The Voices of the Youth

Nā Leo o nā ʻŌpio

Our Online Safety

Edited by Thanh Truc T. Nguyen

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In memory of Thomas W. Speitel

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The Voices of the Youth:
Our Online Safety

The MJV project staff expresses our sincerest gratitude to our volunteer review panel for this endeavor.

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Foreword

Sitting cross-legged with tiny two- to five-year-old children, I am struck by the cell phones that their parents have given them to occupy their time. One of the older ones, the five-year-old, picks up my phone and starts swiping the screen with the her pointer finger.

"Aunty, your phone is broken," she whispers.

"What are you trying to do?" I lean in to ask.

"Look at pictures, but your phone is broken," her little voice says. She demonstrates her finger swipe on the screen again, and I smile. She's accustomed to her mom and dad's touch screen phone, and I don't have one of those fancy phones.

"Yes, it's broken. You have to press the T key to see the next picture. Can you find the T?" I might as well make this a learning exercise, right?

"Here it is!" she exclaims as she presses it. "Oooh! How do I go back?"

"Um, you have to hit the arrow near the P. Can you find the P?"

"There it is! <pause> <sigh> You should just fix your phone." I can't help but smile again. I think this may be one of the rare times I will be teaching her how to do anything with technology. If my phone had not been "broken" she would have been operating it perfectly.

We are in a time when technology adoption by our youth is almost immediate. They learn it faster, accept it more readily, and use it more frequently than we might know. Considering the technology of the past, it was mom and dad who taught their son how to drive a car. It was a teacher who taught students how to use that pencil and master penmanship. Now, however, a grandson is teaching grandpa how to program his cell phone. A daughter may teach her mother how to video-conference relatives overseas. A student may show a teacher how to operate the projector in the classroom. But, student forays into the online world have not been without unfortunate drawbacks. Misinformation, crime, viruses, and stalkers are online too, waiting for our innocent self-explorers.

The Voices of the Youth, Nā Leo o nā ʻŌpio in Hawaiian, is one of the results of two years of formal research into the manner by which juveniles may become victims in online environments. It came out of a request to Hawaiʻi students to provide short answers to the questions, "What issues do you think of when you consider Internet safety?" and "Do you have any concerns

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for your own Internet safety as youths?" Their short answers spurred us to seek full essays submitted in a competition about Internet safety. *Nā Leo o nā ʻŌpio* (*The Voices of the Youth*) comprises select essays from that competition. Their selection was a very difficult task for myself and the review panel. The voices of the of youth were strong, persuasive, and clear. To truly retain nā leo o nā ʻōpio, the voices of the youth, we strove to edit the student writing as little as possible. We believed it best to leave the spelling and grammar choices those of the student authors. Our youth truly took this opportunity to heart, and *Nā Leo o nā ʻŌpio*: *Our Online Safety* is a serious compendium of the technology issues in their lives.

Our youth wrote to one of several topics in online safety. These topics are cyber bullies, sexting, online predators, cyber stalkers, hate group recruiters (gangs), identity theft con artists, scam artists, spam, virus, worm hackers, misinformation and bias, and violent video games. The topics are not all encompassing of the issues that we face online, but it provided a sounding board against which our youth could voice their concerns and demonstrate innovative thinking about how the Internet shapes their world.

Holly begins with her perspective of how teens are more sensitive to online bullying because the World Wide Web is such a large part of a teen's life. She describes online bullying as difficult to ignore or shut off, but she still urges other teens not to be hurt by someone who might be a complete stranger. Anastasia reflects that the best way to be safe online is to be cautious, especially when it comes to cyber bullying. She suggests strategies to cope with cyber bullies, the primary strategy being to inform an adult.

Jillian and Bailey share their concerns about sexting in their essays. Jillian talks about a typical teen's desire to be complimented to boost self-esteem and cautions other teens to think twice before they press send. Bailey concurs with Jillian and extends the discussion to include national studies on sexting. She suggests that the laws be changed to emphasize education rather than criminalization when it comes to sexting behavior amongst teens.

Karyana describes her use of the Internet as a place where she not only does research, but also relaxes, plays games, and get updates on news. She strives towards personal vigilance to not fall victim to online sexual predators, a topic that she admits remains vague and confusing to her. Jason begins his essay "One in Five" with an alarming statistic, that one in five teenagers may have received unwanted online sexual solicitation. He is emphatic that we need to act to reduce the dangers online with joint action by schools, parents, and law enforcement.

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In their essays about cyber stalkers, Kamela and Hanna both identify cyber stalking as an issue for all of society, not just teens. Both young ladies call for better awareness and share tips and techniques to avoid becoming victims. Hanna additionally urges schools to respect student privacy, but take action when warranted.

On the topic of hate groups online, Irene admits to being shocked by the amount of subliminal, subtle messaging online. She argues that parents merely telling her and her peers "never to install things" is not enough of an internet safety discussion. Bianca questions whether the internet has caused a significant increase in hate groups and makes the argument that it has.

Switching to identity theft, con artists, and scam artists, Savannah paints a vivid picture of how people do not know how to react when they become victims. She describes the various laws in place to protect people, but how there are still ten million people who become victims. Kierdre shares a very personal story of her own family's victimization to a scam artist who managed to convince her father to trust him using the anonymity the Internet provides.

Justin puts spin on the old adage, "The dog ate my homework" with his essay, "The Viruses Crashed My Computer…Again!" His informative essay defines viruses and worms and provides step-by-step directions on preventing infection.

Phoebe emphasizes that misinformation and bias online can be avoided through knowledge, understanding, and vigilance. She articulates the threats that are posed if skewed, unfavorable, or biased information is believed to be true. As an example, she describes the need to be cautious of Wikipedia, calling it a good starting point for research, but emphasizing that all information still needs to be verified elsewhere.

Finally, Ken and Jonathan provide insights into the ultimate youth culture, the video game. Although the research may be unclear about the links between video games and the likelihood of committing violent acts, both young men are adamant that games have the capacity to influence their generation and that parents are the best safeguards for their children.

Mahalo nui loa to these youth of Hawai'i who chose to share their vibrant and vital voices with us. Join me in celebrating and listening to *Nā Leo o nā 'Ōpio* as we strive to keep them safe online.

Me ke aloha,

Thanh Truc T. Nguyen
Editor

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The Voices of the Youth
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Emotionally Hurt: Online Bullying

Holly Fongblatt, Grade 7
Hilo Intermediate School
Category: Cyber Bullies

For this particular topic, I feel that more people should be informed about it. Being cyber bullied can hurt you emotionally, while the ones who care about you most, might not even know what's happening. Anybody could be bullying you, and personally, I think it would hurt more to be bullied on the internet, because you might not know who it is and you'll agonize over what they said, and why they did. My perspective would be if more people knew about online bullies, and they knew how to cope with it, they wouldn't be hurt by it. If you can ignore the people who try to hurt you with cruel words, and your parents know what they are trying to do, then the people trying to bully you will have failed. If you're hurt by words said from people who, sometimes, don't even know what you're like and nobody knows about it but you you'll be an unhappy and miserable person.

The parents of a child who is being bullied might not know if their child doesn't tell them. A young teen would not want their parents to know anything about them, so they wouldn't tell their parents anything so as to keep their identity secret. A teenager is always afraid of criticism, and nobody likes to be teased, but especially teens because they take what people say that's bad about them seriously. If someone hates them for some reason, most teenagers start hating themselves too. Not many teens would go to their parents and tell them they're being bullied, because that would give the bully further reason to torment them about being a crybaby. If you're being bullied online, you might not tell because of your being ashamed. If you were being bullied on a site you weren't supposed to go on, you would not want to tell because you wouldn't want your parents to find out that you were on that particular site. Another reason could be that if you did tell your parent, a responsible parent would want you to show them. The bully might have insulted you in a way that you didn't want your parents to see.

In my point of view, those who bully others could just be doing it to feel better about themselves. Some bullies actually have a life nobody wants to live. In some cases, their family members, who are supposed to love them,

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bully them instead. This gives them low self esteem and sometimes, none. They find the faults in other people to make themselves look better in their own eyes.

The internet has a HUGE impact on the world, nearly everyone uses it. No one could ever know how many websites there are online. No one could ever know all of subjects or what even happens all the time on the web. Most children now spend more time on the internet than anything else. Since they are spending so much time on the web, it becomes important to them. Even in school, they can access the internet on their phones. At home, they simply log on to the computer or a laptop. Most typical teens spend more of their lives on the internet than on TV. If they need to look up something, they don't look in books for it, they go on the web and search for it there. Since teens are on the web more often, they might get bullied online and know about it as soon as it happens.

I feel that many students and parents are not informed about this particular subject, because not everybody is cyber bullied. Most parents are not as involved with the internet as teenagers are. They may not understand how important the internet is to a teenager. They also think that what happens on the internet stays on the internet. They think it can only hurt you if you pay attention to it. But since teenagers are more sensitive than their parents, it can and will hurt them. Students or friends might not know about it if they aren't bullied online. Also some children who are poor wouldn't be cyber bullied, because if they were poor they wouldn't spend their money on electronics. For those children who aren't cyber bullied or go online often, they might not even know that you can be bullied online. Some kids do know though, either if they are bullied online, or maybe if their friends are being cyber bullied. Sometimes if a teen is being cyber bullied they won't tell either their friends or their family, which still leaves them clueless about what it is, and that you are being bullied. Some students and parents simply have misinformation on the particular subject. If you found out about cyber bullying from someone who didn't really know about it, they just were guessing, it's not always correct information. After finding out about a topic from a friend or acquaintance, you should always check either online, or with someone who actually was cyber bullied.

Schools and law enforcement could help more people to know about topics like cyber bullying by giving out information. They could have more

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contests like these, and post essays where many people will read them. If they handed out information at school, some people wouldn't even look at it, but some students and teachers will actually read it and comprehend it. But if the information on that particular subject was handed out, and it wasn't too long, more people would read it because nobody wants to read something which is too long. It should also be interesting, because if the people who read it find it interesting they are more likely to share it with relatives, friends, maybe even strangers.

Law enforcement could help by telling the community how much the internet means to some teenagers, how some teens care more about their online relationships than they do with their real life ones. The police need to tell everyone that if a teenager cares about what's said about them, then they are going to be hurt on the inside, by things like cyber bullying. The public needs to know, that if your teenager is getting bullied online and they don't care, the bully lost. Don't be hurt by someone you might not even know, and who doesn't know how you're like at all.

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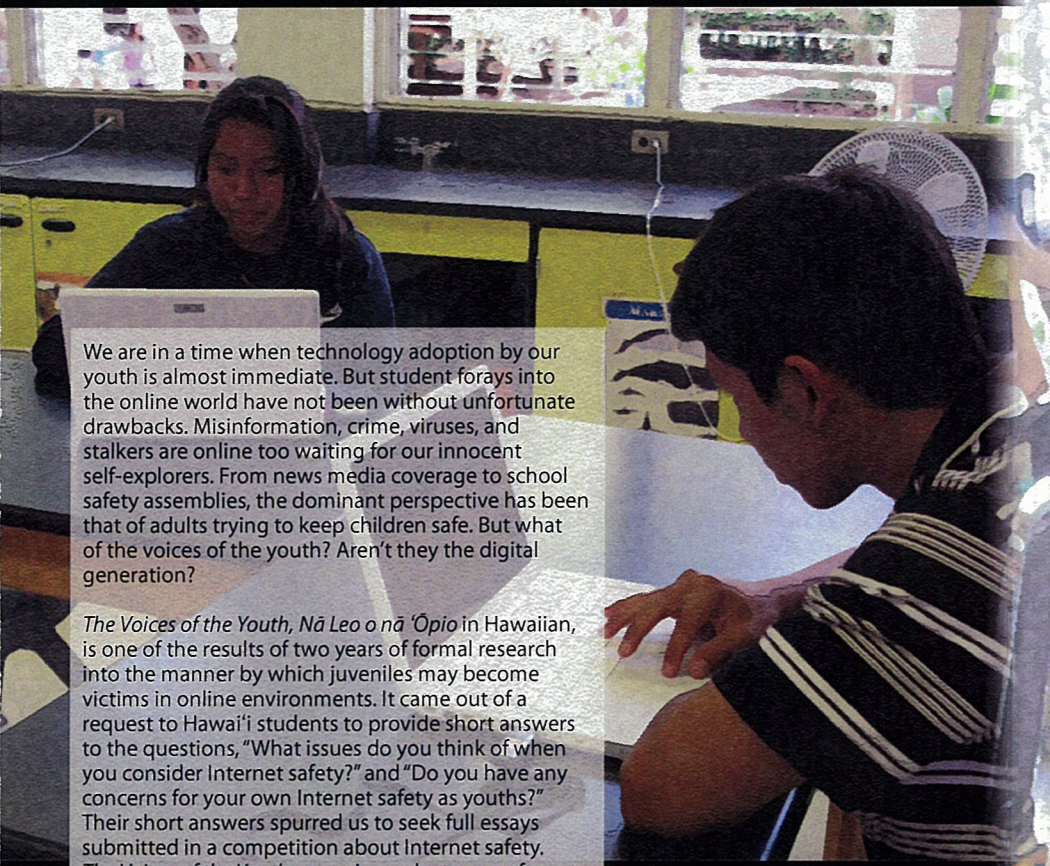

We are in a time when technology adoption by our youth is almost immediate. But student forays into the online world have not been without unfortunate drawbacks. Misinformation, crime, viruses, and stalkers are online too waiting for our innocent self-explorers. From news media coverage to school safety assemblies, the dominant perspective has been that of adults trying to keep children safe. But what of the voices of the youth? Aren't they the digital generation?

The Voices of the Youth, Nā Leo o nā ʻŌpio in Hawaiian, is one of the results of two years of formal research into the manner by which juveniles may become victims in online environments. It came out of a request to Hawaiʻi students to provide short answers to the questions, "What issues do you think of when you consider Internet safety?" and "Do you have any concerns for your own Internet safety as youths?" Their short answers spurred us to seek full essays submitted in a competition about Internet safety. *The Voices of the Youth* comprises select essays from that competition. The topics addressed include cyber bullies, sexting, online predators, cyber stalkers, hate group recruiters, identity theft con artists, scam artists, spam, viruses, worm hackers, misinformation and bias, and violent video game influences. Our youth truly took this opportunity to heart, and *The Voices of the Youth*: *Our Online Safety* is a serious compendium of the technology issues in their lives.

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