Adult–Child Sex Advocacy Websites as Social Learning Environments: A Content Analysis[1]

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Abstract

This study reports on a content analysis of 64 websites that promote, advocate, and convey information in support of sexual relationships between adults and children to determine whether these sites were structured as learning environments for crimes involving the sexual exploitation of children. The findings indicate that the adult-child sex advocacy websites examined are criminogenic in that they contain a myriad of communication tools (e.g. chat rooms, instant messengers, and message boards) to foster interaction among site users and expose users to rationalizations for offending and, in turn, definitions favorable to sexual violations against minors. Given the present findings, the courts and community corrections officials should consider expanding restrictions put on the Internet use of offenders released on parole and defendants on probation to include adult-child sex advocacy websites. Additionally, companies offering website hosting services should modify their terms of service agreements to ban content advocating sexual relationships between adults and children.

Keywords: Internet; Advocacy; Differential Association Theory; Techniques of Neutralization; Social Learning Theory.

Introduction

Email, instant messengers, chat rooms, and websites are just a few of the many tools available to facilitate communication over computer networks. Email provides users with an alternative to postal mail and the fax machine, and can be used to send a myriad of communiqués, including business contracts, office memos, and love letters, across the globe in seconds. Instant messenger programs enable real-time text communication and provide an alternative to the telephone. They can be used to send a quick greeting to an

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overseas friend or to keep parents in touch with children away at school. Like the local pub, the computer chat room can bring together prospective lovers or provide a meeting place for people to debate politics, sports, the arts, or any conceivable topic. Websites facilitate commerce by bringing together merchants with distant customers and allow for the easy distribution of information, such as the latest headlines or a novel on the New York Times bestsellers list. Social networking websites remove psychological and geographic barriers to social relationships and link like-minded people from around the world.

To date, however, the effects of computers on society have not been entirely positive. Just like past innovations in communication, computers have created new opportunities for crime. Computers and related networking technologies have created new opportunities for those looking to sexually exploit children (D'Ovidio & O'Leary, 2006; Durkin, 1997; Taylor & Quayle, 2003). Digital cameras, personal computers, digital editing software, the Internet, and remote storage drives have, for example, simplified the creation, distribution, and collection of child pornography (Jenkins, 2001; McAuliffe, 2001; Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, K., 2005). The virtual spaces where children congregate online have created alternatives to the playground and ball field for adults looking to sexually solicit children. The World-Wide-Web offers adults a means to promote and search for sexual liaisons involving children (Brunker, 1999; Hall, 2003; McKim, 2006). Encryption, steganography, remailers, and other anonymizing tools have further aided criminals looking to sexually exploit children by providing a means by which to conceal their identity and criminal activity from law enforcement officials and significant others (Denning & Baugh, 1997; Jossi, 2001).

This paper reports on a content analysis of websites that promote, advocate, and convey information in support of sexual relationships between adults and children and the elimination of age of consent laws. Specifically, we examine how adult–child sex advocacy websites are structured to foster social relationships and interaction among adults interested in sexual relationships with children. These interactions are, according to Differential Association Theory, an integral part of the process by which criminal behavior is learned (Sutherland, 1947/1974). This research also looks at adult–child sex advocacy websites as environments where interested parties can learn criminal behavior. We were particularly interested in examining these websites for content that exposes users to rationalizations for crimes involving the sexual exploitation of children. In the next section, we explore criminogenic considerations concerning online communities. We, then, describe the research methodology. Next, we report the results and discuss the findings and implications for the criminal justice system. Lastly, we discuss the limitations of the current research and recommend future directions for research work in this area.

Criminogenic considerations concerning online communities

Computer networks, including the Internet, reduce the impact of space and time on social interactions and provide opportunities to form relationships that were previously cost prohibitive. The disembodiment of humans and ensuing interactions through online communities has challenged the traditional notion that communities are composed of people and entities that are linked by geographic proximity. Computer networks, according to Kollock & Smith (2003, p.4), "renew community by strengthening the bonds that connect us to the wider social world while simultaneously increasing our power in that world." It is through this connectivity to the wider social world that the

Internet and online communities offer new opportunities for commerce (Bressler & Grantham, 2000; Goyner, 2007; Jeon, Crutsinger, & Kim, 2008), education (Hofer, 2004; McIntosh, 2005; Renninger & Shumar, 2002), entertainment (Fisher, 2004; Kline, Dyer-Witheford, & DePueter, 2003; Lastowka & Hunter, 2006), romance (Mahfouz, Philaretou, & Theocharous, 2008; Reid, 2005; Turkle, 1997), and political activism (Denning, 2001; Jordan & Taylor, 2004; Kahn & Kellner, 2004).

The same features of the Internet that enable humans to easily traverse time and space to offer new opportunities for education, commerce, entertainment, love, and activism provide new opportunities for crime and can influence the proclivity to commit crime. Namely, the Internet and its comprising spaces of community provide access to victims who might otherwise not be viable targets for crime if it were not for their presence in cyberspace (Cox, Johnson, & Richards, 2009; D'Ovidio & O'Leary, 2006). Social networking websites, chat rooms, and instant messaging services, for example, place children in environments devoid of traditional guardians (e.g. parents and teachers) and, thus, leave them vulnerable to sexual advances by adults (Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2005; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006).

Online communities also bring together like-mind people from throughout the world and create an environment where crime can be learned. Past research has made the connection between social learning theory and crime involving computers and the Internet (Higgins & Makin, 2004a; Higgins & Makin, 2004b; Higgins, Wolfe, & Ricketts, 2009; Hollinger, 1993; Skinner & Fream, 1997). Social learning theory explains crime in terms of four processes: differential association, definitions, imitation, and differential reinforcement (Akers, 1998). According to Sutherland (1947/1974), learning crime begins with the process of differential association, which involves interactions with people who favor criminal behavior. These interactions can be direct or indirect exchanges and can include verbal and non-verbal communication (Akers, 1998; Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, & Radosevich, 1979). They include exchanges with individuals, primary groups, secondary groups, and reference groups.

Internet tools and services have evolved to offer online communities a plethora of options for site administrators to communicate with users and for users to communicate with each other either directly or indirectly. Chat rooms and instant messengers, for example, enable synchronous two-way exchanges and offer online community members instant feedback from those members with whom they are communicating. Message boards, on the other hand, are asynchronous, but provide an archive of the exchange between community members that is searchable and available for all community members to read and, subsequently, learn from. Email, listservs, and blogs can be integrated into the structure of an online community to also support two-way interactions among members. Content published by community administrators to a webpage or to an online calendar of community events limits the communication to a one-way interaction, but, nevertheless, exposes members to ideas that may advocate crime and fosters community participation.

It is through these interactions, or through the process of differential association, that people learn the techniques to carry out a criminal act and the motives, attitudes, and rationalizations that favor committing a specific criminal act (Akers, 1998; Sutherland, 1947/1974). Rationalizations for committing crime serve to neutralize psychological restraints (i.e. guilt) against criminal behavior. Sykes and Matza (1957) offer five rationalizations, or techniques of neutralization, that are used by offenders to explain their

involvement with crime. Offenders can deny responsibility for engaging in crime and place the blame on forces outsides their control, such as bad friends or unloving parents. Offenders can trivialize the criminal act by denying or discounting any resulting injury. Rationalization is also sought by seeing the victim as a rightful recipient of any harm resulting from the crime or when the resulting harm to the victim is not obvious because the victim is not physically present when the crime occurred. Offenders can also find a release for their criminal activities by shifting the focus away from their behavior towards the motives and actions of the people who condemn the crime. Lastly, offenders can prioritize and rank norms in such a way where societal norms that promote law-abiding behavior are superseded by the norms of a smaller reference group that support violations of the law. These rationalizations create, according to Sykes and Matza (1957), definitions that favor criminal violations. It is through an "excess in definitions favorable to violations of the law over definitions unfavorable to violations of the law" that a person becomes delinquent (Sutherland, 1947/1974, p.75).

Our interactions in cyberspace serve a purpose other than establishing definitions favorable to violations of the law when it comes to the learning process associated with crime. Direct interactions through synchronous and asynchronous communication tools and indirect interactions where users come upon archived content left on a message board, posted in a blog, or displayed on a website provide users, at times, with the methods by which to carry out specific criminal acts and convey stories of criminal exploits that can later be imitated, or modeled. Skinner and Fream (1997) found, for example, a positive relationship between the use of computer bulletin boards and illegal access to networks, given the frequent posting of passwords and access credentials in these online forums. Adult–child sex advocacy websites can be a source of imitation, with respect to the process of learning crime, to the extent that they contain stories of sexual liaisons with children, suggest security techniques that can be used to elude the detection of law enforcement when using the Internet to lure children or exchange child pornography, or provide links to resources containing sexually explicit materials involving children.

Additionally, our interactions in cyberspace can provide insight into the possible consequences of criminal behavior. This insight can be derived from the experiences of others who have committed similar acts and from third-party accounts (e.g. media reports) referenced in an online forum. The consequences, expressed in the form of the anticipated and potential rewards or punishments, serve to reinforce the decision of whether or not to engage in a criminal act. It is the differential between the contingent rewards and the punishments that, according to Akers (1998), guides our actions.

Adult–child sex advocacy websites and the resulting associations they create in cyberspace can, thus, be criminogenic in that they expose people to the techniques for committing crime, definitions that favorably define crime, potential punishment and rewards, and stories of criminal behaviors that can be imitated. The following section provides a methodological roadmap for assessing the criminogenic structure of adult–child sex advocacy communities on the Internet to the extent that they support the learning of crime. We discuss the process by which the adult–child sex advocacy websites were selected, operationalize our measures, and describe the data collection process.

Methodology

This section describes the sampling procedures used to identify adult–child sex advocacy websites, defines the measures gathered during the content analysis, and explains the data collection process. To be included in the present study, a website needed to satisfy four criteria.

- First, the website needed to encourage sexual relationships between adults and children and support the elimination of age of consent laws.
- Second, the website needed to provide information to users beyond the content contributed by those who visited the website.
- Third, the website needed to be interactive. It must have allowed for user participation, inquiry, contribution, or interaction with other users or the website administrators.
- Lastly, the website needed to be published in English or have an English-language translation.

Sampling

The Internet is a dynamic network with content that is constantly changing. The lack of a search engine that catalogs and indexes all web content in real-time makes the identification of the population of adult–child sex advocacy websites problematic. An Internet search on the phrase "pedophilia activism" using the Google, Yahoo! and Windows Live search engines returned, for example, different results in terms of content and ordering.[6] Without a known population, the use of probability sampling techniques to identify a representative sample of adult–child sex advocacy websites was not possible. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were, thus, used to identify the websites used in this study. The use of non–probability sampling techniques to identify websites for content analysis is consistent with the approaches used by Schafer (2002) and Gerstenfeld, Grant, and Chiang (2003) in their examination of hate groups and extremists websites.

Sixty-four adult–child sex advocacy websites meeting the four selection criteria described above were identified. Table 1 lists the name of each of the identified websites. We began our search for adult–child sex advocacy websites using purposive sampling techniques. Websites listed in the "sexuality organizations" directory of the Yahoo![7] search engine and under the Wikipedia[8] entries for "pedophilia activism" and the "history of pedophilia activism" were first examined to identify those sites that satisfied the four selection criteria described above.

Snowball sampling techniques were then used to find additional adult–child sex advocacy websites that met our selection criteria. Specifically, Google[9] was used to search for adult–child sex advocacy websites categorized as being similar to the adult–child sex advocacy websites identified through the purposive techniques described above. External links off the websites identified through Yahoo!, Wikipedia, and Google were then examined to search for additional sites that met our selection criteria.

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[6] The search was performed on May 10, 2007 at 9:00 a.m.

[7] The Yahoo! search engine can be accessed at http://www.yahoo.com

[8] The Wikipedia open-source encyclopedia can be accessed at http://www.wikipedia.com

[9] The Google search engine can be accessed at http://www.google.com. Google has a built-in function that returns a listing of websites that are similar in nature to a specified site.

Table 1. Adult–Child Sex Advocacy Websites

Name of Website	Name of Website
North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA)	Open Hands
IPCE	Boy Sky
Safet.net	Boy Tales
Girl Chat	LifeLine
Alice Pix	Angels Boylove Forum
Americans for a Society Free from Age Restrictions (ASFAR)[10]	RoboFrosh
Butterfly Kisses	Boyz World
Danish Pedophile Association	Somersault's Lounge
Martijn	Mhamic
Glorious Girls	Paiderastia
Debate Guide	The Human Face of Pedophilia
Cerius Love	Philia
Pedologues	CLogo
Puellula	Paedo UK
Boy Chat	Pedofilie
Free Spirits	The Church of Zeus and Ganymede
Pedophilia: Truth vs. Myth	Critical Estoppel
Boy Lover	Boy Bliss
Age Taboo	Magic Boy Angels
Christian Boylove Forum	Boyland Online
Boy Moment	The Childlove News
Elijah's Forum	Common Ground
International Boylovers United	Crossroads Debate
The Boylove Online Community	DreamScape
Teen Boys World	Pedophiles Against Child Molestation
A Hundred Years of Pedophilia	Haven 4 Boys
International Boylove Magazine	Boyz World Photo Gallery
Starry Twilight	Proud to Love
Backwoodsman's Bits	Koinos Magazine
Boylove Channel	Perspectives
JON	BoyWiki
About Boylove	Kid Shady

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[10] Debate does exist as to whether ASFAR constitutes an adult-child sex advocacy group. We include ASFAR because it meets the selection criteria for the present study. In its call for the elimination of laws that establish age of consent for sexual relationships, ASFAR believes that children have the capacity to make the determination as to whether they want to have a sexual relationship with an adult and if such relationships are consensual then they should not be prohibited. Early in its history, ASFAR became fractured as a group due to the active participation of pedophiles in its activities.

Measures

The variables collected on each website were organized into two constructs. The first construct, or the communication and participation construct, refers to the structure of the website in terms of enabling participation and interaction among users and between site administrators and users. Communication and participation capabilities were assessed using twelve measures.

The following measures were gathered on each website:

- *Country of Registration*: this variable refers to the country in which the registrant of the adult–child sex advocacy community was located. Registrant information was gathered on each website using the publicly accessible *Whois* directory online.[11] The *Whois* directory catalogs information on the registrant of a particular domain name, including name, email address, and postal address. It also includes technical information on the domain name, including the host IP address and location.

- *Language*: this variable refers to the languages in which website content was published and indicates a capability for interaction and participation among users with diverse linguistic backgrounds.

The remaining communication and participation variables were defined as dichotomous variables, with response options as *No* (0) and *Yes* (1). The following measures were gathered for each website:

- *Synchronous Chat/IM*: this variable refers to the presence of a chat room or instant messaging within the website structure.

- *Asynchronous Forum*: this variable refers to the presence of a forum or message board within the website structure that allows users to post content and replies to previous posts. The postings must be archived and accessible by those who use the website.

- *Listserv*: this variable refers to the presence of a listserv, or mailing list that is operated by the website to which users can subscribe.

- *Calendar of Events*: this variable refers to the presence of a calendar on the website that displays group events or website functions (e.g. guest chats).

- *Donations*: this variable refers to whether users can make a donation to the advocacy group through the website.

- *Children's Section*: this variable refers to the presence of content on the website that was specifically marketed or directed at children so as to encourage their participation in the online community.

- *Official Website Membership*: this variable refers to the presence of a registration process for membership to the website or advocacy group.

- *Members-Only Section*: this variable pertains only to those websites or advocacy groups that have an official membership. It refers to the presence of website content or resources that can only be accessed by users with a membership.

- *Membership Fee*: this variable pertains only to those websites or advocacy groups that have an official membership. It refers to whether there is a fee charged to gain membership to the website or advocacy group.

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[11] The WhoIs directory maintained by Network Solutions was used to gather registrant information on the adult-child sex advocacy website examined for this paper. It can be accessed at http://www.networksolutions.com/whois/index.jsp.

The second construct, or the techniques of neutralization construct, focuses on content that justifies sexual relationships between adults and children. These justifications serve to neutralize feelings of self-blame for transgressions that are deemed deviant by society at large and give rise to definitions that favor violations of the law. With respect to the techniques of neutralization put forth by Sykes and Matza (1957), we were particularly interested in looking for the presence of website content that offered the following justifications:

- *Condemnation of the Condemners*: this variable refers to the presence of content on the website that attacks and discredits those who view sexual relationships between adults and children as wrong.
- *Denial of Injury*: this variable refers to the presence of content that rejects the notion that harm falls upon children when they are involved in a sexual relationship with an adult.
- *Appeal to High Loyalties*: this variable refers to the presence of content that associates the adult-child sex advocacy community to social movements that are not tied to pedophilia activism and that garner acceptance by segments of society (e.g. gay/lesbian rights groups and civil rights groups).

Each neutralization variable was defined as a dichotomous variable, with response options as *No* (0) and *Yes* (1).

Data Collection

All websites used in this study were identified and examined between December 18, 2006 and June 5, 2007. The boundaries of a particular website were limited to the publicly accessible pages included under the domain name used by the adult-child sex advocacy group. Our analysis for the present research was limited to content created by website administrators. Content created by website users that appeared in site forums, bulletin boards, chat rooms, or listservs was, thus, not used in this study. At no point during the data collection process did members of the research team find, access, view, or download child pornography.

All measures were coded for each website by two independent raters. Before starting the coding process, both raters were trained on the technical concepts associated with each measure. The raters were shown examples of chat rooms, instant messaging interfaces, and listservs so that they understood the difference among these communication tools. The raters sat through a tutorial on using the *Whois* directory so that they learned how to search for the country in which a website was registered. Definitions of the *Condemnation of the Condemners*, *Denial of Injury*, and *Appeal to Higher Loyalties* variables were given to each rater to guide them when searching for the presence of neutralization techniques in the content of the targeted websites. Training on the neutralization construct also involved the raters reviewing Sykes and Matza's (1957) seminal article on techniques of neutralization and previously published research by De Young (1988) and Durkin and Bryant (1999) involving rationalizations used by adults with sexual predilections towards children.

Individual websites were coded on the same day by both raters to minimize coding errors resulting from content changes on the target websites. Scheduling conflicts did, however, prevent the raters from coding some individual sites on the same day. In these instances, raters coded each individual website within five days of one another. Cohen's kappa coefficient was used to assess inter-rater reliability on all measures. Kappa

coefficients exceeding .75 are considered very good and indicative of high coding reliability, or agreement, among raters (Bryman, 2004). The kappa coefficients for all measures in the present study exceeded .81. A third rater was used when raters disagreed on a particular measure. The third rater coded only those measures that were in question for a particular website. The values coded by the third rater were then matched to the similar values coded by one of the original raters and selected for inclusion in the final analysis.

Results

Table 2 is a descriptive summary of the countries in which the adult-child sex advocacy websites were registered. Over sixty percent (62.5%) of the websites were registered in the United States. The Netherlands, Canada, and the United Kingdom rounded out the top four countries, with 14.1%, 7.8%, and 6.3% of the websites being registered in these places, respectively. Brazil, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Liechtenstein, and Slovakia each was home to the registrant of one website.

Table 2. Country Where Website is Registered

Country of Registration	Number of Sites	Percent of Total Sites (N=64)
United States	40	62.5
Netherlands	9	14.1
Canada	5	7.8
United Kingdom	4	6.3
Brazil	1	1.6
Czech Republic	1	1.6
Finland	1	1.6
France	1	1.6
Liechtenstein	1	1.6
Slovakia	1	1.6

Table 3 is a descriptive summary of the languages in which the websites were published. As part of the selection criteria for this study, websites needed to be published in English or have an English-language translation available. All 64 adult-child sex advocacy websites used in this study, thus, contained English-language content. Almost 19% of the websites were available in French and Spanish. Approximately 17% of the sites were available in German. Dutch-language translations were available on 15.6% of the websites. Italian, Portuguese, Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Danish, Farsi, Finnish, Russia, and Slovak translations were all available in less than 10% of the adult-child sex advocacy websites used in this study.

Table 4 is a descriptive summary of the website tools that enable interaction among users and between site administrators and users. Only 20.3% of adult-child sex advocacy websites hosted a chat room or supported instant messaging for site users. Asynchronous forums were more popular than synchronous communication tools. Approximately 58%

Table 3. Content Languages Appearing on Websites

Language	Number of Sites	Percent of Total Sites (N=64)
English	64	100
French	12	18.8
Spanish	12	18.8
German	11	17.2
Dutch	10	15.6
Italian	5	7.8
Portuguese	4	6.3
Czech	3	4.7
Hungarian	2	3.1
Polish	2	3.1
Danish	1	1.6
Farsi	1	1.6
Finnish	1	1.6
Russian	1	1.6
Slovak	1	1.6

of the adult–child sex advocacy websites had online forums or bulletin boards for users to post topical messages and replies to earlier postings. A post to the forum section of the *Girl Chat* website on January 9, 2007 by a user named *paper-doll* extolled, for example, the benefits of sexual relationships between children and adults and elicited six other community members to post a message about their relationship experiences with children. Later that same day, a *Girl Chat* community member named *Lateralus*, for example, began a dialogue in the forum about the child–actors in the movies MirrorMask, Silent Hill, and Little Miss Sunshine.

Listservs were not popular among adult–child sex advocacy websites. Only one site operated a listserv. Slightly more than 14% of the advocacy groups included a calendar on their website to display dates for upcoming events such as a group meeting or an online chat organized by the site administrators. Almost one-quarter of the advocacy groups accepted donations online through their website. Only 6.3% of the adult–child sex advocacy websites contain content specifically directed at children who visit the site. Lastly, a majority (51.6%) of the websites had an official membership.

Table 4. Website Communication and Participation Tools

Communication/Participation Tools	Number of Sites	Percent of Total Sites (N=64)
Synchronous Chat/IM	13	20.3
Asynchronous Forum	37	57.8
Listserv	1	1.6
Calendar of Events	9	14.1
Donations Accepted on Website	15	23.4
Children's Section	4	6.3
Official Site Membership	33	51.6

Table 5 is a descriptive summary of measures concerning websites or advocacy groups that have an official membership. More than three-quarters (75.8%) of the websites with an official membership had content on the site that was restricted to members. Far fewer websites charged a membership fee. Only 6.1% of the websites with an official membership required users to pay a fee as part of the registration process.

Table 5. Membership Participation

Membership Participation Variable	Number of Sites	Percent of Websites with Official Membership (N=33)
Members-Only Section on Site	25	75.8
Membership Fees	2	6.1

Table 6 is a descriptive summary of the techniques of neutralization measures. Approximately 63% of the websites contained content that advocated at least one of the three neutralization measures gathered in this study. With respect to specific justifications or techniques to neutralize deviant behavior, 42.2% of the adult-child sex websites appealed to higher loyalties to gain acceptance for their actions by linking to websites of social movements not tied to pedophilia activism or causes supporting sexual relationships between adults and children. The *Age Taboo* (2006) website, for example, framed the issue of sexual relationships between adults and children in terms of the rights of sexual minorities by linking to the website of the American Civil Liberties Union's Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Project.[12] The *Boy Moment* (2006) website, for example, provided a link to the website of the Volunteer Institute to draw a connection between the care adults' show to children with whom they have a sexual interest to the concern society shows to children who are homeless or who have runaway from home.[13]

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[12] The website of American Civil Liberties Union's Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Project was accessed at http://www.aclu.org/LesbianGayRights/LesbianGayRightsMain.cfm
[13] The Volunteer Institute website was accessed at http://members.tripod.com/~Volunteer_Institute/index.html

Table 6. Neutralization Content

Variable	Number of Sites	Percent of Total Sites (N=64)
Techniques of Neutralization	40	62.5
Appeal to Higher Loyalties	27	42.2
Condemnation of the Condemners	23	35.9
Denial of Injury	23	35.9

Twenty-three, or 35.9%, of the websites contained content condemning those people who speak out against sexual relationship between adults and children. For example, the following excerpt from the *Free Spirits* (2006) website labels the police as the real abusers of children and chastises them for unscrupulous police procedures and inciting vigilantism against adults who engage in sexual relations with minors:

Participants are also very aware of the legal issues. They understand the extreme penalties for even the slightest physical contact or suspicion of sexual contact between adult and minor. They know about the knock on the door in the middle of the night, the removal of and destruction of property, the planting of evidence and the extraordinary mental and sometimes physical torture of possible victims. They know that boys, even if not already victims, will become so at the hands of the police in the name of child protection. Readers are aware of the bashings and rapes in prison; the informing of neighbors and employers and the sign in the yard, the modern Scarlet Letter.

Another attempt to neutralize one's own deviance by condemning the actions of those who speak out against adults who engage in sexual relationships with children was found on the *Pedologues* website. The following excerpt from *Pedologues* (2006) demonizes those people who do not understand the lure of sexual relations between adults and children and labels them as bigots and hypocrites:

To those who do not like me and who purport to understand "what I'm about" yet are   blind and deaf to your own ignorance, intolerance, and bigotry--those who have wished for my imprisonment for merely practicing my 1st Amendment rights, and would wish me dead or publicly humiliated simply for being attracted to minors--I pity you. Time will show just how hypocritical and lost you are.

Twenty-three, or 35.9%, of websites contained content denying the notion that harm falls upon children when they are involved in a sexual relationship with an adult. The following excerpt from the *About Boylove* (2006) website uses, for example, alleged testimony from therapists, medical professionals, and university professors as the basis for stating that no harm comes to children who engage in sexual relationships with adult men:

Many, many prominent psychiatrists, psychologists and other physicians, university professors and well-educated persons around the globe agree that the effects of boylove on pre-adolescent and adolescent boys cause no harm to the child at all! In fact, most of the time, the contact is seen as a very positive experience.

A similar theme was found on the *SafeTnet* website. The following excerpt from *SafeTnet* (2007) shows, for example, a concern for the well being of boys who capture the sexual interest of adult men and a denial that harm falls upon these boys from any subsequent physical relationship:

> *Boylovers… are people whom you know. Men who deeply love and are concerned about the boys with whom they come in contact, men who would not harm a boy in any way. Men who are just like every other man except that they have been born with a sexual attraction to boys.*

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study reports on a content analysis of websites that promote, advocate, and convey information in support of sexual relationships between adults and children. We examined criminogenic factors of adult–child sex advocacy websites to determine whether they were structured as learning environments for crimes involving the sexual exploitation of children. Specifically, we analyzed these sites to determine their capacity for fostering social ties among people who favor sexual relationships between children and adults. We also analyzed these websites for the presence of content that can neutralize psychological restraints against crimes involving the sexual exploitation of children.

The adult–child sex advocacy community, or the collective of adult–child sex advocacy websites examined in this study, was multinational and offered the ability to participate in 15 different languages. The websites were registered across 10 countries, with a majority of the sites being registered in the United States. All sites were registered in countries that hold freedom of expression in high regard, scoring at least 15 out of 16 in 2007 on the "freedom of expression" index calculated annually by Freedom House (2007). With the global reach of the Internet, advocates of sexual relationships between adults and children have sought countries to register their sites where speech supporting sexual relationships between adults and children is legally tolerated. The ability to use and contribute to the online communities of these adult–child sex advocacy groups in multiple languages reduces the barriers language place on fostering social ties.

The multinational dimension of the online adult–child sex advocacy community is consistent with the global penetration of online communities that exist for trading child pornography images and video (Johnston, 2004; Ryan and Cook, 2008). The Wonderland Club, for example, amassed over 750,000 child pornography images and required prospective members to contribute 20,000 images to gain entrance into the club (Wakefield, 1999; Wearden, 2001). At the time the online child pornography ring was taken down by the international law enforcement community, the Wonderland Club had over 200 members across 12 countries. The Teenboys online child pornography community dwarfed the Wonderland Club in its size and reach, with 1,800 members from across the globe.

The adult–child sex advocacy websites examined in this study offered their users a number of options to foster relationships with like-mind people. More than half (57.8%) of the websites had forums, or bulletin boards, where users could post comments or request information from other users. Real time interaction was also available on some of the websites through chat rooms or instant messaging services. The sites were also structured to promote a sense of community. For example, more than half (51.6%) of the websites had an official membership. On most sites, membership was free and gave users access to exclusive members–only content. Free membership is important to entice users to forums supporting adult–child sexual relationships in that it eliminates the need to

provide site administrators with credentials that divulge one's true identity (e.g. legal name, mailing address, and credit card number). Requiring users to provide identifying information to access online services catering to adult–child sexual relationships is considered a security risk by child pornographers and pedophiles that could result in their arrest (Jenkins, 2001; Sheldon and Howitt, 2007). In their attempt to build a community, some websites even posted a calendar to keep users informed of upcoming events related to the group and its mission.

In our analysis, we also found content that exposes users to rationalizations for crimes involving the sexual exploitation of children. Approximately 63% of the advocacy websites contained content to neutralize feelings of self-blame for sexual actions against children. The appeal to higher loyalties, or the attempt to gain legitimacy by drawing connections to more socially desirable causes than causes advocating sex between adults and children, was the most common technique used by adult–child sex advocacy websites to neutralize feelings of self-blame. Advocacy websites also sought to neutralize self-blame by denying the actions of their members cause harm to children and by condemning the actions of people or groups who are outspoken against adults who engage in sex with minors. Durkin and Bryant (1999) found the use of the same exculpatory accounts as found on the websites examined for this study in their analysis of postings by self-proclaimed pedophiles to Internet newsgroups pertaining to sex between adults and children. The use of neutralization techniques by advocacy groups to justify sexual relationships between children and adults is, however, not new to the age of the Internet. De Young's (1988) analysis of hardcopy publications by three adult–child sex advocacy groups in the United States (i.e. the Rene Guyon Society, the North America Man/Boy Love Association, and the Childhood Sensuality Circle) found content consistent with Sykes and Matza's (1957) denial of injury, denial of victim, condemnation of the condemners, and appeal to higher loyalties neutralization techniques.

In terms of the impact on practice within the criminal justice system, our findings can guide courts and community corrections officials when setting release conditions on Internet use for offenders being released on parole and defendants being released on probation for sex crimes involving children. Restrictions on computer and Internet use for sex offenders who act against minors are regularly imposed by the courts and have been upheld on appeal on many occasions (e.g. *United States v. Boston*, 2007; *United States v. Johnson*, 2005; *United States v. Paul*, 2001; *United States v. Thielemann*, 2009). A total ban on computer use and Internet access for people on probation or parole for a sex crime against a minor is not recommended and can be seen as a hardship by the courts given the increasing reliance on these technologies for everyday tasks, including work and education (Smith, Grabosky, and Urbas, 2004). Instead, computer and Internet restrictions for those under the supervision of a community corrections agency for sex crimes against minors have traditionally banned access to child and adult pornography and online interactions with minors, whether these interactions occurred in chat rooms, via instant messaging, through email, or on social networking sites (Hyne, 2002; Smith, Grabosky, & Urbas, 2004).

A number of technology solutions have recently become available to assist community corrections agencies with enforcing computer use restrictions imposed on sex offenders released into their jurisdiction by the courts. For example, Image Scan (2009) is a tool created by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation that searches a computer for child pornography by cataloging image files stored on a hard drive or external storage media.

Probation and parole officers can use Image Scan on-site during supervision visits in the field. Impulse Control (2009), by IPPC, is another tool that helps probation and parole officers manage sex offenders who have computer and Internet restrictions placed upon them by the courts. With Impulse Control, probation and parole officers can remotely set and manage the computer and Internet restrictions of the offenders they supervise. The software also allows officers to monitor offenders' online activities and automatically notifies them if restrictions are violated so that they may respond in an expeditious manner.

Given the present findings, the courts should consider banning people who are under the supervision of a community corrections agency for sex crimes against minors from using adult-child sex advocacy websites. These bans would reduce the criminogenic concerns of exposing patrons of adult-child sex advocacy websites to like-minded people who can provide supporting definitions, or rationalizations, for criminal behavior. Community corrections agencies can adopt Internet management and monitoring tools, such as Impulse Control (2009), to help enforce these restrictions.

Forced removal of adult-child sex websites from the Internet by government authorities is unlikely, given a general prohibition of criminal content on the sites by site administrators and the protections afforded to speech and expression in countries where the sites are registered and hosted. Companies providing website hosting services can, however, be selective with the customers they decide to take on. In its terms of service agreement for hosting online content, Web Site Source, Inc. (2009), for example, states that it has the right for refuse service to anyone. Hosting companies with terms similar to the terms used by Web Site Source, Inc. should, thus, make it a practice not to host sites advocating adult-child sexual relationships. Although not as broad as the hosting policy put forth by Web Site Source, the policies of companies such as MidPhase (2009) and WebHostingWorld (2009) restrict website content that contains, for example, satanic themes, hate speech, and pornography. These restrictions could easily be expanded to include content that advocates sexual relationships between adults and children. Some hosting companies, such as Yahoo! (2009) and Infusion Hosting (2009), have policies that forbid content that is harmful to minors. These companies would be justified in banning adult-child sex advocacy websites from their servers given that they foster communications among adults with sexual interest in children and contain content that advances rationalizations for sexually exploiting children.

Researchers examining adult-child sex advocacy websites in the future should take into consideration the methodological limitations of the present study. The Internet, as a collection of computers, services, websites, and content, is constantly changing. The population of adult-child sex advocacy websites used for this study and the content on these sites has, most certainly, changed since the data were collected. Some websites, like the website of *International Boylovers United*, are, for example, no longer available.[14] Likewise, new adult-child sex advocacy websites may have emerged. New online tools and services have materialized since the data were collected that may have changed the structure of existing adult-child sex advocacy websites, the methods by which website patrons communicate, and the places where adult-child sex advocates congregate. The emergence of the virtual community *Second Life* has, for example, offered patrons of adult-

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[14] Our research team accessed the *International Boylovers United* website at http://www.iblu.net/ during the data collection phase of this study. This URL was no longer active when checked on January 26, 2010.

child sex advocacy websites an alternative place to congregate where they can meet and interact with like-minded people (Associated Press, 2007).[15]

Our analysis was limited to content created by website administrators. We have, thus, not taken into consideration content created by visitors who use the asynchronous forums, listservs, and chat rooms affiliated with a website. This content may contain rationalizations and stories of sexual interactions with minors, which, in turn, may affect the social learning process as it pertains to the proclivity of adults to sexually assault children. The interplay between the physical and virtual worlds as it pertains to adult-child sex advocacy groups was also not considered in the present study. Future research should recognize that "social groups in cyberspace spill out in to the real world and vise versa" and should look to see how adult-child sex advocacy communities online affect how these groups organize in the physical world and, in turn, affect the victimization of children (Kollock & Smith, 1993, p. 18).

The present study finds that adult-child sex advocacy websites are criminogenic in that they contain a myriad of communication tools (e.g. chat rooms, instant messengers, and message boards) to foster interaction among site users. According to Akers (1998) and Sutherland (1947/1974), the bringing together of people who favor criminal behavior (i.e. sexual relationships between adults and children) is how the process of learning crime begins. Additionally, the adult-child sex advocacy websites exposed users to rationalizations for offending and, in turn, definitions favorable to sexual violations against minors. Repeated exposure to these websites, the people who use these websites and the accompanying rationalizations for crime can set a normative reference for users and, thus, result in an excess of definitions favorable to sexual violations against minors over definitions unfavorable to sexual violations against minors. Hence, we recommend that courts ban the use of adult-child sex advocacy websites when setting community release conditions for sex offenders who have acted against minors. We also recommend that companies hosting websites modify their content restrictions to include content that is harmful to minors, including adult-child sex advocacy websites.

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[15] Second Life can be accessed at http://secondlife.com/?v=1.1

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