

Assessment Issues With Young People Who Engage in Sexually Abusive Behaviours Through the New Technologies

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Introduction

In 2005 meetings were held throughout the world to inform the global study commissioned by the United Nations on violence against children. One topic that attracted little attention was whether cyberspace and the new technologies should be considered as a separate category, or should simply be thought of as another location in which harm might be done to children that would be subsumed under all other categories, such as the family, institutions, the community and the workplace. Indeed, it might also have been argued that such violence against children, even if it does exist, was largely confined to the western countries where computer and Internet saturation was high. For practitioners and researchers working in this area this raised difficult challenges. What is different about the new technologies? Why are they important media to consider in relation to young people? This is also the starting point for this chapter, because what sparse research has been done in this area would suggest that the new technologies are different in many ways and that the largest consumers and, indeed creators, of the new technologies are young people. It might follow from this that some of the sexually abusive behaviours evidenced in relation to the new technologies are practiced by children and young people in a context that normalises such practices.

The abundance of publications concerning young people who engage in sexually abusive behaviours is evidence of a general concern about this population (Concepcion, 2004). This concern in part relates to the belief that many sexually aggressive practices emerge during adolescence and that without intervention, children and young people who engage in such behaviours will grow into adults who offend against others. Such research also sits alongside other work which suggests that only a very small number of young people who engage in sexually abusive behaviours ever go on to offend as adults (Righthand and Welch, 2001). For practitioners,

tensions exist about the need to protect other, vulnerable children, and the possibility of over-evaluating risk to the detriment of the young people themselves. Hackett (2004: 51) has suggested that, 'In an area of practice which remains controversial and contested, and which often presents professionals with a high degree of anxiety, good assessments can help ensure that young people are treated equitably, that the nature and meaning of their sexual behaviours are understood, that their specific needs are highlighted and that risks are quantified and strategies to manage such risks are identified'.

In the context of the new technologies it is not even clear what it is that we are concerned about. What constitutes sexually abusive practices in these media? Are we concerned that children will continue to engage in such practices or that this will develop into other sexually abusive behaviours that involve physical off-line contact with a child? In relation to sexually abusive behaviours all together, authors such as French (2005) have argued that there are difficulties in providing adequate definitions of sexually abusive behaviour by young people, which are compounded by the absence of literature regarding 'normal sexual development' and confusion about what is appropriate at different ages. However, most definitions acknowledge that abusive behaviour involves force or coercion of another child and the severity of the behaviour increases with greater disparity between the ages of the children involved. These definitions will pose some difficulties for us in relation to the new technologies.

Araji (2004: 4) raised the question as to what are the factors that can be used to determine when the sexual behaviour of children, 'cross the line from normative to non-normative or criminal behaviours', again raising the important issue that youths should not be labelled 'deviants' if their behaviours are normative. This author posed a series of questions that parents, clinicians and other professionals can use as a general



guide for determining whether sexual behaviours are problematic and these include:

- Whether the behaviour puts the individual at risk of physical harm, disease or exploitation.
- Does it interfere with the person's overall development, learning, social or family relationships?
- Does it interfere as above in relation to others?
- Does it violate a rule or a law?
- Does it cause the person to feel confused, embarrassed, guilty or negative about themselves?
- Does it cause the above in relation to others?
- Is the behaviour abusive because of lack of consent, inequality, coercion or force?
- Is it dysfunctional in relation to the development of healthy relationships?
- Is it destructive to the family, peer groups, school, community or society?

These are useful questions for us to keep in mind in relation to the new technologies and we will come back to many of the issues they raise. One central aspect of these questions relates to the importance of considering the problematic behaviour within a developmental framework (Medoff, 2004). Prentky and Righthand (2003: 1) have suggested that, 'Unlike adults, adolescents are still very much 'in flux.' No aspect of their development, including their cognitive development, is fixed or stable. In addition, their life circumstances often are very unstable. In a very real sense, we are trying to assess the risk of 'moving targets'.

A further challenge for this chapter relates to the lack of empirical data. Hackett (2004) has emphasised that information gained as part of an assessment needs to be evaluated in order to generate hypotheses about an individual case and how best to proceed. The context for this part of the assessment should be a wider frame of reference, grounded in research evidence about the nature and progression of the problem in other cases. Such evidential material is lacking in the context of the new technologies, and we therefore run the risk that our frame of reference is based on limited clinical experience or on the limited data with adult offenders, or on a more substantial body of research that predates the development of the Internet. It is with this in mind that the chapter will attempt to examine what constitutes a 'normal framework' for how young people use the new technologies, what

little empirical evidence there is about abusive practices and what issues these may raise for the assessment of abusive practices. This is not to ignore the considerable body of evidence as to what constitutes effective assessment (Becker, 1990; Hackett, 2004; Print et al., 2001; French, 2005; Araji, 2004; O'Reilly and Carr, 2004; Knight, 2004; Will, 1999; Calder, 2001) but rather to look at additional issues which may be important to consider when the young person's abusive behaviour relates to the new technologies.

Young people and the new technologies

When conducting an assessment of young people and the new technologies, it is important to consider what in fact most young people do. The literature in this area has been written within the last few years and reflects the rapidly changing nature of the Internet. No doubt that by the time the current book has been published this will have changed yet again. In 2003, DeBell and Chapman reported computer and Internet use by 28,002 children and adolescents between the ages of 5–17 in the United States during 2001. They found that 90 per cent of their sample used computers and 59 per cent used the Internet, with such use starting at an early age (twenty-five percent of five year olds) and increasing over the age groups. While there were no gender differences in overall computer or Internet use, girls were more likely to use e-mail, and boys use them for games, shopping and finding information about news, weather or sports, with home the most common location for Internet access. Another study examined Internet usage among Australian children (NetRatings Australia, 2005) and found that most of the 502 children in their sample had accessed the Internet within the last three years. Boys and younger children were more likely to access the Internet for entertainment (games, websites, music) while girls and older children were likely to use it as a communication resource.

In the UK, Madell and Muncer (2004) have suggested that Internet use appears to have plateaued, with about 42 per cent of homes having access. However, they noted that there is evidence that a disproportionate number of non-users appeared to be over the age of 50, and that the young are most likely to go online eventually. In a collaborative study between



Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland and Norway (SAFT, 2003) it was found that 80 per cent of Irish children had access to the Internet at home, although only 12 per cent said that they used it everyday, compared to 46 per cent per cent of children in Sweden. A further UK study by Livingstone and Bober (2005) of 1,511 children and young people aged 9–19 indicated that school access to the Internet was almost universal (92 per cent) with 75 per cent having access at home. Within this study, 71 per cent of children had their own computer, 38 per cent a mobile phone, 17 per cent a digital TV and 8 per cent a games console, all with Internet access.

Such studies suggest widespread use of the Internet by young people, and it is now hard to imagine a world where it does not exist as an educational and information resource, a facilitator of communication and a source of inexpensive entertainment accessed from the apparent safety of home, school or the library. However, the Internet is also a provider of information and materials that many of us would see as problematic. Kanuga and Rosenfeld (2004: 120) suggested that the World Wide Web makes it easier for an adolescent to stumble across sites with 'nefarious intention, such as sex-seeking chat rooms and pornographic websites, while searching for answers about sexual health'. If we refer back to Araji's (2004) guidelines for harmful or problematic behaviours, one area of concern was whether such behaviours may place the person at risk by having a negative effect on overall development, learning, social or family relationships, or whether it causes feelings of confusion embarrassment, guilt or negativity about themselves. This will be the first area that we will give consideration to, as accidental and intentional exposure to sexualised materials occurs frequently to many young people. As yet we do not know whether this may be a source of continuing harm to themselves or to others.

Accidental and intentional exposure to sexualised materials

It would be naïve to assume that pornographic or sexualised materials did not exist prior to the Internet. However, in answering the question posed at the beginning of this chapter about what makes the new technologies different, the Internet has brought with it a proliferation of sexualised material. On the Internet it is possible to find

material to suit all interests and proclivities (Taylor and Quayle, 2003), either through purposeful or accidental exposure. The accessibility, interactivity and anonymity of the Internet, however, are the very factors that increase the likelihood of exposure to violent or sexual material. In the SAFT (2003) study, almost one in five children had been invited to a face-to-face meeting with a stranger, and 34 per cent had viewed a violent Website, either accidentally or on purpose. Other authors have highlighted the accidental exposure of young people to unwanted sexual material on the Internet (Mitchell et al., 2003; Finkelhor et al., 2000: 334) but have also acknowledged the fact that existing research examining the effects of exposure to unwanted sexual material had been, 'almost entirely based on college students and other adults. None of it concerns children, certainly not younger than aged 14. Moreover, the existing social research is all about voluntary and anticipated exposure. No research on children or adults exists about the impact of exposure that is unwanted or unexpected'.

In their national sample of 1,501 US Internet using youth, Mitchell et al. (2003: 342) indicated that 1 in 4 of children who regularly used the Internet encountered unwanted sexual pictures in the year prior to data collection. Seventy-three per cent of such exposures occurred while the youth were searching or surfing the Internet, and the majority happened while at home. These authors also discussed the ways in which Internet protocols maintained such exposure, 'Explicit sex sites are also sometimes programmed to make them difficult to exit, referred to as 'mouse-trapping'. In fact, in some sites the exit buttons take a viewer into other sexually explicit sites. Indeed, in 26 per cent of the surfing incidents, youth reported they were brought to another sex site when they tried to exit the site they were in. This happened in one third of the distressing incidents'. The majority of children who were exposed to material regarded such exposure as not particularly distressing. However, the authors emphasised that such exposure, particularly unwanted exposure, may affect attitudes about sex, the Internet, and young people's sense of safety and community. Greenfield (2004) similarly discussed how on peer-to-peer file sharing programmes, banner advertisements provided a source of inadvertent exposure to sexuality, which were viewed as soon as one entered the programme, and which could



not be controlled by the user. Livingstone and Bober's (2005) study also indicated high levels of exposure to online pornography, with 57 per cent of young people having come into contact with it. Most of this material was viewed unintentionally, through a pop-up advert, when searching for something else or through junk mail. Again, 54 per cent of these children claimed not to have been upset by it, but a significant minority did not like it.

Cameron et al. (in press) used a web-based focus group methodology to examine 40 young people's exposure to sexually oriented websites (SOWs) and sexually explicit web sites (SEWs). Within this sample, there was a sub-group of boys who described intentional exposure to SEWs, citing curiosity and arousal as reasons for visiting these websites. As with Mitchell et al.'s (2003: 4) study, the majority of participants suggested that exposure to SEWs had no negative impact on them. The authors concluded, 'A notable finding was the perception of exposure to SEW on oneself. Results show that the participants perceived no impact on themselves. This perception may be problematic because previous research had documented negative effects of exposure to sexually explicit content. It may be that adolescents are developmentally unable to judge how this content affects them or that there are other individual characteristics (e.g. liberal attitudes, attitudes toward censorship) that may affect their perceptions'.

Potential problems related to exposure

How then can we conceptualise the problems in relation to adolescents, sexual material and the new technologies? Such problems may include:

- An adverse impact on current or future sexual and emotional development.
- Exposure to online deviant sexual material may act as a catalyst to engage in a sexually problematic way with another child or children.
- Finding material on the Internet leaves the young person open to sexual exploitation by others, either adults or children.
- Victimisation which may occur to other young people through accessing images of child abuse (also referred to as 'child pornography') through the new technologies, or through

making sexual solicitations to others (Taylor and Quayle, 2004).

- Sexually abusive behaviours that may be construed as 'self-victimising' or 'self-harming'.

A largely unknown factor relates to the nature of harm through exposure, and how it might manifest itself. Kanuga and Rosenfeld (2004: 120) have argued that, 'While there is little documentation of the influence of unrestrained access to pornography on adolescents, there is, at minimum, concern that this may have a negative influence on the psychosocial developmental process which takes place during puberty. While it might not be possible to precisely define what constitutes normal sexual behaviour, there should be concern for young people with a relatively narrow perspective who are exposed to frequent images of behaviours such as sodomy, group sex, sadomasochistic practices, and bestiality'. In a similar vein, in a review of the literature related to inadvertent exposure to pornography, Greenfield (2004) concluded that the evidence indicates that pornography and related sexual media can influence sexual violence, sexual attitudes, moral values and sexual activity for children and youth. In a further study of teen chatrooms in which Greenfield (2004b: 757) was a participant-observer, she concluded that, '... we cannot speak of the Internet as simply doing something to teens; teens are also constructing the Internet ...'. She summarised the likely developmental effects of online sexual activity as:

- Disinhibition related to sexuality, aggression and race relations.
- Early sexual priming.
- Models for racism, negative attitudes towards women and homophobia.

However, what we do not know in this area far exceeds what we do know, and while such research alerts us to the possible dangers of unrestrained access to violent or coercive sexual materials, it does not help us quantify who is at risk or what factors might increase either vulnerability or resilience.

To date, there is little written about the elective use of pornography by young people who sexually abuse (Epps and Fisher, 2004). Alexy (2003) re-examined a data set of 160 sexually reactive children and adolescents and compared the characteristics of those who used pornography and those who did not. The study



indicated several significant positive associations between pornography use and psychiatric symptoms, non-sexual criminal, antisocial and delinquent behaviours, and sexually aggressive behaviours. However, the data used came from the 1990s and pre-dated the use of the Internet to access pornographies. Kaufman et al. (1998) have suggested that being interested in pornography represents a normative, developmental experience for a large number of adolescents and a significant source of information about sexuality. However, Malamuth (1993) emphasised the importance of the content of the material, in that if the portrayal of sex was intertwined with violence, hatred, coercion and humiliation of women, then the individual could have the experience of being aroused to such material, with the result that those who already have a sense of being attracted to sexual aggression are most likely to be influenced by such material. Malamuth (2000) further contended that associations between pornography consumption and aggressiveness toward women could be explained by a circular relationship between high coercive tendencies and an interest in certain content in pornography, whereby aggressive men are drawn to the images in pornography that reinforce and therefore increase the likelihood of their control, impersonal and hostile association to sexuality. What may be of particular importance in relationship to this is the emphasis placed by Malamuth on the fact that pornographic stimuli are part of a larger corpus of media images, and that the role of media stimuli cannot be appreciated in isolation from other variables. Browne and Hamilton-Giachrisis (2005: 78) have also acknowledged the methodological problems with media research, including the difficulty of control for people exposed to media sources containing violent imagery at only one time, making it, '... difficult to establish causal links between one media influence and changes in attitude and behaviour'.

Establishing the degree of influence that pornography and related sexual media can have on sexual violence, sexual attitudes, moral values and sexual activity of children and young people is complex. Studies such as that of Emerick and Dutton (1993) had suggested that with high-risk adolescents, 80 per cent acknowledged the use of pornography for stimulation, and the number of female child victims was said to have increased progressively with the severity of the

pornography used as a stimulus for masturbation. Similarly, studies by Zolondek et al. (2001) and Ford and Linney (1995) found an elevated use of pornographic materials amongst young people engaged in sexually abusive behaviour. However, other research (O'Reilly et al., 1998) showed no differences in pornography use (magazines, films and sex lines) between youths who engaged in sexually abusive behaviour and those who did not.

Recent research by Burton and Meezan (2005) have suggested that pornography may be a medium for learning sexually abusive behaviour, where orgasm reinforces cognitive rehearsals of sexual behaviours or aggression generated from memories of sexual victimisation. Masturbatory fantasies, which are stimulated by pornography, then lead to cognitive distortions about sex, possible sexual partners, or potential partners for sexually aggressive behaviours.

Sexually problematic behaviours and the new technologies

To date, there is very little published research that helps us understand what it is that young people do (as opposed to what they may be exposed to), that constitutes sexually problematic behaviour in relation to the new technologies. In this section, we are going to consider three classes of behaviours, none of which are unique to children and young people, but which might help in our understanding of the problems. These are:

- Soliciting, or sexually harassing behaviours.
- Downloading, trading and production of child abuse images (the legal definition of which would be child pornography).
- Self-victimising behaviours.

The first of these, soliciting activities, was examined in a study by Finkelhor et al. (2000) through the analysis of telephone interview data from a large sample (1,501) of young Internet users about their experiences online. Their findings indicated that 1 in 5 children who regularly used the Internet experienced a sexual solicitation or approach over the year examined by the study. One in 33 received an aggressive sexual solicitation, which included being asked to meet offline, telephone calls or things sent through the post. One in 4 had unwanted exposure to sexual images, and 1 in 17 were



threatened or harassed. Approximately one quarter of the children who reported these incidents were distressed by them. The data from Finkelhor et al.'s (2000) survey indicated that juveniles made up 48 per cent of the overall, and 48 per cent of the aggressive solicitations against youth (27 per cent were of an unknown age). These authors concluded that not all of the sexual solicitors on the Internet fit the media stereotype of an older, male predator. Many were young and some were women. A number of the sexual solicitations appeared to be propositions for 'cybersex', and in almost half of the incidents the young person did not tell anyone about the episode.

The second group of sexually abusive practices by adults and young people, involving abusive images of children, were described in an important research report examining cases investigated by the Department of Internal Affairs Censorship Compliance Unit (CCU) in New Zealand. The results of this study were subsequently updated later that year by Wilson and Andrews (2004) using the same methodology, and including an additional 79 offenders. Their results indicated that of the 184 people in the study, only one was female, and 89 per cent were classified as New Zealand Europeans. The largest single group of offenders, which remained the same as in Carr's (2004: 2) study, 'continues to be aged between 15 and 19 years. Those under 20 years at the time of detection comprise a quarter (24.3 per cent) of all offenders'. The largest occupational group was students (32.4 per cent), followed by those whose career was in information technology (19.5 per cent). The majority of the offenders were found to be in possession of child sex abuse material, with images of bestiality and material containing the use of urine and excrement being the second and third most commonly found sorts of objectionable material. These two New Zealand reports provided the first systematic analysis of seized materials. They caused considerable concern because they identified a high number of young people engaged in the collection of illegal images and this was substantiated in the second data set. The results were somewhat different from those reported by Wolak et al. (2005) in the US in a study called N-JOV (National Juvenile Online Victimization Study) where only 3 per cent were younger than 18.

While Carr's (2004) study does not systematically analyse the nature of the activities

relating to the use of abuse images, they seemed to be largely the same as those reported in other adult samples (Quayle, 2004) and included downloading, trading and producing illegal images. Carr's (2004) data analysis of the New Zealand sample revealed other interesting findings about the young people in the study. The collection of material portraying the exploitation of children, young people or both, for sexual purposes was common across all of the age and occupation categories, but those individuals identified as school students were much more likely to trade or possess images of teenagers or older children than any other group of individuals. They were also most likely to select material showing children and young people with others of their age. Indeed, even when they chose images pertaining to other categories of the Censorship Act, school students tended to select materials portraying youth aged under 17 years. The author concluded that, 'As such, it appears that their interest was within the realms of 'age appropriateness''.

However, it should be noted that all of the school students were found to trade or possess images of children and young people engaged in explicit sexual activity, including images of children aged between 2 and 7 years, giving cause for concern about their activities. Also of concern was that school children were also proportionately more likely to trade or possess images of children and young people that suggested or implied incest. Nonetheless, Carr (2004) felt that the data did provide clues as to the motivation for initially accessing this material and that it offered support for, 'the concept of a sexually curious group of adolescents'. In contrast to the results of school students, those individuals who were identified as tertiary students aged under 25 years and non-students aged under 25 were found to demonstrate a much greater range of image preferences and were identified as being proportionately more likely to collect images portraying babies as the subject of sexual exploitation. In addition, 60 per cent of those aged under 25 spent less than 10 hours per week using the Internet. The research did not provide any evidence that these individuals were involved in the commission of physical sexual offences against children, but the author expressed concern about the nature of the images in the light of research suggesting offence behaviour beginning in adolescence.

The results of the New Zealand study also indicated that offenders identified as secondary



school students were more likely than the others to collect large numbers of images that were well indexed. They were also more frequently associated with the collection of images of older children and teenagers, portrayed with other children, and were much less likely to collect images of adult rape or the torture of adults or children. Carr (2004) concluded that what is worrying was that their Internet based exploration had led them to subject matter involving largely deviant activities at a time when they were most likely to be influenced by the message it conveys.

The third category of sexually abusive practices relates to what might be called self-victimising activities through both the Internet and mobile phone technology. The evidence would suggest that mobile phone ownership may be higher among children aged 11–16 than among adults, with 76 per cent of children having their own phone (Child-Wise Monitor, 2002). Madell and Muncer (2004) surveyed 1,340 secondary school children from the Teesside area of the UK. Of these 86 per cent owned a mobile phone (89.7 per cent of females and 82.3 per cent of males). In this study, mobile phone use was restricted to voice calls and text, but there is evidence that increasingly mobile phones can also act as other forms of communication. As already noted, Livingstone and Bober (2005) however, have argued this is now diversifying, and in their study 38 per cent of the young people had a mobile phone, 17 per cent a digital television and 8 per cent a games console, all with access to the Internet. For many young people, the mobile phone is both a vital means of communication and a way of relating to, and participating in, an extended social world.

However, there are emerging concerns that such participation may involve abusive practices that target other individuals or are self-victimising. As yet, no published accounts of such activities have emerged outside of anecdotal or clinical case material, but it is an area that is worthy of consideration. In March 2005, two girls, in separate incidents, took indecent photographs of themselves in their homes without realising how widely they could be circulated on the Internet (TES Cymru, 2005). The first case involved a 14-year-old girl who took naked pictures of herself using a digital camera, which she downloaded on to her computer and sent via an instant messaging service. The second case involved a 13-year-old girl who sent photographs

of herself in underwear, with handcuffs and a whip, via a web cam to an Internet site. This set of photographs were widely accessed by other pupils and led to a fight in the school grounds. The child's parents were very distressed by the event as they thought she was using the computer to do her homework. Both of the girls described their actions as either a dare, or fun. In a similar incident, the *Daily Herald* (2005) reported that police and social services were called in after six Suffolk schoolgirls took topless photographs of each other and posted them on the Internet. The 15-year-olds posted the pictures on a website they had set up and one of the girls was arrested on suspicion of taking indecent photographs of a child.

A further report (BBC News, 2005) involved both mobile phones and the Internet. It related to an adolescent boy in India who recorded a sexual act between himself and a sixteen-year-old schoolgirl on his mobile phone. The pictures were then circulated across India and abroad. The clip, which lasted 2 minutes 37 seconds was copied onto video CDs and sold. Subsequently the head of an auction Website was arrested after the sale of CDs appeared on the Internet showing the sexual activity between the two students. The person who had attempted to sell the clip on the auction site was himself a student.

Assessment

As already stated, there is little to help inform our assessment of young people who engage in sexually abusive behaviours through the new technologies. Indeed, it may be argued that existing assessment frameworks are sufficient. For example, Print et al. (2001) describe their AIM model as providing a conceptual framework for the initial assessment of young people which is based on four key domains:

- Offence specific factors, such as the young person's offending history, the nature of the offence behaviours and any previous offence history.
- Developmental issues, including any experiences of abuse or trauma, the quality of earlier life experiences and wider behavioural issues.
- Family, including functioning within the family, their attitudes and beliefs, sexual boundaries and parental competence.



- Environment, including opportunities for further offending and the degree of community support.

All of these would clearly have relevance to young people engaging in abusive behaviours through the use of the Internet. In addition, it has also been emphasised that when evaluating the sexual behaviours of adolescents, it is critical to avoid dichotomous thinking, and instead view them on a continuum from healthy to problematic (Longo et al., 2002). These authors have also emphasised that it is important to assess the function that the sexual behaviour serves for the particular young person, stressing that an important indicator of sexual health for teenagers is the degree to which the sexual behaviour is in the service of developmentally appropriate sexual needs as opposed to primarily nonsexual needs. Examples may include exploring personal identity through sexuality, where surfing the web, participating in chat rooms and engaging in Internet sex may be ways of trying on multiple identities to see which fit. Greenfield (2004b: 759) gave an interesting example of this in relation to teen chat rooms that were controlled or moderated (and therefore assumed to be 'safer' than others). These sites still made frequent references to sex, but all in code. 'The codification of the allusions to sexuality made them not only about sex, according to Turkle, but also about ingroup-outgroup issues, which . . . is how teenagers use any medium . . . Coded sexuality is all about the co-construction of cultural norms that are utilised in this online community'.

Equally, the function of sexual engagement with the Internet many relate to managing negative feelings. Longo et al. (2002) have argued that sexual behaviour and pleasure is a powerful way to feel better in the moment, and that this may result in the compulsive use of pornography and masturbation. The literature pertaining to the relationship between affect, emotions and sex offending has been recently reviewed by Howells et al. (2004: 180). They have suggested that 'An emerging issue in the field of sex offender theory and treatment is whether emotional and other affective states in perpetrators are functionally important, particularly as antecedents, for offences. In rehabilitation terms, are affective states criminogenic needs?' Within this review, it was noted that there are problems with definition, in that negative affect is used to describe emotions, moods and feelings, and they

questioned whether states such as boredom or excitement might be genuinely construed as moods. These authors provided substantial empirical support for the relationship between affect and offending in relation to studies on anger and sexual arousal, offence pathways studies, and sexual fantasy studies, and concluded that the most convincing evidence for the role of affect as a causal factor in sex offending comes from the offence-process or offence chain studies. In this context, earlier work by Hudson et al. (1999) had described positive and negative affect routes to sexual offending. While the context of much of this research is with adult offenders, the function of activity for the individual lies within a broader behavioural context (Quayle et al., in press) and is worth further consideration in relation to young people and sexually abusive behaviours.

Earlier work by Marshall and Marshall (2000) (again in the context of adult offenders) looked at affective states and coping behaviour. These authors proposed that when in a state of negative affect, sex offenders are more likely to use sexual behaviours as a means of coping than are non-offenders. Sex becomes a way of resolving non-sexual problems which Howells et al. (2004) have suggested is reinforced and learned precisely because it is effective in reducing a state of negative affect. Linked to this is the idea that some states of emotional arousal, such as anger, anxiety and loneliness, may produce situational suppression of empathic responses and affect subsequent decision making processes.

A further assessment area that has received attention (although not in relation to the new technologies) relates to pornography use. Knight (2004) compared 452 adult offenders to 227 juvenile offenders on selected rationally constructed scales and on 32 scales derived factor analytically from eight of the domains assessed by the MASA (Multidimensional Assessment of Sex and Aggression). One of the derived scales included Pornography Exposure. Juveniles acknowledged being exposed to more pornography in their family homes, but the adult offenders used conventional heterosexual pornography considerably more than adolescents. Adults were also exposed to violent pornography more frequently than juveniles, but there were no differences in terms of exposure to homosexual or child pornography. Knight concluded from this ' . . . that some family members might be providing the juvenile



210 *People and young people who sexually abuse: taking the field forward*

offenders with sexual materials that they might encounter more difficulty in obtaining elsewhere'. With the arrival of the Internet, there is a proliferation of sexual material that is freely available and easy to access, which renders this assumption questionable at best. Similarly Prentky and Wrighthead (2003: 15) in the development of J-SOAP-II (Juvenile Sex Offender Assessment Protocol-II) included a scale on sexual drive and preoccupation which they described as; 'This item measures "hypersexuality" (i.e. the strength of the sexual drive and preoccupation). This is a behaviourally anchored item that focuses on evidence of an excessive amount of sexual activity (exceeding what might be considered normative for youths of that age) or excessive preoccupation with sexual urges or gratifying sexual needs. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, paraphilias (exposing, peeping, cross-dressing, fetishes, etc.) compulsive masturbation; chronic and compulsive use of pornography; frequent highly sexualised language and gestures; and indiscriminate sexual activity with different partners out of the context of any relationship'. Again, this is a useful reference point in terms of assessment, but in the context of the new technologies, we have as yet little understanding about the purposive use of sexually related materials on the Internet by young people, particularly those that relate to extreme sexual practices.

Quayle and Taylor (2002) in the context of adult offenders, attempted to produce guidelines for practitioners that would help form the basis of an assessment, and which would ensure some level of consistency from case to case. The usefulness for such a framework remains to be evaluated. In the context of children and young people, we are still at the stage of exploring what issues may be relevant in relation to abusive practices and the new technologies. It is also acknowledged that young people are not always forthcoming in the information that they are prepared to give (Lambie, 2005) and that it would make sense to collate information from a variety of sources, including where possible a technical forensic report provided by the police.

It is with this in mind that the following guidelines for assessment have been suggested:

The offence behaviours

A description of the sexually abusive behaviours which would include:

- What did the young person do?
 - Where did it take place?
 - When did it take place?
 - Were others involved, either online or offline?
 - How often?
 - Over what period of time?
 - What immediately preceded the abusive behaviours?
 - What terminated these abusive behaviours?
- What was the function of the activity for the individual? What needs was it meeting and did these change over time?
 - Sexual (and in what way)?
 - Social?
 - Emotional avoidance?
 - As part of other collecting or obsessive compulsive behaviours?
 - Risk taking?
- What was the context for the individual?
 - What were the number of hours spent on-line in any one week?
 - How much of this time was engaged in problematic activity?
 - Has there been a reduction in other preferred activities?
 - How much time is spent thinking about their latest Internet experience (chat or image) or planning the next?
- What have the consequences been for the individual?
 - Change in social relationships?
 - Change in family relationships?
- What level of knowledge does the individual possess about the new technologies?
 - How would they (or others) describe themselves in relation to this?
 - What kinds of Internet media would the person have used, and what for? (e.g. Web sites, chatrooms, email, instant messaging, peer to peer).
- Were these activities part of other sexually abusive practices?
 - Engaging in cyber sex?
 - Sexual harassment or bullying?
- Has the young person been sexually victimised?
- Has any victimisation included the use of photography?

Where the sexually abusive behaviours included images

1. Downloading images



- How many images were accessed and from where?
 - Were the images predominantly of one gender?
 - Did any one category of images exceed the others in terms of quantity?
 - What activities were included in the images?
 - How were images saved and organised?
 - How much time was spent offline looking at the images?
 - How often did masturbation take place in relation to the images?
 - What fantasies were associated with the images, and did this change over time?
 - Have any fantasies been acted out with real children (which may or may not be of an explicitly sexual nature)?
2. Trading images
- Have images been exchanged with others (how has this been done, what volume and what purpose did this serve)?
 - Over what period of time?
 - With whom?
 - Has there been any contact in real life with people (adults or children) met on-line?
3. Producing images
- Have images been created through scanning, use of software, use of a digital camera?
 - Were any images of children within the young person's family or social network?
 - Were any images taken of themselves?

Social and family context

- How do respective members of the young person's family view the nature of the abusive activities?
- What level of awareness was there about Internet use?
- What level of supervision was given with regard to Internet use?
- What level of Internet use is there by other members of the family?
- Do other members of the family engage in legal (or illegal) online sexual activities?
- What level of pornography use is there by family members?
- What level of social isolation is present in the young person?
- How much social activity takes place online?
- Has there been self-representation as other individuals (either same or other sex or age)?

- Does the young person have a nickname(s), and what does it mean/signify to them (why did they choose it)?
- Has the person gone on to meet off-line people who have been met through the new technologies?
- Does the young person engage in the abusive behaviours with others known to him/her (e.g. school)?
- Have any of the abusive practices taken place outside of home, and if so where?

Conclusion

Over the last few years, young people are increasingly engaged with the new technologies, and are likely to continue to do so. Such engagement positions them not as passive consumers, but as social actors who are part of the creation of these new media. The Internet has been a largely unregulated environment, and as such has provided a context for the proliferation of sexual materials which bring with them access, availability and a perceived level of anonymity which has never been seen before. We do not know what the impact of both accidental and purposive exposure might be for young people, both in terms of their own development or the possible impact that this might have on their actions towards other young people. This touches upon several of the points raised by Araj's (2004) list of useful questions. Of concern is that access to such material 'moves the goalposts', both for adults and young people, in terms of what is socially acceptable, and normalises sexual practices that until recently would (and remain so for many people) have been seen as extreme or abusive. The anonymity of the Internet also gives access to an unlimited number of communities, many of which are created by young people, with whom it is possible to share ideas, fantasies and products.

It is also the case that the perceived anonymity of the Internet not only facilitates access to both legal and illegal sexual material, but allows for sexual harassment and bullying. Each new technical progression, for example the advent of inexpensive digital cameras, has brought with it the possibility of abusive activity, either through the production of sexualised images of others, for example, or of the young people themselves. And all this at a time when sexual curiosity and risk taking is at their highest. For most adults reading



this book, such unrestrained access to a highly sexualised social world lies beyond the range of our own adolescent experiences. However, the reality is that many adults engage in online sexual activities which are both legal and illegal (Cooper and Griffin-Shelley, 2002), and which challenges some of our traditional notions of what constitutes 'normal' engagement or preoccupation.

It is with this in mind that the chapter has tried to situate assessment in the context of how young people use the new technologies and how they might function in their lives. Thinking about function might help us work fairly with young people, and also enable us to formulate their problems in ways that increases the likelihood of a working hypothesis that enables us to proceed, evaluate and monitor progress. It also allows us to think about behaviours as being topographically similar, but which may function in different ways. What this chapter has not been able to do is to give any easy answers about risk. We do not know whether a young person who has largely downloaded images of male children is more problematic than someone who has downloaded images of female children (although assessments such as J-SOAP-II might give reason to believe this). We equally do not know whether volume of material is important, particularly as many young people may have obtained illegal images through peer-to-peer or other file sharing networks. We know that to some extent a collection of images relates to sexual fantasies, but we do not know whether a young person who has collected highly abusive or degrading images is any more at risk of committing further offences than someone who has collected images that do not depict specific sexual activities. It is also the case that where trading takes place, people often keep images not because they are of sexual interest, but because they may be useful currency to secure other images (Quayle et al., 2000).

Any assessment needs to take account of the fact that the media are a dominant and influential activity of childhood and adolescence and an increasingly important force in our culture (Horner, 2004). As has been suggested by Greenfield (2004b) young people are active media consumers who choose, interpret and apply the media in a variety of ways, and the media as accessed through the new technologies are increasingly interactive and multisensory. At present, the largely unregulated content of the

Internet provides not only a vehicle for offending behaviour but an interactive cyberspace which is both challenging and reflecting societal values. It is important not to exaggerate the potential problems of the new technologies, in that the Internet cannot be seen to cause sexually abusive behaviours in young people. It may be, however, that violent content and the ease with which it is engaged with on the Internet, may be one factor that for some children influences the occurrence of problematic behaviour, both in the present and in the future.

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