

The Blame Game:
Perceptions of Blame, Responsibility and Seriousness in Cyberbullying

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for the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours), Division of Social Science

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Approval

The undersigned recommend acceptance of the thesis

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Abstract

Cyberbullying is gaining increasing media attention. Victims may be reluctant to report such bullying due to the perception by others that these victims somehow play a role in their own victimization. This perception, often referred to as victim blame, has been commonly researched in child sexual abuse, rape and hate crime cases, but it has not really been examined in cases of cyberbullying. To assess victim blame, 241 participants were recruited and asked to read a scenario of cyberbullying that involved either a 14-year-old or a 20-year old victim. Perpetrator gender and victim gender were also manipulated. It was found that perceptions regarding the scenario were influenced by the gender of the perpetrator and the age of the victim. This was particularly the case when perceptions of the seriousness of the crime and the necessity for legal action were assessed.

The Blame Game: Perceptions of Blame, Responsibility and Seriousness in
Cyberbullying

By the end of 2014, it was predicted that three billion people would be using the internet (ITU, 2014). Internet access can break down the geographical and social barriers (e.g., social anxiety) of face-to-face communication. With just the click of a button and a few keystrokes, people are free to express their feelings and opinions with others, creating positive social relationships (Roberto, Eden, Savage, Ramos-Salazar & Deiss, 2014). However, in the same time it takes to have a positive interaction, it is just as easy for negative interactions to occur (Roberto, Eden, Savage, Ramos-Salazar & Deiss, 2014). It is no surprise then that individuals often report being the victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying (Dilmac, 2009; Li, 2006; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). Researchers interested in investigating this new form of bullying have taken the definition of traditional bullying and revamped it to include electronic devices (Dredge, Gleeson & de la Piedad Garcia, 2014; Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2014).

Cyberbullying refers to the practice of repeatedly intending to cause emotional abuse to an individual by communicating negative messages or sending inappropriate pictures through electronic devices (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Kowalski & Limber, 2013). Some researchers include in the definition that the victim is unable to defend him or herself and that the perpetrator can be an individual or a group (Smith et al., 2008). Since first becoming aware of the problem of cyberbullying in 2004 (Van Cleemput, Vandebosch, & Pabian, 2014),

researchers have increasingly tried to determine the characteristics of cyberbullying.

Although many individuals perceive cyberbullying as occurring mainly among school aged children, there is increasing evidence that cyberbullying occurs just as often or more often among university students (Dilmac, 2009). For example, Jones, Mitchell, and Finkelhor, (2012) found that 11% of youth experience cyberbullying while MacDonald and Roberts-Pittman (2010) found that 22% of university students experience cyberbullying. More specifically, estimates suggest that the likelihood of a university student being involved in a cyberbullying incident at least once is 22.5% and the chance of being a victim is 55.3% (Dilmac, 2009). Supporting the notion that high rates of university students may be victimized, Baum, Catalano, Rand, and Rose report half a million adults in the United States have claimed to experience online harassment (as cited by van Laer, 2013).

Given such high prevalence rates, studies have been conducted that are devoted to discovering the consequences of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying has been associated with suicidal thoughts and behaviours, substance abuse, acting out violently and sexually (Litwiller & Brausch, 2013), feelings of sadness, anger and having difficulties trusting others (Deuhue, Bolman, & Vollink, 2008). Beran and Li (2007) report that cyber victims often skip school, have problems concentrating, and achieve lower grades. The negative effects of cyberbullying are not only seen in victims but in perpetrators as well, with lower self-esteem being seen in both groups (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). Although traditional bullying is more common than cyberbullying (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Li,

2006), research shows those who are bullied online are often the victims of bullying offline (Olweus, 2012) and those who are cyberbullied are more likely to cyberbully others (Beran & Li, 2007). Add to this the fact that perpetrators can reach a wider audience (Bannink, Broeren, van de Looij-Jansen, de Waart, & Raat, 2014) and cyberbullying appears to be a serious problem. In fact, students often report that they feel cyberbullying is more threatening to them than traditional bullying because it can occur at home, a place where they expect to be protected (Mishna, Saini & Solomon, 2009). Furthermore, Mehari, Farrell and Le (2014) suggest that reduced inhibition created by anonymity and lack of authority causes the perpetrator to feel unaccountable and therefore unstoppable. Supporting this, Barlett, Gentile, and Chew (2014) found that level of anonymity is directly correlated to bullying behaviours, such that the more anonymous participants felt online, the more likely they were to report bullying others online. While the previous research on the prevalence rates of cyberbullying, consequences of cyberbullying and factors related to cyberbullying are both interesting and important, an area that has yet to be explored and that could be quite useful is how victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying are perceived, more specifically how attributions of blame are assigned to those involved in cyberbullying.

Attribution of Blame

When someone is attacked, be it physical, emotional or sexual, it unsettles us because we worry that something similar can happen to us. In order to increase our perception of safety and decrease our perception of risk we often hold on to the belief that bad things only happen to those who deserve it (Furnham, 2003; Lerner & Miller, 1978). This belief that negative events do not happen without

justification is referred to as the Just World Hypothesis (Lerner & Miller, 1978). Studies have shown for example, that having a belief in a just world influences ratings of blame and responsibility towards victims and perpetrators of rape (Strömwall, Alfredsson & Landström, 2013). Having a high belief in a just world has been associated with blaming the victim more and the perpetrator less (Strömwall et al., 2013). Moreover, Kleinke and Meyer (1990) found that participants who hold a strong belief in a just world would sentence perpetrators to a shorter prison sentence.

The age of the victim, gender of the victim, and the gender of the perpetrator have all been shown to influence perceptions of blame, responsibility, and seriousness when studies assessing victim blame in sexual assault or rape cases are considered. Maynard and Wiederman (1997) for example, report that participants in their study believed sexual assault was less abusive and the perpetrator was less responsible and blameworthy when the victim was 15-years-old compared to when the victim was 7-years-old. The scenarios they presented were also perceived as less abusive when the genders of the perpetrator and victim were opposite (i.e., male child with female adult or female child with male adult; Maynard & Wiederman, 1997). Male participants in particular were more likely to perceive the situation as less severe and to see the perpetrator as less to blame. Similar research has shown male participants with a high belief in a “just world” blamed young male victims more than young female victims in scenarios that were provided (Strömwall et al., 2013). Likewise, when slightly older individuals are considered, young and middle-aged male victims are generally

seen as more blameworthy than young or middle-aged female victims (Strömwall et al., 2013).

This attribution of blame towards male victims could explain why only a handful of male victims of sexual abuse actually report their abuse (Walker, Archer & Davies, 2005). The lack of reporting could be because victims fear being blamed for what happened because of a belief that males should be able to defend themselves and that any sexual act performed on a male, whether consensual or not, elicits pleasure and is therefore, not abuse (Strömwall, et al., 2013; Walker, et al., 2005). This is illustrated by the finding that when victims portrayed in studies are male, the perpetrators are generally rated as being less guilty and as deserving a lighter sentence than when victims portrayed are female (Schnieder, Soh-Chiew Ew & Aronson, 1994). There appears to be an even greater bias when female perpetrators are considered such that sexual abuse committed by a woman is considered less serious than sexual abuse committed by a man (Esnard & Dumas, 2013).

Tabak and Klettke (2014) suggest that individuals who are 12 years of age or older are seen as more able to protect themselves from an assault and are more able to lie. Furthermore, they found that participants in their study were more likely to see the perpetrator as not guilty when the victim was a 15-year-old versus when the victim was a 6-year-old.

Plumm, Terrance, Henderson, and Ellingson (2010) found that sexual orientation could also increase victim blame. In their study assessing perceptions of victims of hate crime, the researchers found when the victim of a hate crime

stated he was homosexual he was seen as deserving more blame for what happened to him and participants were shown to sentence the perpetrator to a shorter sentence than if the victim did not directly mention his sexuality. They also found that when the victim was described as actively participating in a gay pride parade (shouting) during the incident, he was blamed even more. Findings suggesting negative consequences of victim blame in rape cases, sexual assaults, and hate crimes, suggest something similar may be happening in cases of cyberbullying. Individuals decide to use social networking sites and can choose to turn them off if they do not like the way interactions are occurring. It is possible then that people may blame those who suffer from the negative consequences of cyberbullying because they continue to use social networking sites and to engage in online communication.

To date, only one known study has assessed how attributions of blame and responsibility are assigned to the perpetrator and victim in situations of physical bullying and cyberbullying. In their study, Morrow and Downey (2013) focused on the predictability and severity of the victim's reaction to either traditional bullying or cyberbullying to see whether the type of bullying that occurred, influenced ratings of blame, responsibility, punishment and intent. They did not examine age of the victim, gender of the victim or gender of the perpetrator (Morrow & Downey, 2013). Currently there is no research on attribution of blame and responsibility towards adults in the situation of cyberbullying. Researchers examining such perceptions have focused their attention to the circumstances of rape, work place bullying and medical diseases such as HIV and cancer. The question to whether victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying are

perceived in similar ways to the victims and perpetrators in such cases was the main focus of this study.

Current Study

The majority of research concerning bullying has been conducted using scenarios of traditional school bullying. However the numbers indicate that not only are youth using the internet, they are engaging in/experiencing online bullying (Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2014). This illustrates a need to accurately discover and depict the situation of cyberbullying. The current study was designed to investigate differences in blame attribution among 14-year-olds and 20-year-olds and to determine whether perceptions differ according to the gender of the victim or the perpetrator. Consistent with past research assessing victim blame in cases of sexual assault, the hypotheses were as follows:

- 1) The abuse would be seen as less serious, and participants would feel there was less need for police intervention and a criminal conviction when the victim was male. This is consistent with studies assessing blame consistency which show that male victims are perceived differently than female victims and often receive more blame than female victims (Davies, Rogers & Whitelegg, 2009; Schnieder, Soh-Chiew Ew & Aronson, 1994).
- 2) The abuse would be seen as less serious, and participants would feel there was less need for police intervention and a criminal conviction when the perpetrator was female. Studies that have assessed blame and responsibility find that female perpetrators are perceived differently than

male perpetrators. Female perpetrators are often perceived as less culpable and receive less blame (Rogers & Davies, 2007)

- 3) Participants would rate the victim as deserving more blame when the victim and perpetrator were both males compared to when the victim was male and the perpetrator was female or when both the victim and perpetrator were female. It was believed because the male victim sent another male a sexual picture of himself participants would perceive the victim as homosexual. Previous studies have found that a homosexual male victim is assigned a higher rating of blame than both heterosexual male/female victims and homosexual female victims (Davies et al., 2009).
- 4) Participants would believe that sending nude photos makes one responsible for the negative consequences of his/her actions. Previous studies have found that a victim's behavior influences perceptions of the victim (Schult & Schneider, 1991). Therefore, provocative behavior such as sending a nude photo should cause participants to assign a higher rated of responsibility for any negative consequences.
- 5) Fourteen-year-old victims would be seen as more to blame than 20-year-old victims. The situation would also be perceived as more serious when it involved the 20-year-old victim than when it involved the 14-year-old victim. A previous study assessing blame and responsibility found that a 15-year-old victim was blamed more than a 6-year-old victim (Tabak & Klettke, 2014). This finding was attributed to the perception that the 6-year-old was too naïve to know what was happening, while the 15-year

old was not (Tabak & Klettke, 2014). The Just World Hypothesis suggests that in comparison to adults, younger victims must have done something to deserve victimization if bad things happen to them (Strömwall et al., 2013).

Method

Participants

Two hundred and forty-one adults were recruited to take part in this study using the university subject pool and using a snowball sampling method through Facebook. Of the 239 participants, 208 identified as female with ages ranging from 18 to 74 years of age ($M = 28.74$, $SD = 13.34$). Thirty-one participants identified as male with ages ranging from 18-61 years of age ($M = 26.48$, $SD = 11.13$). Two participants either failed to provide their gender or identified as non-binary. Before the study began it was reviewed and granted approval by an ethics review process in the psychology program at Grenfell Campus.

Materials

The survey used in this study was designed to assess perceptions of blame and responsibility held by adults in instances of cyberbullying amongst 14-year-olds and 20-year-olds. Each survey described a scenario in which an individual sent a nude picture of him/herself to a friend that was later posted on his/her social media profile by the original recipient. It was stated that the individual in the picture repeatedly received negative comments due to the posting of the picture. The scenarios differed in the age and gender of the individuals described. The victim and perpetrator could either be of the same gender (male on male or female on female) or could have opposite genders (male on female or female on male). The age was also varied to involve either individuals of 14-years of age or individuals of 20-years of age. Therefore there were eight possible scenarios to which a participant could be randomly assigned (See Figure 1). After the participants read their assigned scenario they were asked to use a Likert scale to respond

to questions involving their perceptions of blame, responsibility, seriousness, and the possibility of legal action. The seriousness of the situation was assessed using five items (Questions 2, 3, 4, 13, 14); victim blame was assessed using one item (Question 1); victim responsibility was assessed using two items (Questions 7 and 8); perpetrator blame was assessed using one item (Question 12) perpetrator responsibility was examined using one item (Question 11); the rights of the victim were assessed using one item (Question 6; and the rights of the perpetrator were assessed using one item (Question 10; See Appendix A). Once participants had finished assigning each question a rating, they were asked to provide their gender and age.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through a newly established subject pool consisting of first year Psychology students enrolled at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. A link to the survey was also posted on Facebook through the researchers profile inviting anyone one who was 19 years of age or older to participate. Those who wanted could also copy and paste the message and link to their own Facebook page to increase the number of potential participants. The link took viewers to the consent screen which told them they were about to take part in a study assessing perceptions of online interactions. The potential participants were informed that they were free to stop participating at any time as it was completely voluntary and that IP addresses were not being recorded to ensure their anonymity and the confidentiality of their participation (See Appendix B). Once the participants clicked “continue” it was understood that they agreed to participate and they were directed to their scenario and the survey that followed.

Once the participants completed the survey they were redirected to the debriefing screen. The debriefing screen described the true nature of the study, which was to assess their perceptions of victim blame and responsibility in situations of cyberbullying. The contact information of the researcher and her supervisor was provided in the event participants had questions or wanted to know the results of the study. Finally, a link to the website “Get Cyber Safe” was also included in case the participants wanted to learn more about cyberbullying (See Appendix C).

Results

The surveys were analyzed to assess perceptions of blame, responsibility, seriousness, and the need for legal action. Questions were answered on a scale from one to eight with higher scores indicating more blame, responsibility, seriousness, or perceived need for legal action. Participants' perceptions can be seen in Figure 1.

A 2 (gender of victim) x 2 (gender of perpetrator) x 2 (age of victim: 14 years, 20 years) independent measures MANOVA was conducted with the dependent variables being participants' ratings on the various questions in the survey (e.g., how much do you blame the victim for what happened?). An effect of gender of the victim was found, Wilk's $\Lambda = .890$, $F(15, 209) = 1.71$, $p = .050$, $\eta_p^2 = .110$. Therefore one-way ANOVAs were conducted to determine the questions for which there was an effect of victim gender. There was an effect of victim gender for the question "how serious do you believe the situation to be?" $F(1, 223) = 7.32$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, 95% CI [-0.45, -0.07]. The situation was perceived to be more serious when the victim was female ($M = 7.79$, $SD = 0.51$) than when the victim was male ($M = 7.53$, $SD = 0.89$). There was also a significant effect of victim gender for the question asking "to what extent does the situation warrant police intervention," $F(1, 223) = 11.24$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .048$, 95% CI [0.36, 1.40]. Participants were more likely to perceive the situation as requiring police intervention when the victim was female ($M = 6.34$, $SD = 1.85$) than when the victim was male ($M = 5.46$, $SD = 2.15$).

The MANOVA also revealed a significant interaction between the gender of the perpetrator and the age of the victim, Wilk's $\Lambda = .852$, $F(15, 209) = 2.42$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .148$, which meant one-way ANOVAs were needed to determine the questions for which

this interaction occurred. As there were multiple significant ANOVAS, results are organized according to seriousness of the situation, victim blame, victim responsibility, perpetrator blame, and perpetrator responsibility.

When the questions assessing seriousness were considered there were three significant gender of perpetrator by age of victim interactions. There was a gender of perpetrator by age of victim interaction for the question “to what extent do you consider the perpetrator’s behavior to constitute bullying?,” $F(1,223) = 10.95, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .047$. Participants were more likely to perceive the situation involving the 14-year-old victim as bullying when the perpetrator was male ($M = 7.82, SD = 0.77$) than when the perpetrator was female ($M = 7.60, SD = 1.72$), $F(1, 109) = 8.54, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .073, 95\% CI [.24, 1.25]$. However, there was no significant gender of perpetrator difference in assessing perceptions of bullying with a 20-year-old victim, $F(1, 114) = 2.67, p = .105, \eta_p^2 = .023, 95\% CI [-0.75, 0.07]$.

There was also a gender of perpetrator by age of victim interaction for the question “How serious do you believe the situation to be?,” $F(1, 223) = 4.10, p = .044, \eta_p^2 = .018$. There was no gender difference in perceived seriousness of the situation when the victim was 14-years-old, $F(1, 109) = 1.96, p = .165, \eta_p^2 = .018, 95\% CI [-0.07, 0.40]$ or when the victim was 20-years-old, $F(1,114) = 2.23, p = .139, \eta_p^2 = .019, 95\% CI [-0.52, 0.07]$. However, when the victim was 14-years-old the situation was seen as more serious if the perpetrator was male ($M = 7.77, SD = 0.52$) than if the perpetrator was female ($M = 7.60, SD = 0.72$). In contrast, when the victim was 20-years-old, participants perceived the situation as being more serious when the perpetrator was

female ($M = 7.74$, $SD = 0.67$) than when the perpetrator was male ($M = 7.51$, $SD = 0.93$) (See Figure 2).

Finally, there was a gender of perpetrator by age of victim interaction for the question “To what extent does the situation warrant police intervention?,” $F(1, 223) = 4.31$, $p = .039$, $\eta_p^2 = .019$. There was a significant gender of perpetrator difference in perceptions of whether the police should get involved in the situation involving the 14-year-old victim, $F(1, 109) = 6.02$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .052$, 95% CI [0.16, 1.49]. Participants were more likely to perceive the situation involving the 14-year-old victim as requiring police intervention when the perpetrator was male ($M = 6.92$, $SD = 1.49$) than when the perpetrator was female ($M = 6.11$, $SD = 2.09$). Unlike with the 14-year-old victim, there was no significant gender of perpetrator difference in perceptions of whether the police should get involved in the situation involving the 20-year old victim, $F(1, 114) = 0.44$, $p = .506$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$, 95% CI [-1.07, .53].

When assessing the question of victim blame a one-way ANOVA revealed a gender of perpetrator by age of victim interaction for the question “how much do you blame the victim for what happened?,” $F(1, 223) = 8.58$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .037$. Participants assigned a higher rating of blame towards the 14-year-old victim when the perpetrator was female ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 1.94$) than when the perpetrator was male ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 2.28$), $F(1, 109) = 6.93$, $p = .010$, $\eta_p^2 = .060$, 95% CI [-1.81, -0.26]. However, there was no significant effect of gender of the perpetrator with regards to ratings of blame towards the 20-year-old victim, $F(1, 114) = 2.37$, $p = .127$, $\eta_p^2 = .020$, 95% CI [-1.81, 1.44].

When the questions assessing victim responsibility were considered there were two significant gender of perpetrator by age of victim interactions. There was an

interaction for the question “To what extent was the victim responsible for what happened?,” $F(1, 223) = 6.30, p = .013, \eta_p^2 = .027$. Although there was no significant gender of perpetrator difference in ratings of responsibility assigned to the 14-year-old victim, $F(1, 109) = 2.48, p = .118, \eta_p^2 = .022, 95\% \text{ CI} [-1.36, .16]$ or to the 20-year-old victim, $F(1, 114) = 3.90, p = .051, \eta_p^2 = .003, 95\% \text{ CI} [-0.00, 1.54]$, as seen in Figure 3, the 14-year-old victim was thought to be more responsible for what happened when the perpetrator was female ($M = 5.57, SD = 1.89$) than when the perpetrator was male ($M = 4.97, SD = 2.12$), while the 20-year-old victim was perceived to be more responsible when the perpetrator was male ($M = 5.73, SD = 2.18$) than when the perpetrator was female ($M = 4.96, SD = 1.95$).

There was also a gender of perpetrator by age of victim interaction for the question “In your opinion does sending nude pictures make a person responsible for any negative outcome that may come from doing so?,” $F(1, 223) = 8.57, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .037$. There was a significant gender of perpetrator difference in the ratings of responsibility for the 14-year-old victim who sent a nude photo, $F(1, 109) = 6.55, p = .012, \eta_p^2 = .057, 95\% \text{ CI} [-1.80, -0.23]$. The 14-year-old victim was assigned a higher rating of responsibility for sending nude pictures when the perpetrator was female ($M = 6.05, SD = 1.95$) than when the perpetrator was male ($M = 5.03, SD = 2.19$). In contrast, there was no significant gender of perpetrator difference in ratings of responsibility for the 20-year-old victim who sent a nude photo, $F(1, 114) = 2.63, p = .108, \eta_p^2 = .023, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.15, 1.53]$.

When considering the one question investigating perpetrator blame, a one-way ANOVA found a gender of perpetrator interaction by age of victim interaction for the question “How much do you blame the perpetrator for what happened?” $F(1, 223) = 6.84,$

$p = .010$, $\eta_p^2 = .030$. There was a significant gender of perpetrator difference for ratings of blame towards the perpetrator for the 14-year old victim, $F(1, 109) = 9.02$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .076$, 95% CI [0.25, 1.22]. The participants assigned a higher rating of blame towards the perpetrator of the 14-year-old victim when the perpetrator was male ($M = 7.18$, $SD = 1.24$) than when the perpetrator was female ($M = 6.45$, $SD = 1.33$). There was no significant gender of perpetrator difference for ratings of blame toward the perpetrator of the 20-year old victim, $F(1, 114) = 0.52$, $p = .474$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$, 95% CI [-.67, .31].

The ANOVA examining the question regarding perpetrator responsibility showed there was a gender of perpetrator by age of victim interaction was discovered for the question “To what extent was the perpetrator responsible for what happened?” $F(1,223) = 10.21$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .044$. There was a significant gender of perpetrator difference for ratings of responsibility towards the perpetrator for the 14-year old victim, $F(1, 109) = 8.07$, $p = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .069$, 95% CI [0.25, 1.38]. The participants assigned the perpetrator of the 14-year-old victim a higher rating of responsibility when the perpetrator was male ($M = 7.41$, $SD = 1.34$) than when the perpetrator was female ($M = 6.60$, $SD = 1.65$). Contradictory to what was found with the 14-year old victim, there was no significant gender of perpetrator difference for ratings of responsibility towards the perpetrator of the 20-year old victim, $F(1, 114) = 2.54$, $p = .114$, $\eta_p^2 = .022$, 95% CI [-.89, .10].

Despite the MANOVA not showing a significant effect of perpetrator gender, given the hypotheses, one-way ANOVAs were conducted to assess whether there were any differences in perceptions according to gender of the perpetrator. A significant effect was found for the question “To what extent do you think the perpetrator believed the victim was willing to have the nude picture sent to others?” $F(1, 223) = 4.30$, $p = .039$,

$\eta_p^2 = .019$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.91]. The perpetrator was perceived as having a higher belief that the victim was willing to have the picture sent to others when the perpetrator was male ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.93$) than when the perpetrator was female ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.44$).

Similarly, given the original hypotheses, despite the non-significant MANOVA, ANOVAs were utilized to determine whether there was an effect of victim age for the various questions. There was an effect of victim age for the question “To what extent was the perpetrator responsible for what happened?,” $F(1, 223) = 4.32$, $p = .039$, $\eta_p^2 = .019$, 95% CI [-0.77, -0.02]. The participants rated the perpetrator as being more responsible for what happened when the victim was 20-years-old ($M = 7.00$, $SD = 1.32$) than when the victim was 14-years-old ($M = 6.61$, $SD = 1.56$). There was also an effect of victim age for the question “How much do you blame the perpetrator for what happened,” $F(1, 223) = 4.57$, $p = .034$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, 95% CI [-0.72, -0.03]. Participants perceived the perpetrator as more deserving of blame when the victim was 20-years-old ($M = 6.85$, $SD = 1.32$) than when the victim was 14-years-old ($M = 6.48$, $SD = 1.33$).

Finally, an assessment of gender of victim by age of victim interactions revealed a gender of victim by age of victim interaction for the question “How much do you blame the victim for what happened?,” $F(1, 223) = 6.37$, $p = .012$, $\eta_p^2 = .028$. There was no difference in blame towards the 14-year-old, $F(1, 109) = 3.26$, $p = .074$, $\eta_p^2 = .029$, 95% CI [-0.07, 1.49] or the 20-year-old, $F(1, 114) = 3.13$, $p = .08$, $\eta_p^2 = .027$, 95% CI [-1.54, 0.09] victims as a function of gender. However, when the 14-year old victim was male ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 2.15$) more blame was assigned than when the 14-year old victim was female ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 2.22$). In contrast, participants assigned a higher rating of blame

towards the 20-year-old victim when the victim was female ($M = 5.08$, $SD = 2.11$) than when the victim was male ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 2.06$) (See Figure 4).

Discussion

This study was conducted to investigate the perceptions of blame, responsibility and seriousness in situations of cyberbullying. Specifically, the study was designed to determine how the age of the victim, gender of the victim and gender of the perpetrator influence perceptions. Cyberbullying is a fairly new phenomenon with Van Cleemput et al. (2014) dating it back to 2004. Therefore, it is of no surprise that researchers are just beginning to investigate important factors that are relevant to cyberbullying. Much of the research so far has examined prevalence rates (Beran & Li, 2007; Dilmac, 2009; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Li, 2006), gender differences in who is likely to cyberbully others, gender differences in who is likely to be the victim of cyberbullying (Ang & Goh, 2010; Dehue, Bolman & Vollink, 2008; Li, 2006; Smith et al., 2008), and the psychological consequences of being involved in this type of harassment (Beran & Li, 2007; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Patchin & Hinduja, 2007, 2010). Researchers have also compared cyberbullying to traditional bullying and some have found that they often occur together (Beran & Li, 2007; Juvonen & Gross, 2008). To date, little research has examined the perception of victims and/or perpetrators, the factors assessed in the present study.

Supporting the first hypothesis, in the current study it was found that when the victim was female the participants perceived the situation as more serious and as more likely to require police intervention than when the victim was male. This was not surprising given that previous studies assessing sexual assault, such as the one conducted by Groth and Burgess, (1980) have found that victimization was seen as more severe when the victim was female compared to when the victim was male (as cited by Davies, 2002). Herek (1986) explained this by suggesting that there is a stereotype that men are

strong enough to protect themselves and therefore do not need to depend on others for help (as cited by Davies, 2002). Findings with male victims of cyberbullying then may parallel those seen with male victims of sexual assault cases and the belief may persist that male victims should be able to help themselves, regardless of the harassing behaviour that is being considered.

Interestingly, in somewhat of a contrast to the second hypothesis, perceptions of seriousness differed according to the interaction between the age of the victim and the gender of the perpetrator, and not just the gender of the perpetrator. Participants were more likely to believe the situation involving the 14-year-old was bullying and saw it as more serious when the perpetrator was male than when the perpetrator was female. In contrast, and somewhat surprisingly, in the situation involving the 20-year-old victim, the opposite occurred. The situation was perceived as more serious when the perpetrator was female than when the perpetrator was male. This suggests the perception that an assault by a male perpetrator is more severe than an assault by a female perpetrator may actually depend on the age of the victim. Considering the age differences in perceptions according to the gender of the perpetrator, it would seem that Rye, Greatrix, and Enright's (2006) finding that female perpetrators are perceived as less blameworthy than their male counterparts may only be true for younger victims, at least in the case of cyberbullying. There was no difference in the perceived need for police intervention or a criminal conviction according to the gender of the perpetrator.

Perceptions of victim blame and victim responsibility were also influenced by an age of the victim by gender of the perpetrator interaction and continue to demonstrate that the difference in perceptions of male versus female perpetrators may depend on the age

of the victim. In the current study, the 14-year-old victim was rated as being more deserving of blame and was seen as more responsible for what happened to him/her when the perpetrator was female than when the perpetrator was male. In contrast, the 20-year-old victim was rated as being more responsible for what happened to him/her when the perpetrator was male than when the perpetrator was female. Furthermore, it was found that contrary to both Rye et al.'s (2006) results and to hypothesis three, the male victim was not attributed more blame and responsibility when the perpetrator was male than when the perpetrator was female, that is when there was a same sex versus an opposite sex interaction.

When asked to rate on a Likert scale with 1 being "Not at all responsible" and 8 being "Completely responsible," their perception regarding the action of sending nude pictures making a person responsible for any negative consequences that result from doing so, participants' ratings were not extreme but veered toward blaming the person in the picture ($M = 5.41$). It seems then that as with rape victims who may be held more responsible for their own assault if they engage in sexual activities, wear revealing clothing or are under the influence of alcohol (Schult & Schneider, 1991), cyber victims who exhibit provocative behaviour may be blamed for the consequences to some degree. However, it appears the perception of such individuals may be more complex than was suggested in hypothesis four. The 14-year-old victim who sent nude pictures was thought to be more responsible for any negative consequences that result from doing so when the perpetrator was female than when the perpetrator was male and the 20-year-old victim who sent nude pictures was thought to be more responsible for any negative consequences that result from doing so when the perpetrator was male than when the

perpetrator was female. It seems then there may be some dynamic to victim blame for younger versus older participants that can be somewhat explained by perpetrator gender.

Similar to perceptions of victim blame and victim responsibility, the perceptions of perpetrator blame and perpetrator responsibility appear to be influenced by victim age and perpetrator gender combined. Supporting the second hypothesis, the participants perceived the perpetrator in the scenario involving the 14-year-old victim to be less responsible and deserving of blame than the perpetrator in the scenario involving the 20-year-old victim. This is consistent with Back and Lips' (1998) finding of perpetrator blame when comparing 6-year-old victims of sexual abuse to 13-year-old victims of sexual abuse. In both cases, adolescent victims and not the perpetrators were seen as more blameworthy, suggesting people may be judging adolescents differently than younger or older individuals. Findings in the present study continue to suggest however, that negative perceptions of adolescent victims and more positive perceptions of perpetrators may be influenced by the gender of the perpetrator. The perpetrator of the 14-year-old victim was seen as being more blameworthy and responsible when portrayed as a male than when portrayed as a female. In contrast, there was no gender difference in perceptions of blame or responsibility when the victim was 20-years-old. Therefore, Rogers and Davies' (2007) finding that a male perpetrator is perceived as more culpable than a female perpetrator appears to only hold true for the adolescent victims and not the adult victims.

Perceptions of the perpetrator's intent were assessed through asking the participants to rate the perpetrator's belief that the victim was willing to have the photo shared with others. The descriptive statistics show that participants rated the perpetrator

as having a low belief that the victim was willing to have the pictures sent to others. However, participants rated the male perpetrator as having a stronger belief that the victim was willing to have the nude photos sent to others than the female perpetrator.

When perceptions of victim blame were evaluated based on the age and gender of the victim, although not significantly different, the 14-year-old male victim was blamed more than the 14-year-old female victim while the 20-year-old female victim was blamed more than the 20-year-old male victim. This illustrates that the negative perception of male victims found in previous studies may also be influenced by victim age and may be different for cyberbullying than for other behaviours.

Lastly, it was hypothesized that the situation involving the 14-year-old would be seen as less serious than the situation involving the 20-year-old because there is a perception that bullying happens mainly among children and it was thought that this could desensitize the participants such that they might perceive such a situation as being just a part of growing up. However, when perceptions of seriousness of the situation based on age of the victim were examined, the situation involving the 14-year-old victim was perceived as more serious than the situation involving the 20-year-old victim. As previously noted however age differences in seriousness varied according to the gender of the perpetrator.

Findings in the present study appear to relate back to the just world hypothesis in which bad events are perceived to only happen to individuals deserving of such things (Lerner & Miller, 1970). Victims are often perceived more deserving of assaults when the perpetrator is female compared to when the perpetrator is male (Rogers & Davies, 2007). This belief that perpetrators are more likely to be males rather than female can be

explained by gender stereotypes. Females are traditionally believed to be more caring and nurturing than males; who are generally believed to be physically stronger (Heilman, 2001). The fact that the child victim was blamed more and held to a higher level of responsibility when the perpetrator was female compared to when the perpetrator was male, could suggest that there still exists today a stereotype that females are more child oriented than males. It seems individuals may knowingly or unknowingly think that in order for a female to victimize a child, the child must have done something to deserve the abuse because it is out act out of character for a female to do so (Hetherington, 1999). Considering it was previously noted that victims of rape are often blamed more if they act or dress provocatively (Yarmey, 1985), the fact that the 20-year-old victim was rated as being more blameworthy and responsible when the perpetrator was male suggests that consistent with the research assessing perceptions of rape victims, the participants may have perceived the adult victim who sent a nude picture as trying to seduce the male perpetrator and therefore as being to blame for his/her own victimization. These findings have vast implications for the consideration of male versus female victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study is not without limitations. There were significantly more female participants than male participants which prevented a comparison of gender differences in perceptions. Much of the previous research examined found that males perceived the victim less favourably and the perpetrator more favourably than females (Davies & Rogers, 2009; Hammond, Berry & Rodriguez, 2011; Rogers & Davies, 2007). Male participants have been shown to perceive the severity of the situation, as well as the

blame and responsibility based on perpetrator gender and victim gender, differently than female participants (Rogers & Davies, 2007). Without an adequate number of males, it was impossible to assess whether this was the case in this study. Additionally, given the limited number of male participants, it is unknown whether the present findings are applicable to perceptions of cyberbullying among both genders or if they are just applicable to female participants. Future research is needed then to replicate the current findings with a sample that is representative of both genders.

The scenarios in the current study involved victims and perpetrators of the same age. However, often in cases of child abuse, the victim is a child and the perpetrator is an adult, resulting in a significant age gap between victims and perpetrators. Moreover, adults have been known to bully adolescents online. For example, in the case of Amanda Todd, a young girl who died by suicide as a result of cyber victimization, it is widely believed that the perpetrator who engaged in cyber harassment was an adult (Surbramian & Whalen, 2015). It would be beneficial then for future research to look at ratings of blame, responsibility and seriousness in situations where there are notable age differences between the victim and the perpetrator.

Another suggestion for future research would be to look at differences in perceptions according to participants' experience with past cyberbullying. Research has shown that the attribution of blame is influenced by feelings of dissimilarity or similarity to the victim (Shaver, 1970). The question as to whether participants' favourability towards the victim or perpetrator is influenced by whether they have been a cyberbully or cyber victim would provide a better understanding as to whether cyberbullying is similar to other forms of harassment.

Finally, future research should compare perceptions of responsibility, blame and seriousness between traditional bullying and cyberbullying. The only known study to do this was Morrow and Downey's (2013) study assessing differences in perceptions of bullying and it did not include any consideration of victim age, victim gender or perpetrator gender. It would be interesting to see how participants' perceptions of seriousness of the situation, blame and responsibility towards the victim and perpetrator are similar or different for these two forms of bullying.

Conclusion and Implications

Although, many of us are aware that cyberbullying is occurring, as it is a frequent topic in the media and academic literature, especially where the consequences are severe (e.g., suicide), little was known regarding how age of the victim, gender of the victim and gender of the perpetrator influence ratings of responsibility and blame assigned to the victim and perpetrator in situations of cyberbullying. The present study suggests there seems to be a negative attitude towards adolescent victims compared to adult victims of online harassment. This study and previous research using other forms of victimization have shown that although teenagers are not fully cognitively and emotionally developed when it comes to decision making, observers appear to hold them more accountable for their actions and behaviours than they do adults.

As cyberbullying cases are brought to the attention of the justice system, it is necessary that those involved in the distribution of justice and in treating those affected, be aware that attribution of blame may be more complex than previously thought. When deciding who is responsible and blameworthy, individuals do not use the all or none method, but rather they perceive all parties as responsible and blameworthy. Whether the

victim or the perpetrator receives more blame seems to be the result of the gender and age of those involved. It is important then that people be aware of such potential biases and look beyond them when considering cyberbullying cases.

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Figures

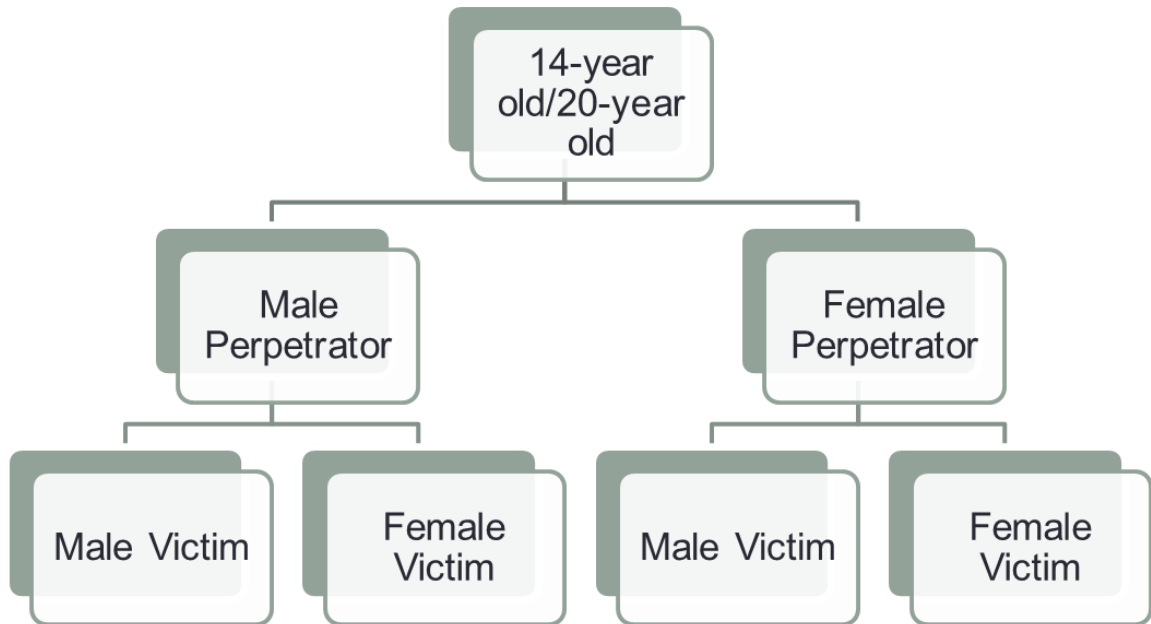


Figure 1. Experimental conditions.

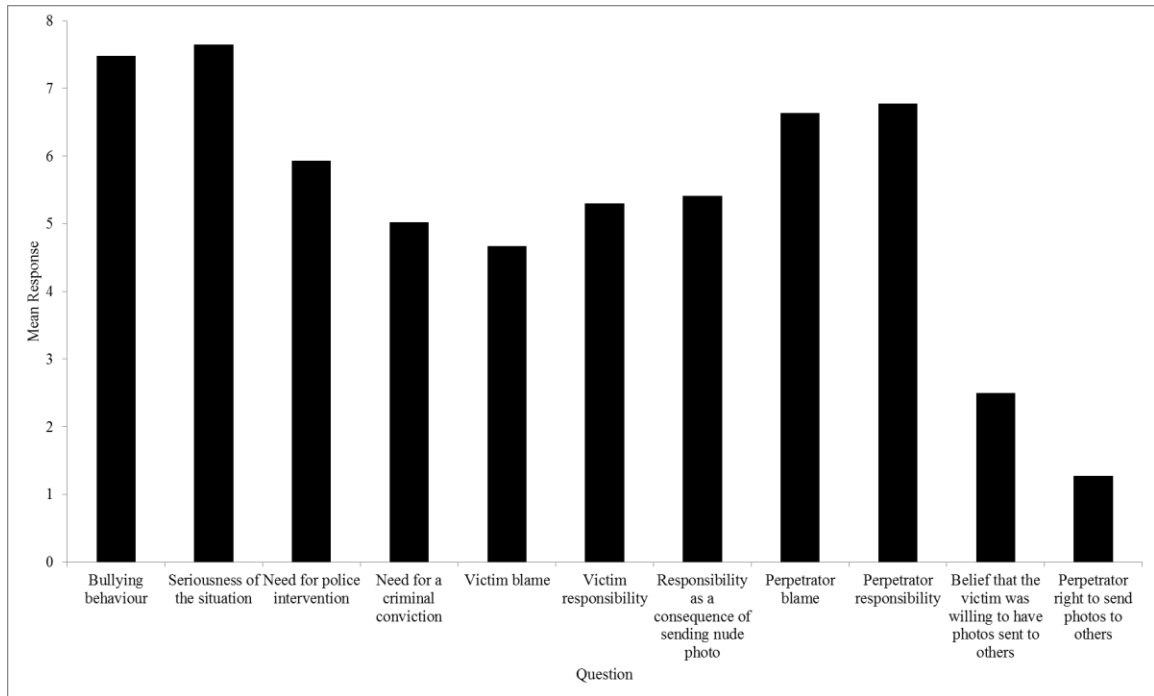


Figure 2. Mean rating given in response to questions assessing the seriousness of the situation, victim blame and responsibility, perpetrator blame and responsibility, and perpetrator intent.

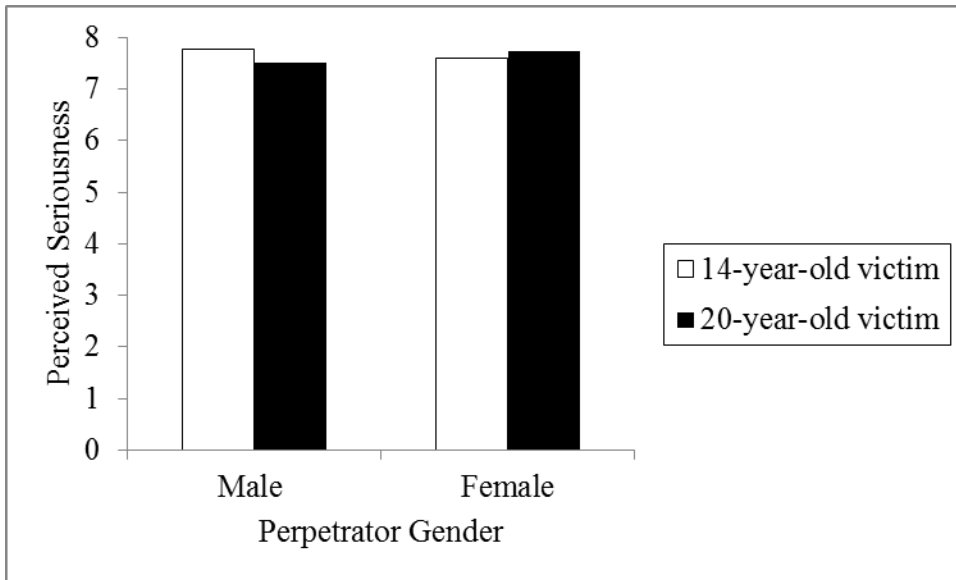


Figure 3. Perceptions of seriousness as a function of victim age and perpetrator gender.

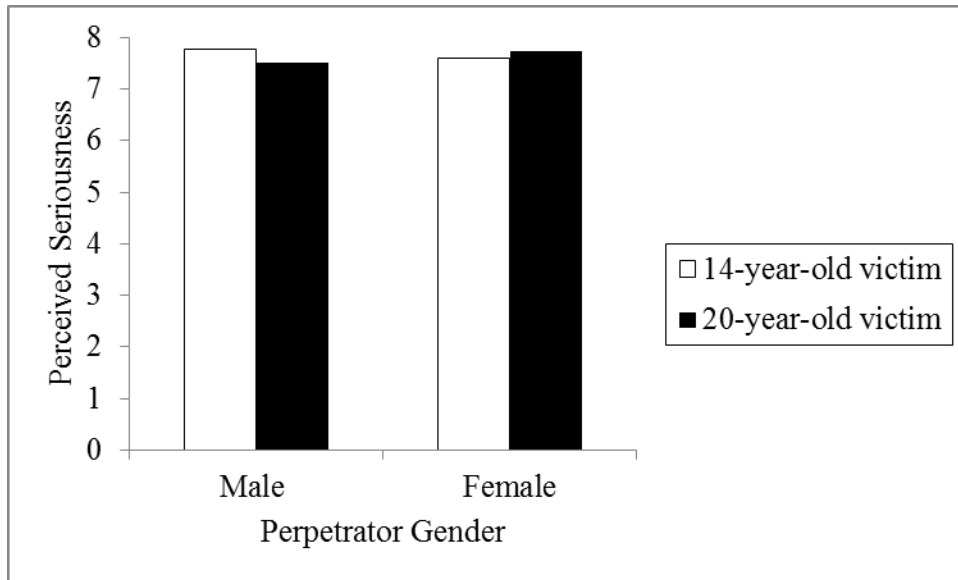


Figure 4. Perceptions of victim responsibility as a function of victim age and perpetrator gender.

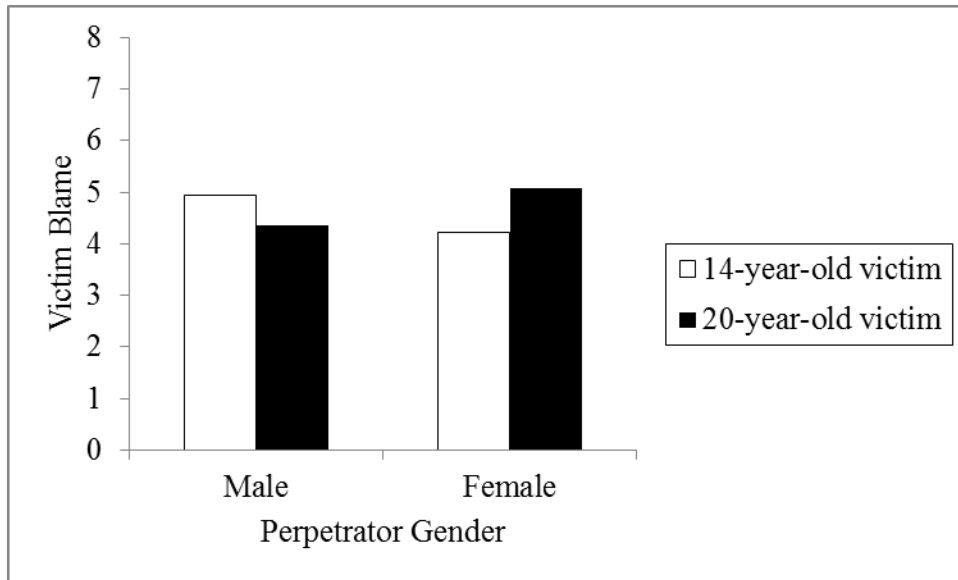


Figure 5. Perceptions of victim blame as a function of victim age and gender.

Appendices

Appendix A

Cyberbullying Online Questionnaires

Instructions: Please read the following scenario.

14-year-old Male victim Female bully

Christopher is your typical 14-year-old. He loves sports, movies and keeping up with all of his friends on social media. He prides himself on how popular he is on social media and is constantly adding friends, updating his status, and posting cool photos in hopes of getting lots of comments and likes. One day as Christopher is walking to class, he hears students giggling and whispering things like “did you see the photo of Christopher, posted online”. Christopher thought nothing of it since he is always posting photos. Later that day, when he signs into his social media profile, he is horrified to see that the nude photo he privately sent to his friend Melissa earlier that month had been posted. Christopher’s embarrassment only increases when he sees that the photo has been shared by not only his friends, but also friends of his friends and has received very negative comments, some of which call him names. The posting of pictures and name calling continue for a month after the first incident.

Instructions: Please answer the following questions based on the above scenario

Questions

1. How much do you blame Christopher for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

2. To what extent do you consider Melissa’s behaviour to constitute bullying?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

3. How serious do you believe the situation to be?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Very serious
all serious

4. To what extent do you think the situation will cause Christopher alarm or distress?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Very likely
all likely

5. In your opinion, did Christopher communicate that he did not want the picture sent to other people?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

6. If Christopher were to file a complaint that the picture had been wrongfully sent, to what extent would you consider this complaint to be reasonable?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all reasonable reasonable

7. To what extent was Christopher responsible for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all responsible responsible

8. In your opinion does sending nude pictures make a person responsible for any negative outcome that may come from doing so?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all responsible responsible

9. To what extent do you believe Melissa believed Christopher was willing to have the nude picture sent to others?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all willing willing

10. To what extent do you believe Melissa had a right to forward the nude picture to other people?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
No right Every right

11. To what extent was Melissa responsible for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all responsible responsible

12. How much do you blame Melissa for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely to
all to blame blame

13. To what extent does the situation warrant police intervention?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all necessary							necessary

14. To what extent is a criminal conviction necessary?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all necessary							necessary

15. To what extent do you think Christopher will be able to resolve the situation?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely	
all resolved							resolved	

Participants' Demographics

Gender _____

Age _____

Instructions: Please read the following scenario

14-year-old Male victim Male bully

Christopher is your typical 14-year-old. He loves sports, movies and keeping up with all of his friends on social media. He prides himself on how popular he is on social media and is constantly adding friends, updating his status, and posting cool photos in hopes of getting lots of comments and likes. One day as Christopher is walking to class, he hears students giggling and whispering things like “did you see the photo of Christopher, posted online”. Christopher thought nothing of it since he is always posting photos. Later that day, when he signs into his social media profile, he is horrified to see that the nude photo he privately sent to his friend Mike earlier that month had been posted. Christopher’s embarrassment only increases when he sees that the photo has been shared by not only his friends, but also friends of his friends and has received very negative comments, some of which call him names. The posting of pictures and name calling continue for a month after the first incident.

Instructions: Please answer the following questions based on the above scenario

Questions

1. How much do you blame Christopher for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

2. To what extent do you consider Mike’s behaviour to constitute bullying?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

3. How serious do you believe the situation to be?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Very serious
all serious

4. To what extent do you think the situation will cause Christopher alarm or distress?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Very likely
all likely

5. In your opinion, did Christopher communicate that he did not want the picture sent to other people?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

6. If Christopher were to file a complaint that the picture had been wrongfully sent, to what extent would you consider this complaint to be reasonable?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all reasonable reasonable

7. To what extent was Christopher responsible for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all responsible responsible

8. In your opinion does sending nude pictures make a person responsible for any negative outcome that may come from doing so?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all responsible responsible

9. To what extent do you believe Mike believed Christopher was willing to have the nude picture sent to others?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all willing willing

10. To what extent do you believe Mike had a right to forward the nude picture to other people?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
No right Every right

11. To what extent was Mike responsible for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all responsible responsible

12. How much do you blame Mike for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely to
all to blame blame

13. To what extent does the situation warrant police intervention?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all necessary necessary

14. To what extent is a criminal conviction necessary?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all necessary necessary

15. To what extent do you think Christopher will be able to resolve the situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all resolved resolved

Participants' Demographics

Gender _____

Age _____

Instructions: Please read the following scenario

14-year-old Female victim Male bully

Cindy is your typical 14-year-old. She loves sports, movies and keeping up with all her friends on social media. She prides herself on how popular she is on social media and is constantly adding friends, updating her status, and posting cool photos in hopes of getting lots of comments and likes. One day as Cindy is walking to class, she hears students giggling and whispering things like “did you see the photo of Cindy, posted online”. Cindy thought nothing of it since she is always posting photos. Later that day, when she signs into her social media profile, she is horrified to see that the nude photo she privately sent to her friend Mike earlier that month had been posted. Cindy’s embarrassment only increases when she sees that the photo has been shared by not only her friends, but also friends of her friends and has received very negative comments, some of which call her names. The posting of pictures and name calling continue for a month after the first incident.

Instructions: Please answer the following questions based on the above scenario

Questions

1. How much do you blame Cindy for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Completely
 all

2. To what extent do you consider Mike’s behaviour to constitute bullying?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Completely
 all

3. How serious do you believe the situation to be?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Very serious
 all serious

4. To what extent do you think the situation will cause Cindy alarm or distress?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Very likely
 all likely

5. In your opinion, did Cindy communicate that she did not want the picture sent to other people?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Completely
 all

6. If Cindy were to file a complaint that the picture had been wrongfully sent, to what extent would you consider this complaint to be reasonable?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Completely
 all reasonable reasonable

7. To what extent was Cindy responsible for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Completely
 all responsible responsible

8. In your opinion does sending nude pictures make a person responsible for any negative outcome that may come from doing so?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Completely
 all responsible responsible

9. To what extent do you believe Mike believed Cindy was willing to have the nude picture sent to others?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Completely
 all willing willing

10. To what extent do you believe Mike had a right to forward the nude picture to other people?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 No right Every right

11. To what extent was Mike responsible for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Completely
 all responsible responsible

12. How much do you blame Mike for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Completely to
 all to blame blame

13. To what extent does the situation warrant police intervention?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all necessary necessary

14. To what extent is a criminal conviction necessary?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all necessary necessary

15. To what extent do you think Cindy will be able to resolve the situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all resolved resolved

Participants' Demographics

Gender _____

Age _____

Instructions: Please read the following scenario

14 year-old Female victim female bully

Cindy is your typical 14-year-old. She loves sports, movies and keeping up with all her friends on social media. She prides herself on how popular she is on social media and is constantly adding friends, updating her status, and posting cool photos in hopes of getting lots of comments and likes. One day as Cindy is walking to class, she hears students giggling and whispering things like “did you see the photo of Cindy, posted online”. Cindy thought nothing of it since she is always posting photos. Later that day, when she signs into her social media profile, she is horrified to see that the nude photo she privately sent to her friend Melissa earlier that month had been posted. Cindy’s embarrassment only increases when she sees that the photo has been shared by not only her friends, but also friends of her friends and has received very negative comments, some of which call her dirty names. The posting of pictures and name calling continue for a month after the first incident.

Instructions: Please answer the following questions based on the above scenario

Questions

1. How much do you blame Cindy for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

2. To what extent do you consider Melissa’s behaviour to constitute bullying?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

3. How serious do you believe the situation to be?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Very serious
all serious

4. To what extent do you think the situation will cause Cindy alarm or distress?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Very likely
all likely

5. In your opinion, did Cindy communicate that she did not want the picture sent to other people?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

6. If Cindy were to file a complaint that the picture had been wrongfully sent, to what extent would you consider this complaint to be reasonable?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all reasonable							reasonable

7. To what extent was Cindy responsible for what happened?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all responsible							responsible

8. In your opinion does sending nude pictures make a person responsible for any negative outcome that may come from doing so?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all responsible							responsible

9. To what extent do you believe Melissa believed Cindy was willing to have the nude picture sent to others?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all willing							willing

10. To what extent do you believe Melissa had a right to forward the nude picture to other people?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
No right							Every right

11. To what extent was Melissa responsible for what happened?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all responsible							responsible

12. How much do you blame Melissa for what happened?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely to
all to blame							blame

13. To what extent does the situation warrant police intervention?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all necessary							necessary

14. To what extent is a criminal conviction necessary?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all necessary necessary

15. To what extent do you think Cindy will be able to resolve the situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all resolved resolved

Participants' Demographics

Gender _____

Age _____

Instructions: Please read the following scenario

20-year-old Male victim Female bully

Christopher is your typical 20-year-old. He loves sports, movies and keeping up with all of his friends on social media. He prides himself on how popular he is on social media and is constantly adding friends, updating his status, and posting cool photos in hopes of getting lots of comments and likes. One day as Christopher is walking to class, he hears students giggling and whispering things like “did you see the photo of Christopher, posted online”. Christopher thought nothing of it since he is always posting photos. Later that day, when he signs into his social media profile, he is horrified to see that the nude photo he privately sent to his friend Melissa earlier that month had been posted. Christopher’s embarrassment only increases when he sees that the photo has been shared by not only his friends, but also friends of his friends and has received very negative comments, some of which call him names. The posting of pictures and name calling continue for a month after the first incident.

Instructions: Please answer the following questions based on the above scenario

Questions

1. How much do you blame Christopher for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

2. To what extent do you consider Melissa’s behaviour to constitute bullying?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

3. How serious do you believe the situation to be?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Very serious
all serious

4. To what extent do you think the situation will cause Christopher alarm or distress?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Very likely
all likely

5. In your opinion, did Christopher communicate that he did not want the picture sent to other people?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

6. If Christopher were to file a complaint that the picture had been wrongfully sent, to what extent would you consider this complaint to be reasonable?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all reasonable							reasonable

7. To what extent was Christopher responsible for what happened?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all responsible							responsible

8. In your opinion does sending nude pictures make a person responsible for any negative outcome that may come from doing so?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all responsible							responsible

9. To what extent do you believe Melissa believed Christopher was willing to have the nude picture sent to others?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all willing							willing

10. To what extent do you believe Melissa had a right to forward the nude picture to other people?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
No right							Every right

11. To what extent was Melissa responsible for what happened?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all responsible							responsible

12. How much do you blame Melissa for what happened?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely to
all to blame							blame

13. To what extent does the situation warrant police intervention?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all necessary							necessary

14. To what extent is a criminal conviction necessary?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all necessary necessary

15. To what extent do you think Christopher will be able to resolve the situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all resolved resolved

Participants' Demographics

Gender _____

Age _____

Instructions: Please read the following scenario

20-year-old Male victim Male bully

Christopher is your typical 20-year-old. He loves sports, movies and keeping up with all of his friends on social media. He prides himself on how popular he is on social media and is constantly adding friends, updating his status, and posting cool photos in hopes of getting lots of comments and likes. One day as Christopher is walking to class, he hears students giggling and whispering things like “did you see the photo of Christopher, posted online”. Christopher thought nothing of it since he is always posting photos. Later that day, when he signs into his social media profile, he is horrified to see that the nude photo he privately sent to his friend Mike earlier that month had been posted. Christopher’s embarrassment only increases when he sees that the photo has been shared by not only his friends, but also friends of his friends and has received very negative comments, some of which call him names. The posting of pictures and name calling continue for a month after the first incident.

Instructions: Please answer the following questions based on the above scenario

Questions

1. How much do you blame Christopher for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

2. To what extent do you consider Mike’s behaviour to constitute bullying?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

3. How serious do you believe the situation to be?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Very serious
all serious

4. To what extent do you think the situation will cause Christopher alarm or distress?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Very likely
all likely

5. In your opinion, did Christopher communicate that he did not want the picture sent to other people?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all							

6. If Christopher were to file a complaint that the picture had been wrongfully sent, to what extent would you consider this complaint to be reasonable?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all reasonable							
							reasonable

7. To what extent was Christopher responsible for what happened?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all responsible							
							responsible

8. In your opinion does sending nude pictures make a person responsible for any negative outcome that may come from doing so?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all responsible							
							responsible

9. To what extent do you believe Mike believed Christopher was willing to have the nude picture sent to others?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all willing							
							willing

10. To what extent do you believe Mike had a right to forward the nude picture to other people?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
No right							Every right

11. To what extent was Mike responsible for what happened?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all responsible							
							responsible

12. How much do you blame Mike for what happened?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely to
all to blame							
							blame

13. To what extent does the situation warrant police intervention?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all necessary							necessary

14. To what extent is a criminal conviction necessary?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all necessary							necessary

15. To what extent do you think Christopher will be able to resolve the situation?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely	
all resolved							resolved	

Participants' Demographics

Gender _____

Age _____

Instructions: Please read the following scenario

20-year-old Female victim Male bully

Cindy is your typical 20-year-old. She loves sports, movies and keeping up with all her friends on social media. She prides herself on how popular she is on social media and is constantly adding friends, updating her status, and posting cool photos in hopes of getting lots of comments and likes. One day as Cindy is walking to class, she hears students giggling and whispering things like “did you see the photo of Cindy, posted online”. Cindy thought nothing of it since she is always posting photos. Later that day, when she signs into her social media profile, she is horrified to see that the nude photo she privately sent to her friend Mike earlier that month had been posted. Cindy’s embarrassment only increases when she sees that the photo has been shared by not only her friends, but also friends of her friends and has received very negative comments, some of which call her names. The posting of pictures and name calling continue for a month after the first incident.

Instructions: Please answer the following questions based on the above scenario

Questions

1. How much do you blame Cindy for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

2. To what extent do you consider Mike’s behaviour to constitute bullying?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

3. How serious do you believe the situation to be?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Very serious
all serious

4. To what extent do you think the situation will cause Cindy alarm or distress?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Very likely
all likely

5. In your opinion, did Cindy communicate that she did not want the picture sent to other people?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Completely
 all

6. If Cindy were to file a complaint that the picture had been wrongfully sent, to what extent would you consider this complaint to be reasonable?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Completely
 all reasonable reasonable

7. To what extent was Cindy responsible for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Completely
 all responsible responsible

8. In your opinion does sending nude pictures make a person responsible for any negative outcome that may come from doing so?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Completely
 all responsible responsible

9. To what extent do you believe Mike believed Cindy was willing to have the nude picture sent to others?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Completely
 all willing willing

10. To what extent do you believe Mike had a right to forward the nude picture to other people?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 No right Every right

11. To what extent was Mike responsible for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Completely
 all responsible responsible

12. How much do you blame Mike for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 Not at Completely to
 all to blame blame

13. To what extent does the situation warrant police intervention?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all necessary necessary

14. To what extent is a criminal conviction necessary?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all necessary necessary

15. To what extent do you think Cindy will be able to resolve the situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all resolved resolved

Participants' Demographics

Gender _____

Age _____

Instructions: Please read the following scenario

20 year old Female victim female bully

Cindy is your typical 20-year-old. She loves sports, movies and keeping up with all her friends on social media. She prides herself on how popular she is on social media and is constantly adding friends, updating her status, and posting cool photos in hopes of getting lots of comments and likes. One day as Cindy is walking to class, she hears students giggling and whispering things like “did you see the photo of Cindy, posted online”. Cindy thought nothing of it since she is always posting photos. Later that day, when she signs into her social media profile, she is horrified to see that the nude photo she privately sent to her friend Melissa earlier that month had been posted. Cindy’s embarrassment only increases when she sees that the photo has been shared by not only her friends, but also friends of her friends and has received very negative comments, some of which call her names. The posting of pictures and name calling continue for a month after the first incident.

Questions

1. How much do you blame Cindy for what happened?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

2. To what extent do you consider Melissa’s behaviour to constitute bullying?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

3. How serious do you believe the situation to be?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Very serious
all serious

4. To what extent do you think the situation will cause Cindy alarm or distress?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Very likely
all likely

5. In your opinion, did Cindy communicate that she did not want the picture sent to other people?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all

6. If Cindy were to file a complaint that the picture had been wrongfully sent, to what extent would you consider this complaint to be reasonable?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all reasonable							reasonable

7. To what extent was Cindy responsible for what happened?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all responsible							responsible

8. In your opinion does sending nude pictures make a person responsible for any negative outcome that may come from doing so?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all responsible							responsible

9. To what extent do you believe Melissa believed Cindy was willing to have the nude picture sent to others?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all willing							willing

10. To what extent do you believe Melissa had a right to forward the nude picture to other people?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
No right							Every right

11. To what extent was Melissa responsible for what happened?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all responsible							responsible

12. How much do you blame Melissa for what happened?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely to
all to blame							blame

13. To what extent does the situation warrant police intervention?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at							Completely
all necessary							necessary

14. To what extent is a criminal conviction necessary?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all necessary necessary

15. To what extent do you think Cindy will be able to resolve the situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at Completely
all resolved resolved

Participants' Demographics

Gender _____

Age _____

Appendix B

Consent Screen

Perceptions of Online Interactions

This study is being conducted by Megan Penney, as part of the degree requirements for the honours Program in Psychology at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Megan is under the supervision of Dr. Kelly Warren. The study is designed to investigate perceptions of interactions through online mediums. The results of this study will be used to write an honours thesis and may also be published in the future. In completing this study, you will be asked to read a scenario and to answer the questions that follow. You may omit any questions you do not wish to answer. The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

There are no obvious risks or benefits involved with your participation in this study. Your responses are anonymous and confidential and to ensure this no IP addresses or other identifying information will be collected. All information provided will be analyzed and reported on a group basis. Thus, individual responses will not be identified. Your participation in this research is totally voluntary and you are free to stop participating at any time. Incomplete questionnaires will not be included in the data analysis.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact Megan at mcpenney@grenfell.mun.ca or her supervisor, Dr. Warren at kwarren@grenfell.mun.ca. As well, if you are interested in knowing the results of the study, please contact Megan or Dr. Warren after May 9. This study has been approved by an ethics review process in the Psychology Program at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland and has been found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy.

Once you click continue, it will be assumed that you have been informed of, and understand, the nature and purpose of the study, and that you freely consent to participate.

Appendix C

Debriefing Screen

Thank you for your participation. This study was designed to investigate perceptions of blame and responsibility in cases of cyber bullying and more specifically how the gender and age of victims and perpetrators influence these perceptions. The results of this study will be used to write an honours thesis in psychology and may also be published in the future. As previously stated, the responses you provided are anonymous and confidential therefore no IP addresses or other identifying information was collected. All information provided will be analyzed and reported on a group basis and your individual responses cannot be identified. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact Megan at mcpenny@grenfell.mun.ca or her supervisor, Dr. Warren at kwarren@grenfell.mun.ca. If you are interested in knowing the results of the study, please contact Megan or Dr. Warren after May 9. If you feel you or someone you know has experienced or is experiencing cyber-bullying, please visit the website "Get Cyber Safe" at <http://www.getcybersafe.gc.ca/cnt/cbrbllng/prnts/cbrbllng-eng.aspx> for information and tips on where to seek help.

This study has been approved by an ethics review process in the psychology program at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland and has been found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy.