

Chapter 7

Internet Child Pornography: A Stepping Stone to Contact Offences?

ABSTRACT

Internet child pornography is a topic which is eliciting greater attention from society and the media, as parents and caregivers become more aware of the risks to their children and law enforcement agencies become more aware of the techniques and strategies used by offenders. Sheldon and Howitt (2007) indicate that at least in terms of convictions, internet child pornography is the major activity that constitutes Internet related sex crimes. However, the distribution of child pornography in itself is not a new offence, but rather one which has been facilitated by the introduction of new technologies such as digital photography and the internet. Before the popularity of the internet, public concern and academic interest in child pornography was quite low as it was considered to be a small and specialist issue. However, the proliferation of images of child sexual abuse online has altered public opinion considerably. This chapter considers how online distribution of child pornography is different to offline distribution. It also considers the psychology of the online child pornography offender and considers the difference between these individuals and contact offenders, attempting to determine if online offenders later progress to offend offline as well. The chapter will then examine what psychological effects child pornography can have on the victims involved, and finally examines the rehabilitation techniques that have been used on these offenders.

BACKGROUND

Sophie is a 38 year old survivor of child sexual abuse. She was abused by her uncle, and has undergone many years of therapy to help her to emotionally overcome the traumas she endured. Only recently has she begun to fully enjoy her life. She has a successful career as a lawyer and a loving husband, and she is expecting her second child.

However, she has now learned that her uncle took photographs of her abuse, and has been posting the images to file-sharing websites. Although the photographs are almost thirty years old, Sophie is afraid that she is still recognizable in the images. She has no idea how many people have downloaded or seen the images. Every time a passerby makes eye contact with her in the street, she wonders if the person has recognized her from the images. Her confidence in the courtroom has been shattered, as she wonders if her opponent or the jury

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have seen the pictures. During her last case, she found herself preoccupied with these fears, and she had a panic attack in the middle of her opening statement. She stopped going to work and refuses to even go out to buy groceries anymore. She has been diagnosed with agoraphobia.

Jack is a happy and healthy six year old boy. Occasionally he visits Graham, his next door neighbour, and helps him with the gardening. Recently Graham has started touching Jack, and Jack is unsure about if this is okay or not. Graham assures him that it's fine, and perfectly normal. Graham turns on his computer and shows Jack pictures of other little boys who are also being touched. The other little boys seem to be enjoying it, and there are lots of pictures. Jack thinks that perhaps it is normal, even though he's still a little unsure.

While the two accounts above are fictional, they represent the thousands of children who are affected by child pornography online. One example of a real life case involves Ian Green, a 45 year old unemployed convicted sex offender from West Sussex. In August 2010, Green admitted to making, possessing and distributing child pornography. He used eleven difference accounts on the social networking site Facebook to distribute both still images and videos. Green created private groups on Facebook, and only allowed others to join when they had verified their trustworthiness, normally by uploading images of child pornography themselves (BBC News, 2010).

It is difficult to establish one commonly accepted definition of child pornography. The acceptability of images that depict minors in nude or sexually explicit scenes has varied throughout history and across cultures, with some of the most famous examples being depictions of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Juliet is just thirteen years old. Tate (1990) indicates that sexualised images of children were being traded and collected soon after cameras became more widely available in the early nineteenth century, although the early images were generally

of poor quality and difficult to obtain (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). As technology has developed, the quality of the images and the ease of access have improved dramatically.

While most individuals intuitively feel that child pornography is easily identifiable, there are several classification systems available, some of which would include images that are present in most family photo albums. This has resulted in making child pornography difficult to define in a legal sense. Wortley and Smallbone (2006) outline the history of child pornography laws in the United States of America, indicating that the first federal law regarding the issue was passed in 1978, with the first laws regarding computers and child pornography being passed ten years later, with the laws being progressively tightened since then. In brief, the content of the images does not have to involve obscene behaviour, but may include suggestive explicit content of any person under the age of eighteen. It is not only an offence to produce or trade the image, but also simply to possess it, and the image only needs to have been accessed, not saved to the offender's own computer. Definitions in academic literature are also quite diverse (Endrass et al, 2009), and confusion is added by phenomena such as 'barely-legal pornography' (where the individuals in the image are close to the age of consent, often just eighteen years old), and ageplay, where an adult may pretend to be a child, often wearing a costume. In other cases, the image may be of an adult, but the person's head has been replaced with a child's, or virtual child characters (actually controlled by adults) may be used to create pornographic images (as was the case in the 'Wonderland' area of Second Life as reported by Sky News in October 2007).

Before the popularity of the Internet, child pornography was more limited – images tended to be manufactured and traded locally, and distributors needed a considerable amount of equipment to develop and copy the images (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). With the advent of digital cameras and webcams, images and videos can now

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