Chapter 10

When thinking leads to doing: the relationship between fantasy and reality in sexual offending

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Immersing ourselves in our 'own world' provides an opportunity to escape from the restraint, confines and persecution of reality – albeit the persecution we impose upon ourselves. This highly personal place enables us to dwell on thoughts, aspirations and dreams, and unless such thoughts are verbalised or acted upon they remain purely in a psychological space. Naturally, some thoughts are shared. Individuals, for example, might think about winning the National Lottery and will dream (both personally and verbally) about how a substantial win would change their life and how they would spend their new found wealth. Such thoughts, however, are of limited interest, and the very fact they are verbalised represents their social acceptability. But what about those thoughts that represent our deepest, darkest and most erotic desires – sexual fantasies? Such thoughts are unlikely to be verbalised and when they are, they are likely to be shared between consenting adults and only ever acted out in part. The likelihood of two individuals sharing exactly the same sexual fantasy is limited because fantasies are a complex interaction of experience, thought and arousal highly personal to the individual.

Sexual fantasies are not temporally constrained. Their fluidity enables them to be recalled, rehearsed, manipulated and abandoned as the individual chooses. Neither are they constrained by ethnicity, age, gender, duration or frequency. Sexual fantasies may form nothing more than a fleeting thought, or may represent a longer period of reflection where certain acts are mentally replayed, in part to increase an individual's level of physiological arousal. Doskoch (1995), for example, suggests that on average men fantasise about

sex 7.2 times per day and women 4.5 times per day. Sexual fantasies, by their very nature therefore, truly represent 'our own world' and for the majority of individuals this is where they reside. For some individuals, however, the satisfaction of mental recall is insufficient and sexual fantasies are projected into the physical or 'real' world. As fantasies enter the realm of physicality they cross the barrier between 'thinking' and 'doing', and for some this partnership is so intrinsically linked that thinking almost always leads to doing. For consenting adults, such behaviour, although sometimes on the boundaries of acceptability and extremity, is mutually enjoyed without the fear of reprimand and serves to satisfy the fantasies of those individuals. Such fantasies are likely to be rehearsed both during the act and in the future, but they are not static and will also be updated as a result of the fantasy being acted upon in the physical environment. For those individuals who are unable to consent, who are physically and psychologically vulnerable, forcing 'our own world' upon them is permanently damaging and illegal. Exploring the link between 'thinking' and 'doing' is a critically important step in understanding the transition of sexual fantasies into reality, and in understanding why for some individuals such a transition involves offending yet for others it does not.

Sexual fantasy

Sexual fantasies perhaps best represent our most uninhibited thoughts, aspirations and desires where criticism, taboo and embarrassment are invited only by the self, and not imposed by others. Such secret 'erotic' desires serve to sexually arouse and excite, but where sharing and acting upon those desires would be deemed inappropriate. There are of course situations where sexual fantasies are shared and physically acted out, either through self-masturbation or between consenting, like-minded adults in relatively safe and confined environments. The infiltration of reality can occur in both a non-invasive and ubiquitous manner through adult-themed retail environments such as Ann Summers and Sh! Such commercially popular environments reflect our desires to share (albeit in a limited form), discuss and reflect upon our sexual fantasies in a 'normalised' environment. Ann Summers for example tussles for dominance alongside more traditional retail outlets in shopping centres and high-streets throughout the United Kingdom, providing a 'safe' retail environment where both men and women are welcomed and shop alongside each other for often sexually explicit

and fantasy-provoking material. On the whole, such normalisation is acceptable, and the image of the 'traditional sex shop' has drastically changed from an environment predominately aimed and frequented by men complete with concealed windows and warnings of explicit material on display, to one of smart facades with eye-catching windows seeking to invite as many couples and single women through their doors as men. This challenges the convention that such stores (and to some extent fantasies) are male domains (Malina and Schmidt 1997). This of course is notwithstanding the differences between 'traditional' and the new 'normalised' environments, where the former is more likely to sell sexually graphic pornographic material and the latter underwear and sex 'aids'. Both, however, seek to serve the same purpose – the reflection of fantasy into reality.

The transition between fantasy and reality can move beyond the accepting retail environments described previously to other arguably 'darker' and more seductive environments including swinging parties, sex clubs, dogging sites, saunas and holiday sex resorts. In such environments fantasies are projected into reality with gusto and expectation, but not always without fear of reprimand. Male adult members of a Manchester-based sadomasochistic club, for example, were arrested in September 1989 for violating the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, even though mutual genital manipulation acts (based on the member's sexual fantasies) were consensual (Thomas 2000; Green 2001). This draws into question the issue of social acceptability and level of normalisation we are prepared to grant sexual fantasies. On the one hand it is publicly acceptable to promote 'soft' fantasy on the high street, but on the other it is unacceptable when fantasies turn 'harder', even if they remain largely 'hidden' from the voyeuristic eyes of society. Fantasy and reality are so inextricably linked that without each other there would be no place for Ann Summers or sadomasochistic clubs to exist. Indeed, we suggest that fantasies are influencing and shaping our environment to such an extent that Ann Summers now reports in excess of 140 UK-based stores (Ann Summers 2008).

Fantasies, however, originate as part of our 'own world' and to some extent this is where they remain as internalised secret desires. The very phrase 'fantasy' suggests mental imagery coupled with sounds, expectations and physiological response that may last no longer than a fleeting thought of some sexual activity, or may take the form of a more elaborate story but both with the same aim of sexual arousal (Hicks and Leitenberg 2001). Therefore it is sensible to suggest that once a fantasy has occurred and therefore sexual arousal has taken

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place, the progression of the fantasy into some form of reality forms part of this sequential progression. Naturally, there are occasions and times where acting upon sexual fantasies would be deemed wholly inappropriate and, for the majority of individuals, sexual arousal is balanced and controlled by the norms, attitudes and values of social acceptability. The 'fantasy space', however, is an important part of our 'own world' as this space enables individuals to be relatively free to indulge their lusts and impulses in ways that might be unacceptable in reality (Wilson 1997). Fantasies, therefore, afford the individual with a 'space' where highly personal and sexually arousing thoughts can be reflected upon, updated and manipulated without the transition into the real world due to such societal constraints.

For the majority, it appears that sexual fantasies are relatively tame with many conventional fantasies focusing around present partners and bedroom scenes. For those that move beyond the confides of the bedroom, Doskoch (1995) suggests three 'primary' types of sexual fantasies: forbidden imagery, sexual irresistibility and dominance and submission fantasies. Forbidden imagery refers to those thoughts focusing upon images of unusual partners (possibly celebrities and unobtainable others, e.g. married friends) and positions. Sexual irresistibility is concerned with issues of seductiveness and multiple partners, while dominance and submission allows the individual to reflect upon rape and bondage-based fantasies. Within the realm of fantasy any of these types are both plausible and carry no penalty either psychologically or socially – they are simply fantasies: hypothetical constructs blending eroticism and knowledge of the real world (locations, people or situations) to create arousal. Even when elements of Doskoch's fantasy types transit into the real world they too carry no penalty (many individuals may experiment with light bondage and seductiveness), and some are even supported and promoted by physical environments such as sex clubs.

The link between fantasy and reality (albeit selected parts of a fantasy) is clear, although the link between simply 'thinking' and 'doing' is significantly more controversial, particularly when considering offending behaviour. Quayle and Taylor (2003) observe that, 'there appears to be little support for the allegation of a direct causal link between viewing pornography and subsequent offending behaviour'. Therefore, if an individual views pornography with a rape-based scenario, Quayle and Taylor (2003) suggest this is insufficient to suggest the individual will move on to commit a rape-based offence. However, what happens if the individual's fantasy is also taken into consideration? If the individual also holds a rape-based fantasy

(which is highly plausible following Doskoch's reasoning) which is strengthened, changed or viewed in a different way following viewing pornography, does this highly personal thought process supported by eroticism and arousal now lead to offending? There is a distinct difference between passively viewing imagery and imagery that actively results in the creation or support of a pre-existing fantasy, so to some extent 'thinking' can lead to 'doing' when such thinking is also supported by arousal – *fantasy*.

If we hold a fantasy about rape, however, are we likely to take it to the extreme of actual physical rape, or do we 'play out' this fantasy in a less extreme and more accepting form such as persuading our partner to play the role of the victim and to say no during intercourse – a form in itself legally and ethically problematic? The next question is what happens once an element of a fantasy has been 'played-out' (but not in its entire or original form)? Do we update the fantasy with what has happened in reality, and thus prevent a state of cognitive dissonance? Or do we seek to push the boundaries of the original fantasy, continuing to act out more and more, seeking to finally and fully fulfil the original fantasy?

Such questions, particularly the latter ones, are only of interest and therefore importance if thinking does lead to behaviour that is unwanted, non-consensual, damaging and ultimately illegal. Even in the case of rape-based fantasy, some may question both the level of acceptability (even within the remit that fantasies reside within highly personal spaces) and the notion of 'harm'. Is it psychologically harmful to erotically think about rape, particularly when such thoughts are coupled with a strong, reinforcing arousal response? Further, if fantasising about rape results in self-masturbation the transition from fantasy to reality has clearly occurred (complete with a physical and psychological response), then this may serve to strengthen and reinforce the fantasy to such an extent that the individual moves onto a new or stronger fantasy. If fantasising about members of an individual's own family, rape or other forms of sexual violence result in illegal and disturbing acts then the link between thinking and doing is a critical one. For example, *The Guardian* (2006) reported the trial of Graham Coutts, who was convicted of murder (and is currently awaiting a re-trial following a successful appeal in 2006 – see report in *The Guardian*, 20 July 2006), for fulfilling his fantasy of asphyxiation and hanging by strangling a teacher to death. Likewise, if an individual fantasies about performing sexual acts on a child and conducts such acts in the real world then the link between thinking and doing is one worthy of further exploration and challenge.

Spaces

Thus far two 'spaces' have been considered – psychological space (where fantasies are created, reflected upon, manipulated and abandoned), and physical space (where fantasies are either acted out or where socially acceptable places are chosen to explore such fantasies further). There is, however, a third space, a hybrid pseudo-real space where the boundaries between acceptability and convention are blurred to such an extent that disentangling them is almost an impossible task – the virtual space. The virtual space is where elements of fantasy are perfectly blended with reality to create images, sounds and video reflective of the other two spaces, and crucially feed into the psychological (or fantasy) space. It is a space where new ideas emerge and existing ones can be 'tried out' through sheer voyeurism: there is no requirement on the individual to fully engage within the space but the newly afforded ability to choose the level to which one immerses balances tentatively between thinking and doing.

Pornography is an exemplar of pseudo-reality and therefore of this third 'virtual space', where images of fantasy are coupled with reality but where acting out does not *physically* involve us as individuals, but instead invites us as voyeurs. Research supports the link between offenders viewing inappropriate images of children to generate and reinforce sexual fantasy which is later (physically) reinforced through masturbation (Wyre 1992).

While pornography has been widely available since the mid-1800s, originally touted as 'erotica', it is since the advent of the Internet into mainstream society during the technological explosion of the mid-1990s that pornography has become more widely and freely accessible. Both the variety and intensity of pornography has also increased ranging from soft pornographic imagery to hardcore anime images. It is worthy to note that anime, originating from Japan, takes the form of cartoon-based characters following the tradition of Manga and is truly fantasy-based in every sense. It is interesting, therefore, that those characters designed to reflect other elements of fantasy are now being utilised in a sexual way. King (1999) argues that more research into internet use and human sexuality is required as more people have access to types of materials that were previously unavailable, or available only at great personal risk. Pornographic images of children are an example where the Internet has transformed the access to images that were once difficult and risky to locate (for a general introduction to crime, deviance and the Internet, see Williams

2006). Even in its more advanced stages, the use of the Internet by sexual offenders has largely been unexplored (Taylor *et al.*, 2001), which is particularly surprising considering both the wide use of the Internet and the thousands of pornographic images of children available (Quayle and Taylor 2003). Furthermore, Middleton (2007) suggests that research data into the evaluation of assessment and treatment outcomes of problematic Internet use has trailed behind the rapid growth of inappropriate use in this area.

Silverman and Wilson (2002) reported that in 2005 the Obscene Publications Unit of Greater Manchester Police seized about a dozen images of child pornography during the whole year, but in 1999 the unit recovered 41,000 images and by 2001 so many images were being recovered that they stopped counting. The number of convictions for offences in relation to possession, creation and distribution of indecent images of children has increased by almost 500 per cent between 1999 and 2004 (Home Office 2006; Middleton 2007). The number of pornographic images and the number of individuals accessing them is likely to increase in an upward trend reflecting the increase in the number of households with Internet access. In 2002 the number of households in Great Britain with Internet access was approximately 45 per cent rising to 61 per cent (15 million households) in 2007 (National Statistics 2007).

The extent to which the virtual space can fuel fantasies and may play an important role in catalysing the relationship between thinking and doing is highlighted by studies suggesting that the Internet provides an attractive alternative to an unhappy or mundane life (Morahan-Martin and Schumacher 2000) and that prolonged Internet activity can be associated with mood changes (Kennedy-Souza 1998). This isn't to suggest, however, that only those individuals who are deemed to lead a mundane or unhappy life are prolific Internet users, nor that they access online pornography. However, it does suggest that some individuals may be more predisposed to internet use particularly when other environmental stimulation is lacking. Hills and Argyle (2003) further suggest that individuals frequently change their original intentions when accessing the Internet to involve themselves in something more interesting and gratifying – recall of sexual fantasies coupled with arousal is likely to be more interesting and gratifying in many cases than the original intentions of Internet use. Such studies clearly demonstrate the psychological allure of the Internet and how pornographic images (as exemplars of virtual spaces) – even those that are illegal – may be accessed to provide alleviation from the mundane.

The virtual space therefore provides a third tier between fantasy and reality. This pseudo-real space is a potent combination of pure fantasy and reality, where individuals are able to blend, update and further manipulate their original erotic thoughts and desires. Furthermore, it is a space catalysing thinking into doing just as high-street retail stores catalyse fantasy into reality. The virtual space provides individuals with the opportunity to view, experience and dwell upon images, sounds and videos of others partaking in their fantasy and, in turn, affords them with the opportunity to update their original fantasies, act them out or abandon them. With the exception of the ethical and manipulation issues associated with legal pornography, the extent to which such material is problematic is questionable, particularly with the origins of erotica dating back thousands of years. However, when material 'normalises' behaviour, particularly when that behaviour is deviant, non-consensual and illegal, a problem does exist. Virtual spaces promoting the use of sexual violence, rape, incest and abuse seek to titillate those with a pre-disposition for such scenarios, in doing so, however, they both demonstrate the acceptability of such behaviour (through the relative ease of access to both material and like-minded individuals), and provide an even greater opportunity for individuals to voyeur upon and experience such sexual behaviour. With increased normalisation and the 'barrier' of social acceptability (encompassing norms, attitudes and values) coming under threat, the fragile link between thinking and doing is further weakened. This third space, however, is under-researched and lacks understanding. Many individuals will hold fantasies relating to forbidden imagery, dominance and rape (Doskoch 1995), but never access online pornography. Similarly, many individuals who access such material will never go on to abuse, but in the minority of individuals whose fantasies are so extreme and their arousal so high, the opportunity to further fuel their fantasies through access to pornographic material is so strong that they are already thinking and doing – the question is not one of does thinking lead to doing, but *when* will thinking lead to doing?

Offending spaces

In the 'psychological space' of the offender, fantasies are places where offences may initially take place, actual offences are recalled or existing ones are manipulated and updated. Those individuals whose fantasies incorporate offending against children are likely to

initially develop their fantasies prior to actual offending here in the psychological space. The offending space model (see Figure 10.1 – and Wilson and Jones 2008) takes into consideration the role of each of the three previously outlined spaces and, crucially, the interaction between them and the permeable barrier of social acceptability and normalisation. In particular, the offending space model accounts for the transition between thinking (fantasy) and doing (committing offences) in convicted paedophiles. The reason for choosing this group of offenders to help inform the design of the model and to help further our understanding of sexual offenders is twofold. First, the link between sexual fantasy and 'doing' is reflective of behaviour that is non-consensual, harmful and illegal, therefore demonstrating the highly negative transition from psychological thought to physical behaviour. Secondly, paedophiles are a 'hard to reach group' unlikely to discuss their fantasies (and in particular their intentions) prior to conviction, but for whom such extreme sexual behaviour is of interest to themselves, therapists and society. The US postal survey reports that only one in every three people convicted of downloading child pornography had actually committed an offence against a child, which suggests a more casual link than the one we are arguing for here, and one which is not necessarily clear but certainly warrants more investigation (Silverman and Wilson 2002; Wilson 2007). If committing an offence against a child doesn't follow from a sexual fantasy about children, it can be argued that such a link is not causal as the offence has happened without the preceding context of 'thinking'. However, by virtue of downloading child pornography from the Internet, the individual doing this is actually performing a behaviour (albeit a voyeuristic one), and one which is likely to result in some form of arousal and is therefore fantasy based. It is also reasonable to argue that since a child (who is unable to provide consent) has been photographed or videoed either naked or as part of a sexual act, the child has been violated and through downloading such material the individual is further performing an offence against that child. The model, however, does acknowledge that even when access, opportunity and motivation are coupled together with the three spaces, lack of congruency or consistency between fantasy and reality, or norms and values, may be sufficient to prevent offending from occurring.

The offending space model (Wilson and Jones 2008) was developed based on case-study data from a convicted paedophile serving his sentence at HMP Grendon. HMP Grendon is unique in the penal system of England and Wales in that it operates as a therapeutic

community (see Genders and Player 1995, for a general introduction to the prison, and Wilson and Jones 2008, for a review of the methods adopted to help inform development of the model). Case-study data with a paedophile named 'James' (not his real name but one adopted to provide anonymity) was crucial in developing an understanding of the link between thinking and doing and the transition of fantasy into reality. The proposed model is also unique in that it takes into consideration the fluidity of sexual fantasies and the relationship of the third tier of 'virtual space'.

While retaining important differences, the offending space model does incorporate some theoretical elements of Ward and Siegert's (2002) pathways model, a model itself incorporating theoretical perspectives and features while addressing the limitations of the following frameworks: Marshall and Barbaree's (1990) description of the effects of developmental adversities; Hall and Hirschman's (1992) typology discussions; and Finkelhor's (1984) multi-factorial pathways model addressing the psychological vulnerabilities involved in child sexual abuse. The pathways model (Ward and Siegert 2002) proposes five potential pathways with four of the five pathways reflecting a primary causal 'mechanism' that can result in sexually abusive behaviour. Ward and Siegert define a mechanism as follows:

> … a mechanism is what makes things work or function and a dysfunctional mechanism is one that fails to work as intended or designed. Examples of dysfunctional mechanisms include impaired cognitive or behavioural skills and mental states such as maladaptive beliefs and desires. Psychological mechanisms generating child sexual abuse constitute *vulnerability* factors. (Ward and Siegert 2002: 332)

The offending space model recognises the notion of dysfunctionality in self-regulation and social acceptability (defined as a combination of attitudes, beliefs, values and norms) as a crucial component that may lead to offending behaviour. The model suggests that even when motivation, access and opportunity afford the individual with the opportunity to offend, offending may not occur if self-regulation and social acceptability remain functional. The offending space model both recognises the high permeability of this barrier but also the importance of congruency between fantasy, pseudo-reality (afforded by the virtual space) and the physical environment. If a level of discongruency between fantasy and reality exists, even with dysregulation of social acceptability and self-regulation, offending

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may not occur. The strength of 'sexual fantasies' and the extent to which other environments provide congruency is in part due to the physiological level of arousal coupled with fantasies.

The pathways model (Ward and Siegert 2002) proposes the following five pathways to child sex offending:

1 *Intimacy and social skills deficits*. Sexual abuse arises from dysfunctionality with intimacy and social skills. Insecure attachment styles with parents or caregivers and abuse and neglect in childhood results in poor relationships characterised by lack of self-esteem, emotional loneliness and isolation.

2 *Deviant sexual scripts.* Distorted sexual scripts and dysfunctional attachment styles may result in sexual abuse as interpersonal contact is only achieved via sexual contact. Individuals are likely to demonstrate deviant patterns of sexual arousal, intimacy deficits, inappropriate emotional experience and inappropriate cognitive distortions.

3 *Emotional dysregulation.* Individuals may have 'normal' sexual scripts and do not face the same issues as individuals with deviant sexual scripts; however, they have difficulties in the self-regulation of their emotions (Thomson 1994). Individuals are likely to experience becoming overwhelmed and sexually inhibited by their emotional state or adopt sexual behaviour to help soothe their emotional dysregulation.

4 *Anti-social cognitions.* Individuals with anti-social cognitions do not experience deviance in sexual scripts but have a general tendency towards deviance and criminality. Individuals are more likely to experience difficulties with impulsivity and engage in behaviours consistent with conduct disorder from an early age.

5 *Multiple dysfunctional mechanisms.* Individuals hold both deviant sexual scripts which coincide with dysfunctions on all of the other psychological mechanisms.

Arguably, all of the mechanisms involved in the pathways model are of interest. However, in relation to the offending space model, deviance with sexual scripts and emotional dysregulation are of most importance. As fantasies are largely uninhibited due to their high degree of personalisation they afford the perfect opportunity for deviance. Individuals do not have to constrain their thoughts and do not fear reprimand because the 'psychological space' is regulated

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by the 'self' and not by others. The model does acknowledge that interactions with other individuals may influence (both positively and negatively) some aspects of fantasies; however, they are predominately regulated by the self. In contrast to the pathways model, the offending space model suggests that deviant sexual scripts or deviant fantasies are in fact coupled with emotional dysregulation, which in turn can lead to contact offending. Emotions are in part likely to be difficult to regulate because of the strong arousal tendency of sexual fantasies which are further reinforced through behavioural outputs such as masturbation. We propose that to see the mechanisms in isolation, albeit with the recognition of a 'catch-all' fifth mechanism, is too simplistic due to the rich interrelations between deviant fantasies, dysregulation of emotions, dysregulation of social acceptability and lack of control.

Psychological space

The psychological space best represents the pure 'fantasy space' and provides the motivation for offending. Without fantasy and thinking about a sexual fantasy there is no motivation, and without motivation it is highly unlikely an offence will occur. The psychological space enables fantasies to be initiated and replayed and mental 'fantasy' imagery to be constructed. This space is both dynamic and is heavily influenced by both the physical and virtual spaces. If aspects of the virtual space lack consistency or congruency with the psychological space they may be abandoned or incorporated into an 'updated fantasy space'. For James the psychological space is deeply entwined with fantasy rehearsal and mentally 'acting out' and replaying fantasies, demonstrating the active nature of this space, particularly in contrast to the more passive 'virtual space'. Sexual fantasies occur most vividly at the onset of puberty, although this is not to suggest that such fantasies do not occur at an earlier age, nor that they lack intensity prior to puberty. In reflecting upon his fantasies at puberty, James states the following: 'I can't remember much at 12, but at 13/14 I started thinking about it. I don't actually think it took up a full fantasy until probably 14/15. I started to think about children in a sexual way … children I'd seen …'

This statement is reflective of the onset of vivid sexual fantasies and also demonstrates how James's fantasies were created and updated through influence with other spaces (either virtual or physical), highlighting the link between the three spaces. James comments on his fantasies by stating the following: 'I guess fantasy is where I want it to go, what I can do for getting aroused to that thought.'

'Where I want it to go' – arguably this suggests James's desire to move his thoughts and his fantasies about children from the psychological space and into the physical space. This doesn't indicate offending per se as fantasies could be played out through self-masturbation – an act itself requiring a combination of physicality and fantasy replay, but in the absence of any offending behaviour. However, it does suggest an important link between 'thinking' and 'doing' – the transition from fantasy to reality.

In the psychological space fantasies are dynamic and transient, and are inextricably linked to physical and virtual spaces. As a convicted paedophile, James alludes to having committed offences on approximately twelve (female) children prior to his incarceration, and that his offences played an important role in the development of his fantasies. Thus as the fantasies developed so did his offending behaviour:

> I think as my fantasies grew my offending grew … the actual curiosity to touch her [names family member] obviously made me touch her and I guess from then on as my fantasies grew the more I actually involved doing it to a child.

> I think your fantasies stay with what you've done and you revisit.

> So the abuse that I've carried out in the past has gone on to fantasise about doing it to a real person.

> Yes, it could be part of my fantasy (giving pleasure as a way of helping) … I can believe that the victim enjoyed it because it felt good.

James makes reference to both the revisiting aspect of the psychological space and the dynamic interaction between the psychological space and physical space. Motivation is contained within the psychological space and without motivation to move the fantasy into reality, the fantasy is likely to remain within the psychological space. James comments on how his 'curiosity' to touch a family member motivated him to follow out the action and actually begin touching that family member. In a cyclical relationship his fantasies fuelled his offending behaviour and his offending behaviour helped to update, redefine and shape his fantasies. An important part of James's fantasies was the integration of pleasure and enjoyment for the victim and to deny

that the victim was in any way distressed. Even though distress was inevitable, to acknowledge this would have led to incongruency between the fantasy and reality and therefore manifest itself as cognitive dissonance. Although James was in a position of power and dominance over his victim, this did not manifest itself in his fantasy in the same way as, say, an individual with a sadomasochistic fantasy, but James psychologically challenged his fantasy and changed this relationship into one of enjoyment and approval:

> I always seek approval of people through what I do. I feel that I am being helpful and I feel that they're liking it then I'll be more helpful to them

> [*If the child was upset or unhappy how did that affect your …?*]
>   It didn't go into my fantasy.

Arguably this may have been an attempt by James to introduce the norms of sexual behaviour into his fantasies – in other words, sex should not occur without consent and that pleasure follows sexual gratification. However, this demonstrates how fantasies are developed following interaction with the physical space. The following example shows that the psychological space is not limited by spatio-temporal constraints, and the dynamic nature of fantasies:

> Because although I abused a child I didn't necessarily masturbate over it that night or fantasise on it, but it may come again. It may not be that I'm fantasising doing it with that child but it may mean that the actual abuse I've done with that child goes into a fantasy about another child that I may have captured, that I might have seen the other week or a picture in the paper.

The relationship between thought and action is also clear as James incorporates memories of previous offending into his fantasies, and may recall a fantasy about offending but not necessarily immediately following an offence. The psychological space enables James to replay his fantasies in a space and time that suits, and either play out these thoughts mentally or physically through self-masturbation or further abuse. Interestingly, James uses the word 'captured' when referring to his fantasy of another child suggesting a more dominant, controlling and violent aspect to his fantasy, rather than the 'pleasurable' and 'helpful' perception previously conveyed.

Physical space

The strength of the relationship between the psychological space and physical space is unequivocal because to be 'played out' – to be truly satisfied – fantasies need to transcend into the physical 'real world'. The physical space affords a crucial element for offending through the provision of access. After all, without access the sexual offender may have motivation but is unable to act out their fantasies (and is therefore unable to reincorporate their offences into subsequent fantasies), and the fantasy remains in the psychological space. The physical space is also a space in which non-offending behaviour – such as masturbation occurs, and is therefore viewed as the space in which all behavioural outcomes take place.

Furthermore, the physical space may play an important role in preventing offending from occurring (not only through lack of access opportunities), but also through lack of congruency. If, for example, an individual has a fantasy located within a particular environment and an offence takes place in that environment, the fantasy and environment remain congruent and therefore the fantasy is positively reinforced. If the environment changes, it may of course prevent access, but is also now incongruent with the original fantasy and may prevent offending from occurring. It would be too simplistic to suggest that in order to prevent offending paedophiles are moved to new environments as within time their fantasies are likely to adjust and incorporate their new environment. However, in the shorter term a lack of congruency may prevent an offence from taking place. James's offences (primarily) took place within a UK context and with people he knew or 'acquaintances':

> Most of them had been people I'd know. [Names an individual] she lived next door and I abused her … there were [names a group] across the street that knew me when I was growing up with my mum … I took advantage of the fact that she knew me growing up with my mum.

For James the physical locality of his home environment and immediate surroundings afforded him the opportunity to offend and provided the necessary access. His subsequent early abuse fantasies were also in relation to this physical environment. When James spent time working abroad he states that while he still had fantasies about children and the motivation remained to commit offences, the lack of access and, as we have argued, the incongruency between original

offending environment and new context may have prevented him from offending:

> Obviously [names a country] was the ideal place to fuel my fantasies. I didn't know people out there especially people with families – I think that was the only thing that kept me from offending because I didn't have access. I spent time on the beach and obviously seeing children undressing was part of the fantasy.

Initially access appears to be the most important factor; however, James was working in an English bar where opportunities to meet English-speaking families would have been high. James also comments that part of his 'access' to victims involved seeking approval from their family. Therefore some opportunities for access could have existed and the extent to which James is telling the truth can be questioned: 'I'd be friendly and gain the trust of the family, thinking this is a nice guy. I've used my personality to gain access.'

Virtual space

The virtual space blends fantasy and reality in a 'pseudo-real' environment, where opportunities to offend are provoked and fantasies can be created, replicated and updated from the rich tapestry of available sources and materials. As previously suggested, the Internet is perhaps the space that best affords and creates new opportunities for offending behaviour, where an offender's fantasies can be played out before their eyes, and where elements of previously unthought of or untapped offending potential can be incorporated into fantasies and then 'acted out' in the real world. The importance of the virtual space to the offending model is through its reinforcement of both fantasies and physical behaviours, where the offender can view other individuals offending in ways similar to what they have done or hope to do. It is a space where values and societal norms are not imposed, and in James's words:

> The Internet is designed purely for sexual thoughts.

> A male may be abusing the hell out of a child – using that as a fantasy – it's a totally different kind of image, it's almost the very best of the actual fantasy on the screen – in the book it's not the fantasy, you've got to make it a fantasy.

These poignant and indicative statements eloquently demonstrate the important role of the pseudo-real space in helping to create and re-evaluate fantasies within the psychological space. The fact that James can see someone 'abusing the hell out of a child' grounds his fantasies in a physical reality, the 'real world', and provides reinforcement to James that such behaviour is acceptable, exciting and – importantly – achievable. Through James's own admission the link between fantasy and behaviour (thinking and doing) is an inextricably linked one, where fantasy fuels offending and vice versa ('as my fantasies grew the more I actually involved doing it to a child'). Therefore what is the relationship between the virtual space, fantasies and offending behaviour?

> I think it actually made me fantasise more, I don't think it made me offend more but I suppose it made me do different things in the offences, but I don't think it made me offend more. I don't think the actual Internet made the abuse more but definitely the fantasies were more frequent. I think – I spent hours.

This statement suggests that the Internet provides more opportunity to fantasise more. However, it also provides a dichotomy, because James suggests that fantasising more didn't lead to an increase in offending although, in his words, 'as my fantasies grew my offending grew' highlights the causal relationship between 'thinking' and 'doing'. If the Internet is fuelling fantasies both in frequency and complexity it is reasonable to assume that the fantasies may be later played out in the physical space as either offending behaviour or masturbation.

The virtual space provides the opportunity to blend elements of what is being perceived with the offender's fantasy, and if incongruencies exist between perception and fantasy the offender can choose to remove these incongruencies to ensure the 'pseudo-real' and fantasy remain consistent:

> Obviously if there's a scene on the Internet and I see a male abusing a child I didn't then take that fantasy and watch them abuse. It just didn't come into my head – I never justified it because someone else was doing it would make it okay. The justification was given the fact that I saw the child and if they didn't seem too uncomfortable if you like – the story made the child seem that it was okay.

For James his fantasies didn't involve another individual abusing a child, and when such images were perceived in the virtual space they failed to be incorporated into his fantasies. Part of James's fantasies (as previously indicated) was the acceptance by the child that what was happening was 'pleasurable' or 'comfortable', and if incongruencies existed between the virtual and fantasy spaces James would ignore what was being perceived to ensure his fantasies remained consistent and congruent.

The importance of the virtual space in terms of reinforcement for the psychological space is particularly significant for James as he spent on average between six and seven hours an evening searching and looking at child pornography on the Internet: 'It's just so much – the longer you watch, the more you see and the more you see the further you want to go'.

Where did James want to go? The more James watched and became involved with the 'pseudo-real world' the further his fantasies would have been fuelled. James may have wished to have searched for longer, delving deeper into the Internet looking for extreme and titillating images to serve his sexual desires. The combination of fantasy and pseudo-reality may have been played out in either further 'surfing' behaviour, offending behaviour or self-masturbation behaviour: 'Occasionally I masturbate at the computer or just masturbate to what's on [the computer screen].'

The virtual space is not limited to the computer, but images of children in relatively benign contexts such as newspapers, television and even compact-disc covers can provide sufficient 'pseudo-real' material to fuel and combine with existing fantasies or help to create new ones:

> I still struggle to a certain degree with fantasies. I try not to masturbate with them now but they are still there – I can't hide away from the fact that they are still there and I have to monitor what I watch. I have to be careful that I don't watch a programme that I know is going to sexually arouse me'.

> He [another prisoner] bought a CD and on the cover was images of children naked – they weren't photographs they were images but that was enough to fuel my excitement … I booked the CD out just to see these children'.

Conclusions

The immersion into 'our own world' provides the opportunity to purely fantasise about our most erotic desires, which for the majority are without malice, intentional hurt or damage. However, for a minority such fleeting thoughts are the gateway to offending behaviour. The offending space model attempts to map the contours between thinking and doing, and in doing so attempts to finally uncover the unique interrelationship between thought and behaviour. If fantasies remained purely in the psychological space then offending shouldn't occur, but underlying processes prevent fantasies from residing purely in the psychological space. A critical combination of dysregulation of behaviour and social acceptability combined with environmental congruency provides the unique opportunity for offending. The tendency for fantasies to transist into physicality is arguably more likely to occur than ever before because fantasies are supported by an ever growing space – *the virtual space*. It is the opportunity for normalisation of sexual fantasies by this 'third space' which is likely to catalyse fantasies into the realm of acceptability, and to enable individuals to further recall, dwell and manipulate their fantasies more than ever before. The normalisation of extreme sexual behaviours, even those that are damaging, illegal and derogatory, may result in the increasingly vulnerable and permeable layer of social acceptability being eroded even further. As fantasies become the 'norm' and creep further into reality, more extreme fantasies are likely to be created in the psychological space and in turn will find themselves being played out either in part of in full in physical or virtual spaces.

Understanding the role of virtual spaces further is crucial in understanding the relationship between thinking and doing. It is acknowledged that the offending space model is in its infancy and requires further refinement, verification and evidence. However, it is an exploratory and to some extent unique model in that it incorporates a hybrid space. Further, the model does not suggest that every individual who has sexual fantasies will act upon those fantasies, nor that every deviant fantasy – such as rape-based scenarios (Doskoch 1995) – will transist into anything more than a fleeting thought or desire. The critically important role of social acceptability and regulation should not be underestimated in helping to prevent behaviour that is deemed inappropriate, unacceptable and damaging

from occurring. Such societal 'rules', the conducts of behaviour and self-regulation prevent for the majority extreme fantasies ever being played out in the real world. However, if extreme behaviour is normalised the existing black-and-white areas of acceptability may be grayed.

The question therefore remains whether *thinking* does in fact lead to *doing.* However, one thing is certain, and that is that fantasies created in the realm of 'our own world' do not always reside there. Their creation is merely the first step of normalisation and because of their high level of personalisation and their ability to be recalled and acted out they represent an important area of future research. As James has stated in his own words, fantasies afford the opportunity for the creation of an individual's 'own world', even if that world is dysfunctionally skewed:

> It was my own world. It was a place I felt safe in, I could get everything I wanted out of it and I didn't have to feel inadequate.

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