"Maybe you don't want to face it" – College students' perspectives on cyberbullying

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ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying is a growing phenomenon in our society with the technological advances that are occurring. This type of bullying can transpire at all hours via text message, email, or social networking sites. According to several studies, college students are being affected by cyberbullying, with prevalence rates ranging from 8% to 21%. Many psychological ramifications exist as a result of cyberbullying among victims and bullies. It is crucial to learn more about how this phenomenon is affecting the social and learning environments in college, as well as how college students view cyberbullying. First and second-year students at a southern university were recruited to participate in this qualitative study. The researchers conducted six focus groups with 54 students. The participants reported reasons for cyberbullying in the college environment, such as retaliation in relationships. Independence and autonomy were discussed as reasons why college students do not report cyberbullying to others when it occurs. Participants discussed future interventions to reduce cyberbullying that included coping strategies, utilizing university services, and engaging in legal action. The authors recommend utilizing a multi-level Socio-Ecological approach to reduce cyberbullying rates. Additionally, evaluation research needs to be conducted on what works and what does not in the prevention of cyberbullying.

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1. Introduction

Cyberbullying is a growing phenomenon in our society with the technological advances that are occurring. While cyberbullying has been defined as repeated, unwanted harassment using digital technologies (Adams & Lawrence, 2011; Kraft & Wang, 2010), there are several other definitions discussed in the literature focusing on threats of physical harm to online aggression to the use of specific technology such as web cams (Sabella, Patchin, & Hinduja, 2013). Although better consensus is needed for a clear definition, cyberbullying can have potentially long-lasting effects on victims and further research is needed to understand the context in which it occurs. Traditional bullying is often contained to the schoolyard; however, cyberbullying can occur at all hours via text message, email, or social networking sites. The frequency of victimization may be greater given the fact that our lives are intricately connected to technology and the permanency of what is written is an added consequence.

1.1. Emotional effects of cyberbullying

Cyberbullying victims have reported effects such as emotional distress, anxiety, and isolation (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Kaminski & Fang, 2009; Roland, 2002; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012). Unfortunately, suicide has occurred among some cybervictims and the media has highlighted certain cases, such as Tyler Clementi and Jessica Logan. For instance, Tyler's college roommate recorded his sexual encounter with another man and this was streamed live on the Internet. Tyler subsequently committed suicide three days later (Foderaro, 2010). Similarly, Jessica Logan was cyberbullied via text message when her ex-boyfriend disseminated a nude picture of her to hundreds of adolescents. Jessica endured a great deal of harassment and name-calling before she ended her life (Wells, 2012). The fact that these lives were tragically impacted by the inappropriate use of technology warrants more data on why students are engaging in this type of behavior. Furthermore, given that these specific instances occurred among college-age students, this raises the important question of how older students are affected by cyberbullying.

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1.2. College cyberbullying

Because cyberbullying occurs in high school (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Kaminski & Fang, 2009; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010; Roland, 2002), as well as in the workplace (Privitera & Campbell, 2009; Science Daily., 2012), it is logical to infer that college students also face these challenges. One study indicated that cyberbullying in high school may also lead to further cyberbullying in college (Kraft & Wang, 2010). The prevalence of college-level cyberbullying ranges from 8% to 21% (Kraft & Wang, 2010; McDonald & Roberts-Pittman, 2010; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012) and may include receiving threatening text messages, sexually harassing messages, spreading rumors, and faking someone's identity (Walker, Sockman, & Koehn, 2011).

1.3. Psychological states of victims and bullies

To what extent are college students really impacted by cyberbullying, especially given their age and experience? Researchers have sought to describe the ramifications of college-level cyberbullying to better understand the mental health outcomes. In a recent study, the psychological state of college cybervictims was characterized by interpersonal sensitivity, depression, hostility, and psychotic behaviors when compared to controls (Schenk & Fremouw, 2012). On a behavioral basis, cybervictims became less trusting of people and avoided certain situations (Crosslin & Crosslin, 2014; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012). Cybervictims were not the only ones affected, but cyberbullies themselves also displayed psychological effects as a result of the victimization. Interestingly, cyberbullies manifested many of the same symptoms as victims, but also reported increased aggression levels, violence, and drug crimes compared to controls (Schenk, Fremouw, & Keelan, 2013).

1.4. Qualitative research is needed – purpose

Given the psychological states of students involved in cyberbullying, it is crucial to learn more about how this phenomenon is affecting the social and learning environments in college. When cyberbullying occurs in high school or in the work place, there are trusted people who can assist with these situations (e.g., parents, counselors, supervisors); however, college students may not have many resources at their disposal, particularly at a time when independence and autonomy is reinforced. Previous research has largely been quantitative to better describe the scope of the problem. Nevertheless, there are very few qualitative studies in the published literature about how college students perceive cyberbullying. Qualitative approaches are crucial to glean more in-depth descriptions of cyberbullying and to determine whether college students view cyberbullying as an issue.

Furthermore, prevention programs are more effective when the social context is understood instead of relying solely on individual skills (Page & Page, 2011). Prevention requires understanding the factors that lead to cyberbullying, and the interplay of factors in social environments is often explained well with the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention [CDC], 2013). This includes levels of influence (i.e., individual, organizational, community, and policy) that impact cyberbullying attitudes and behaviors in college students. By applying the SEM, salient factors may be identified to guide multi-level interventions to prevent cyberbullying. The purpose of this study was to assess undergraduate students' perceptions of cyberbullying by conducting several focus groups. Additionally, the authors sought to determine acceptable interventions to reduce cyberbullying in this population by applying the SEM.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

First and second-year students at a southern university were recruited to participate in this study. Students in their first years of college were sought because they are more likely to live on campus and in a community with other students where cyberbullying may be more pervasive.

Potential participants were informed of the study using various channels, such as announcement in undergraduate classes, an invitation to participate using a campus-wide information board, and through the psychology department which requires students to participate in research studies. While there were some students who participated in the study due to the university-wide advertisements, most participants were drawn through psychology. The study was advertised as a way for participants to express their views on the positive and negative aspects of technology, especially in social networking. All students received partial course credit and a $25 gift card as a reimbursement for their time. The study was approved by the university Institutional Review Board.

There were 54 students who participated in this research with the mean age of 19 years (SD = 1.8; range, 18–27). The majority of the participants were female (85%) and several ethnicities were represented, such as African American (33.33%), Hispanic (27.8%), Asian (18.5%), and Caucasian (14.8%).

2.2. Research design

The researchers conducted six focus groups (6–10 participants per group) to learn more about college students' experiences with cyberbullying, and collected rich contextual data on how students perceived this issue. Two researchers experienced in qualitative approaches conducted the focus groups, as a moderator and note taker, respectively. Given the anonymity and opportunity for clarification in focus groups (Then, Rankin, & Ali, 2014), this design was well-suited for the nature of this study. The design also allowed for individual and group opinions to be expressed in order to gain an overall understanding of the issue.

2.3. Discussion guide

The authors carefully reviewed the current literature on cyberbullying to develop a discussion guide for the facilitation of the focus groups. Participants answered open-ended questions regarding their views of cyberbullying and described any experiences they have had on this topic. The following interview questions were utilized: (1) What does cyberbullying mean to you? (2) How useful is the term "cyberbullying?" (3) Is cyberbullying a significant issue in the college setting? (4) Should more attention be given to cyberbullying in the college arena? If so, who should be involved?

2.4. Data collection

When participants attended the focus group, they were in a private room on campus. Light refreshments and a brief introduction to the study were provided. Ground rules and expectations for participation were communicated, as well as the need to treat all information conveyed as confidential. Additional information about the study, including potential risks, was communicated and the participants completed the informed consent form. Before the groups began, the participants also completed a brief demographic questionnaire. Because this topic is on deviant behavior, the researchers asked an ice breaker question on the positives

and negatives of technology. Once the group was comfortable sharing their opinions, the moderator proceeded to ask the planned discussion questions. The researchers did not define cyberbullying, but fully relied on constructivism to explore how college students viewed this phenomenon. The focus group interviews were audio recorded, but only first names were used to protect the identity of the participants. Each focus group lasted from 60 to 90 min.

2.5. Data analysis

The audio files were transcribed by an administrative assistant who was hired as an outside consultant. Once the transcriptions were complete, the researchers read through the data several times independently. Thematic analysis was conducted and two researchers independently developed a list of codes based on line by line analysis of the data. The codes were collapsed into similar categories to develop overarching themes and sub-themes. For instance, one of the discussion questions asked "what does cyberbullying mean to you?" While reviewing the examples of cyberbullying provided, the researchers identified "reasons for cyberbullying" as a spontaneously emerging theme and looked for the underlying trends in the data. Codes like "teach someone a lesson" or "cause relationship problems" were condensed into the sub-theme of "inflicting harm on relationships." This process was repeated to identify themes/sub-themes in the data. The research team re-convened to compare their codes/emerging themes and found that there was a high degree of similarity, and any differences were discussed and re-evaluated. Once the themes and sub-themes were finalized, the researchers reviewed the data using a content analysis approach to collect the frequencies in which participants mentioned the various themes.

2.6. Validation

A follow-up focus group was conducted with 10 students who were representative of the study population to facilitate a member-check of the data. A summary of the data along with quotes to support participants' perspectives were presented and discussed. Participants in the member-check focus group confirmed many of the findings, but preferred a different venue for cyberbullying education than some of the original participants. In addition, an outside researcher reviewed the results and provided helpful feedback and asked clarifying questions in the form of peer debriefing.

3. Results

In Fig. 1, the themes and sub-themes are aligned with the research questions to illustrate the natural flow of data and how the researchers embodied the findings. The following themes were identified: Reflections on cyberbullying; Reasons for cyberbullying; Perceptions of cyberbullying terminology; Pertaining to college students; and Awareness & education. The authors have listed salient quotes below to provide a rich context illustrating the participants' perspectives on cyberbullying.

3.1. Reflections on cyberbullying

3.1.1. Mocking
Technology can be utilized to sabotage one's reputation and to masquerade as another person in order to obtain sensitive information (Walker et al., 2011). Over 50% of participants reported that cyberbullying is often used to mock others in this manner. For instance, one person said, "I know if you post a picture of somebody behind their back and it is making fun of them, it does not

matter if you post it and you feel bad and you delete it." The student continued to express that the damage was already done since postings can never be truly erased online.

Participants were affected by masquerading and shared about situations that escalated. A participant was contacted by another female student who "created this alias and used her cousin's pictures…he was really attractive, so she just created a Facebook [account] portraying herself as a guy….and used all of his pictures….she befriended 5 girls in the school and I was one of them and she just created this huge elaborate story. She even got in a relationship with a girl at school pretending to be a guy."

3.1.2. Childish
Approximately 17% of participants expressed that cyberbullying is childish and not something you communicate about with others, like parents or friends. One participant stated that "cyber bullying is childish, but then again people are going to get hurt by it by the end of the day…and everybody sees it." While understanding the emotional ramifications of cyberbullying, some participants did not know how to handle the idea of cyberbullying. "You just feel like it is funny… I know it's not funny but just like seems a little more childish to me."

3.1.3. Time for contemplation
Six participants (11.3%) noted that people become very bold online and act foolish when communicating on social networking sites. One person said, "you have time to think about it" and devise a hurtful response on a social networking site. The fact that anonymity can fuel cyberbullying along with the time to contemplate a response, one participant reported that "it's the same concept as when you're in a mascot suit, they can kind of do whatever they want because nobody can really see who they are…when you're not face to face, you have time to process what someone's really thinking and you're not relying on your true people skills."

3.2. Reasons for cyberbullying

3.2.1. Inflict harm on relationships
According to 30% of participants, cyberbullying may be used to create disagreement or harm romantic relationships by friends, acquaintances, and ex-significant others. For instance, one participant stated that "some people posted pictures of somebodies girlfriend….and caused problems relationship-wise or he posted pictures at parties….situations that could be embarrassing or could lead to trouble down the road." Other people used cyberbullying as a way to play a mean trick on another person, such as when a participant "posted a picture of one of my brothers and like you passed out on the couch like look you were really messed up….we use it more like a reminder…wow I need to watch myself next time I go out to not to drink as much, so I know my limits."

3.2.2. Retaliation
Eleven participants (20.7%) stated that cyberbullying is a way to retaliate when relationships go awry and in one instance, someone said she was supposed to go out with a guy and "she found out that the guy wasn't good so she didn't go out for the date and he kept emailing her and he kept using Blackboard" as means to make repetitive contact. Another participant said that she "has an ex that's just relentless…I deleted my Facebook and any type of communication and he will hack into any kind of email….and he sent photos to my current boyfriend through my email and he uploaded them through Google chrome." Similarly, an ex-boyfriend of another student attempted to become Facebook friends with all of her friends to share the truth about their relationship.
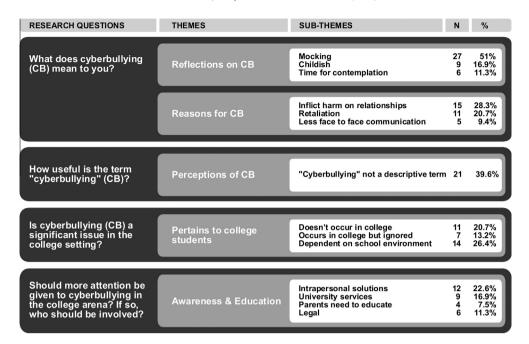
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	THEMES	SUB-THEMES	N	%
What does cyberbullying (CB) mean to you?	Reflections on CB	Mocking Childish Time for contemplation	27 9 6	51% 16.9% 11.3%
	Reasons for CB	Inflict harm on relationships Retaliation Less face to face communication	15 11 5	28.3% 20.7% 9.4%
How useful is the term "cyberbullying" (CB)?	Perceptions of CB	"Cyberbullying" not a descriptive term	21	39.6%
Is cyberbullying (CB) a significant issue in the college setting?	Pertains to college students	Doesn't occur in college Occurs in college but ignored Dependent on school environment	11 7 14	20.7% 13.2% 26.4%
Should more attention be given to cyberbullying in the college arena? If so, who should be involved?	Awareness & Education	Intrapersonal solutions University services Parents need to educate Legal	12 9 4 6	22.6% 16.9% 7.5% 11.3%

Fig. 1. Thematic analysis with frequency and percentages of sub-themes.

3.2.3. Less face to face communication

Five participants thought that people rely on technology too much for communication and relationships are "getting a lot more distant, cause there relying on, there not going to see this person, they just type in a message, 'hey I miss you' and don't even have to mean it." Another participant stated that it is difficult to have a real connection with others, and that "you don't see each other face to face anymore." By having less face to face contact, people may struggle to discern joking via digital technologies. "Interpretation can be skewed, because you can't crack a joke over a text message….and they don't hear the way that you said it so they misconstrue what you mean by it." Intent to harm is an accepted criterion for cyberbullying, and while the sender of the message may assume that a "cyber-joke" is funny, the receiver of the communication may perceive the behavior as mean or harmful and lead to a "texting war."

3.3. Perceptions of cyberbullying terminology

3.3.1. 'Cyberbullying' not a descriptive term

Approximately 40% of participants believed that the term 'cyberbullying' is outdated and one person said "We are like the Jetson's using terms like cyberbullying, as if we were in the video game or something." Similarly, another person said that "nowadays, the cyber world is a part of our real world… it used to be separated, but I feel it's a way of life now." The fact that cyberbullying can occur via text message apart from the Internet indicates the term can be misleading. Some participants thought that the word harassment or attack would better describe cyberbullying—"I feel like it is kind of an attack whereas bullying I think of a TV show of a little kid is picking on a smaller kid." Interestingly, some participants did not realize they were cyberbullied in the past until they completed the focus group interview. Apparently, the terminology did not register with them enough to be cognizant of what was occurring in relationships.

3.4. Pertaining to college students

3.4.1. Does not occur in college

Eleven participants (20.7%) did not think that cyberbullying is an issue for college students. They gave examples of how older

students are more focused on school and have already "figured out on our own how to handle cyber bullying in high school." Another person thought that college students do not "have that much time on their hands in college to just sit around and stir up drama; it's definitely like in the younger groups like in high school or middle school."

3.4.2. Occurs in college but ignored

Not all students believed that cyberbullying occurs only in younger students, with several participants sharing that it does affect college students, but they handle cyberbullying discretely (13.2%). One participant said, "Maybe you don't want to face it, you know you are an adult and you just make that problem disappear and maybe just deal with it yourself." The desire for self-reliance was quite apparent in participants, with one person commenting that "you know, I should really just deal with this myself… in adulthood you don't want to rely on your parents or talking to someone like, you just feel you can deal with it yourself."

3.4.3. Dependent on school environment

Participants who have attended other universities stated that cyberbullying was rampant at the "party schools" and is more dependent on the culture of the school (26.4%). "I think it just depends on the school, but this is a real hard core academic school like, no one wants to hang out…I went to another university, that's a party school and you have a good time." A participant shared that her friend at another university was cyberbullied the first semester of college, "she was getting picked on because of her size by her roommates and because she snored… they would just attack her on Twitter."

3.5. Awareness and education

3.5.1. Intrapersonal solutions

Over 20% of participants thought that cyberbullying was a rite of passage in life and it makes us stronger. "Bullies are going to be bullies whether they're on the Internet or in person…so be prepared and don't take it seriously." Inner strength was a coping strategy mentioned and one person said, "if you're a strong person than you can take your stance and no one can push you over."

Others have deactivated their Facebook account to stop further cyberbullying from occurring.

3.5.2. University services

Nine participants (16.9%) reported that cyberbullying awareness could be disseminated via campus services, such as through the counseling office, student life, and student organizations. Resident Assistants (RAs) in the dormitories could also be utilized in helping students become more educated in online harassment. One participant stated, "I do remember there being situations where if they were in the same dorms as a lot of different girls, they [girls in the dormitory] would use the Internet as avenues to pick on each other or expose things about each other, cause they all live in such a small setting with a bunch of strangers."

3.5.3. Parental involvement

Some participants (7.5%) believed that parents were a crucial component to curbing cyberbullying, "because they are raising them [students], they talk to them daily and tell them what is good or bad." However, other participants acknowledged that parents are from a different generation and may not understand cyberbullying or the ramifications. "Unfortunately parents may not know…maybe they don't realize what could happen…kids are growing with technology now and that's a different generation versus parents who didn't grow up with it, and were introduced later on, so more awareness is needed." Others noted that parents may not believe that their child is a bully and "they're not looking to see if their kids are the ones instigating it or saying something that they shouldn't say."

3.5.4. Legal

Approximately 11% of participants thought that legal action was necessary to stop cyberbullying from occurring and it was noted that these particular students had struggled with ongoing cyberbullying with others to the point that the authorities needed to be involved. "I feel like it should be the court…a lot of people are not threatened by the school…people don't even take it seriously." Financial consequences were mentioned as a better way to raise awareness. One person mentioned the need to document and go to court with evidence – "they're not going to take you seriously…you have to have written accounts or picture accounts."

4. Discussion

The first goal of this study was to examine undergraduate students' perceptions of cyberbullying. The results confirmed what others have reported that cyberbullying continues from secondary schools into the college setting (Adams & Lawrence, 2011; CDC, 2011; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2014). Additionally, this study provided new insight into how college students may not seek help regarding a cyberbullying situation, relying more on their own resources for a solution.

4.1. Cyberbullying terminology

Some participants portrayed an accurate understanding of what the term truly meant while others associated cyberbullying with childish behaviors from elementary school. Participants were less inclined to discuss cyberbullying issues with parents or friends thinking they would appear immature. Several participants suggested "cyber-attack or harassment" as a better term to describe cyberbullying, conveying the urgent, sensitive nature of this power imbalance. The discrepancy in understanding the term confirms research conducted by Sabella et al. (2013, p. 2704)—"that everyone knows what cyberbullying is" is a myth. During the focus

groups, quite a few students realized that they had in fact been cyberbullied, but had previously been unable to identify this phenomenon. As documented in the literature, other researchers found cyberbullying terminology to be outdated and have expressed the need for a new term (Dredge, Gleeson, & Garcia, 2014). Several of the reasons discussed in the focus groups for cyberbullying (e.g., mocking and retaliation) are well defined in the literature (Doane, Pearson, & Kelley, 2014; Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2013), but having an updated label for this type of bullying would enable victims to better understand what they are experiencing.

4.2. Addressing cyberbullying in college

While some students did not think that cyberbullying occurs in college or that it was important, the majority thought it deserved more attention. Cyberbullying has not been widely studied in the college population; however, available studies in the literature have found a natural carryover into the college setting (Adams & Lawrence, 2011; CDC, 2011; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2014). As stated by participants, they were intent on handling cyberbullying occurrences independently or perhaps not even facing these situations because of the stigma associated with bullying as a young child's dilemma. For this reason, more discussion is needed on how college students encounter cyberbullying and the fact that this issue is a recognized problem in the workplace as well.

4.3. Cyberbullying initiatives in college

Based on previous reports and confirmed by the participants in this study, cyberbullying can result in serious actions that lead to further school violence (Duncan, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Therefore, more serious consequences should be established to raise significant attention at the college level (Zalaquett & Chatters, 2014). In the follow-up focus group, substantial discussion took place about the most appropriate way to raise awareness. While first-year orientation seems like an obvious place, several students commented that, "I don't really listen" and "It doesn't really sink in." Students recommended utilizing RAs to conduct ongoing workshops for their floor or to pass out fliers with information. It was also suggested to include information on cyberbullying as part of the "First Year Course" – a class designated to help students adjust to their first year of college which is being offered on many university campuses. As stated above, students also noted that if more severe consequences were in place and students knew about those consequences ahead of time, they might be more likely to take cyberbullying more seriously.

4.4. Future interventions

The secondary purpose of this study was to determine acceptable interventions to reduce cyberbullying in this population. Based on the findings from this study as well as from the literature, the researchers recommend utilizing a multi-level SEM approach to addressing cyberbullying in the college setting (Table 1). Stanbrook (2014) discussed this approach extensively in the secondary school setting–that it is critical to include all key stakeholders if there is to be significant change.

4.4.1. Intrapersonal interventions

At an individual level, this study has further demonstrated that cyberbullying among college students is an issue that requires more education. Additional training is needed to reinforce the idea that cyberbullying is not acceptable and should not be considered a "rite of passage," as 20% of participants in this study reported. To affect change at the individual level, the notion that "bullying is

Table 1
Utilizing a socio-ecological approach to reduce cyberbullying in college students.

Level of intervention	Selected quotes and intervention examples
Individual level	"Bullies are going to be bullies whether they're on the Internet or in person…so be prepared and don't take it seriously." Interventions: - Expose the idea that "bullying is expected or normal" - Create a system for victims to report cyberbullying instances
Organizational level	"…they would use the Internet as avenues to pick on each other or expose things about each other while living in the dormitory." Interventions: - Awareness curriculum for RAs and student life personnel - Conduct surveys to assess cyberbullying occurrence on college campuses
Community level	"…kids are growing with technology now and that's a different generation versus parents who didn't grow up with it, and were introduced later on, so more awareness is needed." Interventions: - Shape negative perceptions of cyberbullying to foster changes in attitude - Reinforce positive norms related to acceptable technology use
Policy level	"I feel like it should be the court…a lot of people are not threatened by the school…people don't even take it seriously." Interventions: - Establish guidelines at universities for handling cyberbullying instances - Align university policies with emerging state and federal laws on cyberbullying

expected or normal" needs to be exposed. Many of the students discussed cyberbullying as embarrassing, taboo, and childish. Students may be ashamed to come forward appearing like a high school student – as documented by Adams, Lawrence, and Schenck (2008) who stated that college students did not know where to go to report the cyberbullying. Some of the participants in the current study deactivated their social media accounts. However, Sabella et al. (2013) commented that this defense is not always effective, as the cyberbullying can continue even without the victim's online presence. With an increased level of awareness as well as an infrastructure to support cyberbullying reporting, students would receive backing from both peers and personnel if they came forward with claims.

4.4.2. Organizational interventions

At an organizational level, an awareness curriculum for RAs and student life personnel would be useful to increase awareness about the problem and solidify definitions for university personnel that handle students on a routine basis. In addition, universities may also elect to survey college law enforcement departments to determine the extent of cyberbullying cases that are reported. How often has legal action been needed due to cyberbullying? Are there protocols in place on university campuses for this type of behavior?

4.4.3. Community interventions

At a community level, awareness programs can continue to help shape cultural values and norms against cyberbullying. Studies have repeatedly shown that perceptions of cyberbullying are correlated with cyberbullying behaviors and recommendations include interventions that shape less accepting attitudes about cyberbullying behaviors (Boulton, Lloyd, Down, & Marx, 2012; Doane et al., 2014). The majority of people use technology in appropriate ways, so it is important to reinforce positive norms, while also assessing for any deviant behavior (Sabella et al., 2013). In addition, the community should continue to support cyberbullying education and enforcement on the college campus.

4.4.4. Policy changes

Lastly, at a policy level, the researchers recommend that universities establish guidelines for handling cyberbullying instances and to consider including repeated, severe cyberbullying under the same guidelines as harassment (Willard, 2012). Approximately 20 states in the US have passed cyberbullying legislation (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014), and as this number grows, universities will benefit from aligning their policies to support state and federal laws to better protect the learning environment.

5. Limitations

The researchers utilized a convenience sample of students from the psychology department at a public, southern university. Therefore, the results may not be generalizable to the general public. In addition, it is possible that only those students that had experience with or an interest in cyberbullying chose to participate in the study. However, the results from this study aligned closely with other studies in the literature.

6. Conclusion and future research recommendations

This was one of the first qualitative studies that sought to identify how college students view cyberbullying in a social context. In-depth data, such as this, is very useful in generating theories and these results can be applied to future interventions to reduce cyberbullying in college students. Future recommendations include follow-up surveys with college level administrators at a variety of universities to gain further knowledge about their perceptions of cyberbullying and their view of the university role. In addition, all stakeholders, such as RAs, student life personnel, counselors, faculty, and students should be engaged to determine their perceptions of cyberbullying at the college level and how they have handled instances in the past. Schenk et al. (2013) discuss the importance of understanding cyberbullies and designing prevention programs that address the social factors at play. More research is needed to further examine those factors. Lastly, as Sabella et al. (2013) point out, much evaluation research needs to be conducted on "what works and what doesn't" in the prevention of cyberbullying.

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