



Report on Cyber- Harassment

A brief synopsis on the modern-day
bully concerning social media.

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Definition:

“the use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature.” -*Google.com*

By definition, cyberbullying or cyber-harassment is a variant of traditional bullying using electronic means via social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp ect. wherein the victim is bullied by sometimes anonymous individuals. Examples of Cyberbullying include: Verbal harassment, verbal threats and the deterioration of the victim’s self-esteem.

With over 25% of adolescents experiencing cyber-bullying worldwide, it has truly become a modern-day blight upon the future generations.

Differences between cyber and traditional bullying

Firstly, we’ll take a look at where cyberbullying differentiates from traditional bullying:

Because of the use of social media platforms, cyberbullying is no longer restricted to many of the same restrictions observed in its traditional variant. Where as traditional bullying was previously encountered solely on the school playground or office workspace, now with the use of the internet, cyberbullying offenses can occur at any place and at any time. Individuals are often granted some sense of anonymity allowing the bully to disregard any notion of responsibility for their actions. This is where cyberbullying or cyber-harassment differs yet again from traditional bullying wherein the situation is direct, personal and

	Cyberbullying	Traditional bullying
Occurrence	Happens electronically and anonymously	Happens physically and directly
Focus	Focuses on the deterioration of the victim’s mental well-being	Mostly emphasises the exploitation of the individual, their property or their low self-esteem to empower the offender.
Method	In cyberbullying blackmailing, verbal threatening and social stature play key roles in the attempts to reduce the victim’s social and detached personal life.	In traditional bullying the victim may be physically assaulted.

often times physical. Due to the ease of which offenses can occur against innocent individuals more offenses can occur in a shorter period of time. The amount of overall offenses against these individuals are directly proportional to the amount of offenders that have access to the internet at any given time. Traditional bullying is often restricted to being remote and extremely personal as opposed to cyberbullying, which does not have these same restrictions applied to this variation of harassment. The method of the offenses also differs slightly between these two forms of bullying. Cyberbullying tends to be more mentally harmful to the victim as opposed to traditional bullying wherein the emphasis is placed more on victim in physically appearance and well-being. In the case of cyberbullying, methods such as verbal threatening, verbal intimidation, social stature and blackmailing play key roles in the offenses committed. This could at first glance be seen as a positive in respect to the alternative yet when we take a deeper look into the victims behaviour after one or more cyber offenses, we can clearly observe that

cyberbullying may be more harmful in to today's age where we as humans have become almost dependant on technology.

Possible reasons for occurring offenses

In this section we will be taking a look at the personal lives of both the offender and their victim.

To understand the reason behind the offense we have to peer into the personal lives of the offender to find a reason for the negative behaviour they display towards their victims. In most cases the bully experiences certain negative and sometimes even traumatic events over the course of their lives, some of which may yet be recurring or currently present in their own personal lives at the time that the offence was committed. 9 out of 10 times this is proven to be the direct cause of their negative social behaviour and sometimes violent tendencies. Understanding this is the key to understanding the potential reasons certain individuals choose to commit acts of harassment. Bullying is in itself merely an act of deflecting or the projection of negative emotions and emotional stress in an unhealthy and harmful manner. There are countless reasons for such behaviour but most can be categorised into three distinct categories.

The first is by far the most common and can be summarized as **assertion of control** or **assertion of dominance**. This is a relationship of power between the victim and the offender wherein the offender asserts control over the current situation by means of verbal threating and/or physical violent behaviour. This is commonly caused by the bully feeling a lack of control or freedom in their separate personal lives such as social status or a controlling partner/ authority figure. By forcefully asserting control over a person the bully feels empowered enough to then project all the negative emotions they harbour towards their "controller" onto their victim.

Summary: Bullies that fall into the first category empower themselves by asserting control over their victim because they feel powerless in other areas of their lives.

The second category deals with the offender's mental status. The bullies of this category experience some form of **self- image dysphoria**. They might find themselves lacking in certain areas of life some of which are fixed and unchangeable. Examples of this may vary from body-image dysphoria all the way to major mental disorders such as bipolarism or even schizophrenia. *(The latter is extremely rare but when such a case is encountered the individual can prove to be unstable and overly dangerous. In cases such as this the offender can be viewed as a victim in their own right due to the fact that cases of serious mental disorders, if left unidentified and unmanaged, can result in the offender committing heinous acts towards innocents without the ability to control their behaviour. When this occurs the offender will then be placed into to both the first and second category as they are unable to assert control over themselves due to their mental instability. However more often than not, this is not the case when dealing with the average bully).* A bully with some minor metal disorder such as body dysphoria will project their own emotional distress onto their victims.

Summary: Bullies that fall into the second category project their own negative emotions towards themselves onto their victims to make themselves feel more complete.

The third and final category a bully can fall into is **behavioral imitation**, a type of non-social behaviour that occurs more often than we'd like to admit. Based on the bully's social status or personal status with a witnessing bystander, the bystander in question may also commit acts of non-social behaviour towards the victim in an attempt to gain popularity or approval from the offender. Again, to reiterate, the bystander may become an accomplice to the offense based on the offender's social status or their personal relationship with the bystander. It then stands to reason if the bully has a high social status the bystander may choose to aid in the offence in the hopes to raise their own social status. If the bully has a negative

or low social status, then the resulting action of the bystander will differ drastically. Depending on the bystander's personality type and their own mental resilience they could choose to intervene or simply ignore the offence taking place. Some may view the bystander as an indirect accomplice to the offence if they choose not to intervene, however doing so may put the bystander at risk of becoming a potential victim of the offender. It is basic human behaviour to preserve the safety of one's self and in some individuals the emotional stress of the situation can have a crippling effect. (*This is highly dependant on the bystander's personality and psychological resilience*) If the bystander has a positive personal relationship with the bully they may also choose to aid in the offence against the victim thereby transferring their situational status from bystander to accomplice. Behavioural imitation can be observed in almost every case of cyber-harassment resulting in the initial offence growing exponentially more damaging to the victim.

Summary: People may aid in committing offenses against others to gain personal fame or to raise their social status, thus placing them in the third category of bullying.

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Cyberspace vs. direct conflict

The revolution of technology since the early 90's has given way to a new and ingenious method of communication. With the birth of the world wide network we know as the internet came many amazing new opportunities, opportunities to meet new people, travel around the world without the need to leave your house and...many new opportunities to darken the bright days of countless individuals.

Since its inception, the internet was designed to connect people who would otherwise be completely unaware of each-other. This was extremely beneficial to many, but throughout its evolution many of its flaws started to creep into the light. What used to be restricted to a direct and personal encounter, now had the opportunity to occur at a moment's notice when traditional bullying transformed into a far greater danger. In the dark corners of social media obscured from common knowledge, cyber-harassment or cyberbullying is a very real and painful situation to some. Mostly brushed off as mere distasteful commentators and critics, cyber-bullies often get away with offenses that are normally unacceptable and scorned about in public. So we have to ask ourselves why it is acceptable in society that these same crimes are viewed with a lesser urgency to be committed if the individual simply types the words instead of verbally speaking them aloud? When we start to evaluate the behaviour of cyberbullies we can clearly see why they often prefer the cyberspace over the real world. Social media platforms offer us something we can't possibly find anywhere else... anonymity. Although your name is often required by most platforms, it doesn't necessarily have to be your real name, meaning the individual can easily dissociate themselves from the offense. Furthermore we have to consider that the possibility of the offense directly affecting the offender via some means of repercussion is extremely narrow if at all. With this we can start to see why bullies tend to prefer this means of harassment over the conventional method, however there may also be far more pertinent reason for the amount of cyberbullies actively scouring social media for their victims... Masculinity. This applies to both male and female for the individual may not be physically intimidating and therefor many disregard their threats or could easily act upon the offense. With the anonymity that social media provides, the bully is completely free create a powerful persona that is capable of intimidating individuals they otherwise would not be able to if they were attempting to do so personally.

In conjunction with the ability to not only create an empowering persona online, the anonymity and lack of responsibility granted to the bully by social media platform, the bully is also able to attract a crowd of like-minded individuals. This means that the severity of the offense is escalated extremely causing a directly proportional effect on the deterioration of the victim's self-esteem and overall mental state. It is

unfortunate that cyber-bullies are also able to gain popularity on social media platforms due to the attraction of similar individuals. As an effect of the bully's popularity they also gain a measure of status and along with this even more power to commit heinous acts upon innocent individuals all while still being personally. It is debatable whether or not their status effects the severity of their offenses in any way, however due to their status it may become more difficult for the bully to remain unaffected by their crimes against individuals.

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Impact of the offense on the victim

As with any form of harassment be it verbal, physical or sexual the victim almost always shows signs of the negative impact it has had on them. This is commonly expressed by a change in the victims overall behaviour such as a lack of confidence, self-esteem, depression etc. Depending on the topic of the offense the victim tends to hold a degraded or cynical view in regards to the subject targeted by the bully. E.g. If the target of the offense was the victim's weight, the victim will start to reflect this in their day to day behaviour. Such an attack may drive the victim to eat less regularly, develop body dysphoria and in worst case scenario become anorexic. In the end the victim will almost always adjust their behaviour according to the offense of which most often tends to be a negative development.

In our modern society people tend to incorrectly respond when a cyber-offense is committed. Let us briefly discuss the victim's supportive individuals such as parents, partners or close friends and their responses towards the offense. When a cyber-offense occurs the customary response in an attempt to aid the victim is that they should simply ignore it or that the victim is acting in an overly sensitive manner and that they should disregard the offense as normal behaviour. This is completely wrong! First and foremost we need to establish that verbal deterioration of an individual's self-esteem is just as if not more detrimental to the victim's mental health than a physical encounter. As we have previously established, cyber-harassment is a direct attempt to affect the victim's mental state and does not require any means of physical injury to the victim. After a cyber-offense has already occurred, the damage has already been done to the victim and as such certain measures has to be taken towards aiding the victim in order to restore them to a positive mental state. If this isn't done the victim will not only dwell on the offense and the intended target area of the harassment, they may even go so far as to change their behaviour to negatively affect their physical health which in the worst-case scenario could lead to the victim's own death. There has been previous cases of attempted suicide related to cyber-harassment which indicated that the cause of the victim's state of mind at the time of the attempt on their life was one or more cyber-offenses. With this in mind we have to consider whether or not it is necessary to escalate our responses towards attempting the prevention of cyber-harassment.

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Closing words

When its all said and done, a bully is merely a person with a negative method of emotional ventilation. Although this does not excuse their behaviour, we know now that they too are just people. It will take a collective effort to minimize the effect of bullying in any shape or form and I believe that the first step towards realizing this goal, is to understand the mechanisms that drive people to act in ways that undermine the rest of humanity. As long as people have emotion in their hearts, so to will we experience the worst that dwells inside each and every one of us. We cannot end bullying, but we can work to minimize its effects. I have linked a few webpages in this synopsis that will take you to sites dedicated to the prevention of bullying. Let us be the light to guide the lost souls of our children who do not yet understand the meaning of love.

<https://www.childlinesa.org.za/children/for-children/issues-affecting-you/bullying/>

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/resources/facts>

<https://www.learnpsychology.org/now/bullying/>

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/school-violence-resources/bullying-prevention>

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National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice Statistics, *School Crime Supplement - PDF*, 2011. (<https://www.stopbullying.gov/resources/facts>)

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Andrew Faas ; Jonathan Fast ; Dr. Marlene Seltzer (2020) "Bullying, awareness and prevention" (<https://www.learnpsychology.org/now/bullying/>)

Additional Sources:

<https://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/stats.asp>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bullying>