

Cyber Anonymity

Ethan is in 9th grade at a medium-sized high school outside of Albany, New York. Ethan is active in the school, being part of both the student council and the school band. He has a big group of friends who are all part of the different clubs and sports teams and they often all get together whether being at the bowling alley or online gaming. While Ethan and his friends were bowling one day, they were sharing the things they had heard about their classmates, conversations they were having with their girlfriends, and joking about how bad some of the sports teams were in the school. Ethan thought it would be cool if there was a way for all of them to share this together in one place online so that they don't have to wait weeks between hangouts.

Ethan that night decided to start a new Instagram page that was meant to be private between him and his friends. He shared the login with all of his friends, and everyone had the opportunity to post news, comments, conversations, memes, and pictures onto the page.

While this started as a harmless place for everyone to post inside jokes, it started to become more hostile. More people started to follow the private page but were not allowed to post. Ethan and his friends started to post content that was directed at specific classmates. iMessage conversations, screenshotted snapchats, and people's photos started to get shared on the page with the intent of making fun of those people.

The boys then started to do weekly rankings of "hot" and "not" lists; they would post photos of the sports team's scoreboards after losses making fun of the players; they'd also post any photos that were DM'd to the account that they found funny.

Soon enough, while private, the account's following grew and it was not as "secretive" and "exclusive" as Ethan thought it was going to be. After one of the followers was bullied in a photo, the student decided to share the account with their parents and the school. The next day at school, Ethan was brought into the office by the Principal and Dean of Students and his parents were there. He admitted to being the one that started the account and they went through each picture to see who was involved in sending them, which he told.

Not only was everyone involved kicked off of all teams and clubs they were a part of, but they were all suspended from school as well. It was also brought to their attention that their account was named as a big reason that multiple students have either changed schools or have stopped coming because of the backlash they caused for sharing private information.

1. What are some of the elements, both online and offline, that played into the growth of this Instagram page?
2. What becomes easier when posting on Instagram opposed to looking at the people you're posting about on Instagram?