Online Bystanders: Are They the Key to Preventing Cyberbullying

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Prevalence of Cyberbullying

- Recent estimates of cyberbullying in the United States ranged from 21-42%.

- In a July 2006 poll 1/3 of teenagers and 1/6 of children were victims of cyberbullying (Opinion Research, 2006).

- Cyberbullying is increasing, twice as many 10-17 year olds had been victims and perpetrators of online harassment in 2005 compared with 1999-2000 (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2007).
Examples of Cyberbullying

- Sending threatening or offensive e-mails, instant messages, or cell phone messages directly to the victim.

- Mass cruel or embarrassing e-mail or text messages can be sent to peers about the victim by mobile phone or e-mail.

- Taking pictures of a victim naked in locker rooms or bathrooms and posting the pictures on the web or sending them to others via e-mail or cell phone.
Examples of Cyberbullying

- Dedicating a website to degrading the victim

- Filming a violent attack such as a beating using a third generation mobile phone and posting the clip on the web is the newest cyberbullying trend called “Happy Slapping” (Saunders, 2006)
How is Cyberbullying Similar to Traditional Bullying?

- Power imbalance that favors the perpetrator over the victim
- Perpetrators are supported by a group of peers – bystanders who encourage the bullying or others that watch but do nothing to help the victim
- Perpetrators action are deliberate, repeated, and often relentless
- Perpetrator’s behavior is unwanted by victim
How is Cyberbullying Similar to Traditional Bullying?

- Targeted students draw negative attention of their peers and are rejected by peer group and isolated (Burkowski & Sippola, 2001; Crick et al, 2002; Schuster, 2001)

- Exclusion and isolation from the peer group increase the power of the perpetrator
How is Cyberbullying Different From Traditional Bullying

- 24/7 Harassment
  - Victim could be safe at home with traditional bullying

- Worldwide audience
  - Traditional bullying audience limited to school or local community
  - Website postings can be viewed worldwide
How is Cyberbullying Different from Traditional Bullying

- Technology allows information to reach a large number of people in a short period of time (EPACT, 2005)
  - Spread rumors and humiliating pictures faster
  - Large scale rumors and pranks can significantly disrupt the school day

- Anonymous Nature of Internet
  - Lowers inhibitions
  - People say things they never would say in person
How is Cyberbullying Different from Traditional Bullying

- Parents Just Don’t Understand
  - Adults use the Internet for work whereas kids use it for socializing
  - Parents are unaware of or do not realize how serious cyberbullying is
Role of Bystanders

- Bystanders are an important part of the bullying experience as they provide an audience for the bullying.
- Some may encourage the perpetrator to carry out their own cruel impulses (Imperio, 2001).
- Others feel empathy towards the victim, making them reluctant to standup to the instigators because they want to avoid involvement in the encounter (Imperio, 2001).
Serious Effect of Cyberbullying

- Suicide

- Withdrew from school and required psychiatric hospitalization
  - Star Wars Kid
  - http://vodpod.com/watch/861-star-wars-kid-original

- As of November 27, 2006 it was estimated by The Viral Factory that the videos had been viewed over 900 million times, making it the most popular "viral video" on the Internet
Reasons Bystanders Don’t Intervene (Craig and Peppler, 1997)-Traditional Bullying

- Children know that adults expect them to support each other, but find it difficult to do so in the reality of the playground environment.
- “Diffusion of responsibility” among the crowd.
- Concerned for their own safety.
- Don’t fully understand the process of bullying and don’t have the knowledge or skills to intervene effectively, worrying that they will make matters worse.
- Will not receive help from teachers or administrators (Besag; 1989; Henderson & Hymel 2002; O’Moore and Hillary, 1991; Tarum & Herber 1993).
Reasons Bystanders Don’t Intervene - Cyberbullying

- Afraid of becoming the next victim
- Victims fear losing their technology privileges and being further victimized
- Do not think that adults will do anything about the situation
- Do not recognize that bullying has occurred
Reasons Bystanders Don’t Intervene (Rigby & Johnson, 2004)-Traditional Bullying

- School authorities unaware of the problem
- Anti-bullying programs not supported by children
  - Watch in a “curious, but largely disengaged manner”
  - Enjoy watching the incident
  - Small minority object to the incident
- Responsibility is with the victim
- Not my concern
International Bystander Project 2005

- Students who intervened in traditional bullying incidents
  - Action was to “go get a teacher”
  - Recognized adults strongly disapproved of bullying behavior
  - Successful with intervening in the past
  - Most influenced by their friends who thought they should intervene to support each other

Tactics for Bystanders for Traditional Bullying (Department of Defense)

- Name the Behavior
  - Interrupt situation for targeted student to leave
- Ask for help
  - Group response from others shows bullies that actions are not OK
- Use humor
- Tell an Adult
- Swarm the bully
  - Surround the victim and move them away from the bully

Issues with Bystanders and Cyberbullying

- Most cyberbullying occurs off campus not allowing schools to take action
- Teachers and authority figures are victims of cyberbullying
- Bystanders do not see themselves as actual participants, even though they may watch and may make posts that contribute to the harassment
- Infinite audience of bystanders and perpetrators can extend worldwide as in the case of the Star Wars kid
  - Classmates who engage at school can do so from home and hide behind technology
What Adolescents say works- Harris Interactive (2007)

- Blocking people online who bully (71%)
- Refuse to pass along cyberbullying messages (62%)
- Online groups should have moderators who block online messages as the most effective (56%)
- Telling a friend who tries to cyberbully to stop (56%)

http://attorneygeneral.utah.gov/PrRel/CyberBullies/Fight%20Crime%20Invest%20in%20Kids%20CARAVAN%20Teen.pdf#search=%22opinion%20research%20corporation%2C%20%22Cyber%20bully%20teen%22%22
What Adolescents Thought Was Less Effective- Harris Interactive (2007)

- All schools should have rules against cyberbullying (37%)
- Schools should educate students in small groups not to cyberbully (33%)
- Teaching adults to help young people not to cyberbully (32%)
- Holding school assemblies to educate students not to cyberbully (25%)
What to do if Cyberbullied

- Do not respond
- Tell an adult
- Block the cyberbully
- Print and save the evidence
- Contact site to remove material - Myspace now has a procedure and hotline for educators and law enforcement
- Report to law enforcement
The Posts in a Nutshell

- College students have flocked to the site to
  - Reveal sexual escapades
  - Comment on who is the “biggest slut” or “hottest fraternity member “on campus
  - Discuss who has what STD’s
  - Who uses drugs?
  - What happened at parties
  - Spread nasty rumors
  - Make racist comments
  - Come out of the closet.
What was JuicyCampus.com?

- Online gossip site about campus life that started at over 60 and expanded to 500 colleges by fall 2008

- Postings were “always anonymous, always juicy” ([www.JuicyCampus.com](http://www.JuicyCampus.com), 2008)

- Matthew Ivester, a 2005 Duke University graduate started the site with the intention of creating a site about "all the ridiculous things we did and the hilarious stories" (McNiff, 2008).

- Site says its’ mission is “enabling online anonymous free speech on college campuses.”

- Site shut down on February 4, 2009 citing the economic downturn for its closure
Student Reaction to Juicycampus.com

- Contacted the Attorney General’s Office
- Wrote comments expressing dissatisfaction on the site in response to requests by JuicyCampus for feedback
- Replied to posts with additional information or differing opinion
- Wrote editorials in school newspapers speaking out against the site
- Suggested that users make the content interesting and substantial
Student Reaction to Juicycampus.com

- Boycotted the site
- Requested college administrators contact the site to have posts removed.
- Complain to advertisers
- Requested that the site be blocked from the campus network
- Spammed the site
- Ignored the site
- Wrote gossip about fictitious people
- Took what’s said on the site with a grain of salt
www.ownwhatyouthink.com
Conclusions

Bystanders could help by
- Refusing to pass along bullying messages
- Not participating in bullying on the web
- Blocking people online who bully
- Reporting messages to moderators
- Telling friends to stop bullying
- Provide support to the victim
- Showing disapproval by making a simple statement when encountering an online bullying incident to stop rather than engaging further discussion
Conclusions

- The dynamics of bystander behavior are different online than for physical bullying
  - Parents need to supervise adolescents more carefully
- Both adolescents and college students do not want to tell authority figures about cyberbullying or online harassment
- Anonymous reporting methods such as a central e-mail address should be considered
- The audience for cyberbullying can be worldwide whereas physical bullying is constrained to the setting making intervention strategies more difficult
Conclusions

- Bystanders may not recognize that bullying takes place online
- Online bystanders often become the target of bullying when intervening online
- Consider offline intervention
- College students demonstrated that they can make a difference by targeting website advertisers and expressing discontent on another website such as Facebook.com
  - Showed disapproval within peer group
References


References


