Cyber-Bullying Is Worse than Physical Bullying


"Although [cyber-bullying] is less physical than traditional forms of bullying, it can have more devastating and longer-lasting effects."

In the following viewpoint, Scott Meech discusses the rise of cyber-bullying, schoolchildren's use of the Internet or cell phones to intimidate their peers. Meech claims that cyber-bullying is widespread in America. He also asserts that this form of harassment is worse than physical bullying because it subjects the victim to humiliation from a large audience, which can be embarrassing pictures or taunts that are typically spread throughout a peer group. Furthermore, Meech states that victims have no safe haven from cyber-bullying because it reaches into homes and invades the technologies most children now depend upon for communication. Scott Meech is a computer and technology teacher at the Plano Middle School in Illinois.

As you read, consider the following questions:

1. According to the author, how do Paris and Robert Strom define cyber-bullying? How does Meech wish to amend their definition?
2. Why is cyber-bullying a difficult problem for authorities to handle, in Meech's view?
3. What two pieces of advice does Meech give to protect oneself from cyber-bullying?

To most teachers, the general stereotype of a bully is an over-sized male student who uses verbal and/or physical abuse to torment the smaller or weaker child. This stereotype is perpetuated throughout pop culture.

But the Internet has changed that, as it has changed so much else. Now there is "Cyber Bullying," and although it is less physical than traditional forms of bullying, it can have more devastating and longer-lasting effects. It is rapidly becoming a major problem. Now, a small physically weak child can be as much of a bully as the big brute but with more impact. Educators definitely need to understand how powerful and dangerous this new type of bullying has become as it has greatly impacted the classroom.

[Education professors] Paris and Robert Strom define cyber bullying as harassment using an electronic medium (e-mail, chat rooms, cell phones, instant messaging, and online voting booths) to threaten or harm others. This author believes that the definition should also include any form of information posted on the Internet, as in blogs, forums, etc. This latter form of cyber bullying involves gossip, humiliation, and threats.

Many Children Are Victims

The statistics are shocking. In the year 2000 a University of New Hampshire study found that one out of every 17, or 6 percent of kids in the United States, had been threatened or harassed online. But in March of 2006, statistics showed that 75 to 80 percent of 12 to 14 year olds had been cyber bullied. Furthermore, 20 percent of kids under 18 have received a sexual solicitation. So cyber bullying is clearly on the rise, and it affects both genders. An American Educational Research Association study [from 2006] shows that female bullies preferred the use of text messaging harassment versus face-to-face bullying by 2 to 1.

Cyber bullying is a very difficult form of bullying to prevent and to police. A major difference between cyber bullying and traditional bullying is the ability to bully without a face-to-face confrontation. Kids become emboldened by the false feeling of being anonymous and they say things they might not have said in person. Unfortunately, identifying a cyber bully isn't as easy as identifying the traditional big bad bully.

Authorities have greater difficulty in tracking down the bully because of problems in identification. Students are too often lax in their security with usernames and passwords so messages can be falsely written by individuals and misrepresented.

No Refuge from Harassment

The long-term impact of cyber bullying is greater than with traditional bullying. Digital images, cell phones, and other electronic means can greatly increase the speed in which the bully's messages can spread. Strom and Strom write, "Harmful messages intended to undermine the reputation of a victim can be far more damaging than face-to-face altercations. Instead of remaining a private matter or event known by only a small group, text or photographs can be communicated to a large audience in a short time."

Perhaps the greatest long-term effect is the loss of the home as a safe-zone. Traditional bullying usually ended when a person was home, safe with his or her family. Cyber bullying enters into the home and is with the students at all times. As [USA Today reporter] Greg Toppo writes, "Vulnerable children have virtually no refuge from harassment. It's a non-stop type of harassment and it creates a sense of helplessness."

Bullies use this additional terror to traumatize their victims even more.

Our youth have grown up with technology, to them it is commonplace and part of their everyday life. Taking technology away from kids to protect them is not the answer, as they have integrated its use to such an extent that it would now begin to isolate them within their peer circles. Besides, the technology in itself is not bad; it is the manner in which it is used.

Educating Children About Cyber-Bullying

Students need to be educated on how to deal with cyber bullying as much as learning the traditional issues of drugs, sex, and nutrition. There are additional strategies that should be employed when dealing with cyber bullying. Never respond to a cyber bully. This just provides fodder and they now know that you have actually made official contact. Protect your personal information with technology and change your online information including password and screen names on a regular basis.

Technology is changing the world in many ways. However, new negative uses of it have increased as well. Cyber bullying is on the rise and it is very serious.

Further Readings
Books

Periodicals
- Jonathan Milne "What Have We Got To Be Scared Of?" Times Educational Supplement, January 25, 2008.


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Cyberbullying Is Not Worse than Physical Bullying


“Overall, both boys and girls say that kids their age are more likely to be harassed offline.”

Amanda Lenhart is a senior research specialist at the Pew Internet & American Life Project, a nonprofit organization that researches the impact of the Internet on American society and culture. She reports in the following viewpoint that cyber-bullying, the harassment of people over the Internet, cell phones, or other novel communications media, is a problem in the computer age. Lenhart states that cyber-bullying is most common among young people and that about a third of teenagers polled by Pew in 2006 reported being the victim of this form of intimidation. Most of these teens said they had private e-mails or other messages publicly disclosed. However, Lenhart asserts that the respondents to the Pew survey claimed that traditional bullying was still more common than online harassment.

As you read, consider the following questions:

1. What percentage of teens in the Pew survey said that bullying was more likely to occur off-line than online?
2. According to Lenhart, are girls or boys more likely to be the victims of the online rumor mill?
3. As Lenhart relates, what percentage of online teens who do not use social networking sites report having embarrassing photos posted on the Internet?

About one third (32%) of all teenagers who use the Internet say they have been targets of a range of annoying and potentially menacing online activities—such as receiving threatening messages; having their private e-mails or text messages forwarded without consent; having an embarrassing picture posted without permission; or having rumors about them spread online.

Depending on the circumstances, these harassing or “cyberbullying” behaviors may be truly threatening, merely annoying or relatively benign. But several patterns are clear: girls are more likely than boys to be targets; and teens who share their identities and thoughts online are more likely to be targets than are those who lead less active online lives.

Of all the online harassment asked about, the greatest number of teens told us that they had had a private communication forwarded or publicly posted without their permission. One in 6 teens (15%) told us someone had forwarded or posted communication they assumed was private. About 13% of teens told us that someone had spread a rumor about them online, and another 13% said that someone had sent them a threatening or aggressive e-mail, IM or text message. Some 6% of online teens told us that someone had posted an embarrassing picture of them without their permission.

Yet when asked where they thought bullying happened most often to teens their age, the majority of teens, 67%, said that bullying and harassment happens more offline than online. Less than one in three teens (29%) said that they thought that bullying was more likely to happen online, and 3% said they thought it happened both online and offline equally.

These results come from a nationally-representative phone survey of 935 teenagers by the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

Victims of the Rumor Mill

Girls are more likely than boys to say that they have ever experienced cyberbullying—38% of online girls report being bullied, compared with 26% of online boys. Older girls in particular are more likely to report being bullied than any other age and gender group, with 41% of online girls ages 15 to 17 reporting these experiences. Teens who use social network sites like MySpace and Facebook and teens who use the Internet daily are also more likely to say that they have been cyberbullied. Nearly 4 in 10 social network users (39%) have been cyberbullied in someway, compared with 22% of online teens who do not use social networks.

The most commonly experienced bullying is having someone take a private e-mail, IM or text message and forwarding it on to someone else or posting the communication publicly. Nearly 1 in 40 social network users (3%) have been cyberbullied in someway, compared with 22% of online teens who do not use social networks. The most commonly experienced bullying is having someone take a private e-mail, IM or text message and forwarding it on to someone else or posting the communication publicly. Nearly 1 in 40 social network users (3%) have been cyberbullied in someway, compared with 22% of online teens who do not use social networks. Older teens (ages 15-17) say they are more likely to have had someone forward or publicly post private messages—18% of older teens have experienced this, compared with 11% of younger teens.

A bit more than one in eight or 13% of teens said that someone had spread a rumor about them online. A girl in middle school told us: “I know a lot of times online someone will say something about one person and it'll spread and then the next day in school, I know there's like one of my friends, something happened online and people started saying she said something that she never said, and the next day we came into school and no one would talk to her and everyone's ignoring her. And she had no idea what was going on. Then someone sent her the whole conversation between these two people.”

Girls are more likely to report someone spreading rumors about them than boys, with 16% of girls reporting rumor-spreading compared with 9% of boys. Social network users are more likely than those who do not use social networks to report that someone had spread a rumor about them (16% vs. 8%).

Threats and Embarrassing Photos

One in eight online teens (13%) reported that someone had sent them a threatening or aggressive e-mail, instant message or text message. One fifteen-year-old boy in a focus group admitted, “I played a prank on someone but it wasn't serious ... I told them I was going to come take them from their house and kill them and throw them in the woods. It's the best prank because it's like 'oh my god, I'm calling the police' and I was like 'I'm just kidding, I was just messing with you.' She got so scared thou.

Older teens, particularly 15- to 17-year-old girls, are more likely to report that they have received a threatening e-mail or message. Overall, 9% of online teens ages 12-14 say they have been threatened via e-mail, IM or text, while 16% of online teens ages 15-17 report similar harassment.

Fewer teens, some 6%, reported that someone had posted an embarrassing picture of them online without their permission. Not surprisingly, given the number of photos posted on social networking Web sites, users of those sites are more likely to report that someone had posted embarrassing pictures of them online without their permission—9% of social network users reported this, compared with just 2% of those who do not use social networking sites. Similarly, teens who post photos themselves are more likely to report that someone has posted an embarrassing photo of them without their permission.
A More Serious Problem Off-line

Girls are a bit more likely than boys to say that bullying happens more online (33% of girls vs. 25% of boys), though overall, both boys and girls say that kids their age are more likely to be harassed offline. White teens are a bit more likely than African-American teens to think that bullying is more of a problem online—32% of white teens said bullying happens more often online, while 18% of African-American teens said the same. Teens who have online profiles are just as likely as those who do not to say that bullying happens more often offline.

Teens who have been cyberbullied are more likely than those who have not been bullied to say that they believe bullying happens online more often than offline. However, the majority of bullied teens say that bullying is more likely to happen offline than online. More than 7 in 10 (71%) of teens who have not experienced bullying believe it happens more often offline, while 57% of teens who have been cyberbullied themselves say bullying happens more offline.

Further Readings

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