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<h1>Abstract</h1>

Young adults are becoming more and more engaged with social media for a variety of reasons. Social networking sites—such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter—provide them with free and open space for exchanges of ideas, collaboration, and expression. For the most part, these online interactions are positive, respectful, and socially responsible. However, a significant number of young adults are using social media for a darker and more dangerous purpose: cyberbullying. While this phenomenon has been discussed widely in the media, what is lacking is a clear and consistent understanding of cyberbullying.

This literature review will synthesize the current research on cyberbullying, identify key findings that can be drawn from the research, acknowledge existing research gaps, and suggest opportunities for further research. Although the focus of this article is a review of the literature, a secondary focus is the potential for public librarians, through pastoral care, to serve as a support system for victims of cyberbullying.

<h1>Introduction</h1>

Young adults are engaging with social media at a rapidly increasing speed.¹ The majority of young adults are using social media tools to interact with real-world friends in positive and healthy ways.² Social networking sites, like Facebook and Instagram, can be venues

for young adults to express themselves in creative and exciting ways. According to danah boyd and Nicole Ellison, social networking sites permit individuals to create a public or semi-public profile within a confined system, construct a list of other users with whom they wish to interact, and navigate through their lists of connections—“friends” or “followers”—and those of other users within the system.³

However, a significant number of young adults are using social media for a darker and more dangerous purpose: cyberbullying. National and international press coverage of extreme cases of cyberbullying has brought attention to this relatively new phenomenon.⁴ Due to disagreements among researchers over the operational and conceptual definitions of “cyberbullying,” it is difficult to construct a working definition and determine how prevalent it is among young adults.⁵ For this literature review, the definition provided by Robert Tokunaga will be promoted: “Cyberbullying is any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others.”⁶

In a report on young adults, social media, and cruelty produced by the Pew Research Center, 15 percent of young adults reported being the target of aggressive behavior while online.⁷ Nineteen percent of surveyed young adults said that they had been victimized by cyberbullies in some form during the previous year.⁸ Clearly, online cruelty and harassment is an unfortunate reality for many young adults. Information professionals, particularly public librarians, have an opportunity to work as first responders by providing support, education, and guidance for victims of cyberbullying. However, considerably more research must be conducted to create an appropriate and actionable rubric for librarians engaged in cyberbullying prevention and intervention.

This literature review synthesizes the current research on cyberbullying, identifies existing gaps in the research, and suggests possibilities for future research.

<h1>Outline of Literature Review</h1>

This literature review will begin with a brief description of the method used for research selection. Next, the finding/analysis section will summarize themes occurring throughout the current literature on cyberbullying. Finally, the implications for future research into cyberbullying section will point out the gaps and weakness that exist in the literature as well as make recommendations for further investigations.

<h1>Method for the Literature Review</h1>

Four databases were used to locate relevant articles for this literature review: Library Literature & Information Science Full Text, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Web of Knowledge, and OmniFile Full Text Mega Edition. These databases cover the main fields in which the bulk of research on bullying and cyberbullying has been conducted. These fields include education, psychology, sociology, library and information studies, and human-computer interaction. To locate relevant articles in these databases, a combination of search terms were used including “online bullying,” “cyberbullying,” “bullying,” “young adults,” “teens,” “youth,” “school bullying,” “Internet bullying,” “school library,” and “libraries.”

Approximately 2,583 articles were returned through the database searches. From these articles, thirty-nine articles were selected for this literature review, with the oldest article published in 2004 by Michele L. Ybarra and Kimberly J. Mitchell.⁹ The majority of the retrieved articles were not relevant to the focus of this literature review. When choosing the articles for this review, two criteria were particularly important: publication

date and relevancy. Research into cyberbullying has grown steadily since the introduction of social media in the early 2000s. Although this review includes a few older articles, the bulk of the cited research has been published within the past three years. Through the selection of recently published articles, the researcher could present relevant and current information on cyberbullying. A quick read of the titles and abstracts aided the researcher in determining the relevancy of the returned articles for this review. Many of the 2,583 articles were narrowly focused on aspects of cyberbullying outside of this review's focus on an overarching understanding of cyberbullying, young adults, and the roles of librarians. Thirty-nine articles were selected that fell within this range.

Young adults are engaging in more information sharing about themselves on social media than they had been in the early days of MySpace and Friendster.¹⁰ As a result, there is almost no research about cyberbullying prior to 2004. A significant number of the thirty-nine articles were drawn from psychology- and education-focused journals, for example, *Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties* and *Journal of School Violence*. Within the total body of literature identified, the frequency of publication increased noticeably beginning in 2010. The majority of the articles included in this literature review were published within the past four years, and nineteen of the thirty-nine articles were published within the last two years (2012 and 2013).

<h1>Findings/Synthesis</h1>

<h2>Bullying and Cyberbullying Are Different</h2>

Although bullying and cyberbullying share many similarities, there are some significant differences. The most obvious ones are the definitions given for cyberbullying and traditional bullying, along with the characteristics that are ascribed to each. These

differences are a result of the online environment through which cyberbullying occurs. A list of the key definitional differences between traditional bullying and cyberbullying is provided in table 1.

<!Table 1 here!>

Researchers frequently cite a definition of traditional bullying proposed by Dan Olweus that states, “A person is being bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons.”¹¹ Although Olweus’s definition is regularly referenced, bullying is not a clearly defined concept in the literature.

In addition to this definition, three criteria are commonly associated with traditional bullying: repetition, power imbalance, and intentionality.¹² In cyberbullying, these criteria may be absent or modified to better reflect the online environment where the behaviors occur. For example, traditional bullying involves repetition of an aggressive behavior. Offline repeated instances of bullying can be documented and counted.¹³ However, in an online environment, it is extremely difficult to know how many times a single action has been e-mailed, posted, uploaded, or otherwise shared.¹⁴ The effect of these types of behaviors is typically more devastating for the victim than traditional bullying behaviors.¹⁵

The audience for cyberbullying is also typically considerably larger than that of traditional bullying.¹⁶ Since cyberbullying occurs in an online environment, attacks can spread quickly and with little effort or planning on the part of the bully or bullies.¹⁷ Young adults often see this public form of bullying as having more serious repercussions than its more private form, face-to-face traditional bullying.¹⁸ The victim can be reached anywhere at any time due to the always-on nature of the Internet.

Traditional bullying can be carried out physically, verbally, or relationally. Relational bullying, or social bullying, is an indirect form of bullying in which gossip, rumors, or exclusion play key roles.¹⁹ Typically, relational bullying is associated with females and causes more emotional distress than more direct forms of bullying.²⁰ Relational bullying is common online as this environment affords bullies a sense of anonymity and privacy.²¹ Individuals may easily and willingly post something online that they would be reluctant to say offline.²²

Though there is some consensus in defining the concept of traditional bullying, an academic definition of cyberbullying is much more nebulous. The definitions of cyberbullying can vary widely, and this ambiguity has been criticized frequently in the literature.²³

Additionally, the characteristics of power, imbalance, publicity, and anonymity in cyberbullying are much more context-sensitive and driven by the nature of the medium.²⁴ Without the physical context, some of the characteristics of traditional bullying are not present in cyberbullying. The power imbalance shifts from the physical power focus of traditional bullying to the focus on technological power in cyberbullying.²⁵ Instead of a victim lacking the physical strength of an offline bully, the victim lacks the technical savviness of a cyberbully.²⁶

Anonymity is a key characteristic that distinguishes cyberbullying from traditional bullying. Cyberbullies are normally viewed as anonymous, hiding behind their laptops and smartphones.²⁷ This anonymity may disconnect young adults from the consequences of their online actions. This “disinhibition effect” may change how young adults portray themselves online and encourage them to share private information with

one another.²⁸ For cyberbullying victims, anonymity has been shown to increase feelings of fear, powerlessness, insecurity, and frustration.²⁹

Two cases of cyberbullying can help to illustrate the characteristics described above. Recently, Rebecca Sedwick, a twelve-year-old girl in Florida, jumped to her death after being bullied online nonstop over the course of eighteen months by two of her classmates.³⁰ In another tragic case, Canadian teenager Amanda Todd told her cyberbullying story through YouTube before killing herself in October 2012.³¹ The bullying she suffered took place both online and offline, despite changing schools and friends. Both of these young adults experienced online bullying through social media over an extended period of time. The bullying, at the hands of their classmates, did not stop at the end of the school day but continued on Facebook, despite attempted intervention by parents.

Blurring of Roles in Cyberbullying: Bully/Victim

During a bullying experience, individuals typically play one of three roles: bully, victim, or bystander.³² Traditionally these roles are fixed, with very little shifting among them. However, in cyberbullying these roles can become blurred.³³ In one cyberbullying occurrence, an individual can be labeled a bully, but in another the same individual may be identified as the victim. The bully/victim role reversal often occurs when one individual seeks revenge or retribution for an earlier online attack. In fact, being bullied online is a strong risk factor for bullying online.³⁴ Danielle Law et al. highlight the need for more research into the frequency of bully/victim roles played during cyberbullying.³⁵

What Drama Means for Cyberbullying

Young adults use the term “drama” to separate their online experiences from the victimization inherent in the adult term of “cyberbullying.” According to Alice Marwick and danah boyd, “Drama is a performative set of actions distinct from bullying, gossip, and relationship aggression, incorporating elements of them but also operating quite distinctly.”³⁶ Drama can cover a range of behaviors including gossip, bullying, breakups, makeups, trash talk, and kidding around.³⁷

With “drama,” young adults take ownership over painful experiences and diminish the power of these experiences.³⁸ The term “cyberbullying” reinforces the stigma associated with the “victim” label. In a *New York Times* editorial, boyd and Marwick point to the common refrain of “there’s no bullying at this school” that they encountered while interviewing young adults across the country to show that to young adults, cyberbullying and drama are two different concepts.³⁹

By developing an understanding of the way that young adults label online interactions and behaviors, researchers can gain a sense of how young adults are truly living online. To provide young adults with the best support possible for cyberbullying, researchers must “work within a teenager’s cultural frame.”⁴⁰ Intervention programs against cyberbullying should be positive and empowering, not negative or emphasizing victimization.⁴¹

<h2>Perceptions Young Adults Have of Cyberbullying</h2>

To better grasp young adults’ online experiences, their views, concerns, and recommendations about cyberbullying should be recognized. However, only recently has research been conducted regarding young adults’ perceptions of cyberbullying.⁴²

After holding seven focus groups with thirty-eight fifth- and eighth-graders, Fay Mishna et al. found that participants largely viewed cyberbullying as anonymous.⁴³ According to the study participants, this anonymity encouraged their peers to behave in ways they might not offline. Although cyberbullying was often perceived as anonymous, the participants described it as occurring most often within already existing offline social groups and relationships. Additionally, participants expressed great reluctance to share their cyberbullying experiences with parents or other adults due to fear of punishment such as restricted access to the Internet or to cell phones.

Anna Ševčíková et al. interviewed young cyberbullying victims to understand how they viewed online attacks and at what point such attacks were seen as harmful.⁴⁴ Participants were less disturbed by cyberbullying if the aggression never transferred from online to offline situations. Moreover, they described online attacks coordinated by several bullies as more harmful than individual attacks.⁴⁵

Brett Holfeld and Mark Grabe surveyed 665 middle school students to investigate how they reacted to instances of cyberbullying.⁴⁶ They found that 60 percent of those who observed cyberbullying told an adult about it. This figure contrasts slightly with earlier research that reported that the majority of young adults involved in cyberbullying did not share the experience.⁴⁷ However, the participants in Holfeld and Grabe's study said that whom they chose to tell had no impact on the likelihood of the cyberbullying ending.⁴⁸

Why Aren't Young Adults Telling Adults about Cyberbullying?

One question appearing repeatedly in the literature is "Why aren't young adults reporting these online attacks to adults?" Instead of informing an adult about the behavior, young

adults often turn to other methods of coping. These methods are usually technical in nature such as changing passwords, e-mail addresses, blocking messages, blocking users, or changing online accounts.⁴⁹ Generally, young adults perceive reporting cyberbullying to an adult as the last possible solution. Adults are seen as being both unfamiliar with the online environment and unaware of the severity of cyberbullying.⁵⁰ Samantha Biegler and danah boyd reported that bystanders are more likely to report instances of cyberbullying than victims or bullies.⁵¹

Frequently in the literature, young adults expressed that by reporting instances of cyberbullying they risked severe consequences from parents and/or teachers.⁵² The main reason for young adults' reluctance toward telling parents or other adults about cyberbullying is the fear that access to computers or smartphones may be taken away.⁵³ Another fear is that it would be difficult for adults to find enough proof of cyberbullying to identify the bully (or bullies), and they would be unable to end it.⁵⁴ Often students experiencing cyberbullying believe that teachers and school administrators can do nothing about the behaviors because it occurs outside of school grounds and school hours.⁵⁵

<h1>Implications for Future Research</h1>

<h2>Gaps in the Literature</h2>

<h3>Lack of Theory in Cyberbullying Research.</h3> Tokunaga highlights the theoretical issues within cyberbullying research.⁵⁶ The chief issue is that there has been no unified theory applied to cyberbullying. Theory is a system of assumptions, principles, or rules that can be used to guide predictions, analyses, or explanations of the nature of a behavior or phenomenon.⁵⁷ Theory development and application are necessary for a

research area or field to advance and become useful outside of academia. This is particularly true of cyberbullying research. Along with aiding in predicting the behaviors of bullies or victims, theory has the potential to explain the different aspects of the cyberbullying phenomenon.⁵⁸

While noteworthy research has been conducted on the risk factors, criteria, roles, and victimization rates of cyberbullying among young adults, very little theory has been applied to the area.⁵⁹ Not only would theory aid in predicting the actions of cyberbullies and victims, but it could also clarify why the effects of cyberbullying can be worse than those of traditional bullying.⁶⁰

Similarly, a well-thought-out and purposeful model could visually illustrate the complexities of cyberbullying interactions, roles, and behaviors.⁶¹ In his literature synthesis, Tokunaga suggests several possibilities for how to model cyberbullying, such as modeling as an episodic process, as a non-recursive model, or as a stratification of cyberbullies and victims model.⁶²

Possibilities for Public Librarianship

In the cyberbullying literature, librarians are occasionally pointed out as members of a possible support system for cyberbullying victims. Libraries have long been promoted as safe, inviting, and supportive environments for young adults.⁶³ Librarians, especially public librarians and school librarians, frequently serve as adult advocates for young adults in their communities.⁶⁴ Librarians and library staff, in addition to their job description duties, often play a supportive role for troubled young adult patrons. To illustrate the emotional and social support that librarians provide for their patrons, pastoral care—a model borrowed from education—is useful. For cyberbullying, this

model demonstrates how librarians can be a source of support for young adults who are experiencing cyberbullying.

Pastoral Care. In education literature, the supportive roles that are played by teachers and other school staff are often referred to as “pastoral care.”⁶⁵ Pastoral care is a model native to education, particularly the educational system of the United Kingdom.⁶⁶ Within the past ten years, there has been a significant interest in the “teacher’s social-emotional competence” and the importance of a supportive relationship between students and teachers.⁶⁷ Many U.S. states include the emotional and social support of students within the classroom as part of encouraged teaching strategies, practices, evaluation, and assessments.⁶⁸ However, this theory can also be applied to librarians and their roles within the library.⁶⁹ Pastoral care by librarians is composed of three core components: “general support and positive relationships” with young adult patrons, “creating and maintaining the right environment,” and “contributing to social inclusion, self-esteem, and appropriate behavior.”⁷⁰

Librarians approach their pastoral care role in three ways. First, they “play it down.” This is a low-key approach, with librarians recognizing that they can only do so much and focusing instead on being strategic with resources to better serve their community as a whole.⁷¹ Second, librarians promote the social role of the library within the community. Librarians using this approach may develop social events and activities that encourage social skills and foster positive associations to the library.⁷² Third, they focus on the pastoral needs of young adults who see the library as a refuge. In this approach, librarians provide tailored one-on-one support to troubled young adults.⁷³

These three approaches are equally worthwhile and beneficial when helping cyberbullied or troubled young adults.

The concept of pastoral care is particularly applicable to cyberbullying interventions.⁷⁴ As a designated safe space that lacks the structure and teacher presence of the classroom, libraries are a natural location to which cyberbullying victims can turn. A library is a public space that satisfies many needs, yet it “allows for anonymity and independence.”⁷⁵ Librarians do not possess the powers and influences that parents, teachers, school administrators, or even peers possess. However, by working in one-on-one, caring relationships with troubled young adults, librarians can connect with these patrons in entirely different and beneficial ways.⁷⁶

Education on Digital Citizenship and Online Relationships. While pastoral care explains the psychological support that librarians can provide, another role that librarians can play is that of cyberbullying educators. Education is crucial in the prevention of cyberbullying and intervention when it does occur. Young adults should be educated on possible online dangers long before threats are encountered.⁷⁷ Prevention and intervention programs should focus on encouraging good digital citizenship and healthy, responsible online relationships.⁷⁸ Digital citizenship emphasizes teaching children and young adults how to be safe, ethical, and responsible on the Internet while successfully and intelligently participating in the online community.⁷⁹ Librarians can have a part in this education process by developing structured or unstructured workshops, presentations, classes, and online resources.⁸⁰

Prevention and intervention programs should “emphasize prudent online disclosure of personal information, positive online social interaction, online empathy, and

good communication channels for reporting online aggression.”⁸¹ The attention of these programs should be on the positive aspects of digital citizenship and online relationships, not the negative cyberbullying side. Young adults should not be labeled as “victims” of cyberbullying. Instead, any programs developed by librarians should empower and motivate young adults. It is critical that librarians support young adults in ways that encourage them to feel capable, strong, confident, and independent.⁸² By doing so, young adults will become responsible, empathic, ethical, and active members of the fast-paced twenty-first-century participatory culture.

<h1>Conclusion</h1>

Today’s young adults have grown up in a society that has incorporated social media into every aspect of daily life. Social media has prompted many positive changes in the ways in which individuals create, discuss, and collaborate. However, social media has also been a destructive force in the lives of some young adults. With the rise in the use of social media, cyberbullying has become a frequent topic of discussion among young adults, parents, teachers, school administrators, the public, and the press. While cyberbullying shares many of the same characteristics as traditional bullying, the distress experienced by its victims may be much more severe.

This literature review has synthesized the current major research into cyberbullying, highlighted gaps existing in the literature, and demonstrated how librarians can support victims through pastoral care and education. In literature on cyberbullying, librarians are often overlooked as sources of support for victims, yet through library programming, education, collection development, and one-on-one interactions, librarians can provide greatly needed help to troubled young adults. Because

librarians do not have the same authority in young adults' lives as parents or teachers, they can connect with young adults in more approachable ways. Proactive classes, workshops, and discussions that empower young adults before cyberbullying begins can encourage empathy, emphasize the severe consequences of cyberbullying, and demonstrate responsible and ethical online behavior. Cyberbullying research has the potential not only to improve the quality of many young adults' lives, but to also prevent this negative behavior from ever occurring.

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