what is cyberbullying?

Cyber-bullying involves sending or posting harmful or cruel text/and or images using the internet or other digital communication devices, such as cell phones (Feinberg, Robey. 2010).

Cyberbullying vs. Traditional Bullying:

According to Olweus (1999) Traditional bullying is characterized by the following three criteria: (1) it is aggressive behaviour or intentional 'harm doing' (2) which is carried out 'repeatedly and over time' (3) in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power". Cyberbullying is an extension of traditional bullying. Although cyberbullying is similar in its effects there are a number of important differences that can exacerbate its negative consequences. These differences include:

- People can remain anonymous due to technology (Burton & Mutongwizo, 2009).
- In cyberbullying there is an absence of non-verbal cues and emotional reactions. As a result the individual who is bullying the person may not realise what effect he or she is having on the person (Lahmann, 2012).
- Cyberbullying can occur at any time and at any place allowing for continuity (Lazarus et. al., 2013).
- Unlike traditional bullying which is usually one on one, Insults and images can be distributed to a wide audience quickly through technology (Lazarus et. al., 2013).

Types of Cyberbullying:

- Flaming: online fights using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language.
- Harassment and stalking: Repeatedly sending cruel, vicious, and/or threatening messages.
- Denigration: Sending or posting gossip or rumors about a person to damage his/her reputation.
- Impersonation: Breaking into someone's email account and using it to send vicious or embarrassing material to others.
- Outing and trickery: Engaging someone in instant messaging, tricking him or her into revealing sensitive information, and forwarding that information to others.
- Exclusion: Intentionally excluding someone from an online group.
- Happy slapping – a relatively new type of cyber bullying – involves incidents where people walk up to someone and slap that person, while another captures the violence using a camera phone. In some cases it constitutes more than slapping and assault may occur.

(Feinberg, Robey. 2010)

Characteristics of Cyberbullies:

- Can be male or female.
- Likely to be involved in other problematic behaviors like substance abuse.
- Low self-esteem.
- Less empathy.
- Poor social environment.

The STOP Cyberbullying Program describes 4 Types of Cyberbullies:

The Vengeful Angel: does not see him/herself as a bully, but rather as a vigilante, as he or she becomes involved in trying to protect a friend who is being cyberbullied.
Power-Hungry: cyberbullies who want to exert their authority and control others with fear, and they are often victims of traditional bullying.
Mean girls: cyberbullying often occurs in a group. The Perpetrators are usually bored and look for entertainment.
Inadvertent: cyberbullies who do not intend to cause harm, they just respond without thinking of the consequences of their actions.

It is important to remember in cyberbullying multiple roles often occur. One can be a bully and a victim.

(Feinberg, Robey. 2010)

The effects of Cyberbullying:

Persistent bullying, regardless of environment, makes victims vulnerable to social, physical, and mental health consequences. These can include:

- Depression
- Anger
- Feelings of Frustration
- Self-blame and Guilt
- Suicidal ideation, including cutting
- Poor university attendance which impacts negatively on one's academic performance.
- Low self-esteem
- Feelings of isolation and loneliness
- Fear

(Feinberg, Robey. 2010).

what can you
do about
cyberbullying?

Interventions for the Victim:

- If you are being cyberbullied tell someone you trust: friend, parent, lecturer or a psychologist at student counselling. There is no shame in reaching out for help.
- Contact host/site providers if inappropriate material is being posted on their website.
- Contact Information Technology Services at DUT so they can also report it and assist you with blocking inappropriate material.
- Save all evidence if you're being bullied online. Don't delete without keeping a copy for yourself.
- Never respond via technology when you are angry, it will make things worse.
- Remember there is no anonymity on-line, everything is traceable, deleted or not.
- Protect your username and password. Don't share it with friends.
- Don't post information online if you don't want everybody to read it.
- Keep privacy settings on your computer. Secure your information.
- Only accept close friends on your social networking sites.
- Most importantly, treat others as you want to be treated.
- If bullying persists and you feel physically and emotionally unsafe: report the bullying to the South African Police Services. The Protection from Harassment Act, 2011

(http://www.justice.gov.za/forms/form_pha.html) now allows for legal intervention against cyberbullying.

(Feinberg, Robey. 2010)

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Interventions for the Cyberbully:

- If you find yourself being the bully try to put yourself in the victim shoes and think about how they may feel or you may feel when reading your message.
- Think about why you are bullying someone. Were or are you a victim of bullying? Does the victim remind you of someone you don't like from your past or something you don't like about yourself?
- Think before you click. Look at what you're posting or uploading and ask "Would I want someone saying that about me online?" If the answer is "No" then don't do it.
- Think about your feelings. Do you have a lot of negative (anger, sadness) or positive feelings (happy)? Where have these feelings come from? How are they contributing to your everyday interactions?

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- Think about other stressors that may contribute to your cyberbullying behaviour. These can include a poor home environment, past trauma, academic difficulties or jealousy regarding another student's academic success, depression, anxiety or substance abuse. If so ask someone for help (a friend or a psychologist at student counselling).
- Finally, remind yourself you do have good qualities and you are more than just a cyberbully.

(Feinberg, Robey. 2010)

If you are experiencing the problem of cyberbullying, whether you are a victim or perpetrator, we at the Student Counselling Centre are here to provide you with support in a confidential and non-judgmental manner.

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