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CYBERBULLYING PREVENTION IN SCHOOLS

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CYBERBULLYING PREVENTION
IN SCHOOLS

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for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
Robin Neorr
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Abstract

Cyberbullying is a growing problem among teenagers. Students are always connected via text messages and social media websites. The years of a student being bullied at school and then going home to a safe space where their bully was no longer able to torment them are over. Constant connectivity allows for 24-7 access for the bully to torment their victim. Combine this with an increasing number of social media outlets and the tormentors' belief that they can remain anonymous online; it is clear there is a need for students to learn ethical communication methods in school.

This essay will examine why cyberbullying is on the rise, different forms of cyberbullying, and how rhetoric, the art of persuasion through communications, plays into social media landscapes. The essay will look at programs to prevent cyberbullying in schools throughout the world. It will show how learning about rhetoric in social media will help faculty implement a successful cyberbullying prevention plan. The essay will conclude with a basic plan a communications manager can implement to curb cyberbullying in the school setting.

Introduction

This essay will define cyberbullying and introduce different forms of cyberbullying that takes place on social media. The piece will look at cyberbullying's roles, such as victim, bully, bully/victim, and not involved. It will look at how rhetoric applies to social media and cyberbullying.

Social media is an ever-expanding means of communication for young adults. Social media posts share the five rhetorical situation elements: text, author, audience, purpose, and setting. In the case of cyberbullying, the words or pictures used on social media are the text, the person who posts this information is the author, the audience is the reader of the words or pictures, the purpose in cyberbullying would be to harm the victim, and the setting would be on the internet.

We see that “social media sites demonstrate so much user-generated text and communication that students are familiar with, these sites can be used as a bridge to rhetorical analysis, particularly with audience awareness and appeal” (Head, 2016). Teaching students to become ethical communicators online and educating students about using rhetoric, the art of using language to persuade, in social media, will provide tools to help schools prevent cyberbullying.

The way teens communicate has been shifting over time. Daily communication by teens online is increasing. Smartphones are used to share pictures and messages on social media sites such as Instagram or Facebook. Teens use social media to keep in touch with friends and family

who live far away. They can play online games and chat with people in different states or even different countries. Teens are making connections virtually with like-minded people that they might not encounter in everyday life. Teens with “out of the box” hobbies can meet others who enjoy the same pastimes regardless of their physical location.

We live in a world connected by cybercommunication, and it is not going to change. Instead of just letting students learn as they go, we can help them with communications skills to craft a positive online presence. We can teach students to use rhetoric to positively appeal to their audience and encourage the use of social media as effective “equipment for living.”

“Equipment for living” is a term coined by Kenneth Burke (Burke, 1957). It is based on the thought that literature can be used as “equipment for living” because it provides us with the tools and strategies which can be applied to real life recurring situations. We can look at social media texts in much the same way that we look at literature; therefore we can use social media as equipment for living. We see this in schools when students use, “online media as equipment for living, by recognizing online media as symbol that helped them deal with situations that occurred in their lives” (Cumberbatch, 2014).

The project will conclude with a review of current cyberbullying programs worldwide and share a simple plan to reduce cyberbullying in school managed by the school’s communications director.

What is Cyberbullying and Why Are Incidents Rising?

In the past decade, cyberbullying has emerged as a phenomenon at the school, college, and university levels (Meyers, 2019). An older survey from 2007 reported that 18% of middle school students in the United States said they were targets of cyberbullying at least once within the previous two months (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). A little more than ten years later, research from the Pew Center states, “that 59% of U.S. teens have personally experienced at least one of six types of abusive online behaviors” (Anderson, 2018). These behaviors include offensive name-calling, spreading false rumors, receiving explicit texts, always asking where they are or what they are doing by someone other than a parent, physical threats, and having explicit images shared without their permission.

An early definition of cyberbullying described it as, “online behavior that encompasses three characteristics: (1) it is performed by individuals or groups using electronic or digital media; (2) hostile or aggressive messages are repeatedly communicated; and (3) the behavior is conducted with the intent to cause discomfort or inflict harm on the target, was advocated” (Tokunaga, 2010). This definition still holds ten years later.

Cyberbullying of teens differs from traditional bullying. The CDC defines traditional bullying as “any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying may inflict harm or distress on the targeted youth, including physical, psychological, social, or educational harm”

(Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2014). Cyberbullying does involve the same three main characteristics, unwanted aggressive behaviors, repeat occurrences of the message, and inflicting harm on the victim. The difference is that traditional bullying primarily occurs within the school walls, whereas cyberbullying can occur at any time of day. Teens had a safe space away from bullies when bullying was mostly confined to a school's hallways. Now teens are connected to phones, computers, or other forms of electronics that allow access to social media both while at school and in their homes. Constant connectivity allows cyberbullying to invade all areas of a target's life both day and night, both at home and at the school where the target studies (Myers, 2019).

Cyberbullying is on the rise for two simple reasons. Teens are online more, and there is the perception that what they do online is anonymous and can not be traced back to them. A survey done at the University of Minnesota showed that "92 percent of adolescents in the United States (ages 13–17) visit online websites daily, with 24 percent stating that they are online "almost constantly"" (Zurher, 2018). Teens spend time on apps such as TikTok, ASKfm, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat. There is a benefit to increased social media use, but an increase in social media use offers students a new opportunity to bully outside of the school halls. According to the Pew Research Center, "Some 42% of teens say they have been called offensive names online or via their cell phone. Additionally, about a third (32%) of teens say someone has spread false rumors on the internet." (Anderson, 2018).

In cyberbullying, the author uses anonymity and the absence of physical strength imbalance, both present in face-to-face bullying situations, to bully someone they would never

consider harassing in person. A study by Bartlett and Gentile showed that “the more people feel that they are anonymous online, the more they are likely to cyberbully others” (Barlett, Gentile, & Chew, 2016). This anonymity gives students who would not typically bully others in person an outlet to become a bully without the repercussions of getting caught.

Students believe that they can anonymously write something on social media, and the victim will never trace it back to them. In this rhetorical situation, the author believes that the words or pictures they are sharing online are anonymous; the audience is blind to who is really sharing this information. The author’s belief they are anonymous emboldens them to say things online and use their words against someone they would typically not use their words against online. This author’s anonymity means that they can choose a victim that they do not have a personal relationship with and harass them online. A 2016 study found that using “anonymity may be more pronounced because the aggressor may not be as identifiable and the bully does not need to have a previous relationship with the victim” (Barlett, Gentile, & Chew, 2016).

The author obtains anonymity through the creation of fake social media accounts. These fraudulent accounts are sometimes known as “finstas” or “imposter accounts.” Fake accounts are created for a variety of reasons. Fake accounts can be used to hide students’ online activities from parents or only post to a select number of their close friends. A student might also create a “finsta” to stalk and harass other students online under a perceived cloak of anonymity. Cyberbullying gives the bully a false sense of online disinhibition, allowing people who might not be traditional bullies to use this form of bullying online under a cloak of anonymity (Redmond, 2020).

The perceived power imbalance that is common in face-to-face bullying is no longer applicable to cyberbullying. A broader range of bullying scenarios come into play when the bullying takes place online versus face-to-face. The weaker student, or a student of smaller stature, can now use any number of methods to cyberbully a physically intimidating student because size does not matter when the act of bullying is anonymous. Their muscularity or physical stature is not in play in cyberbullying (Barlett & Kowalewski, 2018). The strength imbalance that may occur at school is not happening online.

This rise in cyberbullying causes a growing number of cyberbullying victims to develop low self-esteem, experience school failure, express anger, anxiety, depression, school avoidance, school violence, and suicide (Li, 2010). Once this misinformation about the victim is out there, it can be challenging to remove the online content. These victims' suffering has been so severe that there are notable cyberbullying cases leading to suicide among school-aged children such as Megan Meier, Mallory Rose Grossman, Phoebe Prince, and Ryan Patrick Halligan (De Nies, James, & Netter, 2010).

Defining Cyberbullying Terms

Cyberbullying takes place over social media, where the author can manipulate what their audience perceives as the truth. Much like literature is stated to “direct the larger movements and operations,” social media directs the reader to see the author’s reality. In some cases, the author is using social media to bully or cause harm with their text. The cyberbully uses rhetoric to paint

a picture that they want their audience to see. This new manipulation of social media words or images is why we needed to create a new term, cyberbully. Like the people who were up against recurrent situations needing a name in Mencken's book on *The American Language*, the term cyberbullying was developed because people needed a name for the act of bullying people virtually.

To understand cyberbullying, it is essential to understand that cyberbullying is a blanket term that encompasses various ways cyberbullying is carried out. Sociological criticism codifies "the various strategies which artists have developed with relation to the naming of situations." (Burke, 1957). The naming of various cyberbullying methods is essential. New terminology has emerged to discuss the topic of cyberbullying. The text used in social media can be generalized in the same way that literature is generalized as medicine and equipment for living throughout the ages. Burke pointed out that we can replace ancient Roman scripts with modern-day New York, and we can replace lions and foxes with salespeople and politicians. We can switch Burke's texts about literature to texts meant to describe social media.

This works when discussing cyberbullying. Burke speaks of "certain social relationships recurring so frequently that they must have a word for it" (Burke, 1957). In his example, he said that the Eskimos have 15 different words for snow. In the realm of social media, we find that cyberbullying happens so frequently that the blanket term is no longer enough to explain it. From the outside, we only see cyberbullying as cyberbullying; to truly understand cyberbullying, new terms have been added to our vocabulary. The terms differentiate the various types of cyberbullying that takes place online. Cyberbullying occurs via text message or on social media

sites such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter, Instant Messaging, or Email. It is essential to understand some of the terms used for various forms of cyberbullying. Essential terms include Fraping, Dissing, Catfishing, Trickery, and Outing.

Fraping occurs when “a person accesses the victim’s social media account and impersonates them in an attempt to be funny or to ruin their reputation” (Peled, 2019). It is a change to a person’s social media account by someone other than the account owner. It can be an innocent change, such as a daughter logging into her parent’s Facebook account and posting, “Sara is my favorite child.” It can also be a cruel attack, such as when a cyberbully hacks into the victim’s Instagram and posts an embarrassing photo online, or logs in to the victim’s Facebook account and changes their profile picture or starts posting derogatory information.

The term “dissing” means that you “share or post cruel information online to ruin one’s reputation or friendships with others” (Peled, 2019). The cyberbully will send private messages to the victim or the victim’s friends or publicly post hateful statements or rumors online to damage the victim’s reputation or friendships. An example of dissing would be a cyberbully posting on social media outlets that the victim, a vegetarian, actually enjoys secretly eating hamburgers, complete with a photoshopped picture of the victim with a hamburger.

Catfishing is another common form of cyberbullying. Catfishing is when someone “steals one’s online identity to recreates social networking profiles for deceptive purposes. Such as signing up for services in the victim’s name so that the victim receives emails or other offers for potentially embarrassing things such as gay-rights newsletters or incontinence treatment” (Peled, 2019). An example of catfishing is when a cyberbully creates a fake profile online to befriend the

victim, gain personal information, and then turn around and use it to humiliate the victim.

Catfishing could also be when a person creates a social media account using a picture of someone else to friend a victim, start an online relationship only to have it come out that the cyberbully is not whom they say they were online.

Finally, trickery and outing are “when the cyberbully tricks an individual into providing embarrassing, private, or sensitive information and posts or sends the information for others to view” (Peled, 2019). An example of trickery or outing would be a bully tricking the victim into sharing personal information and then sharing it online.

Four Categories of Cyberbullying

There are four categories of Cyberbullying. They include those who cyberbully, those who have been victims of electronic bullying, students who have been both bullies and victims, and those not involved in bullying or being victimized by a bully (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Interestingly enough, in cyberbullying, we see that “the perpetrators of cyberbullying reported that they had been bullied themselves in traditional ways. The researchers speculate that the anonymity of cyberbullying enabled these young people to fight back in ways that would be impossible face-to-face” (Myers, 2019).

Why is Cyberbullying is Hard to Prevent and What Can We Do About it?

One issue faced in preventing and identifying cyberbullying and cyberbullies is that it is a newer phenomenon. Cyberbullying is something that the students' parents did not experience growing up. It shares similar aspects of traditional bullying, but it is not isolated to when the student is in the same physical location as the victim. A teen comes home from school, and it is not a place safe from school-related harassment; the bullying does not stop. Cyberbullying takes place on students' mobile phones, tablets, and computers. If teens connect online, they may become a victim of cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying poses a threat to teens' health and well-being. Adolescents who are targets of cyberbullying have reported an increase in depressive affect, anxiety, loneliness, suicidal behavior, and somatic symptoms (Nixon, 2014). Teens internalize this struggle and do not reach out to friends or family to help them navigate these difficult situations. They are either embarrassed that they are the victims of cyberbullying, or they fear the repercussions of admitting to being bullied.

Teens are hesitant to tell their parents about being cyberbullied. They feel as though their parents will not understand, or worse, parents will take away the child's access to social media. When parents take away child access to individual social media accounts, they take away the method that a child uses to communicate with their friends. The adolescent is left out of online conversations, and this event can negatively affect them socially.

Rhetoric in Social Media

We have discussed that cyberbullying has an author, the bully, and an audience, everyone who sees the post. The audience may be just the victim, or the audience may be everyone connected to both the victim and the bully's social media accounts. The next piece of the cyberbullying puzzle is the text, the word, or pictures that the cyberbully is putting online to upset their victim. The text is the context of their posts. This text is the way that the author is using rhetoric to persuade their audience.

Kenneth Burke defines rhetoric as “the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or induce actions in other human agents” (Burke, 1969). Rhetoric is the art of persuasion. Social media is using words and images across the internet to connect with and persuade others. Social media posts are an ever-expanding method in which students communicate. These emerging modes of communication and their rhetoric need to be studied in elementary and high schools.

Looking specifically at the works of Kenneth Burke, we can see just how social media are used as rhetoric. “Kenneth Burke's identification theory restructured communication with the focus on connecting with the audience” (Head, 2016). Identification creates an opportunity to teach and study how to use rhetoric to better communicate and connect with the audience through social media.

We see that students use rhetoric every day without even realizing it. They “persuade and connect to their audience by “identifying” with them in certain ways” (Head, 2016). Students are using rhetoric on social media and, “these sites serve to provide transferable knowledge and

praxis that students already have to composition and rhetoric” (Head, 2016). This is the perfect time to teach students about rhetoric because they use Burkes' identification theory on social media.

We see that social media fulfills a need. Besides allowing students to communicate with one another on their chosen platform efficiently, students can learn from social media. They see celebrities and influencers using rhetoric to appeal to and identify with their audience. We see that when students “identify with a celebrity they want to be like the celebrity and thus are prone to adapt the celebrity’s attitudes, beliefs, and behavior” (Lindenberg, Joly, & Stapel, 2011). Students unwittingly study famous social media influencers’ rhetoric, and without even knowing it, they begin to use the same words and terminology. They are looking at social media influencers’ rhetoric as a guidebook to how to live their lives.

Social Media and Equipment for Living

What is “Equipment for Living,” and why is it essential to use social media today? Kenneth Burke believed that we could use literature as “Equipment for Living” to understand better how to cope with life. “Kenneth Burke believed that people used the narratives in texts, such as literature and poetry, to help them deal with situations that occurred in their everyday lives, using the texts as equipment for living” (Cumberbatch, 2014). Students use social media the same way that literature and poetry were used in the past. Social media is their escape. To help deal with life, students use social media to communicate and escape.

Social media is a tool used by students to cope with life, just as literature is used to cope with life. This allows today's teens to use social media as equipment for living. Teens need social media to feel connected, just as people needed literature in the past. Social media can replace the word literature in Kenneth Burke's essay, "Equipment for Living," and it would still come to the same conclusions. Literature is still widely consumed and enjoyed, but we also see students spending hours consuming social media posts. His sociological criticism of literature can be swapped out for a sociological criticism of social media.

We see that literature is a strategy. It is "Designed to organize the army of one's thought and images" (Burle, 1957). It is "one's campaign of living." What students put out on social media is their campaign of living. The rhetoric in literature can be used to be a campaign for living, and the rhetoric contained in the literature is a vital component of Kenneth Burke's identification theory. To be successful equipment for living, social media needs to acknowledge and address the problem of cyberbullying. This theory can be tied to social media. In the current state of social media, without proper cyberbullying prevention programs, this equipment, social media, is failing the students.

To persuade the audience that social media posts are their actual reality, they use identification theory. We learn about Kenneth Burke's "Theory of Identification and Consubstantiality" in *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Students use the same principles as used in literature when they incorporate identification into their social media posts to present themselves on social media how they want the world to see them. This use of identification gives our audience the feeling that they can relate to the post's author. Ways students create this

identification can vary; identification can result from a shared empathy, feeling of responsibility, or a sense of community created by the students' rhetoric.

Teens use social media to craft their online identity. They are crafting how they want the world to see them. They might create immaculately lit Instagram posts or humblebrags on Facebook about how glorious life is. They could craft hashtags and messaging that their audience can relate to. They use text on social media to get the audience to feel as though they understand the author. We see this same sense of companionship with literary authors as we do with social media superstars. While one reads and, in a way, derives a feeling of success from reading about being successful, they do not go ahead and apply these learnings to themselves. Social media savvy teens will most likely not be using what they learn from viewing social media celebrities' in their everyday lives. In both cases, the act of "applying such study in real life would be very difficult, full of many disillusioning difficulties" (Burke, 1957).

While social media's increased use can effectively be "Equipment for Living," the text of the cyberbullying, using their social media words and pictures to induce negative attitudes in others, adds a stumbling block to this idea. It takes social media from successful equipment to faulty equipment that we need more training to utilize appropriately. We need to look at cyberbullying not as a problem with social media being defective equipment for living, but a problem with the text that cyberbullies produce.

Social Media and Literature

Teens of today use social media in the same way literature was once used. Aside from the increased ways social media offers teens to communicate, social media offers their audience the opportunity to escape reality. They look at the text in social media in the same manner as the text in a book. While they read books, readers are immersed in “the aura of success.” Just this fact, just reading this literature makes the audience feel like they have had a small success. This idea applies to social media, as well. The act of “following” social media celebrities is a form of escapism that allows viewers to momentarily live in the lives of the famous YouTuber or Instagram sensation of the moment. Students might watch a TikTok video and learn a dance, it is like they have escaped into the influencer world, and real connections are felt.

Literature is better equipment for living once education provides us with the means to understand it, so we have to provide education on social media to serve as effective equipment for living. Neither social media nor literature on their own are faulty or defective equipment for living. The text in the literature or the text in social media posts causes both forms of media to be faulty.

Literature has always provided the reader with a chance to escape. Social media can provide this same escape. Students can be taught to recognize that social media, just like literature, is not always an accurate representation of life. Social media and its use can only be successful as long as truth does not go by the wayside. Students need to be taught that social

media accounts are not always factual accounts of life, and everything said on social media is not the truth.

Education on social media use in schools needs to be incorporated to be a positive campaign for living. This education goes beyond just telling students to only use their words on social media accounts for good. We must also look at how students manipulate information put out on social media to harm others. We must examine how to tell if the message that is being sent is real or fictitious.

Cyberbullying and Rhetoric

Rhetoric is used to persuade the reader of something. Social media texts can provide the rhetoric needed to manipulate what people perceive as the truth. Much like literature is stated to “direct the larger movements and operations,” so can the text used in social media direct the reader to see the author’s reality, and in some cases, the author, a cyberbully, can manipulate the narrative to show what they want their victims to see. They can convincingly present mistruths, use identification to connect with their audience and make their social media followers believe their lies are true.

Cyberbullying comes into play when the ‘bullies’ social media platform tries to manipulate the readers' perception of reality with their text. Manipulation is “the act of influencing or managing someone deviously or shrewdly” (Croucher, 2016). The goal of cyberbullying is to humiliate, embarrass, or intimidate the victim. A cyberbully does not have to

be as strong or as smart as their victim. The cyberbully exists online; the imbalance of power between the bully and the victim is erased, making it easy to manipulate social media text to harass the victim. These various forms of social aggression can occur using text, images, audio, or video (Redmond, 2020).

We can look at the text of social media in the same way as we look at literature. On social media, as in literature, we see this darker side of human existence. We see words used for harm. The authors can forget that “realism is an aspect for foretelling; he may take it as an end in itself” (Burke, 1957). In this case, the author is the cyberbully and is authoring their recipes for revenge or humiliating their victims.

Cyberbullies use their rhetoric to spread their untruths and blindly lead the audience into believing their manipulation of reality. The author creates a new world in this cyber realm. They may even dilute themselves into thinking of this world they have crafted as reality to the reader as their actual reality. They create a reality that the reader will believe in by using rhetorical devices such as identification to create a sense of ethos towards the author of the texts. They choose their rhetoric carefully based on who their audience is and craft their text to cause the reader to empathize and identify with them. This causes the reader of the text to feel that they are on the same page as the bully and when the bully puts out a false social media message about the victim, they feel as though they have to believe the author. thus making their .

False social media messaging can manipulate the truth and create a strategy whereby one “cannot lose.” The goal of cyberbullying is to manipulate the truth to inflict pain. Cyberbullies take information about their victim and put it out on the web through social media. The purpose

of their manipulation of the truth is to hurt the individuals they bully. They might post an embarrassing picture of the victim with text to humiliate them or use social media to spread rumors through a text message chain. All acts of cyberbullying come down to an act of the author manipulating the truth.

Burke states, “Each work of art is the addition of a word to an informal dictionary.” So, we can see social media as art. It is adding to reality. It is creating its existence. Thus, the cyberbullies can create these lies, this complete untruth, and let the world believe it and even look back on it. Whereas bullying in person ends, the act of cyberbullying on social media can last forever.

Kenneth Burke mentions that “if one is a victim of competition, for instance, if one is elbowed out if one is willy-nilly more jockeyed against than jockeying, one can by solace and vengeance of art convert this very “liability” into an “asset” (Burke, 1957). This is a common occurrence with victims of social media harassment. They might even turn around and become a bully to someone else. We see that a small amount of people, “who are the target of cyber bullying also simultaneously engage in cyber bullying behaviours resulting in them being classified as bully/victims” (Betts, Gkimitzoudis, Spenser, & Baguley, 2016).

Cyberbullying Prevention Methods

Now that we know what cyberbullying is and how cyberbullying ties into communications, we must examine how to prevent students from cyberbullying others. We must

turn social media into effective equipment for living. As an emerging problem, cyberbullying prevention programs are needed in schools. “There is clearly a significant need for effective intervention and prevention programs” (Gaffney, Farrington, Espelage, & Ttofi, 2019). The job of the Communications Manager in a school or group of schools would be to provide the school with a program that teaches cyberbullying prevention methods. These programs are lacking in the United States.

Teaching students that their words online mean something, they carry weight, and that this form of communication has long-lasting effects on the victim is crucial. Nevertheless, there does not seem to be a widely agreed-upon method of dealing with cyberbullying throughout schools in the United States. In fact, according to a study in 2014, teens in the United States use the “strategy of ignoring rumors, and derogatory comments were mentioned by multiple focus group participants” (Pelfrey, 2014). Ignoring bullying is not a successful means of preventing cyberbullying from happening again in schools. It will not make the bullies silent.

Studies have shown, “anti-cyberbullying programs are effective in reducing both cyberbullying perpetration and victimization” (Gaffney, Farrington, Espelage, & Ttofi, 2019). There is a second benefit of cyberbullying prevention in schools. “Intervention designed to prevent cyberbullying can help prevent students from bullying others in traditional ways” (Chaux, Velásquez, Schultze-Krumbholz, & Scheithauer, 2016). The increase in empathy and understanding of the consequences of the students’ actions spill over into face-to-face communication.

The United States is not alone in its lack of a uniform cyberbullying prevention program. Overall, “Few evidence-based prevention interventions have been published despite the need for school-based prevention programs to improve peer relationships and reduce bullying/cyberbullying” (Garaigordobil & Martínez-Valderrey, 2015).

Some programs have proven to be successful programs in other countries. The United States can customize one of these programs to create a successful cyberbullying program to be rolled out across the country. These programs include the Media Heroes program in Germany, KiVa in Finland, and CyberProgram 2.0 in Spain. Each program aims to empower adolescents with social and emotional skills. This empowerment helps the students to be better able to cope with bullying. They teach teens how to react when being bullied and assist teachers and parents in the proper protocol of responding when they learn of a cyberbullying situation.

Media Heroes

The goal of the Media Heroes (Medienhelden) program is to “prevent cyberbullying mainly by promoting empathy, providing knowledge about definitions, Internet risks and safety, and legal consequences, and promoting assertive ways for bystanders to intervene” (Chaux, Velásquez, Schultze-Krumbholz, & Scheithauer, 2016). The program was created in 2010 for students in 7th through 10th graders. There were few evaluated cyber-bullying prevention programs at the time, and studies had shown that up to 20% of students had experienced cyberbullying.

There are two versions of the Media Hero program. Trained and supervised teachers run both. The first teaches the skills over a “long period” of time or fifteen 45 minute sessions. The second or “short-version” of the program teaches the skills in a single day with four 90-minute sessions. Although both versions of the program have proved successful, “Evaluation of Media Heroes showed that it contributed to the reduction of cyberbullying perpetration, as well as to increases in empathy, perspective-taking skills, self-esteem, and subjective health, especially among those who received the long- version of the program.”

The benefit of the Media Heroes program is that it trains the teachers to teach Media Literacy to their students. Media literacy allows the students the chance to look at the text of cyberbullying. It is integrated into the existing school curriculum. It teaches students how to look at social media and think critically about what the author says in their text. Students examine the rhetoric being used in social media and this media literacy allows students to have a better understanding of the purpose of the social media post.

The Media Heroes program in Germany includes parents with an evening where the adolescents' present the information to their parents (Ferrer-Cascales, 2018). This teen to parent teaching session is an essential part of the program. Studies have shown the importance of education on cyberbullying for parents and caregivers, not just students. Practical applications need to include the individual components of communication and social skills, empathy training, coping skills, and digital citizenship, but involve parents in education on cyberbullying (Hutson, 2018). Students will have comfort in knowing that they can talk to their parents about what is

going on in social media and what to do if they are victims of a cyberbully. The parents having this training will understand what their student is talking about and have the tools needed to help.

The Media Heroes program is successful in secondary grades, where students communicate more online than in person. This is because, “A cyberbullying prevention program might become an opportunity to remember, practice, and deepen the knowledge, attitudes, and socio-emotional competencies they might have learned in elementary school, and to apply them in a context that is meaningful to the challenges facing their adolescent relationships” (Chaux, Velásquez, Schultze-Krumbholz, & Scheithauer, 2016).

KiVa

The KiVa program was funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland. The KiVa antibullying program began in 2006 at the University of Turku in Finland for students between the ages of 7 and 15 (Persson, Wennberg, Beckman, Salmivalli, & Svensson, 2018). It is taught in a series of student lessons and online games throughout the year, teaching children how to support and speak out if they learn of someone being cyberbullied. It is implemented nationally and thriving because of the buy-in from students, staff, and parents.

The intervention focuses on the bystanders’ reactions to a bullying situation. The response to the bullying situation receives what the KiVa program sets out to change. KiVa’s purpose is to get the bystanders to identify with the victim and not the bully. By identifying and feeling empathy towards the victim, the bully will no longer receive positive or attention-getting

responses. The program aims to take power out of the bullies' social media posts. This attention would typically assist and reinforce the bully. Without the reinforcements, bullies' social rewards and, consequently, their motivation to bully will be eliminated (Salmivalli, Poskiparta, Ahtola, & Haataja, 2013).

This program does not punish the bully; instead, it celebrates those who support cyberbullying victims. "The program is designed to produce its effects, first of all, by encouraging students to support victimized peers instead of providing social rewards to the bullies. Besides, adults (teachers as well as parents) are provided with information about bullying and efficacy to intervene and prevent it" (Salmivalli, Poskiparta, Ahtola, & Haataja, 2013). It aims to make social media a safe space for students to use and enjoy. It takes away the fear that they will be harassed online because the programming in KiVa makes cyberbullying an unrewarding act for the author of the cyber attacks.

The KiVa program is most successful when taught in elementary school. This is because in elementary school, "contact with the virtual media is still limited" (Chaux, Velásquez, Schultze-Krumbholz, & Scheithauer, 2016). Elementary students are still learning how to communicate virtually, and their responses to cybercrimes can easily be shaped.

The KiVa program has been so successful that it is now used in 90% of Finland's schools. It is licensed throughout the world in Chile, Belgium, Sweden, and various other countries.

CyberProgram 2.0

In Spain, schools teach CyberProgram 2.0 over a year with 19 one hour sessions. “It has been confirmed that the program decreases bully/cyberbullying behaviors” (Garaigordobil & Martínez-Valderrey, 2014). The program has four goals for the school year (1) To identify and conceptualize bullying/cyber- bullying; (2) to analyze the consequences of bullying/cyberbullying; (3) to develop coping strategies to prevent and reduce bullying/cyberbullying behaviors; and (4) to develop positive traits such as empathy, active listening, and social skills (Garaigordobil & Martínez-Valderrey, 2016). CyberProgram 2.0 accomplishes these goals by breaking down the program into three Modules: Conceptualization and Identification of Roles, Consequences, Rights, and Responsibilities, and Coping Strategies (Garaigordobil & Martínez-Valderrey, 2016).

The rhetoric used to talk to the students in Cyberprogram 2.0 is designed to inform them about cyberbullying, persuade them that cyberbullying is wrong, and encourage them to take action and not just be a bystander when they encounter cyberbullying. The teachers administer CyberProgram 2.0 to the students. There are 25 different activities throughout CyberProgram 2.0. The first five activities help the student to identify what cyberbullying is, the next five activities teach students to analyze the direct and indirect consequences of the act of cyberbullying, and the program concludes with fifteen activities designed to analyze the bullying patterns from the perspective of the victim, aggressor, observer. Each activity will include an objective designed to increase empathy, a look at the consequences of this cybercrime, positive

strategies to cope with this situation, and a discussion or debate. CyberProgram 2.0 has been shown to reduce successfully cyberbullying and regular bullying in schools.

Recommendations for Plan for Preventing Cyberbullying in Schools

Cyberbullying in schools can not be eliminated, but the communications manager can implement a program to reduce cyber victimization occurrences. The communications manager will teach students to use social media safely. This will be done by utilizing components of each of the plans discussed in this essay.

In order for this or any plan to be successful, two parts must be included. The first is mandatory education for the parents, teachers, and staff on cyberbullying. This education will help adults support students by understanding the various sites their students are on; they will also learn cyberbullying terminology. Furthermore, they will be educated on how to be an ally against cyberbullying. This will include learning what to look for if you suspect that a child is being cyberbullied and whom to contact if a child is a victim of cyberbullying. The second part will educate the students with a monthly program that runs throughout the school year. The program will work with students to be allies against cyberbullying.

The communications manager will begin the training by hosting two meetings before the start of the school year. The first meeting will be with the staff. It will take place during the staff training that takes place at the beginning of the school year. This meeting will serve to present

the latest research on cyberbullying. The meeting will then discuss the school's protocol for teaching cyberbully prevention this coming school year.

The second meeting will be with the school's parents and occur in conjunction with the school's annual back-to-school meeting. Sharing information with parents is a crucial element of the school's anti-cyberbullying program. The goal of this meeting is for parents to buy into educating their children on preventing cyberbullying. How this message is presented is critical. The rhetoric used to present this cyberbullying prevention program will affect whether the parents buy into being partners with the school to combat this problem or dismiss this as yet another program they do not have the time or energy to invest in.

The communication manager will address the audience and lay the foundation for the parent's role in cyberbullying situations. Parents might be averse to admitting that cyberbullying is happening at their child's school. The communications manager will use a carefully crafted rhetorical appeal to persuade the parents to acknowledge that cyberbullying is a problem at their child's school. Parents might be afraid to admit that their child could be being bullied or be the bully. "Through our interactions, we strive to identify with one another as a way to counteract the divisions that exist; when our interests are joined with others', we identify with them and often share common goals" (Petre, 2019). The parents and the communications manager's goal is to reduce the amount of cyberbullying in schools.

The communications manager will speak from the perspective of a parent; they will use explicit identification with "a rhetor trying to directly appeal to an audience by saying I have had essentially a similar experience as you (which, then, implies that you should identify with me)"

(Petre, 2019). This will let the parents know that cyberbullying is a challenging and uncomfortable topic, it can and does happen to kids like theirs, but together they can help stop cyberbullying.

A simple overview will be given to parents of several different forms of cyberbullying and its effect on kids just like their own. The school communications manager will provide them with written material to be revised yearly, which can be used as a resource for looking to see if their child or one of their child's friends are victims of cyberbullying. They will learn the steps they need to report if they suspect their child is being cyberbullied. They will also be educated on how to talk with their children about cyberbullying. They will commit to regular talks with their students on the importance of standing up against and reporting a cyberbully when encountered.

Parental education on cyberbullying will continue throughout the school year. A monthly newsletter will be sent to parents. Parents will receive a website to learn all aspects and real-life answers on what they can do for their children if they are victims of cyberbullying. Talks with their students will be encouraged to keep the lines of communication open. A recent study shows that, “when adolescents experience a more positive communication environment, able to stimulate self-disclosure with parents and enrichment of parental knowledge about their online activities, this may result in lower levels of moral disengagement” (Bartolo, 2019).

It has also been shown that “When adolescents are experiencing a positive communication environment with parents, this can produce more opportunities for moral socialization that, in turn, can prevent cyberbullying” (Bartolo, 2019). For the school to be successful, we need to set parents up to communicate with their students successfully.

Throughout the school year, the communications manager will hold sessions with the students that will teach how the use of their words online and how they communicate on social media is their chance to create their life story. Do they want this life story to be one of bullying and harming others, or will they choose to use their actions online to influence others' lives of others positively?

The school program's goal is to positively teach students to use social media, not to spread rumors or post pictures of someone to belittle them. Students are not going to stop using social media; cyber communication is not going anywhere. What we can do is teach students that they are the authors of their social media accounts. They need to take into consideration their audience. They need to develop content that is positive and uses cyber communication for good.

Students will be empowered to become anti-cyberbullies. Students will have the tools to communicate with a trusted adult what they are witnessing or witnessed if they see cyberbullying. Students will be taught not to spread false messages. They will report false or misleading content. When they see this content online they will talk with the person who is spreading false information.

When a student is found to be cyberbullying, the school will create an opportunity for the student to meet in a small group and work on empathy training. The communications manager will have small group sessions that will use rhetoric to help the bully identify with their victim. The communications manager will "share stories as a way to connect" and "hopefully inspire actions to be taken on their behalf" (Petre, 2019). This empathy-building workshop should not be

looked at as punishment, instead of a chance to work with the cyberbullies and help them grow toward empathy. It will teach them the consequences of their actions.

Schools can work within this framework to decide how to create classes to work on the student body, becoming anti bullies. They will decide how often the students will meet and what materials will be used by the school. The communications manager can create a plan from scratch, or the school can opt into an existing cyberbullying program such as the KiVa program, which has been proven to be effective and is available in the United States.

Conclusion and Future Research

Cyberbullying is a growing problem with teens throughout the world. A communications manager's role in the prevention of cyberbullying is to make sure that there is a successful cyberbullying prevention program that communicates to students, parents, teachers, and staff. These programs must continually evolve from year to year. The challenge comes in the fact that the world of cybercommunication is continuously changing. One day people are making vines and using musical.ly, and the next minute, those sites are no more.

Future research would be a more extensive study of the different cyberbullying programs used throughout the world. Research on anti-bullying programs, especially those used in the United States, is arduous to come by. A deeper look at what individual schools are using to communicate their anti-cyberbullying message is needed. A more in-depth look at the success of these programs over time is also needed.

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