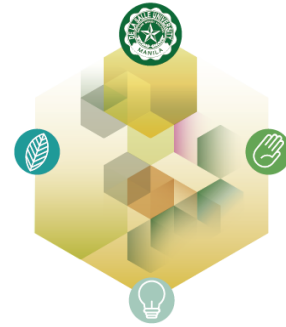


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Cyberbullying Case Study: A Proposal for Self-Regulation

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Abstract: Cyberbullying includes verbal, visual, or exclusion behaviors that deem to attack another person online. Such cases on campus are handled by the discipline offices as related to harassment cases. Online perpetrators bully others without regard for the feelings of other persons, which demonstrates negative self-regulation. This proposed cyberbullying intervention program is deemed to be provided to students who have been found by the university discipline board to be guilty of offenses related to cyberbullying. This proposal for program development used a case study to determine the needs of cyberbullying perpetrators in the university. Interestingly, it has been found that cyberbullying does not necessarily happen in a vacuum but that offenders of cyberbullying may be cyber victims themselves, consistent with the literature found on cyberbullying among college students. The findings show precedents and responses to cyberbullying behavior that appears to be a vicious cycle, as the literature also attests. The proposed program aims to strengthen student self-regulation using Karoly's systems view of the mechanisms of self-regulation, which will heavily require students to reflect on their actions as they develop these skills. Its objectives are to: (1) identify and discover self-regulatory capacity of students and (2) develop self-regulatory behaviors through self-regulation skills training. The expected outcomes for this program are the (1) ability to identify areas that need self-regulation; (2) ability to describe the goal striving for self-regulation; and (3) self-reflective capacity to monitor self-regulation.

Key Words: cyberbullying; cyber victim; self-regulation; student conduct

1. INTRODUCTION

As most college students spend time online, a cyberbullying study of US college students interestingly found that a whopping 96.1% and 84.2% of the participants experienced cyberbullying victimization and perpetration, respectively (Doane et al, 2013). In a replication of this study conducted in New Zealand, Phizacklea & Sargisson (2018) found almost the same results with those victimized at 94.9% and perpetrating at 82.0%. Cyberbullying includes verbal, visual, or exclusion behaviors that deem to attack another person online (Bottino, et al, 2015). In the Philippines, cyberbullying is defined by the law (R.A. 10627) as bullying done through the use of technology or any electronic means.

Cyberbullying cases in the campus are handled by the discipline offices as harassment case (Crute, Redinbaugh & Gregory, 2012). In the researcher's university, as the discipline case is being processed and investigated, both the alleged cyberbully and cyber victim are referred for counseling where mental health needs are addressed. For the discipline office, the primary focus is the development of the respondent who, when found guilty, undergoes a formation program. However, at the moment, there is no particular program that specifically caters to university offenders of cyberbullying-related cases.

There is a plethora of definitions of the cyberbullying phenomenon but the common ground is the intent to harm someone through electronic means. In a systematic review of literature on cyberbullying,

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Bottino, et al (2015) found that cyber victims and cyberbullies' mental health shows that these students had "more emotional and psychosomatic problems". They also had social difficulties, and feelings of not being safe and cared for in school. Unfortunately, Navarro, et al (2016) found that this social exclusion contributes to self-regulation difficulties that add to the involvement in behaviors that are aggressive and violent.

In Karoly's (1993) systems view of self-regulation, he defined this as "those processes, internal and/or transactional, that enable an individual to guide his/her goal-directed activities over time and across changing circumstances (contexts)". According to him, self-regulation encompasses "up to five interrelated and iterative component phases" which are (1) Goal selection, (2) Goal cognition, (3) Directional maintenance, (4) Directional change or reprioritization, and (5) Goal termination.

McKennie (2017) asserts that, in cyberspace, the important role of self-regulation and self-efficacy is seen in the capacity of individuals to see themselves as having control over their lives and their environment. Her study also narrates how self-regulation in cyberbullying can be seen in behaviors, positively or negatively. Online perpetrators bully others without regard for the feelings of these other persons, which demonstrates negative self-regulation. However, those who are positively self-regulated show that, in a cyberbullying instance, these individuals are able to control feelings and behaviors rather than allowing circumstances to determine them.

This study terminally aims to propose developing a program that aims to help and prevent cyberbullies and cyber victims.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Needs Assessment

The objective of this needs assessment is to identify the responses, thoughts, and feelings of students perceived to have committed cyberbullying, filed with a cyberbullying case, and found guilty of the charge or a case related to it that exhibits cyberbullying behaviors as defined in the literature. Therefore, this assessment aims to develop a program for students who have been referred to the university discipline office.

A case study was used as the method for meeting this objective. This paper peered into an alleged cyberbullying case that was filed by a university student against two other students from the same school. For the purpose of this study, we will be zooming in on the experiences of the alleged cyberbullies. The responses of the students regarding the case filed against them were documented through an official form that these students gave consent to use for research. The narrative responses were analyzed using content analysis.

Student A, male and 24 years old, and Student B: female, 21 years old. The students come from different colleges but know each other personally. Thus, this case study is about one filed discipline case with two students being complained of: one male and one female. For a brief background, a complaining student filed for cyberbullying and/or gross acts of disrespect due to alleged malicious social media comments and personal messages sent by the two abovementioned students. Eventually, the complained students were found guilty of gross acts of disrespect. Though technically not appraised as cyberbullying, the students were found guilty of the actions complained of against them (malicious social media comments and personal messages) which they conducted through the use of technology (internet, social media) and electronic devices (cell phones). This case captures the definition of cyberbullying for this study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the content analysis of the students' responses showed that there are two main themes: *precedents* and *responses*.

Precedents

As each student explained their side of the story, it appears that the students experienced incidents that emotionally affected them. These, as they shared, were: (1) a circulation of false information about them:

Student A [SA]: "pagkakatatagan ng maling impormasyon" (circulating false information)

Student B [SB]: "maligayang karakter"

(2) unpleasant previous social experiences:

SA: "naranasan sa mga paniniil at kapootan" (experienced in oppression and hatred)"

SB: "repeated acts of disrespect"

and (3) mental health impact of these incidents:

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SA: “lubusang na-depress” (completely depressed); “hindi nakatulog dahil sa pagkabagabag” (could not sleep due to restlessness); “hindi ko alam kung ano ang maaari kong gawin dahil sa kasalukuyang sitwasyon” (I did not know what to do because of my current situation)

SB: “affected my psychological well-being and mental health”.

Looking at the precedents above, these students, who eventually resorted to cyberbullying acts, evidently show that certain negative experiences triggered them. One can infer from these that the ones being complained of cyberbullying have experienced bullying themselves, thus, as victims as well.

Responses

The other main theme found in this study are the responses of the students to what they have experienced. The students were conscious of their engagement in cyberbullying behavior as (1) an emotional reaction:

SA: “reaction brought about by strong emotions”

SB: “messages were emotionally driven”

and (2) a retaliation to the precedents mentioned above. Both students stated that in their “self-defense,”

SA: “ipinadala ko ang mapanakit na mga pananalita sa text” (I sent the hurtful remarks through text), while

Student B admits that she sent “messages (that) were emotionally driven and humanly flawed.”

In these responses, students have also been made aware of the unpleasant emotional impact of their behavior:

SA: “labis po akong dismayado sa aking sarili at sa kinalabasan ng sitwasyon” (I am very disappointed with myself and the outcome of the situation.)

SB: “this was an isolated incident... that have left myself and my loved ones feeling disrespected, uncomfortable and fearful”

From this case study, we would see that the engagement in cyberbullying behavior of these perpetrators has been preceded by certain psychosocial experiences. It appears that the cyberbullying that transpired has been a response to being victimized by others’ cyberbullying. This particular case study reflects a cause-and-effect relationship of cyberbullying as cause, and

cybervictimization as effect resulting to cyberbullying from the supposed victim’s end. And the vicious cycle has started. Apparently, perpetrating cyberbullying also has consequences for the mental and emotional health of the perpetrator and of those around him/her.

Consistent with the literature, many college students engage in cyberbullying as victims and perpetrators themselves (Doane et al, 2013; Phizacklea & Sargisson, 2018). This phenomenon has been associated with mental health concerns such as social anxiety, depressive symptoms, and emotional stress (Bottino et al, 2015) which are evident in the findings of this study.

Most cyberbullying studies focus on the victims. As far as the researcher’s knowledge is concerned, there seems to be limited research that attempts to help the perpetrators of cyberbullying (Zych, Farrington, & Ttofi, 2019; Yang, 2021). As the needs assessment findings have shown, some cyberbullies are cyber victims themselves, with needs surrounding interventions that, technically speaking, may simply be referred to the counseling office for emotional processing. However, as a formative office, the discipline office takes under its wings the discipline offenders in the university and creates programs that directly address their needs.

Self-regulation has been found helpful for cyber victims, who can be prone to become cyberbullies themselves, to recover from this negative experience (McKennie, 2017). For those guilty of committing cyberbullying and related acts, Heirman & Walrave (2012) suggest that intervention strategies should aim at reducing the acceptability of this behavior. Cyberbullying as retaliation for hurt emotions or as an emotional reaction to precipitating circumstances should not be something that psychosocially healthy emerging adults would resort to. Thus, this study proposes that students who are able to self-regulate their responses to triggers that, in a technologically active society, may be inevitable or consequential to our acts or even innocence, are able to fare better.

Program Description & Rationale

This proposed cyberbullying intervention program is about “Strengthening Student Self-Regulation.” As literature states, “having (self-regulation traits) could lessen the amount of cyberbullying” and its negative consequences. Self-regulation can also lead to better life quality and decrease negative emotions when one experiences cyberbullying. (McKennie, 2017).



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The goal of this program development is to help college students who are perpetrators of cyberbullying-related offenses to develop self-regulation skills. The target participants for this program are those who were filed a complaint and found guilty of cyberbullying-related acts against another person/s such as, but not limited to, threatening, gross acts of disrespect, bullying, harassment, causing emotional and psychological harm, and other similar forms.

Ultimately the objectives are to: (1) identify and discover self-regulatory capacity of individual students, through a self-regulation questionnaire to be provided before and after the intervention sessions, as well as self-reports through a journal system; and (2) develop self-regulatory behaviors through self-regulation skills training.

The expected outcomes for this program are the following: (1) ability to identify areas that need self-regulation; (2) ability to describe the goal striving for self-regulation; and (3) self-reflective capacity to monitor self-regulation.

Program Design

The design of this program for students is patterned after Karoly's (1993) systems view of the mechanisms of self-regulation. Table 1 shows the proposed activities (Group & Individual) for the implementation of this program.

Day	Topic/ Focus	Activities	Resources	Proposed Evaluation
1	Diagnostic Assessment	Interview – Individual (I) Homework – Journal (I)	Interview Guide Self-regulation Questionnaire	Journal entry (staff & student)
2	Goal Selection – Goal definition Goal setting – identifying goal properties	Discussion – Group (G) Interview (I) Homework – Journal (I)	Slide Presentation (G) Interview Guide & Student Journal (I)	Journal entry (staff & student)
3	Goal cognition – Identifying commitments Self-efficacy	Journal discussion (I) Questionnaire Homework - Journal (I)	Slide Presentation (G) Self-efficacy measure (G) Interview Guide (I)	Self-developed questionnaire Journal entry (staff & student)
4	Goal cognition – Goal striving	Journal discussion Discussion Homework - Journal	Slide Presentation (G) Student Journal (I)	Journal entry (staff & student)
5	Directional maintenance – Feedback Feed forward	Discussion (G) Performance feedback (I & G) Interview & Homework – Journal (I)	Slide Presentation (G) Interview Guide & Student Journal (I)	Self-developed questionnaire Journal entry (staff & student)
6	Directional change or reprioritization – Representation vs execution Self-monitoring	Discussion (G) Interview & Homework – Journal (I)	Slide Presentation (G) Student Journal (I)	Self-developed questionnaire Journal entry (staff & student)
7	Meeting Termination	Discussion (G)	Slide Presentation (G) SRQ (I)	Journal entry (staff & student)

Table 1. Proposed Program Activities

The program is deemed to be implemented on a full regular term, which is fourteen (14) weeks. Seven sessions, conducted bimonthly or every other week, on one (1) to one and a half (1.5) hour sessions per meeting. The sessions will be conducted by an

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office staff trained to conduct self-regulation skills training.

Participants in the study will be gathered within a term based on the recommendations of the discipline board for students who have violated policies that are related to cyberbullying. Thus, this program will have student/s who were referred by the discipline panel as part of their sanctions and formative conditions. They will be required to finish the program satisfactorily.

The Strengthening Self-Regulation program may have a group of students per academic term to undertake this training. However, the program is also flexible for one-on-one sessions, should there be only one student on a particular term. The program is set to start concurrently with the start of the term's week. It is deemed to have a maximum of five students for every group, to ensure that each is being mentored closely by the staff program implementer. Should there be more than five, another session group shall be formed.

Program Evaluation

For the evaluation of this program, since the outcomes are sought to be based on behavior, Holden & Zimmerman (p.15, 2009) recommend focusing on “developing measures and questions at the individual level” against the program’s intended outcomes: the student’s (1) ability to identify areas that need self-regulation; (2) ability to describe the goal striving for self-regulation; and (3) self-reflective capacity to monitor self-regulation.

As the implementation of this program gathers self-reports via journal writing throughout the entire sessions, qualitative input from the student that have been collected in self-reports via reflection journals per week. These will be subjected to a content analysis, based on weekly responses and collectively for the entire duration of the program. A final essay on the effectiveness of the program in developing self-regulatory behaviors, with detailed application of the skills learned, will be required from the student/s, also to be subject for content analysis. For additional input about the program delivery, the staff will also be required to journal her experience in the implementation on a weekly and final basis.

The Self-Regulation Questionnaire developed by Brown, Miller, & Lawendowski (1999) will be administered to the students on the first and last sessions to determine if there has been changes in the self-regulatory behavior of the students, as identified

in the intended outcomes. This will quantify and compare the skills learned in the program by the individual student. A self-developed questionnaire will also be provided as an additional evaluation tool at the termination of the program.

Findings and results of this program evaluation may be used by the discipline office to review the utility of the program in meeting its goals. If the evaluation results meet the goal for its development, the program may be considered as part of the regular formation programs provided by the office. Otherwise, as deemed acceptable and appropriate by the office as its sponsor, revisions to the program components may be considered for a second run, in which an evaluation will also ensue.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study is an attempt to determine the needs of the students charged with a cyberbullying offense. This research supports previous studies that show that cyberbullying behavior may be a response to precedent cyberbullying experiences. While that may not always be the case, in a virtual space where anonymity may encourage aggressive behavior toward others, it may be important to learn self-regulation skills to address unexpected triggers from the social online space.

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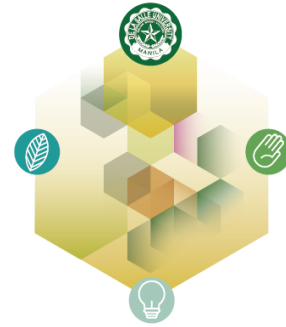
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