
Cyberbullying is defined as “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cellphones, and other electronic devices” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, p.5). Authors Sabella, Patchin, and Hinduja examine the available empirical research on cyberbullying to determine the accuracy of often-perpetuated claims about this phenomenon. Their research revealed multiple inaccuracies about the nature and extent of cyberbullying, that often originate from and are further bolstered by the media and uncorroborated individual public statements.

The authors identified seven myths that are commonly perpetuated within the community related to cyberbullying. These include, (a) everyone knows what cyberbullying is, (b) cyberbullying is occurring at epidemic levels, (c) cyberbullying causes suicide, (d) Cyberbullying occurs more often than traditional bullying, (e) cyberbullying is a rite of passage that all teens’ experience, (f) cyberbullies are outcast or just mean kids, and (g) to stop cyberbullying turn off your computer or cell phone. By examining currently available data the veracity of these claims can be better understood so that those who work in this field have a clearer picture of the true nature of cyberbullying. They are thus better equipped to aid in its effective prevention and response. The authors emphasize the seriousness of this issue stating, “Though it occurs in cyberspace, this problem should not be trivialized since it has been linked to real world consequences.” They then go on to list a wide array negative emotions and behaviors that have been linked to it, ranging from delinquency and interpersonal violence to low self esteem and suicidal ideation. The authors explain that the definition of cyberbullying given above is not necessarily universally accepted. They further expound that the offending conduct
typically exists and occurs over a range and continuum of behaviors. As a result subjectivity may come in to play in determining what is cyberbullying and what is not. Finally the term bullying itself does not always have an equivalent in other languages. For these reasons there remains a lot of variability in the description and definition of cyberbullying, and consequently it is not easily universally understood. The authors go on to give several examples of sensationalistic headlines seen through mass media publications about cyberbullying, but assert that there is no evidence for such claims. Rather they feel that the majority of studies indicate 70-80% of youth have not been cyberbullied, and have not cyberbullied others. In addition despite several high profile incidents in which teenagers committed suicide, in part because of experiences with cyberbullying, research shows that the vast majority of cyberbullying victims do not kill themselves. There is also no evidence that cyberbullying occurs more often now than traditional bullying, and the authors caution that making cyberbullying a priority at the expense of addressing traditional bullying is a mistake, and that both should be addressed as different manifestations of the same underlying issue.

The authors go on to emphasize that no matter how pervasive or prevalent bullying has been in our history it was not acceptable then and is not acceptable now. It is not a normal rite of passage. They also determined that cyberbullies are not just outcasts or mean kids, but rather that As Elizabeth Englander (2008) concluded after surveying youth who admitted to cyberbullying others: Cyberbullies themselves identify their own anger and desire for revenge as the major immediate motive for engaging in cyberbullying. A second motive is identified by students who report that they engage in cyberbullying as a joke”. Finally they contend that encouraging youth to avoid or turn off technology, as a means of avoiding cyberbullying is an unrealistic and overall ineffective long-term strategy. The ubiquitous nature of technology and its necessity as a
social and educational tool for teens makes this impractical. Also even if the individual is offline, harassing or malicious profiles or webpages of the target can be created without them even knowing about it. In conclusion the authors admit the work done on understanding the behaviors and myths about cyberbullying are certainly not exhaustive and they support further empirical study and investigation of this topic. They caution that if this is not done educators youth advocates and others in the field by default risk falling into the trap of relying on conventional wisdom and media embellishment in their attempts to address cyberbullying.