Chapter 5
Cyberbullying:
Negative Interaction Through Social Media

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to examine cyberbullying through social media among youth. Drawing on research from a variety of disciplines, such as psychology, education, social work, sociology, and computer science, this chapter is organized into seven sections. These sections include 1) background; (2) youths' characteristics and risk factors; (3) negative psychosocial and academic outcomes; (4) theoretical framework; (5) solutions and recommendations; (6) future research directions; and (7) conclusion. The chapter will draw on multidisciplinary qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-design research methodologies from psychology, sociology, social work, and criminology.

INTRODUCTION

Millions of youths use electronic technologies, such as social media, mobile phones, and the Internet, daily (Lenhart, 2015). These technologies allow youths many opportunities, such as the ability to communicate with just about anyone, quick access to information for leisure and homework purposes, and entertainment (e.g., watching videos). Despite the positives associated with electronic technology use, many youths are at risk for exposure to problematic online situations. Such situations might involve viewing unwanted electronic content through videos, images, and text, which contains gory or sexually graphic content. Problematic online situations also include experiencing identity theft and being targeted by sexual predators. Cyberbullying is another risk associated with youths' electronic technology use, and is the focus of this chapter.

Defined as an extension of traditional bullying, cyberbullying involves being targeted by negative and unwanted behaviors via electronic technologies, including email, instant messaging, social networking websites, and text messages via mobile phones (Bauman, Underwood, & Card, 2013; Grigg, 2012). The anonymity of the cyber context allows cyberbullies greater flexibility to harm their victims without having to witness the reactions of the victims and/or experience any negative consequences as a result of their actions (Wright, 2014b). Cyberbullies' ability to remain anonymous is made possible by the ability to mask or hide their identity in cyberspace. Because youths can remain anonymous online, anonymity can trigger the online disinhibition effect. The online disinhibition effect is when youths do or say something to others that they typically would never do or say in the offline world (Suler, 2004; Wright, 2014). Another component of electronic technologies is the rapid transmission of communication. Because electronic technologies have such features, many cyberbullies can target their victims more quickly. For example, a rumor in the offline world might take several hours to spread around school, while in the online world, this rumor could take a matter of minutes to spread to various classmates. Bullies can often target victims as often as they want as it is difficult to escape bullying in the online world as the behaviors can follow the person almost anywhere there is electronic technology access. Although it is possible to have many bystanders for traditional school bullying, cyberbullying has the potential to reach an audience of millions. These individuals can then perpetuate the cycle of cyberbullying by further sharing cyberbullying content (e.g., videos, pictures) with others.

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