The Impact of Cyberbullying on the Self-Esteem and Academic Functioning of Arab American Middle and High School Students

Wael Shaher Mohammed Yousef[1]

&

Al Bellamy[2]

[1]College of Technology, Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, Michigan
[2]School of Technology Studies, Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, Michigan

USA

Correspondence: Al Bellamy . School of Technology StudiesEastern Michigan University Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197.USA. E-mail: al..bellamy@emich.edu
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Wael Shaher Mohammed Yousef and Al Bellamy

Abstract

Introduction. Cyberbullying has received a considerable amount of attention within the academic and public literature. However, very little if any cyberbullying research has been conducted among Arab American students. This current study explored the impact of cyberbullying among middle and high school Arab American students on their self-esteem and academic functioning. It further explored the extent to which levels of emotional intelligence moderated these relationships.

Method. The population of this study consisted of 1,152 middle and high school students, grades 6 through 12 from four different charter schools in Wayne County in Michigan. These schools represented different ethnic groups, such as Arab Americans, African Americans, Hispanic and White.

Results. The results of the study indicate that Arab Americans experience more cyberbullying than the other ethnic groups within the study. The data illustrates that cyberbullying has an expected negative effect on student self-esteem and academic functioning among the Arab American group. There were mixed findings among the other ethnic student groups.

Discussion. The level of student emotional intelligence was shown to moderate the relationships between cyberbullying, self-esteem and academic functioning more-so among Arab Americans than for the African American and White American student groups. This finding informs school practitioners that it would be advantageous to develop programs that promote emotional intelligence among students.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Arab Americans, Academic Functioning, Emotional Intelligence

El impacto del ciberbullying sobre la autoestima y el rendimiento académico de estudiantes árabe-americanos de Secundaria
Resumen

Introducción. El acoso cibernético ha recibido una considerable atención en la literatura académica y pública. Sin embargo, muy poca o ninguna investigación de acoso cibernético se ha realizado entre los estudiantes estadounidenses árabes. Este estudio exploró el impacto de ciberacoso entre la escuela media y secundaria los estudiantes americanos árabes en su autoestima y el funcionamiento académico. Se exploró también el grado en que los niveles de inteligencia emocional moderados estas relaciones.

Método. La población de este estudio consistió en 1.152 estudiantes de secundaria y preparatoria, grados 6 al 12 de cuatro escuelas diferentes en el Condado de Wayne en Michigan (USA). Estas escuelas representan diferentes grupos étnicos, como los árabes americanos, los afroamericanos, los hispanos y los blancos.

Resultados. Los resultados del estudio indican que los árabes estadounidenses sufren más acoso cibernético que los otros grupos étnicos dentro del estudio. Los datos ilustran que el acoso cibernético tiene un efecto negativo esperado en la auto-estima y funcionamiento académico entre el grupo estadounidense de origen árabe. Hubo resultados mixtos entre los otros grupos de estudiantes étnicos.

Discusión. El nivel de inteligencia emocional estudiante se mostró a moderar las relaciones entre el acoso cibernético, la autoestima y el funcionamiento académico más así entre los estadounidenses árabes que para los grupos de estudiantes estadounidenses y negro afroamericanos. Este hallazgo informa practicantes escolares que sería ventajoso desarrollar programas que promuevan la inteligencia emocional de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: ciberbullying, árabes estadounidenses, el funcionamiento académico, inteligencia emocional

Introduction

Cyberbullying has received a considerable amount of attention within the academic and public literature (Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2007; Beran and Li, 2005; Hindujia & Patchin, 2008; Ybarra, & Mitchell, 2007; Patchin & Hinduja, 2012) within the United States. It has drawn recent empirical attention in China (Zhou et. al, (2013; Finland (Williford, et.al., (2013) and Australia (Sakellianou, et. al, (2012) as well as among other nations. Holfeld and Grabe, (2012) in a study of middle school students reported that 55% of their sample of students had experienced some form of cyber bullying.Olweus (1993) defined bullying as "A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself" Olweus (p. 9). Cyber bullying has been defined as: "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices" (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, p. 5). It also has been defined by the Belsey, (2000) as "The use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others" (P. 1). Ybarra and Mitchell (2004b) defined cyber bullying as "an overt, intentional act of aggression towards another person online" (p. 1308).

The relationship between cyber bullying experiences among Arab American students and their self-esteem and academic functioning in middle and high schools has received very little attention within the research literature. The United State of America has "the largest immigrant population in the world, indeed in world history," which contributes to making American society "one of the world's largest multiethnic societies" (Schuchman, 1997). Arab Americans are one of these multi ethnic groups coming from multiple Arab countries such as Yemen, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Oman, Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Kuwait, United Arab Emirate, Algeria, Bahrain, Libya, Syria, Qatar, and Morocco. According to the U.S. Census in 2000, there are 1.2 million Arabs in the U.S. Today there are many more.

The purpose of the current study was to determine the extent to which Arab American students in middle and high school experience cyber bullying, and the extent that cyber bullying is related to self-esteem and academic functioning. The study further explored the extent to which emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between levels of bullying

and academic functioning and self-esteem. The research also includes data collected from students from three other cultural backgrounds: African American, White and Hispanics. Comparative data between these three groups and the data from Arab American students enabled the researchers to determine similarities and differences between ethnic groups in their response to cyber bullying experiences. Data for this study was gathered from middle and high school students attending schools in a large metropolitan area.

Many of the Arab students arrive in the U.S. with language barriers, culture shock and may have experienced turmoil in their country of origin. These circumstances in and of themselves put psychological stress upon these students. Add to this the availability of the internet and the potential for cyber bullying and one finds a potentially toxic school environment that can have a tremendous impact on student self-esteem and academic functioning. Electronic intimidation is possible today because of the ready availability of a large number of digital communication technologies and social media websites, and occurs both inside and outside of school. Students are no longer safe in their own homes; these technologies extend the destructive reach of the bully. Because the United States has experienced a steady increase in immigration and the numbers of ethnic groups attending public schools, it is increasingly important for school systems to have up to date information about cyber bullying in order to avoid any additional stress on these newly arriving students.

During the teenage years, students are in a stage of development where they are developing their own specific identity (Sullivan, Clearly, & Sullivan, 2004). Socializing is almost an obsession during this time period and teasing is often a part of the socializing experience. Teasing is oftentimes viewed as a harmless way for students to test their identities and the identities of their peers. Students may accept the teasing and laugh it off or become defensive if the teasing offends their identity. Sometimes the teasing can escalate to cyberbullying.

The paper will proceed in the following manner; we first present the conceptual frameworks of the study. We will then proceed with the research questions, research methodology, a report of the results and then a summarizing discussion.

Conceptual Frameworks of Study

Impairment of Academic Functioning

The researchers Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, and Kernic (2005) stated that victims and bullies are low performers in school, while other researchers found that poor peer relationships during adolescents affect children's academic performance (Patchin and Hinduja, 2007). Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamota, and Toblin (2005) also pointed out that peer adolescent relationships and cyber bullying in school could negatively affect students' academic performance. Graham, Bellmore, and Juvonen (2003) stated that low academic performance and skipping school is due to traditional bullying among adolescents.

Graham et al. (2003) surveyed 785 students from sixth grade to eighth grade. The results of the study indicated that the victims of bullying had less interest in school than other students. Also Nansel, Haynie, and Simons-Morton (2003) stated that students who were involved in bullying and victimization were not interested in school and less engaged in academics. According to the National Association of School Psychologists, some students skipped school each day because they had fears of being bullied. Glew et al. (2005) also stated that bullying affects academic achievement. David-Ferdon and Hertz (2007) stated that students who were involved in cyber bullying as a victim or perpetrator were often struggling in school with academic performance. According to the National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Protection (2009), students who were victims of cyber bullying start to struggle in their homework and become unenthusiastic about attending school.A study conducted by Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) stated that 31% of students who were cyber bully victims reported that they are emotionally upset. They also stated that 19% of the students of cyber bully victims were extremely afraid, whereas 18% of them were very embarrassed about online harassment. They concluded that students who experience cyber bullying behaviors fall behind in school and some even drop out of school.

According to Tippett, Thompson, and Smith (2009), cyber bullying caused more harm to the students than does traditional bullying because as the use of pictures and video clips give the bully more options for tormenting the victim Students who experience cyber bullying usually suffer from depression and anxiety. They do not like to go to school and

their performance declines. They usually show anger or fear and avoid playing with their friends (Patchin & Hinduja, 2007; Willard, 2006; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004a).

Emotions and Emotional Intelligence

Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined emotional intelligence as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 189). Mayer and Salovey (1997) defined it again as:

> *The capacity to reason about emotions, and the use of emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth* (p. 197)

Online activities and interactions can heighten the emotions (Walther, 1997). According to Finn (2004), the internet can create a misunderstanding of intentions, and a misleading of the sense of relationship. Alderman (2001) indicated that bullying targets may blame themselves, and, according to Willard (2007), bullying targets believe that they deserve to be bullied and harassed, both in school and online.

Cyber bullying has many consequences such as depression, anxiety, and negative social views of oneself. (Grene, 2003; Juvonen et al., 2003; Olweus, 1999) (Cetin et. al. 2012)(Patchin and Hinduja (2007) stated in their study that 54% of cyber bully victims were negatively affected in some way, such as feeling frustration, madness, or distress. Several studies have expressed their concern with the negative emotions resulting from cyberbullying, which often has been resolved youth through self-destructive behaviors, violence between individuals and various forms of deviance (Borg 1998; Ericson, 2001; Rigby 2003; Roland 2002; Seals and Young, 2003). Litwiller & Brausch (2013) in a study among adolescents delineated violent behavior and substance abuse as mediating factors of the relationships between cyberbullying and suicidal behaviors.

The impact of cyber bullying, as stated by Breguet (2007), is that the cyber bully victims are often friendless, lack confidence, and feel humiliated. Consequently, cyber bully

victims often suffer from lowered self-esteem, hopelessness, depression and withdrawal (Patchin and Hinduja, 2007; Strom and Strom, 2005b).

Given the attention that has been given to emotions within the literature, particularly as it pertains to educational processes (Bellamy, Gore, & Sturgis, 2005; Pegalajar, Carmen, & Colmenero-Ruiz, 2014); Yusoff, & Zin, 2013), this study wanted to investigate if a student's level of emotional intelligence affected the impact of bullying on academic functioning. We are advancing the theoretical proposition that the correlation between levels of cyberbullying and perceptions of academic functioning as well as self-esteem would be weaker for students of lower emotional intelligence. An important practical implication extending from the confirmation this proposition would be to develop mechanisms within the context of the education process to enhance the emotional intelligence of students.

Self Esteem

Based upon the vast amount of literature that has documented the effect of self-esteem(Hadwin and Webster, 2013;Pavandeh, et. al., 2013) and on academic achievement, we felt that it was equally important to examine the effect that cyberbullying has on self-esteem, particularly among Arab American students. (Rosenberg, 1965),defined self-esteem as "a positive or negative attitude toward particular objects, namely, the self" (p. 30). Several studies have described the negative influence of cyberbullying on self-esteem. A study conducted by O'Moore and Kirkham (2001) on students in Ireland found that students who had been victims of bullying had lower self-esteem than students who had not been bullied; whereas, students who had not been involved in bullying had higher self-esteem than bullies. Patchin and Hinduja (2007) pointed out that self-esteem can be damaged by experiencing cyber bullying. Craig (1998), Kowalski and Limber (2007), and Ybarra and Mitchell (2004), stated that cyber bullies and their victims showed lower self-esteem than bullies or students not involved in cyber bullying. Meta-analysis research was conducted on bullying by Hawker and Boulton, (2000).Their analysis revealed that victims of bullying are more depressed and had lower self-esteem than their non-bullied peers.: Sampasa-Kanyinga et.al.,(2014) in a study of Canadian middle and high school students described the breakfast skipping as a negative outcome of cyberbullying.

According to Salmivalli (1998) victims of bullying have low self-esteem because they blame themselves for attacks and being failures. Students, who have low self-esteem usually find difficulty in making friends, and tend to become isolated and lonely at school (Olweus, 1993c). Olweus (1993a),proposed that the individuals who have low self-esteem usually are unconfident, ignored and have unbalanced emotions. Studies conducted by Hunt (2012 and Modecki et. al (2013), also revealed a negative relationship between cyberbullying and victim self-esteem.

Research Questions

1. What are the differences among Arab American, White, Black and Hispanic American students in their frequency of being bullied?

2. What is the relationship between cyberbullying and academic functioning and self-esteem among Arab American Students?

3. To what degree is the correlations between cyberbullying, self-esteem, and academic functioning different or similar among students of other ethnic groups and Arab Americans?

4. To what extent does emotional intelligence moderate the relationship between cyberbullying and academic functioning and self-esteem among Arab American Students?

5. To what extent does emotional intelligence moderate the relationship between cyberbullying and academic functioning and self-esteem among students of other ethnic groups?

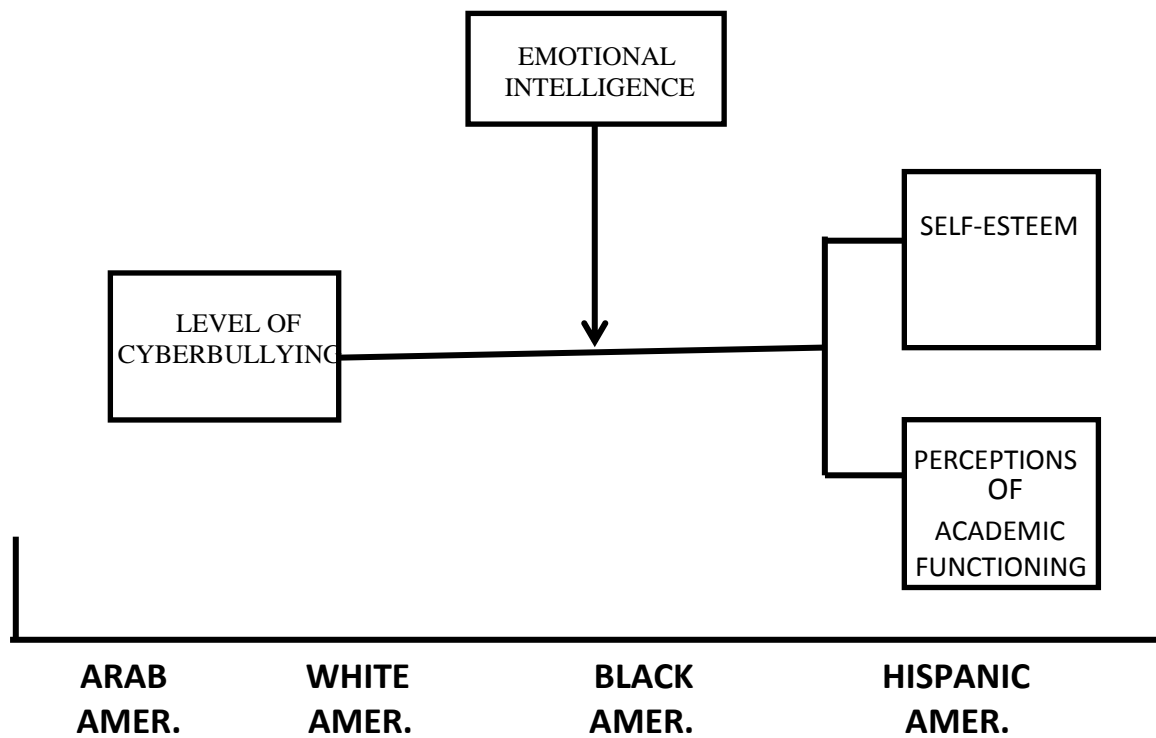Figure 1 describes the conceptual model of the study.

Figure 1. **Conceptual Model of Study**

Method

Participants

This study was conducted among 1,030 middle and high school students within Arab American charter schools located in a large Midwestern metropolitan area. These schools were relatively diverse in regards to ethnicity. Table 1. describes the ethnicity/race distribution within the study.Since the largest groups were Arab Americans, White American, African-American and Hispanic American, the data analysis of this study are confined to these four ethnic groups. The study consisted of 442 males and 588 females. Table 2 illustrates the grade distribution.

Table 1. **Ethnicity/Race Distribution**

	Number	Percent
Arab American	367	35.6
Bangladeshi	4	0.4
Indian	13	1.3
Pakistani	2	0.2
African-American	155	15.0
White American	358	34.8
Hispanic American	110	10.7
Native American/Native Alaskan	13	1.3
Others	8	0.8
Total	1,030	100.0

Table 2. **Grade distribution**

Grade	Number	Percent
6	130	12.6
7	159	15.4
8	185	18.0
9	212	20.6
10	121	11.7
11	134	13.0
12	89	8.6
Total	1,030	100.0

Instrumentation

The researcher used a survey tool, which consists of four scales: a Cyber Bullying Scale, a Self-Esteem Scale, an Emotional Intelligence Scale (EQ), and The Impact on Career and Educational Function (ICEF) Scale (Linn, 1999). The questionnaire included four

questions regarding the student's gender, school, grade, and ethnicity/race as well as 64 multiple choice questions about cyber bullying, self-esteem, emotional intelligence and academic functioning. The entire survey included 68 questions.

Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, and Tippett Cyber Bullying Scale

The researchersutilized a modified version of the Cyber Bullying Scale that was developed by Smithet al. (2006). The modified version consisted of 13 items which asked students to describe the frequency in which they had been cyberbullied inside and outside of school during the past 3 months. The scale also included questions regarding other aspects of bullying such as identifying the bully. This study, however, will focus on the frequency of bullying questions which consisted of format that queried the frequency of being bullied.The responses were ranked on a scale from 0 to 4 with 0 meaning the respondents had never been cyber bullied and 4 meaning the respondents had been cyber bullied as much as several times per week. The Chronbach Alpha reliability for this scale was .90 for the present study.

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale

The Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, (1965) was used to identify levels of student self-esteem. This scale consisted of 10 items utilizing a Likert-type format of: 1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *disagree*, and 4 = *strongly disagree*. The Chronbach Alpha reliability of the scale within the present study was .72.

Schutte's Emotional Intelligence Scale

The Schutte's Emotional Intelligence Scale, (1998)used to measure students' emotional intelligence. This scale consisted of 33 itemsutilizing a five-point response scale. The Chronbach Alpha for the scale was .94.

Impairment of Academic Functioning Scale

The Impact on Career and Educational Functioning (ICEF) Scale (Linn, 1999) was utilized to measure impairment of academic functioning. This scale consists of 18 items. A modified version consisting of 8 items was used for the current study.The scale items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale 0 = *not at all*, 1 = *a little bit*, 2 = *some*, 3 = *quite a bit*, and 4 = *most of the time*. This scale revealed a Chronbach alpha reliability score of .60.

Procedure

The survey was implemented through Survey Monkey. Students were required to submit a consent to participate form. Permission to implement the survey was gathered from each of the participating high schools.

Data analysis

Data collected via Survey Monkey was transferred to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Data was analyzed utilizing the Pearson Moment Correlation procedure along with descriptive statistics.

Results

1. *What are the differences among Arab American, White, Black and Hispanic American students in theirfrequency of being bullied?*

As revealed in Table 3, Arab Americans reported the highest number of times being cyberbullied while in school (42%) followed by White American students. Each of these two groups also reported the highest level of cyberbullying outside of school with White American students reporting 42% and Arab Americans reporting 41% respectively. What is interesting about these findings is that African and Hispanic American students report significantly lower rates of cyberbullying within both categories.

Table 3. **Number of Times Students Have Been Cyber Bullied Victims In and Outside of School**

Ethnicity	Cyber Bully In School				Cyber Bully Outside of School			
	N	%	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	%	Mean	Standard Deviation
Arab American	157	42.0	2.92	1.06	97	41.0	2.71	1.00
African-American	50	13.0	3.14	1.16	17	7.0	2.76	1.03
White American	125	33.0	2.89	1.01	101	42.0	2.41	0.79
Hispanic American	43	12.0	2.88	1.05	24	10.0	2.50	0.98
Total	375	100.0	2.94	1.05	239	100.0	2.59	0.94

2. *What is the relationship between cyberbullying and academic functioning and self-esteem among Arab American Students?*

The results in Table 4 reveal that cyberbullying has a moderate and statistically significant effect on both self-esteem and academic functioning among Arab American students. The direction of the relationships is negative indicating that increases in cyberbullying are associated with a decrease in self-esteem and academic functioning for both categories of cyberbullying.

Table 4. **Correlations Between Cyber Bullying and Self Esteem and Academic Functioning Moderated By High and Low Emotional Intelligence**

	How often have you been Cyber bullied in school the past 3 months?		How often have you been cyber bullied out of school the Past three months?	
	Self-Esteem	Academ. Funct.	Self-Esteem	Academ. Funct.
Arab Amer. Students (n=367)				
Low EQ	-.276**	.-261**	-.205*	.233**
High EQ	-.172	.123	-.282**	.145
White Amer. Students (n=358)				
Low EQ	-.225	.213	-.103	-.060
High EQ	.124	-.076	-.078	.110
Afro. Amer. Students (n=155)				
Low EQ	-.125	.079	-.154	.313
High EQ	-.140	.276**	-.103	-.058
Hispanic Amer. Students (n=110)				
Low EQ	-.325*	-.057	-.337*	.196
High EQ	-.323*	-.388*	-.236	-.069

*p$\leq$.05   **p$\leq$.00 Two-tailed

3. *To what degree are the correlations between cyberbullying, self-esteem, and academic functioning different or similar among students of other ethnic groups and Arab Americans?*

Table 4 illustrates that the only ethnic group that has statistically significant correlations between cyberbullying, self-esteem and academic functioning for both cyberbullying categories is the Arab American student group. The White American and

African student groups only reveal statistically significant correlations within one cyberbullying category. There is positive correlation between in school bullying and academic functioning among the African American students which indicates that higher levels of cyberbullying leads to higher academic functioning among this group students. This is a very surprising finding.The Hispanic American student group reveals the strongest correlations between cyberbullying, self-esteem, and academic functioning. However, this finding is found only within the cyberbullying while in school category.

4. *To what extent does emotional intelligence moderate the relationship between cyberbullying and academic functioning and self-esteem among Arab American Students?*

Table 4 presents some interesting findings regarding the extent to which the level of emotional intelligence among Arab Americans impacts the relationships between cyberbullying, self-esteem, and academic functioning. Relatively moderate and statistically significant correlations are revealed among all of the variables for both categories of cyberbullying among Arab American students with low emotional intelligence. The correlations within the cyberbullying within school category are stronger than those revealed for the direct correlations among Arab American students. However, only onestatistically significant correlation is shown (self-esteem within the out of school category) among students with high emotional intelligence.This indicates that high emotional intelligence among Arab Students insulates them from the negative effects of cyberbullying, at least to a certain degree. This is particularly the case for in-school cyberbullying.

5. *To what extent does emotional intelligence moderate the relationship between cyberbullying and academic functioning and self-esteem among students of other ethnic groups?*

In comparison to the Arab American students (Table 4), the level of emotional intelligence among the White and Black American student groups does not moderate the relationship between cyberbullying and self-esteem and academic functioning. There are no statistically significant relationships revealed among the White student group and only one significant correlation among the Black American student group – cyberbullying in school and academic functioning. This correlation, however, is not substantially different from the direct correlation.For the Hispanic American student group on the other hand, there is a

notable difference revealed between the direct and moderated correlations for the cyberbullying and academic functioning variables within the in-school cyberbullying category. The direct relationship indicates a relatively small and statistically insignificant correlation. The same correlation among the high emotional intelligence sub-category reveals a moderately strong and statistically significant negative correlation. This finding being revealed within the high emotional intelligence category is indeed surprising. This is contrary to the correlation found among the Arab American group.

Discussion

There are very few, if any, studies that have been conducted on the effect of Cyberbullying on the psychological and educational outcomes among Arab American students.The results of this current study indicate that Arab American students are indeed victims of cyberbullying.It further illustrates that the percentage of victims among Arab Americans is significantly higher than African American, White American and Hispanic students. Cyberbullying has been shown by previous studies conducted among Non-Arab American student groups to negatively affect student self-esteem and academic functioning. The current study illustrates that this is also the case among Arab American students. The findings of this study strongly suggest that other studies should be undertaken that utilize a qualitative methodological approach that would generate more substantial information regarding the

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