

Gabby Douglas partners with anti-bullying group after Olympics backlash

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U.S. Olympian Gabby Douglas visits the Citi Terrace at the USA House at Colegio Sao Paulo in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, August 5, 2016. Photo: Joe Scarnici/Getty Images

Gabby Douglas logged onto the Internet after winning her second straight gold medal in the all-around gymnastics team finals this summer at the Olympic Games. She was hoping to see articles and tweets talking about her stunning performance on the uneven bars.

She stuck a double-layout landing and earned the third-highest score of the event with 15.766 points. Instead, the 20-year-old found a steady stream of hate from online bullies questioning her patriotism after she stood at attention, but didn't place her hand over her heart when the national anthem played during the medal ceremony.

"I was like, 'What? This can't be a thing,'" Douglas recalled in a phone interview Wednesday.

Things Got Worse

Things got even worse for Douglas later in the games. Online bullies attacked her for what they saw as a lack of support for her teammates Aly Raisman and Simone Biles, who were competing in the individual all-around competition.

Douglas, who narrowly missed out on a spot to compete in the event, attended the event in the stands. Some viewers found her expressions too sour for the occasion.

The trolls worked fast, labeling her #CrabbyGabby on Twitter and declaring she was either too conceited or too jealous to properly support her teammates. It was enough to draw tears from Douglas, who later apologized for how those people interpreted her behavior.

"I support (my teammates)," she told reporters in August, "and I'm sorry that I wasn't showing it."

Keeping Your Head High

Douglas is done apologizing now, however. As the three-time Olympic gold medalist heads into 2017, she's dried her tears and is holding her head up high, declaring that she's "overcome it."

Online harassment, or bullying, "could be about anybody," she said.

This is one reason she recently teamed up with Hack Harassment, a group that seeks to reduce online bullying. Douglas will be touring high schools and college campuses for the organization next year.

To this day, the two-time Olympian maintains she has "no idea" why she became such a target for criticism. In 2012, when Douglas was just 16, online bullies got on her about her hair, which they thought looked messy.

Douglas doesn't chalk up the criticism to her sex or her race, but simply blames "the mean few that feel like they need to comment on everything."

Young Adults Report Most Bullying

According to the Pew Research Center, approximately 70 percent of people aged 18 to 24 have been bullied online. While Douglas bore the brunt during this year's Olympics, some of her teammates, including Biles, 19, Raisman, 22, and Madison Kocian, 19, also found themselves on the receiving end of online hate. They posted a picture to Instagram of themselves in bikinis on a Rio beach after the games.

It wasn't their expressions, hair or patriotism that some took issue with, but their muscular builds.

"Everybody's on social media in my generation and everybody's using it," Douglas said. "I think that's why a lot of teens, more than adults, are dealing with these problems."

Douglas said she stayed offline before the Olympics to concentrate on her training. She said she wasn't ready to deal with the flood of criticism she received when she finally logged back on.

"I Googled myself after the team event, after we won the gold," she said, explaining how she found out she'd become a target of online bullies once again. "I probably shouldn't have done that."

She said when she first saw what people were saying, she thought it "was gonna blow away" quickly, but when it didn't, it really began to affect her.

People Can Be Hurtful

"When they talk about my hair or me not putting my hand up on my heart or me being very salty in the stands, they're really criticizing me, and it doesn't really feel good," Douglas tearfully told reporters in Rio in August. "It was a little bit hurtful."

Douglas can still recall the hurt she felt, although it no longer brings tears.

"We already feel a lot of pressure being out on the competition floor ... and when someone has to deal with that, you know, it's a lot," she said. "It was a lot for me."

She continued, "I thought people were taking such small things and making them a bigger deal than they were and I had accomplished something so great. You know, going back to the Olympics, winning another team medal, qualifying for the bar finals. I was like, wait, why can't they focus on the good instead of the negative?"

Douglas doesn't claim to know the answers, but she knows it's not because of anything she did or didn't do. She's hoping to instill that sense of self-worth into young people she plans to meet while touring schools for Hack Harassment.

"I feel like when you really stand up for yourself and you really tell people, 'Hey, you know, that's not right,' ... they back off," she said. "You gotta face the situation without fear."

Quiz

- 1 Which of the following options BEST supports the idea that Douglas is no longer concerned with what online bullies think?
- (A) She was hoping to see articles and tweets talking about her stunning performance on the uneven bars.
 - (B) It was enough to draw tears from Douglas, who later apologized for how those people interpreted her behavior.
 - (C) As the three-time Olympic gold medalist heads into 2017, she's dried her tears and is holding her head up high, declaring that she's "overcome it."
 - (D) "I feel like when you really stand up for yourself and you really tell people, 'Hey, you know, that's not right,' ... they back off," she said. "You gotta face the situation without fear."
- 2 Read the first paragraph of the section "Young Adults Report Most Bullying."

According to the Pew Research Center, approximately 70 percent of people aged 18 to 24 have been bullied online. While Douglas bore the brunt during this year's Olympics, some of her teammates, including Biles, 19, Raisman, 22, and Madison Kocian, 19, also found themselves on the receiving end of online hate. They posted a picture to Instagram of themselves in bikinis on a Rio beach after the games.

Which idea is BEST supported by the information in this paragraph?

- (A) Many young people have experienced some form of online bullying.
- (B) Most online bullying occurs on social media sites such as Instagram.
- (C) All Olympic athletes face some form of online bullying during their careers.
- (D) A lot of young people keep using social media despite the online bullying problem.

3 Read the introduction [paragraphs 1-3].

What does the following sentence from the introduction accomplish?

"I was like, 'What? This can't be a thing,'" Douglas recalled in a phone interview Wednesday.

- (A) It emphasizes that Douglas should not have gone online to see what people were saying about her.
- (B) It provides information about Douglas' decision to combat online bullying.
- (C) It explains that Douglas denied doing anything that might offend others during the Olympics.
- (D) It shows how shocked and upset Douglas was that people did not focus on her Olympic performance.

4 Which section of the article explains how Douglas is fighting online bullying?

- (A) Introduction [paragraphs 1-3]
- (B) "Things Got Worse"
- (C) "Keeping Your Head High"
- (D) "Young Adults Report Most Bullying"