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"I H8 U": The Cyberbullying Debate

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On October 10, 2012, a teenager's tragedy struck the worldwide news. Fifteen year old Amanda Todd committed suicide after suffering from about a year's worth of Cyberbullying. After seeking help and remaining unheard, she moved from town to town in Canada in an attempt to escape her conflict. Never being able to evade the bullying, she decided to end her life. This is only one of the many cases of Cyberbullying that the 21st century has experienced. In Nandoli Von Marees' article, "Cyberbullying: An Increasing Challenge for Schools," Cyberbullying can be defined as "an intentional, repeated, and aggressive act or behavior carried out by a group or individual employing information and communication technology (ICT) as an instrument" (Marees 468). Thus, different forms of Cyberbullying can be implemented via the internet, e-mail, texting, and phone calls. According to Pew Internet and American Life Project Researchers, 80% of teenagers between the ages of 12 and 17 use a social networking website and approximately one third of these teens claimed that they had been perpetrators or victims of Cyberbullying (Nitzburg 1225). Therefore, with the advancements in technology and the increasing use of it by teenagers, it is clear that Cyberbullying is now a risk that comes hand in hand with technology. Parents, teachers, and school administrators should take into consideration that technology and the dangers that accompany it are not going away. They should realize that there are various causes for a teenager to be a bully or be bullied, and that solutions to reduce the number of cases of Cyberbullying should be provided to lessen the incidents. Due to the fact that all teenagers experience different life stressing situations and many are uninformed about online dangers, parents, teachers, and school administrators should unite and reach out to individual, conflicted teenagers, as well as incorporate workshops about Cyberbullying into their school curriculum to prevent future hazard.

A cause for Cyberbullying could be that teenagers face stresses in their lives. There are various stressors among a teenager's life such as what is occurring at home, how they are doing at school, and the relationships that they have with their peers. According to Nandoli von Marees, "Students experiencing stressful life events and the negative emotions that these evoke were more likely to participate in bullying and Cyberbullying"(471). Many times, teenagers do not learn how to cope with these stressors and end up causing more harm to them. The impact that Cyberbullying has on teenagers is moderated by factors such as social acceptance, social integration, effectiveness of coping strategies employed, and self-blaming attributions (Marees 471). Therefore, a cause for Cyberbullying would be the fact that a teenager is attempting to be accepted and is coping with their personal life. This mode of coping is not a smart one as it may lead to deaths caused by the constant online rages. Cyberbullying can furthermore cause severe psychological outcomes such as depression, suicide, anxiety, and severe isolation (Nitzburg 1226). If a teenager is affected by getting a bad grade in a class or being rejected by a friend, it is possible that they may seek freedom through attacking someone else online. Then the person who was bullied online may want to seek revenge and do it to someone else. The pattern then continues and the Cyberbullying increases. Basically, online technology where teenagers can

interact never closes. It is always available to the teenager, which then causes the increased rate of Cyberbullying and action should be taken to reduce it.

Another cause for Cyberbullying is that teenagers who are frequently online are uniformed about the dangers of technology. Many of those teenagers, who log on to Social Networks such as Facebook, expose private information. Unfortunately, teenagers who "provide very personal information about themselves become more vulnerable to Cyberbullying…" (Marees 470). Social Networks often ask for a real name, phone number, hometown, and other private information that other users may have access to. This is a danger for a teenager who is uninformed because a perpetrator may easily use all that information against them. It is possible that a teenager may post their hometown, and if they are already being victimized online, then it is easier for the perpetrator to find them. In William Pelfrey's article, "Keyboard Gangsters: Analysis of Incidence and Correlates of Cyberbullying in a Large Urban Student Population," he argues that on a Social Network, it is possible that one may have hundreds of friends and hurtful comments or information that can damage one's reputation can be spread to all of those individuals almost immediately (71). Consequently, if harmful information is spread about a teenager then it could easily turn into a case of Cyberbullying. To a teenager, it may just be sharing information with their friends. However, it may be a danger if they do not know the appropriate information to share. A study conducted by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy found that 19% of teens aged from 13-19 years had sent a sexually suggestive picture or video of themselves via e-mail or cellphone (Nitzburg 1126). The inappropriateness of this act among teenagers is shocking. Most of the time, teenagers do not measure the consequences of their actions because they are uninformed. They do not realize that by exposing private information, or sending sexual images, they become easy targets for cyberbullies. Once information is put online, it is there forever. While teenagers may know that this fact is true, they do not seem to be well informed about the latter consequences. Hence, the main cause for Cyberbullying is teenagers being uninformed and therefore a course for action should be taken.

Parents, teachers, and school administrators should take action on the quickly growing conflict of Cyberbullying. One of the many solutions to this problem could be reaching out to conflicted teenagers individually. In a study conducted by the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 23 schools in a large urban district were surveyed to determine the correlation between "demographics, perceptions of safety, fighting, bullying victimization, drug use, and the perceived risk of drug use" (Pelfrey 73). Based on this study, the results found that Cyberbullying perpetration and victimization are both significantly related with other risky behavior such as drug and alcohol use. In addition to drug and alcohol use, teenagers who admitted to having fought or brought weapons to school were more likely to participate in an act of Cyberbullying (Pelfrey 81). A solution to this problem would be to directly observe teenagers who have previously had some sort of conflict with another teenager and keep record of their actions. School administrators may view a problematic student within a spectrum of existing and potential problematic behavior, and then they could be "targeted for heightened scrutiny within an array of sanctioned activities" (Pelfrey 81). School administrators could possibly hold counseling sessions in which a teenager can express what sort of personal problems they have and they could be aided for that. Instead of the teenager searching for other modes of coping with their problems such as Cyberbullying or drug and alcohol use, they could escape by actually

speaking about their problems to a counselor. Nandoli von Marees writes, "Open discussions about Cyberbullying may improve students' confidence that seeking help from an adult could be helpful" (472). Therefore, if a teenager feels that there is someone to help them possibly at school, then they may not need to participate in violent behaviors. This leads to another important mode of action.

To address the problem about teenagers being uninformed about Cyberbullying, schools should administer programs that teach them the realities of technology. "Parents and teachers need to find adequate ways and means to monitor children's use of information and communication technology, and the impact this has on their lives" (Marees 472). For example, schools could hold a class for both parents and students to inform them about this rising problem. The subjects that would be discussed could be identity protection, sharing too much information, becoming friends with strangers, and other similar subjects. Although it is not clear that schools are responsible for protecting teenagers online, schools should at least attempt to protect their students by doing what they can to teach them about it. Teenagers who experience a form of Cyberbullying, either being a victim or perpetrator, often "feel less safe at school and uncared for by teachers, have a lower self-esteem, more suicidal thoughts, and are more likely to attempt suicide than those not involved in Cyberbullying" (Marees 471). As in Amanda Todd's story, she transferred from one school to another, ate lunch alone, and the bullying and beatings did not stop. She attempted to kill herself by drinking bleach, then by trying to overdose on pills. Amanda Todd wrote on a video she posted on YouTube, "Every day I think why am I still here? I have nobody. I need someone" (Friscolanti). If the schools that she attended had actually paid attention to what was occurring to her, then maybe she would still be alive. Schools and parents need to work together. Whether it is by holding anti-bullying campaigns at school or teaching a class on Internet safety, action should be taken. Cyberbullying is not simply a fad; it is a problem that should be addressed as soon as possible.

Phoebe Prince, a 15 year old girl who committed suicide in January 2010, had recently moved to Massachusetts from Ireland. She committed suicide because six of her classmates harassed her on Facebook calling her "Irish slut" and other names. The six classmates who harassed her were sentenced to probation and community service due to their violation of her civil rights and denigration of her national origin that interfered with her education ("Introduction to Bullying"). Many people argue that Cyberbullying should be considered a crime. In addition, if Cyberbullying leads to suicide, then it should have a larger punishment. The people who argue that Cyberbullying should be punishable by law most likely argue that cyberbullies violate others' civil rights. In addition, they may argue that if a victim commits suicide, then it could be considered bodily injury. While this is a very well expressed argument, it does not exactly fix the problem. Cyberbullying is not the only reason as to why a teenager may commit suicide. Other factors may play a role such as "problems at home, clinical depression, drug and alcohol abuse, and alienation" ("Introduction to Bullying"). How can one determine if the Cyberbullying was the only cause for a suicide? Susan P. Liber, a Clemson University psychology professor, argues that the brains of adolescents are not fully developed and are ill-equipped to comprehend the full consequences of their actions ("Introduction to Bullying"). Punishing cyberbullies could possibly be a good form of action, but a better one would be to inform the teenagers. If their brains are not fully developed then maybe by teaching

them at school and at home, teenagers would more likely understand that they should not bully others and that exposing the wrong information could lead to Cyberbullying.

Teenagers often have stressors in their lives as well as being uninformed about online dangers; therefore, parents, teachers, and school administrators should work together to aid individual teenagers who have shown they have conflicts in addition to incorporating programs about Cyberbullying into their school curriculum. If action is not taken soon, then many more teenagers may be affected by Cyberbullying. The "old school" problem that teenagers faced was more physical such as being slammed into a locker. Now, teenagers are being exposed online and hurt emotionally. If all members of society could work together to start campaigns and come up with strategies to prevent Cyberbullying, then maybe it could diminish soon. The internet is not going away. While it is aiding businesses and others to improve their workplace, it is possible that it could be damaging teenagers at the same time. If Cyberbullying does not begin to be prevented, then who knows how many more injuries and deaths will be caused? Without prevention, teenagers who experience Cyberbullying may not get to be part of the technological future.

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