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OVERVIEW OF CYBERBULLYING

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Kids have been bullying each other for generations. The latest generation, however, has been able to utilize technology to expand their reach and the extent of their harm. This phenomenon is being called *cyberbullying*, defined as: *"willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices"* (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009:5). Basically, we are referring to incidents where adolescents use technology, usually computers or cell phones, to harass, threaten, humiliate, or otherwise hassle their peers.

Where does cyberbullying commonly occur?

Cyberbullying occurs across a variety of venues and mediums in cyberspace, and it shouldn't come as a surprise that it occurs most often where teenagers congregate. Initially, many teens hung out in chat rooms, and as a result that is where most harassment took place. In recent years, most youth have been drawn to social networking websites (such as Facebook) and video-sharing websites (such as YouTube). This trend has led to increased reports of cyberbullying occurring in those environments (Burgess-Proctor, Patchin, & Hinduja, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008b; R. M. Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Lenhart, 2007; Li, 2007a; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Instant messaging on the Internet or text messaging via a cell phone also appear to be common ways in which youth are harassing others. Moreover, since most cell phones attractive to youth are "smart" phones (e.g., iPhones, Blackberries, Droids), they often have full computing, recording, and Internet capabilities on a device that is always with them. Adolescents have sometimes taken pictures in a bedroom, a bathroom, or another location where privacy is expected, and posted or distributed them online. More recently, some have recorded unauthorized videos of other teens and uploaded them for the world to see, rate, tag, and discuss. We are also seeing it happen with portable gaming devices, in 3-D virtual worlds and on social gaming sites, and in newer interactive sites such as Formspring and ChatRoulette.

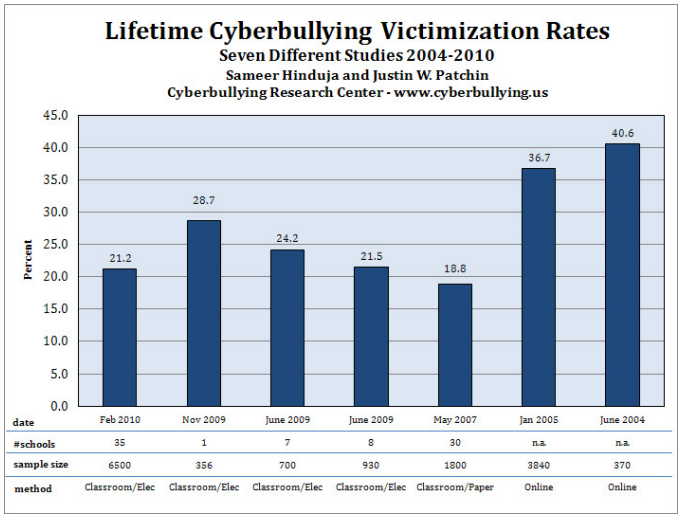
How much cyberbullying is out there?

Estimates of the number of youth who experience cyberbullying vary widely (ranging from 5-40% or more), depending on the age of the group studied, how cyberbullying is formally defined, and the research methodology (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007, 2009, 2010c; R. M. Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Li, 2007b; Williams & Guerra, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). In our work, we inform students that cyberbullying is when someone "repeatedly makes fun of another person online or repeatedly picks on another person through email or text message or when someone posts something online about another person that they don't like." Using this definition, about 20% of the over 4,400 randomly-selected 11-18 year-old students we surveyed in 2010 indicated they had been a victim at some point in their life. About this same number admitted to cyberbullying others during their lifetime (Hinduja & Patchin, forthcoming). Finally, about 10% of

teens in this recent study said they had both been a victim and an offender.

What are some of the negative effects that cyberbullying can have on a person?

There are many detrimental outcomes associated with cyberbullying that reach into the real world. First, many targets of cyberbullying report feeling depressed, sad, angry, and frustrated (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007, 2008a, 2009; Kowalski, Limber, Scheck, Redfearn, Allen, Calloway, & Farris, 2005; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Li, 2007a, 2007b; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Williams & Guerra, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004), and these emotions have been correlated with delinquency and interpersonal violence among youth (Berson, Berson, & Ferron, 2002; Cowie & Berdondini, 2002; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007). As one teenager stated: "It makes me hurt both physically and mentally. It scares me and takes away all my confidence. It makes me feel sick and worthless." Victims who experience cyberbullying also reveal that are were afraid or embarrassed to go to school. In addition, research has revealed a link between cyberbullying and low self-esteem, family problems, academic problems, school violence, and delinquent behavior (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007, 2008a, 2009; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010; Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Finally, cyberbullied youth also report having suicidal thoughts, and there have been a number of examples in the United States where youth who were victimized ended up taking their own lives (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010a).

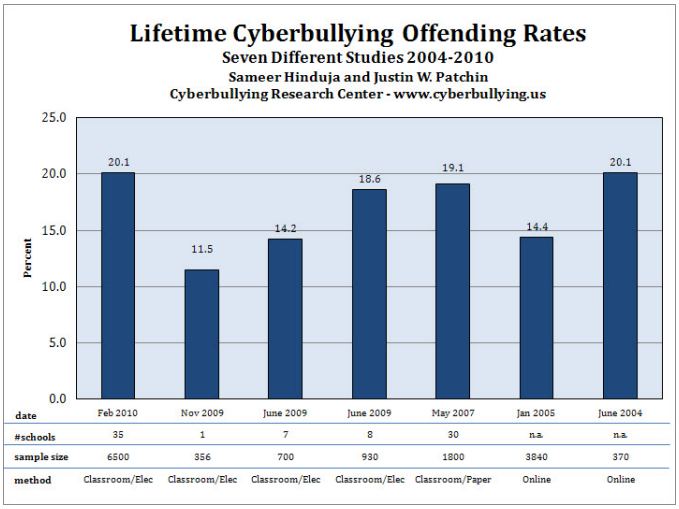


How is cyberbullying different from traditional bullying?

While often similar in terms of targeting peers with hurtful words or threats, bullying and cyberbullying have many differences that can make the latter even more devastating. First, victims sometimes do not know who the bully is, or why they are being targeted. The cyberbully can cloak his or her identity behind a computer or cell phone using anonymous email addresses or pseudonymous screen names (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008a). Second, the hurtful actions of a cyberbully are viral; that is, a large number of people (at school, in the neighborhood, in the city, in the world!) can be involved in a cyber-attack on a victim, or at least find out about the incident with a few keystrokes or clicks of the mouse. The perception, then, is that absolutely everyone is in on the joke.

Third, it is often easier to be cruel using technology because cyberbullying can be done from a physically distant location, and the bully doesn't have to see the immediate response by the target (Willard, 2007). In fact, some teens simply might not recognize the serious harm they are causing because they are sheltered from the victim's

response. Finally, while parents and teachers are doing a better job supervising youth at school and at home, many adults don't have the technological know-how to keep track of what teens are up to online. As a result, a victim's experience may be missed and a bully's actions may be left unchecked. Even if bullies are identified, many adults find themselves unprepared to adequately respond.



Why is cyberbullying becoming a major issue?

Cyberbullying is a growing problem because increasing numbers of teens are using and have completely embraced interactions via computers and cell phones. Two-thirds of youth go online every day for school work, to keep in touch with their friends, to play games, to learn about celebrities, to share their digital creations, or for many other reasons (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Because the online communication tools have become an important part of their lives, it is not surprising that some teens have decided to use these devices to be malicious or menacing towards others. The fact that teens are connected to technology 24/7 means they are susceptible to victimization (and able to act on mean intentions toward others) around the clock (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2007). Apart from a measure of anonymity, it is also easier to be hateful using typed words rather than spoken words face-to-face. And because some adults have been slow to respond to cyberbullying, many cyberbullies feel that there are little to no consequences for their actions.

Despite these differences, a significant body of research notes the close connection between experiences with online and offline bullying. While it is difficult to determine whether being a bully or being bullied in the real world *causes* similar experiences in cyberspace (or vice versa), a clear correlation between the two spheres of interaction exists. For example, Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) found that about half of cyberbullying victims and offenders report also experiencing traditional, offline bullying (see also Hinduja & Patchin, 2009) and we Hinduja & Patchin, 2008 found that traditional bullies were more than twice as likely to be both the victims and the perpetrators of electronic forms of bullying compared to those who do not engage in traditional bullying. Moreover, victims of offline bullying were 2.7 times as likely to also be a victim of cyberbullying compared to those who hadn't experienced offline bullying.

What can parents do?

The best tack parents can take when their child is cyberbullied is to make sure they feel (and are) safe and secure, and to convey unconditional support. Parents must demonstrate to their children through words and actions that they both desire the same end result: that the cyberbullying stop and

that life does not become even more difficult. This can be accomplished by working together to arrive at a mutually-agreeable course of action, as sometimes it is appropriate (and important) to solicit the child's perspective as to what might be done to improve the situation. If necessary, parents should explain the importance of scheduling a meeting with school administrators (or a teacher they trust) to discuss the matter. Parents may also be able to contact the father or mother of the offender, and/or work with the Internet Service Provider, Cell Phone Service Provider, or Content Provider to investigate the issue or remove the offending material. The police should also be approached when physical threats are involved or a crime has possibly been committed.

Overall, parents must educate their children about appropriate online behaviors (and teens must follow these guidelines!). They should also monitor their child's activities while online – especially early in their exploration of cyberspace. This can be done informally (through active participation in your child's Internet experience, which we recommend most of all) or formally (through software). Cultivate and maintain an open, candid line of communication with your children, so that they are ready and willing to come to you whenever they experience something unpleasant or distressing when interacting via computer or cell phone. Model, teach, and reinforce positive morals and values, and instill in youth the importance of treating others with respect and dignity, whether online or off.

Parents may also utilize an "Internet Use Contract" and a "Cell Phone Use Contract" to foster a crystal-clear understanding about what is and is not appropriate with respect to the use of technology. Within these documents, both the child and the parent agree to abide by certain mutually-acceptable rules of engagement. To remind the child of this pledged commitment, it is recommended that this contract be posted in a highly visible place (e.g., next to the computer). When there are violations to this contract, immediate consequences must be given that are proportionate to the misbehavior, and that leave an impact. Teens need to learn that inappropriate online actions will not be tolerated. Victims of cyberbullying (and the bystanders who observe it) must know for sure that the adults who they tell will intervene rationally and logically, and not make the situation worse.

If a parent discovers that their child is cyberbullying others, they should first communicate how that behavior inflicts harm and causes pain in the real world as well as in cyberspace. Depending on the level of seriousness of the incident, and whether it seems that the child has realized the hurtful nature of his or her behavior, consequences should be firmly applied (and escalated if the behavior continues). If the incident was particularly severe, parents may want to consider installing tracking or filtering software, or removing technology privileges altogether for a period of time. Moving forward, it is essential that parents pay even greater attention to the Internet and cell phone activities of their child to make sure that they have internalized the lesson and are acting in responsible ways.

What should schools do to prevent cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying that is initiated using computer on campus – such as in a school lab or on school-issued laptops, or even via personally-owned devices (cell phones,

iPads, netbooks) between or during classes – can obviously affect the mission, value system, and goals of a school. However, even if cyberbullying originates off-campus from a student's home computer or phone, it can lead to the same problematic outcomes on campus. This is because the social and relational fallout frequently carries over into the school environment since it mostly involves conflict between students who know each other, rather than involving strangers (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007, 2008a, 2009, 2010a; McQuade & Sampat, 2008; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007; Ybarra, et al., 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). As such, the school is necessarily implicated in a large number of these cases, which not only tends to compromise the safety and well-being of youth, but also undermines the positive school climate that teachers, staff, and administrators have worked to create.

The most important preventive step is to educate the school community about responsible Internet interactions. Students need to know that all forms of bullying are wrong and that those who engage in harassing or threatening behaviors will be subject to discipline. It is therefore important to discuss issues related to the appropriate use of online communications technology in various areas of the general curriculum – and not just in technology-related classes. To be sure, these messages should be reinforced in classes that regularly utilize technology. Signage also should be posted in the computer lab or at each computer workstation to remind students of the rules of acceptable use. In general, it is crucial to establish and maintain a school climate of respect and integrity where violations result in informal or formal sanction (Davis & Davis, 2007b).

Furthermore, school district personnel should review their harassment and bullying policies to see if they allow for the discipline of students who engage in cyberbullying. If their policy covers it, cyberbullying incidents that occur at school - or that originate off campus but ultimately result in a substantial disruption of the learning environment - are well within a school's legal authority to intervene. The school then needs to make it clear to students, parents, and all staff that these behaviors are unacceptable and will be subject to discipline. In some cases, simply discussing the incident with the offender's parents will result in the behavior stopping.

What should schools do to respond to cyberbullying?

Students should already know that cyberbullying is unacceptable and that the behavior will result in discipline. Utilize school liaison officers or other members of law enforcement to thoroughly investigate incidents, as needed, if the behaviors cross a certain threshold of severity. Once the offending party has been identified, develop a response that is commensurate with the harm done and the disruption that occurred.

School administrators should also work with parents to convey to the student that cyberbullying behaviors are taken seriously and are not trivialized. Moreover, schools should come up with creative response strategies, particularly for relatively minor forms of harassment that do not result in significant harm. For example, students may be required to create anti-cyberbullying posters to be displayed throughout the school. Older students might be required to give a brief presentation to younger students about the importance of using technology in ethically-sound ways. The point here, again,

is to condemn the behavior while sending a message to the rest of the school community that bullying in any form is wrong and will not be tolerated.

Even though the vast majority of these incidents can be handled informally (calling parents, counseling the bully and target, expressing condemnation of the behavior), there may be occasions where formal response from the school is warranted. This is particularly the case in incidents involving serious threats toward another student, if the target no longer feels comfortable coming to school, or if cyberbullying behaviors continue after informal attempts to stop it have failed. In these cases, detention, suspension, changes of placement, or even expulsion may be necessary. If these extreme measures are required, it is important that educators are able to clearly demonstrate the link to school and present evidence that supports their action.

How is cyberbullying and school climate related?

The benefits of a positive school climate have been identified through much research over the last thirty years. It contributes to more consistent attendance, higher student achievement, and other desirable student outcomes. Though limited, the research done on school climate and traditional bullying also underscores its importance in preventing peer conflict. Existing research has consistently identified an inverse relationship between specific components of school climate and bullying among students (e.g., Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1985; Malecki & Demaray, 2004; Rigby, 1996; Whitney & Smith, 1993).

Also, a school climate that condones bullying (Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999) within a high-conflict, disorganized school environment tends to exacerbate the problem of bullying (Kasen, Berenson, Cohen, & Johnson, 2004). Finally, youth who are introduced to and adopt normative beliefs that support peer aggression are more likely to bully others (Bentley & Li, 1995; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Huesmann, 1997; Olweus, 1991).

One of our recent studies found that students who experienced cyberbullying (both those who were victims and those who admitted to cyberbullying others) perceived a poorer climate at their school than those who had not experienced cyberbullying. Youth were asked whether they "enjoy going to school," "feel safe at school," "feel that teachers at their school really try to help them succeed," and "feel that teachers at their school care about them." Those who admitted to cyberbullying others or who were the target of cyberbullying were less likely to agree with those statements.

Overall, it is critical for educators to develop and promote a safe and respectful school climate. A positive on-campus environment will go a long way in reducing the frequency of many problematic behaviors at school, including bullying and harassment. In this setting, teachers must demonstrate emotional support, a warm and caring atmosphere, a strong focus on academics and learning, and a fostering of healthy self-esteem. Additionally, it is crucial that the school seeks to create and promote an atmosphere where certain conduct not tolerated—by students and staff alike. In schools with healthy climates, students know what is appropriate and what is not.

One way to combat cyberbullying is to create a positive school climate. The benefits of a positive school climate have

been identified through much research as improved attendance, student achievement, perceived and actual campus safety, and other desirable student outcomes, along with decreased peer-on-peer bullying. The following are ways to foster a positive climate at school:

- Constantly demonstrate emotional support, a warm and caring atmosphere, a strong focus on academics and learning, and encourage healthy self-esteem among students.

- Offer training workshops for staff to get them up to speed on the positive and negative uses of Facebook, YouTube, FormSpring, ChatRoulette, instant messaging programs, chat rooms, message boards, and cell phones.

- Hold assemblies for students that are relevant, hard-hitting, and meaningful, emphasizing that the *vast majority* of kids do the right thing with their computers and cell phones and that appropriate and wise Internet participation is the social norm. This should inspire the rest to "get on board."

- Use peer mentoring by having older students informally teach lessons and share learning experiences with younger students to promote positive online interactions.

- Establish clear rules about the use of the Internet, computers, and other electronic devices, making sure to cover online harassment. Post eye-catching signs or posters in school computer labs, hallways, and classrooms to remind students to use technology responsibly.

- Create a formal behavioral contract specific to cyberbullying or introduce clauses within the formal "respect policy" or "honor code" that identify cyberbullying as inappropriate behavior. Do what you can to make sure this policy or honor code is viewed as sacred among students.

- Share important facts, reminders, and guidance about cyberbullying over the audio or video morning announcements on a weekly basis.

- Develop *anonymous* ways for students to report situations or incidents that may weaken the school climate (cyberbullying and other forms of harassment). Post a web form on the school's web page, create an e-mail account where messages are forwarded to the counselor or assistant principal, or provide a cell phone number to which students can text their concerns.

- Develop a website, blog, Facebook group, or Twitter page for parents and students to further inform them about your school's position and how you will respond to incidents. Send out news, reminders, and links to stories involving appropriate and inappropriate online communications among young adolescents to keep these issues in the forefront of their minds and reinforce them as priority issues for your school.

- Motivate students to initiate an anti-cyberbullying awareness or pledge campaign. Let them come up with a very cool and relevant design for their hard-hitting message, then approach local businesses and organizations to sponsor the production of T-shirts, buttons, pins, key chains, magnets, or bumper stickers

to spread the word.

Cultivating a positive climate on campus will not only promote student achievement, success, and productivity, it will decrease peer harassment—online and offline.

What can youth do?

Most importantly, youth should develop a relationship with an adult they trust (a parent, teacher, or someone else) so they can talk about any experiences they have online (or off) that make them upset or uncomfortable. If possible, teens should ignore minor teasing or name calling, and not respond to the bully as that might simply make the problem continue. It's also useful to keep all evidence of cyberbullying to show an adult who can help with the situation. If targets of cyberbullying are able to keep a log or a journal of the dates and times and instances of the online harassment, that can also help prove what was going on and who started it.

Overall, youth should go online with their parents – show them what web sites they use, and why. At the same time, they need to be responsible when interacting with others on the Internet. For instance, they shouldn't say anything to anyone online that they wouldn't say to them in person with their parents in the room. Finally, youth ought to take advantage of the privacy settings within Facebook and other websites, and the social software (instant messaging, email, and chat programs) that they use – they are there to help reduce the chances of victimization. Users can adjust the settings to restrict and monitor who can contact them and who can read their online content.

What can bystanders do?

Bystanders also have a very critical role to play. Those who witness cyberbullying generally do not want to get involved because of the hassle and problems they fear it might bring upon them, yet they often recognize that what they are seeing is not right and should stop (Davis & Davis, 2007a). However, by doing *nothing,* bystanders are doing *something.* We have a responsibility to look out for the best interests of each other. Bystanders can make a huge difference in improving the situation for cyberbullying victims, who often feel helpless and hopeless and need someone to come to the rescue. Bystanders should note what they see and when. They should also stand up for the victim, and tell an adult they trust who can really step in and improve the situation (Patchin & Hinduja, forthcoming). Finally, they should never encourage or indirectly contribute to the behavior – by forwarding hurtful messages, laughing at inappropriate jokes or content, condoning the act just to "fit in," or otherwise silently allowing it to continue (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

What can law enforcement do?

Law enforcement officers also have a role in preventing and responding to cyberbullying. To begin, they need to be aware of ever-evolving state and local laws concerning online behaviors, and equip themselves with the skills and knowledge to intervene as necessary (Patchin & Hinduja, forthcoming). In a recent survey of school resource officers, we found that almost one-quarter did not know if their state had a cyberbullying law. This is surprising since their most visible responsibility involves responding to actions which are in violation of law (e.g., harassment, threats, stalking). Even if the behavior doesn't immediately appear to rise to the level of a crime, officers

should use their discretion to handle the situation in a way that is appropriate for the circumstances. For example, a simple discussion of the legal issues involved in cyberbullying may be enough to deter some youth from future misbehavior. Officers might also talk to parents about their child's conduct and express to them the seriousness of online harassment.

Relatedly, officers can play an essential role in preventing cyberbullying from occurring or getting out of hand in the first place. They can speak to students in classrooms about cyberbullying and online safety issues more broadly in an attempt to discourage them from engaging in risky or unacceptable actions and interactions. They might also speak to parents about local and state laws, so that they are informed and can properly respond if their child is involved in an incident.

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