



DIGITAL RISK COMPETENCE - STORYTELLING

5. CYBERBULLYING.

- Cyberbullying - Getting to know the phenomenon.
- proper wording: mobbing, bullying and what about cyber?
 - At the beginning there was ... mobbing?
 - Personality and bullying behavior: Are they linked?
- Going cyber: online vs. offline attacks.
 - Cyberbullying: an invisible ambush, cheap and easy to handle.
 - Cyberbullying: For those who cannot handle the sight of blood.
 - Cyberbullying: For tag-alongs who follow the crowd.
 - Cyberbullying: For those who want to present themselves as hyper bullies.
 - Is cyberbullying more “intense” than “traditional” bullying?
- Facts & Figures: insights into scientific studies.

Dr. Astrid Carolus
Prof. Dr. Frank Schwab

Medienpsychologie, Universität Würzburg

*"It really surprises me the hateful things people say on the internet...
After all the awareness of cyber-bullying...I mean wow. So sad."*

Demi Lovato (American actress and singer)

Nowhere to be secure

Anna, 14 years old, had a terrible day at school. Again. All the kids laughed at her - because of her weight, because of her clothing, her shoes and all the rest of it. It's not even her fault but she can't defend herself. She's just naturally shy and reserved, which makes her an ideal target for all sorts of ridicule. As she closes the door of her parents' house, she feels relief: Finally at home - in her own room without all the other kids screaming and bustling around!

It all began when her parents moved to this new town one year ago. She had to switch schools and the other kids in her new class immediately started to make fun of her. She never even had a chance to become an accepted member of the class. Thus, days at school were tough but there was at least one place of peace: home. She enjoyed the time with her family, especially with her little baby sister. This was her shelter where she could be herself.

But the peace has been broken. These days there is no more safe haven. Today, her tormentors are everywhere at any time. Ironically, the two things she likes the most turned out to be gateways of terror: Facebook (which used to be the connection to her old friends) and her smartphone (her connection to her beloved ones during awful school days).

What has happened? Her classmates found her profile on Facebook where she had also entered her cell phone number. And from that day on the horror has not stopped. Facebook and WhatsApp are on 24/7 and so are her classmates. They send her text messages telling her how ugly she looks, insulting Anna and her family in the worst way possible. Even some pupils who had been nice to her previously join in. There is no way to escape these messages and she has nowhere to hide.

1. Cyberbullying – Getting to know the phenomenon.

These days cyberbullying seems to be a universal topic broaching the issue of an apparently new hazard, particularly our children are exposed to. Overall, about 17 % of all pupils have been victims of cyber-mobbing-attacks.¹ Several risk factors seem to be of particular importance:

- age: 12-15 years
- sex: female
- identification with the virtual world: highly identified with online life
- social networking sites

The age between 12 and 15 years involves a critical developmental stage: puberty begins and online activities increase. Particularly girls at that age and those who strongly identify with the online world are exposed to the risk of cyberbullying.

What is important to understand right from the start: distinct demarcations are not that easy to define in this topic area:

- mobbing vs. bullying: precise definitions of the term; delineate one from another
- offenders or victims: as some of them may be both (Quandt & Festl, 2013)
- offline or online life: online activities are often influenced by experiences in real life, e.g. for wreaking revenge on bullies from school.

¹ Bündnis gegen Cybermobbing e.V. (2013); <http://www.buendnis-gegen-cybermobbing.de>

2. proper wording: mobbing, bullying and what about cyber?

Cyberbullying: willful and repeated infliction of harm through the use of electronic devices.
(Patchin & Hinduja, 2010)

Leymann (1993) defined **mobbing** as negative communicative actions against any individual, while these actions must happen frequently (at least once a week) and over long periods (for more than six months).

Bullying is a related term, often described as an aggressive, intentional act or behavior that is carried out by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself (Whitney & Smith, 1993). Smith and Sharp (1994) outline “a systematic imbalance of power”.

The terms bullying and mobbing are often equated. However, this is not entirely accurate because bullying represents a sub-category of mobbing: The victim is not only harassed, annoyed and extorted but additionally suffers from physical violence (Teuschel & Heuschen, 2012). It does not come as a big surprise that the term **cyberbullying** does not involve physical violence. Consequently, cybermobbing would be the correct term. However, cyberbullying has prevailed and we will conform to this nomenclature.

At the beginning there was... mobbing?

Originally, the term “mobbing” comes from “to mob”. In its early use, the term described a wildlife phenomenon: the attack behavior of animals, more precisely, the attack of a weak group on a single stronger animal (Lorenz, 1988). Later the term was transferred to our human world, where mobbing or bullying are cross-cultural phenomena: in every human society which was searched for bullying it could be found (Smith, 1999), with prevalence rates between 10% and 60% of adolescents. Bullying is also widespread amongst social animals, ranging from fishes to chickens and chimpanzees. Why do all these animals bully? What advantages come along with bullying? Evolutionary psychologists would argue: Bullying promotes access to physical, social, and/or sexual resources and therefore can be adaptive. The benefits in detail (Volk et al., 2012):

- **individual somatic benefits:**
positive outcomes for growth and survival in terms of somatic resources (e.g. food).
- **individual sexual benefits:**
although it might sound peculiar, there is empiric evidence that bullies are more active in dating and sex. How is that possible? Research shows that bullies tend to enter puberty at a younger age and therefore have greater dating opportunities. Moreover, bullying is a powerful strategy to fight against competitors (Connolly et al., 2000).
- **group-based benefits/dominance:**
bullying for dominance and status is nothing more than competing for social resources. These can in turn be translated into current or future adaptive benefits in somatic, sexual, and/or parental domains.

However, we have to keep in mind: Not all adolescents are bullies. Environmental cues triggering bullying behavior are necessary (Volk et al., 2012). Thus, bullying should be more prevalent when adolescents receive cues (e.g. threat of loss of face) that motivate them to assume full risk (by risking detrimental sanctions) for the momentum (by violating social norms; Volk et al., 2012).

If there was “some biology” in bullying behavior, genetic influences would be expected. According to Ball et al. (2008), genes indeed have an important and strong influence on children becoming victims or bullies. However, this does not imply that victimization is a fixed personality trait, but merely acknowledges that genetic factors can influence children’s individual characteristics - even in terms of their risk of becoming victimized or becoming an offender themselves.

If there was “even more biology” in bullying behavior, gender differences or more precisely sex (male vs. female) differences would be expected. What comes to your mind when thinking of a

bully? Do you think of a tall and strong boy that pushes other kids around with ease? A lot of bullies do indeed fit that picture: Bullying is a male-dominated field (e.g. for the workplace: 68% males, 32% females; 2010 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey). However, women also bully - nevertheless they seem to use different techniques:

- **girls fight with words and round the back**
female bullying for dominance can be described as being more verbal and indirect social bullying; they avoid direct and physical mobbing, which is more risky (Volk et al., 2006)
- **boys fight full force**
- male bullying can be described as being of a higher level of physical violence (Volk et al., 2006); additionally we can say: male bullies are physically stronger than boys in general, and their victims in particular (Olweus, 1978)

To sum up: real world bullying is rather for boys. However, the opposite is true for the online world. Further down in this text we will see that girls are more active in cyberbullying. Thus, the popular nursery rhyme characterizing girls as “sugar and spice and everything nice” turns out to be quite one-sided.

Personality and bullying behavior: Are they linked?

Several studies focus on the link between personality traits and bullying behavior. Although the findings do not imply causality, some interesting correlations can be found. While not bullying is significantly correlated with honesty, emotionality and conscientiousness, bullies are described as being...

- tolerant of violence, impulsive, and unempathic (Olweus; 1993).
- less agreeable and emotionally highly instable (Menesini, Camodeca, & Nocentini, 2010).
- part of a risk group because bullying can be viewed as one component of a more generally antisocial and rule breaking behavior (Olweus, 1993).

3. Going cyber: online vs. offline attacks.

There is no strict separation between offline and online life in general, and online and offline activities are more and more interwoven: We talk to people who we also email or send messages to. Consequently, bullying could start offline and proceed online (or vice versa): a victim of bullying can be tormented at school (offline) and via Facebook (online). According to the mentioned definitions, both versions of bullying can be understood as antisocial communication. However, there are obvious differences: offline we communicate face to face, online we communicate computer mediated. Media psychologists use several concepts to describe these differences. In terms of cyberbullying four approaches of computer-mediated communication (cmc) are of prime importance:

- cmc is anonymous, accessible and affordable: **Triple A Approach**
- cmc is less rich in terms of sensory perception: **Reduced Social Cues Approach**
- cmc can facilitate a hostile group identity: **Social Identity Model of Deindividuation**
- cmc can be more personal than face-to-face: **Hyperpersonal model of cmc**

Cyberbullying: an invisible ambush, cheap and easy to handle.

Imagine: You want to bully without fearing any consequences? You prefer an attack without the risk of being physically hurt or bullied back? At best without leaving your cozy home? Cyberbullying seems to be your answer!

Cooper (1998) identifies three aspects of Internet communication called **Triple A**: cmc is

anonymous, easily accessible and affordable – perfect parameters for bullies.

Anonymity: “degree to which the identity of a message source is unknown and unspecified” (Scott, 2005, p. 243).

Anonymity facilitates bullying because the offender does not have to see the victim’s physical response. Furthermore, the so-called *distancing effect* might lead people to more evil deeds compared to traditional face-to-face bullying situations (Donegan, 2012).

Accessibility: an individual’s access the internet

Nowadays the internet has become ubiquitous: nearly everyone (at least in the western world) has access to the internet. Due to mobile devices, this access is no longer limited to our desktop PC but accompanies us 24/7.

Affordability: the cost of engaging in internet activities is mostly very low.

Cyberbullying: For those who cannot handle the sight of blood.

Imagine: You are the kind of bully who does not give many thoughts to your victim? You do not want to be faced with your victim’s (physical and mental) pain? In the end you might feel sorry for him... Cyberbullying seems to be your answer!

The **Reduced Social Cues** Approach characterizes communication online as being less abound in terms of nonverbal cues. The communicators cannot see each other. Consequently, they cannot see their counterparts’ facial expressions, gestures or spatial behavior. If they did not know each other before, also sex, age and status will remain unknown. This can go along with the communicators becoming more self-oriented and less concerned with the feelings, opinions and evaluations of others which, in turn, is thought to lead to “uninhibited and even hostile behavior, with accompanying negative perceptions of others” (Giuseppe & Galimberti, 2003, p. 55) as well as “reduced evaluation anxiety on the part of low status and shy individuals” (Giuseppe & Galimberti, 2003, p. 56).

Cyberbullying: For tag-alongs who follow the crowd.

Imagine: You only feel powerful as a member of a group? You prefer hiding behind others who have started off and who are worse than you are, of course? Cyberbullying seems to be your answer!

According to the **SIDE (Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects)** Approach you have to differentiate between two kinds of identity: (a) individual or (b) group identity. On the one hand, (a) people are aware of their personal identity. They act as an individual following their own values and beliefs. On the other hand, (b) social identity can dominate personal identity. This means that people follow the crowd and forget about their own norms. Thus, in-group behavior and thinking is amplified (think of football fans who strongly identify with their team causing phenomena such as hooligans) (Lea & Spears, 2001; Reicher et al., 1995). Applied to the phenomenon of cyberbullying, social identity dominating personal identity may encourage bullies to act as a strong, homogenous group, which lowers their inhibition threshold of harassing members of the so called outgroup (those who do not belong to us).

Cyberbullying: For those who want to present themselves as hyper-bullies.

Imagine: You are a shy and puny teenager who is rather the victim than the bully in real life? Someone who cannot hide his physical weakness or someone who is not quick at repartee? You want to change parts and feel powerful at last? Cyberbullying seems to be your answer!

The **Hyperpersonal Model** (Walther, 2007) promotes advantages of cmc: because of its special characteristics (e.g. anonymity, reduced social cues, time to think about what you do or say) online communication is perfect for presenting ourselves in the desired way. Normally we want to

be seen as kind and socially acceptable. Communicating online gives us the chance to select the information we want to reveal. Thus, we act very kindly (e.g. writing nice things in a chat room). Based on the communicated information we are perceived as likable by our communication partner who in return reacts correspondingly, leading us to answer in the same way, etc. resulting in (a) an idealization of the counterpart and (b) a communication that is experienced as even more intense than face to face communication. This phenomenon can be used for cyberbullying to: online you have the chance to present yourself as being the bad guy you had better not mess with. You can hide weakness and unease and take your time to think about the right (here: worst) words suggesting the image of a really bad guy ("hyperpersonal" impression).

Sexting: The naked truth.

Sexting (sex + texting) generally refers to sending sexual messages, primarily sexually explicit photos via cell phones. Furthermore, sexual content (images, text, videos) can also be distributed by email, instant messaging, short messaging systems or in chat rooms (Mitchell et al., 2012). In terms of bullying it is not the sexting itself which is primarily problematic, but what could happen if the sexually explicit material fell into the wrong hands. After having sent a message you may completely lose control of what will happen next. You do not know for sure what the receiver will do with the image. Does he keep it safe or does he spread the message? Think about a girl who sends a nude picture to her boyfriend. What will happen if they break off? It only takes a few clicks to start the circulation of the picture. And then a snowball principle may begin: the boy forwards the picture to his ex-girlfriend's greatest enemy, who forwards it to his friends, who forward it to... This is a perfect starting point for harassing, taunting and bullying - particularly when considering the subject matter. The phenomenon and its prevalence (among teens) is fervently discussed by the media. Shocking stories of teenagers committing suicide over sexting have been published in the last years.² However, precision is required again: How do you define sexting (nude/semi-nude pictures vs. sexually explicit material)? If photos of a girl in a bikini or a boy in shorts (semi-nude) are considered sexting, this will lead to higher rates than if only explicit photos are defined as sexting. Thus, broad definitions lead to high numbers (over-reporting), narrow definitions to very low numbers. This is the same with the definition of "teens": The prevalence of sexting for teens depends on the specific age range you consider: Sexting is lower within the age group 10 to 19 years than within the age group 15 to 19 years.

Conclusion: Statistics don't lie. However, it is up to you to interpret them with reason. Altogether, studies suggest that sexting (appearing in, creating, receiving sexually suggestive messages) is far from being a widespread behavior for today's youth.

- depending on the definition of sexting and teen, 2³ to 20⁴ percent have engaged in some kind of sexting (creating, sending, receiving or forwarding sexually suggestive messages) with a nude or nearly-nude photo
- more girls than boys send pictures of themselves: 65 % are female, 35% male⁵
- sexters (senders and receivers) are more likely to have been bullied and slightly more likely to have bullied someone⁵
- 13 % of sexting teens report having committed a suicide attempt during the past year, compared to 3% of non-sexting kids⁵

² <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/sexting-shame-and-suicide-20130917>;

<http://edition.cnn.com/2010/LIVING/10/07/hope.witsells.story/>;

http://www.today.com/id/29546030/ns/today-parenting_and_family/t/her-teen-committed-suicide-over-sexting/#.U9t3CWNKTt8

³ <http://www.unionleader.com/article/20111205/NEWS04/712059957>

⁴ <http://thenationalcampaign.org/resource/sex-and-te>

⁵ http://www.cox.com/wcm/en/aboutus/datasheet/takecharge/2009-teen-survey.pdf?campcode=takecharge-research-link_2009-teen-survey_0511

Is cyberbullying more “intense” than “traditional” bullying?

Bullying is horrible - regardless of whether it takes place offline or online. However, there is evidence suggesting that the online type is even more evil. Four characteristics describing the differences between the two types of bullying might influence the perceived severity of being bullied:

- **bullies, victims and bystanders are hard to define:**
as cyberbullying can happen faceless in an anonymous online setting it is hard to establish the bullies' identities and to prove who is ultimately responsible (Law et al., 2012a; Law et al., 2012b).
- **the internet is for everyone and does not forget:**
all the humiliating information is stored online - theoretically forever accessible for everyone (Kowalski & Limber, 2007).
- **victims remain silent**
it is unlikely that adolescent victims of cyberbullying confide in adults because they are not perceived as experts of the cyberworld.
- **it is hard to hide**
it is more difficult to escape from cyberbullying because victims are accessible via computers or smartphones, anytime and anywhere (Law et al., 2012a).

Facts & Figures: insights into scientific studies.

(1) To jump or not to jump: the dramatic effects of cyberbullying.

(Bauman, Toomey & Walker, 2013; Kowalski & Limber, 2013)

Kowalski and Limeber (2013) took a look at the correlations of online and offline bullying with certain outcome variables. Compared to offline bullying they revealed stronger correlations of online bullying and:

- depression
- low self-esteem
- suicidal ideation
- number of absent days in school

In general, females are more likely to have problems with depression when they are victims of cyber bullying than victims of traditional bullying. For males it is the other way round: Offline bullying is the bigger risk factor in terms of depression (Bauman, Toomey & Walker, 2013).

(2) Profile of a cyberbully.

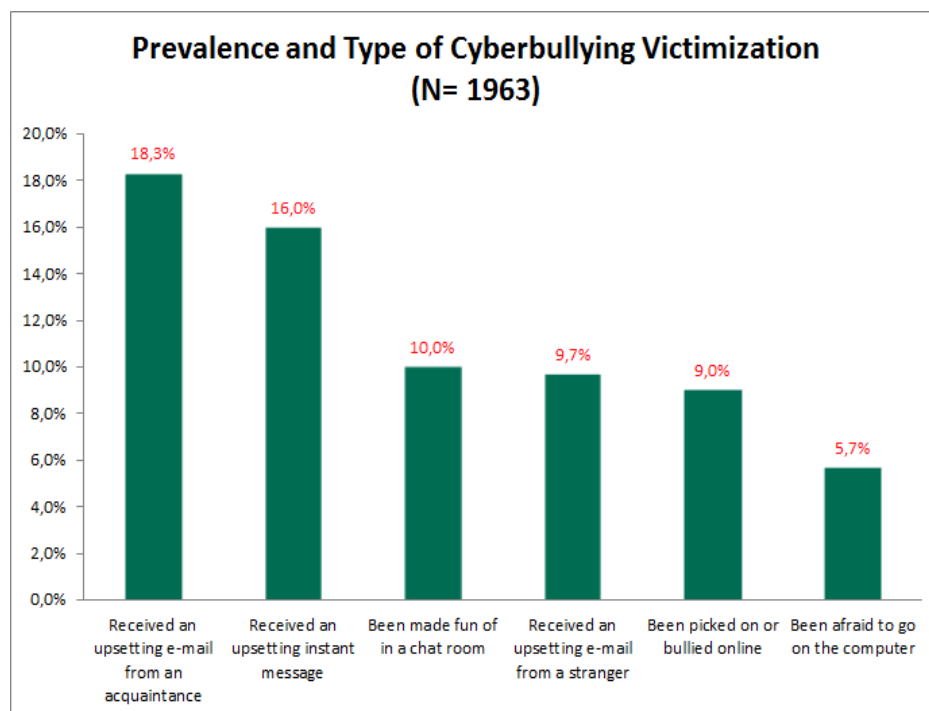
(Teen Online & Wireless Safety Survey, 2009)

- 59% of cyberbullies are girls, 41% are boys
- cyberbullies spend more time (11.6 hours) online than teens overall
- 87% of cyberbullies agree that bullying online is easier to get away with

(3) Different ways to do harm.

(Patchin & Hinduja, 2010):

1963 middle-school students were asked about their experience with cyberbullying in the previous 30 days. As you can see in the figure below there are several methods used by cyberbullies to harass their victims.



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