

Paedophilia or paedophilic breakdown?

The impetus to seek illegal images online

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In the 1950's and 1960's the Kinsey reports on sexual behaviour (Kinsey et al, 1948; 1953) necessitated major shifts in thinking about human sexuality. Kinsey and his colleagues documented levels of sexual activity and responsiveness in women which challenged prevailing notions of female sexuality. In addition, they pointed to the prevalence of homosexual experiences, with 46% of male respondents reporting that they had reacted sexually to persons of both sexes in adulthood. Kinsey challenged a rigid dichotomisation between homosexuality and heterosexuality, and argued that human sexuality was more fluid than it was thought to be at that time.

In the new century, the availability of sexual materials online has had a similar, unexpected consequence. Whereas people accessing sexual materials online often imagine themselves to be invisible to others, elaborating a very private sexual fantasy, actually they are committing an act in external reality which leaves a footprint. What these footprints are revealing is the extent of adult sexual interest in children. Once again we are required to revisit our theories of sexuality to account for this new evidence.

Prosecution and conviction rates for possession and distribution of indecent images of children show steady rises². In the UK, police estimates of the number of people accessing indecent images online doubled over the three year period from 2013-2016, from 50,000 people to 100,000 people in 2016³. Help-lines for those arrested or concerned about their use of illegal images receive more calls than they can answer⁴. In 2015 the Internet Watch Foundation, based in the UK, found over 68,000 internet addresses for sites containing child sexual abuse images. The NSPCC refer to this as a social emergency. At the Portman Clinic we had a single referral for compulsive use of internet pornography in 1998 – this was the first. It is now the most common reason for referral to the Clinic. More than half of the people referred for problems with internet pornography are viewing or have

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² Number of offences recorded by police of viewing child sexual abuse images doubled across the UK in 5 years to a total of 8,745 in 2015. See bbc.co.uk/news/uk for 8.11.16

³ See inews.co.uk/essentials/news 13.10.16

⁴ See The Economist (13.8.16) regarding Stop it Now (www.stopitnow.org.uk). Answer 700-800 calls per month and another 1,500 go unanswered for lack of resources

viewed illegal images, and this proportion increases during the course of treatment, as people reveal more about their behaviour.

There are a number of possible explanations for this trend. The first is that a sexual interest in children is far more prevalent than we previously thought and the internet simply allows the detection of previously covert behaviours; whereas people imagine themselves to be “invisible” while online, in practice it is **easier** for the police to detect access to illegal imagery through the internet than when tracing the purchase of illicit materials previously. The second possibility is that people who would formerly have offended off-line have now shifted to online offending; there is certainly clinical evidence that some people with longstanding paedophilic interests now use materials available on the internet to avoid the contact abuse of children. Both of these explanations probably contribute to the available figures. But the third possibility is that internet sex in some way facilitates or engenders a sexual interest in children, and does not just reveal existing sexual interests, but actually contributes to the crystallisation or emergence of such interests. My clinical experience leaves me in no doubt that this is occurring and this is now finding confirmation from research⁵.

Seto and Hanson, two major sex offender researchers in Canada, note that internet sexual crime laws have captured two types of people: those who would have accessed physical forms of child pornography or have committed contact sexual offences against children prior to the internet, and those who *‘may never have overtly expressed their sexual interest in children or sexual coercion without the catalytic effects of internet technologies’* (Seto and Hanson, 2011, p.5).

How do we understand the fact that, in some people, established adult-to-adult sexual functioning breaks down to reveal explicit paedophilic interests under the influence of immersion in internet sex? I would argue that a psychoanalytic approach to sexuality, which recognises the origins of adult sexuality in childhood and child development, can offer us a way of thinking about this thorny issue.

⁵ Preliminary research findings suggest that the risk of an “internet only” offender progressing to commit a contact offence against a child are very low within the timescales studied⁵. Seto et al (2011), in a meta analysis of 9 studies, found that only 2% of internet –only offenders recidivated with a contact offence a child in the time period studied. These are under-reported crimes, and this is new phenomenon, so follow-up periods are relatively short, but there is accumulating evidence that, for the vast majority of people accessing paedophilic materials online, this appears to represent an extension of sexual fantasy, rather than a rehearsal for action.

First, some thoughts about these terms, 'paedophilia' and 'paedophile'. In the UK these terms are used in the popular press to express venom and contempt. Any sex offender against children is described as a 'paedophile', even though we know that there are people with paedophilic sexual interests who never enact them (Federoff et al, 2001) and people who commit acts of child sexual abuse who are not primarily paedophilic in their sexual interests (see for example Freund, Watson and Dickey, 1991), and now, it appears, people who develop paedophilic sexual interests while immersed in internet sex. The term 'paedophilia' is used to imply that this is a unitary condition, and that it is a dichotomous condition – either someone does, or does not have paedophilia – and if they have paedophilia, they are bound to enact it.

The term 'paedophile' also implies that the person suffering from this mental health disorder can be equated with the condition. It is striking that when it comes to other disorders, in these relatively enlightened times we tend to avoid labelling people by their diagnostic condition, since labelling often carries stigma, and generally this is dehumanising and distancing. It would no longer be acceptable to refer to someone suffering from a personality disorder as 'a PD', for example.

I think this subject of child sexual abuse evokes such an intense emotional response, that thinking about this phenomenon can be very skewed and distorted. I will outline some thoughts about why the subject of paedophilia seems to evoke such intense feelings, before going on to describe a psychoanalytically-based model of paedophilia and paedophilic breakdown as a result of immersion in internet sex.

Countertransference responses to paedophilia

There seems to be a way in which the topic of paedophilia disturbs not just our ability to think psychoanalytically, but our ability to think rationally. At the most basic level there is no doubt that work in this field can be very anxiety-provoking. Professionals involved with cases potentially involving the sexual abuse of children inevitably feel concerned to protect and prevent harm to potential victims. There are challenging dilemmas about confidentiality and ethical practice – when to report, when not to report? We know that working with risk of any kind engenders anxiety and sometimes distorts decision making. But there seems to be something specifically disturbing about paedophilia per se.

In psychoanalytic terms, our orientation to reality depends upon acceptance of the psychological facts of life. The Oedipus Complex concerns one such fact of life, that of generational difference – not just the difference in **age** between an adult and a child, but crucially, the difference between adult and infantile sexuality – the child has a nascent form of sexuality which may be

about sensuousness, curiosity, the beginnings of awareness of sexual feelings – but this is the precursor and not the equivalent of adult sexuality – and a child cannot be an appropriate sexual partner for an adult. In paedophilic acts, where a child is taken as a sexual partner for an adult, there is an obvious repudiation of this fact of life.

But, as Don Campbell (2014) suggests, the recognition of generational differences does not start with the Oedipus Complex, it starts in early infancy with the recognition of dependency and helplessness on a larger being. Campbell argues that the repudiation of generational difference in paedophilia has a very primitive quality because it implies an omnipotent overturning of our biological helplessness, our dependence on an other who, through their size and maturity, is unlike ourselves. In paedophilia, through the overturning of the generational difference between sexually mature adults and dependent children, the very building blocks of the orientation to reality are fractured.

Because paedophilia ‘messes’ with our sense of reality in this way, Campbell describes how there is a particular way in which work with paedophilic patients engenders doubt. Campbell (2014) describes first, ‘honest doubt’, the ‘non-judgemental open-mindedness’ and ability ‘to sustain a sense of uncertainty and not-knowing’ (p.443) which are the hallmarks of an analytic stance. He contrasts this with ‘inherent doubt’, which characterises work with people with paedophilia, which leaves us confused about what is real and what is fantasy. The 2008 film, ‘Doubt’ is a powerful evocation of the doubt which often pervades this subject. In the film, Philip Seymour Hoffman is as a priest who engenders doubt about his motives when he befriends a vulnerable boy, and Meryl Streep is a mother superior who seems alternately astute and moral, and vindictive towards the poor misunderstood priest. The film brilliantly leads the audience to oscillate between trust and doubt towards the priest and his motives. It is interesting that Freud struggled with precisely this issue, whether to believe his female patients about the prevalence of sexual abuse in society, or whether to attribute their apparent ‘recollections’ to unconscious fantasy about seduction by an older man. Campbell suggests that the subject of paedophilia can leave us confused about the nature of truth and reality, and unable to orient ourselves around a fundamental assumption that the parent’s role is to protect the child.

Feeding into these issues about doubt, there is also the problem that it is impossible to detect whether, at any one time, someone is having a paedophilic thought. Patients with these problems describe excessively stringent measures to prevent them, for example, sitting next to a child in church, or attending the birthday party of a child who is a relative, situations in which the presence of other adults would effectively preclude the conduct of a contact offence. The adult’s thoughts

cannot be detected or controlled. Families, friends, and statutory agencies that are unable to tolerate this uncertainty may resort to trying to segregate the man completely from children, in order to limit the possibility of him having paedophilic thoughts about known children. In psychoanalytic work, there will inevitably be thoughts or fantasies that the patient withholds and this leaves the therapist or analyst having to tolerate uncertainty.

The term 'perversion' is a tricky one, since it has undoubtedly been used to express moral condemnation, and to label specific behaviours 'perverse' in a judgemental way. But the term does continue to be used within the psychoanalytic field, not generally to label specific behaviours, but to denote the fusion of libido and aggression, and the use of sexualisation as a defence, to manage both anxiety and aggression. Within this current definition we would still consider paedophilic acts as inherently perverse. What is enacted in perversions, masquerading as (sexual) 'love' or desire, is often revealed to be an act of hostility as described by Stoller in his theory of perversion (1975). Paedo-philia – 'love for the child' – is such a misnomer. Paedophilic acts, masquerading as sexual love or desire for a child, often have very little to do with feelings of love for the child as the person that they actually are. More often they are about hatred of some aspect of childhood, and the child victim is a vessel for the projection of unwanted aspects of the self – this is central to a psychoanalytic understanding of paedophilia. When an adult male abuses or imagines the sexual abuse of a female child, it would be a mistake to think of this as a form of heterosexual desire. Often the girl child represents a projected emasculated, denigrated self who is effectively attacked, either in reality or in fantasy. Hostility and aggression are central aspects of these behaviours. The implicit hatred towards children revealed in some 'paedophilic' acts adds to the troubling impact of such crimes.

Whereas violent acts can evoke a countertransference response of fear, knowledge of perverse sexual assaults typically provokes a countertransference response of nausea (Rob Hale, personal communication). We feel sickened by the thought of a bodily intrusion that is disguised as something pleasurable, yet which is damaging to the psycho-sexual integrity and development of the victim, and sometimes physically painful and damaging as well.

These are 'negative' emotions evoked by the subject of paedophilia, but perhaps most troubling of all is the fear of finding the subject matter exciting or arousing, or being seen to have a prurient interest in the subject. Campbell (2010) notes that 'Even psychoanalysts, with our special interest in the unconscious, have written relatively little about paedophilia' (p. xiii). It is as though one's professional integrity may be contaminated by association with this field. In my professional experience male colleagues tend to be more reluctant than female colleagues to have an

acknowledged interest in this area of work. At one networking meeting in London for professionals working in this area, mainly clinical and forensic psychologists, there was not a single male present. It is as if men are more likely to fear that their interest will be seen to be suspect, but women are not exempt from this concern.

There is no solution to these pressures, only the possibility of recognising, managing and metabolising them in order to maintain a rational approach to this work. But I think that some of these emotional reactions may underpin a pressure towards dichotomous thinking when it comes to any evidence of paedophilia, and specifically paedophilic enactments on the internet. It is so troubling that we do not know what is in people's minds, we do not know whether they are having sexual thoughts about the children they live with, for example, we do not know whether their sexual interests are exclusively paedophilic and they are lying to us, and the stakes are tremendously high – we are talking about the risk of sexual abuse of children – that it is easier to eliminate doubt, to assume that they are all predatory paedophiles, and to treat them as such. But the clinical evidence, and increasingly the research evidence, does not support this stance. And in the clinical domain, dichotomous thinking and an inability to tolerate uncertainty are antithetical to a neutral analytic stance.

Case example of Mr A [case material redacted to protect confidentiality]

I came to believe that this man was not suffering from primary paedophilia, but from a 'paedophilic breakdown', a collapse of ego functioning allowing the emergence of explicitly paedophilic sexual fantasies. This seems to have been an enactment of a masochistic wish to provoke a punitive parental object, but at least an object that had definition, rather than the terror of murky mis-attunement. It was an act of revenge against a child-mother who had failed to provide the maternal container he needed. It also seemed to be an attack on the emasculated self projected into the girls. His paedophilic acts can also be seen as a means of triumphing over the Oedipal father who task it is to uphold the incest taboo – in his case, a father who he felt could not tolerate letting his son win, and so who could never allow him to identify with and become the adult man.

Psychoanalytic theories of paedophilia

There is no single pathway to paedophilia, and no single psychoanalytic theory around which there is consensus but I will sketch the kind of issues that we recurrently find important in our work with people at the Portman Clinic who have paedophilic sexual interests which may have been enacted either in contact offences or internet offences.

There is often a sense when working with such patients of an extremely emotionally impoverished early history, underpinning a feeling that is like a 'depressive wasteland'. This is not like a reactive depression, but a bleak sense of emptiness. As one patient described it to me:

People used to think God was at the centre of the universe. Now they say it's a black hole. It doesn't surprise me at all. It's what I feel is at the centre of everything – oblivion....

This might arise where there is maternal depression, or an incapacity to care adequately for the infant for any number of reasons – perhaps in Mr A's case, a mother on the autistic spectrum. Where there has been such early failure, Greenacre (1970), as I mentioned earlier, describes the child turning to eroticisation to comfort itself and as a vehicle for the expression of rage. This is not dissimilar to Campbell's view that the foundations for a paedophilic sexual interest may be laid in the earliest relationships. He describes how, in response to acute or cumulative trauma, and this may be non-sexual trauma or deprivation, the infant or child reconstitutes itself by identification with the perpetrator of the trauma, and then becomes the one to inflict pain on dependent and more vulnerable objects (2010, p. Xiv). 'When the aggression behind that identification is erotised, that is, when the aggression is converted into sadism, the foundations are laid for a paedophilic sexual orientation' (p. xv). So these are two interesting ideas – first, that what we are seeing is identification with the aggressor – an attempt to reverse an experience of vulnerability by attacking someone younger, smaller, more vulnerable. And second, that the aggression, the wish to inflict pain on someone more vulnerable, comes **before** the eroticisation.

For the person who has experienced severe deprivation or trauma in early infancy, the stage of separation from the primary object, what we might think of as the core complex stage as described by Glasser (1979), may pose heightened threats, of intensified **longing** for merger and consequently a heightened **fear** of being taken over and annihilated, and so amplified **aggression** towards the object of desire – potentially the foundations of a sadomasochistic stance in relation to the object of desire. For the person who is terrified of being swallowed up or consumed by the object of desire, who in this situation may seem particularly powerful, enticing and dangerous, focusing that desire on someone small and unthreatening may seem like a solution to their primitive fears. **They** can be the big and powerful one, and can project the fear of being taken over and annihilated into the child.

Moving on to the older child passing through the Oedipal and latency stages, we know that there is an elevated rate of histories of sexual abuse in people who go on to sexually offend against children,

although this is by no means always the case⁶. In our Portman experience, the people who are most at risk of going on to become abusers themselves, are those who feel that being sexually abused as a child did them no harm, indeed, it may be held onto as a highly prized experience, often representing an illusion of adult attention that was otherwise lacking in their lives. We think of the abuse then as 'ego-syntonic', in harmony with the sense of the self, as opposed to ego-dystonic, when the person knows that something happened to them that was abusive or aversive. The response of others – the parents, the family, care systems – can be crucial in establishing early on the recognition that this was not a special, privileged experience, but abuse.

Sometimes there are more subtle forms of sexual intrusion into the child's development, such as an atmosphere of sexualisation within the family, or excessive exposure to parental sexuality.

Meyer (2004) takes Freud's (1910) notion that children yearn to be bigger and to do whatever it is that adults do, and argues that, in paedophiles, the realization by the Oedipal child of the disparity between his sexuality and that of the adult, is traumatic. The paedophilic act thus represents "the formation of an intimate couple, of a secret society where the difference between the adults' and the children's worlds are eradicated" (p.5). In Meyer's view, the paedophile projects onto the child the part of the self that imagines it can fascinate the adult and prove the superiority of childhood sexuality. Meyer's account captures the sense of triumph one can encounter with such patients, the sense of having created a superior universe with their own rules.

The transition through puberty is often particularly problematic. Patients describe feeling left behind as their peers come to terms with their maturing bodies and start to make intimate relationships. There is often a sense of isolation or dislocation from peers, for a wide range of reasons, including being an only child, or repeated moves, or being removed from normal schooling. If there is parental neglect, this may be felt particularly acutely as the individual struggles alone to assimilate their child self into their newly emerging adult body. The age of the child chosen as victim is often revealed to be an indicator of the age of maximum developmental difficulties of the individual; for example, the man who seeks images of 10 year olds will often recount a series of difficulties at exactly that age, suggesting that this was a developmental stage that could not be traversed and has become a point of fixation. Hall and Hall (2007) report a study by Snyder (2000) of federal statistics for the US, which found a bimodal distribution for the age of the abused child, with peaks occurring at 5 and 14 years of age, which would approximately coincide with the Oedipal phase and puberty. It may be that children passing through these psychosexual transitions are experiencing a surge of libido and are

⁶ Hall and Hall (2007), reviewing the literature, quote figures ranging from 28-93% of perpetrators reporting a history of child sexual abuse compared with 15% for male random controls

more vulnerable to the attentions of a predatory adult at these times, but it may also be that someone who has not made a satisfactory transition through these stages himself will be fascinated by or drawn to disrupt the development of a child undergoing these transitions.

Paedophilic breakdown

Within this psychoanalytic perspective, paedophilia is not the outcome of particularly exceptional or distinctive events in childhood, but linked to subtle failures to negotiate developmental tasks which are universal: tolerance of helpless dependence on a larger being in infancy (Campbell, 2010), negotiation of the conflicts and primitive wishes and fears stimulated by separation / individuation from the primary object (Glasser, 1988), negotiation of the Oedipus Complex (Meyer, 2004) and puberty. There is a sense that these and similar experiences combine to leave the person feeling not wholly adult – indeed, identified with children, with a lack of confidence in, or outright shame and disgust for the adult sexual body, a sense of disconnection from peers, and a lack of confidence about forging and sustaining sexual intimacy with an age-appropriate partner.

When development proceeds well enough, the childhood roots of sexuality, which include the early experience of intimacy and bodily care, the relation to the body, and traumatic and exciting sexual experiences of childhood – blend together to shape adult sexual functioning, but are typically assimilated into the adult sexual self and forgotten or repressed.

In this group of people who have achieved a degree of adult-to-adult sexual functioning, which breaks down under immersion in internet sex, it is as though the adult sexual adaptation has a degree of precariousness, and effectively unravels, so that the childhood roots of sexuality come to the fore – leading to a renewed fascination with childhood sexuality and excitement about the breaching of the incest taboo or the generational divide.

How might such developmental difficulties be restimulated by the use of internet sex? For some people, immersion in internet sex seems to lead to a breakdown in ego functioning, as I described earlier.

- There is a sense of an unboundaried world in which there is an ambiguity between the internal and external worlds.
- Manic defences and omnipotence are fuelled

- Narcissistic object-relating is encouraged by the invitation to treat those viewed as existing solely for the gratification of the viewer.⁷
- Core complex anxieties are temporarily contained (though not actually metabolised), as the individual can regulate distance from the object at will,
- All prohibitions are removed from the sexually curious Oedipal “child” in the adult, who now finds himself able to view or create whatever sexual fantasy he chooses.
- The internet also comes to function like a large group where the individual relinquishes their normal inhibitions and values and allows themselves to be “led” by the prevailing culture of the group (Freud, 1921; Wood, 2011). This internet “group”, either in chatrooms, or via the materials that are available, may appear to endorse transgression, the fantasized enactment of destructiveness, and sexual gratification and curiosity without constraint.

All of this undermines mature, depressive-position functioning, and invites regression to a more primitive world of part-objects and narcissistic use of the other, and reconnection with the child sexual self, but now charged with adult libido. Thus what might appear as an ‘escalation’ in the nature of the images viewed, actually becomes an ‘excavation’ into the more primitive and childlike parts of the mind. While the individual may feel seduced into a world that promises limitless pleasure, for many this is in fact a profoundly unsettling and destabilising experience. If there are fault-lines in the individual’s early development, there is a risk that they will be amplified, rather than resolved, by this regression. People with unresolved issues from childhood may be drawn to revisit sexual or non-sexual trauma, or drawn to project unwanted childhood feelings onto an external child.

The internet is not the only stressor which can trigger such regression but the internet has a unique capacity to foster manic defences, narcissistic object relating, and large group dynamics, while simultaneously engendering the sense that what we are doing is virtual, not real. In all of us the ego

⁷ If paedophilia were akin to a sexual orientation, one would expect to see the gamut of emotions towards the object of desire that are evident in well-rounded intimate relationships between adults. In practice, there is more often a powerful sense that the child functions as a narcissistic object, a vessel into whom phantasies may be projected, but whose real needs are disregarded in the process. The fact this is a narcissistic object choice is underlined when images are pursued on the internet: there is no attempt to engage with and understand the needs and wishes of an actual child; what is sought is a child who will serve as a screen for projections, or whose image can be used while the adult elaborates his own sexual fantasy script.

and superego seem to have one set of rules for things designated 'fantasy' in the mind, and another set of rules governing actions. Much more lenient rules usually operate where fantasies are concerned. In fantasy we may contemplate not just sexual acts but cruel or violent acts that we would never enact. For some people, the internet appears to call into play the implicit rules relating to fantasy rather than action and so we see not just paedophilic sexual interests, but trolling, cruelty, unmodified hatred. People experience it as an extension of their own mind, and are shocked when arrested.

Conclusions and implications

The internet has drawn attention to the extent of adult sexual interest in children. More than this, I think there is growing evidence that immersion in internet sex has contributed to the explicit crystallisation of paedophilic sexual interests in people who had previously attained a level of adult-to-adult sexual functioning. At a clinical level, my message is simple: I think it is vital that we find ways to attend to and contain countertransference reactions of panic, nausea, maybe moral condemnation when a patient shows evidence of paedophilic interests or fantasies, and to bring to this situation all the open-mindedness with which we would approach thinking about any other symptom. This does not mean being reckless about risk. It does mean mobilising all the help we need to maintain an analytic attitude when thinking about formulation, the treatment, and about risk.

Who are the individuals who may be particularly vulnerable to the stimulus which the internet represents? From my clinical experience I would identify three key factors:

- People who struggle with adult-to adult relationships and for whom physical and emotional intimacy arouses intolerable anxieties
- People with underlying depression who resort to sexualisation as a manic defence, and who treat their depression with large doses of internet sex
- People with unresolved issues from childhood, particularly unresolved issues about their psychosexual development, who are drawn to project their distress into a fantasy child

At a societal level, I think we need a much more differentiated approach to internet offenders. I understand that Michael Seto in Canada is in the process of developing a risk instrument to distinguish between higher and lower risk internet offenders. If this can be shown to be reliable, it would be great if our criminal justice systems took psychological research into account in developing strategy and sentencing guidelines. In the UK, new sentencing guidelines were brought out in 2014, some of which are sensible, but in other respects they simply ignore the research evidence.

'Remorse' is included as a mitigating factor, despite the fact this is consistently shown not to be related to recidivism. The range and size of picture collections is an aggravating factor, despite the fact that one study suggests it is the people with narrow and specific interests we should be more worried about (Long et al, 2012)⁸ in terms of the risk of crossover to contact offending. It would aid rehabilitation and focus resources if we had a court diversion scheme where there is an assessment of risk, and **low** risk internet offenders were cautioned rather than sentenced – coming face-to-face with the Criminal Justice System can be very important in stopping someone in their tracks – and then redirected to a treatment programme – hopefully one that doesn't just address behavioural management, but also looks at the meaning of and the drivers for the behaviour.

In 1948, Kinsey et al concluded by challenging a dichotomous notion of sexual orientation:

'Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats...The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects'.

Nearly 70 years on, the same dichotomous thinking is evident with respect to paedophilia where people are assumed to be either paedophilic or not paedophilic, and the 'paedophiles' are undoubtedly those regarded as 'goats'. Fonagy and Allison (2015), writing more recently about homosexuality, say:

'...it behoves us to be suspicious of ourselves when our wish for simplicity begins to override our respect for the complexity of subjective experience that our patients engender and bring with them in relation to their experience of sexuality' (Fonagy and Allison, 2015, p. 135)

This is a caution which could apply equally to the subject of people seeking indecent images of children online.

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⁸ Long et al (2012)¹⁰ used data from police records to compare internet-only offenders convicted of offences involving indecent images of children with dual offenders who also had a previous contact child sexual offence. Dual offenders had significantly fewer indecent images. Dual offenders also possessed images of children within a smaller age range, there was a significant positive relationship between the average age of children in the indecent images and the average age of the contact victim, and dual offenders possessed a higher proportion of level 3 and 4 images on the COPINE scale. Long et al construe the dual offenders' online behaviour as more selective, reflecting an 'anchoring' of their sexual interests with children of a specific age and in specific sexual acts involving adult – child sexual contact.

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