Cyber Bullying in Higher Education

A qualitative study about students cyber bullying instructors

Maria Minor, D.M.
Henry M. Brashen, Ph.D.
Gina Smith, Ed.D.
Your Presenters

College of Management and Technology

Dr. Henry Brashen

Dr. Maria Minor

Dr. Gina Smith
Today’s Learning Objectives

- Define Cyber Bullying
- Examine research and laws related to cyber bullying
- Share design and results of study related to cyber bullying of faculty in higher education
- Offer recommendations on how cyber bullying should be handled in online forums

“the use of the Internet, cell phones, or other device to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person” (para. 2).
Definition

According to Olweus (2012), "A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself" (para. 2). This definition includes the following three components:

1. Bullying is aggressive behavior that involves unwanted, negative actions.
2. Bullying involves a pattern of behavior repeated over time.
3. Bullying involves an imbalance of power or strength.
Current Research

- Cyber Bullying research is mainly focused on:
  - K-12 grades
  - Student to student cases

Little research identifies the existence of student’s cyber bullying instructors in post secondary education.
Current Laws

- As of February 2012, all but two of the 50 states in the United States have enacted anti-bully legislation.
- As of September 2011, only 8 state laws include cyber bullying in the law.
- Currently, there is no federal law that defines cyber bullying.

(Hinduja, & Patchin, 2011)
Who Gets Bullied?

Cyber bullying is not limited to the student to student level, it is also directed at instructors through technology such as:

- Facebook
- Rate my professor
- Personal emails
This research was intended to answer four questions:

1. What are the experiences that college faculty in online settings have with cyber bullying from students?
2. If they have experienced cyber bullying from students, how have they handled the situation?
3. If an instructor does not do anything about the problem, why?
4. How should cyber bullying in online education settings be addressed?
The Who, What, Where, and When of the Study

- Qualitative survey method using SurveyGizmo.
- 346 online faculty members (both undergraduate, graduate and doctoral) including full and part time.
- Conducted at the College of Management and Technology at a large online institution during the 1\textsuperscript{st} quarter of 2012.
Survey Details

- 20 questions; 5 questions on demographics, 15 questions on cyber bullying
- Anonymous and optional
Survey Results

- 68 surveys returned (20%)
- 58.8% male, 41.2% female
- 85.3% part time faculty
- 14.7% full time faculty
Results of Survey

- 61.8% said they had never been cyber bullied in the online classroom.
- 33.8% said they had been bullied in the online classroom.
- 4.4% were not sure if they had been bullied in the online classroom.
How Cyber Bullying was Identified

- **Threats** - law suits, verbal abuse, aggressive language repeated, aggressive emails, verbally intimidating phone calls
- **Escalation** - threatening to contact academic advisor, supervisor, associate dean, university vice president or university president
- **Public Forum** - inappropriate sharing of conflict with faculty in either a group forum, discussions, or instructor forum
Who Handled the Cyber Bullying Issue

- 22.1% said they handled it themselves.
- 11.8% said their direct supervisor handled it.
- 1.5% said someone else handled it, but did not specify who that was.
- 4.4% said no one handled it.
How Well was Cyber Bullying Handled?

• 26.5% felt it was handled effectively.

• 5.9% said it was not handled effectively.

• 5.9% said it was handled somewhat effectively.
Perceived Barriers to Reporting Cyber Bullying

- Unsure who to go to when encountering cyber bullying
- Worry that faculty member might not be supported by supervisor or above
- Embarrassment
- Fear of losing job
- Dealing with issue would take time and energy
How Do We Create a Safe Online Environment for Students and Faculty?
Recommendations

• Provide training for faculty on how to facilitate and address cyber bullying.
• Identify and communicate a clear process that faculty should follow should they encounter cyber bullying by a student.
• Train supervisors of faculty on how to address student cyber bullying of instructors.

• Develop a zero tolerance policy and ensure that it is communicated to faculty and students alike.
• Legitimate student complaints should be handled according to university policies.
Questions?

