

The introduction to cyber bullying media essay



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Young people today are using the internet more than ever. They view the internet and even more so the mobile phones as positive aspects of our society. The internet and mobile phones systems are the two biggest systems of communication which play a crucial role in our daily activities and development of identities. On the other hand, these same technologies are also often used negatively. Many children are the targets of bullying via the internet or mobile phones resulting in total confusion on the part of the “target”. Very often, children are not able to understand that what they are going through is a form of bullying. As a result the previously safe environment of the internet is now becoming a source of confusion and anxiety.

As a teenager myself, I am not immune to factors that influence everybody else in our society. I am very concerned about what is happening so I therefore wanted to look into the reasons behind cyber-bullying and who should be blamed for it. Is there any way for cyber-bullying to be stopped?

The internet holds many dangers such as viruses and programming faults that could be dangerous for people but also two of the most menacing problems for young people today; child pornography and cyber-bullying. I decided to focus on the issue that tends to influence a large portion of teenagers and not solely, cyber-bullying. It seems that, now, in 2010 cyber-bullying is increasing dramatically as more and more children are becoming victims of this type of bullying, though not only children. I will research this problem in detail as it is saddening me that a system that makes information flow and communication easy, is turning into a dangerous “place” to be. I

can't understand why such a useful system is used in so negative a way where one can cause psychological harm to others.

Although cyberbullying does not pertain to the USA alone, I chose to focus on the USA is because it seems to have more documented incidents which apparently make it one of the countries with a higher percentage of cyber-bullies and victims of cyber-bullying. In fact, there has been a number of shocking incidents that caught my attention, some of which I will report in the main body. There are many countries that do deal with cyber-bullying but not to the point that the USA does. I strongly believe that if cyber-bullying reaches an end one day it will certainly start from the U. S. A. I deem that the USA covers all aspects that I am looking into so this is the reason why I chose it.

In recent years many US states have started to impose laws specifically regarding cyber-bullying. Some other states support that laws imposed for traditional bullying also cover cyber-bullying. The internet provides anonymity and the chance to create a profile with a hidden identity; so how possible is it for cyber-bullying to be stopped? The truth is that this question cannot be answered easily as it is not something so simple. Being already concerned about it and seeing that more and more cyber-bullies are getting away with it, I will attempt to investigate how possible can this be. The research question which I will develop is the following: " Can cyber-bullying and bullying through the internet and mobile phone systems stop?"

In this essay, I will look into cyber-bullying by defining what it is, report incidents and show statistics of how bad the situation in the U. S. A. is. I will

also examine if blame can be attributed. Through my research I hope to reach a conclusion on whether there is a chance for cyber-bullying to be stopped.

What is Cyber-Bullying

Cyber-bullying has more than one definition, cyber-bullying can be defined as “ when the Internet, cell phones or other devices are used to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person”[1]or as “ a situation when a child or teen is repeatedly ‘ tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted’ by another child or teenager using text messaging, e-mail, instant messaging or any other type of digital technology.”[2]The last definition I gave refers only to teens or children because bullying through the internet or cell-phones from adults to adults can be referred to as cyber-stalking which due to word limitation I will not go into.

A cyber-bullying situation can be as simple as sending e-mails to someone that wants no further contact with you but it can also be very serious when it includes threats or sexual bullying or when a forum is created and that person is ridiculed. Cyber-bullies may post personal data of their victims at websites or forums or even pretend to be someone else in order to publish different material to the victim’s name that diminishes or humiliates him. The biggest percentage of the bullies use pretty much the same tactic as they send threatening messages to their victim or call them mean names.

Who is a Cyber-Bully

A cyber-bully is generally more of a product of his environment in which he too is abused in many ways, verbally or physically or he might even be

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cyber-bullied. Perhaps however, they are simple bored or completely rotten to make everyone else's life messy. Many times cyber-bullies work in groups because in that way they feel stronger but they inwardly, sometimes, do not enjoy their actions. Their main problem is that they cannot move away from their team because they feel unsafe and they have the fear that they will get cyber-bullied themselves. As it is identified by researchers, tormentors are sometimes likely to be more depressed than their victims. What should be worrying us is that cyber-bullies get a false feeling of satisfaction when they send threatening and flame e-mails to their victims because that means that they amuse themselves. The number one objective of cyber-bullies but also traditional bullies is to have power. They want to have the control of each situation. They want to be dominators and subjugate everyone.

Effects of Cyber-Bullying

In my mind, cyber-bullying shows the ugly " face" of the internet. Victims of cyber-bullying can become depressed and in extreme cases even commit suicide. We can therefore understand that the internet is dangerous and unknown to most people, capable of " hurting" them if they are not aware of the internet as a whole.

Cyber-bullying has several negative effects on individuals or groups of people. Usually, it starts with a confused feeling on the part of the victim, feeling hurt because a person or a group of people has targeted them and insulted them for no other reason than simply to be mean. Most would ask why they are the target but perhaps even cyber-bullies do not know why. They gradually get feelings of fear or of loneliness, fear of leaving their home or fear of going to school. If the victim is being bullied continuously, his

grades may drop or even show symptoms of paranoia that would make it difficult for him to communicate with people of his age or make new friends. Depression can be one of the symptoms of cyber-bullying, and I am calling them symptoms because it seems that cyber-bullying is now a “disease” for our society. A feeling of helplessness occurs as the victim does not know where to turn to for help. It is of course true that in serious cases of constant bullying, suicide may be part of the story. Cyber-bullying should be stopped but the question still exists, can it be stopped?

Proper individual reaction

I believe that the reason why the U. S. A. is more concerned about cyber-bullying is the big amount of their population that is affected and the relatively big number of incidents reported that has prompted them to impose laws against it. What should the average person suggest? Ignore the bully, do not take him seriously, not answer to him and if he is at your school just ignore him once more. It is suggested that you report it to your counselor or your parents so they get the chance to help you. It is possible that cyber-bullies will be discouraged if you do not answer to them and they will move on to their next victim. Nevertheless, these suggestions would only help an individual to be saved from cyber-bullying. Furthermore, cyber-bullying will not stop but it is a good start for individuals to save themselves from resulting victims.

Significance of Cyber-Bullying

How real is the threat of cyber-bullying? Is it such a big issue? Opinions seem to vary. Adults mostly support the opinion that cyber-bullying, along with regular bullying, is responsible for many of the social, anxiety and depression

problems kids live with since this situation mostly influences them. On the other hand, many teenagers do not agree with this claim, they support the idea that cyber-bullying is not such a problem because nothing is “ real” on the internet and things said or done should not be taken into consideration so much. In my mind, we, teens, understand better the evolution of technology than adults and so we are not tricked by the media as their role is always to report every situation in its most dramatic way but that cannot explain the rising number of suicides among young people. I believe that anyone who claims being bullied knows nearly nothing about how to protect themselves in the digital world, even when it comes to simple computer problems. It is true that the internet does not show its real “ face” immediately and cyber-bullying is not the only internet issue that should be worrying us. Internet is full of dark pits, full of lies that could trick anyone into confusion. My opinion is that cyber-bullying is a very big issue that is shocking our society every day but I also believe and agree that cyber-bullying is not the last thing that we should consider as a problem. People need to be educated on how to be immune to internet dangers and of how to avoid being mocked or cheated through the internet.

Proof of the significance

An example of a severe case of cyber-bullying took place in 2008, it shocked most people in the U. S. A. into understanding what cyber-bullying is when Megan Meier, a 13-year old girl from Missouri, committed suicide in her room. Investigators found that Megan’s death was the result of constant stress caused by relentless and cruel cyber-bullying. A group of people that lived in Megan’s neighborhood, including adults such as Lori Drews, the

father of a friend of Megan's who she had a fight with, and an 18-year old officer who worked for M. Drews, pretended to be a new boy in the area where Megan lived and developed a relationship with her through Myspace (a social networking site). The group had created a hoax in order to make Megan believe that she had a growing relationship with the "boy". When the hoax was revealed, Megan did not have enough mental strength to deal with the humiliation of being mocked and she decided to take her life. Back then, Missouri did not have any laws against cyber-bullying so they were not able to prosecute any of the members of the group.[3] Having taken this incident into consideration, Missouri has now imposed laws against cyber-bullying which I will report on next in my extended essay.

Another suicide took place in Massachusetts. Phoebe Prince was a 15-year old Irish immigrant who was harassed both at school, web sites and over her cell phone. For fear of losing her few friends, she refused to change her Facebook settings or cell number. Unfortunately, the idea of her being a "loser" led her to kill herself.[4]

The statistics are as shocking as the incidents. A Cyber-bullying research survey

in 2008 of 2,000 middle-school students shows that around 43% of them have been victims

of situations that can be defined as cyber-bullying:

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"Receiving an instant message that made them upset (15.8%)"

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“ Having something posted on their MySpace that made them upset (14.1%).”

“ Even more alarming, a Survey of AM/MTV in September 2009 of 1, 247 young people,

aged 14-24, found that”:

“ 50% of youngsters in this age group have experienced digitally abusive behavior, with older teens aged 18-24 (52% vs. 47%) and females more likely to be targeted (53% vs. 42%)”

“ 45% of young people report that they see people being mean to each other on social networking sites.”[5]

The relation ship with traditional bullying

There is a phrase that says: “ Sticks and stones can break your bones but names will never hurt you” Personally, I cannot agree with that claim.

Although cyber-bullying is less physical than traditional forms of bullying, it has very destructive and longer-lasting effects on individuals. It is very easy to access a computer and ruin someone’s mental state. Something that people ignore is that online everyone can be a bully, even a small, physically weak child that was a victim of traditional bullying. However the difference being that someone is now in the position to cause even greater damage than a big brute can cause. As British bullying victim, Emily Moor said, “ The internet is a sinister, silent enemy: you simply don’t know where to start to tackle the problem. But faceless as a computer may be, it is every bit as threatening as a physical bully, if not more so because the audience reading

these horrible messages can be enormous.”[6]It is true that if you are bullied at school then you can just go home and end it, if you are cyber-bullied you have nowhere to go.

Laws against Cyber-Bullying

It is now well known that with the existence of fake profiles or profiles with hidden identities, the guilty party is hard to be traced. Lawmakers are seeking to pass new legislations on cyber-bullying because it seems that there are currently no specific laws on the books that deal directly with it. They want to address cyber-bullying with laws that would call the action of intimidation, bullying or any other actions that cause severe emotional distress illegal. Nevertheless, I was not able to find lots of information on laws against hidden identity or fake profiles but only from states like Texas and Georgia which have passed laws that deal directly against posing as someone else on the internet. What is important is that people who post fake profiles in social network sites could be charged for their unsocial behaviour. [7]

In a respected number of U. S. states including New York, Missouri, Rhode Island and Maryland, legislation geared at penalizing cyber-bullying and digital bullying has been introduced. In 2007, at least seven states passed specific laws against bullying through the internet. For example, Dardenne Prairie of Springfield, Missouri passed a city law making online bullying a misdemeanor. Another city of Missouri, the city of St. Charles has passed a similar law. Furthermore, in Jefferson City of Missouri, state lawmakers gave final approval to a bill making cyber-bullying illegal in 2008.[8]It is believed

by supporters that this bill will cover bullying from computers, text messages and other electronic devices.

In August 2008, the California state legislature passed the first law to deal directly with cyber-bullying. The legislation was named " Assembly Bill 86 2008" and the idea was that it would add provisions related to bullying committed through an electronic communication device or system and a definition of electronic communication was added for this purpose to the School/Law Enforcement Partnership program. Eventually, this law took place at January 1 of 2009.

Even if it is due to the following changed that many schools are now able to confront cyberbullying, I will keep the following information in the Laws against Cyber-Bullying section.

In Arkansas in 2007, they passed a law that would allow school officials to deal with cyber bullies even if a person's bullying did not take place or start on school property. After the law was imposed, the result was that school administrators gained more freedom to punish individuals that were the bullies.

In Iowa, several laws have been passed that forced schools to adopt anti-cyber bullying policies which cover bullying in the school or in school property or generally at a school function or activity sponsored by the school.

In New Jersey the Garden State has always maintained tough legislation against bullying, but until 2007 there weren't any laws enforced which

included cyber-bullying. Once again, the law gives the power to the school staff to punish people related with bullying against their fellow students.

In Idaho, in 2006, its lawmakers passed a law that allowed staff of the school, especially officials, to suspend students that were using a computer or another electronic device to harass specific students.

At Oregon state, they decided to look in detail at cyber-bullying and broadened its' definition.

Recently, the governor of Rhode Island tried to pass a bill which would take cyber-bullying offenders to court with the charge of being illegal against the state's laws.

Vermont, had already very strict laws against bullying and cyber-bullying but its' lawmakers recently added a fine of 500 dollars for those who where offensive to other people on the internet. Vermont is considered as one of the states with the strictest legislation against this type of bullying.[9]

School action

It is important to mention that many schools are adopting policies to address cyber-bullying and that is something really important. Since cyber-bullying is mostly a problem because of the existence of the internet, many schools reduced their internet sites' range so as to protect children from entering sites that could lead them to becoming the victim of a cyber-bully. Also, many schools have passed anti-bullying rules and policies which address cyber-bullying. They closely monitor students' use of computers at school and have bought tracking software but without relying solely on it in order to

screen out problematic online behaviors and bullying. Many educators try to educate students, teachers and different staff members about the dangers of cyber-bullying and about what should be done in order to avoid it

Who should be blamed?

Despite attempts at changing laws and policies and trying to implement them, what is worrying, is the fact that no law can really stop cyber-bullying while communication through the internet or cell phones provides anonymity, many fake profiles are created in order to tease or bully people in social sites like " Facebook" and " Myspace". Really, is there anybody we can accuse or blame for this mess? Is there any way to identify the extinction of a fake profile? Our society promotes violence and that does not help to overcome this problem. Video games, television and all mass media mostly project violent incidents. Because of this children and teens become familiar with the idea of violence and they think of it as the normal. Parents on the whole are not familiar with the idea of cyber-bullying and they are not able to protect their children from being cyber-bullied. It is not really their fault as technology is developing very fast and many of them cannot keep up with it. Teens do not usually talk to their parents about their problems and that makes it very difficult for the parents to help their children. Many schools make the mistake of not informing students enough about it or showing them how to protect themselves. Children should have some knowledge about cyber-bullying so as to get through it without any " wounds". I believe that the society as a whole is the only that can be blamed for this issue.

Conclusion

In conclusion although the internet and mobile phones communication systems make our lives easier and play a very important role in our activities, it is unfortunate that they have been poisoned and destroyed by being used to abuse others. The positive aspects of the internet and mobile phones cannot be questioned or enumerated however what I am mostly certain of is that the negative aspects are just as great in number and in seriousness. As a Kevin Brennan said: " Cyberbullying is the unacceptable face of new technology, and we need concerted action across society to address it. Schools must play a key role, and this new guidance will help them to identify and tackle instances of cyberbullying more effectively, as well as providing practical advice and information on how to prevent it." [10]

Cyber-bullying is on the rise and it affects almost anyone that possesses and uses a computer or a cell-phone but the idea of stopping or obstructing cyber-bullying seems to be very far. Cyber-bullying exists in schools, out of schools and everywhere and since parents are not totally controlling their child's actions in and out of school, it is very hard to follow the plans of bullies. While school violence as a whole is declining, bullying behaviors have increased by 5%. Furthermore, the last months of 2010; there were multiple suicide deaths as a result of cyber-bullying. [11] There are lots of reasons that could lead a person to bully another and there are even more sources of traps that could lead the bullied person to remain silent and contribute in this way to the growing problem.

After much research, I no longer wonder if this whole situation could be stopped but whether it can at least decrease. It seems that there is no way

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for it to be stopped since most states of the U. S. A. do not have any legislations that deal directly with cyber-bullying. Even where legislation does exist it does not have the power to reduce cyber-bullying to any great amount because of the anonymity or the hidden identity that the internet provides. This could even be a great research question for another extended essay. “ Should the internet provide anonymity and the choice to retain your identity hidden?” Existing legislation in states of the U. S. which I have mentioned have only worked in very few situations where the bully has not hidden his identity. What could make us think that legislation could stop anonymous bullies?

What will always be needed to overcome such a situation is the support of adults towards children and young people that have fallen victims to the dark pits of the internet. Parents especially must not forget that. Since bullying through internet and mobile phones cannot really be stopped then the next best way to deal with it, is to make children immune to it. Children should be taught to avoid it and go on with their lives. They should be taught how to prevent bullies from using them as victims. Parents should help them build a strong personality.