

# From the Sandbox to the Inbox: Comparing the Acts, Impacts, and Solutions of Bullying in K-12, Higher Education, and the Workplace

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## Abstract

As research advances in the areas of bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment in various sectors, it is a useful endeavour to consider the connections between research studies conducted in what may appear to be parallel spheres. In this paper, we examine the similarities and differences between research on bullying, harassment, and especially cyberbullying in the K-12, higher education, and general workplace sectors. First, we review the research literature on the nature and extent of these issues, taking into account variations in conceptual definitions, types of experiences, distinctions between different socio-demographic groups, underreporting, and prevalence rates. Next, we consider the range of impacts reported in the different areas. Finally, we examine the solutions proposed within each of these research literatures. Despite some contextual differences between the K-12, higher education, and workplace sectors, there are many commonalities among them in terms of the acts, impacts, and solutions, thus suggesting the need for a more concerted approach to these problems and a cross-pollination of ideas between the sectors for solutions.

**Keywords:** bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, K-12, post-secondary, higher education, workplace

## 1. Introduction

Once believed to be the dominion of the schoolyard “tough” kid, bullying is now viewed as a more complex and widespread problem. Different categories of bullying have been identified such as overt and covert, physical, verbal, and psychological, as well as various forms of cyberbullying. There is also emerging understanding that bullying extends beyond the schoolyard into the contexts of post-secondary education, intimate relationships, and the workplace.

School bullying programs are now formulated to address the fact that bullying is more widespread than previously thought and carried out by individuals who may not normally attract the attention of counsellors and/or school administrators. Many programs place high value on the culture and climate within the school, to the connection students feel towards one another and towards school personnel, and to the role played by bystanders. Such approaches signal a move away from identifying individual factors that place particular students at higher risk of being bullies or of becoming targets of bullying.

The shocking suicide of Tyler Clementi of Rutgers University after his roommate posted a video of him engaging in sexual intercourse with another male shone light on the fact that bullying does not end in high school. Further, books with such eye-catching titles as *Snakes in Suits* by Paul Babiak and Robert Hare (2006), *The No Asshole Rule* by Robert Sutton (2010), and *Surviving Bullies, Queen Bees & Psychopaths in the Workplace* by Patricia Barnes (2012) also bring awareness to the phenomenon of bullying beyond the schoolyard. But psychopathy is a very narrow frame for understanding the scope of the nature of bullying that goes on in workplaces. Research suggests a much wider range of explanatory models.

As research advances in the areas of bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment in various sectors, it is a useful endeavour to consider the connections between research conducted in what may appear to be parallel spheres. In this paper, we examine the similarities and differences between research on bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment in the K-12, higher education, and general workplace sectors. We review the research literature on the nature, extent, impacts, and

solutions. In doing so, we bring together some key points that highlight the connectedness of these issues throughout the life course.

## 2. The Nature of Bullying, Cyberbullying, and Harassment

### 2.1 Definitions

The classical definition of bullying entails three key features identified through the pioneering research of Dan Olweus (1993): *repeated* aggressive behaviours that are intended to cause *harm* to a victim with relatively less *power* to defend themselves. Cyberbullying researchers have largely adapted this definition to incorporate abuse that occurs in various online forums (see, for example, Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Smith, Smith, Osborn, & Samara, 2008). However, a number of nuances have been drawn in order to articulate what repetition, intent, and power imbalance represent when it comes to cyberbullying, such as: the potential for anonymity in online communications; the detachment that results from not seeing the target's reaction to a message; the permanent nature of online messages (i.e. self-repeating); the wider audience of bystanders to cyberbullying; and the variable nature of the power imbalance in online communications (Cassidy, Brown, & Jackson, 2011; Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2013; Dooley, Pyzalski, & Cross, 2009; Grigg, 2010; Kowalski, Morgan, & Limber, 2012; Menesini, 2012; Smith & Slonje, 2010; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009).

Related behaviours of harassment and mobbing can also be taken into consideration here. Harassment is a legally defined category of unwanted physical or verbal behaviour that offends or humiliates (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2013). It can include discrimination based on prohibited grounds, threats, intimidation, and unwelcome physical contact. In some jurisdictions, such as the U.S., a behaviour can only be considered harassment if it targets a person whose status (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, religion) is protected under the law. Mobbing is a specific term used in the research literature to refer to "ganging up" types of behaviours. The term was originally put forth by Heinz Leymann (1996) to refer to harassment, ganging up, and psychologically terrorizing others at work. For example, Duffy and Sperry (2014) define workplace mobbing as "a destructive social process in which individuals, groups, or organizations target a person for ridicule, humiliation, and removal from the workplace" (p. 1; see also Tehrani, 2012b; Westhues, 2006).

Incivility is also linked to the issues of bullying, harassment, and mobbing, either as the "low end" of a behavioural spectrum or as a related set of behaviours with the potential to escalate into bullying, harassment, or even violence (DeSouza, 2010; Knepp, 2012; Lampman, 2012; Morrissette, 2001; Namie & Namie, 2009). The research literature on higher education, in particular, addresses the issue of incivility within the context of an increasing sense of academic entitlement among post-secondary students in recent years (Chowning & Campbell, 2009; Kopp & Finney, 2013).

In what is ostensibly the most frequently cited definition of workplace bullying, Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, and Cooper (2003) state:

Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone's work. In order for the label bullying (or mobbing) to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g. weekly) and over a period of time (e.g. about six months). Bullying is an escalated process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts. (p. 15)

These authors use bullying, harassment, and mobbing interchangeably in their work (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011); however, others draw distinctions between these terms (Duffy & Sperry, 2014; Keashly & Neuman, 2010; Westhues, 2008) and certainly some jurisdictions hold a very narrow view of what can be considered harassment based on discrimination grounds (Hollis, 2012; Tepper & White, 2012). Further, cyberbullying is seen as the new frontier of workplace bullying and harassment (Piotrowski, 2012; Privitera & Campbell, 2009).

Although variations exist between the definitions of behaviour used in K-12, post-secondary, and workplace research, these are minor and comparable to differences between authors working within the same sectors. Within the K-12 and workplace literatures, there are definitions that stand out as most cited (Smith et al., 2008 and Einarsen et al., 2003, respectively). However, there is also a consideration of alternate views and definitions (see, for example, Roberge, 2011). Also, within each of these sectors, there are a variety of perspectives as to which terms best denote the concepts (see, for example, Faucher, Jackson, & Cassidy, 2014).

Of greater note are the similarities that tie these definitions and concepts together. Firstly, they all refer to harmful and unwanted behaviours. Although the degree of intent to harm may vary, the harm is caused nonetheless. Secondly, the notion of power is important within each of these sectors, whether it is the use of one's power to harm or hurt another or the gaining of power through harming another. Thirdly, bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment are distinguished from aggression by the characteristic of repetition. In some instances, single acts may fall into the categories of bullying,

cyberbullying, and harassment; however, such is the case only when these single acts have enduring and repeated consequences for the target.

## *2.2 Types of Experiences*

The general literature on bullying in the K-12 sector has drawn the distinctions between different types of bullying behaviours, namely verbal, physical, and relational for over a decade. Detailing each of these types of experiences is beyond the scope of this paper (see for example, Dixon, 2011; Jimerson, Swearer, & Espelage, 2010). Cyberbullying has been added in the last decade or so; however, its specificities are such that it is not clearly a sub-category of traditional face-to-face bullying.

In the earlier work by Cassidy, Jackson and Brown on cyberbullying in the K-12 sector (Cassidy, Brown, & Jackson, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009; Jackson, Cassidy, & Brown, 2009, 2010), the authors noted a number of ways in which middle school and secondary school students were exposed to cyberbullying. For instance, students reported the most frequent venues through which they saw cyberbullying occurring were chat rooms, emails, text messages, and Facebook or other social media (Cassidy et al., 2011; see also Sakellariou, Carroll, & Houghton, 2012). Other research has also highlighted the prevalence of cyberbullying in the online gaming community (Monks, Robinson, & Worlidge, 2012; Yilmaz, 2011). Students reported various types of inappropriate messages, including gender-based harassment (more typically aimed at girls), harassment about sexual orientation (more typically targeting boys), having personal information posted about them online, being deliberately excluded, and 11% had received messages that made them afraid (Jackson et al., 2009).

In our recent research on cyberbullying at the university level (Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2014; Faucher et al., 2014), surveys of students, faculty, and other teaching personnel showed that cyberbullying is part of the reality in higher education as well. Students and faculty experience bullying and cyberbullying in a number of contexts: within physical and online classrooms, through email, on message boards, in residences, in faculty meetings, on list-serves, in teaching evaluations, on professor-rating websites, in online gaming websites, etc. The research literature on bullying and harassment in higher education includes many more examples of negative unwanted behaviours to which post-secondary students, faculty, and staff are subject. Sexist and racist bullying experiences are not uncommon (DeSouza, 2010; Lampman, 2012; Lester, 2009; Sallee & Diaz, 2012) and the long-term relationships that exist in the academic community can lead to persistent bullying over periods of years (Hollis, 2012; Keashly & Neuman, 2010; McKay, Arnold, Fratzl, & Thomas, 2008).

The competitive, individualistic, and hierarchical nature of post-secondary institutions is such that formal and informal power can be used when bullying colleagues (Crookston, 2012; Lester, 2009). Further, the bullying or mobbing that faculty experience from their peers appears to be of greater concern than what they may experience at the hands of students. Keashly and Neuman (2010) suggest that faculty are twice as likely as staff to report “mobbing” (i.e. peers ganging up against one colleague) and that professional staff in the university may be more likely to experience bullying by a single perpetrator, quite often their superiors. However, Fratzl and McKay (2012) argue that the limited literature on professional university staff shows them to be vulnerable to bullying from those in a position of authority over them, as well as co-workers at a higher level, peers, academics, and students, with the latter two groups being particularly demanding ones.

The literature on workplace bullying and harassment also suggests similar patterns of behaviour. Workers may be subject to bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment by their peers, their superiors, their clients, and even occasionally from their subordinates, highlighting the variety of contexts and power dynamics at play in different workplaces. Some of the typical examples reported include: public humiliation, gossip and rumours, abusive language, persistent and/or unwarranted criticism, explosive outbursts, threats of job loss, threats of violence, social isolation, stripping of the target’s status or dignity, “ganging up” against a target, unreasonable deadlines or unmanageable workloads, and intimidation (Crookston, 2012; Duffy & Sperry, 2014; Einarsen et al., 2011; Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012).

The commonalities of experiences reported in all three sectors (K-12, post-secondary, and workplaces), are startling. Also, the range of ways and relationships through which these negative behaviours can infiltrate the daily lives of students and workers are troubling.

## *2.3 Gender, Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality*

The research literature informs us about the gendered nature of the problems of bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment. In the K-12 research, gender differences found suggest that girls are more likely to experience some forms of gender-based harassment (Cassidy et al., 2012b; Halder & Jaishankar, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2012b; Jackson et al., 2009; Shariff & Gouin, 2005) and to experience greater impacts from the cyberbullying than boys (Jackson et al., 2009). Boys are involved in traditional face-to-face bullying to a greater extent than girls (Kowalski, Morgan, et al., 2012;

Rigby, 2002; Topcu & Erdur-Baker, 2012; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). Some research suggests girls are more likely to be involved in cyberbullying than in face-to-face bullying, both as targets and/or as perpetrators (Cassidy et al., 2011; Cassidy et al., 2009; Dooley et al., 2009; Englander, 2008; Hamm et al., 2015; Jackson et al., 2009; Kowalski, Morgan, et al., 2012; Rigby, 2002; Wang et al., 2009). Cyberbullying often occurs within girls' friendship groups (Cassidy et al., 2011, 2012b; Jackson et al., 2009; Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2012; Shariff & Gouin, 2005; Smith, 2012b).

Bullying and cyberbullying affect K-12 students from different racial/ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as students with varying levels of academic success (Cassidy et al., 2011; Kowalski, Limber, et al., 2012; Rigby, 2002; Wang et al., 2009). Very little evidence is available to date to demonstrate racial or ethnic differences among perpetrators or victims of bullying and cyberbullying (Kowalski, Limber, et al., 2012; Patchin & Hinduja, 2012). However, in a large U. S. sample of students from grades six to 10, Wang et al. (2009) found some racial/ethnic and socio-economic variations in levels of involvement in physical, verbal, relational, and cyber forms of bullying both in terms of perpetration and victimization.

We could plausibly assume LGBTQ students are more vulnerable to targeting, although the K-12 research has been slow to document such a trend (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012). However, when we asked students who they believed were most likely targets of cyberbullying, many respondents pointed instead to specific attributes of potential targets such as special needs, very high or very low academic abilities, lack of popularity, physical appearance, physical or mental disabilities, unfashionable clothing, and ethnicity, rather than sexual orientation or gender identity (Cassidy et al., 2009).

While female students appear to be more likely to be the ones engaging in cyberbullying in the K-12 system, this is not the case at the post-secondary level. In university, it is more typical to see males involved in cyberbullying as perpetrators and females as targets (Dilmaç 2009; Englander, 2008; Faucher et al., 2014; Turan, Polat, Karapirli, Uysal, & Turan, 2011). Research on the post-secondary sector reports that female students are more likely to be targeted by individuals known to them, whereas male students are more likely to be targeted by someone they do not know (Faucher et al., 2014). Female university students who have been targeted report far more negative effects stemming from the experience than do male students (Faucher et al., 2014; Turan et al., 2011; Zacchilli & Valerio, 2011). Female faculty appear to be much more likely than male faculty to be targeted by their students and by their colleagues, with important negative professional ramifications (Cassidy et al., 2014).

Minority status also appears to make post-secondary students vulnerable when it comes to cyberbullying. Finn (2004) reports that LGBT college students are twice as likely to experience online harassment as heterosexual students (see also, Wensley & Campbell, 2012). Undergraduate student participants in the study by Molluzzo and Lawler (2012) were most aware of gay, lesbian, and female students being targets of cyberbullying. Faucher et al. (2014) report that male undergraduates listed their ethnicity as one of the top reasons for which they believe they were targeted by cyberbullies.

Gender differences are also reported in the research literature on academic and other workplaces: overall, women appear to be more likely to be bullied in the workplace (Cassidy et al., 2014; Hollis, 2012; Lampman, 2012; McKay et al., 2008; Namie & Namie, 2009; Sallee & Diaz, 2012; Zapf, Escartín, Einarsen, Hoel, & Vartia, 2011) and men seem to be more likely to be the perpetrators (Namie & Namie, 2009; Sallee & Diaz, 2012; Zapf et al., 2011). Racial and sexual minority individuals appear to be more vulnerable to bullying (Sallee & Diaz, 2012). Cassidy et al. (2014) report that 24% of visible minority faculty members and teaching personnel they surveyed had been cyberbullied by students compared to 8% of those who identified as Caucasian.

It is not entirely clear if men and women are targeted differently within organizations. Sallee and Diaz (2012) report that men and racial or ethnic minority individuals are more likely to be bullied by their superiors whereas women and LGBTQ faculty and staff are more likely to be bullied by their superiors, colleagues and subordinates. Namie and Namie (2009) state that same-gender bullying is more typical, especially among women. Similarly, Lutgen-Sandvik (2013) suggests that women who bully target other women twice as often as they target men.

In terms of socio-demographic variations, gender stands out as the most relevant. In K-12, we see male students significantly more likely to be involved in face-to-face bullying and female students somewhat more likely to be involved in cyberbullying as both targets and perpetrators. However, among the post-secondary and workplace literatures, men appear to be the most frequent perpetrators and women the most likely targets. Nonetheless, it should be noted that same-gender targeting is more typical (Cassidy et al., 2011, 2012b; Faucher et al., 2014; Jackson et al., 2009; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2013; Namie & Namie, 2009; Shariff & Gouin, 2005; Tokunaga, 2010). Less is known about other variables that may impact vulnerability, such as visible minority status and sexuality. Some research suggests that LGBTQ post-secondary students and workers are more likely to be targeted than their peers, as are racial/ethnic minority male undergraduate students and racial or ethnic minority individuals in the workplace. In all three sectors, women who are targeted report greater impacts than do men.

### 2.4 Underreporting

One of the reasons for which there may exist a lack of awareness about bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment (or a lack of accurate information), is that many targets choose to suffer in silence rather than report what they are experiencing. In the K-12 research, it has been shown that many students are unwilling to report the bullying or cyberbullying to adults, particularly to school officials, for a number of reasons, including fear of repercussions such as retaliation or having restrictions imposed on their access to technology, as well as the belief that adults will not understand, will not believe, or will not be able to help (Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2012; Cassidy et al., 2011; Smith & Slonje, 2010; Von Marées & Petermann, 2012; Yilmaz, 2011).

In the post-secondary research, the vast majority of both students and faculty who were cyberbullying targets did not report the incidents to anyone working at the university (Cassidy et al., 2014; Faucher et al., 2014). The fear of reporting, the lack of awareness about policies and enforcement, and the unwillingness to take the time required to pursue official channels were cited as reasons for this underreporting (see also, Cowie et al., 2013; Finn, 2004; Hollis, 2012; McKay et al., 2008; Minor, Smith, & Brashen, 2013; Vance, 2010).

Underreporting is also an issue in workplace bullying and harassment, for similar reasons, as there is the fear of escalation, retaliation, being perceived as incompetent or weak, as well as the belief that it will not do any good to report. The belief that reporting will not help is well founded, as most targets of workplace bullying who did report it felt that it either made the situation worse or nothing changed (Namie & Namie, 2009).

Underreporting and fear of reporting transcends all three levels. Despite some variations in the reasons behind these fears in the three sectors, the fear of repercussions is a common thread, as is the notion that it will not help to improve the situation. Underreporting should be taken into consideration when examining the data on prevalence.

### 2.5 Prevalence

In the K-12 studies, studies providing data on both traditional and cyber forms of bullying suggest that traditional bullying is more widespread (Monks et al., 2012; Kowalski, Morgan, et al., 2012; Olweus, 2012; Smith, 2012a; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009; Wang et al., 2009; Zacchilli & Valerio, 2011). Smith (2012a) argues that cyberbullying represents about one quarter to one third of all school bullying. However, a number of researchers have commented that traditional bullying and cyberbullying are not two separate entities and that, instead, there is considerable overlap between the groups affected by these behaviours (Dooley et al., 2009; Kowalski, Limber, et al., 2012; Olweus, 2012; Smith, 2012a; Smith & Slonje, 2010; Tokunaga, 2010; Von Marées & Petermann, 2012).

In terms of cyberbullying in the K-12 sector, Cassidy et al. (2012b) found that 36% of students reported they had been victims of cyberbullying and 32% admitted to cyberbullying others. In another study by these authors, 40% of respondents identified as victims of cyberbullying and 25% of 12 to 14 year olds in the study reported they had cyberbullied others (Cassidy et al., 2011). These rates are within the range of what has been reported in the literature around the world (Cassidy et al., 2013).

Because of the difficulties in defining bullying and cyberbullying and the discrepancies in the manner of posing the questions, there is a wide range when it comes to estimates of the prevalence of these behaviours. A recent review of 36 studies on cyberbullying among middle school and high school populations reported a median prevalence of 23% with an interquartile range of 11% to 43% (Hamm et al., 2015). Multiple studies using a cyberbullying definition (based on three criteria – intent to harm, repeated aggressive behaviour, and power imbalance between victim and bully) and a specific time period (usually within the last 30 days to twelve months) have found fairly consistent prevalence rates. In fact, so many prevalence studies have been conducted that researchers have begun synthesizing these findings. For instance, Tokunaga (2010) reviewed 25 studies published prior to 2009 and found victimization prevalence rates that varied between 20% and 40%. Patchin and Hinduja (2012) examined 35 peer-reviewed articles published up to January 1, 2011 and found victimization rates varying between 6% and 72%, with an average of 24%, and the majority of studies showing rates between 6% and 30%. The rates of perpetration reported in these studies varied between 3% and 44%, with an average of 18% (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012).

Also at issue in the K-12 bullying and cyberbullying literature is the overlap between the groups of perpetrators and the targets of each set of behaviours. Agatston et al. (2012) report that 61% of cyberbullying victims also report being victims of traditional bullying. Others have noted a possible correlation between the role in traditional bullying (perpetrator, victim, or bully-victim) and the same role in cyberbullying (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009). Olweus (2012) argues that traditional bullying has a much higher prevalence rate than cyberbullying (which he estimates at 4-5% prevalence) and that in most cases, children and youth who are cyberbullied are also bullied face-to-face, suggesting a high degree of overlap between bullying and cyberbullying. Other cyberbullying experts have criticized this view (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012a; Menesini, 2012; Smith, 2012a; Smith &

Slonje, 2010), indicating inconsistent research findings among studies.

Our cyberbullying at university study found that about 25% of students and 25% of faculty respondents had been targets of cyberbullying within the last 12 months (Cassidy et al., 2014; Faucher et al., 2014). Also, in the student surveys, about 5% admitted to having cyberbullied someone at the university in the last 12 months (Faucher et al., 2014). Findings from other studies done at the post-secondary level show a range of prevalence between 7% and 62% of students being victims of cyberbullying. For example: Finn (2004) found between 10% and 15% undergraduate students had been victimized; Molluzzo and Lawler (2012) found that 7% of students in their study had experienced cyberbullying at the university and 20% outside the university; Schenk and Fremouw (2012) found 9% of their sample identified as victims based on experiencing cyberbullying behaviours at least four times. Walker, Sockman, and Koehn (2011) reported that 11% of the undergraduates they surveyed had experienced cyberbullying at university, while Wensley and Campbell (2012) found that 21% of first-year undergraduates they surveyed had been victims of traditional bullying within the last 12 months and 12% had been victims of cyberbullying. Zhang, Land, & Dick (2010) found a much higher percentage; they noted that 62% of undergraduate students in their study had experienced cyberbullying in the past year. Vance (2010) researched students and faculty members who participated in the online learning environment, and found that while 12% of students in online learning had been cyber-harassed, the percentage was much higher for faculty members, at 39%. Minor et al. (2013) also looked at the online environment and found a similar percentage of instructors (34%) who claimed to have been cyberbullied by students.

Beran, Rinaldi, Bickham, and Rich (2012) examined the prevalence of harassment and cyber-harassment among university students in Canada and the United States both during their high school years and at university. The prevalence of cyber-harassment victimization was higher than offline harassment both in high school and in university. The authors further found that the types of harassment experienced in high school were associated with the type of harassment experienced in university, thus suggesting a continuity of harassment between these two settings (Beran et al., 2012; see also Adams & Lawrence, 2011).

The literature on bullying and harassment in the academic workplace reveals similar findings to ours on cyberbullying at the university level. Yamada, Cappadocia, and Pepler (2014) surveyed psychology graduate students at Canadian universities and 21% of the respondents indicated that they had experienced workplace bullying from their supervisors while at graduate school; 52% had experienced at least one of the 20 bullying behaviours listed in the survey at least once or twice from their supervisors. In a U.S. study of incivility directed at faculty members, Lampman (2012) found that 91% of faculty reported at least one act of student incivility in the classroom, while more than 10% were bullied by a student, including being screamed at, threatened, or accused of discrimination.

Other research on bullying and cyberbullying in higher education also examined the experiences of professional staff at universities. The research literature suggests that they experience bullying and cyberbullying to the same extent as other members of the university community. McKay et al. (2008) surveyed faculty, instructors, and librarians at a Canadian university and reported that 52% had been bullied, predominantly by their peers (64%), persons in a position of power (45%), and students (27%). Hollis' (2012) study of workplace harassment in American universities surveyed academics and other university personnel and found that 62% had been bullied or witnessed bullying in their higher education workplace in the last 18 months. Respondents rated the following departments as most likely to have bullying: Executive, Academic – Arts, Athletics, and Academic – Science, and those with less power within the higher education administration were more likely to be targeted (Hollis, 2012). Interestingly, Taylor (2012) found that 12% of the faculty members surveyed at a Midwestern university indicated that they were targets of bullying in the last 12 months, however, the examination of specific behaviours revealed a much higher exposure level. Such a finding alerts us to the lack of awareness about bullying and ambiguity in its conceptual definition (see also, Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007).

The workplace bullying and harassment literature from several international studies provides a range of estimates of the workforce having experienced workplace bullying with an additional portion who witness it without being targeted. In a large U.S. study by the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) and Zogby International, 37% of the 7,740 adult American respondents had experienced workplace bullying and 13% were currently experiencing it or had within the 12 months prior to the survey (Namie & Namie, 2009). An additional 12% had witnessed it without being the targets of the bullying, bringing the total of workers exposed to workplace bullying to 49%, which the authors defined as an “epidemic” (Namie & Namie, 2009). In a U. S. study by Lutgen-Sandvik et al. (2007), the authors contrasted the prevalence of workplace bullying based on the *number of negative acts reported* during a specified time frame (operationally defined as “at least two negative acts, weekly or more often, for at least six months”) and based on *respondents self-identifying as targets* of workplace bullying (stating whether they have been a target of workplace bullying based upon a provided definition). One quarter of respondents were bullied at work based on persistent negative acts they reported experiencing in the workplace. However, only 9% self-identified as targets of bullying. In a

smaller study of male Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union members, 34% reported they had been bullied at work and 11% indicated they had been cyberbullied (Privitera & Campbell, 2009). Here again, very few self-identified as victims of workplace bullying. The authors hypothesize that certain negative acts may be normalized within a male dominated workplace and that self-identifying as a victim or target may be considered a sign of weakness in the wider culture.

One study compared the U.S. prevalence rates to those of studies from Scandinavian countries and found far lower prevalence rates in the latter (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007). The authors attribute cultural differences as the reason for this variation. The more feminine/egalitarian Scandinavian culture places greater emphasis on the quality of interpersonal relationships and, thus, leaves less room for conflicts such as bullying and cyberbullying (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007).

In addition to bullies and targets, another group to consider is the bystanders. According to Duffy and Sperry (2014) estimates of the number of bystanders to workplace bullying range from 9% to 70% (with higher education workplaces featuring in the higher end of that spectrum). Bystanders also are impacted by the bullying they witness in a number of ways. Bystanders experience physical and mental health impacts that are similar to (though less severe than) the impacts on the primary targets of the bullying. Further, "they are more likely to leave their jobs because of witnessing the abuse of another and because of what such abuse says about the culture of their workplace" (Duffy & Sperry, 2014, p. 111).

Some researchers suggest that there is a peak of bullying behaviours in the middle school years or slightly later and that these behaviours taper off thereafter (Cassidy et al., 2009; Patchin & Hinduja, 2012; Smith, 2012b; Smith et al., 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). However, some of the prevalence data discussed above suggests that bullying behaviour may persist to a greater extent than we might think. Despite some adults' reluctance to self-identify as targets of bullying, the extent to which bullying behaviours are observed in universities and other workplaces belies the notion that bullying is a problem of children and youth. Research by Beran et al. (2012) and by Adams and Lawrence (2011) suggests that the cyberbullying experienced in university tends to follow trends established in the K-12 levels. Further, unpublished data from our recent study suggest that, of the university students who admitted to cyberbullying someone in the last 12 months, 42% also admitted to cyberbullying other students back when they were in high school and 18% admitted to cyberbullying a teacher or administrator in high school. As such, we see that the behaviour appears to continue in some cases well into adulthood. Also, we cannot exclude possible pathways into bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment, which do not originate in childhood and youth, but rather begin in adulthood. Such trajectories will require examination in future research.

The range of prevalence rates within each sector is considerable, although there are ostensibly tendencies that can be noted. In all sectors, face-to-face bullying seems to be more prevalent than cyberbullying. The K-12 sector has been the most examined in relation to bullying and cyberbullying and the range of 20-40% does appear to encompass the majority of the data. In post-secondary, studies of students have reported prevalence rates of bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment in the 10-30% range. However, studies of university faculty and other personnel have reported far higher prevalence rates, generally ranging from 25-60%. Further, other workplace studies have reported prevalence rates in the 30-40% range. Some of these variations can be accounted for by differences in methodological approaches and conceptual definitions. However, it should also be taken into account that each of the ranges cited touches upon the 30% mark, which points to a significant portion of individuals within each of these sectors being directly impacted by these negative behaviours, not to mention those bystanders who may be indirectly impacted as well.

### 3. Impacts

Another facet of this issue, which highlights similarities among the three contexts, is the matter of the impacts that these behaviours have on those who are targeted.

In the K-12 bullying and cyberbullying research, the children and youth report impacts such as depression, poor self-esteem, concentration problems, anxiety, stress, academic problems, school avoidance, suicidal ideation, and a range of psychosomatic problems such as headaches and sleep disturbances (Agatston et al., 2012; Beebe & Robey, 2011; Cassidy et al., 2013; Gini, Pozzoli, Lenzi & Vieno, 2014; Houbre, Tarquinio, Thuillier, & Hergott, 2006; Jackson et al., 2009; Kowalski, Limber, et al., 2012; Olweus, 2012; Patchin & Hinduja, 2012; Smith, 2012a, 2012b; Tokunaga, 2010; Von Marées & Petermann, 2012).

In the university research, a significant proportion of both students and faculty respondents reported that the cyberbullying they experienced impacted their ability to do their work including productivity, loss of confidence, concentration problems; it affected their relationships both inside and outside of the university; it caused them to feel their emotional security or physical safety was threatened; it led to mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, emotional outbursts; and physical health issues, including headaches, stomach problems, nausea, heart palpitations or

chest pain, and sweating (Cassidy et al., 2014; Faucher et al., 2014). Many students also reported that their grades suffered (Faucher et al., 2014) and many faculty reported that it made them feel like quitting their job (Cassidy et al., 2014).

The broader literature also speaks to the issue of academic entitlement and incivility (both online and in person), which may lead to bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment (Boswell, 2012; Chowning & Campbell, 2009; Ciani, Summers, & Easter, 2008; Clark, Werth, & Ahten, 2012; Knepp, 2012; Kopp & Finney, 2013). When these issues are unaddressed or not adequately addressed, they can lead to disengagement, both for students and for faculty, low morale, stress, cynicism, depression, anxiety, decreased motivation, lower productivity, suicidality, and even violence in rare cases (Blizard, 2014; Celep & Konalki, 2013; Ciani et al., 2008; DeSouza, 2010; Hollis, 2012; Lampman, 2012; McKay et al., 2008; Wildermuth & Davis, 2012).

In the workplace bullying literature, we find a very similar portrait in terms of the impacts of bullying and harassment on workers (not just the targets, but also the witnesses or bystanders): absenteeism, more stress, lower job satisfaction, mental and physical health impacts, disengagement, avoidance, reduced productivity, turnover, socioeconomic effects, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicidal ideation (Duffy & Sperry, 2014; Hoel, Sheenhan, Cooper, & Einarsen, 2011; Hogh, Mikkelsen, & Hansen, 2012; Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007; Namie & Namie, 2009; Soares, 2012; Tehrani, 2012a).

Hollis (2012) reports that, on average, a target of workplace bullying in a higher education setting spends 3.9 hours avoiding their bully in a given work week. When multiplied by the number of weeks the bullying endures and the number of individuals targeted by bullying in the workplace, added to the costs of personnel turnover, paid leaves, grievances, litigation, etc., it is easy to place the costs of bullying in the millions of dollars annually for universities and other workplaces (Hoel et al., 2011; Hollis, 2012).

One analogy that is particularly illustrative of the range of impacts of workplace bullying is from Lutgen-Sandvik et al. (2007, p. 855). The authors compare the impacts of bullying to those of burns. First-degree burns (and low levels of bullying) are common, superficial, quick to heal, but prolonged or repeated exposure can lead to problems. Second-degree burns (and more intensive, frequent, and persistent bullying) are more painful and require more intervention to heal. Third-degree burns (and escalated cases of bullying) can “result in deep scarring and permanent damage.”

The impacts of bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment are manifold and quite comparable across the three sectors. Those who are targeted can experience a range of physical and mental health impacts, as well as academic and professional impacts stemming from absenteeism, concentration problems, relational issues, and attitudinal changes brought about by being a target of these negative behaviours.

#### **4. Solutions**

The research also speaks to the question of solutions to bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment in these different environments. It is interesting that the same types of solutions emerge regardless of the context, regardless of who is making the suggestions. This commonality suggests that, on some level, the solutions are not mysterious and elusive. We know what needs to be done, however, these solutions are not simple, quick, or easy. They require time, energy, money, and commitment.

In our K-12 studies, students, teachers, school administrators, and parents agreed that education and awareness are key (Cassidy et al., 2011, 2012a, 2012b). In terms of awareness, respondents felt that all parties needed to better understand the nature, extent, and impacts of the problem and to work collaboratively on creating solutions. Students wished for a system to report the incidents anonymously (Cassidy et al., 2011). Creating positive self-esteem in students was seen as important to prevention, as well as modeling appropriate behaviour in the home and school (Cassidy et al., 2011). Others have focused on the importance of educating students in digital media literacy and digital citizenship as well as developing curriculum that fosters empathy (de Santo & Costabile, 2012; Grigg, 2010; Kowalski, Limber, et al., 2012; Spears, 2012; Topcu & Erdur-Baker, 2012).

The teachers and school administrators we surveyed felt that greater attention needed to be given to policy development, implementation, and programs based on research (Cassidy et al., 2012b). The need to develop, implement, and communicate clear and relevant policies, and also to monitor these policies for their effectiveness, has generally been supported in the cyberbullying literature (Agatston et al., 2012; Grigg, 2010; Smith et al., 2012; Willard, 2012). Other solutions include: empowering bystanders (Agatston et al., 2012; Davis & Nixon, 2012), focusing on pro-social uses of the Internet (Cassidy et al., 2011; Del Rey, Sanchez, & Ortega, 2012; Spears, Kofoed, Bartolo, Palermi, & Costabile, 2012), and examining and improving the school climate (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012b).

The parents we surveyed tended to favour punishment-oriented solutions to cyberbullying, much more so than the



students or the teachers and school administrators (Cassidy et al., 2012a). Such a preference can help us understand students' fear of reporting any cyberbullying they experience to adults, including their parents, as they might be blamed or have their technology taken away or restricted (Agatston et al., 2012; Cassidy et al., 2012a). On the other hand, disciplinary measures do play a role in designing effective anti-bullying programs in schools as indicated by Farrington and Ttofi (2009). Their meta-analysis pinpointed disciplinary methods, parent and teacher training, improved playground supervision, information for parents, school conferences, classroom rules, and classroom management as important factors to finding solutions to bullying. Olweus (2012) suggests that, given that most youth who are cyberbullied are also bullied, programs aimed at the prevention of face-to-face bullying should be successful in combatting cyberbullying as well.

In our university study, out of a list of 15 proposed solutions, the same set rose to the top of the list for both students and faculty: counselling and support for victims; a stronger anti-bullying policy developed in consultation with the campus community; better reporting mechanisms and awareness about them; and the need for a kinder and more respectful culture on campus (Cassidy et al., 2014; Faucher et al., 2014).

Our scan of Canadian university policies relevant to addressing cyberbullying on campuses revealed that few universities in fact had policies on the issue of cyberbullying (Faucher, Jackson, & Cassidy, 2015). This means that currently such behaviours, if they are addressed at all on campuses, must be dealt with through a variety of other policies, though the selection process for which policy (or policies) to use is unclear. For instance, one administrator working within a university counselling department stated:

so there's a bunch of different policies but no one uniform clear policy. It's like you have to string a bunch of policies together, read them, go through them yourself. If you're new, you don't even know what policies to look for. I know to look under Policy X. I know to look under policy Y. [...] we could go back to human rights and University B Student Conduct Policy which says we're all supposed to be in a safe environment. And so then you have to extrapolate from all these different policies to try to prove what they were doing is wrong. Trust me, no one faculty member is ever gonna get that straight.

Policies set the standard for behaviour and actions, which allow for evaluations to be conducted in order to determine if they are effective. The importance, then, in addition to making sure those affected by policies are aware of them, is to assure that the policies themselves are grounded in appropriate values – that they set the balance between the tensions between individual rights such as freedom of expression and security of the person and that the broader based policy values such as care and support are also operationalized in practice.

Some students in the focus group component of our university study argued that if there is a need to address cyberbullying at the university level, it could almost be considered “too late,” in the sense that these lessons should have been learned in K-12. Nonetheless, taking the view that this behaviour is found in K-12, universities, and other workplaces suggests that bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment should also be addressed at the university level as part of the continuous preparation for entering into the workplace.

Other studies of university incivility, cyberbullying, and harassment have also emphasized that clear policies and codes of conduct are crucial, as are awareness and education, and training for university personnel, including staff, faculty, and administrators (Celep & Konalki, 2013; Crookston, 2012; DeSouza, 2010; Hollis, 2012; Keashly & Neuman, 2010; Lampman, 2012; McKay et al., 2008; Taylor, 2012; Tepper & White, 2012; Yamada et al., 2014). In addition, university administrations need to provide greater support for victims (Adams & Lawrence, 2011; Crookston, 2012; DeSouza, 2010). University administrators and faculty can set the tone and model appropriate behaviour and play an important role in promoting a supportive, inclusive, civil, and respectful campus culture (DeSouza, 2010; Hollis, 2012; Knepp, 2012; Morrissette, 2001; Taylor, 2012).

The workplace literature also argues that awareness is needed about the nature, extent, and impacts of this problem and how to address it (Duffy & Sperry, 2014; Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007; Vartia & Tehrani, 2012). The need for a workplace bullying policy that is clear, well communicated, and in line with the legal requirements has been repeatedly emphasized (Duffy & Sperry, 2014; Hoel & Einarsen, 2011; Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012; Privitera & Campbell, 2009; Rayner & Lewis, 2011; Vartia & Tehrani, 2012). Such policies must be accompanied by education and training for new workers and for managers. Further, the workplace climate or culture that enables bullying to occur in the first place must be addressed (Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012).

Here again, despite K-12, universities, and workplaces being rather different institutions, similar recommendations seem to emerge from each of these settings: awareness and education about the issues of bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment, their impacts, and how to address them; a clear policy supported by training and resources for successful implementation; and attention to individual behaviour (modeling) and organizational behaviour (campus or workplace culture/climate).

## 5. Conclusion

Our purpose in this paper was to bring together three literatures that are habitually treated separately and to demonstrate that there is insight to be gained from examining them jointly. There are distinctions between the conceptual definitions of bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment. However, these are found as much within the respective sectors of K-12, post-secondary, and workplaces as they are between these sectors. Fundamentally, these negative behaviours share features, which make their analysis across different sectors relevant. We have shown that there are important similarities in the types of experiences reported in the three sectors, despite the contextual differences that exist between schools, universities, and workplaces. With some exceptions in K-12, the gendered patterns of behaviour are quite analogous among the three sectors and what little evidence is available on visible minorities and sexuality suggests similar patterns in this regards as well. Underreporting is discussed in each of these literatures with varying justifications for not reporting, but fear of repercussions is found in all three sectors. Prevalence rates vary within each sector and between them for many reasons. However, in each sector, a substantial number of individuals are targeted, suggesting that a more concerted approach to this problem is needed. The impacts reported by targets in all three sectors are similar as well, again placing emphasis on the importance of developing research-informed long-term approaches to solving these problems. Since research from all three settings point to the same set of solutions, it would seem that greater attention must be paid to the development and implementation of these solutions.

In conclusion, we would encourage researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers to think outside the box of one institutional context and to explore what is being done in the other sectors. Such a cross-pollination of ideas can only serve to enhance our understanding of these issues by helping us to consider these problems within a broader societal context and by allowing us to consider more effective, multi-pronged approaches.

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