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Cyberbullying: Feminine Vulnerability in Anonymous Spaces

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In this paper, I examine the need for research on how cyberbullying and cyber victimization affect women and girls along with what tools women and girls use to cope with these affects. I also look at how ideas about the performance of gender and related societal norms exacerbate the problems of cyberbullying and cyber victimization for women and girls. In addition, I explore the theory that early lessons of gender affect identity and relationships in ways that matter in relation to cyberbullying and cyber victimization vulnerability, responses, and accessible networks of support.

Introduction

Cyberbullying is a growing epidemic that affects many people across the world, however there is a distinct lack of research about how women and girls are uniquely impacted. Consequently, there is very little known about the specific coping mechanisms that women and girls use to deal with cyberbullying. Learning about coping mechanisms and how effective they are is important to negating the affects of cyberbullying. Doing research in the area of coping mechanisms can shed light on why some girls seem to deal with cyberbullying easily while others cannot cope, resulting in disastrous consequences. I believe that our society's normalization of the 'mean girl,' the obsession to meet the standards of physical beauty portrayed by the media, and other lessons related to

behavior and appearance during girlhood, leave women and girls more vulnerable to cyberbullying. At the same time, these lessons during girlhood impact identity and the formation of relationships that are important when coping with cyberbullying and other types of cyber victimization. Adolescence is "when individual, developmental and cultural factors combine in ways that shape adulthood" (Pipher, 1995, p. 26). Ortega et al. (2012) also agree that "some of the emotional and cognitive schemes that will shape our 'adult personality' are being developed" during adolescence (p. 354). Therefore, what girls are taught about being a girl affects their ability to handle life situations from girlhood through adulthood.

This topic is personal and important to me because a girl that I love has been deeply affected by both cyberbullying and bullying, and as a result, has dealt with various mental health issues. While I am not here to tell you her entire story, I am here to discuss how her experience was shaped by the lessons of girlhood, and how her experience could have been different if she had the tools to cope with cyberbullying before it occurred. In addition, I want to bring attention to how little we know about the effects of cyberbullying on women and girls and

how they cope with these impacts. Within the topic of cyberbullying, I am an outsider. I have not experienced cyberbullying nor have I experienced many of the mental or physical affects that are a result of cyberbullying. Although I do not have experiential knowledge in this particular area, I can relate to this topic in other ways: I am a woman; I was a girl; I experienced bullying. My observations and personal experience as a feminist woman also inform my topic, therefore, I am both an outsider and an insider within the subjects of this paper (Collins, 2004). Based on my own personal experiences and observation understanding both the ways in which women and girls are cyberbullied and how they cope are important to maintaining both mental and physical health.

Terminology

In the context of this paper, I define cyberbullying broadly: bullying via electronic means. This wide-ranging definition includes all forms of bullying from interacting with personal electronics such as cell phones and gaming systems to the internet and social media sites. Because there is not one solid definition, not all women and girls recognize what they experience as cyberbullying. If you cannot identify the

root of a problem, then it is difficult to come up with ways to cope with it. There is also a sense of normalization of cyberbullying. Much in the same way that people say, "boys will be boys," there is an assumption that cyberbullying is something that just happens and it should be brushed off. Cyberbullying should not be something normal, something that is considered a "rite of passage," especially considering that this can happen throughout a lifetime.

The term cyber victimization is also key to understanding how and why girls react to and cope with cyberbullying in the ways that they do. For the purpose of this article, I am defining cyber victimization as when cyberbullies prey upon women and girls in a sexual or criminal manner in a cyber environment. Scenarios of cyber victimization include situations where the victims are asked to provide sexually explicit pictures, videos, and sometimes conversation. The request for sexually explicit material can progress into further exploitation, such as online prostitution. Cyber victimization is different from cyberbullying in that there are clear criminal and legal consequences for the actions of the perpetrator when/if they are caught.

An important issue to address when discussing cyberbullying is identifying and defining the coping mechanisms that girls and women use to get through the experience. For the purpose of this article, I define three types of coping mechanisms: self-support, social support, and professional support. Self-support includes things such as reading and exercising. But not all coping mechanisms under self-support are good or healthy such as self-medicating with drugs or alcohol. Essentially, self-support is anything a person does on their own (not necessarily alone, but rather, without the prompting of others). Social support is the reliance on friends or family members for advice. Interestingly, social support can also come from cyberspace sometimes in the form of support forums. The final coping mechanism, professional support, includes seeking professional help through physicians, mental health counselors, psychiatrists, etc. It is important to know where women and girls learned about specific coping mechanisms, because this tells us not only who they are relying on for support, but also, what support systems are most accessible.

What Research Tells Us

Current research into the cyberbullying phenomena is in a fledgling stage; there is still much that experts have not

discovered about the effects of cyberbullying and how to combat it on a large scale. Although various methods of cyber technology have been around for many years, the harmful effects related to this technology are just now being realized. The topic of cyberbullying and cyber victimization is currently a highly discussed issue due to news media coverage highlighting the often fatal consequences that these situations create. Cyberbullying is much like regular bullying, however, cyberspace gives a bully confidence via anonymity. Cyberbullies can act in whatever manner they wish to without consequence. Although not all cyber platforms are anonymous, cyberbullies still believe that there are no consequences for their actions. Due to the almost unlimited access people have to electronic communications, cyberbullying can happen in an instant, spread quickly, and be vicious, particularly in the case of women and girls.

One problem with research on cyberbullying is that it is often overly generalized in that it primarily tells us about the effects it has among adolescents or adults. By generalizing, researchers miss important issues that are related not only to specific ages but to gender as well. In addition, most research involving cyberbullying is quantitative, focusing on the number of people who have experiences instead of what type of experiences people have. Without understanding the circumstances around cyberbullying events, the feelings that people have, and outside influencing factors, such as socio-economic status, lifestyle, and even family make up, there will never be a full understanding of what cyberbullying does to people and why coping mechanisms work differently for different people and situations.

One key to understanding the circumstances of cyberbullying events is who experiences it. Does gender matter? Not all research about cyberbullying in relation to adolescents takes into account gender differences. In research about cyberbullying that does indicate a difference between male and female adolescents, there is no focus on the cause of difference in experiences based on gender (Carter & Wilson, 2015; Lenhart, 2007). In addition, there is little research that focuses specifically on women and girls. Of the little research reported on the cyberbullying phenomenon that even mentions gender differences, researchers cannot agree as to whether or not adolescents experience cyberbullying at different levels in relation to gender (Carter & Wilson, 2015; Chisholm, 2006;

Machackova, Cerna, Sevcikova, Dedkova & Daneback, 2013). However, in a study on cyberbullying by the Pew Research Center, Lenhart (2007) notes that girls were more likely to experience cyberbullying than boys. Additionally, girls in the fifteen to seventeen-year-old age range specifically were more likely to be cyberbullied; those who used social media experienced higher levels of cyberbullying (Lenhart, 2007). Later research by Machackova et al. (2013) and Carter and Wilson (2015) indicate that girls are still affected by cyberbullying more than boys, possibly due to the increase in social media use. In addition to cyberbullying, girls are more vulnerable to cyber victimization, often in the form of sexual exploitation or harassment (Chisholm, 2006). It is clear from these studies that there is a need for research into the experiences that girls have online, specifically related to cyberbullying and cyber victimization.

Adding to the void in knowledge, available research focuses primarily on how the actual act of cyberbullying is performed, not the causes nor the consequences (Carter & Wilson, 2015; Lenhart, 2007). There is some research available on the coping mechanisms to deal with cyberbullying however it does not deal with the tools used to cope with both the mental and physical affects

(Parris, Varjas, Meyers, & Cutts, 2011; Machackova et al., 2013). The affects of cyberbullying and cyber victimization can manifest in many different ways including depression, emotional distress, and eating disorders (Carter & Wilson, 2015; Ortega et al., 2012). In addition, the affects can also manifest through acting out, low self-esteem, anxiety, sexual promiscuity (and often exploitation), substance abuse, suicidal ideations, and ultimately suicide (Chisholm, 2006; Davison & Stein, 2014). Despite the affects of cyberbullying and cyber victimization being serious in nature, most often professional support is not sought out. Paris et al. (2011) focus on how adolescents rely primarily on avoidance, acceptance, justification, and social support as 'reactive' coping mechanisms to cyberbullying. However, they do not indicate what happens when adolescents actually recognize that cyberbullying is causing mental or physical harm, nor how they cope with those effects. Research done by Machmutow, Perren, Sticca, and Alsaker (2012) looks at whether or not there are coping mechanisms that 'buffer' symptoms of depression in children who are victims of cyberbullying, however, this research again does not cover the wide variety of

physical, mental, and emotional effects of cyberbullying.

It is clear from the current research on cyberbullying that a large portion of the research with respect to both gender and the coping methods associated with the mental and physical affects of cyberbullying is incomplete. I believe that further research should be completed that also looks at the feelings and experiences of all parties involved in cyberbullying. In a situation such as this, I believe that we need to forget what we think we know about cyberbullying from generalized and one-sided research, and instead, go forward acknowledging that gender does matter. There are many other factors that affect personal experience with cyberbullying such as race, class, and sexuality. Although intersectionality is important to any research, fully exploring the intersections of gender, race, class, and sexuality with regard to cyberbullying is outside the scope of this paper.

What Experience Tells Us

Standard research on cyberbullying is missing the 'human factor,' what it means to be female and bullied online in our culture. Our culture is one in which people are supposed to look and act in certain specific ways based on their perceived gender; when they do not,

they are ridiculed. This performance of gender is a large factor in not only cyberbullying and cyber victimization itself, but also, in the way that girls and women cope with it. When women and girls experience cyberbullying, it is often based on personal appearances and imagined behaviors that are outside societal norms. I believe that what happens to girls during the formation of their identity is a key part of how girls react to cyberbullying. As females, the first lessons of girlhood are often that our appearance is most important to our feminine identity. At birth, girls are dressed in pink with ruffles to announce to the world that they are female, and it just goes down hill from there. Appearance is so important to proclaiming gender that our bodies are *wounded* by ear piercings as babies just to differentiate girls from boys. As Butler (1993) notes, the performativity of gender is not just one "act" but it is the "reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to an extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (p. 241). Being forced to wear pink with ruffles and having our ears pierced may seem like individual acts, however, they are just part of the larger process of performing gender. Eventually, girls are taught that "'good

girls' are polite, traditional, asexual, cute, cheerful, obedient" (Martin, 2008, p. 39). This 'good girl' persona is often promoted, or perhaps projected is more accurate, by adults who want their daughters to behave in a certain manner. Although second-wave feminism argued "that being a 'good girl' was actually an oppressive, unnatural state – that it endangered women's capacities to develop real personalities and genuinely happy lives," the 'good girl' ideal still persists today (Martin, 2008, p. 43). It is important to note that the formation of identity, especially at such an early age, relates to the creation of self-esteem and to how girls feel connected to others. According to Orenstein (1994), "girls with healthy self-esteem have an appropriate sense of their potential, their competence, and their innate value as individuals" (p. xix). When women and girls do not value themselves, they are discounting their abilities and limiting their own agency. While this is largely a consequence of parental input, parental influence is not the only thing that shapes the identity of girls.

One of the first environments that shapes the identity of girls is the educational system. Things that happen within the school environment lead to ideas about the values and traits that girls should have which ultimately affect self-esteem (Orenstein, 1994). Educational institutions frequently teach girls that they are incompetent in math and sciences, regardless of whether or not they actually have the aptitude for these particular subjects. Often, girls hide their intelligence because this trait makes them stand out, leaving them subject to criticism from their peers. The desire to blend in with peers exacerbates the issue of teachers who fail to acknowledge male and female students equally. Orenstein (1994) describes this underlying message of inequality in the education system as a "hidden curriculum" which teaches "girls to value silence and compliance, to view those qualities as a virtue" (p. 35). This "hidden curriculum" also reinforces the 'good girl' ideal and makes girls feel inferior to boys in a place that they spend a majority of their formative years. The education system also affects girl's self-esteem through the lessons taught about sex, sexuality, and gender.

As girls get older, their performance of gender is based on visual consumption; they must look like the examples they see in popular culture or else they are not 'feminine' enough. We live in the age of technology where we are constantly connected to media, so girls and women are bombarded with images of the 'ideal' look and behavior that is supposed to be

the standard. According to Milestone and Meyer (2012), "the beauty ideal is very narrow: girls should be small, thin, have silky hair and be conventionally pretty" (p. 93). In order to obtain this beauty ideal, girls are encouraged to 'fix' themselves by wearing makeup, exercising, dieting, and having cosmetic surgery. According to Pipher (1995), the "gap between girls' true selves and cultural prescriptions for what is properly female creates enormous problems" (p. 22). The societal expectation to live up to this unnatural beauty ideal often leads to obsessions that are detrimental to the health of girls and women; these include eating disorders, over-exercise, and plastic surgery addictions, along with various mental health issues. Orenstein (1994) notes that eating disorders (and presumably other bodily addictions) can only survive in a culture that will allow or encourage them. This is exactly what our society does with the media-perpetuated feminine beauty ideal. Ultimately, this beauty ideal leads to self-esteem issues that leave women and girls susceptible to cyberbullying and cyber victimization.

Another aspect to the visual consumption of gender is the over-sexualization of women and girls. One component of the beauty ideal is being 'sexy,' but who are women and girls told to be sexy for? Men. Women and girls receive the message that they have to be 'sexy' not only through their peers, but through the media that they consume. Everything from children's cartoons that are designed with a sexual undertone, to popular music, television, and social media, tell women and girls that latent sexuality is essential to being female. We are told that we have to be sexually appealing to men yet we cannot be 'too sexy' or we are labeled with an assortment of derogatory names, the most popular being "slut." It is interesting that being 'sexy' also correlates to being sexually active, sometimes even before girls are teenagers, in that you are supposed to appear to be sexually active, yet if you are, and happen to mention this, then you are again labeled a slut. In Orenstein's (1994) study on middle school girls, she notes, "a 'slut' is not merely a girl who 'does it,' but any girl who – through her clothes, her makeup, her hairstyle, or her speech – seems as if she *might*" (p. 51). Essentially, you are supposed to follow all of the mandates of being a girl or woman; however, you cannot do it too well. Our society puts women and girls into a position where they are damned if they do and damned if they do not conform to these socially

constructed sex and gender expectations.

To cope with their personal experiences, women and girls often seek to control their own body as that is the only thing that they can have control over. This bodily control presents itself in various ways including limiting or increasing food intake and outtake, physical self-harm such as cutting, and self-medicating with alcohol and drugs. The eating disorders, such as bulimia and anorexia, result not only from an obsession with the 'beauty ideal,' but from the need to control what happens to the body because outside life factors cannot be controlled. Physical self-harm is done again to have control, however, Pipher (1995) sees it "as a concrete interpretation of our culture's injunction to young women to carve themselves into culturally acceptable pieces" (p. 158). Regardless of how it is viewed, self-harm becomes an addiction that brings a sense of release or catharsis. In addition, teenage girls often find chemical use to be the quickest way to cope with their feelings, immediately replacing bad feelings with chemically induced good ones instead. There are different substances that bring good feelings about certain things. For example, alcohol and mood altering drugs, such as marijuana, are popular because they result in an instant good feeling while other drugs, such as diet pills, bring good feelings because taking them means that physical changes will happen (Pipher, 1995). These primary coping mechanisms used by girls during adolescence continue to be the coping mechanisms used later in life.

Where Research and Experience Connect

There is a complex, multifaceted connection between the performance of gender, cyberbullying, and cyber victimization. The lessons that women and girls learn about being female often take a toll on how they view themselves, their level of self-esteem, how they interact with others, and how they seek approval. According to Bordo (1993), the contemporary notion of femininity is a "double bind that legislates contradictory ideals and directives" (p. 95). If what we are being taught about being female is contradictory, then how are we supposed to gain confidence and self-worth? Pipher (1995) notes that "many [women] have tried to be the perfect women and failed. Even though they followed the rules and did as they were told, the world has not rewarded them. They feel angry, and betrayed. They feel miserable and taken for granted, used rather than loved" (p. 25).

These feelings of anger, betrayal, and being used lead women to feel insecure. When we are insecure about our place in the world and ourselves, we are more open or vulnerable to criticism. It is this vulnerability that cyberbullies and cyber predators take advantage of, and that can harm and exploit women and girls. When girls cyberbully each other, they use appearance and behavior of their target as the reasoning for their actions; the victim falls outside of societal norms or the specific norms of their peer group. Interestingly, not all victims actually fall outside the societal norms. Often the cyberbully just thinks they do.

Due to the nature of our connectivity, one instance of cyberbullying quickly becomes something uncontrollable. One hateful comment on a picture posted on a social media site such as Facebook or Instagram can spawn hundreds or even thousands of similar responses in less than twenty-four hours as the image is shared repeatedly. While the subject of the hateful comments varies, the tone and words used do not. Some of the more prevalent comments include things along the lines of "you're worthless so go kill yourself," "everyone hates you so you should just disappear," "I hope you kill yourself," "you're so [insert physical descriptor here] you should kill yourself," and the list seems to go on

infinitely. It is also very easy for cyberbullying to change to face-to-face bullying as the harassment escalates. As cyberbullying is perpetuated, it becomes almost like a game to those who are doing the bullying; who can say the most hurtful thing to cause a drastic reaction from the victim. All too often cyberbullies push their victims relentlessly until the victim feels that they have no other choice but to die to escape the feelings associated with being cyberbullied.

Why Does It Matter?

The disconnect between what research and experience tells us matters because cyberbullying is like a disease, an epidemic that is killing girls before they can even become adults. There are many girls, just like the girl who inspired me to do this work, who have been unable to get help coping with their cyberbullying, ultimately taking their own lives. While I cannot share the details of the cyberbullying that the girl who inspired my work experienced, I can tell you about what happened to other girls who experienced cyberbullying and cyber victimization. It is all too common to see stories on the nightly news about children, especially young girls, committing suicide as a result of cyberbullying. In the moment, the news

stories are shocking, however the shock soon fades, we do nothing, and then we forget. We forget that girls like Rebecca Sedwick, Phoebe Prince, Megan Meier, and Amanda Todd did not need to die because they were cyberbullied.

Rebecca Sedwick was a normal, twelve-year-old girl who in December 2012 began to experience a combination of bullying and cyberbullying by up to fifteen other girls her age. On September 9, 2013, Rebecca could no longer stand the cyberbullying, and chose to end her life to escape it (Newcomb, 2013). Phoebe Prince was a fifteen-year-old girl who emigrated from Ireland and settled in Massachusetts. She committed suicide on January 14, 2010, after weeks of cyberbullying via Facebook and text messaging. Even after Phoebe committed suicide, the cyberbullying continued on a Facebook memorial page created in her memory (James, 2010). Megan Meier was a thirteen-year-old girl from Missouri who was targeted on Myspace by an adult woman pretending to be a teenaged boy. The hoax, started by Lori Drew, led to vicious cyberbullying that resulted in Megan's suicide on October 17, 2006 (Maag, 2007; Orenstein, 2012). Amanda Todd was a fifteen-year-old girl from Canada who was cyber victimized through blackmail and sexual exploitation on Facebook, physically bullied, and then cyberbullied. The anxiety, panic disorders, and major depression that resulted from the traumatic cyberbullying that Amanda Todd experienced ultimately led to her suicide on October 10, 2012 (Ng, 2012). What do all of these stories have in common? The self-worth and confidence related to their personhood and femininity was targeted by others in such vicious ways that the victims could only see their torment ending through death. While the stories of Rebecca Sedwick, Phoebe Prince, Megan Meier, and Amanda Todd are tragic, these are but a few of the many stories where girls and women have suffered due to cyberbullying and cyber victimization.

Navigating the vast spaces within the cyber world is complicated in that there are opportunities for liberation while oppression is also magnified. Cyberspace is an environment much like Donna Haraway (1985) describes a cybernetic organism to be, a combination of organism and machine that is "a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (p. 344). Cyberspace gives women and girls a way to explore and create themselves by 'trying on' different personas, imitating people and traits they aspire to while at the same time learning to interact with

others, not just their own peer group. In essence, in this cyber space, women are real-life cyborgs that are "actively rewriting the text of their bodies and societies" (Haraway, 1985, p. 352). Given the ability to choose their online persona, and the anonymous environment cyberspace can afford, women and girls are free to be and express themselves in liberating ways, especially in comparison to face-to-face interactions more common to offline environments. However, according to Orenstein (2012):

> Young people's real-life identities are becoming ever more externally driven, sculpted in response to feedback of networked 'friends,' therefore the space that is liberating can also be oppressive in that there is a need to conform to the will of others (p. 165).

During the examination of self within cyberspace, women and girls are vulnerable in both identity and place. The struggle to discover who you are and where you fit in at that particular moment alters your perception about what is right and wrong, good and bad. Predators of all kinds look for these vulnerabilities to target and attack their victims. While I focus primarily on the culture of girlhood, making girls more

vulnerable in online spaces, the ways in which power and dominance shift from the real world to cyberspace also contribute to this vulnerability. Cyber-technology has also oppressed women and girls in other, subtler ways. The social reality created in cyberspace is a replica of our society, therefore the structures of power and dominance are the same. The people who create the means of electronic communication and dictate the use of those communication methods are part of heteropatriarchy. So the question then becomes who controls cyberspace? The heteropatriarchy that created it, the decisions of individual users, or the social reality that was created by the replication of our society as a whole?

What Can We Do?

Cyberbullying and cyber victimization are phenomenon that are growing increasingly common in our society. In order to decrease the instances of cyberbullying and cyber victimization with regard to women and girls, research must be done specifically about how victims are affected and how they cope. We need to look at what electronic means are used to cyberbully, what are the tactics used to perpetrate cyberbullying, and what is the basis of the cyberbullying. In addition, how

women and girls access the tools they use to cope with cyberbullying needs to be looked at in conjunction with how their sense of self makes an impact on those specific tools.

While cyberbullying and cyber victimization are large social problems, the underlying causes are part of an arguably larger social problem. Ultimately, societal norms about the performance of gender for all people, not just women and girls, need to be looked at and altered in a way that makes performance of gender less rigid. We have socially constructed the performance of gender into a binary system where people can only be one gender or the other by following societal guidelines in very specific ways. Butler (1990) notes "that gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notion of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity … conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restrictive frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality" (p. 444). Therefore, we must recognize that our replication of femininity and masculinity is an illusion that is problematic; there is no right or wrong way to perform gender. Halberstam (2012) agrees that rigid gender structures are problematic because they control sexuality, strip away individuality which is dangerous, and do not reflect how we actually live our lives. In the book *Gaga Feminism,* Halberstam (2012) discusses the idea that gender as we know it is something that can change overtime and what would happen if we no longer gendered people based on appearance but behavior. The idea of gender fluidity is a valid point, however, if we gendered others based on behavior, then society would still fall into the pattern of policing others.

The idea of policing others also needs to be addressed on a large scale. As Bordo (1993) notes, "through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity …--female bodies become docile bodies-- bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, 'improvement'" (p. 91). This concept of policed bodies becoming docile bodies can be applied to the policing of any gender. Policing is oppression, and oppression silences our legitimate voices. In cyberspace, the policing of bodies, appearance, and behavior leads to the oppression of women and girls in a way that is highly detrimental to their health and well-being. It is not up to

society to police others when it comes to performance of gender or any other attributes associated with individual identity.

Conclusion

Through my work exploring gender, identity, and vulnerability in cyberspace, I have realized that as a society we have to do better in many different ways. We have to do better research on significant social issues. The research that has been done with regard to women, girls, and cyberbullying is one sided, incomplete, and possibly biased because it does not take into consideration the identity of who is being studied, nor how they are uniquely affected by cyberbullying. If we do not have reliable research, then we cannot understand the scope of the problem and come up with ways to fix it. We have to recognize that gender is not binary or fixed, and that it can be performed in any manner we choose as individuals. When we recognize that the performance of gender is something that is personal and individual then the societal norms that are taught during girlhood will change too. In turn, women and girls would be more likely to have higher levels of self-confidence and feel more secure with both their identity and place in the world making them less vulnerable across the board, not just in cyberspace. Our societies obsession with policing others has also created a world in which everyone must be the same. By accepting that there are variations in the performance of gender (and many other things), then there would be less judgment and policing of others. In addition, if expressing your individuality or true self is not bound by societal norms regarding the performance of gender, femininity, and masculinity, then a large portion of cyberbullying could be eliminated because those traits are things that cyberbullies target. Changing the societal view on the policing of others can also change the distribution or balance of power and domination that exists today both online and in real life. Ultimately, being open to and accepting differences both as individuals and as a societal collective would make a large impact on many aspects of life for everyone, not just women and girls.

The only way to disrupt the status quo is to take back our individual and collective power and address issues that affect personhood, especially with regard to women and girls. We matter. Our physical and mental health matters. How we feel about our place in the world matters. How we feel about our identity matters.

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