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Far Right Groups on the Internet: A New Problem for Crime Control and Community Safety?

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Over the last few years there have been an increasing number of publications about Internet crime in general (eg, Mann and Sutton, 1998; Griffiths, 2001, Wall, 2001; Thomas and Loader, 2000), in addition to more specific activities such as online fraud (Griffiths 2000a), hacking (Griffiths, 2000b; Taylor, 1999), cyberstalking (Elison and Akdeniz, 1998; Griffiths, Rogers and Sparrow, 1998), child abuse (Leong, 1998) terrorism (Campen *et al*, 1996) and Internet gambling (Griffiths, 2000c). All of these involve criminal activity taking place on the Internet. However, there appears to be a growing number of instances where the Internet is being used as a facilitator or enabler of crime. For instance, the "Brick Lane Bomber" David Copeland took the recipes for his pipe and nail bombs from the Internet. It also appears to be the case that some groups of people (particularly right-wing extremist organizations) are using the Internet for hate crimes by spreading their views to wider and more diverse audiences than ever before.

Either directly or indirectly, the far right are deliberately seeking to dominate "other" groups. Therefore, their activities on the Internet may directly increase the number of racial incidents at the street level. Consequently, it is important for us to know more about the dynamics of on-line hate groups, particularly the relationship between their strategies and tactics both on and off line, and the psychology of why people engage in this kind of behaviour. More research in this area will help to inform important policy questions regarding the threat that the powerful and growing Internet presence of far right groups might pose to community safety and democracy in the Information Age.

According to Perry (2001) hate crime "involves acts of violence and intimidation, usually directed toward already

stigmatized and marginalized groups". Hate crime is thus a mechanism of power and oppression, intended to reaffirm the precarious hierarchies that characterize a given social order. Clearly, not all hate activity is criminal even though it may be as damaging. Perry (2001), for example, goes on to explain how some politicians in the USA described gay men and lesbians as "less than human", thus creating an enabling environment in which hate-motivated violence can flourish. Similar arguments have been made in the UK regarding Enoch Powell's infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech and to a much lesser extent, Home Secretary David Blunkett's stance on asylum seekers.

Hatred has manifested in recent violent conflict in towns across the UK including Bradford, Stoke-on-Trent, Oldham and Burnley. In these regions there are areas where members of minority ethnic groups are particularly at risk from racially motivated offenders – making threats, being violent, stealing and vandalizing. Where the perpetrators are white, writers have been noting for years that they frequently come from areas where many feel aggrieved enough, by their own lack of opportunities and hope, to blame clearly identified "others" as the reason for so many of their problems. This blame stems from the competition for scarce resources for which many impoverished communities struggle. In towns and cities where the less well-off white communities do not hate their Asian neighbours, but rather complain about their perceived success in obtaining scarce resources, far right groups frequently seize upon the opportunity to create an enabling environment for hate crime to flourish and they are increasingly using the Internet to get their message across in ways that have never before been possible. As a consequence, this use of new technology may ultimately have serious implications for community safety.

How Does the Internet Facilitate Hate Crime?

There has been a combined growth and evolution in the race hate movement in the UK in recent years and the Internet has undoubtedly encouraged their development. The Internet has brought a new dimension to the hate movement. Racist web sites provide an enabling environment in which hate crime can flourish both on and off-line. However, unlike those politicians whose ill-considered and sometimes well meant comments provide an enabling environment, far right hate groups are proactively and strategically shaping that environment both on and off-line.

Back (2002) has demonstrated five ways that the Internet assists racist activities. The Internet:

- (1) enables the celebration of real instances of racial violence with photographs and dehumanizing comments.
- (2) enhances racial narcissism, promoting indifference towards victims – using images and cartoon caricatures.
- (3) enables the merchandising of white power music and Nazi paraphernalia – building an economic powerbase.
- (4) enables the archiving and downloading of collections of racist materials in one place – such as racist speeches and debates.
- (5) enables people to experience and yet remain geographically distant from racist culture.

To provide just one example, this includes indulging in simulated racism through online games with names such as “Jew Rats”, which may be particularly alluring to the young who could confuse the racist message with anarchic humour.

On a psychological level we could ask what is it about the Internet that may turn an ordinary easy-going person into a potential racist? Furthermore, to what extent can the Internet facilitate hate crime? There are a number of factors that make online activities potentially seductive. Such factors include anonymity, convenience, escape, dissociation/immersion, accessibility, and disinhibition. These are briefly examined below:

Accessibility - Access to the Internet is now commonplace and widespread, and can be done easily from the home and/or the workplace. Given that prevalence of behaviours is strongly correlated with increased access to the activity, it is not surprising that the development of regular online use is increasing across the population. Increased accessibility may also lead to increased problems including hate crimes.

Anonymity - One important dimension of the Internet is anonymity (Griffiths, 2000d). This allows users to engage in hate crime without fear of stigma. This anonymity may also provide the criminal with a greater sense of perceived control over the content, tone, and nature of the online experience. Anonymity may also increase feelings of comfort since there is a decreased ability to look for, and thus detect, signs of insincerity, disapproval, or judgment in facial expression, as would be typical in face-to-face interactions.

Disinhibition - This is clearly one of the Internet's key appeals, as there is little doubt that the Internet makes people less inhibited (Joinson, 1998). Online users appear to open up more quickly online and reveal their true feelings,

attitudes, and emotions much faster than in the offline world. This allows people to become disinhibited very quickly.

Convenience - Interactive online applications such as e-mail, chat rooms and newsgroups provide convenient mediums to engage in online behaviours including overt racism. Online behaviours will usually occur in the familiar and comfortable environment of home or workplace, thus reducing the feeling of risk and allowing even more extreme behaviours, which may or may not be potentially criminal.

Escape - For some, the primary reinforcement to engage in hate crime will be the gratification they experience online. The mood-modifying experience has the potential to provide an emotional or mental escape and further serves to reinforce the behaviour. Online behaviour can provide a potent escape from the stresses and strains of real life.

Immersion/Dissociation - The medium of the Internet can provide feelings of dissociation and immersion and may facilitate feelings of escape (see above). Dissociation and immersion can involve lots of different types of feelings, such as losing track of time; feeling like you are someone else; blacking out; not recalling how you got somewhere or what you did; and being in a trance-like state.

Concluding Comments

The rapid growth of the Internet has created a new dimension in hate crime by bringing together diverse racist groups such as the British National Party (BNP), White Aryan Resistance, Combat18, National Alliance, Stormfront, The Identity Church Movement, Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and the (US based) militia movement. Not only is this powerful international communications medium facilitating the development of neo-Nazi networks, but it is also providing a conduit for the sharing of ideas and ideologies (Back, Keith and Solomos, 1998) rather than as a means of command and control (Whine, 2000). There is however a growing body of evidence to suggest an increase in the latter function, since names addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of intended targets have been published on the Net.

It is our proposition that the unfamiliarity of hate crimes on the Internet denies those in the criminal justice system all important access to their own scheme of understanding. If computer-related crime is evolving to occupy a position of increasing importance in the range of offending behaviour, then those in the criminal justice system must be willing to familiarize themselves with such activities in order to make judgments about the offender and the nature of their offending. We are beginning to see the criminal justice system making inroads into the distribution of obscene images of child abuse on the internet. It seems likely that in the not too distant future, hate crimes, taking place on or facilitated by the Internet, may be viewed in the same way that other more “traditional” criminal acts are currently viewed.

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Transporting Dangerous Loads

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The legislation on the carriage of dangerous goods by road is now governed by a directive adopted by the EU Council 94/55/EC which harmonizes the law throughout the European Union.

There are three sets of regulations of which the practitioner should be aware and they cover: (1) classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous goods; (2) their transport by road in containers, tanks and vehicles; and (3) the training and certification of dangerous goods drivers. Regulations introduced in 1999 require those who load, unload and transport dangerous goods by road to appoint a Dangerous Goods Safety Adviser and these regulations implement EU Council directive 96/35/EC.

The regulations governing these activities are complex in the extreme but must be adhered to by all those involved in the transportation of dangerous goods. This article can do no more than give a general overview of what is required and a more detailed understanding could only be obtained by reading the regulations themselves. The Carriage of Dangerous Goods (Classification, Packaging & Labelling) & Use of Transportable Pressure Receptacles Regulations 1996 (SI 2092/1996) prohibit the carriage of dangerous goods unless their classification, packaging group and any subsidiary hazards have been determined from an approved carriage list. This list is set out in the regulations. Once the goods have been so classified, then packaging requirements come into force. In particular, dangerous goods must not be transported unless the packages themselves are suitable, in

other words they must be designed, constructed so that the contents cannot escape, be made of materials unlikely to affect the contents and, in appropriate cases, designed for repeated use without leakage. There are exceptions, for example, when the capacity is nominal or the container empty. Such packages must be marked with their designation, the danger sign and any relevant hazard sign. Such markings must be clear so that they can be easily read. In the event of transportable pressure receptacles, which themselves are the subject of further regulations, their designers, manufacturers, importers and suppliers must all ensure that they are safe and suitable for their purpose. The same requirements attach to those who repair or modify such receptacles. In essence therefore, dangerous goods must be properly packed and suitably marked so that all can see exactly what they are and take suitable precautions as and when necessary.

The Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road Regulations 1996 (SI 2095/1996) deal with the actual road transport of dangerous goods. All containers, tanks and dangerous goods vehicles must be suitable for the purpose, in particular for the journey being undertaken by them and any hazardous properties of those goods, and they must all be adequately maintained. In the event of the packaging being sensitive, for example, to moisture, the goods should be sheeted or alternatively carried in a closed vehicle. Tanks must be of a certified design, conforming with various constructional and equipment requirements, must be suitable for the purpose, and have been examined and tested, and a signed certificate