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MyMoralPanic:

Adolescents, Social Networking, and Child Sex Crime Panic

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In April 2006, 19-year-old-Pete Solis from Travis County, Texas came across a profile on MySpace that caught his attention. The information on the MySpace profile of “Julie Doe” identified her as a 14-year-old high school freshman, and Solis had no reason to doubt she was who she said she was. Solis’s own MySpace page said that he was an 18-year-old high school senior and football star. The two had numerous interactions via MySpace and over the phone before agreeing to meet in real life for a date; in each of these instances, neither Solis nor Doe told the other that their MySpace profiles were not entirely accurate.

According to Solis, the two went to dinner and a movie, followed by some sexual activity not including intercourse (Hylton, 2006a). The following day, Julie’s mother “Jane” called the police and reported the sexual assault of her daughter. In Texas, it is a felony for anyone over the age of 18 to engage in a sexual act with someone under the age of seventeen, though a defendant has an affirmative defense if he is less than three years older than a victim who is at least 14 years old (Texas§ 22. 011). Solis faced potential criminal charges for statutory rape and violated MySpace’s terms of service policy by intentionally providing false information. It turned out that Julie Doe was actually 13 years old and thus also in violation of MySpace’s terms. Her mother filed a lawsuit against MySpace seeking \$30 million in damages, alleging, “MySpace actively and passively encourages young underage children to join MySpace, and then directs them to communicate and socialize with complete strangers” (*Doe v. MySpace, Inc*, 2006, 13). As such, the complaint continued, MySpace and its parent company, News Corp, as well as Pete Solis,

were guilty of negligence, gross negligence, fraud, fraud by nondisclosure, negligent misrepresentation, sexual assault, and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

In essence, the Does accused MySpace and its owner, Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, of exaggerating the extent of the measures taken to prevent children under fourteen from using the site. The lawsuit alleged that MySpace tacitly encouraged underage kids to use it, pretending to protect them from online predators, while in actuality doing nothing. The lawsuit charged that MySpace and News Corp should be held responsible for the sexual assault of Julie Doe because without MySpace facilitating her communication with Solis the assault would have never occurred. In 2007, a federal judge in Austin, Texas ruled in favor of MySpace and that ruling was upheld by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in 2008 (Kunzelman, 2008).

In this chapter, we suggest that the *Doe v. MySpace* may be treated as a convenient temporal marker of the beginning of a moral panic about adolescents, sex crime, and social networking technology, a "social networking moral panic." We argue that this was not a distinct moral panic but rather should be seen as a phase of an ongoing moral panic that has evolved in concert with changing technology and is itself the intersection of at least three larger moral panics, an "emerging technology child sex crime panic." This panic is an example of a new breed of techno-scientific moral panics that, sociologist Phillip Jenkins (2009, 46) suggests, will emerge "as social issues focus more on scientific areas that demand substantial background—in information technology and biotechnology, to name just two." We argue that this panic did not end, but rather transitioned to a new suite of technologies: away from social networking and toward mobile devices. We also argue that the moral panic created risks and opportunities for technology providers. In the case of the social networking the moral panic played a role in shifting the balance of power between the two titans of the industry, MySpace and Facebook.

Facebook's more adept response to the moral panic, a response which may not necessarily have entailed actual technological superiority but merely superior public relations, may have played in a role in its seemingly permanent displacement of its erstwhile competitor.

Intersecting Moral Panics

Moral panics result from a collective response to the behavior of a few that is seen as deviant, immoral, and a threat to society. As Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994, 31) explain, "The moral panic . . . is characterized by the feeling, held by a substantial number of the members of a given society, that evildoers pose a threat to the society and the moral order as a consequence of their behavior." Other scholars add to this definition that moral panics tend to erupt suddenly, with a multitude of voices speaking as a consensus and media representations emphasizing sudden and dramatic increases in numbers and incidences far beyond a logical evaluation of the facts would support (Jenkins, 1998; Hall et al, 1978). Of paramount importance in moral panics is a collective sense of being wronged, that an accepted boundary has been crossed, and someone or something fundamentally evil is to be held accountable. The sources of these evildoers, these folk devils (Cohen 1972), do not appear overnight. Rather, they consist of "some existing and recognizable elements" (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994: 28). As the name implies, a moral panic results in some uproar along a moral boundary, a fear of change or invasion by some sort of known yet mysterious evil, and a collective response to this perceived transgression.

An occurrence we will call the "social networking moral panic" may be viewed as merely one moment in a continuous panic that we call the emerging technology child sex crime panic. This panic is itself merely one of many moral panics over children and youth. As a number of commentators have noted, children and youth are especially prone to becoming the subject of moral panics (Buckingham, 2000, p. 123; Krinsky, p. 1). The social networking panic may also

be viewed as a sort of braided rope composed of at least three strands of moral panics: a child sex crime panic, an Internet sex crime panic, and a larger panic over the effect of computer technology on young people.

The episodic child sex crime panics that have occurred over the course of the twentieth century are among the most studied of American moral panics (Chauncey, 1993; Fass, 1997; Freedman, 1987; Grometstein, 2008; Jenkins, 1998; Kincaid, 1998). As long ago as 1998, Jenkins observed that, while historically child sex crime panics had waxed and waned periodically due to political, social, ideological shifts, the contemporaneous panic over child sex crimes, which had begun around 1980, showed no sign of abating. The subsequent decade has done little to cast doubt on Jenkins's assessment. A number of scholars have explored the contours of the current child sex crime panic (for example, Corrigan, 2006; Pratt, 2005; Simon, 1998, 2000; Zimring, 2004). Jenkins (1998) notes that it is an accepted "fact" in America that children face a pervasive and grave threat of molestation or sexual abuse, especially by some unknown predator. However, in the contemporary sex crime panic, scholars have noted that sexual predators have been particularly associated with computer technology and the Internet, giving rise to the notion of the "cyber-predator" (Barak, 2005, pp. 80-81; Jenkins, 1998; Lynch, 2002; Schultz, 2008).

The development of computer technologies inexpensive enough for mass consumption and the Internet networking of these technologies, transforming them into communication devices, provoked social anxiety about sex for adult users: a "cyberpanic" (for example, Aycock & Buchignani, 1995; Sandywell, 2006). The notion that communication tools such as online communities and chat sites might be used to experiment with different sexual identities though cybersex produced both euphoria and anxiety (for example, Shaw, 1997; Stone, 1995). The

proliferation of pornography and adult services on the Internet provoked further anxiety (Sandywell, 2006, p. 50; Kuipers, 2006). Online dating was seen as novel and risky. Early anxieties focused on rape in text-based online communities and multi-user domains and whether such a notion was even plausible (Dibbell, 1993; MacKinnon, 1997a, 1997b; Mnookin, 1996). There were worries that the Internet facilitated sexual harassment (Barak, 2005) and fostered “anonymity and amorality in everyday life and incivility in public discourse” (Sandywell, 2006, p. 49).

A third converging moral panic involves anxieties about the effects of computer technology on young people in general. While techno-optimists have seen computer technology as a potentially empowering educational tool for young people, techno-pessimists have seen a wealth of threats in the increasing availability of computer technology to young people, including vision problems, bad posture, decline of physical activity, failure to develop social skills, isolation and antisociality, exposure to violence, pornography, and content promoting seemingly destructive behaviors like self-harm, “cyberbullying,” reinforcement of gender stereotypes, and obesity (for example, Attewell, Suazo-Garcia, & Battle, 2003, pp. 279-282; Boyd, Ryan, & Leavitt, 2011; Buckingham, 2000, p. 44; Livingstone & Helsper, 2010). The Internet is often portrayed in the media as fraught with “dangers” for “the digital generation,” which is viewed as “vulnerable, at risk from new information and communication technologies” (Livingstone, 2003).

And some scholars agree. Turkle (2011), for example, found that many teenagers reported feeling anxious, and as though they had to maintain a particular image on their online profiles. Other teens discussed the pressure they felt in creating online profiles and reported that they often feel completely tethered to their technology. Turkle ponders the potential long-term

effects on these teens, who grow up with the Internet, and their inability to set boundaries or even to arrange much-needed “alone time.” Turkle considers the possible long-term effects will be for a generation that has grown up posting every kind of information online, where it might be accessible forever.

These three strands of panic, we suggest, combine to form an especially potent emerging technology child sex crime panic. This panic itself may be seen as passing through various stages as information technology evolves at the blistering pace to which we have become accustomed in contemporary culture. Bazelon (2011) observes that the panic in the 1940s over the pernicious influence of comic books on youth was eerily reminiscent of the contemporary panic over the influence of social networking and mobile technology. In the early 1990s concerns about computers, youth, and sex crimes focused on technologies that would today be regarded as quaint artifacts of the pre-history of computer networking (and social networking), such as MUDs. There was concern about the increasing availability of “cyberporn” and about the even more serious concern that child pornography was being spread through file sharing technologies like Usenet and bulletin boards that today might be viewed as obsolete (Jenkins, 1998, 2009; Potter & Potter, 2001, p. 33).

The media scare over the Chamberlain case in 1996, precisely a decade prior to the Doe case, illustrates how certain themes have persisted despite changes in technology. A scare erupted over the activities of George Chamberlain, a prison inmate serving time for murder in Minnesota. Chamberlain, “a murderer known even outside the prison as a computer genius,” worked while incarcerated as “manager of computer operations” for Insight, a company that essentially insourced computer a telemarketing work to cheap labor in American prisons. Using the Internet connection provided by this work assignment, Chamberlain had collected child

pornography. But something seemingly both more innocuous and more “sinister” caused the scare: a database of children’s names, ages, and addresses compiled from local newspapers, which had—with trustfulness that seems like naivety—run features with photographs of local children with titles like “Citizens of Tomorrow.” Media coverage described the incident “as a case study on the cusp of a new information culture, at the shadowy crossroads of technology and criminal justice.” It described “hamlets in northern Minnesota, places born of the railroad in the last century and bypassed by the highway in this one” which “now . . . stand at the threshold of a new information age.” It described the list as “a kind of nightmare mutation of data-base marketing” and said it “demonstrates how easily information can lose its innocence,” a remarkable turn of phrase, “in the era of the Internet” (Bernstein, 1996). Although the technology seems anachronistic, the discourse seems prescient. In subsequent years, similar scares emerged about chat rooms as facilitators of sexual predators seeking children (Potter & Potter, 2001, p. 38; Sandywell, 2006, p. 48).

Social Networking

By 2006, there was little worry about chat rooms. Social networking sites (and especially the two most popular sites, MySpace and Facebook) were now the online sites where youth were vulnerable to being preyed upon by sexual predators (Grimmelmann, 2009, p. 1190). Privacy concerns, particularly over the redistribution and accessibility of underage users’ personal information, were a major source of criticism for both Facebook and MySpace. In 2006, MySpace’s Terms of Use Agreement dictated that in order to create a profile, one must be at least 14 years old, promise not to post false information knowingly, and agree not to post identifying information such as phone numbers, street addresses, last names, or emails (MySpace, Terms, 2006). However, since MySpace did not require verification of a user’s age,

for example, by having users submit photocopies of drivers' licenses, there was no way to ensure that user-generated information was accurate. Additionally, research shows that Internet users routinely lie about identity, gender, and physical attributes (Donath 1999; Lenhart and Madden 2000). As a result, it is not surprising that MySpace's rules about honesty, self-report information, and age were broken often, with little reprimanding from other users or the company.

In 2006, MySpace described itself in this way:

MySpace is for everyone:

- Friends who want to talk Online
- Single people who want to meet other Singles
- Matchmakers who want to connect their friends with other friends
- Families who want to keep in touch--map your Family Tree
- Business people and co-workers interested in networking
- Classmates and study partners
- Anyone looking for long lost friends! (MySpace, About, 2006)

MySpace promoted itself as the premier social networking site. MySpace used virtual space in order to facilitate and keep track of real time interactions and relationships. MySpace was marketed primarily as a place to keep in touch with people one already knew. Nevertheless, with a multitude of search options available to users, it was perhaps easier to make new acquaintances than to reconnect with old friends.

On the other hand, Facebook represented itself as a place to connect with more people: friends, colleagues, and classmates. In its original conception, Facebook only allowed college students with valid college email address to join. Over time, Facebook's policy on membership became more and more inclusive, and by 2006, anyone with a valid email could join (Thomas, 2007). Facebook was similar to MySpace in that its terms of service restricted users under the age of 14 from creating a profile and banned registered sex offenders from joining. Further,

Facebook's terms also mandated that each person only create one personal profile, and that one could not provide any false personal information (Boyd et al., 2011). Facebook also nominally required that contact information be current and correct, and the site encouraged users to stay aware of changing privacy policies (Facebook, 2011a). With all of the insistence on truthfulness and accurate self-representation, Facebook appeared to be a place to both reconnect with friends and make new ones.

Despite these terms of service, both sites were accessed by users who did not abide by all of its terms. But MySpace and Facebook had little incentive to prioritize enforcement of their terms, as a more rigorously policed sign up processes would discourage users from joining their networks. If the purpose of social networking sites was to connect with known friends, why did people routinely connect with strangers, and in particular, why was there so much concern about interacting with strangers online? The media hype surrounding social networking sites, Facebook and MySpace in particular, underscored the perception that such sites facilitated oversharing of private information, especially by adolescents. The panic surrounding social networks is part of a wider concern that youth have developed a culture of oversharing, supported by advances in technology, including smartphones and other mobile devices. Adolescents today have more opportunities to overshare, and these opportunities proliferate in step with technology.

In tandem with this culture of oversharing, much attention was given to the presence of sexual predators online, and how information shared not only by adolescent users themselves but also by their schools and community clubs could be gathered and used by lurking predators online, echoing similar concerns expressed with older technology in the Chamberlain case. This phantom predator then, was often portrayed as using social networking sites in order to prey upon adolescents online, though some research indicated that the rise of social networking had

actually been accompanied by a *decrease* in sexual soliciting of minors online (Mann 2009: 262).

The Social Networking Panic

Solis was not the only man accused of meeting his victim on a social networking site. The *Doe v MySpace* (2006, 6-9) lawsuit catalogued 13 instances of an underage girl being sexually attacked or solicited by a man over 18 through MySpace. Another story, out of Chicago, was the court case of a 15-year-old girl who was gang raped and left unconscious in an alley after meeting two high school seniors who contacted her through MySpace (Sherriff, 2006). Yet another online meeting to end in tragedy was that of Ashleigh Hall, a 17-year-old British girl who left one night in October 2009 to meet a boy she had corresponded with on Facebook. However, instead of the teenage boy she had expected, she met a 32-year-old sex offender who raped and murdered her (Handley, 2010).

Along with public concern about the online presence of sexual predators, significant social anxiety also existed concerning a problem that was, in a sense, its mirror image: young people oversharing accurate identifying information about themselves. The fear of oversharing online was often fueled by cases of offline victimization that frequently began with an online meeting, as with the case of Pete Solis and MySpace. For example, in 2006, 13-year-old Missouri resident Megan Meier committed suicide after receiving negative correspondence via MySpace from a boy named Josh Evans, whom she had met on the site. As it turned out, though, Josh Evans did not exist. His profile was created by Lori Drew, the mother of a classmate of Meier. Drew claimed that she created the account as part of plan to uncover whether Meier had been spreading malicious rumors about her 13-year-old daughter, Sarah. The plot then evolved to include embarrassing Meier at school by printing out correspondences with Josh—and showing

them to classmates (Glover, 2008). Masquerading as Josh Evans, Drew befriended Meier, and after gaining her trust, began sending her hurtful messages. The final blow allegedly came in a message from Evans that told Meier “the world would be a better place without you” (Zavis 2009).

Though Drew tried to conceal her involvement in Meier’s suicide by deleting the account, she was indicted in federal court in Los Angeles on felony charges usually applied to hackers who steal government information (LA Times blog, 2008). Local officials in Missouri had tried to find a way to charge Drew, but could not find any legal statutes under which her activities fell, a lacuna that to many demonstrated that the law was falling behind technology (see Carbonell, 2010 on a similar case in Australia). Because MySpace’s head offices were located in Los Angeles, prosecutors believed (apparently incorrectly) that they found a way to charge Drew with felony violation of the terms of service in order to use MySpace illegally to access information about Meier (LA Times Blog, 2008). Drew was acquitted of felony charges associated with violating MySpace’s terms of service agreements, and the judge questioned whether the charges were an appropriate use of the statute. If Drew had been convicted of a felony crime for violating MySpace’s terms of service, it would have made anyone who provided false information on the website (intentionally or not) guilty of committing a crime (Zavis 2009). The case then became widely read as an example of prosecutorial overreaching (for example, Jones 2011).

But moral panics are less about actual dangers than perceived threats. The notion that social networking sites posed unique and insidious dangers to young people was repeatedly featured in newspaper and online articles during this period. For example, articles in the *New York Times* included headlines such as “MySpace Draws a Questionable Crowd” (Gordon,

2006), “New Scrutiny for Facebook over Predators” (Stone, 2007b), “States Fault MySpace on Predator Issue” (Stone, 2007a), “Teens Who Tell Too Much,” (Downes, 2006), and “Don’t Talk to Invisible Strangers,” (Bahney, 2006). Articles from Time magazine included “How Safe is MySpace” (Hylton, 2006b), “The Internet: Safe for Kids?” (Cruz, 2009), “Teens Behaving Badly,” (Stephey, 2009), and “Should Facebook Have a ‘Panic Button?’” (Handley, 2010). Newsweek ran stories like “Predator’s Playground” (Schrobsdorff, 2006), and “A Towering Danger to Kids,” (Braiker, 2007). Articles from other news sites included headlines such as “MySpace, Facebook Attract Online Predators” (Williams, 2006), “MySpace: Your Kids’ Danger?” (Kreiser, 2009), and “Thousands of MySpace Sex Offender Refugees Found on Facebook” (Schonfeld, 2009).

These articles (along with hundreds of similar articles) reflected a picture of social networking sites as safe havens, even playgrounds, for sexual predators. Though numerous articles were written about potential online threats for adults, considerably more space was dedicated to the specific threat of online sexual predators to children and young adults, and in far more inflammatory language. For example, the *New York Times* reported, “Some of the country’s top law enforcement officials are charging that the online social network MySpace has discovered thousands of known sex offenders using its service, but has failed to act on the information” (Stone, 2007a). Here, MySpace was accused of failing to act to remove thousands of sex offenders that were known to be using the site, and this claim was supported by statements from the country’s top law enforcement officials. This assertion highlighted the fear not only that social networking sites are full of predators, but also that those running the websites do nothing about it. “MySpace is in the spotlight today because it revealed that 90,000 registered sex offenders have been kicked off its site in the past two years. But where did all of those sex

offenders go? Some evidence suggests that a portion of them are now on Facebook” (Schonfeld, 2009). This statement reiterated the claim that social networking sites were full of sex offenders, who traveled from one site to another. Tens of thousands of sex offenders were removed from one site, and a portion of them moved to another. The size of the portion did not matter, what mattered was that sex offenders flocked to social networking sites in droves, while the sites failed to defuse the threat, either because they did not try or because they were unable to do so.

“Police and school officials nationwide urge parents to remind their children that when they post their private thoughts online, strangers are definitely watching,” one online news article cautioned (Williams, 2006). Again, the dangers online were from the unknown stranger who stalked children’s profiles. Parents were bombarded with images of lurking predators gathering information posted by youth enveloped in the culture of oversharing. The confusing realm of social networking sites required even more vigilance than prior threats. According to *Time* magazine: “For parents who have only a passing knowledge of MySpace, let alone the ever multiplying horde of competitors like Xanga, Facebook and Bebo, it may be hard to understand why kids flock to these sites and how they can be more dangerous than old-school chat rooms” (Hylton, 2006b). Social networking sites were not only dangerous, but were even more dangerous than earlier subjects of concern like the dreaded online chat rooms. Monique Nelson, an Internet safety expert, warned, “These networking sites are a perfect predator's playground. Predators don't have to go to chat rooms, they can troll through and look for pretty faces that they like and get all the information they want” (as quoted in Schrobsdorff, 2006). Social networking sites were easier to access than chat rooms. Instead of predators hunting for victims in chat rooms, on social networking sites teenagers put themselves on display. These media reports alluded to imagery typically associated with childhood innocence, and social networking sites

were portrayed as an open door to pursuing children. This fear of online predation was legitimated through cases like those of Solis and Drew despite the stark difference between the fear (online sexual predators) and the reality (deception in identity and cyberbullying by a known person).

The Solis and Drew cases highlighted the complex social, political, and legal issues that comprised a moral panic. In the end, the cases functioned less to prosecute individual offenders than to alert the public to the supposed dangers of social networking. Though these cases attracted media attention, both MySpace and Facebook remained incredibly popular and highly visited sites. Further, these cases illustrate, yet again, the persistent pattern that child sex crime panics focus on strangers while the actual threat to children from known, trusted individuals is far greater. In particular, with the Megan Meier case, it was a classmate's mother, not a sex offender, who stalked and tormented her. When it comes to social networking sites, it really is all about whom one knows, and "friends" can be far more dangerous than strangers.

Privacy Protection as Opportunity

Moral panic did not successfully bring down social networking, far from it. However, it may have had unforeseen effects on the competition between social networking providers. At the time of the outbreak of the social networking panic, around 2006, MySpace was the dominant social networking site, ranked sixth in overall web traffic with more than triple the number of Facebook's unique US visitors (Dwyer, Hiltz, & Passerini, 2007). Today, of course, Facebook is the dominant social networking site, having vanquished both MySpace and the earliest such site, Friendster (Grimmelmann, 2009, p. 1144; The Economist, 2010). Today, MySpace is primarily a niche site focusing on music, with a vaguely sordid and thoroughly youth culture-ish reputation. MySpace's status in the social networking hierarchy was further delegitimized in the summer of

2011, when News Corp sold the site for \$35 million, 6 per cent of the price for which it had purchased the site for in 2005 (LA Times Blog, 2011). Facebook's fortune and status have continued to escalate, however, as evidenced by its \$50 billion (U.S.D.) valuation from Goldman Sachs. This figure represents fifty times its value in 2007 (Craig and Sorkin, 2011).

In sharp contrast to MySpace, Facebook is perceived as thoroughly respectable, as well as potentially a key portal to the Internet, as evidenced by its stratospheric market value and omnipresence in commerce. Today, Facebook is thoroughly corporate and mainstream: advertisements for consumer products regularly refer consumers to the vendor's Facebook page. At one time, the difference between perceptions of the sites was perhaps due to the fact that Facebook was initially exclusive and collegiate, whereas MySpace was democratic (Grimmelmann, 2009, p. 1148). Even when Facebook opened to everyone, it retained its classier image. In 2007, Dwyer, *et al.* found that MySpace has a poor reputation in terms of members' trust, among users, while "Facebook's association with physical entities, i.e., universities, helps vouch for the authenticity of its members." Perhaps because of this, Facebook users tended to reveal *more* personal information than MySpace users (Dwyer, et al., 2007).

While MySpace made little effort to address concerns about the protection of its users' information, Facebook rolled out a sophisticated campaign to address, or at least appear to address, such issues. Facebook's effort was headed by its Chief Privacy Officer, Chris Kelly, a Harvard Law School graduate, veteran of the *Harvard Journal of Law & Technology* where he would have been exposed to various perspectives on technology and privacy, and future candidate for Attorney General of California. The issue was less the efficacy of Facebook's privacy policy, which has been roundly criticized, than the fact that Facebook, contrary to MySpace, *had* a privacy policy at all. Kelly unapologetically addressed Congress about

Facebook's privacy policies, and he was able to declare, "From the founding of the company in a dorm room in 2004 to today, Facebook's privacy settings have given users control over who has access to their personal information by allowing them to choose the friends they accept and networks they join" (Kelly, 2008).

Paradoxically, today concerns about the privacy issues surrounding social networking focus on Facebook, not MySpace (Boyd, 2008; Grimmelmann, 2009). But that is because Facebook has rendered MySpace largely irrelevant. Moreover, the privacy concerns about Facebook largely concern such matters as damage to reputations, exploitation by corporate advertisers and so on (Boyd, 2008; Grimmelmann, 2009; Mayer-Schönberger, 2009). Even the privacy debates surrounding Facebook have largely escaped the sorts of concerns about outright violence and criminal behavior—such as provoked suicides and statutory rapes—associated with MySpace and the social networking panic, though there have been some homicides associated with such activities as updating of Facebook status (Grimmelmann, 2009, p. 1174).

Surprisingly, Facebook emerged from the social networking panic with an enhanced reputation. Its chief rival, meanwhile, has largely been eliminated from serious competition and appears to have had its reputation permanently tarnished, even though Facebook's privacy policies have been widely criticized, teenagers continue to use Facebook, and little has been done to prevent its use as a platform for predatory behavior (Boyd, 2008; Grimmelmann, 2009; Mann, 2009).

After Social Networking

Since 2010, there has been a shift in the controversy surrounding social networking sites. Greater emphasis has been placed on the culture of oversharing, the changing definition of privacy, and the real danger that people known to users might pose. An emerging trend in online oversharing is location-based applications, which post on users' social networking profiles where they are in

real time, leaving them vulnerable to victimization by someone in their network (Efrati & Valentino-DeVries, 2011). Another trend garnering both media and academic attention is that of mobile technology and youth culture (see Turkle, 2011; Lewin, 2010).

A study released in early 2010 revealed some surprising statistics about who actually uses social networking sites. According to the study, social networking users were older than generally believed, especially on Facebook. Social networking was no longer a youth culture phenomenon. The primary users of social networking sites are adults, not children. In fact, users under the age of 18 make up only about 15 per cent of social networking site users (Royal Pingdom, 2010). MySpace now markets itself as “a leading social entertainment destination powered by the passions of fans. Aimed at a Gen Y audience, MySpace drives social interaction by providing a highly personalized experience around entertainment and connecting people to the music, celebrities, TV, movies, and games that they love” (MySpace, 2011). Through this reimagining, MySpace is appealing to the original users of social networking sites, now in their thirties, by appealing to their music and entertainment interests. But Facebook remains the premier social networking site, describing itself as a place “giving people the power to share and make the world more open and connected” (Facebook, 2011b). As the statistics and the site’s own self-descriptions indicate, the focus of social networking has evolved to an older audience and moral panic over youth and oversharing has become obsolescent.

While both Facebook and MySpace remain a focus for discussions of privacy and the potential harm of posting things on the Internet, where they remain forever, Mark Zuckerberg stated in January 2010 that “people have really gotten comfortable not only sharing more information and different kinds, but more openly and with more people. That social norm is just something that is evolved over time. We view it as our role in the system to constantly be

innovating and be updating what our system is to reflect what the current social norms are” (as quoted in Paul, 2010). Zuckerberg is here portraying the discourse surrounding decreased user control of privacy on Facebook as a reflection of evolving social norms, and thus, what the public wants. But the issue he elides is the power wielded by Facebook, as the “default” social networking site, in constructing those norms.

Does this mean that the emerging technology child sex crime panic has abated? We argue that, rather than abating, the panic has shifted to new technologies. Panic about predators on social networking sites has almost become passé, as social networking sites themselves have come to be viewed more as mainstream tools used by all sectors of society, including corporations and adults, and less cutting-edge, youth-oriented technologies. While young people still use social networking sites, they have shifted their primary modes of communication to new technologies, notably Twitter and smart mobile devices. The rapid proliferation of the latter has prompted yet another phase in this ongoing panic, over issues like sexting and “digital dating abuse,” a new form of cyberbullying (Boyd, et al., 2011; Hoffman, 2011; CNN, 2011). This drifting of the moral panic across technological platforms may be seen as analogous to the sort of drifting of moral panics across youth culture “fads, crazes, and fashions” observed by Cohen (1972: 201). Indeed, today technologies increasingly *are* fashions, fads, and crazes. It has become progressively more difficult to determine whether young people’s choices of communication platforms are guided by technology or fashion (or even to distinguish between the two). In this context, it is important to note that the child sex abuse panic the discussed here displays a characteristic that Jenkins (1998: 189), writing well before the development of social networking, called “the protean quality of the child abuse idea and its ability to adapt to changing political and technological environments.” While it is difficult to make firm predictions about

how the next phase of the child sex crime panic will play out, one prediction we can make with confidence is that it will shift to yet another emerging technology before long.

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with Michael Lynch, Ruth McNally & Kathleen Jordan). He has written on moral panics concerning identity theft (with Henry Pontell) and “wilding” and on the “CSI effect” as a media panic (with Rachel Dioso-Villa). He is Co-Editor of the journal *Theoretical Criminology*.

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