Blackmail on the Internet
An exploration of the online sexual coercion of children

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List of Abbreviations

CAID – Child Abuse Image Database

CAM – Child Abuse Material

CEOP – Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command

CPS – Crown Prosecution Service

CSEM – Child sexually Explicit Material

ECPAT – End Child Prostitution And Trafficking

FBI – Federal Bureau of Investigation

GT – Grounded Theory

HMIC – Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies

HMP – Her Majesty's Prison

HMSO – Her Majesty's Stationary Office

ICMEC – International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children

IIOC – Indecent images of Children

IPA – Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

MSN – Microsoft Network (an online chat room)

NCA – National Crime Agency

NPIA – National Policing Improvement Agency

NSPCC – National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

OFCOM – Office of Communications

ONS – Office for National Statistics

OSCEC – Online Sexual Coercion and Exploitation of Children

PIU – Pathological (or Problematic) Internet Use

RAT – Remote Access Trojan

SOA – Sexual Offences Act

SCA - Serious Crime Act

SEMc – Sexually Explicit Material involving children

SECC – Sexual Exploitation of Children in Cyberspace

SOTP – Sexual Offences Treatment Program

SNS – Social Networking Site

UN – United Nations

YISS – Youth Internet Safety Survey

Abstract

The online sexual coercion of children involves an adult building a relationship with a child, the child is made to send sexual images or perform sexual acts at the direction of, the adult. It becomes a form of blackmail committed against the child through manipulation, it has serious consequences for both the victim and the perpetrator. Existing research focuses on the incidence and methods of criminality. It does not explain how sextortion develops or how a child may become vulnerable to it. This thesis aimed to tackle this by conducting four empirical studies. The first, a comparative analysis of cases revealed that perpetrators created many victims globally, offended for extended periods of time and commit offences via popular internet platforms. Most victims were blackmailed using simple methods. Prosecutions of offenders was made difficult by international borders and they gave inconsistent results.

The second study, an online survey of 461 people who used the Internet as children revealed that little action was taken to report the frequency of inappropriate online sexual contact. Within this sample 5.64% of participants were coerced into sending sexual images. The majority of these victims were subject to repeated image requests. This sub-sample of victims reported experiencing a greater number of positive emotions when being coerced than those who did not become a victim.

A unique insight was provided by the qualitative interviews of studies three and four. The experiences of victims (*n*=9) and perpetrators (*n*=9) were analysed within the qualitative framework of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Common themes provided how children experienced sex on the Internet with little to prevent victimisation other than their own actions. Those becoming victims to coercion described personal problems that led them to seeking validation online. Their judgements of those abusing them were distorted due to the turmoil caused by their own negative emotions. Ultimately, this left them open to sexual coercion; the consequences of which they chose to accept or ignore.

The perpetrator interviews provided how the convicted participants felt a need to justify their actions. They further described how it was too easy to transition from innocent Internet use to compulsive online offending. This route to offending was explained in themes which clouded their personal judgements when they experienced problematic sexuality or distorted cognitions. They explained how they became focused to control and manipulate their victims for gratification. The sexual reward maintained their maladaptive coping strategies and, in some cases, strengthened the need to offend. The contribution of this thesis is its insight into the lives of the

participants and the recommendations created from their experiences. The analysis suggests that earlier intervention may prevent many thousands of children becoming victims.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The use of blackmail and coercion against children in the commission of online sexual exploitation offences was flagged as a tactic in 2009 by the Child Exploitation and On-line Protection command (CEOP, 2009). Offenders use coercion to obtain sexual imagery of children, or to maintain the compliance of the victim in the sexual abuse process (CEOP, 2009). CEOP disclosed how online offenders threatened children by hacking their social media profiles and/or using blackmail when committing online grooming offences. A style of offending that was attributed to increasing Internet awareness, and the rise of Social Networking Sites (SNS). The various platforms offered by SNS allow for quick and private communication, exchange of photos, and live video conversations. A further increase in this type of exploitation was expected (CEOP, 2009). The annual threat assessment of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse in 2012 claimed there had been a marked increase in reports of Self-generated Indecent Imagery produced by teenagers that had been shared online (CEOP, 2012). They were distributed through messaging, hosting, and chat platforms. Whilst it concluded the majority of imagery was not distributed as a result of coercion, it was recognised there was some evidence of criminal activity and that further work was necessary to establish the degree to which it was supported by criminal intentions in obtaining the imagery through "grooming, deceiving and threatening the children" (CEOP, 2012, p.7). It disclosed children were being "incited to perform sexual activity via webcam" as a result of "criminal coercion" (CEOP, 2012, p.10). In describing the tactics used by offenders it was claimed there was a transition from the slower grooming of a single victim, to one where many potential victims were targeted more quickly, and the time from initial engagement to that of offending behaviour had become shorter. The focus was one of gaining leverage over a victim rather than building an online trusting relationship which is noted in grooming (Kloess et al., 2017). This progression of the Modus Operandi was becoming more forceful, introducing coercion into the online relationship at an early stage. CEOP has now been absorbed into the National Crime Agency (NCA) and no longer publish an annual threat assessment. However, the NCA publish a strategic assessment. The 2020 assessment states "…it is highly likely that the scale of the threat from child sexual abuse continues to increase. The main driver of child sexual abuse is sexual gratification, while secondary drivers include power and control over the victims" (NCA, 2020, p.18)

This thesis was created from a project conceived at Nottingham Trent University (NTU) in 2015, it was initially titled "Blackmail on the Internet: An emerging modus operandi for sexual offenders". The project was initiated following a concern being raised between the project coordinator and the police due to a perceived increase in incidence of online child sexual abuse where the blackmail of a victim formed an element of the crime. The researcher, who formerly had a career in law enforcement started the research in 2016.

Whilst research is emerging that examines the use of coercion and blackmail when committing online sexual offences against children, it remains quite limited. Most uses secondary data from case studies and reports (Nilsson et al., 2019; Wittes et al., 2016), or is of a quantitative nature to typify specific behaviours or elements of the offending (Kopecky 2017; Acar 2016; Patchin & Hinduja, 2018). The lack of directly related blackmail/coercion literature meant reference was made to the abundant extant literature for online sexual offending where inciting a child to engage in a sexual act is referred to as grooming. Sexual grooming is used in both online and offline environments (Kloess et al., 2014). However, the development of the online relationship to the point where the offender would use coercive techniques such as blackmail to obtain sexual images or prevent the victim from ending the online relationship add a more forceful aspect to child sexual abuse. Data of convictions for possessing indecent images has shown steady increases over the years (London Assembly, 2019). Unfortunately, it does not detail whether or not the offender is in direct communication with the victim. This makes it difficult to establish if coercion or direct communication has taken place. This style of offending, which is also labelled as sextortion (Wittes et al., 2016), involves an offender interacting directly with their victim. This direct communication, which does not happen in the majority of indecent image possession crimes, has a devastating impact on victims (Nilsson et al., 2019) wherever they are based in the world.

Online offending is not restricted by geography. Offenders and victims may be in similar or very distant countries (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016). Research from one part of the world appears pertinent to others. Kopecky's (2017) research into chat logs between blackmail offenders and child victims using SNS in the Czech Republic examined the content and direction of the conversations within the chat logs. A model was provided to outline the steps of progression used by offenders. This model demonstrated how offenders lead their victims into blackmail and was not dissimilar to the models provided by Mitchel et al. (2010) and Kloess et al. (2014) produced to explain how children were groomed into sexual abuse. Similarities such

as relationship building and the sexualisation of conversations are apparent. The research of Whittle et al. (2014) examined the manipulation techniques employed against victims explained how it manifests in both physical and psychological forms to sexualise the child. The manipulation included flattery, games, blackmail and bribery.

But what these studies do not provide are the thoughts and decisions that are made by the offenders or victims, in the period leading up to, during and after the abuse takes place. By understanding what both victims and offenders are thinking and feeling, insight into why the offending occurs is possible. To bridge this gap and build on the knowledge, this research initially explored the offending using a survey to provide data on the style and prevalence of offending. Then, to try to understand the offending process from a victim and offenders' perspective, it used in-depth interviews from participants who have experienced what it is like to be sexually abused or to sexually abuse a child online.

Ultimately the purpose of this research was to explore and take the understanding of the online sexual of children coercion to a deeper level. Surveys only allow for very specific and directed data collection. To achieve the aims qualitative research methods were utilised to collect evidence from those who had lived through the experiences of online coercive sexual abuse, examining the perspectives of both the abused and the abuser.

1.1 Research Aims

This research project had three ultimate aims that guided its approach:

1. Understand how coercive online child sexual abuse develops
2. Explore why individuals blackmail/coerce children for sexual purposes instead of using other methods carrying less personal risk
3. Gain an insight into what it is that makes a child vulnerable to online sexual coercion

From these aims, research questions were developed that allowed the project to openly explore an acknowledged phenomenon that at the time had little academic knowledge behind it other than the development of secondary data. The questions were broad in nature, providing only a guiding direction to allow exploration of the subject area without too much constraint.

- What do the experiences of child Internet users tell us about how coercive online child sexual abuse develops?

- How do the online activities of a child make them more vulnerable to being sexually coerced online?

- Why do perpetrators of online sexual coercion of children choose to interact directly with their victims for sexual purposes, rather than using other means?

1.2 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of seven chapters. The first of these chapters presents the background to the research, a brief overview of the current research state and the aims of the researcher in conducting this project.

The second chapter examines the available literature. It is worth noting that the pool of sexual offender research is quite large. To maintain focus within the specific subject area relating to online sexual coercion of children, the literature review examines some of the wider sexual offending research, and then narrows its focus into the smaller pool of research, which focuses specifically on coercive online child sexual abuse.

The third chapter covers the philosophical stance and methodology used within this project, providing the rationale behind the selection of the research methods. It elaborates on the sampling processes and closes after a discussion of the ethical issues. Chapters 4 to 7 present the empirical studies that were conducted.

Chapter 4 (Study 1) provides a comparative case analysis constructed from reports of convictions for online coercive child sexual abuse. It was prepared from open source documents. The data were aggregated and provide an insightful picture of the methods used by the perpetrators. It is valuable in setting the scene as to how offending occurs.

Chapter 5 (Study 2) is an exploratory chapter, it surveyed adults about their Internet use when they were children to establish whether they were subject to online sexual approaches from adults, and how they went on to deal with these approaches. The data and subsequent analysis are presented in a simple form, again to provide simple scene setting.

Chapter 6 (Study 3) deepens the exploratory research from the survey by presenting qualitative interviews of a selection of participants who had been approached sexually online and subjected to image requests and coercion. The subsequent analysis of the different interviews looks to provide an understanding of their experiences and brings together common themes through the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Chapter 7 (Study 4) is also one that involves in-depth qualitative interviews and IPA. The participants are adults who have been convicted of online sexual offences against

children where coercion was used to obtain imagery. Again, the analysis looks to understand their very personal experiences and the choices they made in life.

The final chapter (Chapter 8) presents a discussion of the results. It examined the implications of the findings and provides some future recommendations. This chapter concludes the thesis.

In summary, this thesis examined some of the pre-existing literature that has been developed for on and offline sexual offending. It focuses more directly towards that applicable to online sexually coercive offences against children. It consists of four studies that firstly examine reported case data of those with convictions using secondary, open source data to inform and advise how the offending occurs. This is followed up with a survey of young people to understand their online experiences. The final two studies form the main part of the thesis where primary data from interviews is used to understand individual experiences of online sexual coercion and establish what causes its commission.

1.3 Note

The investigation and management of crime involves dealing with policies and processes where those with convictions for sexual offences will commonly have a label applied to them. These labels are used in the application of policies such as Sexual Offender registration and Sexual and Violent offender descriptors, they are further used in intelligence briefings. Such labels are used commonly amongst those in working environments that manage and process individuals with sexual convictions, an environment the researcher formerly worked within.

As a result, some of the terminology and phraseology may have been used by the researcher within this thesis in describing a particular set of facts, circumstances or scenarios. Its use is however considered as inducing a bias against those with convictions suggesting a risk for recidivism (Kahn et al., 2017). But care has been taken during the project to try and minimise any research bias based on the researcher's previous career by using an analysis with a full audit trail and personal reflexivity. Hopefully this is reflected in a balanced and evidenced product, which is aimed at providing a greater understanding of the online sexual coercion of children.

Chapter 2 - Literature review

2.1 Introduction

Online sex offending attracts a harsh response from the media (Shlenker et al., 2001). Sensationalist reports assist in ensuring it is capable of striking fear into the hearts of parents. Media quotes relating to online sexual offending such as that reproduced below help to create a feeling that there are hidden demons lying in wait for children who dare to use the Wi-Fi connection.

> "Monster paedophile couple plotted to abuse child, 5, to spice up sex life" (Daily Mirror, Gallagher and Elliot, 2020).

To provide a balanced and objective view of sexual offending this chapter provides a review of some of the existing literature that surrounds the subject of online sexual coercion of children. Much of the literature is linked to other aspects of sexual offending or online offending. It becomes more limited when just considering the online sexual coercion of children. For this reason, the literature review initially takes a broad view of sexual offending and then narrows its focus to the fewer available pieces of research that linked directly to the research subject (2021). It starts by examining terminology and the law. It then reviews the knowledge around sexual offending, and grooming. The focus then turns to Internet based offending before looking at victimology and finally the research subject – the online sexual coercion of children.

2.2 Terminology

The terminology used in considering the illegal sexual images of children is varied and has changed over the years. It lacks standardisation. Examples from different pieces of literature are listed below.

Child Pornography (Elliot & Beech, 2009; ICMEC, 2016)

Sexually Explicit Material involving Children (SEMc) (Elliot, 2013)

Indecent Images Of Children (IIOC)(CEOP, 2013)

Child Sexual Abuse Material (ICMEC, 2018) (Interpol,

Child Abuse Material – (CAM) (Interpol, 2016; European cybercrime centre, 2015)

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command provide how they use the term Indecent Images of Children as "the term child pornography is seen to benefit child sex abusers. It implies "legitimacy and compliance on the part of the victim" (CEOP 2012, p.15). Despite organisations and academics using their own preferred terminology, the reference to sexual images of children from organisations across the world points to a global trend of Internet offending against children.

This abundance of terminology is further apparent when considering the subject of this research – the online sexual coercion/blackmail of children. Blackmail is one of the legislative structures used in the prosecution of sexually coercive offences, but different phraseology is used to describe such offending behaviour. One of the most common is that of sextortion. In 2016, an FBI agent defined sextortion as "a serious crime that occurs when someone threatens to distribute your private and sensitive material if you don't provide them with images of a sexual nature, sexual favours or money" (FBI 2016, p.1). Although sextortion has no legal definition in the UK, the use of the term has been widely adopted and is used to describe the online sexual extortion of Internet users, it includes both adults and children. The National Crime Agency attributes the term sextortion to Webcam Blackmail (NCA, 2017). The phrase is used by media, academia and enforcement agencies (Webb, 2014) and its use now seems widespread. Similar to child pornography, use of the term sextortion is said to encourage reductionist thinking as it does not recognise the true attributes of the crime and the deadly consequences it has with children (Europol, 2015). The term can also cause confusion around the style of offending as it can also be committed against adults and children. Consequently, the use of the term Online Sexual Coercion and Extortion of Children (OSCEC) is encouraged (Europol, 2017), with the belief that coercion is far more encompassing than extortion. This does little to clarify a definition rich environment. These definitions become vital though when it comes to prosecution as legislation follows a series of formal definitions which need to be clearly evidenced in the criminal justice process.

2.3 Law

To understand the legal perspective of criminal actions, this section will examine some of the statute commonly in use in the UK to prosecute those who offend online against children. It becomes clear that it is not just the law in the UK that is relevant. The online sexual coercion of children finds victims and offenders wherever the Internet reaches. The activity occurs across national boundaries (Wittes, 2016). Within the UK, there is currently no specific statute to criminalise sextortion; other legislation such as possession of indecent images, malicious communications, sexual communication with a child, or blackmail may be used to prosecute those who offend dependent on the facts of each case. It will be seen in this chapter that inconsistent law, sentencing policies, and geographical boundaries make the prevention and detection of crime more difficult. This does not mean that it is impossible to prosecute an offence, it merely means it is more difficult to accomplish than if it were a crime committed

within the legal jurisdiction of the investigating authority. With no specific law applicable to the online sexual coercion of children one of the most common to be used is that of illegal image possession or creation which the next section focuses on.

2.3.1 Indecent Images of children

Within the UK, two main pieces of legislation are used to prosecute those involved in the supply and possession of indecent images of children. Both acts were written prior to the widespread availability of the Internet and except for some minor modifications concerning pseudo-photographs and age limits, have proved resilient and effective for law enforcement in the age of the Internet. This provides an indication that legislation can be applicable and transferable even when new methods of criminality evolve. Section 160 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 creates the offence of possession of an indecent photograph (or pseudo photograph) of a child. The offence carries the maximum sentence of five years imprisonment. Although similar, Section 1 of the Protection of Children Act 1978 targets those individuals whose possession of indecent images is closer to causing harm to the child. It penalises those who take or permit to be taken, possess with intent to distribute, or publish indecent photographs of children. This offence carries the higher sentence of up to ten years imprisonment to reflect the greater severity of being part of the creation or distribution chain of indecent images. These two pieces of legislation have proved to be life changing for many perpetrators. After UK authorities acted on information from the Federal Bureau of Investigation at the end of the 20th century where the personal details for thousands of Internet payment transactions were passed on to local law enforcement agencies. Coming under the operational name of "Avalanche" in the USA and "Ore" in the UK, approximately 35,000 individual transactions were identified worldwide made to a website believed to be involved in hosting indecent images of children. It resulted in many arrests of perpetrators from perceived respectable backgrounds (Da Castell & Kelly, 2012). The indecent image legislation proved to be devastating in many respects. Once it is used against a perpetrator it tends to consign them to having the paedophile label, being beyond redemption and thus socially excluded (Gavin, 2005). This has shown to be the case whether a finding of guilt is forthcoming or not. Public opinion can be fuelled by media reports and lead to the vilification of a person.

Coercing sexual images from a child can be accomplished by using a similar process to that used in grooming (Wittes et al., 2016). Craven defined this as

> "A process by which a person prepares a child, significant adults and the environment for the abuse of this child. Specific goals include gaining access to the child, gaining the child's compliance and maintaining the child's secrecy to avoid disclosure. This process serves to

strengthen the offender's abusive pattern, as it may be used as a means of justifying or denying their actions" (Craven et al.2006, p297).

Missing from this definition was the understanding of what would constitute a child. Whilst it could be considered a petty criticism, as far as the law in the UK is concerned, this is a matter of importance as it is can be perfectly legal to groom an adult.

2.3.2 The age of a child

Within the UK, legislation generally protects a person under the age of 18 from harm. But between the ages of 16-18 the degree of protection varies dependent on the legislation involved. For example, The Children's Act of 1978 outlaws taking, publishing, production, and distribution of indecent images of persons under 18, unless you are married to them and they are over 16. Section 67 of the Serious Crime Act only prohibits sexual communication with a child up to the age of 16. Section 160 of the Criminal Justice act 1988 creates an offence to possess an indecent image of a person under the age of 18. Further confusion is added when taking a global view of sexual abuse. The legal age for a person to have consensual sex in the UK is 16, in France it is 15, in Portugal 14. When prosecuting domestic crimes differing legal definitions/age restrictions are of no relevance, this changes when the crime occurs across international borders. Differences regarding age restrictions can impact on whether a prosecution is viable (Wittes et al., 2016).

The Sexual Offences Act (SOA) 2003 changed the pre-existing legislative acts and introduced some new statutes. Section 15 of the SOA 2003 created the offence of meeting a child following sexual grooming, an offence that can be initiated in the online world but is finalised in the physical world (Section 15 SOA, 2003). A person commits the offence if they are over the age of 18 and meet or travel with the intention of meeting a person under 16 with whom they have communicated with the intention of committing a relevant (sexual) offence. The communication for the grooming may be committed online or through some other means, so it is used in a number of scenarios. Sections 48, 49 and 50 of the SOA 2003 further create the offences of causing, inciting, controlling, arranging and facilitating child pornography. It is not stipulated whether this should be a digital or physical picture; it could be either. The explanatory notes to this legislation outline "a person is involved in pornography if an indecent image is recorded" (SOA 2003, S51). The legislation also utilises the phrase 'child pornography' which is now considered politically incorrect (CEOP, 2013), but is a legally defined term in statute. More recent legislation in the form of the Serious Crime Act (SCA) 2015 provides the offence of sexual communication with a child (Section 67 SCA, 2015). It states that it is an offence if an individual is over 18 and

for the purposes of sexual gratification communicates with a child aged 16 or under in a sexual manner or in a way to encourage the child to communicate in a sexual manner. This offence carries a maximum penalty of two years (Serious Crime Act, 2015). This offence, similar to most of the law discussed thus far, is not Internet specific. This legislation forms just a small part of some of that commonly used within the UK to prosecute sexual offences committed against children. The global context of coercive sexual offences against children indicates that offenders and victims are frequently in different countries, most have differing legislative structures (Wittes et al., 2016).

2.3.3 International Borders

In recognition of differing legislative structures, guidelines have been published advising on definitions, legislation and policy. The United Nations (UN), to which 193 member states subscribe, highlighted a lack of consistency shown in legislation and policy by member states, believing it hinders any response (UN, 2015). In 2006, 95 countries did not have any specific legislation to address the online sexual abuse of children; 35 of these countries still did not have it in 2016 (International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC, 2016), and Afghanistan and Pakistan had no specific legislation that related to indecent images of children. In an effort to work more effectively with governments and organisations around the world to tackle child sexual abuse, model legislation was developed to implement with the relevant partner countries (ICMEC, 2016). Discussing law enforcement on the Internet, Kierkgaard (2008) explained how individual nations must apply their own legislation which may differ to that in others. This creates a disparity which can make some activities illegal in one country but not in another. Whilst steps are being taken to address legal and procedural enforcement differences with a more standardised framework (UN, 2015; ICMEC, 2016). The uptake of criminalisation of sexual images of children in some countries has been slow, and there remains a variety of differing legislation from country to country. Whilst this does not make prevention and enforcement impossible, it has the effect of slowing down, and placing obstacles in the way of progress.

2.3.4 Blackmail

This research focuses on the online blackmail/extortion/coercion of children to obtain sexualised images from them. Each of the aforementioned terms appear similar to the other.

The Cambridge Online Dictionary (2020) define the terms as:

- Blackmail – "the act of getting money from people of forcing them to do something by threating to tell a secret of theirs or to harm them"

- Extortion – "the act of getting something, especially money, by force or threats"
- Coercion – "the use of force to persuade someone to do something that they are unwilling to do" (Cambridge online dictionary, 2020)

Placing these words into the context of online sexual coercion, the definitions point to an activity where psychological pressure is used against children to force them into sexual activity, providing sexualised images, or maintaining their silence about having done so. Throughout this thesis, words such as blackmail, coercion, and extortion should be considered as interchangeable when used within the context of sextortion-based activities to avoid confusion.

This laissez-faire approach is not however possible in legal contexts, clear definitions are required to prove criminal offences. UK law defines blackmail under section 21 of the Theft Act of 1968. An act that was created over 50 years ago to prosecute crime relating to the appropriation of property, fraud and blackmail (Theft Act, 1968). Its age is such that it was created prior to the Internet but is still applicable now in online and offline environments.

The Theft Act defines blackmail as -

"with a view to gain for himself or another or with intent to cause loss to another, he makes any unwarranted demand with menaces" (Theft Act 1968, s21).

Gain and loss referred to are defined as -

"gain or loss in money or other property" (Theft Act 1968, s34).

Without a material gain (or loss), there can be no offence of blackmail (CPS, 2019), ruling out demands made for sexual acts or services in the physical world as no property or money is generally involved. However, in the online world, if the gain were a video file of a sexual act, the offence could be committed. The law can be further complicated by offenders working across legal jurisdictions due to differences in definitions or legislation not existing at all in some cases (ICMEC, 2016).

In an example from 2006 (Crown Prosecution Service, 2006; The Guardian, 2006), a perpetrator posing in chat rooms as a younger male, planted trojan viruses onto the computers of victims to identify embarrassing material. Threats were made to expose the material unless victims sent sexual images. Although prosecuted in the UK, victims were based in the UK and Canada. It provides an example where cross border cases can cause complication as the definitions of blackmail and extortion vary slightly between the two jurisdictions.

The Canadian criminal code provides that –

"Every one commits extortion who, without reasonable justification or excuse and with intent to obtain anything, by threats, accusations, menaces or violence induces or attempts to induce any person, whether or not he is the person threatened, accused or menaced or to whom violence is shown, to do anything or cause anything to be done"(Sec.346 Canadian criminal code)

The Canadian penal code provides a statute-based definition of Extortion which is not available within the UK. Within the UK a prosecution would have to be a theft-based offence or one of blackmail. As no statute-based form of extortion exists. This could also mean no crime, or a different crime is committed within in a different country. A problem that does not just apply to online blackmail but all cross-border offences. To address this, guiding principles are issued by the Crown Prosecution Service in the UK to assist this process to decide where and who should prosecute (CPS, 2013). Additionally, police in the UK have policy documents (National Policing Improvement Agency, 2012) advising on lead jurisdictions.

A discussion of the law used in online child sex offences could potentially be far-reaching and very lengthy. This section has only briefly examined a small amount, and it has not considered many other acts of legislation, such as those surrounding computer misuse, malicious communications, obscene publications or harassment. Whilst the law appears to be plentiful, it can become confused by the international element of Internet offending. Japan only legislated against sexual images of children in 2014, some other countries are still to do so (BBC, 2014; ICMEC, 2016). The global nature of the Internet ensures that criminal activities do not adhere to the strict borders of a single countries' jurisdiction.

2.3.5 Investigation and prosecution

This section examines some of the background data, reports, and responsibilities of investigating online sexual crime in the UK. It starts with the comments of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies crime audit (HMIC, 2016) which showed at a time of low levels of crime, there was a "risk that some crime was being displaced, and is now taking place online" (HMIC, 2016, p.5), with 11.4% of the sexual incidents examined having an online element, of which a significant proportion involved children. It concluded children and young people were progressively experiencing online sexual crime, which occurred through the use of commonly available smartphone apps. The inspectorate was of the opinion that current processes failed to represent the scale of online sex crime (in Scotland specifically) and potentially many other constabularies (HMIC, 2016). Recommendations made included creating processes to label cybercrime incidents, enabling an assessment and an appropriate

response. It was highlighted that the crime recording processes was not able to establish the scale of cybercrime. In layman's terms, the current processes were not particularly suitable in identifying the scale of the problem. Of 11.4% of reported sexual cyber-incidents nearly 75% resulted in a crime report. The majority of reports came from commonly used social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter (HMIC, 2016). Reporting a significant proportion of the incidents involved those under 18, it raised concerns that the most popular social media networks were "recurring vehicles for sexual crime" (HMIC, 2016, p.22).

The National Crime Agency's mission as published on its website is "protecting the public by targeting those and pursuing those who pose the greatest risk to the UK" (NCA, 2020). It takes leadership for investigating and enforcing the law in relation to child sexual exploitation and abuse. This is in addition to other responsibilities it holds. Its top five reported threats to the UK from serious and organised crime in 2016 (the time of the HMIC report) were:

1. Child sexual exploitation and abuse
2. Organised immigration crime
3. Cyber crime
4. Firearms
5. High-end money laundering (NCA 2016, p.3)

Of these five key strategic areas, at least two of the crime threats to the UK are rooted in online sexual offending. The NCA's strategic assessment of 2015 reveals child sexual exploitation and cybercrime feature as high priority crime types (NCA, 2015). Concerns which were raised in the 2009 Strategic overview (CEOP, 2009) where issues of extortion of children on the Internet were highlighted. The strategic assessment published by the NCA in 2020 maintains its focus on Child sexual abuse (NCA, 2020). It states: "it is highly likely that the scale of the threat from child sexual abuse continues to increase" (NCA 2020, p.17). They estimate there are 300,000 people in the UK representing a sexual threat to children, reporting there were 94,342 contacts received by Stop it Now in 2019 by people with concerns about their own sexual attractions, an increase of 219% from the previous year (NCA, 2020). The various reports from the NCA highlight the problem of online child sexual abuse as an enduring problem that shows no signs of abating.

The number of offences for possessing indecent images of children in the UK increased steadily from 2768 offences (2006) to 3849 offences (2013), an increase of 71.9%, with sexual grooming offences doubling from 186 in 2004/5 to 373 in

2012/2013 (McGuire, 2013). Prosecution data (Table 1) shows a steady increase in the indecent image's crime types until 2017, after which a reduction is seen (CPS, 2019). Revised charging guidelines were issued by the CPS at this juncture to streamline proceedings, this effectively reduced the number of offences charged per individual. Comparison of data over this period is thus difficult. There are currently no data available that indicate offences where children are sexually coerced online.

Table 1-Indecent image prosecutions in the UK

	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19
Possession of an indecent photograph of a child S160, CJA 1988	4241	4117	4532	3885	3849	4265	4820	5248	5141	2357	1568
Possession of a prohibited image of a child	0	0	21	179	394	534	631	625	971	769	729
Making an indecent photograph of a child	13454	13652	15768	14570	13596	14443	14518	14930	13324	10504	7770
Distributing an indecent photograph of a child	931	804	670	695	803	907	1318	1422	1155	1248	920
Showing indecent photographs of children	258	137	410	333	294	224	292	319	209	176	109
Publishing an advertisement likely to suggest the advertiser distributes or shows indecent photographs of children	13	2	3	1	1	0	1	1	3	1	0

2.4 The Internet and pornography

This section examines how sexual content and the Internet have established a symbiotic association, with the Internet hosting sexual content that is quick and easy to find.

It was estimated in 2006 that pornographic websites formed 12% of all websites (Ropelato, 2007). It was further estimated that up to 30% of Internet content may be pornography (Buchholz, 2019). Search engines receive 68 million pornographic searches daily (Silver, 2018). In 2017, it was represented that the website Pornhub averaged 81 million visitors per day, with 75% of its traffic originating from mobile devices (Silver, 2018). The usage statistics associated with online pornography are varied and often inconsistent. Provided the content does not include children, violence or extreme material, the viewing of online pornography is considered legal in the UK (CPS, 2019). Cooper described the sexual content of the Internet as a "triple A engine" (Cooper, 1998, p.187) with the A's representing accessibility, affordability and

anonymity. It provides an environment for hosting pornography and sexual content with the benefits of instant and 24-hour access, with little or no cost associated to viewing the content, and a perception that the users of the content remain anonymous (Cooper, 1998).

This brings risks in the form of the availability and acceptance of sexual content (Howitt & Sheldon, 2007). Barak and King (2000) discuss the enrichment of human functioning that the Internet provides but point to the risks it creates of facilitating sexual exploitation. Making the transition from viewing pornography to sexual images of children is not that easy or straightforward (Howitt & Sheldon, 2007). Entering search parameters related to online child sexual abuse into commonly known search engines now highlights police successes in bringing people to justice for possessing indecent images of children around the world[1]. Performing such an internet search results in the search engine advising the user that accessing sexual images of children is illegal. The search algorithms of service providers were revised following governmental intervention (Dixon, 2013). Despite this intervention, there did not appear to be any obvious reduction in the prosecution of possessing indecent images (Table 1). Viewing child pornography online requires a degree of knowledge of the tools to be used, and the location of files (Howitt & Sheldon, 2007). This is not the case however for people who choose to communicate directly with children via social media. Mobile phones with video streaming capabilities have enabled the sharing of self-generated indecent images via apps and media capable websites such as social media. Such activities can be considered as a natural part of child sexual development and risk taking of a child, or they can be as a result of grooming (CEOP, 2013). In the USA from a random sample of 3715 children aged 13-18 years old it is presented that the sending of sexual images or sexting occurred amongst 7% of them, and females were more likely to share these images than males (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2014). Of those sending sexual images 31% sent them to a contact they knew only from online activity. The participants who sent images of themselves were more likely to use substances, less likely to have high self–esteem, or more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2014).

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[1] Google search 13/10/2202 -
https://www.google.com/search?q=child+pornography&andoq=child+pornography&andaqs=chrome..69i57.5017j0j1&andsourceid=chrome&andie=UTF-8

The Internet is "a cause" of the problem when considering online child sexual abuse rather than just being the medium through which it is committed (Wortley, 2012, p21), it is argued that the Internet fuels this crime by the quantity of illicit material that is made available. Prior to the internet's availability it is presented that child pornography trafficking was being actively reduced in USA in the 1970's to the point where it was believed to have been virtually eliminated. Wortley blames the existence of online sexual images of children on the opportunities of access provided by the Internet.

It is further presented that although males might not sexually prefer children they might be drawn to engage sexually if the correct conditions exist (Wortley, 2012). Considering online sexual offending from this angle provides a wealth of further preventative opportunities which can be easier (and cheaper) to accomplish than the more person-centric ones that are borne out of the traditional sexual offending theories and subsequent treatment programmes. Whilst they do not tackle the core problems of sexual attraction faced by the individuals, they target the 'opportunity' aspect of the crime in a more global manner. It takes the emphasis away from the individual and focuses on removing the ease with which the crime can occur. It could be argued that it will drive offending 'underground' or cause a shift in the manner in which offending will occur. However, it is also possible that such prevention will provide less opportunity to create victims by those intent on offending online. This preventative view is one currently shared from within the governing structure of the UK, as well as other developed nations. In the UK, it takes the form of a consultative proposal to introduce protection from the online harms (Woodhouse, 2021) in a parliamentary document. Giving consideration to a regulatory framework which encompasses companies who "host user-generated content which can be accessed by users in the UK" (Woodhouse, 2021, p.16) or "facilitate public or private online interaction between service users one or more of whom is in the UK" (Woodhouse, 2021, p. 17). Whilst such a regulatory framework is to be encouraged, the global nature of the Internet creates a danger that a UK-centric view threatens becoming slightly parochial if care is not taken in the production of such a framework. It was noted in this report that the IWF and partners had taken action to prevent 8.8 million attempts to access child sexual abuse images online from within the UK in a month-long period during a COVID-19 "lockdown" period. This statistic alone raises questions such as why some form of positive or preventative action is not taken against those seeking sexual abuse images at the consumer level.

2.5 Sexual offending against children

This section examines some of the main theoretical views of child sexual offending. There are numerous viewpoints that provide opinion as to what causes an individual to sexually offend against children which date back many years.

One multivariate model provided that four preconditions must be satisfied before a person can go on to offend sexually against children (Finklehor, 1984). In summary these are:

- Emotional Congruence – A motivation to sexually abuse a child is required, this is usually an emotional need meaning sexual arousal towards the child is possible.

- Overcome internal inhibitions – It is necessary to rationlise the thoughts of committing sexual offences such as being arrested or prosecuted.

- Overcome external inhibitions - Access to the child to commit sexual acts is needed in an environment away from the protection of parents or other adults.

- Overcome resistance of child – The victim may naturally be reluctant to become involved in sexual activities with the offender. This must be eroded and undermined to minimise resistance.

Many of these theories also produce follow-up research and divergences which are tested and analysed subsequent research. This makes the pool of literature for sexual offending large and at times contrasting. It was established pre-Internet and has grown to include Internet based offending. This volume of literature has been recognised and attempts made to consolidated it. Ward and Beech (2005) produced a framework that integrated many of these theories. It examined the thinking around some of the causative factors of sexual offending trying to bring them under one umbrella. It suggested there are three factors which interact. When biological, ecological niche, and neuropsychological factors interact dynamically, sexual offending can occur, generating what is described as "deviant arousal" (Ward & Beech, 2006, p.50).

Typically, factors such as emotion regulation problems, cognitive distortions and social difficulties can contribute to sexual offending. For example, those showing social difficulties such as preoccupied attachment styles were potentially more likely to sexually abuse children (Ward & Beech, 2006). Other causative factors point to cognitive distortions where abusers view children as sexual beings with the belief that sex does not cause them harm (Ward & Keenan, 1999). This allows them to believe offending is acceptable.

A further review into sexual offending theory by Seto (2018) recognised that the different models of behaviour demonstrated similarities. It identified that sexual

arousal towards children was a common feature, but its importance and development were subject to differing views. It also identified that "cognitive and social deficits" (Seto, 2018, p.91) contributed towards offending, and that internal and external inhibitors needed to be subdued for men to sexually offend against children. Seto's critique believed that the models did not incorporate the progress of research into more recent criminological understanding, nor did it test the theories in their entirety on large samples. They had mostly been tested in smaller male samples. This resulted in the development of the motivation-facilitation model (Seto, 2018), it integrated previous sexual offending theory into wider criminology research. Within this model motivations such as paraphilias or compulsive sexual behaviours are contributors to sexual offending, and they combine with trait and state factors to facilitate it. These trait factors are relatively stable factors which increase the likelihood of a person committing anti-social acts. Examples include poor self-regulation or anti-social beliefs. State factors are more dynamic and created out of strong emotions, emanating sometimes from external factors such as alcohol or drug use. Seto's (2018) model also included the online offending styles such as indecent image possession. With the creation of the Internet came a separation in thinking as to whether the typology of offenders had changed. The next section will examine the perceived differences in situational offending typologies.

2.5.1 Online and offline offender typology

The Internet caused a migration of pornography and sexual offending to the online environment. Previously it had only occurred in the physical world. This section examines these two aspects of online and contact offending together with the offender typology. Comparisons in a meta-analysis of 27 different studies by Babchisin, et al., (2010) try to understand differences that are present between online and offline offenders. This study surmised that online offenders showed a tendency to be younger (38.6 vs. 43.6 years) than their offline counterparts (Babchisin, et al., 2010). A later study gave that the mean age was of online offenders as 33.6 years (Kloess et al., 2014). More offline offenders indicated they had been subject to physical abuse (40.8% vs. 24.4%), but the differences in sexual abuse experienced were negligible. This meta-analysis also presented that online offenders showed a greater degree of victim empathy than offline offenders by reporting a Cohen's *d* value of 0.56. It was further presented that offline offenders have less sexual deviancy (Babischin, et al., 2010) compared to online offenders - sexual deviancy was measured using penile

plethysmography (d=-0.57). It was also represented that offline offenders would display more cognitive distortions and displayed a greater emotional identification with children (Babischin, et al., 2010). The aggregation and analysis of the 27 different studies suggested some evidence that a different psychology drove the online offender. Bourke and Hernandez's (2009) US based study claimed that on sentencing 26% (n=40) of participants with a conviction for indecent images of children had a prior history of contact offending against children. The remaining 74% (n=115) claimed they had not committed such offences. But following their involvement in a sexual offences treatment program (SOTP), participants were again asked whether they had committed contact offences, 85% (n=131) declared that they had committed contact offences. Those who had initially denied contact offences disclosed an average of 8.7 victims each. In considering an online offenders' risk of committing physical contact offences, Bourke and Hernandez (2009) delivered a conclusion that hidden contact offending occurs with online offenders. This study did however receive criticism; it had been utilised to pass stricter sentences in US courts, and it was suggested the participants of the study had an incentive to admit to offending as part of their SOTP (Seto et al., 2011). The intimation was that this could have affected the reliability of the results,

A different study cited that 55% of males charged with offences relating to indecent images of children are also charged with contact offences (Eke et al., 2011). This is higher than suggested by Bourke and Hernandez (26%). The rate for reoffending for those convicted of indecent image-based offences was established at 32% (n=541), with 6.3% (n=34) being charged with a contact sexual offence after their initial offence. Of these 2.4% (n=13) were charged with historical sex offences and 3.9% for recidivism offences (n=21) (Eke et al., 2011). Offenders who produced their own indecent images were also more likely commit contact offenders, and those that groomed children online are also more likely to commit contact offences (Long et al., 2012). These claims were based on a study conducted of 120 males, 60 of whom were convicted for possessing indecent images alone, and 60 of whom were convicted of possessing indecent images who had a previous contact offence against a child. Research of online, and contact offending can be dependent on many variables. The accessing of online child pornography could also be used to reduce the urge to commit contact offending or prevent offending by offering a diversion (Taylor & Qualye, 2003).

Concentrating more specifically towards online offences. A multivariate study which examined behaviour, demographics, clinical and social data from the cases of 51 people convicted of internet-initiated sexual offenses concluded that the offenders came from a variety of backgrounds and careers (Briggs et al., 2011). There was a high (86%) level of employment amongst them, and a low level of prior arrests, with 94% of those studied experiencing their first arrest. From the sample of 51 people, 58.8% (n=30) were described as contact driven, and 41.2% (n=21) fantasy driven. The non-contact chat room offenders were categorised as "less severe" (Briggs et al., 2011, p.72) than those who committed physical offences, although caveats were placed around the limited scope of the study and the sample basis. A sample in which 90% of the convictions were as a result of police initiated covert activity, a factor that the authors of the study felt may have introduced unknown factors to the results (Briggs et al., 2011).

In the eyes of the Schedule 3 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, all those convicted or cautioned for possession of indecent images are classified as a 'sexual offender'. It does not matter whether they have offended online or offline. This label brings with it a gamut of restrictions in the form of sexual offender registrations, these can be enforced against the individual (HMSO, 2003). It further attracts social vilification (Thomas, 2015) from the media and society at large, irrespective of whether offending was committed online or not.

In summary, it is presented that some of those with convictions for online offending involving indecent images may also pose a risk to committing physical offences against children. It is also opined that the availability of online indecent images may divert some people from contact offending. The presentation of facts suggesting that chat room or online only offenders may present less of a threat does not appear to provide a firm grounding on which reliable policy decisions or risk assessments can be made.

Creating two clear categories of contact and fantasy driven offenders who were labelled as less severe could be considered as a dangerous categorisation. It does not cater for those whose sexual interests are changing or progressing as per Quayle and Taylor's framework (2003), and it could also place those who may be responsible for undetected contact offences into a lower risk category.

Offenders can and do commit both contact and fantasy type offences (Elliot et al., 2013; Bourke and Hernandez 2009; Long et al., 2013). Briggs et al. (2011) concluded that 50% of the participants studied were classified as having a personality disorder, with avoidant and narcissistic disorder being the most common, and Anti-social the least common. The motivations of chat room offenders differed in both their aims and their use of the Internet. The fantasy driven offender tended to use it as a "sexual medium to connect with teens for the purpose of cybersex" (Briggs et al. 2011, p.88) and the contact offender as a means to locate and communicate with victims to facilitate offline offending. Fantasy driven online offenders use the Internet to distract them from uncomfortable realities in their own lives such as depression or anxiety (Quayle et al., 2006).

A dated study by Mitchell et al. (2010) in the USA which has not been updated or replicated in the same depth, collected arrest data for reported sexual crime arrests against minors (n=7010). It reported that 33% (n=2322) involved the use of a Social Networking Site in the commission of the offence[2] in 2006. Of the total number the arrests (n=7010), 7% (n=503) identified victims where SNS's were utilised in the commission of offences. The SNSs was used to initiate the relationship in 50% of the cases (Mitchell et al., 2010). It is likely that these statistics have changed with the take up of mobile/smart phones. However, as discussed by Quayle (2016), pinpointing any form of accurate representation of a particular type of sexual offending against children remains difficult. Different surveys and counting methods around the world have ensured inconsistency.

Social Networking Sites are used in a variety of ways in the offending process, including:

- Relationship initiation
- A form of communication with victim
- A means of finding out information about the victim
- A means to transfer imagery of victim/s or other indecent images
- Contact friends of victim/s
- Use by police in covert operations or evidence gathering

Offenders using SNSs were found to be generally younger than those who did not, and they were more likely to be single (Mitchell et al., 2010). Although SNS offenders

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[2] Online offence included – 1.relationship initiated online, 2.offender who was family member used internet to communicate with victim to further victimization, 3.Internet undercover investigation, 4.Child pornography received or distributed, 5. Child pornography found related to computer use.

were less likely to be registered sex offenders and produce or possess child pornography than non SNS offenders, the difference was however small. Whilst SNSs were used in a large number of sex offences against minors they did not represent a risk greater than any other online sites, with the number of SNS related arrests for child sex offences being small in comparison to their use by children. It was also found that cases of SNS use resulted in more interactions between the victim and offender and were more likely to result in a face-to-face meeting (Mitchell et al., 2010). Having examined the differences between on and offline offending, the next section will focus on how victims are prepared for sexual abuse.

2.5.2 The grooming process

The Internet has been used by those wishing to sexually abuse children since its inception in the late 20th Century (Durkin, 1997). Online sexual offenders have been labelled with names such as "chat room offenders" (Briggs et al., 2011), "groomers" (Webster et al., 2012) or "solicitation offenders" (Babchisin et al., 2010). They are all terms for those who commit online sexual offences against children. The common factor being the initiation of a dialogue by an adult with a child online. Upon starting a chat with a victim, the perpetrator encourages a child to use a private means of communication away from the public messaging forums (Leander et al., 2008). This has become easier since the number of children owning smartphones has increased (Briggs et al., 2011). The offender's motivations to establish communications with the victim are divided into two subcategories – contact and fantasy driven (Briggs et al., 2011). The latter focuses on obtaining satisfaction/gratification from the online only relationship.

Online groomers are categorised based on nine "typological dimensions" (Webster et al., 2012); these reflected factors such as previous sexual offending, offence supportive beliefs, how contact is made and sustained. The three main categories of grooming types were listed as:

1. Intimacy seeking – Invest time and effort to build a relationship with the child aimed at a later physical meeting. No previous convictions for sex offending. Do not have indecent images, objective is to develop a relationship. Offence supportive beliefs – viewed contact with child as a consenting relationship.

2. Adaptable – Use a variety of online personas to suit the perceived situation. Tend to have previous convictions for offending against children, some resort to indecent images of children, but not necessarily intent on a meeting in

person. Offence supportive beliefs – Viewed victims as mature sexual beings and capable withdrawing consent if they wished to.

3. Hypersexual – Predominantly discussed sexual themes without the aim to meet the victim in real life. Many with previous convictions for image or contact based sexual offences with children. Most have extensive libraries of indecent images of children. Contact with children would be "highly sexualised" and escalates quickly. Offence supportive beliefs – Dehumanised victims.

The fantasy element of offending is included within the maintenance factors of offending rather than forming a separate category of its own (Webster et al., 2012). This particular model leans heavily on the diversity of grooming behaviours and highlights that the behaviour of the victim can impact significantly on the outcome of the online contact and subsequent offences committed (Webster et al., 2012). Translating this into the context of an online coercive offence could indicate that the outcome of the transaction could be very much in the hands of the victims – i.e., their own engagement with an online offender can dictate if they ultimately go on to be victimised or not. Offenders refine their methods based on previous successful transactions (Webster et al., 2011). The progression of offending is not a linear process, but one that is cyclical with waves of progression and relapse dependent on factors influencing the offender's life (Webster et al., 2011). Briggs et al. (2011) separate out the contact and fantasy element of offending into mutually exclusive categories, suggesting that chat room offender's behavioural patterns emanate from social isolation, and dysphoric moods. These are also driving factors in the Intimacy seeking category offered by Webster et al. (2011). Thus, the speed and severity of online offending appears to be dependent on any number of factors occurring within the offender's own life.

O'Connell (2003) examined the methods used by online offenders by presenting as a socially isolated child to conduct research in chat rooms. The resulting content provided a sociolinguistic analysis of how children were groomed online. The steps in the online chat room grooming process were represented as:

1. Friendship forming stage
2. Relationship forming stage
3. Risk assessment stage
4. Exclusivity stage
5. Sexual stage (O'Connell, 2003, p.8-9).

The first two stages described represent the point where an offender would initiate contact and build an initial relationship with the child. The two stages are closely linked and allow the adult to get to know the child. In the third-risk assessment stage the offender asks questions to test the likeliness of their detection. Anyone who presents a risk can be rejected before progressing to the exclusivity stage where it is presented that the offender and victim build a special relationship where they have secrets that are only known to them (O'Connell, 2003). The sexual stage is largely dependent on factors such as the offender's motivations, the child's inhibitions, and the responses they give to the increasingly sexual requests from the offender. O'Connell divides the sexual stage into different categories, describing how the offending adult can try to push the child into complying with their requests using a range of tactics such as "inviting, emotionally blackmailing, and overt coercion" (O'Connell, 2003, p.11-12). The references to coercive tactics hint that they have been used in online offending for some time. Factors driving the conversation such as fantasy enactment, obtaining sexual images, or the desired duration of the relationship from the offender's perspective, as well as the reluctance of the victim can dictate the speed and aggressiveness of the communications. In this research there was a recognition that there were many variances and nuances to the manner in which the adult would act, many of which were dictated by the responses of the victim (O'Connell, 2003). The various pieces of research show that the responses given by a victim can drive the escalation of the offence and whether or not the offender moves on to a different victim.

To progress an online conversation into a sexual one, perpetrators use explicit material when talking to the victims to sexually stimulate the conversations, with the introduction of sexual material having a normalising effect on the victims, making it easier for the offender to engage the victim in sexual behaviours (Kloess et al., 2015). Similar to O'Connell's (2003) study Kloess et al. identified that security measures seemed to be designed into some of the conversations. The offender checks with the victim to ensure they have not told anybody about their conversations, and they are the gender they state. It was not clear whether the security measures were used as a result of the subjects of the study having had prior convictions/arrests, if they engaged in communities that would share provide peer learning, or for another reason.

In Kloess et al.'s (2015) study victims were approached via easily accessible forums (chat room, SNS or dating websites) where they were subsequently engaged sexually.

The analysis of the chats allowed identification of common themes of discussion between the offender and victim. These were categorised as follows:

- Directness in initiating online sexual activity – Initiation of online sexual activity to incite victims to engage in mutual webcam usage and sexual behaviours.

- Pursuing Sexual Information – Specific questions and conversation initiated about victim's body parts, previous sexual experiences, likings and sexual practices.

- The next step – Conversation initiated in relation to physical meetings.

- Fantasy rehearsal – explicit statements and questions in relation to sexual contact offline, including the expounding of specific sexual behaviours and acts offenders and victims would engage in and perform, if they were to meet offline.

The wording used in the interactions is carefully selected to enhance and advance the experience for the adult's benefit. Using strategies such as flattery compliments or minimisation (Kloess et al. 2015) the conversation is progressed. The conversations possess elements of sexuality to ease them towards the offender's goal. The majority of offenders did not deceive victims into thinking they were not adults, but there was manipulation of age. Very little evidence was found of offenders misrepresenting themselves or adapting their own personas. It was suggested that this may be due to the abundance of potential victims making it unnecessary. It was further suggested that the offenders did not engage in a process where they attempted to form a relationship with the victim or believe that they were in one (Kloess et al., 2015). This study examined chat logs from five people with convictions for online offences, two had convictions for both online and offline offences, the other three just for online offences. The majority of the online interactions did not progress to physical meetings; similar to the findings from Briggs (2011) in that the subjects of study were content to engage in cyber sexual interactions. It was not clear however, whether this was because the subjects of study felt that the pre-conditions for a safe physical meeting were not satisfied, or whether they never intended to meet physically. As discussed, the offender can direct the conversation in a specific direction, but they are reliant on the victim's response. If the victim does not respond in the way desired, then the progression of the chat may be halted.

O'Connell (2003) made a number of strategic recommendations to lessen the incidence of online grooming:

1. Communication between product developers and Internet safety groups so new products are designed with child safety in mind.

2. Research programs to explore how new technologies are utilised in sexual offending, the impact they have on children, and the difficulties they bring to enforcement authorities.

3. Awareness training for children, parents, teachers, and the criminal justice sectors of the online risks to children.

4. A centralized reporting structure with only one central repository of information.

5. Test and evaluate current anti-grooming strategies to ensure they are effective.

6. In recognition of the difficulties of gathering prosecution evidence, design a process that allows for the capture of grooming evidence.

It was identified that there was no linked reporting network amongst enforcement and investigation units (4), which would potentially identify incidents with similarities, be it the Modus Operandi or offenders. In 2013 this was still largely the case (authors personal knowledge). Interviews with investigators (2017) that are not used as part of this study within the eastern and north western regions of the UK showed offences were investigated on a standalone basis without utilising a central/national repository for intelligence or crime recording. These interviews pointed to a difficulty in gathering evidence that suggested product developers and authorities were not working as closely as they could to prevent and enforce (as per points 1 and 6 above) when designing systems and applications. Without a process to identify grooming behaviour that occurs across different forums and regions it becomes more difficult to easily link series offences that arise as a result of repeated offending. In such circumstances, it is likely that this could raise both the chances of an individual becoming a victim and repeat offending. As the online sexual offender becomes more experienced in the grooming process, they may become increasingly able to recognise a potential victim. Failure of the hosting platform to identify and highlight the grooming behaviour can allow it to continue.

Within the next section on Problematic Internet Use, it is discussed how for those individuals who suffer addictive preoccupations, a 'perfect storm' of offending can be created.

2.6 Problematic Internet Use

Internet use can be addictive. It can be signified by symptoms such as preoccupation, mood changes, withdrawal, inter and intrapersonal conflicts (Griffiths, & Kuss, 2014). It is defined as "A behavioural addiction involving the excessive use of online applications and leading to detrimental impacts on individuals" (Griffiths & Kuss, 2014). Vaughan and Taylor (2006) present that the Internet can be used by sexual offenders as a distraction from negative emotional states, this can range from being bored, personal anxiety or a dissatisfaction experienced in life. The Internet provides a stimulus, which is found to be gratifying, thus removing, albeit temporarily the negative feelings. This stimulus can come in the form of sexual arousal and masturbation over images, video footage or online conversations. It provides an intensely positive feeling that fuels a further desire to embark on similar action. In effect it becomes addictive (Vaughan & Taylor 2006). Problematic or Pathological Internet Use (PIU) was adopted to describe Internet use which is excessive, and/or creates signs of intolerance or withdrawal when Internet usage is stopped (Brenner, 1997). PIU may not necessarily always involve committing crime, sexual or otherwise. Neither is it restricted to just being sexually compulsive. The disorder could equally apply to those with online gambling, gaming or other issues. It is described as problematic behaviour, which focuses on a specific online activity (Davis et al., 2001).

In the context of Internet use for sexual interests the Internet use can be classified on a scale ranging from normal to what is described as problematic (Cooper et al., 2000). This compulsivity of Internet use has been noticed in people who have not previously demonstrated any sexual compulsivity. Caused by feelings of vulnerability combined with the unique factors created by the Internet such as the vast supply of and ease of access to ingratiating material (Putnam, 2000). Cooper et al. (2000) created categories to classify Internet sexuality with three subgroups:

1. Recreational – inquisitive or occasional experimentation of gratification,
2. Compulsive – users with a compelling urge, and possibly suffer ramifications as a result, may have established patterns of unconventional sexual practices or paraphilias.
3. At risk – users who do not have a history of sexual compulsion but since starting to use the Internet for sexual purposes have encountered lifestyle problems as a result of their Internet use.

PIU results from problematic cognitions acting with other behaviours that either

strengthen or maintain the reaction (Davis et al., 2001). In short, psychopathological disorders such as depression or anxiety are worsened by the introduction of a stressor such as Internet pornography or gambling. These main proximal factors (cognitions) are those, which involve a low self-esteem on the part of the subject such as anxiety, loneliness, and depression. Once coupled with Internet use such as online pornography the subject receives an immediate stimulation or response. This then tends to lead to obsessive thoughts and behaviour in Internet use. Obsessive Internet use can then lead the individual to further retreat from society as a result of being unable to individually control the impulses created by the online activity (Davis et al., 2001).

It is argued that the theory behind PIU tends to focus on those who show problematic socialisation and relationship forming skills but ignores those that do not possess these aforementioned issues and show addiction to Internet use (Elliot & Beech, 2009). It was further concluded that certain temperaments and character traits were significant predictors of "excessive internet use" (Kaliszewska-Czeremska, 2011, p.136). The character traits found in excessive Internet use were typical of those found in personality disorders. Which led to the conclusion that "loss of control over one's behaviour in Internet users may occur in individuals who have immature or disordered personalities" (Kaliszewska-Czeremska, 2011, p.137), this suggested that Internet use is not the primary source of problems, but a catalyst for dysfunctional behaviour (Kaliszewska-Czeremska, 2011).

An underlying psychopathology is necessary for the symptoms of PIU to develop. Such conditions might include depression, substance dependence or anxiety. One of these conditions must be evident or have been in the past before a person would be vulnerable to PIU (Davis, 2001). Considering this within the environment of those with sexual interests in children, and to elucidate on some unclear conclusions such as those surrounding a lack of socialisation, a further theoretical model was created specific to the online sexual offender and escalating PIU. This suggested that when distal and proximal "setting events" (Taylor & Quayle 2003, p.178) such as socialisation issues, childhood sexual experiences, and problematic cognitions conjoined, it could lead to an escalation of PIU when using the Internet. This can be further exacerbated by the presence of factors such as anonymity, disinhibition, accessibility of fantasy[3], and/or cognitive/social factors[4].

The result of PIU can be a problematic escalation of increased immersion online, and

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[3] Factors which are not too dissimilar to Copper's "triple A engine" (Cooper et al. 2000)
[4] Examples include normalization of behaviour from interest groups or reduced social contact through excessive Internet use.

online sexual behaviours of increasing severity fuelled by the increased social isolation, validation of actions by others online, or sexual cognitions. It was noted that not all individuals progressed to offending, joint online communities, or physically offended against children. But those who did blamed the addictive qualities of the Internet for their personal actions as a way of rationlising their behaviour (Taylor & Quayle, 2003).

Offenders move through stages of involvement in their Internet use and offending with little intervention. This is fuelled by problematic cognitions about the self and the material being viewed (Taylor & Quayle, 2003). These cognitions can change if the internet user/offender moves from a passive viewer of images to engaging in other aspects of child sexual offending. For example, online communities assist in the development and coaching of Internet users to justify cognitions such as children enjoying engaging in sexual activities with adults online, or that having sex with children is justified (Taylor &, Quayle 2003). The increased social disengagement also further prevented the usual social inhibitions from intervening in the increasingly unlawful behaviour.

Whilst PIU provides an understanding behind the addictive nature of online sex offending and is described as one of the key proximal reasons for collection of indecent images of children (Elliot & Beech, 2009), the current lack of research makes it unclear whether this is also applicable within the blackmailing/sextortion environment or whether some other factor such as control provides a more powerful driver for the individual offender. The focus will now turn to Children's use of the Internet and examine some of the literature that exists highlighting their sexual abuse.

2.7 Children and online sexual abuse

A report from 2011 detailed how children aged between 9 to 16 years old used the Internet and examined the risks they faced. This information is now dated but provides one of the more comprehensive analysis that has not been replicated. Its baseline statistics claimed that 93% of children in the target group (aged 9-16 years) used the Internet weekly, and 60% of them use it daily (Livingstone et al., 2011). At that time, 59% of children had a social media profile, and of these 26% had a profile that was completely open and accessible to anyone. This report is now 10 years old (as of 2021), more recently Buckholz (2019) estimated that 71% of children aged 12-15 had social media profiles by the year 2019. The Office for National Statistics estimated that in 2019, 99% of UK households with children had Internet access (ONS, 2020). The EU-kids online report states that children aged 12-14 spend between two and a half to four hours online. Those in the age category of 15-16 years spend between three to four and a half hours online (Smahel et al., 2020)

It is claimed by Livingstone et al. (2011) that 40% of the parents whose children have seen sexual images online stated their children had not seen them and 56% of parents whose children who had received malicious communications from others believed their child had not been in receipt of them. It was further presented 52% of parents whose children had received messages of a sexual nature believed their children had not. A gap in child Internet activity and parental awareness was apparent. This same report revealed that just over a quarter (28%) of parents used technical means to limit, block, or restrict Internet activity. A similar amount (24%) tracked website use. It was also quoted that 30% of parents would not talk to their children about Internet usage. Of the children sampled, 13% outlined that they did not discuss Internet activity and use with parents. It was summarised that from a sample of over 25,000 children, between 3250 and 7500 do not talk with their parents about Internet activity.

The Internet has become more mobile, in the decade up to 2010 the majority of child usage was in the home, and schools were the second most popular browsing location (Livingstone et al., 2011). By 2017, 33% of 8-17 (n=1500) year old children had used Facebook or YouTube in the last hour, 25% had been on Shapchat, and 20% had used Instagram (UK Safer Internet Centre, 2017). The survey revealed that 70% of the child participants had viewed images they felt were not suitable for their age, and just under half stated that they had seen an image of somebody they knew being shared within the school or community that contained nude or almost nude content (UK Safer

Internet Centre, 2017). Examining risky Internet behaviour by children on the Internet, the same report stated that 65% of children surveyed had shared images on a social media site with people they only knew online, and a quarter of these had been done in the last 24 hours. Over a quarter of those asked said that they had shared content they would not want their parents or guardians to see. Both Livingstone et al. (2011) and the Safer Internet Centre (2017) embraced the positive aspects of "the power of digital images and communications" and how they can "inspire" or be used "positively" (UK safer Internet Centre, 2017, p.18). But it was also stated caution was needed in the posting of online content to lower the risk. Risks in the form of sexual abuse, bullying, and the meeting online contacts in the real world, could be managed with supervision and education to minimise them (Livingstone et al., 2011). Service/industry providers were urged to provide the maximum-security settings to children by default; with information about security features being made clear and accessible. Guidance was also issued that parents should be made aware of and be able to use tools to assist filtering, blocking and reporting. To assist in the child protection-process a need to highlight and improve the access to and usability of these tools was needed (Livingstone et al., 2011).

The Office of Communications (OFCOM, 2014) reported that the majority of 12-15's (59%) used a mobile phone to use the Internet (OFCOM, 2014). A further study by Livingstone et al. in 2015 corroborated this statistic indicating that in the UK, 58% of children aged 9-16 owned a smartphone, with 56% of them using it on a daily basis to access the Internet. In 2018, the ONS stated that mobile phones are the most popular device to access the Internet. It does not present data for users under the age of 16, but 98% of those in the age group 16-24 used them for Internet access (ONS, 2018). A marked move away from fixed devices such as computers to smartphones is apparent. The portability of smartphones brings supervision difficulties to parents/guardians, and others charged with the welfare of children as each device tends to be personally owned by the user and good security practice recommends the utilisation of locking the device from unwanted access (Thinkyouknow, 2020). It places a greater emphasis on the education of safe Internet use to prevent inappropriate use.

The integration of mobile data communications protocols such as Wi-Fi and 3/4/5G add further additional complexities in content management, whilst it can be blocked on one data source it may be fully accessible on another (Livingstone et al., 2015).

In 2000 only 13% of children would spend over two hours online a day. By 2010 this increased to 32% of the children (Mitchell et al., 2013). Likewise, the number of

children who would spend 5-7 days a week accessing the Internet increased from 36% to 69%. The usage of chat rooms decreased from 56% of children in 2000 to 48% by 2010 (30% in 2005), and the use of social networking sites went from non-existent in 2000, to 80% of children by 2010 (Mitchell et al., 2013). The percentage of children reporting unwanted sexual solicitations fell in most categories from 2000 (19%) to 2010 (9%), despite increased Internet usage and accessibility. The only form of solicitation that did not lessen was that of solicitation with an offline contact, staying static at 3% of children (Mitchell et al., 2013). Attempts to understand this reported decline showed that those solicited were more likely to frequent chat rooms, use social networking sites, and to talk with people they only knew in an online environment.

Direct comparison of academic statistics to those of the enforcement authorities is difficult due to the different counting methods and definitions. But there is appears to be some degree of disparity in this reported decline by Mitchell et al. (2013) and prosecutions. For example, Table 1 of CPS data in section 2.3 shows a summary of sexual offence prosecutions. This indicates an increase in Indecent image convictions between the period of 2008-2015. Prosecutions for online solicitations as described by Livingtsone et al. (2011) will also include those for indecent images. It is likely that these also would reduce if solicitations were reducing. Further to this, a tactical threat assessment produced by CEOP in 2013 estimated an increase of 125% in distributed indecent images January 2010 and December 2012. This included a 23% increase in the number of images in which both adults and children were present (CEOP, 2013). The reasoning behind the apparent difference in academic and reported crime statistics is not clear. It is appreciated that Mitchell et al.'s (2013) research is US based, and prosecution statistics are from the UK. But, examining US based data, where Mitchells research was carried out, reveals similar increasing trends. It is stated that the number of arrests increased from 2577 (2000) to 8144 (2009) over a 9-year period for "technology facilitated sexual crimes against children" (EPCAT 2018, p.9).

The reports from Mitchell et al. (2013) state the sex of the perpetrator has stayed fairly constant over the 10-year reporting period with approximately 70% of them being male. Chat rooms were the most popular forum for soliciting children in 2000, with 64% of those interviewed stating that this is where they were first approached. By 2010 chat room use by perpetrators had fallen to 16% with social networking sites becoming responsible for 58% of first approaches, having not featured in research in the years prior to this. In the year 2000, 39% of those interviewed disclosed the solicitation incident to somebody, this increased to 53% by 2010. It is encouraging to see statistics suggesting that a higher proportion of a lower number of incidents are

being disclosed. However, of those incidents disclosed only 9% were reported to either the police, the internet service provider or utilised an online reporting process. This dropped to 6% by 2010. In effect, a lower percentage of incidents were reported to the authorities, despite a lower number of incidents. Unfortunately, the research did not investigate this aspect further.

It was noted that children reporting the incidents of solicitation stated that the age of the person responsible was under 25 for approximately 70% of the cases, remaining fairly static from 2000-2010. Studies by Mitchell et al. (2008, 2004) suggested that those responsible for online child sex offending were happy to use their real age on social media sites in the majority of cases.

To assist in identifying victims of child abuse in images, a database called "Childbase" was launched by CEOP (UK) in 2003. It closed in 2011 due to resourcing issues. Its successor was called the Child Abuse Image Database (CAID) launched in 2014 to address issues such as duplicate images being investigated worldwide. It identified victims of abuse by assigning each image an identifying tag given to it by an algorithm that would process the image characteristics (Home Office, 2015). A study of the Childbase examined 24,550 images and conducted an analysis of a random 10% sample between 2005-2009. The images were assessed and categorized dependent on particular characteristics. This study was based upon mostly demographic data of the child victims. Of the total number of victims, 80.9% (*n*=19852) were female and 20.1% (*n*=4698) male (Quayle & Jones, 2011). Of the female victims 47.9% were pubescent and 51.4% prepubescent, with less than 1% being classed as very young. Of the male victims 25.4% were pubescent, 73% were prepubescent and 1.6% were very young. It was identified that 91.1% of the female victims, and 89.3% of the male victims were of white ethnicity. The male victims were more likely to be classified as prepubescent or very young whereas female victims were more likely to be pubescent or prepubescent. As the database is UK hosted, the ethnicity of the victims is perhaps not surprising. Without a deeper probing of the data and perpetrators associated to the submitted victim images it is difficult to fully understand why these 24550 children became victims. The study acknowledges a lack of information such as image age, and origins. An offender demographic study (Webb et al., 2007) identified that a large majority of offenders were white males, it may be possible that offenders are simply looking to children from a similar racial background to their own. Demographic cross-links of victim studies and offenders were difficult to locate, thus making it almost impossible to understand any relevance of racial background. The following section

will start to examine aspects that make a child more likely to become the victim of sexual abuse.

2.7.1 Victim typology

Character traits have a bearing on victimisation (Conte et al., 1989; Finkelhor et al., 2000). The Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS) found that the risk of solicitation was higher for those who were described as "troubled" (Finkelhor et al., 2000, p.313). The definition of troubled was given as including one or more of the below:

- Negative life event symptoms (death in family, moving to a new home, parents divorced or separated, and/or a parent losing a job)
- Physical and sexual assaults symptoms
- Depressive symptoms

The risk of solicitation was also perceived to be higher in those who used the Internet more (stated as - two or more hours per day for four or more days per week), and those who involved themselves in risky Internet behaviour (Finkelhor et al., 2000). With risky Internet behaviour being classed as partaking in activities such as:

- Posting personal information
- Online derogatory personal comments, harassment, embarrassing others
- Sexual conversations with strangers
- Visiting websites containing sexual content.

Despite risky Internet behaviour including posting personal information, the YISS study claimed that those who kept an online blog or other type of journal, which might contain a large amount of personal information, did not receive higher rates of solicitation unless they engaged in online communications with people they did not know (Finkelhor et al., 2010). An indication that a degree of interaction with another person is required for victim selection, and it is not just a random process. Chat room use was associated to "psychological" distress or a "difficult living environment", which served to highlight a greater "vulnerability" (Beebe et al., 2004, p.116) and subsequently the likelihood to take risk. This risk-taking increases an individual's vulnerability to inappropriate online approaches. It is possible that the victim's response when engaging in risky behaviour, or conversations could highlight their individual vulnerabilities and result in sexual solicitations, and subsequent abuse when considering the earlier research of Conte (1989) and Finkelhor (2000). In considering what makes an individual more vulnerable to crime it is not just the internal or emotional factors that have relevance. External factors such as opportunity and lack of

a deterrent also have a bearing. The next section will review the literature associated to the reporting of online sexual abuse.

2.7.2 Crime reporting

Offline child sexual abuse is considered a heavily under reported crime (LeClerc et al., 2011). Examining victim disclosures of physical sexual abuse from an offender's perspective, it was found that the disclosure rates were lower amongst victims who demonstrated the below listed attributes:

- Victim came from a dysfunctional family,
- Victim did not resist the abuse.

It was also found that disclosure of an offence was likely to increase as the victim aged if the victim did not live with the offender. In concluding LeClerc et al. (2011) summarised that disclosure of an offence was related to the vulnerability of the victim, those with lower levels of vulnerability were more likely to disclose the offence to someone. Considering this research, it is easy to make a comparison to online offending where it is indicated that children with issues are more likely to become victims. If LeClerc et al's. (2011) findings are transferable to online offending it is possible that much offending remains unreported. An assertion that is supported by Wolak and Finklehor (2017), who reported the incidence of reporting online sexually inappropriate behaviour at 13%. The NCA and formerly CEOP have reported a growth of in the volume of online child sexual abuse material over a number of years (NCA, 2019; CEOP, 2012; CEOP, 2013) as have organisations such as ECPAT[5] (2020). It will always remain difficult to establish the proportion of crimes that go unreported, especially if they do not have a distinct category as in the case of online sexual coercion.

2.8 Blackmail and coercion

The main focus of this thesis' is the sexual blackmail or coercion of children. To fully understand the phenomenon this section will now examine the concept. Blackmail is a marginal crime and marginal crimes fall outside the daily policing and political priorities (Peelo & Soothill, 2014). It is further represented that blackmail sits on the edges of criminology, away from the mainstream of criminal activities focused on by the politicians, police and public. It only achieves notoriety from time to time when serious or interesting cases occur which fit the public interest criteria. In a study of over 50 years of blackmail convictions it was also seen that there was an "ebb and

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[5] ECPAT an international NGO dedicated to ending child exploitation, whose name is an acronym for 'end child prostitution and trafficking'

flow" (Peelo & Soothill, 2014, p.234) of the reporting of cases dependent on the moral panics of the time. The popular modus operandi of blackmail convictions show a tendency to gently morph with time dependent on the current social anxiety, be it police corruption, gang violence (1970s), trade union activity (1980s miners' strikes), or consumer terrorism (1990s) according (Peelo & Soothill, 2014). It could be that social networking companies have presented another social anxiety in putting their drive to achieve corporate mission statements above the greater needs of a safe society.

Perpetrators of blackmail distort reality in their favour to oblige a victim to comply with their demands. A sense of low self-esteem, or interpersonal dependency is created by perpetrators of blackmail to make victims comply with demands (Forward & Frazier, 1997). Victim traits, such as needing approval, and high self-doubt could be likened to those described by Conte (1989) in his interviews with perpetrators of sexual offences when they describe victim selection. During blackmail a manipulation by the perpetrator utilises a victim's fear, obligation, or guilt to manipulate them into complying with the demand (Forward & Frazier, 1997).

Blackmail creates an offence by threatening to carry out actions that may not ordinarily be a crime. The disclosure of information may not usually be a criminal offence, but if an individual were to ask for a sum of money to not disclose this information it would then create the offence of blackmail (Robinson et al., 2010). As earlier highlighted in Section 2.3.4 blackmail, coercion, or extortion lay on grey boundaries; they have similar definitions and involve similar actions. Sometimes these actions are criminal, and sometimes not. Forms of coercion can often be described as playing hardball, especially within the workplace (Robinson et al., 2010). Theories suggest that changes in the power base of a relationship can change the interaction into a criminal offence. These changes range from a moral improperness of actions to the creation of "relationship of dominance and subordination between the blackmailer and recipient" (Robinson et al.2010, p.299).

It is argued that "blackmailers sell secrecy" (Altman, 1993, p.2), and were it not for the ability to bargain with it, they would be powerless. The success of blackmail depends upon the vulnerability the victim feels. These vulnerabilities can come in the form of the fear of loss of self-respect, self-worth, reputation, or fear of relationship breakdown to name but a few. If that vulnerability can be removed the success of blackmail can be limited (Altman, 1993). Victim selection in child sexual abuse can

be based on perceived vulnerability (Conte, 1989). Pre-Internet research of convicted sexual abuse perpetrators revealed statements such as "has a look of being vulnerable in some way", or "I would pick the one who appeared more needy" being used to describe victim targeting (Conte, 1989, p.296). The risk of online solicitation was higher for those children categorised as "troubled" or using Internet behaviour that increased risk (Finkelhor et al., 2000). In the case of online sexual coercion, it is possibly the vulnerabilities as highlighted by Conte (1989) and Finkelhor et al. (2000) that are noticed and then exploited by perpetrators when sexually coercing children. As previously highlighted for blackmail/coercion to be successful, a perpetrator needs to be able to provide a leverage or means to force the victim to pursue a course of action. This can range from a subtle coercive request which a victim complies with to gain acceptance or maintain a friendship, to a more forceful request in the form of blackmail with a direct threat to enforce compliance. Whilst it can be argued that one is more forceful than the other, the subsequent outcome can be just as serious whichever method is used.

The use of coercive tactics or blackmail within sexual offending is an intrinsic part of the grooming process. It was presented that 49% of perpetrators used intimidation or threats in an offline environment as a grooming method used in contact sexual offences against children (Lang & Frenzel, 1988). In a study of 250 children over half were coerced (Defrancis, 1969). The age of this reference suggests coercion is a long standing and established method of gaining compliance from child victims of sexual abuse.

In analysing inducements used on children to enable sexual contact it is presented that both incest and paedophilic offenders would use multiple methods to enable the sexual contact. These methods included misrepresentation of moral standards, reward, bribes, frightening, and withholding of privileges (Lang & Frenzel, 1988). Thus, a form of manipulation, coercion, or blackmail of the child was frequently apparent. The participants of research into pre-Internet contact offences indicated that they would use a variety of methods to trick, bribe or coerce children to seduction, these would be followed up with warnings used to maintain secrecy (Lang & Frenzel, 1988). Although these assumptions are pre-Internet, the manipulation, power, and control over victims seem to form important factors in the commission of the crimes. With a basis of power being used by perpetrators to accomplish the desired results in an effective way. But there can also be more subtle drivers, which impact upon the methods chosen. These might include a need of power, affiliation or achievement. Those with a higher need for power are more likely to select the power bases of impersonal coercion or

legitimate position to achieve their goals. Those with particular personality characteristics or deficits may be more inclined to use specific power bases such as coercion to manage interactions (Raven, 2008). Coercive (reward based) power provides the user with an actual gain of some type (IIOC offending) by using a form of threat to enforce the result. Examples provided by Raven (2008) include threats of losing a job, or monetary rewards for achievement, but could equally apply in the online world for image procurement in the form of threats for failing to provide an image or video. Successful interactions from coercive power bases tend to be attributed to the actions of influencing agents. Influencers with low self-esteem feel satisfaction at the thought that they are holding power and are in charge; as a result, they tend to favour the more controlling bases of power such as coercion (Raven, 2008). Low self-esteem is a character trait that features with Internet based sexual offenders (Ward & Beech, 2006), and Pathological Internet users (Davis et al., 2001). It is possible that these prominent character disorders or social difficulties make them more prone to using harder victim management tactics such as blackmail/coercion or are exacerbated at times of pressure or stress which lead to offending.

Historically a person's reputation was considered an asset of value (McLaren 2002) it meant a sexually embarrassing situations could be transformed into a commodity which could be traded. Many examples of sexual blackmail can be found that include names from past history such as Marie Antoinette (Burrows, 2009) and Alexander Hamilton (Cougan, 1996). Whilst these examples provide titillating media, the impact of extortion and blackmail upon the victim is rarely considered within the news articles. The consequences can and do lead to suicide, born out of the fear, shame and perceived helplessness of a victim's situation (Nilsson et al., 2019). With Internet blackmail, the effort needed to execute a threat such as publishing information or pictures is very small. This makes it very easy for the offender to carry out the threat. This has an effect of increasing the "credibility of threats" (Acar, 2016, p.118). It leaves the victim making difficult choices whether or not they should concede to the threat, ignore it, or report it. With each option carrying a risk for the victim.

The following section moves on to examine more specifically the online sexual coercion of children.

2.8.1 Online sexual coercion against children - Sextortion

Sextortion is often used as an all-encompassing term to describe online sexual extortion. It is described by as "the threatened dissemination of explicit, intimate, or embarrassing images of a sexual nature without consent, usually for the purpose of

procuring additional images, sexual acts, money or something else" (Patchin & Hinduja, p.140, 2018). This is a very loose term which could cover a multitude of scenarios, against both children and adults. The offences fall within a category of criminality described by Henry et al. (2018) as "technology facilitated sexual violence" (2018, p. 565). Sextortion specifically was presented in a subcategory of "Image based sexual abuse" (Henry et al., 2018, p. 566). This section will examine the limited, but expanding, literature available covering the main subject matter of this thesis.

Sextortion perpetrators can inflict misery and suffering on their victims, forcing them to take part in increasingly demanding sex acts under threat of being publicly exposed to their friends and family (Wittes et al., 2016). Victims also experience difficulty in breaking the cycle of progressive online sexual coercion and abuse that develops (Wittes et al., 2016). Enforcement agencies such as CEOP (2009) and the FBI (2016) are in belief that coercion is being used increasingly to enforce the demands of online sexual offenders against children. Blackmailing or extorting a child to self-produce sexual images of themselves creates "new" undistributed images. These are a desirable currency in some online forums which can be traded and increase the reputation of the supplier (Virtual global taskforce, 2015). Data relating to the incidence of online sexually coercive offences against children is difficult to obtain due to its inconsistent classification (Wittes et al., 2016).

A questionnaire which sampled 21,372 children and investigated the different manifestations of online aggression used against them from their own perspectives found that verbal attacks formed the most common form of cyberbullying (33.44%). Forming a lesser but still sizeable proportion were threats and intimidation (17.38%), humiliation by spreading photographs (10.85%), and extortion (7.33%). The most commonly used platforms for cyberbullying were social networking sites (44.5%) followed by SMS/text messages (23.4%), with instant messaging/chat platforms, and emails forming smaller proportions of the platforms utilised (Kopecky et al., 2014). It was further found that 43.82% (n=9203) of the respondents had been invited to a personal meeting by an unknown online friend, with 49.19% (n=4072) stating they would have met them. Whilst this particular study was carried out in the Czech Republic the descriptions of the cases within it were not dissimilar to those found in the UK or USA (Wittes et al., 2016). A follow up study found 5.35% of respondents were reportedly bullied with 'threats and intimidation', it included those being blackmailed for indecent images (Kopecky et al., 2014b). The categorisations made it

difficult to specifically assess the incidence of sextortion. A study conducted in the USA indicated that 5% of under 18's have been subject to sextortion, with a higher percentage of victims falling into the 13-17 age group (Patchin & Hinduja, 2018). It was found that a slightly higher proportion of males (5.8%) than females (5.0%), and more than double the proportion of non-heterosexual victims (10.9%) opposed to heterosexual victims (4.5%), were subject to online sexual coercion (Patchin & Hinduja, 2018). The dichotomous nature of this study, as identified by the authors, made it difficult to understand some of the context behind the victim's experiences. Consequently, it is not known how frequently they occurred or the type of relationship the victim held with the perpetrator. The majority (over 60%) of victims in this particular study personally knew their perpetrators. The representation of unknown online only perpetrators was relatively low. The research by Patchin and Hinduja (2018) did not examine the motivations of those who wished to commit online sexual coercion. These are both areas this research is looking to address.

2.8.2 Committing online sexual coercion

Kopecky (2017) stated that the online sexual blackmailing of children can have the following intentions:

1. To obtain money.
2. As a constituent part of a grooming offence with a view to meeting up with the child.
3. With the intent of obtaining intimate or indecent photographs or video footage of the child.

The third element - obtaining sexual imagery was referred to as sextortion (Kopecky, 2017). In this study of 1374 victims, 73% were female and 27% male, victim ages ranged from 11-17 years. The research carried out in partnership with cyber-crime specialists in the Czech Republic analysed the communications of both victims and perpetrators online. It found offender ages ranged from 28-39 years old and presented that many of the cases would not have occurred if the victim took preventative actions to protect themselves. This was explained by concluding that in a non-virtual world people are taught "defense mechanisms" (Kopecky et al., 2014b, p.17) by being warned against risks by parents or teachers. It opined that risk management was not as common in the virtual world. The Internet is viewed as a place where one can escape from reality, during leisure time and not have to worry about problems faced in the real world. This emboldens people to discuss areas they would not normally or with less inhibition. From these lowered inhibitions (disinhibition) it is argued that an

individual becomes more vulnerable to cyber bullying a category in which sextortion is included (Kopecky et al., 2014).

Reported methods to commit online sexual coercion vary. They have included cases utilising malware to remotely access webcams and locate personal information and files from potential victims, or more simply just asking victims for an initial image. The information or images are then used to coerce victims into creating sexual images and videos (Wittes et al., 2016). Case examples include those where teenage victims have committed suicide following blackmail. The knowledge that sexual images were obtained through fear, fraud and coercion and that there is no subsequent control over them has proven too devastating for some teenagers to deal with (Webster et al., 2012). To understand how an individual sextortion crime can occur, some brief facts have been summarised below from a case prosecuted in the US (Wittes et al., 2016), It should be remembered that this is just one example from a myriad of methods.

Example

Using a self-installing malware link, a perpetrator hacked into different victims' computers. Once control of the computer was established files were searched for and webcams/microphones taken over to obtain indecent images of the victims. An initial sexual image of the victim was obtained by the perpetrator, then by communicating online with the victims they demanded further sexual images and threatened to publicly release the initial image. Evidence from this case indicated that the perpetrator was prepared to carry out the threats. Once arrested 15,000 webcam videos and evidence of 230 victims were found on computers. In this particular case 44 of the victims were children, the remainder adults. The offender was convicted of just two charges for which six years imprisonment were received (Wittes et al., 2016).

There are 3 pre-conditions that need to be present for sextortion (Acar, 2016):

1. Cyberspace – interactions occur online,
2. Possession – The perpetrator needs to possess a sexual image, or other compromising material or information to shift the balance of power in their favour,
3. Extortion – Once the perpetrator has the balance of power, demands can be made of the victim.

Prevention can be effective by removing or disrupting just one of these elements (Acar, 2016). The child (victim) is the initial holder of power in the online relationship until the perpetrator acquires an image or some other piece of valuable information. At this point the child then becomes vulnerable and can be blackmailed. If the communication

develops into a physical meeting and moves away from the Internet environment, then the process transforms into a grooming type crime (Acar, 2016). Analysing chat logs on social media forums, a 5-stage model to represent the process of online sexual blackmail of children was created (Kopecky, 2017). The stages are as follows:

1. Establish contact with child – Often the contact would be represented as accidental, allowing chat to be established. Dependent on outcome the perpetrator may send non-intimate images.

2. Manipulation through compliments – positive or flattering comments are made about the victim.

3. Verification of victim's identity – attempts are made to confirm that the victim is a child and that they are willing to send real images.

4. Intimacy intensifying – the move from non-intimate to intimate images is made. Further requests may be made for the performance of sexual acts, photographs or videos. Naked or sexual photographs may be sent to the child by the perpetrator.

5. Blackmail – If the child declines to exchange images blackmail may be used. Threats include revealing images to friends or family members.

In some cases, attempts are made to force the victim to meet the perpetrator in the physical world (Kopecky, 2017). The above model does not include these, neither does it include blackmail cases aimed at financially gaining from victims. These are often committed by organised crimes groups. It was identified that none of the children in the study who were targeted during periods of victimisation advised parents/adults/carers, but some did use the online help/report links (Kopecky, 2017). Once the perpetrator of a blackmail transaction obtains a sexual image by using coercive methods, the number of images obtained increased dramatically. Females in the age group of 15-17 are more likely to be targeted by blackmail, and those who have been blackmailed were more likely to use a similar tactic themselves (Kopecky, 2017). This subsequent use of blackmail was attributed to victims wishing to take revenge.

The intimidation and threats of children who are victimised in sextortion was found to be enduring (Wolak et al., 2016). Research designed to encompass the childhood years of 18 to 25-year-old participants discovered approximately a quarter reported sextortion lasting in excess of six months. Nearly half of these victims reported that perpetrators carried out their threats by going on to publish sexual images (Wolak et al., 2016), and victims showed a reluctance to tell anyone of what they experienced. According to Acar "abusers rarely execute their threats and usually move to the next victim" (2016, p.120). This can increase the risk to the perpetrator by exposing their

anonymity, bringing them to the attention of law enforcement. With the execution of the threat reducing the power balance by sacrificing any images or knowledge that they hold. Perpetrators can victimise many children (Acar, 2016; Wittes et al., 2016), it is likely to be easier to move to another victim than to persist if one represents a risk. It was stated that those committing sextortion offences against children display similar traits to those committing sexual offences both on- and offline (O'Malley, 2020). From a study of 152 offenders identified from online sources, there was evidence that they demonstrated higher levels of sexual deviance through their collections of child sexual abuse material, and coercion of children to abuse others. A distinct difference found by O'Malley (2020) between sextortion offenders and offline sexual offenders was that the victims were not generally known to the online sextortion offender. Additionally, threats to distribute victim images were mostly used in controlling victim responses, whereas in offline offending, power and control was achieved through different means.

The main factors that differentiate online abuse from offline tactics are the remoteness and anonymity of the attacker and the unfamiliarity of parents/guardians with online communication methods (Dehue et al., 2008). The perpetrator is unable to witness the response of the victim to the attack, which can then result in an increasingly aggressive attack (Dehue et al., 2008, p.217). This form of attack in what was is perceived as a safe environment - such as the family home, can have the tendency to increase its impact on the victim (Dehue et al., 2008). Black et al. (2015) opined that online offenders employ similar grooming strategies to those used by people committing offences offline including flattery and intimidation. These online strategies move at different speeds to suit the environment. For example, flattery and risk assessment strategies can be deployed immediately to try and assess whether the victim is indeed a genuine child or a police officer. It is likely the speed with which online perpetrators can utilise grooming strategies enable them to target and manage multiple victims at the same time in sextortion cases. The literature and media reports of sextortion convictions suggests many victims are targeted by an individual offender and there is little constancy in prosecution of cases (Wittes et al., 2016).

2.8.4 Prosecuting sexual coercion of children

Wittes et al. (2016) presented that the prosecutions of sextortion results in varied sentencing. Examining whether this view is valid in the UK research revealed that revised guidance was issued for prosecuting cases involving communications on social

media, or those who abuse victims online[6]. The guidance issued in March 2016 (CPS, 2016), introduced categories against which prosecutors must assess online communications where a victim is subject to behaviour such as coercion, and blackmail. The varying categories allow the CPS to process cases appropriate to the level of seriousness. The existence of guidance suggests that a recognition of the cases exists, along with a need to introduce a standardised approach to prosecution. However, there was very little other guidance publicly available, and with no specific sextortion legislation, enforcement bodies have to use other statutes to prosecute the crime. Because of this, cases are dealt with under a "hodgepodge" (Wittes et al., 2016, p.4) of legislation, such as indecent image, or computer misuse laws. It is further claimed that sentencing for sextortion contains many irregularities within multiple victim cases. Examples are given where perpetrators offend against numerous victims and do not receive a higher penalty than those with fewer victims (Wittes et al., 2016). It was also presented that there were examples of regional clustering of sextortion cases. This was attributed to the efforts of investigators/prosecutors and evidenced by an increased number of prosecutions within specific geographical locations. If this assertion were correct it could highlight a lack of knowledge of the crime type and necessary rectifications steps needed to prosecute it within certain geographic jurisdictions.

The visibility element of Sexual Extortion of Children in Cyberspace (SECC) is low; only a small number of perpetrators are bought to justice and few victims are identified, with confusion over classification of incidents being partly responsible (Acar, 2016). Unclear and multiple definitions do not help in this respect, SECC could be considered as grooming under the definitions given by Krone (2004) but could also be categorised as cyber-bullying (Kopecky et al., 2014). This lack of consistency also extends into law enforcement (HMIC, 2016). The blackmailing element of online sexual coercion of children can be committed by organised crime groups working for financial benefit; individuals who are soliciting indecent images; and individuals who are looking to progress to a personal meeting with the victim. Each of these different intents can cloud the crime classification process (Acar, 2016).

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[6] http://www.cps.gov.uk/consultations/social_media_consultation_2016.html

2.8.5 Sextortion - key findings

The literature about the online sexual coercion of children is still developing, but there are findings that offer useful prevention strategies and guidance. Acar (2016) outlined the best method of prevention was to stop the circulation of compromising images in the first place, thus a refusal to comply with threats was a passive but effective method of prevention. The research provided by Kopecky (2014, 2017) has assisted the development of a prevention program in Czech schools, which heighten awareness of Internet risks to children on social networks, steps such as verifying the identity of online contacts and maintaining privacy of information are highlighted as key security measures (Kopecky et al., 2017).

Key points provided by Wittes et al. (2016) included:

- Sextortion was understudied, whilst there are warnings about the crime from agencies such as the FBI, little data was published to indicate the scale of the problem.
- The method of offending was not uncommon. It had identified numerous cases spanning a period from 2005 to 2016.
- Those convicted of sextortion were responsible for numerous offences.
- In this research the offenders were all male. However, several of the offenders would pose as females using false identities.
- A lack of consistency in prosecution due to no case specific legislation.
- Lack of consistent sentencing.
- The impact on the victim can be severe.

Victims of sextortion have found the experience "degrading and alarming" (Howard & Rokach, 2017, p. 290). Studies examining the self-esteem of those who have and have not been subject to sextortion and sexting have produced mixed results. A non-significant relationship between these factors was found by Howard and Rokach (2017) and Gordon-Meser et al. (2013), whereas others have found positive correlations (Dake et al., 2012; Perkins et al., 2014). Only one of the studies considered sextortion, with the others concentrating on sexting behaviour. The impact of sextortion has shown to be severe by consequence of victims' subsequent actions (Nilsson, 2019), unfortunately the indicators and signs of a child suffering from online sexual coercion do not yet appear to have been fully understood.

There has been a gradual progression towards a regulatory framework affording greater protection for children from exposure to online harms (Romero et. al., 2019). The 'Online Harms White Paper' (Romero, et al., 2019) is still (June 2022) being debated in UK Parliament. It seeks to put in place formal regulation of social media platform providers and 'tech' companies - taking away the element of self-regulation currently relied upon. The Internet and technology have provided an ideal locus for sexual criminality against children (Taylor & Quayle, 2006). Studies suggest that children using social networking sites face higher levels of risks whilst online (Straksrud et al., 2013). Not using this knowledge to reduce the online risks faced by children suggests a failure to adequately mitigate them.

2.9 Discussion

This chapter has examined some of the legislation and academic research available for sexual offending against children. Both the legislation and research were established in a pre-Internet era. They have been gradually updated, extended or renewed to cater for the online environment. Both legislation and academic research provide some areas of conflict and/or differing opinion. One such area of expert opinion is based upon the likeness of online offenders committing physical offences (Bourke & Hernandez, 2009; Eke et al., 2011). From a more practical perspective, this may prove unhelpful to those trying to reduce or investigate offending. Claims that online offenders are less likely to commit physical offences could result in assumptions being made and subsequently a lower risk rating to an individual. Or lead to them being wrongly eliminated/included in an investigation. The consequences of this may lead to a higher number of victims being created.

The cited research provides an insight into some of the psychological factors that can create the environment for offending and lead to its continuance. Much of it focuses on addictive Internet use. Problematic Internet Use provides a model of psychopathology showing evidence linking causative factors for online addictions. Many of the causes given for PIU are also similar to the those identified in research for online sexual offending against children, such as image collection. In the context of online sexual coercion of children, the presence of a victim is required who the offender corresponds with; this is not necessary in other aspects of PIU, such as gambling, gaming, and to some extent indecent image collection. It is unclear at this juncture whether it is PIU, control, or other factors which provide the drive behind sextortion/coercion offences.

This review also examined children's use of the Internet looking specifically at what was likely to increase the likelihood of being victimised. Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the factors presented highlight that children who were 'troubled' (Mitchell et al., p216, 2010) or 'needy' (Conte, 1989, p296) were more likely to become victims, increasingly so if they engaged in what was classed as risky internet behaviour. This enables us to raise the question that if we understand what it is that creates the risk to specific children, then why is more not done to reduce this risk by those in a position to do so.

The final part of the review examined online sexual coercion of children (sextortion) by reviewing the limited literature available. It found that those offending repeatedly do so (Wittes et al., 2016). Moreover, the impact of their actions on victims was significant, sometimes leading to suicide (Cybersmile, 2020; Wittes et al., 2016).
In considering the multiple victims of sextortion, there was a remarkable lack of research available to explain what led to the experiences they had been subject to and how it may have impacted on them, suggesting future research in this area is necessary.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This chapter focuses on the methodological approach used for this thesis, examining various paradigms that were considered and ultimately chosen. It details some of the confidentiality and ethical issues required for data collection during sensitive research with participants who were willing to share intimate experiences. Consideration was given to how they processed and recalled their life stories. The research rationale is provided for each of the methods chosen in the four studies and how the sampling, recruitment and analysis were executed. Also, included in this chapter is a discussion as to how validity and reliability of the analysis are considered.

The methodology was tailored to this project from the research aims and subsequent questions. The research questions are repeated below.

- What do the experiences of child Internet users tell us about how coercive online child sexual abuse develops?
- How do the online activities of a child make them more vulnerable to being sexually coerced online?
- Why and how do perpetrators of online sexual coercion of children choose to interact directly with their victims for sexual purposes, rather than using other means?

The research questions were extrapolated into individual studies to examine the criminal methods, analyse the perspectives and lived experiences of those directly involved in the process of coercive online child sex abuse. It comprised of four individual studies, each designed to gather data pertinent to the research questions.

Study 1 – Comparative case studies, analysis of cases of online sexual coercion of children.

Study 2 - Online survey to establish the extent, type, and individual response to online sexual coercion that children experience.

Study 3- Semi-structured interviews with adults who were subject to online sexually coercive behaviour as a child.

Study 4 – Semi-structured interviews with those convicted of online sexual abuse of children involving coercion.

The first two studies explore the methods of criminality and occurrence of online coercion of children. The final two studies provide an understanding from the perspectives of those who have experienced online sexual abuse, by interpreting the

personal experiences of those who were victimised and/or perpetrated such behaviour. Various methods of data collection were considered which are elaborated on later in this chapter. However, the overriding factor remained that all of the research questions involved gathering data about sensitive subjects that would be very personal to the participants. Building trust and confidence with the participants to elicit the best data remained crucial to the success of the study.

3.1 Methodological approach

Research paradigms in the social sciences are based around four classical concepts (Blaikie, 2010), with psychological research tending to adopt just one paradigm to answer research questions (Alasuutari et al., 2008). The adoption of either a positivist approach, which considers the reality constructed around a series of events that are observable and subsequently measurable (Blaikie, 2009); or an interpretivist stance where meaning is drawn from social action to construct understanding from it, is not uncommon in psychological research (Alasuutari et al., 2008). Both methods present strengths and weaknesses.

Some of the main critiques of the methods are -

- The positivist approach seeks to measure specific quantities and scientifically analyse them, presenting that they represent a reality when there is not a truly reliable representation of reality due to the many other influencing factors in life (Robson, 2011)

- Interpretivist methods lack a scientific basis being too subjective, and are lacking in reliability (Nudzor, 2009).

Using a combination of these methods via a mixed methods framework, a more realistic or sensible problem-solving approach can be achieved by drawing on the strengths of both methods (Tashakkori & Charles, 2010). The use of mixed methods does however come with countering arguments that paradigms cannot be mixed and have rigid boundaries which are incompatible with each other (Creswell, 2011). There are valid arguments both for and against the mixing of research methods. The assertion by Howe that *"there are thus no good reasons for educational researchers to fear forging ahead with what works"* (Howe, 1998, p.10) provided sensible guidance. A mixing of methods and subsequent research paradigms can provide a more robust product by drawing on the inherent strengths of the two different approaches and balance out their weaknesses (Kelle, 2006). Thus, adhering to just one paradigm or method may not provide the broadness of knowledge that could be achieved from utilising two or more methods. The nature of the research aims/questions within this

thesis are exploratory. They aim to build a comprehensive understanding of the occurrence and nature of coercive online sexual exploitation of children. The use of more than one method can provide greater insight and detail into the topic in question (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). Integration and interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative data in a mixed methods process can provide this collectively stronger appreciation of the research questions (Creswell, 2015).

A convergent parallel design of mixed methods allows the differing research components to be collated independently within the same time frame. No particular component of the research carries a greater weighting or emphasis. The results are then considered together (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). Effectively, this allows a comparison or "validation" of results (Creswell, 2015, p.6). Within this thesis, the data of the four individual studies were analysed separately with each study carrying an equal weight, in a convergent design.

Thus, the research paradigm employed within this thesis was a combination of the classic paradigms of Positivism and Interpretivism. The use of "what works" and combining methods is known as pragmatism (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). The interpretivism of phenomenological analysis of the qualitative studies was supported by positivism in the form of surveys and case studies to provide a hybrid comparison for use in the final discussion. It was done to provide a more rounded, multi-faceted understanding of the incidence and causes of the online sexual coercion of children. This integration of methods provides greater understanding than one method alone (Koshy, Koshy & Waterman, 2011), a key consideration when investigating human experiences (Diener & Fujita, 1995; Hindle & Franco, 2009).

The research questions seek an understanding of what and how child sexual abuse is able to develop online, and why those convicted choose this method to offend. To delve gradually deeper into this research area, a methodology was chosen that gathered initial exploratory data (case studies and survey). It was then supported by a deeper understanding from those who had lived and experienced online sexual abuse. Phenomenology provides the opportunity to understand the lived experiences of participants (Franchette et al, 2020). As a methodology paved from the 20th century theoretical viewpoints of philosophers such as Husserl and Heidegger (Horrigan-Kelly et al 2016), it concentrates on analysing the understanding and interpretation of life experiences. A definition provided by Strandmark and Hedelin (2002) explains that phenomenology should "uncover the essence of the phenomenon, its inner core, what the 'thing' is" (2002, p.79). There are opposing schools of thought as to the approach to be used. These focus on 'descriptive' and 'interpretive' stances (Larsson &

Holmstrom, 2007) which have led to the evolution of research methods such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis that aims to make meaning of the lived experiences (Smith el al, 2009). This became the research methodology favoured within the later sections of this thesis when considering what was being sought in the research aims and questions.

3.2 Research process

This section was responsible for ensuring the supportive processes were in place to make the research compliant with guidelines, and fair to those participants who kindly donated their time and experiences to the project.

3.2.1 Ethics and approvals

This project involved conducting surveys and interviews on a sensitive topic. It was likely participants might discuss criminality, whether they were a victim to it, had committed it, or had knowledge of its occurrence. It was also likely that participants might have exhibited vulnerabilities at some point. Further, there are also risks associated to engaging with participants currently serving custodial sentences. To conduct research in line with guidelines, authorities and approvals are required. From the outset the research was designed as per the best practice offered by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2014; BPS, 2018). Written approval for the research project was obtained from the Governor of HMP Whatton, the proposed research site for participants who had committed online sexually coercive offences against children. This was an additional requirement necessary in addition to formal ethical approvals. Ethical approvals were also made to the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of Nottingham Trent University detailing the proposed studies and outlining the considerations made to conduct them with appropriate mitigation processes in place to protect data, minimise risk, ensure proper consent, maintain confidentiality, and an informed recruitment process. Following the REC approval, a subsequent application was made via the Integrated Research Application System to the National Offender Management Service for ethical approval to conduct research at HMP Whatton, the proposed research site for study 4. This requested approval to conduct interviews with participants who were serving custodial sentences following conviction for sexual offences involving children. Specific considerations for the ethical approval are discussed in the following sections.

3.2.2 Consent

Difficult choices are presented when carrying out research of sensitive subjects. The benefits gained from the research; need to be balanced against the impact of carrying it out (Robson & McCartan, 2016). As the proposed studies involved interviewing both victims and perpetrators of online sexual abuse of children, it was intended to conduct this research with the full informed consent of participants. This was to create a more open and trusting relationship between the researcher and interviewee. Failure to build this trust could be counter-productive to the reputation of academic research, and the working relationship between the prison and educational establishment. Participants withdrawing consent at a late stage due to lack of trust in the research processes or for other reasons also introduces unnecessary complexities to a project. It reduces the available data (Robson & McCartan 2016) and necessitates further approvals to be granted. This is undesirable in any study, but especially so in an establishment such as a prison where access is restricted. Gaining full and informed consent allows potential participants to make their own choices based on the information provided than rather feel pressurised by the researcher (Bryman, 2012).

Online survey consent

When surveys are conducted online the basic principle of gaining informed voluntary consent is removed from the researcher and trusted to a tick box. Common problems associated to this are that participants can be provided with limited or incorrect information (Roberts & Allen, 2015). The participant information page was an intrinsic part of the survey; it appeared at the start of the survey. It explained the sensitive nature of the survey, what would be asked of each participant, and how it was not compulsory to complete or take part. All participants had to confirm that they were over 18 years old and provide consent to take part in the survey.

Interview consent

Studies 3 and 4 both had similar processes to obtain consent. But the participants in study 4 were constrained by prison processes and detention. Gaining informed consent within the prison environment required some additional care. There is a risk that individuals may take part as a means to change the day-to day structure of their incarceration, alleviate boredom, or a number of other reasons (Bosworth et al., 2005). There is also inbuilt tendency for ethical authorisations to concentrate on the protection of the institutions rather than recognise the torment that some of the participants may be suffering as a result of their conviction and incarceration (Bosworth et al., 2005). With this in mind, a policy of clarity and honesty was maintained when explaining the research process to all potential applicants. Each person who responded to the

recruitment process was personally visited in a private room. The research aims, and purposes were explained to them. They were also given written information about the project and the opportunity to think about whether they wished to take part without having to commit immediately. The information sheets were written as clearly as possible, and the researcher explained the content of them in a way that was felt to be understandable whilst checking what was being said was understood (Smith et al., 2009). A copy of the information sheet was handed to the participants. This included details about the purpose of the study, methods of recording data, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the withdrawal of consent. Due to the relative incommunicado status of the participant in a prison environment, a means for contacting the researcher was made clear to them. Participants were advised that no material, or institutional benefits would be provided as a result of taking part (i.e. it would have no impact on parole or other treatment in the prison). This was to encourage those with a genuine interest in telling their story to volunteer providing a benefit to society in general.

In study 3 the initial stages of recruitment were done via the usual channels of communication such as email or phone. Once a willingness to take part was shown, each person was emailed written information about the project, this included consent forms. In study 4 the initial recruitment was via internal information screens and newsletters within HMP Whatton, with prospective candidates being invited to submit a written note to the researcher.

When participants for both studies were met, the consent procedure was made clear to them in person. The bounds of the questioning were explained as was the right to decline to answer or terminate the interview if they so wished. This ensured participants knew what to expect during interview. Each participant's confidentiality rights were explained in line with the confidentiality policy below. They were advised of the support procedure if they felt this was needed in the event of distress. Written consent was also required from each participant prior to the start of the interview. The interviews voluntary nature and withdrawal process were explained to them again. To maintain independence from the prison service the researcher explained they were a student of Nottingham Trent University and were not in any way affiliated, employed or sponsored by the prison service, courts or investigating authorities. The researcher advised the participants that although the interviews had a loose structure, they were free to respond how they wished. This handed them control of the direction, and

content of the conversation during interview. They were also advised they could decline to answer or stop the interview at any point. The hope was to provide a non-judgmental arena in which they could speak frankly about their personal experiences with no threat (Waldram, 2007).

3.2.3 Confidentiality

Similar to consent, confidentiality is an underlying right for those volunteering to participate in research (BPS, 2018). Maintaining this confidentiality was designed into the whole research project, and not just limited to the redaction of a name. There are natural places of confidentiality conflict throughout the research process, such as where the identification of a participant is necessary for simple communication purposes, or where a participant describes an incident in such detail it can lead to the identification of a place or person involved (Bryman, 2012).

For the in-depth interviews, only the researcher was aware of the identity of the participants and their personal contact details for communication. Identifying information was stored on a stand-alone computer with access restricted only to the researcher. Subsequent to the interview process each participant was assigned a unique identifier. This was subsequently used throughout the transcription and analysis process. Once transcribed, interviews were checked for identifying information such as names, locations and descriptions of places and people. They were edited out anonymise the interview content. Further consideration was given to the use of language or style of conversation used in the interview in case it might be recognisable to others known to the participant. Finally, where a participant tended to use repeated phrases or pragmatic markers within a conversation, this would be highlighted within the interview in the event that the quote was used at a later date in the analysis. This process allowed careful consideration of the interview sections in the event they were used in a thesis or for subsequent publication.

Interviews were recorded on passcode-protected Dictaphones. Risks to the data are present from the way they are stored and transferred from the interview location to the workplace of the researcher and its subsequently storage. To comply with both prison rules and ethical responsibilities the Dictaphone used offered both encryption and password protection. Once interviews were completed the Dictaphone was returned to a secure location. Data on it was erased as soon as the interview was transferred onto the stand-alone computer used to transcribe the interview. Only the researcher had

access to the computer used. Interview recordings were stored in an encrypted, password-protected folder, as were the subsequent transcriptions.

3.2.4 Limits to confidentiality

In the research of sexual offences participants may have knowledge of criminal matters that have occurred or hold information that could assist in public protection or reduce threats to public safety. Making assurances of confidentiality might mean an individual could be less guarded about disclosing information they would not normally disclose (Cowburn, 2005). This information is not just limited to those who have committed offences, it is also held by those who have been subject to online sexual abuse in the form of intelligence and evidence that can be of assistance to protective bodies such as social services or the police. Thus, the approach of Cowburn (2005), which offers limited confidentiality, was adopted in this research project for both those who were victims and perpetrators. All interview participants were notified of this limit to confidentiality if they indicated they might have information that would assist in the prevention/detection of undetected crime, present a threat to public safety or breach prison rules in the case of those participants who were incarcerated. They were further notified how this information may be passed on to any appropriate authorities. This exclusion to confidentiality was included within the notice to participants, consent form, personal meetings and pre-interview meetings.

3.2.5 Vulnerability and risk assessment

Researchers need to identify and minimise any perceived risks so that the benefits of carrying out the research are greater than the risks of carrying it out (Barnbaum & Byron, 2001). A risk assessment of the proposed research studies was completed, to minimise risks to the participants, researcher, and the organisations involved. It allowed participants to describe their experiences where they may have been sexually abused, and/or committed sexual offences. This carries a risk of evoking strong emotions. These may cause the individual participant to feel vulnerable when recounting their lives (Draucker et al., 2009; Gibson & Morgan, 2013). Although it is likely there is little the researcher can do to prevent this from happening if the participant chooses to elaborate on sensitive subjects, steps can be taken to minimise the impact. Providing a safe interview environment where no judgments are made about circumstances described (Waldram, 2007) is one of these steps. The participants were allowed to recount their experiences in the way they wished, with the researcher used a loose structure to gather this information. Clear structures were provided to signpost support services for those who felt in need of them post interview. The

participants were reminded of this and given a notice about it at the conclusion of the process. Actively listening to the life experiences of those who are willing to tell them is a key skill in the researcher's toolkit. However, this can pose a risk that the interviews are considered as a therapeutic session. Clear lines were drawn on the interviews purpose at both the commencement and conclusion of the process, so this was clear to each participant (Dickson-Swift et al., 2016).

Whilst the interview processes for both victims and perpetrators were similar, the method of access to those who had committed sexual offences was complicated by them being prisoners in a restricted access location. This added a layer of complexity to the risk assessment process that had to be addressed. To minimise these risks personal safety training, familiarisation, and induction were required prior to the researcher being granted access to the prison. In addition to this, simple risk mitigation methods such as using secure walkways and ensuring an awareness of the researcher's location were employed at all times.

Listening to accounts of personal trauma can be a challenging process for a researcher (Cowburn, 2010). Thus, a support network for the researcher was designed into the process. A practice considered essential by Dickson-Swift et al. (2008). This involved regular de-briefs and supervision meetings throughout the information gathering stage, with advice and support being offered when necessary.

3.3 Samples, Data collection and analysis

As a mixed methods approach is used for this research project the processes are presented on a study by study basis to simplify the rationale behind the different methodologies used.

3.3.1 Study 1 – Comparative case studies

Case studies are the detailed but limited descriptions of things such as events or processes. They provide a general insight into a principle rather than an in-depth scientific analysis. They use sources of information which provide context to a subject area (Knight, 2001). The comparative case study adds an additional iteration by examining the similarities across cases sharing similar elements. The methods can be inductive or deductive, but they are heuristic in their approach, Thus, they can only generalise from the evidence provided (Knight, 2001). However, multiple cases tend to make the evidence found stronger. Comparative case studies have a fundamental purpose of developing knowledge and understanding of specific situations (Knight, 2001). The data used in such studies tends to be secondary which makes the researcher reliant on the facts as reported by another individual or organisation. But studies of

this nature allow the researcher to make comparisons and generalisations whilst considering the complexities of the real world (Knight, 2001). The purpose of developing knowledge and understanding was the underlying reason for the selection of the first study method. It essentially examined the facts of online sexual coercion of children as reported in the world we live in, allowing for a thorough understanding of a crime type that was relatively un-researched.

Selection criteria

To select cases for inclusion in this study, the key search terms of "Sextortion, Blackmail, and Extortion" were used in Internet and academic library search engines. The results were then filtered to include results that included only online cases where children or both adults and children were indicated as victims to this criminal behaviour. A final requirement was that the cases should involve a perpetrator obtaining or requesting sexual imagery from the victim in an online environment. Searches were conducted using public (Google and Bing) and academic database search tools (NTU Library). Although it would have been feasible to contact prosecuting authorities to obtain details of cases under the Freedom of Information Act, or through joint working protocols, a lack of consistent classification (see Chapter 2), and potential data disclosure/privacy issues made the process of using open source material simpler and faster. The searches for cases used in this study were made during 2017 and 2018.

Sampling

At the time of collecting the data, there was not an unlimited number of cases available for reference purposes. This resulted in a convenience sample having to be relied upon as it presented a reasonable solution to collecting a sufficient quantity of data after the selection criteria had been applied. Although some basic processing of the data was carried out, statistical significance testing was not used in this study and the results provide only evidential generalisations. This decision was made as the cases were only ever intended to build a foundation of knowledge to assist the more in-depth studies. With this in mind, a target of approximately 20 sample cases was set as this offered a suitable variety to produce meaningful results.

Data Collection

The data used in this study originated from numerous different sources including media reports as well as public body reports. The data was not formatted in a consistent way. Reports identified as being suitable for inclusion in this study were collated and

then coded onto a spreadsheet. Key evaluation data fields were used to standardise the information to allow it to be processed and compared.

Method of analysis

The methods used in analysis were simple data processing, graphical or tabulated representations. With only a modest target of case numbers, more complex statistical processing would be likely to result in an excessively large variance, making conclusions difficult to draw. In data fields where text descriptions were used, a simple form of inductive thematic analysis was used, determined by the data in the reports. This was aggregated into similar type themes to provide some form of numerical or graphical representation.

Ethical considerations

The research documents used for this study were from open sources and available publicly. It included news, court and police media reports. They all included the name, age and locality of the person convicted of a sexual offence. As these data are secondary and publicly available, they are not subject to the requirements of ethical approval for their collection and use. However, to maintain confidentiality, and in the event that any of the subjects may successfully appeal their convictions at a later date, the names have been omitted from the case studies. Ages and geographical locations are still used for the data processing aspects of the studies. It is recognised however that the source reference material will identify the people concerned.

3.3.2 Study 2 – Online survey

The literature available to the researcher at the time of the project inception (2016) was as discussed in Chapter 2 limited in its scope. There was little detail on the incidence of online sexual coercion against children, and even less that specifically focused on what were either the drivers or inhibitors of the criminality. The available studies examined how the offences occurred but did not examine the Internet use of children to establish if there were risk factors that increased their vulnerability whilst online. As a result, Study 2 - an online survey was designed to examine the online sexual contact that children experienced, how they went on to dealt with it, and how it made them feel. The studies purpose was exploratory and is presented as an appropriate method when the data is used to base future theories on (Eisenhardt, 1989). The methods of data collection and processing were simple and were not intended to involve complex statistical processing. They consisted of multiple-choice questions, Likert scales and open questions with text boxes to illicit comments from participants.

Consideration was given to various forms of survey to gather data. But it was the ease of application, low cost, and data handling capability (Loomis & Paterson, 2018) which ultimately led the researcher with a minimal budget to choose an online method of data collection.

Participant criteria

As widespread Internet use has only been part of society for 20-25 years (ONS, 2019), some recruitment criteria were necessary to target participants from the correct age groups. They needed to have used the Internet as a child. Its general uptake was estimated at 9% of households in 1998, 55% in 2005, and more recently 93% in 2019. As a result, anybody over the age of 34 years in 2016 was excluded from taking part. A 34-year-old adult would have been 14 years old in 1996 when Internet availability was more limited. The sexual nature of some of the questions in the survey could also make them uncomfortable for children, potentially exposing them to unnecessary discomfort. It was considered that a larger pool of participants over the age of 18 years could provide this same information with less individual risk of embarrassment and discomfort; as a result, children were excluded from participation. The population for the survey sample was restricted to an age range of 18-34 years old when the survey was launched. This effectively created a purposive sample (Maxwell, 2014). No other restrictions were placed around the recruitment of participants.

Sampling

When conducting research on previously unstudied populations or samples, difficulty can be experienced in setting parameters around desired sample sizes and levels of confidence as it is an unknown quantity being studied. It is often necessary to rely on estimates based on the desired level of accuracy wanted from the subject being surveyed (Blaikie, 2010). This can be further complicated when sub-samples obtained from the initial sample size become reduced after filtering answers. Confidence levels set at the outset of an exploratory piece of research are not likely to be as high when smaller sub-samples are considered within the survey. Some sub-samples may become very small when factors such as demographics or particular sub-sets are analysed (Blaikie, 2010). Unfortunately, it is not known at the outset of research, which particular sub-samples are those that are most likely to be of relevance, so estimates have to be made.

As the survey asked questions about the participants' sexual encounters and experiences online, it was recognised that it may cause discomfort or distress leading to a participant to drop out of the survey. There was also no requirement to complete

a question because of the sensitive nature of the questions; the participant could simply move on to another question or leave the survey. Due to the potential for drop out of participants who may have felt uncomfortable with the questions, a higher final target was set to ensure a broad range of data was available to the researcher. This was above the calculated sample size to allow for this (see Chapter 5).

Recruitment

To encourage participants to take part in the survey, a number (10) of online shopping vouchers of a nominal value (£10) were offered in a prize draw to those who wished to leave contact details at the end of the survey. To avoid the situation where monetary incentives could be considered as coercion to complete a survey (Ridley, 2009), it was left to the discretion of the participant whether they took part in the prize draw. It was also made clear that there were only a small number of prizes and that the chances of winning one was small (1 in 50 participants if n=500). The incentive offered was modest in line with the college guidelines (NTU), to avoid a perception of bribery to take part (Miller & Kreiner, 2008). Participation in the survey was possible via a web link. This was circulated widely on survey recruitment forums[7] with a worldwide exposure, and within the environment of the researcher's educational establishment. The link was circulated via departmental managers and placed onto a research participation forum (SONA[8]). Research credits were offered for those students who subscribe to the SONA research participation website. They have no monetary value but are required as part of the fulfilment of a psychology qualification. Whilst the credits are necessary to students, the number of research projects typically available numbers in excess of 50, further, there is no requirement to complete any particular type of survey. This gives participants freedom of choice to take part or not.

Data collection

As this was an exploratory study, it was decided not to target or limit specific demographics or groups of people other than the desired age ranges. This was to attract as broad a selection of participants as possible. To maintain the participants' anonymity, only age and gender were requested. The survey link was circulated widely within the researcher's academic institution. It was also disseminated on websites that focused on finding participants for research surveys within an education environment[9]. The survey remained open until the desired sample size was exceeded.

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[7] studentroom.co.uk, smartsurvey.co.uk
[8] http://www.sona-systems.com/participant-recruitment.aspx
[9] https://www.surveycircle.com/en/, https://www.findparticipants.com/

Methods of analysis

Analysis of the data gathered from the survey proceeded with the researcher choosing to use simple numerical representation, and cross tabulation of the gathered data opposed to more complex methods. The intention being to provide a snapshot of the proportions of the sample that felt they were subject to online sexual activity from adults. The survey explored the feelings evoked, the methods the individual participants used to deal with threats, and potentially what made them more vulnerable to online exploitation. Casting such a wide net in search of knowledge carries a risk of failing to meet the research goals (Blair et al., 2013). To avoid this, analysis of data was kept at a rudimentary level. In addition to the numerical representation, a simple form of thematic analysis was used for the text-based responses to categorise and grade the feelings that the participants experienced into a format that could subsequently be represented in simple numerical format. A deeper analysis of participants' responses was intended for the subsequent studies 3, and 4, which would analyse in-depth the accounts given by participants.

3.3.3 IPA Studies 3 and 4

Study 3- Semi-structured interviews with adults who were subject to online sexually coercive behaviour as a child.

Study 4 – Semi-structured interviews with those convicted of online sexual abuse of children involving coercion.

The two IPA studies (3 & 4) used the same methodology and analytical processes. The differences in the two studies were in the methods used in the recruitment and interviewing phases. Study 3 was conducted in an open environment, whereas Study 4 was conducted in a prison with participants convicted of offences involving the online sexual abuse of children. The recruitment and interviewing for study 4 were completed within the confines of a prison that housed males convicted of sexual offences. Whilst it made the recruitment and interviewing a slightly more complex process, the general principles of recruitment and interviewing remained consistent across both studies.

Sampling

The goal in interpretive phenomenological analysis is to make a detailed interpretation of the life story given by the participant (Smith et al., 2009). This 'quality' of information for a study comes at a cost to sample size. The volume of data and depth of analysis from a single participant make it very difficult to analyse larger populations (Smith et al., 2009). Guidelines for sample sizes focus on the point where data

saturation has been attained (Guest et al., 2006). This point remains subjective, but recommendations vary between the 6-12 with higher numbers of participants resulting in a loss of focus (Smith et al., 2009). A target of between 8-12 participants, towards the higher end of the recommendations was set for this research. This would allow the project to remain viable even if some participants later withdrew consent towards the end stages of the project.

Recruitment

Study 3 - Victims

The study dictated a subset of participants was required who had experienced online sexually coercive behaviour as a child and were willing to share their experiences for research purposes. The sample was effectively purposive (Patton, 2014), represented by a small number of subject experts (Lavrakas, 2008) able to provide an in-depth knowledge from their personal experiences. Recruitment of participants for study 3 was via two methods. The first a screening section in study 2. This automatically identified participants who had been asked by adults for sexual images when they were children and been subject to coercive methods to obtain them. Those who fell into this criterion were asked if they wished to take part in a follow-up survey. If they did, they were asked to provide contact details of their choosing.

The second method employed was direct recruitment via the academic SONA system commonly used to provide research studies with participants. A cloud-based participant management pooling tool[10]. The researcher contacted all potential candidates identified and, the project was explained to them. They were supplied with information about the research, advised of its voluntary nature and given the opportunity to ask further questions. Those agreeing to take part were subsequently met in person where the process of consent was formally explained prior to any interviews being conducted.

Study 4 - Offenders

Recruitment of participants for a study within a prison comes with both advantages and disadvantages compared to those participants who are not incarcerated. The disadvantages were that simple tasks such as contacting a participant were made far more difficult. Participants had to be contacted in person rather than utilising the commonly adopted methods offered by technology. However, the advantages were

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[10] http://www.sona-systems.com/research-management.aspx

that that once a system of communication was established it worked remarkably well and the participant was generally always available.

Two methods were used for recruitment for study 4. The first was to place a notice on the internal communication/TV screens. These relay messages and notices to inmates. A request was made via this medium for participants who had a conviction for online offences of coercing sexual images form children. The second method was to place a similar request for participants in an internal news publication for inmates within the prison. All interested participants were requested to apply for the research by completing a basic application form, giving their name and prison number. Once this was received, the researcher visited each participant to explain the research process and to check whether the volunteer fulfilled the research requirements.

Data collection

Data collection was intended to provide in-depth accounts for qualitative analysis; all the participants had been involved in online sexually coercive abuse, a very sensitive and personal experience. To maintain their anonymity and promote the confidence of those that volunteered their life stories, the only real choice to gather the data ethically and confidentially was to conduct one-to-one interviews in a private environment. This allowed each interviewee to talk freely and with confidence (Waldram, 2007).

A loose semi-structured style of interview format was used that had an outline structure to establish rapport, and initial background/demographic information from the interviewee. It was then used to direct the interview into specific areas of discussion. The participants were ultimately allowed to discuss those issues they felt were of personal importance (Howitt, 2016) and relevance. Unless clarifying a particular point, open questions were used throughout the interview. These allowed the participant to answer in a way they choose without forcing them to discuss matters they felt uncomfortable with. Open questions are also useful in preventing issues of suggestibility during the interview process. For all participants in studies 3 and 4, interviews were conducted in private interview rooms with just the researcher and participant present. There were no remote viewing facilities. All interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone to allow later transcription. This also allowed the researcher to engage fully with the participant without having the distraction of having to write notes.

Method of analysis

The research aims for these two studies was to obtain an in depth understanding from people who experienced online coercive sexual abuse. Such a depth is commonly

provided by an ideographic approach, which concentrates specifically on the individual's personal life events (Conner et al., 2009). It examines the participant's experiences to create meaning from the accounts given (Smith et al., 2009). The method of analysis provides a structure to find this meaning. In considering an appropriate way to achieve the research aims, methods such as grounded theory, discourse analysis and phenomenological analysis were all considered for the in-depth interviews. Discourse analysis attempts to construct a reality from the study of language or communication, with the discourse being the focus of the enquiry to create meaning (Bryman, 2012). It is more applicable in circumstances where its social context is the purpose of the study (Howitt, 2016) and does not explore how the participants made sense of the lived experiences they recount during interview (Smith et al., 2009). For this reason, it was rejected. Grounded Theory (GT) is an approach to analysis that can, in a similar way to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), analyse the perspectives of the participants from their interviews. It constructs how they make meaning of their experiences within a social context (Smith et al., 2009). Its constructivist approach allows it to engage not just with the inductive what and how questions of social life, but also the why questions of a social constructionist approach (Charmaz, 2008). It offers a structured process for the development of theory, albeit the sampling requirements are quite large (Smith et al., 2009) and possibly more suited to a project utilising a large social group. With a larger sample size comes a less nuanced analysis (Smith et al., 2009). Grounded Theory uses an iterative style of method to create a process that develops a theory out of the collected data. This then directs further data collection from a larger sample than would be expected of a method such as IPA (Howitt & Cramer, 2014). Whilst this did not create an insurmountable problem, within the prison environment where the data collection was to take place, it provided a concern that there may not be sufficient numbers of participants who would fulfil the selection criteria. This could extend the data collection period unnecessarily whilst trying to find suitable participants. IPA was considered to be a more suitable method of making sense of the life stories of participants who had volunteered for the research studies (3 & 4). Whilst the hermeneutic process of making sense of the life stories gathered is dependent on the researcher's sense-making and life experiences, it is the life stories and meaning provided by the participants that drives the whole process. Thus, it relegates the researcher to be the interpreter and reporter (Smith et al., 2009). It was this capability of IPA that led to its selection as it allows the individual experiences of the participants to be heard.

Interviews

Open group forums of data collection provide less confidentiality and anonymity than a one to one interview. In addition, those who are more confident can have more of a 'voice' than those who are less so (Howitt & Cramer, 2014). This research concentrated on the life stories of individual participants, and it is these that the researcher wished to capture rather than a group perspective. The best choice in this scenario was believed to be one-to-one research methods, in the hope this would allow each individual participant to elaborate in a way and at a pace they felt comfortable with. This would instil confidence in the process, allowing them to reveal their experiences and the meaning they gave to those experiences. To be effective, IPA needs to gather rich and detailed data (Smith et al., 2009). There is a danger that too much structure to an interview schedule may stifle data collection (Howitt, 2016). For the purposes of this project loose semi-structured interview schedules were used. These offered the freedom for the interviewee to explain matters they felt were of importance and provide sufficient structure to maintain the research goals. Interview schedules were prepared for studies 3 and 4 that reflected the desired outcomes of the research interviews. This being a deep and meaningful explanation of the online sexually coercive abuse the participants had experienced whether as a victim, perpetrator or both. The questioning areas were grouped into sections that tried to build the confidence of the participant and the rapport between the interviewer and participant (Howitt, 2016). The schedules were reviewed and amended as required to ensure they were sympathetic to the subjects being discussed but keeping a focus on the necessary data collection. Further reviews examined the questioning style to ensure it was open and not suggestive. Consideration was given to the interview schedule to ensure it was constructed of open style questions and allowed the participants to talk freely about the specific areas they felt were important. This avoids suggestibility of thematic areas and negating the purpose of the analysis (Brocki & Wearden, 2006).

All interviews were conducted in suitable private rooms; only the researcher and participant were present. As it transpired the majority of the participants were keen to tell their personal stories and required little assistance to do so. Whilst the order of the interview schedule was not adhered to strictly, its objectives were met easily in the majority of cases with little guidance from the researcher. Some probing was required to clarify specific points with some of the participants. When this was felt necessary it was done in a manner that was minimally leading to encourage further reflection on the subject. All interviews were recorded to allow for transcription and to offer the respect to the participants that they deserved.

Analysis Process

The procedures described for conducting IPA analysis almost encourage a procedural flexibility that allows the analysis to develop (Smith et al., 2009). It begins with transcription of the interviews so they can be read, re-read and then analysed. The transcriptions were completed on a verbatim basis. Whilst the prosodic aspects of the conversation were not highlighted into the transcripts, significant pauses, emotions or repetitions were noted in event that they would have a bearing on the analysis (O'Connell & Kowall, 1999). Once transcribed, interviews were checked for accuracy. Each interview was read twice prior to notation to provide a familiarisation with the data. It gives the researcher the opportunity to engage with the interview transcript and to "take the insiders perspective" (Reid et al., 2005, p.22).

Transcription and reading were followed by a notation phase where each interview was further read with notes and comments made about the dialogue provided by each participant. This initial notation builds a picture of how the individual understood and interpreted their experiences. (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher was mindful of their personal reflexivity to maintain an analysis based on the evidence of the interview, providing comment where it was felt it personal bias or influence could impact on the analysis to enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis. In instances where emotional responses or unusual/distinctive ways of providing explanation were provided, these were also noted should they become relevant for deeper analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Emergent themes were developed from the initial notation phase. These themes move away from the complexity of the increasingly large data set of transcripts and notations. They shift the focus to working with the notes and themes, and ultimately just the developed themes (Smith et al., 2009). This leaves a traceable continuity back to the original text. The process of identifying emergent themes represents part of the hermeneutic process in which the interview is broken down by the researcher to make sense and understanding of the connections between different themes (Smith et al., 2009).

The developed themes from the interviews were tabulated onto spreadsheets chronologically, and labelled, to aid later identification and sourcing in the event they needed to be reconsidered or traced. Connections between the emergent themes were then considered. They were clustered according to these connections. This was an iterative process with consideration given to the meaning of the themes and its relevance to other themes. Its purpose was to draw out the sense and meaning of the participant's experiences and engage the researchers own sense to the double

hermeneutic process (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The clustering of the (sub) themes was further developed into a small number of super-ordinate themes. These were created to represent the essence of the meaning as given by the participants. The final part of the IPA process was to bring together the interviews representing how the themes create the super ordinate themes and provide a narrative as to how the connections and meaning were made.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

The positivist style of quantitative research lends itself to quality control in the forms of reliability (consistency over time) and validity (ability to measure what was intended) (Golafshani, 2003). With the emphasis of quantitative research generally being on observable or measurable facts to generate or test a hypothesis (Glesne & Peshkin, 1995). Measurement of its repeatability and accuracy is like the research itself a quantifiable observation (Golafshani, 2003). To apply these measures to qualitative research is more problematic as they do not fit well with the interpretivist research approach (Bryman, 2016). The difference in purpose of evaluating the quality of studies is one of the reasons why reliability does not fit well with qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). To ensure the reliability of the qualitative research product the concept of trustworthiness is argued as an effective gauge. It is constructed from the four key measures of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Lincoln & Guba 1985). These four criteria were utilised as explained in the following paragraphs, as a way of introducing quality controls to the qualitative research studies. It is worth noting that there are other models and arguments for assessing and maintaining reliability and validity, such as Yardley's four characteristics (2000). They offer similar concepts to those offered by the more accepted trustworthiness of Lincoln and Guba (1985), which was used due to its widespread acceptability.

3.5.1 Credibility

Research credibility is defined as promoting the confidence that the findings presented are plausible and representative of the data provided by participant interviews. Correctly interpreting the meaning conveyed from the original interview (Anney, 2014), or being the qualitative version of internal validity (Bryman, 2016). It is recognised as being achieved through a number of methods. These include adhering to the best practice principles such as those issued by the BPS or other organisations who promote legal, ethical and governance standards (Bryman, 2016). Other possible methods "include prolonged and varied field experience, time sampling, member checking, peer examination, triangulation" (Anney, 2014, p.276). To try and gain

credibility during the qualitative studies as well as adhering to best practice; the researcher utilised peer examination which came in the form of supervisory sessions and debriefing of the various interviews, and processes within the IPA process. In addition, for study 4 there was a prolonged period of engagement with the research site to allow the researcher to immerse himself into the world of the participants. Whilst it is recognised that this was the post-conviction 'world', it was closely linked to and resulted from their previous lifestyles. The researcher's exposure to the participants' lifestyle and regimes assists in understanding and giving context to their experiences and promotes trust and confidence from the participants (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Triangulation of data was also utilised in studies 3 and 4 to strengthen the credibility of the analysis. This took the form of utilising data sources of both sexes and from different loci in the UK opposed to one central location in study 3, and participants of differing sexualities in study 4. The participants were of a broad age range and no selection constraints were placed around sexuality or other demographic factors, other than having been involved in online sexually abusive coercion. This resulted in a range of participants who had experienced very different lives. These credibility factors were utilised to reduce any investigator bias (Anney, 2014).

3.5.2 Transferability

Transferability is a reference to the manner in which the research results may be applied to other contexts, or specifically predict how another sample may react under similar circumstances. With an IPA analysis, transferability is more difficult to achieve as its focus is on the individual lived experiences of a small sample of participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Within the qualitative studies of this thesis there are certain aspects where it would not be possible to consider the research as easily transferable to the whole population. This is because the area of study is very small. Despite this, there are specific circumstances which could be considered to be transferable, such as where individuals are on the cusp of engaging sexually as an adult with a child, or as a child with an adult. Some of the concepts and experiences described within the IPA analysis chapters could be transferable. This, as Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) describe can be achieved by providing a depth and richness to the data, with documentation that demonstrates what has occurred and when, effectively creating an evidential audit of the interpretation and decision-making in the analysis. Dissemination and explanation of this process allows it to be considered in similar (limited) situations.

The qualitative element of study 4 of this research was conducted within the environment of a prison for "men convicted of a sex offence"[11]. This environment is an unusual one, and the transferability of the results should be considered with this in mind. The content and frankness of the interviews may be reflective of the safe space feeling created by such a community (Blagden et al., 2016). It is quite possible that the interviews would not have been as open and honest if taking place in another location.

3.5.3 Dependability

Dependability is the equivalent of the concept of reliability and defined as "The stability of findings over time" (Bitsch, 2005, p.96). It should be possible to produce similar results if the study were repeated under similar conditions elsewhere. To ensure a dependability of the results a documented consistency has to be maintained to allow replication of the conditions and explanation of the decisions made during the research and analysis process. Clear explanation and documentation of the enquiry procedure including a reflexive process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is recommended. During the qualitative studies the researcher numerically linked all iterations of the IPA process and created commentary surrounding the decisions made to explain the rationale of the decisions. These were discussed and reviewed with supervisors on a regular basis to ensure that decisions were substantiated from the collected data. These reviews allowed a reflexive process on the enquiry to be maintained thus minimising bias.

3.5.4 Confirmability

This aspect of trustworthiness is rooted in whether or not other researchers can corroborate the findings of the research, and that the results are not "figments of the enquirers imagination" (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p.5). Similar to dependability, the processes of auditing and using reflexive notation are employed to maintain objectivity in the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The personal values, life experiences and instincts of the researcher should effectively be prevented from unduly influencing the findings unless they are rightly grounded in evidence (Bryman, 2004). This reflexive process was particularly important in this research as part of the researcher's previous career involved investigating and prosecuting sexual offences. It is easily arguable that from this a bias could be introduced. But through a process of reflexivity, supervision and open discussion this aspect can be minimised and managed (Anney, 2014).

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[11] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/whatton-prison

3.6 Summary

This chapter examined the methodology used in this research project, examining the rationale behind the research paradigms and choices of methodology used in the four empirical studies of this project. It examined some of the ethical considerations that were encountered in conducting research involving sensitive subjects whilst trying to promote the confidence and maintain confidentiality amongst those participants taking part. The rationale behind the sampling, recruitment processes, and analysis method was explained. Concluding this chapter, the methods of maintaining the products quality control were examined.

Chapter 4 - Case Studies

4.1 Introduction

Case studies are "not well defined in social science" (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999, p.372) They can be further confused when conjoined with additional terms such as method, analysis or comparative cases. Some definitions do exist. One such definition is that of Yin who quantifies case studies as "an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (Yin, 1994, p. 240). This definition serves to frame the purpose of the study within this chapter.

Sextortion as per Chapter 1 is a crime that occurs when threats are made to an individual to force them to provide sexual images. According to Wittes, it is "quite easy to accomplish" (Wittes et al., 2016, p.3), and can be committed against adults as well as children. It could involve the hacking of a computer to steal files and images to blackmail a victim into providing sexual images. More usually it is the manipulation of a victim into providing sexual images by a perpetrator who convinces them it is in their best interests to provide the image through trickery or lying. Social media and gaming sites are places where seemingly frequent and harmless conversations may commence between participants, often in the privacy of a bedroom with the door closed (Virtual Global Taskforce, 2015). These initially harmless conversations can develop into sexual ones. They result in victims self-generating sexually explicit images. It is claimed just under 86% of sexual images of children aged 15 and under are created in the home environment, frequently in the bedroom or bathroom of the victim's home on a mobile phone (Virtual Global Taskforce, 2015). Sextortion cases have more victims per perpetrator than other forms of sexual exploitation, with 28% of cases having a victim who committed or attempted suicide (US Department of Justice, 2016). It was further claimed that "sextortion is brutal" (Wittes, 2016, p. 5).

To test these claims and provide further understanding, this chapter was designed to examine "how sextortion happens". It does this by utilising comparative case studies which present data from published criminal convictions to establish whether reported 'real life' scenarios support the published research, and to provide direction for the further empirical studies of this thesis. Whilst case studies are a method that are considered as appropriate for the exploratory phase of research, they can also provide causal explanation. Case studies can attract criticism for not being carried out with the rigour of traditional academic methods of research or being teaching cases as opposed to true research (Yin, 2018). However transparent, methodical and balanced results

presentation avoids any potential research bias (Rosenthal & Rosnow 2009) and provides balanced inference based on the evidence within the data.

4.2 Method

With the purpose of this study being to find out 'how sextortion happens', data samples were obtained from examples of cases which were reported in open source documents. These included reports form police, courts, and news media. These are essentially sources of secondary data which present facts regarding 'real' crime cases. The researcher has no control over the facts or content presented. It is recognised that such reports could be factually limited and potentially contain a bias from the reporting organisation. However, they provide an insight into how crimes are being committed. This insight is essential to fully understand a criminal phenomenon.

4.2.1 Data Collection

Data were collected for this study by performing Internet searches using the key words "sextortion", "sexual blackmail", "sexual coercion" and "sexual extortion". The searches were conducted between 2017 and 2018. It should be noted that the results of Internet searches change with time[12], searches conducted during this research may be difficult to replicate in later years. Searches were carried out on Google, Bing and the Nottingham Trent University library search engine. No geographical restrictions were applied to the case search. Literature indicated those committing sexual offences do so across international boundaries (Wittes, 2016). Each iteration of search revealed in excess of ten pages of search results, with a minimum of ten results on each page. Four search terms and three search engines were used. This provided in excess of 1200 hyperlinks with potential cases. To reduce this number a three-stage process was applied to filter, incude/exclude and then select cases most relevant to the study. These cases were subject to the data extraction criteria which was developed as per Appendix 1 to provide a specific standard of information to be studied. This process involved the manual examination of the browser hyperlinks returned by each search engine. The criteria as outlined below was applied.

Filtering out criteria

1. Included within first four pages of search results for each iteration of search.
2. Any cases prior to the year 2000 were screened out due to the infancy of the internet, and its lower level of use within a residential setting.

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[12] https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/what-search-engine-and-how-do-they-work

3. The case to be reported in English to avoid translation errors.

4. The search result had to report the conviction of person/s for a sexual offence against a victim under 18 years of age.

The intention of the filtering out process was to increase the relevancy of the cases in the search results and minimise the risk of translational error. At the conclusion of this stage 87 potential cases remained.

Inclusion criteria

Specific inclusion criteria were applied to the remaining cases they had to adhere to the following points.

(i) Child victim - Cases where the victim ages were unclear were excluded. It had to be clearly stated that the victims were children.

(ii) Finalised prosecution - All sub-judicial or appeal-pending cases were excluded due to their unknown outcome.

(iii) Coercion or threats were used to enforce demand for images/video – the report had to contain direct evidence of such demands.

(iv) Factual cases only – matters reported only on social media and/or vigilante/paedophile hunter style websites were not included. Information on them was not always factual or based on the evidence offered in a judicial process.

Any duplicated cases were then aggregated, this reduced the number of cases for consideration to 32. With the range of hyperlinks for each case consisted of anything from one to six different sources of information, dependent on the popularity of online reporting. The third and final stage was the application of a set of specific criteria which had to be present for the case to be included in the comparative case analysis.

Specific selection criteria

1. Communication between convicted person and victim occurred online.

2. The case had to include circumstances where the victim was subject to a threat/coercion and sexual images/video were demanded as a result.

3. The sexual images requested had to be of a child.

No restriction was placed on the type of electronic device an offence was committed on. Neither did the victim or convicted person need to be in the same country when the offending occurred.

A total of 21 separate cases remained after the three-stage process which were included in this comparative case study. It included 22 different convicted offenders with one case had two convicted two offenders.

Verification

All selected cases were checked for accuracy. This was accomplished by conducting additional Internet searches using the available names of the convicted person/s. The searches were performed on Google and Bing. Additional searches were also conducted using the terms "sex", "conviction", "online", "internet", "offence" and "offender", "child porn" in conjunction with the name/s given in the selected cases. It was intended that those showing inconsistent reporting would be omitted, however this was not necessary, as there were no major factual inconsistencies.

4.2.2 Procedure

The data used in this study came from numerous different sources including media and public body reports, the data were not presented in a consistent manner.

To standardise the information within each of the individual cases, the factual data were listed onto a spreadsheet and placed into data fields. If information was unclear, it was omitted to avoid misrepresentation. The data fields containing similar facts, such as victim numbers, ages, sentencing, and Modus Operandi were clustered together. Any data field that was not populated by at least 70% of the cases was subsequently omitted. After clustering and filtering out of the insufficient data fields, 31 key evaluation data fields remained. These are indicated in Appendix 4. The nature of using non-standardised cases meant that, in its initial form, the spreadsheet had a variety of text-based and numerical data fields. These were refined where possible to contain standardised data (e.g., a numerical value for numbers of victims and sentencing). Where a data field was text-based, standardised words and phrases were used where possible that represented the reported facts of the case to allow comparison and data processing. For example, where possible, phrases such as "posed as teenage female", or "befriended teenagers on social media" would be used to enable comparison. If an author's opinion was used in a report, it was omitted.

Data extraction sheets are provided in Appendix 2, these provide detail of the finalised cleansed data used for analysis. The links (as of 2017) to the source documents of the cases studied are provided in Appendix 3.

4.2.3 Analysis

The analysis used were basic comparison processes such as counts, means, and tabulations. This was done to identify similarities and differences (Goodrick, 2014), between the varying cases to create an overview of the offending type.

4.3 Results

All of the data subjects were male (*n*=22). One case involved two offenders committing offences together as a team but from different locations (US and Iraq). The remaining 20 cases were males acting alone. The reports indicated that 15 people (68.18%) were convicted of online only offending. But within this online only category were four (18.64%) people whose convictions included remote sexual assaults on minors - they would direct the sexual activities of a child to offend against another child. These convictions included the statutory rape of a child under the consenting age by another child victim under the direction of the perpetrator. Five (22.73%) of the cases included convictions for contact based sexual offending, and a further two (9.09%) cases where the offender had either offered or tried to arrange a physical meeting.

4.3.1 Offender demographics, locations, and sentencing

The ages of the perpetrators (*n*=22) at the time of conviction ranged from 19 to 42 years old, the mean age was 30.13 years (mode=31, median=31, *SD*=6.21).

In eleven (50%) of the cases the offender was stated to have posed as a female when online, and 14 (63.74%) represented that their age was younger when online. Table 2 indicates the locations of the study subjects, with 36.36% in the UK, and 33.36% in the USA.

Table 2-Locations of offenders

Offender Location	Frequency
UK	8
USA	8
Australia	3
Netherlands	1
Iraq	1
Romania	1

The data in Table 3 presents the offender locations, their victim locations, and whether offending occurred across an international boundary. Of the total sample 59.10% (*n*=13) offended across borders, a much smaller proportion (36.36%) only offended in the country where they lived. In one case (4.54%), this information was not known. The perpetrators with the identifiers 3 and 4 acted jointly.

Table 3-Offender/victim locations and offending type

Identifier	Location	Victim Location/s	Across international boundary	Offending type (see key)
1	California, USA	Canada, Ireland, Moldova, USA	Yes	O
2	Florida, USA	USA, Canada, UK	Yes	O
3	North Carolina, USA	Quoted as "around the world"	Yes	O
4	Baghdad	Quoted as "around the world"	Yes	O
5	Alabama, USA	USA & "internationally"	Yes	O
6	California, USA	USA and "overseas"	Yes	O,C
7	Indiana, USA	USA	No	O
8	Netherlands	Netherlands, Canada	Yes	O
9	Newport UK	UK	No	O, M
10	Melbourne Australia	Australia and "overseas"	Yes	O
11	Melbourne, Australia	Australia, USA, and "overseas"	Yes	O,R
12	California, USA	N/K	N/K	O
13	Oldham, UK	UK	No	O
14	Derbyshire UK	UK, Canada, USA	Yes	O, C
15	Victoria, Australia	Australia	No	O, R
16	Birmingham, UK	UK	No	O, R, C
17	California, USA	USA	No	O, R, C
18	County Durham, UK	UK, USA, Canada, Australia	Yes	O
19	Romania	Northern Ireland	Yes	O
20	Manchester, UK	UK	No	O
21	Staffordshire, UK	UK	No	O, M
22	Birmingham, UK	UK and "worldwide"	Yes	O, R

O= Online offending only, R= Remote online contact offending, C=Contact offending in person[13], M=Arranged to meet victim

Figure 1 indicates each perpetrator's sentencing along with the nation of prosecution and where available the locality. Those perpetrators who committed contact offences are highlighted in red. The six most substantial sentences were passed within courts in the USA. The two most substantial sentences were passed against offender 2 (110 years) and 3 (105 years) for online only offences. In the UK, perpetrator 16 was

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[13] The definition of contact offending used was - "Those who physically commit sexual offences against child victims" (Elliot et al., 2012, p. 4).

convicted for remotely raping three children by coercing another child to perform a sexual act, there were also a further 13 cases of blackmail to obtain indecent images within the indictment. This person was sentenced to a lower sentence than some of the online only offenders from within the same prosecution jurisdiction as well as those from overseas. The lowest sentence was passed against an offender who hacked into 100-150 victims' computers from around the world, and subsequently demanded indecent images (Offender 1, 1.5 years). Those who committed sexual offences by remotely forcing a victim to perform sexual acts against another child (11,16,17, 22) also received lower sentences than perpetrators convicted of online only offences.

Figure 1-Sentencing duration
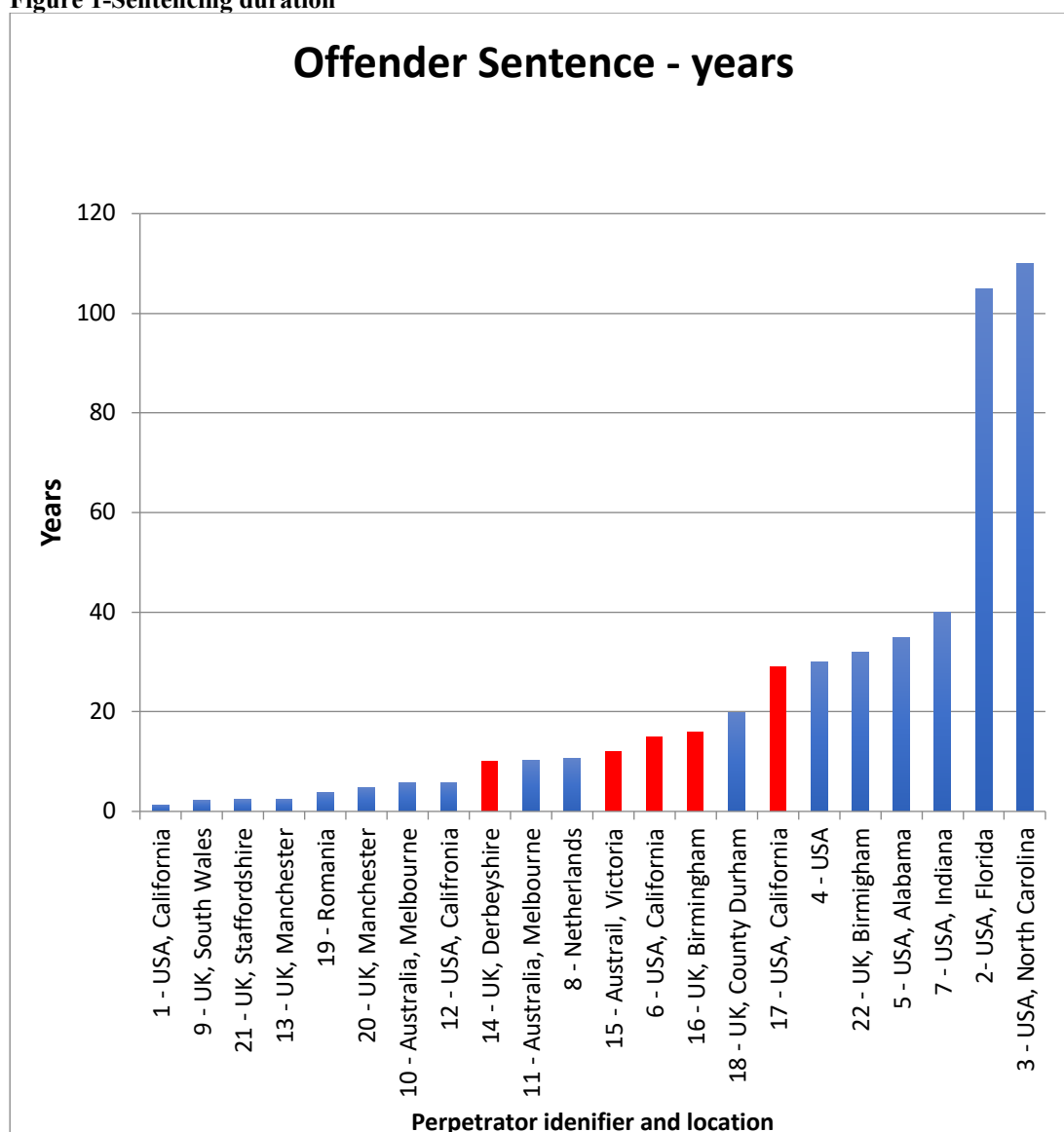
4.3.2 Victim ages.

Of the 22 examined cases the victim's sex was male in four cases (18.18%), female in 13 cases (59.09%), and both in five cases (22.73%). In the mixed sex cases it was not

possible to ascertain the proportions of male/female victims due to insufficient information. A total of 18 (81.81%) of the studied cases indicated that only children under 18 were victimised, with four (18.18%) involving the coercion of both adults and children. From the available data, there were no indications that the victims were known to the offender prior to the offence. In seven (31.82%) of the cases, the victims were reported as being younger than teenagers. The youngest reported victims of blackmail were eight and nine years old. However, there were further secondary victims created by the offenders who coerced their initial online victims to perform sex acts against relatives who were also minors, the youngest being against a 12-month-old baby who was reportedly raped by a blackmail victim under duress (Case 18).

4.3.3 Contact Offending

In five (22.73%) of the cases, the offenders had either requested to meet the victim or have been found (by police) with a child victim. In four (18.18%) of these cases, it was reported that the offender had performed a sex act with a child victim. Three (13.64%) of these were the victims of online coercion/blackmail. In one (4.54%) of the cases, police officers found the offender (15) in bed with a naked child having just performed sexual acts, the child was not a subject of the initial investigation. In the remaining fifteen (68.18%) cases, no attempts to meet with the victims were reported.

4.3.4 Contacting Victim

The most popular method for offender to establish contact with the victims was using social media. Fake or multiple fake profiles would be created on social networking sites. A total of 14 (63.64%) offenders used social media alone to correspond with their victims. In one case it was unclear how the offender had corresponded. In the remaining five (22.72%) cases malware was used to access the victim's computers, with chat rooms and social media also being utilised by the offenders to either threaten to publish information, account takeovers, or communicating with victims. Social media featured in 17 (77.27%) of the cases. In the remaining cases, it was not stipulated whether it was used or not within the report details.

4.3.5 Hacking of victim's computers

In the five (22.73%) cases where hacking or account takeover was identified, all of the cases used some form of Remote Access Trojan (RAT) (Europol, 2020). It was disguised in files or attachments the victims were encouraged to download. Once opened they installed a piece of trojan software. Bifrost, Poison Ivy, Dark Connect and

Blackshades were RAT applications identified as being used in the cases studied. These allow the victim's computer to be controlled remotely and covertly by another user. Typically, this gives the offender the capability to collect log-in information (key logging), download and upload files, change computer settings, run tasks and processes (Symantec, 2017). Once this level of access to the victim's computer is achieved by the perpetrator, they are able to use the computer as their own. In these case studies the below were reported to have occurred:

- Identify personal information or explicit images of the victims from the computer

- Access computer webcams covertly to obtain images of victims when they are in a state of undress

- Obtain login information to social media accounts to access them

- Identify other victims or victims' friends to involve in the blackmailing process

- Threaten to destroy files on computer or cause computer to crash/become unusable.

4.3.6 Coercive techniques employed to procure images from victims

In 21 of the 22 cases (95.5%), the offender threatened to expose an image of the victim on the Internet unless a sexual image was sent. In the majority of cases this threat was to expose a pre-existing image or piece of information to friends (27.27%), publicly online (22.73%) or on pornography websites (13.64%). Additional threats were also made against the victims in seven cases (31.82%). These included threatening to reveal a victim was gay (13.64%), physical harm to the victim and their family (4.5%), telling police the victim had sent indecent images (4.5%), payment of money (13.64%), or the withholding of benefits the perpetrator had previously given the victim (4.54%). In one case the victim was told the police would be informed they had produced indecent images of a child unless they complied. Technically the child victim would have committed a criminal offence although they would have likely committed it under duress, which is considered an allowable defence in the UK (CPS, 2019).

4.3.7 Demands

Table 4 indicates the style of demands made by the perpetrators to the victims. The majority of them (86.36%, n=19) were for indecent imagery - pictures, videos or live streaming. The most severe demands were arguably those leading to personal meetings, physical abuse or forcing victims to abuse other children.

Table 4-Demands made by perpetrators

Demand	Frequency
Nude/sexual pictures	19
Strip/perform sexual acts on camera	7
Money	3
Personal meeting	2
Perform a sexual act against another child	2
Not given	1

In making demands 22.73% (*n*=5) of the perpetrators made multiple types of requests from victims. The demands made were reported as becoming progressively more sexual as the offending continued in 54.46% (*n*=12) of the cases. A small proportion of the cases (9.1%, *n*=2) reported financially oriented blackmail against some of the victims for not disclosing their sexuality. In 9.1% (*n*=2) of the cases, suicides were associated with the blackmailing activities of the offenders.

4.3.8 Obtaining leverage against a victim

The online sexual coercion of children relies upon the ability of the offender to obtain the first victim image or other means of providing leverage to compel a victim to fulfil a demand (Acar, 2016). The most common method used was for the offender to deceive the victim about their true identity whilst in a chat room or on a social media platform, and then build an online relationship. After establishing this relationship an initial trade of images occurred providing the necessary material for the offender to blackmail the victim. This was a method used in 68.19% (*n*=15) of the cases. A fake online profile was used in 77.27% (*n*=17) of the cases. Table 5 indicates the frequency of the methods.

Table 5-Methods of gaining compromising information

Leverage gained by	Frequency
Hacked computer and gained access to webcam obtaining compromising images of victims	3
Hacked computer and obtaining compromising image from stored files	1
Befriended people on social media using fake profile. Sent Malware, hacked computer and threatened to damage it	1
Befriended people on social media using fake profile, developed an online relationship manipulating victim into providing compromising image	15
Befriended people on social media using fake profile, developed an online relationship manipulating victim into providing personal information	1

4.3.9 Social media and fake profiles

As highlighted fake online profile use was common; 63.64% (*n*=14) of the perpetrators posed as someone younger when offending. Of those using social media or chat rooms 50% (*n*=12) posed as a female, 13.64% (*n*=3) posed as both male and female. Two perpetrators (9.10%) posed as Justin Bieber, with 27.27% (*n*=6) perpetrators presenting as a male. In one of the cases (4.54%) the perpetrator posed as a modelling agent. Table 6 indicates the frequency an individual social media sites was named as being used in coercing sexual images from children. Facebook was the most frequently quoted platform, being quoted in 50% (*n*=11) of the cases.

Table 6-Frequency of social media site usage

Facebook	11
Myspace	2
Omegle	2
Stickam	1
Meetme	1
Habbo	1
Kik	1
Whatsapp	1
BBM	1
Snapchat	1

4.3.10 Number of victims

Table 7 provides the number of victims from each of the cases studied. The cases identified were not selected based on the number of victims; they are a reproduction of the facts that were reported, but it is accepted that generally only the more serious and sensationalist cases tend to get reported in the media or by the enforcement agencies responsible. In cases where no victim numbers were reported a minimum of one was given (even if numerous charges were made). The proved victim numbers are the minimum number of victims available and those used in court proceedings. The suspected victim numbers are the number of victims that are believed to have been targeted as a result of descriptions made in the reporting of the cases. Where it was not possible to establish this number, the actual number of victims from the charges was used. In all cases the minimum number from the estimates has been used. For example, in one of these examples (case 13), personal communication between the researcher and case officer revealed that 21 female children were identified from images on the offender's mobile phone, but the prosecution relied on evidence from one victim.

The number of victims in both categories (proved and suspected) is high. The proved victim number totals 456 victims amongst 22 perpetrators, equating to a mean of 20.72 victims per offender (Median=9.5, Mode=1). Using the suspected victim numbers from the case reporting multiplies this by a factor of over 12 to 5505 victims[14]. This gives a mean number of offences per perpetrator of 250.23 (Median=24, Mode=1).

Table 7-Number of victims per perpetrator

Case Identifier	Proved victim numbers	Suspected victim numbers	Sentence
1	12	100	18 months
2	1	350	105 years
3	1	3800	110 years
4	-	-	30 years
5	15	15	35 years.
6	12	24	15 years.
7	20	153	40 years
8	20	250	10 years 243 days
9	3	3	28 months
10	17	17	6 years
11	43	43	10 years 5 months
12	230	230	72 months
13	1	21	32 months
14	4	4	10 years
15	22	22	12 years
16	1	63	16 years
17	1	1	29 years
18	19	100	20 years
19	1	1	4 years
20	7	7	Indeterminate sentence - minimum of 5 years
21	1	1	2 1/2 years
22	45	300	32 years
Total	456	5505	

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[14] The perpetrators for Case identifier 3 and 4 acted together so the victim numbers were only stated once

4.3.11 Offending period

Table 8 presents the identifiable period of offending the perpetrators were reportedly active for. There does not appear to be any correlation of the length of offending time to the number of victims or sentencing of the perpetrator. For example, the two most extended offending periods (Cases 15 (Australia) and 22(UK)) both included remote sexual assaults/offending against victims but did not attract the highest sentences instead ranking 11th and 5th on the sentencing chart (Figure 1). The shortest offending periods (Cases 13(UK) and 19(Romania)) ranked 19th and 18th on the sentencing chart. The different legal systems faced by the samples tended to show that those convicted within the US jurisdiction on average got longer sentences than other countries (see Figure 1).

Table 8-Period of offending

Case Identifier	From	To	Period of offending	Legal jurisdiction
13	2007	2007	<1	UK
19	Jun-15	Jun-15	<1	Romania
21	2015	2015	<1	UK
1	2012	2013	1	UK
6	2012	2013	1	USA
12	2009	2010	1	USA
5	2009	2011	2	USA
7	2010	2012	2	USA
11	2011	2013	2	USA
14	2003	2005	2	Australia
17	2011	2013	2	UK
2	2007	2010	3	USA
9	2012	2015	3	USA
10	2009	2012	3	UK
20	2008	2011	3	Australia
3	2005	2009	4	UK
4	2005	2009	4	USA
16	2011	2016	5	USA
8	2008	2014	6	UK
22	2009	2017	8	Netherland
15	2006	2015	9	UK
18	-	-	-	Australia

The mean sentence for the offenders in the USA was 40.28 years opposed to the UK for example, which was 12.17 years, the sample size was not sufficient to provide an

accurate representation for examples from other countries. The legal jurisdiction did not appear to bear any correlation to the offending period either, although again the sample size was too small to provide a reliable guide.

4.3.12 Detection avoidance

The methods used by offenders to avoid detection varied in sophistication. Two out of the five (9.09%, n=2/22) offenders who utilised hacking took steps to hide their Internet Protocol addresses. Using either virtual IP addresses or IP cloaking, making it more difficult to identify them. In the remaining hacking cases, no steps were taken to hide IP addresses, but false names were used on social media/email accounts. One of these offenders used his workplace IP address - the US state department - when offending. Of the 17 non-hacking cases, only two offenders used tactics to hide an IP address. It may be worth noting that even when steps were taken to avoid detection, once the authorities were informed of the crimes, they were able to trace and detect the perpetrators using a variety of conventional or covert investigative methods. Some of which included simply checking registration with Internet service providers, account registration details, or cross checking the multiple identities for common data. Only one of the perpetrators (22) utilised more sophisticated methods, such as encryption, to avoid detection.

4.4 Discussion

Whilst it has to be remembered that not all the facts of these case studies were available, there did appear to be some common themes within the studied offending style. Online sexual coercion of children on the Internet appears to be a form of criminality predominantly committed by males, with those responsible targeting numerous victims over a prolonged period of time. The criminality does not seem to be limited to online only offending, with just under a quarter of the offenders also contact offending. What is probably a more troublesome aspect of this type of offending are those offenders who coerce the initial child victims to go on and commit sexual offences against their siblings or other children within the household at the request of the offender.

The cases examined in this study highlighted one which included the rape of a 12-month old baby by a victim of online coercion at the direction of the offender across international borders (case 18). The offender for this case was based in the UK and the victims in the USA. This criminality falls very much within the realms of a cybercrime (Burden et al., 2003) one which is enabled by the Internet and falls across international boundaries. This introduces jurisdictional difficulties in the form of ownership,

information disclosure and legal process. It makes the detection and prosecution of the offender more difficult and slower, but not insurmountable. Protocols are in place (CPS, 2013, and NPIA, 2012) to assist this. This study provides a good example of where cross border enforcement protocols are needed along with the specialist knowledge to apply them. Their application requires a greater commitment in time and more liaison with others in the judicial process than domestic investigations. Because of this, cases of online sexual coercion are likely to benefit from being allocated to specialist investigative departments with the knowledge and capacity to perform this. This will further ensure prosecutions can truly establish the level of victimisation that has occurred and allow sentencing to reflect this.

Although sentencing tended to attract a substantial custodial period for those who progressed to contact offences, the largest sentences were for non-contact offences committed in the USA. Given that over 50% of the offenders in this study communicated across international borders it indicated a joint and consistent international sentencing policy is worthy of consideration as a deterrent to counter cross border criminality of this nature. This is not a new revelation but does substantiate the claims that have already been disclosed by others (Wittes et al., 2016).

In the majority of the cases the victims provided a self-generated sexual image or video footage to a person who they believed was someone else. The offender subsequently used this as a means to force the victim into providing further imagery. Targeted prevention advice about the creation, storage and production of naked or sexual images might reduce the images available to be used as leverage. But this is already in place for most children going through the education systems in the countries subject to this study. This suggests a stronger preventative method is needed such as the filtering of images suspected to contain sexual content or moderation of sexually suggestive conversations amongst those below the age of consent. These processes could be both automated and/or performed manually.

The number of offenders using sophisticated methods to avoid detection was low. Most offenders used fake details for registering online accounts. Being able to create multiple fake social media accounts on platforms such as Facebook means the barriers to entry for this crime type are low (Case 18 perpetrator had over 30 accounts). Making multiple and fake accounts should be made far more difficult when the platform is hosting children. Safeguarding guidance provides an obligation to discharge duties in

promoting child welfare. This includes controlling how those considered high risk to the welfare of children are allowed access (HM Government, 2018). Extending these obligations to industries and platforms that allow open communication and easy access to children may require some consideration, especially when it is known such abuse has resulted in suicides.

The majority of threats were to expose compromising pictures of the victims to peers and family. The impact of the threat was sufficient to force the victims to comply and provide further indecent images. In cases 8 and 19 of this study, victims were so traumatised it ultimately it led to their suicide. This is a reminder that online sexual coercion should not be underestimated (Kopecky, 2017). It is also worth noting that the cases of blackmail were not discovered until after the suicides. Possibly the victims felt they had no other option. This should never be the case, providing a route for victims of sextortion to follow should be paramount to avoid such suicides. The organisations who do this already exist. The signposts might not be in the correct places. Artificial intelligence and algorithms currently calculate what we want to buy and direct us to it on the Internet, there is nothing to stop them from being used to prevent harm.

Within the case studies a variety of offences were disclosed that formed the prosecutions, including blackmail, rape, enticement, solicitation, computer misuse, there were no reports of insufficient statute. Wittes et al. (2016) highlights the lack of an offence of sextortion. Other than providing a label for a crime type and counting the size of the problem it is not clear if this would improve prosecution rates. In the UK guidance exists outlining how online sexual crimes should be categorised and processed (College of policing, 2016; CPS, 2013). It seems that the processes and law are in place to put authorities into an informed position to tackle crimes of this type. But, the high number of victims suggests that interventions are not coming early enough. Improvement of this is likely to require a change in attitude on reporting, victims should not have to think twice about reporting unacceptable behaviour, the processes should be quick and easy, and the response should be appropriate and visible. It might also give those who feel they have no choice other than suicide some confidence that they are not in an irretrievable situation.

From the cases studied it is worth noting that even those who tried to hide their IP address and identity were brought to justice. Once a notification was made to the

authorities, they were able to trace and detect the offenders using a variety of means. These included checking registrations with service providers, or cross checking of multiple identities for common registration information. Whilst there may be a perception of anonymity on the Internet. The tracing of an offender by the authorities is a realistic prospect. It is achieved through conventional investigative methods. But without a report or notification only those crimes proactively investigated will ever be detected. For someone to commit 3800 offences (Cases 3 and 4) or have 27 hard drives full of 20,400 images (Case 8), there is clearly a problem with the notification of online offending. The case studies provide only an initial glimpse into online sexual coercion, it seems that those committing these offences become involved in a protracted period of repeat offending against children. Within this study 27.27% (*n*=6/22) of the cases included offending periods of over four years, and 81.82% (*n*=18/22) of them offended for a period in excess of a year.

The concept of remote sexual offending is introduced when examining these cases. The perpetrator directs sexual activities of primary victims, making them a perpetrator to sexual offences and creating secondary victims who are potentially abused in far more serious ways. Briggs et al.'s (2011) study of internet chat room offenders explained how there were two types of Internet-based offender, those who had a desire to engage in offline sexual practices, and those who were interested in cybersex. With the online offenders categorised as having less severe criminogenic factors than other offenders. The remote sexual offending cases do not seem to adhere to this hypothesis, with some of the most serious sexual offences being committed by online only offenders.

4.4.1 Limitations

1. This study collected data from a variety of sources in an unstandardised format and made generalisations from it to understand the subject matter. It has not been produced under scientific conditions and cannot claim to provide a statistical guidance. Future research into this subject area should explore in a more specific way any patterns or trends highlighted within this chapter.

2. The case study searches were conducted in 2017. Search engine results and website content changes with time. The results returned in 2017 may not be achievable in later years. Similar searches conducted might report on different cases and aspects of criminality which would change the key data found within the reports used in this study.

3. Whilst comment is made of the range of sentences passed in different legal jurisdictions it is also recognised that sentencing and legal powers are different within these jurisdictions. To fully explore whether sentencing is consistent fully representative samples within the various jurisdictions would be required.

This study took an initial look into the incidence of sextortion, how it happens, who commits it and how they do it. It revealed that offenders commit crimes across international boundaries, victimise many children, and continue offending until they are caught. It provides the foundations for understanding how online sexual coercion develops. The next chapter will examine the reported experiences of adults when they used the Internet as children. This is to establish what happened to them and how some might be more vulnerable to sexually abusive situations.

Chapter 5 - Study 2 Survey

5.1 Introduction

At the start of this project in 2016 more headline-grabbing information was available from the media relating to online sexual coercion of children than available from academic journals or research papers. The media reports painted an ugly picture of recidivism, serious offending and cyber-crime (Wittes et al., 2016). Time has increased the available knowledge in subjects such as sextortion, sexting, or similar activities carried out on the Internet which involve acquiring sexual images from children (Howard et al., 2017). When the studies for this thesis were designed, a number of the research studies now available about the online sexual coercion of children had not been published. As a result, small parts of this research now overlap with other work (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2016; Howard & Rokach, 2017; Patchin & Hinduja, 2018, 2020). The benefit of this is that it provides a quality control with which to compare data gathered in this study. The general low volume of research at the start of this project meant this survey study was designed to start at a basic level with an exploration to compliment and direct the in-depth interviews of the two qualitative studies in this research project.

This was study aimed to provide a basic snapshot of the online coercive sexual threats experienced by young people who used the Internet in their childhood years. It looked to understand the emotions they experienced, and what led to some of them being more vulnerable than others. Interviewing or surveying children presents logistical and ethical difficulties compared to the same activity with adults. To avoid this, the study was designed to survey young adults between the ages of 18 and 34 years who used and experienced the Internet when they were children. An exclusionary tactic which was primarily used to make the research easier, but it carried an element of risk in that event cognition can be altered by the passage of time and/or interference (Inda et al., 2011). This study also links to the empirical study in Chapter 6, which explored in greater depth the lived experiences of those self-identifying as having suffered online sexual coercion as a child. The survey objectives were aligned to research aim (1) - understanding how coercive online child sexual abuse develops. Achieved by incorporating the three research questions into its core design. By gathering data from a sample of adults who used the Internet in their childhood years, an insight of their experiences of online sexual approaches by adults was provided.

5.2 Method

The survey was directed at individuals who had used the Internet as children. This was interpreted as being under the age of 18 years, and is the age used by most nations to signpost the transition of a child to an adult (Graupner, 2000). Whilst computer networking and communications date back to the 1960s and 1970s, the Internet was not broadly rolled out for public use until the late 1990s. The survey was intended for those who were over 18 years old and were likely to have used the Internet as children in the period from the late 1990's onwards. It gave a desired age span of between 18-34 years old at the time of releasing the survey. The survey consisted of 79 questions, was launched in September 2017, and closed in December 2017.

The survey targeted four main areas of data collection:

- Internet usage controls
- Inappropriate contact
- Sexual interactions
- Asking others for images

The collected data explored the participants' online experiences, how they dealt with sexual approaches from adults, and the emotions it created. These provided the foundations for understanding how coercive sexual abuse developed prior to the in-depth interviews of Chapters 6 and 7.

5.2.1 Participants

As disclosed in Chapter 3, setting a sample size is not an exact science. The Office for National Statistics suggested that the UK has a population of 65,648,054 persons (ONS, 2019). Of these, 16,513,332 were in the age range of 18-35 years. It was further given that 99% of those aged 16-44 years are recent Internet users (ONS, 2018). To calculate a desired sample size for a survey targeting this age group, an online sample size calculator[15] was used based on that provided by Foddy (1993). Using this suggested population for 18- to 35-year-olds, a confidence level of 95%, and a margin of error of 5% produced a desired sample size of 365. Allowing an extra 10% for screened out participants would make the desired sample size 402, based on the UK population within the desired age range.

To minimise the unknown impact of reduced sub-sample sizes on the analysis (Blaikie, 2010), the number of participants was further increased to 500. This was above the minimum suggested sample size. When the survey was closed, a total of 506 people had completed the survey. Recruitment of participants was not restricted to any

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[15] https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/mp/sample-size-calculator/

subsection of society, and neither were participants of any specific demographic requested. For the purposes of anonymity, the only demographic data that were collected was age and self-identified gender. The links requesting volunteers for the survey were posted within the academic environment of the researcher's institution, as well as on well-known websites[16] to find volunteers for academic research. As a result, the participants were likely to be from within the Higher Education environment.

Participants who completed the survey were mostly located in Western Europe or the United States. Of these 85.6% (*n*=395) were located in the UK when taking the survey. This was within the desired sample size for the UK; circulation of the survey on the Internet allowed it to be completed by participants across the world.

The requirement of participants aged between 18-34 years led to a skew of the age distribution of participants, which can be seen in Figure 2. This was considered acceptable as well as desirable by the researcher as it introduced the benefit of more recent experiences and cognitions.

Figure 2-Frequency of participant ages
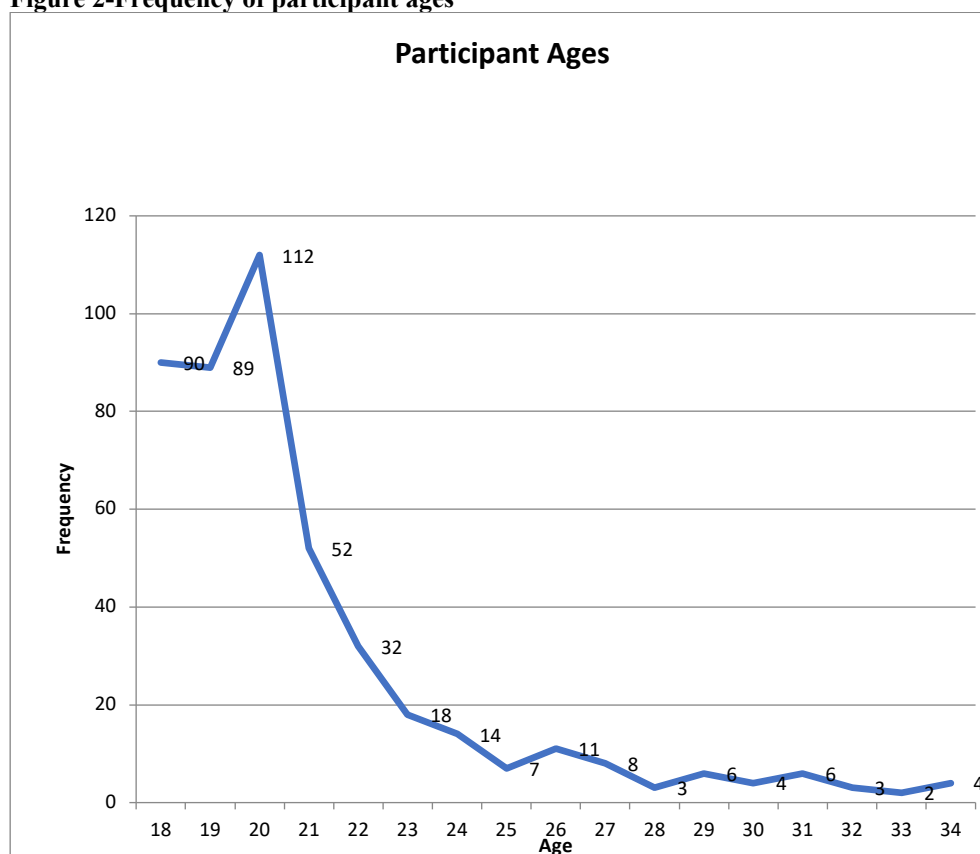
5.2.2 Procedure

The survey for this study was administered via the online platform Qualtrics. This was chosen on the basis of convenience, being the platform subscribed to by the academic institution attended by the researcher. The link for the survey was published at the researcher's academic institute (Nottingham Trent University), and on websites that host academic research studies. This provided an exposure to participants in the UK and internationally. In the initial pages of the survey data protection measures and the withdrawal procedure were explained. Participants were asked to confirm they were over 18 and consented to taking part in the survey. Contact information was provided in the event that participants wished to withdraw consent or had further questions.

5.2.3 Measures

The style of questions varied. They included closed questions to screen out participants who did not fulfil selected criteria for the survey; Likert scales to measure responses; and free text to allow participants to provide verbal responses to their online experiences. The survey started with an initial age screening section, and was then divided into 4 main categories which corresponded to the main aims of the research –

- **Internet controls -** Questions that explored whether the participants had their Internet usage restricted in any way. The questions concentrated on whether the participants were subject to any parental controls, Internet monitoring software and service provider controls. Information was gathered on the type of content that was restricted. This was subsequently used to assess its effectiveness in preventing inappropriate or sexual approaches online.

- **Inappropriate contact -** Questions focusing on whether participants felt they were contacted by people unknown to them and how they felt about this. This was followed up by probing whether the participants had been subject to inappropriate approaches on social media or chat rooms, how they responded to it, and the subjects they chatted about. They were further asked whether they had received any education in dealing with Internet threats

- **Sexual Interactions and online coercion –** Within this section participants were asked if they were involved in sexual conversations, and how they made them feel. This was followed up by questions exploring whether or not they were asked for sexual images and/or were subject to coercion to obtain them. The section finished with questions asking who they told about their experiences.

- **Asking others for images -** The final section explored if the respondents had asked other people for sexual images online and how often. It enquired about the type of relationship they had with them, and whether or not they had to use any persuasion to obtain these images.

Please see Appendix 5 for a complete copy of the survey.

5.2.4 Data processing

The dataset was download and cleansed prior to analysis. All participants who were outside the target age range of 18-34 or did not consent were excluded automatically (n=17). The data were checked for duplicates and/or incomplete responses. Where duplicate IP addresses were found, responses were aggregated and checked for uniqueness. Any surveys completed by a participant with the same IP address, gender, age, and filled out with irregular answers at a screening question within a 3-minute time scale were excluded. In examining responses for completeness; any surveys where the participant did not complete at least 70% of the questions were also excluded. This allowed participants to ignore any questions they may not have been comfortable answering without automatically excluding them.

Extraneous data[17] from the downloaded survey dataset was removed to ease handling; this initial dataset was saved into a format suitable to be used in both Excel and SPSS. Parsing of the data set was then carried out to isolate specific elements, these were standardised and consolidated into smaller data files. After screening and cleansing the sample size was reduced from 506 to n=457.

As the study was intended to provide a basic 'snapshot' of experiences, in-depth data processing was minimal. Preference was given to percentile representation and cross tabulations. However, where appropriate, analysis was carried out on those parts of the dataset allowing for testing of statistically significant relationships between key gender (Male and Female) variables and observed frequencies of reported participant experiences. The process used for this was Chi-Squared testing which has the advantage of testing relatively simply for associations and differences in observed and expected values (McHugh, 2013). Whilst tests such as Mann-Whitney were considered, the decision was based on assessing only the variables of gender which were constrained to Male and Female. The responses of 'Transexual', 'Prefer not to

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[17] This included information about the start and end date, survey progress, and survey platform gathered information, which was not relevant to this research.

say' and 'other' formed only four of the 457 included participants and were excluded from significance testing due to these low numbers.

5.2.5 Ethical Considerations

An application was made for ethical approval to collect data from participants in line with the British Psychological Society's guidance. For this study it involved an authorisation from Nottingham Trent University's research ethics committee. All participants taking part in the survey were required to read an initial statement outlining that they were free to withdraw from the survey at any time, that data would be anonymised and access to data would be strictly controlled. Participants were required to confirm that they were over 18 and consented to taking part in the survey. Contact information was provided in the event that participants wished to withdraw their consent or had further questions.

5.3 Results

From the final sample size of 457, 82.4% participants (n=380) were female, and 16.5% (n=76) were male. Within the 'other' category were 0.2% (n=1) of participants, 0.7% (n=3) were transgender, and 0.2% (n=1) preferred not to say. The mean age of the participants was 20.9 years (Mode=20, Median=20, SD=3.3). The majority of the sample, 88.2% (n=407), were in the age range of 18-24 years of age when taking the survey.

5.3.1 Internet controls

Internet usage restrictions

The first part of the survey examined Internet restrictions the participants experienced as children, and whether they felt their use of the Internet was controlled. The items and responses are presented in Table 9.

Table 9-Overview of responses and questions

5.1.1. Did your parents restrict your Internet use?

Sex	Yes	No
Male	23	49
Female	109	268
Transgender	0	3
Other	1	0
Prefer not to say	1	0

5.1.2. Was your Internet use restricted by the ISP or a monitoring app?

Sex	Restricted by app	Restricted by ISP	Both	Neither
Male	3	8	0	58
Female	8	71	6	286
Transgender	0	0	0	3
Other	0	0	0	1

5.1.3. Did you use the Internet privately when you were not monitored by parents or guardians?

Sex	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Rarely	Never	Other
Male	24	26	13	3	3	1
Female	142	138	58	20	8	7
Transgender	1	1	0	0	1	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	1

5.14. What type of content was restricted?

Sex	Sexual content	Gaming	Gambling	Profanities	Chat sites	Social media sites	Age related content	Other
Male	10	1	9	7	2	3	9	0
Female	67	14	43	24	15	12	59	7

From the sample, 70.02% (n=320/457) of participants indicated that parents or guardians did not restrict their Internet use, whilst approximately a third (29.32% n=134/457) indicated that they did. Chi squared testing indicated no significant differences between genders (Male or Female) regarding Internet restrictions put in place by parents, χ^2 (1, N=452) = 0.28, p=.61.

Of the participants (29.32%, n=134/457) who were subject to restricted Internet use, the age range mode when the restrictions ceased was specified as between 14-16 years (SD=1.131). Figure 3 provides a breakdown of when participants stated that parental Internet usage restrictions no longer applied to them.

Figure 3-Age when parental restrictions were removed

Age parental Internet restrictions removed
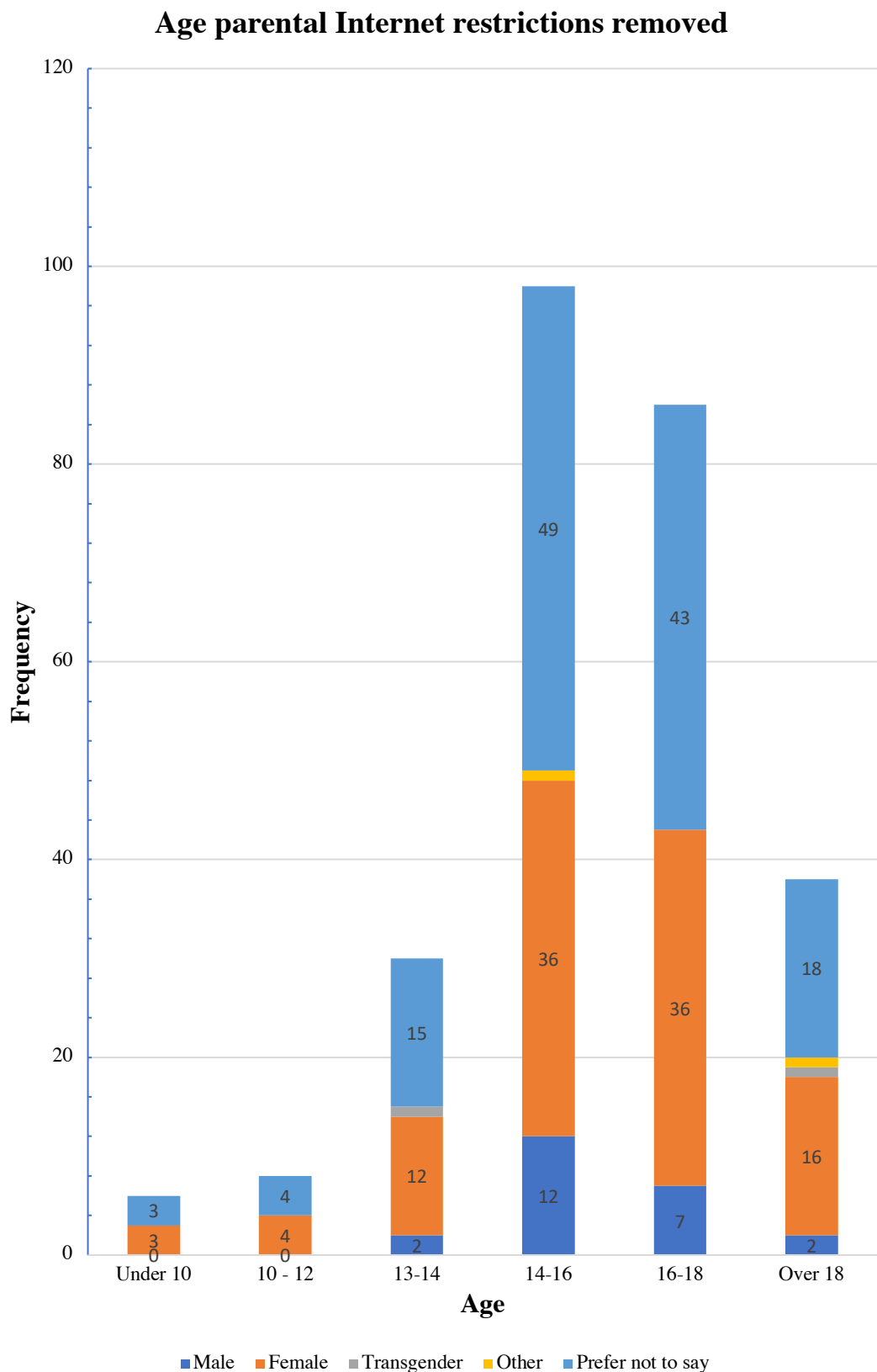
Some form of automated Internet usage restriction was in place for 21.01% (n=96/457) of the participants. The most frequently used method was to use the Internet service provider controls, with 17.29% (n=79/457) participants having used this. Application/software-based Internet protection was in place for 2.41% (n=11/457) of the sample, with 1.32% (n=6/457) of the sample using both.

Chi squared testing indicated no significant differences between genders (Male or Female) regarding automated Internet restrictions put in place by parents, χ^2 (3, N=440) = 5.48, p=.144.

Parental Internet monitoring

Question 5.1.3 on Table 9 asked participants to consider whether their Internet use was monitored by parents; 36.54% (n=167/457) indicated that they used the Internet unmonitored 'all the time'. A further 36.10% (n=165/457) stated they used the Internet unmonitored 'most of the time'. Thus, a total of 72.64% of participants were unmonitored on the Internet either all of the time or most of the time. By gender, 69.44% (n=50/72) and 75.07% (n=280/373) of males and females, respectively, fell into these same categories.

Chi squared testing indicated no significant differences between genders (Male or Female) regarding parental monitoring of Internet usage, χ^2 (5, N=443) = 1.693, p=.89.

Restricted content

The participants were asked to specify the types of content subject to restrictions (Question 5.1.4); it was possible to select more than one category. The most frequent response was 'sexual content' at 16.85% (n=77), followed by 'age related content' being referred to by 14.88% (n=68). Amongst the least restricted of the options was 'social media', with 3.28% (n=15) of participants stating that they had usage restrictions in place targeting its use.

Figure 4-Type of content restricted
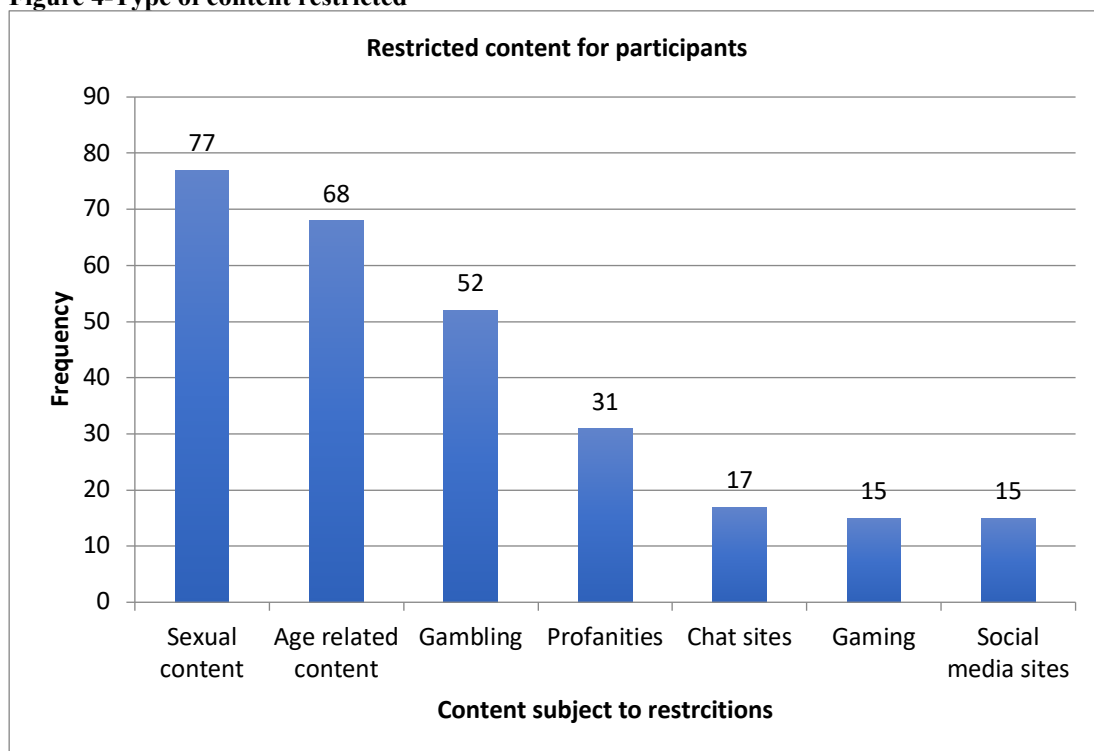
The survey indicated that 70% of the participants enjoyed use of the Internet without any parental restriction. Taking into consideration automated Internet controls such as those provided by Internet service providers or online safety software, most participants (59%) were able to browse the Internet freely as children. Freedom of use of the Internet did not differ significantly according to gender (male/female) with 70.53% ($n=268/380$), and 68.06% ($n=49/72$) of females and males respectively, not having parental usage restrictions. For those participants that had usage restrictions in place, sites with sexual content were the most frequently controlled; with the least restricted being social media sites (Figure 4). Chi-squared testing within this section did not reveal any significant differences between the male/female genders regarding any form of restrictive Internet use.

Those with controls in place felt the controls tended to ease as they approached their mid-teens. Those participants that had usage restrictions felt this focused on sexual content mostly, with just 3.28% ($n=15/457$) of the participants feeling their use of social media was restricted. The subsequent sections will reveal that this low level of control over social media use could be increasing the risk of children receiving sexual approaches.

5.3.2 Inappropriate online contact

This section of the survey gathered data on inappropriate approaches the participants received from people they did not personally know. It probed the participants' level of concern, Internet safety awareness, and how they responded to inappropriate approaches. Within the sample 3.06% ($n=14/457$) of the participants stated they did not use social media or chat rooms as children.

The items and responses are presented in Table 10.

Online contact from unknown people

Of the participants, 5.91% ($n=27/457$) felt they were 'never' contacted online by people that they did not know. By gender this was 19.44% ($n=14/72$) and 3.42% ($n=13/380$) for males and females, respectively. A significantly smaller proportion of females felt that they were 'never' contacted. The largest proportion of participants at 49.89% ($n=228/457$) felt they were 'sometimes' contacted by unknown people and 9.41% ($n=43/457$) felt they were 'always' contacted by unknown people. By gender this was 5.56% ($n=4/72$) and 10.26% ($n=39/380$) for males and females, respectively. In this case, a greater proportion of the female participants felt that they were 'always' contacted.

Chi squared testing indicated a significant difference between gender (Male and Female) regarding receiving online contact from unknown people, χ^2 (4, N=422) = 36.815, $p<.001$.

Knowing the age of who you are talking to

Probing the whether the participants knew the age of people they were conversing with online revealed that 3.94% ($n=18/457$) of those polled stated they 'always' knew the age, with the highest scoring answer being 'sometimes' at 46.39% ($n=212/457$).

Chi squared testing indicated significant differences between gender (Male and Female) regarding knowing the age of who the participant was talking to, χ^2 (4, $N=420$) = 9.883, $p=.042$.

Table 10-Overview of questions and responses

5.2.1 When you used social networking sites or chat rooms, did people you didn't know try to establish contact with you?

	Never	Sometimes	About half of the time	Most of the time	Always
Male	14	35	3	6	4
Female	13	193	58	57	39
Other	0	0	1	0	0
Transgender	0	2	0	1	0

5.2.2 Were you aware of their age?

	Never	Sometimes	About half the time	Most of the time	Always
Male	18	24	6	12	3
Female	53	187	43	61	15
Other	0	1	0	0	0
Transgender	0	2	1	0	0

5.2.3 How did you feel about not always knowing their age?

	Not bothered	It worried me a little	Concerned me a lot	Something else
Male	28	26	2	5
Female	88	176	60	19
Other	0	0	0	1
Transgender	1	2	0	0

5.2.4 Did you consider any of the contact you received from people you did not know was inappropriate?

	Yes	Maybe	No
Male	12	16	35
Female	180	88	90
Other	1	0	0
Transgender	1	0	2

5.2.5 What made you feel the contact was inappropriate?

5.2.6 Please list the websites or apps that you received most inappropriate approaches on?

5.2.7 Were you told how to respond to strangers on the Internet?

	Yes	No
Male	39	23
Female	238	102
Other	1	0
Transgender	1	2

5.2.8 Who told you how to respond

	Parents	Teachers	Friends	Other - please specify
Male	27	28	5	1
Female	183	191	29	14
Other	1	1	0	0
Transgender	0	1	0	0

5.2.9 Did you ever respond in any way to the inappropriate approaches?

	Yes	Sometimes	No
Male	6	11	9
Female	37	106	116
Other	1	0	0
Transgender	1	0	0

5.2.10 How did you respond to inappropriate chat or contact?

	Engaged in chat	Ignored(%)	Blocked(%)	Told them to leave you alone(%)	Reported the incident(%)	Other - please specify(%)
Male	9	4(5.56)	6(8,33)	4(5.56)	0(0)	1(1.39)
Female	51	67(17.63)	62(16.32)	60(15.79)	10(2.63)	12(3.16)
Other	0	0	0	1	0	0
Transgender	2	0	0	0	0	0

Concern level

Participants 'level of concern' at not knowing the age of those they talked to online is plotted in Figure 5. The largest proportion, 44.42% (*n*=203/457) of the participants were in the category of 'it worried me a little'.

Figure 5-Participants level of concern
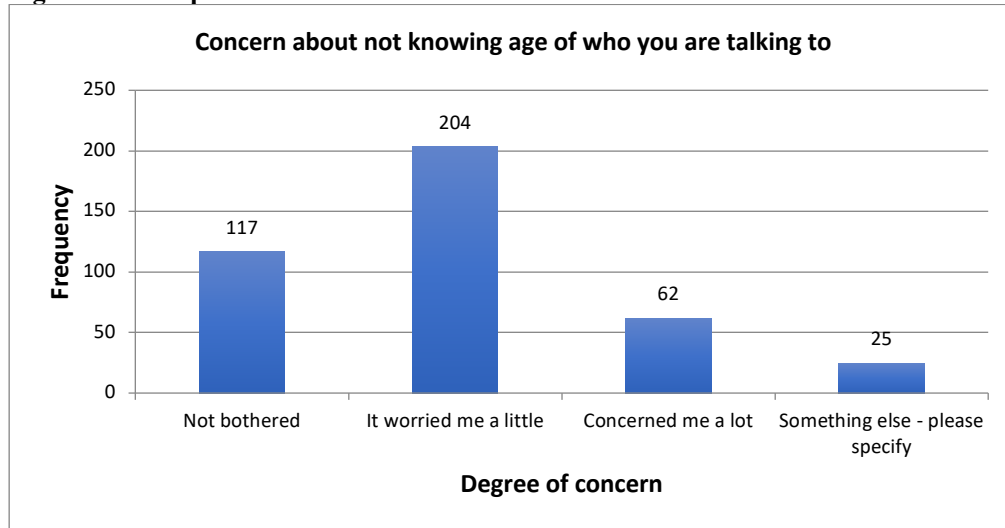
When considering these answers by gender, 37.50% (*n*=27/72) of males selected the category of 'not bothered' versus 23.16% (*n*=88/380) of females, and 2,78% (*n*=2/72) of males selected the category 'concerned me a lot' versus 15.79% (*n*=60/380) females. The male participants expressed lower levels of concern than the females about not knowing the age of those they conversed with. Chi squared testing indicated significant differences between gender (Male and Female) regarding levels of concern expressed about who they were talking to, χ^2 (3, *N*=402) = 15.137, *p*=.002. (Appendix 11 presents the data.)

Inappropriate contact

When asked if they felt the online contact they received from strangers was inappropriate, 42.45% (*n*=194/457) of participants chose 'yes', 22.54% (*n*=103/457) indicated 'maybe' and 27.57% (*n*=126/457) stated 'no'. Considering this by gender, the perceptions were different – 47.22% (*n*=34/72) of males responded with 'no' versus 23.68% (*n*=90/380) of females; and 16.67% (*n*=12/72) males responded 'yes' versus 47.37% (*n*=180/380) of females. Females showed a greater tendency to feel that online conversations were inappropriate.

Chi squared testing indicated significant differences between gender (Male and Female) concerning receiving inappropriate online contact, χ^2 (2, *N*=419) = 27.144, *p*<.001.

The responses from question 5.2.4 were cross tabulated against the restrictions on Internet use the participants felt they were subjected to. Table 11 indicates the participants' different forms of Internet restriction and whether they felt they received inappropriate contact. The variance seen on the 'yes', 'no' and 'maybe' categories is no greater than 3.6%.

Table 11-Internet restrictions Vs. inappropriate approaches online

Approached inappropriately	Internet use restricted by parents	%	Internet use not restricted by parents	%	No software or ISP restriction on use	%
Yes	52	**43**	122	**46.6**	152	**45.5**
Maybe	29	**24**	61	**23.3**	79	**23.7**
No	40	**33.1**	79	**30.2**	103	**30.8**

A similar cross tabulation was performed to compare those participants who were subject to Internet monitoring or supervision by parents or guardians, and whether they felt they received inappropriately contacted or not. Table 12 provides the results.

Table 12-Private unmonitored use of Internet Vs. inappropriate approaches online

Internet use unmonitored by parents or guardians - when online		All of the time	%	Most of the time	%	Some of the time	%	Rarely	%	Never	%
Approached inappropriately	Yes	87	**53**	67	**41.9**	24	**37.5**	7	**33.3**	2	**20**
	Maybe	42	**26.1**	38	**23.8**	15	**23.4**	5	**23.8**	3	**30**
	No	32	**19.9**	55	**34.4**	25	**39.1**	9	**42.9**	5	**50**

Higher variances are seen on the 'yes' and 'no' categories of Table 12 than on Table 11. There is some evidence of a reduction in the inappropriate online approaches the participants received, which suggests that parental monitoring of Internet use may lessen the amount of inappropriate contact received by a child.

Making a conversation inappropriate

To understand why participants felt a particular online conversation was inappropriate a text box was provided for comments; 281 participants responded. The responses were extracted and grouped into themes. The themes are represented below in Table 13 order of occurrence. There were a total of 354 themes from within the 281 responses.

Table 13-Extracted inappropriate themes

Subject	Frequency (%)
Sexual conversations	132 (35.63)
Older person	39 (11.68)
Sent naked/ sexual pictures	38 (10.78)
Not known to participant	37 (11.08)
Asking for asked/sexual pictures	36 (9.58)
Conversations participant uncomfortable with	31 (9.28)
Commenting on looks	18 (5.39)
Asking for personal details	12 (3.59)
From a foreign country	5 (1.5)
Overly friendly	3 (1.5)
Ask to meet	2 (0.6)
Offered money	1 (0.3)

Chi squared testing indicated a significant relationship between gender (Male and Female) and inappropriate sexual conversations, χ^2 (1, N=423) = 5.946, p=.015.

Sources of inappropriate contact

A free text box was provided for participants to name the websites/apps where they felt they received the most inappropriate approaches. The total number of times each website or app was given as a response was tabulated. Responses were provided by 59.51% of the participants (*n*=272/459). In total 70 different sites/apps/chat rooms were listed. They were sorted into order of frequency with the top ten most listed sites shown in Figure 6. The most frequently mentioned site was Facebook quoted by 31.95% of the participants (*n*=146/457), followed by 'Omegle' an adult oriented sexual website which was quoted by 10.50% (*n*=48/457) participants. Forty-two chat sites/social-networking sites were quoted just once.

Figure 6-Most frequently quoted for inappropriate contact
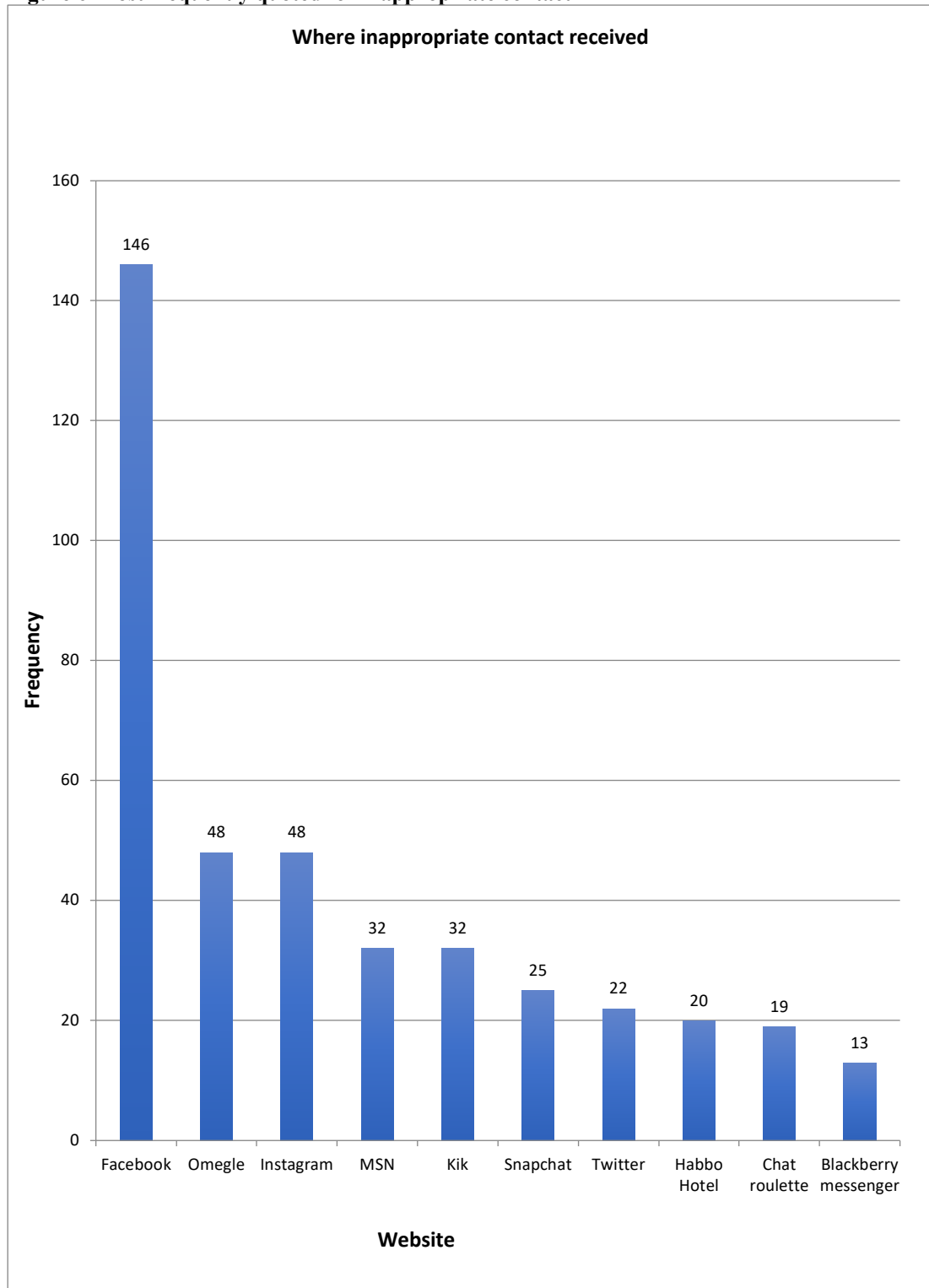
How to respond to strangers

When questioned whether they had been told how to respond to strangers on the Internet, 61.05% (*n=279/457*) of the participants answered 'Yes'.

Chi squared testing indicated no significant differences between gender (Male and Female) regarding knowing how to respond inappropriate contact on the Internet, χ^2 (1, *N=400*) = 0.599, *p=.439*.

Who told you how to respond?

Those participants who confirmed they had been told how to respond to strangers were asked who had advised them how to respond. Multiple answers for this question were possible, 46.17% (n=211/457) had been told by parents, and 48.36% (n=221/457) were advised by teachers. A total of 35.23% (n=161/457) of the participants were advised by both parents and teachers how to respond to strangers on the Internet.

A cross tabulation comparing whether participants were advised how to respond to strangers on the Internet was made against those who were victims of coercion or sent indecent images and is highlighted in Table 14.

Table 14-Cross tabulation of Internet awareness vs. vulnerability

		Did any of the people who you spoke to online ask you for photos or videos that you felt were inappropriate in some way?		Did you provide them with the material that they had requested?		Did any of the people who you spoke to online pressurise you, or try and force you into providing personal photos, or videos, that seemed either sexual or inappropriate?	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
When under 18 were you ever told how to respond to strangers on the Internet?	Yes	81 (64.3%)	58 (60.4%)	24 (68.6%)	56 (62.2%)	40 (61.6%)	40 (66.7%)
	No	45(35.7%)	38 (39.6%)	11 (31.4%)	34 (37.8%)	25 (38.4%)	20 (33.3%)

This table shows that participants who were told how to respond to strangers on the Internet did not appear less likely to be asked for, provide, or be coerced into sending sexual pictures.

Chi squared testing indicated no significant differences between participants being told how to respond to inappropriate contact and receiving inappropriate contact on the Internet, χ^2 (2, N=221) = 1.639, p=.441.

Chi squared testing indicated no significant differences between participants being told how to respond to inappropriate contact and requests for inappropriate images on the Internet, χ^2 (1, N=221) = 0.154, p=.694.

Chi squared testing indicated no significant differences between participants being told how to respond to inappropriate contact and being pressured or forced to provide inappropriate images on the Internet, χ^2 (1, N=125) = 0.356, p=.551.

Responding to inappropriate contact

When questioned whether they responded to the inappropriate contact they received online, 28.01% (n=126/457) stated they did not respond to the person making contact, 25.60% (n=117/457) said they sometimes responded and 9.85% (n=45/457) did respond to inappropriate contact.

By gender the responses of males and females to these approaches was similar at 8.33% (n=6/72)

and 9.74% (*n*=37/380), respectively.

Chi square testing indicated no significant differences between gender (Male and Female) and responding to inappropriate contact on the Internet, χ^2 (2, *N*=285) = 1.779, *p*=.411.

Actions taken following inappropriate contact

Exploring what actions participants took in response to inappropriate contact revealed the least given answer was 'Reported the incident' with 2.19% (*n*=10/457) selecting this answer; all were female. Similar percentiles of males and females indicated they would engage in chat with the inappropriate online correspondents (12.50% and 13.42%, respectively). As demonstrated in Table 10, far higher percentiles of females took evasive action over this behaviour (ignore/block/request to be left alone/report incident) than males.

Table 15-Responses to inappropriate contact

How did you respond	Degrees of Freedom	N	χ^2	p
Ignored	1	452	6.667	0.010
Blocked	1	452	3.018	0.082
Chatted	1	452	0.450	0.833
Told someone	1	452	1.194	0.164
Reported	1	452	1.938	0.164
Other	1	452	0.678	0.410

Content of inappropriate conversations

Those participants indicating that they had inappropriate conversations were asked about the content and outcomes of their chat. Responses were given in a free text format, 14.44% (*n*=66/457) of the participants responded. The responses were tabulated and grouped into thematic areas. The thematic areas are represented in Table 16 in order of frequency. The most frequent are general chat, and sexual conversations. A number of the participants (*n*=10) indicated that they would 'lead on' the person they were chatting to, to see where the conversation would lead.

Table 16-Themes developed from response to inappropriate chat

Theme	Frequency
General chat	25
Sexual conversations	24
Lead on contact	10
Ended conversation	7
Older person	7
Blocked	5
Knowingly allowed conversation to develop	3
Unsure how to deal with conversation	3
Questioned why contacting	2
Felt it difficult to leave chat	2
Excited by conversation	2
Threatened to report contact	1
Ignored uncomfortable aspects of conversation	1
Curious about conversation so continued	1
Flirted	1

The results presented that 91.31% of females and 68.06% males feel they were contacted by people who they did not know when online. With such a high level of stranger contact, especially amongst females, a simple strategy is desirable for children to be able to deal with this contact if it is unwanted.

Very few of the participants (3,94%) 'always' knew the age of those they corresponded with. This did not present itself as a concern for most of the participants, and less so for the males.

Chi-squared testing provided a significant difference between genders (males) regarding knowing the age of an online correspondent.

Whilst 42.54% of the participants felt they were subjected to inappropriate approaches, there was a large difference by gender, at 16.67% for males and 47.37% for females. This was affirmed by the Chi-squared testing which indicated that a significant difference between gender and receiving inappropriate contact.

Parental restrictions (such as filters or time-based limitations) that were placed on the participants Internet use did not seem to make a marked difference to whether or not they were likely to receive inappropriate online contact.

Most inappropriate contact was received on well-known social media sites and perhaps unsurprisingly a live streaming sexual content site. The most popular location for inappropriate contact was Facebook but considering its popularity this is also likely to make it a target site for those intending to identify victims.

Whilst 61.05% of participants stated they had received advice in dealing with strangers online (Q 5.2.7) there was a large proportion (35.45%) who still went on to respond to those contacting them.

The cross tabulation in Table 14 presents that the online safety education the participant's received did not noticeably impact on them being asked for, providing, or being coerced into providing sexual images. Despite the majority of participants being advised how to deal with strangers only 2.19% (n=10/457) took steps to report any of the inappropriate contact they received (Q 5.2.10). The percentile difference of males taking evasive action in relation to inappropriate behaviour was noticeably lower than females, Chi squared testing did not present a statistical significance in the majority of categories (Table 15). This may be worth further exploration.

Analysis of the content of the conversations provides that only 3.28% (n=15/457) of the participants indicated that they took a stance that might have prevented the escalation of an inappropriate conversation. This was made up of seven participants who ended the conversation; five who blocked; two who questioned why they were being contacted, and one who threatened to report the online correspondent. Much larger proportions of the participants were unsure how to deal with, tolerated, or encouraged criminal behaviour to be committed against them-selves.

5.3.3 Sexual Interactions and online coercion

This section explored some of the coercive methods experienced by the participants subject to sexualised conversations. They were questioned how attempts were made to elicit images from them, and the emotions they experienced. The items and responses are presented in Table 17.

Being spoken to in a sexual way

Participants were asked if adults spoke them to in a manner that was sexual or otherwise inappropriate for someone of their age. There were 226 responses to this question. A total of 32.60% (n=149/457) participants responded with 'yes', 13.79% (n=63/457) responded with 'no', and 2.63% (n=12/457) were 'unsure'. By gender this represented 15.28% (n=11/72), 35.53% (n=135/380), 100%, (n=1/1), and 66.67% (n=2/3) of males, females, other, and transgendered people respectively felt they were spoken to in an inappropriate manner.

Chi squared testing indicated a significant difference between genders (Male and Female) regarding being spoken to in a sexually inappropriate manner on the Internet, χ^2 (2, N=221) = 22.270, p<.001. Appendix 12 presents the table subject to significance testing.

Table 17-Overview of questions and responses

5.3.1 Did any of the adults talk to you in a way that was sexual or inappropriate for your age?

		Yes	No	Unsure
Sex	Male	11	20	4
	Female	135	43	8
	Other	1	0	0
	Transgender	2	0	0

5.3.2 How did this conversation make you feel?

5.3.3 Did any of the people ask you for photos or videos that you felt were inappropriate?

		Yes	No
Sex	Male	13	22
	Female	113	72
	Other	0	1
	Transgender	2	0

5.3.4 How often did this happen?

		1 time only	2-3 times	3-5 times	5-10 times	More than 10
Sex	Male	2	2	2	2	5
	Female	2	38	20	15	38
	Transgender	1	1	0	0	0

5.3.5 Did they try to force you to send photos, or videos, that were sexual or inappropriate?

		Yes	No
Sex	Male	5	7
	Female	59	54
	Transgender	1	1

5.3.6 How did they pressurise you?

		Threats to post images online	Demanded money	Threats to damage computer	Published personal details online	Other – please describe
Sex	Male	1	0	1	2	2
	Female	18	1	1	12	41
	Transgender	1	1	1	0	

5.3.7 Did they carry out any threats they made to you?

		Yes	Not sure	No
Sex	Male	1	2	2
	Female	2	14	43
	Transgender	0	0	1

5.3.8 Did you provide them with the material they requested?

		Yes	No
Sex	Male	7	5
	Female	26	87
	Transgender	2	0

5.3.9 Did you tell anyone about this?

		Yes	No
Sex	Male	4	8
	Female	28	85
	Transgender	0	2

5.3.10 Who did you tell?

		Parents/guardians	Friend	Police	Teacher	'Report' button	Other
Sex	Male	1	4				
	Female	9	23	3	1	10	1

5.3.11 What, if any action was taken by the person you told?

		No action taken	Reported to authorities	Other – please specify	Investigation was started
Sex	Male	3	1	0	0
	Female	19	2	4	3

Emotions created from sexualised conversations

To explore the emotions participants experienced during the sexually inappropriate online sexual conversations, a text box was offered prompting a written response.

Responses varied from a single word, to the longest response which was constructed of multiple sentences containing 147 words. A total of 33.92% (n=155/457) of the survey participants completed this section. By gender, 36.05% (n=137/380) were female, 19.44% (n=14/72) were male.

Each of the responses given to this question was tabulated onto a spreadsheet, the keyword/s given were aggregated into themes, these were counted and graded according to the number of times that particular emotion was experienced by a participant. The emotions were also graded as a positive, negative or neutral emotion. Table 18 below indicates the most frequently quoted themes and the relevant emotional grading given to it.

Table 18-Themes and emotions from participant's comments

Emotion	Grading	Total Occurrence	% of responses
Uncomfortable	Negative	80	51.61
Worried/scared	Negative	13	8.39
Confused	Negative	8	5.16
Disgusting	Negative	6	3.87
Guilty	Negative	5	3.23
Dirty	Negative	4	2.58
Unsure	Negative	4	2.58
Excited	Positive	8	5.16
Funny	Positive	8	5.16
Flattered	Positive	6	3.87
Grown up	Positive	5	3.23
Wanted	Positive	4	2.58
Enjoyed	Positive	4	2.58
Validated	Positive	3	1.93
OK	Neutral	12	7.74
Fine	Neutral	3	1.93

The most frequently quoted negative emotion was 'uncomfortable' which was used by 17.51% of the participants (n=80/457), the most frequently quoted positive comment was 'excited' at 1.75% (n=8/457) of the sample. The most frequent emotions described by the participants were those describing negative emotional states, with the top seven given in Table 18 providing 77.42% of the total responses.

Table 19 provides the emotions experienced by gender of participants. The low number of 'transgender', 'other' and 'prefer not to say' genders make it difficult to provide any representation for those categories. The female respondents indicate a higher weighting of negative emotional states at 31.84% (n=121/380) versus the males 11.11% (n=8/72).

The male sample showed a marginally higher weighting of positive emotive states of 12.50% (n=9/72), opposed to the 11.84 (n=45/380) of female respondents.

Table 19-Emotions experienced when images requested - by gender

Sex of participant	Negative Emotions	Positive Emotions	Neutral	Total emotions expressed
Male	8	9	5	22
Female	121	45	18	184
Other	0	1	0	1
Transgender	2	0	1	3
Prefer not to say	2	0	0	2
Total	133	55	24	212

Tables 20 and 21 represent the emotions experienced by those indicating that they sent images and those that did not respectively.

Table 20-Emotions of participants sending images

	Males sent images	Females sent images
Positive emotions	3	14
Negative emotions	**4**	**19**
Neutral emotions	2	4
	Sample size n = 6	Sample size n = 23

Table 21-Emotions of participants not sending images

	Males did not send images	Females did not send images
Positive emotions	1	17
Negative emotions	3	61
Neutral emotions	0	8
	Sample size n = 3	Sample size n = 76

The range of emotive responses from the participants varied from just one, to multiple, and varied emotions. These were tabulated by participant gender, and whether or not images were sent. Table 22 provides a representation in percentile terms of the emotions described amongst the female and male groups of participants.

Table 22-Frequency and range of emotive responses

	Positive only	Negative only	Neutral only	Positive and negative	Positive and neutral	Negative and neutral	All
% of female responses no images sent	6.42	66.06	7.34	14.7	0.92	4.59	0
% of female responses images sent	**13.64**	**31.82**	**4.55**	**40.91**	**0**	**4.55**	**4.55**
% of male responses no images sent	**0**	**66.67**	**0**	**33.33**	**0**	**0**	**0**
% of male responses images sent	16.67	16.67	0	33.33	33.33	0	0

Those participants who sent images provided responses that indicated higher positive emotions, and a greater variety of emotive feelings about their experiences than those who did not.

Asked for images

Participants were asked if inappropriate images had been requested from them, 223 responses were received. From the entire sample 28.00% (*n*=128/457) answered 'yes'. By gender, 18.06% (*n*=13/72) of males and 29.74% (*n*=113/380) of females in the sample had been asked for images.

Chi squared testing indicated a significant relationship between gender (Male and Female) and being asked for inappropriate images on the Internet, χ^2 (1, N=220) = 6.892, p=.009. (Appendix 13)

Frequency of requests for inappropriate images

Participants who were asked for images were further asked how frequently this occurred. The total responses and those who had sent images are presented in Tables 23 and 24. Table 23 represents those participants who had not sent inappropriate images to a requester, and Table 24 those that did. The Likert scale achieving the highest request response was 'more than 10 times' at 9.41% of the participants (*n*=43/457).

Table 23-Frequency of requests for images for those not sending them

	Frequency of requests for images	Males indicating they did not send images – frequency of requests	Females indicating they did not send images – frequency of requests
1 time only	5	1	2
2-3 times	41	2	35
3-5 times	22	1	17
5-10 times	17	1	13
More than 10 times	43	0	20

Table 24-Frequency of requests for images for those sending them

	Frequency of requests for images	Males indicating they had sent images – frequency of requests	Females indicating they had sent images – frequency of requests
1 time only	5	1	0
2-3 times	41	0	3
3-5 times	22	1	3
5-10 times	17	1	2
More than 10 times	43	4	18

Considering Tables 23 and 24 13.89% of males (n=10/72) and 29.21% of females (n=111/380) received requests for inappropriate images on two or more occasions. Chi square testing indicated no significant differences between genders (Male and Female) regarding the frequency of being asked for sexual images, χ^2 (4, N=126) = 8.184, p=.085.

It can be established that 5.56% of males (n=4/72), and 4.75% of females (n=18/380) who indicated they had sent images had them requested from them on more than 10 occasions; in the category of those not sending images this was 0.00% (n=0/72) of males and 5.26% (n=20/380) of females.

Chi square testing indicated no significant differences between genders (Male and Female) regarding the frequency of being asked for sexual images if images have been supplied, χ^2 (4, N=33) = 4.941, p=.293

Being coerced

Participants were asked if they felt pressurised or forced into sending personal images of a sexual or inappropriate nature, 126 provided responses; 14.22% (n=65/457) answered 'yes'. By gender 15.52% were female (n=59/380), 6.94% male (n=5/72), 33.33% transgender (n=1/3).

Chi square testing indicated no significant differences between genders (Male and Female) regarding being forced or pressurised into providing sexual images, χ^2 (1, N=125) = 0.483, p=.487. (Appendix 14)

Methods of coercion

Participants were asked how they felt 'pressurised', pre-selectable categories, or 'other' with a text box were provided; multiple answers were possible. The highest frequency response at 4.38% (n=20/457) of the participants was the category 'threatened by posting compromising images online'. This was followed by 3.06% (n=14/457) selecting 'publish personal details online'. The category 'other' was selected by 9.41% (n=43/457) of the participants who provided detail of the threats entered into the text box. Of the respondees 2.62%, (n=12/457) listed more than one category. Within this category the responses were clustered into 14 styles of pressure/coercion. These are presented in Table 25**.**

Table 25-Other methods of coercion

Method	Frequency
Persistence	16
Emotional blackmail	10
Compliments to coerce	6
Tell parents	5
Pressurised or persuasion	4
Guilt trip	4
Intimidation or threats of violence	4
Verbal abuse or aggression	4
Reassurance	2
Manipulation	2
Withhold friendship	1
Threats to tell friends	1
Hack computer	1
Deceit	1
Stalk online	1

Carrying out threats

From the 65 participants who felt pressurised to provide images only three felt that any threats received were carried out. This equated to 0.66% (n=3/457) of all of the respondents. The majority, 10.07% (n=46/457), of respondees to this section answered 'no' and, 3.50% (n=16/457) were 'unsure'.

Of the 3 respondents who felt that the threats had been carried out against them; one stipulated that personal information had been posted about them, one outlined that

photos and personal information had been revealed and the remaining participant advised that personal information had been revealed to others.

Chi square testing examining significant differences between genders (Male and Female) regarding whether or not threats were carried out violated the testing assumptions due to the small subsample size, although the likelihood ratio indicated that there was no significant relationship (p=.142)

Sending images

Table 26 provides the count of those who went on to send sexual images when requested. The table presents this information by gender, and whether or not the participant felt coerced to provide the images.

Chi square testing indicated a significant difference between genders (Male and Female) concerning those who provided sexual images, χ^2 (1, N=125) = 6.967, p=.008.
(Appendix 15)

Table 26-Gender of participants sending images

	Coerced into providing images	Sent images	Did not send images	Total
Male	Yes	3	2	5
	No	4	3	7
Female	Yes	22	37	59
	No	4	50	54
Transgender	Yes	1	0.0	1
	No	1	0.0	1

From the entire sample, 5.69% (n=26/457) participants advised that they had sent images following coercion. In contrast, 1.97% (n=9/457) of the participants sent sexual images who did not feel pressurised to do so. Examining the proportions of those coerced to send images by gender; 5.79% (n=22/380) of the female, 4.17% (n=3/72) of male and 50.00% (n=1/2) of the transgender sample subsequently went on to send images of themselves.

Table 27 provides a cross tabulation of those participants whose parents/guardians restricted their Internet use and sent sexual images. Information provided in the table suggests that restrictions impacted in only a minor way on whether images are sent or not for those participants in the sub-sample (n=127).

Table 27-Cross tabulation of parental Internet restrictions and sending images

		Sent images	Did not send images
Did your parents/guardians restrict your Internet use?	Yes	9 (25.71%)	22 (23.91%)
	No	26 (74.29%)	70 (76.09%)

Table 28 presents a crosstabulation of the answers given to the question "Did you use the Internet privately (without parental supervision) and send images". It suggests that parental supervision has minimal impact on the sending of images.

Table 28-Cross tabulation of private Internet use and sending images

		Sent images	Did not send images
Did you use the Internet privately not monitored by parents/guardians?	All of the time	19 (33.3%)	38 (66.7%)
	Most of the time	10 (26.3%)	28 (73.7%)
	Some of the time	4 (22.2%)	14 (77.8%)
	Rarely	1 (14.3%)	6 (85.7%)
	Never	0	3 (100%)

Telling someone about it

Participants were asked if they had advised anyone about the inappropriate contact they experienced online. The sub-sample consisted of n=127 participants. Of these 7.00% (n=32/457) advised they had told someone, and 20.79% (n=95/457) stated that they had not. Considering only those participants who had provided sexual/inappropriate images 1.75% (n=8/457) told somebody what had occurred and 5.91% (n=27/457) did not.

Chi square testing indicated no significant differences between genders (Male and Female) concerning whether or not participants told anybody about being pressurised to provide sexual images, χ^2 (1, N=125) = 0.417, p=.519.

Who did you tell?

Of those participants that indicated they told somebody about the coercion they experienced; 5.91% (n=27/457) told a friend, 2.19% (n=10/457) told parents, 2.19% (n=10/457) utilised the website report facility, 0.66% (n=3/457) advised police, 0.22%

(*n*=1/457) told a teacher, and 0.22% (*n*=1/457) selected the 'other' choice, stating 'counsellor'.

Action taken when telling someone

When asked what they thought happened as a result of telling somebody about the sexual coercion they had experienced 4.81% (*n*=22/457) felt no action was taken by the person they advised, 0.66% (*n*=3/457) believed that an investigation was started, 0.66% (*n*=3/457) advised the matter was reported to the authorities. There were four 'other' responses; these included not taking the matter any further, blocking, not using relevant sites any further, and Internet usage guidance.

This section of the survey revealed that 32.82% (*n*=150/457) of the total sample were spoken to sexually online by adults who they did not know. By gender 16.67% (*n*=12/72) of males, and 35.52% (*n*=135/380) of the sample felt they were spoken to in a sexually inappropriate way.

A higher proportion of females (29.74%) felt they were asked for inappropriate images than males (18.06%).

Being subject to sexual conversations created a variety of emotions. The majority of emotions described (62.74%) were negative state emotions such as uncomfortable and scared. There were however some positive states of emotion such as 'excited', 'wanted' or 'validated'. The cross-tabulation analysis in Tables 20 and 21 provide that the proportion of participants who sent sexual images of them–selves felt more positive and neutral emotions than those that did not send images. Table 22 provides that those sending images experienced a greater variety of emotions to those who did not send them.

Considering the frequency of requests for images (Q 5.3.4), there was a proportion (9.41%) of the sample that were subject to '10 or more' requests for images. This sub-sample had a constituent of 41.87% (*n*=18/43) females that had sent images. Indicating a possible vulnerability to being victimised.

Of the 22 participants that sent images who were subject to image requests on '10 or more' occasions, a majority (*n*=17/29) of them expressed positive emotions about the experience. However, these were also mixed with many negative emotions. Although this survey did not explore this aspect it could be an indicator to more deep-seated psychological problems occurring in their lives, or even a by-product being sexually abused online.

The survey responses revealed that females felt more than twice as likely to be pressurised or coerced into providing images then the male sample (15.52% vs. 6.94%). A very small sample size made it difficult to assess the accuracy for those in the transgender category. But the proportion coerced in this category was 33%.

The methods of coercion utilised were not complex, with the most popular ones being threatening to post images, personal details, or merely persistence in asking. From the responses provided it also appeared that the threats were not frequently carried out with just 0.66% of those subject to them confirming they were.

Table 26 indicates that a higher proportion of females (5.79%) than males (4.17%) that were coerced went on to send sexual images.
When no coercion was involved, only a small proportion of females (1.10%, *n*=4/457) sent sexual images. For males this proportion was higher (5.56%, *n*=7/72).
Parental Internet restrictions did not appear to significantly change the proportion of participants who sent images (Table 27).

The data collected in the survey shows that three out of the reported 128 cases of sexual image requests from children were reported to investigating authorities. This translates into a reporting rate of 2.34%. When considering that the majority of those receiving sexual image requests received them on multiple (two or more) occasions, the reporting rate is likely to be even lower. It appears that in the majority of these cases very little action was taken to combat the incidence of child abuse.

5.3.4 Asking others for images

The final section of the survey questioned whether participants had asked for naked, sexual, or explicit images from others. The items and responses are presented in Table 29.

Table 29-Overview or questions and responses

5.4.1 Have you ever asked anybody, for naked, sexual, or explicit pictures?

Sex		Yes	No
	Male	19	17
	Female	50	135
	Other	0	1
	Transgender	1	1

5.4.2 How often have you asked someone for naked, sexual, or explicit images/videos?

Sex		1 time (%)	2-5 times (%)	5-10 times (%)	10 or more (%)
	Male	0 (0)	7 (36.84)	5 (26.32)	7 (36.84)
	Female	4 (8.0)	21(42)	10(20)	15(30)
	Transgender	0	1(100)	0	0

5.4.3 What type of relationship did you have with them?

Sex		Partner (%)	Online friendship - person you have not met (%)	Friend you have met (%)	Someone else - please specify (%)
	Male	12 (42.85)	7 (25.00)	7 (25.00)	2 (7.14)
	Female	44 (61.97)	14 (19.72)	11 (15.49)	2 (2.82)
	Transgender	1 (50)	1 (50)		

5.4.4 Did you have to persuade them to send you an image/video?

Sex		Yes (%)	A little bit (%)	No (%)
	Male	1 (5.26)	5(31.58)	12(63.16)
	Female	1(2)	5(10)	44(88)

5.4.5 Did they provide image/video following the request?

Sex		Yes (%)	No (%)
	Male	6(85.71)	1(14.29)
	Female	6(100)	0

Asking others for sexual images

A sub-sample of 224 participants responded to the question asking if they had asked others for images of a sexual nature. Of the total sample this represented 15.32% (*n*=70/457) of the participants. Of those responding to the question 36 were male, 185 were female and 3 self-categorised as transgendered/other/preferred not to say. By gender 13.89% (*n*=19/72) of males and 13.16% females (*n*=50/380) confirmed they had asked for images.

Chi square testing indicated a significant difference between genders (Male and Female) regarding participants asking for sexual images, χ^2 (1, *N*=219) = 9.009, *p*=.003. Appendix 16 presents the test data.

Frequency of asking

The majority of the sub-sample who had requested sexual images from another person (n=66/69) requested them more than once, this represented 14.44% of the survey sample (n=66/457).

Chi square testing did not indicate a significant difference between genders (Male and Female) regarding the frequency of participants asking for sexual images, χ^2 (3, N=68) = 1.826, p=.609.

Relationship with person asked

Participants were asked what relationship they had with the person they requested images from, 12.47% (n=57/457) indicated they had requested images from a partner. By gender this equated to 16.67% (n=12/72) of males and 11.58% (n=44/380) of females. With 4.81% of the participants (n=22/457) stating they requested them from an online only friend, and 3.94% (n=18/457) stating they had requested them from a friend they knew offline.

Using persuasion

When asked if they had to use persuasion when asking for images, 69 participants responded. A total of 12.25% (n=56/457) participants stated they did not use persuasion, 2.12% (n=10/457) advised they use 'a little bit' and 0.44% (n=2/457) replied 'yes'.

Chi square testing did not indicate a significant difference between genders (Male and Female) regarding the use of persuasion when asking for sexual images, χ^2 (2, N=68) = 4.145, p=.126.

Relationship between being coerced and coercing

A total of 2.41% (n=11/457) participants were successful in gaining the images they requested after using persuasive methods; five were male, and six females. This represented 6.94% and 1.58% of the total male and female survey sample, respectively.

Table 30 provides a cross tabulation of those participants who felt coerced to provide images by others online, compared against whether or not they also used persuasive methods in requesting images. Only 0.87% of the participants (n=4/457) fall into the categories of 'being pressurised to send images', and subsequently answering 'yes' or 'a little bit' to the question asking if they used persuasion to illicit images. Of this sub-sample, 1.39% (n=1/72) were male and 0.79% (n=3/380) were female.

Table 30-Sexually coerced participants who tried to sexually coerce others

		Did you have to persuade them to send you an image/video?		
		Yes (%)	A little bit (%)	No (%)
Were you pressurised or forced to send images	Yes - Male	0	1(25%)	3(75%)
	Yes Female	1(5.26%)	2(10.53%)	16(84.21%)
	No - Male	0	0	6(100%)
	No - Female	0	0	13(100%)

Table 31 considers those who sent sexual images of them-selves online, cross-tabulated against whether they used persuasive methods in requesting images from others. Only 0.22% of the participants (n=1/457) that sent images of them-self went on to use persuasive methods, and 0.66% (n=3/457) of the total sample who had not sent images went on to use persuasive methods to illicit sexual images.

Table 31-Sexually coerced participants that sent sexual images who used persuasion to obtain images from others

		Did you have to persuade them to send you an image/video?		
		Yes (%)	A little bit (%)	No (%)
Sent images	Yes - Male	0	1(14.29%)	6(85.71%)
	Yes Female	0	0	10(100%)
	No - Male	0	0	3(100%)
	No - Female	1(4.55%)	2(9.10)	19(86.36%)

Nearly all (95.65%) of those who asked for images did so on more than one occasion. Males were more likely to ask for sexual images. The males from this sample also demonstrated that they were more likely to ask persistently for sexual images than females, with 9.71%% (n=7/72) of males asking for images on more than ten occasions versus 3.95% (n=15/380) of females.

The majority (70.00%) (n=56/80) of those who requested sexual images did not use persuasion to acquire an image. Very few of the participants confirmed directly that they had used persuasion with 0.44% (n=2/457) giving a 'yes' response. However, there was a larger proportion of 2.19% (n=10/457) who chose to respond with 'a little bit'. A response which is open to personal interpretation and has a bias towards the 'yes' choice.

From the total survey sample, 2.63% (n=12/457) of the participants obtained sexual images after using persuasive methods. By gender this represented 8.33% (n=6/72) of males and 1.58% (n=6/380) of females, with Chi Squared testing indicating a significant difference between male gender and asking for sexual images.

5.4 Discussion

This study was designed to explore the experiences of participants who as children may have been subject to sexually coercive behaviour. It was done as per the research objectives to try and understand how online sexually coercive abuse develops, and what makes some children more vulnerable than others. The responses by the participants provided an insight which suggested that security and restrictions put in place by parents did little to prevent them being targeted. Some participants were subjected to repeated image requests and appeared to be more vulnerable to sending sexual images despite being aware of online risks. These same participants also experienced more varied and positive emotions when subject to online sexually coercive behaviour. The reasons for them becoming victims seemed more related to how they responded to a perpetrator than a lack of awareness.

5.4.1 Internet controls

Cross tabulations of answers provided about internet security (Table 11) indicated that restricting Internet with the use of ISP filters or software controls provided little reduction in the inappropriate contact a child received. A similar finding was achieved with parental restrictions such as controlling the time a child was on the Internet.

There was however a small difference in the amount of inappropriate contact that participants received as children if their parents or guardians monitored their Internet usage. Table 12 provided that a greater percentage of participants who felt they were not subject to parental monitoring received inappropriate online contact. These aggregated results indicated that parental supervision of Internet use appeared to slightly lower than incidence of inappropriate contact a participant received.

A similar finding was evident when considering the transmission of sexual images. The results shown in Table 27 indicated similar percentiles of participants would either send or decline to send images irrespective of whether they had Internet restrictions in place. But if parents or guardians were actively involved in the monitoring of Internet activity, the resulting Table (28) showed an increase in images being sent. The research carried out by Broll et al. (2013) examined the impact of educational programs designed for parents around the significance of controlling children's media exposure and its explained importance preventing negative outcomes (Broll et al., 2013). Table 28 suggests that this had minimal impact in the case of the respondents to this survey. However, a more detailed exploration of its significance would be required.

5.4.2 Inappropriate contact

The most inappropriate contact was indicated as being received on social media (Figure 6), it was also the least controlled form of online activity (Figure 4). Facebook was by far the most frequently given website for such activity, followed by other popular social media networks. Whilst it is accepted that these are also the most used social media sites (Statista, 2020), the fact that they attract so many children (OFCOM, 2019) should also mean that they are the best equipped to deter the sexual, and criminal approaches of adults towards children. Popular social media sites should be safe places for children, without the threat of being sexualised, victimised, or forced to send explicit pictures of them-selves.

Chapter four introduced the how social media was prominent in the commission of this offence type. This chapter has further reinforced it. It adds more weight to the requirement for the risk mitigation already mentioned in section 4.4.

Receiving contact from someone unknown was not an exceptional event to the majority of the participants and only a minority showed concern, with males being less concerned than females and Chi Squared testing corroborated this, with 25.60% ($n=117/457$) of the participants showing indifference and being 'not bothered', and a further 44% ($n=204/457$) only a little concerned by the sexual conversations they had with adults; there seems to be a disconnect between the levels of concern held, and the sexual nature of the conversations occurring between adults and children online.

The National Crime agency's online safety advice states "It can be fun chatting to people who are interested in the same things as you" (Thinkyouknow, 2020, p.1). It provides five key subjects, which might highlight improper online behaviour, these being-

- Things seem too good to be true
- Offering presents or making promises
- Pressurising
- Messaging in private
- Keeping conversations secret

The explanations of the key subjects above provide individual descriptions which are similar to the inappropriate themes described by the participants in Table 13. These warning triggers are also highlighted by the many charities and public bodies that oversee online safety and sexual abuse of children such as Safetynetkids, and the NSPCC. This is suggestive that the guidance being given is correct, but it is not preventing incidents from occurring. Internet safety and online awareness is embedded into a school's curriculum using a whole of school approach (Department for

Education, 2019), the majority of the participants advised that they had received Internet safety advice. The cross tabulation revealed little difference in incidence of sending images between those who were, and those who were not educated about Internet safety. A marginally higher percentile of participants who had been told how to respond to strangers online were subject to requests, pressure, and subsequently supplied images than those who were not educated in such a way. This could suggest a number of possible scenarios, including safety messages not being acted on; a child's vulnerability is not a result of lack Internet safety awareness; the safety messages/training are not directed correctly; or the risk is just not perceived.

The risk of being coerced into supplying sexual images might be underpinned by more of an emotive or psychological factor opposed to an awareness one. Looking at the responses of Table 10 (Q 5.2.9) more than half of the participants receiving inappropriate approaches responded to them, or sometimes responded to them. From a sub-sample of 268 participants, 25.4% (n=68) of them went on to engage with online correspondents rather than use self-protection strategies such as blocking, or requesting to be left alone (LeClerc et al., 2011).

5.4.3 Sexual Interactions and online coercion

When the participants of this study were asked how being approached online sexually made them feel, 51.6% (Table 18) of those responding provided a similar answer - it made them feel uncomfortable. The next most frequent responses were worried/scared and confused. Mixed amongst these negative emotions were also some positive emotional responses. These responses quoted emotions such as excited, flattered, grown up, and wanted. Negative emotions were quoted by a smaller proportion of the males (11.11%) than females (31.84%). Positive emotions were quoted by similar proportions of males (12.50%) and females (11.84%)

Proportionately more of the participants who sent self-generated sexual images also described experiencing these positive emotions (Table 22). This could indicate that some of those participants sending images are undergoing a state of emotional insecurity during their online conversations. By sending a sexual image it may be that they are seeking to suppress a negative emotional state that they hold, in the desire to achieve more positive one in the form of the compliments or positive feedback achieved from the recipient of the image. Englander (2015) considered the negative and positive consequences of sexting and surmised that 74% of those who were

voluntarily involved in sending images reported no "negative outcomes" (Englander, 2015, p.21). But 39% of those who felt pressurised to sext experienced negative outcomes. The results in Table 19 indicate that more males who send images experience positive emotions than those who do not, whereas more females who send images experience negative emotions than those who do not. It was noted that 70% of Englanders participants expressed that they felt some pressure (2015).

The findings within this survey did not fully support this – one explanation might be the type of contact online described by the participants. This study specifically concentrated on contact from people the participants did not know, whereas the sexting study by Englander (2015) did not appear to do this. This survey also asked questions about unwanted sexual contact rather than the potentially more consensual communication of sexting in Englander's (2015) study. The small sub-sample size of males is also likely to allow a greater deviation in the results.

A total of 28.00% of the participants stated that images were requested from them; only 18.06% of males, opposed to 29.74% of the females were requested to send images. In a common thread throughout this survey being female appeared to make it more likely that a participant would receive sexual contact from unknown people, be asked for inappropriate images online, and receive inappropriate images. This claim is further strengthened by Chi squared testing, indicating statistical significance of differences across genders in these areas.

It has been presented that just over one quarter of the participants (26.91%) were asked for sexual images on two occasions or more. Of those who sent images, 66.67% were subjected to 10 or more requests for them. Within this survey there appeared to be a sub-sample of the participants who might be considered vulnerable to online manipulation. Whilst most of these participants had received some form of online safety awareness, the majority (77%) of them expressed positive emotions about their own victimisation. Although not explored fully within the survey, it is possible that negative emotional states or circumstances in their lives may have increased their likelihood of being victimised repeatedly. Mitchell et al. (2000; 2005; 2010) stated that the likelihood of solicitation was higher in those described who were troubled. Beebe et al. (2004) found that increased "vulnerability" was associated to "psychological distress" or a "difficult living environment" (Beebe, 2004, p.116).

Englander (2015) reported that males were nearly twice as likely to sext voluntarily, whilst those feeling more pressured to sext were mostly female respondents. Within this study, 14.22% of the sample felt that they were pressurised for images. A much larger proportion (15.52%), consisted of female respondents, opposed to (6.94%) of the male respondents. Englander (2015) reported that those who were pressured to send images were more likely to report "they felt they had no choice" or did so "to prove they trusted someone" (Englander, 2015, p.20). Within this study descriptors such as persistence; compliments; guilt trips; and threats to withdraw friendship were reported. These methods are not dissimilar to those used in descriptions of sextortion methods of other research (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2017; Wittes et al., 2016). Although some of the methods of coercion described were subtler than others, they were all verbal threats made over Internet communication channels.

The remoteness of the threat can take away immediacy of personal danger which can allow a victim time to think about and process what is occurring to them if they so choose. It also provides the opportunity to report such behaviour or talk to someone about it, which as the data in Table 10 suggest, does not seem to happen with a high enough frequency.

The most commonly used methods of applying pressure or coercion to a participant were threatening to reveal information or images about them. Whilst the individual impact of a threat cannot be underestimated, lessening the availability of the information or images being revealed is likely to prevent the coercion in the first place in the majority of cases. If these jigsaw pieces of personal information were not available, the leverage they provide would not be effective. Simple strategies restricting access to posted information and/or preventing people from revealing personal information is likely to minimise its availability. This responsibility should lay with both users and providers of communications platforms. Younger users of social media platforms may not fully know where these risks lie. But the platform providers do and should do all within their power to minimise them.

Those grooming children for sexual purposes use manipulation methods (O'Connell, 2003) similar to those given by this study's participants when they were pressurised or coerced to provide images (Tables 17 and 26). They are also similar to the methods used to overcome resistance to online sexual predators provided by Beech et al. (2013). These methods are also currently highlighted in Internet safety education (Childline, 2020). Table 14 suggests some participants either did not heed the advice given to

them, did not understand it, or felt compelled to comply with the coercive tactics employed against them. Of those participants that sent sexual images, the most frequently used adjective when answering how they were pressurised was 'emotional' (Q 5.3.3). It seems those involved in the coercion of the victims in this survey were able to manipulate the emotions of the victim participants by using methods that do not differ greatly from those used in other forms of sexual grooming.

Wolak et al. (2018) presented that the threats made in sextortion are carried out in approximately half of the incidents. In this study, only three of those who were coerced felt this was the case; this represented 4.61% of the sub-sample. The difference found may be explained by the inclusion of incidents where a victim knew the perpetrator in Wolak et al's, (2018) study. It equated to 59% of the sextortion cases examined in this study. This study only asked about those who were not known to the participants, people who were also less likely to possess the intricate personal knowledge of the participant/victim necessary for leverage in coercion.

This survey revealed that 5.69% of those experiencing coercion went on to send sexual images. Patchin and Hinduja's (2018) research into victims of sextortion amongst adolescents in the US found a similar proportion at 5%. When considering just those sending sexual images after coercion, 84.6% of females (*n*=22/26), and 42.9% (*n*=3/7) of males were coerced to do so. A slightly smaller proportion of males (4.17%) who sent images did so without being coerced than those who were coerced (5.56%). This was not the case for the female participants (4.81% vs 1.05%).

All of the participants who were asked to provide sexual images when under 18 (*n*=127) can be considered victims of online child sexual abuse in the UK (Protection of Children Act, 1978).

Only 0.66% of the participants reported an incident of sexual coercion to the police. A slightly higher proportion of 2.19% (*n*=10) made an online notification about their experiences. It is likely that the vast majority of criminal activity remained unreported. A similar phenomenon was reported by Wolak et al. (2018) they asserted a reluctance of child victims to report serious sexual crimes existed. Citing a reporting a rate of 13% of minors reporting incidents to the police, the level disclosure reported by Wolak et al. (2018) was not as low as found in this research. It is suggested that young teens are more likely to discuss problems with those they hold close/trusting relationships with opposed to professionals (Ranahan, 2009). This was evident within this survey,

where 52.9% of the respondents advising somebody 'told a friend' about their experiences. Unfortunately, this did not progress to positive action with the majority of notifications resulting in 'no action' (Table 10). The notification of sexually inappropriate online behaviour appears to be under-reported.

Being seen to seek help for a problem might be considered as a sign of weakness, strong negative emotions impact on a teenager's desire to seek help (Ranahan, 2009). With victims being less likely to seek professional help a barrier to the reporting of crime is likely to be created. This is not likely to be the only barrier to reporting - being seen to become involved in something they had previously been warned not to do by parents or teachers could also create another barrier (Thinkyouknow, 2020). Providing clarity on how to deal with incidents for victims and their confidents may help increase the reporting of online sexual coercion. The message should be conveyed that seeking help is a sign of individual strength opposed to one of weakness.

5.4.4 Asking others for images

Ostrager (2010) present that 67% of teenage males, and 71% of females send or post sexual content to a boy or girlfriend. Willard (2010) stated the majority of sexualised image exchange between teens is practiced as a form of entertainment, and rarely with bad intention. This survey concentrated primarily on the sexualised coercion of children, so the results are more likely to have a negative undertone. However, the responses provided indicate that a more pro-active stance to acquiring sexual images was present amongst some participants. Table 30 showed roughly twice the proportion of males (26.39%) asked someone for sexual images compared with females (13.16%). It was evident that a greater proportion of the male sample requested images in the more frequent categories (5-10, and 10+) than the female sample. Males were more likely to request sexual images from a person they had not physically met and were only acquainted with online (42.1% vs. 28% - Table 32). Participants were asked if they felt they had to use persuasive methods to procure the sexual images they requested. Given the nature of the question and its potential implications of self-incrimination, it is perhaps unsurprising that the number of 'yes' responses was very low at 2.86% (n=2/70), but there was a significant proportion of males (31.58%) who responded with 'a little bit', and a lower proportion of females (10%) within this category. Whilst the bounds of the category 'a little bit' are grey - arguably using 'a little bit' of persuasion is the same as using persuasion.

Patchin and Hinduja (2020) provide that 12% of 11-18 years olds stated they had sent nude images and 19% had received them. They opined that sexting activity was not as serious as media portrayed. Following up this claim, within the same report it was stated that sexting activity was showing increases of 13% and 22% for those sending and receiving sexual images respectively (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020) and that less than 10% of the youth participants asked had asked someone for a nude image. The results of this survey presented that just over 13% of the participants had asked another person for sexual images, a higher proportion than that presented by Patchin and Hinduja.

This survey established 2.63% of participants (n=12/457) tried to obtain sexual images by pressurising the recipient concerning the request. By gender, six were males representing 8.33% (n=6/72) of the sample, and six were females representing 1.58% (n=6/380) of the respective samples.

Englander's study into sexting and sextortion asked participants if they had coerced others to "send nude pictures" (2015, p. 21), 1.2% confirmed they had, with 60% of those participants stating they had also been coerced. Patchin and Hiduja (2018) presented that 2.2% of those subject to sextortion also went on to carry it out.

These results are higher than found within this survey with 0.22% of the entire sample falling into the category of being coerced to send images and pressurising others to do the same. There are variations in the rates of children sending and receiving sexual images. These can probably attributed to the differing methods of data collection or selection criteria across the various surveys and interviews. Whether these rates equal to an 'epidemic' (Patchin and Hiduja, 2020, p.140) or not is subjective. What the various studies do not consider is the frequency with which images are sent or requested by one person, or the specifics of the requests made.

Within this study, of the 12 participants who said they used coercion or pressure for obtaining sexual images 92.3% (n=11/12) were successful. The rate of successful image acquisition following coercion was high. Combining this with a low chance of reporting (Table 17), there may be a low perception of deterrence from using pressurisation or coercive techniques to obtain sexual images.

Liong and Cheng (2017) concluded males were more likely to 'sext' than females as they perceive it more positively. They gain status or approval amongst their peers for such activity. This study was based in China, it pointed to a difference in perception of sexuality in the East to that experienced in the West, opining that Western females were more empowered. The responses found in this survey seem to support the fact

that males do seem more likely to be involved in the sending and procurement of sexual images. Although whether the small proportion of females within this study who used coercive pressure to obtain images was due to being empowered remains to be explored.

In summarising this section, the results suggest that Internet security measures did not have much impact upon the inappropriate sexual approaches that children experienced. There was some evidence that parental monitoring of Internet use might reduce this slightly. The sexualisation of children took place on routinely used social media or gaming websites; it did not use sophisticated methods. This knowledge should be enough to shame social media providers into minimising any such activity on their platforms. However, the age range of the participants and the rate of occurrence suggest that this is yet to happen effectively.

The participants in this survey had an understanding of what presented online risks to them. Most had received some form of online safety education.

Despite this awareness some participants still went on to engage with people presenting an online threat, by sending sexual images of them-selves.

The participants sending images described more positive emotional responses to the online sexual contact. Those who did not send images described discomfort.

A small proportion of the respondents presented a greater risk of being exploited on numerous occasions. An online risk assessment process by platform providers to score an individual's propensity to engage in risky behaviour may be of some merit. Repeated sexual image requests to a particular individual under 18 should create a warning that a user may have an increased level of vulnerability. It is noted that some online providers (Yubo, 2020) utilise real time interventions and algorithms to prevent inappropriate live streaming. Their use can only be encouraged in a more widespread manner and should be considered as an industry minimum standard.

The survey indicated, those participants who used persuasive techniques to obtain sexual images were remarkably successful in getting them. In the hands of a determined offender these rates of success have proved to be devastatingly high (Wittes et al., 2016; Chapter 4). Reducing this image acquisition rate requires a determined prevention and prosecution effort that can probably only be achieved with the assistance of the companies behind the online portals used by victims and offenders. The use of encrypted data and difficult data sharing protocols make this

hard to achieve unless there is a joint working protocol between the online industries providing the platform and those who prosecute it.

Introducing social media companies as a formal partner to the safeguarding process could provide the focus needed for them to make their platforms safer places for children, this is not a new consideration (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2020, and Online Safety Bill, (Woodhouse, 2021)). If social media providers worked as a statutory or formal partner with investigative authorities and child protection teams then many of the data protections barriers that make public service work difficult will be lowered. This will Improve intelligence and data sharing for all parties and is key to fast effective prosecutions.

For a child, knowing how to respond or what to do if they, or a friend experience inappropriate sexual activity does not yet appear to have developed into taking positive defensive action in the form of reporting. Only a very small proportion of the crimes in this study were reported. A clear signposted route needs to be in place for the child, or their friends to confidently follow it if they feel uncomfortable with what is occurring online. Just listening passively to a friend's experience of online abuse will not assist in reducing it. It needs to be reported and investigated. Targeted enforcement has on numerous occasions made reductions to criminal activity when it comes under the spotlight.

5.4.6 Limitations

1. A convenience sample was used for this survey. Those who self-classified as transgender were under-represented. The male sample was smaller than the female one by a factor of five. The results from the smaller and under-represented groups showed a greater variability. This could be avoided in the future by larger sample sizes in the under-represented groups.

2. The working sample size was 457 participants after exclusions and data cleansing. The survey design filtered out participants into smaller sub samples. This has the effect of reducing the sample size, it gave a greater variability in the responses using these smaller samples. As per above it could be avoided in future research by targeting of populations specific to certain categories on online abuse.

3. In considering the risk of causing discomfort to a younger sample of child participants and the additional ethical controls which would have been

necessary the survey chose to use adults as participants. Asking them to recall events from some years before carries the risk that cognition can change with time (Inda et al., 2011). This could alter the results of a study.

4. The data gathered in this study was not subject to in-depth statistical analysis. It was intended to provide a basic insight into online sexual coercion. Greater use of statistical modelling would have provided a more scientific basis for these results. In designing studies compromises and judgements have to be made. A compromise was made to gather a greater breadth of data rather than more focused testing of specific behaviours. Future studies could seek to test specific aspects of the victim's online experience with more statistical modelling.

The aims of this research were biased towards the understanding provided by the qualitative studies, as they formed a much larger part of the project. Chapter 6 begins this with interviews of those who suffered online sexually coercive abuse.

Chapter 6 - Study 3 The victim experience.

6.1 Introduction

Within the UK there are 3.07 million males and 2.92 million females between the ages of 10 and 17 years old (Office for National Statistics, 2019), this is just over 9% of the total population. OFCOM (2019) report that 99% of children are online for over 20.5 hours per week. Child Internet use is widespread with the online industry accommodating and monetising it (Children's Commissioner, 2019). Preventing children from online sexual abuse by restricting their Internet use does not appear to be a viable option. The Internet has simply gained too much traction and acceptance into everyday life. Prevention of sexual abuse is more likely to be effective by understanding what causes or allows it, and then targeting those aspects.

The Internet is used by children to increase sexual knowledge and provides a structure for sexual experiences and a perceived safe method of playing them out (Döring, 2008). But it comes with a darker side in the form of unwanted sexual images and solicitation (Boies et al., 2004). A survey of 16 to 22 year old's which investigated the well-being of Swedish youths suggested that those who posted sexual pictures online showed an increased likeliness of "a poorer sense of coherence", and "a more problematic relationship with their mothers" (Jonsson et al., 2015, p.1252). This is suggestive of a vulnerability being present in those who engage in risky online behaviour. It is further reinforced by Ybarra and Mitchell (2014), and Quayle (2017, p.10) that voluntary sexual exposure is associated to a "vulnerability on the Internet". In the EU kids online report (Smahel et al., 2020) it is stated -

- The percentage of children who report negative online experiences increases with the age of the child,
- There is little difference by gender.
- The older a child is, the more likely they are to see sexual images,
- Females feel more "upset" at seeing sexual images than males
- The risks of receiving sexual communications is higher for those who sensation seek or who experience psychological difficulties.

For children with vulnerabilities it appears their Internet engagement can be reflective of those vulnerabilities and the way in which they engage with risks.

There is a plentiful supply of content online which enables engagement with risk. Websites such as Chaturbate openly encourage sensation seeking, it promotes "The

act of Masturbating while chatting online"[18]. Similarly, Omegle - "Talk to Strangers"[19]; allows anonymous users to meet online and live-stream sexual videos. These websites provide little in the way of regulation. Users just tick a box to agree they are over 18. As of 2021, those wishing to broadcast sexual activity can create a user profile with these websites by providing just an email and a date of birth, which if necessary, can be false. For a child in the UK, there are (2022) more regulatory conditions to open a bank account (MetroBank, 2019) than there are to talk to a stranger online and stream obscene sexual material (CPS, 2019). Material which according to current legislation is illegal in the UK (Criminal Justice Act, 1988). For those with a propensity to engage in online risk there appear to be few barriers to prevent it.

Social media platforms fade in and out of popularity and children migrate to the most popular (Smahel et al., 2020). At the time of writing these included Snapchat, Twitter, You Tube, WhatsApp and Facebook (YouGov, 2019; Statista, 2019), but they will change with time. Chapters 4 and 5 have indicated those committing online sexual offences also use popular social media platforms. These are the same sites frequently used by children, they provide a large supply of potential victims. To further understand what causes a child to be susceptible to online sexual coercion this chapter analyses the real life experiences the participants provide in their interviews.

6.2 Method

6.2.1 Participants

To be considered for this study a participant had to have indicated that they had been subject to sexually coercive online image (still, moving, or live stream) requests from an adult whilst they were a child (under the age of 18).

The only demographic restrictions placed on participants were to be in the age range of 18-34 at the time of being interviewed (as per participant criteria in chapter 3). The sample was a purposive and convenience-based sample due to its sensitivity.

Two sources of potential participants were used as per below –

1. Those participants who completed Study 2 whose answers indicated that they had been victims to online sexual coercion as children were filtered as being potentially eligible. These participants were asked if they consented to being contacted and contact details were requested. They were then asked if they wished to take part in this Interview study.

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[18] https://chaturbate.com/
[19] https://www.omegle.com/

2. A request for participant's was made on the research participation scheme (SONA) at Nottingham Trent University. Assistance was requested from those participants who had experienced sexually coercive online image requests from an adult whilst they were a child (under the age of 18) as per the study requirements.

Potentially 40 participants were identified through these two methods (36 from method 1, and four through method 2). Seventeen of these participants indicated a willingness to take part in the research. They were all contacted; of these nine were identified who were willing to be interviewed about their experiences.

This was within the desired target range for a project of this type and size (Smith et al., 2009) as per section 3.4.

No financial incentives were offered to any participants. Those who took part via the University's research participation scheme were granted online research credits. These credits are needed by students to progress their own studies but have no financial value. The participants were all from within the higher education environment; but their personal backgrounds proved to be very different, adding variety and diversification to the sample and results. Table 32 outlines participants' demographics; the mean age was 21.9 years old (SD=3.98). The majority were female (88.89%, n=8). From this sample 55.66% (n=5) had sent sexual images of themselves. The participants described abusive experiences which varied in duration from single encounters with individuals online to those with durations in excess of four years. All of the participants used English as their first language. None were known to the researcher prior to interview. No filtering of participant ethnicity, religion, nationality, or sex took place. Dependent on participant age, the Internet would have been in different stages of development when the participants were children.

Table 32-Participant information for study 6

Participant number	Age when interviewed	Sex	Stated sexual preference	Age when sexual coercion took place, (years)
1	27	F	Opposite sex	11-15 (2002 – 2006)
2	18	F	Opposite sex	16 (2016)
3	30	F	Opposite sex	14-17 (2002-2005)
4	21	F	Opposite sex	16 (2013)
5	19	F	Opposite sex	16 (2015)
6	20	F	Opposite sex	12-17 (2010-2015)
7	22	M	Same sex	14-17 (2010-2013)
8	20	F	Opposite sex	13-14 (2011-2012)
9	20	F	Opposite sex	14 (2012)

6.3 Procedure

6.3.1 Data collection

Each participant was provided with an information sheet, explaining the purpose of the study, consent, confidentiality, and information security (Appendix 6). Consent was obtained from each participant prior to interview in documentary format (Appendix 7). Of the nine participants eight were interviewed via a pre-arranged appointment at a location convenient to them. The remaining participant elected to have the interview conducted via Skype as they felt more comfortable talking through this manner about a personally emotive subject.

6.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

In depth semi-structured interviews were carried out. The interview structure was designed to maximise the participants' opportunity to talk about those issues they felt were of importance. This is considered an acceptable way to interview for a qualitative data-gathering environment such as IPA (Smith et al., 2009). An open style of questions was used to give the interviewees the confidence to talk freely (Bryman, 2016). The interviews were structured in line with the recommendations of Smith et al. (2009). There were five thematic areas to assist the flow of the interview (Howitt,

2016) and provide a structure to maintain consistency of data collection as outlined below.

1. Introduction and Rapport - The participants were invited to discuss their personal backgrounds in a rapport building section. This had a two-fold purpose. To increase their confidence and openness within the interview scenario, and to understand their own personal circumstances.

2. Internet usage as a child - an introduction into the main subject area talking in general about Internet usage and how they felt about it.

3. Online sexual approaches – Elaboration of the participants' coercive experiences.

4. Current Internet usage – How the participants' Internet usage may have changed and their retrospective views of their experiences.

5. Closure – Clarification, summarising and thanks.

These themes were designed as a guide to the interviewer rather than using a rigid structure. Its goal was to lead the participant through the interview process with as little discomfort as possible. It was not rigidly adhered to. If the participant decided to elaborate on a particular area, or in a manner out of sequence with the structure they were left to talk and explain these experiences. If necessary, the interview guide (Appendix 8) was used to prompt them to discuss aspects of their experiences (Smith el al., 2009). The interview durations varied between 40 minutes and 150 minutes (Mean=76mins, SD=31.6).

6.3.3 Analysis

The method used in this analysis was IPA, as discussed in section 3.3.3. It involved the full transcription and notation of each of the interviews (Appendix 17 provides a partial example of initial notation from an interview). The interview notations were then applied to a spreadsheet but referenced back to the originating text. This created a database for each interview (Appendix 18 details an example). Doing so takes the interview responses out of the context of an interview, essentially deconstructing it into sentences or sections of text (Smith et al., 2009). From the deconstructed interview, themes were created for each piece of text on the database. An iterative process was applied that reduced the initial number of themes into subordinate themes. The themes from the nine individual interviews were merged into a larger group at this stage. The superordinate themes were developed from the recurrent themes of the nine interviews using a process of hermeneutic interpretation of the interviewees comments to make sense of their personal experiences (Aresti et al., 2010). The original pieces

of text were given identifiers referencing the subsequent notes and themes, thus providing a full audit trail from the interview to the final analysis product to assist with maintaining the reliability and validity aspects of the research (Appendix 19 provides an example of the theme development spreadsheet). The theme development was an iterative process which involved reading and reflection of the meaning of the interview and development of the themes.

6.3.4 Ethical considerations

Approval for this study was granted by the Research and ethics committee at Nottingham Trent University as per Chapter 2.

6.4 Results

All participants in this study had received unprompted naked images from people they chatted to whilst using the Internet. They had also been asked to provide naked or sexual images. Table 33 outlines that five out of the nine participants (55.56%) sent sexual images of themselves. All of the participants experienced multiple requests for naked or sexual pictures online and were victim to more than one perpetrator. Those who sent images received multiple requests for sexualised content over a more prolonged period.

Table 33-Participant sending sexual images

Participant number	Sent sexualised images	Type of coercion	Multiple perpetrators
1	Y	Threatened to remove friendship	Y
2	N	Threatened to tell family they had slept together (untrue)	N
3	Y	Threats to reveal explicit pictures	Y
4	N	Threats to withdraw friendship	N
5	N	Threatened to tell best friend they were having a relationship	Y
6	Y	Threatened to tell friends and family they had sexual encounters (untrue)	Y
7	Y	Undisclosed threats to smear reputation	Y
8	Y	Threats to withdraw friendship	Y
9	N	Threats to reveal explicit pictures	N

From an initial 122 themes developed from the interviews, nine subordinate themes, and ultimately three superordinate themes were created. The superordinate themes are represented in Table 34

Table 34-Superordinate and subordinate themes

Superordinate themes	Subordinate themes
1. Using the Internet safely is an individual choice	No one looks out for you when you're online
	Of course children look for sex online
	Learning how to deal with the red flags
2. Exposing personal problems on the Internet	I wanted to be liked by men
	He would tell me that he loved me - The clouded judgements
	Ignorance is not bliss
3. Pushing the boundaries towards blackmail	Oh, come on you've seen me I'm so horny – The unreasonable demands
	Pushed beyond the comfort zone
	I don't know if that was like grooming - Being manipulated

6.4.1 Superordinate theme 1 – Using the Internet safely is an individual choice

The first superordinate theme focuses on each participant's use of the Internet, how they were educated to use it, and the manner in which they dealt with problematic online encounters. It defines what the individual participants felt the Internet should be used for, what they were wary of, and how they protected themselves online. Whilst this forms a standalone superordinate them it is also intrinsically linked to the other super ordinate themes. If it were not for the factors in superordinate theme 2 then it is likely that the individual participants who were abused would have had better defences to such abuse and been less likely to allow sexual abuse to develop (superordinate theme 3).

No one looks out for you when you're online

All of the participants were exposed to sexual content and explicit pictures online whether they wanted to see them or not. This theme explores how some participants were able to protect themselves from online harms. Some of the participants had online protection in place such as P2 who described having well known online security software, which promised safe web browsing (McAfee, 2019) amongst its attributes. She also had parental control in the form of curfews that constrained her Internet use between certain hours. P2 was allowed a smartphone as she got older and favoured the ease of use and privacy it offered. It allowed her access to social media without usage controls or restrictions. The privacy it offered from parents made it more appealing to her than using the desktop computer which had browsing protections.

154

Extract 1

"I was just able to talk to everyone and stuff, and it was just easier to get onto Facebook and I didn't have to like go by mum's set times and stuff" (P2, line 226)

This browsing freedom offered by her mobile phone came at a cost though. She found that people contacted her with inappropriate sexual messages and pictures. For P2 the parental restrictions seemed to get in the way of the freedom to browse as and when she wanted. But as she explained in extract 2 this left her more vulnerable to explicit approaches.

Extract 2

"And they were like 19-20, like sending me pictures of my pictures, saying I looked really good and stuff. And there was actually one guy that like sent a picture of me. And at this stage (my sister) was only about (under 10). And was saying that like that he was like wanking over me and stuff" (P2, line256)

Her social media account allowed her posts to be examined by strangers who contacted her in sexually explicit ways. It left her feeling confused and unsure of herself. P2 felt that parental guidance would have been useful in learning how to deal with problematic contact. Despite having been told about online threats and problematic behaviour she did not have the confidence to effectively deal with it when it was experienced. The security procedures in place by her parents which were only on the computer, did not assist her when she used her mobile phone. Because she had been involved in a sexual conversation, she felt she had done something wrong and her mother would be angry - despite her being victim of attempts to exploit her.

Extract 3

"I feel like I would have like, liked mum to be there whenever I was on the Internet whenever I was that wee bit like younger, just because then whenever any of that stuff happened, I didn't know what to do. And I felt like if I told mum she'd be annoyed, but if mum had of been there, she would have seen it and been able to like do something about it there and then" (P2, line 659)

Internet supervision was varied amongst the participants. For some, limitations were placed on access to particular sites or apps which parents or guardians felt represented a risk. Participant 4 was not allowed to use Facebook until she was 15, websites had to be confirmed as suitable by an older sibling and her Internet access was restricted at night. This did not prevent her from being exposed to sexual approaches and imagery. However, the supportive environment and structured approach to Internet use

assisted her in controlling the sexual approaches she faced. In extract 4 she describes how she applied caution when speaking to strangers.

Extract 4

"I'd definitely say when you were on your own it would be, personally, I would definitely just speak to people that I knew and that sort of thing" (P4, line 205)

The parental guidance had instilled a sense of right and wrong towards what she should and should not do online. Both P2, and P4 were resistant to attempts to obtain sexual images despite being placed under duress. In contrast, P6 did forward sexualised images. She explained at the time she did not fully understand the potential threats or implications despite the education and warnings she had received (extract 5) as a child.

Extract 5

"Like you know you get the talks in schools being like, don't ever give up personal details, don't tell blah, blah, blah. But like, never, I like didn't know why you couldn't. Like there wasn't, for me, any immediate threat, I didn't know that there were strange people who could potentially do all these nasty things to children. I wasn't aware. So my mum would always be like – just be careful of what you're doing and who you're speaking to – and that would be it. Like they were just talking to me, like what possible threat could they be? So yeah I never really fully understood like the dangers of the Internet. I never knew there was, I didn't see it as, the Internet as dangerous" (P6, line 219)

When she discussed her thoughts about the dangers, she was either unable or unwilling to recognise the threat to her well-being. Instead she believed that if she got caught talking to strangers online, she would be in trouble with her mother for having spoken to them. Despite them approaching her and instigating the conversations. In extract 6 when she discussed her experiences with an older male who tried to convince her to make a personal visit, she saw him as a lesser threat than that of her mother finding out about her discussions.

Extract 6

"It was like far away to like use the train. Erm and I was like what would I tell my mum, and he was like, oh you tell her that you met me at a music concert or something. I was like 13 years old; I don't go to music concerts. Well I'll pay for your train to come here, and like you know, come on this day, you can like stay over and things like that. And I didn't, I wasn't, like I didn't say like no because I was worried about what this guy could potentially do, I said no because of like my mum finding out," (P6, line 514)

P6's threat perception was in variance to P2 and P4's; she focused concerns on how she would be perceived by her mother, whereas P2 and P4 identified those they spoke with online as being the problem. It was not the protective measures such as online

monitors and restricted hours that made the difference in receiving problematic or inappropriate communications it was how a participant responded to them. Those participants who were unable to decline the sexualised and coercive behaviour seemed unable to fully put in place a strategy to halt its development.

> **Extract 6**
> "When I was like really, not like really young, but probably like 14 or whatever you get the whole like excitement of it's a boy or whatever messaging me. But never like anything inappropriate. Because then I knew that like then this is wrong and like I need to obviously like block this person." (P9, 435)

In extract 6 the participant recognised what constituted a threat to her and dealt with it accordingly, these actions were not apparent with P6 and other participants who went on to correspond with abusers. Despite the participants having been educated about Internet dangers, and restrictions being put in place by parents to protect them. These threats were present to all participants. They all faced predatory actions and sexual approaches, some dealt with them more successfully than others.

Of course children look for sex online

It was reported in 2003 that 75% of children used the Internet (Livingstone, 2003). At this time the Internet was over a decade old, but still awaited the launch of the first iPhone in 2007. It was also before the mobile apps were launched since smartphones became available. As reported by OFCOM (2019) - 83% of children aged 12-15 have personal smartphones. The majority of Children in the UK have had access to and grown up with the Internet since the start of the 21st Century. Participant 3 was the oldest of those interviewed at 30. She used the Internet in its infancy in the years from 2002 – 2005. She discussed its use in extract 7 and portrayed as it were the something that all of her friends were doing and was not an exceptional event.

> **Extract 7**
> "obviously I was like 13, 14. I'd, I'd use it games for it and stuff, and when I started going on Internet it was…. there wasn't Facebook or anything like that, it was all MSN messenger and all stuff, so I used to talk to people on MSN messenger, and I used to like go on chat rooms and stuff and what have you, and just used to talk to people through that really" (P3, line 141)

Similarly, participant 7, discussed his Internet use as a child and highlighted how it became part of the family entertainment routine, they would use the Internet and watch television together. It was accepted as part of his family life. Initially his online activity was aimed at gaming but evolved to include using social media in the form of Twitter. He also used this platform as a medium to explore his sexuality (extract 8).

Extract 8

"The, yeah the types of people that I tended to talk to were gay people."

I – Male, female?

"Oh erm male, yeah male. Because it's just back then I hadn't come out to people So it's a kind of place where I could be myself, erm, and explore that community, how I wanted to. And just feel more accepted, well not accepted, but I could be in that community without being publicly out" (P7, line 231)

He described the Internet as a place where he felt he could safely and anonymously explore sex without drawing too much attention to himself. This offered the advantage of maintaining a sexual anonymity in his social circles at school. P7 described a normal Internet activity, which mimicked that of his parents and his peers. One where he initially played games and searched for information. As he developed through his teenage years his use further expanded to include social media where he found he could explore and engage with people in subjects of personal interest, and sexual exploration.

A progression to sexual exploration on the Internet was evident in extract 9. Participant 6 described how she initially used the Internet as a pre-teen, to play games and create an online space as an extension of her personal identity. She found it offered a focal point within her peer group, similar to her peers she would visit the same sexually orientated websites others at school had used.

Extract 9

"No, it was generally Omegle, only because like everybody at school was doing that. That was the thing like, everybody at school was doing this and that and then this. And it was like - oh if you go on Omegle you get like these weird people. But none of us really like knew that was a bad thing" (P6, line 561)

P6 presented that she was simply mimicking the behaviour of her friends Internet use by visiting the sites they did. She further stated how the people using Omegle were 'weird' and did not mention the sexual content she would have encountered. It was further noted that she did not seem to consider her own and her friends use of this website as being encompassed by the term 'weird' but focused on the other users, saying 'everybody was doing it'. P4 also discussed using this particular site when with friends (extract 10). She suggested that they were doing it for 'a laugh', but when reflecting back on her actions now she believed that there may have been a more sinister angle to what occurred on that particular website.

Extract 10

"every 4 or 5 person, fifth person that you'd chat to would be a pornographic video, would pop up, and you'd giggle about it at that age but looking back on it now. Like, we were having this conversation the other day, like that is not OK, like when we were younger, we were so naïve, and we just thought oh my god that's just so funny and haha. But now we're looking at it and it's like you'd never go over to someone's house now and go on Omegle" (P4, line 270)

There was though one main difference between P6 and P4's use of this particular website. P4 only ever used it with friends in an exploratory way. When asked if she would use the site on her own, she responded in the negative as per Extract 11.

Extract 11
"Yeah it wasn't really uumm, no it wouldn't be something that you would do sort of by yourself sort of thing." (P4, line 355)

This was not the case for P6 who used it extensively alone. Although she acknowledged that the website was 'weird' she did not avoid it, and whilst using it went on to send sexual images of herself. The modest number of interviews conducted in this study indicated that children go online to play, communicate and explore. Arguably this is just part of growing up. The NSPCC website currently classifies looking for sexual pictures as one of the stages of sexual development a child goes through (NSPCC, 2019). The penetration of Internet use is estimated at 94.6% in the United Kingdom (Internet World Stats, 2019) and children using it can probably be considered as a daily part of life. As with any vast source of information, it will get used to expand knowledge, and question views. As the interviews indicate this included learning about, engaging with, and questioning sexuality. Something that should be routinely considered in website design and access when young people are likely to use a web service for social/contact purposes.

Learning how to deal with the red flags

This subordinate theme is one of contrasting behaviours demonstrated by those participants who were more resistant to coercive sexual approaches and those who were not. It highlights the online responses in an effort to understand what it was that made one group of participants more resilient to sexual suggestion than the other. P9 had one of the most robust defences to online strangers of all the participants. She describes a number of factors which formed part of her online safety education that she had adopted, a further compliance with parental controls and a submission to

accepting that the Internet was not to be used after nine o'clock. In addition to these factors extract 12 pinpoints the mutual trust built between her and her mother.

> **Extract 12**
>
> "Yeah mum always had the attitude that if I trust you then I've got no issue ..…If you give me a reason not to trust you then I'll start coming down on you. I thought - oh fair enough" (P9, line 397)

This trust gave her both support and freedom on the Internet. Something that was highly valued by the her. With this participant the online awareness education and mutual parental support appear to have made her very effective in identifying and dealing with potential online threats. In extract 13 she described how she would question the identity of someone contacting her.

> **Extract 13**
>
> "Erm, I think purely the realisation that you don't actually know them….You're like Ok this is where I've got no like common interests with you at all. No-one I know, you know, stuff like that….Usually judge it by like the photo and their profile. So like usually its says like, and I had one person once when I was like quite young, and it was like lives in (country) or something, and I was, well that's clearly like I got no need to know you" (P9, line 704)

If they did not come from her social circle or geographic locality, she would not engage with them, or would block them. Those participants who took some form of preventative action or declined to engage with unknown people making sexual approaches seemed less likely to fall victim to the attempts of coercion or sexual exploitation. In extract 14, P2 explained a process she followed where she would generally ignore unwanted contact, but if it persisted, she would take positive action such as blocking them.

> **Extract 14**
>
> "Most of them I'll just ignore the messages when I was sent a couple of messages. But then if they are like, keep going on, I'll actually like reply to them and tell them that it's not on, and I'm not having it and to stop talking to me.
>
> I – Yeah, and do they accept that or…
>
> Some of them do and then there's been other times when the guys will just keep going so I end up blocking them on everything" (P2, line 439)

A similar parental mutual trust was evident in the Internet use of P4 (extract 15). She felt she was subject to monitoring but not too intrusively, a trust was built up between the participant and parent to allow them to do what they wanted as long as they were careful.

160

Extract 15

"I would say it wasn't supervised in terms of I wasn't having someone sat in the room with me 24/7 or watching over my shoulder but sort of the amount of time I was spending on it and I was often asked what websites I was going on just to sort of like do you know – monitor, more monitored than supervised, if that makes sense." (P4, line 150)

Participants 2, 4, and 9 described a relationship with their parents that was supportive and non-conflictive. Notably, none of them conceded to the attempts to obtain sexual images from them. They had adopted the preventative structures that their parents had advised. Interestingly, two of these participants had experienced childhood traumas; this included the loss of a parent, and acrimonious parental separation.

In contrast to those who did not send images, P6 seemed to be worried about what her mother or sister would say about her online activity rather than the threat presented by the older males she was sending images to. Within extract 16, P6 who knowingly hid her actions, seemed to transfer the blame for sending images to her mother and others because they did not step in and tell her to stop. Knowing there was a danger - albeit in the form of upsetting her mother she went on to send images. She then assumed that someone should have stepped in to stop her from doing so.

Extract 16

"Yeah it was just erm, she just said to me, be careful of like what you're doing. But no-one ever really stepped in to be like please let's see what you're doing, and who are you talking to. Cos, I thought I'd get in trouble. And like I didn't think it was because they wanted to just see what was actually going on. I just saw it as I'd get in trouble for talking to strangers." (P6, line 833)

P8 attributed her online behaviour to her rebellious state of mind at the time, she typified herself as a normal teenager and minimised her actions. P8 showed an awareness that sending images had consequences despite having been warned about it. In Extract 17, using the phrase "even after my dad told me" as she explained that she sent images in defiance to those who cared for her.

Extract 17

"I was in such a rebellious stage in my life like you know, dying my hair this that and other, not going to school, self-harm, you know it was one of those, just so typical you know teenage rebellious stages. And that's why I was like, I don't care, like I don't care. But now I care, and now its too late, now, so now like its too late. I cared too late and now I'm like – fuck…….because I wouldn't of, someone telling me, like, even after my dad told me. I still did it. I still sent pictures, even after he told me don't. You're a fucking twat if you do, I still did it. And I, I had to learn the hard way about it" (P8, line 1177)

Similar to P6, P8 regrets her actions at the time but was unable to prevent herself from sending images despite knowing that it was not in her best interests.

P7 who also sent images explained how he struggled to feel accepted in an online gay community feeling that he did not have followers or friends. He would always wait for others to talk to him. His confidence within this community appeared low. As a result, he did not put in place protections to prevent his own online sexual abuse. He used phrases such as 'weird' or 'dodgy' as a descriptor for those that coerced sexual images from him, even going on to describe them as 'nice' at one point before conceding they had an 'agenda'. To gain acceptance, P7 allowed himself to be exploited taking no preventative measures and accepting the trade off by sending sexual images to be accepted into a community he wanted to be a part of.

> **Extract 18**
>
> "initially, like when we're talking back when I was younger, I'd always wait for people to talk to me. But because I was new to Twitter and didn't have many followers, whatever, no one was. I wasn't friends with anyone. Erm it was all people who were a bit weird or dodgy, like the guys I actually ended up talking to who seemed nice and everything….. But of course they had an agenda" (P7, line 488)

This subordinate theme concentrated on the steps the participants did or did not take to avoid sending sexual images of themselves online. Discussing the online threats that they experienced, the participants all showed awareness of what represented a risk.

Those who sent images of themselves appeared to have an emotional factor that prevented them from disengaging from perpetrators during online interactions. This either made them more vulnerable, and/or dismissive of the risks associated to sending sexual images.

It is suggested that young people who are provided with social support have a lower propensity to take risks, parental and family networks provide an inhibiting factor to this risk taking. Young people who rely solely on peer groups have a higher risk profile (Abbot-Chapman et al., 2008). Emotions such as seeking approval, acceptance, and defiance appear to have been present amongst those participants who sent images. It is feasible that these emotive states may have proved to be limiting factors in communicating within the familial structure, as per Abbot-Chapman et al. (2008) who suggested a "disturbing lack of inter-generational communication and trust among some very ordinary families" (Abbot-Chapman et al., 2008, p.652) At the time of P6, 7, and 8's online sexual coercion they were experiencing uncertainty, insecurity and frustration within the familial structure. This was quite possibly a factor that effected their ability to comprehend and deal effectively with the online risks they faced.

6.4.2 Superordinate theme 2 – Exposing personal problems on the Internet

This superordinate theme was generated out of a total of 38 thematic areas developed from the interviews. Of these themes 78.9% (*n*=30) were from the interviews of those participants who had sent images of themselves, opposed to 21.1% (*n*=8) of those who had not. During interview, the participants explained the challenges they faced as children. Traumas such as the separation of parents, body dysmorphic disorder, the death of a parent, or being bullied. However, it was not these participants who faced what might be perceived as the most difficult challenges that sent images of themselves. With those that sent images seeming to focus on factors such as isolation, acceptance, or self-esteem when discussing their online sexual abuse. It is these emotions that the 2nd superordinate theme is grounded upon, and that appear to have been noticed by the online perpetrators.

I wanted to be liked by men

This subordinate theme examined how the participants needed to feel wanted or have friendships. This lowered their defences and ability to walk away from risky online relationships which they openly recognised. The emotions discussed by Participant 1 were complex; and featured in all of the thematic areas in this superordinate theme. In extract 19 she maintained a negative viewpoint on her real-life friendships and relationships. She described seeking out relationships online as a replacement for the real-life ones she struggled to maintain. Her need for socialisation was perceived by her as wanting to 'be liked by men'.

> **Extract 19**
> "I think I was probably seeking the social life and relationships that I never had in real life…..After 14 I had a few other friends at school, but didn't really go out with them, because I didn't trust anyone, and didn't really feel like they were friends. I was generally one of those kids who just went inside my head, I would read lots of books and when we got a computer at age 10, I just wasted my time on that. I wanted to be liked by men, and needed attention from men, because previous life experiences had taught me that your worth depends on these things. And that men like you if they are sexually interested in you, it's like a boost of self-worth (P1, line 131)

She associated the sexual interest shown towards her as men liking her, linking men wanting sexual images of her to being desirable, and consequently providing what she described as "a boost of self-worth". Needing to feel wanted appears to be one of the root causes that allowed her to feel it was acceptable to send sexual pictures of herself. In extract 20, P1 reflected how central feeling 'special' was for her. Offenders would say the positive things to her which boosted her self-esteem, this allowed her to feel that it was acceptable to provide the sexual images they wanted.

Extract 20
 "They were the expert manipulator ones. The ones that made you feel special as a person.
They didn't jump straight to the sexual stuff" (P1, line 214)

An increase in positive feelings also seemed fundamental to P6's online experiences
in following extracts she focused on what she felt were the benefits of sending
sexualised images, ignoring the negative and criminal aspects of what had occurred.
For her, feeling special and wanted appeared to be the driving force, with the images
she sent being the currency that bought it.

Extract 21
 "because I thought it made me feel, like you know mature and like at school, boys were more
interested in like the more developed girls, and things like that. Erm yeah, definitely, cos I felt
like, it made me feel – special I suppose ….it felt cool that older people wanted to talk to me.
I didn't see it as perverted" (P6, line 318)

The positive feelings and encouragement provided by the recipients of her images
were used to offset the instability she was feeling in her home life at the time. P6 had
described experiencing parental separation and struggling to come to terms with her
mother's new relationship. She associated her behaviour to teenage rebellion. A
rebellion that appears to have been created from a difficulty in coming to terms with
the dissolution of her parents' relationship. One where her father moved out and was
replaced by another male. For some young adults, studies have shown the effects of
family separation can increase the likelihood of psychological or social behavioural
problems (Amato et al., 1995; Stadelmann et al., 2010). P6 recognised how her
behaviour changed in the home environment but did not link it to her online behaviour
where she wanted to be made to feel 'special'. It is possible that the resultant loss of
her father from the family home may have caused her to seek comfort from males
online.

Participant 3 described the isolation she experienced at home after school. She felt her
life was restricted unlike her other school friends. During extract 22, P3 mainly
focused on this isolation as a child as a reason for going onto the Internet and using
chat rooms.

Extract 22
"Like I was an only child, and I didn't really go out at night to play with my friends and things
so it was mainly - I used to come in, have me tea, and I'd go straight on the computer. That
was, that was my time to interact with people, was through chat rooms" (P3, line 604)

But the rebellion which she also discussed later, coupled with her feelings of injustice
at not being allowed to socialise may have been a driver that exacerbated her online

activity which progressed from sending images to meeting a male and subsequently living with an adult male when under 16.

Extract 23

 "So yeah, me childhood was, it was good, but like I said I was a bit isolated and a bit alone, and then kind of made me want to rebel, to go out and like I said I ended up getting with a 21-22 year old bloke. And got kicked out and moved in with him and things and…. (P3, line 886)

For those participants who were coerced into sending images, it seems likely that strong feelings such as loneliness, isolation, or frustration are key to them engaging in risky behaviour on social media. Effectively with lowered defences. This makes them more vulnerable to suggestion by online abusers. However, the reasons in this subordinate theme form only part of the picture. Other subordinate themes contained within this superordinate theme were also displayed by most of the participants who were coerced (Table 35). This suggests that it is perhaps more of a collection of emotions and feelings that makes the individual more vulnerable to coercion than just one factor.

"He would tell me that he loved me" - The clouded judgements

This subordinate theme was constructed out of the emotions and personal feelings experienced by the participants. These feelings influenced the relationships they held with adults they met on the Internet. Earlier comments made by the participants within this chapter indicated an awareness that what was occurring between them and their online perpetrator was 'wrong'. Despite this, they went on to send self-generated sexual images of themselves, thus, exhibiting what seems to be an example of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). These emotions were rooted in their self-perceptions, and relationships with close family members. The following paragraphs demonstrate some of the challenges that the different participants felt were facing them and how their vulnerabilities were manipulated. In extract 24, P1 reflected on how she felt her parents were not capable of raising her, and she considered herself to have suffered emotionally as a result of her parenting. She initially focused on her parents as a cause of many of the problems she experienced. But this focus then shifts onto herself where she explains how she felt she was 'awful, and ugly' and a 'horrible person'.

Extract 24

 "On reflection (a lot of reflection!), they didn't really know what they were doing as parents, so they ended up being abusive/emotionally neglectful etc. I'd say I resented them all my life up until about a month ago, where I had a paradigm shift, and now I know that they just were naive/ignorant. Not an excuse but can't change the past……these guys didn't know who I was, how awful and ugly and what a horrible person I was, and all the other things I believed I was at the time, that it was like being another person. A different life, a life where people liked me" (P1, line 54)

She highlighted a number of vulnerabilities in her self-perceptions towards family life. To escape from these emotions and provide a positive emotive state she conceded to requests for images. This meant she felt valued and liked by the older males. The compliments and encouragement received were ones she felt were missing from her life. Thus, the negative feelings she was having were lessened as a result of the boost to self-worth she received online.

Similar personal vulnerabilities were evident within the interview of P3, who focused on her personal appearance. It caused worry about how people would react to her. In P3's case low self-esteem appears to have caused her to seek friendships online.

> **Extract 25**
> "I've always been very conscious of the fact that I don't really like the way I look anyway, so sending pictures of myself, not very self-conscious..., like conscious, I don't know what the word is. I don't want to send pictures to somebody if they turn round and go – err – do you know what I mean." (P3, line 924)

Her mind-set at the time clouded her risk assessing abilities. Whilst feeling conscious of her self-image and experiencing isolation she is encouraged by the positive attention that she received online. It results in her sending sexual pictures and engaging in risky relationships despite her own consciousness of how they might be commented upon. For this participant, as discussed in the previous subordinate theme her judgement also seems to have been fuelled by the perceived isolation of excessively restrictive parental control.

With participant P6, a lack of understanding over parental separation created a resentment towards her mother (extract 26). She described how she vented this frustration on her mother, despite the separation being borne out of her father's infidelity. Unaware of the facts, she blamed her mother for her father leaving despite this not being the case.

> **Extract 26**
> "My mum and my dad had quite a lot of problems, my dad was a bit of a cheater. And he wasn't very faithful to my mum, pretty much before they were married, through their marriage. But I wasn't really aware of that, I didn't really understand it as much as my sister did…..So when things like kicked off, I didn't really understand it, as it was my mums' decision to make herself happier. I saw it as more like you know your parents splitting up like. You know….Both me and my sister were really upset ..….because I was living with her full time, so I kind of took it out on her a bit. My dad has always been a really good dad and he's always loved me" (P6, line 62)

Her frustration towards the parental separation was reflected in her online bahaviour. Her father's absence seemed to draw her to other older males online, almost as if they offered a replacement to her missing father. By not fully understanding what was occurring in her own family life, and the instability caused by the subsequent

arguments, P6 became vulnerable to the suggestibility of the males she engaged with online (extract 27).

Extract 27
"he was older and in a different country. But we really got on….he would ask for pictures or you know he would tell me that he loved me and things like that erm…. " (P6, line 325)

The extent of this vulnerability is reflected in her account where she elaborated how she believed she was in a relationship despite the circumstances making this highly unlikely.

With P7 the clouded judgments were created from a lack of self-confidence/anxiety, coupled with a confusion over sexuality. Rather than working out how to manage his emotions in face to face situations he found it was easier to join online forums to try and find acceptance. He used the social media feed of a gay icon to find people he felt might be similar to him-self. His desire to fit in and be part to this community led him to find many older men with a sexual interest in him who would provide him with encouragement and validation.

Extract 28
"a kind of place where I could be myself, erm, and explore that community, how I wanted to. And just feel more accepted, well not accepted, but I could be in that community without being publicly out" (P7, line 237)

Like the other participants, this desire to be accepted appeared to have created a vulnerability that prevented him from considering rationally what he subsequently took part in online.

Ignorance is not bliss

Thomas Gray suggests "where ignorance is bliss, tis folly to be wise" (Gray, 1966, p. 10). Interpretations of this are varied, but roughly mean that it is better to not know about something than know about the true extent of what is occurring. Putting this into a context of online sexual abuse, a child who does not, or will not recognise what is occurring may allow their own victimisation to carry on unabated. It has been posited that simple steps taken by victims may have been enough to prevent an escalation from a speculative contact to prolonged abuse (Kopecky, 2017). Unfortunately, some of the personal issues faced by some of the participants stood in the way of prevention being a straightforward step.

In the following extracts (29) the participants highlighted how they avoided discussing difficult issues or seem to have dismissed the experiences almost as a way of pretending they never happened.

Extracts 29
I – "Did you ever speak to anyone about what happened online?

"I think you're the first person actually, because I had kind of forgotten about it all…... But at the time, no I didn't. Never told my parents anything" (P1, line 329)

"But like I didn't want to say anything to mum about it because it thought she'd be annoyed.
I – Have you told her subsequently?
"No" (P2, line 668)

Had the participants been able to overcome this difficulty or speak to someone else, then they might have been better equipped to deal with the challenges they faced online. Telling someone what they experienced or disclosing it to a third party may have been enough to break a long chain of abuse in some of the cases. This is typified by P8 when she reflects on her relationship with her mother. Sexual images she had sent were found on her phone; the ensuing argument failed to put any constructive prevention in place for the future. Unfortunately, this participant went on to send more images and these were also found by parents.

Extract 30

"my mum found them, and like obviously we fell out big time over it. I was like fourteen, fifteen, what year was it. Year 9, how old are you in year 9, yeah 14…..yeah, and then we've never spoken about this. It's always been like that elephant in the room when it comes to like talking …Because me and my mum never talk about it…. I know its stupid now but it still makes me feel so uncomfortable to like think that I did do that. And to think that like I put myself in that position. Because I actually could have like, something bad could have really happened" (P8, line 950)

It is very easy to consider an interview account and form a retrospective opinion of what occurred and why you think it occurred. But it is harder to comprehend the individual's state of mind at the time, and how this can impact on the decisions they make when online. In extract 31, P6 elaborated on how when aged 12 she chatted with a male on a virtual platform. The male had presented an online persona which turned out to be completely different to his real one. He was also significantly older and requested access to the participants webcam. When he was unable to activate her webcam via the remote assistance facility, he became disinterested in her and stopped chatting. What would be recognised by many as an older male showing concerning interest in a pre-teen child did not raise any concern with the participant who allowed him full access to her computer. Despite all the warnings and online education, the participant had received she did not at the time recognise a risk to herself. Neither were any warnings raised by the platform hosts/providers. The entire incident is allowed to pass unnoticed without any form of notification or intervention being made.

Extract 31

"…they're dressed as a boy who says they're like 15. But when you actually give them like your MSN address and you get talking to them, oh I'm actually like this old. And I'm actually like extremely like overweight and not what I said I was at all. ….And I remember there was one who I met on Habbo, we were talking for a while and I gave him my MSN address and erm. But my camera wasn't working for some reason, I dunno, I couldn't. I think it was just

broke, I couldn't get it to fix at all. And he was like adamant to get me on camera, and when I clicked accept on like the camera thing, mine obviously wasn't working. But he was like - his character on Habbo was like muscular, short hair like, cos it was all in like pixel art. So like just kind of looked a bit, as attractive as a pixel avatar could be really. When he got on camera, he was like this obese, long greasy haired... I can't remember how old he was but he was definitely older than 20 I believe, and I was a bit like, why..... I was like oh god, and he said why sort of like isn't your camera working. I was like oh dunno, it just won't fix. And he did this thing where he like took control of my computer and tried to like literally, I watched him do it. Like the mouse moved while he tried all these different things to get my camera working. Erm and because my camera wouldn't work he just sort of like stopped talking to me I think.... He was fine with me being like younger as well." (P6, line 419)

The point where P6 describes 'he was fine with me being younger' is suggestive that she felt that it was her that was doing something wrong and not him.

Within the interview accounts given by the participants there were common behaviours that they chose to ignore whilst online. When they considered these afterwards, they felt they were indicators of potential abusers. Participants noticed that the people they spoke to were older than they represented and identifying features were often not present in the video footage that was sent.

Extract 32
"They'd say well I've sent you more pictures, but you'd never see anything apart from that lower Section" (P3, line782)

In extract 32, P3 explained she rarely received facial pictures from those who she spoke with in chat rooms; her correspondents were willing to send pictures of their genitals, but not their faces. Using the anonymity component of Cooper's 'triple A engine'[20] (1998) to their own benefit by limiting access to facial pictures. In extract 33 the participant explained how his abusers pretended to be far younger and placed themselves into an age range that would not concern him.

Extract 33
"I was definitely aware that they were older, they, they, I don't know how old they actually were. Because I do think now that they were pretending to be younger than they actually were. But I would say they were portraying themselves as early to late twenties. So about 22-27 was the age range that they tended to be. And I was completely fine with that" P7 (568)

By not using effective age and identity verification for registered platform users it becomes difficult to prevent adults from gaining access to children. Children who in some cases cannot, or do not want to recognise the cold truth behind what their online friend is actually doing; especially if they need this friend to alleviate the negative emotions they are experiencing. This need of acceptance and friendship seemed to override a common-sense approach to filtering out potential threats to the participants. In extract 34 P7 describes how the contact number he was provided with was never answered, and he could only contact his online companion via a pre-recorded message

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[20] See section 2.4 for further information

on an anonymous application. Despite having suspicions about this relationship, P7 still continued to correspond and send images.

Extract 34

"That phone number because it was a lot cheaper, erm, he didn't answer. Erm, but yeah, he did send me like voice messages over Vimeo….. It's another app, you basically just record what you're saying and send it. And he sent me some of that stuff. Erm, but of course, never videos of him talking of whatever…. So you could never really tell if it was actually him. Of course, I kind of didn't believe it was him" P7, line 836)

The grooming processes described by Kloess et al. (2015) of initiating chat with children gave all appearances of being equally applicable in the experiences described by the participants of this study. They were subjected to an online rapport building to gain trust and friendship prior to sexualisation. In extract 35 below, P3 described how conversations would progress, it has an air of repetitiveness, as though she has been asked questions of those type many times and they have become mundane.

Extract 35

"Yeah, so it used to always get from like, hi, to how big are your boobs basically, those sort of things….. It started off with your demographic kind of things, and then it was like, oh well if I did this to you, what would you do, or are you a virgin, have you done this. And if I met you what would you do to me. It used to get progressively into like scenarios as such like. Do you know what I mean" (P3, line 245)

The participants who sent images also described how perpetrators created an emotional dependency on them. In extract 36, P7 knew that sending the images to the perpetrator would please him, and he would subsequently receive encouraging compliments back. This maintained the fictitious online overseas relationship.

Extract 36

"But as it went on, and as we were in a relationship, I was more willing to send more photos., and er whatever he wanted. Videos that kind of stuff" (P7, line 662)

This section has examined how some of the participants have increased the risk to themselves by choosing not to react to a series of events which might seem obvious to the outside observer to be predatory.

Current and previous online safety training that children receive covers the potential risk aspects highlighted within this subordinate theme (Thinkuknow, 2021). But the participants failed to respond to these danger signals. The following juxtaposed responses given by participants make obvious those who did (extract 37) and those who didn't (extract 38) send images

Extract 37

"And I kind of like didn't have much respect for myself or anything, or anyone else. So I just like, if he asked I would just send it, cos I was like I don't care. Like I've got no..... But now, if anyone asks now, I'm like – how dare you. Like how dare you ask me." (P8, line 998)

Extract 38

"And he was really giving it, bless him he was trying. And he was like oh no come on send us one, send us one, send us one. He literally would message like 6 different messages at a time trying to get my attention and I ended up blocking him" (P5, line 485)

It is worth noting that in the final comments given by P8 in extract 37, she described how she now deals with online predators. This is also one of the self-protection methods described as being more effective by LeClerc et al. (2011). Unfortunately, she had to learn this lesson the hard way.

This superordinate theme of 'Exposing personal problems on the Internet' was constructed of 3 themes that conjoined to allow some of the participants to accept sending sexual images of themselves as a trade-off to boost their self-esteem and mitigate negative emotions they experienced at the time.

6.4.3 Superordinate theme 3 – Pushing the boundaries to blackmail

This final superordinate theme is one that concentrates on how a sexualised environment is created between the participants and those they talked to online. It was noteworthy that sexual pictures were routinely sent to all participants unprompted and without intervention. The majority of the participants describe how it shocked them or made them feel uncomfortable. Normalisation to image receipt seemed common. Attempts were made to coerce all of the participants into supplying images. The required force used to do this varied from subtle coercion, offers of money through to direct threats to disclose information.

Oh come on you've seen me I'm so horny – The unreasonable demands

In the UK, a person responsible for exposing themselves might be arrested for a breach of Section 66 of the Sexual Offences Act of 2003[21]. The law does not stipulate whether such an act of exposure should be committed publicly or privately. The offence is aggravated if the witness to such behaviour is a child, or the offender masturbates (Sentencing Council, 2014). All of the participants in this study experienced receiving unwanted sexual pictures. A fairly recent addition to statute under Section 15A of the Serious Crime Act 2015 further outlaw's sexual communication with a child. Despite widespread receipt of images and sexualised chat, none of the participants of this study chose to report the activity to any type of authority. Exemplifying this - in extract 39, P3 described how she was shocked when she received unprompted images of male genitalia when she was chatting to a male she did not know. It caused her conversation became a little more hesitant and stinted when discussing the experience.

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[21] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/42/section/66

Extract 39

"yeah you used to get pictures through and stuff, and then I used to get, oh I'll send you one will you send me one. And I was very much like, no, I'm not gonna do that…. like sometimes like messages would pop up and be like – are you alright, and then next thing – bang – male genitalia would pop up, and your like – do you know what I mean I wasn't expecting that. And like I said I wasn't very erm, in the know with boys at that age. I weren't really, erm, like hanging around with boys or anything like that …… so seeing them sort of images kind of, it's a bit taken aback. Kind of like 'whoa' ….. Yeah, sometimes yeah it's like I've said, they used to pop up and, hi, how are you – bang – there'd be a picture, and you'd be like ugghh, do you know what I mean." (P3, line 645)

Despite the claims P3 made that she would not send images, she did however go on to send them under the threat of losing a friendship. Similarly, P2 discussed how she received images of male genitalia via Snapchat. Using the words "it's like you know that they've sent it to other people" in extract 40 suggested a normalization and acceptance of the behaviour intimating it was widespread.

Extract 40

"So like the guy, some of the guys that I've had send Snapchats have literally just sent like pictures of their dicks, and been like, oh come on you've seen me I'm so horny. And it will be gone in 10 seconds, and it's like, you know that they've sent it to other people because you don't know who they are, so they can't know who you are. And they're just sending it round" (P2, line791)

It is presented that 46% of females have received a picture of a penis via an online communication, and that younger women are more likely to have received them; 89% of these images are unrequested (Smith, 2018). Of those receiving images, 46% were under the age of 18 when first receiving them. Research into the sending of unsolicited images, which have become colloquially termed dick pics, concentrates on forms of sexual harassment/abuse or sexual entitlement rather than making direct links to grooming (Waling & Pym, 2017; Hayes & Dragiewicz, 2018). The sending of such images is further described as a form of sexual exploration or "girl hunting" (Mandau et al., 2019, p.89). Failing to consider grooming within this activity is likely to have a diluting effect, making online grooming/sexual abuse vanish amongst perceived adolescent behaviour. Additionally, the language used in the description of image receipt and its normalisation is not likely to help in tackling the sexual abuse of children, its use has a tendency to informalise criminal activity.

The requests for sexual images were reported frequently by the participants. P2 describes a level of persistent harassment in extract 41 from an unknown male who added the participant to his friends list on a social media platform. This harassment was reinforced with unwanted sexual images sent by the perpetrator. As already highlighted, if such behaviour were to happen in public in the street it is likely to result in arrest for an offence of indecent exposure. If convicted for this offence a custodial

sentence and registration as a sex offender could be imposed (Sexual Offences Act, 2003).

Extract 41
 "I wasn't replying to messages, and he just started being like – can you send me pictures, erm, like that was when he added me on Snapchat. He just like kept sending me pictures….." (P2, line 373)

In extract 42, P5 disclosed how she had to think twice about posting any sort of picture onto social media as each one caused her to consider what type of sexualised comments and images she would receive as a result.

Extract 42
"there's been multiple occasions, across loads of different platforms where I've had that. And its, I think that's very common nowadays. Cos, I'm not an unattractive person, but I'm not saying that I'm stunning kind of thing, but when your someone who's vaguely attractive as a woman you kind of learn to expect that to happen…. Which I think is really sad. Because that's the danger of it, you can't put up a picture of yourself without thinking, oh is someone going to message me and ask for something" (P5, line 415)

These are the experiences of young people growing up. These conversations highlight what appears to have become an accepted practice of sending dick pics online. The recipients of the images are normalised to sexual images and with the 'lucky' ones just being harassed to send nude images, those less lucky are subject to manipulation, coercion and sexual abuse. There seemed to be little in the way of intervention or filtering of images from the hosting platforms that stopped these communications. The perpetrators discussed by the participants seemed to believe their actions were acceptable and beyond reproach. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 suggests otherwise. But in order to change such behaviour the unacceptability of it needs to be highlighted and reported, this and other aspects of this research have highlighted that this does not happen with the frequency it should.

Pushed beyond the comfort zone

Part of the process that the participants described when being subject to coercion was being taken out of their comfort zone and being forcibly introduced to sex. Sexual introduction and normalisation is a part of the grooming process demonstrated in online offending (O'Connell, 2003) and was experienced by the participants in this study. P5 described being introduced to sexual images by an older male in extract 43. Despite not wanting to receive them. P5 reflected how she was a young child and that the content was harmful to someone of that age. Her strength of feeling was demonstrated in three separate pieces of text where she says 'no'. Her sense of violation was strong enough to cause her to reinforce this disapproval by deleting the app.

Extract 43

"he was saying like oh I have pictures from this, do you want to see them. And I was like, no. Like as a kid…...he was like oh would you be open to sending me a picture, I'll send you one. And I was like, no……Like what do I have to show as a 13-year-old kind of thing. And he did send a couple of explicit pictures, and I just kind of got rid of the App after that. I was like no this is, this is really kind of harmful to a 13-year-old who doesn't know what sex is. " (P5, line 319)

P5's comments suggested her values had been strongly violated by the sending of sexual images. This impact, which would never be known by the perpetrator lasted some time for this participant. The shock effect of receiving unwanted pictures was also evident in P2's interview. She explained how a male had lewdly commented about a picture she posted of herself online. His comments that he was masturbating caused expression of revulsion and shock.

Extract 45

"And there was actually one guy that like sent a picture of me out in the snow with my (relative). And at this stage my (relative) was only about (under 10). And was saying that like that he was like wanking over me and stuff……I was only like 16, and (relative) was in the photo as well, and she was only like (under 10)….It actually made me feel sick whenever he said it, cos it was just like a general photo, it wasn't even like any of my photos or bad. It was just a photo of me out in the snow with my sister. (P2, line 261)

This discomfort that the participants described was progressive, it would push the boundaries of previous conversations to test the participants responses. In extract 46 the participant told how she had been asked for an image and the perpetrator had then threatened to disclose some information about her. She experienced initial panic and confusion not knowing how to respond. However, the online encounter was controlled by the participant stopping to gather her thoughts and discussing the incident with a relative. This 'buying of time' allowed her to take advice and understand how to deal with the online threat. Once P4 diffuses the initial shock she is able to consider and make sense of the request, and subsequently avoid sending images of her-self.

Extract 46

"So, I was thinking well if I say no to this and then he asks me again then what's he gonna ask after that. Do you know what I mean, what's he gonna say if I don't send him a photo. Is he gonna say well I'm gonna come to your school and I'm gonna beat you up, do you now what I mean. Even though it didn't get to that, it did make me, it makes you panic. But then you realise, well no, because I don't have to, do you know what I mean I don't have to. You think about it logically, but if it say was someone else who didn't have an older sister to talk to, or friends that said 'oh no don't do it', or didn't have anyone to speak to. I could easily see how someone would definitely be pressured into actually doing it by someone who's older" (P4, line 696)

Some degree of discomfort or shock was evident amongst all of the participants when online conversations were sexualised. The participants who sent self-generated images, such as Participants 6, 7, and 8, described a lower initial discomfort at what they saw online. This contradiction in initial response to those not sending images did

seem to be subsequently followed by an increasing reticence by them to allow their online abuse to continue. Within extract 47, P6 does not describe shock in the way that P2, 4, or 5 do. She does however talk with acceptance of sending images, but when discussing sexual actions, a line appears to have been crossed she is unhappy with. This appears to create a dissonance with her.

Extract 47
"I think there was always sort of like, let me see you naked, and things like that. Or like can you try and do this. But I was never, I don't think I was…. ever really wanted to go that far, so I would always be like no, I don't want to do that….my mentality at the time wasn't like scared, it was, but, erm. I think like the worst things were either just you know seeing men playing with themselves, and like asking me to do like really explicit things" (P6, line 679)

Interlaced within the account P6 provides of her experience were explanations that described how she was not comfortable with what was being asked of her. This is demonstrated when she says she did not want it 'to go that far', and 'want to do that'. Whilst she recounted some of the sexual encounters, she does not indicate that she is shocked in the way that those participants who refused to send images were. With the later increased apprehension evident in her account in extract (48). She appeared to realise the severity of the ongoing demands that had been made of her. Self-doubt and fear seem to have played a part in the rationalisation of the situation she faced. This was likely to have been exacerbated by the position of weakness she was in by having already sent numerous images.

Extract 48
 "Cos I'd said to him a few times, like I don't think this should be going on anymore. I don't feel like, I don't want it, I don't want to be doing this anymore. He said oh can we not at least be friends. Because at like at that age I felt nervous, and scared, I remember walking home one day and usually I was quite excited to come back and talk to him. I remember I got to like a certain point, and I was like, I don't want to speak to him. Like I don't feel comfortable speaking to him anymore. Because I was scared in case, you know…. I don't know if he ever did take like, like pictures. You know like print screens, sort of thing." (P6, line 941)

At the end of the paragraph, P6 diverted the conversation away from the core subject of her abuse to talk about what happened to the images she sent, almost as though it were easier to discuss than what had actually happened to her online.

This ambivalence was also evident with P7 in extract 49. Initially he described being withdrawn after his first request for sexual images. He tried to counter this feeling with a degree of bravado later in the interview saying how he felt it did not negatively impact on him, in variance to his initial comments. P7's outlook was slightly different from the female participants; he interpreted the process as being a learning experience which he was convinced many others had also experienced. Whilst his experience might have been attributed to online sexual exploration, it seems that it was an event with a lasting impact on him. He was able to describe with much detail the feeling that

it created for him at the time, not something that would be expected of a passing encounter.

Extract 49
"so, I always had that in the back of my mind that what they were doing would actually be considered illegal for them. Erm, but yeah, its erm yeah I did think they had better intentions than I think they had, now, looking back…...It changed, so for me, initially I was very withdrawn on that. I said earlier about the guy that used emotional blackmail to get pictures he wanted. And erm, its actually the same guy that I considered to be in a relationship with later on. But erm, yeah that, so back then. That was one of my first encounters with people. Erm, so I was quite withdrawn…...I mean I kind of see it as a learning experience for myself. Its, you've done that, you've gone through all of that. It didn't really negatively impact me. It just seemed like something that happens to quite a few people" (P7, line 645)

At the time P7 convinced himself that providing sexual images to older men was part of allowing his sexuality to develop. This is an unusual reaction suggestive of self-denial when he explained how he was withdrawn initially, his comments early in the extract indicate that he believed what occurred was criminal. It seemed more likely an example of cognitive dissonance used by the participant to process what he had experienced.

The participants in this study were all in their teenage years when they were faced with sexual requests. The study concentrated on sexual requests from adults, and not peers of a similar age. To some children, adults hold an authoritative position. So, it is perhaps not surprising that some of them found it difficult coming to terms with the requests made of them. Some participants were more able to deal with the requests than others, this usually came in the form of declining the requests or blocking the contact. The best protection strategy that can be deployed by the victim is to tell their abuser "they do not want to participate in such activities" (LeClerc et al., 2011, p.1879). This is probably easier to say than do when faced with a coercive situation. The victims at the time were fighting from a position of weakness and/or feeling vulnerabilities and were likely to find it difficult to deny strong manipulative tactics when faced with them.

I don't know if that was like grooming - Being manipulated

This final subordinate theme demonstrates how the participants were manipulated into a position where they felt they should send a sexual image of themselves. P1 described in extract 50 how she felt she was subject to subtle forms of persuasion. She was plied with compliments but was very aware that the friendship she needed might be taken from her. The compliments she received about her looks provided a boost to her self-esteem that she needed at that time. The threat of losing this socialisation and friendship was enough to ensure she complied with the requests for sexual images.

Extract 50

"I don't think it was a willing thing as such, but they persist these guys, they go on and on until you give in. So, it wasn't like oh yes, I'd love to. But also I wasn't threatened with murder. It was more the subtle coercion….come on, I thought we were friends; it'll be fun; don't you like me anymore?; I bet you're really hot/pretty/sexy etc. So, there's the chance they would not be my 'friends' anymore, so that would be taking away the little human connections I had. Also, they used lots and lots of flattery. I hated myself so I never posted pictures of myself, so when they saw me on webcam and would complement me it would make me feel that maybe I wasn't horrible after all." (P1, line 327)

A similar phenomenon was also experienced by P3 (extract 51) who felt isolated. She developed an online relationship over a period of time and came become dependent on the friendship it provided. Despite not wanting to send images she felt obliged, as she wanted to maintain the relationship. Reinforcement of this fact by the perpetrator/s requesting images was sufficient to remind P1, and P3 of the ease with which this friendship could be taken from them. The negative emotions they were experiencing at that time were sufficient to make them send sexual images to receive the positive feedback which they needed.

Extract 51

"if you have been talking to somebody for a while, and you kind of build up that sort of rapport with them. And then they start asking for pictures and your like, oh no I'm not really comfortable with that. And then they like well I don't want to talk to you no more – you kind of feel like – oh well I do want to carry on talking to you, so you feel more obliged to, erm, do you know what I mean, like agree with things that they say….I think that's kind of why I sent that picture because I'd kind of built up that relationship with whoever this person who I were talking to, and they asked and I sent it. Like I said. (P3, line 727)

Extracts 50 and 51 demonstrated how perpetrators invested time into developing a relationship with the participants, getting to know them and what their particular vulnerabilities were. This effectively put the perpetrators into a stronger position to exploit the victims (participants) to their advantage. As mentioned, these tactics show similarities to those used in the grooming process (Webster et al., 2012; Briggs et al., 2011). The findings of Conte (1989) seem to be very applicable where it is described that those showing vulnerabilities were more likely to be targeted.

A number of the participants who sent images described an emotional attachment to the offender which had been built over time. This was in addition to the boost to self-esteem they received from the positive feedback by sending images. In extract 52, P6 explained how she genuinely felt affection for her abuser. This is despite the circumstances suggesting that it was never likely to be a successful relationship. During the extract she seemed to consider the logic of an older male from a different country contacting a young girl online was not perhaps as innocent as she initially considered it to be. Her final sentence was left hanging when she said, "I don't know

if that was grooming or just…", almost as if there was a realisation of what occurred to her when she was young. She had not openly spoken about these experiences before.

Extract 52
"but this boy M1 he really stayed in my life quite a lot, like for a good few years. And I thought I had genuine feelings for him, which sounds crazy because obviously I was like 13, 12 at the time, and he was older and in a different country. But we really really got on and he was always really nice, but it just started getting a bit weird, he started being like, during my later years when I kind of stopped the contact with him. He would say like oh I'm going to come to the UK, we're going to meet up and… Cos I told him where I live, like my town, it wasn't like the specifics erm, and I just started to feel a bit more and more like weirded out as I got older. And obviously as he got older as well. So, I don't know if that was like grooming or just…" P6 (323) –

During interview P6 explained how a male told her he loved her when asking for pictures, massaging her emotions during a period when she had recently lost the father figure from her home environment. Her reluctance to send images was overcome with more compliments followed by further requests. Through manipulation the perpetrator is able to force her into a position where she feels she should send the images to please him. The tactics used on P6 to obtain images utilised multiple angles to attack her vulnerabilities. In extract 53 she explained how the threats had also extended to telling a friend to about the online relationship to maintain it.

Extract 53
"I think I was more frightened of my friend (F1) finding out that me and (M1) were like talking, and I can't really remember, I've got such a shit memory…I want to say that I feel like he's, he'd always be like, you know I'll tell (F1) like what's going on. But it was only if you don't send me a picture I'm going to something. It was always, I suppose emotional.
I – So what sort of context was that in then.
" Dunno, it was just, if I tried to like stop taking to him or something like that. Like I would often block him for like a week or so, and come back, and he'd be like, I've not heard from you. Do you want (F1) to like find out what's been going on?" (P6, line 914) –

Throughout the interview with P6, there was evidence that she tried not to comply with and end contact with her abuser but found difficulty in doing so. Even after ceasing contact the participant re-established the relationship on a number of occasions indicating a possible reliance or attachment to either the perpetrator, or to the positive reinforcement that he provided (Reiner et al., 2017).

In extract 54, P7 described the images he forwarded saying how he 'wouldn't want to be sending them'. It was considered in the context that he was trying to understand his sexuality and find a place within a community he did not fully understand. This seemed to be a trade-off he allowed for the acceptance he wanted. Similar to P6, he felt he was in an online relationship with the person he was providing images to. This was despite the male being twice his age and living over 3500 miles away. By needing this relationship and the compliments he received, he coalesced with the image requests.

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He effectively placed himself into a position of weakness that others were able to exploit. It is interesting to note that the efforts the first perpetrator made in getting P7 to send images made it easier for subsequent ones. Within this extract he described his de-sensitisation to sexual contact following the initial event. This probably lowered the barriers for other subsequent offenders who requested images from him.

Extract 54
"It changed, so for me, initially I was very withdrawn on that. I said earlier about the guy that used emotional blackmail to get pictures he wanted. And erm, its actually the same guy that I considered to be in a relationship with later on. But erm, yeah that, so back then. That was one of my first encounters with people. Erm, so I was quite withdrawn. The pictures that I'd sent, I wouldn't really want to be sending them, but I did anyway. Erm, probably because I got a bit of positive reinforcement, he'd say how much he liked them and everything. ….. when that ended, and I started talking to other guys, I was a lot more. I wasn't too wary about what I was sending…. so I'd send stuff and it didn't bother me. I kind of thought that it's almost like I'd become de-sensitised, to feeling er, awkward or I dunno, like shame of sending it" (P7, line 656)

In contrast to those who sent images, Participants 2, 5 and 4 also received threats to expose information about them. But they were made without the perpetrator having possession of any sexual images. P2's response to this threat 'well you can go ahead' comes across as indifferent and was probably caused by her not feeling vulnerable to the blackmailer who she thought did not have any real power over her. This put her into a stronger position than the male, allowing her to challenge or treat his attempts at authority over her with contempt.

Extract 55
"He has said that he'll let people, like, tell people round like (town), which is like quite close to me, that erm I'd done stuff with him and all if I didn't. I was like – you can go ahead cos the people that I knew in this room (unintelligible) will know that I don't have a clue who you are."(P2, line 546)

This, resilience to requests is further demonstrated by P5 in extract 56. Her comments displayed a strongly held view that the male would not be successful in his requests. By saying 'come on now just grow up' she appears to be treating him as a naughty child rather than a person in a position of strength who should be complied with.

Extract 56
"And he was basically threatening I guess saying like, oh well, I'll tell her that like you sent it anyway even though you've got a boyfriend, like you might as well just do it blah blah. And he was like - oh I can ruin your reputation and stuff like that. And I was just like – come on now just grow up" P5 (514) –

In the final interview extract for this theme (57), P4 explained how she was panicked when confronted by a male trying to blackmail her. Despite the panic, she was able to halt the process, which allowed her to seek guidance.

Extract 57
"So, I told my sister, and my sister spoke to **** and said look **** being really inappropriate to (participant) like I don't know whether you want to say something to him or whatever." (P4, line 655)

By removing the immediacy of the pressure P4 was able to find a simple solution to resolve the threat. P4 like the other participants who were resistant to coercion did not concede power to those trying to illicit images from them.

This superordinate theme presented how participants were routinely subject to unwanted approaches and normalised to sexuality. Those who engaged with abusers or demonstrated online vulnerabilities to them seem appear to have been pursued more successfully than those who did not. They also appeared less able to deal swiftly with any threats due to a need for the validation that were receiving.

6.5 Discussion

The aim of this chapter was to try and understand why some children were more vulnerable, and able to be coerced into providing sexual images to adults. The three superordinate themes created are discussed in the following sections.

6.5.1 Using the Internet safely is an individual choice

The participants discussed how they used the Internet for various reasons, including playing games, socialising, and, as they grew older to explore subjects around sexuality. This is reaffirmed by Boies et al. (2004) who discusses how children learn about sex online. It is considered to form part of the normal sexual development that a child undergoes (NSPCC, 2019). Those participants who had software or parental controls in place to protect them from harmful content demonstrated that they also either accessed or were in receipt of sexual content. Using smartphones offered a less restrictive environment that was free from such parental controls. But this also attracted sexual solicitations (Boies et al., 2004). All the participants experienced this. Not understanding or ignoring the risks of engaging with unknown adults made the participants appear more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. It was also seen that using openly accessible social media accounts with limited privacy appears to have further increased the online accessibility to the participants and their data.

Children have an inquisitive nature, often encouraged by parents, education and society. They should be free to develop in a safe environment. Accessibility to both children, and age-related content on the Internet is less regulated and much more abundant than in physical life (Cooper, 1998). The interviews demonstrated that modern technology allows adults and children to socialise and talk in a sexually exploitative way easily. Sexual images could be sent with little intervention.

All of the participants used mainstream social media extensively and received unwanted approaches and sexual images as a result of doing so. The companies

providing these services should shoulder much of the responsibility for facilitating sexual exploitation and coercion. Popular companies such as Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat were all mentioned as being portals for sexual abuse in the interviews of this study. Participants also described how they used sexually orientated websites such as Omegle. Whilst access to them remains unchallenging they will continue to present a means through which children can be sexually abused.

Platform providers will no doubt argue they have a robust system in place to protect children. Social media working groups are a recognition that they are making some efforts to deal with this (UKCCIS, 2015). However, the participants explained that they routinely received unwanted sexual approaches from adults. It could be argued that the cases are historical which for some was true. However, the tactics used did not vary greatly across the 12-year age span between the oldest and youngest participant.

Examining Facebook's terms and conditions, the following account restrictions were found –

"We try to make Facebook broadly available to everyone, but you cannot use Facebook if:
- You are under 13 years old.
- You are a convicted sex offender.
- We've previously disabled your account for breaches of our Terms or Policies.
- You are prohibited from receiving our products, services or software under applicable laws."[22] (Facebook, 2019)

A policy one would expect to see in place to offer safety to minors using the site. However, when identity verification is limited to sending a text message and submitting a photograph[23], its effectiveness becomes questionable. Current UK data protection law restricts a person's previous convictions from being easily available (Information Commissioner's Office, 2021); this makes it very difficult for a private organisation without a legal obligation to safeguard children (such as a social media company operating outside of the UK) to know if a person has sexual offence conviction as per Facebook's account holding requirements. Whilst the terms and conditions quoted by Facebook set the scene, they are not effectively able to vet those with convictions for sexual offending. Thus, the terms and conditions merely serve as window dressing.

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[22] https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/child_nudity_sexual_exploitation

[23] As January 2021 an SMS verification, and photograph submission were required to register for a Facebook account in a feasibility test conducted by the researcher registering as a teenage female on Facebook.

Promoting the welfare of children is not just a social responsibility; safeguarding is enshrined into the United Kingdom's legal foundations (Children's Act, 2004). The interviews conducted in this study provided that most online platforms did not appear to have had a sufficient strategy to prevent the participants from experiencing many instances of unlawful online sexual communication and solicitation. Extending safeguarding legislations umbrella of responsibility to providers of communications platforms used by the vulnerable would make them legally responsible for ensuring protection from online sexual abuse. The online conversations and activity reported by the participants in this study should not have been allowed to continue without intervention. Section 67 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 prohibits sexual communication with a child by those over 18 years. None of the experiences of the participants described this law being enforced. Whilst some of these risks are recognised with the development of 'online harms' legislation[24] by the UK government, this act is still not currently enshrined in law.

Many more victims will be created before it is effective

6.5.2 Exposing personal problems on the Internet

When comparing the interviews of those who sent images of themselves to those who did not, simple acts appeared to be effective in preventing the exposure of a child to online sexual abuse. Blocking and/or not engaging with people stopped abuse. The participants who did not feel comfortable with conversations and halted them were effective in preventing their escalation. The participants subject to online sexual abuse explained they did not fully understand or chose to ignore the advice they received to prevent it. In some cases, they believed they were involved in a relationship with their abuser despite it seeming unlikely to the casual observer. Those who were sexually abused were secretive and evasive about their online behaviours when asked by members of their family and friends. Those participants who felt able to talk to somebody about what was occurring online when they felt vulnerable seemed better equipped to prevent themselves getting involved in a sexually abusive relationship. Merely asking a relative what to do led to a chain of events that prevented abuse for one participant. Familial support proved effective in preventing abuse for those participants who used it. The sexual abuse experienced by the participants appeared to follow the patterns of grooming as discussed by those such as O'Connell (2003), they also demonstrated a similarity to the steps laid out by Kopecky (2017). The structure

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[24] https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper/online-harms-white-paper

of the steps towards coercion however seemed more flexible than that pinpointed in the model. In countering online sexually coercive abuse protection from could come from a variety of other sources. These could include education, online notification processes, live keyword monitoring algorithms; live conversation monitoring, and/or selective sampling of conversations. Live algorithmic monitoring of video streaming has provided some protection in detecting the exposure of body parts during online conversations (YUBO, 2019). This will no doubt inspire images of an Orwellian state but can be balanced against the prevention of harm caused to children that are solicited and subsequently abused on and offline.

The participants seemed to prefer uncontrolled Internet use, but it created a risk that allowed exposure to content and behaviour controlled by various statutes of legislation. Such as the Obscene Publications Act (1959) in the UK. This, and other legislation has been updated to offer enforceable protection; for example, the Sexual Offences Act was revised to encompass Internet offending (Sexual Offences Act, 2003). However, it is reliant on crimes being reported and for organisations to proactively looking for them. None of the participants in this study made a formal notification of a crime. In some cases, the interviewer was the first person they had told of their sexual abuse. As discussed in earlier chapters the failure to report inappropriate communications and sexual image possession only serves in allowing it to continue. Research indicates that at least one in four online sexual offenders commit physical sexual offences (Bourke and Hernandez, 2009; Eke et al., 2011). The victims are real people not virtual. Reporting crime of any type always has, and always will prevent many more victims being created by raising awareness. Steps need to be taken to increase this reporting, or even automate through the use of processes such as AI.

Some of the real-life difficulties experienced by the participants seemed to increase their vulnerability online, but not for all of them. Those who struggled to deal with their negative emotional states appeared to be more susceptible to manipulation. Escaping from poor familial relationships, conflicts, insecurity and isolation were reasons focused upon by the participants for seeking online friendships. Unfortunately, these emotional difficulties acted as signposts which were read by the perpetrators, who then targeted them (Conte, 1989). The interviews showed that offenders would take the child out of their comfort zone and introduce sex during online conversations. As discussed, these are methods used in grooming (Kloess et al., 2105). They also

serve to identify victims to the perpetrator; those who continued to engage demonstrated perhaps unwittingly that they were willing to continue the conversation or seek the friendship of the perpetrator. Those participants who did not terminate the online engagement found themselves subjected to follow up conversations. These normalised sexual content, and continued engagement which resulted in manipulation and requests for images. It also provided the perpetrators with a greater knowledge of their victim. This knowledge can then be used to applying coercive pressure to vulnerabilities. Manipulative tactics such as the threat of withdrawal of friendship when the victim was feeling lonely, or seeking acceptance were used. Possibly the best prevention would be to stop engagement in the first place, rather than to continue with a risky communication. The parties that can do this are the platform provider, the victim, or the perpetrator. The interviews have shown that in some cases the victim was unable to halt the process meaning another solution may be needed. The platform provider could assist especially if it knows vulnerable people are using its platform and could be at risk.

6.5.3 Pushing the boundaries to blackmail

Receiving sexual images and becoming involved in sexual conversations made the participants feel uncomfortable and shocked. For some, this feeling was not fully realised until they had already sent images of themselves. Some of the participants seemed to accept it as a cost of the relationship or improving the negative feelings they were experiencing. Most did not immediately recognise they were the victim of a crime. They also faced difficulty in removing themselves from the sexual coercion they had become involved in. The participants who did not send images showed that if the online threats did not have any leverage on them, they were able to deny the perpetrators what they wanted. But those participants who had built any emotional dependence on their relationships tended to be more vulnerable to coercion. This balance of power in the pre-conditions for sextortion (Acar, 2016) laid very much with the victim; as soon as this power passed to the perpetrator it could lead to sexual manipulation.

The accounts given by the participants purveyed a sense that the sending of 'dick pics' to those under 18 was considered acceptable, many seemed to accept it. Research has linked this to sexual harassment and entitlement (Waling and Pym, 2017; Hayes and Dragiewicz, 2018). In these interviews it seemed to be sexual grooming. Statute in the UK and other developed countries allows prosecution under laws such as sexual communication with a minor, and indecent exposure – incidents need to be proactively

treated as such to break the cycle of offending and reduce the incidence of children receiving sexual images. Indecent exposure such as that described by the participants within a physical environment such as at a school or a public place is likely to result in a safeguarding concern being raised and a crime being reported. They are often raised by concerned third parties such as parents, teachers or other witnesses. On the Internet, these witnesses are not so abundant. With instances of reporting amongst the participants being low, awareness will also be low. This highlights how important work carried out by organisations and charities can be in combatting offending behaviour such online coercion and abuse. Organisations such as the Internet Watch Foundation, NSPCC, and UK Council for Internet Safety (2018) retain an importance in highlighting illegal image hosting, education, and driving independent policy for platform providers to ensure that the need to be profitable does not get in the way of the safety. The platform providers remain the only other witness to victim's online abuse and should fulfil their social duty. No difficulty is found in matching an advert to a browser's tastes. These skills should be easily transferable in identifying harmful behaviour.

6.5.4 Limitations

1. The sample for this study was formed of nine people, only one of these was male. Eight of the participants self-defined their sexuality as heterosexual, and one self-defined as gay. This introduced a gender and sexuality under/over representation (ONS, 2019) into the data. Recruitment for this study was targeted within an academic environment, this may also have limited the demographic representation of the sample. These are inherent risks experienced in the methodology of low sample sizes in qualitative studies. The impact of these factors may have an influence on the final analysis produced due to some sections of the population placing more emphasis on certain aspects of the researched subject. This potential bias could be designed out in later research by targeting specific sections of the population, increasing sample size or changing methodology

2. The participants in this study were in the age group of 18-34 years old. At the time of conducting the interviews the researcher was 50-51 years old. It is possible some of the participants found it difficult to talk about sensitive subjects with someone from a completely different demographic group. This could alter or limit the manner in which they responded during interview. Stinted responses in a qualitative interview could potentially limit the analysis.

Although the option to have a younger interviewer of the same sex was given to the participants only one of them took up this option.

3. Similar to Chapter 5 this study used adults to gather data about childhood experiences. As previously discussed, this presents risks that recollection can change with time (Inda et al., 2011). Internet use also changes with time (Holt, 2017) so what may have been a popular method of committing a crime at the time of the victim's recollection may not now be one. These limitations can be minimised in the future by conducting research on a younger sample who have had more recent experiences.

Chapter 7 – Study 4 The inside experience

7.1 Introduction

> "There appear to be four ways in which pedophiles are misusing the Internet: to traffic child pornography, to locate children to molest, to engage in inappropriate sexual communication with children, and to communicate with other pedophiles" (Durkin, 1997, p.14).

The comments of Durkin highlight early inappropriate use of the Internet. Much of the research into Internet use and those convicted of sexual offences against children is focused upon indecent images and the grooming of children for contact offences. Coercing children to generate their own sexual imagery or content appears to form an alternative category of offending. Those responsible actively engage victims using forms of deceit, threats and/or manipulation to obtain the sexual imagery. The term sextortion was initially phrased to cover it; this has now evolved into permutations of online sexual coercion/extortion of children (Europol, 2017).

Crime on the Internet takes two distinct forms, Cyber-crimes and e-enabled crimes, each having their own subcategories (Burden et al., 2003). Within the subcategory for e-enabled crimes is a list of traditional crimes, made easier by the use of the Internet. These take the form of theft, fraud or harassment for example. Cyber-crimes are described as those "which would not exist outside of an online environment" (Burden et al., 2003, p.222). Online sexually coercive offences against children fall into the cyber-crime category. They involve an offender using an online communications platform and the transmission of images. Without the Internet the crime would not be feasible as the communication is instigated online. The Internet provides easy access to markets and materials which can bypass regulatory and offline enforcement agencies to create an almost instant marketplace (Cooper et al., 2000). The Internet and its associated software and applications have become tools to allow the user to access collections of sexual content. Content which can be examined by anybody presenting as whichever persona they wish, involving little cost. The identity of the person browsing online can remain unknown. This effectively moves pornography from the top shelf of the newsagent to the privacy of a screen at little to no cost. The creation of vast libraries of illegal material for those so inclined is possible (Cooper et al., 2000). Illegal uses of the Internet for sexual exploitation of children do not happen for a single reason but are borne out of a more complex set of behaviours and/or maladaptive cognitions which interact (Quayle & Taylor., 2003). These produce a self-propagating environment in which an individual can become addicted to the high achieved from problematic Internet use (Quayle et al., 2006). This study examines in-

depth the lives of those convicted of online sexual coercion against children to try and understand why they chose the paths they did. This is done to assist effective and targeted prevention strategies which might reduce offending. Although quantitative studies within this knowledge area exist, they do not provide the insight given by qualitative interviews. The interviews and subsequent analysis within this study examined the perspectives of convicted participants/offenders using the double hermeneutic process of IPA to see what they believed pushed them towards offending. By doing this, the causative and offence supportive factors can be seen from their perspective. This enhances future chances of prevention for both victims and offenders.

7.2 Methodology

7.2.1 Participants

Participants for this study were recruited from a category C prison that houses adult males with convictions for sexual offences. They were recruited through purposive and convenience sampling methods. Within the UK, the number of individuals incarcerated for sexual offences is approximately 18% of the total prison population (UK Government, 2020). A total of nine participants were interviewed in the study. This sample represents a very small proportion of serving prisoners at 0.01% (0.07% of those serving sentences for sexual offences). Despite the small size of the sample, it is one that is in line with the accepted guidelines for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

The purpose of the interviews was to gather rich data from a modest number of participants as opposed to a volume-focused representative sample. This is in line with current views on IPA studies to provide a thorough analysis without drowning the researcher in data (Pietiewicz & Smith, 2012). Recruitment of participants for this study was carried out by placing notices on a prison information system which could be seen within common areas of the prison. The notice used is detailed in Appendix 9. It requested volunteers with a conviction for an online offence/s against children where coercion was used. The phrase sextortion was used within the notice, as this is often the means by which people recognise the offending style due to its use in the media. The notice encouraged 14 people to express an interest in being interviewed. Each of them was visited and the interview process was explained to them. Each potential participant was asked basic background questions to establish whether they met the required criteria. The criterion to be met was a conviction for an online based sexual

offence against a child victim that involved some form of coercion against the victim. Of the 14 people initially showing an interest, five were unsuitable as they had not committed a relevant offence. Examples included only being convicted for possession of indecent images, or not using coercion in the offence. The remaining nine volunteers consented and took part in one to one semi-structured interviews. All were conducted within the prison in a private interview room. No incentives were offered.

Basic demographic data from the sample are represented in Table 35. The ages of the participants when interviewed ranged from 24 to 46 years (Mean=34, *SD*=6.56). In some cases, up to nine years had passed from when they offended due to the length of sentence imposed on them. All participants had sentences in excess of two years. Two of the participants were educated to degree level, two achieved advanced level secondary education, one attended a college of further education, three completed the minimum required levels of school leavers in the UK. Participant 6 did not provide information about his education, although his employment prior to arrest suggested it would have been at least the minimum required of school leavers. All participants were English speaking and, born in the UK. No filtering or targeting was used to attract any particular demographic other than the recruitment criteria.

Table 35-Participnats demographic data

Participant number	Gender	Age when interviewed	Educational level at time of offending	Current sexual preference	Sexual preference displayed to peers/family prior to sentence	Victim sex
P1	M	46	Minimum required	Male	Heterosexual	F
P2	M	33	GCSE's and further education	Male	Heterosexual	M
P3	M	24	A level	Bisexual - but prefers males	Bisexual - prefers males	M
P4	M	34	Minimum required	Males	Male	M & F
P5	M	30	A level, did not complete university	Bi-sexual	Heterosexual	M
P6	M	41	Not Known	Males	Heterosexual	M
P7	M[25]	30	Minimum required	Male or Female	Bisexual	M & F
P8	M	31	Degree level	Male	Heterosexual	M
P9	M	37	Degree level	Female	Heterosexual	F

7.2.3 Data Collection

Each participant was provided with an information sheet, explaining the purpose of the study, consent, confidentiality, and information security (Appendix 10). Consent was documented and agreed prior to interview. The process was verbally explained to the participant and they were then asked to confirm their understanding. In depth semi-structured interviews were carried out. The interview structure (Appendix 11) was designed to maximise the participants' opportunity to talk about those issues they felt were of importance to them and the subject area. This is a tried and tested method of interviewing participants in a qualitative data-gathering environment and considered as the acceptable way to interview for IPA (Smith et al., 2009). A loose and open style

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[25] Participant 3 offended and was convicted as a male, but since incarceration identifies as female.

of questioning was used to encourage and give the interviewee the confidence to talk about their experiences. This allowed the interviewer to understand them and to learn of their experiences (Waldram, 2007). The interviews were structured into five loose thematic areas to assist the flow of the interview (Howitt, 2016) and provide a structure to maintain consistency of data collection, as follows.

1. Introduction/ Rapport building - The participants were invited to discuss their personal backgrounds prior to conviction and their current situation. This rapport building section had a two-fold purpose of increasing confidence and openness within the interview scenario, and to understand the participants own personal circumstances.

2. Relationships and Personality – Exploration of the participants life and probing of their relationships and sexuality.

3. Internet usage - an introduction into the main subject area about Internet usage and sexuality.

4. Offending – Elaboration of experiences in contacting children and committing sexual offences.

5. Closure – Reflection, clarification, summarising and thanks.

The themes were designed as a guide to the interviewer rather than a rigid structure. The intention was to lead the participant through the interview process with as little discomfort as possible. If the participant decided to elaborate on a particular area, or in a manner out of sequence with the structure, they were left to talk and explain these experiences. If necessary, the guide was used to prompt the participant to discuss certain aspects of their experiences (Smith el al., 2009).

The participants were encouraged to talk openly about their family structure, interests, feelings and lives prior to and after conviction. Specific attention was paid to the participants' Internet use throughout their lives and what led them to contact children online. Some participants had convictions for offline contact, and/or multiple sexual offences. Where the participants were willing to, these were also explored to provide a fuller picture. Interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis between the researcher and participant. No other persons were privy to the content of the interviews. They were recorded using a digital device for later transcription, with the participants' consent. The interview durations varied between 60 minutes and 140 minutes (Mean=84mins, *SD*=22.3).

7.2.4 Ethics

Approval to conduct this research was given by the Governor of HMP Whatton. In addition, as detailed in Chapter 3.6, ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at Nottingham Trent University, and the National Offender Management Service. All participants taking part in this research gave verbal and written consent after the research process was explained to them.

7.2.5 Analysis.

The method used in this analysis was IPA. As discussed in Chapter 3, it involved the full transcription and notation of each of the interviews. The interview notations were then applied to a spreadsheet and referenced back to the originating text (Appendix 20 provides examples); this created a database for each interview. Doing so takes the interview responses out of the context of an interview, essentially deconstructing it into sentences or sections of text (Smith et al., 2009). From the deconstructed texts, themes were created for each piece of text on the database (Appendix 21 provides an example of the development). Upon completion of the individual interview analysis, the developed thematic areas from the nine interviews were grouped to form subordinate and ultimately super-ordinated themes common across the entire sample. (Appendix 22 provides examples from an early stage of the process). All of the analysis processes were iterative, whereby the notations, thematic areas and superordinate themes were created through stages of reading, consideration and development.

7.3 Results

Table 36 shows the four superordinate themes developed from the nine interviews and also lists the contributory subordinate themes. This analysis examines the themes together with some of the relevant interview sections.

Table 36-Superordinate and subordinate themes

Superordinate theme	Subordinate theme
1. This is the reason I'm giving you	I don't want it to sound like excuses… but that's when my offending started
	Problems fester if you don't deal with them
	Boredom and loneliness can be resolved without abusing children
	"If I hadn't found the Internet" – there's always a way of lessening the personal impact.
2. Nothing stops you	"actually, it was really easy"
	Online mission creep
	Addicted and losing control
3. Making bad decisions	"I wouldn't have to hide" – putting yourself under pressure
	Control your sexual urges before they control you
	It was all about the ending I wanted
4. I'm only here for one thing	"I'll give you the attention tonight" – regaining the control I lost
	The puppet masters who pull the strings
	Resourceful and goal orientated

7.3.1 Superordinate theme 1 – This is the reason I'm giving you

This superordinate theme featured frequently and prominently throughout the participants interviews. All of those interviewed provided numerous responses, categorised in this theme. Consideration was given to whether taking part in a treatment programme could have been responsible for the emergence of this theme, as they seek to challenge the ways of rationalising offending (Sheldon, 2007). However, participants who were yet to undertake a treatment programmes also contributed to this particular theme.

An explanation for its appearance might come from Gannon and Polashek (2005) and Schlenker et al. (2001). Being able to provide an account for offending can act as a diversion from the harsh public criticism that can be experienced by those convicted of a sexual offence "to minimise damage to the excuse maker's identity" (Schlenker et al., 2001, p.16). Being able to present a rationale or causative factor for offending is

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likely to be far preferable to that of being labelled as a paedophile or identifying with a paraphilia. Something frequently done by the media in reporting some of the participants' cases[26]. However, it is also argued that excuse making creates the conditions for offending (Maruna & Mann, 2006). Rooted in the delinquency theories of Sykes and Matza (1957), numerous further theories have been developed. Examples include those of Bandura et al. (1996) which elaborated that learning how to displace, diffuse, and distort responsibility allows criminal activity to occur. This superordinate theme where participants gave a reason for their offending gives an insight into what was prominent in the lives and minds of the participants when offending and when interviewed. The superordinated theme is divided into four subordinate themes. All of the participants elaborated on behaviours that fitted into more than one of the subordinate themes. Some of the reasons given were external ones out of the control of the participants, but many were internalised and linked to negative personal emotions. Some of these internal reasons may be considered offence supportive. It is possible that addition of the external factors could dilute the personal impact of the internal factors and be a preferable presentation of facts as per Gannon and Polashek (2005) and Schlenker et al. (2001).

"I don't want it to sound like excuses… but that's when my offending started"
Within this theme the participants focused on emotional situations that occurred in their lives around the time their offending started. These different events were showcased as being responsible for triggering their offending. In extract 58, P9 felt he resorted to offending after finding out his partner was in a relationship with someone else. He elaborated how further pressure was felt through stressors experienced in the workplace. Feeling his sense of safety was under threat by his partners rejection and pressure at work, he explained how his offending periods provided him with sanctuary from these problems by feeling "wanted and accepted" when he spoke to girls online. His account describes being able to escape into his online place away from the threats, this would take away the 'hostile' feeling. Paradoxically his place of safety was one that created a greater danger to his livelihood than dealing with a perfidious girlfriend or an excessively authoritarian management style. P9 used his safe place theory as a way to comprehend and explain why he had been convicted of sexual offending on a number of occasions. His final throwaway comment about physical attraction alludes to a positive the reinforcement that he received when he engaged with victims.

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[26] Reference cannot be provided, as it is likely to identify the individual participants.

Something which would have been received whilst offending. Suggestive that he may well have sought out this reinforcement rather than stumbled across it.

Extract 58
"On their part, they were cheating. And there was confirmed cheating, you know they admitted it. Erm, in both cases so that obviously had a massive dent on my self-esteem. So basically, I was offending because I felt safe. I felt I wasn't going to be rejected by the victims. You know talking to people online, there's hundreds of people online, so erm, you know if people don't want to talk to you, there's somebody else isn't there" ….They made me feel wanted and accepted where everything in my life seemed really hostile, and erm there was a physical attraction there as well" (P9, Line 186).

Within interview P9 explained that he received the attention and comfort from teenage females that he was not receiving elsewhere due to relationship problems. He chose not to elaborate again on the physical attraction aspect he had raised in extract 58. When P6 a middle-aged married male identified a reason for his convictions (extract 59), he focused on a number of traumatic events within his family as being a trigger for his offending.

Extract 59
"Yeah, my main offending started round about (year). At the time my (parent) died. I had two (relatives) that died of (illness)…Yeah my Mrs. lost a (parent) to (illness), then her (parent) remarried and then (they) lost that partner through (illness). Throughout it all, that's when, well I don't want it to sound like excuses, cos it always comes across now as excuses…..But that's when my offending started, when all these people sort of passed away. Do I link it just with my offending to what happened, in a way yes but then I was still in control. I was still… I wasn't stupid" (P6, Line 117).

Although he knew he had a choice not to offend, P6 decided that the family losses were probably the main causes of his offending. He did not describe any marital breakdown and was still living within his family unit. Rather than focusing on internal person-centric factors such as his own sexual insecurity. A subject which he raised later in the interview when he described how he wanted to experiment with young males; he presented the family bereavements as the trigger point for offending. P6 preferred to provide the external factor of bereavements in the family as a pivotal point for him. Seemingly an easier way to comprehend the choices he made rather than explain his changing sexual preferences. Within this subordinate theme, the participants highlighted how they encountered the everyday life issues faced by many people. In the case of the participants, these issues were held as defining moments that led to their own offending behaviour.

Problems fester if you don't deal with them
This subordinate theme is one that was created by the way the participants' portrayed an uncertainty around their sexuality. Some were in stable relationships with the

opposite sex but wanted to hold a relationship with the same sex; others experienced sexual attractions towards children which they knew were illegal. These feelings were recognised and pinpointed by the participants as a contributory cause to their offending (although as mentioned above, not the main factor). For example, after P6 had initially blamed his offending on family bereavements, he then went on to discuss his sexuality. Having been within a nuclear family environment for numerous years; he appeared to want a male partner (extract 60) but was unsure how to achieve this. His explanation displayed a lack of confidence and confusion towards his own sexual attractions, he used additional words such as 'probably', 'don't mind' and 'sort of' within his explanations, words which soften sentences, as though he was still not completely comfortable with them. He appeared to struggle with the thought of losing the control from his life when experimenting with his attraction to males.

Extract 60
"I don't know if it's always been there. I think part of me thinks like now I'll openly say I'm bi-sexual I've had a male partner, and I've had a female partner now. Maybe, I think that I was ultimately wanting …was a male partner. And probably circumstances never allowed that to happen. And maybe part of me knew, I was probably in denial. Whereas now I can be open and say if I get out yeah I don't mind a male partner. Maybe I almost wanted a male partner…..Yeah, this is where I wanna be, you know in a relationship with another male. I'm not confident, I'm not experienced yet to go straight for the male… Yeah I could sort of control this a little bit more, and he probably won't be that demanding of me, at the time. But it's here that probably we need to be, we need to do this, hold on this is too much for me, I'm only thinking about being bi-sexual here, hold on a minute" (P6, line 644).

The participant elaborated how he felt his online offending with teenage boys may have been a way of experimenting with same sex relationships. His explanation indicated he did not have the confidence to develop a relationship with an adult male, or the commitment that it might bring. Soliciting indecent images from teenagers was for him a softer entry into sexual relationships with males - a means to experiment with his sexuality and safely 'dip his toe in the water'. When he offended, he would pose as a teenage female and hide his real identity. This provides some support for his lack of confidence in forming relationships with males in a perceived safe way as he hid behind the fictitious identities he created. Perversely had he experimented with adult males he would not have been convicted and would have achieved what he wanted.

In discussing his offending P2 placed blame on his inability to come to terms with and discuss his sexuality. Within extract 61, he described how his sexual feelings changed. The inability to understand and discuss the attractions he felt to young males was blamed on his criminal actions. He believed that discussing his feelings rather than suppressing them would have enabled him to better deal with them. At the end of the

extract he said "apart from that really" an indication that perhaps he is still unable to discuss and process his problematic thoughts openly.

> **Extract 61**
> " then sort of toward the end of my teens when I was going out drinking with my mates, and playing football, and doing all the normal things that a guy would do. Erm I started to feel more towards that. Even though I was taking girls back and having sex, it was. It was erm. And then I just started to veer down a path that ultimately I preferred…. Where I realise if I had those feelings and I was able to talk to my family about them and get help as early as possible, I think that may have helped me. But I just think it's not really, it's not well I don't think it's possible. I mean my family are supporting me now, I feel I could talk to them about anything really, apart from that really." (P2, line 23)

P2's frustrations remained suppressed until he started using the Internet. This resulted in social media and gaming sites which led to a prolonged and prolific period of contact and online offending. For most of the participants sexual confusion or uncertainty was apparent, it provided a focal point for them at the beginning of their offending periods. It is worth bearing in mind that most had a significant period of time to reflect on their actions post sentencing, this may also have enabled them to structure and process their experiences following conviction.

Boredom and loneliness can be resolved without abusing children

This sub-theme refers to the unfulfilled social needs participants felt were present at the time of their offending. They were responsible for creating strong negative personal feelings which the participants sought to alleviate by offending, arguably they could have found other more constructive ways to deal with these issues. The convenience offered by social media was probably responsible for allowing the participants to delve into a world that they may not have ordinarily done.

In extract 63, P1 discussed how he had recently separated from his wife and went online to try and reduce the loneliness and boredom he was experiencing as a result of the separation. He was unable to find adult females willing to chat with him online to reduce this loneliness. As a result, he described how he then tried to talk to younger females who would talk to him.

> **Extract 63**
> "Because I wanted to talk to the adults and they weren't talking to me. And I just thought talk to like 18 to like 16. But when I put me names in sometimes they don't have the age properly. On the Facebook it's, I think it's supposed to be age is 13 I think." (P1, line 273)

He did not disclose that he had also reduced the age of his online profile at this point or requested the victims to perform sexual acts. But he placed the blame for his offending at not being able to find an adult female to chat with (extract 64), and totally ignored how he sexualised the conversations and demanded his victims perform sexual acts.

Extract 64

"I think if I weren't bored, then I probably wouldn't be on. Er probably wouldn't go on there. I'd try something else. But I, cos I told these inside like on programmes. I knew it was wrong to do it" (P1, line 660).

The closing words of extract 64 intimate his underlying knowledge of the illegitimacy of his actions.

Participant 3 who was diagnosed with Asperger's on conviction described how he explored sexual images as a child (extract 62). He performed searches based on people of a similar age to him-self. Whilst technically a criminal offence, it could also be considered as part of sexual behaviour that many adolescents indulge in (NSPCC, 2019). He subsequently used this exploration of childhood sexuality when he was feeling lonely or rejected as an adult. By elaborating how he had not got into trouble as a child it affirmed its acceptability to him when he was an adult. He described his actions as an 'unfortunate case' as he had chosen to contact children and talk to them sexually. Almost as though it was just a bit of bad luck rather than a wilful act on his part.

Extract 62

"yeah I was just looking at normal pornography but because I was 12 I wouldn't type in like 'man' and that. Like it was all 'boy'. Because when you're younger you don't use the word 'man' you use 'boy' so obviously different stuff came up for me…. And I never got caught for that so that was like a bit of a confirmation to say it was OK….. Erm yeah so I'd be looking at normal adult stuff after that and then, I had, I remember my girlfriend breaking up with me. And then I had a massive downfall being lonely and stuff like that. And then I tried looking for people my own age online and stuff like that, and then when that backfired, I guess I resorted back to my old self, looking at the younger stuff….I failed to find someone my own age to have a relationship with….so failing that, I think I thought to myself. Ok if I can't find someone my own age, is there someone of a different age bracket. So, I could have gone older people or younger people. And in an unfortunate case I've gone younger people, erm, you know, and then I was looking at pictures and then that wasn't working. So, I ended up making the Facebook account." (P3, line 325)

The participant then applied this viewpoint and built upon it when facing rejection from girlfriends or failing to find a partner. It progressed from being acceptable to view sexual images of children as a child, to viewing them as an adult, and then to interacting with them sexually online. His feelings of rejection and loneliness were blamed for his online search for gratification.

In considering the developmental disorder - Asperger's, research suggests that some of its greatest impacts are felt by adolescents and young adults (Tantam, 2000). P3 was in his early 20s when offending. Asperger's manifests in a number of ways, including impairments of social interactions such as deficient empathy and sexual frustration (Murrie et al., 2002). In his interview, P3 explained how he believed he had failed in developing a relationship almost as if it was something that was expected of him.

Tantum (2000) suggested that for those experiencing Asperger's, failure in social interactions can be a source of distress when they "cannot distinguish between self-presentation and intrinsic worth" (Tantam, 2000, p.57).

Murries' (2002) observations from a number of case studies of people convicted of sexual offences and also diagnosed with Asperger's suggested that combining social impairments with a desire for a relationship or sexual experiences can lead to offending. P3 felt he needed to have a relationship, and this subsequently became problematic. He adopted a mindset of failure by not being in a relationship which increased the pressure on him to want one. This pressure appears to have caused him to move his boundaries and limits of acceptability.

This theme indicated how participants linked negative feelings and particular social needs in their life to their offending. They described it as a factor that influenced them and assisted in initiating their offending.

"If I hadn't found the Internet" - There's always a way of lessening the personal impact.

The final subordinate theme in this section focuses on the participants disassociating themselves from their convictions or lessening the personal impact by presenting the facts associated to their behaviour in a more positive way. Participant 2 initially placed the blame for his offending on his discovery of the Internet; he used this when playing online games. The Internet was used for entirely innocent purposes at this stage. However, P2 subsequently groomed an online friend's pre-teen son, introduced himself into the family house, and slept over in the young male's bedroom where he would offend. By representing that his offending was because he found the Internet in extract 65, P2 obscures the cause of his criminal actions by passing blame onto the existence of the Internet. His convictions for contact offending make such a claim difficult to substantiate. They relegate his claims that the Internet was responsible to one where the Internet was more likely the enabler.

> **Extract 65**
> "If I hadn't found the Internet, I think I definitely wouldn't be here, right now." (P2, line 1396)

This lessening of impact was also adopted by P4 who had a number of arrests/convictions for sexual offences. He used minimising language on numerous occasions throughout his interview (extract 66).

> **Extract 66**
> "I only had something like 70 odd images compared to bigger people that were into this where they have thousands. You know so I only had a few" (P4, line 1055).

The conversational style he adopts compares his actions to people who he considers are more serious offenders rather than those who might have no convictions. This introduction of impact lessening facts was also evident in the conversation of participant P9. This participant justified his actions by suggesting that the children he spoke to were not victims of sexual abuse but consenting women. Within his interview the participant made comparisons of teenage girls to petite women, so it appeared his victims were only a short step from being legally allowed to send him images. In extract 67, P9 maintained that the girls already had images in an attempt to make it sound as though they would have sent images anyway.

Extract 67
"Like I've said a lot of the, these girls already had the images on their computer so if someone else had already opened the door, and they'd already done it for somebody else. Then chances were that they weren't going to think much of, you know, anything was any different doing it for me" (P9, line 794).

Minimisation and distancing are a theme encountered in other research. Winder et al. (2010) interviewed online offenders responsible for acquiring child abuse images. The research reports participants self-distanced from the image creation; in this case to imply their offending did not create victims. The participants interviewed within this study had all contacted the victims online, making this a harder claim to make. However, the suggestion that they did not create victims was still evident in the form of the participants telling the interviewer that the victims enjoyed the process they were going through, or that they wanted to take part.

Extracts 68
"But the thing is, he was, he was also enjoying the attention" (P2, line 475).

"…Once they got their pictures, they could go to school the next day and show all their mates, look what I've got." (P6, line 1257)

"… because generally they enjoy it, they do say they enjoyed it in the er thing" (P5, line 1137).

The above multiple extracts (68) from different participants introduce further misrepresentations or distortions. They represent only a selection of those available. They imply an assumption that the acts were consensual and enjoyed by both parties. They conveniently ignore any legislation that makes it an offence whether the victim consents or not. The shifting of blame amongst the participants was widespread, but not unexpected. As discussed by Schlenker et al. (2001) it lessens the personal impact of a negative event. It further allows the individual to distance themselves from the impact of being convicted of a sexual offence (Blagden et al., 2014), reducing the expected discrimination of possessing the label 'sex offender' (Winnick, 2008).

This superordinate theme did not focus on the detail of each specific participant's offending, but more the reasoning each used to rationalise a course of behaviour they had pursued. As a part of this process the participants minimised behaviour, interpreted facts in their favour, and distanced themselves from some of the circumstances of offending. It should be noted that all of the participants were convicted for offending over extended periods of time and for multiple offences. This gave them ample time to consider what they had done post arrest/sentence.

The interview extracts provide an insight into the external problems that the participants felt they faced prior to offending. For the majority of the participants these problems were not exceptional or unduly different from those faced by other members of the general population. But the participants have marked these life experiences as triggers for prolonged periods of offending against minors. They describe these experiences as sources of stress or anxiety. It is feasible that the online offending has become a behavioural response to that stress (Fink, 2016). Part of the coping strategy they devised was to provide a rewarding situation in the form of gratification.

Whilst all of the participants offended in different ways, they shared a common factor in that they utilised the Internet to seek out a sexual experience, seeking solace from negative experiences in their personal lives. Quayle et al. (2006) suggest that the Internet is used to avoid negative emotional states. It seems that in the participants' circumstances these negative emotional states resulted in them either seeking a relief from them or using it as an avoidance tactic as per Quayle et al (2006) suggest. But factoring in the addictiveness that will be discussed in the following paragraphs it seems that that if avoidance was present initially, it became the lesser reason once offending had become established. Within the next theme it can be seen how there is little to prevent the escalation of the situations they faced.

7.3.2 Superordinate theme 2 – Nothing stops you

This superordinate theme was based on how the participants of this study felt there were too few obstacles to prevent them from committing crimes against thousands of victims. Whilst this claim is a strong and sweeping one, examination of the interview responses indicates that it is grounded on an evidential base. The barrier to entry for offending was set at a low height. Once the participants had started offending, the compulsion to achieve a sexual reward through their actions became progressive and increasingly more serious with an addiction to offending being described.

"actually, it was really easy"

This theme discusses the easiness of committing crimes which participants focused on during their interviews. They elaborated on this when discussing incidents, opposed to considering how they responsible for victimising people. Initial thoughts were given to placing this theme within the superordinate theme 1. However, this theme's overriding difference was considered to be its focus on the use of the Internet rather than apportioning blame to it. The comments of P2 provided some momentum for this decision. This participant was probably the most criminally active of the sample, creating thousands of victims over a period of years. He elucidated how he felt that parents were just not aware of what was going on when their children were online. In extract 69, he discussed the ease with which he used fake profiles and engaged males. Even if subsequently challenged by the parents of victims he was able to manoeuvre the conversation in his favour.

> **Extract 69**
> "the parents need to be more aware, because they are clearly not aware. Erm, it was just, once I went on Omegle it was just a free for all. Just easy. And boys from all backgrounds as well, the most polite boys you'd ever know. And the parents would come on - if I got them on Skype, and the parents would look back on the Skype conversations. The parents would be like – you made my son do this, you made my son do that. And then I'm like - scroll back up and read the chat. And they read the chat, and it's just the boy saying, do this, do that, do this, do that, do this, do that. Now I've coerced them into being involved in it, yes. But they are not as, they are not as sweet an innocent as the parents think they are" (P2, line 1088).

Whilst the participant accepts that he initiated the sexual activity, he firmly believed that teenage male victims were online, using a poorly restricted, sexually focused websites to become involved in sexual activity with a teenage female (the participants online persona). On occasions when parents intervened in these conversations, the participant passed blame onto the child for taking an active part in the sexual encounter. He did not get challenged or reported. Throughout this interview the participant reiterates that none of the parents of his many thousands of victims reported an incident. The participant, with his experience of manipulating conversations, has further used his skills on the children's parents. In Extract 70 he explained how he convinced parents that their child is at fault for being actively involved. The legislation for online sexual offences is supportive of prosecuting offenders in this type of situation (Sentencing Council, 2013), but parents did not take the necessary steps to bring it to the attention of the service providers or authorities.

> **Extract 70**
> "The parents quite often would come on site and think who's this, like a week later, who's this – you've been talking to my son, you shouldn't be talking to my son. I'm going to the police. I'd be like, what do you mean. I'll go to the police, I'm like well he told me he was 18…..and you'd pretty much guarantee - well I never got reported for them. So, I assume that a lot of them, either through maybe feeling worried that they might get into trouble for being …. But

for it being their children, or their children getting into some sort of trouble, which wouldn't happen" (P2, Line 1666).

P2 demonstrated he was fully aware that if just one of these parents had reported his actions, he would face prosecution. However, by using the phrase "well I never got reported" he intimated that it did not happen. Just one early report from one of the many thousand victims of this participant could have prevented a 3-year campaign of sexual abuse. Yet P2 relied on the fact that that the children did not report anything. Likewise, the parents fear of how it would look if their child was involved with the authorities as they performed sexual acts online worked to his benefit.

P8 successfully exploited the ease of creating false profiles and lack of identity checks, this enabled him to engage victims.

> **Extract 71**
> "So it was a case of, if it was somebody that I knew that I'd find attractive I would add them on the list, false persona, create a back story, say oh I've added you by mistake, etcetera, etcetera. Start talking, erm, and exploit in some ways the naivety of them….they weren't questioning it. So from that perspective, it was, it was fairly easy to speak and get something back" (P8, line 578).

In extract 71, the participant described how he targeted a victim by creating the impression of mistakenly adding them as a friend before subjecting them to process of grooming (O'Connell, 2003). He emphasised just how easy it was to exploit them. Using a slightly more elaborate scheme, P9 posed as a modelling agent on social media chat groups. By speculatively sending messages to young females asking if they were interested in a modelling career, he engaged teenage females in chat and got them to send naked images of themselves.

> **Extract 72**
> "Erm, and some of them had nude pictures on their computers already. So that tells me that I wasn't the first person that they'd shared those pictures with. Oh yeah literally it was a case of – have you got any pictures - and then ping ping ping ping, there'd be a…. You know was quite easily hauling in 10, 15 girls a night…. there was no questions, there was no questions about my authenticity, no questions about where I was getting the work from." (P9, line 903)

P9's belief was that the victims just did not challenge his online intentions (extract 72). He felt the speed with which he received the images back following his requests suggested they had images already stored on their computers. His remarks in the interview expressed incredulity about the ease of the process he had created. He was not challenged by his victims, and there were no interventions to prevent his offending until he was arrested.

The technical capabilities of the participants in this study varied, but even those with only basic knowledge were able to easily offend on social media.

Extract 73
"I think for me doing it on the Internet and for that, is probably I'd say, ease....Its, I shouldn't be able to say, it was easy. I shouldn't be able to say that.....Yeah, cos it sounds horrible when you say actually, it was really easy, and probably was too easy." (P6, line 548)

In Extract 73, P6, who was not the most technically capable Internet user, expressed his frustration with the ease of committing crimes by emphasising "I shouldn't be able to say that" twice. His assertions are of course correct: he should not have been able to commit his crimes as easily.

Online mission creep

This subordinate theme was constructed from the manner in which participants Internet use changed from innocent to exploratory, and then criminal use. Participants browsing activity morphed from innocent purposes such as gaming or chatting to people to sexually coercive behaviour. This was evident when they were unable to engage in the way they wanted. P1 described in extract 74 how he used the Internet to speak to his ex-wife via Facebook. Having been rejected by her, he tried to socialise with other adults with little success. He then resorted to chatting to teenagers who responded to him.

Extract 74
"No at first I was trying to talk to me missus on Facebook. Me ex missus on Facebook but she blocked me because she didn't want me to be on there....Because I wanted to talk to the adults and they weren't talking to me. And I just thought talk to like 18 to like 16. But when I put me names in sometimes they don't have the age properly. On the Facebook its, I think it's supposed to be age is 13 I think." (P1, line 253).

The chats progressed to becoming sexualised and the participant started to demand his victims perform sexual acts by blackmailing them to do so. The participant describes this as an evolving process that took place over a number of weeks and months. When probed why this occurred, he outlined that it was due to boredom, and "not getting too much sex". There was a sense that his frustrations at being rejected by adults were the drivers to his subsequent criminal activity. P1 tried to fulfil needs and enhance his wellbeing through socialisation and sexuality (Bancroft, 2009). But this initial failure caused an adaption to his online behaviour and he found other methods of achieving it.

Participant 3 described himself as "a big video gamer" with an avid interest in technological products used the Internet for gaming initially. Within the interview he described how he developed online friendship groups but struggled socially with people offline. The online friendships seemed to be a replacement for the offline socialisation that he struggled with. It is quite likely the symptoms he experienced as

an undiagnosed Asperger's sufferer were not as evident to the people he conversed with in an online environment, thus making communication easier and less stressful for him.

> **Extract 75**
> "I remember the first time I went online it was just to find games and stuff like that, but then I was like exploring sexuality and stuff like that.… and then I was looking at pictures and then that wasn't working. So I ended up making the Facebook account" (P3, line 304).

In extract 75 P3 discussed his initial and later Internet use within the same sentences, and points to a change in the way he used it. Within later parts of the interview he described how he suffered negative feelings due to not being able to develop a stable relationship. This caused him to modify his Internet use to alleviate these feelings.

In extract 76, Participant 4 described how his online activity evolved when he progressed into his adulthood. His early computer use centred on gaming. Like most teenagers as he got older his interests moved to social media. But once his sexual interests into adolescent males and females developed, he started to utilise messaging platforms. This caused P4 to separate out his offending and non-offending online behaviours and categorising the former as his other life. His offending took place on his phone separate from any other online activity on the family computer.

> **Extract 76**
> "I wasn't, at that time, I wasn't interested in the Internet. I was more interested in games….Being you know late teens all I wanted to do was games, games, games. Then when we went to the new house, Sky then, cos we had Sky. Sky is slightly (unintel) that we've got broadband things like this. So we got that installed. And that back then was like the early stages of Facebook….and that's when I then started going onto Facebook. I started doing, just going on for the games at first. Then it was the social side of things. Er and then when they advertised Wi-Fi, we then got Wi-Fi installed. And that's when basically I started getting (unintel) phones, and things like that. Tapping onto Wi-Fi and things like that. Er and it was on the phone, was where I was doing basically my other life" (P4, line 572).

The participants initially embraced the use of social media for its intended purpose of bringing together people to communicate and share information. Their personal vulnerabilities or sexual interests gradually distorted their use of social media and communications platforms. The participants demonstrated that they had moved through different stages of Internet usage and offending as suggested by Taylor and Quayle (2003) in their model of problematic Internet use. Here it is modelled that the behaviour adapts from justifying the downloading of images, to normailsing the behaviour through to justifying other forms of engagement such as offline offending or working in partnership with others. This process was most evident with P2 who initially acted alone but progressed to using social media to chat with other offenders

with similar interests. Ultimately, he progressed to working in a very effective offending partnership (extract 77).

> **Extract 77**
> "Because we were, we ended up talking to the boys together so we would end up saying stuff and, he'd pretend to be a girl and I'd pretend to be a girl" (P2, line 813).

For the participants in this research, the Internet appeared to develop into a tool used to escape from problems and experiences they found difficult to deal with in life. But, ultimately for them it was their Internet use that became the much larger problem. This is highlighted further in the following theme.

Addicted and losing control

This subordinate theme was built from the compulsion to continue offending that the participants experienced. It shows similarities to the theories of Problematic Internet Use. This is based on problematic cognitions coupled with other behaviours to strengthen or maintain an online behaviour (Davis et al., 2001). P6 below described how he equated his online activity to an addiction (extract 78). In earlier re-produced sections of conversation P6 expressed how he was unsure of his sexuality and lacked the confidence to approach males of his own age. He felt that it was easier to experiment with young boys who were less likely to reject him, he knew this was wrong. P6 internalised a view that it was acceptable for him to experiment with vulnerable younger males to satisfy his curiosity. These cognitions were held whilst suffering from the anxiety associated to bereavements and confusion about his sexual identity. The highs he received from gratification became the strengthening emotions referred to by Davis et al. (2001) that reinforce continued PIU. They provided an addictive reward for him which he repeatedly sought out.

> **Extract 78**
> "But once you've started this online life, you can't get out of it. I'd say it's an addiction, or a drug…..You can't leave the computer, you can't leave the mobile phone" (P6, line 242).

Research into PIU by Kaliszewska-Czeremska (2011) suggested that certain character traits surrounding personality disorders can be predictors of excessive and problematic Internet use. During the interview, P6 fixated on his difficulties in dealing with family bereavements, and his sexual insecurities. This could be considered evidence of a borderline personality disorder (DSM-5) this would correspond with claims that suggest that the Internet "triggers or catalyses dysfunctional behaviour" (Kaliszewska-Czeremska's 2011, p.137). P6 was probably the interviewee with the weakest evidence of a personality disorder. The other participants tended to exhibit stronger evidence of

such disorders. The following extracts (79 and 80) show potential addictions and disorders present in other participants.

Extract 79
"I was very disruptive and angry as a child growing up…. Erm, I attacked one foster carer, bit another…. at the age of 17, and I think at that point, that's when my life just downturned cos I became addicted to cider…...I'm happy that I had actually got caught when I did. Because I knew that if I hadn't it would have spiralled out of control. It would have. I know that now and I am actually happy and glad that they did finally get me and I'm able to change" (P4, line 614).

P4 recalled how he had problems managing his emotions and anger as a child, in later years he went on to display addictive tendencies. Ultimately, similar to other participants, he described a relief at having his cycle of offending broken by arrest.

P2 felt he showed tendencies towards obsessive behaviour as a child. Once his offending started, he made comparisons to seeking the instant highs experienced by drug users, highlighting how he subsequently lost control to achieve the highs offered by gratification.

Extract 80
"but quite a solitary child. A lot of my behaviour and my patterns were sort of a bit of addictive, compulsive sort of…..I'm quite excessive with my behaviour" (P2, line 63).

The interview analysis created clusters of behaviours within the developed themes, which are described as being symptomatic of borderline personality disorder (DSM-5). These were behaviours described by the participants prior to or during their periods of sexual offending. Within this section, all of the participants describe becoming addicted or unable to control their Internet usage when they offended. Whilst for some these characteristics were not as obvious in the offline world; they did become problematic in the online world.

This superordinate theme "nothing stops you" was created as it showed how a lack of preventative barriers allowed the participants Internet activity to progressively evolve into serious and prolonged offending. Factors such as poor website design, lack of identity verification or parental knowledge/supervision benefitted the activities of the participants. It allowed offending to develop amongst the participants when they suffered from negative emotional states. The gratification that they achieved from online sexual activities provided the stimulus for fuelling compulsive behaviour which the participants found difficult to refrain from.

7.3.3 Superordinate theme 3 – Making bad decisions

This superordinate theme is constructed of three contributory themes each is formed from the mindset the participants describe prior to and during their offending periods. They are rooted within their personal feelings and emotions. The interview accounts given by the participants highlight how these emotive states were present and impacted upon their decisions.

"I wouldn't have to hide" - putting yourself under pressure

An inability to process and resolve personal conflicts was the foundation for this subordinate theme. Failing to deal with them created a personal turmoil which led to negative emotional states being experienced and potentially the offence-supportive cognitions for online offending to occur. P5 demonstrated this when he talked about his sexuality in using the phrase "I wouldn't have had to hide". In extract 81, he stated how he believed that if he he'd been more open about his sexuality when aged 15-16 years, it would have prevented the urges he felt when offending. He categorised his feelings as something a teenager experienced. He did not seem to want to consider other possible scenarios such as having been in denial over his true sexuality, potentially having an underlying attraction to children, or that the urges he felt may not have been satiated when he was younger and still been problematic to him throughout his life. For him the existence of this sexual insecurity for many years seemed to create confusion and uncertainty.

> **Extract 81**
> "I would be more honest with my family, in terms of my sexuality… If I was more honest I would not have offended because I wouldn't have to hide…I, if I did that at an earlier age I wouldn't have had these interests because I would have kind of used those at the same age as when I was 15 – 16 I would have had those experiences." (P5, line 1260)

Once P5 had started offending he exacerbated the stress on himself, something which was likely to have caused more distorted rationalisation. In extract 82 he described how he did not answer the door to his family home in case it was the police, despite other family members living there who were likely to answer the door if he did not. He seemed to ignore problematic issues in his life rather than process and deal with them.

> **Extract 82**
> "I always felt like, erm, I was waiting for a knock, I always felt that. Erm, there was a knock on the door once, and I didn't answer it cos I felt, oh that could be them. Er, I knew a few months later anyway, I was due to leave anyway. So, I always felt they were kind of on my tracks. I'd stopped offending by here as well, but I always thought it was gonna catch up on me. Erm, but, it wasn't as if I'd go to them and say, look it was me" (P5, line 1341).

P5 demonstrated a full knowledge that he had committed offences and could be held liable until arrested. Consequentially he felt unable to talk to anybody as it would lead

to prosecution. Once arrested, he admitted to his offending, and during his interview described his relief at having broken the cycle of offending.

Within extracts 83-84, P3 explained what caused him to offend. He experienced difficulty in elaborating how he offended when he felt low and was unable to finish his explanation. P3 expressed on a number of times that he wanted to develop a relationship and find a partner, but he found it difficult to maintain a relationship. At the time of offending he was a young adult in his teens and living within a supportive family environment. He focused on needing to be in a relationship with somebody. Not achieving this created confusion and negative feelings.

> **Extract 83**
> -"Erm, it's just when I was feeling low, go down that route, you know, and well that's too much (unintel)…… (didn't finish sentence)"
> I – And what was it that would make you feel low.
> "Erm just remembering that I didn't have a partner, and I felt, I knew I wasn't alone. Its just that I felt as if I couldn't have a proper connection with someone, intimate relationship sort of thing" (P3, line 585).

In an attempt to overcome these feelings, P3 used the Internet. It was an environment he was comfortable in, and he used it to try and find companionship. But finding himself further rejected by adults he went on to apply an irrational logic where he believed it was acceptable to interact sexually with children and coerce images from them. The images and self-gratification provided him with the emotional boost he needed. He consequently became less dependent on seeking a relationship, and simply used the victim's images for his own sexual purposes, finding this a sufficient replacement for the need to be in a relationship.

> **Extract 84**
> "probably once every other night maybe… yeah it could be more, it could be less depends on the week, depends on how I was feeling.
> I –ultimately what were you looking to achieve from all of this?
> Erm, initially I was looking for a partner, but then it went down to just getting sexual gratification. I wasn't looking for a partner, it was the gratification at the end." (P3, line 467)

P3 further elaborated on how he rationalised and normalised his thoughts which allowed him to sexually abuse children despite being in a state of uncertainty about these online actions.

> **Extract 85**
> "erm, I think there was a point where I was thinking that it might have been wrong because all my mates were talking about adults and stuff like that, and I was the only one thinking well I'm not looking at adults, I'm looking at kids. And then I'd stopped for a few months I think, and then I ended up going back to it. And I think the fact that I thought it might have been wrong stopped me. But then I probably convinced myself that it wasn't wrong…..just so I could carry on getting the sexual gratification" (P3, line 622).

Within extract 85 he explained how despite acknowledging he was offending he could justify that his personal need for gratification outweighed the risk of offending.

The participant extracts within this sub-theme indicate that the inner conflicts they were experiencing were a source of personal confusion and agitation in their life. This caused them to look for and find online solutions to resolve these states of turmoil, in doing so they placed themselves under increased pressure and stress in the knowledge that they were offending and liable to prosecution.

Control your sexual urges before they control you

The sexual attractions and feelings of the participants were responsible for many of the problematic cognitions they displayed during their offending periods. Within extract 86, Participant 4 described how he felt he was in a world surrounded by children and had difficulty in stopping himself thinking sexually about them.

> **Extract 86**
> "look, you know I've got these thoughts at the moment I need to know what to do…….whatever I watch on television, or hear on the radio, it's going to end up, being, involving children…...So I can't stop that from happening, however I can put things into place so thoughts or things like that, that can trigger me to basically just get them out of my head." (P4, line 1330)

He recognised the difficulty he faced in dealing with these thoughts, and the problems the thoughts caused. The strategies he referred to for dealing with his sexual thoughts were taught to him as part of a treatment programme, post-conviction. Prior to conviction he did not have a strategy to deal with them. In addition to his problematic sexuality P4 also demonstrated addictive tendencies (P4, line 170); found it difficult to trust people following personal sexual abuse; and had low self-esteem (P4, line 820). He expressed how he sent body images of another male in his online communications as he was conscious of his own personal image. It is likely that all these factors impinged on his personal judgments and cognitions but the sexual attractions he felt seemed to be the most pervasive. As already discussed, P4 considered his online offending separate to his "other life" (P4, line 591). He believed he had separated his problematic sexual feelings from what he considered to be his 'normal' life. But his conversation displayed a level of obsession towards children, it did not appear to be something he could turn off or control in such a simple manner. Prior to conviction he seemed to avoid confronting his problematic sexual interests. For P4 the Internet provided an excellent platform in which he could shroud his lack of self-confidence and uncontrolled sexual feelings. Something he felt unable to in an offline environment. It created a strong driving force making online offending attractive to him.

In extract 87, participant 5 explained how he used to present he was heterosexual and had girlfriends despite being sexually interested in males. He alluded to feeling pressurised to be heterosexual because of his peer groups.

Extract 87
"I'm not gay actually, I'm bi-sexual. But I always gave face to those that I was straight, and I went with girls and I, I made them happy because that's what I was doing. And I led a kind of double life, I knew I was interested but I was always in denial about it. Kind of saying no it was wrong because of people's opinions" (P5, line 387).

This state of denial where he and other participants suppressed true sexual feelings can result in a "hyper-accessibility of formerly undesired thoughts" (Johnston et al., 1997, p.304) which can cause a relapse of the suppression and promote maladaptive behaviours. P5 demonstrated how he processed these cognitions in extract 88 when he explained how he believed that the victims enjoyed the sexual coercion they were subject to. This was despite his deception in posing as a female and being significantly older than he stated.

Extract 88
"because generally they enjoy it, they do say they enjoyed it ….. You know the victims I think yeah, they'll have, obviously they'll have to deal with things like this. But they'll get a bit of money for compensation" (P5, line 1137).

Further into the extract, P5 displayed an arrogance towards his victims in thinking that monetary criminal injury compensation would suffice to make things better for the victims of his abuse. Paradoxically, he maintained this view after taking part in a rehabilitative treatment programme. Some of the comments of P5 such as those in extract 87 have a passive aggressive stance to them which is supportive of the promotion of maladaptive behaviours described above.

Participant 2 described himself as a "boy lover" (line 1709) and experienced attractions to pre-pubescent boys as a teenager. In extract 89 he recognised that these attractions were not the feelings that others in his peer groups experienced. The use of the phrase "I'm like, oh, no, no, no" signifies that he understood that this was problematic. He suppressed much of this feeling rather than trying to understand it. These feelings became far more problematic later in life when he was older.

Extract 89
", I started to look at some and think, oh, OK, he's nice. And I'm like, oh, no, no, no.….. Just shut it away, I didn't offend until I was 23, 24" (P2, line 251).

P2 described that he was unable to talk to anybody about the feelings he experienced (extract 88), and post-conviction still believed it was unlikely he would be able to talk about them. This inability to deal with his suppressed sexuality seemed to have done little to diffuse his problematic sexual thoughts about children. It merely delayed and

amplified the sexual behaviours that emerged some years later. Within extract 90, P2 describes his first sexual offence.

Extract 90
"I manipulated the situations, and we went down a certain path, which was wrong. And then I… we did stuff on webcam like showing his penis and things like that. And then eventually he said oh I don't want to do it anymore. I said, yeah that's fine, I understand. And I was freaking out because I didn't want … I didn't want the trouble from it, and I didn't want to get caught at that early stage, I was really sort of panicky. I was like that's fine. And after a few months, argh you should come and meet, you know you should come in our house" (P2, line 396).

He elaborated on how he had manipulated his friendship with a young boy. This encounter seemed to awaken him to the consequences of his actions, whilst he did not terminate the relationship, he understood the danger it presented to him. P2 describes the personal conflict he has with his sexual desires and the moral 'wrongness' of what he wanted to do. Ultimately, and after some time had elapsed, he was not able to stop himself from re-establishing contact with his victim who he went on to meet and physically abuse.

Within this theme, there is evidence that where the sexual feelings of the participants were suppressed or ignored, they did not simply go away. They seem to have rebounded in a similar way to the findings in the experiments of Wegner et al. (1987) where participants were asked not to think about certain subjects. It found that suppression of these thoughts led to a subsequent pre-occupation with them. It was also presented that this suppression could cause cycles of rebound and preoccupation in an increasingly escalating manner. Some of these circumstances appeared to be applicable in the case of the participants within this study.

It was all about the ending I "wanted"

This theme was developed from the way in which participants described how they pursued their own needs for gratification. During interview they gave the impression of giving little thought to the victims who they encountered and subsequently manipulated. In extract 91, participant 5 described how he was trying to get what he "wanted", a word he chose to use to describe a process of directing the live feed from a victim whilst he masturbated. The use of the word 'wanted' is one that excludes the victim the harm that might be caused. It changes the encounter into a more selfish one.

Extract 91
"But that's what I wanted to gain from, you know, small talk and just get what you wanted…...the majority were 15 years old, a couple 14, and one 13 year old. Generally, my preference was like 15, 16 area but I did 17, 18 year old as well. I think that was like kind of the bordering line of legality….. So it was always like kind of dicing with death in a way. But, erm, so the danger of that, I think I used to consciously enjoy, that's why I did it." (P5, line 676)

P5 described how he was fully aware that his interactions with children under 18 years were illegal, to the extent that it appeared to increase the satisfaction he achieved from their online abuse. Throughout the interview he continued to maintain that his male victims were willing partners to his online deceit. One where he presented himself as a female to have a greater chance of success in coercing them into give him explicit webcam footage.

In extract 92, P9 made the conflicting claim that the images that aroused him were 'just nudes' and not sexual. He outlined how he would chat to his victims about their personal lives and the conversations would become sexual, and they would talk about fantasies. The participant took an active and encouraging role in discussing these sexual fantasies saying he would "open the door" to them. The manner in which he explained this process occurred was one where he felt he adopted the role of a helpful friend towards his teenage victims. He does not seem to consider that a normal friendship would be unlikely to encourage online abuse. Within the interview, P9 described his sexual fantasies which involved a photographer/model relationship. In this relationship he would direct and control any subsequent photography. He recreated this in his online offending by establishing a fake online modelling agency. When contacting victims, he tried to become their friend and confidant; this appeared to be in an effort to make the method of manipulation more successful and possibly more palatable to himself.

Extract 92
"most of the images were just nudes, there wasn't any sexual content. Erm, but it would be a case of just gradually building their confidence, and you know, they were quite often… I'd quite often talk to these girls about boyfriends and stuff like that. Erm, and you know the conversations would delve into their personal lives at times. Either they'd share something about their personal lives, or I'd ask them more questions about that, or I'd ask them about their personal life, erm as part of a conversation it would; you know quite a lot of the time the conversations would become sexual to some degree. Even through their fantasies, and them wanting to talk in a sexual way, or I'd open the door to that" (P9, line 818).

Within extract 93 the participant gave a retrospective view on the victim's vulnerability, expressing his shock at how he had been able to manipulate them.

Extract 93
"I'm shocked by how, how gullible the victims were. And, yeah, yeah that's what leads me to think that they were vulnerable and wanting some form of validation of themselves at that time." (P9, line 874)

It is difficult to comprehend how this view could have been formed retrospectively during a period of offending which involved in excess of 1000 victims over a period of many months. It is probably more likely that there was a selfish ignorance towards the victims' vulnerabilities, and they were objectified to further the gratification needs

of the participant. It is argued that a lack of victim empathy becomes an offence-supportive cognition in child sexual offenders (Marshall et al., 2001). It is also presented that a lack of victim empathy is apparent prior to offending (Ward et al., 2006). It is difficult to pinpoint from the interviews when the participants become indifferent to the injury caused to the victims. However, it was clear that once they offended and discarded the needs of the victim, they were more readily able to offend again. The next superordinate theme presents how important this became to the participants.

7.3.4 Superordinate theme 4 – I'm only here for one thing

The participants were frank and open about ultimately seeking gratification from their online activity. The fact that they engaged with and directed their victims suggests that they needed to transact with them, rather than just obtain images. This superordinate theme represents the participants' drive to achieve a satisfactory engagement and transaction with their victims.

"I'll give you the attention tonight" – regaining the control I lost

The first subordinate theme in this section highlights how participants had problems in controlling particular aspects of their own personal lives; their online activity offered them a chance to regain some of this control. Whilst the need for reward from the gratification was obvious, the evidence also suggests that the participants needed to feel a sense of empowerment from the transaction. In extract 94, P5 explained how he felt he had no control over his life at the time.

> **Extract 94**
>
> "I think I came to wonder well maybe I could make someone do that. I think because it was me having the control element of it….being obviously real time element, I found that erm, more gratifying to be able to be able to do that. That's why I did that because I had no control over the way my life was going, but I could kind of have that element of control there…. I actually, I enjoyed the aspect of finding someone, speaking to them and saying, how are you, oh… I'll make… you can be… I'll give you the attention tonight" (P5, line 587).

During his interview he described how he had dropped out of university and was working in a job he felt was mundane. He elaborated that he spent a lot of time alone in the evenings due to financial constraints. By going online, he was able to regain some of the control he had lost in his life by directing victims to perform sexual acts for him. He does not try to hide the fact that he found more enjoyment finding and coercing a victim than he did in just viewing images. By using the phrase "I'll give you the attention tonight" he introduces an arrogance and uncaring aspect to his offending. It created an impression that he perceived himself to be superior to his victims who should be thankful for his attention.

Participant 2 explained in extract 95 that initially he would accept a victim not complying with his requests for the webcam footage he wanted. But as his offending continued and his addiction grew it would progressively annoy him if things did not proceed as he wanted. To gain control he enforced his demands by threatening to publish compromising sexual images. P2 who at the peak of his offending outlined he would masturbate up to five times a day, struggled to control his sexual attraction to young males, and found it necessary to use increasing force to obtain the sexual webcam footage he wanted.

Extract 95

"I noticed this when I was first doing the webcam capping, I would just be like, oh – you now what I'll move on to another one. But then I was like – no. I was like, there was part of me that was pissed off, and there was another part that was also – I wanna get them as well. I want to actually, it's what I was entitled to. What I thought I was entitled to, and then I'd go right, you either do this or I'm putting this on YouTube…. when I was on bail. I got arrested I was on bail. Then I was released, and then after a few months I went back to capping. And then my level of tolerance was just – I didn't give a shit, I was like right you will give me this, you will do this. And my whole strategy had changed, from just letting it go, and being oh plenty more fish in the sea. To just – no, you will do this, you will do that" (P2, line 968).

P2's increasing sense of entitlement and experience in achieving results reached a point of no return for him when he was under investigation for sexual offences and on bail. Believing he would be going to prison he used as much coercive force as was necessary to achieve his goals quickly.

The participants used the control or coercive element of online sexual offending as a reaction to problems within their own lives. In discussing using power in interpersonal transactions, Raven (2008) represented that those with low self-esteem can feel satisfaction if they are in control, and that those with a greater need for power or control are more likely to select a legitimate position (P9-model agent, P8 public-servant and youth community volunteer) or impersonal coercion (P1, P2, P7, P5) to achieve their goals. The disorders or social difficulties the participants experienced appear to have made them more prone to using harder management tactics, such as blackmail and coercion. This seemed to have been exacerbated at times of pressure or stress.

The puppet masters who pull the strings

Once criminality had developed amongst the participants, their intention was to have a sexual transaction with their victim. The processes used varied dependent on the method preferred by the participant. They were not unlike those used in grooming offences (Craven et al., 2006). Each person committed a varying element of time to build rapport with the victim before normalising sexual content within the conversation. The final goal was that of obtaining some form of sexual imagery, meeting or conversation with the victim. To do this they used the measure of coercion they were comfortable with, or thought was necessary. This theme concentrates on the manipulation used by the participants to transform the encounter into the sexual experience they wanted.

Participant 7 described how when chatting to a young girl online he saw an opportunity to make her to doubt herself about what she was wearing (extract 96). Knowing there

may be a possibility of getting her to change clothing, the participant used his victim's insecurity to manipulate the situation to benefit from it.

Extract 96

"originally just started erm, one of the lasses bless her she was, she was 12 years of age, and we had, we were both on cam at the time. She was on hers I was on mine. And she'd come on camera rather, how would I say hurriedly should I say, half-dressed type to matter. She was in the process of going out, but at the same time wanting to talk to me. So of course, I took that to my advantage, used it for what I wanted to. Oh, and when I got to the point where I was happy with what I wanted to see, or near to the point, or if I wanted to see more I'd use the, my favourite terminology back then was – yeah that doesn't suit you love you need to change. You know, she's on camera for crying out loud, so, take off what she's wearing, so you've got what you wanted" (P7, line 529).

The participants conversation showed a speed and adaptability which was used to exploit the victim and achieve the results wanted. In extract 97 the participant explained how conversations were an opportunity used to steer the victims towards sexual transactions or to incorporate other younger family members into the abuse.

Extract 97

"Not straight away no, they were just general family photos and so on and so forth. And then of course after a period of a year or so the conversations would still be loving, but eventually in some cases they would ask, oh do you want to come and meet the family, oh do you want to meet up here or whatever. Which in turn would happen and further conversations would happen in meetings that we'd have face to face….And then when I'm back on the computer, oh I'd like to see, I'd like to have a chat with your little sister or, let's have a chat with your brother or whichever…..and that would happen and then things would escalate to more interesting, more sexualised matters should we say" (P7, line 508).

Within the extract it can be seen how opportunities are looked for and then developed through a manipulative process. In extract 97 the participant, was able to incite the initial victim to abuse younger siblings, this further strengthened the control held over victims once they have committed sexual acts. This increased the leverage held against the initial victim and allowed the offending cycle to continue. The participants' use of the phrase "they would still be loving" indicates the participant considered that affection and care were shown to the victims prior to them being abused, creating a differential in the way the victim was treated at the point at which abuse commenced when the relationship would stop being loving.

The manipulation took a different form for P9 (extract 98) but was still orientated towards obtaining sexual images. This participant built a rapport and friendship with the victims who responded to his unsolicited messages for model recruitment. His style of conversation encouraged progressively more sexualised images of his victims by progressively moving the boundaries for the victims.

Extract 98

"And then of course it leads onto can you send me some pictures. And send through, they'd just send through a selection of pictures, and some of them would be…, you know some of the girls would be quite adventurous and think – of right, OK this is going for modelling so you'd get the underwear and swimwear shots straight off. And you know that was a good starting point, and then, you know I'd use the power of persuasion and the story that I'd step up the

manipulation to say right, you know, you've told me your underwear sizes and stuff like that, you know let's see you without your underwear on, just so that I can…" (P9, line 528).

Participant 6 added victims to his social media friends' list as an excuse to engage them in conversation, he pretended it was done in error just to initiate a chat. His conversational style using the phrase "said a load of the usual bits" suggested this was a mundane but necessary part of the process he endured prior to being able to progress to obtaining images from victims. His actions of posing as a female initiated a deception in which he was able to manipulate the conversation to the point where naked images were traded (extract 99). By referencing to his employment in a school at the time he offended he is alluding to his familiarity with the manner in which children talk and communicate. This familiarity and understanding were then used to his advantage in managing the conversation with victims so he could move it at the correct pace towards a sexual encounter.

Extract 99
"Most of the time, once you've had a chat, and said a load of the usual bits, you might have a little bit of sex chat in there. You'd probably, mostly you'd find the boys didn't want; oh lets go down the boring route, you send 2 or 3 normal pictures, normal picture. No, go straight for nudes. So, they'd start off with you send a picture of your tits; I'll send one of my cock. You send me your vagina; I'll send one of my hard cock, or whatever. So, there was never a, there wasn't really a massive, you had to build up to it. You know there was no, right I'll send one of my face, then I'll send one of my body, and you send one of your legs or whatever. It mainly went straight into. I think just at that time, probably the things like Snapchat were just coming into… And I'd say probably they were used to doing straight into nudes. Because I used to work in a school, you'd hear them talking. They don't send ordinary pictures to each other nowadays, its (unintel) use Snapchat because click, it's gone after 10 seconds or whatever." (P6, line 991)

Using similar methods, P3, a Facebook user, posed as a 12-year-old female in order to chat to young male victims (extract 100). He added males he thought were about 14 to his profile and started conversations with them. He found that by pretending to be playful with the victims he could get them to comply with his requests. Effectively he was deceiving them into a false relationship whereby he could lead them through a series of steps that would result in them sending the images he wished to masturbate over.

Extract 100
"Well speaking to them, texting to them and stuff like that. I found that texting in a certain way would make them more susceptible to doing what I wanted. I would say acting giddy, sending a lot of emoji's, acting as if everything was a nice game. That usually made them do what I wanted." (P3, line 774)

The phrase "that usually made them do what I wanted" added a more forceful angle to the process he applied, reinforcing that he wanted to exploit the male victims.

Extract 101
"Some of them I would pressure them into it if they said no the first time." (P3, line 860)

Extract 101 provided a reminder that the participant was not online to play games. Any hesitancy to supply images by victims was dealt with through a number of ways. Methods such as persistence in asking, making victims think it was a normal thing to do, continued rapport building to make them feel more at ease, or a challenge which was designed to make them question themselves and lower their defences; all were methods applied to enforce demands.

All of the participants described a process of building the confidence of victims prior to manipulating the conversation towards sex and then requesting images, or the performance of sex acts. To overcome any reluctance, as per above a variety of methods were employed to coerce them into thinking that the requests should be complied with. These methods of reinforcement ranged from subtle ones such relationship building and persisting with the use of multiple accounts (extract 102), to more forceful tactics such as demanding images under the threat of exposing earlier online activities as per extract 103.

Extract 102
"Well yeah yeah but it was picking somebody that was, that a young boy that I would assume would find attractive. Erm and to just to, yeah. There were 4 accounts. They'd… I didn't set out 4 accounts straight from the onset. There was one, then that progressed whenever, if I'd approached somebody that I'd wanted to, if I'd approached somebody that I wanted images from, and that maybe didn't go as well as I'd wanted at the time….I'd leave it a bit, and then there would be another account that I would try to see if it… yeah" (P8, line 810).

Extract 103
"And I'd go – no – fuck you, and then I'd show them a screen of themselves" (P2, line 964).

The extracts have demonstrated that styles of coercion were varied and dependent on the responses the participants received from victims. In some cases, the coercion got progressively more forceful over time. This was frequently caused by the need to get a positive stimulation. This is the subject of the next theme.

Resourceful and goal orientated

This final subordinate theme was derived from the drive to get results the participants demonstrated. They created an online process which they developed and honed, making it an effective tool to obtain the sexual material they wanted. In extract 104 P9 discussed how he improved the process he used, perfecting it to make it as successful as possible. This participant was well educated and had experience in manufacturing and running a business. Within these environments he would have learnt process improvement strategies which he applied to his offending.

Extract 104
"I had a background business model in that, you know I'd take 25% of all their earnings, you know going forwards. That was, you know I had a contract that I'd knocked up. So it was all,

all the background was there. You know, no stone was left unturned in terms of preparation. You know even that was part of, part of my fantasy going on at that time, you know. I've got to have all of the credentials in place to carry this on. You know I would learn as I went on, as I say I became fairly expert at this by the end part of my offending" (P9, line 925).

In discussing his offending, he appeared to have utilised workplace skills into online the online offending. The process he created delivered the images for fantasy and gratification in the most efficient way he felt was possible. The desire to get the best possible results was even extended to educating the victims who responded to him. He taught them how to improve the pictures they took (extract 105).

Extract 105
"Because one of the things is, I would coach the girls in how to improve their photos as well, so it was a case of, you know, open the curtains so there's a bit of light….. You know use the mirror so you're not having to do all this bending around and trying to take a selfies from a weird angle - just take a picture of yourself in the mirror. You know it's all fairly basic stuff." (P9, line 999)

This process displayed a desire to be achieve the best possible results. Within the interview he reflected on the quality of the images collected during his period of offending and explained he would not share them with others as he felt they were far superior to anything else on offer.

P2 elaborated on how he had considered his responses and online presence to maximise his chances of getting results in extract 106. He used multiple methods to obscure his actions and to overwhelm his victims so they did not have time to consider what might really be going on. He would give his location as being reasonably close, thus giving his victims a false hope that his female persona could visit them.

Extract 106
"I'd say oh I only live the neighbouring city. I'll come and visit. We'll come and visit. And it was always better to use 2 girls in one camera, because it would, there was just more going on. And if you have stuff constantly going on they don't question things….. when I was on Omegle opening up three browsers, so I had three chat rooms on the screen at one time. So, there's more chance I'd bump into boys who go next, next, next, next, next. Stop on a boy, close all the others and then just work on that one." (P2, line 1592)

P2 described a process which maximised the chances of procuring a victim by having numerous browser windows and chats open. On identifying a potential victim, his focus was placed on the person responding to him. He told the interviewer how he used more than one fictitious female on the webcam so that the victim was less likely to question what was occurring in the confusion. P2 had identified that the use of multiple accounts and false profiles would give a higher probability of success (Extract 107).

Extract 107
"Erm, but multiple accounts so that you could contact a boy and attention from one girl is like, well that could be anyone. But attention from a couple of girls, or three or four girls. Its like

oh ok yeah. So it's a lot more easier to get them to talk to you. Or to get them to interact, to get them to do what you want them to do" (P2, line 585).

The participant had effectively done as much as he felt he could to ensure that he would achieve a positive result,

In extract 108, P5 discussed how an initial investment in time was made to set himself up online by creating false profiles and accounts. Once he had created these, he then followed a series of steps to achieve his goals which he described as "steps to success".

Extract 108
"Yeah, I didn't spend much, once I'd created, I didn't spend much time doing anything else. It was really easy. Just log on, there, then I kind of always had an itinerary. Well not always an itinerary but I had the same, erm steps to success in a way (unintel) you know and it became just part of, part of the way of doing it" (P5, line 830).

In the final extract (109) of this chapter P9 explained that when he felt his incarceration was imminent, he stopped caring about what he should and shouldn't do, at this point his only concern was satiating his sexual needs.

Extract 109
"Towards the end, towards the end it was, yeah , there was erm, like I say while I was on bail. My level of what was acceptable to risk had suddenly gone out of the window because I was about to go to jail for like 15 years, and I didn't really care. Even though I knew it was wrong, and I regretted it I still though – oh you know what, fuck it." (P2, line 1288)

These comments should provide a reminder to those in the judicial process to give careful consideration to the bailing of a suspected offender. Whilst for some it marked an end to their addictions, for others such as P2 it led to a worsening of offending, creating many more victims.

During the interviews, the participants indicated they had developed and improved their offending models over time. This was especially evident in those who were convicted for longer periods of offending. Dealing with many victims over a period of years they were able to develop their strategies. This in turn led to a task-orientated and results-driven focus. It also seemed to lessen the chances of them considering each victim as an individual person who they abused. When considering the volumes of crimes that were committed against Finkelhors' pre-condition (1984) model, it is possible that an increased incidence of offending also increases desensitisation and disinhibition.

This superordinate theme of "resourceful and goal orientated" was constructed from elements that made participants successful in what they were doing. They created strategies to manage their victims, obtain images from them, and avoid detection for extended periods. However, the term success is used loosely as all of the participants were ultimately convicted for serious crimes leading to imprisonment. This in turn tore

apart the participants' families, destroyed careers and reputations. It also left in its wake a plethora of victims which they make minimal reference to in the interviews.

7.4 Discussion

This study was designed to analyse the experiences of participants convicted of online sexual offences where children had been coerced into providing sexual content. It identified four super-ordinate themes based on the experiences of nine participants.

7.4.1 This is the reason I'm giving you

In the first superordinate theme, the participants elaborated a reason that was the cause of their online behaviour. It was difficult to establish if these reasons were developed prior to or post offending, and whether they were justifications or realisations. Identifying the cause of offending was something that seemed of importance to the participants, and they spent some time elaborating on it. It provided a focal point on which to base their experiences. It is also a central focus in the rehabilitative treatment processes (Maruna & Mann, 2006). Seven of the nine participants had taken part in treatment/rehabilitation programs. It is possible this theme was borne out of this process. Although as earlier stated even those participants who were not on a treatment programme also contributed to this superordinate theme. The reasons which were given by some of the participants were predominantly attached to external events which they had little control over. For some it was a reaction to a life event such as family death, starting to use the Internet, or some other external stressor. But coexisting with these causes were more personal factors. These were based upon self-esteem, relationship problems, sexual insecurity or problematic sexual attractions. These internalised factors were not the same for all of the participants, but they all exhibited one or more of them. The participants generally pointed to the external factor as the trigger for the start of their offending, despite the existence of the underlying internal factor. For example, P2 who suppressed the paedophilic attractions he felt blamed the availability of the Internet on his offending. This phenomenon of an underlying internal stressor was apparent amongst all the other participants, albeit the causes and reasons varied slightly. The reasons given for starting to offend seemed to be more of a distraction from the true cause. The external reasons offered a more 'acceptable' excuse than the internal factors that the participants also described. These internal factors were more personal and being based on factors such as sexual attractions they were also potentially less publicly 'acceptable' to those considering them. The internal factors do not differ greatly from those referred to by Ward and

Beech (2006) (emotion regulation problems, cognitive distortions and social difficulties). The external reasons given for offending were not ones that were ordinarily classed as offence supportive (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020), they appeared to be more of a 'cover story' used by the participants for embarking on a course of behaviour that led to their imprisonment.

7.4.2 Nothing stops you

The participants suggested it was too easy to commit online sexual coercion. They felt that there was nothing in place to stop them offending. They repeatedly expressed how easy it was to engage in conversation with children and to then sexually abuse them. Mainstream social media accounts were used by all of the offenders to commit offences; there was little vetting on the part of the account provider, and little in the way of intervention to prevent offending from the social media providers, parents, or victims. The number of children who became victims as a result of the actions of the nine participants of this study was in the thousands. One participant alone estimated that he victimised around 3000 children during his offending period. Kopecky et al. (2014) stated many instances of abuse could be avoided by simple protective measures being taken on the victim's side of the crime. The interviews have showed this to be the case, it should be remembered however that the victims are children and as such should be afforded protection against threats such as this. The interviews suggested this is not being done adequately. Real-time interventions through the use of algorithms, artificial intelligence and live monitoring to detect inappropriate content undressing, and naked image transmission is possible (YUBO, 2019). Innovation such as this could lead the way in making the Internet safer. Chapter 4 has already discussed how fake and multiple online accounts are being used in online sexual coercion. The participants within this study provided more evidence of this. Effective identity verification processes for online account holders to prevent this is needed. More should be done in the way of controlling those who access websites/apps and then actively policing their actions.

A potential rollout of end-to-end encrypted chats (Doffman, 2021) is unlikely to assist child Internet safety as it will make it harder to decipher what is being discussed between victim and offender. If those who offended felt it was too easy and they were able to offend for prolonged periods without challenge or intervention, then they should be listened to. Nobody else is likely to know better. It is noted that the Online

protection bill is still being debated in parliament (as of 2022) after numerous years of discussion[27], it is unfair on the victims to keep debating it.

Waiting for governments to legislate, or the media to embarrass social media platforms into action is simply allowing the creation of more victims. A more proactive role in prevention is needed. Rather than hiding behind a cloak of privacy or data protection requirements providers should be forced to prevent crime and assist investigative authorities who face difficulties in prosecuting cross border offending (Wittes, 2016). Whilst an obligation to assist investigations already exists it is cumbersome, and much more assistance should be provided by preventing incidents in the first place.

Research through analysis of interviews from those who sexually coerced children online was limited at the time of writing this thesis. It was not possible to examine and compare literature on a like for like basis. But parallels can be drawn with research into Problematic Internet Use. The various models offered by Davis (2001), and Quayle et al., (2006), and Quayle and Taylor (2003) seem to be of valid application to online sexual coercion. It was evident that negative emotional states (Quayle et al., 2006) were present amongst those interviewed (P2, P4, P7). However, equally applicable were the distal and proximal setting events that conjoin with problematic cognitions discussed by Quayle & Taylor (2003). All of the participants showed some evidence of these. This seems to strengthen the relationship that the online sexual coercion of children has to PIU. The manner in which participants described offending when they were feeling down, is similar to the behaviours exhibited by those with addictions. Effectively, the gratification is being used as a means to receive a high or an immediate stimulation to remove negative emotional states in the short term – a method used to cope with emotional stress (Cortoni & Marshall, 2001). The highs became addictive and seem to have fuelled the problem and driven the offender.

7.4.3 Making bad decisions

The evidence for the causal attribution of online coercion seemed to be far stronger when considering this superordinate theme. The personal stress associated with factors such as loneliness, low self-esteem or sexual denial created a maladjusted decision-making process and misguided coping strategies (Cortoni & Marshall, 2001). This in turn caused individual participants to put their personal needs above that of the law and well-being of the vulnerable. By seeking this gratification, they created further

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[27] https://news.sky.com/story/online-safety-bill-has-the-government-botched-its-attempt-to-stop-the-spread-of-hateful-content-online-12568823

problems for themselves in the form of internalised conflicts and problematic behaviours these in tandem with the coping strategies appear to have led to the formation of offense supportive cognitions (Parquette & Cortoni, 2020). A number of the participants felt that intervention was not possible once they had commenced their criminal activity. Whilst they would get no protection for their historical activities, the judicial process is likely to take into account any positive steps to prevent its further occurrence and admissions of guilt (Sentencing Council, 2021). Charities and organisations to assess, intervene and divert people from problematic online behaviour exist and have done so for a number of years. It is possible that the message about the work of charities and organisations which offer live chat facilities (Stopitnow, 2021) or remote support to assist those having problematic thoughts is not being received by the right people, or at the right time.

7.4.4 I'm only here for one thing

The last superordinate of this chapter concentrated on the participants enthusiasm and drive to offend. It encapsulated some of the fantasies/needs of the participants in the form of wanting to be in control or to direct online activity. It resulted in them manipulating those they spoke to through a process that they honed and improved, creating an efficient and effective method to coerce victims into providing sexual content. This process of improvement and achievement was especially evident in those who had offended for longer periods. The control element of this theme may have inadvertently been explained by Raven (2008) through the definitions of power bases within social interactions. A number of reasons are given for using a coercive means as a power strategy to achieve goals. Amongst them is rapid compliance, or for those with low self-esteem a sense of satisfaction is achieved being able to direct and influence people. In order to exercise a coercive power base, a preparatory phase was sometimes necessary with the target (victim). This is not dissimilar to the manipulation carried out by the participants with some favouring ingratiation some intimidation, and some using both methods to achieve what they wanted.

In summarising, the offending that occurred within this study had the appearances of being a maladaptive coping strategy created from negative emotional states, and/or deviant or confused sexual attractions. Those who suppressed their feelings for longer periods of time appeared to become more serious offenders. The participants, who formed a sample of both online and contact/online offenders put their own sexual needs above the well-being of others. This is potentially in conflict with the research

of Babchishin et al. (2015), which suggested online offenders tend to show "greater victim empathy and greater self-control" (Babchishin et al., 2015, p.47) than contact offenders. The participants of this study appeared to show little concern for the victims whilst offending, with some believing the victims enjoyed the online engagement. This minimisation effect has been previously discussed in other studies which examine online child sex offending (Steel et al, 2021; Howitt & Sheldon, 2007; Paquette & Cortoni,2020). The participants demonstrated they used forethought and planning when offending. They created websites, multiple accounts and online legends to create the best environment to obtain sexual images or videos of children. Experiential learning came from extended offending periods which allowed them to improve their tactics and become increasingly efficient. They were able to extend this skill to manipulate the victims and parents into not reporting criminal activity. Many thousands of victims and many of the parents simply took no steps to report what had occurred, and the criminal activities were not flagged up by the hosting platforms.

The point at which the participants eventually entered the justice system proved to be a milestone at which the rational decision making of the participant could be particularly vulnerable. Some contemplated harm to themselves, and others experienced an increase in offending. But once sentenced they all seemed to experience some form of relief at coming to the end of an emotional cycle of extremes caused by the highs and lows of offending. Despite this relief, some went on to repeat this offending cycle once they had served their sentences.

7.4.5 Limitations

1. The confidentiality exceptions built into the study, and the researcher's previous occupation were apparent to the participants and may have led them to disclose less information than they could. Qualitative research is reliant on participants engaging freely and openly with interviewer, this may have been limited by fears of further prosecution or simple personal views and beliefs.

2. One of the participants disclosed an ongoing appeal for a conviction (not related to the study) which he did not wish to discuss during interview. The issues not disclosed during interview could have had a bearing on the experiences he discussed and on the subsequent interpretations.

3. Limitation 3 in chapter 6 is equally applicable in this study.

4. The sample used in this study were all white males. Five of them only offended against males, two against males/females, and two against females. The sample participants were also all categorised as Category C prisoners. None were from

other categories (A,B,or D). There was an inherent bias in the sample which was not fully representative of the sexuality of the general population in the UK (ONS, 2019). Neither was it representative of other categories/demographics of convicted sexual offender. Had participants from these other groups been interviewed different experiences may have been revealed. This could be limited in future research by including a wider population with similar convictions.

Chapter 8 – Discussion and conclusions

Discussion

This thesis was intended to provide an understanding of the online sexual coercion of children. A subject area which only had a very small base of academic literature to underpin it at the start of the project. The main aims, as set out in Chapter 1, are restated below: -

1. Understand how coercive online child sexual abuse develops

2. Explore why individuals blackmail/coerce children for sexual purposes instead of using other methods

3. Gain an insight into what it is that makes a child vulnerable to online sexual coercion

These aims were exploratory in nature, designed to give an insight into the causes and maintenance factors of sextortion against children. This was further reflected in the research questions:

- What do the experiences of child Internet users tell us about how coercive online child sexual abuse develops?

- How do the online activities of a child make them more vulnerable to being sexually coerced online?

- Why do perpetrators of online sexual coercion of children choose to interact directly with their victims for sexual purposes, rather than using other means?

Four studies were used to answer the research questions and achieve the research aims. The first of these (Chapter 4) provided an overview of the online sexual coercion of children by comparing open sourced data from 21 prosecuted cases and the 22 people convicted of them. Chapter 5 provided a victim focus in the form of a survey which sampled a population of 461 people to ascertain their experiences of online sexual coercion as children. The final two studies provided a more in-depth examination of the experiences of those who were victimised and those who commit online sexual coercion. This was in the form of qualitative in-depth interviews which were subject to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Thesis aims

    1. **Understand how coercive online child sexual abuse develops**

Within Chapter 4 there were signposts that indicated the barriers to committing offences of online sexual coercion were low.

    1. The commission of the crime was possible on everyday social media platforms.

    2. Unsophisticated methods were used where those responsible would create multiple and fake social media accounts with no challenges.

    3. The majority of offenders only took basic steps to prevent identity from being traced.

    4. It was possible to commit crimes for a prolonged period against large numbers of victims.

This was further reinforced in the other studies. The survey of Chapter 5 indicated that the majority of inappropriate sexual contact was received on the most popular social networking platforms. Within Chapter 6 a subordinate theme entitled "No one looks out for you when you're online" hinted that an individual would be responsible for the outcome of online inappropriate sexual approaches. This chapter further revealed that participants were routinely exposed to unsolicited sexualised content and would be asked for sexual images of themselves. These levels of exposure to sexual content did not differ for those with Internet safety protection, or parental controls in place.

Exposure to sexual content can be used as a form of selection strategy for grooming (Kloess et al., 2015) it allows an assessment of response of the child and decisions as to whether continued engagement is worthwhile. The ease of access to children and committing crime was further highlighted in Chapter 7. The superordinate theme "Nothing stops you" was constructed from a sub-theme in which participants with convictions repeatedly stated how easy it was to commit offences. They explained how they experienced little obstruction or intervention in a prolonged period of offending. They were also aware there was a large pool of potential victims on popular social media platforms. Whilst this ease of committing offences did not cause offending, it did nothing to prevent it. Had more effective protective strategies been in place it is possible the perpetrators may have been discouraged or could have been arrested at a much earlier stage.

The participants in Chapter 7 explained how they offended for prolonged periods. Sextortion has been publicised in the media for over ten years. This indicates an awareness that sexually coercive crimes are being committed online. It is frequently

presented by news institutions how sextortion occurs on social media. The corporate responsibility of online platforms should be seen to tackle child sexual abuse effectively rather than be known for hosting it. Those who do not actively seek to minimise it should be held to account. Websites such as Omegle, which according to the participants of this study did little to prevent sexual abuse should either prevent it, or face enforcement. Online social media platforms provide temptation and access to children for those suffering sexual preoccupations and problematic cognitions.

To commit sexual offences, it is argued that deviant arousal is necessary (Ward & Beech, 2005). This is created out of factors such as social difficulties or cognitive distortions. Finkelhor's precondition theory (1984) presents that for sexual offending to occur factors such as emotional congruence, overcoming internal and external inhibitors, are necessary. The conditions as presented by Finklehor relate to a pre-Internet era. Seto's (2018) internet inclusive theory suggested how cognitive and social deficits contribute to sexual offending. Babchisin et al. (2010) suggest a slightly different psychology drives the online offender, notably a greater victim empathy and a higher sexual deviancy. Within Chapter 7, the participants describe a number of factors that were present leading up to the period during which they were actively offending. Some of them described external events caused by circumstances outside of their control. But notably there were more personal internal factors described, these were causing negative emotional states and were deeply rooted. Whilst they differed for each participant, there were common themes. Examples included: sexual insecurity, suppression of sexual feelings, loneliness and low self-esteem. In trying to alleviate these negative emotional states, the participants would use the Internet, in doing so they were able to engage with children experiencing not dissimilar vulnerabilities in some cases. The was especially so with those who went on to become victims of abuse.

Chapter 6 noted the superordinate theme of "Exposing personal problems on the Internet", it was constructed largely from the extracts of participants who were coerced into sending images of themselves. The victim participants were exhibiting negative emotional states. Notably feelings such as low self-esteem, loneliness, problematic parental relationships or sexual insecurity were indicated.

Within Chapters 6 and 7 some of the participants described similar experiences. For example, Participant 8 in chapter 6, and Participant 5 in Chapter 7 both described the

Internet as a place where they could explore their sexuality with less of a threat. They were also able to maintain anonymity. Participants within both Chapters 6 and 7 would hide their actions from parents or relatives and act evasively about their online behaviour. Within both IPA studies, participants described their loneliness and low self-esteem. The Internet managed to bring the negative emotions experienced by both groups together, but with one key difference. The participants in Chapter 6 were children in vulnerable emotional states, whereas the participants in Chapter 7 were adults who sexually abused them albeit with vulnerable emotional states. This conjoining of perpetrators and victims on social media platforms or chat rooms allowed the vulnerabilities of the victims to exploited by the more experienced adult perpetrators who were able to read (Conte,1989) and manipulate the victims' weaknesses.

They satiated their own needs rather than considering the welfare of the those they victimised and believed might be vulnerable to manipulation. This apparent lack of victim empathy is in contrast to the findings of Babchisin et al. (2010). Both the online only and the contact offending participants of this research displayed this behaviour. In considering this, it is possible that the anonymity offered by the Internet hid the impact of what they were doing to victims from them. A response suggested by Dehue et al. (2008) who proposed that online abuse can be increasingly aggressive due to the perpetrator being unable to witness an emotional response from the child when they are offline. It is also possible that the perpetrators themselves have become normalised to the abuse they were committing.

This research aimed to establish how online sexually coercive abuse of children developed; the participants in Chapter 7 felt it was because it was too easy to accomplish, and it provided respite from negative emotional states. But it is worth noting that the perpetrators explained they were subsequently able to learn effective strategies to deal with the problematic cognitions that arose from these emotional states when taking part in SOTP's as part of their rehabilitation.

2. Explore why individuals blackmail/coerce children for sexual purposes instead of using methods carrying less personal risk

It would be logical to think that, by conversing directly with a victim, the likelihood of a perpetrator being arrested would be higher. The victim could potentially identify them, and they are likely to leave a trail of evidence assisting detection. Whilst this

might be the case, the victim first has to report the matter to the authorities. Mitchell et al. (2010) reported that only 9% of studied offences of online solicitation were reported to police. The survey of Chapter 5 found that 2.36% of those who had been asked for sexual images reported the matter to the police, and 7.9% of the participants reported the matter to the hosting platform via an online notification tool. A notification rate of 21% for reporting sextortion to the website or App was claimed by Wolak and Finkelor (2017). Within Patchin and Hinduja's (2018) research it is claimed that 34.8% of males and 47.0% of females reported sextortion to the police. There is a large variation in these different pieces of research. Participants in Chapter 7 claimed they were never reported and could manipulate the victim's parents that their child was a willing participant to the process. This is all despite legislation existing to make sexual communication with a child (Serious Crime Act, 2015) and indecent image transmission/possession (Criminal Justice Act, 1988) illegal. Within Chapter 6, three of the five participants who were victims of online sexual coercion advised the researcher that he was the first person they had told. Low levels of reporting crimes will lower the risk of arrest or prosecution to perpetrators.

This risk to perpetrators is also lowered by inconsistent sentencing, a subject raised by Wittes et al. (2016) within early research into sextortion. The case studies in Chapter 4 reinforced that there were variations in sentencing internationally. By offending across borders, perpetrators make it more difficult for enforcement authorities to investigate them. The use of encrypted messages makes it more difficult to investigate offences. A social media platform based in a different country to the investigating authority also makes it more difficult to investigate offences (Kierkegaard, 2008). The global nature of the internet makes it more difficult to investigate offences within a single jurisdiction. This ultimately lowers the risk of an individual being prosecuted.

The participants in Chapter 7 were convicted for committing offences where children were sexually coerced. All of them chose to engage online with their victims and lead them through a process where they coerced them into providing sexual imagery. There was no necessity for them to engage with the victims, images and videos are available online to those that want them and know where to find them. Revisiting the literature, it is asserted that the main driver for online sexual abuse of children was gratification (NCA, 2020; Briggs et al., 2011). But it is also disclosed that there are secondary reasons such as "power and control over victims" (NCA, 2020, p.18). The participants

in Chapter 7, described how they were seeking gratification when committing offences. But within the interviews they also disclosed other factors. The superordinate theme "Oh, come on you've seen me I'm so horny – The unreasonable demands" indicated the participants needed to regain an element of control that they felt they had lost from their own lives. The negative emotional states experienced by the participants seemed to introduce a maladaptive coping strategy seeking gratification and an element of power and control over the victims. This as they described proved to be addictive for them. There was also evidence that when the participants suffered increased stress or negative emotional states their offending would worsen. The interviews offered support to the Problematic Internet Use theory that the Internet catalysed dysfunctional behaviour but did not cause it (Kaliszewska-Czeremska, 2011). It is worth noting that the participants were Internet users prior to offending and displayed gradual changes towards online offending. They also described viewing images passively prior to progressing to engaging victims directly, with some also offending physically. These are remarkably similar to the varying stages of involvement in PIU described by Quayle and Taylor (2003). Within this research, it seems that the participants were having distorted/problematic cognitions prior to and when committing online offences, these created offence supportive conditions for them. The positive stimulus they received from the process resulted in an escalation of criminal behaviour which they struggled to control. This research explored why those with online sexual offence convictions against children took what at face value appeared to be a higher risk in committing offences by directly engaging victims. The interviews in Chapter 7 suggested that the participants did not perceive the risk of being arrested as very high, and that the compulsiveness of it ensured they would continue to offend until arrested.

3. Gain an insight into what it is that makes a child vulnerable to online sexual coercion

The survey in Chapter 5 suggested that the use of safety software or prohibitive Internet control by parents/guardians did little to stop the participants from being approached sexually online by adults. The proportion of participants who stated they were coerced to send sexual images was 5.6%. Of these a high proportion at 62.9%, were subject to repeated image requests on ten or more occasions. This sub sample also described a greater variety of emotions being experienced with a higher

proportion experiencing positive emotions when describing the interactions that they had online.

Previous research has indicated negative life events increase the risk of a child being solicited online (Mitchell et al., 2000), and that this risk would be increased amongst those with a greater exposure to Internet use, and/or who took part in risky online activities. All of those interviewed in Chapter 6 disclosed at least one negative life event occurring. But only five of these nine participants who were subject to coercion sent sexual images of themselves. Those sending images described receiving positive validation when they sent them. This came in the in the form of compliments and flattery and are described within grooming literature (Whittle, 2014; Webster et al.2012; O'Connell, 2003). The participants who did not send images appeared to have developed effective coping strategies that prevented them from engaging in risky Internet behaviour, being manipulated, or coerced. They took simple steps such as declining requests or blocking other users, but they proved effective. The outcome of an online solicitation is significantly reliant on how the victim responded to the perpetrator (Webster et al., 2012). Chapter 5 provided that despite having been advised about Internet safety over 55% of participants still responded or sometimes responded to the inappropriate contact they received. Different approaches to dealing with online threats were demonstrated in Chapter 6. Those who were sexually abused did not close down communications with people they were not comfortable talking to. The self-protection methods given by LeClerc et al. (2011) such as blocking, declining, or not responding appeared effective in preventing abuse amongst those who used them.

The participants in Chapter 6, described the frequent receipt of unsolicited sexual pictures. Research surrounding the transmission of unsolicited "dick pics" links it to sexual harassment and entitlement (Waling & Pym, 2017; Hayes & Dragiewicz, 2018). Chapter 6 disclosed how these images would be received unprompted and cause shock and distress. Despite this very little action was taken as a result of these images being received. The transmission of sexual images is a method used in grooming, used to normalise children to sex, de-sensitising them, and stimulating their interest (Kloess et al., 2015). It is also an illegal activity when it is directed towards children (Serious Crime Act, 2015; Sexual Offences Act, 2003). The participants did not consider themselves to be victims of crime they just accepted receiving the images as part of life. The connection to grooming was only seen by some of them retrospectively.

Failure to treat these as improper sexual behaviour or a crime allows the behaviour to continue without intervention. Engaging with those that send them is also likely to increase a person's vulnerability to further sexualised conversations and subsequent attempts of sexual abuse.

In understanding what increased the vulnerability of a child for this research aim a number of factors became apparent. Vulnerability of the child would be increased in those struggling to cope with issues such as low self-esteem, sexual insecurity, or familial separation. These negative emotional states seemed to increase the participants need for positive validation, and a reliance on the perpetrators who provided it once they had received a sexual image. The victims appeared to either accept or ignore the cost of this validation. When faced with the lack of empathy, and the positive drive and focus of perpetrators, the victims were pursued through a process where they were coerced as a commodity that could provide sexual images.

Within Chapter 6 some of the participants genuinely felt they were in relationships with their abusers. Research has presented that "offenders did not engage in a process whereby they attempted to form a relationship" (Kloess et al., 2015, p.587). This would tend to strengthen the claim that the victims were treated as a commodity and that little empathy was present.

Recommendations

This thesis has highlighted a number of factors that increase the vulnerability of children to online sexual coercion. Similar factors can also be found within other research in online sexual abuse against children (O'Connell, 2003; Europol, 2015; Wittes et al., 2016). An indication that they are long standing and perhaps difficult to resolve issues. But Cyber-crime changes at pace (Holt, 2017), it should be expected that methods of committing sexual abuse online will change with it. Prevention is likely to need periodic reassessment as methods change to ensure effectiveness. O'Connell's (2003) recommendation of establishing communication between product developers and child internet safety groups, offered a common-sense approach to prevent online sexual exploitation of children. It encouraged industry, governmental departments and safety groups to work together to minimise exploitation. However, studies carried out in this research indicated that the majority of perpetrators used multiple social media accounts and fake identities to commit crimes. They had a number of purposes such as presenting themselves as someone the victim would be

attracted to, and also as a rudimentary means to frustrate detection. The numerous false accounts held by perpetrators in these studies suggest there was not a sufficient procedure in place by product designers/industry to prevent it.

The acceptability of receiving unsolicited sexual images is also questioned as this normalises sexual content to children and makes it easier for grooming to proceed unnoticed.

To minimise the sexual coercion of children the following recommendations are suggested -

1. A formal process of identity verification for a personal online communication accounts should be mandatory. This is to minimise the incidence of fake accounts. Such identity checks are cheaply available through numerous third-party suppliers. This could enable a social media platform or chat hosting site to attain a certified status which can be promoted as offering a safer environment for children's use.

2. Websites and apps (Omegle, Chaturbate etc.) hosting sexual content should be legally obliged to enforce a process that ensures that formal account registration and verification is necessary. This is to control access to obscene material compliant with the law in the country in which it is being accessed. The check boxes currently employed are not a sufficient control of access.

3. Online communications platforms to become embodied within the current safeguarding processes and legislation. This would oblige them to provide a safe and secure means of communications to the vulnerable, and to intervene in problematic communications and potential offending.

4. Proactive prevention programmes should be targeted at and made available to people displaying sexually problematic behaviour when using online platforms. The interviews from some of the perpetrators suggested that had an avenue away from their problematic cognitions been available, they would have taken it.

5. Consideration should be given to establishing proactive task forces with representatives from the numerous online platforms, enforcement agencies, and public protection departments to share and conduct joint investigations. This is to allow the development of profiles of those displaying risky Internet

behaviour and encourage early interventions to prevent crime. By working jointly with memorandums of understanding the protocols of data protection can be less restrictive leading to a more effective sharing of information than is currently possible between organisations.

6. The use of live monitoring, software and algorithms to assist in identifying sexually abusive behaviour should implemented across platforms hosting children. Its use should be promoted to assist in identifying online exploitative/coercive behaviour and to provide interventions for both the perpetrators and the victims. This is to assist preventing the escalation of sexually abusive Internet use. The intelligence gleaned from its use should be pooled to create a more complete intelligence picture and problem profiles of individuals showing a tendency for risk or escalation towards illegal activity. This will enable faster interventions that divert individuals away from crime.

7. An education campaign should be initiated to raise awareness of the consequences of failing to report online sexual activity and, the unacceptable/illegal nature of naked image transmission to/between children. The studies indicate a change of mindset is necessary to increase the incidence of reporting unwanted sexual images, and sexual communications with children.

Contributions

The key contributions of this thesis lie in the understanding it provides to the whole of the research area. The first study provided a generous quantity of scene setting data giving a broad understanding of the methods used in the online sexual coercion of children. The second study provided an insight into how children responded to online sexual approaches with some basic numerical data giving a snapshot of online sexual coercion. The real understanding of online sexual coercion comes from the third and fourth studies consisting of in-depth interviews. The frank and open accounts given by perpetrators who lived the experiences informed us what caused them to go online and repetitively commit sexual offences. This helps to understand what may prevent others from doing so. Thus, helping to prevent them from damaging their own lives and those of the victims.

The victim interviews showed how some needed respite from the negative emotional states they were experiencing. This was fulfilled by the validation and confirmation they received by sending images.

This thesis corroborated and complimented some of the pre-existing literature into sextortion which provided detail about the offending style and prevalence (Wittes et al., 2016; Kopecky, 2017; Patchin & Hinduja, 2018); the pre-conditions (Acar,2016); and the characteristics (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2016). It provided a deeper subject knowledge when considering the individual victims and perpetrators. Recommendations have been provided for the future prevention of online sexually coercive crime. These recommendations do not just apply to this subject, they can be broadly interpreted for wider use of the internet by vulnerable persons.

Limitations and Future directions

Limitations are inevitable due to constraints on time, resources, methodologies and an individual's own abilities. The main limitation of this thesis are the compromises accepted at the design stage and the methodology. To provide a broader and more balanced knowledge base the methodology was less focused on one specific method. This in turn means that the research was less able to draw the scientifically based conclusions that quantitative studies alone offer.

Chapter 4 examined historical cases of online sexual coercion the data was from secondary sources. There is a risk when using secondary data that it is misrepresented or interpreted wrongly from its original source. It must also be remembered that as per Knight (2001) that case study analysis is built on generalisations, limited and non-scientific. However, it provided an exploratory insight that is not available from more focused methods.

The survey in Chapter 5 was intended to provide an insight into what had been experienced by a sample of young people who had used the Internet when growing up. It was never intended to provide statistically significant results or a scientific hypothesis. It did reveal some trends of interest that are worth further exploration under more controlled conditions. Subsequent and more complex significance testing designed into studies could help to provide some of the scientific basis that Chapter 5 lacked. It would be worth exploring in greater depth the impact of negative and positive emotions on a victim's online responses to see how under controlled conditions they impact on the likeliness of becoming a victim of sexual coercion.

The qualitative studies in Chapters 6 and 7 both used similar methodologies so will have similar strengths and weaknesses. As discussed in Chapter 3 they do not provide the scientific basis found in quantitative methods. This was accepted in the research design process in order to gather a larger quantity of in-depth data of the lived experiences of those participating. This in turn creates smaller sample sizes, which could mean that important factors may not be described and subsequently missed from the results of unrepresented populations. This smaller sample size may not truly reflect the experiences of all of those who are subject to or commit online sexual coercion.

It could be presented that the researchers previous career choices may introduce a bias against the participants in a study such as this. IPA is a method dependent on interpretations from both the participants and the researcher. In the case of the researcher, these are coming from an ex-police officer. Despite a clear audit trail being maintained, the results are dependent on personal reflexivity and the evaluation of the researcher. A different researcher might find different subordinate themes and superordinate themes are more prominent and base their analysis on these.

An aspect of this research which is worthy of further investigation are the causative factors and offence supportive views that were provided by the participants in Chapter 7. The participants described a number of factors they felt caused them to offend and tended to focus on them. It is difficult to know if they were causative to offending or they were used as a diversion from the label of sexual offender. Further research could establish whether they were present prior to offending or not.

The final limitations to receive comment are the confidentiality clauses built into the research. All participants were fully aware that if they mentioned something that may later need investigating as a crime it was likely to be disclosed. This could have limited some of the experiences relayed. The threat of further prosecution to someone trying to get parole could be problematic if they did not 'clear their slate' when sentenced.

Reflection on the research experience

The PhD pathway is a long and circuitous route, one mountain is conquered only for another larger one to be revealed behind it, and on its goes. There are new learning experiences and challenges which can provide an insight into the journey undertaken. If there is a recognised pathway to embarking on a PhD, I certainly did not take it. But

hopefully I can leave small legacy of value to others. I started this qualification aged in my late forties and end it in my fifties. I have had previous careers in Manufacturing/Engineering and within the Police where I performed a variety of roles. In my later years this was mostly in an investigative role managing both serious and volume crime. I had a varied career which reached into the lives of many people bringing with it both happiness and sadness in bucket loads. The experience of institutional form filling that exists in public service turned out to be good preparation for the research process.

Returning to education

We never really stop learning and depending on career choices it can continue continuously throughout the working life. I have had the privilege of experiencing both workplace learning and the academic learning environment. Mandatory and supplementary courses to assist in my skill base to support this research were expected and necessary. But it never ceased to amaze me how much longer everything took in the academic environment, and how inefficient it seemed. What I felt could be completed in a few hours would be timetabled to last for a number of days. It would involve PowerPoints, handouts, breakout sessions, group sessions and feedback etc. etc. Perhaps progress into later years has made me impatient, but the contrast to the length of the learning experience within the workplace was vast. Ignoring this aspect of my studies I found the research process to be a seamless affair which flowed naturally from start to finish. Yes, it involves never ending form-filling, but as disclosed I am hardened to this and expect it within an institution.

Collecting data

Despite it sounding dull this aspect of the research turned out to be the most enjoyable part. The studies gave me purpose and engaged me with people who had stories to tell. These stories were real and had meaning. The data from case studies, surveys and interviews all involved different people who pieced together a much larger picture.

The individuality of the one to one interviews whilst not an new experience for me was slightly different in that the participants were handed the control to explain what had happened. It was a novel experience when the perpetrators admitted to everything, and I was surprised by how cathartic they found it. I will freely admit to thinking some of the participants had committed acts that they deserved to be in prison for. However,

I also found I could empathise with the experiences they relayed. The prisoners, or offenders as I called them, were amenable, helpful and did their best to assist the research for which I am grateful.

The interviews with victims revealed some online experiences which as parent, I would not wish to see a child endure. Although the participants were offered an interviewer who was more closely related to them in age and gender only one chose that option. I am grateful for this as I understand that it will not have been easy for them to relate stories of online sexual abuse to a researcher who was probably closer in demographic to a perpetrator than a victim. But they freely relayed their experiences and feelings to provide an excellent product. Which as I researcher was all I could ask for.

Transcription

Whilst I fully took on board the need to engage with my data and understand its nuances, I felt that spending months transcribing hours of interviews was not the most effective use of time. I finished this aspect of my research completely frustrated with the amount of time lost. With the passage of time my views haven't changed, and I still believe that consideration should be given to providing access to suitable software to automate this process, as much as possible. I will undoubtedly not be the only student or researcher who has this gripe. The hours of productivity gained through the use of a good transcription package will mean payback is achieved fairly quickly.

The study that wasn't

The initial proposal for this research involved a further study which interviewed investigators of online offences. Ethical approval was obtained, and three interviews were conducted and transcribed. The aim of the study was to examine the investigation process and see what problems were encountered. Ultimately highlighting the difficulties encountered in the investigation process to make prosecutions easier. For a number of reasons this study was not completed. Firstly, the case studies and survey were inadvertently providing similar information which was also being gathered in the three interviews that had been conducted. Secondly it was proving difficult to find further participants willing to be interviewed. Thirdly time was pressing on and the three interviews conducted had not revealed anything that was not already known or to be found in the other studies. For these reasons this study was not progressed any further.

A PhD is a slow and painful journey, but it is like this for a reason. It ensures that the student questions in a prolonged and thoughtful way what they see. I have enjoyed parts of it more than others and developed in areas I would not have imagined many years ago. I am thankful to those who have guided me.

Concluding remarks

This thesis presented a series of studies that examine the commission of the online sexual coercion of children. It has highlighted how both child victims and adult perpetrators use online communications platforms when suffering from negative emotional states and/or emotive disorders. In seeking respite both groups seem to be drawn together where one manipulates the other sexually. Unfortunately, very few of the victims interviewed reported these experiences. This provides the perpetrators with the reassurance that they are free to repeat the process many times. The participants in the study reported how they became addicted to the temporary boost to their emotional state provided by gratification. This fuelled a repeating cycle of offending which continued for an extended period. Further research should concentrate on what methods are effective at pinpointing adults using sexually coercive tactics at a far earlier stage in their offending cycle to minimise the impact and damage it causes.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Data extraction criteria

	General Information	
Title of study	Comparative case analysis of sextortion convictions	
Study objective	To establish how reported cases of sextortion occur	
Study Methodology	Aggregation of similar cases into a data set capable of being subject to basic numerical analysis	
Source of data	Three search engines - Google, Bing, Nottingham Trent University library	
Date of study	2017	
Researcher	Ian Baker	
	Population and data inclusion	
Data sample description	Conviction for sexual offence against a victim under 18 years	
Data collection setting	Data will be collected by performing searches with the key terms - sextortion, sexual blackmail, sexual coercion, sexual extortion.	
Methods of sampling	Searches will be performed on two popular search engines (Google and Bing) and one academic library (NTU)	
Inclusion criteria	Communication between offender and victim was online	
	Victim subject to a threat/coercion and sexual images requested	
	Sexual images requested were of a child	
	Case reported in English	
Exclusion criteria	Unclear if victims were under 18 years old	
	Case occurred prior to year 2000	
	Case is sub-judicial or appeal pending	
	Reported only on social media or vigilante/paedophile hunter website	
	Risk of bias	Level of risk
Incomplete data	The cases used will utilise secondary data reported by public bodies and news organisations. There is a risk that they may not report all the salient facts of cases.	Low
Selective data reporting	The cases are dependent on the evidence offered in the prosecution of each case; there is a risk that some evidence will not be admitted or is not reliable.	Low
Other bias	The data will be collected at random based on search engine results. This is not representative of a specific sample of a population. This creates a small risk that particular methods or types of criminality may not be included on the comparative analysis	Med

	Applicability	
Have important populations been excluded from the study	A randomised sample based on the results of Internet searches was obtained; it is possible that this will exclude some sections of society	
Does the study directly address the questions	The study provides a basic representation of how different cases of online sexual coercion of children occurred.	

Appendix 2 – Data extractions sheets

Case identifier	1		
Offender age	19	**Offender location**	USA
Posed as female	N	**False age used**	N
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online only		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2012-2013		
Sentence period	18 months		
Method of contacting victim	Emailed victims		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	Y		
Coercive techniques used	Hacked victims' computer, emailed victim to demand video chat where naked pictures would be requested		
Demands made form victims	Demanded naked pictures		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to upload naked pictures to social media		
Social media sites used	Not specified		
Number of victims (suspected)	12 (100-150)		
Offending period	1 year		
Methods of avoiding detection	VPN, dynamic DNS, multiple email account		
Offended across international boundary	Y		
Victim age	13-18	**Victim location**	USA, Canada, Ireland, Moldova
Victim sex	M & F		

Case identifier	2		
Offender age	31	**Offender location**	USA
Posed as female	N	**False age used**	Y
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online only		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2007-2010		
Sentence period	105 years		
Method of contacting victim	Contacted victims via messaging on social media posing as a female		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	Y		
Coercive techniques used	Pretended to be teenage boy on social media, asked victims to strip on camera. Once he had compromising video or pictures threatened to release material publicly unless they provided more		
Demands made form victims	Demanded naked pictures		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to post compromising pictures to social media		
Social media sites used	Stickham and other unspecified social media sites		
Number of victims (suspected)	14 (350)		
Offending period	3 years		
Methods of avoiding detection	Proxy servers		
Offended across international boundary	Y		
Victim age	13-18	**Victim location**	US, Can, UK
Victim sex	F		

Case identifier	3		
Offender age	37	**Offender location**	USA
Posed as female	N	**False age used**	N
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online only		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2005-2009		
Sentence period	110 years		
Method of contacting victim	Messaging via social media		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	Y		
Coercive techniques used	Messaged victims on social media and tricked them into downloading malware. Hacked victims' computer and obtained personal information, emailed victim to demand video chat where naked pictures would be requested		
Demands made form victims	Demanded naked pictures		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to reveal compromising images to friends and family		
Social media sites used	MySpace		
Number of victims (suspected)	3800		
Offending period	4 years		
Methods of avoiding detection	False accounts		
Offended across international boundary	Y		
Victim age	Under 18	**Victim location**	Worldwide
Victim sex	F		

Case identifier	4		
Offender age	31	**Offender location**	Iraq
Posed as female	N	**False age used**	N
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online only		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2005-2009		
Sentence period	30 Years		
Method of contacting victim	Messaging via social media		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	Y		
Coercive techniques used	Messaged victims on social media and tricked them into downloading malware. Hacked victims' computer and obtained personal information, emailed victim to demand video chat where naked pictures would be requested		
Demands made form victims	Demanded naked pictures		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to reveal compromising images to friends and family		
Social media sites used	MySpace		
Number of victims (suspected)	3800		
Offending period	4 years		
Methods of avoiding detection	False accounts		
Offended across international boundary	Y		
Victim age	Under 18	**Victim location**	Worldwide
Victim sex	F		

Case identifier	5		
Offender age	31	**Offender location**	USA
Posed as female	Y	**False age used**	Y
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online only		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2009-2011		
Sentence period	35 years		
Method of contacting victim	Messaging via social media		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	N		
Coercive techniques used	Pretended to be new to area and messaged teenage females. Sexualised chat and subsequently demanded images		
Demands made form victims	Demanded naked pictures		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to tell friends/parents and reveal pictures, and to withhold benefits previously granted		
Social media sites used	Facebook		
Number of victims (suspected)	15		
Offending period	3 years		
Methods of avoiding detection	Fake profiles and accounts		
Offended across international boundary	Y		
Victim age	9-16	**Victim location**	Worldwide
Victim sex	F		

Case identifier	6		
Offender age	24	**Offender location**	USA
Posed as female	Y	**False age used**	Y
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online and Contact		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2012-2013		
Sentence period	15 Years		
Method of contacting victim	Social media messaging		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	N		
Coercive techniques used	Used fake social media profile, posed as young boy or girl to develop online relationship and then encourage victims to send explicit material		
Demands made form victims	Demanded naked pictures		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to harm victims or family members unless they sent naked images		
Social media sites used	Facebook, Meetme		
Number of victims (suspected)	12		
Offending period	1 year		
Methods of avoiding detection	Fake profiles		
Offended across international boundary	Y		
Victim age	13-17	**Victim location**	USA and worldwide
Victim sex	M & F		

Case identifier	7		
Offender age	39	**Offender location**	USA
Posed as female	Y	**False age used**	Y
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online only		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2010-2012		
Sentence period	40 years		
Method of contacting victim	Messaged victims on adult sexual website		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	N		
Coercive techniques used	Posed as person similar in age to victim and transmitted fake sexual webcam footage to victims to encourage them to send him sexual material.		
Demands made form victims	Demanded further sexual videos		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Recorded sexual activity of victim and subsequently threatened to upload onto pornographic websites unless they complied with requests		
Social media sites used	Omegle		
Number of victims (suspected)	150		
Offending period	2 years		
Methods of avoiding detection	Fake accounts and video feeds of others		
Offended across international boundary	N		
Victim age	13-17	**Victim location**	USA
Victim sex	M & F		

Case identifier	8		
Offender age	38	**Offender location**	Netherlands
Posed as female	Y	**False age used**	Y
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online only		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2008-2014		
Sentence period	10 years 243 days		
Method of contacting victim	Messaging via social media		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	N		
Coercive techniques used	Posed as young male or female, chatted to victims and persuaded them to perform sexual acts in front of webcam.		
Demands made form victims	Demanded victims perform sexual acts on webcam		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to send videos to friends and family of victims		
Social media sites used	Not specified		
Number of victims (suspected)	20 (250)		
Offending period	6 years		
Methods of avoiding detection	Multiple fake profiles		
Offended across international boundary	Y		
Victim age	8-17	**Victim location**	Canada & Netherlands
Victim sex	M & F		

Case identifier	9		
Offender age	20	**Offender location**	UK
Posed as female	Y	**False age used**	Y
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online and attempted contact		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2012-2015		
Sentence period	1year 6 months		
Method of contacting victim	social media messaging		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	N		
Coercive techniques used	Posed as female teenager and contacted victims on social media, sent naked picture to victims and requested pictures back		
Demands made form victims	Demanded naked pictures		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to distribute naked pictures online unless more were sent		
Social media sites used	Not specified		
Number of victims (suspected)	3		
Offending period	3 years		
Methods of avoiding detection	Fake account		
Offended across international boundary	N		
Victim age	13-17	**Victim location**	UK
Victim sex	M		

Case identifier	10		
Offender age	42	**Offender location**	Australia
Posed as female	N	**False age used**	Y
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online only		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2009-2012		
Sentence period	3 years		
Method of contacting victim	Messaging on social media		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	N		
Coercive techniques used	Posed as teenage male or Justin Bieber to chat to teenage females and build a relationship		
Demands made form victims	Demanded victims take naked pictures of themselves		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to upload naked pictures to pornography websites		
Social media sites used	Facebook		
Number of victims (suspected)	17		
Offending period	3 years		
Methods of avoiding detection	Multiple false social media and email accounts		
Offended across international boundary	Y		
Victim age	12-15	**Victim location**	Worldwide
Victim sex	F		

Case identifier	11		
Offender age	33	**Offender location**	Australia
Posed as female	Y	**False age used**	Y
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online and remote contact		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2011-2013		
Sentence period	10 years 5 months		
Method of contacting victim	Messaging via social media		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	N		
Coercive techniques used	Posed as teenage female on social media and sent images of other victims		
Demands made form victims	Demanded victims send pictures and perform sexual acts		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to tell police victims had sent pornography		
Social media sites used	Facebook, Kik		
Number of victims (suspected)	43		
Offending period	2 years		
Methods of avoiding detection	Fake social media and email accounts		
Offended across international boundary	Y		
Victim age	5-15	**Victim location**	Aus, USA, worldwide
Victim sex	F		

Case identifier	12		
Offender age	32	**Offender location**	USA
Posed as female	N	**False age used**	N
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online only		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2009-2010		
Sentence period	6 years		
Method of contacting victim	Email		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	Y		
Coercive techniques used	Used P2P networks to post music with malware attached. Hacked victims' computers and downloaded compromising images of girlfriends, then identified victim and emailed them with threats		
Demands made form victims	Demanded naked pictures		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to upload naked pictures to social media		
Social media sites used	Not specified		
Number of victims (suspected)	230		
Offending period	2 years		
Methods of avoiding detection	IP cloaking and fake email addresses		
Offended across international boundary	N/K		
Victim age	13-17	**Victim location**	N/K
Victim sex	F		

Case identifier	13		
Offender age	32	**Offender location**	UK
Posed as female	N	**False age used**	Y
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online only		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2007		
Sentence period	1year		
Method of contacting victim	Messaging via social media and mobile phone SMS		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	N		
Coercive techniques used	Asked victim to send images of herself in underwear, when these were received went on to demand more images		
Demands made form victims	Demanded sexual images of victim		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to post victims details and phone number on Internet		
Social media sites used	Netlog		
Number of victims (suspected)	1 (20)		
Offending period	1 year		
Methods of avoiding detection	Fake social media account		
Offended across international boundary	N		
Victim age	14	**Victim location**	UK
Victim sex	Fake social media account		

Case identifier	14		
Offender age	36	**Offender location**	UK
Posed as female	N	**False age used**	Y
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online and Contact (found with victim when arrested)		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2003-2005		
Sentence period	2 years		
Method of contacting victim	Messaging in chatrooms		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	Y		
Coercive techniques used	Sent victims malware in an image file, made threats to crash computer or post compromising images		
Demands made form victims	Demanded sexual pictures		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to upload naked pictures to social media		
Social media sites used	Chat rooms		
Number of victims (suspected)	4		
Offending period	2 years		
Methods of avoiding detection	Fake profiles and email addresses		
Offended across international boundary	Y		
Victim age	13-16	**Victim location**	UK, Canada, USA
Victim sex	F		

Case identifier	15		
Offender age	28	**Offender location**	Australia
Posed as female	N	**False age used**	N
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online and Contact		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2006-2015		
Sentence period	12 years		
Method of contacting victim	Emailed victims		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	N		
Coercive techniques used	Engaged in chat with victims on social media and coerced them into sending sexual pictures		
Demands made form victims	Demanded sexual pictures and sexual acts		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to upload naked pictures online		
Social media sites used	Not specified		
Number of victims (suspected)	22		
Offending period	9 years		
Methods of avoiding detection	None specified		
Offended across international boundary	N		
Victim age	Nov-17	**Victim location**	Australia
Victim sex	F		

Case identifier	16		
Offender age	19	**Offender location**	UK
Posed as female	Y	**False age used**	Y
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online, contact and remote contact		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2011-2016		
Sentence period	5 years		
Method of contacting victim	Messaging through social media		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	N		
Coercive techniques used	Created fake social media accounts pretending to be young female, sent sexual images to male victims and encouraged them to send images back		
Demands made form victims	Demanded sexual images and acts be performed		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to upload naked pictures to social media or send to family		
Social media sites used	Facebook, WhatsApp		
Number of victims (suspected)	63		
Offending period	1 year		
Methods of avoiding detection	VPN, and dynamic DNS, multiple email account		
Offended across international boundary	Y		
Victim age	13-17	**Victim location**	UK
Victim sex	M		

Case identifier	17		
Offender age	23	**Offender location**	USA
Posed as female	N	**False age used**	N
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online only		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2011-2013		
Sentence period	29years		
Method of contacting victim	Emailed victims		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	N		
Coercive techniques used	Posed as wealthy modelling agent on social media offering money for images. These images were then used to procure sexual images		
Demands made form victims	Demanded naked pictures and performance of sex acts		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to publish naked images online		
Social media sites used	Facebook		
Number of victims (suspected)	12 (100-150)		
Offending period	2 years		
Methods of avoiding detection	Fake online profiles		
Offended across international boundary	N		
Victim age	12-15	**Victim location**	USA
Victim sex	F		

Case identifier	18		
Offender age	31	**Offender location**	UK
Posed as female	Y	**False age used**	Y
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online and remote contact		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	More than 1 year		
Sentence period	20 years		
Method of contacting victim	Emailed victims		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	Y		
Coercive techniques used	Befriended teenage females on social media and persuaded them to send naked pictures. Then used these to coerce more		
Demands made form victims	Demanded naked pictures, and directed sexual activity		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to send naked/sexual pictures to friends and family		
Social media sites used	Facebook		
Number of victims (suspected)	19 (100)		
Offending period	1 year		
Methods of avoiding detection	Numerous (excess of 30) fake accounts		
Offended across international boundary	Y		
Victim age	12 months to 14	**Victim location**	UK, USA, Australia, Canada
Victim sex	M & F		

Case identifier	19		
Offender age	31	**Offender location**	Romania
Posed as female	Y	**False age used**	Y
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online only		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2015		
Sentence period	4 years		
Method of contacting victim	Messaging on social media		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	N		
Coercive techniques used	Posed as female on social media and deceived victim into sending intimate picture.		
Demands made form victims	Demanded money not to publish pictures		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to post intimate pictures unless money paid		
Social media sites used	Not specified		
Number of victims (suspected)	1		
Offending period	1 year		
Methods of avoiding detection	Proxy servers		
Offended across international boundary	Y		
Victim age	17	**Victim location**	Ireland
Victim sex	M		

Case identifier	20		
Offender age	27	**Offender location**	UK
Posed as female	Y	**False age used**	Y
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online only		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2008-2011		
Sentence period	3 years		
Method of contacting victim	messaging on social media and chat rooms		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	N		
Coercive techniques used	Posed as female and convinced victim to strip off in exchange for topless photos		
Demands made form victims	Requested sexually explicit photos		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to tell friends and family victim was gay and to post video footage on social media		
Social media sites used	Facebook and chat rooms		
Number of victims (suspected)	7		
Offending period	Indeterminate sentence (min 3 years)		
Methods of avoiding detection	Fake accounts		
Offended across international boundary	Y		
Victim age	13-15	**Victim location**	UK
Victim sex	M		

Case identifier	21		
Offender age	19	**Offender location**	UK
Posed as female	N	**False age used**	N
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online only		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2015		
Sentence period	2 1/2 years		
Method of contacting victim	Messaging on social media and chat rooms		
Fake profile used	N		
Used malware/hacking	N		
Coercive techniques used	Befriended victim on social media and convinced her to send revealing picture. Used screen capture software to save image.		
Demands made form victims	Demanded naked pictures and then money		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to send image to friends and family		
Social media sites used	Snapchat and blackberry messenger		
Number of victims (suspected)	1		
Offending period	1 year		
Methods of avoiding detection	None		
Offended across international boundary	N		
Victim age	15	**Victim location**	UK
Victim sex	F		

Case identifier	22		
Offender age	29	**Offender location**	UK
Posed as female	Y	**False age used**	Y
Offending style (online only, online and contact, Online and remote contact, all)	Online only		
Known to victims	N		
Offending period	2009-2017		
Sentence period	32 years		
Method of contacting victim	Emailed and messaging		
Fake profile used	Y		
Used malware/hacking	N		
Coercive techniques used	Would initiate contact with victim and demand increasingly depraved acts from them		
Demands made form victims	Demanded naked pictures and performance of sexual and depraved acts		
Method used to gain leverage over victims	Threatened to upload naked pictures to friends and family		
Social media sites used	None specified		
Number of victims (suspected)	45(300)		
Offending period	8 years		
Methods of avoiding detection	Encrypted emails, fake accounts		
Offended across international boundary	Y		
Victim age	13-18	**Victim location**	Worldwide
Victim sex	F		

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Appendix 4 – Key evaluation data fields

Identifier
Investigating agency
Employment
Offender location
Married
Date Arrested
Offender age
Victim ages
Adult victims
Child victims
Victims sex
Contact Offending
Consenting images
Personal meeting
Offending from
Offending to
Victim location
Proved victim numbers
Suspected victim numbers
Hack victim's computer
Software used
Social media
Threats used
Threats carried out
Methods
How detected
Steps to prevent detection
Posed as younger person
Posed as female
Offences charged
Sentence

Internet blackmail

Survey Flow

> **Block: Demographic info (3 Questions)**
> **Standard: Internet usage when under 18 (9 Questions)**
> **Standard: Inappropriate contact (14 Questions)**
> **Standard: Adult chat (7 Questions)**
> **Standard: Sexual chat (4 Questions)**
> **Standard: Blackmail (17 Questions)**
> **Standard: Have requested images? (8 Questions)**
> **Standard: Details of victims identified (0 Questions)**
> **Standard: Thank you (1 Question)**

Q41 This survey is part of a PhD research project at Nottingham Trent University investigating inappropriate online sexual approaches towards children.

This research is seeking to understand the use of blackmail against children to obtain indecent images from them, and how it can develop online through everyday social contact.

It asks you to think back to when you were under 18 and consider whether you received any inappropriate contact online.

You will not be asked to elaborate in great detail during the survey. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. Your data will be anonymised prior to analysis and stored securely, with strictly limited access. It will not be possible to identify you from the survey.   It consists of 6 sections - you may not be asked to answer all of them.

It is appreciated that some people may find this subject distressing - contact details are provided at the end of the survey for those wishing to seek further assistance.

Please tick this box to give your consent to taking part in the survey and to agree that you are over 18 years of age.
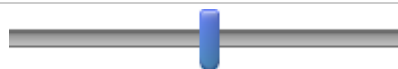
○   I am over 18 and consent to taking the survey (1)

○   I am not over 18 (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Q41 = I am not over 18

Q1 How old are you ?

	18 20 22 23 25 27 29 31 32 34 36
What is your age ()	

Skip To: End of Survey If Q1 [What is your age] >= 35

Q2 What is your gender ?

○   Male (1)

○   Female (2)

○   Transgender (4)

○   Other (3) _____

○   Prefer not to say (5)

Q57 **Section 1 of 6**

This part of the survey asks you to think about your Internet usage when you were under 18 and how it may have been controlled or restricted.

Q3 Did your parents/guardians restrict your Internet use when you were under 18?

○   Yes (1)

○   No (2)

Skip To: Q4 If Q3 = No

Q50 At what age were you allowed unrestricted use of the Internet?

○   Under 10 (1)

○   10-12 (2)

○   13-14 (3)

○   15-16 (4)

○   17 (5)

○   Over 18 (6)

○   Something else - please specify (7)

_____

Q6 How was your time on the Internet restricted ?

○   It was not restricted (4)

○   I was only allowed to use it at certain times (1)

○   I was only allowed to use it when supervised (2)

○   I was only allowed to use it under certain conditions (3)

Display This Question:
    If Q6 = I was only allowed to use it at certain times
    Or Q6 = I was only allowed to use it under certain conditions

Q73 Please outline the restrictions of your Internet use as a child

_____

_____

Q4 When you were under 18 did you use the Internet privately where you were not monitored by parents/guardians ?

○   All of the time (6)

○   Most of the time (1)

○   Some of the time (2)

○   Rarely (3)

○   Only in certain circumstances - please specify (4)

_____

○   Never (5)

Q11 Was your Internet use restricted via the Internet Service Provider or a monitoring app ?

○   Restricted by an app (1)

○   Restricted by service provider (2)

○   Restricted by both service provider and app (3)

○   Neither (4)

Skip To: End of Block If Q11 = Neither

Q72 Please name the apps or service provider that restricted your Internet use

_____

_____

_____

Q12 What type of Internet use was restricted ?

☐   Sexual content (1)

☐   Gaming (2)

☐   Gambling (8)

☐   Profanities (3)

☐   Chat sites (4)

☐   Social media sites (5)

☐   Age related content (7)

☐   Other - please specify (6)

_____

Q58
 Section 2 of 6

This section asks about your use of chat rooms or social networking sites as a child under 18.

- -

Q51 When you were under 18 did you use chat rooms/social networking sites ?

○   Yes (1)

○   No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Q51 = No

Q13 Thinking back to when you were under 18 years old -

When you used social networking sites or chat rooms, did people you didn't know try to establish contact with you ?

○   Never (1)

○   Sometimes (2)

○   About half of the time (3)

○   Most of the time (4)

○   Always (5)

Q52 Were you aware of their age ?

○   Never (1)

○   Sometimes (2)

○   About half the time (3)

○   Most of the time (4)

○   Always (5)

Skip To: Q15 If Q52 = Always

Q53 How did you feel about not always knowing someone's age?

○   Not bothered (1)

○   It worried me a little (2)

○   Concerned me a lot (3)

○   Something else - please specify (4)

_____

Q15 When you were under 18 -

When using social networking sites and chat rooms - did you consider any of the contact you received from people you did not know was inappropriate?

○　　Yes　(1)

○　　Maybe　(2)

○　　No　(3)

Q16 What made you feel the contact was inappropriate ?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q14 Please list the websites or apps that you received most inappropriate approaches on ?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q54 As an under 18 year old - how often do you feel you were you contacted inappropriately by unknown people?

○   None at all (1)

○   A little (2)

○   A moderate amount (3)

○   A lot (4)

○   A great deal (5)

Q15 Did you ever respond in any way to the inappropriate approaches ?

○   Yes (1)

○   Sometimes (2)

○   No (3)

Skip To: Q55 If Q15 = No

303

Q16 How did you respond to inappropriate chat or contact?

☐ Engaged in chat (1)

☐ Ignored (2)

☐ Blocked (3)

☐ Told them to leave you alone (5)

☐ Reported the incident (please specify who to) (4)

_____

☐ Other - please specify (6)

_____

Q17 What would you chat about when this happened ?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q55 When under 18 were you ever told how to respond to strangers on the Internet ?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q56 Who told you how to respond ?

☐   Parents (1)

☐   Teachers (2)

☐   Friends (3)

☐   Other - please specify (4)

_____

Q20
Section 3 of 6
This part considers your interactions with people who you didn't know prior to meeting them on the on the Internet, and were unsure of their age.

Please think about your Internet activity when you were under 18.

Q18
When under 18 - did you chat to people online who you had not met but thought may have been over 21

○   Yes - they approached me (1)

○   Yes - I approached them (2)

○   Yes - sometimes they approached me and sometimes I approached them (5)

○   No (3)

○   Something else - please specify (4)

_____

Skip To: End of Survey If Q18 = No

Q60 What made you think they were 21 or over

○   They told me (1)

○   They said they were under 21 but I didn't believe them (2)

○   They initially said they were under 21 but I found out later they were older (3)

○   Something else - please specify (4)
_____

Q19 When you were under 18

How often would you chat to an adult online who you did not know - but thought was over 21

○   Never (1)

○   Occasionally (2)

○   Frequently (3)

○   Other (4) _____

Q21 Did you chat in private, or on open chats that others could view ?

○   Private (1)

○   Open (2)

○   Both (3)

Skip To: Q25 If Q21 = Open

Q22 Who requested that you chat privately ?

○   They did (1)

○   I did (2)

○   We both wanted to (3)

Display This Question:
   If Q21 = Open

Q25 How appropriate did you think it was chatting with an adult you did not know who was older than you ?

○   Extremely appropriate (1)

○   Moderately appropriate (2)

○   Neither appropriate nor inappropriate (3)

○   Slightly inappropriate (4)

○   Extremely inappropriate (5)

○   Something else (6)

_____

Q66 **Section 4 of 6**

This part of the survey is asking you to think about when you were under 18 and chatted with people you hadn't met in person, but had met on the Internet.

Consider if they started to talk to you in a sexual or other way that you felt was inappropriate or uncomfortable.

- -

Q26 Did any of the adults you did not know that approached you online, start to talk to you in a way that you thought may be sexual or inappropriate for your age ?

○   Yes (1)

○   No (2)

○   Unsure - please explain (3)

_____

Skip To: End of Block If Q26 = No

Q63
How did this conversation make you feel?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q28 How did you deal with the person who talked to you in a sexual or inappropriate way ?

☐   Ignored (1)

☐   Blocked (2)

☐   Chatted to them about the subjects they raised (3)

☐   Told someone - please specify (4)

_____

☐   Other - please specify (5)

_____

End of Block: Sexual Interactions online

Start of Block: Blackmail

Q65 **Section 5 of 6**
This section asks you to think about people you spoke to online when you were under 18 who may have requested photos or video footage from you, or may have obtained them without you knowing about it.

- -

Q74 Did any of the people you spoke to online manage to obtain information about you without you knowing, either prior to, or during your online relationship with them.

○   Yes (1)

○   No (3)

- -

Display This Question:
   If Q74 = Yes

Q79 What information did they obtain?

☐ Passwords or log-in information (1)

☐ Files or images stored on my computer (2)

☐ Contact information for me (3)

☐ Contact information for friends (4)

☐ They could control my computer (5)

☐ Something else - please specify (6)

_____

Q75 Do you know how they obtained it ?

☐ I don't know how they got it (6)

☐ Malware / hacking (1)

☐ From social media sites (2)

☐ From friends/family (3)

☐ I may have given it to them by mistake (5)

☐ Other - please specify (4)

_____

Q63 Did any of the people who you spoke to online ask you for photos or videos that you felt were inappropriate in some way ?

○   Yes (1)

○   No (3)

Skip To: End of Block If Q63 = No

Q67 How often did this happen ?

○   1 time only (1)

○   2-3 times (2)

○   3-5 times (3)

○   5-10 times (4)

○   More than 10 times (6)

○   Never (5)

Q68 If you know - what age group did they fall into ?

- [ ] Under 18 (1)

- [ ] 18 - 24 (2)

- [ ] 25 - 34 (3)

- [ ] 35 - 44 (4)

- [ ] 45 - 54 (5)

- [ ] 55 - 64 (6)

- [ ] 65 - 74 (7)

- [ ] 75 - (8)

- [ ] Unsure (9)

Q64 What made you feel they were inappropriate?

- [ ] They asked for pictures/videos of me in my underwear (1)

- [ ] They asked for pictures/videos of me naked (2)

- [ ] They asked me for sexual pictures/vidoes (3)

- [ ] Something else (4)

_____

Q31 Did any of the people who you spoke to online pressurise you, or try and force you into providing personal photos, or videos, that seemed either sexual or inappropriate?

○   Yes (1)

○   No (2)

Q32 How did they pressurise you ?

☐   Threatened to post compromising images online (1)

☐   Demanded money (2)

☐   Threatened to destroy/damage computer or files (3)

☐   Published personal details online (4)

☐   Other - please describe (5)

_____

Q33 Did they carry out any threats they made to you ?

○   Yes (1)

○   Not sure (2)

○   No (3)

Q71 How did they carry out the threats ?

○   Posted personal information online (1)

○   Posted images/videos online (2)

○   Revealed information to people (3)

○   Something else - please specify (4)

_____

Q34 Did you provide them with the material that they had requested?

○   Yes (1)

○   No (2)

Q35 Did you tell anyone about this ?

○   Yes (1)

○   No (2)

Skip To: Q36 If Q35 = No

Q45 Who did you tell ?

☐   Parents / Guardian (1)

☐   Friend (2)

☐   Police (3)

☐   Teacher (4)

☐   Clicked on website 'report' button (5)

☐   Other - please specify (6)

_____

Q46 What if any action was taken by the person you told

○   No action taken   (1)

○   Reported to authorities   (2)

○   An investigation was started   (4)

○   Other - please specify   (3)

_____

Q36 How did you feel about this request for sexual material?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q69 **Section 6 of 6**
This final section of the survey asks you to think about whether or not you have asked other people for pictures or videos that might be considered as 'nudes' or contain material that is sexual.

All responses are confidential.

Q37 Have you ever asked anybody, of any age for naked, sexual, or explicit pictures ?

○   Yes (1)

○   No (2)

Skip To: End of Block If Q37 = No

Q77 How often have you asked someone else for naked, sexual, or explicit images/videos ?

○   1 time (1)

○   2-5 times (2)

○   5-10 times (3)

○   10 or more times (4)

○   Never (5)

Q70 What type of relationship did you have with the people you asked ?

☐   Girlfriend/Boyfriend/Partner (1)

☐   Online friendship - person you have not met (2)

☐   Friend you have met (3)

☐   Someone else - please specify (4)

_____

Q42 Did you have to persuade them to send you an image/video ?

○　　Yes (1)

○　　A little bit (2)

○　　A lot (3)

○　　No (4)

Q44 How did you persuade them ?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q38 Did they provide image/video following the request ?

○　　Yes (1)

○　　No (2)

Q43 What age category were they in ?

○　　Under 21 (1)

○　　21 - 40 (2)

○　　Over 40 (3)

○　　Prefer not to answer (7)

Q48 **Thank you for taking part.**
  If you feel that you need support and are a student, your Student Services have a process in place to advise you.
  At Nottingham Trent University, this is explained on the following link - https://www4.ntu.ac.uk/student_services/health_wellbeing/counselling/index.html
  You could also call one of many charitable organisations to discuss your concerns discreetly who can provide advice.
  One such organisation - Safeline, specializes in dealing with victims of sexual offences. They can be contacted on 08088005008 or

https://www.safeline.org.uk/   Victim support offer assistance to those who have been subject to a crime and are able to confidentially discuss and assist you. They can be contacted on 08081689111 https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/how-we-can-help   If following this research you would like to report or discuss a crime then this should be done to the police at   https://www.police.uk/information-and-advice/reporting-crime/

Appendix 5 – Information sheet

<div align="center">

Research participant information sheet

</div>

Project title - Blackmail via the internet: an exploration of the online coercion of children.

Thanks for thinking about taking part in this study.

Below are some details, which explain the project, the process, and why you have been invited to take part.

Purpose of study
This research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how an unusual form of online sexual exploitation occurs and the impact on those involved.

The study is being conducted to try and understand why adults go online and engage children in sexualized conversations and encourage them to exchange naked images.

The findings of the research will hopefully be of use in preventing children from being sexually exploited in the future.

Participants will be invited to tell the researcher their experiences in the form of an interview. The interview is tape recorded so it can be transcribed, studied, and analysed by the researcher.

A number of participants are sought who have experience of handling online sexual offences, to give a broad understanding and overview of the topic.

Can I say no
Taking part is entirely optional; you do not have to give a reason.

Even if you are interviewed but later change your mind you can still have your interview data withdrawn from the study.

As this research forms part of an academic study the researcher has to submit a thesis and academic papers of the research results. If a request to withdraw comes after these have been submitted it is difficult to remove data.
Although all requests will be respected, interviewees should realise that a late request for withdrawal from the research may cause difficulties in removing all data from written submissions. However, efforts will be made to accommodate wishes.

Why have I been asked to take part and what should I expect
You have been invited to take part as you work within the enforcement environment and have indicated that you deal with online sexual offenders as part of your job.

It is likely that the interview with you (the participant) will take 1-2 hours, although there are some questions the researcher will ask you, ultimately the interview is led by the you. It is your experiences that we would like to understand.

Research of this nature can become quite emotive as it involves thinking and talking about things that have happened to you, it is understood that this can sometimes be distressing. Everything that occurs within this interview is confidential, and it will be sensitive to your needs. You will be handed a leaflet after the research that details support networks that may be able to assist you if feel they would be of help to you.

Confidentiality of interviewees
The identity of the interviewees remains confidential to the researcher and their direct supervisory team. Participants will be allocated coded numbers and letters, which make them anonymous in the subsequent interview analysis. All steps possible will be taken to remove any identifying information within the text of the interviews.

This research is being conducted as part of a PhD study at Nottingham Trent University, and is independent of the Police, National Offender Management Service or any other public service.

The interviews will be analysed and then discussed within a written thesis or academic documents – no individuals will be identified from these.

Interview notes will be stored securely. Access will be strictly limited to those on the research team. Any subsequent interview analysis will have personal data removed to create anonymity of the interviewee. All documents created as a result of this project will be managed in line with data protection recommendations and be password protected/encrypted.

The researcher will take all possible care to maintain interviewee confidentiality.

Research Outcomes
Copies of the PhD thesis, and any academic papers created as a result of this research will be published via the academic library at Nottingham Trent University.
They are available upon request by interviewees.
All copies requested will usually be sent electronically.

Further questions
If you wish to ask further questions please feel free. The researcher is happy to be contacted. Details are listed below.

Who is conducting this research
Ian Baker a PhD student at Nottingham Trent University is conducting the research.
The research is supervised by Professor Belinda Winder and Dr Daria Kuss, and Rebecca Lievesley from the Social sciences department at Nottingham Trent University.
The research has been independently assessed and approved; it is also subject to an ethical approval process.

Further information is available from
Email – ****** or *******

Tel - *********

Appendix 6 – Consent form

NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY
Proforma: Research Consent Information Sheet

Research Title	Blackmail via the internet: **an exploration of the online coercion of children**.
Researcher	Ian Baker
Supervised By	Prof Belinda Winder, Dr Daria Kuss, Rebecca Lievesley

What is the purpose of this study?
To understand how and why people use blackmail against children to get them to send indecent images to them.

What are we asking you?
To take part in a recorded interview and tell us your experiences of dealing with sex offenders.
This will involve talking to the researcher for approximately 1-2 hours about your work.
You can take a break at any time, or finish the interview if you are not comfortable with it.
The process is entirely voluntary.
To allow the researcher to concentrate on what you are saying without having to take notes, the interview will be recorded.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?
Your participation does not involve any risks other than that you would encounter in daily life. If you are uncomfortable with any of the questions and topics, you are free not to answer.
However, some of the subjects that will be discussed may be considered sensitive, and might be distressing for you. If this is the case then you can ask for a break or stop the interview.

What if I change my mind
If you are interviewed and wish to withdraw from the research project afterwards then you are free to do so. Advise the researcher and all records and interview notes will be destroyed. As this is a research project with written submission deadlines any withdrawal requests made after December 2019 may be difficult to remove from written submissions, although every effort will be made to do so where possible.

Who should I call if I have questions or concerns about this research study?

You can contact the project researcher - Ian Baker via email or call the Doctoral School and leave a message; you will then be contacted as soon as possible.
Email – *******
Phone - *******

Your rights

What are my rights as a research participant?
You have the right to withdraw your consent and participation at any moment: before, during, or after the interview. If you do wish to withdraw your consent please contact me using my contact details as above (TIME FRAME).

You have the right to remain anonymous in any write-up (published or not) of the information generated during this interview.

You have the right to refuse to answer to any or all of the questions you will be asked.

You also have the right to specify the terms and limits of use (i.e. full or partial) of the information generated during the interview.

You have the opportunity to ask questions about this research and these should be answered to your satisfaction.

If you want to speak with someone who is not directly involved in this research, or if you have questions about your rights as a research subject, contact Professor Michael White, Chair for the Joint Inter-College Ethics Committee (JICEC) in Art & Design and Built Environment/Arts and Science at Nottingham Trent University. You can call him at 0115 848 2069 or send an e-mail to michael.white@ntu.ac.uk.

What about my Confidentiality and Privacy Rights?
Participation in this research study may result in a loss of privacy, since persons other than the investigator(s) might view your study records. Unless required by law, only the study investigator, members of NTU staff and the sponsoring organisation [details] have the authority to review your records. They are required to maintain confidentiality regarding your identity.

Results of this study may be used for teaching, research, publications and presentations at professional meetings. If your individual results are discussed, then a code number or a pseudonym will be used to protect your identity.

Compliance with the Research Data Management Policy
Nottingham Trent University is committed to respecting the ethical code of conducts of the United Kingdom Research Councils. Thus, in accordance with procedures for transparency and scientific verification, the University will conserve all information and data collected during your interview in line with the University Policy and RCUK Common Principles on Data Policy (http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/datapolicy/) and the relevant legislative frameworks. The final data will be retained in accordance with the Retention Policy. All data will be anonymised and made available to be re-used in this form where appropriate and under appropriate safeguards.

CONSENT FORM

Dear Research Participant

This study will be examining how children and teenagers are approached online and befriended by adults who then attempt to obtain illicit sexual images of them.
In order to encourage the child or young person to provide the images they may try to enforce the request by the use of blackmail. This research is examining how this happens and the impact it has, and how the police deal with it.

There are a number of questions we would like to discuss with you. However, you only need to respond to the ones you want to. There is no time limit on this interview it may be as long or as short as you wish. Most interviews last around 1-2 hours. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed into text form with identifying features removed (e.g. names and places). Relevant quotations may then be included in the final report. All recordings will be stored securely and remain confidential.

All participation in the project is voluntary. If do you agree to be part of the project, we would like to use the information to develop a report; but your name and identity will remain anonymous. If you decide at any stage, you no longer want to be part of the project, just let us know and we will make sure any information you have given us is destroyed.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Nottingham Trent University Joint Inter College Ethics Committee.

Please read the following statements:

I have read the above project description, and had an opportunity to ask questions about the research and received satisfactory answers to any questions.
I have had sufficient information to decide whether or not you wish to take part in the study.
I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time by informing the researcher of this decision.
I understand that the information I give will be treated in the strictest confidence.
I agree to take part in the study.
I agree that this interview can be recorded.
I understand that quotations, which will be made anonymous, from this interview may be included in material published from this research.
I am willing to participate in an interview as part of this research project.
I understand that anonymized data may be used in other studies in line with the University Research Data Management Policy

I confirm that data obtained from the study can be used in the final research report. I understand that the data will be used anonymously: names, places and identifying details will be changed.

Full Name _____

Date _____

If you have any questions please contact   ******
In line with the Research Data Management Policy, requests may be made to use data from this study for other projects.   If you do not wish your anonymized data to be used for future studies please tick here ☐

Appendix 7 – Interview guidance schedule

Introduction and Rapport – questions are guidelines
Tell me about yourself, age, background, where are you from, what do you do,
family members, friends, hobbies and interests.
Education/work experience
What is your family/home life like?

Internet usage as child/teenager
Tell me about Internet usage as a child/teenager
When did you start using Internet and why, how much time spent online.
What sort of sites visited, and why.
Explain what level of parental supervision was in place for Internet use.
Was the use of Internet private or in a place where your parents could see you – was
this a personal choice?
What was it that Internet usage offered you as a child that you enjoyed?
What didn't you like about it.

Explain online sexual approaches
You indicated in a survey that inappropriate approaches had been made to you online
– tell me about those.
What was your online 'profile', i.e. how did other people see you ?
How often did people approach you on the Internet in this manner?
Why do you think they approached you
How did the online and relationships develop.
How did this make you feel
What was the impact of this on you/how did it affect you
During your encounter were you asked to give naked or sexual images of yourself
How did this make you feel and how did you deal with it.
Were attempts made to try and force you into providing this material?
How did you respond to it?
Who did you tell about it (why or why not).
What happened when you told someone?

Current Internet usage
Tell me about you Internet usage now
Has it changed as a result if so, why
What was the Impact on you and those around you as a result of the online
encounters?

Closure
Clarify understanding of unclear points
Summarise and review
Thanks and further contact

Appendix 8 – HMP Whatton request for participants notice

NOTTINGHAM
TRENT UNIVERSITY

Can you help – interview volunteers required to help prevent adults from following a route to online offending against children?

I am conducting a research project with Nottingham Trent University; it is aimed at understanding how adults contact under 18s and develop an online relationship with them. It is examining the process where adults request sexual images from under 18's, and overcome any initial resistance from them to provide the images.

Sometimes this is referred to as 'sextortion' in the media.

The purpose of the research is to identify any factors that may prevent adults from following this course of action, and to lessen the chances of children becoming victims. By improving our understanding, we are able to better prevent its commission in the first place.

I would like to interview a selection of people who have been convicted of an offence where they persuaded an under 18 year old to provide images/videos of them-selves via the Internet.

The interviews are confidential so no names or identifying information will ever be revealed.

For further information, please send an app for the attention of Ian Baker or Belinda Winder at the Psychology department. We will arrange to meet you in a private interview room to tell you more about the research so you can decide if you want to take part.

Appendix 9 – Offender participation information sheet

NOTTINGHAM
TRENT UNIVERSITY

Research participant information sheet

Project title - Blackmail via the Internet: an exploration of the online coercion of children.

Thanks for thinking about taking part in this study.

Below are some details, which explain the project, the process, and why you have been invited to take part.

Purpose of study
This research aims to provide an understanding of how a form of online sexual coercion occurs and the thought processes that occur with those involved.

The study is being conducted to try and understand why adults go online and engage children in sexualized conversations and encourage them to exchange naked images.

The findings of the research will hopefully be of use in preventing children from being sexually exploited in the future, and to help prevent adults from following this offending pathway.

Participants will be invited to tell the researcher their experiences in the form of an interview. The interview is tape recorded so it can be transcribed, studied, and analysed by the researcher.

A number of participants are sought to give a broad understanding of the topic.

Can I say no ?
Taking part is entirely optional; you do not have to give a reason.

Even if you are interviewed but later change your mind you can still have your interview data withdrawn from the study.

As this research forms part of an academic study the researcher has to submit a thesis and academic papers of the research results. If a request to withdraw comes after these have been submitted it is difficult to remove data.
Although all requests will be respected, interviewees should realise that a late request for withdrawal from the research may cause difficulties in removing all data from written submissions. However efforts will be made to accommodate wishes.

Why have I been asked to take part and what should I expect
You have been invited to take part as you have been convicted of a sexual offence possibly similar to that being researched by this study.

It is likely that the interview with you will take 1-2 hours, although there are some questions the researcher will ask you, ultimately the interview is led by the you, the participant. It is your experiences that we would like to understand.

Research of this nature can become quite emotive as it involves thinking and talking about things that have happened to you, it is understood that this can sometimes be distressing. You will be handed a leaflet after this research that details support networks that may be able to assist you if this research causes distress.

Confidentiality of interviewees
The identity of the interviewees remains confidential to only the researcher and their direct supervisory team. Participants will be allocated coded numbers and letters, which make them anonymous in the subsequent analysis, any references to interview responses in the research will be to the given coded names, all steps possible will be taken to remove any identifying information within the text of the interviews.
All possible care will be taken to ensure that participant identity remains confidential unless certain circumstances regarding criminal activity and risk of safety apply[28].

This research is being conducted as part of a PhD study at Nottingham Trent University, and is independent of the Police, National Offender Management Service or any other public service. Your confidentiality will be fully respected unless certain circumstances apply (see footnote 1).

The interviews will be analysed and then discussed within a written thesis or academic documents – no individuals will be identified from these.

Interview recordings will be encrypted and stored securely. Access will be strictly limited to those on the study. All interview transcripts will have personal data removed from them to prevent identification of the interviewee. All documents created as a result of this project will be subject to data protection laws and password protected/encrypted.

The researcher will take all possible care to maintain confidentiality.

Research Outcomes
Copies of the PhD thesis, and any academic papers created as a result of this research will be published via the academic library at Nottingham Trent University.

They are available upon request by interviewees.

All copies requested will usually be sent electronically.

Further questions
If you wish to ask further questions please feel free, the researcher is happy to be contacted. Contact details are below, messages can be passed to the researcher via a member of prison or Psychology staff.
Just bear in mind it can take a while for the message to filter through.

---

[28] If during an interview a participant raises a matter which could be reasonably considered as being an undetected criminal matter; or one that threatens the personal safety of an individual the relevant investigating authority will be notified.

Who is conducting this research

Ian Baker a PhD student at Nottingham Trent University is conducting the research.
The research is supervised by Professor Belinda Winder and Dr Daria Kuss, and
Rebecca Lievesley from the Social sciences department at Nottingham Trent
University.
The research has been independently assessed and approved; it is also subject to
ethical approvals.
Further information is available from
Email – ************

Appendix 10

Research Questions

(i)   **How does online child sexual abuse develop?**

(ii) **Why do offenders blackmail children for sexual purposes instead of using other easier methods to gain indecent images?**

(iii) **What are the experiences and understanding of the police as they investigate this problem?**

Indicative interview schedule for offenders

1 Introduction / Rapport building
Opening and thanks
Interviewee - demographic data, background, family life, interests etc
Enquire about friendships and relationships, (social circles, family arrangements and how feel about them).
Establish any career or lifestyle to date
Notable experiences when growing up, how did this impact upon them, and how did they deal with them

2 Relationships and personality
Explore social life / friends / working life relationships
Sexuality and preferences including relationships prior to arrest and now
Problems experienced in life

3 Internet usage
History of internet use
What used for - Type of sites and why
Personal Impact of Internet on life
Explore social media usage
How behaviour online and offline may have changed
Explore arrest and impact on life

4 Offending behaviour
Explore development of offending.
Processes used
Goals and what led to success
Victim sources, profile and management
Reaction of self and victim to offending
Coercion process

5 Reflection
Probe the impact of your online activity, arrest and sentencing on home/family/work life
How feel about the victims (sexual, empathy, no feelings etc)
What would they change or do differently?
Explore prison experience, impact, and changes in life during and on release
Clarify any points unsure of, and summarise understanding
Thanks

Appendix 11

Sex * How did you feel about not always knowing someone's age ?		How did you feel about not always knowing someone's age ? - Selected Choice				Total
		Not bothered	It worried me a little	Concerned me a lot	Something else - please specify	
Male	Count	27	25	2	5	59
	Expected Count	16.9	29.5	9.1	3.5	59
Female	Count	88	176	60	19	343
	Expected Count	98.1	171.5	52.9	20.5	343
Total		115	201	62	24	402

Appendix 12

When you used social networking sites or chat rooms, did people you didn't know try to establish contact with you ? * Sex - Crosstabulation		Sex	
		Male	Female
Never	Count	14	13
	Expected Count	4	23
Sometimes	Count	35	193
	Expected Count	33.5	194.5
About half of the time	Count	3	58
	Expected Count	9	52
Most of the time	Count	6	57
	Expected Count	9.3	53.7
Always	Count	4	39
	Expected Count	6.3	36.7
Total	Count	62	360

Appendix 13

Sex * Did any of the adults that approached you online, start to talk to you in a way that you thought may be sexual or inappropriate			Yes	No	Unsure - please explain	Total
Sex	Male	Count	11	20	4	35
		Expected Count	23.1	10	1.9	35
	Female	Count	135	43	8	186

		Expected Count	122.9	53	10.1	186
Total		Count	146	63	12	221
		Expected Count	146	63	12	221

Appendix 14

Did they try to pressurise or force you to provide sexual or inappropriate images		Yes	No	Total
Male	Count	5	7	12
	Expected	6.1	5.9	12
Female	Count	59	54	113
	Expected	57.9	55.1	113
	Total	64	61	125

Appendix 15

Did you provide them with the images they requested?		Yes	No	Total
Male	Count	7	5	12
	Expected Count	3.2	8.8	12
Female	Count	26	87	113
	Expected Count	29.8	83.2	113
Total		33	92	125

Appendix 16

Have you ever asked anybody, of any age for naked, sexual, or explicit pictures ? * Sex		**Sex**		**Total**
		Male	**Female**	
Yes	**Count**	18	50	68
	Expected Count	10.6	57.4	68
No	**Count**	16	135	151
	Expected Count	23.4	127.6	151
Total	**Count**	34	185	219

Appendix 17

Examples of interview notations

Interview 1

P - Congrats too! Yes, both mum and dad and brother. Not really close, weren't back then either.

I - Ok - why was that

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P - On reflection (a lot of reflection!), they didn't really know what they were doing as parents, so they ended up being abusive/emotionally neglectful etc. I'd say I resented them all my life up until about a month ago, where I had a paradigm shift, and now I know that they just were naive/ignorant. Not an excuse, but can't change the past

I - No indeed - so how did you feel about this as you grew up into a young adult

62

P - Lots of feelings mashed up, lots of hurt, anger, hostility, sadness. Lots of psychological issues, lots of ongoing therapy. I know though that only I can change how I feel about things.

I - OK - i know it can be hard to describe these things but do you think that

Ian Baker
48 – very dismissive of family ties both past and present form the outset – this is in variance from what is suggested in comment 1

Ian Baker
53 – Has been reflective about family

Ian Baker
53 –strong criticism to levelled at parents, could this be a reflection on the difficulties she presented them with.

Ian Baker
54 – these are all feelings based thoughts as opposed to physical, perhaps an indication of an inability to deal with own emotions and reach reasonable middle ground with people

Ian Baker
55 – a lot of ill feeling towards parents until recently.

Ian Baker
55 – something changed outlook. Blaming of parents seems to stop and a shift in focus occurs

Ian Baker
56 –blaming parents for problems - they are focus of negative aspects of life

Ian Baker
62 – Mixture of feelings as a child that made life difficult

Ian Baker
62 – recognition of problems and treatment

Ian Baker
63 – realisaton that only she can improve things

Interview 6

P – Not really, obviously I'd been like told don't talk to strangers, you know don't do things. But I was never fully aware of like why I shouldn't .

I – Yeah

P – Like you know you get the talks in schools being like, don't ever give up personal details, don't tell blah, blah, blah. But like, never, I like didn't know why you couldn't. Like there wasn't, for me, any immediate threat, I didn't know that there were strange people who could potentially do all these nasty things to children. I wasn't aware. So my mum would always be like – just be careful of what you're doing and who you're speaking to – and that would be it. Like they were just talking to me, like what possible threat could they be? So yeah I never really fully understood like the dangers of the Internet. I never knew there was, I didn't see it as, the Internet as dangerous.

Ian Baker
213 – had been advised not to talk to unknown people online, and not to do certain things

Ian Baker
213 - No understanding of why restrictions were suggested

Ian Baker
219 – didn't fully understand implications of warning given in school over internet use

Ian Baker   August 06, 2018
221 - If threat cannot be seen or understood then how should they realise

Ian Baker
222- did not realise that predators used internet

Ian Baker
224 – although given warnings did not understand what could happen

Ian Baker
225 – didn't believe there was any danger in her actions

Ian Baker   June 21, 2018
227 – went onto internet to socialize and play, did not understand that it could present a risk

Appendix 18

Example of grouping of notations from victim interview transcripts

Line	Group A	Line	Group B
14	Feeling of vulnerability	15	Confused thoughts and feelings
679	Sometimes declined to do things not happy with	790	Believed boys interested in developed girls
954	Scared of friend finding out what had been going on so would continue to talk to him	791	Wanted to feel loved by father who was absent from parental home
944	Not wanting to go back home to computer (when involved in sending pics)	351	Felt boys her age immature
676	Did not want to want to perform any sexual acts	358	Confused about relationships
891	Re-emergence of abuser from past made her feel vulnerable	546	Made to feel wanted by older male - connected with father leaving recently ??
893	Realisation of potential impact of online relationship	780	Believed online activity was part of growing up

Appendix 19

Example of initial thematic area development from grouped notations of victim interviews

Feeling isolated/lonely	Needing to feel wanted	Using the internet to escape from problems	Not making the right choices	Failing to deal with online risks	Minimising what was happening	Not fully understanding what they were being used for	Not telling anyone	Being forced into sex	Being made to feel uncomfortable	Unwanted sexual pictures and talk
1d - Feeling isolated	6h - being made to feel wanted	1f - Escaping from a difficult life	8i - Inconsistant or erratic values/views	6c - Knowing somethings wrong but ignoring therisks and signs	6i - understating sexual abuse	7n - naivety about intentions of online contacts	6k - keeping secrets from family and friends	1c - Feeling compelled to comply to maintain relartionship	2d - not enjoying the sexual attention	2e - unwanted sexual approaches and pictures
3l - socially isolated	1b - Boosting self esteem by using chat sites	3p - needing online friendships	3b - no consideration to online risks and actions	8c - not reducing risks	7i - understating and ignoring the problems	6o - confused about relationships and sex	7d - keeping secrets from family and friends	3c - lured and pressured into sending pics	3j - doing things not comfortable with	4i - feeling exposed to unsolicited sex
3m - problems with beng isolated	8n - using social media to increase self worth	5i - able to be herself online without fear of bullying	8l - refusing to recognise what is causeing problems	9h - not taking action against those contacting		6g - Not seeing implications of actions	1i - hiding the truth	2g - feeling pressurised to provide images	4h - made to feel vulnerale	9g - receiving unwanted images

333

Appendix 20

Examples of interview notations

Interview 2

18	with equality and everything, but what I consider normal. And
19	probably towards the end of secondary school I started looking. My
20	attraction is young boys, that's my problem. And so towards the end
21	of the secondary school, I started to look at some and think, oh, OK,
22	he's nice. And I'm like, oh, no, no, no. And then sort of toward the end
23	of my teens when I was going out drinking with my mates, and
24	playing football, and doing all the normal things that a guy would do.
25	Erm I started to feel more towards that. Even though I was taking
26	girls back and having sex, it was. It was erm. And then I just started to
27	veer down a path that ultimately, I preferred.
28	
29	I – Yeah
30	
31	P – And I don't know if that (unintel) women was just sort of the
32	norm. Do you know what I mean, I. So yeah that was my starting
33	point. Where I realise if I had those feelings and I was able to talk to
34	my family about them and get help as early as possible, I think that
35	may have helped me. But I just think its not really, its not well I don't
36	think its possible. I mean my family are supporting me now, I feel I
37	could talk to them about anything really, apart from that really.

Ian Baker
22 – feelings caused conflict in his mind as he didn't think it was right

Ian Baker
22 – trying to be similar to friends

Ian Baker
25 interested in boys grows

Ian Baker
25 – confused sexually about what he wanted

Ian Baker
26 –feelings/attractions dictated where his sexuality led

Ian Baker
33 – didn't feel able to talk about feelings to family.

Ian Baker
34 - retrospectively thinks being able to talk about it may have helped

Ian Baker
35 – still doesn't feel able to talk t0 family about his sexual preferences

Interview 8

212	
213	P – Erm, I was bailed and whilst I was on bail, the police obviously -
214	their investigation, erm, dug up a few more bits and bobs. They came
215	when I was er. When I was bailed back I turned up at the station and
216	was further arrested for several different offences. I'd been inside for
217	a little bit, and then I had to go back to (location) for some offences
218	that took place prior to the (location) stuff.
219	
220	I – Right

171 – an unusual choice of words considering circumstances involved and the seriousness of them

Ian Baker
171 – minimising situation

Ian Baker
173 – downplaying/minimising aspects of offending

Ian Baker   April 07, 2019
167 –suggests internet offences were not the first offences

Appendix 21

Example of initial grouping of notations from offender interview transcripts

Appendix 22

Example of initial thematic area development from grouped notations of offender interviews

Participant		Super - ordinate themes		
P1	Shifting responsibility of actions	Uncomfortable with self	Difficulty attaining social acceptance outside of fmaily	Morphing from social media to gratification
P2	Failing to deal with sexual confusion	Nothing to prevent online abuse occurring	Personal shame	Becoming addicted to sexual encounters
P3	Becoming stressed by inability to find partner/maintain relationship	Finding the wrong solution to problem	Making himself feel better	Not thinking about what he is doing
P4	Avoiding personal insecurities	Reacting to trauma as a child	Evolving online persona	Unchecked and increasing paraphilia
P5	Making self feel better at expense of victims	Failing to address personal problems	Finding a reason not to blame self	