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The Psychology of Cyberbullying as Seen Through the University of Rhode Island

Meaghan Rose Costello
mrcostello@my.uri.edu

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The Psychology of Cyberbullying as Seen Through the University of Rhode Island



STUDENT: MEAGHAN ROSE COSTELLO
FACULTY SPONSOR: DR. GRANT WILLIS

Overview



- Spring & Fall 2014
- What I wanted to learn
- My plan & what went well
- What did not go well
- Next steps
- Closing thoughts & Summary/What I learned

Spring & Fall 2014



- RA in Gorham Hall last year
- Experienced issues between suitemates based on cyberbullying*
- Bothered everyone involved....
- ...but ALL parties continued to take part until subsequent inclusion of myself and my supervisor.

Spring & Fall 2014 Continued



- Inspired my fall independent study
- Under Dr. Willis' supervision:
 - Performed research on current psychological studies regarding collegiate cyberbullying
 - Literature review and critique of that research
 - Compared it to my spring experience

Spring & Fall 2014 continued



The Issue

- Recently-many efforts to decrease/eliminate middle and high school cyberbullying
- Most research stops there* (Brashen, Minor, & Smith, 2013; Brewer et al., 2012; Kimali, 2014).

Spring & Fall 2014 continued



One Study

- Cyberbullying Among Female College Students: An Exploratory Study (Brewer et al. 2012).
- Surveyed 288 students from a health promotion class at Western Washington University *
- 54% of students CURRENTLY knew a victim of online harassment
- 94% could not accurately define cyberbullying
- *There is a currently high prevalence of cyberbullying in colleges, but a notably low understanding it.*

Spring & Fall 2014 continued



Another Study*

- 48 states have laws on bullying
- Only 24 include cyberbullying
- Surveyed 511 college students
 - 23.6% have sent harmful messages about a person to the internet (facebook statuses, group pages, etc.)
 - 6% of them sent messages directly TO the victim
 - 43% of participants who have been cyberbullied admitted to cyberbullying someone else after*

What I Wanted to Learn



- *Sparked interest in the combination of freshmen, cyberbullying, and the following:
 - How many freshmen in college know a perpetrator and/or victim of cyberbullying?
 - How many freshmen in college engage in cyberbullying themselves?
 - Have freshmen in college been educated on university policy?

My Plan & What Went Well



- What: to answer those questions, I organized an intervention
- Who: Freshmen in Browning Hall
- How: Pretest and Posttest with a presentation on my fall research in between

My Plan and What Went Well Continued



Pretest and Posttest

- To ensure confidentiality and match tests: ask for name of street residents grew up on
- Both ask residents to respond to eight statements with: Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree, Disagree, or neither agree nor disagree
- Determine whether my intervention (program) is effective

My Plan and What Went Well Continued



Pretest and Posttest

- *Similarities in statements*
 - *I have felt bullied online*
 - *Most people can recognize when cyberbullying is happening*
 - *I have said harmful words to someone online*
 - *I consider cyberbullying less severe than bullying in person*
 - *Cyberbullying is becoming an increasing issue in our society*
 - *Cyberbullying is mainly an issue for people in middle and high schools, that fades away as people mature*

My Plan and What Went Well Continued



Pretest and Posttest

- *Differences*
 - *Pretest: I understand and can define cyberbullying accurately*
 - *Posttest: I can understand and define cyberbullying more accurately**
 - *Posttest also asks if residents' understandings of cyberbullying changed after the study*

What Did Not Go Well..



- Because this research involves human subjects, IRB approval required to:
 - Ensure confidentiality
 - Maintain proper risk-benefit levels
 - Determine whether the study should even be done

What Did Not Go Well...continued



- Still pending IRB approval...until yesterday
 - Takes a LONG time*
 - Back and forth with corrections
 - Expedited vs exempt
- Did not get to complete the study or include results/numbers/conclusions

Next Steps



- My brother...
- These messages need to reach RA's, who are very involved in the lives of freshmen on campus*
 - Office of Civility Education & Bias Response team promote civility and respect, provide targets of bias a safe space to have their voices heard, and ensure comprehensive responses to bias incidents.

Summary



- I wanted to learn: about the presence of cyberbullying at URI
- My plan: implement a psychological intervention including a presentation sandwiched by pre and posttest
- Went well: creating/organizing the intervention and preparing for it
- Did not go well: timing of IRB!
- Next steps: RA summer training and intervention rescheduling

Questions?

