


Topical Issues on Cyberbullying Prevention

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ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying represents an actual risk, especially for the online generation which is continuously connected and socialize through the internet. This article presents and comments on some cyberbullying issues (e.g. relative anonymity of perpetrators and repetition of bullying acts) and is devoted to educators engaged in cyberbullying prevention. The first step for cyberbullying prevention is the knowledge acquisition of what cyberbullying is and how it occurs within a specific context. This is not an easy task since cyberbullying is a complex and creep new phenomenon, so much that researchers' opinion is often divided on its definition and there isn't agreement on many aspects concerning it.

KEYWORDS

Cyberbullying And Technology, Cyberbullying Prevention, Cyberbullying, Cyberspace Threats, New Media Risks, Online Well-Being

INTRODUCTION

The internet has changed our lives, but the human nature has remained the same. Accordingly, the spread of the new technologies has multiplied the risks and threats for the internet users since the cyberspace is not forbidden to cheaters, perpetrators, and individuals that like to harm, harass, and victimize other people especially they who are weak and vulnerable.

Cyberbullying is an alarming phenomenon closely connected with the relational changes introduced by the digital technologies and the online communication. Indeed, a large number of young people are continuously connected with their peers and use social networks to communicate with them sharing all sort of experiences, emotions, and secrets. For this reason, the most part of victims of cyberbullying are children and adolescents and the recent statistics show this bleak situation (Lessne & Yanez, 2016): 25 percent of teenagers report that they have experienced repeated bullying by phone calls and texting or on the internet;

- 52 percent of young people report being cyberbullied.
- 11 percent of adolescents and teens report that embarrassing or damaging photos of them have been taken and posted on the internet without their knowledge or consent.
- 10 percent of middle school and high school students have received threatening, offensive or of hate messages.
- 55 percent of all teens that use social media have witnessed outright bullying online.

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How can we contrast the evil phenomenon of cyberbullying? Some years ago, Hinduja and Patchin (2009) presented the top ten tips for educators aimed to prevent cyberbullying. These tips can be reduced to three main suggestions:

- Improve contextualized knowledge.
- Develop continuing educational programs.
- Organize technical support services.

Develop continuing educational programs includes five of the ten preventing tips, this way showing the importance that education occupies in promoting appropriate solution strategies. In the following paragraphs, the current strategies for cyberbullying prevention, the Hinduja and Patching's tips (Marzano, 2015), are analyzed and commented upon. However, before dealing with cyberbullying prevention, the issue of what cyberbullying is should be tackled. Indeed, many forms of cyberbullying correspond to traditional harmful and aggressive behaviors (teasing, name calling, spread rumors, threatening, and ransoming). Nevertheless, the internet gives to perpetrators new and powerful means to harass their victims. The appropriation of these new means by bullies is only one aspect of cyberbullying since the technology extended the opportunity to harm people without a physical contact increasing the range of stalkers and harassers.

The Multifarious Faces of Cyberbullying

At the moment, there is no universally accepted definition of cyberbullying. This is due to the fact that cyberbullying is a relatively recent phenomenon, closely tied to the progress of technology. In many ways, it can be considered a collateral effect of the behavioral changes that digital technologies are producing in the spheres of communication and social interaction.

As a consequence, cyberbullying represents a multifaceted phenomenon, since the more the internet and social networks spread, more new forms of harassment and violence emerge on the web.

Before the term cyberbullying became popular, other expressions, such as online harassment, online bullying, and cyberstalking (Benfer, 2003; Ellison, 2003; Bocij, 2004), were used to describe the harmful and malicious acts enacted through electronic means.

The harmful consequences of the spread of electronic communications began to appear very early on as people started using the Internet for communication. In the 1980s, one unpleasant phenomenon was particularly widespread, namely the heated exchange of messages expressing hostility or acrimony toward others, commonly known as "flaming" (Baron, 1984). Respondents of a survey conducted in two divisions of a large US firm declared that they had experienced flaming in electronic mail messages an average of 33 times a month (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986).

By the 1990s, online harassment, especially against women, was a serious problem, and many female teachers stopped giving out their e-mail addresses as a result:

[...] many women are discouraged from speaking up online for fear of being targeted for some sort of sexual advance or another. I wonder how many women have stopped posting their words because they were sick of constantly being attacked for their opinions (Brail, 1996, p. 152).

Furthermore, at the end of the 1990s, many cases came to light of children being solicited by adults for illegal sexual activities over the internet. The risks related to unwanted or illegal exposure of children and adolescents to sexual solicitation, harassment, and pornography on the internet was reviewed and analyzed at different levels (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000).

The term cyberbullying first appeared in the early 2000s. It quickly became popular, and was preferred to the expressions 'online harassment' or 'online bullying' (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004a; 2004b).

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