Chapter 8
Victimization:
Sexual Minorities

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ABSTRACT

Not all groups are equally likely to be subject to acts of aggression; specific subgroups are more likely to be victimized. For example, youth who identify as a sexual minority are more likely to be victims of traditional forms of bullying than their heterosexual friends. There has been less research, however, on population subgroups and the likelihood of becoming a victim of cyber aggression. In exploring this topic, this chapter examines several questions including, "How important is the amount of time spent online as an intermediate variable in predicting whether an individual will become a victim of cyber aggression?" and "Does sexual orientation impact the likelihood of being a victim of cyberaggression above and beyond the amount of time spent online?" Multivariate statistical methods and survey data from the Pew Research Center for the year 2014 was used in this analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Within gender and sexual identity, students who identify as lesbian (L), gay (G), bisexual (B), transgender (T) or questioning (Q) (sexual minorities), are at a much higher risk for victimization than students who do not identify as a sexual minority. According to Kosciw et al., (2016), schools nationwide are hostile environments for a significant number of LGBTQ students, the overwhelming majority of whom routinely hear homophobic language and experience victimization and discrimination while at school (p. XVI). As identified in the research literature, youths who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender

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report higher levels of physical, verbal, and relational aggression and bullying (PACER, 2017; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2017a; Kosciw, et al., 2016; Kosciw, et. al., 2014; Gladden, et. al, 2014; Minton, 2014; GLSEN, CiPHR, & CCRC, 2013).

The media has played an important role in raising public awareness of cyber-aggression against certain vulnerable groups bringing attention to bullying of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning persons. The media coverage of this issue began with Ryan Patrick Halligan who in 2003, at age 13, committed suicide after enduring online and in person taunts about his sexuality. Although there was no indication that Ryan was gay, the homophobic attack endured by Ryan raised awareness about the susceptibility to bullying faced by LGBTQ youth (NoBullying.com, 2015). While the death of Ryan Halligan brought public attention to bullying experienced by sexual minorities, it was the suicide of 18-year-old Rutgers student, Tyler Clementi in 2010, which helped to bring national and international attention to bullying and LGBTQ suicide. Tyler jumped off the George Washington Bridge in New Jersey after discovering that his roommate (Dharun Ravi) had set up a webcam in their dorm room that recorded Tyler engaging in an intimate relationship with another man. Ravi then posted the recording on Twitter (Spaulding, 2010; Leefeldt, 2016). Other examples include 14-year-old Kenneth Weishuhn who committed suicide in 2012 after being bullied at school and online and receiving death threats following his decision to "come out" as gay (Wong, 2012).

With each death like Ryan's, Tyler's and Kenneth's, there is often media coverage and heightened public awareness. The media, in reporting on these cases, is doing the job of agenda setting by sending a message to the public that bullying of sexual minorities is a topic of concern (Iyenger & Kinder, 1987). For public concern to develop into public policy, additional information, such as the scope of problem and the populations most likely to be impacted, is required. Thus, it becomes necessary to move beyond the initial media coverage and ask this question: to what extent are the LGBTQ populations more vulnerable than others? In exploring this topic, this chapter begins with an overview of the literature on sexual minorities and victimization.

A VULNERABLE POPULATION: SEXUAL MINORITIES

Sexuality occurs across a continuum which is to say that same-gender attraction and relationships are normal variations of human sexuality (American Psychological Association, 2015a; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMSHA], 2014; American Psychological Association, 2009; American Psychological Association, 2008). Likewise, a gender identity that is different than sex assigned at birth, and a gender expression diverging from the conventional cultural norms for gender, is normal variation of human gender (American Psychological Association, 2015a; SAMSHA, 2014). Sexual minorities include lesbian (L) women, gay (G) men, bisexual (B) men and women, and transgender (T) men and women. Questioning (Q) is a designation referring to individuals who are uncertain about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Q is also used as a verb to describe the process of exploring one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Buist & Lenning, 2016; SAMSHA, 2015).

The spectrum of sexuality includes orientation (attraction), expression (behavior), and identity (self-identification). Sexual orientation is based on the gender of the person or persons to whom someone is emotionally, physically, sexually, or romantically attracted and is expressed in relationship to others who fill a need for love, attachment, and intimacy (National LGBTI Health Alliance, 2015; SAMHSA, 2014). Sexual orientation is a multi-component construct commonly measured in three ways: attraction