

29th October 2021

Dear NZOA

RE: s 9(2)(a) – DOCUMENTARY

s 9(2)(a) was pitched as a documentary about youth bullying, mental health and cyber-harm told s 9(2)(b)(ii)

We had hoped to include the s 9(2)(b)(ii)

As we've researched more, we've become increasingly concerned about the s 9(2)(b)(ii)

s 9(2)(b)(ii) Also with Covid delays s 9(2)(b)(ii) has been postponed again making it very difficult to make plans around this factor too.

So, while s 9(2)(b)(ii) may still be part of the content, we'd like to evolve the treatment to explore the bigger picture of why we bully, our online behaviour and what the future might look like...so are writing now to seek approval for a change of treatment.

New Zealand has shocking statistics for youth bullying that show no signs of improving but the proliferation of life online has taken this problem to another level.

The promise of social media was conversation, connection and community but after two decades of use it's increasingly divisive, untrustworthy, exploitative and toxic.

The recent Facebook Papers revealed that Facebook and Instagram have known for years that their algorithms have been feeding a stream of targeted negative and dangerous content to young people. Tiktok and YouTube no better.

Many adults think Gen Z are “digital natives” who know to navigate this world, but that’s not the case. They are living in a dangerous and addictive online world where they struggle to separate fact from fiction, are vulnerable to cruel and incessant bullying, and measure their worth by social media feedback.

In the last decade the rates of youth suicides, self-harm and eating disorders have soared with the proliferation of our social media and lives increasingly lived online.

Social media bites hard on the psychological needs of young people by feeding on, reinforcing, and amplifying the user’s inclination to over-share personal information at a time when their own identity, voice, and moral compass are still a work in progress. “Likes” – which one young Facebook user describes as “our generation’s crack cocaine” – have been devised to deliver variably timed dopamine shots that drive us to double down on sharing a photo, web link, or status update. A post with zero likes isn’t just privately painful, it’s also a kind of public condemnation.

Sociologists talk of social media steering us towards living in a “hive” mind - of social pressures to conform existing at a level humanity has never experienced before. This is reflected in shocking research that shows 9 of 10 New Zealanders aged between 18-23 now name becoming an Instagram influencer as their dream job.

The revised documentary with working title “Anti-Social” looks at that online environment, how it is changing and what really needs to happen to ensure the digital environment we all increasingly inhabit is healthy and safe.

It starts with a close-up personal story about a New Zealand teenager being bullied online... but as the story arc develops, the documentary increasing zooms out to reveal the global forces that are casually altering our behaviours and shaping our interaction – and how our “Digital Native” youths are the canaries in the coal-mine.

s 9(2)(a) [REDACTED] was struggling with her body image before one Instagram picture she posted of herself prompted a slew of s 9(2)(a) [REDACTED] s 9(2)(a) [REDACTED]

s 9(2)(a) who are tackling the issue of cyber harm in the real world. Each has been a victim of cyber bullying, revenge porn, ‘catfishing’ and/or harassment – and is now part of a ‘think tank’ for big tech and working with other young people to support, and educate them about their rights, digital harm and interventions through Netsafe.

The groups’ focus is the world-first Harmful Digital Communications Act which was drafted in response to a New Zealand case that made headlines around the world. The 2013, the Roast Busters case saw a group of teenage boys targeting underage girls for sex then boasting, ‘slut shaming’ and naming the girls on social media. At that time the police were hamstrung by the lack of laws regulating online behaviour.

Over lockdown Netsafe’s phones have been running hot with a surge in online abuse cases. These are handled by caseworkers on site, who work to mediate and resolve issues directly. The caseworkers have direct lines to social media platforms and can achieve dramatic results – having posts and sites pulled down and their creators investigated. Few people know that this resource is there to protect them.

The relatively new law is the most powerful weapon we currently have against the effects of online harm but few know it’s there or how to use it.

The documentary will include the story of s 9(2)(a) The perpetrator was one of the youngest people to be taken to court under the online safety law and the consequent restorative justice provided some closure for her grieving whānau.

We'll look at how the law is currently being hijacked and tested by social media influencers s 9(2)(a) who are waging a battle s 9(2)(a) At the heart of the appeal is whether “hurt feelings” constitute “harm”, and whether our courts should be intervening in slanging matches on social media.

We'll also look at a worrying trend of ‘self-harm’ online – where teenagers invent bullying stories for sympathetic attention.

The documentary looks at the big picture – why we are so cruel, why online bullying is rampant, how our understanding of bullying and the recognition of

the harm it does is changing and what really needs to happen to make the digital world a safe and healthy environment.

With the current controversy about the Facebook Papers, the safety of young people on line has come into focus. Facebook's plans for a junior Instagram platform have been pulled. In the UK, a former Children's Commissioner is suing Tiktok with claims it has illegally mined data of millions of young people.

Antisocial will be an important contemporary picture of how we attempt to apply brakes to a cyber world already speeding ahead into a future few of us really understand.

NB:

s 9(2)(a) [REDACTED] – she has helped with research and been in conversation with me throughout about the editorial challenges so it's been really valuable learning about story focus, purpose, treatment and structure. s 9(2)(a) [REDACTED] super excited about how the documentary is evolving.