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# An Exploratory Analysis of the Mental Health Impacts of Digital Media on Electronic Aggression in Youth: The Coliseum Effect

Cinnamon Blair

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Cinnamon Blair

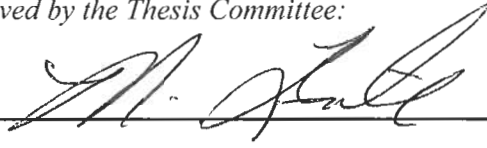
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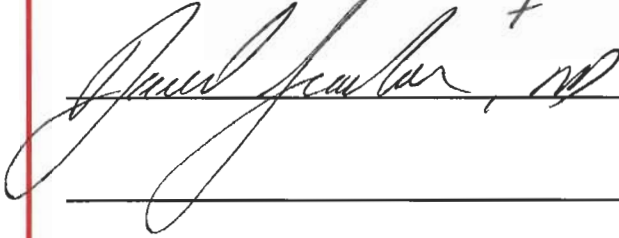
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,Chairperson



**AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF  
THE MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS OF DIGITAL MEDIA  
ON ELECTRONIC AGGRESSION IN YOUTH:  
THE COLISEUM EFFECT**

**BY**

**CINNAMON BLAIR**

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B.A., POLITICAL SCIENCE, EMORY UNIVERSITY, 1991**

**THESIS**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Science  
Health Education**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May, 2010**

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**ABSTRACT**

Electronic aggression is a relatively new communication phenomenon, the mental health impacts of which among youth are an emerging and increasingly critical health problem. The problem is important as many researchers, policy makers, educators, parents and young people are finding it difficult to identify and prevent this form of violence. Moreover, the means and media of this movement continue to evolve at a rapid rate. The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine the phenomena of electronic aggression in youth and the corresponding impact to their psychological health.

The current exploratory analysis examines the similarities and differences between traditional bullying and electronic aggression and the significance of the resulting mental health outcomes for youth shown in the bully, victim and bystander roles. A line of inquiry was developed by the researcher to determine whether there may be a potential *coliseum effect*, amplifying the psychological harm to those involved. Theoretical sampling was used to examine three cases chosen for their social notoriety and ongoing proliferation. In addition to the factual and documented data relative to the

cases, the original posted comments and interactions of third-party bystanders on the Internet were collected and analyzed in order to examine their contributing role in and potential impact on electronic aggression.

Upon analyzing the themes found within these cases, a critical factor emerged relative to the role of the electronic bystander. The ability for a dissociated online persona to be anonymous and invisible in an environment – the Internet – that is relentless and the stage to infinite audiences has the potential to amplify the aggression's negative effect on the target by prolonging the victimization indefinitely. At the same time, this virtual coliseum seems to evoke aggressive behaviors among some youth who otherwise might not engage in this form of violence.

The researcher determined that potential negative mental health impacts may be increased as a result of a *coliseum effect*, where peripheral spectators to acts of electronic aggression contribute to and nourish its existence. As unmonitored access to the Internet and other electronic media increases, electronic aggression will likely follow a similar trajectory. It is therefore critical to conduct further research on this phenomenon in order to understand how and why it occurs and how various short and long term repercussions on the mental health of the youth involved evolve. Only then can preventive measures be developed, implemented and systematically evaluated.



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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Sticks and stones  
May break my bones  
But words will never hurt me.

When I'm dead  
And in my grave,  
You'll be sorry for what you called me!

- popular English-language nursery rhyme

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM: OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

The virtual world in which young people now find themselves is fast-paced, ever evolving and unfettered by geographic boundaries. Immersed in keeping up with emerging mobile technologies, the *wired generation* is one that enjoys the unprecedented freedom that this technology allows as well as the dependency it fosters. Like most advances in technology, there is always the potential for misuse and abuse as well as for positive constructs. The most recent research shows that 97% of today's teens use the Internet (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Increasingly, this use is for online socialization with peers, though not all of it is positive in nature (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, & Macgill, 2007). Potential risks of engaging with these new forms of media technology are also beginning to emerge. Specifically, "increasing numbers of young people are becoming targets of aggression perpetrated by their peers with this new technology" (Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2006).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have identified electronic aggression, which they define as "any type of harassment or bullying (teasing, telling lies,

making fun of someone, making rude or mean comments, spreading rumors, or making threatening or aggressive comments) that occurs through email, a chat room, instant messaging, a website (including blogs), or text messaging [as an] emerging adolescent health problem.” Youth who are victims of electronic aggression “may be at higher risk for behavioral problems such using alcohol, receiving school suspension, or experiencing in-person victimization” (N. C. f. C. D. P. a. H. P. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health & National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2008). Every day, young people are subjected to acts of electronic aggression and are left to shoulder the residual effects of these personal attacks (Trolley, Hanel, & Shields, 2006; Willard, 2007). According to a 2004 survey conducted by i-SAFE America, 42% of school-aged children (fourth through eighth graders) have been bullied while online (Walpole, Jacobs, & Jorgensen, 2004). This percentage increased drastically in a 2008 study that raised the level from 42% to 72% (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). This emerging health problem appears to be escalating at virtually the same speed as the technology that supports it. Due to the problematic nature of this phenomenon, prevalence will be used to estimate the extent of the problem, even though some research cited actually refers to new episodes (e.g. cases cited in the past 30 days).

Traditional bullying, generally defined as repeated, abusive behavior toward another person, may be both physical and psychological. Electronic aggression, which for the purpose of this analysis is interchangeably called cyberbullying, is purely psychological. The arsenal of tactics used in the digital realm of cyberspace and through wireless communication has expanded over time to include methods such as sending hate email or text messages, forwarding private emails or text messages without permission,

taking an embarrassing photo with a camera phone and posting it on the Internet, creating web sites intended to humiliate a target, setting up polls on Web sites to vote on who's the sluttiest, ugliest, nerdiest, or (insert derogatory superlative here) kid in the school, and even instigating physical confrontations to be recorded and posted online.

With regard to reach, the schoolyard bully pales in comparison to the cyberbully. The damage inflicted through acts of electronic aggression can be more far-reaching than most *tweens* (a term denoting children aged nine to twelve) and teens imagine or intend. It is the nature of this type of offense, and the nature of mobile technology, that through the simple press of a button, one need not consider the consequences to one's actions. By not being physically present to see or experience the reactions of the target, the perpetrator remains dissociated from those consequences (Keith & Martin, 2005). Furthermore, the range of participants in incidents of electronic aggression is as large as the perpetrator's electronic address book. Given the viral nature of electronic communication, the number of bystanders multiplies exponentially in the digital world. The target of the electronic aggressor has far less ability to escape the tormentor than the target of the traditional bully (Coloroso, 2003; David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007).

Simply avoiding the bully is impossible when a cyberbully can continue to email, text message and post abusive comments twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. In addition, the electronic aggressor can remain anonymous or impersonate others, thereby potentially avoiding identification and punishment, and any slanderous or defamatory information sent out into cyberspace is difficult, if not impossible, to completely expunge (Franek, 2006).

Some of the worst cases of electronic aggression are tragic:

- Girls at a Chesapeake, Virginia high school teased a thirteen-year-old boy online about his size and physical abilities until he committed suicide. They egged him on until he shot himself with his grandfather's rifle, leaving an online message: "The only way to get the respect you deserve is to die";
- In Burlington, Ontario, teens created a website titled *Welcome to the page that makes fun of David Knight*, which consisted of multiple pages of disparaging and mean-spirited comments about David, who had been kicked, punched and teased at school for years. David told reporters, "It never goes away and anyone can see it. Six billion people see it"; and
- A web site created by students at Horace Greeley High School in New York included biographies, sexual habits, phone numbers and addresses of forty female students. This incident ended in the arrest of two seniors for aggravated harassment (Aspen Education Group, 2009).

The purpose of this exploratory analysis is to provide a comprehensive examination of the current research (2000-2010) on electronic aggression in youth, and the implications of the issues that surround it in order to develop future researchable hypotheses in the area of electronic aggression as it relates to both short- and long-term mental health impacts on this population.

## SCOPE AND RESEARCH

To successfully address the issue of electronic aggression, the following questions outline the research topics that are examined in this analysis. These questions were developed by the researcher, following the investigative patterns of several leading researchers (Campbell, 2005; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008a; Shariff, 2008; Smith, et al., 2008; Trolley, Hanel, & Shields, 2009; Willard, 2007; Williams & Guerra, 2007; Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007) in the field of adolescent electronic aggression (cyberbullying):

1. What is the nature of electronic aggression in youth?
  - How is cyberbullying different from traditional bullying?
  - What basic components are necessary for electronic aggression to take place?
2. What are the presumed mental health impacts of electronic aggression on adolescents?
  - Are the mental health impacts more severe in cases of electronic aggression compared to those in cases of traditional bullying?
  - What are the compounding emotional impacts of virtual bystanders?

Multiple forms of literature have been examined in the review and analysis. The existing body of literature pertaining to electronic aggression is relatively new, most of which having been conducted within the past five years (Campbell, 2005; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008a; Shariff, 2008; Smith, et al., 2008; Trolley, et al., 2009; Willard, 2007; Williams & Guerra, 2007; Ybarra, Diener-West, et al., 2007). References attached to previous studies are also investigated for possible avenues of examination. Online research includes key terms such as: electronic aggression, cyberbullying, cyberabuse, electronic harassment, cyberbullycide, Internet safety and any other terms that emerge as

relative as the research expands. Key researchers as well as those who seek to create and change public policy in this area of interest have established various online safety sites. A thorough examination of these sites has provided critical information for review.

### **RATIONALE FOR THE CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND SIGNIFICANCE**

Electronic aggression has become a global problem with increasing incidents reported in the United States, Canada, Japan, Scandinavia and the United Kingdom, as well as in Australia and New Zealand (Campbell, 2005). This emerging public health issue has as yet not received the attention it deserves, but there is a growing body of research literature that is reflecting the significance of the problem as well as its consequences and possible prevention and intervention strategies.

The full scope and spectrum of electronic aggression is difficult to measure. However, according to a recent survey, 72% of children have been cyberbullied and 35% have been threatened online (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Peer approval is very important to adolescents; in this context, acts of electronic aggression can have a negative or even destructive emotional effect on victims, “ranging from hurt feelings to intense anger” (Shoemaker-Galloway, 2007). These acts may also result in significant depression and in the most severe cases have even resulted in suicide (Aspen Education Group, 2009; Campbell, 2005; Nansel, Overpeck, Haynie, Ruan, & Scheidt, 2003). Unfortunately, young people rarely report occurrences to an adult (Opinion Research Corporation, 2006).

Research in the area of electronic aggression and its implications to the mental health of adolescents is relatively new; thus, the frameworks upon which interventions



should be based are still emergent. It may be in the best interest of those who provide mental health care to this vulnerable population, as well as those who are developing and implementing policy in this area, to have an understanding of the themes related to electronic aggression and how they are interconnected so that more effective interventions and policies will be actualized. Ultimately, this health issue is critical to the safety and mental well-being of our nation's young people.

Related issues include traditional bullying, adolescent social networking and media use, the technology gap between today's adolescents and their parents and educators, the various and emerging forms of electronic aggression, legal boundaries protecting First Amendment rights, and policy and intervention relative to all of the aforementioned issues. Much of the research indicates that the topic of electronic aggression cannot truly be addressed unless it is approached both proactively and reactively.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Whilst accidents and assaults injure and kill people quickly and spectacularly, bullying and consequent prolonged negative stress injure and kill people slowly and secretively. The outcome though is the same.

- Tim Field, "*Bullycide: Death at Playtime*"

"I just want them [the bullies] to stop. I can't take it anymore. I used to love going to school. Now I hate it." 9-year-old Verity Ward quoted in the U.K.'s BBC News (BBC News, 2000).

What has historically been perceived and accepted as a rite of passage or 'kids being kids' has taken on more menacing implications of physical and psychological abuse. Bullying has been referenced for centuries, most notably in the popular nursery rhyme: *Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me*. How far from the truth this statement has turned out to be. With advances in technology, increasing numbers of teens and preteens are becoming victims of a new form of violence evolved from traditional bullying: electronic aggression.

### DEFINING ELECTRONIC AGGRESSION

Generally, the definition of electronic aggression depends upon the viewpoint of those who are defining it. There is significant variability in the conceptualization and measurement of this term and its related nomenclature (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Williams & Guerra, 2007; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007; Ybarra, Diener-West, et

al., 2007; Ybarra, Espelage, & Mitchell, 2007). Many correlating terms, such as cyberbullying, electronic bullying, online social cruelty, online or Internet harassment, and online or Internet bullying have been used to describe this type of violence examined in this review of the literature; however, electronic aggression is “the term that most accurately captures all types of violence that occur electronically” (N. C. f. I. P. a. C. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Violence Prevention, 2009). Furthermore, what exactly constitutes an act of electronic aggression is not always easy to characterize. Definitions of electronic aggression should “illustrate the forms it takes, the tools that are used to engage in it, and ways in which it is understood to differ from traditional bullying” (Shariff, 2008). Two individuals have been credited with coining the term *cyberbullying*: Bill Belsey, a Canadian school teacher, who is also credited with establishing the first online site pertaining to cyberbullying, *cyberbullying.org*, and Nancy Willard, an American lawyer and executive director of the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use. Belsey (2008) states “cyberbullying involves the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others.” Willard (2003) originally defined cyberbullying as language that is “defamatory, constitutes bullying, harassment, or discrimination, discloses personal information, or contains offensive, vulgar or derogatory comments.” While these definitions outlined the form of the language, they did not define the tools that that were used for engagement or how cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying. Willard (2007) has since redefined cyberbullying as “sending or posting harmful or cruel text or images using the Internet or other digital communication devices.”

The conceptualization of cyberbullying as defined by Belsey and Willard has been used to guide the emerging body of research on the topic; their definitions, ideas, and studies have been the cornerstones for current research (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008b; Shariff, 2008; Trolley & Hanel, 2006). However, while their definitions are relatively comprehensive, one element is missing that is needed for the purpose of this review – the ages of those involved. This review of the literature will focus on electronic aggression relative to youth and the potential associated psychological health consequences on that population.

In order to conceptualize this review of the literature, the definition established by Parry Aftab, a cybercrime, Internet privacy and cyberabuse attorney and the creator of *wiredsafety.org* will be followed: “cyberbullying is when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones” (Aftab, n.d.). A minor must be involved on both sides, or the act must at least have been instigated by a minor against another minor. Once adults become involved, the act becomes cyberharassment or cyberstalking; adult cyberharassment or cyberstalking is never referred to as cyberbullying (Aftab, n.d.). Aftab’s definition establishes what the act of cyberbullying is, the tools used, and pinpoints that cyberbullying is something that is done child on child, as most state law defines minors as those who are under the age of 18 (Nolo, n.d.). This is a critical understanding for those who are working with this psychologically vulnerable population, and it helps to focus the scope of possibilities that potential treatments and interventions need to encompass.

## THE CONTEXT OF TRADITIONAL BULLYING

*"Your children who have ridiculed me, who have chosen not to accept me, who have treated me like I am not worth their time are dead...."* 17-year old Eric Harris, one of the duo who killed 13 people and injured 21 others in the Columbine High School massacre before committing suicide.

Bullying was cited as a causal factor in over 40 school shootings that have taken place during the past fifteen years, such as the ones in the box below:

DATE	INSTITUTION	LOCATION	DEATHS
02.05.2010	Discovery Middle School	Madison, AL	1
05.18.2009	Larose-Cut Off Middle School	Larose, LA	1
11.12.2008	Dillard High School	Ft. Lauderdale, FL	1
10.20.2008	Vasquez High School	Acton, CA	1
04.16.2007	Virginia Tech	Blacksburg, VA	33
03.21.2005	Red Lake High School	Red Lake Indian Res.	8
09.24.2003	Rocori High School	Cold Spring, MN	2
04.20.1999	Columbine High School	Littleton, CO	15
05.21.1998	Thurston High School	Springfield Oregon	2
03.24.1998	Westside Middle School	Jonesboro, AR	5

The National School Safety Center's Report on School Associated Violent Deaths (Stephens, 2010).

In order to fully comprehend electronic aggression, it is crucial to recognize its origins in traditional bullying. Historically, bullying has been seen as a rite of passage for young people and instances of bullying have not been taken seriously (Campbell, 2005). Most instances of school-aged bullying occur on the school campus (Sampson, 2002) –

a place that is supposed to be safe and nurturing for students. These instances of traditional bullying “are most likely to occur during less supervised or unsupervised times such as when students are in class transition, locker rooms, gyms,” (Sampson, 2002) or on the school bus. Instances may also “occur in the classroom setting while the teacher is present; many times, the teacher will dismiss the claim of the target or downplay the importance of the incident” (Campbell, 2005).

Bullying as a phenomenon was not well researched until the latter part of the twentieth century. In the early 1970s, a study was conducted in Norway researching the harms of school-aged bullying by Olweus, who is commonly recognized as the pioneer in school-aged bullying research; this in-depth study of the phenomenon of school-aged bullying was actually the first of its kind (APA Online, 2008). At that time, Olweus (1993) defined bullying as “when (a student) is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students.” He went on to define ‘negative actions’ as “when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another – basically what is implied is the definition of aggressive behavior.”

Subsequent research built upon the works of Olweus defines bullying as “conscious, willful, and deliberate hostile activities intended to harm, induce fear through the threat of further aggression, and create terror” (Coloroso, 2003). Coloroso (2003) states that acts of bullying always contain three elements: “an imbalance of power, intent to harm, and a threat to further aggression”; when the incidents are allowed to occur for too long a fourth element is added, terror.

- *Imbalance of power:* traditionally, bullies are male, bigger, stronger, and/or older than those they are victimizing. Acts of bullying can be perpetrated by one person or, in more serious cases, a group of like individuals who have pinpointed a target(s) due to a common reason like race, gender or sexual orientation (Cohn & Canter, 2005; Coloroso, 2003);
- *Intent to harm:* simply stated, the bully means to hurt their victim. This pain can be physical, emotional, or verbal. The bully “expects the action to hurt, and takes pleasure in witnessing the hurt” (Coloroso, 2003);
- *Threat of further aggression:* when a target(s) is chosen, they know that the attack upon their person, no matter what form it takes, will not be a one time thing. Targets are usually selected because the bully knows that they are easy quarry (Coloroso, 2003; Craig & Pepler, 1998);
- *Terror:* the bullied know that they will be bullied again, and this promotes a sense of fear that grows with each attack. They become trapped within the cycle of violence that bullying creates. This fear often causes victims to keep the incidents of bullying to themselves, as they fear more retribution from those who are bullying them (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Coloroso, 2003).

Based upon this general understanding of bullying established by Olweus, later research in the 1980s and 1990s was conducted in other countries. However, U.S. researchers did not begin to study the prevalence of school-aged bullying until 2001. Interestingly, this is the same year in which initial studies in cyberbullying were conducted. The attention to bullying by American researchers was generated by the wave of school violence and high profile crimes that were sweeping across the national media

in the 1990s (Sampson, 2002). The most publicized of these incidents occurred at Columbine High School in Jefferson County, Colorado, where on April 20, 1999 two teenagers, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, killed twelve classmates, one teacher, and wounded twenty-four others before killing themselves. These young men had formed their own neo-Nazi group dubbed the *trench coat mafia*, which was later discovered to have been created in response to the ongoing bullying that they had received from the more popular cliques on campus (Anderson, et al., 2001). None of this was noted or addressed by school officials or the parents of the boys. For over a year, Harris and Klebold had planned their retaliation against their school peers (Raywid & Oshiyama, 2000). Early reports subsequent to the shootings “charged that school administrators and teachers at Columbine had long condoned a climate of bullying by the so-called jocks or athletes”, allowing an “atmosphere of outright intimidation and resentment to fester” which, they claimed, could have “triggered the perpetrators’ extreme violence” (Adams & Russakoff, 1999).

In 2001, researchers noted that while aggression among U.S. youth was increasing, such as the incident at Columbine, there was no obtainable national data on the pervasiveness of school-aged bullying (Nansel, et al., 2001). In reviewing studies from other countries, Nansel and colleagues believed that there was a correlation between bullying, aggression, and youth crime. It was their objective “to measure the prevalence of bullying behaviors among U.S. youth and to determine the association of bullying and being bullied with indicators of psychosocial adjustment” (Nansel, et al., 2001). They analyzed data gathered from a 1998 administration of the *World Health Organization’s Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey* in which 15,686 students in 6<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup>



grade were questioned. The objective of this analysis was to identify self-reporting of involvement in bullying and/or being bullied by others. To qualify as an act of bullying, the act of aggression had to have been “intentional, repetitive, and represented an imbalance of power, with a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one” (Nansel, et al., 2001). The following statistics were extrapolated from their data analysis:

- 29.95% reported moderate or frequent involvement in bullying (13% as the bully and 10.6% as the bullied);
- 10.6% bullied others infrequently;
- 8.8% bullied once a week or more;
- 8.5% experienced bullying infrequently;
- 8.4% experienced bullying once a week or more;
- 6th – 8th graders bullied more prevalently than 9th and 10th graders;
- males were more likely than females to be the bully and the bullied; and
- those who bullied or who were bullied demonstrated poorer psychological adjustment than those who were not involved in acts of bullying.

Based on this data, if 29.95% reported moderate or frequent involvement in bullying, this would translate to a national estimate of 5,736,417 children, with the most severe cases of 1,634,095 students bullied with moderate frequency and 1,611,809 bullied frequently (Nansel, et al., 2001). These statistics symbolize masses of children whose intellectual, social and mental potential and well-being are being jeopardized.

### *Characteristics of the Traditional Bully and Bullied*

Research shows that traditional bullies are typically male, at the same age or older than their victims, stronger than their victims, and generally hold some level of popularity on the school campus (Chan, 2006; Coloroso, 2003; Nansel, et al., 2001). Bullying is usually described as physical, verbal, or emotional. Physical bullying involves kicking, hitting, pushing, and other aggressive gestures. Verbal bullying, the most prevalent type of bullying, can take the form of name-calling, persistent teasing, and spreading rumors about others. Emotional bullying, the most difficult type to gauge, is the use of intimidation by gesturing, making facial expressions, or excluding someone from a group (Coloroso, 2003). Boys are more likely to use physical and verbal bullying, while girls are less obvious and use emotional bullying against those with whom they may feel in competition or whom they perceive as inferior to themselves (Nansel, et al., 2001; Underwood, n.d.). Consistent with several studies, traditional bullying is more prevalent among males than females and occurs with greater frequency among middle school-aged youth than high school-aged youth (Nansel, et al., 2001).

If left unchecked, bullies may escalate their behavior to more violent acts of aggression, show increased poor academic performance, and exhibit delinquent behaviors such as drinking and committing criminal acts (Coloroso, 2003; Nansel, et al., 2001). School-aged bullies have a higher tendency to be convicted of a crime when they reach adulthood, and often grow up to be perpetrators of domestic violence (National Education Association, 2008). Statistics show that the bully is at an even higher risk than the bullied for thoughts of or acts of suicide, and it is believed that this can be contributed to the other factors that make someone tend to bully others (Sampson, 2002).

The bully's target often has perceived flaws and it is upon these characteristics that the bully preys (Chan, 2006; Coloroso, 2003). More current researchers in the field of bullying place children who are bullied into two character categories: passive/submissive victims and provocative victims (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008). Passive victims are those who are most likely to be bullied; there is no one indicator, but rather a list of possible characteristics that they may fit. These children tend to be "to themselves", typically have few friends and are not part of the larger cliques at school. "It is obvious that they fear being hurt and are anxious because of the body and verbal expressions that they use"(Kowalski, et al., 2008). They are usually physically weaker and enjoy spending time with adults more so than they do with other children. Provocative victims are those who have a specific characteristic that rouses an aggressive response in the bully. Those most at-risk as provocative victims are those who are viewed as different from the crowd. "Obese, special needs, learning disabled, and physical handicapped children are most at risk in this category." Those who are different in sexual orientation or race from the bully are also at risk (Kowalski, et al., 2008).

#### *Psychological/Psychosocial Effects of Traditional Bullying*

Bullying among school-aged youth is increasingly being recognized as an important problem affecting well-being and social functioning, with depression perhaps being the most frequently cited correlate of bullying (Nansel, et al., 2001). In a 23-country meta-analysis, Hawker and Boulton (2000) report that being the target of bullying is most strongly related to depression when compared to other measured forms of psychosocial maladjustment.

While research on the long-term consequences of bullying is minimal, the studies that have been conducted show negative effects into adulthood. Olweus (1994) found that formerly bullied individuals had “higher levels of depression and poorer self-esteem at the age of 23 years, despite the fact that, as adults, they were no more harassed or socially isolated than comparison adults”. Olweus (1994) also found that former bullies have a four-fold increase in criminal behavior at the age of 24 years, with 60% of former bullies having at least one conviction and 35% to 40% having three or more convictions.

The experience of being bullied can be devastating to a young person. In addition to the social, emotional, and/or physical pain of the actual bullying experience, victims are also more likely than those who have not been bullied to suffer from poor social adjustment, high levels of anxiety and emotional distress, more actual and perceived (psychosomatic) health problems, and enduring mental health problems (Olweus, 1991; Rigby, 2003). “Their everyday life is characterized by fear, their self-concept is beaten down, and their efforts to avoid confrontations with their tormentors deprive them of many important and healthy experiences” (Farrington, 1993). Bullying can negatively affect the victim’s educational achievements, attendance, and future aspirations (Kowalski, et al., 2008). For example, according to the National Association of School Psychologists, approximately 160,000 students miss school each day because of fear of being bullied (Cohn & Canter, 2005). Furthermore, “victims of bullying often lose their friends both directly and indirectly as a result of their bullying experiences”(Craig, 1998). Some friends confuse a victim's efforts to avoid the bully with attempts to avoid them, others are afraid of becoming victims themselves, and still others “come to dislike the victim due to his or her inability to deal more effectively with the bully” (Craig, 1998).

Victimized youth, relative to non-victimized youth, are at risk for a variety of specific negative outcomes: they are more anxious and insecure (Olweus, 1991), have lower self-esteem (Craig, 1998), are lonely (Boulton & Underwood, 1992), are more likely to be rejected by their peers (Craig, 1998), and are more depressed (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Craig, 1998; Meraviglia, Becker, Rosenbluth, Sanchez, & Robertson, 2003). Bullied youth report more sleeping difficulties, despondency, headaches, stomach pains, and other health symptoms than other children do (Williams, Chambers, Logan, & Robinson, 1996). Higher levels of depression are common among bullying victims, with suicidal ideation being four to five times as common among victims as non-victims (Cohn & Canter, 2005). Chronic victims, about 6 - 10% of those who are bullied, sink into severe states of depression (Rigby, 2003). To a similar degree, they begin to see themselves as devalued as those who are bullying them or watching the acts of bullying against them. The damage done to their self-esteem can have lasting effects on their adult relationships and self-image (Sampson, 2002). It is not surprising then that the bullied are at increased risk of depression and suicidal ideation (Meraviglia, et al., 2003; Riittakerttu, Rimpela, Marttunen, Rimpela, & Rantanen, 1999) than those who are not victims of bullying.

Just over 15% of children and adolescents are bullied *sometimes* or more frequently (Due, et al., 2005; Nansel, et al., 2001) with negative health and social challenges consistently reported (Due, et al., 2005; Nansel, Craig, Overpeck, Saluja, & Ruan, 2004; Nansel, et al., 2001; Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2006). In a study conducted by Nansel et al (2001), measures of psychosocial adjustment included questions about problem behaviors resulting from traditional bullying such as the nature

of the behaviors, social and emotional well-being and parental influences. Those bullied demonstrated “poorer social and emotional adjustment, reporting greater difficulty making friends, poorer relationships with classmates and greater loneliness, as well as generally showing higher levels of insecurity, anxiety, depression, loneliness, unhappiness, physical and mental symptoms and low self-esteem” (Nansel, et al., 2001). Data from 28 countries participating in the *World Health Organization (WHO)-sponsored Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey* revealed that victims report significantly more concurrent health problems, emotional-adjustment problems, school-adjustment problems, and poorer relationships with classmates when compared with non-bullying involved youth (Nansel, et al., 2004). Experiencing peer harassment has been linked to depression, loneliness, and social isolation (Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000). Depression, loneliness, and social anxiety were uniquely predicted by being victimized by relational bullying (Crick & Bigbee, 1998) and also predict future social and psychological difficulties (Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999). Due and colleagues (2005) report that boys who are bullied weekly are almost four times more likely to report somatic or mental health problems as non-bullied boys; a similar finding is noted among girls (Ybarra, et al., 2006).

The aggressor is also at risk for negative health outcomes. Research also shows that acts of bullying can be a sign of other serious antisocial or violent behavior. Youth who frequently bully their peers are more likely than others “to get into frequent fights, be injured in a fight, vandalize or steal property, drink alcohol, smoke, be truant from school, drop out of school, and carry a weapon” (Nansel, et al., 2003; Olweus, 1994). Longitudinal research indicates that childhood bullying is associated with adult anti-

social behavior, such as criminality, as well as with limited opportunities to attain socially desired objectives (Farrington, 1993; Olweus, 1994).

There is some evidence that bullying may be related to incidents of school violence such as the previously referenced Columbine High School shootings. One study concluded that perpetrators of school-based homicides were more than twice as likely to report being bullied by their peers (Anderson, et al., 2001). In a study of the 37 violent school attacks in the United States from 1974 through June 2000, researchers found that almost three-quarters (71%) of the attackers “felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured by others prior to the incident” (Vossekuil, 2002).

Acts of bullying negatively impact all those involved. The bully/victim/bystander relationship begins a vicious cycle in which everyone suffers. Peers also suffer from bullying behavior by feeling group pressure to join in the bullying. Merely observing bullying may lead to distress (El-Sheik, Cummings, & Goetch, 1989). Research and experience consistently show that bullying is a serious issue, with far-reaching consequences for the youth involved, their families and peers, and the community around them.

### *Suffering in Silence: The Bullied*

The question of why the bullied child remains silent and the possible answers describe a cycle not unlike classic emotional abuse. As previously stated, acts of bullying have historically been seen as a rite of passage on school grounds and this is reinforced in our society – the stronger tell the weaker what to do. “Bullying often stems from the social inequities that adult society creates, fosters, sustains and continues to grapple with”

(Shariff, 2008). Because of this societal parallel, young victims have little faith in how adults will respond to their situation (Coloroso, 2003; Sampson, 2002). A host of studies have suggested additional reasons as to why the bullied child remains silent: fear of retaliation, feelings of shame for being weak, fear of not being believed, a need to not worry their parents, thoughts that nothing would change as a result of telling, thoughts that involving parents and teachers will make it worse, thoughts that teachers would tell or involve the bully, and fear of being called a *snitch* (Coloroso, 2003; Sampson, 2002).

Most of the reasons given by the victim involve thoughts of how others will perceive them after telling about an act of bullying; the bullied child does not want to appear weak or *uncool* in front of his or her peers, teachers, and parents. However, research shows that the bullied child often becomes a loner and anti-social in order to avoid subsequent bullying (Nansel, et al., 2001). It seems like an unfortunate catch-22 situation for the victim; the bullied child does not tell to avoid being judged and ostracized by others, which is eventually what transpires if he or she does not tell.

### **THE EVOLUTION FROM TRADITIONAL BULLYING TO ELECTRONIC AGGRESSION**

A target of traditional bullying can ostensibly retreat to the safety of his or her home to escape incidents of bullying, but the same cannot be said for the target of electronic aggression. The impact of cyberbullying does not stop when students pass through the school door. The need for geographic proximity has been eliminated; this evolved form of aggressive behavior invades young people's homes, their bedrooms, and their computers and mobile devices. Even more insidious is the fact that incidents of cyberbullying may be targeted directly to the individual, wherever (s)he may be, or on the



Internet where anyone may observe or be a party to the victim's distress (Aftab, 2007; Coloroso, 2003; Willard, 2007). Because bullying has been framed as a schoolyard issue, the focus of research has largely been on bullying in schools — whether in the classroom, locker room, hallway, or school bus — based on the assumption that personal contact is a prerequisite to bullying.

Electronic aggression is clearly not physical in nature and has more in common with verbal and emotional bullying. The intimidation that is the hallmark of face-to-face bullying is quickly being augmented by humiliation, abusive messages, gossip, slander, and other virtual taunts communicated through e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, and blogs (Willard, 2006; Williams & Guerra, 2007). Correlates to traditional bullying can be a useful guide to understanding electronic aggression, because this field of inquiry is much more established.

#### *Characteristics of the Cyberbully and Cyberbullied*

“Opportunities for self-affirmation and self-expression provided by the Internet can quickly become vehicles for denigration and cyberbullying” (Kowalski, et al., 2008). Studies show that the motives for bullying someone online have remained fairly the same as traditional bullying: power and a need to dominate or subdue others (Feinberg & Robey, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008a). However, the profile of the bully is changing with the technology s(he) employs. The anonymity of being online has empowered those who may not have typically shown aggression openly (Shariff, 2008). No longer is the bully just the physically dominant, aggressive male on campus. Adolescent bullies may now include those one may not typically suspect: the nerdy kid in the corner, the heavy

girl in PE class, the quiet kid who sits in the front of the bus, and just about any other person who needs or just wants to feel empowered. The Internet has “democratized” bullying (Goodstein, 2007).

To date, there is little research on the specific characteristics of people who are cyberbullies and those who are the targets of their aggression. Although it might be reasonable to assume that people who cyberbully have certain features in common with those who engage in traditional bullying, there appear to be some differentiating characteristics of both those who bully electronically and their targets.

Research has consistently shown boys to be more likely to engage in direct forms of aggression (e.g., face-to-face physical and verbal confrontations), whereas women and girls tend to engage in more indirect types of aggression (e.g., ostracism, gossip) (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Olweus, 1993). Consistent with prevalence rates of indirect aggression among females, one may expect more girls than boys to have experience with electronic aggression (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Since so little is known about young people’s use of electronic technologies to bully each other, a study was conducted by Kowalski & Limber (2007) which attempted to fill some of these gaps by “examining age and gender differences in the nature and prevalence of electronic bullying among middle school-aged children and youth across the United States” (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). This research represents one of the first large-scale studies to examine electronic bullying among middle school children in the United States (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007). Notably, the data exposed gender differences in the frequency of electronic bullying, with girls outnumbering boys. Their study reflected that more girls (13%) than boys (9%) report perpetrating cyberbullying—an indirect form of aggression (Kowalski & Limber,

2007). Importantly, more girls (25%) than boys (11%) report being targets of cyber bullying (Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

Findings from a study by Hinduja & Patchin (2008a) conducted during a similar time period as the Kowalski & Limber (2007) study indicate that cyberbullying does not discriminate based on gender or race. Their findings show that there was “no statistically significant difference between boys and girls in terms of their experiences with cyberbullying either as an offender or victim” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008a); this finding is surprising as it contradicts the only other relative study in this area. Hinduja & Patchin (2008a) found that over 32% of boys and over 36% of girls have been victims of cyberbullying, whereas about 18% of boys and 16% of girls reported harassing others while on-line. The Second Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS-2), conducted in 2004, also showed that half of the harassers (50%) were reportedly male (Ybarra, et al., 2006). A later and more comprehensive study by Hinduja & Patchin (2009) still supported that when looking at recent experiences (the past 30 days), boys and girls report about the same involvement (8.3% and 8.1% respectively) in cyberbullying victimization and offending (Figures 1 and 2). Lifetime participation rates are higher for girls (19%) than boys (16.1%), however, “suggesting that they have been engaging in these types of activities longer” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

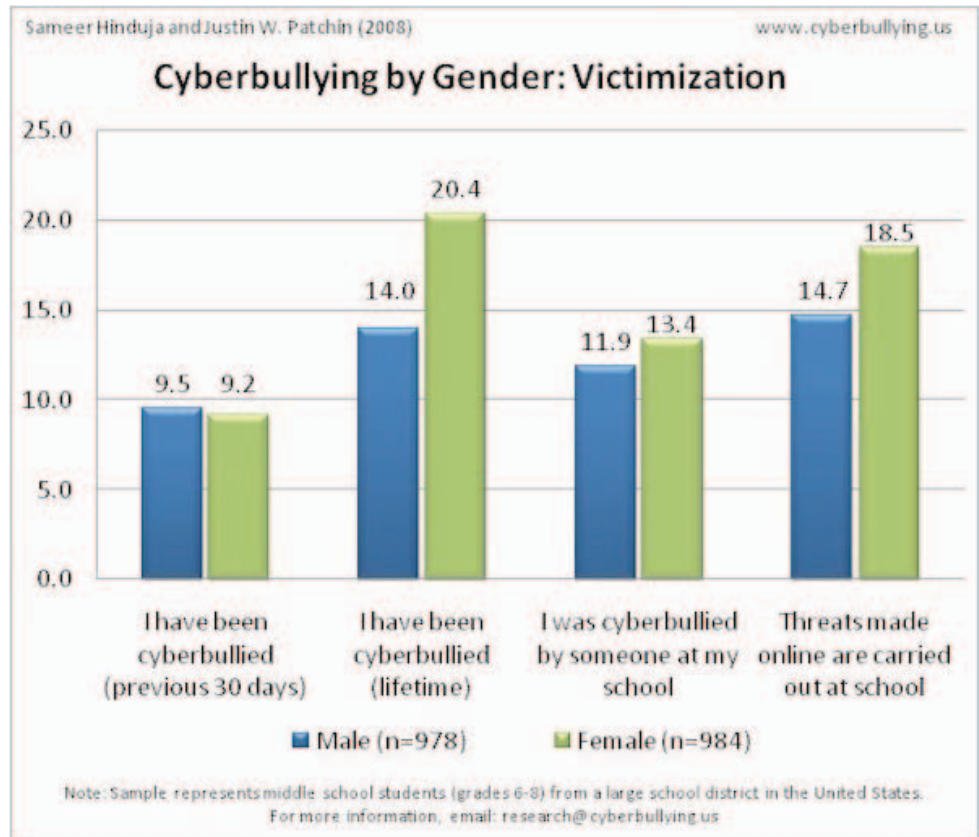


Figure 1

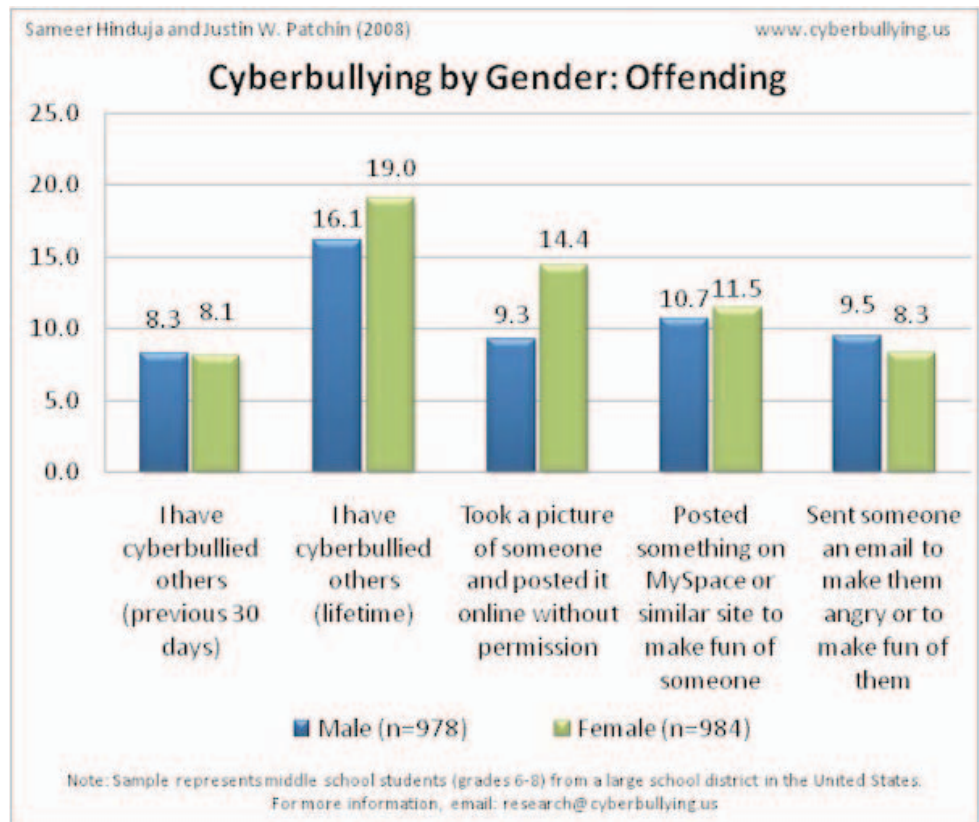


Figure 2

While these studies provide some insight into the make-up of the cyberbully and the cyberbullied, their limitations and conflicting findings regarding gender differences in the profiles of those who are electronic aggressors as well as their targets indicates the need for further research in order to effectively determine accurate predictors and corresponding interventions.

In addition to gender differences in electronic aggression, “personality variables also moderate the frequency with which people experience cyberbullying” (Kowalski, et al., 2008). Heightened levels of social anxiety have been observed among perpetrators of cyberbullying; furthermore, among individuals who cyberbully, “those who do so most frequently report the highest levels of social anxiety” (Kowalski, et al., 2008). Notably, however, even among respondents who frequently perpetrated acts of electronic aggression, the targets of this type of violence still reported higher levels of social anxiety (Kowalski, et al., 2008).

Specific descriptions of the types of four broad categories of cyberbullies are described by the STOP Cyberbullying program (Wired Kids, Inc.):

- *The Vengeful Angel* does not see him- or herself as a bully, but rather as a vigilante, as he or she often becomes involved trying to protect a friend who is being bullied or cyberbullied;
- *Power-Hungry* cyberbullies want to “exert their authority and control others with fear”, and they are often victims of traditional bullying. Sometimes called “*Revenge of the Nerds*” cyberbullying, because these bullies are often physically small and targeted by their peers for not being *cool* or [for being] technologically

skilled”;

- *Mean Girls* cyberbullying often occurs in a group. The perpetrators are usually bored and looking for entertainment. This kind of cyberbullying grows when fed by group admiration, cliques or by the silence of others who stand by and let it happen; and

- *Inadvertent* cyberbullies do not intend to cause harm; they just respond with emotional impulse, without thinking about the consequences of their actions (Aftab, n.d.).

On the continuum of risk, some youth are more susceptible to instances of electronic aggression than others. As with the aggressors, targets may be as likely to be female as male and are more likely to be older teens than younger children (Feinberg & Robey, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008a). Approximately half of the victims of cyberbullying are also targets of traditional bullying (Feinberg & Robey, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008a; Kowalski, 2008). Victims are generally unpopular, isolated, depressed, anxious, and fearful compared to their peers. Those at risk are more likely to be “searching for acceptance and attention online, more vulnerable to manipulative techniques, less attentive to Internet safety messages, less resilient in dealing with a difficult situation, less able or willing to rely on parents for help, and less likely to report a dangerous online situation to an adult” (Willard, 2007). Related risk factors for youth may include having temporarily impaired relations with parents and/or peers or facing major ongoing challenges “related to personal mental health and disruptions in relations with parents, school, and/or peers” (Feinberg & Robey, 2009).

Some youth who are bullied online are the same who are bullied offline, usually resulting from the same motivations (Coloroso, 2003; Shariff, 2009). But among adolescents harassed online, the majority (64%) reported not being harassed or bullied at school (Ybarra, Diener-West, et al., 2007). This finding suggests that for over two-thirds of electronic aggression victims, “their use of new forms of media technology have created a vulnerability that they may not have typically experienced elsewhere and exposed them to this type of violence” (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007).

### *Psychological/ Psychosocial Effects of Electronic Aggression*

Similar to traditional forms of youth violence, there is a growing understanding that electronic aggression is associated with emotional distress and conduct problems at school (N. C. f. C. D. P. a. H. P. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health & National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2008; Shariff, 2008; Ybarra, Diener-West, et al., 2007). Acts of cyberbullying may actually begin with traditional bullying instances at school and then move to the electronic realm or vice-versa (Pepler, Jiang, Craig, & Connolly, 2008; Swartz, 2009), and are usually not mutually exclusive. Similar to traditional bullying, acts of electronic aggression are intentional, repetitive, and meant to exclude (Coloroso, 2003). Shariff (2008) would argue that the medium of cyberspace simply provides an avenue for expression of the message and that the message is not different from that which is often expressed when bullying occurs in physical space, overtly or covertly. Chan (2006) points out that emotional abuse relative to physical abuse, tends to occur everyday, so the effects are more harmful because of the frequency. This prompts the question of whether

a single act of aggression in cyberspace is really a single act, since it can be viewed in perpetuity, and by an exponential number of witnesses. If this is the case, the implications for psychological harm may, indeed, be more severe than those relative to traditional bullying.

Several studies in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* special supplement (2007) demonstrate an association between electronic aggression victimization and a range of psychosocial difficulties and risk factors, “including emotional distress, school conduct problems, weapon-carrying at school, and low caregiver–adolescent connectedness” (Wolak, et al., 2007; Ybarra, Diener-West, et al., 2007; Ybarra, Espelage, et al., 2007). Cybervictimization has also been shown to cause poor grades, low self-esteem, repeated school absences, depression, and in some cases suicide (Chait, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Li, 2007; Nansel, et al., 2003; Shariff, 2008; Ybarra, et al., 2006). These outcomes are similar to those associated with traditional bullying; however, with cyberbullying there is often no escape. “Perhaps the greatest long-term effect is the loss of the home as a safe-zone” (Strom & Strom, 2005). Where traditional bullying usually ends at the threshold of a young person’s home, safe with their family, electronic aggression knows no such boundaries. “Vulnerable children have virtually no refuge from harassment. It’s a non-stop type of harassment and it creates a sense of helplessness” (Toppo, 2006). This additional terror tactic is used by the aggressor to traumatize their victims to a heightened degree. Due to this extension of time and space for electronic aggression, as well as the anonymity of and dissociative behavior displayed by the electronic aggressor, more severe and additional outcomes may exist for cybervictims than for victims of traditional bullying, and those may manifest themselves in different



ways. "Harmful messages intended to undermine the reputation of a victim can be far more damaging than face-to-face altercations. Instead of remaining a private matter or event known by only a small group, text or photographs can be communicated to a large audience in a short time" (Strom & Strom, 2005).

A victim of electronic aggression may seem anxious and have unexplainable mood swings after online use or stop using their equipment at home all together (Shariff, 2008). They are less likely to talk about their online experiences or friends and may avoid allowing others to view their computer usage (Shariff, 2008; Trolley & Hanel, 2006; Willard, 2007).

The single-most differentiating and integral issue for the targets of electronic aggression is that of trust. Aggressors often hide behind screen names and email addresses that do not identify who they are, and not knowing who is responsible for the aggression can potentially exacerbate the victim's insecurity (Dombeck, 2007; Smith, et al., 2008; Ybarra, Diener-West, et al., 2007). Face-to-face situations usually allow the victims to see the aggressor and those who are supporting the aggressor's actions. Likewise, the victims have a better chance of knowing who is on their side and can be trusted. This is not often the case for the victim of electronic aggression. The analogy cannot even be made to that of the perpetrator(s) wearing a mask (like a face-to-face aggressor might); the victim cannot describe the aggressor, in physical form, gender, age or number. The Internet is open not only to the victim's peers but to the world, and it is difficult to be completely sure of who and how many people may be involved in an act of electronic aggression. The anonymous nature of electronic aggression may leave the

victims paranoid and unsure of their surroundings, and this self-doubt can be debilitating (Willard, 2007).

Another characteristic unique to electronic aggression that can be especially damaging is that it is so pervasive and access to the victim is unfettered. A ninth grade girl from Washington, D.C. repeatedly received hate mail on her instant messages: “Whenever I was on my computer, I’d get IMs saying that everyone hated me and I should watch my back. It seemed like it was from girls who I thought were my friends. When I confronted them, they denied it and blamed it on someone else. I never knew who was really behind it. I got really paranoid and couldn’t concentrate in school.” (Wiseman, 2007). This young person is not an isolated case, with many victims feeling trapped, frustrated and distracted with no time for reflection or distance from the abuse. Sociologist Robert Agnew maintains that those who experience this “stress or strain are more likely to participate in deviant or delinquent” behaviors in order to cope (Hinduja & Patchin, 2006). Some youth involved in electronic aggression may be global victims, vulnerable to victimization in multiple environments. This is especially important to note because of the potential ripple effect for delinquent behaviors affecting peers, school life, family and the community.

It is apparent that when young people use the Internet that they are often quite willing to do or say things that they would be much less likely to do or say in the *real world*. This phenomenon has been termed *disinhibition* (Willard, 2006). This freedom of social and physical restraints, relative to expressing one’s self electronically, may have either a positive or negative effect on those involved. The Internet provides a person the privacy to research a matter they may see as sensitive, and this may be especially

beneficial for shy or modest individuals. But for the cyberbully, disinhibition may empower them to say or do whatever they choose with no apparent consequences. For the victim, “disinhibition may confirm their belief that they are insignificant and their life has no real value as there is no one to watch over them” (Humble, 2008).

Data from the First Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS-1, 1999) suggested that 6% of Internet users between the ages of 10 and 17 years had been targets of Internet harassment in the previous year, one third of whom reported feeling emotionally distressed because of the incident (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000). The Second Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS-2, 2004) sought to further identify the “characteristics of youth who are targets of Internet harassment and characteristics related to reporting distress as a result of the incident” (Ybarra, et al., 2006). Youth who report being victims of Internet harassment are significantly more likely to concurrently report “depressive symptomatology, life challenge, interpersonal victimization (e.g., having something stolen), deficits in social skills, and harassing others online themselves” (Ybarra, et al., 2006). Almost two in five harassed youth (39%) report emotional distress as a result of the experience (Ybarra, et al., 2006). Findings of the YISS-2 survey showed that 9% of the youth who used the Internet were targets of online harassment in the previous year, which was an increase of 3% in five years. Though the numbers reflected in this study are not increasing rapidly, they are increasing significantly.

Using data from the *Growing Up with Media* survey, a national survey of 1,588 youth between the ages of 10 and 15 years, researchers reported psychosocial characteristics associated with being targeted by electronic aggression to further the understanding of the phenomenology of victims of this type of violence (Ybarra, Diener-

West, et al., 2007). Consistent with previous research (Ybarra, et al., 2008; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004a; Ybarra, et al., 2006), youth who are bullied online report a mix of psychosocial problems. Detentions, suspensions, skipping school and weapon carrying were each more frequently reported by youth who also reported being harassed online. Differences between youth were especially apparent for weapon carrying; “youth reporting being targeted by Internet harassment were eight times as likely to concurrently report carrying a weapon to school in the last 30 days compared to all other youth” (Ybarra, Diener-West, et al., 2007). Subsequent analysis of the type of aggression experienced indicated that 27% of youth targeted by rumors and 21% of youth targeted by threats monthly or more often online also reported carried a weapon to school at least once in the previous 30 days (Ybarra, Diener-West, et al., 2007). This association was “not due to underlying differences in youth sex, age, race, ethnicity, household income, or Internet use” (Ybarra, Diener-West, et al., 2007). Findings are consistent with Ybarra and colleagues (under review), who report that youth who receive insulting comments via text messaging are significantly more likely to also report feeling unsafe at school (Ybarra, Diener-West, et al., 2007).

The increasing frequency of being a target of electronic aggression is also associated with “poorer parental monitoring and caregiver/child emotional bond” (Ybarra, Diener-West, et al., 2007). Externalizing behaviors also are noted in elevated rates among youth harassed online, including alcohol use and other drug use. Based upon previous research (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004a), it is likely that these behaviors are reflective of aggressor/victims, youth who are harassed and harass others online, and may be indicative that psychosocial problems may be heightened for dually involved youth.

These aggressor/victims (akin to bully/victims) “have the highest rate of psychosocial problems compared with all other youth, including problem or delinquent behavior, low school commitment, substance use, and poor parental monitoring” (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004a).

To compound the issue of electronic aggression, there is also debate as to whether high levels of Internet use alone interfere with psychological functioning. Kraut and colleagues (1998) found higher levels of Internet use to be associated with higher levels of depression and loneliness, which may increase vulnerability to more severe outcomes of electronic aggression in youth.

What is clear from the empirical extant research is that when youth are victimized by their peers, either through traditional means or through electronic means, they experience psychosocial difficulties (Wolak, et al., 2007; Ybarra, Diener-West, et al., 2007; Ybarra, Espelage, et al., 2007). Since acts of electronic aggression lack the physical hurt, skeptics feel it is not as harmful as traditional bullying (Shariff & Churchill, 2008). Researchers must look at the psychological damage caused by electronic aggression to appropriate gauge its importance as a serious health issue.

### *Suffering in Silence: The Cyberbullied*

Like traditional bullying victims, youth who are victims of electronic aggression are not likely to tell adults about the abuse they are receiving. Studies show that 58% of those who are bullied online do not tell an adult – parent or others (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). This unwillingness to tell is not only due to the fact they feel adults may not respond appropriately, but also because they that fear their Internet usage (computer

access, mobile device) will be taken away or monitored by those who are trying to protect them. This fear turns to panic when the media being used against them (e.g. personal photos or messages) are not something that they would want shared with adults (Coloroso, 2003).

Agatston, Kowalski and Limber (2007) conducted a focus group study of middle school students in order to gain a better understanding of the impact of cyberbullying on this demographic. Students indicated that the majority of the incidents occurred outside of the school day, with the exception of cyberbullying via text messaging. They also indicated that they were unlikely to report cyberbullying to the adults at school, as it frequently occurs via cellular phone use, and it is against the school policy to have cellular phones on during school hours. When students were asked if they placed text messages or used their cellular phone during the school day, the majority of the students interviewed indicated that they did despite the policy. Students also indicated that “they did not think the adults at school could help them if they were experiencing cyberbullying (Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2007)”. Students were more likely to report acts of electronic aggression to parents than adults at school, particularly if the bullying was threatening in nature. However, students also indicated that they were reluctant to report cyberbullying to parents because they feared the loss of Internet privileges (Agatston, et al., 2007). Electronic aggression appears to have created a type of new-age paradox in that the tools used to abuse are also the social umbilical cord of today’s youth; young people may choose to suffer in silence rather than risk losing what they view as a vital social connection.

*Not-So-Virtual Realty:*

*The Environment in which Electronic Aggression has and Continues to Develop*

“Technology and youth seem destined for each other. They are both young, fast paced, and ever changing” (Hertz & David-Ferdon, 2008). Over the past twenty years there has been an explosion in new technology, which has been eagerly embraced by young people and has led to expanding knowledge, social networks, and vocabulary that includes instant messaging (*IMing*), blogging, and text messaging (*texting*). This novel digital world holds many potential benefits for youth; they can interact with others across the United States and throughout the world on a regular basis. Social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace also allow them to develop new relationships with others, some of whom they have never even met in person. “New technology also provides opportunities to make rewarding social connections for those youth who have difficulty developing friendships in traditional social settings or because of limited contact with same-aged peers” (Hertz & David-Ferdon, 2008). In addition, regular Internet access allows youth to rapidly develop their knowledge on a wide variety of topics. However, the recent upsurge in technology does not come without possible inherent risks. Youth are also using electronic media to embarrass, harass, or threaten their peers; increasing numbers of this population are becoming victims of electronic aggression.

In recent years, technology has transformed the landscape of young people’s social lives. With an estimated 45 million children between the ages of 10 and 17 in the U.S. alone using the Internet every day (Williams & Guerra, 2007), social interactions have increasingly moved from personal contact in the school room to virtual contact in the chat room; 73% of *wired* U.S. teens now use social networking websites, a significant

increase from previous surveys. Just over half of online teens (55%) used social networking sites in November 2006 and 65% did so in February 2008 (Lenhart, et al., 2010). Amid the increase and surge in *wired* connectivity, electronic aggression has emerged as a new and growing form of social cruelty.

### *Tools of Electronic Aggression: The Means and the Media*

Just as Willard (2007) took the privilege of using the term *Internet* as an “all-encompassing term to cover current and emerging information and communication technologies,” so has the researcher for the purpose of this analysis. It is not enough to use the term Internet without some appreciation of what it entails. In order to address questions regarding what current and emerging technologies are being used in electronic aggression and how youth are using them, it is necessary to first understand the degree to which the Internet is used by this demographic and the extent to which the Internet is integrated into and impacts their daily lives. For most young people the Internet is the computer, telephone, television, radio and game console all wrapped into one; this translates into it having become a significant focal element in many American families (Goodstein, 2007). Youth access the Internet to “connect with friends, expand their social networks, explore their identities, and learn new things” (Lenhart, et al., 2007).

Goodstein (2007) describes the phase of adolescent development of teenagers today as not being much different from that of past generations. Young people have always wanted “to figure out who we [they] were apart from our [their] families, through our [their] friendships, boyfriends, and the music we [they] listened to... most of us experienced the similar impulsiveness, invincibility and highs and lows otherwise known



as teen angst” (Goodstein, 2007). Despite differences in eras and social norms, youth have always desired acceptance for who they are and what they believe. The most significant distinctions by generation are the means and media through which adolescents have tried to gain this acceptance; generally, these are what differing generations see as generational gaps. It is interesting to note that the generational gap between today’s youth and the previous generation is now being referred to as a *digital gap* or *digital divide* (Shariff, 2008) – so undeniable is the saturation of digital media. Today’s youth are *totally wired* (Goodstein, 2007) in their daily lives. This population is continually transitioning from one form of media to another in order to complete everyday tasks. Understanding a person’s technological environment is now a critical clue to understanding how that individual uses the Internet, connects with others and accesses information. “Among teens, the average person owns 3.5 gadgets out the five we queried in our survey: cell phones, mp3 players, computers, game consoles and portable gaming devices” (Lenhart, et al., 2010). This sentiment has been similarly expressed by other researchers in the field of teens and social media, as well as popular news media (Belsey, 2008; Hertz & David-Ferdon, 2008).

The disconnect between youth and the adult authoritative figures in their lives occurs relative to incidents of electronic aggression because youth tend to understand the technology that is the medium for these acts of violence better than the adults who are responsible for setting rules and boundaries. (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008b; Shariff, 2008); in other words, youth are more knowledgeable than those who are normally in charge. Just as actual acts of electronic aggression are committed to demonstrate control or power over another, so are the rules and guidelines that are set forth by the adults in a young

person's life. Since most equate knowledge with power, "the Internet has created a power struggle between young people and the adults who are responsible for setting the rules and guidelines that the children must follow" (Shariff, 2008).

In 2007, PEW Internet & American Life Project, a nonpartisan organization that supports research on the Internet and its impact on society, published a report focusing on a 2006 survey concerning teens aged 12 to 17 and their use of social media. This survey administration was a repeat of similar PEW surveys that had been conducted in 2000 and 2004 (Lenhart, et al., 2007). The focus of these reports was twofold: to assess the level of use of the Internet by teens and to assess the types of media that they were using. Findings from this study showed a significant escalation in teen use of the Internet; in just six years, the use of the Internet had increased 20%, with 62% of teens going online on a daily basis. Another notable statistic is large increase in cell phone use by teens – over 40% in just six years. Adolescent use of cell phones includes all of the common functionalities of a typical cell phone: camera, video, Internet, texting, and content sharing capabilities – all of which are being used to build online social networking sites (Lenhart, et al., 2007). In the 2004 PEW survey the Internet was mostly seen as a source of information, not as a teen gathering spot. It was noted in the 2006 study that "more of them [teens] than ever are treating it [the Internet] as a venue of social interaction – a place where they can share creations, tell stories, and interact with others" (Lenhart, et al., 2007). Not only did the PEW 2006 study show the increased degree to which teens are using the Internet, but it also portrayed how they are using it. The following statistics have been taken from the PEW 2006 *Summary of Findings* page:

- 64% of online teens have participated in one or more among a wide range of content-creating activities on the Internet;
- 39% of online teens share their own artistic creations online, such as artwork, photos, stories, or videos, up from 33% in 2004;
- 33% create or work on web pages or blogs for others, including those for groups to which they belong, friends, or school assignments, basically unchanged from 2004 (32%);
- 28% have created their own online journal or blog, up from 19% in 2004;
- 27% maintain their own personal webpage, up from 22% in 2004;
- 26% remix content they find online into their own creations, up from 19% in 2004;
- 55% of online teens have created a profile on a social networking site such as Facebook or MySpace;
- 47% of online teens have uploaded photos where others can see them, though many restrict access to the photos in some way; and
- 14% of online teens have posted videos online (Lenhart, et al., 2007).

While one may come to the conclusion that these activities are similar to those in which past generations have engaged, like sharing scrapbook photos, writing diaries (today's blogs), passing notes, and talking with friends, the media through which they are sharing these activities have changed. Most online socialization takes place through social networking sites. Boyd (2008) studied the teen phenomenon of online social networking use, specifically MySpace and Facebook, and the corresponding implications to teen social and psychological development. He characterized social network sites as based around profiles, "a form of individual...homepage, which offers a description of each member" (Boyd, 2008). In addition to text, images, and video created by the member, the social network site profile includes comments from other members and a public list of the people that one identifies as *friends* within the network. While these

online profiles are specific to the individual who creates them, they are accessible by and public to a broad audience of friends, acquaintances and complete strangers.

Consequently, things that the public may not normally know about someone are more readily accessible by more than just their closest friends.

Boyd (2008) states that online social networking sites have four inherent differences from typical face-to-face interactions: persistence, searchability, replicability, and invisible audiences. These characteristics are defined to include the implications of how these interactions may lead to unsafe situations for youth:

- *Persistence*: online speech is persistent in that networked communications are permanently recorded and exist even after they are no longer visible, and they can be retrieved at any time. Therefore, thoughts or ideas expressed that one may want to take back or no longer feel are still expressed, long after the time has passed to which it applies (Boyd, 2008; Franek, 2006);
- *Searchability*: as individual identities are stored and recorded, anyone has the ability to search for anyone else, even if they do not know the person. Searches for those who have similar tastes, friends, or profiles can open up an individual's profile to the world. This exposes the users to those who may not necessarily have the best intentions towards them (Boyd, 2008);
- *Replicability*: it is as easy as *copying* and *pasting* to move someone's words from one site to another, leaving it difficult to distinguish between the original from the copied text. This leaves open the possibility that someone else can use an individual's words or thoughts against him or her or in a way that was not originally intended (Aspen Education Group, 2009; Boyd, 2008); and

- *Invisible audiences:* unlike face-to-face situations, online users cannot definitively ascertain with whom they are interacting in a virtual setting. Users cannot be sure that the person to whom they are talking is really who they say they are, and users cannot identify who is virtually looking at them. The implications for this are the most frightening for today's youth; they never know who is watching them and for what reason (Boyd, 2008; Goodstein, 2007).

These unique variables to social networking have opened a Pandora's box of potential abuse and misuse. Moreover, society's inability to establish safeguards against such abuse continues today.

Cyber bullying can take many forms. However, there are six forms that are the most common.

- *Harassment:* repeatedly sending offensive, rude, and insulting messages;
- *Denigration:* distributing information about another that is derogatory and untrue through posting it on a Web page, sending it to others through email or instant messaging, or posting or sending digitally altered photos of someone;
- *Flaming:* online "fighting" using electronic messages with angry, vulgar language
- *Impersonation:* breaking into an email or social networking account and using that person's online identity to send or post vicious or embarrassing material to/about others;
- *Outing and Trickery:* Sharing someone's secrets or embarrassing information, or tricking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information and forwarding it to others;

- *Cyberstalking*: Repeatedly sending messages that include threats of harm or are highly intimidating, or engaging in other online activities that make a person afraid for his or her safety (depending on the content of the message, it may be illegal).

“Appendix A” presents a full spectrum of the tactics and methods used to perpetrate electronic aggression. While each behavior is described independently, the users of this repertoire generally combine them while perpetrating acts of aggression online.

Regardless of the way the way in which the electronic aggression takes place, it is easy to see why someone who is victimized would be tempted to respond. The impulse to react is difficult to control, especially for young people (Coloroso, 2003). A unique development in electronic aggression is that the difference between the aggressor and the target is not always clear. Once the target reacts to the aggressor, he or she may no longer be called a victim (Willard, 2007). The victimization can be recurring and as it progresses, those involved continually switch roles between bully and bullied; thus the painful cycle begins and each participant owns a part of the blame (Willard, 2007). To conceptualize how one incident of aggression can grow from an electronic device to an entire school or the whole world and back, one must know and understand the actions through which electronic aggression naturally occurs.

### *The Changing Role of the Bystander*

The role of the bystander is one that is not often given much study in the literature on electronic aggression (Coloroso, 2003); perhaps this is because the bystander(s) in an incident of electronic aggression can never clearly be defined. Unlike traditional bullying,

the audience to an act of electronic aggression is not comprised of just those who witness the incident unfold at the time that it occurs. Bystanders can witness the act several days, months, and possibly years later as words and images often placed online can be retrieved indefinitely (Coloroso, 2003; Shariff, 2008).

Craig and Pepler (1998) looked at the roles of bystanders in incidents of traditional bullying. They found that 85% of bullying incidents were witnessed by bystanders. Of these cases, 81% of the incidents were reinforced by those who were there; 48% of the bystanders became active participants, and only 13% of the bystanders actually intervened. After the incident, the bystanders were often more supportive and friendly towards the bully than the bullied (Craig & Pepler, 1998).

When bystanders to face-to-face bullying were asked why they do not intervene, four reasons are most often given: the bystander is afraid of him- or herself getting hurt, is afraid of becoming a new target, is afraid of doing something that will make it worse, and that the bystander simply does not know what to do (Craig & Pepler, 1998). Craig and Pepler (1998) feel that these are more excuses than legitimate reasons. They along with Coloroso (2003) believe that repetitive witnessing of bullying causes bystanders to become desensitized and indifferent. This indifference or apathy is reinforced because the bystander's sense of self-confidence and self-respect erodes with each act of bullying they witness. Eventually the bystander will understand the side of the bully more so than the bullied (Coloroso, 2003). Taking a more neutral view, Underwood (n.d.) states that "many children do not have the self-confidence or skills to stop bullying on their own and should not be expected to do so." Studies also suggest that youth feel that teachers do not appropriately react when told about acts of bullying on campus, nor do they feel teachers

react severely enough when they, themselves, witness and respond to acts of bullying in their own classrooms (Sampson, 2002).

Willard (2007) believes that bystanders play an important role in preventing acts of electronic aggression. Research shows that the role of friends, those who have been identified online as such, is a determinant of how the victim will respond to acts of online aggression. If he or she is supported by friends, and they defend the victim in appropriate manners online, the target is more likely to feel less victimized. Therefore, “empowering bystanders will be a key prevention strategy” in averting cyberbullying (Willard, 2007). By teaching them how to influence the online climate and report incidents to others, bystanders in the cyberworld will have the tools to decide which role they wish to play – to be part of the problem or part of the solution (Trolley & Hanel, 2006; Willard, 2007).

The role and responsibility of bystanders in electronic aggression should not be overlooked. More so than in cases of face-to-face bullying, bystanders have an active role in the scope and magnitude of the act; they may forward messages to an unlimited number of people, contribute to discussions in a chat room, or take part in an online poll. Even though they may not have initiated the act of aggression or think of themselves as an aggressor, they are active participants, making the situation worse and compounding the distress for the victim. This phenomenon will be discussed later in the conclusion section as the *coliseum effect*, one of the major findings of this theoretical research, which is not addressed in the current literature.

#### **PREVALENCE AND PREDICTORS OF ELECTRONIC AGGRESSION**



To date, information on the prevalence of electronic aggression comes primarily from anecdotal reports and a limited number of youth surveys. Findings suggest that cyberbullying and victimization rates are around 25% (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Willard, 2006), although, one study found victimization rates as high as 75% (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). This is higher than physical bullying rates but lower than indirect bullying rates from most school-based prevalence studies (Kowalski & Limber, 2007), and reported more outside of school than inside (Smith, et al., 2008). Of the studies that have examined age and gender differences for electronic aggression, it appears that overall bullying appears to peak during early adolescence, with verbal bullying remaining high throughout the adolescent years. There is some indication in the findings that girls may be overrepresented as both aggressors and victims of electronic aggression (Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

This review of the literature attempts to obtain a comprehensive overview of rates of electronic aggression and victimization by analyzing several notable studies, which examine the prevalence of cyberbullying, including differences in the rates of aggression and victimization between the sexes and trends over the past several years. Some limitations to comparing the data include there being a wide range of sample sizes, that several surveys were administered online and that many studies admittedly had a significantly greater number of female respondents than their male counterparts. Furthermore, some studies also reported an age range, whereas others reported only the grade in school, making it difficult to compare. The nature of the questions were also different enough to prompt varied responses (for example “have you ever been bullied

online” and how that may be conceptualized by the respondent, compared with a specific question asking “has anyone ever said something online that hurt your feelings”.)

Nansel et al (2001) studied bullying behaviors among U.S. youth relevant to prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment; the purpose of the study was to contrast the prevalence of cyberbullying with physical and verbal bullying among elementary, middle, and high school boys and girls, and to “examine whether key predictors of physical and verbal bullying also predicted cyberbullying” (Nansel, et al., 2001). The findings on the prevalence of bullying perpetration suggest that distributions vary by type, with verbal being most prevalent, followed by physical and then by cyberbullying. Physical and cyberbullying peaked in middle school and declined in high school, whereas verbal bullying peaked in middle school and remained relatively high during high school (Nansel, et al., 2001; Williams & Guerra, 2007). Males were more likely to report physical bullying than females, yet no gender differences were found for cyber- and verbal bullying. Notably, all three types of bullying were significantly related to “normative beliefs approving of bullying, negative school climate, and negative peer support” (Nansel, et al., 2001).

Perhaps the earliest study on what was referred to as *electronic bullying* was an unpublished survey conducted by the National Children’s Home in Great Britain (National Children's Home, 2002). Researchers defined electronic bullying as being bullied via mobile phone or personal computer. They surveyed 856 children and youth 11–19 years of age and found that 16% had been bullied via mobile phone text messaging, 7% via Internet chat rooms, and 4% through e-mail (National Children's Home, 2002).

In a later U.S. study, Ybarra & Mitchell (2004b) interviewed 1,501 regular Internet users 10–17 years of age to compare characteristics of aggressors, victims, and aggressor/victims. They were interested in “the degree to which respondents had been victims of or had perpetrated online harassment or rude and threatening online comments” (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004a). They found that 19% of the sample was involved in online aggression, 4% as online victims only, 12% as online aggressors only, and 3% as aggressor/victims only (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004b).

According to a 2004 survey administered by i-SAFE America, 42% of school-aged children have been bullied while online. This percentage was increased drastically in a 2008 study that raised the statistic from 42% to 72% (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Compare these statistics to the near 20% of students who report being traditionally bullied (Nansel, et al., 2001) and it is evident that there is a dramatic increase in victimization when bullying occurs online.

As is evident in the review of the literature, the prevalence of electronic aggression ranges from relatively low to staggering. What is also evident is that the rate at which youth are becoming victimized is growing significantly. Wolak, Ybarra, Mitchell & Finkelhor (2007) note that from 2000 to 2005 there was a 50% increase in the percentage of youth who were victims of online harassment (i.e., threats or other offensive behavior, not sexual solicitation, sent online to youth or posted online about youth for others to see). The research brings to light that new media technologies are facilitating the “development of a new group of adolescents who under traditional circumstances are not victimized by their peers, as well as providing another conduit for

perpetrators to continue to victimize youth who are already targets at school” (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007).

A study by Kowalski & Limber (2007) examined the prevalence of electronic bullying among middle school students. The most common methods for electronic bullying (as reported by both victims and perpetrators) involved the use of instant messaging, chat rooms, and e-mail. Importantly, close to half of the electronic bully victims reported not knowing the perpetrator’s identity (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). The data suggests that, among middle school students, electronic bullying is a problem. Of the students, 11% had been electronically bullied at least once in the last couple of months; 7% were aggressor/victims; and 4% had electronically bullied someone else at least once in the previous two months (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). If anything, these statistics may underestimate the true frequency of electronic aggression. Because there is so little research on electronic aggression, targets may not have recognized that what they had experienced was actually a form of bullying (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Kowalski & Limber’s (2007) examination of the methods of electronic aggression underscores that all forms of media technology may not be used by adolescents with the same frequency. Similar to the findings of the National Children’s Home (2002) study, they found that both victims and perpetrators reported that electronic aggression was inflicted through instant messaging more frequently than through chat rooms, e-mail, and Web site postings.

Because both verbal and cyberbullying can occur behind the target’s back with a greater degree of anonymity than with physical bullying, both the prevalence and predictors of Internet bullying are expected to be more similar to verbal bullying than to

physical bullying (Nansel, et al., 2001; Williams & Guerra, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007). Consistent with the expectation that cyber- and verbal bullying would share common features, no gender differences were found for prevalence of cyber- and verbal bullying (Williams & Guerra, 2007).

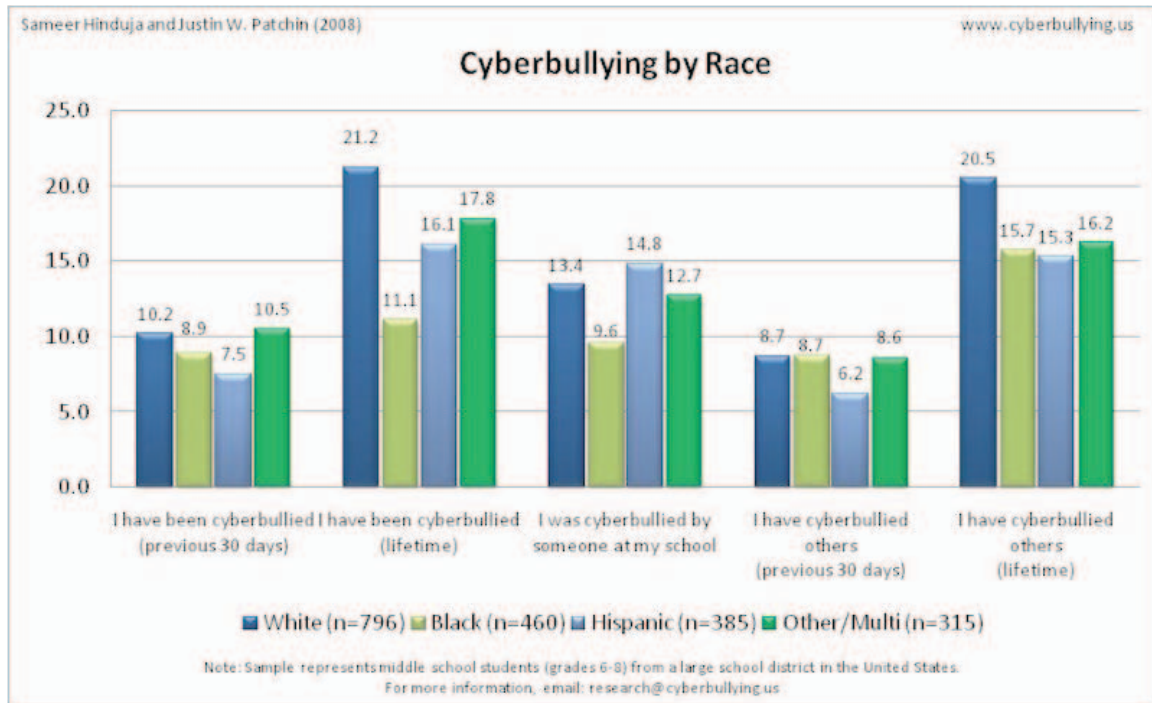
Very few studies have examined the correlates and predictors of cyberbullying and whether these are similar or distinct from factors linked to bullying in schools. In examining the PEW Internet & American Life Project *Teens and Technology* study the sheer frequency of use of electronic technologies by adolescents provides a context within which the statistics are not all that surprising. Three quarters (75%) of the teenage population use cell phones; almost all (93% to 97%) use the Internet, and a large proportion of these use it everyday (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005; Lenhart, et al., 2010).

Overall, predictors of physical and verbal bullying are quite similar to predictors of aggression in general. However studies of the etiology and prevention of bullying have “emphasized a smaller set of predictors reflecting the social and normative context of bullying within peer networks and school settings” (Williams & Guerra, 2007). Two important predictors linked to bullying in both prediction and prevention studies are “student perceptions of the acceptability (or moral approval) of bullying and student perceptions that school is an unsupportive context in which peers and adults cannot be trusted” (Williams & Guerra, 2007). The influence of peers is particularly noteworthy in discussing contextual characteristics of schools; within the school setting, peers can escalate bullying through encouragement and validation (Williams & Guerra, 2007). No research has been conducted that examined how this relates to the much larger context of

the Internet, and how peer and participant influences may also encourage and validate electronic aggression on a magnified level over an indefinite period of time.

Despite measurement and methodological variations, the research analyzed in this review of the literature consistently indicate that adolescents who experience and perpetrate electronic aggression represent a significant and rising number of youth who use electronic media. Likely due in part to measurement differences, victimization estimates range from 9% to 72% of youth, and perpetration estimates range from 4% to 21% of adolescents (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Williams & Guerra, 2007; Wolak, et al., 2007; Ybarra, Diener-West, et al., 2007; Ybarra, Espelage, et al., 2007). Furthermore, Williams & Guerra (2007) demonstrate that face-to-face verbal and physical aggression perpetrated by adolescents remain the most prevalent forms of aggression.

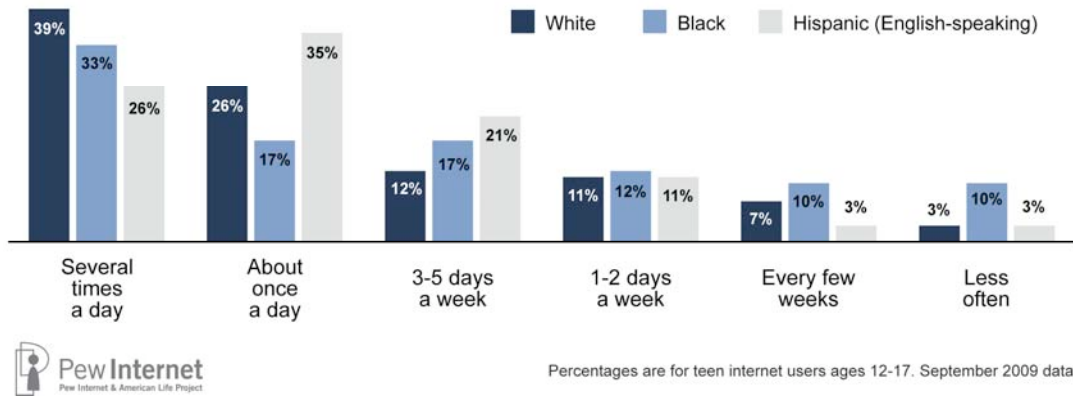
The review of the literature found that only one study included data collected corresponding to prevalence relative to race/ethnicity and none corresponding to socio-economic status (SES). A recent study by Hiduja & Patchin (2009) suggests that all races are vulnerable to cyberbullying victimization and offending, as illustrated in Figure 3.



**Figure 3**

While it appears that white students are more likely to report lifetime experiences with cyberbullying (both as a victim and an offender), when looking at the previous 30 days, all races are fairly evenly represented as victims or offenders. A recent study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project did show that daily use of the Internet is over 30% for whites, African Americans and Hispanics. Access to the Internet appears to be equitable, as shown in Figure 4, but no associations have been made to aggressive behavior.

## Frequency of teen internet use by race/ethnicity



**Figure 4**

With regard to socio-economic status, cell phone ownership is one area where rates vary, with teens from lower income families being less likely to own a mobile phone. More than half (59%) of teens in households earning less than \$30,000 annually have a cell phone, while more than three quarters of teens from wealthier families own one. However, 69% of all teens aged 12-17 have a desktop or laptop computer. Teens from wealthier families are slightly more likely (74%) than less well-off teens to personally have a computer (Lenhart, et al., 2010). What may be relevant here is that while opportunity to engage in aggressive online behavior is not limited by SES, the mobility of having a cellular telephone to perpetrate those acts may limit the opportunity, frequency and popular methods for electronic aggression (such as texting) to those with the means to own the technology.

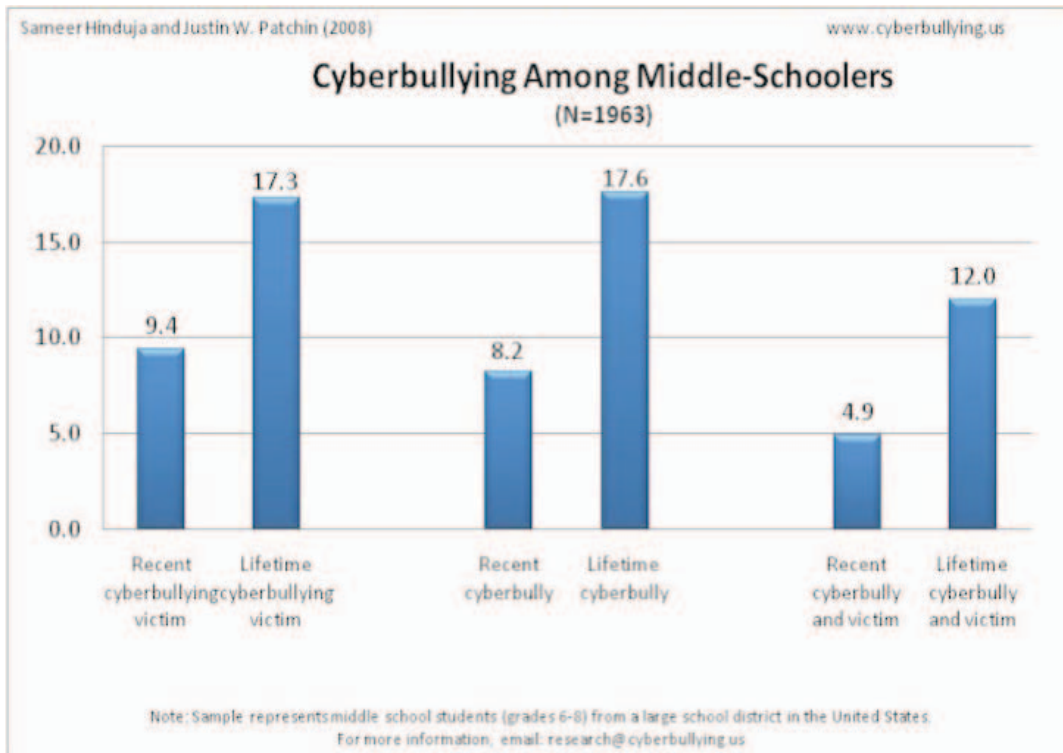
Among otherwise similar youth, the odds of being a target of electronic aggression were higher for those youth who bullied others online, reported borderline/clinically significant social problems, and were victimized in other contexts.



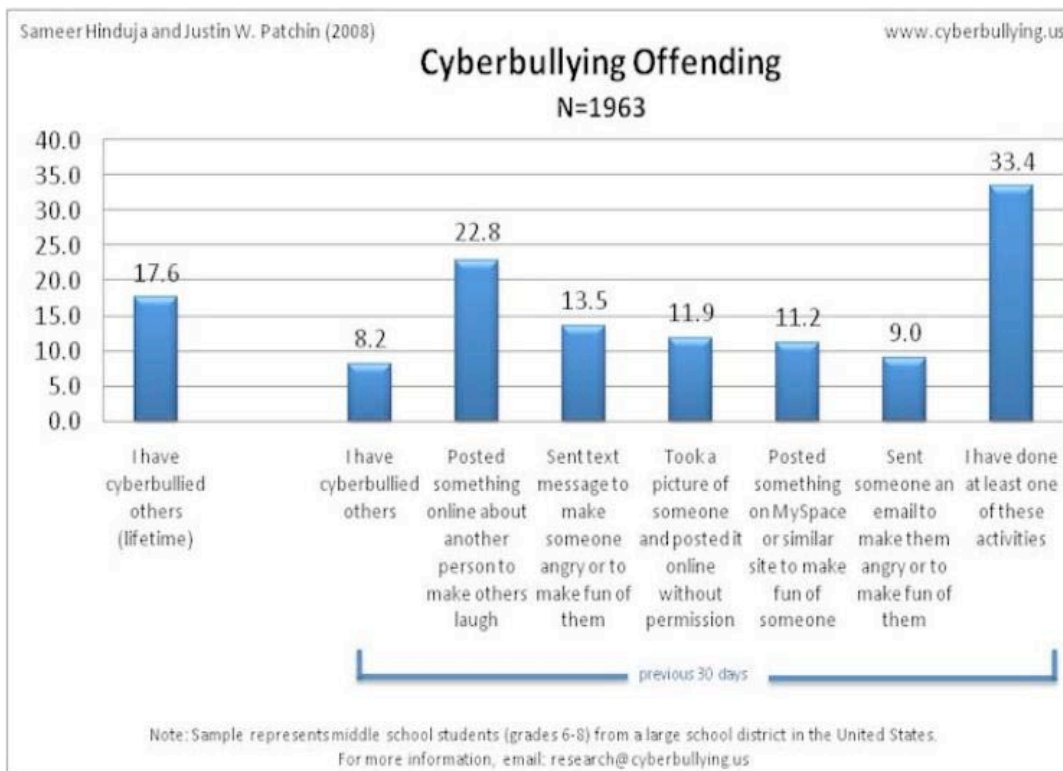
Likewise, using the Internet for instant messaging, blogging, and chat room use each elevated the odds of being a target of electronic aggression versus those who did not engage in these online activities (Ybarra, et al., 2006).

Although electronic aggression is a relatively new phenomenon with few comprehensive studies conducted to assess its scope and impact, the research examined in the review of the literature shows a definite increase over the past decade in both the perpetration of electronic aggression in its various iterations and reported victimization. Future research on the prevalence of this type of violence needs to be more consistent, as results may be difficult to interpret, sample sizes vary widely, and the method of data collection is not always trustworthy (i.e. surveys on websites, where anonymity can pose problems). Yet, with average victimization rates ranging from 25% to 75% of the adolescent population, cyberbullying is clearly a significant problem that is showing no sign of ebbing in the near future.

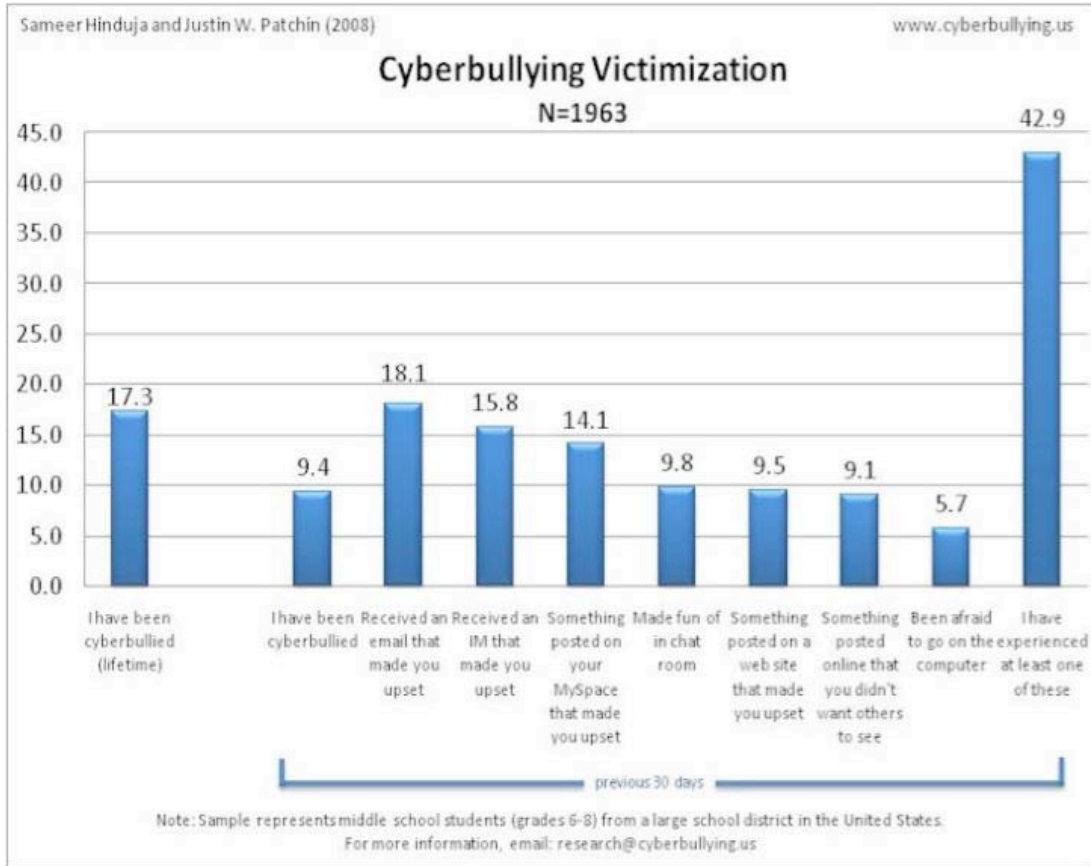
The following figures represent the most recent prevalence data relating to cyberbullying among middle school children compiled by Hinduja and Patchin (2009):



**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**



**Figure 7**

What is very important to note in the data shown in last Figures 6 and 7 is even though only 9.4% of the students surveyed reported being cyberbullied in the previous 30 days, approximately 43% reported experiencing one of several experiences that could be defined as cyberbullying; and even though only 8.2% reported cyberbullying others, 33.4% reported engaging in activities that could be defined as acts of cyberbullying. It may be that acts of electronic aggression and victimization have been underreported due to the lack of conceptualization that has been thematic through out this review of the literature.

## AN EMERGING HEALTH PROBLEM

Although some overlap exists, it appears that 64% of youth who are bullied online are not also being bullied at school. Moreover, the rate of electronic aggression is similar for youth who are home schooled and youth who are schooled in public/private schools, suggesting that it is not always an extension of school bullying (Ybarra, Diener-West, et al., 2007). It is possible that, although there are similarities in characteristics of youth who are bullied in the physical world and those who are bullied online, we may nonetheless be looking at different groups of young people in some cases. “The Internet and other new technologies may have increased the chances for harassment for youth who might otherwise not be targeted” (Ybarra, Diener-West, et al., 2007).

In September 2006, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention convened a panel of experts in technology and youth aggression to examine the specific risks of adolescents to become victims of “aggression perpetrated by peers with new media technology” (e.g. personal phones, personal data assistant, computer for Internet access). (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007). A special 2007 issue of the *Journal of Adolescent Health* presented the data and recommendations for future directions discussed by this panel, which “support the argument that electronic aggression is an emerging public health problem in need of additional prevalence and etiological research” (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007). Two studies in the *Journal* report that many victims of electronic aggression do not know the identity of their perpetrator(s) (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Ybarra, Diener-West, et al., 2007). The anonymity provided by new technology limits a victim from responding in a way that may ordinarily stop a peer’s aggressive behavior or influence the probability of future acts, which provides an advantage to the aggressor.

Additionally, new technology allows victims to be attacked at anytime and in any place, again giving the advantage to the aggressor. Correspondingly, the recent increase in the use of mobile phones, text messaging, e-mail, and chat rooms by youth have opened new venues for social interaction in which aggression can occur and youth can be victimized — new venues that break the old boundaries of family, neighborhood, and community that might have protected this population to some extent in the past.

The Internet has become a new arena for social interactions, allowing youth to say and do things with a certain degree of anonymity and limited oversight by adults (Williams & Guerra, 2007). One of the most compelling and arguably most dangerous aspects of the Internet is that it allows people to maintain their anonymity when communicating with others (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). The potential threat of anonymity provided by the Internet is compounded by the fact that people cannot see the target's emotional reactions, leading to what researchers have described as *disinhibition* (Willard, 2006). The victim and perpetrator cannot see one another in cyberspace, which may lead some perpetrators to remain unconvinced that they are actually harming their target, and therefore allow them to rationalize their behavior and protect themselves from the knowledge that they are doing harm (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Thus, verbal and physical cues such as crying or flinching, which might lead people to realize that their comments have been carried too far or misinterpreted, are no longer visible (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Ybarra, et al., 2008; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004b).

It should be noted that, consistent with previous findings (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007), “as the frequency of involvement in Internet harassment...increases, the prevalence of psychosocial problems also increases.” Thus frequency of involvement

should be a marker for particular concern, even though it is less clear that it should be a requirement for the definition of bullying (Ybarra, Espelage, et al., 2007).

Unlike the schoolyard, the review of the literature painfully illustrates that youth are increasingly becoming involved in electronic aggression, and the numbers reported for both committing and being the victim of this insidious form of violence may only be the tip of this iceberg. The increase in victimization alone increased by 50% from 2000 - 2005, according to comparative report on the YISS-1 and YISS-2 (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006). The YISS-3 is being administered in 2010, the findings of which will no doubt add to the growing evidence of an emerging and evolving health problem which warrants the continued attention of researchers, child health professionals, policy makers, educators and families.

### **ELECTRONIC AGGRESSION: THE LAW AND POLICY**

Electronic aggression in the various forms it takes has received a significant amount of attention in recent years, some of which has begun to shape and augment laws and policy related to this form of violence. The same technology that makes this a problem has given it a national spotlight in the media. However, the mercurial nature of the Internet and mobile technology and their rapid evolution makes it difficult to generate definitive and encompassing language. Issues have arisen criticizing potential cyberbullying legislation as being in conflict with existing harassment statutes and possibly with First Amendment rights.

### *Federal Response*

At this point, no decision on a cyberbullying case has been made by the United States Supreme Court; the issue is just too new. Nonetheless, as reported by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) (2008), Congress has recognized the issue of cyberbullying through the recent updating of the *2001 Children's Internet Protection Act* (CIPA). CIPA requires all schools who receive federal funding through E-rate, a grant program that makes affordable specific communication devices for schools who qualify, to follow set guidelines to receive funding. Initially, these guidelines focused on policies and filtering systems that limited children's access to unsuitable content and materials. In the summer of 2008, the requirements of the grant were modified to require receiving schools to have safety policies and technologies planned and implemented before receiving funds. Specifically, "schools and libraries must also certify that, as part of their Internet safety policy, they are educating minors about appropriate online behavior, including cyberbullying awareness and response and interacting with other individuals on social networking sites and chat rooms" (Federal Communications Commission, 2008).

While the federal government has not enacted cyberbullying legislation, U.S. Representative Linda Sanchez (D-CA) sponsored the Megan Meier Cyberbullying Prevention Act in 2008 in response to the suicide of Megan Meier, a 13-year-old girl from Missouri. The act seeks to amend the federal criminal code to punish anyone who uses electronic means to send a communication intended to "coerce, intimidate, or cause substantial emotional distress to another person" ("Megan Meier Cyberbullying Prevention Act," 2008). Opponents of the bill argue that this act threatens free speech rights and would continue a trend of "overcriminalization"—using criminal laws to solve

problems and punish mistakes instead of using civil penalties (Grossman, 2008). The bill has not passed.

### *State Response*

State response to cyberbullying across the nation has been great. Thirty-six states have anti-bullying laws dating back to 1999. As of October 2009, twenty states have laws that specifically address cyberbullying while numerous others are currently considering cyberbullying bills.

States often delegate the authority to control and punish bullying to individual school districts (Beckstrom, 2008). However, because cyberbullying is a relatively new phenomenon that frequently originates off-campus, it is often unclear how far the school district's jurisdiction extends. Similarly, it is unclear whether school officials can be held responsible for cyberbullying between students, especially if the act is committed on a student's home computer. Controlling the online speech of students also raises concerns regarding the violation of free speech rights (Beckstrom, 2008).

In 2006, South Carolina passed *The Safe School Climate Act*. This act required school districts in the state "to adopt policies to *prohibit harassment, intimidation or bullying at school*. Electronic communication was included in the definition of bullying" (USA Today Research, 2008).

In 2007, Arkansas passed a bill that allowed school officials to intervene in acts of cyberbullying even if the acts of cyberbullying did not happen on campus. As stated in the bill, school officials have the right to act "if the electronic act is directed specifically at students or school personnel and is maliciously intended for the purpose of disrupting



school, and has a high likelihood of succeeding in that purpose” (USA Today Research, 2008). Both of these state examples are similar to bills being created across the nation. These state initiatives are models for other state response across the country.

Unfortunately, state reactions have usually been in response to great tragedy. A noteworthy case surrounds the 2005 suicide of a Florida teen, Jeffrey Johnston. At the age of 15, Jeffery committed suicide after two years of ongoing cyberbullying by a classmate. On April 30, 2008, the Florida senate unanimously approved HB669, the *Jeffrey Johnston Stand up for All Students Act*, which was signed into law by the Governor on June 12, 2008. As stated on the Florida State Legislature website, the bill has been established to: (a) Prohibit bullying and harassment of any student or employee of public K-12 educational institutions, (b) require school districts to adopt policies prohibiting bullying and harassment, (c) provide immunity for school officials and restrictions with respect to defending the action and application of policy provisions, and (d) require Florida DOE approval of school district policy and school district compliance with reporting procedures as prerequisites to receiving state funds ("Jeffrey Johnston Stand Up for All Students Act, State of Florida Statute," 2009). This law obliges school systems to address the issues of bullying on all levels, including cyberbullying. This law also grants some immunity to school officials as they address these new issues. Just as in other issues of student rights, the requirement of the school to safely guard its students has once again outranked the school system's obligation to ensure student free speech (Beckstrom, 2008). *Jeff's Law* will become the measuring stick for other states as they respond to this issue.

Seven states require school officials to develop policies or programs to help prevent and control bullying, which includes cyberbullying. Only two states, California and Idaho, explicitly allow schools to suspend or recommend expulsion for cyberbullying, and three states require schools to provide cyberbullying awareness training. “Appendix B” summarizes the identified state laws and is separated into three sections: definitions, location of cyberbullying, and school regulation.

What is not addressed in the criminalization of this new form of violence is that when parties interact globally, the reach of localized laws is extremely limited.

#### **LIMITATIONS TO THE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The current research provides a foundation for an understanding of the problem of electronic aggression. However it is insufficient to guide the theorization of the structure of electronic aggression, and develop sound measurement tools to measure the construct. The few surveys that exist have used different definitions and time frames, finding widely varying rates (Wolak, et al., 2007).

As with many new areas of research, many definitions have been proposed for constructs (or concepts) under study. The literature illustrates that there is considerable variability in the conceptualization and measurement of what is broadly referred to as electronic aggression (or cyberbullying) and the variety of media used; therefore the lack of a standardized operational definition makes it extremely difficult to pool results and draw conclusions across the limited studies. Constructs used in the studies referenced in this review of the literature have emerged from various disciplines, including public health, developmental psychology, sociology, criminal justice, and mass communication.

While each discipline has a particular and relative perspective that it brings to the table, varying constructs also present a challenge, as data from various studies are difficult to compare.

Operationalizing electronic aggression (or cyberbullying), or the process of creating a survey instrument to collect data relating to electronic aggression is another challenge reflected in the literature. In addition to disparity in concepts, the wording used to operationalize research questions varies between studies, producing sources of dissimilarity. These points of variance explain in part why certain statistics vary greatly, such as the wide disparity in reported cyberbullying (4% to 46%). Different wordings and research instruments will naturally result in widely varying statistics on the prevalence of cyberbullying. Therefore, clearly defined constructs would also address the confusion in operationalizing the issue.

#### **DISCUSSION OF THE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The researcher built upon and synthesized key studies from the literature to establish the issues informing this work. Critical reviews and analyses were drawn from the literature as a starting point to highlight the mental health concerns of electronic aggression.

Olweus' work (1993) on traditional bullying in the late 1970's set the tone for future work in the study of school bullying. He brought to light the common occurrence of child on child aggressive behaviors in the school setting and the detrimental health effects these behaviors had on those who were involved in them. Subsequent research supported that bullying incidents at school were traditionally seen as rites of passage that

allowed children to learn to “adapt to the *real world* and take up for themselves” (Coloroso, 2003). This was further substantiated by the fact that although most instances of bullying were witnessed by others, few actually did anything to assist those who were bullied and the victims were often left to fend for themselves (Craig & Pepler, 1998).

The review of the literature reveals that cyberbullying has some rather unique characteristics that differentiate it from traditional bullying:

- *Anonymity*: as bad as the traditional bully may be, he or she can be readily identified and potentially avoided; conversely, the young person who bullies electronically is often anonymous. The victim is left wondering who the aggressor is, which can cause paranoia and distress;
- *Disinhibition*: the anonymity afforded by the Internet can lead youth to engage in behaviors that they might not do face-to-face. Ironically, it is that anonymity that allows some individuals to be aggressors at all;
- *Accessibility*: traditional methods of bullying generally occur in the context of school; there is usually an identifiable period of time during which these children have access to their victims. Electronic aggression can occur at any time of the day or night with no geographic limits;
- *Punitive Fears*: victims of electronic aggression often do not report it because they fear of retribution from their tormentors and/or fear that their computer or cell phone privileges will be taken away. Often, adults' responses to cyberbullying are to remove the technology from a victim - which in their eyes can be seen as punishment; and

- *Bystanders*: most traditional bullying episodes occur in the presence of bystanders or witnesses. The phenomenon of being a bystander in the cyberworld is different in that they may receive and forward emails, view web pages, forward images sent to cell phones, etc., extending the number of bystanders in the digital realm into the millions.

Studies concerning traditional school bullying were not conducted in the U.S. until 2001 with the work of Nansel and colleagues, the same year that researchers began to study the emergence of a new aggression issue, cyberbullying. Since then these issues have been merged in the works of researchers conducting quantitative studies and meta-analyses of previous research to shed light on the commonalties and differences of these types of violence and how related factors influence social reactions and policy. Belsey (2008) and Willard's conceptual frameworks (2003 & 2007) on cyberbullying and responses to cyberbullying have been guiding pieces for the subsequent work of Aftab (2006 & 2008), Hinduja & Patchin (2008), and Shariff (2008). All concur that acts of cyberbullying are reflective of acts of traditional bullying in that they are attempts by one group to have power over another; they all also concur that the medium through which these cyberbullying acts occur – the Internet – has created a construct difference that must be recognized in order for all involved to appropriately respond.

Research examining the prevalence and predictors of bullying largely has examined this behavior as it unfolds within a specific social context. For youth, schools have been the primary context for studying traditional bullying behavior (Olweus, 1991; Olweus, Limber, Mahalic, & University of Colorado Boulder. Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence., 1999). "Over the last decade, interest in understanding and

preventing bullying among school children in the U.S. and internationally has surged” (Williams & Guerra, 2007). Coinciding with a growing awareness of the detrimental consequences of being bullied on young people’s well-being as well as the recognition that bullying is a significant problem in schools (Nansel, et al., 2001; Williams & Guerra, 2007). When the social context moves from the schoolyard to the Internet, the heightened vulnerability that accompanies electronic aggression gives youth who might otherwise not be in a powerful enough position to engage in bullying behavior the power to take on the role of the aggressor. Young people who do not possess the physical strength or presence to engage in face-to-face bullying or who are not popular enough to engage in verbal or relational bullying now have the means, opportunity, and sometimes motive to bully others on-line. This increases the exposure level of this population to one much higher than that of traditional bullying. The Internet gives victims a forum to adopt a dominant position relative to their tormentors, and certain researchers believe that often students who are bullied at school turn around and bully on-line (Ybarra et al., 2006).

A concern derived from this review of the literature is that a higher number of youth are at risk of being potential cyberbullies than potential traditional bullies (Kowalski, 2008). Individuals will say and/or do things anonymously that they would not say and/or do directly or in front of someone. The effect of this lack of inhibition increases not only the number of potential perpetrators of electronic aggression but also the magnitude of the threats, taunts, and other forms of social cruelty that they are willing to deliver via the Internet (Kowalski, et al., 2008; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004a). A lack of tangible feedback (verbal or physical cues) from the victim undermines the empathic response by the aggressor, and thus undermines potential feelings of remorse. It also

makes it easier to rationalize an irresponsible or harmful action as not having caused harm to anyone, allowing the aggressor to abdicate responsibility for actions taken by their online persona.

Although electronic aggression has received extensive attention in the media, few studies have assessed the nature and extent of electronic aggression among youth. The research that exists has primarily examined the frequency of young people's use of the Internet and their experiences with electronic aggression. The literature reveals that there is little empirical data about how to effectively address this problem. Both the "etiologiical and prevention research that are needed to fill this gap are challenged by the fluidity and constant evolution of technology" (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007). Regardless of these constraints, this formative research is "critical to prevent the continued emergence of this new group of victims and to address resulting personal and institutional problems" (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007).

#### **CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

A comprehensive evaluation of the literature conclusively shows that electronic aggression represents a problem of significant magnitude. As the use of electronic communications technologies by youth is unlikely to diminish in coming years, "continued attention to this emerging health problem is critical" (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). These globe-spanning electronic communication media may not have really introduced new psychological threats to young people, but they have made it "much harder to protect youth from the threats, and have exposed many more of them to threats that only a few might have experienced before" (Huesmann, 2007). Results suggest that

“adolescent health professionals should be especially aware of, and should ask about involvement in” (Hertz & David-Ferdon, 2008; Ybarra, Espelage, et al., 2007), aggressive behaviors that youth may be involved in online both as perpetrators and as victims.

### *Separate but Equal?*

Today’s youth are much more fluent in using online technology and resources than ever before. Their understanding of cyberlanguage and cybersociety contributes to and the *digital divide* between their generation and that of today’s adults. Young people today do not see the Internet as separate from traditional socialization and interactions, but as common as face-to-face conversation and as an extension of themselves (Goodstein, 2007; Shariff, 2008). These differing viewpoints have caused a division in how Internet use and the issues related to it are understood by different generations (Goodstein, 2007).

Possibly this division in understanding has also created a divide between traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Until the late 1990s traditional bullying, in which cyberbullying undeniably has its roots, had never really been recognized as an issue that needed to be addressed on school campuses. Since then, many character education programs have been developed to instill good citizenry and values (Goodstein, 2007; Olweus, et al., 1999), but there is no real research to gauge if they have been effective in curbing bullying behaviors at school or if the same basic premises can be applied to cyberbullying response (Coloroso, 2003; Shariff, 2008). The question arises: *do these two issues, traditional bullying and cyberbullying, need to be separated in order to be addressed?*



Although comparisons with traditional bullying seem logical, there are unique and particularly troubling aspects of electronic aggression. Unlike traditional bullying, electronic aggression can occur at any time, which may heighten young people's perceptions of vulnerability. Electronic aggression via messages and images may also be distributed rapidly to a broad audience. The interactions that occur in virtual reality can "affect the everyday reality that youth experience elsewhere" (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Unlike traditional bullying, in which the perpetrator is generally known to his or her victims, findings suggest that about half of children who are bullied electronically do not know the identity of the perpetrators. Unlike traditional bullying, in which the audience of bystanders usually consists of a handful of youth who are physically present to witness the bullying, the potential audience of bystanders and observers of electronic aggression is limitless and open to a wider demographic spectrum (Coloroso, 2003; Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

One of the elements researchers have identified as necessary for an experience to be considered bullying is the repetition of an aggressive experience (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007; Nansel, et al., 2001). The frequency of aggressive acts in traditional, face-to-face circumstances is easier to quantify than those perpetrated through electronic means and leads to the following questions that require further research:

- For a victim of an aggressive text message or Internet posting, does the experience constitute one episode of aggression even if the victim rereads the message or repeatedly logs onto the Web site?

- If the message or posting becomes widely disseminated, does it remain one incident of aggression or does it become a repeated act as the victim becomes aware that more individuals are viewing the message or posting? and
- If other peers join in and forward the message, add to the blog or Web site, or create new content from the original does the episode remain one act of aggression or become part of a cycle of repeated acts?

The answers to these questions may shed some light on how the construct of electronic aggression should be developed and operationalized. The very need for these questions to be addressed has led the researcher to determine that the role and characterization of the bystander, and the quantification of frequency and repetition of acts of electronic aggression will show a distinct difference in how this problem should be researched and how corresponding interventions may be developed, implemented and evaluated.

Electronic media creates tremendous positive social and learning opportunities for adolescents, but new technology also comes with some degree of risk. “This growth will likely contribute to the continued increase of electronic aggression as an emerging public health problem” (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007).

### *Recommendations*

As the field of research on electronic aggression grows, continued attention must be given to how some of the unique elements of new media technology may “contribute to or compound the negative impact of victimization and increase the likelihood of perpetration” (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007), especially as this demographic appears to experience the distinct phenomenon of role switching from victim to bully and back with

each exchange. The Internet and the form of electronic media that support it are not regulated by any one agency, so youth, parents, schools, and technology-related businesses must work together to create a coordinated strategy that is flexible and agile enough to evolve as technology and electronic aggression change.

An interesting social quandary arises when considering access to technology as a positive construct. The small percentage of young people who do not have access to this technology may still be at risk for victimization, but be completely unaware of it. This may possibly serve as a protective factor against electronic aggression and warrants further exploration.

Further research in the systemic patterns that are related to bystander reactions to online bullying would bring to the forefront how the audiences' responses to electronic aggression influence future occurrences. The adage that *it takes a whole village to raise a child* has never been truer than in the realm of the Internet, where the boundaries of the village are growing to encompass multitudes of individuals and personalities that have never been considered before.

While social networking sites have been the topic of research, no studies were found that used these sites as vehicles for study. Studies conducted in the natural setting of the problem and those who are part of the problem will most likely create a more conducive environment in which true responses can be acquired. Focus groups gathered from these sites or other online social forums would be able to draw upon already created participant samples that have self-formed based upon interests prior to researcher manipulation.

A critical gap in the literature is how little responsibility appears to be attributable to parents in both the research and in the application of legal remedies. Much of the burden is left to the schools. Parents may be the real untapped resource in reducing bullying and electronic aggression. Violence behavior and cyberbullying expert Elizabeth Englander notes that “almost all cyberbullying by kids takes place on computers in the home. Where are the parents? They don’t know what their children are up to online, and they don’t know how to talk to them about it” (Englander, 2006). The researcher believes that is the parents' responsibility to educate children about acceptable behavior online, just as in the physical world.

The price of involvement in electronic aggression is high, generating “lifelong costs in multiple systems, such as mental health, juvenile justice, special education, and social services” (Nansel, et al., 2001; Ybarra, et al., 2006). Interrupting this pattern of violence is a critical issue. The prevalence and seriousness of electronic aggression and victimization compels researchers to examine this phenomenon in order to improve the health of children and young people. Improving the current understanding may yield knowledge to provide direction for social policy and to design effective interventions that could or at least curtail, if not significantly reduce, this dilemma.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

For all its revolutionary benefits,  
The Internet is also a malice engine,  
The men's room wall writ unimaginably large –  
but with one devastating difference.  
You can scrub the bathroom wall.

- Bob Garfield, *On the Media*, National Public Radio (NPR)

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the phenomenon of electronic aggression in youth and the corresponding impact to their psychological health. Through the examination of the facts of three cases that illustrate different manifestations and effects of electronic aggression as well as the original published comments by online bystanders, analysis of the implications for potential negative mental health outcomes were analyzed. This descriptive study measures the variability of the problem and explores associated factors. It is guided by questions rather than formal hypotheses and is the first step in more directed research on this topic.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The researcher examined two key questions:

1. What is the nature of electronic aggression in youth?
  - What basic components are necessary for electronic aggression to take place?
  - How is cyberbullying different from traditional bullying?

2. What are the presumed mental health impacts of electronic aggression on adolescents?

- Are the mental health impacts more severe in cases of electronic aggression compared to those in cases of traditional bullying?
- What are the compounding emotional impacts of virtual bystanders?

### **RESEARCH APPROACH**

It has been determined by the researcher that the best way to examine the research questions posed was to profile three case studies in order to better understand this social phenomenon using Internet media sources to analyze the events of electronic aggression and the corresponding effects of and responses to them in that element. These cases only capture a cross-section from an emerging field; they are not representative of an entire population, nor are they meant to be. While limited, this study serves to convey the critical importance that the impact of this social phenomenon is having on youth.

#### *Subjects*

In order to demonstrate the nature of electronic aggression in youth, the researcher chose to examine three cases selected for their social notoriety in the environment in which this form of violence occurs. Unfortunately, without such media and viral notoriety, it would be difficult to examine this phenomenon.

Within such a context, the researcher determined the following criteria should be used:

- a. both the victims and perpetrators should be adolescents, reflective of the topic of this research - this would exclude the highly publicized case of

Megan Meier, a young girl whose suicide three weeks before her 14<sup>th</sup> birthday was attributed to cyberbullying, as there was an adult involved in that case;

- b. the cases, collectively, should portray both male and female aggressors and victims;
- c. the cases should have received extensive media attention
  - o have generated at least 10 national news or media articles;
- d. the cases should be highly searchable
  - o generate at least the first 20 entries in the *google.com* search engine;
- e. the cases should have a rich source of public viewing and interaction
  - o have generated at least 250,000 views of a single original media or reported media event on the popular video sharing site YouTube
  - o the video should have no less than 2,000 corresponding posted comments;
- f. for each case, there should exist subjective materials such as video or transcripts in addition to media reporting in order to corroborate statements, stated findings and for the researcher to make additional observations; and
- g. since this phenomenon is emerging, the time parameters are limited to occurrences that have taken place within the past ten years.

### *Nature of data*

The key assumption in this qualitative research approach was that the cases to be examined were selected for their diversity on the dependant phenomenon of electronic aggression, and that no generalization can be made to a population beyond cases similar to those examined. These cases are revelatory, exposing relationships that cannot be studied by other means, and unusual, as they shed light on extreme cases.

For each case, the data is presented in three sections: the facts of the case, the media analyzed, and the case analysis relative to the research inquiry. A brief meta-analysis of the three cases follows the Case Examinations section.

### **DATA COLLECTION METHOD**

Due to the need for unaltered and authentic examples of electronic aggression and the communications used in activities related to electronic aggression, the researcher chose to use purposive sampling, seeking cases which collectively included authentic media and documents, comments posted online in relation to the events and transcripts of interviews with persons having been involved in or affected by the act of electronic aggression chosen for sampling as the methodology for this study. These cases are extreme but far from unique examples of the devastation wrought by electronic aggression.

The researcher employed the search engine *google.com* and the video file sharing site *YouTube.com* to search for terms such as: electronic aggression, cyberbully, cyberbullycide, online bully, viral video, online fight, and happy slapping. The researcher then collected examples from search results, news reports, television show transcripts,



and other public forum posts in order to preserve the original content. The sample includes two videos depicting the actual events of electronic aggression, a news release from law enforcement, a transcript of the *Frontline* episode “Growing up Online” and numerous news articles which provided narrative of as well as first-, second- and third-party accounts and perspectives the events. Samples also include the posted comments of online spectators of these media.

Once discovered, all conversational documents were screen-captured using the Macintosh application *grab* in order to preserve photographic evidence for later analysis.

## CASE EXAMINATIONS

### *Ghyslain Raza - The Star Wars Kid*

#### Facts of the Case

On November 8, 2002, Ghyslain Raza, a somewhat overweight and slightly awkward Canadian 14-year-old made a video of himself acting out a fight scene from the movie *Star Wars* using a golf ball retriever as a makeshift lightsaber. For several months the video remained on a shelf in the TV studio of Ghyslain's school, where he had filmed it. In early April of 2003 another student discovered the video and shared it with friends. Thinking that it would be a very funny prank, they digitized the video and shared it using the Kazaa peer-to-peer file-sharing network, calling the video file *Jackass\_starwars\_funny.wmv*. The video first appeared on the Internet on the evening of April 14, 2003 but quickly spread around the globe (The Associated Press (AP), 2003). The video was so popular and so widely circulated that sites hosting the video were

recording millions of downloads. One website solely dedicated to the *Star Wars Kid* video recorded 76 million hits by October, 2004 (BBC News, 2006).

His awkward performance appeared humorous to many, in part because it wasn't meant to be, and it certainly was never meant to be public. Within days, *Star Wars Kid* had become a viral frenzy and an otherwise ordinary teen became the object of worldwide ridicule. The video was posted on hundreds of blogs, enhanced by music and special effects, and watched by millions. Entire websites were dedicated to the subject; one, *jedimaster.net*, was even named one of *Time Magazine's* "50 Best Sites of 2003". As of November 27, 2006 it was estimated by The Viral Factory, a U.K. based digital media and marketing firm, that the videos had been viewed over 900 million times, making it the most popular "viral video" on the Internet (BBC News, 2006). In 2009 *urlesque.com* proclaimed it still #1 of the "The Top Most Iconic Internet Videos" (Reeves, 2009). The video itself might have lost its viral momentum, but soon people were adding effects and editing the video to make new versions. The *Star Wars Kid* fame soon spilled over into merchandising and T-shirts, mugs and other paraphernalia that are still available online.

Ghyslain was tormented at school and became so despondent over the whole episode that he dropped out and retained a private tutor, even spending some time at the Pavillon Arc-en-ciel child psychiatry ward at the Trois-Rivières Regional Hospital Centre (Ha, 2006). In July 2003, the Ghyslain's family filed a CA\$250,000 lawsuit against the families of four of his schoolmates. The lawsuit stated, in part, that he "had to endure, and still endures today, harassment and derision from his high-school mates and the public at large" and "will be under psychiatric care for an indefinite amount of time." The

document ads that “the stigma of mental illness can generate social prejudices having severe consequences” on the teen, including making it more difficult for him to “enroll in the school of his choice or get a job, or even forcing him to change his name”. On April 7, Ghyslain Raza and his parents reached an out-of-court settlement with the defendants (Ha, 2006).

### Media Analyzed

There are several websites on the on the Internet that host the original video as well as numerous parodies. The researcher examined a version of the original 1:49 long video posted in 2006 ("Star Wars Kid," 2006). As of March 12, 2010, this version of the video on YouTube has over 16 million views and almost 80,000 comments such as the following representative samples:

\* geewizer33 (58 minutes ago)

*look kid if your gonna do ballet get a sense of balance first*

---

\* Hunsanity (1 hour ago)

*so classic. Def one of the funnier\_ things on tube*

---

\* laagin5 (13 hours ago)

*I cant decide whether this is funny or sad \_\:/*

---

\* elitexc4life (4 days ago)

*well he did it to himself*

---

\* dreadss64 (1 week ago)

*this kid has no life and is a faggot  
a funny faggot*

---

\* DarthVadermatt (1 week ago)

*WOW! this teaches you a lot! "Hey kids know how to be cool? The only thing you have to do is get fat and act like a retard\_for a minuet!"*

---

\* Phitsamay79 (1 week ago)

*why do i keep watching this a LMAO [laughing my ass off] almost ten years later??? thanx star wars kid for bringing a smile to my\_face for all of time!!!!*

\* aliwashah111(1 week ago)

*15,918,452 views?????? for this stupid video..... omg [oh my God] you are taking 1:49 min from our life..... i hope that stick u use goes trough your ass*

---

\*\* posted on Sat Sep 2 01:33:46 2006 by DieHard the Hunter

*Hmmmm... you'll see much clumsier performances at nearly any beginners Kendo class...I shouldn't want to try to take his weapon off him, unarmed: not for all the tea in China.*

*A pity some of his tormentors and bullies didn't try: they'd be seeing stars and nursing bruises and fractures for a few weeks, and they'd firmly resolve to pick on somebody else.*

*I \*hate\* bullies.*

*Goodonya Star Wars Kid. Take up Kendo or Escrima or Arnis, or even the Nunchukas: you got the basic moves right. Now refine 'em with some proper training.*

---

\*\* posted on Sat Sep 2 02:12:39 2006 by Straight Vermonter

*Here is the story of a young man from my area who was cyber bullied. He won't be able to sue for damages or parlay his "fame" into millions. Ryan committed suicide when the bullying became more than he could take.*

*People should recognize the pain that comes, not from teasing, but from non-stop harassment. When young people today leave school the bullies can still reach them on their cellphone, e-mail, AIM etc.*

*RIP Ryan*

---

\*\* posted on Sat Sep 2 02:38:30 2006 by Proud\_USA\_Republican

*THey gave Larry the Cable guy a movie. This kid is a 100 times more talented via that performance and should of milked it for all its worth.*

*He could of milked this 15 minutes for all it was worth.*

*Instead, he jumps on the victimhood bandwagon being driven by ambulance chasing lawyers that make a mockery of western civilizations justice systems.*

---

\*\* posted on Sat Sep 2 00:32:17 2006 by Names Ash Housewares

*The kid could have been rich.*

*He could have taken lessons, lost some weight, and worked for Master Replicas that makes light saber replicas or made more films improving his skills. People pay big money for the kind of national attention he had.*

*Seriously. He had a phenom going there and dropped the ball. Ok, he is a kid and got his feelings hurt. But making lemonade from lemons was a lesson clearly not taught nor learned. Too bad.*

---

\*\*\* Comment: 5.01.09

By Ralph DeMattia

*This retarded little asshole makes a dick out of himself on tape, some clown posts it on the internet, and his jerk-off parents sued AND WON?*

*What group of idiots would award them so much as a penny because their kid made an asshole out of himself? His parents should both be sterilized and fined by Murphy's 3rd law of Procreation:*

*STUPID PEOPLE SHOULDN'T BREED!*

---

\* ("Star Wars Kid," 2006)

\*\* (Ha, 2006)

\*\*\* (Reeves, 2009)

There are also numerous cultural references to *Star Wars Kid*, which illustrate the power of this vector – the Internet – in distributing the ‘virus’ and its various mutations:

- In 2007, the G4 TV show, *Attack of the Show*, rated it the #1 viral video of all time;
- In 2007, it was ranked #2 on *VH1's Top 40 Internet Celebrities*;
- According to U.K. marketing firm The Viral Factory, *Star Wars Kid* became the Internet's most downloaded video of 2006;
- In 2005, the Swedish TV-series *100 höjdare* (100 Highlights) ranked the video clip as the 60th funniest moment in the world;
- In 2005, the TV-series *Veronica Mars* featured a reference to the *Star Wars Kid*;
- In 2005, the San Francisco Giants, when playing at AT&T Park, played a video of the *Star Wars Kid* on the Jumbotron alongside the away team pitcher whenever the catcher and coach come out for a meeting on the pitcher's mound;
- In 2005, C|Net listed the *Star Wars Kid* as #8 on its *Top 10 Web Fads* list;
- In 2005, the TV-series *American Dad*, has Ghyslain stepping out of a crowd and "attacking" a character in a sequence mimicking the video;
- In 2005, *MAD Magazine* made a brief reference to the *Star Wars Kid*. "The only special video we were really looking forward to was that one with the fat kid having the lightsaber battle all by himself."
- In 2005, *Ned's Declassified School Survival Guide* on Nickelodeon showed a boy swinging a mop around and acting like the *Star Wars Kid*;
- In 2004, the video game *Tony Hawk's Underground 2* featured three references to Ghyslain Raza;
- In 2004, the TV network *G4* featured Dave Navarro in a spoof of the *Star Wars Kid* on their annual awards show *G-Phoria*;
- *Star Wars Kid* was parodied in multiple episodes of the show *Arrested Development*;
- "Weird Al" Yankovic briefly imitated the *Star Wars Kid* in his music video *White & Nerdy*; and

- *Star Wars Kid* appears thirteen seconds into the Meth Minute 39 video, *Internet People* (StateMaster, 2005).

“What would any viral video top 10 list be without the Star Wars Kid planted firmly on top. There have been over 200 spin-offs of this clip, and it's gonna take one hell of a Video to dethrone it” (VidFan.com, n.d.). The result of repeated distribution of the video has resulted in Ghyslain Raza unwillingly becoming a part of the public domain, or what is termed as an *Internet meme*, which refers to a cultural phenomenon that spreads rapidly from person to person via the Internet.

There is limited documentation of Ghyslain Raza’s first hand response to the event that changed his life forever. However, the researcher was able to get a glimpse of his suffering through reported court documentation from the lawsuit filed on his behalf against his tormentors. In the transcripts, Ghyslain said the experience left him unable to attend school. He recalled that whenever he walked by his high school's common areas, other students would jump on tables and chant, "Star Wars Kid! Star Wars Kid!," shouting and poking at him, trying to get a reaction. "There was [sic] about 100 people in those halls. It was total chaos . . . Any opportunity was good enough to shout 'Star Wars!' It was simply unbearable, totally. It was impossible to attend class," he said. Whenever he was in a public place, he said, strangers would call to him. "Hey! It's Ghyslain Raza! Star Wars Kid, hey!" Ghyslain said the situation left him feeling drained of energy and that he had been diagnosed with depression by a pedopsychiatrist at Montreal's Sainte-Justine Hospital (Ha, 2006). “I want my life back,” said Ghyslain in an e-mail interview with the *National Post*, a Canadian daily newspaper (The Associated Press (AP), 2003).

As for the boy who posted the video, his response was, "All I did was take the cassette, digitize it on the studio computer to pull a joke on Ghyslain. After that, I had nothing to do with it." He said that when a school counselor confronted him Ghyslain's distress, he replied, "It's no fun what happened here, but that's the problem with the Internet. Things travel fast" (Ha, 2006).

### Analysis of the Data

Among a generation that has been reared online, stories like that of Ghyslain Raza are becoming more and more common. They serve as important reminders of a dark side of instant Internet fame: humiliation. Already dozens of websites exist solely to assist those who would shame others. Had the teenager wanted to be famous, he could not have asked for anything better; however, in Ghyslain's case, it became a source of public humiliation, precisely what every young person fears the most.

*"So why #1, you ask? To us, Star Wars Kid single-handedly represents a new era... where technology, for better or worse, easily allows for our private moments to be made available for the world to see. Where anyone can be famous, whether they intend to be or not. It's been nearly six years since the video's upload and yet it still continues to stay relevant and rack up views"*(Reeves, 2009).

Although the individual who first posted the video by his own accounting had no intent for it to become so proliferated, the original intent was still to humiliate. Unlike traditional bullying, the repetition is not sourced solely at the original aggressor(s), but rather a snowball effect occurs where the repetition results from ongoing and infinite distribution of the event. As articulated by one of the boys who put the original video of

Ghyslain on the Internet, responsibility and accountability are diluted as the act of aggression becomes “mainstream”, further removing the originator of the act from accountability, which leads to the effect of *disinhibition* discussed in the literature.

The resulting psychological ramifications of Ghyslain Raza’s debut as the *Star Wars Kid* are evident in the claims of his lawsuit; will never get his life back.

*Ryan Patrick Halligan (December 18, 1989 – October 7, 2003)*

#### Facts of the Case

In his 1999–2000 school year, 11-year-old Ryan Halligan of Essex Junction, Vermont suffered bullying at the hands of a group of students at his school because of his learning disorder. In December 2002, Ryan told his father that the bullying had started again. However, towards the end of 7th grade in spring of 2003, Ryan told his father that he and the bully had become friends. Unfortunately, after Ryan told this “friend” an embarrassing story related to a recent medical exam, the bully used the information to spread a rumor that Ryan was gay (Halligan, n.d.).

According to his father and news reports, Ryan spent much of his time online during the summer of 2003, particularly on AIM and other instant messaging services. During that summer, Ryan became the victim of a vicious cyberbullying campaign, being repeatedly sent instant messages (IMs) from middle school classmates accusing him of being gay, and was "threatened, taunted and insulted incessantly" (Public Broadcast System (PBS), 2008). He unintentionally archived these conversations on his hard drive when he installed DeadAIM, a freeware program. In this folder of archived conversations, his father also found transcripts of online exchanges in which a girl on



whom Ryan had a crush pretended to like him but later told him at school that he was a "loser". Ryan found out that she had only pretended to like him in order to retrieve personal information about him. Their private exchanges were copied and pasted into other IMs among his schoolmates to embarrass and humiliate him. After he had approached the girl and she had called him a "loser", Ryan told her, "It's girls like you who make me want to kill myself" (Halligan, n.d.). Ryan had also begun corresponding with an online "friend" who encouraged him to commit suicide (ABC News, 2006).

In the early morning of October 7, 2003, when Ryan's father was away on business and everyone else in the Halligan family was sleeping, Ryan went into his family's bathroom and hanged himself. He was 13 years old.

#### Media Analyzed

The researcher examined the website created by John Halligan, Ryan's father, which tells Ryan's story in detail (Halligan, n.d.). The researcher also examined the 2008 *Frontline* segment entitled "Growing Up Online" (Public Broadcast System (PBS), 2008) and *ABC News* story entitled "Cruel Kids, Tragic Ends" (ABC News, 2006), which includes an interview with the girl who was a part of the cyberbully prank played on Ryan shortly before he died.

Ryan did not leave a suicide note that would explain why he took his life, but when his father logged onto Ryan's instant messaging account, he found a dearth of evidence that Ryan had been victim of electronic aggression. First, there was a folder for a girl; it appeared that Ryan and the girl were boyfriend and girlfriend. After corresponding with her electronically throughout the summer of 2003, Ryan approached her in person, she said, "Ryan, you're a loser. I was just joking, pretending to like you on

line for a good laugh." Ryan told her, "It's girls like you who make me want to kill myself" (ABC News, 2006; Halligan, n.d.).

In addition to enduring merciless electronic aggression, Ryan had also met an online "friend" (not identified) who encouraged and supported his suicidal ideation and helped him to explore different methods of doing so. Following is an excerpt of one their online exchanges discovered on Ryan's hard drive:

other boy: *the last time I hear u complain?*

other boy: *ur finally gonna kill urself?!*

Ryan: *yep*

other boy: *phew*

other boy: *its about f\*\*\*in time*

Ryan: *you'll hear about it in the papers tomorrow*

(ABC News, 2006; Public Broadcast System (PBS), 2008).

In 2008, his suicide and its causes were examined in a segment of the PBS *Frontline* television program entitled "Growing Up Online". In the interview, John Halligan recounts his shock upon discovering the extent of the abuse his son endured, stating that he believes that,

*"the computer and the Internet were not the cause of my son's suicide, but I believe they helped amplify and accelerate the hurt and the pain that he was trying to deal with that started in person, in the real world."*

He goes on to say,

*"I have been blown away with how this whole technology has evolved into being a critical part of their social life and their socialization among themselves. It's*

*more than just having a conversation. It's about how they portray themselves...And then the whole interaction. It really isn't just one-on-one conversations...They're doing it now in a very virtual way.”*

*“His [Ryan’s] own peers -- I knew these kids in person -- when you read the words and attach the voice to it, it's hard to put the two together. There is just something about being online that seems to remove any sense of self-checking and sense of responsibility or proper behavior.”*

Sarah, one of Ryan’s schoolmates who was interviewed, opined,

*“I guess the fun [in humiliating someone online] is, like, dropping the bomb, you know, ‘oh, just kidding!’ and then that, like, crushed him. I mean, you wouldn’t do that to someone’s face. But online it’s completely different; you can do whatever you want and no one can do anything. You’re at your house, they’re at their house.”*

In an interview with Parry Aftab, a leading expert on cyberabuse issues, she states,

*“There’s something about reading words, you read it over and over again and you start to believe it the words make it real. One kid told me ‘you never know if it’s your best friend or your worst enemy that’s doing it because so much of this come to you anonymously so you never know who to trust”*

(Public Broadcast System (PBS), 2008).

In 2006, *ABC News* aired a story entitled “Cruel Kids, Tragic Ends”, in which Ashley, the girl who had used electronic media to trick and humiliate Ryan, reflected,

*“We were bitches...after I had teased him online with my friend, and I had told him it was all a joke, he said ‘girls like you are the kind of people that want to make me kill myself’...I felt so guilty”*

(ABC News, 2006).

Also examined were the many comments to these news stories such as the following representative samples:

\* psychicmindpowers (7 hours ago)

*to deal with a bully : shave ur body hair. wear gloves. "accident happens" dispose of the weapon and the body and don't piss on it no matter how much u may want to. \_ plenty of open space in the countryside*

---

\* coreyhaimisdead (18 hours ago)

*bullying is\_ way more awesome when the kid is a fag*

---

\* msjustinbeiber (1 day ago)

*This story is touching.....Rip Ryan Patrick Halligan\_ u left a hand print in my heart*

---

\* Xenogan (1 day ago)

*That girl telling the story is smiling... she says its horrible but she doesnt seem to feel its horrible. What\_ a bitch, she still is. Someone should kill her. People like that dont deserve to live in my opinion.*

---

\* Greogrios (3 days ago)

*Wtf [what the f\*\*\*]? he really killed\_ himself? thats...horrible*

---

\* vanrocksound (4 days ago)

*You should have your school session professionally taped so that it can be played in schools across North America. I am so glad that this is posted and that you are going to schools to share this story and save some precious lives. People show\_ this to your children. Hopefully if they were thinking of/or doing a form of bullying they will rethink what is happening.*

---

\* smileitamanda (1 week ago)

*if any of you actually grasped the intention of this video, its that you shouldn't bully. and thats what basically all the comments are doing about the girl. Obviously none of you took to\_ heart what the video was actually saying... That girl was very brave to go out there and talk.*

---

\* alexg2195 (1 week ago)

*for all of you that might think the girl is a mean\_ person etc. You probably have never heard the story in person. When you hear it from Mr. H you will understand how she really felt.*

---

\* wickedlovely19 (1 week ago)

*yea he came to our school today. you all\_ need to listen to the story and think about it from every point of view yes she did something bad but shes not a bad person and she lives with what she did to him everyday we have no idea how much pain that couldve caused her*

---

\* slugger664 (1 week ago)

*I can't believe that fucking girl can sit there and talk about it with a smile on her face. No, she didn't hang him but where is her accountability for the situation? if you sit there and say that she didn't make him do it or she didn't hang him then you are excusing her\_ from her actions that DID lead to his suicide.....Hope some day she realizes what she did.....*

---

\*\* aaronator20 (2 days ago)

*mr halligan came to my school today. . that was so sad i am never gonna bully again..\_ thx mr halligan.. yu are an inspiration*

---

\*\*loardkiller1 (3 days ago)

*he came to my school monday and my two friends were laughing and i confronted them after class and they were\_ just making snotty nose little jokes i almost hit them in the face*

---

\*\*cindy1000000 (1 day ago)

*they shouldn't have laughed at\_ all this is not meant to be funny.I would have hit them.*

---

\*\*funnyent (1 week ago)

*The sad thing is this crap still happens on YouTube today. People are so mean\_ on the internet!*

---

\*\*nealvu (3 weeks ago)

*I HATE PEOPLE WHO JUST KILL THESELVES THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND IT HURTS SO MANY PEOPLE . if you're getting bullied get help itdosen't last\_forever .. theres a friend for everyone ! one that would be enough to keep you going*

---

\*\*barudirush (2 months ago)

*Cyber Bullies? What a bunch of freaking losers! Kids with no brains (caused \_ probably by bad parenting) It should be considered a CRIME! Cause it hurts people! I live in Brasil, hard to that guy go but I have a friend that did try suicide...It took some months of intensive care, and love to make him see that, internet is full of stupid jerks that pick on people just for the lols of it*

---

\*\*\* mexicxtremo10 says:

February 22, 2010 at 6:00 pm

*Stupid dumbass ashley bitch. Fuck you Ashley, fuck you stupid bitch!!! I want to fucking kick your ass Ashley. Stupid Bitch!!! I want to fucking punch her in the face!!*

---

\*\*\* TheThing2008 says:

February 22, 2010 at 9:21 pm

*I literally cried at the last part of the video... Please don't kill yourself when you are being bullied just tell someone you truly trust and they WILL help you no matter what.*

---

\*\*\* farmerdude5 says:  
February 22, 2010 at 10:57 pm

*I don't know about that. In all honesty, bullying never really stops until the victim changes; becomes more assertive or more successful/stronger so that they feel empowered and become more assertive. This kid had a mental disability. If he had lived, he probably would of had trouble getting job. He would have been bullied through college. Suicide is always sad, but his life would of been nothing but pain. The boy who convinced him should of been more compassionate though.*

---

\*\*\* trevorthe monkey says:  
February 23, 2010 at 12:36 am

*someone should shoot her does anyone know if she has a facebook*

---

\*\*\* girley8787 says:  
February 23, 2010 at 2:00 am

*I think Ryan's story can touch anyone and everyone who hears it. It shows that even when you might not know how much you are hurting someone, that person could be suffering. Mr. Halligan talked in my school today and I cried and the story made me think of how I treat others and now I have a MUCH greater respect for people. His story reaches out to many. Rest In Peace Ryan Halligan.*

---

\* ("ABC News: bullying story," 2007)  
\*\* ("Ryan Halligan story on Frontline," 2008)  
\*\*\* ("ABC News: bullying story," 2007)

### Analysis of the Data

Technology is being utilized as a weapon for abuse and humiliation, which are far more effective and reaching than the simple ones of previous generations. It is one thing to be bullied and humiliated in front of a few kids and to feel rejection by the opposite sex. But the experience of these hurts and humiliation being witnessed by a far larger, online adolescent audience may result in some youth committing suicide, which is now even being dubbed *cyberbullycide*.

John Halligan believes his son “would have survived these incidents of bullying and humiliation if they took place before computers and the Internet;” that there are “few of us that that would have had the resiliency and stamina to sustain such a nuclear level attack on our feelings and reputation as a young teen in the midst of rapid physical and emotional changes and raging hormones...” (Public Broadcast System (PBS), 2008).

There lies the potential that electronic aggression may have the effect of accelerating and amplifying psychological pain to levels that may result in a number of psychological harms, including suicidal ideation and suicide.

Prior to the phenomenon of electronic aggression, young people who were the victims, and even the bullies, would come home and have the opportunity to be away from the violence and have time to decompress from the corresponding negative effects. As Ryan's mother, Kelly Halligan, aptly notes, kids are "coming home, and they're getting right onto the computer, and the drama continues right into the evening. Nobody is taking a break. And they're acting out and behaving in a way that they would never in person, especially in front of adults. ... There's just no check and balances occurring online" (Public Broadcast System (PBS), 2008).

In examining the posted comments, there is a recurring theme of extremely violent call for justice on Ryan's behalf, interspersed with sorrow for Ryan. There is little to no compassion for the bullies, even though John Halligan is adamant that he does not blame Ashley for Ryan's death and has forgiven her. Though the anti-bullying sentiment is encouraging, the visceral anger and wish for violent retribution seven years after the incident illustrate how these events take on a life of their own and can have mental health impacts on each person they touch, no matter how far removed from the original event. In Ashley's case, the former bully has now become a public target of ridicule and harassment herself.

Facts of the Case

On March 30 2008, 16-year-old Victoria Lindsay was lured to a friend's house in Lakeland, Florida, where she was soon after brutally beaten by six teenage girls "for the sole purpose of capturing and posting the video on the Internet" ("Girls Record Brutal Attack On Teen To Allegedly Post On YouTube," 2008), while two look-outs kept watch outside. The girls slammed her head into a wall, and then punched her repeatedly until she was unconscious. When Victoria regained consciousness the girls began beating her again. One of the girls filmed the beating the entire time, with the alleged intent of posting the video on the popular video website *YouTube.com* ("YouTube") and *MySpace.com* ("MySpace"). On the video, the girls can be heard encouraging the fight in the background, even taunting Victoria to fight back.

The attackers say they were upset with so-called "trash talk" the victim posted on her MySpace page, and that they "wanted to post their own video of the beating on MySpace and YouTube" (Alexander, 2008).

Victoria was hospitalized, suffering a concussion, eye injuries and several bruises. After arriving at the hospital where she was taken after the incident Victoria's father said, "I didn't recognize my own daughter when I went in. Her face was disfigured. She was crying" (Ferran & Johnston, 2008).

The eight suspects faced charges for false imprisonment and battery, and three of them were charged with kidnapping because, according to the local sheriff's office, they forced Victoria into a car and drove her to another location after the beating.



*(note: charges were dropped against three of the eight teens, and the other five were sentenced to various lengths of probation) (Alexander, 2008).*

### Media Analyzed

The researcher examined the 10:15 long footage from MSNBC's *Today Show*, which includes segments of the original video and an interview with Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd (MSNBC, April 8, 2008); the 5:14 long interview with Victoria Lindsay on *Good Morning America*, which includes footage of the actual beating and the victim's accounting of the event on YouTube ("New Victoria Lindsay Interview (Good Morning America)," 2008). The entire original video is reported to be over 30 minutes in length. Also found on YouTube and reviewed by the researcher are the original 911 call from the victim ("Actual 911 Call ( 8 teenagers jump girl )," 2008), and an interview with Victoria Lindsay's parents at ("Parents of Beaten Teen, Victoria Lindsay, Speak Out," 2008).

The majority of comments associated with the video segments are in support of the victim, but reflect a higher level of outrage and call for violent justice on her behalf than pure sympathy, as can be following representative samples:

\* pippie911 (23 hours ago)

*...shes kinda a drama queen....wut do yew expect if yew say shit about ppl?? they'll jus let it go? she got bruised, so wut?? havent\_ we all? wutever shes drama*

---

\* teamhalo2444 (4 days ago)

*that be funny if\_ some of those bitches get life*

---

\* gigas94 (5 days ago)

*well\_ ill be waiting for them when they get out of jail with bats and guns :D*

---

\*gamelvr1 (5 days ago)

*absolutely disgusting. how the fuck could anyone think that was\_ ok*

---

\* saucyc123 (5 days ago)

*how brave\_ is she!*

---

\* hahdjasus1 (6 days ago)

*i honestly want to\_ beat all those fucking girls asses. all 6 of those girls deseve a beating.*

---

\* jayparrish1 (1 week ago)

*That poor girl, wish i was there... man those guys are such fucking pussies... i so wanna kick all their asses one by one... hell ill take em all at the same time too... they must be fucking weak if they needed eight of them... i know this wont happen but i actually pray for them to get the death sentence... fucking cunts... if i could put myself in that girls place i would of any day... those\_ eight teens are stupid fucking shits hope they all die and go to hell and meet with Satan himself...*

---

\* maxey9711 (1 week ago)

*She's so beautiful!! How could\_ anyone hurt her? She seems like a really nice person*

---

\*\* newworld191 (7 hours ago)

*this white american bitches are all\_ spoiled and they need to learn a lesson, hell fucking yeah!*

---

\*\* GGunouluvme (18 hours ago)

*I cant believe some of these comments. It doesnt matter what you look like. A girl was hurt. That should be enough. Every single person has feelings and can feel pain. What hurts an Asian will hurt and African. For heaven sakes.. Go out and travel the world and see all the beauty the world has to offer, including all the beautiful people out\_ there in the world. I cant believe Im reading this shit... Racist Idiots!*

---

\*\* UMuddyFuggy (1 week ago)

*lol that guys name is Zachary Ashley? Hope Mr. pretty gay fuck had a nice ass rape\_ by gorilla man in jail. hahahaha*

---

\* ("New Victoria Lindsay Interview (Good Morning America)," 2008)

\*\* ("Parents of Beaten Teen, Victoria Lindsay, Speak Out," 2008)

In an interview with the Polk County Sheriff, Grady Judd, he recounted that even though those involved could face prison time, the perpetrators showed no remorse after their arrests. Some of the girls charged with the attack sat making jokes in their holding cell, one asking if she would be able to make it to cheerleading practice the next day.

## Analysis of the Data

Victoria Lindsay is the latest victim in a shocking trend: camera-wielding attackers beating a victim so that they can post the video on popular sites like MySpace and YouTube. Victoria's attack shows how physical bullying is crossing genders and migrating to the Internet.

More than any physical reminders, Victoria's emotional scarring was intense and her ability to trust has suffered. "It knocks it [the ability to trust] down and it breaks it apart," she said. "And it's hard for me" ("New Victoria Lindsay Interview (Good Morning America)," 2008).

The purported motivation for this video was to become famous on the Internet by humiliating and abusing Victoria. The mental health impacts of violence for the sake of creating entertainment not only normalizes and glamorizes the violence among youth, but may also escalate the level if one knows that he or she is performing for the world.

Developmental psychologist Cooper Lawrence says of the teen attackers, "they are living in a culture now where, when you put yourself on a video, it's a way to be famous. They see themselves as an actor playing a role. Even when they were arrested, they were like, 'Oh, we're going to be late for cheerleading practice.' They weren't realizing the severity of what they've done because they're completely desensitized" (Huguenin, 2008).

Combining a twisted sense of stardom with Internet-savvy aggressors, this form of electronic aggression seems like something that can only grow if not addressed.

## ANALYSIS OF DATA

The goal of this qualitative study and its analysis was to uncover, synthesize, categorize and compare these findings in order to answer the research question: What is the nature of electronic aggression in youth and the corresponding mental health impacts?

After collecting the data on the selected three cases and analyzing each one individually the researcher was able to find several interesting patterns in the communication of aggressors and victim, as well as the bystanders to these events. The five attributes that emerged as common harmful denominators to this phenomenon are:

- *Anonymity*: when individuals have the opportunity to separate their actions from their real world and identity as they do on the Internet (dissociating), they do not have to own their aggressive behavior by acknowledging it within the full context of their *real selves*, and do not take responsibility for those actions. This was reflected in the comments of the boy responsible for posting Ghyslain Raza's video as well as in the postings made by bystanders on these events;
- *Invisibility*: similar to anonymity, the lack of face-to-face contact may tempt the aggressor(s) to new levels of cruelty. The opportunity to be physically invisible, and not privy to the non-verbal cues of others that may prevent actions in the physical world, amplifies the *disinhibition* effect. Best illustrated in Ryan Halligan's case, where his bullies were also his "friends" in the physical world and by his online "friend" who encouraged his suicide;
- *Online persona (dissociation)*: youth may feel that the online personas that they have developed exist in a different space, separate and apart from the rules and responsibilities of the *real world*. They may see their online life subject to rules

and norms that don't apply to everyday living that, once they disconnect with the Internet, they can leave behind. This is most relevant in the blatant cruelty and viciousness of the bystanders who have posted comments on these events, threatening obscene violence, hatred and mockery that would be unacceptable and likely not made in the physical world;

- *Relentlessness*: There is no escape from the Internet – it is a 24/7, 365 day a year socially dependent environment for today's youth. It is obvious that each of the three cases is alive and well in cyberspace, even years removed from the events;
- *Infinite audiences*: The sheer scale of the Internet audience also makes electronic aggression daunting for many young people, with many fearing the potential for mass humiliation. The MSN Cyberbullying Report (2006) found that for one in five young people (22%), the fact that more people would potentially know about the bullying than if it happened in the physical world was the worst thing, and for one in eight young people (13%) cyberbullying is even worse than physical bullying. With an estimated billion views after seven years, nowhere is there a better example of this than in the case of Ghyslain Raza, where he may need to go so far as to change his actual identity to escape infamy. The alleged intent of the videotaped assault on Victoria Lindsay and forwarded text messages and emails of Ryan Halligan to his schoolmates are also reflective of the devastating effect that being put on public display may have.

## LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Electronic aggression is a social phenomenon, which shifts and expands with the speed of the new technology used to perpetrate this form of violence. When one year is equivalent to a generation, it makes it extremely difficult to keep current and compare data. Since this is a newly emerging area of research and due to the nature of sampling used in this study (without personal contact with the participants), there was no ability by the researcher to quantify the extent of the mental health impacts on the victims or others involved.

Because both the perpetrators and victims are minors at the time of the events, the researcher had to rely on limited public information. Information such as gender and age of electronic bystanders examined cannot conclusively be determined. This limits the ability of the researcher to attribute this behavior exclusively to youth.

While the scope of inquiry is limited and since the entire body of data collected exists in the public domain of the Internet, the study poses no ethical consideration for risk of harm to the subjects.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This is our island. It's a good island.  
Until the grown-ups come to fetch us we'll have fun.

- William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*, 1954

The researcher found that the pivotal reasons for the mental health effects of electronic aggression being so harmful to youth were that the characteristics that distinguish it from traditional bullying collectively amplify the aggression's negative effect on the target by prolonging the victimization indefinitely. At the same time, the environment in which electronic aggression flourishes seem to evoke bullying behaviors among some adolescents who otherwise might not bully. An act of electronic aggression on Internet is not a one-time or one-person incident.

The researcher noticed an emerging *Lord of the Flies* mentality as thematic in many of postings relative to the case examinations, where the Internet is their island, and violent content escapes the boundaries of *civil* society. This stems, in part, from the *digital divide* that leaves parents, educators and policy makers unfamiliar with the technology and the way on which it is being employed. Additionally, the anonymity and disembodied proximity of Internet communication can lead otherwise civilized people to barbarism and cruelty, discussed in the literature as *disinhibition*. The Internet itself is engineered with no centralized control and this has, as previously stated, democratized electronic aggression. Everyone in the cyberworld – regardless of status, wealth, race, gender, etc. – begins on a level playing field. What most determines one's influence on

others in cyberspace is one's skill in communicating, persistence and technical savvy. The Internet, by its lack of restrictions and boundaries, allows youth to be actors and not just acted upon, which is usually the case in the physical world.

Based on a selection of the latest 100 posts at a single point in time, the researcher evaluated each post as either positive, negative or neutral. Positive sentiments were encouraging and sympathetic, negative sentiments were malicious, derisive or violent (even if the violence was in reaction to an injustice to the victim), and neutral sentiments expressed no real emotion or opinion in either direction. Figure 8 show the results for each video expression selected by the researcher on YouTube.com on March 25, 2010:

	Positive Comments	Negative Comments	Neutral Comments
<b>Ghyslain Raza</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>Ryan Halligan</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Victoria Lindsay</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>24%</b>

(ABC News, September 15, 2006; New Victoria Lindsay Interview (Good Morning America)," 2008; Star Wars Kid," 2006).

It is important to emphasize the lasting effects of the power of the written word with regard to electronic aggression. As Campbell (2005) explains, "conventional bullying may be severe at the time of the incident, but over time memory fades and words



and taunts become vague.” Notwithstanding the seriousness of traditional bullying, electronic aggression may involve the written word, and now photo and video recordings (physical documentation), which last forever. Young people may revisit the written insult or humiliating photo or video repeatedly, re-living the experience. This may potentially cause a prolonged sense of victimization, which in turn may lead to depression and other physical and mental disorders (Brown, Jackson, & Cassidy, 2006). If the author(s) of the aggression is unknown, the anonymity, combined with the fact the victims may be forced to limit or even temporarily eliminate their online use because of continual harassment, may make a young person’s life unbearable.

Another notable finding from the cases of Ryan Halligan and Victoria Lindsay is the way in which the posted comments become aggressive toward the persons reported to be bullies. This creates a cycle that cannot occur in the physical world, where large numbers of anonymous strangers seek to denigrate and threaten the individuals who had originally perpetrated electronic violence toward another.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

One of the ill effects of cruelty is that  
It makes the bystanders cruel.

- *Thomas Fowell Buxton*

Research into the causes and effects of electronic aggression is still in its early stages, but it is becoming evident that aspects of electronic communication encourage youth to act aggressively, prompting them to do things they would not think to attempt in the physical world.

Clearly, electronic aggression throws a wider net than traditional forms of aggression, and more and different types of offenders should be expected to emerge. The nature of the cyberworld and its virtual inhabitants ensures that the victim will be accessible, and the generational *digital divide* ensures that the oversight of adults will be sporadic or absent. Technological advances designed to prevent electronic aggression, such as computer system filters, are often easily circumvented and adults are so out of touch that they are often unaware of the prevalence of electronic aggression or the technological sophistication of the types that exist, let alone being aware of how to control or reduce it.

Normative values shift in cyberworld; they are not necessarily reflective of the values in that person's physical community, but of those in the person's cyber community. This may lead youth to not recognize electronic aggression for what it is, and they may think it is a normal part of life and not question it as a form of abuse or other

form of violence. Youth who are bullied online may also fear that reporting the event(s) could mean the end of their social networking privileges, which may account for a severe underreporting of this form of violence. "They are actively hiding it from their parents and doing whatever they can to cover it up," states Aftab (2007), "because they don't trust their parents not to make it worse or not to take their technology away."

This exploratory analysis highlights the need for further investigation into the mental health effects of electronic aggression, with specific attention being paid to the critical third-party role of the electronic bystander. Since the bystanders of electronic aggression are often inadvertently drawn into the aggression through indirect means, the effects on this group may be more problematic than those on bystanders to traditional bullying. Young people are growing up in a world where the boundaries between the physical and virtual world are becoming increasingly blurred. Parents, educators and communities must become more aware and technologically knowledgeable on the topic if they are to be able to effectively prevent these kinds of problems.

### **THE COLISEUM EFFECT**

The researcher has developed the following theoretical model, which captures a subtle yet powerful commonality that is present in varying degrees in the discussion of electronic aggression, both in the literature and the three case analyses.

The *coliseum effect* is a social psychological phenomenon that refers to instances where individuals become peripheral participants in acts of electronic aggression, resulting in the potential amplification of psychological harms to the victim. This effect may be found in the virtual theater of the Internet, where the electronic actions of these

spectator/ participants, who largely remain anonymous, range from the simple observance (or view) of an electronic event, to the forwarding or republishing the event, to the creation of new content meant to more widely distribute the event. These collective actions, regardless of intent, may generate a snowball effect of harms, which allows for the possible proliferation of the event in perpetuity with an ever-expanding audience, thereby not allowing the event to come to an end for the victim.

### *Rationale for the Coliseum Effect*

In analyzing the phenomenon of electronic aggression, the researcher discovered that the peripheral participants and bystanders who engage in this form of violence exhibit behavioral traits analogous to those attributed to the spectators in the Roman Colosseum (or Coliseum) almost two thousand years ago. Much like the original Colosseum, which became a symbol of Rome, its society, culture and life, the Internet has become a symbol of young people, their society, culture and life.

In examining the comparative behavioral and psychological characteristics of these two groups, the researcher discovered many common and striking observations, which may enable future researchers and mental health providers to discover meaningful new interventions for youth engaging in acts of electronic aggression.

Drawing from both world history and the research findings and observations on electronic aggression, it is evident that neither the ancient Roman spectators nor the electronic bystanders of today are of a single mind. In attendance are sure to be the ones who hate and take pleasure in the misery of others, the ones who are there to be a part of the community, the ones who are there to be philosophers and observe the nature of

others; the ones who are there, despising the cruelty of *the mob*, but without any thought of transforming it; the ones who cheer and laugh, and the ones who go home shaken and wondering what has happened to the world.

In both the Roman and electronic coliseum, a world of fantasy has been created from the material of a real world that is accepted all too easily. As Carlin Barton (1993) eloquently writes: "The absence of cooperation between the actors and the audience turned the witnesses...into perpetrators of a sordid spectacle, ugly and nasty for themselves as well as their victims." The unsettling truth is that neither the Roman spectator nor the electronic one is merely an innocent bystander watching other people's humiliation and conflict, but rather an active accomplice in the creation and staging of these events. "The Roman spectator, in order to protect himself from feeling degraded, was dependent upon the maintenance of this all-important fiction - that the spectacle did not really come from himself, but existed outside of him, that he was an observer, not a creator... that he had not utterly lost his humanity, only found ways to deceive it and disarm it" (Barton, 1993).

While some spectators watched "with sadistic delight, others apparently wept and were sickened, while still others began to grumble against the authorities or to call out for a stop to the slaughter" it must still be emphasized that the brutality and cruelty of the games were phenomenal, and that the "damaging effects upon the souls of those who watched them must have been correspondingly severe." (Rainsnow, 2005). Rainsnow (2005) goes on to say that the Roman spectator was a person with "human feelings and moral potential, ravaged by pain and tricked by custom to perpetuate one of the cruelest phenomena ever beheld on our earth." As this behavior is accepted, normalized, and even

encouraged in the electronic coliseum, it is disconcerting to think of how its spectators will be affected psychologically by being a part of a new phenomenon of social cruelty. The amplification of harms may be further compounded by the fact that the new coliseum is always open for the *games* and has an infinite capacity for spectators.

### *Difference from the Bystander Effect*

The social phenomenon known as the *bystander effect* has been discussed in relation to traditional and cyberbullying as an explanation as to why young people who are witness to either form of bullying are reluctant to intervene and assist a victim (Coloroso, 2003; Craig & Pepler, 1998; Willard, 2007). According to this model, when others are present, people are less likely to intervene. The *coliseum effect* does not attempt to explain behavior related to assisting the victim; it provides a theoretical model for understanding the behavior of the witnesses to electronic events of aggression and their varying levels of participation, and the concomitant potential increase of psychological harms to the victim. Viewing the event, forwarding the event, modifying the event for entertainment, posting comments which may be judgmental, cruel, encouraging, etc. are all participatory and encourage the virtual coliseum to grow in popularity and power. The fact that most participants are intentionally anonymous frees their inhibitions from amplifying pain and hurt, intentional or not. Unlike the bystander effect where witnesses abdicate responsibility as their number increases, the *coliseum effect* reflects a *diffusion of guilt* where, as the number of spectator/participants increases, each of their acts becomes negligible, while the collective force of their participation becomes excessive.

### *Relative to the Cases Examined*

The cases examined in this exploratory analysis each demonstrate the potential *coliseum effect* in the posted comments associated with the media expression of the event. Each case had at least 2,000 – one up to almost 80,000 – postings attributed to at least one sourced media event. As the researcher found, each day brought additional comments, each exacerbating the event and sustaining it. The *coliseum effect* and its potential for increased harms will continue to expand as long as there is an appetite to sustain it. At this point none of these cases has reached the critical point where views and comments have significantly decreased; even as long as seven years later, the appetite for participation and proliferation has not been sated.

### *A Model for Future Research*

Future research that would operationalize and measure the *coliseum effect* will be challenging, given the mercurial nature of the Internet environment, the anonymity of spectator/participants and the inability to conclusively represent the entire scope of an event of electronic aggression.

The researcher has not attempted to operationalize and understand the *coliseum effect* empirically. The intent of future research should therefore be to build upon qualitative examination of the *coliseum effect* to construct an empirical model, using quantitative survey and interview data, to investigate the nature and extent of the *coliseum effect* in electronic aggression.

It is the researcher's hope that the *coliseum effect* framework may become a helpful tool for analyzing the social phenomenon of electronic aggression and further understanding the problem, leading to effective, sustainable and, ultimately, preventative interventions.

#### *Related Future Research*

One further critical recommendation for future research would be to examine the *survivors* of electronic aggression and to ascertain what the strategies of these young people are who have successfully endured and coped with being a victim. Based on the work of Rutter regarding the psychosocial resilience of children, research should focus on protective mechanisms and processes rather than broadly based protective factors (Rutter, 1987). Determining these protective mechanisms and processes could become an important tool in assisting youth, their parents and schools to assume a proactive and sustainable role in combating electronic aggression and its harmful outcomes.



## APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A: TABLE OF TACTICS AND METHODS USED TO PERPETRATE  
ELECTRONIC AGGRESSION**

**APPENDIX B: TABLE OF STATE LAWS APPLYING TO ELECTRONIC AGGRESSION**

**APPENDIX C: COLISEUM EFFECT THEORETICAL MODEL**

## APPENDIX A

### TACTICS AND METHODS USED TO PERPETRATE ELECTRONIC AGGRESSION

TACTICS/METHODS USED IN ELECTRONIC AGGRESSION	DEFINITION OF TACTIC/METHOD	EXPLANATION OF TACTIC/METHOD
<b>Bashboards</b>	Online bulletin boards, or virtual chat rooms, where one can go to anonymously and write anything one wants, true or false.	Generally, the postings are mean, hateful and malicious. Intended for the population at large to see and to participate.
<b>Blogs</b>	Similar to diaries, except that they are posted online for public view and comment.	Blogs can be platforms for aggressors to post comments, thoughts or secrets of others. Readers may also make cruel or hurtful comments in responding to a blog.
<b>Chatrooms</b>	Real-time written conversations, except that the content is public to everyone in the chat at one time. Possible to move to private chat within chatroom.	A method of <b>social exclusion</b> ; a participant can invite some, but not others, to private chat. People are not always who they appear to be or who they say they are in chatrooms.
<b>Cyberthreats/ Cyberstalking</b>	The former may be threats to others, threats to harm a third party or parties, or threats to harm self; the latter involves repeatedly sending messages that include threats of future harm.	These types of harassment are more intimidating and serious in nature, and are typically associated with emotional distress. Usually applies to adults and may result in legal action.
<b>Defamatory Websites</b>	Web sites that mock, torment and harass others.	Defamation is all about reputation, and in particular about statements which: damage others' reputations by attempting to lower public opinion of someone; injure a person's reputation by exposing him/her to hatred, contempt or ridicule; or tend to make a person be shunned or avoided.

<b>Denigration</b>	Also known as <i>dissing</i> , occurs when a person a person sends or publishes cruel rumors, gossip or untrue statements about a target electronically.	The goal is to intentionally damage the target's reputation or friendships. The art of putting someone down.
<b>Emails</b>	Electronic messages sent from an account.	Can be employed to send offensive messages, to harass and to do harm via <b>masquerading</b> .
<b>Flaming</b>	Sending or posting confrontational electronic messages that are deliberately hostile, insulting, mean or angry to one person or several, either privately or publicly, to an online group. Often uses explicit or vulgar language.	This type of online fight uses language that moves dialogue to a new level. Flaming often occurs in cyberfights, and can result in a "flame war."
<b>Griefing</b>	Involves chronically causing grief to other members of an online community, generally by the harassment of another player or participant within an online game or virtual space.	The <i>griever</i> traps and attacks the victim through the game using torments, humiliation and belittling as their tools. Since many games are multi-user, there may be a multitude of witnesses.
<b>Happy Slapping</b>	This occurs when an unsuspecting victim is physically attacked in person, as an accomplice films or take pictures of the incident with a mobile phone. The image or video is then posted online or distributed electronically for anyone to view and make comments.	Often the attackers will say it was only a prank or joke, hence the term "happy slapping". Happy slapping is becoming more common, especially since most cell phones now include cameras.
<b>Images/Videos</b>	Some images are emailed to other people, while others are published on video sites such as YouTube.	Images and videos are a rapidly growing concern. Due to the prevalence and accessibility of camera cell phones, photographs and videos of unsuspecting victims, taken in bathrooms, or other compromising situations, are being distributed electronically.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Instant Messaging (IM)</b></p>	<p>Real-time written dialogue via the Internet. Similar to email except that it is synchronous (both parties are online and send messages back and forth). Users create “buddy lists” of contacts and are alerted when a “buddy” is online.</p>	<p>A method of <b>outing</b>, text can be copied without the sender’s knowledge and sent to others who were not the intended recipients. Also used as a method for <b>social exclusion</b>; only inviting some “buddies” to participate, while excluding others.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Malicious Code</b></p>	<p>Intentionally sending viruses, spyware and hacking programs to victims’ computers.</p>	<p>Malicious code is sent by the aggressor to either spy on their victim or destroy their computer.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Masquerading (Impersonating)</b></p>	<p>Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material that appears to come from the victim, making the victim look bad or placing them in personal danger.</p>	<p>This is usually accomplished by breaking into someone’s account, by stealing a password and perhaps changing it, or by maliciously using that information provided by a friend. Once the impersonator has access to the victim's information, considerable damage can occur. By sending out emails supposedly from the victim or by posting material online, the victim’s reputation or friendships can be irreparably harmed. Requires some advanced technical skills.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Online Polls</b></p>	<p>Online polls ask readers to vote on specific questions.</p>	<p>These polls are often very hurtful and demeaning, such as "Who is the ugliest person in 8th grade" or "Who do you love to hate?"</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Outing</b></p>	<p>Sending or publishing sensitive, private, or embarrassing information, online. This includes forwarding private electronic messages or images meant for private viewing.</p>	<p>This is the tactic that former friends use to share secrets or embarrassing photos that were provided in confidence. Often goes together with <b>trickery</b>.</p>

<b>SMS Text Messaging (Texting)/Text Wars</b>	Typically short messages using words and abbreviations sent from mobile phones.	Can be employed to send offensive messages to harass. Text wars occur when several people gang up on the victim, sending the target hundreds of emails or text messages. In addition to the emotional toll it can take on the victim, their cell phone charges can be costly.
<b>Social Exclusion</b>	Actions that specifically and intentionally exclude a person from an online group by not allowing someone to be part of or participate in electronic communication.	Can occur online just as it does in real life. Targeted persons are not allowed to enter a chat room, or are not included on various “buddy” lists.
<b>Trickery</b>	When a person purposely tricks another person into divulging secrets, private information or embarrassing information, and publishes that information online.	The aggressor manipulates the target into disclosing information or making statements that this person then publicizes to embarrass the target. Often goes together with <b>outing</b> .
<b>Trolling (Troll)</b>	When someone posts intentionally antagonistic messages on an online bulletin board or discussion area. The person doing this is referred to as a <i>troll</i> .	The <i>troll's</i> angers and upsets individual members with their messages, but their primary goal is to gain attention and to disrupt communities, especially when the members are peacefully helping and advising each other.

Table Sources: (Li, 2007; National Education Association, 2008; Shoemaker-Galloway, 2007; Trolley & Hanel, 2006)

## APPENDIX B

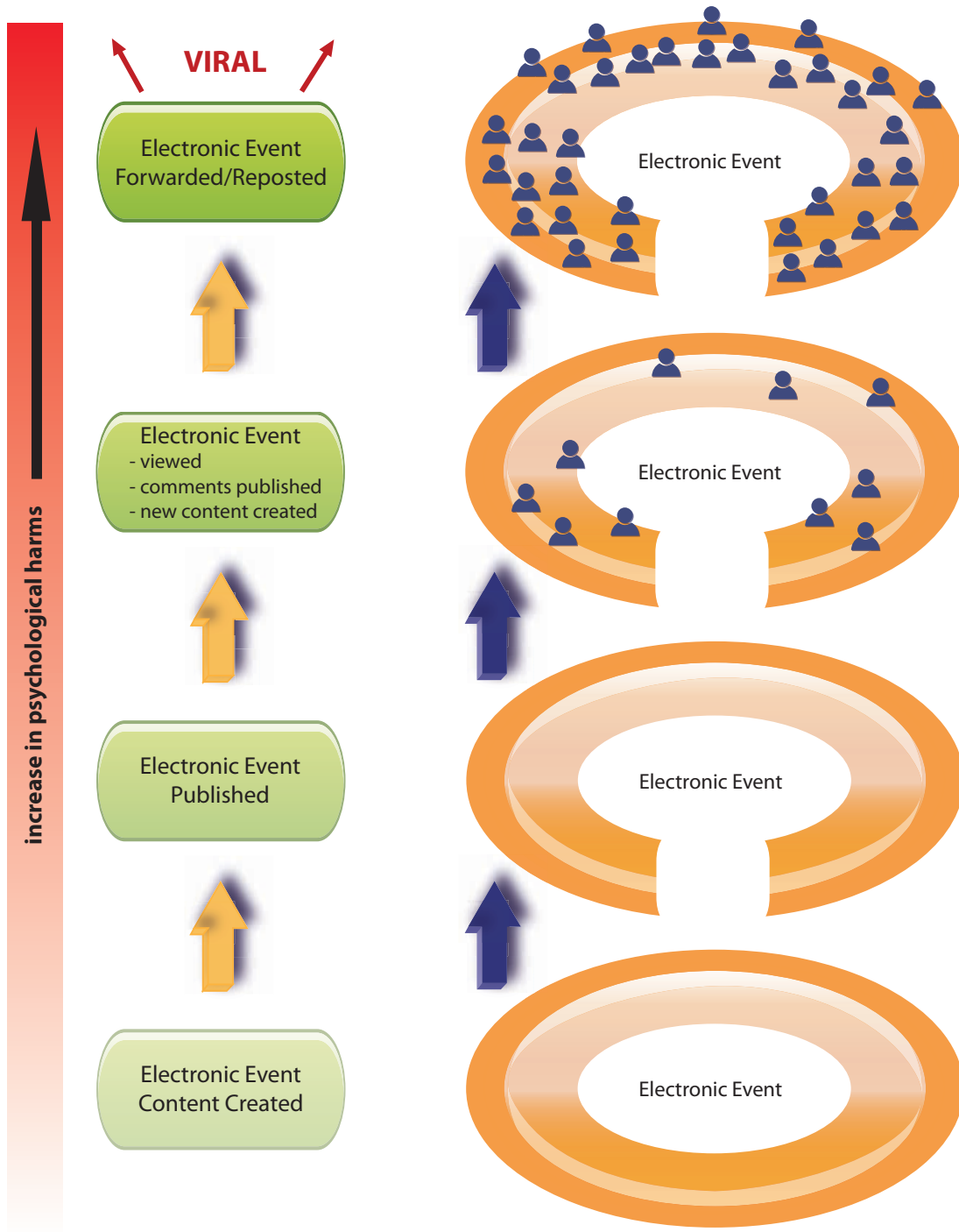
### TABLE OF STATE LAWS APPLYING TO ELECTRONIC AGGRESSION

	DEFINITIONS		LOCATION OF CYBERBULLYING				SCHOOL REGULATION		
	Amends previous law to include electronic communication	Bullying on school property or at school-sponsored events/and or use of data or computer software accessed through school computer systems	Does not apply to off-campus bullying	Applies weather or not electronic communication originated at school or through school equipment	Law did not specify weather can discipline off-campus cyberbullying	School can define bullying to include off-campus cyberbullying	Requires schools to provide specific cyberbullying training, such as disseminating informational materials	Includes cyberbullying in school district harassment prevention policies	School officials can suspend or recommend expulsion for bullying, including bullying by electronic act
Arkansas	✓	✓		✓				✓	
Colorado	✓								✓
Delaware	✓	✓				✓			
Florida	✓	✓							
Idaho	✓				✓				✓
Iowa	✓				✓				
Kansas	✓	✓			✓				
Maryland	✓	✓			✓				
Minnesota	✓							✓	
Missouri	✓	✓							
Nebraska	✓	✓	✓	✓					
New Jersey	✓	✓						✓	
Oklahoma	✓	✓						✓	
Oregon	✓	✓					✓	✓	
Pennsylvania	✓	✓				✓		✓	
Rhode Island	✓	✓							
S. Carolina	✓	✓							
Utah	✓						✓		
Washington	✓						✓	✓	

Michigan's law is not included in this table as it does not fall into any of the above categories. Instead, the Michigan law charges an advisory board to establish and maintain accountability-based programs to enhance school safety, specifically mandating a program to address cyberbullying. (Weitzel, 2009)

# APPENDIX C

## COLISEUM EFFECT THEORETICAL MODEL



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