LGBT and Allied Youth Responses to Cyberbullying: Policy Implications

by
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Introduction: Bullying—An Old Theme

Jamie Nabozny, a student in Ashland, Wisconsin, was continually harassed and physically assaulted by his peers throughout middle and high school because he was gay. Students urinated on him, pretended to rape him during class, and when they found him alone, kicked him so many times in the stomach that he required surgery. Jamie reported that even school administrators themselves mocked him. Although Jamie's parents continually informed administrators about the abuse, officials said at one point that Jamie should expect such treatment by his peers because he is gay.

Jamie attempted suicide several times, dropped out of school, and ran away from home. With the loving support of his parents, he gained the strength to help ensure that other students did not undergo the same kind of nightmare he experienced. When officials failed to take action to address the problem, the Nabozny family filed suit against several school officials and the District pursuant to 42 U.S.C. Section 1983 alleging, among other things, that the defendants: 1) violated his Fourteenth Amendment[1] right to equal protection by discriminating against him based on his gender expression; 2) violated his Fourteenth Amendment right to equal protection by discriminating against him based on his sexual orientation; 3) violated his Fourteenth Amendment right to due process by exacerbating the risk that he would be harmed by other students; and, 4) violated his Fourteenth Amendment right to due process by encouraging an environment in which he would be harmed.

When Jamie initially sued his former school, a trial court dismissed his lawsuit. Lambda Legal, a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) legal rights

organization, took over his case before a federal appeals court, which issued the precedent-setting judicial decision, finding that a public school could be held accountable for not stopping homophobic harassment and abuse. The case went back to trial, and a jury found the school officials liable for the harm they caused to Jamie by violating the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause. The court awarded Jamie $962,000 in damages (Lambda Legal, 1996).

During a three year period in a public school in Spencer County, Kentucky, a 6th grade girl and her parents claimed that she was repeatedly called sexually suggestive names, such as "German gay girl" and "Lezzy," grabbed on the buttocks, stabbed in the hand with a pen, and shoved into walls. Throughout this period, the girl and her parents reported these incidents to school authorities, though the response was usually merely verbal reprimands to the reported perpetrators (Horner & Norman, 2005).

The girl's parents brought suit (*Vance v. Spencer County Public School District*, 2000) against the school district under Title IX[2], Kentucky's Civil Rights Act, and protections under national origins for failing to intervene and interrupt harassment against her on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, and national origin. The court found "deliberate indifference" on the part of the Spencer County Public School District, claiming that "[w]here a school district has actual knowledge that its efforts to remediate are ineffective, and it continues to use those same methods to no avail, such district has failed to act reasonably in light of current circumstances." The court awarded the girl a monetary settlement of $220,000.

Definitions

"Bullying," as defined by the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Tonja, et al, 2001), involves,

> …a specific type of aggression in which (1) the behavior is intended to harm or disturb, (2) the behavior occurs repeatedly over time, and (3) there is an imbalance of power, with a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one. This asymmetry of power may be *physical* or *psychological*, and the aggressive behavior may be *verbal* (e.g., name calling, threats, taunting, malicious teasing), *physical* (e.g., hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing, taking personal belongings), or *psychological* (e.g., spreading rumors, engaging in social exclusion, extortion, or intimidation). (p. 2094, emphasis in original)

And the United States Department of Justice (Ericson, 2001) adds that "Bullying encompasses a variety of negative acts carried out repeatedly over time. It involves a real or perceived imbalance of power, with the more powerful child or group attacking those who are less powerful" (p. 1).

The National Association of School Psychologists (2000) found that approximately one in seven K-12 students is either a person who bullies or a person who is bullied, and that bullying affects about five million elementary and junior high

students each year in the United States. Ten to fifteen percent of *all* young people report being bullied *on a regular basis*.

School Reform

Reports indicate that in more than two-thirds of the 37 incidents involving school shootings between 1974 and 1999, the offenders felt "persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured by others prior to the incident" (Vossekuil, et al., 2002, p. 7). In lieu of this spate of school violence, during the 1990s in the United States, a number of districts instituted programs to prevent weapons and student gangs from entering the schools. In the two cases of school bullying profiled above, however, state legislators and school administrators either did not enact or enforce policies proactively or reactively to adequately address issues of intimidation, harassment, bullying, and persecution of students. For these students, turning to the judicial system was their only effective recourse to redress their plight.

Overall, the social context and supervision at school have been shown to play a major part in the frequency and severity of bullying problems (Payne & Gottfredson, 2004). While teachers and administrators do not have control over individual and family factors, bullying problems can be greatly reduced in severity by appropriate supervision, intervention, and creating a welcoming climate in a school (e.g., Olweus, 2000).

Just as low levels of supervision and/or abuse in the home have been shown to be associated with the development of bully problems in individual students (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986; Ma, 2001), so, too, are low levels of supervision at school, particularly on the playground or schoolyard and in the hallways. Also, the appropriateness of interventions by adults when they see bullying, or are made aware of it, is very important.

According to Payne and Gottfredson (2004), *school climate* refers to the "inner workings" of the school and includes such factors as the school's social organization, the system of social relations between and among teachers and students, and the cultural system of norms and values in the school. Payne and Gottfredson stress that the school climate needs to be one emphasized by warmth and acceptance of all students, and one where there are high standards for student and teacher behavior toward one another. Teacher attitudes toward aggression and skills with regard to supervision and intervention partly determine how teachers will react to bullying situations. Curricula and administrative policies and support are also very important. Also, Whitney and Smith (1993) in their classic study, have shown that in schools where teachers are more likely to discuss bullying with students, recognize bullying behavior, are interested in stopping bullying, and actually intervene in the bullying incidents are less likely to have bullying problems.

On the statewide and local level, a number of states and districts have enacted laws that address bullying and harassment in schools based on sexual orientation *and* gender identity. These include California (1999/2004), Illinois[1] (2007), Iowa (2007), Maine (2005), Maryland (2008), Minnesota (1993), New Jersey (2002), Oregon (2007), Vermont (1993/2007), and Washington, DC (1977/2006). Other states that address bullying and harassment in schools based on sexual orientation (while excluding gender identity) include Connecticut (1997), Massachusetts (1993), Washington (2002), and Wisconsin (2005). Some states with school anti-bullying and harassment laws that do not list actual protected categories include Alaska (2006), Arizona (2005), Arkansas (2003), Colorado (2000), Connecticut (2002), Delaware (2007), Florida (2008), Georgia (2000), Idaho (2006), Illinois (1995), Indiana (2005), Kentucky (2008), Louisiana (2001), Minnesota (2005), Missouri (2006), New Hampshire (2000), Ohio (2006), Oklahoma (2002), Oregon (2001), Rhode Island (2003), South Carolina (2006), Tennessee (2005), Texas (2005), and West Virginia (2001).

Though state boards of education, legislatures, and school districts are now addressing issues around bullying, in our current era of advanced information and communication technologies, a new variation on the old theme has emerged, for we now live in the age of cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying: A New Variation

Ryan Patrick Halligan was born in Poughkeepsie, New York in 1990. His parents described him as a shy, sensitive, and affectionate young child with an infectious smile that early-on drew people close. Before he entered school, his parents had concerns about his speech, language, and motor skills development, and from preschool through fourth grade, they enrolled Ryan in special education services. The family moved to Essex Junction, Vermont, where, by the fifth grade, he encountered face-to-face bullying on a regular basis in his school. Rumors soon circulated throughout the school that Ryan was gay. By middle school, his classmates continually teased and harassed him for having a learning disability and for allegedly being gay. They soon extended their taunts against Ryan into cyberspace.

On October 7, 2003, feeling that he could no longer live with the constant and escalating abuse, Ryan Patrick Halligan took his life. He was 13 years old.

Reports (Spero News, 2006) indicate that Ryan displayed many of the symptoms of youth targeted by cyberbullying: he spent long hours on his computer, and he was secretive regarding his interactions on communication and information technologies. His parents saw him manifest a number of changes in his behavior: he increasingly lacked interest in engaging in social activities that included his peers, and he exhibited a pronounced change in his overall attitude, his appearance, and his habits.

John P. Halligan, Ryan's father, wrote, "I believe bullying through technology has the effect of accelerating and amplifying the hurt to levels that will probably result in a rise in teen suicide rates" (RyanPatrickHalligan.com). John established a website in loving tribute to his son and as a clarion call to prevent what happened to Ryan from impacting the lives of any other young person. John expressed his hope:

> This site is dedicated to the memory of our son Ryan and for all young people suffering in silence from the pain of bullying and having thoughts of suicide. We hope young people become less ashamed to ask for help when feeling suicidal. We hope adults gain knowledge from our tragedy. As a society, we need to find better ways to help our young people through their most difficult growing years (RyanPatrickHalligan.org, retrieved April 19, 2009).

John Halligan developed a brochure titled "Parenting Suggestions Regarding Technology" to assist parents in working with young people to avoid problems of cyberbullying.

The American Psychological Association passed a resolution (2004) calling on educational, governmental, business, and funding agencies to address issues of face-to-face *and* cyberbullying. In the resolution, they particularly addressed acts of harassment "about race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity" (p. 1). In addition, the resolution specifically emphasized the high rate of bullying around issues of sexual orientation and disability:

> WHEREAS children and youth with disabilities and children and youth who are lesbian, gay, or transgender, or who are perceived to be so may be at particularly high risk of being bullied by their peers (Dawkins, 1996; Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995; Hunter, 1990; Nabuzka & Smith, 1993; Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995; Rigby, 2002; Whitney, Smith, & Thompson, 1993; Yude, Goodman, & McConachie, 1998).

Though too late to help Ryan Patrick Halligan as someone with a disability and who was perceived as gay, possibly this resolution can assist in developing policies and can ultimately help in the reduction of bullying behaviors and incidents.

Definitions and Rates

While schoolyard bullying and harassment have long been problems for young people in our nation's schools, the advent of advanced information and communication technologies has now allowed this abusive and destructive practice to extend to virtually all aspects of a young person's life. What has come to be called "cyberbullying," like "face-to-face bullying" (also termed "real life" bullying), involves deliberate and repeated aggressive and hostile behaviors by an individual or group of individuals intended to humiliate, harm, and control another individual or group of individuals of lesser power or social status (Tonja, et al., 2001).

Hinduja and Patchin (2009) define cyberbullying as "the intentional and repeated harm of others through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices" (p. 185).

Cyberbullying involves information and communication technologies such as Internet web sites, e-mail, chat rooms, mobile phone and pager text messaging, and instant messaging. Instances of cyberbullying include: 1) people sending hurtful, cruel, and oftentimes intimidating messages to others (e.g., "Flame Mail") designed to inflame, insight, or enrage; 2) "Hate Mail" (also knows as "Cyberharassment"), which constitutes hate-inspired and oppressive harassment based on actual or perceived social identities in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, gender, sexuality, physical and mental abilities, socioeconomic class, and others; 3) people stealing other peoples' screen names and sending inflammatory messages under those screen names to others; 4) anonymous postings of derogatory comments about another on web journals called "blogs" or on social networking sites (e.g., MySpace or Facebook); 5) young people creating online polling booths, for example, to rate girls and boys as the "hottest," "ugliest," "most boring," "biggest dyke," or "wimpiest faggot" in the school; 6) individuals taking pictures of others in gymnasium locker rooms with digital phone cameras and sending those pictures to others (a form of what has come to be known as "sexting"), or posting them on Internet web sites; 7) people creating web sites with stories, cartoons, caricatures, pictures, or "jokes" ridiculing or mocking others; 8) posting material about a person involving private, sensitive, or embarrassing information, for example, "outing" a person's sexual identity to classmates and sometimes to the targets' parents or guardians; 9) sending intimidating or threatening messages (also known as "Cyberstalking"); 10) or actions designed to isolate and exclude a person from online communication technologies. Li (2006) found that males are more likely to engage in face-to-face bullying *and* cyberbullying than females.

Researchers conducting the two Youth Internet Safety Surveys (Finkelhor, et al., 2000, 2006) reported significantly increased rates of behaviors attributable to online bullying and to online victimization in the intervening years between the two surveys, with young people increasingly using information and communication technologies to threaten, embarrass, harass, and humiliate. One in 11 (9%) of survey participants reported being harassed online (Finkelhor , et al., 2006) with almost one-third of the youth surveyed participating in behaviors attributable to online bullying. This is compared to 1 in 17 (6%) in YISS-1 (Finkelhor, et al., 2000) harassed online with 12%-15% of those surveyed participating in behaviors attributable to online bullying.

GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network), in its 2005 National School Climate Survey of 1,732 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students between the ages of 13 and 20, found that both face-to-face and online bullying "remain common in America's schools" (p. 4).

Reform

Policies and legislation have not always caught up with the realities of cyberbullying, and are often outside the legal reach of workplaces, schools, and school boards when it occurs outside of the workplace or school property.

Yet, even with the technology to track cyberbullying, Steven Brown, the executive director of the Rhode Island branch of the American Civil Liberties Union (cited in Norton, 2007), suggests, "it would be difficult to draft a cyber bullying law that doesn't infringe on free-speech rights" (p. 2). According to the i-Safe website (National I-Safe Survey, 2006), however, schools may discipline those who bully and/or harass others using information and communication technologies even if it takes place off campus. Schools, though, may not always be able to discipline those who engage in cyberbullying behaviors, especially if the cyberbullying takes place off campus and outside of school hours. Making it even more difficult, often the majority of the student targets and bystanders of cyberbullying fail to report these incidents to adults, though females are more likely to report than their male counterparts (Li, 2006).

Cases exist where the police could become involved in the cyberbullying if it involves slander, fraud, and especially violent threats. The legal ramifications would result in barring the perpetrators from chat rooms and instant messaging, having profile accounts deleted, suspension from school, and, in some cases criminal prosecution (National i-Safe Survey, 2006).

Even with all the difficulties around prosecution, schools and school districts are beginning to take appropriate steps to discourage such behavior in the educational setting. States like Oregon and Rhode Island are considering ways to curb cyberbullying, yet there is much disagreement over how best to implement these new crackdowns on cyberbullying (Norton, 2007). Other states have taken aggressive steps to curtail cyberbullying. States prohibiting cyberbullying within their overall anti-bullying laws include Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Despite this momentum in addressing cyberbullying inside and outside of schools, Willard (2007) asserts that confusion continues to exist regarding the legal ramifications among legislators, schools, and school district administrators.

The Current Study

The researchers of the current study undertook a detailed national youth survey to determine the extent and implications of cyberbullying on the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) and allied youth between the ages of 11 and 22. Though a number of studies have focused on similarities and differences between male and female involvement as perpetrators and targets of and responses to cyberbullying (e.g., Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Li, 2006, 2007; Maher, 2008),

this new research fills a glaring void in the extant literature base by concentrating *specifically* on the experiences of and recommendations by LGBT and allied youth in the area of cyberbullying.

The following data detail the action strategies and policy recommendations the participants suggested in the open-ended qualitative data questions in the national survey that administrators, school personnel, parents/guardians, and young people themselves can employ to address issues of cyberbullying.

Design & Methods

The Survey Instrument

The researchers developed a 174-item cyberbullying instrument that included a number of Likert-type scale items as well as a number of open-ended questions organized around the following categories: types and frequency of technology used, experiences and frequency of cyberbullying and face-to-face bullying, behavioral outcomes and overall impact for all the "actors" in the spectrum of cyberbullying—from either experiencing cyberbullying on the receiving end or as witnessing cyberbullying to actively or passively participating in the act of cyberbullying on another person or group of persons. Participant demographic information was collected. The survey instrument also assessed participants' attitudes and perceptions toward reporting and addressing incidences of cyberbullying. Open-ended questions provided a space for participants to delve deeper into the various categories addressed within the overall cyberbullying instrument.

Data Collection

The researchers recruited participants to respond to their on-line survey through email invitations distributed to gay-straight alliances (GSAs) throughout the United States with the assistance of the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and through LGBT college and university student organizations.

Though researchers offered no monetary incentive to participate, researchers noted that information gained from their participation would provide them the opportunity to document the extent and the form that cyberbullying has taken in their lives, and that this would give administrators and school personnel information that would be helpful toward addressing cyberbullying in schools and within the larger society.

Participants

Participants (n = 444) were middle and junior high school, high school, and undergraduate college and university students between the ages of 11 and 22 years old. They identified as "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual," "with a same-sex attraction," or as an "LGBT-allied youth." Overall, 350 participants identified as non-hetero-

sexual, 86 identified as heterosexual, and 8 who did not identify and were subsequently excluded from *group* comparisons. Participants represented 44 of the 50 United States, and 326 (73.8%) identified as female, 107 (24.2%) as male, 7 (1.4%) as transgender, 2 (.1%) as intersex, and 2 did not identify. In addition, 321 (72.5%) identified as Caucasian, 46 (10.4%) as Biracial/Multiracial, 30 (6.8%) identified as Latino/a, 20 (4.5%) as Asian/Pacific Islander, 11 (2.5%) as African-American/Black, 2 (.5%) as American Indian/Indigenous People, 13 (2.9%) as other, and 1 did not identify.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software to provide descriptive characteristics for survey questions. Qualitative data were analyzed through open and focused coding methods to identify commonalities and differences in participant responses (Esterberg, 2002). Specifically, participant responses to the open ended questions were first analyzed utilizing open coding methods where the researchers examined the data line-by-line, noting key phenomenon that produced open codes leading to common categories in the data. Once all data were coded using this method, the researchers further reduced the data categories through focused coding (Esterberg, 2002) to produce thematic responses to the open-ended questions.

The areas addressed in the findings of the study utilize both the quantitative and qualitative data from the survey and center around two key issues in cyberbullying. The first looks at whether participants would notify a parent or guardian if they were targeted by cyberbullying. The second area centers around participants' suggestions for change, in this regard, change strategies to diminish or alleviate the problem of cyberbullying. Using the group of participants who identified as non-heterosexual ($n = 350$), we compared and contrasted the results with participants who identified as heterosexual ($n = 86$).

Whether to "Tell" Parents or Guardians

Participants were asked, "If you were being cyberbullied at home, would you tell your parents/guardians?" A large gap developed between groups, with 37% of heterosexuals, as compared to only 18% of non-heterosexuals stating, "Yes," I would tell. On the reverse side, 35% of heterosexuals and 47% of non-heterosexuals stating "No," I would not tell, with 29% and 35% respectively replying "Maybe" I would tell.

Asked why those who responded "No," would not tell, the largest contrast centered around the following: "My parents might restrict my use of technologies," 35% to 52%; "They couldn't do anything to stop it," 38% to 55%; and "They wouldn't believe me," 28% heterosexual to 40% non-heterosexual respectively. Figure 1 breaks down the full range of responses between groups:
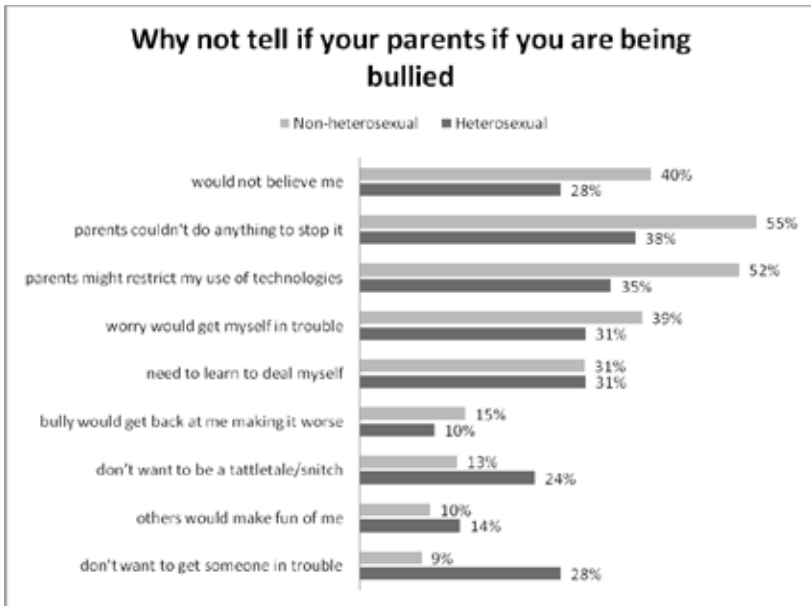
Why not tell if your parents if you are being bullied

■ Non-heterosexual   ■ Heterosexual

	Non-heterosexual	Heterosexual
would not believe me	40%	28%
parents couldn't do anything to stop it	55%	38%
parents might restrict my use of technologies	52%	35%
worry would get myself in trouble	39%	31%
need to learn to deal myself	31%	31%
bully would get back at me making it worse	15%	10%
don't want to be a tattletale/snitch	13%	24%
others would make fun of me	10%	14%
don't want to get someone in trouble	9%	28%

Figure 1

Comparison of Non-heterosexual and Heterosexual groups on why they would not tell parents or guardian.

For those participants who replied that they would not tell their parents, re-searchers gave participants the opportunity to expand on their reasons. The vast majority of participants who listed that they would not tell their parents or guard-ians and answered the open-ended question as to why, stated that they were fearful of doing so because of their non-heterosexual identities and potential exposure of these identities. Responses in this category included: "My parents are homopho-bic."; "It depends on why I was being bullied. If is was for my sexuality I couldn't tell my dad because he hates the fact that I am a lesbian."; "My parents are unac-cepting of my sexual orientation."; "They wouldn't love me if they knew I was a lesbian; they could find out." Other responses included, "I'd be embarrassed and wouldn't want them to know," and "Don't want my parents to worry about me."

Strategies for Change

When asked who should do more to stop cyberbullying, 80% of the total number of participants stated that their peers should do more to stop it, 58% of participants stated that their school administrators/teachers should do more to stop it, 58% of participants stated that their parents/guardians should do more to stop it, and 48%

of participants stated that the state or federal government should do more to stop it.

A number of themes emerged from the data analysis of the open-ended question responses regarding what should be done to alleviate the problem of cyberbullying. Following are the thematic suggestions from participants.

From nothing can be done to self-monitoring. In the "nothing can be done" category, participants came to the conclusion that the technology is difficult to regulate for many reasons, including "there would probably be lots of free-speech-based objections thrown around (by people with a very different concept of free speech than me…)" (P421), to the difficulty in regulating the complex and ever-changing technology itself. One participant entered the area of human nature:

> In happy fun dream land, where everything is perfect, we should all just get along and be kind to one another. :(This is also my take on war, and that won't happen, either (P278).

In addition, participant 433 concluded that "Being mean to people on the [I]nternet is something that comes with the anonymity of being behind a computer screen. People can learn to deal with text that says mean things."

How, though, can people learn to "deal" with it? In this regard, participants offered individualistic self-monitoring suggestions for protection while using the technologies, ranging from spending less time online, to "Everyone just minding their own business, and if anyone starts anything just 'walk' away" (P58), to "discourage talking to offensive people or not talking to people you don't know" (P174), to "Ignore the one who is being hurtful to others, they thrive on attention…" (P234), and "chat rarely and don't give personal information, including gender, race, etc." (P284). Participant 436 gave the stern warning to "avoid crap like myspace."

Related to self-monitoring by those who engage in the act of cyberbullying, participant 364 touched on meeting the psychological needs of people who bully, and also by developing empathy for others: "I think kids who cyberbully need to feel better about themselves, and they need to know how much other people hurt…" Participant 6 invoked the "Golden Rule": "I strongly believe that it should be stopped by people making wise choices not to hurt anyone and treat people how they would want to be treated."

Outside monitoring. Participants proposed employing human overseers to supervise and check for those who abuse the technologies. According to participant 99, "Employ more moderators on sites to scan chatroom/message board conversations so that rule breakers can be warned or banned." Participant 380 reiterated, "In cases of message boards and chat rooms, moderators should ideally be in place to limit such behavior and protect the privacy of their users." Participant 120 concentrated on two specific sites: "More monitoring of Facebook and MySpace by administrators."

Participants, especially those who have been on the receiving end of cyberbullying, advocated for parents and guardians to become more involved in monitoring young people's on-line activities: "Stronger parental control" (P496), and "Parents should watch behavioral patterns in kids…" (P70).

Other participants asserted that parents have a responsibility to instruct their children on issues of respect: "Parents should be aware of what their children are doing and should teach them to be decent human beings" (P98), and "I think parents should be far more aware of what their children are doing on the [I]nternet and should make an effort to teach them to respect others" (P386).

Report cyberbullying. Oftentimes, young people are reluctant to report incidents of cyberbully for fear of retribution, and because of the stated rule of "no snitching or tattling" on peers. Many participants, however, were well aware of the important difference between "reporting" a serious incident, and simply "tattling" on peers. In order to protect the identity of the targets of cyberbullying, participant 26 wanted school personnel to "make it easy and confidential to report it." In addition, respondent 54 wanted "An organization where people can send anonymous emails reporting the incident that could later be investigated," and for respondent 151, "Have links you can click on to report offensive or abusive users on the spot, to record and delete accounts of those who abuse others."

Though a number of participants in our survey found it difficult to discuss the issue of cyberbullying with a parent, guardian, or other close family member if they were on the receiving end, some participants in this category, as well as others who believed it would be advantageous for other adults to be included in the process or cyberbullying reduction, suggested, for example, "mak[ing] help lines more available/known" (P110), and creating "an open, secure environment for kids in high school and middle school to discuss problems with an adult who is not a family member" (P15).

Enact and enforce policies & laws. While some participants argued that cyberbullying revolves around free speech issues or felt that authorities should not "regulate what we can and cannot say to each other online… (P74), others advocated for the control of certain language, for example, "The restriction of using bad words or insults or saying things that might hurt" (P210), and "Define limitations of free speech more in depth so it cannot be justified, like sexual or racial attacks, etc." (P341).

Some participants called for tighter restrictions coming from the local school level to the national level related to abuses of the technologies specifically in the realm of cyberbullying. Respondent 56 suggested "Inclusive public policies that will protect students from being cyber bullied"; and to "Have stronger rules, and make sure that the school enforces them" (P162). Participant 191 looked to larger governmental institutions: "State/federal governments should have the power to intervene in cases of cyberbullying by working with the website ([F]acebook, [M]ys[S]pace, [AIM]) and taking measures to warn, block, or ban the cyberbullies."

Along with instituting policies, participants advocated enforcement with some sort of punishment for the perpetrators of cyberbullying ranging from the indefinite condition of "mak[ing] sure they know the horrible possible impact they have on their victim's life" (P165), to "threaten[ing] students that participate in cyberbullying with academic punishments (suspension, probation, possibly even expulsion if the bullying was pervasive)" (P338), and "I think ISPs [Internet Service Providers] should be responsible to stop a user's service when they are guilty of cyberbullying" (P306), to more serious "legal ramifications for those of-age to be prosecuted legally. And legal ramifications for parents/guardians of under-age children who bully for letting it happen/aiding it in happening" (P498).

A number of participants noted that people must challenge those who engage in cyberbullying. Most participants in this category advocated aggressive means, for example, "I think that more people should confront bulliers *(sic)* and should have more severe punishments for those who take part in it" (P100). One participant, however, suggested temperate persuasion:

> I think cyberbullying can only be halted if someone is confronted (online or no) about what he/she said and that it is damaging to people. Only with understanding and candor can this be fixed—gentle exposure. Radical reactions are just as bad as the original hateful messages (P303).

Peer leadership. For some participants, if the problem of cyberbullying is to be solved, the major responsibility must rest on the young people, on the peers themselves to address the issue. "The only people who can stop it are the responsible and intelligent kids who know its (sic) wrong…" (P188). Others felt peers must take on the issue because they were pessimistic that adults could do much to reduce the problem: "Getting the whole system—government, teachers, etc.—involved doesn't really help. It needs to come from fellow peers" (P57), and "I don't really think that there is anything that authorities can do about cyberbullying. I think that we as teenagers need to put a stop to it. What could they do to stop cyberbullying—regulate what we can and cannot say to each other online?" (P74).

Education. Seeing education in many of its forms as a solution to cyberbullying, participants offered suggestions ranging from "hav[ing] sessions for teens in the matter but have it in a fun and active environment" (P2), to assemblies "in schools to inform people about the effects of cyberbullying and show the consequences of being a cyberbully" (P19), and "rais[ing] awareness by adding it onto student organizations' agendas. Have a day that honors it and perhaps even a national protest (similar to the day of silence)" (P181), and "Hold parent information sessions" (P347), to "teaching tolerance…not only in the realm of cyberbullying, but all abuses based on prejudice" (P102). One participant suggested the implementation of educational technologies to reduce abuses on the technologies. "Try making a video about it showing the effects of cyberbullying and possibly even bullying in general…" (P106).

Information and Communications Technology Strategies

Participants called for more effective enforcement of appropriate behaviors on the information and communication technologies by use of existing and enhanced technological means. Participant 218 wants similar enforcement technologies such as already exists on YouTube: "I think that things like comments posted on YouTube have to go through a filter to prohibit pointless, hateful messages from being posted." Similarly, according to participant 18,

> "ALL online communication and cellular communications need to have a report feature to report any cyberbullying…."

Some participants are willing to exchange enhanced security features for diminished personal freedoms on the technologies. "Enforce a more secure, less private system—TCPIP addresses, etc. to actually apprehend anyone who breaks the law online (threats of physical violence, etc.)" (R99), and "Decrease the amount of anonymity on these networking sites, because people say the most outrageous shit that they would never say in real life because they can hide behind a fake identity" (R77).

Discussion

Though youth of all sexual identities and gender expressions are impacted by abuse of human-computer interactions, our study highlighted the gap that exists between heterosexual participants as compared to non-heterosexual participants who would inform parents or guardians if they were cyberbullied (37% versus 18%, respectively).

Regarding information and communication technologies, for many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth, these technologies are their only or primary means of communicating with others like themselves, while offering a virtual window on the world free from many of the restraints imposed upon them within their communities. With the fear that parents or guardians might possibly take away or severely restrict their access to these technologies, thereby potentially closing this window, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender teens are possibly more likely to withhold information related to cyberbullying from parents and guardians. In addition, divulging the nature of cyberbullying instances might also put them at increased risk of "coming out" with their sexual or gender identities to parents and guardians, which in a number of cases could place them at greater peril.

Research has shown that the repercussions for youth who come out to their parents as gay or lesbian with no family support can be devastating (c.f., D'Augelli, Pilkington, and Hershberger, 2002; D'Augelli, 1991; Herdt and Boxer, 1993). Family rejection is often more feared than victimization or harassment (D'Augelli, 1991). For example, researchers (Gibson, 1989; Ramafedi, et al.,

1991), found that a significant percent of LGBT youth are forced to leave home once their sexual or gender identity is questioned by family members, and approximately 20-40% of all homeless youth are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (National Network of Runaway and Youth Services, 2001). Subsequently, LGBT youth often rather risk the taunts and abuse by remaining "on-line" rather than losing their windows to the world by possibly divulging their sexual or gender identities when reporting incidents of cyberbullying to parents, guardians, or even school official, or others.

This finding somewhat contradicts a study by Smith, et al. (2008) on cyberbullying in secondary school, which *did not* factor the characteristics of sexual identity and gender identity into the equation. Instead, they found that secondary school students, in general, recommended as their best coping strategies in countering cyberbullying both blocking and avoiding messages, and telling someone when they were being cyberbullied.

Overall, students in our study are rather pessimistic that adults and others in authority (e.g., government, school administration) can do much to significantly alleviate the problem of cyberbullying. This result challenges school officials to educate themselves to the problem, to assess the degree and depth of this obstruction to the entire educational environment within their institutions, districts, and communities, and to take action to resolve the situation for all young people, including LGBT and allied youth.

Participants in our study suggested that school districts institute policies and educational initiatives that address issues of cyberbullying. For example, a policy that provides online methods for students to anonymously report incidences of being cyberbullied or having witnessed someone being cyberbullied could allow for early opportunities to intervene and educate. Another example could include an educational program that is peer-driven and peer-delivered discussing the impact of cyberbullying.

Our study confirmed that the problem of bullying and cyberbullying involves more than those who bully and those who are bullied (the so-called "dyadic view") but, rather, involves a constellation of "actors," or roles, across social and school environments. In their study, Sutton and Smith (1999) discovered that peers were present to witness 85% of the bullying incidents at school. Some researchers have defined the roles various actors play in the drama of bullying (Olweus, 2000; Sutton & Smith, 1999).

Though participants in our study were somewhat unenthusiastic that school officials and government leaders could or would sufficiently tackle the problem, students called on their peers to take *major* responsibility in reducing instances of cyberbullying. Regarding those who witness bullying and cyberbulling, but take no action to intervene (the "bystanders"), participants are calling on their peers to become empowered to interrupt and prevent such incidents (to become "upstanders").

In our continuing research on the phenomenon of cyberbullying, we have been investigating ways to empower the "bystander" to become the "upstander." One method in particular we have discovered is known as "Social Norms Theory." First suggested by H. Wesley Perkins and Alan Berkowitz (1986), social norms theory is based on the premise that behavior is often influenced by *erroneous* perceptions of how other members of a social group think and act. What an individual believes others think and do (in social norms theory called a "perceived norm") and what in fact are others' real attitudes and actions (an "actual norm") are often at odds. The distance between a perceived and an actual norm is referred to as "misperception." For example, Perkins and Berkowitz (1986) found that college students often *over*estimated the extent to which their peers supported unhealthy drinking behaviors, and that these *mis*perceptions predicted how individuals drank.

Social norms theory involves interventions that are intended to correct misperceived social norms. A critical element in this approach is to correct misperceptions of norms by focusing on the positive and healthy attitudes and behaviors of the majority in an attempt to increase these behaviors. This element should be developed in consort with the use of information regarding these positive norms to direct interventions with abusers. Fabiano (1999) enumerates six stages in the social norms intervention process: 1) assessment to collect data; 2) selection of the normative message; 3) testing the message with the target group; 4) selecting the normative delivery strategy; 5) determining the "dosage" (amount, form) of the message; and 6) evaluation of the effectiveness of the message.

Focusing on peer influences, social norms interventions have shown promise, especially when combined with other strategies—for example, with detailed policy changes[4]—in addressing issues related to changing unhealthy patterns of alcohol consumption and the use of tobacco, prevention of sexual assault, improvement of overall academic climate in an educational institution, and reducing discriminatory behaviors.

Social norms theory can be an effective strategy in the reduction of bullying behaviors generally, and specifically, cyberbullying. In one study (Salmivalli, et al., 1996), researchers found that between 80 to 90% of young people expressed aversion to bullying behavior and disapproved of people who bully others, though this proportion decreased somewhat during adolescence. The same study showed, however, that merely 10% to 20% of those surveyed actively intervened on behalf of those who were victimized by the bullying behaviors of peers. This indicates that while bullying behaviors—and aggression in general—may be (mis)perceived as being an accepted norm by a significant number of people in a given environment, in reality, the vast majority find these behaviors distasteful at best. Social norms theory in many contexts has proven effective in empowering those who oppose an unhealthy or abusive behavior, as well as empowering "bystanders" who are aware of negative behaviors, but who feel powerless to intervene.

Whichever strategy is employed must take into consideration the unique characteristics and traits found within each specific environment. What has become consistently clear in our study and others, however, is that cyberbullying is now a persistent and pervasive problem, and that efforts must be implemented for the benefit of all young people and for future generations. Listening to and truly hearing the voices of youth in developing effective strategies is paramount in any school reform efforts.

End Notes

1. The 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution of 1873 provided for equality under the law, and extended the basic guarantees of the Bill of Rights to all citizens in the areas of state and local government. The Amendment reads, "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."
2. Title IX of the 1972 Higher Education Act provides for equality on the basis of sex in employment and in educational institutions and programs. This applies to all educational institutions, including K-12, vocational and professional schools, and public and private undergraduate and graduate institutions. Because of Title IX, school systems, colleges, and universities must ensure equal treatment based on sex in all areas including vocational education, athletic programs, textbooks and curriculum, testing, admissions, and employment.
3. OR, MN, IL do not list categories in their anti-bullying laws, but bullying and harassment on the basis of sexual orientation *and* gender identity are prohibited by their nondiscrimination laws, which cover educational institutions. CT similarly does not list categories in its anti-bullying law, but bullying and harassment on the basis of sexual orientation are prohibited by its education-inclusive nondiscrimination law. http://www.familyequality.org/resources/publications/anti-bullying_withcitations.pdf
4. Policy statements need to be detailed and specific. For example, though she did not investigate the practice of cyberbullying *per se*, Harrington (1994) found that *generic* company codes of ethics and executive statements had little or no significant effect on employees' computer abuse judgments.

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