Woman indicted in fatal MySpace hoax on girl

By Dan Whitcomb
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LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - A 49-year-old Missouri mother accused of using a fake MySpace persona to "torment, harass, humiliate and embarrass" a 13-year-old girl who hanged herself was indicted on Thursday on federal charges.

Lori Drew, accused of helping dupe 13-year-old Megan Meier into believing she was chatting with a teenage boy, was indicted on conspiracy and other charges by a U.S. District Court jury in Los Angeles.

Meier's suicide in October of 2006 made worldwide headlines and prompted calls for social networking sites like MySpace to crack down on cyber-bullying.

"Any adult who uses the Internet to bully or harass another person, particularly a young teenage girl, needs to realize that their actions can have serious consequences," U.S. Attorney Thomas O'Brien said in announcing the indictment.

Meier for several weeks had what she thought was an online relationship with the fictional 16-year-old boy, "Josh Evans," when in fact she was exchanging messages with Drew and others.

Drew, 49, is the mother of a teenage girl who had a falling out with Meier.

Meier hanged herself in the closet of her bedroom in a St. Louis suburb on October 15, 2006, after "Evans" told her he did not want to be friends with her anymore and that "the world would be a better place without you."

Prosecutors say Drew and others created the fake persona using the picture of an unwitting teenage boy.

A former employee of Drew, 19-year-old Ashley Grills, told ABC's "Good Morning America" in an interview that she set up the fake MySpace account because Drew...
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5/15/08 5:13 PM

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Officer America in an interview that she set up the fake MySpace account because Drew wanted to find out what Meier was saying about her daughter.

After Meier killed herself, Drew had the hoax MySpace account deleted and told an unnamed juvenile who knew about it that she should "keep her mouth shut," according to the indictment.

It said "defendant Drew and the co-conspirators used the information obtained over the MySpace computer system to torment, harass, humiliate and embarrass the juvenile MySpace member."

Drew, who faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison if she is convicted on all of the charges, was expected to surrender to authorities in Missouri.

(Editing by Vicki Allen)

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