

# **New Girl**

**A one-act play about Cyber-Bullying**

**by**

**Eileen Moushey**

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## INTRODUCTION

Cyber-bullying, because of its use of technology, is an increasing problem for parents, teachers, and the juvenile legal system. When writing *New Girl*, I focused on several aspects. . First, is the escalation of this kind of harassment. What sometimes starts out as mild online harassment and even prank-playing can take on a life of its own. Back-and-forth retaliation can quickly spiral out of control. Second, the original “justification” for the bullying can get lost. The effort, time, and thought put into the actual acts take center stage, so that the original “offense” can become vague and even forgotten. Third, victims of bullying are not always outcasts or the ones whose appearance or actions are radically “different.” The internet provides myriad opportunities to aggressively – and sometime anonymously – pursue personal vendettas. Cyber-bullies often pursue harassment just for the pure sense of power and validation that it gives them. Lastly, cyber-bullies, like their real-time counterparts, frequently resort to objectification in order to assuage their consciences about the cruel things they do. If they don’t “see” their victims as people, or if they don’t have to deal with them face-to-face, it’s easier to proceed. And the use of the internet places even more distance between themselves and their victim. These things are at the heart of *New Girl*, particularly the last. I also wanted to create multi-dimensional and distinctive characters. None are pure evil, but each brings a fatal flaw. Combined, they are a toxic collaboration.

I also purposely avoided getting into detail about the actual logistics of cyber-bullying. I did not want to create a primer on how to cyber attack. For that reason the actual online logistics are purposely vague. Experienced teenage hackers can do a LOT more than the characters in this play. I wanted to get to the heart and

results of cyber-bullying rather than what goes into the actual methods themselves. They exist. The audience will accept that - they don't need to know the nuts and bolts of how it's done. And for simply logistical reasons, the "cyber" used in the play is iphones, rather than actual computers. This is the current state of the art when it comes to being online, and to utilize desktops or laptops will seem old-fashioned very, very soon!

Likewise, I am not specific about the legal charges that can be levied for cyber-bullying. This is not a mock trial and laws vary by state.. However, there is a definite place for that kind of information. After contacting us and requesting permission to produce, I will send producers an email with linkable online resources of legal information. I consulted with an attorney to get information on juvenile proceedings. He explained that these are usually conducted by one judge and confirmed that it is very common for that judge to meet with young defendants prior to sentencing.

I've attempted to give a flavor for the way teenagers really talk versus the way they should. That is, there's slang, dropped consonants, contracted words and the use of expressions - "like," "he goes," etc. In readings and rehearsals with young actors, I utilized their input to edit and amend, based on the way they talk. But just as the cyber world seems to change minute-by-minute, so too does the idiom used by teenagers, and there may be some dialogue that is already passé by the time I finish writing this. These words and idiom may certainly be changed by producers.

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

MADDIE - Cute. The most popular girl in school.

MIKE - Maddie's brother. Also cute, but with an "edge."

DEENA - Smart, part of the "in" crowd, Maddie's most eager deputy

KATELYN - Maddie's oldest friend, more of a "follower" than Deena.

BRAD - A peripheral member of the "in" crowd, Brad really wants to secure a spot.

HAZ - not a member of the crowd, but a generally well-liked guy.

THE WOMAN - any age, including a young actor, suitably "aged" Professional.

## **STAGING NOTES**

The stage is divided into 2 playing areas, which will be indicated in the script as SR (Stage Right) and SCL (Stage Center Left). SR is smaller. It is an office, signified simply by furniture pieces and set dressing - a rolling office chair, a desk or table, a chair opposite.

USR is a coat tree on which is what appears to be a dark coat. The desk/table will have stacks of folders and a phone and various other desk set pieces. An area that will signify the office door should be assigned and used by all characters entering and exiting. It is not, however, necessary to have an actual door OR mime opening

and closing an imaginary door. All the scenes in SR are current.

The SCL area contains benches, chairs, or stools of various heights and sizes. This is meant to give the feeling of a cafeteria, or perhaps an outside lunch area. A picnic bench and table could be used. It is not important to identify this as a specific place, but just as gathering place for the young people. All the scenes in SCL are flashbacks, except for the final one.

Lighting and/or “walls” can differentiate between the two areas and indicate when scenes shift from one to the other. However, the play is written so that the posture of the characters establishes this. By facing upstage and “freezing” into place, audience focus will naturally turn to the area where a scene is being played.

Regarding “freezing”: this should not be stiff or uncomfortable. In fact, one reason I have the actors facing upstage during freezing is so that slight movements, especially facial, won’t be noticed. It’s harder than it seems to remain immobile! Give your actors some leeway. Instruct them to limit any movement as much as possible, but recognize that complete adherence may be impossible. They should position themselves as comfortably as possible in anticipation of the freeze. Whatever is comfortable for the moment should be used, rather than trying to strike a tableau.

Related to that, it is strongly suggested that incidental music be used, not only to set mood during pre-show, but also so that musical snippets can accompany transitions from one scene to the next.

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*At rise, MIKE, KATELYN, AND DEENA enter and sit or stand in the SCL area, face upstage and freeze into place.*

*Simultaneously, in the SR area, the WOMAN and MADDIE enter the office. The WOMAN sits behind the desk and faces MADDIE sitting opposite it. Both freeze into place.*

**SCENE ONE**

*As pre-show music fades, the WOMAN and MADDIE thaw. MADDIE slouches in her chair, looks up at the ceiling, and sighs loudly. The WOMAN leans forward as if to say something, but doesn't. MADDIE sits up straight, takes out her phone, looks at the WOMAN, and puts it back in her pocket. There is an uncomfortable silence.*

**WOMAN:** Well, Maddie, one of us is going to have to say something and I'd prefer it be you.

**MADDIE:** I don't even know why I'm here!

**WOMAN:** Really? No one's explained it to you? Your parents? Mr. Sampson?

**MADDIE:** OH, them. (*rolling her eyes and sighing*) I tune them out - why should I listen to them when no one ever listens to me? No one ever wants to hear my side.

**WOMAN:** Well, I am extremely interested in hearing your side. Really.

**MADDIE:** (*without conviction*) Right.

**WOMAN:** C'mon, Maddie. Work with me here.

**MADDIE:** Okay, look, I used to be with this senior - Chas. We were like dating and stuff and he is a major hottie and all. But he's not real quick, y'know? I mean, like he doesn't "get" stuff, at least not the stuff I'm interested in. All he cares about is cars and bands and soccer and all that bores me to death. And I'm definitely goin' to college and he isn't sure about it. . . All my friends kept sayin' I could do a lot better. So. . . I kinda broke up with him.

**WOMAN:** How do you "kinda" break up with someone?

**MADDIE:** I just told him I needed a little breathin' room, y'know? But it wasn't a definite, solid, total shut-down. More like a temporary thing.

**WOMAN:** And you figured he would get smarter, more interesting, and suddenly want to go to college if you "kinda" broke up with him?

**MADDIE:** Yeah. No. I dunno. Look, everything I read says that girls are a lot more mature than guys, right? So I figured Chas just needed to catch up with me. So I was gonna give him some time to do that. But I still really liked him and figured we'd get back together. And then, Tara started at Central.

**WOMAN:** Ah. I see.

**MADDIE:** She just swooped in and started flirting and stuff with Chas. And, like I said, he's not real mature and all that.

Especially when it comes to girls, y'know?

**WOMAN:** I'm starting to get the picture.

**MADDIE:** So, of course, he fell for it. Look, you really don't know me. None of those people do. I'm not a mean girl, really I'm not. And Tara's no saint, believe me.

**WOMAN:** I don't think that's quite the point.

**MADDIE:** Why not? I mean, why isn't that the point? She stole my boyfriend.

**WOMAN:** You mean your "kinda" boyfriend.

**MADDIE:** Yeah, yeah. I just explained all that. It wasn't a real break-up, okay? How many times. . .okay, maybe Chas thought it was, but that doesn't make what Tara did right. And, anyway, everybody seems to keep forgetting that I really didn't actually DO anything. I can't help it if my friends got carried away.

**WOMAN:** Oh, your hands are clean?

**MADDIE:** Absolutely. I didn't do anything.

*WOMAN turns chair upstage,freezes. Simultaneously, MADDIE exits the office and joins MIKE, KATELYN, and DEENA, who thaw and begin chatting. KATELYN is texting on her phone.*

## SCENE TWO

**DEENA:** Well, it sure didn't take him long.

**MADDIE:** No kidding. We just had "the let's-take-a-break" (*she uses her fingers for quote marks*) talk like three days ago.

**DEENA:** Doesn't he, like, know who you are?



**MIKE:** The guy is a tool, sis, forget about him.

**MADDIE:** He's acting like he's not even upset.

**DEENA:** I can't believe he's already hitting on someone else.

**MADDIE:** He's not hitting on anyone. She's hitting on him! And, y'know what? She can have him, the jerk.

**KATELYN:** (*reading text from phone*) Oh, oh, OH. . .here. Listen to this. Brad says Chas is with that new girl, Tara, and they are like all over each other outside of the chem lab - right now!

**MIKE:** Tell him to take pictures!

**MADDIE:** Yeah, we want pictures!

**KATELYN:** (*texts quickly*) Done (*closes her phone*). Maddie, do you think Chas didn't "get" it that your break up wasn't fer sure? That it was just kinda temporary? He isn't always real smart about that stuff. I mean, maybe he thought it was a fer-sure-definite-permanent thing? .

**DEENA:** Aw, c'mon, Katelyn, even if he DID think it was "fer sure definite," he'd have tried to keep it together. He'd be begging Maddie to take him back. And he'd have been really bummed. Remember Jake Willis? When Maddie broke up with him, he lost like 20 lbs and moped around for a month.

**MADDIE:** (*laughs*) Heck, if he'd lost the weight before, I might not have dumped him. He was a bit chunky, y'know?

**MIKE:** Well, ol' Chas doesn't appear to be losing any weight over it. Instead he's gone and found himself a replacement, in less than a week. Guess you've lost your touch, Mad.

**MADDIE:** Oh, shut up, Mike. Who is this girl, anyway?

**KATELYN:** She came here from Arizona or Alabama or someplace. One of those “A states” out west. Albuquerque, maybe?

**MIKE:** Lives over by the mall in a big ol’ mansion. Probably has some serious paper. *(She rubs her thumb and fingers together in the common gesture for money.)* Remember, Maddie, when Dad and Mom looked at houses over there?

**MADDIE:** Yeah. We could have been neighbors with her. Oh, eww.  
*Phones all make different chiming “you’ve got a message” noise simultaneously. ALL open their phones, clicking a button to get to pictures. There are exclamations, whistles, and then a pause.*

**MIKE:** *(overlapping)* Well, Chas, Chas, Chas my man, who’d da thought?

**DEENA:** *(overlapping)* So that’s what true love looks like!

*All except MADDIE laugh.*

**MADDIE:** Shut up, all of you. *(She starts to get emotional.)* How could he?

**DEENA:** Ah, geez, Maddie.

**KATELYN:** Maddie, she’s not nearly as cute or hot as you or anything.

**MIKE:** Hey, Maddie. I’m sorry. I guess I figured you didn’t care that much. You and Chas only went out for like a month or so.

**KATELYN:** And, y’know. . . . you did kinda dump him.

**MADDIE:** I did not! We've gotta find out more about this Tara. What's her last name, anybody know? Katelyn, tell Brad to find out.

*KATELYN texts and joins the others as they turn upstage and freeze. The WOMAN faces DS as BRAD enters and sits on the chair. He is ill at ease.*

### SCENE THREE

**WOMAN:** So, Brad, what's your take on all this?

**BRAD:** *(nervously spitting out his sentences)* It was something that just got outta hand, that's all. . .I thought it was all a big joke. . .just a joke. . .Maddie, she's. . .it wasn't anything. . .we were just sticking up for her. . .and Chas was being such a dud and. . .*(he stutters)* And. . .and. . .well, Tara, she brought some of it on herself, y'know? It wasn't all us.

**WOMAN:** Okay, okay. Slow down, Brad. Whose idea was it to take Tara's last name - Schuznik *(pronounced Shoes-nik)* and turn it into Skuzznik, then Skuzz? Tara The Skuzz, isn't that what you started calling her? Was that nickname your idea, Brad?

**BRAD:** No. . . yeah, maybe. I guess so. But I didn't tell anyone except our little group! I mean, it was private. . . A private joke - just us. One of the other guys must have spread it around or something.

**WOMAN:** Maybe one of those text bombs that Tara got on her cell.

**BRAD:** I didn't do any of that! Honest, you can ask anyone - that wasn't me. I swear.

**WOMAN:** But you were the one who got her cell phone number, weren't you, Brad? By pretending to be her friend?

**BRAD:** It wasn't all pretending! I liked Tara at first. But then I saw how mean she was being to Maddie and well, Maddie and I go way back and . . .

**WOMAN:** And Maddie asked you to find out things about Tara and you did. It's odd. Everybody seems to be almost afraid of Maddie.

**BRAD:** Wha. . .?? Afraid of Maddie? Nah. She's a doll. Everyone really loves her. Yeah, she asked me, and I did it. But I did it 'cause I was her bud, not 'cause I was scared or anything. You're way off on that.

**WOMAN:** What else did you find out about Tara?

**BRAD:** Nothing. Just her her cell number.

**WOMAN:** You gave it to the others?

**BRAD:** Yeah. But I only used it to call her, like regular. Normal. Like I wanted to talk.

**WOMAN:** Did you ever really want to just talk to her?

**BRAD:** Sure. Sure I did.

**WOMAN:** You didn't call her to find out where she was going and what she'd be doing? Or what was going on with Chas?

**BRAD:** Yeah, well that, too. But still, sometimes, we did just talk on the phone, like friends.

**WOMAN:** Okay, Brad, then answer me this. Did you ever, even once, talk to Tara on the phone and NOT go back and report the conversation to Maddie?

**BRAD:** *(Thinking)* Sure. Sure I did. Yeah, I must have. . . *(Looks down and thinks a moment. . .)* Oh, geez. Well, maybe.

I mean, thinkin' back, I guess I DID always talk to Maddie and the others afterward.

*WOMAN turns upstage and freezes. BRAD joins the group in the SCL area. They thaw. All are comforting MADDIE, who is crying. MIKE is obviously angry.*

## SCENE FOUR

**MIKE:** You just say the word, Mad, and me 'n' the guys will take care of him.

**KATELYN:** I can't believe he actually told you that. It's like social suicide.

**DEENA:** Listen, are you sure you didn't misunder. . .?

**MADDIE:** I DIDN'T MISUNDERSTAND HIM, DEENA! I offered to take him back, told him how much I missed him - even told him I'd made a mistake and was sorry.

**BRAD:** Oh, wow. You said all that? You really said "sorry"?

**MADDIE:** YES! And he just went, like, "I got a new girlfriend, Maddie. And she's into cars and music and the things I like. And you and me just didn't work." And then he said he was sorry but that's the way it was.

**MIKE:** It's not like him. I swear he wasn't like that ever. It's Tara the Skuzz.

**DEENA:** It's like she's hypnotized him or something.

**KATELYN:** Well, she's got the "hips" for it. I mean, she's not even pretty and she's got a big ol' behind. And she walks all funny - she's got a limp or something..

**BRAD:** I don't think. ..

**MADDIE:** And the awful thing is that some of the other kids actually like her! Did you hear - Lynette invited her to go shopping next weekend!

**KATELYN:** Lynette did that? I don't believe it.

**DEENA:** Maybe they're putting in a Hips R Us store at the mall.  
*(They laugh.)*

**MIKE:** Ya know what I think? I think if the other kids aren't "on" to her, we oughtta fill 'em in. 'Cause if she's played Chas, you know she's gonna do it to others.

**BRAD:** She's like a spider – catchin' people in her Skuzzy web!

**KATELYN:** It's not funny, Brad! Hey, I know! What if we all "friend" her on Facebook! Then we can write something on her page that's like really obnoxious.

**DEENA:** Like what? She'll just ignore it and delete us.

**KATELYN:** Unless. . .

**BRAD:** Unless what?

**KATELYN:** Unless she doesn't know that it's us. Remember when we wanted to find out the scoop on that college guy that Deena was crushin' on?

**DEENA:** For about a minute!

**KATELYN:** And then Mike went undercover as. . .what was your fake-o name, Mike?

**MIKE:** Oh, right. *(Affecting a voice)* I was Ross. Ted Ross. I like the NBA, bock beer and skinny girls. *(In his regular voice)* Only took about a day to find out that the guy was total loser.

Wasn't in college – heck, he wasn't even out of high school!

**KATELYN:** Me! Me! I'll go undercover. Oh, let me. Please! I'm the one who can write! I'll create this really believable girl and her and me will become like best friends.

*They turn upstage and freeze. KATELYN enters the office and sits in the chair opposite the WOMAN.*

## SCENE FIVE

**KATELYN:** So I became “Ashley.” I told her we'd been in kindergarten together and, since she's moved around a lot, she bought it. I made up a whole bunch of other stuff, too.

**WOMAN:** Then what?

**KATELYN:** At first, it was kinda fun. I got to “be” all the things I'm not in real life, like real nice and all. That's why nobody ever caught on.

**WOMAN:** What was the point? I don't get it.

**KATELYN:** It was just more research, see? Like the guys thought that the more we knew about her, the more we could use against her.

**WOMAN:** And you found things out on her facebook page?

**KATELYN:** Not so much on the page, actually. But I started sending her private messages and asking her for advice, that kind of thing.

**WOMAN:** And she gave it?

**KATELYN:** Oh, gosh, yeah. Well, first we started writing to each other by email.

**WOMAN:** So you got her email. . .

**KATELYN:** Right. It was like a two-fer! And of course, I made up a new addy for me as “Ashley” - just for the project.

**WOMAN:** The “project”?

**KATELYN:** Oh, that was Maddie’s name for it - The Skuzz Project.

**WOMAN:** What happened when you asked for “advice”?

**KATELYN:** Oh, she gave it. And I mean TONS. She LOVED to dish out advice. Like she was this big expert on everything in the world.

**WOMAN:** How did that lead to the pictures?

**KATELYN:** I. . . I told her I was really self-conscious ‘bout my weight. I even used some pictures I found on the web. Really gross ones. Told her it was me. And I told her I was kinda jealous of her ‘cause she had this cute boyfriend so she must have like a really great “bod.” And she wrote back and she goes, “Oh, I’m not in good shape at all. And I used to be even worse!” And I wrote back that I didn’t believe her.

**WOMAN:** And then she sends pictures.

**KATELYN:** Yeah. And they were baaad. I mean, she must have thought it would make me feel better to know how she used to look. She’s wearing this bikini and well, they were really awful pictures.

**WOMAN:** It must have been hard for her to even look at those pictures.

**KATELYN:** No kidding! I would have burnt them all. She said she kept them to remind her to keep active and healthy and work



out and all that.

**WOMAN:** And not only did she keep the pictures, she actually SHARED them with you - to make you feel better.

**KATELYN:** Yeah, I guess so. But it didn't change anything, really. She hurt Maddie and I've been best friends with Maddie since second grade.

**WOMAN:** But, still, you felt bad.

**KATELYN:** Well, kinda.

**WOMAN:** And you sent them to Maddie and the rest?

**KATELYN:** No! I mean, I thought about it. But, like you said, Tara was just trying to be nice.

**WOMAN:** How did the pictures get out then?

**KATELYN:** I sent them to Deena – but just to her - 'cause I had to show someone. And I told her not to give them to anyone else.

**WOMAN:** But she did.

**KATELYN:** Yeah. She said she didn't read the whole email before she forwarded them. . .well, anyway, they got out. It was just a stupid mistake.

**WOMAN:** It sounds like you were starting to regret what was going on. Why didn't you stop?

**KATELYN:** How could I do that? Maybe Tara was trying to be nice. But she wasn't being nice to me! She was being nice to "Ashley." If she had known it was me, she would have been her usual nasty self.

**WOMAN:** That's quite a leap in logic. How did you figure that out?

**KATELYN:** I didn't. I mean, I didn't work it all out, at least not completely. I'm not sure.

**WOMAN:** It's okay, Katelyn, I can guess who explained it all to you.

*The WOMAN turns upstage and freezes. KATELYN returns to the SCL area with the other kids, who turn to face downstage and thaw. They are laughing as they do, although BRAD and KATELYN both don't seem to be joining in quite so much.*

## SCENE SIX

**MIKE:** Oh, my God - those pictures.

**MADDIE:** I thought I would die.

**DEENA:** They're all over the school.

**KATELYN:** You really can't see her face though. I mean, I think a lot of people don't even know it's her.

**BRAD:** Yeah, you're right.

**DEENA:** Well, we'll just have to let them know then, right?

**MADDIE:** Hey, Katelyn, have you gotten any emails from her about it? (*KATELYN doesn't answer right away.*) Yoo-hoo, Earth to Katelyn, I asked if you got any emails from her?

**KATELYN:** I dunno, I didn't check.

**MIKE:** Well, check now!

*KATELYN takes out her phone and punches a few buttons.*

**BRAD:** I saw Chas this morning. He looked kinda bummed.

**MADDIE:** Good. I hope he's bummed forever.

**MIKE:** Loser.

**DEENA:** What ya got there, Katelyn?

**KATELYN:** *(reading)* She's really upset about the pictures. She says the only person she sent them to was me, so she knows I did it.

**DEENA:** You didn't do it, Katelyn. "Ashley" did.

**KATELYN:** And she's figured out that I'm somebody at school.

**BRAD:** You gonna write back?

**KATELYN:** I dunno. I don't know what to say.

**DEENA:** I do. Give it to me! *(She grabs the phone from KATELYN who struggles to get it back.)*

**MADDIE:** Katelyn! Come over here with me. *(MADDIE takes KATELYN aside while DEENA types on KATELYN'S phone.)* Katelyn, I know this is hard for you and that Tara has made you feel like she's really a friend. But, she's not. You know she's not. We're your friends. I'm your friend. You've always been there for me, Katelyn. Always. I don't think I could have gotten through this whole Chas thing if you hadn't been with me. I love you, Katie. *(She embraces KATELYN.)* Thank you SO much for doing this for me. I'll never forget it.

**KATELYN:** That's okay, Maddie.

*DEENA has passed the phone to MIKE.*

**MIKE:** *(laughing so hard he can barely speak. When he does it's in a high-pitched voice.)* "Oh, wow, Tara. I'm so sorry. I sent them to my cousin, Lynette. I didn't know you went to the same school! And I never in a million years thought she'd send them to anyone else. Please forgive me! Your bff, Ashley. P.S. Do you have any other pics? Maybe some where your face is showing better?" *(Normal voice.)* And with that, we "send."

*MIKE clicks button and he, MADDIE, and DEENA laugh and ad-lib. KATELYN and BRAD don't exactly join in, but they don't lodge a protest either.*

**DEENA:** Somehow I don't think Tara and Lynette are going to be shopping together.

**MADDIE:** And see, Katelyn, you're off the hook, now.

**BRAD:** I don't know 'bout that. Tara is not a dumb girl.

**DEENA:** Oh, sure she is. Hey, Katelyn, what's your password and all for the email account? I'll take over being "Ashley," 'kay?

**KATELYN:** Be my guest, Deena.

*ALL turn upstage and freeze, except for DEENA who goes to the office door, enters and sits as the WOMAN thaws.*

## SCENE SEVEN

**DEENA:** I know why you want to talk to me. It's about all those pictures, isn't it?

**WOMAN:** Among other things, Deena. But let's start there.

**DEENA:** Katelyn always writes these really long emails - we never read 'em all the way to the end. And it was only down at the bottom that she told me not to pass the pics along. Although, why did she send them to me if she didn't want them to get out?

**WOMAN:** Maybe she felt bad about it, because Tara was actually being a good friend.

**DEENA:** Oh, so she was like torn? That makes sense. You know what I think? I think Katelyn subconsciously wanted them to get out. But she didn't want to be the one to do it.

**WOMAN:** And she knew you'd be happy to oblige.

**DEENA:** Sure. Why not? But I only sent 'em out to our group. I'm not the one that sent them to the other kids. And it was just some dumb old pictures.

**WOMAN:** And you were able to crop one – isn't that how you got your profile picture when you started pretending to be her on Facebook?

**DEENA:** Yeah.

**WOMAN:** And so you were able to fool people that you were Tara.

**DEENA:** It was more like "role playing." Or an acting job. I mean, I just imagined the nastiest thing that she could say and made a few postings on the other kids' walls.

**WOMAN:** But mostly on Maddie's.

**DEENA:** Yeah. Of course Maddie knew it was me, I mean it was her id. . .*(she cuts off the word)* . . we. . .the two of us. . . .we worked it out ahead of time.

**WOMAN:** I understand the language was pretty raw.

**DEENA:** Well, yeah. Some of the kids do talk like that. I mean, I don't, but I figured Tara must have a real trash mouth so I let it rip.

**WOMAN:** "She". . .you said some pretty horrible things about

Maddie, called her names, made jokes about her appearance, and stories about wild parties, that kind of thing.

**DEENA:** Yeah. But, believe me, it's exactly what Tara really would have said, because she hated Maddie. For being Chas's girlfriend before her. Oh, yeah, she'd have written that stuff if she wasn't so busy being all fake and nice and stuff. None of us could figure out how Chas could fall for it. It's was obviously an act.

**WOMAN:** As a result of the things you were writing, a lot of the kids at school started avoiding Tara, didn't they? And some of them started writing nasty things about her. And to her.

**DEENA:** Yeah, but so what if they did? They just had their eyes opened to how mean and rotten she really is. It's like natural that they'd want to let her have it. Especially since everyone really loves Maddie and wanted to stick up for her.

**WOMAN:** But Tara wasn't doing anything to Maddie. YOU were. It was all fake. They were sticking up for her from an imaginary attack. Don't you get that?

**DEENA:** No, I really don't. She may not have written all that stuff, but she's a terrible, awful person. You just don't know.

**WOMAN:** Actually, I think I know quite a lot about Tara.

**DEENA:** Even Chas finally caught on to her! It took awhile, but he saw through her act. And he wanted to get back with Maddie, but she told him to take a hike.

**WOMAN:** Really?

**DEENA:** Yeah. He begged and begged but she was SO over him.

*DEENA exits and joins the SCL group and “freezes” with them a beat, then all thaw and begin chattering. From SCL, CHAS enters and joins them. All become quiet.*

## SCENE EIGHT

**MIKE:** What are you doin’ here, Chas?

**CHAS:** Maddie, can I talk to you for a minute?

**MIKE:** She doesn’t have anything to say to you, dude.

**CHAS:** I think she can talk for herself, dude.

**MIKE:** *(standing and moving towards him)* You think I don’t know that about my own sister? Mad and me stick together, Chas. Don’t ever forget it.

**BRAD:** Whoa. Chill, Mike.

**MADDIE:** Mike, it’s okay.

**CHAS:** Look, Maddie, all of you. I just wanted to say that. . .well, I’ve been really stupid. I mean, I guess I didn’t really know Tara.

**KATELYN:** No kidding.

**DEENA:** We tried to tell you, Chas.

**CHAS:** I know, I know. I guess I had to see it for myself. I mean, Maddie, that stuff she wrote about you, it was like way over the line. . .I . . .I think maybe, if her and me hadn’t been goin’ out, she never would have gone after you like she did.

**BRAD:** I was her friend, too, for awhile. I get where you were coming from, man.

**MADDIE:** Chas, it's okay. She fooled a lot of people, not just you.

**CHAS:** Anyway, I broke up with her. I just wanted you to know that.

**MADDIE:** You did?

**KATELYN:** What'd she say?

**CHAS:** Um, she was pretty upset. Actually, she was really upset. She said she never wrote or said or did any of that stuff. It's like those. . .those pictures. First, she said they weren't her and then she said they were but it was before she lost weight. Like she couldn't trust me with the truth or something. But, geez, it was right there, on the net. I mean, how could I not believe that?

**DEENA:** She is such a LIAR.

**KATELYN:** It's like pathological.

**MADDIE:** Forget about it, Chas. It's all in the past.

**MIKE:** No, it isn't.

**MADDIE:** Mike. . .

**MIKE:** After what she did to you? To us? She can't be allowed to get away with it! No freakin' way!

**MADDIE:** (*moving to Chas and taking his hand*) Well, Chas did break up with her.

**MIKE:** I don't care. . .

**CHAS:** (*uncomfortable*) Um, guys. . .can I talk to Maddie alone for a few minutes.

**DEENA:** Sure.



**KATELYN:** Hey, behave, you two!

**BRAD:** Um, c'mon, everyone. Give them some privacy.

**MIKE:** *(crossing and getting in CHAS' face.)* Okay, Chas. But I want to talk to you before you take off. Got it?

**CHAS:** Uh, sure.

*They cross to far SCL.*

**MADDIE:** It is so good to see you again, Chas. I've really, really missed you. *(She puts her hands on his chest.)*

**CHAS:** Um, Maddie, I just really wanted to apologize - just you and me, for all that stuff. I'm really sure that Tara wouldn't have done any of it, if we hadn't been dating. So I feel kinda responsible.

**MADDIE:** It's okay, baby. I understand. I don't blame you at all.

**CHAS:** It's just. . . I never saw her acting jealous or anything. And she sure never said anything to me like that. She never said anything about you at all. I never would have let her. Really.

**MADDIE:** *(taking his face in her hands)* It's okay, really, Chas. It's over and done. We can forget it now.

**CHAS:** Whew! I'm really glad you feel that way, Maddie. I'd hate to lose you as a friend.

**MADDIE:** *(reaching up and putting her arms around his neck. She talks softly.)* Just friends, Chas? Is that all?

**CHAS:** Oh, Maddie. *(He takes her hands from his neck and gently disengages from her.)* Yeah, friends. I really like you a lot, but right now, well. . .I think maybe I need a break from relationships. You always said I wasn't real good at them. And

I think you were right. So. . .friends?

**MADDIE:** *(without looking at him)* What? Oh, sure. Never can have enough 'friends.'

*CHAS exits to SR 'doorway' to office and freezes there. After a beat, the GROUP thaws and moves back to MADDIE.*

**MADDIE:** Before you even ask, no, I did NOT take him back.

**KATELYN:** Aw, poor guy. Maybe you should have given him a break.

**DEENA:** Did he beg?

**MADDIE:** Practically on his knees. But I mean, seriously, why would I want him after he'd been with her?

**MIKE:** Yeah, and just because Chas got his sanity back doesn't mean the project stops. Because you know she's gonna find some other sucker to dig her nails into.

**BRAD:** I dunno, Mike. Doncha think. . .

**MADDIE:** *(interrupts)* I do know, Brad. Mike's right. We keep going.

*The GROUP all faces upstage and freezes. CHAZ and the WOMAN thaw.*

**WOMAN:** May I help you?

**CHAS:** Um, yeah, I think so. I'm Chas Cooper.

**WOMAN:** Oh, Chas. I've been trying to reach you. Do your parents know you're here?

**CHAS:** Yeah, they know. They didn't want me to come in at first, but I felt like I had to.

**WOMAN:** Far as I've been able to tell, you really weren't involved in what went on with Tara.

**CHAS:** Not directly, no. I mean, I didn't know any of the stuff that they were doing. *(Puts his head in his hands.)* God, I am so dumb.

**WOMAN:** No, you're not, Chas. You're just 17, that's all. So, what did you want to tell me?

**CHAS:** I hafta tell you or someone, or I'll go freakin' nuts.

**WOMAN:** What is it, Chas?

**CHAS:** I told him. I told him. And I didn't have to.

**WOMAN:** Who, Chas?

**CHAS:** Mike. I told him Tara's password. She used it for everything. It was "Davidson815"

**WOMAN:** Oh. Well, that explains one piece of the puzzle. Why'd you tell him, Chas?

**CHAS:** He - Mike - really kinda scared me. I guess I was afraid he and his buddies would beat me up or something or. . .*(He stops and takes a deep breath.)* No, no, no. That's not true. *(Takes another deep breath)* I thought if I didn't tell him that the kids wouldn't really take me back into the crowd. I was afraid of being shunned and hated and laughed at and treated just the way everyone . . . *(he stops suddenly.)*

**WOMAN:** Just the way everyone was treating Tara?

**CHAS:** Yeah. Oh, man. I was so dumb.

**WOMAN:** Chas, you really couldn't have stopped them. Password or not, they would have found ways to do what they did.

**CHAS:** Really?

**WOMAN:** Really. You're a good kid, Chas. Like you said, you just got a little stupid.

**CHAS:** You got that freakin' right.

**WOMAN:** And by the time you came back to the group, the whole "project" was so far gone, I don't know if anyone could have stopped it.

**CHAS:** *(standing)* I hope. . .I mean, at least I could have tried. But. . .Thanks. . .for seein' me.

**WOMAN:** Thank you, Chas.

*CHAS exits completely through "doorway" and then SR. He is not seen again for the remainder of the play. The WOMAN turns upstage and freezes as the GROUP SCL thaws. They have their cell phones out.*

## SCENE NINE

**MIKE:** Ladies and gentlemen, kindly point your browsers to Google. *(Pause while they do.)* Everybody there?

**BRAD:** Where's Katelyn?

**MADDIE:** She said she was sick, but hey, she can log on at home, y'know?

**DEENA:** I wouldn't miss the launch party for anything.

**MIKE:** Now, search for “The Tara Skuzz Project.”

*They click buttons. We hear muted dance-style music. They immediately burst out laughing and hooting although BRAD is much more restrained.*

**DEENA:** Oh, my God, Mike, that is freakin’ awesome! How in the world did you animate her big ol’ behind?

**MADDIE:** It’s the way that big ol’ behind is stuffed in that bikini that kills me! Bro, you have really outdone yourself. I knew you could do Photoshop and some of that stuff. .

**MIKE:** Well, to give credit, Deena did help a bit with the dedication. . .”This page is dedicated to all the people who’ve been exposed to Tara Schuznik, aka Tara The Skuzz, and are awaiting decontamination. The lucky ones, like us, who’ve gotten our shots, now feel free to take some. And Tara, if you’re reading this, be sure to visit all the pages. If your eyeballs aren’t bleeding now, they will be soon. HAHahaha!”

**BRAD:** God, all these pictures. Are these all from “Snap The Skuzz Day”?

**MIKE:** *(laughing)* Was that genius or what? Half the kids in school were taking pictures of her. I didn’t even use most of ‘em.

**DEENA:** I heard that’s why she went home at noon that day.

**MADDIE:** *(laughing)* Yeah, well she couldn’t very well stay in school. She had gym in the afternoon. There was no way!

**BRAD:** Y’know, I can’t figure out why she didn’t, like, tell her parents or a teacher or Mr. Sampson or somebody.

**MIKE:** Maybe she did and they didn’t care.

**MADDIE:** Maybe they hate her, too.

**DEENA:** I know what ya mean, Brad. I've kinda been expectin' somebody to get involved and shut us down, but it hasn't happened.

**BRAD:** I guess we're just lucky, or something.

**MIKE:** Hey, and I was real careful 'bout coverin' my tracks. We all were, really.

**MADDIE:** Mike - did you put the Bikini Dance up on You Tube?

**DEENA:** Oh, God, Mike, you have to!

**MIKE:** Puhleeze, Ladies. Would I forget something like that. *(as he clicks)* Did it last night! I called it Dancing With The Skuzz. Check it out.

**MADDIE:** Oh. My. God.. It's gotten like over three thousand hits already!

**DEENA:** Tara's gone viral!

*ALL, except MIKE turn upstage and freeze. MIKE enters the SL office through the door. As he sits, the WOMAN "thaws."*

## SCENE TEN

*NOTE: It is important to have MIKE play this scene in a reasonable, yet tired, almost bored-with-it manner. He is NOT being a smart aleck*

**WOMAN:** So, Mike, how many hits did it receive before You Tube took it down?

**MIKE:** *(shrugging)* I dunno, exactly. Somewhere 'round thirty

thousand. Probably could have hit fifty if they'd left it up for a few more days.

**WOMAN:** You sound like you're sorry that they didn't.

**MIKE:** I don't care one way or another.

**WOMAN:** Maybe you're just sorry that you got caught.

**MIKE:** Hey, of course I am.

**WOMAN:** I'm surprised, with all your computer expertise and knowledge, that you didn't realize that almost anything on the web can be traced.

**MIKE:** Oh, I knew it. I just didn't think anybody would bother doin' it.

**WOMAN:** You don't think that what you did to Tara was awful?

**MIKE:** Ah, c'mon. I am so tired of this junk. It was a JOKE, get it? It was a bunch of kids playing a practical joke on another kid. A kid who obviously couldn't take it. And just how were we supposed to know that?

**WOMAN:** What if someone had done all this to you?

**MIKE:** I woulda paid 'em back. I wouldn't sit around and cry. Wah, wah, wah! It's not like we robbed a bank or beat up an old lady. We were just kids, messing around.

**WOMAN:** Do you know how many text messages Tara got every Thursday at 6 a.m.?

**MIKE:** I have no idea and don't really care.

**WOMAN:** You organized the text attacks. She only had limited

messaging.

**MIKE:** And I'll gladly pay for it. I still don't get - what is the big freakin' deal?

**WOMAN:** What if someone had done it to your sister? What if they'd done it to Maddie?

**MIKE:** They DID do it to Maddie. She did. Tara. Fact is, what she did was worse.

**WOMAN:** Oh, come on, Mike. You don't really believe that, do you?

**MIKE:** Yeah. I do. Don't ya get it? She made a fool out of Maddie. So, we just made a fool out of her. Far as I'm concerned, it's even now. She leaves us alone, we leave her alone.

**WOMAN:** So, the "project" is finished?

**MIKE:** Yep. Case closed.

**WOMAN:** I'm afraid it doesn't work like that, Mike.

**MIKE:** Look - I'm a straight A student, I've got a scholarship to Stanford for next year, locked in, signed and sealed. Do you seriously think that a prank is going to slow me down? Really? I am not being disrespectful here. Honest. But this is all such bull. Tara is upset. I'm sorry. No, I take that back. I'm not sorry. We didn't lay a finger on that girl and she had it coming. She'll think twice before messing with my sister. That's all I wanted. Ever.

**WOMAN:** I don't believe that, Mike. I wish I could, but I don't believe that at all.



*MIKE exits and returns to the area with the other kids. They strike any benches, chairs, or furniture so that area is completely clear. Then, they split into 2 groups, form lines that angle in a V-shape, with the point UCS. Facing US, their postures are stiff and formal. MADDIE is at the SL end of the line. Simultaneously, the WOMAN retrieves what appeared to be the dark coat from the coat tree. Now, it is seen as a judge's robe. She exits thru the "doorway" and goes SC at the apex of the V. She addresses the audience and KIDS - who are the defendants.*

## SCENE ELEVEN

**WOMAN:** As part of my deliberations, I met with each of the defendants individually. After those interviews, I had a good idea of what happened, and felt like I knew all of them.

Maddie, Mike, Katelyn, Deena, and Brad. Before I give my decision, I want to read you a letter I received from a teacher at Tara's former school. (*WOMAN takes out letter and reads*)

"Up until August 15, 2008 (*note: change year as applicable*) Tara Schuznik – who I knew by her full name – Theresa - was a perfectly normal, happy girl. She got good grades, she was a cheerleader, she enjoyed drama club and playing basketball and she was very popular. In fact, she was a lot like Maddie. She also had a regular babysitting job, every Saturday afternoon, with a little boy down the street whom she had known since the day he was born. By the time he was 4, he was like her little brother. He couldn't pronounce her name, so he just called her "T". And she called him "D" because his full name was way too grown-up for a little guy with messy hair and a runny nose. She only called him "Davidson" when she was being mock serious with him or trying to get him to behave. On August 15, 2008, they were walking down the quiet suburban street where they both lived. He didn't want to hold her hand but she held onto it firmly. And when the car jumped the curb and headed towards them, T tried to shield him with her body, taking the brunt of the impact. She broke both legs,

suffered a concussion, and was in serious condition. But she would have taken twice the injuries and pain, if it would have saved D's life. What followed for Theresa was months of surgeries and physical therapy and almost constant pain. She couldn't exercise properly and she didn't have an appetite except for junk food so she gained weight. But none of this compared to the deep sorrow she felt and her inability to forgive herself. It took months for her body to heal and even longer for her spirit to mend. When Theresa's parents decided to move, it seemed to finally lift her from the dark place where she had hidden since D's death. She was so excited to come to your town, to your school. And then Theresa Schuznik made the unforgivable mistake of becoming friends with a boy who's girlfriend had "kinda" broken up with him. Many of us wonder why, with everything that was done to her, why she never told her parents or a teacher or a counselor. I think she figured she had it coming. Not for a simple, silly, short flirtation, but for her failure on August 15, 2008. That's why she remained silent, even though no one ever blamed her for D's death. No one ever wanted her punished. To the contrary, we think she's a hero. I know I still do."

*WOMAN stops reading and folds the letter.*

The woman who wrote this, the English teacher who was also a friend of the family, was also D's mother.

Looking at your faces now, I think if you had really known Tara, you never could have treated her as you did. I hope that's true. You will need to believe that as you grow older and the full implications of your actions become clear. One way or another, you will have this with you for the rest of your life. The challenge will be what you do with it. .

*Lights xfade from the WOMAN to individual kids as they turn one by one and speak. DEENA is first.*

**DEENA:** At first, no one outside of our town even knew the names

of the kids involved. When the story broke in the local news, I mean. Most of us were juveniles, so they couldn't publish it. So when I went away to school, I thought I left it all behind. Until someone started a blog – with all our real names. Then it got a lot harder.

**BRAD:** I took off right after – went to my uncle's place and worked on his dairy farm. It's way out, so it can get pretty lonely – and my aunt and uncle are older and all that. I don't hear from anyone back home 'cept my parents. Don't have a computer so I can't do e-mail. I don't even have an iphone. And don't want one. At all.

**KATELYN:** No one at my college ever knew and when I got a teaching job in a large city, I figured it was all behind me. Then Chas wrote his i-book and it went viral and all it took was a google search and there I was. After that, everyone kinda looked at me funny. But the worst thing was my son. . .he's kinda shy and not athletic or anything. And he's. . .he's. . . kinda gotten picked on. When he gets a little older, maybe I can explain it. . .but right now, he's having a hard time with me and wants to go live with his father for awhile. Maybe that would be for the best. But just for a while.

**MADDIE:** It was awful right after it happened and we were labeled "bullies" and all that. And the rest of high school wasn't fun – I wanted to drop out, but my parents wouldn't let me. But going away to college was great - it was just like it didn't happen. I had some trouble sleeping, but I've got my chardonnay to help with that, y'know! Met a great guy and we were married a few years ago. I told him the Tara story beforehand and it didn't matter to him at all. He looked it all up – and he's great with it. Says it doesn't matter. I'm glad it doesn't.

**MIKE:** I am living proof that there is life after high school. I was just a dumb kid, who did a dumb thing. I graduated from Stanford, I'm working for a big firm making a really good living. I married the most beautiful woman in the world and we have a little girl. My wife is from Scandinavia and knew nothing about it and I didn't feel

the need to tell her. Only time I think of it at all is when I talk to Maddie – which is only about once a year or so. We've kinda drifted apart. And, then, the other day Emily – that's my baby, was playing around hitting keys on my laptop. And I started thinking, how about when she gets old enough to search for things? I was worried for a minute and then thought that by then it will be like, what, 20 years old? It won't still be online. I mean, it's gotta die sometime, right?

## **END OF PLAY**

## *DISCUSSION QUESTIONS*

1. What do you think happened to Tara?
2. Why did the playwright choose not to show Tara?
3. Were the kids really guilty of anything, legally?
4. If so, what should have happened to them?
5. Could Tara have stopped the harassment? What could she have done?
6. The kids kept talking about Tara like she was an awful person. Do you think she was? What led you to believe that? Do you think any of the other characters actually believed that?
7. Have you ever been bullied or harassed online? What happened?
8. In America we have free speech. Does that mean you can say anything you want?
9. Should there be laws against using the internet to harass?
10. How is cyber-bullying different than “regular” bullying?

## RESOURCES

<http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/index2.html>

<http://www.cyberbullying.us/>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyber-bullying>

<http://www.ncpc.org/cyberbullying>

<http://www.cyberbully.org/>

A rundown of individual states' laws re: cyber-bullying

[http://blogs.findlaw.com/law\\_and\\_life/2010/01/cyberbullying-suicide-shows-need-for-cyberbullying-laws.html](http://blogs.findlaw.com/law_and_life/2010/01/cyberbullying-suicide-shows-need-for-cyberbullying-laws.html)

This is an overview of cyber-bullying legislation in general

<http://www.cyberbully.org/cyberbully/docs/cblegislation.pdf>

## NOTES