

SLAVERY NO MORE 2012 GLOBAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING CONFERENCE

August 10-11 ~ LOS ANGELES, CA

The Internet: Antagonist and Ally

Jocelyn White: We met Mark last year when he came to visit the Los Angeles Metro Task Force. We have Mark Latonero from USC and Julie Cordua from the DNA Foundation and Jennifer Musto, a Post Doctorate Research Fellow. Please join me in welcoming them in discussing the Internet - Antagonist and Ally.

Mark Latonero: Hi everyone. Good afternoon. My name is Mark Latonero from USC. I'm going to lead off this discussion about the internet and human trafficking. The Annenberg Center at USC has been focused specifically on technology and human trafficking for the last two and a half years. This project started in coordination with the Department of State. We've conducted international field work in Thailand, Cambodia, Haiti, Saudi Arabia. We've published a report last year on the role of online classifieds and social media in human trafficking, and we co-sponsor meetings most recently with the California Attorney General's office on multi sector responses to technology and trafficking. We're also developing tools to monitor domestic minor sex trafficking for federal and local law enforcement.

When we look at what's happening with technology and trafficking, we see that the internet and the web is clearly being used to facilitate human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. This facilitation happens, because the internet makes things more visible. The internet has a way of making any social activity and more of our social activity and communication visible online. Because of this visibility, the internet has a way of magnifying and amplifying the good, the bad, and the ugly for all of us to see in our society.

Those who are involved in sex trafficking use this visibility to their advantage. Online advertising sites like Cityvibe which advertises services here. You can see on a map of the Los Angeles metro area or of course like Backpage.com. What Backpage does is dramatically increase the visibility of the old classified sections found in the back pages of things like the *L.A. Weekly* such that it makes easier for potential traffickers to advertise or anyone to sell and advertise anything from furniture to concert tickers, and it has become a tool for traffickers to advertise to a larger audience and exploit victims across greater geographies. Therein lies a paradox. This very quality of high visibility also makes online advertising sites a useful tool for the identification and investigation of potential cases of domestic minor sex trafficking.

The question we ask ourselves is how do we use these tools to our advantage? Interesting thing about online visibility is that if you can see something online, it leaves a trace. It leaves a trace of digital data. With that trace of data, we can store it, we can collect it, and we can monitor it. Let me use an example from our report. All of these blue lines and the numbers next to them actually represent the number of posts daily on *L.A. Backpage*. Not any other city. Not San Diego but just Los Angeles. On average it's about 600 to 700 posts a day. That's 50,000 posts over a three month period. That's what this graph represents in *L.A. Backpage*

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alone. That's over 200,000 posts per year, so what we're doing is we're collecting all of it. We're creating a permanent historical record by collecting and storing all of these digital traces, all of these posts on Backpage and about a dozen other sites.

What's important to realize here is that because of these online tools, we're collecting evidence and information that we really have never had access to before. In fact, the internet is giving us an unprecedented window into criminal behavior on a massive scale. We've collected all this data. What do we do with it all? How do we make sense of it? The sheer amount of information online, on just *Backpage L.A.* makes it literally impossible for an individual human being to comprehend it all.

They cannot go through it all by themselves but with digital search looking through that data is fairly easy. One way we search through that data is through keyword searches. So for those 50,000 posts over that three month period that I showed before, we did a simple term search. We found out, for instance, that the term girl was mentioned about 15,000 times. Young about 145 times. Latina is about 10% of all the posts. Asian about 20%. Visiting is sort of a transitory signal or indicates maybe transitory behavior just over 2,000.

Of course, the problem with keyword searches for commercial sexual exploitation of children is that the clandestine nature of the communication, the language is coded. It's constantly evolving. Here we use the help of people on the front lines to tell us what new terms are emerging that we should search for. *DNA Foundation* and others have been instrumental in helping to collect these terms.

We know that possible trafficking behavior is visible online. It leaves a trace of data that we can monitor, and we can search through. How else can we use technology? What we've been doing at USC is doing a little more advanced analytics to aid and counter trafficking efforts. We can track potential cases over time, and we can track them through their mobile phone numbers or the phone numbers that they exhibit on these posts. Here we see the same phone number advertising not only on *Backpage* but simultaneously on *Cityvibe* and some other sites.

Imagine every post out there; we're collecting all the texts, photos, phone numbers, names, pseudonyms any mention of geographic location, street names, or cities. What we can do for instance with the geography, we can extract identifying posts by phone number. We can extract the language in the advertisements that relate to geographic region and get a sense of where that person is from or where they're advertising from. We have a post from Inland Empire, 16 from L.A., 25 from Orange County.

Another type of advanced analysis that we're working on along with Microsoft's pioneering work in this area is the use of photo and facial recognition, so comparing the photographs of the database of missing and exploited children with the millions of pictures that we are gathering online.

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I'm just going to end with some additional issues that we're grappling with, and we're going to address in our next report. If you have any ideas, we'd love to hear them as well. One is the relationship between online trafficking and offline trafficking. Is what we're seeing online the majority of trafficking cases now, or is it just the tip of the iceberg? How do minors that are trafficked move from street to online to back again? Another issues is how can internet tools not only disrupt the supply of trafficking but also the demand, and I know DNA has done a lot of work in that area too.

Also how can we leverage the same tools that we are using to disrupt sex trafficking to labor trafficking as well? For example, are labor traffickers recruiting via online sites? We also need to look at how trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children is mutating beyond online advertising to other digital means from mobile phones and the rest. As we have seen there is no doubt that newer technologies will be used to facilitate domestic minor sex trafficking. Yet as we have also learned, we can find, and we will find innovative ways to leverage those tools to combat trafficking as well. Thank you very much for your time.

Julie Cordua: I'm Julie Cordua. I'm the Executive Director of the *DNA Foundation*. I can speak to what we're doing. Many of you are probably familiar with the *DNA Foundation* as the organization that Demi Moore and Ashtyn Kutcher started in 2009 to fight child sex trafficking. The organization broadly focused on the demand side of the issue for the first few years that it existed. Then last year, we took a strategic shift in our focus. We had convened in 2009 as part of the original foundation something called the DNA Tech Task Force where we had actually convened about 25 of the top tech companies in Silicon Valley and outside of Silicon Valley to come together and talk about how from a technology point of view could you use technology to fight trafficking.

Last summer after being in the issue for a while and understanding some of the trends and the space, we decided that was an area we should just focus all of our resources on. And focus not only on how can technology be used to disrupt child sex trafficking but look at child exploitation as a little bit of a broader net. I know everyone here is really focused on trafficking as a broad net. We're actually going to take a little bit of a different approach. We focus on the role of technology in disrupting child sexual exploitation as a broad net. We look at child sex trafficking as well as child pornography and will be expanding into other forms of crimes that technology facilitates.

Something that we firmly believe, and a lot of people say well if all these tools and technology went away, we'd be in a better place, but the fact is it's here. It has brought us so many good things. Technology and the internet. And what we believe in our stance and organization is how can we use those same brilliant minds that have built these tools and get them invested in this issue to build the tools to disrupt some of this behavior that's happening online.

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Our work really focuses in three areas. The first is what we can Intel. That's learning new things and sharing things amongst the players that can make a difference. Our first two projects under research is a national survey of child sex trafficking survivors and the role that technology played in their recruitment, their grooming, their advertisement, and ultimately their escape. The reason that is so critical to our work is, because ultimately you'll hear me talk about our secondary area which is designing deterrents programs for pimps and johns and child pornographers and consumers of child pornography. We don't want to do anything until we've heard from survivors. We want to know straight from them the role that technology has played.

We have heard some organizations come up with different ideas, and we want to know would those ideas actually have put you at risk when you were in your situation or would that have been helpful? We're constantly getting feedback from the field. We're working with a variety of survivor organizations across the country to administer the survey and get those results in and use that to develop programs moving forward.

The second area of our research specifically also on child sex trafficking, and it's similar to what Mark's doing. You can't design programs online, deterrents programs, until you understand what the indicators are of child sex trafficking. That is something that we're trying to do. We're actually looking within both escort pages and john boards which many of you may be familiar with. These are online discussion boards where men who buy sex go to talk about their experiences, share tips, and other things. We're comparing it actually to a truth set of data, so we actually have a truth set of known instances of child sex trafficking victims online.

We're working with a company that does this type of sophisticated, predictive, linguistic analysis actually for the Department of Defense when it comes to terrorist activity in the Middle East. What they're trying to do is can we predict within these environments where we are discussing a child? One that's very good for what it gives you at face value which is the ability to look with some degree of confidence if something is a child. It also gives you new indicators of what are those key words that represent children. What you can then take to other environments, so when you're talking to the Facebook's of the worlds, Google's, Tagged, other social networks they cannot find trafficking on their platform unless you give them indicators of it.

They can create all the algorithms in the world if you help them find what the indicators are. That's what we're trying to do. We have open conversations with many of these companies, and we are trying to give them data. They can then go into their systems and see if they can create to identify high risk activity that would then be flagged for them to review and possibly report to law enforcement.

They do this successfully right now for child pornography. Child sex trafficking is a different beast as we know, and as Mark outlined, it's often hidden and masked under false language. Driving into that language is really what is critical.

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I wish we had our slides for me talking about our second area of focus. I should say under our research and Intel, we have those two research projects we conduct. Then we also convene our technology task force multiple times a year where we come together, we share the research we've learned. We identify where companies are willing to participate with us on projects. There are many of these big companies that have amazing engineering resources that are willing to pilot efforts with us. When they have a lot of data, a lot of users on their system, can they test out whether they indicators we are seeing actually prove out to be high risk postings and test these projects with us.

The second area that we work on is deterrents. That's ultimately where we hope the research we do will lead us to develop online deterrents programs for those participating in child sex trafficking. The program we run right now under deterrents is specifically related to child pornography, but we are learning a lot. We think it could have significant impact in the trafficking space. We currently run our own site where people who are either searching for child pornography on major search platforms which believe it or not you can find it easily or downloading peer to peer files will be intercepted by our website. They will not get what they're looking for. Instead they land on our website where we communicate to them the consequences of their actions. We geolocate them on a map with their IP address, and we tell them if we know where you are, so can the police. We also offer them help, because the reality is that most of the people who are trying to consume this have some kind of issue that they need to deal with. We are telling them seek help before you harm a child.

We ran this program for about a year in what we call beta which was let's put these decoys out there and just see if we can get anyone there. We got over 240,000 unique visitors to our page in a very like I said beta phase. We just three weeks ago relaunched this effort with much more significant presence in search, and we will be increasing our presence in peer to peer environments in about six weeks. We've already tripled our daily traffic to the site just through search platforms. When I talk about search, this is low hanging fruit. These are not professional consumers of child pornography. These are people going on Google looking for child pornography.

We've also implemented better data collection, so we're starting to see trends of who the consumers of this content are. We've implemented better testing, so all of our projects we do we really try to put metrics in place so we can see if we're being impactful. We've worked with the communications agency, because what we're talking about here is behavior change. We're trialing different messaging on that page, so different pages will pop up based on the visitor. We have one page right now that's actually seen a 16 click through to the help page where these are people who are not just getting freaked out and jumping off the page but deciding to click through to the help page. We're then able to measure how long they stay on that page. We know we have actually also generated multiple phone calls to the help line that have lasted longer than ten minutes. I mean this is just three weeks into our better metric testing.

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We're starting to see that if you intercept what people believe is anonymous hidden behavior and you give them pause for a minute and just say you're not alone. This isn't a one to one channel for you to abuse a child, think about your actions. There is possibly an ability to divert that behavior. Now what we need to do is see how can we find the indicators of child sex trafficking and possibly implement our leanings of this into something where we divert people who are online looking to buy sex from a child or another type of online intervention strategy.

Our third area of focus is trying to spur technology innovation in this space. We will actually just a short plug for any law enforcement who's in the room. We will be launching this fall innovation challenge with a significant sum behind it where we actually want to put the challenge out to an international network of developers and engineers and say here's one of the biggest technical challenges that we face when it comes to either disrupting child pornography online or disrupting child sex trafficking have at it and come back to us. The winner will get X amount of money. This is about taking the issue that we all deal with every day and putting it into the minds of those people who built these tools that are amazing and getting them to think about it a different way. Right now we're still trying to craft what is that challenge. I don't think it's going to be the silver bullet, but it's something that could be useful to the field of law enforcement and others who are working on the front lines. We are looking for ideas if anyone has them, but that's the area we play in. We're welcome to any questions after we're done. Thank you.

Jennifer Musto: Just waiting for our technological slides. Here we go. Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us today. It's nice to share a panel with my esteemed colleagues. My name is Jennifer Musto, and I hold a dual appointment at Rice University and USC. What I want to do today is actually offer you some tales from the research field. You may have heard today already notes about data and information. Interestingly there's very little academic or evidence based research on these issues. What my plug is today for all of you is that we need good sound rigorous data in order to know the most effective anti-trafficking solutions, specific to technology.

Myself along with a number of other scholars have received some funds from companies like Microsoft and Google to advance basic understanding about these kinds of technologies and how they're facilitating trafficking. In the interest of full disclosure, I have received Microsoft funding. Part of what my research is looking at are how are law enforcement harnessing the tools of technology in order to respond to these cases. I want to take two tacks today with my presentation. First to offer you some tales from the field and stories from law enforcement that I've spoke with but also to point out some areas for future action and research.

Backpage has been mentioned already. I want to underscore that when we're talking about the kinds of platforms that are used, there's actually a multiplicity of online sites, but often times *Backpage* captures a wide array of public attention. Julie referenced it earlier. *Backpage* is really the online low hanging fruit. Though there's been a lot of public attention

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around *Backpage* what law enforcement has demonstrated that rather than having a kind of singular site or a silo of technology that's used in fact what's happening and what's taking place is the kind of multiplicity of sites. We're calling it at USC information and internet technology ecosystem.

I've put up here in the icons some evidence of the new sites that law enforcement are coming across. Some of them may seem familiar. *Facebook*. Increasingly law enforcement have come across sites like *Mocaspaces*. Fascinatingly enough the technology's advancing at such a rate that often times law enforcement don't know what these technologies actually are before they get a case. On that score I just want to share with you some of the interview experts. I do apologize. As a scholar I like more data than less, so let me just point out to you what this federal law enforcement agent noted to me in talking about this, the prevalence of social networking spaces.

"We had a case where a juvenile was lured into prostitution by a Facebook account. It [Facebook] definitely plays a role in the work that we're doing." [Meredith] goes on to point out that these girls use cell phones, the internet. Rather again than looking at online classified sites like *Backpage* or online classified sites like *Backpage*, there's a multiplicity of sites that are taking place. What I want to suggest is that this is a notable trend for us to pay attention to in that social networking sites blur the boundaries of what we have traditionally thought of as recruitment and advertisement. Preliminary interviews with traffic persons suggest that the amount of traffic persons that maintain an ongoing communication through their Facebook or through their *Mocaspaces* accounts with pimps or with their pimp traffickers demonstrates the kind of fluidity that's taking place between one site and the other. Often times connected most notably through mobile applications and mobile phones.

Meredith further points out, *"I've seen I more and more. We had a 14 year old who was lured by the pimp through Mocaspaces. I don't know much about Mocaspaces."* Here if we're thinking and have a mind towards solutions, I really think we need to think about the kinds of trainings that law enforcement have and also ways we can harness understanding about technology into these increasing social media and networked mobile realms. If law enforcement are coming across cases they have very little understanding. It's a kind of key way for us to focus future training efforts to really ensure that law enforcement have the tools and the fluency with some of these technologies to respond in the most suitable way.

Another assumption that widely circulates when we talk about trafficking and technology is that trafficking is increasingly moving from the track or from the stroll to hotel rooms. There's this presumption that all commercial sex as well as domestic minor sex trafficking is moving indoors and is facilitated online. One of the things that I've been really struck by in interviewing law enforcement and doing preliminary interviews with traffic persons is in fact the mobile phone. Mobile phones are allowing for a kind of fluidity and interplay between social networking sites, advertising sites, and actual street based prostitution.

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I think again this is key if all investigation muscle is put behind looking at online classifieds like *Backpage*, we may be missing out on the ways in which sites like *Backpage* along with *Mocospace* along with mobile phones are actually promoting both the advertisement and the facilitation of commercial sexual exploitation.

In just thinking about the mobile phones, I wanted to draw your attention to the fact that mobile phones came up as a huge key point in all of the interviews that I did with law enforcement. In fact if *Backpage* was to 2011 the discussion of online sex trafficking cases, I think the new discussions really have to be around mobile phones. This is important in that a number of youth that law enforcement have worked with are accessing websites vis-à-vis their mobile phones.

Why this is important is that there are different industry wide standards for mobile phones, particularly in how they store their data. I think it's welcome that corporations like Microsoft and Google have begun to play a role and think about how data can be scraped to better address this issue. Another very low tech solution is having an industry wide standard of how certain kinds of information is stored. That would make preservation letters and subpoena requests a lot more singularly useful for law enforcement, so they don't have to kind of reinvent the wheel with every technology company that comes to the fore.

What was really striking to me in starting this research study is visiting some local agencies where there is a real capacity and resource deficit. For all the talk of high tech and how technology can be harnessed to address trafficking, I really think we need to begin to think about emboldening and providing adequate resources for local agencies that are often responding to the issue. A number of local agents I spoke with noted that the FBI's Innocence Lost Task Force has really provided a great supplement. Certainly the existence of task forces have helped to address some of these key technological issues. Like local agencies, the FBI also has certain kinds of budgetary constraints, so thinking about ways that we could use technology that can be accessible, affordable and can be used at the local level.

The last point I think in really thinking with an eye towards the future is how do we share information better? Part of what technology offers is the ability to share information across a wide array of spaces in between professional boundaries. Because of the multijurisdictional reality of trafficking, technology can really help in that way. Just as information sharing can be difficult in all aspects of anti-trafficking coordination so too do we need technological tools and platforms that can help facilitate information sharing not only between law enforcement at the federal and local level but also for others who are involved in anti-trafficking activities. Thank you.

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