

## Chapter 6

# An Overview of Child Abuses in 3D Social Networks and Online Video Games

**Miguel A. Garcia-Ruiz**  
*University of Colima, Mexico*

**Miguel Vargas Martin**  
*University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Canada*

**Patrik Olsson**  
*University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Canada*

### ABSTRACT

*It appears that child pornography distribution and child abuses on the Internet have permeated to massively multiplayer online role-playing video games (MMORPG) and 3D social networks, such as Second Life (SL), a compelling online virtual world where millions of users have registered. Although SL is intended for general entertainment in its adult (over 18) version, cases of simulated pedophilia have been reported inside SL's virtual world, generated by some of its users, employing SL communication capabilities to trade and show child pornography images to exchange related text messages. This chapter provides a literature review on child pornography in MMORPGs and other 3D social networks including SL, as well as policy and network approaches for overcoming child abuse. A review on ethical and legal issues of dealing with child pornography and other types of child abuse in 3D social networks and MMORPGs is also addressed in this chapter.*

### INTRODUCTION

Child pornography has been defined as “any visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct involving children under the age of 18” (Kierkegaard, 2008), and is a persistent form of social deviation con-

flicting with the established social norms in any society (Schell et al., 2007). Social or humankind deviations can be defined as actions, behaviors, or thoughts that are carried out by individuals or group of persons in irresponsible, immoral, unethical, and/or illegal manners (Gomme, 2002). The trading of child pornography is presumably

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an underground multi-billion Internet industry worldwide, and in February 2009 alone, almost 1900 cases of child pornography and other types of child sexual abuse were reported weekly at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children of the U.S. (Cybertipline, 2009). Law enforcement agencies and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) of a number of countries have started to track down and catch pedophiles (both child pornography producers and consumers) and child stalkers, mainly doing manual search on Web search engines and with the help of specialized software or by providing services where the public can alert them on child abuse and other disturbing content (Hansen, 2005). However, this is an enormous and complex task, due to the increasing number of producers and consumers of child pornography (Shell et al., 2007), and the ever increasing number of child pornography images and other materials on the Internet (Beech et al., 2008). This increase may, to a significant extent, be attributed to low-cost and technologically advanced digital photography and video cameras that have facilitated child pornography production, as well as easy and fast Internet accesses for persons who exploit and consume child pornography (Taylor et al., 2001), not to mention novel ways to conceal child pornography from law enforcement agencies (Farid, 2004).

Child pornography on the Internet and its underground revenues are not the only issues regarding child pornography. Psychology and social studies have shown that a number of people who are exposed to child pornography on the Internet do suffer psychological disorders, such as the so-called cybersex addiction, and other disinhibited and inappropriate sexual, from the norm, deviating behaviors (Quayle & Taylor, 2001; Quayle, & Taylor, 2002).

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. While we implicitly raise awareness by outlining misuses of technology that pose Internet threats, we touch upon a number of technical scenarios which may fall into cracks of legal systems at both international and in a number of countries due to the

fast pace of information technology development (see e.g., Future Crimes, 2010). Furthermore, we discuss how some massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) and 3D social networks have been used to exploit and molest children, and provide a perspective of future trends.

It is arguable whether crimes against children are increasing or not. While the US National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (Wolak et al. 2006) found a smaller proportion of youth Internet users receiving sexual solicitations from 2001 to 2006, and the US Department of Justice (Department of Justice, 2009) reports lower trends of children victimization in recent years (homicide, rape, robbery, and both simple and aggravated assault are included in the report), these numbers refer to the US only, however the problem of child exploitation deserves global perspectives. From a global perspective, data is not as encouraging as UNICEF (UNICEF Child Protection Information Sheet, 2006) has reported alarming numbers of children involved in commercial sexual exploitation in developing countries. Our position, here, is from a neutral point of view, in light of recent documented events that have used MMORPGs and 3D social networks as a channel to perpetrate sexual crimes against children. We do not argue whether these incidents are “significant” enough to make a case that deserves attention, but we focus on the facts from an information technology perspective, and comment on the dangers these misuses of technology may pose should they become significantly persistent.

## **MISUSE OF VIDEO GAMES AND 3D SOCIAL NETWORKS**

In this section we review some documented and hypothetical incidents that have happened or could happen in MMORPGs and 3D social networks, and use these cases to build a table where we classify and compare different virtual environments and their incidence of child abuse under different scenarios.

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