**The Effects of Parental Guidance and Internet Use on Teenagers Experiencing Cyberbullying**

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**ABSTRACT**

The majority of the younger population has access to the Internet in some capacity (Guan and Subrahmanyam, 2009, p.). Though the Internet has many positive aspects, the abundance of uses inevitably brings about negative characteristics (Ybarra and Mitchell 2004). Offensive behavior, such as cyberbullying, is one of these negative characteristics the youth faces today (Guan and Subrahmanyam 2009). Although cyberbullying has been studied recently, it is still a serious problem, especially on social media. Cyberbullying can take many different forms, which makes it hard to study all of the ways and reasons as to why cyberbullying occurs (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, and Lattanner 2014). The purpose of this study was to assess the roles a parent plays in their child’s online behaviors, as well as general Internet use versus focused Internet use, and its relationship to the likelihood of being cyberbullied. These findings suggest two things: (1) safe Internet use, parental concern with teen online behavior, and using parental controls do not completely prevent cyberbullying and (2) general Internet use does not provide enough support in regards to being cyberbullied, but use of social networking sites does increase the likelihood of being cyberbullied.

**INTRODUCTION**

Despite efforts to end bullying, this problem continues to be a widespread issue (Beale and Hall 2007). Although bullying is typically something that is thought of to be face-to-face, bullying online has become an increasing issue with the easy access of the Internet (Cassidy, Jackson, and Brown 2009). Cyberbullying is an appealing way to belittle someone because of how simple it is to hide one’s identity (Erdur-Baker 2010). The anonymity the Internet provides leaves seemingly no consequences to cyberbullying, which, in turn, makes cyberbullying even more prevalent (Beale and Hall, 2007, p.8). Teens do not typically disclose their bullying experiences, and this study seeks to bring this information to light so that is able to change (Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla, and Daciuk 2011). Previous research has studied Internet use and its relation to cyberbullying, which is what this study is continuing to do while also looking at using the Internet for social reasons. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of parental involvement and Internet use on the likelihood of being cyberbullied.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

As the number of youth online continues to grow, so does their risk for negative and even unsafe experiences while online (Ybarra and Mitchell 2004). Sometimes children will lie about information they provide online in order to hide profiles from their parents and to make it more difficult for them to be found online (Boyd 2007, p. 131). The Internet can be uses as a place to let out anxiety as well as for social purposes (Kowalski et al. 2014). Children seek to develop relationships with their peers from school and even those solely internet-based (Gross, Juvonen, and Gable 2002). Online relationships have become popular recently and there is more evidence of solely internet-based relationships (Gross et al. 2002). With the growing uses for the internet, it is important to teach children how to safely use the internet. Harassment on the Internet can sometimes even go as far as stalking (Kowalski et al. 2014). Relationships formed on the Internet can present a new set of dangers as many youth report not knowing the people they have formed relationships with (Kowalski et al. 2014).

Many youth use the Internet to express positive emotions and connect with each other. However, negative feelings, such as aggression, can stem from the use of the Internet (Erdur-Baker 2010). Considering that the Internet can be anonymous, these feelings are exceptionally easy to express (Ybarra and Mitchell 2004). In this way, the Internet is a popular choice for letting out negative emotions that are otherwise not acceptable to display (Ybarra and Mitchell 2004). The ability to hide one’s identity makes the Internet a popular choice for bullying someone, creating an unsafe and uneasy environment (Valcke et al. 2011). Youth

not being monitored by their parents online has been shown to relate to delinquency (Ybarra and Mitchell 2004). Lack of parent-monitoring and being anonymous can create an environment where a bully may feel safe from being caught for their actions (Erdur-Baker 2010). Anonymity of the Internet can even be dangerous, as it can be easy to not only bully someone but even go as far as stalking them (Erdur-Baker 2010).

(H1) Teens whose parents show them safe Internet use are less likely to be cyberbullied than teens whose parents do not show them safe Internet use.

Much of what happens in regards to cyberbullying goes beyond a school setting (Beale and Hall, 2007, p.11). One of the main issues cyberbullying brings up is that the consequences and prevention are left up to the parents, and not the school (Erdur-Baker 2010). When children come to their parents about their bullying experiences, it is especially important that parents communicate with the school about these issues (Fekkes, Pijpers, and Verloove-Vanhorick 2005). Schools that have policies and procedures in regards to reporting bullying have higher percentages of students reporting bullying (Cassidy, Faucher, and Jackson 2013). However, schools need to be informed about the issues of bullying going on outside of school in order to prevent and stop cyberbullying (Beale and Hall, 2007, p.10).

Studies have shown that children do not report bullying for a variety of reasons. Children tend to feel they will not be believed, sometimes they do not know who the bully is, and they usually do not feel that anyone will understand what happened to them (Cassidy et al. 2013). When children do not tell their parents or school personnel, they often report their experiences to their friends (Cassidy et al. 2013). Parents have a duty to make a comfortable environment where their children feel they can open up and share when someone is cruel to them online (Beale and Hall, 2007, p.11). Parent involvement in their child’s life has shown children to be more likely to report when they are bullied (Ybarra and Mitchell 2004). Children copy what they see, and they model their parent’s behavior and relationships in their own lives (Nation, Vieno, Perkins, and Santinello 2007). This notion could potentially encourage children to be bullies as well as fall victim to bullying (Nation et al. 2007). When adults do not victim-blame and are more open minded, a positive environment is created that brings about more reporting of bullying (Cassidy et al. 2013).

(H2) Teens whose parents are concerned about how teens treat each other online are less likely to be cyberbullied than teens whose parents are not concerned about how teens treat each other online.

Typically, teens are more familiar with technology than their parents, making it harder for parents to monitor their child’s online activity (Beale and Hall, 2007, p. 11). Studies have found that most youth report that their parents actually do not monitor or control what they do online (Ybarra and Mitchell 2004). One of the main issues with cyberbullying is that it is largely not reported to parents or other adults (Beale and Hall 2007**).** This makes the need for parental controls unknown to most parents. Studies have shown that teens whose parents who do not monitor their online activity are more likely to fall victim to bullying than those who do observe what they do (Sengupta and Chaudhuri 2011).

How children’s web activity is controlled is entirely up to the parent. Many options are available for parents to control their child’s activity while they are online (Beale and Hall 2007). For example, the bullying can be reported to the service provider or website the bullying is happening on, or even the police if the circumstances are extreme enough (Beale and Hall 2007). Plenty of ways are available for parents to control what their children are able to access on their computers (Cankaya and Odabasi 2008, pp. 1108). Software has been developed to provide blocking and filtering on computers so that parents can limit what their child is able to see (Cankaya and Odabasi 2008, pp. 1108).

(H3) Teens whose parents use parental controls are less likely to be cyberbullied than teens whose parents do not use parental controls.

Overwhelmingly, the dominant use of the Internet among the youth is social networking sites (Valcke et al. 2011). Sites that allow some type of social interaction can be defined as a social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube) (O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson 2011). Research shows that these types of sites can enhance communication skills among those who use social networking sites (O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson 2011). Relationships among teens are not limited to time spent at school. Social media has paved the way for teens to stay in contact with each other 24/7 (Beale and Hall 2007). These sites have made it easy to build relationships and have positive interactions with peers (Gross et al. 2002).

However, despite this positivity, research has also shown that youth may become depressed while on social networking sites, which although is not a direct correlation, is a result of being cyberbullied (O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson 2011). Use of social networking sites leaves one more exposed and vulnerable to factors such as cyberbullying (Sengupta and Chaudhuri 2010). Cyberbullying can cause isolation, anxiety, and sometimes situations as devastating as suicide (O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson 2011).

(H4) Teens who use social networking sites more often are more likely to be cyberbullied than those who do not use social networking sites often.

The Internet is widely known and used as a learning and educational resource (Agius and Bagnall (1996). Along with the Internet being an educational resource, it is now used for social purposes as well as a place to let out anxiety (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, and Lattanner 2014). Young children are becoming well-acquainted with Internet usage and are beginning to use it more frequently (Valcke et al. 2011). The risk of cyberbullying increases with this rise of Internet use. The Internet provides a vast array of ways to be able to bully someone online.

Outside of a school setting, in the online world, kids can express themselves negatively or positively. This makes the Internet a more “comfortable” environment for others to join the ridicule when others cannot see them (Erdur-Baker 2010). What is done through social media, texting, and other platforms is out there forever and potentially for all to see (Seiler and Navarro 2015). The age at which children are using technology is getting younger and younger (Seiler and Navarro 2014). This puts children at a greater risk of being cyber bullied. Teens can easily access the Internet at school, home, school, or even work (Sengupta and Chaudhuri 2010).

(H5) Teens who use the Internet more often are more likely to be cyberbullied than those who do not use the Internet as often.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

***Data***

The data for this study was collected by the Pew Research Center. The survey used for this study was the 2011 Teens and Digital Citizenship Survey (Pew research Center, 2011). This survey took a sample of teenagers, ages 12-17, and their parents (*n=799).* Using phone interviews, researchers asked a variety of questions about both online and offline behaviors/experiences.

***Measures***

The dependent variable used for this study was if a teen has been “bullied online.”This was measured by the survey question: “In the past 12 months, have you been bullied … “d. online: such as through e-mail, a social networking site, or instant messaging?” The response options were: “(1) Yes” or “(2) No”. This responses were recoded as: “(0) No” and “(1) Yes.”

The independent variables used were: “safe Internet use,” “parental concern,” “parental controls,” “use of social networking sites,” and “use of Internet.” “Safe Internet use” was measured by the survey question “Have your parents ever talked with about”: “a. ways to use the Internet and cell phones safely.” The response options were: (0) “No” and (1) “Yes.” “Parental concern” was measured by the survey question: “Are you very, somewhat, not too or not at all concerned? C. How teens in general treat each other online or on their cellphones.” The response options were: (1) “Very concerned,” (2) “Somewhat concerned,” (3) “Not too concerned,” (4) “Not at all concerned.” Response options 3-4 were recoded into: (0) “Not concerned and 1-2 were recoded into: (1) “Concerned.” “Parental controls” was measured by the survey question: “As far as you know, have your parents ever done any of the following things? Have they ever: “a. used parental controls or other means of blocking, filtering, or monitoring your online activities.” The answer choices were: (0) “No” or (1) “Yes.” “Use of social networking sites” was measured by the survey question: “About how often do you use social networking sites?” The response options were: (0) “Less Often,” (1) “Every Few Weeks,” (2) “1-2 Days a Week,” (3) “3-5 Days a Week,” (4) “About Once a Day,” (5) “Several Times a Day.” “Use of Internet” was measured by the survey question: “Overall, how often do you use the internet?” The response options were: (0) “Less Often,” (1) “Every Few Weeks,” (2) “1-2 Days a Week,” (3) “3-5 Days a Week,” (4) “About Once a Day,” (5) “Several Times a Day.” “Use of Internet” was measured by the survey question: “Overall, how often do you use the Internet---Several times a day, about once a day, 3-5 days a week, 1-2 days a week, every few weeks, or less often?” The response options were: (0) “Less Often,” (1) “Every Few Weeks,” (2) “1-2 Days a Week,” (3) “3-5 Days a Week,” (4) “About Once a Day,” (5) “Several Times a Day.” “Use of social networking sites” and “use of Internet” were treated as continuous variables in this study.

The control variables used were: “parent’s income,” “race,” and “parent’s age” “Parent’s income” is measured by the survey question: “Last Year—that is in 2010—what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes?” The response options were (1) “Less than $10,000,” (2) “$10,000 to under $20,000,” (3) “$20,000 to under $30,000,” (4) “$30,000 to under $40,000,” (5) “$40,000 to under $50,000,” (6) “$50,000 to under $75,000,” (7) “$75,000 to under $100,000,” (8) “$100,000 to under $100,000,” (9) “$150,000 or more.” “Race” was measured by the survey question: “What is your race?” The response options were: (1) “White,” (2) “Black or African-American,” (3) “Asian or Pacific Islander,” (4) “Mixed race,” (5) “Native American/American Indian,” or (6) “Other.” These were recoded to: (0) “White” and (1) “Nonwhite.” “Parent’s age” was measured by the survey question: “What is your age?” The response options were: “1-99.”

***Analytical Strategy***

Using SPSS 23, weighted data, including chi-square, was used along with a multivariate logistic regression analysis. This analysis determined how much the independent variables affected the dependent variable, being the likelihood of being cyberbullied. Odds ratio and probability were used to specifically determine how much of a chance there is of being cyberbullied. This will help clarify or reject the hypotheses. The equation used for probability was:

Probability =

exp (a + b1x1 + b2x2 + b3x3 + b4x4 + b5x5 +b6x6)

1+ exp (a + b1x1 + b2x2 + b3x3 + b4x4 + b5x5 +b6x6)

**FINDINGS**

Using the dependent variable, the likelihood of being cyberbullied, a multivariate logistic regression model was used to access factors influencing this variable. According to the multivariate regression model, using the Internet safely, parental concern about how teens are treating each other online, use of parental controls, use of social networking sites, use of the internet, parental income, race, and sex can explain about 8.8% (Nagelkereke r^2=.088) of the variance in the likelihood of being cyberbullied (Model Chi-Square= 128.511; p<.001). Contrary to hypothesis one, teens whose parents show them how to use the Internet safely are three times more likely to be cyberbullied than teens whose parents do not show them safe Internet use (odds ratio=3.478; p<.001). Teens who are shown by their parents how to safely use the Internet have almost a 10% chance of being cyberbullied (probability=.098), whereas teens whose parents do not show them how to safely use the Internet have a 3% chance of being cyberbullied (probability=.030).

Contrary to hypothesis two, teens whose parents are concerned about how teens treat each other online are about 74% more likely to be cyberbullied than teens whose parents are not concerned about how teens treat each other online (odds ratio=1.740; p<.01). Teens whose parents are concerned about teen behavior online have just over a 9% chance of being cyberbullied (probability=.091), whereas teens whose parents are not concerned about online behavior from teens have only about a 5% chance of being cyberbullied (probability=.054).

Contrary to hypothesis three, teens whose parents use parental controls are almost 51% more likely to be cyberbullied than teens whose parents do not use parental controls (odds ratio=1.507; p<.001). Specifically, teens whose parents use parental controls have almost a 10% chance of being cyberbullied (probability=.098), whereas teens whose parents do not use parental controls have only about a 7% chance of being cyberbullied (probability=.067).

Consistent with hypothesis four, teens who use social networking site often are almost 47% more likely to be cyberbullied than teens who do not use social networking sites often (odds ratio=1.464; p<.001). Compared to teens who use social networking sites less often, teens using these sites every few weeks have a 3% chance of being cyberbullied (probability=.032). Teens using social networking sites 1-2 days a week have over a 4% chance of being cyberbullied (probability=.046). Teens who use social networking sites 3-5 days a week have almost a 7% chance of being cyberbullied (probability=.066), teens using these sites about once a day have just over a 9% of being cyberbullied (probability=.093). Finally, teens who use social networking sites several times a day have a 13% chance of being cyberbullied (probability=.131), whereas teens who use social networking sites less often have about a 2% chance of being cyberbullied (probability=.022).

Contrary to hypothesis five, teens who use the Internet more often are 24% less likely to be cyberbullied than teens who use the Internet less often (odds ratio=.759; p<.001). Compared to teens who use the Internet less often, those who use the Internet every few weeks have a 16% chance of being cyberbullied (probability=.167). Teens using the Internet 1-2 days a week are about a 13% chance of being cyberbullied (probability=.132) and teens using the Internet 3-5 days a week have a 10% chance of being cyberbullied (probability=.103). Teens who use the Internet about once a day have an 8% chance of being cyberbullied (probability=.080). Teens who use the Internet several times a day have about a 6% chance of being cyberbullied (probability=.062), whereas teens who use the Internet less often have about a 21% chance of being cyberbullied (probability=.209).

In regards to the control variables, it was found that teens whose parents are nonwhite were almost 39% more likely to be cyberbullied than teens whose parents are white (odds ratio=.613; p<.01). As for income, as parent income increases, the teen’s likelihood of being cyberbullied decreases by about 2% (odds ratio=.979; p<.001). Although for every one year increase in the parent’s age, the likelihood of their teen being cyberbullied decreases by about 1%, this is not statistically significant (odds ratio= .989; p<.073).

**DISCUSSION**

This study was intended to look at parent roles and involvement in their child’s online world and how general and specific Internet use differ in relation to cyberbullying. Hopefully, this study can be used to bring awareness to the prevention of cyberbullying in the future.These findings suggest that showing a teen safe Internet use does not equate to a teen being bullied less. The intention with this hypothesis was to show how being presented with safe ways to use the Internet would help a teen to not partake in cyberbullying as well as be at a lesser risk of victimization. This includes talking to strangers, giving away personal information, and cyberbullying. Expressing to teens that what they put on the Internet is potentially out there permanently and forever could urge them to use the Internet in more productive ways. This could encourage a teen to avoid engaging in any arguments or cruel comments with their peers. The first analysis did not support the claim that being shown how to use the Internet safely would prevent cyberbullying, which is supported by previous studies and results (Valcke et al. 2011). Previous research describes the Internet as being a gateway to unsafe environments through anonymity (Valcke et al. 2011).

The second hypothesis was not supported by the findings, but was supported by previous research. Previous research has shown that parental involvement can increase a child’s likelihood of reporting bullying, which could lead to ways for parents to prevent this from continuing (Ybarra and Mitchell 2004). Many students see the harm in cyberbullying, but fear the repercussions of speaking up about cyberbullying, which is the opposite of what they should think (Agatston, Kowalski, and Limber 2007, p.S60). Based on the findings, it seems as though parental concern came into the equation after the teen experienced cyberbullying. This leaves room for further research to be conducted.

Hypothesis three’s analysis indicates that the use of parental controls does not directly relate to not being cyberbullied as often. Even though this hypothesis was proven incorrect, it does support previous research. Studies have shown that when parents do not monitor their child’s online activity, their children are more likely to fall victim to bullying than those who observe what they do (Sengupta and Chaudhuri 2011). This supports the results in the sense that parental controls were possibly put into place after their child’s victimization. Previous research has also shown that most children do not tell their parents everything they do online, which would support parental controls being used after knowledge of bullying (Cankaya and Odabasi 2008, pp. 1108). Further research is needed to potentially examine whether or not parents began to use parental controls to prevent repeated victimization.

Previous research continuously supports the claim that general Internet use is not a direct correlation to cyberbullying. Research has shown that the Internet can be a useful tool for learning and social development (Guan and Subrahmanyam 2009). Some studies have shown that using the Internet more frequently might increase the risk of being cyberbullied, but general Internet use is not enough to directly correlate to cyberbullying (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell, and Tippet 2008). How the Internet is used is more likely to relate to the likelihood of being cyberbullied.

How the Internet is being used and what someone does on the Internet affects cyberbullying more than general Internet use. While research tends to lean towards cyberbullying and use of social networking sites, some research has shown that this relationship is not extremely strong. Instead, online behaviors and attitudes show a stronger relationship to bullying (Sengupta and Chaudhuri 2011). This opens up the floor for further research to see if the use of social networking sites has the largest effect, or if something else has a larger effect. However, in regards to this study, use of social networking sites was statistically significant in being more likely to be cyberbullied.

***Limitations***

Though the dataset used in this study accurately represented the U.S. population, there were some limitations with this data. The main limiting factor to this dataset was the timeline presented with the questions. When asking about bullying, the only question regarding time was within the past twelve months. To help with this analysis, knowing if the teens were bullied previous to those twelve months could have provided a better indicator of when certain things came into play, like use of parental controls. Most of the response options were dichotomous, which left many follow-up questions that were not asked. The follow-up questions that were asked would have been extremely useful to use, but they were dependent on the previous question and would not have given an accurate interpretation.

**CONCLUSION**

With teens using the Internet more frequently, awareness and prevention of cyberbullying play an important role. Educating the youth on safe Internet practices is crucial in preventing bullying. Education should also be provided for parents and school systems in order for teens to feel comfortable sharing their bullying experiences, as this study has shown. This education could help mend the gap between parents and teens in regards to technology. The findings presented in this study reiterate previous research about usage of the Internet and the chances of being cyberbullied. Using the Internet more frequently does not increase the likelihood of being bullied. Rather, these findings as well as many other studies, find that specifically what and how the Internet is used can increase the chances of being bullied. Accordingly, practicing safe Internet uses, like parental controls and other types of parental involvement are not inherently connected to being less likely to be cyberbullied. Again, further research is needed to fully understand if these safe practices were instilled before or after any bullying occurred to get an accurate understanding.

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