Bullying prevention: The need for a kinder and braver world

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Introduction

- Due to the various associated negative outcomes of bullying, many intervention and prevention programs have been developed to reduce bullying behaviors. However, recent meta-analyses have not demonstrated wide-spread effectiveness (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008).
- Both kindness and bravery are believed to impact involvement in bullying. Kindness is incompatible with bullying behaviors, and research has examined the potential that bystanders have in reducing bullying behaviors, such as by standing up for the victims (O'Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999).
- Therefore, this study sought to investigate the links between kindness and bravery with involvement in bullying.

Research Questions

- Does involvement as a victim or perpetrator of physical, verbal, relational, or cyberbullying predict self-reported levels of kindness and bravery?
- What social media sites, mobile applications, and online gaming platforms are youth and young adults using internationally?
- Does usage of social media sites, applications, and online gaming predict self-reported levels of kindness and bravery?

Method

Participants

- Data were collected from 4,269 participants between the ages of 13 through 25 in 2014. In this study, responses from youth in 101 countries were analyzed.
- Participants had a mean age of 19.86 (SD = 2.97) and were mostly Caucasian (73.2%) and from the United States (49.9%). Additionally, 57.5% self-reported as female, 38.4% as male, and 4.1% transgender, genderqueer, or other.

Measures

- *Verbal and Physical Bullying Scale* (VPBS; Swearer, 2008)
  - Previous work using the VPBS (Wang, Swearer, Lembeck, Collins, & Berry, 2015) has found two distinct scales: Physical Bullying and Verbal/Relational Bullying. One question assessing one's involvement in cyberbullying was added to the Verbal/Relational Scale.
  - Physical Bullying Scale, Perpetration α = .822 , Victim α = .821; Verbal/Relational Bullying Scale, Perpetration α = .775, Victim α = .827
- *Kindness and Bravery Scale* (KB Scale, Born Brave Survey, 2014)
  - Kindness Scale, , α = .565; Bravery Scale, , α = .723
- *Social Media Involvement* (α = .681, Born Brave Survey, 2014)

Procedure

- Participants were recruited online with IRB approval from June to December of 2014 as part of a larger ongoing study.

Results

- Participants reported that 11.5% bullied others this past year and 45.5% had been bullied this past year.
- Multiple regressions were conducted to examine the relationship between involvement in verbal/relational and physical bullying and kindness and bravery scores.
- A multiple regression assessing the relationship between perpetration of verbal/relational and physical bullying with kindness was significant, R^2 = .093, adjusted R^2 = .088, $F(2, 353)$ = 18.034, $p < .000$. See Table 1 for beta and p-values.
- In addition, the model assessing the relationship between perpetration of verbal/relational and physical bullying with bravery was significant, R^2 = .036, adjusted R^2 = .030, $F(2, 353)$ = 6.505, $p = .002$. See Table 1 for beta and p-values.
- Neither of the models assessing bullying victimization were significant.

Table 1. Regression Coefficients for Self-Reported Bullying Perpetration on Kindness and Bravery Scores

	Type	Beta	p-value
Kindness	Verbal/Relational Bullying: Perpetrator	-.252	<.000*
	Physical Bullying: Perpetrator	-.099	.073
Bravery	Verbal/Relational Bullying: Perpetrator	-.177	.002*
	Physical Bullying: Perpetrator	-.025	.441

Note: *Regression coefficients significant at $p < .05$

- In addition, participants were surveyed about their time spent on 34 different social media sites, applications, and online video games (0=Never, 1=one or more times a year, 2= one or more times a month, 3= one or more times a week, 4=one or more times a day). See Figure 1 for mean values by location (e.g., United States and internationally).
- Regressions were conducted to examine the relationship between social media usage and kindness and bravery scores.
- Regressions assessing the relationship between social media usage with kindness and bravery were significant.
  - Kindness: R^2 = .004, adjusted R^2 = .004, $F(1, 3,059)$ = 12.870, $p < .000$.
  - Bravery: : R^2 = .007, adjusted R^2 = .007, $F(1, 3,059)$ = 21.598 , $p < .000$.
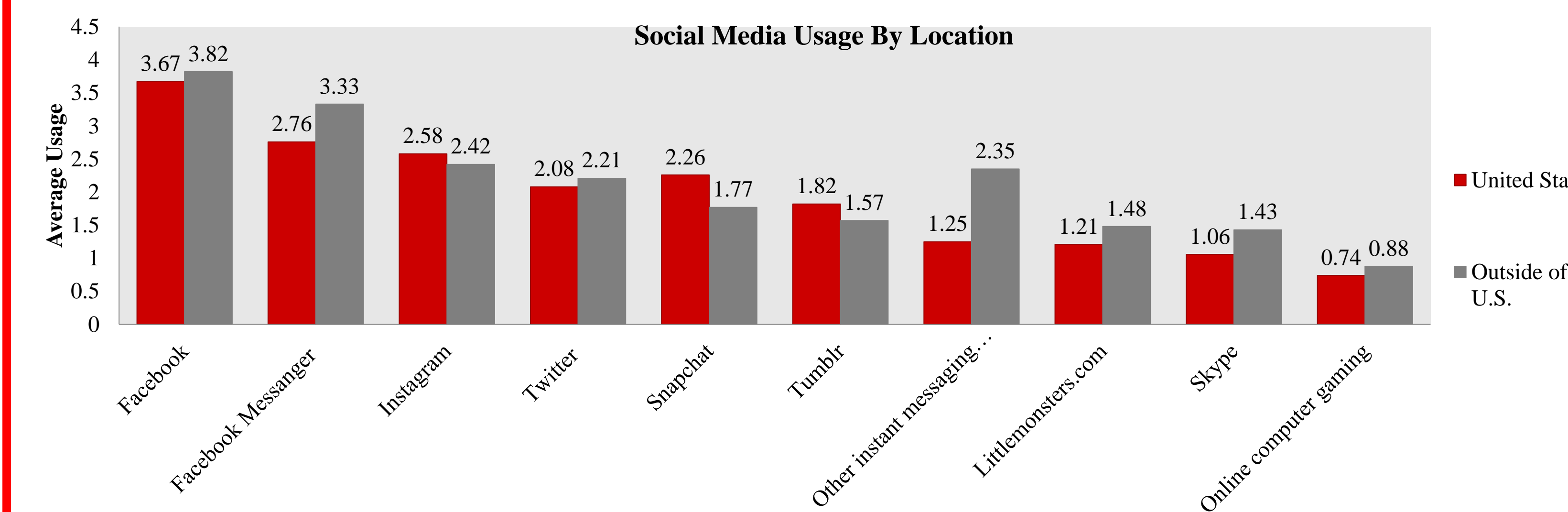

Figure 1: Average social media usage for participants from the United States and internationally.

Discussion

- Results indicate that perpetrators of verbal and relational bullying are more likely to report lower levels of kindness and bravery.
- These results suggest that perpetrators of verbal and relational bullying may struggle with some of the skills related to kindness and bravery, such as wanting to help others, standing up for peers, and understanding the perspective of others.
- Therefore, perpetrators of verbal and relational bullying may benefit from specific strategies to increase kindness and bravery, such as empathy training and civic engagement activities (e.g., volunteer work.)
- In addition, reported social media usage was associated with higher kindness and bravery scores, indicating the potential for positive social media use.

Limitations

- These data were drawn from a specific population (e.g., fans of Lady Gaga, those who have visited the BTWF website. Therefore, generalization of these findings must be made with caution.
- Involvement in bullying was determined using self-report measures. Other sources of data (e.g., office referrals, peer nomination scales) may provide additional validating information.

Conclusion

- While the rationale for bullying others likely varies by individual and situation, these data suggest that perpetrators of verbal and relational bullying may have difficulty displaying kindness and bravery in their lives.
- Therefore, it is important for school practitioners to recognize this potential skill deficit and incorporate relevant interventions targeting kindness and bravery into their work with perpetrators of bullying.
- Additionally, school practitioners should be aware of the myriad of sites, applications, and online games that youth report using on a regular basis in order to best intervene with cases of cyberbullying, as well as promote kindness and bravery through positive social media usage.