Chapter 47
New Directions in Understanding Cyberbullying

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ABSTRACT
This chapter focuses cyberbullying, or bullying messages that are transmitted via electronic technologies. This chapter synthesizes research focusing on predictors and outcomes associated with cyberbullying into an overall conceptual message-based model that highlights both the role of messages as products of various influences, and the messages themselves as influences upon numerous affective, behavioral, and cognitive outcomes. The chapter provides (1) an initial review of how cyberbullying and related behaviors are termed and defined; (2) an overview of message factors that predict cyberbullying messages and tactics, and (3) a discussion of the outcomes of cyberbullying. The chapter concludes by offering potential solutions and recommendations to problems associated with cyberbullying.

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INTRODUCTION

“I hate you. Everyone in town hates you. You’d be better off dead!” A generation ago no one considered how bullying messages such as these might be sent via interactive mediums. Yet, in contemporary society there are a range of interactive mediums that have the potential to be maliciously utilized, especially by today’s tech-savvy youth. Malicious behavior can be inflicted through many different mediums and channels, ranging from photos, text messages, email, instant messages, cell phone video, webcams, personal digital assistants, and computers. Students have the ability to send one another threats, incriminating or doctored photographs, explicitly worded messages or more depending on the creativity of the perpetrator. Moreover, students across age groups are clearly taking advantage of both an array of and access to these mediums to deliver malicious messages. The Pew Internet and American Life Project (Rainie, 2008) reports that 94% of teens use the Internet, 71% own a cell phone, approximately 70% connect to the Internet wirelessly, 62% go online daily, and 58% have created a profile on a social networking site such as Facebook or MySpace. The combination of persistent access to interactive technologies and potential for malicious use suggests the need for such an analysis. Recent research suggests between 9-35% of youth have experienced cyberbullying. For example, Beran and Li’s (2005) study of school-aged individuals estimates that between 20-35% have experienced some form of harassment. Consistent with these estimates, Kowalski and Limber (2007) reported that 22% of their student sample was involved in episodes of electronic aggression. Other studies report more modest estimates. Wolak, Mitchell, and Finkelhor (2007) in their examination of 1500 youth aged 10 to 17 found that only 9% of their sample engaged in cyberbullying. However, reported frequencies of cyberbullying across studies may differ because, as we discuss below, the term is not consistently conceptualized or operationalized in a consistent manner from study to study.

The emphasis of the present chapter is on bullying messages that are transmitted via electronic technologies. As we summarize below, this type of communication has been defined in a variety of ways, although an integrated understanding of the factors that lead to and the effects of such communication has yet to be documented. The present chapter addresses these concerns by synthesizing research focusing on predictors and outcomes associated with cyberbullying into an overall conceptual message-based model (Figure 1). We refer to the model as message-based because it (a) highlights the role of messages (as identified in the current literature) as products of various influences as well as (b) the messages themselves as influences upon numerous affective, behavioral,
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