

## SUBMISSION No. 124

To the Standing Committee,

Firstly I'd like to congratulate the government on opening this issue to public debate and look forward to a considered, but limited, set of actions recommended by this committee.

My name is Kieran Salsone and I'm the Technical Producer and Business Channel Chief for APN newspapers. I deal with online communication on a daily basis and, working for a news outlet, I'm exposed to a constant stream of information regarding 'safety' in the online environment. I'm also 25 years old and given my generation's reliance on and heavy uptake of the internet, would consider myself as having a strong grounding on this issue.

Secondly, I'd like to deal with the points outlined in section (a) ii of the terms of reference:

- abuse of children online (cyber-bullying, cyber-stalking and sexual grooming);
  - The web, and more broadly, the internet, has not significantly changed the landscape of these issues. I find it, as most who study this area, disingenuous to prefix bullying and stalking with the term 'cyber' and consider it a different problem. Both problems have, and always have had, their root causes unchanged by the media over which they occur, whether they be in the schoolground, in public, or online. Traditional methods of dealing with bullying and stalking have failed to curtail these issues outside of cyber-space, and so attempts to deal with their symptoms as they appear on the internet and web will meet the same lack of success. To properly deal with the problems of bullying and stalking online, one must more adequately deal with the root causes, which are not caused by a child's access to the Internet. I recommend, then, that this be addressed as part of a broader discussion and the fantasy that this is a separate issue be abandoned.
  - Sexual grooming, a more serious problem, is likewise not caused by a child's access to the internet. I concede that the internet provides an additional channel by which this can occur, but in both the real and online senses, sexual grooming can be quickly curtailed, and those that attempt to pursue grooming identified, by open discourse between children and parents about what is and isn't sexually appropriate. It is unfortunate that existing Australian mores and values have made us shy away from having these discussions with children, and again, dealing with the problem in the real world is the key to helping children protect themselves online. I recommend that sexual education be introduced to schooling at an earlier stage in the education system, or that public consultation occur with a mind to that outcome. I see this as the only way to adequately protect children from grooming of any kind.
- exposure to illegal and inappropriate content;
  - The first point I would like to make is that the Committee and the Department should cease using the overly vague and ambiguous term 'inappropriate'. Given the lack of a legal definition, it can only introduce uncertainty to the public at large. On a private level, the judgment as to what is and isn't appropriate should be made on an individual (for adults) or familial (for children) basis. If something is to be deemed illegal, it should be made so. In the cases where something cannot or should not be made illegal for whatever reason, it should be left to the discretion of the individual or family involved to make that decision. I should also note that the categories of content that are to be deemed illegal should be as narrow as possible to avoid ambiguity and maintain legal certainty. I recommend that the Howard Government's policy of providing free PC-based filtering software to families be reinstated, and that the lesson to be learned from that offer's low uptake should be that the only people

interested in filtering the internet are a narrow band of lobbyists, and not even a remotely significant proportion of the population.

- inappropriate social and health behaviours in an online environment (e.g. technology addiction, online promotion of anorexia, drug usage, underage drinking and smoking);
  - In terms of technology addiction, and this applies to other aspects of these terms, I would suggest that the problem of technology addiction is in fact two separate phenomena:
    - Firstly, that the natural/socialized predisposition of humans towards communication has been greatly served by these technologies and that there is little to gain from inventing a difference between offline and online communication. This appears to be a kind of 'internal ethnocentrism' where the values of an older generation are clumsily used to judge the behaviours of a younger one.
    - Secondly, in cases of significant social withdrawal through computer games, Émile Durkheim's concept of *Anomie* does well to explain this as a failure of broader society to engage the values of these people in a meaningful way. In western societies this is often attributed not to a lack of societal values, but to a complete disconnect between the narrow values of society and the values that individuals hold. This is extremely complex and affected by the entire breadth and depth of the way we live. My recommendation is that the Committee accept that the problem of social withdrawal in favour of the online environment won't be solved by narrowing the explicit social norms of what is and isn't acceptable. To explicate such a social narrative would only make the problem worse.
  - In terms of the online promotion of anorexia, drug usage, underage drinking and smoking, I would suggest that once again significant *Anomie* as I have explained it above is at play. That being said, even though there is a massive disconnect between social values as seen by legislators and the actual and more broad values of Australian society, it is worth supporting organisations that take a more social (as opposed to legislative) approach such as Beyond Blue. I recommend that the committee undertake a broader study of the affects that narrow explicit social values has on worsening the severity of these problems.
- identity theft; and
  - I see articles about identity theft published on an almost daily basis. In practically every case it is a situation caused by a lack of savvy about the online world that allows predators to take advantage of, mainly elderly, computer users. My recommendation is that more resources should be given to the AFP's contribution to international joint efforts that target the perpetrators of identity theft, and that funding to organizations like Electronic Frontiers Australia be increased so that they may continue and enlarge their work in education the public on online privacy.
- breaches of privacy;
  - My response and recommendations are as above, though in this case I would add that education and awareness are more key.

Lastly I'd like to address section (a)iii of the terms of reference, specifically filtering:

- Task forces such as Centurion and Argos have done a fantastic job of curtailing the trade of child pornography online and offline. Filtering, however, has shown no such effectiveness in places where it currently exists. Proxy and bypass technologies will always be steps ahead of the government's technical abilities, and the added risk of forcing the trade offline (where it is much harder to detect) is very real and very scary. One only has to look at the prevalence of bypass technology (comms dishes and pirate phone networks) in Iran to see the failure

of filtering and the ingenuity of a populace that won't stand for it. The community won't stand for it, those that peddle in human misery won't notice it, and the United States State Department (as well as countless private vendors) provides the tools for mitigating it for free anyway. The benefits are practically nil for the serious cost in public trust and international standing. I recommend that more funding and more staff be given to the AFP and related state taskforces for use in finding the sources of these crimes.

I would comment on other aspects of the terms if I had more time.

Sincerely,

Kieran



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