Cyberbullying: A Moving Target

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Introduction

- Research examining individual-level differences in cyberbullying involvement has resulted in mixed findings.
- Investigations of age differences have varied, with studies suggesting that electronic perpetration is most common during early and middle adolescence (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Ševcˇíková & Šmahel, 2009). However, college students have also reported experiencing cyberbullying (Zalaquett & Chatters, 2014).
- Gender differences have also been examined; however, a synthesis of the literature found mixed results (Tokunaga, 2010).
- In addition, research has primarily utilized binary (i.e., male and female) gender variables in bullying research. Given the well-documented research on the bullying experiences of sexual and gender minority youth, further research is needed to provide a more realistic examination of the cyberbullying experiences for all individuals.

Research Questions

- Does self-reported cyberbullying involvement (e.g., perpetrator, victim) differ across participants' age, gender identity, or sexual orientation?
- Are victims or perpetrators of cyberbullying more likely to report involvement in the same role in traditional bullying?
- Which sites and applications are most often reported by cyberbullying victims?

Method

Participants

- Data were collected from 1,731 participants between the ages of 13 through 25 in 2016. In this study, responses from youth and young adults in 10 countries (e.g., United States, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom) were analyzed. Participants had a mean age of 19.79 (SD = 2.98) and were primarily Caucasian (63.3%), from the United States (43.1%), and identified as gay or lesbian (40.8%). Additionally, 41.0% self-reported as female, 50.4% as male, 2.3% transgender, 3.5% genderqueer or pangender, and 2.5% other or prefer not to disclose.

Measures

- *Bully Survey- Student Version* (BYS-S; Swearer, 2001)
  The BYS-S is a 44-item self-report survey that assesses participants' bullying experiences and perceptions. Two items were included in this study that measured participant's self-reported involvement in bullying this past year.
- *Cyberbullying Questionnaire* (CQ; Myers, 2016)
  The CQ is a 47-item self-report survey that was adapted with permission from Smith's Cyberbullying Questionnaire (Smith et al., 2008). This adapted measure assesses for participants' involvement in cyberbullying as a victim and/or perpetrator and includes many updated methods for cyberbullying perpetration (e.g., social media websites and applications, online gaming).

Procedure

- Participants were recruited online with IRB approval from May to July of 2016.
- Participants completed all measures via the online survey platform Qualtrics
- Data were collected as part of a larger ongoing international study designed to study the factors needed in creating a kinder and braver world.

Table 1. Involvement Rates for Traditional and Cyberbullying

Type of Bullying	Yes	No
Traditional Bullying: Victim	47.1%	52.9%
Cyberbullying: Victim	22.7%	77.3%
Traditional Bullying: Perpetrator	13.8%	86.2%
Cyberbullying: Perpetrator	5.0%	95.0%

Table 2. Frequency of involvement

Type of Bullying	One or more times a month	One or more times a week	One or more times a day
Traditional Bullying: Victim	59.0%	24.8%	16.2%
Cyberbullying: Victim	83.9%	12.3%	3.9%
Traditional Bullying: Perpetrator	80.6%	12.9%	6.5%
Cyberbullying: Perpetrator	81.2%	10.5%	8.3%

Results

- Involvement and frequency rates for traditional and cyberbullying are included in Tables 1 and 2.
- Eight separate chi-square analyses were conducted to determine the relationships between reported involvement in cyberbullying and age, gender identity, and sexual orientation, as well as the relationship between reported involvement in traditional bullying and cyberbullying.
  - The chi-squares evaluating sexual orientation and cyber victimization, as well as age and both cyber victimization and perpetration were non-significant. In addition, the chi-squares examining the relationships between cyber perpetration and both gender identity and sexual orientation were unable to be interpreted due to expected cell counts below five.
  - There was a significant relationship between victimization through cyberbullying and self-reported gender identity (X^2 (4, N = 1,089)= 15.364, p =.004, Cramer's V = .119). Follow-up analyses revealed that transgender youth were more likely to report cyberbullying victimization than were youth who identified as male (X^2 (1, N = 569) = 13.285 , p < .001), female (X^2 (1, N = 466) = 11.561 , p < .001), or other/prefer not to disclose (X^2 (1, N = 56) = 4.051, p < .05).
  - There was a significant relationship between victimization in traditional and cyberbullying (X^2 (1, N= 1,089) = 121.418, p < .001, ϕ = .334).
  - There was a significant relationship between perpetration in traditional and cyberbullying (X^2 (1, N = 1,080) = 68.272, p < .001, ϕ = .251).
- Of those who reported as victims of cyberbullying, 77.4% also reported being victimized by traditional bullying, and for those who were not cyberbullied, 37.7% reported being traditionally bullied.
- Of those who reported as perpetrators of cyberbullying, 53.2% also reported perpetrating traditional bullying, and for those who did not cyberbully others, 11.4% reported bullying others through traditional means.
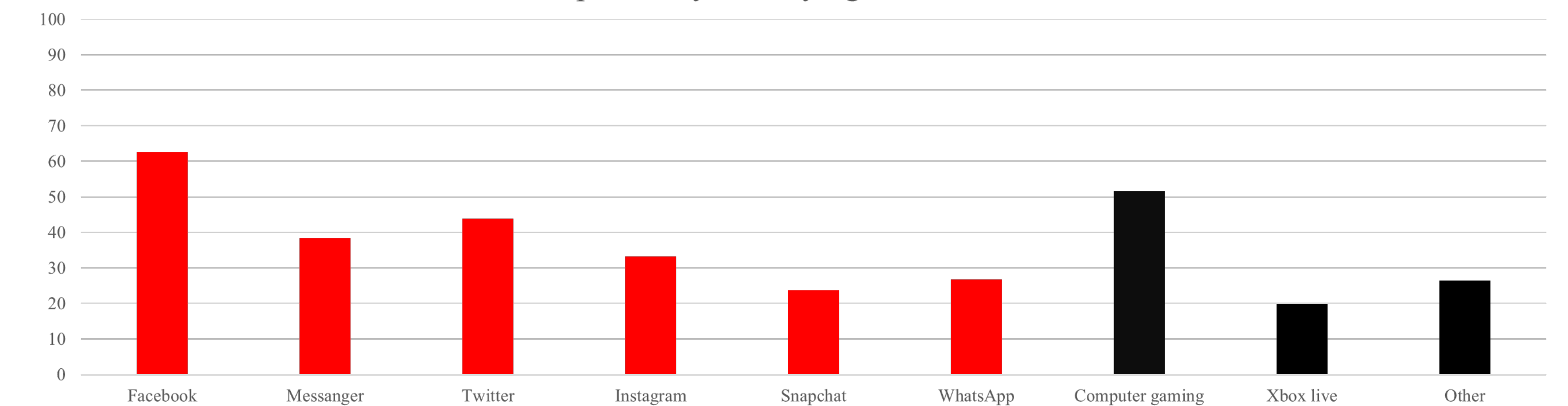- Figure 1 displays reported social media sites for cyberbullying victimization.

Figure 1. Percentage of social media sites and online gaming platforms used for cyberbullying

Discussion

- As has been previously found in the bullying literature, participants reported cyberbullying involvement as occurring less frequently than does traditional bullying.
- However, the majority of participants who reported cyberbullying involvement as a victim or perpetrator reported involvement in the same role in traditional bullying. Thus, while cyberbullying may occur less frequently than traditional bullying, the victims of cyberbullying are likely victimized in-person as well.
- Those who identified as transgender were more likely to self-report cyberbullying victimization than were those who identified as male, female, or other/preferred not to disclose. However, there was no significant difference in the percentage of self-reported victimization across reported sexual orientations.
- For those who reported victimization through social media, Facebook was the most reported site for victimization to occur (62.6%). The private instant messaging platform, Facebook Messenger, was also one of the top reported applications (38.4%), indicating that Facebook is still often used for cyberbullying others.

Conclusions and Limitations

- Several limitations arose with this investigation that must be taken into account when interpreting the results:
  - These data come from a unique population (e.g., Lady Gaga fans, Born This Way Foundation supporters) and contain demographic rates that are inconsistent with the general population (e.g., less than 30% straight). Thus, these findings may not generalize beyond this population.
  - Bullying is a low-frequency behavior. Therefore, some analyses lacked the power necessary to fully explore the relationship between cyberbullying involvement and self-reported gender identity and sexual orientation.

Conclusions

- While cyberbullying may occur less frequently than traditional bullying, the majority of those victimized through electronic means are likely also victimized in-person. Future research should continue to investigate the mental health correlates of those receiving both forms of bullying and help youth develop helpful coping strategies for mitigating these negative outcomes.
- Transgender youth may be at greater risk for experiencing cyberbullying victimization. This finding highlights the need for future research to include more diverse responses for gender identity than the "traditional" binary measure.
- While Facebook was the most widely reported site, youth reported numerous social media sites and gaming platforms where cyberbullying has occurred. Thus, parents, educators, and practitioners must continue to be aware of the multitude of sites available to youth and their functions.