

## Chapter 15

# Cyberbullying Among High School Students: Cluster Analysis of Sex and Age Differences and the Level of Parental Monitoring

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Bullying, a typical occurrence in schools, has gone digital. As a result, cyberbullying has become ever more present among youth. The current study aimed to classify high school students into four groups based on their cyberbullying experiences and to examine the characteristics of these groups based on the sex and age of the participants and the level of parental monitoring. Participants were 133 high school students located in central Texas. A cluster analysis revealed four distinct groups of students who were “highly involved both as bully and victim,” “more victim than bully,” “more bully than victim,” or “least involved.” Significantly more girls and more students in lower grades were classified into the “more victim than bully group” while older students were more likely to be classified into the “more bully than victim” group. No significant differences were found between cluster membership and the degree of parental monitoring.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying among youth has been becoming a serious societal and educational concern internationally. The media, educators, and parents have been paying great attention to the phenomena for the past few years because researchers from various countries have revealed the relatively high prevalence of cyberbullying among youth. For example, approximately 30% of youth ( $N=384$ ) surveyed in 2004 reported their victimization, and 11% have cyberbullied others (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). The more recent study shows that 72% of the youth ( $N=1,454$ ) were victimized at least once in the past year, and 13% of them reported frequent victimization (Juvonen & Gross, 2008).

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF CYBERBULLYING

Researchers have linked bullying behaviors with theories of human behaviors and communication. For example, the well-known theory is the *social cognitive theory*, which argues that adolescents model their parents or friends' aggressive behaviors (Duncan, 2004; Mouttapa, Valente, Gallaher, Rohrbach, & Unger, 2004). "The effect [of the model] will be stronger if the observer has a positive evaluation of the model, for example, perceive, him/herself as tough, fearless, and strong" (Olweus, 1993, p. 43). In other words, observing an aggressive model makes aggressive behaviors less inhibited if observers see a model getting rewarded for the aggressive actions. In these cases, the reward means the bullies' victory over the victims. Thus, all forms of bullying may be learned actions (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008) because bullying is a type of peer aggression.

One theoretical model that can possibly explain cyberbullying is *desinhibited behavioral effects* on the Internet (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowalski, Limber, & Agatson, 2008). Joinson (1998) argues that people in cyberspace behave

in a way they do not in real life because of the effects of disinhibition: "Disinhibition means that normal behavioral restraint can become lost or disregarded" (Mason, 2008, p. 328). For example, researchers have demonstrated that people tend to behave more bluntly when communicating by e-mail or in other electronic venues. Moreover, misunderstandings, greater hostility, aggressive responses, and nonconforming behaviors are more likely in computer-mediated communication than in face-to-face communication (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). In face-to-face interaction, people read the emotional reactions of others and modulate their own behavior in response to the consequences (Kowalski et al., 2008). In other words, human behaviors are inhibited by social situations and public evaluations (Joinson, 1998). In cyberspace context, on the other hand, people have less social, contextual, and affective signs than in face-to-face communication; thus, they are less sensitive and remorseful for the types of behaviors that they exhibit (Mason, 2008). In cyberbullying, perpetrators have no direct social disapproval and punishment for engaging in bullying others and do not see that victims suffer (Willard, 2007). As a result, their behaviors are often disinhibited and become ruder, harsher, and more difficult to control (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Disinhibition effects are caused by deindividuation (Joinson, 1998). Deindividuation can occur when accountability cues are reduced; in other words, anonymity can reduce concerns about others' reactions (Joinson, 1998). Deindividuation also occurs when an individual's self-awareness is blocked or reduced by external factors because "it decreases the influence of internal (i.e., self) standards of or guides to behavior, and increases the power of external, situational cues" (McKenna & Bargh, 2000, p. 61-62).

## Students' Status in a Peer Group

In traditional bullying studies, differences among children have been conceptualized through cat-

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