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CRITICAL REFLECTION AND CHALLENGES IN CREATING A MULTI-LEVEL CYBER WELLNESS POLICY TO SUPPORT DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

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Synopsis:

People routinely underestimate effects of their actions, yet the implications can be profound. This paper will address contemporary issues of cyber wellness and reflect upon challenges and solutions that are necessary to promote cyber-wellness. It will provide an opportunity to discuss what kind of policies (at micro, meso, macro level) should be developed to promote cyber-wellness. In this paper I will contextualize the conversation addressing policy development supportive to cyber wellness.

Critical Reflections and Challenges in Creating a Multi-level Cyber Wellness Policy in Support of Digital Citizenship

Overview:

This paper will contextualize the conversation addressing policy development supportive to cyber wellness. My intent is to pose questions and develop issues that will lead to rich conversations and growth of our collective knowledge in the post- modern digital world. Cyber wellness is a facet of cyber or digital citizenship, in that it asks us to think about digital equity, digital citizenship and cyber wellness within the larger frame of a global socio-critical perspective or within the context of culture, politics and civil society (Collin. Et al., 2015).

According to the Task Force on Cyber Wellness, cyber wellness may be defined as "*the positive well-being of Internet users and a healthy cyber-culture for the Internet community*" (Putnam and Pulcher, 2007, p. 73). Implicit in this definition of cyber wellness is the recognition that there is a need for freedom to socialize virtually, to use e-learning platforms to obtain mental and physical health information and to participate freely in a political process. It also requires a degree of cyber etiquette, responsibility, and civility in the virtual public sphere. Searson, et al., (2015, 730) defines global or digital citizenship as follows: "*a person who develops the skills and knowledge to effectively use the Internet and other digital technology especially in order to participate responsibly in social and civic activities*". Searson continues by adding digital communication and collaboration, etiquette, health and welfare, and respecting rights and acting responsibly as components of global digital citizenship. The challenge may well be in reaching consensus on a definition of "appropriate" and "responsible."

Issues such as political ideologies in opposition, global and sovereign views of the Cosmopolis and how the liberal democratic telos of freedom of speech and expression navigates these divides are at the heart of policy creation. Rather than a granular view of the topic, something that would far exceed the scope and intent of this paper, I chose to take a balcony view which will bring into focus the at times incommensurate ideologies at play. From a structural perspective I will

first address what I perceived to be the most salient geopolitical variables (macro-level issues). Secondly, I will touch upon the philosophical – ethical – cultural factors that need to be reflected upon in a meso- level view. Lastly, I will briefly share my thoughts on the educational process that may be relevant in the crafting of both policy and intervention strategies. I will close this paper with the challenges that I believe will need to be addressed to develop policy. In a truly Hegelian fashion, I believe that the tensions which initially are presented between the opposing ideologies, will lead to a true consensus.

In 2016 the United Nations Department of Public information convention was held in Korea. The outcome of this convention was an initiative titled *A Global Day of Education* which emphasized education, learning and literacy as a means of supporting global development, peace, and democratic practice. This initiative is in keeping with the United Nations sustainable developmental goals especially SDG 4, which emphasizes quality education for all and historically with article 19 of the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights which proclaimed:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (Ash,2016, 26-27).

Attempting to place cyber wellness and or digital citizenship within a larger global and cosmopolitan context is attempting to situate these constructs in a matrix of intersecting and potentially conflicting variables. Searson et al. (2011) raised a salient point regarding the degree to which the development of cyber wellness and cyber-citizenship is limited by national/state identity and other structural factors. This begs the question of whether CW, as a component of digital citizenship, should be subsumed under the umbrella of civil rights or human rights. Further, does the constituent power to develop substantive policies addressing CW and cyber-citizenship lie within the domain of a new international cosmopolitan order—or reside within sovereign location-bounded states.

Again Searson (2015) asks, to what degree is the development of cyber wellness and cyber citizenship limited to nation – state identity and other structural factors. Perhaps, situating human rights as civil rights or privileges

of citizenship can be viewed as the modern equivalent of feudal privilege, and inherited state that greatly enhances one's life chances (Carens, 1987). Turner (1993) defines human rights as a sociological construct that has often been viewed as an essential supplement to institutional citizenship providing a guarantee to civil rights. This is partially true on the grounds that in a global or Cosmopolitan political system, human rights would function as a more realistic and potentially more progressive structure, than the traditional sovereign based concept of citizenship. Turner (1993, 499-500), continues "*human rights as a concept has been challenged. It is seen by many to be biased and Western; it provides Western powers with an opportunity to intervene in the Third World under the auspices of international organizations. The human rights movement has been criticized for adopting Western individualism as the underpinning for the modern exercise of rights*".

Countering the above position is the summarized and expressed view of Ignateff (1999) that the movement towards secular human rights has become the Lingua Franca of global politics and the postmodern world. Much of what we are seeing in this statement is the implication that a new project of human rights is linked to the proposition that the nation – state can no longer serve as the unit of analysis for rights and that perhaps a post-national citizenship may emerge (Sommers and Roberts, 2008). The apparent decoupling of the legal frame addressing rights from the sovereign states suggests that territorial states are losing their power in our postmodern world.

It would seem, that the emergence of human rights based on consensus implies that global cosmopolitan law trumps sovereign constitutive power. The cosmopolitan view of human rights, enforced by international humanitarian interventions, is perhaps an attempt to conceptualize and implement this new global order. Not only may there very well be a new global movement supportive of human rights but implicit is a far greater change that the Westphalian sovereignty paradigm of international relationships, with its principles of sovereign immunity, domestic jurisdiction, and non-intervention, has been displaced by a new principal of the unassailability of human rights; *Globalization of human rights leading to a universal humanism*" (Cohen, 2012, 8-9).

To summarize, the first issue to be addressed under policy development can be stated simply: should cyber wellness as a component of digital citizenship be subsumed under the umbrella of civil rights or human rights and secondarily does the constituent power to develop the substantive policies addressing cyber wellness and cyber citizenship lie within the domain of a new international cosmopolitan order or sovereign location bounded states.

At a meso level of analysis, each of us develops a personal understanding of the world and our place within it. Given the multitude of social and cultural contexts around the world, there is no common standard for appropriate and rational behavior in the virtual public sphere. Each of us uses multiple ideological surround models (ISM) to craft our understanding of the world and our place within it. Observations and or behaviors made or performed within the adherence to our ideological surround models will be viewed as normative and appropriate within the boundaries of our specific ideological surround. Advocates of different ISMs may lack a common standard of evaluation that enables them to agree with us as to what is appropriate and rational behavior in the virtual public sphere. The task is to move beyond this postmodern relativistic stance, and toward a common and agreed to ethos of cyber wellness and digital citizenship.

Further, the open nature of the World Wide Web (WWW) does not allow for control over the information that is posted, so disparate world views are bound to come up against each other. The question is how do we move beyond this relativistic frame to a common and agreed upon global ethos of cyber wellness and digital citizenship? Since we cannot control for or perhaps should not attempt to control the information on the WWW, the development of globally acceptable cyber wellness norms will need to focus on the user, with self-restraint replacing external constraints. This leads us to a view of cyber wellness that is teachable and navigates the channel between relativism and the human right to seek-receive-impart information in a self-monitored and civil virtual public sphere.

In the quest for a global human rights norm, addressing cyber wellness, that would develop etiquette in three of the key and related actions of cyber wellness (to seek – receive – and impart information) a multiplicity of powers, public and private interests, intersect and compete with each other to determine whose ideological surround model will have constitutive power. To focus and limit this conversation we offer thoughts on two constructs that are

core to the challenge of developing a cyber wellness policy all can abide by: civility and openness.

I take civility to be more than manners in a conventional sense. The Oxford English dictionary states that civility is behavior or speech appropriate to civil interactions and the minimum degree of courtesy required in a social situation. Quoting Ash (2016,209): "*Civility is a cool virtue. It does not demand warmth or friendship. It just asks that you stay in the same space and keep talking*". Civility in respect to the beliefs and views of others is inseparable from the ideas of tolerance and toleration. Tolerance makes differences possible; differences make toleration necessary (Walzer, 1997). Again Ash referencing Karl Poppa, (2016:214): states that "*an attitude of tolerance underpinning a policy of toleration is always a difficult balancing act*". Tolerance asked us to position ourselves somewhere between wholehearted acceptance and unrestrained opposition. To go too far in tolerating those who are themselves programmatically intolerant (dictatorship) we will end up destroying the foundations of tolerance. Karl Popper (1966,295) calls this the paradox of tolerance: "*unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance.*"

Openness about all kinds of human diversity is a vital component of civility. One cannot express themselves unless one is able to identify differences with others. Openness is simply the willingness to hear another's position or opinion in opposition to our own. Openness without civility may induce the opposite of what we intend, chaos and anarchy.

The second or meso level issue or challenge in creating a policy for cyber wellness then must address how does one develop an agreed to policy of cyber wellness that is teachable and navigates the channel between relativism and the human right to seek-receive-impart information in a self- monitored and civil virtual public sphere.

It would appear to be obvious that what is required for the development of a cyber wellness norm to be universally acceptable is that as far as humanly possible, external constraints need to be replaced with self- restraint. This then leads us to the third section which addresses educational approaches to developmental and socio-psychological components of cyber wellness.

At the micro level, our task is to educate students so that they can safely and equitably participate in online communities, and that this participation is viewed as essential to a student's development in our global society. There is considerable literature that advises us on how and what to teach students to develop cyberwellness and a healthy sense of digital citizenship (see Law, et al., 2018; Hui & Campbell, 2018). The technical and educational tools are already available in virtual schooling programs whereby classrooms from opposite sides of our global can have an opportunity to develop relationships, viewpoints, and conversations in a virtually safe place. The third challenge for policy development is to provide sustainability and capacity to ensure that a virtual global educational process is integrated as part of a student's ongoing educational experience.

Finally, just a few thoughts about the challenges presented to policy development and more importantly to implementation by the intersect in our postmodern society of radical individualism and the age of authenticity. Most noticeable since the 1960's, civil society has been faced by an obsession to being true to oneself; being authentic. The seeking of authenticity and sincerity has for some been criticized as leading to a corrosion of all forms of collective authority. Radical individualism (my priorities over societies) can be seen in the refusal to wear masks, socially isolate or even believe there is actually a pandemic. Epistemology asks us to think about the social conditions that create our knowledge foundations. If society is adhering to the ideological surround model of authenticity and radical individualism, how do we as educators gain support and inculcate in our students the collective sense of responsibility that is necessary for civility, toleration and an equitable version of digital citizenship.

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