Child pornography and the Internet: Perpetuating a cycle of abuse

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Abstract

13 men convicted of downloading child pornography were interviewed with a view to understanding how these men talked about the photographs and the function such talk played in their accounts. The interviews were informed by earlier work with defended subjects and were analysed within a discursive framework. Quotations are used from the interviews to illustrate the analysis. Six principal discourses emerged within these accounts in relation to child pornography: sexual arousal; as collectibles; facilitating social relationships; as a way of avoiding real life; as therapy and in relation to the Internet. These are discussed in the context of previous research. The analysis illustrates the important role that the Internet plays in increasing sexual arousal to child pornography and highlights individual differences in whether this serves as a substitute or as a blue print for contact offences. It also draws our attention to the important role that community plays in the Internet and how collecting facilitates the objectification of children, and increases the likelihood that in the quest for new images, children continue to be sexually abused. Discourses focussing on both therapy and addiction serve to distance the respondent from personal agency, and allow for continued engagement with child pornography.

Introduction

This paper presents an analysis of semi-structured interviews with 13 men convicted of downloading pornography from the Internet. The purpose of the analysis was to examine the ways in which these respondents talked about child pornography and the function this played in their accounts. Central to the analysis is recognition of the significance of the subjective meanings given to child pornography by the respondents, as opposed to the actual content of the pictures themselves. Four of the respondents had also been convicted of assault on children, three had been involved in assaults prior to accessing pornography on the Internet and two had produced pornographic pictures of children, but had not traded these on the Internet.

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Although child pornography existed long before computers and the Internet came into existence (Edwards, 1994), the Internet is quickly becoming the principal medium for the distribution of such material (Fournier de Saint Maur, 1999; Taylor, 1999). Computers act as an aid for those who are sexually interested in children and allow for the production, viewing, storage and distribution of child pornography. They also allow paedophiles to communicate with each other and act as a conduit for contact with potential victims.

The function of child pornography and its relationship to contact offences remains unclear. Authors such as Goldstein (1999) suggest that pornography is a by-product of contact offences, used by offenders to facilitate the seduction of new victims (Tyler et al, 1985), and an inevitable part of the process of oganised abuse (Itzin, 1997). What is assumed is that pornographic images play an important role in sexual fantasy and are used for purposes of arousal (Lanning, 1992). Tate (1990) suggested that it reinforces both the paedophile's attraction to children and his self-justification process. Yet in relation to the new technologies, there are people involved in both accessing and distributing child pornography who have no apparent history of child molestation (Quayle et al, 2000). Whether paedophiles use pornography more than the general population, how this relates to contact offenses and the role that the Internet may play in this remains unclear.

One recent study that addressed the role of pornography in the offending process is that of Proulx et al (1999). Their results suggested that within a population of child molesters, there were two distinct pathways to offending; coercive and non-coercive. Only the latter had generally used pornography and deviant sexual fantasies prior to their offence. For such, pornography was used as part of the commission of an offence, similar to the findings of Marshall (1988) where 53% of their sample of child molesters deliberately used pornographic stimuli as part of their planned preparation for offending. Carter et al (1987) also examined the use of pornography in the criminal and developmental histories of sex offenders. They found that all offenders had a similar prior exposure to pornography in childhood, but child molesters were more likely to use such material prior to and during their offences and "employ pornography to relieve an impulse to commit offenses" (p205). This suggests the idea that pornography may also have a positive function for some offenders in that it may prevent the commission of a contact offence. However in

contrast, much of the research to date about the relationship between pornographies and contact offences suggests an association between induced sexual arousal and the depiction of sexual activities. This is thought to facilitate an interest in offending, and is consistent with earlier conditioning theories (for a recent relevant review see Marshall, 2000).

One of the difficulties with much of the research examining the relationship between child pornography and offending relates to methodology. Laboratory experiments necessarily involve relatively short exposure to such stimuli, whereas collectors of pornography spend considerable amounts of time with their collections. It is also the case that many paedophiles are highly selective in their choice of material, a factor largely ignored by experimenters, (Howitt, 1995). What this also highlights is that what is sexually stimulating does not necessarily relate to overt content but more to the way the offender perceives it. The congruence between pornographic content and behaviour may be influenced by how much the viewer identifies with the pornography. Seto et al (2001) suggested that men who are sexually deviant, such as paedophiles, may preferentially seek out pornography that depicts content that is highly arousing to them. It may be that subjective responses to pornography depend on how well the depicted content matches the individual's existing, preferred sexual scripts (Mosher, 1988).

Furthermore, much of the research that has examined the functions of child pornography for the offender has focused on traditional ways of accessing material, either through magazines or video. The Internet has now emerged as one of the most versatile and accessible outlets for pornography. Much of the child pornography available of the Internet has its origins in commercial production, but has not been placed on the Internet for commercial purposes, and is freely available (Taylor, 1999). Barron and Kimmel (2000) suggested that there has been a 'democratization' as the cost of producing pornography has dropped and the control of production has become diffused. In the context of adult pornography, these authors found evidence of an increase in the amount of nonconsensual violent material available on the Internet, suggesting that men were more likely to be depicted in dominant positions as victimizer and not victim in far greater proportions than in magazines and videos. They also suggested evidence of satiation, leading the consumer to seek out newer, more explicit and more violent forms of sexual material in order to gain arousal. It is unclear as to whether this is reflected in similar changes in child pornography on the Internet,

but there is a suggestion that the emergence of new photographs of children are of very young age groups and depicting more sexual victimisation (Taylor, 1999).

Pierce (1984) has drawn our attention to the fact that by focusing on the finished product (the pornographic image) rather than on the harm done to the participating child, we appear to be blatantly disregarding the dehumanizing experience the child or children may encounter. This can be exaggerated when such images are seen as commodities to be collected and exchanged. Lanning (1992) likened this to collecting baseball cards. What this emphasises is that child pornography has functions that go beyond that of sexual arousal and encompasses the importance of collecting and social cohesion. Holmes et al (1998) suggested that the computer acts as a mechanism of metamorphosis in that fantasies are provided with the opportunities and resources to become more concrete. Fantasies may also take on a new realism that can be shared on-line with others who have similar interests. The Internet also provides anonymity, giving both pleasure from 'hiding' oneself and ones behaviour, along with the potential pleasure of playing another role (Chou and Hsiao, 2000).

What is also evident with the Internet is that for many people, engagement with this medium is not a passive response. It can be used by individuals to alter mood in the context of feeling down, anxious or isolated (Morahan-Martin and Schumacher, 2000). For those who have difficulty in relating to others, Internet communication can lessen social risk and lower inhibitions, without the demands of traditional friendship (Turkle, 1995). It can enable multiple self-representation and may provide a context where deviance can flourish (Lamb, 1998). For paedophiles, on-line communities show strong evidence of group dynamics (Lamb, 1998; Evans, 2001), expressed through issues of status, expertise and apprenticeship (Linehan et al, in press). Child pornography played a role in that status within the community was achieved through amassing a large organised collection, through distributing parts of missing series of photographs and through providing new pictures via postings. Used in this way, child pornography both validated and justified paedophile behaviour and acted as a medium of exchange within a community (Healy, 1997; Durkin, 1997). It is also the case that the Internet is an environment that challenges old concepts of regulation, which are reliant upon tangibility in time and space (Akdeniz, 1997). Conventional hierarchies are disrupted by a distributed, decentralised network in which power is spread among various people and

groups (Granic and Lamey, 2000). One possible consequence of this is that those who have been traditionally marginalised within our society, such as paedophiles, may in fact be empowered by the Internet. Such empowerment is likely to be reinforced by anonymity but also by the fact that everybody's agenda can find a niche on the Internet. Such experiences may contribute to the development of personal beliefs about efficacy and control that serve to heighten disinhibition in the off-line world through a blurring of fantasy and reality.

The ways that people use pornography on the Internet has largely focussed on sexual gratification, as a tool in molestation, as a means of locating children and as a social consolidation mechanism (Durkin, 1997). This paper seeks to examine the accounts of those convicted of downloading pornography in order to further our understanding of the complex relationship between those who are sexually interested in children and the Internet. What are explored are the different discourses that emerge when these respondents talk about child pornography, and the role that the Internet plays in such discourses. Above all, it recognises the central significance of meaning for the individual in understanding the role of child pornography.

Method

a. Participants

The data is drawn from semi-structured interviews with 13 men, all of whom had been convicted of possessing illegal and obscene images of children on their computers (see Taylor et al. (in press) for further discussion of this). While preferences were shown for certain images over others, all participants had viewed similar images (as identified by forensic evidence). Of these men, four were also convicted of assault on children, three had been involved in assaults prior to accessing pornography on the Internet and two had produced pornographic pictures of children, which had not been traded. They came from a variety of demographic backgrounds and varied in terms of both current judicial status and engagement with treatment programmes. The respondents were accessed through Probation, Police, Social Work and Voluntary agencies. All were approached prior to the Interview, were given information about the study, and gave their consent. The data set is part of a much larger, on-going series of interviews and was chosen because they had all used the Internet to download child pornography. The interviews, each lasting

approximately two hours, were recorded using a mini-disc system and then transcribed. All identifying names were removed or changed to ensure anonymity and the transcripts were kept in a secure environment. The first author both interviewed the respondents and transcribed the data.

b.   Method of analysis

Both data collection and analysis were informed by the research of Hollway and Jefferson (2000) in working with defended subjects. Such work suggests that defended subjects may not hear the question through the same meaning-frame as that of the interviewer or other interviewees; are invested in particular positions in discourses to protect vulnerable aspects of self; may not know why they experience or feel things in the way that they do; and are motivated, largely unconsciously, to disguise the meaning of at least some of their feelings and actions.

When interviewing, open-ended rather than closed questions were used, efforts were made to elicit 'stories' in order to anchor accounts, 'why' questions were avoided, and follow-up questions used the respondent's ordering and phrasing.

Once transcribed, the Interviews were read and re-read and questions were asked in relation to talk about pornography as to what was noticed, why it was noticed and how it might be interpreted. The interviews were analysed within a discursive framework, with an emphasis on the 'function orientation' of what was said (Gill, 1996). What was acknowledged in this analysis is that people use discourse in order to do things: to offer blame, to make excuses and, for example, to present themselves in a better or different light. The interviews were subsequently coded in relation to the research question and the data sorted into emerging categories. These were based on an initial search for patterns within the data, looking for instances of similarity and difference between accounts. This was followed by formulating ideas about the functions of particular features of this discourse and constantly checking these against the data. The analysis presented is examined in the light of existing literature about the function of child pornography for those who collect it. Quotations are taken from the interview transcripts to illustrate the analysis. Each respondent is identified through initials and the page number of the transcript is also given

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Analysis and discussion

Six principal discourses relating to the ways that respondents used child pornography emerged during the analysis, and are discussed below under discourse headings. All discourses were common across respondents, with the exception of 'Child pornography facilitating social relationships'. This was largely confined to respondents who had gone on to 'chat' online with others through IRC. Selected quotations from the interviews are used to both illustrate and give support to the analysis.

Child pornography and sexual arousal

The most dominant discourse to emerge in the analysis was that of child pornography as a means of achieving sexual arousal. Some of the pictures that were accessed (but not all) were used for masturbatory purposes, and respondents were selective in the pictures that they used. Such selectivity might relate to specific age groups, physical types, gender of the child, or to a particular sexual activity. For example,

"… developing girls… just starting to get pubic hair and just starting to develop breasts… my preference was for younger people" (OK p43)

Such pictures were used as an aid to fantasy,

"Fantasies… it would basically run like I take a young girl on a date… and then we'd go home and then she'd we'd… you know the stuff that adults do which would lead to sex and would involve her masturbating me and then me giving her oral sex" (QH p10).

and were often selected, as with QH, to fit with pre-existing fantasies, some of which related to earlier contact offences, or related to new offending fantasies. Such offending fantasies often were of children known to the participants,

"… I would be interested like if… I found pictures of children that looked like some of the kids I knew in real life" (QH p9)

This invariably, but not exclusively, involved masturbation to the fantasies,

"Because if I was on-line for an hour or so I actually would be masturbating on and off for an hour… and wanting to… maintain the sense of arousal… trying not to come" (II p21)

and levels of masturbation seemed to increase after the respondent went on-line.

> "… while I was on the Net? I mean it was anywhere between 7 and 15… simply because of what I was collecting" (EI p9)

It is interesting that what followed after masturbation was that respondents stopped looking at the pictures and either closed the computer down or moved on to some other non-sexual topic. More than this, for some, the images themselves became almost aversive in the absence of sexual arousal,

> "Actually, once I had come then I'd almost be… I'd find it distasteful. That what had been acceptable during a state of sexual arousal… afterwards wasn't acceptable" (II p21)

> "usually… that would be the point at which I could sort of… switch off" (MQ p28)

Not all respondents masturbated, one because although he was sexually aroused he was unable to ejaculate, and a second respondent because the excitement came from the fact that these pictures were taboo.

Claims were made that such masturbation to child pornography was a substitute for abuse,

> "… our main aim in collecting the child pornography is that we weren't involved with kids… it was helping… I didn't feel the urge as strongly as I do now to try and start something with a child… when I was on-line with the child porn… because when I felt that urge I'd look at the child porn I'd masturbate or I'd read the stories more often and masturbate… and it was under control" (EI p109)

although clearly such accounts failed to acknowledge that the pictures being accessed were ones of children being abused. Responsibility for such abuse is clearly placed elsewhere.

Offending fantasies in relation to images were not always confined to looking at the pictures on screen, and within this sample had also acted as a blue print both for abuse and for the production of photographs.

> "the offences against me victim erm… were touching her breasts touching her vagina… erm I also used a video camera… I copied what I'd seen on the computer" (KQ p2)

> "… but for me I wanted to abuse her… looking at the images I wanted to do pretty much as I've seen" (DX p25)

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Accessing the images appeared to reinforce existing fantasies and was used to give permission to act on them,

> "… it made me want to do the things I wanted to do. It gave me more courage to do them…
> knowing that I've seen it on there… they were doing it… I can do it" (DX p67)

Here the account used the pictures as a form of justification, a sense that if others are engaged in this then it doesn't matter. It allowed one respondent to ignore the other cues that were presented to him, such as his victim crying or constantly covering her face with her nightdress. Such fantasies were also fuelled by the excitement that came from a sense of doing something illegal.

The selection of images for sexual purposes was also made according to some sort of 'moral' or 'ethical' code, which varied according to the individual and also according to the circumstances. The boundaries which related to the acceptability of the images are similar to those that determine sexual interest, such as age, sex, activity and were influenced by superficial cues which allowed the viewer to believe that the children in the pictures were consenting and enjoyed being photographed.

> "eh… well there was definitely never any baby pictures believe you me… I would have said
> there's definitely nothing below ten on what I have on my system" (TS p14)
> "Oh no Sand M pictures, no pictures of kids being hurt, no pictures of kids being killed" (QH p26)

The suggestion is made that smiling faces of children in the pictures in some way legitimised them.

> "… just basically images of girls mainly. Girls actually having sex. And they had to look happy…
> I mean I wasn't looking for rape or anything" (EI p40)

The extreme counter scenario of rape minimised the actual content of the pictures used for masturbation and again managed to distance the participant from being part of an offence against a child.

These moral boundaries were fairly flexible, in that if such images were accessed adventitiously, rather than searched for purposefully, then they may be kept by some participants,

> "… I didn't go out of my way for new pictures because I knew where the new pictures came from.
> Unless they were a pose or nudist. Nudist pictures I was interested in… These were the only
> pictures where I was sure that the kids weren't being hurt or coerced or anything. These pictures I

was interested in. Other pictures, if I found them great, if I didn't find them I wasn't going to go out of my way for them" (QH p8)

Where images had a social function in that they were used for exchange, this also would overcome such boundaries. This is discussed in more detail when examining the social function of child pornography.

Such collecting of pornography was often a continuation of previous interest in pictures from magazines and videos, and while these had mainly been pornographic pictures of adults, for one offender he had been collecting legitimate 'nude art' photographs of children.

Child pornography as collectibles

The discourse of collecting and its importance for respondents overlapped with but was not subsumed by discourses of arousal. Pleasure was obtained from collecting pictures as part of a series, even when the material was not attractive or sexually arousing.

"… some of them I didn't much care for at all… but as I say they were part of a series or they were there for other people or they were just to see what was out there… I mean it gets to a stage also where you're just collecting to see how many different ones you can get and this sort of thing and you're not… necessarily aroused or turned on by all the pictures that are coming in…" (OK p42)

Such pictures were often talked about in a very dispassionate way with no reference made to the fact that they were pictures of children. This is seen both in comparisons made to other kinds of collections and also in terms used to describe the pictures themselves.

"We were trading pictures… it's as much as it pains me to say… kinda like trading baseball cards." (QH p6)

"… and there was also the thrill in collecting them. You wanted to get complete sets so it… was a bit like stamp collecting as well" (EI p47)

Comparisons between baseball cards and stamps also served to normalise the activity, and made it appear innocent in its intent. When talking about the pictures, invariably no reference was made to the content as being child pornography,

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Not only was pleasure obtained from completing missing pictures in a series, but also the act of categorising the photographs off-line. This categorising could be either simple or complex, depending whether access to the photographs was for individual use or for purposes of exchange.

> "I had a threefold er… a fourfold tier system of organising my pics. First of all in alphabetical order… second tier would have been sexual… sexual act erotic pose and nudism… so four tiers" (QH p30)

> "I had all the material in separate directories… so the directories would be… chosen specifically for the type of material it contained" (II p22)

Where the material was kept only for personal use and there was no trading involved, sorting would still take place but in a much more rudimentary way.

Referring back to photographs once sorted took second place to seeking out new material,

> "…'cause as I said you just you just move onto the next set next set next set" (TS p22)

> "Because there was new stuff… there was new stuff now so…" (ME p24)

For the majority of participants the photographs became an archive that they could refer back to when necessary, use for trading for new material, and have as a collection of artifacts appearing in series. Completing the series was as much an end in itself as using the photographs for sexual pleasure although it could be associated with sexual pleasure when it enabled fantasy. This was particularly the case where there was a narrative theme to a series,

> "you know I suppose I was deliberately going for groups… erm… so you like get an idea of the full event that was going on… you know so you get an idea of… the full continuation rather than just one 'photo" (TS p19)

Collecting behaviour was not solely confined to child pornography and for many participants (even those who identified their primary sexual orientation as paedophilia) it was part of a progression through collecting other forms of pornography.

> "yeah I mean its like… very poor analogy but it's like when you drink some beers you I mean you might like Caffreys you might love it but after a while you go off it and you go to Guinness and you might go on to something else" (TS p38)

The majority of respondents moved through a variety of pornographies, each time accessing more extreme material. This might refer to the age of the children in the photographs or to the actual activities being portrayed.

> "… and er it just progressed from there… it would go having a look at the teenage sites and then these teenage sites would point you to younger things and then it would say like illegal site… you'd think oh what's that… you'd have a look at the site and the girls are obviously getting younger and it was a steady… downward trend" (KQ p18)

The fact that the site was flagged as illegal acted almost as a prompt. With respect to the Internet, it was also the case that responses were chained, each prompt acting as a discriminative stimulus to move onto the next site. One respondent started by accessing child pornography but quickly became bored with it when he could no longer use it for sexual purposes. At this point he moved onto other categories, again accessing more and more extreme varieties of material within these categories,

> "well there was like full penetration from animals erm… dogs, donkeys… think there's a zebra at one point so… I don't think you could actually get more extreme without changing the subject area" (TS p33)

It is important to note that by using the Internet, not only could such materials be accessed, but access could be rapid and movement could take place across categories. The density of the material that could be downloaded in any one session was high, and there is some suggestion that with this form of collecting behaviour, where the collection was a stimulus for sexual behaviour, satiation would occur quite rapidly,

> "… I was actually getting quite bored as it were… erm… with the sort of child pornography… I was becoming sort of more obsessed with bondage… and sort of torture… imagery. So… I'd kind of exhausted… the potential that it had for sexual arousal" (II p20)

Depersonalising of the pictures was seen most strongly when reference was made to the pictures as trophies,

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" … the idea of keeping the images was like trophies" (II p16)

as objects that could be collected and manipulated. One function of the Internet in relation to this was that
images could be downloaded and changed, to meet the needs of the collector,

"… I was actually manipulating the images a fair bit… and I was aware that these were electronic
files… there was a sense that… although these represented real people… because they were
photographs… that kind of material… was in no way really connected with the original act" (II
p19)

"it wasn't a person at all it was… it was just a flat image… it was a nothing" (OC p54)

"I don't mean to be denigrating but some of the people were ugly… so I would actually sort of
chop their head off…" (OC p35)

Here OC used the word 'people' when talking about the children in the pictures, as does II. This moved
attention away from the fact that the material being downloaded and manipulated to fit with the collection
was actually pornographic images of children. The notion of images as commodity was also seen when one
respondent talked about their commercial value to him and his partner,

"… what he was doing he was downloading loads and loads of pictures… putting them in folders
and everything… putting them on CDs… selling the CDs" (OC p17)

Respondents talked about accessing the Internet, downloading pornography and organising their collections
as if it was part of a ritual, which for many respondents led to huge collections of photographs. Earlier
research in this area has suggested that one feature of such collections is that they are permanent. Certainly
all the respondents in this study had kept child pornographic images either on CDs, floppy disks or their
hard disks, and this had led to their prosecution. However, the majority of them had deleted images on a
regular basis, but had never been able to get rid of their collection completely,

"… and I was thinking I might as well get shot of these now… but there's a thing
at the back of your mind… well I'll do it tomorrow, do it tomorrow and tomorrow never comes
and that sort of thing" (OK p2)

What is different about the Internet in relation to collecting child pornography may relate to the volume of
material that can be accessed and the fact that once the picture is on the Internet it will remain there,

accessible as a part of somebody else's collection. Unlike where hard copy images are destroyed, it is always possible to access more of the same on the Internet.

Child pornography facilitating social relationships

Discourse about child pornography and social relationships were almost exclusively seen in the accounts of respondents who traded images and who used IRC (Internet Relay Chat) to communicate with others. This would not be the case with adult pornography, which was previously shared with other people, particularly men in the context of work. When on-line, those who traded images inevitably came into social contact with others similarly engaged, and clearly this was very important to some respondents,

> "… pornography was there almost as much to facilitate the on-line relationship as an end in itself"
>
> (II p17)

Where respondents traded pictures, both the pornography, and the chat that was associated with it through IRC, enabled social cohesion,

> "Well like I said I was very good at finding people to trade with. I was a good negotiator so to speak and I would tend to find pictures… I managed to find the whole series from somebody and I let the channel operators know and… they were deeply grateful. It's kinda like an art collector who finds a lost Picasso" (QH p13)

What this also indicated is how rapidly respondents could build up enormous collections of pictures through trading, and that there was clearly a hierarchy that was associated both with number of images and the ability to complete series of pictures. Having child pornography was also a requisite for community membership,

> "… if you wanted to be a member of the group… you just popped into the channel and started trading and if you traded correctly… and if you didn't abuse other users… and you didn't trade crap basically… and you didn't trade snuff or anything that showed kids actively being hurt… "
>
> (EI p64)

Clearly such membership was reinforced by having material to trade, by behaving correctly and by following the rules for trading. Once status had been achieved through membership of the group, trading

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reduced and instead the social function of the on-line exchanges and the ability to be on the inside and obtain special photographs was more important,

> "There was less and less trading going on because a lot of us by now had most of what we were interested in from each other's collections. And there were very few new people or producers. I mean Paul was one and I was one of the few people he trusted enough to give everything that he was making with his kids" (EI p67)

EI's friendship with Paul gave him status but it also allowed him to access new pictures as they were being produced as well as giving him contact with Paul's children. The latter served to enable his sexual fantasies. The notion of community in relation to the pornography was reinforced by the metaphor of club or bar with reference to virtual space,

> ""I mean the times when I would… stay up all night swapping pics with people were long gone. All I did basically I was a bar tender… I was serving drinks and what not" (QH p25)

This analogy is an interesting one because it emphasised the idea of the community as a club, giving people what they wanted and ensuring that everything was running smoothly. Again, we have the idea of child pornography as having some equivalence with alcohol: a commodity to enable social exchange.

> "… once my collection grew past 40,000 I really didn't trade that much. I would mostly let people just take what they wanted off my FTP site… for want of a better word my collection site… my museum… while I was conjuring up new ways of evading law enforcement and securing the collections and what not" (QH p7)

In a similar way to earlier references about lost Picassos, the metaphor of the museum served to highlight the value of the images and also made them into legitimate artifacts to collect. Not only was the material allocated such status, the same also applied to the group members,

> "… I was already you know… on the Usenet… where you don't pay anything at all… swapping with other people… by this I mean quite a select group I mean… it wasn't just anybody willy-nilly" (OK p23)

Not all respondents wished to trade and be members of a community. For some the decision was bound up with ideas of doing wrong by being involved, while for others it related to fears about security.

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Using child pornography to build social networks and relationships served many other complex functions.

It was used as a way of confirming sexual interests to others on-line,

> "… and I could sort of back that up by giving them images… that supported that… so… you know
>
> you name it as a sort of sexual proclivity…" (II p15)

and it generated almost an etiquette with regard to trading relationships which meant that others would trust

you,

> "So I was kind of talking to people and it was exchanging images with one person and then
>
> passing that image on to someone else. So there is this kind of network and these… these images
>
> were currency… because it allowed me to maintain my relationship with the people" (II p18)

The importance of such relationships was often prioritised over the pornography,

> "We were trying to support each other… we were friends" (EI p106)

and occasionally resulted in the indiscriminate saving of material in case it played a role in terms of future

exchange with others.

> "I think some of the really nasty stuff I… or what I consider to be nasty I used to get rid of but the
>
> rest of the stuff I didn't because I used to think perhaps it doesn't appeal to me but it appeals to
>
> somebody else and they might send something else that doesn't appeal to them but it appeals to
>
> other people" (OK p10)

Decisions about the nature of the material were placed in the context of its value. Even though OK might

have thought of some of the pornography as nasty, he still judged it as valuable for exchange. Nor did he

make any sort of value judgments about the people he was willing to trade with.

Child pornography as a way of avoiding real life

It is interesting that for many respondents, linking up with others on the Internet provided important social

support that often replaced unsatisfactory relationships in the 'real world'.

> "I wanted sex all the time… and you know I had a very high sex… and I wasn't getting as much
>
> sex as I want off me wife" (DX p19)

Accessing child pornography on the Internet became part of a bid to create a secret and separate world,

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"… and it was a very private thing I was doing and I… didn't want to share it with anyone else" (KQo p27)

"… er it was a little fantasy world for me… and it was so different from the mundane existence I'd been leading. Here was something that was dangerous… it was exciting… it was new" (II p15)

Clearly this 'cyber world' had many qualities that were unobtainable in the 'real' world and allowed escape from many unpleasant realities,

"I think it mattered to the extent that it shut out the … part of my life that I was finding difficult to deal with… it was sort of my time, it was my space… I got to the stage where I started to feel… annoyed if I felt… other people were intruding on that" (MQ p33)

This could be taken in a very literal way in that MQ was able to physically remove himself into the room where they kept the computer and where he could access his own files. He was also able to emotionally shut himself off from a situation that was becoming increasingly aversive and achieve pleasure and escape through sexual arousal and masturbation.

Through the Internet the unsatisfactory elements of life that were difficult to address or change could for periods be avoided and substituted for a world that was more controllable. Sexual satisfaction could be sought and gained and over which the respondent had perfect control,

"… it was just a picture… there was nothing to worry about… they couldn't talk back to you… they couldn't argue… they couldn't run away… it was just there… it wasn't a person it was just a flat image a flat picture" (OC p55)

For some respondents, this way of dealing with the unsatisfactory side of life took a more extreme form when accessing the pornographic images was referred to as a form of therapy.

Accessing child pornography as therapy

This therapeutic discourse overlaped with talk of satiation and addiction. However, some respondents made claim to actively seeking pornographic images as a way of controlling their interests.

> "because I really wanted to find out about myself as well… in a sense I wanted to know… what I was about… what was it that I… that actually turned me on and… perhaps in the process deal with it… accept it and then move on" (MQ p20)

What was prioritised were his needs, his feeling of wanting to explore the nature of the problem. The children in the pictures had a function only in so far as they were meeting this need. They are almost incidental to the process. The idea of self-exploration was also seen in talk about examining the 'dark side' of one's personality.

At its most extreme, accessing child pornography was seen as a form of personal survival,

> "yeah… I was aroused by some of the pictures… some of the images I wasn't aroused by… erm… you know I was just desperate to find some way of getting out of the shit life that I was in" KQo p44)
>
> "… it was the only thing that was remotely keeping me alive at that point 'cause I could escape on it. I could play games and look at child porn…" (EI p77)

and a way of dealing with emotions such as anger which had no other outlet,

> "I think certainly they precipitated it yeah… and I started downloading child pornography… one it was getting the anger out of my system and saying up yours to the police… and two it was a way of relieving the pressure" (OT p3)

The idea of therapy extended beyond what was good for the respondent to what was good for potential victims of child abuse,

> "… rather than go off and offend and offend again… rather than go out and find a victim" (OT p4)

Accessing pornography through the Internet as therapy is an interesting 'medical' discourse and overlaps very strongly with talk about addiction. With the latter, respondents are unclear as to whether they are addicted to the Internet or to the images, the two having become inextricably intertwined. Of course, the idea of therapy functions in many ways. It allows the respondent to present himself as someone who is 'ill' in someway and who has problems that are largely out of his control. It also allows for the respondent to appear to be behaving responsibly towards his problem by attempting to both explore and deal with it. This

is used as a justification for accessing the images and becomes intertwined with ideas that it is also good for children, in that it prevents actual contact abuse. This needs to be considered alongside other talk about children as images, who clearly have no rights once their photographs are on the Internet.

The Internet and child pornography

Respondents talk about child pornography inevitably, as their crimes related to downloading, overlapped with talk about the Internet. It is clear that the Internet facilitated access to photographs, whether adventitiously or purposefully,

> "… it was only the children side of it came into being when I discovered this er stuff on the Internet" (KQ p69)

Accessing such material was possible because the Internet as a medium was anonymous and because there was an enormous variety of pornography freely available,

> "So I then got into this kind of regime of finding hard core porn… the sort that if I had… the nerve I would have bought a magazine that showed this kind of material in a shop, but then there'd be the problem of sneaking the magazine back into the house and then accessing that material privately…" (II p7)

What was also associated with the Internet was a chain of responses, leading to more and more extreme material, even when that material was not kept for personal collections or for trading,

> "…it seemed to be getting younger and younger… as the more I got into the sites and more I diversified the more you could… you know… the harder the pornography got… seemed to be getting harder and harder…" (DX p3)

What we also see here is the use of the passive voice in relation to the Internet, as if the responsibility lies with it as a medium. What is also apparent is that with the Internet access is rapid and for those interested, child pornography can be found very quickly (which would not be the case from more conventional sources). Inevitably, the more the respondent used the computer as a means of accessing pornography, the more skillful he became in finding material and getting round any security checks.

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What is also interesting in relation to this is that there appeared to be a blurring of boundaries in what constituted child pornography that was exaggerated on the Internet. In some instances this was used as a justification for downloading material, while in other instances there appeared to be confusion as to the overlap between nudist and 'art' photographs and pornography.

"Where do you draw the line… where does society draw the line… where is what is considered legal in one country illegal in another" (KQo p58)

"… that's where the trouble sets in actually… it's hard to explain… it's hard to tell somebody the difference between a pornographic image and a nude art image"(ME p6)

"They were of children, but not of child pornography… It was done in a tasteful… you could tell by the image it wasn't… it wasn't anything… there was no sexual overtones or anything it wasn't with legs spread…" (ME p8)

All respondents made reference to the Internet and addiction when talking about the compulsive elements of downloading. This is used to make sense of a loss of control, of high rate behaviour and also as a way of distancing oneself from ideas of personal agency.

"… now at one point I sort of deleted all the pornography off the machine and I tried not to get back on… to it. But… the sense of addiction, compulsion and obsession was so strong that I ended up, you know, falling back into old habits" (II p18)

"… I couldn't stop looking at these pictures… I was a junkie… a junkie par extraordinaire… I figured that the only way I was going to stop was if I got busted" (QH p29)

"… I was obsessed by it I really was I will definitely admit that… an addiction… mmm definitely" (DX p9)

Such distancing was also seen in talk about the nature of sexual offences against children. The person downloading images was able to put himself into another category of offender, one who had done something illegal but who had not committed an offence against a child,

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> "I don't like the idea of being a sex offender 'cause to me… a sex offender is somebody who er… somebody who goes raping people… who's harmed somebody in a sexual manner… not looking at images" (ME p13)

> "… the way I looked at it I'm doing no harm because at the end of the day I'm not taking the pictures I'm not setting 'em up… I'm not distributing them… all I'm doing at the end of the day is just looking at .em…" (TS p30)

This is further reinforced by an appeal to common sense, using the opinion of a trusted family member as the voice of reason,

> "… it's like me dad… I mean me dad thought exactly the same as me… he says well it's only a bloody picture" (OC p53)

> "Me dad could understand… he says being male… you know the sex drive… women can't understand that…" (ME p46)

This blurring of boundaries in what constituted pornography, is similar to the findings of McCabe (2000) who suggested that one third of her respondents thought it was all right to download such material.

Conclusion

What emerged from these accounts is that child pornography downloaded from the Internet does act as a means of sexual arousal and is used as an aid to masturbation both on and off-line, and that for the majority of respondents in this sample resulted in an increase in masturbatory behaviour. This is similar to the findings of Hamman (1996) in the context of cybersex on the Internet. Respondents were highly selective in the material they chose, seeking out content that was arousing for them and which fitted with individual fantasies. This confirms the suggestions made by both Howitt (1995) and Seto et al (2001) but seems to conflict with the latter's allegation that there is little evidence to support assumptions that pornography users become sexually aroused and masturbate while viewing pornography. Again, one aspect of Internet use is that respondents could largely ensure privacy, which maybe facilitates immediate sexual behaviour. It is also a fact that given the scope of child pornography available on the Internet, none of the respondents had difficulty in finding material that met their sexual proclivities.

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 The relationship between contact offenses and pornography remains unclear, and would seem to support the suggestion by Seto et al (2001) that earlier studies have not considered the possibility of interactions between individual characteristics and pornography exposure. Certainly it appears that for some respondents, pornography was used as a substitute for actual offending, whereas for others, it acted as both blueprint and stimulus for a contact offence. Justification for viewing and downloading images revolved around ideas of the consenting child, as it being preferential to contact abuse and the fact that 'moral' limits were set with regard to what was downloaded. Such limits often appeared to be quite flexible, however, if the photographs themselves had value in terms of exchange.

The Internet clearly plays an important role in collecting behaviour related to child pornography, and here we see a function that overlaps with that of sexual arousal. Material is often collected even when it has no arousing properties for the individual but because it is part of completing a series or is new. Collections can be correspondingly large, because the bulk of child pornography on the Internet is free and also because respondents often acquired the technological skills to use software that allowed them to download without them having to be physically present. Tate (1990) suggests that "… pedophiles don't simply view the material they collect, they catalogue and index it as well" (p112). All respondent's showed some level of cataloguing behaviour, but in the main the degree of sophistication shown in relation to this was largely a function of the use to which the photographs were to be put. Those who traded also organised their collections systematically and spent a great deal of time off-line cataloguing and indexing their photographs. Such collecting behaviour emphasises the role of pornography as both trophies and commodities, distancing the downloader from the content of the photographs.

Discourse about child pornography and social relationships is almost exclusively seen in the context of trading and using IRC. Such social relationships are bound by rules and have all the qualities of 'community' outlined by Linehan et al (in press). Pornography played a role in such communities because status was reflected in volume, having parts of missing series and distributing these and new images through the Internet. Social relationships also allowed respondents to normalise their activities, consolidating a body of accounts which allowed others to justify or legitimise their orientation and

behaviour (Durkin and Bryant, 1999). Such legitimising activity is also heightened by the metaphor of the Internet as a physical space, a bar or a museum, where the commodity is pornography rather than alcohol or art.

Morahan-Martin and Schumacher (2000) talk about the Internet as providing an attractive alternative to a mundane or unhappy life. Certainly, for these respondents, accessing child pornography on the Internet was often used as a way of creating a private and intensely arousing world, where it was possible to go beyond normal limits. Such a world was often associated initially with feelings of regaining control, but this quickly changed and was followed by frequent reference to loss of control and addiction. Such discourses of addiction are not confined to those who access child pornography on the Internet. Kennedy-Souza (1998) suggests that what we are seeing is merely the continuation of a trend of people spending increasingly more time with technology than with other human beings. What is often achieved through prolonged engagement with the Internet is an alteration in mood, resulting in what Kennedy-Souza (1998) argues is Internet addiction. Griffiths (2000) has suggested that excessive use of the Internet for sexual purposes appears in the majority of cases to be purely symptomatic, but for what appears to be a small minority, the Internet may be functionally addictive. Why such addiction should take the form of collecting child pornography is more difficult to ascertain, especially when, as for some respondents this appears to occur in the absence of any prior interest in such material.

At its most benign, the Internet facilitates access to a wide variety of child pornography. Tate (1990) suggests that the particular advantage of the Internet to the paedophile is its security, as a lifetime's collection can be hidden on a small amount of electric gadgetry, stacking the odds heavily against discovery. What also seems to be the case is that the Internet functions in such a way that there are constant links to other sites, some of which are signaled by the word 'illegal' and that these in turn act as a discriminative stimulus for accessing more and more extreme material. Frequent reference was made by respondents to the pictures being of younger and younger children, or of more extreme activities. It may be that the quest for newness and difference and the rapidity of habituation is exaggerated on the Internet because of the shear volume of material available and the amount of time that downloaders spend with it.

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It is evident that there is some confusion about what constitutes pornography and with regard to child pornography the issue is complex (Taylor et al, 2000). The Internet seems to allow for a blurring of boundaries and is used by the respondents in this study as a justification for downloading. This is interesting given that these were 'insider accounts' and all acknowledged that the images, regardless of whether they could be justified as 'art' or 'naturist' were sexually arousing to the viewer. While the label of 'sex offender' was accepted with varying degrees by respondents (depending on whether they had also committed a contact offence), there was clearly a distinction made between the activity of downloading and the commission of a contact offence. This was reinforced by reference to common sense judgments and was made possible by the respondent distancing himself from these photographs. Such emotional distancing is one frightening aspect of these accounts, where the child is reduced to an electronic image or, as described by one respondent, "a nothing". The ability to manipulate images is another feature of this.

Whilst the presence of child pornography on the Internet is recognized to be a major social problem, its management to date by law enforcement agencies has tended to focus on the development of pragmatic tools of apprehension (such as sting operations), or a focus on evidential issues rather than interventions based on coherent conceptual responses. The results presented in this paper suggest that child pornography may have multiple functions, and is not only associated with sexual arousal. This seems to be of particular concern when those functions become apparent within a deviant community environment. An important issue following from this relates to the extent to which what might be otherwise dormant interests are facilitated by the dynamics of the Internet, and the extent to which facilitation of an interest in child pornography relates to the subsequent commission of contact offences against children.

At the moment, the task of managing child pornography on the Internet has largely fallen to law enforcement. However, despite well-publicised successes, the amount of child pornography on the Internet continues to grow. In developing enforcement initiatives, there has been a growing tendency to focus on technical approaches such as automatic scanning of IRC channels, or image scanning to detect evidential material on seized hard drives. The enormous volume of Internet activity related to child pornography

undoubtedly presents problems for law enforcement, but this paper has emphasised the need for psychological, as well as technical, initiatives to understand the nature of the problem. Recognising that collecting child pornography belongs in a broader psychological and social framework, and that such material might have multiple functions, offers additional tools to law enforcement. At a simple level, evidence presented above (and supplemented by further unpublished interviews) suggests that highly organised picture collections are related to an active involvement in trading pictures, an avenue that needs to be explored further therefore when reviewing seized computer material. In a more general sense, recognising the social functions associated with picture collections offers opportunities for infiltration into networks and groups without involvement in compromising enticement operations.

Because of the nature of the Internet, further understanding of these issues presents unique challenges for policy makers and the Internet industry. A central issue for policy makers is the problem of reconciling freedom of speech and limitations on censorship of the Internet with the very evident child protection problems presented by the production, distribution and viewing of child pornography. Legislative developments have tended to separate the regulation of child pornography from broader censorship issues, as a means of avoiding controversial problems related to differing national perspectives on censorship, and also as a way of encouraging the development of ecommerce by minimising the regulatory framework applied to the Internet. A particular problem in regulating the Internet is the sense in which no national framework can apply to it. A focused approach to the management of child pornography has undoubtedly helped in the development of a common international agenda in the emergence of protective legislative frameworks. However, this development has also tended to divert legislative and policy attention from the broader problem of the regulation of adult pornography, and explorations of features in common with child pornography. At least for some individuals, an interest in child pornography is a step along a path of access to pornographies in general; this emphasises the more general issue of the need to encourage the development of a broader regulatory environment (see Edwards (2000) for a discussion with respect to British obscenity laws). The increasing evidence of organised criminal involvement in the trade in child pornography and its links to the sex industry adds further emphasis to this point.

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The Internet industry occupies a critical role in any discussion about regulation of the Internet. Initiatives to encourage self regulation amongst Internet Service Providers (ISP's) offers an alternative to legislative intervention, with the added bonus of a significant international dimension, at least amongst the larger ISP's. Recent US initiatives such as the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's CyberTipline-II (mandated by 42 USC 13032 (b)(1)) will facilitate this development. This was established to handle child pornography leads by electronic service providers, the reports from which are available online and 'real time' to the FBI and the US Customs Service. The emergence of national structures to facilitate the development of self-regulation, such as the Irish Government's Internet Advisory Board (2000), will also facilitate this.

A critical issue relevant to the above emerging from this paper is the link between child pornography picture collection, and engagement with chat and other forms of communication with like-minded individuals. Much of this communication relates to exchange of fantasy (but presumably at times real) accounts, although there is clear evidence of individuals learning security procedures, and gaining information generally about the location of supportive material. In this context, an important related issue that is not discussed in this paper is attempts at child seduction in chat rooms (see Quayle and Taylor (*in submission*) for a discussion of this). In practical terms, meaningful legislative attempts to control fantasy and personal communication are difficult in the extreme to develop, and impossible to apply, as well presenting major human rights issues. A more effective way of addressing this problem is through individual ISP's, through their terms of service, which will effectively allow control over chat rooms and other communication protocols where obviously illegal material, such as pictures, is not involved. The challenge here, of course, is the development of effective international self-regulatory frameworks for ISP's.

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