

Society's Fears of Cyberbullying Through Modern Technology

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According to the Marxian theory of social change, society is influenced primarily by the forces of production and relations of production that take place in a specific time and place. The presence and relevance of this theory can be observed in North American 2019 society. New economic productions and technologies have influenced the ways in which North Americans communicate in every way, shape, and form. Relatively new technologies such as cell phones, laptop computers, and internet are some of the most frequently used electronics in this period of time. In coordination with the Marxian theory of social change, North Americans now use these inventions to communicate socially with family, coworkers, and friends. According to PEW Research Centre, 95% of teens in the US either own or have access to a smartphone, which also allows these young people to be subject to social change. As these technologies are new, society is experiencing a vast sense of uncertainty, surrounding the use and effects of these technologies.

Bullying is an age-old epidemic; parents and teachers have struggled with finding a solution to bullying for many years. However, with the common use of devices like cell phones and laptops, there is a new, and concerning subcategory of bullying that remains to be terrifying for parents: cyberbullying. This form of bullying takes place primarily online, and is largely unregulated by social media sites, and school policies. Cyberbullying has become a popular choice of oppressing others, due to the feature of anonymity. Many tormentors favour online bullying, because of the lack of face-to-face communication, and the decreased possibility of consequence. In one study completed by two psychology scholars, teen subjects recognized the terror in online anonymity, ““Basically, like someone over in America or wherever could be going through my [...] profile, as we’re talking right now so [...] it’s kinda, it’s a little bit, little bit scary to be honest when you think about it. (Beeker, age 15, Focus group 2).” (Betts & Spenser, 2015). Cyberbullying has taken away the sanity of many children, and has also robbed many of their lives. According to a publication titled, “Bullying, Cyberbullying, and Suicide”, children who experience cyberbullying are two times more likely to attempt suicide. (Hinduja and Patchin, 2010). Due to these alarming statistics, parents, educators, and concerned citizens have exhibited fear as a result of technological instability. Consequently, as a result, many of those who feel associated to this issue of technological instability, create forms of art to express their concerns with this form of technology and its effects. Two forms of art that have been created as a result of this technological instability are the film *Cyberbully* (2011), and the graphic novel *Click* (2018).

The film *Cyberbully* (2011) features Emily Osment, as a young teenager who is being bullied and harassed by an online acquaintance, which instigates further bullying by many other peers online. In this film, the main character goes through many hardships of attempting to deal with the online harassment, and eventually tries to take her own life. The online profile that begins harassing the main character is someone who she does not know outside of her online presence. By the end of the film, it is revealed that through the help of the ability to create fake profiles online, that her best friend created this profile to harass her. This film is an emotional rollercoaster made by *Seventeen Magazine* and *ABC Family* as a result of the increase of bullying through online mediums. Emily Osment commented on her part in assisting in the creation of the film, “I get to reach out to over a million people everyday on Twitter and enlighten them with what I feel about cyberbullying and I what I think you can do to avoid it and

the places you can visit online that are safe.” (Emily Osment, 2011). This film was based around the components of online medium that allow anyone to communicate anonymously with another person, without any consequences. This troublesome aspect of online technology was addressed in the study conducted by Betts and Spenser, “The potential for anonymity was also identified by participants as a reason for why people may engage in cyberbullying behaviours. Anonymity could operate on many levels including: the target not being aware who the perpetrator was and the perpetrator could be hidden from the consequences of their actions because they were not in the same physical environment as the target. Further, because the perpetrator of the bullying behaviour may not be identifiable this was regarded as empowering the bully to continue their acts: Cyber, cyber bullying it’s like taking [...] aim at someone coz they won’t give it back to you, so it’s like going for the weak person just coz you won’t get it back. (Chique, age 15, Focus group 2).”” (Betts & Spenser, 2015). This film can be deemed accurate of the online experiences of teenagers through drawing insight from this study, which features real-life participants, who presumably engage in online activities and interact with many online profiles firsthand.

Another artistic work that was created in lieu of the growing concerns of online harassment is the graphic novel, *Click* (2018). This graphic novel was created by teenager, Alexandra Philips, as a way of expressing her own experiences of the world of online bullying. The plot is based around Alexandra being harassed online, after an argument occurred at school. The bullies disliked Alexandra because of the argument, but instead of harassing her on school property, and in person, the girls waited until they could go online and bully her without communicating in person. Alexandra then moved schools, and made a new group of friends to combat this cyberbullying. This graphic novel corresponds with the study conducted by Milosevic in 2015, “A distinctive feature of cyberbullying is that it involves electronic communication as a means to embarrass, harass, or socially exclude...” (Milosevic, 2015). The bullying that occurred online in this graphic novel, was successful in embarrassing Alexandra, harassing Alexandra, and socially excluding Alexandra.

Based solely on the two works of art discussed, it can be observed that society has changed drastically in response to the fears of the ability to harass others online, anonymously. This result also corresponds with Marshall McLuhan’s theory of technological determinism. The online mediums in this example, have caused many teenagers to feel comfortable in their own homes bullying others, these online mediums have caused cyberbullying victims to be fearful, embarrassed, and socially anxious, as well as these mediums have caused, parents, teachers, and concerned citizens to fear for the well-beings of young people due to these technologies. Hopefully, in the future, society will become less effected by this particular instance of social instability, and the lives of young people will be a more secure.

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