



SEALing Off Central High: What are Schools' Obligations in a Social Media World?¹

Henry Atkins

<https://justiceinschools.org>

Setting	
Central High School (ages 14-18) in the United States	
Primary Characters	
Principal Weathers: Principal	Jerica Lewis: Freshman student
Jack Weathers: Freshman student	Ms. Lewis: Jerica's mother
Ms. Tierney: Freshman biology teacher	John: School secretary

Principal Weathers reclined in his chair in complete and utter exhaustion as he scanned the printout in his hands once again. "What the fuck did you just fucking say about me, you little bitch?" the Facebook comment began, going on to warn the reader that the author was a Navy SEAL with "over 300 confirmed kills," "trained in gorilla warfare" who would "wipe you the fuck out with precision the likes of which has never been seen before on this Earth." (See Appendix for a full copy of the posting.)

The commenter, of course, wasn't actually a Navy SEAL. It was Jack Miller, a freshman here at Central High. He'd posted it sometime two nights ago as a comment in response to a girl who'd posted a status lambasting the "absolutely garbage" way he dressed. Principal Weathers had googled the material and found a web page that explained it was a [viral joke](#), and the poorly-written, over-the-top writing suggested a poor attempt at humor. However, he was far from certain that this profane, threatening meme constituted a mere student prank, and it was undeniably disturbing regardless of its context. He'd also seen numerous occasions where students had weaponized humor, using seemingly hyperbolic humor to intimidate their classmates. What this student apparently hadn't considered was that Jerica's mother had a different sense of humor than he did, and she'd phoned the school office yesterday morning angrier than just about any parent Principal Weathers had spoken to this year.

"He threatened my daughter," Ms. Lewis had said. "I don't care if he pretended it was a joke, it was still a threat of *violence*, and he needs to be *expelled*. How is Jerica supposed to go to school with a boy who would write those things?" She'd been irate, keeping him on the line for over twenty minutes, talking about how her daughter didn't feel safe around Jack anymore, how Jerica felt he was always looking at her like a "creep" even before the incident, how it'd be an abdication of Principal Weathers' responsibility if he wasn't willing to protect Central's kids. She'd even threatened to take it to the school board.

Still, he felt he'd handled this one well, asking her to send him a screenshot of the Facebook post over email and telling her he'd get to the bottom of it immediately. He had bigger problems at Central, to be

¹ This case is a work of fiction. It is based on real-life events, including a meme that has been circulating among middle and high schoolers since at least 2012 (see Appendix), but the school, characters and dialogue are entirely fictional.

sure—getting parents more involved, easing teachers into the new state high school curriculum guidelines, and figuring out how they were going to put together the summer school this year, for starters—but when a kid felt scared to come to school, the matter had to be examined immediately. Specifically, district policy dictated that any threat made by a student on school property be met with an automatic suspension of one month. However, ambiguities remained regarding the policy’s applications to off-campus speech.

And so yesterday he’d called each of them down to his office to discuss the matter. He’d started by speaking to Jack alone, who maintained the whole thing was a wisecrack response to someone who’d actually been bullying him. Jerica, he said, was often rude to him in class, frequently attempting to embarrass him in front of their peers.

When Principal Weathers had spoken to Jerica, she maintained that *she* was the one who’d been goofing around, and that *Jack* had been the one who was rude in class. According to Jerica, it was 1 precisely this context that had led her to feel so afraid when Jack posted the content. He’d asked her if it would be okay for the three of them to discuss things together, but she said the idea frightened her too much. After his conversation with each student, he wasn’t even sure he’d actually learned all that much—if anything, things seemed a little *more* muddled.

That’s why he’d invited Ms. Tierney, Jack’s biology teacher, up to his office. If anyone could help him figure this situation out, it was her. During the six years she’d been at Central, Ms. Tierney had won school-wide praise for her bright and sunny personality, in addition to her open, caring attentiveness toward the students she taught. Even now, asked to help provide information about one of her students who had reportedly threatened another, she was cool and collected, slowly reading and rereading the copy he’d handed her moments earlier. Finally, she put it down, clasped her hands together and placed them on the desk between them, and spoke. “So, Jerica’s mother called in about this.”

“Yes,” Principal Weathers sighed. “She thinks it’s a legitimate safety issue, and I can’t say I blame her. It’s not original language, and I’m not entirely sure it’s fair to call it a threat—he copied it from the Internet—but the violent language, the profanity...this is scary, especially for a fourteen-year-old kid. I just wanted to get you in here so I could hear what your thinking is on all of this. Is this type of behavior typical for him?”

A pause as she carefully considered the question. “Yes and no,” Ms. Tierney finally answered. “Violent and threatening? Definitely not. Jack’s one of the quietest kids in my class, and he mostly just seems to try to stay out of sight. But amused by an online meme? Sure. Before I moved them to the front, he and a couple of his friends were always trying to get away with playing games on their phones in the back of my class. Typically a B- or C+-student. It doesn’t surprise me at all that he’d be referencing something he found on the Internet in a humorous context, but I don’t think there’s a mean bone in the kid’s body.”

“Well, that’s good to hear,” Principal Weathers responded. “But he did post this message.”

“Sure, as a joke—or a lame way to express frustration over Jerica’s original posting. I also think it’s worth mentioning that this was something that was said outside of school,” Ms. Tierney added. “I’m really not sure we have either the responsibility or the right to be policing student behavior in that context.”

She raised a good point, and from the few interactions Principal Weathers had had with the kid, he also agreed that he seemed a fairly harmless student. Jack, a small, pudgy kid with glasses, was one of the students who always kept his head down when they walked past each other, always on his phone texting away or listening to music. He definitely wasn’t king of Central, and he didn’t seem like a genuinely mean kid, either.

"I just don't know what to tell Jerica's mom," he said, almost plaintively.

Ms. Tierney raised an eyebrow. "I'd tell her the truth: that it wasn't meant seriously and we don't believe Jack intended to do anything wrong. He's clearly being rude here, but I think it's a step too far to say he's actively threatening another student with something he copied and pasted off the Internet. Are we really in a position to determine this ourselves? Or to determine how kids speak outside of school?"

"I don't like it either," Principal Weathers replied, "but you know we have an obligation to take action if we see one of our kids being threatened. He might have made this threat outside the classroom, but if Jerica doesn't feel safe here anymore, it's absolutely our responsibility to deal with it. Besides, we've had kids make threats over text before, and we've always handled those cases the same as if they'd threatened our students in person."

"What does 'deal with it' entail?" she asked, eyes narrowed. "What's going to be appropriate here? Do you really believe this is serious enough to warrant a suspension that's going to take him out of school for an entire *month*? A suspension that's going to be on his record forever? Because that's typically how we'd deal with a serious, in-person threat."

"Yes, you do have a point there," he said, nodding slowly. An entire month's suspension was an incredibly damaging disciplinary tool, one that he hesitated to use. But at the same time, how unfair would that be, really? Use of profanity in school was an automatic detention, and threatening to hurt another student could earn you a month's suspension. The words Jack had posted—threatening to shoot another kid, to maim and disfigure her—were way beyond the pale, and he'd even done it in a public setting where other students could see. *I can't change the fact that he decided to post this online, where anyone could see it*, Principal Weathers thought to himself. "What happened, happened, and now a girl's scared. How can I ignore that, no matter whether it happened in your classroom or not?" he said forcefully.

"Well, for starters, even though you've talked to both of the students, it's likely that there's still a lot of context we don't know about. Things they may not have felt comfortable telling the principal of Central." Ms. Tierney started gaining steam. "Also, I just can't get past the fact that this exchange was via Facebook post, at night, totally independent of school. It's a step too far to be suggesting we have the ability and the right to make substantive judgments about what kids say out of school on their own time. I'm just not comfortable with it. Can you imagine what would have happened to us as teens if every word we uttered, no matter where or when, was subject to school discipline? With my smart aleck mouth, I never would have made it past eighth grade!"

It was true that he didn't know everything about the situation, Principal Weathers reflected. He, too, wouldn't have wanted to be held accountable for some of the stupid things he had said or done late at night or on the weekends. Good thing those days were behind him. But he also knew to take Jerica's mom's concerns seriously. They were a good family, one which was deeply involved at Central. The Lewises didn't have a lot to give, but he saw Jerica's mom at just about every PTA meeting, bake sale, you name it. Her dad clerked at the grocery store down the street from Central, and he was always inquiring about what was going on at the school, how Jerica was doing in classes, and whether there was anything Principal Weathers needed volunteers for. And even if Jack did feel targeted, would that justify such a vicious response? How could he tell a parent that such terrible things could be said to their child without repercussions?

Then, a knock on the door. "Come in," he called, and in walked John, the school secretary. John was still on his phone, probably knocking out another email on the five-second walk from his desk to the principal's office - another one of Central's superstars. "What do you need?" Principal Weathers asked.

“Oh, should be quick,” John replied. “I just wanted to let you know that that parent from earlier, Ms. Lewis? She called again. Want me to transfer her over?”

Principal Weathers hesitated as Ms. Tierney silently shook her head. Then, aware the problem wasn’t going anywhere, he spoke. “Yeah, of course,” he said, and waited for his office phone to ring.

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Appendix



Navy Seal Copypasta

Part of a series on Copypasta. [\[View Related Entries\]](#)

Updated 6 days ago by SabrinaTibbetts.

Added 5 years ago by NovaXP.

★ 136

7,734,902

22

116

188

Share

7,452

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2

G+

187

Like us on Facebook!

Like 891K

PROTIP: Press **T** to view the image gallery, **V** to view the video gallery, or **R** to view a random entry.

About

Navy Seal Copypasta (also known as the "Marine Copypasta," "Internet Tough Guy Copypasta" and "Gorilla Warfare Copypasta") is a facetious message containing a series of ridiculous claims and grandiose threats that portray the poster as an Internet tough guy stereotype. In the original post, the writer claimed to be a former Navy Seal with a long history of combat experiences, using comical typos and hyperboles like "Gorilla Warfare," "300 Confirmed Kills" and "I can kill you in over 700 ways with just my bare hands." Since its emergence in mid-2012, the copypasta has spawned a variety of spin-off stories, similar to the John Copypasta meme.

Origin

The copypasta is believed to have originated on the military and weapons enthusiast image board Operator Chan sometime in 2010. The earliest archived posting was submitted on November 11th, 2010 to 4chan's /jp/ (Otaku Culture) board, in which the poster claimed to have seen the message previously on Operator Chan.

What the fuck did you just fucking say about me, you little bitch? I'll have you know I graduated top of my class in the Navy Seals, and I've been involved in numerous secret raids on Al-Qaeda, and I have over 300 confirmed kills. I am trained in gorilla warfare and I'm the top sniper in the entire US armed forces. You are nothing to me but just another target. I will wipe you the fuck out with precision the likes of which has never been seen before on this Earth, mark my fucking words. You think you can get away with saying that shit to me over the Internet? Think again, fucker. As we speak I am contacting my secret network of spies across the USA and your IP is being traced right now so you better prepare for the storm, maggot. The storm that wipes out the pathetic little thing you call your life. You're fucking dead, kid. I can be anywhere, anytime, and I can kill you in over seven hundred ways, and that's just with my bare hands. Not only am I extensively trained in unarmed combat, but I have access to the entire arsenal of the United States Marine Corps and I will use it to its full extent to wipe your miserable ass off the face of the continent, you little shit. If only you could have known what unholy retribution your little "clever" comment was about to bring down upon you, maybe you would have held your fucking tongue. But you couldn't, you didn't, and now you're paying the price, you goddamn idiot. I will shit fury all over you and you will drown in it. You're fucking dead, kiddo.

On May 24th, 2012, an anonymous user submitted a thread to the /pasta/ board, claiming he had created the original copypasta two to three years prior (shown below).

Meme

Status

Confirmed

Type:

Copypasta

Year

2010

Origin

OperatorChan

Tags

lol, marine, catchphrase, copypasta, warfare, navy, seals, gorilla, 4chan, macro, meme, response, kill, sniper, throat, internet tough guy, army, military, Phelps, meme, ricki, ricki Phelps, gorilla

Additional References

Encyclopedia Dramatica