

**Berkman Center Internet Safety Technical Task Force
First Full Meeting
Washington D.C.
April 30, 2008**

Minutes

Introduction

The meeting opened with brief remarks by Chairman John Palfrey.

Presentation by the Research Advisory Board

The meeting began with a presentation by Amanda Lenhart, Senior Research Specialist, Pew Internet & American Life Project, entitled “Teens, Online Stranger Contact and Cyberbullying: What the Research Tells Us.” She was followed by a presentation by Michele Ybarra, President and Research Director, Internet Solutions for Kids, who presented “Social Networking Sites, Unwanted Sexual Solicitation, Internet Harassment and Cyberbullying.” Next, Janis Wolak, Assistant Research Professor, Crimes Against Children Research Center, University of New Hampshire, presented “Youth Enforcement Surveys by the Crimes Against Children Research Center.” Finally, Task Force co-director danah boyd spoke briefly about some of her findings. During each of these presentations, members of the Task Force asked brief, clarifying questions, while further discussion and comment was saved until after the presentations were completed. Copies of the presentation slides can be found on the Task Force Website. In addition, this session was recorded.

Question and Answer with the Research Advisory Board

After a break for lunch, Task Force members were given the opportunity to ask questions of the researcher-presenters.

The first question asked what the research implies about what kinds of education programs should be developed to address these issues. The researchers answered that the issue is not so much whether kids are hearing the message, but whether they respond to it. If you can view media coverage of this issue as an education program, teens are definitely getting the message. Formal education programs might be helpful in terms of clarification, however, because while kids know about the myth of the 40-year-old lurking in the corner they are not as aware of other risks.

Members also asked about the amount of deception that researchers found online regarding the age of people inappropriately contacting young people on the Internet, and whether this seems to point to less of a need for age verification. Researchers agreed that there was not a lot of evidence to support the deception hypothesis, and that the problem of statutory rape was not going to be solved by age verification.

Researchers were asked, if they had to focus on the top things to do, whether from a technical or education perspective, what they would recommend. The first thing suggested was making inappropriate content, conduct and contact easier to report and creating suggestions for kids to intervene and support safety measures. Education was also suggested, particularly in the areas of statutory rape and inappropriate user-generated content. Another suggestion was to pair up mental health professionals and social networking sites and have mental health professionals monitor the sites, reaching out to at-risk kids. Finally, it was suggested that more peer education and peer contacts should be instituted as a more accessible way for kids to talk about issues of safety.

The next question was about formulating intervention strategies and who should be responsible for this? The answer was that the model was that this should be done not through schools, but through partnership of mental health organizations and professionals with social networking sites.

Next, members asked about how the process of grooming was taken into account when evaluating the threat of sexual solicitation online. The answer was that during the course of research young people were asked what happened to them, and for the most part the responses did not amount to grooming, which is a process more associated with younger children (because it involves reducing inhibitions to sexuality over time).

The next question was about the use of child pornography as something kids engage in as conduct and something that might be used in contact with them. Researchers said that in their research they have found that the percentage of young people who report looking at pornography is the same online as that who report looking at it offline. Across the board kids do not see creation of images of themselves as child pornography, and they frequently produce it for men who are a little bit older than themselves for the purpose of attracting their attention. This is an issue where education is really important.

Next it was asked whether pre-social network sites like Club Penguin were experiencing the same problems with bullying or sexual solicitation, and the answer was no, less than 10% of those who are solicited or harassed are in these virtual worlds.

It was remarked that the realities of the risks presented by the researchers are not the same as those portrayed in the media and concerned about by the attorneys general. Researchers responded that this is a much more nuanced and complicated issue than typically portrayed in the media, and that the kids that really need to be reached are the same kids who are already at risk offline.

Next, it was asked why, since it seems plausible that abductors would use the Internet to reach out to kids, why this was not happening more. The answer was that most sex offenders who offend against children and adolescents are not strangers, and that the stranger abductions you read about are really very rare. People who commit those crimes have certain characteristics that the Internet probably is not that favorable to, including the use of authority over younger kids (which does not translate well on the Internet) and the impulsiveness that tends to accompany most stranger abductions (most teens will not actually reveal a lot of information about

themselves and so it takes a lot of patience to finally strike up a relationship that leads to an offline relationship).

Finally, it was asked whether anyone has done a larger work using a social network site or something similar to ask kids anonymously whether they have encountered someone offline and been assaulted against their consent. The response was that no study like that has been done to their knowledge, but that the numbers in their studies match up with what is seen elsewhere.

Refinement of Scope and Questions to be Addressed

After the researchers left, the Task Force turned to a discussion of how to refine the scope of its inquiry taking the research into account. First, a reminder was issued that the Task Force is guided by the background of the joint-statement between MySpace and the attorneys general, and the reality that the issues being dealt with are complex and broad-based. Suggested areas of discussion included how to narrow the discussion of content and whether or not Cyberbullying should be included within the scope of the Task Force's inquiry.

The discussion began with the language as expressed in the working document: "preventing harmful contact with adults." Participants initially expressed approval with this language as a broad definition of scope, but the suggestion was made that the Task Force should decide what types of specific contact it was worried about and whether it would further divide its inquiry by age group (ex: one set of recommendations for children 12 and under, another for 13 and over). It was agreed that the different age groups will be relevant regardless of whether the scope is formally limited by age. The suggestion was also made that issues of contact and conduct should be either separated, or that, instead of addressing content separately it should be subsumed within discussions about contact and conduct.

The discussion next turned to the issue of child pornography. Some suggested that issue of child pornography generally was beyond the scope of this group; but that it should consider including the use of child pornography in contact with or the conduct of minors as something to be aware of as the inquiry proceeds.

Questions were asked about the position of attorneys general and what they intended the Task Force's focus to be. It was suggested that the Task Force look at what is happening when there are no "walls" separating adults and children, and the fact that much of the contact that occurs in these situations is "wanted" by teens that are compliant. In response, it was reminded that the charge is to look at technological safety for kids, and that this can be much broader than just age verification and social network sites, and to recognize that the Task Force is dealing with international issues but that the its inquiry will have a domestic scope.

It was next decided that the most productive way to discuss scope would be to go through the five questions discussed at the last meeting. In doing so, it was suggested that the questions be reworded to ask, what are the technologies that will assist in limiting, rather than stopping, the harm identified. The questions were then discussed in turn.

1. Is there a technology that can limit harmful contact between adults and children?

Everyone agreed that as a general principle this question should be included in the scope. Concerns were raised about whether the unwanted contact should be defined in terms of the desires of the parents (what parents don't want) or the children (what kids don't want) or both, because these perspectives can vary widely. It was suggested in response to this that the AGs were likely most concerned with empowering parents and allowing them to make the decision as to what is and is not harmful for their child.

Additional concerns were raised about limiting the scope of this question to harmful contact between adults and children, or if it should be expanded to include child to child contact. Part of this concern was driven by the feasibility of technology being able to differentiate children and adults online in a reliable way. Also driving these concerns were the results of the research presented earlier in the day which suggested that the most frequent contact is peer-to-peer rather than adult-child.

2. Is there a technological solution to limiting children from accessing inappropriate content on websites?

Concern for this question was that if the Task Force took on too many projects during its limited tenure its inquiry would fail. Suggestions were made that market forces are already placing tremendous incentives in front of the production of tools that parents can use to limit their children's access to inappropriate content, and that the market may be better suited than the Task Force at tackling this particular problem. It was also suggested that, to the degree that market forces are successful, there is a risk that regulation can get in the way.

An alternative concern was raised that the Task Force should focus less on child access to inappropriate content than on child production of inappropriate content. Some children are producing inappropriate content on their profiles in social networking sites or on their cell phones.

Others suggested that, rather than taking on child pornography or other inappropriate content on the Internet, the Task Force should start with the foundation that has been laid by older studies and issue and update or addendum to these studies. One way of updating these previous studies would be the inclusion of methods to address user-generated content, because this is a relatively recent phenomenon, and that the focus be on Web 2.0 rather than social networking sites alone.

3. Is there a technological solution to limiting the availability of illegal content?

There was a great deal of discussion regarding whether or not illegal content should be included in the scope of the inquiry. It was suggested that if this content were address, it should include child pornography and gambling, but not copyrighted material. It was also reiterated that perhaps user-generated content should be within the scope of the inquiry but commercial or other child pornography should and is being dealt with elsewhere. Another suggestion was made that

if the Task Force is going to branch out into all of these different areas, it should consider breaking up into smaller subcommittees in order to work more efficiently.

Also heavily discussed was the meaning of “illegal” content and what should be included in this question. It was argued that copyright should not be included, and this was generally agreed on although no consensus was reached. It was suggested that illegal be more narrowly defined and the touchstone of what is illegal should also be harmful.

Finally, a non-binding straw poll was taken and the majority present agreed that this should not be a separate question, but that it should be folded into question two, which should deal with the production of inappropriate user-generated content.

4. How do you prevent children from getting onto social networking sites without parental consent?

First, it was suggested that this should be rephrased to ask, is there a technological solution that has the capability to allow parents to block access to social networking sites, if they so desire? To this it was pointed out that kids do not typically access these unwanted sites in the home, and that they also know proxies and are very good at getting around filtering software.

Concerns were expressed about focusing on something narrow – such as social networking sites – rather than at-risk kids more generally. It was also pointed out that the reality of social networking encompasses much more than just Facebook and MySpace, and that it includes instant messaging, Amazon accounts, and anywhere else you can create a profile and communicate with others.

It was next suggested that the question be reframed again, to say: How can we give parents the ability to shut down a kids profile under certain circumstances? The suggestion was made that if a parent can be confirmed as the parent with legal custody over that child and the child is younger than a certain age, the parent should be able to contact the company and have the child’s profile removed. This rephrases the focus from preventing access to empowering parents and giving them more control, in exchange for placing the burden on parents.

In response to this, a final wording of this question was suggested: What tools and technologies can be used to empower parents to have more control and information over the services their children use?

5. How do you prevent young people from engaging in bullying, harassment, and unwanted solicitation?

It was suggested that this question should focus on empowering kids to prevent, avoid and self-report cyberbullying. Immediately, however, concerns were raised that this question was already encompassed by the discussion in question one. Additional concerns were raised that bullying and harassment do not fall within the concerns of the Task Force, that this is not what the attorneys general had in mind, and that, given the limited time frame, this question should not be included. Others pointed out that this is the next big issue and the Task Force ought to address it.

A non-binding straw poll was taken, and it was agreed that instead of focusing on cyberbullying as its own question, it should be folded into the first question as peer-to-peer predation and violence.

Ultimately, the Task Force discussed compressing the five original questions in to the following three:

1. *Is there a technology that can limit harmful contact between children and other people?*
2. *Is there a technology that can limit children from accessing or producing inappropriate and/or illegal content online?*
3. *What tools and technologies can be used to empower parents to have more control and information over the services their children use online?*

Logistics

The meeting concluded with a brief discussion of logistics. First, some members of the Task Force have expressed reservations about using email as the primary mode of discussion. The Berkman Center will work on arranging another method of in-between conversations, such as conference calls. Second, some members have expressed concern that they are being approached for business as part of this Task Force, and it is extremely important this not occur. Third, Task Force members were reminded that it is inappropriate for members to represent to the attorneys general what individual members of the group are saying. This is not a gag order, but a formal mechanism of quarterly reports is in place to communicate with the attorneys general.

Finally, because other discussion ran long, an update about the Technical Advisory Board will be sent out via email. Laura DeBonis, formerly of Google, will chair the board and help come up with other members. All members of the Task Force are encourage to make membership recommendations, though it should be remembered that these should be limited to people with as little financial encumbrance as possible.

The next meeting will take place on June 20, 2008 in Cambridge, Massachusetts.