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Instances of online suicide, the law and potential solutions

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To understand the social and legal issues posed by suicide-related communications over the Internet (messages of threatened suicide and advocated suicide), this article examines a selection of cases involving different types of online baiting and harassment that illustrate different legal and technological issues. The anonymity afforded by computer-mediated communication allows bullies to harass vulnerable individuals and leak (disclose) their personal information. Computer mediation of communication potentially diffuses responsibility; imposes a temporal asynchrony between signified intent and audience response; and reduces the empathy that might motivate observers or witnesses to intervene and render assistance, factors that make online baiting a serious social, legal and technological problem. Potential actions (both legal and technological) for addressing this problem are outlined.

Keywords: suicide; Internet; webcam; legal; intervention.

Introduction

Almost all countries grapple with the challenge of supporting people during times of mental distress, and in extreme cases preventing threatened and actual suicide (Bertolote & Fleischmann, 2002; World Health Organization, 2016). Professional and community assistance is often too little, too late. Mann (1981) examined 21 cases of threatened suicide in front of actual crowds, some members of which baited and maliciously encouraged the vulnerable and desperate person to jump from a ledge or a bridge. He analysed the circumstances, – such as crowd size, anonymity, cover of darkness, and duration, – to compare baiting crowds and non-baiting crowds. With the advent of social media, distressed individuals can now communicate suicidal intent online. People who indicate an *intent* to commit suicide over a webcam are sometimes encouraged by a remote audience to *complete* their suicide attempt (Polder-Verkiel, 2012; Seko, 2016; Westerlund, Hadlaczky, & Wasserman, 2015). The focus of this article is on the legal and social psychological issues posed by the online environment, where suicide threats and attempts can be broadcast, and witnessed in real time, and where there is provision for audience responses (helpful or destructive) to be communicated to a distressed individual. The advent of on-line suicide baiting requires serious attention, because it has implications for internet providers and of course legal and mental health professionals and developers of forms of Ecological Momentary Assessment

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(or intervention; see) (Davidson, Anestis, & Gutierrez, 2017). This article specifically examines a range of legal and social issues that relating to suicide baiting on line, while distinguishing online suicide baiting behaviour from related anti-social behaviours such as cyber-bullying. We this paper addresses specific issues posed by the current system architecture, indicating where this has contributed to suicides, and drawing attention to potential solutions in the online environment.

Media guidelines

Concerns have been raised about the harmful effects of the publicity generated by the and media reporting of suicides (World Health Organization, 2008). Often suicides reported in an attractive (e.g. Evelyn McHale) or favourable light (Phillips, 1974) are thought to lead to copycat incidents (Haw, Hawton, Niedzwiedz, & Platt, 2013; Stack, 2005). There is well-documented evidence of the relationship between media coverage (and specifically favourable media coverage) and the incidence of subsequent suicide (Etzersdorfer, Voracek, & Sonneck, 2004; Gould & Lake, 2012; M G. Martin, 1998). However, the media continues to report suicide attempts, particularly unusual forms (Maloney et al., 2014; Thom et al., 2011). For such reasons there are media guidelines for reporting suicide (Bohanna & Wang, 2012; Maloney et al., 2014). Media professionals should avoid language which sensationalizes or normalizes suicide, or presents it as a solution to life's problems, avoid description of the methods, that was used and educate the public about treatment options (World Health Organization, 2008).

Unfortunately, the Internet is not bound by local legal jurisdictions and therefore circumvents media guidelines for both the reporting of suicides (Maloney et al., 2014; Mishara & Weisstub, 2013) and the community response to an emerging suicide cluster (Robertson, Skegg, Poore, Williams, & Taylor, 2012). The

capacity to author online content personally means that witnesses to a threatened jump can provide commentary, stream a live feed of the event, or even situate themselves in the moment by taking "selfies" (Bates, 2013). There is a growing list of instances in which potential suicide jumpers have elicited online responses. In the case of Dylan Yount in San Francisco in the United States (US) and Shaun Dykes in Derby in the United Kingdom (UK), audience reactions appeared on Twitter posts, Facebook statuses, Flickr comments, Yelp reviews and YouTube (Pidd, 2009; Samaha, 2013). In these two cases there was no "return path". The online reactions, good or bad, did not reach Dylan Yount, but while he stood on the ledge anonymous voices from the crowd baited him, encouraging him to jump (Samaha, 2013).

Social media now provides a capability for desperate people to use discussion boards to attract attention to their misery (Eichenberg & Schott, 2016) and promote live feeds using webcams. People threatening suicide online can now receive audience reactions, and in a number of instances vulnerable people have been baited (Polder-Verkiel, 2012; Seko, 2016). In most cases the incident and audience responses are subsequently erased by the hosting website and the witnesses (Polder-Verkiel, 2012; Seko, 2016) [but see Westerlund et al., 2015]; nevertheless, video of the incident may still be available elsewhere to influence others (Luxton, June, & Fairall, 2012).

Legal issues

Suicide baiting is highly irresponsible and antisocial. A person contemplating suicide may be seeking help publicly (Bell, Mok, Gardiner, & Pirkis, 2017; Eichenberg & Schott, 2016). Although visitors to pro-suicide sites may initially be ambivalent about committing suicide, the such sites can provide encouragement that strengthens visitors' resolve to end their lives (Baume, Cantor, & Rolfe, 1997; Becker, Mayer, Nagenborg, El-Faddagh, & Schmidt,

Table 1.   Selected jurisdictions' efforts to control suicide related materials online.

Country	Intervention
Australia	Suicide Related Materials Offences Act 2006
European Union (EU)	Safer Internet Plan expects ISPs to control access to illegal or dangerous sites
New Zealand	Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015 paragraph 30 makes it an offence to encourage another person to commit suicide, and paragraph 22 makes it illegal to place offensive information on electronic media for purposes of harassment. (http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2015/0063/latest/whole.html#DLM5711876).
Russia	Internet blacklist used to protect children from harmful content (e.g. advocates suicide or describes suicide methods)
United Kingdom	Voluntary ISP web blocking of suicide and self-harm sites
United States of America	Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) requires that schools and libraries block access to harmful materials (see also http://suzyslaw.com/about-hr-1183/hr-1183/).

2004; Biddle et al., 2012; Westerlund, Hadlaczky, & Wasserman, 2012). This has led some legal jurisdictions to attempt to control material promoting suicide (see Table 1); see also [see http://suzyslaw.com/). The promotion of suicide over the internet is censored by filters or blacklists (e.g. in Russia, the UK, the USA), and is illegal in some jurisdictions (e.g. Australia), but not in others (e.g. Japan).

Suicide may be rationalised or perceived by troubled persons as a final resolution to the troubled person's their problems. However, survivors of unsuccessful suicide attempts have reported that they changed their minds immediately after jumping (Friend, 2003). Indeed, suicidal ideation may resolve over time (Christensen et al., 2013), and follow-up studies of suicide attempted indicated that some people may make no further attempts (Pajonk, Ruchholtz, Waydhas, & Schneider-Axmann, 2005). Hence it is clear that suicide baiting is not only morally but also logically wrong (Mishara & Weisstub, 2005; Mishara & Weisstub, 2013), as desperate people may change their minds and recover. Also, although crowd anonymity may help to protect offline suicide baiters (Mann, 1981), in Massachusetts people who have encouraged suicides have been charged with committing a public nuisance (e.g. Kotz, 2011).

The legal response to cases of *spontaneous* baiting (such as those documented by Mann, 1981) should be contrasted with other incidents in which the baiting of the victim has continued intermittently for years. Consider the following horrific example. In 2008, Rosimeiri Boxall had already experienced 2 years of relentless and terrifying bullying at the hands of Hatice Can and accomplice Oluwakemi Ajose (M A. Martin, 2009). Minutes before Rosimeiri Boxall jumped from a third floor window in London, she was told by Hatice Can: 'Do you want to die? Jump out of the window'. When Rosimeiri replied asked: 'Do you want me to jump?', the 13-year-old said replied: 'Yes'. As Rosimeiri she lay dying on the street below, Hatice Can looked over Boxall's her body and said: 'Serves you right, bitch.' For their parts in Rosimeiri Boxall's suicide, Hatice Can and Oluwakemi Ajose were found guilty of manslaughter (M A. Martin, 2009).

Unlike the Rosimeiri Boxall case, in which the victim and the perpetrators were in the same location (co-located) and there was a long history of abuse, there can be difficulties in determining the legal consequences of actions in regard to distressing disclosures in online environments (Stern, 2003). There are legal principles and standards for determining

whether or not someone caused harm (Mishara & Weisstub, 2013). Typically, a person needs to be in close temporal and physical proximity to a victim when harm is caused. In such cases it is relatively simple to determine that the perpetrator's actions had immediate physical consequences for the victim. It can be more difficult to determine whether the actions of a taunter or baiter physically separated from the victim were causally related to consequences (Shadwell, 2016). Ascription of legal culpability is difficult when the victim is at a remote location (Mishara & Weisstub, 2013), and communications between the baiters and the victim are not temporally contingent and the identities of the baiter and the context are lacking (Stern, 2003).

Arguably, people who spontaneously bait a potential online suicide are less responsible than a co-located witnesses (Polder-Verkiel, 2012). Indeed, the mediated nature of the baiting communication provides less opportunity to test the veracity of a supposed suicide threat. As context is lacking, an unhappy person engaged in cathartic venting could be construed as being at serious risk of suicide, or an unhappy person engaging in serious suicide deliberation of suicide could be overlooked (Barak, 2007; Stern, 2003). In particular, the rendering of assistance remotely may require specialist knowledge. In order to assist, on-line observers must decide whether or not the situation is genuine and serious, find the location of the victim, locate the relevant agencies capable of rendering assistance, and then persuade them that assistance should be rendered. This may require efforts across jurisdictions and time zones.

For instance, Abraham Biggs, a 19 year old youth from Florida, indicated his intent on a body-building discussion board to commit suicide in 2008, and provided a live feed from a webcam. He reported that he was considering an overdose. His online post elicited a mixture of concern, jokes and encouragement. An estimated 1500 people watched during a period of 11 hours as Biggs died from a drug overdose (Polder-Verkiel, 2012). Of the approximately 1500 witnessing Biggs' suicide threat it is estimated there were only 4 attempts made at rendering assistance. Intervention from an Indian forum member required that he: (1) perform an internet search to find Biggs' contact details to post on the forum; (2) locate Miami police's contact details to send an email; (3) make repeated phone calls to Miami police (while exhausting his parents' mobile phone credits) (Polder-Verkiel, 2012). By the time the attention of authorities was attracted, it was already two hours too late (Polder-Verkiel, 2012).

While rendering online assistance can be difficult, the failure to assist may sometimes be quite calculated. Unlike the spontaneous audience reactions to Abraham Biggs, (concern, jokes, encouragement), others have deliberately sought out opportunities to distress desperate people online. Some "witnesses" of online suicides have apparently been more complicit in the suicide attempt act, and have accordingly been charged with serious offences, and a diverse range of laws have been invoked. Table 2 lists a range of examples of online interactions linked to suicides. The premeditated and sustained behaviour of the perpetrators has led to a variety of charges, ranging from online fraud to witness tampering and to assisting a suicide. In several of these cases the legal system was unsure which law to apply, and some of the decisions were have been overturned or altered on appeal. However, the sustained nature of previous interactions between baiter and victim suggested to prosecutors that the suicide was not the result of a sudden impulse (Simon et al., 2001). In the following sections we describe some social psychological factors that likely to contribute to online suicides, and suggest potential legal and technological interventions.

Anonymity

Computer mediation can facilitate anonymous threatening communications. Anonymity was

Table 2. Selected cases involving suicide and the internet.

Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Charges	Comments
Robert Roemmick et al.	Jeffrey Johnston	Threatened with out-of-school suspension	Targeted online by a group of students http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/story?id=4774894&page=1 http://www.polk-fl.net/parents/generalinformation/documents/bullying_jeffreyjohnstonstory.pdf
Tanya Heti et al.	Charlotte Dawson	Bringing the organisation into disrepute	During an exchange of abuse on Twitter, Heti was identified as a Troll and temporarily suspended by her employer http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/uni-staffer-suspended-for-go-hang-yourself-tweet-20120829-25015.html http://www.stuff.co.nz/auckland/local-news/7581592/Twitter-tirade-hospitalises-Dawson
Lori Drew	Megan Meier	Computer Fraud and Abuse Act	Interaction occurred over a period of two months http://www.meganmeierfoundation.org/megans-story.html http://stanford.edu/~jmayer/law696/week1/United%20States%20v.%20Drew.pdf
2 to 4 under aged males	Rehtaeh Parsons	Child pornography	Pictures of her alleged rape were circulated online http://thechronicleherald.ca/metro/1252984-second-young-man-pleads-guilty-in-rehtaeh-parsons-case
Dharun Ravi	Tyler Clementi	Bias intimidation (overruled), invasion of privacy, tampering with evidence and hindering apprehension	2 incidents over 2 days http://tylerclementi.org/tylers-story/
Aydin Coban	Amanda Todd	Extortion, luring and criminal harassment and possession of child pornography	Blackmailed over a 2-year period http://www.inquisitr.com/3254478/man-accused-of-tormenting-amanda-todd-leading-to-her-suicide-to-be-extradited-to-canada-to-face-charges/ http://www.rtl.fr/actu/societe-faits-divers/tarn-et-garonne-un-adolescent-se-suicide-apres-un-chantage-a-la-web-cam-7778613259 http://www.french-news-online.com/wordpress/?p=13706#axzz4GiMXYevi

Table 2. (*Continued*).

Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Charges	Comments
Archie Tolin, Jomar Palacio, and Vincent Bravo	Daniel Perry	Blackmail	Interaction occurred over a number of months http://www.dailystormer.com/british-teen-tricked-into-committing-suicide-by-filipino-sexcam-scammers/
The Surve family	Shobhana Surti	Sections 498A (for dowry harassment) and 304B (for dowry death) of Indian Penal Code	Interaction occurred over a period of 6 months http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/victims-inlaws-surrender-husband-still-absconding/
Michael John Morlan	A 16 year old girl he had previously raped	Aiding or soliciting suicide, intimidation and tampering with witnesses and informants	Initial interaction had occurred 4 years previously http://fox6now.com/2014/09/18/convicted-rapist-accused-of-communicating-with-victim-via-skype-pressuring-her-to-kill-herself/
William Melchert Dinkel	Mark Drybrough, Nadia Kajouji	Assisting suicide. Attempt to assisting of suicide.	Reportedly over 100 other attempts over 4-5 https://mn.gov/law-library-stat/archive/ctapun/2015/opa150073-122815.pdf https://mn.gov/law-library-stat/archive/supct/2014/OPA110987-031914.pdf
Gerald Krein	6 women	Solicitation to commit murder	Attempts occurred over a period of 5 years http://www.lawcitations.com/case/n/gerald-d-krein http://www.newprophecy.net/valentine.htm

a factor in the online harassment of Megan Meier (Table 2) and Charlotte Dawson (Table 2). In each both cases the victims committed suicide after a sustained campaign of bullying and harassment. The use of anonymous accounts and proxies can lead to less accountability, and weak surveillance can contribute to disinhibited online behaviours (Suler, 2004).

It is possible for victims to block individual accounts or and IP addresses, but although baiters can create new accounts or use different devices. However, database searches, reverse email directories, IP locators and GPS can be used to identify some perpetrators (e.g. Tanya Heti). Lori Drew used fake personas to bully Megan Meier over the internet, which leading to her suicide. Lori Drew was charged unsuccessfully for violations of a Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, and there is growing concern over activities of this nature (Roberts, Indermaur, & Spiranovic, 2013).

Anonymity has been thought to contribute to deindividuation and then lead to disinhibited and antisocial behaviours (Zimbardo, 1969), but this is by no means the case. People construct a role from cues within a social context. Any reduction of individuality that might be conferred by the absence of nametag and photo on a uniform does not automatically lead to malicious behaviours (Johnson & Downing, 1979). In laboratory settings dressing female students in nurse's costumes led them to administer appreciably less shocks to a male confederate than when dressed in Klu Klux Klan costumes (Johnson & Downing, 1979).

Such findings should be considered when examining cases of suicide online. Anonymous troll sites have featured in several online suicides. Marcus Jannes announced his intent to commit suicide on 4chan, and Kevin Whittrick announced his intent to commit suicide on a "funny insult" site (Westerlund et al., 2015). Knowing the membership and activities of such forums, the baiting response of the members of these websites could have

been anticipated. Although "rant sites" are thought to have a cathartic role, research indicates that people become more polarised in their outlook and have more negative emotions after visiting a rant site (M R. C. Martin, Coyier, VanSistine, & Schroeder, 2013). While there is a role for free speech, such sites can be of questionable value for to vulnerable members of the community (McDonald, Horstmann, Strom, & Pope, 2009), and the servers hosting such material could be approached to reduce such content.

Remote locations

People are less likely to assist a person in trouble when the requests for assistance are made over a communication channel (e.g. telephone) than when the troubled person and the potential helper are co-located (Weinberger, 1981). Perpetrators who reside outside a specific jurisdiction pose special problems before compliance with local laws can be claimed (Geist, 2001). For instance, the people harassing Amanda Todd (Canadian) and Daniel Perry (British) resided in the Netherlands and the Philippines respectively, and so would require extradition would have been required for their prosecution. Electronic commerce test cases suggest that local jurisdiction can be asserted if actively targeted by an international website (Geist, 2001). The magnitude of the physical or geographical separation of the locations between the baiter and the victim is also a relevant factor. It is reasonable to assume that the greater the distance the more likely the harassment, as the potential victim is "not one of us" (Mann, 1986).

Privacy leakage

Some cases of online harassment result from violation of privacy. Unknown to Tyler Clementi, his roommate Dharun Ravi had in 2010 activated a webcam in their shared room in New Jersey in the Unitred States. The webcam revealed Tyler's sexual orientation and contributed to his eventual suicide (see

Duguay, 2016). After Tyler Clementi texted his threat to jump off a bridge, Dharrun Ravi tried to dismiss and cover up his actions. Dharun Ravi was retried in New Jersey on charges of invasion of privacy, tampering with evidence and hindering apprehension (Table 2) .

In separate cases, Amanda Todd and Daniel Perry were blackmailed after an online indiscretion. These minors were encouraged to expose themselves and then threats were made if they did not cooperate further (see Burke, Sowerbutts, Blundell, & Sherry, 2002). Privacy leakage regularly occurs in social media systems such as Facebook, where information shared between friends can be accessed by third parties (Duguay, 2016; Mathews-Hunt, 2016; Li, Wu, Shen, & Li, 2015). Although many users of communication media have the naïve expectation that their information is secure, databases may have backdoors that can be exploited (Mathews-Hunt, 2016). A major worldwide incident involved the hacking of Canadian-based Ashley Madison's online adultery database in 2015 (Weise, 2015). Several suspected suicides were linked to the release of personal information from the Ashley Madison website (Ashley Madison hack, 2015 (CBC News, 2015; Chirgwin, 2015; Malm, 2015; Segal, 2015). Electronic devices potentially have a similar function to an aircraft black box. Users of social media need to be alerted to about the potential consequences of providing personal information (Zeadally & Winkler, 2016).

Absence of online controls

Social media are viewed as having great potential for accessing and engaging large numbers of hard-to-engage individuals (Robinson et al., 2016). Some suicide-related discussion groups established to encourage prevention and provide support may become quite polarised in their outlook, discouraging therapeutic intervention (Westerlund, 2013), and attracting deviants (McDonald et al., 2009).

In one case, William Melchert Dinkel was a serial predator who used fake identities to encourage people into bogus suicide pacts (e.g. Nadia Kajouji). Dinkel suggested and then witnessed the method of Mark Drybrough's online suicide. Dinkel was charged in 2011 in Minnesota in the United States with two counts of assisting suicides (in the UK and Canada). Although convicted, Dinkel's conviction was overruled due to technicalities associated with freedom of speech. He was eventually convicted again in 2014 on one count of assisting suicide, and one count of attempting to assisting suicide.

In another case, Gerald Krein set up a Yahoo chat room and over a period of five years encouraged women to have sex with him and then commit suicide. His attempts to co-ordinate a Valentine's day suicide pact came to the attention of the police in Oregon in the United States, and he was arraigned on one count of solicitation to murder and four counts of solicitation to manslaughter for allegedly planning a Valentine's Day suicide party in 2005. Krein was found guilty (except for insanity) of solicitation to commit murder.

There are many instances in which fringe social media sites have been used to aid baiting. Several suicidal individuals (e.g. Marcus Jannes; and Kevin Whittrick) have visited anonymous, unregulated sites only to be and were baited and encouraged in their suicide attempts (Westerlund et al., 2015). Online helping behaviour is known to reduce with larger group membership size (Markey, 2000), and is likely to vary as a function of the stated goal of the site and its membership (M R. C. Martin et al., 2013; McDonald et al., 2009).

Reputation technologies (Kollock, 1999) were have been developed in an effort to allow the self-regulation of websites and discussion boards (Kollock, 1999). In theory, an individual who behaved in an inappropriate fashion could be downvoted, excluded (Kollock, 1999), reported to service providers (Luxton et al., 2012), or identified automatically (Lin, 2015). But unfortunately however, baiting can

still occur even on self-regulated sites can allow baiting. Abraham Biggs (see above) had established a good reputation on a body-building discussion board prior to his webcast suicide. The baiting of hapless victims and the delays in organising intervention and rendering assistance (Polder-Verkiel, 2012) show demonstrate a need to provide trained services online (see Amichai-Hamburger, Klomek, Friedman, Zuckerman, & Shani-Sherman, 2014; Barak, 2007).

Premeditation

In all the previous examples in which prosecutions have been were sought for baiting a suicide victims, the perpetrators had engaged in a prolonged campaigns over a period of time. The perpetrators have actively harassed an the victim individual or solicited a suicide attempt repeatedly. Spontaneous offline audience reactions in response to an announcement of a suicidal the threat of suicide can be considered a public nuisance (e.g. Kotz, 2011), whereas a sustained and premeditated campaigns of online bullying tends to be viewed differently by the law (see Table 3). In 2013, Shobhana Surti committed suicide while transmitting the act to her husband over a webcam. Surti's suicide occurred in response to an ongoing six month dispute over the payment of her dowry. The Indian police subsequently arrested her husband and parents. Premeditation is assumed if the behaviour was planned and harassment occurred *before* suicidal intent was announced.

Online interventions

The proliferation of online websites promoting suicide is a concern (Klein, 2012; Pirkis, Neal, Dare, Blood, & Studdert, 2009), as and some research has suggested that the internet might be favoured by people with lower self-esteem (see Bell et al., 2017; Warden, Phillips, & Ogloff, 2004). Methods of committing suicide that have been found on the internet feature in the cases of a number of suicide attempts (Aloa, Soderberg, Pohl, & Aloa, 2006 Alao, Soderberg, Pohl, & Aloa, 2006; Becker et al., 2004). Solutions to for addressing the problem include self-censorship, filters, websites promoting help-seeking behaviour (Luxton et al., 2012; Mishara & Weisstub, 2007) and internet based cognitive behavioural therapy (Lai, Maniam, Chan, & Ravindran, 2014). Jurisdictions consider internet censorship as a method of dealing with the problem (https://opennet.net/), but efforts can be fragmented and unsystematic, and filters may end up blocking responsible content (Peltz, 2002, p. 413).

A number of countries are developing programmes of online support for people in need of counselling for suicidal ideation (e.g. Barak, 2007), or are debating whether or not online support should be provided (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2014; Eichenberg, 2008). The phenomenon of suicide in front of webcams argues for the provision of online support. In a number of cases the suicide incident has been taken down from the website, but

Table 3. Classification of negative behaviours directed towards another individuals and possible legal options.

Environment Domain	Occurs prior to announced suicidal intent	Relevant laws	Only occurs after suicidal intent revealed	Relevant laws
Offline	Bullying	Anti-bullying laws	Suicide baiting	Public nuisance
Online-within jurisdiction	Cyberbullying	Harmful digital communications act	Online Suicide baiting	Suicide related materials act?
Online-outside jurisdiction	Cyberbullying	Extradition	Online Suicide baiting	Extradition?

copies continue to circulate on the internet, potentially influencing others (Baume et al., 1997; Klein, 2012).

The media have live broadcast a number of suicides. However, early instances on television have been were brief and did not give the TV audience time to react (e.g. Christine Chubbuck, Rubin, 1974). Some individuals have reported suicidal intent in front of cameras and given the local audience time to react and attempt to assist, but there was no remote, real-time audience (e.g. R. Budd Dwyer, Stevens, 1987). In brief, until recently there was been no "return path" to allow a remote audience to respond to the suicide threats. The following sections discuss several issues faced by organisations attempting to develop online interventions to deal with suicide threats.

Asynchrony

Early visionaries saw the potential of using email to communicate and overcome the limitations of distance (Wilson & Lester, 1998). However, some communication media methods do not overcome *time* limitations. As users of surface mail and email post a message and then wait for a receipt, there is an imposed communication delay (time lag). There is no guarantee of an immediate response to an email detailing an impending crisis (Shirren & Phillips, 2011). Potential objections to the provision of online support for individuals threatening to commit suicide threateners point to limitations such as asynchrony of interactions (Stern, 2003). For instance, Martin Manley documented the reasons for his suicide at length on his website, but only allowed the website to become available *after* his death (Gross, 2013). A suicidal individual is in crisis, and so for an effective intervention it may need to be contingent upon a signified intent.

The internet gives email low priority, and asynchrony is known to reduce helping behaviours (M K. K. Martin & North, 2015). The advent of Spam further reduced the utility of email as a medium of communication (Kim, Jeong, Kim, & So, 2011). A received message

is not necessarily read, nor will the reader recipient necessarily reply (Shirren & Phillips, 2011). When a person is in crisis, a delayed response can be critical (Aloa et al., 2006). Nevertheless, advances in telecommunication now allow real time interchanges in the form of chat, audio and video, and there is a real potential to for monitoring vulnerable individuals or and intervene in real time (Davidson et al., 2017).

Peer-support

The social media have holds considerable potential for providing professional counselling support for individuals who are "at risk" of suicide and self-harming behaviours (Robinson et al., 2016). Systems such as Facebook now make provision for suicidal behaviour to be reported. Some studies suggest that lay people can recognise suicidal ideation (e.g. Corbitt-Hall, Gauthier, Davis, & Witte, 2016), although other studies suggest that such communications can be ambivalent and that suicidal ideation is generally overlooked (Owen et al., 2012).

However, studies of altruistic behaviour suggest that there are limits to the degree of assistance that is spontaneously available online, and that peer support is insufficient. As group the size of a group increases, its members are become less likely to render assistance (Latane & Nida, 1981). For instance, Markey (2000) found that the larger the size of a chat group, the longer the interval for between a person to needing and receive assistance. Instead, a that person was more likely to receive assistance online if they he or she made a direct appeal to a specific individual (Markey, 2000), or there was a degree of perceived similarity between individuals (Guéguen, 2003).

Peer support may take the form of offering assistance for to potential victims, or censure of actual harassers and trolls in online environments. A variety of self-regulated systems allow members to vote down inappropriate behaviour and/or exclude perpetrators

(Kollock, 1999). By contrast, there is less control of suicidal ideation in online environments in Japan. There are also concerns that some online groups have social norms that promote violence rather than assisting people (Baume et al., 1997; Mann, 1986; M R. C. Martin et al., 2013; McDonald et al., 2009; Westerlund, 2013).

Masuda, Kurahashi, and Onari (2013) examined factors associated with suicidal ideation on a social networking service (Mixi) in Japan. They examined 9,990 individuals who were members of an online community related to suicide, and compared them to 228,949 individuals who were not members. The Individuals who belonged to a group associated with suicide also belonged to more online communities overall, reflecting a greater involvement with the internet. However, the individuals who belonged to a suicide-related community also had reduced interconnection with others, and were more likely to have contacts belonging to suicide-related communities. Although pro-suicide sites are legal in Japan, they are banned in Australia, and Suzy's law (HR1183) was tabled federally in the United States in an attempt to curb the activity of pro-suicide sites.

Contingency

Online service providers monitor the use of electronic devices in order to provide better customer service and sell products (Hoffman, Novak, & Peralta, 1999), arguing that they need to know us their customers better in order to help us serve them better. To encourage consumer loyalty and repeated patronage, a range of personalised search engines (e.g. Amazon) have been developed that make marketing recommendations based upon a consumers' demographic profiles, and prior interests, and as well as on the behaviour of their peers (Resnick & Varian, 1997). However, as a consequence of search engine technology, the internet can act as a filter that shows you the user what you she or he wants to see, rather than what you she or he needs to

know (Pariser, 2011). This occurs because search engines will prioritise information based on the content of your users' past searches – and that those of your their peers – when presenting information (Resnick & Varian, 1997).

Having A previously negative outlook can therefore bias search engine results and in turn contribute to and further distorting the viewpoints of suicidal individuals (Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014). The mechanisms that cause of this kind of selective exposure are well developed (Montaner, Lopez, & de la Rosa, 2003), and the tendency is concerning, as internet users may only look at material congruent with to their interests (Pariser, 2011). This is might be satisfactory if one has "healthy" interests, but someone who frequents pro-suicide websites is more likely to see pro-suicide and other negative information (McDonald et al., 2009).

Personalised search engines can now make recommendations based upon the users' demographic profiles and online activities of users and, their peers, or their online activity (Montaner et al., 2003). This sort of technology has enabled made it possible to tailor advertising to individual a users' specific online interests (Chen & Stallaert, 2014). Although described as scary and disturbing by some users (Moore, Moore, Shanahan, Horky, & Mack, 2015), the technology has considerable potential to respond contingently to words such as "depressed", "blue", and "suicide", and offer assistance. Such technologies are already in operation, but are not well understood (Mathews-Hunt, 2016). It is not unclear whether or not people will tend to welcome impersonal automated offers of assistance when they are showing "signs" of distress on the internet (Barnard, 2014; Moore et al., 2015). However, various support groups are aware of this capability to target specific search terms, and messages of support regularly feature as "advertisements" during searches for suicide related information on some search engines (Luxton et al., 2012).

Such technologies may appeal to specific segments of the community (Seward & Harris, 2016 Seward, & Harris, 2016). The proportion of members of the community with mental health problems that who also possesses a mobile phone is potentially quite high (Campbell, Caine, Connelly, Doub, & Bragg, 2015). Systems for the ecological momentary assessment of risk and intervention are under development (de Beurs, Kirtley, Kerkhof, Portzky, & O'Connor, 2015), or currently in operation (Skovgaard Larsen, Frandsen, & Erlangsen, 2016), and have the potential to assess, spatially locate and assist "on site" and in "real time".

A range of surveillance systems also have the capacity to search a person individuals's personal electronic devices for signs of suicidal ideation (e.g. Flexispy, GoGuardian), but although there are concerns that the application of such systems will detract from freedom of speech (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). There may also be concerns about privacy with such systems (Milward, Day, Wadsworth, Strang, & Lynskey, 2015; Smith, Birnholtz, Reynolds, & Hancock, 2013). For instance, the remote activation of student webcams in 2010 by the Pennsylvanian School System (to check for substance use) caused the WebcamGate controversy (Robbins et al. v. Lower Merion School District, 2010).

Empathy

Another objection to the provision of online support for to those who threaten to commit suicide threateners is that the communication channels do not afford the necessary cues for effective empathic interactions and assistance (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2014). It remains to be seen whether younger cohorts respond differently (Seward & Harris, 2016), but evidence suggests that better interactions should occur with communication channels that providing richer cues. Studies of communication have used games such as Prisoners' Dilemma and Daytrader to examine the development of cooperation over a communication channel.

Such studies suggest that video interactions promote better co-operation than audio or text (Bos, Gergle, Olson, & Olson, 2001; Bos, Olson, Gergle, Olson, & Wright, 2002; Jensen, Farnham, Drucker, & Kollock, 2000). For instance, disinhibited negative online behaviours such as "flaming" can be reduced by eye contact (Lapido-Lefler & Barak, 2012).

There are suggestions that videoconferencing can provide similar therapeutic benefits to that those achieved in of face to face settings (Antonacci, Bloch, Saeed, Yildirim, & Talley, 2008; Barak, Hen, Boniel-Nissim, & Shapira, 2008; Demiris, Oliver, & Courtney 2006; Hyler, Gangure, & Batchelder, 2005). Such reports of online benefits need to be treated with care caution. There are likely to be differences in the ways in which such online services operate. Even if online services are of equivalent efficacy under ideal circumstances (Frueh, Monnier, Elhai, Grubaugh, & Knapp, 2004), they may not be equally effective under typical operation, – and other constraints such as efficiency may determine the selection and use of the different services (Andrews, 1999). Nevertheless, the provision of such services deserves serious consideration (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2014; Seward & Harris, 2016 Seward, & Harris, 2016), as they extend the practical reach of suicide prevention services into the internet (Lai et al., 2014; Luxton et al., 2012; Robert, Suelves, Armayones, & Ashley, 2015; Robinson et al., 2016).

In the absence of online therapeutic services, many troubled people are left to treat themselves (Baker & Moore, 2008), or spend their time in dark places (Biddle, Donovan, Hawton, Kapur, & Gunnell, 2008; Westerlund et al., 2012). In particular, their appeals for assistance are not made from public places like buildings or bridges (Mann, 1981), but from electronic devices (Bell et al., 2017) where assistance is not necessarily forthcoming (Polder-Verkiel, 2012). The assumption that troubled people can simply help themselves on the internet without the input of professionals is mistaken, and in the case of

vulnerable people such as Mark Drybrough, Amanda Todd, Shobhana Surti, Suzy Gonzales, and Abraham Biggs, this mistake has been fatal. We this article has have drawn attention to identifiable cases that highlight specific issues associated with the current situation, as this can assist efforts to persuade policy makers and to facilitate positive change (Small & Loewenstein, 2003).

Conclusion

Electronic devices can potentially perform the same function as aircraft black boxes, recording the details of a critical moment in someone's the user's life (see Davidson et al., 2017). In these circumstances the activities of observers and witnesses can also be recorded. In instances where there is a prior record of sustained negative interaction the legal system may consider prosecution, whether this is for cyberbullying or incitement to commit suicide. In other situations where an audience spontaneously responds to a threatened suicide with baiting behaviour (Mann, 1981) the action is illegal in some jurisdictions (e.g. Australia). The cases cited here demonstrate that there is no guarantee that a vulnerable person seeking online assistance will receive it, and this in turn argues that a range of online interventions should be developed and offered by trained professionals, and receive support.

This article has identified a number of factors underpinning the online baiting behaviours directed at of would be suicides vulnerable or suicidal persons (e.g. anonymity, remoteness, privacy leakage, reduced controls). We have referred to some of the legal issues underpinning the prosecution and punishment of suicide baiters in different jurisdictions. The potential for the online medium to respond responsibly, rapidly and effectively to online suicide threats was been discussed. We it is concluded that the phenomena of online suicide threats and baiting are serious and growing, and we identify a number of specific victims have been identified in order to draw attention to the areas that requiring change and

provide in an affort to provide an impetus for engaging in further research and reform.

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