

# Cyber Bullying Behaviours

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## INTRODUCTION

Through both the increasing digitalisation of society and our increasing reliance on technology, the way in which technology influences our lives is rapidly changing and consistently evolving. There are many benefits associated with our increasing access to, and use of, technology and online resources. For example, technology and online resources can be used to: Develop and maintain social networks (e.g., Karavidas, Lim, & Katsikas, 2005), promote social responsibility (e.g., Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown., 2009), prevent cognitive decline (e.g., Slegers, van Boxtel, & Jolles, 2012; Tun & Lachman, 2010), facilitate knowledge acquisition (e.g., Jackson et al., 2011) and knowledge transfer (e.g., Erickson & Johnson, 2011), and complete day-to-day activities such as banking (e.g., Suh & Han, 2002). However, this increasing access to, and reliance on, technology is not without risks. One such risk is that technology can be used as a medium through which individuals can engage in antisocial behaviour directed towards specific others. Moreover, through threatening emails, spreading rumours, or engaging in forms of harassment, technology can be used to intimidate others (Dehue, 2013; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Depending on the circumstance, engaging in such behaviour can be cyber bullying whereas being the target of such behaviour can be cyber victimisation.

Cyber bullying represents a specific form of aggressive behaviour directed towards an individual that takes place using digital means (Law, Shapka, Hymel, Olson, & Waterhouse, 2012). Cyber victimisation can be considered as the experiences of being the target of bullying behaviours. The current article will begin by exploring what acts constitute cyber bullying and the various forms that cyber bullying behaviour can take. The article will also explore why individuals engage in such behaviour and consider the role of the bullies' potential anonymity and the potentially large audience.

Finally, the article will make some recommendations that should be considered by researchers examining the area of cyber bullying and cyber victimisation.

## BACKGROUND

Interest in understanding victimisation experiences and bullying behaviours was initially prompted by Olweus' work in the 1970s and subsequently by the wealth of research evidence that has reported longitudinal relationships between experiences of bullying and wellbeing (e.g., Renda, Vassallo, & Edwards, 2011; Sinclair et al., 2012; Wolke, Copeland, Angold, & Costello, 2013). Together, these studies have suggested that negative consequences may occur for those individuals who engage in bullying behaviour and those who experience victimisation. Therefore, because of the reported association between bullying and psychosocial adjustment, a number of researchers and educational practitioners have sought to understand the various forms of bullying behaviours that individuals engage in. Bullying behaviours have been conceptualised as: (a) Direct attacks on an individual including verbal attacks, physical attacks, and non-verbal exclusion from social relationships and (b) indirect attacks on the individual such as damaging reputations (see Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Consequently, victimisation experiences can be considered to be verbal, physical, or social.

Cyber bullying is a relatively new phenomenon that involves individuals using technology as a medium to bully others (Smith, 2009). Consequently, cyber bullying has been defined as "the use of the Internet or other digital communication devices to insult or threaten someone" (Juvonen & Gross, 2008, p. 498). Mark and Ratcliffe (2011, p.92) extended this definition to "the intentional act of online/digital intimidation, embarrassment, or harassment." . Regardless of how cyber bullying is conceptualised the aim of the bully

is to “embarrass, threaten, hurt, or exclude” (Bhat, 2008, p. 58) the victim. The reported prevalence rates of cyber bullying among children and young people range from 16% (Dehue, Bolman, & Völlink, 2008) to 72% (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). There are a number of explanations for this wide variation including the participants’ age, the definition of cyber bullying used by researchers, and the form of cyber bullying examined.

## Forms of Cyber Bullying and Cyber Victimization

Cyber bullying can occur in many forms and the variation, to some extent, represents the evolving nature of technology. Consequently, there is often little agreement among researchers, practitioners, and young people as to what constitutes cyber bullying. Some researchers, such as Mason (2008), have suggested that cyber bullying comprises both written and verbal acts which can be aligned to the more traditional face-to-face forms of bullying. Conversely, other researchers such as Tokunaga (2010) suggested that cyber bullying includes elements of aggressive, hostile, and harmful acts that are carried out through an electronic device. However, whilst different conceptualisations of cyber bullying have been proposed, when assessing cyber bullying behaviours and cyber victimisation experiences it is important to consider: (a) what technology individuals actually use and (b) how individuals use the technology. Therefore, it is likely that as new technologies emerge and current technologies evolve, new forms of cyber bullying will also continue to emerge and evolve (Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2013).

Parallels have also been drawn between cyber bullying and the various forms of face-to-face bullying. Mark and Ratliffe (2011) argued that cyber bullying is a form of relational bullying that uses technology, rather than face-to-face methods, as the medium to bully others. For example, technology can be used to victimise by calling others names, making threats, spreading rumours, disclosing another individual’s private information, and purposefully socially isolating or excluding individuals. Similarly, Wang, Iannotti, and Luk (2012) argued that parallels could be drawn between face-to-face relational bullying and cyber bullying as both forms of bullying involve verbal bullying, social exclusion, and spreading rumours but not

physical acts, although of course the medium through which these acts occur is different. However, whilst parallels have been drawn by some researchers between face-to-face bullying and cyber bullying it is clear that some young people regard them as distinct entities. Mishna et al. (2009) reported that some young people regard cyber bullying as a distinct form of bullying that was perceived to be more serious than face-to-face bullying. One potential explanation for why young people regard cyber bullying as more serious than face-to-face bullying is that whilst cyber bullying may occur because of something that happened at school (Cassidy et al., 2009), the accessibility of technology means that incidences of cyber bullying often extend beyond the school day. Consequently, compared to face-to-face forms of bullying, cyber bullying is regarded as more relentless in nature. Further, because technology is available to many 24 hours a day, this means that many cyber bullies engage in bullying behaviour for periods longer than the typical school day, making the timing of cyber bullying episodes more unpredictable. Consequently, whilst face-to-face bullying is likely to end with school, cyber bullying does not (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

There is also little agreement amongst researchers as to whether cyber bullying represents an indirect or direct form of bullying. For example, Huang and Chou (2010) argue that because of the range and scope of technology available cyber bullying can be regarded as an indirect form of bullying. Conversely, Vandebosch and van Cleemput (2009) argue that cyber bullying comprises both direct and indirect forms. The direct forms of cyber bullying include physical (e.g., purposely sending a virus infected file), verbal (e.g., using the Internet or mobile phone to insult or threaten), non-verbal (e.g., sending threatening or obscene pictures or illustrations), and social (e.g., excluding someone from a group online) acts. The indirect forms of cyber bullying can involve disclosing entrusted or private information (e.g., through an email), masquerading (e.g., deceiving someone by impersonating someone else), spreading gossip (e.g., using a mobile phone, email, or chat facility), and taking part in voting on a defamatory polling website. In addition to the forms of cyber bullying outlined by Vandebosch and van Cleemput (2009), Calvete, Orue, Estévez, Villardón, and Padilla (2010) suggested a number of additional acts that constitute cyber bullying. In particular, intentional exclusion from an online group; spreading,

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