Seminar 3 Preparation

Read Chapter 9 of Holt et al (2018) and answer the following questions (be prepared to share your findings in this week’s seminar:

Pick two theories discussed in the chapter. Briefly summarise these and identify weaknesses and strengths in explaining cybercrime.

Carry out an internet search and identify a news event involving cybercrime (in any country). Reflect on which theory you might use to make sense of the individual(s)’s behaviour.

Do we need cybercrime-specific theories or are traditional criminological theories adequate? By drawing upon Holt et al. try constructing a theory which might help us making sense of cyberspace deviance.

Cybersmile

Introduction

The development of email and other forms of computer-mediated communications, or CMC, has completely changed the way in which we engage socially with others. Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and other social media platforms make it easy for us to tell friends and the whole world what we are up to, when, and with whom, around the clock. Geotagged posts on social media sites like Snapchat and Twitter also allow other users to know where others were in physical space at certain times. The ability to livestream our lives also allows us to share virtually every facet of our days with whoever is interested.

The relatively open nature in which people can now lead their lives is unparalleled and limited only by an individual's willingness to share. While it may seem that technology engenders users to be truthful about themselves and their lives, there is increasing evidence that people are very willing to say and post whatever they can to either become popular or to connect with individuals with whom they are interested to meet.

In fact, the creation and development of relationships through social media predicated on false information has gained prominent attention in the last decade. This act has been referred to as “catfishing” after the documentary movie and television show of the same name (Peterson, 2013). Both the film and show follow individuals as they attempt to disentangle and identify who is actually behind the social networking profile with whom they have built an emotional, though nonphysical, relationship.

Summary

In reviewing our knowledge of bullying, harassment, and stalking, it is clear that this problem will not go away. Technology has made it incredibly easy for individuals to send hurtful or threatening communications online, and the perception that victims may not be able to report their experiences means that incidents may go unacknowledged. As a result, it is hard to combat this problem because of confusion over who has the appropriate jurisdiction to investigate the offense and whether or not it is a crime based on existing statutes. The increasing public attention drawn to the serious consequences of cyberbullying and stalking cases, however, may force a change in the policy and social response over the following years. The attempts to develop national laws around cyberbullying are an excellent demonstration of the ways that society is attempting to respond to these acts. Thus, the way that we deal with bullying and stalking will no doubt change over the next ten years as perceptions of these behaviors change.

Reporting Online Bullying, Harassment, and Stalking

Though there are substantive psychological and behavioral consequences for victims of bullying, harassment, and stalking, it appears that very few report these incidents to agencies or individuals who can help them. While many researchers examine the prevalence of cyberbullying or traditional bullying, few have considered how often these behaviors are reported. One of the only studies to look at reporting with a nationally representative sample suggests that approximately 75 percent of kids harassed told someone about the incident, though they primarily told friends rather than parents (Priebe et al., 2013). Similarly, the NCVS supplemental survey on bullying found that 45.6 percent of youths contacted a teacher or school official about their experience (US Department of Education, 2019).

The lack of reporting to parents or authority figures may be a consequence of concerns among youth that they may lose access to the technology that enables cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Marcum, 2010). In fact, youth who experience cyberbullying were likely to have had a conversation with their parent(s) about harassment and the risks associated with online communication, though it did not affect their likelihood of reporting the incident (Priebe et al., 2013). A logical parental response may be to take away their child's cell phone or perhaps limit the amount of time that they can spend online. Such a response may be undesirable, especially for a teenager who only recently acquired a cell phone or is used to having unrestricted access to technology.

Instead, many youths who are cyberbullied tend to simply delete the messages they receive, ignore it when possible, or block the sender in order to reduce their exposure (Parris et al., 2012; Priebe et al., 2013). In fact, most youth only report the incident if they feel it is severe (Holtfeld & Grabe, 2012; Slonje et al., 2013), such as if it lasts for several days or produces a severe emotional response (Priebe et al., 2013). Limited research on the topic suggests that reporting cyberbullying experiences to parents decreases as youths age (McQuade et al., 2009; Slonje et al., 2013). Instead, teens are more likely to report cyberbullying experiences to their peers as a coping strategy. In addition, parents do not appear to report instances of cyberbullying to police due to perceptions that they will not be able to handle the case due to limited laws (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; McQuade et al., 2009). Similarly, there is some evidence that school administrators may not want to contact police due to concerns over how the incident will impact the school's reputation (McQuade et al., 2009).

Similar issues are evident in the number of cyberstalking or harassment cases reported to law enforcement agencies. Statistics on victim-reporting from the NCVS suggest that approximately 42 percent of female stalking victims and 14 percent of female harassment victims contacted police (Catalano, 2012). The data reported for this study were amended recently due to errors in the way in which some acts of stalking and harassment were coded. As a result, it is not clear how many cases were actually made known to police (Catalano, 2012). Using information from a nationally representative sample of female college students, Fisher and her colleagues (2000) found that less than 4 percent of women sought a restraining order against their stalker and less than 2 percent filed criminal charges. More recently, Fissel (2021) found that only 18 percent of cyberstalking victims reported their victimization to law enforcement. Though there is less information available on cyberstalking and harassment victim-reporting internationally, evidence from the Canadian Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey found that the majority (70 percent) of victims reporting intimidation or harassment online were female (Perreault, 2013).

Victims are more likely to report their cyberstalking victimization to law enforcement when the cyberstalking lasted longer and when the victim felt threatened, lost time at work or school, or suffered financial consequences (Fissel 2021; Reyns & Englebrecht, 2010). The lack of reporting for most stalking and harassment cases may be due to a perception among victims that their case will not be taken seriously by law enforcement (Nobles et al., 2012). Victims of crimes like sexual assault or domestic violence often feel that their experience is not serious enough to report to police or will not be viewed as real by officers. In much the same way, victims of stalking and harassment cases, online or offline, may assume that officers will not be inclined to make a report or investigate. As a result, victims may feel abandoned by the criminal justice system and may proactively change behaviors that are perceived to put them at risk for further harassment. In fact, research suggests that victims who feel greater levels of fear because of the incident and perceive that they are being stalked are more likely to engage in multiple self-protective behaviors (Nobles et al., 2012).