

Cyberbullying: When Peer Bullying Moves

from the Classroom to the Home

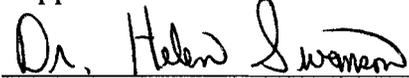
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ABSTRACT

This literature review examines cyberbullying, an emerging form of bullying that knows no boundaries and most often occurs in the context of the home. Cyberbullying can occur via various electronic modes of communication such as cell phones and text messages, or through the Internet through instant messaging, email, personal websites, or blogs. As the access to online resources increases, so does the likelihood that youth may become involved in the act of cyberbullying, either as the bully or the target.

The literature addresses characteristics and warning signs of both cyberbullies and targets. There are significant effects of cyberbullying to those engaged in and to targets of cyberbullying, both socially and academically, and in some cases the results could be fatal. Also included is a review of legislation and how past legal cases and freedom of speech affect school policies. Prevention and intervention strategies for the home and school environment are also discussed. Parents play a key role by instilling positive values through open communication, while providing a support system and holding their

children accountable. It is critical that school staff members are on board to implement bully-proofing programs that will carry over into cyberspace. A comprehensive approach that includes the school environment, classrooms, and individual students is essential when implementing an anti-bullying program, and by incorporating cyberbullying into such a program, students should have a clear understanding of what is expected of them.

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Chapter I: Introduction

On October 7, 2003, thirteen year-old Ryan Halligan committed suicide as a result of prolonged bullying, including cyberbullying. On and off through elementary and middle school, Ryan was bullied by his peers. His parents wanted to intervene by contacting school officials, but Ryan begged them not to – saying it would only make things worse. After learning self-defense and ending up in a physical fight with the school bully, the bullying stopped, and eventually Ryan befriended the bully. Ryan enjoyed typical teenage-boy activities, such as being active outdoors as well as online gaming and instant messaging. During the summer of 2003, Ryan’s parents noticed he was spending long periods of time instant messaging and made sure to set up ground rules for Internet use, including no secret passwords, for safety purposes.

Little did Ryan’s parents know, during these late nights on the computer Ryan was a target of cyberbullying. Private, somewhat embarrassing information that Ryan shared online with his new friend (the ex-bully) was passed around to classmates; they ridiculed Ryan at school, but it did not stop there. The bullying continued at home through use of the Internet and other electronic communication devices. Another instance of cyberbullying is when Ryan was chatting with a girl online; she made him think she was interested in him, which led him to tell her personal and possibly embarrassing information about himself. When they met face-to-face at school, she denied everything; it turns out she was forwarding their conversations to her friends for a good laugh. Ryan’s parents were unaware that he was being cyberbullied, and they did not find out until it was too late. Already suffering from teenage depression, the addition

of being the target of cyberbullying was too much for young Ryan Halligan to handle (Halligan, 2003-2007).

The following story of David Knight also involves cyberbullying, but his story does not end in the same tragic way as that of Ryan Halligan:

Sixteen-year-old David Knight was having a hard time at school, being teased and taunted by peers. But his life became unbearable when a friend sent him a link to a website entitled “Welcome to the page that makes fun of David Knight.” The webpage had hateful comments directed at David and his family. The combination of harassment at school and on the Web was too much for David and he dropped out (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007, p. 565).

Cyberbullying has emerged in recent years, as more and more youth are gaining access to the Internet, cell phones, and other electronic modes of communication. Being that this is such a relatively new topic, the statistics reported in the research regarding cyberbullying incidence rates vary. This variability could be due to differing definitions of cyberbullying acts or to the perceived intensity of a specific act. “Simply asking about incidents will not effectively distinguish between a student who received one or two harmful messages and a student who was the subject of a...Web site upon which many other students posted hurtful comments” (Willard, 2007a, p. 32). Needs assessments focused on cyberbullying should be done by individual school districts to best gauge the prevalence of the behavior within the school, as these rates are likely to change as the communities change.

According to a 2005 study conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 45% of teens aged 12-17 years own cell phones, and one-third of them have used

the text messaging option. Along with that, roughly 21 million (almost 90%) of the teens surveyed use the Internet, and 51% of those youth go online daily. Instant messaging is popular among teens; it is an immediate way to communicate with peers, and some even use instant messaging to communicate with parents. Half of teens using instant messaging have sent links to websites through the program, while others may include photos, documents, or music files. Unfortunately, 21% of the youth surveyed have said that after sending a private e-mail, instant message, or text message, they found out that the information was passed along to others, via electronic means.

As seen in the previous anecdotes, being the target of cyberbullying can have a variety of effects and can differ depending on the extent of the bullying, as well as how the child handles it. As opposed to the traditional face-to-face bullying, cyberbullying allows the bully a sense of anonymity which may create greater anxiety for the target because of the bully's unknown identity, and the harassment may occur at any time, not only during the school day (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007; Willard, 2007a).

In many cases, students are afraid to report cyberbullying because they perceive that nobody will be able to help them, or that the repercussions from the bully will be greater than what is gained from reporting the incidents (Anderson & Sturm, 2007). In a study by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids (cited in Willard, 2007a), about half of children aged 6-11 years told their parents if cyberbullying had occurred, whereas only 30% of teens aged 12-17 years reported the incidents. Parents and teachers need to be aware of the issue and encourage students to report harmful activity occurring on the Internet or through the use of other electronic communication devices. Parents should talk with their children, setting up rules for going online and even signing an Internet Safety contract.

Schools should also be involved through the implementation of programs to prevent cyberbullying as well as positive interventions for those who have been bullied or harassed through electronic means.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this comprehensive literature review is to gain insight into this new, technology-based form of bullying. Cyberbullying is occurring more frequently as students gain access to various online resources such as the Internet, instant messaging, and cell phones. The research was conducted in the spring of 2008.

Research Objective

This study addressed three objectives. The first objective was to assess the academic and social impacts of this act on both the cyberbully and target. The second objective was to examine past legal cases and how they have impacted school policies regarding freedom of speech and online privacy. The third and final objective was to identify what parents and educators can do to prevent and intervene with cyberbullying.

Definition of Terms

There are some critical terms that need to be defined for clarity and understanding. Additional terms which may be helpful, including the more specific types of cyberbullying, can be found in Appendix A.

Cyberbullying: Sending or posting harmful material or engaging in other forms of social aggression using the Internet or other digital technologies (Willard, 2007a), which can include email, cell phones, instant messaging, and personal websites which “support deliberate, repeated and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others” (Trolley, Hanel, & Shields, 2006, p. 6).

Online: “the Internet or any other form of electronic communication, such as a cell phone or personal digital device” (Willard, 2007a, p. 3). This can include using e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging, blogs, web pages, and Internet websites.

Target: used instead of the term “victim,” the person who is the subject of cyberbullying (Willard, 2007a).

Assumptions

It was assumed that the literature reviewed would clearly show the seriousness of cyberbullying and the negative effects it has on those involved, including the impacts of cyberbullying, both academically and socio-emotionally, on the bully and the target. In addition, the literature would show how past legal cases have impacted what schools may, or may not, do in instances of cyberbullying. Finally, the literature would show the need for parents to become involved to help minimize the occurrence of cyberbullying in the home, along with various methods the schools can utilize to prevent and intervene in cases of cyberbullying.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Given that cyberbullying is considered a relatively new issue emerging in today's society, this chapter begins with a discussion of the characteristics and warning signs of those involved in cyberbullying, followed by the impact of cyberbullying on each of the people involved. Then, there is a discussion on legal issues and court cases in terms of how they affect school policy. Next is a discussion of what parents can do at home to help minimize the extent of cyberbullying. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion on prevention and intervention techniques that can be adopted by the schools to raise awareness of this new form of bullying.

Who is Involved in Cyberbullying?

When it comes to cyberbullying, there are more people involved than just the person doing the bullying. Participants may consist of the bully, including the social climber bully and the henchman; the target, including the resilient target; and the bully/victim. The following is a discussion of the characteristics and contributions of each participant. Also included are warning signs to help determine if a child is the target of cyberbullying or is engaged in said behavior.

For the most part, characteristics of bullies are similar. Bullies are likely to be impulsive with dominant personalities, and are likely to show aggression towards others, including adults. They have a difficult time showing empathy and understanding how their actions affect others (Bolton & Graeve, 2005; Willard, 2007a) and make sure they are able to stay in power through degradation of peers (Anderson & Sturm, 2007). While some bullies may experience peer rejection leading to possible depression or antisocial behavior (Willard, 2007a), others may be popular and involved in many school-related

activities (Bolton & Graeve, 2005). Willard (2007a) also added that some bullies may not have parents who are involved or may experience and witness violence in the home, which may lead the bully to perceive that violence is the only way to solve problems.

Social climber bullies are most likely to be those in the in-crowd, and the bullying often occurs “within the context of the interrelationships between the in-crowd, the wannabes (those who want to be part of the in-crowd), and the losers (as defined by the in-crowd)” (Willard, 2007a, p. 35). Most cyberbullying occurs subtly in this type of situation and is unlikely to be reported due to the cyberbullies being viewed as leaders among the student population.

The targets, often part of the wannabe crowd, are involved in online contact with the cyberbullies as they are hoping to become closer to that group. The bullying is not reported because doing so would ruin their chances of joining the in-group. Those who are not considered popular are also unlikely to report acts of cyberbullying because the behavior is taking place by those who are highly regarded in the school, and if word gets out, there may be revenge (Willard, 2007a).

The henchmen are the passive friends of the bully who are unlikely to start bullying on their own, but will do so with encouragement from the more dominant friend. This is dangerous because the bully takes advantage of groups of students to carry out the “dirty work” (Bolton & Graeve, 2005).

It is necessary to be aware of the warning signs which may help determine if a child is cyberbullying others. Some of these may include: using the computer late at night after everyone has gone to bed; becoming upset if unable to use the computer; does not like to talk about what happens online or quickly switches computer screens when an

adult is nearby; and other forms of secretive behavior (Hinduja & Patchin, n.d.b; Willard, 2007b). Another sign to be aware of is the deletion of computer history and Internet files, as the student may be trying to cover tracks of inappropriate online behavior (Willard, 2007b). A later section in this chapter will be used to inform parents and school staff on what to do if cyberbullying is suspected.

The targets of cyberbullying may be seen as different, either emotionally or developmentally, with participation in few social groups. They also have a difficult time being assertive and trying to stop the bullying. Some targets may even believe those in authority are doing nothing to combat the bullying, but rather perceive that the target is deserving of the behavior (Bolton & Graeve, 2005; Willard, 2007a). Anderson and Sturm (2007) stated that targets are “sensitive, respectful, honest, creative, have high emotional intelligence, a strong sense of fair play and high integrity with a low propensity to violence” and “will respond to bullying with dialogue and a sense of fairness, which the bully then exploits” (p. 25). Some targets may blame themselves (Alderman, 2001) or believe that they deserve to be bullied and harassed, both in school and online (Willard, 2007a).

Resilient targets “may not fit the mold of acceptability as established by the in-crowd” but “are determined to walk their own path and recognize that it is okay to be different despite the challenges this causes them” (Willard, 2007a, p. 36-37). These targets are often emotionally tough and able to overcome the trials and hurdles that the bullies may throw at them, either in school or through electronic communications. Occasionally their resilience will lead to a discontinuation of the bullying, or they will be

strong enough to ignore the bully and avoid situations in which the bullying may occur (Willard, 2007a).

Indications that a child is the target of cyberbullying may include: appearing nervous when receiving instant messages or e-mail or upset and frustrated when finished using the computer; may stop using the computer altogether; does not like to discuss what happens when online; and may isolate themselves from family or friends (Hinduja & Patchin, n.d.b). If parents are suspicious that their child may be the target of online harassment, it is essential that they pay attention to any subtle comments from the child. Willard (2007b) noted that subtle comments are important in that the child may want to discuss the cyberbullying that is occurring, but is afraid of parent overreaction.

The bully/victims, or aggressive victims, are those individuals who are the targets of bullying, but “also bully younger or weaker children” (Willard, 2007a, p. 34). This type of bully may be overlooked because this person is perceived by others to be the target, not the bully. These individuals are likely to react quickly in situations, especially when being teased. He or she may intentionally aggravate the bully, so as to be able to fight back and be okay with it because the bully “started it.” Willard (2007a) noted that the bully/victims are more likely to create and utilize Internet websites and blogs to target other students, rather than using instant messaging, e-mails, or text messages which directly attack the target.

Impact of Cyberbullying on the Participants

Being the target of cyberbullying can have some detrimental effects both academically and socially. Willard (2007a) noted that unlike traditional face-to-face bullying, those who are bullied through electronic means have no way of escaping the

torment. While harassment or threats may occur online, those messages affect the target's feelings and behaviors offline (Hinduja & Patchin, n.d.d.). Whenever an electronic device is used, the target becomes available to receive these discouraging messages, as in the case of cell phones and instant messaging. Even though one might turn off the computer, log off an instant messenger, stop checking e-mail, or turn off a cell phone to escape online aggression, it is difficult to refrain from using these tools, as they have likely become a part of daily life (Anderson & Sturm, 2007). Unfortunately, even if the target chooses to not utilize these devices, or does not have access to them, cyberbullying can still occur through websites and blogs which may be developed to attack the targeted student.

Socially and emotionally, a student who is on the receiving end of cyberbullying is more likely to feel anxious and insecure, which over a long period of time, may leave the target feeling emotionally drained and affect one's perceptions of oneself (Willard, 2007a). A 12-year-old girl from Massachusetts who was the target of cyberbullying said, "It lowers my self-esteem. It makes me feel really crappy. It makes me walk around the rest of the day feeling worthless, like no one cares. It makes me very, very depressed" (Hinduja & Patchin, n.d.d, n.p.). Low self-esteem impacts the target in that peer relationships tend to suffer and there is great difficulty in making and maintaining friendships (Willard, 2007a). In a study by Finkelhor, Mitchell, and Wolak (cited in Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007), those who had been the target of online bullying felt extremely upset, afraid, and/or embarrassed, as well as experienced symptoms of stress following the incident. Youth who report being bullied, either online or in person, have an overall poor psychosocial adjustment (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007), including an

increased likelihood of isolating and withdrawing themselves from social situations (Willard, 2007a) and becoming depressed (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). One who is the target of cyberbullying may also make subtle comments regarding feeling uncomfortable in relationships, either online or in person (Willard, 2007b). In some cases, like that of Ryan Halligan, the online abuse may reach a point at which the target feels helpless and believes that the best solution is to commit suicide, also referred to as “bullycide” (Anderson & Sturm, 2007, p. 26).

On many occasions the cyberbully will likely remain anonymous, which can impact the target’s school performance. By not knowing who is sending the cruel messages, the target does not know whom to trust or may think that everyone is in on it. This can lead to difficulty concentrating in school (Willard, 2007a), failing classes, fights or other altercations on the school premises, avoiding school or certain classes, changing schools (Willard, 2007c), or even dropping out (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007).

It is not just the targets who are affected by cyberbullying; the bullies are also impacted as a result. Aggressive bullies have an increased likelihood of delinquency, including drug and alcohol use, which can lead to problems academically. Instead of isolating themselves from others, bullies have the ability to make friends, although their friends are likely to have similar values which support, encourage, and reinforce bullying behaviors (Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Willard, 2007a). Because cyberbullying does not occur face-to-face and is often anonymous, the bully is likely to feel detached from the situation, therefore reducing any potential feelings of guilt over the situation (Batheja, 2004, cited in Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Lack of guilt and feelings of detachment may

lead to disinhibition for taking part in activities online that one would not participate in, if in the “real world” (Willard, 2007b, p. 135).

Legal Issues and School Policies

In instances of cyberbullying, where does the law fit in and how does it affect school policies and procedures? There is no clear legislation targeting the act of cyberbullying specifically, but various cases have set a precedent regarding freedom of speech, which can be applied to cyberbullying in certain instances. According to Hinduja and Patchin (n.d.a), there are some states that are working to pass legislation that will require school districts “to update their policies to include cyberbullying or other types of electronic harassment in their definitions of prohibited behavior” (n.p.). Although some may argue that such a law is a violation of the First Amendment right to free speech, all students have the right to a safe education, which may be endangered through the occurrence of cyberbullying and online harassment.

Willard (2007a) reviewed legal cases that have impacted First Amendment speech rights of students and can be used in addressing student speech occurring in cyberspace. Willard noted that in *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*, a principal refused to publish several articles in the school newspaper. It was decided that schools may “impose educationally related restrictions on student speech” (p. 108) if the speech is sponsored by the school or others may deem the speech to be school sponsored.

In another case, *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, students were disciplined for wearing black armbands in school to protest the Vietnam War (Willard, 2007a). The result was the *Tinker* standard in which “school officials may only respond with formal discipline in cases where the off-campus speech causes, or

threatens to cause, a substantial and material disruption at school or interference with the rights of students to be secure” (Willard, 2007c, p. 3). Hinduja and Patchin (n.d.a) linked this case to cyberbullying, in that if the cyberbullying occurs off-campus, but causes “substantial” (n.p.) disruption within the educational setting, school administrators have the right to become involved. Administrators are often wary of intervening in activity that does not occur in the school environment; however, “officials are more likely to respond...when off-campus activity appears to be criminal or to raise the prospect of violence” (Stover, 2006, p. 42). Because hurtful communication may be taking place online, it could severely impact the targets’ interactions and feelings of security while on campus, leading to an inability to reach their full potential.

Few, if any, laws have been passed specifically regarding cyberbullying. Although many states are considering enacting legislation as the prevalence of online bullying continues to grow, they are reluctant to do so as this could be construed as an attempt to regulate free speech (Hinduja & Patchin, n.d.a). Recently, a law has been passed in the town of Dardenne Prairie, Missouri when Megan Meier, a 13-year old girl, had committed suicide after receiving hurtful messages online. The new law considers cyberbullying and online harassment a misdemeanor, which is “punishable by a fine of up to \$500 and 90 days in jail” (Lane, 2007, n.p.). Lane stated that the law includes harassment by adults towards minors and can be in the form of any of the various online communication tools including e-mail, text messaging, and instant messaging.

In taking the previously noted court cases into consideration, Willard (2007a) discussed what schools can do to monitor Internet usage on school computers, similar to school locker or desk searches, as they are school property. This includes first informing

all students that they should expect having little privacy when using the school district's computers, as the computers are routinely monitored. System monitoring can occur in various ways, including the usage of software programs and technical monitoring tools. These allow remote monitoring of the computer screen as well as the following of communication patterns. Staff monitoring is one method in which student computer use can be observed. It is suggested that all staff members who utilize computers and the Internet consistently should undergo professional development training so as to become aware of student behaviors that may indicate inappropriate computer use (Willard, 2007a). Another way to supervise on-campus Internet use and hold students accountable is to require them to print their browsing history at the end of a computer session. It is essential to emphasize that school computers and Internet should be used responsibly and that individual computers and files may be more thoroughly searched if there is reasonable suspicion to do so.

Many schools do not include a cyberbullying or online harassment policy in the student handbooks, making it even more difficult to reprimand students engaging in such activity when there is nothing that specifically addresses the issue. Willard (2007c) made three recommendations that are key to effectively addressing cyberbullying in the school environment. School policies must address the use of the Internet on campus, as well as any personal digital devices that may be brought onto the school premises. Furthermore, the policies must address and allow administrators to respond to online speech or harassment that meets the previously noted *Tinker* standard. That is, if online actions occurring off of the school grounds are having a noticeable effect on students within the building, then school officials should intervene.

Willard's (2007c) first point was that cyberbullying should be added to the student handbook and school policy under "prohibited actions" such as harassment, bullying, or discrimination, but done through any of the various electronic forms (p. 7). She also gave examples of possible wording that could be used to include on-campus Internet use and use of cell phones or personal digital assistants, as well as off-campus activities which meet the *Tinker* standard. To address cyberbullying, which encompasses both on- and off-campus behavior, Willard's recommendation for wording was as follows:

Any act that takes place on or immediately adjacent to school grounds, at any school-sponsored activity, on school-provided transportation or at any official school bus stop, use of the district Internet system, use of a personal digital device on campus, or off-campus activities that cause or threaten to cause a substantial and material disruption at school or interference with the rights of students to be secure (pp. 7-8).

Lastly, some school districts may have legislation in place which addresses cyberbullying by requiring that it be incorporated into safe schools planning (Willard 2007c). Parry Aftab recommended that the school administrators stress how important it is to be aware of off-campus speech, in that harmful behavior off-campus "can lead to escalating conflict that spills over into the schools" (cited in Stover, 2006, p. 42). Willard (2007c) also suggested that even if there is no legislation against it in the state or school district, district officials should still consider adding it to a safe schools plan. It can only do more good than harm.

What Parents Can do to Minimize the Occurrence of Cyberbullying

Because cyberbullying most often occurs away from the schoolyard, it is essential for parents to be aware of what they can do to help minimize this type of activity taking place in the home. Educating both parents and teens is necessary. Education for parents to inform them about cyberbullying, up-and-coming technology, and various computer software programs may include contacting the technology specialist at a local school to gain insight as to what types of programs youth are using online (Bolton & Graeve, 2005; Trolley, Hanel, & Shields, 2006). Also, Franek (2005/2006) noted that if a new piece of technology is purchased which may be an avenue for electronic communication, parents should discuss its appropriate uses with children. In cases of cell phones, parents have the choice of whether or not to add text messaging services as part of the phone's plan. Parents may also contact the phone service provider to request that certain phone numbers be blocked. If the children are aware of parents' expectations, and if the parents are involved with promoting positive electronic interactions, cyberbullying is likely to decrease.

Internet-accessible computers should be kept in a common room of the house, such as the family room, den, or kitchen (Franek, 2005/2006; Stop Bullying Now!, n.d.; Trolley, Hanel, & Shields, 2006; Wolfsberg, 2006), and not in the privacy of the child's bedroom (Bolton & Graeve, 2005). Also, the amount of time the child spends on the Internet each day should be limited, so as to reduce potential negative online interactions (Bolton & Graeve, 2005; Trolley, Hanel, & Shields, 2006). Parents should encourage openness with their children regarding online activities, regularly discussing with their children what they enjoy doing online and who their online friends are (Anderson &

Sturm, 2007; Stop Bullying Now!, n.d.). Hinduja and Patchin (n.d.c.) created sample scripts for parents to use as a guide if they suspect that their teen may be the target of cyberbullying. These scripts can encourage open communication on the subject of cyberbullying through social networking sites, e-mail, cell phones, and text messages.

Many researchers suggested monitoring children's online behavior as another way to minimize the possibility of cyberbullying entering the home. Monitoring can include: reviewing Internet history, not allowing secret passwords (Bolton & Graeve, 2005), installing parental control filtering software or tracking programs (Stop Bullying Now!, n.d.), or helping children set up online accounts so as to be more aware of the activities in which they are partaking (Anderson & Sturm, 2007). By letting their child know there is a "limited expectation of privacy" (Willard, 2007b, p. 41) and explaining that they may review and monitor what their child has been doing, the child is more likely to remove him or herself from any potential harmful online situations (Bolton & Graeve, 2005).

Additionally, Willard (2007b) recommended that children and parents should create and sign an Internet use agreement. This agreement should be based on family values, religious values, and/or other family rules, which it would be best that the child abide by. The parent agreement may include: paying attention to what is happening online; helping the child make responsible decisions and assist in providing the avenues to do so; and not overreacting to a concerning situation, but rather working together to solve any potential problems that may arise. The teen's agreement may consist of ways to protect privacy, websites to avoid, appropriate versus inappropriate online behavior, ways to stay safe, and what do to if harassed or bullied online, or know of someone who is. Bolton and Graeve (2005) supported the idea of Internet use contracts with additional

information to include, such as not keeping secrets from parents, notifying an adult of uncomfortable situations, not meeting new online friends in person, and asking an adult prior to providing personal information to websites and/or people met online. Wolfsberg (2006) noted that there should be negative consequences if children violate any part of the Internet safety contract, as the contract is enforced to provide protection for the children. They should also be acknowledged through positive reinforcement when following the contract (Bolton & Graeve, 2005).

Just as parents may need to become educated regarding technological advances, teens may also need to be educated by their parents about what is appropriate behavior online. This education could prevent them from being a cyberbully as well as give them the knowledge of what to do if they are being victimized online or know of someone who is. Teaching responsible behavior both in everyday life and online by instilling positive family values such as showing kindness and treating others respectfully (Willard, 2007b) is just part of what can be done to minimize the likelihood of one's child becoming a cyberbully.

Willard (2007a) noted four topics that parents can discuss with their teens which incorporate feelings of empathy, personal values, and positive decision-making strategies. Because youth may believe that what is said or done through electronic modes of communication makes them invisible or anonymous, it is important to explain that they leave "cyberfootprints" (p. 79) which can be used to trace their actions back to them. Helping teens recognize how their actions affect others through practicing perspective taking, including that of those they cannot see, can increase a teen's level of empathy. When children realize this, they may be less likely to behave in a manner that causes

harm to another. Parents should also teach their children how important it is to treat others kindly and avoid harming others online by promoting positive moral values. Children are in the process of forming their own moral codes and personal values, and encouraging them to learn and act in a way that is morally right will also help minimize negative behaviors occurring through electronic means. Bolton and Graeve (2005) recommended that parents teach “online etiquette” (p. 183) in which behaviors such as threats, harassment, profanity, or other inappropriate comments are discouraged and that parents should deliver the appropriate consequence if the rules are not followed. Along with these strategies, Willard (2007a) suggested that parents help youth “learn to use effective decision-making strategies” (p. 85) by giving them questions about their behavior to reflect upon. Some of these questions include: “Am I being kind and showing respect for others and myself?” “What would my mom (dad, guardian, or other important adult) think?” “Is this action in violation of any agreements, rules, or laws?” and “Would it be okay if I did this in the real world?” (p. 85). By providing teens with questions such as these, they will learn to look at the bigger picture, the effects and consequences of their actions, rather than focusing on what may be occurring in the heat of the moment.

Prevention and Intervention Techniques in the Schools

Although cyberbullying often takes place outside of school, the results of it tend to affect a student’s behavior while in school. This is why it is imperative that school staff and administrators do their part to employ preventative measures to reduce the occurrence of bullying through electronic means. A previous section covered how legislation has affected school policies, including the extent that school officials can go to

prevent cyberbullying from taking place on school grounds by incorporating it into the student handbook under prohibited actions. Staff members are also to remind students of the school's acceptable use policy regarding the Internet, and they may take steps to ensure that the policy is being followed through various monitoring and filtering systems.

Bully-proofing programs should be established within the school to focus on preventing face-to-face bullying; however, it may extend to Internet use and forms of cyberbullying as well. Providing education and training workshops for teachers and administrators on the effects of cyberbullying, including warning signs and how to intervene in the case of an incident, will bring into the light the concerns around this growing form of nontraditional bullying. Teachers can then use their knowledge to educate students on how to detect cyberbullying, possible ways of reporting incidents anonymously, and reiterating the school policy – provided it addresses cyberbullying (Limber, 2004; cited in Chibbaro, 2007), as well as empowering youth who are the targets of cyberbullying (Willard, n.d.). Anti-bullying programs should start in elementary school and include character education lessons such as fairness, kindness, respect, empathy, friendship, and problem solving techniques (Willard, n.d.).

Conducting social skills small group interventions at the elementary level may also be beneficial to combat bullying behaviors. Research by DeRosier (2004) used a social skills group intervention for third grade students who were either disliked by peers, socially anxious, or seen as bullies. The intervention group met once each week for eight weeks and the sessions lasted approximately one hour. The group was “designed to help children with peer problems learn basic social and cognitive skills with the goals of enhancing the quality of social relationships, confidence in dealing with social situations,

and social behavior” (p. 199). Results of the study showed that students who participated in the intervention group had a positive response in that they showed “enhanced self-esteem, greater social self-efficacy, and lower social anxiety over time” (p. 199). The research also showed that students who were seen as bullies prior to taking part in the group showed a reduction in their aggressive behaviors when the eight weeks were complete. By educating students at a young age as to appropriate social interactions, they are more likely to show confidence in social situations, have increased constructive relationships, and overall have fewer adjustment problems. As children grow, the skills learned can be applied to appropriate behavior when utilizing various forms of electronic communication.

Successful school bully-proofing programs are comprehensive and preventative in nature (Willard, 2007a, Whitted & Dupper, 2005). They should be comprehensive in that the prevention takes place at three levels: working to change the culture and climate of the school; providing strategies for teachers and staff to implement in classrooms; and working on the student level to help those who have been a part of bullying – either as the victim, the bully, or the bystander. In order to employ such preventative measures, it is critical that the school, community, and parents are on board and committed to attaining said results.

Whitted and Dupper (2005) detailed interventions at each level starting with the school climate. A needs assessment should be conducted in order to determine how serious bullying is and to raise staff awareness. Rules should be set both in the classrooms and throughout the school as a whole as to what behavior is expected and consistently enforced consequences for not following the rules. At the classroom level,

teachers should have training in bully prevention and have discussions with students about bullying, intervention techniques, and socially appropriate behavior. Willard (n.d.) discussed that it is essential to empower “student bystanders-who-are-part-of-the-problem to become student bystanders-who-are-part-of-the-solution” (p.5), by recognizing bullying situations and feeling strong enough to report them to an adult figure (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Prevention strategies at the student level may include the aforementioned social skills training as well as “changing students’ knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors by using interactive teaching techniques” (p. 171). If there are reports of cyberbullying, it is important to investigate them as soon as possible (Stop Bullying Now!, n.d.) and intervene by connecting the students involved with their school counselor (Chibbaro, 2007). The counselor can work to improve anger management techniques, social skills, and feelings of empathy for the cyberbully (Hazier, 2006; cited in Chibbaro, 2007), and may practice assertiveness skills and work with the target to improve self-esteem (Harris & Petrie, 2003; cited in Chibbaro, 2007).

The implementation of a comprehensive bully-proofing program throughout the school is likely to improve the school climate and daily face-to-face contacts between students and their peers. When children have a good moral foundation for their day-to-day interactions, those qualities will hopefully carry over into the online world.

Chapter III: Summary, Implications, and Recommendations

Cyberbullying is the up-and-coming form of bullying. It no longer takes place only at school, but can happen at any time and place thanks to technological advances. This chapter includes a summary of the key points from the information discussed in chapter two. In addition, this chapter includes implications of the research, and it concludes with recommendations made from the analysis.

Summary of Key Points

This study included an analysis of cyberbullying, including those involved and how they are impacted. Research also reviewed school policies and legislation that may either help or hinder the extent that schools can enforce regulations regarding cyberbullying. Literature also addressed what parents can do to minimize the occurrence of cyberbullying in the home, as well as action schools can take to prevent cyberbullying and intervene in situations where it is occurring.

Warning signs and characteristics were reviewed for those who bully, the targets, and the bully/victims. It is important to note that bullies often have a dominant personality, show lack of empathy, and signs of aggression. There are multiple reasons why the bully may act in such a way, including the desire for power and control. Bullying behavior often is not reported by the targets for fear of retaliation or because the bully is seen as involved in the school and is well-liked by staff members. Targets of cyberbullying frequently lack assertiveness skills which may lead them to believe that they deserve to be bullied, since nobody is doing anything to combat it; however, resilient targets are emotionally strong enough to overcome the bullying by ignoring and avoiding it altogether. Bully/victims may be viewed as the target, but react in an aggressive

manner so as to get the bully in trouble because he or she “started it.” Bully/victims are also often seen teasing younger children so as to have a feeling of power.

The target of cyberbullying undergoes great emotional strain including anxiety, fear, and depression, which in some cases leads to suicide. Academically, targets struggle as well, engaging in coping strategies such as truancy, failing classes, changing schools, or dropping out altogether. Those who use electronic communications as an avenue for bullying are also at risk for social problems, which may include the use of drugs or alcohol and being surrounded by others whose lack of values encourages bullying behavior. Bullies may also have academic difficulties, similar to those of the targets.

In the school setting, it has been difficult to discipline students as a result of outside-of-school cyberbullying, because some say that is limiting the right of free speech. The precedent-setting case of *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, however, allows schools to respond with discipline, if the off-campus behavior considerably interferes with productivity in the educational setting. In order to make known that the school will take cyberbullying seriously, it was recommended that districts add it to their handbook under the list of prohibited actions. It is important to include how administrations will respond to these acts if the *Tinker* standard is met; what are the proper steps needed to resolve the issue? Yet another suggestion was to incorporate cyberbullying into the school district’s safe schools planning curriculum.

Parents and schools need to be on board with the goal of reducing or preventing cyberbullying incidents. There are many steps that parents can take to ensure a safer online environment in the home. When parents hold children accountable by monitoring

Internet usage through filtering software, keeping the computer in a common room, and setting time limits, then children are less likely to put themselves in a harmful situation. Signing an Internet usage contract encourages openness between the parent and child as to what behaviors are expected when online, and the consequences when rules are broken. Education for parents on the topic of cyberbullying and keeping up-to-date with current technological advances are essential to the understanding of cyberbullying warning signs and to gaining an understanding of popular online programs being used by youth. It is also critical that parents educate their children about cyberbullying and what to do if placed in an uncomfortable situation. Discussing responsible online behavior, family and personal values, and encouraging effective decision-making strategies are ways to open the lines of communication, therefore minimizing the likelihood that bullying will invade the home.

Prevention and intervention techniques in the schools must be comprehensive in nature. Bully-proofing programs should address three levels: the school climate and culture; prevention strategies that can be utilized within the classroom setting; and interventions at the individual level. When a bully-proofing program is implemented within a school, it should not be limited only to face-to-face bullying, but should extend to incorporate cyberbullying. Teachers and administrators should be educated through training workshops on cyberbullying so, just as parents, they are aware of possible warning signs, effects of cyberbullying on the participants, and how to best address the issue in the classroom setting. Utilizing this knowledge to educate students, starting at the elementary level, and tying it in to character education programs will work to empower youth to handle cyberbullying in an effective manner. Research has shown that

participation in a social skills group for elementary students who were disliked by their peers, were seen as bullies, or showed social anxiety resulted in a decrease of these negative behaviors; they were seen as less aggressive at the conclusion of the group. Teaching tolerance, respect, and empathy will hopefully lead to a decrease in the occurrence of electronic bullying.

Implications

This literature has several implications. Cyberbullying is on the rise as new technologies are made available to today's youth. It is important to educate students about appropriate Internet and cell phone use and how their actions affect others, even though they may not see these results in person. By informing parents and educators of the characteristics and warning signs of bullying through electronic means, they will be more apt to recognize cyberbullying and take action. Knowledge regarding prevention and intervention strategies, both at home and in the school, will prepare adults to respond to incidences of cyberbullying in an appropriate manner.

Recommendations

In order to gauge the incidence of cyberbullying occurring both on and off school grounds, students should complete an anonymous needs assessment or survey each academic year which addresses: parental involvement with online activities; personal involvement in cyberbullying; if students believe cyberbullying to be of concern; effectiveness of current school district policies; and ways to possibly prevent and respond to cases of cyberbullying. A needs assessment should also be completed by staff members each year, in which they could discuss cyberbullying concerns occurring on the school premises, the effectiveness of the school district's Internet use policy, and the

school's response to inappropriate online behavior (Willard, 2007a). When conducting these surveys, the language used, such as the definition of cyberbullying and frequency, needs to be very specific so as to pinpoint the problem more effectively. Furthermore, district administrators need to revise school policies to incorporate cyberbullying into the list of prohibited actions. It is critical that youth and their parents are aware that the school will take cyberbullying seriously, so notifying them that if electronic communications are used to bully, harass, and/or make others feel uncomfortable, consequences will result.

Implementing a bully-proofing program in the schools is yet another way to prevent and intervene with this issue. Placing anonymous bully boxes throughout the school will allow students to feel comfortable in reporting incidents of bullying and/or cyberbullying. The reports should be reviewed by a team of faculty, including the school counselor and an administrator, to determine what action should be taken. If the behavior violates the school's policies, consequences should be enforced accordingly, so that the student body is aware of possible repercussions for their damaging behavior. Because face-to-face bullying on the school grounds can lead to cyberbullying away from school, teaching tolerance and respect for others is crucial. Anti-bullying programs, however, will only be most effective if resources, time, and energy are committed to executing and regularly evaluating the program plan.

It is essential that parents, children, school faculty and administration, and ideally the community are all on board to minimize the frequency of cyberbullying. Preventative measures may include installing monitoring and filtering software on computers at home, in schools, and at the local library or other popular Internet-accessible locations

frequented by teens. By holding students accountable for their actions, both in daily life and in cyberspace, the likelihood of their participating in acts of bullying, including cyberbullying, diminishes.

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Appendix A: Additional Terms

The following are additional, more specific forms of cyberbullying that can occur. These terms can all be found in the book *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats* by Willard (2007a).

Cyberstalking: “repeated sending of harmful messages that include threats of harm, are highly intimidating or extremely offensive, or involve extortion...a target begins to fear for his or her own safety and well-being” (p. 10).

Cyberthreats: Direct threats “generally contain information about an actual planned event” while distressing material “provides clues that the person is emotionally upset and may be considering hurting someone, self-harm, or suicide” (p. 11).

Denigration: “speech about a target that is harmful, untrue, or cruel...and may be posted online or sent to others. The purpose...is to interfere with friendships or damage the reputation of the target. This activity includes spreading gossip and rumors” (p. 7).

Exclusion: designating “who is a member of the in-group and who is an outcast” (p. 9).

Flaming: “a heated, short-lived argument that occurs between two or more protagonists...generally includes offensive, rude, and vulgar language, insults, and sometimes threats” (p. 5).

Harassment: “repeated, ongoing sending of offensive messages to an individual target...generally sent through personal communication channels, including e-mail, instant messaging, and text messaging” (p. 6).

Impersonation: happens “when the cyberbully gains the ability to impersonate the target and post material that reflects badly on the target or interferes with the target’s friendships (p. 8).

Outing: “publicly posting, sending, or forwarding personal communications or images, especially communications or images that contain intimate personal information or are potentially embarrassing” (p. 9).

Trickery: tricking the target “into thinking that a communication or sending of images is private, when the cyberbully intends to trick the target into communicating or disclosing something embarrassing that will then be disseminated to others or used as a threat” (p. 9).