



Full length article

Cyberbullying among college students with disabilities



Robin M. Kowalski*, Chad A. Morgan, Kelan Drake-Lavelle, Brooke Allison

Clemson University, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 October 2015

Received in revised form

16 December 2015

Accepted 17 December 2015

Available online 31 December 2015

Keywords:

Cyberbullying

Disabilities

College students

ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying has received increasing attention in recent years. However, the majority of this research has focused on children in middle school and on neurotypical youth, to the omission of people with disabilities. The current study, however, examines cyberbullying as it occurs among college students with and without disabilities. Two hundred five students completed a survey examining their experiences with cyberbullying, along with measures of predictor and outcome variables theorized to be related to cyberbullying. The results revealed that, as with traditional bullying, students with disabilities are at particular risk for cyberbullying victimization. Predictors of victimization included traditional bullying victimization, Internet use, and the noticeability of the disability. Outcomes of cyberbullying victimization (e.g., low self-esteem, high depression) appear to be particularly pronounced for individuals with disabilities.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Since Columbine, attention to the topic of bullying has burgeoned. Increased media attention has been devoted to the topic, the number of research articles published on the topic has ballooned, and the majority of states now have some type of legislation related to bullying. Early on, this attention was directed primarily toward traditional bullying, defined as an act of aggression that is typically repeated over time and that occurs among individuals between whom there is a power imbalance (Olweus, 1993). This power imbalance can take any number of different forms including differences in social status, physical stature, or socio-economic level, to name a few. More recently, attention has shifted toward electronic bullying or cyberbullying (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014; Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2012a). Cyberbullying refers to bullying that occurs via the Internet or text messaging. Like traditional bullying, cyberbullying is an act of aggression that is often repeated over time (e.g., a single message posted where thousands of people can view it), and that occurs among individuals whose relationship is defined by a power imbalance. In the case of cyberbullying, this power imbalance may be as simple as a difference in technological expertise.

Much of the research on both traditional bullying and cyberbullying has focused on middle school children as this seems to be a particularly vulnerable age during which bullying is likely to occur.

In addition, this research has been largely limited to neurotypical samples of children, to the relative exclusion of examinations of bullying, particularly cyberbullying, among youth with disabilities. The purpose of the present study was to fulfill two gaps in the literature by examining antecedents and consequences of cyberbullying in a college-age sample of students with and without disabilities. The National College Health Assessment sponsored by the American College Health Association in 2014 found that 56.2% of college students reported being diagnosed or treated by a professional for some type of disability, the most common of which was ADHD (8%). In addition, the National Assessment found that, within the previous 12 months, 33.2% of college students felt so depressed that they found it difficult to function, a significant majority of these stating that the depression interfered with their academic performance. Given these statistics, understanding behaviors, such as cyberbullying, that are related to depression and related emotions, is critical to improving the physical, psychological, and social well-being of college students.

1. Prevalence rates of cyberbullying

Prevalence rates of cyberbullying are highly variable across studies. Allowing for these variations, estimates of the prevalence of cyberbullying typically range between 10% and 40% for secondary school age students (e.g., Kowalski et al., 2014; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Lenhart, 2010; O'Brennan, Bradshaw, & Sawyer, 2009) and between 10% and 28% for college-age students

* Corresponding author. Department of Psychology, Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29634, USA.

E-mail address: rkowals@clemson.edu (R.M. Kowalski).

(Francisco, Samoa, Ferreira, & das Dores Martins, 2015; Na, Dancy, & Park, 2015; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012; Selkie, Kota, Chan, & Moreno, 2015).

Although only a handful of studies have examined cyberbullying among youth with disabilities (see, e.g., Didden et al., 2009; Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2015; Heiman, Olenik-Shemesh, & Eden, 2015; Kowalski & Fedina, 2011), research on traditional bullying among adolescents with disabilities has highlighted the vulnerability of this population (see e.g., Annerback, Sahlqvist, & Wingren, 2014; Christensen, Fraynt, Neece, & Baker, 2012; Farmer et al., 2012; Rose, Espelage, Aragon, & Elliott, 2011a; Rose et al., 2011b; Rose, Simpson, & Moss, 2015; Swearer, Wang, Maag, Siebecker, & Frerichs, 2012; Twyman et al., 2010). Research on traditional bullying suggests that individuals with certain disabilities are more likely to be bullied than others. For example, Zeedyk, Rodriguez, Tipton, Baker, and Blacher (2014) found that youth with autism spectrum disorders not only experienced higher rates of bullying than youth with intellectual disabilities and youth without disabilities, but they also experienced higher rates of internalizing relational issues. Sterzing, Shattuck, Narendorf, Wagner, and Cooper (2012) found that youth with autism spectrum disorder were more likely to perpetrate bullying than individuals in other disability categories that they tested. Additionally, they observed that students with disabilities in general education settings were more likely to be victimized than those in special education settings. Youth with ADHD and/or autism spectrum disorder have been shown to be more likely to be both victims and perpetrators of traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Heiman et al., 2015; Kowalski & Fedina, 2011; Twyman et al., 2010; Unnever & Cornell, 2003; Yen et al., 2014). Furthermore, individuals with physical health conditions (e.g., obesity, eczema, diabetes) or special needs (e.g., muscular dystrophy) that set them apart from others are more likely to be bullied (Dawkins, 1996; Fox & Farrow, 2009; Magin, Adams, Heading, Pond, & Smith, 2008; Storch et al., 2004).

In keeping with research on traditional bullying, the few studies that have been conducted on cyberbullying among students with disabilities have been consistent in finding that youth with disabilities report higher rates of cyber victimization and perpetration than youth without disabilities. Adolescents with ADHD report higher levels of cyberbullying victimization (Didden et al., 2009; Heiman et al., 2015; Kowalski & Fedina, 2011), cyberbullying perpetration (Heiman et al., 2015; Kowalski & Fedina, 2011), and cyberbullying witnessing (Heiman et al., 2015). Additionally, adolescents with ADHD who were both victims and nonvictims of cyberbullying report greater feelings of loneliness and lower feelings of social self-efficacy compared to youth without ADHD (Heiman et al., 2015). Adolescents with learning disabilities attending special education classes report higher levels of both cyber victimization and cyberbullying perpetration than youth with learning disabilities in mainstream classes (Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2015). However, these studies, while informative, provide only an initial foray into the cyberbullying experiences of individuals with disabilities. Additionally, they focus on middle and high school students, to the exclusion of an examination of the experiences of college-age students with disabilities.

2. Predictors of cyberbullying

The General Aggression Model (GAM; Anderson & Bushman, 2002) has been used as a theoretical model to outline variables related to cyberbullying victimization and perpetration (Kowalski et al., 2014). Antecedent factors to cyberbullying behavior include a number of person and situational variables that influence aggressive behavior. Representative person factors include age,

gender, and personality characteristics. Situational variables include school climate, parental involvement, provocation/support, and perceived anonymity (Casas, Del Ray, Ortega-Ruiz, 2013; Kowalski et al., 2014). Person factors of interest in the present study were dispositional social anxiety and the Big Five personality traits of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Research has been consistent in showing that cyberbullying victimization is correlated with higher levels of anxiety (Kowalski et al., 2014; Kowalski & Limber, 2013). Much of this research, however, has focused on anxiety as a consequence of cyberbullying victimization rather than a predictor, hence the focus of the current study on dispositional social anxiety. Youth with anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression are at increased risk of traditional bullying victimization (Fekkes, Pijpers, Fredriks, Vogels, & Verloove-VanHorick, 2006; Swearer, Grills, Haye, & Cary, 2004). Given the co-occurrence between traditional bullying victimization and cyberbullying victimization (Kowalski et al., 2014), it follows that anxiety might also be a predictor for cyberbullying victimization. Indeed, recent research has shown self-esteem to be a predictor of cyberbullying victimization among high school students (Brewer & Kerlake, 2015). Given that self-esteem and social anxiety are frequently inversely related (Leary, 1983), social anxiety should positively correlate with cyberbullying victimization. Additional support for this can be found in the fact that socially anxious individuals engage in more problematic Internet use, placing them at increased risk for negative outcomes (Kim & Davis, 2009), cyberbullying being a likely negative outcome.

In addition, research has demonstrated differences in the Big Five personality traits by disability status (Gagliano et al., 2014). In this study, dyslexic children scored lower on openness, conscientiousness, and agreeableness than children who did not have dyslexia. The dyslexic children also displayed poor emotion control and moodiness. Like social anxiety, personality traits such as low agreeableness may make it more likely that an individual becomes a victim of any type of bullying, including cyberbullying. Support for this was found in a study by Neuber, Künsting, and Phieler (2014) who found that cyberbullying victimization correlated negatively with agreeableness and positively with neuroticism in a sample of 1800 adolescents. A meta-analytic review of research on traditional bullying victimization and personality supports the link between high neuroticism, low agreeableness, and bullying victimization (Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015; see also Kodžopeljčić, Smederevac, Mitrović, Dinić, & Čolović, 2014).

Researchers have also examined the role that involvement in traditional bullying as victim and/or perpetrator plays in cyberbullying victimization and perpetration. Kowalski et al. (2014) found a correlation of 0.45 between perpetrating traditional bullying and perpetrating cyberbullying (see also, Kowalski, Morgan, & Limber, 2012b). They similarly found a correlation of 0.40 between traditional victimization and cyberbullying victimization. Consistent with these findings and the GAM, one would expect a positive relationship between traditional victimization and cyber victimization, particularly for individuals with disabilities who are more likely to have experienced traditional bullying victimization.

3. Consequences of cyberbullying

The consequences of bullying involve a number of physical and psychological difficulties. Victims of cyberbullying experience higher levels of loneliness, anxiety, and depression, and lower levels of self-esteem (Egan & Perry, 1998; Kowalski et al., 2012a; Selkie et al., 2015; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012; Tennant, Demaray, Coyle, & Malecki, 2015; Undheim & Sund, 2010). Individuals involved in cyberbullying also show higher levels of suicidal

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/350250>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/350250>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)