

**SEXUAL PREDATORS ON MYSPACE:  
A DEEPER LOOK AT TEENS BEING STALKED OR APPROACHED FOR  
SEXUAL LIAISONS**

Short Report 2006-01

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I recently completed two studies of adolescents on MySpace. Study 1 included 1,257 MySpacers who were surveyed through an anonymous online questionnaire that assessed MySpace usage plus psychological variables including: depression; self-esteem; Internet addiction; family and friend support; impact on family friends, school and job; and online shyness, creativity and honesty/superficiality. Study 2 included data from 267 pairs of teen MySpace users and their parents. Data were again collected anonymously through an online questionnaire that included: teen MySpace usage, and parent and teen perceptions and attitudes concerning the teen's use of MySpace. Parents and teens were asked identical questions concerning the teen's time spent on MySpace; concern about MySpace issues (e.g., social isolation, sexual predators, addiction, friendships and lack of physical activity); teen disclosure of personal information; MySpace interference with daily activities; prevalence and media coverage of sexual predators; time and meals spent together; and parental limits placed on teen MySpace usage. Complete results from both studies can be found in an Executive Summary online at [www.csudh.edu/psych/lorosen.htm](http://www.csudh.edu/psych/lorosen.htm).

One result found in these studies is that “7% to 9% of the teens were approached for a sexual liaison.” This report delves into further detail about these experiences.

**STUDY 1**

Overall, 7.4% of the sample (98 cases out of 1,257) had a bad experience that was of a “sexual nature.” However, overall, only 1.5% of the sample (19 people) were stalked

while 4.6% (58 cases) involved being approached by someone they didn't know about having sex. The remainder (1.3%) involved other sexually-related experiences such as someone receiving occasional pornographic messages, someone posting naked pictures, etc.

Of those who were stalked (n=19), here is a representative sample of their comments:

- ✓ “A really bad date. A stalker when I was in high school. The kid went to my high school and found me online.”
- ✓ “People trying to talk to me, aka stalkers who have recognized me out and about becuz of the pictures I have on my page. I've had people stalk me on the freeway.”
- ✓ “Girls have stalked me.”
- ✓ “Stalkers but luckily you can block them.”
- ✓ “The guy was totally in to me and he began to stalk me online which was very freaky.”

Of those who received sexual messages from someone they didn't know (n=58), here is a representative sample of their comments:

- ✓ “A gay guy tried to hook up with me.”
- ✓ “A man sent me a message telling me that he needed more females for his production and I already knew what that production was obviously pornography so I gave him a message telling him that he was a pervert and should be ashamed of himself.”
- ✓ “Being hounded by old trolls who won't take go to hell for an answer.”
- ✓ “Guys keep posting really nasty comments. They offer invitations to sexual stuff.”
- ✓ “I've had old perverts send me e-mails and write gross messages to me. I find it really offensive and scary!”
- ✓ “I had a guy send pornographic pictures of himself.”

- ✓ “I have only had one. This one guy had at one point kept sending me rude and inappropriate messages when I hadn't known him or talked to him ever before.”
- ✓ “Just some unwarranted lewd messages.”
- ✓ “One time this one guy kept sending me messages of how he wanted to have sex with me and I had to report him to Tom.”
- ✓ “Really, only when random guys write me messages about how sexy I am and how they want to hook it up...it's annoying...”
- ✓ “I find it unpleasant when guys ask me to look at their web cam and watch them engage in some kind of sexual activity. Or the random, unsolicited invites to chat with/meet singles in my area. Don't like those either. Vulgar.”

### **WHO WAS “STALKED”?**

There were no demographic or MySpace usage differences in who reported being stalked and who did not. The 19 MySpacers who reported being stalked were representative of the entire sample in terms of age, gender and usage of MySpace.

### **WHO WAS CONTACTED BY SOMEONE FOR “SEX”?**

There were differences in who reported being approached by someone through a sexual message.

- ✓ Females were approached than males
- ✓ Those who started on MySpace more than a year ago were approached more than those who joined more recently.
- ✓ Those who spend more hours on MySpace were contacted more than those who spent less time.

## **STUDY 2**

Only 8.3% of the sample of 267 adolescents reported a bad experience of a sexual nature. Overall, only one teen (.4%) reported being stalked while 19 (7.1%) reported having been contacted by someone they did not know for a sexual liaison. The remaining two teens gave unclear explanations that could not be coded.

### **HOW WERE THEY APPROACHED?**

Here is a sample of comments made by the MySpacers about being approached for a potential sexual liaison:

- ✓ “Yes. I got hit on by a lesbian.”
- ✓ “ya some guy was hitting on me but I just blew him off.”
- ✓ ”I try to avoid the situation as best as possible.”
- ✓ “Perverts always email me but I just ignore their messages and block them on myspace so they can't contact me again.”
- ✓ “One time, a guy, probably 18 or 19, kept messaging me on Myspace. He continuously asked me inappropriate questions and made perverted remarks. The good thing is that you are allowed to block people and he is of course blocked.”

### **WHO WAS APPROACHED?**

There were differences in who was approached.

- ✓ Females were approached more than males.
- ✓ Those who had been on MySpace for more than a year got approached more than those who had been on less than a year.
- ✓ Those who spent more time on MySpace got approached more than those who spent less time on MySpace.

- ✓ Those who had more MySpace friends were approached more often than those with fewer MySpace friends.
- ✓ Those who felt that there are quite a few sexual predators on MySpace were approached more often than those who felt there are very few sexual predators on MySpace.
- ✓ Those adolescents who felt MySpace was not safe were approached more often than those who thought it was safe.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

Overall, it appears there are two types of predatory problems on MySpace — actual stalking and being approached by an unknown person for a possible sexual liaison. These occurrences are extremely rare with stalking happening only between .5% and 1.5% of the time (1.3% when combining Study 1 with 1,257 subjects and Study 2 with 267 subjects in an unweighted mean) and being approached for sex happening between 4.6% and 7.1% of the time (an unweighted mean of 5.1%). It appears that females who had been on MySpace for more than one year and who spent more time on MySpace were more likely to be approached for sex. In addition, at least in Study 2, MySpacers with many friends were approached more often than those with fewer friends. Finally, those MySpacers who were approached were those who felt MySpace is both less safe and that there are more sexual predators on MySpace.

What does this all mean? First, it means stalking is extremely rare, happening about 1.3% of the time, while being approached for sex happens slightly more often, roughly 5.1% of the time. Second, given the explanations from MySpacers, it appears that, for the vast majority, the episode was brushed off and had no lasting impact. Only six teens out of 1,524 mentioned that the experience bothered them. Three called it “scary”, one “freaky”, one “disturbing” and one “creepy.” Third, it appears that females who have been on MySpace for some time and who spend more time there are approached more often for sex. And finally, those who have had these experiences find MySpace less safe with higher perceived incidence of sexual predators.

Coupled with the complete data from these two studies, a picture of MySpace is emerging that is different from what is portrayed in the media. MySpace is not a den of sexual stalkers nor is it a place where unknown people ask for sex. These episodes do happen but it appears that for nearly all adolescents, it is a momentary event that is quickly dismissed. As one MySpacer put it: “Perverts always email me but I just ignore their messages and block them on myspace so they can't contact me again.” And another adolescent made an even more definitive statement saying, “so I gave him a message telling him that he was a pervert and should be ashamed of himself.”

It is time for parents to become more aware of what their adolescents are doing on MySpace. Parents, and the media, should stop focusing on sexual predators and start assessing the MySpace actions of teens that may make their adolescent transition easier or may provide additional struggles in a time of a constant search for identity and direction.