

Online Communication in the Digital Age
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Lecture – 50
Cyberbullying

Good morning, dear friends and welcome to this module. In the previous module, we had seen how the themes of digital deception are interpreted and depicted through the medium of cinema. Today, we will be focusing on cyberbullying. Cyberbullying has now emerged as a significant concern due to the rapid advancement of technology and the widespread use of the internet as well as several social media platforms which are within the easy reach of young and adolescent people.

Introduction

- **Definition of cyberbullying:** Cyberbullying refers to the use of electronic communication tools such as social media, instant messaging, or online platforms to intimidate, harass, or harm others (Wong-Lo and Bullock, 2011)*.
- **Prevalence of cyberbullying in online communication and online spaces:**
 - Cyberbullying has become a widespread issue in today's digital age.
 - Research studies indicate that a significant number of individuals, particularly children and adolescents, have experienced cyberbullying in various online spaces.



*Wong-Lo, M., Bullock, L. M. (2011). Digital aggression: Cyberworld meets school bullies. Part of a special issue: Cyberbullying By: Preventing School Failure, 55(2), 64-70.

It refers to the use of electronic communication tools such as social media, instant messaging as well as other online platforms to intimidate, harass or harm other people. It is also very prevalent in online communication as well as in every online space. It has become a widespread issue and research studies indicate that a significant number of individuals particularly children and young adolescents have experienced cyberbullying in various online spaces.

- The double-edged nature of modern technology, continuously balancing between risks and opportunities, manifests itself clearly in an emerging societal problem known as cyberbullying. (Walrave and Heirman, 2011)*
- Cyberbullying is the unfortunate by-product of the union of adolescent aggression and electronic communication. (Hinduja and Patchin, 2008)**
- Victims experience powerfully negative effects (especially on their social well-being); and the reactive behavior from schools and students is generally inappropriate, absent, or ineffective, instead of being supportive. (Hoff and Mitchell, 2009)*

*Walrave, M., & Heirman, W. (2011). Cyberbullying: Predicting victimisation and perpetration. *Children & Society*, 25(1), 59-72.

**Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. W. (2008). Cyberbullying: An exploratory analysis of factors related to offending and victimization. *Deviant Behavior*, 29(2), 129-156.

***Hoff, D. L., & Mitchell, S. N. (2009). Cyberbullying: Causes, effects, and remedies. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 47(5), 652-665.

As we have discussed, modern technology in the digital era is like a double-edged sword and we have to continuously balance the risks as well as opportunities. This aspect is clearly manifested in this emerging societal problem of cyberbullying. It is the unfortunate byproduct of the union of adolescent aggression and the facilities provided by the electronic communication. Victims experience powerfully negative effects especially on their social well-being and the reactive behavior from schools and other students is generally inappropriate, absent or ineffective instead of being supportive and understanding.

Let us now look at a video that explains this concept further.

Is it Cyberbullying?

Source: [StopBullying Gov](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtfMzmkYp9E) Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtfMzmkYp9E>

Cyberbullying happens when someone posts or shares harmful or mean content about someone else on the internet, social media, apps, texts, video games or digital devices. Take this example. Maddie took a screenshot of her classmate Shonda's photo from social media.

She then used an app to make Shonda look like a monster in the photo and added some insulting words. After sharing it in a group text, some classmates replied with hurtful, mean comments about Shonda. Others laughed and shared it with others. Is it cyberbullying? Yes. Maddie wanted to embarrass Shonda and by doing so, she encouraged others to do the same.

What can Shonda do? Take screenshots of the cyberbullying. It's painful but Shonda needs to document what happened in case it happens again. Shonda can also block the group texts. She should tell what happened to an adult she trusts. Together, they may want to report what happened to the school.

How about this one? Malcolm plays multiplayer video games online with people he only knows through gaming. A few of them have added him on social media. One player, Lucas123x or Lucas, used to chat with him a lot while playing, asking a bunch of personal questions. Malcolm answered and didn't think much about it. But one day, Lucas posted all kinds of personal information about Malcolm on social media, mixed in with lies and comments about his ethnicity and gaming skills.

Is it cyberbullying? Yes. Lucas was trying to harm Malcolm and his reputation. What

can Malcolm do? He can take screenshots of the posts and block Lucas on social media. What Lucas did may have also violated the rules of the social media site and the gaming platform. Malcolm should report Lucas' behavior to the sites.

He can also avoid a game if he knows Lucas is one of the players. Malcolm can tell an adult about what happened. Together, they can help determine if they should report it to the police. And remember, never give out personal information to strangers. Here's another one.

Jaden and his friend Dylan were having fun, kidding around after school. Jaden took photos and posted them online. One photo showed Dylan making a weird face, which they both found funny. But other kids who saw it started posting mean comments about Dylan's face in the photo. Dylan was upset by the photo and the comments.

Is it cyberbullying? No. If Jaden didn't mean any harm and he's willing to delete the photo, it is not cyberbullying. If Jaden doesn't delete the photo after seeing the negative comments being posted about his friend Dylan, he could be contributing to cyberbullying, though. What can Dylan do? He can ask Jaden to remove the post and, in the future, to ask permission before sharing photos of him. If Jaden is a friend, he'll respect Dylan's request, apologize, and delete the photo.

For more information, visit StopBullying.gov.

Cyberbullying can have serious and long-lasting repercussions on the psyche of an individual. Furthermore, the digital nature of cyberbullying means that the harm inflicted on victims can spread rapidly, reaching a wide audience within seconds. This unfortunate amplification effect is more insidious as it can intensify the impact and make it difficult for victims to escape the torment.

Example #1*

- One of the first and best-known illustrations of cyberbullying is **Ghyslain Raza**. He created a video of himself on November 4, 2002, acting out a scene from the movie *Star Wars*, using a golf-ball retriever as his light saber.
- Classmates then posted the video online without his permission or knowledge, where it was seen by millions.
- In 2004, a Web site was created that contained original and modified clips from the video, along with special effects, and music from the *Star Wars* movie.
- Labeled the “Star Wars Kid,” Ghyslain was forced to change schools and received psychiatric help.
 - He was 15 year old then. Raza has since affirmed his identity. He uses the incident to sensitize others to the ill-effects of cyberbullying and harassment.



Source: <https://www.businessinsider.com>

Lampert, A. (2006, April 8). Starwars kid settles lawsuit. *The Gazette (Montreal)*, p. A8.



One of the first and perhaps the best known illustrations of cyberbullying is the case of Ghislaine Reza. He had created a video of himself in 2002 acting out a scene from the movie *Star Wars* and using a golf ball retriever as his lightsaber. Classmates then posted this video online without his permission or even knowledge and where it was seen by millions suddenly. A website was created in 2004 that contained original as well as modified clips from the video along with special effects and music from the *Star Wars* movie. Labeled the Star Wars kid, Ghislaine was forced to change schools and also he had to receive psychiatric help. At the time when this video was made by him, he was barely 15 and he has since, fortunately, been able to affirm his identity. But he has used this incident to sensitize others to the in effects of cyberbullying and consequential harassment.

Example #2*

- In March 2011, a group of high school students in Westchester, New York created a list known as the SMUT List.
- About 100 girls were rank-ordered on the list based on their sexual activity.
- The list first circulated via text messaging but was later posted on a Facebook group page.
- Within 24 hours, over 7000 people had “liked” the page.
- It can have lethal effects on susceptible teenage victims, raising concerns about sexual harassment and discrimination, reducing a person to an object only.



Source: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk>
<https://patch.com/new-york/harmon/smut-list-in-area-high-schools-raises-concerns-of-cyberbullying>

*Stamoulis, K. (2011, March 16). SMUT list: Another case of online slut bashing. Psychology Today. Retrieved from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-new-teen-age/201103/smut-list>.

We can cite another example which is known as the SMUT list. In March 2011, a group of high school students in Westchester, New York had created a list which came to be known as the SMUT list. It was a list of about 100 girls who were rank-ordered on the list based on their sexual activity. The list was circulated via text messaging but was later posted on a Facebook group page. Within 24 hours, over 7000 people had liked officially this page. Such incidents can have lethal effects on susceptible teenage victims raising concerns about sexual harassment as well as discrimination, reducing a person, particularly a girl, to an objectified entity only.

Unlike face-to-face bullying, cyberbullying allows perpetrators to remain anonymous and distance themselves from the consequences of their actions. The online environment provides bullies with a sense of detachment, and it also empowers them to target victims in a relentless manner. Often it happens that the school going kids don't tell adults about it because they worry that their phones or computers will be taken away. So they suffer alone and silently without sharing it with their adults, with the senior teachers and also without any psychological help.

Understanding the prevalence, characteristics and impact of cyberbullying is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies in online communication and online spaces.

Reasons of Cyberbullying

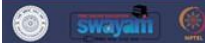
- According to Calvete, et al (2010)*, cyberbullying was significantly associated with the use of proactive aggression, exposure to, and justification of violence, and less perceived social support of friends.
- Other reasons for cyberbullying are envy, prejudice and intolerance for disability, religion, gender, shame, pride, guilt, and anger. (Jones, Manstead, & Livingstone, 2011)**



Source: <https://www.news-medical.net>

*Calvete, E., Orue, I., Estévez, A., Villardón, L., & Padilla, P. (2010). Cyberbullying in adolescents: Modalities and aggressors' profile. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 26(5), 1128-1135. 8p.

**Jones, S. E., Manstead, A. S. R., & Livingstone, A. G. (2011). Ganging up or sticking together? Group processes and children's responses to text-message bullying. *British Journal of Psychology*, 102(1), 71-96.



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Critics like Calvete have pointed out that cyberbullying has been significantly associated with the use of proactive aggression, justification of violence, exposure to unnecessary violence and less perceived social support of friends. Other reasons for cyberbullying are envy, prejudice and intolerance for disability, religion, gender, shame, pride, guilt, anger.

- Snakenborg, Van Acker, and Gable (2011)* state cyberbullying is especially insidious because it affords a measure of anonymity and the opportunity to reach a much larger number of victims without a significant threat of punishment.
- Reece (2012)** supports this argument by agreeing that the anonymous nature of the Internet makes it easier to say/do things an individual would not say/do in person.
- In addition to this anonymity influence, impulsivity among adolescents can be an influential factor in cyberbullying.
- They will act without considering the full ramifications for themselves and their victim(s) (Bhat, Suniti, Shih-Hua, and Jamie 2010)***.

*Snakenborg, J., Van Acker, R., & Gable, R. A. Cyberbullying: Prevention and intervention to protect our children and youth. *Preventing School Failure*, 55(2), 88-95.

**Reece, T. (2012). Cyberbullying 411. *Current Health Teens*, 38(5), 7-9.

***Bhat, C., Suniti, C., Shih-Hua, L., & Jamie A. (2010). Addressing cyberbullying as media literacy. *New Horizons in Education*, 58(3), 34-43.



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Critics like Snackenborg, Acker and Gable have pointed out in their research that the insidious nature of cyberbullying is intensified as it simultaneously affords a violence associated a measure of anonymity and an opportunity to reach a much larger of victims without a significant or tangible threat of punishment. Other critics have supported this

argument by agreeing that the anonymous nature of the internet makes it easier to say and do things to an individual which perhaps in a face to face and direct conversation we would not say or do. In addition to this anonymity influence, impulsivity among adolescents can also be an influential factor as far as cyberbullying is concerned. Adolescents often act without considering the full ramifications for themselves as well as their victims.

Although there is no single profile of cyberbullies, research suggests that they are likely to share some common traits and experiences.

Characteristics of Cyberbullies*

- They have dominant personalities and like to assert themselves using force. They have a temper, are impulsive and are easily frustrated.
- They have more inclination toward violence than other people. They appear to be tough and show little empathy or compassion for those who are bullied.
- They have difficulty following rules. They are good at talking themselves out of difficult situations.
- They engage in both proactive aggression (i.e., deliberate aggression to achieve a goal) and reactive aggression (i.e., defensive reactions to being provoked) (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005)**.

*Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. New York: Blackwell.

**Camodeca, M., & Goossens, F. A. (2005). Aggression, social cognitions, anger and sadness in bullies and victims. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 46, 186–197.



They are more likely to have dominant personalities and adept in asserting themselves using force. They also have a temper, are impulsive and can also get easily frustrated. They also have more inclination towards violence in comparison to several others. They appear to be tough and show little empathy or compassion for those who are being bullied. They also have difficulty in following rules, and they are good at talking themselves out of difficult situations easily. They also engage both in proactive aggression, that is deliberate aggression to achieve a goal and reactive aggression that means defensive reactions to being provoked.

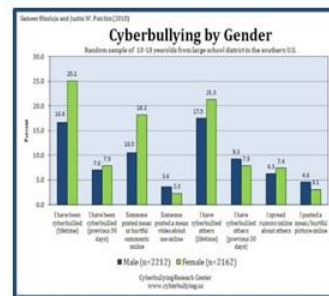
Although both boys and girls are frequently involved in cyberbullying, there has been debate among researchers about which gender is more likely to engage in and experience cyberbullying.

Gender Differences in Cyberbullying

- When gender differences are uncovered in traditional bullying, boys are more involved as both bullies and victims than girls (Boulton, Lloyd, Down, & Marx, 2012)*.
- Adams (2010) found adolescent girls are more likely to have experienced cyberbullying than boys--25.8% versus 16%, respectively.
 - Girls are more likely to spread rumors while boys are more likely to post hurtful pictures or videos.
 - Girls are more likely to become victims of cyberbullying, whereas boys are more inclined to engage in electronic bullying.

*Boulton, M., Lloyd, J., Down, J., & Marx, H. (2012). Predicting undergraduates' self-reported engagement in traditional and cyberbullying from attitudes. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 15(3), 141-147.

**Adams, C. (2010). Cyberbullying: How to make it stop. *Instructor*, 120(2), 44-49.



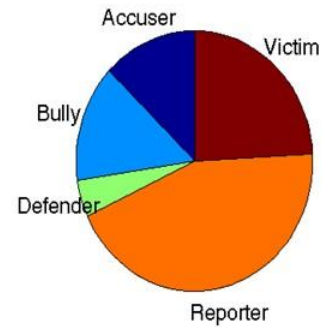
Source: <https://cybercomm309.wordpress.com>

When we look at gender differences in the context of traditional bullying, it has been found that boys are more involved as both bullies and victims in comparison to girls. Adams found in his 2010 research that adolescent girls are more likely to have experienced cyberbullying than boys. He has pointed out that it is 25.8% versus 16% respectively. Girls are more likely to spread rumours while boys are more likely to post heart full videos or pictures. Girls are more likely to be victims of cyberbullying whereas boys are more inclined to engage in electronic bullying.

Researchers and practitioners have also focused on understanding the roles people knowingly or inadvertently play while they are involved in cyberbullying including those who are bullied, those who bully and are also being bullied that means that they are bullies as well as victims in certain situations. The majority who are witnesses or bystanders to the bullying have also been studied for a psychological profile.

Roles in Cyberbullying*

- **Entitlement Bullies** are individuals who believe they are superior and have the right to harass or demean others, especially if the person is different.
- **Targets of Entitlement Bullies** are individuals who are picked on because bullies believe that they are different or inferior.
- **Retaliators** are individuals who have been bullied by others and are using the Internet to retaliate.



Source: <https://research.cs.wisc.edu>

*Notar, Charles E., Sharon Padgett, and Jessica Roden. "Cyberbullying: A review of the literature." Universal journal of educational research 1.1 (2013): 1-9.

Let us look at different roles people play in the whole context of cyberbullying.

There are entitlement bullies who believe that they are superior to others and therefore have some type of a right to harass or demean others especially if the person happens to be different from them. And then there are targets of entitlement bullies., those people who are picked on because they are considered to be somehow inferior or different by the bullies. Retaliators are those individuals who have been bullied by others and are now using the internet to retaliate.

- **Victims of retaliators** are individuals who have been bullying others but are now receiving the cruelty of being cyberbullied.
- **Bystanders who are part of the problem** are individuals who encourage and support the bully or who watch the bullying from the sidelines but do nothing to help the victim.
- **Bystanders who are part of the solution** are individuals who seek to stop the bullying, protest it, and provide support to the victim



Source: <https://www.myknowledgebroker.com>

Victims of retaliators are obviously individuals who have been bullying others but are now receiving the cruelty of being cyberbullied by others. Bystanders who are part of the problem are individuals who encourage and support the bully or who watch the bullying from the sidelines but do nothing to help the victims. Then there are bystanders who are part of the situation as they seek to stop the bullying, protest it and also try to provide support to the victims.

Cyberbullying takes various forms, and these types can overlap or coexist in online communication and spaces. It is important to note that cyberbullying is not limited to any single method of attack. Perpetrators may employ a combination of direct and indirect tactics amplifying the harm inflicted on the victim.

Methods of Cyberbullying*

- In one of the first books to address the topic of cyberbullying, ***Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats***, Nancy Willard (2006)**, an attorney who is the Director of the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use, outlined a number of behaviors that she argues constitute cyberbullying.
- Included among these are flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing and trickery, exclusion, and cyberstalking.



Source: <https://richmond.nsw.edu.au>

*Kowalski, Robin M., et al. "Bullying in the digital age: a critical review and meta-analysis of cyberbullying research among youth." *Psychological bulletin* 140.4 (2014): 1073.

**Willard, N. (2006). *Cyber bullying and cyberthreats: Responding to the challenge of online social cruelty, threats, and distress*. Eugene, OR: Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use.



In one of the first books to address the topic of cyberbullying, Nancy Willard in 2006 had published research- *Cyberbullying and Cyber Threats*. It is perhaps one of the first books to address the topic of cyberbullying. She is also an attorney who is the director of the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use, and she has outlined a number of behaviors that she argues constitute cyberbullying. Included among these are flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing and trickery, exclusion and cyberstalking.

Let us try to understand these concepts.

We would begin by discussing the concept of flaming. The term flaming originates from the metaphorical association with a fiery and heated exchange of words.

Flaming

- Refers to a brief, heated exchange between two or more individuals that occurs via any communication technology.
- Typically, though, flaming occurs in “public” settings, such as chat rooms or discussion groups, rather than private e-mail exchanges.
- If a series of insulting exchanges ensues, then a flame war has started (Willard, 2006)*.



Source:
<https://getkonsistent.app>

*Willard, N. (2006). Cyber bullying and cyberthreats: Responding to the challenge of online social cruelty, threats, and distress. Eugene, OR: Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use.

Thus, it refers to a brief but heated exchange between two or more individuals that has occurred via any communication technology. Typically though, flaming occurs in public settings such as chat rooms or discussion groups rather than private email exchanges. If a series of insulting exchanges ensues, then a flame war has started.

This phenomenon can have detrimental effects on online communities, fostering a toxic atmosphere and discouraging healthy debate and collaboration amongst the people.

Harassment within the context of digital communication and the internet refers to the deliberate and repeated use of various online platforms in order to engage in aggressive, intimidating or harmful behaviors towards individuals or groups.

Harassment

- In the cyberbullying literature, cyber harassment generally is viewed as a unique form of cyberbullying that involves repetitive offensive messages sent to a target.
- Most often harassment occurs via personal communication channels, such as e-mail, but harassing messages may also be communicated in public forums, such as chat rooms and discussion groups



Source: <https://www.dreamstime.com>

Cyber harassment is viewed as a unique form of cyberbullying which involves repetitive and offensive messages sent to a target. Most often harassment occurs via personal communication channels such as email but harassing messages may also be communicated using the public forums such as chat rooms and discussion groups.

Such harassing behavior can have severe psychological, emotional and sometimes even physical consequences for the victims. It also poses significant challenges for maintaining a safe and inclusive online environment.

Denigration, the next one, refers to a rhetorical or communicative strategy that involves the deliberate act of belittling, degrading or disparaging someone or something.

Denigration

- Included within this category of cyberbullying is posting or sending digitally altered photos of someone, particularly in a way that portrays them in a sexualized or harmful manner.
- Online “slam books,” which are created to make fun of students, represent a form of denigration.
- Students create a Web site where classmates’ names are listed, and students write mean and nasty comments about targeted students.



Source: <https://twitter.com/HerInternet>

In this category, we find that people often post or send digitally altered photographs of someone particularly in a way that portrays them in a sexualized or harmful manner. Online slam books which are created to make fun of students represent a form of denigration. Students may create a website where classmates' names are listed and students write mean and nasty comments about the targeted students.

This concept is often employed as a means to undermine the reputation, credibility or value of a person, group, idea or object.

Impersonation in the realm of online communication refers to the deliberate act of assuming a false identity or pretending to be someone else when interacting with others over digital platforms.

Impersonation

- With impersonation, the perpetrator poses as the victim, most often by using the victim's password to gain access to their accounts.
- Perpetrators then communicate negative, cruel, or inappropriate information with others as if the target/s were voicing those thoughts.
- At the extreme, a cyberbully impersonator may post an offensive remark or comment on a hate group or some other type of group's message board pretending to be the victim, and "doxx" them (publish the name, address, and phone number of the victim).
- Should the members of the hate group decide to track the victim down, this puts the victim's life in danger.



Source: <https://www.microsoft.com>



The perpetrator may pose as a victim and most often by using the victim's password in order to gain access to their accounts. Perpetrators then communicate negative, cruel or inappropriate information with others as if the target themselves are voicing these thoughts. At the extreme, a cyberbully impersonator may post an offensive remark or comment on a hate group, or some other type of group's message board pretending to be victim and dox them that means publish their names, address and phone numbers. Should the members of the hate group decide to track the victim down, this puts the victim's life in danger.

Next we have outing and trickery which are widely condemned for their potential to violate privacy and personal autonomy.

Outing and Trickery

- Outing refers to the act of disclosing someone's private or confidential information, typically related to their personal identity, sexual orientation, or other sensitive details, without their consent or against their will.
- This may take the form of receiving an e-mail or instant message from a target that contains private, potentially embarrassing information and/or photos and then forwarding that e-mail on to others.
- Trickery refers to tricking someone into revealing personal information about themselves and then sharing that information with others.



Source: <https://blog.securly.com>

Outing refers to the act of disclosing someone's private or confidential information typically related to their personal identity, sexual orientation or other sensitive details without their consent or even against their will. This may take the form of receiving an email or instant message from a target that contains private potentially embarrassing information or photographs and then forwarding this email to the others.

Trickery refers to tricking someone into revealing personal information about themselves and then sharing that information with others.

These acts are considered a breach of privacy and can have severe emotional as well as psychological impacts and consequences for the individual whose information has been revealed.

Ostracism in online communication refers to the social exclusion or isolation of individuals within digital communication, social media platforms or online groups. It involves deliberately ignoring, excluding or shunning someone in the virtual space.

Exclusion/Ostracism

- Much of our social behavior is guided by our attempts to be included by others and to avoid being excluded, a situation referred to by some as “social death” (Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000)*.
- Online exclusion can occur in any type of password-protected environment or by a target being knocked off of buddy lists.
- In some instances, the ostracism may be perceived rather than real, as when someone doesn’t respond as quickly to an IM or e-mail as you would like them to.
- According to Bill Belsey, the creator of www.cyberbullying.ca, the first Web site devoted specifically to cyberbullying, not responding promptly in the online world is viewed as a “real social faux-pas.”



Source: <https://www.nih.gov>

*Williams, K., Cheung, C. K. T., & Choi, W. (2000). Cyberostracism: Effects of being ignored over the Internet. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79, 748-762.



Much of our social behaviour is guided by our attempts to be included by others and to avoid being excluded, a situation referred to by some as social death. Online exclusion can occur in any type of password protected environment or by a target being knocked off of a buddy list. In some instances, ostracism may be perceived rather than real as when somebody does not respond as quickly to an email or a message as you would like them to. According to Bill Bilsey, who is the creator of the first website devoted specifically to cyberbullying, not responding promptly in the online world is viewed as a real social faux pas.

Cyberstalking are disturbing and pervasive digital phenomenon involves using digital communication tools such as social media, email, messaging apps or other online platforms to harass, intimidate or monitor the target continuously.

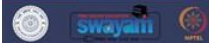
Cyberstalking

- Black's Law Dictionary (2009, p. 444)* defines "cyberstalking" as: "the act of threatening, harassing, or annoying someone through multiple e-mail messages, as through the Internet, esp. with the intent of placing the recipient in fear that an illegal act or an injury will be inflicted on the recipient or a member of the recipient's family or household."
- Cyberstalkers may engage in a range of activities, including sending threatening or intrusive messages, tracking the victim's online activity, spreading false information, and attempting to gain unauthorized access to the victim's personal information.



Source: <https://vpnoverview.com>

*Black's Law Dictionary (2009). 9th ed., B. A. Garner (Ed.). St. Paul, MN: West Group.

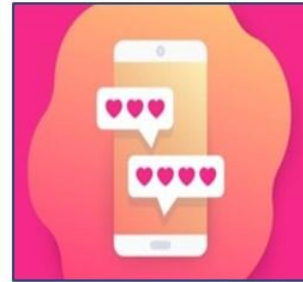


The 2009 edition of Black's Law Directory has defined cyberstalking as and I quote, the act of threatening, harassing or annoying someone through multiple email messages as through the internet, especially with the intent of placing the recipient in fear that an illegal act or an injury will be inflicted on the recipient or a member of the recipient's family or household, unquote. Cyberstalkers may engage in a range of activities including sending threatening or intrusive messages, tracking the victim's online activity, spreading false information and attempting to gain unauthorized access to the victim's personal information.

Finally sexting, which is a portmanteau word of sex and texting represents a contemporary and controversial aspect of modern interpersonal digital communication. In an era where smart phones and instant messaging applications are ubiquitous, the exchange of sexually explicit text messages, images or videos has become increasingly prevalent. Individuals, especially in the context of romantic relationships and adolescent interactions have become more and more prone towards it.

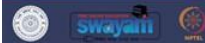
Sexting

- Sexting refers to the sending or posting of nude or semi-nude pictures or videos via text messages or other electronic means.
- Sexting has personal and legal consequences (Marshall & Stanfield, 2011)*.
- Individuals who send sexts and who are found with nude pictures or videos on their cellular phones can face suspension or expulsion from school or jobs.
- Youth involved with sexting may face substantial legal consequences, including felony charges of distribution of pornography and legal classification as a lifetime sex offender.



Source: <https://www.healthshots.com>

*Marshall, J., & Stanfield, A. (2011). The realities of sexting (you can't unsend!). Retrieved from <http://www.learningseed.com>.



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Sexting thus refers to the sending or posting of nude or semi-nude pictures or videos via text messages or any other type of electronic media. Sexting has personal and legal consequences for people. Individuals who send sexts and who are found with nude pictures or videos on their cell phones or any other electronic device can face suspension or even expulsion from schools and the jobs. Youth involved with sexting may face substantial legal consequences including felony charges of distribution of pornography and legal classifications as a lifetime sex offender.

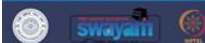
Online Body Shaming And Image Issues

- According to a study conducted by Yahoo Health with 2000 participants aged 13–64 years, 94% of adolescent females and 64% of adolescent males experienced being shamed online related to their bodies (Miller, 2016).
- Body shaming features similarities to appearance teasing, which describes negative social feedback on a person's physical attributes (Cash, 1995).
- Lumsden and Morgan (2017) classified body shaming as a subtype of trolling, which is an event of online abuse.

Miller, K. (2016). The shocking results of Yahoo Health's body-positivity survey. Retrieved January 15, 2019,

Cash, T. F. (1995). Developmental teasing about physical appearance: Retrospective descriptions and relationships with body image. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 23(2), 123–130.

Lumsden, K., & Morgan, H. (2017). Media framing of trolling and online abuse: Silencing strategies, symbolic violence, and victim blaming. *Feminist Media Studies*, 17(6), 926–940.



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Although clearly some individuals engage in sexting for relational purposes and others do it because it seems to be the in thing to do in the relationships, still others engage in sexting as a means of bullying and hurting others deliberately. For example, following the breakup of a relationship, one member of the former couple may forward nude or compromising images of the former partner to different groups as a revenge for the breakup.

Furthermore, in the age of social media, the pressure to conform to beauty standards and the prevalence of body shaming have also become intensified. Online platforms have become spaces where individuals are targeted based on their appearance facing negative comments and comparisons to unrealistic beauty ideals.

Let us have a look at a video that discusses this issue in detail.



Source: [HUB Scuola](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yE_WU_vYM94) Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yE_WU_vYM94

swayam

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When individuals make hurtful comments or cruel jokes about another person's physical appearance whether in person or online, it's called body shaming. Victims who experience persistent body shaming are more likely to suffer from mental health issues including eating disorders, anxiety, and depression compared to those who don't experience body shaming.

Body shaming can take many forms. There's shaming for fat, thinness, height, hairiness, hair color, skin color, facial features, gender presentation, and skin marks. While individuals body shame, the act is a symptom of a greater societal problem. Our society has narrow beauty ideals that aren't inclusive of the real diversity of our bodies. Many companies use these beauty ideals to pressure us to buy products promising to change our appearance. On the positive side, many industries have embraced the body

positive movement instead.

Fashion advertisements, films, and even social media ads now include models of all sizes, shapes, and ethnicities. Yet others say that the body positive movement doesn't go far enough because it still focuses on appearance. They say that we should move toward a body neutral mentality in which we stop giving physical beauty so much attention.

Body shaming is a symptom of a greater societal problem as our society has narrow beauty ideals that are not inclusive of the real diversity of our bodies.




Online Body Shaming And Image Issues

- According to a study conducted by Yahoo Health with 2000 participants aged 13–64 years, 94% of adolescent females and 64% of adolescent males experienced being shamed online related to their bodies (Miller, 2016).
- Body shaming features similarities to appearance teasing, which describes negative social feedback on a person's physical attributes (Cash, 1995).
- Lumsden and Morgan (2017) classified body shaming as a subtype of trolling, which is an event of online abuse.

Miller, K. (2016). The shocking results of Yahoo Health's body-positivity survey. Retrieved January 15, 2019.

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Yahoo! Health had conducted a study with 2000 participants to find out more about body shaming and image issues. This study was very detailed and comprehensive as the target group aged between 13 to 64 years. It suggested that 94% of females during their adolescence and 64% of males during their adolescence had experience being shamed online related to their bodies. Body shaming features similarities to appearance teasing which describes negative social features feedback on a person's physical attributes. Lumsden and Morgan have classified body shaming as a subtype of trolling which is an event of online abuse.

This context is fueled by the curated and edited images that flood social media feeds, creating an atmosphere where individuals constantly evaluate their own bodies in comparison to others. This personal comparison can lead to a decline in self-esteem, body dissatisfaction and the development of mental health issues such as eating disorders or anorexia etc.

Similarly, online gaming communities have long grappled with the issue of toxicity which refers to harmful and negative behaviours exhibited by players.

Toxicity in Online Gaming Communities

- Key aspects of cyberbullying may play out in unique ways in gaming contexts.
- For example, social dominance is often identified as a primary motivator for perpetrators of bullying (Morales et al., 2016)*.
- In gaming contexts, “game rank—an indicator of dominance... [may be] a potential motivating force” for cyberbullying (Ballard and Welch, 2015)**



Source: <https://kidshelpline.com.au>

*Morales, J. F., Yubero, S., & Larrañaga, E. (2016). Gender and bullying: Application of a three-factor model of gender stereotyping. *Sex Roles*, 74, 169–180.

**Ballard, M. E., & Welch, K. M. (2015). Virtual warfare: Cyberbullying and cyber-victimization in MMOG Play. *Games and Culture*.

Key aspects of cyberbullying also play out in unique ways in the context of gaming. For example, social dominance is often identified as a primary motivator for perpetrators of bullying. In gaming context, game rank, an indicator of dominance may be a potential motivating force by cyberbullying. In gaming context, game rank which is an indicator of dominance may perhaps be a potential motivator for cyberbullying.

- Thus, the power imbalances characteristic of bullying may take on different forms in gaming contexts and may be instigators of conflict. (Mishna et al., 2016)*
- Boys may be especially likely to engage in online gaming with voice connections, allowing them to collaborate and converse. (Lenhart et al., 2015).**
- This includes ‘trash-talk’—disparaging, taunting, or boastful comments... between opponents trying to intimidate each other.

*Mishna, F., McInroy, L. B., Lacombe-Duncan, A., Bhole, P., Van Wert, M., Schwan, K., ... Pepler, D. J., et al. (2016). Prevalence, motivations, and social, mental health and health consequences of cyberbullying among school-aged children and youth: Protocol of a longitudinal and multi-perspective mixed method study. *JMIR Research Protocols*, 5(2), e83.

**Lenhart, A., Smith, A., Anderson, M., Duggan, M., & Perrin, A., (2015). *Teens, technology and friendships*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved March 5, 2016,

Thus, the power imbalance characteristic of bullying may take on different forms in gaming context and may be instigators of conflict. Voice may be especially likely to engage in online gaming with voice connections allowing them to collaborate and converse. This includes trash talk that is disparaging, daunting or boastful comments between opponents trying to intimidate each other.

The gaming industry has historically faced scrutiny regarding issues of representation, diversity and sexism. This culminated in the controversial gamergate controversy in 2014. It began as a purported movement focused on ethics in video game journalism but quickly developed into a campaign marked by harassment, misogyny and online abuse.

Gamergate emerged at a time when discussions around these topics were gaining momentum with critics pointing out biases in gaming journalism and emphasizing on the need for more inclusive narratives. However, the movement soon became a platform for coordinated online harassment targeting women especially female game developers and female critics.

Case Study: #Gamergate*

- #Gamergate originated with the release of a blog post by game developer **Zoe Quinn**, which led to allegations of unethical behavior within the gaming industry.
- The movement quickly escalated, spreading to social media platforms like Twitter, where coordinated harassment campaigns targeted several women in the industry, including Quinn, game developer **Brianna Wu**, and media critic **Anita Sarkeesian**.
- The controversy gained significant media attention, shedding light on the issue of online harassment and the toxic elements within gaming culture.



Anita Sarkeesian
Source: <https://psmag.com>

*Evans, S. B., & Janish, E. (2015). #INeedDiverseGames: How the queer backlash to GamerGate enables nonbinary coalition. QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking, 2(2), 125–150.

Gamergate originated with the release of a blog post by game developer Zoe Quinn which led to allegations of unethical behavior within the gaming industry. The movement quickly escalated spreading to social media platforms like Twitter where coordinated harassment campaigns targeted several women in the industry including Quinn herself, game developer Brianna Wu and media critic Anita Sarkeesian. The controversy gained significant media attention shedding light on the issue of online harassment and the toxic elements within the gaming culture.

Gamergate sparked broader discussions about the need for safer spaces, inclusivity and the importance of addressing toxic behavior in online communities.

Impact of #Gamergate

- **Long-lasting effects:** #Gamergate had a lasting impact on those targeted by the harassment, with many experiencing severe emotional and psychological distress.
- **The fight for inclusivity:** The movement galvanized activists, developers, and gamers who continue to advocate for greater diversity, representation, and safer spaces within the gaming community.
- **Ongoing challenges:** Despite progress, the gaming industry still faces challenges related to sexism, discrimination, and toxicity, highlighting the need for continued efforts to facilitate a more inclusive environment.



Source: <https://mediaschool.indiana.edu>

This controversy also had long lasting impact particularly on those who had been targeted and had to face harassment with several women experiencing severe emotional and psychological distress for a long time. The movement also galvanized activists and developers and gamers who continue to advocate for greater diversity, representation and safer spaces within the gaming community. Despite certain progress, the gaming industry still faces challenges related to sexism, discrimination and toxicity highlighting the need for continued efforts to facilitate a more inclusive environment.

The lessons learned from gamergate controversy continue to shape conversations around the social impact of gaming highlighting the ongoing need for a more inclusive and responsible gaming culture.

In conclusion, cyberbullying is a pervasive issue that demands our collective attention and action. It is a stark reminder of the dark side of the digital age where the misuse of technology can inflict lasting harm on individuals, particularly on the younger generations who are more vulnerable to its effects.

Conclusion

- To combat cyberbullying effectively, it requires a multi-pronged approach involving parents, educators, policymakers, and technology companies.
- We must continue to raise awareness, adopt a culture of empathy and respect, and provide the necessary support systems for victims.
- Laws and regulations must adapt to the digital landscape to hold perpetrators accountable, and social media platforms must play a more proactive role in preventing and addressing cyberbullying.

To combat cyberbullying effectively requires a multi-pronged approach involving parents, educators, policy makers as well as technology companies. We must continue to raise awareness, adopt a culture of empathy and respect and provide the necessary support systems to the victims. Laws and regulations must also adapt to the digital landscape to hold perpetrators accountable and social media platforms must play a more proactive role in preventing and addressing cyberbullying.

The online world can be a source of incredible connection, knowledge and opportunity. But to fully harness its potential, we must also address the darker aspects like cyberbullying. Only then we would be able to ensure that everyone can participate in the digital age with safety, inclusivity, dignity and respect.

Thank you.