

Chapter 4

Protecting Youth from Dangerous Media: Online Predators

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Introduction

The Internet allows users to communicate and form bonds with other users across the globe. This use, however, can be accompanied with the threat of online sexual exploitation, particularly solicitation of minors. Online sexual solicitation refers to requests to engage in sexual activities and/or sexual conversations, either through the Internet or face to face. Approximately one out of seven youth in the United States report having experienced online sexual solicitation (Jones et al. 2013). And other research shows that online sexual soliciting often results in sexual contact, with some studies reporting that 47.5 % of solicitations aimed at adolescents and children lead to sexual interactions (Schulz et al. 2015). Although such findings may raise the public's awareness regarding the need to protect minors from harm, doing so is not an easy task as adolescents outpace adults in their use of technology (Saleh et al. 2014), and this growing gap of technological proficiency adds to the already existing difficulties of monitoring and regulating adolescents' online activities.

The very nature of adolescence may influence adolescent users of the Internet and render them susceptible to online sexual exploitation. Adolescence can be described as a period of heightened sexual interest (Boies et al. 2010; Ponton and Judice 2004) as individuals actively seek relationships (Grello et al. 2003; Mendle et al. 2013) and even disregard potential risks when doing so (Tymula et al. 2012). In that sense, it is not surprising that the Social Networking Sites have become the new arena for adolescents where they can freely and privately form new bonds and pursue romantic relationships (Chang 2010). However, the content, structure, and users of Social Networking Sites are often unregulated, making these sites somewhat ideal hunting grounds for predators who can gather information and directly communicate with potential victims in hopes of sexual encounters.

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As sexual solicitation of adolescents has become more easily achievable by motivated offenders, monitoring and regulating adolescents' Social Networking Sites use have become crucially important in protecting minors from unwanted online sexual solicitation. In most cases regarding sexual exploitation through Social Networking Sites, there exists a dynamic relationship between offender and victim. Adolescents can be deceived or at times willingly fall victim to online sexual exploitation (Wolak et al. 2008). What society often fails to acknowledge is that unmonitored adolescents can also become offenders themselves and target others through Social Networking Sites. In that sense, the digital revolution has presented new challenges that include raising the awareness as well as responsibilities of adolescent users of the Internet.

Vulnerable traits associated with online sexual solicitation need to be thoroughly investigated for the legal system to protect minors from online predators. This is especially critical as online predators tend to possess a great understanding of adolescents and target those who are most vulnerable (Groppe 2007). An equally important task is to address offender–victim dynamics. Society may be holding a misleading perception that all adolescents are innocent and that all online offenders are older male pedophiles (Wolak et al. 2008). Such stereotypes must be clarified as they may lead to ineffective protections of minors in addition to problematic legal responses. Adopting a more accurate and flexible view of online offenders will lead to better protection of vulnerable adolescents from online offenders. Thus, legal responses must be carefully implemented based on effective offender typologies and offender–victim dynamics.

Previous legal responses to convicted sex offenders often have been criticized as being unconstitutional and ineffective. Such criticisms stem from blanket bans on the Internet or Social Networking Sites that were implemented for all convicted sex offenders. Blanket bans can be seen as responses that largely ignore empirical understandings of offender typologies as well as offender–victim dynamics. Such responses may inhibit proper deterrence and, further, may lack therapeutic effects. In that sense, legal reforms must focus on deterring high-risk offenders as well as teaching adolescents the proper use of their newly gained autonomy and privacy. Technological developments are altering the previously held assumption of complete parental control over adolescents. Adolescents' increased privacy and autonomy is a byproduct of the digital revolution that parents and policy makers should acknowledge and react accordingly.

Unanticipated Risks Associated with Social Networking Sites

The portable nature of recent technology and its increasing affordability have presented adolescents with privacy and autonomy that allows them to seek sensations, build relationships, and fulfill sexual curiosities unrestricted by time and

place. Due to the sense of anonymity provided by the Internet, it is likely that adolescents perceive the Internet as the best venue to fulfill their sexual curiosities without risking social stigmatization and embarrassment. It is also likely that the sense of anonymity may amplify adolescents' risk-taking behaviors (Joinson 2001; Livingstone and Helsper 2007; Runions et al. 2013). Relatedly, many adolescents turn to Social Networking Sites in hopes of building new relationships (Blais et al. 2008). However, there are unanticipated risks associated with Social Networking Sites, namely the sexual exploitation of minors, to which society has not yet been prepared to respond accordingly.

Investigating who online offenders are and how they operate is a necessary step to protect minors from online sexual solicitation. It is a commonly held conception that people can act differently online than they would in the real life (Casale et al. 2015; Suler 2004). In that sense, online offenders who exploit adolescents may be vastly different from offline predators in terms of strategies as well as demographics. Studies of online offender typologies have revealed surprising results. For example, an online victimization survey revealed that 47 % of online offenders were younger than age of eighteen. It also found that 67 % of offenders were male, 19 % were female, and 13 % of offenders' gender was unknown. Results show that a large proportion of online offenders did not fit the stereotype of an "older male predator" (Finkelhor et al. 2000; Spencer 2009). Seto et al. (2011) defined online offenders as predators who use technologies to contact children to create opportunities for sexual offending. This broad definition and the statistics regarding offenders are a reminder that online sex offenders do not share universal traits and, therefore, must be categorized into subgroups.

The digital revolution may have expanded the risk of sexual exploitation of adolescents. Due to the lack of public awareness and appropriate preventive measures, it is evident that many adolescents have not yet adopted a proper reaction to the new challenges provided by the digital revolution. Furthermore, parents may not be aware of such risks and may be surprised by the high rate of online sexual solicitation. In fact, research shows that roughly 20 % of minors have reported experiencing an online solicitation (Finkelhor et al. 2000). More recent data showed that approximately one out of seven youth in the United States had experienced sexual solicitation (Jones et al. 2013). In another sample, 5.6 % of male adolescents and 19.1 % of female adolescents reported having been unwantedly sexually solicited on the Internet at least once in the past six months (Baumgartner et al. 2010). Perhaps the more disturbing finding was that less than 10 % of sexual solicitation was reported to the authorities and, in 75 % of incidents, adolescents had no or minor reactions to the experience (Finkelhor et al. 2000). Such results can be explained by the lack of public awareness of online sexual solicitation. Every member of society should be aware of the unanticipated perils brought by the digital revolution.

Vulnerable Adolescents in Social Networking Sites

Technological developments such as smartphones, tablets, and portable computers have contributed to the *always on* or *plugged in* culture among adolescents (Loubser 2012). These devices allow adolescents to access the Internet with ever-increased privacy and autonomy. As of 2013, 95 % of teens regularly use the Internet (Madden et al. 2014) for a variety of reasons (see Blais et al. 2008 for review). When considering the fact that heightened sexual curiosity, risk-taking behavior, and the need to build relationships are defining features of adolescence, the increased privacy, and autonomy are factors that must be dealt with extreme caution. Compared to the past, parents are unable to identify with whom their children are communicating and forming bonds. This reality is becoming more indisputable as more and more adolescents are visiting Social Networking Sites. In fact, research shows that over 70 % of adolescents are on Social Networking Sites (Lenhart et al. 2010; Tsitsika et al. 2014). Unsurprisingly, the main motivation for Social Networking Sites use among adolescents is to maintain and make new relationships; social interaction is a popular choice of Internet activity for both boys (63 %) and girls (68 %) (Lenhart et al. 2001). In many occasions, Social Networking Sites allow adolescents to engage in private communications with multiple users at once, expanding their opportunity to build intimate relationships. Adolescents may choose to communicate with online strangers for reasons of entertainment, social inclusion, maintaining relationships, meeting new people, and social compensation (Peter et al. 2006). Predators may be well aware of adolescents' need to build relationships and may take advantage of the functions of Social Networking Sites (Quayle et al. 2014). A self-report survey revealed that 4.5 % of respondents reported having solicited adolescents and 1.0 % reported having solicited children. Importantly, 47.5 % of these solicitations lead to sexual interactions (Schulz et al. 2015). In a similar study, 9.8 % of participants reported having sexual interactions with unknown youth ranging 0–17 years of age (Bergen 2014). It is, thus, crucially important to identify vulnerable situations and characteristics of adolescents that may increase the risk of becoming a victim of online sexual solicitation.

As suggested by ecological models, all aspects surrounding an adolescent must be considered since no child exists in isolation of their social and environmental surroundings (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Hamilton-Giachritsis et al. 2011; Whittle et al. 2013). These models suggest that individual, family, community, and culture must be taken into account when investigating vulnerable factors associated with online sexual exploitation of adolescents. Similar to offline child abuse, girls are more likely to be targeted than boys (Baumgartner et al. 2010). Also, adolescents are at a greater risk of unwanted sexual solicitation compared to younger children (Wolak et al. 2008). In fact, girls between ages fourteen to seventeen are twice more likely than ages ten to thirteen to form relationships with strangers they met online (Wolak et al. 2003). This result may be explained by older adolescents' increased need and capability to form bonds. Family factors are also crucial. Girls with high

conflict levels with their parents and boys with low levels of communication with parents are likely to form bonds with strangers online (Wolak et al. 2003). Peer-relationships are also an important factor as adolescents who struggle with social interactions among peers in school are more vulnerable to online sexual solicitations (Stanley 2001). Wolak et al. (2003) found that troubled boys and girls were 11 % more likely to form romantic relationships, 11 % more likely to be asked to meet face to face, and 12 % more likely to have attended a face to face meeting with a person they met online compared to less troubled adolescents. On the other hand, adolescents with parents who oversee their Internet use are found to have experienced fewer negative events, perhaps because adolescents who are aware that they are being monitored tend to engage less in sexual conversations with others online (De Graaf and Vanwesenbeeck 2006; Soo and Bodanovskaya 2012). Adolescents' awareness of parental monitoring and supportive parent-child relationships are thus a powerful protective barrier (Whittle et al. 2013).

As most adolescents actively seek relationships, those with poor relationships both at home and at school are at a greater risk of online sexual solicitation. Lack of healthy relationships may be related to increased risk-taking behavior, which in turn may raise the likelihood of agreeing to a face to face meeting with online strangers. It is important to note that sexual solicitation involves a dynamic interaction between victims and offenders. Relying solely on victims' vulnerability factors is only a fragmentary attempt to protect minors as not all interactions between victims and offenders can be represented by a singular format (Briggs et al. 2011). Investigating the types, motives, and strategies implemented by online offenders are equally important steps to protect minors from perils of the digital era.

Offender-Victim Dynamics

Sexual curiosity, the desire to build relationships, and risk-taking behavior among adolescents can become dangerous combinations when motivated predators take advantage of the new functions provided by the Social Networking Sites. This is troubling as an increasing number of people are using the Internet for sexual activities (Cooper et al. 2006). Cooper (1998) proposed that "Triple A Engine" features of the Internet, namely accessibility, affordability, and anonymity, may facilitate online sexual abuse of adolescents. Online offenders can directly contact their victims by posing as either themselves or as an online persona at an affordable cost (Kloess et al. 2014). This has become more problematic as teens share more personal information on Social Networking Sites than they have before: In 2012, 91 % of adolescents posted photos of themselves which is a 12 % increase from 2006. Also, 71 % of adolescents posted the city or town they live in (10 % increase), 92 % posted their real name on the profile page, and 33 % of adolescents were Facebook friends with people they have not met in person (Madden et al. 2013). The abundance of shared information allows predators to select vulnerable targets. As motivated predators often synchronize the style of communication with

their victims and approach them with similar interests (Whittle et al. 2013), a predator's attempt to build trust with their target is likely to be more successful with more easily available information. Many predators build trust by providing attention and appreciation to make their victims feel special (Shannon 2008). Again, troubled adolescents with poor relationships at home and at school are especially vulnerable to such approaches. In fact, 73 % of victims who had face to face sexual encounters with an offender did so multiple times (Wolak et al. 2008). A victim's experience of online sexual solicitation can vastly differ from that of another victim because different offenders have different motives and strategies when approaching potential victims. In addition, the surrounding factors of a victim would heavily influence the victim's reaction to online sexual solicitation. Thus, exploring the various types of offenders will aid in a better understanding of offender-victim dynamics.

Researchers have offered a variety of ways to understand online offenders. Online offenders can be broadly categorized into two categories according to their motivation: (a) fantasy-driven and (b) contact-driven offenders (Briggs et al. 2011). Fantasy-driven offenders are characterized by their motivation to engage in cybersex with an adolescent, whereas contact driven offenders arguably pose a greater threat since they are motivated to develop sexual relationships with adolescents.

More recently, Tener et al. (2015) identified four categories of online offenders who used online communications to commit sex crimes against minors. The categories were based on offenders' patterns of online communication, offline and online identities, relationship dynamics with victims, and levels of sex crime expertise. 32 % of the entire offenders were categorized as the "expert type" who meet their victims online by sometimes fabricating online identities. They use multiple strategies to attract their victims and take sophisticated or extreme ways to conceal their crimes. Offenders in this category never get emotionally attached to their victims, therefore their motive seems very clear and dangerous. Second category of offenders is called the "cynical type" (34.6 %). They are similar to the "expert type" offenders but usually have smaller number of victims and have less sophisticated ways of committing the crime. Another important difference is that the "cynical type" offenders usually know their victims face to face and use the Internet as a tool to increase their chance of sexual exploitation. Again, their motive seems obvious. The third category of offenders is the "affection-focused type" (21.3 %). This group of offenders differs from the previous two groups in that they show genuine feelings of love, care, and affection toward their victims, even revealing their true identities, whereas the "expert types" and "cynical types" manipulate their victims so they appear loving and caring. Furthermore, the "affection-focused type" offenders sometimes begin the relationship without realizing that the victim is a minor. Tener and colleagues further notes that unlike the expert type offenders, it is rare for the affection-focused group of offenders to possess child pornography. In that sense, it is arguable rather "affection-focused type" offenders deliberately seek minors with motivations to sexually exploit them. The final category of online offenders is the "sex-focused type" (12 %) whose sole purpose is to have immediate

sexual encounters. They do not specifically seek minors nor invest much emotion and time. In many cases the “sex-focused type” offenders engage in victim initiated relationships regardless of the partner’s age. Again, these differences among online offenders suggest that online offenders differ in motivation, strategies, and methods. Also, the assumption about online predators as “child molesters” or “rapists” may not be accurate in case of online sexual solicitation (Bourget and Bradford 2008), especially since “sex-focused type” and “affection-focused type” offenders do not deliberately seek minors.

In sum, the “expert type” and “cynical type” of offenders approach potential victims with false promises of intimacy. Such promises are powerful weapons as many adolescents are actively seeking attention, validation, and acceptance (Dombrowski et al. 2004). For most reported cases, sexual relationships between an adult and a minor did not involve physical force because many victims developed close relationships with the offender and even reported being in love (Tener et al. 2015). This may explain the extremely low report rate of sexual solicitation as predators tend to target lonely, shy, and “needy” adolescents (Sullivan 2009). In many cases regarding “affection-focused type” offenders, the relationship was initiated by the adolescent. The prolonged relationship may develop into a true affection from both sides. Relatedly, the “sex-focused type” of offenders pose a great threat since heightened sexual interests and risk-taking tendencies are expected features during the development of adolescents. In that sense, invitations of immediate sexual encounters can be tempting for many adolescents, leading to sexual exploitation. As can be seen, online sexual solicitation is a result of various dynamics between offenders and victims, therefore making a singular legal response and rehabilitation methods inappropriate approaches to solving this challenge.

Legal Responses to Online Offenders

In reference to Tener and colleague’s typology, four categories of offenders differ in motive, means, and expertise. Unfortunately, the legal system tends to view all types of offenders similarly, perhaps as pedophiles, and tends to treat them with identical legal responses. For example, many convicted sex offenders were given blanket Internet bans, and more recently, a ban on Social Networking Sites was given as a condition of supervised release.

Critics of Internet bans argue that a blanket ban on the Internet given to all convicted sex offenders is unconstitutional. The primary goal of supervised release is not to incapacitate and punish, but to ease the defendant’s transition into the community and provide rehabilitation (Brant 2008). Also, it is a fundamental principle guiding post-release condition which is supposed to be that the restrictions imposed on offenders be no greater deprivation of liberty than reasonably necessary (Wynton 2010). With that being said, the blanket ban on Internet use can be seen as an anachronous approach in the digital age. In fact, the Internet is quickly replacing

traditional venues of communication such as televisions, telephones, newspapers, and bulletin boards. Hence, the blanket ban on Internet can be argued as unconstitutional due to the indispensable nature of the Internet in daily lives.

The ban on Social Networking Sites could be an attractive alternative, but there are numerous loopholes to this approach. Online games and web forums could easily replace Social Networking Sites for motivated offenders seeking access to minors. Thus, the ban on Social Networking Sites is limited in that it is merely a temporary barrier in protecting minors from the perils lurking online. Nonetheless, due to the growing popularity of Social Networking Sites among minors, restricting high-risk offenders from accessing Social Networking Sites is an obvious and necessary measure.

Bans on Internet Access

In many cases regarding online sexual exploitation of adolescents, offenders have been banned from accessing the Internet as a condition of supervised release. For example, *United States v. Crandon* (3d Cir. 1999) upheld the Internet restriction for Crandon who communicated with a fourteen-year-old girl via the Internet and drove to meet her for sexual encounters. Also, *United States v. Paul* (5th Cir. 2001) upheld the ban for Paul who not only downloaded child pornography but also encouraged others to exploit adolescents. In both cases, the offense was seen as closely related to the Internet and therefore the ban was affirmed. For Crandon and Paul who used the Internet as a tool for sexual exploitation, the courts have upheld the complete ban on the Internet as reasonably necessary to protect the public by preventing recidivism (Brant 2008).

In other instances, the courts have appeared to be more reluctant in implementing blanket Internet access prohibitions for online offenders. This can be seen as the court's acknowledgement of the Internet's pervasiveness in the digital era. For example, *United States v. Sofsky* (2d Cir. 2002) rejected an Internet ban against an offender convicted for the possession of child pornography based on the virtually indispensable nature of Internet in today's world. Similarly, *United States v. Peterson* (2d Cir. 2001) vacated the Internet ban by comparing it to accessing a telephone; it noted that an offender might use the telephone to commit fraud, but this would not justify a condition of probation that includes an absolute ban on the use of telephones. In *United States v. White* (10th Cir 2001), White was sentenced to 24 months in prison followed by three years of supervised release for possessing child pornography. Unlike the case with Paul who committed the same crime, the Court overturned the Internet restriction for White. This overturn was based on the argument that a total restriction on Internet use is a greater punishment than necessary since it prevents convicted offenders from using the Internet for legitimate reasons. Since the Internet is an extremely valuable medium for information and communication, perhaps even indispensable for daily routines, a blanket ban on the Internet can be argued as too severe a deprivation of liberty.

It is evident that courts are attempting to find a balance between protecting the public as well as the individual liberties of convicted offenders. Finding an appropriate balance is a nettlesome conflict since the pervasiveness of the Internet in daily lives cannot be ignored. In fact, the Internet has ranked above books, newspapers, televisions, radio, and magazines as an extremely important source of information regarding health, politics, job search, and more (Habib 2004). The Internet has undoubtedly become a necessary tool for economic competition, making a ban on Internet use a severe economic deprivation. This reality is particularly important to consider for offenders who are expected to be reintegrated into society upon release. Due to the growing reliance on the Internet for daily activities, Internet prohibitions may be too great of an infringement on an offender's liberty.

The digital revolution has presented a new challenge for the courts and legal scholars. The Internet is already an omnipresent aspect of life, and its importance will continue to grow. Denying access to the Internet can be a serious deprivation, hence a compromise is necessary. In response to such a challenge, more recent legal responses toward online offenders have targeted specific elements of the Internet, namely the Social Networking Sites. The ban on Social Networking Sites likewise faces criticisms, nonetheless it is a preferred balance between protecting the public and individual liberties.

Bans on Social Networking Sites

As the Internet has heavily saturated our daily lives, the courts unavoidably became more reluctant to impose complete bans on released sex offenders' Internet use. This tendency is evident in cases such as *United States v. White* (10th Cir. 2001), *United States v. Sofsky* (2d Cir. 2002), and *United States v. Freeman* (3d Cir. 2003) where the Internet bans were overturned by courts concluding that members of the modern society cannot afford to be without Internet access. Perhaps due to such inclinations, courts recently approached the issue with a more narrowly tailored fashion by explicitly banning sex offenders from accessing Social Networking Sites. However, bans on Social Networking Sites still face criticisms among scholars (Brant 2008; Habib 2004), especially because many states are imposing such bans on *all* registered sex offenders. A blanket ban on Social Networking Sites to all convicted offenders neglects the fact that online offenders do not share universal characteristics. The obvious next step in improving legal responses would be to impose Social Networking bans only when closely considering offender typologies, as will be discussed in the next section.

Another criticism regarding the ban on Social Networking Sites is that such bans may be impractical to enforce. For example, the installation of monitoring software is only effective for already existing Social Networking Sites. Many new Social Networking Sites are being developed; thus, requiring constant and frequent software updates. Such maintenance would be extremely costly and difficult to

implement. Furthermore, it is questionable whether such software could keep up with the rapid technological developments. It is highly possible that new and advanced devices could allow unmonitored access to Social Networking Sites. Thus, a ban on Social Networking Sites can be seen as a temporary barrier in protecting adolescents from motivated offenders.

Additionally, motivated online offenders could seek other venues to gain access to potential victims. For example, a motivated offender banned from accessing Social Networking Sites could seek online games as their next available medium to have access to potential victims. Online games would be a preferable alternative since gaming is a popular hobby among minors. Also, numerous online communities allow direct communications among users. Although Social Networking Sites provide offenders an opportunity to gather information regarding potential victims, motivated offenders do not have to rely solely on Social Networking Sites for direct communication with minors. Nevertheless, Social Networking Sites are popular playgrounds for unsuspecting minors; therefore, banning high-risk sex offenders from accessing Social Networking Sites is an obvious and necessary measure. A complete ban on all computer-related devices may perhaps fully protect minors from online predators; however, this extreme approach is unlikely to be a popular and reasonable choice in the digital era due to the growing importance of technology. A narrowly tailored ban for high-risk offenders in addition to introducing preventive measures that consider offender–victim dynamics are the next necessary steps to protect minors from online sexual exploitation.

Legal Reforms

Although it may be tempting to implement a complete ban on Internet use by all online offenders, the online environment has become an indispensable element in the digital era. Thus, finding a proper balance between protecting minors and individual liberty has become a complicated task, especially regarding online sexual exploitation of minors. With that being said, legal reforms must be narrowly tailored so that specific offender types are given specific legal responses, rather than blanket bans given to *all* offenders. As online offenders are heterogeneous groups with different motives and strategies, it is important to refrain from perceiving all online offenders as older male pedophiles since data shows that many online offenders deviate from this stereotype. Holding on to such stereotypes will manifest itself in poor legal responses that disregard offender typologies and offender–victim dynamics. Such responses, as previously criticized, can be a great deprivation of liberty as well as an ineffective measure to protect minors from high-risk offenders. Narrowly tailored legal responses that fit specific offenders would be required for enhanced deterrence and rehabilitation and, ultimately, for better protection of minors from online sexual solicitation.

As online sexual exploitation is a result of dynamic interactions between offenders and victims, many minors do not report their experiences to the

authorities and even profess love toward their offenders. Perhaps the most vital and urgent matter is to raise the awareness of minors and parents regarding such perils. Thus, preventive measures must be implemented both at home and at school. Preventive measures are especially important because upcoming technological developments may present new threats. Establishing and enforcing new laws may become necessary, but, in the long run, preparing adolescent users of the Internet with awareness and responsibilities will certainly act as the most fundamental protective barrier against harm.

Reforming Social Networking Sites Bans

Social Networking Sites are appealing to both adolescents and predators for different reasons. While minors perceive Social Networking Sites as a digital playground that allows them to maintain and form new relationships, Social Networking Sites may be perceived as a perfect hunting ground for motivated offenders. Hence denying high-risk offenders from accessing this potential weapon seems to be an obvious measure. However, not all online offenders deliberately seek sexual encounters with minors as established in previous research. Also, 47 % of reported online sexual solicitation cases involved offenders younger than age of 18. These results pose an important question of whether the ban on Social Networking Sites should be implemented to *all* apprehended online offenders, including minors.

A firm legal response toward adult online offenders must be established by using offender typologies such as Tener and colleagues' four categories of online offenders. As an example, the "sex-focused type," "expert type," and "cynical type" offenders undoubtedly must be banned from accessing Social Networking Sites as "expert type" and "cynical type" offenders deliberately seek sexual encounters with minors. The "expert type" and "cynical type" offenders utilize Social Networking Sites to sample and attract potential victims while taking advantage of adolescents' need to form relationships. "Sex-focused type" offenders too must be banned since they would willingly have sexual encounters regardless of the other person's age. Since many adolescents on Social Networking Sites are at a stage of heightened sexual interest with risk-taking tendencies, the "sex-focused type" offenders pose a great threat to adolescent users. In sum, motivated offenders who used Social Networking Sites as tools to have sexual encounters with minors must be denied access. It is, however, debatable whether the ban should be imposed on all "affection-focused type" offenders.

Tener and colleagues' typology also reveals offender types that do not warrant Social Network Site restrictions. For example, offenders categorized in the "affection-focused type" use Social Networking Sites as a medium to form new romantic relationships, which is perfectly legal. In many cases, the "affection-focused type" offenders form bonds with minors without realizing the other person's age, as minors sometimes deceive others about their age. In such cases, it is questionable whether offenders in this category are pedophiles who are, by

definition, sexually attracted to prepubescent children (Wolak et al. 2008) and it is questionable whether the ban should be imposed to them as well. As Social Networking Sites are swiftly growing as a powerful medium of information and communication, the ban on Social Networking Sites to all “affection-focused type” offenders may not be necessary, perhaps may even be a deprivation of liberty. Obviously, if the offender categorized in the “affection-focused type” continued the relationship after realizing that they were interacting with a minor, the ban should be imposed. Thoroughly investigating each case in terms of motivation, process, and outcome of the offense would be required to confidently implement legal responses that deter high-risk offenders and provide proper therapeutic measures. Such measures are important for justice to be properly individualized, which is a foundation of justice.

Another important matter that must be addressed regards adolescent offenders who used Social Networking Sites for sexual encounters. As almost half of reported online sexual solicitation involves offenders younger than age of 18, some may argue that motivated offenders, regardless of age, must be banned from accessing Social Networking Sites while others may argue that adolescent offenders should be given leniency and avoid labeling them as sex offenders. Since increased interest in sexuality, the need to build relationships, and risk-taking behaviors are natural and expected aspects of adolescent development, it is somewhat predictable that many adolescents would be actively using Social Networking Sites for sexual encounters. Thus, society must abandon the assumption that all minors are innocent and harmless.

Sexual exploitation in Social Networking Sites is an example of a new challenge provided by the digital revolution which the society, parents, and legal system have not yet been prepared to respond appropriately. The need to implement mandatory education programs incorporating the features of adolescence and technology use cannot be stressed enough. Education programs aimed at raising the awareness of potential perils and guiding appropriate use of technology among adolescents are undeniably vital prerequisites in the digital era. Such preventive measures would ensure safe use of Social Networking Sites among adolescents and thus protect them from being victimized and also prevent them from becoming an offender as well.

Implementation of Preventive Measures

Movement toward protecting minors from unwanted online sexual exploitation should not be solely focused on banning high-risk sex offenders from using Social Networking Sites since the offense involves a dynamic relationship between offenders and victims. Preventive measures are crucial steps, perhaps even more important than the ban itself. The mandatory education program focusing on the features of the adolescence in relationship with their technology use can protect minors from becoming a potential victim as well as a potential offender.

Attempts to protect minors from online sexual solicitation should start at home. Both adolescents and their parents must be aware that motivated offenders give false promises of trust and intimacy to attract minors for sexual encounters. It is crucially important for parents to be involved in adolescents' Social Networking Sites use as minors who are aware that they are being monitored engage less in sexual conversations with strangers online (De Graaf and Vanwesenbeeck 2006; Soo and Bodanovskaya 2012). Parental engagement in adolescents' lives would counter the risk-taking tendencies of adolescents and, furthermore, guide their sexual curiosity in healthier directions (Berson et al. 2002). Preventive measures at home would thus prevent adolescents from becoming potential victims and/or offenders. Scholars previously recommended installing computers in the living room so that parents could have greater control over adolescents' use of Social Networking Sites (Saleh et al. 2014). This, however, is no longer an effective solution as other devices such as phones, tablets, and gaming consoles allow access to Social Networking Sites. Forcibly removing the computer from adolescents' room can further complicate the matter especially for those who are already experiencing poor relationship with their parents as poor parental monitoring and relationships with parents is associated with increased likelihood of online victimization (Ybarra et al. 2007). More technological development will enable minors to access the Internet privately and freely, thus healthy parental involvement becomes increasingly important.

Preventive measures at home may be insufficient to fully protect minors due to the growing gap of technological proficiency between parents and adolescents. Thus, mandatory education programs must be introduced at school. Such programs would be a good supplement to the existing sex education since Social Networking Sites can be closely related with sexual activities. One of the most essential recommendations of such programs would be to advise minors not to post personal information on Social Networking Sites for everyone to see. This can drastically deter online offenders seeking minors living close by. Borrowing from anti-cyberbullying policy (Hinduja and Patchin 2007), education programs on online sexual solicitation should further educate teachers and students regarding specific definitions of online sexual solicitation, legal and social consequences, and procedures for reporting. In addition to formal education program, educational brochures should be distributed to students and parents so that parents may learn to react accordingly (Diamanduros et al. 2008). Internet safety programs can be effective in raising the awareness and knowledge of dangers of the Internet (Chibnall et al. 2006). The National Computer Security Alliance survey of 2010 concluded that youth are not receiving adequate instruction to use digital technology; this leaves them unable to navigate cyberspace in a safe, secure, and responsible manner (Kraft and Wang 2009; National Computer Security Alliance 2010). Surely, there is a great need for implementation of education programs at school environments. In the long run, education may be more effective than regulation aimed toward restricting uses (Szoka and Thierer 2009). As online sexual solicitation often involves dynamic interactions between offenders and victims, educating adolescents about proper responses to a wide variety of situations is

necessary to prepare them for unanticipated perils that may come with further technological developments.

The increased risks associated with Social Networking Sites are a byproduct of digital revolution that demands urgent interest from parents, policy makers, legal scholars, and minors themselves. Parents and policy makers must acknowledge that minors in the modern society have greater autonomy than ever before. Banning high-risk sex offenders from accessing Social Networking Sites may merely be a provisional measure of protecting adolescent Internet users. The most important necessity is to educate minors to become responsible users of technology.

Conclusion

The increased privacy and autonomy enjoyed by adolescents of the digital era begs for immediate attention. As adolescence is a period described as sexually curious, risk-taking, and relationship-seeking, the Social Networking Sites are obviously appealing playgrounds where they can freely seek intimate relationships. Unfortunately, the contents, structure, and the users of Social Networking Sites are often unregulated. This is an indication of how society has not yet fully coped with the digital revolution. The defining features of adolescence have a dangerous synergy when motivated offenders take advantage of the functions provided by Social Networking Sites. Without proper awareness and responsibilities, adolescents not only can be exploited by motivated offenders but also can become online offenders themselves. In that sense, preventive measures aimed to increase the awareness and responsibilities related with Social Networking Sites use needs to be properly addressed both at home and at school. The digital revolution has tremendously influenced peoples' lifestyles and it will continue to do so. It is time to acknowledge that parents' alleged complete control over adolescents is waning. Trying to restrict online freedom may have backfiring effects as adolescents' autonomy and privacy will be strengthened along with more technological developments. It may be best to acknowledge their new freedom and focus on raising their responsibilities. In other words, appropriate education should be prioritized over regulation.

Deterring high-risk offenders from Social Networking Sites may protect vulnerable adolescents as Social Networking Sites provide motivated offenders with sufficient information about potential victims as well as opportunities to directly communicate with them. This danger is likely to be graver in countries with high population density and developed transportation systems where offenders can easily schedule face to face meetings with their victims. Thus, deterring high-risk offenders from accessing Social Networking Sites remains a necessary measure. However, bans themselves are only provisional barriers as motivated offenders can seek other venues such as online forums and online games to have access to their victims. In that sense, society should not rely solely on banning access. It is also important to note that not all online offenders are pedophiles, and regrettably, not all

adolescents are innocent. The commonly held perception that all sex offenders are older male pedophiles needs to be confronted as holding on to such stereotypes may prevent proper protection of adolescents from other potential offenders, especially their peers. Broader society and the legal system need to grasp a flexible view of online offenders and implement legal responses accordingly. Thus, accurate categorization of offenders will become increasingly necessary.

The digital revolution has brought unanticipated perils that need to be properly addressed. This is especially true given that technology is heavily embedded in the lives of most adolescents. Future research must focus on the traits of adolescence in relationship with technology use. More empirical evidence will aid in raising the public awareness and also help implement better legal responses. The type and strength of the legal response would depend on the culture, norms, and the situations of various countries, thus the standard of balance between the protection of adolescents and protection of individual liberty will differ. Nonetheless, appropriate legal responses that effectively protect vulnerable adolescents and accurately apprehend offenders would derive from better understanding of offender–victim dynamics. But more importantly, adolescents must be properly educated regarding their use of technology. Mandatory education programs at school will become a necessity of the digital era as new technology will continue to influence peoples’ lives, for better or for worse. It is very possible that new technological developments will bring more unanticipated problems, much like the rise of Social Networking Sites did. Thus, the most important step in protecting adolescents of the digital era is to raise the awareness and responsibilities of adolescents so that they may be prepared for a upcoming perils associated with new technological developments.

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