

# Chapter 11

## Developing an Understanding of Cyberbullying: The Emotional Impact and Struggle to Define

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### ABSTRACT

*When considering ethical practice for educators in the 21st Century it is imperative that teacher educators, school counselors, and administration are knowledgeable in all aspects of bullying via technology that youth and young adults are experiencing on school campuses throughout the country. The exponential proliferation of technology and social media has brought traditional bullying into cyberspace. The purpose of this chapter is to enhance the reader's understanding of the incidents of cyberbullying, to provide knowledge of the challenges researchers face in operationalizing cyberbullying that will enable all professionals to assist victims, and to proffer techniques that may be implemented in the ethical practice of primary, secondary, or college educators as they work with Millennials and Neo-millennials in the 21st Century classroom.*

### INTRODUCTION

Educators in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century face a new ethical dilemma when considering the use of technology for learning. The plethora of affordable technologies, used by Millennials and Neo-millennials, enhances the need for exploration into how they are used to bully others and the emotional toll that cyberbullying may take. The Internet and World Wide Web (WWW) enable scholars and educators to enhance their research and communication; however, when people are accessible on a 24/7 basis, via cell phones and the WWW, negative circumstances may also develop. All one has to do is read the newspaper or peruse the Web; cyberbullying events and the impact on today's youth and young adults is evident. Without prejudice between small towns or large city campuses, students are often susceptible to the unrelenting attacks, whether by strangers or those known to them.

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## ***Developing an Understanding of Cyberbullying***

In order to provide a comprehensive assessment of the events of cyberbullying that impact 21<sup>st</sup> Century youth and young adults in the United States, this chapter will evaluate literature associated with six main areas:

1. Bullying,
2. The influence of technology,
3. Cyberbullying and the student,
4. The struggle to define cyberbullying,
5. Proposals for cyberbullying education, and
6. Legal implications.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Traditional Face-to-Face Bullying**

Historically considered an inherent part of childhood the idiom “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words may never hurt me” was often the method provided for youth to deal with schoolyard harassment. It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that research into the aggressive behavior of bullying began, in Scandinavia. Bullying behavior was termed “*mobbing*” (Norway, Denmark) or “*mobbing*” (Sweden, Finland), and Dan Olweus was the first to apply empirical research to better understand the phenomenon (Olweus, 1993, p. 8).

### **Bullying Defined**

Employing the model of mobbing, bullying was defined by Olweus, as “A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students.” To further define the expression, “negative actions” are delineated as the aggressive behavior of intentionally inflicting or trying to inflict “injury or discomfort upon another” such as “teasing, name calling, threatening, and taunting” or physical actions such as hitting, pushing, or restraining others. Finally, non-physical actions without the use of words are also considered. Actions such as “making faces or dirty gestures, intentional exclusion from a group, or refusing to comply with another’s wishes” were also found to be bullying behavior. An imbalance of power, where one student does not have the same “physical or psychological” strength as another must also be present, whereas, the weaker student has trouble defending themselves (Olweus, 1986, 1991, as stated in Olweus, 1993, p. 9).

In 1982, the suicide of three Norwegian boys, due to bullying, initiated a national research project by the ministry of education, in Norway. From there bullying research reached the United States and other countries in the 1980s and 90s. Throughout this research, there have been disputes on how bullying should be defined and various definitions have come forth. A general acceptance of two main forms of bullying was established. Relational or indirect bullying consists of the non-physical and often indirect actions of teasing, social isolation, and intentional exclusion. Direct bullying is the physical or verbal attack of one individual against another (Olweus, 1993). Three features have become standard components of bullying definitions used in research and include events that inflict harm or fear on the victim, repeated

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