Virtual Reality: How Students’ Self-Perception of Invincibility Online Impacts College Campuses

Ashlei Tobin-Robertson, Assistant Director of Community Standards & Student Conduct, University of Washington
Jordan Draper, Dean of Students, The College of New Jersey
Kevin L. Pitt, Director of Student Conduct, Rutgers University
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Introduction

Advancement of Technology + Risk-Taking Behavior = Feeling of Invincibility Online
Gen Z Upbringing & Culture
Gen Z Upbringing & Culture

According to Coyne, Padilla-Walker & Howard (2013), for students born in the 1990s:

- computers were in many homes during their childhood
- the number of websites has risen exponentially throughout their life
- social media websites have flourished as they grow older
- smartphones were commonplace in high school
Gen Z Upbringing & Culture

**How Often Teens Spend Online**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Almost Constantly</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several Times a Day</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Often</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pew Research Center (2018)

**Percentage of Students Who Log In Multiple Times a Day**

- Facebook: 55%
- Instagram: 52%
- Snapchat: 52%

Source: Criteo (2017)

Advancement of Technology
“Email has become the new ‘formal’ communication, while texts and tweets remain enclaves for the casual.”

“If you want to reach them, you’d better send a text – emails are oft ignored.”

“A phone has been primarily a video game, direction finder, electronic telegraph, and research library.”

“They have always been able to refer to Wikipedia.”

Risk Taking Behaviors
There are many studies that examine the concept of risk-taking among college students examining college students’ choices about sex, alcohol and drugs.

Research shows that college students ignore risks due to developmental factors that create a form of egocentrism that allows individuals to feel invincible (Ravert & Zimet, 2009).
Risk-Taking Behavior

- Generally, participating in risky behaviors sometimes requires an individual to ignore or fail to recognize the associated negative consequences (Ravert, et. al., 2009).

- Studies about the period of emerging adulthood lead to conclusions about a disproportional amount of irresponsible behavior, sensation seeking and risk taking compared to other developmental eras in life (Arnett, 1992, 2000, 2007; Bradley & Wildman, 2002; Duangpatra, Bradley & Glendon, 2009; LaBrie, Shaffer, LaPlante & Wechsler, 2003; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Worthy, Jonkman & Blinn-Pike, 2010).
Risk-Taking Behavior

1 in 4 College Students Have an STI (Sexually Transmitted Infection)

15-24 year-olds only account for a little over ¼ of sexually active Americans

27% 50%

Yet they make up half of all newly diagnosed STIs each year

The probability of unprotected casual sex increased from seven percent to 16 percent per hookup

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2013), getSTDtested (2011); Bearak (2014)
Risk-Taking Behavior

1 in 2 College Students Binge Drink or Abuse Prescription Drugs

1 in 4 Students Who Binge Drink or Abuse Drugs Meet the Medical Definition of Dependence – THREE Times the Rate of the General Population

4 in 10 College Student Drinkers Admit to Binge Drinking at Least Once Within Two Weeks of Being Surveyed

Source: Drug Watch (2010)
Risk-Taking Behavior

50% to 90% Percentage of College Students Who Cheat

55% of College Students Involved in Clubs, Teams, and Organizations Experience Hazing

From 2005-2014, the number of reported disciplinary actions steadily rose.

Based on reported data through the Clery Act

Sources: Biswas (2013); Allan & Madden (2008); U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education

Academic & Non-Academic Misconduct
Feeling of Invincibility Online
Feeling of Invincibility Online

- There are very few studies regarding risk-taking behavior related to technology.
- However, connections can be made among the prevalence of technology, the sense of invincibility and risk-taking behavior.
Feeling of Invincibility Online

Current college students are unlike any other peer group before due to the advances in technology and the overall risk-taking phenomenon.

With new apps and online forums, students feel more anonymous with their risk-taking behavior that impacts campus. Students have a sense of invincibility where they do not connect the decisions they make with their physical self.
Feeling of Invincibility Online

Bullying

Stalking

Trolling

Hacking

Impersonation “Catfishing”

Types of Online Abuse
What are some cases of online abuse on your campus?
Feeling of Invincibility Online

- The number of reported instances of online misconduct on college campuses has increased over the years as students use Twitter, Facebook, Yik Yak and other applications and internet sites (Lindsay & Krysik, 2012; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012; Rafferty, 2011; Reyns, Henson & Fisher, 2012).
Feeling of Invincibility Online

- Studies show that students intentionally present negative portrayals of self and negative posts because they find comfort in anonymity and may think, “‘If I don’t know them, why should I care what kind of image I portray?’” (Peluchette & Karl, 2009, p.35).

- Moreover, when individuals decide to participate in cyber aggression, anonymity is considered a significant motivator (Wright, 2013).
Feeling of Invincibility Online

- Mason (2008) posits that the distance electronic communication provides creates a lack of restraint and the individual feels as if anonymity guards against the penalties of risky behavior online.

- Additionally, “researchers argue that the anonymity of online communication encourages impulsive reactions, resulting in disinhibited behaviors, such as cyber aggression…” (Wright, 2013, p. 859).
Feeling of Invincibility Online

- When normal self-control is lost, anonymity may allow someone to avoid retaliation or the consequences of their actions, resulting in the belief that their behaviors are ‘masked’ in the online environment” (Wright, 2013, p. 859).

- Some users do not understand the permanency of posting online and believe their decisions to participate in online risky behavior will eventually disappear (Wright, 2013).
IMPACT ON CAMPUS
Impact on Campus

- As technology continues to create facades for students who use online communication technology, the number of challenges for student affairs professionals increases.

- Students are dissociating themselves from their actions online.

- It seems as if students are unable to comprehend the impact their online actions have on the “real world”.
Impact on Campus

- Students are exposed to more high-risk behavior in their adolescents as a result of their online interactions and increase in technology.

- These high-risk behaviors increase negative behavior in students’ “real life” because students role model what is presented to them through socialization.
What are some things your campus is doing regarding this topic?
Best Practices

- As a result, it is imperative that student affairs professionals are proactive with education for college students.

- Additionally, it is even more important to be able to balance the impact the Internet has on our campuses and students with Free Speech.

- We must educate students about the permanency of online posts and the potential impact it will have on their future.
Best Practices

- We should encourage students to seek “good feedback” about positive posts on Facebook, to chat about affirmative topics online, neurotically stay up to date with current events, and find a balance with face-to-face interactions.

- As a result of education, a goal for administrators should be to prevent future attacks on social media sites that are used to demean and outcast others.
Conclusion

- We must work proactively against online misconduct.
- It is imperative to stay up to date on technology and current research and trends.
- And, we must role model positive behavior online.
- Overall, it is our goal to continue to create safe places for our students on campus and online.


References


Questions?

Ashlei Tobin-Robertson
ashleitr@uw.edu

Jordan Draper
draperj@tcnj.edu

Kevin Pitt
kevin.pitt@echo.rutgers.edu