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Cyberbullying : a literature review

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Cyberbullying : a literature review

Abstract

Technology is becoming more prevalent each day, with that a new form of bullying is happening. The new form is cyberbullying. It is form of bullying that takes place over cell phones, email, websites, and chat rooms. While cyberbullying is a form of bullying, there are differences between cyberbullying and normal bullying. Cyberbullying makes it hard for some students to escape from the bullying, because cyberbullying is through technology, so it allows the bullying to continue outside of the school walls. This literature review is going to give students, teachers, administrators, and parents some helpful tips as to how to look for cyberbullying, and how to prevent it in and out of the schools.

CYBERBULLYING: A LITERATURE REVIEW

A Research Paper

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts or Masters of Education

Natalie Nesbitt

University of Northern Iowa

December 2010

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Abstract

Technology is becoming more prevalent each day, with that a new form of bullying is happening. The new form is cyberbullying. It is form of bullying that takes place over cell phones, email, websites, and chat rooms. While cyberbullying is a form of bullying, there are differences between cyberbullying and normal bullying. Cyberbullying makes it hard for some students to escape from the bullying, because cyberbullying is through technology, so it allows the bullying to continue outside of the school walls. This literature review is going to give students, teachers, administrators, and parents some helpful tips as to how to look for cyberbullying, and how to prevent it in and out of the schools.

Cyberbullying: A Literature Review

Computers and other electronics are becoming more a part of our everyday world each day. New technologies are being discovered, and new programs are being made to improve different aspects of our environment. One big example is the use of technology to better our communication to each other. With the internet we are now able to email, blog, instant message, create websites, and talk in chat rooms, etc. The internet is not the only developed mode of communication. Cell phones are becoming more popular than ever. People are able to use the cell phones not only to talk to other people, but to also text, send pictures, and access the internet. Most of these advances have been positive, and have created easier routes of communication between people; however, technology has also had negative effects, especially on the youth. School aged children have started to use this technology to bully others; cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is best defined by Keith and Martin (2005):

Cyberbullying involves the use of information and communication technologies such as email, cell phone, pager text messages, instant messages (IM), defamatory personal websites, and defamatory online personal polling websites, to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others (p.224)

Cyberbullying is a new topic of discussion. This paper is going to review some of the literature that is already published on this topic. Specifically, how the students are dealing with the cyberbullying, what the teachers and parents can do, and how to enforce anti-cyberbullying without breaking the first amendment right of freedom of speech.

Even though cyberbullying is a relatively new topic, due to the recent availability of technology, there have already been quite a few relevant studies performed to understand this concept of bullying a little better. Both quantitative and qualitative

methods have been used with students, to understand their thoughts behind cyberbullying. One of the qualitative studies performed by Agatston, Kowalski, and Limber (2007) dealt with 150 students from two middle schools and two high schools who participated in focus groups. The groups were divided by gender, and the age ranges were 12-17 years. Agatston et al., found that the female students stated more than the male students that cyberbullying was a problem at their school. Also, the students stated that cyberbullying usually happened outside of school, except cyberbullying through text messaging. These students said that they were less likely to report this type of bullying because they are afraid that they will lose their privileges with their technology devices.

A second qualitative study was done by Mishna, Saini, and Solomon (2009) also using focus groups. This study was more extensive, and included more of the questions, and results that came out of the focus groups. There were 38 students in this study that were divided into seven groups. Unlike the previous study, the groups were made up of both males and females, and they were in grades 5-8. The students were asked different questions about cyberbullying like how often does it occur, what form does it take, who does the bullying, who is bullied, and whether and who they tell. The students were not asked about their own experiences to protect their confidentiality. After each group, the researchers would listen to the audio files again to prepare questions for the next group, in order to dig deeper into some of their responses.

Mishna et al. divided their findings from these focus groups into five categories. The first category focused on how much time was spent using technology and how young the students started. Some of the student expressed that their younger siblings play on the computer with no problems. They also told the facilitator they tend to spend more time on

the computer than in front of the TV. They usually spend a minimum of three hours daily on the computer. The second finding dealt with how the students defined cyberbullying. There was a 10 year old boy who explained cyberbullying as, "I think cyberbullying is much worse than verbal bullying because you can't tell anyone about it and then no one really know what's going on and, the person who's doing it doesn't feel as guilty because they're not saying it to their face."

The third category was asking the students what are the differences between bullying in the traditional form, to cyberbullying. Their main answers revolved around the fact that you cannot escape cyberbullying. It follows you home. One student labeled it as "non-stop bullying." The second difference was the anonymity of cyberbullying. The students claim that it is easier to be hurtful when you cannot see the person who you are hurting. Plus you can deny saying those things, by saying someone else got into my account, or stole my phone, etc. This is called masquerading, a form of cyberbullying, which is the fourth category. Masquerading is pretending to be someone that they are not through the means of technology. Another form of cyberbullying is black mail. Students said that other students will state that they will tell all of their secrets if they do not do what they say. Usually this has something to do with a webcam.

The final category that the student discussed was how often they tell adults about these incidences. Most of the students states that they do not tell adults for a couple of reasons. One being that they think the adults do not understand the technology and how hurtful some of these things can be. Another reason they do not tell is because they are afraid that they are going to lose their privileges with the technology, for example,

ground from the computer or their cell phone. Plus they feel that even if they did tell that the adults would not be able to do anything about it.

Mishna et al. got a good response from their focus groups. The only problem is this study is not representative of a large population. Even though the article gave good insight into cyberbullying and the thoughts students have about it, it is important to keep in mind that this may not be every student.

Both of the qualitative studies were productive, because the students were able to give a lot of valid information about the technology, and how cyberbullying takes place. However, because they were qualitative, and only focused on a small group of students, they were not very generalizable. The next three studies that are going to be presented, are quantitative, so they deal with a larger sample size, and have a higher level of generaliability. The first study was done by Beran and Li (2005). Beran and Li wanted to know what electronic media is used for cyberbullying, how often it occurs, and what adolescents' reactions are to the cyberbullying. There were 432 students in grades 7-9 who participated in this study. For this study there were 15 questions, some open ended, others using a likert scale, taking approximately 15 minutes.

Beran and Li found that students' main form of electronic media for cyberbullying was email or instant messaging. Only one third of the students stated they have not heard of any cyberbullying happening. In Beran and Li's study, it was found that a quarter of the students surveyed experienced cyberbullying at least a few times, and 35% experienced it once or twice.

Of the students who have experienced cyberbullying 57% said they felt angry on several occasions, and 36% said they felt sad, and hurt. Plus 64% of the students' who were cyberbullied, also stated that they were victims of other types of bullying as well.

Beran and Li (2005) was not the only study trying to find out the answers of cyberbullying. In 2007 Wolak, Mitchell, and Finkelhor created a telephone study. With this study they were able to interview 1500 youth ages 10-17. The study was performed by first contacting the family to get parental assent and student consent verbally. The student was then allowed to schedule their own interview time, so that they would be able to talk freely and confidentially. The phone interviews lasted roughly 30 minutes.

All of the students were asked two questions: "In the past year, did you ever feel worried, or threatened because someone was bothering or harassing you online?" and "In the past year, did anyone ever use the internet to threaten or embarrass you by posting or sending messages about you for other people to see?" Outside of those two questions the students were also asked about their care-givers, and were asked a couple of questions off of the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire.

Wolak et al. found that 9% of the students have been harassed online in the past year. Of these students who have been harassed, 43% were by known peers, and 57% were by people who they did not know. The main types of cyberbullying in this article were sent or posted messages for others to see, suggesting gossip or rumor spreading, and incidents that would be difficult for target to terminate. Wolak et al. decide that bullying may not be the correct term for all online interpersonal offenses, because they vary so much, online harassment would be a better term. They state that the term bullying needs

to be reserved for when the bullying is happening offline as well. This is different compared to the other studies that have been looked at thus far.

Wang, Iannotti, and Nansel in 2009 also performed a study to learn more about bullying and cyberbullying. Wang et al. focused on two research questions. They wanted to know how age, race, gender, and SES influenced the type of bullying performed. Also, they wanted to examine the relationship with the adolescents' parents and friends.

This study was performed on 7,508 students in grades 6-10 through self report questionnaires. The questionnaires included questions about sociodemographic variables, bully/victim, parental support, and number of friends. When asked about bullying, or being bullied, the time frame in reference was the past two months.

Wang et al. found good information in regards to bullying. Their study helps put a perspective on how much cyberbullying is actually being used. Of the students who said they were bullied, 12.8% percent said it was physical, 36.5% said it was verbal, 41% was relational, and 9.8% was cyber. So while cyberbullying is on the rise, there are still other forms of bullying that occur more often. Wang et al. also found that higher parental support correlated with less bullying. Plus the more friends a student had correlated with more bullying. This indicates a need for adolescents to establish social status. An interesting piece of information that the researchers found was cyberbullying did not follow the same trends as traditional bullying. Cyberbullying was not related to number of friend, and it did not vary by grade.

Since it is evident that some students are dealing with cyberbullying, and some students are the cyberbullies. In 2007 Li performed a study to help get more answers on cyberbullying, to ultimately find ways of preventing it. Li (2007) designed the study to

answer seven different questions: “(1) To what extent do adolescents experience cyberbullying? (2) What are the characteristics of cyberbullying? (3) What are the students’ perceptions about school climate in terms of adults’ prevention of cyberbullying? (4) To what extent do students know safety strategies in cyberspace, and who taught them? (5) Are there relationships between cyberbullying and the reported academic achievement? (6) Are there relationships between cyberbullying incidents and the frequency of using computers? and (7) Are there relationships between bullying in school and cyberbullying? (p. 1781)”

Li surveyed 177 seventh grade students, and found that about half of the students have been bullied during school, and over half of the students knew someone who had been cyberbullied. Of those students who were cyberbullied, most did not know who was bullying them. Li also found that almost 30% of bullies are also cyberbullies, and almost a third of bully victims are also cyberbully victims. This indicates a close tie between both traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Meaning you can make the assumption that cyberbullying should not be treated as completely different from traditional bullying, but more like another type.

Li found that 60% of the cyberbully victims are female, and the males are the majority of the cyberbullies. Even though there were quite a few students in this study who have experienced cyberbullying, they have chose to keep quiet and not inform adults, because they felt the adults would not understand, or not do anything about it. The final question that was discussed was how safe they are when using electronics. Three out of 4 students indicated they know safe strategies for cyberspace, but Li thought maybe

they only had safe strategies in a shallow way, so more information or teaching may be needed in this area.

As the literature has shown, there have been quite a few studies done to get students perceptions on cyberbullying, as far as how it affects them, who is doing it, and how they are dealing with it. One of the common things that is listed in each study is that the students are afraid to tell adults, because of the consequences they may have to face, or because they feel the adults will not understand. The next couple of articles that will be discussed will help the administrators, schools, and parents combat this new form of bullying.

Administrators and the school systems need to figure out how prevalent cyberbullying is within their school district. Along with that they need to provide classes, and general information to the teachers, and other staff to help educate them on cyberbullying, and how to prevent it (Beale & Hall, 2007). Beale and Hall also mention the importance of educating the students on cyberbullying. This education could come from a variety of ways such as, internet safety tips, how to report cyberbullies, and how to prevent your internet identity from being stolen.

Some of these changes that may take place in the school district may need to be changed in the school handbook, so it is important to revise the definition of bullying to include cyberbullying, and the consequences of cyberbullying (Beale & Hall, 2007). A final item that Beale and Hall suggest to make a safe environment for all students is to establish a schoolwide cyberbullying task force. This force is to be made up of technologically savvy educators, parents, students, and community members. Their goal is to create and implement anti-cyberbullying programs.

Beale and Hall had some great tips for combating cyberbullying in the schools. One thing to add from that is from Keith and Martin (2005). When creating new standards for bullying, and new rules to enforce them, it is very important that the schools actually have a zero tolerance for bullying. Any form of bullying can be very harmful for a student, so when implementing new rules, it is important that students understand that there is zero tolerance to breaking the new cyberbullying rules.

Not only did Beale and Hall 2007 have great tips for schools and administrators, but they also had some great tips for parents as well. Just like the teachers and administrators need to make sure they are educated on cyberbullying, and the different forms it can happen through, parents need to get the same education. Plus, the literature states that most of the cyberbullying happens at home, which is part of the problem of students not being able to escape the bullies. Parents need to understand that their perception of technology is different than their kids' perception of technology. For example, kids see technology as a lifeline to their peer groups, whereas parents see technology as a tool.

The main thing to pull from the Beale and Hall article for parents is to be educated on the "talk" of the internet. For example, when students are in chat rooms, emailing, or texting, there are different words or abbreviations for different things. One example that the article used was PIR (parent in room) or POS (parent over shoulder). If parents do not know what these abbreviations mean, they will not know what is happening on the computer screen. Along with learning the "talk" it is important for parents to sit down with their kids and develop rules for the internet, such as what is acceptable internet behavior, and what is not.

Not only do the students have a special code for talking on the internet or through text messaging, but they are very smart as to how to get to continue to do what they want to do. For example, many parents have some type of filtering software for added security on their computer, and to prevent their children from entering some of the websites.

According to Stomfay-Stitz and Wheeler (2007), students can break through that software with ease, if they want to. So parents and some school faculty also need to be aware of how technology savvy the students are becoming.

With students being just as smart if not smarter with technology now, as their parents and other adults in their life, it creates problems. Parents and educators may not even be aware that their student is being a cyberbully, or is being cyberbullied. However, Keith and Martin (2005) list some behaviors that their kids may be performing if they are being cyberbullied. Some of those behaviors are: “spending a lot of time on the computer, having trouble sleeping or having nightmares, feeling depressed or crying without reason, mood swings, feeling unwell, becoming anti-social, and falling behind in homework, (p. 226)”

All of the information so far has been straight forward. However, there are some people who may argue that by not allowing a student to write how they feel on a blog, email, or through a text message, that they are losing their first amendment right of freedom of speech. There have been several cases brought to the attention of the courts regarding cyberbullying. The main reasons being, one party is very hurt by the things posted or written, where as the other party argues that he/she can write whatever because of freedom of speech (Shariff, 2005).

Some of the cases to support battling cyberbullying go all the way back to 1986. In 1986 Matthew Fraser was suspended for writing a campaign speech that was full of sexual insinuations. The judge ruled “that the schools should not have to tolerate speech that is inconsistent with school values (Shariff, 2005, p. 475).” Another court case similar happened in 1988. This was over a school newspaper article, the principal had ruled that an article may not be appropriate and could embarrass the people who were interviewed in the article. The students then sued for freedom of speech. Again the court ruled that “schools were not bound by the First Amendment to accept or tolerate speech that goes against the values held by the school system (Shariff, 2005, p. 476).” There are other cases to back up the fact that schools first priority is to follow the rules and guidelines that they set up, and second to protect their students.

Keeping these cases in mind, it is appropriate to say that schools do not violate the students’ First Amendment rights when they prohibit inappropriate uses of the technology that they have provided for the students (Shariff, 2005). Not to mention, they can even include some of this information in their student handbooks that contain rules, and consequences for such behavior. That way the students are aware, that there is freedom of speech, but if it goes against the schools values, or harms other students, the school can take it away.

As the literature has shown, there have already been some huge advances as far as how to combat cyberbullying within the school and outside of the school. Also, it is important to note that even though there is a lot of information out there about cyberbullying, there does not seem to be a whole lot of information out there as to how to stop cyberbullying. This will be an important part of the process as the schools and

parents learn more about what their kids are doing with their technology, and how to make sure they are not harming, or being harmed by others. Most of the literature at this point is recommending the normal bullying programs and incorporating education on cyberbullying, but in the future, there needs to be specific cyberbullying curriculum, to make sure that students are receiving the right amount of information, and understand that it is ok to tell an adult that things on the internet, or over text messaging are happening. If schools and parents are going to be successful at this, there is going to be a lot of educating going on to stay on track with the fast growing field of technology.

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