Cyber Bullying and the Effect on Education

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Abstract
This research paper is going to cover the cause and effects of cyber bullying on education, as well as the affects on psychological health. This paper will also explore how different minority groups are affected by Internet aggression and how different genders bully others directly and indirectly. In addition, it will also discuss past and current research on psychological effects of online aggression on the aggressors.
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I chose the topic of Cyber bullying because I was curious to know the extent of damage caused by the discrimination and harassment from the abusers. I wanted to further research the causes and effects of this type of online harassment and the burden it has on an individual’s psychological and emotional health. The rapid increase in technology has allowed every individual with Internet access to instantly receive information. Facebook and other online social networking cites also allow easier and faster ways for students to express feelings toward one another. I hope to learn through my research the proven causes and effects of cyber bullying on a child’s education and psychological health.

Technology is rapidly changing education around the globe positively and negatively. Online social networks and wireless communications are removing barriers and providing access to virtually limitless information and resources to all students (Pascarella, 2008). Never in the history of education has there been instant access to limitless resources in the tips of students fingers. Obviously, technology is providing educators with advantages in education that will forever change the way we think about schools and learning. As educators embrace the new strides for knowledge, it is equally important to address the negative issues that utilize the increase in technology (Pascarella, 2008). Instant access to the Internet has brought about a new form of bullying called cyber bullying. Cyber bullying is defined as the use of technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person (Fritz, 2011). Cyber bullying is the new medium in which adolescents’ face discrimination and hate from their peers. Victims of cyber bullying often end up having low self-esteem, social or emotional difficulties and often start believing the lies that are being spread about them (Didden, 2009). Cyber bullying is a serious issue in the effects it has on students learning and mental state. Discrimination is often based on
social class, mental or physical disability of students, gender, race and sexual orientation, as well as popularity and social behavior (Fritz, 2011). Sharl Kessel Schneider (2012) in the *American Journal of Public Health* States, “Study’s have found that anywhere from 9%-40% of students are victims of cyber bullying.” With the advancement of technology, bullies find it easier to victimize students without having to do it face-to-face, in addition to escaping consequences for their actions (Didden, 2009).

Online abuse affects a student’s education by causing low self-esteem, social and or emotional difficulties, and victims often start believing the lies being said (Didden, 2009). According to Adams and Lawrence up to thirty percent of high school students carried the effects of being bullied into higher education. The exclusion, isolation, alienation, loneliness, and fear for safety carries a heavy weight on students affecting their education (Adams and Lawrence, 2011). The bullying and abuse that is taking place continuously affect victims of online abuse, resulting in a mental block. Victims are distracted by the harassment and negative words being spoken towards them. Feeling a lack of inclusion, victims begin to feel that nobody is willing to listen to them, which may lead to becoming anti-social, further affecting their education. Sufferers of abuse can begin alienating themselves from others, refusing to work positively with others in groups (Adams and Lawrence, 2011). Students lose the ability to feel secure in a safe place causing them to constantly feel anxious and nervous. Online abuse can cause long-term effects of social or emotional difficulties communicating or trusting others. (Adams and Lawrence, 2011). Students can become often paranoid or experience insomnia where specific prescription drugs are needed for essential sleep. In addition to all the problems arising from online abuse it can be nearly impossible for a student facing these challenges to receive a proper education and keep their academic scores high.
While online victimization is often considered it’s own form of discrimination, it also includes social discrimination and injustice against particular groups. “… two groups suffer disproportionately from bullying: those who don’t conform to gender stereotypes and those in special education” (Fritz, 2011). The LGBT community has a long history of being marginalized and cyber bullying is no different. By not conforming to the gender stereotypes they are unjustly faced with peers who look at the differences between them, often resulting in intense verbal and emotional abuse voiced through the anonymity allowed by the Internet (Fritz, 2011). Teenagers feel the urge to belong to a peer group which substitutes for their family in the journey to find their own identity. This lack of a peer group that many LGBT members can be faced with at early ages can often lead to abuse by multiple peers which the internet makes so easy to do (Fritz, 2011). A 2009 study from Informa Healthcare found that cyber bullying is prevalent among students with intellectual and developmental disability in special education settings (Didden et al, 2009). “Significant associations were found between cyber bullying and IQ, frequency of computer usage, and self esteem and depressive feelings.” (Didden et al, 2009)

Mental disabilities such as ADHD and more can also make one the target of cyber bullying. It is clear that any difference from the norm can cause one to be the target of online abuse from peers (Didden et al, 2009).

Another interesting facet of cyber bullying is the topic of gender. The 2009 study from Informa Healthcare performed by Didden et al (2009) also reveals interesting information on the topic of gender stating, “…boys are more likely to engage in physical direct bullying than girls.” The opposite is also found to be true in girls are more likely to behave in indirect bullying, “characterized by psychological attacks such as humiliation and/ or manipulation of relationships” (Didden et al, 2009). Cyber Bullying can be the result of both direct and indirect
bullying, but it is fascinating how gender can influence the type of bullying committed. Informa Healthcare studies show that girls are more likely to psychologically harass and indirectly bully peers with humiliation tactics rather than deal with face-to-face conflict (Didden et al, 2009). The Internet allows anyone to harass individuals with a hidden name, which eliminates the chance of punishment for their actions. Abusers find it easier and more efficient to harass peers instantly and indirectly rather than face-to-face where words may not be said the way the abuser had hoped (Didden et al, 2009).

While there is an abundance of new research coming out pertaining to cyber bullying and victimization, research surrounding engaging in cyber aggression is limited. Effects of cyber aggression are just beginning to surface, but according Schoffstall and Cohen (2011), “There is a long history of research showing that traditional aggression is related to a variety of negative consequences for children.” They go on to list the effects to be “…poor peer relations, peer rejection, and developmental outcomes such as juvenile delinquency, school failure, and substance abuse” (Schoffstall and Cohen, 2011). Do these effects carry over to cyber aggression as well? Research has not yet shown whether there is a correlation between the two (Schoffstall and Cohen, 2011). Yet, if physical bullying causes severe negative consequences such as poor social skills or school failure, cyber aggression causes negative psychological effects as well (Schoffstall and Cohen, 2011). Earlier studies by Informa Healthcare showed cyber aggression affecting emotional and social factors of students. Students were distracted in class and in part could not maintain an education (Didden et al, 2009). These studies done by Informa Healthcare described the negative effects on those performing in traditionally aggression may soon be linked to online aggression and cyber bullying as well (Didden et al, 2009).
I learned many fascinating facts throughout my research such as how gender roles affect and define different types of bullying. Each gender is more apt to participate in a different type of discrimination. Males are more likely to participate in direct bullying, whereas girls are more likely to participate in indirect bullying. More adolescents are affected by cyber bullying than I previously thought and I was surprised to learn how disproportionately minority groups are affected. I thought sexual orientations such as gay or bisexual were more accepted than they actually are. I learned that bullying doesn’t only affect learning directly, but it also affects learning indirectly by causing persisting mental and psychological problems throughout one’s life such as sleep disorders, anxiety, and emotional or social psychological difficulties. I also learned how suicide is much more prevalent among adolescents then I previously suspected.
References


