

## **SHAPING THE FUTURE**

2019 ATSA Conference | Thursday November 7 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

**T-17**

### **My Digital Journey (MDJ)©<sup>i</sup> A Reflective Tool to Help Understand and Chronicle a Youth's Digital Experience**

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All youth are online, and increasingly this is the medium through which they engage with each other and the broader world.<sup>ii</sup> Given the statistics regarding the average time American youth spend on-line<sup>iii</sup>, it is inevitable that their world view is being shaped by their use of, and interactions on, the multiple platforms available to them (e.g. Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr).<sup>iv</sup> It is therefore imperative that we understand the digital choices that they make, especially when those choices lead them to be exploited, and/or to exploit others.

Our current comprehensive assessments for youth who commit sexual offenses have recognized the importance of exploring their online behaviour but they have often been limited to a tertiary scanning for areas of concern. This approach appears to miss the greater opportunity to evaluate our clients' digital citizenship<sup>v</sup> so that we can incorporate their knowledge and experiences into our understanding of their strengths and needs.

We believe that the endeavour to develop a validated tool that could remain current and up-to-date in the lightning speed of the digital age is prohibitive and likely unrealistic. It is therefore our collective assertion that a neutral approach which emphasizes gathering and tracking the client's digital footprint is best. MDJ © can become the template where the youth can share and explore their digital activity with the clinician.

The neutrality and user accessibility of the tool is vital. This position is founded upon a number of factors. Namely, it is our belief that stating or implying judgment within our questions could be a limiting factor to full disclosure by our clients. Secondly, we believe that technology is constantly evolving and so clinicians and clients alike need to be encouraged to develop a critical, evaluative stance when using technology. This ensures that we all are approaching the material with an inquisitive and dynamic mindset. Thirdly, we feel that neutralizing the generational hierarchy (among clients and clinicians) is important in order to elevate the clients to be competent agents of their own life choices. Fourth, and perhaps most important, we want to remain neutral in evaluating online activity because we recognize the great potential for shaming when youth begin to explore their sexuality using technology. MDJ© is premised on the assertion that most of the online activity by children and youth is not harmful in nature; however, it is fraught with unknowns where critical judgement skills can be promoted.<sup>vi vii</sup>

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We have developed a non-judgmental and developmentally appropriate, reflective tool to help understand and chronicle a youth's digital experience, entitled My Digital Journey (MDJ) ©. It is intended to be used as an adjunct to supplement a comprehensive assessment for youth who have committed sexual offences. Our goal is to understand the youth's digital footprint including the needs, thoughts and functions of their digital activity within the context of their developmental milestones. Likewise, we believe it is important to highlight the strengths and resiliency of each youth within their digital world as these protective factors will be foundational to their on-line decision making. MDJ© explores their social media savvy, on-line literacy and communication style. Moreover, MDJ© is intended to establish and provide support opportunities of the client's strengths, safe choices and skills. It also serves to identify potential educational and corrective opportunities that could be incorporated into a comprehensive treatment plan.

This workshop will invite participants to interact with the tool exploring how they might invite their clients to share their digital journey. Clinicians can expect to be called upon to consider how they might approach the material from a non-judgemental position in an effort to support the development of the critical thinking skills necessary to become better digital citizens.

### **Learning Goals:**

- To become familiar with the clinical application of MDJ© for youth engaged in sexual offending behaviour or children under 12 engaged in concerning sexualized behaviour.
- To become aware of the benefits of using an alternative, non-judgemental approach when evaluating a youth's online activity.
- To explore how MDJ© may augment current assessment practises.

**Franca A. Iannotta, C. Psych.** is a Registered Psychologist in private practise in the Greater Toronto Area. Over the past 30 years she has provided a wide range of psychological services to children, youth and their parents related to learning, trauma, sexualized behavior, and adolescent sexual offending behaviour. She has presented locally and at the international level on a range of topics in the field of sexual abuse including trauma, sibling sexual abuse, concerning sexual behaviours in children, and adolescents who have committed sexual offenses. She currently serves as the Alternate Chair of a Research Ethics Board.

Her practise also includes specialization in the areas of learning/cognitive assessment, emotional/personality evaluation, and social and behavioral functioning. Franca has consulted and provided supervision to clinical staff at various community-based organizations, school boards, children's mental health agencies and sexual abuse programs in the regions of Toronto, Halton, Peel and Hamilton. She currently provides psychological

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consultation and training for Thrive Child and Youth Trauma Services, Radius Child and Youth Services, Crisci and Associates, and Rae Counselling & Psychotherapy

**Heather Barbour, B.S.W., R.S.W.** brings over thirty three years of experience in working with children and their families, both in Mental Health as well as Family Service Agency settings. She has developed specialized clinical skills in the area of trauma assessment and treatment for preschool; latency aged children, as well as adolescents. She also provides sexualized behaviour assessment and treatment for children under the age of twelve, and risk assessment and treatment for adolescents who commit sexual offences.

Heather has presented both locally and internationally on topics ranging from sibling sexual abuse, concerning sexual behaviours in children, and adolescents who have committed sexual offenses. She has co-authored a guide book, **Let's Talk About Touching**, for clinicians working with children who have engaged in concerning sexual behaviours and a second guide book **Sexual Decision Making: Your Personal Code** for clinicians working with youth who have committed a sexual offense. She has also authored a therapeutic children's book, **Body Book Private Parts Have a Reason**.

**Nancy Rumble, M.Sc, M.S.W., R.S.W.** has been a practicing clinical social worker for over six years. She specializes in the assessment and treatment of children and adolescents who have experienced a variety of trauma including sexual, emotional and physical abuse, neglect, and war trauma. She is particularly interested in working with children and youth involved in child protective services. She has presented locally and internationally regarding sexualized behaviour in children. She currently practices at Thrive Child and Youth Trauma Services and consults to Radius Child and Youth Services.

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<sup>i</sup> My Digital Journey has been copyrighted to prevent duplication without permission by the authors, and not for financial gain.

<sup>ii</sup> Children In A Digital World, Unicef-2017

<sup>iii</sup> [https://www.common sensemedia.org/sites/default/files/uploads/research/census\\_researchreport.pdf](https://www.common sensemedia.org/sites/default/files/uploads/research/census_researchreport.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> <https://scrollingbeyondbinaries.com/2017/01/23/is-there-something-queer-about-tumblr/> or

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2056305116672487> or

<https://www.cnn.com/2015/11/03/health/teens-tweens-media-screen-use-report/index.html>

<sup>v</sup> [getdigitalsafe.gc.ca](http://getdigitalsafe.gc.ca)

<sup>vi</sup> 'Online risk, harm and vulnerability: Reflections on the evidence base for child internet safety policy' by Sonia Livingstone, 2013.

<sup>vii</sup> Children's online activities, risks and safety: A literature review by the UKCCIS Evidence Group. Sonia Livingstone, Julia Davidson, Joanne Bryce, with Saqba Batool, Claran Haughton and Anulekha Nandi, October 2017.