

Let Us Put A Full Stop To Cyber-Bullying

By Benny Lim

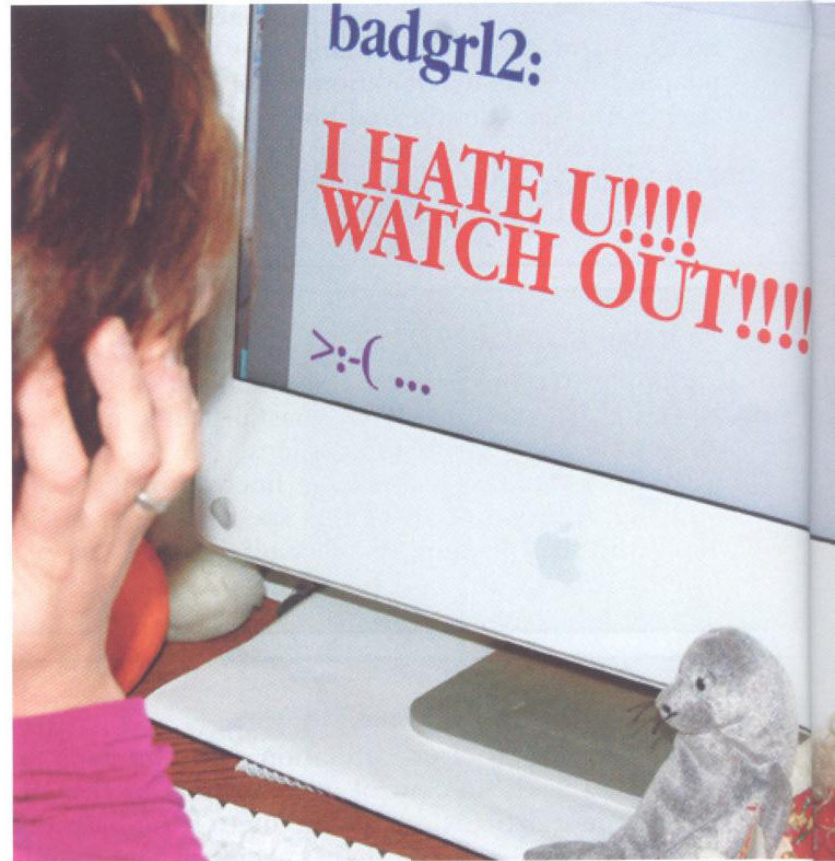
There are so many things happening in the world right now, some having been around for decades while others, only more recently showing itself in our society. As we journey through our schooling years, I am sure that many of us have experienced (even if not personally) the evil that is called 'bullying' at least once in the 11 years of our school life and/or at the neighbourhood playground. Whether it is just a small issue of being pushed around or a bigger one where someone actually ends up in a hospital because of injuries, bullying has been around for a very long time. It's not just in schools anymore but in work places too.

However, since the dawn of the cyber age, a new form of bullying has emerged - 'cyber-bullying'. If not looked into properly, it can become a very serious issue, if it is not already one.

Wounds that can't be seen

People say that the deepest wounds are the ones that can't be seen, the ones that are mentally, spiritually and psychologically inflicted, rather than the physically inflicted ones. Physical wounds can heal. A black eye will go away, a bruise or a cut will close up and heal over time. But a psychological wound will remain there forever and this can be dangerous, especially if the victim is not mentally or psychologically strong.

When someone has been physically bullied, we can tell as there will be bruise marks and such on the victim. But when someone has been cyber-bullied, can we really tell if that person has been a victim or not?



Fear of Seeking Help

Since I started working for CyberSecurity Malaysia, I have given talks in both primary and secondary schools across the country, talking about the dangers of the Internet if not used properly. I have given examples and one of them is always cyber-bullying. Whenever I talk about the topic, I always ask for a show of hands if any of the students in the audience have been a victim, know a victim or have played the role of cyber-bully. Never, not a single time, has there been a raised hand in the audience. My crowd has always been a good range from 30 to a couple of hundred students at one go and each time I put that question to them, I get the same response – silence!

Not a single time has a student raised his or her hand to admit that they have been a victim of cyber-bullying or if they know anyone who is or has been a victim. They all just laugh and make fun or shake their heads and smile.

But when I am done with my talk and as I'm packing up my stuff, I invariably get one or two students coming up to me and telling me that in truth, they have been a victim of cyber-bullying before. And each time I ask why they didn't raise their hands when I asked the question during the talk, they tell me the same thing, that they were too shy or embarrassed to admit it in front of their friends and teachers. When asked if anyone else knows about it, they said that no one else knew about it but them.

The thing is, if these students did not come up to me after my talk and tell me they had been victims of cyber-bullying, I would never have known.

The only way for us to know if someone has been or is currently a victim of cyber-bullying, is if that person tells us. If we do not ask, we will never know. The effects of cyber-bullying are unseen. The psychological effects are well-hidden behind a façade; victims are trying to be brave or just too afraid to come out. And this holds true victims of all ages.

Effects of Cyber-bullying

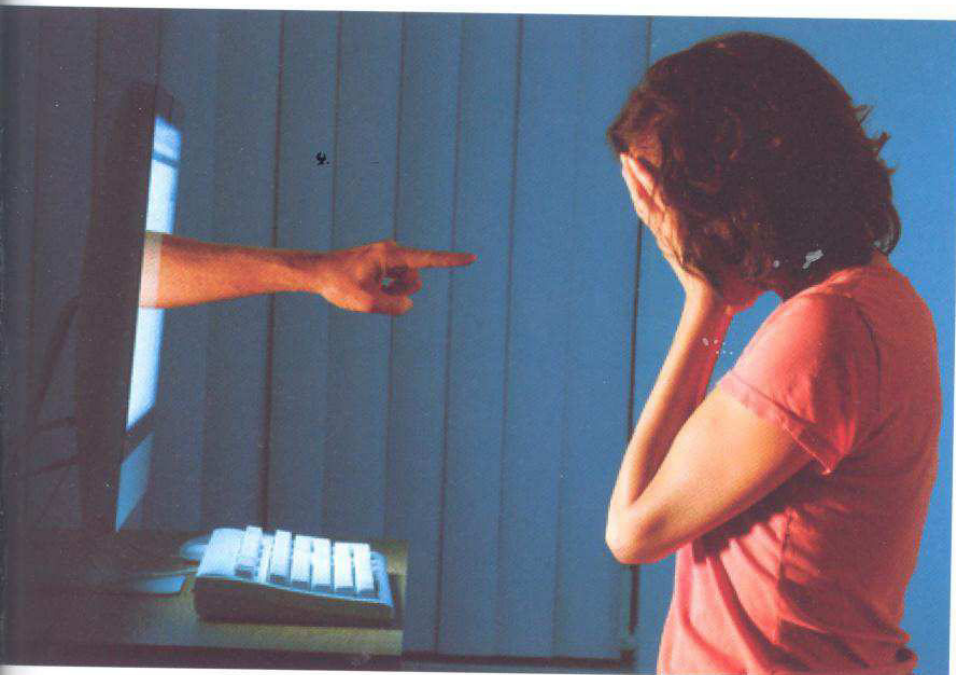
The effects of cyber-bullying can be very harmful if not treated quickly and properly. A victim can suffer from depression if continuously cyber-bullied. When depression is not treated it can lead to suicidal tendencies.

Claudia Boerner was a former German model who committed suicide after she was abused on social media sites for her participation in a reality cooking show in Germany. Critics accused her of being an attention seeker, claimed that she had showed off for the cameras and made nasty comments about her 'fake breasts' and appearance. This was a perfect example of what happens to a victim of cyber-bullying when no one helps them overcome their problem.

Cyber-bullying may come off as something of a petty issue to some people. Victims of cyber-bullying are usually called names or made fun of especially regarding their appearance. Many say these are not the worse forms of abuse one can be subjected to, but when the hate and the humiliation is felt every single day, it takes a huge toll on the victims. They slowly lose their will to fight, and even their will to live, seeing no sense in staying in a world where people hate and make fun of who they are.

Some are even blackmailed by pictures and videos of their past which former friends

and lovers may have and use to extort money or properties from them. That fear of something so personal being made public can be a frightening experience for them. Without sensible advice and a supporting shoulder, it will become something that is too heavy for them to handle by themselves. This will affect them not just in the short term but in the long term as well. If the victim is still young, it may severely affect character development as he/she grows up and lead to a very unhappy adulthood.



Another thing about cyber-bullying is that it is not limited to when a bully and a victim actually meet. Since it can be done anywhere with the use of a computer or a phone, it can be a 24/7 attack on the victim. A relentless attack that can last for as long as the bully wants it to, it can become very hard for victims to escape from it by themselves.

So, do we really know what is going on around us? Are we victims of cyber-bullying ourselves? Pay close attention to what happens to you and around you. It is never too late to help someone in need, nor is it too late to seek help. As in all cases of bullying, be it physical or cyber-bullying, the only one who is in the wrong is the bully, not the victim. Never let the bully win in any situation.

Let us put a full stop to cyber-bullying.

(For more assistance or a helping hand, victims can give Talian Nur a call at 15999. Talian Nur is the hotline link of 29 call agents who work on 3 shifts to answer calls 24-hours a day and seven days a week to enable early intervention for victims of domestic violence, bullying and natural disasters.)

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Claudia Boerner, a victim of cyber-bullying, committed suicide

Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI). He is involved in the DiGi CyberSAFE program (cybersafe.my/dcp/) for raising awareness among students throughout the country. For additional information, please visit the website at <http://www.cybersecurity.my>. For general inquiry, please email to info@cybersecurity.my.

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