

DASA Case Study Questions

- A. Megan Meier
- B. Phoebe Prince
- C. Jon Carmichael

1. What about my life and school experience may make me more vulnerable to bullying, harassment, and intimidation.

2. What additional information would you like to know about me that might make a difference in my life and school experience?

3. What does the bullying, intimidation, harassment look like?

4. How would my experience impact me educationally?

5. How could parents/teachers protect me from bullying?

6. Why did the attempts to advocate for me fail?

The Megan Meier Bullying Case

The tragic death of 13-year-old Megan Meier is the case that really woke up the public's awareness to the issue of cyberbullying. Megan was just 13-years-old when she hung herself in her closet after a brutal online exchange with somebody she thought she was in love with.

It started when a former friend of Megan's created a fake profile for a boy named "Josh" and began to contact Megan. Over the course of many weeks they chatted online and got to know each other, to the point that Megan came to believe she was in love with this boy. With Megan on the hook, it was time to spring the trap. So in October of 2006, seemingly out of the blue, "Josh" turned on Megan and emotionally assaulted her, talking about how horrible she was, that he had never actually liked her, and how the world would be so much better off without her. Megan, it appears, took this advice to heart.

What made this case even more unique was the revelation that Lori Drew, the 49-year-old mother of the other girl, apparently participated in this cyberbullying and actively helped her daughter carry on the ruse. She was eventually indicted by a federal grand jury on a charge of conspiracy and three counts of a computer crime and accessing protected computers without authorization to obtain information used to inflict emotional distress. (Welch, 2008)

"It's clearly a tragic case," said U.S. attorney Thomas O'Brien. "We think Ms. Drew's actions resulted in the death of a child. ...Any adult who uses the Internet or a social gathering website to bully or harass another person, particularly a young teenage girl, needs to realize that their actions can have serious consequences." (ibid) The case would eventually be resolved without Ms. Drew doing any significant jail time, an outcome that infuriated many anti-bullying advocates. (We feel it was probably the proper one – as atrocious as this mother's actions may seem in hindsight, I doubt either she nor her daughter ever dreamed that their actions might bring such severe consequences. Destroying two more lives out of vengeance wouldn't have done a thing to make the world a better place. Like all perpetrators of bullying, they'll have to reconcile with their conscience sooner or later.)

We do hope that this case illustrates just how easily a prank can go wrong, and that it also serves as an example of how bullying may not seem like bullying at the time, even to adults. The parties involved were former friends who had fallen out of favor with one another. There were hurt feelings all around. The child and adult on the other end of the computer believed they were merely 'getting back' at Megan for some perceived injustice she had directed towards the woman's daughter. Therein lies the trickiness of bullying behavior: it frequently seems justified at the time.

The Phoebe Prince Bullying Case

Phoebe Prince was 15-years-old when she became another senseless tragedy in the long history of bullycide victims. Her problems began when she emigrated from her native country of Ireland about a year before her death, and then had the unfortunate luck of catching the eye of a popular boy, whom she briefly dated. This apparently drew the ire and resentment of some of the other girls, who started bullying her relentlessly thereafter.

Being an immigrant to the U.S., she no doubt stood out from her peers. She had also been bullied in Ireland, and her mother (a teacher herself) had taken the initiative to inform the school ahead of time, letting them know about this bullying history and that she was very vulnerable to its effects. She went so far as to ask them to keep an eye out for this, since Phoebe would likely internalize its effects rather than talk out about it.

Much was made of the cyber bullying phoebe experienced, but Phoebe's mother says that in reality, cyberbullying was only a small fraction of what phoebe went through, and most of that occurred after her death. What she did experience was relentless bullying at and on her way to and from school. There was some physical bullying, but most of it was emotional: Calling phoebe names, spreading rumors about her, humiliating her, using peer exclusion, writing swear words or racial slurs next to her name in the library, and so forth.

One of the bullies shortly before her death was overheard saying, "Why doesn't someone just convince her (Phoebe) to kill herself?" In one of her final text messages, Phoebe ominously wrote about the hurt she felt over the fact that her former boyfriend seemed to be overtly supporting what was taking place: "I think Shawn condoning this is one of the final nails in the coffin...it would be much easier if he or one of them would just hand me a noose."

In addition to talking with school staff during enrollment, Phoebe's mother twice complained to school staffers, but to no avail. On a Thursday, Phoebe was hounded by her bullies in the library, the cafeteria, and the hallways. Walking home from

school that day, she had a can of Red Bull thrown at her from the window of a passing car. Unable to take any more, she went home and hung herself with the scarf she'd been given for Christmas. Phoebe's little sister was the one who found her body hanging in a stairwell. In one last sad twist of fate - ad a testament to the power of bullying to destroy a youth's outlook on life - her mother had booked her a flight to return to Ireland to take a break from the abuse. All she had to do was hold out another two weeks, but the bullying was just too destructive. Convinced her life was worthless; she decided to end it instead.

The Phoebe Prince Bullies

What made this case especially unsettling was the non-chalet attitude that Phoebe Prince's bullies took about her death. Not only did they not seem the least bit concerned with the possibility that they had driven this girl to suicide, but they actually continued the taunting post-mortem. After her death, some of Phoebe's former classmates set up a memorial Internet site for her. It was defaced with insults and slurs by Phoebe's bullies, who were intent on continuing to deface her name even after death. Rebecca Brouillard, another student who dared to talk on camera about Phoebe's bullying, was roughed up afterward by one of Phoebe's bullies. (Hampson, 2010; Wiseman, 2010)

Charges were pressed against several of Phoebe's bullies, including a statutory rape charge against her ex-boyfriend, but all would wind up receiving community service and a slap on the wrist. Three of the teens received probation and community service, 2 others faced only probation. (Heller, 2011) Of course, the greater price they'll have to pay is that which their conscience extols. For the rest of their lives, they'll have to live with the knowledge that they are murderers by proxy.

In a television interview later on, one of Phoebe's bullies would rather narcissistically complain about the taunting she was experiencing at a new school on account of the publicity over her role in the bullying of Phoebe Prince. With tearful eyes she talked about how she just wanted the other kids to leave her alone. A bit of poetic justice, some might say. But before we get too carried away in *schadenfraude*, we should remember that for as callous and monstrous as Phoebe's bullies may have appeared, they are still just kids who were engaging in behavior that millions of other youth

engage in, and doing things that as a society we inadvertently promote. So it should give us no satisfaction to see them destroyed, too. It's only sad that this girl couldn't empathize with such pain beforehand. If she and Phoebe's other tormenters had understood the immense and unjustifiable injury that relentless bullying will bring, this whole tragedy would have been avoided in the first place.

The Jon Carmichael Bullying Case

Jon Carmichael was 13-years-old when he killed himself to escape the relentless bullying he experienced at school. His problems with bullies had started very early in life, around the third or fourth grade.

Tami Carmichael, Jon's mother, describes some of the torment her son experienced at school: "He was pushed to the ground on an almost daily basis. They'd throw him in the school's dumpster a couple times a week, and they stuck him head-down in a toilet and started flushing. One day they stripped him naked, tied him up, and stuck him in a trash can, and they taped it with their cell phones and put it all on YouTube." (Hollandsworth, 2011, p. 76) That happened about a day or two before he killed himself.

When interviewed about Jon's death after the fact, a classmate admitted he bullied Jon but says he wasn't alone: "It was most of the school who messed with Jon." In a statement that offers testament as to how clueless bullies can be about the consequences of their actions, he adds that he actually considered Jon a friend: "I never did it because I hated him. ...The things I have done to him, I just wish I could take it back." (Hampton, 2010)

Sadly, Tami Carmichael reports that things aren't getting much better. "I thought some of the grief would go away, but it's only gotten worse. We've never received a phone call from anyone at Jon's school, we've never gotten a visit, and we've definitely gotten no apology. Every time I go into town and see one of Jon's teachers or coaches, they turn their heads. I heard they have been told not to talk to me because of the lawsuit. It's like they're trying to pretend that we don't exist anymore." (Hollandsworth, 2011, p. 81)