

# Chapter 8

## Cyber–Aggression in Higher Education

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### ABSTRACT

*Emerging adults are actively engaged in a digital world in which blogs, social networking sites, watching videos, and instant messaging are a typical part of their daily lives. Their immersion in the digital world has occurred for as long as many of them can remember, with many not knowing a world without our modern technological advances. Although the digital age has brought us many conveniences in our daily lives, there is a darker side to emerging adults' involvement with these technologies, such as cyber aggression involvement. This chapter draws on research from around the world, utilizing a variety of research designs, to describe the nature, extent, and consequences associated with emerging adults' involvement in cyber aggression. Concluding the chapter is a solutions and recommendation section in which various recommendations are given to help colleges and universities strive to reduce cyber aggression on their campuses among their students.*

### INTRODUCTION

Given that many emerging adults have grown up in a digitally connected world, it is not surprising that many of these individuals have fully embraced information and communication technologies. These technologies have become cheaper and more efficient, allowing emerging adults to quickly connect to anyone they want and have access to an assortment of information by simply clicking a button or swiping a finger. It is not uncommon for emerging adults to use information and communication technologies at least once a day, with social media being extremely popular among this age group (Smith, Rainie, & Zickuhr, 2011). Despite the many benefits associated with emerging adults' information and communication technologies use, they are potentially vulnerable to internet addiction, identity theft, sexual predation and exploitation, stalking, viewing unwanted sexual images or videos, seeing gory or other unpleasant images or videos online, and cyber aggression (Copes, Kerby, Huff, & Kane, 2010; Finn, 2004; Weigman & van Schie, 1998; Wright & Li, 2012). Use of information and communication technologies

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increases the likelihood of cyber aggression involvement as victims and/or perpetrators, with the risk of experiencing or perpetrating these behaviors increasing as emerging adults' use of these technologies increases (Alvarez-Garcia, Nunez Perez, Gonzalez, & Perez, 2015; Brighi et al., 2012; Holt, Fitzgerald, Bossler, Chee, & Nq, 2016; Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla, & Daciuk, 2012; Perrin & Duggan, 2015). Given emerging adults' high levels of information and communication technologies use, they are likely to unknowingly increase their vulnerability to online risks, especially the risk of experiencing cyber aggression. It is important to understand cyber aggression involvement among emerging adults because these behaviors and experiences are linked to various psychological, social, academic, and behavioral difficulties among emerging adults (Feinstein, Bhatia, & Davila, 2014; Kokkinos, Antoniadou, & Markos, 2014; Landoll, La Greca, & Lai, 2013; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012; Tennant, Demaray, Coyle, & Malecki, 2015). The difficulties associated with cyber aggression involvement have spurred interest among researchers, parents, schools/universities, and the general public concerning this topic.

Although emerging adults use information and communication technologies at similar levels as children and adolescents, little research attention has been given to their experience of cyber aggression. This is unfortunate because there have been a handful of high profile cases of cyber aggression occurring among emerging adults, which resulted in dire consequences, including suicide. The general public is likely to believe that cyber aggression is a risk for children and adolescents and not something that emerging adults might experience. Ignoring emerging adults' vulnerability to cyber aggression prevents the development of knowledge concerning this topic and it stunts recommendations for how to deal with and reduce these behaviors among this population. The purpose of this review chapter is to examine cyber aggression among emerging adults, particularly those adults who are students at colleges or universities. Drawing on research from a variety of disciplines, including psychology, education, media studies, communication, social work, sociology, and computer science, this chapter is organized into six sections, including:

- **Definition and Description:** An explanation of the case studies, the definitions, information and communication technologies used, the role of anonymity, and the prevalence rates of cyberbullying involvement among emerging adults,
- **Negative Outcomes Associated With Emerging Adults' Involvement in Cyber Aggression:** A review of the literature regarding the psychological, social, behavioral, and academic consequences resulting from emerging adults' cyberbullying involvement,
- **Theoretical Frameworks:** Description of two theories, social cognitive theory and the online disinhibition effect, and how these theories apply to cyber aggression among emerging adults
- **Solutions and Recommendations:** Solutions for prevention and intervention programs of cyber aggression among emerging adults and public policy recommendations; attention is also given to recommendations for developing programs and policies for universities and colleges,
- **Future Research Directions:** Describes recommendations for future research aimed at understanding and preventing emerging adults' involvement in cyberbullying,
- **Conclusion:** Closing remarks and summary concerning the current state of the cyber aggression literature among emerging adults.

This chapter reviews literature with cross-sectional, longitudinal, cross-sequential, qualitative, and quantitative research designs to describe cyber aggression among emerging adults. The chapter also draws

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