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

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

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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
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).
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.*
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
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
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.
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?