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Cyberstalking and Cyberpredators: A Threat to Safe Sexuality on the Internet

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Abstract: No matter what the invention, it appears that there will always be those who exploit its dark side and, in recent years, internet crime has been on the rise.

An enormous amount of the internet is devoted to sex and, accordingly, cybersexcrimes are also increasing. The sexual predation of children on the internet is beginning to be well researched but the targeting of adults is not so well documented.

Online sexual harassment can include obscene emails, unsolicited porn, spam, the posting of false personal ads advertising the victim’s availability for sex and may escalate to threats of, or actual, sexual violence and death.

Little is known about cyberpredators of adults or how their victims are affected. This paper explicates the behaviour of cyberpredators of adults, the need for further research in this new area of forensic cybersexology, and the demand for appropriate and comprehensive legislation, internationally, to address this growing concern of internet use.

It is common knowledge that the world of online sex is big. Dating sites, chat-rooms and sex sites are easy to find, easy to join and everyone wants to meet you. It might be expected, then, that this blossoming of accessibility could lead to a more positive sexuality, tolerance and an opening up of a true spectrum of sexual possibilities. Unfortunately, this has not entirely been the case. While there are positive aspects of sexual expression on the World Wide Web, the internet has also allowed for the development of new angles on old crimes and created a whole new arena for cruelty and fear. Some people are now finding that the online world is not a safe place and that the internet is not necessarily a superhighway to love.

In 1999, in a Massachusetts romance chat room, an argument began over a woman’s online username. Every time ‘Nanci’ logged on, her aggressor was already online and rapidly became more abusive. He told her of his plans to have her beaten up and began making death threats.
None of the police departments Nanci approached were willing or able to help even when the harasser revealed his knowledge of both her own and her family’s names, personal information and daily movements. Eventually Nanci began legal proceedings but it took media coverage to force the authorities to help her and charges were eventually filed.1

In October of the same year, Amy Boyer was killed by a man whom she did not know, who then killed himself. Her killer had fallen in love with her at school after a distant sighting but became enraged when he saw her with a boyfriend. He created websites devoted to both his love and hate for her, bought guns and planned a mass shooting at the high school. He bought her social security number from the net for A$45 allowing him access to more personal information including her workplace address. Three days later he shot her as she left work.2

In 2000, newspaper staff, responsible for firing a photographer, began receiving calls asking for personal meetings from people in chatrooms which none of the staff had visited. Unsolicited subscriptions to porn and other magazines followed as well as purchase orders that no one had made. To date, the police and other authorities cannot take action and the harassment continues.3

In 2002, a woman’s ex-boyfriend published her home address on a number of websites, advertising that she fantasised about being raped. Within days, men were turning up at her house ready to oblige.4

These case studies are examples of cyberstalking, a relatively recent addition to the internet experience. Cyberstalking is also known by other names such as online harassment, online abuse or cyber-harassment. Cyberstalkers use the internet to target their victims and the harassment may range from continual unwanted contact to threatened violence or may even escalate into an attempt to control a person’s behaviour or lifestyle.5 Reactions to this abuse may range from annoyance to distress and, as in ‘real-life’ stalking, victims may eventually fear for their lives.6 In extreme cases, the offender may even take control of their victim’s computer, using special programs which can trace each character typed and each connection made, to interfere with both on and offline life, controlling, assessing and punishing. Although virus checks may detect these programs, sometimes the only remedy is to delete all programs and reformat the computer entirely.7

Cyberstalking does not always include a sexual element but sex can be a very efficient weapon to make victims feel distressed, vulnerable and threatened. Although women appear to make up the majority of victims, men have also been targeted and the emotional result for both genders ranges from mere irritation to extreme trauma.8 Sexual harassment on the internet may include the sending of obscene emails, pornographic pictures or spam. As pornography is so easy to access on the internet and offensive or distressing images simple to download and send, it is a readily accessible form of abuse which is relatively safe and easy for the abuser to use, reuse, and abuse. Advertisements for sex, real or fictitious sexual details, fantasies, or photographs of the victims may also be posted to websites – along with their addresses and other personal
They may be threatened with violence, rape or death, and it appears that protection for victims of this kind of abuse is dangerously inadequate.

Stalking and the law

Sexually offensive behaviour on the internet appears to be an uncertain jurisdiction within the law. It is difficult to find departments within the police forces, certainly in Western Australia, that deal specifically with this area of crime and this may be because the law has not yet caught up with the nature of sex crimes on the internet which specifically concern adults. The sexual targeting of children through the internet is well publicised and, quite rightly, of great concern. It is becoming well researched, globally, and strategies have been implemented to try to combat internet paedophilia, but sexually distressing behaviour against adults does not yet seem to receive the same attention, perhaps because paedophilia has much more ‘media’ appeal. Sexual harassment and abuse on the internet does not appear to have much consideration in its own right and is usually treated under legislation which covers other crimes such as ‘real life’ stalking. This umbrella treatment may not address all the concerns relating to or arising from this type of crime and may result in loopholes and grey areas which leave the authorities powerless, victims unprotected and defenceless, and perpetrators free to offend again and again.

At present, under Australian law, offensive use of the internet is considered to be similar to a nuisance call on a telephone. Any crime involving a telecommunications connection falls under Federal jurisdiction and is the responsibility of the Australian Federal Police under the Telecommunications Act. If offenders plan and develop the groundwork for a telecommunications crime and then act on it, this is also a Federal offence and is covered by the Crimes Act. Crimes involving sex, stalking, disruptive behaviour or obscenity, however, fall under State jurisdiction. The laws which cover both sexual conduct and stalking differ from state to state, so crimes of this nature must be dealt with by the police forces of each individual state. Problems arise when a crime is committed which crosses state borders and these problems are greatly multiplied when the internet is involved. The nature of the internet is such that not only are state borders non-existent, but anyone with internet access can be in immediate contact with any other country in the world, at any time, for any reason. When it comes to negotiating international law, this instant virtual crossing of borders renders differences in state legislation negligible.

In Western Australia, according to the Western Australian Consolidated Legislation Criminal Code, section 338E, anyone who pursues another person in a way that could be expected to be intimidating, is classified as a stalker. Conviction for this crime carries a penalty of up to 12 months imprisonment or the offender may be fined up to A$4000. If it can be proven that the pursuit has been carried out with intent to intimidate, then the penalty can be imprisonment for up to 3 years with a summary conviction penalty of 18 months imprisonment or a fine of A$6000. If there is aggravation involved, the penalty increases to an 8-year prison
sentence with a summary conviction penalty of 2 years imprisonment or a fine of $8000.\textsuperscript{11}

The Crimes Amendment Act 2000 (No. 4) No. 85 of 2000 – section 55 replacing s34A of the Australian Commonwealth Consolidated Acts goes into more detail about what constitutes stalking behaviour:

(1) A person must not stalk someone with intent –

(a) to cause apprehension, or fear of harm, in the person stalked or someone else; or

(b) to cause harm to the person stalked or someone else; or

(c) to harass the person stalked.

Maximum penalty:

(a) imprisonment for 5 years if –

(i) the offence involved a contravention of an injunction or other order made by a court; or

(ii) the offender was in possession of an offensive weapon; or

(b) imprisonment for 2 years in any other case.

(2) For this section, a person stalks someone else (the stalked person) if, on at least two occasions, the person does one or more of the following:

(a) follows or approaches the stalked person;

(b) loiters near, watches, approaches or enters a place where the stalked person resides, works or visits;

(c) keeps the stalked person under surveillance;

(d) interferes with property in the possession of the stalked person;

(e) gives or sends offensive material to the stalked person or leaves offensive material where it is likely to be found by, given to or brought to the attention of, the stalked person;

(f) telephones or otherwise contacts the stalked person;

(g) acts covertly in a way that could reasonably be expected to arouse apprehension or fear in the stalked person;

(h) engages in conduct amounting to intimidation, harassment or molestation of the stalked person.

(3) However, this section does not apply to reasonable conduct engaged in by a person as part of the person’s employment if it is a function of the person’s employment to engage in the conduct and the conduct is not otherwise unlawful.

(4) Without limiting subsection (1), a person is also taken to have the intent mentioned in the subsection if the person knows that, or is reckless about whether, stalking the other person would be likely –
(a) to cause apprehension or fear of harm in the person stalked or someone else; or
(b) to harass the person stalked.

(5) In a prosecution for an offence against subsection (1), it is not necessary to prove that the person stalked or someone else apprehended or feared harm or that the person stalked was harassed.

(6) For this section:
- harm means physical harm, harm to mental health, or disease, whether permanent or temporary.
- harm to mental health includes psychological harm.
- physical harm includes unconsciousness, pain, disfigurement and physical contact that might reasonably be objected to in the circumstances, whether or not there was an awareness of the contact at the time.  

According to the Criminal Code, to be considered stalking, these behaviours must be carried out in such a manner as to cause apprehension or fear to either the victim or a third party; constitute violence to the person or their property, or cause any other detriment to them and the intent to intimidate by unwanted contact applies as much to the internet as to ‘real life’.

**Cyberstalkers and cyberpredators**

Most cyberstalking incidents are opportunistic and occur between strangers: the stalker seizes an opportunity to create a situation but does not deliberately target any one individual. When caught, offenders often claim that they did not mean to cause distress and that the incident went further than they intended. The medium of the internet provides anonymity and protection by hiding the identity of the stalker and the limitations of tracing connections makes them very difficult to apprehend or control. The physical distance that usually exists between the offender and the victim tends to create the false illusion that cyberstalking is less serious than ‘real-life’ stalking, but cyberstalking should be thought of as pre-emptive and dangerous. Stalking and abusive behaviour of any kind is traumatic and, although a computer may be switched off and safety measures taken, once targeted, victims may find that online stalking behaviour may escalate to ‘real-life’ stalking.

Cyberpredation differs from cyberstalking in that the incident is not opportunistic, the victim is deliberately selected, and the stalker spends time and effort in order to intimidate and cause distress. Although a stalking target might be limited to one person, predatory behaviour might include multiple targets and be habitual or even obsessive. There are no hard and fast definitions of cyberpredators as offenders are usually named after the specific crimes which they have committed, but there are patterns of behaviour which can be used to identify them. Typically, however, predators tend to use specific models for targeting.
their victims and the model which follows has been derived from the profile of online paedophiles which is the closest model available.\textsuperscript{15}

At first, a predator will enter a chat room as a silent observer, someone who does not contribute to the online conversation but watches, invisibly, from the sidelines. They will pay attention to the conversation and be on the lookout for likely targets, noting features about a person that interests them. Eventually, a target will be chosen, based on the information that has been found out through the observed chat conversation. The predator will then join in the chat and attempt to isolate their target, perhaps inviting or persuading them to enter a private chat. Private conversations will then follow, over time, and the target will be encouraged to reveal personal information. Eventually, the offender will try to establish a meeting in person. The end point of this particular model is to achieve a personal, preferably sexual meeting but personal contact is not always needed or even desired in the case of adult predation. Anecdotal evidence has revealed that sexual abuse may take other, more insidious forms such as entering into a cyberaffair in order to exploit the victim for money.

Finding cyberoffenders

When the victim knows the offender, and harassment has grown out of conflict, stalking is a much clearer crime in the eyes of the law because the connection of both parties to a relationship is clear and a history of cause and effect can be established. When stranger is stalking stranger, it becomes much harder to prove that a relationship exists and that the stalking behaviour was intentional. When the stalker is a cyberstalker it becomes harder still. The distances involved, the anonymity which the internet affords and the difficulty of tracing internet connections all contribute to hide and protect the offender.

Unfortunately, there are a number of ways in which the very nature of the internet gives cyberstalkers an advantage. The safety strategies which are recommended to safeguard the general public, using ambiguous names and anonymous addresses such as hotmail or yahoo, for example, protect the offender just as much as the potential victim.

Confusion of jurisdiction can easily arise when the crime crosses international borders. The fact that the offender and the victim may be in different countries means that their activities may be governed by different laws. Any crime committed on a website falls under the jurisdiction of the country in which the site is registered so offenders can be prosecuted under the laws of that country. The disadvantage of this system means, however, that crimes can be inadvertently committed through ignorance of local laws. The minefield continues into state jurisdiction because, even if victim and offender are only separated by state borders, the offender may not actually be committing a crime according to state law. In addition, under Australian, American and British law, the crime and identity of the offender must be proven beyond reasonable doubt but on the internet it is neither easy to find an offender nor to prove their identity or location at the time of committing the crime.\textsuperscript{16}
One way in which law enforcement authorities can overcome differences between international law is to collaborate to set up sting operations. The Australian Federal Police, along with Interpol and other international forces have, in the past, used this strategy to crack paedophile rings but it is doubtful whether this type of operation would be viable to locate individuals.\(^{17}\)

It is possible for internet connections to be traced by police departments as long as they can access the IP record through the service provider. This temporary connection is logged and kept on record but not all service providers keep permanent records and not all states or countries require that they should. Tracing and subsequent identification is rendered almost impossible by this fact and some form of nationwide, if not worldwide standardisation is required if the problem is to be seriously addressed. Police departments have expressed a need for collaboration between the computer industry and government to develop strategies to enable them to locate and identify offenders by tracing their online activities.\(^{18}\)

Identifying and investigating both the crime and the offender is made yet even more difficult by the fact that victims are often unwilling to report their experiences to police or other authorities. This may be due to feelings of shame or an ignorance of where to go for help, or even a lack of knowledge that what they have suffered is a crime and should, or can, be reported. Similarities can be drawn between cyberstalking and rape where victims may not only feel traumatised but ashamed and guilty. They may believe that they are somehow responsible for the situation and may be afraid to ask for help or refuse to take action, thus leaving themselves vulnerable to further attack from their abusers. The nature of the crime itself, the limitations on police forces and individual attitudes may all contribute to the difficulty in bringing cases to prosecution. Further research is needed to identify areas in which changes could be made and practical ways in which these changes could be implemented.

**Research**

As cyberstalking and predation are still fairly new crimes, the statistics tend to be incomplete and detecting the exact extent of the problem is virtually impossible at this stage.\(^{19}\) It is difficult to find either data on cyberstalkers or people who are willing to talk about their experiences. Shame, guilt, embarrassment and fear may be some of the reasons why victims are not prepared to speak out about their experiences. Information to date has been collected via the internet and, though the anonymity of the medium has made it easier for victims to admit that the situation has occurred, the exact truth and circumstances of the event is difficult to verify. When information is volunteered, there is often no way of checking the truth of the details and there appears to be no official central authority or research body collecting this information in Australia. It is even more difficult to obtain information or data about online harassers as they are very unlikely to come forward to provide their personal information unless they are caught.
WHOA, Working To Halt Online Abuse, is an American-based self-help organisation which has been collecting statistics on cyberstalking since 2000 in order to provide information to the community, as well as support and protection for victims of online abuse and assistance in online organisational policy-making. These statistics, taken from the WHOA website were collated from the 827 cases reported for the years 2000, 2001 and 2002.

In 2002, 218 cases of cyberstalking were reported. Although this appears to be a decrease from 256 cases reported in 2001 and 353 cases reported in 2000, it is important to note that these figures are based on completed questionnaires only, not the number of cases actually dealt with by WHOA, and reflect only reported cases to one organisation in one country, in a new field of research enquiry.

Of these, 61.62 per cent of victims were female and 29.54 per cent were male with 8.84 per cent being unknown. Of harassers, 60.77 per cent were male, 30.62 per cent were female with 8.61 per cent being unknown.

12.84 per cent of the victims’ ages were unknown, but the largest known age group was between 18 and 30. In 2002, these made up 49.08 per cent of reported statistics. The 31–40 age group made up 36.24 per cent, 1.38 per cent of victims were aged between 41 and 46 per cent were aged over 50. WHOA refers all cases under 18 years of age to another group and those statistics are not included here.

According to WHOA, online harassment is most common in the USA but they admit that their demographics may be skewed because they are a US based organisation. According to 2002 statistics, Americans made up 80 per cent of the victims and 58 per cent of the harassers. Updated statistics on the location of harassment taking place in non-US locations show that 31.58 per cent of harassment occurred in Canada and 18.42 per cent occurred in the UK. Australia and France came fourth in line with 5.25 per cent and 5.26 per cent respectively. Belgium, Argentina, Bali, India, Germany, Israel and Kenya all show very low rates of 2.63 per cent with Ireland and Japan recording no harassment at all.

According to WHOA’s information, cyberstalking behaviour most commonly began by sending emails. 43 per cent of online harassment was reported to have started in this way. It must be noted, however, that while this was often the first form of contact, the incident which triggered the harassment may have begun elsewhere, such as in a chat. 13 per cent of online abuse was reported to have started in chat rooms or on message boards. 11 per cent of harassment began through instant messages, 7 per cent began on websites, 4 per cent began through newsgroups and 8 per cent beginning through some other means. 1 per cent began offline and escalated to online harassment.
Escalation
Some victims found that the harassment grew in intensity. The most common form of escalation was the progress from chat room contact to abusive emails or phone calls and progress to abusive instant messaging or message board postings were the next most common. WHOA's statistics show that although only 39 per cent of online harassment cases intensified, of these cases 26 per cent went further, progressing to offline harassment, threats or stalking. Although these figures are relatively small, they are still a cause for concern because they show that a significant number of people live in fear of abuse.27

The need for further research
There are three main online organisations that have contact with victims of online abuse, WHOA, CyberAngels and SafetyEd, all of which are American based. WHOA was founded in 1997 and its president, Jayne Hitchcock, herself a victim of cyberstalking, gives regular talks at conferences and seminars and is an active lobbyist for more efficient legislation in the fight against cyberabuse. WHOA is staffed by volunteers who counsel victims and work towards educating the community, law enforcement personnel and other agencies by formulating policies which may be adopted to create a safer online environment.28

CyberAngels are an online branch of the Guardian Angels, the volunteer group set up by Curtis Sliwa to patrol urban trouble spots. CyberAngels was formed in 1995 and claims to have been the first cyberstalking help program, seeking to prevent and monitor internet crime, with a view to broadening public awareness of the issues as well as assisting victims to trace and identify offenders. CyberAngels conducts classes in online safety and publishes information for distribution to schools, libraries and the general public.29

SafetyEd International was founded in 1998 by its President, Colin Gabriel Hatcher as a non-profit organisation also run by volunteers. SafetyEd primarily aims to educate children and young adults in internet safety and conducts an advisory service for parents, teachers and those facilities which offer services to young people. They also provide advice, resources and information on cyberstalking and harassment to the general public and both State and Federal Governments.30

These organisations report that they receive, on average, 400 requests for help each week. This is about 20,000 cases per year. If the percentages are correct and Australia has about 2 per cent of America's total cases (a conservative and likely outdated estimate) then it might be predicted that there would be about 400 cases of cyberstalking per year in Australia.31 As these figures are derived only from those cases that are reported, the real figure is likely to be much larger.

As a cyber organisation, WHOA admit that their statistics only show part of the story. WHOA also only reflects the narrow perspective of one US based website which depends on the voluntary supply of information for their data. While WHOA is a primary site for cyberpredation reporting, if these statistics show only a part of the real numbers, and we have no absolute idea of the real figures involved, then it is clear that research needs to be undertaken: firstly in order to establish exactly how much of
a cyberstalking problem exists worldwide, why and how the internet is such an easy vehicle for abuse, psychological and criminal patterns of behaviour, and what, if anything, can be done about it.

**Safeguarding**

In the meantime, in the absence of research-based strategies, policies and governing laws surrounding this issue, there are ways in which users of the internet can help to protect themselves. Many websites provide conditions of use and outlines for behaviour and, while these may not deter those determined to cause distress to others, they are a useful first line of defense as anyone violating the set conditions may be asked to leave the site. Microsoft’s Terms of Use section, for example, contains a code of conduct requesting that users treat others with respect, pointing out what is unlawful activity and noting that offenders can be removed or have action taken against them. It also recommends that users protect themselves by employing safe internet practices. It is a sensible internet precaution that a household’s main email account should be reserved for communication with familiar, trusted people. Other contacts, such as chat room visits, should be conducted through an anonymous email account with a non-gender-specific username which is unique and dissimilar to any previously used name. Unwanted emails or chats can be blocked by using filters, and virus checks should be kept updated in order to detect unauthorised access. It is also recommended that users do not fill in profiles for accounts which require personally identifiable information.

**Defence strategies**

These precautions, however, are not always practical or possible. Personal details must sometimes be given out over the internet such as during credit card transactions or online bookings and it is possible for an online harasser to become abusive after gaining the trust of the victim enough to be given their real name and home email address.

If harassment does occur online, however, there are some defence strategies which can be used. The harasser is most likely looking for a reaction so retaliation is not recommended. This behaviour can be likened to the psychology of schoolyard bullying or obscene phonecalls where the reward for the behaviour is the distress that is caused. The lack of a reaction removes the satisfaction and pleasure gained from another person’s suffering and, theoretically, the abuser should move on, looking for easier targets. If the harassment takes place in a chat room or on another type of website, incidents should be reported to the webmaster. Most sites have contact details for webmasters while some sites even have specific contact addresses for abuse and harassment should be reported immediately by contacting whichever address is most appropriate. It is possible that changing usernames will afford a solution to the situation but it may become necessary to stop visiting the site altogether. Although it seems unfair to be driven away from a site, it is considered by many better to leave than to suffer. If the harassment escalates into abuse, the offender can be contacted, in a polite but firm manner and asked to stop. If they refuse and the behaviour continues, their messages can be saved and forwarded to their service provider.
using the ISP information which is included as part of an email address. The service provider can then take action to bar the offender from using their server. If necessary, this information can be relayed to the police and, with the co-operation of the service provider, it should be possible to track the offender. Unfortunately this is not always the situation and these strategies may not always stop the behaviour. Service providers may not always be prepared to take action and police may not always be able to assist.

Online support

Victims can also contact volunteer groups for support and advice. The best known of these are WHOA, SafetyEd and CyberAngels but these are American based and to date there seem to be no equivalent groups in Australia. NetAlert, however, is a community advisory body which was set up by the Commonwealth Government in 1999 in order to educate the Australian community about safety on the internet.

On 2 July 2003, the Australian High Tech Crime Centre (AHTCC) was launched. This is a Canberra-based joint venture between all State, Territory and Federal police forces which aims to combat some of the problems which arise from the multi-jurisdictional nature of internet crime. AHTCC may be accessed through their website and ecrimes can be reported using their online form. Although child sexual exploitation is the only online sex crime represented to date, and there is no specific category for cyberstalking or predation of adults, this should not prevent the reporting of these offences. Offensive use of the internet can also be reported through the Australian Broadcasting Authority hotline or by accessing their internet page at www.aba.gov.au/internet/index.htm.

While reporting cyber abuse is important, often there isn’t enough that can be done about it, even once reported, even by such groups as the ABA. However this should not dissuade the practice of reporting crimes such as cyberpredation. Reporting internet crimes, even from a research perspective only, is a valuable tool to combatting the rise of these issues.

Responsibility

Although the law exists to guide behaviour and to protect the community, it should be stated that the main duty of the law is to help people when they cannot help themselves. Each person has a responsibility to protect themselves, to remove themselves from danger, and to avoid conflict when they can. On the internet, this should be relatively easy as there is always the option of the ‘off switch’, however many find this to be an inappropriate and partial solution. It cannot be dismissed that misuse of the internet in many various guises is well under way and cyberstalking is a growing problem. Law enforcement bodies and legislation has, in the past, been slow to recognise cyberstalking as a specific crime however, this attitude is changing.

In 1998, a paper on trends in cybercrime was presented for the first time at the Australian Institute of Criminology’s February conference. Although the main focus was on corporate crime, hacking and counterfeiting, sex was briefly addressed. Pornography, especially child pornography and ‘sexually related commerce’ were the main issues and, although it was acknowledged that this was seen by many crime squads
as 'a major problem area' and 'the fastest growing single area of computer crime', cyberstalking was not mentioned. It was not until October 2000, that a paper specifically dealing with cyberstalking was presented. This, however, was only an introduction to the problem and it is clear that more discussion, awareness, education and research are needed before the problem is fully understood and solutions can be formulated.

At present, the only Australian legislation which specifically addresses cybercrime covers unauthorised access and modification of data. There is no specific legislation regarding cyberstalking or sex crimes on the internet.

On 13 October 2002, however, a media release from the Victorian Government announced an amendment to the Crimes Act, which will officially make cyberstalking a crime. The Crimes (Stalking) Bill, set before State Parliament will apply equally to cyberstalking offences committed out of or into Victoria and will include email, manipulating another's computer operating system, and the electronic publishing of offensive material. Previously, the victim had to be aware of the stalking behaviour for it to be considered a crime but a person may be apprehended for stalking behaviour through reports by another party, for example, or incidentally, in relation to another crime. This legislation will remove the need for the victim's knowledge of the crime and will allow the police earlier intervention options and the provision of more effective protection.

The amendment will set the punishment at up to 10 years imprisonment and, if passed, will be the first legislation of its kind in Australia. This bill heralds a new attitude and an awareness which is needed to successfully fight cyberpredation and make the internet a safe place for both children and adults.

Legislation of this kind will be the first step towards giving cyberstalking and cyberpredation the recognition for the gravity of the crimes that they are, and will help to provide the victims with the protection they need. It is clear that internet crime is a growing problem worldwide and that cyberstalking has thus far been a neglected area of concern, and one in desperate need of research. Crime on the internet is a truly global problem and, although it is necessary for each country to set its own legislation and research in place, it cannot be stressed enough that the limitations of action across international borders are providing safety nets and loopholes for criminals. There is a growing need for a standardisation of laws which govern the Internet, and a corresponding need for research into exactly which changes to the law are needed and how these are best implemented. The internet is now an integral element of our societal everyday life, and sex certainly has been and continues to be the most widely accessed subject area on the net. Dating sites and chat rooms are now a major source of sexual expression for people around the world. Match.com, who claim that they are the leader in online dating services report that in 2002, over 89,000 members found success in their dating search and there is no indication that this will...
To the contrary, dotcom dating is booming, and cyberpredators, cyberstalkers and online abusers are fast catching on and logging on. It is therefore vital for those who can make a difference to do so. Researchers, governments, law enforcers, the computer industry, law makers, internet law experts, policy makers, sexuality educators, and counsellors, are encouraged to do all that is possible, given the constraints of culture, politics and law, to learn, investigate, make changes, provide awareness, supply education, and render support when it is needed to enable lust, chat, sex, dating, and the hunt for love online, to be safe, positive, and predation-free.

Notes
2. Hitchcock.
5. Hitchcock.
6. Ogilvie.
8. Ogilvie.
13. Hitchcock.
17. Philips, Federal.
18. Philips, State.
19. Ogilvie.
21. WHOA online harassment statistics.


27. WHOA beginning and escalation of harassment statistics.


31. Radcliff.


33. Hitchcock.

34. Hitchcock.


38. Philips, State.


