The impact of a text

The alarm rings. Another start to another seemingly endless day.

He sits up in bed and rubs the sleep from his eyes. He can hear his mother making him breakfast downstairs and his father shuffling around trying to get everything prepared for work. He closes his eyes again and imagines what would change if he didn't exist; if he just dropped off the earth. The sounds of life downstairs continue and he tries to shake the depression off, replacing his defeated feeling with a happy facade. After completing his morning routine, he slinks downstairs avoiding the gaze of his prying parents. This is when his phone beeps.

He rushes to get it before his mother does, so as to avoid a bombardment of questions that he wouldn't know how to answer anyway. He doesn't know who keep sending these hurtful messages, he doesn't know why, he doesn't know how to make them stop, and he doesn't know what he has done to deserve it. On the bus ride to school, three more texts arrive and he quickly tries to delete them before their words penetrate his mind. He catches a glimpse of the typical name-calling; he notes, with a smirk, their lack of originality. However, despite the numerous times these words are used, he still feels a tightening in his chest and a loosening behind his eyes. But he holds back his tears; he's fifteen years old, only about ten years too old to be crying.

He thinks back to the first message he received, about three months ago, exactly one week after he came out to his best friend. Unfortunately, said " best friend" was the person who sent the message full of hateful words and an accusation that the world would be a much better place without his "

kind" of people and a good place to start would be eliminating himself. Confusion was the first reaction, followed almost instantly by embarrassment. He hated himself, he hated who he was, and he hated that he told people about it. These feelings grew with each message he received, each of them reminding him that nobody here liked who he was and would prefer it if he disappeared.

The bus hits a bump and jerks him back into the present. He can hear the two boys behind him talk about him and the rumors that were spread about his unacceptable sexuality. (Cyberbullying Victimazation) Survey taken by researchers Sameer Hinduja and Justin Patchin depicting the different types of bulling and the popularity of each. There is no doubt that too many children experience some form of bullying during their 13 years of education, as seen in figure one, 17% of the sample responded yes to experiencing multiple different categories of bulling throughout the past month. The question is what preventative measures are being taken and whose responsibility is it? Most would agree that the main responsibility falls to the school administration to control the issue. School districts have realized the growing problem and have encouraged positive internet behavior and education of internet safety.

Recently, New Orleans passed a law stating that schools are required to provide an educational presentation to all its students on the hazards of cyberbullying. In addition to this requirement, " Louisiana legislators passed a law this year declaring cyberbullying a crime punishable by jail time" (New Orleans). By passing these laws, the legislature has acknowledged the growing threat that cyberbullying poses. Not only will this appeal to the

parents because their children will learn the dangers and the precautionary measures that need to be taken, but also it will have a major impact on the kids. Although they might think they are the exception to every rule and law, many kids will lessen their attacks because the threat of police involvement. Even though there seems to only be positive responses to including an anti-cyberbullying law, only 31 states have a law against electronic harassment, and only six of those have one specific to cyberbullying (State).

Law enforcement may be the strictest measure, but not necessarily the most direct. Many independent schools have applied national programs, such as the Anti-Bully Alliance, No Place for Hate, and the Bully Suicide Project. The purpose of these programs is to educate students and teachers about the prevalence of cyberbullying, especially with the increase in internet activity by teens. After the emotional and controversial suicide of Tyler Clementi, a student at Rutgers University, NPR researched Clementi and the influence the school had on his suicide. In an interview with Joel Rose of NPR's All Things Considered, Gregory Blimling, a professor at Rutgers, explains, " We have a variety of programs and activities in which we try to make this an accepting and secure environment for people from all different backgrounds" (Rutgers).

With the school apparently doing its part in preventing bullying and the subsequent effects, including depression and suicide, people, particularly parents, are still searching for a scapegoat to blame for their children's misfortunes. However, there is only so much the school administration can do before the debate about privacy intervenes. Often times, when the bullying takes place online or through text messages, administrators are

completely clueless, and " even when they are aware, many school districts aren't certain that the law allows them to punish bullies who attack online" (Your). Because most laws only allow schools to intervene when the situation occurs on campus or at a campus activity, many are hesitant to take action in the cases when the act is committed in cyberspace. Another factor mentioned by the New York Civil Liberties Union is the fact that " prying into students' personal Web pages [...] is a violation of the first amendment" (Your). This is where the field of blame shifts, away from the school zone and towards the parents who should be monitoring their children's activity on the internet.

However, as advised by Forrest Collier, CEO of InternetSafety. com, parents should not be easily distracted by media exploited cases that stretch the truth, but " instead, parents need to learn prevention and response strategies in the same way that children learn about ' Stranger Danger', as an everyday tool" (Cyberbullying Tragedies). Although it is very important to keep parents involved and updated on the most recent events, parents must not rely only on media-altered news. If parents are too preoccupied with the headlines and disregard conducting research on their own to become knowledgeable, they will lose focus and won't continue to control kids after the shocking headlines aren't in the media. While it is easy to divide the blame between the school administration and the parents, students have to step up for some of the responsibility, as well. The boys that sit behind him on the bus continue with their gossip the entire bus ride to school.

As he sits innocently eavesdropping, he figures it's only fair since they are talking about him, he begins to wonder what these kids were thinking; how it

is that they can insult a harmless boy about his homosexuality right in front of his face and not have a conscious enough to feel guilty or ashamed. He thinks back to the assembly his school had that addressed issues like these. He doesn't really remember much about it; there were some flyers handed out and a list of websites they were encouraged to visit. But this was before he came out, before he was a victim. Since he didn't pay any attention, he figures hardly anyone else did either and considers the insufficiency of the system. His classmates sit through the assembly simply because they are required, not because they are concerned or interested.

No one takes this sort of thing seriously; it's never happened here before and it never will; no one at his school could possibly be bullied to the breaking point. He considers his options and decides it's time for a change. It's time for his school to be a safe, welcoming place once again. It's time for personal opinions and choices not to impact the way people treat others. He realizes that it's up to him and his fellow classmates to embrace each other's differences and accept people for who they are.

He realizes he has the power to teach the other kids what is truly important and that although the administration and their parents have the ability to start the revolution to free kids of the harmful effects of cyberbullying, it ultimately his and each of his classmates' own choice to stay positive and warn others of the seriousness of the cyberbullying issue. Works Cited " Cyberbullying Tragedies Point to Need for Parent Oversight." Entertainment Close-up 25 Oct. 2010. General OneFile. Web.

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