

**TEEN**  
PROBLEMS

# TEENS AND CYBERBULLYING

By Marie-Thérèse Miller, PhD





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## CHAPTER ONE

# WHAT IS TEEN CYBERBULLYING?

**T**eens are active in the digital world. They enthusiastically use devices such as cell phones, computers, tablets, and gaming consoles. Technology has many positives to offer. Teens can text their friends to keep in touch after school or make plans to meet up and do something fun together. The internet makes researching for school projects and papers easier. There are social media sites to share thoughts, news, and funny memes.

## CYBERBULLYING DEFINED

Online access also presents challenges. Sometimes, the internet becomes a place to write mean comments or share embarrassing photos or videos. It becomes a way to cyberbully. Cyberbullying happens when an individual or a group uses digital means to intentionally cause repeated harm to another person.

In order to understand cyberbullying, it is important to know exactly what bullying is and what it is not. A person who bullies has the goal of causing physical or psychological pain to



**Teenagers spend many hours every day online. While technology allows teens to access information and communicate easily, it also introduces the risk of cyberbullying.**

another person. Bullying is an intentional, repeated behavior. One exchange of an unkind word or embarrassing comment does not fit the definition of bullying.

In bullying, there is an actual or perceived power differential. For example, the bully might be physically larger than the victim. There might be a difference in intellectual ability between the bully and victim. The power difference can also be social, in which the person bullying could be more popular than the target.

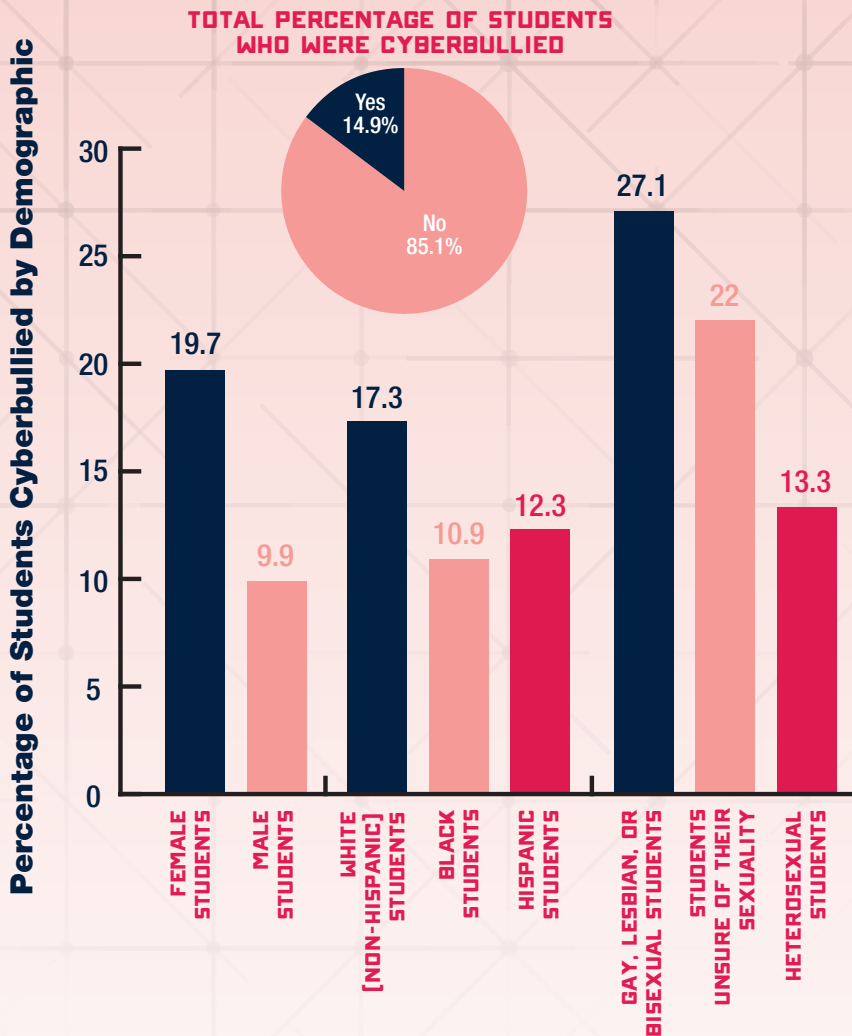
Professors Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin write that the difference in power in cyberbullying can be different than in real-world bullying. The power difference could be that the cyberbully is more skilled when it comes to digital media. The cyberbully could have access to private photos or information about the victim that he can share, and that makes him more powerful than the target.

Bullying happens in many places. Teens are often bullied at school. It might also happen off school grounds, such as on the school bus or in the victim's neighborhood. Cyberbullying has a particularly long reach. It can happen anywhere there is a digital connection. With cyberbullying, the bully and victim do not have to be in the same location. Cyberbullying can take place at any time, twenty-four hours a day. Online bullying has an element of permanence. Even if a cruel tweet is deleted, it can remain as a screenshot. Bullying spreads quickly online, such as when embarrassing videos are shared and go viral.

## **CYBERBULLYING TYPES AND METHODS**

There are many types of cyberbullying. These can include gossip, rumor-spreading, cruel comments, threats, embarrassment, and exclusion. And there are many ways that cyberbullying can occur. With a cell phone, a person can relay cruel or threatening communications by calling, leaving

# PREVALENCE OF CYBERBULLYING



Source: Laura Kann, Tim McManus, William Harris, et al., "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2017," Surveillance Summaries, June 15, 2018. [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

The 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) asked students in grades nine through twelve if they had been bullied electronically over the last twelve months. The researchers defined electronic bullying as being bullied through texting, Facebook, Instagram, or other social media.





**Around half of the victims of cyberbullying do not know the identity of their bully. Cyberbullies can make anonymous comments or create fake profiles.**

voice messages, or texting. The bully could also send hurtful messages to the victim through email.

Cyberbullying can also take place on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or YouTube. Bullies might add mean posts or comments. Cyberbullies could use social media private messaging as well. Embarrassing photos or videos taken of the victim might be shared to these sites.

Sometimes, a bully makes a fake profile to impersonate the victim on social media. She pretends to be the victim and posts comments, photos, or videos. These posts are designed to hurt the victim's reputation. The cyberbully, for instance, could make



racist comments from this fake profile. The bully might also create a fake profile to hide herself while she cyberbullies. This is precisely what happened to Megan Meier from Dardenne Prairie, Missouri, in 2006. When Megan was thirteen, her parents let her join the social media platform Myspace. A boy named Josh Evans contacted her. His picture showed a good-looking young man, and he wrote her complimentary messages. Megan had low self-esteem, which means she didn't value herself. Megan welcomed his kind comments.

Suddenly, Josh's comments turned cruel. He wrote, "I don't know if I

## ANGER-INDUCING TROLLS AND BOTS

It is important to understand that some people comment on social media just to elicit a reaction. Trolls are people who jump into an online discussion and comment negatively or with outrageous opinions merely to start an argument or make others angry. Experts recommend not responding to trolls.

Bots can also cause trouble online. Bots are automated programs that perform a certain task. On Twitter, there are bots that Tweet political propaganda. If someone is fooled into believing the bots are real people sharing their opinions, that person might get into heated conversations that began with the bot. Bots can infuriate others and turn groups of people against one another.

There are signs that point to a fake social media account or bot. If the profile photo is too perfect or if the profile description is exaggerated, this suggests a fake account or bot. When the account hardly has any followers, but it follows many others, this is another clue.

Whether it is a troll, a bot, or a peer making a person angry online, the best thing to do is walk away from the digital device. That way, people won't make comments they might regret. Their anger may subside in the time they are away.

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