

Cyber Harassment

In many ways, social media platforms have created great benefits for our societies by expanding and diversifying the ways people communicate with each other, and yet these platforms also have the power to cause harm. Posting hurtful messages about other people is a form of harassment known as cyberbullying. Some acts of cyberbullying may not only be considered slanderous, but also lead to serious consequences. In 2010, Rutgers University student Tyler Clementi jumped to his death a few days after his roommate used a webcam to observe and tweet about Tyler's sexual encounter with another man. Jane Clementi, Tyler's mother, stated, "In this digital world, we need to teach our youngsters that their actions have consequences, that their words have real power to hurt or to help. They must be encouraged to choose to build people up and not tear them down."

In 2013, Idalia Hernández Ramos, a middle school teacher in Mexico, was a victim of cyber harassment. After discovering that one of her students tweeted that the teacher was a "bitch" and a "whore," Hernández confronted the girl during a lesson on social media etiquette. Inquiring why the girl would post such hurtful messages that could harm the teacher's reputation, the student meekly replied that she was upset at the time. The teacher responded that she was very upset by the student's actions. Demanding a public apology in front of the class, Hernández stated that she would not allow "young brats" to call her those names. Hernández uploaded a video of this confrontation online, attracting much attention.

While Hernández was subject to cyber harassment, some felt she went too far by confronting the student in the classroom and posting the video for the public to see, raising concerns over the privacy and rights of the student. Sameer Hinduja, who writes for the Cyberbullying Research Center, notes, "We do need to remain gracious and understanding towards teens when they demonstrate immaturity." Confronting instances of a teenager venting her anger may infringe upon her basic rights to freedom of speech and expression. Yet, as Hinduja explains, teacher and student were both perpetrators and victims of cyber harassment. All the concerns of both parties must be considered and, as Hinduja wrote, "The worth of one's dignity should not be on a sliding scale depending on how old you are."



Discussion Questions:

1. In trying to teach the student a lesson about taking responsibility for her actions, did the teacher go too far and become a bully? Why or why not? Does she deserve to be fired for her actions?
2. What punishment does the student deserve? Why?
3. Who is the victim in this case? The teacher or the student? Was one victimized more than the other? Explain.
4. Do victims have the right to defend themselves against bullies? What if they go through the proper channels to report bullying and it doesn't stop?
5. How should compassion play a role in judging other's actions?
6. How are factors like age and gender used to "excuse" unethical behavior? (ie. "Boys will be boys" or "She's too young/old to understand that what she did is wrong") Can you think of any other factors that are sometimes used to excuse unethical behavior?
7. How is cyberbullying similar or different from face-to-face bullying? Is one more harmful than the other? Explain.
8. Do you know anyone who has been the victim of cyber-bullying? What types of harm did this person experience?

Resources:

Teacher suspended after giving student a twitter lesson

<http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/12/world/americas/mexico-teacher-twitter/index.html>

Pros and Cons of Social Media in the Classroom

<http://campustechnology.com/Articles/2012/01/19/Pros-and-Cons-of-Social-Media-in-the-Classroom.aspx?Page=1>

How to Use Twitter in the Classroom

<http://thenextweb.com/twitter/2011/06/23/how-to-use-twitter-in-the-classroom/>

Twitter is Turning Into a Cyberbullying Playground

<http://www.takepart.com/article/2012/08/08/twitter-turning-cyberbullying-playground>

Can Social Media and School Policies be “Friends”?

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/policy-priorities/vol17/num04/Can-Social-Media-and-School-Policies-be-£Friends£¢.asp>

What Are the Free Expression Rights of Students In Public Schools Under the First Amendment?

<http://www.firstamendmentschools.org/freedoms/faq.aspx?id=12991>

Teacher Shames Student in Classroom After Student Bullies Teacher on Twitter

<http://cyberbullying.us/teacher-shames-student-in-classroom-after-student-bullies-teacher-on-twitter/>

Author:

Christina Bain, Ph.D.

Department of Art and Art History

College of Fine Arts

The University of Texas