VILE PORNOGRAPHY, SEXUAL MISCREANTS, AND ELECTRONIC STALKERS – POLICY DISCOURSES OF YOUTH INTERNET SAFETY

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Across the generations of youth who have had access to information technologies, prevalent media and legislative discourses have taken as their object the protection of children as they go about playing, communicating and working online. As Thomas (1998) asks, "If the goal of law enforcement is to 'protect' us from high tech hoodlums, as is so often claimed, the question remains: what is it that is being 'protected'? And what does it mean to be 'protected'? What are the 'positive effects' of protection?" (p. 386). In the case of Internet safety, legislative and media discourses have variously figured youth and information technologies relative to the future of the nation – producing and reconstituting spaces, technologies and individuals. Cyberspaces, digital natives, floods of vile content, and shadowy Internet predators are produced through these discourses, grounded in conceptual resources made possible by varying patterns of technology adoption and use. The protection of youth online requires an intertwining of childhood and technological development, bounding off youth from various forms of behavior, content, and predatory individuals. Legislative and media images of an information based economy of the future striate technological spaces into more efficient spheres of childhood development, producing a workforce which will in turn develop and support the information technologies of the 21st century.

In 1994, writing a letter to a constituent apparently concerned about issues of content and crime online, Senator Jim Exon stated that:

> All Americans look forward to the arrival of new telecommunications technology. Families will gain new options for communication and entertainment and students will gain easy access to a wealth of knowledge. At the same time, recent stories of computer and telecommunications technologies being used to transmit pornography, to engage in "electronic stalking" and to engage children in pornographic or indecent electronic conversations send shivers up the spine of all families... As I said in my statement introducing the Decency Amendments, the information superhighway should not become a 'red light district.' (1994)

Exon's statement outlines a particular vision of "new telecommunications technology," "students," and the nation, presented alongside these dangers otherwise unregulated technological spaces might pose to society. In so doing, he marks out a variety of

potential problems which would go on to draw national attention – notably stalking, sexual predation, and pornography. However, only one would truly capture the attention of the media and other legislators in 1994, in this instance that of cyberporn. The construction of particular "panics" over youth Internet safety are strategic – they emerge as the widespread adoption of particular forms of technology make possible particular governing productivities, both in terms of conceptual availability and material affordances. Put more simply, social patterns of technology adoption and use make possible forms of "panic," which in turn set the conditions for various forms of governance.

As such, the various concerns over youth Internet safety can be contextualized within the broader, disjointed shift from disciplinary society (Foucault, 1977) to societies of control (Deleuze, 1992), undergirded by the adoption of information technologies. Read in such a way, legislative attempts to protect youth online – variously supported by forms of media coverage – become visible as exploratory moves to harness the productivities of control technologies. Nunes (1999) notes that, "metaphors [of cyberspace] do not just organize space; they create a space, or more accurately, they substantiate cyberspace as a virtual topography," Through metaphors of information technology, media reports and legislators produce forms of cyberspace, moving from the smooth virtuality of the teenage hacker scare through to the striated information highways of the cyberporn and predator panics.

Fundamentally, the problematization of teenage hacking in the 1980s by legislators and the media was not a response to the broad range of computer crimes perpetrated by both adults and youth. Instead, the response represented an intersection of anxieties surrounding youth and technology in a pattern which would be similarly reproduced throughout the history of Internet safety. Personal computers – and by extension the youth who used them – were largely underdetermined by the adults purchasing them for use in the family home. Both a product and reinforcement of these anxieties, Wargames and the media coverage surrounding the 414 gang provided a widely accessible narrative through which to conceptualize computer technologies and a generation of youth for the first time. While earlier narratives of adult computer crime held little relevance for middle class and affluent households, the relative lack of understanding around youth computer use both made possible worst-case narratives of the teenage hacker, and demanded some form of adult intervention. These narratives discursively constituted a computerized generation in a lawless computerized space relative to adults being left behind in the "real world," necessitating legislative territorialization as part of a process to establish the computer world as a safe space for commerce and private communication.

Similarly the ineffectual move by legislators to bound off pornographic content through the CDA was not one of moral panic. Instead it becomes an initial, stumbling foray into the harnessing the new potentials and productivities made possible by the Internet as a control technology, using the operative codes of disciplinary power. Further, by developing highly controversial legislation addressing a widely publicized media issue, public attention was drawn to the issue of pornographic and obscene content online. Between the stable regulatory effort of CIPA – demonstrating the willingness of the state

to filter public information systems – and the public statements of Gore and Clinton, an image of appropriate parenting practice was placed into circulation. It became clear that even with successful legislation, parents would play an important role in the supervision of online spaces, and developers of filtering technology would provide the tools through which to facilitate such supervision. As Guins (2008) describes: In line with the instrumentalist view of technology, the state and the market take a "hands-off" approach that refines their role as supplier of tools legislating to enable through self-regulation. In our hands is placed a beneficent technology that will enable parents to exert more control over culture with ease and automatic results... Security resides in the home and in the hand of parental control. (p. 44)

While, undoubtedly, the legislative efforts of Senators Exon and Grassley were sincere, the failure of the CDA simply "works" with the distribution of filtering technologies into the home as part of the broader assemblage of Internet Safety.

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