Digital Feminism, Cyberbullying and Gender issues

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Abstract

In the recent past, young feminist activism has assumed prominence in main stream media where we come across news headlines showing the efforts of school girls in fighting sexism, sexual violence and inequity. Feminist activism is a platform where girls can speak about gender-based injustices experienced and witnessed. The present paper deals with issues in digital feminism such as Cyber bullying, trolling and other related issues.

KEYWORDS: Digital Feminism, Cyberbullying, Gender Issues, Internet & Social Media Trolling

What is cyberbullying?

The US National Crime Prevention Council defines cyber-bullying as "the process of using the Internet, cell phones or other devices to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person."

In simple terms, harassment of an individual using the Internet, cell phone or other digital devices can be termed cyberbullying. It involves sending offensive text messages, posting sensitive information or hateful comments about the victim, video shaming and so on.

Technology means that bullying is no longer limited to schoolyards or street corners. Cyberbullying can occur anywhere, even at home, via smartphones, emails, texts, and social media, 24 hours a day, with potentially hundreds of people involved. Cyberbullies use digital technology to harass, threaten, or humiliate you. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying doesn't require face-to-face contact and isn't limited to just a handful of witnesses at a time. It also doesn't require physical power or strength in numbers.

Cyberbullies come in all shapes and sizes—almost anyone with an Internet connection or mobile phone can cyberbully someone else, often without having to reveal their true identity.

Cyberbullies can torment you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and the bullying can follow you anywhere so that no place, not even home, ever feels safe. And with a few clicks the humiliation can be witnessed by hundreds or even thousands of people online.

The methods kids and teens use to cyberbully can be as varied and imaginative as the technology they have access to. they might range from sending threatening or taunting

messages via email, text, social media, or IM, to breaking into your email account or stealing your online identity to hurt and humiliate you. Some cyberbullies may even create a website or social media page to target you.

As with face-to-face bullying, both boys and girls cyberbully, but tend to do so in different ways. Boys tend to bully by "sexting" (sending messages of a sexual nature) or with messages that threaten physical harm. Girls, on the other hand, more commonly cyberbully by spreading lies and rumors, exposing your secrets, or by excluding you from social media groups, emails, buddy lists and the like. Because cyberbullying is so easy to perpetrate, a child or teen can easily change roles, going from cyberbullying victim at one point to cyberbully the next, and then back again.

The effects of bullying and cyberbullying

Whether you're being targeted by bullies or cyberbullies, the results are similar:

You're made to feel hurt, angry, afraid, helpless, hopeless, isolated, ashamed, and even guilty that the bullying is somehow your fault. You may even feel suicidal.

Your physical health is likely to suffer, and you are at a greater risk of developing mental health problems such as depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, or adult onset PTSD.

You're more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school to avoid being bullied.

In many cases, cyberbullying can be even more painful than face-to-face bullying because:

Cyberbullying can happen anywhere, at any time. You may experience it even in places where you'd normally feel safe, such as your home, and at times when you'd least expect it, like during the weekend in the company of your family. It can seem like there's no escape from the taunting and humiliation.
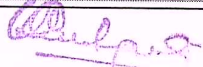
A lot of cyberbullying can be done anonymously, so you may not be sure who is targeting you. This can make you feel even more threatened and can embolden bullies, as they believe online anonymity means they're less likely to get caught. Since cyberbullies can't see your reaction, they will often go much further in their harassment or ridicule than they would if they were face-to-face with you.

Cyberbullying can be witnessed by potentially thousands of people. Emails can be forwarded to many, many people while social media posts or website comments can often be seen by anyone. The more far-reaching the bullying, the more humiliating it can become.

According to law, cyberbullying has three major components:

1. Use of harsh words

2. Intention to embarrass, harass and insult the victim
3. Convey the above via information and communication technology and/or digital communication technology

The following are the most common sources of cyberbullying:

1. Social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter
2. Instant messaging services such as Whatsapp
3. SMS
4. Email

Types of cyberbullying

With time, cyberbullying has evolved to take many forms. Here are some common types of cyberbullying:

- Flaming: Using hurtful language in emails, text messages or chat rooms against an individual
- Harassment: Sending hurtful, hateful and/or threatening messages
- Cyberstalking: Following an individual online and sending emails or messages to scare, harm or intimidate him
- Exclusion: Deliberately excluding an individual from a group and posting malicious comments/messages about her
- Impersonation/masquerading: Using a fake identity to damage an individual's reputation, and publicly sharing real or false information about him
- Trolling: Intentionally hurting an individual by posting insulting or inflammatory comments
- Fraping: Using an individual's social networking accounts to post inappropriate content to ruin her reputation.

Cyberbullying in India:

According to Intel Security Teens, Tweens and Technology Study conducted over a period of 5 years in India, the results published in 2015 claim that 81% of the children aged 8 to 16 years are already active on social media. Nearly 77% of these children had a Facebook account before they were 13 years of age. Almost 22% of these children, that is, one in five children, face online abuse.

India, unfortunately, is emerging as the global capital of cyberbullying. Here are a few studies that raise concerns about this menace.

- A survey conducted by Microsoft Corporation in 2012, across 25 countries ranked India third in the number of online bullying cases reported.
- According to the 2014 study conducted by the Internet security company, McAfee, "Half of the youth in India have had some experience with cyberbullying."

Some incidents of cyberbullying in India:

Here are a few cyberbullying incidents that happened in India recently:

- A student in Kerala was severely trolled for selling fish to raise money to meet her educational expenses and feed her family.
- A school student in Delhi was stalked and invited to go on a date by someone who became her online friend just a month ago.
- A law student from Kerala was harassed for posting a poem about taboos attached to menstruation.

Reporting cyberbullying in India:

If it is clear, or parents suspect, that a child is being cyberbullied, the matter should be reported to the concerned authorities. Here's what parents should do:

- Identify and block the bully's phone number to prevent him/her from sending messages.
- Save all the chats, posts, and emails sent by the bully, to be used as evidence.
- Report the bully's phone number/account details to the service providers – all social networking platforms have this facility.
- If the bullying still continues, register a complaint at the cybercrime cell of the local police.

Anti-cyberbullying laws in India:

Although there are no specific laws to regulate cyberbullying in India, we do have Section 66A of the Information Technology Act. This Act prescribes the punishment for sending annoying, offensive and insulting communication through digital and information communication technology.

Given below are some other laws that can be used to tackle cyberbullying:

- Publishing or transmitting obscene material — Sec. 67
- Publishing or transmitting sexually explicit material in electronic form — Sec. 67A
- Word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman — Sec. 509
- Sending defamatory messages by e-mail — Sec. 499 IPC
- Printing, selling, advertising grossly indecent or scurrilous matter or matter intended for blackmail — Sec. 292A
- Stalking and contacting, or attempting to contact a woman — Sec. 354D
- Making sexually colored remarks, guilty of the offence of sexual harassment — Sec 354 A
- Violation of privacy — Sec. 66E
- Criminal intimidation by anonymous communication — Sec. 507

Although there are laws to penalize bullying, only a few victims and their families report instances of cyberbullying. A majority prefer to stay silent and hope that things will improve on their own.

Here is a list of some celebrities and public figures who were cyberbullied and how they responded to it.

1. Swara Bhaskar: Swara Bhaskar often trolled for her tweets on right wing. She has always responded the trolls in positive and satiric manner.
2. TapseePannu: TapseePannu trolled for her hair style and comparison with other Bollywood actresses and nowadays for raising her voice against the ongoing protests.
3. Deepika Padukone: She has recently trolled a lot for her visit to Jamia. Her visit referred as a publicity stunt for promotion of her new film which is based on acid attack.
4. Mahua Moitra: She is young politician from Bengal and social media trollers are targeting her for her speeches in Parliament.

Apart from Indian celebrities, many Hollywood actresses are also being trolled for different reasons. Some of them are:
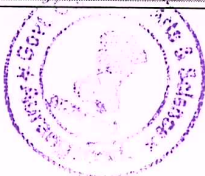
1. Emma Watson

Emma became an instant heartthrob after her role as *Hermione Granger* in the *Harry Potter* series. With fame came the hatred and trolling, which she found hard to escape when she started college at Brown University. Her fellow members of the class started tormenting and bullying her. So, she moved to Columbia University to start afresh and is achieving great success there.

2. Selena Gomez

She has been in the news facing both, mental and physical health problems in the recent past. A large part of it comes from her being cyber-bullied. People trolled and commented on her posts because she had gained some weight. Accepting that it did kind of hurt her feelings, she found an excellent way to cope by channelling her emotions in new music. If we look at the result, her songs have been killin' it with no bumps in the road!

3. Taylor Swift

Ever since she was in high school, she has been a victim of cyberbullying. People comment and lash out at her regarding her personal life, choices and much more that has nothing to do with these strangers hiding behind their computer screens. She too found a healthy way to cope with this and now projects her feelings through her music. It makes her forget about what's going on and focus on the composition!

Conclusion: Digitalization and social media plays an important role in the lives of people both positively and negatively. Digitalization has brought transformations in feminist theory and practice in multiple ways and continue to challenge areas of gender discrimination. Negatively, digitalization is responsible inflicting mental and physical traumas on women such as Cyberbullying, Cyber Extortion, Harassment on dating sites, on threats targeting women, etc.

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Links:

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