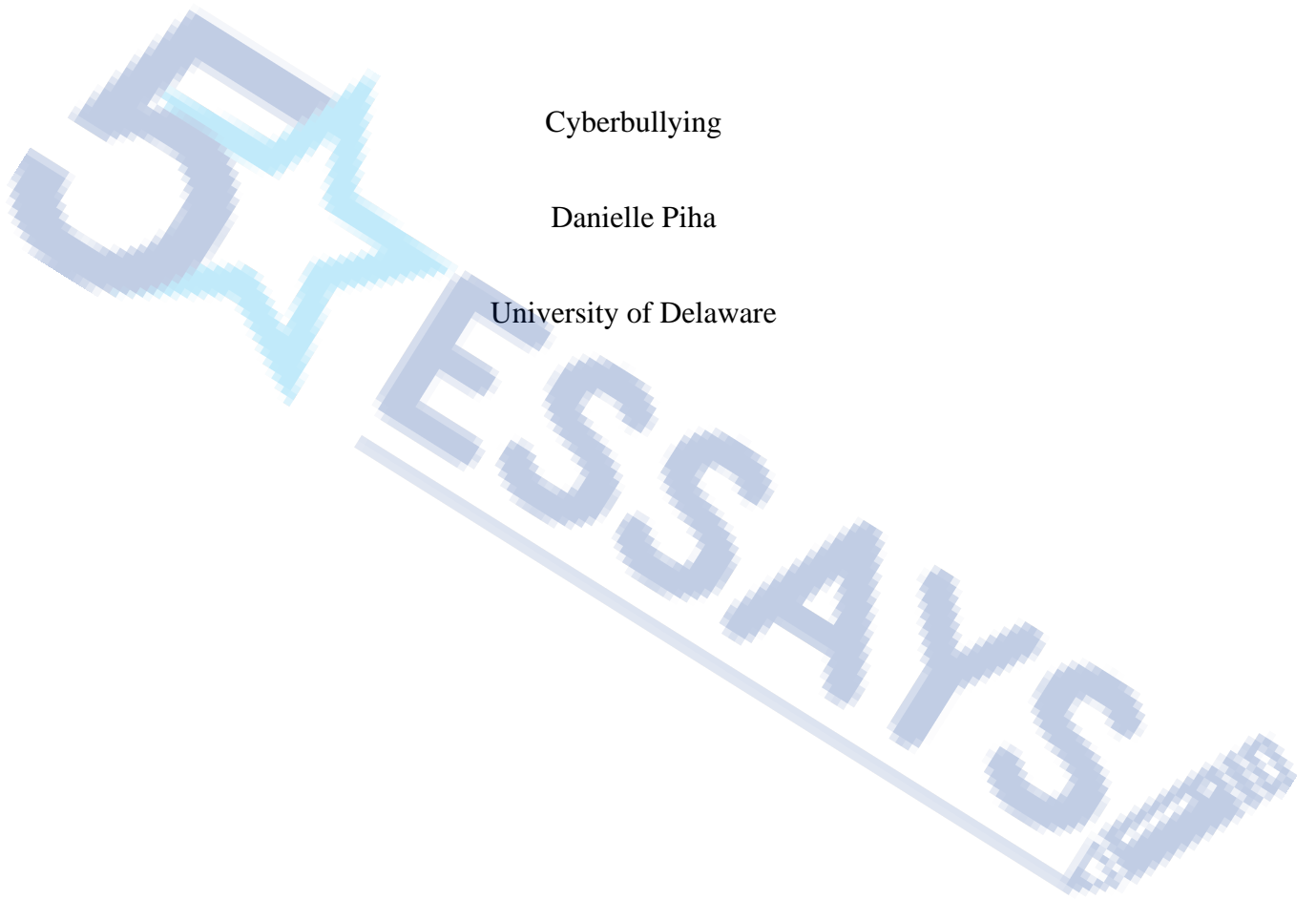Cyberbullying

Danielle Piha

University of Delaware

Abstract

This paper discusses the issue of Cyberbullying in our society. It examines the fundamentals of cyberbullying such as what cyberbullying is, the methods used to cyber bully, and the types of cyberbullying that occur. It will also explain how to prevent cyberbullying from taking place, the signs that may indicate cyberbullying is occurring, and ways to approach cyberbullying in terms of resolving the issue at hand if it does end up happening.

Introduction

With the advancement of technology in our society comes a variety of ups and downs. Unfortunately, one of the biggest issues with the multimedia world today is the prevalence of cyberbullying. According to Smith (2008), the definition of cyberbullying is "an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself." A study done by Raskauskas and Stoltz showed that forty-nine percent of students reported being victims to online bullying, and twenty-one percent of students reported engaging in the act of being an online bully (Smith, 2008). These are numbers that have been sky rocketing in the last couple of years due to the increase in use of technology, and are expected to continue rising due to the number of children who have access to the internet and mobile devices. It is also suspected that there is a higher incidence with girls rather than boys in terms of being the target and the predator. This is because girls are thought to use technology more frequently (Slonje, 2008).

Methods and Types of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can occur in many different ways due to the various forms of technology available. The most common types are through a phone call, text message, email, picture/video clip, instant message, website, or chat room. Text messaging, phone calls, and emails were the most frequent method used out of them all. The majority of this was found to take place outside of school, usually at home. Therefore, children who are using technology frequently when home are at a greater risk (Smith, 2008).

There are various types of cyberbullying that take place. The main categories are harassment, flaming, denigration, and impersonation. Harassment involves online behavior that is repetitive, long lasting, and offensive. It is used most commonly through email, instant messaging, text messaging, and social networking sites. It consists of a bully sending hundreds of aggressive messages to a single person. Flaming is portrayed as a heated exchange between two or more kids, so it occurs usually in a public environment like a chat room. It is usually a shorter period of time and can become very powerful, personal, and result in strong emotional reactions. Denigration is when a bully spreads a lie or cruel rumor about someone with the intention of ruining that person's reputation. This can be done by sending out false emails or instant messages to other people, posting a false statement on a social networking site, or changing a picture to portray something else and then sending it out to other people digitally. Impersonation is when a bully imitates or poses as the victim, and sends hateful or hurtful things out to others making it look like the victim said them. This is usually carried out through fake emails, instant messages, or social media sites that they hacked that are the victims (Carpenter, n.d.).

The four other important types of cyberbullying to be aware of are trickery, outing, exclusion, and exposure. Trickery is a very common type because it is easier than most of the others and can result in a huge negative impact on the victim. This is when the bully acts like they want to be good friends with the victim, and tricks the victim into trusting them. Then, the bully has the victim discuss mean things about other people with them. Later, the bully sends all the hurtful things the victim got tricked into saying out to all the people they talked about. This results in the victim losing all of their friends and makes them look terrible. Outing is simply when a bully shares private information about the victim with others over the internet. This one

is used a lot with girls, because they tend to tell their friends a lot more about themselves. Then, when they get mad they announce the other person's personal information publicly. Exclusion, also known as cyberostracism, is when a bully blocks the victim from being involved in online social activity. This can happen by being blocked from sending emails or messages to others, or being denied on a social media site when asking to be someone's friend. Lastly, exposure is the phenomenon of posting embarrassing photos or videos of the victim online. All of these types of cyberbullying can result in the victim being extremely depressed or devastated (Carpenter, n.d.).

Preventing Cyberbullying

It is crucial for our society to learn about the actions that you can take to prevent cyberbullying from occurring. There are preventative measures that schools and parents can take to reduce the chances of this happening. In schools, it is important to start by creating an "anti-bullying task force" consisting of different levels of faculty. Once this is created, they should work to raise awareness campaigns about how cyberbullying forms, and how to prevent it from occurring. They should involve the students in creating and applying the teaching techniques to their peers. Also, teaching them how to avoid it, respond to it, and report it are crucial elements that will eliminate the chances of cyberbullying from taking place. Schools should also inform the students about the consequences involved with cyberbullying such as detention, expulsion, and criminal prosecution. Also, encourage them not to share private information and to report any cyberbullying they believe is occurring. Establishing a relationship with local law enforcement and having them talk to students is a big help as well. Lastly, making sure that schools the students will be continuing on to have a cyberbullying prevention program is ideal to

make sure they will be consistently aware of how to prevent it from happening (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2009).

At home there are also preventative measures parents can take to reinforce the topic that children are now aware of hopefully from school. First, parents need to be sure they understand cyberbullying and how technology can be used to carry this act out before talking with their family about it. They can also contact internet service provider (IPS) to learn about their policy and suggestions on the topic. While talking with IPS, parents can also learn how to set controls that will monitor their children's internet activity. After that, parents should identify which sites their children are visiting online, set limits about which sites they can go on, and for how long. Parents then should talk to their children about what to do if they ever receive a cyberbullying message. They should tell them to either ignore it, or ask they bully to remove the harmful material. Remember to remind children not to share any sort of personal information online such as passwords, addresses, phone numbers, or full names. Lastly, keeping any household computers in public areas of the house is also likely to reduce the risk (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2009).

Signs of Cyberbullying

In the event that a child does get cyber bullied, there are some red flag warning signs that people should be aware of so they know to intervene. A common sign is when a child who frequently uses the computer suddenly stops using the computer altogether. Another big sign is when the child shows actions of nervousness or jumpiness when they receive an instant message, text message, or email come through on their computer or phone. Also, if the child appears anxious about going to school or even leaving the house in general, there is a good chance this is

occurring. There are also emotional changes such as anger, depression, or frustration after using a computer when previously the child did not display these emotions afterwards. Lastly, if the child refuses to discuss online activities or strangely withdraws from usual friends and family members, there is a chance that they are being cyber bullied (Hinduja, 2009).

In the case that your child is the cyber bully, there are also profound warning signs that can be seen so you know to get involved. If the child abruptly changes screens or closes the internet when you walk by, you should be suspicious. Also, if they are up late hours throughout the night and get abnormally upset if they cannot get on the computer you should look into this. Another important sign is if they laugh a lot when they are on the computer, and avoid talking about what they are doing on the computer. Lastly, if you see they are using multiple accounts online or if you see them on one that is not their own, there is a strong possibility this is the reason (Hinduja, 2009).

There are also warning signs of cyberbullying in general that can be seen in the form of emotional, social/behavioral, or academic changes. For emotional changes, the child may suddenly become withdrawn or shy, depressed, very moody or agitated, uneasy or overly stressed out, or show signs of hostile behavior. Socially or behaviorally the child may suddenly stop using the computer, exhibit a change in eating or sleeping habits, have nightmares, withdraw from activities they once took pleasure in, injure themselves or attempt suicide, or abruptly change their group of friends. Academically, the child may refuse to go to school, act out in school, skip school, lose interest in school, or let their grades suddenly drop. In the end, the most important sign of them all that indicates cyberbullying is occurring is the sudden

withdraw from technology after they previously used it on a daily basis (National Crime Prevention Council, 2001).

Resolving Cyberbullying

Unfortunately cyberbullying does occur, so when it happens it is important to know how to resolve the issue. The first thing you should do is talk to your child about what is going on and tell them never to retaliate by being a cyber bully as well. After that, you should inform the child's school officials, inform the police, and ask them the details about the bullying so you can come up with a "safety plan" for them. You should then reinforce the problem of sharing personal information and make sure they don't do so. Then, tell them to save "the evidence" of the bullying that was done so you can identify the bully and contact someone with proof. Next, you should change the child's number or get a new email account set up so there can't be any further contact between them and the bully. Also, teach them how to be confident. According to Borba (2008), "research finds that kids who learn how to be assertive and appear more confident are less likely to be targeted by bullies." Lastly, have a serious conversation with the child because this is extremely hard for them to go through. You need to make sure that they are stable, and support them in every way possible (Borba, 2008).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has identified the major aspects of cyberbullying and how it can seriously impact a child's life. This is a very serious issue that will only continue to grow with our advancement in technology. Being aware of this problem and actively trying to prevent it are crucial in keeping cyberbullying under control. Also, knowing what to watch for is equally

important so you can end the bullying before it gets even further out of control. Lastly, knowing

how to properly intervene when cyberbullying does occur helps to resolve the issue as best as

possible.

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