Cyber Bullying

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INTRODUCTION

"Cyberbullying" comprises a wide spectrum of behaviors that have negative and often devastating impacts upon their targets (or "victims"). This article is intended to analyze research trends on cyberbullying as well as related concerns involving online harassment, online reputational damage, and cyberstalking. Its focuses are as follows: (1) analyze the creative and innovative conceptual work and research that have emerged on the technological as well as social and ethical aspects of these issues; (2) present insights as to how cyberbullying and reputational damage can best be mitigated, given the technological capabilities and emerging know-how of technical specialists, educators, and organizational consultants; and (3) discuss why cyberbullying is of continuing importance to a broad business, government, non-profit, and educational audience. The article also includes reflections about the moral and personal dimensions of cyberbullying.

Bullying incidents are intricate and frustrating phenomena from whatever contexts they emerge, face-to-face or online. Cyberbullying often involves words and pictures that are considered as protected speech under various national and local laws, often providing cover for those who are attempting to abuse or unsettle a victim (Fraser, Bond-Fraser, Buyting, Korotkov, & Noonan, 2013; Oravec, 2012). The prevalence of cyberbullying is difficult to determine, given the privacy with which many cases dealing wth juvenile offences (as well as offences in workplace settings) are handled. In their "Scoping Review on Studies of Cyberbullying Prevalence Among Adolescents," Brochado, Soares, and Fraga (2016) found the following:

Most of the studies tend to assess cybervictimization experiences. However, even considering the same perspective, the same country, and the same recall period, a high variability in the estimates was observed. As a main conclusion, the way in which the prevalence of cyberbullying is estimated is influenced by methodological research options.

Added to the difficulties in studying cyberbullying is the observation that some individuals who are victimized may not display signs of damage or even choose to respond to the bully. Other individuals may be extremely harmed by comparable words and pictures; some may choose to fight back while others become depressed or even suicidal. Generally, cyberbullying consists of repetitive behavior that has a particular focus on a victim; the bully's attacks can be shielded from video from others who could possibly intervene. As related in Bonanno and Hymel (2013), "Cyberbullying also takes place on a virtual playground that makes it possible to victimize a peer within the sanctity of one's own home, at any time of the day or night, in complete anonymity, and with maximal exposure and hence potential embarrassment for the intended target" (p. 646). Kamali (2015) adds an angle relating to the growing assortment of networked devices: "the perpetrator can employ varied means (e.g., cell-phones, texts, blogs, Internet, social media, etc.)" in conducting the bullying (p. 43). Anonymity can give some protection to bullies in shielding them from observation in whole or part of their bullying (Barlett, Gentile, & Chew, 2016). Cyberbullies can also combine anonymous interactions with personally-identifiable ones to make it appear that more than one individual is involved in the attacks, potentially intensifying the negative social impacts of the bullying.

Equipping individuals in workplace, community, and educational contexts to be aware of cyberbullying issues may enable them to become more sensitive and empathetic as well as more effective as the front line of defense against these phenomena. It will also help them to mitigate bully-related problems in their organizational and community roles and provide an "early warning system" for the new forms of bullying various technological changes may engender (such as drones and virtual reality). Emerging research efforts may also enhance understanding of cyberbullying as well as empower citizens and organizational participants in their efforts to mitigate it.

BACKGROUND

Public discourse on bullying and mobbing has increased dramatically in the past decade: in the *Journal of Psychohistory*, Dervin (2010) labelled 2010 as "The Year of the Bully" because of the number of shocking incidents involving young people, many of which incorporated some social media component. The classic novel *Lord of the Flies* (Goulding, 1960) has often been mentioned in discourse on youth-related cyberbullying; many of the young people characterized by Goulding had forms of autonomy and power within their environments but did not have the moral guidance to understand fully the consequences of their actions. Cyberbullying attracted public attention in part because of cases such as that of Rutgers University student Tyler Clementi who committed suicide after having some of his sexual activities broadcast via webcam on the Internet (Byers, 2013; Oravec, 2012). "Cyberstalking" has been distinguished as a phenomenon related to and often overlapping with cyberbullying (Adam, 2002; Kamali, 2015); it is more often associated with the conduct of adults than cyberbullying, the latter which has been more often associated with children and adolescents (Carter, 2015). Research from Milosevic (2015) shows that in US mainstream media "overall debate on cyberbullying is narrow, focused on incidents that resulted in suicides, and

subsequent blaming of individuals involved. Such framing can have implications for audience's support of punitive policies, inability to comprehend complexity of the issue and moral panic around children's use of technology." (p. 492).

Computer networking is adding new and complex dimensions to bullying, providing the venue for complex cases of online reputational damage and privacy invasion via social media (Oravec, 2013; Van Royen, Poels, Daelemans, & Vandebosch, 2015). Victims, bullies, and onlookers can often interact in debilitating and confusing patterns in cyberbullying incidents, given their relatively-recent emergence in society and lack of common understandings concerning them. As new forms of cyberbullying emerge, individuals who work online and engage in networked educational and social activity can encounter harassment, belittling, damaging or doctored materials that refer to them, and related harms. Technologies such as digital video, text messaging, and social media can be combined in ways that make victims perceive that they have nowhere to hide and no real legal or social recourse. Victims often lose the ability to contribute their full efforts to their jobs, schoolwork, and social interactions, and sometimes even choose to end their lives.

Cyberbullying can affect people of all gender affiliations; it can also affect individuals of various religious heritages as well as racial and ethnic backgrounds (Cappadocia, Craig, & Pepler, 2013; Stanbrook, 2014). Individuals with disabilities can be targeted as well as become perpetrators themselves (Kowalski *et al.*, 2016). Certain patterns can be found in the way cyberbullying and online reputational damage emerge in the context of various groups and settings, which can help in detecting bullying and mitigating its consequences. For example, some varieties of cyberbullying infuse forms of hate speech (as described in Adam, 2002, Byers, 2013, and Oravec, 2000), integrating themes involving race, gender, religion, or other perceived affiliation; some of this speech, however debilitating to the victim and bystanders, may be protected by the First Amendment (Conn, 2015).

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