



College Bullying: The Wrath of Mean Girls in College

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*Names have been changed

Think you've escaped the wrath of mean girls once you graduate high school? Think again. If you think mean girls disappear in college, you're dead wrong.

Bullying can and does happen in college. A report finds that, "15% of college students report being bullied" (Dimmer, 2016, p.1).

I was one of those students. I was bullied during my freshman year of college.

When I first entered college, I was shy, socially awkward, and a bit insecure with my new environment. This made me an easy target for bullies. In fact, one article notes that, "Bullies often focus on those who are different in some way. For example, targets of bullies might dress

differently, be overweight, indulge in unpopular hobbies, be socially awkward, or have a disability” (Lee, 2020, p.1).

On my first night in the dorm, I met Stephanie*, one of my suite mates. She was nice in the early weeks, like everyone is when they first go to college. I associated with her a lot as I got to know other people. However, I soon saw that all of this was nothing more than a façade. I began to notice some bad habits of hers as the semester wore on.

For one thing, Stephanie made fun of me a lot. She often told me I had “weird” habits, and that I was “OCD” for being clean and sanitary. It just annoyed me - even if it was just a “joke”. She also criticized and gossiped about other people’s personal choices a lot, even though they didn’t affect her. On top of those things, she used my things without asking. I’m very particular about my things and I don’t like people - especially people I don’t know - touching my stuff.

But worst of all, Stephanie loved drama. She did *anything* to start drama. She liked to be involved in everything, even when it had nothing to do with her. Anytime there was seemingly an argument or disagreement between anyone, she wanted to be part of the drama.

Things really started to go downhill in November. Stephanie began to get obsessed with the idea that I liked this certain guy, Chris*. I don’t know how or why she came up with the idea that I liked him. I hadn’t mentioned him at all.

At the end of the semester, the university dining hall held a special event celebrating finals week. I didn’t go, instead preferring to go to bed early. I was tired, and I needed to do good on my exams. Stephanie knew I wouldn’t be there, so unbeknownst to me, she crafted a plan.

When she and her friends returned to the dorm suite in the middle of the night, they woke me up, and then proceeded to taunt me and tell me everything they had done.

Stephanie had made up lies and spread rumors about me to start drama. She lied to Chris and told him horrible things about me because she knew I wouldn’t be there. She claimed that I had told her to talk to him about me and that she was “just trying to help” - but that was a lie too. I had never told her to do anything like that. She just wanted to start drama - like usual. What was more disturbing was the fact that she thought it was hilarious. She was laughing about it hysterically, like some psychopathic maniac. I didn’t know what was going on or who to believe. It was just too many lies. I knew I couldn’t trust Stephanie - she had done so much already. It was at this point that I saw Stephanie for the manipulative, backstabbing liar that she was. She also threatened to tell more lies about me to Chris.

I was absolutely horrified. I couldn’t sleep that night, or eat the whole next day.

What I was experiencing is a mixture of both social/relational bullying and verbal bullying. To describe social/relational bullying, a report says, “This form of bullying involves harming victims through relationships and reputation. This can include purposeful exclusion, spreading rumors, revealing secrets and fears, and public mocking” (Rich, 2019, p.1). Of verbal bullying, that same report says, “Beyond name-calling and teasing, verbal bullying can involve such actions as taunting, intimidation, and threats” (Rich, 2019, p.1).

I didn’t know what to do about the situation. I was confused, angry, and upset. I didn’t know how to even begin talking about what was going on. This is not uncommon. In fact, an article notes that, “Many college students who are bullied never tell anyone what they are going through.

There are several reasons for their silence. First, many times victims of bullying are embarrassed by what they are experiencing. To talk about the bullying requires them to share the embarrassing details of what other people are saying or doing” (Gordon, 2020, p.1). I also didn’t know who to talk to about the situation. I was too embarrassed to tell my parents. I hadn’t made many close friends yet, and I didn’t know any adults on campus who could help me.

Bullying can quickly escalate if nothing is done about it. Unfortunately, in my case, it did escalate quickly and uncontrollably. Because I didn’t tell anyone what was going on, I didn’t talk out my feelings with anyone. So, I was furious with Stephanie, and I wanted revenge. About a day after she told me what she did, I dumped water all over her bed. When I was done, her bed was soaking. She couldn’t use it anymore, and the dorm staff had to get her a new mattress.

After that incident, a LOT of things happened in the next few days. After (somewhat) speaking with the dorm director about the issue, I switched rooms for the next semester.

Even after I switched rooms, I felt isolated and disconnected. I was embarrassed by what Stephanie had done to me, and I was embarrassed by what I had done to her in response. I felt like everyone hated me (even though this wasn’t true). I felt....alone.

Bullying can have negative impacts on the victims. I became depressed and developed anxiety. I started to go to the campus counseling center regularly. I was traumatized by the whole situation. This is not uncommon for bullied students. A report notes that bullying puts victims at risk for, “mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD” (Rich, 2019, p.1). And, another article says that, “Bullying can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety and depression, learned helplessness, difficulties with social relationships, alcohol or drug use, violence, and self-harm or suicidal thoughts” (Lee, 2020, p.1).

It’s important to encourage students to report bullying, rather than trying to take the situation into their own hands, as I did. Because I retaliated against Stephanie, I ended up getting in big trouble.

A crucial thing to do when being bullied is to keep documentation and evidence. An article says to, “Write down the dates and times of the incidents, the words she used and any witnesses. You also may want to include how these names and comments made you feel” (Gordon, 2020, p.1). This is a very important step because it gives you a tangible record of what the person did, rather than trying to remember everything that happened.

Then, report the bullying to the university. I didn’t realize at the time that I actually should’ve told on Stephanie. I thought telling on her was “tattling”. I also didn’t realize that my university had a judicial affairs department that handled cases like this. Reporting the bullying will inform the university of the issue so they can perform a formal investigation. The department can also help you take steps to report the issue to local law enforcement if you want.

I didn’t take any of these steps to combat my bully when I was in college, and I suffered because of it. It’s important for colleges to put an emphasis on bullying, and acknowledge it as a serious issue among students. College bullying is a very real issue, and it must be stopped on college campuses.

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