

verde

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EDITORIALS

ONLINE SHAMING NEEDS TO STOP

With the popularity of social media sites like Tumblr today — where people can hide behind anonymous personas — the line between joking and hurting someone has become more difficult to define. At what point are you going too far?

Recently, an anonymous Palo Alto High School student created and quickly deleted a “Paly Gossip Girl” Tumblr page, which accepted “tips” from Paly students and posted rumors about people’s personal lives (ranging from matter like relationships to rape). In short, the blog created a venue for rapid online shaming. It became popular with students on social media networks within an hour.

For the most part, people responded with angry Tweets and Facebook statuses. Some students rose up to defend their friends while others condemned the blogger’s general actions; and in an offhand manner, the Tumblr page vanished as if the whole thing never really existed.

The Verde staff brings up this short-lived incident again in order to address a much larger issue at hand: the lack of individual action against online shaming. True change can only come through more widespread awareness about such hurtful actions, along with the desire to build a community that stands against them.

Part of the problem has been an inaccurate common percep-

tion of bullying. We imagine bullies as the “big bad guys” ganging up on someone in a corner, an image that doesn’t align with the reality of social media. The distance between two computers in homes doesn’t lessen the effect of certain words; and now, the bully can be anyone behind a computer screen and gray profile box. No faces or fists to match with the blows. Bullying isn’t just specifically targeting someone or a group of people. Anonymous public shaming (such as a posting a rumor on Paly Gossip Girl) can be just as hurtful as receiving a direct and private message.

The Internet also amplifies the “bystander effect.” Closing a window and opening up another is an easy way to pretend you didn’t see any bullying. You can easily avoid the discomfort you experienced, even when this discomfort is a strong indicator that you need to step in and help.

Rather than simply expressing frustration through statuses and reblogs, people need to build a community that stands against this kind of online shaming. These steps can be as small as reporting a post on Facebook, or as big as directly confronting the poster — even if the bullying incident does not involve you or your friends. Paly may offer various services or activities to combat bullying (such as inclusion-focused “Not in Our Schools Week,” guidance counselors and Adolescent Counseling Services), but the most powerful asset will always be you.