European
Online
Grooming
Project_

Final Report

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1. Executive Summary

Background

- The sexual abuse of young people via the Internet is an international problem, a crime without geographical boundaries. Solutions both to perpetrators' use of the Internet and to the safety of young people online must be sought and will necessarily involve agencies working to protect young people at local, national and international levels. Action 3.1 of the Safer Internet Plus programme invited proposals for projects that aim to enhance the knowledge of the online sexual abuse of young people, with a particular focus on online grooming.

- Online grooming is defined as the process by which a person befriends a young person[1] online to facilitate online sexual contact and/or a physical meeting with them, with the goal of committing sexual abuse.

Aims

- The European Online Grooming Project research consortium is comprised of experts from across Europe and was tasked with meeting the following research objectives:
    - describe the behaviour of both offenders who groom and young people who are 'groomed',
    - describe how information, communication technology (ICT) may facilitate online grooming,
    - identify how young people are selected and prepared by online groomers for abuse online,
    - contribute to the development of prevention initiatives aimed at parents and young people.

Methods

- The project had three separate but interlinked phases. The first was a scoping project that involved a literature review, review of police case files and interviews with key stakeholders. Phase 2 of the research involved in-depth interviews with 33 male offenders convicted of online grooming in the UK, Belgium and Norway. Online groomers' chat-logs were sourced from Italy. Phase 3 encompassed twelve focus groups with young people in the UK, Belgium and Italy. The aim of these groups was to understand young people's online behaviour in the context of the groomers' accounts, and explore young people's view of online risks and current safety initiatives. In addition, seven dissemination events were held with teachers, parents and professionals in Belgium, Italy, Norway and the UK in order to promulgate the key findings from the project.

- This report brings together findings from the main stages of the European Online Grooming Project - the in-depth interviews with online groomers, focus groups with young people, and dissemination

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[1] For the purpose of this report, young people are defined as those age 16 years or younger.

events with key stakeholder groups. The scoping report and literature review have been published and are available for download at the project web-site[2]

Characteristics of Online Groomers, Technology and Websites

- Online groomers are not a homogenous group in terms of their demographic and offending characteristics. Scores on Full Scale Intelligence Quotient (FSIQ) standardised tests were high, with a FSIQ score of over 110 common. The current offence of online grooming also tended to be the first conviction for the sample.

- Limited education or training in ICT *was not* a barrier to achieving a sophisticated understanding of computing and the Internet. Learning was developed at the workplace and/or by covertly watching the behaviour of family members online. Desktop computers, laptops as well as gaming consoles were all used to facilitate online grooming. The map of sites and chat-rooms accessed by participants encompassed: **social networking sites; instant messaging; online dating/romance; image exchange; and sexual abuse sites**. Finally, the extent of some groomers' activity meant being online for four to six hours (outside of work) a day.

Features of Online Grooming

- Six features of online grooming were identified alongside two important concurrent factors: offence maintenance and risk management. Movement through the different features of online grooming was neither unitary nor linear. Instead, it was cyclical and involved a pattern of adoption, maintenance, relapse, and readoption.

- The process of online grooming was described as taking minutes, hours, days or months. Consequently, online groomers remained at different behavioural points for various lengths of time according to a dynamic inter-relationship between their goals and needs, and the style, needs or reactions of the young person.

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[2] http://www.europeanonlinegroomingproject.com/

The Features of Online Grooming

Maintenance Factors

Risk Management

Vulnerability

Relationships

Situations

Scanning

Mapping

YP Appraisal

IT Security

Identity

Own

Extent Changed

Online Spaces

Dissonance

Perception of YP

Contact

Mode

Style

Extent

Timing

Intensity

Images

Language

Incentives

Private Spaces

Outcome

Online contact

Physical meeting
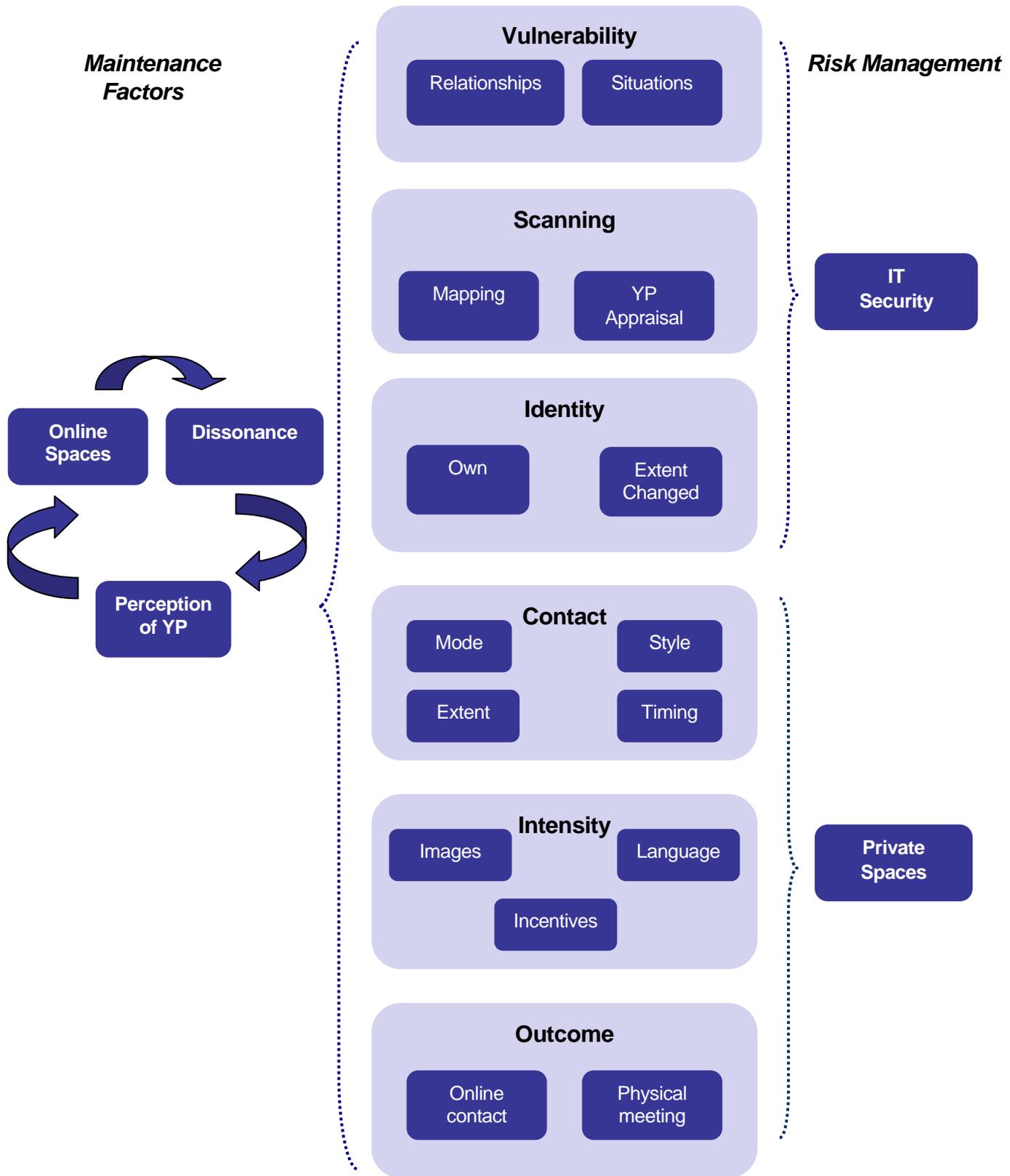
Vulnerability

- The men described event(s) that made them vulnerable and low and so triggered their underlying goal or desire to contact and groom a young person. **Situational factors** included being made redundant from work, or losing their home. There was also the breakdown of **interpersonal relationships** such as a partner or spouse leaving the offender, or an argument with a friend.

Scanning

- Some men did not immediately begin to groom the first young person they encountered online. Instead, some offenders scanned the online environment to make an 'informed' decision about who to approach for sexual contact. Scanning encompassed *being in online spaces* where young people meet to identify the nature of different conversations and what friends were saying about other young people in the forum. Scanning also involved *appraising the characteristics* of particular young people online. Three types of appraisal emerged: **virtual-sexual**-interpreting the screen name or forum tag; **idealistic/romantic**-looking for young people who would be good in a 'relationship'; and **physical characteristics**-using images of the young person to identify whether they were physically developed enough to warrant potential online contact. In contrast to those scanning, there were also men who did not hide an immediate and explicit desire for sexual contact with young people.

Identity

- Online identities were shaped to present the men positively to young people. There were men that described making **'minor' changes** to their identity such as changing their name, age, marital status or using a younger (perhaps more attractive) photograph of themselves. Some men made these minor changes to their identity based on unsuccessful previous attempts at contact. There were also people that made **major changes** to their identity. Here changes went beyond amending age or name, and could involve pretending to be a young girl or woman. Some offenders also talked about using multiple concurrent identities online, and switching between them to maximise the opportunity of contact. Finally, there were online groomers that did **not change their identity** before or during their online encounters with any young people. Alongside listing legitimate details, some men were also explicit about their sexual interest in young people. That some of these men went on to develop contact with young people raises important questions about the vulnerability of some young people online.

Contact

- Contact with young people online was made and sustained in four ways.

Mode

- **Forums and chat-rooms** were used for text communication that continued until the encounter with the young person ended, or escalated into a physical meeting. Alongside text chat, some offenders

also described using **webcams**[3] as a key part of their offending behaviour. Webcams reinforced, strengthened and maintained grooming by bringing some offenders' fantasies to life. **Phones** were used to contact young people and were described as being a more immediate and intimate method of contact. Finally, **online game platforms** were used by some men that were attempting to groom young boys. Grooming via game platforms helped to reinforce the *fantasy* aspect of offending behaviour and gave the men *credibility* in the eyes of the young men being approached.

Extent of contact

- The number of young people online across time zones meant that some men had sexual conversations with dozens of young people concurrently. In contrast, some online groomers were very particular about whom they spoke to. For those groomers speaking to a number of young people, keeping on track with multiple conversations was a challenging task. To manage this, some described strategies such as logging conversation histories on Excel spreadsheets, or using other coding schemes to monitor conversation 'progress'.

Style

- A 'typical' grooming approach was not always used. The identity of some men online was denoted by a picture of their flaccid penis as their avatar or a profile name such as *PussyLicker69.* Here limited conversation and an instant sexual request/act characterised these approaches. For those men that did not make instant sexual requests, a deliberate process of *gentle socialisation* was described. Here the approach was tailored to meet the needs of the offender and/or the perceived needs of the young person and encompassed three styles. **Complimentary** (using language to explicitly flatter the young person); **mentor** (presenting themselves as somebody to discuss and solve the young person's problems**)**; **experience congruence** (approaching young people that shared similar interests or life experiences). In addition, some adopted a style of text to present themselves favorably. This included using *text-type* ('*Hi gorgeous hope to cu l8r')* and *emoticons*[4].

Timing

- Online groomers talked about spending seconds, minutes, days, months and even years talking to young people. For those offending quickly, the Internet has speeded up the process of child sexual abuse. That is, the anonymous, disinhibiting properties of the Internet are allowing offenders to behave in a sexually explicit way, at a speed that would be almost impossible to replicate face-to-face with a stranger offline.

Intensity

- Online groomers intensified contact using three desensitisation techniques.

Visual

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[3] A webcam is a video capture device connected to a computer or computer network. Their most popular use is for video telephony, permitting a computer to act as a videophone or video conferencing station. This can be used in messenger programs such as Windows Live Messenger, Skype and Yahoo messenger services.

[4] An emoticon is a textual expression representing the face of a writer's mood or facial expression. For example, :), :(, and :D. They have now been replaced by pictures such as

- Visual desensitisation involved sending young people adult-pornography and/or indecent images of children. Where online groomers talked about a gradual process of offence intensity and escalation, images were used to instigate sexual discussion. Use of images also intensified the abuse process for the offender. For example, it was not uncommon for some offenders to describe masturbating to ejaculation whilst discussing images with young people.

Language

- Running concurrently to visual desensitisation, some men created further process momentum by using language to encourage and reassure the young person. Here a *'sexual test'* was given to young people that could involve an explicit or subtle **sexual discussion**. The choice of approach was influenced by how the young person was presenting online. For example, a young person's provocative screen name could be used to introduce sexual topics. Where there was nothing to indicate a sexualised young person, sex was more subtly introduced. In addition, competitions to masturbate to ejaculation or telling sexual jokes helped promote **sex as entertainment**.

Incentives

- The incentives described were either **gifts** or **threats**. **Gifts** included topping up mobile phones, providing new phone handsets, sending webcams to young people, and offers of cash. Providing gifts to young people as part of the sexual offence process is also a common tactic used by men who sexually offend offline.

- There were two forms of **threat** described by some offenders. The method selected depended on whether the groomer wanted the young person to begin sexual contact, or continue behaving sexually. *Where the young person had not yet acted sexually,* there was an example of one offender hacking into the computers of young people to encourage them to act-out sexually. *Where the young person had been behaving sexually online*, some offenders also talked about making explicit threats to encourage the young person to continue. For example, threatening to make public indecent images of the young person.

Outcomes

- For some online groomers, being able to continue to collect images and engage with young people in a sexual way was the desired outcome - a meeting or any longer-term contact for these offenders was not the goal driving their offending behaviour. However, there were also accounts of a physical meeting between the young person and offender as the final outcome. Meetings were held in hotels, car-parks, parks, bus stops, and the offender or young person's bedroom. Meetings could take place on a single or multiple occasions with the same young person.

Offender Maintenance and Risk Management

- Given the view of society towards sexual offenders, and the negative emotions some offenders associated with their thoughts about young people, some online groomers needed to motivate themselves and to some extent, give themselves permission to continue grooming.

Maintenance

- Offence maintenance occurred in three, interlinked ways.

Online environment

- Although low self-efficacy (offline) was described by some online groomers, the Internet was a place where some men could socialise with **confidence**. Influencing this confidence was the extent of potential opportunities to offend and how the Internet provided the men with the opportunity to separate their online self from their real world identity. The online environment was also a place where some men felt more alive or **stimulated**. Here the mundane aspects of life were described as being mitigated by the excitement of going online and behaving in a way that was not possible in the offline world. Some groomers also talked about being **addicted** to the Internet, where feeling tense and almost obsessed with the need to go online was a recurrent theme. Finally, the **disinhibiting** properties of the Internet helped to *maintain* online grooming offending behaviour as set out in the figure below:
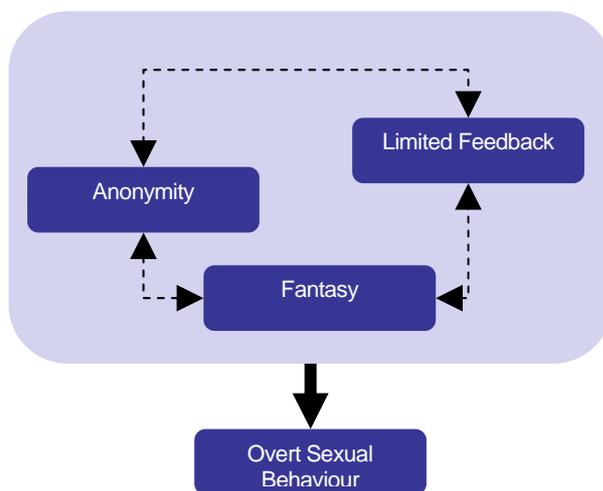
  - **Anonymity:** some men used the anonymous nature of the Internet to maintain and escalate their offending behaviour.
  - **Fantasy**: running concurrently to anonymity is the belief that the offending behaviour was part of a fantasy life.
  - **Limited Feedback:** a lack of visual interaction meant some men did not have to attend to accepted conversational norms indicating displeasure, such as a frown or shake of the head.
  - **Overt Sexual Behaviour:** the final feature of disinhibition maintenance was influenced by the previous three and so allowed the men to normalise their sexual behaviour online.

Dissonance

- Cognitive dissonance is the discomfort of holding conflicting cognitions simultaneously. Three features of dissonance were evident. The first was the influence of **adult and child images.** Adult pornography use was a recurrent theme, with some users searching for adult models that were 18 or

19 years old, but looked younger - labeled and marketed as a 'barely legal' category. Collections of indecent images of children ranging from none to collections in excess of 20,000 were also described by some men. Indecent images were sourced from commercial sites; swapping or trading with other adults; or from mainstream file-sharing sites. The *relative ease in which illegal content could be sourced* was an important maintaining feature - some talked about viewing pornography and indecent images as a normal part of their life. The *scale of indecent material* available online also had a bearing on some behaviours - with so much material online to view, groomers do not feel isolated or 'different' viewing the content. As well as maintaining or supporting online sexual offending, for some online groomers viewing adult pornography and indecent images of children was discussed as having a role in *escalating deviant behaviour* by:

- o **Saturation**: some men did not become so easily aroused when masturbating to a particular type of image. Consequently they moved from images they saw as mild to material that was ever more explicit and thus arousing again.
- o **Denial of harm to child**: the features of some images were focused on to justify and continue offending, such as those showing the young person smiling.
- o **Fantasy:** indecent images helped 'bring to life' the young person being groomed online. For example, one participant talked about asking a young person to describe themselves in detail so he could quickly match that description to an indecent image. The image was then used during masturbation whilst concurrently chatting to the young person
- o **Demand fuelling status:** as well as meeting individual needs, there was also kudos and credibility in being a provider of indecent image material. In turn, this made some individuals feel important and so want to create and share more images of abuse.

- The second feature of dissonance that helped to maintain online grooming was **online chat.** This took place in 'labeled' venues for men (i.e. *Cherry-Popping Daddies*) with a sexual interest in children and young people. Such explicit labelling helps to reinforce the idea that this behaviour is legitimate and acceptable. The second type of area for chat was unstructured Newsgroups[5] or ad-hoc discussions with other men on message boards.

- The third feature of dissonance was **offence supportive beliefs.** These are the maladaptive beliefs and distorted thinking that play an important role in facilitating or justifying sexual offences. A wide range of distortions were acknowledged by the men that encompassed: *harm reduction views* - by not physically meeting or touching a young person the behaviour was less harmful; *socio-affective*

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[5] A Usenet newsgroup is a location, usually within the Usenet discussion system, for messages posted from many users in different locations. Newsgroups are technically distinct from, but functionally similar to, discussion forums on the Internet. Newsreader software is used to read newsgroups.

reasons - here low self-efficacy underpins the reasons given to justify offending; *external locus of control* - the sense that some men felt addicted to, or trapped by the Internet.

Perceptions of young people and behaviour

- The final feature of online maintenance involved the online groomers' perceptions of young people. These perceptions were underpinned by: *how the young person looked online* - whether the young person was physically developed, looked mature for their age, or was 'just under' the legal age of consent for sexual activity; *how the young person behaved online* - young people who posted sexual pictures, used sexual language about themselves or other people, were seen as sexually mature and willing for chat.

Risk Management

Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) logistics

- The use of ICT was adapted by some men to manage the risk of detection. These steps included: using **multiple hardware**, for example, purchasing a laptop or smart-phone for the sole purpose of offending that was then hidden to avoid probation monitoring. **Multiple ISP addresses** and multiple proxy servers[6] were also used to hide the actual location of the offender. **File labelling and storage** management encompassed changing file extensions of indecent images; filing indecent images in a hidden hard drive, directory or folder; and using external devices to store indecent material.

Conversation management

- Having a chat in any open space was described as risky so some online groomers asked for the **private email address, postal address or mobile telephone number** of the young person. The **language** used in some encounters was also tailored to minimise the risk of detection and so encourage the young person not to disclose the abuse.

Offending location

- Some online groomers picked young people and meeting locations far away from their own homes so they were less likely to be recognised in a new environment. This behaviour was particularly pronounced amongst the groomers from Belgium and Norway. However, not all online groomers adopted risk management behaviours. For some individuals, their view was that they were not doing anything wrong and so there was no need to hide their actions. This is explored further in the next part of the summary that presents three types of online groomer.

Typology of Online Groomers

- Three types of online groomer were identified across eight behavioural dimensions. These dimensions were whether the offender: had any previous convictions for sexual offending; used their own or another identity; the nature and extent of indecent image use; if they contacted other offenders online; the type of offence-supportive beliefs described; the speed of contact made with

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[6] A proxy server is a server that acts as an intermediary for requests from clients seeking resources from other servers. The main aim of proxy servers is to keep machines behind it anonymous and help to bypass security / parental controls.

young people; how contact was made and sustained; and the outcome of the offence (online offending and/or offline meeting).

Intimacy-Seeking

- Men in this group did not have any previous convictions for sexual offending. They had offence supportive beliefs that involved seeing contact with the young person as a *'consenting relationship'*. As such, they did not change their identity in any way as they wanted to be liked for who they were. They did not get involved in other online behaviours that indicated to them, and others, that they were sexually offending. Consequently these men did not have any indecent images of children and they did not have any contact with any other sexual offenders online. This group spent a significant amount of time talking to the young person online before meeting to develop or further the *'intimate relationship'*.

Adaptable Style

- These men tended to have previous convictions for sexual offending against children. They had offence supportive beliefs that involved their own needs and seeing young people as mature and capable. Unlike the group above, they did not discuss the encounter in terms of a 'relationship'. Some men had indecent images of children but these were not significantly large collections. They also tended not to have significant contact with other sexual offenders online. *The key feature of men in this group is that they adapted their identity and grooming style according to how the young person presented online, and reacted to their initial contact*. Contact developed quickly or slowly, depending on how the young person responded to the approach. Risk management was a feature for this group with hidden folders and sometimes extra computers/phones that could be used for online grooming.

Hyper-Sexualised

- These men were characterised by extensive indecent image collections of children and significant online contact with other sexual offenders. Some men also had significant collections of extreme adult pornography. They adopted different identities altogether, or had an avatar picture that was not of their face but their genitals. Contact with young people was highly sexualised and escalated very quickly. Their offence supportive beliefs involved 'dehumanising' young people. They tended not to personalise contact and so did not tend to use the phone to groom young people. In this group, meetings were less prevalent than the adaptable and intimacy seeking groomers. Some of these men also had previous convictions for having indecent images of children.

Young People Online

- From the behaviour of online groomers and their accounts of young people online, it was possible to note the characteristics of victims. However as this was second-hand information it may be open to distortion, although evidence from the Italian chat logs provided some substantiation.

Typology of Young People Victimised

- A categorisation of victims was developed indicating those 'vulnerable' and those 'risk takers'.

Vulnerable victims	Distinguishing themes	Risk-taking victims	Distinguishing themes
Need for attention and affection	- Loneliness - Low self-esteem	Disinhibited, seeking adventure	- Outgoing - Confident
Relationship with parents and home lives difficult	- Psychological disorder(s) - Concurrent sexual abuse	Young people (and offender) feel they have control	Complicit and consenting to sexual contact
Seeking 'love' online - believe they have a true relationship with groomer.	- Offender as 'mentor' - Self-disclosure and joint problem solving	Less known about family, but less confident on meeting than online.	- Offender re-assessment on meeting - Introverted or immature at meeting
Resist disclosure - want to continue the relationship.	Loyalty	Open to blackmail due to apparent 'complicity' – own behaviour used as evidence of cooperation.	Non disclosure of abuse, threats and computer intrusions

Matching Grooming Style with Young People

- We can only speculate upon links between the style of online groomer and young person at this time. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that it is exactly this meshing of the characteristics which helps expalin the specific dynamics observed during online grooming. A framework was developed on the hypothesis that for at least a proportion of the interaction, some **'matching'** was at play between groomer and victim profile. What is meant by matching is the aligning of grooming style with victim profile, with a view to maximising the likelihood of contact, and fulfilling the groomers need, whether for more intimacy, or more sex.

Offender Type   Victim Type
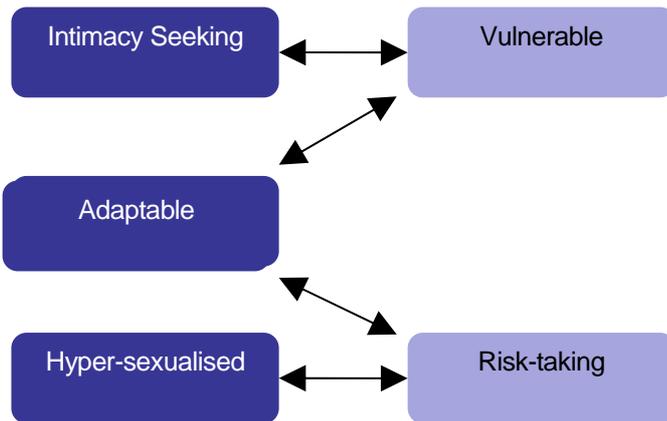
Offender Type	Victim Type
Intimacy Seeking	**Vulnerable**
Adaptable	
Hyper-sexualised	**Risk-taking**

More information needed on
- Psychological profile
- Attachment/vulnerability
- Disinhibition/regulation
- Context and protective factors

- The *'intimacy- seeking'* groomer seems likely to match with the vulnerable victim, since both want intimacy and both mistake the online interaction for a real romantic relationship. Both seem needy in terms of confidence and support, and both want to continue the interaction over a long period and to make it exclusive. The *adaptable groomer* can develop his style to meet the needs of either type of young person. The *hypersexual* groomer is likely to interact with the risk-taking young person, given their attraction to the use of sexual screen names, and use of sexual chat. Both seem to want the adventure of an online sexual interaction, and are open about wanting sex.

Resilient Young People

- From the accounts of online groomers, there was evidence of resilient young people that refused to engage online. The key features of young people's resilience (from offenders accounts and the academic literature) were the ability to: recognise risk and fend off any approach they consider 'weird', understand safety messages, feel confident about rejecting advances and informing others, coming from more secure backgrounds. The groomers did not particularly show annoyance at conversations ending abruptly, nor did they feel rejected. The anonymous nature of the online interaction meant that there was little sensitivity to rejection.

Young People Online: Focus group data

- Twelve focus groups were conducted across the UK, Italy and Belgium with young people age 11 – 16 years. The aims of this phase of the research were to understand: the nature and extent of Internet use; young peoples understanding and awareness of online safety; their experiences,

behaviours and strategies to stay safe online; social networking behaviours; their knowledge and attitudes regarding online groomers; their attitudes to online safety awareness advice and training.

Nature and extent of Internet use

- Time spent online ranged from 5 minutes to 6 hours as a maximum. The older group age 14-16 spent longer online which is consistent with literature about online behaviour in the teenage years. Personal computers (PCs) and personal laptops were used during the week for searches related to homework.   At weekends more time was spent social networking and, in the case of the older group, this was conducted from their mobile phones rather than PCs or laptops.

- There was both congruence and incongruence between online groomers' behaviour and young people's current use of the Internet. For example, some online groomers used **online gaming platforms** to make contact with young boys. In the focus groups there were no examples of girls using gaming consoles to go online. **Webcams** and **MSN** were also described by the groomers as a popular mode of contact; however, young people indicated a more limited use of this hardware and forum.   These different patterns could be explained by the retrospective nature of the online groomers' interview accounts and how technology is evolving. Finally, the online groomers tended to take interactions to private spaces where possible. Young people described **where they used the Internet** as a matter of convenience and expediency; however, the bedroom did seem to be the preferred location and was influenced by the need for privacy.

Online safety

- Three **risk awareness** themes emerged from the group discussions. First, was the concept on **non-disclosure** and encompassed people not sharing information about their private life to strangers, or meeting people they do not know (stranger-danger). In schools where there had been no safety awareness, some young people (particularly those from the 'vocational' education stream) talked about meeting someone under particular circumstances. For example, if they were attractive. Second were risks to the **health of their computer and thus the young person**. Here, getting hacked and/or people taking control of webcams to spy on them were discussed. The final category is labelled '**no knowledge'** as some young people were unable to articulate any awareness of risk.

- **Risk-management strategies** for the young people meant having settings to 'private', not giving out phone numbers or addresses and specifically not giving out passwords. It appeared that much of the online safety practice had been learnt 'by doing' rather than through explicit advice. This was particularly evident where there had been no awareness training in school. Sources of unstructured learning tended to be from siblings and parents.

Social networking - Facebook

- The popularity of Facebook was striking and virtually all young people used the site. Where Facebook was not used, it was because the young people were not yet old enough to access the site.

Adding friends

- Facebook friends ranged from 50 to 1000. Irrespective of the actual number of Facebook friends, a sense of **competition** to have more friends underpinned this aspect of Facebook behaviour. Here there were examples of some young people adding friends they had not met. Despite the competition influencing how friends are added to Facebook, some safety messages are getting through. That is, the pressure and competition to have many friends was discussed by one of the older girls as a concern about younger children using the Internet.

Profiles and privacy settings

- Some young people had their **profile settings** on 'public'. This meant anyone using the Internet can access the page and discover personal details about the young person. These young people tended to come from 'vocational' education streams. For those that had their settings on 'private', influencing this behaviour were safety awareness sessions in school, or parents that were aware of safety issues and also users of Facebook. There were also some young people in this group who talked about having good awareness, but had not yet put the learning into practice.

- Acceptable **profile content** was name, gender, birthday, 'information about your life', and the name of the town lived in. In addition, some young people used profile names such as 'Squiggle' or 'JackiesGirl'. Given that some profiles were public, and some online groomers scan profile information to target particular people - this is risky practice. The information seen as not suitable to post on profiles was personal addresses and phone numbers. When 'relationship status' on profiles was discussed, there was a difference between the countries in terms of the type of information posted. This behaviour was not mentioned at all in the UK groups, but did feature in the Belgium and Italian groups. Given some online groomers perceive young people as mature and ready for contact, openly disclosing relationship status has safety implications.

- **Fake single or multiple profiles** on Facebook were also discussed. Here young people developed multiple profiles in response to safety risks and so posted different information on each profile according to who they expected to view the page.

Awareness and Perception of Online Groomers

Awareness of grooming

- In some cases the word 'groomer' was an unfamiliar term. When definitions were established, descriptions of online groomers tended to be stereotypical depictions of old, unattractive or 'sick' people. These attitudes suit some online groomers' approach if they present themselves attractively.

Perceptions about approaches

- The range of responses reflected understanding of how groomers may socialise with young people and attempt to relate to the young person by wanting to learn more about them. The information gathered from young people was encouraging as they show that some safety messages about the type and style of approach are being understood.

Approaches received, appraisal and actions taken

- Some young people shared experiences of receiving inappropriate approaches. In fact, an approach by some that they judged as 'suspicious,' seemed to be an almost expected experience. The **identity** and **escalation** features of online grooming were the point when young people became aware of a potential risk. Here, not trusting someone referred to persistence by the 'stranger' trying to communicate. Some young people also described men that made fast sexual contact with explicit sexual behaviours. Beyond general suspiciousness of some approaches, the style of language used by online groomers was discussed as a key identifying marker of risk. For example, clumsy attempts at shorthand, excessive use of emoticons were all described as signs of a 'fake approach'.

- Young people's responses to an approach covered three themes. **Immediate action** - consistent blocking of messages or ignoring inappropriate requests. **Risky behaviours** - keeping strangers phone numbers and continuing to chat online until things seem suspicious. **Extent of disclosure** – a common feature across boys and girls accounts was they deal with things alone and doing so was not much of a problem. Boys in particular tended to be more resistant to the idea of telling anyone about inappropriate online approaches, girls tended to tell a friend. There was some resistance to telling parents or carers, influenced by a fear that their computer privileges would be removed.

Attitudes to Safety Training

- The **style or approach of the training provider** distinguished attitudes to safety training. In Italy all training seemed to be welcome, in the UK, some young people wanted to relate to the provider. This did not necessarily mean the provider needed to be someone of a similar age, but people who liked Facebook. There was a sense that some parents were fearful of Facebook, and so some young people were sceptical about the advice the parent gave. Therefore an open and balanced delivery does seem to **influence the credibility of the message**. Some younger girls in the sample had been put-off Facebook (temporarily) and other social networking sites on account of earlier safety awareness initiatives. Ultimately this is not helpful given that not all online interaction is going to be

harmful. The young people were clear that **education programmes need to target younger children**. The suggestion here was that the younger children are more vulnerable precisely because of their desire to get online and their **competitiveness** to have as many friends as possible.

Implications: Applying the Research to Practice

Safety initiatives in a public health model

- The potential scale of victimisation of children or young people online makes the issue one of public health, given the population base of potential victims and the damaging impact on children's mental health and even physical health following abuse initiated online.

Prevention   **Treatment**

Degree of Harm to YP

Contact /exposure harmful materials   *Physical Contact*

Awareness for parents & educators

Managing Online Grooming: A Collaborative Approach

Tailored treatment for victims

Policy Makers, Education, Criminal Justice, Psychological Services, Social Workers, NGOs, Charities

Secure online environments

Offender assessment & intervention programmes
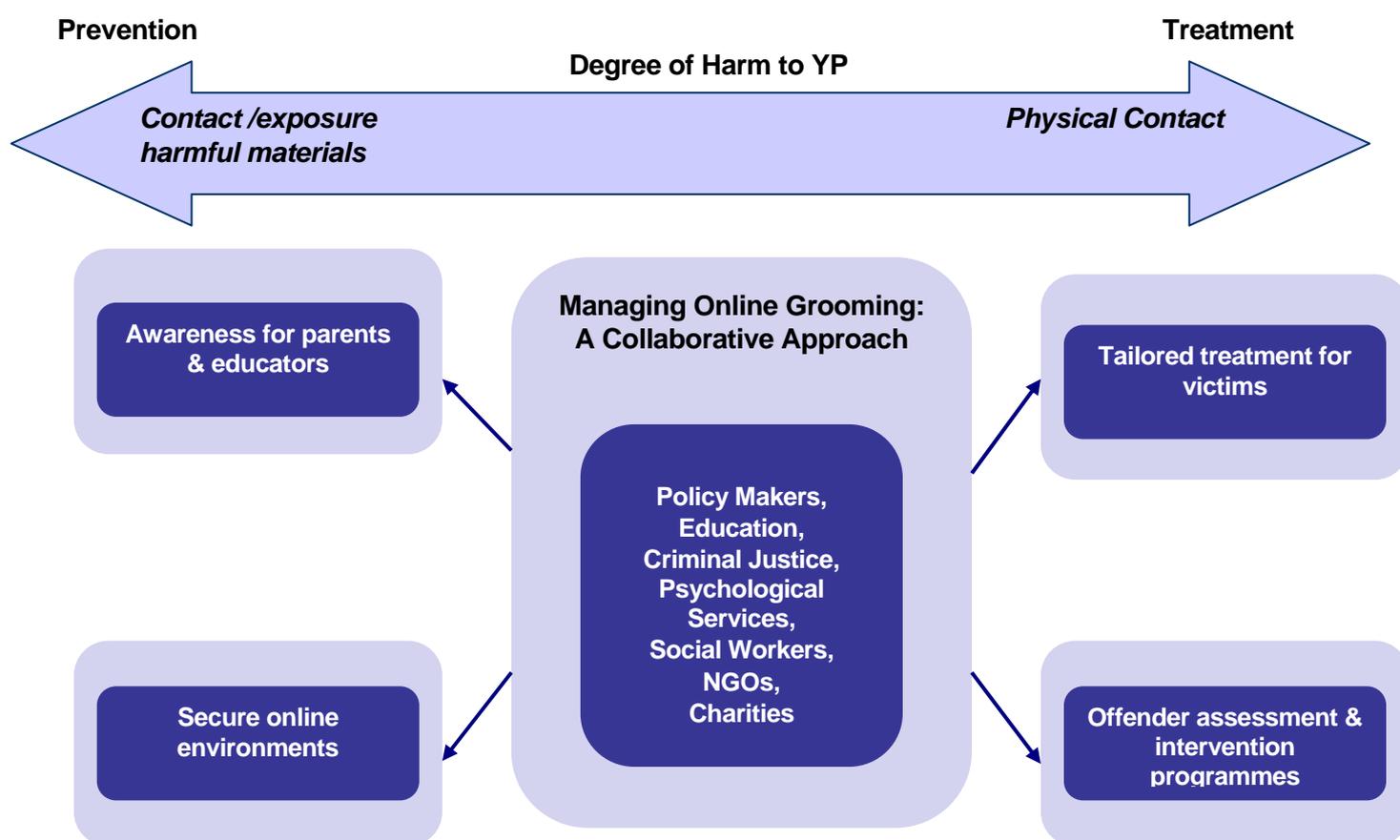
Public protection and intervention packages

- Safer Internet Programmes have led to much greater provision of information and awareness across Europe. However lack of awareness about online risk is still a problem. From this research with online groomers and young people, gaps in safety campaigns were identified regarding the **content of messages** and **how they were delivered.**

Content gaps

- Some young people still have **no knowledge** about online risks

- Some young people did not understand the term '**grooming**'

- There is mixed awareness with regard to the **benefit of private profile pages**

- Descriptions of online groomers tend to be **stereotypical perceptions** that do not mirror reality

- There is limited awareness of how some offenders **scan the online environment** for information

- There was **no awareness of continued abuse online by collecting images** without a meeting

- **Internet enabled mobile phones** is an emerging risk not acknowledged by young people

- Limited awareness of the **potential risk in continuing conversations** with unknown contacts

- The **importance of disclosure** is not embedded in an understanding of risk management. To engage young people and parents with this information messages could encompass:

  - **targeted approached for boys and girls** and **identified vulnerable children**

  - **sharing information beyond peer groups,** to encourage disclosure by friends/siblings

  - people **will not be seen as unintelligent** if mistakes are made online.

Process gaps

- To empower and engage young people, a **punitive, fear-based approach** does not seem effective

- Parents to encourage disclosure of harm. **Internet access as a home privilege undermines the potential for disclosure**

- **Parents and carers** have a key role to play in providing compelling, balanced information about online risks. Significant others require accurate information about online behaviour and risks.

How can the industry contribute

- Multi-national organisations have done much to fund and assist the promotion of online safety. However, a sense of competition when social networking encouraged some young people to accept unknown adults as friends, with profile pages of use to groomers kept open. Therefore, can social networking sites keep all settings private when an account is opened, with the onus on the user to unlock settings rather than having to lock them retrospectively?

- In addition, can more be done to prevent the sharing of indecent images and discussion of offence-supportive beliefs on forums that promote the sexual abuse of young people? Indecent images and offence-supportive helped maintain the online offending process, therefore, any intervention from the Industry to limit this type of behaviour would be welcome.

Online groomers assessment and treatment needs

Risk assessment

- For online groomers without offline contact histories and no previous conviction, it is not clear if current **static risk** assessment scales can be reliably used. For static scales to accurately assess

the future risk for online grooming, it would be helpful to consider the *number of people contacted online* and whether *multiple identities were used*. The **dynamic risk factors** it would be helpful to consider include: *the role of indecent images and sexual chat in maintaining the offence process; the impact of the online environment on disinhibition, with particular regard to anonymity and identity masking.*

Treatment approaches

- Internet Sexual Offenders can receive a diverse range of interventions across Europe. Therapies differ according to the model adopted by the therapist, or organisational preference if delivered in institutions. The range of treatment options and how this research may contribute to programme content is set out below.

Approach	Considerations for Treatment of Online Groomers
Addiction model	- aspects of online grooming as an addiction (time spent online, compulsion to go online, collection of indecent images).
Cognitive-behavioural model	- online offenders treated separately or mixed in with a group of contact sexual offenders? this research suggests groomers share many characteristics with those offending offline, - nature of online disinhibition included in programme content for online sexual offenders, - develop risk, need, responsivity treatment targets pertinent to findings from the features of online grooming, offence maintenance/images, and type of groomer presenting, - develop psychometric measures of treatment change that measure the offence-supportive beliefs described by online groomers in this report, - consider pairing CBT with pharmacological treatment (hormonal drugs that reduce sexual drive) for the hyper-sexual groomer obsessed with indecent images.
Psychodynamic model	- what does Internet pornography and indecent images of children offer and the role of a virtual second life?
Good lives model	- evidence of strengths include: pro-social activities that took place online; some men had the skills and capability to learn how to build computers and operate ICT in a sophisticated way - suggests potential that could be used positively.

Raising awareness across key stakeholders

- A core aim of this research was to empower professionals, policy makers and parents with robust information to manage the risks presented by online grooming. Seven events were run in the UK, Italy, Norway and Belgium with parents, teachers and professionals working with offenders and young people.

- The key learning messages from **parents** encompassed greater awareness of how online groomers can use the Internet and enhanced knowledge of how young people are operating online, and the associated potential risks. In particular, there was a sense that the concept of being a parent is evolving, as are new technologies. As such we need to equip parents with the right information for them to feel empowered and cascade that learning to their children.

- Events with **teachers** were also well received. In Italy, some of the feedback concerned the report 'not telling them anything that they did not already know'. This is encouraging as it indicates that our sample of Italian teachers are equipped with good information about online grooming. In Belgium however there seemed to be an implicit view that the problem of online harm felt almost unmanageable. The final dissemination events involved groups with **professionals** working with offenders, and/or survivors online grooming. The overarching feedback was that the professionals had gained additional and detailed knowledge about online grooming to help their work.

- From the accounts of stakeholders, online groomers and young people, the European Online Grooming Project has presented a series of implications for safety campaigns, the Internet industry and the assessment and management of online groomers. We argue that if the challenge of online grooming is to be robustly tackled, it is helpful for online grooming to be understood as a public health concern. This will enable a joined-up response to a multi-dimensional problem. This in turn will help identify and target the needs of different young people and online groomers, and ensure we do everything possible to keep people safe online.

2. Introduction

This report presents findings from the European Online Grooming Project. The research was commissioned by the European Commission Safer Internet Plus programme and conducted by a collaboration that encompassed: Stephen Webster, NatCen Social Research; Julia Davidson and Julie Grove-Hills, Kingston University; Antonia Bifulco, Royal Holloway University of London; Petter Gottschalk, The Norwegian School of Management; Vincenzo Caretti, University of Palermo and Thierry Pham, University of Mons-Hainaut.

This chapter outlines the research and policy context, the aims and objectives of the study, and the design and methodology used during the research.

2.1 Scale of the challenge

The availability and widespread use of digital technology has transformed the way in which we consider children and young people to be at risk of harm. Despite the widely acknowledged benefits that Internet use provides in terms of school work and information seeking, as well as leisure in the form of games, communicating with peers and the development and maintenance of friendships through social networking sites, there are clearly risks that children can be exposed to, with the potential for personal harm. We now know from recent large scale European surveys (EU Kids Online) that online Internet activity is thoroughly embedded in children's daily lives, with 93% of 9-16 year old users going online at least weekly with 60% going online every day or almost every day (Livingstone et al 2011a). Whilst traditionally this has been higher in teenage users, the age at first going online is now getting younger, with an average age of first Internet use of 7 in Denmark and Sweden and 8 in various Northern European countries including Norway and the UK (Livingstone et al, 2011b). Excessive Internet use is identified as high in Belgium and the UK (43-44%), but with the lowest rate in Italy (17%) showing variability across the EC.

However, the EU Kids Online survey, found that as many as 41% of European 9-16 year olds have encountered online risks (Livingston et al, 2011). The most common risky activity reported by children was that of communicating online with new people not met face-to-face, affecting 30% of European children aged 9-16. Particular risks have been identified in relation to use of Social Networking Sites (SNS) with 38% of 9-12 year olds and 77% of 13-16 year olds having a profile online, but with age restrictions only partially effective and younger children more likely to have a public profile. Parental rules for SNS use are only partly effective, and a quarter of SNS users communicate online with people unconnected to their daily lives. One fifth of children whose profile is public, display their address or phone number and younger children are shown not to understand features designed to protect children using SNS. In terms of safety skills online, Italy is among the lowest in the EU study, with the UK slightly above average, but below Norway. Age is clearly an important factor with different developmental levels related to different exposure and risk status.

Girls appear to be at higher risk, and more likely to have had a 'threatening' experience online, but boys are twice as likely to do nothing about such an experience. (Davidson, Lorenz, Martellozo & Grove-Hills, 2009). Girls are also more likely to make use of the social aspects of the Internet (notably instant messaging and social networking sites), and appear more willing to share personal information and to interact with strangers. In terms of risk for online grooming a large survey of 1718 young people across the UK aged 11-16 revealed that 42% had received electronic attachments from strangers; 37% had added a stranger to their instant messaging and 35% added a stranger to their social networking friends group. Online risk-taking by young people is therefore common (Davidson et al, 2009).

Online offending

Offenders who perpetrate technology mediated crimes against children, fall into two principal categories. Those who use the Internet and mobile phones to target and 'groom' children for the purposes of sexual abuse (Finkelhor et al, 2000); and those who produce and/or download indecent illegal images of children from the Internet and distribute them (Quayle & Taylor, 2001, 2002, 2003; Quayle, 2009; Davidson & Martellozzo, 2005, 2008: Davidson 2007). Although some recent research has been conducted that explores online offender behaviour (Martellozzo, 2009; Hernandez, 2009; Seto, 2009, Elliott & Beech, 2009) we have limited knowledge about the nature of sexual crimes against children mediated through information and communication technologies, those who perpetrate them and the impact of these crimes on children. We have even less knowledge regarding the nature of the link between online abuse and contact offending. This lack of knowledge understandably underpins insecurities and anxieties evidenced by those within the criminal justice system tasked with making decisions about the nature of these offences and the risk they pose to vulnerable groups within our society (Davidson, 2007, Quayle 2009).

Existing offender research has focused almost exclusively on intrapersonal aspects of offending, ignoring the interpersonal, group and situational factors that influence the perpetration of online sexual offences against children. This research goes some way to address this gap exploring offender behaviour in the context of the use of technology. Quayle and Taylor (2003) comment on the possible motivations of online child sex abusers. It is suggested that sex offenders perceive the Internet as a means of generating an immediate solution to their fantasies. Factors including presumed anonymity, disinhibition and ready accessibility, undoubtedly encourage offenders to go online, it is also acknowledged, however, that the unique structure of the Internet may play a major role in facilitating online child abuse. This is not to suggest that the Internet creates online abuse, but situational theoretical approaches to sexual offending emphasise the importance of the context in which offending occurs and is facilitated (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). It is probable that the Internet has unique characteristics that both sustain and direct child sexual abuse through image collection and online grooming - findings from our study certainly support this contention.

Indecent child image collection

The number of indecent images of children on the Internet is difficult to estimate, during 2011 the US National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) received 161,000 reports of child pornography and reported a growth of 86% in reports from 2009 to 2010. NCMECs analysis of these reports concludes that the growth in such images has risen exponentially, with increasingly violent images depicting sexual abuse perpetrated against often very young children and infants (cited in Report of the Supreme Court of the United States, 2011). This figure represents a fraction of those images reported and in reality it is recognised that millions of indecent child images are currently in circulation on the Internet (Carr & Hilton, 2010).

Early groundbreaking research in this area conducted by Quayle and Taylor (2001, 2002, 2003) explored the behaviour of offenders collecting and distributing indecent child images and suggested that the material found in offender collections ranged from pictures of clothed children, through nakedness and explicit erotic posing, to pictures depicting the sexual assault of the child photographed. This constitutes what Taylor et al (2001) has referred to as a continuum of increased deliberate sexual victimisation. This continuum ranges from everyday and perhaps accidental pictures involving either no overt erotic content, or minimal content (such as showing a child's underwear) at one extreme, to pictures showing actual rape and penetration of a child, or other gross acts of obscenity at the other.

Therefore, attention is focused not on just illegality as a significant quality of the pictures, but on the preferred type of pictures selected by the collector, and the value and meaning pictures have to collectors: '*The images then are seen as not only reflecting the ways in which children are victimized but also how such victimization is mediated by the use to which the images are put*' (Quayle, 2009, p10). However, it is not necessary for the picture to depict an actual assault on a child for it to be used in an abusive or exploitative way (Quayle, Lööf and Palmer, 2008), as offenders may collect images for their own use and/or may swap images with other offenders. Carr's (2004) study, in which he analysed the images used by offenders, indicated that the vast majority selected material portraying Caucasian and Asian children and Baartz's (2008) Australian data describing the gender, ethnicity and age of the victims portrayed in the images examined by investigators also suggests that they were mostly white, westernized females, aged between 8 and 12 years. The lack of knowledge about children being abused through photography is reflected in the relatively small numbers who are ever identified. However Microsoft and the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children in the US have recently developed a new technology called PhotoDNA to assist in the identification of known child victims in indecent images.

Prevalence of online grooming

Whilst there is some evidence that incidents of sexual abuse reported to services is reducing in the UK (NSPCC, 2011), evidence is also accruing for increases in sexual abuse incidents which are initiated or performed with the use of new technologies (ICAC, 2000). This includes a wide range of technology-related behaviours. For example, Internet and mobile phone use for stranger grooming of youngsters for on-line or

off-line abusive contact with the child; the creation and distribution of indecent and abusive images of children, often by known adults or peers as a currency in paedophile rings or to aid with the grooming and 'normalising' in the coercive compliance process. This extends to the use of cameras for creating still photographs or films of abusive acts as part of the abuse ritual and for later distribution and means of humiliating and controlling the child (ECPAT International Report, 2005). Thus, the technological elements can involve cameras, Internet communication through chat rooms or games and mobile phones. In addition to sexual abuse from strangers through the online groomer 'travelling' to meet the child for offline abuse, other dangers include known persons such as peers posting sexually explicit pictures of the victim, or from family members involving the creation of indecent abusive images of the child in the home. These activities are all inter-related (although the extent is not known) and some victims may encounter all of them.

Whilst the investigation of sexual abuse involving ICT is new, there is evidence of increasing prevalence from UK, US and cross-European studies (CEOP; Finkelhor et al, 2000; EU Kids on Line, 2009; Swedish Youth Study). It is not known whether the children successfully targeted overlap with those already known to be at high risk for non-ICT related sexual abuse, or whether new categories of children and young people are being accessed for sexual abuse through the increased use of new technologies and its large reach. Evidence described earlier about children and young people's greater exposure to risk through use of the Internet may result in an escalation of sexual abuse of children and young people through these new sources of access, which need to be taken seriously.

The psychological and social impact of the ICT aspects of sexual abuse on victims' have only recently been explored and are still little understood. This includes the psychologically abusive aspects of humiliation, emotional blackmail, exploitation, abuse of trust and terrorising which can accompany grooming and public distribution of abuse images creating feelings of shame and guilt (Palmer & Stacey, 2004, Nyman, 2008). A study of 83 Barnardo's cases showed long-term, chronic psychiatric disorder impacts, including depression and suicide attempts, with preoccupation with shame and guilt and damaged self esteem (Palmer 2005). The added impact of the photographing of victims is highlighted as a source of distress and disturbance and a failure to get closure after the offender is sentenced, given these remain in circulation. Further research is needed to establish the effects of ICT aided sexual abuse in order to inform interventions for victims and appropriate sentencing for offenders. For this a more detailed exploration of psychologically abusive techniques in the grooming and abuse process need elucidating, and their impact in terms of psychological damage on victims, which is beyond the scope of the present study.

Current policy context

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) children have a right to protection from all forms of violence. Article 34 of the UNCRC commits states to 'protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse…' and to take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to that end. Article 19 seeks to protect children from all forms of abuse:

'States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child'. http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm#part1

The UNRC is clear regarding under 18 being the age of consent but there is geographically wide variation. Defining childhood in this way is clearly problematic and this issue continues to prove a barrier to any international consensus in child safeguarding law. The UNCRC also contains important general principles which should be taken into account throughout all relevant legislation and measures, including the principle that the child's best interests should be taken into account in actions which affect them. There is also an Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography which is the only universal treaty specifically addressing this topic. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has been set up to monitor the implementation of the convention by states, but it is unfortunate that the convention has no real legal teeth and cannot force states to follow its recommendations.

Political initiatives at National and EU level

The concept of sexual grooming is well documented in the sex offender literature (Finkelhor, 1984), and is now filtering into legislation policy, crime detection and prevention initiatives. The UK was the first member state to introduce the new offence category of 'grooming'. The Sexual Offences Act (2003) in England and Wales, and Northern Ireland and the Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences Act (2005) in Scotland includes the offence of '*meeting a child following certain preliminary contact*' (section 1). 'Preliminary contact' refers to occasions where a person arranges to meet a child who is under 16, having communicated with them on at least one previous occasion (in person, via the Internet or via other technologies), with the intention of performing sexual activity on the child. The definition of UK 'grooming' legislation is provided by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) (England and Wales):

'The offence only applies to adults; there must be communication (a meeting or any other form of communication) on at least two previous occasions; it is not necessary for the communications to be of a sexual nature; the communication can take place anywhere in the world; the offender must either meet the child or travel to the pre-arranged meeting; the meeting or at least part of the journey must take place within the jurisdiction; the person must have an intention to commit any offence within or outside of the UK (which would be an offence in the jurisdiction) under Part 1 of the 2003 Act. This may be evident from the previous communications or other circumstances eg an offender travels in possession of ropes, condoms or lubricants etc; the child is under 16 and the adult does not reasonably believe that the child is over 16'. (CPS, 2007).

Norway (2007), Sweden (2009) and the Netherlands (2010) are the only other European countries to have adopted the grooming legislation. The relevant sections in the General Civil Penal Code ("straffeloven") concerned with sexual offenders in Norway are: Section 195. Any person who engages in sexual activity with a child who is under 14 years of age shall be liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years. If the

said activity was sexual intercourse the penalty shall be imprisonment for not less than 2 years, and Section 196. Any person who engages in sexual activity with a child who is under 16 years of age shall be liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years. Section 201a is the new grooming section in Norwegian criminal law. This section was included in The General Civil Penal Code in April 2007. : *With fines or imprisonment of not more than 1 year is any person liable, who has agreed a meeting with a child who is under 16 years of age, and who with intention of committing an act as mentioned in sections 195, 196 or 200 second section has arrived at the meeting place or a place where the meeting place can be observed.* In Norwegian law the grooming section refers to *the intention of committing an act*. However, the perpetrator must actually appear for a meeting (sometimes a police trap), an intention to meet is not enough.

The Swedish legislation on grooming intended to target adult contacts with children for sexual purposes. A report by ECPAT Sweden suggests that the legislation has not been acted upon effectively (ECPAT 2012) . The legislation came into force on July 1, 2009 and has so far resulted in only one conviction. The report describes the current legislation as '*weak and ineffective'*. In the Netherlands three convictions had been made under the legislation (Article 248e Dutch Criminal Code) by May 2011(Kool 2011), although substantially more convictions have been made in the UK.

There has in recent years been a concerted attempt to enhance the protection of children through political initiatives at EU level. In 2003 the EU adopted a Council Framework Decision on '*combating the sexual exploitation of children and child pornography*' committing EU member states to bringing their national laws in line with the standards it contains, including criminalising child pornography and other child sexual exploitation offences. In November 2011 the Council of the European Union introduced a directive aimed at introducing legislation to address the sexual exploitation of children. The legislation provides for the removal or blocking of websites containing child indecent images, introduces measures against online grooming and criminalises child sex tourism. All Member states have two years to ratify the provisions into national law. The minimum sentences stipulated in the new legislation are three years in prison for producers of child indecent images, and one year for consumers, forcing children into sexual acts will be punishable by a 10 year minimum custodial sentence. http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/jha/126068.pdf

The difficulty is that whilst states will be forced to adopt the legislation, the legal definition of a child at national level remains determined by the legal age of consent which still varies widely across Europe and is as low as 13 in some countries. There is a need for a EU consensus regarding the age of consent if such attempts to standardise the law are to succeed. The experience of member states that have already introduced the grooming legislation seems to suggest that it results in few criminal convictions. This difficulty may be do with a reluctance to actively enforce the law at national level but may also be attributable to the rather unusual precautionary nature of this particular criminal law that requires compelling evidence regarding the '*intention*' to offend which is sometimes difficult to obtain (Kool, 2011).

2.2 Research Objectives

Action 3.1 of the Safer Internet Plus programme invited proposals for projects that enhanced the knowledge of the online sexual abuse of young people, with a particular focus on online grooming. Here online grooming is defined as the process by which a person befriends a young person[7] online in order to facilitate online sexual contact and/or a physical meeting with them with the goal of committing sexual abuse. To this end the European Online Grooming Project has the following overarching objectives:

- describe the behaviour of both offenders who groom and young people who are 'groomed' and explore differences (e.g. in demographics, behaviour or profiles) within each group and how these differences may have a bearing on offence outcome,
- describe how information, communication technology (ICT) is used to facilitate the process of online grooming,
- further the current low knowledge base about the way in which young people are selected and prepared by online groomers for abuse online,
- make a significant contribution to the development of educational awareness and preventative initiatives aimed at parents and young people,
- contribute to the development of online sex offender risk assessment and management knowledge.

2.3   Research Design

To meet this challenging set of objectives, the research programme involved three distinct but related phases: a scoping study; interviews with online groomers; and dissemination of awareness messages to key stakeholders.

2.4 The Scoping Phase

The aim of the scoping phase was to explore the background and context of Internet abuse in each partner country so that the research could be set in the current legislative and offender treatment context. However, alongside mapping the policy context, this phase also set out to ensure that phase 2 of the research was of the highest possible quality and represented good value for money. As such, the scoping phase aimed to ensure that questions asked of online groomers were based on the current and most comprehensive information available about these individuals.

To this end, the scoping phase drew on a combination of three distinct data collection approaches, described below.

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[7] For the purpose of this report, young people are defined as those age 16 years or younger.

2.5 Scoping Methods

Literature review

Presented in a separate paper[8], the key library sources for the literature review were the British Library and the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics. In particular, the joint JISC and ESRC funded International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS). Specific government, academic and agency sites were used such as EUKids Online at LSE, the Department for Children Schools and Families, Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre and the Internet Watch Foundation. In addition, the EU website was searched to supplement the contributions sent from the consortium partners from each country. Alongside the sourcing of published materials, there was also use of unpublished articles from, for example, the G8 Carolina Symposium 'Examining the relationship between online and offline offenses and preventing the sexual exploitation of children'.

Review of police case files

Five case files were drawn from the United Kingdom Metropolitan Police High Technological Crime Unit and the Paedophile Unit. Four of the report authors (SW, JD, AB, JGH) read the case files and recorded the key points on a Performa. Each case was then discussed by the research team, with the conversation digitally recorded. Case file data was analysed using the Framework method, discussed in detail in the sections below. In table 2.5.1 the demographic and offence-specific characteristics of the case file sample are described.

Table 2.5.1: Case file sample characteristics

	1	2	3	4	5
Age	45	36	37	56	48
Ethnicity	White-British	White-British	White-British	White-British	White-British
Occupation	Professional	Professional	Skilled manual	Professional	Skilled manual
Marital status	Married	Married	Married	Partner	Married
Access to children	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No. own children	1	2	1	1	1
Exposure self on line	No	Yes – photos & webcam	No	Yes – photos	Yes - webcam
Images sent to YP	3 adult movies	None	None	Yes	Yes
No. indecent images seized	510	259	Not specified	35	2
Class of indecent Images	1 to 5	1 to 5	2 to 4	1 to 4	1 to 3

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[8] Davidson, J., Grove-Hills, J., Bifulco, A., Webster, S., Gottschalk, P., Caretti, V. & Pham, T (2010). European Online Grooming Project: Literature Review and Legislative Context. European Commission Safer Internet Plus Programme.

Travel to meeting with YP	No	Yes	Yes, arrested nearby	Yes	No, stated no intention

Interviews with strategic stakeholders

The stakeholder sample for the scoping evaluation was developed to ensure that all key professionals with expertise on the behaviour of online groomers were included. The report authors identified and recruited stakeholders in each country. Stakeholders were then approached by letter or email, outlining the aims and coverage of the scoping evaluation. This first contact was followed up by a telephone call to see if the stakeholder was willing to participate, and to arrange a convenient time for interview. There were no instances of stakeholders refusing to take part.

In-depth interviews were conducted with nineteen strategic stakeholders from the United Kingdom, Italy, Norway and Belgium. Researchers explained how study findings would be reported before the interviews commenced. The voluntary nature of the research was also emphasised, and the interview only began once the participant had indicated that they were happy to proceed by signing a consent form. The interviews were digitally recorded and carried out using a topic guide. The topic guide covered the key themes likely to be relevant in the interviews and helped to ensure a systematic approach across different encounters and countries. The interview questioning was responsive to participants' own experiences, attitudes and circumstances and participants' contributions were fully explored to allow as detailed an understanding as possible. As with the literature review above, the scoping report has been published by the research team and European Commission, and can be downloaded from the project website[9].

Table 2.5.2: Stakeholder sample information

Country	Stakeholder Number	Role
United Kingdom	1	Sexual offender treatment specialist
	2	Internet safety expert
	3	Police – overt investigator
	4	Police – covert investigator
	5	Young people treatment specialist
Norway	1	Young people treatment specialist
	2	Police – overt investigator
	3	Sexual offender treatment specialist
	4	Sexual offender treatment specialist
Italy	1	Police – national prevention co-ordiantor
	2	Police - overt investigator
	3	Public prosecutor
	4	Information technology expert
	5	Police - overt investigator
Belgium	1	Police – human trafficking prevention
	2	Police - overt investigator
	3	Police - overt investigator

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[9] http://www.europeanonlinegroomingproject.com/

4	Police - overt investigator	
5	Police - overt IT investigator	

2.6 Interviews with Online Groomers

UK sampling and recruitment: the sample of online groomers was provisionally selected from sexual offender assessment data collected by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). This group were an 'internal partner / sponsor' for the research. Demographic and offence-specific data were interrogated to in which to draw a purposive sample of online groomers. Prior to the commencement of sampling in January 2010, NOMS took advice about the research to ensure that all procedures fully complied with the Data Protection Act. Following this review of recruitment, the research team were required to re-design their recruitment strategy into a two phase process.

Phase 1 involved treatment providers seeking individual offenders consent for contact details to be passed to the research team. Phase 2 involved the research team contacting individuals who consented to release their details about participating in the study. The information sheet, recruitment letter, consent form and topic guide used for interviews are presented in the Appendices.

A total of 33 interviews were achieved during 2010 with convicted male online groomers across Europe. In **England and Wales** 26 interviews with online groomers were conducted in prisons. Each offender interview lasted approximately 1.5 hours and was digitally recorded for verbatim transcription. In the **3 partner countries/sites** five interviews were conducted in Norway and two in Belgium. These transcripts were sent to the UK for analysis. In Italy, researchers found it challenging to identify and recruit online groomers for the research largely due to the absence of grooming legislation at that time in Italy. This was an identified risk to the study at inception and was acknowledged by the European Commission. To ensure there was still research coverage from Italy, transcripts of Italian online offenders' interactions with children were sent to the UK. These were analysed and used to cross-validate the offender interviews conducted. The demographic and offence-specific characteristics of the online groomers are presented in table 2.5.3 below[10].

Table 2.6.1 – Online groomers sample characteristics

Factor	Criteria	Conducted
Age	18 – 24	4
	25 – 34	7
	35 – 44	11
	45 – 54	7
	55 and above	4
IQ Score	Less than average (90 or below)	5
	Average (91 – 109)	7

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[10] Data for RM2000 score and access to treatment interventions was not available for the Norwegian sample, thus these frequencies do not total 33.

	Above average (110 +)	15
	Don't know	6
RM 2000 score	Low risk (0 – 1)	6
	Medium risk (2)	10
	High risk (3+)	10
Offence	Online grooming no meeting	2
	Online grooming meeting	8
	Images and online grooming – no meeting	5
	Images and online grooming – meeting	18
Offender access to children	Yes	17
	No	16
Sex offender treatment received this sentence	None	2
	Core programme	26
	Core plus other (Booster, Extended, HSF)	5
Sex offender treatment received (prior to sentence)	None	25
	Core programme	1
	Core plus other (Booster, Extended, HSF)	1
	Thames Valley SOTP	1
Pre-convictions	None	16
	Non – sexual	6
	Sexual - children offline	6
	Sexual - children online	5
	Sexual - children online and offline	0
	Sexual - adult offline	0
Victim age (of grooming)	5 – 9	1
	10 – 12	5
	13 – 15	27
Victim gender (of grooming)	Male	5
	Female	28
	Both	0

2.7 Focus Groups with Young People

Focus group discussions were conducted across three of the four partner countries. This fieldwork was provided by the consortium as an additional unfunded element of the research. Schools opted-in to the research and all young people were provided with detailed information to make an informed decision about whether to take part. Consent was also sought from each young person, using a consent form before each group started.

The purposive sample frame was young people at secondary school with an age range of between 11 and 16 years. We know from previous research that there are differences between younger and older children in the incidence and nature of Internet use. There are also gender and socio-economic background differences. For this reason we ensured that the achieved sample comprised: two age groups of 11-13 years

and 14-16 years; a mix of boys and girls with two of the groups being single sex (girls only); and where possible socio-economic diversity to identify any differences in awareness, behaviours and attitudes[11].

Twelve focus groups were delivered with 6-12 young people in each group (n=98). The strategy for including young people from a range of socio-economic backgrounds could not be consistent across the different partner countries. In the UK, socio-economic representation can generally be achieved by selection of schools in a particular 'catchment area' but it is not necessarily a transferable method for other European countries. As such, in Belgium and Italy the groups would be mixed. For example in Belgium the groups were young people in 'vocational' or 'general' education. Young people in vocational education tended to be from lower socio-economic groupings and pupils had selected special subject streams such as hairdressing, horticulture and drawing. Confirmation of the different socio-economic backgrounds was provided throughout the discussions where references were constantly made to their circumstances, particularly occupation of parents or a similar indicator. The final sample in terms of age groups and gender are given below in Table 2.7.1.

Table 2.7.1 Focus groups sample profile

Age	Male	Female	Total
11-13 yrs	17	22	39
14-16 yrs	29	30	59
	46	**52**	**98**

A topic guide was used to shape discussion and covered four main areas:

- General nature of Internet use

- Safety awareness, awareness and perception of groomers

- Their own online experiences

- Attitudes to safety awareness training

The questions were mostly open with guidelines for suggested prompts where relevant. This guide was translated for use in the partner countries.

2.8 Stakeholder Dissemination Events

Seven dissemination events were held with teachers, parents and professionals in Belgium, Italy, Norway and the UK in order to disseminate the key findings from the project. Feedback from those attending the

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[11] Though not with any expectation of statistically significant differences due to the qualitative design of the investigation

events was gathered and is reported later in this report. The groups included three with parents; three with teachers, and one with forensic psychologists. All participants were provided with information before each event and gave consent to take part. The workshop format was agreed between team members, but varied to reflect the local context and group members, with materials translated into the 3 languages from English. The format included a presentation of key findings from the project, a period of discussion and then a standardised evaluation form to ascertain the usefulness of the messages.

2.9 Qualitative Analysis

The case file and interview data was analysed using Framework (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), a systematic approach to qualitative data management developed by NatCen Social Research. This involved a number of stages. First, the key topics and issues which emerged from the research objectives and the data were identified through familiarisation with the transcripts. An initial analytical framework was then drawn up and a series of thematic charts or matrices were set up, each relating to a different thematic issue. The columns in each matrix represented the key sub-themes or topics and the rows represented the individual interview participants. Data from each interview transcript was summarised into the appropriate cell and was grounded in participants' own accounts. The final stage of analysis involved working through the charted interview data in detail, drawing out the range of experiences and views, identifying similarities and differences, developing and testing hypotheses, and interrogating the data to seek to explain emergent patterns and findings.

2.10 Coverage of the report

This report brings together findings from the main stages of the European Online Grooming Project. That is, the in-depth interviews with online groomers, focus groups with young people, and dissemination events with key stakeholder groups. The scoping report and literature review have been published and are available for download at the project web-site[12]. The next chapter describes the features of online grooming. Chapter 4 sets out the maintenance and risk management strategies that were important in underpinning online grooming behaviour. Chapter 5 presents a typology of online groomers alongside case-study material. This is followed in chapter 6 by a description of young people online, from the perspective of online groomers and young people themselves. Finally, chapter 7 illustrates the implications of the research for safety campaigns, the Internet industry, and the treatment and management of online groomers.

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[12] http://www.europeanonlinegroomingproject.com/

3. Understanding Online Grooming

The widespread use of the Internet in the educational and social lives of young people is a relatively new behaviour. Consequently, it is only within the last decade that law enforcement and scientific communities have attempted to understand and address the challenge presented by men who have taken advantage of the Internet 'boom' to groom young people for sexual purposes. However, it is challenging to develop a robust evidence base in five to ten years, and this explains the dearth of literature about the motivations, attitudes, behaviours and experiences of online groomers. To this end, the overarching aim of the European Online Grooming Project is to make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge. In doing so, the work will help policy makers, police officers, treatment providers, carers and young people behave in the most effective way to manage the risk presented by online groomers.

This chapter represents a key aspect of the project's contribution to a robust evidence base - a detailed analysis of the motivations, choices, thoughts, feelings and behaviours of online groomers. The first section of the chapter briefly describes three theories that may help professionals understand online groomers', given the complexity of their behaviour. The chapter then attempts to understand *who are online groomers and the technology they use,* beyond the sample demographics presented in section 2.6 above. A detailed analysis of the offence features described by online groomers is then presented in the remaining sections.

3.1 Theoretical context

The design of effective interventions for online groomers and awareness programmes to reach policy makers, teachers, carers and young people requires an understanding of how online groomers behave, their barriers and enablers to change, and what influences their actions in general. From accounts drawn from all phases of the research, it is clear that these offenders' behaviour is dynamic, multi-faceted and complex. However, for this work to have optimum impact it is important that it describes as well as explains online groomers behaviour.   As such, alongside the typology of online grooming presented in chapter 5, three theories that may assist professionals to understand online groomers' behaviour in the context of theses results are described.

The first of these is Ward and Hudson's (1998) *self-regulation model of the sexual offence process*. The central premise of Ward and Hudson's theory is that different self-regulation styles, the internal and external processes that allow an individual to engage in goal-related behaviour, underpin the sexual offence process. Two styles of goals are discussed; approach and avoidance. Approach goals concern the successful attainment of a state or situation and involve approach-focused behaviours. For example, an individual tailoring their online profile page in order to attract the interest of a particular young person. In contrast, avoidance goals involve the reduction of a particular state whereby attention is focused on negative information signalling failure rather than success. An example here may be an online groomer

who masturbates to their collection of indecent images of children in order to suppress the desire to contact a young person online. Intrinsically linked to approach and avoidant goals are three self regulation styles. The first, underregulation, refers to individuals who may behave in a passive or disinhibited manner. Misregulation describes the misplaced effort to avoid offending due to a lack of knowledge about the impact of the response selected, as in the example above. Finally, individuals who consciously think out a sequence of behaviours in order to commit an offence do not show emotional under regulation or dysregulation as a feature of their offending and thus form a third group. For these individuals their emotional state is likely to be positive and they do not see their behaviour as particularly problematic.

In addition to setting the sexual offence process in the context of self-regulation theory, Ward and Hudson's seminal paper also suggests that comprehensive models of the sexual offence process should encompass three further features:

- the integration of cognitive, affective and behavioural factors that underpin the sexual offence,
- a demonstration of the dynamic nature of the sexual offence that accounts for the various phases or milestones of the offence process, and,
- identification and description of the psychological mechanisms that drive and inhibit the relapse process.

This report will cover all three of these points in this chapter.

Moving away from theories specific to sexual offending, Suler's (2004) *online disinhibiton effect* contains three dimensions that may also help develop understanding of online groomers' behaviour. The first dimension, **dissociative anonymity** refers to the Internet providing people with the opportunity to separate their actions from their real world identity, making them feel less vulnerable about opening up. Suler argues that individuals believe that whatever they say or do online cannot be directly linked to the rest of their lives. Consequently individuals do not have to own their behaviour by acknowledging it within the full context of who they really are.

Invisibility refers to the online individual not being physically seen, with many people unaware that the individual is there at all. Suler suggests that invisibility gives people the courage to go to places and do things that they otherwise would not. Although there is clear overlap with anonymity, Suler suggests that with the user physically invisible the disinhibition effect is amplified. That is, unlike in face to face interaction, invisible individuals do not have to worry about looking or sounding foolish and do not have to attend to other accepted conversational norms indicating displeasure or disinterest such as a frown or shake of the head.

Finally, **dissociative imagination** refers to the belief that the online persona along with online others live in a make-believe dimension, separate and apart from the demands and responsibilities of the real world. Here individuals dissociate online fiction from offline fact, whereby online life consists of games, rules and norms that do not apply in actual living. As such, Suler suggests that once the computer is

turned off and daily life returned to, individuals believe they can leave that online game behaviour and their game-identity behind.

Finally, clinicians that have worked online groomers suggest[13] that this group of sexual offenders are susceptible to the social influence of other groomers and like-minded individuals in cyberspace. That is, this online "community" appears to shape the thinking patterns and beliefs of online groomers, eventually influencing the degree and rate of their behavioral disinhibition online. Therefore, it may be that it is not just the deindividuating characteristics of the Internet, (dissociative anonymity, invisibility, and dissociative imagination) that have an influence on the groomer, but also the actual "community" of sexual offenders. That is, the online groomer's social identification with and "immersion" in the community of like-minded individuals in cyberspace may further influence his behavior through a process of deindividuation. The **theory of deindividuation** (Zimbardo, 1969) proposes that factors such as anonymity, loss of individual responsibility, arousal and sensory overload contribute to a state of deindividuation and behavioral disinhibition where established norms of conduct may be violated.

3.2 Characteristics of Online Groomers, Technology and Websites

Sexual offenders are not a homogenous group (Marshall et al, 1999) and the same may be said of online groomers reported in the literature (O'Brien & Webster, 2010, Briggs et al, 2011), as well as those examined in the current research. The table in section 2.6 above supports the evidence base with variance in the age of groomers, the gender of young person targeted, and the outcomes desired and 'achieved' from their offending behaviour. However, there are two standalone demographic characteristics that were particularly striking in this sample.

The first was the high Full Scale Intelligence Quotient (FSIQ) scores achieved on standardised tests. Among the sample, an FSIQ score of over 110 was common, and these profiles place the groomers in the high intelligence range amongst the general population and considerably higher than offline sexual offenders (Nijman et al, 2009) and non-sexual offenders in custody (Motram 2007).

Second, was extent of the groomers' previous convictions for sexual and non-sexual offences. Here, it was not uncommon for the current offence of online grooming to be the first time some of the men had come into contact with the criminal justice system. This does not necessarily mean that the online groomers in the sample had not offended sexually before, online or offline, they simply may not have been caught offending. However, the previous offence history of online groomers does have a bearing on the development of reliable risk assessment scales for this type of sexual offender. That is, within the literature one of the biggest single predictors to accurately measure the likelihood of offline or contact sexual recidivism is the number of previous sexual offence convictions (Hanson & Bussière, 1998). If previous convictions (or the lack of) are taken out of a risk prediction model for online groomers, research will be required to develop robust

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[13] European Online Grooming Project: Scoping Report. Available from: www.europeanonlinegroomingproject.com

replacement predictors. The implications of this research for the risk assessment of online groomers is discussed further in chapter 7.

Beyond the analysis of single demographic features, there were combinations of characteristics and behaviours that suggest an approach-goal motivation for some of the sample, in line with the Ward and Hudson (1998) classification. For example, the extent of formal education or training in Information, Communication Technology (ICT) *was not* a barrier to achieving a sophisticated understanding of personal computing and the Internet - learning that could then be utilised during contact with young people. Groomers without a formal training in ICT talked about two overarching methods of learning.

The first was learning via the workplace. This is not unsurprising given that frequent use of the computer is common for the majority of non-manual occupations. Consequently, for men with a sexual interest in children whose age pre-dates the introduction of ICT lessons in mainstream education, employment sometimes helped these offenders develop a sophisticated understanding of computing.

I have no formal IT qualifications, no, but I'm more than computer literate. When computers first came in at work in the early 80's, as a (occupation) I had to learn them and in the end got to re-design them…. (UK participant, female victim age 10-12)

Second, some people with limited knowledge of ICT also talked about learning about the basics, and then more advanced techniques from family members.

I've got a very rudimentary knowledge of the computer, if I lost some work I would have to call my wife to tell me how to get it get it back for me…but you know (after a while) I found a way in, into 'things' after that. (UK participant, female victim age 13-15)

However, instruction from family was not always overtly requested by the groomers. For some offenders, observing their children's online behaviour 'over their shoulder' was described as helpful in terms of knowing the language and symbols/emoticons used by young people when social networking. This knowledge could then be transferred to develop 'credible' conversations with young people online.

In contrast to those with no formal training in ICT, some men in the sample were highly proficient users of computers, with qualifications and a dedicated role in the technology industry. How ICT skills were used to manage the risk of online grooming by those proficient and people with less knowledge is explored in detail in chapter 4. Regardless of *how* offenders became skilled in ICT, groomers' accounts of learning were explicitly or implicitly influenced by a drive to use ICT as competently as possible to meet adults and young people online. This motivation meant the groomers talked about using desktop and laptop computers, as well as gaming consoles to facilitate the online grooming of young people. The map of sites and chatrooms accessed by participants encompassed five themes:

Social networking

- **For adults and young people**: Facebook; Multiply; JayDoCity (Local site in UK)

- **For young people**: Bebo; Coolbox (Begium); Faceparty; High 5;

Instant messaging

- **For adults and young people**: Mobistar Proximus (Belgium); Skyblog (Belgium); MSN; Chatavenue; Flikster; MySpace; Yahoo Messenger; Netlog

Online dating/romance

- **Adult theme**: Adultfinder; Ladslads; BoysZone; BoyBliss; Datingdirect; Love at Lycos; Hot or Not; and Ladslads.

- **Young people theme:** MyLoL

Image exchange

- Limewire; Kazaa; Flickr; eMule; WinMax

Sexual abuse sites:

- Men who Like Young Boys; Boylovers; Cherry-Popping Daddies; Young Petals; Nifty; ImagesRU

The map of sites highlights two issues that are important in understanding online grooming. First, offenders cross-over from adult to young peoples' online domains to abuse. Later sections of this chapter will also demonstrate that young people can also populate adult sites for sexual contact. Second, some sites are accessed to support or legitimise the grooming process via indecent images, chat or abuse-specific essays/ narratives/fantasies. The role of some sites in underpinning the grooming process is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

The extent of some groomers activity with the hardware and websites described, meant that being online for four to six hours (outside of work) a day was a recurrent theme discussed during the interviews. To facilitate extended and continual online access, computers were sometimes described as being in private places, in the bedroom if living with parents or friends, or the office or study when living with a partner/children. If a private space could not be located, some online groomers described waiting for partners/children to leave the house, go to bed, or made an excuse before going online.

There were times when she would be watching something on TV and I would say 'I'm just going to check my emails' and I would not only check our main account email, but also my other (grooming related) accounts for messages….I actually felt extremely guilty hiding things from my wife because in other respects we talked about everything together (UK participant, female & male victims age 5-15)

With the technology understood and regular online sessions embedded in daily life, the foundations were laid for the men to contact young people and move in and out of different phases of the grooming process to meet their needs. These phases are explored further in the sections below.

## 3.3 The features of online grooming

In the section above we have illustrated that online groomers are not a homogenous group. As such, we would not expect their patterns of offending behaviour to be identical. For example, there was evidence of men contacting on one to two young people online at any one time, alongside other accounts where a significant number of young people were on an online friend lists at different stages of the grooming process.

I'd say that before I came into prison, I had about two thousand people on my MSN, about seven hundred and fifty were young girls age 14 to 15. I didn't obviously talk to them all on a daily basis but would have spoken with them at some time yeah…. (UK participant, female victims age 13-15)

In chapter 5 the report sets out a typology that helps explain this behavioural diversity. But whether or not one or a number of young people were contacted currently, a feature of online grooming shared across the sample was that offenders tended to refine their activities on the basis of what had *'worked well'* in previous encounters with young people. Consequently, movement through the different features of online grooming described below is neither unitary or linear. Instead, it is cyclical, involving a pattern of adoption, maintenance, relapse, and readoption over time. For this reason the features are not numbered as that would inaccurately indicate a linear process. Additionally, the actual process of online grooming may take minutes, hours, days or months. As such, online groomers remain at different behavioural points for various lengths of time according to a dynamic inter-relationship between their goals and needs and the style or reactions of the young person.

Figure 3.3.1 presents the features of the online grooming process, alongside two important concurrent features: offence maintenance and risk management. In the subsequent sections we describe each of theses features in detail. In chapter 4, offence maintenance and risk management are explored.

Figure 3.3.1 – The features of online grooming

Maintenance Factors

Risk Management

Vulnerability
- Relationships
- Situations

Scanning
- Mapping
- YP Appraisal

IT Security

Identity
- Own
- Extent Changed

Contact
- Mode
- Style
- Extent
- Timing

Intensity
- Images
- Language
- Incentives

Private Spaces

Outcome
- Online contact
- Physical meeting

Online Spaces

Dissonance

Perception of YP
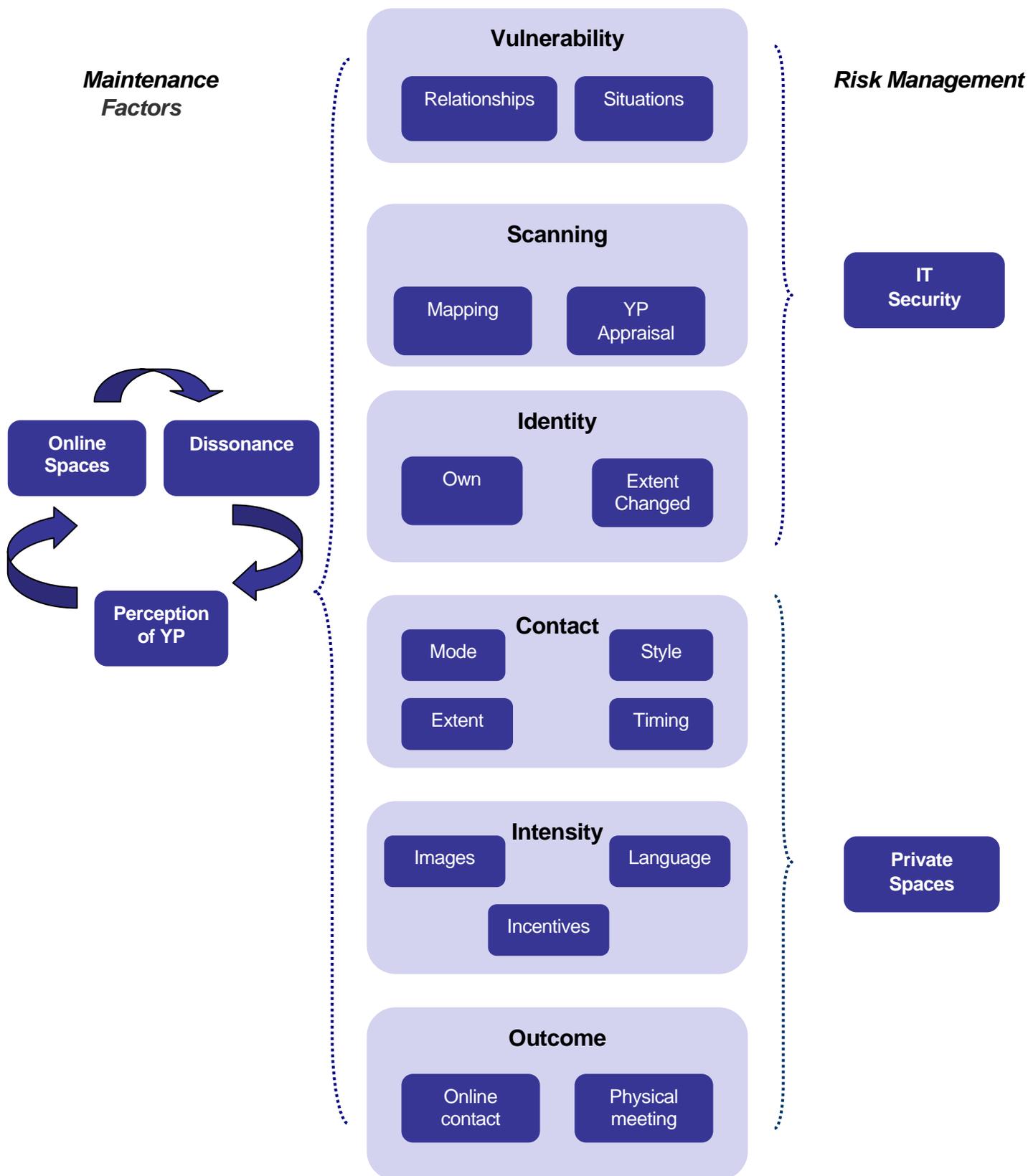
Vulnerability

The literature regarding contact sexual offences is clear that such behaviour does not happen out of the blue, but instead is triggered by something or someone (Proulx et al, 1999). From the accounts of men in the sample the same may be said of online grooming. That is, the men described some form of event that made them vulnerable to offend. This then appeared to trigger their underlying goal or desire to contact and groom a young person. Two broad types of vulnerability factor emerged from offenders descriptions of their lives, just prior to going online.

The first was **situational factors** and included events such as being made redundant from work, or losing their home.

…losing my job, I suppose it knocked me for six when I couldn't find a job quickly after that. It knocked my confidence and I thought 'am I any good in this field, can I get another job..' and a lot of self-doubt crept in… (UK participant, female victims age 13-15)

Experiencing a job loss or not having a home can be a testing experience for lots of people. However, what seems to distinguish online groomers from the general population is the offenders' inability to appropriately cope and respond in a pro-social way to these challenging life events. In fact, having the urge to go online and offend following a situational event resonates with Ward and Hudson's (1998) concept of underegulation, in that the offender is failing to appropriately control emotions regarding losing his job, and instead starts to contact young people to feel better.

The second set of vulnerability events tended to involve the breakdown of **interpersonal relationships**, such as a partner or spouse leaving the offender, or an argument with a friend or acquaintance. Irrespective of the type of relationship challenge, this vulnerability factor was underpinned by feelings of low self-worth. Low self esteem is a common feature amongst offline sexual offenders (Webster, Mann, Thornton & Wakeling, 2007) and can be a significant risk factor in the offending process. The online groomers in this sample seemed to be no different in this regard:

I'd lost all self-respect, I wasn't functioning as a person, more…..mechanically (UK participant, female victim age 10-12)

In response to these feelings of low self-esteem, the invisible or anonymous properties associated with being online gave some online groomers the opportunity to change their characteristics, appearance and life history before meeting young people. This behaviour shows how Ward and Hudson's theory of underegulation and Suler's concept of dissociative imagination appear to be operating concurrently at this phase. That is, low self esteem can trigger disinhibited behaviour, underpinned by a belief that the virtual environment allows individuals to leave behind who they really are.

The role of the online environment in maintaining offending behaviour is explored in further detail in the next chapter.

Scanning

With the decision made to go online as a result of the vulnerability event, it was not necessarily the case that the offenders would immediately begin to groom the first young person that they encountered on the Internet. Instead, some offenders described a process of scanning the online environment to make an 'informed' decision about who to approach for sexual contact. Online groomer's who talked about *scanning*, described two related aspects within the process.

The first was being in online spaces where young people meet and talk in order to *map the territory*. In section 3.2 there is evidence that these spaces could be forums for young people and/or older people and social networking sites. Here the approach was described by some online groomers as getting an idea of who was discussing what, the nature of different conversations, and what friends were saying about other young people in the forum. As such, scanning this way could involve observing and interpreting a significant amount of information across hundreds of different conversations.

When offenders were new to online discussions, some also talked about early scanning behaviours as having an educational dimension. That is, the process enabled online groomers new to forums and social networks to pick up, understand, and sometime re-use in later contacts the terminology and symbols observed when scanning young people's conversations.

The second aspect of the scanning process involved *appraising the characteristics* of particular young people online. There were three appraisal groups within this part of the process: **virtual-sexual; idealistic/romantic; and physical characteristics.**

-   **Virtual-sexual** appraisal involved examining and interpreting the screen-name or forum tag used to indentify individual young people. Here some online groomers described honing in on names that suggested sexual awareness:

    I'd always aim for someone with a sexy name because obviously, they'd be into sex. Usually BigTits or whatever; it wouldn't be a normal name or anything. It was some sexy name (UK participant, female victims age 13-15)

    You then have normal exchanges with people in chat-rooms until an opportunity comes along. "Hmm, that girl has a pretty racy alias (Belgium participant, female victims age 13-15)

    Another aspect of sexual appraisal was seeing if the online name indicated that the young person was in the groomer's target interest group:

If they called themselves 'sara14' or 'Jenny15' then I'd get interested. (Norway participant, female victim age 13-15)

- The second group was **idealistic/romantic** appraisal. In these cases, some online groomers would describe looking for young people who seemed to fit their conception of somebody that would be good in a relationship – almost as if the groomer was perusing an adult online dating site looking for a potential partner:

The young person looked fun, fun to be around and with (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

- The third aspect involved appraising the **physical characteristics** of the young person. Here some online groomers talked about using photographs or other images of the young person to identify whether they were physically developed enough (breasts and body shape) to warrant further investigation and potential online contact.

The girls I was interested in, they had to look mature enough (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

Ideally I looked for people age 14/15 as more physically developed and I saw younger people as too young (UK participant, female victims age 13-15).

In chapter 5 of the report, the classification of online grooming types is to some extent defined by the characteristics individual offenders targeted when they were appraising young people. In terms of a theoretical explanation, it does seem sensible to suggest that online groomers who are acting in accordance to such plans or behavioural scripts are adopting approach goals. That is, what Ward and Hudson (1998) term *approach-explicit* sexual offenders (systematic planners with intact self-regulation).

However, it is important to note that not all online groomers in this sample went through a process of scanning the online environment before making contact with young people. There were men who described their online behaviour as far less subtle and sophisticated with little or no attempt being made to mask an explicit desire for sexual contact with young people. In fact, it is questionable whether it is appropriate to call such behaviour as 'online grooming', as no real victim socialisation takes place in these cases. As with those who scanned online, a classification and explanation for offenders that made random almost instant contact with young people online is described in chapter 5.

Identity

Digital deception (the phenomena of lying online) has received significant attention in the mainstream media and academic literature (Hancock, Curry, Goorha & Woodworth, 2008). Given the propensity of the general public to be more dishonest online than in face to face communication (Zimbler & Feldman, 2011), it is perhaps unsurprising that the online groomers' talked about the extent their identity was altered for the offending process.

Online identities were described by the offenders in three ways. First, there were those in the sample who described making **'minor' changes** to their identity. Within this group people talked about changing either their name, age, marital status, the extent to which they were outgoing or use a younger (perhaps more attractive) photograph of themselves.

I said I had an athletic body rather than skinny, but otherwise my profile was true (UK participant, female victims age 13-15)

The only thing on my profile that was not true was that was I said I was more social than I actually was…. (UK participant, female victim age 13-15)

The key factor underpinning the decision to make minor changes was to present them in the most positive way possible to attract young people. However, there was diversity within the group in terms of when the decision to alter the identity was made. Here, in contrast to those who made profile changes before they first made contact with young people, there were some men who made minor changes to their identity based on unsuccessful previous attempts at contact:

At first I was honest about my age but sometimes I got negative reactions and was called a 'peado'…so I then used a younger age as girls were then more likely to respond to me (UK participant, female victims age 10-15).

The second group of groomers described making **major changes** to their identity in order to contact and sexually offend against young people. Within this group, the changes discussed went beyond amending personal age or name, and could involve pretending to be a young girl or woman.

You can put any picture up and say it's you, you can invent all sorts of stories. I got a kick out of it. The manipulation is part of the game. Why? You're certainly not going to come out and say "I'm 30 years old and I would like to get to know you" (Belgium participant, female victims age 13-15).

Some offenders in this group also talked about using multiple concurrent identities when online, and switching between them to maximise the opportunity of contact.

I sometimes created a new identity and would speak to the victim as real and fake me. That way I could transfer information about me through two channels. I would typically pretend to be a younger girl as girls tend to talk more openly and honestly to other girls (Norway participant, female victims age 10-15).

In the most extreme case within the sample, one offender adopted the identity of the girl he was targeting and pretended to be her to her friends. The rationale given for this behaviour was to find out information about the girl that she would not share with the offender when he had asked her the questions directly.

There can be little doubt that using two or more identities to speak to the same person requires considerable cognitive effort, and is a highly manipulative communication style. This will be explored further when the process of contact is described in the next section. In terms of a theoretical basis for changing identity, there

are clear links to the dissociative anonymity and invisibility aspects of online behaviour proposed by Suler. Regarding Ward & Hudson's self-regulation styles, irrespective of the degree to which the identity is adapted, the offenders in the two groups above are describing goal-focussed approach-explicit behaviours.

The final group contained men that described **not changing their identity** in anyway before or during their online encounters with either young females or males:

I said I was 28 and I was, did this job, got my own place, got a car….I wanted to be honest with her, because I wanted her to make, to make the decision about whether to talk to me or not… (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

Alongside listing a legitimate age, occupation and so on, some men took this open approach further and were also explicitly honest about listing their sexual interest in young people.

I was quite open, I wasn't pretending to be younger to groom people that way......I said I was interested in young girls hoping out there that might be some young teens out there that were curious….(UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

I wasn't trying to be them, I wasn't trying to say 'look I'm a cool guy and I understand all about teenagers, and yeah, JLS is, whatever it may be. I was being honest, 'I'm a 36 year old guy and I like young girls'. (UK participant, female victims age 13-15).

There were also extreme examples of online disinhibition within this group, to the extent that some men posted a picture of their flaccid penis as their avatar (online picture identification) or used a sexually explicit online name tag such as *PussyLicker69* alongside publication of their genuine name, age and occupation. As with the two groups above, some men talked about this extreme behaviour as being underpinned by the way the online environment facilitates openness and frank conversations.

The fact that some of these men went on to develop contacts with younger people also raises sensitive questions about the vulnerability of some young people online. This issue is discussed in detail in chapter 6. In addition, the motivation to retain a legitimate identity is also related to other aspects of these offender's grooming behaviours, to be discussed in subsequent sections and explained in detail in the chapter 5.

Contact

This report illustrates that there was not a one-size fits all approach to scanning the online environment and developing an online identity. As such, it is not surprising that the men talked about a range of different ways they made and sustained contact with young people online. In this section the contact process is described in terms of: **mode; number of contacts; style; and timing**.

Mode

Before an approach to a young person is made, the features of online grooming tend to be characterised by use of forums and chat-rooms for text-only surveillance. These sites are detailed in section 3.2. For some online groomers, this form of text communication would continue until the encounter with the young person ended, or escalated into a physical meeting.

Alongside text chat however, some offenders also described the use of **webcams**[14] as a key part of their grooming behaviour. Webcams are like live video and so allow individuals to see each other in real time whilst talking or typing online. Consequently, some of the men would use this media to see young people they were targeting, and for the young people to see them. Over-time therefore, webcams were sometimes used as an integral part of the sexual offending process, with single or mutual exposure of genitalia a recurrent theme discussed.

I was at home and had the opportunity to get on the Internet quickly, and she happened to be on there. And so, you know, it sexually aroused me. So I said 'do you want to see my webcam' and she said she did. She didn't have a webcam, she just watched me. I just typed about what I'd like to do to her, and masturbated on the webcam (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).
.
As well as providing the opportunity to offend, seeing the young person and having the young person observe the offender also served to reinforce, strengthen and maintain the offending behaviour. That is, linking text with a live image of a young person watching them seemed to help bring some of offenders' fantasies to life. In addition, that the young person was watching was tacitly taken by some men as 'consent to continue'. How images, video and chat help reinforce and maintain sexual offending online is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Phones were also used to contact young people and maintain the grooming process by some offenders. In these cases phone contact could entail text messaging, conversations or both. As was the case with webcams, phones were also used to sexually offend against young people.

I got her phone number and started phoning her, and then sort of, the conversation did turn sexual on the telephone. No image, just well, phone sex I suppose you'd call it…(UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

In the next chapter the use of phones as a risk management approach is described. However, online groomers were clear that contacting young people by phone went beyond self-preservation or simply as another way to send or receive an indecent image. Here, some of the men talked about the phone (both texting and conversation) as being a more immediate, realistic and thus intimate way of contacting young people.

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[14] A webcam is a video capture device connected to a computer or computer network. Their most popular use is for video telephony, permitting a computer to act as a videophone or video conferencing station. This can be used in messenger programs such as Windows Live Messenger, Skype and Yahoo messenger services.

It's easier to talk on the phone, when I was talking on the phone it was like I was right next to them, like I was face-to-face with them (UK participant, female victim age 10-12).

The text ones would be like 'how are you, how's your day, what you've been up to'. Sometime in the morning she would text me and say 'morning' and I would say 'morning' back. We would also sometimes text 'goodnight' to each other. (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

The relationship between mode of contact, the need for intimacy and the overarching style of some online groomers is discussed further in chapter 5.

Finally, **online game platforms** such as the Xbox were also used by some participants in the sample to contact young people, via the online multiplayer function to some games. The distinguishing feature of this type of contact was that they were only used by men who were attempting to groom young boys. In some respect, this approach represents a 'rational choice' for men sexually interested in boys, as the evidence suggests that young men tend to be online playing games more than young females (Hartman & Klimmt, 2006).

Aside from the extent of potential boys to contact, there are two dimensions of online gaming that made this method an attractive place to target young people. The first was that playing a game, such as online role-play, helped to reinforce the **fantasy**, or 'unreal' aspect of what is clearly offending behaviour. This then reinforces Suler's concept of *dissociative imagination* driving the behaviour of some people online.

I started with the name (online character) as that was the name of the character I was playing online. I then became more into fantasy play and so changed my name to (mythical creature name) (UK participant, male victims age 5-12).

The second dimension relates to online gaming performance reinforcing the **credibility** of the offender as somebody worth talking to. That is, being competent at online games and 'leveling up' by gaining experience points means a great deal to some online players (Williams, Consalvo, Caplan & Yee, 2009). Consequently, some offenders talked about how they could use their considerable online scores as a way to 'attract' and open up conversations with some young boys.

I spent a lot of time playing (name of online war game) with boys. I was good, it was a 'shoot em up' (UK participant, male victims age 5-12).

All three methods of contact described above highlight the extent on online disinhibition amongst the men in this sample. For example, offenders felt comfortable using a webcam to show them masturbating to young people watching, or using the telephone for 'phone sex'. It is clear however that these data also provide strong support for Ward and Hudson's concept of approach goals to help understand the choices made by some online groomers. That is, some offenders articulated clear goals that underpinned their chosen method of contact (telephone to increase intimacy; online gaming to present credibly and so on).

Extent of contact

With technology allowing near 24-hour media access for young people, the amount of time young people spend with entertainment media has increased considerably. For example, in a recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation (2010) states that 8-18 year-olds devote an average of 7.5 hours online in a typical day. The number of young people online across time zones, meant that for some online groomers, having sexual conversations with hundreds of young people at any one time was not uncommon.

It's a bit of a guesstimate, but I reckon on Yahoo I was talking to about a couple of hundred young people…(UK participant, female victims age 13-15).

In contrast, there were also online groomers who talked about being very particular about whom they spoke to. Consequently, the extent of their online contact could be limited to one young person at any one time. As with the method of contact, the motivation underpinning single or multiple contacts is described in detail when a typology of online groomers is presented in Chapter 5.

For those groomers who talked about speaking to tens or hundreds of young people concurrently, keeping on track with conversations in terms of what was said by the groomer to whom, where the last conversation ended, and whether a conversation could and was progressing sexually presented a significant challenge. This was amplified if the offender was using multiple identities concurrently, as there was the additional need to recall what was said to which young person, under each particular identity. To manage the situation, some online groomers talked about various strategies such as logging conversation histories on Excel spreadsheets, or using other types of coding schemes to monitor conversation 'progress'.

It was difficult because I was talking to so many young boys online, I mean I must have had over 200 on MSN at any one time. It was difficult remembering what we talked about so I started to put a tick by his name or a star by his name.

I: And what did the tick and star mean?

A tick would be a non-sexual chat and a star was a sexual chat (UK participant, male victims age 5-12).

I would save the MSN chat-logs, so I could reference them again and remember who they were (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

Irrespective of the method of managing multiple conversations, the accounts from these offenders are a very compelling example of approach-explicit offending, as defined with the Ward and Hudson framework. However, for some offenders that were grooming multiple young people concurrently, as conversations progressed sexually their ability to maintain numerous conversations actively diminished. For example some offenders described being unable to concentrate or focus on other discussions as they became cognitively and physically aroused by sexual escalation within one conversation.

If one was becoming a sexual chat then the others would start to fall off. My responses would become to slow and the young people would say 'look you've obviously got other things on your mind, you're obviously busy, we'll chat later…' (UK participant, female victim age 10-12).

Style

The definition of online grooming states that contact between the offender and young person develops via a process of socialization. However, as we have seen throughout this chapter, not all men convicted of online grooming in this sample adopt what can be seen as 'the typical grooming approach'. For example, earlier sections have shown that some men had a picture of their flaccid penis as their profile picture, or had a profile name such as *PussyLicker69*. As might be expected, the approach of some of these men was characterized by very limited conversation and an almost instant sexual request or sexual act.

> *I'd just go online and say straight out 'what's your name, what's your bra size'. And they would reply back with a size and I'd say 'that's nice and big…..' (UK participant, female victims age 13-15).*

There is very little seduction in such methods and questions must be asked about whether 'online groomer' is in fact the correct terminology to describe these men. We address this issue further when presenting the typology of online groomers in chapter 5.

Turning to those men who did not talk about making instant sexual requests, there was evidence of online grooming contact methods that mirrored closely the well documented techniques used by offline sexual offenders. Here, a deliberate process of *gentle socialisation* was described whereby early discussion themes tended to be neutral and non-threatening.

You have to continue manipulating. Dig deeper, see what sort of experiences she's had, find out where she lives, whether she has a boyfriend…… (Belgium participant, female victims age 13-15).

The style of approach and topic discussed was chosen according to the needs of the offender (discussed in detail in chapter 5) and/or the perceived or actual needs of the young person (covered further in chapter 6). The approaches described by online groomers encompassed three broad styles:

- **Complimentary**: online groomers described using language to explicitly flatter the young person in terms of their physical appearance, maturity compared to stated age, clothes, taste in music, and the types of sites the young person visited online.

> *Mostly I influenced them by giving compliments and then I could steer the conversation my way (Norway participant, female victims age 10-15).*

> *She had a very low self esteem of herself because she was slightly overweight. She'd always say 'oh I'm really fat, I'm ugly' and I would say 'no you're not you're good looking', I was very supportive (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).*

- **Mentor:** this refers to the way some online groomers described presenting themselves as somebody who would always be on hand to discuss and solve the young person's problems, be it about school-work, boyfriend difficulties, or online / offline bullying. In effect then, the groomers adopting this approach seem to be acting as a substitute parent. For vulnerable young people who may not have regular access to advice and support, it is not difficult to image why this style of approach would be attractive.

I fitted the criteria for a couple of boys, they wanted a father figure and they saw me as a sort of father figure, as it were. It was the way they said things, calling me 'daddy' and stuff like that. (UK participant, male victims age 5-12).

Her parents were divorcing and so I was trying to comfort her……(UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

- **Experience congruence:** some men talked about approaching young people that shared similar interests (such as music or sport) or life experiences (parental separation, bullying at school and so on). As such, some offenders described sharing their personal experiences with young people online get their attention and model that is normal to openly discuss personal issues online.

In addition to the three approaches made above, the style of text and symbols used were also adopted by some online groomers in order to present themselves in a favorable or non-threatening manner. Here some offenders talked about using text-type with young people, whereby words within sentences are abbreviated, with letters sometimes replaced by numbers. For example: '*Hi gorgeous hope to cu l8r'.*

Alongside use text-type, some men also used other imagery to communicate with young people. These tended to be emoticons[15] and further helped underpin a credible, compelling and engaging communication style.

I: How did you show the boys that you were interested in what they had to say to you?

I would put the 'hugs' sign and stuff like that. I would also put SWALK, that's 'sealed with a loving kiss' or something like that. But it was mainly icon-based as well. If it was someone's birthday I would put a birthday cake up, or if they were from America I'd pull up a stars and stripes symbol…. (UK participant, male victims age 5-12).

I made a point of using short words and smileys that were typical for teenage chat. I also typed in teenage spelling but used adult language (Norway participant, female victim age 13-15).

Timing

In the sections above the range of different approaches (such as 'instant sexual' and 'gentle socialisation') as well as the number of people contacted online (one-to-two or two hundred) has been set out. With this

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[15] An emoticon is a textual expression representing the face of a writer's mood or facial expression. For example, :), :(, and :D. They have now been replaced by pictures such as

diversity in mind, online groomers talked about spending seconds, minutes, days, months and even years talking to young people.

In chapter 5 a typology of online groomers is presented that attempts to explain the different temporal choices made by online groomers when contacting young people. Irrespective of the offender's motivation here, what seems clear is that the Internet has speeded up the process of child sexual abuse. That is, the anonymous, disinhibiting properties of the Internet are allowing offenders to behave in a sexually explicit way, at a speed that would be almost impossible to replicate with a stranger, offline and face to face.

However, for those offenders who did not instantly have a sexual conversation, it is important to understand how they managed to switch the encounter from neutral to sexual, and when the time was right to do so. This is the next feature of online grooming to be discussed.

Intensity

In the literature regarding offline sexual offences against children, offender's attempts to get the young person used to the idea of sex, nudity and sexual contact is well documented (Marshall et al, 1999). The key motivation for this behaviour is that subsequent sexual requests by the offender will not seem unsettling or out of the ordinary to the young person. Desensitisation from online groomers in this sample encompassed three styles: **the use of visual images, language and incentives.**

Visual: An integral part of visual desensitisation involved sending young people explicit images, archive clips and real-time web-cam film. The material sent to young people included adult-pornography and indecent images of children. Where online groomers talked about a gradual process of offence intensity, images were used to instigate sexual discussion.

I sent them pictures of, of some of the bits that I had or videos or images. I'd send them through and we would comment on the, on the person in the image. About sort of whether they were attractive or not…..and maybe talk about what I wanted to do with, what I want to do with the girl and sometimes we had conversations about, even with the young girls about what I want her to do with, with the young girl as well or want her to do with me and what the three of us could do together, that, those sorts of conversations. (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

An important point about the use of images is that they also served to intensify the abuse process for the offender. That is, it was not uncommon for some offenders to describe masturbating to ejaculation whilst discussing images with young people. Linking a behavioural response (ejaculation) to the cognition and sexual language was described as strengthening the need to offend by some men. This is discussed in further detail when 'maintenance processes' are set out in the next chapter.

We have seen in the section above there were diverse styles of grooming within the sample that for some, involved numerous fast contacts with young people. As such, some offenders talked about intensifying contact almost instantly by emailing young people pictures or videos of their penis or the man masturbating and ejaculating. In some extreme cases, the offenders avatar was a visual image of their flaccid penis. The

extent of online disinhibition amongst this group is very clear. In terms of the Ward and Hudson framework, there is also compelling evidence to support the idea of an Approach-Automatic style characterised by impulsivity, less careful planning and underregulation.

Language: Running concurrently to visual desensitisation techniques, some online groomers created further process momentum by using language to both encourage and reassure the young person. This is illustrated clearly in the quote excerpt used directly above. The selection of language to be used was not random, but instead depended on the age and perceived 'readiness' of the young person, and style of offender (discussed further in chapter 6).

Across the groomers that talked about *not* making an immediate sexual request on first contact, there was discussion of a *'sexual test'* given to young people that could involve any of the following:

- **Image request**: here some men described asking young people to send them a personal image. Sometimes, explicit instructions would be given in terms of what the offender wanted the young person to wear. However, these types of requests were described as still being non-threatening, but at the same time meeting the needs and fantasy of the man:

    After a while I would ask her to go on web-cam 'with a short skirt on, like….' (UK participant, female victims age 13-15).

    However, there were also examples of image requests that were remarkably explicit, given the neutral and social nature of the conversation(s) that had gone before. These conversations could involve requests for pictures of the young person's genitals or asking them to perform a sex act, such as masturbating live on the webcam. Concurrent to these explicit requests, some men also talked about sending the young person a picture of the offender naked, or engaged in a sex act. Arguably this action helps offenders present their request in a more tolerable way. That is, they are not asking the young person to do anything that the offender is not prepared to do themselves. However, whether the request is subtle or explicit, by encouraging the young person to send images the online groomers are framing the activity as normal and acceptable.

- **Sexual discussion**: as above, sexual discussion was described as both explicit and subtle. The decision about what approach to use was sometimes underpinned by how the young person was presenting online. For example, an offender in Belgium talked about using a young person's provocative screen name to introduce sexual topics, following a series of neutral opening conversations.

    You test her by saying stuff like: "Are you slutty, are you horny?" If she's receptive, then we can take it a step further. If not, you move on to something else (Belgium participant, female victims age 13-15).

In cases where there was nothing overt to indicate that the young person was particularly sexualised, sex was described as being subtly introduced into the discussion. For example, some offenders would bring their own sexual interests into conversation to see how the young person reacted. What made these approaches more subtle was that the topic and focus of the conversation, although sexual, is about the offender and not the young person.

I would begin to describe my fantasies of dominance. How they responded to each suggestion was used as a marker as to whether he could take things further and then potentially meet to act the fantasy out (Norway participant, female victim age 13-15).

I'd be like just probably talking sexual like, saying something like what I like and like to do, and stuff like that (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

- **Sex as fun**: in the third theme discussed by the men, 'sexual entertainment' underpinned the way in which young people were tested about their propensity to act sexually. Again, the way in which 'entertainment' was presented was both explicit and subtle. Taking explicit examples first, one online groomer set a request for mutual online masturbation in the form of a 'competition'.

The chat was basically what were you wearing and things like that. And they would say 'I'm getting hard, and that type of thing. And that's how it would instigate from there. We, just sort of like chat about other things as well, but primarily the sex was important. And we would both wank together, as it were. And, or we would have a competition to see who could come first, you know? (UK participant, male victims age 5-12).

A more subtle approach was discussed in terms of telling a 'sexual joke' or using names for a penis or vagina that young people would be able to relate to, and perhaps find amusing. If there was laughter when the 'joke' or terminology was introduced, the groomer took this as a cue to escalate the nature and extent of subsequent sexual requests.

There was the point where I thought, okay, well I say a joke about having 'a big black penis in my pants, do they want to see it' and they said yes, okay, that's why I thought okay (UK participant, male victims age 5-12).

This section has so far examined the use of images and language to desensitise young people. From the conversations with online groomers across Europe, there were also examples of some men **incentivising** young people to continue contact and / or escalate the nature of discussions and behaviours. The incentives described were either **gifts or explicit threats**.

Gifts: included topping up mobile phones (a behaviour that was particularly prevalent in Italy); providing new mobile phone handsets and credit, sending webcams to young people, offers of cash, and presents related to the young persons interest, such as a CD of a favourite band.

Providing gifts to young people could be perceived as a one-way gesture that only benefits the young person. However, the *gifts* selected and provided seemed to also ensure that the grooming process would continue. For example, if a young person's mobile phone is topped up, or a brand-new handset provided, there is no reason for the young person not to keep in contact with the offender.

She may have said she was short on phone credit once and I topped her phone up, went to the shop and brought a top up card for her network and text her the number from it. There may have been a couple of times when I did things like that.

I: Why was it you would have done that?

I think it was partly because, as I say there was a connection, I wanted to chat to her. If shed got no money to text, then we couldn't chat, so I felt you know, partly it was a, just a gift, but maybe it was so I could carry on chatting to her. (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

In the case of new phone handsets, this also neutralises potential process risks for the online groomer, such as parental checks of a young person's phone. Here, the parent may not know that their child has the new handset and so will be unaware of the offending behaviour taking place.

A similar case for the offender benefiting from providing gifts can be made with webcams. That is, once the webcam has been accepted and installed by the young person, it is perhaps becomes more difficult for them to resist subsequent requests to appear online, either clothed or in a state of undress. It is important to note that providing gifts to young people as part of the sexual offence process is a very common tactic used by men who sexually offend offline. What this study has illustrated is the selection of gifts can help propel forward or increase the unique properties of online sexual abuse, sexual disinhibition via webcams and phones.

Threats: the second collection of behaviours to intensify the offending process made no attempt to subtly manipulate the young person. Here there were two forms of threat described by some men. The method selected depended on *whether the groomer wanted the young person to begin sexual contact, or continue behaving sexually.*

In cases where the young person had not yet acted sexually, there was an example of one offender hacking into the computers of young people. Here, alongside having the technical competence to hack a computer, the offender described two features of some young people that supported this technique. First, that some young people are naive and do not have a basic awareness the attack could be prevented. Second, computer use being a privilege. Therefore, the offender can play on the fear of what will happen when parents find out what has been happening to the family PC.

On MSN chat, you know that's not like a chat room, its like a chat programme, you have a direct link between their computer and yours, so once that's established you can go into the, the DOS prompt and you can find their IP address, which is very easy to do. Once you've got their IP address, if they have no protection or

little protection on their computer which is like a firewall, if they don't have any of that its very easy to just use a simple programme to hack straight into their computer. If they do have some protection you can send a virus, which is a SubSeven virus or, various other viruses. You'd send them what they would think is a, you know, a simple photograph or, or file, executable file. When they open it, they'd see the photograph but unbeknown to them, files would be installed into the Windows operating system that would open ports and allow me to get into their computer through those open ports. When they were open, I could access their files, I could control their computer as though I were sat in front of it, and if I was just browsing the files they wouldn't even know I was in there but I could, you know, open the CD drawer, reverse the display on the screen, print things out on the printer. You could do pretty much whatever you could as if you were sat in front of the computer so if, if I spoke to the girls and they wouldn't do what I wanted to do, I would hack in via those means and then say, you know, look, I can do this, I can do that: do what I want or Ill, you know, mess up your computer, delete files, whatever…

I suppose, young people are more likely to go along with the demands rather than just say, you know, bugger off and switch their computer off. You know, I suppose a, a younger child, if it was their adults computer, you know, their parents computer, they would kind of like be more reluctant for anything bad to happen to it and just say well, you know, just, you know, do what you want to do and then leave my computer alone, so to speak (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

The quote and preceding section presents a graphic and disturbing account of offence escalation. However, with this disturbing account comes the need for Internet education programmes to include information about firewalls on all PCs. In addition, the safety campaigns also need to encourage some parents to have a more open relationship with their child about computer use. That is, young people need to feel empowered to be able to talk to their parents and carers when things go wrong. Vice versa, responsible adults also need to feel equipped with the knowledge that such extreme offending behaviour can occur and can be managed. In chapter 7 the implication of this research for safety campaigns are discussed further.

Moving away from safety implications, the section above also illustrates strong support for Ward and Hudson's approach-explicit style, within an online sexual offending context. That is, some offenders had sophisticated strategies they could flexibly use, depending on the reaction of the young person to a sexual request. Although some techniques were described as being 'preferred' over others, the overarching approach goal to sexually offend would override any uncertainty over the technique:

I'd rather they were compliant and went along with it and, you know, sort of like participated as well rather than me hacking in and, and blackmailing them…(UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

In cases *where the young person had been behaving sexually online,* some men talked about making explicit threats to encourage the young person to continue. Again, the young person's naivety about online safety concepts like the 'digital footprint' was described as influencing the 'success' of these threats:

If she breaks my trust, I'll threaten that I could play dirty tricks on her. For example, I could say: "Everything you did in front of the webcam, well I made photos, I'll post them all on a website, out of spite. I did that for a while, and if I have to I'll hack into your account and I'll send the password out to all your contacts". And that's what happened. They're afraid and they realize they've been had. They can break out crying, some go into a panic …….. (Belgium participant, female victims age 13-15).

It is not unreasonable to suggest that the threat of disclosure alone is a powerful motivation for young people to continue contact. Coupled with the young person's feelings of responsibility or guilt that they may have been complicit in 'letting this happen', the online groomer is in a strong position to move forward to their desired final outcome.

Outcomes

A key aim of this research was to understand the process of online grooming and map the final outcomes associated with the behaviour. In doing so, the consortium was determined to challenge some common assumptions about grooming. For example, that all online sexual offending involves a process of socialisation, and that online grooming tends to culminate in a physical meeting.

Across this sample, there was evidence that for some online sexual offenders, being able to continue to collect images and engage with young people in a sexual way was the desired outcome. Here, a meeting or any longer-term contact for these offenders was never the goal driving their offending behaviour.

As long as they looked more mature, that was all I was kind of interested in really. At the time, cause it wasn't anything long-term, it wasn't a case of I'd even want to speak to them the next day. It was just for that moment, so there was no real specific target in there (UK participant, female victims age 13-15).

From the quote above and evidence in some of the preceding sections, some online groomers are conceptualising Internet contact with young people as transient, impersonal and immediate. This then speaks to Suller's theory of online disinhibition. However, to inform safety campaigns and offender treatment programmes, it is important to identify any patterns influencing this type of behaviour and outcome. This typological analysis is detailed in chapter 5.

In contrast to those continuing online contact, there were also accounts of a physical meeting between the young person and offender as the final outcome. Depending on the individual's overarching offending style, meetings were held in hotels, car-parks, parks, bus stops, and the offender or young person's bedroom. As noted in the earlier sections, meetings took place only once, or for some, on multiple occasions with the same young person.

Beyond the sexual offence outcome itself, how some meetings played out provided further evidence of the difference between online and offline reality, thereby supporting the role of the online disinhibition effect in grooming. For example, some men who went on to meet the young person had got to this point by describing online, in graphic detail, what they were going to sexually do to the young person when they actually met. In some cases, this sexually explicit behaviour was mirrored by the young person. It is not unreasonable to imagine that given the graphic nature of the sexual conversation that had already taken place, the contact sexual offence would occur as soon as the offender and young person met. However, this was not always the case. Some offenders talked about spending a significant amount of time socialising with the young person before committing the assault. For example, in one case the

offender took the young person for a hamburger and ice cream. In another example, a trip to the cinema preceded the indecent assault. Irrespective of the socialising method, the feature that linked these behaviours was the need to behave differently in a face-to-face encounter.

The contrast between online and offline reality also had a bearing on the self-efficacy of some young people at the physical meetings. For example, one online groomer described a significant amount of contact with a confident and bubbly young woman online. However, when the physical meeting occurred, the young person was described as withdrawn, to the extent that she almost never spoke. Another offender said that a previously mild and quiet young boy became very different after he began drinking during the face to face meeting.

He was shouting stuff like 'I suck cock and I'm gonna come up and suck your cock'. He went and said it to adults, people who had children there and I was getting very embarrassed (UK participant, male victim age 13-15).

It should be said, however, that there were also accounts from some online groomers of multiple meetings with young people who presented as enthusiastic throughout the offending process. For safety campaigns to have maximum impact, it is important to understand what is driving some young people to 'willingly' meet adult men on numerous occasions. This is explored further in chapter 6. Similarly, how some online groomers perceive young people's 'consent' also has a bearing on understanding particular online and offline offending patterns – the focus of chapter 5.

This chapter has presented the features of online grooming, set in the context of seminal psychological theories. It has shown that online groomers are not a homogenous group, and so illustrated the diversity of different online and offline behaviours within each individual cognitive and behavioural feature. In the next chapter, the characteristics and behaviours that helped maintain men down the offending path, and strategies they used to manage their risk of detection are described.

4. Offender Maintenance and Risk Management

Adults with a sexual interest in young people can be in little doubt that the general public finds such behaviour abhorrent. Offenders themselves may also be disgusted or unsettled with their sexual attraction towards young people but feel that they do not have the strategies or power to resist such urges. Given the view of society towards sexual offenders and the negative emotions some offenders associate with their thoughts about young people, some online groomers will need to motivate themselves and to some extent, give themselves permission to continue grooming. This suggestion resonates with the theory of deindividuation (Zimbardo, 1969), where a loss of individual responsibility can contribute to a state of deindividuation and behavioral disinhibition - consequently, established forms of social conduct may be violated.

At the same time, the consequences of sexual offending in terms of prison sentences, family break-up, unemployment, and vilification from the public are frequently discussed by the mainstream media. Given the clear personal and social risks associated with online grooming, how some offenders actively tried to deal with these threats has important implications for offender management and Internet safety policy.

The first section of this chapter sets out the maintenance activities described by the online groomers. The chapter then concludes with a presentation of the different risk management techniques deployed.

4.1 Maintenance

From the accounts of online groomers interviewed, offence maintenance or deindividuation occurred in three, interlinked ways: the nature of the **online environment; dissonance;** and through **perceptions of young people and their behaviour.**

Online environment

The way in which we communicate has changed significantly. New technology such as the Internet and mobile phones allows people to communicate without ever physically meeting. The lack of social cues or norms asociated with online sociialisation means that some people can take advantage of the opportunity of being and feeling anonymous. This in turn can lower inhibitions (Caretti & La Barbera, 2000; Turkle, 1995, 2004; Schimmenti & Caretti, 2010). Unfortunately what this also means is that sometimes personal information may be involuntarily given by people online and as we have seen in the previous chapter, can attract the attention of particular individuals, such as online groomers (Davidson & Gottschalk, 2008; 2009, Davidson & Martellozzo, 2008a; 2008b).

In the previous chapter, Suller's theory of online disinhibition has been described and then used to contextualise the diverse array of offending behaviors discussed by the online groomers. However, from the accounts of offenders interviewed, the online environment did more than just facilitate contact with a vast amount of potential young victims. Being online also seemed to influence how offenders felt about themselves and in doing so, maintained or further propelled these individuals along a sexual offending pathway. There were four ways in which being online maintained sexual offending behaviours:

Confidence: Literature that has focussed on offline sexual offenders describes a group of men who can have low self-esteem and lack social confidence when dealing with other people or everyday social situations (Webster, Mann, Thornton & Wakeling, 2007). There was clear evidence of similar self-efficacy challenges in the current sample of online groomers. This tends to indicate that the socio-affective functioning of some online groomers is very similar to offline sexual offenders.

I have suffered through my life with low self-esteem, low self-confidence. I'm not a sort of gregarious person, and I'm uncomfortable in meeting new people, you know, in, in anything more than the very sort of surface of a social thing (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

Actually, because you're not sitting face-to-face with them. If you're sitting face-to-face with someone, you might feel a bit uneasy when online you feel a bit more confident a little bit cause you don't actually know that person so you could devolve maybe just a little bit more and I felt, felt a bit more at ease and not be myself really, so I, I could be someone else…. (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

Given the lack of offline self-efficacy some men described, what was particularly striking was to hear some online groomers talk about the Internet as a place where they could easily socialise, make friends, and contact people with freedom and confidence. Underpinning this confidence was a sense that the Internet provided online groomers with the opportunity to separate their online self from their real world identity. In turn being online made them feel less vulnerable about opening up socially, and so speaks directly to Suller's concept of **dissociative anonymity**.

I used the Internet as a place where I could be myself, I felt safe communicating, it was a space where I felt fine (Norway participant, female victims age 13-15).

This sense of increased confidence was further influenced by the sheer amount of offending opportunities that being online presented. Consequently, rejection by a young person did not tend to be internalised as a personal failure or statement of the individuals' poor self-efficacy. Instead, offenders were aware that they could confidently and quickly move on to another encounter with the young person. In some respects, online sexual offending removes the protective factor that offline rejection can temporarily offer young people. That is, online, there seems to be very little gap between one 'unsuccessful' encounter and a further attempt at contact.

sometimes they'd leave the conversation and I'd be, I'd just forget it, just wipe their details and then carry on somewhere else (UK participant, female victims age 13-15).

There are plenty of fish – you'll always catch one eventually (Norway participant, male victims age 13-15).

Stimulation: Alongside feeling confident, the online environment was described as a place where some online groomers felt more alive or stimulated. Here the boring or mundane aspects of life were described as being mitigated by the excitement of going online, meeting different people, and behaving in a way that was not sometimes possible in the offline world:

I was bored. I hadn't got anything better to do. Because I was working long hours, so about 7 o clock at night it's either watch television or go on the Internet (UK participant, female victims age 13-15).

I would come home from work, have dinner and then due to boredom I would check the sport sites and at same time sign onto social networking sites and form there people would contact me (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

Addiction: The final aspect of the online environment was how some men talked about feeling addicted to the Internet. Given the previous two sections have described how being online made some men feel more confident, socially skilled and stimulated, it is not surprising to hear how these individuals then became dependent on the Internet on a day to day basis. Here, some men talked about feeling tense and almost obsessed with the need to go online. For example, one offender talked about being away with work without Internet access for three days. However, after two days, he said that he felt so desperate to go online that he faked illness so he could return home early and use chatrooms.

I had the chat seven days a week, 'cause I'd just sleep for about three hours and that's it. (UK participant, female victims age 13-15).

I was on the Internet every day, it really was an addiction. I hardly ate, its all I did (Belgium participant, female victims age 13-15).

Consequently, for men with a sexual interest in young people, the more time they spend online the greater the risk of harmful contact developing.

Disinhibition: It seems clear from the previous chapter that the Internet functions as an enabler of interpersonal contact that then lowers individual inhibition. This tends to happen because an online identity, even if not voluntarily falsified, is seen as 'something other' than the normal, daily identity (Ciulla, 2008). As such, Internet interaction can be regarded as apart from reality, not integrated with it (Caretti, Craparo, Schimmenti, 2010). Furthermore, it is a context in which individuals can do whatever they want, because there seems to be no tangibale consequences to their actions in their daily life. This then is the key distincation between offline sexual offending and online grooming.

Suller's theory of online disinhibition has been developed with non-offending behaviour in mind. However, we have seen in the previous chapter that this research provides strong support for Suller's framework as a way of understanding the features of some groomers' behaviour. Furthermore, support for Suller's theory was never more pronounced than when the online groomers discussed how the disinhibiting properties of the Internet helped to *maintain* their offending behaviour. Four inter-related features of disinhibition emerged from offenders accounts. These are shown in figure 4.1 below and described in subsequent sections.

Figure 4.1: Maintaining features of online disinhibition
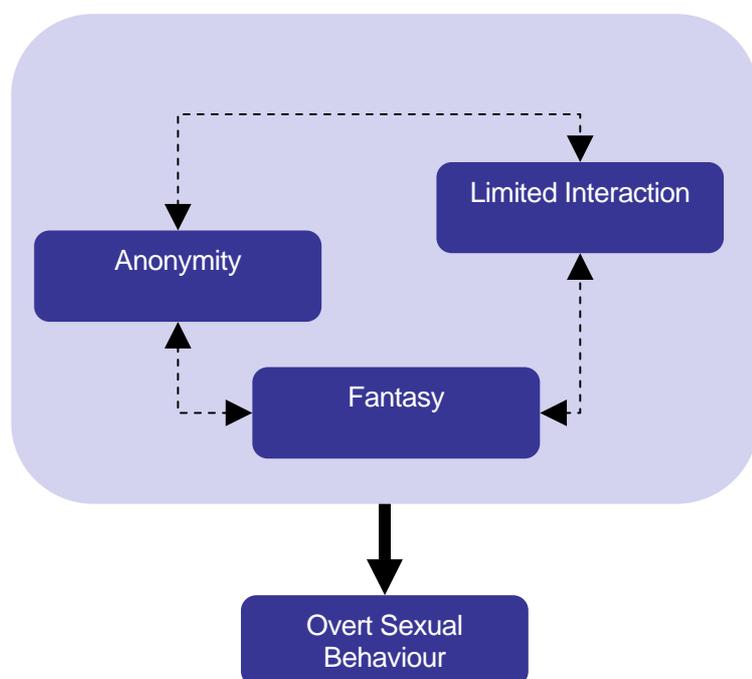
Anonymity

Suller's concept of ***invisibility*** refers to the online environment giving people the courage to go to places and do things that they otherwise would not. From the groomer accounts, there was clear evidence of some men using the hidden nature of the Internet to maintain and escalate their offending behaviour. For example, we have seen in Chapter 3 how some men were able to anonymously adopt the identity of someone else, using both text descriptions and photographs. That nobody they were contacting knew who they were in the first place, helped to maintain this behaviour

It's really very easy to manipulate someone, especially from behind a PC. They don't see us. You can put any picture up and say it's you, you can invent all sorts of stories (Belgium participant, female victims age 13-15).

It is important to note that the concept of anonymity helped maintain the behaviour and motivation of offenders and perhaps some of the young people groomed. For example, in chapter 3 there are examples of young people who were behaving very sexually online, but who were then quite reserved during a face to face meeting. Arguably, as with the offender, it is possible that the hidden nature of Internet enabled

conversations to escalate in a way that would not be possible for the young person offline. This is discussed further in chapter 6.

Fantasy

In our model of disinhibition, running concurrently to feelings of anonymity is the concept that the online groomers behaviour was all part of a fantasy life. Suller describes this as **dissociative imagination,** whereby the online persona along with online others live in a make-believe dimension. The extent some individuals saw their behaviour as a fantasy was particularly evident in the accounts of online groomers that had children. Specifically, children of a similar age to those the man was targeting and offending against online. Consequently, when asked how they were able to reconcile their offending behaviour with their feelings toward their own child, online sexual contact as fantasy, or a harmless game was a recurrent topic of discussion.

I mean in all honesty, I mean it is so ridiculous and absurd that, the kind of thing can it's just not normal. And it's not the kind of way that, you normally think about things or interact or, how you perceive people in the real world either. That's something that I can't, that really isn't expressed enough. I think its important to sort of try and get some understanding because I think Internet chatting can become something different from the reality, how you perceive people on there that you're talking to is not based on reality at all. (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

It took me into another world, really. It's just like being somewhere else, being with people and chatting to people and talking about (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

Limited feedback

With feelings of anonymity and fantasy embedded in the cognitions of the groomers, the online environment further maintained offending behaviour by protecting individuals from looking or feeling foolish. For example, one groomer who used forums to target young people talked about the lack of visual interaction meaning he did not have to attend to accepted conversational norms indicating displeasure or disinterest, such as a frown or shake of the head.

Partly because one thing that worries me, it worried me at the time going to a nightclub to chat someone up, I would look silly and everyone would laugh at me. So I suppose on the Internet you can't see peoples reactions and there aren't other people to laugh at you I suppose (UK participant, female victims age 10-15).

Overt sexual behaviour

The final feature of disinhibition maintenance was influenced by a culmination of the previous three dimensions. That is, anonymity, fantasy and vey limited feedback allowed the online groomer to behave online in a very sexual way. Over time, there was the sense amongst some groomers that constantly talking in a sexual way online helped them normalise what at first could be seen as an embarrassing or dangerous behaviour. Consequently, normalising overt sexual behaviour with young people further propelled some men down the offending pathway.

I mean, I would never talk like sexy chat or dirty talk to, to anybody other than online, which is, you know, its, its a bit strange, really. Well, being online allowed me to do my, you know, give me that sort of freedom to do that, for some reason. I don't understand it (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

Again it's the kind of thing that you'd never say to someone face to face, even if there was a possibility of a relationship or it was in a date. Because on the Internet you don't care. You know if you get a bad reaction it doesn't matter (UK participant, female victim age 13-15)

Having set out the features of the online environment that helped maintain online grooming behaviours, the next section addresses the second sustaining factor – dissonance.

Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance is the discomfort of holding conflicting cognitions simultaneously. For example, having a sexual interest in young people online whilst being acutely aware of the widespread public condemnation of such behaviour. There were three features of dissonance that emerged from the accounts of the online groomers. First is the influence of **adult and child images; second the bearing of online chat on attitudes and behaviour; third the manifestation of offence supportive beliefs**.

Adult and Child Images: Given the amount of time the men in this sample spent behaving sexually online, it is not surprising to find adult pornography use as a recurrent theme. Adult pornography was sourced from three places; commercial streaming sites such as *RedTube;* file-sharing sites such as *Limewire* and directly from other adults the men were chatting to online. The type of videos and images sourced covered a wide range of sexual behaviours and interests (heterosexual couples, same sex couples; paraphillias and so on). However, a particularly key factor for some adult pornography users was identified when they talked about searching for adult models that were 18 or 19 years old, but looked younger. This type of pornography is sometimes labeled and marketed as a 'barely legal' category. The influence of these searches on indecent image use and behaviour is discussed further below.

I found myself looking at younger and younger pornography pages. I mean some of them, one of them was a website called U18, you know, and the models were like, 18 years old, but they looked younger. You know, I was finding myself sexually turned on more by those (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

Turning to indecent video and images of children, the use of the Internet by sexual offenders to trade and develop collections of indecent images is a well documented concern (Quayle & Taylor, 2002; Quayle, Vaughan & Taylor, 2007; O'Brien & Webster, 2007). This sample was not different in that regard, with men describing collections of images ranging from none, to a few, to in excess of 20,000. As with adult pornography above; indecent images were sourced from commercial sites; via discussion and swapping/trading with other adults; or from mainstream file-sharing sites. The content of these images spanned all five categories on the Copine Scale (Quayle & Taylor, 2002), from children posed in underwear to sexually sadistic images depicting the torture of infant children.

In the literature, there has also been some attention about how men who collect indecent images of children store and classify the material. In particular, the extent of storage specificity for each indecent image (O'Brien & Webster, 2007). From the interviews, there was evidence of precise storage systems across some of the sample for both archive material and images that were being collected as part of the ongoing sexual grooming of a young person. These systems encompassed:

- Separate folders for each individual young person being groomed
- Folders by gender of child and adult (girl alone, boy – boy together, boy adult and so on)
- Storing by type of sexual act taking place (kissing, hugging, penetration and so on)

The collection of indecent images of young people was a recurrent theme in the interviews. However, it would be misleading to suggest that all men using images had a storage/classification system as this was not the case. There were examples of men simply saving every image, sometimes thousands, into one folder. The relationship between individual's behaviour with indecent images and their overarching grooming style is discussed further in the next chapter.

Although the data presented on the sourcing and storing of adult pornography and indecent images adds to the collective body of knowledge, it could be suggested that these data do not really provide new insight. Where the literature is less clear is with regard to:

- how images may **maintain** offending behaviour?
- the relationship between the **viewing of indecent images and online / offline sexual offending**?

These questions are the focus of the rest of this section. In the next chapter we present a typology of online grooming that shows the differential influence of images on the different grooming styles.

Maintenance

When some of the online groomers discussed their use of adult pornography and indecent images, the relative ease in which illegal content could be sourced was the first maintaining feature. That is, these men did not have to go far or work hard to search out the material. As such, some talked about viewing pornography and indecent images as becoming a normal part of their life, as perhaps other people would view email, or regular online shops.

There was also something about the scale of indecent material available online that had a bearing on some behaviours. That is, with so much material online to view, groomers do not feel isolated or different viewing the content. Here, it is not hard to see how the online disinhibition also plays a role in making individuals feel safe and anonymous whilst taking part in what is quite clearly illegal behaviour.

Escalation

As well as maintaining or supporting online sexual offending, for some online groomers viewing adult pornography and indecent images of children was discussed as having a role in escalating deviant behaviour in four different ways:

- **Saturation**: although there were different saturation trajectories according to the type of material first accessed (adult pornography or indecent images of children), the overarching impact was described as the same. That is, becoming bored of looking at a particular type of image, and/or not becoming so easily aroused when masturbating to a particular type of image. Consequently some men described moving from images or films that they saw as mild or perhaps 'more acceptable', to material that was ever more explicit (and thus arousing again).

> *[at first] it was just the odd pornographic image I was looking at, and by the time I was arrested my computer could be on 24 hours a day downloading off file share software… I think I was looking for higher level images, to get the same satisfaction, you'd start off at level one, two images, then it progressed to images of three and four and the odd level five image, just to be able to get the same kick that I was getting at the beginning. (UK participant, female victim age 13-15)*

> *It didn't start with chat, it started with images. (UK participant, female victim age 10-12)*

For those groomers who began by looking at adult pornography, some began to search for ever younger films, images or 'models' (on the cusp of legality). These seemed to temporarily meet their sexual interest in young people whilst still not 'feeling illegal'. There were also examples of men who talked about becoming intrigued by what 'indecent images' would look like, and that it would potentially offer something different to 'regular adult content'.

> *…it was something new, something different…but then I sort of started thinking, well, in the same way that I'd been talking to adults about sex and pornography and everything, I thought well, maybe there's going to be young people out there to talk to about sex so I started going looking for profiles on Yahoo! and MSN for, for young girls (UK participant, female victims age 13-15).*

- **Denial of harm to child**: Offence supportive beliefs play a key role in sustaining sexual offending behaviour. There was evidence in the accounts of some offenders that particular features of some images were focused on to justify and continue with child sexual abuse. Here, a key overarching feature was that images were collected that showed the child as smiling or happy. This then helped support the myth that children enjoy sexual contact with adults. For example, one offender talked about purposively only choosing images where the boys looked to enjoy what they were doing:

> *If I saw a facial look which looked as if, they were uncomfortable in what they were doing…Not enjoying it, so to speak… I would filter that out and to begin with [one] that was. (UK participant, male victims age 13-15).*

At the time… I said I'm not doing any harm. Harm isn't even being caused. Its all just pornography; its all part of the same thing. (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

The literature on the impact of sexual offending on children is replete with examples of how emotionally and physically painful the experience of abuse is. Some offenders said there were examples of such pain in the faces of some of the young people in the images and films they were sometimes viewing. For example, some young people were described as crying or showing other signs of obvious distress. Clearly, such explicit distress does not support the idea that young people like sexual contact with adults. Consequently, some offenders took active steps to avoid any such conflicting or distressing material that would challenge their offence supportive beliefs.

Yes, and when it got to images…my line of reasoning at the time was they've opened their eyes in the image and they was, they was haunted. In my mind they weren't enjoying what the image, what was going on in the image…So for me I would disregard those images (UK participant, male victims age 13-15).

Another way in which material was filtered was by only selecting images and film were the young person looked older. Here, like the searching of 'barely legal' adult pornography described above, collecting images of older looking children seems to help the offender feel like there is a form of consent, legality, and thus permission to continue.

You would have said that she was about 16, 17. Even my solicitors have said she was 16, 17, from the picture (UK participant, female victim age 10-12).

…once I got into the children chat rooms it was a case of well, it kind of gives me the same buzz as this and they look like adults, they're acting like adults, you know, for all I know they could be as good as adults, to all intents and purposes, but obviously they weren't (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

I had in my mind that the boy in the image had to be sexually mature, so for me they had to have pubic hair. If they didn't have any pubic hair it wasn't of any interest sexually to me at all. I didn't get any, anything out of it for me (UK participant, male victims age 13-15).

- **Fantasy:** As we have described in the preceding chapter when child desensitisation and offence intensity occurs, images played a role in this feature of online grooming. Underpinning this use of indecent images was that they helped make real, the young person who was being groomed online. This seemed particularly pertinent to men who were not using webcams, and so had no immediate visual picture of the young person. Here, how indecent images were stored and classified on the groomers PC had a bearing on the immediacy in which a particular picture could be accessed during online chat with a young person. For example, one participant talked about asking a young person to

describe themselves in detail so he could quickly match that description to an indecent image. The image was then used during masturbation whilst concurrently chatting to the young person

I would be trying to look at an image or group of images that somehow made me think that it was the person Id been talking to…[I looked for] the image I've built up in the head about what she was sort of like. That image could be all sorts of different things, you know, it... peoples personalities often come across in chat by the way you chat, and you can look sometimes… look at the picture and imagine the sort of person that they're going to be, you know, if you were to meet this person, you know, how would they talk? ((UK participant, female victim age 10-12).

Beyond specific image to young person matching, there were also examples of men using random indecent images of children to masturbate whilst chatting online, as well as also using them to sustain fantasies whilst offline.

The images helped make real what was going on in my head – It was great (Norway participant, female victim age 13-15).

Well if I liked the look of the girl then I would take a picture or a video clip of her and I… suppose I like… a girl that looks like the girl that you might see in the street. So that's what motivated me to take the pictures of them in the street because I think oh I'll masturbate to that when I get home because its real and you'd seen them (UK participant, female victims age 10-15).

- **Demand fuelling status:** in the previous chapter we have seen that some offenders were capturing images of young people whilst they were offending, and that the continued collection of indecent images was their desired outcome. As well as meeting their own needs, for those talking to other sexual offenders online, their was also a sense of kudos and credibility in being a provider of material, that in turn made some individuals feel important:

…it was something else I thought I was good at. I could collect these things, I knew where to go. You know Id even show off to people [in chat rooms], that was the first offence… I sort of like become part of a club and I had more images I could show off to them (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

Underpinning this demand were two interrelated features of the trade in indecent images online. The first related to how the material was sourced, and the popularity of file-sharing sites such as Limewire. That is, the same indecent images can be copied and shared on thousands of occasions every day. Consequently, some men described seeing the same picture on numerous occasions and it being 'old material'.

Second the concept of saturation, whereby men talked about become bored or tired of viewing the same images. Together these two features undoubtedly create a market for new material and so, encourage some men to continue to abuse young people.

I felt powerful and important knowing that people wanted access to my images. It was exciting and gave me a kick. When I logged on I would get a stream of requests 'do you have something new for us'. I then began to abuse more frequently to meet the request for more pictures (Norway participant, male victims age 13-15).

Although indecent images undoubtedly played a key role in maintaining some online groomers offending behaviour, it is important to be clear that there were some men in the sample that had never accessed indecent material. An explanation for this behaviour is set within the typology of groomers presented in the next chapter. Having described adult pornography and indecent images as the first feature of dissonance, the next section explores the second – the role of online chat.

Online Chat: The literature regarding offline sexual offending is replete with descriptions of 'associations' that have attempted to promote the sexualisation and abuse of young people. For example, the *North American Boy Lovers Association (NAMBLA)* produced written newsletters. However, these associations now tend to publicise their agenda online, with the key advantage for the online groomer being that they can access information anonymously from home.

Chat was described by the online groomers in this sample as taking place in two broad areas. The first were 'labeled' venues for men (as described directly above) with a sexual interest in children and young people. The striking thing about these venues was that the labels of these sites, for example; *Men who Like Young Boys; Boylovers; Boy Bliss, Cherry-Popping Daddies*; and *Young Petals*; seem to be making no effort to hide the content discussed. Arguably, such explicit labelling helps to reinforce the idea that this behaviour is legitimate and acceptable. That is, the content should not be, and is not, hidden.

The second type of area for chat were more unstructured Newsgroups[16] or ad-hoc discussions with other men on message boards such as MSN or Yahoo Messanger.

These two different types of online space tended to meet different needs for the groomers. Labeled discussion forums or Newsgroups were described as a place for men to share explicit sexual fantasies about young people, as well as a place for offering tips and advice to men with a sexual interest in young people.

It's the fact that I could talk to other boy-lovers, as it were, and see how they would do things. I would post things on there and they would post messages back. They would give me advice, as to what the next step was….(UK participant, male victims age 5-12).

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[16] A Usenet newsgroup is a location, usually within the Usenet discussion system, for messages posted from many users in different locations. Newsgroups are technically distinct from, but functionally similar to, discussion forums on the Internet. Newsreader software is used to read newsgroups.

When discussions developed in a more unstructured way, the desire to source or trade in indecent images of children underpinned the motivation. As we have seen throughout this report, the extent of online disinhibition was so pronounced in some of the sample that they would describe openly asking for indecent image from other adults. However, conversations were also described as beginning in a more underhand ways. That is, some online offenders initially thought they were chatting to a young person when requesting images, when in fact, they came to realise they were actually talking to another man, posing as a child. When both parties realised the reality of the situation, a more 'conventional' conversation about images then ensued.

I noticed that there were other adults in chat rooms pretending to be girls. I thought I was chatting to a 14 year old girl and we shared our fantasies whilst masturbating. After we had got our sexual gratification they would reveal to me that they were a boy.

I: How did that happen then?

The reason they have done that is, they obviously first pretend to be a girl as that attracts me to them. They then think I am okay and so they ask me if I have got any pictures…'have you got any younger…under ten or whatever…'. They know there is no way I can risk anything, go to the police or whatever, they're in the same situation as me… (UK participant, male victim age 13-15).

However, there were also examples of men in the sample being groomed over a prolonged period of time in a sophisticated way by other sexual offenders. For example, one participant described having sexually explicit discussions with someone he thought was a 14 year old girl (but was in fact an adult male offender). He then became so attracted, or addicted to these conversations, that he met 'her' request for indecent images by sending 'her' indecent pictures of his two-year old daughter.

I took her to the baby changing area, she was naked from the waist down and I took the photos. When I got back to work on the Monday I transferred them onto my work computer and sent them to 'her' when she came online. At first I was very iffy about sending them, so just sent the ones with her face not in the picture…but eventually I sent them all (UK participant, male victims age 5-12).

We have seen in the section above how the scale of images and ease of image access helped to maintain and normalise a sexual interest in children, and for some, propel forward online grooming behaviours. When the men in the sample articulated the role of online chat in their offending, the way it which chatting helped to 'make okay' the sexual abuse of young people was once again a recurrent theme.

Certainly, when I talked to other people and they said 'yeah I've done this or I've done that', it for me goes back to wanting to, and feeling accepted (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

I was more interested in looking for someone who could have always normalised it, who would understand it or wouldn't judge me for it. It's not something I could admit to somebody (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

However, as with images, it would be misleading to assume that all online groomers are chatting to other like-minded men when online. Our sample was replete with men who never spoke to other men online and this style of behaviour is explained further in the next chapter.

It's a very selfish thing, a very personal thing. You don't share, you're working for yourself. You do it for your own personal pleasure (Belgium participant, female victims age 13-15).

In the next section, the final feature of dissonance is discussed – offence supportive beliefs.

Offence supportive beliefs refer to the maladaptive beliefs and distorted thinking that play an important role in facilitating or justifying contact sexual offences (Maruna and Mann, 2006). From the accounts of online groomers, a wide range of distortions were also apparent and acknowledged by the men. In some respects, the type of offence supportive beliefs described seemed to be influenced by the other dissonance activity previously discussed. For example, images of smiling children, other offenders describing sexual fantasies and so on. In other cases, vulnerability features described early in chapter 3, such as low-self-esteem or emotional loneliness underpinned the nature of some justifications. Consequently, four broad categories of offence-supportive beliefs emerged:

- **Harm reduction views:** This type of belief describes the distortion that the sexual abuse of young people is not harmful in of itself. Here the nature of the online environment influenced these beliefs in that some offenders felt they were not causing harm as they were not physically meeting or touching a young person.

  I'm interested in just looking, and not touching, as it were. And that's what I did. I didn't touch. I looked (UK participant, male victims age 5-12).

  Another example relates to the sense that chatting, albeit sexually, is a normal way of interacting online and offline, and so is not doing any real harm.

  Genuinely at the time I thought this is a female, okay she was under age, like I said age was hardly of any relevance in my thoughts. She was female, supposedly looking like she was curious about sex, sex is harmless, sex is a normal part of life, therefore there is no reason to stop it. (UK participant, female victim age 13-15)

- **Socio-affective reasons:** In this second category, low self-efficacy underpins the range of reasons given to justify the offending behaviour. Here we see direct cross-over between the cognitions described by the online groomers, and the literature concerning the offence-supportive beliefs of child molesters. For example, some offenders talked about having strong *emotional congruence with children*, That is, the felt that they have more in common with young people than people of the same age and so identify with children sexually and emotionally:

I get on better with young people than I get on better with people my own age… (UK participant, male victims age 5-12)

…it tended to be people of a younger age who would talk to me; older people didn't seem to be interested, which I put down to the fact that, you know, I was single, I had no family, so I didn't really have anything in common with them at the time. (UK participant, female victim age 13-15)

Another dimension of socio-affective justification related to the *self-esteem* of the online groomers. Here, online conversations were described as making the men feel happy, wanted, needed and in some respects helped them escape from the hassles and troubles of everyday life that tended to make them feel bad.

…she was taking away all the problems; she was making me feel more confident, more happy kind of thing, more, more self-esteem, that was stronger, more, I was feeling better about myself when I was talking to her online so I, I thought, you know, there's no harm, I see there is now but there's no harm in meeting her, you know? (UK participant, female victim age 13-15)

…it made me feel wanted (UK participant, female victims age 13-15)

The third aspect of this category was how online grooming made some men feel more in *control* or in charge of things than they necessarily did in their offline world:

I think, think its more, more a case of trying to chat to somebody that's inexperienced and I could be in sort of charge or be the boss of her rather than somebody else dictating. (UK participant, female victims age 13-15)

he wanted sex more every day, he wanted to cyber-sex every day, and I said, Look, hang on a minute… I'm not going to do this every day. I'm going to do it when I want to do it, not when you tell me Im going to do it, as it were. (UK participant, male victims age 5-12)

External locus of control: This group of beliefs relates to the sense that some men felt addicted to, or trapped by the Internet. This is discussed in the first section of this chapter, in the context of the 'online environment' as a key maintenance feature.

Young People and Behaviour

The final feature of online maintenance involved the online groomers' perceptions of young people. This topic has been touched on the previous chapter and is discussed in detail in chapter 6. Briefly, these perceptions were underpinned by:

- *how the young person looked online*. For example, a recurrent theme was that the young person was physically developed, looked mature for their age, or was 'just under' the legal age of consent for sexual activity.

- *how the young person behaved online*: Here, young people who posted sexual pictures, used sexual language about themselves or other people, and/or talked about an interest in men, were seen as sexually mature and willing participants in sexual conversations and conduct.

This chapter has described the range of ways the online environment, sexual offending via images and chat, and individual perceptions of young people helped to maintain and in some cases escalate online grooming. In the final section, the ways in which some online groomers attempted to manage the risk of their online behaviour are set out.

4.2 Risk Management

The literature regarding the modus operandi of offline sexual offenders describes the adoption of a range of risk management strategies (Wakeling, Webster, Moulden & Marshall, 2007). This section will show that risk management techniques are also prevalent amongst the behaviour of some online groomers. Four broad risk management strategies were described by some online groomers that encompassed: **Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) logistics; conversation management;** and **offending location**. These are discussed in the sections below.

ICT Logistics

At the beginning of chapter 3, the advanced technical competence of some online groomers was described and set in the context of Ward and Hudson's (1998) theory of approach-explicit goal behaviours. That is, the range of ways some sexual offenders deliberately behave to facilitate a sexual offence. This technical knowledge and goal focus, coupled with significant ongoing media coverage about the arrest of online groomers, meant that some men adapted how they used ICT to help them manage the risk of detection. These steps included:

Multiple hardware

For some of the sample, their current offence was not the first time they had been convicted of sexual offending. Consequently, some of the online groomers had received sentences that included restrictions about using specific sites or chat rooms, or the Internet per se. Given that these offenders were undergoing probation supervision, that included searching declared ICT, some offenders were aware of the risk they would be taking talking to young people online using a computer that was being screened on random occasions by the authorities. To manage this risk, some offenders purchased a computer for the sole purpose of offending:

I got myself a laptop for the purpose of going back on chat. I got a, a SOPO saying not to go in chat rooms. So I went back online undercover on this laptop that was hidden under my bed if, if I ever got raided. I was using a different Internet connection than the main computer when I first started to contact my victim…. obviously for cover up, again. (UK participant, female victims age 13-15)

The use of 'clean hardware' was not however limited to replacing computers. For example, one offender described how he began to use a smart-mobile phone to access fantasy material and images when he was banned from owning or using a computer.

I then got mobile phones, cos now mobile phones come with Internet access and, and DV-, not DVD players, MP3 players and, all-singing, all-dancing phones. So in a way I just thought that, I just wanted to finish what I was doing online (UK participant, male victims age 5-12)

Basically I've, I was a bit naughty. I was at the hostel and I had a phone that I gave the hostel number to, and I had another phone. I had another, two more phones. So I had one phone for the hostel, and two phones for everything else, as it were. (UK participant, male victims age 5-12)

As technology develops, such as the mainstream use mobile phones with full Internet capacity, deploying robust risk management strategies becomes far harder for the authorities and parents/carers. The implications of this research for the industry and online safety campaigns are discussed in the final chapter of the report.

Multiple ISP addresses

When online groomers register and use one legitimate email address, personal address and name with one Internet Service Provider (ISP), the chances of identification and arrest by the authorities increase. This is due to the ease in which police forces can track and trace illegal activity online. Consequently, there was evidence of online groomers managing this risk by using multiple ISPs and multiple proxy servers.[17] In this way, should the conversation be traced and tracked by the police, the location of the computer shows up in a country that is nowhere near where the actual grooming behaviour is taking place.

…when I got further into like technological knowledge I started setting up virtual personal networks and proxy servers, so that the Internet believed that I was from a different country… because there are certain websites out there which are illegal in this country but aren't illegal in other countries. (UK participant, female victim age 13-15)

A further example of multiple ISP use did not involve the offender's personal computer, but equipment that belonged to other people. For example, one online groomer interviewed in Belgium talked about how he liked to use public cyber cafes rather than his own PC as it was more difficult for the police to trace the grooming chat back to him personally.

File labelling and storage

The final feature of ICT risk management was how some online groomers labelled and stored files on their computer. As we have seen in section 4.1, some men were downloading and saving thousands of indecent images. Alongside the illegality of this behaviour, the risk of detection for some men was raised further as they were storing the material on a family computer that could be used at anytime by partners and / or

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[17] A proxy server is a server that acts as an intermediary for requests from clients seeking resources from other servers. The main aim of proxy servers is to keep machines behind it anonymous and help to bypass security / parental controls.

children. Consequently, online groomers talked about a number of ways to mask the nature of the image. This involved changing the file extension (i.e. from jpeg to something more anonymous like tmp), that would prevent the image showing up as a picture on the computer.

I used to zip them up in a zip file, then change the name of the zip file so that someone couldn't just stumble across it and open it up. I just named it tmp.tmp. As long as it hasn't got .zip at the ending, then at least it'll just appear like a file that they couldn't open. If they tried to open it in a text file, it would just look rubbish. (UK participant, female victim age 13-15)

My son was young but he did use the computer, my partner would have friends round and their kids would use it so yeah, it was a communal machine. The risk was minimised by surreptitiously storing and hiding the images as .dll files. Nobody could possibly stumble across them by chance, you would have to know it was a RAR file, and change the extension, Nobody else using the computer was that savvy to do that (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

As well as changing the label or extension of files, there were also examples of men filing indecent images of children on separate part of the computer's hard drive in a type of hidden drive, directory or folder.

If you left click on a folder you can hide it from everyone. So you can't see it, you've got to know its there in the first place to find it (UK participant, female victim age 13-15).

Finally, there was evidence of external devices also being used to store indecent image collections. For example, one offender from Norway talked about how he used a separate stand-alone hard-drive to store his collection of images. This was felt to help prevent detection when his hardware was routinely monitored by the authorities.

Conversation management

The overarching aim of conversation management is to facilitate greater process control for the online groomer by moving the young person from a public forum to private online or offline space. This then provides less opportunity for the young person to be distracted or warned by online peers / friends, chat-room moderators and less chance of detection by the police. There was evidence that some online groomers were aware of the various security arrangements of different forums and chatrooms. For example, one man described how he met a young girl on *FaceParty* but encouraged the conversation to move to *MSN* as that was felt to be less monitored and thus a less risky place to have a sexual chat.

However, having a chat in any open space was also described as risky per se. As such, some online groomers talked about how they attempted to obtain from young people a private email address, postal address or mobile telephone number. This was felt to help the grooming encounter to continue with the chanced of detection by the authorities and/or significant others minimised.

As I said at the beginning, a sexual chat would always have taken place in one of the private places…never in the open because anybody could see it. I suppose there was an element of hiding protection of being caught in that (UK participant, female victim age 10-12)

Beyond where the conversations took place, the language used in some encounters was also tailored to minimise the risk of detection. Here, there were similarities to the strategies used by offline sexual offenders with regard to encouraging the young person not to disclose the abuse.

All I used to say is, 'this is our secret, don't tell anyone (UK participant, male victims age 5-12)

Offending location

The final aspect of risk management involved the steps some online groomers took to pick young people and meeting locations far away from their own homes. The motivation here was that they would be less likely to be recognised if offending in a new environment. Interestingly, this behaviour was particularly pronounced amongst the groomers from Belgium and Norway. That is not to say that UK online groomers did not travel long distances to meetings, or have sexual conversations with young people from another part of the country. Where the UK sample differed, is that they did not explicitly discus choosing remote locations to manage the risk of detection.

Proximity is important as well. For example, I'm from xxxx, I'm not going to meet with someone from xxxxi because I'll risk getting caught. So I'm going to choose girls who live further away, where no one knows me, if I want to meet them. You also take into account the risk factors. Is she likely to tell her parents? Will she show up alone? What are the chances that she turns me in? Because you expose yourself. (Belgium participant, female victims age 13-15)

I never used Norwegian sites for chatting – just Thai sites. I wanted to keep some kind of distance (Norway participant, male victims age 13-15)

Whether an online groomer is using one or all of these risk management strategies, it seems sensible to suggest that they are using well thought-out **approach behaviours** and goals with **intact self-regulation**. Such rational behaviour therefore presents a challenge for law enforcement agencies. However, it is important to note that not all online groomers adopted risk management behaviours. For some of these individuals, their view was that they were not doing anything wrong and so there was no need to hide their actions. This is explored further in the next chapter in the context of different types of online groomer. There were however men who were aware that they were behaving illegally and in hindsight, felt that they had been incredibly naive when sexually offending online.

I think looking back now, I was quite, quite naïve about the security side of. Certainly having heard (in the treatment group) about what some other people had done. Its just that these things didn't cross my mind at the time, so I suppose I never thought I was going to get caught. I mean, I realized there was a risk, but I suppose well, 'it wont happen to me'.. (UK participant, female victims age 13-15).

Here Suller's theory of **invisibility** as a facet of online disinhibition may explain such risk risky behaviour. On the other hand, online groomers with no risk management strategies may be acutely aware of the personal risk their behviour presents, but are so **underegulated** that risk management strategies are not at the

forefront of their functioning. These topics are explored further in the next chapter where we present a classification of online groomers.

5. Typology of Online Groomers

The European Online Grooming Project is the first in-depth research study examining the characteristics and behaviours of online groomers. Despite the lack of empirical evidence on this subject, a range of myths about online grooming are prevalent in the mainstream media. These include:

- *"All online groomers want to meet young people…"*

- *"Pornography and indecent images cause online offending…"*

- *"Young people are passive when communicating with adults…."*

- *"All online offending involves socialisation….."*

The two previous chapters have clearly shown that online groomers are a diverse group, with different emotions, behaviours and goals driving their actions. Clearly then, by evaluating online groomers as a whole group, there is the potential for offender treatment programmes and Internet safety campaigns to overlook key aspects of the behaviour. Consequently, child protection responses may not be as robust as they could.

The aim of this Chapter is to look at the associations between the different features of online grooming, maintenance strategies and risk management information in order to present a typology of online groomers. This will take the analysis and report beyond description of diversity within the grooming features, and enable targeted offender treatment and perhaps a more precise approach to future online safety campaigns.

The first section provides a brief overview of the method of classification. Section 5.2 presents the typology, followed by composite case study material and a description of how the grooming features, maintenance and risk management strategies relate to each online grooming type.

5.1 Approach to classification

A key feature of all typologies is that each individual or case should be allocated to one 'type' only. Using the Framework method of case and theme analysis, a Central Chart was used that plotted a summary of each individual's interview responses under the key themes of interest. This then enabled within and between case associations to emerge, and the overarching classification to be refined and developed.

For the classification to be robust, it was important for the typological dimensions to relate to key aspects of the *features of online grooming, maintenance behaviours and risk management strategies*. An iterative approach was used; whereby the number of dimensions was reduced until a typology was

achieved that allowed each groomer in the sample to be applied to one group only. The typology reported in the section below had nine dimensions that encompassed:

- any previous convictions for sexual offending;
- whether their own or another identity was used;
- the nature and extent of indecent image use;
- if they contacted other offenders online;
- the type of offence-supportive beliefs described;
- the speed of contact made with young people;
- how contact was made and sustained;
- the outcome of the offence (online offending and/or offline meeting).

The inclusion of these dimensions is not to say that the other features of online grooming described in the previous chapters do not make an important contribution to understanding this complex behaviour. It is simply that the dimensions above differentiate the online groomers in this sample. Clearly, it would be very helpful for further qualitative or quantitative research to test and challenge these data.

5.2   Three grooming types

These analyses led to the development of a classification that encompassed three types of online groomer across the eight behavioural dimensions. In this section, a summary of each group is presented. This is followed by some example case study material to further bring the classification to life. The description of each type concludes with an illustration of the specific features of online grooming pertinent to that 'type'.

Intimacy-Seeking

The first 'type' of groomer identified is the **intimacy-seeking** offender. Men in this group did not have any previous convictions for sexual offending. They had offence supportive beliefs that involved seeing contact with the young person as a *'consenting relationship'*. As such, they did change their identity in any way as they had a desire to be liked for who they were, and did not get involved in other online behaviours that indicated to them, and others, that they were sexually offending. Consequently, men within this group did not have any indecent images of children and they did not have any contact with any other sexual offenders online. This group also seemed to spend a significant amount of time online talking to the young person before they met the victim. All men in this group went on to meet the victim to develop or further the *'intimate relationship'*.

Composite Case Study

Tom was a 42 year old single parent bringing the children up after his partner had left him. Tom had a steady job but was recently made redundant. At the time of the offence he was concentrating on looking after his

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children. He said that he sometimes felt lonely being at home all day. He had never been in trouble with the police before. As he was at home all day, Tom talked about having lots of time to go online and do things like looking for houses, looking for jobs, and downloading films for him and his children. One day when surfing the Internet, Tom talked about feeling particularly low so he wanted to meet somebody. He then went on MSN as he had heard that was a good meeting place. Tom used his own name and details on his profile page. At first Tom talked about playing online games with other adults and some young people, with no suggestion of any sexual conversations.

Tom's Internet use steadily increased and he found himself spending more and more time online playing games with adults and teenagers. On one occasion he said 'hi' to a fifteen year old girl and they begin talking about all sorts of things but nothing sexual at first. Over a period of weeks, Tom and the girl decided to exchange phone numbers and conversations moved from MSN to phone chat. Tom said that the girl was chasing him as much as he was her, and that she would sometimes call him up for a chat. Eventually they both decided to meet, and did so on several occasions over a few months. During the meetings they would spend the day together and then go to a hotel where the sexual offence took place. Looking back Tom said that sex was never the main aim of his relationship with the girl - he was looking for company and friendship. He said that whilst the grooming was taking place he knew what he was doing was wrong but that he could not stop as he was like a 'love struck' teenager. Tom reacted angrily when asked whether he had seen or used indecent images of children, saying he was 'disgusted by such behaviour'.

Looking at the description and case study material, the following features of online grooming, maintenance and risk management are pertinent to understanding the 'intimacy seeking' groomer. Shaded dimensions refer to the factor not emerging from the data as prevalent for that particular grooming style.

	Dimension	Attitudes and Behaviour
Grooming features	Vulnerability	Emotional loneliness, emotional congruence with young people
	Scanning	
	Identity	Own, wants to be accepted for who he is, it's a 'consenting open relationship'.
	Contact	Prolonged and frequent, sexual conversations not introduced early, slow build up, as if getting to know a friend.
	Desinsitisation & Intensity	
	Outcomes	Physical meeting to develop the relationship further. Meetings can take place on numerous occasions.
Maintenance	Online Environment	Feels more confident online, helps increase low sense of self-efficacy
		No indecent images or chat with other offenders.

	Dissonance	Offence supportive beliefs involve feelings of a 'consenting relationship' and feeling 'love struck'. Idealised romantic fantasy.
	Perceptions of Young People	Consenting to a relationship and also wanting affection
Risk Management	IT Security	
	Private Spaces	Regular telephone contact, but not described in risk terms, more in terms of increased intimacy or 'the obvious thing to do in a relationship'.

Adaptable Style

The second type is the **adaptable online groomer**. This group of men tended to have previous convictions for sexual offending against children. They had offence supportive beliefs that involved their own needs and seeing the victim as mature and capable. Unlike the group above, they did not seem to have discussed the encounter in terms of a relationship. Some men in this group had collections of indecent images of children but they were not significant collections in terms of size. They also tended not to have significant contact with other sexual offenders online. *The key aspect of men in this group is that they were adept at adopting their identity and grooming style according to how the young person presented online, and reacted to their initial contact.* Similarly, the speed at which contact developed could be fast and/or slow according to the how the young person responded to contact. Risk management was a feature of this type of groomers offending, with hidden folders for images, and sometimes extra computers or phones that could be used exclusively for online grooming.

Composite Case Study

Derek was a 49 year old man living alone in a bedsit. He had previous convictions for contacting young people online and so was under regular probation supervision. Since his last offence Derek talked about trying to stop his online offending and managed to stay offline for a couple of months. However, he said the urge to go back online and talk to young people overcame him so he found himself back in chat rooms. Derek said that he was aware of the risk he was taking, so he brought a new laptop that he would use only for his online chats. The other computer to be monitored by the Probation Service was 'clean and safe'.

Derek said that he felt quite adept at talking to young people sexually from his previous experiences. He said that when he first went online, his profile was of his own age and details. However, he said that lots of young people would laugh at him in forums and tell him to 'piss off'. Consequently, Derek adjusted his identity to that of a 19 year old man and used a picture of a handsome young man as his avatar. Derek talked about spending lots of time in chat rooms, and over time go to know who to approach for a sexual chat. That is, if the young girl had a sexual screen name, or talked sexually to her friends, she was obviously 'sexually mature'. Derek would make contact with several girls at the same time, and within a matter of minutes turn

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the conversation to sex by asking them about their physical characteristics or what they liked to do sexually. In tandem with these chats, Derek would request images from the girls and would also go on his webcam to show the girls images of him masturbating. Derek said that sometimes he would go on to meet the girls where a sexual offence would take place. Derek would sometimes bring gifts, or things the girls said they were interested in to the meetings. On other occasions, the sexual conversation would stay online and never develop into a meeting. Derek said that he had spoken to other offenders online but not regularly. Usually these conversations were brief and involved requesting or exchanging indecent images of children.

As with the first example, the following features of online grooming, maintenance and risk management are pertinent to understanding the 'adaptable' groomer.

	Dimension	Attitudes and Behaviour
Grooming features	Vulnerability	Acute sexual interest in young people, lack of ability to manage or cope with the sexual interest.
	Scanning	Sexual screen names of young people, sexual chat, sexual avatar picture.
	Identity	Own, but can also tailor his 'legend' to fit the needs of the conversation at that particular time. Adaptable offenders also had the ability to have multiple identities running concurrently.
	Contact	Typically short, sexual conversations can happen in a matter of minutes. Contact with one particular person can be one off or regular, depending on how things are developing.
	Desinsitisation & Intensity	Asks a sexual question quite quickly, requests an image or webcam contact. Also tend to send pictures of self. Men in this group could also use threats to intensify the relationship, typically involving blackmailing the young person into continuing contact.
	Outcomes	Physical meeting for sexual contact, or online image sharing only.
Maintenance	Online Environment	Talk about fantasy life online, sometimes not feeling real. Feelings of anonymity also.
	Dissonance	Some indecent images and some chat with other offenders. In some cases chat can be intense and involve sharing fantasies about young people online. Offence supportive beliefs involve feelings of a 'mature sexual young people' and feeling that 'young people can stop this' if they want to.
	Perceptions of Young People	Young people are inherently sexual, as evidenced by

		sexual screen names, photos and chat.
Risk Management	IT Security	Evidence of multiple hardware, hiding images and multiple ISP addresses.
	Private Spaces	Some phone contact and private mail chat. Not really to increase intimacy, but due to an awareness of the risk of talking sexually in an open space.

Hyper-Sexualised

The **hyper-sexualised** group of men were characterised by extensive indecent image collections of children and significant online contact with other sexual offenders or offender groups. Some men in this group also had significant collections of extreme adult pornography. They adopted different identities altogether, or had an identity picture that was not of their face but of their genitals. Their contacts with young people were highly sexualised and escalated very quickly. Their offence supportive beliefs involved 'dehumanising' young people. They tended not to personalise contact and so did not seem to be using the phone or other personal media like the other groups of offenders. In this group, meetings were less prevalent than the adaptable and intimacy seeking groomers. Some if of these men also had previous convictions for having indecent images of children.

Composite Case Study

Bob was a 29 year old man living in a flat with this friend. He had previous convictions for having indecent images of young people. He talked about not being too social and spending a large amount of time online, surfing, chatting or looking at pornography. Bob said that he was fascinated by pornography and that often there was not really a dividing line between adult pornography and images of child abuse. When his computer was seized, a significant amount of extreme adult pornography was found (bestiality, for example) alongside hundreds of indecent images of children. Bob also talked about having some extreme fantasies about young people and would sometimes discuss these online with other men. Bob would talk about some awareness of what he was thinking about was wrong, but his thoughts of young people in the images as 'almost not real' would override this.

Bob's online profile picture was of his flaccid penis, the name tag was not identifiable to him. When Bob engaged young people online, contact tended to be frequent, fast and very sexualised. He said that sometimes, within seconds he would ask for an image or a graphic sexual chat. He sometimes would send the young people adult pornography at the same time. Bob did not seem to be perturbed by frequent rejection from young people online, as he was not really looking for a relationship. The fact that he could quickly have a sexual chat with someone else also seemed to 'help' here. Bob was arrested having had a very fast sexual conversation with a young person, who was in fact an undercover police officer. He was invited to a meeting and arrested by police at the scene.

The following features of online grooming, maintenance and risk management pertinent to understanding the 'hyper sexual' groomer are presented below. Shaded dimensions refer to the factor not emerging from the data as prevalent for that particular grooming style.

	Dimension	Attitudes and Behaviour
Grooming features	Vulnerability	Sexual obsession, possible saturation from collection of adult pornography.
	Scanning	
	Identity	Identify is not his own, or cryptic and not identifiable. Identity tag can also be explicit '*PussyLicker69*'. Only identifiable feature tended to be a picture of his penis as the avatar image.
	Contact	Very fast, literally seconds sometimes. Not really interested in developing relationships.
	Desinsitisation & Intensity	Fast, adult pornography or images of self sent.
	Outcomes	Tended to be characterised by image collection. However, some meetings evident but these men seemed particularly susceptible to undercover police operations.
Maintenance	Online Environment	Fantasy and anonymity online plays a big role. Extent of sexual material and chat online saturates and desensitises.
	Dissonance	Significant collections of indecent images and extreme adult pornography. Offence supportive beliefs tend to dehumanise young people.
	Perceptions of Young People	
Risk Management	IT Security	Tends to be more limited than the adaptable type.
	Private Spaces	

The typology presented above illustrates the diversity of online grooming behaviours. This in turn presents challenges for the effective assessment and treatment of online groomers. These challenges are set out in Chapter 7. In addition, the data presented in Chapters 3 and 4, and the typology here, show that the behaviour of young people online and how this is perceived by the online groomer, can have a significant bearing on offence outcomes. Consequently, the next chapter provides a detailed illustration of the behaviour of young people online, from the perspective of online groomers and young people personally.

# 6.	Young People Online

The chapters thus far have focused on the online groomers, their behaviour, attitudes and the method by which they entice or lure children and young people for sexual victimisation using online technology. However, given the linkage between groomer and potential victim is solely mediated by the technology, and the initial take-up of any communication is voluntary on the child's part, it is necessary to understand how children and young people succumb to such advances, in the apparent safety of their own homes.

This chapter will first consider some of the relevant background research into victims of online grooming, to set the presentation of study data in an established context. Section 6.2 will then examine information given by the groomers in the course of this study to indicate the profiles and online behaviour of young people who were potential or actual victims of the sample interviewed. Section 6.3 will then provide two frameworks for understanding the interaction between young people and online groomers. The final section of the report (6.4) presents data from focus groups with young people.

## 6.1	Empirical context

In order to understand the 'dangerousness' of child sex offenders in the digital world, it is necessary to also understand the characteristics of the victims they abuse. It may only be through the potential 'matching' of perpetrator and victim characteristics and circumstances that a true understanding of the process of abuse and the nature of the interaction during grooming can be understood in relation to the part that technology plays. From this understanding, prevention and intervention can be established that is technological, social and psychological which will help to reduce the likelihood of abuse occurring.

Child maltreatment in general remains a major public-health and social-welfare problem in high income countries, and sexual abuse gives particular cause for concern (Gilbert et al 2009). Whilst the true prevalence of any form of sexual abuse is difficult to ascertain given the attendant secrecy, stigma, and barriers to disclosure, a wide range of 5%-30% prevalence is quoted in research studies. This rate is ten-fold that reported to professional services and conviction rates for sexual abuse of children are notoriously low (Davidson & Bifulco, 2010). In addition, the proportion of sexual abuses that in recent years may have been aided by Internet or mobile phone grooming is unknown. The longer term impacts of all sexual abuse, regardless of mode of selecting the child or young person, are pernicious, including high lifetime sequelae clinical disorder such as depression and anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, alcohol or drug abuse, deliberate self-harm and suicide behaviours (Gilbert et al 2009; Bifulco & Moran, 1998). This is accompanied by increased adult vulnerability in terms of inability to make long term relationships, sexual dysfunction, risky sexual behaviour and attachment difficulties**.** The risks for such abuse include family breakdown, children 'Looked After' and in residential care, parental drug and alcohol abuse, and child runaway status (Gallagher, 2006). There are significant gender differences. Double the number of girls experience sexual abuse than

boys, but boys are over-represented in some at-risk groups, such as those in care. Those sexually abused have a very high rate of re-victimisation (7-fold higher than other groups) with at least a third being re-victimised in a 12 month period (Finkelhor et al 2007).

A review of scientific literature dealing with sexual exploitation of children and youth over the Internet, identified predictors of unwanted exposure to sexual material online, offline interpersonal victimization, depressive symptoms, behavioural problems, parental conflicts, and a history of physical or sexual abuse (Ospina, Harstall & Dennett, 2009). Less is known about specific victim risk profiles whereby the prior or concurrent experience of family difficulties, neglect, physical or sexual abuse or child or teenage disorder can add to the likelihood of cyberharm. Conversely, we know little about what makes other children or young people resilient to harmful approaches online.

Risky behaviours online

Risk-taking behaviour of young people on the Internet has been identified as a factor in online abuse. This can be from a spectrum of risky action, through having personal information on line, to having sexually explicit pictures of themselves or their peers being posted (CEOP, 2007). At a greater extreme are instances of young people using the Internet explicitly for selling sex and prostitution (Palmer & Stacey, 2004). There are a range of different scenario's whereby children and young people are put at risk of abuse, made more complex by issues of apparent 'complicity' or malevolent intentions towards peers which make the distinction between victims and perpetrators at times blurred. This is a complex and often uncomfortable message to absorb where the child or young person appears to be actively seeking sexual contact online, perhaps unaware of its true danger.

The issue of apparent 'complicity' in ICT-related abuse is complex and much debated. Many children and young people are entirely duped by the grooming behaviour of manipulative perpetrators and become entrapped in abuse scenarios quite unwittingly (Lanning, 2005). There are different levels of initial agency in interacting with an online groomer, but all then take a course where the child or young person no longers has freedom to act as they would wish. Chat-logs show that often the interaction begins very benignly with engaging about teenage preoccupations. This can be followed by the child or teenager giving naïve agreement to be involved in having sexually explicit pictures taken, or agreeing to look at adult pornographic pictures. As soon as this happens, it can be used by the perpetrator as justification of 'compliance' and used to emotionally blackmail the child into secrecy and further pressurised compliance (Palmer, 2005). Other young people may have agency in initiating the first contact with a groomer as more sexualised, through chat rooms or through posting explicit images of themselves, but nevertheless become manipulated into meeting and falling victim to off-line abuse by experienced on-line abusers, against their volition. Highest levels of victim agency occur when young people are proactively sexual online and use the Internet to sell sex to adults. However, the likelihood is that many of these young people are already victims of sexual and other abuse, in unmonitored living arrangements, such as residential care, hostels or are homeless and therefore highly vulnerable (Palmer and Stacey, 2004). These young people (often boys) are ultimately

equally exploited. Thus the level of agency in engaging in the interactions online, or apparent 'complicity' is likely to be a function of earlier abuse or sucsceptibility and effective re-victimisation. Finally, there maybe a group of young perpetrators who may re-enact their earlier sexual abuse with adults, with younger victims using on-line technology possibly learned from their own abusive experience or from more experienced paedohpiles online. Thus grooming online may be be directed both to victims and potential young online perpetrators. Here the boundary of victim and perpetrator becomes blurred, creating difficulties in categorisation for professionals ultimately involved, but also for criminal justice services. In all scenarios it is important to understand that longer term damaging effects of ICT-related sexual abuse will occur for victims. Whilst the psychological impact of unwitting 'complicity' may involve enduring feelings of shame and guilt in the victim, providing added barriers to disclosure, other impacts might involve the re-enactment of abuse and its perpetuation, again involving technological means of contact.

As we have seen from the previous chapters, grooming behaviour on-line can involve psychological abuse, when this involves entrapment, emotional blackmail over apparent complicity and manipulating the child/young person's trust. Similarly, threats to distribute and make public sexually explicit images of the child or images of the abuse can be used to terrorise and blackmail. The psychological impact of these techniques may cause additional psychological damage over and above the sexual abuse or near-abuse experiences themselves. This can result in life long levels of mistrust and damaged self-concept impacting on future relating ability and attachment.

Whilst evidence is sparse, research review of those at most risk of unwanted exposure to sexual material online includes offline interpersonal victimization, depressive symptoms, behavioural problems, parental conflicts, and a history of physical or sexual abuse (Ospina, Harstall & Dennett, 2009). Less is known of specific risk profiles whereby the prior existence of family difficulties, abuse or disorder may create additional risk for harm online.

6.2   Online Groomers Perceptions

Because the project focused on interviewing online groomers, there was no direct research contact with victims. In fact victims are hard to identify since among those in services, there is not an integrated system for recording whether sexual abuse was a result of Internet grooming. Thus the victim population of those abused online is largely unknown.

Instead the groomers were asked in the interviews for information on the age, choice of victims, type of grooming approach and the victims' response. From this, is it possible to note characteristics of victims. It does however need to be borne in mind that this is second hand information, and may be open to distortion, although the small amount of evidence from the police chat lines included provide some substantiation. In this study the groomers described victims that were primarily teenagers (age 13-15), most of whom were female.   However, it is possible that these groomers approached many more victims who were not specifically identified.

Whilst this sample was in no way statistically representative, the lower rate of male victims is consistent with the research literature. When the interview information from groomers of male victims was examined to see if they had any different mode of grooming, they seemed little different from groomers of female victims. Whilst the groomers who used online gaming tended to identify male victims, otherwise there was no difference with female victimisation. For example, there was a mix of own and fake or tailored identities, with some having single victim targets whereas others had multiple. Furthermore, in terms of typologies developed and presented in the previous chapter, the men targeting male young people did not appear to constitute a separate group.

On the basis of the description of all victims, or potential victims, given by groomers, a dual categorisation of victims was developed indicating those 'vulnerable' and those 'risk takers'. In addition there were clearly descriptions of resilient young people who the groomers failed to abuse, who are described later.

Table 6.2 Categorisation of victims as described by groomers

Vulnerable victims	Distinguishing themes	Risk-taking victims	Distinguishing themes
High need for attention and affection	• Loneliness • Low self-esteem	Young people disinhibited, seeking adventure	• Outgoing • Confident
Difficult relationships with parents and difficult home lives	• Psychological disorder(s) • Concurrent sexual abuse	Young people (and offender) feel they have control	• Complicit and consenting to sexual contact
Seeking 'love' on the Internet. Believe they have a true relationship with groomer.	• Offender as 'mentor' • Self-disclosure and joint problem solving	Less known about family risks, but less confident on meeting than appear on line.	• Offender re-assessment on meeting • Introverted or immature YP at meeting
Resist disclosure because they want to continue the relationship.	• Loyalty	Open to blackmail not to disclose because of apparent 'complicity' – own behaviour used as evidence of cooperation.	• Non disclosure of abuse, threats and computer intrusions

Data and quotes from the online groomers to illustrate this categorisation are given below. Of course these descriptions assume the groomers accurately described their victims, but for the purpose of the categorisation these descriptions will be taken at face value.

Vulnerable young people

Whilst all victims may prove to have vulnerability in the sense of being high risk for online grooming, the label of 'vulnerable' is used to differentiate young people presenting personally as vulnerable in terms of being shy, lonely, needy or unhappy, with existing psychological disorder and/or with contextual vulnerability such

as having problems in family life or disruptions in care. An example of the latter involved one young male victim who was abused through online contact while in foster care as a result of prior family neglect or abuse. This dual psychological and social vulnerability then gave the groomer the opportunity to fulfil the young person's personal needs as part of the grooming approach, and at the same time take advantage of the young person's impoverished circumstances.

These young people are described by groomers as having a high need for affection. For example some young people were described as showing acute **loneliness**:

'I chatted to one girl for half a year. She had problems in her family situation. They were all lonely in some way'

'Many of the girls were lacking adult contact. They felt safe with me. I was there when they needed me, and I always made time. I learned about their lives and it was important to them'.

In addition to loneliness, the young people were also reported as presenting with **low self-esteem** – particularly with concerns about body image. For example one offender against teenage victims said '*she had low self-esteem as she was overweight'.* There was also some indication of **psychological disorder** with one victim, who when met by the groomer showed clear signs of scarring on her wrists and arms from self harm behaviour. The online groomer also pointed out that in addition to the scarring, the young person was silent for almost the entire meeting at a roadside hotel.

Given the number of men online who are offending sexually, it is perhaps unsurprising there was also indication that some of the young people were already **victims of abuse (**constituting the social vulnerability): *'These were girls who, quote unquote, were already being abused. They're aware of it, and they play along.'* Note here the groomer refers to the abuse, but refers to 'in quotations' it as though it was not in his view real abuse, presumably to concur with his distorted cognitions as discussed in chapter 3.

'Some felt forgotten and lonely at home. Others would talk about how they were being urinated on (by men).'

Assuming these groomer comments about their victims are accurate then it would seem that the online contact fulfils the need for being supported, loved and cared for which the victims lack at home or with their families. In psychological terms such young people may be described as vulnerable emotionally, possibly with more anxious attachment patterns, lower self-esteem and recipients of poor parental care or neglect. This need could be readily fulfilled by a groomer with the '*intimacy seeking*' profile who will spend a long time with the young person, developing an apparently 'loving' attachment, and be ready to offer support and comfort through the online grooming process. These victims may also be preyed on by the '*adaptable*' groomer who would need to cultivate a supportive and caring persona to lure such young people.

As described in earlier chapters, some groomers felt they had a real **relationship** with the victim, and this may well have been echoed by the vulnerable victims who also felt it was a real personal relationship. They reported an emotional congruence with the young people, feeling 'young at heart' and having more in common with younger people and finding it easier to chat with younger people. For example, one groomer described developing feelings for the victim. In another example, the man said he wanted to marry the victim when she fell pregnant.

A further feature of the 'relationship' was that that the online groomer talked about how he and the young person would confide in each other, to discuss their **respective problems and daily hassles**, and then think of ways to solve them together. It is important to remember that the men in this sample are adult males who tended to be in their middle years, with their victims in the early teenage years. As such, to be reliant on these young people for their emotional needs points to a high degree of immaturity and poor functioning, aside from the sexually abusive behaviour.

The problem solving role manifested in a number of key ways during groomers interactions with young people. For example, there were some groomers who adopted a quasi-father role, offering fatherly advice to young boys and girls. There were also examples of men who talked about helping the victims with their school work. This then speaks to the mentoring contact style described in chapter 3.

Finally, the feelings of being in a relationship, perhaps unsurprisingly, invoked **loyalty**, on the part of the offender and the young person. This loyalty in some cases helped to prolong the sexual abuse as the opportunity for disclosure was not taken by the young person. For example, it was reported that one young person warned the offender that her parents had found out they had met. In another example, there was evidence that the young person was deceiving her parents in order to maintain the 'relationship'.

'She actually lied to her family and said I was much younger than I was'.

Risk taking young people

In the section above, we have seen how some online groomers were attracted to the vulnerability of young people, and used those different features, be it low self esteem, or concurrent sexual abuse to instigate and maintain sexual contact online and in some cases, offline. In contrast to this group, a theme of **risk-taking** young people also emerged from the accounts of the online groomers.

The first facet of risk-taking involved how the young people were described as having a very **gregarious persona online**. As such there were said to be more extravert, confident and outgoing. Here Suller's theory of online disinhibition is again relevant in that some online groomers described these young people as wanting to talk about sex online, using explicit sexual screen names, and ready to put up provocative pictures

of themselves. As we have seen in the previous chapter, and is evidenced in the section below, this sexualised behaviour online was described almost as a 'green light' by groomers for further sexual contact.

'She was funny and confident, happy at home and had lots of friends'.

In addition to the online confidence, there was evidence from some groomers' accounts of an implicit sense that the **young person was in fact in control of the situation,** dictating the speed and direction of the interaction. For example, one young person was reported as instigating the contact because she asked for the online groomer's phone number and for subsequent phone sex. Another was reported as turning the conversation sexual, which the groomer saw as permission to continue with the abuse.   In a further example, a young person was described as not being deterred by the groomer's real age when she said '*my mates going out with a 33 year old…..I'd love to shag an older guy'.*

In the context of these behaviours and requests, the groomers would articulate a belief or sense that the young person was a consenting party, or **complicit in the online interaction**. That is, their belief that these young people want sex and want to meet up to have sex with adult men.

She gave no indication she was not comfortable with sex or with seeing me…she was interested in me'.

'There are girls who push you to it in part as well. I want to stress this point, because I've spoken to girls in the past, and I was well aware of their age, and I wasn't after anything, and they're the ones who propositioned me. They had no hang ups about my age and they bragged about that sort of thing.'

'For starters, in the beginning, I met her in a chat-room. She knew my age and I knew hers. It was just chatting at first. We then exchanged our MSN hotmail addresses and that's where it started. What happened, in the beginning, on MSN, was that she would get back from school, talk to her friends and what not, and she would then invite you to go on the web cam, and that's where… There's nothing wrong with that initially until she goes off to change. And she comes back wearing a stretch top. I'll never forget it: It was a black top. Then, she began pulling on it until you could see one breast, and then both. What happens then is that you ask for more'.

As we have described in chapters 3 and 5, the apparent confidence of the victims, alongside the sense that the young person is control and complicit is taken advantage of by the groomer. For example one of the men who offended against boys described his victims as '*highly sexualised and often demanding*'.   Another online offender against young men said that he would '*chase boys who had lost their virginity*'.   In turn, the explicit inter-personal confidence and sexual disinhibition on line was used by some men to justify the grooming:

'I came across certain things...girls who knew how old I was, whom I wasn't asking anything of, and who would strip in front of the webcam and proposition me. I didn't have to do a thing. There are girls who are horny. They're small adults nowadays. They're so convinced they are adults, that in the end, who is the victim?'

However, what was striking from some offenders accounts was how the apparent **confidence online was not matched by actual behaviour during the offline meeting**. Here, the groomers themselves were able to see that in reality, the young person was in fact quite different from how they had appeared on line. For example:

'She was well developed and womanly and presented as mature but after meeting I think she had been putting on a mask as she was immature'.

'On reflection I think the girls were provocative because they were lonely and wanted attention'.

Therefore the apparent risk taking behaviour of some victims on line does not seem to correspond in many cases to confidence and overt sexual behaviour when met face-to-face. So the underlying psychological vulnerability of these victims may well not differ from the first group described, but their behaviour online seems to follow a different pattern. In psychological terms they could be described as having more behavioural disorder and 'acting out', to be more disinhibited emotionally, possibly with more avoidant attachment patterns, with lower levels of need for affection, less empathy and more 'defensively high' self esteem. In terms of potential matching to groomer style, it would seem these young people are more likely to be approached by the 'hypersexual' groomers who seek out sexual screen names or other 'invitations' to interact. They would also be approached potentially by the 'adaptable' groomers who would adjust their online persona to that fitting the victim interests and style on line. As one groomer quite openly said: '*the purpose of being on line was sex not friendship*'

In the context of this *approach-explicit* offending behaviour (where the explicit goal is sex not friendship), we have seen in chapter 3 how the young person's complicit style could be used by some offenders to **escalate and continue with the online sexual abuse**. Here, a threat to disclose images of the young person to friends or family, and in one extreme case, actually taking control of the young persons computer remotely were examples of this behaviour by the groomers. It is therefore easy to see how the young person would not disclose these threats and abuse, if they felt in some way responsible for the sexual behaviour that had taken place previously.

It is important to note this range of behaviours of teenagers online when considering how groomers get access to young people on the Internet. This resonates with the discussion on victim complicity discussed in the research literature section and can make preventative messages more difficult. However, a note of caution is that the groomers themselves are giving this description and may be exaggerating complicity as part of their offence supportive beliefs about victims being willing. They may be wilfully misinterpreting, or alternatively failing to take the usual and responsible adult line of seeing child or teenage-inappropriate behaviour as showing developmental distortion in the young people. Young people can often act impulsively or naively, perhaps over-estimating their own maturity or control in social situations. This is not a reason for exploiting such behaviours. Also the apparent complicity needs to be considered in relation to how individuals and society perceive 'cyberspace' and the rules of conduct in relation to this new social medium

which are largely unformulated. Social interactions, even benign ones, with strangers possibly never met face-to-face can now assume levels of emotional intimacy on social networking sites. These individuals are termed 'friends' but using rather different definitions from those in physical contact in situations which are socially monitored. How teenagers are interacting in virtual space, in the apparent privacy of their own homes may seem innocuous to those involved. It has a very different tone from being complicit with sexual actions in a face-to-face environment. Clearly the boundaries of what is acceptable on line with codes of online 'etiquette', 'hygiene' or moral behaviour, need to be more carefully developed and linked with child development in the social psychological literature.

6.3   Online Groomer – Victim Chat Interaction

We know from the discussion of groomers' behaviour in earlier chapters, as well as from the research literature, that some of these men are skilled in controlling the interaction with their victims, both in terms of getting personal information swiftly, ensuring privacy and gaining compliance and secrecy. The purpose of this next section is twofold. First, to illustrate the specific contact style of some online groomers and how the interaction can progress to meet their goal(s). Second, to show how some young people respond to contact, building on the descriptions in the previous section and earlier chapters.

The following extracts are derived from chat lines in Italy. They were used by the Italian Police as evidence to secure the conviction of two online groomers' who went onto sexually abuse.

In this extract the 47 year old groomer gets personal information from a 13 year old girl within a few minutes of chat[18]:

G: I wish you a happy Easter!

V: Tell me who r u?

*G: My name's A***** what's your name?*

*V: L****, what's your surname?*

G: Why do you want to know my surname, you don't know me?

V: Just curious. How old are you?

G: 20 and you?

V: 13 but my cell number? Who gave it to you?

G: No one, I must have mistaken the number I though it was my friend's sorry. Am I not too old for you?

V: ok ok.. I don't think so.

G: Do you mind if we know each other better, here in the chat line?......Are you already tired of writing to me in chat?... what are you doing?

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[18] G=groomer, V=victim

….By the way, you have a beautiful name, but I don't know more about you. Can you tell me more for instance where are you from?

V: I'm from A***, and you?

G: R******* but what school do you attend and where?

V: Commercial School at R*******

Here the groomer manages to find out personal information he could use about the young person. He does this through just a few lines of interaction using some flattery, and the apparent disclosure about his own personal information. At this stage the young person can feel safe since nothing sexual has yet transpired.

In this next extract, the online groomer is desensitizing the young person by encouraging them to take sexual pictures to send on. This is undertaken swiftly, as well as advising on how to destroy evidence to ensure privacy. In addition, this passage shows how quickly the different features of online grooming and risk management strategies can unfold:

G: Just take advantage, you're talking to a grown-up. Try to be more… you know… open-minded. Why not? ….Ah, right. I told you, it's not wise… Anyway, that thing we talked about, I didn't mean to scare you when I told you that SMS can be stored for five years; you need a very serious reason to order to get them... you know, it's up to a judge, do you understand? The police cannot decide on their own… it must be authorized by a judge who believes they are evidences in a criminal investigation. Do you understand?

G: Now that I have told how to take full figured or naked pictures you can practice.

V: No, no, never.

G: I didn't mean you have to send them. You can practice. You can take some and then cancel them. It's not that bad.

Again, it is reinforced that the action is private and not harmful, but the groomer is also ensuring privacy and is obliquely threatening by mentioning the police and judges. This is all used as a step towards getting the young person to put sexual images online.

As we have seen in chapter 3, the online groomers interviewed in this study offered inducements to the young people. For example, offering money for sex, buying birthday presents, giving phone credit in order to continue sexual chats, offers of CDs of favourite bands. However in the following extract from the chatline it is the young person who asks for a cell-phone refill:

V: Hello, I'm L****, 13, from S***** I'd like a generous cell phone refill :-)

G: Anything you want…

V: What do you want in return??

G: Pictures of you and I want you to play with me… I may start with €30 and then it's up to you… […]

G: Let's start with 50 :)

G: Let's cut a deal so there won't be misunderstandings. 8 photos every €30 refill… Deal?

This illustrates a risk-taking victim who is seeking to get phone refills from the interaction on line. Of course the control aspects can shift quickly from victim to groomer who ensures he gets the photo images he wants. In another example which fits the picture the groomers give of compliant or provocative young people online, is this young girl who wants reassurance as well as inducement:

G: I like you so much… Send me more…

V: Do you really mean it or you say so to every girl my age?? You did meet other girls, didn't you? Were they nicer than me?

G: I'd like to see more… The other one in underwear and your tits as well… I like you so much… You must be very hot… The other girls I know are not as beautiful as you… I wanna see you in underwear…

G: Ok… I'll let you know… You're beautiful… Think about what you want in return for the other pics…

V: I bet you say that to all the other girls!! What do you usually give the others?

G: Give them?? I don't give anything to other girls… Now that I've got you…

V: Sure, unless you find another girl to chat to…

V: I won't look for any other girl, promise… Now it's up to you…

In the section above, we outlined how threats can be used to escalate and continue with the online abuse. In the following final extract, threats are made quite swiftly when the young person becomes reluctant, changing the tone of the interaction and using capital letters to denote shouting or aggression:

G: Have you received my MMS? (of male genitalia) How is it?

V: Oh... I don't know... fine?

*G: But aren't you going to send me a picture of your **** (female genitalia)?*

V: No I don't want to...

G: I THOUGHT YOU TRUSTED ME? THEN PREPARE TO SEE YOUR PICTURE ON INTERNET. YOU'LL REGRET IT!!!'

Although seeing these extracts make for disturbing reading, they are included to highlight the themes presented in this chapter, and chapters 3, 4 and 5. In the next section, we show two speculative frameworks that may help understand further, the complex interactions between the style of the online offender, and the emotions, attitudes and behaviour of young people.

6.4　Matching offending style with young people

Despite the fundamental role played by interactions between the groomer and his victim, we can only speculate upon links between the two it at this time. This is because, to our knowledge, there has been no indexed study that has observed the link between character variables with connection to the mental functioning of both individuals. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that it is exactly this meshing of the characteristics of the groomer and the victim, which outlines the specific dynamics observed during online grooming. This seems clear when we consider in section 6.5, that fortunately, not all the teenagers that are subjected to a grooming attempt give in to the groomers' requests. In fact many of them succeed in refusing the requests and putting an end to the contacts because they are capable of adequate coping strategies.

The first groomer – victim framework has been developed on the hypothesis that for at least a proportion of the interaction, some **'matching'** was at play between groomer and victim profile. What is meant by matching in this context is the aligning of grooming style with victim profile, with a view to maximising the likelihood of contact, and fulfilling groomer need, whether for more intimacy, or more sex. Given groomer perceptions that a large volume of children and young people are available through the Internet, seeking such matches from early in the contact will progress the engagement more quickly and reduce 'wasted' contact time with a child or young person who is resilient and not prone to grooming advances. The proposed matching is presented in figure 6.4 below and discussed in subsequent sections.

Figure 6.4 Speculative matching of groomer and victim
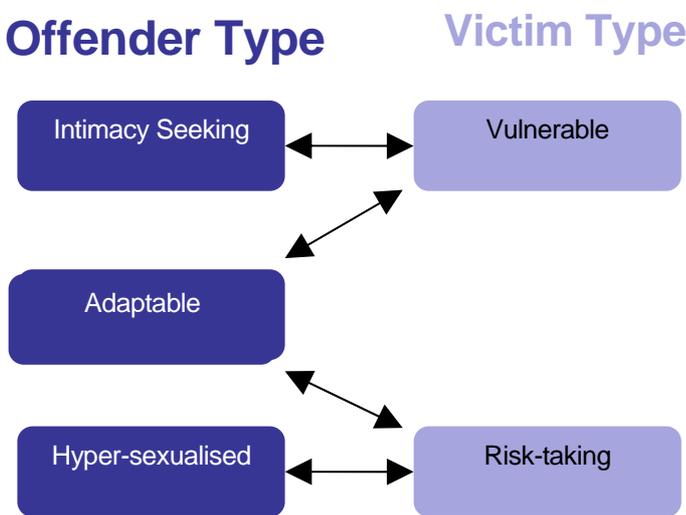
More information needed on
- Psychological profile
- Attachment/vulnerability
- Disinhibition/regulation
- Context and protective factors

If we begin with the example of the *'intimacy- seeking'* groomer, they seem likely to match with the vulnerable victim, since both want a relationship and both mistake the online interaction for a real romantic relationship. Both seem needy in terms of confidence and support, and both desire to continue the interaction over a long period and to make it exclusive. In addition, both tend to use their own identity and to want to be 'loved for themselves'. In this situation the victim becomes apparently complicit and may find it difficult to disclose even after the abuse comes to light because of their fantasy relationship with the groomer.

On the other hand, the *hypersexual* groomer is likely to interact more readily with the risk-taking young person, given their attraction to the use of sexual screen names, and use of sexual chat. Both seem to want the adventure of an online sexual interaction, and are open about wanting sex. Both may hide their real identity. The *adaptable* online groomer can tailor their approach to meet all kinds of needs presented.

In the second framework, we present an indication of the research that has been conducted in this field that can be applied to theories of offender-victim interactions. In particular, we have drawn on self-regulation theory as key context to this report, and used throughout to explain the different facets of online groomers' behaviour. Our framework uses the same indicators as the 'M Axis' (on Mental Functioning) of the Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual (PDM Task Force, 2006). These highlight the general characteristics of both groomer and victim which can interact together to create the dangerous emotional entanglement that starts from the initial online contact, and can end with the victim's abuse. Clearly, empirical, clinical and legal research is required to verify the utility of this theory for the development of protocols oriented towards preventing this behaviour in the future.

Table 6.5. Characteristics of the mental functioning of groomer and victim

Mental functioning	Groomer	Victim
Regulation, attention and learning	Uncertain (in relation to offender type)	Difficulty in processing affective and social cues
Relationships and intimacy	Need-orientated, lack of empathy	Emotion-orientated, insecure or disorganized attachment style
Internal states	Vulnerable, state-dependent self-esteem	Vulnerable, state-dependent self-esteem
Affect-regulation	Under-regulation, inconsistent affective patterns	Distorted view of others' motivation, need for external regulation
Defensive Patterns	Rationalization, projection, dissociation, splitting	Identification with the aggressor/perpetrator, denial or idealization as coping mechanisms
Internal representations	Externally-oriented thought– lack of mentalisation	Unstable, dependence on relationship

Differentiation and integration	Lack of integration, superficial differentiation of one's own and others need	Usually undeveloped, lack of psychological mindedness of other's intentions
Self awareness	Lack of awareness about one's own psychological states; capability of interpersonal manipulation	Inability to read specific psychological states; negative self-representation
Moral sense	Denial of guilt, lack of internal moral standards	Feelings of inadequacy, expectation of punishment

Both of the frameworks presented in this section have implications for Internet safety and child protection campaigns. These are discussed in the next chapter where the implications of this report are presented. However, whilst we clearly need to learn from the experiences of those young people that have been the victim of online grooming, there are also things to learn and build on from the profile of young people that are able to fend off inappropriate online advances. This group of young people are the focus of the next section.

6.5   Resilient young people

Despite the challenging data presented in this chapter, an encouraging finding from the accounts of online groomers was that the greater proportion of young people approached were resilient and refused to engage when they sensed the person they were talking to was 'weird'.   For example, some young people were described as abruptly ending initial interactions by: cutting-off the online link when the groomer started a sexual conversation; blocking the groomer on the site; and/or hanging up the mobile phone. Interestingly the groomers did not particularly show annoyance at this, nor did they feel rejected. It seems the anonymous nature of the online interaction meant that there was little sensitivity to rejection involved, which may be different in face-to-face situations. This, when combined with the knowledge that there were potentially thousands more children who could be approached meant the groomer simply moved on to other targets. For example as one groomer said: *'I wouldn't get cross if the girls said 'no' I would just move on to the next one'.*

However it is notable that the earlier example given of threatening the young person did lead to some taking positive action and stating they would report it to the police. The groomer commented: '…*others come right out and say they'll report you to the police. At that point you cut everything off'.* This deters the groomer and is effective coping by the young person.

From the accounts of online groomers and what we known from the victimization literature, figure 6.6 below highlights the key features of young people's resilience.

Figure 6.6   Resilient young people on line.

Resilient young people on line
Recognise the risk and fend off any approach they consider 'weird'.
Take on board safety messages.
Confident about rejecting advances and informing others
Come from more secure backgrounds.

Whilst less is known about such young people in this study because they did not become victims of the groomers interviewed, the implications were that they were more confident, secure and assertive and were not lured into interaction for longer than a brief period of time. Whilst we do not know the frequency with which this happened, the implications are that this may have been the normative young person's response. The groomers themselves were able to suggest safety tips for potential victims. For example that they should:

- not put phone numbers online,
- be better supervised,
- use better firewalls against explicit messages,
- should not add their age to their screen name,
- not to post pictures in a state of undress.

'parents need to be more present and more open. Its not enough to tell kids not to do certain things online otherwise I can just become that substitute parent, and adult they can relate to. They should not blame their children, the blame lies with people like me'.

This chapter has covered in detail online groomers views about young people online. In the following sections, the views of young people in school (who have not been groomed) are presented.

6.6   Young people online – focus group data

Much is now known from extensive quantitative studies about young people's use of the Internet generally and social networking sites in particular (Livingstone et al, 2011) but less about young people's attitudes and practices in terms of how they use social networking sites, particularly in terms of staying safe online. This gap in the knowledge base seems particularly important given the data presented in the previous section and earlier chapters. To this end, twelve focus groups were conducted across the UK, Italy and Belgium with young people age 11 – 16 years. Full sample information for this phase of the study can be found in section 2.7.

The broad aims of this phase of the research were to understand:

- the nature and extent of Internet use reported
- young people's (YP) understanding and awareness of online safety
- their experiences, behaviours and strategies to stay safe online
- social networking behaviours
- their knowledge and attitudes regarding online groomers
- their attitudes to online safety awareness advice and training

Nature and extent of Internet use

Given that the previous chapters have shown the significant periods of time some online groomers spend on the Internet, it is important to understand how young people spend their time online, and whether there are any patterns of use by age and gender. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the age range of the sample, time spent online was described as being from 5 minutes to 6 hours as a maximum. Here the older group age 14-16 tended to talk about spending longer online. This is consistent with literature about online / offline friendships in the teenage years and given homework levels, the use of Internet for school work purposes.

However, with the need to spend significant periods online, some young people in the 14-16 age group talked about a **commitment** to going online, sometimes to the detriment of other key daily functions:

Quite a lot, like from when I get home at about 4.30 until about midnight….sleep is irrelevant. Sleep is irrelevant when it comes to the Internet!' (Girl, 14, UK)

The pattern of time spent online decreased with age according to the comments of those younger in their early teenage. For example, those aged 11-13 tended to spend up to an hour a day during the week but longer at weekends. Interestingly, the Italian young people said they spent less time online per day than others in the sample. Here they also appeared to be spending less time online at weekends in favour of actually going out with friends as opposed to chatting with them online. Thus real face-to-face social interaction appeared to limit online interaction.

When the young people were asked about how they used the Internet in the context of the time they spent online, two patterns emerged from the data. First, personal computers (PCs) and personal laptops were used during the week for searches on Google related to homework or listening to music while working. Second, at weekends young people said that more time was spent social networking and, in the case of the older group, this was conducted from their **mobile phones rather than PCs or laptops**. Where mobile phones were described as less readily used, this was influenced by the cost of mobile social networking, and restrictions on use imposed by parents.

There were some interesting patterns that help understand the associations (or not) between online groomers modus operandi and young peoples current use of the Internet. For example, in chapter 3 we have seen how some online groomers used **online gaming platforms**, such as Xbox Live or Playstation to

make contact with young boys. In the focus groups there was evidence to support this gender difference as there were no examples from any of the groups of girls using gaming consoles to go online. The boys however talked about repeated use of Playstation, Nintendo or Xbox.

Chapters 3 and 4 also highlighted how **webcams**, were described by the groomers as a popular mode of contact. However, the data collected from young people indicated a far more limited use of webcams. When webcams were used, this was to contact family who were away on holiday, but not to contact friends online. Similarly, whilst **MSN** was described by the online groomers as being a regular place to contact young people online, conversations with young people made it clear that the use of MSN has diminished considerably in recent years. Thus, the young people aged 14-16 talked about MSN hardly being used at all. These different patterns between groomers' mode of contact and young people's current behaviour could be explained by retrospective nature of the online groomers' interview accounts, interviewed throughout 2010 about offences that happened some years earlier. Clearly, technology and online modes have moved on significantly since then, particularly with the introduction of smart-phones. Therefore, safety campaigns need to keep up to date with patterns and mode of technology use if prevention initiatives are to have the desired impact.

The final part of this section outlines **where young people go online**. Here the implications for safety campaigns are clear. We have seen in chapter 4 how groomers tended to take interactions to private spaces where possible. In the conversations with young people, the location of Internet use was described as a matter of convenience and expediency. As such, the family sitting-room, dining-room, and bedroom were all talked about as common locations. However, the bedroom did seem to be the preferred location. These views were underpinned by the need for privacy and wanting to be away from their parents:

I like to be somewhere quiet 'cos sometimes my friends send stupid emails and it can be embarrassing if my parents looked' (girl, 12, UK).

yes and somewhere quiet because my sister is a nosey little parker (girl, 11, UK).

In this section we have set out how long young people described being online, their preferred mode, and where online conversations tended to take place. The safety implications of this behaviour have also been outlined. The focus of the next section is the extent of online safety awareness and associated risk management techniques.

Online Safety

The number of young people that are using the Internet (Livingstone et al 2011), set alongside the information we have reported from online groomers, makes the importance of young people operating safely online inherently clear. In particular, it is important to understand the extent of awareness young people have about safety issues, and the different techniques they may use to manage such risks. This information can then be used to appraise and perhaps refine safety initiatives so that they may have maximum impact.

In this section we describe online safety in two discrete, but complementary sections. First, we illustrate the **risk awareness** discussed by the young people. The section then concludes with a description and appraisal of **risk management strategies**.

Risk awareness

When asked the question, 'what does online safety mean to them', three themes emerged from the group discussions.

First, was the concept on **non-disclosure** and encompassed people not sharing information about their private life to strangers and the sense that people need to be aware of what they say and how they say it. It was striking that young people in the UK related the need for non-disclosure as helping prevent potential harm from strangers (stranger-danger). One reason for this awareness may be due to the widespread online safety campaigns disseminated in schools, using material provided by the Child Exploitation and Online Prevention centre.

Yeah, being aware….making sure you don't post pictures of yourself…just staying aware of keeping away from people you don't know (girl, 15, UK).

Don't give out information to people you don't know, don't give information to random people (girl, 15, UK).

Awareness of the stranger-danger concept also seemed to cascade down into attitudes and behaviours towards whether it was safe to physically meet with somebody that you only know online. For example, in one school in the UK that had welcomed safety training, the young people were emphatic that they would never meet an unknown online friend, offline, under any circumstances. In direct contrast, in schools where there had been no safety awareness, some young people (particularly those from the 'vocational' education stream) talked about meeting someone under particular circumstances. For example, if they were attractive.

…..if it's a pretty girl (boy 16, Belgium).

If they're not too old, then for sure (girl, 14, Belgium)

However, given that we have reported how some online groomers would use a completely different identity profile to their own, accompanied by a fake picture to engage young people online, the risk associated with these attitudes is striking. In addition, the education level of some of the young people with risky attitudes perhaps indicates the need for a more targeted safety approach to engage and meet the needs of people with different abilities.

Finally, in the schools where no awareness training was evident, there was however some discussion from young people that meeting an unknown online friend, offline, would not be a good idea. However, in contrast

to the people from schools with robust online safety programmes, the rationale for why it wasn't good to meet was less precise and certain.

The second theme was about the risks to the **health of their computer and thus the young person**. Here, some young people talked about the need to install antivirus software to prevent computer viruses, getting hacked and /or people taking control of their webcams to spy on them.

Me, I put something on my webcam so no one can see me 'cos there's this girlfriend of mine who got hacked and people were able to see her through the webcam' (girl 13 Belgium)

This level of awareness is particularly encouraging given how chapter 3 has described a case of one online groomer taking control (remotely) of a young girl's computer in order to continue the abuse. However, some people in this group only talked about viruses in the context of broader risk awareness. In particular, some young people in Italy and Belgium had to be prompted by the group facilitator to realise the issue could also be about personal safety online.

However, in direct contrast to the awareness described above, the final category was labelled as '**no knowledge'** discussed. That is, there were some young people in the focus groups that were unable to articulate any awareness of risk whatsoever. The potential risk to these young people online is unfortunately high.

Having set out the extent of young people's risk awareness, and the features underpinning the different levels of understanding, this chapter will now explore the strategies discussed for staying safe online.

Risk-management strategies

Staying safe online for the young people meant having 'private' settings, not giving out phone numbers or addresses and specifically not giving out passwords. It appeared that much of the online safety practice had been learnt 'by doing' rather than through explicit advice. This was particularly evident where there had been no awareness training in school. Sources of unstructured learning tended to be from siblings and parents. In some cases, siblings were described as handing down good advice based on their own risky experiences online.

My sister taught me…before I used it…because some things had happened to her and so she told me to change it (girl, 12, UK).

I told my sister about a guy who once sent me a friend request. She advised me to block his account and not to answer his emails anymore for he could cause me trouble or steal my passwords (girl, 13, Italy).

In the focus groups where there had been no safety training in school or from parents it appears that the young people do nothing at all in terms of prevention and have no effective strategies.

Across the groups in the UK, Italy and Belgium, when people gave example of risk management in all its forms, the unifying theme was that these strategies had been deployed whist using Facebook, presumably due to the popularity of this social networking site. Consequently, the report now moves from generic risk awareness and management, to behaviour that was pertinent to the Facebook social networking site.

Social Networking - Facebook

It is important to understand how young people use Facebook for two reasons. First, it is the worlds' most popular social networking site. Second, as we have seen in earlier chapters some groomers talked about the advantage of using this site to access profile pictures, demographic descriptions and conversations for victim-targeting.

From the conversations with young people in the focus groups, the popularity of Facebook was striking. Virtually all used the site. Where Facebook was not used, it was because of not yet being old enough to access it. However, even then the site was definitely going to be accessed in due course:

*I don't have Facebook…**yet!** (her emphasis)…so I usually have Google open to do my homework and so I've got Youtube on a lot listening to music when I'm doing my homework (Girl,11, UK)*

In this section we describe various aspects of young people's behaviour on Facebook, and set these observations in the context of online groomers' accounts and broader safety implications. In the next section how friends were added is discussed. The section concludes with a description of behaviour associated with young peoples' profile pages and the information they display.

Adding friends on Facebook

The number of friends young people have on Facebook, and how those friends are established has a clear bearing on the development of effective safety campaigns. The questions are: do young people know the Facebook friends that they add personally? How do they ascertain the real identity of a Facebook friend (in the context of the online groomers' accounts of identity deception)?

The young people discussed having a number of Facebook friends that ranged from 50-1,000. Looking across all the focus group data, around 400 hundred friends tended to be the norm. Irrespective of the actual number of Facebook friends added, what was interesting was the sense of **competition** to have more friends that underpinned this aspect of Facebook behaviour. For example, some young people added people from a previous school or younger members within their current school - even if they did not really know them well or talk to them in real life to increase numbers. There were also examples of some young people adding friends that they sometimes added people they hadn't met. Alternatively adding 'friends-of friends' was also discussed. Here the clear rationale expressed was that even though they are not friends to talk to, adding them will increase their overall total number of Facebook contacts.

Sometimes I add people I don't know; it's a way to meet people (boy, 16 yrs, Belgium)

*Plenty. Some I see around, they're like these smaller kids at school, **they bring the number up**, but I don't talk to them (girl, 15 yrs, Belgium)*

Staying with the topic of adding friends, there was an interesting exchange within one of the groups when asked how many of these friends they had met before. This in turn revealed the potential for 'learning' from each other in the possible absence of safety awareness or guidance from parents:

Sometimes I add people I don't know; it's a way to meet people
But accepting people you don't know is dangerous
Yeah, there are maniacs/perverts out there
There could be paedophiles and who knows what else out there
(Belgium group aged 14-16 yrs)

Despite the competition driving diverse behaviour when adding friends to Facebook accounts, it was encouraging that some safety messages were getting through. For example the pressure and competition to have many friends was discussed by one of the older girls as one of her concerns about younger children using the Internet.   Furthermore, a very recurrent example from our sample was a form of vetting or screening. Here the young person checked whether the person making a friend request had mutual friends.

It (Facebook) is much easier: you can read his wall posts, check on his friends. (girl,13, Italy).

Q When you get a friend request (on FB) what do you usually do?
- *I check on his/her wall posts*
- *I check on his friends list!*
- *I have a look on his profile picture first*
- *I check if we have mutual friends*
(Italy FG)

In addition to checking the identity of Facebook friends, there was also awareness or agreement that young people should not meet someone that they have only met online.   However, it is interesting that this safety awareness does not seem to be congruent with the behaviour described directly above with regard to how some friends are added. That is, some young people are aware of safety risks, but some do not seem to be implementing them fully.   Perhaps the theory of online disinhibition can help explain this ambivalent behaviour. In addition, the profile of risk-taking young people set out in section 6.2 may also shed further light in understanding and responding to this child protection challenge.

Profiles and privacy settings

One of the features of online grooming described in chapter 3 shows how some groomers *scanned* social networking sites to find out information about young people. Based on the information on the young person's profile, such as whether the gender and features fitted their preferred sexual interest, or the nature and extent of sexual behaviours shared, a decision was taken by groomers about whether to initiate online contact. There are thus important safety implications with regard to how profile pages are set up, and the information they contain.

When privacy and profile settings were discussed in the focus groups, a range of risky practices were disclosed. Turning first to profile settings, some young people talked about having the profile settings on **'public'.** This meant that anyone using the Internet can access the page and discover personal details about the young person. Where the circumstances of these profile-page risk-takers were explored further, two influencing features emerged. First these young people tended to come from a vocational schooling background and thus lower socio-economic groups in both Italy and Belgium. Second, there had been no Internet safety awareness training provided either in their schools, or seemingly from their parents.

I can't remember…I really don't know if mine is set to public or to private (boy, 13, Italy)

In direct contrast were the circumstances of the group of young people that described having their profile page set to **'private**'. Here, these young people said that their profile had been private for as long as they can remember. Directly influencing this behaviour was exposure to either safety awareness sessions in school, or: parents that were very aware of safety and were adept users of Facebook themselves.

I was told to (set it to private)…it was the condition before I could use it (girl, 13, UK)

Despite this encouraging safety behaviour, there were some young people in this group that talked about having good awareness, but had not yet put the learning into practice. This reinforces the need for safety campaigns to highlight the need to implement action and learning immediately, and give instructions on how to change settings, for these initiatives to have maximum impact.

Me, it's public but I think I'm going to change that because I don't want people I don't know to be able to see my profile (girl, 16, Belgium)

Alongside whether young people keep their Facebook profile settings on public or private, it is also important to understand what young people think is acceptable **profile content**, and the features influencing this behaviour. When discussed in the focus groups, the information listed as acceptable to post on their profiles were name, gender, birthday, 'information about your life', and the name of the town they lived in. In addition, there were also examples of some young people who used profile names such as 'Squiggle' or 'Jackie's Girl'. Given that some of these profiles are public, and some online groomers scan and use profile information to target particular people in the sexual offence process, this is unsettling information.

The type of information young people regarded as not suitable to post on their FB profiles was personal addresses and phone numbers. There was however examples of young people posting a variety of personal pictures, mostly between friends they know, but on occasions these images showed the young people wearing their school uniform. Again one exchange revealed the value of safety awareness training that had been provided in the school to challenge this risky behaviour:

We're not allowed to send photos with our school uniform
Aren't we?
Apparently not
Oops, I did
(UK group aged,12-14 yrs)

We have seen in chapter 3, 4 and 5 how some online groomers perceived some young people as sexually mature and so talked about interactions in terms of a relationship. Facebook profiles contain a 'relationship status' question and it may be that however innocent the entry by the young person, some groomers may distort this knowledge to justify contact and a connection with the young person. When 'relationship status' was discussed in the groups, there was a difference between the countries in terms of the type of information posted here. This behaviour was not mentioned at all in the UK groups, but did feature in the Belgium and Italian groups. For example:

'I only put the name of my town and indicate my age and the fact that I'm single' (girl, Belgium, 13).

'single male' (boy, Belgium, 14).

In Italy when the young people mentioned sharing 'relationship status', the facilitator checked this by asking them again. In response, the whole group said they had stated 'single' on their Facebook profiles.

The final aspect of Facebook profile behaviour was the practice amongst some young people of having **fake single or multiple profiles** on the site. In fact, this behaviour was not unusual and there were, for example, some young people that had a different profile for boyfriends or girlfriends. What is very interesting is that young people are developing multiple profiles in response to the safety risk presented online. That is, they posted different information on each profile according to who they expected to view them. There were also examples of some young people with one profile, that contained fake information, for the same safety reasons.

I often fake my own information, so that if I'm on the same website as my friends and they need information I always tell them my user name so they know it's me but I will describe myself differently. So I'll say I have black hair..I come from Asia or something like that…not exactly like that, but I'll fake my settings for my safety (UK girl 13 years)

It is important to note that this behaviour was also unheard of in some of the groups, where participants expressed surprise as to why anyone would want to have more than one profile. However, when they were questioned by the facilitator as to why they thought this behaviour occurred, the suggestions were that it was possibly related to the disinhibition that you can experience when online. This of course is in keeping with Suller's theory that we have drawn on throughout the report.

So that you can change personality…? You can have two different accounts…..on the computer you can be completely different to like when you're talking to someone in real life (boy, 14, UK).

*I've also got a joke profile…I made a fake one with my friend….and it's really surprising how many people accept you…it's really weird being in a position where you know you're **not a real person but some people are so vulnerable that they think you are** (girl, UK, 14).*

This section has explored the behaviour of young people on Facebook. These accounts provide compelling information about how young people set up their page, add friends and the extent of open personal disclosure online. In some respects, this information serves to validate the accounts of some online groomers

presented earlier. In particular how they used such open information to scan and assess young people before making contact. But beyond cross-validation, this information is critically important to the development of the most robust safety messages for Facebook use.

Awareness and Perception of Online Groomers

One of the core aims of this research programme was to use information from the online groomers' interviews to make a significant contribution to the development of educational awareness and preventative initiatives aimed at parents, teachers and young people. In chapters 3, 4 and 5, this report has clearly shown that online groomers are a diverse group. For safety campaigns to have the most effect, it is important to understand the nature and extent of young peoples awareness of grooming. By doing so, safety initiatives can be tailored to address any knowledge gaps or myths identified by this research.

This section begins by mapping awareness of online grooming per se. It then focuses on the characteristics young people associated with online groomers that approached young people. The section concludes with an analysis of how young people talked about responding to inappropriate approaches.

Awareness of Grooming

When the young people were asked about whether they had heard of online grooming, in some cases the word 'groomer' was an unfamiliar term. However, when it was established that the groups understood the behaviour[19] young people provided some broad and specific definitions. An example of a broad definition was *'adults who want to attract young people because they think they're still young themselves'*. In contrast, specific definitions tended to drill-down on both the characteristics of the individual, the style of approach and the perceived outcome associated with any encounter

*it's like when a 50 year old man like pretends to be a 12 year old girl and like says 'oh why don't we meet up and we can talk about this band'….and whatever…and then you meet up and something **terrible** (her emphasis) happens (girl, 12, UK).*

In the previous sections we have illustrated how the extent of safety awareness articulated by young people tended to underpin the accuracy of their views. Clearly, this explanation seems to have relevance for the diverse understanding of what online grooming actually is.

With the broad definitions mapped, the next aspect explored in the groups was young peoples' sense of what type of person would be interested in approaching them online. The range of verbatim responses are organised thematically to aid translation into safety campaigns and materials. Table 6.7 presents these data, some of the responses were given more than once by different young people in the various groups.

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[19] Where the word 'groomer' was not understood the focus group facilitators used as little explicit prompt as possible to tease out their understanding of what sort of behaviour it refers to. The term 'entice' worked best here.

Table 6.7: Young peoples perceptions of groomers' characteristics

Theme	Verbatim Data
Age (and presentation)	- Fat and old - They're 20 plus…obviously - This may be very rude but I always imagine them to be like mainly old…something like 50 years old - Old farts, not 70, more like 40 - Creepy old man – starey eyes - Old but lives with their parents - Older than us…and then when hear about them they're not like you imagine
Unattractive appearance	- Bearded - Bald - Sweaty - Slimy - Someone wearing big thick glasses - Disgusting people - Like those pictures, mug shots, like those people that have gone into prison - Really scarey – look scarey - Geeks with big old beer guts
Unstable personality	- A sick person - A weirdo - Mentally disturbed - They're crazy - Psychopaths - They must be drunk - They're not right in the head
Relationship	- They're people we don't know - Maybe foreign people who'd ask me out
Sex offenders (generic)	- They are child molesters - They are child profiteers - They're paedophiles - Perverts - Rapists
Accurate (non-stereotypical)	- A man in his thirties who looks for 15 year old girls - Could be a girl though - I always think boys…or men - Adults who want to attract young people because they think they're still young themselves

The data presented in Table 6.7 are striking for two reasons. First, the descriptions tend to be stereotypical depictions of old, unattractive or 'sick' people. For example, *'good-looking men don't need to do these things'*. Given the data presented in chapters 3, 4 and 5, these attitudes and beliefs seem to be playing directly into some online groomers' hands if they present themselves as not in this category. Second, that safety campaigns are clearly not getting across the most helpful messages about the diverse nature of online grooming. That is, these men can be attractive teenagers, friendly socially skilled father figures, or indeed fat old men.

The table above does however present some descriptions that are more accurate. For example, that groomers can be boys, men or women. Some of these observations were articulated further, and illustrated the successful nature of some safety training that had been provided.

Most of the time they're nice because if they were mean they wouldn't get what they are after, they're nice but, actually, they're not. In their head they think they're nice but they have a problem.

I think anyone…in that well first of all you think it's like old fat people that just stare at the computer but then we watched this thing (video in Assembly) where it was actually young people as well.

You just assume it's a weird person but then they showed us that video and it was just a normal person, probably about 20 who went and did it

The fact that young peoples' prevailing image tends to be of an unattractive old fat man is a real cause for concern. As such, the scale of the task to **empower and engage** all young people with accurate safety information is clear to see. The following section builds on these data to illustrate how young people perceive that approaches by online groomers are made.

Young People's Perceptions about Approaches

As was the case with understanding the type of person who grooms online, it is also very important to identify the extent of awareness young people may have in terms of the method or style of approach. By doing so, critical gaps in awareness can then be addressed. As with the previous table, the range of verbatim responses are organised thematically in the event this information can be directly translated into safety campaigns and materials. Table 6.8 presents these data.

Table 6.8: Mode and style of approach perceived by young people

Type	Sub-theme	Verbatim data
Mode	*Computer chat*	- Through a message
	Images (generic)	- He would send us pictures/images
Identity Deception	*Age*	- They pass themselves off as a young person, as someone else - They'd say they're your age, like,'I'm your age do you want to come round?' - They'd probably try to convince you that they were like you, so they'd probably send you pictures of what they think you'd like…so if he knew you were 12 they'd probably send you a picture of a 12 year old girl - By passing themselves off as someone our age. As far as pictures go, sure, all you have to do is 'Google "male 25 years old" and *voila*, you've got loads to choose from - You can tell if it's for real or not because a good-looking guy, let's say it, there aren't so many of them around anymore
	Image	- Think that they could send pictures to pass themselves off as younger than they are, could doctor pictures found on the Internet - He could like send us fake pictures anyway, couldn't he?
	Relationship	- If you said 'No' or 'I'll ask my mum', they'd try to convince you to come round and say 'Oh don't tell them, don't worry…it's quite safe'…or something like that - Pass themselves off as someone you know - And just like trying to be like a friend - Yeah, cos lots of people who've had that sort of experience have said they wouldn't know as it's just like a normal friend - If he's way older than me, he could pretend he's a friend of my parents - Yes, he might say he's a friend of my father - By sending a friend request to a friend of ours e.g. can we meet?
	Intention	- He'll say good things about himself

Socialisation	Generic	- They'll talk to us and stuff - He'd write "What's up"? - Start chatting to you on Facebook and saying 'I saw you in the park and things'…
	YP Interests	- They'll ask us about our hobbies - If you share a band say that you like then they might say 'I've got these tickets for two and I was going to take my friend and now she can't come, so would you like to come with me' - Or they might when you've said your favourite band, say 'oh come round, she's my favourite too and we could cut our hair or something' (*laughter*)
Information seeking	Explicit	- Ask you where you live
	Implicit	- He could find our email address on Facebook and use it to add us on MSN as well! - They might fake their Facebook profile…like to spend time checking your friends and gathering information and typing your name into Google and that…
Outcome	Meeting	- Like getting to know you and then eventually meeting up - Ask to meet you - Write whether we'd like to meet, ask that we trust him
No awareness		- I really can't imagine

The data in table 6.8 are encouraging as they indicate that some safety messages about the type and style of approach are clearly getting through. That is, the range of responses reflected understanding of how groomers may socialise with young people, and the attempt to relate to the young person by wanting to learn more about them. Young people were also acutely aware of the role that deception can play in these approaches.   Despite this, the research has identified some key gaps in the knowledge base that it would be helpful for safety campaigns to address. This includes:

- limited awareness of how some groomers **can scan the online environment for information** before actually contacting anybody. This gap speaks to the data presented in earlier sections that indicate a lack of awareness about how profile page information can be used,

- no awareness of the **role of mobile phones** in the grooming process,

- outcomes are perceived to involve a meeting. **Continuation of online abuse as an outcome, via image collection** does not seem to be understood.

Approaches received, appraisal and actions taken

In chapter 3 we have seen the extent to which some men talked about spending time online attempting to approach young people. It is perhaps unsurprising then that some of the young people shared experiences in some groups of being approached in an inappropriate way. In fact an approach by some that they judged as 'suspicious,' seemed to be an almost expected experience - *'it happens all the time'!*

Examination of the accounts of some young people showed the **identity** and **escalation** features of online grooming appeared to be the point when they became aware of a potential risk. Here, acting 'suspiciously' or not trusting someone seems to refer to persistence by the 'stranger' in attempts at communication, or asking for a phone number.

'Yeah, it was on Facebook, someone added me as a friend and, seeing how he used the photo of someone I knew, I added him as a friend and then he came to talk to me, asking me how old I was and wanting to meet and all. I cut it short because the conversation seemed weird to me because he was asking stuff he should have known already' (girl, 16, Belgium).

'Well, once there was this guy who passed himself off as a friend of mine, I didn't know his (my friend's) computer had been hacked. And the guy says meet me at this place, but it seemed strange to me because I'd never been there before. So I said ;yeah' but I never showed up. And the next day I said sorry to my friend for not making it and he said "what are you talking about?" (boy, 13, Belgium),

'Me, once, one of them (and he says 'paedophile') asked me to do things in front of the webcam. First he passed himself as a 16 year old girl, then he said he was 25, so I reported it to netlog and netlog deleted him (boy, 16, Belgium).

'Me too, he was an old man as well'……..I didn't accept his friend request. I checked on his profile and it was full of very weird photos. They were all very dark and shadowy (girl, 15, Italy).

Unfortunately, alongside the perhaps more subtle approaches at contact, there were also examples of explicit online disinhibition, characterised by fast sexual contact and explicit sexual behaviours.

'Yes, he passed himself off as someone that I know and then he asked to turn the webcam on and he had it pointed on his penis. So I immediately blocked him' (girl, 15, Belgium).

Beyond the general sense of suspiciousness described briefly above, when young people talked about how they assessed the veracity of an online approach, the type and style of language used by the online groomers was discussed as the key identifying marker of risk. For example, the young people talked about clumsy attempts at shorthand, excessive use of emoticons such as smiley faces, and inappropriate use of young people's 'slang' language.

'a kid my age uses a language and makes questions that an adult wouldn't ask. An adult would speak (online) in a different way'

'Oh yeah, I can always tell…say if someone is on someone else's account…I can just tell it's not them just because of they way they 'talk'…I know it sounds silly but some people might just put loads of smiley faces on the end or like abbreviations and stuff…I kinda know.. (girl, 14, UK)

'(so by evaluating his language?)….Yes, but also the questions he asks, the slang he'd use. (boy, 14, Italy)

Although helpful in preventing some approaches, this strategy is of some concern in the context of how some online groomers in chapter 3 talked about learning and refining their approach after earlier 'unsuccessful' contact attempts. Therefore, it is unlikely that this risk management strategy will be completely effective

when appraising all potential contacts by groomers. In particular, those online groomers with a more 'sophisticated' style.

Turing to an appraisal of young people responses, these cover three themes: **immediate action; risky behaviours**; and **extent of disclosure**.

- **Immediate action**: There was evidence from the young people of consistent blocking of messages or by ignoring inappropriate requests. However, one young person said that when one groomer had been particularly persistent, the only action left to the young person was to close down their own Facebook account. Therefore, beyond the clear risk of harm these men can present, this Facebook example shows how online grooming can impact on broader aspects of socialisation

- **Risky behaviours**: In section 6.2 we presented a typology of young people based on online groomers' perceptions. One of these behavioural types was risk taking. From the accounts of young people themselves, there was evidence to support the sense of risk taking:

  'I received a call once (on mobile). I didn't know the number but I answered. It was a guy who told me he heard I was a very nice girl and wanted to meet me. I refused but kept his number' (girl, 15, Italy).

  When asked why she kept the number, the young person said that she might want to investigate this another time. In another example from our sample, some young people said that they would often continue a chat with a stranger online until they decide 'it's getting fishy' (*suspicious).* This behaviour was underpinned by the young person feeling curious and wanting to know who the other person was. Given how some online groomers said they could use chat to make the young person feel responsible or compliant with the offending process, that some young people have prolonged chats with adults that are clearly not their friends is a cause for concern.

  Interestingly, amongst some young people there was also a degree of intolerance towards others that might put themselves at risk. Here the view was that they should know how online communication works, that they were in some way 'stupid', and should know better. Where views on those at risk were perhaps more empathetic, the pressure to have a socially desirable profile with lots of friends underpinned perceptions of what makes some young people more vulnerable.

  'I just think some people get, not over emotional, but like into their online profile…what they look like to other people so they accept people to make it look like they've got lots of online friends. So it's sort of a bit of a vulnerable thing' (girl, 14 UK).

- **Extent of disclosure**: The final aspect of a young person's response is perhaps the most important – whether they share what has taken place and with whom this is discussed. A common feature across both boys and girls accounts was a sense that they deal with things alone and a general sense was that it was not much of a problem. Boys in particular tended to be more resistant to the

idea of telling anyone about inappropriate online approaches. In some respect boys saw themselves as at less risk than girls. These views were influenced by stereotypical perceptions of masculinity and being 'tough'. That is, they felt that they could deal with it and protect themselves:

'It's easy, you set up a date, you show up with 40 friends and you beat the hell out of him (boy, 16, Belgium).

In contrast to boys, girls commented that they would be more likely to tell a friend. In some cases, there was also discussion of mentioning the approach to their parents. However, where there was resistance to telling parents or carers, this was underpinned by a fear that their computer privileges would be removed.

The evidence in this section provides some helpful indications to how some online safety campaigns may be improved. These include:

- Making clear the **potential risk in continuing conversations** with unknown adults, no matter how safe the young person may be feeling.

- The **importance of disclosure**. To engage young people (and parents here) messages could encompass:
    - **targeted messages for boys and girls** - focussing on stereotypical aspects of masculinity amongst boys and the associated risks here,
    - the need to **share information, beyond peer groups,** and that people **will not be regarded as stupid** if online mistakes are made,
    - how parents need to have a relationship with young people that encourages disclosure of harm. **Linking Internet access at home to school performance or other privileges is always going to undermine the potential for disclosure.**

Given the implications of these data for effective safety interventions, the final section of this chapter examines how young people perceive current online safety campaigns and the lessons that can be learnt for interventions in the future.

Attitudes to safety training

When considering the young people's attitudes to safety training, one of the key features that distinguished responses in the focus groups was about the **style or approach of the provider**.   For example, whereas in Italy, all training seemed to be welcome, in the UK, some young people talked about wanting to be able to relate to the provider. This did not necessarily mean the provider needed to be someone of a similar age, but people who liked Facebook. That is, there was a sense that some parents who provided advice about social networking were against it or fearful of it. Young people felt that the key aspect underpinning this fear was that their parents did not actually know enough about social networking. In the next chapter we provide

evidence from parents' that tends to support this view. However, where parents and siblings had been more balanced in their approach, the key safety messages seem to have been embedded into consciousness and practice.

'Well because I started the Internet when quite young my sister she used to tell me what to do and what not to do…if I hadn't had that…if I was the older sister and hadn't had that I'd have probably ended up in a lot of trouble. But also because of my parents' professions they're very strict…they say 'oh you can't use this website because we know it's not good'.

This therefore speaks to our recommendation above about parents, carers, and even older siblings, needing to have a more open approach to online behaviours and risk. That is, such **openness and balance does seem to influence how messages are received.**

'Some people need it more than others…because there are hundreds of people who are less careful about using it and they will put up images without thinking about what sort of images they are and won't bother with their security settings because they think 'Oh that won't happen to me….my parents are very tight on my Internet use 'cos my dad he works in computers, he knows a lot about computers and…you know my laptop has a timer on it so I can only stay online between certain hours in the day…and with the whole safety thing my mum sat with me when I got my laptop and went through all the safety settings on Facebook when I got it and I think that not a lot of parents do that" (girl, 12, UK).

Away from the role of significant others, there was also evidence from some of the younger girls in the sample that they had been scared or put-off Facebook (temporarily) and other social networking sites on account of earlier safety awareness initiatives. This may not be ultimately helpful, given that not all online interaction is going to be harmful, and the role that online space will play in young people's lives.

Beyond the style of provider, when asked about **who they think needs safety training,** people were clear that education programmes need to target younger children. The suggestion here is that the younger children are more vulnerable precisely because of their desire to get online and their **competitiveness** to have as many friends as possible. This is an important observation and provides a clear message about the need for safety training at an early age.

'…Internet education doesn't really start until you get like to secondary school and with online stuff it's really very easy to fake your age but people do it…they're doing it pretty young.

' yeah quite...maybe Internet education should start when you're six or seven…they're trying to be cool…like they want to be the first person to have over 100 friends…and so they're more competitive then.

The final aspect of discussion about safety was in the context of **putting learning into practice.** Here, there was a degree of scepticism, particularly concerning how some sites govern age limits. That is, some young people could be taught about the risk of going on adult sites, but in practice, there was nothing to stop them doing so:

'I find it's useless because often on sites they'll ask: "Are you 18 years old?". You click yes and you're registered anyway even if you're not 18.' (girl,13, Belgium).

Perhaps then there needs to be greater co-operation between the industry and safety campaigns with regard to key messages and technical approaches to design-out some risky behaviours. In the next chapter, the implications of this research for the industry, safety campaigns and offender management programmes are discussed.

7.   Implications: Applying the research to practice

The European Online Grooming Project is the most comprehensive and in-depth study of online grooming to date. The previous chapters have clearly illustrated the extent of the challenge in terms of the diversity of online groomers' behaviour, the different ways in which young people can be at risk, and the perceptions of young people regarding the influence of current online safety initiatives. The size of the project and multi-disciplinary nature of the consortium provides a unique opportunity for this research to set-out robust information for campaigns, professionals and parents/carers – all of whom have an interest in tackling the problem of online grooming.

This chapter begins by drawing out implications for safety campaigns, set in the context of a public health approach. Section 7.2 explores the implications for the assessment and management of online groomers. The chapter concludes with a description of feedback from awareness raising events held with key stakeholders.

7.1   Safety initiatives in a public health model

It is clear from this research that the potential scale of victimisation of children or young people online makes the issue one of public health, given the population base of potential victims and the damaging impact on children's mental health and even physical health following abuse initiated online. Whilst there have been a number of preventative programmes in the UK, typically based in schools, but also in the online environment, there is less available either for vulnerable victims already affected by family adversity or dysfunction, or for victims of sexual abuse, for whom the online grooming process has left residual problems. We do not know the likelihood of such victims resuming their high risk online behaviour. Below we describe the public intervention packages currently available as well as making a case for tailored intervention programmes for children or young people in vulnerable populations.

Prevention   **Treatment**

Degree of Harm to YP

Contact /exposure   *Physical Contact*
harmful materials

	Managing Online Grooming:	
Awareness for parents & educators	**A Collaborative Approach**	**Tailored treatment for victims**
	Policy Makers, Education, Criminal Justice, Psychological Services, Social Workers, NGOs, Charities	
Secure online environments		**Offender assessment & intervention programmes**

Public protection and intervention packages

Whilst the effects of a number of Safer Internet Programmes has led to much greater provision of information and awareness across Europe, lack of awareness related to online risk is still a problem, both through parental unawareness of online behaviour, as well as through naïve or risky behaviour in the young people. The large quantitative European surveys found that 61% of parents whose child has met an online contact face-to-face were unaware of their actions and 56% of parents whose child has received nasty or hurtful messages online are unaware that this has occurred (Livingston et al, 2011). There is still evidence of a generation gap in this technology-use. Whilst this is in large part a technology issue, there is also probably a different mode of effective communicating in the generations, a different definition of 'friend' and a different developmental need in children and young people for high levels of friend contact.

Access to information, and raising awareness, is a central focus of the European Commission's (EC) Safer Internet Action Plan and this is implemented across Europe through the INSAFE network of national awareness-raising nodes. Thus a Safer Internet Day is organised by INSAFE each year to promote safer use

of online technology and mobile phones. The UK INSAFE is represented in the UK by a consortium of the awareness raising node SWGfl (South West Grid for Learning), Childnet and the hotline IWF (Internet Watch Foundation). There are now Awareness Centres belonging to the INSAFE Network in 27 European countries. On a broader international scale centres can also be found in Argentina, Australia and the USA. It is clear that while messages are getting through to the general public, these need to be reinforced and repeated in order to help protect children and young people from harm delivered through digital technologies.

Measures to protect children include school-based intervention programmes aiming to educate children, parents and teachers about the dangers posed by sex offenders in cyberspace, in order to change online behaviour. A variety of initiatives have been developed through the Safer Internet Centres which are focussed on the principal issues of safety from risks such as pornography and child abuse images, cyberbullying and the concern over contact with strangers through behaviour on social networking sites and chat rooms. Amongst these initiatives are hotlines and helplines, teaching and training material for teachers and parents and the establishment of youth panels. For example, the Youth council – DigiRaad- in the Netherlands is a young advisory group which has proved to be an extremely influential panel of young people aged between 10 and 18 years old that advises the Dutch government about safety for young people. Austria, France and Germany have developed targeted websites related to safe practices offering cartoons and games with safety messages attached, teenager advice, and information for parents.

One particular initiative in Spain, Navegacion Segura (Safe Navigation) contains games with quizzes to include cyberbullying and grooming warning messages. In the UK, Childnet actively promotes positive and creative ways for young people to use the Internet with an emphasis on the three strands of Access, Awareness, Protection and Policy. In the UK, the ThinkuKnow (TUK) programme, part funded by the European Commission's (EC) Safer Internet Plus programme, is managed by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP). It is now widely disseminated in schools and concentrates on three key messages: to have fun; to stay in control; and to report a problem around dangers online. These three messages perfectly reflect the content of existing safety awareness initiatives throughout Europe and they have targeted young people, parents and teachers (Davidson, Lorenz, Martellozo & Grove-Hills 2009). However evaluation of these has shown that effects erode quite quickly over time with need for refresher courses. Also, the impact on the more vulnerable young people, who may not even be at school, is not known.

From this research with online groomers and young people, the following gaps in both content and process of delivery of messages in current safety campaigns were identified.

Content gaps
- Some young people still have **no knowledge** about online risks
- Some young people did not **understand the term 'grooming'** , the nature of the behaviour should

- be made explicit in awareness programmes

- There is mixed awareness with regard to the **benefit of private profile pages** to guard personal information

- Yong people's depictions of online groomers tend to be **stereotypical perceptions** of offenders in terms of a creepy unattractive old man, which may make them susceptible to advances of younger and socially adept groomers

- Some young people are unaware of how offenders can **scan the online environment** for information before contact takes place

- The outcome of online grooming is seen only as linked to a physical meeting. There was **no awareness of the possibility of continued abuse by collecting images** online without a meeting

- The role of **Internet enabled mobile phones** is an emerging risk and does not seem to be acknowledged by young people

- Making clear the **potential risk in continuing conversations** with unknown contacts, no matter how safe the young person may be feeling

- The **importance of disclosure** is not embedded in young people's understanding of risk management. To engage young people (and parents with this information) messages could encompass:
  - **targeted messages for boys and girls** - focussing on stereotypical aspects of masculinity amongst boys and the associated risks here,
  - targeted messages for identified vulnerable children and young people for example those involved in social services,
  - the need to **share information beyond peer groups, to encourage disclosure by friends and siblings** and to communicate that people **will not be regarded as unintelligent** if online mistakes are made.

Process gaps

- Need to empower and engage young people with safety information – young people tend to see current messages through a **punitive, fear-based approach** and miss the key points

- Parents need to have a relationship with young people that encourage disclosure of harm. **Linking Internet access at home to school performance or other privileges undermines the potential for disclosure**

- **Parents and carers have a key role** to play in providing compelling, balanced information about online risks and need to educate themselves about children and young people's behaviour online and relevant technological safety issues

Targeted programmes for young people

In box above, is evidence from young people of differential awareness and responses according to gender. In chapter 6 we have identified two types of victim of online grooming for sexual abuse, on the basis of the groomers accounts, but also by reference to two chat lines confiscated by the police as evidence. Whilst providing a preliminary profile of both offender and victim characteristics, a matching between the two is suggested as a way of explaining how groomers get compliance form the young people they target.

Despite the virtual online experience of the grooming, actual real harm is done to the young people both in terms of distress caused by threats, blackmail and coercion to put their own image on line, but also through offline sexual abuse. This leads to damaging effects on the young person, which may be life long, and is likely to also damage other family members indirectly.

There is now increasing understanding about risks for such 'cyber-harm' in the European population. This has occurred through a number of EC initiatives and local preventative programmes run by Safer Internet Centres throughout the EU. The same level of input has not yet been directed at practitioners responsible for the care of vulnerable children - those who are in services for reasons of child protection, family difficulties including domestic violence, learning disability and mental health problems. It is increasingly likely that such children and young people are at particular risk of victimisation through digital technologies with the potential for adding to their burden of adversity, vulnerability and damaged functioning. Such children and young people have fewer sources of protection against cyber-risks through family, peers, neighbours and school setting. In addition, they have psychological profiles likely to attract predators who operate in the digital world. In order to provide interventions and preventative work for vulnerable children and young people known to services, training and resources are needed for social workers and related professionals responsible for their care. Such training resources will enable practitioners to identify, intervene with, and prevent future risk to already vulnerable children/young people. The aim is to improve current practice to mitigate the effects of cyberharm and to build resilience against future targeting for children and young people in services.

The targeting of training and intervention packages for vulnerable children and young people and professionals working with them, has not yet been developed to the same extent as awareness raising and educational materials in normative populations. This includes social workers in child protection and family support, and related practitioners such as those working in residential care, youth workers, psychiatrists and psychologists working in child and adolescent mental health specialisms and child safeguarding teachers in education. Thus children and young people considered to be at risk include those who have been neglected or abused or witnessed domestic violence or other family mental health problems, and are the focus of child protection or family support services, and those with mental health or learning problems. Further understanding of online cyberharm and safety to these professionals and these vulnerable young people is needed.

The analysis in this report confirms that children or young people with more vulnerable psychosocial profiles are more at risk to online grooming (Ospina, Harstall & Dennett, 2009) due to lack of family based protection

(solation, poor support form parents, residential care backgrounds, prior abuse experience leading to greater grooming or bullying susceptibility and so on) and lack of psychological resilience (low self-esteem, poor coping, lack of help-seeking behaviour, psychological disorder or learning difficulties and so on). However, the mechanisms by which such children may become trapped in abusive online contact, or the situational constraints on their help-seeking, clearly has other contextual elements not well documented and needs further investigation.

The pressing need for this awareness training for social work professionals was highlighted in a recent report in the UK which recounted the experience of some young women that had been the victims of sexual abuse following online grooming. The issue of emotional and psychological vulnerability was demonstrated by their reasons for not reporting the abuse or seeking help. They reported 'being in love" and having emotional dependency on their online "boyfriend" perceiving the relationship as a real attachment (Palmer, 2009). This accords with the vulnerable victims described here, potentially matched with the groomer with intimacy-seeking behaviour. The report shows that these young people provided only minimal information in initial interviews with police and it took as many as 10 to 12 sessions with the assigned social worker before they were able to talk in detail about their abuse experience. The young women described had started to form online relationships with predatory men when they were between the ages of 12 and 14. Impacts reported were psychological harm through emotional blackmail, guilt about collusion, distorted attachment to perpetrators, feelings of entrapment online and shame and humiliation due to the widespread nature and permanence of some of the digital evidence of their victimised behaviour. However, in large part their vulnerability was argued to be determined by their specific stage of development whereby protective factors which may have acted at other ages become less effective (Palmer, 2009). Groomers too seem aware of the age groups most susceptible and target young teenagers. The target age group may of course reduce over time as teenagers become more resistant to grooming advances and preteens increase their use of the Internet. The safety messages will then have to be communicated with even more care given the developmental stages of the children involved. Awareness raising, specific training and availability of intervention tools to tackle cyberharm is therefore needed, particularly targeted on those working with vulnerable children and young people across Europe.

The findings from this project have begun to formulate the profile of young people on line who become victims, and is able to indicate the interaction between groomer and victim as well as attempt a speculative matching of type of groomer to type of victim. As yet this is speculative and needs replicating on a larger sample, once there are higher numbers of convicted groomers to study, and once there is also a method of identifying victims in health and social care services as having been groomed by means of the Internet. The ROBERT programme (Risk Taking Online Behaviour: Empowerment through Research and Training)[20] is currently underway as a Safer Internet Project conducting interviews with victims of online grooming across Europe to establish in detail the characteristics of young victims, their behaviour online, and the impacts of

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[20] www.childcentre.info/robert

the grooming to which they were subjected. The findings from this project will be available in 2012 to further enhance understanding of grooming victims to inform the proposed project. There is very little other empirical evidence regarding the offender and victim experience of online harm and the findings from the study reported here is an excellent starting point for gaining new understanding of how groomers and victims come together online, with such dangerous and damaging effects for young people.

How can the industry contribute

Although this chapter has evidenced how online campaigns can be improved further, there is also a role for the industry to assist in preventing online harm. Clearly, large multi-national organisations have done much to fund and assist the promotion of online safety, but can more be done to design-out risky behaviours from hardware devices and software programmes? For example, we have seen in the previous chapter how a sense of competition when social networking encouraged some young people to accept people as friends, even when they had no sense of who some of these adults were. In addition, profile pages were kept open that contained socio-demographic information of use to online groomers when scanning. This begs the question about whether social networking sites can keep as private all settings when an account is opened, with the onus on the user to unlock settings rather than having to lock them retrospectively.

The second issue for the industry is whether more can be done to monitor Internet use? In particular, to prevent the sharing of indecent images and discussion of offence-supportive beliefs on forums that are set up to promote the sexual abuse of young people. This report has clearly illustrated how indecent images and offence-supportive chat can maintain the online offending process. Consequently, any intervention from the Industry to limit this type of offending behaviour would be very welcome. In the next section of this chapter, we will explore in further detail the implications of this research on the assessment and treatment of online groomers.

7.2   Online groomers assessment and treatment needs

During the last decade, mental health professionals have had to begin to face the challenge of treating sexual offenders that have used the Internet to facilitate or commit their sexual offences. Despite this, relatively little is known about the characteristics and treatment needs of individuals who commit such offences (O'Brien & Webster in 2011). Many of the existing studies of Internet offenders have tended to focus on their behavioural characteristics and so tend to describe rather than explain the process of online grooming. Consequently, at the scoping phase of this research, stakeholders from across Europe were united in the view that a key contribution of the current research would be to enhance understanding of the psychological functioning of this population. In turn, this was perceived to help ensure that assessment and treatment approaches had the optimum impact.

This section begins by looking at assessment implications, in the context of current approaches to the assessment of risk used for offline sexual offences. The section concludes with an appraisal of four treatment approaches currently utilised in Europe.

Risk assessment

Within the sexual offending assessment literature, there are two types of risk factors described: **static and dynamic**. The static factors are the aspects of the offender's history (like the previous convictions or the connections he had with the victim) which are directly related to recidivism. The dynamic factors are important psychological characteristics that are related to the aetiology of the sexual offence behaviour (Pham & Cortoni, 2011). These characteristics can be modified with appropriate psychotherapeutic interventions (Beech & Ward, 2004; Mann, Hanson & Thornton, 2010; Ward & Beech, 2006, mentioned by Pham & Cortoni, 2011).

There are two types of dynamic factors: stable and acute. The stable factors are constant characteristics of sexual recidivism, but these characteristics can be modified (Hanson & Harris, 2001, mentioned by Pham & Cortoni, 2011). The acute factors are short terms states that create favourable conditions that increase the likelihood of sexual assault (Pham & Cortoni, 2011).

Concerning risk assessment, for sex offenders who have committed sexual offences with contact, it seems preferable to use methods conceived to evaluate general criminal risk assessment and not only sexual recidivism (Pham and Cortoni, 2011). For sex offenders without offline contact histories and no previous conviction, it is not clear if static risk assessment scales can be used. In the context of this research, the interviews with the online groomers showed that for a number of these men, the current conviction for online grooming was their first offence. The subsequent behaviours that they went on to describe however do not give the impression that some of these men were particularly low risk. That is, some would talk about multiple online contacts as well as changes to their identity to achieve their 'approach-goals'. Clearly, for instruments to accurately assess the static risk for online grooming, it would be helpful for developers to consider some of the information in this report.

With regard to **dynamic risk**, primary factors that are often associated with a sexual offence are: the deviation of sexual interest, the cognitive distortions leading to sexual offences and intimacy difficulties (Harris & Hanson, 2001). Research has established that the reduction of these factors leads to a reduction of recidivism. As such, associated treatment targets include a reduction of sexual deviation, an increase of appropriate sexual arousal, modification of the problematic cognitions, the related emotional states and, finally, the improvement of self-management abilities.

Pham and Cortoni (2011) outlined the importance during treatment of offenders correctly: (a) identifying the elements leading to the offence, (b) developing a self-management plan and; (c) understand the progression of their behaviours directly associated to the offence. Offenders should stay aware of the factors that have facilitated the offence and engage themselves into appropriate strategies in order to manage the risk. Again, this research has highlighted a number of dynamic risk factors that it would be helpful to consider in the context of accurate dynamic risk assessment. These include: the role of indecent images and sexual chat with other adults in maintaining the offence process; the impact of the online environment on disinhibition,

with particular regard to anonymity and identity masking.   To develop robust data across Europe that could contribute to large scale meta-analyses of online groomers' risk factors, a collaborative project that sets out and co-ordinates data collection standards for professionals working with online groomers would be a very helpful start.

Treatment approaches

The lack of consistent and robust evidence to date means that there is diverse range of treatment practice with Internet Sexual Offenders. Here, therapies differ according to the model adopted by the therapist, or organisational preference if delivered in institutions such as prisons in the United Kingdom. In the next section we will consider several of these models, and how this study and other research can shed light on their potential efficacy when treating online groomers:

- the addiction model
- the cognitive-behavioural model (including risk-need-responsivity and working with fantasies)
- the psychodynamic model
- the Good Lives Model.

Addiction model

Considering aspects of online grooming as an addiction in itself, may be considered as a legitimate treatment target. For example, in chapter four we showed how some men talked about feeling addicted to online encounters, to the extent that they would fake illness from work in order to contact some people online. In addition, that some men talked about spending in excess of eight hours a day online, meticulously categorizing thousands of images, further supports the concept of addiction as an influencing factor.

With regard to other research, according to Quayle (2011): *Internet addiction is defined as an increasing investment of resources on Internet-related activities; unpleasant feelings when offline; an increasing tolerance to effects of being online and denial of problematic behaviours.*

In terms of issues for DSM-V: Internet addiction (AM J Psychiatry 165:3, 2008, mentioned by Quayle, 2011)…d*iagnosis is a compulsive-impulsive spectrum disorder that involves online and/or offline computer usage and/or offline computer usage and consists of at least three subtypes: excessive gaming, sexual preoccupations, and e-mail/text messaging. All share the following four components: 1) excessive use, often associated with a loss of sense of time or a neglect of basic drives, 2) withdrawal, including feelings of anger, tension and/or depression when the computer is inaccessible, 3) tolerance, including the need for a better computer equipment, more software, or more hours of use, and 4) negative repercussions, including arguments, lying, poor achievement, social isolation and fatigue.*

In the context of the Quayle (2011), our results demonstrate that addiction is a vulnerability factor that it would be helpful to include in treatment interventions.

Cognitive behavioural therapies (CBT)

Cognitive behavioural therapies are the most widely used treatment methods for sexual offenders at present (Davidson & Gottschalk, 2010). These therapies use the group because they may reduce the resistance factors that often occur in a dual relationship. As a consequence, the inter-personal relationships and also the sexual difficulties can be targeted (Cordier, 2002). However, at the scoping phase of the research, UK stakeholders talked about how placing online groomers in the same CBT groups with offline offenders and rapists could be challenging. That is, some stakeholders felt some online offenders would disengage with treatment, arguing that the content was not relevant to them. Consequently, one UK stakeholder described development of the *Internet Sex Offender Treatment Programme* (i-SOTP) (Hayes, Archer & Middleton, 2006). Although there is some emerging evidence that the i-SOTP may be effective for those downloading indecent images of children, online groomers would not normally meet the current suitability criteria for this intervention.

In addition, there was also the view that developing a treatment group explicitly for one type of sexual offender may create the potential for offender / offence type collusion. In fact, this is one of the reasons that 'traditional' sexual offender treatment groups tended to comprise both child molesters and rapists. There is enough evidence from this report to show that online groomers do share some of the characteristics of offline sexual offenders. However, even where they do differ, there is no doubt that online grooming is a sexual offence and so the treatment of these men should perhaps be integrated into programmes for other sexual offenders. Of course, the content of some courses will need to be adapted. For example, it seems imperative that the nature of online disinhibition be incorporated into any intervention with online groomers. In the final aspect of this sub-section, we explore further three features of current CBT interventions- the risk-need-responsivity model; addressing offence supportive beliefs; denial and fantasy.

Current cognitive-behavioural therapies have been shown to have the most effect in treating sexual offenders when they are set within **the risk-need-responsivity model** (Andrews & Bonta, 1990). Here, the principle of risk determines what degree of intervention the offender must receive, whereby a high risk offender is going to need more intense treatment than a low risk offender. The need principle involves the criminological needs. These criminological needs are in fact another way of talking about the dynamic risk factors (Pham & Cortoni, 2011). The treatment has to be related to the elements that are linked with the criminological behaviours, and so an individual's dynamic risk factors. The responsivity principle identifies the type of treatment delivered to and with the offender. To illustrate the effectiveness of the risk, need, responsivity model, both Mailoux et al (2003) and Friendship et al (2003) have shown that medium and high risk sexual offenders benefit most from treatment. Low risk sexual offenders show negligible benefits and probably do not require intensive treatment. However, shown in this section and the previous section on assessment, a current barrier to effective use of the risk-need-responsivity model is the dearth of validated assessment

measures for online groomers. A key contribution of this research is the identification of factors that need to be considered when this development of instruments begins.

Offence-supportive beliefs are thoughts reflecting unrealistic or deformed conceptualizations of reality (Beck, 1963, mentioned by Vanderstukken, Pham, Menghini & Willocq, 2006). An appropriate evaluation of these beliefs should be conducted before treatment, with cognitions restructured during the treatment programme (Murphy, 1990; Bumby, 1996, mentioned by Vanderstukken, Pham, Menghini & Willocq, 2006). There are several very well validated scales that are used with contact sexual offenders, such as the Molest Scale or the Rape Scale (Bumby, 1996, mentioned by Vanderstukken, Pham, Menghini & Willocq, 2006). However, their efficacy in assessing the offence supportive beliefs of online groomers is less clear. In this research we have highlighted a range of offence supportive beliefs that are embedded in the context of online interactions. For example, the role of sexualized profile names; young people in control of online interactions; smiling children in indecent images and so on. We argue therefore that it would be helpful for measures to be developed that assess the offence supportive beliefs pertinent to online grooming behaviours.

Denial of the sexual offence is also considered in CBT interventions for contact sexual offenders. Scales available for the evaluation of this particular aspect of functioning include the *Facets of Sexual Offender Denial* (FoSOD, Schneider & Wright, 2001, mentioned by Vanderstukken, Pham, Menghini & Willocq, 2006). Again, this research has shown that some online groomers were denying or minimising aspects of their sexual offending. However, as above, the efficacy of applying measures standardised on contact sexual offenders to online groomers is open to conjecture.

Finally, our research has shown that **fantasy** played a significant role in the modus operandi of some online groomers. It was particularly evident in the discussion of indecent images, young peoples chat, and the matching of images to chat that occurred for some whilst they were masturbating. During a 2011 workshop, Quayle explored the therapeutic challenges of working with fantasy (Quayle, 2011). The outcome of the discussion was that that fantasies can be considered, but should not perhaps be too deeply explored. Here the concern was that this type of intervention could exacerbate the fantasies.

Although this is a legitimate concern, UK treatment interventions using CBT for sexual offenders have been successfully modifying fantasies for some time. Working one to one with offenders - paired with pharmacological treatment (hormonal drugs that reduce sexual drive) has been a particularly effective approach. One of the types of online groomer in this research were labelled 'hypersexual', and characterised by significant use of extreme adult pornography, indecent images of children, and contact with other sexual offenders about fantasy. It seem sensible to suggest that fantasy modification, paired with pharmacological treatment would be a helpful way forward in the treatment of the hyper-sexual online groomer.

Psychodynamic model

The psychodynamic model also offers opportunity for the treatment of online offenders. For example, Wood (2007, mentioned by Quayle, 2011) suggested that what should really be asked when we work with Internet offenders, is the interest offenders find in Internet pornography. That is, what does Internet pornography offer? Consequently, not only the conscious mind but also the unconscious mind can be reached. To date, the psychodynamic model seems to be the only model that offers a criticism of addiction model, in that addiction can be used defensively as an excuse. Balier (mentioned by Cordier, 2011) also refers to 'acting out' as a defence mechanism with regard to addiction. The psychodynamic model also indicates that the addiction model imbues the omnipotence that is associated with pornography to the Internet itself (Quayle, 2011).

Wood (2011, mentioned by Quayle, 2011) brings up the following question for psychodynamic approaches. Is there something to do with the sense of guilt? *(The Internet) is not merely an object to be projected onto, but invites the individual to participate as an actor, created whatever drama is desired. Fundamentally paraphilic behaviours create scenarios in the person's mind, with actors and dramas, and those scenarios function as means of evacuating intolerable feelings, enacting punishments on the self and others either in fantasy or in reality, avoiding the perils of genuine intimacy with another, and filing unbearable empty spaces in the person's emotional world with excitement. On the Internet the individual can create a virtual second life but also in less concrete ways, the person can engage with sexual scenarios which allow the projection into another of any feelings or parts of the self-felt to be intolerable.*

However, the degree of introspection that psychoanalysis encourages might present some difficulties with people that sometimes exhibit an impulsive behaviour, like psychopaths. In addition, Cordier (2002) argues that these therapies can be difficult because there is a risk of breaking the therapeutic contract.

The Good Lives Model

The Good Lives Model[21] is a strength-based approach, and provides another, perhaps more positive way of treating of sexual offenders. The idea is that we have to build capabilities and strengths in people to reduce their risk of committing new offences (Ward, 2011). Consequently, the Good Lives Model is a positive approach to the treatment of sexual offenders.

It assumes that as human beings, sexual offenders are goal directed organisms who are predisposed to seek a number of primary goods (Ward, Mann & Gannon, p.90, 2007). These goods can be states of affairs, states of mind, personal characteristics and activities or experiences *that are sought for their own sake and are likely to increase psychological well-being if achieved* (Ward, Mann & Gannon, p.90, 2007). In the Good Lives Model-Comprehensive, the criminal offence is committed because of a lack of the capabilities to realize valued outcomes in personally fulfilling and sociable acceptable ways (Ward, Mann & Gannon, 2007). In

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[21] http://www.goodlivesmodel.com/glm/Home.html.

addition, the Good Lives Model-Comprehensive suggests there should be some degree of tailoring in the therapy to match each offender. Individual offender's particular good lives plan is considered in its association with risk factors. When the treatments plan is constructed, the offender's strengths, interests, social and personal circumstances, environments and values (weightings of goods) are taken into account (Ward, Mann & Gannon, 2007). As unsettling as some of the data provided by the online groomers in this report is, there has been evidence of strengths that can be focused on in a positive way. For example, if online groomers spent as much time on pro-social activities as they did online, they arguably could achieve much. In addition, that some men had the skills and capability to learn how to build computers and operate ICT in a sophisticated way, also suggests potential that could be used positively.

In this section we have shown that several approaches and models applied to sexual offenders treatment. The question remains whether they can be transposed to a particular population of offenders like online groomers? Following Babchishin, Hanson and Hermann's (2010) review, we wonder if online offenders constitute truly a distinct type of sexual offenders. How really different are online offenders from offline offenders? As we have argued in this section, analyzing the role of the Internet, anonymity and the disinhibition process seem to be critical to the effective treatment of online groomers. But at present, these are simply hypotheses that need to be scrutinized via clinical research practice to understand their feasibility and effectiveness.

7.3   Raising awareness across key stakeholders

A core aim of this research was to empower professionals, policy makers and parents with robust information to manage the risks presented by online grooming. Beyond the detail contained in this report, a key part of the project's dissemination strategy was to deliver a series of knowledge sharing events in the consortium member's countries. The aim of these presentations was to present a summary of the report findings and gather feedback on the study in terms of its efficacy in increasing stakeholders' body of knowledge about online grooming.

To this end seven events were delivered in the UK, Italy, Norway and Belgium with parents, teachers and professionals working with offenders and young people. However, in planning these events it was important that the findings were presented in a way that did not overly alarm people, particularly the parents. This was because we have seen in chapter 6 how some young people can disengage from parents advice if they feel the Internet is presented as a 'place to fear per se'.

Encouragingly, feedback from all these events indicated that they were very well received. The key learning messages from **parents** encompassed greater awareness of how online groomers use the Internet and enhanced knowledge of how young people are operating online, and the associated potential risks. This learning was articulated further in a broad summary of free-responses from the event feedback questionnaires, which in turn forms another aspect of the report's reccomendations:

- rich information to inform the need to be more aware about how their child used the Internet
- findings could help the industry 'better control' online spaces
- the need for harsher sentences and specific legislation for online offenders (in Italy and Belgium)
- the workshop helped some parents also become more aware about how to use the Internet safely
- the concept of being a parent is evolving, as are new technologies. As such we need to equip parents with the right information to feel empowered and cascade that learning down their children.

With regard to feedback from the **teachers**, although the events were well received there was diversity of response between Belgium and Italy in terms of overall usefulness. In Italy, some of the feedback concerned the report 'not telling them anything that they did not already know'. This is encouraging news, as it indicates in our sample of Italian teachers at least, that some educators seem to be equipped with good information about online grooming. In Belgium however there seemed to be an implicit view that the problem of online harm felt almost unmanageable – with one teacher reporting in Belgium that she felt almost 'helpless' in the face of this challenge. Teachers were clear that any updated information is helpful, and encouraged sfatey initiative providers to keep thinking of engaging ways to deliver messages (away from seminars or paper-based instruction).

The final group of dissemination events involved events with **professionals** working with perpetrators of online grooming, and/or survivors of this type of sexual abuse working in Belgium. As above, the workshop was very well received by delegates, with the overarching feedback conveying a sense that the professionals felt more equipped with detailed knowledge about online grooming. The key messages from the event were:

- there may be an evolution of grooming within the three types presented in this report, and further research would be helpful to further test and validate the classification
- treatment should be tailored according to the type of groomer – in keeping with the risk-need-responsivity principles described earlier
- treatment needs to incorporate Internet addiction and the influence of online – again this is in keeping with our earlier recommendations in this chapter
- narcissism and psychopathy may be underlying clinical traits within our typology – these were felt to be key assessment indicators.

This chapter has drawn together findings from the European Online Grooming Project. In doing so it has presented a series of implications from the research for safety campaigns, the Internet industry and the assessment and management of online groomers. We argue that if the challenge of online grooming is to be robustly tackled, it is helpful for online grooming to be understood as a public health concern. This will enable a joined-up response to a multi-dimensional problem that in turn helps identify and target the needs of different young people and online groomers. Here, we believe that effective partnership working will underpin the robust use of a suite of methods to ensure that we do everything possible to keep young people safe online.

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Appendices

Recruitment letters and consent form for online groomers

March 2010

Dear [insert name]

Understanding online grooming

We are writing to ask if you would be prepared to help us with an important study, funded by the European Commission Safer Internet Plus Programme, about individual's use of the Internet to access young people.

The aim of the research is to find out about the different ways in which men convicted of sexual offences approach and communicate with young people online. We will be speaking to other men throughout the UK and Europe about their experiences and would be very interested to hear yours too. What we find out will help to develop effective treatment programmes as well as child protection policies.

Taking part would involve a single interview with a highly trained, independent researcher. The attached leaflet contains more information about the research and what taking part would involve. Your participation is completely voluntary so please read the leaflet before making a decision about whether you want to take part. Participation in this study will not have any impact on your sentence, treatment programmes, or any broader activities undertaken in prison.

If you would like to take part in the research please tell [insert name of Treatment Manager]. In the meantime, if you have any queries about the study, please ask [insert name of Treatment Manager] or call the following freephone number … to speak to a member of the research team:

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Webster
Project Lead, NatCen

June 2010

Dear [insert name]

Understanding online grooming

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study about use of the Internet to access young people, which has been funded by the European Commission Safer Internet Plus Programme. The findings from the study will help to develop effective treatment programmes as well as child protection policies.

I am writing to confirm the time, date and location for your interview with NatCen. The interview will take place at [time] on [date] at [location].

The discussion will last for approximately 90 minutes and will be recorded. I would like to reassure you that everything you tell the research team will be in confidence. No personal information will be passed to anyone outside the research team. This includes staff from any programmes you are undertaking, the European Commission Safer Internet Plus Programme and Government departments. We will write a report of the study but no individual will be identifiable from the published results of the research. Participation in this study will not have any impact on your sentence, treatment programmes, or any broader activities undertaken in prison.

Thank you once again for agreeing to participate in the research. If you have any questions about the interview or any other queries, please do ask [name of Treatment Manager], or call the following freephone number, 0808 168 3834, to speak to a member of the research team.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Webster
Project Lead, NatCen

Understanding Online Grooming
On behalf of the European Commission
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH CONSENT FORM: OFFENDER PARTICIPANTS
(before interview)

European Online Grooming Project_

INTERVIEWER: Ask the participant to read a participant leaflet and answer any questions. If the participant agrees to be interviewed, ask them to read and sign their consent. If the participant is unable to read, please read out the consent form to them.

				Prison code	Individual no.	Ckl
Researcher name:			Participant **Serial No:**			

Consent to be interviewed by NatCen:

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read / had read to me the participant leaflet, and I understand the content.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason, without my treatment status, supervision status, medical care or legal rights being affected.

3. I understand that the interview will be digitally recorded and written out word-for-word. The recording and interview notes containing my answers will be securely stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

4. I understand that anything I say will be treated confidentially, in accordance with the Data Protection Act. My answers will only be used for research purposes. The only potential breach to my confidentiality may be if I talk about a suicidal intent, plans to escape, or a risk of harm to somebody who can be identified, and who is not able to speak for themselves.

5. I agree to take part in the understanding online grooming research study

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

Name of Researcher   Date   Signature

1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher

Online Groomer's interview topic guide

Understanding the process of online grooming

Online Groomers Topic Guide

> **Research Aim:**
> To understand how online groomers behave and use the Internet to facilitate their access to children and young people.
>
> **Research Objectives:**
> - describe the techniques used by online groomers to target and maintain contact with young people
> - describe how ICT is used to facilitate online grooming
> - understand the way in which young people are selected and prepared for abuse online
> - describe online groomers perceptions of assessment and treatment regimes in order to develop a robust body of interventions knowledge for practitioners.

As this is an exploratory study, we wish to encourage participants to discuss their views and experiences in an open way without excluding issues which may be of importance to individual respondents and the study as a whole. Therefore, unlike a survey questionnaire or semi-structured interview, the questioning will be responsive to respondents' own experiences, attitudes and circumstances.

The following guide does not contain pre-set questions but rather lists the key themes and sub-themes to be explored with each group of participants. It does not include follow-up questions like `why', `when', `how', etc. as it is assumed that participants' contributions will be fully explored throughout in order to understand how and why views, behaviours and experiences have arisen. The order in which issues are addressed and the amount of time spent on different themes will vary between individuals and according to individual demographics and dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

Aim: to remind the participant about the aims of the study, the consortium and funder, explain how the interview will be conducted, and how the data collected will be used.

- Introduce **self and NatCen.**

- **Introduce the study**: Commissioned by European Commission to understand how online groomers behave and interact with young people. Being conducted in the UK, Norway, Italy and Belgium

- Details about participation:
    - **voluntary** nature of participation
    - **digital recording** of interview
    - **confidentiality**, and who findings will be reported to
    - no **right or wrong** answers – need to gather opinions and experiences
    - length of interview – up to **1.5 hours**

- **GO THROUGH THE CONSENT FORM IN DETAIL** (verbally as well as written) and obtain signature. Be clear about caveats to confidentiality and the potential for disclosure.

- Definitions
    - remind participant that we are focussing on their online grooming behaviours, (but may also want to contrast with any 'contact' sexual offending behaviours).

    - **Any questions participant has** at this stage about the research?

1. BACKGROUND

Aim: To set participants life circumstances and experience in context and enable data analysis to consider any demographic and offence-specific differences.

- Social history
    - where from
    - educational background
        - PROBE FOR IT EDUCATION
    - employment history
        - PROBE FOR IT BACKGROUND
    - who previously living with/who spent time with
        - access to young people
- 'Wider' family
    - where living
    - level of contact
- Use of the Internet
    - how long used
    - extent of use
        - use discretion to potentially probe here (or later) for viewing / exchange of child abuse images online.
    - places used
    - experience of social networking sites
        - extent of use
- Pathway into and experience of custody (brief synopsis)
    - length of time in current establishment
    - sentence details and conditions - prison/community/released on temporary license
    - nature of any previous offending (N.B. sexual and other offences - **broad history only)**
        - type of crime(s) committed
        - number of sentences overall

2. ONLINE GROOMERS OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR

Aim: to understand how online groomers behave by mapping the range of thoughts, feelings and behaviours groomers use to contact and meet young people. Here we are interested in understanding the different types of equipment groomers use to contact young people, the language they use, the process of victim selection, whether they work alone or in groups and how consistent their behaviours are over time and with the same and different victims:

INTERVIEWER NOTE: It is important to explain to the offender that we are interested in understanding the full range and diversity of their behaviours. For each of the subsections below we are looking to gather as much detail as possible.

Ask the participant to think about when they were contacting people online, from the time just before they first went online to the last contact pre-arrest. Then take the participant through the series of question themes below:

Vulnerability factors

- what was going on in offenders life that motivated them to contact a young person online
  - ease of victim access
  - low risk
  - advice from others / networks
  - life crises
    - relationship / employment breakdown
    - alcohol / drug misuse
  - lapse / relapse: explicit sexual interest in children and young people
  - high risk / thrill seeking

- what emotions and cognitions are associated with the different factors identified

- to what extent do these factors always instigate the desire to go online

- broad timescale between the vulnerability factor and going online

- what did the offender want to get out of the encounter
    - contact
    - images
    - fuel fantasy
    - other

- extent aware that they were vulnerable to offend at this time, attempts to stop

Preparation for grooming (here we are looking to explore the extent to which the groomer researched online behaviour before contacting young people)

- extent groomer prepared for online encounters

- map different types of sources offender used to research online environments and young peoples' behaviour.

- what was the role of offence supportive beliefs in giving the offender permission to groom
  - map the range of distortions used.

- what maintenance activities is the online groomer conducting at this phase (any use of offender forums, blogs or indecent images)

If the interviewer has the sense that this is an 'opportunistic' offender

- extent of any preparation – how did he know who to contact

- what are the strategies used to attempt to exit the offence process at this time

Hardware or equipment used (here we are trying to map the range of ICT groomers utilise)
- Information, Communication, Technology (ICT)
  - Internet
    - different types of websites (Bebo; Facebook; MySpace etc)
    - chat-rooms (different types of forums where young people meet)
    - web-cams (purpose, one way or two way)
    - email exchange / instant messaging
    - other image exchange (describe the types of images sent to young people as part of the grooming process and how this took place)
  - Telephone
    - type of phone used (landline, mobile – probe for rationale for selection of phone 'type')
    - calls made between young person and groomer (probe for frequency of call where relevant)
    - texts sent between young person and groomer
    - nature and extent of any images sent by groomer and / or young person – photo messaging, video messaging)
  - Game platforms (the nature and extent that online gaming is being used as a victim access method by groomers).
    - Playstation 3
    - X-Box
    - Wii
    - Other

- Extent that same software and hardware always used
  - reasons for any diverse selection and use of equipment and software

Victim selection (to explore the range of different features that underpin who young people are targeted for grooming)

- how was the young person selected for an approach
  - what were the key markers identified by the groomer
    - language of the young person (probe for examples here)
    - online profile / behaviour of the young person (probe for the specific types of information that young people are 'giving away')
    - extent to which young people selected mirror offenders 'fantasy' / images
    - what other young people were saying about the victim

- what was the role of offence supportive beliefs in maintaining the grooming behaviour
  - map the range of distortions used.
  - extent to which young persons verbal or visual presentation reinforced offender's cognitive distortions

- what are the groomers thoughts and feelings when they are assessing young people

- what maintenance activities is the online groomer conducting at this phase (any use of offender forums, blogs or indecent images)

- what are the strategies used to attempt to exit the offence process at this time

Online presentation (here we are exploring the range of ways that the offender presented to young people online and the motivation for different styles of presentation)

- Extent that offender assumed their own or another identity and rationale for selection of a particular identity:
  - own adult identity
  - another adults identity
  - young persons identity

if different identity used……..

- how are identities developed and refined

- what are the groomers thoughts and feelings when they are adopting an identity

- extent to which groomers adopt multiple identities concurrently
  - rationale for use of multiple identities
  - strategies used to keep track of the different identities used for different young people at different times
  - extent identities swapped within a single encounter (i.e. female to own male)

- Language used to groom young people (probe for and get examples of):
  - adult language – non sexual
  - adult language – sexual
  - implicit and explicit threats
  - promises, gifts, cash
  - young persons language
  - slang or buzz words used
  - text type (i.e. abbreviating words: four weeks = 4 wks)
  - how knowledge about the different styles of language and other communication types (smiley's etc) is acquired by the groomer

- what maintenance activities is the online groomer conducting at this phase (any use of offender forums, blogs or indecent images)

Location, frequency and timing of online encounters (here we are trying to understand the physical and temporal features underpinning online groomers behaviour)

- range of grooming locations used – probe for:
  - home
  - office
  - other (including more public locations such as Internet cafes)
- how were locations selected – probe for:
  - privacy
  - low risk
  - other
- what was the range of total number of contacts made to different young people
  - what features underpinned the use of few or many contacts
  - extent multiple young people were groomed concurrently
    - how multiple contacts maintained, monitored and managed
    - rationale for running multiple contacts (increased chance of desired outcome)
- when did contacts occur (probe for)
  - range of different times
  - features underpinning particular times selected
    - school hours
    - when parents away from home
- duration of individual online contacts

- elapsed time between online contacts
- time between contact and physical meetings/online encounters
  - features underpinning short and long grooming behaviours

Encounter management (how the range of encounters are managed, sustained and escalated)

- how were contacts managed and gradually escalated
  - probe for the different strategies offenders use within contacts
  - how do the contacts develop towards a physical meeting or online exposure over-time
    - types of persuasion – coaxing versus threats; gifts, money, phones and so on
    - use of images to desensitise and escalate
    - extent of openness / honesty from groomer about what the physical meeting / online exposure will entail
- what made a young person 'ready' for contact escalation and movement towards a physical meeting or online exposure
  - extent that risk is appraised

- what are the groomers thoughts and feelings when they are escalating the encounter

- what maintenance activities is the online groomer conducting at this phase (any use of offender forums, blogs or indecent images)

Individual or groups (here we are looking to see the extent to which offenders groom alone or as part of a broader network, or both)
- extent participant operated individually
  - what features underpinned the solo approach
- if relevant: what did groups 'add' for the groomer – probe for:
  - added 'expertise'
  - encouragement
  - normalise the behaviour / reinforce distortions
  - additional potential victims
- how do groups form
  - meet in person or developed online
- how are they maintained
  - abusive image exchange
  - grooming tips
  - collusion / distortions about sexual contact with children
- how do individuals find out about them and judge that they are private, trustworthy and 'meet their needs'
- what are the groomers thoughts and feelings when they are communicating with others about young people

Risk management (the extent to which online groomers are risk aware)
- to what extent was risk management on their mind
- range of risk management strategies adopted – probe for:
  - different Internet Service Providers
  - fake identities used
  - multiple log ins used
  - multiple hardware sources
  - hacked into unsecured wireless accounts
  - other strategies encountered
- extent different strategies used at different times in the process
- how were they detected and arrested for the offence

Contact offending and online groomer crossover (here we are looking to understand whether there is any association between being a contact offender and online groomer and the extent to which one behaviour may influence the other)

If the offender has been convicted of or discloses contact offences……
- order of behaviours
    - online grooming first then other contact offences managed and commissioned offline
    - other contact sexual offences managed and commissioned offline and then online grooming
        - what makes offline sexual offenders move into online offending
            - extent and ease of potential victim access
            - low risk
            - other
- role of abuse images in the facilitating the desire to groom online

If separate……
- features making the online groomer distinct from other sexual offenders

If easy access to young people (own children and so on)….
- what stopped them sexualising these encounters

Overarching Style (here we are looking to see if the groomer always adopts the same approach be it targeted or opportunistic)

Thank participant for providing the helpful detail. Now that we have a sense of the process…

- extent that this style/approach always adopted
- reasons for consistency or diversity of approach
- incidences of two different approaches running concurrently

Outcomes (important to map the range and breadth of negative and 'positive' outcomes – probe for):
Offender:
- contact with young person
- increased access to indecent images
- feeling that what they were doing was okay – entrenched distortions
- loss of employment
- relationship breakdown

*Young person groomed **(important to see if any impacts are first identified without probing)**:*
- low self-esteem
- fear
    - of Internet
    - older people
- impact on sexual functioning
- any 'positive' outcomes

*Significant others **(important to see if any impacts are first identified without probing)**:*
- shame
- disgust
- increased risk of harm from local community
- impact on siblings life (if relevant)

4. ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT
Aim: to explore online groomers perception of assessment and treatment regimes in order to learn lessons for future practice.

Assessment:
- map the range of measures used:
  - RM200
  - SARN
  - Psychometrics

- Offender's perception of the adequacy of these measures
  - extent needs accurately identified
  - what could be done differently

Treatment:
- map treatment received in community ands / or custody (I-SOTP; Core SOTP; Rolling Programme)

- experiences of treatment (compare and contrast interventions if more than one received)
  - content
  - other group members
  - duration
  - other

- extent needs identified and met

- what could be done differently in treatment

5. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Aim: to bring the interview back to a neutral territory in order to leave the participant in a 'safe place'

- Future plans
  - How will these be realised
  - who is responsible
  - when and where

> **AT THE END OF INTERVIEW THANK PARTICIPANT FOR THEIR TIME.**
> **REITERATE THAT THE INTERVIEW WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL.**