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When Ray Tomlinson developed the first e-mail application in 1971, he did so for the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANet), a computer network built by and for the United States Department of Defense.^{1,2} When Tim Berners-Lee and Robert Cailliau developed the protocols that gave rise to the World Wide Web in 1989, they did so for CERN, a laboratory in Geneva dedicated to high-energy physics and nuclear research. When Yair Goldfinger created instant messaging (IM) technology in 1996, he did so with three friends for Mirabilis, a company they started and initially ran from a basement in Israel.

Each of these inventors had a clear purpose and intended application for their technology, whether it was to improve national defense, expedite research, enhance business efficiency, or facilitate interpersonal communication. Undoubtedly each was able to predict constructive unintended uses of their individual creations, as well as unexpected individual and global benefits. For example, Goldfinger developed his IM protocol with a \$10,000 starter loan as a fun way for friends to stay in touch with one another. Yet just 2 years after its development Goldfinger and his partners sold Mirabilis to America Online (AOL) for over \$400 million.

Known as ICQ (an acronym for "I seek you"), Goldfinger's IM application is the preferred IM platform internationally. ICQ was downloaded by 300 million users by mid-2004, and was download.com's most popular program for 7 years in a row. AOL used ICQ technology to develop Instant Messenger (AIM), the most popular IM platform in the United States with 195 million registered users. Instant messaging—which includes Internet chat-rooms and is available on mobile communications systems—is considered the world's fastest growing form of technology-based communication.

Getting Connected

Ironically, the very technology that was designed to connect people has resulted in greater interpersonal distance and isolation. Goldfinger himself acknowledged concern regarding the impact IM has had on social interaction and lifestyle, referring to the decrease in face-to-face verbal exchange and the increase in children's indoor-virtual versus outdoor-physical play. At the same time that IM has decreased in-person interaction, it has provided a new venue for both positive and negative social connections that might not have taken place otherwise. On the positive side is the increasing number of people who use ICQ/"I seek you" chat-rooms and Internet dating services to find, meet, and even marry a romantic partner. On the more negative side is the increasing number of people who use ICQ (also an acronym for "I cheat quietly") to carry on extramarital affairs.

An inherent (though perhaps unintended) feature of ICQ is the possibility for total anonymity. In cyberspace men and women are free to be and act however they wish, as driven by their needs, limited only by their imagination, and

with no one the wiser. In turn, the anonymity of the Internet allows for increased disinhibition, providing an environment in which the socially insecure can reveal themselves without the anxiety associated with face-to-face interaction. Those who are lonely and desperate for attention and those who feel worthless and yearn for validation can receive what they crave with the added attraction of being able create a vision of the other person that fulfills their fantasies. Those unable to take risks in the real world are emboldened to do so in the virtual world of cyberspace.

While letter writing also allows for disinhibition, chat-rooms and IMs are uniquely different in that disinhibition occurs in the context of anonymity with an illusion of safety, combined with immediacy of response or reinforcement. This potent combination often leads to a sense of immediate connection or premature emotional intimacy that, whether real or perceived, can be intensely rewarding, alluring, and even intoxicating. With increasing frequency, emboldened, impulsive risk-taking is resulting in these connections evolving into emotional affairs, virtual relationships that meet the individual's needs without violating the taboo of involving a "real" person. Typically, the chatter becomes sexual in nature, may become elaborately detailed, and in order to keep the "sex-buddy" interested (so he or she won't move on), reflective of the individual's fantasies rather than real-life preferences and tolerance.

Going Offline

Research conducted by Zogby International revealed that one out of six women (17%) believe they can find a meaningful relationship and sexual fulfillment in cyberspace.³ A remarkable 80% of these women eventually make the choice to take their chat-room affair into the real world, often with disastrous and deadly results. A rather bizarre example of this growing trend is the cybersex relationship between chess prodigy Oliver Jovanovic (a then 30-year-old doctoral student in

molecular biology at Columbia University) and Jaime Rzucek (at the time, a 20-year-old Barnard College English and philosophy major at the end of her freshman year), who met in a chat-room during the summer of 1996.⁴

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Without using their real names, Jovanovic and Rzucek exchanged over 57 pages of macabre, titillating e-mails and IMs in which each divulged in detail their experience in sadomasochism and interest in "snuff" films. Less than 6 months later, at 3:00 a.m. on November 22, the couple shared their first phone conversation that lasted 4 hours. At 8:30 that evening, Jovanovic met Rzucek at her dorm and the two went to a restaurant where they continued their on-line revelation of common sadomasochistic interests. The couple left the restaurant at 10:30 and went to Jovanovic's apartment "for tea," followed by over 20 hours of consensual, mutually gratifying bondage, domination, and sadomasochism (BDSM) as described by Jovanovic, or brutal, perverse torture, as described by Rzucek.

After a prolonged struggle (during which she dressed herself piece by piece) Rzucek was able to flee Jovanovic's apartment some time on the 23rd. She then took the subway back to her dorm, fell asleep at 10:00 p.m., woke, showered, and then visited a male friend whom she

told about her ordeal. Checking from the campus library on the 24th, Rzucek found an e-mail from Jovanovic informing her she had left her necklace at his apartment. Rzucek responded and their cyber-sex e-connection continued. In one e-mail Rzucek described feeling "quite bruised mentally and physically, but never been so happy to be alive" and "the taste is overpoweringly delicious, and at the same time, quite nauseating" (a line she took from Burroughs' controversial 1959 book, *Naked Lunch*).⁵

Eventually Rzucek filed a report with the police against Jovanovic, and four days after the incident she underwent a medical examination at Barnard's medical center. Though Rzucek reported profuse bleeding from both breasts as a result of extensive abuse, only a fading bruise on one was found. She alleged excruciatingly painful vaginal and anal penetration resulting in three days of heavy bleeding, yet a highly sensitive test found no evidence of blood in the rectum. Although she claimed to have been "hog-tied" and described endless struggling against the restraints, no rope marks, bruises, nor scratches indicative of such were found. Despite the absence of physical evidence, Jovanovic was arrested on December 5, 1996, and was portrayed as a "sexual sadist" by the media.

During the last week of March 1998, just weeks before he was to defend his dissertation, Jovanovic was on trial on charges of kidnapping, aggravated sexual abuse, sexual abuse, two counts of assault in the second degree, one count of assault in the third degree, and sodomy. Armed with Rzucek's e-mails, Jovanovic attempted to put forth a consent defense to all of the charges. This defense was thwarted by the judge's questionable interpretation of the Rape Shield Law and by his instructions to the jury. Specifically, the judge's application of the Rape Shield Law resulted in the redaction of a significant number of Rzucek's e-mails; in particular, those that included her self-reported history of bondage and domination, her interest in "snuff" films, and her general knowledge and seeming familiarity with

the alternative sexual lifestyle of BDSM. Prior to deliberation, the judge instructed the jury with good reason that consent is not a defense to assault.

The 3-week trial ended on April 15, 1998, with the jury acquitting Jovanovic of the sodomy and aggravated sexual abuse counts, but convicting him of kidnapping, assault in the second and third degrees, and sexual abuse. On May 21, 1998, he was sentenced to 15 years to life for kidnapping with concurrent sentences for the lesser charges, resulting in a maximum sentence of 25 years to life. In February 1999, the New York Appellate Court reversed the conviction and ordered a new trial on the grounds that the Rape Shield Law had been applied in error, improperly hampering Jovanovic's defense.

After being detained for 20 months, Jovanovic was released. The new trial was set for September 4, 2001, and it was inevitable that all of Rzucek's cyber-correspondence to Jovanovic would be admissible, publicly revealing she had perjured herself at the first trial. The prosecution's appeal of the higher Court's decision was denied and in a desperate effort to hang on to a disintegrating case, they offered Jovanovic a plea bargain, which he flatly refused. Within days of trial, Jovanovic's case was dropped because Rzucek refused to testify. With a 5-year defense costing half-a-million dollars finally over, in October 2004 Jovanovic filed a lawsuit against New York City in which he claimed the allegations had harmed his reputation.

There appears to be no question Jaime Rzucek's cyberspace relationship with Jovanovic was consensual. Yet two questions remain: whether her self-representation as an experienced "pushy bottom" (the "submissive" in sexual sado-masochism who "pushes" the "dominant" to inflict greater pain) was true, partially true, or pure cyber-play, and to what degree she willingly participated in the 20 hours of sado-masochism (the true brutality of which may never be known). What is known is that Rzucek went offline with Jovanovic in November 1996, only one

month after reading an article in her college newspaper regarding a woman who was killed when she took her online relationship offline.

Lost in Space

Ironically, it was in 1994 that John Edward Robinson, Sr., discovered cyberspace and became enthralled with the opportunities it provided.^{6,7} Robinson had five computers in the home he shared with his wife (they were married in 1964 and, at the time, their four children were grown and living on their own). It wasn't long before Robinson surfed into websites dedicated to his area of sexual interest: BDSM. It was online that in 1997 Robinson (whose online identity was Slavemaster) met Izabela Lewika, a Purdue University freshman studying fine arts who shared an interest in bondage. Shortly after forming a cyber-connection with Robinson, Lewika told her parents she received a summer internship in Kansas City, where Robinson lived. Though never seen again and believed to have been murdered in the fall of 1999, Lewika's parents continued to receive intermittent e-mails from their daughter until early 2000.

It was in the fall of 1999 that "Slave-master" made a cyber-connection with 27-year-old Suzette Marie Trouten, who enjoyed the role of "slave." He offered Trouten, a licensed practical nurse from Michigan, \$60,000 to move to Kansas City and care for his diabetic, wheelchair-bound father. In February 2000, having driven to Kansas City with her two dogs, Trouten called her family to let them know she'd arrived safely and was settling into a motel. After a call home on March 1, Trouten's contact with her mother (which had been on a near daily basis) essentially stopped. Trouten had left Robinson's phone number with her mother and when she received letters she instinctively knew were not written by her daughter (although they bore her signature), Trouten's mother went to the police.

In 2000, Victoria "Vickie" Neufeld moved to Houston to complete a

practicum for her doctoral degree in psychology. Just before relocating, her marriage of 20 years ended in an unexpected divorce which she adamantly did not want. To compound her sense of loss and disconnection, the move separated Neufeld from her children. As a final assault to her sense of stability, Neufeld lost her job and was left with essentially no financial resources. A lonely and desperate Neufeld turned to cyberspace for connection and hope, choosing to seek comfort in sites she found familiar. A practitioner of BDSM, she placed an ad on a BDSM bulletin board, which drew numerous responses, but only one that spoke to her.

Neufeld had received an e-mail from Slavemaster, who told her he was wealthy and had helped several professional women get started in Kansas City, where he was purportedly well-connected. Choosing to take a risk, she used the \$100 Robinson sent her to drive to Kansas City, Missouri, arriving on Easter Sunday. In what should have been an obvious indicator of trouble ahead, Robinson had not reserved Neufeld a hotel room with his credit card, something he had said he would do. The second red-flag was Robinson's day-late arrival and flood of excuses. Third was the elaborate "slave contract" he brought for her (and all his other BDSM partners), which she signed. Fourth was his "not by the rules" response when she told him the collar he had put on her was too tight; he bound her wrists and tethered them to the collar such that any movement actually tightened the collar. With this an edge of fear materialized, but desperate for the job he had promised she stayed for three days of sex games.

On the third day, Robinson claimed he had to fly to Israel and sent Neufeld back to Houston with a promise to send a moving truck so she could move to Kansas City permanently. When the truck never arrived and her search of the web revealed there was no flight to Israel on the day Robinson indicated, Neufeld felt both humiliated and angry. She filed a report with the police explaining that



while she was a novice in BDSM she knew the “rules” and he had gone further than she wanted, turning consensual sex into criminal assault. In addition, she alleged that Slavemaster had stolen the sex toys and BDSM props she brought with her, representing a combined value of more than \$500.

Scripting a Security Threat

Years prior to going online, Robinson met women with an interest in BDSM through personal ads combined with lucrative job offers in bogus and fraudulent companies he “owned.” Two women, 19-year-old Paula Godfrey in 1984 and 26-year-old Catherine Clampitt in 1987, were never seen again after being “hired” by Robinson. In the mid-1980s Robinson began visiting homeless and battered women’s shelters, posing as a philanthropist but never making a donation; he actually took steps (albeit, fraudulent) to open a home for “unwed mothers with no familial support.” It was through this “trolling” that in 1985 Robinson met 19-

year-old Lisa Stasi (who was separated from her abusive husband) and her infant daughter. Perhaps as the pinnacle of Robinson’s perversely manipulative behaviors, after Stasi’s 1985 disappearance, Robinson arranged for her daughter’s adoption by his own brother and sister-in-law, who were unable to conceive. A completely fraudulent, illegal adoption, Robinson’s brother gave him a total of \$5,000 in fees for a non-existent attorney.

At a distance, Robinson was seen as a dedicated husband and father, Christian businessman, Eagle Scout, and former choirboy. Minimal interaction with this one-time Kansas City “Man of the Year” (an honor he won by blatantly rigging the vote) provided sufficient opportunity to see a man motivated by self-interest who was chronically manipulative of others and pathologically deceitful. A brazen forger, Robinson was seemingly addicted to theft and embezzlement. With multiple arrests for financial scamming dating back to the late 1960s, he had been placed on probation, received reduced

sentences, and charmed or weaseled his way out of others. Finally in 1987, through combined sentencing in three separate convictions in two jurisdictions, Robinson served six of the 6-to-19 year prison sentence and was released on parole in March 1993.

Prior to his release, Robinson met Beverly Bonner, a prison librarian married to a prison doctor. Within months of Robinson’s release, Bonner filed for divorce, moved to Kansas City where she was to work in another of Robinson’s alleged businesses, and wasn’t seen after early 1994. Bonner’s family attributed her seeming disappearance to the world-travel she previously told them her new job would require. Letters the family received from various parts of Europe reinforced this belief; it was later learned Robinson’s wife had mailed the letters while traveling at his request, under some pretense.

In the summer of 1994 Robinson responded to a personal ad placed by Sheila Faith, a 46-year-old woman with an interest in BDSM. Having recently

lost her husband to cancer, Faith was left to care for their 15-year-old daughter who suffered profound disabilities caused by cerebral palsy. She was lonely and living hand-to-mouth on the monies she received from social security and help from friends. Lured by Robinson's promises of financial security and specialized treatment for her daughter, Faith decided to accept his invitation to Missouri before driving on to see relatives in Texas. Though Faith and her daughter were never seen again, her social security checks (and those of her daughter) were cashed monthly until June 2000, and her sisters received occasional typewritten letters, although they didn't seem to reflect the Sheila they knew.

Virus Alert

The police had been investigating Robinson in relation to the disappearance of Godfrey followed by Stasi. The families of both women had filed missing person reports with the police and reported the alarm raised by receiving letters that were uncharacteristic of their loved ones in style and content. Over time, the other missing women were connected to Robinson, followed by Neufeld's complaint of Robinson's perverse violence and theft.

Arrested on June 2, 2000, the media identified Robinson as being the "first Internet serial killer." A total of five female bodies in various stages of decomposition were found in chemical drums on Robinson's property and a rented storage unit. Identified as Beverly Bonner, Sheila Faith and her daughter, Izabela Lewika, and Suzette Trouton, all five had been killed by one or two blows to the head after suffering untold torture. Robinson later admitted to having raped Sheila Faith's daughter before killing her. He also confessed to having raped, sodomized, and beaten Lisa Stasi before her murder, and to having killed Paula Godfrey and Catherine Clampitt.

In 2001 Robinson went on trial in Kansas for the capital murders of Lewika and Trouton; the rape, sodomy, and murder of Stasi; and the theft of Neufeld's sex

toys.⁸ Found guilty by jury, in January 2003 he was sentenced, receiving two death sentences and one life sentence. Robinson was still facing multiple murder charges in Missouri (including capital murder) related to the remaining victims. Compared to Kansas, which had reinstated capital punishment in 1994 and at the time had only four men on death row, Missouri was aggressive in enforcing death sentences. Knowing this, in mid-October 2003 before a Missouri Superior Court judge, Robinson acknowledged the prosecution had sufficient evidence to convict him for multiple counts of capital murder. In brief, Robinson manipulated a plea bargain in which he indirectly admitted guilt and was guaranteed life sentences (rather than death) in exchange for providing authorities with information regarding the location of the remaining bodies.

Robinson is now housed on death row in Kansas in the administrative segregation unit of the El Dorado Correctional Facility along with six other inmates.⁹ In 2004, existent death penalty law in Kansas was ruled unconstitutional as it mandated a death sentence when mitigating evidence presented at the penalty phase balanced that in aggravation.¹⁰

The Tangled Web

Despite her loneliness and desperation at the time she was lured into Robinson's web, Vickie Neufeld had the sense to set up certain safety precautions. She insisted on meeting in a public place, gave Robinson's cell phone number to the head of a sadomasochist group she was associated with in Houston, and pre-arranged "safe calls."¹¹ A safety measure often used by those who practice BDSM, "safe calls" are made (typically by the submissive) to a third party who knows the couple's location. If the submissive fails to make an arranged call, the third person notifies the authorities.

Robinson was reportedly infuriated by the safe calls Neufeld is said to have made. His anger undoubtedly contributed to the brutality of the experience, but also probably saved her life by removing her

isolation and his anonymity from their encounter, conditions he strategized for his own potentially deadly purposes. Neufeld's ordeal with Robinson did not dampen her interest and involvement in BDSM. With a doctoral degree in psychology, Neufeld is the editor of *Silenced No Longer*, a non-pornographic website dedicated to alternative relationships, in particular, BDSM.¹²

End Notes

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