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CHAPTER 4:

Gender Differences and Cyberbullying Towards Faculty Members in Higher Education

Abstract

This chapter offers a gendered analysis of experiences with cyberbullying reported in a sample of 331 faculty members from four Canadian universities. Cyberbullying in higher education can be situated on a continuum between cyberbullying in K-12 education and cyberbullying in the workplace. Numerous commonalities exist between these environments; however, in this chapter, we focus on the power dynamics that characterize the post-secondary context. We also discuss faculty members’ vulnerability to cyberbullying, the impacts they experienced, their perceptions of the problem, and recommended solutions. Results from our online survey showed that 25% of faculty members had experienced cyberbullying either by students (15%), and/or by colleagues (12%) in the last 12 months. Gender differences were apparent, as female respondents were more likely to be targeted by students as well as by colleagues. Females also expressed greater concern about the problem, reported more negative impacts if victimized, were more likely to report the incident, and argued more strenuously for more effective and transparent policies to address cyberbullying on campus. The findings promote a gendered understanding of vulnerability to cyberbullying, which is closely tied to power imbalances among members of the university community. Cyberbullying at the post-secondary level is an understudied area, particularly in terms of cyberbullying towards faculty members.

Keywords: Cyberbullying; Harassment; Higher education; Faculty members; Gender; Post-secondary; Workplace bullying; University culture; Social media.
Introduction

The ubiquity of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the personal and professional lives of university faculty members has been valuable; however, these advances have also resulted in an increased opportunity for negative behaviours, such as cyberbullying. The phenomenon of cyberbullying has come to the fore in the past decade, although we typically associate the term with youthful behaviour and not with adults. Cyberbullying research has been aimed at children and youth of middle school and high school age (see Cassidy, Faucher & Jackson, 2013, for a comprehensive review of this literature). The earlier ostensible consensus definition of cyberbullying suggested it was another form of traditionally defined bullying: “an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself” (Smith et al., 2008, p. 376). In this rapidly evolving field of inquiry, researchers increasingly are providing nuances with respect to what intent, repetition, and power imbalance signify in the context of cyberbullying, as well as evaluating the impacts of anonymity and the hypothetically limitless audience for the bullying (Dooley, Pyżalski, & Cross, 2009; Grigg, 2010; Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2012; Menesini, 2012; Nocentini et al., 2010; Patchin & Hinduja, 2012; Smith, 2012; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009; von Marées & Petermann, 2012). This understanding has led us to adopt a broader definition of cyberbullying: through ICT media, cyberbullying uses language or images to defame, threaten, harass, bully, exclude, discriminate, demean, humiliate, stalk, disclose personal information, or contain offensive, vulgar, or derogatory comments with an intent to harm or hurt the recipient.
Cyberbullying at the post-secondary level has not been a priority of this emerging research area. For those who have investigated cyberbullying at universities, the focus primarily has been on undergraduate students’ experiences (Beran, Rinaldi, Bickham & Rich, 2012; Dilmaç, 2009; Finn, 2004; Molluzzo & Lawler, 2012; Schenck & Fremouw, 2012; Turan, Polat, Karapirli, Uysal & Turan, 2011; Walker, Sockman & Koehn, 2011; Wensley & Campbell, 2012; Zhang, Land & Dick, 2010). Relatively little attention has been paid to the experiences of university faculty members or other teaching personnel. The emerging scholarship on cyberbullying in the workplace (Baruch, 2005; D’Cruz & Noronha, 2013; McQuade, Colt, & Meyer, 2009; Piotrowski, 2012; Privitera & Campbell, 2009), however, provides some parallels to the cyberbullying of university personnel. Further, some connections have been drawn between cyberbullying in the K-12 sector, universities, workplaces, and beyond (Bauman, 2011, 2012; Englander, 2008; McKay, Arnold, Fratzl, & Thomas, 2008; McQuade et al., 2009).

We see cyberbullying against faculty members and other teaching personnel in universities along this lifespan continuum. Cyberbullying in universities is distinctively situated as a bridge between bullying in schools and in the workplace (Cowie et al., 2013; McKay et al., 2008). Several continuities have been highlighted, such as the persistence of roles—victim, bully, bully-victim (Bauman, 2011; Beran et al., 2012), and the similar impacts reported at both the school and workplace levels (Baruch, 2005; Beran et al., 2012; Cassidy et al., 2013).

Individual and contextual factors influence cyberbullying behaviours that take place in schools and in workplaces (see Jones & Scott, 2012). The theoretical framing of cyberbullying in terms of power is particularly relevant in the context of higher education. Cyberbullying also relates to incivility in the classroom and in the workplace. It has been pointed out that lower level mistreatments can escalate into more severe forms of harassment and even violence.
(Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langout, 2001; Wildermuth & Davis, 2012). Our contextual understanding of incivility and harassment in universities as workplaces is premised on an awareness of the power imbalances that exist between university students and faculty members or other teaching personnel, as well as between colleagues.

This chapter examines online survey data from 331 university faculty members and other teaching personnel (including teaching assistants, tutor-markers, instructors, lecturers, and student advisors) from four Canadian universities. The purpose of the survey was to determine the nature, extent, and impacts of cyberbullying experienced by faculty members as well as their opinions about the problem and possible solutions.

**Literature Review**

**Cyberbullying Correlates**

The view of cyberbullying in higher education as part of a behavioural continuum suggests that knowledge regarding cyberbullying in other realms (K-12, workplace) can inform and assist in theoretically framing this study. However, the nature of interpersonal relationships and interactions that exists between faculty and students as well as between colleagues in the specific context of higher education suggests that attention also be given to power imbalances that are at play and how these may present in the form of cyberbullying.

The research literature on the correlates of cyberbullying relate primarily to youth, however, the perspective of cyberbullying throughout the lifespan (Bauman, 2012; McKay et al., 2008; McQuade et al., 2009) suggests that an awareness of known correlates may assist us in our examination of cyberbullying towards university faculty members. For example, research on youth indicates that heavy ICT usage may increase risk of exposure to cyberbullying (Smith, 2012; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009; von Marées & Petermann, 2012; Yilmaz, 2011).
Gender is one of the most examined correlates. Some work suggests that females are more likely to experience cyberbullying than traditional face-to-face bullying (Dooley, Pyżalski & Cross, 2009; Jackson, Cassidy & Brown, 2009; Kowalski, Morgan, and Limber, 2012; Li, 2005). Moreover, the online environment has given rise to new forms of sexual and gender harassment, such as ‘sexting,’ ‘morphing,’ ‘virtual rape,’ and ‘revenge porn,’ to which women are particularly vulnerable (Cassidy, Brown & Jackson, 2012; CCSO Cybercrime Working Group, 2013; Halder & Jaishankar, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2012; Shariff & Gouin, 2005). Indeed, according to Halder and Jaishankar (2009), women are the second most vulnerable group online, after children.

We have come to understand bullying as stemming from a power and control imbalance between the bully and the victim (Olweus, 1993), and the same may be said of cyberbullying. However, the power differential in cyberbullying may be attributable to different sources; for example, ease with technology, number of viewers, potential anonymity of perpetrator, and 24/7 access to the victim online (Dooley et al., 2009; Nocentini, Calmaestra, Schultze-Krumboltz, Scheithauer, Ortega & Menesini, 2010; Shariff & Gouin, 2005; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009; von Marées & Petermann, 2012). The hierarchical nature of universities may suggest one straightforward interpretation of power imbalances between senior and junior colleagues and between professors and students. However, in the context of higher education, a number of variables such as status, position, role, authority, gender, ethnicity, and age have an impact in shaping the relative and perceived power of individuals, whether in faculty-student relationships or in relationships between colleagues. The significance of these power differentials allows us to situate the analysis of cyberbullying within the Power and Control model (Pence and Paymar, 1993), where the abuser uses such tactics as intimidation, threats, harmful language, social
standing, exclusion, harassment and technology to exert control over the victim (see also Faucher, Jackson, & Cassidy 2014).

**Cyberbullying in Higher Education**

The cyberbullying experienced by faculty members has not been well examined within the research literature. To date, we are aware of only three studies specifically documenting cyberbullying against faculty (Blizard, 2014; Minor, Smith & Brashen, 2013; Vance, 2010), two of which were restricted to online learning environments. We also located some research on online misbehaviour, which refers to cyberbullying experienced by faculty members, but within the context of online incivility (Clark, Werth, & Ahten, 2012; Jones & Scott, 2012; Wildermuth & Davis, 2012). Cyberbullying in universities appears to be conveyed primarily through email (Martin & Olson, 2011; McKay et al., 2008). However, scholarship on workplace bullying suggests: “bullying on the e-mail system appears to be at the same level as other communication modes used to conduct bullying and negative outcomes of bullying exist irrespectively to the media of communication” (Baruch, 2005, p. 366). Websites such as Rate My Professor, YouTube pranks, Facebook, gossip and confession websites, and defamatory online profiles have also received attention as formats for the cyberbullying of professors (see, for example, Binns, 2007; Browne, 2014; Daniloff, 2009; Martin & Olson, 2011).

Blizard (2014) surveyed 36 instructors and conducted in-depth interviews with four members from this group at a Canadian university. She found email or faculty polling sites were the main formats employed to target faculty members, many of whom experienced a wide range of negative effects, some of which were severe and long lasting.

Minor and colleagues (2013) surveyed 68 online instructors at a large online university in the United States. About a third of their respondents reported that they had been cyberbullied by
students. Of those who were targeted, about a third reported the matter to their direct supervisor. The majority did not know what resources were available or felt that there were no resources available to help them should they encounter cyberbullying from students. Concerns which impeded respondents in reporting instances of cyberbullying included: fear of impacting further teaching opportunities; fear of decreasing student retention rates; embarrassment; fear of not being supported by the supervisor; and time requirements for adequately addressing the issue.

Vance (2010) surveyed 225 students and 56 faculty respondents engaged in online learning environments. Cyber-harassment (the term he uses) in online learning occurred at least once for 12% of students and 39% of faculty respondents, and more than once for 2% of students and 16% of faculty. Older faculty and students and those who had been involved in more than 20 online courses (primarily faculty members) reported higher rates of cyber-harassment. The most common types of cyber-harassment experienced were email and flaming (online verbal abuse). The majority of those targeted did not report the incident(s), citing reasons such as: doubt that authorities could help; not thinking it was an offence; not knowing where to report; and fear of retaliation.

Jones and Scott (2012) examined factors related to the socio-cultural context of the university classroom that may be conducive to incivility and cyberbullying among students. Although the cyberbullying in this case was not against faculty members, it raises a number of relevant issues. Considerations such as perceived power imbalances, perceived lack of consequences to cyberbullying, frustration and dissatisfaction, and motivations such as higher grades were contributors to cyberbullying.

Wildermuth and Davis (2012) reviewed the literature regarding students’ uncivil electronic discourse aimed at faculty members. The authors contend that student incivility has
increased due to specific aspects of online interactions (such as perceived anonymity, asynchronicity, lack of non-verbal cues, greater potential for misinterpretations), broader trends in declining civility and changing definitions of politeness, and the informal nature of higher education coupled with students’ sense of entitlement and consumerist attitudes toward their education. Student incivility, as a result, can lead to faculty stress, decreased morale, cynicism, disengagement, lower standards, and violence.

**Academic Entitlement, Incivility, and Harassment in Higher Education**

The literature on academic entitlement, classroom incivility, and harassment can also aid in our understanding of the issue of cyberbullying towards faculty members in higher education. Academic entitlement refers to “expectations of high rewards for modest effort, expectations of special consideration and accommodation by teachers when it comes to grades, and impatience and anger when their expectations and perceived needs are not met” (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, & Farruggia, 2008, p. 1194). There is a body of work documenting an increase in academic entitlement among higher education students in recent years (Boswell, 2012; Chowning & Campbell, 2009; Ciani, Summers & Easter, 2008; Greenberger, et al., 2008; Kopp & Finney, 2013). Academic entitlement has also been associated with student incivility (Chowning & Campbell, 2009; Kopp & Finney, 2013). Morrissette (2001, np) has defined incivility as:

the intentional behaviour of students to disrupt and interfere with the teaching and learning process of others. This behaviour can range from students who dominate and foster tension in the classroom to students who attend classes unprepared, are passively rude, or unwilling to participate in the learning process.
Student incivility toward faculty members is a form of contrapower harassment, which occurs when a person with presumably less power bullies someone with more power (DeSouza, 2011; Lampman, 2012). This incivility can occur in the classroom, outside of the classroom, as well as online (Bjorklund & Rehling, 2011; Boice, 1996; De Souza, 2011; Meyers, Bender, Hill & Thomas, 2006). Young, female, low-status, and minority faculty members appear to face a greater risk of exposure to incivility both in terms of frequency and severity of the behaviours (DeSouza, 2011; Knepp, 2012; Lampman, 2012; Rowland, 2009; Twale & De Luca, 2008).

Aside from individualistic traits of perpetrators, we should also consider some broader contextual factors linked to our education system that encourage and perpetuate academic entitlement and incivility in higher education. Email access to professors has created, rightly or wrongly, an impression of constant availability to students and has lessened the formality of student-faculty exchanges due to the casual nature of online modes of communication (Greenberger et al., 2008; Wildermuth & Davis, 2012). More generally, online communication creates a sense of anonymity, a disconnect with the potential negative consequences of our words and actions, an absence of nonverbal cues available in in-person communication, and asynchronicity in exchanges, all of which play a part in uncivil online exchanges and cyberbullying (DeSouza, 2011; Kowalski, Limber & Agatston, 2012; Smith & Slonje, 2010; Tokunaga, 2010; Topcu & Erdur-Baker, 2012; Wildermuth & Davis, 2012). Furthermore, certain characteristics of the university classroom, such as large class size and impersonal instructor-student relationships may also add to the feeling of anonymity and the behaviours it engenders (Jones & Scott, 2012; Knepp, 2012). Additionally, students who adopt consumerist attitudes toward education may believe they are entitled to good grades in exchange for paying tuition. Such beliefs then may feed the academic entitlement attitudes related to student
Incivility (Knepp, 2012; Morrissette, 2001; Rowland, 2009). Academic entitlement and consumerist attitudes may unsettle the perceived power imbalance between students and the faculty members who are seen as exerting control over their grades (see Blizard, 2014).

Incivility and cyberbullying are not unidirectional. Less has been said about the misbehaviour of faculty towards students or colleagues than about misbehaviour targeting faculty members. Although faculty cyberbullying of students was not a focus of our study, we did investigate cyberbullying by colleagues and we found no literature directly related to this topic. However, adopting the same theoretical frame as above, we did note some work on faculty incivility and workplace bullying to consider. For example, Twale and De Luca’s (2008) work on faculty incivility links university governance structures, committees, hierarchy, and bureaucracy to this problem. They also argued that the entry of previously excluded groups such as women and minorities and the growing corporate culture are precipitating factors of the academic bully culture.

Civility, both on and offline, and countering the problematic behaviours of cyberbullying and incivility are educational as well as societal challenges. However, incivility and workplace bullying also seriously impact the victim as well as the university culture as a whole. A wide array of effects are reported such as: trauma; distress; psychosomatic symptoms; student and/or faculty disengagement; unwarranted negative faculty evaluations and increased fear over job security; lowering of standards, including unwarranted grade inflation; low morale; high stress; cynicism; decreased motivation; and in rare instances the culmination into physical violence, homicide, and suicidal thoughts (Blizard, 2014; Boice, 1996; Ciani et al., 2008; DeSouza, 2011; Lampman, 2012; Wildermuth & Davis, 2012).
Methods

This chapter reports on findings from parts of a broader study of cyberbullying at the university level, which includes a policy scan, student and faculty surveys, student focus groups, faculty interviews, and policymaker interviews at four Canadian universities. Two of the universities are in British Columbia, one in the Prairies, and one in Atlantic Canada. We are reporting here on findings from the faculty surveys from the four participating universities. An online survey, using Fluid Surveys, was disseminated through various mailing lists to gain maximum exposure. The survey included 111 items, which included both closed and open-ended questions related to demographics, ICT usage patterns, experiences of cyberbullying from students or colleagues, solutions, and their opinions about the phenomenon. The surveys were anonymous and no identifiers were used. Three hundred and thirty-one faculty members completed the surveys, during the period September 2012 to February 2014.

Cyberbullying was defined at the outset of the survey as: ‘Cyberbullying uses language that can defame, threaten, harass, bully, exclude, discriminate, demean, humiliate, stalk, disclose personal information, or contain offensive, vulgar or derogatory comments. Cyberbullying is intended to harm or hurt the recipient.’ Respondents were then provided with a list of examples of cyberbullying, including the medium used, and asked to comment about their experiences over the past 12 months; for example: receiving nasty, mean, rude, vulgar, hurtful, or harassing email or text messages; having terrible, derogatory, sexist, racist or homophobic things written about you on-line; someone posting an embarrassing photo or video of you on-line; someone pretending to be you on-line; and being deliberately excluded from an on-line group or chat.
Results

Respondents’ Profile

**Background.** Professors constituted the largest group of respondents (45%), followed by teaching assistants or tutor markers (18%), instructors (14%), student advisors and others with teaching-related positions (12%), and lecturers (9%). Participants varied in terms of teaching experience, level of employment security, and type of interaction with students and colleagues. Each participant, however, was involved in a teaching role and had a degree of power or control over students at the university. Our analysis of these different groups of teaching personnel indicates that there were no statistically significant quantitative differences between them as far as experiences of cyberbullying by students or by colleagues; therefore we have grouped them together in this analysis.

The faculty members who responded to the survey were drawn from many different faculties in each of the universities. Of those who responded, 31% were from Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences, 15% from the Faculty of Education and 13% each from the Faculties of Science and of Health. The remaining 28% came from Applied Sciences, Business, Kinesiology, Law, Medicine/Dentistry, Preparation and Extension courses, and administrative units. Survey respondents were predominantly female (68%), Caucasian (84%), identified English as their first language (81%), and were born in Canada (70%). Forty-seven percent of respondents had been working at the university for five years or less, while 48% of respondents had tenure or a permanent position; these percentages were approximately equally divided between female and male respondents. The age profiles were also similar between male and female respondents.

As the responses came in, it became apparent that gender, however, would be an issue worth examining. Data from the Council of Canadian Academies (2012) indicates that, for the
academic year 2008-09, 32.6% of all faculty members in Canada were women, with the percentage at three of the four participating universities between 32% and 39% (p. 194-195). Data on our fourth university was not provided in the Council report, however sources within the institution suggest a higher proportion of female faculty at 54%. Nonetheless, these percentages are much lower than the 68% of female respondents to the survey.

Survey respondents were also asked whether they would volunteer to participate in a one-on-one interview on solutions to the problem of cyberbullying. Almost all volunteers were women. It should also be noted that the female respondents to the online student survey, reported elsewhere (Faucher, Cassidy, & Jackson, 2014), outnumbered male respondents three to one. Women appear to have a greater interest in, or willingness to engage with, this topic than do men.

Female respondents also showed a higher level of concern about the problem of cyberbullying at university. On a five-point scale from extremely concerned to not concerned at all 84% of females indicated that they were extremely concerned or somewhat concerned about the problem compared to only 54% of males. Respondents were also asked to rate the importance of preventing cyberbullying and of encouraging and teaching respectful online communications among the various competing priorities at the university. Here again, the gendered perspectives surfaced as 86% of female versus 72% of males felt it was extremely or somewhat important to prevent cyberbullying, while 98% of females versus 84% of males felt it was extremely or somewhat important to encourage and teach respectful online communications. This greater level of concern about the issue may have contributed to the gender discrepancies in response rates noted above.
Faculty Members’ Experiences with Cyberbullying

Prevalence and background characteristics. Table 1 provides the rates of cyberbullying victimization by gender as reported by respondents.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Overall, 25% of faculty respondents had experienced cyberbullying either from students (15%) and/or from colleagues (12%) in the last 12 months. A small number, only 10 individuals, had experienced cyberbullying from both students and colleagues. Female faculty members were targeted more often by both students and colleagues. While the percentage of female faculty members targeted by students was only slightly higher than their male counterparts (16% versus 13%), almost twice as many female faculty members than males were targeted by colleagues (14% versus 8%).

Table 2 identifies the some of the background characteristics of those faculty members who had experienced cyberbullying.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

As noted in this table, professors and those with tenure or a permanent position experienced more cyberbullying overall from both students and colleagues (31%), compared to sessional instructors (26%), teaching assistants and tutor markers (18%), and those without tenure (19%). Those in less permanent and less senior positions, however, experienced much more cyberbullying from students than from colleagues. Faculty members who self-identified as
being from a visible minority experienced slightly more cyberbullying than those who identified as Caucasian (27% versus 24%), with most of the cyberbullying coming from students (19%) rather than colleagues (12%). Similarly, those for whom English is not a first language were targeted more often by students (17%) than by colleagues (12%).

ICT usage variables bore some relationship to cyberbullying. Faculty members who spent over six hours each day online for their professional activities and for their personal activities experienced more cyberbullying from students than from colleagues. No correlations, however, could be found between ICT usage and cyberbullying by colleagues. Although 71% of faculty respondents had a Facebook page, they were no more likely than non-Facebook users to experience cyberbullying by students or by colleagues. Further, having their own blog or their own website also did not appear to be correlated with cyberbullying by students or by colleagues.

**Form of technology used.** Email was, by far, the most common vehicle used to cyberbully (reported by 74% of those targeted by students and 78% of those targeted by colleagues). Forty-two percent of respondents noted being targeted by students on a professor-rating website, with 28% indicating course-related sites, blogs, forums, or chatrooms. Only 10% of respondents targeted by colleagues indicated that this had occurred on Facebook or other similar social media sites.

**Reasons for being cyberbullied.** ‘Teaching-related reasons’ was noted as the most common reason (78% of the time) for being cyberbullied by students; that is, a grade they assigned a student, their teaching style, something they said to a student or in class, their course content, organization, deadlines, schedule, or assignments. Next was their ‘position or role at the university’ (36%). Female respondents also identified their gender as a reason for being cyberbullied by students, although none of the male respondents gave this reason. Among those
respondents who explained why they had been cyberbullied by students, gender ranked third after the two most common explanations cited above. In most cases, the cyberbullying was carried out by a student or students known by their victims.

Respondents who were cyberbullied by colleagues most often cited ‘work-related reasons’ for being targeted: a professional difference of opinion, competition between university colleagues, professional jealousy, their professional status, an attempt to establish power and control (80%). They also noted their position or role at the university (49%); gender (17%); and age (17%). In all but one of the cases, the cyberbullying was carried out by a colleague or colleagues that the faculty respondents knew.

**Perceived intent and impacts of the cyberbullying.** When asked about what they perceived as the intent of students’ cyberbullying against them, the most frequently cited descriptors were: insulting (70%), demanding (52%), demeaning, belittling, derogatory (50%), spreading rumours (40%), harassing (36%), and rude or vulgar (30%). In terms of impacts, those reported with the greatest frequency were: it affected their ability to do their work, including productivity, loss of confidence, concentration problems (64%); it affected their relationships with students and/or university colleagues (62%); feeling their emotional security or physical safety was threatened (34%); mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, emotional outbursts (30%); they felt like quitting their job at the university (30%); and physical health issues, including headaches, stomach problems, nausea, heart palpitations or chest pain, sweating (28%). The majority (64%) did something to try to stop the cyberbullying, but less than half of them felt that it had worked.

Respondents described the intent behind the cyberbullying they experienced from colleagues in similar ways to the cyberbullying from students: insulting (73%), demeaning,
belittling, derogatory (59%), harassing (46%), spreading rumours (39%), and demanding (37%). They also added other intents: meant to exclude them (29%), threatening (29%), and humiliating or embarrassing (29%). Many felt that it affected their ability to do their work (73%), made them feel like quitting their jobs (49%), noted that it affected their relationships with students and/or university colleagues (49%), and/or their relationships outside of the university (39%), and made them feel their emotional security or physical safety was threatened (46%). Some also experienced mental health issues (39%), and/or physical health issues (29%) as a result. The majority (66.7%) said they tried to do something to stop by cyberbullying by colleagues, but again less than half of them felt that it had worked.

Seeking help. Most targeted faculty members told someone about their experiences, although they were more likely to tell someone if the perpetrator was a colleague (73% told) rather than a student (58% told). Women were much more likely to tell someone than were males. Victims mainly told their colleagues, partners and/or friends. Few reported the incident to their superiors or to others who might have assisted them in an official capacity (for example, university administration, counselling services, union/faculty association, human rights office, or campus security). Those who did report the cyberbullying to authorities were almost exclusively women.

Opinions About Cyberbullying at University

General opinions. We put a list of statements to the respondents and asked them to rate their agreement with each of them on a scale ranging from: strongly disagree, disagree somewhat, neutral (neither agree nor disagree), agree somewhat, strongly agree, or don’t know. For the purposes of simplifying the analysis, the two ‘agree’ responses were collapsed into a single category, as were the two ‘disagree’ responses. The strongest level of agreement came
from the following two statements: ‘I would like to help create a more kind and respectful online world’ (66% agree); and ‘I would report cyber-bullying if I could do it anonymously’ (42%).

The strongest disagreement came from the following statements: ‘Cyber-bullying can’t hurt you; it is just words in virtual space’ (85% disagree); ‘I have the right to say anything I want online because of freedom of expression’ (78% disagree); ‘Cyber-bullying is a normal part of the online world; it can’t be stopped’ (64% disagree); ‘Solutions to cyber-bullying lie with youth as they are more techno-savvy’ (54% disagree).

**Differences in opinions between victims and non-victims.** Faculty members who had experienced cyberbullying differed in their responses to some of the opinions posed. For example, victims were less likely than non-victims to disagree with the statement that ‘Cyberbullying is a normal part of the on-line world; it can’t be stopped’ (51% of victims disagreed compared to 64% overall). Further, those who had been victimized by colleagues were more likely than non-victims to agree with the same statement (22% agreed compared to 12% overall). This disparity may reflect the victims’ feelings of frustration when trying to stop the cyberbullying they were experiencing. Faculty members who had been cyberbullied by students were also more inclined to agree with the statement that ‘Students are less likely to bully on-line if they are happy with their university life/course grades’ (36% vs. 25% overall).

**Relationship between opinions and gender.** Males and females held similar opinions on many of the non-policy-related opinion questions. For example, both males and females generally agreed that they would like to help create a more kind and respectful online world, and had similar responses to the statements that ‘it is the university’s responsibility to stop or prevent on-line bullying,’ and that ‘they would report cyberbullying if they could do it anonymously.’ Both males and females overwhelmingly disagreed with the statements: ‘Cyberbullying can’t
hurt you; it’s just words in virtual space’ and ‘I have the right to say anything I want on-line because of freedom of expression.’ Male and female respondents generally disagreed with the statement ‘Cyberbullying is a normal part of the on-line world; it can’t be stopped,’ although female respondents were more likely to disagree (69% female, 52% male).

**Opinions About University Policies**

Statements related to university policies elicited much more ambivalence and uncertainty from the respondents; these included statements about student conduct, harassment, and bullying, as well as awareness of these policies, their clarity, enforcement, and effectiveness.

Table 3 illustrates the lack of consensus among faculty respondents on these points.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Only 23% of respondents said that their university policies and procedures on student conduct, harassment and bullying were clear, with 27% indicating strong disagreement with this statement and 17% answering that they did not know the answer to this question. Nearly a third of respondents did not know if the policies were enforced or if the policies were effective. Further, in most cases, faculty members chose ‘neutral’ or ‘don’t know’ rather than agreeing or disagreeing with the statements about the policies. Almost 50% of respondents, for example, chose ‘neutral’ or ‘don’t know’ when asked about policy enforcement, effectiveness, and accessing support services if victimized by cyberbullying.

Overall, their responses indicate that many are either unaware of what the policies are in place or what support services are provided, or do not believe they are communicated effectively or enforced. Further, since most victims did not report their experiences with cyberbullying to an
administrator at the university (discussed above), it is unlikely that they had any direct experience with whether the policies were clear, effective or enforced, thus contributing to the wide range of responses across the agree/disagree scale.

**Policy responses and gender.** Female faculty were more likely than male faculty to disagree that the policies are clear (29% of females disagreed vs. 22% of males), enforced (21% vs. 12%), and effective (24% vs. 11%). About 28% of respondents did not know if victims of cyberbullying at the university would be able to access support services, and of those respondents who believed support would not be accessible, 14% were women and only 2% men.

**Relationship between policy opinions and victimization experience.** There were obvious differences in opinions between victims and non-victims in relation to university policies. Table 4 compares the responses from the full sample with those who were victimized by students and by colleagues.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

These findings suggested that those who had been victims of cyberbullying had a far more negative view of the university policies and their capacity to adequately address cyberbullying situations. Faculty members who had been victimized by students were particularly concerned that the university policies were not clear, not effective and not enforced. The questions that were asked of participants in this section only addressed policies relating to student conduct and not conduct by colleagues, as we did not anticipate the relatively high percentage of faculty members who had been cyberbullied by colleagues. Even so, faculty members who had been cyberbullied by colleagues were much more critical of relevant
university policies than the total sample of participants. Respondents who had been cyberbullied by students and/or by colleagues also showed a higher level of disagreement regarding access to support services if victimized.

**Opinions About Solutions to Cyberbullying at University**

Respondents were provided with a list of 15 suggested solutions to cyberbullying at the university level and asked to rank their top five choices. The top three choices overall for faculty respondents were:

1. Develop a more respectful university culture where kind behaviour is modeled by all.
2. Engage the university community in developing a strong university anti-cyberbullying policy.
3. Provide counseling/support services for cyberbullied victims.

Each of these three solutions was ranked among the top five by more than half of the respondents, as were suspending or expelling students who engage in cyberbullying, organizing workshops on cyberbullying and its effects, and creating an anonymous phone-in line for reporting cyberbullying. These rankings were generally agreed upon by both male and female faculty members indicating overall support for a multi-pronged approach to countering cyberbullying: strengthening policy, modeling respectful behaviour, educating the university community about the problems of cyberbullying, strengthening reporting procedures and victim services, and also dealing strongly with perpetrators.

**Gender differences.** Some gender differences were evident. Women showed slightly stronger support for dealing harshly with offenders, including involving the police if necessary or expelling students from the university. Male faculty were somewhat more favourable to the provision of counseling/support services to both cyberbullies and their targets, ranking
counseling for victims as the top solution overall. Men were less favourable to proactive approaches such as the creation of workshops on cyberbullying or establishing prevention as a priority at the university. Likewise, male faculty were more likely than women to support taking a step back from the problem and employing dispute resolution approaches between concerned parties or letting students take charge of this issue.

Discussion and Conclusion

These survey findings highlight the pervasiveness of ICT in university life, which has increased the potential of being negatively targeted, or cyberbullied. Twenty-five percent of faculty members across four Canadian universities have been victims of cyberbullying at the university in the past 12 months. Fifteen percent were targeted by students and 12% by colleagues. These numbers point to the need for universities to make the prevention and curtailment of cyberbullying a priority, just as it is in schools at the lower levels.

Gender Differences

The gender differences found throughout the survey are the most striking findings to report. Just as was true for student-to-student outcomes in our earlier study of gender differences in cyberbullying at the university level (Faucher, Cassidy, & Jackson, 2014), gender is the factor of import to explore in more depth in understanding the problem and developing effective solutions. Female faculty, including those in permanent and non-permanent positions, and at both the senior and junior levels, are more likely to be targeted than male faculty members. Both students and colleagues target women faculty more often than they do men.

Female faculty responded to the surveys in far greater numbers than men and almost exclusively women volunteered to be interviewed. Women faculty were more engaged with the problem and expressed a greater level of concern for the potential impacts on them personally as...
well as professionally. Male respondents tended to have a more hands-off attitude to the problem, as demonstrated by their higher level of agreement with statements such as, cyberbullying is normal, it is not the university’s responsibility to stop or prevent it, and that students should take charge of the issue and work out their own solutions. Female faculty members, on the other hand, wanted cyberbullying to become more of a priority issue on campus as well as wanting administrators to develop more effective policies and to deal more harshly with offenders, including the possibilities of involvement with the police or expulsion of the offender from the university. Female faculty are less confident than male respondents about the efficacy of current university policies related to cyberbullying as well as the availability of support services for victims.

Female faculty targeted by cyberbullies report a greater range of negative impacts on their professional and personal lives than do men. The fact that nearly three quarters of victims of cyberbullying by students and nearly all of the respondents who reported being cyberbullied by a colleague reported that the cyberbullying came from someone they knew reflects negatively on the work culture of the university. This finding is not specific to these universities, however, as female faculty members have been found to be more vulnerable in other studies as well (DeSouza, 2011; Knepp, 2012; Lampman, 2012; Rowland, 2009; Twale & De Luca, 2008).

Female victims said the messages they received were insulting, demanding, belittling/demeaning, and/or harassing, and that it affected their ability to work, their mental health and their relationships inside and/or outside the university, with one quarter wanting to quit. Although women were more likely than men to tell someone about being a target of cyberbullying, they tended to tell a colleague, partner, or friend that they had been targeted,
rather than an administrator at the university. Of those who did try to stop the cyberbullying, less than half said that their efforts were successful.

**Power Imbalances**

Many of the findings emerging from the gender differences are consistent with the Power and Control Model explanation mentioned earlier (Pence and Paymar, 1993). The Power and Control Model allows us to describe cyberbullying as a form of abuse whereby one party attempts to exert control over the other. Gender is clearly a key factor at play in the Power and Control model dynamic for cyberbullying at the university level. Female faculty members reported that they were most often targeted for work-related reasons, including professional jealousy, status, competitiveness, or to establish power and control. Finally, age was also a factor of significance in cyberbullying between colleagues, one which typically can reflect imbalances in power and control.

There are also indications that racial minority status or speaking English as a second language might make a faculty member more vulnerable to be cyberbullied. These findings, along with gender and age, suggest a rights-based or *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* lens could be used to analyze the relationship between the marginality a faculty member experiences, and his or her vulnerability to being cyberbullied. It is important to more thoroughly investigate factors such as age, race, ethnicity and language in future studies.

Since tenure and rank did not impact the amount of cyberbullying experienced by faculty members, it may be that a broader understanding of power is needed. Perceived power in the university context may not be uniquely tied to the academic hierarchy. Academic entitlement and consumerist attitudes to education may also lead to power imbalances in favour of the students. The vast majority of faculty who experienced cyberbullying by students attributed the
abuse to teaching-related reasons. Academically entitled students may believe they are justified in reacting in a demanding, insulting, or harassing manner when they are dissatisfied with the content or outcomes of their education.

The literature on cyberbullying in the K-12 sector suggests that anonymity may confer power to cyberbullies and leave targets feeling powerless. The same may be true within the higher education context, although anonymity may not wield the same power at this level. Faculty members knew most of the students and all of the colleagues who targeted them. It appears that students still sent harassing, demeaning and derogatory messages to their instructors, even when their names were attached to the message. Similarly, colleagues did not try to hide their identity when sending a hurtful email to a colleague. There appears to be other factors at work here that need further investigation.

In conclusion, this study raises the issue of cyberbullying of faculty at university and the need for university administrators to develop effective and transparent policies that address the problem and to communicate these policies within the university community. More attention also needs to be given to services for victims. The workplace environment is not a healthy one for those at the receiving end of cyberbullying by students and colleagues. Women faculty members are particularly vulnerable. Much of the cyberbullying is taking place under the radar of administrators since faculty are unlikely to communicate their experiences to those in charge, unless they can be assured that appropriate actions will be taken to help the victim and deal effectively with the perpetrator.
References


doi:10.1177/0143034312446976


doi:10.1007/BF01730110


Jackson, M., Cassidy, W., & Brown, K. (2009). “you were born ugly and youl die ugly too”: Cyber-bullying as relational aggression. *In Education: Special Issue on Technology and Social Media, Part 1*, 15(1). Retrieved from http://www.ineducation.ca/article/you-were-born-ugly-and-youl-die-ugly-too-cyber-bullying-relational-aggression


doi:10.1375/ajgc.20.2.129


Retrieved from www.oii.ox.ac.uk/cybersafety.


Table 1

**Prevalence of faculty cyberbullying victimization by gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victims Of Cyberbullying</th>
<th>Males (%)</th>
<th>Females (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall (in last 12 months)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By students at the university</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By a colleague</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Percentage of respondents with different background variables who have been cyberbullied (CB)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>CB by student (%)</th>
<th>CB by colleague (%)</th>
<th>CB by either (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall (in last 12 months)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…who have tenure/a permanent position</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…who do not have tenure/a permanent position</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…who are Teaching assistants or Tutor-Markers</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…who are Sessional instructors</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…who are professors</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…for whom English is not 1st language</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…who are on Facebook</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…who identify as Caucasian</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…who identify as part of a visible minority group</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…who have their own blog</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…who have their own website</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…who spend 6+ hours online/day for professional activity</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…who spend 3+ hours online/day for personal activity</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…who spend 6+ hours online/day for personal activity</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

Respondents’ levels of agreement with opinion statements about cyberbullying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion Statements</th>
<th>Disagree (%)</th>
<th>Neutral (%)</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
<th>Don’t know (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty members are aware of the university policies and procedures on student conduct, harassment and bullying.</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University policies and procedures on student conduct, harassment and bullying are clear on prohibited behaviour/sanctions.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies and procedures on student conduct, harassment and bullying are enforced at this university.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies and procedures on student conduct, harassment and bullying are effective at this university.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty members can access support services if they are victims of cyber-bullying at this university.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Row percentages do not total 100% as the missing data are not shown. Approximately 10% of respondents did not answer the opinion section near the end of the survey.
Table 4

Comparison of disagreement rates on opinion statements based on cyberbullying experience(s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion Statements</th>
<th>Total (% disagree)</th>
<th>Cyberbullied by students (% disagree)</th>
<th>Cyberbullied by colleagues (% disagree)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty members are aware of the university policies and procedures on student conduct, harassment and bullying.</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University policies and procedures on student conduct, harassment and bullying are clear on prohibited behaviour/sanctions.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies and procedures on student conduct, harassment and bullying are enforced at this university.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies and procedures on student conduct, harassment and bullying are effective at this university.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty members can access support services if they are victims of cyber-bullying at this university.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>