

Cyberbullying and Indigenous Australians: A review of the literature

Bronwyn Carlson and Ryan Frazer

Prepared for the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council
of New South Wales



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A note on terminology: There is no universally agreed upon terminology for referring to the many diverse groups who comprise the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. In this review, we primarily use the term 'Indigenous' to refer to all peoples and groups whose ancestors' pre-date colonisation and who identify as such; 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander' is also used where appropriate.

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1 Introduction

Academic interest in peer bullying first emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, when Swedish researchers began investigating what was initially called ‘mobbing’ (Olweus 2013). Over the next few decades, bullying – particularly in schools – became widely understood as a serious and widespread global public health concern. It was found to be correlated with a range of negative social and health outcomes for both victims and perpetrators of bullying, including school drop-out, anxiety, depression and suicide ideation (Olweus 2013).

Much of this early research focused on forms of ‘direct’ aggression, the most overt and conspicuous forms of schoolyard intimidation such as name-calling, physical aggression, and the like. But in the 1990s, researchers developed increasingly nuanced understandings of how bullying operates in schools, looking at more ‘indirect’ forms of bullying (i.e. working through a third party) and ‘relational’ forms of bullying (i.e. intending to damage someone’s peer relationships) (Slonje & Smith 2008:147). In this way, researchers produced increasingly complex typologies of bullying, allowing them to see how it can take myriad shapes and forms and take place through a range of different mediums.

The term ‘cyberbullying’ was first coined in 2000 in Canada (Aboujaoude et al. 2015). It was used to describe the emerging forms of aggressive behaviour that were playing out on new digital technologies, particularly mobile phones and Internet-capable computers. It soon became clear that these technologies had led to an evolution in the nature of peer-to-peer aggression (Hinduja & Patchin 2010). Moreover, and significantly, a number of high-profile suicides among teens who had been victims of bullying through Internet technologies launched the phenomenon of cyberbullying more widely into the public consciousness (see Srivastava, Gamble & Boey 2013). In the past two decades, a significant body of research has explored this digitally mediated form of aggression, mapping its prevalence across different social groups, the impact it has on individuals, and potential pathways for its mitigation.

1.1 SOCIAL MEDIA AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Internet technologies, in particular social media, have become ubiquitous among Indigenous peoples and communities across Australia over the last two decades (Lumby 2010). Research shows that these technologies have brought many important benefits, especially in facilitating connections between families and communities across vast distances, sharing and maintaining cultural knowledges, fulfilling cultural protocol such as Sorry Business, and engaging in political activism (Kral 2011; Carlson & Frazer 2015; Frazer & Carlson 2018). It has, however, brought negative consequences too, such as social media facilitating racist abuse against Indigenous peoples, violent conflict between families in communities and widespread cyberbullying – the focus of this review (Carlson & Frazer 2018; Matamoros-Fernández 2017).

Research also shows that, for a range of social, cultural and political reasons, the impacts of current Internet technologies are often *different* for Indigenous peoples and communities. Despite this, the vast majority of existing work assumes a normalised white subject, generally differentiated only by age and gender (Brownlee et al. 2014). The small body of available research specifically on Indigenous cyberbullying – in Canada (Broll, Dunlop & Crooks 2018; Brownlee et al. 2014), the United States of America (USA) (Samulski 2014), and Australia (Coffin, Larson & Cross 2010) – has yielded important insights, particularly in demonstrating that we cannot assume cyberbullying occurs at the same rate, for the same reasons and with the same impacts as for non-Indigenous peoples.

1.2 THE FOCUS OF THIS REVIEW

This review focuses on the available literature on cyberbullying, with a focus on research that has explored its prevalence among, and its effects on, Indigenous individuals and communities. Most existing research has explored cyberbullying in the context of schooling, as it appears to be most prevalent among student populations (Aboujaoude et al. 2015). Although there is certainly evidence that cyberbullying is a serious concern for people beyond schooling age, the review will follow this research focus and primarily engage with literature concerning cyberbullying among school students.

The review is structured into two major sections. The first section reviews the literature on cyberbullying among mainstream populations, on which most research has been conducted. It begins by covering some of the definitional debates and tensions around what ‘counts’ as cyberbullying. Next, it provides an overview of the three major areas of academic concern around cyberbullying: the *prevalence* of cyberbullying perpetration and victimisation; the *effects* of cyberbullying on perpetrators and victims; and the possible *responses* to cyberbullying.

The second section looks more specifically at cyberbullying and minority groups, with a specific focus on Indigenous populations in Australia. It reviews literature demonstrating that Indigenous peoples experience different rates of cyberbullying, and that they are victimised by perpetrators for reasons that differ from mainstream populations. Moreover, this section explores the cultural, social and political factors that influence the rates of, kinds of, and responses to cyberbullying among Indigenous peoples. It closes by arguing that there remains much to be done in understanding the causes of cyberbullying among Indigenous peoples and strategies for how it might be effectively mitigated.

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2 What is cyberbullying?

There is an ongoing debate around what actually constitutes cyberbullying (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput 2008), and there remains no universally agreed upon definition. Thus, researchers have drawn on a range of definitions in theorising online peer aggression, collecting data and conducting analyses.

Tokunga (2010:278), for instance, defines cyberbullying as ‘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’. Likewise, Hinduja and Patchin (2010:208) define it as ‘willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices’. But while there is some disagreement around the exact definition, Kowalski et al. (2014:1109, emphases added) write that scholars generally agree that cyberbullying has four main components: ‘(a) *intentional* aggressive behavior that (b) is carried out *repeatedly*, (c) occurs between a perpetrator and victim who are *unequal in power*, and (d) occurs through *electronic technologies*’ (see also Hemphill et al. 2012).

This generic definition is helpful as it leaves the scope open enough to include a wide and continuously evolving range of digitally mediated aggressive behaviours. Most commonly, these include:

- flaming – posting a hostile argument online
- harassment – sending repeated abusive messages to a person
- denigration – publicly and unfairly criticising someone
- revenge porn – distributing private nude photos/videos of someone without their consent
- outing – revealing personal information about someone, particularly their sexuality, without their consent
- exclusion – actively shutting someone out of peer groups
- cyber-stalking – using digital technologies to follow someone, find personal information, and threaten them
- impersonation – falsely posing as and misrepresenting the victim (see Willard 2007; Campbell, Cross, Slee & Spears 2010; Kowalski et al. 2014).

These acts of cyberbullying can take place on a range of digital mediums including: ‘instant messaging, e-mail, text messages, web pages, chat rooms, social networking sites, digital images, and online games’ (Kowalski et al. 2014:1074). The prevalence of cyberbullying in these various online mediums shifts greatly and often rapidly, however, as online cultures evolve and new communication technologies become available (Kowalski et al. 2014). Thus, while earlier research focused on cyberbullying occurring through text messaging, email and online chat rooms, more recent work has documented the rise of mobile technologies (i.e. smart phones) and social media (such as Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram) as its primary platforms (Kowalski et al. 2014).

2.1 HOW DOES IT DIFFER FROM TRADITIONAL BULLYING?

In addition to being digitally mediated, researchers have identified five main factors that make cyberbullying qualitatively different from more traditional forms of bullying (see Campbell, Cross, Slee & Spears 2010). First, cyberbullying has the potential for a much wider *audience* (Srivastava, Gamble & Boey 2013). While ‘traditional’ bullying is, generally, contained through physical encounters between perpetrator(s), victim(s) and any present onlookers, cyberbullying has the potential to reach an almost unlimited audience. For instance, a humiliating story could be shared with an entire school year group, or a bullying encounter could be filmed and uploaded on social media and potentially be seen by millions of viewers who can view the content again and again.

Second, written words, images and video have been found to have a different interpersonal and emotional power than verbal and physical aggressions (Campbell, Cross, Slee & Spears 2010). Consequently, these new digital forms and mediums have changed the range of affective, emotional and psychological impacts that peer aggression can have on victims. For instance, receiving intimidating and violent videos (rather than being verbally threatened) can significantly amplify the affective impact of a threat. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that cyberbullying involving video, in particular, is more psychologically traumatic than any other form (McLoughlin, Meyricke & Burgess 2009; Slonje & Smith 2008).

Third, because cyberbullying occurs through digital mediums, including smart phones, tablets and computers, there is less opportunity to *escape* from victimisation (Campbell, Cross, Slee & Spears 2010; Kowalski et al. 2014). These technologies are ubiquitous and highly mobile, so victims and bullies no longer need to share the same physical space (Srivastava, Gamble & Boey 2013). Rather, a person can potentially be bullied at any time and in any place, including previously 'safe' spaces such as the family home. Research has found that many victims find the inescapability of cyberbullying to be one its most traumatic characteristics. Moreover, rather than the largely ephemeral nature of 'traditional' bullying, many forms of cyberbullying involve posting potentially permanent content online, whereby 'the offending communication can be read and/or seen repeatedly', even months or years later, as Srivastava Gamble and Boey (2013:27) explain.

Fourth, and importantly, cyberbullying can be perpetrated anonymously (Kowalski et al. 2014; Srivastava, Gamble & Boey 2013). Many digital platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, allow users to hide their identity and create 'fake' accounts. This means that victims often do not know who is bullying them thereby creating a psychological trauma as anyone could be their bully. 'It can [render] the victim globally threatened because he or she does not know who is behind the attacks and whom to protect against,' explain Aboujaoude et al. (2015:16).

However, as Campbell, Cross, Slee & Spears (2010) point out, anonymity also means that 'some students could be emboldened to cyberbully when they would not bully face-to-face'. As these bullying behaviours are technologically mediated, physical size tends to matter less in 'virtual space' than access to and mastery of digital technologies (Kowalski et al. 2014). The disembodied nature of cyberbullying, then, promotes disinhibited and magnified aggression (Aboujaoude et al. 2015).

Finally, there are also differences in rewards for perpetrators (Kowalski et al. 2014). As the impact of cyberbullying is not always immediate, gratification of perpetration can be delayed. Conn (2004) suggests that this absence of immediate feedback can aggravate the harshness of cyberbullying (see also Campbell et al. 2012; Campbell et al. 2013). There can be a 'lack of emotional reactivity' (Kowalski et al. 2014:1074) too, because the bullying is mediated through digital technologies. This means that bullies rarely see the impact on victims of their behaviour, thereby precluding the possibility of empathetic responses. For this reason, researchers have theorised a negative relationship between empathy and cyberbullying.

Whether cyberbullying should be considered as a new form of bullying, or whether it would be better understood simply as an extension of more traditional forms of bullying (see Olweus 2013), it is clear that there are differences that matter. Given the five factors outlined here, some scholars have argued that cyberbullying is 'more pervasive and more insidious' (Srivastava, Gamble & Boey 2013:27) than traditional forms of bullying.

3 Rates of victimisation

One strand of literature has sought to explore the *prevalence* of cyberbullying perpetration and victimisation and how both of these might differ across a range of demographic characteristics.

It is not known whether rates of cyberbullying are increasing, stabilising or decreasing; neither is it known how these patterns might vary across various social groups (Katz et al. 2014). This is exacerbated by the fact that many of these digital technologies are still quite new, with more continually emerging.

Indeed, the prevalence of cyberbullying globally is difficult to estimate and studies have yielded wildly divergent results. While most studies have reported between 10 and 40 per cent of schoolchildren experiencing cyberbullying victimisation (see Katz et al. 2014; Aboujaoude et al. 2015), there have been estimated victimisation rates of between 4 and 75 per cent of children at different stages of their schooling (see Kowalski et al. 2014).

Researchers have identified several potential reasons for this huge variation. First, there is the aforementioned problem of the lack of a standardised definition (Vandebosch & van Cleemput 2008), with researchers still working towards a common understanding of what actually constitutes cyberbullying behaviours. As a result, studies have drawn on more or less restrictive definitions of cyberbullying (Kowalski et al. 2014). Second, there is great variety in the methods deployed by researchers, such as self-reported survey tools and teacher observations, which have different rates of accuracy (Campbell, Cross, Slee & Spears 2010). Third, there has been a lack of consistency in study samples (Aboujaoude et al. 2015). For instance, one study might survey whether students have experienced cyberbullying in the previous month, another in the previous year, and yet another in the person's lifetime. These temporal differences make meaningful comparisons between studies difficult. Finally, cyberbullying is believed to be greatly underreported 'for fear of losing access to technology or punishment by the bully or for embarrassment about being perceived as weak' (Aboujaoude et al. 2015:11). This too leaves the validity of results in question.

3.1 RATES IN AUSTRALIA

Researchers have found the prevalence of cyberbullying in Australia to align quite closely with other minority countries, such as the USA and the United Kingdom and other European Union nations, with most studies revealing rates of victimisation ranging between 6 and 40 per cent of young people (Katz et al. 2014). An Australian survey conducted by the Telstra Foundation, for instance, found that in a one-month period in 2011, 30 per cent of Victorian students from a sample of 400 had been victimised online (Reid, Kauer & Treyvaud 2010). Another found 25 per cent of 300 surveyed 10–17-year-old students had been cyberbullied (Galaxy Research 2008). A study by Cross et al. (2009), with a much larger sample size (n=7000), revealed significantly more conservative rates, with only between 4.9 and 7.8 per cent of students reporting they had been cyberbullied.

A major 2014 review report for the Australian Government Department of Communications concluded that, taking into account all the published data on cyberbullying in Australia, some 20 per cent of 8–17-year-olds experienced cyberbullying in the previous year, or around 463,000 people nationally, 'of whom around 365,000 are in the peak age group of 10–15 years old' (Katz et al. 2014:2). So while exact rates of cyberbullying victimisation remain disputed, there is little doubt that it is a serious and widespread issue that significantly affects the wellbeing of youth in Australia and elsewhere.

3.2 DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

Researchers have found that rates and kinds of cyberbullying can vary across demographic categories. By far the most commonly analysed demographic factors are the *gender* and *age* of victims and perpetrators.

Studies that factor gender differences have revealed inconsistent patterns. On the one hand, there is some evidence that boys perpetrate and are victimised more often than girls (Li 2007; Aboujaoude et al. 2015). Hinduja and Patchin (2008), for instance, found boys (18%) were more likely than girls (16%) to report bullying others online. Likewise, Li (2007) found boys were more likely to be victims of cyberbullying. However, this is contradicted by other research. Hinduja and Patchin (2008) also found that boys (32%) were less likely than girls (36%) to be cybervictims, a finding supported by Campbell et al. (2012). Ultimately, then, it remains unclear if these gender differences are statistically significant or whether they can be generalised across populations (Hinduja & Patchin 2008:143).

Some evidence has found a gender difference in the *kinds* of cyberbullying being perpetrated. Overall, it appears that boys are more likely to engage in ‘direct’, overtly aggressive behaviour, such as directly abusing victims online, posting offensive materials, and violently coercing victims, while girls prefer more ‘indirect’, social and relational forms, such as social exclusion and gossiping (Kowalski et al. 2014; Katz et al. 2014). Interestingly, Campbell, Cross, Slee & Spears (2010) suggest that technology has led to a convergence in the kinds of bullying perpetrated across genders. ‘Technology has seemingly enabled boys to up-skill in the use of indirect, socially and relationally aggressive behaviours,’ they explain, ‘which have traditionally been more often associated with girls in the past’ (Campbell, Cross, Slee & Spears 2010:11).

Patterns across age differences have been more rigorously documented, with much of the evidence centred on bullying among adults, particularly in workplaces (Aboujaoude et al. 2015). However, a large body of work suggests that cyberbullying is most prevalent in the last years of primary school and first years of high school (see Price & Dalgleish 2010), with rates trailing off after and before these years. This is sometimes described as an ‘inverse U pattern’, ‘with few incidents occurring for children under 10, the prevalence rapidly increasing after this age, and then decreasing slowly for young people over 15’ (Katz et al. 2014:2). Importantly, this trend seems consistent across Australian studies (Campbell, Cross, Slee & Spears 2010).

Several explanations have been proposed for this pattern. Younger people have been generally more sensitive and responsive to the last two decades of continuous and significant changes in communication technologies, tending to take them up more quickly and connecting to a greater number of people, which increases their risk of victimisation (Aboujaoude et al. 2015). In addition, this ‘inverse U pattern’ might be an extension of human maturation processes, in which bullying is a somewhat ‘natural’ part of adolescence that becomes less prevalent over time. As Kowalski et al. (2014:1112) write, bullying likely peaks in middle school ‘as youth work to establish their place in the social hierarchy’.

Thus, while rates of perpetration and victimisation are difficult to estimate, it is clear that cyberbullying is a widespread phenomenon particularly in the middle schooling years. These global trends appear to be realised across Australian schools too, with approximately 20 per cent of students experiencing cyberbullying victimisation at one point in their school years. The next section reviews literature exploring the potential impacts that cyberbullying can have on victims.

4 The impacts of cyberbullying

A second major strand of research has sought to identify and measure the *effects* that cyberbullying has on those involved, including both victims and perpetrators.

Despite widespread media reporting on suicides following cyberbullying (ABC News 2014; O'Brien 2018; Rosenblatt 2017), research has found it difficult to document exactly what effects cyberbullying actually has on its victims. This is partly due both to the relatively recent emergence of cyberbullying as a widespread phenomenon (i.e. since the early 2000s), and to methodological issues around defining cyberbullying. It is also difficult to find accurate ways to measure emotional and psychological impacts, which are often quite imprecise and measure 'mood', for instance, rather than more established psychiatric diagnoses (Aboujaoude et al. 2015).

Moreover, different forms of cyberbullying can have different impacts on victims, in both kind and degree. Slonje and Smith (2008:147), for example, found the 'impact of cyberbullying was perceived as highly negative for picture/video clip bullying'. Similarly, McLoughlin, Meyricke and Burgess (2009:n.p.) claim that 'Videoing or photographing someone being bullied and putting them online is the most severe form of bullying'.

However, it is clear that the last decade of research has yielded relatively strong indications that cyberbullying can result in serious, long-lasting harm for both victims and perpetrators. Indeed, a small body of work has suggested that, because of the often inescapable nature of this aggressive behaviour and its potential to reach a much wider audience, the longer-term effects of cyberbullying may be more serious than those of face-to-face bullying (Cross et al. 2009; Campbell, Cross, Slee & Spears 2010). As Campbell et al. (2012:398) note, however, 'the consequences for victims of bullying are not homogeneous'. In this section, then, research on the various psychological, emotional, physical and social consequences of cyberbullying on both victims and perpetrators will be reviewed.

4.1 EFFECTS OF VICTIMISATION

Research from psychologists and social scientists have identified a range of associated psychological and social problems associated with being victim to cyberbullying. These can be separated into *internalised* and *externalised* behaviours.

Several studies have demonstrated strong links between cyberbullying victimisation and 'internal' mental health and wellbeing issues, such as emotional distress, fear and shame (see Aboujaoude et al. 2015), and high self-reported levels of decreased self-esteem and self-worth (Didden et al. 2009; Sakellariou, Carroll & Houghton 2012). Studies using psychological tools have revealed that these stressors often lead to diagnosable mental disorders, particularly anxiety, depression and insomnia (Didden et al. 2009; Perren et al. 2010). Impacts can also be expressed psychosomatically, with victims reporting headaches and abdominal pains (Aboujaoude et al. 2015; Kowalski et al. 2014).

Most worryingly, there is an increasingly well-established link between cyberbullying and suicide ideation and actualisation (see Aboujaoude et al. 2015). In fact, the term 'cyberbullicide' has been used by researchers to refer to 'suicide indirectly or directly influenced by experiences with online aggression' (Hinduja & Patchin 2010:207). There is some evidence that suicide is more strongly associated with online bullying. Price and Dalgleish, citing a 2009 submission to Parliament by BoysTown, write that 'young people impacted by cyberbullying may be more likely to experience suicide ideation as a reaction to cyberbullying than those who experience traditional bullying (Price & Dalgleish 2010:52).

This research demonstrates clear negative outcomes both for people who perpetrate and for those who experience cyberbullying. These outcomes are complex, and impact at both internal/individual ... and external/social levels...

Cyberbullying victimisation has also been linked to a range of 'externalised' (or social) behaviours, in which victims 'act out' in various ways (see Spears et al. 2009). Studies have found these externalised behaviours range greatly in kind and severity. The 'lower' end of the spectrum includes behaviours such as a loss of trust in others (Campbell et al. 2012), social isolation, school truancy, absenteeism and drop-outs, and lower grades (Kowalski et al. 2014). Other studies have made links to tobacco, alcohol and drug use, poor physical health (Ybarra & Mitchell 2004), and violent and criminal behaviours (Olweus 2013; Kowalski et al. 2014). In most cases, cybervictims will experience a mix of both internalised and externalised behaviours.

4.2 EFFECTS OF PERPETRATION

The negative impacts of cyberbullying are not limited to victims, however. A growing body of research demonstrates clear links between cyberbullying and a range of serious negative health and social outcomes for the perpetrators themselves. Among cyberbullies, Australian studies have shown that internalised impacts can include depression (Ybarra & Mitchell 2004), anxiety (see Campbell 2013; Cross et al. 2009), and a sense of loneliness and isolation at school (see Cross et al. 2009). As with those experiencing victimisation, bullies have been found to display elevated rates of suicide ideation (Hinduja & Patchin 2010).

A study by Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) also revealed a range of externalised behaviours, with perpetration strongly linked to school drop-out (39%), substance abuse (32%), and delinquent behaviour (such as theft, vandalism and violence) (37%) (see Campbell, Cross, Slee & Spears 2010). These rates are often higher than for those who experience cyberbullying victimisation and can extend well into adulthood.

This research demonstrates clear negative outcomes both for people who perpetrate and for those who experience cyberbullying. These outcomes are complex, and impact at both internal/individual (mental and physical wellbeing) and external/social levels (school drop-out, loss of trust, delinquency, etc.). As yet, little is known about how these might vary across different social groups, and much is yet to be understood about how the prevalence and impacts of cyberbullying might be mitigated. To this end, the next section examines the literature on possible preventions and interventions for cyberbullying among schoolchildren.

5 Cyberbullying interventions

A third major strand of research has sought to examine the effectiveness of various *responses* that have been implemented to curb the prevalence and negative impacts of cyberbullying.

Although this area is comparatively less well researched than cyberbullying's prevalence or impacts, the available studies – which are mostly focused on the individual, school and state levels – have yielded positive results in preventing and responding to cyberbullying.

5.1 INDIVIDUAL INTERVENTIONS

Several, mostly qualitative, studies have documented the extant preventative and reactive strategies that *individuals* who have experienced cyberbullying have spontaneously deployed. These individual strategies fall into two main categories.

The first is *technological* strategies that include such things as avoiding and removing technologies/applications, restricting personal privacy settings on social media platforms, blocking specific users, implementing parental controls, and changing phone numbers, emails addresses and social media accounts (Katz et al. 2014; Campbell, Cross, Slee & Spears 2010). Although these technological responses can be effective, very often they do not solve the issue of victimisation; and if victims decide to leave digital platforms, feelings of exclusion might in fact be exacerbated.

The second is what are often called *relational* strategies. These might include such things as telling a friend, parent or teacher, calling a helpline, or attempting to discuss the issue with the perpetrator themselves (Katz et al. 2014; Campbell, Cross, Slee & Spears 2010). Studies have demonstrated these relational strategies can be effective in reducing both the prevalence of the bullying and its negative outcomes. However, as discussed in the previous section, it is widely recognised that victims, particularly boys, rarely tell authority figures they are being subject to bullying. This issue of non-disclosure thus limits the extent to which relational strategies can be effective. Moreover, and importantly, individual interventions tend to be *reactive*, rather than preventative – meaning the root of the problem is generally left unsolved.

5.2 SCHOOL INTERVENTIONS

In practice, then, most coordinated interventions occur at the level of the *school*, which can offer both preventative and responsive strategies. Cyberbullying, as Campbell et al. (2012:399) note, 'is a vexatious problem for schools as parents and the community are increasingly turning to schools to provide preventive strategies and to manage incidents of cyberbullying'. While most schools over the past 50 years have been implementing anti-bullying policies and educational components to the curriculum, the relatively recent emergence of cyberbullying has produced new kinds of practical and legal issues (Katz et al. 2014). It is not altogether clear, for example, what responsibility a school has towards preventing and responding to incidents of cyberbullying among its students.

Traditional bullying that occurs within the material boundaries of the school is largely seen as the school's legal and moral responsibility. However, cyberbullying takes place in the dematerialised 'virtual' space of social media, digital messaging, gaming, email and online chat rooms (Lam, Cheng & Liu 2013). This makes direct intervention by the school difficult, as it rarely has any capacity or authority to monitor or moderate these spaces. Furthermore, it is unclear whether these spaces are better managed by parents or some other authority, considering so much online activity occurs outside school hours (Campbell, Cross, Slee & Spears 2010).

In any case, schools have increasingly sought to respond to these issues through preventative educational programs, with most already including education about cyberbullying as part of the curriculum (Katz et al. 2014). These educational programs generally seek to educate students on what constitutes cyberbullying, what impacts it can have on victims, what consequences there are for perpetrators,

and how students can help prevent and respond to it. Mobin, Feng and Neudorf (2017:480) argue that coupling awareness programs of this kind with ‘social skills training’ for students ‘to build their confidence and effectiveness in social interactions with their peers may mitigate their risk of being cyberbullied’.

These kinds of often commercially available anti-bullying programs have become increasingly popular in schools (Campbell, Cross, Slee & Spears 2010), and many show promising results – particularly those of longer duration and intensity. However, the vast majority of these programs remain formally unevaluated (Pearce et al. 2011). Indeed, Pearce et al. (2011:3) suggest that these kinds of ‘single-level programs are unlikely to provide an effective solution due to the systemic and complex nature of bullying’.

Rather, the most promising response to cyberbullying involves what is often referred to as a ‘whole-of-school approach’, which allows cyberbullying to be targeted at many different levels simultaneously:

... the school level (policy, classroom and school climate, behaviour support, peer support, school yard improvements); the classroom level (curriculum); the home level (engaging and involving parents); and the individual level (working with higher risk students).

(Pearce et al. 2011:3)

Such an approach is also capable of reaching potential victims, perpetrators, and bystanders all at once.

5.3 LEGAL INTERVENTIONS

Cyberbullying has also presented challenges at the level of the law and *State*, with much discussion in the literature around how cyberbullying should be treated under the law (Campbell, Cross, Spears & Slee 2010; Young et al. 2016). In the USA, most states have implemented legislation that specifically targets cyberbullying, leaving avenues for criminal prosecutions of perpetrators. In Australia, however, there has not yet been a satisfactory legal consensus about what to do about cyberbullying, and no legislation specifically targeting it currently exists (Srivastava, Gamble & Boey 2013).

In an attempt to address this issue, the Australian Government Department of Communications commissioned a report in 2014 on ‘whether to create a new, separate cyberbullying offence and in its consideration of a new civil enforcement regime’ in Australia (Katz et al. 2014:1). The report surveyed whether lawyers, researchers, schools and public servants thought governments should introduce new legislation to address cyberbullying. More than half of those surveyed believed there should be a new offence to take into account cyberbullying.

Advocates of a cyberbullying law highlight the benefits it would bring as a clear deterrent, and in providing a legal pathway for dealing with offences. Moreover, it would likely also lead to ‘greater community awareness and social norms with regard to acceptable online behaviour’ (Katz et al. 2014). However, there is little existing research that suggests cyberbullying laws are actually effective in reducing its prevalence. Nor is it entirely clear to what extent a behaviour that mostly occurs among school-aged children should be criminalised, with the law constituting a relatively extreme response to a phenomenon that might be more effectively handled by schools, families and individuals (Katz et al. 2014).

...there is little existing research that suggests cyberbullying laws are actually effective in reducing its prevalence.

Moreover, some forms of cyberbullying can already be criminally prosecuted under a patchwork of existing generic laws, particularly around stalking and defamation, and opponents of further legislation suggest these laws are mostly effective enough. Langos (2013:39), for example, argues for a compromise position, in which a specific criminal offence of cyberbullying 'ought to be tailored to capture cyberbullying, but only its most serious manifestations, thereby preventing any potential over-reach of the criminal law'.

While state and national policies are still being debated in Australia, in 2015 the Australian Government appointed an e-Safety Commissioner 'whose role involves a complaints referral process, and powers to require large social media companies to remove offensive material' (Clark, Augoustinos & Malin 2017:109). It has yet to be decided whether a cyberbullying law will be implemented at either the state or federal level.

5.4 A MULTI-PRONGED APPROACH

Alternatively, it has been suggested that cyberbullying is best addressed by what is described as a 'multi-pronged approach', which allows interventions to occur at many levels. As Aboujaoude et al. (2015:10) explain, this could include: 'educational media campaigns; school-based programs; parental oversight and involvement; legislative action; and screening and evidence-based interventions by health care providers, especially pediatricians and mental health professionals'. The flexibility afforded by this kind of wrap-around approach is appealing, as it provides individuals, families, schools and communities with the scope to respond in a manner they deem appropriate, without being unnecessarily punitive.

In a meta-study by Farrington and Ttofi (2009), it was found that these more comprehensive interventions, which include the individuals involved, parents and schools, demonstrated a significant reduction in the perpetration of cyberbullying. Moreover, a focus on prevention rather than litigation, as the report by Katz et al. (2014:14) concluded, could better contribute to 'creating safe and respectful environments for children and young people'. While there remains debate around the best ways to address the perpetration and impacts of cyberbullying, it's clear that there are some effective interventions already in place at the individual, school and state levels.

6 Cyberbullying and Indigenous peoples

While recent research on cyberbullying has yielded valuable insights into the prevalence and impacts of, and potential responses to, cyberbullying, this work has been demographically limited, focusing mainly on white, urban populations, differentiating students only by age and (binary) gender (Brownlee et al. 2014; Carlyle & Steinman 2007; Kowalski et al. 2014; Espinoza 2015; Espinoza & Wright 2018; Mobin, Feng & Neudorf 2017).

In doing so, it has largely overlooked non-majority populations, including ethnic, cultural, differently abled, sexual, gender and religious minorities. Likewise, demographic variables that cut along socioeconomic, geographical (urban, suburban, rural, etc.) and educational (state, private, religious, etc.) lines have also tended to be overlooked or ignored.

This matters for several reasons. First, some studies have shown that students from minority groups – particularly non-white, non-heterosexual, and non-able-bodied students – experience higher rates of cyberbullying victimisation (see Aboujaoude et al. 2015; Llorent, Ortega-Ruiz & Zych 2016). Kowalski and Toth (2018), for instance, found that ‘the highest rates [of victimisation were] reported among individuals with disabilities’ (see also Nicolai et al. 2018), while Abreu and Kenny (2018) reported that up to 71 per cent of LGBTQ adolescents had experienced cyberbullying victimisation. By ignoring social differences, we might overlook important patterns such as these, thereby curtailing the possibility of more effective interventions.

Second, it’s clear that for a range of social, cultural and political reasons cyberbullying affects different social groups differently (Goebert et al. 2011). For instance, Hinduja and Patchin (2010:214) reported that ‘White respondents scored significantly lower on our suicidal ideation scale than non-Whites’. Duarte et al. (2018) found that ‘sexual minorities experienced greater mental health symptoms when compared to non sexual minorities’, while research by Nicolai et al. (2018) revealed greater levels of depression among adults who stutter and who were bullied as a student.

Finally, by only taking into account the demographic variables of age and gender, researchers have relied on relatively conservative approaches to studying cyberbullying. Psychological and sociological studies that draw on survey instruments tend to individualise and homogenise participants, and in doing so erase the social, cultural, political and economic contexts in which cyberbullying occurs. As Coffin, Larson and Cross (2010:85) have argued: ‘Without context, understandings can only be superficial’.

To address this, several studies have sought to draw on more dynamic methodological frameworks. Espinoza and Wright (2018), for instance, have argued that the field would benefit from an ‘intersectional approach’, that allows more social, cultural and political factors to be considered in understanding the phenomenon of cyberbullying. In their research, Mobin, Feng and Neudorf (2017) drew on ‘ecological systems theory’ to look *beyond* the individual and explore more of the social, cultural and political factors that play out in cyberbullying. ‘The ecological systems theory,’ they explain, ‘contends that a community’s contextual environment influences an individual’s risk for involvement in deviant or aggressive behaviours’ (Mobin, Feng & Neudorf 2017:475).

Indigenous peoples have received little attention in the literature on cyberbullying, both in Australia (Coffin, Larson & Cross 2010) and globally (Brownlee et al. 2014; Lemstra et al. 2011). This is despite a growing body of research demonstrating that Indigenous peoples engage with digital technologies, particularly social media, at rates equal to or even great than mainstream populations (Callinan 2014). Even in the most remote communities in Australia, social media is

extremely popular; a 2016 survey, for instance, found more than 50 per cent of very remote community members use Facebook and Divas Chat (see Rennie, Yunkaporta & Holcombe-James 2018).

Moreover, there is increasing acknowledgment that these technologies are used in highly culturally specific ways, with a clear continuity between offline and online cultures. By focusing academic attention on majority cultures, these often-crucial cultural differences are erased. There is also evidence that, much like other minority groups, Indigenous peoples are disproportionately affected by cyberbullying. In the USA, Lemstra et al. (2011:462) found that 'bullying is more common for First Nations youth living on-reserve, compared to other Canadian youth' – a finding supported by Carlyle and Steinman (2007) and Samulski (2014). In Australia, Kral (2014:181) notes that 'accounts across remote Australia of so-called 'cyber-bullying' are on the rise' (see also Radoll 2014). Their claim was recently confirmed by Mobin, Feng and Neudorf's (2017:479) research, which revealed that 'Aboriginal students are at a higher risk of being cyberbullied compared to non-Aboriginal students' (see also Katz et al. 2014).

All of this work has drawn attention to the need for more research that takes into consideration the cultural and political factors that make cyberbullying different for Indigenous peoples. This review identifies two major strands of enquiry and opportunities for such research.

First, it reviews literature exploring the *cultural* factors that need to be accounted for in cyberbullying research. In the context of Indigenous Australians, these include the cultures of *kinship* and communication that influence online practices, and the cultures of *conflict* that influence what does and does not 'count' as cyberbullying. Second, it reviews literature emphasising the *political* factors. More specifically, it demonstrates that cyberbullying is intimately tied to ongoing *racism* towards Indigenous peoples, and shows that rates of cyberbullying are linked to the ongoing legacy of *colonialism* and extant disadvantage among Indigenous populations. Drawing on the arguments presented in these sections, this review also identifies culturally relevant potential responses to cyberbullying among Indigenous populations.

All of this work has drawn attention to the need for more research that takes into consideration the cultural and political factors that make cyberbullying different for Indigenous peoples.

7 Cultures and cyberbullying

Covering thousands of distinct nations and language groups, Indigenous populations hold myriad value systems, sets of norms, ontologies and religious/spiritual beliefs. However, the vast majority of existing cyberbullying research strips away these cultural specificities, assuming instead a homogenous (white) population.

This section identifies several *cultural* factors that must be addressed in researching Indigenous cyberbullying. In particular, it argues that kinship systems and cultures of communication impact significantly on how Indigenous peoples engage with Internet technologies, which in turn affects the emergence and mitigation of cyberbullying. Further, it suggests that ‘what counts’ as cyberbullying behaviour should not be taken for granted. Rather, different populations have different ‘cultures of conflict’, which affect what is considered aggressive online behaviours.

7.1 CULTURES OF KINSHIP AND COMMUNICATION

Research on Indigenous cyberbullying would be greatly strengthened by considering systems and protocols of kinship and communication. The current literature does not often recognise that the use of communication technologies, such as social media, is a deeply *cultural* practice that, inevitably, distinct social and cultural groups will engage with quite differently (Brownlee et al. 2014; Kowalski et al. 2014). In particular, many Indigenous peoples follow highly specific rules for, and responsibilities around, social relations, and these often differ significantly from non-Indigenous sociality (Kral 2014).

Most centrally, various kinship, skin name and moiety systems determine the ways in which different groups and people can relate to one another – whom one may marry, to whom one may speak, and one’s responsibilities towards different individuals, groups, places, animals, knowledges, and so on. These relational systems are often complex and can determine, to a great degree, one’s place and responsibility within a community. Thus, because Indigenous sociality does not neatly align within

non-Indigenous sociality, people’s online behaviours need to be contextualised within these broader social and cultural practices and knowledges.

Recognising Indigenous sociality matters in the context of cyberbullying research for several reasons. First, the continuity of culture inevitably impacts on how people engage with new communication technologies. While working to change social relations between people, social media technologies also have continuities with traditional communicative practices that reflect ongoing kinship relations. Indeed, a growing body of research has shown that Indigenous peoples engage with social media in highly culturally specific ways (Carlson & Frazer 2015). Researching the ways in which mobile technologies have affected a remote Australian community, for example, Vaarzon-Morel (2014:248) notes that ‘social relations mediated by mobile phones are kin based, and Warlpiri use of mobiles serves to intensify family intimacy’. It is important, then, to recognise the degree to which how and to whom one connects through online platforms is influenced by broader social norms that guide and govern interpersonal relations.

Second, and inversely, the introduction of new communication technologies inevitably leads to the modification and disruption of traditional modes of communication and sociality more broadly. For instance, Kral (2014) documented the decline of ‘indirect speech’ with the introduction of new communication technologies.¹ Perhaps, more significantly, through connecting people in entirely new ways technologies often work to shift and even undermine kinship and moiety relations. In particular, there have been concerns that social media has enabled pathways through which to circumvent the norm of leadership by Elders that governs the

¹ Kral (2014:183) explains: ‘Indirect speech employs subtle, highly metaphorical features and was used to deal with conflict in public, or utilised when individuals who stand in a constrained relationship needed to communicate with one another.’

social organisation of many communities. As Kral (2014:185) writes, ‘the gerontocratic norms of the past are undergoing a profound disturbance where the patterned habitual practice of elders exercising authority and exerting social control is under challenge’. Some communities have blamed social media for undermining this and the other established structures of authority responsible for dealing with social conflict, such as bullying.

Third, in many Indigenous communities, notions of the ‘individual’ are significantly less important than the various social collectivities to which one belongs, such as Country, clan, community and family (Rennie, Hogan & Holcombe-James 2016; Rennie, Yunkaporta & Holcombe-James 2018). This more expansive notion of the ‘collective self’ often stands in contrast to the highly individualised and atomised subject assumed in much cyberbullying research. While Western notions of privacy, for instance, tend to emphasise the autonomy and rights of the individual, ‘For Aboriginal knowledge systems, the individual is subsumed within the social, defined by kinship and clan membership’ (Rennie, Yunkaporta & Holcombe-James 2018:11). In their major report on cyber-safety in remote Indigenous communities, Rennie, Yunkaporta & Holcombe-James (2018) found participants to be much less concerned with online privacy; for instance, sharing mobile devices and mobile accounts was common. But by contextualising these practices within cultures of kinship and communication, they suggest that: ‘The apparent gap between privacy concerns and behaviours may be linked to how the notion of relatedness in Aboriginal culture differs from personhood as understood in Western cultures’ (Rennie, Yunkaporta & Holcombe-James 2018:11).

Finally, and consequently, this more collective notion of the self means that cyberbullying incidents cannot always be considered as an isolated act between individuals. Rather, conflict and bullying can reflect and lead to broader community conflicts:

While the initial communication is often between children (jealousy among adults being the other major type of contributing event), the receiver’s kin will seek retribution from members of the opposing family. (Rennie, Yunkaporta & Holcombe-James 2018:13)

The current literature rarely considers the potential impacts of cyberbullying on anyone other than the individuals involved. However, online conflict between Indigenous peoples can involve the breaching of cultural protocols between family and kinship groups, and ultimately affect broader community cohesion (Kral 2014; Rennie, Hogan & Holcombe-James 2016; Rennie, Yunkaporta & Holcombe-James 2018; Vaarzon-Morel 2014). Indeed, some communities have seen social media as such a threat to traditional systems of authority, gerontocratic norms and community stability, they have rejected the extension of mobile Internet coverage and have limited public Wi-Fi access (Rice et al. 2016). By considering cyberbullying as something that occurs within and across *families, clans and communities*, rather than just between individuals, we can develop more nuanced understandings of its causes and impacts and how these might be mitigated.

7.2 CULTURES OF CONFLICT

Since cyberbullying is, fundamentally, a cultural phenomenon, we cannot assume that any singular notion of it will fit neatly into how it is seen by other peoples, communities and cultures; rather, that cyberbullying ‘is not necessarily experienced everywhere in the same way’ (Vaarzon-Morel 2014:252). By not recognising the cultural specificity of bullying – and aggression and conflict more generally – research has tended to privilege, albeit implicitly, Western ideas of bullying.

For many Indigenous communities, conflict is often considered an important component of social relations and is not always understood as necessarily negative (Vaarzon-Morel 2014). For instance, in the context of a Ngaanyatjarra community

... public explosions of anger or frustration were a socially acceptable way of releasing tension in the Western Desert that enabled conflict between kin to be resolved... generally through ritualised payback, spearfights or ‘yaarlpirri’.
(Kral 2014:184)

By assuming we already know what bullying looks like, we risk incorrectly including behaviours that communities themselves wouldn't consider a problem, while overlooking forms of bullying that might have significant impacts on the individuals and groups involved.

What might be considered aggressive or bullying behaviour by non-Indigenous observers, then, might in fact be a form of Indigenous conflict *rectification*. As Rennie, Yunkaporta & Holcombe-James (2018:8) write: 'Physical conflict can signify social breakdown, or it can be an attempt to reinstate social order in accordance with traditional modes of dispute resolution.'

However, some behaviours that non-Indigenous researchers might not consider to be 'bullying' could actually be seen as highly offensive and aggressive by Indigenous peoples. Vaarzon-Morel (2014), for instance, discovered Warlpiri-specific forms of bullying that included defacing digital images of deceased kin and sharing them on social network sites such as Facebook and Divas Chat. Similarly, Rennie, Yunkaporta & Holcombe-James (2018:10) documented a culturally specific form of aggression referred to as 'swearing', which they describe as being 'almost akin to a curse, an indecent assault that must be answered with vigorous aggression'. By assuming we already know what bullying looks like, we risk incorrectly including behaviours that communities themselves wouldn't consider a problem, while overlooking forms of bullying that might have significant impacts on the individuals and groups involved.

Finally, as discussed in the previous section, Indigenous sociality is very often, and in many ways, different to non-Indigenous sociality; in particular, family, kinship and community relationships often take precedence over the self. In the existing literature, however, cyberbullying (and bullying more generally) is almost always considered an aggressive act that takes place between *individuals*, when in many Indigenous communities conflict can, in fact, be a long-standing state between families and groups. Thus, to understand how any particular instance of cyberbullying arises, and how it might be mitigated, we must expand our purview beyond the individual.

In these and other ways, researchers would benefit from taking a more culturally nuanced approach to studying cyberbullying among Indigenous peoples and within Indigenous communities. Assuming that what constitutes bullying is either obvious or always the same in every community overlooks the cultural specificities of conflict. This particularly needs to be kept in mind when debating the need for a standardised concept of cyberbullying (see Vandebosch & van Cleemput 2008).

8 The politics of cyberbullying

Indigenous peoples occupy a unique political position both among mainstream populations and among other minority groups. Most significantly, Indigenous peoples have, by definition, experienced colonisation. The implications of this are too vast and complex to unpack in any detail here. But it is important to acknowledge that colonisation comprises a significant element of the context in which Indigenous cyberbullying takes place.

One of these impacts is that Indigenous populations perform comparatively worse than non-Indigenous people on a range of important metrics, including socioeconomic status, health and wellbeing, life expectancy, unemployment and educational attainment.

This section examines some of the political considerations that should be included in any research on Indigenous cyberbullying. In particular, it argues for the need to take into account the racial politics that underlie Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations, and which can serve as an impetus for the perpetration of cyberbullying. Moreover, it argues that researchers must consider the social, political and economic disadvantage experienced by Indigenous populations in Australia, as the literature demonstrates that these factors are implicated in the prevalence of cyberbullying among Indigenous peoples.

8.1 THE POLITICS OF RACISM

In the debate around the definition of cyberbullying, it is generally recognised that bullying necessitates an imbalance of power. According to Slonje and Smith (2008:147), 'Bullying is a form of abuse that is based on an imbalance of power; it can be defined as a systematic abuse of power'. Similarly, Brownlee et al. (2014:40) state that bullying always 'occurs within a cultural context of historical and social biases that both generate and perpetuate power differentials across social groups'. Clearly, power also matters in the context of race relations, with Indigenous peoples widely regarded as generally occupying a less powerful social position in Australia (and globally). As a result, the existing power dynamics between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students are likely to influence the prevalence and forms of cyberbullying that emerge in any given school.

Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that racism is widespread in Australian society, including its schools where many Indigenous students face individual and systemic prejudice and discrimination. It should not be surprising, then, that researchers have often found bullying to be motivated by racial, ethnic and cultural differences, what Broll, Dunlop and Crooks (2018) describe more generally as 'ethnic bullying'. Sumulski (2014:n.p.), for instance, found that Native American students who 'adhered to their tribal traditions and values' were significantly more likely to be victimised by cyberbullying than other students, including those who did not obviously display different values and practices to the mainstream. Likewise, in their New Voices/New Laws report Tallon et al. (2012) found that, in Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait groups experienced the highest prevalence of cyberbullying, compared with other groups. Racial prejudice thus needs to be considered when researching how often and why cyberbullying occurs.

Further, broader racial politics can have important consequences for how victims and authorities *respond* to bullying. For instance, Coffin, Larson and Cross (2010) found that many Indigenous parents feel that teachers and schools do not listen when they report that their kids are being bullied, but it was not clear if this was due to racial prejudice, under-resourcing or some other factor. Alternatively, the victims of bullying can respond in racially reflected ways. Coffin, Larson and Cross (2010:83) also found that Aboriginal children often responded to bullying by 'separat[ing] oneself from non-Aboriginal children and [by being] as "Aboriginal" as possible'.

Unfortunately, these racial differences are rarely acknowledged in cyberbullying research, with the vast majority of studies differentiating students only by age and gender. It is interesting to note, then, that the first research into schoolyard bullying – what was then

generally called ‘mobbing’ – emerged in the 1970s because of concerns around racial discrimination (Olweus 2013). It appears, however, that this more socio-political focus has been sidelined in recent research on cyberbullying.

By bringing racial politics back to the forefront of research into cyberbullying, researchers can address several important lines of questioning, including:

- How prevalent is cyberbullying perpetration and victimisation among different racial, cultural and ethnic groups?
- To what extent is bullying racially motivated?
- To what extent and in what ways are responses to bullying influenced by racial prejudice?
- How do racial, cultural and ethnic minority groups respond to bullying victimisation?

8.2 THE POLITICS OF DISADVANTAGE

Following on from this, the legacy of colonisation should be considered in the context of Indigenous cyberbullying. As previously discussed, the small amount of existing research on cyberbullying and Indigenous people has found they experience disproportionately high rates of victimisation in Australia (Mobin, Feng & Neudorf 2017), the USA (Samulski 2014) and Canada (Lemstra et al. 2011). The ongoing impacts of colonisation in all three countries are many, and include the splintering of families; removal of children; theft of land; suppression of language and culture; political, cultural and economic marginalisation; low levels of employment and education; and drug and alcohol misuse (Coffin, Larson & Cross 2010).

The politics of disadvantage – which can be understood as a systemic form of racism that manifests materially – relates to cyberbullying in complex ways. Coffin, Larson and Cross (2010) argue that the high rates of cyberbullying in some Indigenous communities can be at least partially attributed to the legacies of colonial violence and dispossession. Similarly, Mobin, Feng and Neudorf (2017:479) write that the high rates of bullying experienced by Indigenous students can be attributed ‘to power differentials across social groups with roots in intergenerational trauma and the after-effects of colonialism’ (see also Clark, Augoustinos & Malin 2017). Mental ill-health, in particular, has been found to influence the prevalence and impacts of cyberbullying in Indigenous communities (Broll, Dunlop & Crooks 2018).

Further, bullying has been found to be more common in communities with high levels of violence more generally. According to Coffin, Larson and Cross (2010:84), ‘The Aboriginal people interviewed consistently identified the high levels of violence in the community, as well as alcohol and drug use, as reasons why bullying occurs’. Consequently, they suggest that it is not surprising that the highest reported rates of bullying were in the more isolated towns they visited. Finally, the recent research by Rennie, Hogan and Holcombe-James (2016) suggest that lower rates of educational achievement in some communities can also influence rates of online conflict.

The vast majority of existing research on cyberbullying fails to take into account the political context in which cyberbullying takes place. Rarely do studies note any historical, socioeconomic or racial factors in their analyses. By paying more attention to these factors, we can build a better understanding of how cyberbullying is related to the ongoing effects of colonisation, including intergenerational trauma, the splintering of families, and various forms of economic, political and social disadvantage.

9 Responding to Indigenous cyberbullying

To cite Coffin, Larson and Cross (2010:85) again: ‘Without context, understandings [of cyberbullying] can only be superficial’. This section has sought to bring attention to some of the ways in which cyberbullying research would benefit from taking into account the cultural and political contexts in which cyberbullying occurs.

In particular, it has shown that, for Indigenous peoples, cyberbullying takes place within a complex milieu that the vast majority of existing research fails to consider.

Section 5 of the review discussed various interventions that have been implemented to prevent and mitigate incidents of cyberbullying. However, according to Coffin, Larson and Cross (2010:85), ‘Bullying behaviour among children may be universal but the factors that perpetuate and protect are unique to each setting’. Therefore, we should not assume interventions that work effectively for mainstream populations will also work for Indigenous populations, and vice versa. Responses to, interventions for, and strategies to mitigate cyberbullying cannot be uncritically applied homogeneously across social and cultural groups. In this vein, Coffin, Larson and Cross (2010:78) argue that ‘bullying involving Aboriginal children and youth cannot be effectively tackled by mainstream programs that fail to understand and engage with their cultural, familial and socio-economic realities’.

The final section of this review will briefly discuss three possible avenues for developing effective interventions for cyberbullying among Indigenous students.

9.1 CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE PROGRAMMING

First, there is a growing body of research suggesting that culturally relevant and appropriate programming can effectively reduce the prevalence and negative impacts of cyberbullying among Indigenous students (Broll, Dunlop & Crooks 2018; Brownlee et al. 2014; Carlyle & Steinman 2007). In Australia, for example, Radoll (2014:13) suggests that the Indigenous cyber-safety program *Be Deadly Online* ‘goes a long way into addressing these issues and specifically targets Indigenous youth’. These programs and interventions do not assume that the emergence, effects and mitigation of cyberbullying can be equated across all populations. Rather, they consider the culture and

specificities of Indigenous communities, and draw on language that more effectively relates to Indigenous students.

9.2 EMPHASISING CULTURAL STRENGTHS

Second, and relatedly, there is evidence that community conflict – and, extrapolating from this, cyberbullying – can be mitigated through promoting the strength of culture. Positive conceptions of cultural identity, for instance, are correlated with higher levels of wellbeing, with culture also a source of personal and community strength. Coffin, Larson and Cross (2010:78) explain that ‘where cultural identity is strong... the well-being of Aboriginal people, and especially children and youth is much better’.

9.3 DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS OF AUTHORITY

Finally, we must also ask, what are the most important *institutions* for Indigenous peoples? As discussed in Section 5, most research assumes that family, school or state institutions are the most appropriate and effective levels at which to stage interventions. However, clearly this is not necessarily the case for all social and cultural groups. Indeed, as Section 7 demonstrates, Indigenous sociality often emphasises the ‘institution’ of the clan or community.

There is also some research that suggests that interventions involving traditional structures of authority can be effective in resolving online conflict. In their recent report on cyber-safety in remote Indigenous communities, Rennie, Yunkaporta & Holcombe-James (2018:30) suggest that ‘...the best way to de-escalate fights is for Elders from relevant family groups to undertake mediation’. They explain that this form of conflict resolution involves publicly working through the conflict and determining an appropriate punishment. However, as they go on to note, this type of mediation requires adequate resourcing, such as funding organisations to hold the Elder meetings, and to ensure that Elders feel confident dealing with new social media technologies.

10 Conclusion

This review of the available literature on cyberbullying opened by discussing the ongoing debate around what constitutes cyberbullying and how this differs from more traditional forms of bullying. Next, it reviewed literature that has explored the prevalence and impacts of, and responses to, cyberbullying. This section revealed that cyberbullying is a widespread problem, affecting some 20–40 per cent of students, with serious social and psychological consequences for both victims and perpetrators.

The second section turned to research on cyberbullying among and directed at Indigenous peoples, and identified a severe lack of existing research in this area. Indeed, the vast majority of available work tends to erase social and cultural difference altogether, instead implicitly assuming a homogeneous white population. The review then presented arguments that cultural and political context matters when researching and understanding Indigenous cyberbullying. Indigenous people have diverse cultures of kinship and communication, which impact significantly the ways in which they engage with digital technologies, such as social media. Further, there are culturally specific understandings of what constitutes conflict itself. The review argues that broader political forces, such as racism and disadvantage brought about through colonialism, need to be taken into account.

Cyberbullying does not take place within a vacuum. Rather, it emerges in a context in which systemic racism, intergenerational trauma, and economic disadvantage are widespread. However, it remains unknown in what ways and to what degrees these factors are related to the emergence of cyberbullying. Considering that cyberbullying remains a significant problem among Indigenous Australians – with some research suggesting they experience it at rates higher than non-Indigenous populations – these cultural and political factors warrant further investigation.

There are several research directions that would help address the lacunae discussed above. Firstly, it is clear that we need a better understanding of the cultural specificities of conflict, bullying and violence, and how these intersect with existing and emerging digital technologies. This review has discussed some of the recent research that has explored Indigenous sociality,

conflict and social media. However, although this work has produced some important insights, it has tended to be relatively geographically limited – focusing only on one or two communities at a time – or conducted with small numbers of participants. Moreover, it has largely explored conflict on digital technologies more generally, rather than cyberbullying through social media specifically. To develop a richer, more complete picture, we would benefit from national-scale, qualitative research that specifically addresses the issue of cyberbullying towards and among Indigenous populations.

Secondly, it is important to recognise, too, that Indigenous populations are not homogeneous. Thus, future research could take a more intersectional approach by exploring how Indigenous peoples' experiences of cyberbullying intersect with other social identities, including sexual and gender minorities, differently abled populations, socio-economic status or geographic variables (including city, suburban, rural and remote locations).

Finally, if we are to mitigate the negative consequences of cyberbullying more effectively, or aim to prevent it altogether, we need to understand its causal, preventative and ameliorative factors. Available research suggests that Indigenous groups engage with social media in culturally specific ways; that there exist unique preventative factors in Indigenous communities, such as a strong sense of culture; and that traditional justice pathways (such as gerontocratic authority) can be more appropriate and effective than those most often used among mainstream populations (such as through schools or police). However, these factors are still little understood, and future research should aim to address this important gap.

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