

A Heideggerian Reflection on the Psycho-Moral Consequences of Cyber-Bullying

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Abstract: Cyber-bullying is one of the effects of information and technological advancements. The Psycho-moral concerns of Cyber-bullying will be to review from Heidegger's moral thinking, to justify the claim that human interaction is enslaved and ruptured by Cyber-bullying. Using the method of a philosophical analysis, we maintain that Cyber-bullying is a product of technological innovation with moral complexities. The paper concludes that Heidegger's psychological moral education be instill into the child to avoid bullying crisis, and to maintain an upright and virtuous lifestyle among children.

Keywords: Cyber-bullying, Education, Psychology, Morality, Heidegger

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Introduction

The prevalence of electronic technology in today's world has led to an upsurge of cases traceable to cyber-bullying among teens. This has become a source of concern for both children and parents in the moral development of the former. It is the case that some children find an avenue for their frustrations through bullying others. There is no doubt that there is a psychological underpinning to this behaviour. As a matter of fact, before now, these antisocial actions could be better controlled because they were limited to face-to-face interactions. But technological evolution has made the issue more perilous and complex to contain (Straw, 1995). Various forms of technology like cell phones, social media sites, chat rooms, to name but a few, have allowed bullying to magnify within cyberspace.

The aim of this paper is to evince background information about bullying. It defines the problem and where it is focused, looks at the various issues and consequences of cyber bullying, and discusses possible preventative programs. It does this in five sections, the first being this introduction. In the next section effort is made to give a conceptual overhauling of the term cyber-bullying. The section attempts to reveal the distinction between cyber bullying and traditional bullying to deduce why the former is of the graver concern in this age of information revolution. The section also chronicles how cyber bullying operates, and examines the psychological consequences on adolescent children. In the section that follows, attention is given to some of the proposed solutions for parents and educators regarding how to combat the psychological trauma that so often has damaging consequences in adulthood. The fourth section concludes the inquiry that Heidegger's psychological moral education be instill into the child to avoid bullying crisis, and to maintain an upright and virtuous lifestyle among children.

Cyber-Bullying and the Psycho-Moral Impression on Adolescents

In common parlance, bullying refers to an act of insulting and/or harassing a person. To bully is to frighten, hurt, or threaten (a smaller or weaker person). Put differently, bullying is when a person or group of persons with more power, intentionally and continually cause(s) a harm or hurt on a person or group of persons who are considered unlikely or helpless to respond. Kowalski, et al., define bullying as an aggressive behaviour that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power strength (Kowalski, 2008). Sometimes this imbalance involves a difference in physical strength between children, but often it is characterized by a difference in social

power or status. Because of this imbalance of power or strength, a child who is being bullied has a difficult time defending him or herself. Typically, bullying does not occur just once or twice, but is repeated over time.

‘Cyber’ is a prefix that is mostly used to describe a person, thing, information or idea which is part of computer and information range. With the advancements in technology, a new form of bullying called cyber bullying has emerged. Thus, the intimidation of peers in the classroom has taken another dimension. Students intimidate or harass their peers online. Cyber bullying “is the use of technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person” (Susan, 1996). Similarly, cyber-bullying is the use of technology to harass, hurt humiliate and embarrass another person (Vanisher, 1996).

Cyber-bullying refers to the act of bullying an individual through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) - through mediums such as mobile phones, text messages, internet chat rooms, emails, phone calls, social networking websites, and so on (Lenhart et al., 2011). A person who uses technology to bully, like one who bullies face-to-face, often aims at the vulnerable. Cyber-bullying is the willful and repeated harm inflicted with computers, cell phones and other electronic devices (Hinduja et al., 2014). Put differently, cyber bullying involves the use of Information and Communication Technologies to support the deliberate, repeated and hostile behaviour of an individual or group with the intention to harm others.

The National Bullying Prevention Center states that Cyber-bullying is the use of technology to harass, hurt, embarrass, humiliate, and intimidate another person (Pacer’s, 2014). Students using technology to bully, just like those who bully face-to-face, often look for targets who are vulnerable, socially isolated, or who may not understand social norms. This suggests that Cyber-bullying refers to incidents where adolescents use technology to hurt, harm, threaten and humiliate their peers. For example, a youth may send a text message to others or spread rumours using cell phones or the internet. Hence, Cyber-bullying refers to bullying that occurs through electronic communication devices.

Cyber bullying must incorporate bullying’s essential elements: (1) wilfulness; (2) repetition; (3) causation of harm perceived by its target; and (4) perpetration via computers, phones, or other electronic devices (Hinduja^b, 2009). The first three elements of cyber bullying mirror those of traditional bullying; the requirement that cyber bullying be perpetuated via electronic device is the main distinguishing feature between the two. But what in the first place is traditional bullying?

The traditional bullying usually occurs in schools during the period when students are less monitored or unsupervised (Kowalski et al., 2013). It is a

form of social interaction in which a more dominant individual (the bully) exhibits aggressive behavior, which is intended to and does in fact, cause distress to a less dominant individual (the victim). The aggressive behavior may take the form of a direct physical and/or verbal attack or may be indirect when, for instance, the bully hides a possession that belongs to the victim or spreads false information about the victim (Stephenson et al., 1989).

There are three main types of traditional bullying: verbal bullying, physical bullying, and social bullying. All three involve the harassment of a victim by an aggressor whose intent is to inflict harm. Verbal bullying is a situation whereby an individual verbally mocks and teases their victim in a direct or indirect way. The direct verbal bullying consists of face-to-face interaction with the individual(s) involved, which may consist in name-calling, threats, hurtful comments or similarly offensive actions. The indirect verbal bullying is done without the immediate knowledge of the victim but makes negative comments about the victim to others. Physical bullying includes pushing, punching, kicking, and striking that cause pains on the victim. Social bullying is a situation in which an individual spread rumours about another that has the effect of ostracizing the victim from his or her peers.

From the foregoing, one may deduce the following distinctions between cyber bullying and traditional bullying:

The use of Internet/computer and electronic devices:

Cyber-bullying is the willful and repeated harm inflicted by computers, cell phones and other electronic devices. On the other hand, traditional bullying is not done through internet or electronic devices but centers upon physical acts. In other words, traditional bullying is any type of bullying that involves or that is carried out throughout non-electronic means.

Anonymity/Impersonation:

People who cyber bully may attempt to remain anonymous. Unlike the traditional method of bullying, cyber bullying does not require any superior physical strength on the part of the bully, neither does it require face-to-face contact - a person who bullies another on the internet may not reveal his or her true identity. This implies that cyber bullying can be done anonymously. In this case, victims may not know who the bully is, or why they are being targeted. The cyber bully can cloak, masquerade or personate his or her identity behind a computer or phone using anonymous email addresses. Thus, cyber bullying is sometimes difficult to trace to its source.

Large audience/rapidly reached/Hard to control:

In cyber bullying, the audience can be very large and reached rapidly. Unlike the traditional act of bullying that may be carried out at a particular place and seen by few persons, the person who engages in cyber bullying can torment their victim throughout the day and anywhere (home, bedroom, school, kitchen, shopping mall et cetera) and the humiliation is seen by hundreds and thousands of people online. Besides, emails could be forwarded to hundreds of people, while social media posts can be viewed by many. The victim of cyber bullying can be reached at any time and in any place. The hurtful actions of cyber bullying are viral in nature, which means that a large number of people (at school, in the neighborhood, in the city, or in the world) will know that a person is being bullied and they too can be involved in the victimization or find out what the incident is all about. The victims, offenders and witnesses are limitless.

Invasion of home/personal space:

Unlike the traditional bullying that is restricted to a particular place, cyber bullying since it involves the use of technology can take place at any time and can intrude into spaces that have previously been regarded as safe and personal. In other words, cyber bullying can happen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and reach a child even when he or she is alone. It can happen at any time of the day or night. Besides, the person who bullies another person does not have to see the immediate response of the target. Sometimes the teen who bullies another teen may not recognize the serious harm done to the victim.

Fear of Reporting:

In most cases, cyber bullying victims are fearful or reluctant to report incidents to their parents, teachers or other adults because they feel they could be punished, or perhaps forfeit their computers, laptops, internet, or cell phone privileges. On the other hand, those who are bullied traditionally are most likely to report to parents, teachers and other adults because in most cases the parents see the physical hurt.

In any case, both cyber bullying and traditional bullying are devastating to the victims. A bully is a bully whether they exist in the online realms or physical realms. Bullying is a serious problem with several consequences. However, cyber bullying appears to pose greater threat to young people than do traditional forms of bullying. Therefore, all hands must be on deck. That is, parents, students, teachers, and school administrators are all needed to combat this menace.

With the meaning and nature of cyber bullying laid out, and the distinction between cyber bullying and traditional bullying clearly stated, it is time to turn to the consequences and the psycho-moral outcomes of the individual victim.

While the social media, or internet, is the arena of cyber bullying, the following signs and symptoms may be noticed:

- being emotionally upset during or after using the internet or phone;
- being very secretive or protective of one's digital life;
- withdrawal from family members, friends, and offline activities, and spending an excessive amount of time alone;
- avoiding school or group gatherings;
- slipping grades and "acting out" in anger at home;
- changes in mood, behaviour, sleep, or appetite;
- wanting to stop using the computer or cell phone;
- being nervous or jumpy when getting an instant message, text, or email;
- avoiding discussions about computer or cell phone activities;
- low self-esteem;
- reluctance to let parents or other family members anywhere near their mobiles, laptops etc;
- finding excuses to stay away from school or work, including school refusal;
- friends disappearing or being excluded from social events;
- losing weight or changing appearance in an attempt to fit in;
- fresh marks on the skin that could indicate self-harm, and dressing differently such as wearing long-sleeved clothes in the summer to hide any marks; and not limited to
- a change in personality, for example, more angry, depressed, tearful, or withdrawn.

If these are the possible and usual outcomes of the activities of cyber-bullying on an individual, it is therefore pertinent to ask what are the likely causes of this act that diminishes self-esteem. There has been great deliberation among intellectuals to explain why people engage in cyber bullying. Cyber bullying could be seen as a fun fact activity but most often it is emotional and behavioural problems and disturbances, which lead children to indulge in cyber bullying activities (Lawrence, 1995). Individual perceptions, attitudes, or internalized sentences about outside things and events consciously or unconsciously affect their behaviours, reactions as well as their relationships or feelings towards others. We contend that cyberbullying is to: flaming (electronic transmission of angry or rude messages), harassment (repeatedly sending insulting or threatening messages) cyber stalking (threats of harm and intimidation), denigration (insults, spreading painful rumours), masquerading (pretending to be someone else and sharing information to

damage a person's reputation), outing (revealing personal information about a person which was shared in confidence), exclusion (maliciously leaving a person out of a group online, such as a chat line or a game, or ganging up on one individual). There is evidence that cyber bullying stems from teens' beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and so forth, as well as internalized judgments about things and events which contributes to unhealthy feelings and self-defeating behaviors. These then provoke or lead them to engage in cyber bullying.

Psychological harm of cyber bullying:

the impact of cyber bullying finds expression in violence and suicidal thoughts as well as in mental disorders, particular states of recurrent stress and severe depression (Jerry, 2010). Cyber bullying exerts psychological, physical and academic effects that can lead the victim to himself/herself becoming a menace to society if not properly addressed. We maintain that many cyber bullying victims are depressed, fear, anger, sadness and frustrated (Kowalski, 2008). Cyber bullying could lead suicide or death of victims due to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD reawakens traumatic memory linked to Cyber bullying creating depression and anxiety (Monday, 2020). The memories of unanalyzable fragments linked to Cyber bullying "have seen, heard, done, and felt can trigger PTSD, a common problem among survivors. In rare circumstances, a person with severe PTSD may attack oneself, insult oneself, or engage in extreme violence" (Monday, 2020).

Physical harm of cyber bullying:

this type of cyber bullying impact lures the victims to self-harm. Besides, a student once said "Cyber bullying hurts me physically and mentally, it shocks me and takes away my joy and confidence. It makes me feel sick and worthless." Some teens have been reported to have suicidal thoughts and while some have committed suicide as result of cyber bullying. There have been a number of examples in the United States and other places where youths who were victimized ended up taking their lives (Hinduja^b 2009.). Indeed, there exists an extensive range of physical harms that are done because of cyber bullying. A child may skip school because he or she is ashamed to go to school. More so, the child may begin to injure himself physically because of the stress that he is experiencing.

Emotional harm of cyber bullying:

the effect of this causes victims to lose their self-esteem and sense of self-worth, which can then lead to engagement in unhelpful, self-demeaning or

illicit forms of behavior in an effort to correct the damage inflicted by the bullying. Some go so far as posting their own nude picture on the internet or uploading private videos of their friends. In addition, cyber victims are prone to psychosomatic symptoms like headaches, abdominal pains, and sleeplessness (Wanda, 2010).

Social harm of cyber- bullying:

Humans are by nature social beings, finding their fulfillment through association with others. Arguably, anything that hinders one from socializing suggests a corresponding likelihood of being anti-social or non-relational with others. A child by nature would want to play around with his friends and peers in the neighborhood. Cyber bullying is a public act of humiliation that can have long-lasting effects. Thus, when a child experiences cyber-bullying, he withdraws to himself and stays away from other children - for example not going out for the picnic, or being shy to go and see Santa Claus. That is to say, victims of cyber bullying on so many occasions face embarrassment leading unfortunately to anti-social outcomes.

Academic harm of cyber bullying:

Though the act of cyber bullying usually occurs outside the school, its effects are manifest in the classroom. The impact encourages a child to skip school and classes. Besides, when a child engages in anti-school activities his academic performance is invariably affected. That is to say, cyber bullying results in poor academic performance because the child lacks concentration during class due to emotional instability. Skipping school is inevitable. Moreover, some of the victims who manage to maintain school attendance may end up unleashing their anger on whoever comes across their path, with further violence the likely end.

Social vices of cyber bullying: since most of the teens that are victims of cyber bullying skip school, they may end up joining criminal gangs or becoming agents of gang leaders in their environment by going on errands for them and learning their bad behaviors. Some use hard drugs to overcome their depression. This spiral into an underworld can ultimately lead to becoming an outlaw of society. A child may develop a smoking or alcohol addiction, or, worse, become a cultist or a fully-fledged gang member, shattering their journey through adolescence and early adulthood.

There are many obstructions to combating cyber bullying. In this connection, Hinduja S. and Patchin J.W identified two principal challenges that make it difficult to eliminate cyber bullying, namely nonchalant attitude and lack of technical skills on technology (2010, Wanda). The problem of

nonchalance finds expression in the fact that, though the problem of cyber bullying has been here for years around the globe, yet some people do not see the harm associated with it and its resulting consequences on the teens' moral and academic life. They believe that there are more serious problems of adolescents than the issue of cyber bullying. So this a call on teachers, parents and law enforcement agencies to be involve in the fight against cyber bullying.

Another challenge is lack of technical skills on technology. Most parents often say that they do not have the technical skills to check their kid's online activities, and that schools should be covering it in detail during class time and through other programmes. But some parents tend to discourage schools from disciplining their kids who cyber-bullied others. Most parents often sue the teacher or school for infringing on the rights of their children. Besides, most parents do this to show their children that they care about their wellbeing but they do not know that they are making matters worse by such actions.

In addition to the above, another major challenge of combating cyber bullying is with regard to cyber bullying laws. Should cyber bullying be considered a crime? There are two opposing camps regarding this question, possess challenges to combating cyber bullying. Those who oppose cyber-bullying law believe that suicide is too unpredictable an outcome of cyber bullying. However, they hold that students be punished for crimes in which they intend to inflict harm, yet they still have the right to freedom of speech. In addition, they argue that results have shown that cyber bullying is the direct cause of suicide, but there many other factors and variables such as home problems, clinical depression, drug and alcohol abuse, and forms of alienation. On the other hand, those who favour cyber bullying hold that bullies should be held accountable for the irresponsible cruelty done to others whether it results to suicide or not. In a 2010 poll, 69 percent of those surveyed believe that harassing someone over the internet should be a punishable crime. Family and friends of those who have lost loved ones as a result of Cyber-bullying believe that loss of such a young life should not go unpunished. What then is the solution to this problem?

The issue of cyber- bullying and its impacts on the teen's whole being is of great concern to parents in particular and teachers in general. We maintain that the inclusion of Heidegger's psychological moral education in the school curriculum and parent teaching their wards at home will go a long way in curbing the menace of cyber bullying among teens. Cases of human action and inaction are alike informed by both rational and irrational incentives. Irrational self-defeating thinking and behaviour prevent goal attainment, leading to inner conflict, as well as more conflict with others. We

argue that inclusion of moral education in schools will help teens to identify and evaluate disputes in ways that push out irrational or self-defeating judgments.

Psycho-Moral Implications of Cyber-Bullying and Heidegger's Remedial Approach

The aim of this section is to undertake the task of providing the possible solution to cyber bullying. We suggest that Heidegger's view on technology if instilled into the child by parents and policy makers, it would naturally open up a diagnostic tool for understanding cyber bullying for the common good of the society.

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) was conceivably the most conflict-ridden philosopher of the twentieth century. While some scholars maintain that Martin Heidegger is one of the greatest and most original thinkers of the twentieth century (Mark, 2014) but western civilization had been on a trajectory toward nihilism, which would lead to cultural and intellectual crisis. Heidegger maintains that a “decline toward nihilism – was intimately linked to this forgetting of being” (Mark, 2014).

Heidegger's reflection on technology is a vindication of human trajectory toward nihilism. Technology brings about a decline by “constricting our experience of things as they are (Mark, 2014). To understand the essence of technology from the way it is, through a free relationship with it. In his words: “when we can respond to this essence, we shall be able to experience the technological within its own bounds” (Heidegger, 1977). Technology is not correspondent to the essence of technology. When we, in quest of the essence of “tree,” we have to turn out to be aware that that which pervades every tree, as tree, is not itself a tree that can be encountered among all the other trees. This is to say that the essence of technology is by no means anything technological. Technology is a human activity for creation, but nature is conceived as a means to an end. The technological “sector had produced jobs, profits, expanded the quality of life, but it equally alienated human beings from nature” (Osebor^b, 2020).

Heidegger argues that modern technology is a mode of “revealing” just like *physis*, *techné* and *poiesis*, it is not a bringing-forth in the same sense that *poiesis* (poetry, art) or *physis* (nature) is, but a “challenging-forth,” (Heidegger, 1977). In Heidegger's analysis, humankind should see technology not as the only mode of revealing but one out of the many modes of revealing. Unless one realizes this, Heidegger maintains, humankind steeped in ignorance and enslaved to technology.

A reflection of Heidegger's technology/technicity thesis, one can validly infer that in recent times technology has become the only mode of revealing, eroding other "other modes of being" The consequences of cyber bullying, in Heidegger's reading reveals the psychological bondage that humanity has entered under the tyranny of technology. In this sense, technology is a means to an end. The highest danger" is risking, if humankind are not properly guided on the positive use of technology.

Conclusion

Cyber bullying among peers is something that has eaten deep into the psychology and morals of society, thanks to the advent of social media. In this essay, the principal task has been to look at the meaning, nature, distinction, function, and consequences of cyber bullying. And a consequence of this is the dire need of a panacea which this essay finds in the caution of Martin Heidegger about technology as well as in the role of parents and the school in supervising the psycho-moral development of individuals. It is the view of this research that cyber bullying is a very crucial issue that could make or mar the psychology and dignity of the individual, if not checked in the right way.

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