

describing sexual behavior in the era of the internet: a typology for empirical research

James F. Quinn

*University of North Texas, Denton,
Texas, USA*

Craig J. Forsyth

*University of Louisiana, Lafayette,
Louisiana, USA*

Gagnon and Simon's (1967) groundbreaking work on sexual deviance divided behaviors into normal, pathological, and sociological categories. We reconstruct this typology as a pair of two cross cutting continuums describing the normative status and social organization of behaviors in order to keep pace with changing sexual mores and technology while bolstering its empirical rigor. The first extends from normal activities to those deemed pathological by current mores, while the second focuses on describing a continuum from isolated to communal activities. These continua may be used either to reduce descriptions of behaviors to a four-part typology or to apply them as semantic differentials to allow more precise measurement of the behaviors' social organization and normative status. This scheme is especially well-suited for describing shifts in the perception and organization of behaviors brought about by adaptations of new technologies such as the Internet.

Received 29 April 2004; accepted 27 August 2004.

Address correspondence to James F. Quinn, Substance Abuse & Addictions, P.O. Box 311456, University of North Texas, Denton, Texas 76203. E-mail: jquinn@unt.edu

The impact of the Internet on sexual behavior, and especially on sexual deviance, is the focus of much popular concern and has been studied from a public health perspective, which links it to the spread of disease (McFarlane, Bull, and Reitmeijer 2002). The statistics on Internet pornography illustrate the magnitude of the industry and its potential for societal impacts. It is estimated to be a \$3 billion annual industry; nearly 15% of all websites (4.5 million) have pornographic content; over 25% of total search engines requests are for pornography; 35% of downloads (over 1.5 billion per month) are pornographic; and over 75 million people annually visit porn web sites. The largest consumer of internet pornography is the 12–17 age group and 90% of 8–16 year olds have viewed pornography online, mostly when they do their homework. Researchers have established some baseline demographics of the consumers of Internet erotica. Men constitute 86% of the cyber-pornography users but women are a significant presence in erotically-oriented chatrooms that sometimes lead to face-to-face meetings or relationships. More than half of the pornography users are married or in a committed relationship (Cooper, Scherer, Boies, and Gordon 1999). However, no theoretical model is available to guide empirical research on the effects of this technology on behavior and its social organization. Given the size of the cybersex industry, this sort of theoretically guided research is sorely needed in social science.

Many researchers (Fisher and Barak 2001; Esposito 1998; Kopelev 1999; Kubasek 1996; Spranza and Spranza 2000) contend that the Internet has caused a surge in the production and distribution of child pornography and is dangerous to children. Over 100,000 pornographic websites are thought to contain at least some images that are illegal—primarily child pornography. These legal concerns are evident in the FBI statistics. In 1998 there were over 700 cases involving online pedophilia, 25% of which were online predators attempting to get children under 18 to meet them. In 2002 the number of cases had increased to over 3,000 (National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families 2004). More central to this paper, the Internet has created an unprecedented opportunity for individuals to have anonymous and unfettered access to a virtually unlimited range of sexually explicit texts, still and moving images,

and audio material, much of it at nominal cost or free. The Internet increasingly provides a mechanism for linking sexual predators with one another and with potential victims. As with other forms of high-technology crime, law enforcement struggles to keep abreast of criminal innovations (Wolak, Mitchell, and Finkelhor 2003). As topics such as bestiality, cross-dressing/transgenderism, bondage-domination-sado-masochism BDSM, and incest are more frequently encountered, the impact of the Internet sex industry on the distribution and organization of deviant sexuality, and indeed upon the very definition of that term, requires examination.

Social science and law enforcement have examined these issues with regard to the exploitation of children. Durkin (1997) discusses four ways in which pedophiles misuse the Internet; to traffic child pornography, to locate victims/children, to engage in inappropriate sexual communication with children, and to communicate with other pedophiles. Jenkins (2002) also describes child pornography on the net as a growing threat, especially through its use of newsgroups and bulletin boards that directly link pedophiles with one another. He provides great technical detail about how the purveyors of child porn use the Constitutional guarantees of free speech to protect some written materials and create short-lived websites to distribute illegal images that make it almost impossible to discern the progenitors. This means that a socially proscribed and severely sanctioned behavior that was once relegated largely to secrecy among isolated individuals is now at the center of a cyber-community in which all manner of support is readily available. The ramifications of this shift have yet to be explored by social science. Nor is there a theoretical scheme available to describe this shift in the nature of deviant sexuality or to guide empirical research on the topic. We offer a revised version of a well-known, theoretically-based typology of sexual deviants that will advance these goals.

Gagnon and Simon (1967) defined three types of sexual deviance; normal, pathological, and sociological, which has proved useful in a series of research efforts (Forsyth 1996; Gauthier and Forsyth 1999; Hensley and Tewksbury 2003; Little 1983, 1995). Normal deviance is sexual behavior that is widespread and occurs with low visibility, partly

because of its sexual nature and partly as a result of the fact that it is felt to "offend the normative standards of most people in a community" (Little 1983:28). While public adherence to these standards may be widespread, so also is their private violation (Goffman 1963). Likewise, if laws against these acts exist they are rarely enforced and often considered largely anachronistic. Sodomy and fornication statutes are largely of this type. Statistically speaking, these acts are thought to be commonplace and some researchers refer to them as secret deviance (Becker 1963). Oral sex, masturbation, and premarital sex are typical of this variety of sexual deviance. Normal deviance can lead to the creation of specific structural forms related to either the act or its consequences. Soft core or mainstream types of pornography are of this type since they are marketed through the same "normal" channels as cigarettes and milk. Many forms of "normal" deviance occur in social relationships, such as romantic or conjugal dyads, where no special efforts or organizations are needed to continue their practice (Gagnon and Simon 1967). Although many individuals would publicly define these acts as improper, bad, or deviant, most adults have participated in these sorts of acts at least once and many practice them routinely (Benokraitis 1996). Indeed, some theorists challenge the very definition of these acts as deviant (Becker 1963; Sagarin 1975).

The second type, pathological sexual deviance, describes behaviors that are severely proscribed by rigorously enforced law and mores. These acts are considered harmful by most members of the community or culture and few people actually engage in them. Examples include sexual contact with children, incest, bestiality, exhibitionism, overt voyeurism, and rape (Forsyth 1996; Gagnon and Simon 1967; Little 1983, 1995). Historically, the perpetrators of these "pathological acts" have no special social structures; they rarely involve more than one offender and are seen as driven by his (or her) idiosyncratic psychological desires, drives, and conditioning. Their etiological explanations almost universally rely on psychological or social-psychological perspectives rather than sociological ones (Gagnon and Simon 1967). Much of the research on voyeurism, for example, uses a criminal/clinical psychological framework that treats it as either a sexual perversion (paraphilia) and/or

a symptom of a greater personality disorder such as psychopathy (Alamensi 1960; Bergler 1957; Coleman 1956; East 1946; Karpman 1960; Oberndorf 1939; Yalom 1960).

The sociological category of sexual deviance consists of behaviors that must spawn unique forms of social structure in order to survive and spread. The creation of special structures is necessary to recruit and/or gather participants, train them, and provide them with social support. Examples are pornography, bug chasing, some forms of voyeurism, homosexuality, prostitution, swinging, and naturism/nudism. Hard core movies and magazines, which require special distribution networks culminating in "adult" book stores are of this type. Sociological forms of sexual deviance are partially explained by the psychological history of the participants, but an elaborate set of ongoing relationships must be created and maintained to assure the capability to continue the behavior. The resultant social relationships follow the parameters of social learning theory by including not only the techniques and motives of the act(s) but also the associated attitudes and rationalizations that allow the perpetrators to reconcile them with their otherwise relatively conventional self-images (Little 1983). While some individuals develop a homosexual commitment and engage in homosexual behavior without having had contact with other homosexuals, most homosexuals engage in, and in many ways, depend upon, contact with other homosexuals (Gagnon and Simon 1967; Little 1983, 1995). While homosexuality itself has been mainstreamed in much of Euro-American culture, subsets of homosexuals, such as leather fetishists, the denizens of bath houses and tea rooms, and bug chasers constitute obvious examples of sociological deviance with their unique meeting places, publications, organizations, and slang. The same is true of many forms of prostitution (Little 1983). Gagnon and Simon conceive these forms of sexual behavior to be quite separate from the pathological because of their quasi-legal status, etiological explanation, and requisite social structure. They are distinguished from normal deviance by their segregation from the mainstream and unique social structures. For example, homosexual and prostitution subcultures are readily distinguished from the mainstream population's sexually-oriented social structures just as the soft-core pornography found in many convenience

stores is distinct from the varieties relegated to pornography outlets.

The permeability of the boundary between this category and the first two poses a problem for researchers seeking a mutually exclusive typology with which to describe behaviors. Forsyth (1996), for example, found that some forms of voyeurism are sociologically supported by a network of mutual voyeurs that continued to recruit new members. The socially approved need for lower-risk sex in the post-HIV era helps to legitimize this sexual outlet. Further, the behavior is widespread and in many ways comparable to pornography, thus straddling the boundary of normal deviance. Indeed, some researchers have used the term normal voyeurism, to describe the activities of sheet-lifting orderlies and peeping high-rise construction workers (Bryant 1982; Feigelman 1974). The fact that these are collaborative activities suggests that certain kinds of voyeurism are, to some degree, sociological and may, in the latter example, even be somewhat normalized (Feigelman 1974). While changes in sexual mores and the social organization of particular activities are to be expected under any circumstances, the advent of new telecommunications technologies has revolutionized sexual expression. The Internet's impact on sexual expression is vast but the new social structures it offers have not been integrated into research on either cybercommunities or human sexuality.

ANOTHER CATEGORY OF SEXUAL DEVIANCE

Social science has long recognized that technology has a powerful influence on human behavior (Bryant 1984; Durkin and Bryant 1995; Forsyth 1986; Melbin 1978; Ogburn 1932 [1964]). Social responses to technology often take the form of normative and patterned behavioral configurations termed "technicways" (Bryant 1984; Odum 1937). These technicways generally assume practical extensions, but they also may come to take on deviant functions. New variations in patterns of sexual deviance, or deviance in general, do not emerge from social lacunas nor are they merely the inventions of prolific imaginations. New forms of sexual activity often arise from changes in technology and lifestyles. Similarly, new technicways may radically change the nature

of recognized sexual behaviors, much as did the birth control pill in the 1960s.

Technicways are often employed to extend or elaborate opportunities for sexual gratification. The telephone and then the beeper turned the street walking prostitute into a call girl. VCRs expanded the "X-Rated movie" market. Telephones have become the modem for the huge phone sex industry. CB radios are the advantageous method for prostitutes, who cater to truckers, to contact clients (Luxenburg and Klien 1984). The Polaroid camera and more recently the camcorder have expanded sexual frontiers. Computers have extended the reach beyond these boundaries as bulletin boards catering to the most bizarre and sometimes criminal sexual interests have emerged (Durkin and Bryant 1995, 1999; Jenkins 2002; Lamb 1998). The telescope has taken the voyeur from the bush to the board room, while DVDs/VCRs provide XXX movies and ostensibly safer sex (Forsyth 1996). The latest fad in Europe is tooting, in which people use cell phones to locate others nearby on trains and busses for quick, impersonal sex in restrooms (Terdiman 2004). Telephones with video capacities, and a huge variety of other "spyware" also have added to the repertoire of the voyeur as well as to Internet postings and intrusions on personal space and privacy. In short, technology has transformed vicarious sex into an increasingly viable and attractive substitute for interpersonal forms of sexual fulfillment. Likewise, it has expanded the range and accessibility of both normal and pathological interpersonal sexual behaviors in ways that social science has barely begun to explore. In particular, the Internet is a technicway that represents an important means of sexual expression for an increasing number of individuals that is not immediately accessible to societal constraints.

Emerging technologies effect virtually all forms of human behavior and deviant sexuality is no exception. The personal computer and the Internet provide a mechanism for linking individuals with like-minded partners for sexual experimentation, conversation, and social learning (Durkin and Bryant 1995). This appears to be the case with the particular forms of unsafe sex known as barebacking and bug chasing (Gauthier and Forsyth 1999). Many forms of deviance that were previously seen as unlikely to spread (Douglas, Rasmussen, and Flanagan 1977), now have technology-based

structures to maintain or popularize them (Forsyth and Fournet 1987; Forsyth and Benoit 1989; Gauthier and Forsyth 1999; Toolan, Elkins, and D'Encarnacao 1974; Weinberg 1981a, 1981b). Bergling, for example notes the role of chat rooms in generating interest in "openly forgoing the use of generally accepted safe-sex practices when engaging in intimate contact with . . . other(s)" who are likely to be HIV positive (Bergling 1997:71).

Cyber spaces dedicated to bondage-domination, pedophilia, incest, bestiality, and other pathological practices are easily found, especially by those seeking Internet pornography. Indeed, a recent series of arrests resulted when a woman seeking a recipe typed "sweet spicy hot" into a search engine and was directed to a pedophile site (Tharp 2004). Most sites catering to clearly illegal content, such as child sex, are carefully camouflaged, however, and require knowledge, effort, and financial cost to access (Jenkins 2002; Johnson 2004). Nonetheless, the Internet makes possible the formation and continuity of communities that found it difficult to survive as viable entities in the pre-Internet era. For example, the existence of the North American Man-Boy Love Association has been documented but its impact has been negligible except among the most committed of pedophiles (deYoung 1989). Pathological actors usually discovered the behavior long before they engaged in social contacts with representative organizations in the pre-Internet era. However, the opposite may now be true; the Internet may whet the appetite of the curious and introduce them to sophisticated versions of its rationalization systems before actually participating in the act. Alternatively, it may serve as a surrogate for the act and thus act as a safety valve for potentially pathological actors.

In either case, the Internet is an especially effective environment for spawning and supporting communities formed around behaviors that are on the extremity of deviance. The small numbers of individuals committed to these activities deter the development of a subculture being initiated in physical space. However, the volume of Internet pornography leads "normal" deviants to quick satiation and perhaps even overload. Simultaneously, new extremes are intermingled with more standard forms of erotica to tantalize the curious and the bored. The Internet creates a locus that is

analogous to what Goffman (1963: 81) calls "back places," where people of similar preferences feel no need to conceal their pathology and can openly seek out one another for support and advice. Simultaneously, the felt-anonymity of cyberspace (Akdeniz 2002; Gyorgy 2002) eases concern with public stigmatization and legal sanctions.

Much hi-tech sex is explicitly designed to substitute for actual contact in order to guarantee physical safety while seeking gratification. Increased concern with sexually transmitted diseases and an increased range of sexual content has led some to experiment with new sexual activities, such as voyeurism by mutual consent or telephonic and chat room sex. The exploration of how these technicways affect physical and interpersonal activities remains unclear as does the role of pornography in generating predatory sex crimes. The 1970 Presidential Commission on Pornography suggested that sexual media was a substitute for physical contact and thus unrelated to sex crimes or a means of reducing them. The 1986 Attorney General's report on the topic concluded that pornography inspired sexual violence. In all probability each of these explanations of the relationship between the use of pornography and sexual behavior have some utility in explaining the actions of subgroups. The debate about the pornography-behavior link is beyond the scope of this paper, but the amended typology we offer could advise research designed to clarify the issues raised by that controversy and related ones pertinent to Internet-based sexual expression.

Currently, for example, chat rooms that claim to offer surrogate "fantasy" play that substitutes for "real" acts of pedophilia can be found on the Internet along with fiction of a similar nature. The veracity of these claims has not been empirically examined but time spent in online "fantasy" sites certainly distracts from actual attempts at predatory behavior. However, the social learning model suggests that individuals may not focus on more or less "latent" desires for proscribed behaviors until they interact with others who share similar interests. These interactions can provide the logistical, emotional and social support needed to cross the line from contemplation to action. Technology is increasingly facilitating a wide variety of interactions in which such individuals come to believe or recognize they are not

different from others. This raises the question of whether the exposure to such media content inspires new interests in proscribed, and even predatory, behavior or if it simply supports repressed intentions and brings them to the surface. The theoretical format on which to base empirical inquiries into these issues can be devised with a reconceptualization of Gagnon and Simon's (1967) typology.

We amend Gagnon and Simon's (1967) typology in order to: (1) update the typology to ensure its comprehensiveness, especially vis-a-vis the structural and normative changes wrought by technology; (2) assure the mutual exclusivity of the categories by reducing their permeability; and (3) allow its use in both quantitative and qualitative research efforts. In doing so we hope to render the typology more useful to empirical studies of modern sexual behavior. The new techniques described above have altered the applicability of Gagnon and Simon's categories. For example, the behaviors of some sexual predators and other pathological actors that were clearly pathological now have sympathetic group structures that offer all manner of advice and assistance. This makes them both pathological and sociological forms and thus undermines the mutual exclusivity of the typology. Hence Gagnon and Simon's sociological category, which traditionally suggested relatively harmless forms of sexual deviance now is definitely inclusive of clearly pathological participants.

A NEW TYPOLOGY OF SEXUAL DEVIANCE

We conceive the third, "sociological," category of deviance in Gagnon and Simon's (1967) original scheme (Forsyth 1996; Gauthier and Forsyth 1999; Little 1983; 1995) as a cross-cutting variable that dichotomizes the original two rather than a third grouping (see Table 1). We denote this as "communal" rather than "sociological" to clarify its independence from the original scheme and more precisely describe the dimension of behavior. This separates the nature of the act from the manner in which it is socially manifested. Society may define behaviors as normative or pathological, but this is independent of whether they are the product of isolated individuals or communities. By juxtaposing social organization with social definition these two continua form

TABLE 1 Types of Sexual Behaviors

	Normal deviance	Pathological deviance
Isolated actors (individual or dyadic)	Anal & oral sex	Pedophilia, bestiality
Communally supported actors	Swingers, social voyeurism	Tea rooms, BDSM, sexual asphyxiates

a typology that is both exhaustive and mutually exclusive. Each continuum can be used as a dichotomy for simple classificatory methodologies or as a semantic differential if inferential data analyses are sought. Both approaches also allow descriptions of changes in the status and organization of the behavior over time. Such a typology allows the categorization of acts or actors in a manner thwarted by the original, tripartite scheme. Just as the distinction between “normal” and pathological is actually a continuum based on subjective, culture-bound judgements, the differentiation of social organization into communal and isolated is one of degree based on macro-social judgements bound to time and place. We define isolated actors as those operating by themselves or as part of a stable dyad. Communally supported actors, by contrast, are those who benefit from membership, and receive practical advice and emotional support from a group of similarly inclined people. Pathological deviance consists of acts that are actively prosecuted in most American jurisdictions or would result in social ostracism if participation became public knowledge. These are acts that would clearly result in palpable sanctions if discovered. “Normal” acts are those that are generally tolerated by both law enforcement and the public.

Respondents could, for example, be asked to rate oral, anal, and other forms of dyadic sex on a semantic differential ranging from normal to pathological or to simply classify them in one or the other category. Anal sex would presumably score more pathologically or “deviant” than oral but the extent to which this varied across subgroups would indubitably be interesting. Similarly, ratings of the relative pathology of bestiality and BDSM could be expected to vary with exposure to Internet pornography. The degree to which

social support for the behavior (or desire) was perceived to be present by those who admitted fantasies of pedophilia or BDSM activities could similarly be measured for analysis with inferential methods. Alternatively, content analyses of the availability of rationales for various behaviors, and other justificatory materials could be counted and used in lieu of semantic differential rating. Qualitative efforts could utilize the four way typology to describe transitions from one cell to another and emergent behaviors such as barebacking and tothing.

The Internet's expansion of the pathological-communal cell at the expense of the isolated-pathological one (Leiblum 1997) opens a variety of questions for empirical research, a few of which can be sketched here in general terms for heuristic value. Prior to the development of the Internet, only a few forms of pathological deviance had formed communities. Many of these existed as subcommunities of "normal" deviant groups (e.g., leather fetishists within gay communities). They required communal support for logistical purposes, often because promiscuity was implicit in the behavior and a large social network was required to assure a reliable supply of partners. These practices tended to be forms of pathological deviance at low risk of criminal prosecution which made supra-personal communication feasible in the pre-Internet era. Some of these activities relied on printed media to create communities because they required partners and/or an audience (i.e., BDSM, Swingers). Tea rooms' use of graffiti to denote semi-permanent meeting and activity locations also would fall into this category. Despite the risk of arrest and the impersonal nature of the behavior, tea roomers require multiple partners and so qualify as a communal pathological form of behavior. Actors on the more pathological extreme of the spectrum (e.g., bestiality, pedophilia) defined by these categories tended to remain isolated because of the risk to liberty and reputation posed by use of printed material or permanent meeting places.

The Internet offers at least a felt-anonymity, and perhaps a real one (Akdeniz 2002; Gyorgy 2002), which lends itself to fantasy and experimentation with forbidden behaviors. It also is an effective means for communicating with others who share similar interests regardless of how bizarre or

rare those interests may be (Bell and Lyall 2000). These developments among deviants parallel Internet use by others with unusual interests, (e.g., antique Philippine numismatists) or issues (parents of murdered teens) who could not afford to meet regularly in real time/space. The question for researchers of sexual deviance revolves around the impact of this change on the actual behavior of the pathological (and especially the criminal) deviant. The typology offered here allows retrospective classification of all variety of forms of sexual deviance documented in the pre-Internet era and encourages their comparison with their current manifestation. It also facilitates comparisons of the nature of sexual interactions in cyberspace with those having similar content or focus that occur in real time/space. Thus, the impact of Internet communities on actual behavior can be described and discussed in empirical terms. This is a necessary and much needed supplement to the theoretical and philosophical treatises that currently dominate social science literature on the Internet's ramifications for social life (e.g., Northcott 1999; Silverman 2001).

CONCLUSION

Grace (2000) describes the popularity of porn on the Internet as having to do, in part, do to the fact that the bizarre or obscene comes looking for you. As such, the smut of the Internet is not confined to a red light district, and its wide dissemination has led to broad cultural acceptance of erotic materials. This is an area of study that unites communications researchers with those focused on sexuality. Stern and Handel (2001) have addressed the cyclical nature of this form of sexual media. Although the Internet is a relatively new technology, many of these concerns regarding its power to alter mores and behaviors are not. Sexual print media evoked these same sorts of concerns and subsequent censorship in the past. Concerns over the deviant use of technology has surfaced with each new advancement including the telephone (phone sex); and the violence and sexuality of television, radio, and movies. Thus, current trends regarding sexuality on the Internet may be seen as part of a larger pattern by which new technologies emerge and develop.

Technology changes social interaction—sexuality included; as such, technology continues to make the study of deviance a lively topic as new forms are constantly emerging. By use of a typology that focuses on the behavior's social status (normal or pathological) and its social organization (isolated or communal) researchers should be better equipped to describe both historical and current changes in sexual behavior wrought by technology.

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