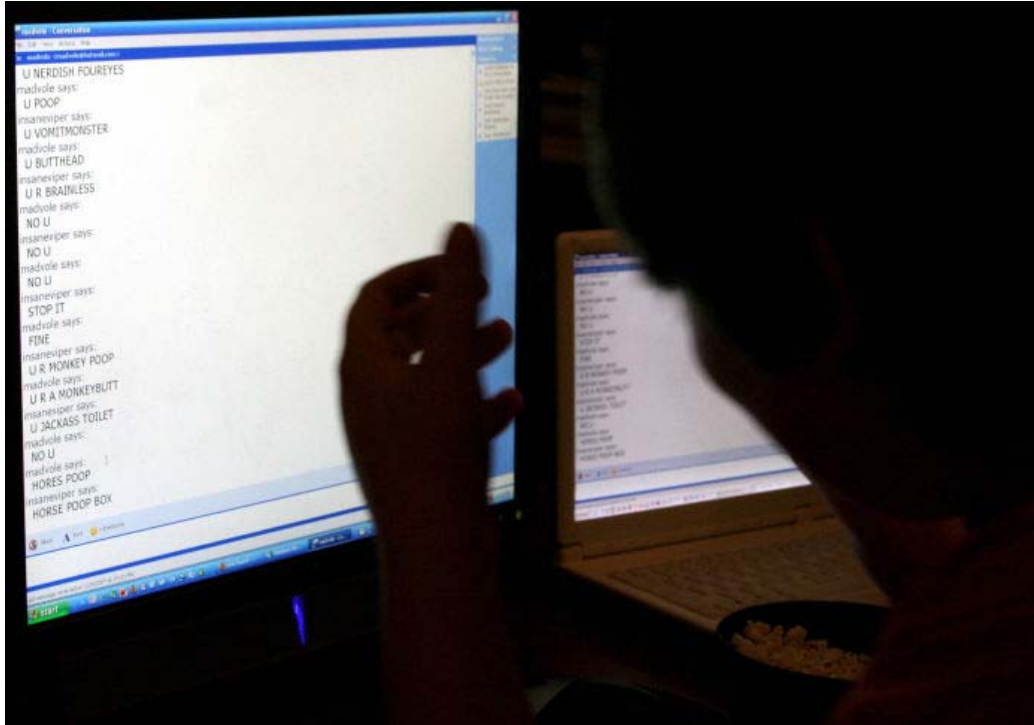


Can a lack of knowledge of modern technology impact a family's reaction to cyberbullying?

José Martínez | May 8th, 2013, 7:00am



AFP/AFP/Getty Images

Researchers found that about 1 in 6 high-schoolers reported being cyberbullied over the previous year – and that girls reported it more than twice as often as boys did.

Almost 1 in 6 high school students reported being cyberbullied over the past year, and girls reported it more than twice as often as boys.

That's according to **new research** (http://www.abstracts2view.com/pas/view.php?nu=PAS13L1_2835.3) that was presented Sunday at a gathering of the **Pediatric Academic Societies** (<http://www.pas-meeting.org/2013DC/default.asp>), which also noted that nearly 1 in 3 high school students reported spending at least three hours in front of a TV or computer screen for non-academic purposes.

From the federal government's **anti-bullying website** (<http://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/what-is-it/index.html>):

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place using electronic technology. Electronic technology includes devices and equipment such as cell phones, computers, and tablets as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat, and websites.

CDTech (<http://www.cdtech.org/>) is a South L.A.-based nonprofit focused on community economic development. Kristine Williams, the vice president of strategic initiatives, recalled a group discussion with about 20 area high-schoolers that shed light on a common form of cyberbullying among South L.A. youth: posting racy photos of their friends – mostly young women – online or sending them around electronically.

"They were clearly, clearly familiar with it on a personal level," she said, indicating that a good number of the students present at that meeting had at least received photos like that. "I think it's fairly innocent to begin with. I really do. I don't think it begins with an intent to take someone down."

But those racy photos can become a tool for cyberbullies, she said.

"I think it just starts with taking photos," said Williams. "And sharing that – just that constant communication, so if you get angry with someone, or if you don't like someone, or someone does something to you, it's just a natural extension of that."

Meaning it can easily become a way to blackmail or get back at someone. That's cyberbullying. But it may not be a conscious effort to bully, cautioned Williams.

"We think of someone targeting and purposely directing people to hurt someone, and I don't know that's what goes on," she said.

Behind the technology curve

Benny Torres, CDTech's president and CEO, said his organization has made a big investment in South L.A.'s Vernon Central neighborhood, which he estimates is home to about 100,000 residents. Of those 100,000, Torres said CDTech "might have impacted 5,000 households." Which means they are likely less-tech savvy than the average L.A. household.

"From what we saw, the parents had **very little basic understanding of technology** (<http://www.oncentral.org/news/2012/05/25/funding-problems-force-shut-down-local-tech-center/>) at the beginning," he said. "And even though we built some capacity, we know they started at zero."

Which can mean, when it comes to cyberbullying, children are braving the digital frontier on their own – at least at home. Torres said if parents "understood the potential dangers of the Internet or how young people communicate with each other on the Internet," they could respond more quickly if a problem arose, whether that means talking a situation through with their children or going to the authorities.

But the current landscape is often a far cry from that.

"We have parents that are still trying to understand the school system, let alone cyberspace," said Torres.

The Pediatric Academic Societies **analyzed data** (http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2013-05/aaop-cra042613.php) from more than 15,000 public and private high school students to arrive at their figures. Torres said South L.A. youth may be more vulnerable than other communities when it comes to students' trying to respond to their bully.

"The thing that scares me is how do people protect themselves, how do people respond to cyberbullying in communities where you have such high levels of violence, for a variety of different reasons," he said. "Let's hope that young people can go to the school or counselor or teacher and say, 'Hey, this is what's going on with me. Let's have some intervention take place.'"

Torres has said in the past that South L.A. is "**still very behind**" (<http://www.oncentral.org/news/2012/07/09/united-nations-says-internet-access-basic-human-ri/>) the technology curve, with relatively limited access to the Internet and a general lack of technological training opportunities and know-how.

Internet access in L.A. and California

Research funded by the **California Emerging Technology Fund** (<http://www.cetfund.org/>) (CETF) shows that **69 percent** (http://www.ppic.org/main/publication_show.asp?i=263) of L.A. County residents had broadband Internet access at home, compared to the statewide rate of 73 percent. (That number doesn't include mobile Internet access.) L.A. is getting connected quickly, though: Just five years ago, fewer than half of the county's residents were connected.

"Generally, we've found that those who lag behind are poor neighborhoods, Latino households [and] people with disabilities," said Mary Anne Ostrom, the CETF's director of communications. About 57 percent of South L.A.'s population is Latino, according to the L.A. Times' **Mapping L.A. project** (<http://projects.latimes.com/mapping-la/neighborhoods/region/south-la/>); well over 86,000 area households make \$20,000 a year or less.

For 2012, the CETF's data also noted that in California:

- Only 60 percent of households that brought in \$40,000 a year or less had broadband at home.
- As a whole, Latinos were far behind the black, white and Asian communities in terms of broadband at home – only 58 percent had access, compared to 74 percent, 84 percent and 76 percent, respectively.
- Fewer than 60 percent of state residents who hadn't gone to college had broadband at home.
- Just over 50 percent of "noncitizens" had access at home, compared to 82 percent of U.S. citizens and 64 percent of naturalized citizens.

Ostrom added that the current digital age means "affordable, reliable access to high-speed Internet at home is essential," whether it's being used for academics, on the job hunt or to research health problems.
