

## Book Review

# Cyberbullying Through the New Media: Findings from an International Network

Peter K. Smith and Georges Steffgen, editors  
New York: Psychology Press, 2013

Reviewed by: Jonathan Kremser  
Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

On September 22, 2010, Tyler Clementi, a first-year student at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, jumped from the George Washington Bridge into the Hudson River after his roommate used a webcam to record Clementi's encounter with another man in a dorm room. The student's tragic death quickly shifted the issue of cyberbullying to the forefront of what seems like a growing list of concerns facing both children and young adults. In response to the Clementi case, legislators in New Jersey—the state in which he resided—passed a new Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act, which is often referred to in the media as “the toughest such measure in the country” (Rundquist, 2012, para. 3). The legislation mandates strict new rules and time frames for schools to address allegations of bullying, resulting in the term HIB (harassment, intimidation, and bullying), which has now become part of the anti-bullying vocabulary in schools across New Jersey.

*Cyberbullying Through the New Media: Findings from an International Network* sheds light on a problem that is both old and new. The first systematic study of bullying is attributed to Dan Olweus, who conducted research involving schoolchildren in Scandinavia in the early 1970s (Olweus, 1993). Since the original Olweus study several decades ago, there has been a rapid infiltration of computers, mobile telephones, and the internet into the routine activities and domiciles of both adults and children, dramatically expanding the reach of the offender, who had previously been limited by time and space. Smith and Steffgen discuss what four decades of research has discovered about bullying, how that research aligns when bullying occurs in cyberspace, and the shortcomings of prior research when applied to the new medium.

From early studies of bullying, there appears to be some need to clarify terms used to describe the problem. The traditional description from Scandinavia and Europe was *mobbing*, which implied that the issue of bullying was perpetrated by a large group. Current definitions of bullying focus more on repetitive, intentional harm to another individual and in situations where there is an imbalance of power. Current definitions of bullying must now incorporate the offender's use of technology to carry out the intentional harm.

The book's first two parts grapple with these challenges of defining and measuring the problem in light of rapidly evolving technology. Setting the stage with a thorough review of the existing literature, Smith and Steffgen compare and contrast the problem of cyberbullying with its more traditional counterpart. They describe the different types of cyberbullying, involvement by age and gender, motives of offenders and impacts of offences on victims, youth coping

strategies, and school-based interventions. One area that should have been discussed and expanded upon is the suggestion that bullying generally lacks an overall theoretical approach.

The routine activity approach in criminology (Cohen & Felson, 1979) could serve as a useful framework for the study of both traditional bullying and cyberbullying. According to the routine activity approach, criminal opportunities are the result of likely offenders meeting, suitable targets or victims, and the absence of capable guardians. Advances in technology have provided new opportunities for likely offenders and their victims to converge in time and space, away from the protective supervision of a teacher or parent. For example, a mean text message can be sent by the offender who is riding the bus to school while the intended target is sitting in the back seat of his mother's car. In this case, neither of the two adults, the bus driver or the mother, who would normally provide some level of capable guardianship to prevent an incident of traditional bullying, are aware of what is happening. While this approach has been used extensively to explain direct physical crimes, the routine activity approach, along with an elaboration that incorporates social control theory (Felson, 1995), provides a useful theoretical approach that should be further explored within the context of cyberspace.

Menesini, Nocentini, Palladino, Scheithauer, Schultze-Krumbholz, Frisén, Berne, Luik, Naruskkov, Ortega, Calmaestra, and Blaya update the traditional definition of bullying starting with its three elements, intentionality, repetition, and power imbalance, to include the specific realm of cyberbullying, which involves anonymity and publicity. They make an important point about cyberspace obviating the element of power imbalance, which is an element in the traditional bullying definition (Olweus, 1993), replacing it instead with anonymity, which is a common feature of communication in cyberspace. Not knowing the identity of the offender likely increases the psychological impact that the bully's comments will have on the victim.

The authors further observe that cyberbullying measurement currently suffers from methodological problems, as the term is operationalized differently in survey instruments. The authors effectively break new ground by shifting away from the traditional elements of bullying to suggest that definitions incorporate three elements that make cyberbullying unique, the 24/7 possibility of victimization, the broader audience, and anonymity. The lack of consensus among researchers in how to define cyberbullying is similar to the varying definitions used within instruments designed to measure traditional forms of bullying. Overall, this essay provides a valuable new approach to the study of cyberbullying.

Part 3 explores regulation of cyberbullying and the media's role in focusing on the problem. Campbell and Završnik discuss the challenges of criminalizing cyberbullying. They mention some of the more common legal challenges, extending the problem of definition, free speech, and effective enforcement. Along with the reluctance of police intervention because of limited technological resources, the authors briefly mention the challenge of jurisdiction. Cyber-related offenses often transcend multiple jurisdictions, requiring the cooperation of several law enforcement agencies. The authors observe that the law has traditionally been based on geographic boundaries not recognized by cyberspace. There should be further exploration of how law enforcement agencies are collaborating to investigate cyberbullying, and what, if any, initiatives or task forces are currently being proposed to encourage victims to report cyber-related bullying.

Coyne and Gountsidou provide an overview of cyberbullying prevention strategies used by social networking sites, Internet Service Providers, and mobile phone companies, which are referred to collectively as *the industry*. The difficulty with this section is the broad range of policies within the industry, as well as its need to rapidly provide protective technical features

based upon consumer demand. Data presented in this chapter suggest that parents share a substantial portion of the responsibility for keeping children safe online; a finding that deserves further exploration.

A content analysis by Vaandebosch, Simulioniene, Marczak, Vermeulen, and Bonetti explores the extent and nature of cyberbullying coverage in daily newspapers across Europe and Australia. Media coverage provides vast ground for the exploration of cyberbullying as moral panic. Future research in the role of the media should explore the moral panic phenomenon of cyberbullying specifically in media outlets where there is heavy national or regional coverage of one particular incident, such as the one that happened in the United States with the Clementi case.

Part 4 analyzes what is presently known about coping with and preventing cyberbullying. McGuckin, Perren, Corcoran, Cowie, Dehue, Ševčíková, Tsatsou, and Völlink draw clear comparisons between traditional bullying and cyberbullying. The authors discuss some of the evidence-based strategies that have effectively reduced bullying and suggest that more longitudinal studies are needed. The authors also suggest a clearly delineated direction for measuring the success of cyberbullying strategies.

O'Moore, Cross, Valimaki, Almeida, Berne, Deboutte, Fandrem, Olenik-Shemesh, Heiman, Kurki, Fulop, Sygkollitou, and Stald discuss the important role of the bystander, which is an understudied component within the context of online bullying. To prevent and address cyberbullying, the authors' provide a cyberbullying prevention guidelines booklet that offers best practices for the whole school community (teachers, parents, and students). In sum, the authors effectively bridge research and policy by providing useful recommendations.

Part 5 identifies the research challenges involved in the study of cyberbullying. Cowie, Bauman, Coyne, Myers, Pörhölä, and Almeida expand the scope of the discussion beyond the more common focus on primary through secondary school to include what is currently known about the issue among university students. They provide an interesting comparative analysis between the younger and older groups of students and expand upon the social group characteristics among university students that may contribute to cyberbullying. The authors suggest exploration of restorative justice approaches in addressing cyberbullying, particularly peer-mediation and conflict resolution strategies on campus. This suggestion, along with university counseling services, might be beneficial given the absence of clearly defined legal implications for the offenders/victims of cyberbullying amongst university students who are legally adults. It is questionable, however, how mediation and conflict resolution would positively affect the victims. Further exploration of cyberbullying issues within the university setting should be conducted, particularly in light of the Clementi case.

The focus of Spears, Costabile, Brighi, Del Rey, Pörhölä, Sánchez, Spiel, and Thompson is on the positive use of information, communication, and new mobile devices rather than their use as a facilitator for cyberbullying. While the authors observe the impact that social media has on the psychological and social development of youth, there needs to be more focus on the role of parents in facilitating their children's access to social media. Moving beyond the authors' suggestion of parents merely having discussions with their children about norms and rules, there should be a focus on the encouragement of supervision and monitoring of online activities, perhaps within the framework of the routine activities approach. This theoretical concept from criminology states that there must be a convergence of likely offenders, vulnerable and available victims, and the absence of guardianship or protection by guardians for the offense to occur (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

Spears and Kofoed, Cross, Campbell, Slee, Spears, and Barnes, and Boronenko, Ucanok, Slee, Campbell, Cross, Valimaki, and Spears provocatively and appropriately call into question the more traditional methodologies of bullying research. They argue that while there is certainly a place for cross-sectional survey methodology in the study of cyberbullying, the perspective of youth needs to be engaged. The authors use the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989) as their framework, suggesting that the UNCRC has shifted the perception of childhood to one in which children have the right to share opinions about matters of importance to them. This chapter provides what should be an important roadmap for future research methodology regarding the study of a technology that is entwined with social relationships. The one theme that permeates this section is the recognized importance of researcher cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural collaboration. These research strategies, along with the addition of the youth perspective, suggest that the authors have carefully laid a strong foundation for the future study and prevention of cyberbullying.

The book concludes by articulating many of the challenges that confront both researchers and practitioners when studying and preventing cyberbullying. Patchin and Hinduja observe the importance of creating a “culture of caring” (p. 269) within the school environment, noting that youth will be reluctant to undermine the strong social bonds they have in the school environment by behaving inappropriately within the online environment. This ethic is an example of the need for cooperation across social institutions. It also illustrates how cyberbullying transcends geographic and institutional boundaries. While the specific venue of cyberbullying will certainly change, *Cyberbullying Through the New Media: Findings from an International Network* provides a stable foundation for further research and the development of social policy.

### References

- Cohen, L., & Felson, M. (1979). Social change and crime rate trends: A routine activity approach. *American Sociological Review, 44*, 588-608.
- Felson, M. (1995). Those who discourage crime. In J. E. Eck & D. Weisburd (Eds.), *Crime and place* (pp. 53-66). Monsey, NY: Criminal Justice Press.
- Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Rundquist, J. (2012, January 27). N.J. will need money to fund new anti-bullying law, council rules. *The Star-Ledger*. Retrieved from [http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2012/01/nj\\_will\\_need\\_money\\_to\\_fund\\_new.html](http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2012/01/nj_will_need_money_to_fund_new.html)
- United Nations (1989). *United Nations Convention on the rights of the child*. Geneva, CH: Author.

---

*Jonathan Kremser* is an Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania. His research focuses on school violence, discipline policies, and security. He is also interested in Pennsylvania school history from the Industrial Revolution through the First World War.