Module 4 Paper: Public Perception of Cyber Bullying

This paper will address the suicide case of Ryan Halligan. Ryan was born on December 18, 1989, in Poughkeepsie, New York. He committed his suicide on October 7, 2003, in Essex Junction, Vermont. Ryan attended Hiawatha Elementary School, and, later, Albert D. Lawton Middle School. He was described as a gentle and sensitive soul, and experienced some developmental delays affecting speech and physical coordination in his early school years. Ryan would eventually overcome those difficulties, but school would always be an issue for him, and would affect how he was treated in his younger years.

In regard to the case, bullying began in the 5th grade due to Ryan’s developmental issues as previously stated. Later on, Ryan would receive counselling that would help little and in the 7th grade, would continue to get bullied. Ryan would receive a kickboxing set from his father for Christmas and the two would create a routine that bonded them together as well as allow Ryan to defend himself. He would later beat and befriend a bully, who, later on, started a rumor about Ryan that he was gay. During this time, a popular girl, Ashley, in which Ryan had a crush on would pretend to like him, just for him to ask her out and she say no and torment him. Bullying continued for Ryan into high school and it was on AIM, a popular web chatting service, that he would find a ‘friend’ that suggested suicide. After many dark conversations with this individual from AIM, Ryan would be convinced to take his own life.

Many people in the comments of these news article blame two perpetrators, Ashely and the bully that started the rumor that Ryan was gay. The comments made on the news article definitely had the ‘pitchfork’ mentality, and condemned Ashley and the bully. Many were convinced that Ashley was a sociopath, and that she should be made to feel very guilty for her actions. Some even said that Ashley and the bully deserved the death punishment as they were the direct cause for Ryan’s death. One person even went as far to blame Ashley, her friends, the bully, the school, and Ryan’s parents all for a lack of action.

The one thing that was consistent throughout all of the articles and comments was the fact that laypersons did not even factor in the portion of cyber bullying. All of the comments were directed towards Ashley and the bully in face-to-face settings. Not a single person reviewed commented on the cyber bullying portion of this case. This means that the laypersons tends to equate bullying with cyber bullying.

In conclusion, Ryan was a victim of bullying as well as cyber bullying. The laypersons tend to feel very strongly in this case and want to condemn the perpetrators whole-heartedly. Even though bullying and cyber bullying occurred, laypersons tend to equate the two and use them interchangeably.

SOURCES

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[3] Ifuzz05 (2009), *ABC News Bullying Story Halligan*, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGwYPAMJeh0>