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CS349

CYBERBULLYING AND HARASSMENT

WHAT MAKES CYBERBULLYING DIFFERENT FROM BULLYING?

- ▶ Takes place over digital devices
 - ▶ SMS, apps, social media, forums, gaming
- ▶ Includes sharing personal information or false information in a public way in order to embarrass or humiliate
- ▶ Bullying can occur persistently offering victim no relief
- ▶ Information is more permanently available affecting victim for longer
- ▶ Bullying is harder to notice as it occurs outside of class

GLOBAL TRENDS

- ▶ A 2012 study assessed cyberbullying awareness
 - ▶ Difficult to gauge actual bullying statistics so instead asked 18,000 adult participants from 24 countries to assess their understanding of cyberbullying
- ▶ Worldwide 66% of respondents knew about cyberbullying, 10% reported their child had been a victim, 25% knew a child that had been a victim
- ▶ Cyberbullying closely tied to Internet access
 - ▶ Countries with higher rates of access have more bullying
- ▶ 60% of participants cited social networking sites like Facebook as vehicle for cyberbullying
- ▶ Mobile devices and online chat rooms cited by 40% of participants each

CYBERBULLYING BY COUNTRY

- ▶ 32% of parents in India reported their children had experienced cyberbullying
- ▶ 53% of Indonesians reported knowing a child who had been bullied
- ▶ 87% of Australians were aware of cyberbullying
- ▶ 82% of Americans were aware of cyberbullying
- ▶ Less than 50% of Chinese were aware of cyberbullying
 - ▶ Countries with high censorship rates tended to under-report awareness

EFFECTS OF BULLYING (BOTH CYBER AND PHYSICAL)

- ▶ Decreased concentration, fear of school, and poor grades
- ▶ Self-harm, mental illness such as depression and anxiety, and suicide
- ▶ In 2012, more than 12 American teens committed suicide due to cyberbullying
- ▶ Half of youth suicides in Britain related to bullying
- ▶ Since 2007, youth suicides in Japan have ranged between 300 to 350 a year
 - ▶ In part associated with bullying
 - ▶ Around 224k reports of school bullying in 2015

CASE STUDY: LORI DREW AND MEGAN MEIER

- ▶ In 2006, 13-year old Megan Meier committed suicide after online boyfriend “Josh Evans” told her “the world would be a better place without her”
 - ▶ Megan had attempted suicide once before and had made comments about suicide to friends earlier
- ▶ Later revealed that “Josh” was a fake MySpace user created by Megan’s former best friend, Sarah Drew, Sarah’s mom, Lori (47), and Lori’s employee, Ashley (18)
 - ▶ Used to spy on Megan
- ▶ No federal statute against cyberbullying and no violation of state laws in Missouri
- ▶ Federal prosecutors filed charges in California under CFAA (Computer Fraud and Abuse Act) against Lori for violation of MySpace’s user agreement
 - ▶ Charged with four felony charges in first federally prosecuted cyberbullying case

THE LEGALITY OF EULAS

- ▶ MySpace's user agreement requires registrants to provide factual information and to refrain from soliciting personal information from minors and harassing/harming others
 - ▶ By clicking "agree" Drew committed same crime as a hacker
- ▶ Ashley Grills received immunity in order to testify as prosecution witness
 - ▶ Admitted she set up account, did not read terms of service, and posted final message that triggered Megan's suicide
- ▶ Sarah Drew took stand in place of her mother

OUTCOME?

- ▶ Lori Drew cleared of 3 felonies but convicted on 3 misdemeanors
 - ▶ Jury deadlocked on remaining felony charge of conspiracy
- ▶ Federal judge later acquitted misdemeanors
 - ▶ Misdemeanors not considered constitutional as it would require Drew to have obtained unauthorized access
 - ▶ MySpace did not provide sufficient notice to hold her responsible
- ▶ Drew family left Missouri after receiving harassment locally in town and online

CASE STUDY: TYLER CLEMENTI

- ▶ In 2010, three weeks after starting his freshman year at Rutgers College, Tyler Clementi committed suicide after posting a brief note on Facebook
- ▶ Revealed that, three days earlier, his roommate, Dharun Ravi, obtained a video of Clementi kissing another man
 - ▶ Clementi had asked for alone time
 - ▶ While out of the room, Ravi set up a webcam with hall mate, Molly Wei
 - ▶ When Ravi saw his roommate with a man, he tweeted about it to his followers
 - ▶ Two days later, Ravi announced via Twitter he'd live-stream Clementi's second encounter but Ravi did not
- ▶ New Jersey charged Ravi and Wei with 15 counts involving invasion of privacy, bias intimidation, tampering with evidence, witness tampering, etc

OUTCOME?

- ▶ Charges against Wei were dropped in order to gain her testimony against Ravi
- ▶ Both Wei and Ravi withdrew from Rutgers
- ▶ Ravi convicted on 15 counts in 2012
- ▶ In 2015, the state Supreme Court ruled the laws under which Ravi was convicted were unconstitutional
- ▶ In 2016, appeals court threw out all convictions
- ▶ Ravi served 20 days in jail, paid a \$10k fine, and did community service
- ▶ Clementi's family created a foundation to help prevent bullying of LGBT youth

CASE STUDY: MICHELLE CARTER

- ▶ In 2014, Carter (17) convinced her boyfriend, Conrad Roy III (18) to kill himself
 - ▶ Repeatedly texted Roy, goading him toward suicide
 - ▶ During suicide, Roy left truck to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning, but Carter ordered him to get back in leading to his death
- ▶ Carter and Roy began dating in 2012, but relationship was mostly through texting and telephone calls
- ▶ First discussed committing double suicide, then Carter urged Roy to seek psychological counseling before finally encouraging him to kill himself
- ▶ Carter charged with involuntary manslaughter in a juvenile court

OUTCOME?

- ▶ Carter found guilty
 - ▶ Ordered to spend at least 15 months of a 2.5 year sentence incarcerated
- ▶ Sentence stayed in 2018 by judge, allowing Carter to be free pending appeals in Massachusetts
 - ▶ Involuntary manslaughter conviction upheld in 2019 starting her sentence
- ▶ First involuntary manslaughter conviction based on words alone
 - ▶ Potential implications for free speech and liability in remote communication
- ▶ Carter harassed by online bloggers and commentators

ANTI-BULLYING POLICIES AND MEASURES

- ▶ Philippines has Anti-Bullying Act requires elementary and secondary schools to have strategies for prevention and management of bullying behaviors
- ▶ In the UK, all schools are required to have anti-bullying policies, but no national law against cyberbullying
 - ▶ Laws for harassment and stalking used in this context
- ▶ In the US, victims can sue cyberbullies for defamation or harassment, or prosecute for stalking
 - ▶ Certain states have anti-cyberbullying laws
- ▶ In all cases, it can be difficult to locate, and therefore enforce, cyberbullying laws

STOPPING CYBERBULLYING...

- ▶ Why do people cyberbully?
- ▶ Why is legislation failing to prevent cyberbullying?
- ▶ Why did none of the above defendants consider themselves cyberbullies?
- ▶ What are the legal risks of prosecuting cyberbullying?
- ▶ What is needed to end cyberbullying?

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BULLYING

- ▶ Previous wisdom stated bullies suffer from low self-esteem and often were victims themselves of bullying
- ▶ More recent studies suggest bullies view themselves positively, are untroubled by anxiety but lack prosocial behaviors
 - ▶ Good at social navigating but use it entirely for their personal benefit
 - ▶ Often popular but rarely liked
- ▶ Harshly punitive home environments can encourage bullying
 - ▶ Bullies often have strained relationships with parents and peers
- ▶ Adult bullies more likely to sexually harass and exhibit dating aggression
- ▶ Preventing bullying requires building greater empathy in both potential bullies and children who are “bystanders”

SOCIETAL NORMS AND DEHUMANIZATION

- ▶ Dehumanization can emerge from a desire to maintain societal norms
 - ▶ Hate groups often do not believe they can co-exist with “the other”
 - ▶ Acknowledging “the other” as fully human is a threat to them as individuals
- ▶ Bullies use societal fears to their advantage
 - ▶ Specifically target those who are already marginalized
 - ▶ Easier for bystanders to normalize the bully’s behavior
 - ▶ Reinforces social status and structures that already exist

CASE STUDY: GAMERGATE

- ▶ “It’s about ethics in game journalism”



BRIEF DETOUR: ETHICS IN GAME JOURNALISM

- ▶ There is actually an issue with ethics in game journalism!
 - ▶ Reviews by journalists and playthroughs by streamers are bought by major publishers to promote their games
 - ▶ Little transparency in exchange of gifts or monetary compensation for these promotions
- ▶ ...
- ▶ But GamerGate has about 0% to do with ethics in game journalism and if anything, it shut down any meaningful conversation there could have been
- ▶ Why?

HOW GAMERGATE STARTED

- ▶ In 2014, game developer, Zoe Quinn, was accused by her ex-boyfriend of cheating on him with five men, several of whom were game journalists
- ▶ Quinn was accused by gamers of having slept with game journalists to get positive publicity for her recent text-based game, Depression Quest
- ▶ #GamerGate represented in-crowd's desire to expose corruption of the game industry
- ▶ Quinn's address and phone number doxxed (revealed publicly)
 - ▶ Coordinated death and rape threats forced Quinn to flee her home

SO WHAT ABOUT ETHICS IN GAME JOURNALISM?

- ▶ Kotaku writer, Nathan Grayson, was dating Quinn but he never reviewed Depression Quest
 - ▶ Mentioned it once in a half-sentence before his relationship with Quinn started
 - ▶ Quinn's ex-boyfriend later rescinded his accusatory blog posts
- ▶ Attacks on Quinn expanded to attacks on/doxxing other women:
 - ▶ Feminist critic, Anita Sarkeesian, who created a Youtube series applying feminist critique to games
 - ▶ Popular actress and gamer, Felicia Day
 - ▶ Game developer, Brianna Wu
- ▶ Gamergate mobs petitioned companies such as Intel to pull ads from sites critiquing their movement

GAMERGATE AS BULLYING AND MISOGYNY

- ▶ Movement specifically targeted women
- ▶ Abuse committed through Facebook, Twitter, etc and coordinated via Discord, Reddit, IRC channels, etc
- ▶ Believed that they, as primarily young, white males, were under attack by the media and minorities* who were taking away their safe space of gaming
 - ▶ e.g. Gamergaters believed games made by women and/or targeting women was an existential threat to their identity as a "gamer"

* In 2013, women over 18 are 36% of the game-playing population in the US (largest demographic) with women totaling to 48% of game-playing population in the US

EFFECTS ON GAMING COMMUNITY

- ▶ The rest of the world looks on GamerGate with horror
 - ▶ The term “gamer” becomes more deeply associated with misogyny and violence
- ▶ Schism between “main stream” and “diverse” game communities
 - ▶ Toxicity of online gaming communities continues to be both unacceptable and largely unavoidable
 - ▶ Publishers recognize there is money in “diverse” gaming and therefore target non-white males, which furthers Gamergaters’ victim complex
- ▶ Rise of red pill/incel subcultures but if you don’t know what those things are, consider yourself lucky!
- ▶ Still no real discussion about corporate influence on game reviews, though...

WIDER EFFECTS

- ▶ Gamergaters tried to expand into science fiction/fantasy novels by attempting to take over the 2015 Hugo Awards
- ▶ Successfully expanded in to politics, evolving into movement known as the "alt-right"
- ▶ Alt-right is a hard-to-categorize movement, but, in Breitbart's own words, basically a bunch of trolls:
 - ▶ "The alt-right is a movement born out of the youthful, subversive, underground edges of the internet. 4chan and 8chan are hubs of alt-right activity. For years, members of these forums - political and non-political - have delighted in attention-grabbing, juvenile pranks."
 - ▶ Usually varying degrees of white supremacy/misogyny in thinking

WHY DID GAMERGATE HAPPEN?

- ▶ My personal theory:
 - ▶ Gaming culture has always had issues with promoting insensitivity, exclusivity, and provocativity in its inter-personal interactions
 - ▶ As gaming becomes more mainstream, fringe groups and subcultures have lost their perceived home/safe space
 - ▶ As gaming becomes more mainstream, fringe groups and subcultures become a "target demographic" and all the power that entails
 - ▶ Result is "gamers" who take out aggression/frustration on "safe" target (i.e. marginalized people) rather than addressing internal unhappiness or conflicts arising from growing numbers of "bros and jocks" in gaming circles
 - ▶ Toxic masculine culture has made it difficult for young men to understand and express the complexity of their feelings in a meaningful, productive way

INSTAPOLL: PROMOTING EMPATHY ACROSS DIVIDES?

- ▶ List one specific way you feel you can promote empathy in yourself and others. Try to make this as specific as possible and relevant to your personal experience and habits.*

* The personal experience and habits you mention need to be safe for work and not involve illegal activity, thanks!

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