

## **Cyberbullying at Canadian Universities: Linking Research, Policy, and Practice**

### **Parameters of the Issue Working Paper #1**

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## Executive summary

- This working paper is the first in a series summarizing the working group discussions, which took place at the *Cyberbullying at Canadian Universities: Linking Research, Policy, and Practice* symposium on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014.
- The symposium brought together participants, including students, faculty members, university staff, and administrators/policymakers, from BC and surrounding areas.
- There has been little research to date on the nature, forms, prevalence, and impacts of cyberbullying in the post-secondary context. However, cyberbullying and workplace harassment and bullying more generally are issues that increasingly require attention.
- Wanda Cassidy, Margaret Jackson, and Chantal Faucher presented findings from their study of cyberbullying at Canadian universities. Notably, they reported that:
  - About one in five of the over 1800 student respondents to their survey reported that they had been cyberbullied in the last 12 months;
  - A significant number of faculty members also reported they had been cyberbullied in the last 12 months by students and/or colleagues;
  - Both student and faculty respondents reported a range of impacts due to their cyberbullying experiences;
  - Student and faculty respondents generally favoured the same types of solutions to cyberbullying at university: counselling for victims, stronger policy, reporting mechanisms, and a respectful culture;
  - Most Canadian universities have multiple policies that could be applied to cyberbullying, especially codes of student conduct, codes of acceptable computer usage, and harassment/discrimination policies. However, most of these policies do not address prevention and do not make reference to online conduct.
- Symposium participants discussed the issue of cyberbullying and found it is difficult to circumscribe due to several unclear boundaries:
  - The artificial separation between online and offline conduct;
  - The line between on campus and off campus activities and when/where the university can legitimately intervene;
  - Where freedom of expression ends and harassment begins;
  - The roles of objectivity and subjectivity in defining what constitutes cyberbullying;
  - The differences between perception and reality;
  - The nature of relationships in the online world and how expectations can be better delineated to avoid misunderstandings and difficulties.
- Symposium participants also explored reasons for the underreporting of cyberbullying, including: anonymity, lack of awareness around cyberbullying, shame and fear of repercussions of reporting, lack of evidence, not wanting to relive the experience, and not knowing where to report.
- Symposium participants also discussed impediments to moving forward on the issue of cyberbullying at university. It is clear that what occurs in university is not divorced from what is happening in broader culture and major changes are needed. Further, the legal and policy aspects of the issue are complex and will require development. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, moving forward will require willingness on the part of all stakeholders to address the issue of cyberbullying, and harassment and bullying more generally.

## Introduction

The dialectical relationship between research, policy, and practice is well known, but not always implemented in a fruitful manner due to the separation between these spheres of activity. Researchers often work in isolation from policymakers and practitioners, often with little ability to influence the former, nor to receive critical feedback from the latter. Nonetheless, it is recognized that the ideal would be for the three spheres to work collaboratively and nowhere is that potential more conceivable than in the context of universities.



It was based on this idea of merging research, policy, and practice that we undertook to organize a symposium that would allow for dialogue between these groups around the issue of cyberbullying in universities. The culmination of those efforts took place on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014 at Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue in Vancouver, BC.

The objectives of the symposium were to:

1. engage academic staff and administrators in better understanding an emerging issue that we will need to be able to respond to more comprehensively in the future;
2. develop a process based on research and dialogue that can be replicated on other important issues of a similar type we may be facing;
3. highlight and model best practices in university collaboration; and,
4. increase the profile of key applied research taking place at SFU and in other institutions.

Over 130 participants registered to attend the symposium. This group included university administrators and policymakers, faculty members, teaching and non-teaching personnel, as well as many students. These stakeholders came from 12 different post-secondary institutions in British Columbia, one university in Alberta and one in the state of

Washington, as well as interested local community groups, school districts, and law enforcement branches.

This one-day event included research presentations on various aspects of the issue of cyberbullying in university, legal presentations, and opportunities for dialogue between participants in varied contexts. The program alternated between the formal presentations, feedback sessions, and break-out sessions to allow for rich dialogue between participants from differing stakeholder positions, as well as for strategizing for participants within the same stakeholder positions.

This paper is the first in a series documenting the discussions that took place at the symposium and the follow-up that has and will ensue. In this first working paper, we start by briefly outlining the existing literature on cyberbullying, and bullying more generally, in the post-secondary context. We then review the key points of the research that was presented by the SFU Cyberbullying Research Team at the symposium ahead of the working group discussions. Finally, we delineate the parameters of the issue as it was discussed in the working groups where the attendees' shared their experiences with cyberbullying at their institutions, within their various roles. This section includes a discussion of the "blurring of lines", which make this issue of cyberbullying difficult to circumscribe, the reasons for underreporting of cyberbullying, and the impediments to moving forward on this issue.

## **Literature Review**

The field of K-12 cyberbullying research has exploded in recent years (see Cassidy, Faucher & Jackson, 2013a for trends in research coverage and Cassidy, Faucher & Jackson, 2013b for a comprehensive review of this literature). The same trend has not yet been paralleled in the examination of cyberbullying among adults, whether in post-secondary education or in the workplace more generally. Internationally, there have been some studies that have documented prevalence rates and characteristics of cyberbullying among university students (Adams & Lawrence, 2011; Akbulut & Eristi, 2011; Beran, Rinaldi, Bickham & Rich, 2012; Dilmaç, 2009; Finn, 2004; Kennedy & Taylor, 2010; Molluzzo & Lawler, 2012; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012; Snell & Englander, 2010; Turan, Polat, Karapirli, Uysal & Turan, 2011; Walker, Sockman & Koehn, 2011; Wensley & Campbell, 2012; Zacchili & Valerio, 2011; Zhang, Land & Dick, 2010). Very few studies have explored the issue of cyberbullying against university faculty members, and among those studies, only faculty members in online courses have been studied (Minor, Smith, & Brashen, 2013; Vance, 2012).

Prevalence rates of cyberbullying experienced by university students vary between 7% (Molluzzo & Lawler, 2012) and 15% (Finn, 2004). However, Walker, Sockman and Koehn (2011) reported that, although 11% of their respondents affirmed that they had experienced cyberbullying when asked the question directly, over 30% acknowledged the experience when asked about specific cyberbullying scenarios. The authors of that study suggest that we may see in this discrepancy an indication that some forms of cyberbullying have become legitimized parts of the online world.

Some studies have attempted to establish correlations between cyberbullying and other socio-demographic variables such as gender, sexuality, and gender identity, but much remains unknown. With respect to gender, male perpetration of cyberbullying seems to be more common (Akbulut & Eristi, 2011; Dilmaç, 2009), but the results are mixed in regards to gender and victimization. With respect to sexuality and gender identity, minority groups appear to be more vulnerable to cyberbullying (Finn, 2004; Molluzzo & Lawler, 2012; Wensley & Campbell, 2012).

While the studies on cyberbullying among university students do suggest a continuum between cyberbullying in the K-12 realm and in post-secondary education, there are also some important differences in the conceptualization of the nature of the problem and of the rights and responsibilities of those involved. For instance, in the Pridgen case, which involves young adults at the post-secondary level, the Alberta Court of Appeal emphasized that the complainants' rights of freedom of expression had been infringed.

The impacts of workplace bullying and harassment have been recognized and have led to an expansion of research and policy on the issue (Agervold, 2007; Cowie, Naylor, Rivers, Smith & Pereira, 2002; Lieber, 2010; Lim & Cortina, 2005; Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy & Alberts, 2007; MacIntosh, 2006; Privitera & Campbell, 2009; WorkSafeBC, 2012). Last fall, new WorkSafeBC policies governing bullying and harassment in the workplace came into effect and set out requirements for employers to provide a bullying and harassment free workplace, and to prevent and address workplace bullying and harassment through policy and training. Given that the university environment is increasingly impacted by the information and communication technology (ICT) used within and outside the university, there is no doubt that cyberbullying must feature in the research and policy development in this area.

### **Research presented ahead of working groups**

The symposium program started with research presentations by SFU's Cyberbullying Research Team who have been working on a SSHRC-funded study of cyberbullying at the university level. The slides from these presentations were provided to participants and are posted on the [www.sfu.ca/bullyingfreecampus](http://www.sfu.ca/bullyingfreecampus) website and, therefore, do not need to be repeated here in detail. However, as the research did inform the working group discussions that followed, we provide here some highlights from the study:<sup>1</sup>

- The study involved four universities across Canada
- The study included: an online faculty and an online student survey, student focus groups, faculty interviews, plus a scan of 465 policies at 74 universities in Canada
- **Definition:** Cyberbullying uses language or images in online venues that can defame, harass, bully, exclude, discriminate, demean, humiliate, stalk, disclose personal

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<sup>1</sup> Although data collection is on-going for this study, preliminary findings were presented based on data available as of February 2014.

information, or contain offensive, vulgar or derogatory comments or images. Cyberbullying is intended to harm or hurt the recipient.

### ***Highlights: Student Survey Findings***

- Based on approx. 1800 responses from 3 of the 4 universities (Results still coming in from some institutions)
- 74% of the respondents were female
- Overall, 22% of students report they were cyberbullied in the last 12 months
  - Depending on the university, between 11% and 17% of students have been cyberbullied by a student they know at the university
  - Between 12% and 20% by someone they don't know
- Main vehicles were FaceBook, text messages or email
- Just over half told someone about it
- Reasons the victims gave for being cyberbullied included interpersonal problems, gender, race, physical appearance or they didn't know
- Those who said they cyberbullied, stated their intention was to insult or humiliate, with between 18-27% saying it was fun.
  - The primary reason given for cyberbullying another student is that the person upset them.
- Negative effects: affected their school work, fear for their safety, affected their relationships in and outside school, mental health and physical health issues with from 9 to 18% saying they felt suicidal.
- Top solutions posed:
  - Provide counselling and support services for victims
  - Provide anonymous phone-in lines for reporting cyberbullying
  - Develop an anti-cyberbullying policy with the campus community.

### ***Highlights: Faculty Survey Findings***

- Findings drawn from all four universities: 269 participants thus far
- 70% of the respondents overall are female
- Extremely or somewhat concerned about cyberbullying: 72-79%
- Had experienced cyberbullying from students (5% to 32%)
  - Primarily by email, course sites and rate my professor sites
  - Overwhelmingly for teaching-related reasons
  - The messages were primarily demanding, demeaning or insulting
  - Most knew who was cyberbullying them
  - Affected their relationships at work & their ability to do work
  - Most tried to stop it, but usually their attempts did not work
- Had experienced cyberbullying from colleagues (9 - 18%)
  - Almost entirely through email
  - Primarily because of work-related reasons or because of their role
  - At one university only the women and no men were targeted by colleagues.

- Almost everyone knew who cyberbullying them
  - The messages were demeaning or insulting.
  - Negatively affected their mental and physical health, with over half saying they felt like quitting.
  - Several commented on fearing for their safety with 20% at two of the universities said they contemplated suicide/self-harm.
  - Most attempted to stop the cyberbullying, but their attempts were not very successful
- Top solutions posed:
    - More effective policy which is communicated
    - Develop a more respectful university culture
    - Provide counselling and support services for victims

### ***Highlights: Policy Findings<sup>2</sup>***

- Of the 465 policies at the 75 universities:
  - Most involve codes of student conduct, computer acceptable use policies, and harassment/discrimination policies;
  - Only a few made reference to prevention
  - Only about 1/3 specifically referenced online conduct, suggesting that the policy environment may not have kept pace with the technology that permeates the university.
  - Multiple applicable policies at most universities
  - A “road map” to guide students/faculty to the appropriate policies for particular cases is therefore needed.

### **Cyberbullying issues raised in working groups**

Following the morning research presentations and a legal presentation outlining the context within which universities’ handling of cyberbullying cases is situated, symposium participants were divided into small working groups composed of a mix of representatives from each of the stakeholder groups for an initial discussion of the issue of cyberbullying. In the session that followed, participants were re-shuffled into different working groups based on their stakeholder group identification to discuss solutions to cyberbullying based on their own stakeholder group perspective. The following is a summary of the themes that were recorded in each of those groups outlining how they view the issue of cyberbullying at their institutions and the types of problems they have encountered.

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<sup>2</sup> The policy presentation was derived from a paper (in press, Faucher, Jackson & Cassidy, 2014) entitled “When on-line exchanges bite: An examination of the policy environment governing cyberbullying at the university level.”



## ***Blurring the lines***

A number of the concerns raised by symposium participants related to the blurring of the lines when trying to circumscribe this issue. Several facets to this “blurriness” were emphasized.

- ***Online – offline***

The overlap and connectedness between what occurs online and offline contributes to the confusion around cyberbullying. Are the two realms distinct or are they so intimately tied in our daily lives that they are inseparable from each other? Some argued that the “real life” impacts of cyberbullying suggest that it should not be categorized separately from bullying – it is the behaviour that is key.

- ***On campus – off campus***

Participants shared a common experience of the blurred line between what happens on and off campus. Often, university policies will only deal with issues that occur on campus. However, the cyber-world has no boundaries, and can affect students/faculty and the educational climate, regardless of where the source originates. The issue of jurisdiction recurred throughout many groups’ discussions. Many felt that cyberbullying is a university-related activity because so much of what is happening at university happens online (online teaching tools, online assignments, etc.). Further, things that happen off campus can affect students on campus (e.g. family issues, break ups, communicating outside of class or in environments outside of the university, etc.). Where does the boundary lie?

One illustrative example of the difficulty here was provided: a confessional social media site for students at one post-secondary institution (although the site was not owned or controlled in any way by the university) contained anonymous posts that were discriminatory and harassing. The longer the posts stayed up, more negative comments were added, thus increasing the harassment and damage. But there was no way for the university to shut down the bullying dialogue. The only recourse was to help the victim and work on supporting an “equitable and fair” climate of social network exchange.

- ***Freedom of expression and harassment***

Another area of ambiguity identified in the working groups was that of where freedom of expression ends and harassment begins. On the one hand, freedom of expression and differences of opinion are highly valued in academic debate. On the other hand, some education or training is needed on how to communicate those opinions effectively without engaging in harassment and hate speech.

It was suggested that administrators and policy writers must learn about harassment and come up with a policy that balances ‘freedom of expression’ and ‘security of the person.’ Policies should not interfere with, or prevent, academic debate, differences of opinion, and the legitimacy of multiple worldviews on issues. Policies and codes of conduct need to be narrow and specific so as not to be used to curtail ‘freedom of



expression. Well-written policies can help people work out their internal code of ethics and online behaviour.

One aspect of the presentations that caused a reaction among participants was the notion that cyberbullying could be carried out via anonymous professor-rating websites. The researchers pointed out the types of hurtful comments and the types of personal and professional impacts that could be derived from such comments being available on the Internet. Differing perspectives were raised regarding the value of rating systems such as these and the lack of accountability, which underpins them.

○ ***Objective – subjective***

Another point raised in relation to the ambiguity around what constitutes cyberbullying and how to assess its impacts was the notion of objectivity. For instance, the absence of paralinguistic cues such as tone of voice and facial expression renders many electronic forms of communication “flat” and make interpretations of messages highly subjective. What offends one person may not offend another. Both legal presenters emphasized that the law relies on what the “reasonable person ought to have known” for setting a standard of objectivity.

○ ***Perception and reality***

Relating to the previous point, the discrepancy between perception and reality was highlighted in relation to several aspects of cyberbullying and harassment at university.

- *Perceptions of what constitutes bullying:* Participants grappled with what is perceived as bullying compared to the legal definition of what constitutes harassment. This discrepancy was particularly of concern to practitioners who receive complaints from students who claim they are being bullied, but those claims cannot be validated by the law. Participants also explored varied perspectives on ethnicity and diversity issues and how these are expressed, as well as defamatory remarks made on professor-rating websites.
- *Perceptions of intents:* Participants felt it was important to understand the intent behind the actions in order to determine whether a behaviour constitutes cyberbullying. However, as one participant pointed out: “People say ‘I don’t mean to,’ but that is not a defence.” There is also a difference to be highlighted here between criminal intent and intentionally being disrespectful. Misperceptions of anonymity also impact our understanding of intent. Also, gender differences in communication styles were discussed, suggesting that men have another type of authority that women do not when communicating in personal or professional settings.
- *Perceptions of impacts:* Participants also spoke to the failure to perceive the impacts of certain behaviours. For instance, several participants mentioned that students do not perceive professor-rating websites as cyberbullying, but also that they do not expect that the professor will read those websites and be impacted by what they read. Nonetheless, other students are impacted by

negative ratings when they feel unable to register for a course (especially a problem with mandatory courses) with a particular professor due to these ratings. An assessment of the impact of behaviour should also be taken into account when examining cyberbullying and harassment.

○ ***“Relationships” in an era of technology***

It is clear that the technology that permeates our daily lives inside and outside the university has impacted our personal and professional relationships in ways that we may not always fully appreciate. Awareness of these impacts and how to shape our digital behaviour is greatly needed.

- *Public – private:* A lot of the legal and policy frameworks that are in place were created with pre-Internet ideas and expectations. We do not fully understand the intricacies of publishing (on Facebook, for example) to our friends/social networks versus publishing to the general public. We seem to conceive of the Internet as a safe place for expressing aggression without consequences. Skills need to be taught in order to prevent cyberbullying, that social media spaces are public, and that there are repercussions and connections between environments. There is a disconnection between digital spaces and in-person spaces. Greater understanding of the social protocol of online spaces is needed by policymakers too.
- *Secondary school – post-secondary:* Another shift in relationships is related to the transition from secondary school to post-secondary. Participants felt students needed help to transition from the high school environment and policies to the post-secondary, perhaps through building rapport with peer mentors and having faculty role models.
- *Workplace/professional vs. personal relationships:* Relatedly, students need assistance with redefining the nature of the relationships and expectations for communications they have at university. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on interpersonal relations in the workplace and the degree of formality that is expected in professional communications, e.g. providing a format to follow. Participants reported many instances of relational issues between students, such as ostracism in class, exclusion, shunning, or complaints about contributions to group work. Some participants discussed that in relational bullying, both parties involved may claim harassment. In these cases, evidence and clear policies are the most important for determining a conflict resolution.

***Reasons for under-reporting***

Participants largely felt that cyberbullying in university is highly under-reported. They offered a number of reasons for why this might be the case.

○ ***Anonymity***

Although the majority of cyberbullying is not anonymous, anonymity was repeatedly cited as particularly problematic for the handling of cyberbullying at university.

- *For perpetrator:* Anonymity and lack of monitoring appears to contribute to cyberbullying, anti-social behaviour, and lack of social responsibility. Many targets of cyberbullying will not report it due to being unable to identify who the perpetrator is. Although there was acknowledgement that perpetrators are not always as anonymous as they would like to believe, the matter remains that investigations are costly. It is not clear how this process unfolds and who should pay for the investigation.
  - *For victim/complainant:* Anonymity was also discussed in terms of the person making the complaint. Many of those wishing to make a complaint (whether victims or witnesses) want to remain anonymous, but then, how do we proceed with anonymous complaints? How do we assess the evidence? How do we solve the issue?
- ***Lack of awareness around cyberbullying***

It was suggested that research in this area is new and that we are just starting to capture this problem. As awareness increases, so too may reports of cyberbullying. One participant, a personal safety officer, said that cyber-stalking combined with physical stalking is a big issue, that cyberbullying is more extensive than what comes forward/is reported, and that it is a serious, sometimes life-threatening, issue.
  - ***Shame and fear of repercussions of reporting***

Many participants cited shame, particularly for faculty members, in reporting cyberbullying. The faculty members would not want to attract undue attention to negative reports against them and felt they had no way to defend themselves when ratings are anonymous. Also, some of the cyberbullying was centered around grades which made faculty members reluctant to report as well. For untenured faculty and sessional instructors, there was a fear of repercussions for reporting cyberbullying, i.e. fear of not being supported by administrators or of not being re-appointed. For students, fear of retaliation for reporting cyberbullying may curb their willingness to report or seek help through official channels. There are concerns of safety. It was also mentioned that males may be more reluctant to report being a victim as it might be perceived as admitting defeat in a way, not ‘manning up.’
  - ***Lack of evidence***

Being unable to prove the cyberbullying may render some individuals unwilling to report it. Participants discussed how some individuals are quite adept at covering their tracks, ‘skating the edge’ in public, being very polite in emails, but then engaging in rude in-person activities, or using proxies or fake IP addresses.
  - ***Reliving the experience***

However, even when evidence is preserved, reliving the experience is too onerous for some individuals who refrain from reporting the cyberbullying for this reason.

- ***Do not know where to report***

Many participants were not surprised by the study results showing the prevalence of cyberbullying at university. They in fact believe that much is going unreported because students do not know where to get help or to report incidents.

***Impediments to moving forward***

Although our intent is far from focusing on the negative, it is important to be aware of the obstacles that lie ahead if we are to address the issue of cyberbullying at university in a realistic and effective manner.

- ***Culture change***

Cyberbullying that occurs at university is part of what has been observed in the broader culture. As such, addressing cyberbullying in universities cannot be carried out in isolation from what is happening in society more generally.

- ***Accountability:*** The lack of accountability for one's words and actions is one by-product of the anonymity of certain online exchanges. There appears to be a generation gap between what is and what is not appropriate. However, statements made out of frustration without any consideration or awareness of each other and of our responsibilities to one another are problematic. There should be a positive obligation to be accountable for one's words and actions.
- ***Entitlement:*** Participants discussed how a sense of entitlement may breed contempt and manifest in cyberbullying, among other ways. Two facets of entitlement were addressed. First, the culture of entitlement among students, whereby students are paying tuition for a service at an educational institution, leads to their expectation (or demand) for certain outcomes. One participant accounted for this culture of entitlement by stating that the commodification of education is impacting people's approach to the value of their education. Another participant saw a more generalized trend in entitlement among the younger generation, which may be perceived by (older) others as disrespectful. The second facet of entitlement that participants touched upon was that of faculty members hiding behind academic freedom and feeling entitled to say whatever they want without being held accountable. Some questioned the kind of culture that is being promoted by university administrators standing behind faculty who engage in bullying/cyberbullying because the latter have tenure.
- ***Kindness:*** The need for a shift toward a culture where respect, civility, and kindness play a larger role was repeatedly brought up in several of the working groups. The development of a culture of kindness would require action on many levels. At an informal level, stopping someone to say that a particular comment is not funny is a behaviour that we want to foster. How can that happen? How can we make it happen in our respective work environments? How can we demonstrate more of that behaviour? We need to set expectations for the demonstration of kindness and respect, guidelines for classroom civility, and make it a valuable experience. Such expectations also need to be encompassed

within a broader relationship and community-building effort. The teaching of empathy, resilience, and mindfulness from a young age would help with the understanding of the impacts that stem from experiences of cyberbullying. As one group reported: “We need to change the *value* system that underpins policies and law – we are taught as children to ‘be nice to one another’ but we don’t get consistent value messaging once we transition into adulthood. The social norm is to celebrate people who are ‘shock jocks’ – underlying values are subtle and there is not much to counteract the narratives that are part of our everyday life. How do we ‘re-frame’?” While much is made of the negative aspects of technology in our discussion of cyberbullying, we cannot lose sight of the positive aspects of social media. These resources can be used to promote cyber-kindness, to offer support, to foster respectful relationships and conversations.

○ ***Legal and policy issues***

The lack of a clear and consistent policy on cyberbullying, as well as the lack of knowledge and awareness about the existence and effectiveness of policies and procedures, was identified by research respondents (students and faculty) as well as by symposium participants as an obstacle for addressing the issue of cyberbullying at universities.

- *Definition:* Many participants expressed concern over the lack of consistent definition of what constitutes bullying, cyberbullying, etc. and in which situations the university is responsible to intervene. These definitions should be laid out by legal departments and informed by the legal context governing these behaviours outside of the university as well. Several groups felt that such definitions should be consistent across institutions. The lack of policies clearly defining cyberbullying means that these situations can be handled through different institutional policies that are deemed applicable on a case-by-case basis. An overly broad definition of cyberbullying is unhelpful. It creates uncertainty and confusion. From a legal point of view, defamation, teasing, threatening, and harassment are treated very differently, so we need a descriptive definition of cyberbullying that does not create an umbrella for all these different acts. For instance, we must differentiate between life-threatening and insulting words/actions/images. A clear definition should codify the acts that are “offensive,” again based on the “reasonable person” assessment, but also take into account that some acts are very subtle and may not fall clearly into narrow categories. The language of the policies is also a barrier for some members of the university community and efforts should be made to address this issue in policies as well.
- *Knowledge and awareness:* In addition to the need to develop clear and consistent policies relating to cyberbullying based on research and practice, it is imperative for the policies to be communicated in an effective manner. Lack of knowledge and awareness of policies renders policies ineffective, as does inadequate implementation and support. While some of the symposium

participants expressed knowledge about what policies exist at their institution, others had no idea or believed that there was no policy that could be used. Several reported that the university websites were inadequate for obtaining information and that a university website search of “cyberbullying” yielded no results. These anecdotal reports are supported by the research team’s experiences with searching out relevant policies through the websites of Canadian universities.

Participants suggested that university policies with respect to bullying and harassment could be communicated more effectively through the website, through information in various media formats (e.g. workshops, videos, social media, pamphlets, etc.) provided in an on-going manner from orientation forward, in each course syllabus and treated in a similar way to other university concerns such as plagiarism and academic integrity. Information about policies should be easy to find. Several participants referenced having a clear “road map” to guide users to the policies, procedures, and support resources. Not only should the existence of the policies be better known, but so too should the resources that are in place to support their implementation as well as the process for handling complaints that arise. There are misinterpretations about how things work and targets of cyberbullying may feel things are “stacked against them” and, consequently, choose not to report.

Participants were also interested in what other groups are doing, which practices appear to be promising, and how those approaches might be incorporated into universities. Successful strategies should be shared, as should the more negative experiences, which can be educative as well. Transparency will promote awareness of the issue.

- ***Willingness to address the issue***

Participants acknowledged that the kinds of changes that are needed are unlikely to occur without a firm willingness to address the issue on a personal, institutional, and collective level. At a very basic level, it is necessary to acknowledge, as an organization, that the problem exists within the institution and to recognize the need to address this issue. The demonstration of decisive leadership in administrators/ policymakers and a commitment to working with faculty and staff associations/ unions and student associations/ unions are needed. The willingness of individuals to self-reflect and to inform their behaviours in terms of how they would like to be seen are also important. Policy development and implementation needs to be supported by training for faculty, staff, and students on behavioural expectations and technology management. On-going dialogue will assist with the processes of awareness raising, policy review, and supportive community-building more generally.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of the symposium was to bring together key stakeholders from the universities and the community to engage in a dialogue about the issue of cyberbullying



and to discuss solutions to the problem. This first working paper summarized the key aspects of cyberbullying from the perspectives that participants shared at the symposium. Participants were particularly concerned by:

- The complexity of delineating exactly what constitutes cyberbullying and how to define it (taking into account subjectivity and differences in perception);
- The connection between cyberbullying and other forms of bullying and harassment;
- Whose jurisdiction it is to deal with cyberbullying;
- How cyberbullying is impacted by freedom of expression;
- The impact of technology on relationships;
- The underreporting of cyberbullying for various reasons;
- The considerable obstacles that we face moving forward on this issues, including cultural change, policy development and implementation, and willingness to engage in the process of change.

We did not enter into the discussion of the solutions to this issue in this working paper. The participants contributed a great deal of ideas about solutions, therefore, we have prepared a second working paper, which specifically addressed that part of the dialogue that took place at the symposium and that we hope to keep going as we move forward.



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