Gender Perspectives on Cyberbullying in Different Countries for Comparison

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Abstract. To assess the impacts of cyberbullying from a gender perspective, after a literature review, this paper defines cyberbullying first and discusses its relationship with traditional bullying. And then, the paper concludes the consequences of cyberbullying on women, including suicidal ideation, agency, dignity, and professional achievements. Moreover, from the feminist perspective, cyberbullying reflects the hegemony ideology and power hierarchy of patriarchy. Finally, the paper explores how power relations in cyberbullying intersect with gender and other topics.

Keywords: Cyberbullying; Gender; Media; Different Countries.

1. Gender, media, and cyberbullying

1.1 Definition of Cyberbullying

To evaluate the impacts of cyberbullying from a gender perspective, it is crucial to define cyberbullying first and discuss its relationship with traditional bullying. Previous studies perceive cyberbullying as an extension of traditional forms of bullying. Patchin and Hinduja identify that cyberbullying origins from traditional bullying. A three-part definition of bullying, a broadly accepted baseline definition to date, was introduced by Olweus (1994). In his definition, the act of bullying is an aggressive act with three hallmark characteristics: a) it is intentional; b) it involves a power imbalance between an aggressor (individual or group) and a victim; c) it is repetitive in nature and occurs over time. Olweus furthered that there are also various means of bullying including words, facial expressions, bodily contact, or obscene gesture. Researchers often adopt Olweus's definition as a baseline measure for offline. Additionally, they explain cyberbullying as bullying that involves information and communications or other network technologies (Levy, 2012, p.9). To put it simply, cyberbullying is an online form of offline bullying. Others have also illustrated the definition of cyberbullying with examples. Definitions of cyberbullying contain either concepts or characteristics of the initial definition, and further give an enumeration of devices where bullying occurs online (Vandebosch & VanCleemput, 2009). Tokunaga (2010) proposed a clear and integrated idea of cyberbullying, which is the behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly conveys hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others. Since cyberbullying is rooted in traditional bullying, it's thus fair to infer that cyberbullying is featured by power imbalance and repetitive aggression.

1.2 Impacts of Victimisation and Cyberbullying

This section turns to review the impacts of cyberbullying on women, who are more susceptible to aggression online. Studies after studies have shown that women tend to be the constant victims of cyberbullying. A study by Werner, Bumbus, and Rock (2010) finds that girls involved in relational bullying offline at school are more likely to participate in online bullying or to be its victims. As Lori O. Favela writes in a 2010 blog, 'girls are clearly at the forefront of this technological disaster' (Hinduja and Patchin, 2010). But this increasingly prevalent victimisation and aggression due to gender discrimination online is not simply a phenomenon within the school. What happens at the school, reflects and mirrors, the online aggression women experience in society as a whole. The online harassment of women exemplifies the present-century behavior that profoundly harms females yet too often remains overlooked and even trivialized (Citron, 2009). The Stalking Resource Centre, a

branch of the National Centre for Victims of Crimes, released about 60 percent of online harassment cases pertinent to male attackers and female targets.

There are several consequences of being a cyberbullying victim. In 2021, a study by Lee et al. adopts a socio-ecological approach to learning more about the relationship between cyberbullying victimisation and suicidal ideation among teenagers in South Korea. It is found that a positive correlation between being cyberbullying victims and increased risks of suicidal ideation. The socio-ecological approach of this study offers insight into the impact of online aggression and victimisation on the victims' psychological well-being especially. The socio-ecological approach argues that individuals live in myriad interactive systems in society that resemble the ecological system in the animal kingdom and that others' actions could exert an influence on another willy-nilly. Based on the social-ecological model, adolescents are embedded in various interactive systems, including their family and school environment, and are inclined to be impacted by their peers and elders. Thus, it is vitally important to study youth problems like suicidal ideation in the context of the related socio-ecological variables (Lee et al., 2010, p.3). Indeed, in the study, Lee et al. even take account of academic achievement and physical health for the operation of their approach:

'Social-ecological contexts included the individual-, family-, peer-, and school-level variables. The individual context consisted of age (in years), gender (male, female), school level (middle school, high school), school grade point average (GPA: low, middle, high), socio-economic status (SES: low, middle, high), and self-report physical health (very bad to very good).'

Angrove identifies two ways how the experience of being cyberbullied is detrimental to the victims: explicit and implicit impacts. Explicit impacts can be divided into various parts, namely, study difficulties, mental anxiety, low sense of self-identity, other physical symptoms, and self-harming behaviours. In contrast with explicit impacts, implicit impacts include internalized oppression, harmful impacts on self-identity, and distorted attitudes towards one's gender group. 'Further, sexualized cyberbullying affects girls' perception of self, and inhibits their participation online' (Angrove, 2015).

Cyber harassment can also interfere with women's agency, dignity, and professional achievements (Cirton, 2009, p.385). Therefore, cyber harassment can influence women's well-being both online and in real life. There is evidence that shows women shut down their social accounts like websites and blogs (Sheridan & Grant). "A woman explained that cyber threats had a 'major impact on me both online and offline – I removed my name from my Website and my Internet registration…, I changed my business and home phone numbers…'(Kennedy)" (Cirton, 2009, pp. 385-386). As employment applications increasingly rely on the Internet and search engines, women who have experienced being cyberbullied tend to be disadvantaged in their professional achievements. Opinions that degrade the victims and women undermine women's confidence in their abilities, and the employers' decisions:

"Assertions that '[t] he is why women are TOO STUPID to think critically and intelligently about the film; AND business for that matter and 'why don't you make yourself useful and go have a baby' signed to generate feelings of inferiority and to discourage women from engaging in professional activities online…Employers may decline to interview or hire targeted women not because they believe the malicious postings but because it is simply easier to hire individuals who don't come with such baggage. Moreover, candidates with impressive online reputations are more attractive to employers than those who lack them" (Cirton, 2009, p.386).

1.3 The Presentation of Women on Media in Different Countries

Feminists perceive media as an inherently patriarchal institution and explain cyberbullying as a justification for women's inferiority to men. Hence to look through the feminist lens, power struggles and controls between men and women are the nature of sexualisation and gender-related cyberbullying. The perception of feminists over how women are depicted in media offers explanations for the prevalence and proliferation of cyberbullying in the twenty-first century. For instance, Hall (1982, pp.63-64) argues that media is an ideological institution that contributes to

stabilising and reproducing the existing, dominant social order, a patriarchal social order. The media does not reflect reality; rather it constructs reality via 'active work of selecting and presenting, or structuring and shaping.' Berberick (2010) argues that 'the representation of women in the media has always been exploitative'. The media almost always presents women with an 'ideal', deceptive image of women that females have infinite access to on the Internet. Yet this is an image that is impossible to realize, making women fall into the dangerous trap of self-comparison, anxiety, and fear. A study by Hans-Christoph Friederich in 2007 shows that, shockingly, women's minds were deeply embedded with this deceptive, ideal image in media. The study used FMRI (Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) technology to compare the 'ideal' and 'inferior and flawed' body images. Friedrich concluded that anxiety ratings in all 18 women participants without eating disordered were 'significantly higher' after they admired plenty of pictures of ideal bodies (Berberick, 2010, p.6). The inferiority of women is also attributed to the commodification and objectification of their bodies in media. As a result, women become objects of desire and consumption. The pervasiveness of the patriarchal ideology in advertisements manifests women's objectification:

'…Women's bodies are equated with commodities, presented as rewards of consumption. By instructing men to regard women's bodies as objects, ads help create an atmosphere that devalues women as people, encourages sexual harassment, and worse'(Jacobson and Mazur, 1995, p.84).

Instead of presenting women as complete beings, advertisements are prone to present women in fragments, as 'bare breasts and phallic symbols are understood everywhere. As are the nude female buttocks featured in the Italian and German ads for similar worthless products to remedy the imaginary problem of cellulite'(Kilbourne,1999, p. 72). Similarly.

'The pictures show only legs, torsos, or an open mouth with rouge lip color provocatively placed atop a glass bottle. This reduces women to collections of parts, something less than human. This objectification and sexploitation have changed the rules of society and along with it the attitudes of men and women have changed' (Cirton, 2009, p.8).

The objectification of women, the dominance of patriarchy, and the consequences of cyberbullying in media are not unique Western phenomena. In South Korea, the instances of suicide and rates of suicidal ideation of female celebrities are significantly higher than in any country in the world, and these have long been social concerns. In 2019, South Korea had the fourth highest suicide rate among all countries, with 28.6 suicides per 100,000 people. Moreover, South Korea also has the highest suicide rate among developed countries, according to The Economic Times in 2022. The aforementioned study by Lee et al. shows the relationship between being cyberbullied and suicidal ideation in teenagers in South Korea. A study that examines the impact of thirteen Korean celebrities' suicides over five years suggests that more than 40 percent of subjects were subsequently followed by significant increases in suicide deaths, while keeping seasonality, secular trends, and unemployment rates under control. Such increases were reported mainly to arise in the same age or gender groups, as well as those with the same suicide methods (Fu & Chan, 2013).

To conclude, from the feminist perspective, media is an institution controlled by the patriarchal ideology and it also mirrors power struggles between men and women. Despite differences in societal opinions towards women's roles, cyberbullying is thus a reflection of the hegemony ideology and power hierarchy of patriarchy.

2. Power relations in cyberbullying

2.1 The Socio-Ecological Approach to Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is not simply a private offence between individuals, but a product resulting from the interactions and decisions of several social actors within a dynamic, interactive context of society as a whole. The socio-ecological approach to cyberbullying means looking at cyberbullying beyond private, individualized interactions. 'Everybody is a player in creating the atmosphere in which bullying occurs. Bullying is not a manifestation of an individual personality problem, but a natural phenomenon in groups (Feinson, 2008, p.176). Section II will turn to discuss the power relations and

roles of various social actors that are involved in cyberbullying: the attackers and the victims. Specifically, this section will look at how power relations in cyberbullying intersect with gender. Section II will also review the dynamics of power relations between other actors, and existing measures that address adolescent cyberbullying.

2.2 Responses from the Attackers and the Victims

2.2.1 The Attackers

Research has shown that bullies or attackers, tend to be aggressive and derive pleasure from controlling others. Bojorkvist et al. (1982) concluded bullies with three keywords: strong, dominant, and impulsive. Similarly, Sphenson and Smith (1989) also discovered that bullies or attackers were physically stronger and more confident. A 2008 study finds that bullies tend to take pride in bullying: bullies endorse attitudes of aggressive retaliation and perceive themselves to be more popular than individuals who are not involved in bullying (Bradshaw, et al., 2008). Especially, the study of Olweus (1078) found that male bullies tend to demonstrate aggressive and dominant personalities. 'Olweus (1978) deduced that male bullies had an aggressive character, weak inhibitions against aggression, a strong need to dominate, and a favourable attitude towards aggression… They were relatively tough, strong, confident, …' (Farrington, 1993, p.400).

2.2.2 The Victims

Victims are usually physically and emotionally weak, and easily saddened psychologically. Many cases of cyberbullying often develop into serious bad behavior as a result of the initial minor bullying that went unchecked. After mild bullying has been tried, the abuser's subsequent behavior will evolve into more egregious forms of bullying.

In most cases of cyberbullying, the attackers have a long history of bullying. Similarly, the women who are bullied have been insulted several times to some extent, which leads to long-term and gradually aggravated physical and mental abuse. Most of them lack the right ability and safe environment to call for help, so they can only hurt themselves by silence and gradually go to the limit of what they can bear.

2.3 Difficulties & Measures to Address Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is not a legal concept, and the descriptive term "space + behavior" is only the phenomenon description of torts. It is easy to confuse the concept with the phenomenon, generalize the concept of cyber violence, and reduce the sensitivity of governance.

Thus, unclear subjects of prevention and control responsibility, loose distribution of legal provisions, low ranking of special documents, and lack of specialized legal regulations are the shortcomings of effective control of cyber violence.

What's more, the existing laws and regulations governing cyber violence are relatively scattered, and exploring the legislative mode of special laws is an important way to effectively control cyber violence in the future.

Meanwhile, it does require joint efforts from all social parties. First, regulatory authorities guide Internet platforms to optimize algorithms and enable technology to detect and screen cyberbullying promptly. Second, the news media should intensify anti-bullying propaganda, so that victims can be protected and get relief. Internet regulatory authorities and online platforms should actively prepare manuals on preventing cyberbullying, set up anti-riot tips in prominent parts of web pages, and clearly inform the channels for complaint, relief, and rescue services. Last but not least, in the face of cyberbullying, ordinary users should learn to use notarization to fix evidence. The main perpetrators of massive disclosure of personal information, insult, and slander can timely complain to the platform for deleting information, disconnect links, and complain to the network information department, and file a lawsuit to court.

3. Conclusion

Cyberbullying is the behaviour performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others. Male bullies tend to demonstrate aggressive and dominant personalities, while female victims are weak and easily saddened psychologically. Thus, from a gender perspective, despite differences in societal opinions towards women's roles, cyberbullying is thus a reflection of the hegemony ideology and power hierarchy of patriarchy. It's urgent to regulate cyberbullying from the law, social education, telecommunications protection, and other aspects, as well as improve the mechanism for preventing cyber violence and enhance our ability to fight crime.

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