Examining Factors Influencing Cyber Bullying Among Canadian Youth: Appraisal of the I^3 Model

Laurie-anne M. Hellsten, PhD
Brittney P. Hendry, MEd
Marguerite L. Koole, PhD
Laureen J. McIntyre, PhD

Abstract

Purpose: Drawing on the I^3 Model as our theoretical framework, the purpose of this study was to examine the push and pull factors that may intensify or mitigate instances of youth cyber bullying. Methods: Data were collected from school personnel and community stakeholders in a western Canadian province utilizing semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Results: Multiple triggers (n=5), impelling influences (n=2) and inhibiting forces (n=3) were identified. Discussion: Our study is one of the first to examine the utility of the I^3 Model as a theoretical lens in which to view cyber bullying. This study was based on the perspectives of important stakeholders who rarely are asked to provide input. Similar to Wong et al. (2018), results identified online disinhibition as an impelling force and suggested that empathy building would act as an inhibiting force. Further research is needed in other contexts and global locations to more fully investigate the efficacy of the I^3 Model to cyber bullying.

Introduction

Cyber bullying is a term often used to describe any behavior “performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others” (Tokunaga, 2010, p. 278).

Some of these behaviors have been linked to negative outcomes for both victims and perpetrators. Berne et al. (2015), Cyberbullying is a common issue among adolescents (Ybarra et al., 2012).

A recent nationally-representative study found that approximately 14% of Canadian youth (ages 10 to 17) have been cyber bullied in the past month, while approximately 8% cyber bullied another others during the same time period (Beran et al., 2015).

While the study of this phenomenon has grown exponentially, until recently, few studies have relied on theory to explain findings (Berne et al., 2013).

I^3 Model

The I^3 Model explains the processes by which non-aggressive interactions can become aggressive and is based on three core interrelated stages (see Figure 1):

- **Instigating Triggers** (situations that increase the likelihood of an aggressive response);
- **Impelling Influences** (influences that determine the likelihood and/or strength of the response); and
- **Inhibiting Forces** (forces that decrease or inhibit the likelihood of an aggressive response) (Sloter & Finkel, 2011).

According to the perfect storm theory, cyberbullying is most likely to occur when instigation and impulsion are strong and inhibition is weak (Finkel, 2014).

Figure 1. I^3 Model

Methods

- 16 stakeholders from across one western Canadian province.
- Participants included school personnel (e.g., vice principals, principals, superintendents, teachers, school and guidance counselors, and instructional technology consultants, n=12) and community stakeholders (e.g., police officers and leaders from private organizations that conduct bullying education for youth; n=4).
- Participation in interviews or focus group interviews between June 2012 and May 2013. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended and probing questions. Interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed.

Results

- Analysis supports multiple instigating, impelling, and inhibiting forces are at play (see Figure 2).
- Example participant quotes are located in Tables 1-3.
- Some forces can be characterized as either a trigger/impelling force or as an inhibiting force depending on direction (e.g., adult digital illiteracy is a trigger; adult digital literacy is an inhibitor).

Table 1. Example Participants’ Quotes: Instigating Triggers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ubiquitous Access to Technology</th>
<th>Youth today have 24/7 access to each other and with their phones under their beds.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 2. Example Participants’ Quotes: Impelling Influences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illiteracy &amp; Incompetence</th>
<th>Impetus to bully provided by the anonymity of the digital environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 3. Example Participants’ Quotes: Inhibiting Forces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disinhibition</th>
<th>Easy to pass the buck and “not my job” stance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Discussion

- Results of our study was promising – we identified multiple instigating triggers, impelling influences, and inhibiting forces.
- A recent study examining the I^3 Model and cyber bullying found that, in a sample of 211 university students, the I^3 Model predicted the pathway from cyber bullying victimization (an instigating trigger) to cyber bullying perpetration, while subjective norms (inhibiting factor) and online disinhibition (impelling force) moderated the strength of the relationship (Wong et al., 2018).
- Similar to Wong et al. (2018) study, we identified online disinhibition as an impelling force and suggested that empathy building could act as an inhibiting force (likely through peer subjective norms). In contrast, stakeholders in our study did not specifically identify previous cyber victimization as an instigating trigger.
- Future research should further examine the factors identified in our study using a quantitative study similar to Wong et al. (2018).
- Future research also needs to explore impelling forces in more detail. Our study highlighted many potential instigating triggers (situational factors that enhance cyber bullying) but less evidence of impelling forces (the internal or dispositional context).
- Future research should also apply the I^3 Model directly to youth perspectives – in order to explore what instigating triggers, impelling influences, and inhibiting forces do youth identify?

Conclusions

- This study is a preliminary exploration of the I^3 Model as applied to cyber bullying.
- The current application of the I^3 Model appears to have some utility in exploring and refining constructs related to cyber bullying victimization, impulsion, and mitigation.
- Building on this work and the work of Wong et al. (2018), a more thorough test of this framework should be carried out to confirm the dimensions of the interrelated concepts found.

References


