Argumentative Essay – Mrs. Day Model

“Should individuals be prosecuted for statements made on social media?”

 How would you feel if you were assaulted, and the offender went unpunished? What about theft, should thieves be punished? What people don’t understand about harmful statements made on social media is that they *are* assault, and theft. They assault the victim verbally, and are thefts of well-being. Individuals should absolutely be prosecuted for harmful statements made on social media because of the huge number of people affected, and the immense damage done.

 Online assaults are everywhere. The sheer number of cyberbullying offences shows us that current consequences for these offences are not working. The Ophelia Project’s Fact Sheet reports that, “20% of youth ages 11-18 have been a victim of cyberbullying” and “10% of youth ages 11-18 have been both a victim and an offender”. The numbers may be even higher than that. According to Eden Foster, a child psychologist and advocate for a bill to prosecute cyberbullies, “Although cyberbullying may seem insignificant in the big picture, in a survey conducted in 2006, nearly 1 in 3 teens admitted to being the victim of cyberbullying.” That is too large a population of our young people being affected by this crime. I am a teacher, and I can say that if one in three of my students has a problem, *any* problem, it’s important enough for me to take action. We must take action on behalf of the millions of teens who are being affected by cyberbullying.

 In addition to the large number of victims, the severity of the damage that can be done by harmful statements made online is compelling. It’s a very serious issue. The Ophelia Project’s Fact Sheet defines bullying as, “Willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices.” It’s the “willful and repeated harm” that tells you just how serious these acts are – we’re not talking about an accident, or a one-time unkind statement. The Ophelia Project also says that “60% of targets…reported experiencing feelings of frustration, anger, and sadness.” In addition to this, according to Eden Foster, “Cyberbullying can also lead to kids getting physically injured.” How are we, as a country, not taking this more seriously?

Now, there are people like Kirk Sigmon, who wrote an article about cyberbullying on October 10th, 2011, who think that the First Amendment allows people to say whatever they want online, with no criminal consequences. Mr. Sigmon finds it “ridiculous” and “offensive” that we would consider passing such a law, because it will restrict people’s First Amendment rights. Perhaps he is unaware that the first amendment already does not apply to all speech! It is already against the law to threaten, harass, or slander someone. We prosecute people for these offences already, and cyberbullying *is* online harassment! It’s time for us, as a nation, to stop pretending that what happens online isn’t “real life” – it is.

 Cyberbullying is a prevalent and serious issue for America’s youth today, and it’s time we take a stand to make it stop. Prosecuting those who intentionally hurt others online is appropriate and necessary at this time in our technological history. Support legislation to prosecute individuals who make harmful statements on social media!