Drawing the Threat: A Study on Perceptions of the Online Pervert among Estonian High School Students

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Maria Murumaa-Mengel[1]

Abstract

This article analyzes Estonian high school students' (N = 10) perceptions of the online pervert. To get a multimodal and thorough understanding of this phenomenon, 12th graders were first asked to make drawings of online perverts and, later, follow-up in-depth interviews were conducted. A combination of visual and verbal methods helped to reveal that the young did not see themselves sharing any noticeable characteristics with the pervert and tended to construct this 'otherness' mainly through psyche, age, nationality and appearance. The definition of a pervert, however, was very ambiguous, as the interviewees perceived the pervert to be, on the one hand, harmful, violent, obscene and insidious, and, on the other hand, a sad, lonely voyeur or a rather ordinary person.

Keywords

online risks, youth, privacy, pervert, online predator, online harassment, creative research methods

Introduction

For many years now, great attention has been paid to the 'technopanic' over online predators, the people who use the Internet to interact with minors for sexual contact (Marwick, 2008; Wolak et al., 2008). Mainstream media coverage of incidents in which younger children and teenagers are abused on the Internet has increased, and social networking sites (SNSs) have been criticized for serving as a breeding ground for cyber-bullying and harassment by strangers (Sengupta and Chaudhuri, 2011). There seems to be an inexhaustible number of male adults who go online with the aim of looking for minors with whom to have sex (Brenner, 2010), and the image of the online predator seems to be rather one-sided: the pervert is usually portrayed 'as

[1] University of Tartu, Institute of Social Sciences, Estonia

Corresponding author:
Maria Murumaa-Mengel, University of Tartu, Institute of Social Sciences, Lossi 36-226, 51003 Tartu, Estonia
Email: maria.murumaa.mengel@gmail.com

an older, unattractive man who falsifies his identity to deceive, groom, kidnap, and rape children' (boyd and Marwick, 2009: 410).

The use of the specific word 'pervert' is undoubtedly problematic and has different connotations in different languages. In the Estonian context, the word 'pervert' has some quite mundane uses, for example, it is sometimes used as a curse word or to describe lewd jokes or people; even Estonian glossary (2014) gives a usage example where the term is used as an execration. In the context of this article, the term was chosen as a key concept mainly for two reasons: first, my previous research (Murumaa and Siibak, 2012) has shown that one of the negative Facebook user types perceived was the foreign pervert (as referred to by the participants in the study); and second, the Estonian media discourse has embraced the word 'netipervert' (net-pervert) as the main expression to use in reference to people who harass others online. Although the data gathered for the present study suggest that the term 'pervert' can refer to many online threats, the dominant perception is connected to the sexual solicitation of underage children.

The public worry about online predators has inspired and activated many researchers to look into the subject of online risks. One of the most important and extensive studies on the topic was carried out by the research network, EU Kids Online, which recently surveyed children and parents in 25 European countries (Livingstone et al., 2011a). Although some research has been conducted specifically about young people's perceptions about online perverts in the United States (US) (boyd and Marwick, 2009; Wolak et al., 2008), there are practically no European studies of the kind. Furthermore, a recent European overview of around 400 studies on children and the Internet showed that around 60 per cent of studies relied only on quantitative data and only some 20 per cent of the studies were based on qualitative data (Kalmus and Ólafsson, 2013). The current study aims to diminish this gap in qualitative research by offering a look into young people's perceptions of Internet perverts.

Rather than making use of more traditional approaches to gathering data (e.g., interviews and focus groups), I decided to use a creative research method (Gauntlett, 2007), an approach in which participants are asked to produce artefacts (drawings, videos, etc.) and hence, 'to spend time applying their playful or creative attention to the act of making something symbolic or metaphorical, and then reflecting on it' (Gauntlett, 2007: 3). For the present study, high school students were asked to draw sketches of online perverts and, later, in-depth interviews were carried out to elicit the students' oral descriptions of and reflections on their drawings.

The study was conducted in Estonia, a 'high use, high risk' country (Hasebrink et al., 2008), which provides an interesting case study for researching online threats. In Estonia, the Internet penetration rate is nearly 100 per cent among 11- to 18-year-olds (Kalmus et al., 2009) and the majority of teens have profiles on SNSs (Livingstone et al., 2011b). At the same time, the Estonian youth are quite careless about their online practices compared to the youth of other European countries: 28 per cent of the young SNS users in Estonia do not use any privacy settings; and 50 per cent have contacted strangers through SNSs (Livingstone et al., 2011b).

Previous research (Murumaa and Siibak, 2012) has shown that Estonian young people perceive different types of people as what Marwick and boyd (2010) called 'nightmare readers' (members of the audience that the disclosed information is not originally meant for) on SNSs, one of the most distinct types being the foreign pervert. The reason for perceiving this specific type of unwanted audience is partly rooted in

a case that shocked the Estonian public in 2008. A news story was published about a Spanish girl who had contacted hundreds of young male Estonian SNS rate.ee users and lured over 40 of them into taking nude photos of themselves on webcams (Kase, 2008). The girl proceeded to demand more and more intimate material from the boys, for example, telling them to masturbate on camera and arranging for boys to meet up to make sex videos (Lamp, 2009). When her requests were refused, she threatened to go public with the material that she already had. This large-scale extortion was revealed when the family of a 14-year-old boy who had committed suicide because of this scheme decided to go public. It was later confirmed that the Spanish teenage girl was actually a 22-year-old man, who is believed to have victimized over 700 people across Europe (Birkan, 2009). The media outrage was amplified by context-specific factors, such as the fact that Estonia's population can be considered rather conservative, even intolerant (Vihalemm, 2011). Despite the fact that homosexuality has not been officially classified as a pathology for decades, gays continue being stigmatized in Estonian society (Moltšanov, 2013).

Research on online predators often focuses on statistics (Jones et al., 2012; Wolak and Finklehor, 2013) and is conducted in legal/criminal (Brenner, 2010; Choo, 2009) or psychological/clinical discourse (Leander et al., 2008; Wolak et al., 2008). Not many studies have given the young a voice on this matter, although 'the key to addressing online safety is to take a few steps back and make sense of the lives of youth, the risks and dangers they face' (boyd and Marwick, 2009: 410). The present study set out to research the perception of the online pervert more closely and to investigate how these perceptions had formed, and which factors possibly influenced their development. This knowledge can be used to create more effective, comprehensive prevention programmes that take real experiences into account.

SNS Usage Practices of the Young

Since young SNS users are often at the forefront of emerging social practices, they attract the academic and popular attention the most (Robards, 2013). Sonia Livingstone (2008) argues that because virtual environments are relatively free from parental control, they are suitable for testing the limits on doing things that parents might not allow young people to do. These border breakers include posting sexy pictures of oneself, talking to strangers and sharing passwords or very personal and emotional information.

It must be remembered that, for young people, communication and sharing information on social media can be compared to writing a personal diary or having a phone call with a friend (Solove, 2007). While adults are concerned about the future, youth are more interested in the present and the social relationships within which they have to manage their identities (Valentine and Holloway, 2001). In other words, the young use the Internet's potential for liberation, opportunities for self-expression (Awan and Gauntlett, 2013), for developing highly strategic practices connected with managing their audiences on SNSs (Robards, 2013). Therefore, privacy is more nuanced and richer for young people, as social contexts are multilayered and overlapping (West et al., 2009). Online crimes are similarly hard to unambiguously point out and define. Nevertheless, some characteristics of online crimes are offered next.

Online Threats

In the context of the present study, online risk is defined as the probability of harm (Hansson, 2010). There is no consensus regarding what online risks consist of (Ponte et al., 2013), but according to boyd and Marwick (2009), four main issues predominate in contemporary conversations about online safety: sexual solicitation; harassment; exposure to inappropriate content; and youth-generated problematic content. From the European perspective, Livingstone et al. (2011a: 3) claim that public anxiety has focused on pornography, bullying and 'stranger danger'. In the course of this article, I mainly focus upon the latter concept, also referred to as sexual solicitation or cybersexploitation (O'Connell, 2003).

Although the young do not report Internet-initiated sexual abuse to the police as fully as offline abuse (Leander et al., 2008) and the exact numbers are unknown, we can see that online sexual solicitation (of children and adolescents) is certainly a visible problem. In a US study, one in seven minors was found to have been sexually solicited online (Wolak et al., 2006). Unwanted sexual solicitations have shown a clear decline in some research (Jones et al., 2012), but it should be taken into consideration that many minors do not report unwanted Internet experiences simply because they do not think that the incidents are serious enough (Priebe et al., 2013), and youth typically ignore or deflect the experience without distress (boyd and Marwick, 2009).

Online 'Perverts'

For most people, a 'pervert' is often seen as synonymous with a paedophile (boyd and Marwick, 2009) or an intimate cyberstalker (McFarlane and Bocij, 2003). In my previous study (Murumaa and Siibak, 2012), Estonian teens described the online pervert as an older male who pretended to be much younger so as to contact children (of both sexes). The term, so far, 'is almost exclusively used to describe men, as there has been less media coverage of women using the Internet to meet under-age boys' (Marwick, 2008). As Johansson et al. (2012) have argued, women are usually seen as vulnerable, thus leading to the opposite construction: stereotypes of strong men who are potential perpetrators. The general discourse usually involves opposition of men and women but same-sex abuse is not exceptional, as boys constitute 25 per cent of victims in Internet-initiated sex crimes, and virtually all of the offenders are male (Wolak et al., 2004).

Although the majority of Internet users prefer to portray themselves as realistically as possible (Debatin et al., 2009), the opportunity to deceive is often welcomed by Internet predators who can share very specific things about themselves, and keep many aspects secret, to get closer to their victims. While some researchers are convinced that the 'anonymous nature of the Internet allows offenders to masquerade as children in cyberspace to gain the confidence and trust of their victims' (Choo, 2009: x), others (boyd and Marwick, 2009; Wolak et al., 2008) stress that the online pervert is not usually a mastermind child molester who uses trickery and violence to assault children, but point out that most Internet-initiated sex crimes involve adult men who use the Internet to meet and seduce underage adolescents into sexual encounters, and in the majority of the cases, victims are aware they are conversing online with adults.

Interviews with police indicate that most victims are adolescents who knowingly meet adults for sexual encounters (boyd and Marwick, 2009).

Later, I present the results of a qualitative study that took a look at how some young people perceive and experience this subject, but first a quick review of the method used.

Methods and Data

Method

Ten drawings of Internet perverts made in April 2012 by 10 Grade 12 students were selected as the basis for this study. As 'a picture is a statement' (Arnheim, 1969: 137), only the maker of the 'statement' is able to explain and describe the intentions and meanings behind the work. I conducted follow-up interviews a couple of months after the drawing exercise, to give the participants some time for creative reflection so as to make language central 'after time has been spent engaged in the non-verbal reflective process of making items' (Awan and Gauntlett, 2013: 112). Another reason behind the time gap was the desire to give participants a chance to 'forget' what they had drawn and thereby offer them a pair of 'fresh eyes' to look at their own work. In many interviews, the young expressed surprise at what they had drawn and had to reflect upon their decisions on another level, needing to think through their previously made choices. In comparison with more traditional qualitative methods, where participants are asked to provide instant answers on complicated and sometimes very personal matters, I aimed to give the participants a chance for in-depth reflection on their work.

Regardless of the various opportunities such an approach offers, I was also aware of the many pitfalls creative methods may have: the effects of group dynamics, stereotypes, poor skills of oral self-expression, the lack of confidence in artistic abilities, etc. As a researcher, I was prepared to deal with these obstacles. For instance, I decided to combine the creative task with interviews so as to overcome the possibility of the participants providing only stereotypical ideas on the topic; I also tried to encourage the participants throughout the study process and emphasized the fact that artistic skills were of secondary value in the drawing task.

The drawings were analyzed mostly using a social semiotic approach. The theory of reading images that was introduced by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), and developed further in the studies of Bell (2001), was also used to seek the meaning encoded in the structures of the images (e.g., the presentation of people and objects). More specifically, viewer's point of view as a representation of 'position of symbolic power' (Jewitt and Oyama, 2001: 135), horizontal angles and frontality, decoding facial expressions (Goffman, 1979) and Hall's (1966) ideas on social distance were used when analyzing the drawings.

Many researchers who work with visual creative methods have claimed that the relative trustworthiness of image-based research is likely to be achieved via images in conjunction with words (Prosser, 1998: 106), which was why elements from the qualitative text analysis were incorporated to analyze words and phrases used by the interviewees to express their perceptions of the sketches they had drawn.

Participants

This study was based on a convenience sample, as the students were recruited by the author of the article who was the teacher of media studies at the high school the students concerned attended. Participation was voluntary, but all participating students received extra credit in media studies for taking part.

Regardless of the power imbalance in a teacher–student relationship, which might have influenced disclosing certain information and might have led to the participants giving some socially desirable responses, I believe that in the present case, it proved to be useful to have a person who had been previously engaged with the interviewees as the moderator (Murumaa-Mengel and Siibak, 2014). In addition to having a previously established friendly relationship with the participants, I also used specific interviewing techniques to narrow the hierarchical gap: shared personal stories to make participants feel more comfortable sharing information (Berger, 2001); emphasized on the confidentiality of the interview to avoid under-reporting 'socially undesirable behaviour' (Ogan et al., 2013: 135); used friendly conversational tone and sympathetic responses; as well as probing and offering sets of alternatives in questions (Hodkinson, 2005). Similar to Eglinton (2013), I found that many participants saw the study as a chance to talk to someone on a topic that may have been off limits to talk about with other adults in their lives.

Sensitive topics of research—those where participants may feel uncomfortable to express their thoughts (Noland, 2012)—often require special attention on how to protect the participants, and also a strategic research design, considering possible harmful consequences of participation (e.g., painful memories). For example, I followed the advice of Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) and had the contact details ready for a professional who could offer advice and counselling to the participant if a need arose.

My final sample consisted of five male and five female 12th grade students aged 17–20 (two girls aged 17, five participants aged 18, two male interviewees aged 19 and one 20-year-old male participant) from a high school located in a middle-sized city. As Estonia is rather homogeneous—apart from a large Russian population, all other ethnic nationalities add up to only 2 per cent of the population (Statistics Estonia, 2012)—all the participants were native Estonians from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Study Procedure

First the students were asked to draw sketches of Internet perverts; no further specific instructions were given. They were provided with A4-sized blank sheets of paper and a variety of pencils and (felt-tip) pens. When participants asked questions to clarify the task (e.g., 'what do you mean by pervert?'), I avoided giving restrictive answers and encouraged them to interpret the exercise any way they felt to be right. Follow-up in-depth interviews, which lasted from 36 minutes to 65 minutes depending on the participants' communicative ability, were conducted two months after the students drew the sketches. The length of the interviews was probably also related to how the interviewees situated themselves vis-à-vis the questions and the person asking them (Block, 2000). The participants who seemed to attribute the role of

confidant or friend(ly) adult to the interviewer (Murumaa-Mengel and Siibak, 2014) were more elaborate in their answers and the discussion. A couple of participants, however, seemed less communicative, possibly because of their character, their relationship with the interviewer or, due to the compulsory nature of schools, felt the pressure to take part (Richards and Morrow, 1996). The latter is also the reason why I took extra care to emphasize that the participants could leave at any point of the research without any consequences.

In the first part of the interview, the participants were asked more general questions about their Internet usage practices, followed by more general questions about Internet crimes. In the third phase of the interview, sketches drawn by the interviewees were presented and questions about the details on the sketches were asked. The interviews ended with a broader approach, with the students being asked about their thoughts about the possibility of rehabilitation, just punishment of the criminals in question and prevention of such online crimes.

Results

A brief overview is given here of the physical and psychological characteristics that the participants perceived that the online pervert possesses. In addition, their thoughts on the reasons behind deviant behaviour are also presented.

Essence and Actions of the Pervert

Someone 'being a perv' or 'acting pervy' was used in different contexts by the participants in this study. Sometimes these phrases were used in a friendly, mocking way amongst friends, but most of the young people in the sample used the word pervert or 'perv' to refer to an adult person who sought contact with underage children with a sexual intention, that is, the person used sexual images or words while communicating: 'M5: A real pervert is a person who sits behind a computer or lurks around pre-schools to seek out victims…and when they start saying things like "are your breasts growing yet?" or "do you like pee-pees?"' The interviews revealed that most of the participants had either been approached by such people at some point in their lives, had noticed 'creepy pervs' on SNSs or had a story to share that had happened to their friends.

The interviewees believed that an online pervert might have different aims and reasons that triggered their actions and practices: (*i*) talking dirty online just to prove that they could get a young child if they wanted to; (*ii*) getting the victim naked online; (*iii*) getting together with the victim offline just to get a rush from the idea that they could get this young person if they wanted to; or (*iv*) having sex with a minor in an offline setting. Most of the interviewees said that a typical online pervert was seeking sex with a child:

> M2: Presumably it's a sexual need; a lot of guys have some virginity fetish, that when you get to take a young child's virginity, you're a tough guy. Maybe it has to do with that, with the purity of an innocent child.

The interviewees believed that in order to fulfil the above-mentioned aims, perverts searched for and contacted many children and young people on SNSs. The

participants suggested that after the initial contact had been established, the usual way for the pervert to gain the victim's trust was to compliment them or offer them something.

Usually, the offender was thought to be pretending to be 'normal' at the beginning of the contact: talking about mundane things and keeping the conversation light. However, the interviewees believed that such communication soon changed: the pervert started telling obscene jokes and asking for more and more revealing photos and videos; after receiving these, the participants believed, the offender had more power over the victim so as to manipulate them into doing things offline as well. When meeting a victim offline, similar step-by-step grooming behaviour was described:

> M4: When the perv's like 35 and the girl's 14, he can pretend to be her father and buy her things and take her out to eat…and ask her out to go for a walk, 'would you like me to take my dog with us?', and stuff like that, talk romantically and ask her in for a coffee and then say 'it's late already' and she has to spend the night and 'I have only one pillow and blanket, let's sleep together tonight' and like that.

Out of 10 sketches in the sample, eight depicted the pervert as a male. When asked about it in follow-up interviews, the young explained that there were probably female perverts out there too, but the participants had never or rarely heard of such cases and never met anyone who could be characterized as a female online pervert. Two gender-specific reasons were provided:

> F5: Perhaps it's because, to some extent, every woman has experienced harassment from men, whether pulling on a pony-tail or…or…and they understand more clearly and are aware that it's not good and ethical. Empathy.

> M4: Maybe women are cleverer that way, covering up. If they get caught, they can say that it's my child or that it's for a model-seeking show or something.

One drawing depicted a sort of shadow of a person in a mirror (Figure 1). The author of this drawing explained that anybody could be an online pervert, as we all do things online that can be seen as perversion by someone.

In not so clear words, he said the norms that applied to online activities were so individually variable that there was no way of defining the characteristics of a pervert:

> M2: A perv does things that are forbidden or unusual; it's a question of interpretation. I think that we all have been perverts at one time or another, looked at and done things we shouldn't. Young boys going to adult websites, it's forbidden, so at that moment they're perverts.

In relation to the previously mentioned case of the Spanish girl—almost all of the participants referred to this during the interviews—a noticeable belief that the majority of online perverts were not of the same nationality as the participants of the study was expressed. Stereotypical assumptions about users from different cultural contexts were emphasized mainly by female participants, who said they had

Figure 1. Picture of a Mirror and Text, 'It Is in All of Us! Online-pervert!', Written on Top in Estonian and 'Try to Say No!!!' on the Bottom of the Drawing

had negative online experiences with foreigners, more specifically Indian and Turkish men approaching them with invitations to chat privately, usually accompanied by a wish to video chat. The participants said that they quickly blocked or ignored these kinds of contacts. When the interviewer asked about Estonian perverts, four girls related personal stories about adults approaching them on Estonian SNS rate.ee:

> F2: I remember, like five or six years ago [she was 13 or 14 then], men who were my father's age wrote to me like 'hi, beautiful girl, how are you doing?' I deleted those immediately because it felt so weird, like jeesh, you're my father's age! How can you do that? Ugh. And then of course there was this sponsorship stuff: 'oh, do you want me to sponsor you?' But it must have worked on some people; otherwise, they wouldn't have written me so much…it's impossible to take the money and not give anything back. It just doesn't work like that.

Hence, despite the fact that the first perceptions of online perverts tended to be of foreign background, local perverts were actually more common in the stories shared during the interviews. One of the female interviewees explained the xenophobic tendency with another example:

> F2: I drew him with red hair probably unconsciously, maybe because I don't want to admit that there are a lot of pervs. There are plenty of dark-haired people and plenty of fair-haired people but not a lot of red-haired people. Maybe I wanted to make the pervs an exception, not a part of the mass, make them marked and recognizable.

Pervert's Appearance

The pervert was seen mostly as strange and opposite to the participants and this difference was constructed through appearance as well. Most of the interviewees said that online perverts did not present themselves as they really were, but rather used deceptive photos that showed them from far away or from a clever angle, trying to look better and younger than their real ages. The real face of a pervert was usually described as ugly: 'F3: Why ugly? Let's say he's a handsome man—he could get a woman who's his own age. Why would he chase after young ones? Ugly and old men can't get anyone so easily.'

The pervert was very often (in seven sketches) drawn with facial hair, and in five sketches, in unfashionable or dirty clothes and with glasses to show that 'they spend a lot of time behind a computer screen which has damaged their eyesight' and did not take care of their appearance or had an outdated understanding of what was hip in 'real' life (Figure 2). Living only behind a computer was also expressed by drawing the pervert with bags under eyes, a pale complexion or being overweight.

In half of the sketches, the pervert was smiling, in an effort to make them 'more trustworthy' and 'seemingly friendly'. In two drawings out of three that had a victim included, it was surprising to see the victim smiling as well (for example, Figure 3). The interviewees who had made this choice explained it by saying that the drawing depicted a situation where 'nothing serious has happened yet' and 'they are having fun in the beginning' (M4).

Figure 2. M5's Drawing of an 'Old-school' Perv (the address on top refers to Estonian SNS rate.ee)

Figure 3. The Victim is Smiling because Nothing Bad has Happened...'Yet', as M4 Described His Drawing

One of the most surprising findings was related to gender expectations and stereotypes. Several interviewees mentioned that perverts were not and did not look like 'real' men (and in one case, 'real' women were mentioned as well)—a perception of behaviour and looks that did not comply with the traditional gender expectations:

> F1: Here is a girly man or a manly woman who touches little kids. I just have this feeling that a real paedophile is a man who acts like a woman or a manly woman.
>
> Interviewer: Why do you feel that way?
>
> F1: From TV. Crime shows on Fox Crime—like 'Criminal Minds'—often have these bad characters who are perverts, then they're generally gay or otherwise weird and, when it's a woman, also like weird and sturdy.

The non-heterosexual stereotype of a pervert emerged even after an interviewee had drawn a man with a little girl in a sketch.

Pervert's Background

As mentioned earlier, not being able to be true to themselves was perceived as one of the main reasons for people 'going perv'; in many interviews, participants connected sexual orientation with this problem: 'M3: They can have friends and families, be fathers with three children and then be discovered to be homosexuals.'

When asked what might be the reason that some people went too far and acted out the darkest fantasies or mistreated others, the interviewees gave two possible

explanations. A traumatic childhood was perceived to be one cause for abnormal behaviour. The majority of the young respondents described an uncaring, abusive family (especially absent or violent fathers) as a possible root source for a person's own abusive and deviant actions. Some of the participants pointed out that people mimicked the patterns that they had seen over and over again, even if they did not want to: 'M1: People try to fight it but it stays with them in their subconscious and manifests maybe at some low points in their lives...'.

In addition to an unloving broken home, feeling lonely or being mocked and mistreated by others at school were also named as possible reasons for someone 'becoming a pervert'. Such people were said to grow up unable to communicate normally with their peers, so they turned to children for company:

> F5: Maybe they couldn't hang out with them [other kids] when they were young them-selves and they want to sort of make up for it, go back in time and do it all over. It's easiest to attack those who can't fight for themselves, a 20-year-old understands what's going on but a seven-year-old—you can shape their outlook on the world, like 'no, that is totally normal...'.

Here, unequal intellectual and psychological levels and standards were seen as obstacles in connecting with people who were of the same age and seen as suitable romantic partners.

Discussion

This article set out to analyze some specific perceptions of the online pervert to develop more thorough insight into emerging adults' thoughts and experiences on the topic.

The students' sketches and their reflections during the interviews indicated a con-troversial dual perception of this online threat. On the one hand, the online pervert was seen as a disgusting, abnormal and harmful person. On the other hand, partici-pants showed compassion for, and to a certain degree, understanding of, the predator after thinking about and discussing the pervert's background and personality.

Leaving aside the playful mocking usage of the word pervert by the participants, it is apparent that the young people tended to construct a profile of a pervert who was different from them. The main characteristics that were often used to define the pervert were age, nationality, sexuality and sex.

The participants usually perceived the pervert to be noticeably older, although international studies indicate that up to 90 per cent of sexual solicitations are made by peers and young adults (Wolak et al., 2006). In fact, some previous studies suggest that many of the solicitors do not hide their true ages but rather tend to give accurate information about their ages (O'Connell, 2003). Furthermore, the participants mainly characterized the pervert as an anonymous stranger, although research has shown that the majority of harassment victims know their perpetrators (Choo, 2009).

The second characteristic the respondents believed the pervert to share was asso-ciated with nationality—the pervert was predominantly perceived to be a foreigner. This finding coincides with my previous research (Murumaa and Siibak, 2012),

where one of the more negative Facebook user types in young peoples' opinion was the foreign pervert, mainly originating from Turkey, Brazil or the Middle East. In fact, extroverted male Turkish SNS user stereotypes are widespread outside of Estonia too, as this specific nationality has somehow left a strong impression globally (Constine, 2011). SNS Tagged named Turkey the most social and most flirtatious country of the world's top 25 most populous countries (Ingalls, 2011), but the findings of the present study indicate that what is seen as flirtatious in one culture might be perceived as harassment in another.

Furthermore, the previously mentioned case of the 'Spanish girl' and the media-induced technopanic which surrounded it probably also play a significant role in forming young people's views on the topic and helping to construct the double 'otherness' of the online pervert–homosexual from abroad. In fact, the young seemed to have internalized and accepted the hetero-normative way of seeing the world that is presented by the media (Ménard and Cabrera, 2011). My study reveals that the young perceived a homosexual to be a bit dangerous and strange, a deviation from the norm, and therefore also fitting the profile of the pervert. In fact, on several occasions, interviewees stumbled when speaking about 'perverts', 'paedophiles' and 'fags' (the offensive Estonian term for homosexuals is the etymologically close 'pede'), as though mixing up these concepts. Using these words interchangeably could have socio-psychological roots but it could also be partly language specific.

In terms of the last two proposed common characteristics shared by online perverts—being homosexual and being from abroad—it is important to note that intolerance of 'others' is unfortunately one of the more worrying characteristics of Estonian society. Despite quite high levels of civic freedom, Estonia's population is relatively intolerant of ethnic minorities (Vihalemm, 2011) and similar intolerance exists in attitudes towards sexual minorities: in 2012, 34 per cent of polled Estonians supported and 60 per cent were opposed to same-sex marriage (Teder, 2012). We should keep in mind that same-sex sexual activity was illegal in Estonia until 1992, because 'homosexuality was a criminal offence in the Soviet Union and remains highly stigmatized across the region' (Rechel, 2010: 112). Hence, the present findings demonstrate that old mental patterns and belief systems are still quite strongly rooted in the mindset of present-day young Estonians, even though the Iron Curtain fell decades ago.

Although the interviews seem to suggest that many of the young participants would like to think that an online pervert is someone who can be easily spotted and stereotypically recognized, Choo (2009) has pointed out that offender profiles are very heterogeneous. Persons committing sexual offences against children tend to be inadequate in their social functioning and diverse in their psychopathology, often involving neurotic and compulsive behaviours (Choo, 2009). Surprisingly, the participants expressed some understanding and even showed some compassion for the perverts they described, paying attention to the harasser's personal history and childhood, and the effects they might have on their adult selves.

The majority of the participants could tell stories from their own or friends' lives that involved adult men seeking clearly underage girls on SNSs, people who were classified as online perverts. With surprisingly common descriptions of Internet routines, the young described how adult men often approached younger girls on rate.ee (and occasionally, on Facebook), bluntly offering sponsorship for sex. So, instead

of being deceitful and lying, in line with the common perception, the experiences the respondents of my study had had with online perverts suggest that the perverts were often actually quite frank about their motives. Being upfront about their intentions might give the perpetrators a false sense of sincerity and prevent them from seeing their actions as morally wrong. Legislators, parents and educators should thus consider changing how online threats are communicated to children and teens. At the moment, 'stranger danger' is often based on the fear that one cannot see with whom one is communicating online, and deception and lying about 'true' identities is the main threat. As we see from this study, young people often already know how to identify a pervert, for example, by recognizing certain kind of code words and phrases (e.g., 'do you have a webcam?' or 'sponsorship'). However, it is worth emphasizing that going along with flirting and intimate games 'for fun' or 'for laughs' can have negative consequences. And, more importantly, should the perpetrator be different from the perception, less 'other', the young might not regard the harmful actions to be dangerous and downplay the harassment, resulting possibly in serious harm, self-blame or victim blaming.

The present study has offered some interesting qualitative insights into how some emerging adults perceive one of the main online threats, the Internet pervert. Creative research methods offered the opportunity to examine perceptions of these rather intimate and hidden experiences, and the use of visual materials provided 'richer insights' and 'more nuanced research results' (Awan and Gauntlett, 2013: 112). However, it should also be acknowledged that the method has been criticized for 'naïve empiricism' (Buckingham 2009: 635) and the fact that the empirical material gathered through such an approach cannot be taken as objective documentation of reality. Still, as Bennett (2003) notes, it is now relatively taken for granted among researchers that the notion of 'objectivity' is itself an ideological construct. In addition, I would like to stress that while the drawings themselves might appear naïve sometimes, through combining the drawing assignment with oral reflections on the drawings, the researcher gains a much more detailed understanding of the phenomenon.

The topic definitely warrants further research: one possible focus is the prevention of online crimes and protection from online threats, as the young often have insight into the subject that grown-ups do not have.

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Author's bio-sketch

Maria Murumaa-Mengel is a PhD student and a junior researcher at Institute of Social Sciences, University of Tartu (Estonia). She is currently involved in research projects focusing on teenagers' use of social media and the transformation of privacy in new media. In addition, she is interested in intergenerational relationships in information society; and as a media studies teacher, in different learning 2.0 projects.