

Online hate speech

I have myself never been a victim of online hate speech. However, Marion Fraisse, 13, hung herself in 2013 because she was victim of online but also offline hate speech and violence from her classmates. Her mother now fights against bullying, she wrote a book and a movie was made about it. It touched me quite a lot, and I think it helps showing the consequences that hate speech, and here more precisely school bullying, can have on the victims. Another case of online hate speech that got public in France was the “Ligue du LOL” case, which also had long-lasting consequences on its victims.

I think people do it because they are not punished, or if they are punished it is not strong enough. Even though there are regulations and laws in some countries, it is not easy to punish the perpetrators online and it is not always applied. Being anonymous helps feeling powerful, because it makes it harder to be found, and doing it online is easier as the victim is not directly seen. Moreover, victims often are scared to report facts, and lack awareness about their rights and the tools available to them to defend them. Thus, perpetrators stay unpunished and therefore continue doing it because they feel invincible and do not feel threatened by any judicial reprisals. This may also explain why it can then escalate into violence.

Finally, people often hide behind the freedom of expression to spread hate speech. They argue that they are allowed to say what they want thanks to this freedom. They often defend themselves by saying that “it was just a joke”, too. I think it is often hard to explain them that freedoms are not limitless and need to be considerate of others’ rights. People are often, to my opinion, egoistic and think only about their own rights, they want to enjoy them, no matter if it has consequences on others. They forget that “a man’s freedom ends where another man’s freedom begins”.

I think it is thus important to teach children at school about hate speech and its consequences on the victims, as well as the extent to which freedom of speech goes, as it can sometimes be unclear. It is also important to tell them about the mechanisms in place to protect them if they are victims and the punishments if they are perpetrators of hate speech. By providing them with a full understanding of the phenomena, to me, they will be less likely to spread hate speech – even if it is probably impossible to completely prevent it.