

UNDERSTANDING BYSTANDER BEHAVIOR IN CYBERBULLYING
ENCOUNTERS:

AN APPLICATION OF BYSTANDER APATHY THEORY

A Thesis

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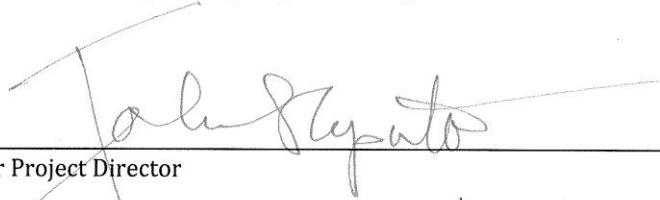
Master of Arts in Communication and Leadership Studies

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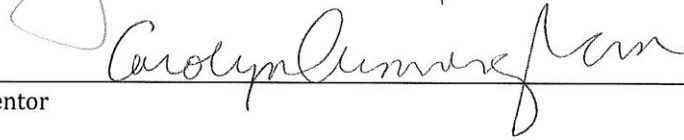
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Abstract

Cyberbullying consequences are increasingly turning tragic with the victims committing suicide. Cyberbullying is carried out through computer mediated communication and due to public nature of social media platforms, it is natural to believe any number of individuals are witnessing any and all acts of communication. This becomes especially problematic during cyberbullying encounters because the victim is vulnerable to hurtful communication from anyone who views the attack. The victim is also subject to humiliation because of sharing capabilities that computer mediated communication provides. However, it has been proven that bullies will typically back down in face-to-face situations if a witness intervenes, so it could be hypothesized that the same would hold true in cyberbullying instances. This study takes the first step in researching personal action accounts of witnesses. The study examines bystander behavior and communication in cyberbullying encounters to help determine why bystanders behave the way they do when witnessing cyberbullying. To better understand bystander behavior, the study was analyzed through the steps detailed in the bystander apathy theory. The study was conducted through a convenience sample survey, focus groups, individual interviews, and email correspondence. Results of the study demonstrate that bystanders do go through a step-by-step process similar to the steps in the bystander apathy theory to determine whether they will or will not intervene. The study also produced three common themes of non-intervention: lack of responsibility, trivialization of the situation, and fear of embarrassment.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Introduction

Computer mediated communication (CMC) has provided great advancements in one's ability to stay connected with others, whether they are miles or minutes apart. However, CMC has also had negative results. Thurlow, Lengle, and Tomic (2004) state that "CMC is especially prone to aggression because interaction is less easily regulated and is more uninhibited" (p. 71). Bullying and cyberbullying are examples of aggression from CMC that have received much attention in recent years. Rightfully so; it is imperative that, as a technologically adept society, we move away from the *kids will be kids* (Mills & Babrow, 2003) mentality many have about how children, teenagers, and young adults interact with each other. "Although many people associate teasing with fun and good-natured ribbing, others have lasting scars from the teasing and bullying they experienced as children and adolescents" (Kowalski, 2007, p. 170). CMC has opened the door for cyberbullies to wreak havoc on their victims, virtually 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Current and past studies have focused on bystander behavior and communication patterns in face-to-face bullying situations (Easton & Aberman, 2008; Pöyhönen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2012), teasing as a means of social influence (Mills & Babrow, 2003), and traditional face-to-face bullying (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005; Thornberg, Rosenqvist, & Johansson, 2012). There is one aspect of cyberbullying that has not received much research attention. Bystander behavior and communication habits in cyberbullying encounters is an area that is unexplored. This study utilizes the bystander apathy theory (Latané & Darley, 1969) to analyze bystander behavior and communication habits in cyberbullying encounters to gain insight as to the process

cyberbullying bystanders go through when determining whether they will or will not intervene.

Importance of the Study

According to the STOMP Out Bullying (2014) website “35% of kids have been threatened online. Nearly 1 in 5 have had it happen more than once. 58% of kids admit someone has said mean or hurtful things to them online. More than 4 out of 10 say it has happened more than once.” These statistics highlight the rates in which children and teens are experiencing cyberbullying, which alone indicates a need for further study. According to Dr. Kate Roberts (2013) in an interview with Ciaran Connolly for Nobullying.com, “bystanders are actually the most critical person to be a deterrent for bullying” (Connolly & Roberts, 2013, Bystanders section, para 2). Bystanders can play a vital role in curbing tragic consequences of cyberbullying if they determine they have a responsibility to intervene.

This research explores the step-by-step process a cyberbullying witness maneuvers through when determining their level of personal responsibility to intervene. Further, this study examines the underlying reasons behind specific actions and communication patterns of bystanders to determine the most common themes amongst non-intervention.

Statement of the Problem

Fifty-eight percent of cyberbullying victims have not told their parents or another trusted adult about their online harassment experiences (STOMPOutBullying.org, cyberbullying statistics, 2014). They likely feel alone and do not want to experience the humiliation of admitting to being bullied. This is where bystanders can play a critical role

by intervening when they witness an episode of cyberbullying. By simply reaching out to the victim, whether by personal message or directly commenting on a thread, a bystander can communicate to the victim that he/she is not alone. However, this is not a course of action that is regularly taken by witnesses.

Definition of Terms and Phrases Used

This study utilizes a number of terms and phrases that require clarification.

Bystander – an individual that witnesses an act that could be considered cyberbullying

Cyberbullying - willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text

Diffusion of responsibility – is a sociopsychological phenomenon whereby a person is less likely to take responsibility for action or inaction when others are present.

State of Pluralistic Ignorance – is state of being in which the majority of members in a situation portray the situation to be less serious than it is, thereby affecting the reactions of other members in the group. This causes inaction amongst a group of people.

Victim – an individual who has been cyberbullied

Witness – same as bystander; used interchangeably

Organization of Remaining Chapters

This study includes five chapters. The first chapter introduced the importance of studying bystander behavior in cyberbullying encounters. The second chapter discusses the philosophical assumptions and theoretical basis that guided this research. Chapter two also consists of a literature review of past research to provide a basic understanding of why bullying occurs, bullying as viewed by adolescents, various definitions of cyberbullying, who cyberbullies, and bystander behavior in traditional face-to-face

situations. Chapter two concludes with the researcher's rationale for the study and a statement and explanation of the study's research questions. Chapter three discusses the study's scope and methodology and addresses how the research will be conducted and analyzed. Chapter four presents the results of the study as well as a discussion of the three key themes that emerged from the research and how they align with the guiding theory presented in chapter two. Finally, chapter five summarizes the study, discusses limitations to the study, and provides suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2. Review of the Literature

Philosophical Assumptions

Clifford Christians is the creator of *communitarian ethics*; “A moral responsibility to promote community, mutuality, and persons-in-relation who live simultaneously for others and themselves” (Griffin, 2012, p. 387). Christians believed that people are “most fully human” (Griffin, 2012, p. 387) when they are in relations with others living for others and for themselves, creating a moral community. In these communities, people have a sincere concern for those around them. “Communitarianism is a social philosophy that contradicts mainstream individualism. When it is developed in terms of public communication, the operating term is social responsibility” (Christians, 2007). Communitarian ethics is closely linked to Martin Buber’s philosophy of how individuals should treat one another (Buber, 1970). “Buber wrote “the relation...here is the cradle of actual life” (Buber, 1970, p. 60) and differentiated two different types of relationships, I-It and I-Thou.

Holding true to Christian’s (2007) philosophy of social responsibility, when people engage in an I-Thou relationship, they treat each other as they would want to be treated. Individuals are seen as “created in the image of God and resolve to treat him or her as a valued end rather than a means to our end” (Griffin, 2012, p. 79). And it is through dialogue, which Buber indicated is the equivalent of ethical communication, which people “help each other to be more human” (Griffin, 2012, p. 79). It is through this dialogue, social responsibility, and treating each other in the way we would want to be treated, that individuals grow, learn who they are, and determine their value within their community.

In an I-It relationship, individuals are denied the dialogue necessary to develop self-worth. People are, instead, used and manipulated (Griffin, 2012, p. 79). An I-It relationship negates all that which communitarian ethics stands. Children, teenagers, and adults who are bullied are being deprived of self-worth-building dialogue that would allow them to see themselves as valued members of their community. Bullied individuals are being used for the self-interest of the bully.

It is often assumed that bullying is a “kids will be kids” behavior or that individuals are merely partaking in teasing. Teasing is a normal part of growing up and is a behavior that is seen well into adulthood around the world (Mills & Babrow, 2003). According to Mills and Babrow (2003) people engage in teasing as a social influence strategy to “shape untoward behavior” (p. 275). Untoward behavior would consist of any behavior that is inappropriate or incongruent with social norms. Teasing used in this manner is said to cause the teased individual to rethink their behavior without feeling attacked. When used appropriately, teasing can have positive effects.

Teasing, though, involves “an element of play” (Mills & Babrow, 2003, p. 283) and is understood by all participants that the comments are said in jest. However, individuals are not all emotionally and cognitively the same, and it is when a participant takes the teasing too far or the act is misinterpreted that teasing can potentially be seen as bullying. When teasing is used as arousal management it is intended to upset or anger the teased individual (Mills & Babrow, 2003). “To students, teasing can be both playful and inclusive or exclusionary and humiliating” (Hoover & Milner, 2005, p. 4). If the teasing is a repeated behavior directly used as arousal management, it is then considered by this researcher as bullying.

Before a theoretical study of virtual bystander behavior can be undertaken, it is first necessary to understand the various aspects of bullying and cyberbullying as well as the basics of how the act is defined and how individual roles associated with the act are interpreted and understood by those most directly affected, children and teenagers. Understanding how adolescents attribute meaning to bullying acts in face-to-face situations will allow better understanding of their behavior in a virtual environment. Much of prior research focuses on adolescents or professionals in the workplace. While there have been some studies done on college-age individuals, this seems to be an under-represented category. This is concerning because this age group certainly still experiences cyberbullying. When victims have met their breaking points, we often hear about tragic acts they commit to gain vengeance on their bullies or end their own suffering.

Theoretical Basis

Research conducted by Bibb Latané and John M. Darley (1969), leading developers of the bystander effect, indicated that when there is more than one witness to an emergency situation the likelihood of bystander intervention is low. Their research is the direct result of a woman's murder in 1964 that was witnessed by 38 individuals, and yet none of them reported the crime to police or went to the aid of the victim (p. 244). While the witnesses' failure to react could certainly be explained by apathy, Latané and Darley felt there must be a reason, other than apathy, to explain the reasons motivating their behavior (p. 244). The theory the researchers developed, the bystander effect, attempts to explain the phenomenon of how bystanders react during an emergency or particular situation. Latané and Darley (1969) indicated that bystanders must go through

a series of steps before deciding whether or not to intervene (p. 247). The sequence of steps are:

1. The bystander has to *notice* that something is happening. The external event has to break into his/her thinking and intrude itself on his conscious mind.
2. Once the person is aware of the event as something to be explained, it is necessary that he/she *interpret* the event. Specifically, he/she must decide that there is something wrong, that this ambiguous event is an emergency.
3. If the bystander decided that something is indeed wrong, he must next decide that he has a *responsibility* to act.
4. If the person does decide that he should help, he must decide what *form of assistance* he can give.
5. Finally, of course, he must decide how to *implement* his choice and form of intervention. (p. 247)

Latané and Darley's (1969) controlled experiments indicated that instances of intervention were markedly lower when there was more than one witness present. They theorized that this reaction is due to individuals entering a "state of pluralistic ignorance" (Latané & Daley, 1969, p. 249) or people trying to appear calm while looking for cues and see that others appear calm. This means that people gauge their reactions based off of what the reactions are of those around them. If other bystanders are communicating (verbally or nonverbally) that the situation is not an emergency, then others will likely not intervene.

Though bystander apathy originated in the psychological field, this researcher believes the theory has relevance to the field of communication studies. In the psychological field, the theory is used to determine the process people go through during emergencies. In communication studies, the theory can be used to determine how people communicate with others and with themselves during specific situations. Therefore, this theory easily lends itself to the study of bystander behavior in an online environment during cyberbullying communication acts. Because of the public nature of the Internet, it can be perceived by users that content is being viewed by more than just one individual. Thus, every person witnessing a cyberbullying encounter can reason that they are a part of a larger group and use that as a way to begin to determine their level of responsibility. The witness would then, theoretically, begin to assess the situation through the series of steps laid out by Latané and Darley (1969). Applying the bystander apathy theory to witnesses of cyberbullying, this research seeks to determine how individuals maneuver through the above-outlined steps and determine if they will intervene to communicate a need to stop bullying to the bully or communicate a sense of being defended to the victim. Additionally, the study seeks to determine if cyberbullying communication acts could be curbed by the development of a prosocial bystander empowerment educational movement.

A subset of bystander apathy is pluralistic ignorance. “Pluralistic ignorance refers to a collective perception or definition of the emergency situation as not being a real emergency as an effect of social comparison between the passive bystanders” (Thornberg, 2007, p. 5). If, during a cyberbullying incident, no one is coming to the aid of the victim, it is reasonable to assume that any other witness will not intervene because

the situation is not interpreted as an emergency due to lack of communicated responses. It is also possible that since the online world is vastly public, individuals fall prey to the fear of social blunders (Thornberg, 2007, p. 5). According to Thornberg (2007) “the mere presence of other bystanders can also inhibit a witness from intervening or helping in an emergency situation because he or she is afraid of looking foolish or behaving in an embarrassing way in front of others” (p. 5).

Pluralistic ignorance directly ties into diffusion of responsibility (Thornberg, 2007, p. 6). The more people who witness an act of cyberbullying the less likely someone is to step up and intervene. This is because responsibility is shared by all of the witnesses which results in no one acting. Each witness assumes that someone else will intervene. This phenomenon was witnessed in Caplan and Hay’s (as cited in Thornberg, 2007) study of preschool children. When a classmate was in distress, very few children tried to help. When they were questioned about their actions, they indicated that it was the teacher’s responsibility to help. It was also noted that there was no instructional teachings offered to let the students know it was okay to help.

In Thornberg’s (2007) study, seven rationalization reasons were given by students observed in an emergency situation. Those reasons were “trivialization, dissociation, embarrassment association, busy working priority, compliance to a competitive norm, audience modelling, and responsibility transfer” (Thornberg, 2007, p. 8). The author of this study proposes that these categories can work hand-in-hand with the bystander apathy theory. When a bystander notices an episode of cyberbullying, the first step would be to determine their level of responsibility. The bystander would have to engage in internal dialogue, as defined by Buber’s dialogic ethics (Griffin, 2012, p. 79) with

himself/herself to decide if they are responsible to act since he/she witnessed the offense. Once determined, the bystander would progress through the steps as outlined in the bystander apathy theory. Once those steps have all been completed the bystander will either intervene or remain silent. If through internal dialogue and results of the bystander apathy theory process, he/she decides not to intervene, it is at that point that he/she is considered a non-helper and must decide which category his/her reason for not helping fits into as outlined by Thornberg (2007). Those categories are:

1. Trivialization – The cyberbullying episode was deemed a non-emergency by the bystander. The incident was trivialized in two ways. either
 - a. Unserious labeling - genuinely feeling it was not important
 - b. Normalization - the act itself was part of normal behavior witnessed online
2. Dissociation – The cyberbullying episode was deemed an emergency situation, but the bystander dissociated him/herself from the victim and their distress. Dissociation can come in two forms.
 - a. Incident dissociation – the bystander was not involved in any previous encounters with the victim that preceded the emergency situation
 - b. Relationship dissociation –the bystander does not consider the victim to be a friend and does not warrant intervention
3. Embarrassment Association – The cyberbullying episode was deemed an emergency by the witness, but the witness associates the situation with embarrassment. There are two forms of embarrassment association.

- a. Victim-oriented embarrassment association – the bystander believes it must be embarrassing for the victim to have to endure the bullying so the bystander does not intervene as a way to avoid causing more embarrassment for the victim.
 - b. Self-oriented embarrassment association – the bystander believes it would be embarrassing for him/her to intervene and is concerned he/she might become the next target of bullying.
4. Audience Modeling – The course of action and seriousness of the cyberbullying episode is determined by other people’s reactions. If other witnesses do nothing, this bystander does nothing.
 5. Busy Working Priority – The cyberbullying episode is deemed an emergency, but the bystander has other priorities to take care of and does not intervene.
 6. Compliance with a Competitive Norm – The cyberbullying episode is deemed an emergency, but instead favors a competitive norm. In this instance, it would be *norm of reciprocity* which indicates we should help those who help us. If the victim has never helped the witness, there is no reason for the witness to help the victim.
 7. Responsibility Transfer – The cyberbullying episode is deemed an emergency, but the bystander does not feel personally responsible to help the victim. He/she transfers the responsibility to other witnesses (perhaps friends or family)

Cyberbullying witnesses may also experience an altruism dilemma. According to Korte (1971) “An altruism dilemma may be defined as a situation where an individual is faced with an opportunity to give assistance to some distressed person while at the same time there exists some restraining forces that inhibit help-giving” (p. 149). Restraining forces could be explained by the categories defined by Thornberg (2007). If bystanders truly are experiencing altruism dilemmas when confronted with communication acts considered to be cyberbullying, this research may help illuminate a new method of encouraging bystanders to intervene.

The Literature

Why Bullying Occurs. Thornberg, Rosenqvist, and Johansson (2012) conducted a study to determine reasons why bullying occurs. The study was administered to 215 Swedish upper-secondary school students via a questionnaire. The results of their study give a better understanding of how older teenagers explain why bullying occurs with a breakdown of three main categories (bully attributing, victim attributing, and social context attributing) and nine subcategories (psychosocial problems, social positioning, emotionally-driven, thoughtlessness, other bully attributing, deviance, group pressure, inviting school environment, and peer conflicts) for bullying causes (Thornberg, Rosenqvist, & Johansson, 2012). Common reasons for bullying, as demonstrated in previous research, are attributed to the victim being different. This explanation was not refuted by the study results, with 44% of students referencing “deviance” (Thornberg, Rosenqvist, & Johansson, 2012) as a cause for bullying. However, interestingly, 80% of students listed causal explanations for bullying to the bully themselves, meaning that the bully has psychosocial problems (Thornberg, Rosenqvist, & Johansson, 2012). These

findings are interesting because attributing bullying behavior to the bully himself/herself shows a higher cognitive understanding of human behavior that is generally not demonstrated in adolescents.

Hoover and Milner (2005) discussed rituals of humiliation and exclusion that are practiced by adults and adolescents. It is theorized that these rituals can lead to acts of bullying. There are humiliation, banishment, hazing, teasing, and rumor spreading rituals that individuals of all ages participate in (Hoover & Milner, 2005, pp. 1-9). Several of these forms are subtle ways of bullying, while others are much more direct. However, any one of them may crossover into cyberbullying. For example, if an individual is banned from their collective social group by the leader, they are experiencing a terrible fate that may lead to terror. "Banning an individual from participation in his or her community is the most extreme form of dehumanization, short of execution..." (Hoover & Milder, 2005, p. 2). Being excluded from one's group could potentially open up avenues for bullying; verbal, physical, and cyber.

Bullying as viewed by adolescents. After looking at explanations for bullying acts, the next step to understanding bystander behavior is to look at how adolescents view the general act of bullying as well as the various strategies for dealing with bullying. Camodeca and Goossens (2005) conducted a survey of 311 children (average age of 11 years) to determine what they think would be effective means of stopping the cycle of bullying. For the purpose of the study the "children were grouped into bullies, followers of the bully, defenders of the victims, outsiders, victims and those not involved" and "items were presented to the children in three different perspectives (imagine you are the victim, the bully, or a witness)" (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005, p. 94). They were then

asked to determine if they would react with assertiveness, nonchalance, or retaliation. The results indicated that children would more often choose to react assertively, demonstrating that they understand a prosocial (behavior that promotes social acceptance and friendship) method is a better conflict resolution tool than retaliation or doing nothing. However, if they were imagining they were in the bully they were more likely to select retaliation as a way to deal with a bullying act (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005).

Defining Cyberbullying. A literature review of cyberbullying conducted by Kiriakidis and Kavoura (2010) concluded that there is a lack of an operational definition for cyberbullying (p. 83). Because of this, definitions for cyberbullying are varied. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014), cyberbullying is defined as “the electronic posting of mean-spirited messages about a person (as a student) often done anonymously.” Strom and Strom’s definition of cyberbullying is “cyber harassment involves using an electronic medium to threaten or harm others. E-mail, chat rooms, cell phones, instant messaging, pagers, text messaging, and online voting booths are tools used to inflict humiliation, fear, and a sense of helplessness” (as stated in Kiriakidis & Kavoura, 2010, p. 83). Nansel et al. and Olweus defined face-to-face bullying “as a type of aggression that is intended to harm another, that is repeated over time and that involves a power inequality between victims and perpetrators” (as cited in Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007, p. 171), but it certainly can be applied to an online bullying situation. For the purpose of this study, the definition of cyberbullying that will be utilized is the definition posited by Patchin and Hinduja; “...willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text” (as cited in Kiriakidis & Kavoura 2010, p. 83). Kiriakidis and Kavoura concluded that “most definitions of cyberbullying convey that the behavior is

hostile and intentional. Not all of them incorporate the repetition of the behavior” (p. 83). The repetitive nature of cyberbullying can possibly lead to prolonged psychological harm.

Who Cyberbullies. Anyone can cyberbully. If they have access to the internet and a desire to inflict pain on another person, they can cyberbully.

Feinberg and Robey (2008) mention the following:

Cyberbullies and victims are as likely to be female as male and more likely to be older, rather than younger, adolescents. Some cyberbullies and victims are strangers, but most often they know each other. Some cyberbullies remain anonymous or work in groups, making it difficult to identify the abuser. (p.27)

With that said, there is still very little concrete information on those who cyberbully and their motivations (Kowalski, Limber,& Agatson, 2012). According to Kowalski, Limber, and Agatson (2012) “it is reasonable to assume that children who cyberbully share some (or even many)” of the characteristics traditional face-to-face bullies exhibit (p. 78).

Children with dominant and assertive personalities, low impulse control, unstable tempers, promote violent behavior, demonstrate little empathy or compassion, are aggressive toward adults, and have difficulty following rules are likely to be bullies.

Many of these characteristics can indicate the possibility of a cyberbully. It should be noted that there are any number of reasons why those who choose to cyberbully do so.

Kowalski, Limber, and Agatson (2012) discuss a myriad of reasons ranging from inadvertently cyberbullying, to retaliating against someone who has cyberbullied, to engaging in the behavior simply out of boredom, amongst several other reasons.

Bystander behavior in traditional face-to-face situations. A study of bystander behavior in traditional face-to-face bullying situations conducted by Easton and Aberman (2008) revealed that while bystanders regularly remained silent when observing bullying, they do surmise that their lack of action sends messages to the bully and the victim (p. 61). The messages assumed to be sent to the bully fell into three categories: 1) the bystander is afraid of the bully, 2) the bystander accepts the bullying act itself and the behavior of the bully or, 3) the bystander is a “friend” of the bully (Easton & Aberman, 2008, p. 61). Messages thought to be sent to the victim were “1. The victim has no friends or anyone to stand up for him/her, 2. The bystanders support a bully’s assertions or actions or, 3. Bystanders are afraid of the bully” (Easton & Aberman, 2008, p. 61). According to Dr. Kate Roberts (2013) in an interview with Ciaran Connolly for Nobullying.com, bystanders may not intervene because

... [they are as] reluctant as adults to speak up. You know, they don’t want to be the whistleblower so to speak in the school setting or on the sports field or in front of their peers and the bully and so you will find a bunch of students thinking the exact same thing about that bullying student and no one is confronting that person” (Physical Bullying and Bystanders section, para. 2).

The bystanders fall into plural ignorance. However, “bystanders are actually the most critical person to be a deterrent for bullying because they are people that aren’t the target so they are not seen as weaker and yet if they are confronting and assertive, the bully will be very likely to back down” (Connolly & Roberts, 2013, Bystanders section, para. 2). In essence, bystanders alone could potentially end the cycle of bullying.

Research Rationale

Cyberbullying and its implications are just now starting to make headlines around the world. Unfortunately, it has taken tragic events, such as bullicide, suicide by bullying (Halladay, 2010, p. 4), for people to start paying more attention to what is transpiring in online environments. Victims can no longer seek refuge at home because in today's technology-addicted culture, the aggressors continue bullying their victims online for the entire world to see. Due to several characteristics of the Internet (ability to post anonymously, instant contact gratification, an overall public environment), being attacked in such a public manner can be especially traumatizing for victims. "You can pass around a note to classmates making fun of a peer, and it stays in the room...But when you post that same note online, thousands can see it. The whole world becomes witness and is invited to participate" (Holladay, 2010, p. 5).

However, because of the newness of this area, more research needs to be done before it can be appropriately understood and possibly prevented. Previous research has focused on cyberbullying and all facets in adolescent groups (Mason, 2008; Deiss, Savage, & Tokunager, 2012), traditional bullying and all facets (Easton & Aberman, 2008), and workplace harassment. While this research has provided much insight on the elements that feed into bullying, there is a lack of research on bystander behavior in an online environment. Perhaps because of the same reasons people turn to cyberbullying (anonymity, public environment) witnesses turn a blind eye to the hurtful encounters they see. Previous research has also focused on adolescent and professional adult bullying. Individuals at the college level are a demographic not extensively researched. Reasons for this have not been determined. For this reason, this study will focus on researching at

the college level. Though there are many areas within college-age cyberbullying, this research is aimed at one very important area, understanding bystander apathy. It is essential to understand how a witness views his or her role in an aggressive online attack. If research is able to determine the reasons people do or do not intervene in a cyberbullying attack avenues may be created for educational programs that support bystander interventions, create prosocial bystander empowerment movements, or assessment tool development to determine one's intervention plausibility.

Research Questions

Given the prevalence and potentially tragic consequences of cyberbullying, the above discussion of bystander involvement (or lack of) leads to some pressing questions. As discussed in the literature review, there are many reasons as to why bystanders do or do not intervene to help the victim. There are many variables that witnesses consider when they determine if they are going to intervene in a cyberbullying encounter (Easton & Aberman, 2008). These reasons are inherently personal; but it is necessary to identify the reasons if the behavior is to be understood and potentially altered. Therefore the following two questions will serve as this study's research focus.

RQ1: What are the reasons cyberbullying witnesses choose to intervene or stay silent?

RQ2: How do the steps cyberbullying witnesses go through to determine if they will intervene fit within the steps laid out by Latané and Darley?

In chapter two, the researcher has attempted to articulate exactly why further research needs to be undertaken in order to change the current trend of non-intervention by cyberbullying witnesses. A review of prior cyberbullying studies and literature has proven a gap in bystander research is evident. The following chapter will outline the

methods used to address the research questions as well as discuss the data gathered throughout the research.

Chapter 3. Scope and Methodology

The Scope of the Study

The focus of this research was people- or behavior-oriented. According to Rubin, Rubin, Haridakis, and Piele (2010) “People- or behavior-oriented research focuses on actions and reactions of people” (p. 218). Behavior-oriented research was ideal for the overall premise of this research because it allowed for self-reports of attitudes and behaviors (Rubin, 2010, p. 218) relating to how they behaved as bystanders online. This study combined both qualitative and quantitative measures to gain an in-depth understanding of bystander behavior in cyberbullying encounters. Initial quantitative data-gathering methods were conducted through a cross-sectional survey to identify those who have had previous experience with witnessing cyberbullying episodes. A cyberbullying episode was defined, for the purpose of this study, as a hurtful, derogatory, slanderous, or untrue statement posted in a public forum for anyone to see and/or comment on. This study utilized qualitative methods to connect each phase of data collection and to expand on individual experiences. This allowed for a more scrupulous understanding of how bystander behavior is perceived in cyberbullying encounters. The research is empirical because the researcher “look[ed] beyond [herself] to observe and to gather evidence” (Rubin, 2010, p. 198).

Scope. Due to the newness of this specific research direction, it was necessary for both qualitative and quantitative approaches to be utilized in the initial exploratory stage of researching. Neuman (2011) stated exploratory research is used when the “subject is very new, we know little or nothing about it, and no one has yet explored it (p. 38). While much research has been done on face-to-face bullying and bystander behavior (Easton & Aberman, 2008), it was determined through the literature review discussed

above, a gap in research exists in understanding how witnesses view their roles of responsibility in cyberbullying encounters, particularly of the college-age category. Though the focus of this research is new, it is cumulative (Rubin, 2010) in the respect that it is based on and building upon previous bullying research. The present study aimed to aid in the formulation of more precise questions for future research (Neuman, 2011, p. 38). The research gap warranted a closer look to attempt to identify how bystanders view their roles, determine if they will intervene, and whether they believe this troubling social phenomenon would benefit by the creation of new prosocial programs. It is important to note that Neuman (2011) stated “exploratory research rarely yields definitive answers (p.38).” The study did not aim to deduce definitive answers; rather the researcher hoped to shed light on and make sense of events that a cyberbullying witness experiences.

The population for this study was derived from undergraduate students at a regional higher education campus in Indiana. Research was limited to approximately 40 lower-level college students. The sought after peer group had yet to be focused on for research in any respect to cyberbullying. It has been argued that cyberbullying is only experienced in primary school and once an individual matures into high school or becomes of legal age that online altercations are considered cyberharassment (Aftab, 2014, para. 8). It is the belief of this researcher that bullying is bullying; no matter the age, method, or channel. Cyberbullying and derogatory communication certainly impacts all individuals no matter their age. Due to the lack of research for college undergraduates, younger age groups as well as those out of college were a hard limit for the premise of this study.

Methodology of the Study

Since this study specifically sought reasons behind how bystanders behave and interpret cyberbullying encounters, a survey proved to be the most effective quantitative research method available to identify respondents with experience. “As researchers, we utilize questionnaires or interviews to learn people’s beliefs or opinions...” (Neuman, 2011, p. 48). Because this study looked to broadly gain an understanding of how people assess cyberbullying situations, the survey was an effective tool. The survey allowed for respondents to be categorized as to their level of past experiences with cyberbullying. From the qualitative approach, field interviews (phone, e-mail correspondence, video chat, face-to-face) were conducted in an environment encouraging interviewees to “express themselves in the forms in which they normally speak, think, and organize reality” (Neuman, 2011, p. 450). Field interviews are intensive and time consuming but they have “an explicit purpose: to learn about the member and setting” (Neuman, 2011, p. 451) which is ideal in understanding how they reacted while observing cyberbullying encounters.

Research methods. The basis of the study was grounded in analyzing behavior from past events; therefore, it was conducted in two phases. The first phase was a survey determining the respondents’ experience with cyberbullying encounters. The second phase of research was conducted through field interviews with those who indicated they had experienced or witnessed cyberbullying. Unlike survey interviews and friendly conversation, semi-structured field interviews focus on “the member’s perspective and experiences” (Neuman, 2011, p. 450) allowing for a better understanding of the sequence of steps they go through when determining if they will intervene or remain silent.

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) indicated that “materials are somewhat systematic and

comprehensive, while the tone of the interview is fairly conversational and informal” (p. 82). A fairly informal, yet somewhat structured, environment allowed the respondents to freely speak of their experiences and opinions. It also provided an outlet for them to candidly discuss how they decided if they would intervene in a cyberbullying situation.

Data collection. A brief “Cyberbullying Experience” survey (Appendix B) served as the initial data collecting device. The survey contained basic questions to determine the respondents’ age, year in college, if they have experience with cyberbullying, and if yes to the previous questions, in what regard is their experience: victim, bully, or witness. The survey took no more than 10 minutes to complete. The survey was constructed through SurveyMonkey.com and sent out to the main researcher’s students, resulting in a convenience sample. Respondents who reported no experience witnessing cyberbullying were screened out from further study research, as the study sought to understand bystander behavior and impacts on cyberbullying situations. Focus groups and field interviews were conducted on the smaller remaining group of respondents that allowed for a more thorough understanding of “people’s beliefs and opinions” (Neuman, 2011, p. 48). The interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and took place face-to-face and via e-mail correspondence.

Due to time constraints, the population was limited to roughly 40 underclassmen from the researcher’s primary teaching institution. The survey resulted in 11 respondents with which to conduct focus groups or individual interviews. By keeping the number of respondents and interviewees low, more time was available for one-on-one contact between the respondent and the researcher. This allowed for qualitative techniques to be used in answering “*why* and *how come* questions” (Rubin, 2010, p. 221). In the

interviews, respondents were asked questions to determine if they followed a common problem-solving process when faced with cyberbullying. These questions were used to elicit information that would give insight to the communication attitudes and beliefs surrounding a bystander's role when observing someone being victimized by a cyberbully.

The initial survey was delivered electronically to students through A web-link provided by SurveyMonkey.com. Upon arriving on the survey landing page, the student was presented with a description of the study and informed consent (Appendix A) form. Complete confidentiality, aside from the researcher, was ensured. The survey description was expressly stated that participation was voluntary and the results would only be used for better understanding of bystander behavior in cyberbullying encounters. It was also made clear that this research was being conducted for the requirements of a master's thesis.

Data Analysis

Data collected was analyzed to ensure that it met internal and external consistency standards. This was done by comparing cyberbullying witness accounts to prior research conducted on bystanders in face-to-face bullying situations. Information gathered from interviews was "organized into conceptual categories" and common themes were determined (Neuman, 2011, p. 510). Research questions were tentatively answered and new questions were created when information was analyzed through the illustrative method. The bystander effect theory provided "empty boxes" (Neuman, 2011, p. 519) that were filled in as data was analyzed and put into the respective steps of the decision making process the bystander must go through.

Validity and Reliability

After survey responses were submitted, the researcher ensured the validity and reliability of the research were on par with ethical communication research standards. This was done by looking for common themes (Rubin, 2010, p. 202) among respondent answers to the survey questions. Common themes in their answers boosted the validity of the reasons and processes a bystander manipulates when deciding if they will intervene on behalf of a cyberbullying victim. This is the first study to specifically look at how a bystander determines whether he/she will intervene. Reliability of this study was based upon previous research utilizing the bystander apathy theory (Easton & Aberman, 2008; Fawzi & Goodwin, 2011; Latané, & Darley, 1969) in emergency situations. These studies have proven time and time again that when people are in a group they are less likely to assume responsibility and act in an emergency. The hypothesis held by the researcher, while not definitely proven true, did tentatively identify that cyberbullying witnesses do not intervene because they are internalizing the situation as a public episode. Therefore the internal and external validity and reliability of this study was upheld (Rubin, 2010, p. 203).

Ethical Considerations

Cyberbullying is a highly sensitive and subjective issue. Those involved may not want to admit they have been cyberbullied, were/are a cyberbully, or have witnessed cyberbullying. The delicate nature of cyberbullying and the range of emotions it can trigger was expressly noted by the researcher. It was the researcher's intention to be "accurate, honest, and precise when conducting research and when discussing the meaning of the data" (Rubin, 2010, p. 204).

With ethical considerations in mind, this study was developed to adhere to the standards discussed by Neuman (2011), “Never cause unnecessary or irreversible harm to participants, secure prior voluntary consent when possible, and never unnecessarily humiliate, degrade, or release harmful information about specific individuals that was collected for research purposes” (p. 145). Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) postulated that “in all social research...ethical issues require taking into account questions that go beyond ethics” (p. 62). They go onto reiterate that “ethical principles of informed consent, the avoidance of deception, harm or risk, and Kant’s universal principle of respect, treating others always as ends and never as means, all go hand in hand with the ways we see...knowledge production” (Ericksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 62). To ensure these ethical standards, the integrity of Gonzaga University, the field of communication studies, and this researcher are upheld the study was conducted in a safe and confidential environment.

Chapter 4. The Study

Introduction

Cyberbullying and bystander behavior in traditional face-to-face bullying instances have both been extensively researched. However, research combining the two components is lacking. The overall objective of this study was to determine how individuals view themselves and their level of responsibility to intervene when confronted with dialogue that could be considered cyberbullying. Due to the small sample size of this study and the complexity of the topic being researched, the study allowed for a more in-depth understanding of how individuals choose to respond when confronted with cyberbullying.

Data Analysis

An initial survey was administered through SurveyMonkey.com and a series of one focus group discussion, two individual interviews, and one e-mail exchange were held. The initial background informational survey (see Appendix B) contained six questions and the option to leave contact information for future participation in focus group discussions or individual interviews. The questions were made up of open ended questions, scaled questions, and fixed-answer questions. The questions were generally basic, but were specifically set up in that way to determine the individual's experience with cyberbullying episodes and their role associated with those episodes. This was to ensure that only candidates with cyberbullying exposure were invited for further discussion.

The initial survey was made available to a total of 40 undergraduate students from October 27th 2014 till November 11th 2014. These were students in two undergraduate

courses being taught by the researcher of this study. Of the 40 students, 57.5% ($n = 23$) voluntarily took the survey; 27.5% ($n = 11$) were male and 30% ($n = 12$) were female. The average age of the respondents was 25.5 years. Six students (15%) were disqualified from further participation in focus group discussions or one-on-one interviews due to age, and six respondents (15%) were disqualified due to not having any direct experience with cyberbullying. The 11 (27.50%) remaining students were all invited to participate in one-on-one interviews or a focus group discussion. Seven (63.63%) students chose to participate in further discussion; three respondents (27.27%) chose to participate in a focus group discussion, two respondents (18.18%) chose individual interviews, and one respondent (9.09%) chose to provide further reflection through e-mail.

Coding of the survey results was completed through open-coding (Neuman, 2011). This allowed the researcher to identify themes in the respondent's answers and determine the extent of cyberbullying experience the respondent had. Open coding also enabled determination of individual roles associated with cyberbullying experiences the respondents had. Open coding ensured that the appropriate survey respondents were invited for further reflection.

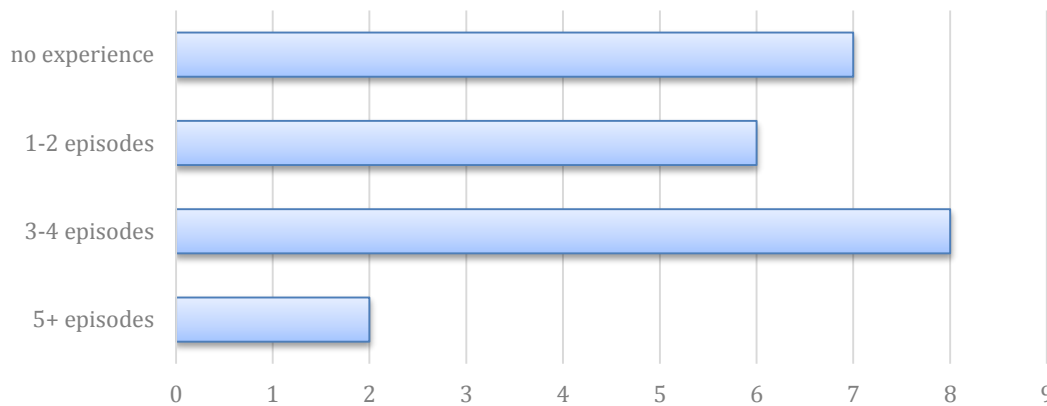
The focus group and individual interviews were both very informal open-discussion settings. Participants were provided with an overview of the thesis topic, the theory guiding the research, and what was hoping to be gained by the research. In order to maintain ethical research practices, participants were assured they were not being judged by their comments and encouraged to speak freely, whether or not they thought their comments would be beneficial.

Coding of the focus group discussion, individual interviews, and e-mail exchange was done through axial and selective coding (Neuman, 2011). The combination of these two different types of coding allowed the researcher to further categorize information through axial coding by organizing common ideas and themes (Neuman, 2011, p. 513) that emerged during discussions. Finally, with selective coding, the researcher was able to determine three major themes in relation to bystander behavior in cyberbullying episodes.

Results of the Study

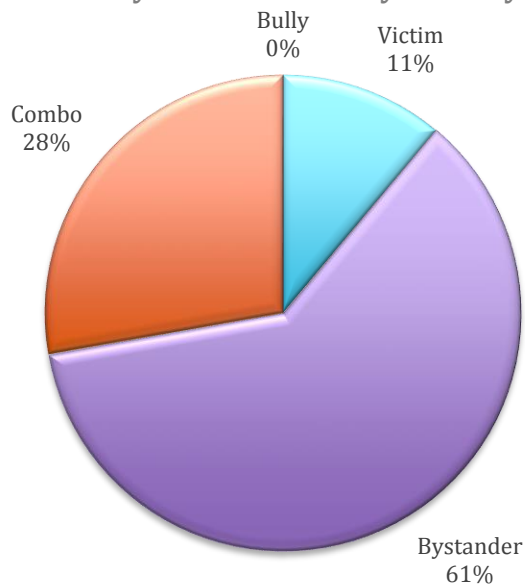
The Survey. The initial survey was used to determine an individual's level of experience with cyberbullying, the way in which they were involved (e.g. bully, victim, bystander, combination of all), and if they intervened in the situation. Of the total 23 respondents that took the survey, 30.43% ($n = 7$) had no experience with cyberbullying, 26.09% ($n = 6$) had experienced one to two episodes of cyberbullying, 34.78% ($n = 8$) had experienced three to four episodes of cyberbullying, and 8.70% ($n = 2$) had experienced five or more episodes of cyberbullying.

Figure 1: What would you rate your experience with cyberbullying (e.g. witnessed, participated in , was a victim of)?



Particularly relevant to this study was the number of individuals who responded they were witnesses (or bystanders) to cyberbullying episodes. Of the 23 initial respondents, 18 (78.26%) answered the question “*What was your role in the cyberbullying episodes?*” and five (21.73%) skipped the question. As shown below in Figure 2, of those respondents who had witnessed a cyberbullying episode, over half or 61.11% ($n = 11$), of the respondents indicated they were witnesses in the cyberbullying episodes they encountered. 11.11% ($n = 2$) of the respondents replied they were victims and 27.78% ($n = 5$) said their roles were a combination of all possibilities. These responses indicate that cyberbullying is still a relevant issue and that individuals do notice cyberbullying while interacting on social media networks. For clarification, these individuals are those that do notice the cyberbullying episodes, but are outside witnesses and not directly involved in the altercation.

Figure 2: What was your role in the cyberbullying episodes?



65.21% ($n = 15$) of the survey respondents indicated they do not intervene when they witness a cyberbullying episode. Only 21.73% ($n = 5$) of respondents said they did

intervene, and 13.04% ($n = 3$) replied they had not personally witnessed an act of cyberbullying. These responses highlight the need to research further why individuals choose not to intervene when they witness a cyberbullying episode. The need to discuss in more detail the reasons behind behavior in online environments can only be determined through focus group discussion or one-on-one interviews.

Focus Group and Interview Discussions. In-depth focus group discussions, one-on-one interviews, and one e-mail exchange allowed for a better understanding of how the survey respondents behave when witnessing a cyberbullying episode. Another guiding goal for this study was to attempt to determine the reasons why individuals choose to intervene or stay silent when witnessing cyberbullying. The questions outlined in Appendix C directed the course of discussion but were not specifically handed out to or asked directly of each focus group participant and interviewee. During the focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews, the researcher took basic notes that mainly focused on capturing common themes amongst question answers and key quotes. Though reasons for and against intervention were numerous and varied, as previously mentioned, the researcher determined three common themes addressing why bystanders do not intervene when confronted with cyberbullying. The discussions and results of them are detailed below.

Theme 1: Lack of Responsibility. The first theme that emerged was a lack of responsibility. Many respondents indicated they felt they did not need to intervene when witnessing cyberbullying. Focus group participant #1 (personal communication) indicated that their lack of intervention was due to the simple reasoning that “they do not need to be involved” (November 4, 2014). This reason was a fairly common response

amongst focus group respondents and fits with Thornberg's (2007) non-helper category of *dissociation* as discussed in chapter two of this thesis (p. 9). Likewise, focus group participant #1 stated "If I don't know the people or the story, I won't intervene" (personal communication, November 4, 2014). These students felt they were not previously associated with the situation and therefore did not feel compelled to intervene when witnessing someone being cyberbullied.

For all of focus group participants, individual interviewees, and the e-mail responder, the way they determined their responsibility to intervene was how well they knew the individuals in the altercations. If they were close friends or family members, they indicated they *might* consider intervening. But even then, their final decision was heavily dependent on whether or not they knew what the back-story of the situation was, whether or not they would only complicate matters more, or if serious detrimental or dangerous actions were being threatened to the cyberbullying victim. The e-mail responder stated "If I don't feel like I have a good understanding of what the situation is and what the context behind what I am seeing is, I rarely feel comfortable getting involved (personal communication, November 15, 2014). Individual interviewee #2 indicated that he does "not intervene in cyberbullying encounters because there might be somebody else who is witnessing the encounter that knows the victim more closely giving them more responsibility to act" (personal communication, November 10, 2014). These two responses indicate that the bystander is allowing diffusion of responsibility to guide their reactions.

Theme 2: Trivialization of Situation. Individual interviewee #1 indicated that she did not really know if what is being seen constitutes as cyberbullying and therefore does

not comment or send a private message to the person being bullied (personal communication, November 4, 2014). The individual has subconsciously labeled most of the altercations witnessed as unserious, thus *trivializing* (Thornberg, 2007 p. 8) the encounter. This same participant indicated that in order for her to take action and intervene in a situation witnessed online, the episode would have to include threats of physical violence to the victim or hearing rumors of the victim potentially committing suicide. The reason behind this was stated that “the emotional side of what is being said is something I do not consider. I am not a sensitive person” (Interview participant #1, personal communication, November 4, 2014). This response brought up a concern not previously considered by the researcher; individuals assign different meanings to words based on how they are psychologically developed. If someone is more sensitive, they are likely to interpret something said in jest as more serious and take hurtful comments to heart.

Theme 3: Fear of Embarrassment. Another common category that reasons for non-intervention fall into is the *embarrassment association* (Thornberg, 2007, p. 9) category. Focus group participant #2 stated “I don’t want them [the bully] to be mean to me, so I’ll stay out of it” (personal communication, November 4, 2014). This sentiment was reinforced by the other individuals in the focus group discussion. E-mail responder (personal communication) stated that “I don’t feel like publicly addressing the issue will solve anything” (November 15, 2014). While this is not explicitly stating he would be embarrassed, it does correlate to the idea. Taking a chance and standing up for someone in a public forum and having no effect can be embarrassing.

All of the discussions the researcher had with respondents shed light on the process cyberbullying bystanders go through when confronted with a cyberbullying episode. It is a complicated, ever-changing, and multi-faceted topic. Reasons for intervening or staying silent in a cyberbullying encounter are highly subjective to the witnesses' personal frame of reference.

Discussion

This study focused on bystander behavior in cyberbullying encounters and attempted to determine the process an individual goes through when witnessing cyberbullying as well as shed light on the reasons given for intervention and non-intervention in relation to Latané and Darley's (1969) theory of bystander apathy. Other theoretical components, pluralistic ignorance and diffusion of responsibility, from Thornberg (2007) were also considered when initially theorizing bystander behavior and considered again when analyzing survey and interview results. It should also be noted that while bystanders are not purposefully intending to harm a cyberbullying victim, they are inadvertently doing so in regard to Buber's (1970) philosophy of how to treat others. By not intervening, bystanders are allowing cyberbullies to engage victims in I-It relationships. They are being manipulated and robbed of the right to be treated as a valued individual. The victims are experiencing amorality (Christians, 2007, p. 96), in which their humanness is devoid by the technological order that CMC has created.

Pluralistic Ignorance and Diffusion of Responsibility. In response to the study's first research question, RQ1, various reasons were determined for intervention and non-intervention in cyberbullying encounters. Pluralistic ignorance suggests that individuals base their reactions of an event off of how those around them behave. This notion is

inherently linked with diffusion of responsibility. Because media platforms are considered public, it is natural to believe more than just one person is witnessing the act, thus believing someone else will step up and intervene. Interviewee #2 specifically touched on this idea and attributed it to one of his main reasons for not intervening when he witnesses cyberbullying. Though this could be seen as anecdotal, the study does support the notions of pluralistic ignorance and diffusion of responsibility. While this study focused on behavior in online environments, it does reinforce much of the previous research conducted on bystander behavior in traditional face-to-face emergencies and bullying (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005; Connolly & Roberts, 2013; Easton & Aberman, 2008; Thornberg, 2007).

Bystander Apathy Theory. This study's second research question, RQ2, asked, "How do the steps cyberbullying witnesses go through to determine if they will intervene fit within the steps laid out by Latané and Darley?" Interviews and focus group discussions did not yield enough information to definitively determine how the steps match. Though there is anecdotal information that ties into the steps outlined in bystander apathy. The first step, as laid out by Latané and Darley (1969) is that an individual must notice that something is happening. All participants in the second phase of research indicated that they noticed cyberbullying episodes regularly; whether that was on their Facebook news feeds, an online gaming platform, or through other social networking sites. In step two, the individual must then interpret the event. Some respondents did interpret the events as an emergency, whereas others trivialized the situations (for various reasons). In step three, the individual must determine their level of responsibility. Most of the respondents in this study did not feel they had a responsibility

to act whenever they encountered cyberbullying (reasons discussed above). The one respondent that mentioned he felt a level of responsibility stated “I believe that I have a responsibility not to ignore abuse of any kind, and I believe I have a responsibility to demonstrate that people shouldn't ever feel alone. I am obviously more aware of what happens with my friends than anyone else, but no one should have to put up with verbal insults and cyberbullying” (personal communication, November 15, 2014). This response is encouraging, however, the respondent went on to state that he does not intervene in every episode that might constitute cyberbullying. The survey results indicated that 61.11% of respondents do not intervene. This is alarming and needs to be better understood. The fourth and fifth steps outlined in the bystander apathy theory are for an individual to determine what form of assistance can be given to the victim and then implementing the choice that has been made. The study infers that all cyberbullying witnesses maneuver through this process, but that they may not be cognizant of the individual steps. This could be due to any number of reasons but was not a specific focus of this study. Overall, the results of studying bystander behavior through the bystander apathy theory add important new elements to the rhetoric of cyberbullying.

Many more concerns, not previously known to this researcher, were brought up during the focus groups and interview discussions. Technology is constantly changing and advancing. Because cyberbullying is a product of advancements in technology, it is rapidly changing too. Developers are readily producing new social media applications that are changing the ways in which individuals can attack, bully, and degrade others. Many of these applications were mentioned during the focus group discussions (e.g. yikyak, ask.fm, sub-tweeting, etc). It was also blatantly clear that the simple fact that

everyone interprets words and situations differently, that cyberbullying will always be a complicated problem. Therefore, the following chapter considers the limitations of this study and makes recommendations for future research in regard to curbing cyberbullying and encouraging bystanders to accept responsibility and intervene.

Chapter 5. Summaries and Conclusion

This study demonstrates that cyberbullying bystanders are maneuvering their way through a series of steps, similar to the process outlined by Latané and Darley (1969) though they are not especially cognizant of the process. More importantly though, the study has shed light on three key themes as to why bystanders do not intervene and how the evolution of technology and new social media platforms complicates cyberbullying intervention as a whole. Upon completion of the study, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research were identified. They are discussed below.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited in three ways; a small sample size which resulted in few eligible respondents for further discussion, lack of willingness of qualified individuals to participate in focus group discussions &/or individual interviews as well as a short time-frame to conduct the survey and follow-up interviews. These limitations are addressed in the following section.

Due to the relatively small sample size of only 40 students, the reach of the initial survey was succinctly limited. This resulted in a very small number of eligible focus-group and individual interview respondents. Had the initial convenience sample been larger, more qualified individuals would have been identified to participate in the study's phase two. The small number of qualified respondents directly impacted the focus-group and individual interviews. Many of the respondents did not want to participate in further discussion. If they did want to participate, timing then became a challenge. The small time-frame in which this study was conducted was also a limitation. If more time had

been available, more individuals could have been reached with the survey, thus resulting in more qualified and willing respondents for further discussion.

However, the limited number of qualified respondents did allow for the development of compelling rhetoric as to how they view their roles associated with cyberbullying. The researcher was able to engage in dialogue with these respondents in an attempt to fully understand how they determine their responsibility to intervene when witnessing a cyberbullying act. It should be noted that the sentiments of these few respondents may not be representative of a larger population.

Further Study or Recommendations

The focus-group discussions conducted for this survey highlighted the need for future study on bystander behavior in cyberbullying encounters. It would benefit the research area of cyberbullying for future studies to conduct more in-depth discussions with respondents. Being able to spend more time with each individual respondent might allow for a deeper insight as to their behavioral decisions when put into a cyberbullying situation.

It would also be beneficial to conduct research on how education programs in K-12 environments affect a person's bystander behavior. Most of the focus-group respondents had some form of anti-bullying exposure while they were minors. But all did not have any educational trainings/discussions on cyberbullying and its potential effects. These types of studies could open the door to new pro-social communication and societal movements specifically designed to educate society on the importance of taking a stand against cyberbullying; whether they are deeply connected with the victims or general acquaintances.

Another area of concern that have ties to the realm of cyberbullying include how new technological developments facilitate cyberbullying. The social media platforms in which cyberbullying is taking place are constantly changing. This demonstrates the need for educators and caregivers to be up-to-date and familiar with popular culture. Another important area for future research is to determine how individuals internalize messages that could or could not be considered cyberbullying. It is not unheard of for a group of friends to pick on each other all in good fun. However, it would be helpful to delineate what is normal and accepted from what is considered harassment and bullying.

Future research on cyberbullying and bullying could also focus on the development of media literacy training materials for primary schools to institute in their curriculum. This would prove beneficial by changing the status quo of what is acceptable online behavior today, to an era where people are living more in sync with Christians' (2007) social responsibility/communitarianism and Buber's (1970) I-Thou philosophy of how to treat one another. Training materials could also focus on ways bystanders can use social media pro-socially to counter negative communication.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that individuals do go through a step-by-step process when determining whether or not they will intervene in a cyberbullying episode, though they are not expressly cognizant of those steps. Looking at their behavior through bystander apathy allowed for this researcher to understand the decisions and motivations behind their actions. Analyzing these steps also allowed for the determination of three reasoning themes for non-intervention; a lack of responsibility, trivialization of the situation, and a fear of embarrassment. Having a better understanding of these themes

will hopefully help in promoting bystander intervention and improved communication patterns, thus lowering the rates of tragic cyberbullying and bullying consequences.

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Appendix A
Research Description and Informed Consent

Hello and thank you for your interest in my survey.

Cyberbullying is a pervasive social media problem, and one that is resulting in tragic events. Cyberbullying can (and does) have lasting negative impacts on not only the victims, but the witnesses and even the bully. While much research has been conducted to explore why cyberbullying occurs and the effects it has on victims, little attention has been paid to an aspect of cyberbullying that could potentially alter this form of social bullying.

As a part of my graduate degree program at Gonzaga University in Communication and Leadership Studies, I am researching how bystanders understand and interpret their responsibility in cyberbullying encounters. The central focus of this research is to determine how cyberbullying witnesses determine whether or not they will intervene in a cyberbullying situation. This study is intended for adult students, aged 18 or older, who have had exposure to cyberbullying episodes.

I would truly appreciate if you could help me by completing the following questionnaire, which will address standard demographic details as well as your level of cyberbullying exposure. All information will be kept confidential and participation is voluntary. You may choose to opt out of the survey at any time. The questionnaire should take no more than 10 minutes to complete.

If you choose to participate you agree to be contacted via e-mail or phone should you qualify for the interview stage of this study. If selected to participate in the interview, please allot 45-60 minutes for a phone conversation or face-to-face interview. If you are unable to be to participate in the interview via phone or in person, the interview will be conducted via e-mail.

Thank you in advance for assisting me with my research.

Jodie M. Bowers

Jodie M. Bowers

Appendix B

Initial Survey Questionnaire to determine level of Exposure/Experience with Cyberbullying
Research Stage 1

Definition of Cyberbullying to consider when answering the following questions:

“...willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text”

Patchin and Hinduja

1. What is your age?
2. What state do you currently claim citizenship?
3. What year of college are you currently completing?
4. As defined above, what would you rate your experience with cyberbullying (e.g. witnessed, participated in, or was a victim of)?
 - a. No experience
 - b. Some experience – 1 or 2 episodes
 - c. Average experience – 3 or 4 episodes
 - d. High experience – 5+ episodes
5. What was your role (if any) in the cyberbullying episodes?
 - a. Victim
 - b. Bully
 - c. Bystander
 - d. Combination of all of the above
 - e. Other _____.
6. Please list your e-mail and phone number in which you can be contacted if you qualify for the interview stage of this research.

e-mail: _____.

phone: _____.

Appendix C

Open-Ended Focus Group Questions – Research Stage 2

1. You indicated in the initial questionnaire you have experienced a(n) (low/average/high) level of cyberbullying episodes. Can you please explain your experiences?
2. You indicated in the initial questionnaire that you have experienced cyberbullying as a witness.
 - a. Did you intervene?
3. Based on your previous response, I would like to focus on the steps you went through in determining whether or not you were going to intervene.
 - a. What social media platform were you using?
 - b. How did you notice the cyberbullying episode?
 - c. How did you determine if the encounter was a bullying episode?
 - d. How did you determine your responsibility to react to the episode?
 - e. If you decided to intervene, how did you do so?
 - f. If you decided to remain silent, what was (were) your reason(s)?
4. Thinking back to your formative schooling years, were you provided with any formal training in how to respond to bullies/cyberbullies if you were the victim?
5. Again, thinking back to your formative schooling years, were you provided with any formal training in how to respond to bullies/cyberbullies if you were a witness?