

Awareness—Responsibility
A Foundation for the Formation and Protection
of Children and Youth
In a Technological Age

By Doug Stead

The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it. ~ Albert Einstein ~

INTRODUCTION

1. The Internet, like any material tool, has no moral quality in itself. The way human persons use it in freedom, however, certainly has vast moral dimensions and implications that should be considered in a realistic and open way.

For example, many even today consider it ironic that a world famous peace prize is awarded each year by the foundation started by the inventor of TNT, Alfred Nobel. Yet the same is true with TNT as with the Internet—in itself there is no moral judgment we can assign to it. If it works, it is good, in a mechanical sense. How it is *used* by persons with free will, though, is an entirely different matter. Here a moral judgment comes into play. If it used by engineers to build a road so that people have a means of reaching centres of medical or social care, we would say that the use of TNT is good. If it used by extremists to kill in a program of terror, we say that its use is evil.

The internet is a far more powerful tool than TNT could ever be. It has “virtually” eliminated time and space as obstacles to communication throughout the world. It shapes and verifies by instant feedback the elements by which people comprehend the world around them.¹ This currently ranges from benign educational tools offered to people of various ages, to the malice of graphic violence and extremism displayed on certain websites which are accessible to nearly everyone with knowledge of internet use. It presents different approaches, some sought and some unwanted, from solicitation to view pornographic and gambling sites, to the more subtle and sinister approaches of online predators who target youth for virtual or real encounters.

There is a great deal in between these extremes that deserves our attention as well. It is the purpose of this brief treatment to help individuals become more critically aware of Internet activity, particularly with respect to their children’s use of it and the formative and psychological effects this can have. Further, we shall look at the unwanted approaches through the Internet, and suggest ways to take responsibility in collaboration with other groups in monitoring and controlling its content and influence on the young. The risks and dangers that have always existed in “growing up” are now evident in this powerful new medium.

A QUESTION OF FORMATION OF CONSCIENCE

2. The Internet, like any verbal or image medium, has the potential of having a direct effect on the formation or malformation of conscience of individual persons. This is important for every user of the Internet, but it is a particularly crucial question with respect to children and youth.

¹ cf. *Ethics in the Internet*, Pontifical Council for Social Communications, article no. 1.¹

We are not talking here about online shopping for toothpaste with the best whitener or a better recipe for mashed potatoes. Such information does not imprint on the practical, intellectual ability to judge actions as morally good or evil. This is what conscience is: a dictate of the practical intellect (or reason) deciding that a given particular action is right or wrong. It is extremely important to remember, however, that conscience is not an oracle, some kind of genetic imprint which leaves a person "feeling" good or bad about some action, proposed or completed. Conscience is like language: *it becomes what it is in itself with the help of others.*² If it is to be an articulate instrument of correct judgment, it needs solid, correct formation. What in current terms is called "de-sensitization" might in fact be a blunting or malformation of conscience. (We shall consider this question in more depth when looking at actual cases of Internet offenders.)

Much of today's concern and discussion about monitoring Internet activity sets up false dichotomies, as if the argument is framed by freedom of expression, "one's own space", etc. on the one hand, vs. censorship or control issues on the other. The real question should be: What kind of *formative* influence does this powerful medium have on our children? What kind of formative influence do we want it to have?

Formation involves a Psychological progression

"Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have [virtue and excellence] because we have acted rightly. *We are what we repeatedly do.* Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit." - Aristotle

The philosophies of formation of character run through millennia of oral tradition and recorded history, yet the basic formula is as succinct as it is psychologically accurate.

--Sensation (something "apprehended" by the senses") tends toward thought. I catch a whiff of basil sauce simmering in the kitchen and I think, "Great! Pasta al pesto for dinner!"

--Thought tends toward action. If I think about something long enough, eventually I want to translate that into some type of action. For example, "I was going to grab something to eat at MacDonald's tonight, but I think I'll stay home and have pasta al pesto, scaloppini and the 1984 Chianti with my parents."³ Tough decision.

--Repeated action tends to form habit. Habits are stronger the more frequently the behaviour is repeated, and thus the longer the habits already exist.⁴

--Habit tends to form character. You want to get an idea of what kind of character your hopeful "significant other" might have? Get to know what his habits are.⁵ Parents and others responsible

² Cf. Josef Ratzinger, *Morals Conference*, Dallas, February, 1984.

³ This an example of action taken after some reflection. Another kind: "Impulsivity is when the space between the thought and the action is missing, where the frontal lobes monitor the intentions of the rest of the brain. There is a gap in the thought process and the person goes directly from thought to action." FAS expert Dr. Susan Doctor, University of Nevada, Reno. (One could argue that between those lies an immediate judgment of action or non-action which the Scholastics called "synderesis", which signifies the habitual and immediate knowledge of the universal practical principles of moral action. For example, someone is so angry as to say, "I could kill you!" but doesn't translate that thought into action, because just as immediate is the knowledge, judgment and decision that such an action is completely wrong.

⁴ Cf. Roger Berger, *Consumer panel data and rational choice based theories of myopic habit formation*, ZUMA-Nachrichten Spezial Band 7, Manheim, 2001.
http://www.gesis.org/Publikationen/Zeitschriften/ZUMA_Nachrichten_spezial/documents/znspezial7/pdfs/12-Berger.pdf

⁵ "I have a big flaw in that I am attracted to thin, tall, good-looking men who have one common denominator. They must be lurking bastards." ---Edna O'Brien, Irish playwright

for formation, especially of the young, could take this and turn it around. You want to see your children grow up with good, solid characters? Help them form good habits.

What does all of this have to do with the Internet?

3. "Advertising is the art of convincing people to spend money they don't have for something they don't need." Will Rogers' famous saying isn't a denial of free will, yet it does point to a truth about the powerful influence carefully fashioned images can have to "advert", that is, to turn and hold the viewer's attention on the product. Of course the advertising profession depends on the same psychological process as described above: the sensation of the ad leads to thought and a subsequent desire to act, that is, to buy the product.

This is all the more powerful with a medium like the Internet, since once the image is presented, the viewer can go back to it or to similar images with the reward of instant feedback, or instant gratification. This has a reinforcing effect, which can become habitual, even compulsive in a relatively short time, leading some individuals to spend increasing amounts of time devoted to Internet navigation. In various areas of Internet communication, the social reinforcement is particularly rapid. This is particularly true of chat rooms, pornographic sites, etc.⁶

Unwanted Approaches

4. If such is the case, it is necessary to qualify the content of Internet approaches and solicitations to which are children are exposed, and to consider measures that safeguard their exposure to unwanted approaches and communications. The term "unwanted" has to refer both to those approaches and communications that the parents do not want for their children, as well as those that make children feel uncomfortable, inasmuch as children can be "groomed" to like or enjoy what is terribly damaging to them.

Although there are several modes of approach (advertising, chat room solicitations, spam, etc.) and many different themes (cults, gambling, the occult, pornography, etc.), the most readily available and most frequent in sheer volume involves sexual content. Ask any teenager what is being sold with the advertisements for beer, cars or whatever, and they will know: sex. Ours is a highly sexualized society.

To obtain a clearer picture of the scope of the problem, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) provided funding to Dr. David Finkelhor, Director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire, to conduct a research survey in 1999 on Internet victimization of youth. His research provides the best profile of this problem to date.⁷

Crimes Against Children Research Center staff interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,501 youth, aged 10 to 17, who used the Internet regularly. "Regular use" was defined as using the Internet at least once a month for the past 6 months on a computer at home, at school, in a library, at someone else's home, or in some other place.

⁶ Cf. Taylor, M. (1999). The nature and dimensions of child pornography on the Internet. Conference paper: Combatting child pornography in the Internet: Vienna, 29 September - October 1999. (http://www.ipce.info/library_3/files/nat_dims_kp.htm)

⁷ Finkelhor, David, Kimberly J. Mitchell, and Janis Wolak, 2000, *Online Victimization: A Report on the Nation's Youth*, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children: Arlington, VA. (http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/Victimization_Online_Survey.pdf)

Survey Areas

The survey looked at four types of online victimization of youth, which Finkelhor defined as

- Sexual solicitation and approaches: Requests to engage in sexual activities or sexual talk or to give personal sexual information that were unwanted or, whether wanted or not, made by an adult.
- Aggressive sexual solicitation: Sexual solicitations involving offline contact with the perpetrator through mail, by telephone, or in person, or attempts or requests for offline contact.
- Unwanted exposure to sexual material: When online, opening e-mail, or opening e-mail links, and not seeking or expecting sexual material, being exposed to pictures of naked people or people having sex.
- Harassment: Threats or other offensive content (not sexual solicitation) sent online to the youth or posted online for others to see.

The survey also explored Internet safety practices used by youth and their families, what factors may put some youth more at risk for victimization than others, and the families' knowledge of how to report online solicitations and harassment.

Statistical Findings

The survey results offered the following statistical highlights:

- One in 5 youth received a sexual approach or solicitation over the Internet in the past year.
- One in 33 youth received an aggressive sexual solicitation in the past year. This means a predator asked a young person to meet somewhere, called a young person on the phone, and/or sent the young person correspondence, money, or gifts through the U.S. Postal Service.
- One in 4 youth had an unwanted exposure in the past year to pictures of naked people or people having sex.
- One in 17 youth was threatened or harassed in the past year.
- Most young people who reported these incidents were not very disturbed about them, but a few found them distressing.
- Only a fraction of all episodes was reported to authorities such as the police, an Internet service provider, or a hotline.
- About 25 percent of the youth who encountered a sexual approach or solicitation told a parent. Almost 40 percent of those reporting an unwanted exposure to sexual material told a parent.
- Only 17 percent of youth and 11 percent of parents could name a specific authority, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), CyberTipline, or an Internet service provider, to which they could report an Internet crime, although more indicated they were vaguely aware of such authorities.

- In households with home Internet access, one-third of parents said they had filtering or blocking software on their computers.

Other Findings

The survey results confirm what is already known: although the Internet is a wonderfully fun and educational tool, it can also be very dangerous. According to the survey, one in five youth who regularly use the Internet received sexual solicitations or approaches during a 1-year period. The survey also found that offenses and offenders are more diverse than previously thought. In addition to pedophiles, other predators use the Internet. Nearly half (48 percent) of the offenders were other youth, and one-fourth of the aggressive episodes were initiated by females. Further, 77 percent of targeted youth were age 14 or older—not an age characteristically targeted by pedophiles. Although the youth stopped most solicitations by leaving the Web site, logging off, or blocking the sender, the survey confirmed current thinking that *some youth are particularly vulnerable to online advances*.

Most youth reported not being distressed by sexual exposures online. However, a significant 23 percent reported being very or extremely upset, 20 percent reported being very or extremely embarrassed, and 20 percent reported at least one symptom of stress. These findings point to the need for more research on the effects on youth of unwanted exposure to sexual materials and the indicators of potentially exploitative adult-youth relationships.

The large number of solicitations that went unreported by youth and families was of particular interest. This underreporting is attributed to feelings of embarrassment or guilt, fear that parents would cut off access to the Internet, ignorance that the incident was a reportable act, ignorance of how to report it, and perhaps resignation to a certain level of inappropriate behavior in the world.

Possibly due to the nature and small sample size of the survey, there were no reported incidences of traveler cases. The survey also revealed no incidences of completed Internet seduction or sexual exploitation, including trafficking of child pornography. Despite the findings of this survey, *law enforcement agencies report increasing incidents of Internet crimes against children*.

The most significant aspect of this survey is that we are only beginning to realize the extent of the complex and increasingly prevalent phenomenon of Internet-based crimes against children. The sample of 1,501 youth, aged 10 to 17, was not large enough to pull any reliable statistics about solicitation with criminal intent or activity. Nor does it examine in depth the question of “distress”, which a number of those surveyed experienced. A corollary to this would be to ask what the “surfing” habits of those who did not experience stress might be. Perhaps both groups need to be flagged in certain ways. For example, those who experienced distress should be monitored as to how often these images return in their thoughts, whereas those who navigate pornography sites on their own might be monitored for signs of de-sensitization.⁸

- IMPRINT OF PORNOGRAPHY AND VIOLENCE

The word “pornography” is a composite of two ancient Greek words: *pornE* prostitute + *graphein*, to write. In other words, it means “the depiction of activities of prostitutes.” It consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties with the intention of causing sexual excitement.⁹ “Violence” involves

⁸ cf. Taylor, 1999, p.5

⁹ Cf. The definition offered by the Media Awareness Network is as follows: *The explicit depiction or exhibition of sexual activity in literature, films or photography that is intended to stimulate erotic, rather than aesthetic or emotional feelings*. Although this definition is true in parts, it has some problems: 1) Some might argue that the definition relates to “hardcore” pornography, but what about provocative,

the exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse. There is no argument of the fact that there has been a widespread increase of pornography and wanton violence in the media. The representation of permissiveness in sexual activity often reaches the point of being openly pornographic (in the strict definition of the term) even during prime time viewing hours. Pornography and the exaltation of violence are age-old realities of the human condition, but the availability of pornographic images in pictures and video on the internet moves accessibility into the privacy of the individual viewer, at any time of day or night, is a new phenomenon. The same is true of violence, especially in the abundance of computer games that engage the viewer in simulated or "virtual" combat on screen, replete with violent sounds and bloody images.

Can any harm come from exposure to such images? What are some of the results from studies of this question? Dr. Victor Cline, a psychologist who has treated over 350 males afflicted with sexual addictions, notes the following:

In about 94% of the cases I have found that pornography was a contributor, facilitator or direct causal agent in the acquiring of these sexual illnesses. I note that Patrick Carnes, the leading U.S. researcher in this area, reports similar findings. In his research on nearly 1000 sex addicts, as reported in his *Don't Call it Love: Recovery from Sexual Addictions* (Bantam Books, 1991): "Among all addicts surveyed 90% of the men and 77% of the women reported pornography as significant to their addiction."

I found that nearly all of my adult sexual addicts' problems started with porn exposure in childhood or adolescence (8 years and older). The typical pattern was exposure to mild porn early with increasing frequency of exposure and eventual later addiction. This was nearly always accompanied by masturbation.

This was followed by an increasing desensitization of the materials' pathology, escalation to increasingly aberrant and varied kinds of materials, and eventually to acting out the sexual fantasies they were exposed to. While this did on occasion include incest, child molestation and rape, most of the damage was through compulsive infidelity (often infecting the wife with Herpes or other venereal diseases) and a destruction of trust in the marital bond which in many cases led to divorce and a breaking up of the family.

Many wives found their husband preferring fantasy sex (they would catch them masturbating to pornography) to making love with their partner. This had devastating effects on the marriage. One wife, in great pain, confronted her husband, "What do you see in those two-dimensional faceless women that I can't give you as a loving wife who is flesh and blood, a real person and committed to you??" The men never had an answer. To some extent they enjoyed sexual relations with their wives but most preferred the fantasy with masturbation because "these women" could do anything and were perfect in form and appearance!

I found that once addicted, whether to just the pornography or the later pattern of sexual acting out, they really lost their "free agency." It was like a drug addiction. And in this case their drug was sex. They could not stop the pattern of their behavior, no matter how high-risk for them it was.¹⁰

solicitous poses? E.g., suggestive underwear advertisements, the fashion world, etc. 2) And what can be called "aesthetic" about exhibition of the "nuptial secret"? That is, primitive and ancient wisdom has endured to the present in most societies, which considers the special relationship of husband and wife to be something exclusive and faithful. To put it on display is to remove the act from the natural intimacy of the partners.

¹⁰ Cline, V., [Treatment and Healing of Sexual and Pornographic Addictions](http://www.obscuritycrimes.org/vbctreat.cfm).
(<http://www.obscuritycrimes.org/vbctreat.cfm>)

His analysis of the problem is summarized in four points:¹¹

1. **“Addiction:** Pornography provides a powerful sexual stimulant or aphrodisiac effect, followed by sexual release, most often through masturbation.” The virtual world of social and sexual reinforcement provided instantly by the Internet, combined with an already strong inner drive, creates a “compulsive” habit in a relatively short period.
2. **“Escalation:** Over time the addict requires more explicit and deviant material to meet his (or her) sexual ‘needs’.” The same image will not stimulate after a certain period of time and exposure, so more variety and more erotic content is sought. And just as “milder” drugs and intoxicants can sometimes serve as gateway substances to more serious drugs, so “there is evidence that for individuals who obtain primary or significant sexual stimulation during interaction with the internet, intensive Internet involvement may facilitate progression from adult pornography to child pornography” (Carr, 2004; Taylor et al., 2001). The escalation of severity in child pornography as compiled by Max Taylor, Ethel Quayle and Gemma Holland in a COPINE Project paper¹² might also serve as a model for a nearly parallel escalation in severity of consumption of adult pornography:
 - Level 1: Indicative (non-erotic/sexualised pictures)
 - Level 2: Nudist (naked or semi-naked in legitimate settings/sources)
 - Level 3: Erotica (surreptitious photographs showing underwear/nakedness)
 - Level 4: Posing (deliberate posing suggesting sexual content)
 - Level 5: Erotic Posing (deliberate sexual or provocative poses)
 - Level 6: Explicit Erotic Posing (emphasis on genital areas)
 - Level 7: Explicit Sexual Activity (explicit activity, but not involving an adult)
 - Level 8: Assault (sexual assault involving adult)
 - Level 9: Gross Assault (penetrative assault involving adult)
 - Level 10: Sadistic/Bestiality (sexual images involving pain or animal)
3. **“Desensitization:** What was first perceived as gross, shocking and disturbing, in time becomes common and acceptable.”
4. **“Acting out sexually:** There is an increasing tendency to act out behaviors viewed in pornography.”

Now let’s return to the definition of pornography: “Pornography consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties with the intention of causing sexual excitement.” On the surface this definition would seem acceptable all: to those who view pornography as harmless entertainment; to those who don’t view it but remain “neutral” about it; and to those who consider it harmful.

Examination of the above definition can lead us to further considerations. Thus: “Pornography consists in:

- removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners. When two people engage in sexual intimacy, we could describe it as two bodies rubbing or slamming together until one or both achieve orgasm. The problem is, that description could fit rape as well as intimate lovemaking, because it describes generically *what is happening*, not *what is going on*. For example, we could describe conversation in a physically accurate way as follows: where two

¹¹ Cline, V., [The Effects of Pornography and Sexual Messages](http://www.nationalcoalition.org/pornharm.html).
(<http://www.nationalcoalition.org/pornharm.html>)

¹² [Canadian Journal of Policy Research](#) (Summer, 2001). [Child Pornography, The Internet and offending](#). pp. 95-96.

or more persons engage in pushing air through the larynx in a way that causes the vocal chords to vibrate, creating air waves that vibrate the ear drums of the speaker and listener. That's what is happening. But is that what is going on? Of course not. A process of *communication* is going on from mind to mind, heart to heart, soul to soul.

What is the point? The "intimacy of the partners" in the sexual expression of human love involves a *communication* of the deepest kind, where each partner is a subject of love, giving herself or himself to the other. In loving intimacy no one is an object of use or exploitation. "Unloving" or "casual" intimacy is an oxymoron, since an intimate relationship by definition is characterized by a depth and familiarity of friendship or love developed through long association.

Just the opposite takes place in pornography. The partners (or the individual posing in a provocative way that suggests sexual attraction and relationship) are no longer subjects of love communicating intimacy, but are objects of use – literally, they are used to produce a form of sexual provocation that is put up for sale. This point is indisputable where child pornography is involved. With the exception of the extreme perverts who produce, traffic and use child pornography, everyone else agrees that severe harm is done, first to the child, but also to society at large, when a little girl or boy is used and victimized as an object of sexual gratification. Is this true of "consenting adults" in the manufacture and display of sexual acts? Even if there were a degree of intimacy between the partners (e.g., hidden cameras), that intimacy is *removed* once it becomes an object for view by third parties.

- in order to display them deliberately to third parties with the intention of causing sexual excitement. Further, the exploitation continues each time a third party seeks to objectify sexual intimacy merely to satisfy *libido*, or subjective pleasure. Thus a double form of exploitation takes place: 1) by the producer who looks for profit or for an exchange of "goods" in the large barter market of pornographic pictures and films which the Internet has made possible; 2) by the viewer who objectifies the sexual provocation or intimacy on view in order to satisfy his or her own libido.

Again, what if all parties concerned are of the age of consent? Is there any harm? After all, parents remember their own youth and the father's cache of *Playboy* magazines, or the neighborhood youth who had similar access and shared it out. Perhaps the answers require that we enter into more questions in the area of psychology and anthropology. As seen above, pornography is a contributor, facilitator or direct causal agent in the acquiring of sexual illnesses.¹³ If we take the period since the mass publication of pornographic literature began (say the early 1950's) and look at any table of statistics for the same period regarding arrests and convictions for rape and other sexual assault offences, as well as statistics on percentages of teenage pregnancies, abortions of "unwanted" children, sexually transmitted diseases, each graph would mark, with few exceptions in one or two years, a steady rise, sometimes a dramatic rise (as in the epidemic rise of STD's) in the last 50 years.¹⁴

The correlation of such statistics with the energetic sexualization of society in various media is inescapable. Since the late 1940's, advertisement experts realized that merely reflecting society is not a formula for success. Rather an idealization is presented that links sexual attraction with the product. Outside of diaper ads, how many "Ozzie and Harriet" or "Leave it to Beaver" type advertisements do we remember? Not many. The model in full length green silk, whose body as well as dress languorously drapes the hood of a Thunderbird convertible; the pool party with a young adult mix and a vodka splash; dinner jackets in afternight with an expensive French cognac, anticipating another romantic adventure; odd groupings (two women with one man, or the other way around) enjoying what the average, middle-class family probably couldn't afford or wouldn't buy from common sense. Ask an average teenager what is being sold in the average beer commercial and, very likely his answer will be: "sex". The media, both in advertisements and programming have gone far beyond languid romance or tipsy cheer in recent

¹³ V. Cline, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Cf. U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, *An Analysis of Data on Rape and Sexual Assault: Sex Offenses and Offenders* (revised 1997); <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/soo.htm>. Also, Violence Against Women Online Resources: *Sex Offenses and Offenders: An Analysis of Data on Rape and Sexual Assault* (Revised 1997); <http://www.vaw.umn.edu/documents/sexoff/sexoff.html#id2633394>.

years, to provocative representation: Calvin Klein's underwear ads, Versaci's "prostitute chic" fashions, etc. Add easily available softcore and hardcore forms of pornography to the mix, and it seems a good recipe for the formation of a high-energy "pro-libido" mentality, if not a pro-libido society.¹⁵

There are still societies on earth that have a more basic and thus much more peaceful approach to sexuality and sex. So many in our society still hold the view that we are becoming more liberated, or more realistic about "being human," when the opposite would appear to be true, judging from the bitter statistical fruits of last decade showing a pro-libido mentality to be very exploitative and very expensive. A comparison with other societies might be a help. As the noted feminist and scholar Germaine Greer wrote in her chapter, *Chastity is a Form of Birth Control*: "Casual devaluation and contempt for cultural patterns of chastity and self-discipline are not only arrogant, they actually discredit our activities in the eyes of people who are supposed to be impressed by them."¹⁶ She notes that "there are hundreds of groups [worldwide] which observe strict and sometimes lengthy restrictions upon the sexual intercourse of spouses."¹⁷ The most abstemious society ever studied anywhere are the Dani of Irian Jaya, Indonesia. From his thirty months living with the Dani, anthropologist Karl Heider summarized his observations in five statements:

- The Grand Valley Dani have a four-to-six year post-partum sexual abstinence.
- The period of abstinence is invariably observed.
- The norm of a long post-partum sexual abstinence is neither supported by powerful explanations nor enforced by strong sanctions.
- Most people have no alternative sexual outlets.
- No one shows signs of unhappiness or stress during their abstinence.

What most puzzled Heider was that this extraordinary low level of sexual activity was not enforced by any powerful system of threats, natural or supernatural, or other controls. ... Heider's conclusion from the observation of the serene, healthy Dani was that the Freudian assumption of normal levels of libido for all people, regardless of enculturation, is wrong; rather sexual activity is learned in response to patters of stimulus which are absent in the Dani from infancy, when there is little erotic play even between mother and child. The Dani are a strange case in that their sexuality is not repressed but rather undeveloped....¹⁸

At first many anthropologists have viewed Heider's observations as too extraordinary to be credible, but it turns out that such low-energy systems are commoner than originally thought. Another example of such a society is found in the Xingu Reserve in the Amazon Basin of Brazil; Anthropologist Lewis Cotlow gives an insight into the sexuality of the aboriginals there:

The Xinguanos are deeply disturbed by *civilizados* who are sexually frustrated; they cannot understand how a man can become aroused at the sight of a nude woman. In his twenty-five years of daily life with the Indians, Orlando [Villas Boas] told me, he had never seen an Indian with an erection. It would be absurd to them. Nor has Orlando seen or heard of any instances of sexual deviation among the Indians. They did not know what masturbation was until they saw a *civilizado* telegraph operator doing it.

From then on the telegraph operator was a problem to Orlando and his colleagues at the Park. The Indians despised him because, in their eyes, he had done something reprehensible. There was nothing to do but remove him from the Park.¹⁹

¹⁵ The prime time television series, *Queer as Folk*, is one example. It is written by homosexuals to "celebrate" the gay lifestyle. Strangely enough, it presents lives that are sad, in disarray and confusion, sarcastic and bitter or coldly promiscuous. This is a celebration?

¹⁶ Germaine Greer, *Sex and Destiny*, Secker & Warburg (London, 1984) p. 86.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87, quoting K.G. Heider, "Dani sexuality: a low-energy system", *Man*, New Series, Vol. w, No. 2, p. 188.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 88, quoting Lewis Cotlow, *Twilight of the Primitive* (London 1973) p. 61.

The Xinguanos' sexuality could also be considered undeveloped rather than repressed. The 25-year observations of the Villas-Boas brothers did not reveal any sexual frustrations. In both cases—that of the Dani and of the Xinguanos—the word “undeveloped” might be an unfair characterization which is symptomatic of Western arrogance in these matters. Has our sophisticated “development” of sexuality resulted in a greater degree of happiness for the individual or for society?

Again we return to the question of formation of our youth. In what areas and in what direction do we want to develop their talents? Preoccupation with sexual matters can become so self-absorbing, that one's energy's and time are taken away from intellectual, cultural or physical pursuits, and more and more devoted to what becomes a sexual addiction. When we look at the question of exposure to pornography, some of the symptoms of this self-absorption will be considered. Adolescence can be a time to learn a great many things and develop many talents that will be of value throughout one's life.

Take the question of single-sex schools compared to mixed comprehensive schools as an example. Academic performance is consistently higher in normal day schools that are separate. In Gloucestershire, U.K., the local school council discussed the possibility of closing two single-sex schools and replacing them with mixed schools. Despite the consistently impressive performance of separate boys' and girls' schools in league tables, and a 70 per cent vote of confidence to keep the schools, the decision was taken to close the schools.²⁰ The reason for better performance should be obvious: the absence of sexual tensions, of sexual competition (and the cruelty that often accompanies it), and of sexual self-absorption. It seems the Gloucestershire council surrendered common sense to current popular ideology.

This ideology of sexual liberation is so firmly entrenched in many societies as to defy common sense. Like cocaine—which temporarily burns up the brain's own ability to provide mood stability, leaving the addict thinking, “Gosh, I felt a lot better when I was high,”—so the sexualization of society has formed generations of people who have objectified sex to the point of a preoccupation above all other sources of human creativity and happiness. It is nourished by the media, who also profit from it. The north west director for public health in Manchester, U.K., Professor John Ashton, said that in showing casual sex in their television programming, producers were “putting viewing figures before social responsibility and they deserve to be held to account for it.” He added that if James Bond were a real person he would have almost certainly been HIV positive and was more at risk from careless sex than he was from arch enemy Blofeld.²¹

Lies, damn lies, and statistics: Alfred Kinsey's Junk Science

The same statistics can be used to inform intelligent opinion or to distort perceptions and understanding. A classic example of the latter is the adolescent protest, “But everybody's doing it!” Whereas adolescents can be excused their emotional attempts at justification, the use of statistics by adults in what today is called “junk science,” is inexcusable. One of the greatest users of statistics in the promotion of junk science was the famous sex “scientist”, Alfred Kinsey. Professor of Constitutional Law Dr. Charles Rice of Notre Dame University concluded that Kinsey's research was: “...contrived, ideologically driven and misleading. Any judge, legislator or other public official who gives credence to that research is guilty of malpractice and dereliction of duty.”²² Criticisms of his “scientific” method, from inclusion of large samples from prison

²⁰ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2004/07/11/nskool11.xml> (*Daily Telegraph* Online, July 11, 2004).

²¹ http://www.manchesteronline.co.uk/news/s/125/125113_sex_scurge_of_big_brother.html (*Manchester Online*, July 27, 2004)

²² Dr. Linda Jeffrey, “Restoring Legal Protections for Women and Children: A Historical Analysis of The State Criminal Codes,” *The State Factor*, April 2004, quoting Charles Rice (cf. <http://www.drjudithreisman.com/alecreport.doc>).

populations to the ongoing abuse of children in various laboratory “experiments”, is well documented. Unfortunately, the Kinsey junk science sexuality model was followed by legislators, resulting in the introduction of Kinsey’s abnormal sexual conduct to American children by means of sex education classes.

The narrow range of Kinsey’s personal (or perverted?) interests and studies became normative for use by such organizations as the Sex Education and Information Council of the United States (SIECUS) and the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists (AASECT) in the development of their educational materials. Thus a statement by AASECT’s first executive director, Patricia Schiller, resonates an open, liberal understanding of sexuality by Kinseyan standards:

AASECT at its national and regional sex workshops and institutes, includes sensitivity sessions.... Attitudes toward nudity, adolescent pregnancy, masturbation, abortion, homosexuality, contraception, divorce, group sex and extramarital sex relations are of major significance in the effectiveness of the sex education and counseling process. These are the realities of human sexuality.²³

Whose realities, anyway? If placed in the context of the anthropology of human sexuality (as we saw with, for example, the Dani and Xinguanos), the above statement is, in fact, arrogant, narrow-minded and very insensitive to many societies, cultures and ethnic groups, who look upon our sexually “liberated” societies as very corrupt and unhappy. If psychological and medical costs for our liberation are any guide, sexualized societies are indeed very sick.

Boys and Their Toys

A cynical view of the exercise of American military might is that beneath their stated reasons for going to war in recent years is really a desire to try out the latest military hardware. Bombing the sides of mountains in Death Valley is not the same as live combat. Even if the view is cynical, there might be some truth to it.

The same view is possible in observing the militancy of sex education in the United States and Canada. Even before Kinsey’s junk science became standard fare for classrooms, the battle was taken up by others with a particular, personal interest in the advancement of the sexual revolution. The *primus inter pares* of the sex warriors was Hugh Hefner, founder of the *Playboy* empire. In the first issue of *Playboy* magazine, Hefner, an ardent disciple of Kinsey, and likewise suffering from the dysfunction of an over-developed libido, wrote: “We believe...we are fulfilling a publishing need only slightly less important than one just taken care of by the Kinsey Report.” In his report, “Where the Battle Rages: *The Sexualizing of America*,” S. Michael Craven writes:

Few people today comprehend the full impact of *Playboy* magazine and its publisher upon the reshaping of America’s sexual ethics. According to Hefner, “*Playboy* freed a generation from guilt about sex, changed some laws and helped launch a revolution or two. *Playboy* is the magazine that changed America.”

Hefner understood that traditional biblical values restricted sex exclusively to the marriage relationship. Thus the first obstacle for so-called sexual “freedom” was the elimination of the idea that men, in particular, had to be married to enjoy the sexual relationship. The elimination of this obstacle was accomplished through a campaign of carefully positioned messages telling men that marriage was a slow death; that the girl next door was really a ravenous sex fiend for the taking and manhood was determined by the number of sexual conquests. By promoting sex outside the relationship of marriage, the personal and social value of marriage itself was eventually reduced to an archaic institution and, as such, the societal expectation of commitment to marriage diminished.

²³ *Ibid.*, quoting Herbert Otto, (Ed.), *The New Sex Education*, p. 171 (Chicago Association Press/Follett Publishers, 1978).

To illustrate Hefner's campaign against marriage, "Between 1970 and 1980, forty-eight states adopted some form of No-Fault divorce law." As Dr. Judith Reisman points out in her book, *Soft Porn Plays Hardball*, Playboy would prove instrumental in advancing no-fault divorce legislation both through the messages of the magazine as well as by financing "an army of young lawyers working to eliminate the legal protections their great-grandfathers had previously embedded in American divorce law for women and children." America's preeminent pornographer was shaping America's family law policies!²⁴

Meanwhile, SEICUS takes up the cudgels in the country's classrooms. SEICUS was a brainchild of the Kinsey Institute. Dr. Mary Calderone, the former medical director of *Planned Parenthood* was the co-founder along with Wardell Pomeroy, Kinsey's former partner. The initial grant to establish SEICUS was given by *Playboy* magazine. It remains to this day a significant resource for sex education in public schools. Again from Dr. Craven:

Understanding human reproduction is certainly important. However, SEICUS introduced a "non-directive" approach, which was more philosophical than physiological offering no true moral direction. Children are encouraged to make their own choices based on what feels right for them. Today sex education curriculums offer little in the way of education related to the real consequences of non-marital sex. Our children are simply encouraged to explore the sexual wilderness without any awareness of the physical, emotional and spiritual consequences. Three decades of "Safe Sex" education have resulted in the highest teen pregnancy rates in the world and an epidemic of sexually transmitted disease that is the highest within the industrialized world. Quite clearly this philosophy has been an abject failure.²⁵

Conclusions

Like so many forms of free expression, the Internet offers an extraordinarily powerful instrument for communication. Just as words have the power to encourage, to entice, to discourage or to destroy, so images have the power to form an appreciation of the beauty of creation or to malform into viewing others as objects of use or exploitation. The high rate of teenage pregnancy in the last decade has not been matched by a increased rush to responsible fatherhood.²⁶ Both the act and its fruits are treated as disposable. The sexualization of different societies share some common traits: one trait is certainly the rupture of the link between sexuality and motherhood (or parenthood in general), where the *libido* becomes the sole justifying reason for sexuality. This attitude is only reinforced by pornography. An abundance of literature is available on the Internet which shows that a wide range of sexual deviants, from pedophiles to sex tourists, have had their attitudes significantly shaped by viewing pornography. A change is necessary on a societal level, but it begins with increased vigilance on the part of parents.

The Kinsey school of sexuality has been discredited for its flawed methods and bogus results, but its offshoots still carry on in the spirit of junk science, especially evident in the crusades of public school sex education and the propaganda wars of *Planned Parenthood*. Even the learned and noble medical profession lends support to junk science by underwriting programs for "safe sex", when the failure rate of so-called safe methods for the prevention of pregnancy is as high as 20 percent, even though fertility occurs in comparatively short cycles. Sexually transmitted diseases exist 100 percent of the time. A credible hypothesis should be simple. Yet the junk scientist leads with his or her chin, claiming: "Even so, we're saving up to 80 percent of youth." What about the other 20 percent? They are not unlucky numbers, but persons, someone's sons and daughters. It is astonishing that no one thinks aloud about these things.

²⁴ S.M. Craven, "Where the Battle Rages: *The Sexualizing of America* (Cultural Apologetic Series, *National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families*) pp. 8-9

(http://www.nationalcoalition.org/apologetics/cultural_apologetics/Sexualizing_of_America.pdf)

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.9.

²⁶ Cf. *U.S. Centers for Disease Control*, 2002 (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/teenbrth.htm>) The small percentage of decline in some areas is a reflection of increased access to abortion, not a decrease of teenage sexual activity.

The dullness and stubbornness of junk scientists matches that of recent generations of sex addicts: don't give us your morality, just give us a cure!

Abstinence education is given a bad rap for bad reasons. First, statistics are presented as deterministic of all behaviour, to wit: "48 percent of teenagers are sexually active; 60 percent will have had intercourse at least once during teenage years."²⁷ Therefore, a realistic program of sex education will include information and materials regarding safe sex. Realistic? The legacy of decades of Kinseyan-SEICUS-Planned Parenthood-*Playboy* realism is the infection of nearly 3,000,000 (that's three million) teenagers with STD's in 2003.²⁸ More children contract sexually transmitted diseases each year than all the victims of polio in its eleven-year epidemic, 1942-1953.²⁹ Why? Because pornographers give an extremely dangerous message to youth (as well as to dysfunctional adults): *Sex without responsibility is acceptable and desirable*. Because pornography encourages sexual expression without responsibility, it endangers children's health.

The problem with abstinence education is that it doesn't go far enough. It has to include philosophical, psychological and anthropological information that shows youth that anything--which removes sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties with the intention of causing sexual excitement--will eventually form a conscience which objectifies both the act and the persons involved, resulting in an attitude and energy toward sexuality which is not equal to the dignity of the person. Abstinence--complete containment of the sexual gift until marriage, known as virginity--won't kill the person. This truth is the same in Africa as it is in North America: those who remain virgins until they are married will survive. Another kind of abstinence--far more difficult, but possible--is abstinence from sensations which cause the same kind of malformation. Pornography is chief among these sensations. And the Internet is currently the chief vehicle for bringing these unhealthy sensations into our lives.

- ONLINE RELATIONSHIPS

Varying degrees of online relationships are possible. For adults, it ranges from information exchange to romance agencies that rope in the lonely by mediating communication with the smoldering Russian beauty pictured in the online catalogue.³⁰ The picture is complex. Many young people are forming friendships on the Internet, and some are forming friendships with adults. According to the Finkelhor Report, most of these relationships appear to be positive and healthy.³¹ Cyber romance and online love affairs seem paradoxical, but no more so than writing daily love letters or carrying on long telephone conversations might be. As with these other types of communication, some online correspondences have led to successful onground relationships, some to disappointment or worse.

It would be unfair to cast all online relationships as potentially dangerous. The most important thing to remember in the development of friendships online is that if it leads to meeting onground, things could turn out completely different. Predators, who seek to make online contact with young people, to groom and eventually to make onground contact, number in the tens of

²⁷ Cf. Robert E. Rector, Kirk A. Johnson, Ph.D., and Lauren R. Noyes, "Sexually Active Teenagers Are More Likely to Be Depressed and to Attempt Suicide", *The Heritage Foundation* (Center for Data Analysis Report #03-04, July 3, 2003) <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Family/cda0304.cfm>.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Cf. also, <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/bbecho98/fig1.html> *Annual number of births, with projections: 1948 to 2018*. The rates of various types of syphilis have actually decreased since 1950, but the spread of chlamydia is epidemic; AIDS is a relative newcomer, but without a vaccine, it will continue to infect hundreds of thousands worldwide no matter how safe the sex. Cf. (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/tables/2003/03hus052.pdf>)

²⁹ Tom Minnery, *Pornography: A Human Tragedy* (Wheaton: Tyndale House).

³⁰ E.g., More people come to grief than to happiness with such long distance arrangements, usually after months of communication and thousands of dollars spent and sent to help the girl's grandmother who is pregnant with complications.

³¹ *Op. cit.*, *Online Relationships*, p. 19.

thousands worldwide. How many more there are, we cannot begin to count. Like the spread of obesity in rich societies with rich food and poor exercise, it seems that virtual pastimes are offering more people a mental diet that is forming very serious sexual addictions and dysfunctions. Dysfunctional formation of conscience leads to dysfunctional attitudes and actions. As one police investigator put it: "It's not the **tip** of the iceberg. We're just seeing the **snowflake** on the iceberg right now."³²

Characteristics

Youth connect with others on the Internet for a variety of reasons: sports enthusiasts, political action, maintaining relationships or forming new friendships. A University of Victoria study suggests the following as characteristic of online relationships:³³

- ~ they are based mainly on conversations and online interactions
- ~ they open spaces for meaningful discussions
- ~ they provide a safer environment for exploration and interaction than onground
- ~ they can be deep in emotions and less painful
- ~ their importance changes over time and space
- ~ they are as or more meaningful than onground relationships
- ~ they complement or fulfill missing onground needs
- ~ they provide a sense of acceptance, belonging and respect
- ~ they are more real than onground relationships
- ~ they are fun and rewarding

One German girl described her relationship with her online boyfriend in this way: "Harmony, solidarity, always being there for one another & and having an open ear." Another girl describes the "safety" of online relationships and communication, but acknowledges that there are big risks if the relationship is taken to ground, i.e., if the two decide to meet.³⁴ There are some advantages to text chat. You don't have to worry how your hair looks. If virtual relationship goes to the next step of exchange of email addresses and photographs, you can always look your best.

Where the Online Relationship Begins

Most people meet for the first time in chat rooms, which can vary in type from friendship chat rooms or chat rooms of specific categories (business, religion, chess, etc.) to game "MUDs" (Multiple User Dimension or Multiple User Dialogue). Just a little time observing the conversations in any of these chat rooms reveals that they take a more personal turn, with individuals pairing up in exclusively directed dialogue, and just as often the request for "private chat" comes up in order to exchange more personal details, like email addresses, telephone numbers, etc. In a small survey on the progress of online to real life relationships, Andrea Baker writes:

Most met in a group in cyberspace with purposes intrinsic to the activity such as playing a trivia game or posting messages to an occupational discussion group, or in a New Age spirituality website. A small number met in areas meant to match people up, while two couples were sysops offering technical help to others. What did they like about each other

³² Cf. Tom Robertson, "Chasing Online Predators", Minnesota Public Radio, April 15, 2002. (http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/200204/11_robertson_predators-m/index.shtml)

³³ <http://web.uvic.ca/~mecht/phdfiles/selves.pdf>

³⁴ *Ibid.* "W" described how she would spend up to 4 hours an evening in online chat with her boyfriend. When He came to visit her, thought, he was "all over me, and my friends didn't like the fact that he was all over me."

right from the start? Sense of humor, response time, interests, qualities described online, and writing style were prominent, along with having something in common.³⁵

What percentage of these exchanges lead to an online relationship, how people communicate to escalate their intimacy over time, and further still to a meeting IRL (in real life) is unknown. It is safe to say that the numbers are far greater than any survey indicates to date.

Migration from Online to Offline contact through regular mail, by telephone or in-person attempts or requests for onground contact

The sequence of steps from online contact to onground meetings between adults is similar among youth. Again, Baker writes:

The typical sequencing of communication from online to meeting in meatspace or RL goes from public discourse to private emails and/or private chatting to telephoning to finally, getting together in the physical world. The importance of an exchange of photographs varies by person from not that crucial at all because the feelings were already present to very necessary to tell if physical attraction could occur to match the mental and emotional bonding. One writer on cyberspace community has suggested that the sequence is backwards, as the couple gets to know each other before meeting, rather than vice versa (Rheingold, 1993) Others have noted that perhaps the pattern of relationship lengthens into three stages, rather than two: meeting online and writing, then talking by phone and then meeting in person. The second two phases are real time (RT) occurrences. In offline circumstances people meet in RT, physically present, and then proceed to talk on the phone and write, perhaps, but make the decision to progress after only that first stage of communication.³⁶

Signs of risk or danger

The Australian Government's "Net Alert" program suggests the following indications that a child could be at risk online:

- Spending large amounts of time on the computer - an indication that children might have discovered an area of the Internet that involves excitement or risk;
- Minimising the screen when you walk past - this type of behaviour may indicate that inappropriate content such as pornography or violence could be being viewed;
- Your child is angry or depressed after being online - a cyber bullying incident might of occurred online that has upset your child;³⁷
- Staying up late at night - children will often wait until parents are out of sight before experimenting with risky behaviour;
- Spending a lot of time alone online - children can form online relationships or be 'groomed online' by adults. Children like to be alone when form serious relationships;

³⁵ A. Baker, "Cyberspace Couples Finding Romance Online Then Meeting for the First Time in Real Life," *CMC Magazine*, July, 1998 (<http://www.december.com/cmc/mag/1998/jul/baker.html>).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Anger can also be a sign that the child is becoming secretive, defensive or confused about an online relationship.

- Excessive use of chat rooms and instant messaging - using the computer for communication is similar to using the phone. Be alert that your child may be talking to strangers who could be adults with hidden motives;
- Unusual mail is delivered - parcels or letters from strangers appear in the mail. Your child could have met somebody online and now the person is making real life contact;
- Your child is sending excessive amounts of SMS messages, or their mobile phones are constantly ringing - this behaviour could indicate a relationship has formed in the real world; and
- Excessive use of other technology - children can all of a sudden start scanning in pictures, copying disks, burning CD's and DVD's. Something must be happening - investigate to see if it is just harmless fun or something more serious.³⁸

Exposure to pornography

The numbers are stupendous: by 2002, approximately 45 million youth world-wide logged on to the Internet regularly. By the same time, more than 500,000 adult websites existed; by now the number is much greater. Of teenagers surveyed, 82% use the Internet for emails, chat rooms or visiting websites; 44 % have visited websites with X-rated content.

As we have seen in the treatment of pornography above, exposure to it causes grave harm. The website "ProtectKids.com" gives the best summary of the potential harm and harm done:³⁹

- **Pornography's Relationship to Rape and Sexual Violence**

According to one study, early exposure (under fourteen years of age) to pornography is related to greater involvement in deviant sexual practice, particularly rape. Slightly more than one-third of the child molesters and rapists in this study claimed to have at least occasionally been incited to commit an offense by exposure to pornography. Among the child molesters incited, the study reported that 53 percent of them deliberately used the stimuli of pornography as they prepared to offend.⁴⁰

The habitual consumption of pornography can result in a diminished satisfaction with mild forms of pornography and a correspondingly strong desire for more deviant and violent material.⁴¹

- **Pornography's Relationship to Child Molestation**

In a study of convicted child molesters, 77 percent of those who molested boys and 87 percent of those who molested girls admitted to the habitual use of pornography in the commission of their crimes.⁴² Besides stimulating the perpetrator, pornography facilitates child molestation in several ways. For example, pedophiles use pornographic photos to demonstrate to their victims what they want them to do. They also use them to arouse a

³⁸ <http://www.netalert.net.au/00951-What-are-the-danger-signs-that-I-should-look-out-for-with-children.asp>

³⁹ <http://www.protectkids.com/effects/harms.htm>

⁴⁰ W. L. Marshall, "The Use of Sexually Explicit Stimuli by Rapists, Child Molesters, and Nonoffenders," *The Journal of Sex Research* 25, no.2 (May 1988): 267-88.

⁴¹ See H.J. Eysenck, "Robustness of Experimental Support for the General Theory of Desensitization," in Neil M. Malamuth and Edward Donnerstein, eds., *Pornography and Sexual Aggression* (Orlando, Florida: Academic Press, 1984), 314. D. Zillmann, "Effects of Prolonged Consumption of Pornography," in *Pornography: Research Advances and Policy Considerations*, eds. D. Zillman and J. Bryant (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1989), 129.

⁴² *Take Action Manual* (Washington, D.C.: Enough is Enough, 1995-96), 9.

child or to lower a child's inhibitions and communicate to the unsuspecting child that a particular sexual activity is okay: "This person is enjoying it; so will you."

Remember the psychological progression? Sensation to thoughts to action to habit...? This is verified in studies of children exposed to pornography.⁴³

Exposure to Pornography May Incite Children to Act Out Sexually against Other Children

Children often imitate what they've seen, read, or heard. Studies suggest that exposure to pornography can prompt kids to act out sexually against younger, smaller, and more vulnerable children. Experts in the field of childhood sexual abuse report that any premature sexual activity in children always suggests two possible stimulants: experience and exposure. This means that the sexually deviant child may have been molested or simply exposed to sexuality through pornography.⁴⁴

In a study of six hundred American males and females of junior high school age and above, researcher Dr. Jennings Bryant found that 91 percent of the males and 82 percent of the females admitted having been exposed to X-rated, hard-core pornography. Over 66 percent of the males and 40 percent of the females reported wanting to try out some of the sexual behaviors they had witnessed. And among high schoolers, 31 percent of the males and 18 percent of the females admitted actually *doing* some of the things they had seen in the pornography within a few days after exposure.⁴⁵

If a 16 year-old, 200-pound bully had beaten up a seven-year old child, the parents of the child would not say: "Oh well, that's life. It's just another learning experience for our little son." They would move heaven and earth to put a stop to it. Pornographic materials are roaming the worldwide web like a schoolyard bully, pounding the formation process of children's conscience and character to pieces, and how do parents react? How should they react?

Sexual solicitation: engaging in sexual talk, activities, giving personal sexual information

The Internet offers unparalleled access to means of personal communication. A simple search for "chat rooms" in any category will literally open up a world of possibilities. These possibilities exist as well for individuals with unclean purposes. Sexual predators, whether experienced or "in training,"⁴⁶ can insert themselves into chat room conversations and, with a certain skill, begin to cultivate particular friendships. Teens face more risk online than younger children because they are more likely to engage in discussions regarding companionship, relationships or sexual activity.⁴⁷ To bar use of the Internet completely is unrealistic. Internet cafes, schools and friends offer access as well. Helping young people to be aware of the hazards and regular, open communication between parents and children are essential.

How does one recognize the beginning of a grooming process that could lead to onground contact and exploitation? At first glance it might not be so easy. Predators generally

⁴³ "ProtectKids.com".

⁴⁴ Stephen J. Kavanagh, *Protecting Children in Cyberspace* (Springfield, VA: Behavioral Psychotherapy Center, 1997), 58-59.

⁴⁵ Victor B. Cline, *Pornography's Effects on Adults and Children* (New York: Morality in Media, 1990), 11.

⁴⁶ Who is in training? Those whose process of malformation has begun, and who are attempting to put into action. The "safe sex" junk science is one example of how teenagers began to equip themselves to argue in favour of recreational sex. E.g., "If you loved me.... See how much I care for you? I brought a condom."

⁴⁷ Cf. L. Magid, "Child Safety on the Information Highway" (1998), *National Center for Missing and Exploited Children* (http://www.safekids.com/child_safety.htm#Risks)

keep up to date with all the latest fashions in clothes, music and sport so they can present themselves as being another child, or as someone who is in tune with children's interests. John Carr, the National Children's Helpline Internet (U.K.) consultant, describes the following movement from online contact to offline:

The initial contact may quickly move from an open, public or semi-public chat room, to a private chat room, then onto email, to SMS text messaging via mobile phones, instant messaging, and then to direct voice contact via a fixed or mobile phone, or even by voice over the internet.

There have been instances where the predator has sent a mobile phone to the child to ensure that the child's parents have no way of knowing about, or monitoring, contact between the two.

There have even been cases where the predator has established a Freephone number for the child to call him on. In the UK, Freephone numbers do not show up on telephone bills; again making monitoring impossible, or at any rate very difficult. Secretiveness is generally essential to the abuser's strategy.

However a process of grooming takes place long before movement offline. How can we recognize it? Are there warning signs? The first stage in a predator's online activity is observation. Someone may enter a chat room and "lurk" (be in the room and watch the conversation without being a part of it). This way he can observe a child's likes and dislikes, as well as relationship factors, such as a recent argument with parents, or the amount of communication and support among others in the chat room.

These are not new behaviors for pedophiles. Before the Internet, a pedophile wanting to meet children went to the playground or schoolyard and watched the children there. This had a certain risk associated with it—that of possibly being seen by teachers, school workers or mothers keeping watch over their children. Now the pedophile can visit the "virtual park" and speak directly with children from the privacy of their own homes without fear of detection by mothers, teachers or watchful neighbors. If the pedophile feels even the least bit concerned about being discovered talking to a child, he can break off the contact and disappear into the anonymity of the Internet.⁴⁸

When a predator begins a chat room conversation with a child or teen, it is innocent because everyone else in the room can see the messages. After a period of time, though, he might suggest moving into a private chat room. Most chat services offer such possibilities. Once in private chat, the predator will try to find out how safe it is to speak with the young person by asking questions such as:

- Are you home alone?
- Who else uses the computer?
- Where is the computer located?

Very likely the predator will bring the chat to a quick end if he finds out that the computer is in the family room and is used by others.

The acronymic codes used on both sides of the conversation include such standby terms as ASAP ("as soon as possible"), LOL ("laugh out loud"), MYOB ("mind your own business"), to less familiar expressions: NIFOC ("naked in front of computer"), POS (could mean "positive",

⁴⁸ J. Monteleone, M.D., "Child Abuse" (G.W. Medical Publishing, Inc., St. Louis, Missouri, 1998), p. 206.

piece of shit”, or “parent over shoulder” – a note of caution), WYSIWYG (“what you see is what you get”).⁴⁹

If the predator is assured that the young person is alone or has his or her own private computer, then the testing and grooming might begin. The first stage of private chat is to establish trust. The predator might use such lines as, “Please promise you won’t tell anyone...” or “I feel I can trust you with this...”. He might even talk as though the child is the only person he feels he can trust. Once a high level of mutual confidence is reached, the predator generally “first sends jokes that are off color or suggestive to gauge your child’s reaction. From this, he may move into a conversation about sexual experience, with the goal of lowering your child’s inhibitions. As the conversation continues, the pedophile [or predator] may describe sexual techniques or positions and may ask your child to attempt masturbation. To show your child that this is a normal practice and that “everyone does it,” the pedophile may send computer-produced images showing other people involved in the activity.”⁵⁰

If communication between a predator and child or teen has reached this level, the predator continues:

- to establish trust by suggesting that the child get rid of the images so as not to get in trouble;
- saying how much he trusts the child not to tell anyone;
- as the trust level increases, the predator eventually suggests a meeting.

What do you do if your teenage son or daughter thinks that online distance is safe enough, and they enjoy the risk of deliberately engaging people that the teens themselves call “creeps” or “perverts”. The problem with this is that it starts out as a kinky prank, but often enough the teen will want to push the envelope by actually agreeing to a meeting with the predator. They should know that this is a dangerous game, and it puts the whole family at risk, not just the teen.

- **ONLINE HARASSMENT and CYBERSTALKING**

Generally online *harassment* is broad category. It includes activities from “spamming,” or sending unsolicited emails pop-ups that cannot be removed without exiting a program, to the much more serious problems of online bullying and predatory approaches. It generally involves deliberate, persistent and methodical communication that disturbs the recipient. *Cyberstalking* is an escalation of online harassment where an individual “follows” another around the Internet. This may include sending emails and IM’s, showing up in chat rooms, newsgroups and/or websites when the victim is using them.

- **SYMPTOMS OF DISTRESS FROM EXPOSURE, HARASSMENT OR ABUSE**

Introduction

Working definitions of terms are helpful. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services *National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information* offers the following minimum definition of child abuse and neglect:

⁴⁹ <http://www.n3d.com.au/HTML/Acronyms.htm> or http://darrel.knutson.com/english_educ/english-acronyms.html

⁵⁰ J. Monteleone, M.D., *op. cit.*, p. 207.

- Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or
- An act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.

The document goes on to describe sexual abuse, which “includes activities by a parent or caretaker such as fondling a child’s genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure, and exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials.”⁵¹

There are two types of statutes in which definitions of sexual abuse can be found – child protection (civil) and criminal. Under child protection definitions, the NCCAN places the following:

- "(A) the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct; or
- (B) the rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children;...”⁵²

State criminal statutes define sexual abuse, which most often include the terms described above.

Clinical Definitions

“Although clinical definitions of sexual abuse are related to statutes, the guiding principle is whether the encounter has a traumatic impact on the child. Not all sexual encounters experienced by children do. Traumatic impact is generally affected by the meaning of the act(s) to the child, which may change as the child progresses through developmental stages. The sexual abuse may not be ‘traumatic’ but still leave the child with cognitive distortions or problematic beliefs; that is, it is ‘ok’ to touch others because it feels good,”⁵³ or “it is ‘ok’ to act out with a friend what daddy did with his girlfriend in front of me.”

The NCCAN report also provides helpful categories for differentiating abuse from non-abusive acts. These are worth quoting in their entirety:

There are three factors that are useful in clinically differentiating abusive from nonabusive acts – power differential; knowledge differential; and gratification differential.

These three factors are likely to be interrelated. However, the presence of any one of these factors should raise concerns that the sexual encounter was abusive.

- **Power differential.** The existence of a power differential implies that one party (the offender) controls the other (the victim) and that the sexual encounter is not mutually conceived and undertaken. Power can derive from the role relationship between offender and victim. For example, if the offender is the victim’s father, the victim will usually feel obligated to do as the offender says. Similarly, persons in authority positions, such as a teacher, minister, or Boy Scout leader, are in roles that connote power. Thus, sexual activities between these individuals and their charges are abusive.

⁵¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information* (2004), “What is Child Abuse?” (<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/factsheets/whatiscan.cfm>)

⁵² <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/usermanuals/sexabuse/effects.cfm#circumstances>

⁵³ *Ibid.*

- Power can also derive from the larger size or more advanced capability of the offender, in which case the victim may be manipulated, physically intimidated, or forced to comply with the sexual activity. Power may also arise out of the offender's superior capability to psychologically manipulate the victim (which in turn may be related to the offender's role or superior size). The offender may bribe, cajole, or trick the victim into cooperation.
- **Knowledge differential.** The act is considered abusive when one party (the offender) has a more sophisticated understanding of the significance and implications of the sexual encounter. Knowledge differential implies that the offender is either older, more developmentally advanced, or more intelligent than the victim. Generally, clinicians expect the offender to be at least 5 years older than the victim for the act to be deemed predatory. When the victim is an adolescent, some persons define the encounter as abusive only if the offender is at least 10 years older.¹⁶ Thus, a consensual sexual relationship between a 15-year-old and a 22-year-old would not be regarded as abusive, if other case factors supported that conclusion.
 - Generally, the younger the child, the less able she/he is to appreciate the meaning and potential consequences of a sexual relationship, especially one with an adult. Usually, the maximum age for the person to be considered a victim (as opposed to a participant) is 16 or 18, but some researchers have used an age cutoff of 13 for boy victims.¹⁷ Apparently, the researchers felt that boys at age 13, perhaps unlike girls, were able to resist encounters with significantly older people and were, by then, involved in consensual sexual acts with significantly older people. However, clinicians report situations in which boys victimized after age 13 experience significant trauma from these sexual contacts.
 - Situations in which retarded or emotionally disturbed persons participate in or are persuaded into sexual activity may well be exploitive, even though the victim is the same age or even older than the perpetrator.
- **Gratification differential.** Finally, in most but not all sexual victimization, the offender is attempting to sexually gratify him/herself. The goal of the encounter is not mutual sexual gratification, although perpetrators may attempt to arouse their victims because such a situation is arousing to them. Alternatively, they may delude themselves into believing that their goal is to sexually satisfy their victims. Nevertheless, the primary purpose of the sexual activity is to obtain gratification for the perpetrator.
 - In this regard, some activities that involve children in which there is not a 5-year age differential may nevertheless be abusive. For example, an 11-year-old girl is instructed to fellate her 13-year-old brother. (This activity might also be abusive because there was a power differential between the two children based on his superior size.)⁵⁴

There are some conclusions to be drawn by way of a comprehensive definition:

Sexual abuse may be defined as involvement of a child, adolescent or developmentally challenged person⁵⁵ by another person of greater power (physical strength or moral authority), of greater knowledge (either older, more developmentally advanced, or more intelligent than the victim), where the victim involved is considered unable to give completely free or "informed" consent. The acts themselves might be *non-tactile*: voyeurism, exhibitionism, exposure to pornography or encouragement to pose or act in the production of pornography, etc. Or the acts

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *I.e.*, physically or mentally.

might be *physical*: oral genital, oral anal, genital genital, genital anal, etc. The purpose of such abuse is the sexual gratification of the perpetrator or of his “clients”.⁵⁶

Signs in children

- *child or child's friend telling you about it, directly or indirectly*

Sexual abuse commonly comes to light through the child's disclosing the incident of sexual contact to a trusted adult. Sometimes a child will blurt out surprisingly precocious things. Often times it is a parroting of what has been heard at the dinner table, or in the private conversations between parents to which he unsuspectingly lends an ear. But there are other expressions to which parents should be alert, namely, verbal or physical cues that indicate distress from abuse. “Distress” does not necessarily mean misery or agony; it can also generally refer to a state of danger or need. Even a child that has been groomed into “enjoying” the attention involving sexual abuse is in danger. For example, one working mother took her 16-month old baby girl to a daycare centre during the working week. At one point while changing diapers, the baby pointed to her own vagina and laughed, saying: “Mummy, lets play the tickle game!” After contacting several mothers of little children at the same daycare centre, it turned out that many of them had learned the “tickle game” from one of the workers. The daycare centre was shut down and the mother arranged with her relatives a rota of care for her child and other children within her extended family.

- *describing sexual acts*

If children exhibits sexual knowledge that it inappropriate to their age, chances are that they have suffered exposure to their parents or educational institution's over-zealous and overdeveloped sense of of what “sex education” need be,⁵⁷ or to some kind of abuse. For example, “Daddy hurt my wee wee” should alert the listener to possible abuse.

Once again, the framework of abuse is much wider than just sexual touching, fondling or other sexual acts. It also includes inappropriate approaches through suggestive gestures or language, pornography, etc. They repeatedly ask questions about specific sexual details, show an obsession with the bodies of the opposite sex, snicker and joke about sex, or try to get access to sexually explicit magazines or Internet web sites. This is not healthy.

- *going to bed fully clothed*

This behaviour might be associated with the child's fear of being molested in bed, because it has occurred there before. Other similar behaviours would include moving the bed to a wall in order that the child can sleep with his or her back to the wall, or, if this is not possible, sleeping on the floor pressed against the wall.

- *sexual knowledge or acting out which is inappropriate for the child's age*

Generally children from 5 to 13 are not preoccupied with sexual matters. However, parents and teachers have noticed that children today seem to be expressing more complex and challenging sexual behaviors than children have in the past. With increasing regularity, child professionals are accumulating evidence that suggests that children (pre-pubertal) are not only displaying more sexual behavior, but are doing so at younger and younger ages. Some of these behaviors are precocious in nature; sexual behaviors that are typically associated only with

⁵⁶ Cf. Cheung Chi Hung Patrick, M.D., *Child Sexual Abuse* (November, 2003), pp. 4-5

⁵⁷ E.g., parents who insist on sex education lessons for their children at an early age, or who consider it enlightened to be uninhibited about displays of sexual conduct in front of their children.

adolescence. Others either occur with an unusually high frequency or are unnecessarily intrusive to others.

The trend of “super-sizing” these days is not limited to fast food outlets. We are “super-sexualizing” our youth. Excessive exposure to sexual messages can cause some children’s typical curiosity about sex to become increasingly distorted or confusing, particularly when parents and adults fail to adequately guide or intervene in these matters. All children are curious about things that are sexual. With continual exposure however, we know that there are some children who run the risk of becoming too preoccupied with sexual matters.

Some children will act out the sexual messages they are exposed to. We have known for some time that children who have been sexually abused have a greater tendency to display sexualized behavior. We now believe the same can happen when children have been exposed or confronted with adult-like sexual behavior. The exposure can come from the over exposure of soap operas, pornographic films or literature from television, publications or the Internet. It can also come from parents who translate their own dysfunctional lives into constant and open talk about sex, or who put their own sexuality on display. Worst of all is the invitation or coercion to children to engage with adults in sexual activity.

Dr. Toni Johnson, a clinical psychologist with more than 25 years professional experience in dealing with child abuse, suggests four clusters or groups that emerge on a continuum of behaviours:

- *Group 1* includes children engaged in natural and healthy childhood sexual exploration;
- *Group II* is comprised of sexually-reactive children;
- *Group III* includes children who mutually engage in a full range of adult sexual behaviors; and
- *Group IV* includes children who molest other children.

This continuum of sexual behaviors applies only to boys and girls, aged 12 and under; who have intact reality testing and are not developmentally disabled.⁵⁸

Dr. Johnson describes the sexual play of children of group as normal—exploring each other’s bodies visually and through touch: playing doctor, trying out gender roles and behaviours (e.g., playing house)—always participating on a voluntary basis (“I’ll show you mine if you show me yours!”). Not all children engage in all behaviours: some may engage in none, and some may only engage in a few. The range of sexual behaviours includes: self-stimulation and self-exploration, kissing, hugging, peeking, touching, and/or the exposure of one’s genitals to other children. In “natural” sexual play, “the children are often excited, and they feel and act silly and giggly.”⁵⁹

Groups II, III and IV refer to children with sexual problems. Those in group II display more sexual behaviours than the same-age children in Group I.

Group II is under the category of “Sexually-Reactive behaviours.” The focus on sexuality of these children is out of balance in relationship to their peers, and they often feel shame, guilt and anxiety about sexuality. According to Dr. Johnson’s work, many children in this group “have been sexually abused; some have been exposed to explicit sexual materials; and some have lived in households where there has been too much overt sexuality. Young children, who watch excessive amounts of soap operas or television and videos, and who live in sexually explicit

⁵⁸ Toni Johnson, PhD., *Understanding the Sexual behavior of Children*, CYC Online, July, 2001, (<http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0701-toni1.html>)

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

environments, may display a multitude of sexual behaviors. Some parents, who themselves may have been sexually and/or physically victimized, express their sexual needs and discuss their sexual problems openly with their young children. This can over-stimulate and/or confuse their children. Some children are not able to integrate these experiences in a meaningful way. This can result in the child acting out his or her confusion in the form of more advanced or more frequent sexual behaviors, or heightened interest and/or knowledge beyond that expected for a child of that age. The sexual behaviors of these children often represent a repetition compulsion or a recapitulation (often unconscious) of previously over-stimulated sexuality or sexual victimization.”⁶⁰

Behaviours of Group II children include: excessive or public masturbation, overt sexual behaviours with adults, talking about sexual acts, etc. Yet these children are still open to help and correction.

Correction becomes much more difficult with Group III (“Extensive Mutual Sexual Behaviours”) children. “They participate in a full spectrum of adult sexual behaviours, generally with other children in the same age range, (oral and anal intercourse, for example), and they conspire together to keep their sexual behaviours secret. While these children use persuasion, they usually do not force or use physical or emotional coercion to gain other children’s participation in sexual acts. Some of these children however, move between Groups III and IV, i.e. between mutually engaging in sexual behaviours and forcing or coercing other children into sexual behaviours.”⁶¹ A striking difference with these children is there “lack of affect” with regard to sexuality. Group III children do not have the light-hearted spontaneity of sexually healthy children, nor the shame and anxiety of sexually-reactive children. They also lack the anger and aggressive characteristics of child perpetrators found in Group IV. Their attitude toward sexual behaviours with other children is matter-of-fact.

Group IV, “Molestation Behaviour,” is the most difficult group of children. In this case it is children 12 years and under who are molesting other children. This is very difficult to accept, but it is in fact a growing phenomenon, as police and sheriff departments across the country will acknowledge. What is the reason for it? In many cases, child perpetrators of sexual abuse have been victimized themselves. However, “victimization” might have wider meaning than usually thought, since often there is no evidence that the perpetrators were themselves sexually abused. “All of the girl perpetrators (females represent about 25% of child perpetrators) and about 60% to 70% of the boy perpetrators have been molested. All of the children live in home environments marked by sexual stimulation and lack of boundaries, and almost all of the children have witnessed extreme physical violence between their primary caretakers.”⁶² Robin Braunstein, director of Services to Aid Families in Oswego County, New York, says that some youthful abusers may have been inappropriately exposed to sexuality at a young age. They could have been shown pornography, or seen excessive sexuality around the house.⁶³ To what extent could such exposure lay the foundations for acquiring such a high-energy, habitual drive, that the person’s behaviour eventually becomes coercive or violent? Perhaps it is time to connect the dots. Dr. Johnson continues:

As a group, they have behaviour problems at home, and at school, few outside interests, and almost no friends. These children lack problem-solving and coping skills, and demonstrate little impulse control. Often, they are physically and sexually aggressive. In preliminary findings on child perpetrators, no one – parents, teachers, or peers -- described any member of the group as an average child.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ T. Johnson (<http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0801-toni2.html>)

⁶² T. Johnson, *op. cit.*

⁶³ Cf. “Young sexual abusers not rare,” *The Post Standard* (Syracuse, N.Y.), March 18, 2004 (<http://www.syracuse.com/news/poststandard/index.ssf?/base/news-4/1079604990251640.xml>)

The sexual behaviours of Group IV children go far beyond developmentally appropriate childhood explorations or sexual play. Like the children in Group III, their thoughts and actions are often pervaded with sexuality. Typical behaviours of these children may include (but are not limited to) oral copulation, vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse and/or forcibly penetrating vagina or anus of another child with fingers, sticks and/or other objects. These children's sexual behaviours continue and increase over time, and are part of a consistent pattern of behaviours rather than isolated incidents. Even if their activities are discovered, they do not, and cannot, stop without intensive and specialized treatment.

A distinctive aspect of Group IV children is their attitudes toward sexuality. The shared decision making and lighthearted curiosity evident in the sexual play of children in Group I is absent; instead, there is an impulsive, compulsive, and aggressive quality to their behaviours. These children often link sexual acting out to feelings of anger (or even rage), loneliness, or fear. In one case, four girls held a frightened, fighting and crying 18-month-old child while another girl fondled him. The girls (all age six to eight) each took a turn. The little boy required extensive medical attention as a result of penile injuries.

While most of the case studies in this group are not physically violent, coercion is always a factor. Child perpetrators seek out children who are easy to fool, bribe, or force into sexual activities with them. The child victim does not get to choose what the sexual behaviours will be, nor when they will end. Often the child victim is younger and sometimes the age difference is as great as 12 years, since some of these children molest infants. On the other hand, some child perpetrators molest children who are age-mates or older. In sibling incest with boy perpetrators, the victim is typically the favourite child of the parents. In other cases, the child is selected due to special vulnerabilities, including age, intellectual impairment, extreme loneliness, repression, social isolation, or emotional neediness. Child perpetrators often use social and emotional threats to keep their victims quiet: "I won't play with you ever again, if you tell"; this is a powerful reason to keep quiet if the child victim already feels lonely, isolated or even abandoned at home and at school.

Specific *sexual* behaviours that should raise concern:

1. The child focuses on sexuality to a greater extent than on other aspects of his or her environment, and/or has more sexual knowledge than similar-age children with similar backgrounds who live in the same area. A child's sexual interests should be in balance with his or her curiosity about, and exploration of, other aspects of his or her life.
2. The child has an ongoing compulsive interest in sexual, or sexually-related activities, and/or is more interested in engaging in sexual behaviours than in playing with friends, going to school, and doing other developmentally-appropriate activities.
3. The child engages in sexual behaviours with those who are much older or younger. Most school-aged children engage in sexual behaviour with children within a year or so of their age. In general, the wider the age range between children engaging in sexual behaviours, the greater the concern.
4. The child continues to ask unfamiliar children, or children who are uninterested, to engage in sexual activities. Healthy and natural sexual play usually occurs between friends and playmates.
5. The child, or a group of children, bribes or emotionally and/or physically forces another child/children of any age into sexual behaviours.
6. The child exhibits confusion or distorted ideas about the rights of others in regard to sexual acts. The child may contend: "She wanted it" or "I can touch him if I want to."

7. The child tries to manipulate children or adults into touching his or her genitals or causes physical harm to his or her own or other's genitals.
 8. Other children repeatedly complain about the child's sexual behaviours – especially when the child has already been spoken to by an adult.
 9. The child continues to behave in sexual ways in front of adults who say "no", or the child does not seem to comprehend admonitions to curtail overt sexual behaviours in public places.
 10. The child appears anxious, tense, angry, or fearful when sexual topics arise in his or her everyday life.
 11. The child manifests a number of disturbing toileting behaviours: plays with, smears feces, urinates outside of the bathroom, uses excessive amounts of toilet paper, stuffs toilet bowls to overflow, sniffs or steals underwear.
 12. The child's drawings depict genitals as the predominant feature.
 13. The child manually stimulates or has oral or genital contact with animals.
 14. The child has painful and/or continuous erections or vaginal discharge.⁶⁴
- *regressive behaviour e.g., sud2den return to bed-wetting or soiling; refusal to change underwear, even for weeks; strange behaviour while toileting...*

A regression to bedwetting or soiling is often a reaction to stress that is introduced into the life of a child. Often, children cannot put their stress into words. This stress can be caused by the parents' divorce, with the emotional and physical effects that it brings. It can also be caused by the traumatic stress of sexual abuse. Many of the children described in Johnson's Group IV regularly use excessive amounts of toilet paper (some relate wiping and cleaning themselves to masturbation) and stuff the toilet until it overflows day after day. The children continue these disturbed toileting patterns even if their families have severely punished them for their behaviour. These signs should also alert parents or caregivers to the possibility of abuse.

- *bruising or bleeding in the genital area or in the area of the buttocks*

Location and pattern of bruising will usually indicate whether or not the bruises are the result of falls, sports accidents or abuse. Bleeding in the genital area or buttocks, or from the rectum should in any event be carefully examined.

- *sexually transmitted diseases*

There are a number of sources on the Internet in which signs and/or symptoms of STD's can be found. Since some symptoms are not immediately visible, regular visits to the family physician might include examination and testing for such diseases, especially in adolescence if romantic or sexual interests are preoccupying the young person.

- *bruising to breasts, buttocks, lower abdomen or thighs*
- *self-destructive behaviour e.g., drug dependency, suicide attempts, self-mutilation*

These behaviours are more commonly evident among survivors of abuse. They might also include eating disorders, depression or dissociative symptoms (suppression of memory, feeling outside of oneself, etc.). Self-mutilation is also found among perpetrators, particularly

⁶⁴ T. Johnson, *op. cit.*

among pedophiles (e.g., Michael Jackson, et al.). There often occurs a strong sense of self-loathing and self-hatred among both predators and victims.

- *being in contact with a known or suspected perpetrator of a sexual assault*

It happens with terrible frequency, that registered and known sexual predators, after years of imprisonment and treatment, return to the crime of sexual assault. Prudence dictates that they not be given work, voluntary or otherwise, where children may be present, and if a child has made contact with a known sexual predator, careful, even professional efforts should be made to discover the nature of that contact.

- *anorexia or over-eating*

Anorexia, which at its psychological foundation is an issue of personal control, also occurs among victims of sexual abuse. Having suffered abuse by someone in greater control, the victim could seize on the one area of control that no one else can touch, i.e., what and how much he or she eats.

- *adolescent pregnancy*

With adolescent pregnancy, there are three things which call for particular awareness:

1. the relationship between childhood abuse and adolescent pregnancy
2. the likelihood of abuse during adolescent pregnancy, and
3. the likelihood of abuse among children of adolescent parents.⁶⁵

With regard to the first point, effort should be made to determine whether or not the adolescent was vulnerable to the influence of a more powerful individual. Although our over-sexualized society has, in a sense, groomed teenagers *en masse* for sexual exploitation, there are those who still have an innate sense of the connection between sex and motherhood, and who therefore resist heavy sexual advances. Did grooming on a personal level take place? What is the "history" of the other partner? Even when it is determined that both partners were adolescent and consenting, efforts should be made to uncover possible sexual abuse that occurred in childhood.⁶⁶

On the second point, a sexual predator will convince himself or herself that nothing further could go wrong, and so the relationship quietly continues.⁶⁷

The likelihood of abuse among children of adolescent parents arises from the following factors: First of all, if engagement in voluntary intercourse is a result of previous sexual abuse, the cycle might be continued with the new child; secondly, the relationship of a previously abused adolescent with another is characterized by a likely use of drugs and alcohol, by a big age difference (the adolescent's sexual partners are older and are also using drugs and alcohol), and they are more likely to be in a stormy, if not violent relationship. All of these factors put the child of an adolescent at risk.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ <http://outreach.missouri.edu/hdfs/satconf/>

⁶⁶ Cf. J. Monteleone, M.D., *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁶⁷ Cf. the case of Mary Kay Letourneau and Vili Fualaau

(http://www.crimelibrary.com/criminal_mind/psychology/marykay_letourneau/8.htm [l?sect=19](#))

⁶⁸ Cf. J. Monteleone, M.D., *Ibid.*

- *unexplained accumulation of money and gifts*

The difference between what lawn-mowing money can buy and expensive clothes or toys should be obvious to an attentive parent. Smaller or more modest additions to a child's possessions might be harder to detect. Even a pocket of shiny copper pennies, a little child's favourite coin, might be reason enough for a gentle enquiry as to their origins.

- *persistent running away from home.*

Running away from home or threats of running away from home is an indication of low self-esteem, of fear, of helplessness or hopelessness. These could be signs of a medically manageable mood disorder (e.g., bipolar disorder) or of possible abuse. "Children or adolescents incorrectly think that they can find peace by running away and avoiding the problem."⁶⁹ What the children really need is professional help and a supportive home environment. Parents who face this strange behaviour in their children should seek professional help as soon as possible.

signs in parents or caregivers

- *exposing a child to prostitution or pornography or using a child for pornographic purposes*

This is an area where the rubber meets the road in all that we have considered regarding exposure to materials that malform conscience and development of bad habits. A web page designer accidentally comes across a child porn site (sensation and thought), and after repeated returns to this and similar sites (action and repetition), it soon becomes an obsession, a "grotesque fascination" (habit and character formation).⁷⁰ This "progress" from sensation to becoming hooked has implications for children at both ends of the spectrum. First of all, accessing and paying to view such sites guarantees the existence of such sites and the further production of child pornography, meaning the growth of an ever widening net. In peer-to-peer exchanges, the child porn addict is looking for new material, and often resorts to producing his own by exploiting children known to him.

- *intentional exposure of a child to sexual behaviour of others*

Respect for the "nuptial secret" is not a puritanical attitude. Once again, to put the sexual act on display for outside parties is to remove the act from the natural intimacy of the partners. To exhibit sexual acts in front of children imprints on them something that is not part of normal pre-adolescent mental interests or physical behavioral patterns, and creates a process of thought and action that will eventually result in high-energy sexuality. It begs the question: is such an attitude on the part of adults a sign of liberation, ignorance or arrogance?

- *previous conviction or suspicion of child sexual abuse*

If there is a case for "profiling," convicted or suspected sexual predators would certainly qualify. Where registration and notification exist of the whereabouts of sexual offenders, such a person usually will not feel welcome in a neighborhood where children live. Given today's understanding of pedophilia and related sexual proclivities as deep-seated mental illnesses, it is unrealistic to think that a prison term and the treatment that goes with it will "fix" the person. It might well be a lifelong struggle, in which case conditions upon release should be such that both

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁷⁰

http://icwales.icnetwork.co.uk/0100news/0200wales/tm_objectid=14435201&method=full&siteid=50082&headline=net-designer-jailed-over-child-porn-name_page.html

the offender and the public are safeguarded from further offenses. It is true that there is a risk in the tendency to avoid moral labels “right” or “wrong” with regard to free acts. Dr. Tana Dineen⁷¹ angrily asserts that

“by turning pedophilia into a sickness, we have found a way of showing faint mercy for these who are today the most hated of offenders. So that, like lepers of old, we may cast them outside the wall or, in modern terms, incarcerate or monitor them forever, while feigning compassion by offering treatment, too. Or is it that we have lost touch with the fundamental notions of what’s right and what’s wrong? If we stopped arguing about whether or not people who want sex with children are sick with some mental disorder called “pedophilia,” we could focus instead on making clear distinctions about what, in our society, we think people should and should not be doing.”⁷²

One is not sure from the above what angers her about the treatment of offenders: that they are shown faint mercy or treated like lepers? Yet the dichotomy she poses—treating pedophilia and related “paraphilias” as mental illnesses vs. good old fashioned morality—does not in fact exist. First of all, the mental illness is usually the result malformation or abusive trauma early in life, so that the mental illness is understood as proceeding from immoral acts at some point in the offender’s life, not as a genetic or contagious disease. Secondly, the imposition and acceptance of restraints (marginalization, isolation), even the severest of social restraints (prison) is necessary for the safety and well-being of society as a whole, and for the offender himself/herself. No one argues that it is unmerciful to prohibit individuals with cerebral palsy from driving vehicles (and there is no question of a moral offense here). Why then should we argue about placing grave limitations on the freedoms of sex offenders when grave moral offenses have been committed? Yet justice without any mercy would be extremely cold, and—if applied to the moral and spiritual murder involved in the sexual abuse of children—would likely result in the death penalty being seen as a punishment befitting the crime. Dr. Dineen is probably not arguing that position.

In brief, extreme care should be taken with regard to sexual offenders who have been released into the community. The data for re-offending is discouraging enough.⁷³ There are many opportunities (half-way houses, job opportunities in “safe” environments, etc.) to offer chances for a social life to the offender after prison, while at the same time safeguarding the community at large.

- *coercing a child to engage in sexual behaviour with other children*

A man who is not well known to the community lives in a trailer at the edge of town. He targeted children who were homeless and runaways. Initially, he provided them with food and shelter. He organized recreational activities and parties for them. However, he also gave them alcohol and other drugs, as methods of manipulating and coercing them into participating in sexual abuses. He coerced them also to participate in other criminal activities (e.g., breaking and entering homes, prostitution) to pay for drugs and the offender's lifestyle.⁷⁴

According to the example above, coercion does not only mean to exert undo pressure or violence against another’s will. Coercion can also include a domination or restraint that involves a weakening of another’s will and/or “informed consent” by means of the disinhibiting effects of drugs or alcohol. Often children are drunk when carrying out sexual acts with adults or with other children under the encouragement or direction of a predatory adult.

⁷¹ http://tanadineen.com/COLUMNIST/Columns/morality_pedophilia.htm

⁷² Tana Dineen, M.D. *Ottawa Citizen* (Friday July 11, 2003) p. A15.

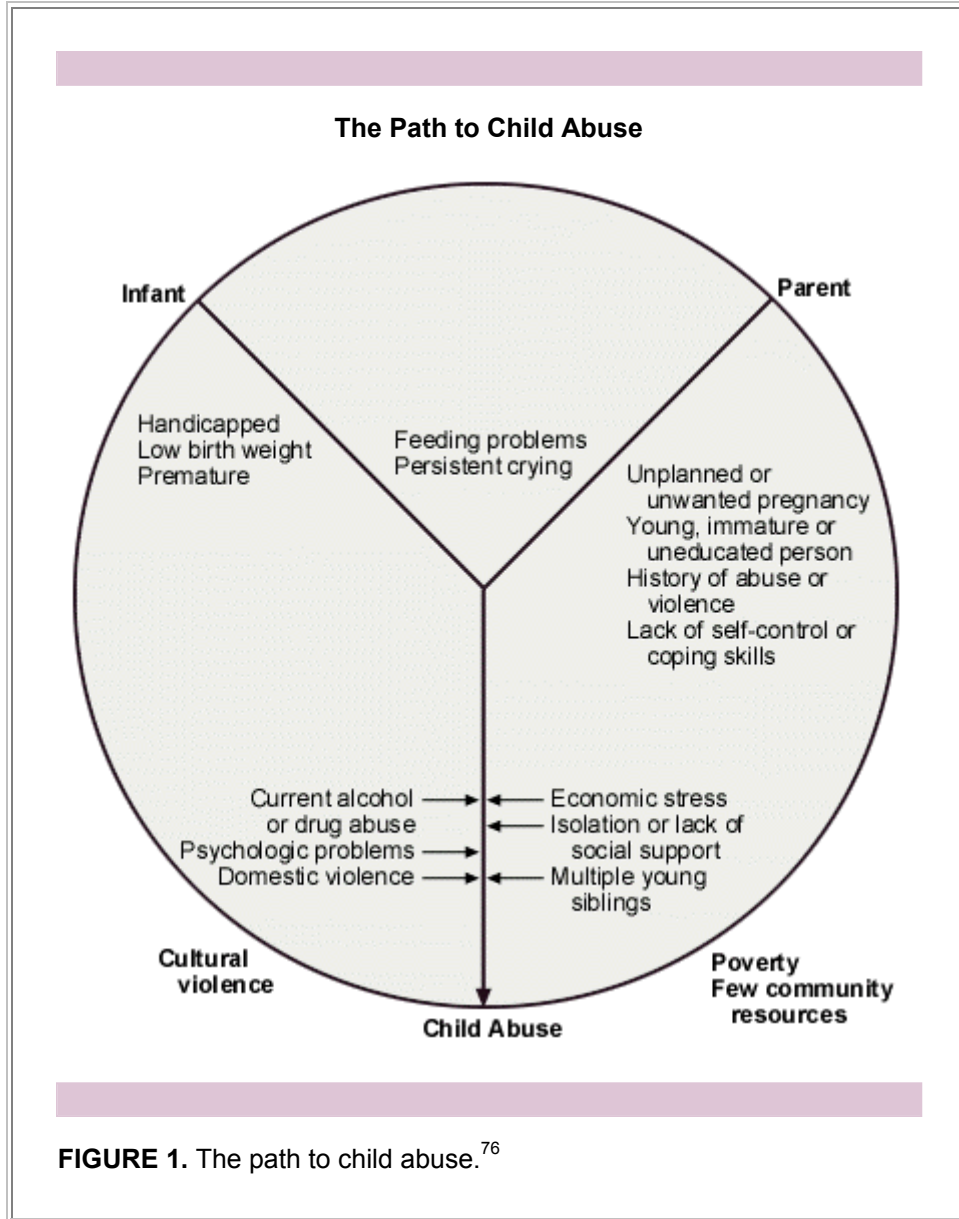
⁷³ Cf. U.S. Department of Justice · Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Recidivism of Sex Offenders Released from Prison in 1994* (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/rsorp94.htm>)

⁷⁴ “Multiple Victim Child Sexual Abuse: The Impact on Communities and Implications for Intervention Planning”, *Health Canada*, 1991 (http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/html/nfntsxmultipleagr_e.html)

- *denial of adolescent's pregnancy by family.*

One of the indicators that alert professionals to the possibility of child abuse is the denial of pregnancy, either by members of the family or by the pregnant girl herself.⁷⁵

The graph below offers, more accurately, "a path" to Child Abuse:



Another figure could show a path from normal home and upbringing to child abuse, which would include on the part of parents lack of supervision, lack of defining boundaries and lack of

⁷⁵ Cf. (http://www.angelfire.com/ns/southeasternurse/Violence_within_the_family.html)

⁷⁶ American Academy of Family Physicians, "Primary Prevention of Child Abuse," *American Family Physician*, March 15, 1999 (<http://www.aafp.org/afp/990315ap/1577.html>).

communication; on the part of the child: exposure to sexuality that is inappropriate or completely removed from the dignity of marital intimacy (pornography, men's room jokes, etc.), with a conscience formed by the Kinsey-Hefner high-energy sexuality from elementary school onward. It is not only a matter of cultural violence or poverty, but also of extreme poverty of intellect in very rich societies.

Additional risk factors for child abuse, suggested by the American Academy of Family Physicians⁷⁷, are:

- Personal history of physical or sexual abuse as a child
- Teenage parents
- Single parent
- Emotional immaturity
- Poor coping skills
- Low self-esteem
- Personal history of substance abuse
- Known history of child abuse

- Lack of social support
- Domestic violence
- Lack of parenting skills
- Lack of preparation for the extreme stress of having a new infant
- History of depression or other mental health problems
- Multiple young children
- Unwanted pregnancy

- *Verbal threats regarding sexual abuse*

All types of abuse and neglect harm children psychologically, but the term 'emotional abuse' applies to behaviour which destroys a child's confidence. The threat of sexual abuse is a fairly sure sign that something is actually going on. Likewise, perpetrators of incest and extrafamilial sexual abuse successfully use fear to get a child to cooperate in keeping the sexual abuse secret. Often this fear involves threats. Verbal threats include convincing the child that their parent(s) will be angry at them or reject them, including sending him/her away from family and friends. Perpetrators also successfully use physical threats, convincing the child that if they tell he/she will be harmed by the perpetrator.

signs in children

- *constant feelings of worthlessness about life and themselves*

A sexually abused child, often tries to protect himself/herself from further shame by keeping the abuse a secret. The victim believes that he should have somehow stopped it from occurring. As the victim grows older, there are also feelings that if other people knew, they might think less of him, try to blame him, or make him explain how it could have happened. Or he may think that no one else could understand what he went through or how confusing it was and still may be. The sum of these feelings is a sense of having a life that has no worth for self or others. Loneliness and isolation also accompany such feelings. A psychiatrist or psychologist who specializes in emotional abuse would best be able to help those in these abuse situations.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

- *inability to value others and lack of trust in others*

The *ability* to value others has to do with respect for their lives, their good deeds, their reputation and honour, their commitment to act. This value is also tied with the trust that is an essential part of a meaningful relationship. It follows, then, that a personal relationship that has been characterized by grooming, abusing and discarding is going to leave the victim with a bitter understanding of personal relationships, especially with adults (if the adults are the abusers in fact). Inability to form close relationships, particularly with those of the same sex as the abuser, is the result of lack of trust. The victim may look on adults as potential abusers, who will eventually discard him/her.

- *lack of people skills necessary for daily functioning*

The adult-child who has poor social skills, is frequently whiny or boring, critical, lacks humor... is indecisive or poor at planning for future and unable to see "solutions, is might be suffering from a depression brought on by a very low self-esteem. This is a consequence of abuse.

- *extreme attention-seeking behaviour*

Dr. William Menninger (1899-1966) defined the following criteria of emotional maturity:

- The ability to deal constructively with reality
- The capacity to adapt to change
- A relative freedom from symptoms that are produced by tensions and anxieties
- The capacity to find more satisfaction in giving than receiving
- The capacity to relate to other people in a consistent manner with mutual satisfaction and helpfulness
- The capacity to sublimate, to direct one's instinctive hostile energy into creative and constructive outlets
- The capacity to love⁷⁸

The victim of abuse has already been malformed in several of these areas by the way in which the abuser has related to him or her. In its worst effects, long term or traumatic abuse can produce an emotionally fragile state that lasts for years, if not for life. It is clear that the abuser has dealt "destructively" with reality as regards relationships with victims; sometimes parents or caregivers unwittingly deny reality in failing to pay attention to the signs a victim shows. Rather than learning about relationships that offer mutual satisfaction and helpfulness, the victim learns about manipulation, coercion and selfish behaviour in the extreme. In these and many other ways the relationships in which the abused child grows up are not equal to his or her dignity, and low self-esteem is one of the many results. Various forms of attention-seeking behaviour may indicate this low self-esteem and emotional immaturity. Attention-seeking methods include such profiles as the sufferer, rescuer, saviour, organiser, manipulator, mind-poisoner, drama queen, busy bee, feigner, false confessor, etc. Other behavioural disorders, such as bullying, disruptiveness, aggressiveness can also be attention seeking methods and might also point to much deeper problems.

- *exposure to domestic violence*

⁷⁸ Cf. (http://www.driesen.com/emotional_maturity_criteria.htm)

More than half of the school-age children in domestic violence shelters show clinical levels of anxiety or posttraumatic stress disorder.⁷⁹ Without treatment, these children are at significant risk for delinquency, substance abuse, school drop-out, and difficulties in their own relationships.

Children exhibit a range of reactions to violence within their own homes. Preschool and kindergarten-age children often take it to their own hearts, e.g., “I must have done something wrong.” From this kind of self-blame emerge feelings of guilt, worry and anxiety. Loss of appetite and sleeplessness, as well as physical discomfort are common. In addition to some of the symptoms shown by the child, the pre-adolescent may “show a loss of interest in social activities, low self-concept, withdrawal or avoidance of peer relations, rebelliousness and oppositional-defiant behavior in the school setting.”⁸⁰

“Adolescents are at risk of academic failure, school drop-out, delinquency, and substance abuse. Some investigators have suggested that a history of family violence or abuse is the most significant difference between delinquent and non delinquent youth. An estimated 1/5 to 1/3 of all teenagers who are involved in dating relationships are regularly abusing or being abused by their partners verbally, mentally, emotionally, sexually, and/or physically (SASS, 1996). Between 30% and 50% of dating relationships can exhibit the same cycle of escalating violence as marital relationships (SASS, 1996).”⁸¹

- *suicide threats or attempts*

In the past 25 years the rate of suicide for adolescents—those between 15 and 24 years of age—has tripled. It is the third most common cause of adolescent deaths after accidents and homicides.⁸² This is a topic for an entire thesis in itself. As we have become more “manipulation” oriented—that is, personal worth is viewed as a function of successful manipulation and gathering of talents and possessions, rather than as a function of the essential meaning of our existence—it perhaps should not be surprising that those who feel unsuccessful feel also that even their own lives are disposable.

However, for the purposes of this paper, it is sufficient to point out that the major risk factors of suicide among young people are parallel to the risk factors of abuse victims.⁸³

- *persistent running away from home.*

⁷⁹ Graham-Bermann, S. 1994. *Preventing domestic violence*. University of Michigan research information index

⁸⁰ Joseph S. Volpe, Ph.D., B.C.E.T.S., “Effects of Domestic Violence on Children and Adolescents: An Overview”, *The American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress, Inc.*, 1996 (<http://www.aaets.org/arts/art8.htm>)

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² “Death among children and adolescents”, *University of Maryland Medicine* (<http://www.umm.edu/ency/article/001915.htm>)

⁸³ For example: A child or youth is manipulated by the abuser and the stress of that manipulation is unendurable. The stress need not be caused by predatory actions, but by the abusive pressure “to perform” according to the Hugh Hefner, James Bond hedonistic imperative. There are a number of cases (not recorded in police records or psychological profiles, but known to those who serve in pastoral ministries) of teenagers who found the shame of failure in sexual “prowess” too much or too confusing to bear. Some of these end their lives in suicide. Usually it is peer pressure that starts things rolling—e.g., arranging a date for a friend with a girl who is willing—followed by ridicule from the same peers when the girl tells all about the failure of the boy to perform. The fact that it seems to be contained within a specific peer group doesn’t absolve adults, however. We have tolerated or even nurtured the spread of this hedonistic imperative by our subscribing to it, paying for it, viewing it, etc. No wonder our youth are responding with a very high-energy, manipulative sexuality of their own.

Sometimes kids run away to have a good time. In most cases, however, children are not running toward a specific new situation but rather are running away from existing problems. This is one way they cry for help.

Not only do runaways leave anxious and worried parents behind, but they may enter a world of gangs, drugs, prostitution, AIDS, malnutrition and truancy. They are quite vulnerable and at a much higher risk of becoming involved in early sexual behavior, sexual exploitation (if these have not already started at home), or alcohol and other drug use. They may end up living on the street, in a homeless shelter or in jail.

Most children who run away and are reported to the police as missing are between ages 13 and 15. However, some younger children threaten to, or actually do, leave home.

When a child runs away, there has often been a crisis in the family. The child himself may be in some sort of trouble that he feels he cannot face for fear of severe punishment. Or there may be family stresses that can range from marital difficulties to alcohol-related problems to physical or sexual abuse-situations from which the child feels an overwhelming need to escape. Sometimes children are made to feel that they are a burden for their parents or the cause of the family's difficulties; children then run away to relieve their families, as well as to punish them.

Help should be sought from professionals (family counselors or psychologists) to help the parent as well as the child understand what is going on.

signs in parents or caregivers

- *constant criticism, belittling, teasing of a child, or ignoring or withholding praise and attention*

These are ways of making a child feel small, to the point where he or she may simply want to disappear into the background, and this may well be what an abuser wants. The abuser is jealous in a bad sense, not the jealous love which protects a child from harm, but the jealous possessiveness which holds a child back from developing relationships with others. The fear in this for the abuser is that the child-victim might open up to in the new relationship to discussion of what goes on in the abusive relationship. Criticism and belittling is a psychological way of isolating the child from the confidence to explore new relationships. This is why the abovementioned signs of isolation from peers, withdrawal into one's own world, are signs about which teachers or other caregivers should be aware. These children can be helped, but we *have to be aware*.

- *excessive or unreasonable demands*

Demanding a 5 year-old to work as a servant girl from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m., or a teenager to hand over his entire MacDonal'd's paycheque to dad without discretionary rights is symptomatic of that unhealthy possessiveness and extreme manipulation that is characteristic of child abuse. This is accompanied by persistent hostility and severe verbal abuse, rejection and scapegoating.

- *belief that a particular child is bad or 'evil'*

Point a finger at someone and four fingers point back at you. It is very difficult to look within oneself and admit to defects of character, all the more so when the defects lead to such gravely immoral acts as child abuse. To avoid the task of examining conscience and seeking the remedies to overcome the evil in oneself, it is simpler to externalize the problem by blaming someone else. The victim of the abuse is close at hand, and blaming him/her also helps to justify to the abuser that the child deserves such treatment.

- *using inappropriate physical or social isolation as punishment*

Once again, this kind of treatment of a child or adolescent is not only a punishment but also a way of keeping the victim from forming relationships with others that might come to know details of home life for the victim and abusers. Many of the cults which gained notoriety for their spectacular dissolutions, were also notorious for the deviant sexual practices encouraged within. Isolation was crucial to such practices.⁸⁴ Strict ground rules about telephone time, curfew times or wanting to know about the children's friends would not be considered inappropriate, since the goal of such structure is safety and well-being, not isolation. Blocking and soundproofing windows and doors is probably a danger sign, though, inasmuch as it is used to hide inside activity from prying eyes or ears.

- *domestic violence.*

There is often an overlap of child abuse, domestic violence and youth violence. Many of the factors highly associated with the occurrence of child abuse are also associated with domestic violence. Where one form of family violence exists, there is a strong likelihood that other forms will exist along side. And research shows that the impact on children of witnessing parental domestic violence is strikingly similar to the consequences of being directly abused by a parent, and both experiences are significant contributors to youth violence. Overlapping all of these problems is substance abuse. For example, in Novosibirsk, a Russian city of 2 million people, police say that there are over 20,000 "street children," most of whom are driven away by the alcoholism and violence of one or both of their parents.

There is an overlap with sexual abuse as well. More than 50% of incest victims have lived in homes where alcohol abuse was a major problem.⁸⁵ This does not necessarily mean that having conquered the problem of alcoholism, sexual abuse will simply disappear. What the numbers say clearly, though, is that the disinhibiting effects of alcohol will certainly ignite desires and dissolve boundaries for a person who has such difficulties.

- *Substance abuse and sexual abuse among teenagers*

A landmark case study was released in December, 1999 which showed the following correlations between substance abuse and sexual activity among pre-teens and teenagers:⁸⁶

Among the 170-page report's key findings:

- Teens 14 and younger who use alcohol are twice as likely to have sex than those who don't.
- Teens 14 and younger who use drugs are four times likelier to have sex than those who don't.
- Teens 15 and older who drink are seven times likelier to have sexual intercourse and twice as likely to have it with four or more partners than non-drinking teens.
- Teens 15 and older who use drugs are five times likelier to have sexual intercourse and three times likelier to have it with four or more partners than those who don't.

- **RISKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: A QUESTION OF COMMUNICATION AND FORMATION, NOT CENSURE**

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- ***communication***

⁸⁴ Jonestown in Guyana, the "Bountiful" community in British Columbia, etc. (Cf. "Hunting Bountiful" from the *Economist.com* (August 10, 2004)

http://www2.economist.com/World/na/displayStory.cfm?story_id=2907136

⁸⁵ *Public Child Welfare Training Academy* (<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~pcwtas/lib/VideoReviews.html#anchor5>)

⁸⁶ "Dangerous Liaisons: Substance Abuse and Sex," *The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse* (1999)

(<http://www.casacolumbia.org/absolutenm/templates/PressReleases.asp?articleid=136&zoneid=49>)

In a *Time/CNN* poll taken in April, 1999, the following question was asked: *Do your parents have rules about Internet use, and do you follow those rules?* From the answers:

- 31% - Yes, and always follow the rules
- 26% - Yes, but don't always follow the rules
- 43% - No rules regarding the Internet

If two people each take tennis rackets and a tennis ball and start randomly whacking the ball wildly about an open field, it may be somewhat invigorating and fun, but it is not tennis. The interest of the game is heightened by boundaries and rules. The same is true for the use of a tool as powerful as the Internet. It can be fun, exciting and informative, but it needs boundaries.

The key to a relatively peaceful agreement over terms of use for parents and children is *communication*. Here are some principles that might be of help in general, and as regards use of the Internet:

- Communication should be open-ended, not closed. For example: "Tell me about how the school trip went" rather than "Did you enjoy the school trip?" Or, "What's new on the Net?" rather than "Are you being careful?"
- It must be a two-way thing. It's not just about you telling your child something or giving advice, but rather listening to his or her viewpoint and accepting the emotions that go with it.
- Reflective listening is the most effective way of communicating with this age group. Recognize, respect and acknowledge your child's views and worries. Look for the emotional meaning that often lies behind words, identify the feeling and feed it back. Say something such as: "So you must have felt angry when that happened." You can also reflect back the content of what your child is saying to clarify points: "You mean your teacher will be leaving at the end of term?" If there is any sense of closing in on oneself, reassure your children that you are there to listen. (We shouldn't underestimate the value of the "ministry of presence", that is, the mere presence of a parent at home is reassuring.) If you are not sure how they feel, ask them, "How are you feeling?"

Are you listening?

Talking is the only part of the communication process. Listening is an important skill too.

- Stop what you're doing and give your full attention to your child.
- Make eye-contact.
- Don't interrupt too quickly.
- Give prompts - nodding, smiling, saying "mmms", not in a distracted way, say, hunched over the dishes, but with full attention.
- Make it clear that you're always willing to give a sympathetic hearing, whether it's about a falling out with a friend, a failure to make the football team, or disappointing marks in an exam. Stress that making mistakes is the way to learn how to get things right, not just about failure.⁸⁷
- Become an "askable" parent. Make sure you communicate to your children that they are free to ask you any question they may have about sex. If they ask, be prepared to

⁸⁷ Cf. http://www.bbc.co.uk/parenting/your_kids/preteen_communicate.shtml

answer. Don't evade a question or dismiss it. If you don't know how to answer it, assure them that you will find out or ask someone who can. It is okay to say you're not sure but you will find the answer and have it for him/her tomorrow.⁸⁸

Are you guiding?

It's important to remember that your children are still in sensitive stages of formation, so you are there as a guide and mentor as well. Ask questions concerning things about which you have common knowledge, to help them develop critical skills of judgment. Are they being manipulated by peers, by the media or by adults? Predatory sexuality involves a grooming process; yet is sex being used in advertising, for example, to "groom" the viewer into buying the product?⁸⁹ Young people would resent such manipulation.

- utilization of blocking and filtering technology

A good number of Internet providers and websites offer technologies with safeguards known as blocking or filtering technology. Essentially they allow the computer's system operator to set limits so that access is blocked to certain categories of websites. This technology is used chiefly to safeguard the access of minors to the Internet. Such technology is decried by some as "a tremendous blow to the free speech rights of child."⁹⁰ The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the use of such technologies in publicly funded libraries, based on the following reasoning:

The Government here is not denying a benefit to anyone, but is instead simply insisting that public funds be spent for the purpose for which they are authorized: helping public libraries fulfill their traditional role of obtaining material of requisite and appropriate quality for educational and informational purposes. Especially because public libraries have traditionally excluded pornographic material from their other collections, Congress could reasonably impose a parallel limitation on its Internet assistance programs. As the use of filtering software helps to carry out these programs, it is a permissible.⁹¹

⁸⁸ <http://www.aboutourkids.org/aboutour/articles/sexual.html>

⁸⁹ In January of 2004, a media blow-up occurred when some third-rate entertainer bared her breast at the climax of a song and dance number during an American football game. The problem was that this was "prime-time" airing as well as an athletic event, so that young children were watching as well as adults. The point-counter-point debates swirled around issues of freedom of expression vs. censorship, but largely failed to put the performer herself to the test: would she have done the same thing (or even sung the same song) if she were asked to perform to a group of 1st and 2nd graders? Probably not.... And yet there were 1st and 2nd graders watching the half-time performance.

Again, in November of 2004, another media flap ensued when a commercial showed a middle-aged white woman seducing a young black football player into skipping his game and having sex with her instead. This was obvious from her final move, where she doffed her towel and showed her naked back—clearly suggesting that she was totally naked—as she embraced the athlete, at which point he surrendered and said his team would have to play without him. Again the debates took to task the appropriateness of this kind of advertising during Monday night football, but really hard questions were never asked. How is it that a commercial was put together to show a frustrated old white woman successfully seducing a young black man into dishonoring his reputation and his team? What was the thinking on the part of its producers? Further, it is surprising that feminists and the NAACP, just to name a couple of groups, didn't protest such a portrayal. That sexual displays should reach such a pitch where this kind of production is even contemplated is really a sad comment on how far we have devolved by malformation into an increasingly, peculiarly sexually frustrated society.

⁹⁰ http://www.eff.org/Censorship/Ratings_filters_labelling/20030623_eff_cipapr.php

⁹¹ http://www.eff.org/Censorship/Ratings_filters_labelling/20030623.ussupremecourt.cipalibrarydecision.02-361.pdf, p. 3

The same reasoning applies on the home front. In order to exclude pornography from the materials a minor will access, some kind of assistance is reasonable.

- other sources of help, including Cyber Tipline, etc.

There are several software programs that offer guards or blocks to specific categories of websites, especially pornographic sites. Others go further and record such things as P2P chats, websites visited, even keystrokes and passwords (e.g., <http://www.software4parents.com/>). Although such “spyware” may seem invasive to many parents, others will weigh the benefits against the possible risks of not monitoring Internet activity at all. Remember, a child or even adolescent doesn’t necessarily possess the judgment to avoid malformative influences or individuals with predatory intentions, whatever their age might be. NB: Parents should check to ensure that encryption software hasn’t been installed in an attempt to override their vigilance. Then a direct challenge should be made against such activity.

- Place computer in “populated area,” e.g., family room, TV room

Many parents find that they need their own private terminal for personal use. However one terminal is sufficient for children’s use, given a rational plan for sharing. Placing the computer in a populated area, where there is frequent visitation or “traffic,” is the best way of keeping use of the Internet honest. If there are complaints that TV or other forms of racket are distracting someone from serious research, then accommodation could be made by establishing library rules during certain times of day or evening. Less television would be a healthy alternative.

- Look at Screen to See What Youth Is Doing

“POS” is chat code for “parents over shoulder.” In other words, “Watch what you are writing, so it doesn’t land me in trouble.” Part of successful family communication regarding use of the Internet would include clarity of concepts about it, and one of the most important concepts is that use of the Internet should never isolate the user in his or her own little world. That is where danger creeps in for young people (of course it can be a danger at any age). Explain to your children that it is precisely at times when such isolation becomes apparent that a parent will be most concerned. Therefore, expect Mom and Dad to take a personal interest in their children’s use of the Internet.

- Ask Youth About What He or She Does on Internet

See above.

- Check History Function for Sites Youth Has Visited

Ask the children *not* to clear the history log or temporary files; let that be the parents’ job. If parents find that his rule is not being followed, the software mentioned above gets around that.

- Check Files and Diskettes

A simple search can reveal whether or not new material has been stored. File tags, such as “.jpeg”, “.mpeg” or “.avi” indicate images or movies in storage. Often times outside storage will be used for sensitive materials, especially pornographic images. Controls on backup materials can be part of an established protocol for use.

- Youth Must Ask Permission to Go on Internet

In order to establish and keep fair order in use of the Internet, make it a rule that permission must be asked before logging on. This way the parent has a better chance of monitoring the number of hours spent as well.

- **Rule About Number of Hours Youth Can Spend on Internet**

“Surfing the net” can become so all-consuming that the user loses all track of time and of what is going on around him or her. Limits on time can help the user to focus on what is needed rather than rambling or possibly stumbling into trouble.

- **SUMMARY:** Protect the weakest at both ends of the spectrum, both those who might become victims and those who could become victimizers.

[Fifty years ago and beyond, it would be safe to say that society resonated what is expressed concretely in Judaeo-Christian morality. This is no longer the case. Now many parents feel as though they face their challenges in isolation with respect to the formation of their children. Against the relatively few hours their sons and daughters spend at home to eat and sleep, there are the exposures to hypersexual stereotypes reinforced by television, bad associations, etc., much like the reinforcement of bad grammar where people are learning a language from someone who doesn't really know that language; to the vulgar patois that impoverishes language in the painful experience of rap music and in ordinary daily conversation; to the bad science that imparts intimate knowledge in a mechanical and statistical fashion, rather than in a personal way, i.e., while always bearing in mind that *persons* are involved.⁹²]

Education comes from the Latin *educere*, which literally means to “lead out”. In other words, the purpose of education is to lead one out of the darkness of ignorance into the light of truth. Once that process is undertaken, the one who receives is obliged to respond to the light of truth by acting accordingly. If I've learned how to read an accurate map, I don't attempt a journey to a specific place by being blindfolded and starting with a pin-the-tale-on-the-donkey spin.

This paper has attempted to throw light on several specific areas: 1) The Internet is by far the most powerful tool available to individuals of practically every age. It literally has shrunk the world of communication and information exchange to milliseconds. 2) The advantages of this medium have been exploited also for profit or gain in the sale and exchange of some very deviant, perverted information, such as child pornography, or in online “grooming” of susceptible children and youth. 3) However, our caution should reach far beyond those who use the Internet for clearly illegal and immoral purposes. Whatever impinges on the senses can have a formative or malformative influence, and the research is very clear, calling all parents and care providers to honestly face an uncomfortable truth: 4) The patterns of deviant and perverted behaviour are often formed by degrees that begin with unhealthy exposure to sexual behaviours, pornography and the generally sexualized atmosphere that so many societies, east and west, have found alluring and/or profitable. 5) The signs of possible abuse are evident to those who pay attention.

6) In view of the above, it is essential for parents, caregivers and concerned citizens to be far more attentive to the use and access that young people have to information. Parents need to take back ownership of public schools, for which they pay dearly, and monitor carefully what

⁹² The debate regarding AIDS and prophylactic methods is a case in point. In the late 1980's, the push began for “safe sex,” and condoms were touted as the best and most responsible way of reducing the spread of AIDS. The lone voice of dissent was the Catholic Church, who surprisingly argued against the use of condoms mainly on scientific grounds. Their argument ran thus: the best of condoms have a failure rate in preventing pregnancies of up to 20%. How much higher might the failure rate be for the prevention of the transmission of AIDS (or other STD's), since fertility only takes place a few days each *menses*, whereas the AIDS virus is present 24/7? Representatives of the scientific community shot back: “At least we are saving 80%, whereas what you propose saves no one.” Actually, 80% is not an acceptable risk-benefit ratio, even in purely statistical terms. Here, though, we are not merely talking statistics, we are talking *persons*. If one of the scientists' children comes home and says: “I used the condoms all the time, but I still came down with AIDS,” the scientist is looking at his or her own son or daughter, not part of risk statistics. It is also interesting that the media totally ignored what the Catholic Church proposes in order to eliminate the further spread of AIDS entirely: “Save your sexual expression of love until you are ready for a faithful, exclusive and permanent marriage.”

attitudes and practices are being transmitted to youth, especially in the delicate area of sex education, where public schools in North America, at least, have fallen prey to trendy junk science. On the one hand, they teach youth that sex is normal and fun and “you’re going to do it anyway,” and on the other hand, reinforce this high-energy sexuality by making young people feel positively patriotic if they are carrying condoms which have a known failure rate. Teachers should remember that they are delegated a formative role in order to assist in the parents’ primary duty as educators. They should never assume that they know more than the parents of the children they are teaching how to best raise them.

Finally, these problems exist largely because we are unaware and do not communicate effectively enough with each other: parents with their children, parents with educators, educators with students by “leading them out” of the darkness of ignorance about healthy respect for the goodness of creation and a healthy, honest awareness about the dangers that are present in their formation. Humility is a big help in all of this. One renaissance scholar, St. Teresa of Avila, described humility as “bowing before the truth.” The truth can truly liberate us from the ills that junk science and erroneous philosophies have helped to produce.

Boredom = Sadness

In Latin, the word “tristitia” has two meanings: *sadness*, which is the usual meaning attached to the word or its cognates in most romance languages; but also it conveys *boredom*. St. Thomas Aquinas wrote of *tristitia de bono divino*, or “boredom with the things of God.” Perhaps the ancients saw a psychological link that we should revisit, because the sullen boredom—that so many people find they can only relieve with louder, harder, more vulgar and more violent pastimes—points to a sadness in individuals and in society. Is it a sadness without explanation? Psychologists are finding that the causes for cyclical depression can be embedded by traumas which occur before conscious memory develops. For example, the divorce of parents or the death of a parent even before a child’s conscious memory has developed might be the cause for an annual depression occurring at the time the event itself occurred many years before. Failure to come to terms with it may result in the individual seeking escape from suffering by means that actually aggravate suffering, such as drinking or drugs.

The question should be asked: Is it possible that we are creating a climate of unhappiness, even in the “virtual” world, by seeking entertainment that necessarily traumatizes the victims of its production, and “virtually” traumatizes its viewers? This, of course, requires an objectification of standards that for some reason strikes fear in the very people who carry the gravest responsibilities. Feminists decry sexism but never attack the foundations of its systematization. The media and now even the judiciary cringe before the sacred cow of “freedom of expression”, refusing to acknowledge that some forms of expression amount to plain exploitation of women and children. Law enforcement officials are themselves virtually handcuffed by the loopholes and blinds that privacy creates.

It seems a depressing reality, that no matter how vigilant public agencies are with respect to protection of children, online predators will always find ways to keep their activities secret. The only level at which vigilance has a realistic chance is that of parents with regard to their children. The overarching question for each parent is: To which influences will I permit my children to be exposed in order to guarantee the formation of healthy characters? The parents are in most cases the best judges of what direction this should take.

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