Literature Review of Cyber Bullying in College

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The act of bullying has been ingrained in our society since the founding of this country. When technology was introduced and computers came along, a new and serious form of bullying and harassment emerged, called cyberbullying. Cyberbullying has allowed this form of harassment to expand, become more elusive and even harder to define. Cyberbullying occurs when a person or persons willingly use electronic technology to repeatedly harass or threaten another person or group by sending or posting harmful texts and/or images (Belsey, 2008).

Cutting edge technology is an essential tool for students to begin utilizing in college to prepare them for professional employment. Some students have abused and misused technology via social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. **Colleges should be responsible for effectively guiding students in the appropriate use of technology to eliminate or minimize cyberbullying.**

Victims can be attacked via chat rooms, websites, instant messaging, blogs and cell phones. From the beginning, online forums provided a communal breeding ground for youth to assault each other. Chat rooms were supplemented by AOL Instant Messenger, allowing teens to glom together in special rooms to talk for hours about the latest gossip. Today, the most popular social media website is Facebook. In April last year, Facebook indicated in its Form S-1 that it expects to have more than a billion users by year-end. In the same filing, the social media giant also reported that its 901 million existing users post more than 300 million pictures and a staggering 3.2 billion comments every day (Cain, 2012).

Anonymous blogging is another technological advancement that has fostered cyberbullying activity and fueled ethical debate. On sites, such as College ACB and Juicy Campus, which have both recently faced tightened regulations due to their verbally abusive
nature, youth (typically of college age) were able to login and comment anonymously in an open forum. The forum included harsh topics ranging from “Most Attractive” to “Worst Hookup.” The sites even included certain topic headings that were simply a person’s name under which people could post insulting comments. These blogging sites are illustrative of the most dramatic forms of cyberbullying thus far (Cain, 2012).

Although cyberbullying is a form of bullying, there are several characteristics that distinguish it from traditional bullying. One of the main characteristics is the bully’s ability to remain anonymous. Cyberbullies are able to harass their victims without the victims ever knowing who or why they are being cyberbullied. Cyberbullying allows the offender to mask his or her identity behind a computer. This anonymity makes it easier for the offender to strike blows against a victim without having to see the victim’s physical response. The distancing effect that technological devices have on today’s youth often leads them to say and do crueler things compared to what is typical in a traditional face-to-face bullying situation (Patchin, J.W. & Hinduja, S., 2008). Oftentimes, the perpetrator is oblivious to the harm he or she causes his or her victim. Others blindly intensify the harm inflicted on the victim by uploading and sharing a photo, retweeting a post, or liking a negative status posted by someone else. Anonymity also lessens the opportunity for direct feedback and significantly reduces the chance of bystander intervention and empathy or remorse from the perpetrator. In addition to the bully’s ability to remain anonymous, the victim experiences more difficulty getting away from his or her abuser. Various forms of technology allow the victim to be continually victimized via text messages or emails. Unlike traditional incidents of bullying, cyberbullying has the potential to reach thousands of individuals quickly (Slonje & Smith (2007). The characteristics of cyberbullying
compounds the effects of cyberbullying on the victim especially when the audience participates in the bullying by participating in the online conversation, forwarding text messages, and/or reposting comments made. When the bully gains an audience, it seems impossible for the victim to stop the abuse. Consequently, there is no easy way to find the source of the cyberbullying, stop others from sharing the information, or to eradicate the information permanently.

The psychological impact of cyberbullying on its victims is similar to traditional bullying. It includes low self-esteem, depression, anger, anxiety, academic difficulties, school avoidance, school violence, and suicide (Beran, T., & Li, Q., 2005). Victims typically are physically weaker and dislike violence. Youth who are anxious, small in stature, withdrawn, insecure, physically weak or victims of traditional bullying are at risk for cyberbullying. Piskin (2002) asserts that bullies often experience unnurturing home environments and physical violence at home, while victims have nurturing, overprotective parents. Bullies are characterized as unempathetic and aggressive. They use this aggression to establish power and dominance over their victims. Cyberbullying is commonly committed by individuals who were previous victims of cyberbullying or traditional bullying. Sometimes the victims retaliate by cyberbullying those who they believe cyberbullied them as well as other victims. Others participate in cyberbullying to demonstrate their cyberskills; this provides them a sense of power or competence. Many enjoy the vicarious attention given from peers as they witness others talking about or sharing their work. Still, others engage in cyberbullying due to peer pressure.

The research on cyber bullying among college students is limited. According to Finn (2004), 10 to 15% of 339 students at the University of New Hampshire reported receiving
repeated email or instant messages that threatened, harassed, or insulted them. He stated that more than half the students reported receiving unwanted pornography. Dilmac (2009) reported that 22.5% of 666 students at Selcuk University in Turkey reported cyberbullying another person at least once and 55.35% reported being a victim of cyberbullying at least once. At Indiana State University, 22% of survey students stated they had been cyberbullied, while 42% reported that they knew someone who had been cyberbullied (Pena, 2011). According to MacDonald & Roberts-Pittman (2011), of the 439 participants, 38% of college students knew someone who had been cyberbullied, 21.9% had been cyberbullied, and 8.6% had cyberbullied others.

Just as cyberbullying among college students and other young people have the same impacts, cyberbullying and traditional bullying affect victims similarly. The impacts of bullying are major as bullying is associated with major health and psychological issues such as depression, emotional distress, low self-esteem, and poor academic achievement (Mason, 2008). Bullying victims generally exhibit psychological problems such as depression, loneliness, low self-esteem, school phobias, and social anxiety (Greene, 2003). Although, cyberbullying is linked to serious effects, like low self-esteem, family problems, academic problems, school violence and delinquent behavior, the worst consequence is suicide and violence (Patchin & Hinduja, 2008). This tragic consequence occurred on September 12, 2010, when a Rutgers University freshman Tyler Clementi committed suicide after being recorded on a webcam having an intimate encounter with another male student.

Even without cyberbullying, attending college can be very stressful for young adults. For victims of cyberbullying stress is intensified. Many victims often do not report the incidents of
cyberbullying. Typically when the cyberbullying becomes unbearable, young adults tell someone about the incidents (Walker, Sockman, & Koehn, 2011). Because college students regularly use technology, it is likely cyberbullying will continue to increase. In response to this epidemic, college campuses must find creative ways to prevent cyberbullying from occurring and to intervene early when it has occurred. The first steps towards preventive measures should be to clearly define Cyberbullying, outline consequences for the action, and develop policies to protect the victims as well as hold the aggressor accountable for his or her actions.

In addition to identification and policy development, prevention efforts can be composed of collaboration among the college counseling center, the counseling, social work, and psychology departments. Collectively, these entities can meet and produce a prevention and intervention plan. Many researchers have identified prevention and intervention programs, however, most of the programs focus on youth in elementary, middle, and high schools.

The Anti-Defamation League has developed several prevention/intervention programs that can be utilized for parents, educators and youth. Many of these plans can be adapted to fit the university environment. According to the Anti-Defamation League, the prevention plan may include the following components:

- Cyberbullying prevention education rally’s every semester
- Brochures, posters, webpage announcements about cyberbullying
- Updating policies to include guidelines for internet and cellphone use, and consequences of cyberbullying
- Encourage reporting of cyberbullying
• Developing a center for violence prevention and intervention

It is important to take a serious look at this growing problem and develop effective methods to decrease its impact on college campuses. Student input is especially germane in this process as student led initiatives may increase awareness and gain support. Additionally, the plan should be continuously evaluated to assess its effectiveness.

Decreasing cyberbullying incidents is a long and arduous task, thus, colleges and universities should have intervention methods readily available when incidents occur. As recommended by the Anti-Defamation League, intervention methods can include the following:

• Immediately responding when cyberbullying is reported

• Provide counseling to the victims

• Provide counseling to the perpetrators

• Determine consequences in accordance with university policies

• Hold town hall meeting and/or group counseling sessions to help students cope with incident

Because of the widespread use and accessibility of technology among college students, cyberbullying is a serious problem. Cyberbullying often leads to death, violence, and student dropout on college campuses, for these reasons it is imperative that colleges and universities address this issue before it festers in to any form of violence or harassment. It is recommended that research on the impact and prevalence of cyberbullying among college students be conducted. It is imperative that entities on the college campus collaborate on prevention and intervention strategies to help combat this issue. Education and awareness is the key to decreasing cyberbullying on college campuses.
References


