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Cyberbullying: Who is Responsible to for the Solution?

Social Media sites have grown increasingly popular within society today. Especially within the United States, as many people are able to afford and have access to the internet and devices that are capable to connect to the internet. Social media has allowed for positive and negative developments within our society. The positives are great and are viewed with high esteem and pride, however, the negative aspects are muted and disputed over. One of the biggest questions that are asked concerning social media as our technology base expands is, who is responsible for solving and fixing these negative areas? One of these negative aspect is that of cyberbullying within the United States today and the answer to who is responsible to fix it is still not clear.

Many Social Media platforms already have instituted forms and polices that are to help stop cyberbullying. These policies are enforced through self-regulatory mechanisms that address issue on the platforms (Milosevic, 2016). They include reporting tools, blocking, and filtering software, geofencing, human or automated moderation systems as well as antibullying educational materials (Milosevic, 2016). The company can decide whether to reported content violates its policies and then what they should do with the content or the person who posted it (Milosevic, 2016). Although the official policies are written and posted on their websites, the policies do not always explain how the mechanisms to fight against bullying work. Social media platforms are online intermediaries tat enable user-generated content and allow for interactivity among users and direct engagement with the content (Milosevic, 2016). As a part of the Communications Decency Act in the United States online intermediaries are exempt for liability for cyberbullying incidents that take place on their platforms (Milosevic, 2016). As long as they are not involved in the content and maintain their intermediate status they cannot be held responsible (Milosevic, 2016). However, do the policies that they have for reporting and other means of contacting the platform about and issue, do they revoke the corporation’s protection and make them liable? In other countries there are specific laws in place to ask companies to collaborate with law enforcement to reveal the identity of perpetrators or to remove specific content down upon the request of government representatives (Milosevic, 2016). However, there are no laws that manage which mechanisms that all social media companies must develop to address cyberbullying, which should be in consideration if this issue is to be resolved (Milosevic, 2016).

Part of the problem for not being able to have a clear answer on who is responsible to combat the issue of cyberbullying is the aspect that it is not a heavily researched area. There have been studies, but, they were focused on one form or platform of social media and that they were concerning a subject that was too broad (Milosevic, 2016). These studies were so broad that they included the harassment involving adults and were not limited to adolescents (Milosevic, 2016). Other studies focusing on the media platform were inconclusive and either stated that the options provided user were limited but did not leave the company liable or that the options provided did not solve any of the problems that users were facing. Even these studies were not focused toward the youth population (Milosevic, 2016). E-safety is part of a corporate business model within social media companies, however, there has been no long-term study or analysis of the long-term trends in their policy development to combat cyberbullying issues (Milosevic, 2016). This raises the concern that the methods and mechanisms that allow social media companies to remain unliable for cyberbullying and is allowing it to spread and grow into a bigger problem (Milosevic, 2016). There is also no governmental actions or restrictions that are applied to these companies’ policies and many of them have started within the United States (Milosevic, 2016). Although, one hoop that social media companies have to combat with is the line of privacy of the users. There are laws and enforcements that do not allow for user’s privacy rights to be violated. These are important, but should these policies and laws be reshaped to protect user rights and privacy while also protecting adolescence and children from online bullying?

Parents and guardians also may hold some responsibility for tackling the issue to cyberbullying. Parents should know and be involved in their child’s life and should monitor what they are doing, seeing, and posting online. There are a number of approaches and programs that parents can use to do this. This would help to combat the cyberbullying issue, but children can be deceptive, and parents cannot always monitor everything. They may hold a piece of the key to solving and stopping cyberbullying. Schools also have placed enforcement and are using methods to combat cyberbullying as well. They use site blocking software that does not allow students to access social media while at school (Patchin, 2015). Also, seminars and anti-bullying committees and groups are established and are run throughout the school year (Patchin, 2015). Schools are taking part and are trying to combat this issue already.

So, who is responsible for taking on and committing to solve the problem of cyberbullying? Is it the social media companies and corporations, parents or guardians, or schools? I believe that the only way to truly try and eradicate the issue of cyberbullying is if all of the parties that appear to be responsible work together to make change happen. The liability cannot simply fall on just one member because they only have access to a certain part of the problem. The social media companies do need to have policies to monitor for cyberbullying and have ways to follow up, possibly even contact the parents of the child, or even contact the child’s school’s guidance counselor. However, this would invade privacy areas. I believe that this should and would be acceptable because we as society are working to protect the next generation. The internet was built on a value of freedom of expression that people value highly, cyberbullying does not provide our society with the means of betterment and truly just brings tragedy (Whitcomb, 2012). This tragedy is faced due to the increased suicide rate caused by cyberbullying is devastating to the families and people around. I believe that parents would be willing to have social media companies have information and monitor their children if these tragedies would hopefully be prevented. I also believe that parents need to be involved and monitor their children’s actions and interactions online. This would help parents help their children either to get help or to help them stop the cyberbully or stop a cyberbully. Lastly, schools hold part of the solution at the same time. School are already trying to combat cyberbullying with seminars and social media monitoring or restricted access while at school. This does not cover time at home or weekends but does provide awareness and prevention.

Cyberbullying is an ever-growing issue in the United States and countries around the world. Society wants to place the responsibility to solve this issue on one party involved in the development of cyberbullying. I do not believe that this is an acceptable response to protect the future generations. Instead I believe that all the parties involved are and should be held responsible. These parties include social media companies, parents and/or guardians, and schools, and they all need to take a part in solving the issue of cyberbullying to protect the future generations.

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