"We Can Be Pioneers"
– Exploring experimental knowledge sharing in an online peer-support forum for non-offending pedophiles

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Abstract

Online peer-support forums can enable those alienated from society to engage in experimental knowledge sharing practices in the absence of professional and public interaction. This, in turn, helps them manage problems in new ways. However, for pedophiles, it is unsure when peer-support help forum users cope in healthy ways, and when they justify harmful behaviors. The article argues, that exploring the potentials of peer-support forums for pedophiles to help combat child sexual abuse, this produces an analytical challenge to represent the users' experimental knowledge sharing practices without tying them to the very categories they try to escape. To accommodate this challenge, the article proposes to view these practices as politically contingent experiments rather than fixed results, and uses Donna Haraway's concept of situated knowledge to do so. Based on a grounded theory analysis of an observational and ethnographic fieldwork on the Virtuous Pedophiles online peer-support forum for non-offending pedophiles, the article proceeds to analyzes relations and networks between the users' personal experiences and the political situation that surrounds. The results are discussed in relation to classical frameworks of experiments in STS. Finally, experimenting as a mode of practice and analytical tool is argued to contribute to child sexual abuse prevention research, due to its attention to performances, resistances, and constraints, important to understand the challenges of being a non-offending pedophile.

Introduction

> We can be pioneers in daring to confront our struggles. We can refuse to accept their labels. We can support each other in keeping our boundaries and our dignity, knowing that is what is going to protect children and make the future better.
>
> Anonymous User, Virtuous Pedophiles forum

Online peer-support forums have been praised for being powerful platforms for self-disclosure and social support seeking (De Choudhury and De 2014, Manikonda and De Choudhury 2017), as well as being valued for their ability to help people experiment with new solutions to their problems in the absence of professional interaction (Mead & MacNeil 2004). Scholars researching child sexual abuse prevention have started to explore how online, anonymous peer-support forums for pedophiles can be utilized based on their ease of access and anonymity to cope with the detrimental psychological effects of living with sexual attraction to minors (Nielsen, Aaskov & Larsen 2020). This is thought to have important implications for child sexual abuse prevention, as mental ill-health could be a key risk-factor in committing abuse (Jahnke & Hoyer 2013, Lasher & Stinson 2017, Cantor & McPhail 2016).

The idea that sexual thoughts about minors inevitably lead to abuse is at best a misunderstanding, but at worst it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. When pedophiles first experience sexual thoughts about children in early-to-mid adolescence (Tozdan & Briken 2018), many pedophiles report that this experience is often accompanied by severe psychological distress resulting in loneliness, depression and suicidal thoughts, as they fear their lives could have no positive outcome (Rask Pedersen 2017, Houtepen, Sijtsema & Bogaerts 2016). Owing to a lack of support in society, many pedophiles thus turn to online communities to manage the mental ill-health problems of living with pedophilic attractions (Stevens and Woods 2019). However, turning to online forums may not always have the desired effect in reducing child sexual

abuse.

Even though the chance to engage with and discuss serious mental health concerns online and anonymously among peers provides an opportunity to circumvent barriers to seeking professional support (Stevens and Wood 2019) and experiment with new solutions to manage the stigma (Holt, Liggett, Holt & Lee 2020), there is a risk that the absence of professional support in such forums might allow room for justifications and rationalizations of child sexual abuse (Halloran & Quayle 2010, Holt, Blevins & Burkert 2010, Malesky & Ennis 2004, D'Ovidio, Mitman, El-Burki & Shumar 2009). Holt et al. (2020) argue that "exposure to and internalization of subcultural norms within pedophile support forums may lead to users accepting pro-offending justifications, beliefs, and denials that may increase risk for contact offenses" (Holt et al., p. 302). Despite the fact that these forums may be powerful platforms to combat the risk of committing abuse, there is therefore also some concern about how to approach this double-edged sword of online peer support for pedophiles, as the forum user's 'experimental' solutions prove no guarantee to be in the child's favor.

The issue of online peer-support forums, however, does not only present itself in terms of evaluating pros or cons or quantifying the amount of risk of committing child sexual abuse, but also glares at the very instance we suggest researching peer-support forums for pedophiles in an attempt to engage this double-edged sword. For if the value of peer support is the ability to experiment with new knowledge to re-think problems in the absence of professional interaction, how do we explore and represent such interactions without defining them to the categories they try to escape? Furthermore, how do we avoid making pedophiles the only true experts on their challenges and desires, if we dismiss the value of professional categories altogether? In the political world of pedophilia, the concern of romanticizing or ignoring pedophile's experiences have consequences beyond the theoretical. If we fail to learn from the perspectives of pedophiles themselves as to how to manage the stigma of living with pedophilia, we may not only fail to learn about crucial elements in supporting non-offending

lifestyles, but also fail to motivate professional help seeking if it fails to resonate with their realities, thus alienating non-offending pedophiles from professional systems even further. Alternatively, if we approach their accounts on how to live without committing abuse uncritically, romanticizing their role as the only true experts on their experiences, we risk failing to incorporate well-researched and important factors of risk management into the equation, and importantly, risk gaining no ground through the research as it will be dismissed for those reasons.

Online peer-support forums for pedophiles produce two forms of tension, both of which relate to practice in my view: the tension to understand how online practices on support forums help prevent child sexual abuse, and the tension to find credible practices to explore and represent this issue. In this paper, I propose ways of using the concept of *experimentation* to help ease the tension involved in exploring and representing the online peer-support interactions of pedophiles.

Based on observational and ethnographic fieldwork relating to a peer-support forum for pedophiles called Virtuous Pedophiles, I will introduce, engage, and discuss a theoretical and analytical framework to explore the peer-support interactions of pedophiles as situated and experimental, and argue for the value of doing this. Firstly, I introduce peer support in more detail as a general practice of experimental knowledge sharing defined by the absence of professional knowledge and the use of real-life experience. I argue that a classic critique of experimentation in laboratories from an STS perspective may be adapted to explore how users of such forums experiment with producing and sharing knowledge. I propose to use Donna Haraway's 'Situated Knowledges' (1991) as a theoretical and analytical framework to do this. Specifically, I argue that peer support should be explored as a practice situated in both real-life experience and the political categories in which these experiences occur. I introduce the results from a grounded theory-based content analysis on the Virtuous Pedophiles forum, and build Haraway's theoretical perspective into analysis, using Marilyn Strathern's work on relations (2020), hybrids and networks (1996) to visualize the practices of forum users. I then proceed to discuss the

results in two ways: Firstly, I discuss how and why we can regard these practices as experimental. Secondly, drawing on Pickering's concept of 'experimenting in the wild' (2018), I discuss why an emphasis on performance and experimentation is valuable for child sexual abuse prevention.

Experimental Knowledge Sharing

The goal of the Virtuous Pedophiles forum is to help provide pedophiles with peer support to help them lead happy, productive lives. Although this forum believes that this can be achieved by living without any physical form of sexual relations to children, other forums for pedophiles aim to achieve the same goals by presenting a wide range of well-rehearsed arguments to justify child sexual abuse (Holt et al. 2010, D'Ovidio et al. 2009). The troublesome or challenging aspect of relying on online forums for people who are sexually attracted to minors to prevent child sexual abuse is that the ability to be anonymous and engage with peers on online forums is effective in supporting and changing attitudes regardless of moral standpoints.

The ambivalence of the practices of on online peer-support forums for pedophiles is rooted in the fact that peer support is a resource without any formalized treatment goals, and, importantly, that it is defined by its ability to provide knowledge and solutions outside of medicalized and professional frameworks. Mead and MacNeil describe peer support as a general practice and resource to be used in any treatment program which:

> [...] doesn't assume a medical definition of the problem and opens us to exploring other ways of thinking about the experience rather than dealing with it (Mead and MacNeil 2006, p. 10).

In Natasja Kingod et al.'s (2017) qualitative but systematic literature review of peer support in online communities and its influence on the daily lives of people living with chronic illnesses, they identify four themes: 1) illness-associated identity work; 2) social support and connectivity; 3) experimental knowledge sharing; and 4) collective voice and mobilization (Kingod, Cleal, Wahlberg & Husted 2017). The particular ability to open up new ways of thinking about experiences is what they identify as experimental knowledge sharing, which they define as:

> Peers [who] exchanged knowledge that emerged from their own experiences of living with illness. This knowledge was not something that could be generated by health care professionals because it arose from real-life experiences and situations (Kingod et al. 2017, p. 18).

As in Mead and MacNeil's description of peer support, experimental knowledge sharing is defined as a practice somewhat opposed to or in resistance to the (medical) expert systems which typically enroll peers. Notably, Kingod et al. do not describe experimental knowledge sharing as a therapeutic tool in offline settings, as Mead and MacNeil do, but identify this practice as a prominent feature on online peer-support forums. Additionally, Kingod et al. claim that their experimental knowledge sharing is unique because it is generated from real-life experiences and situations. At this point, I should like to return to what I have described as the tensions in online peer-support forums from a child sexual abuse prevention perspective. From a political or societal perspective, there is a motivation to understand how online peer-support practices for pedophiles help them to live without committing abuse – or, alternatively, escalate the risk of committing abuse. As introduced briefly above, this motivation holds its own tension to be able to sort between what helps pedophiles cope and what helps them to justify deviant actions[1]. However, if the value of peer support is to experiment with matters outside of medical definitions and generated

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[1] For more detailed discussions of this particular issue, see both Stevens and Wood (2019), Holt et al. (2020), and Nielsen & Aaskov et al. (2020).

from personal situations and real-life experiences, how do we understand these practices as part of a medical framework regarding child sexual abuse and risk, while still taking the experiments seriously? Or, said otherwise, how do we take pedophile's negotiations of real-life experiences and situations as credible knowledge in itself, while still being taken seriously as producing knowledge relevant for child sexual abuse prevention?

Despite taking a major leap in terms of themes, this question is not unlike discussions of power, representation and experimentation within the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS), and I propose that these discussions can be extended to lend support here. For the purpose of binding STS perspectives to the tension of exploring and representing online peer-support interactions for pedophiles, we might recognize that this tension is a question of how to place agency on who has the ability to define what peer-support is and what it does. Is it the users sharing knowledge in new ways, which does not assume a medical definition of problem who hold this agency, or is it the researchers or scientists with extensive knowledge on child sexual abuse and risk-factors? As I see it, one of the purposes of most STS studies, ranging from the widely used Actor-Network Theory (Callon & Law 1989, Latour 1987), to studies of multiple ontologies in healthcare practice (Mol 2002), and the myth of the cyborg (Haraway 2006), has been to escape an essentialism in which someone or something holds power over others a priori. Instead, a common acceptance in many STS studies is that the knowing world never exists from an objective standard and perspective, but is something that is explored and/or experienced in relation to the wealth of both human and non-human, physical and abstract elements which surround us. Historically, this has been especially prominent in showing that science within laboratories, or experiments, were not exempt from a social/political world, but produced knowledge and facts which were neither neutral nor objective, but bore a relation to both material and political forces (Pickering 1992, Pickering 1995, Latour 1990). One of the most influential works produced by Bruno Latour to date is entitled "Give Me A Laboratory

And I Will Raise The World" (1983). This was a fresh critique of the way in which laboratories, scientists and experiments did not in fact show us the facts of the world, but *produced* facts *in* our so-called modern world (Latour 1993), and it is the same type of critique I now propose to explore the worlds raised by the users on peer-support forums. Specifically, the performative notion of how knowledge is produced, and that we might learn more about the world from placing more emphasis on *how* experiments produce facts, than on the facts themselves.

Building on the proposed notion that peer support includes the ability to engage in experimental knowledge sharing sourced from real-life experience and situations, I argue that we might try to dispel the tension of explorations and representation of facts by exploring the forums users' experimental knowledge sharing analogous to how scientists *perform* experiments. In other words, if we view experimental knowledge sharing as the performance of producing knowledge, we can learn a great deal about these practices if we do not immediately try to sort the results of these, but look at the performances of the practice itself. Like so, it is my argument that we as researchers can also adapt to an explorative process which does not assume an immediate medical definition of a problem, but remains open to the perspectives of the forum users. Crucially, this perspective does not seek to romanticize the real-life experiences and situation of the forum users as if they are the only experts on peer-support, but accept to explore these experiences seriously within their political/material relations.

I propose that a starting point to adapt this perspective of experimentation as practice between both individual and the political world around them, is well founded in Donna Haraway's (1991) introduction of the concept of 'situated knowledges'.

Situated Knowledges

Situated knowledges is Donna Haraway's (1991) attempt to discredit what she calls the 'god trick' where we are compelled to believe that there exists an objective position to describe anything. The critique

of the god trick is not unlike the tension introduced in this paper. In peer-support practice and representation, the concept of situated knowledge reminds us that neither real-life experience and situations nor scientific expertise has the power to describe the value of peer support from a neutral or objective position. As Haraway describes it, both relativism and totalization (real-life experiences or medical frameworks) are god tricks, which promise vision from everywhere and nowhere, but neither is less biased that the other. Showing that knowledge is never truly objective and detached from the social and political world, but is always situated, particular and condensed in an antagonistic field of power, her particular political focus on situated knowledges from the peripheries of societies, I believe, generates valuable insights here. I argued in a previous section that viewing users as scientists experimenting with new knowledge is a valuable perspective with a view to easing the tension of exploration and representation. Even though Haraway does not focus directly on experimentation, situated knowledges still hold the same principles of critique, but place emphasis on the value of pursuing situated knowledge from subjugated groups. In the context of this paper, I take pedophiles to be a subjugated group.

Haraway argues that we acquire extraordinary and potent knowledge to describe the social weaves of the world in a more *adequate, sustained, and objective way* (Haraway 1991, p. 584) when researching subjugated groups. The potency of this knowledge is, that accounts from the peripheries are most likely to deny an all-interpretive account of the world – i.e. a god trick or a reductionist framework. She reminds us, however, that despite of the adequacy, sustainability, and objectivity in the subjugated's accounts, they are not innocent or produce new god-tricks. Instead they are preferred precisely because of their guiltiness in making visible axes of domination and power in the world around them when fighting against it. Haraway also discusses the danger of romanticizing statements when we research subjugated positions. When 'seeing from below', as she describes the way of seeing the world from subjugated positions, we must therefore always be careful to remember that there are no short-cuts to truths here, either. Their knowledge is situated in equally complex ways as any other person (or scientist in a lab), and thus requires the same amount of analytical attention to understand and visualize. When I propose that we visualize the practices of *how* users of the Virtuous Pedophiles forum see their situation and challenges, it is therefore important to understand that when these users exchange knowledge of their own real-life experiences, these experiences do not appear in a social vacuum and do not pave a short-cut to the truth. In other words, discussing experiences and knowledge outside of expert networks does not make such discussions exempt from the power of the social and political world that surrounds you.

Taking seriously the (subjugated) accounts of non-offending pedophiles on Virtuous Pedophiles, this would then provide adequate and sustained accounts of peer-support practices, but only if we explore this from their point of view. That is, explore their situated knowledges.

To explore situated knowledges more specifically, this is for Haraway to look for "semiotic-material technology linking meanings and bodies" (Haraway 1991, p. 585). Revealing semiotic-material links between real-life knowledge and the political situation that surrounds the self-knowledge of pedophiles therefore involves visualizing the meanings and bodies, which are connected.

Approaching the users' experimental knowledge sharing with an analytical focus on the semiotic-material relations produced through their self-knowledge, the very first analytical step now is to point out that accessing an online forum through a digital and pseudo-/ anonymous avatar is a material relation underlying every single semiotic relation drawn in the users' knowledge sharing practices. Indeed, the purpose of this article is based on the material-technological construction of a forum in which people who are sexually attracted to minors find both the courage and the resources to engage in these issues. Consequently, the attitudes and semiotic relations in their situated knowledge might seem very different if they were related to the materiality of a microphone on a podium in a physical group

setting, thus being situated differently. However, although I do not wish to detract from or ignore the existence and semiotic properties of material relations in shaping the users' situated knowledge, materiality rarely features prominently in the discussions on the forum, as I will show. I will therefore not force an analytical look to material elements and relations in the users' accounts, other than what I have done by acknowledging the very material semiotic relation of the forum behind the pedophile's knowledge sharing. For the purpose of this article, a focus on the way in which semiotic relations link meanings and bodies may come to ease the tension of exploration and representation sufficiently.

Following a short introduction to the methodology supporting the observational data, I will take these theoretical perspectives into consideration when analyzing and exploring how the users of the Virtuous Pedophiles forum experiment with new knowledge in order to live non-offending lives.

Method

The data for this paper has been collected through ethnographic observation and sampling on the online peer-support forum Virtuous Pedophiles. This data consists of text-based quotes from various discussions and topics on the forum, and was collected primarily in the period August-December 2019. I did not participate or interact in any of the debates on the forum included in the data, but I did – by arrangement with the owners of the forum – make my presence known when I described my project and my observational activities.

The forum has not been observed and analyzed in its entirety because it contains so many categories, topics, and posts that they cannot all be explored using qualitative methods. Even so, the observational activities were directed towards the most popular and relevant topics. The primary topics on which the focus was placed were "Research and Ideas", "Member Introductions", "Reaction to the News", "Ordinary Discussions", "Life Experiences", "Request for Support", and "Keeping Kids and Ourselves Safe". Approximately 75 topics – containing as few as five posts and as many as 500+ posts – were included in the analysis. Despite a directed observational gaze towards some topics, there were no pre-defined inclusion criteria for analysis other than the criterion of being related to the experience of being a pedophile. Instead, the method for observing the forum was to build a grounded theory by including elements and criteria for analysis on an ongoing basis. If a discussion was included for analysis, it was bookmarked to give prompts between log-ins if new posts were added.

To build a grounded theory with no pre-defined inclusion criteria, I relied on Adele Clarke's work to sort the data by creating situational maps of prominent human, non-human, and discursive elements to continuously evaluate and provoke analysis of these elements (Clarke 2003). In this process, what started out as somewhat confusing maps of a multitude of actors and elements jotted down in observation with no apparent relations, were categorized slowly into more finished constructs until it became possible to conduct relational analysis.

The first categorized and ordered situational map[2] that supported the analysis of this article appears in figure 1, with the most prominent actors included in this article highlighted for convenience.

INDIVIDUAL HUMAN ELEMENTS/ACTORS	NONHUMAN ELEMENTS ACTORS/ACTANTS
• VirPed Founders	• User profiles
• Forum Moderators	• IP-addresses
• Therapists	• ToR-browsers
• Users	• YouTube-videos
COLLECTIVE HUMAN ELEMENTS/ACTORS	IMPLICATED/SILENT ACTORS/ACTANTS
• Pedophiles	• Socioeconomic/class factors
• Feminists	• Bias
• Virtuous Pedophiles	• Individual Rationalizations
• Visions of Alice	• Coping
• Users	• Justifications
DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF INDIVIDUAL AND/OR COLLECTIVE HUMAN ACTORS	DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF NONHUMAN ACTANTS
• 'Wine-tasters'	• Legal Exploitation Material
• Child-whisperers	• Therapeutic Sex Dolls
• Evolutionary Guardians	• Forum Infrastructure
• Virtuous Pedophiles	• 'Pedophile Sexuality'
• "The hegemonic Public"	• Research assemblages
	• Child Sexual Abuse material
POLITICAL/ECONOMIC ELEMENTS	SOCIOCULTURAL/SYMBOLIC ELEMENTS
• Child Sexual Abuse	• Sexuality
• Treatment	• Diagnosis
• Confidentiality	• Control
• Prison sentences	• Gender
• Nation specific legislations	• Desire
	• 'Being a minor'
TEMPORAL ELEMENTS	SPATIAL ELEMENTS
• Historic events of inter-generational relationships	• Digital Spaces
• History with LGBT	• National border in terms of law
• Non-offending/Non-behavior (temporal suspension)	• Access to VPN
• Length of prison sentences	• Places with children
	• Workplaces
	• 'Safe' places
MAJOR ISSUES/DEBATES	RELATED DISCOURSES
• Managing stigma/risk	• Academic Feminism
• Peer Support	• LGBT-values
• Staying legal	• Biology
• Human rights	• Sexuality Studies
• Access to treatment/need for treatment	

Figure 1 – Structured situational map of observations of the Virtuous Pedophiles forum

Collecting data in this way through situational maps is a focused method which should be taken as a first analytical step to navigate the difficulties of exploring peer support for pedophiles in a non-reductionist way by not using pre-defined inclusion criteria. The analysis in this article is thus a next step towards provoking analysis of the relations between all the different actors. However, rather than claiming to build a grounded theory even further, this second-step analysis of relations is done with an attention to situated knowledge to provoke specific attention the subjugated and political position of being a pedophile. I do not mean to derail into new methodological discussions here, but I will add, that I do not think an analytical adaptation to situated knowledges from grounded theory is incompatible, but rather I take it as a comprehensive inclusions of Clarke's (2003) concept of 'sites of silence' to work constructively with all the matters around the pedophiles' articulations as well.

Continuing, I will present the way in which the data from the forum in the situational map has undergone further analysis to provoke analysis between relations and visualize the users' situated knowledge.

Even though the users of the Virtuous Pedophiles forum are encouraged to be anonymous, all quotes in the following sections are still presented without user names, and are paraphrased to avoid direct text searches which might reveal the pseudonyms of the users concerned.

Analysis

To look for and visualize the semiotic relations that link meanings and bodies with a view to understanding the users' discussions as experimental and situated practices, I propose to draw on the concepts of 'relation', 'hybrid', and 'network' in Marilyn Strathern's work. A very first step here is to explain the difference between connections and relations. She describes relations as being the fabric that has an "effect on – or pose problem for – actors far beyond the scope of their connections" (Strathern 2020, p. 8). Entities can thus be related without being connected, and a relation should be understood as existing when the "conception of an entity's self-referential 'identity' becomes modified when that entity is thought of 'in respect to' another." (Strathern 2020, p. 7). However, in my analysis I will not visualize relations between single entities only, but will show how the users' experimental knowledge sharing feature in multiple relations simultaneously. I propose to call these multiple relational constructs hybrids in political networks. I do

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[2] This map reflects a point in time, rather than a fixed visualization of the forum. It is used here as an example to make the methodology of the fieldwork more transparent.

this for two reasons: 1) The logic emerging from the users' statements is not to be found in the logic of the parts, but in the relations that exist between them, thus making their 'total' logic of being a non-offending pedophile a whole or a hybrid consisting of relational activity between several parts (Strathern 1996). As I continue my analysis, I will therefore distinguish between when a relation is a part in itself and when it features as a part in a larger whole. 2) The larger wholes of their logic should, as per Haraway too, be seen in analysis with political categories. Strathern argues:

> It is as though the politics that lies within the image of hybridity does not do sufficient analytical work - politics is re-created as though it were also 'outside' the analysis of representations (Strathern 1996, p. 520).

Encompassing this, rather than being constructs inside political categories, the hybrid (or the cyborg (Haraway 2006)) of the non-offending pedophile should also be seen in relation to political categories, thus doing sufficient analytical work to show how they change into new constructs together. We might call this seeing the hybrid in a political network, or in a 'socially extended state' (Strathern 1996, p. 521). For this reason, the relational work analyzed in the data is visualized in two-dimensional figures, relating parts to wholes on an x-axis, and the wholes in a socially extended state or network on the y-axis. I will present three different analytical figures in this way, one in each of the following themes, which I call: Monsters, Humans, and Peers.

Monsters

> Believe me, you are not the first, nor the last person to read the Monster Monologue here at Virtuous Pedophiles.

One of the topics discussed most frequently on the Virtuous Pedophiles forum was the idea that pedophiles were monsters or abusers. The

initial quote here is a response given to a user who described a lot of self-loathing and felt like a monster, and the respondent even described this sort of narrative as the 'Monster Monologue' owing to its frequency. In many instances on the forum, one of the most important ways of managing the stigma attached to pedophilia seemed to involve realizing or helping people to realize that they were not monsters or abusers. Here are some of the quotes reflecting this tendency:

> It really made things easier when I understood the difference between an abuser and a pedophile. Once I could separate the two, I began not hating myself.

> I had my attractions define who and what I was, instead defining them myself and choosing how it should affect my life.

> She [mental health professional] said I wasn't a pedophile because I never abused anyone. She said pedophiles are monsters who only mean to cause children harm.

> When I became a user here I also let my pedophilia define me. I thought only a monster would be sexual aroused by children. But through the help I've gotten here I'm starting to realize that I am much more than a pedophile.

All four users in these quotes use real-life experiences to reflect on the relation between being attracted to minors and being a monster. I believe it may be useful to present the semiotic relations, the wholes, and the network found in these quotes as follows:

Monster/Pedophile/Abuser	Being defined	Out of control	Offending
"Me"	Defining	"Much more" / "Not hating"	Non-offending

Figure 2 – Author model #1

When Haraway asks "with whose blood were my eyes crafted", it would make some sense to say that to see as a non-offending pedophile is to slay and spill the blood of the monster(fied stigma). In this figure, I try to visualize how the political network of the monster feature important relations to the relations between parts of the non-offending pedophile. In the quotes we see how disconnecting yourself from the monster typology involves creating relations that situate yourself as someone who is in control of defining yourself and thus becoming more than the monster. Their "Me" (as depicted in the table), thus become modified when related to or thought of in relation to a monster and an abuser. The testimonies of their self-knowledge as not being a monster, as something more, as a person capable of defining themselves, is thus shown not in a logic in itself, but as a situated practice in a political network, exemplified particularly well in the following quote:

> It really made things easier when I understood the difference between an abuser and a pedophile

The network of relations shown in the figure is an example of an experimental and situated practice of being a non-offending pedophile in the Virtuous Pedophiles forum. I will continue to consider more quotes and a new network, to add to the complexity of this larger vision.

Humans

> I'm a good person. I try every day to do right, but I'm still totally alone and I don't have anything to show for any of it.

As this quote suggests, being a non-offending pedophile is a lonely and unrewarding existence, as you have nothing to show for doing nothing. I will argue here that experimental and situated knowledge sharing on the Virtuous Pedophiles forum may, in fact, be a way of visualizing the performance of doing nothing. Because you cannot find a connected performance to your missing actions, the performance of a non-offending pedophile may still be related to the action of a choice. Here are some quotes to illustrate this point:

> This is the difference between a monster and a human being. All of humanity are tempted, but we can evaluate whether that temptation is safe or not. We can choose whether or not we want to abuse another person. A monster would not experience this difference. They would always act in self-interest.

> Your morality isn't defined by what you want, but what you do. To think you control your feelings is, well, bluntly, ridiculous thinking created by ridiculous institutions that use guilt as ways to control you. Morality is a choice of action

> Homosexuality was seen the same way as pedophiles are today. They assumed it was a sickness that made men rape boys. But what did they do? They taught the public and changed the way people saw homosexuality. They made people see that homosexuals are not violent people, but just like with straight people, some are rapists. We need

to do the same. I am a pedophile and not a rapist.

I guarantee you there is an abundance of experience and knowledge here that you can dig into whenever you feel the need. I think what you can learn about your 'challenges' will surprise you. And please never feel ashamed, because what you are is not who you are. Always remember that.

As in the previous section, I will consider the hybrid of the non-offending pedophile bottom row, and its socially extended network top row. Here, the political whole of a rapist:

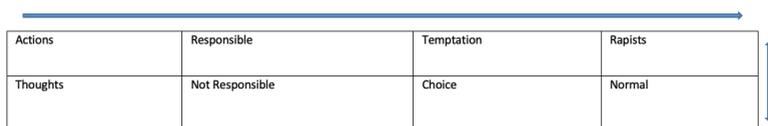| Actions	Responsible	Temptation	Rapists
Thoughts	Not Responsible	Choice	Normal

Figure 3 – Author model #2

This time in the bottom row, we see how the users relate elements such as 'thoughts', 'responsibility' and 'choice' into what I analyze as a related whole of being 'normal'. As before, the total logic of this practice of forming a larger vision of a non-offending pedophile is found in its situated practice when it is related, or extended, up against an opposite. Each part's logic – that being 'thought', 'non-responsibility', and 'choice' - are all modified, mobilized and visualized as elements in a performance of seeing as- and being a non-offending pedophile when it is related to the 'actions', 'responsibilities' and 'temptations' of the abuser/rapists. In this way, seeing yourself as a non-offending pedophile means accepting that you *are* responsible for your choice of *not* acting on your thoughts by relating the choice not to act to a choice of morality, which is then extended as a part in a larger network of being a human rather than a rapist/monster. The users are thus regarded not as non-offending pedophiles, but as moral human beings – which (as

indicated in the quote at the start of this section) is very useful because it gives them something to show for their struggle.

I will consider one last analytical network.

Peers

At the beginning of this article, I argued that many pedophiles report a sense of psychological distress when acknowledging that their sexual feelings probably categorize them as pedophiles. However, despite this distress, many pedophiles do not seek any help. Studies indicate that pedophiles do not refrain from seeking help because they do not want it, but because they do not trust the relevant professionals to have sufficient knowledge to help them, or because they fear that they might be wrongfully reported to the authorities (Kramer 2011).

Even though laws differ from country to country and Virtuous Pedophiles is an international forum, mandatory, national reporting laws are seen as a prominent risk for many users, as they fear having their confidentiality violated if they simply state their feelings (and not their actions):

No one will try to get help if just saying that you are a pedophile will have you treated like an abuser.

Therapy is not an option for me, even though I really need it. I don't think there is help to find where I live, and even if I could find someone, mandatory reporting laws would make it hard to be honest.

The biggest problem of being attracted to minors is that mandatory reporting laws discourage us to get help. We will be reported and wing up in a register, simply for wanting to get professional help.

The fear of getting help is not knowing what is safe to

discuss and always being alert.

Seen from the perspective of the non-offending pedophile user on Virtuous Pedophiles, these quotes already seem to paint a picture of a somewhat antagonistic relationship to mental health professionals owing to their obligations (relations) to mandatory reporting laws or to their stigmatic preconceptions. Considering the different elements in the quotes above, a political network of mental health professionals for the users could look like this:

Professionals	Pedophile = Abuser	Registers	Not safe / Being alert	Alone
Peers	Reassurement	No judgement	Happy / Grateful	Community

Figure 5 – Author model #4

I introduce the top row initially here, as I want the reader to understand this frequent theme and situated challenge before I present the next and final quotes reflecting the way in which users discuss being on a forum with peers:

> I'm happy this forum exists and that young people are finding it. I was completely alone with my thoughts, and too scared to reach out to anyone for over 30 years. That was the hardest part. Finally finding this, totally by accident, seeing others like myself actually saved me from doing things I would regret.

> To see you are not the only one and to be able to voice your concerns without judgement. Knowing you're supported by so many others who go through the same emotions, weaknesses, victories, challenges. I am very grateful for that reassurement.

> This forum was and still is the only place I can define my

sexuality. Honestly, I thought that liking early teen boys while not wanting to hurt them was a completely unique attitude, so I wasn't able to understand or fit it anywhere until I came here.

Considering these quotes and the quotes included previously, the parts and wholes and their relations all together could look like this:

In these examples taken together, we see how users relate parts such as 'peers', 'reassurement', 'non-judgmental attitudes', 'happiness' and 'gratefulness' to belonging to a community. The two-axis relational work that I portrayed here is, however, different from the other examples in the way that the different parts from each row were not directly connected in the quotes, but imposed by analysis. I still relate the political network of barriers in help-seeking to the users' ways of relating the digital avatars of their peers to 'reassurement', 'non-judgementality', and 'happiness' for its direct oppositions to 'being misunderstood', 'registers', and 'fear'. Even though this relational construct is not derived directly from user discussions, I argue that the semiotic relations between 'national borders', 'laws', and 'registers', and 'peers' and 'anonymity' are still relations with powerful implications for the ways in which non-offending pedophiles (peers) are seen on the Virtuous Pedophiles forum.

Discussion

There is a motivation to try to understand how non-offending pedophiles understand their situation and the challenges they face to further ways of preventing child sexual abuse. However, to do so was argued as providing a tension in how to explore these perspectives on online peer-support forums without assuming medical definitions of child sexual abuse and risk which they try to escape. I have argued that exploring experimental knowledge sharing among the users on Virtuous Pedophiles to try to understand their own perspectives on their situation and challenges, we should not mistake the emergence

of real-life experience outside of professional network as emerging in a social vacuum. Instead, I argued to adapt an analogous perspective to the forum users as experimenting scientists to see their practices as situated knowledges to include the actors surrounding the pedophile's experiences for its potency to provide more adequate, sustained and objective accounts from the users.

In the analysis of data collected through observational fieldwork on the Virtuous Pedophiles forum, I have covered three different themes to show how the users' quotes revealed relations to a multitude of actors, including political categories, which together formed a larger vision of the situated practices of being a non-offending pedophile. Using Strathern's work on relations, hybrids, and networks, I have shown how their situation and problems were given meaning and modified through their relation to – and not to – elements situating their knowledge. Thus, despite being emergent from their own experiences and experimental from challenging common understandings, their knowledge was not free and un-tied, but made meaningful through relations to the categories and stigma situating them – i.e., the common understandings. Visualizing how the users on Virtuous Pedophiles saw their situation and challenges of living as non-offending pedophiles through this analytical lens, the results of this endeavor can be summarized in three key points: 1) That seeing as a non-offending pedophile is to proliferate relations from yourself to attributes opposite of a monster and an abuser, thus defining yourself rather than being defined. 2) That you are not responsible for your thoughts, and the action of making a choice *not* to act on your thoughts proliferate relations to a moral human being, capable of being a control, opposite of monsters and rapists, who act on their temptations. 3) That peers on the online forum come to be important resources for them to achieve a positive outlook on life, as they symbolize the opposite of the fears and insecurities in seeking help from mental-health professionals.

These results lead to two conclusions: First and foremost, I believe they provide a methodological, theoretical, and analytical example of how to approach experimental knowledge sharing to manage stigma

on online peer-support forums for pedophiles, navigating a potentially dangerous dualistic separation between professional and political categories and the real-life experiences of pedophiles. Furthermore, I believe the results show the value of regarding the practices of marginalized groups as experimental. I will try to develop this last point here.

Exploring and researching marginalized groups – whether this is done in a context of peer support and experimental knowledge sharing or not – the power and interplay between identity and categories is something to behold critically to understand their realities. This, I believe, is a point which has particular resonance with Ian Hacking's work on the 'looping effect' and how researchers and engines of discovery 'make up people' (Hacking 2006). In Hacking's terminology, the motivation to understand the potential of peer-support practices in child sexual abuse prevention could be described as an engine of discovery to medicalize people and – in turn – regarding a group of people as being defined by definite properties. Hacking means not to criticize the truth in these practices of discovery, but observes that we tend to think that the targets we aim to discover are fixed and standing still, when in reality they are moving. As part of a looping effect, we might therefore also pay attention to *resistance* as the process in which the people who are: "medicalised, normalised, administered, increasingly try to take back control from the experts and institutions, sometimes by creating new experts, new institutions." (Hacking 2006, p. 8). In this way, the situated practices visualized in the results could also be framed in terms of resistance to experts and institutions, but importantly, as moving, creating, and relating knowledge in new ways. Experimentation as a concept of a mode of practice, I then believe to be a way to fix our mode of discovery to a moving target, accepting the emerging interplay between people and categories. Seeing experimentation as a practice of emerging processes between identity and expert categories or standards is supported additionally by considering Charis Cussins' (1996) ethnographical exploration of interactions between female patients in infertility clinics and reproductive technologies. Cussins discusses how the women in infertility clinics engage in what

she describes as an "ontological choreography" between their own personhood and objectifying their infertility. In this choreography, the women forge a functional zone in which they objectify themselves to the standards and cultures of the infertility clinic to bring about desires change in their identities. The power of this analysis, is when Cussins show empirically how the women's agency to get pregnant, i.e. real-life experiences and situation, is not reduced to, but inseparable from the objectifying standards of the clinic. Similar to situated knowledges, but with a sharper attention to agency, Cussins show how to regard practices from (marginalized) groups as motivated and strategic, but still choreographed in specific objectifying relations to the standards and cultures around them to bring about desired agendas. Experimentation in this regard then come to not only mean arbitrary interplay between subject and power, but in fact as a (moving) process of gaining agency through subscribing to standards and norms. Whether in resistance to, or in choreography with, regarding and exploring the pedophile forum user's practice as experimental I value precisely for the attention the inseparability to and interplay with the political world of child sexual abuse, which is shown in the users' interaction. Following Hacking and Cussins, this perspective is then important if we are to understand both the production of identity and the realization of agenda. Another point to exemplify the analytical power of looking at experimental practices in political fields may be lend from Gomart and Hennion's (1999) analysis of social attachment in music amateurs and drug users. Regarding practice concerning knowledge and identity, Gomart and Hennion states that when subjects enter a 'dispositif', i.e. a powerful and political environment meant to structure action and knowledge, we might hold analytical priority to the 'constraints' in this environment as the generous aspects which create existence and initiate transformation, rather than something which reduces it (Gomar and Hennion 1999, p. 221). By looking for how these constraints – i.e. the medicalizations (Hacking) and the objectifying practices (Cussins) - are managed and experimented with reflexively by the people we study, Gomart and Hennion argues, how they in a peculiar way come to write

a sociology for us. When the users studied here then experiment with the constraints of being a non-offending pedophile, such as abusers and monsters, these reflexive practices (or events as Gomart and Hennion would call it), is an important analytical source to understand how to live as a non-offending pedophiles, rather than only looking for action of acting on their attractions or not.

Experiments, I argue, is thus as important explorative and analytical contribution to study marginalized groups for its attention to performances in situated knowledge, resistance, constraints, and ontological choreographies to visualize how the vision, identity, and agenda of being a non-offending pedophile is brought into existence.

My final and concluding point in this paper is to explain why I also believe it is important to adapt a focus on experimentation to understand child sexual abuse prevention specifically. Even though I have used experimentation as a concept to describe the performative and dialectic nature of producing and exchanging knowledge, it also often means producing something new. Even though this paper has been critical of the initial sense of seeing experimental knowledge sharing as generated from real-life experience and situation, I still believe it is important to call the peer-support interactions of pedophiles experimental in order to underline that these practices do in fact have a unique value of creating *new* ways of seeing. As new, complex emergent systems of how to live in ways that resist the inevitability of becoming an abuser. Finding and experimenting with new solutions to your problems in the midst of strands of knowledge from your own experiences and political categories we might call what Pickering (2018) describes as 'experimentation in the wild'.

In Pickering's work "Poiesis in Action", he discusses a framework to engage what sort of knowledge is the alternative to "Strong Knowledge". His argument is that the alternative is in fact not knowledge at all, but 'poiesis':

> a hybrid assemblage of mangle-ish performance and knowledge, but within a gestalt defined by the former (Pickering 2018, p. 3).

When you experiment in the wild, the sort of knowledge produced is not a detached and universal knowledge, but something ancillary to the very performances between the actors from which it emerges. Performances which he calls 'dances of agency' (Pickering 1995). Thus, when he describes poiesis as an alternative to "Strong Knowledge", the center of gravity in this hybrid assemblage is the performances, and not the strands of knowledge identified in them. With a focus on performance, poiesis thus actively explores emergence, whereas "Strong Knowledge" conversely seeks to hide it (Pickering 2018). Pickering makes a compelling argument of poiesis in action, using examples of erosion control in Japan, dam-building on the Colorado River, and natural farming in Japan to show how they each make decisions based on performances in 'dances of agency', and not by doing with any particular knowledge per se. We might therefore with poiesis in action and 'experimenting in the wild' speak of a way of doing in the world without knowledge.

In this discussion I have proposed that the users' interactions and ways of being a non-offending pedophiles came to show experimental and situated performances through resistance and constraints to powerful political categories. Performances of defining oneself, choosing morally, and achieving a positive outlook on life. These may each represent new ways of being a non-offending pedophile – or, poiesis in that they are hybrids assemblage of mangle-ish performance and knowledge. Though the users' experimental knowledge sharing was related through strands of knowledge as showed in the analysis - which was what made them situated - it is the way in which these strands emerge and are mobilized into performances that I argue might both conceptualize it as experimental, and be a contribution to child sexual abuse prevention research. One user was quoted as saying:

> I'm a good person. I try every day to do right, but I'm
> still totally alone and I don't have anything to show for
> any of it.

Finding ways of being in the world and mobilizing strands of knowledge into performances is a performance of managing the stigma and having something to show for it. Therefore, it should be a valuable point of attention in their situated knowledges. That situated knowledge describes their positionality, but it is the performances emerging between the dances of agency of elements in their situated knowledges that show how they see as non-offending pedophiles. Situated knowledge is then a way of directing attention to strands of knowledge to navigate a way of representing the users' discussions, but in accordance with Pickering's discussion of poiesis, also a way of experimenting in the wild to make their real-life experiences count. I will consider the initial quote of this paper once more:

> We can be pioneers in daring to confront our struggles.
> We can refuse to accept their labels. We can support
> each other in keeping our boundaries and our dignity,
> knowing that is what is going to protect children and
> make the future better.
> Anonymous User, Virtuous Pedophiles forum

It is indeed wild to experiment with knowledge sharing when you are a pedophile. However, it is when we understand that another result of their experimental knowledge sharing is to mobilize *performances* in this situated wilderness between political categories and real-life stigmatic experiences that we come to direct our attention to the real value. Not knowing, but doing. Not seeing as a non-offending pedophile, but acting as one. To be pioneers, and to experiment with new ways of resisting the stigma, while maintaining their boundaries and dignity to make a better future for children and themselves.

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