

Evil fiction: teacher a target of fake Facebook profile

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Police are hunting the creator of a fake Facebook profile that was used to impersonate a Sydney primary school teacher and frame him as a paedophile by targeting kids at his school.

The teacher, who cannot be named, is a long-time campaigner against racism online and with others he runs a blog that names and shames racists by publishing their hate-filled Facebook postings.

In a phone interview, he said he believed this is why he was targeted. He said he and his family had been harassed over the phone, received death threats and had threatening notes left in his mail box after his personal details - including his address, phone number, photos and work details - were posted on a white supremacist website.

"This Facebook profile opened up a couple of days ago with a picture of me and a friend with shirts off holding a beer ... they were writing things on the wall such as 'i'm gay and I like little boys' and all sorts of things like that," the teacher said in a phone interview.

"They were engaging with students - kids were commenting and they were writing back pretending to be me."

Screenshots of the fake profile, which Fairfax Media has chosen not to publish, have photos of the teacher with captions such as "this is me being a gay god". The About Me section says: "I'm a teacher at [redacted] and I adore my students. Especially the boy's [sic] I could eat them up with a spoon".

The screenshots also show students posting on the wall debating whether the profile is real. Some appeared to be tricked by the ruse. "Hey mr [redacted] can I do training next week because my leg is better," wrote one.

The teacher said parents had contacted him asking why he befriended their children on Facebook and he worried the impersonators were also grooming them through private messages. Their goal, he believes, was to "portray me as a paedophile and make me lose my job".

The teacher said he had reported the harassment to police. He had been making reports about the phone threats for months but police had never done anything about it.

"I've got about six or seven outstanding police reports and none of them have been touched. I tried to get an AVO [apprehended violence order] in Sydney but I didn't even get it due to a police f*** up," he said.

But now that kids have become involved and parents have begun complaining, NSW Police has fired up an investigation.

"Redfern Police are investigating a fake Facebook page created to impersonate a south-western Sydney teacher," a NSW Police spokesman said.

"The matter was reported to Redfern Police on 1 August 2011 after the teacher was alerted by one of the parents at the school. It will be alleged the parent told him the impersonator had added a number of his students as friends."

Police said inquiries into the matter were continuing. The spokesman said a person charged in relation to this type of crime could be charged with offences under the Telecommunications Act including using a carriage service to harass or menace.

It is understood the teacher reported the incident to his local MP, Tanya Plibersek, whose office referred it to the Australian Federal Police. However, the AFP said it only investigated crimes against federal government departments and not private companies or individuals.

"Facebook is hosted in the United States, which makes it difficult for Australian law enforcement agencies to police," the AFP spokesman said.

"Individual users of Facebook who feel threatened by material that they believe is being posted by someone they know or who is close to them, can report these matters to their local state/territory police in the first instance."

The teacher has been fighting online racism for years and has campaigned through media and privately to have Facebook groups and other websites taken offline.

Asked if he believed he was fighting a losing battle given he was unlikely to change the views of the racists and was simply painting a target on his back, the teacher said he would not be cowed.

"I don't think the debate or argument is unwinnable. They're just trying to intimidate people like me from speaking out against racism," he said.

"I'm just attacking racism - i'm attacking the comments, not the person. It's almost as though they can't engage in the actual discussion or argument at hand without sending death threats or threatening family members."

The fake profile impersonating the teacher has now been removed from Facebook. Asked whether Facebook was responsible for disabling the profile, the social networking site would not comment but said it was against the site's rules to "provide any false personal information on Facebook, or create an account for anyone other than yourself without permission".

As Facebook's user base has ballooned to 750 million users globally, the site has struggled to keep it clean of nasty content and individuals.

It has been heavily criticised for [failing to rid the site of paedophiles](#), child porn and [groups celebrating the Holocaust](#). The site is quick to act when it receives critical media attention about certain issues but generally does not appear to have enough staff to adequately police the copious amounts of content posted by users every day.

State and federal attorneys-general are [discussing ways of forcing](#) the site to give parents access to their kids' profiles or even limit membership to those who are over 18. The South Australian attorney-general, John Rau, has been tasked with reporting back with ways of implementing such regulations.

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/technology/technology-news/evil-fiction-teacher-a-target-of-fake-facebook-profile-20110805-1iefm.html>