

Case Study

Child Seduction and Self-Representation on the Internet

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a case study of a man charged with the offense of downloading child pornography from the Internet. He had used the Internet to traffic child pornography, and, in addition, to locate children to abuse, to engage in inappropriate sexual communication with children, and to communicate with other pedophiles. Such offenses were facilitated by self-representing in Chat rooms as both a child and an adult. The case study illustrates how such offenders move through a repertoire of offending behavior and discusses the role that the Internet can play in supporting inappropriate and disinhibited sexual behavior that victimizes children through the trading of child pornography and possible child seduction. The Internet is seen to play a unique role in allowing individuals to self-represent aspects that might otherwise remain hidden or dormant.

INTRODUCTION

DURKIN¹ suggested that there are four ways in which people with a sexual interest in children may misuse the Internet: to traffic child pornography, to locate children to molest, to engage in inappropriate sexual communication with children, and to communicate with other pedophiles. The following case study illustrates all of these occurring within the repertoire of one individual, facilitated by the ability to self-represent in multiple ways on the Internet. For this individual, the means to communicate with others largely took place through Chat rooms, where anonymity allowed him to assume, first, the persona of a child and, later, that of an adult. Durkin and Bryant² have suggested that pedophiles justify such behavior through generating accounts of their activities that deny any possible injury to

a child and that also condemn their condemners. The Internet provides a perfect medium for the use and dissemination of such accounts, as many such offenders will not engage in direct physical sexual contact with a child, and therefore can deny that any harm has been done. Communicating with like-minded others also allows for the expression of views such as the following: "engaging with children through the Internet is a more responsible way of dealing with their feelings than going out and trying to abuse 'real' children."³

Lamb⁴ provided the first systematic study of how such Chat rooms may be used by pedophiles. He sought to catalog the types of identities and the verbal behaviors of visitors to Chat rooms that specifically targeted young gay males. For the purpose of the study, the author assumed personas of young males. His analysis suggested that those who contacted

the author's personas could be divided into three broad categories: browsers, cruisers, and pornographers. Browsers were genuinely curious people exploring the medium and expecting to meet real people. Their language and general knowledge was congruent with adolescence, and they avoided both personal and sexual chat. They were also the smallest group represented. The largest group was the cruisers, who, while listing themselves as students, displayed little knowledge of the culture or language that would be appropriate to this group. They did, however, possess an extensive knowledge of gay sexual practices, which they wished to discuss at length. The talk was highly sexualized and focused on either their own experiences or fantasies about sexual activities with others in the Chat room. Approximately half of this group also looked for contact outside of the Chat room. The third group, pornographers, revealed little about themselves in conversations, were seen as highly skilled users of the medium, and focused more on trading photographs. Lamb⁴ concluded, "Most visitors to youthful sexually oriented chat rooms are apparently not as described" (p. 133). In addition, it appeared that very few of the people in this study showed any restraints in what they wanted to say or do, engaging others whom they assumed to be young people in fantasies and mutual masturbation.

Two questions central to such a misuse of the Internet are the following: (1) What aspects of the Internet allow for such a high occurrence of unrestrained sexual behavior (2) How and why do people self-represent on the Internet as someone other than who they are in the offline world? Central to our understanding of the individual in relation to the Internet is awareness that there is an overlap between the online and the offline world. The importance lies in the connection between "life on-line and its meaning in relationship to life off-line" (p. 23).⁵ For those with a sexual interest in children, life on-line operates in the context of the abuse of children both online and offline, either in the production and exchange of pornographic images or in attempted sexual engagement. Talamo and Ligorio⁶ have emphasized that, "whenever cyberspace is used within a real and meaning-

ful context, the boundaries between real and virtual are blurred. Furthermore, activities in cyberspace produce outputs for real life and vice versa" (p. 111).

Consideration of the factors that allow people to engage in highly disinhibited sexual behavior on the Internet tends to focus on accessibility, affordability, and anonymity.⁷ Previous authors^{7,8} have suggested that sexual relationships on the Internet can foster superficial erotic contacts and ways of relating that can have destructive results, such as in an accelerated, eroticized pseudointimacy. The Internet also offers the opportunity for the formation of online communities, in which isolated individuals can communicate with each other around sexual topics of shared interest.^{7,8} The availability of erotica (including child pornography) allows for the objectification of others, the ability to fragment one's own sexuality, and the possible emergence of otherwise dormant antisocial inclinations.⁹ Danet¹⁰ has suggested that both the anonymity and the playful quality of the Internet have a powerful and disinhibiting effect on behavior. People are more likely to allow themselves to behave in ways that are different from ordinary, everyday life, and to express previously unexplored aspects of their personalities, which he likened to the effect of wearing a mask. Where, in the context of adult sexual behavior, this may be seen as liberating,¹¹ this would not be the case where the target of this behavior is a child.¹²

The expression of sexual interest is also facilitated by the ability to represent oneself in whatever way one wants in the apparent safety of anonymity. Cyberspace is an interactive arena, where tools such as Chat rooms are used to offer new interactive resources. If we consider identity to be socially constructed rather than fixed, then playing different identities can be seen as a resource that participants use, and choice about what possible self to show is driven by strategic moves that participants can make within that situation.^{13,14} The context also shapes how people represent themselves. Identities constructed during the social interaction depend on what each person decides to show about her or himself in that context, and on the

impact of the context in guiding and modeling the possible choices.¹⁵ Talamo and Ligorio⁶ have suggested that, “[i]f identities are considered as a resource used to reach certain goals during the interaction, cyber identities are based on context-specific features made relevant by the participants in that specific moment” (p. 111). Self-representation on the Internet is largely achieved through verbal exchange, although people can and do use images such as photographs¹⁶ and sexually oriented contacts often migrate into real-life meetings.^{17,18} If the purpose of self-representation is specifically sexual, as in the online seduction of children or adults, then the absence of nonverbal cues makes the process of first-impression formation take on new forms. This is expressed largely through the language chosen, style of writing, timing of the response, speed of writing, use of punctuation, and use of emoticons.¹⁹ Where self-representation or the persona is manipulated to achieve a certain goal, then such factors will be important in establishing credibility and sustaining online relationships. As already seen in the study by Lamb,⁴ such cues can also undermine credibility where they are incongruent with the assumed persona. The Internet offers a unique opportunity for multiple representations of identity that need bear no relationship with other social cues that are normally so salient in the offline world. These would include age, gender, and physical characteristics. Quayle et al.⁹ give a more detailed discussion of these issues.

The function of online resources such as child pornography is to heighten sexual arousal and disinhibition, and to aid in the seduction of children through fantasy manipulation and masturbation. Such images also remain in the offline world as permanent products that can be manipulated, changed, viewed, and exchanged, as can any other commodity, including other illegal ones. The objectification of such images distances the user from the fact that they are photographs of sexual abuse; this is seen most strongly when they are used as a means of social currency. What is of relevance to this study is that the use of pornography, like engagement with the Internet, is not a static process, but has a function within a range of offending activities.

This might be conceptualized as a dynamic model of problematic Internet use by individuals with a sexual interest in children.²⁰

The respondent in this study gave permission to be interviewed on two occasions, in March and April 2001, by the first author, who also transcribed the data, and for this to be submitted to an academic journal. The subsequent analysis was informed by the work of Smith²¹; consequently, we looked for patterns or themes within the transcripts. The following case description is illustrated by quotations from the data and identified by interview and page number.

CASE OF Q.X.

Q.X. is a 33-year-old, single man who is currently participating in a sex offender treatment program. He has been on sick leave from his job as a sixth form (age 17-19) teacher since October 1999, when he was diagnosed by his general practitioner as being depressed, for which he was prescribed medication. He had made two attempts at suicide through overdoses in October 1999 and September 2000, neither of which resulted in admission to hospital. He had no prior psychiatric history, although he described himself as abusing alcohol for many years. He is an only child. Both his parents are alive and work with young people. At the time of his arrest, he was living with them, and they have stayed in close contact. He was arrested and charged with distribution of child pornography in August 2000 and presented voluntarily for treatment in February of the following year. He says that he was aware of his sexual attraction towards younger boys when he was in his mid teens, and he has never had a successful sexual relationship with either a male or female adult. Although he frequently has sought contact with boys between the ages of 9 and 14, this has never involved overt sexual activity. He was arrested on suspicion of child sexual abuse in 1994, when a boy's parent discovered letters written by Q.X., but he was released without charge. He acknowledged that many of his recreational activities (such as involvement with cricket coaching) have been chosen in order to gain access to boys.

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE INTERNET

Q.X. had had limited contact with computers before 1997 and was largely self-taught. He bought a computer in 1997, with the explicit goal of accessing child pornography.

I first got a computer Christmas 1997. . . . Within a matter of days I was looking at Newsgroups that contained pornography and I was downloading from the start . . . (p. 2)

He had used pornographic literature in the past when masturbating, but this was text-rather than picture-based and had been limited to what was readily obtainable. Accessing material on the Internet was, in contrast, very easy, and there was a wide variety of photographs available.

I was very, very surprised in the first couple of days about what type of material I could actually get hold of. (p. 4)

Knowledge about where to look for photographs was attributed to newspaper articles, almost placing the responsibility on the press for giving him the information.

It was dead easy I found. . . . Most of it came from background knowledge that the media had given me really. . . . or that I'd picked up on. . . . I remember specifically one paper . . . it was either the Guardian or the Times . . . and the front cover actually had ****^a or all of those . . . (p. 3)

The initial exposure to these photographs was highly arousing and led to a rapid escalation in downloading pornography.

. . . so there was a bit of a shock but that went very quickly . . . I was very much hooked . . . very quickly into right . . . I'll download more as quickly as I can . . . (p. 5)

But . . . as soon as I got home . . . it would be . . . up stairs in my bedroom . . . shut the door . . . tinnies [cans of beer] with me . . . log on . . . everyday. (p. 58)

The images had a primary function of enabling sexual arousal and were associated with masturbation.

Masturbating once during that session and then after . . . (p. 9)

Levels of masturbation had already been high, but this increased while on the Internet, and arousal was directly linked to preferred sexual material that enabled his own fantasies.

I preferred what I would call . . . boy-on-boy action . . . although I did quite enjoy seeing men-on-boy action . . . obviously about my age to fit with the fantasy I'm having . . . so those were the things I'd like . . . (p. 11)

By his arrest, Q.Z. had approximately 15,000 pornographic photographs on his computer and a much smaller number of movies. He had made some attempt to catalog them, but quickly grew bored with the task, so his collection was sorted into fairly rudimentary categories.

Like my favorites, black and whites, new ones . . . 'cause I'd given up sorting out the old ones because there was so much of it. I thought, well, next time I start downloading I'll be more organized and sort through these this time . . . (p. 8)

Throughout his time on the Internet, Q.X. traded or exchanged both photographs and movies. This was not a constant activity and related to both the size of his collection and what function it served in his relationships with others. This included trade with other adults as collectors as well as using the material to support both individual and mutual masturbation.

. . . because my collection was so large, it was mainly swapping with other people . . . rather than actually going into Newsgroups. (p. 14)

Material was sought that fitted with preferred sexual scripts and was used as an aid to fantasy, both on his own and in the context of cyberrelationships.

. . . a big fantasy for me has always been that

^aName of newsgroup deleted.

I should have a boyfriend who is about 11 or 12 . . . that it should be loving and caring and consummated . . . (p. 11)

PROGRESSION FROM NEWSGROUPS TO CHAT ROOMS

Q.X. described how he quickly became bored with downloading pornography from the Newsgroups and made a progression to Chat rooms. The boredom is expressed as a form of satiation, as the images were insufficient on their own to meet his sexual needs.

There was a progression thing that's dangerous there . . . I was very . . . I became hooked on chat rooms rather than the initial Newsgroups . . . (p. 5)

Chat rooms gave him access to like-minded people and also to movie clips. The latter were important sources of sexual stimulation, as technically they were of higher quality than many of the photographs, and also they had a specific sexual script.

Well, if we . . . if we rush forward I actually got bored with the pornography side really . . . in terms of pictures . . . I was more interested in getting hold of movies . . . (p. 5)

by that stage . . . like an image . . . overload . . . once you've seen a sexual image . . . a sexual pose once, a thousand . . . hundreds of times . . . it loses its novelty (p. 17)

Q.X. talks about the movies as being a source of entertainment and as having a much stronger impact on him than the photographs.

I think a good way of putting it is that you almost become numbed . . . it doesn't have the same impact . . . yeah . . . I'd say that would be true because then I did move on to when I started to get to know people in Chat rooms they were actually sending me movie clips . . . that was the next big thing . . . trying to get that because that was far more entertaining than still pictures . . . (p. 17)

However, when photographs specifically met his preferred sexual scripts, he continued to download them.

Yes, by that stage . . . pictures were . . . unless they were really good quality . . . specifically blond boys . . . boy-on-boy action I really wasn't interested. I'd seen enough . . . (p. 59)

What is also important is that the pornographic material was increasing his desire for an actual relationship with a child.

I suppose that's because I wanted the real thing . . . which, obviously, looking at all those pictures had fuelled big time. (p. 15)

ASSUMING A CHILD PERSONA

Having discovered Chat rooms, Q.X. quite quickly decided to represent himself as a child persona. He described this in the context of increasing the possibility of accessing other children and also as a measure of personal security.

. . . as I then perceived the children in the chat room would more probably be likely to chat to another someone their own age . . . (2p. 1)

Having tried out several child personas, Q.X. self-represented as Joe, a persona that he maintained for 12 months without anyone challenging its authenticity. At the start, Joe was 11 years old, with blue eyes and blond hair. This was very similar to how Q.X. would have looked at the same age and closely fitted his fantasy of a child he would like to have as a lover.

It was relatively easy for him to do this, as Joe's everyday experiences were anchored in the very real offline world of Q.X. as a teacher. They shared the same interests in sports, shared a similar geographical space (an adjoining town and school), had the same birthday, and had a similar time table with regard to everyday activities. Q.X. had long had an interest in creative writing, and assuming this persona was relatively easy.

Now I talk about him in the third person but at the time I was really getting into the character . . . it's like I was script writer . . . actor . . . all in one . . . (p. 20)

This persona also allowed Q.X. to live out fantasies that had been active since he was an adolescent.

... although I was pretending to be Joe, it was like Joe was part of me ... in terms of that's what I wanted ... so therefore I created it and portrayed it to the outside world ... and lived out the fantasies I would have had ... and did have under the guise of Joe ... (2p. 4)

This persona was given credibility by assigning it a "real" identity through a photograph. Initially, Q.X. used one that he had obtained from one of the Newsgroups, but this was recognized as such by other people and censored within the community. He then sent a Polaroid picture of a boy from his cricket team to a man he had been in contact with and who lived in America. This man scanned the image and made it available to others in the Chat room. The same man also took on a protective role towards Joe for the duration of his existence.

Initial contact in the Chat rooms was with adult males and involved a variety of conversations and activities.

You name it, it probably happened ... really in terms of the range of different types of conversations and the cybersex I engaged in ... but that was quite early on ... (2p. 8)

Q.X. categorized these males according to their behavior towards him.

Yeah, we'd have cybersex, and there wouldn't be hardly any conversation ... there were different types of abusers though I mean ... there were ones that were straight direct they just wanted to meet Joe wanted his telephone number ... others were just happy with the cybersex and there were the ones that said how are you Joe what have you been up to recently? (2p. 6)

... you could label them in terms of there was the predators ... the masturbators ... and the befrienders ... (2p. 7)

Much of the sexual activity involved masturbation by both parties, and the descriptions

and instructions given were often very explicit and involved third parties as part of the fantasy building. For example, early on, Q.X. gave Joe a brother (which was later dropped), and others in the Chat room would ask Joe to get his brother out of bed and involve him in a sexual script, while supposedly engaging in sex with another young person. The setting was given reality by descriptions, for example, of what kinds of clothes Joe was wearing. Unlike offline relationships (which for Q.X. had never involved explicit sexual activity), the contact, when online would quickly move into sexual engagement.

You can't go up to a boy in the street and say ... do you fancy having sex ... whereas you could online ... (2p. 49)

We'd describe what we were doing on each side of the computer ... you know what they were doing, what I was doing ... so it was very sexualized, very graphic ... (2p. 8)

Not all the relationships with men were immediately sexual, and his preferred contacts were with men who would befriend him prior to attempting to engage in any sexual activity.

What their fantasies were ... and so on and so forth ... I tended not to like the guys that went straight for age, sex, location, what are you wearing ... that sort of immediate ... one of these again. It was almost like I was ... it was like a relationship thing. I wanted the guys that really ... really quite liked Joe and asked how he was ... for weeks ... (p. 21)

Playing the role of a young boy also meant that others were willing to help him build up his own computer skills, for example, by coaching him in the use of the chat room client mIRC.

So they talked ... I got to grips with that ... by using mIRC ... of course being 11 or 12 they were very keen to help me know everything ... (p. 24)

Q.X., as Joe, then started to talk more frequently to other boys in the Chat room and, as a consequence, engaged less and less with sexual activities with other men.

. . . although Joe was having cyber sex with these other lads . . . he wouldn't really do it with the other adults . . . (2p. 8)

It is odd that, although Q.X. showed a preference for talking to other boys, he was not able to distinguish between them and adults in terms of content. Forming an attachment with one of the boys became public knowledge within the main chat room and, for a while, would have precluded other sexual behavior.

. . . once Joe got sort of involved in a relationship . . . it was like as if he had to behave himself when he was in the room . . . (2p. 10)

Such relationships were also moved into a public area within the Chat room community by, for example, imitating offline relationship behavior.

. . . and we ended up getting married in a public room . . . because well . . . because there was a priest in there at the time . . . (2p. 15)

One major difference between the offline and the online world is, of course, that in the latter there was a formal sanctioning of deviant behavior and that this relationship moved from a Chat room encounter to marriage within a matter of weeks. There was an equally rapid falling out when Q.X. discovered that his partner (based in the United States) had strong "racist" views, which did not fit with Q.X.'s "moral" position. During the time that this relationship was in existence, there was a lot of sexual activity, and this was satisfying because it fitted with a romantic fantasy of sex with a boy that was part of Q.X.'s preferred sexual script.

. . . it would be . . . rubbing my back . . . kissing nipples french kissing . . . that tender side to love making really taking care that your partner is getting as much pleasure from it as you . . . (2p. 16)

The move from mIRC to the instant messenger program ICQ further enhanced the erotic nature of the exchanges.

. . . and I found that quite erotic because you can actually see the person typing at the same time . . . (2p. 16)

The offline world merged into online activity with the exchange of gifts. In the context of the boy he had "married," this included rings. The compressed and at times exaggerated nature of these relationships was also evidenced in what happened when they fell out.

. . . classic camp you know . . . almost comical gay scenario you'd see on a sit com you know . . . throwing camp temper tantrums . . . (2p. 17)

The element of fantasy was important in these relationships. With the men he encountered, he fantasized that they may have boys that he could contact in real life. With the first relationship with a 13-year-old boy, the fantasy was of two boys falling in love and having sex. The notion of consensuality within the relationship was important.

. . . and even the fantasy of two boys falling in love and having sex . . . I found that an attraction . . . probably in the respect that I just . . . that that justifies my abuse . . . (2p. 18)

This relationship was quickly replaced, on the rebound, by one with Zak. The intensity and reality of these online relationships can be seen in the following.

It really was like living out a life . . . online . . . although it's all digital numbers and zeros and ones . . . it felt so strong so real . . . and it . . . and then especially the relationship with Zak that Joe had . . . it was almost that then that activity was then beginning to control the activity outside. (2p. 19)

Q.X. believed that Zak was 13, even though there were a lot of cues that might have suggested otherwise. For example, Zak's knowledge of sexual practices was extensive,

. . . because he did go into a lot of detail . . . about . . . things like . . . oh butterfly kisses and things like that . . . which I didn't know what they meant and it was extremely tender . . . an extremely romanticized view of sex . . . (2p. 22)

Zak had also sent Q.X. lots of gifts, many of which would have suggested that the person he was talking to was adult rather than child.

Zak had sent me quite a few things in the post. . . . during the summer holidays . . . he'd sent me I think it was 18 yellow roses . . . from a local florist . . . obviously done via debit card . . . he'd sent me clothes . . . he'd sent me a \$100 bill . . . (2 p. 32).

While Q.X. acknowledged that he should have realized that Zak was not a child, he was so involved with and enjoying the fantasy that these cues were ignored.

I felt . . . this is what I want . . . this is where I want to be . . . this is how life . . . how I want my life to go . . . because my life is sad, crap and boring . . . full of emptiness . . . and here . . . is a relationship which is full. But that was a strange way . . . because you're getting that as soon as you switch off . . . log off . . . back to that again. But that feels more empty . . . more hollow and not worth living any more . . . so that . . . that is almost like a downward spiral . . . because you were getting so much from something that wasn't real . . . you go back to reality and reality feels even worse than it was before . . . (2p. 25)

During the time that Q.X. was involved with Zak, his contact with the real world was reducing, such that he was cancelling cricket matches and coaching sessions. Paradoxically, this meant that he was engaged in fewer relationships with boys during the time that he was involved with the Internet.

The relationship with Zak was interrupted when Q.X. stopped using the Internet for 3 months. He related this to an increase in his drinking behavior coupled with minor problems with his computer. His decision to go back online seemed to be triggered by boredom and loneliness. Having taken on the persona of Joe again, Q.X. was confronted by a confession from Zak that he was not 13 but was in fact an adult male. This in turn was seen as a betrayal and a source of huge emotional distress, but coupled with this were confusing ambiguous feelings, because in part Q.X. was having to acknowledge that what had been done to him was exactly the same as he had done to Zak.

This prompted Q.X. to confide in Pegasus, the man who had first befriended Joe in the Chat room, who persuaded him to come over to his server where, after a week, he met Noah. Noah again was 13 and living in the United States, and his presentation was at first as someone quite reticent who had to be won round in order to engage him in a sexual relationship.

. . . Joe had a way of . . . 'cause Noah was quite anti cybersex . . . until I got my hands on him but . . . (2p. 34)

The relationship with Noah was a very intense one, in part because he had a more complete "personality" than in the previous relationships. This building up of his character was achieved through supplying minute details about his life.

. . . far more details about his judo, his friends, his brother . . . his adopted brother . . . his parents . . . his house . . . his ranch . . . (2p. 36)

When Noah revealed that he was an adult rather than a child, Q.X. was devastated: "I wanted to smash something." This anger found expression through increasing his alcohol intake.

the character was more realistic . . . more believable . . . I was closer to that person . . . yeah . . . so I was more hurt that time . . . and I was thinking . . . well I failed to have a relationship with a real life . . . and I've failed three times . . . sod it . . . I ran down the . . . I ran down the nearest pub actually . . . and stayed there for a while . . . (2p. 36)

The betrayal by Noah marked the end of the persona of Joe. This was accompanied not by feelings of loss, which might have been expected, as Q.X. had been online as Joe for over 12 months, but by a sense of relief.

. . . to me it was good to be me . . . online . . . from the end of February onwards . . . it was actually . . . it was actually a relief to say . . . well actually it's what . . . I'm 33 . . . (2p. 39)

ASSUMING AN ADULT PERSONA

The disclosure by Noah that he was an adult coincided with Q.X. being given an appoint-

ment to see a Community Psychiatric Nurse, through his Employee Assistance Programme. During this appointment, he talked about downloading pornography, but when asked if he had communicated with other pedophiles, he had denied this. He rationalised this to himself by saying that he had never spoken to other men as an adult before.

And I went away with that thinking that I know a lot of pedophiles but I . . . the real me . . . had never really talked to them (2p. 38)

This was followed by a decision that nothing about his sexual orientation was going to change and that his depression would be more likely to go away if he "came out . . . as me." The coming out and going back online was in some ways liberating.

Because then I could have cybersex as an adult with other boys in the room . . . which is what I wanted in the first place really (2p. 39)

It also opened up the possibility of finding someone to abuse. His previous child persona had precluded this, because to risk meeting somebody would result in the validity of his persona being undermined. He went back into another sexually explicit Chat room and, on assuming an adult role, became "much more of a predator." In the Chat room, he talked with other men both about themselves and about the types of boys that they would like to meet. The exchanges of fantasies also included swapping pornography.

I think that's when the pornography started up quite a lot then . . . this time swapping a lot more . . . more proactively looking for film clips . . . that we started talking about . . . we used to talk about the boys that would arrive . . . in the room. About how real they were. Have you tried chatting him up and how far did you get. Do you think he's real that sort of thing . . . Ah . . . that felt good . . . to be *me* . . . with amongst what I would then consider to be the only people that would really understand me. The only people I can be me with . . . they won't judge me. They feel the same way. We've got so much in common. I can feel . . . I fit in here . . . (2p. 41)

His role within this community was important to him and allowed him to express aspects of himself that he had not previously disclosed to others.

. . . so here I'm not lonely because people do know the real me and I can be open and honest. and then we started talking about, oh, where can you go looking for boys . . . online stuff . . . (2p. 41)

This actively seeking boys to meet, both online and offline "was far more aggressive . . . it became far more aggressive," and this was reflected in the way that he talked when online.

. . . it was more direct . . . How old are you? Where are you from? . . . have you had sex before? . . . would you want to meet? Most of the time it would be a straight question . . . well do you fancy a meeting? (2p. 42)

The bid to access boys was supported by information from other adults within the community.

. . . more times I would get what I would call leads from other adults . . . about boys they know, they'd abused or . . . had contact with. I was working on that one. (2p. 42)

In spite of pursuing these avenues, through email addresses and telephone numbers, over a 6-month period he was not successful in making contact with anyone that resulted in a physical meeting. With one boy he engaged in telephone sex, which Q.X. describes as being initiated by the child.

. . . he was the one that engaged in the sex . . . he was the one that prompted . . . met him in a chat room . . . on on gay.com . . . (2p. 43)

He arranged to meet this boy but failed to turn up as he had been drinking heavily the night before and did not wake in time. A further contact was made with another boy.

The sequence of events was that in June or July . . . of 2000 . . . I'd given my telephone number and picture . . . photograph of myself . . . to an individual who was pretending to be 12 years old. they went to the police with a track

they'd obviously printed out from a conversation we'd had in a chat room . . . that obviously kicked off events. The police came round a month later. (p. 2)

Their online conversation had included references to Q.X. taking photographs of the boy with a digital camera, although he subsequently said that he had had no intention of doing that, but wished to abuse the boy. It turned out that the boy in question was not 13 but was 18 and the Chat room had been dedicated to young homosexuals. Q.X. blurred his intentions with regard to this contact, saying that he was not sure that he was a child and wanted to give him the opportunity to come out as an adult who liked boys.

His arrest was followed by the seizure of the hard drive of his computer and the loss of his collection of pornography. At the time of the interviews, his case still had not been presented in court.

DISCUSSION

This case study provides evidence of how one individual used the Internet to further his sexual interest in children. This was achieved through initially accessing child pornography, which intensified his levels of sexual arousal and behavior, and fuelled his desire to engage in a relationship with a child. His move to Chat rooms allowed him to engage initially as a child persona in cybersex with people presenting as both adults and boys, and then as an adult in order to access boys offline. We can see a progression in offending that moved him closer to behavior that was clearly sanctioned online; that of the sexual predator. This is paralleled in changes in his sexual behavior and language. Pornography was an important feature in that through it he accessed a like-minded community, secured a role in that community, and was provided with a vehicle that allowed both solitary and mutual sexual expression. Pornography cemented both adult and child relationships, giving him status through the size and quality of his collection.

This case study bears similarities with that of Lamb,⁴ in that it is apparent that many people

in sexually oriented Chat rooms, particularly those dedicated to young gay males, are really adult men looking for cybersex. Döring¹⁷ draws our attention to the fact that cybersex is not a conversation about sex, but is a form of sexual encounter in itself. Her definition of cybersex is "a computer-mediated interpersonal interaction in which the participants are sexually motivated, meaning they are seeking sexual arousal and satisfaction" (p. 864). In the context of child seduction, personas are assumed which allow for the engagement of individuals, sometimes in apparently "caring" relationships, to facilitate sexual contact. Lamb⁴ talks of browsers, cruisers, and pornographers in relation to the people in his study. Q.X., however, likens these people to predators, masturbators, and befrienders, all of whom would have used pornography as part of their social exchange. Lamb⁴ was able to distinguish between "real" youths and adults pretending to be such. With Q.X., this seems to have been much more difficult, as his assumed persona as Joe was so firmly embedded in his offline world as a teacher, that his vocabulary and immediate circumstances were congruent with a child of 13. What is also of interest is the overlap between the persona of Joe and fantasies that Q.X. would have had as a child of that age. This merging of boundaries between the offline world and the online one made sustaining his role a relatively easy, if emotionally taxing, task.

This overlap of online and offline behavior was also clearly seen both in the actual sexual behavior and in the assumption of many of the ways of relating that we see offline, such as exchanging rings and getting married. Sexual activity, although largely taking place next to the computer, was not something that took place "in the mind." What was involved, particularly when the need was to establish a loving relationship, as opposed to providing only explicit sexual instructions or cues, was a detailed vocabulary. Such a written expression of sexual sensations has been noted by other authors as being very different from what is normally required in "face-to-face" relationships.¹⁷ This overlap into the "real" world was also evidenced in the exchange of gifts and telephone numbers, and at the end of this process, the at-

tempt to make contact physically with children. On the one occasion that the latter took place, the sexual activity was described as being initiated by the child and in this is similar to the accounts described by Durkin and Bryant.²

While Q.X. and Joe are one and the same, his account of his child persona is often presented in the third person and he moves through talking of "him," "I," and "we." What is also evident is the idea of Joe as an idealised sense of what it could have been like at that age if he had been able to overtly express his sexuality in a safe world. The choice of Joe as a nickname is interesting as Q.X. was adamant that it did not relate to any individual that he actually knew in the offline world. Talamo and Ligorio⁶ suggest that the choice of a nickname is the first strategic move that users do inside the community, since it exposes some characteristics of the self (even if unreal). In keeping Joe apart from other known identities, Q.X. was able to keep ownership for himself and in himself.

The notion of community was very important for Q.X. It initially provided him with material that was highly desirable and arousing (pornography), but it also gave him access to relationships that were more intense at many levels than any he had experienced in the offline world. As a supposed child in that community, other members were keen to supply him with information that enabled him to build up computer and software skills and is similar to the findings of Linehan et al.⁸ What is also evident is that this community traded information to further their own sexual proclivities, and that this trading went beyond images and fantasies to include details of offline children. Q.X. was apprehended before he could successfully meet a child to abuse. Prior to going on the Internet, he had engaged in a lot of sexualised behavior with boys in his preferred target range, and would have used such relationships as part of his masturbatory fantasies. What was different about his online contacts was their highly sexualized, and apparently mutual, content which was enabled by the simultaneous viewing of pornographic videos. His bid to meet children offline must be placed within this context, and must acknowledge that his romanticized and idealized view of "boy lover" had apparently been changed by his ex-

posure to this supportive, online, deviant community.

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