

Chapter 76

Cyber–Bullying Behaviors

Qing Li

Towson University, USA

Deborah Lambert

University of Calgary, Canada

ABSTRACT

A review of the literature reveals that current research has discovered that the severity of cyberbullying may be a result of the impact of many factors contributing to its prevalence and psychological and emotional effects on both cyberbullies and their victims. Most prominent among these factors include socio-demographic factors such as gender, age, socio-economic status, and the technology-related factor, anonymity. Despite the number of programs and legal procedures being implemented to manage and control cyberbullying, it continues to pose a problem among the youth. Further research is, therefore, needed to determine whether gender, age, socio-economic status, and the technology-related factor, anonymity, are interacting with each other in their impact on cyberbullying or whether other factors, not yet investigated, are interacting with the identified factors to cause the prevalence of cyberbullying.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the advancing new technology has brought new dimensions to the responsibilities of educators, administrators, parents, and researchers. Research studies have shown that while the introduction of electronic communication technology into classrooms can have positive effects on student learning, it can also potentially expose students to dangerous interactions which

may jeopardize their mental and emotional well-being (Trolley, Hanel, & Shields, 2006). One such interaction relates to the growing problem of cyberbullying, both in and out of schools.

Belsey (2004) defined cyberbullying as a phenomenon that "...involves the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others." (p.1). Willard (2007), another prominent researcher in the study of cyberbullying, redefines cyberbullying from her last definition in 2003,

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as being “cruel to others by sending or posting harmful material or engaging in other forms of social cruelty using the Internet or other digital technologies, such as cell phones” (p.10).

Some researchers have identified different forms of cyberbullying. For example, Beale and Hall (2007), Mason (2007), and Willard (2008) found that there are at least seven different types of cyberbullying, including: (1) flaming—sending angry, rude, vulgar messages directed at a person or persons privately or to an online group; (2) harassment—repeatedly sending a person offensive messages; (3) denigration—sending/posting rumors, harmful, untrue information person to others; (4) cyberstalking—harassment that include threats of harm or is highly intimidating; (5) impersonation or masquerading—pretending to be another person and posting/sending material on-line to make them look bad; (6) outing or trickery—tricking a person into sending information (secrets, embarrassing information) that can be used to send to others online; and (7) exclusion—excluding someone purposefully from an online group (IM list).

According to Willard (2006), there are three related concerns in addition to the seven types of cyberbullying. These concerns include the disclosure of massive amounts of personal information via the Internet by students, how students become addicted to the Internet to the point where their lives are highly dependent on the time they spend online, and the prevalence of suicide and self-harm communities in which youth that are depressed will access to obtain information on suicide and self-harm methods.

THE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF CYBERBULLYING

As early as 1992, several surveys had been conducted to explore cyberbullying issues. Kiesler and Sproull (1992) and Thompsen (1994) had discovered text-based name calling, use of coarse language, profanity and personal attacks in com-

puter-mediated communication environments. A survey conducted in Canada (Mnet, 2001) revealed that one-quarter of young Canadian Internet users reported that they had the experience of getting messages telling hateful things about others. Four years later, Beran & Li (2005) carried out one of the earliest studies in Canada to specifically examine the issue of cyberbullying, which included these types of messages. In a survey conducted in Britain in 2002, it was discovered that one in four youngsters of 11-19 years old had been cyberbullied (National Children’s Home, 2002). Other researchers (Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002) revealed that one-third of undergraduate students reported being stalked over the Internet. To date, more recent research is being carried out worldwide on the scope and nature of cyberbullying and its effects on the psychological and emotional well-being of students.

OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT KNOWLEDGE STATUS OF CYBERBULLYING

Studies on cyberbullying have become more prevalent in research communities (e.g. Beale & Hall, 2007; Carney, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Li, 2007; Shariff, 2009; Ybarra & Mitchell et al, 2006) including some descriptions of the worst cyberbullying incidences (Maag, 2007). Its growing severity has motivated more research into its nature and possible relations with traditional bullying. Knowledge of cyberbullying, to date, however, is still limited although the existing research has contributed to some understanding of this phenomenon. To provide a knowledge base of what the research has discovered on the nature and scope of cyberbullying, this entry will focus on the types of communication used in its prevalence, the frequency of its occurrence, some of the factors contributing to its prevalence and the

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