

Chapter 85

Youths and Cyberbullying: Description, Theories, and Recommendations

Michelle F. Wright
Pennsylvania State University, USA

ABSTRACT

Youths are immersed in a digitally connected world, where blogs, social networking sites, watching videos, and instant messaging tools are a normal part of their lives. Many of these youths cannot remember a time in which electronic technologies were not embedded within their lives. Electronic technologies afford a variety of opportunities for youths, but there are also risks associated with such use, such as cyberbullying. This chapter draws on research from around the world to explain the nature, extent, causes, and consequences of cyberbullying. This chapter concludes with a solutions and recommendation section, emphasizing the need for cyberbullying to be considered a global concern.

INTRODUCTION

Millions of youths use electronic technologies (e.g., cell phones, the Internet) everyday, engaging in a variety of different online behaviors, such as looking up information, watching videos for entertainment, and communicating with people from around the world (Lenhart, 2015). Although there are many benefits associated with youths' electronic technology use, they are also at risk for identity theft, sexual predators, addiction, and being exposed to unwanted, sexually graphic, or gory content via videos and images. Cyberbullying is also a risk factor associated with youths' electronic technology use. Defined as an extension of traditional face-to-face bullying, cyberbullying involves harming others via electronic technologies (e.g., email, instant messaging, social networking websites, text messages through mobile devices; Bauman, Underwood, & Card, 2013; Grigg, 2012). Bullying through electronic technology offers cyberbullies the flexibility to harm their victims at almost any time of day, without having to be concerned with the consequences of their actions, due to the ability to remain anonymous (Wright, 2014b). The ability to remain anonymous through interactions in the cyber context can potentially trigger the online disinhibition effect among youths. This effect can lead some youths to do or say things

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online to others that they would never do or say in the offline world (Suler, 2004; Wright, 2014a). Electronic technologies also allow bullies to target their victims quicker (e.g., spreading a rumor in the online world can occur in a matter of moments), administer multiple attacks in a short period of time, and the ability to involve various more people or bystanders (e.g., posting a degrading or humiliating video online can receive thousands of watches versus only a handful of students witnessing teasing in the hallway of a middle school).

The aim of this chapter was to review literature on cyberbullying among youths in elementary, middle, and high schools. The literature review draws on research from various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, education, social work, communication studies, gender studies, and computer science. The research involves cross-sectional, longitudinal, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research designs. The chapter also includes research studies conducted by researchers from around the world. The chapter is organized into the following seven sections:

1. Definition and description of cyberbullying
2. Characteristics and risk factors associated with cyberbullying
3. The outcomes or consequences related to youths' involvement in cyberbullying
4. Theoretical underpinnings
5. Solutions and recommendations
6. Future research directions
7. Conclusion

BACKGROUND

Using electronic technologies to hostilely, intentionally, and maliciously harass, embarrass, and intimidate others is known as cyberbullying (Smith, Del Barrio, & Tokunaga, 2013). These online behaviors must be hostile, intentional, and malicious to qualify as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can also include repetition and an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim, similar to the definition of traditional face-to-face bullying. Although these characteristics of the traditional face-to-face bullying definition can be present in cyberbullying acts, these characteristics are often much more pronounced. For instance, repetition of a cyberbullying act might involve targeting the victim multiple times through the sharing of a humiliating video or a text message with one or multiple people (Bauman, Underwood, & Card, 2013). Sending this video or text message to one person could trigger this person to share the content with multiple other people who could then share the contents with yet more people. This cycle can continue over and over again, perpetuating the cycle of cyberbullying victimization. The ability to remain anonymous while engaging in cyberbullying acts can also widen the imbalance of power between the victim and the bully.

Because cyberbullying acts occur through electronic technology, this characteristic separates it from traditional face-to-face bullying (Curelaru, Iacob, & Abalasei, 2009). Some examples of cyberbullying include sending unkind text messages and emails, theft of identity/personal information, pretending to be someone else, making anonymous phone calls, spreading nasty (and oftentimes false) rumors using social networking websites, threatening to harm someone physically (in the offline world), or uploading or sending a picture or video of the victim with the intention to embarrass the victim (Bauman et al., 2013). Cyberbullying acts can also be similar to those acts in the offline world, such as insults, verbal

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