



Cyber bullying in Chinese Web Forums: An examination of nature and extent

Chang Su¹ & Thomas J. Holt²

Michigan State University, USA

Abstract

There is an emerging body of research examining the problem of cyber bullying in juvenile populations. These studies provide significant insight to the frequency and correlates of cyber bullying victimization. Few, however, have considered the content of messages used by bullies in order to understand the most common forms of bullying and the ways that victims are targeted. Additionally, little research has considered the prevalence of bullying in Asian nations despite their increasing connectivity and large population of young Internet users. In order to address this gap in the literature, this study utilizes a sample of 374 threads from web forums for multiple middle and high schools throughout China. The findings are used to understand the forms of bullying that occur in online environments, and the ways that victims and bullies interact. The findings demonstrate the dynamics of cyber bullying in a cross-cultural context, and the prospective policy implications for schools and parents.

Keywords: Cyber bullying, online harassment, China, web forums.

Introduction

Adolescent school violence is a common and significant problem in many countries across the globe (Arseneault, Walsh, Trzesniewski, Newcombe, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2006; Beran & Li, 2005, 2007; Erdur-Baker, 2010; Frost, 1991; Hazler, Hoover, & Oliver, 1992; Ma, 2001; Olweus, 1993; Sharp, Thompson, & Arora, 2000; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). Often, violence among youths involves some component of bullying, wherein individuals repeatedly experience some negative action by another young person who attempts to disrupt, injure, or otherwise cause discomfort for their victim (Olweus, 1993). The impact of bullying can be quite severe, often causing depression and health concerns for victims (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Marttunen, Rimpela, & Rantanen, 1999; Klomek et al., 2008; Kumpulainen & Rasanen, 2000; Nansel, Overpeck, Haynie, Ruan, & Scheidt, 2003; Nansel et al., 2001; van der Wal, de Wit, & Hirasing, 2003), and attempted suicide (Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2007; Klomek et al., 2009). In fact, some researchers argue that bullying is a major public health concern

¹ Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Michigan State University, 7 Human Ecology Building, East Lansing, MI 48824, United States of America. Email: suchang@msu.edu

² School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University, 434 Baker Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824, United States of America. Email: holt@msu.edu

requiring significant research and resources (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001).

As the Internet and computer-mediated communications technologies are increasingly inexpensive and available, the opportunities for individuals to engage in bullying via electronic methods, or cyber bullying, has increased significantly (Beran & Li, 2005, 2007; Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolack 2000; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008, 2009; Snider & Borel, 2004; Wolack, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006; Ybarra 2004). Research on cyber bullying has primarily focused on student populations in the United States and Canada, due to several high profile incidents where cyber bullying was related to incidents of suicide among youth (Beran & Li, 2005, 2007; Finkelhor et al., 2000; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008, 2009; Li, 2006; Marcum, 2008; Wolack et al., 2006; Ybarra, 2004). These studies indicate that there is significant emotional and mental health concerns generated by cyber bullying experiences (e.g. Hinduja & Patchin 2008; van der Wal et al., 2003; Ybarra 2004). Few researchers have, however, actively examined the content of bullying messages to consider the frequency of multiple forms of bullying, and the tenor of the messages posted by bullies to understand how messages are developed and targeted (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008, 2009). As a consequence, it is unclear how the process and experience of bullying occurs.

Considering the significant challenges posed by cyber bullying, researchers across the globe are beginning to examine this phenomenon (Erdur-Baker, 2010; Erdur-Baker & Kavut, 2007; Li, 2008; McLoughlin, Meyricke, & Burgess, 2009; Wolack et al., 2006). Studies utilizing US populations suggest that cyber bullying is a common problem among juvenile populations, though prevalence rates vary depending on the sample and definition of bullying used (Marcum, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Wolack et al., 2006). Similar research has found cyber bullying to be a growing problem in Australia (McLoughlin et al., 2009), Canada (Beran & Li, 2005, 2007), and Turkey (Erdur-Baker, 2010; Erdur-Baker & Kavut, 2007). Few researchers have, however, examined the issue of cyber bullying in developing nations, particularly Asia (Huang & Chou, 2010; Li, 2008). In fact, China is the most populace nation in the developing world, and has experienced an explosion in Internet use over the last decade (Central Intelligence Agency, 2010). In fact, one of the only studies examining cyber bullying in China found that 33 percent of children had experienced cyber bullying, while a very small percentage actually engaged in cyber bullying themselves (Li, 2008). Chinese students appear more likely to report victimization experiences to teachers or adults suggesting that adults are more likely to intervene on behalf of a victim (Li, 2008). Furthermore, most students reported being victimized through multiple electronic media sources, while chatroom or message board victimization was the most common single form reported (Li, 2008).

In order to better understand the nature of cyber bullying in a cross-national context, this study will utilize a sample of 374 threads from web forums for various schools throughout China. The data provides direct information on the forms of cyber bullying used by young people in public settings, as well as language and comments prevalent in these messages. In addition, this study considers the ways that bullies and their targets interact to understand the social dynamics of public bullying. The policy implications of this study for parents and schools are explored in detail.

Data and Methods

Given the prominence of cyber bullying in public forums and chat rooms in China (Li 2008), this qualitative study uses a sample of threads from school-specific public web

forums designed for students to discuss events and issues with others.³ Web forums are composed of posts where individuals can ask a question, give an opinion, respond to other posters, or simply share past experiences (Holt, 2010; Mann & Sutton, 1998). Others respond to the remarks with posts of their own to create a running conversation or dialogue. Since posters often respond to the ideas of others, the exchanges present in the posts of a forum may “resemble a kind of marathon focused discussion group” (Mann & Sutton, 1998, p. 210). This form of computer-mediated communication is an excellent medium for cyber bullying because individuals can directly transmit their thoughts and feelings about others in a relatively anonymous setting (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Li, 2008). Thus, this data can speak directly to experiences of cyber bullying in the offenders’ own words (Holt, 2010), as well as document how bullies, victims, and neutral parties respond to these posts.

Due to the volume of on-line content, the researchers attempted to identify a website with active forums for multiple middle and high schools throughout China in order to capture conversations in the populations most like to engage in or experience bullying. A publicly accessible site was also desirable, because it would not require individuals to actually register with the site to examine posted content (Holt, 2010). As a result, virtually anyone can access the forum without the need to interact with posters, reducing the potential for researcher contamination or bias (Holt, 2010; Silverman, 2001). We also sought forums that were moderated by anyone other than school faculty or staff to better understand how students engage one another when outside of the immediate intervention of school officials. Finally, a site with a large number of existing or archived posts was preferred since frequent posting suggests high activity, interest, and information exchange (Holt, 2007, 2010). Only one site met all of these criteria, and the content of each school specific subforum were examined to create a consistent data point. These forums were not moderated by school faculty or staff, and this sample consists of a purposive selection of 374 threads from 21 school specific forums. This strategy generated a copious amount of data, and a wide range of posts (see Table 1).

Table 1: School Forum Data

Forum	Province	Total Number of Threads	Total Number of Users
1	N/A	4	47
2	N/A	70	6059
3	Beijing	7	461
4	Liaoning	21	447
5	Guizhou	8	389
6	Guizhou	12	264
7	Liaoning	2	102
8	Heilongjiang	13	265
9	Jiangsu	7	275

³ The web addresses and names of the groups and users of all sites and forums used are not provided in this analysis in an attempt to maintain some confidentiality for the participants. Additionally, pseudonyms are used to refer to all forum participants in keeping the general username conventions evident in the forums (Holt, 2010).

10	Gansu	13	419
11	N/A	69	3986
12	Jiangsu	17	501
13	Shandong	5	104
14	Jilin	4	58
15	Heilongjiang	1	36
16	Guangxi	5	131
17	Liaoning	3	33
18	Liaoning	4	30
19	Shanghai	54	1514
20	N/A	46	3980
21	Zhejiang	2	37

The threads were translated by a native speaker, printed, and analyzed by hand to determine the forms of bullying that occur and their prevalence across the forums. A content analysis was conducted using codes derived Willard's (2004) typology of cyber bullying. Specifically, each post was examined and classified based on the language used in the post, including swearing or foul language, as well as the use of exclamatory punctuation. Any post where the user directed an angry or irritated message directly targeting another user was considered "flaming" (Willard, 2004). For example, the use of exclamation points, all capital letters, and angry language or swearing directed at another user were considered evidence of flaming. Denigration was determined based on the use of messages where an individual made statements about an individual's character or behavior that appear to make a value judgment about that person. For example, the authors coded any post where the individual referred to another person as "slutty," "stupid," or "ugly" as denigrating because of their negative impact on the victim (Willard, 2004).

Masquerading posts were determined based on the use of language that suggested a person was making an unusual request, such as the desire for sexual encounters with strangers (Bocij, 2004; Willard, 2004). Additionally, responses from other users questioning the veracity, validity or tenor of the user's request were treated as indicators of masquerading. Exclusionary posts were classified based on the use of terms or phrases that specifically stated a certain individual would not be allowed to participate in an activity or friendship network (Willard, 2004). Harassment was defined as an individual being repeatedly targeted by others for varying types of bullying. Finally, stalking involved the repeated experience of bullying messages that directly target an individual's personal safety or attempt to general social scorn (Willard, 2004).

Inductive methods derived from grounded theory techniques were used to explore the social interactions between bullies, victims, and forum users (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This methodology is particularly useful as its procedures permit the researcher to develop a thorough, well-integrated examination of any social phenomena. Any concepts found within the data must be identified multiple times through comparisons to identify any similarities (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In this way, findings are validated by their repeated appearances or absences in the data, ensuring they are derived and grounded in the data. Specifically, posters repeated comments or observations relating to their behavioral or attitudinal responses to bullying messages were used to highlight the ways that either party

responds to messages posed in these forums. These strategies structure the analysis, with examples and quotes drawn from the data where appropriate.

Findings

In examining the content of threads from these forums, it was clear that the overwhelming majority of posts involved three forms of bullying: flaming, denigration, and outing (see Table 2). Each form of bullying was used alone, and in combination with other forms to cause some harm to the victim. Due to the significant overlap between each form of bullying observed, the findings are presented based on the primary form of bullying. To that end, the most common form of bullying involved denigrating comments about others. For example, there were 100 unique instances of denigration within threads, largely focused on an individual’s appearance or sexual activities. This was exemplified in a post where an individual described a female classmate, stating:

heavy make-up, rubbish, ugly, disgusting; pretending to be naive; you come out to freak people out; are you sexually available?; i'm speechless, really have to find some rapers [rapists] take turns to rape you; do you have a huge breast? I want to feel about it; are you narcissist?; it's a courage that you could still live in the world..

Similar comments were observed across the forums, as in this post by ZYY threatening the safety of their classmate stating: *“don't you feel you are beautiful! Actually you are more slutty than others. Some day, you'll kneel down to me. Wait and see.”* Furthermore, a user named LQQ wrote: *“A very famous whore LWW, really really slutty. She's had sex for numerous times and still told her mom she was a virgin. Wherever there's a bed, she'd have sex with sb.”*

Table 2: Forms and Prevalence of Cyber bullying

Form	Count
Denigration	100
Denigration and flaming	127
Denigration and outing	45
Flaming	56
Flaming, denigration, and outing	24
Outing	15
Outing and flaming	7
Masquerading	7

The consistent use of graphic and sexual language evident in the previous examples was present across the forums (Holt, 2007, 2010). In fact, denigrating posts regularly mocked or exaggerated the sexual activities of other students. Female students were often targets of comments suggesting they were either slutty or promiscuous. For example, several individuals spoke out against the women in an entire grade at an institution in the following exchange:

ZGH: *shameless women in 7th middle school, already had abortion for 3 times. F... you, want to make out with us? If you are available for free, I don't want that. Don't believe women like this.*

YCS: *there's one in class 6 grade 3, a real slutty whore, always want to have sex with men, ugly and fat, disgusting. Her legs are like black hen's legs. Even could freak her mom out.*

CHY: *Girls in class 2 are super slutty*

This sort of language was common in denigrating posts, and often drew support from others. Thus, these posts support the finding that cyber bullying can involve multiple participants (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; 2009). Users often joined in such taunts, adding to the prospective harm victims experienced from such denigrating comments.

The next most common form of bullying involved flaming posts directed against other forum users (Table 2). Flaming posts involved the use of hurtful or angry language, largely to insult an individual (see Holt, 2007; Willard, 2004). If an individual posted a message that another forum user felt was inappropriate or of no value, they noted their dissatisfaction as in the following exchange:

YUZ: *WSJ is not virgin, just graduated and dumped by someone*

ZHY: *why did you say ill of this school? Only a few of them are not virgin, the situation is not that bad*

HHQ: *It's none of your f...ing business. Nobody makes you marry them. It's none of our business to talk about others' body or life.*

Flaming posts typically appeared in response to an individual's comments, rather than at the start of a thread, as demonstrated in the previous example. This was evident across the forums, as in a thread where an individual called a student a cheater, which led another to write: "*who didn't copy homework? Who didn't cheat in exam? Don't you think you are good? How dare you judge TQY as deep evil thinking?*" These examples suggest that flames may be a way for bullying to occur as a direct result of individual activities in on-line environments, rather than in the real world (see Holt, 2007; Willard, 2004).

The use of flaming was particularly evident in posts where individuals described the presence of "ghosts" in their schools. In fact, there were 16 posts related to ghosts or spirits haunting schools. It is not clear why individuals would make posts related to haunting, though they may generate fear in some forum users who believe in ghosts. This was demonstrated in the following exchange:

ZFU: *It's said that some people had died on the 4th and 5th floors, and also right now. a teacher said a boy jumped from 6th floor and died, which is kept as a secret never letting it out to students. If not, our school has to be closed. 3 girls have been there, one died and two went to other schools. it's real!!!!*

UYQ: *Hey, don't be silly. I don't believe that, you might be psychologically problematic. Just go to hospital.*

Similar fights and flaming posts developed when individuals made threads related to ghosts. Thus, the disruptive impact of these posts may be attractive to bullies and individuals interested in derailing on-going conversations.

Posters also utilized outing messages to target users, usually in tandem with other forms of bullying (see Table 2). In these instances, the bully would focus their comments on the sexual activities of their target in order to embarrass or affect that person. This was exemplified in the following posts:

NGG: *ZYZ had sex with a man outside school*

NQY: *I didn't believe this at the very beginning, but ZYZ told me herself*

GGG: *that [ZYZ] ugly, pockmarks all over her face, the man must be an ugly as well*

Though it is not possible to validate this claim, simply posting sensitive or apparently secret information can traumatize the prospective victim and put them on the defensive against other users (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Willard, 2004). A proportion of outing posts also threatened to reveal embarrassing information about a classmate. For instance, the user QQW made the following post to try to generate negative feedback about their

target, writing: “when he was in grade 6 in elementary school, his deskmate kicked his chair away, and he sat down [on] the floor. who wants to know more embarrassing stories, contact me through QQ.” The poster XZR made a similar post threatening to reveal information about their target:

I don't feel satisfied with [the target], but since you are the god of evil, the loner god decides to give you another chance. moreover, I need to say that I have got all the personal information of you the god of evil, and will have more further information. in the upcoming days, your performance will be important as I decide to punish you or not. if you keep behaving badly as usual, I'll make 800 copies of your personal information to everyone, including SS. Wait and see!

This sort of threat can cause significant fear in prospective victims, and may precipitate flaming posts and arguments between users over the veracity of the claims. Thus, outing posts can be a disruptive event in forum exchanges.

A small proportion of threads also involved the use of masquerading posts on the target's sexuality or promiscuity, in keeping with many of the other forms of bullying noted across the forums (Holt, 2010; Willard, 2004). For example, the user LWL posted the following message stating: “I am LYM from Class 4 Grade 1, who wants to have sex with me? 25 RMB per night. We could talk about this in person if you are interested.” In response, other users made fun of the target, such as QYZ who wrote: “She has no sense of shame! Really in need of money. Losing face of women.” In fact, the masquerading posts in this sample of threads indicated that their target was sexually active and willing to be paid for sex, as in this post from TZ:

I'm [name removed] I'm expertise in making love/whore!!! Whoever wants to have sex with me! Come on! I have great technique and I'm sure I'll make you super comfortable. If I can not satisfy you, no charge then! It's really cheap, only 30 RMB one night, no matter how many times you want!

The limited number of masquerading incidents in the sample may be a result of the difficulty in identifying when someone is impersonating another forum user (Holt, 2010). The anonymous nature of the Internet and the potential for a single individual to use multiple nicknames in a forum makes it challenging to completely validate an on-line identity (Holt, 2010). To that end, it is difficult to disaggregate an identity depending on the degree to which the bully incorporates actual information about the user into their post. The only real indication that an individual may be attempting to disguise their identity is through variations in the comments or language used. When the terms and tone of a post differ from an individual's general pattern of on-line speech, this may help users to question the veracity of an individual's identity (Holt, 2010). Without such information, it is otherwise difficult to recognize when a masquerading incident occurs.

Despite the significant volume of denigrating, outing, flaming, and masquerading posts, it is important to note there were no instances of exclusion in the forums. This may be a reflection of the structure of the forum, since anyone can join the site and lurk or post as they see fit (Holt, 2010). Thus, the nature of this form of computer mediated communication obviates the potential for exclusion relative to other private communications like instant messaging (Holt, 2010). In addition, there were no examples of serious repeated harassment or stalking incidents in this data. No user in this sample was a frequent victim of any form of bullying, suggesting that any individual could be subjected to an incident of cyber bullying. The lack of such evidence may, however, be a result of individuals targeting victims through private messaging, email, or cellular text messages (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Li, 2008; Wolack et al., 2006). Thus, public venues

may not be the primary mechanism for stalking and repeated harassment in this sample relative to more private emails, instant messages, or texts (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Li, 2008; Wolack et al., 2006).

Victim/Offender Dynamics

In examining the exchanges present across the forums, it is clear that bullies did not simply make claims without being challenged. In fact, there were 37 interactions between bullies, victims, and defenders in the forums. These exchanges would often become very heated, involving foul language and flaming comments. For example, the following posts exemplify the process of bully/victim interactions:

ZHZ: *Don't you feel you are beautiful! Actually you are more slutty than others. Some day you'll kneel down to me. Wait and see*

YZU: *F..k who said this, I'm the target, who are you? If you dare, you should come to see me.*

ZHZ: *I did, it is me who said ill of you, what do you think? Hit you to death. I'm not bulliable, f..k you are slutty.*

When the prospective targets of bullies attempted to defend themselves, they lashed out against their attackers. For example, an individual whose bullies denigrated his sexuality posted the following message: *"I suggest you to come to see me in person if you don't like me, you are all adults, don't behave like childish."* In addition, an individual who was called a sissy wrote: *"I'm JQS, come to see me, tell me who you [the thread starter] are, you might be hit by thundering, or have many sexually transmitted diseases."* Physical threats were a common response to bullying, as in this post from a user who was called slutty by several posters: *"JWJ, shit you, you dare let me see you back school. I might probably snap your legs. I'm not as slutty as you are. You'd better shut up and keep quiet. The last advice: look out for yourself."* Others used graphic language to vent their anger and express outrage at their bullying experience. For instance, this post appeared after bullies made fun of her appearance: *"f..k your mom. Who did this? dare to leave your real name? I am the target, I do feel I'm beautiful, it's none of your business. How dare you ask me to knee down? What do you think you are? Shit. Do you dare to come to me--your mother!?"* This sort of critical and confrontational language was common when bullying victims confronted their attacker. It is important to note, however, that bullying victims did not usually respond when attacked in these forums. Thus, the language observed here may not be a true reflection of the way in which all victims respond to bullying (Hinduja & Patchin 2008).

In some instances, victims stated that the messages posted about them were not true and demanded to be left alone. For example, an individual who was called slutty and stupid by a bully wrote:

"for those who say ill of me above, why did you do that? You should know me well before talking about me. I didn't do things like that as you've mentioned. Please testify the fact before say ill of people. You don't have evidence to do that. Nobody's gonna believe you!"

Similarly, a poster who was bullied by another forum user requested: *"I want to do everything quietly right now. I hope those who are talking about me will stop doing boring things like this. Don't talk about me or shit about me in forum. Thank you."* This sort of controlled, subdued response was infrequent, and largely ignored. Instead, bullying victims expressed a great deal of outrage over being harassed or targeted by others when they wanted to respond.

In some cases, other forum users stood up against a bully on behalf of a prospective victim, expressing their concern for the target. Specifically, when an individual felt that a victim was being targeted unfairly or treated too harshly, they would come to the victim's defense. This was exemplified in the following exchange:

XWJ: *I'm his [target's] elementary schoolmate, the only impression of him is that he was a thief jerk. I feel so angry once this about him occurs to me. somebody even feels that he is poor person. F..king poor. his parents are deaf and dumb, how could he pretend to be great? he also wastes his grandparent's money. What a f..king pretending. a trash*

ZZQ: *Take care of what you've talked about him. No matter how bad he is. You cannot say ill of him like this! You might hurt his self-esteem. You don't have any quality if you curse others like this. the only thing you know is cursing others, you are insane. you are trash*

XYK: *XWJ from ***school. I have to say that that school produced this kind of rubbish student. The target didn't do anything wrong to you. but you we know you very well, never do the normal and on right track, always goof around. shame on you, trash*

In this example, the posters did not tolerate the negative comments made by XWJ and felt they must respond to assist the victim. It is important to note, however, that individuals did not regularly defend targets. Instead, the user population would primarily assist victims when they felt others had unfairly treated the target of the post. For example, a user posted a message about a girl in her school stating: "Do you have sense of beauty? If she is beautiful, there's no ugly person in the world. She is always gossiping others at the back." In response, a user posted a message writing: "Even if you don't think she is good looking, you don't have to say ill of her. Take care of yourself first." Additionally, an individual stated "who's the partner of homosexual KKY?" Multiple users jumped to the target's defense, with comments such as "Don't talk like that they have true love," "it's not easy, the way you talk about others might hurt them," and "Take care of yourself, don't intrude others' issues, or else you'll not know how you are going to die." These comments illustrate that users are willing to defend others if they feel that bullying incidents are unfair or are overly mean about a prospective target.

Discussion and Conclusion

In light of the growing problem of cyber bullying in various countries across the globe (Beran & Li, 2005, 2007; Erdur-Baker, 2010; Erdur-Baker & Kavut, 2007; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008, 2009; McLoughlin et al., 2009; Wolack et al., 2006), this study attempted to examine the nature of this offense in a transnational context. Using a sample of threads from a series of Chinese middle and high school forums, this study explored the prevalence of various forms of cyber bullying, and the nature of the relationship between victims and bullies. The findings suggest that the overwhelming majority of bullying incidents involved denigration, outing, and flaming. Individuals regularly made comments about the physical appearance, intelligence, or sexual activities of other students. This may be due to the fact that these characteristics may be easily mocked or exaggerated by others (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008, 2009). In addition, such comments may have a particularly deleterious impact on their target's psyche (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008, 2009; Ybarra, 2004).

This study also found that bullying posts consistently involved disparaging, violent, and obscene language. Many posters utilized graphic language to describe an individual's sexual activities or physical appearance, particularly using the description of "slutty" or promiscuous to describe females. Thus, the pervasive use of graphic and hurtful language

identified in this study is in keeping with previous research which finds that bullying victims may be offended or experience emotional harm as a consequence (Beran & Li, 2007; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008, 2009; Li, 2008; Ybarra, 2004). A limited number of posters also threatened to engage in physical violence or conflict in the real world. Though it is difficult to confirm that actual altercations resulted from these posts, these findings support the relationship between bullying on and off-line (Beran & Li, 2007; Erdur-Baker, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2007, 2009; Li, 2008).

There were, however, no real instances of persistent forms of bullying in this sample. No exclusionary bullying was found, though the public nature of the forums sampled make it difficult to restrict access to this form of communication (Holt, 2010). The forums in this study were moderated, though there was no evidence that moderators intervened on behalf of a poster in instances of bullying or kept individuals from accessing the forums as a whole. Thus, these forums appear to tacitly allow bullying between forum participants. Additionally, there was no evidence of pervasive or constant attacks against a single user, despite a substantial sample of threads. There is no immediate explanation for the absence of persistent harassment and stalking as per Willard's (2004) framework, though instances of masquerading and outing were found. This might be due to students finding limited value in persistently targeting someone in public if the prospective victim may fight back or garner support from the larger population of forum users. Alternatively, students may prefer to use email or instant messaging chats to engage in persistent campaigns against a single target. Further research is required to better understand the nature of bullying and the use of other forms of computer-mediated communication to engage in bullying.

Taken as a whole, this study indicates that there is a significant range of bullying in school-related forums in China (Li, 2008). Since the participants were engaged in school-related forums, it is critical to consider if schools identify or have any bullying-related policies. Nine of the 21 schools had a policy document posted on-line detailing how students should behave on campus. Only one school had a written policy stating that students should not spread indecent information on Internet. This document did not specifically refer to "bullying" behavior or specify a specific on-line environment like a forum, but rather indicated that this was an unacceptable behavior. It is important, however, to note that there was generally little variation in the bullying behaviors found in these forums. Additionally, no poster referenced their school's policies related to bullying on or off-line.

The absence of such policies calls to question how school administrators and parents may diminish the risk of bullying. Since Internet use plays an increasingly significant role in student free time, encouraging the development of ethical use courses that present students with guidelines for communicating with others in various outlets may help to reduce bullying (Finkelhor et al., 2000; 2005; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Marcum, 2008). Teaching young people about the importance of the use of respectful language in public spaces on-line, including blogs, message boards, and social networking sites can emphasize the need for treating others with the same respect on and off-line (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Marcum, 2008). Additionally, such courses could demonstrate the impact that the use of harsh language and disrespect can have on others' emotional and social well-being.

Further research should also consider awareness and recognition of cyber bullying among samples of Chinese parents. When youths experience cyber bullying, they may feel less inclined to report these events to their parents or guardians and begin to withdraw

from peers and schoolwork (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Marcum, 2008). Such incidents demand parental intervention, due to the dramatic affect bullying can have on social and emotional development, as well as academic achievement. In addition, parents may not know that their children engage in bullying activities depending on the way that they manage their children's internet use. It is critical that researchers begin to examine how well adults can identify when bullying is taking place with or without acknowledgement from their children. This will improve the overall response to cyber bullying for victims, and potentially reduce the incidence of bullying overall.

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