

# Bystanders Against Cyberbullying: An Intervention Program



Ashley N. Doane, Ph.D., Chowan University

Sarah Ehlke, M.A., Old Dominion University

Michelle L. Kelley, Ph.D., Old Dominion University

Matthew R. Pearson, Ph.D., Center on Alcoholism, Substance Abuse, and Addictions, University of New Mexico



# Abstract

- ▶ Considering the frequency and consequences of cyberbullying, low cost and effective programs are needed.
- ▶ This study tested the effectiveness of a theory-based cyberbullying bystander intervention video program on three outcomes: joining the bully, helping the victim, and doing nothing in a sample of university students.
- ▶ Findings are discussed in terms of implications for cyberbullying intervention programs targeting improvements in bystander behavior.

# Introduction

- ▶ Cyberbullying bystanders (i.e., witnesses) may respond by joining in, helping the victim, or doing nothing (e.g., Barlińska, Szuster, & Winiewski, 2015)
- ▶ Most cyberbullying bystanders do nothing (e.g., Gahagan, Vaterlaus, & Frost, 2016)

# Purpose

- ▶ We developed a cyberbullying bystander intervention video based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1991)
- ▶ Our goals were to improve:
  - ▶ Bystander attitudes (i.e., one's approval)
  - ▶ Norms (i.e., perception of peers' approval)
  - ▶ Perceived behavioral control (i.e., knowing how to respond)
  - ▶ Intentions to respond
  - ▶ Empathy toward victims

# Method: Participants

- ▶ 225 students from a large southeastern university
- ▶ Age:  $M = 23.68$ ,  $SD = 7.5$
- ▶ Gender: 78.7% women
- ▶ Race: 42.7% Black, 39.1% White

# Procedure

- ▶ Randomly assigned in an online study to either:
  - ▶ cyberbullying video  
(experimental group,  $n = 113$ )
  - ▶ alcohol video  
(control group,  $n = 112$ )
- ▶ Completed online surveys:
  - ▶ prior to the video (T1)
  - ▶ immediately after the video (T2)
  - ▶ one month later (T3)

# Measures

- ▶ Based on the Cyberbullying Experiences Survey (CES; Doane, Kelley, Chiang, & Padilla, 2013)
- ▶ For each type of bystander behavior (joining the bully, helping the victim, doing nothing), we assessed:
  - ▶ attitudes (6-point scale, strongly disapprove-strongly approve)
  - ▶ injunctive norms (6-point scale, strongly disapprove-strongly approve)
  - ▶ perceived behavioral control (6-point scale, strongly agree-strongly disagree)
  - ▶ bystander intentions in the next month (5-point scale, never-always)
- ▶ Empathy toward cyberbullying victims (i.e., feeling sorry for a person who was cyberbullied; 6-point scale, strongly disagree-strongly agree)

# Cyberbullying Bystander Program Content

- ▶ Developed by the first author and the Cyberbullying Research and Awareness Group (college student group)
- ▶ Showed students defining and depicting cyberbullying situations with bystanders present and giving suggestions for positive cyberbullying behavior



# Alcohol Intervention Program Content

- ▶ Control Group
- ▶ Consisted of a narrated powerpoint presentation
- ▶ Included protective behavioral strategies regarding drinking situations

# Results: Immediate Post-Video (Table 1)

- ▶ Compared to the control group, the cyberbullying video group scored:
  - ▶ lower on positive attitudes, favorable injunctive norms, and perceived behavioral control regarding doing nothing
  - ▶ lower on intentions to do nothing
  - ▶ higher on intentions to help the victim
- ▶ No other differences were found

# Results: One-Month Follow-Up (Table 2)

- ▶ No significant differences were found

# Discussion

- ▶ Before the intervention, participants generally already disapproved of joining the bully and reported high levels of empathy toward victims
- ▶ Results suggest the importance of focusing more on enhancing knowledge about how to effectively intervene and help the victim, which may increase the likelihood of engaging in positive bystander behavior

# Limitations

- ▶ Volunteers from a single university
- ▶ Self-report measures
- ▶ Small follow-up sample
- ▶ Short follow-up

# Conclusion

- ▶ The cyberbullying video group reported they were less likely to do nothing and more likely to help the victim compared to a control group immediately after the video
- ▶ Although in the expected direction, these effects were no longer significant one month later
- ▶ Although promising, these results suggest that improving cyberbullying bystanders intentions may require a more sustained approach

# References

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