

Cyberbullies: The New Realm

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ABSTRACT

Bullying is deeply engrained in American culture because the society is at the pinnacle of capitalistic competition and power. It has become quite an epidemic in schools and workforce [1]; [2]. School bullying is characterized by unwanted and repeated aggression among students in the presence of a power imbalance and with the intent to cause fear or distress [3]. Here, we will discuss how, with new technologies, bullying has entered a new realm.

Keywords: *Cyber bullying, cyber incivility, bullying*

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Introduction:

Cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying refers to any harassment that occurs via the internet, cell phones or other devices. Communication technology is used to intentionally harm others through hostile behavior such as sending text messages and posting ugly comments on the internet. The National Crime Prevention Council defines cyber-bullying as “the process of using the Internet, cell phones or other devices to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person (<https://definitions.uslegal.com/c/cyber-bullying/>).”

Cyber-bullying can be done via any device used to electronically communicate. Because of the very nature of cyber-bullying, cyberbullies can remain anonymous, and the abuse of victims may last for months or years. The anonymity aspect of cyber-bullying may make this form of bullying even more attractive than traditional bullying. While some anonymity means the bully could target someone he or she does not even know, another side of anonymity is the bully can easily create a false identity which decreases the chance of being caught. This may lead to permanent humiliation because of the infinite nature of the Internet [4]. The anonymity factor also allows the bully to remain hidden while at the same time engaging multiple individuals to view the act [5], [4], including international audiences [4].

Technology today, with its ease of usage as well as able to be secret, has allowed cyber-bullying to be an enormous problem. Students are highly involved in cyber-bullying. The rise of social media such as Facebook, twitter, Twitter, My Space, Facetime, Skype, texting, sexting, ULOOP, OOVVOO, and blogs provides a number of anonymous avenues to use for cyber-bullying. This also gives numerous platforms for instant anonymous communication via the internet, allowing freedom, bravery, sometimes secrecy, and the choice to be assaultive in behavior, where normal face-to-face interaction would not lend itself to such actions [6]. According to a study by Pew Research Center, communication at the fingertips of 12-17-year-old are now at 75% owning cell phones and is up from 45% in 2004. And of those owning cell phones one out of three teens sends 3,000 texts per month [7].

States and corporations are starting to fight back. For example, in June, 2018, the State of Alabama passed The Jamari Terrell Williams Student Bullying Prevention Act, No. 2018-472. This law defines bullying as a continuous pattern of intentional behavior on or off of school property, on a school bus, or at a school-sponsored function including, but not limited to, cyber-bullying or written, electronic, verbal, or physical actions that are reasonably perceived as being motivated by any characteristic of a student, or by the association of a student with an individual who has a particular characteristic, if the characteristic falls into one of the categories of personal characteristics contained in the Jamari Terrell Williams Student Bullying Prevention Act. To constitute bullying, a pattern of behavior may do any of the following:

- Place a student in reasonable fear of harm to his or her person or damage to his or her property.
- Have the effect of substantially interfering with the educational performance, opportunities, or benefits of a student.
- Have an effect of substantially disrupting or interfering with the orderly operation of the school.
- Have the effect of creating a hostile environment in the school, on the school property, on a school bus, or at a school sponsored function.
- Have the effect of being sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive enough to create an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for a student (11).

Over 30% of the students in one study identified as involved in cyber-bullying, as victims or perpetrators, and one in four of the students (25.7%) reported having been involved in cyber-bullying as both bully and victim in a three-month period [8].

Females were over-represented among cyberbullies, victims, and bully victims. The psychosocial characteristics of cyber victims and bully victims included externalizing behaviors, and low self-esteem. Cyberbullies did not endorse any psychosocial symptoms of maladjustment. Cyberbully victims and victims of both face-to-face and cyber-bullying exhibited the poorest psychosocial adjustment. Externalizing behaviors were most predictive of cyber victim status. Increased awareness about the use of technology as a vehicle for bullying and identification of potential problems associated with cyber-bullying and victimization will aid parents, educators, and psychologists in developing intervention and prevention strategies [7].

Cyber-bullying definition

Technological advances have created new ways for one child to bully another. A common form is the cell phone to bully using text (txt) messaging to send threats or abuse. Bullies often find a way to hide their phone numbers from the victim. Many teenagers use the Internet to create Web logs or "blogs," which are online journals or diaries. Blogs can be easily accessed by anyone on the Internet and are easy to set up and maintain. Some teenagers use personal information gathered from another person's blog in hurtful ways such as spreading rumors or gossip.

Cyber-bullying can be defined as bullying through technology by using email, instant messaging, chat room exchanges, websites, text messages, or images sent to a cellular phone or any digital technology. Cyber-bullying may include:

- Impersonation which deals with pretending to be someone else by breaking into a person's account and sending messages on that person's profile in order to damage that person's reputation.
- Denigration which deals with sending or posting gossip or rumors about a person in order to damage the person's reputation.
- Cyberstalking which deals with repeated online messages that include threats of harm, violence and intimidation which make a person afraid for his safety.
- Outing which deals with sharing someone's personal information that should not be shared with others.
- Trickery which deals with convincing someone to reveal secret or embarrassing information, and placing this information online.
- Exclusion which deals with intentional exclusion of someone from an online group.
- Flaming which deals with online fights where people send or post messages that are angry and vulgar[9].
- It takes various forms, such as: Harassment which deals with online messages that are repeatedly offensive, rude and insulting.

However, with the exponential growth of communication technologies the cyberbullies have almost limitless access to instrument such as the cell phones, Internet, chat rooms, online forums, Myspace, Facebook, America Online, Incorporated (AOL), Yik Yak, Instagram, Twitter, Google+, Snap Chat, Social Media, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, Text Message, Instant Message, Email, apps, online in social media, forums, or gaming, instant messaging, chat room exchanges, websites, Web logs or "blogs," which are online journals or diaries, phone calls ... to help them in bullying being proliferated [10]; [7]; [11]; [12]; [13];[14]; [15]; [16].

A base definition would be making anonymous, or abusive phone calls or electronic messages using a public telecommunication system:

- To send a message or other matter that is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene, or menacing character; or
- To cause annoyance, inconvenience, or needless anxiety to another, or to persistently send a message that the person knows to be false [17]; [1].

It is known that cyber-bullying can lead to physical and psychological damage for the one who is bullied [18]; [19]. Specifically, cyber-bullying can lead to issues involving self-esteem, anxiety, anger, depression, avoidance sometimes violence and suicide [20]. In addition, physical effects can include trouble sleeping at night, unexpected stomach aches, headaches, unexplained weight gain or weight loss [9]. However, with technology there is no escape from those who cyberbully – victimization is ongoing, the images/posts can be distributed world-wide and cannot be changed; and the cyberbullies are anonymous.

A student (or adult) who has been cyberbullied may exhibit some of the following signs in addition to the psychological and physical signs of one who is bullied [28]:

- Appears upset about sharing texts with others about online activity

- Appears anxious about receiving texts/emails, or walking away from the computer during while using the computer
- Deletes accounts or blocks others online suddenly
- Exhibits visual changes after using social media e.g., face appearance, mood swings.
- Spends less time on the phone or the computer
- Seems uncomfortable about attending courses, or pretends to be ill
- Withdraws from friends and family, and shows a lack of interest in social activities
- Experiences a decline in academic performance.

As noted above the authors included adults as being targets of cyber-bullying. Including adults is important because *cyber-bullying in the workplace is often overlooked*. The following statements by the Cyber-bullying Research Center are not supported by the authors. Cyber-bullying Research Center states we tend to explicitly focus our attention on adolescents when we refer to cyber-bullying. Many people use the term bullying to refer to a wide variety of behaviors between individuals of varying ages. We feel, though, that it is more appropriate to reserve the term bullying, and therefore also cyber-bullying, for the kinds of behaviors we describe below as they occur between adolescent peers. While these behaviors often occur among adults as well, it is not usually proper to call the incidents bullying. We acknowledge that there is some debate about this distinction, but we want to be clear who and what we are focusing on in our research.

Definition Summary:

Is cyber-bullying essentially the same as bullying, or is it a qualitatively different activity? The lack of a consensual, nuanced definition has limited the field's ability to examine these issues. Evidence suggests that being a perpetrator of one is related to being a perpetrator of the other; furthermore, strong relationships can also be noted between being a victim of either type of attack. It also seems that both types of social cruelty have a psychological impact, although the effects of being cyberbullied may be worse than those of being bullied in a traditional sense (evidence here is by no means definitive). A complicating factor is that the 3 characteristics that define bullying (intent, repetition, and power imbalance) do not always translate well into digital behaviors. Qualities specific to digital environments often render cyber-bullying and bullying different in circumstances, motivations, and outcomes. To make significant progress in addressing cyber-bullying, certain key research questions need to be addressed. These are as follows: How can we define, distinguish between, and understand the nature of cyber-bullying and other forms of digital conflict and cruelty, including online harassment and sexual harassment? Once we have a functional taxonomy of the different types of digital cruelty, what are the short- and long-term effects of exposure to or participation in these social behaviors? What are the idiosyncratic characteristics of digital communication that users can be taught? Finally, how can we apply this information to develop and evaluate effective prevention programs? [21].

Participants in Bullying/Cyber-bullying

Bullying is an interacting multi-factored phenomenon. Historically bullying has been based on a triad: victim, bully, and bystander. With the advent of cyber-bullying the 90 pound weakling can now be the bully and that the triad has changed by decreasing the role of the bystander. Bullying has in the eyes of the public been a male arena, while not true, the role of the female bully has come to the public's attention. Researchers agree that bullying is worldwide in scope and negatively impacts the general public, especially school culture, and cyber-bullying just increases the scale [22]; [23]. However, it is appealing to be able to compare groups and the general perception is that roles are static, roles can and do vary [24].

Roles in Cyber-bullying

Are the roles in cyber-bullying different than Traditional bullying? According to [25] the six different categories of participants in offline bullying within the group context are: bully, victim, outsider, assistant of the bully, reinforcer of the bully, and defender of the victim. Using peer-nominations, they found that 8.2% of the participants could be assigned the role of "bully", 11.7% "victim", 23.7% "outsider", 6.8% "assistant of the bully", 19.5% "reinforcer of the bully", and 17.3% the role of "defender of the victim". There also was a share of students (12.7%) that could not be assigned a clear role in the bullying process.

In cyber-bullying bystanders are placed into sub-categories of outsider, reinforcer of the bully, defender of the victim (16). The role of the bystanders is crucial in offline bullying because bystanders signalize which social behavior is acceptable within the group and their behavior defines the social norm within that specific group. Bystanders' failure to intervene in bullying situations is interpreted as approval of the behavior [26]. These six categories would collapse [25] six roles into four main types of bystander:

- followers (assistants) - do not initiate, but take an active role in the bullying behaviour

- supporters (reinforcers) - do not actively attack the target, but give positive feedback to the initiator, providing an audience by laughing and making other encouraging gestures
- defenders - dislike the bullying and try to help the target by intervening, getting teacher support (using safe telling) or providing direct support to the target
- outsiders - stay away, do not taking sides with anyone or become actively involved, but allow the bullying to continue by their 'silent approval'.

Where traditional bullying has the outlier victim-bully, the cyber-bullying outlier participants are called “combined bullies.” Co-occurrence is where the traditional bully remains a traditional bully but also becomes a cyberbully [27]. Combined bullies are differentiated group of bullies depending on their involvement in traditional bullying and cyber-bullying and combined bullies show the students who bullied others both traditionally and in cyberspace had most adjustment problems compared with all other students. In a second study, combined bullies pursued more instrumental motives (like power, affiliation and fun) when harassing others indicating that these students are comparatively conscious about their actions. They bully others not only to cope with their anger, but also to reach particular goals [19];[28]; [29]; [30]; [31]; [32]; [19].

The Differences between Cyber-bullying and Traditional Bullying

1. Anonymity: How the Internet Protects the Bully

Allot of cyber-bullying can be done anonymously, you may not be sure who is targeting you. Since cyber bullies can't see your reaction, they will often go much further in their harassment or ridicule than they would face to face with you. It's also very important that you don't seek revenge on a cyber bully by becoming a cyber bully yourself. Again, it will only make the problem worse and could result in serious legal consequences for you.

Cyber-bullying proxy is using others to help cyber bully the victim, either with or without the accomplice's knowledge. " People say sticks and stones may break your bones, but names can never hurt you, but that's not true. Words can hurt".

1. Cyber-bullying Can Happen Anywhere, Anytime
2. Cyber-bullying Incidents Can Go Viral
3. There Is a Lot Less Remorse in the Online World.
4. Location

Location, location, location is very important in anything we do and cyber-bullying is no exception. Coates and Vickerman [33] provide a lead into where cyber-bullying takes place. Cyber-bullying takes place were supervision and security is not adequate.

This traditional view of bullying location has been destroyed with the advent of cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying can now be done in many different ways around the world. Cyber-bullying can happen anywhere at any time, even in places where you normally feel safe, such as home [32].

Conclusion:

The world has changed over the last half century with the advent of the internet and it affects history and culture. Bullying has been part of human civilization since the beginning. Cyber-bullying is a product of the Information Age and far exceeds classic bullying in its ability to rapidly humiliate a target child.No one, nowhere, can a person hide, be it school, workplace, or home without being subject to cyber-bullying that is always building and growing beyond what it was before.

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