

## Chapter 6

# Policing Online Aggression: Policy Solutions and Challenges

### **ABSTRACT**

Research argues that to address bullying/cyberbullying it will take the larger school community including teachers, families, health professionals, etc. The same can be said for other forms of aggression. This chapter provides an overview of the literature on what each member of the larger community can do to curtail the spread of online aggression. The chapter concludes by examining the effectiveness of recommendations for individuals for protecting themselves from becoming victims of online aggression as well as strategies for parents to protect their children from becoming victims of cyberbullying. Multivariate statistical methods and survey data from the PEW Research Center for the years 2013 and 2014 were used in this analysis.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Media coverage of cyberharassment/bullying seem to have become common place. Nevertheless, not all examples are ones that the average citizen can relate to. In July of 2016, an updated version of the movie *Ghostbusters* was premiering with all female leads. While the female cast was subjected to misogynist attacks, the harassment was particularly hard on actress Leslie Jones who was subjected to online harassment that was both racist and sexist. The cyber harassment became intense enough that Jones quit Twitter (Fisher & McBride, 2016). Jones was not the only celebrity to be overwhelmed by

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online harassment. Singer Ed Sheeran quit Twitter in July 2017 because of personal attacks (Ehrbar, 2017). These are only a few examples, as a number of stars have quit social network sites (SNS) such as Twitter or Instagram due to online bullying. Some celebrities take a different tactic to cyber harassment. In 2014, Forrest Rutherford engaged in an online fight with John Popper, the lead singer of Blues Travelers. Rutherford, a social service worker from Kentucky initially had his Twitter account terminated, but since reinstated. Recently, some of Rutherford's old tweets have resurfaced online. In response, Popper has subjected Rutherford to a doxing campaign that includes posting pictures of his home online using Google map along with comments about him and his family. Popper fans have joined in the cyber harassment and Rutherford has reported Popper to Twitter but so far no action has been taken (Cary, 2017).

While not everyone can relate to the cyber-harassment that celebrities like Jones and Sheeran have faced and the online feud with lead singer of Blues Travelers, there are media stories like the "Blue Whale Challenge" that have parents worried. According to the coverage, youth who take part in this challenge are instructed over a 50 day period, to take part in increasingly more dangerous actions. To "win," the participant must commit suicide on the 50<sup>th</sup> day. Investigation into the claims of the "Blue Whale Challenge" finds there is no evidence of any suicides attributed to this challenge or that it even exists (Patchin, 2017). Even though the challenge appears to be an urban myth, there is still reason for individuals to be concerned. Just as media coverage of celebrities becoming victims of online aggression seem to becoming more common, stories such as the suicides of teens including Megan Meier and Ryan Halligan are not going away. The media has continued to report on similar tragedies. For example, on August 1, 2017, the parents of Mallory Grossman held a news conference to announce that they were suing the Rockaway Township School District in New Jersey for neglect. Mallory, a 6<sup>th</sup> grader at Copeland Middle School in Rockaway committed suicide at age 12 on June 14, 2017. The lawsuit contends that their daughter had been subjected to bullying (in person) at school, in text messages and through Instagram and Snapchat. Furthermore, the parents stated that while they contacted the school about bullying, administrators failed to follow through with proper district procedures (Stump, 2017). Another recent example is the suicide of 18 year old Conrad Roy III in 2014. Conrad had a history of "threatening to commit suicide" and he did after receiving a series of text

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