

## **POLICING THE INTERNET: *JAKE BAKER* AND BEYOND**

**March 9, 1995**

### **VIRGINIA REZMIERSKI'S OPENING STATEMENT**

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#### **VIRGINIA REZMIERSKI:**

The University of ITD, did you just say?

I'd like to focus on the university and our responsibility, if I may, for a minute.

First of all, the incident that has gotten so much press is not an isolated incident. In fact, these incidents, although not all the same, are continuous in this community as the community learns to experiment with and learns how to manage the technological capabilities that we are very quickly incorporating into the environment.

Universities have a special and unique set of responsibilities and opportunities in regards to dealing with these kinds of incidents.

First, after ensuring that the activity that has taken place really has, in fact, taken place and we have some facts to know where it is occurring and that it has occurred by the person that it seems to have occurred from; once all that kind of confirmation is done, the very first line of intervention at a university needs to be a learning intervention.

By that I mean that we need to be able to foster learning, understanding and higher levels of social cognitive behavior in an environment like a university. This has to be our first commitment. This is not a corporation, not a police state, but a university; a place where we are trying to learn, a place where we are trying to help people understand the implications of their behaviors on themselves and on each other, and where we as a community are trying to have an opportunity to speak out about behaviors that are contrary to the values and standards of this community of open discourse.

It does the University no good to foster a notion that you can separate cognition, what people think, from affect, what they feel, from behavior. And, in fact, those three things have to come together.

So one of the important things that a university has to worry about is making sure that people are feeling about these kinds of events, making sure that they are thinking about them and understanding the issues and making sure that behaviors that cross the lines and boundaries of other individuals in the University are identified and clear and people understand what those boundaries are.

A maturing community like a university has within it a wide range of levels of impulse control and abilities to set boundaries.

Those who are impulsive reactors, those who geocentrically focus only on their own purposes and needs, and even those who are purposeful victimizers need to have clear limits imposed as well as posed. After they have once heard them, they need to be reminded of what the limits are, and then reinforcements for behaviors that stay within the boundaries of the rights and the values of the community and repercussions for those behaviors that go beyond those.

Personal boundaries as well as personal space and professional boundaries and professional space are often hard to draw for individuals.

Those who have never been taught to set boundaries, who don't know how, who are unable to because of the newness of the communication medium, need to have examples and be taught and supported in setting their boundaries verbally and technically. We have not done a whole lot, yet, at the University and we need to do more in terms of helping to teach people some ways in which technically they can set boundaries for behaviors they don't want to have occur for intrusions into their space, and so on.

Universities must foster liberties without license, access and use without the crossing over in violating of the liberties of other people. Universities also have a responsibility to teach and support individuals how to set their boundaries, and that's a piece that is often over looked.

For each of the incidents that occur, the community, and now I'm not talking about the administration -- I'm talking about the university community -- in this regard has three major goals, and I consider these all equally important and at times, various times, depending on the incident, at risk.

The first is to protect against reactive institutional decisions that for political or seemingly benign reasons prematurely intervene for control rather than learning.

The second is to street light the incidents in a way that helps to open the communication and open the discussion, to draw light and attention to the incident, so that issues can be clarified and values of the community can be clarified for the sake of learning of all of the others. If you will, secondary learning for the entire community.

And third, to protect, foster and indeed demand more speech, not less, regarding behaviors that fall short of community standards and values.

All three of those goals every time we have an incident are at risk. I propose that those are critical things for us to hold out front.

The incidents that we have been dealing with raise lots of very, very difficult questions, and I'd like to pose just a couple of them and then we'll certainly have an opportunity to talk about them more.

Is someone harassed if they are not the recipient of a communication?

Can writing to one's self, regardless of how bad the content seems to others, be an act of violence?

Likewise, can writing to willing others, regardless of how bad the content seems to others, be an act of violence?

Can targeted, even loving content if unwanted, rejected, but continuous and escalating be victimizing, violating, harassment or violence against a person?

If sent to a receptive and expecting audience, one that has chosen to access the material, is material regardless of its content appropriate use of resources, or is it a violation of boundaries?

If sent to an unreceptive and unexpected audience that has not chosen to access the material, is material regardless of its content an appropriate use of resources, and in this case, does this violate boundaries?

What's the University's role in the intervention with victimizers?

What's the role of the University in protection of victimizers? Assuring, for instance, that people who are ready to commit violent acts against themselves, suicide, or against others, have the kind of support and guidance they need to get the kind of help they need for the behavior.

What is the University's role in intervention with victims and its role in the protection of victims?

Now, finally, when names are used, alias, real names, pseudonyms, what violation of boundaries occurs? Is there a violation due to exposure, due to representation without permission, due to misrepresentation? We have lots and lots of incidents of people using other people's names, using pseudonyms, and all of those are on a continuum of various levels of intrusion, threat, violence against the individuals or misrepresentation.

So I would go back and just summarize by saying the university community has to watch these really big things, these three big things, very, very carefully.

We need to watch and guard against the knee jerk reactions, which I called earlier, protecting against reactive institutional decisions that intervene prematurely for control rather than teaching. Street light the incident so we can do issues analysis, and protect, foster and demand more speech instead of less

speech so that the whole community can understand its standards and clarify them.

**PROFESSOR LOWENSTEIN:** Thank you. Next, Danny Weitzner.