

Digital and Divergent: Sexual Behaviors on the Internet

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A variety of sexual behaviors occur online, including those that are highly unusual or even plainly illicit. There is a growing body of literature pertaining to sexual abuse of minors that occurs or may be promoted online, but there is a paucity of information regarding other Internet-based sexual interactions, such as manufacturing, dissemination, and online viewing of other atypical sexual material. In this article, I explore and analyze these different practices, which include, but are not limited to, videos of rape, sadomasochism with bodily disfigurement, zoophilia, and necrophilia, with the intention of diminishing the gap in information about this industry. The impact that these behaviors may have on clinical or forensic psychiatric evaluations is discussed, along with pertinent legal regulations and ethics-related considerations.

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In writing this article, I have wondered numerous times what Sigmund Freud would have said if he had had the opportunity to offer his opinions on the matters to be laid out here. As psychiatrists, we have all been made well aware of the critical role sexuality plays in every human being's life, particularly as a dimension in which psychic domains are displayed. Beyond that, as forensic psychiatrists, we have learned to explore the thin line that separates fantasy from enactment, health from psychopathology, and acceptable preferences from unlawful behaviors. However, we are practicing in a time when a new "Royal Road to the Unconscious"¹ is available: the Internet. Just as with dreams, it is often unknown and difficult to navigate, presenting so many vague, indefinable, and almost ethereal perspectives.

The Internet has become an ever-expanding source of information and opportunities in every domain of life, particularly for younger generations. Along with the benefits come certain risks and potentially negative influences. For example, the web provides an avenue for sexual exploration for special populations such as mentally impaired individuals, it provides forums where people recovering from sex-

ual pathologies may find support and guidance, and it provides ease of access and anonymity² for adolescents seeking information or advice surrounding topics of sexuality. This anonymity and ease of access, however, may delay the identification or management of risky behaviors. Online sexual activity begs attention because of its magnitude and potential ramifications, of which many physicians may be currently unaware. In this article, I attempt to provide a review of the literature of various aspects of sexual activity involving the Internet, as well as the statutes pertaining to these matters, in an effort to identify areas where duties and liabilities may arise for the forensic psychiatrist. I also propose conceptual formulations to understand the phenomena, in addition to recommendations for appropriate legal response to identified cyber crimes.

In accordance with legal mandates specified under Title 18 of the U.S. Code, all information gathered for the purposes of researching and writing this review were submitted to an agent of the Department of Homeland Security. In Chapter 71 on Obscenity, § 1466 specifies that a person will be subject to criminal penalties, who

... knowingly possesses a visual depiction of any kind, including a drawing, cartoon, sculpture, or painting, that ... depicts a minor engaging in sexually explicit conduct and is obscene; or depicts an image that is, or appears to be, of a minor engaging in graphic bestiality, sadistic or masochistic abuse, or sexual intercourse, including genital-genital, oral-genital, anal-genital, or oral-anal, whether be-

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tween persons of the same or opposite sex; and lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.³

It states that it

. . . shall be an affirmative defense to a charge of violating subsection (b) (above) that the defendant

- (1) possessed less than 3 such visual depictions; and
- (2) promptly and in good faith, and without retaining or allowing any person, other than a law enforcement agency, to access any such visual depiction—
 - (A) took reasonable steps to destroy each such visual depiction; or
 - (B) reported the matter to a law enforcement agency and afforded that agency access to each such visual depiction.³

The Scope of the Problem

There are more than 270 million Internet users in North America alone,⁴ with a wide variation of demographic characteristics and online activities. The Internet provides educational programs, social networking, live and recorded streaming of videos and music, instant worldwide communications, classified advertisement posting, virtual gaming, and access to practically all services needed or offered. All of these activities may be related to or lead to online sexual activities (OSAs). Cybersex (also called netsex, mudsex, or cybering) involves sexual role-playing by two or more participants, with or without masturbation.⁵ The sexual fantasy may be carried out in text, via live webcam transmission, or through an avatar in multiuser computer games or virtual worlds, such as Second Life.⁶ Some of these games have been designed specifically for purposes of cybersex. Little is known about predatory online behavior, even though some studies have been performed to identify the potential profiles of victim selection or preferred online access mode.⁷ Other studies have looked at the connection between offenders and a nexus to social networking sites, and some have concluded that targeting the victim's behavior may be a more effective preventive strategy than targeting specific online locations where the offenses occur.⁸ This approach focuses on teaching potential victims how to protect themselves and how to report suspicious behavior and websites. Web forums for particular subgroups may provide information, support, and advice without encouraging or supporting criminal acts; for example, in the pedophile community, web forums may support and encourage sexual relationships with minors in virtual as well as real settings.⁹

The definition of obscenity is important because it is not protected by the First Amendment and can therefore be prohibited. To be considered obscene, speech or other material must satisfy all three conditions of the *Miller* test¹⁰, also known as the Three-Prong Obscenity Test. In *Miller v. California*, the U.S. Supreme Court set guidelines for determining whether material is obscene:

- (a) whether "the average person, applying contemporary community standards" would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest, . . . (b) whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law; and (c) whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value [Ref. 10, p 24].

All three criteria must be met for the *Miller* test to be satisfied.

Pornographic material has been distributed through the Internet since its inception, and the pornography industry has thrived through this avenue. Pornographic material ranges widely, in terms of the sexual practices depicted, the participants, and the degree of graphic disclosure. Pornography is available free or through paid subscriptions, and the industry grosses billions of dollars annually,¹¹ and a new pornographic video is being created and uploaded every 39 minutes in the United States.¹²

Although cybersex may involve consenting adults, certain sexual interactions on the Internet may be questionable. Examples of these potentially illegal activities include procurement of paid sexual services; sex trafficking; and possession of and participation in pornography involving minors. A minor, or child, is defined as anyone under the age of 18 years according to federal statutes, although some states define the age of sexual consent as 16. Although the age of consent may allow for lawful engagement in sexual activity, it remains illegal to maintain images or an explicit written depiction of such activity.

Also potentially illegal are depictions of pornographic images gathered without the consent of the participating individual (peep cams); brutal bonding and discipline, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism (While BDSM is considered legal among consenting adults, numerous websites provide access to videos or material where the parties involved are minors, are noticeably intoxicated, or appear to be seriously injured.); actual life events, such as rape or gang rape; and bestiality or zoophilic practices; necrophilia or

necrophilic practices (In the United States there is no federal statute regarding necrophilia. Laws vary according to state and range from misdemeanors to felonies.); incest; and autoerotic asphyxiation with portrayal of fatalities.

The People Involved

It is useful to distinguish between online sex offenders or perpetrators and the users or potential victims. Proposed typologies of online sex offenders have included the following:

Chat Room Sex Offenders

This category is distinguishable from the offline sex offender.¹³ These offenders may have lower criminogenic factors than those who use the hands-on approach. They may be further subdivided into a contact-driven subgroup (i.e., those who eventually seek to meet in person) and a fantasy-driven subgroup (i.e., those who do not have an expressed intent to meet offline). It is interesting to note that two-thirds of online sex offenders initiate a sexual conversation in their first chat exchange.¹⁴

Internet Pedophiles

When compared with other child sex offenders, Internet child pornography offenders have been found to be younger, single, living alone, and childless.¹⁵ Antisocial traits and socioaffective characteristics have also been studied. Socioaffective characteristics are elements of the emotional development of a person as a social being or in response to his social environment. The affect or emotional characteristics may also influence an individual's social subculture and socialization. They include those characteristics that fall within the domains of social integration and participation, in parallel with personality development. These domains take into account characteristics such as emotional identification, communication, and control; establishment of emotional worth and attachment; loneliness; self-confidence; integration; victimization; and social participation. Internet child pornography offenders have been found to have lower indicators of antisocial variables, such as acting out and breaking social rules, than hands-on child molesters have, whereas socioaffective characteristics remain similar in both groups.¹⁶ The relationship between consumption of Internet child pornography and violent sex offending is still being closely examined. It is estimated that approximately

three percent of consumers of child pornography will reoffend with either a violent or other offline sexual offense.¹⁷ Internet pedophiles may also be subdivided into a trust-based seductive group and a direct sexual model group.¹⁸ In the former group, the offender seeks to gain the child's trust through escalating attention for the ultimate purpose of sexual seduction (e.g., stating that he is the same age or sex as the child or that they share similar interests), whereas in the latter group, the subject of sex with the minor is introduced rather directly and more quickly.

Producers and Distributors

A distinction can be made between producers and nonproducers of online child pornography. According to the National Juvenile Online Victimization Study,¹⁹ for Internet-facilitated sexual exploitation of children, a distinction can be drawn between offenders who are looking to profit from the production, selling, or distribution of material, and offenders who simply purchase or otherwise consume the material. Nonproducers may be further differentiated into lookers or collectors and distributors, with most distribution occurring free of charge via peer-to-peer file-sharing.²⁰ Producers have prior arrests and a history of violence and affiliation with other offenders and some are female. The definition of producers and distributors can be difficult to delineate. For example, an early teenage girl who transmits nude pictures of herself via the Internet may be considered to be producing and distributing child pornography, but consideration must be given to the profit gained from such distribution and the involvement of a managing or exploitative adult.

Female Offenders

There has been a paucity of research on female consumers of child pornography; further research is warranted. One recent study of female users of Internet child pornography by Seigfried-Spellar and Rogers²¹ examined personality traits and also concluded that female offenders were more likely to be nonwhite. Also, they were more likely to score low on neuroticism and high on moral choice hedonism (in which a moral choice or action is determined to be good or right that results in the greatest pleasure). Female sex offenders may also be coerced by men to participate in online sex offenses or grooming of children.²²

Minors as Perpetrators of Sex Offenses

Sexual attitudes and the allowance of attitudes that display or endorse sexual violence among adolescents may correlate with the development of cybersex addiction in this population.²³ Cyber violence among adolescents extends to the sexual arena, reaching new heights with a teenage gang rape that was filmed and uploaded to the Internet.²⁴

Special Considerations

Studies have examined variables and risk factors associated with Internet-initiated victimization from a variety of perspectives. Chiou²⁵ investigated sexual disclosure, which is the extent to which a person reveals sexual preferences, behaviors, or sensual body images. The extent of sexual disclosure may be largely influenced by the degree of anonymity that is provided in a particular forum. It may also be influenced by the degree of topic intimacy that other participating parties engage in.²⁵ In this context, sexual disclosure is related to self-representation and impression management, which may differ between males and females. For instance, males show a more reciprocal strategy regarding sexual disclosure (i.e., the more that is disclosed to them, the more they are willing to disclose about themselves). Females, on the other hand, follow a more conservative strategy (i.e., they do not pose or respond to higher levels of topic intimacy, nor do they self disclose sexual topics as readily).²⁶

Noll *et al.*²⁷ found an association between a history of childhood abuse and the avatar that adolescent girls choose to create. The study found that having been abused and choosing a provocative avatar correlated significantly and independently with online sexual advances, and, in turn, with offline encounters. Similarly, Mitchell *et al.*²⁸ emphasized how online victimization is often associated with a broader range of behaviors and experiences; most online victims reported offline victimization during the same period, ranging from sexual harassment to rape. They also reported elevated rates of trauma symptomatology, delinquency, and life adversity.

Domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) is a growing problem in the United States and involves “the commercial sexual abuse of children through buying, selling, or trading their sexual services.”²⁹ These services may include pornography or prostitution, which may be negotiated or arranged online.

DMST online may be approached from the perspective of the trafficker who recruits or promotes the services of youths or the consumer who purchases the service.³⁰

Clinical and Forensic Concerns

Conducting research on this matter or on the subjects involved presents a new level of methodological complexity.³¹ Much of the data gathered regarding online sex offenses is obtained through the engagement of an offender with an undercover agent posing as a minor, either sending sexually explicit material or arranging to meet at a location.³²

The study of online sexual offenses has raised new and challenging tasks for clinicians, including identification of the problem behaviors and clinical decision-making. Clinical evaluations should include nonjudgmental assessments of a client’s online practices. Screening of online practices may include analysis of Internet behaviors in a child or potential victim, to identify risk factors for Internet-based sexual victimization (e.g., choice of avatar, overt sexual disclosure on an unsecured channel, or arrangements for offline encounters). At the same time, screening of online practices in an adult (with or without previous sex offense convictions) may reveal that a child is being abused, and the clinician must ensure implementation of proper therapeutic, preventive, and reporting measures.

Regular screening of online practices in potential perpetrators may also bring to light deviant sexual preferences or behaviors that may be amenable to treatment. Internet sexual behaviors may coexist with other paraphilic disorders, such as pedophilia,³³ sexual masochism, sexual sadism, and paraphilias not otherwise specified (e.g., zoophilia). Krueger *et al.*³⁴ observed that of 60 males arrested for online crimes against children, 40 percent had the diagnosis of at least one paraphilia, 33 percent had a sexual disorder not otherwise specified (characterized by hypersexuality), and 70 percent had an Axis I disorder diagnosis (including mood, anxiety, substance use, and attention spectrum disorders) that antedated and was judged to be contributory to the behavior leading to the incident offense. Some online predators may fit more into the model of statutory rapist, rather than the violent and deceitful child sexual offenders that are usually portrayed in the media. Under this model, one possible dynamic intervention would be geared toward developmental deficiencies in estab-

lishing adult intimate relationships.³⁵ Speaking to this distinction, Elliott *et al.*³⁶ showed that when compared with contact sex offenders, Internet offenders have significantly higher identification with fictional characters, higher scores on the scales of fantasy, underassertiveness, and motor impulsivity. Their contact offender counterparts were found to have higher victim empathy and cognitive distortions, cognitive impulsivity, and higher scores on the scales of locus of control, perspective taking, empathic concern, and overassertiveness.

Predictors of new violent offenses include prior offense history, violence history, and younger offender age. Analysis of online transcripts, when available (via digital forensic investigations or in monitored sex offender programs), may enhance the clinical examination of some Internet-based sexual behaviors.³⁷ However, this avenue would not be available for understanding the phenomenology of production, distribution, or voyeuristic enjoyment of sexually sadistic online videos. From an entirely different perspective, some authors³⁸ argue that the Internet serves as a safety valve for the exploration of stimulating sexual aggression, allowing for safe experimentation of fantasies without crossing into real-life behavior. For some, however, this boundary may be blurred, and certain types of hard-core pornography or violent sexual material may increase aggression and may correlate with the development of sexual addictions. This hypothesis remains an area for future exploration.

From a phenomenological standpoint, it may be useful for evaluators to address the evaluatee's willful suspension of disbelief. As in movies, the willful suspension of disbelief allows for contemplation and enjoyment of fantasized behaviors that would not be allowed in real life. Although this is a psychological ability that is both normative and generally desirable, allowing a person the possibility of a psychic life free of societal and reality norms, it may be considered in these cases to be an extreme and maladaptive behavior that allows for artificial compartmentalization of critical domains, such as sexuality, aggression, and victim empathy. The sensationalistic enjoyment of deviant or outrageous sexual practices (which may include others' suffering) conditioned to evoke libidinal pleasure may desensitize the voyeur and blur the boundaries between what is healthy and pathological sexually. Online voyeurs may find a community that endorses such practices and thus promotes further

regression into violent sexuality rather than mature intimacy.³⁹

When forensic psychiatrists evaluate situations involving online sexual misconduct, they must take into account certain risk indicators. For perpetrators, risk indicators for hands-on offending or other recidivism should include known variables, such as history, psychiatric symptomatology and substance use, planning, and access to intended victims. Variables such as the risk of crossover from online to hands-on offending take on particular relevance in online sexual behaviors, as opportunities for doing so are often offered within the same websites or are otherwise readily accessible. However, the prevalence of crossover from online practices to real-life offending is not yet as clear. In evaluating a victim of online sexual abuse, special attention must be placed on the ongoing availability of computer-based material. Furthermore, consideration must be given to the online and offline behaviors the victim may be engaged in that raise the risk for future victimization.

Forensic evaluators face challenges when examining online sex offenders or victims.⁴⁰ To begin with, many forensic evaluators may be unfamiliar with digital evidence or may have a poor understanding of colloquial digital terminology. The evaluation of online sexually abused victims may require specialized training to enhance accuracy (and increase the likelihood of judicial acceptance), promote timely intervention, prevent recurrence, and preclude the destruction of evidence.⁴¹

Forensic evaluations also include conducting risk assessments for offender recidivism. A recent study by Eke *et al.*⁴² of more than 500 registered male child pornography offenders showed a 32 percent rate of any recidivism for the entire sample; 25 percent re-offended upon conditional release, and half of those re-offenses were against children via Internet access; 4 percent were charged with new contact sex offenses and an additional 2 percent with prior contact sex offenses; and 7 percent were charged with a new child pornography offense. Risk assessments for violence or recidivism may be complicated by the heterogeneity of the evaluatees who present overlapping characteristics. For example, sexual predators and obsessional harassers may both exhibit similar cybersex behaviors.⁴³ The use of actuarial measures, such as sexual arousal rating scales, the Internet Addiction Test⁴⁴ for online sexual activities,⁴⁵ the Internet Consequences Scale,⁴⁶ and the Internet Behaviors

and Attitudes Questionnaire,⁴⁷ may enhance the accuracy of the evaluations. A particularly interesting situation arises for the evaluator who considers a subject's Internet sexual behaviors in the evaluation of fitness for duty. In a recent study,⁴⁸ 30 percent of a sample of medical students had posted online unprofessional and inappropriate sexually suggestive material (e.g., sexually provocative photographs of students, inappropriate friendship requests with patients on Facebook, and sexually suggestive comments). Only 38 percent of the medical schools had policies in place regarding student-posted online content. Whether the posting of such material renders a physician unfit to practice is an open question, but the study demonstrates the pervasiveness of such Internet sexual behaviors.

At an institutional and systems-based level, equal consideration must be given to the advantages of the Internet in regard to sexual behaviors. As previously mentioned, numerous websites provide information regarding sexuality and healthy sexual practices. The Internet Sexuality Information Services, Inc. (ISIS) is a community-based organization that recently developed a program for convenient and confidential syphilis testing,⁴⁹ allowing for early identification and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases. Furthermore, Internet-based groups have emerged and grown in popularity and often provide a venue for psychoeducation or treatment of individuals who would not otherwise seek care on their own accord or until they are involved with the legal system.⁵⁰

Legal and Ethics-Based Implications

The discussion thus far spans a range of potential offenses including solicitation, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, indecent exposure, incest, child molestation and abuse, necrophilia, and thanatophilia (abuse of corpse or sexual violation of human remains), among others. Websites with sexually deviant content are easily accessed, and they show images or videos of these activities. Rape videos may be found that graphically denounce its occurrence (i.e., an outcry to raise awareness and sympathy) or that serve as cybersex material. Some websites are known for graphic video material with various degrees of violence, often advertising young-looking participants who are presented as teens but frequently appear prepubertal. More recently, the pornographic anime industry in Japan has grown considerably, depicting characters that are evidently prepubertal, but

escaping legal jurisdiction due to their fictional nature. It is unclear whether this material would help contain sexual fantasies including minors or would promote such enactments. Other sites are a forum for easy access to videos or news depicting more violent sexual practices, such as sexual sadism and autoerotic asphyxiation.

Bestiality was made illegal in the state of Washington in 2005⁵¹ following the discovery of an animal brothel and the Enumclaw horse sex case.⁵² It was later made illegal in Florida, Alaska, and Arizona and ultimately in the entire United States. However, it is legal in Denmark and Hungary, and videos depicting this practice (whether filmed at a location where it is legally allowed or not) are easily found on the Internet. Pornography depicting zoophilia is widely illegal, even in countries where the practice itself is not legally banned. With some exceptions, production and possession of pornography are legal in the United States, but distribution (which includes cyber distribution) has faced legal debate since 2005. *United States v. Extreme Associates*⁵³ challenges the limits of pornography, as it addresses the legality of material that is often gruesome or extremely violent. In a particularly extreme example, Bauer *et al.*⁵⁴ reported a depiction of necrophilia where the offender had used the Internet to find extensive autopsy instructions and had taken thousands of digital images for the exact reconstruction of the necrophilic act. Legal regulations that pertain to these matters are included within the penal codes of each jurisdiction. Sentencing may vary according to the category of misdemeanor or felony offense and by jurisdiction. The Federal Video Voyeurism Prevention Act of 2004⁵⁵ establishes that no video of a person may be obtained or disseminated without the consent of the person. Recently, some states, such as Florida and Nevada, have passed bills making video voyeurism a third-degree felony offense, in an effort to deter videotaping of unaware youths by teachers or other adults.⁵⁶

Questions arise within the realm of legal regulation, particularly as we move deeper into the era of cloud computing. Jurisdiction is one consideration as these matters often cross international boundaries. Within the United States, legal jurisdiction falls within the state where the material is being produced, regardless of its legality at the point where it is being accessed. There are inherent difficulties in enforcing applicable laws at the access point. Access

may be restricted through content controls, parental controls, or web filters, but the legal authority that a sovereign nation might exercise has not been determined. There are currently no international laws governing pornography.

Ownership is another important consideration in the cloud, since material may not be stored in a personal computer. Ownership of the material is most often attributed to the recipient who has accessed it and perhaps holds (knowingly or not, in the case of material that is contained in malware) a copy in the computer device.

Localization of criminal evidence may be increasingly difficult in the era of cloud storage. Copies of illegal material may not be stored in a personal hard drive and can be deleted or relocated in the Internet within seconds. It may also not be clear what level of privacy a user may expect in cloud storage and whether government agencies may access cloud accounts.

A case that illustrates how difficult it might be to impose criminal sentencing is that of *People v. Reed*⁵⁷ of the California Court of Appeal. In 1997, Mr. Reed placed an advertisement asking for assistance in satisfying his sexual appetite, which was responded to by an undercover detective asking whether Mr. Reed would help with the sexual instruction of her daughters, presented as being of ages 12 and 9 years. Following correspondence, Mr. Reed agreed to meet. He was then arrested and was convicted of one count of attempted molestation of a child under the age of 14 years. Although it pertained to a case of an offline sex offender, the questions raised included whether the fictional nature of the matter invalidated the conviction, whether a defendant who has not moved on to a hands-on offense can be convicted for an attempt, and whether the defendant has been entrapped to identify the offense.

Strategies for the social, clinical, and legal management of sexual offenders have evolved over the years. Cellini and Schwartz⁵⁸ have made some recommendations for sentencing conditions in sex offense cases, and these include (among others) restriction on the offender's use of computers. Sex offender registration laws, such as The Jacob Wetterling Act and Megan's Law, have been controversial. Although an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of such laws is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note that recent studies have questioned their effectiveness in capturing all offenders, differentiating among

them, or facilitating successful community reintegration. In North Carolina, a recent study⁵⁹ found that more than half of childcare providers did not check the Sex Offender and Public Protection Registry "for work purposes," and only three percent of child care centers had a policy requiring that employees check the website. Registered sex offenders often have limitations imposed on their Internet access, which may affect their employment search and coping with community stressors.⁶⁰ Some authors argue that the multiple policies restricting sex offenders create an environment that may negatively impact community reintegration and may even contribute to an increasing risk of recidivism.⁶¹ Chemical or physical castration laws are not widely found in the United States, and where there are such laws, they are usually reserved for hands-on sexual offenses. The effect of castration on illicit Internet behaviors or sexual addictions has not been adequately studied. Being that the Internet is so readily available, some people have even raised the question of whether subjects engaged in these activities would be eligible for or benefit from civil commitment, where the goal of confinement would supersede treatment, until such time as effective treatment is established.

Perhaps a context of more practical import is the legal and ethics-based duty to report. There generally is no duty to report past crimes revealed by patients or evaluatees, unless related to mandated reporting situations involving children or elders. However, from a legal standpoint, civilians, even without a legal duty, may wish to report websites and online activities that they encounter pertaining to the situations described herein to the cybercrimes divisions of law enforcement agencies. Agencies that may be interested in such reports include the Federal Bureau of Investigations, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security, Central Intelligence Agency, Secret Service, or local police departments. If a clinician would make such a report, this topic should be discussed at each clinical encounter as one of the exceptions to confidentiality, along with other limits to confidentiality routinely disclosed. Similarly, in forensic evaluations, evaluatees should be aware that the elicited information may be reported. This possibility should also be discussed with the retaining attorney, as some jurisdictions may protect information elicited during a forensic evaluation under the umbrella of attorney-client privilege. Of course, as in other contexts, such a

warning may chill the evaluatee's willingness to be forthcoming and cause him to withhold information critical to a comprehensive risk assessment. Should an evaluator choose to verify information provided by an evaluatee or investigate the evidence to gain a better understanding of the evaluatee's pathology, the evaluator might protect himself from being in a precarious situation whereby illicit content is now stored in his own computer device by preemptively reporting the context of professional research to the pertinent authorities.

Conclusion

To some degree, society seems to have traded the meeting rooms and playrooms of the past for the chat rooms and virtual rooms available online today. One can be found for almost every aspect of a person's psychic and behavioral life. Psychiatrists should be aware that an everexpanding area in which this is occurring pertains to sexuality and that much of the activity is atypical or illicit and in some cases, violent or sadistic.

The web's ability to provide a broad array of avenues for exploration and sharing of sexual behaviors, with easy access and anonymity, requires close consideration by physicians, due to the significant ramifications for all parties involved: victims, offenders, and clinicians. Screening and careful questioning regarding these online practices should be considered in the evaluation of both offenders and victims. Attention should be given to risk variables that may determine appropriate clinical or legal interventions. The forensic evaluator must weigh legal and ethics corollaries regarding his duties and liabilities and realize that these may have a direct impact on the offender. Thus, development of thoughtful strategies for better social and clinical management of sexual offenders is needed.

More research is necessary in this area so as to understand the phenomena, and education and training of professionals has now become critical to raise awareness of the scope of the activities involved. Furthermore, dissemination of proper reporting procedures and information resources from cyber crime specialists is warranted to provide a more appropriate legal and clinical response.

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