CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Cyberbullying Through The Female Eye

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts in

Mass Communication

By

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The thesis of Amy Nungaray is approved:

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Also, the knowledge that was passed on through each professor during my graduate school has not been lost. Because of Lady Luck, I was sculpted by the words that each educator bestowed during class. I admire each of you for your patience and creativity to still connect with students during a world pandemic. Your efforts were not in vain, and I hope that you see the continued success of your students as the fruit of your labor.

Dedication

This is for all the women who have, at any point in their life, have ever felt less than beautiful

through the cowardly act of cyberbullying. This project is dedicated to showing what your

resiliency has been or still is and why the fight for mental health must continue.

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Abstract

Cyberbullying Through The Female Eye

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This media project examines how cyberbullying affects females of all ages. Young and adult women who have been victims of cyberbullying were interviewed for a documentary. The project shares their stories and how their experiences altered their self-worth. The project also provides recommendations on how other girls and adult women can minimize emotional or physical harm to themselves when they go online. The woman interviewed have endured different emotional or physical outcomes due to the bullying, but overall have recognized the need for rhetoric on this subject to help victims who are currently festering with similar emotions they once felt.

Chapter 1: **Introduction**

Our lives are no longer solely in-person but a hybrid of online communication, making it easier for strangers and others intending harm to interact with us without our consent. Personal information has become increasingly easy to access for those with bad intentions. In particular, social media applications have increased and amplified cyberbullying among women and girls. Thus, the chance of becoming a victim of cyberbullying has grown right alongside it. According to the National Bullying Prevention Center, the number of females who report having experienced cyberbullying has doubled, from 18% in 2007 to 37% in 2019. Another study has found that 57 percent of female undergraduate students have been cyberbullied (Marr and Duell, 2021). A recent study has shown that the trend of cyberbullying continued to grow when the Covid-19 pandemic shifted many work and social life interactions online.

The consequences of internet use, in general, can be detrimental to mental health. There is a link between internet usage and depression among younger females and those in the same age group decades ago (Aboujaoude and Savage, 2015). While there are facets of reasons why depression is on the rise, it has been noted by research studies that Generation Z's addiction to technology is a decisive factor (Keles, McCrae, Grealish, 2020).

The short and long-term effects of cyberbullying continue to be studied, with a growing consensus about their negative impacts (Hinduja and Patchin, 2013). Research shows that online bullying victims are likelier to commit self-harm (Johnston, 2015). Outcomes of cyberbullying include low self-esteem and overwhelming negative emotions. There is a risk of thoughts of suicide or actual attempts associated with being cyberbullied. These statistics continue to climb with the rising dependency on digital technology for communication.

Project Objective

This project consists of a video featuring victims and cyberbullying experts who suggest strategies for coping, fighting, and/or providing helpful resources for victims who may be undergoing current attacks in cyberbullying. The videos capture the victims' stories and document the raw emotions they felt during their experience when they were attacked. The videos also have them discuss what the short and long-term effects were. They also talk about what resources they used and/or recommend to those going through similar situations as they once did.

The video is a tool for any person, whether a female or any other individual who has experienced cyberbullying in their life. They can use these stories as inspiration, guidance, or understanding that they are not alone.

Research Questions:

- How are cyberbullying and traditional bullying different through the female lens?

- What are the long-term effects of cyberbullying on females?

- How can women/girls mitigate the harmful mental effects that cyberbullying causes?

This project falls under feminist media studies, which center on how a narrow view of a gender is created, promoted, and normalized in one of the most critical institution sites for hegemony — mass media (Bachmann, 2018). Feminist media theory delves into the overall grand outlook of how women's rights to equality are affected by the different levels of power, culture, and elements of society.

Chapter 2: **Literature Review**

This section describes theories and concepts related to this project and will summarize specific literature on cyberbullying, focusing on the female experience.

Feminism

The definition of "feminism," according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is the "advocacy of the rights of women based on the theory of equality of sexes." However, feminism evokes many emotions depending on how it is used. To generalize feminism for this paper, it is an umbrella term that creates ideological perspectives to create a political and social movement for females to advocate for equal rights.

An assortment of ideologies falls under "feminist theory," starting in the late 1970s when Gaye Tuchman's chapter "The Symbolic Annihilation of Women in the Mass Media" was published discussing the lack of representation in mass media and has continued to evolve from there. The baseline of each subject that comes from feminist theory revolves around the study and explanation of gender and gendered power (Cuklanz, 2016).

Women's equal rights movements underwent four periods or "waves." These time periods differentiated the societal and economic barriers to advancement, now defined as *glass ceilings*, which were broken at various historical times and periods specific to changing the aims for the women's movement (Grady, 2018).

The first wave was from 1848 to 1920 and focused on the first successful and long-term achievement of women obtaining political equality in the West. Within these seventy years, certain women activists, otherwise known as suffragettes, actively protested, marched, and fought for the right to vote. The status quo understanding of a woman's purpose was challenged,

and eventually, a tangible change was created with the right for women to vote. This occurred when 1920 when Congress passed the 19th amendment. However, black women continued a separate struggle for that practice; it was still an accomplishment and a monumental achievement point and end for the first wave of feminism (Malinowska, 2020).

The second wave began from 1963 to the 1980s, and the focus of this wave was social equality. Betty Friedan's revolutionary book "The Feminine Mystique" reached a mass audience that incited the second wave to begin. Its call for women's rights was not new, but its words reached a mass audience, unifying a powerful movement to create change once again. In this wave, fundamental personal rights for women were being fought for. This included relationships, reproductive rights, pay gap, and financial freedom to allow women to be their own person and be equally entitled to men's fundamental rights. It challenged the systematic procedures and policies, arguing they replicated an antiquated ideology. The idea that women were only meant for domestic purposes was now being defied by women who were no longer following socially constructed assigned norms; this opposition is seen as one of the most radical by some scholars (Grady, 2018).

There was a backlash to the second movement that needs to be noted. This was led by Phyllis Stewart Schlafly, the organizer of the "STOP ERA" campaign. She fought against the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment) movement and created a narrative that women who wanted equal rights – were feminists who were unwanted, not desirable, and lonely women. And we're eliminating the benefits of gendered privileges that women depended upon. This damaged the term feminist but did not stop the revolution for equality rights from advancing (Grady, 2018).

The third wave began in the early 1990s and is still being debated whether we are currently in the midst of it or whether it ended in the early 2010s. Two historical events illustrate the concerns of the third wave: the Anita Hill case in 1991 and the creation of the riot grrl groups in the music industry in the early 1990s (Grady, 2018).One notable event was when Professor Anita Hill, who had previously served as an attorney in the Department of Education, testified in front of a Senate Committee that Clarence Thomas, her former boss at the Education Department and now a Supreme Court Nominee, had sexually harassed her at work. Despite her testimony, Thomas was still named to the Supreme Court, which caused massive outrage. While there was no immediate consequence for Thomas, Hill's testimony opened the conversation for other women who have been in similar situations, and it was noted that the National Women's Law Center received a high influx of calls to seek legal advice on sexual harassment. Congress also passed the Civil Rights Act of 1991, which gave more rights in the case of workplace harassment. Furthermore, women began slowly achieving positions of power to create diversity at the executive level, known as the "Year of the Woman." This was when twenty-four women gained seats in the House of Representatives (Grady, 2018).

Another cultural phenomenon associated with the third wave was the rise of the women who participated in their cultural production rather than being dependent on or influenced by men; this was embodied in the term riot grrls. The first riot grrls were in Olympia, Washington, and were associated with the heavily male-dominated punk rock scene. The riot grrls approached feminism by embracing their music and zines– self-published works of art and writing, – both punk-related activities. They challenged the idea that male artists and musicians were somehow not part of the patriarchy that undervalued women's cultural production.

The fourth wave is at this present moment. It has been ignited by the #MeToo movement, which has similar goals of bringing truth to sexual harassment as the third wave but is differentiated in the fourth by its online presence. Technology created a platform for the flame of confession and discourse to erupt and form more quickly and spread more extensively than activism historically did before (Grady, 2018).

The fourth wave has shown that the past acceptance of powerful men taking advantage of women is no longer socially tolerated. Accountability for past and current misconduct has been nationally televised; powerful men have been publicly shamed for their actions. Women have been encouraged by not only other women but by men, too, who are standing side-by-side at protests. There were between 3.3 and 4.6 million protestors that were accounted for during these times to show the gravitas of how many people participated. Some observers argue that the demand for equality is made visible and driven by both traditional and digital social platforms (Grady, 2018).

However, not all women were included or welcomed with each wave due to ethnicity, class, age, and other differentiating factors. These differences have challenged us to view feminism through a more sophisticated lens. One way to do this is through intersectionality theory. Intersectionality, which Kimberlé Crenshaw coined, considers a framework or lens for a subjective experience based on sex, race, class, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, and a range of other factors (Crenshaw, 2018). There may be familiar stories with common themes in each story, but this does not undermine that each level has its unique take, dependent on who the individual is. A difference in social, economic, and cultural statuses must be acknowledged as it profoundly shapes an experience. This does not undermine one experience from another but instead considers that intersectionality must be considered in the grand scheme of each person.

In sum, these waves have created a precedent for women in this current era not to be complacent but instead fight for change. The archaic normativism for what women were assigned to act and who to be is now being challenged daily. This was allowed and continuously challenged only due to the triumph of past marches, fights, and continuous rhetoric to change the ideology that females — or in this case, feminism — deserved the same embrace that men have in society.

Dark Participation

Participation in the digital world by ordinary people – not just media professionals – has become much easier in the last two decades. New technological tools allowed content to be recorded or created as history has never allowed before. Companies quickly realized that this new technology could make money, and individuals now had access to their platform. Digital participation was promoted as wholesome, but when executed, it has been shown to be flawed (Quandt, 2018). A new world was built via digital communications, and the ground rules of values and respect were not as apparent or applied in this new digital reality. Citizen digital participation can be manipulated because the average citizen does not have the training of a journalist and often does not have the ethics for those they are reporting on.

Thus, ideas that the internet would democratize communication have been challenged by those researchers who have revealed that digital communications enable a dark side of humanity. Such studies focus on "dark participation," in which people can hide in the shadows of their screens and purposely target victims. Dark participation is the paradoxical partner of the digital world's freedom and accessibility. Free speech in online communication brought the ability to hurt, be negative, or be sinister.

Quandt (2018) describes dark participation as: It can be experienced through a person-to-person attack or a mass-scale hate campaign. This vengeful action can hurt others emotionally or spread misinformation that will end up hurting the mass public in alternative ways. In particular, Quandt (2018) offers categories of dark participation that now dominate the internet:

Online trolling or troll armies is a slang term created when either one individual or an organized group posts inflammatory, offending, or insulting rhetoric to provoke or attack others in an online social community. These 'trolls' will manipulate the online social forum to anger or insult victims for amusement or a larger concept to influence a topic and spread incorrect information strategically. This leads to the following form of dark participation: strategic manipulation (Westlund, 2021).

Strategic manipulation is when a company or person with a plan to sway public opinion begins posting crafted messages in the comments, without proof, to influence the public or even journalists themselves. An example is when Russian intelligence uses this tactic, otherwise known as political propaganda, to persuade countries to align with their messaging. These messages soon began to spread like wildfire, and the spread of misinformation may not be stopped. There are cases where this manipulation was intended to attack specific groups or individuals. A new term was popularized for this technique, known as "fake news" (Quandt, Frischlich, Boberg, Schatto-Eckrodt, 2022).

Another form of dark participation is this paper's central topic: cyberbullying. Cyberbullying will be discussed in detail in the next section to unveil the viciousness of this form of attack.

Cyberbullying

Smith et al. (2008) defined cyberbullying as "an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time, against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself." Cyberbullying purposely seeks to harm or engage in intentional aggression towards a victim using electronic platforms (e.g., social media, text messages, email, etc.) (Betts, 2019).

What is traditionally known as bullying has been hyper-charged in the information age. Some forms of online harassment would be considered illegal when committing them and have legal consequences for the perpetrator, as some cases have been found to be the reason for victim's committing suicide. There is evidence that the impact of cyberbullying has more prolonged and more severe consequences compared to the traditional form of bullying due to the distinctive characteristics that come along with it. (Sticca, 2013) Those characteristics include:

1. The anonymity allows bullying through electronic platforms, and you may never interact with your perpetrator face-to-face.
2. The capability to replicate the same malicious messages and spread them faster and quicker than before increases the number of victims and the public viewing and participation in their humiliation.
3. The internet also allows viewers to screenshot an attack easily and forever memorialize the attack.
4. People usually watch but never intervene, whereas intervention may be more common in traditional bullying.

5. The likelihood that the attacker will be held responsible is minimal. Cyberbullying does not always allow moderators to intercept when the bullying occurs. So that even when content is deleted, the intent and damage to the victim have usually already occurred.

For all these reasons, cyberbullying, compared to traditional bullying, is considered by some to be worse (Kim, Colwell, Kata, Boyle, Georgiades, 2018).

Gender Matters

Gender-based power structures need to be addressed to develop successful solutions for females to overcome their oppression (Mishna, 2020). Sexism and misogyny are a large part of the discrimination against females for cyberbullying (Johnston, 2015). Cyber-attacks on women are often sexualized and aim to undermine the female victim (Lloro-Bidart, 2018). It is only by understanding the gender dynamic experienced by and enacted by both men and women that an actual change can be made in the future to mitigate these attacks (Johnston, 2015).

While the abuse of women has continued to grow, the lack of policing by platforms has started to be more frequently called out. Adult women have reported repeated behaviors of insinuations of rape, slurs, and sexual threats without the proper policy to stop them (CCDH, 2022). In one example, a study showed that Meta's popular platform, Instagram, had many concerns over policing cyberbullies against females. Still, the company failed to act on ninety percent of abuses sent to females in direct messages (CCDH, 2022). While Instagram has numerous policies to prevent cyberbullying, it has shown ineffectiveness in the fight for women's virtual and possible physical safety.

There is also a plot twist within the layers of cyberbullying for a woman - while women have a higher chance of long-lasting effects on their self-worth, some research suggests that they also have a higher chance of being the perpetrator. A study by Catherine Marcum (Marcum, 2013) found that females used cyberbullying to start psychological warfare against their victims rather than establish physical dominance. Their preference was to start gossip, as emotional attacks, by hiding behind a screen which allowed them the ability to be more forthright and vindictive instead of physically confrontational. Women have been the primary victims of these social media cyberbullying attacks (Mishna, 2020).

In contrast, males and younger participants were likelier to belong to the frequent victim and occasional bully group. Females and older participants were likelier to belong to the rare victim and bully group (Betts, 2019). (Still, other studies have suggested that males are more likely to be the victim and that there is no difference based on gender. [Walker, 2011]). In general, however, there has been a consensus that women reported more self-harm-afflicting thoughts from cyberbullying than men (Marr, 2021).

Age Matters

Fifteen percent of young girls have been targeted by at least four aggressive online bullies (Johnston, 2015). Age plays an important role due to the influence of peers on adolescents` self-worth and the ways the period of adolescence is a critical time for the development of mental health and mental disorders (Hinduja, 2013). During this time, youth can be acutely aware of their understanding of where they believe they belong, which is often influenced by peers' approval. If a young girl is the perpetrator of an online attack, it may drastically affect the victim's mental state (Smith, 2008). As the youth matures, the perception of self is even more

challenging to understand with the influx of hormones, physical changes, and the possibility of once-trusted peers becoming the source of ridicule for amusement.

As for young adult women, defined as the age group between eighteen to twenty-six, a study determined that when depressive feelings occur, they are likely to be able to handle it better than their younger counterparts (Almenyas, 2017). This may have to do with the uncertainty of self during the teenage years, and once you age, the ability to gain confidence in one's self-being. While women may experience less depression when older if they are constantly subjected to depression, they may experience the symptoms more intensely. Here, concerns lie with the risk of reputation damage that could impact their chances of a successful future. The amount of time online does not appear to differ significantly today. Girls under 18 and young (and older) female adults average around the same amount of time online.

Conclusion

There is a proven trend that cyberbullying has increased due to online presence (Almenayes, 2017). Gender has been shown to influence the experience (Kim, 2017). Overall, women statistically have a higher chance of long-term ramifications of cyberbullying on their overall mental health than men (Marr, 2019). Nevertheless, within each study, whether the victim inevitably suffers an emotional or physical toll depends on the category of cyberbullying they endure and the victim's resiliency or support.

An increase in attacks was noted during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the first shutdown in the United States began in March 2020. The reliance on technology allowed communication to still occur during a rare time in history when people were forced to isolate themselves physically from society. The shift in day-to-day social interactions quickly and drastically changed, making

the reliance on cyber interactions more critical. Using online platforms became both a personal choice and an economical, professional, and safe one. Yet this change contributed to increased cyberbullying attacks (Cowie 2020). The extent to which the attacks correlated to an increased depression, anxiety, and overall mental health decline. The Centers for Disease Control reported a drastic growth of attempted suicidal attempts by 50.6% among girls aged 12 to 17 compared to 2019 to 2021. In contrast, they reported the amount of suspected attempted suicide rates for males in the same age group remained the same as previous years.

Cyberbullying has continued to garner attention in the news and policy-making spheres, and the value of creating policies to minimize destructive physiological and behavioral side effects has become a greater priority. Non-profit organizations continue to work with legislators and technology companies to minimize the attacks by creating algorithms to protect against these attacks and create increased security protocols.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Positionality Statement

I have struggled with my social anxiety and self-worth for most of my life, and it was at its highest when I was a victim of cyberbullying and traditional bullying in middle school. As an adult, I can now see the juvenile attacks that were set upon me, but I still relive those dark moments when I think back on that time. I know I am not alone in this issue, and having these experiences makes me passionate, but it can also be a flaw. I must be careful not to compare any victim's story to mine, recognizing that everyone has unique circumstances. The damage caused by these attacks changed my personality, and I sometimes wonder whether it was for the better or good. All I can attest to is now that I am more empathetic and want to help minimize the damage for any female out there.

When I look back on the type of help or resources I had as a teenager, the pickings were slim. Cyberbullying was a newer term with the explosion of social media platforms integrating into the world, and the damage that could be done was not yet understood. I recall that I had one schoolteacher who introduced me to classic novels for reading and the female characters I could aspire to be like, who were strong and quick-witted. But besides that, the topic of cyberbullying was not taken into consideration.

Many considered the attack of my peers a growing pain and normalcy to being a teenager. I now know this is not true, but an issue that has long been overlooked and accepted until a generation that understood mental health came to the forefront and spoke out and stood up for themselves. Now, there is an opportunity with mass campaigns and a push for legislation to create laws and hold those accountable to stop it.

Project Method

This video will feature victims and gender experts who suggest strategies for coping, fighting, or providing any helpful resource for victims who may be undergoing current attacks in cyberbullying. The video highlights the difference between adolescent cyberbullying and adult cyberbullying. The video will contain people who detail their experiences and/or reflect on what they experienced. Each video will also include subject matter experts to give insight into each issue.

Documentary

A documentary is a video that captures a non-fictional story or stories to educate, instruct, or maintain a historical record. This type of film style was chosen because the stories that will be recorded are non-fiction anecdotes that tell the stories of real people who have experienced cyberbullying. The documentary will hint at a public service announcement, PSA, due to experts in this field recommending resources to help those who are watching these videos. PSAs are intended to inform and serve a community to be safe with a specific topic to be discussed. The documentary style will primarily be interviewing to bring awareness and connection to the viewers by being able to hear of the victim's stories. These two styles were chosen to be deliberate to get the emotional link to break through and create a connection on a sensitive issue.

Preparation

MCOM 612 taught me the techniques of capturing footage, such as b-roll and footage, and editing using Adobe Premiere. In Journalism 585, studying different theories allowed me to discover and delve into feminism and dark participation. By applying these theories to other topics, I could educate myself on the underlying problems with cyberbullying. Each course I

have taken in my graduate school path has been essential to developing and honing an understanding of theories, development, and overall presentation skills that will be shown in this paper and media project.

As for inspiration on what type of video this is like, the documentary called "The Most Hated Man on the Internet" on Netflix was essential for the innovation of this documentary. It showed a great example and how to interview and capture the vulnerability of victims who experienced cyberbullying. I have also watched videos on YouTube to demonstrate and give advice on ways to capture different angles in a traditional documentary style. Other videos were watched where different content methods were used to explore exposing harassment to women. One example was a video of men reading mean tweets directed at female reporters. Videos also posted on stopbullying.org helped show current public resources and a way to fill a gap by creating this particular video. By collecting this intel, I could create a uniform look that would be used while recording them and make the documentary flow.

Many other videos were watched on a YouTube search of female cyberbullying to note the style that was captured and take into consideration what type of music is usually used for scenarios that will be similar.

Equipment

The iPhone 13 was used to capture all the interviews on a tripod to steady the iPhone alongside a lavalier microphone already owned in my equipment inventory to capture the audio. The editing was done using Adobe Premiere Pro.

A general script was created to give an idea of the flow of the video. The script was loosely followed due to the fluidity of the interviews. The direction or theme of the video may alter, but the overall message will always be maintained. The b-roll and sound bites were captured through my cell phone for production. Once all general b-roll and sound were captured, I then used Adobe Premiere to edit and merge the clips and audio together.

Interviews

The documentary will accentuate the difference between adolescent cyberbullying and adult cyberbullying and the unique story each individual endured. The video will contain the subjects that detail their experiences and self-reflection. It will also include subject matter experts to give insight into each issue.

Five women from different ethnic and socioeconomic categories will be interviewed to get a variety of stories to create a 10–15-minute video about the stories of these particular women to show what they overcame. Females aged 18 and up who have been victims and experts of cyberbullying will be the interview subjects. In-depth interviews bring a subjective view to this problem and a unique view of a perception that can only be gained by listening to these personal tales that connect emotion to an actual human being.

The documentary will capture their experiences as victims and how they responded. Some may still be recovering from their experiences, and all interviewees will be reminded that they do not need to be pressured only to tell what they are comfortable revealing. If possible, the interviews will be conducted in person or through an online platform if they are not in a reasonable driving range.

These individuals will be found through word-of-mouth requests from friends, families, and acquaintances to seek out victims and request if they are willing to be interviewed. Also, posters were created and posted around two colleges to recruit victims that were above the age of eighteen. The victims would fill out a quick form to describe their experience and be contacted for in-person or online interviews. There was a total of 3 responses from California State University, Northridge (CSUN), focusing on cyberbullying victims to see if they are willing to be interviewed. The other response was from searching social media on anti-cyberbullying advocates, and that interview was conducted on the Zoom platform. A total of 3 victim interviews were conducted either in-person or online. Each interview lasted approximately 18-30 minutes for both the victims and the experts.

To establish trust with the victims, I would continuously express that they only had to tell which part of their story they were comfortable with. I would go into detail about the purpose of why this project was being created and reaffirm that their stories could help current or future victims. And I would also create empathy and relatability by telling them my own bullying story to not make them feel as if they are being judged or scrutinized. Ultimately, they had full control of their story and were never pushed to go beyond what they wanted to publicize.

The project will also include tools that can help create resiliency, a support group, or a variety of other tools to minimize the mental or physical threats that come from cyberbullying. Not all the stories will be used in the video, but each woman who agreed to be interviewed will be given credit at the end, not to undermine the bravery it took to tell their stories.

List of People Interviewed

 Victims

- Celeste Bonilla

    - Age: 19. Occupation: Student.

- Annabel Jauregui:

    - Age: 18. Occupation: Student

- Lindsey Berman

    - Occupation: Miss Universe.

Experts

- Lynda Bailey

    - Occupation: Executive Director of Riverside Medical Clinic Charitable Foundation/Anti-Bullying Institute

- Holly Sotelo:

    - Occupation: Clinical Associate Professor, Field Education Clinical Associate Professor: Field Education University of Southern California Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work

Interview Questions

Victims

- Introduce yourself.

- Tell me your story about experiencing cyberbullying.

- How cyberbullying is has affected you?

- Can you remember the emotions that you felt while being cyberbullied?

- How do you feel now looking back on it?

- Did you have any resources to help you navigate how to deal with cyberbullying?

- Knowing what you know now, what resources would have helped you through that time to make a difference?

- How do you see the future with this issue and the generations that are growing up in a digital world?

- What would you tell the females currently going through the same thing you once did?

Experts

- Tell me about your expertise in cyberbullying.

- What made you study or go into this issue?

- What have been the key findings in your professional journey that you discovered?

- What are the differences between traditional and cyberbullying?

- Can you provide any anecdotal stories of women who have talked to you in the past without revealing any personal information about those victims?

- How can victims of cyberbullying navigate the mental deterioration that comes with this harassment?

- Can you provide advice to any who is currently watching and struggling with cyberbullying?

- What are the solutions you would like to see implemented to minimize this issue?

When the videos are finished and approved by the thesis committee, they will be shared amongst organizations with similar values and ideologies with the intent of helping with this issue. This will be sent by email to the person of contact found on a website. At least ten different organizations will be sent this, with the capability to follow up with those in the videos (if the subject matters agree to this).

Documentary Transcription

0:00:01

Audio Opening and Voice Narration (Amy Nungaray)

The consequences of internet use in general can be detrimental to mental health. There is a link between internet usage and depression among females and continues to increase each year. Research shows that online bullying victims are likely to commit self harm. Outcomes of cyber bullying include low self esteem and overwhelming and negative emotions. There's a risk of thoughts of suicide or actual attempts associated with being cyber bullied. These statistics continue to climb with the rising dependency on digital technology for communication. This is a serious epidemic. It's time to hear her stories. This is cyber bullying through the female eye.

0:38

Annabelle Jauregui

I'm Annabelle I am 18. And I grew up in the San Fernando Valley.

0:58

Celeste Bonilla

My name is Celeste. I'm 18 years old. Um, I'm pretty much a boring person. I don't really go out much. As much as I seem like I do. I don't I really I stay home most of the time and play games.

1:12

Lindsey Berman

I'm Lindsey Berman. I'm a mom of three living in South Florida. I'm an anti bullying advocate. And currently You are Miss Universe.

1:24

Annabelle Jauregui

I was in a friend group, my best friend, he got a girlfriend. It was not like any romantic relationship at all. And the girlfriend did not want to discuss with me that she did not like me being friends with him or being around him. So she decided to subtly post about me on social media.

1:42

Celeste Bonilla

Like a lot of people would just make fun of me because of how I looked. And they like point out my flaws that like I knew I didn't like they like knew I didn't like it. And they just like call me names. And I was really sad. I felt super insecure. And I didn't want to go out. And I just wanted to like put on... That's why I like kind of started doing makeup. So I can just like, hopefully like it would like prevent them from happening. So like I like tried to like make myself basically look like a different person.

2:16

Lindsey Berman

Winning a title Miss Universe, that it's all an exciting time and moment. But I've also learned that this shine, you know, the brighter you shine rather, it offends the dark as well. And I always

make that comparison between like the light and the dark because it is just true. And it brought on a lot of hate out of nowhere.

2:42

Lynda Bailey

I'm the executive director at the Riverside medical clinic Charitable Foundation, and the anti bullying Institute here in Riverside, California. I've been the foundation director for going on my eighth year.

2:54

Holly Sotelo

I'm Holly Priebe Sotelo. I'm an associate professor for the USC School of Social Work in the field Education Department. My expertise is in areas of school violence, child abuse, human trafficking, crisis response in schools.

3:12

Lynda Bailey

In the last obviously 10 or 15 years, with the popularity of different electronic platforms, cyber bullying has become exponentially more serious. The difference between female and male bullying, females tend to bully more online rather than in person. Males tend to be more physical and more verbal, where girls or women tend to be more verbal, but also behind the scenes of of an electronic device.

3:53

Annabelle Jauregui

For me and continue to like postings about me being like a homewrecker and all this other stuff, when that was 100% Not happening. And we were in a bigger friend group. And also all my other friends were like, what is going on? Like, like, what is all this stuff? And then eventually she blocked me from seeing her posts too. And she kept going, but she told me but my friends could still see it. So they're like Annabelle, it's not stopping.

4:16

Holly Sotelo

The school age is right at that time when they're starting to develop their identities about who they are and who they want to be. And, and so there's so many influences right now with pop culture, lots of different messaging in society that are telling young women that they're not good enough, you're not thin enough, you're not smart enough. You're not You're just not enough. And so there is this. There is this challenge that young girls already are getting these messages, and then to make matters worse, when they haven't quite identified or develop their self esteem. Then you have these harassing either emails, or images, or memes, or things is of that nature that young people are attacking each other and harassing each other. And so it's almost feels like it's another form of stalking, it's another form of violence without the physical attacks. So the emotional abuse of, of the cyber bullying of the cyber tax can sometimes be just as detrimental to someone's psyche, to their mental health as a physical punch.

5:31

Celeste Bonilla

Definitely, I would have wished I handled it differently. Because I, my depression did grow a lot. And it led to a lot of terrible things that I did to myself. And I really regret it. Because now I'm like, kind of like trying to deal with it and like trying to, you know, get over it, and just trying to heal properly. And I just, I really wish I would have at least gone to like a friend, or like, I wish I wouldn't have believed all the things they said, and like, would have known that, like, Hey, I am a beautiful person, and I am me. And they don't really, they shouldn't have the power over me. Like I, I wish I would have been more confident. And like, more protective of myself. Because I regret all the things that I did before to try to deal with all the emotions.

6:24

Lynda Bailey

You have to make your child resilient, you have to work on your own resiliency. When I was younger, there was no social media. And when my children were younger, there wasn't any social media. MySpace came along, I think when my children were, you know, 15 16 years old, and they're only in their late 20s, early 30s. Now, and but they hopefully were raised to be confident and self resilient on a not letting other people affect the way you feel about yourself. Because everybody's different.

7:00

Lindsey Berman

And they just didn't understand it by by even sharing my story with my kids, and letting them know what was happening even just for me, it made them realize that nobody is safe. I guess from even cyber bullying attacks. Just being on social media, we can't just be on there with a lackadaisical approach that we need to understand whether we keep private profiles, for instance, which my kids do. So we're very selective of, you know, the friend requests that we accept. And it is going to be people that we personally know, especially at the ages, you know, of those middle school and high school years. Also, if it's someone from school that we thought was more of our friends, and now we're starting to get messages. I'm thankful that my kids do come to me. And we will just simply block the other person, again, letting the kids know that we can set boundaries that we've don't have to accept these words from others. That is one of the great tools of social media, there really are lots of ways that we can be protected.

8:08

Annabelle Jauregui

I'm very paranoid about people who want to befriend me because I'm like, I like become vulnerable to these people. And then they like weaponize it against me and blast it on social media. So I'm just like, so every time I'm friends with somebody, I'm second guessing, like, do they actually, like the minute they're behind the screen? What are they thinking? What are they gonna say?

8:27

Celeste Bonilla

And like, I didn't want to be here anymore. Because all these people were just continuously being rude to me and like, making fun of me and, and a common like, thing that they'd make fun of me about is that, like, I didn't have my dad in my life. And so they just kind of just like, make fun of the fact that like, hey, like, you have no father, like you. Like, like, you don't have that fatherly figure like fatherly love. Like you're like he they just like say that, like, Oh, he didn't want to like he left you for a reason. And I know it wasn't true, but like a part of me kind of believed that because so many people kept saying it over and over again.

9:09

Lindsey Berman

I unfortunately now especially even as an advocate gets stories and families reaching out. I've had two close family friends lose their daughter in the last year and a half to cyberbullying, and I am talking 11 and 13 years old. That is absolutely the most heartbreaking thing ever that and their parents never saw it. And that's the scariest part. And I can say walking through that and going through those emotions. I understand why so many victims don't talk about it.

9:42

Lynda Bailey

Get the help that they need to be able to speak out when they need help. I think that a lot of individuals get afraid still to say that my mental health is not, right. And this is why, and to get that assistance and to just find collaborative partners, whether they're in business or socially, and don't I think I want people to get together more so that they know their worth.

10:17

Holly Sotelo

So and I recently just saw this really great slogan on his someone's t shirt, and I thought, Oh, I'm going to take I'm going to use that, that it's an empowered women, empower women. And I say, right on sisters, let's go, you know, we have to make sure that we are empowering other women and, and, you know, we need to call others on the spot, call them out, you know, like, when you if you hear friends or someone being mean to other females, it's like, come on, that is not okay, what you just did is harassment, that cyber bullying, and it's not okay, so we need to call each other out on that and stand up for each other.

10:56

Annabelle Jauregui

You know what, it's gonna suck. And that's, that's fine. It's gonna happen, like, regardless of how big or how not big it was, like, it sucks. You know, whether the whole school knows, or whether like, five to 10 people know, it's gonna suck, and it's gonna hurt. But you have to realize that, like, there's only so much you could do like things, if things are out of your control, like, there's nothing you can do about it. How people perceive you as like, on them.

11:24

Celeste Bonilla

You are beautiful as you are, and that you don't need these people to know that. Because every person is amazing, as themselves. And honestly, these people, who are mean, who are just the worst, don't deserve your energy, they really don't. And, I mean, I'm not going to tell you to just

brush it off and ignore it. Because I know you probably won't, but like, just know that like in your heart, that you are an amazing person. And all these things that they're saying are bullshit. Like, it's just an angry green monster inside of them, who is just doesn't know how to let out all their anger and jealousy. And that you're better than them. You don't have to deal with all of these things that they're saying, because you know that you are amazing. And find that one person who will like love and listen to you. And actually, like, help you throughout this time, like, don't be alone, because it does get lonely and sad very quickly if you're alone. And that could lead to a lot of bad things. So like, just find that one person or one friend group who truly loves you and will care for you no matter what, and be there for them as well, because a lot of people go through this sadly, and it shouldn't be happening like that.

12:56

Lindsey Berman

Talking to others, is I want everyone to know that you're not alone. I have walked through the tough times and the dark days, I have felt the pain that the hate brings. My heart has been broken. I didn't know why, I didn't understand. But what I can say is now I wouldn't change anything. I have learned so much about myself, I've been able to now use my story to empower others, and to let others know that it will be okay. But we have to use the support systems that we have in place. I promise you, your parents want to help I promise you your best friend is there for you. I promise you, your English teacher will not just sit off to the side if you include them. So I really encourage everybody to be strong, strong enough to you know, take a stand and to look for help when you need it.

Chapter 5: Results

The interviews conducted by all the women willing to participate did confirm that there are severe psychological and distressing factors resulting from being a victim of cyberbullying. As their self-worth drastically altered, the outcomes of being a victim were continuously brought up. Some victims more recently endured cyber-attacks, but those who had dealt with it years ago showed that long-term damage must also be acknowledged.

The experts who dedicated their professional life to the issue showed concern over the growing problem. It was noted that the understanding of mental health is continuously needed, unlike in the past where it was minimized, to allow further research and programs to be created. However, the need for funding and implementing the right support system would be the foundation for preventing, tackling, and minimizing the damage of cyberbullying.

Online bullying is but a small portion of the chaos that the internet created when it entered society. On the other side of the spectrum, this is not to undermine all the good it has created. The value of sharing information worldwide without concern over geographical concerns or time has changed the fabric of communication. With that comes the advocacy of those fighting to help with this behavior and who have dedicated themselves to advancing mental health. This may be in the form of prevention, understanding, or a mixture of both.

There is a socio-economic factor that must be acknowledged to determine the foundation of how a female may endure these attacks or understanding the psychology why they may be the attacker themselves. Resources and development can be drastically different and evaluating how to find help depending on these factors can be the difference between success or failure. Since they are more susceptible to the pressure of peers. But with that knowledge, researchers can then use their studies to find solutions, which can inform those on the front line who fight bullying to

minimize the damage that can occur. Resources must be created to effectively communicate to victims and possibly the victim's families to address these situations.

These videos could mitigate the self-damage that females experience online and perhaps contribute to lessening long-term effects. This project intends to be a small part of the solution to the problem of cyberbullying. The videos are encouraging, inspiring, and educational, emphasizing that the individual experiencing cyberbullying is not to blame for their own experience. The aim is to show those who have been in their shoes and not only overcame it, but also thrived after, finding a new power intertwined with its pain. A shining beacon of hope comes from life's difficulties, creating a resilience that can only be found when you find yourself doubting your self-worth.

Online communication is a new public sphere that brings its positives and negatives to humanity. Documenting how this upcoming generation is influenced by a new realm of communication and what the effect will be is crucial to informing any future legislation that addresses the problem. Failing to study these new trends will become problematic in addressing new issues. Cyberbullying is but a branch of bullying, and with time, it will more than likely grow into a new issue as society continues to evolve. But with diligence, perseverance, and an understanding of mental health, this problem can become diluted and maybe improve or even save women's lives. For this reason, recognition of the problem is needed.

Limitations to the study

These interviews only show a small fraction of the reality of what women endured, as two common factors were noticed while asking for interviews.

1. Many women did not realize that cyberbullying has different layers of attacks and did not categorize themselves as victims unless there was drastic mental deterioration.

2. Fear of speaking up and reliving their trauma.

Each story is uniquely dependent on what occurred to the victim, how they internally react, and what their support is. There are socioeconomic, cultural, and emotional support systems differentiate what a victim's experience may be and how they are willing to fight against the problem. While extensive research and interviewing were done, there will still be difficulty in exploring all aspects of the issue with this limited number of stories. Viewers want to connect with these videos, but realistically, I cannot cover every female's experience of being a victim of these attacks.

Another factor is that while they try to account for raw emotion, it is something to consider, that I am still a stranger asking them highly personal questions and may be unable to get a complete account of their cyberbullying. Overall, it is unrealistic that this video will drastically change the battle against cyberbullying, and since this problem is worldwide, the video focuses on women in America is limiting.

There are cultural and economic considerations when looking at each victim and what resources they can obtain. Culturally, cyberbullying can be seen as child's play, or it can be seen as an actual threat to others. The importance of tackling cyberbullying cannot be fully addressed in these videos. It is a movement that needs to be embedded into educational policy, conversations at home, cultural morals, and a string of other factors that ultimately create the

nature and integrity of one person. From there, that person could join a coalition of others with a positive moral to stop hate rather than ignite it.

Future Research

A more detailed and long-term documentary needs to follow this with an even more in-depth analysis of victims' experiences and our understanding of these attacks. Capturing live reactions to being attacked will reveal that even a single hateful word online may be the start of a victim's self-destructive path.

Research must continue to address these issues and partner alongside the media, non-profits, educational institutions, and guardians/parents to teach remedies or solutions. It is now up to all of us to promote a kinder society.

Final Reflection

At the beginning of deciding on this topic, with an intimate understanding of what victims have experienced, I still did not fully prepare for the onslaught of emotions that came along with hearing other females' stories. The difficulty in finding people to interview made me question whether this issue was as prevalent as my research showed. But when faced with those who would come forward, it made me realize that there is still fear or lack of awareness that females are victims of cyberbullying. After showing my documentary to my inner circle, many confessed that they were unaware this issue was as serious as they watched it. Reflecting on the hours of searching for victims, experts, interviewing, researching, and editing the video concreted and ignited this desire to continue this fight.

Based on the research and the insight garnered over the past months, my conclusion for this topic is that this is only the start for those who are already victims. There will be an uptick in the consequences of cyberbullying - unless a drastic movement to stop it is solidified and funded.

The need for an open discussion to enter each household and create a support system is detrimental to minimizing the effects when attacks do occur. Instead of reaching a cathartic closure to my tale by creating this resource, it has left me with a mixture of anger and passion. With these emotions, I intend to continue the fight for these women. And can only hope that others will become educated and join the fight alongside myself and the women who bravely were in this documentary.

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