Motvations Behind Cyber Bullying and Online Aggression: Cyber Sanctions,

Dominance, and Trolling Online

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ABSTRACT

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<u>Motvations Behind Cyber Bullying and Online Aggression: Cyber Sanctions,</u>

<u>Dominance, and Trolling Online</u>

Director of Thesis: Thomas M. Vander Ven

Bullying is widely considered to be a serious social problem, with severe consequences for its victims. Recently, a new trend has emerged in bullying; it has moved to the online world. This phenomenon is known as cyber bullying. Unfortunately, because this trend is so recent, very little is known about cyber bullying. In this study, I used a broad symbolic interactionist approach to study both cyber bullying and online aggression. Undergraduate students at a Midwestern university were surveyed to determine the extent and nature of their cyber bullying and online aggression experiences. The results of the study found that 16.8% (n=37) of the respondents reported being victims of cyber bullying or online aggression in the past year. A grounded theory approach was used to analyze qualitative data from the survey, and three primary motivations were discovered. These included: informal social control, dominance, and entertainment. The author uses control theory as a theoretical explanation for cyber bullying and online aggression.

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying has long been considered to be a serious social problem in the United States; it creates a strongly negative environment for its victims, who cannot escape their tormentors for the duration of the school or work day. However, with traditional methods of bullying, victims are offered a brief reprieve in the safety of their own homes. Recently, however, a new form of bullying has emerged: cyber bullying.

Acts of bullying and aggressive hostility that were once escapable are now entering people's homes through their computers and cell phones, making it more harmful than traditional methods of bullying. This new form of bullying has been shown to have devastating effects on its victims. Consider for example, the tragic case of Phoebe Prince, a 15 year old high school freshman who "hanged herself Jan. 14 [2010] after nearly three months of routine torment by students at South Hadley High School, via text message, and through the social networking site, Facebook" (http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/TheLaw/teens-charged-bullying-mass-girl-kill/story?id=10231357).

Stories like Phoebe's are becoming more common in the news, yet researchers know very little about cyber bullying and online aggression. This is in part because the focus of academic studies on and news stories about cyber bullying is very narrow. For instance, most stories that make it into the news involve young victims, typically middle school or early high school children. A similar trend is seen in academic studies on the subject (Siann, et al., 1994; Ybarra and Mitchell, 2004; Beran and Li, 2005; Li, 2006; Patchin and Hinduja, 2006; Raskauskas and Stoltz, 2007; Hinduja and Patchin, 2008;

Juvonen and Gross, 2008; Mitchell, Wolak and Finkelhor, 2008; Smith et al., 2008; Vandebosch and Van Cleemput, 2008; Mishna, Saini and Solomon, 2009; Erdur-Baker, 2010; Hay and Meldrum, 2010; Marsh et al., 2010) which tend to focus on middle school aged children; very little attention is paid to older populations.

However, cyber bullying and online aggression affect older populations as well. Another cyber bullying story makes this very clear: Rutgers University student Tyler Clementi "leapt to his death a day after authorities said two students secretly filmed him having sex with a man and broadcast it over the internet" (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-11446034). Tyler's story shows that cyber bullying and online aggression do affect older populations as well, with equally devastating consequences.

It is likely that, as technology continues to spread and become more affordable, cyber bullying and online aggression will become more prominent social problems in our society. Researchers therefore must learn as much as we can about these issues. This study is an attempt to fill in some of the gaps in the existing academic literature on cyber bullying. As previously mentioned, older populations are largely ignored in the literature, so this study takes a sample from college aged students. Additionally, although researchers hears about the devastating effects of cyber bullying, and are getting an idea of how prevalent it is in our society, little attention has been paid to what kinds of experiences victims are having. Little attention is paid to what is being said and why. This study uses an open ended survey to investigate the typical cyber bullying or online aggression experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The nearly ubiquitous use of the Internet and cell phones is a relatively recent occurrence in American culture. The increasingly widespread access to the internet has a wide array of social implications, both positive and negative. According to DiMaggio et al. (2001), the internet has mixed effects on society. They highlight, for instance, problematic aspects of the spread of the internet, such as the digital divide (310). However, they also argue that, unlike previous concerns about the internet, it is not severely displacing time individuals might otherwise spend with real-world friends. They found, rather, than individuals tend to use the internet to extend the methods of communication they share with those real-world friends (316). Livingstone and Brake (2010) studied the implications of increased use of social networking sites. They, too, found mixed results, arguing that social networking sites allow individuals a more controllable setting in which to construct personal identities (76). However, they also argue that social networking sites also create an increased risk for experiencing cyber bullying and online victimization (78). This study also found that opportunities online were "positively correlated with their experiences of online risk" (79). A study conducted Livingstone and Helsper (2010) found that "internet literacy was positively associated with online risks" (318).

We see evidence of these risks in the media through sensational stories of children being hurt or committing suicide as a result of cyber bullying. It is clear that the claimsmaking stage (Best, 2008) is in progress. Because of the potentially deadly consequences of this new method of bullying, we require scientific understanding and

clarification of the problem. We cannot take news reports as face value, because as Mitchell, Wolak, and Finkelhor (2008) state, "media reports of egregious crimes can be misleading" and "can lead to misguided public policy and overreaction among parents and others" (p. 278).

Although some researchers believe that as social networking websites become more popular, this problem will grow (Mann, 2008), very little is known about these phenomena. There is even disagreement on what actions constitute cyber bullying and what it means to be cyber bullied. Certain researchers (Siann, Callaghan, Glissov, Lockheart, and Rawson, 1994; Vandebosch and Van Cleemput, 2008) argue that this lack of a clear definition leads to inconsistent findings in scientific studies. Sheridan and Grant (2007) similarly conclude that "differing operational definitions and sampling methods mean that results from previous studies cannot be reliably compared and conflicting findings exist" (p. 629).

Some researchers have attempted to solve this problem by conducting studies aimed at creating a definition of cyber bullying. Vandebosch and Van Cleemput conducted a study to determine a concise definition of cyber bullying. Through focus groups composed of youth ages 10 through 18, the definition "bullying via the internet" (p. 500) emerged. However, another study done by Mishna, Saini, and Solomon (2009), also using focus groups composed of youths (between fifth and eighth grade), produced a different way of defining cyber bullying. Rather than a concrete definition, they presented five themes that emerged through their study: "technology being embraced at a younger age, views of cyber bullying as being 'just another way to bully,' factors unique to cyber

bullying, anonymity, types of cyber bullying (masquerading and posting, coercing, and backstabbing), and telling adults" (p. 1224-5).

These are just two approaches to defining and understanding this issue. It is no surprise, then, that prevalence rates do vary, sometimes drastically, between different studies. Mishna et al. exemplify just how varied the research on prevalence rates of cyber bullying is when they state that "The prevalence rates of cyber bullying typically range across studies from approximately 10 to 35%" (p. 1223). This is particularly interesting, since most researchers used similar methods and collected date from approximately the same age group. Most employed anonymous questionnaires in middle school and high school classrooms (Siann et al.; Beran and LI, 2005; Li, 2006; Raskauskas and Stoltz; Smith et al.; Hay and Meldrum; Marsh et al.). Others chose to do online surveys of middle and high school students (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006; Hinduja and Patchin, 2008; Juvonen and Gross) or telephone surveys (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2004). Only a few researchers examined older populations, such as college students or adults in the workplace (Finn, 2004; Dilmac, 2009; Privitera and Campbell). Since most researchers are employing the same research methods with similar samples, it would seem that Vandebosch and Van Cleemput's argument on inconsistent definitions is supported by the wide range of prevalence rates these researchers have found. Additionally, the wide range in results discussed by Mishna et al. may prove problematic in garnering public support for policies to deal with cyber bullying and cyber harassment in schools and elsewhere, as some potential supporters may read a study that cites a 10% prevalence rate and others may read a study that cites 35%.

With such inconsistent results, some researchers have chosen to focus instead on potential causes of cyber bullying and harassment. The study conducted by Mitchell et al. sought to determine if bloggers were more at risk of experiencing sexual solicitation or harassment online than nonbloggers. They found that blogging in and of itself did not put youth more at risk of having negative experiences online; rather it seemed that those who interacted more often with others they have met online were more at risk for sexual solicitation and harassment.

Another researcher (Barak, 2005) found two major factors to contribute to bullying and harassment on the internet: disinhibition and what is known as SIDE (social identity explanation of deindividuation effects) – or deindividuation. In addition to these two factors, Barak found that certain features of the internet itself make cyber bullying and harassment more likely and possible; these features include technical and practical features, such as an easy escape from a situation or easy access to victims; a relative lack of law in the cyber world, and the norms and culture of the internet. The two most common potential causes for cyber bullying and harassment given by researchers include the roles of anonymity and disinhibition (Herring, 1999; Ybarra and Mitchell; Sheridan and Grant, 2007; Bhat, 2008; Hinduja and Patchin, Dilmac, Mishna et al., Erdur-Baker, 2010).

Other researchers have studied the effects of cyber bullying and harassment, rather than the causes. Some studies have shown that, like traditional bullying and harassment, similar electronic experiences are significantly linked to serious detrimental outcomes, such as self harm and suicidal ideation (Hay and Meldrum, 2010), feeling

unsafe in school and missing class (Marsh, McGee, Nada-Raja, and Williams, 2010) and even detrimental effects in the workplace, such as missing promotions and decreased productivity (Privitera and Campbell, 2009). Of particular concern is the fact that research has shown a significant link between cyber bullying and harassment victimization and traditional bullying victimization (Raskauskas and Stoltz, 2007; Sheridan and Grant, 2007; Juvonen and Gross, 2008; Privitera and Campbell, 2009; Erdur-Baker, 2010; Hay and Meldrum, 2010; Marsh et al., 2010).

While the data linking cyber bullying and harassment to negative consequences is very clear, the link between cyber bullying and gender is not so obvious. Several researchers have found no statistically significant link between cyber bullying and gender at all (Finn, 2004; Hinduja and Patchin, 2008; Dilmac, 2009). Others have found a gendered trend in the preferences for types of technology that may facilitate cyber bullying (Juvonen and Gross, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2008). Still other researchers have found a significant relationship between cyber bullying and gender (Siann et al, 1994; Smith et al., 2008; Li, 2006; Marsh et al., 2010). One potential cause for a gender disparity is the internet gender gap as discussed by Bimber (2000), whose study found that there are two major internet gaps: one in access and one in use. Bimber argues that the gap in access is purely due to socioeconomic status, whereas the gap in internet use may be due to a gendered aspect of the internet not yet known.

Of notable absence in the literature are studies on the actual experiences of cyber bullying and harassment. Though these phenomena are being painted in the media as a rising social problem, and there are considerable studies done on the extent of this

problem and its possible causes and consequences, very few studies exist on what victims and perpetrators of cyber bullying experience. The absence of this information in the literature creates an incomplete understanding of the problem. This in turn makes is difficult to create informed and effective policy to combat cyber bullying and online aggression. The qualitative experiences of victims and perpetrators are the primary focus of this study. By focusing on this gap in the literature, I hope to contribute to developing solutions toward reducing this social problem.

Though qualitative studies on cyber bullying and online aggression are quite rare, I am not alone in this effort. Herring (1999) did one of the few studies on the actual experience of internet harassment. According to her, instances of cyber harassment follow a certain pattern, which she calls the stages of rhetorical dynamics: first, there is the initial situation bringing people together online, followed by the initiation of harassment. Then, there is resistance to the harassment, which leads to an escalation of harassment. Finally, the targeted participants do one of two things: either they accommodate to the dominant group norms or the fall silent (156).

Evans (2001) also conducted a study focused on the qualitative experience of cyber bullying and online aggression. She found that unwanted behavior online was often dealt with in a directly confrontational way, and these confrontations typically stemmed from one individual breaking an online norm. Another study that looked at the qualitative experience of cyber bullying and online aggression was conducted by Williams (2007), who examined methods of policing undesirable online behavior in a virtual reality game.

His study showed that acts of online aggression were often met with reciprocal aggression, in order to deter the individual from repeating the offense.

An additional gap in existing literature is the lack of studies on older populations. Studies on cyber bullying almost exclusively use samples of students from the K-12 education system. There are only a handful of studies on older populations (Dilmac, 2009l Privitera et al., 2009). This, too, provides an incomplete understanding of cyber bullying and online aggression. The study I conducted focuses exclusively on college aged students (the ages in my sample range from 18 to 36). Understanding how cyber bullying and online aggression effect older populations will also help to develop effective policies to combat this problem; officials can tailor policy to different age groups if research shows they have different experiences, or can create comprehensive policies should research show that older and younger populations have similar experiences.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Understanding common themes in the personal experience of cyber bullying and online aggression requires the use of a symbolic interactionist approach. Symbolic interactionism offers a unique ability to methodically gather and analyze data the qualitative experiences of victims and perpetrators of cyber bullying. Unlike other perspectives, symbolic interactionism allows sociologists to scientifically assess the meanings that individuals apply to their experiences. This offers researchers a deeper insight into this problem than statistical studies alone can provide.

A broad symbolic interactionist approach provided the framework for conducting this study. According to Charon (2001), symbolic interactionism has five key components: social interaction, thinking, definition, the present, and people who are actively engaged (27-8). These components informed the approach taken in this study as well as the survey questions. Unlike previous studies, which focused more on prevalence rates and characteristics common to victims and bullies, this study was concerned with the qualitative experiences of cyber bullying and online aggression. I wanted to understand what kinds of interactions were taking place between perpetrators and victims, what thoughts both parties had, and how they defined their experiences. In order to gather the most accurate and useful data possible, I used Charon's remaining key components. Respondents were asked to describe only their most recent experience with cyber bullying or online aggression (the present). Giving thorough responses also required an actively engaged respondent – this aspect showed in the length and detail of

the responses: while some respondents simply wrote one line (often a fragment of a sentence), others wrote lengthy anecdotes rich with useful information.

It is important to note, however, that while I chose a quite broad symbolic interactionist approach to conducting my study, I chose not to constrain my data simply to symbolic interactionist explanations. That is, I did not seek to test any particular symbolic interactionist theory. Rather, I chose to use a grounded theory approach (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995), so as to get as much information from my data as possible. Because the body of academic research on this subject is so limited, it is important that researchers not limit their theoretical lens when developing explanations for this issue.. Using a grounded theory approach involves utilizing open coding to develop themes from the bottom up, rather than applying an existing theory to the data from the top down. While this limited my study by not testing a sociological theory, it also opened up several new avenues of inquiry through established frameworks of sociological thought to be pursued in the future.

METHODS

Research Question

Cyber bullying is currently a hot topic in the media, and it is not surprising that only the most sensationalized instances of cyber bullying (usually those involving tragedy) make it into news reports. This fact is unfortunate for researchers and policy makers, as "media reports of egregious crimes can be misleading" and "can lead to misguided public policy and overreaction among parents and others" (Mitchell, Wolak, and Finkelhor, 2008 p. 278), who go on to point out the importance of developing an informed knowledge base on the subject (280). While the topics of cyber bullying and cyber harassment are prominent in the news, there is surprisingly little information on how this phenomenon is experienced by both perpetrators and victims. Therefore, my research question was "how are cyber bullying and online aggression are experienced and understood by both perpetrators and victims of these actions?".

For this study, I define cyber bullying as repeated unwanted, hurtful, harassing, and/or threatening interaction through electronic communication media, such as cell phones, personal computers, or social networking websites. Because of the wide range of academic definitions and individual understandings of the topic, I strove to be as clear and inclusive as possible in my definition. I refer to events that cannot be characterized as bullying in this sense as harassment. Often, respondents in this study provided information on incidents that could not be characterized as cyber bullying according to my definition, but were clearly considered by the respondents to be acts of cyber bullying.

Sampling Methods

Due to the time and budget constraints of the project, an arbitrary sample of undergraduate students at a Midwestern university was used. No databases of victims or perpetrators of cyber bullying and cyber harassment exist; I therefore surveyed undergraduate students in various sociology classes, ranging from introductory to junior level classes. The classes included three introduction to sociology courses, one social problems course, one sociology of poverty course, and one juvenile delinquency course, for a total of 406 potential respondents.

Data Collection Methods

After getting IRB approval and permission from the professors of the chosen classes, I administered a self report questionnaire to the students at the beginning of their class time. I first handed out information sheets and explained the nature of the study and what my research focus was. I informed the potential participants that my survey was completely optional, anonymous, and participation would have no influence on his/her evaluation or grade in the class. Additionally, I informed students that neither I, nor their professor would know the identity of those who filled out surveys. I then informed them that to maintain total anonymity, no signed consent form would be collected, and that completion and return of the survey would imply consent. Additionally, I asked them not to fill out the survey more than once, to account for students who may have been registered in more than one of the classes I surveyed. After fully explaining the project, I took time to answer any questions or concerns that participants had, and then

administered the survey. It took approximately 15 minutes to complete, though with the exception of one class, students were given the entirety of their class period to complete the survey. At the end of class, students placed their survey (completed or not) into a box provided by me.

The survey consisted of two major components; the first dealt with the participants' demographic characteristics. This section asked for respondents' age, gender, class standing, race, and estimated family income. This was to gain an understanding of what my sample looked like, and the answers to these questions were entered as quantitative data. The second section inquired about participants recent experiences (within the previous calendar year) with cyber bullying and harassment. In the second section, participants were asked four sets of questions. Participants were asked if, during the past year, they or someone they knew had either been a victim of cyber bullying/harassment or had cyber bullied/harassed someone else. If they responded in the affirmative, they were then asked how many times this occurred and what medium was employed. Finally, participants were asked to describe, in as much detail as possible, the most recent experience they or someone they knew had with cyber bullying/harassment. This question informed the majority of the analysis.

Quantitative data was entered into Microsoft Excel. Because the focus of this project is not quantitative in nature, only basic descriptive statistics were acquired, to better understand the sample, and to know what percentage of the sample experienced or know someone who experienced cyber bullying/harassment. Qualitative data, which were the primary focus of this project, were typed verbatim into Microsoft Word. The

transcribed qualitative data were coded using the grounded theory approach outlined by

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995). This approach consists of approaching the data with a

blank slate, and building up theories based on trends seen in the data, rather than starting

with a theory and applying it to the data.

The Sample

The sample consisted of a total of 406 undergraduate students in introductory

level through junior year level sociology classes. Of these students, 220 returned

completed surveys (approximately 54% response rate). Approximately 44.5% (n = 98) of

the respondents were male and 55.5% (n = 122) were female. This is comparable to the

university population of 48.9% male and 51.1% female (http://www.ohio.edu/focus/)

Approximately 86.4% (n = 190) of the sample identified as being white

(compared to 84.6% of the overall university population), 5.5% (n = 12) identified as

being black (compared to 5% of the overall university population), 1.4% (n = 3)

identified as being Hispanic (compared to 1.9% of the overall university population),

approximately 3.6% (n = 8) responded other or biracial and 3% (n = 7) did not identify

their race. These numbers indicate that my sample was representative of the population of

the university from which it was drawn. See Table One for a summary of these

demographic characteristics.

The average age of the respondents was 19.77 years old. Ages typically ranged

from ages 18 to 24, with a few outliers of ages 26, 27, and 36. The mode age of the

sample was 19 years of age. The most common response for class rank was sophomore.

This would seem consistent with an average age of 19 years.

Respondents were asked to estimate their total family income per year. 6.4% (N = 14) of

respondents reported their total family income to be $30,000/year or less. 34.1 % (N =

75) reported family incomes ranging from $31,000 through $100,000 per year. 20.4% (N

= 45) of respondents reported family incomes of over $100,000. However, the most

common response was no response; nearly 40% (N = 86) left this question blank.

Limitations

Arbitrary sampling is rarely as reliable as a random sample, and this sample is no

exception. Findings, therefore, cannot truly be generalized and applied to the public.

Despite this inherent limitation to arbitrary sampling, though, the demographics of my

sample are consistent with the demographics of the university population. This suggests

that my findings are more generalizable than other arbitrary samples.

Additionally, the researcher was not able to ask follow up questions (which are

often beneficial to qualitative research); certain experiences are therefore unclear and

lack key components, such as the meaning participants may have attached to their

experiences and other information that may be deemed important. Furthermore, it is

possible that more information may have been gathered if I had instead used an online

survey. It is possible that because students had to hand write their responses, in the

presence of their peers, they did not provide as much information as they might have

otherwise provided.

FINDINGS

Quantitative

The results of the survey show that 16.8% (N=37) of the respondents report that they have been cyber bullied or harassed within the past year, while approximately half that amount (8.6%, or N=19) report having cyber bullied or harassed someone else in that time. Of those who reported being the victim of cyber bullying, approximately 51.4% (n=19) were female and 48.6% (n=18) were male. Of those who reported cyber bullying or harassing someone else, approximately 31.6% (n=6) were female and 68.4% (n=13) were male. A similar trend was seen when respondents were asked whether they knew somebody who was cyber bullied or harassed, or bullied or harassed another person on line. Over twenty-three percent (N=52) of the respondents reported having known someone who was cyber bullied or harassed within the last year, while approximately half the number of those who reported knowing someone who was cyber bullied or harassed (12.3%, or N=27) reported knowing somebody who cyber bullied or harassed someone else. These findings are consistent with the 10-35% range of incidence rates Mishna et al. (2009) provided in their assessment of existing literature on the subject.

Of those who reported being cyber bullied or harassed in the past twelve months, 70.27% (N=26) reported that the event occurred less than four times. Over twenty-one percent (N=8) said the event occurred four to ten times, and 5.40% (N=2) said the event happened more than ten times. Of the respondents who reported cyber bullying or harassing another person, 73.68% (N=14) reported the event occurring less than four times, and 26.32% (N=5) reported the event occurred four to ten times; there were no reports of events occurring more than ten times.

These numbers suggest that the majority of incidents that occur are short-lived. This is supported by Li (2006), who used the same range of indicators for number of times an incident occurred (less than 4 times, 4-10 times, more than 10 times). The results of his study showed that "62 percent of victims were bullied one to three times and 37.8 percent were harassed more than three times" (164).

Of the respondents who reported that someone they knew had been cyber bullied or harassed in the past twelve months, 57.69% (N=30) report that the event occurred less than four times, 26.92% (N=14) say that the event occurred four to ten times, and 9.62% (N=5) report events occurring more than ten times. Of the respondents who report knowing someone who cyber bullied or harassed another person in the past twelve months 55.56% (N=15) report the event occurring less than four times, 29.63% (N=8) report the event occurring four to ten times, and 3.70% (N=1) say the event occurred more than ten times.

Qualitative

The results of the qualitative aspect of the survey found three prominent motivations for cyber bullying and harassment. These will be discussed in greater detail in the next section of this paper, but will be mentioned briefly here. These motivations lend support to a Control Theory of cyber bullying and online aggression, which will also be explored in the next section of this paper.

The first motivation found in responses from the survey is informal social control, which for the purposes of this study, is defined as pressure from one's peers to modify

his/her behavior. This typically occurs between people who know each other in the real world (although some people attempt to hide their identity by creating fake profiles and using fake names); people typically use social networking websites to sanction unwanted behavior in their friends or acquaintances by calling them names or otherwise insulting them. Behaviors that can invoke informal social control in the form of cyber bullying/harassment can range from a lack of socialization to more serious behaviors such as theft.

The second motivation found in responses from the survey is dominance. For the purposes of this paper, dominance is defined as the attempt to hurt, humiliate, or influence the behavior of another individual in order to gain or regain access to some valued resource. These resources ranged from romantic partners to winning video games. Situations involving romantic partners appeared to be the most common occurrence when domination was the motivating factor.

The third motivation found in responses was entertainment, which is commonly referred to in the internet community as trolling, and can be defined as the attempt to hurt, humiliate, annoy, or provoke in order to elicit an emotional response for one's own enjoyment. Anonymity is a key component in this motivation. This type of cyber bullying/harassment is almost always carried out via insults and name calling.

DISCUSSION

Informal Social Control

Informal social control emerged as a strong motivation for cyber bullying and/or cyber harassing one's peers. Approximately 13.6% (n=14) of all the qualitative accounts of cyber bullying and online aggression given by respondents involved informal social control. For the purpose of this study, informal social control is defined as exerting pressure on one's peers to modify his/her undesirable behavior. The use of sanctions to control behavior has long been discussed in sociological research, and I refer to this form of cyber bullying/harassment as "cyber sanctioning." Respondents reported using cyber sanctioning to penalize perceived inappropriate behavior and to attempt to prevent such behavior in the future.

The use of cyber sanctioning to control others' behavior online has been documented in the past. For instance, Evans (2001) studied methods of informal social control in a chat room, and found the use of insults to be prevalent in dealing with undesirable behaviors. Williams (2007) studied cyber sanctioning (which he referred to as vigilantism (66)) to control online behavior in a cyber world. These informal cyber sanctions took place before official means of dealing with inappropriate behavior existed, and these "forms of vigilante justice, peer pressure and ostracization maintained order in an otherwise seemingly chaotic environment" (67).

Behavior that provoked cyber sanctions varied greatly. Something as seemingly innocuous as performing poorly in an online video game could provide enough motivation for one to cyber sanction his/her peers. One respondent reported: "I was

playing a game of Halo and I was participating poorly for my team. Because of my bad game play I began getting harassed by my teammates." Breaking socializing and dating norms are other common offenses. One respondent reported that he had not been at his fraternity house for awhile and "one of my frat brothers commented on my pic[ture] and started fighting with me because I haven't been around." Another respondent reported receiving cyber-sanctions because of a rumor that claimed she was cheating on her boyfriend. Offenses can be much more serious, though, as one respondent discussed; he cyber sanctioned his peers after they "came to my house and stole an iPod amongst other things," and then reported that he told them, "you're going to regret stealing from that house, you bitch." These responses show that both perpetrators and victims interpret these actions as legitimate and perhaps effective means of controlling undesirable behavior in their peers.

Typically, studies on informal social control discuss it as a method of reducing crime and deviance and is rarely thought of as a deviant act itself. An exception to this trend is the work done by Donald Black (1983), who discussed informal social control as an act of deviance. According to Black, people use criminal or deviant acts as a form of informal social control to penalize the actions of others. He refers to this as "self-help," which he defines as "the expression of a grievance by unilateral aggression such as personal violence or property destruction" (34). Black later argues that acts of self-help also includes "bilateral acts" such as "entering into a verbal or physical fight" (quoted in Emerson, 2006).

The results of the survey support Black's theory of self-help. For instance, several accounts of unilateral and bilateral aggression were reported. One respondent reported:

> A girl was upset that I was dating her ex-boyfriend. She would harass me with text messages telling me I was a bad friend and a slut. Then, she turned to Facebook and started posting between her and her friend bad things about me and said my boyfriend was cheating. This went on for a good six months.

This quote reflects unilateral aggression. The respondent gave no indication that she responded to the text messages, and was not involved directly when the attacker began communicating with a third party over Facebook (though this response indicates that the attacker meant for the victim to see these remarks). The personal attacks of "bad friend" and "slut" are indicative of personal violence (though of an emotional nature, rather than physical). Another respondent reported that his friend received a Facebook message "calling her Hitler, and jealous of other's attractiveness. She also received many text messages calling her other names." Again, unilateral aggression and personal violence are shown here.

Because such altercations take place in the cyber world, personal violence and of a physical nature does not typically occur (although, sometimes threats of physical violence are used as cyber sanctions). However, individuals did report several accounts of verbal fights, primarily utilizing insults. Respondents reported strong negative insults, including bitch, slut, fucking idiot, fag, home wrecker, and even Hitler. One respondent reported that often on Xbox Live, he has seen people "join games and hurl around racial/homosexual/gender insults almost casually." Many other respondents reported similar behavior on Xbox Live, and referred to it as "shit-talking" or "trash-talking."

In fact, such insults were the primary method of cyber sanctioning. Similar methods of informal social control were reported by Evans (2001) and Williams (2011). According to Evans, nonmembers of the chat room were most likely to be cyber sanctioned. These nonmembers were referred to as MUGs (this term was not explained any further than simply "a person that chats as a guest" (197), and Evans witnessed several accounts of aggressive self-help. Some of these included: "Lord be with our guest, and prepare them for the butt whoopin they're about to receive; hello mug suicide hotline .. yes sir, put your face right up to the barrel and pull the trigger! /// MUG kill" (199). When discussing the era of vigilantism as a method of informal social control, Williams reported that one member of his study stated, "if someone started to badger another user, multiple people would begin badgering the badgerer" (67).

Many respondents reported that cyber sanctioning took place on their Facebook wall or some other social networking site. One respondent reported, "I stayed in a lot because I was doing some independent studying. My friends decided it would be funny if they barraged my Facebook page with mean comments." Because these walls are owned by individuals and are viewable to anyone in a person's network, posting such insults can be considered property destruction. Such online posts can be deleted, but odds are that many people will see them before they are taken down.

Because of the largely public nature of cyber sanctions, a key component in these events is shame. It appears that individuals engaging in cyber sanctioning aim to do more than just reprimand others' undesirable behavior; they also aim to shame them for these behaviors. Scheff (1988) studied the role of shaming in informal social control. He

argued that the shaming process is "virtually instantaneous and invisible" (396).

However, this description of shaming was not seen in the survey results. Typically when

shaming came into play, it was done publicly (typically via Facebook status updates or

wall posts). One respondent reported:

> This girl kept hooking up with literally 15 guys while she had a boyfriend and she was hooking up with other girls' boyfriends. So me and my friends would make our status about how we liked being home wreckers etc. We never said her name but she knew we were talking about her because nobody else acted that way with guys.

It is clear that this respondent did not approve of her friend's behavior. By utilizing

insults, she aimed to make her friend feel ashamed of her actions; by doing this publicly

on Facebook (via status updates, which her entire network can see), she aimed to make

others aware of her friend's shameful behavior.

Another respondent reported:

> A friend was being made fun of via mass texts and Facebook because she got married to someone that was recently released in jail. Edited pic[ture]s appeared and Facebook status were indirectly making fun of her, and she knew.

Again, we see here that the intent was to make the target ashamed of their actions and

make others aware of these shameful actions.

This is in direct contradiction to the description of shame given by Scheff. While

it may occur immediately after the offense act, it can be drawn out long after the act

occurred. Additionally, while the shame the targets of these cyber sanctions feel is

invisible, the act of shaming itself is not invisible; it is quite the opposite, appearing on

widely viewed Facebook walls and other public places. Individuals not directly involved

in the conflict can be made aware the fact that the victim is being shamed, and can help

engage in shaming that person.

The potential consequences of such public shaming were discussed by Larkin

(2007). He argued that a lack of intervention when such shaming occurs "generates a

norm in which is becomes permissible to harass and humiliate those of lesser status" (14).

Typically, there is no direct intervention by officials on sites such as Facebook, where

this shaming often occurs. According to Facebook's Statement of Rights and

Responsibilities, "You will not bully, intimidate, or harass any user" (2010). However,

Facebook also states in their Statement that "We do our best to keep Facebook safe, but

we cannot guarantee it. We need your help to do that." The implication of this is that

there is no official moderator of behavior on Facebook; there is no official party to

control acts of bullying and harassment. Individuals can report such behavior, but this is a

reactionary process, in which users' accounts are blocked. However, it is easy for an

offender to simply create a new account.

Tumblr (another site where respondents reported experiencing cyber

bullying/harassment) has a similar method for dealing with this behavior. According to

their Terms of Service (2010) "Under no circumstances will Subscriber use the Site or the

Service to harass, threaten, stalk or abuse any person or party, including other users of the

Site;" however, this site also takes a reactionary approach, relying on users to report

behavior that violates the Terms of Service, stating, "If you ever stumble across anything

on Tumblr that looks like it violates our policies, please be sure to let us know." This site

takes the same approach to dealing with issues of bullying and harassment as Facebook, and it is just as easy for users to get around efforts to block their accounts.

Dominance

Another key motivation discovered from the survey was dominance. Approximately 24.3 % (n=25) of the accounts provided by respondents involved dominance, which can be defined as the attempt to hurt, humiliate, or influence the behavior of another individual in order to gain or regain access to some valued resource; the struggle of these resources is what distinguishes dominance from the informal social control motivation discussed previously.

Often, this valued resource was sex. Incidents in which sex was the desired resource were typically carried out by males and directed toward females. These females were typically former partners of the males. For instance, one respondent reported, "I don't know a lot of the details, but one of my friends (young girl, 17) was being harassed by an ex-boyfriend trying to get her to have sex with him. I know it was happening for a month or so and he pretty much filled her Facebook and phone with harassing messages."

However, it was not always a former partner that was the victim of sex-seeking acts of dominance. One respondent provided a poignant example of this sexualization:

> I was playing Xbox Live and a few little kids in grade school were playing multiplayer online with me. We all had mics and were able to talk to each other. One night a kid was trash talking me, and I started trash talking him back till he cried. Then his mom got on the mic and I said I wanted to hook up with her and make her husband seem like a retard in bed.

While this is a shocking account of online aggression, attempts to dominate others can be even more severe. One respondent reported a particularly troubling incident of cyber bullying:

> My friend was threatened over Facebook by a man she didn't know saying that he was going to kill her family. Many times this happened. He made her flash him and he created another MySpace page with her breasts on it. She told her parents and it was turned into the FBI.

Racially motivated acts of dominance were also seen in the survey responses. Aggressors often used racial slurs as a method of exerting dominance over others. Respondents reported this happening most often in Xbox Live games. One respondent reported a particularly telling example of racialized dominance:

> Some kids on Xbox 360 told me when I beat them in a game that I was a stupid nigger and that they were going to lynch me. They also said all niggers were annoying stupid and all of them should be hung.

The most common theme in dominance-motivated cyber bullying and online aggression, though, were romantic relationships. These interactions typically occurred between two or more males or two or more females attempting to gain access to a potential or a former partner. According to Bowe (2010), couples in college often use Facebook as a way to exhibit their relationship to others. They use Facebook as a tool to "depict where their relationship is going" (61). He also discusses the potential dangers in making a relationship's status so public, by bringing "problems and jealousy to the relationship, particularly when the 'ex-partner' was taken into account" (61).

The data from the survey strongly supports this claim. Of the 25 total reports of dominance related cyber bullying or online aggression, 15 involved ex-partners (60%). These typically took two forms. The first form involved ex-partners harassing or bullying

their former partners in an attempt to hurt them or get back together with them. This was almost exclusively done by males toward female ex-partners. Often the female respondents indicate that the relationship had been "bad" or "abusive" previously. One female respondent provides an excellent example of this:

> I was in an abusive relationship and when I tried to cut off all ties with him, he began contacting me in any form possible. First it was calling and texting. I blocked his number, then he began finding more numbers to call and text me through. After blocking 5 of his numbers he began threatening me through Facebook messages.

Another female respondent reported a similar story about a friend of hers: "She had a long term relationship with her boyfriend and he cheated on her. They broke up but he continued to harass her on Facebook by wanting her back. She had even unfriended him but he sent messages." Yet another female respondent reported "Ex-boyfriend, bad breakup. He attacked me verbally with very hateful words on a few occasions." The men in these instances are attempting to assert power over their victims in order to obtain what is presumably a valuable resource to them: namely, a relationship with the women they are harassing.

While these accounts are troubling, they do not comprise the majority of ex-partner related dominance incidents reported in the survey. More often, incidents of ex-partner related dominance were directed not at the perpetrator's ex-partner, but rather, the ex-partner's new partner. Unlike incidents in which the ex-partner was targeted directly, respondents reported incidents in which the new romantic interest was targeted as being perpetrated largely by females, and directed at other females. For example, one respondent reported

> The most recent instance was an ex-girlfriend sent a degrading message to my friend over Facebook. My friend was talking to this girl's ex-boyfriend and this other girl found out, found her on Facebook, and sent her a message. Most of what she said was he was with her because she was easy and that she hoped that this guy didn't get any STDs from her

This female perpetrator is attempting to establish dominance over the victim in several ways. She is attempting to distance the victim from the male romantic interest by forcing unwanted unpleasant experiences on the victim in response to her associating with the romantic interest in question. Additionally, the perpetrator is attempting to establish herself as dominant by suggesting that she is more sexually pure than the victim.

This use of sexual insults is a common theme in female-female dominance interactions involving a romantic interest. For example, a female respondent reported that a "girl got mad at my friend for hooking up with her ex-boyfriend and decided to start rumors about my friend like how she had an STD. She would text her calling her names like a slut and a whore." Another respondent reported that

> This girl was trying to break my friend and her boyfriend up, so my friend used Facebook to start rumors about the girl and how all she wanted from a guy was sex and money. As well she told them that she had std and that if they wanted to have a good time, they should call her.

These incidents do not only occur between females; the results of the survey showed that similar incidents occur between males. A major difference the survey indicated was that, while women engaging in this behavior used insults towards one's sexual purity, males reported utilizing threats of physical violence. For example, one male respondent reported, "This guy that I stole a girlfriend from years ago. Started telling me I was going to die, my current girlfriend was a whore and other insults." Another male respondent reported a similar story: "someone mistakenly believed that I

was trying to seduce his girlfriend and so he threatened me with physical violence through text messaging."

Entertainment

The final motivation that emerged from the survey results was entertainment. This is commonly known in internet culture as trolling (those who engage in this behavior are called trolls), and is defined in this study as the attempt to hurt, humiliate, annoy, or provoke in order to elicit an emotional response for one's own enjoyment. Respondents reported entertainment as the most common motivation for cyber bullying or online aggression; 30% of the accounts provided (n=31) involved entertainment as a motivation. Entertainment was the most diverse motivation in terms of individual experiences; the subject matter of these encounters varied widely. However, as the definition of trolling stated, there are trends in the desired outcome or goal of these encounters.

The first and most common trolling goal that emerged was to annoy or provoke the victim. Here, the goal was to annoy the victim or provoke them, so that they exhibited some sort of negative emotional response. Of the 31 instances of trolling reported by respondents, 18 (58.1%) involved an attempt to annoy or provoke the victim. A technique often used in these cases is to continue or intensify harassment after the victim has made an effort to stop the situation. For instance, one respondent reported, "random people continued to message her saying inappropriate sexual things after repeatedly being asked to stop." Another reports that after he received messages from a known troll on a James Bond blog he runs, the experience intensified: "He began threatening me by saying he

found my address and that I should stop 'harassing' him." Another respondent reported

that a friend of theirs was "repeatedly called 'bitch' several times over Skype."

A common theme in this type of trolling is anonymity. The importance of

anonymity in cyber bullying has been documented in the past (Herring, 1999; Ybarra and

Mitchell, 2004; Sheridan and Grant, 2007; Bhat, 2008; Hinduja and Patchin, 2008;

Dilmac, 2009; Mishna et al., 2009; Erdur-Baker, 2010). These authors suggest that

anonymity gives the perpetrator some kind of power over the victim. Several reports from

the survey support the importance of anonymity, for example, the report discussed

previously involving the James Bond blog. Another respondent reported an experience

her friend had with an anonymous troller:

> My friend has a Tumblr and there was some guy following her. He started telling
> her she was a boring teenager and that her blog should be more exciting and [she]
> replies with 'no it's mine, I'll post what I want.' He then started calling her all the
> vulgar names and telling her she was ugly and boring and only an object to men,
> etc.

Anonymity appears to be so valuable, that several respondents reported going to lengths

to create anonymity by creating fake accounts in various social networking sites. For

instance, one respondent reported that the offending party "made a fake Facebook [sic]

and asked to be my friend." Another reported that "a person at my school made a fake

Twitter page and used it to say rude/mean things about my group of friends."

However, anonymity does not appear to be as big of a factor in trolling when the

goal was to emotionally hurt or humiliate the victim, which is the second trend that

emerged from the survey. 41.9% (n=13) of the incidents involving trolling were meant to

hurt or humiliate the victim, and respondents reported that these incidents often involved friends or known peers. For example, one respondent reported:

> I had a friend who was picked on through Facebook and text messaging. Classmates would write on his wall 'hey douche' and other inappropriate stuff. They would text him saying rude mean things about being gay and saying he has no friends.

While the victim here was not likely close with any of these peers, the respondent noted they were his classmates, and therefore known to him. The fact that they bullied him over Facebook implies that they were not concerned with hiding their identities. Regardless of the goal in trolling, the survey showed that those cyber bullying or harassing others online tended to do so almost exclusively through insults.

Unlike informal social control or dominance, there is no clear benefit to this motivation for cyber bullying or online aggression. Trolls are not attempting to gain access to a particular resource or attempting to stop undesirable behavior in their peers. They seem to be acting merely out of enjoyment. A similar motivation for deviance was discussed by Jack Katz (1988) in his book Seductions of Crime, in which he argued that individuals deviant or criminal behaviors simply because they enjoyed doing so. The gratification in having done something deviant or criminal was a reward in and of itself. The argument Katz makes can be used to explain trolling. In the experiences reported by respondents, there was no goal or reward aside from simply upsetting the victim. Katz discussed several types of crime and deviance, which can be applied to trolling.

The first of these, he refers to as "sneaky thrills" (52), which are "created when a person (1) tacitly generates the experience of being seduced to the deviance, (2) reconquers her emotions in a concentration dedicated to the production of normal

appearances, (3) and then appreciates the reverberating significance of her accomplishment in a euphoric thrill" (53). He explains adolescents' infatuation with stealing small items from stores through sneaky thrills, arguing that it is not the satisfaction of having attained the item in question that is gratifying to the thief, but rather, the successful completion of theft itself.

Presumably, some trolls bully or harass others online for similar reasons; the act of successfully trolling someone is reward in and of itself. Consider, for example, this report provided by a respondent of the survey: "One of my friends had a friend who hijacked his Facebook and started writing on my wall about how stupid my religion is and how my music is bad because it involves my religion." The offending party gained nothing from hijacking a Facebook account or insulting the other person involved; we can assume that the act of successfully hijacking an account and getting away with it was the reward. Another respondent provided a similar story:

> A friend of mine had altered the home [page] of another friend's computer to meatspin.com through indirect means (he hacked the computer from several rooms away). This person felt his sovereignty was violated and was also horrified by his inability to navigate away from the site and finish his school work.

Again, there is no discernable reward in this situation aside from the thrill of successfully hacking another person's computer. These accounts exemplify Katz's sneaky thrills.

Another form of deviance discussed by Katz is the desire "to be 'bad,' to be a 'badass'" (80). He argues that those striving to be bad need to develop three aspects: they must first be "tough, not easily influenced, highly impressionable or anxious about the opinions of others" (80); they must also "construct alien aspects of the self" (80); that is,

they must distinguish themselves from moral society. Finally, they "must add a measure

of mean-ness. To be 'bad' is to be mean in a precise sense of the term" (80-1).

Several incidents of cyber bullying and online aggression were seen in the survey

that supported Katz's theory of striving to be a badass. Consider, for example, the

following story that one respondent provided:

> One of my close friends was in a rough relationship, and it eventually [ended]. Her ex-boyfriend's friends began teasing her about various reasons why they had broken [up]. They would say things like he had cheated on her because she wouldn't 'give it up,' she had a small chest so it was no fun, and other sexual remarks.

The offenders in this incident exemplify the "ways of the badass" (80). Presumably, they

are tough, and don't care what others think of their behavior. They have developed an

alien self that does not adhere to standards of moral society, which dictate one should be

kind and compassionate to a person who has just ended a relationship. Finally, their

comments and actions are just plain mean.

Another respondent provided another excellent example of a perpetrator striving

to be a badass:

> Many of my old friends from high school got Formsprings and linked their accounts to Facebook. After seeing theirs, I decided to sign up for one also, even though my friends at OU didn't really have them. Within a week, I had three nasty comments: 1.) (my full name) IS A WHORE. 2.) it's sad that everyone you met in college hates you. What's it like to not have friends? 3.) I hate everything about you.

Again, we see here that the perpetrator has successfully attained the three levels of

badass. They have ignored conventional, moral society and engaged in behavior that

exemplifies the mean-ness that Katz stated was a crucial component to being bad.

Theoretical Explanation

In order to better understand cyber bullying and online aggression, one must do more than examine common trends and motivations behind these acts. Given that the prevalence rate discovered in this study is consistent with previous works, and that this study focused on a previously understudied population, one must develop a sociological theory to explain these acts. This way we may better understand, predict, and prevent acts of cyber bullying and online aggression. There are countless criminological theories that could explain cyber bullying and online aggression, but the theory that best explains these phenomena is Control Theory (see Figure 1 in Appendix A for a causal model). According to Hirshi (1969), "control theories assume that delinquent acts result when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken" (quoted in Jacoby, 185). He argues that individuals who are most likely to engage in deviant behavior are:

> (1) least likely to be concerned about the wishes and expectations of others; (2) least likely to be concerned about the risk of punishment; (3) most likely to have the time and energy the act requires; and (4) least likely to accept the moral beliefs contrary to delinquency. (Hirschi, 1977: 329)

For the purposes of this article, Hirschi's four-part explanation of delinquency will be broken down, and each aspect will be applied to cyber bullying and online aggression.

Least Likely to be Concerned about the Wishes and Expectations of Others

According to Control Theory, individuals with weaker bonds and attachments to others are more likely to engage in deviant or criminal behavior. Those who are unlikely to be concerned with the wishes of others are also unlikely to have strong social bonds with the others in question, and therefore, more likely to engage in deviant behaviors.

The structure of the internet itself is conducive to weak bonds – relationships forged online are usually somewhat anonymous and transient, thus typically preventing strong bonds from forming. In terms of cyber bullying and online aggression, this means that perpetrators of this behavior are unlikely to have strong emotional attachments to their victims. The results of the survey supported this idea. The vast majority of accounts indicate that the relationship between the offender and victim was weak at that point in time. Additionally, it has been documented in past academic studies (Reich, 2010) that users of social networking sites such as Facebook do not feel a sense of community on the site, likely because networks are so large and members of the network are strangers to each other. Because members of these networks do not feel a strong sense of community with other users, they do not have strong social bonds to other users. It should therefore be expected that, given this theory, cyber bullying and online aggression would occur in this environment. This notion is supported by the data in this study; an overwhelming amount of incidents occurred on Facebook, rather through more personal means, such as cell phones, access to which would likely be limited to more intimate friends.

Least Likely to be Concerned about the Risk of Punishment

Risk of punishment is a key factor in Control Theory. If there are significant forces in place to make punishment of deviance or crime assured, individuals will be less likely to behave in these behaviors. If such forces are lacking, individuals' tendencies to engage in deviant behavior will increase. Risk of punishment in any online environment is considerably lower than in real life, because the element of anonymity is nearly always

at play online, and there are rarely real life consequences to online activities. Additionally, literature on cyber bulling indicates that the number of victims who report cyber bullying to authorities is much lower than the number of people actually being cyber bullied (Finn, 2004; Li, 2006; Juvonen and Gross, 2008; Mishna et al., 2009; Patchin and Hinduja, 2006; Smith et al., 2008). Additionally, as previously discussed, methods of punishment for cyber bullying and harassment on social networking websites are easily thwarted, and these methods have been shown to be an insignificant deterrent to online bullies (Evans, Williams).

Most Likely to have the Time and Energy the Act Requires

Control Theory argues that individuals with free time are more likely to engage in deviant behaviors, while those without free time (due to extra-curricular activities or other responsibilities) are less likely to do so. Generally in American culture, the use of the internet and social networking websites is considered to be a leisure activity, especially among student populations (K-12 or college), who are dedicated increasingly large amounts of time to this form of entertainment. It therefore is logical to assume that those engaging in cyber bullying or online aggression (particularly on social networking websites, which was often the case for the respondents of the survey), are doing so during their free time. Trolling is often thought of as a form of recreation in internet culture, and individuals who engage in this behavior often do dedicate time and energy to it.

Least Likely to Accept the Moral Beliefs Contrary to Delinquency

A key factor in Control Theory is the act of internalizing conventional societal norms; those who do so are less likely to engage in deviant behavior. The internet environment decreases the pressure of internalizing societal norms, likely due to the decreased censorship and supervision of online behaviors. With less pressure to conform to traditional moral beliefs, it seems only natural that one would be more likely to engage in deviant online behaviors such as cyber bullying and online aggression. In fact, the disregard of moral beliefs was an important aspect of deviance as discussed by Katz. This notion is further supported by a common phrase used by respondents. Often, when discussing an incident of cyber bullying, respondents use the phrase "decided to" or "decided it would be a good idea." This implies that victims are assuming that perpetrators are actively making decisions to disregard standard moral values in favor of carrying out these acts.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Existing studies on cyber bullying tend to take their samples from students in the K-12 education system, typically of 6th through 8th graders. Studies on older samples are not common. These studies often argue that cyber bullying is an extension of traditional school-yard bullying, and imply that the school environment, or events that take place at school are a major factor in fueling cyber bullying. While many studies indicate that anonymity is a source of power, most studies also found that victims of cyber bullying often knew their attacker (often, it was a classmate).

This study focused on college students, rather than the typically studied K-12 students, and the results showed that 16.8% of the respondents had been victims of cyber bullying or online aggression in the previous twelve months. While many of the respondents did report knowing their attackers, they are likely not around them in real life to the same extent that they might be if they were in the K-12 school structure. That is, they may have one or two classes with their attacker, but they are likely not forced to be in the same building as them for most of the day. This finding indicates that cyber bullying and online aggression are not only extensions of traditional school-yard bullying, and these findings imply that something about the structure of the internet is conducive to these acts. Future research, then, should focus on testing the control theory discussed earlier.

It is not enough to propose a cause to the problem; sociologists should strive to provide solutions to the problems they discuss. The logical solution to the control theory explanation of cyber bullying and online aggression is that regulation of the internet is

needed to protect individuals from this kind of behavior. This, however, is a problematic

solution. To begin with, the internet is vast; implementing regulations to control it would

be a gargantuan undertaking. Furthermore, the internet and those who use it are

malleable. It is likely that any regulation that was implemented would be easily bypassed

by savvy internet users. Additionally, implementing regulation would likely continue to

rely on reactionary solutions (in other words, punishment, which is a less than ideal

solution). Finally, the kind of regulation that would be needed would infringe on

individual rights, and this must be avoided at all costs.

The situation is not hopeless, though. If sociological theory can determine the

cause of a problem, then theory can point to the solution. Let us consider punishment to

be a control mechanism. Cohen and Felson (1979) wrote that "if controls through routine

activities were to decrease, illegal predatory activities could then be likely to increase"

(589). It is clear that controls online are insufficient to prevent cyber bullying and online

aggression. Punishment, though, is not the only control mechanism available. Cohen and

Felson's routine activities approach argues that three components are necessary for

predatory activities to occur: (1) motivated offenders, (2) suitable targets, and (3) the

absence of capable guardians (589). They argue that if any of these three components is

absent, the likelihood of a crime being committed decreases drastically.

The internet is certainly full of both motivated offenders and suitable targets. It is

also largely lacking in capable guardians – people willing and able to intervene on a

victim's behalf. Rather than focusing on punishing offenders or implementing regulations

that may infringe on individual rights, solutions should focus on increasing the number of

capable guardians online. This will allow for informal social control of a serious problem that is itself largely the result of informal social control; this will likely be swifter and more effective than any official regulation could be.

Marcum, Higgins and Ricketts (2010) conducted a study which applied routine activities theory to online risk and victimization, and found that a "lack of capable guardianship were not shown to be strong or consistent predictors of online victimization of youth" (399). However, this study focused on capable guardians in the real world. That is, the study focused on whether there was a capable guardian in the room with the would-be victim. Increasing the number of capable guardians in the online world who can and will directly intervene will likely be a significant factor in stopping and reducing incidents of cyber bullying and online aggression. Efforts, therefore, should be made to educate youth, parents, teachers, social workers and anyone else who may be in a position to intervene, and future research should focus on the efficacy of this strategy.

CONCLUSION

The main goal of this study was to fill gaps in the existing literature on cyber bullying. It accomplished this by studying a previously under-studied population (college aged students), seeking qualitative data from a symbolic interactionist approach, and developing a theoretical framework to explain cyber bullying and online aggression. By using open ended questions to inquire about respondents' personal experiences with cyber bullying and online aggression, this study discovered three motivations for these acts, which included informal social control, dominance, and entertainment. It is important to note, however, that not everything discussed should be considered "cyber bullying." Although many of the responses I received were text-book examples of bullying, just as many responses cannot be characterized as such. I have characterized these events as "online aggression," and though they cannot be considered true bullying, they do share the same motivations discussed in this paper.

While this study made contributions to the literature on the subject, it had several limitations. Although a sociological theory was developed from the data, this study did not test any theories. Additionally, I did not use an interactive methodology, and was therefore unable to ask for clarification in limited or unclear responses or ask follow up questions. Finally, because I took an arbitrary sample from a population of college students, the results of this study are not truly generalizable.

However, this study did make considerable progress in the academic literature on cyber bullying and online aggression. The qualitative accounts provided by the respondents of this survey aided in developing a theoretical explanation for cyber

bullying and online aggression; this theory comes out of Control Theory, and argues that cyber bullying occurs due to a lack of the concern for others' wishes and risk of punishment, some amount of free time and energy on the part of the perpetrator, and a lack of moral values contrary to deviance. Furthermore, I proposed a solution to this problem based on the control theory. I proposed that increasing the number of capable guardians in the online world would act as a sufficient "punishment" to deter individuals from engaging in cyber bullying and online aggression.

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Table 1: Demographics of Sample

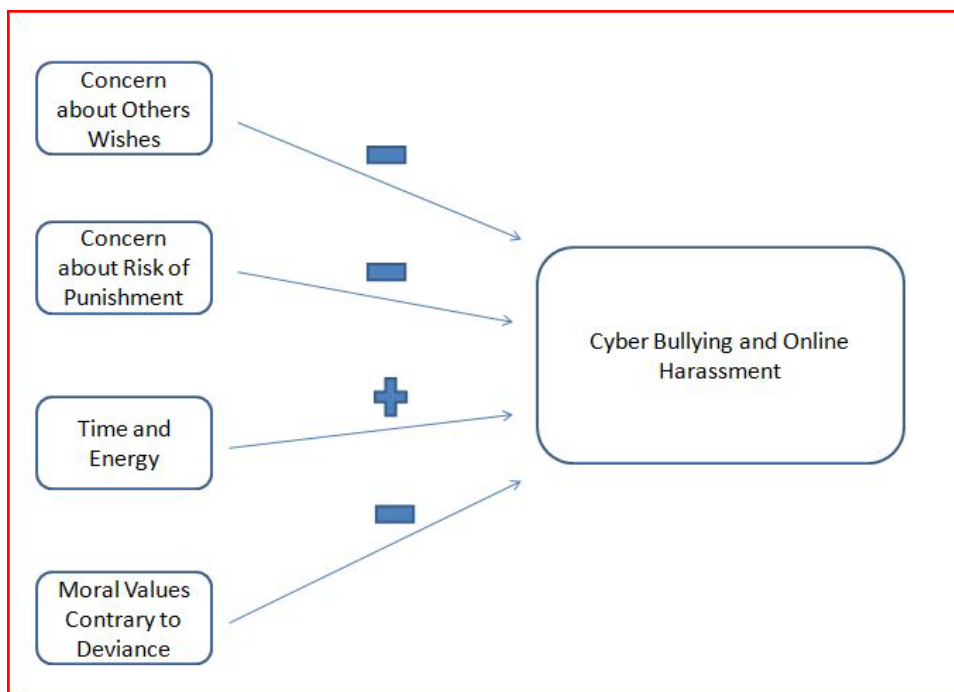|	
Males	44.5% (n=98)
Females	55.5% (n=122)
White	86.4% (n = 190)
Black	5.5% (n = 12)
Hispanic	1.4% (n = 3)
Biracial/Other	3.6% (n = 8)
Did Not Specify Race	3% (n = 7)

Figure 1: Causal Model of Control Theory applied to Cyber Bullying.

APPENDIX A: INSTRUMENT

Section One: About You

1.) Age _____

2.) Class Standing _____

3.) Gender (circle one)

     Male   Female

4.) Race _____

5.) Estimated Family Income in Dollars _____

Section Two: About Cyber Bullying

Cyber bullying is defined as unwanted, hurtful, and/or threatening interaction through electronic communication media, such as cell phones, personal computers, or social networking websites.

1.) In the past year, I have been cyber bullied (circle one)

     Yes   No

2.) If yes, how many times did this occur? (circle one)

     Less than 4 times   4-10 times   More than 10 times

3.) If yes, what technologies were used to do the bullying? (i.e. text message, Instant Message, social networking site, etc.)

_____

4.) If yes, please describe the most recent instance of being cyber bullied. Include information on what was said or done, how many people were involved, and your reaction to these events. Please do not include names or identifying information about yourself or others involved.
[provide space to write response]

5.) In the past year, I have cyber bullied someone: (circle one)

      Yes   No

6.) If yes, how many times did this occur? (circle one)

      Less than 4 times   4-10 times   More than 10 times

7.) If yes, what technologies were used to do the bullying? (i.e. text message, Instant Message, social networking site, etc)

_____

8.) If yes, please describe the most recent instance of cyber bullying. Include information on what was said or done, how many people were involved, and what the reactions were in response to these events. Please do not include identifying information about yourself or others.
[provide space to write response]

9.) In the past year, a friend of mine was cyber bullied: (circle one)

      Yes   No

10.) If yes, how many times did this occur (if known)? (circle one)

      Less than 4 times   4-10 times   More than 10 times

11.) If yes, what technologies were used to do the bullying (i.e. text messaging, Instant Message, social networking site, etc)?

_____

12.) If yes, please describe the most recent instance of cyber bullying. Include information on what was said or done, how many people were involved, and what the reactions were in response to these events. Please do not include identifying information about yourself or others.
[provide space to write response]

13.) In the past year, a friend of mine cyber bullied someone else (circle one)

    Yes   No

14.) If yes, how many times did this occur (if known)? (circle one)

    Less than 4 times   4-10 times   More than 10 times

15.) If yes, what technologies were used to do the bullying (i.e. text message, Instant Message, social networking site, etc)?

_____

16.) If yes, please describe the most recent instance of cyber bullying. Include information on what was said or done, how many people were involved, and what the reactions were in response to these events. Please do not include identifying information about yourself or others.
[provide space to write response]s