Police, administration investigate anonymous child pornography Snapchat account

Once an image is published on an application, its soft tail can never truly be erased. It wasn’t until recently that the recovery of images and applications was published in our school after students reported naked pictures of both male and female on an anonymous Snapchat account, a social media platform known for holding pictures that disappear after opening.

Students who have been affected reported that their male partners were posted to the account without their knowledge and consent. Those involved could potentially be charged for spreading child pornography. The creation of the account has now involved law enforcement, where detectives and Task Force Werder for Internet Crime Against Children, Greg Miller, has been working with the HBSS administration to find who is behind the account. Miller said, “The account is predominately with internet and juvenile crimes, seeing multiple cases of unauthorized and exploiting of negative images on social media, whether they deal with realty drinking or drug use.

“Just by deleting the image, it doesn’t get rid of the problem... If these images get in the hands of the wrong people, bad things can happen. I know that sounds like common sense, but the unfortunate thing is that it continues,” Miller said. “You send an image and you now have no control on where it goes. The boyfriend becomes the ex-boyfriend, the friend becomes the ex-friend and then it trickles down.”

This account was brought to principal Cynthia Prieto’s attention when these students reported the problem to her and a counselor within the same half hour. The situation immediately required Prieto to contact parents and notify the police. Prieto said all of this is an opportunity to be a learning experience for students, rather than a pity talk.

“Because I’m not their parent, there’s no judgment. [They’re] having a conversation and giving them a chance to really show their talent in the open,” Prieto said. “It’s not going to get into trouble. I can help them understand that their parent is going to have a reaction. Usually, parents are going to want to protect their kid,” Prieto said.

If underage, taking a nude image of yourself and sending it is illegal. It’s not illegal because it’s embarrassing, but because it’s child pornography. School resource officer Tony Hermes stresses the importance of how inappropriate material on social media can cause a domino effect on the people involved.

“It’s extremely disruptive when you have images floating around and people huddle in a corner watching videos, watching what’s going on... That leads to fights, that leads to bullying, that leads to someone not comfortable coming to school so they start skipping... It’s a downhill ski,” Hermes said.

According to Miller, those who create this are the ones who post, screenmold or share inappropriate content. Once an image is posted onto a public social media platform, those who are watched are required to report it to the police or school administration for the spread of child pornography. In this situation, investigations are more focused on finding the account creator, rather than going after the victim who sent the pictures.

“We are not out to get [students who send images] in trouble. This can really affect someone’s life and we are out here to help them. It’s the bullying [and] embarrassment. We have people thinking about self-harming, and then suicide, all from a mistake,” Miller said.

Investigations are currently underway to find the creator behind the account. This means going through the phones of victims, dealing with families and contact their friends and social media circles. The investigation will then find the account creator, rather than looking for the victim who sent the picture.