Chapter 72
Adolescents' Experiences of Cyberbullying:
Gender, Age and Reasons for Not Reporting to Adults

Minghui Gao
Arkansas State University, USA

Xu Zhao
University of Calgary, Canada

Mark McJunkin
Arkansas State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This paper reports a multi-method study that investigated adolescents' experiences of cyberbullying. Sixty-one students (grades 10-12) responded to a survey that requires answers of both quantitative and qualitative nature. Quantitative data were statistically analyzed to understand frequencies and compare gender and grade differences. Qualitative data were coded to identify themes. Results suggest that a substantial portion of adolescents have experienced cyberbullying of various types. Significant gender differences exist in cyberstalking, with girls being more likely than boys to be subject to cyberstalking. Significant grade related differences exist in cyberstalking and exclusion, with 12th graders more likely to be victims of cyberstalking and exclusion than 10th and 11th graders. The majority of adolescents are unwilling to report cyberbullying experiences to adults due to reasons including lack of awareness or underestimating the negative effect of cyberbullying, fear of adults' overreaction, and the desire to deal with the problem by themselves.

INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying is "a unique form of bullying" (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010, p. 614) that involves "sending or posting harmful or cruel text or images using the Internet or other digital communication devices" (Willard, 2004, p.1). Cyberbullying has become prevalent among adolescents due to the distancing effect of technological devices that makes it easier for youth to say and do cruel things to others compared to what is typical in traditional face-to-face bullying situations (Donegan, 2012; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Cyberbullying can result in lasting negative impact on its victims, including not only harms on their mental health, social well-being, and experience of schooling, but also the quality of their future life and career as adults (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Mesch, 2009; Sahin, 2012). In extreme cases, it has also led to tragic suicide incidents (CBSNEWS, 2010; Friedman, 2010; Kennedy, 2010; Maag, 2007).

Cyberbullying takes different forms. The rapidly evolving information technology provides numerous easy avenues for spreading negative messages, and thus enables various forms of cyberbullying behaviors such as cyberstalking, denigration, exclusion, flaming, harassment, masquerade, and outing (Li, 2008; Notar, Padgett, & Roden, 2013; Willard, 2004, 2012). Although researchers have extensively explored cyberbullying and its impact on adolescent victims, few have investigated adolescents' experience of particular types of cyberbullying and, importantly, when and why the victims report their experience to adults. The study reported here examined adolescents' experiences of various forms of cyberbullying as well as their explanations of why they decide to report or not to report their experience as victims of cyberbullying. In the following sections, we first present the research literature on the nature of cyberbullying in comparison to traditional face-to-face bullying, the various forms of cyberbullying, and the factors that contribute to its prevalence among adolescents.

Cyberbullying: How Is It Similar to and Different From Traditional Forms of Bullying?

Cyberbullying became a noticed phenomenon in the late 20th century following advances in information and electronic technologies such as the Internet and cell phones (Olweus, 1993). It involves individuals' spreading harsh, hostile, or simply negative messages via electronic devices and communication tools. Cyberbullying can take place on the Internet, through instant messaging (IM), chat rooms, on social networking sites, blogs, or gaming sites; it can also crop up on mobile phones, through short message service (SMS), multimedia messaging service (MMS), or other technologies (Smith et al., 2008). By posting words online or sending messages via cell phones, harsh comments travel much quicker than they once did and can stick around much longer if not forever. All this increases the harmful impact of cyberbullying on its victims. On the one hand, it is easier for the offender to strike blows against a victim without having to see the victim's physical response, and on the other hand, it is harder for responsible adults to detect and contain the situation.

Comparing to traditional forms of bullying, what used to be verbal or physical is now viral. Rather than name-calling on the playground in front of a few people, harsh messages can now be posted online or sent to one person or a group of 100 or more in a matter of seconds. Unlike traditional bullies who are usually physically strong and fast, and who involve in face-to-face confrontations with their victims, cyberbullies can be anyone who has a desire to inflict "willful and repeated" harms by using computers,

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