

Memes Ethics Paper

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Mememes have been a part of our culture for a while now. People see them so often that when looking at them from the outside, one does not tend to think of the back story of how a certain meme came about. Most people can agree that memes do have an impact on society and modern culture. Since memes have become very popular, we are exposed to many throughout our lives and this causes us to not even take into consideration the plight or situation of the person in which the meme revolves around.

There have been numerous examples where people have faced negative outcomes from becoming a meme, and examples where people do better in life. So do these examples, whether good or bad, mean laws should be a place to protect people from the occasional misfortune of becoming a meme? Should laws be in place for people to ask permission before using a person's as a meme? I would argue no.

The reality is that memes often do have a negative outcome on a person. Mememes are even created sometimes solely for the purpose of mocking or making fun of who ever is in it. Although unfortunate, our country cannot police everything that happens in this world, especially when it comes to the internet, and this is a reality we must come to terms with. It all comes down to someone just being mean to another person and maybe sharing some piece of content that another person is insecure about. Or they might not even be aware that they are sensitive to the picture/video. This eventually becomes a well-known video. As long as the internet exists, there will always be viral videos that as a result put the person in a bad situation, even if laws were placed. The internet is a very unempathetic place and people should realize that before participating in it.

Sometimes the effects of memes can create dangerous situations and this is when the police should be involved. <sup>1</sup>In the New York Times there is an article that describes a kid who becomes viral from a meme named Alex from target. People started giving him death threats as he gained popularity. The meme was pretty harmless in the beginning but as he gained popularity it got out of hand, and this is when police should step in.

We've talked about bullying in memes, but we have not yet covered the legality of using a person or character as a meme. Using people or characters in a meme should not be illegal because most of the time memes are not created to make money and this is because memes are a very casual way of expression. Most of the time they are posted by kids and it will sometimes take off. I like to compare memes to Twitter posts. It should be treated as an expression of someone's thought process unlike, for example, a movie director. The only situation in which someone can run into legal trouble with the creation of a meme is by copyright infringement. <sup>2</sup>"If the person who makes the 'derivative work' makes 'fair use' of the copyrighted image, this is a defense to a claim of Copyright Infringement."

Memos are most commonly created with the means of satire. As stated earlier, this can result in putting someone down or even causing depression. Viewers don't usually think of the person the meme revolves around, and as a result this makes it easier to laugh at the person. When watching a funny video it is easy to forget what God teaches in his Word in Proverbs 18:21 that "the tongue has the power of life and death." We shouldn't immediately follow the crowd and make fun of someone. We should first think about what effects this can cause and what we must do as Christians to avoid contributing to someone's pain.

It is wrong to use someone's picture or video as a form of bullying or slander, but there should not be any laws in place which get in the way of an individual creating a meme. It is a casual act and should not be held to the same standard as a commercial product.

## References

- <sup>1</sup>Bilton, N. (2014, November 12). Alex From Target: The Other Side of Fame. Retrieved April 10, 2019, from [https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/13/style/alex-from-target-the-other-side-of-fame.html?\\_r=2](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/13/style/alex-from-target-the-other-side-of-fame.html?_r=2)
- <sup>2</sup>Do Memes Violate Copyright Law? (2018, January 09). Retrieved April 10, 2019, from <https://thelawtog.com/memes-violate-copyright-law/>