



Sticks, Stones, and Cyberspace: On Cyberbullying and the Limits of Student Speech

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Introduction

On October 7, 2003, thirteen-year-old Ryan Halligan of Essex Junction, Vermont, committed suicide.¹ His parents, wanting to understand the circumstances of Ryan's death, searched his computer and uncovered some very disturbing information.² Ryan, a middle school student who had struggled against bullying since elementary school, was relentlessly harassed online just prior to taking his own life.³ A rumor had been spreading that he was homosexual, and he was mocked for it, mercilessly, online.⁴ According to Ryan's father, the online transcripts read "like a feeding frenzy . . . everyone got in on the fun."⁵ Some of Ryan's peers even "goaded him into committing suicide," with one student writing "it's about (expletive) time."⁶

1. John Flowers, *Cyber-bullying Hits Community*, ADDISON COUNTY INDEP. (Oct. 19, 2006), <http://www.addisonindependent.com/200610cyber-bullying-hits-community>.

2. *Id.*

3. *Id.*

4. *Id.*

5. *Id.*

6. *Id.*

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