



COLLEGE EDITION

Library Freedom Project's
**Guide to Protecting Yourself
from Online Harassment**

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WHAT'S THIS?

The purpose of this zine is to provide a quick guide for proactively protecting yourself against online harassment. As a college student and young adult, you are likely worried about the normal parts of university life - getting decent grades, learning for your future career - but you are also likely having fun, meeting new people, and being vulnerable.

You should be able to have an incredible experience in college that is authentic to your truest self without worry of online harassment.

Bibliography and Additional Readings

Why is Online Harassment so Difficult?

- Cyber Civil Rights Initiative
<https://www.cybercivilrights.org/>

- Citron, Danielle- Hate Crimes in Cyberspace
<https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674659902>

- Goldberg, Carrie- Nobody's Victim: Fighting Psychos, Stalkers, Pervs, and Trolls
<https://www.nobodysvictim.com/>

- FemTechNet's Center for Solutions to Online Violence
<http://femtechnet.org/csow/>

- NYC Digital Safety
<https://nycdynamicsafety.org/>

- Speak Up & Stay Safe(r): A Guide to Protecting Yourself from Online Harassment
<https://feministfrequency.com/2015/12/08/speak-up-stay-safer-a-guide-to-protecting-yourself-from-online-harassment/>

- Without My Consent: Tools to Fight Online Harassment
<https://withoutmyconsent.org/>



"Cyber harassment involves threats of violence, privacy invasions, reputation-harming lies, calls for strangers to physically harm victims, and technological attacks"

Online harassment at most universities will be against "stalking" policies. The problem with this is that stalking requires the same person to act in a series of incidents. It cannot be a single event.

Danielle Citron, a cyber harassment expert, shares a number of reasons why handling online harassment is so hard: *"Cyber harassment is often understood to involve the intentional infliction of substantial emotional distress accomplished by online speech that is persistent enough to amount to a "course of conduct" rather than an isolated incident"*.

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Social Media and Internet Supported Harassment

Law Enforcement and the Justice System

As previously stated, the cyber aspect of harassment increases the length of time of damaging actions on the Internet cause harm. Social media networks are designed for connectivity and this can come at a cost. A person's ability to reach another on social media is fairly easy for them and is difficult for the user to control.

Caroline Sinders, who writes about user experience on digital interfaces, describes the many different ways harassment might occur on a platform like Twitter by asking:

"Are you being attacked across multiple "surfaces" of a social network? Are you being attacked on DM? Are you being attacked in a hashtag? Are you being attacked in your own mentions? Are you being attacked in someone else's tweets? Are you being tagged in those tweets? ... Being tagged in a tweet is a different kind of interaction than having just your name mentioned, right? One is sending someone to your profile, and in the other scenario, you are just being talked about without your knowledge. Twitter may not consider that harassment because you're not tagged, you're not the immediate recipient of it. Are you the victim of a hashtag campaign that is driving people to your mentions or to your profile?"



When should I contact law enforcement?
It might seem that when someone is harassing, stalking, or causing emotional harm, that the first place you'd go is to your local law enforcement. The reality is that filing complaints creates a record of your proactivity and not much else. Law enforcement do not often know the laws regarding online harassment or revenge porn. You might find it helpful to research this before you go.

1 Find harassment related legal language here:
<http://www.cybercivilrights.org/related-laws/>

2 Find laws in your state here:
<https://statelaws.findlaw.com/>

3 Find revenge porn laws here:
<http://www.caggoldber-glaw.com/states-with-revenge-porn-laws/>

What Your Law Enforcement Can and Cannot Do

Once you have filed a police report, you may find that you need an attorney to help you navigate pressing charges against your attacker. If an Order of Protection is achieved, law enforcement can arrest attackers according to the guidelines in the protection order.

This line of questioning shows just how multifaceted and encompassing harassment can be on one single social media platform and doesn't even begin to address the situation when other platforms are coupled together.

Harassment on social media can look like in-person harassments via threats, emotionally harmful language, and frequent interactions. When social media is leveraged for harassment, it can take form in new ways.

Campus Response if Your Harasser is at Your School

Terminology

All college campuses have policies against harassment, especially on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, and other personal identifiers. If you are being harassed by a peer, you can and should file a formal complaint to the university. Get to know your institution's harassment policies and note the name and contact information of the person or office responsible for handling those complaints. Keep copies of your complaints for documentation purposes.

Title IX is the law that protects individuals from discrimination based upon sex and gender in education programs that receive federal funds. The law has also been used in cases of sexual assault on campuses. Unfortunately, under Betsy DeVos, Secretary of Education, Title IX is now also being used to better support individuals who are accused of sexual assault.

According to Title IX laws, every university and k-12 school district must have at least one Title IX officer to handle Title IX complaints. If you are being harassed, either online or in-person on the basis of sex, you should file a complaint with the Title IX coordinator. You may find varying levels of success in seeing punishments for offenders, but it means you have covered your bases and created documentation.



Sealioning

When a person (known or unknown) asks a series of seeming benign questions meant to annoy or provoke a large reaction of the victim, usually followed by the attacker deleting their questions to make the victim appear unhinged.



Dog Piling

When a group of users "pile" up on one user in a coordinated or random manner; example: flooding a person's inbox, hundreds of comments on a person's post.



Digital Sexual Harassment

Nonconsensual pornography (or "Revenge Porn") is the distribution of sexually graphic images of individuals without their consent. This includes images obtained without consent (using hidden cameras, hacking phones, or recording sexual assaults) as well as images consensually obtained within the context of an intimate relationship, and may contain sexual language, sexual threats, or lies about a person's sexual activity.



Swatting

When a false call is made to law enforcement requesting a SWAT team arrive at a victim's home.



Doxxing

The public release of documents containing personal and private information.

The unfortunate truth is that it is practically impossible to hold large masses of anonymous trolls accountable for their harassment. Instead, being proactive in protecting yourself and keeping record of the original attacker are your best bets to minimize harm and build a legal case.

Minimizing the Risk Before it Happens

Actions for Anti-Harassment and Anti-Doxxing

1 Ask for your personal information to be taken off of 3rd party data collection websites. These companies collect an impressive amount of information: names of family members, address, etc.

See how to do that here:

<https://onlinesafety:feministfrequency.com/en/>
(under "Preventing Doxxing")

2 Use private profiles on social media when necessary. Avoid oversharing location information. Consider cleansing your social media of old images and posts.

3 Be more anonymous on the Internet. Use an avatar instead of your actual picture. Use a name different from your own. Make up birth dates, locations, and other information that sites don't really need to know.

4 Block strangers from following and befriending your social media accounts.

5 Adjust privacy settings in all of your digital spaces - web browsers, email, social media, cell phone etc.

6 See how to do that using the Data Detox ToolKit:
<https://datadetoxkit.org/en/home>

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Building Documentation
Because harassment and stalking are often labeled after repeated instances of a harmful behavior, keeping record of instances is extremely important in order to build a case. Sometimes, our first reaction is to delete or hide evidence of harassment so that it cannot be seen by others, but we should first follow a couple of steps:

- 1** Report abusive behavior to the platform. Using the platform's tools of making a record is helpful for showing that you did your due diligence to handle the issue.
- 2** Take screenshots of all abusive behavior and save this to a drive in which you own - on a computer, USB drive, or external hard drive. Abusers often attempt to delete or hide their own behaviors, so it is important that you have evidence. As much as possible, try to capture URLs, time stamps, dates, etc.
- 3** If harassment begins, you can also go through the steps outlined in the Minimizing Risk section to reactively reduce the amount of harm being done. But save everything.

Digital Millennium Copyright Act Requests

If you believe you own the copyright to images or other media being circulated without your consent, you can file DMCA requests. This process can be done through companies like DCMA Defender which comes with a fee. If you are working with an attorney, they can also file these requests. If you'd like to submit a DMCA request yourself, the website for Women Against Revenge Porn provides detailed instructions on how to do so.

Placing DMCA requests can be time consuming, as a request must be made individually to each website you want to see content removed from. If information about you has been spread over many websites, you will have to place many DMCA requests.