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Editorial for the Special Issue on Cyberbullying

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INTRODUCTION

This Special Edition of the Journal of Social Sciences deals with a rare but monumental social change—the profound impact of electronic communications on the development of children. Prior to the twentieth century, most people would be born, live and die without ever witnessing first-hand a significant social upheaval. During the last century, however, the pace at which society evolved quickened noticeably. The spread of industrialization, city living, suburban sprawl, transportation and the Sexual Revolution marked the lives of every person in the First World and many outside of it.

In the list of such social changes, however, the overnight boom of electronic communications must rank among the most potent. Having evolved hundreds of thousands of years to communicate fairly slowly, in a blink our communication capacity far outreaches our comfort zone. We can communicate further, faster and to many more people than ever before and in so doing, we have profoundly changed the lives of people in the developed world.

Although children are by no means the only ones affected by this shift, they are doubtless the most significantly affected. While most of their communications remain-childishly-banal, their capacity for careless and intentional cruelty has been exponentially increased. With the good, comes the bad. Violence—in all its forms—is still a relatively rare event for human beings in the United States. But electronic violence is a new animal, with new motives, new understandings, new rationales and new results. We are just beginning to tap into an understanding of how, why and where it occurs.

This volume is the result of research and partnerships developed by the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center at Bridgewater State University. Our focus is on developing the current literature on bullying prevention into the realm of electronic bullying. The Journal of Social Sciences has already published important papers in the area of gender and aggression, recently in 2010, Volume 6 (Edalati and Redzuan, 2010; Edalati *et al.*, 2010).

Our research and fieldwork has increasingly honed in on bullying and the violence perpetrated online by children against their peers. The papers selected for admission into this Special Edition are:

- Cyberbullying Education for Parents: A Guide for Clinicians, by Hannah (2010). This paper gives clinicians guidance on how to address with parents the task of teaching about cyberbullying to their children, drawing from current research on gender differences and cyberbullying
- Cyberbullying Victimization and Behaviors Among Girls: Applying Research Findings in the Field, by Snell and Englander (2010). This paper reports the findings of a study on gender and cyberbullying, including differences on how boys and girls report their experiences as both victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying
- Many Sources, One Theme: Analysis of Cyberbullying Prevention and Intervention Websites, by Ahlfors (2010). In this paper, Ahlfors reports on the information sources that are publicly available and how well these resources sync with professional knowledge about cyberbullying
- Sexting, Texting, Cyberbullying and Keeping Youth Safe Online, by D'Antona *et al.* (2010). This study discusses the analysis of different methodologies in educating children about cyberbullying
- Cyber Bullying: Challenges and Strategies Faced by Juvenile Police Officers, by Thaxter (2010). Officer Thaxter, a school resource officer in Massachusetts, presents the obstacles to addressing cyberbullying with children in schools and how law enforcement can overcome these to enrich the educational opportunities about cyber behaviors
- On the Front Lines: Educating Teachers about Bullying and Prevention Methods, by Glasner (2010). This paper reports on outcome data, specific to programming designed to educate faculty and staff in K-12 schools, about cyberbullying

- **Sexting and Youth: Achieving a Rational Response**, by Willard (2010). In this paper, Nancy Willard, a prominent attorney in the field of cyberbullying, discusses the sometimes irrational response to adolescent nudity that characterizes the adult reaction to sexting.

Together, these articles help to underscore several important findings: First, online abuse (or “cyberbullying”) does not seem to always involve the same children who are at high risk for other types of aggression. Second, electronic aggression differs from its offline counterparts in the skewed ratio of intention to actual damage. Online, it’s very easy (for both adults and children) to miscalculate the impact of a carelessly angry or even simply irritated remark. In addition, children (and some adults) have a profoundly difficult time understanding the truly public nature of their online communications. Finally, the constant availability of electronic communication tempts individuals to utilize it during more awkward or difficult social exchanges, which in turn may lead to more problems socially.

The production of this Special Edition could not have been possible with our reviewers and the staff at the Journal of Social Sciences, to whom we are indebted.

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