

New Jersey was the first state in the country to create an anti-bullying law in 2003.¹ Since that year NJ has been at the forefront of anti-bullying tactics, trying to combat the high suicide rates of children and young adults from ages 10 to 24. I have created this video essay to provide a visual representation of bullying in NJ with media examples. Beginning with sound clips from talk shows, video games, cartoons, and comedy stand up to show how cruelty in children has touched every aspect of society.

In August of late last year, David Arquette opened up to Larry King about his sister, Alexis, and what it was like to watch his transgender sister grow up. During this interview he states that he remembers seeing “how cruel kids are”.² This sound clip was used to provide an outside view of bullying and how its residual effect stays with even bystanders for years. The next example is from season six, episode 12 of The Simpsons, Marge says that “kids can be so cruel” to which Bart, her son, overhears and runs off to mess with his sister.³ A trivial example but also has truth to how impressionable children can be. The next example is from a popular video game, Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance, a character Sundowner has a catchphrase “Like I said, kids are cruel, Jack. And I'm very in touch with my inner child”.⁴ A statement that is terrifying when looking at the visual of this menacing character. Followed by Louis C.K. in an interview with Conan O'Brien saying that “kids are mean”⁵ when talking about how children lack empathy and spend too much time with their heads stuck in cell phones, and concluding the

¹ NJ.com, 'Opinion: N.J. Schools Have Moral Obligation To Address Bullying', last modified 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, http://www.nj.com/times-opinion/index.ssf/2011/11/opinion_nj_schools_have_moral.html.

² YouTube, 'I Remember Seeing How Cruel Kids Are | David Arquette | Larry King Now Ora TV', last modified 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yUaUj3JGLx0>.

³ IMDb, "'The Simpsons' Homer The Great (TV Episode 1995)", last modified 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0701115/quotes>.

⁴ YouTube, 'Metal Gear Rising Revengeance Kids Are Cruel, Jack', last modified 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNzBQhQIarc>.

⁵ YouTube, 'Louis C.K. Hates Cell Phones', last modified 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5HbYSclt1c>.

comedic aspect is Donald Glover's stand up, Weirdo, he states that "kids are awful" when recalling a time when he walked by a schoolyard and a student made fun of another student's mom for being in a wheelchair.⁶ What is learned from this montage of quotes is that children are gaining a reputation of expected cruelty. It is being taught that it is a necessary evil that every child must go through and if you are unlucky it will continue into your teenage years. However children being cruel to other children is not a part of growing but is harassment, intimidation, and bullying.

The Garden State Equality is nonprofit organization based in New Jersey, which primarily focuses on LGBTQ issues. Yet in 2011 they were a key player in helping create the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (P.L. 2010, Chapter 122). They worked side by side with Democrat and Republican legislators to help create a bill that would be the most comprehensive anti-bullying law in the country.⁷ They changed the definition of bullying to HIB, meaning Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying. The new bill identifies a bully as "a student or an adult" that way teachers are held to the same standards.⁸ The new bill also includes hazing to make sure higher education institutions are not getting away with HIB.⁹ The video clip of a bullying testimonial that appears in my short film shows best the work that Garden State Equality has done with anti-bullying and LGBT rights in school. In the clip a mother is being shown sharing her son's story and pain alike. She is shedding light to the horrors that can be

⁶ YouTube, 'Donald Glover (Weirdo) - Kids Are Awful..... Rather Have Aids', last modified 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWmeB7mY_E0.

⁷ Gardenstateequality.org, 'Our Issues', last modified 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, <http://www.gardenstateequality.org/issues/>.

⁸ nj.gov, last modified 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, <http://www.nj.gov/education/students/safety/behavior/hib/ParentGuide.pdf>.

⁹ nj.gov, last modified 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, <http://www.nj.gov/education/students/safety/behavior/hib/ParentGuide.pdf>.

found in New Jersey schools and the GSE is helping combat that by bringing her and others like her in front of a judge to testify.

As the video continues, before I explain who the GSE is and what they do I wanted to introduce the song I would be using for the slideshow. It is entitled, “What a Girl Is” and premiered on a Disney Channel show called, Liv and Maddie.¹⁰ The song addresses how the girls at this high school were being harassed by their male classmate (by which they were being rated by appearance using a 10 point scale). Lyrics from the song include,

“We are flawless in our skin, your words don't mean anything.

I'm done wasting my time, I can make up my own mind.

I'm so over all of these voices around, they've said enough it's my turn let's get loud.

I'll show you what a girl is, 'cause all of me is perfect.

Who cares about the dress size, it's all about what's inside.

I'll stand up now, and won't back down.

We're breaking through the surface, to show you what a girl is.”¹¹

This song was included to show even children’s media has to address the role of bullying in schools and give their young viewers the confidence to combat it. Through the use of song the children watching this show are able to take this song with them and find comfort from the message on the go. It is important through media that message gets across. As Louis C.K. was

¹⁰ YouTube, 'Liv And Maddie | “What A Girl Is” | Music Video Clip | Disney Channel Official', last modified 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8IbDoUDNwsA>.

¹¹ YouTube, 'Liv And Maddie | “What A Girl Is” | Music Video Clip | Disney Channel Official', last modified 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8IbDoUDNwsA>.

mentioning in his interview, youth in America are increasingly involved in their laptops, smartphones, tablets, and countless other gadgets.¹² This escapism has opened up a whole new form of bullying entitled, cyberbullying, which is harassing, intimidating, and bullying our nation's children in and out of the schools.

When a bully is able to follow a child home through their internet connection it creates a whole new problem. The students in Sayreville that were not involved in the scandal but only witnessing it were able to chime in via social media. The student body took to Twitter and Facebook to exclaim their outrage. Some even spoke to media outlets about how they were being treated unfairly.¹³ At this point the student body had not even known the extent of the charges but only that hazing had occurred. One could argue that in our case the residents of Sayreville did not know the true definition of hazing, or just did not view it as something worth the attention it was receiving.

Delving into the real world example of Sayreville War Memorial High School located in the Parlin section of Sayreville, New Jersey. This a high school that has been plagued with scandal surrounding the football team since their Varsity head coach was caught carrying steroids. Six teenagers were charged in 2014 with hazing and simple assault charges, they plead guilty and have been placed on probation with 50 hours of community hours each. A seventh defendant's case is still pending.¹⁴ Their ages range from 15 to 17 with charges including

¹² YouTube, 'Louis C.K. Hates Cell Phones', last modified 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5HbYScltf1c>.

¹³ YouTube, 'NJ School Cancels Football Season Over Bullying', last modified 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6W9BzvQwb4>.

¹⁴ SI Wire and Kayla Lombardo, 'Six Teens Charged In Sayreville Football Scandal', SI.Com, last modified 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, <http://www.si.com/more-sports/2015/08/31/six-teenagers-charged-sayreville-high-school-football-scandal>.

aggravated assault and criminal sexual conduct.¹⁵ The superintendent's response to this was to immediately start cancelling games and eventually cancel the remainder of the football season. The clips show news coverage and then the actual board of education members speaking out to angry parents and students at this point. The parents and general student body at this point did not know the extent of the charges or their sexual nature. As viewer of the clip its purpose was to show how having administration involved is key in situations like this.

Their level headedness provided a calm in a room full of tempers and also clued the attendees that bullying is not something that Sayreville will represent or stand for. The community was worried about image control and the students just wanted their football season back. Yet for the one student who had bravery to tell his parents what was happening to him, and for his parents to get the police involved shows that there was bigger issue at large. New Jersey has the most progressive stance on bullying because it had so many cases of it. This story is just one story of bullying in New Jersey, but the only reason that the superintendent and board of education was able to have such a swift and hard-hitting response was because of the work that the Garden State Equality and NJ legislators put into the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (P.L. 2010, Chapter 122).

¹⁵ Greg Hanlon, '7 Sayreville Football Players Charged With Hazing, Sexual Assault Of Teammates', SI.Com, last modified 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, <http://www.si.com/high-school/2014/10/10/sayreville-football-players-charged-hazing-sexual-assault-teammates>.

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