

Netcitizenship

Addressing Cyberevenge and Sexbullying

Raphael Cohen-Almagor ¹

The University of Hull

Abstract

This article discusses the phenomena of Cyberevenge, sexbullying, and sextortion, especially among young people. The discussion, based on extensive review of books, research reports, newspapers, journal articles and pertinent websites, analyzes these challenges. The article suggests some remedies to counter these online social ills which pertain to promoting responsibility of netcitizens, schools, governments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and social networking sites.

Key words: Cyberevenge; homophobic bullying; Internet; netcitizenship; responsibility; revenge porn; sexbullying; sextortion; social networking

Man is the only animal that blushes. Or needs to.
—Mark Twain

Introduction

The Internet has created new markets and is profoundly changing the way people interact, express themselves, relax, find leisure, explore the world and think about their lives. The Internet, like the electric grid, is made of physical elements that constitute a set of connected nodes. Beyond its physical elements, the Internet includes an interdependent interplay of agents who engage in various social but also anti-social activities. At the dawn of the 21st Century, social networking sites were launched. These sites enable netusers to share information, photos, private journals, hobbies and interests with networks of mutual friends. They provide both off-line and online friends with the ability to email and chat online, connect classmates and study partners,

contact friends of friends. Social networking sites also open ventures by providing forums where business people and co-workers can network and interact, single people meet other singles, matchmakers facilitate bonding between friends, and families map their family trees. While social networking is often used for pro-social activities,² such networks might also be abused for negative, anti-social purposes.

The Internet's design and *raison d'être* enable netusers to post and download anything they see fit, but soon enough people began to exploit the net's massive potential to enhance partisan interests, some of which are

² Chih-Chien Wang and Chia-Hsin Wang, "Helping Others in Online Games: Prosocial Behavior in Cyberspace", *CyberPsychology, Behavior & Social Networking*, Vol. 11 (2008): 344-346; Kaveri Subrahmanyam, Stephanie M. Reich, Natalia Waechter and Guadalupe Espinoza, "Online and Offline Social Networks: Use of Social Networking by Emerging Adults", *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 29, Issue 6 (2008) 420-433; Michelle F. Wright and Yan Li, "The Associations between Young Adults' Face-to-face Prosocial Behaviors and Their Online Prosocial Behaviors", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 27, Issue 5 (September 2011): 1959-1962.

¹ I am grateful to the Editor and referees of the *Journal of Applied Ethics and Philosophy* for their extensive constructive comments. All websites were accessed on August 5, 2015.

harmful and anti-social. As can be expected, given that the Internet has been a part of our lives for a relatively short time, the discussions of the psychology of social networking, its responsible use and whether steps should be taken to self-regulate or regulate it are in their infancy. Generally speaking, the Internet is perceived as a free highway, and the way to combat problematic speech is said to be by more speech. In the United States, still the home of the majority of Internet sites in the world and the land of the First Amendment, emphasis is put on education. Americans put far more protections on free expression than restrictions on speech. We should not allow the abusers to dictate the rules of the game. But of course we should fight against those who abuse this freedom. The discussion about the appropriate means to combat abuse is very much in its embryonic phase.

The objective of this article is to discuss the phenomena of cyberevenge, sexbullying and sextortion. As the Internet provides a forum for making sexual advances and for sharing sexual experiences, it also serves abusers who exploit intimate vulnerabilities to take revenge. Revenge porn is a growing concern especially among young adults who change partners.³ Sometimes, when the termination of relationships is non-consensual, the disappointed partner utilizes technology to share with others the past intimate moments as revenge. The Internet also provides easy ways for sexbullying (bullying that focuses on sexual issues) and sextortion (extortion by the exploitation of sex and intimacy).

I make a distinction between netusers and netcitizens.⁴ The term "netuser" refers to people who use the Internet. It is a neutral term. It does not convey any clue as to how people use the Internet. It does not suggest any appraisal of their use. In turn, the term "netcitizen" as it is employed here is not neutral. It describes a responsible user of the Internet. Netcitizens are people who use the Internet as an integral part of their real life. That is to say, their virtual life is not separated from their real life. Even if they invent an identity for themselves on social networks such as Second Life,⁵ they do it

³ Heather Saul, "Revenge porn 'on the rise in the UK', campaigners warn", *The Independent* (April 5, 2014); Ronald Chavez, "Microsoft joins Google in removing links to revenge porn", *MashableUK* (July 23, 2015), <http://mashable.com/2015/07/22/microsoft-joins-google-will-remove-links-to-revenge-porn/>; Jacqueline Beauchere, "Revenge porn: Putting victims back in control", *Microsoft* (July 22, 2015), <http://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2015/07/22/revenge-porn-putting-victims-back-in-control/>

⁴ Netcitizens are also called Netizens.

⁵ Second Life a virtual world that was launched on June 23, 2003 by Linden Lab. Its users, called "residents", interact with one another via avatars. Second Life provides

in a responsible manner. They still hold themselves accountable for the consequences of their Internet use. In other words, netcitizens are good citizens of the Internet. They contribute to the Internet's use and growth while making an effort to ensure that their communications and Net use are constructive. They foster free speech, open access and social culture of respecting others, and of not harming others. Netcitizens are netusers with a sense of responsibility. This article makes a plea for netcitizenship.

Cyberevenge

Cyberevenge is a sub-category of cyberbullying: using the Internet to settle accounts, taking revenge for disliked conduct of another. Commonly it involves invasion of privacy.⁶ Modern technology has amplified the bullying phenomenon tenfold. Cyber bullies can mask their identity and make use of text messaging, email, instant messaging, message boards, chat rooms, web pages, webcams, blogs, social networking websites, and audio-visual sharing sites such as Flickr (online photo management and sharing application) and YouTube to cause embarrassment to others. The perceived anonymity of the Internet is instrumental in enticing people to cyberevenge. The humiliation can now be posted on many cyber locations, and the list of technological arenas keeps growing with the inventions of new tools and mechanisms. Most cell phones have picture-taking and video-recording capabilities that can easily be uploaded to the Internet. The offensive files could involve pestering, vicious or sexual warnings or threats.⁷

However, if one does not take active steps to conceal one's IP address and other revealing details, it is quite easy to reveal one's identity. Thus, as in cyberbullying cases, a vicious cycle is opened where victims may wish to avenge the revenge or gain compensation. One form of social irresponsibility might yet again lead to another or it might lead to legal battles. Commonly the revenge involves one of the most private characteristics of human life – sex.

residents with opportunities to explore, socialize, participate in individual and group activities, create and trade virtual properties and services, and travel throughout the world. See <http://secondlife.com/whatis/>

⁶ On privacy, see R. Cohen-Almagor, *The Scope of Tolerance: Studies on the Costs of Free Expression and Freedom of the Press* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006): 35-76. For further discussion, see Andrei Marmor, "What Is the Right to Privacy?", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 43(1) (2015): 3-26.

⁷ "Bullying", http://northamptonshirescb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/g_bullying.html

In Ireland, Damien Mulley had lost his bags in a flight. He did not like the way the company, Sky Handling Partners, tried to resolve the matter and posted an angry and frustrated post on his blog.⁸ Mulley's language explicit and blunt, full of rude adjectives, angered someone at Sky Handling Partners who sought cyberevenge by signing Mulley up to a gay dating website and filling in details on his behalf, using his name and email. When Mulley discovered this, he ran a quick reverse Domain Name System check to locate who was sending the false information. The DNS check showed that the originator of the cyberevenge post came from City Jet Handling, which is the former name of Sky Handling Partners. Mulley asked to speak with the Sky manager and when refused he posted his story on Digg, a popular Irish social networking site.⁹ When Mulley's story hit the front page of Digg, Mulley had to move servers to keep up with the traffic on his blog.¹⁰ It is safe to say that the reputation of City Jet Handling was not served by this irresponsible conduct. Freedom of expression is easy to use, by everyone.

Pupils are increasingly using social networking sites to take revenge and undermine disliked teachers. Often they do this by spreading offensive sexual allegations against their targets. Pupils are called to join social networking groups dedicated to offend teachers. In a survey of 630 UK teachers, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers found 94 said they knew of colleagues who had had a group set up to discuss and post abusive messages about them. False social networking profiles can be easily opened in the name of others. In one incident it was reported that such profile was opened in the name of a teacher who was said to enjoy "under-age sex with both boys and girls."¹¹

Revenge Porn and Sexbullying

A widespread manifestation of cyberevenge is revenge porn designed to harass and humiliate the victim. "Sexting" is the sharing of explicit texts, nude photos and

8 Damien Mulley, "Why Sky Handling Partners are cunts", <http://www.mulley.net/2007/06/04/why-sky-handling-partners-are-cunts/>

9 <http://about.digg.com/>; Damien Mulley, "Sky Handling Partners – The Return – So who's signing me up for dating websites?", <http://www.mulley.net/2007/06/20/sky-handling-partners-the-return-so-whos-signing-me-up-for-dating-websites/>

10 Mick Fealty, "Dublin company and a nasty cyber revenge...", *Sluggers O'Toole* (June 21, 2007), <http://sluggerotoole.com/2007/06/21/dublin-company-takes-nasty-cyber-revenge/>

11 Katherine Sellgren, "Teachers bullied by 'hate sites'", *BBC.com* (March 31, 2010).

videos via cellphone. The sending of sexually explicit photos electronically, primarily between cell phones, is on the rise. Kiss-and-tell now becomes show-and-tell. Sexual partners enjoy sharing their intimate moments. In 2008, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy surveyed teens and young adults about sexting or posting such materials online. The results revealed that 39 per cent of teens in the US had sent or posted sexually suggestive messages, and 48 per cent reported receiving such messages.¹² Another 2008 survey showed that 20% of American teens (ages 13-19) and 33% of young adults (ages 20-26) have sent or posted nude or semi-nude pictures or video of themselves.¹³ A 2009 survey reported similarly that about 1 in five teens (13-18) had sent, received or forwarded sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude photos through text messages or email ("Someone put embarrassing pictures or videos of you on an Internet page without your permission," 11%; "Someone videotaped or photographed you doing something embarrassing without your knowledge and shared it with other people," 9%).¹⁴ A 2011 European study found that fifteen percent of 11 to 16 year-olds received peer-to-peer sexual messages or images.¹⁵ With such a volume of activity, no wonder revenge porn is on the increase.

Sexting is fine as long as it is done between consenting people. There is no point to prescribing that only adults, 18 year-old and older, may use sexting. This prescription would not hold water.¹⁶ Such legislation would not be worth the paper on which it is written. It would be as pointless as prohibiting the smoking of weed on campuses today and as the alcohol prohibition in the United States was during the 1920s. It would make many

12 Katy Hastings, "Teenager commits suicide after 'sexting' a nude photo to her boyfriend made her life a misery", *MailOnline* (March 11, 2009), <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1161112/Teenager-commits-suicide-sexting-nude-photo-boyfriend-life-misery.html>

13 Dena Sacco, Rebecca Argudin, James Maguire *et al.*, "Sexting: Youth Practices and Legal Implications", *Berkman Research Publication* No. 2010-8 (June 22, 2010): 5-6.

14 The MTV-Associated Press Poll, *Digital Abuse Survey*, conducted by Knowledge Networks (September 23, 2009), http://www.athinline.org/MTV-AP_Digital_Abuse_Study_Full.pdf

15 Bojana Lobe, Sonia Livingstone, Kjartan Ólafsson and Hana Vodeb, *Cross-national Comparison of Risks and Safety on the internet* (LSE, London: EU Kids Online, August 2011): 10. See also Michele L. Ybarra and Kimberly J. Mitchell, "Sexting' and Its Relation to Sexual Activity and Sexual Risk Behavior in a National Survey of Adolescents", *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Vol. 55 (2014): 757-764.

16 Amy Adele Hasinoff, *Sexting Panic: Rethinking Criminalization, Privacy, and Consent* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

young people criminals. Distributing sex images without consent, however, is criminal. In Britain, those who do this commit an offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003.¹⁷ Society has an obligation to fight against sexbullying as it has an obligation to combat any other form of bullying.

Many couples do not stay together. Later, after they break up, one or both of them sometime betray their mutual trust and post intimate, private photos on the Net. Internet sites collect explicit photos depicting ex-girlfriends in sexual situations.¹⁸ One site promises "Nude and REAL Ex - Girlfriends and Ex - Wives Photo Blog Submitted by Surfers as Revenge or Bragging Rights."¹⁹

Sexbullying includes the creation of graphic websites or SNS pages devoted to harassing a person, ranking the fattest or "sluttiest" student, and online death threats.²⁰ Sexbullies are often motivated by anger, revenge or frustration. Sometimes they sexbully for entertainment or because they are bored or have the opportunity. Some have a wicked sense of humour or wish to receive some sort of recognition from their peers. The power-hungry do it to torment others and for boosting their craving-attention ego. They get a perverse sense of gratification from tormenting others and causing them distress.²¹

Sexbullying might cause significant emotional and reputational damages. The effects of posting intimate photos with disparaging descriptions and identifying details can be devastating. Some victims said that they lost their jobs, had difficulties in establishing new relationships, were approached by strangers who recognized their photos, and experienced difficulties as a result in their friendships and family relationships.²² Sexbullying might also lead to tragic

17 Sexual Offences Act 2003, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/42/contents>

18 Richard Morgan, "Revenge Porn", *DETAILS* (September 30, 2008), at <http://www.details.com/sex-relationships/porn-and-perversions/200809/revenge-porn>

19 <http://www.exgfpics.com/blog/>. See also the explicit and graphic <http://www.revengetv.com/t1/>

20 Ruth Gerson and Nancy Rappaport, "Cyber Cruelty: Understanding and Preventing the New Bullying", *Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol. 1 (2011): 67-71.

21 Why do kids cyberbully each other?, http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/why_do_kids_cyberbully_each_other.html. See also Dorothy L. Espelage, Kathleen C. Basile, Lisa De La Rue and Merle E. Hamburger, "Longitudinal Associations Among Bully, Homophobic Teasing, and Sexual Violence Perpetration Among Middle School Students", *J Interpers Violence* (published online October 13, 2014). One referee noted that the vicious person believes that his bad actions are normal, even right, and that his critics are wrong. He is proud of his acts and does not understand why people blame him.

22 Erica Goode, "Victims Push Laws to End Online Revenge

and most unnecessary loss of life. In several instances, the publication of photos contributed to suicide. For instance, after her former boyfriend distributed nude pictures of her to hundreds of students at high schools in her area, Jessica Logan was tormented by classmates. Her peers were harassing her, calling her offline and online slut, porn queen, whore. The 18-year-old Ohio girl had been harassed by her peers at her school so badly that she became depressed and even afraid to attend classes. Jessie Logan's grades plummeted, and she started skipping school. When Jessie would attend school, she would hide in the bathroom to avoid being teased. Logan committed suicide in July 2008 just weeks after appearing on TV to tell her story and stop others suffering in the same way.²³

In the Spring of 2009, a 13 year-old student named Hope Witsell sent her own topless photo to a boy she liked in order to get his attention. A third party intercepted the photo while using the boy's cell phone and soon enough the photo had gone viral. It was circulated to her peers who began taunting Witsell, calling her "slut" and "whore." A MySpace page titled "Hope haters" was established.²⁴ After a few months of constant badgering, Hope could not stand it anymore and hanged herself in her bedroom.

The ease of taking photos with digital media also gives rise to sextortion. Sextortion involves varying forms of maliciousness and deceit. People may take photos of a sexual nature for their own pleasure and

Posts", *NY Times* (September 23, 2013), http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/24/us/victims-push-laws-to-end-online-revenge-posts.html?hp&_r=0

23 Katy Hastings, "Teenager commits suicide after 'sexting' a nude photo to her boyfriend made her life a misery", *MailOnline* (March 11, 2009), <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1161112/Teenager-commits-suicide-sexting-nude-photo-boyfriend-life-misery.html>; Mike Celizic, "Her teen committed suicide over 'sexting'", *MSNBC.com* (March 6, 2009), at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/29546030/>; "Jessica Logan (18) hanged herself after her boyfriend circulated a nude photo of her", *MyDeathSpace.com* (March 7, 2009), [http://www.mydeathspace.com/article/2009/03/07/Jessica_Logan_\(18\)_hanged_herself_after_her_boyfriend_circulated_a_nude_photo_of_her](http://www.mydeathspace.com/article/2009/03/07/Jessica_Logan_(18)_hanged_herself_after_her_boyfriend_circulated_a_nude_photo_of_her)

24 Randi Kaye, "How a cell phone picture led to girl's suicide", *CNN.com* (October 7, 2010), http://articles.cnn.com/2010-10-07/living/hope.witsells.story_1_photo-new-school-year-scarves?_s=PM:LIVING; Michael Inbar, "'Sexting' bullying cited in teen's suicide", *MSNBC.com* (December 2, 2009), http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/34236377/ns/today-today_people/; Pete Kotz, "Hope Witsell, 13, Commits Suicide Due to Bullying Over Topless Photo She Sexted", *True Crime Report* (December 2, 2009), http://www.truecrimereport.com/2009/12/hope_witsell_13_commits_suicid.php

use. Later those photos might become a source of trouble as they are abused to coerce or to extort from the photographed people. The originators of the photos become victims. As they wish their intimate photos to reach only certain eyes and not others, once the photos reach the wrong eyes those photos might be used for blackmail. Trust, of course, is a major issue. If you do not trust the person with whom you share intimate photos or you are unable to save and/or transmit the photos in a secure place or way that is for designated eyes only, you should avoid taking such photos.

Some forms of sextortion are malicious and deceitful from the start. These forms of conduct are also known as webcam blackmail, where criminals deceive webcam users into unclothing and performing sex acts.²⁵ Here it is not about relationships that had turned sour. Rather it involves criminal design to manipulate people, often young people, deceive them and use their sexuality and naiveté against them.

Adolescents are the most frequent victims of sextortion.²⁶ Netcitizens need to share with younger people their experiences and ideas on how to keep safe online, and advise them what to do if they run into trouble. It is very important to speak to adolescents about the importance of privacy. There is no need for adolescents to divulge too much information about themselves or to expose themselves in intimate ways. They should be extra careful as to whom they reveal personal information. We need to instruct them to listen to their feelings: If postings do not look right, do not feel right, or make Netusers uncomfortable, they should consult a trusted adult. Netcitizens may spend time with younger friends and members of family, showing them how to responsibly use technology and how to report different forms of cyberbullying, explaining that not

reporting cyberbullying only plays into the bully's hands.

Young people might be reluctant to report such intimate and personal incidents to their families and they may not wish to involve the police. Thus it is suggested that awareness will be raised about existing hotlines that are available to Netusers who may wish to remain unidentified to pinpoint disturbing content. One example is www.cybertipline.com operated by the American National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC). Hotlines have to be transparent. Netcitizens should be aware – at the point of entry – of the persons/organizations responsible for running the hotline system and those persons and organizations on whose behalf hotlines are operated. Transparency also means that explanation is provided as to which concerns will be processed, under what criteria and by which public authorities. The reporting system should be explained in sufficient detail, Netcitizens should have the ability to track their concerns throughout the process, and they should be informed of the final outcome of the process.²⁷ To this end, organizations running hotline systems need to publish reports about their work.

Easy targets for all forms of harassment and sexbullying are youth who are questioning their sexuality or are embracing unorthodox sexual preferences: homosexuality, bi-sexuality or trans-gender identity.²⁸ They are at a greater risk than their peers because they seek acceptance, reassurance and like-minded people.²⁹ Thus they use social networking sites to communicate with people and by doing this they also expose themselves to potential abusers who might wish to humiliate and expose them. Outing homosexuals against their will is another form of sexbullying which can be termed homophobic bullying. It might cause enormous strain which, in turn, might lead to suicidal thoughts and actions. Non-consensual outing blurs the line between private and public, and it might have very tragic consequences.

25 Martin Bagot, "Thousands of teens blackmailed by 'sextortion' criminals who threaten to post naked pictures online", *Mirror* (August 11, 2014), <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/thousands-teens-blackmailed-sextortion-criminals-4038111>; "Sextortion", *BBC*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/profiles/40DhRnbN7b69gMkPqsJ1m0Q/sextortion>; "Sextortion", *FBI* (July 2015), <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2015/july/sextortion>. See also Stop Cyber Sextortion, *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/STOP-Cyber-Sextortion/666823696724014>

26 Sonya Colberg, "Teen girls are most-common target of sextortion, OKC detective says", *NewsOK* (August 24, 2010), <http://newsok.com/teen-girls-are-most-common-target-of-sextortion-okc-detective-says/article/3488122>; Erin McClam, "Experts increasingly worried about 'sextortion' of minors online", *CNBC* (July 16, 2013), <http://www.cnbc.com/id/100889001>; Amy Williams, "Teen Safety in the News: Sextortion, the New Online 'Epidemic'", *TeenSafe* (June 1, 2015), <http://www.teensafe.com/blog/teen-safety-news-sextortion-new-online-epidemic/>

27 Jens Waltermann, and Marcel Machill (eds.), *Protecting Our Children on the internet: Towards a New Culture of Responsibility* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Foundation, 2000): 48.

28 Elliot Spagat, "Transgender Teen Commits Suicide After Bullying", *Time* (April 11, 2015).

29 Andrew Shrock and dana boyd, "Problematic Youth Interaction Online: Solicitation, Harassment, and Cyberbullying", in Kevin B. Wright and Lynn M. Webb (eds.), *Computer-Mediated Communication in Personal Relationships* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011). See also R.C. Savin-Williams, "Verbal and Physical Abuse as Stressors in the Lives of Lesbian, Gay Male, and Bisexual Youths: Associations with School Problems, Running Away, Substance Abuse, Prostitution, and Suicide", *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 62 (1994): 261-269.

18-year-old student Tyler Clementi asked his roommate, Dharun Ravi, to give him some privacy in the room they shared at Rutgers University dorms. Ravi agreed, and went down the hall into a friend's room, where he allegedly logged onto his Skype account and connected to a webcam he had set up in their shared room. Ravi and his friend watched Clementi engaged in a sexual encounter with another man. Ravi then allegedly streamed the video live, and that same night broadcast to the 150 followers of his Twitter feed details of his voyeuristic escapade, outing Clementi in the process and writing with no sense of civility and friendship: "Roommate asked for the room till midnight. I went into Molly's room and turned on my webcam. I saw him making out with a dude. Yay."³⁰ Two evenings later, Ravi allegedly tweeted: "Anyone with iChat, I dare you to video chat me between the hours of 9.30 and 12. Yes it's happening again."³¹ The next day, students told Clementi his privacy had been violated via webcam. His world fell apart. Having asked no one for help, Clementi committed suicide. Ravi's alleged clear-eyed irresponsible conduct directly led to this most unnecessary death. Civility, decency, privacy and respect for others are significant. People should think about the likely consequences of their actions.

Netcitizenship

This article makes a plea for Netcitizenship, for conducting one's affairs on the Internet with a sense of social responsibility. People have wider moral and social responsibilities to their community. These are dictated by social norms and by one's conscience. Some things are not to be done. Common standards of civility and decency compel us to keep some activities private. People live within a community and understand that actions have consequences. Most of our conduct is other-regarding in one way or another, affecting the lives of other people. Acting responsibly means acting

30 Ed Pilkington, "Tyler Clementi, student outed as gay on internet, jumps to his death", *Guardian.co.uk* (September 30, 2010), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/sep/30/tyler-clementi-gay-student-suicide>; Paul Thompson, "Student jumps to his death after roommate secretly films gay sex session and puts it on the internet", *MailOnline* (September 30, 2010), <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1316319/NY-student-Tyler-Clementi-commits-suicide-gay-sex-encounter-online.html#>

31 *Ibid.* For further discussion, see Kate Zernike, "Rutgers Webcam-Spying Defendant Is Sentenced to 30-Day Jail Term", *New York Times* (May 21, 2012), http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/22/nyregion/rutgers-spying-defendant-sentenced-to-30-days-in-jail.html?_r=1&nl=todaysheadlines&emc=edit_th_20120522

with foresight: Seeing that offensive and harmful consequences of one's conduct that can be avoided are, indeed, avoided.

Responsibility and accountability are important as sometimes people and organizations seek independence from their responsibilities. Ambrose Bierce, an American journalist and satirist, described responsibility as a "detachable burden easily shifted to the shoulders of God, Fate, Fortune, Luck or one's neighbor. In the days of astrology it was customary to unload it upon a star."³² In the Internet age, Netusers unload it upon cyberspace. Here an interesting phenomenon emerged that confuses the concept of moral and social responsibility. In the offline, real world, people know that they are responsible for the consequences of their conduct, speech as well as action. In the online, cyber world, we sometimes witness unfortunate responsibility shake-off. The Internet has a dis-inhibition effect. The freedom allows language one would dread to use in real life, words one need not abide by, imagination that trumps conventional norms and standards.³³

Netcitizenship is composed of three layers: legal, moral and social responsibility:

Legal responsibility refers to addressing the issue by agencies of the state. Through its various institutions, the state sees fit to provide and administer certain services. It does not leave them for the citizens. For example, the state is responsible for securing its borders against external attacks and to provide security for citizens inside its borders. For that purpose, there are army and police forces, acting in accordance with legally binding decrees that clarify what is allowed in the administration of security. A further example concerns the administration of justice: The state is responsible for establishing courts to settle disputes between individuals, and grievances between citizens and agencies of the state. Presently governments are considering law changes to curb the rising trend in revenge porn.³⁴

32 Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*, 1911, at <http://www.alcyon.com/max/lit/devils/>

33 R. Cohen-Almagor, *Confronting the Internet's Dark Side: Moral and Social Responsibility on the Free Highway* (Washington DC.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 2015).

34 Daisy Wyatt, "Lauren Goodger calls for tougher laws on revenge porn after sex tape leaks online", *The Independent* (July 27, 2014), <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/lauren-goodger-calls-for-tougher-laws-on-revenge-porn-after-sex-tape-leaks-online-9631203.html>; John Lyon, "Newly Effective Arkansas Laws Include Bans On 'Revenge Porn,' Voyeurism Via Drone", *Times Record* (July 26, 2015); <http://swtimes.com/legislature/newly-effective-arkansas-laws-include-bans-revenge-porn-voyeurism-drone#sthash.63QZ1kx.dpuf>; John Moritz, "Lawmakers review penalties to NC's first revenge porn law", *News and*

Agencies of the state see that the Internet is not above the law: what is illegal in the offline world is also illegal on the online world. Sextortion is illegal both offline and online. Citizens are expected to abide by the law.

In moral responsibility, the personal responsibility of the agent to conscience is at issue, with appeals to moral consideration. Certain forms of conduct fall within the realm of morality rather than law. Being mean to others is not illegal yet it contradicts basic norms of civility. In the liberal world, sexting is accepted when conducted between consenting adults. People may debate the morality of the conduct but it is legal. Sexting becomes morally and legally problematic when consent is lacking and more so when sexting abuses and exploits children. It is assumed that there is a causal connection between the agent and the action or the consequences of the action, and that the action was intentional. When people perform a morally significant act, we may think that they may deserve praise. When they fail to perform a morally significant act we may blame them for omission.³⁵

Thus, by moral responsibility it is meant that autonomous agents have the understanding of the options before them, have access to evidence required for making judgments about the benefits and hazards of each option, and are able to weigh the relative value of the consequences of their choice. Responsible agents have a sense of history. They understand the connection between past, present and future. They comprehend causes for action, and are able to appreciate likely consequences of a given conduct. In this context, the idea of conscientiousness is relevant. It describes a condition of an active and inwardly driven pursuit of positive goals, duties, and obligations. The goal is to converge between the ought and the is, that individuals be motivated by ethical standards alongside or instead of profit motives.

William J. FitzPatrick claims that all cases of moral responsibility for bad actions must involve a strong form of akrasia, i.e. acting against one's better judgment.³⁶ If an agent does something bad, either he does so in full knowledge that he should not be doing it, which is clear-eyed akrasia, or he is acting from ignorance. In the former cases the agent will be held responsible. In the latter case whether he is responsible or not will

depend on whether or not his ignorance is culpable. His ignorance will be culpable only if he is responsible for some earlier failure that gave rise to that ignorance. And he will be responsible for that earlier failure again only if that was a case of clear-eyed akrasia. We do not establish culpability until we arrive at a relevant episode of clear-eyed akrasia.³⁷ Ignorance, whether circumstantial or normative, is culpable if the agent could reasonably have been expected to take measures that would have corrected or avoided it, given his capabilities and the opportunities provided by the social context, but failed to do so either due to akrasia or due to vices such as overconfidence, arrogance, dismissiveness, laziness, dogmatism, incuriosity, self-indulgence and contempt.³⁸ Failure to recognize the wrongness or imprudence of one's conduct does not relieve one of responsibility. In the above real-life story, Ravi failed to act in a civil way, respecting the privacy of his roommate due to vices of overconfidence, arrogance, dismissiveness, self-indulgence, contempt for others, or the like.

An understanding of responsibility as protecting individual rights and avoiding the infliction of unjustifiable harm on others is the very basis of liberal morality that presupposes the existence of inviolable individual rights. Responsibility in the sense of honouring interpersonal obligations and responding to the needs of others is a matter of personal choice and of social convention.³⁹ In other words, moral responsibility is often interconnected to social responsibility. Irresponsible conduct that violates basic trust between people about keeping private what should be private is immoral and undermines social conventions and norms, first and foremost those of respect for others, and not harming others.

Lastly, the concept of social responsibility assumes that autonomous agents have the understanding of the options before them, have access to evidence required for making judgments about the benefits and hazards of each option, and able to weigh the relative value of the consequences of their choice. Social responsibility further assumes that people are not islands to

37 *Ibid.*: 593.

38 *Ibid.*: 609. Martha Nussbaum clarified that according to Aristotle akrasia is frequently (not always) caused by an excess of theory and a deficiency in passion. The person who acts akratically against her better judgment is frequently capable of performing correctly in all the intellectual ways; "what she lacks is the heart's confrontation with concrete ethical reality". See M.C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 81. For further discussion, see George Sher, *Who Knew? Responsibility Without Awareness* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).

39 Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice*. Vol. 1 of *Essays on Moral Development* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981).

themselves. We live within a community and have some responsibilities to it. The responsibilities are positive and negative. That is, we have a responsibility to better the society in which we live, and a responsibility to refrain from acting in a way that knowingly might harm our community. Cyberevenge, sexbullying and sextortion have wider negative implications on our community as they undermine trust between people, offend our sensibilities and harm the dignity of the person.

Furthermore, it is assumed that we are rewarded by the social framework in which we live, we care about society, would like to maintain it and to contribute to it. The contribution is proactive. We take active steps to do good and to avoid harm.⁴⁰ Netcitizenship carries burdens and obligations. People should respect their responsibilities, being cognizant of the consequences of their actions. At the same time, people have discretion as to the ways open for them to carry out their responsibilities, in accordance with their capabilities and the circumstances at hand.

In 2009, Craigslist was on the headlines for the wrong reasons. Its adult section was abused for cyberevenge purposes. The victim was a 17 year-old girl who was subjected to a porn attack. Elizabeth A. Thrasher, 40, from Missouri, became the first person to be charged with felony cyberbullying in that state after she allegedly posted photos and personal information of the young girl to the "Casual Encounters" section of Craigslist. Thrasher had an extended argument with her ex-husband. The girl, who was the daughter of the girlfriend of Thrasher's ex-husband, sent Thrasher a message over MySpace. Thrasher responded by posting the youngster's picture, cell phone number, email address, and employer on Craigslist section, which is frequented by adults looking for anonymous, no-strings-attached sex. The girl was bombarded with lewd messages and calls in response, including pornographic pictures from men she did not know.⁴¹

The fact that Craigslist and other such forums can be abused with such ease is most worrying.⁴² More

40 Burton S. Kaliski (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Business and Finance* (New York: Macmillan, 2001); Marvin L. Marshall, "Ensuring Social Responsibility," *Thrust for Educational Leadership*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (1994).

41 Mike Harvey, "American woman Elizabeth Thrasher faces jail over 'cyber-bullying'", *The Sunday Times* (August 19, 2009), http://technology.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/tech_and_web/the_web/article6802494.ece; Dan Goodin, "Woman charged with cyberbullying teen on Craigslist", *The Register* (August 18, 2009); "Cyberbullying Case To Test Megan's Law", *The Law Firm Network* (April 1, 2010).

42 "Craigslist", *NY Times* (December 4, 2011), <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/c/craigslist/index.html>; Associated Press, "CRIME: Another Ohio Craigslist job scam death suspected", *delmarvanow*.

needs to be done to ascertain that the people who post such advertisement are the true advertisers. Otherwise, sexuality-based cyberevenge will increase. ISP Corporate Social Responsibility requires closing the door for Net abusers.⁴³ Craigslist needs to be proactive in setting adequate privacy and security provisions for its users. The hand should not necessarily be the quickest organ in one's body when one is writing; but when it is, the company should ensure good standards of moderation. Livingstone et al persuasively argue for the need to coordinate multi-stakeholder efforts to bring about greater levels of Internet safety and ensure there is meaningful youth participation in all relevant multi-stakeholder groupings.⁴⁴

Conclusion

Social networking sites and blogs have increasingly become breeding grounds for anonymous online groups that attack women, sexual-orientation minorities, and others. The ethical use of information and communication technologies, and the sustainable development of an equitable information society, need a safe and public infosphere for all, where communication and collaboration can flourish, coherently with the application of human rights and the fundamental freedoms in the media. Sustainable development means that our interest in the sound construction of the infosphere must be associated with an equally important, ethical concern for the way in which the latter affects

com (November 25, 2011).

43 Kenneth E. Goodpaster, "Corporate Responsibility and Its Constituents", in George G. Brenkert and Tom L. Beauchamp (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Business Ethics* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2010): 126-157; Gabriel Abend, *The Moral Background: an inquiry into the history of business ethics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014); Michael Kerr, Richard Janda and Chip Pitts, *Corporate Social Responsibility – A Legal Analysis* (Markham, Ontario: LexisNexis, 2009); A.B. Carroll, *Business and Society: Managing Corporate Social Performance* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1981). See also R. Cohen-Almagor, "Freedom of Expression, Internet Responsibility and Business Ethics: The Yahoo! Saga and Its Aftermath", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 106, issue 3 (2012): 353-365.

44 Sonia Livingstone, Giovanna Mascheroni, Kjartan Ólafsson and Leslie Haddon, *Children's Online Risks and Opportunities: Comparative findings from EU Kids Online and Net Children Mobile* (London: EU Kids Online, LSE, November 2014). For further discussion, see K.J. Mitchell, L.M. Jones, H.A. Turner, A. Shattuck & J. Wolak, "The Role of Technology in Peer Harassment: Does It Amplify Harm for Youth?", *Psychology of Violence* (June 1, 2015).

Observer (August 2, 2015), <http://www.newsobserver.com/news/state/north-carolina/article29794702.html>; "Revenge Porn Law", *WXII12* (August 4, 2015), <http://www.wxii12.com/news/revenge-porn-law/34539184>

35 See "Moral Responsibility," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, at <http://www.seop.leeds.ac.uk/entries/moral-responsibility/index.html>

36 William J. FitzPatrick, "Moral Responsibility and Normative Ignorance: Answering a New Skeptical Challenge", *Ethics*, Vol. 118 (2008): 590.

and interacts with the social environment.⁴⁵ Ethical behaviour is behaviour that abides by relevant standards of conduct and considers the consequences of one's actions, and being accountable for it. Ethics is not merely a question of dealing morally well with a given world. It is also a question of shaping the world for the better. This is a proactive approach which perceives agents as world owners, creators, and producers of moral goods.⁴⁶ When Netusers produce evil, society needs to develop adequate mechanisms to educate and raise awareness of the harsh consequences that might result from such an irresponsible behaviour. We all have a shared responsibility to shape a safe and, if possible, better world for our children.

The fundamental principle of social responsibility rests on the duty to make humanity itself our end. The way to do this is by promoting the ends that autonomous human beings freely choose as long as they do not harm others. Abusive language might lead to depression and suicide. Cases of revenge porn, cyberevenge, sexbullying and sextortion should be raised and discussed in schools and, if needed, in the workplace. They should be deliberated openly and fervently. People, especially young people, should be made aware of the power of the word and settle the confusion between online and offline responsibility. Young people are vulnerable and society has an obligation to protect vulnerable third parties.⁴⁷

Responsibility and accountability should be shared by all involved: parents, school teachers and administrators, civil society organizations and business, countries and the international community at large. The aim is that people take responsibility and develop a sense of ownership over their actions, building foundations for change and improvement in their life chances and opportunities. We as a society should invest in transforming Netusers into Netcitizens, people with awareness regarding the consequences of their conduct, users of the Internet who are cognizant about the values and importance of moral and social responsibility. Without such awareness, the present rowdy Internet will continue to be very costly. Safety should be maintained both online and offline, and studies should be carried out about the connections

45 Luciano Floridi, "Ethics in the Infosphere", *The Philosophers' Magazine*, Vol. 6 (2001): 18-19.

46 Luciano Floridi, "Ethics after the Information Revolution", in L. Floridi (ed.), *Handbook of Information and Computer Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

47 K.J. Mitchell, D. Finkelhor & J. Wolak, "Youth Internet Users at Risk for the Most Serious Online Sexual Solicitations", *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Vol. 32 (2007): 532-537. See also Kimberly J. Mitchell, Michele L. Ybarra, Lisa M. Jones and Dorothy Espelage, "What Features Make Online Harassment Incidents Upsetting to Youth?", *Journal of School Violence* (published online January 6, 2015).

between the two. As stopcyberbullying.org holds, the task is to create a generation of good cybercitizens, controlling the technology instead of being controlled by it.⁴⁸

Netcitizens can develop a website, blog, or social networking groups on Facebook and other social Netforums for friends and community in which they evoke awareness to the problems of revenge porn, cyberevenge, sexbullying and sextortion, alerting readers to potential signs of distress that bullied people manifest. The warning signs include unexpected or sudden loss of interest in using the computer; nervous, jumpy, anxious or scared appearance upon accepting messages; with young people, discontinued interest in going to school, extra-curricular and/or general out-of-school activities. Bullied people might be visibly angry, frustrated, depressed or gloomy after using the computer.⁴⁹ They might become abnormally withdrawn and distant from family, friends, and favourite activities. They might lack appetite or suddenly begin to do poorly in school. They might complain frequently of headaches, stomach aches, or other physical ailments, have difficulty in sleeping or have frequent bad dreams, appear troubled or suffer from low self-esteem.⁵⁰

Netcitizens may also point to valuable information on the Internet, put out by The Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use,⁵¹ the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA),⁵² Stop Online Abuse⁵³ and The Cyberbullying Research Center.⁵⁴ In July 2015, an anti-bullying/parent notification app was launched. This anti-bullying app records a video of the bully in real time and notifies the parents of where their child is.⁵⁵ A coordinated effort of all stakeholders – Netcitizens, readers of the Internet, ISPs and web-hosting sites, state authorities and the

48 http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/take_action/take_a_stand_against_cyberbullying.html. For further discussion, see Luciano Floridi, *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

49 Brandy Williams, "6 Signs of Cyber Bullying and What You Can Do About It", Yahoo!

50 Miriam D. Martin, "Suicide and the Cyberbully", <http://ezinearticles.com/?Suicide-and-the-Cyberbully&id=4328660>

51 <https://www.internetsafetyproject.org/wiki/center-safe-and-responsible-internet-use>

52 internet in the Family, *World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers*, <http://www.wan-ifra.org/articles/2011/01/12/internet-in-the-family>

53 <http://www.stoponlineabuse.org.uk/>. The website provides advice for individuals, especially women and LGBT people (lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans) about fighting abuse and harassment online and in other media.

54 <http://www.cyberbullying.us/>

55 <http://the-no-app.com> and <http://apple.co/1MsEaiv>

international community at large, will result in a more responsible Internet. There is a need to assure a certain security level on the Internet, like in any other industry.

I suggest publishing overviews and reports on a regular basis; lobbying for international awareness about the harms and abuse of technology; helping support groups and institutions that want to set up tip-lines, and advancing our knowledge of social networking and the psychology of people who use the Internet for various purposes. Clearly, there is a lot to learn about Net human behaviour and what can be done to increase moral and social responsibility of all parties concerned. The fighting against cyberevenge and sexbullying involves all responsible agents, including me and you.