

THE ENEMY IN THE SCREEN: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY ON  
PERPETRATORS OF INTERNET CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

April 2008

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A Dissertation Proposal

Submitted to the  
Faculty of Liberty University  
in partial fulfillment for  
the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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April 2008

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## Abstract

# PERPETRATORS OF INTERNET CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY

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This collective case study explored the phenomenon of Internet crimes against children from the perspectives of select Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) investigators. The research focused on three questions: (1) How do select investigators describe perpetrators of Internet crimes against children? (2) What, if any, common characteristics do participants identify among the perpetrators and (3) How do participants' descriptions compare and/or contrast? Data was obtained utilizing semi-structured, conversational interviews with eight ICAC investigators. Three main themes emerged from these interviews: general demographic descriptions, motivations and behaviors. Perpetrators of Internet crimes against children were found to be predominantly non-Hispanic males. Other significant findings included the lack of self-

control, the downward spiral associated with obtaining and viewing child pornography, and the addictive behaviors observed in the perpetrators. It was recognized that treatment has been found to not always be successful and incarceration of these individuals may be necessary to protect the children. That notwithstanding, a cognitive-behavioral model of therapy integrated with Christian counseling was provided. The goal of treatment would be developing positive regard for self and others, stopping the cycle of pornography, and establishing and maintaining a relationship with God. The study also included suggestions for future research.

## Dedication

This doctoral dissertation is dedicated in memory of Reverend Jerry Falwell, pastor, friend, and mentor, and my beloved son, Matthew Jordan Brown. Without Dr. Falwell's inspiration, my college career would never have happened. My beloved son, Matt, my angel on my shoulder always believed in me and thought I was capable of anything.

## Acknowledgements

This dissertation would never have been completed without the love and support of my husband, Michael. He was with me through the tears, the late nights of reading and studying, and was my chauffeur on the many trips to interview the participants of my study. He always provided a shoulder to cry on, and never grew tired of answering me the countless times I asked: Why am I doing this? He reminded me that learning was my passion, that counseling and teaching were what I loved to do and always told me he knew I could do it. He truly is my knight in shining armor and my dragon slayer.

I also owe undying gratitude to the members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Fred Milacci, Dr. Nancy Anderson, and Dr. Gary Reynolds. They always believed in me, supported me, and were dedicated to my college career. These wonderful people, with busy schedules of their own, always made time for me and my countless questions. I would especially like to thank Dr. Fred Milacci. Dr. Milacci was a teacher, mentor, coach, encourager and supporter – sometimes all at once. Thanks to all of you I was able to get 'er done! God bless.

In addition, my technology angels – Robin, Mike, Ricky, Kim, Wendy, Kyle, Daniel, Maria – to you go my deepest gratitude. Diana, for all you did to make this whole process easier, God bless you and thank you as well. Thank you to the ICAC Research Committee for their support and encouragement and for granting me access to their investigators. Thank you seems inadequate for the help you all so generously provided, but it comes from the heart.

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## CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

### Background to the Problem

Human beings have always been attracted to, and interested in, younger individuals, sometimes significantly younger (Ferraro & Casey, 2005), and sexual interactions between children and adults have been recorded in history. For instance, in ancient Greece and Rome, young boys were castrated to make them more attractive to adult males and both girls and boys were present in the brothels of that period. In fifteenth century France, the legal age of consent for sex was six years (Clark & Clark, 1989). The first legislation to provide protection from forced sodomy for boys and forcible rape for girls was not enacted until the sixteenth century in England (Tomison, 1995). During the Victorian era, child prostitution and pornography were actually considered acceptable practices (Clark & Clark, 1989).

During the same time that legislation was being enacted in England, reports of sexual exploitation of children in the United States were beginning to gain some measure of attention. A particular case of note was in Connecticut in 1672, when a father was found guilty of committing incestuous acts against his daughter (Tomison, 1995). Even though the parent was found guilty, the child was also believed to have had a part in the crime and was whipped.

During most of recorded history children were considered to be the property of their parents. Rape of a young girl would constitute a property offence against the father of the child and the rapist was often not only required to reimburse the father for the lost income, but under certain circumstances to actually marry the child. This early historical

pattern of acceptance of the sexual exploitation of children depicts the societal view of minors being the property of their parents (Clark & Clark, 1989). Awareness and action on the sexual exploitation of children progressed slowly in the seventeenth century. By the early 1700s parents were warned to supervise their children at all times and to avoid being seen nude by their children (Tomison, 1995).

By the early 1900s, child welfare workers were becoming aware that sexual abuse was occurring within families; however, the pervasive belief that this offense was committed by strangers persisted into the 1950s and 1960s. During that time, the primary focus in the limited literature and discussions on sexual victimization of children were on the dangerous stranger or a dirty old man in a raincoat approaching innocent children at play (Tomison, 1995; Danni & Hampe, 2000; Lanning, 2001). Awareness of sexual assaults on children increased in the 1970s and 1980s, but, for the most part, child sexual abuse was seen as being practically synonymous with incest. Today literature still refers to child sexual abuse in terms of intrafamilial abuse (Lanning, 2001; Ferraro & Casey, 2005). Definitions and views on child sexual abuse have been influenced by the socio-historical context of a particular culture, its laws and beliefs. Views have progressed considerably since ancient times (Clark & Clark, 1989).

Society has become much less tolerant of sexual activity involving children. While several high profile cases in the media have resulted in greater awareness of child sexual crimes and abductions, much less attention has been given to the problem of sexual exploitation of children via the Internet. The Internet is no longer an obscure communications medium. It has become "a ubiquitous fixture in our homes, schools, and

workplaces” (Quayle, Vaughan, & Taylor, 2006, p. 1). The futuristic society of which William Gibson wrote in *Neuromancer*, a society in which increasing reliance on computers and information technology would create a virtual universe where criminal activity flourished, has become reality (Medaris & Girouard, 2002).

Internet activity has grown exponentially. Various results of this growth include proportionate growth of online solicitation of children for sex, sexual abuse of children, and possession and distribution of child pornography. This new technology has provided a haven for those who wish to harm young people, permitting virtually infinite access to victims (Medaris & Girouard, 2001; Quayle & Taylor, 2003; Lanning, 2001; Durkin, 1997).

The Internet presents the greatest danger for older children to become victims. Teenagers are the most likely population to use the Internet on a regular basis. The risk is particularly high for adolescent boys who are becoming increasingly interested in sex and who may be confused regarding their sexual orientation (Lanning, 2001). Although Internet use, and misuse, by sexual predators has increased dramatically, research into the use of the Internet for sexual purposes, and particularly its use to commit crimes against children is in its infancy (Stanley, 2001).

## Purpose of the Study

Given that the problem of online sexual exploitation of children is a growing social phenomenon and the paucity of currently existing research that explores this issue, the purpose of this study was to add to the literature by developing a portrait of perpetrators of Internet crimes against children and by facilitating greater awareness and understanding of this social phenomenon. More specifically, this study sought to investigate this phenomenon from the unique perspective of Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force investigators whose perspectives were compared and contrasted.

Qualitative research is uniquely appropriate for filling a void in literature, for examining an understudied group, and for garnering perspectives of participants on an issue of interest (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 1998). Case studies are particularly useful for answering "how" questions and for focusing on a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context. By using more than one case, the conclusions drawn are more powerful than those derived from a single case (Yin, 2003). Therefore, a qualitative collective case study was deemed to be most appropriate for this present study.

## Research Questions

A presupposition of this study was that perpetrators of Internet crimes against children share common characteristics. With this in mind, the research questions were:

1. How do select ICAC investigators describe perpetrators of Internet crimes

against children?

2. What, if any, common characteristics do participants identify among the perpetrators?
3. How do participants' descriptions compare and/or contrast?

## Definitions

### *Internet*

In this study, the term Internet refers to any online or computer activity that allows communication between individuals. This communication includes information that is obtained, viewed, and exchanged in written or visual form.

### *Children*

The terms children and young people will be used interchangeably and will refer to anyone under the age of 18.

### *Child pornography*

Child pornography will be defined as the depiction of a person who appears to be under eighteen years of age in sexually explicit visual material.

### *Perpetrators*

The individuals who commit crimes against children on the Internet will be referred to as perpetrators, or offenders, and are defined as individuals who:

- communicate with minors via the Internet, initiate, or attempt to initiate, a relationship with a minor online,
- manufacture, receive, or distribute child pornography online.



## Significance of the Study

The Internet provides opportunities for education, entertainment, and communication and the information superhighway is very much like a big city with libraries, universities, museums, places to have fun and opportunities to meet other people (Medaris & Girouard, 2002; Teen Safety, n.d.). Young people have embraced this technology and are quick to pick up on the latest, most interesting, and up-to-date advantages it offers (Stanley, 2001). They use the Internet to do homework, play games and stay in contact with friends. Email and instant messaging now provide immediate access to people outside their peer groups and chat rooms, instant messaging, and web cams are becoming increasingly popular (Teen Safety). However, use of the Internet for sexual purposes has increased proportionately. Technological advances have provided new tools for those who wish to harm young people (Taylor & Quayle, 2003; Lanning, 2001; Stanley, 2001; Craissati, 2002; Medaris & Girouard, 2002; Durkin, 1997).

This study sought to investigate perpetrators of Internet crimes against children and to develop a portrait of the individuals who perpetrate these crimes. It is anticipated that this study will add to the current body of literature, inform future research efforts, and help to promote awareness and understanding of this ever-growing problem.

## Locating Myself as a Researcher

I have become very much aware of the enormity of the problem of Internet crimes against children due to my husband's position as Administrator of Operation Blue Ridge Thunder, a Department of Justice, Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force for

Virginia and West Virginia. His position has allowed me access to specific agencies within the Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) task forces. Additionally, the ICAC Research Committee has given me their enthusiastic support and encouragement as well as permission to contact and interview certain ICAC investigators.

As an Evangelical Christian, it is my conviction that nothing in a Christian's life happens by chance or coincidence. I strongly believe that I have been placed in certain situations, given unique opportunities, and allowed to meet particular individuals so that I may learn more about the problem of online sexual abuse and share this knowledge with others. As van Manen (1990) wrote: "Every project of phenomenological inquiry "is always a project of someone: a real person, who, in the context of particular individual, social, and historical life, circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence" (p. 31).

I maintain that these crimes are horrendous and so evil; therefore, not only do I wish to make sense of it, but my sincere desire is that God will use me, and this research to make a difference. It is my desire that this research will not only educate me, but others, about those who would perpetrate this evil upon children. I consider this research to be more than a part of my doctoral requirement; it is a passion, even a calling.

My concern for children, my Christian beliefs, my husband's work, combined with the increased media attention to child sexual molestation, have served to further increase my awareness and interest in the problem of sexual exploitation of children on

the Internet. One young lady also played an important part in this growing awareness, a young lady that my husband and I met about seven years ago.

Melissa (a pseudonym) was fourteen at the time; she was a beautiful, bright, petite teenager with the face of an angel. She met a fourteen year old boy online who was interested in the same things she was and they began a cyber friendship. Shortly after this friendship began, Melissa realized that her friend was not a fourteen year old boy, but a thirty seven year old man. By then he knew where she lived, where her parents worked and what time they got home in the evening. He knew where she went to school and who her friends were. She had innocently given him all this information as they exchanged notes in a chatroom.

By the time she realized who and what he was it was too late. Melissa and her new "friend" arranged to meet each other at a local mall. He convinced her that he would not only kill her if she didn't comply with his wishes, he would also kill her parents and her younger sister. This individual took Melissa away in his truck, kept her for six to eight hours, brutally assaulted her and then - miraculously! - brought her back to within a block of her home and dumped her out on the side of the road like a sack of garbage. She was one of the lucky ones who survived. However, these stories do not always have this happy ending.

This young lady's mother contacted my husband after hearing of his task force and asked how they may be of service. Since then we have developed a very close relationship with both this young lady and her mother. They have traveled to schools,

PTA meetings and other gatherings to inform and educate parents and teens about the problem of Internet crimes. Melissa has prepared and taken part in public service announcements. She possesses a very strong desire to draw attention to this problem and educate other young people, as well as their parents, to the dangers lurking on the Internet. Melissa touched my heart and continues to do so. She is a very strong and courageous young woman who has overcome so much and is so willing to help others.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Introduction

This chapter focused on a review of the literature related to sexual crimes against children. In an endeavor to understand these crimes and those who perpetrate them, as well as to provide a background against which behaviors of online sexual predators could be compared, the review began with research on the historical classifications of sexual deviancy, characteristics, and classifications of sexual offenders in general (Tomison, 1995; Durkin & Bryant, 1999; Danni & Hampe, 2000; Smallbone & Wortley, 2001; Lanning, 1992, 2001; Lanning & Burgess, 1995; Craissati, McClurg & Browne, 2002; Goodman, 2002; Hall, 2002; Fagan, Wise, Schmidt & Berlin, 2002; Ward, 2003; Seto, 2004; Saleh, 2004; Module 5, n.d.).

Additionally, review of the works of authors on sexual crimes against children and the Internet was conducted (Durkin, 1997; Myths, 2000; Child Safety, n.d.; Cooper, Scherer, Boies, & Gordon, 1999; Cybertipline, 2004; Quayle & Taylor, 2001; Quayle & Taylor, 2003; Quayle, Vaughan, & Taylor, 2006; Stanley, 2001; Fried, n.d., Goldberg, 2004; Internet child sexual predators, 2005; Medaris & Girouard, 2002; Mitchell, Finkelhor & Wolak, 2005; Module 5, n.d.; Online Victimization, n. d.; Protecting Children, 2005; Quayle & Taylor, 2003; Teen Safety, n.d.; Wells, 2006; Finkelhor, Mitchell, Wolak, 2000; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003). Studies on the relationship of pornography and online sexual crimes against children were reviewed (Hernandez, 2000; Young, 2000; McCarthy & Gaunt, 2004; Gillsespie, 2005; Ferraro &

Casey, 2005), as well as studies on Internet addiction (Stein, Black, Shapira, & Spitzer, 2001; Quayle & Taylor, 2003; Griffiths, 2001), and publications of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Juvenile Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) and Operation Blue Ridge Thunder (BRT).

The literature contains contradictions not only as to what type of individual commits sexual crimes against children, but also in definitions used to describe the abuse, the victim, and the offender. For instance, Tomison (1995) described the abuse as the use of a child for sexual gratification by an adult, or significantly older child or adolescent, by engaging in activities ranging from exposing the child to sexually explicit materials or behaviors, to taking pictures of the child for pornographic purposes, or touching, fondling, or masturbation of the child, or having the child perform sexual acts. Finkelhor (as cited in Tomison, 1995), on the other hand, preferred the term sexual victimization, positing that it more adequately defined the problem by recognizing that children were taken advantage of because of their age and naiveté. However, Hall (2002) defined a sex offender as an individual who forced another to engage in sexual contact against their will, or against a person unable to consent.

To date, researchers disagree on a definition of the crime and have yet to develop either a true typology or profile of a child sex offender. Rather, it has been posited that sexual offending against children is a multi-dimensional phenomenon (Smallbone & Wortley, 2001). Child sexual offenders have been described as a heterogeneous group, exhibiting considerable variation in characteristics as well as the manner in which they

perpetrate offenses (Smallbone & Wortley, 2001; Tomison, 1995; Lanning, 2001; Danni & Hampe, 2000; Finkelhor, Mitchell & Wolak, 2000; Taylor & Quayle, 2003; Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2005; Ferraro & Casey, 2005; Module 5, n.d.).

Law enforcement has begun to understand that perpetrators of child sexual abuse do not fit a stereotype. These individuals are no longer thought of as dirty old men lurking parks or schoolyards (Clark & Clark, 1989; Lanning & Burgess, 1995; Danni & Hampe, 2000; Stanley, 2001). The overriding view for the general public, unfortunately, is that a sex offender is usually someone demented and/or unstable (Craissati, 2003).

#### Historical Classifications of Sexual Deviancy

Historically, the classification of sexual offenders began with research on sexuality, and the terms deviance and perverted were used (Hall, 2002; Goodman, 2002). The Marquis de Sade, writing on sexual perversions during his imprisonment in the Bastille, placed individuals into three categories: (1) weak or repressed sexual desires, (2) natural perverts and (3) libertines. Natural perverts, according to de Sade, were born perverted, while the libertines were perverted by choice. Approximately one hundred years later, Kraft-Ebing also placed sexual perversions into three categories: (1) too little or too much sexual feeling; sexual feeling appearing at the wrong time or wrongly directed, (2) inflicting or receiving pain, and what he described as (3) inverted sexuality, such as homosexuality and bisexuality (Goodman, 2002).

## Characteristics and Classifications of Sexual Offenders

The term paraphilia literally means love (philia), that is beyond or irregular (para). Paraphilias are psychosexual disorders that may or may not involve criminal activity. Individuals suffering from one or more of these paraphilias can engage in fantasy, or can act out their fantasies legally (e.g., with consenting adult partners or objects), or illegally (e.g., with either nonconsenting partners or underage partners) (Goodman, 2002). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV (DSM-IV) of the American Psychiatric Association (2000), the essential features of paraphilia are “recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors generally involving (1) nonhuman objects, (2) the suffering or humiliation of oneself or one’s partner, or (3) children or other nonconsenting persons, that occur over a period of at least six months” (criterion A, p. 566). Certain behavior patterns may be criminal, yet not necessarily fit the specific diagnostic criteria of a paraphilia. Sex offenders may *think* about sex and value sex in the same way as others; where they differ is that they *act* on their sexual fantasies (Dannie & Hampe, 2000).

Pedophilia, sexual attraction or contact involving children, is only one of the categories of paraphilias, and usually refers to men sexually attracted to children. The word pedophilia is derived from the Greek (Fagan, et al., 2002) and literally means “the love of children” and an essential feature is a sexual attraction, either exclusively or in part, to prepubescent children (Goodman, 2002; Hall, 2002; Seto, 2004).



The following is the diagnostic criteria for pedophilia listed in the DSM-IV (2000).

- A. Over a period of at least six months, recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors involving sexual activity with a prepubescent child or children (generally age 13 years or younger).
- B. The person has acted on these sexual urges, or the sexual urges or fantasies cause marked distress or interpersonal difficulty.
- C. The person is at least age 16 years and at least 5 years older than the child or children in Criterion A (p. 572).

Danni and Hampe (2000) and Fagan et al. (2002) distinguished between offenders sexually attracted to children, as pedophiles or hebophiles. While pedophilia literally means the erotic love of children hebophilia refers to an exceedingly high sexual attraction to post pubescent adolescents. They reported that pedophiles were more likely to prefer prepubertal children and were more motivated to seduce their victims than the nonpedophile. Hebophiles, on the other hand, were described as preferring relationships with a post pubescent child.

In 1979, Groth and Birnbaum developed a dichotomous classification of sexual offenders designed to cluster sex offenders based on their primary sexual interests (Ferraro & Casey, 2005). Fagan et al. (2002) reported that a pedophile is not a sexual offender unless he or she commits a legally proscribed act. What both pedophiles and hebophiles have in common is the attraction to children who are minors (Danni & Hampe, 2000; Fagan et al., 2002). Although pedophiles are not the only individuals who use the Internet, a substantial amount of deviant behavior has been found to be associated with the Internet, including adult and child pornography (Lanning, 1992; Durkin, 1996;

Durkin, 1997; Lanning, 2001; Stanley, 2002; Medaris & Girouard, 2002; Ferraro & Casey, 2005; Fried, n.d).

No consensus was found among researchers as to whether or not all sexual offenders who commit sexual crimes against children are pedophiles. Some studies have found that pedophiles are more likely to have experienced sexual victimization as children, to prefer prepubertal sex partners, and to be motivated to seduce their victims than nonpedophiles (Danni & Hampe, 2000; Fagan et al., 2002). Other researchers have suggested that individuals who commit sexual crimes against children may have experienced external stress, and, as a result, sexual contact with children only represented a maladaptive method of coping (Danni & Hampe, 2000).

Tomison (1995) maintained that the basic assumption of society is that pedophiles who abuse same-sex children are homosexual. Some individuals may, in fact, prefer sex with a female partner and only substitute a child when an adult is not available (Ward, 2003). Some offenders have been found to possess a preference for children as sex objects, to have begun molesting children as adults, and to offend as a result of external stressors (Danni & Hampe, 2000; Tomison, 1995; Ward, 2003).

Typologies reported by The Massachusetts Treatment Center (MTC), which were primarily based on the work of Knight (as cited in Ferraro & Casey, 2005), were more complex. They basically centered on the degree of fixation, amount of contact, and the extent to which the offender caused physical injury to the victim. This typology focused

on two axes: (1) fixation (high or low pedophilic interest) and (2) social competence (high or low) (Ferraro & Casey).

Lanning's classifications (1992) of offenders also included sexual preferences. He described an individual as either exclusively or primarily sexually attracted to a person of a specific age or gender as a fixated offender. The term regressed offender, on the other hand, referred to an individual who may have had age-appropriate relationships at one time but for whatever reason reverted to a younger partner (Ferraro & Casey, 2005).

Lanning (1992) initially suggested the term situational offender included four subtypes: (1) Regressed Immature, (2) Morally Indiscriminate, (3) Sexually Indiscriminate, and (4) Inadequate. A regressed individual was described as being socially inept, and turning to children during periods of stress. The morally indiscriminate were portrayed as antisocial, and abused children as part of a lifelong history of abusing others. The sexually indiscriminate offender is a person who experiments with several types of sexual activity, with abusing children being only one of them. The subcategory of inadequate offenders was used for those with low social skills, low intelligence or mental illness.

Later, Lanning (2001) placed offenders who use the computer to exploit children into three broad categories: (1) the situational offender, (2) the preferential offender, and (3) miscellaneous offender. The term preferential offender included pedophiles with a

definite preference for children, but also included the diverse offender who may not have a strong preference for children. The preferential offender's actions are premeditated.

Preferential offenders have also been found to possess latent sexual preferences which they act upon when their inhibitions have been lowered (Lanning, 2001). These individuals quite often are perceived as pillars of the community and are often considered to be nice guys (Lanning, 2001). Lanning cautioned that the fact that a person may be a doctor, clergy member, or therapist, for example, does not mean that person cannot also be a child molester. He maintained that molesters operate on a preferential-situational continuum.

Lanning (2001) described a situational offender as either a normal adolescent or adult, who does not necessarily have a sexual interest in children, but who possesses a variety of deviant sexual interests. These individual may be extremely curious about sexual opportunities afforded on the Internet. Although their behavior may be criminal, their behavior has been found not to be as long-term, persistent or predictable as the behavior of a preferential offender. An important difference between a pedophile and a diverse offender, Lanning maintained, is the strength of the sexual preference for children.

While no causal explanations have been discovered to date, characteristics have been identified in child sexual offenders generally and those who use the Internet to sexually offend against a child. These characteristics include cognitive distortions, social isolation, deficits in social skills, low self-esteem and motivation, a need for approval, a

fear of rejection, and deviant sexual arousal interests and urges (Dannie & Hampe, 2000; Smallbone & Wortley, 2001; Ward, 2003; Quayle & Taylor, 2003; Chou, Condrón, & Belland, 2005).

Cognitive distortions are manifested in the perpetrators lack of possession of empathy for their victims, their inability to see them as something other than an object to fulfill their sexual needs, as well as their attempts to either minimize or rationalize their behaviors (Quayle & Taylor, 2003; Stanley, 2001). They have also been found to possess emotional regulation deficits, including low impulse control and difficulty identifying and modulating emotions. These individuals have also been found to have deficits in social skills and an inability to develop relationships.

#### The Internet and Crimes Against Children

Computers, and particularly the Internet, have come to play a major role in sex crimes committed against children (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003). In 1994, there were 38 million people on the Internet worldwide. By 1999 there were nearly 24 million young people alone online regularly, and by 2005 the number had surpassed 77 million, with the greatest proportion of users under the age of 16 (NCMEC.). The explosion of Internet use has resulted in new terminology such as *cyberspace*, *cybersex*, *cyberporn*, *cyber child molesters* (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000; Fried, n.d.; Quayle & Taylor, 2001; Medaris & Gerouard, 2002; Ferraro & Casey, 2005).

This amazing technology has made it possible to connect millions of people around the world (Durkin, 1996; Durkin, 1997; Stanley, 2001.; Teen Safety, n.d.;

Medaris & Girouard, 2002). However, there is a dark side. The Internet also can provide opportunities for individuals whose interests are much more sinister (Stanley, 2001; Durkin, 1996; Durkin, 1997; Taylor & Quayle, 2003; Lanning, 2001; Teen Safety, n.d.; Medaris & Girouard, 2002; Fried, n.d.; Goldberg, 2004; Protecting Children, 2005; Alexy, Burgess & Baker, 2005).

The Internet not only provides easy and immediate communication, most importantly from the perspective of the predator, it affords anonymity (Stanley, 2001; Craissati, 2003). Anonymity provides a feeling of safety and bravado and allows those wanting to use this technology for sinister purposes the opportunity to locate and prey upon victims. This incredible technology provides opportunities for individuals from around the world to obtain, exchange, and seek pornographic material. (Durkin, 1997; Stanley, 2001; Taylor & Quayle, 2003). Medaris and Girouard (2002) reported that the Internet provides a nearly perfect medium. They also maintained that it provides privacy, anonymity, and a virtually unlimited pool of children and teenagers who may be susceptible to manipulation.

Individuals who perpetrate these despicable crimes are preying on children, the most vulnerable group in society. They no longer have to skulk in parks and malls, but can achieve their goal from home, the workplace, or anywhere they have access to a computer (Medaris & Girouard, 2002; Ferraro & Casey, 2005). Of grave concern is the fact that these predators can have access to young people while they are in their own

homes, can be online with them while their parents are at home, or even while they are in the same room (Ferraro & Casey).

Wolak, Finkelhor and Mitchell (2000) found, in a sample of 1,501 children ranging in age from 10 to 17, that 19 percent reported having been approached for sex via the Internet, and 3% reported that the offender had tried to have direct contact. Even more ominous is the finding of The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) reports that two out of five missing children in the United States, aged 14 to 17, are missing due to activity on the Internet.

The computer, however, is not the only means for young people, or those seeking to harm them, to exchange information. It is now possible to reach into cyberspace from a cell phone, a personal digital assistant, or even a video-game console (Child Safety, n.d.; Teen Safety, n.d.). Cell phones are now very high-tech and it is possible to send text messages, take and exchange pictures, and videos. These phones are becoming increasingly popular with teenagers and are used with increasing frequency as an alternative for getting on the Internet as they can be used anywhere (Teen Safety).

A peer-to-peer (P2P) system basically turns a computer into a server that allows others to have access to information on another computer. Utilizing this software, videos, photographs, and text documents can be downloaded, and exchanged without having to go through a website or other centralized system. This software has become increasingly popular and is being used more and more by child molesters to obtain and exchange pornographic images of children (Teen Safety, n.d.).

In summary, the Internet is a wonderful tool. It will most likely continue to grow and the numbers of children and young people who use it will continue to increase as well. Unfortunately, the easy accessibility of the Internet makes it possible for young people to be exposed to individuals who wish to exploit them and cause them harm. Teenagers are especially at risk because they are often unsupervised and more likely to have discussions with other people online. The danger is that people are not always who they seem to be. Law enforcement, educators, parents and the general public face a daunting challenge. The challenge is to allow young people to use this wonderful technology but be protected from those who want to do them harm.

#### Characteristics and Classifications of Online Offenders

Since deviant behavior, particularly deviant behavior directed toward children, has been associated with use of the Internet, one must then ask: Who are these individuals who prey upon young people on the Internet? Are they either different or similar to child molesters in general? There is a paucity of available literature as to whether any qualitative differences exist between child molesters who use the Internet and those who do not (Ferraro & Casey, 2005).

In their 2000 study, Finkelhor, Mitchell and Wolak reported that juveniles made up 48% of online aggressive solicitations. Slightly more than two-thirds of the solicitations were reported to have come from males, one-quarter from females. This study also noted that not every sexual solicitor on the Internet fit the stereotype of an older male predator. Ninety-seven percent were between the ages of 18 and 25.



Review of the literature revealed that individuals who offend against children have been described as homosexual, pedophile, sexually disordered, normal and curious. Contributing factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation have been studied as well. Research has found that individuals who commit sexual crimes against children on the Internet can be introverted, socially incompetent individuals, but also that the accessibility and anonymity of the Internet could be attractive to individuals who are very intelligent and socially competent (Ferraro & Casey, 2005). Lanning (2001) posited that sex offenders who utilize the computer do not represent a new category of criminal, but rather are individuals using modern technology to fulfill their needs.

Predators who utilize the Internet to prey on victims have been placed in four categories: (1) collectors (2) manufacturers (3) travelers, and (4) chatters. Collectors are described as individuals who have had no prior contact with either law enforcement or illegal activity with children. They may possess child pornography but have not produced it or used the Internet for any other purpose (Internet Child Predators, n.d.)

Manufacturers distribute child pornography and are usually associated with harboring runways as well as likely to have a history of child sexual offending. These individuals utilize the Internet as a means to possess, distribute or trade child pornography (Lanning, 2001). While these individuals may not be guilty of offenses against a child, they are sexually exploiting children; additionally, possession of these images is a crime (Lanning).

Chatters, on the other hand, prefer to chat with their victims online, but not necessarily meet with them. They are usually not involved in child pornography, but consider themselves to be mentors or teachers. They comprise the smallest group of Internet predators (Internet Child Sexual Predators, n.d).

Lastly are the travelers. These are individuals who engage in online chat with children, then manipulate and coerce them to meet for sexual purposes (Alexy, Burgess, & Baker, 2005). They have been found to range in age from 17 to 56. They travel across the country, and even internationally, to have sexual liaisons with young children (Internet Child Sexual Predators, n.d.; Alexy, Burgess, & Baker, 2005).

One of the most dangerous areas regarding child sexual predators is the online chatroom. These chatrooms are places where young people can engage in conversation with anyone, anywhere in the world. The most popular chat rooms are those devoted to sports. African-Americans have been found to be least likely to use chatrooms and Hispanic users most likely to use them (Roberts & Foehrer, 2004). Pedophiles are drawn to chatrooms, often using them to groom and solicit victims (Fried, n.d.; Quayle & Taylor, 2001; Roberts & Foehr, 2004; Ferraro & Casey, 2005) and arrange meetings with young people that can result in actual contact (McCarthy & Gaunt, 2004). Finkelhor, Mitchell, and Wolak reported in their study done in 2000 that 65% of sexual solicitations were initially made in a chatroom.

## The Role of Pornography

Pornography is not new, nor is the multi-million dollar industry surrounding it. It is also not exclusively "high-tech" (Gillespie, 2005, p. 430). Pornographic magazines, books, and movies have been in existence for decades. However, the growth in information and communication technology has led to an explosion in the number of pornographic images that are now accessible (Gillespie). The Internet now provides the opportunity and means for individuals to obtain, exchange and solicit pornographic material (Stanley, 2001; Lanning, 2001; Taylor & Quayle, 2003). The Child Protection Act of 1984 made online or offline child pornography illegal (Fried, n.d.). Offenders who traffic in child pornography are committing serious violations of the law (Lanning, 2001).

Some researchers have indicated the possibility that some individuals may never have become involved in child pornography had it not been for the Internet (Internet Child Sexual Predators, n.d.; Quayle & Taylor, 2003; Cooper, Putnam et al. as cited in Griffiths, 2001). That notwithstanding, collecting child pornography constitutes criminal behavior; therefore, molesting children is not an element of an offense, it is an offense. As Lanning (2001) pointed out: "The issue should be the harm it does to the child portrayed, not the viewer. Victims must live with the longevity and circulation of these images for the rest of their lives" (p. 86)

Viewers of child pornography have been described as a heterogeneous group. No determination has been made as to whether or not viewers of child pornography are

more or less likely to commit a contact offense (Stanley, n.d; Stein et al., 2001; Craissati, 2003; McCarthy & Gaunt, 2004). It has been suggested that some individuals may become aroused by pornographic images of children, yet never seek out a relationship (Fagan et al., 2002). Craissati (2003) reported that research has seldom shown that looking leads to touching.

Other researchers have suggested that viewing child pornography serves as a means of desensitization, reducing inhibitions (Fagan, et al., 2002; McCarthy & Gaunt, 2004). In addition, viewing child pornography has been found to heighten sexual awareness to the point that the images initially viewed are not sufficient to meet sexual needs. The progression from viewing pornography is, accordingly, viewed not as a static process but a dynamic one that can transition to the commission of contact offenses (Quayle & Taylor, 2001; McCarthy & Gaunt, 2004).

A study by Hernandez (2000), conducted with sexual offenders in the North Carolina Bureau of Prisons convicted of Internet-related offenses, including possession and distribution of child pornography, provided insight into the relationship between pornography and contact offenses against children. Prisoners were questioned upon entering Hernandez's treatment program as to whether they had ever committed a contact offense against a child. It was discovered that 80 to 85% of these offenders, who were child pornography offenders, had committed contact sexual offenses against a child. This was a much higher percentage than had been reported when these individuals were questioned upon entering prison. He concluded that Internet child pornographers are

more dangerous than previously thought and suggested more research be done in order to determine if a significant relationship can be found between Internet child pornography offenders and contact sexual offenses against children.

While it has been shown that the Internet provides opportunities for aiding the transition from viewing child pornography to perpetrating contact sexual offenses, not all users of child pornography appear to be at equal risk of future sexual assaults on children. Research again reveals conflicting opinions, specifically that some individuals would, or would not commit a contact offense (Craissati, 2003; McCarthy & Gaunt, 2004), and some would do both (Lanning, 2001).

It appears that technology has resulted in the development of new variations of sexual compulsivity. People who were not sexually compulsive in the past appear to have developed problems due to a combination of their particular personal vulnerabilities and factors unique to the online environment. One must question if the sexual interest comes first, or the interest in the Internet, compelling individuals to use the Internet to find victims. Lanning (2001) maintained that because of the traits and needs of these individuals, they are among the first to obtain and make use of the latest technology.

The Internet has been found to provide validation and justification of aberrant behavior through communication and interaction with like-minded individuals by offering support, encouragement, advice and reinforcement for deviant feelings and behavior (Durkin, 1997; Lanning, 2001; Stanley, 2001; Quayle & Taylor, 2003; Ferraro & Casey, 2005). It has been suggested that this validation is the chief reason these

individuals use the Internet, particularly the preferential offender (Lanning, 2001).

Individuals often attempt to validate their behavior by saying that “engaging with children through the Internet is a more responsible means of dealing with their feelings than going out and trying to abuse ‘real children’” (Quayle & Taylor, 2001, p. 597). The Internet also provides a sense of safety by offering anonymity (Quayle & Taylor, 2001; Stanley, 2001; Craissati, 2003). In addition, the knowledge that they are using the same technology used by intelligent and talented people in society lends an air of legitimacy and value to their behavior (Lanning, 2001).

Quayle and Taylor (2003) reported the emergence of a new category of sexual offender, similar to a voyeur. These individuals, they purported, may quite possibly be interested only in viewing images of children online. Fairly recently, other categories such as hypersexual disorder, pathological Internet usage and Problematic Internet use (PIU), have begun to appear in the literature along with the terms Internet addiction, cybersex addiction, and Internet addiction (Young, 2000; Griffiths, 2001; Stein et al., 2001; Quayle & Taylor, 2003).

As with most, if not all, of the literature surrounding Internet crimes against children, contradiction occurs in the discourse as well regarding whether this type of behavior can truly be called an addiction. Along this line, important contribution to the field was made by Griffiths (2001), who examined the relationship between sexual addiction and excessive use of the Internet. Griffiths (2001) citing his work in 1996, maintained that “any behavior which fulfills the criteria” of “salience, mood

modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict and relapse” (p. 334) were applicable to Internet sex and that behaviors meeting these criteria could be operationally defined as addictions.

A term that has been employed by researchers is Problematic Internet usage (PIU), which has been described as a product of maladaptive cognitions (Davis, as cited in Quayle & Taylor, 2003). According to this model, there is a difference in the way sex offenders think. These cognitive distortions allow these individuals to exploit others as well as rationalize their own behavior. These individuals have been found to lack the ability to understand other people's feelings, needs and desires, to lack empathy and impulse control (Griffiths, 2001). As viewing pornographic images becomes normal behavior because they are able to de-personalize the images. These people rationalize the behavior as being a more responsible way of dealing with their feelings. Rather than feeling marginalized as they are in society, the Internet empowers them.

A case study conducted by Stein et al. (2001) was focused on an individual who initially presented for problems with depression. This gentleman reported progressively increasing viewing of online pornography during his depressed mood. On further questioning, however, it was discovered that use of the Internet for viewing pornography was present even after the depression responded to medication. This individual reported not only increasing usage, but also that he began to search for certain kinds of photographs, an endeavor that sometimes took hours and required spending an inordinate amount of time in Internet sex chat rooms, even at work.

The authors stopped short of referring to this behavior as addictive, but acknowledged that the Internet had become an important location for expressing what they referred to as "pathological sexuality" (p. 1592). Stein et al. considered this type of behavior as pathological sexuality. Griffiths (2001) wrote that when individuals were not actually engaged in sexual activity on the Internet, they were thinking about when they would be again.

Lanning (2001) maintained that while conditions such as bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression, anxiety disorder, or Internet addiction may be present in individuals who commit crimes against children, these circumstances do not permit them to be less accountable for their actions. He further maintained that these conditions do not explain "why they are downloading child pornography and trying to have sex with thirteen year olds" (p. 135).

A case study by Quayle and Taylor (2001) of an individual who had been charged with downloading child pornography, who also admitted to trafficking in child pornography, communicating with children online, and proceeding to locate children to abuse provided important insight into the behavior of individuals whose Internet behavior progresses. This individual indicated that he taught himself how to use the computer for the explicit purpose of obtaining child pornography and admitted that he was extremely surprised as to the type of material he was able to find online. His sexual arousal was very quick and very powerful and he readily admitted that he "was very much hooked" (p. 600).



This individual reported a progression from looking at images online to chatrooms where he found like-minded individuals. He further admitted that the material he viewed increased his desire to have an actual relationship with a child: "I suppose that's because I wanted the real thing ... which, obviously, looking at all those pictures had fueled big time" (Quayle & Taylor, 2001, p. 601).

Others have found labeling these behaviors as addictions troubling and prefer to use terms such as hypersexual disorder, dependence, Problematic Internet use (PIU), and pathological Internet use (Quayle & Taylor, 2003; Stein et al., 1999). It has been posited that individuals use the Internet to avoid boredom, anxiety, or depression and that it provides a means for them to alleviate feelings of distress or dissatisfaction in their lives (Griffiths, 2001; Chou, Condron & Belland, 2005). Young et al., as cited in Griffiths (2001), maintained that some individuals "use the Internet excessively as a medium to fuel other addictions" (p. 334), and reflected that quite often these individuals suffer from a poor body image and low self-esteem. They may also have experienced prior sexual addiction and be at risk for developing cybersexual addictions.

While no conclusive evidence has been found to support the hypothesis that Internet use and sexual addiction were related, cybersex has been found to be potentially addictive (Griffiths, 2001). This medium is often perceived by the perpetrator as a more responsible way of dealing with feelings and desires, satisfying biological and psychological needs, and representing one's self any way one chooses, in what is perceived to be the safety of anonymity (Chou et al. 2005; Quayle & Taylor, 2001).

Kennedy-Souza, as cited in Quayle and Taylor, 2001, suggested that individuals are spending more time with technology than with people and that the "anarchical nature of Internet communication" (p. 94) has resulted in increased social problems and difficulties in regulating behavior.

The speed, ease of operation of the Internet, as well as vast amount of information available, most definitely can create an environment that generates a powerful influence which can contribute to the potential for addiction, especially in individuals who suffer from low self-esteem, "low motivation, fear of rejection and need for approval" (Chou et al., 2005, p. 373). Regardless of the terminology, the number of individuals seeking the services of counselors and therapists for problems associated with online sexual activity has increased (Freeman-Longo, as cited in Griffiths, 2001) and will most likely continue to increase as Internet usage increases (Cooper et al., 2000).

#### Studies on Internet Crimes Against Children

In 2000, a survey by Finkelhor, Mitchell, and Wolak found that sexual victimization on the Internet was more diverse than had been previously thought. In addition, it was reported that the most vulnerable population was teenagers, aged 14 years of age and older. A follow up study, even more comprehensive, by Wolak, Mitchell, and Finkelhor at the University of New Hampshire, in 2003 surveyed a stratified sample of 2,574 state, county, and local law enforcement agencies that specialized in Internet sex crimes against minors. The authors acknowledged that there was much more Internet activity involving the sexual abuse and exploitation of children than was found in this

study. Moreover, they recognized that just as Internet usage would continue to grow in the years following this study and a proportionate growth would occur in activities and arrests in Internet related crimes. They concluded that only future studies would be able to confirm this fact.

Another initiative is the CyberTipline®, managed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), which offers a means of reporting incidents of sexual exploitation of children including “the possession, manufacture, and/or distribution of child pornography” and online solicitation. To date, this tipline has reported 9,377 cases of online solicitation of children for sexual acts (Medaris & Girouard, 2002; Cybertipline, 2004).

### Summary

Review of the literature revealed studies that have been conducted exploring the historical classifications of sexual deviants and characteristics and behaviors of child molesters (Fried, n.d.; Lanning, 1992; Tomison, 1995; Danni & Hampe, 2000; Smallbone & Wortley, 2001; Craissati, 2003; Craissati, McClurg & Browne, 2002; Fagan et al., 2002; Goodman, 2002; Hall, 2002; Ward, 2003; Seto, 2004; Saleh, 2004;). Others studies investigated individuals who were most likely to commit a sexual crime against a child using the Internet, their characteristics as well as the methods employed (Durkin 1996; Durkin, 1997; Durkin & Bryant, 1999; Hernandez, 2000; Lanning, 2001; Medaris & Girouard, 2002; Stanley, 2001; Quayle & Taylor, 2001; Quayle & Taylor, 2003; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2003; Fried, n.d., Goldberg, 2004; Ferraro & Casey, 2005

The findings in these studies revealed differing opinions regarding the individuals who commit sexual offenses against children. Differences were also discovered regarding whether offenders are pedophiles or suffering from addiction or emotional illnesses. Furthermore, descriptions of Internet usage and viewing and/or possession of child pornography transitioning to commission of contact offenses differed as well.

Internet predators have been found to be predominantly single males, (Protecting Children, 2005; Myth, 2000; Lanning, 2001; Stanley, 2001; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2003). They have been described as predominantly non-Hispanic Caucasians (Mitchell, Finkelhor & Wolak, 2005; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2003; Fried, n.d.), ranging in age from 13 to 65 although differences appeared as to the age most frequently observed, whether below eighteen years of age (Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2003) or older than 25 (Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2005). Research has found that approximately one percent of the male American population spends more than forty hours a week engaged in online activity, looking for sexual extremes (Craissati, 2003).

As the preceding sections have shown, thus far most perpetrators of crimes against children on the Internet have been found to be Caucasian males. However, to date no single type of sex offender has been identified (Danni & Hampe, 2000). Researchers do agree that sexual offending against children is a multi-dimensional phenomenon (Smallbone & Wortley, 2001), that these offenders do not appear to fit a stereotype (Danni & Hampe, 2000), that not all perpetrators are pedophiles, and most have been classified as preferential or situational offenders (Lanning, 2001; Fried, n.d.;

Ferraro & Casey, 2005). A number of individuals who commit these crimes have been found to be addicted either to sex or the Internet, or both, while still others have been found to be socially inept, lacking in social skills and unable to develop appropriate relationships.

As computer ownership becomes less expensive, and as they become more sophisticated, and easier to use, the numbers of people using the Internet will grow, with Internet related crimes growing proportionately (Lanning, 2001; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2003). What the research has yet to show is whether the Internet offender is a new type of criminal or simply a sex offender who uses the latest technology to fulfill sexual needs (Lanning).

Ferraro and Casey (2005) recommended that further research be done on the online habits and characteristics of Internet child molesters. Research to determine if any qualitative differences exist between the child sexual offenders who use the Internet and those who do not, and/or if a relationship exists between viewing pornography and offending is very limited (Hernandez, 2000; Stanley; 2001; Quayle & Taylor, 2003). To date, no collective case study of child molesters, including those who use the Internet has been found. In addition, no study to date has utilized participants who were exclusively Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force investigators.

As stated previously, sexual crimes against children is not a new phenomenon. However, it appears that the Internet *has* made the problem greater. From the review of the literature, it appears that no one really knows for sure who these people are, what they

are like, or if they share any common characteristics. This research was designed to address these questions specifically.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Review of the literature revealed that research is limited. In addition, a great deal of contradiction exists as to the type of individuals who commit sexual crimes against children, including those who use the Internet to commit crimes against children (Fried, n.d.; Lanning, 1992; Tomison, 1995; Danni & Hampe, 2000; Hernandez, 2000; Smallbone & Wortley, 2001; Stanley, 2001; Stein, Black, Shapira, & Spitzer, 2001; Craissati, 2002; Craissati, McClurg & Browne, 2002; Fagan et al., 2002; Goodman, 2002; Hall, 2002; Quayle & Taylor, 2003; Seto, 2004; Saleh, 2004; Ward, 2003; McCarthy & Gaunt, 2004; Ferarro & Casey, 2005; Gillsespie, 2005). This study, guided by the research questions, examined perpetrators of Internet crimes against children, by comparing and contrasting perspectives and experiences of select ICAC investigators.

Given that research into Internet child molesters is limited, and that very little research that seeks to determine if any qualitative differences exist between offenders who use the Internet and those who do not is currently available, the principal research questions framing this study were:

1. How do select investigators describe perpetrators of Internet crimes against children?
2. What, if any, common characteristics do participants identify among the perpetrators?
3. How do participants' descriptions compare and/or contrast?

## Research Design

Qualitative research techniques are particularly appropriate for shedding light on an aspect of social concern, for allowing participants' insights to emerge without the influence of preconceived constructs of the researcher, and for explaining and understanding a phenomenon (Portney & Watkins, 2000; Rudestam & Newton, 2001; van Manen, 1990; Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Concomitantly, case studies, which can be qualitative and/or quantitative, single or collective, can be utilized to provide answers to "how" questions, to focus on understanding contemporary phenomena, provide descriptions, and contribute to the knowledge of a particular group (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003).

The intent of this research was to describe perpetrators of Internet crimes against children by interviewing ICAC investigators who have experience relating to the issue being researched (Kruger, 1999). The use of more than one case allows more powerful conclusions to be drawn and broadens applications of these conclusions to other populations (Yin, 2003). To that end, this study utilized a qualitative collective case study design. Moreover, this particular study is phenomenological in that it sought to describe how individual ICAC investigators perceived their experiences within a special social context (Portney & Watkins, 2000).

Data was collected through informal, semi-structured interviews with select ICAC investigators who were chosen because of their unique experience and expertise which qualified them as key informants (Tetraut, 2006). Variety was achieved by choosing



participants of different gender, marital status, length of law enforcement and ICAC experience, and geographic location. This variety allowed the descriptions and perspectives of the participants to be compared and contrasted (Tetraut).

### Bounding the Study

According to Hycner (1999) a phenomenon dictates the research method, including the type of participants chosen. The type of participants for this study were selected because the feelings, thoughts, perspectives, and descriptions important for this study could only be investigated by questioning individuals who were in a particular environment, and who were considered key informants (Portney & Watkins, 2000; Tetraut, 2006). The method chosen for this study, therefore, was a qualitative collective case study. The case is the unit of observation, and is bounded basically by what will not be studied (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The unit of observation in this study is the perpetrators of Internet crimes against children.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) created the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force Program under the 1998 Justice Appropriates Act, Public Law 105-119 in order to assist state and local law enforcement agencies in the development of effective responses to cyber-enticement and child pornography cases (Medaris & Girouard, 2002). The mission of these task forces is to safeguard children from Internet crime by weaving a seamless web of protection around them. ICAC maintains that a child's innocence can never be replaced.

There are now 59 regional ICAC task forces throughout the United States. These task forces were not only designed to assist local and state law enforcement agencies in developing effective responses to cyber enticement and child pornography cases, but also to provide training and technical assistance, community education, and victim assistance (Medaris & Girouard, 2002). These task forces were charged by the United States Attorney General and the Department of Justice with the responsibility of criminal investigation of child pornography, preferential offenders, threats via communication devices, and other crimes resulting from computers, including possession of, and distribution of internet child pornography, as well as online solicitation of children for sex.

The ICAC investigators who served as participants in this study were able to furnish a detailed, in-depth description of the perpetrators of online sex crimes against children. They deal exclusively with perpetrators of Internet crimes against children on a daily basis. As a result of this experience, they provided a more realistic description of the individuals who commit these offenses.

In seeking to understand the individuals who perpetrate sexual offenses against children, research has attempted to categorize these individuals and develop a typology or profile. Do we really know, or even want to know, who these individuals are? If these individuals are to be known and understood, is it possible to learn the truth from the perpetrators themselves?

ICAC investigators were chosen as participants in this study rather than the perpetrators of the crimes, because self-reports from perpetrators have been found inaccurate and less than reliable (Lanning, 2001). In the case of incarcerated individuals, it is possible that these individuals might believe their cases are better served if they are seen as victims themselves (Smallbone & Wortley, 2001; Seto, 2004; Saleh, 2004).

Additionally, these offenders have been described as manipulative, consummate liars, who can portray themselves as whomever they need to be, and who are very much unknowable (Saleh, 2004). Seto (2004) suggested that these individuals are pathologically narcissistic and tell their stories to amaze, astonish and overwhelm their listeners. Lanning (2001) used less strong language, but indicated that when either pedophiles or other preferential offenders are apprehended, they commonly deny that anything happened, claim that they and/or their actions were misunderstood, justify their actions, and minimize the severity of the offense.

On the basis of these findings, this researcher maintained that it would be less likely to know and understand these individuals through self-reports or case studies of individual perpetrators. Therefore, participants chosen for this study were ICAC investigators. These investigators work exclusively with this population, have extensive experience, and therefore their reliability is considered to be much greater.

### *Participants*

A purposive, criterion based sample was utilized for this study and participants were chosen using networking, snowball and convenience techniques (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Networking took place through discussions with participants' supervisors at a meeting of ICAC administrators in the summer of 2007, at which time permission was granted to contact their investigators. The study was bounded by utilizing only Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) investigators. These investigators were considered to be informed, reliable sources - key informants (Tetrault, 2006) - whose work places them in the "forefront of identifying and combating these crimes" (Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2005, p. 50). Their experiences in this field provided a distinctive perspective and, therefore, they were considered to be the best sources of "accessible, in-depth information" (Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, p. 50) on perpetrators of Internet crimes against children.

The sample was homogenous in that all participants were ICAC investigators, but heterogeneity was attained through the selection of individuals from different geographical locations, different ages, sex, gender, and length of experience in the field. Eight participants were interviewed, seven men and one woman. Five of the participants were married, one was divorced and two had never been married. Ages ranged from thirties to fifties, and number of years of law enforcement experience ranged from nine years to twenty-five years. Years of experience with ICAC ranged from two to nine years. Participants were geographically diverse as well and represented ICAC task

forces in the south, the East coast, mid-Atlantic, and West coast of the United States (See Table 1).

**Table 1** *Participant demographics*

---

Gender

7 male  
1 female

Age

30s 2  
40s 5  
50s 1

Geographic Area

East coast 3  
West coast 1  
Mid-Atlantic 1  
South 3

Law Enforcement Experience

20 – 25 years 4  
9 – 19 years 4

ICAC Experience

9 years 1  
8 years 2  
5 years 1  
4 years 3  
2 years 1

*Procedure*

After obtaining institutional review board approval, approval of the ICAC Research Committee, and permission from each investigator's supervisor, each participant was contacted either in person or by phone. The purpose and scope of the

study was reviewed, each participant was advised of criteria for selection, informed consent forms were signed (see Appendix A), and arrangements were made for an interview. Each interview was audio taped and took place in the task force location of each participant. Logistics presented a problem for the interview on the West coast. Therefore, this interview was, of necessity, conducted by telephone (Creswell, 1998).

The investigator who was interviewed by phone had previously been sent and returned a signed copy of an Informed Consent form. After signing and reviewing the Informed Consent form, including the need for audio recording of the interviews and verbatim transcripts, and the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time, each investigator was interviewed. The interviews were in-depth and lasted approximately one and one half to two hours (van Manen, 1990; Rudestam & Newton, 2001).

### *Data Collection*

The primary means of data collection in this collective case study was semi-structured, informal, conversational, audio taped interviews. Flexibility was maintained by altering and amending the questions as the interviews progressed. However, as research should be well-defined and well-focused to prevent the researcher from becoming lost in the sheer expanse and depth of the questions, an interview guide with questions and prompts was prepared in advance (see Appendix B). These prompts were used only when necessary, consistent with the qualitative research tradition, and to prevent the imposition of preconceived constructs on the participants. To that end, the

researcher maintained focus on the research questions as these questions prompted the need for the interview in the first place (van Manen, 1990).

During the interview process, a conscious and deliberate effort was made to listen carefully to the participants' descriptions, making mental (and sometimes written) notes of words, phrases, gestures, for potential prompts that can be used to obtain the type of information being sought (Milacci, 2003).

### *Data Analysis*

The interviews constituted the raw data for this study and were transcribed verbatim by a trained transcriptionist who signed a confidentiality statement. Transcription of interview data is important because, according to van Manen (1990), "human science meaning can only be communicated textually" (p. 78). All transcriptions were read in their entirety and checked for errors.

Stake (1995) maintained that there is no right way to analyze data and that each researcher must find a form of analysis that works best for them and one that is determined by the research questions and nature of the study. For this study, categorical aggregation was deemed most appropriate. An overall sense of the data was obtained, themes identified and categorized. Significant statements from each interview were extracted, looking for categories and identifying themes (Creswell 1998) using a combination selective and line-by-line approach (van Manen, 1990).

Data reduction was accomplished by categorizing the data into themes and subthemes (See Appendix C) and reducing them to a manageable level (Creswell, 1998).

Analysis also included listening and re-listening to the interview tapes, reading and re-reading transcribed interview data (Milacci, 2003). Subsequent findings were woven into a narrative description of perpetrators of Internet crimes against children. Member checking with two participants provided meaningful feedback that enhanced the study's trustworthiness and validity (Tetraut, 2006; Sosin, 2008). The findings were also found to be credible and plausible by readers who were not involved in this study (Sosin, 2008).

### Summary

This study explored the phenomenon of perpetrators of Internet crimes against children. The study was designed as a collective case study using multiple sites and cases. It was bounded by ICAC Task Force investigators as these individuals were considered to be key informants who could provide a unique perspective on perpetrators of Internet crimes against children. From investigators' descriptions of the perpetrators a narrative portrait of these individuals emerged. The descriptions were obtained through personal interviews, which were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim, analyzed and categorized. Pseudonyms were used for each participant to ensure confidentiality.



## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

The purpose of this collective case study was to investigate perpetrators of Internet crimes against children and to develop a portrait of the individuals who commit these crimes. More specifically, this study sought to investigate these criminals from the unique perspective of select Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) investigators. A presupposition of the study was that the perpetrators would be found to share common characteristics. Through conversational, open ended interviews, the participants were asked to describe the perpetrators with whom they came in contact and to offer their insights and opinions on the behaviors of those individuals. Yin (2003) pointed out that as participants assist in this process, they become "key informants" (p. 90) rather than only respondents and, as such, contribute to the success of the study.

This chapter begins with introductory portraits of the eight key informants, who were collaborators and co-researchers in this study. This introduction includes both a group snapshot of the participants and more detailed individual portraits. Also included are insights shared by the co-researchers on the topic being investigated, perpetrators of Internet crimes against children. These portraits were developed by me and every effort was made to ensure that they provided accurate descriptions of the participants (Milacci, 2003). These portraits allow the reader to get to know the investigators and to understand the passion and commitment they bring to their work.

Data was obtained from informal, semi-structured interviews with the participants. From these interviews, guided by the research questions, three main themes emerged: theme one focused on general descriptions of the perpetrators; theme two addressed descriptions of perpetrators' behaviors and theme three concentrated on descriptions of the motivations of the perpetrators. Research question three was addressed throughout this chapter, as participant descriptions are compared and contrasted (Davis, 2007; Tetrault, 2006).

#### Portraits of the Co-Researchers

This section begins with narrative portraits of the eight participants, the key informants and co-researchers in this study: Bill, Joe, Larry, George, Fred, Alice, Frank, and Al. First, a group snapshot is presented that identifies the commonalities shared by the participants, including the goals and purpose of their work, along with their passion and commitment to the work in which they are engaged. This is followed by individual portraits of the participants. The group photograph and the individual portraits of the participants serve to "draw the reader into the case" (Creswell, 1998, p. 188), to place the study in context, and to involve the reader personally (van Manen, 1990). Against this backdrop, greater clarity was brought to the findings of this study.

#### Group Snapshot

The eight participants in this study share some commonalities. Specifically, they are all Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) investigators and are all thoroughly trained before they begin working online. Additionally, their work is both pro-active and reactive. The pro-active portion of their duties includes being online and investigating

the chatrooms and other areas the perpetrators are known to utilize to find their victims. The reactive portion deals with phone calls from individuals, and information received from the Internet service providers through cybertips provided by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).

The commonalities that were perhaps most pertinent to this study were the passion, the commitment and the dedication for keeping children safe on the Internet. When queried as to the purpose of their work, a unanimous response from the participants was “protecting the kids”. They each reported that knowing that they were doing everything they could to keep children safe on the Internet and keeping them safe from those who wish to harm them was their goal as well as their greatest reward. Larry explained that this goal of protecting the children from online predators also included education: “It’s all about the kids. It’s about safeguarding them and making sure that they understand the dangers. It’s also about educating their parents”. Bill agreed and commented on the satisfaction he experiences:

I think the greatest satisfaction in this job is knowing that once the predators have been taken off the streets, we have protected someone. There is no greater reward or satisfaction than knowing we are protecting the children. That’s what keeps us going.

All of the investigators indicated that their job was rewarding, but was also difficult, and quite often takes time to find and arrest the perpetrators. Joe's acknowledgement, of both the rewards and the difficulties involved in being an ICAC investigator, typified statements made by all the participants:

Trying to snare those who want to hurt our child, that’s the goal.  
Sometimes we can lay hands on them [the perpetrators] quicker than

other times. Sometimes it's more drawn out, but we like to feel that we are going to make a difference somewhere down the road. We know that we aren't going to be able to arrest everyone, but if we can take away a piece of the puzzle, if we can protect the victim, or prevent the perpetrator from getting to the victim, we have achieved our goal.

### Individual Portraits

#### *Joe*

Joe comes from a law enforcement family. He now has over 25 years experience and has been working with ICAC for almost four years. He is in his fifties, is married, and has children. Joe reported that he enjoys what he is doing now more than anything he has ever done. However, he acknowledged feeling frustrated at times, but added that this frustration would not deter him from accomplishing his mission of protecting children.

#### *Bill*

Bill, indicated he became interested in law enforcement and that he has "always" wanted to be a police officer, even in high school. A bachelor in his thirties, Bill has been in law enforcement for eleven years and has been with ICAC for five years. When queried as to what he considered to be the purpose of his work, he agreed with Joe that it was about protecting children. He went on to state that he, and other investigators, often receive expressions of gratitude from the public:

It's rewarding to listen to the radio, or read in the newspaper after an arrest has been made, the comments that a citizen we don't even know has made about what our unit has done and is doing. It's good to come into work and read the emails we get. I've gotten three within the last two days from people I don't even know commenting on how they are proud of our unit and thanking us for what we are doing to keep the children safe. For me, there is no greater satisfaction. Keeping children safe is what keeps us going.

*Larry*

Larry has been with ICAC for eight years. He, too, stated that all he ever wanted to be was a cop. He has military experience, has been in law enforcement for sixteen years. He is in his forties, married, and is a father. When asked about the purpose of his work, he indicated it was twofold: protection and education.

*George*

George has past military experience, is in his forties, is married, and has children. He began his law enforcement career sixteen years ago and has been with ICAC for nine years. The goal and purpose of his work he stated was "to protect the kids". He explained the he does that primarily by doing proactive online investigations, looking for perpetrators who are out there trying to solicit kids as well as those who are viewing, distributing and manufacturing pornography.

*Fred*

Fred is a bachelor in his thirties. He is a college graduate, with nine years of law enforcement experience. He has been with his ICAC unit for almost two years and had various other law enforcement experiences prior to coming with ICAC. He reported that he was interested in police work since he was very young. "I got into it to help people. Of course I do like the excitement, but primarily I got interested because I wanted to help people". He maintained that protecting the children and "putting the bad guys away" is the purpose and goal of his work.

*Alice*

Alice, the sole female participant, is in her forties, has been in law enforcement for twenty years, and has been with ICAC unit for almost four years. She is a single mother who stated that she loves her work and has found it to be both interesting and rewarding. She sees her goal and purpose as protecting the children and helping them to be aware of the dangers on the Internet.

*Frank*

Frank reports that he always had an interest in law enforcement, and has been a law enforcement officer for twenty four years. He has worked with ICAC for eight years. He is in his forties and is zealous about protecting children from predators on the Internet and educating parents and children to the dangers.

*Al*

Al is married, in his forties, comes from a law enforcement family, and has been in law enforcement for twenty four years. He has been working with ICAC for almost eight years. When asked to describe the purpose of his work, he replied: "protecting children, that's our primary objective". He went on to indicate that, for him, the reward was knowing that "we are making a difference here", but he also reported that it wasn't always easy to leave at the end of the day:

It's pretty overwhelming at times and it can be difficult to turn it off when you leave. I have learned to say: I'm done for today and it helps to have a cohesive group working with you and someone who understands. But there's never an issue of quitting. We've got to protect the children and we are making a difference.

### *Summary*

Safeguarding children and educating them and their parents about the dangers on the Internet was acknowledged by all the participants as being the purpose and goal of their work. These investigators are dedicated, passionate, and committed to keeping perpetrators off the streets, off the Internet, and away from the children.

### Participants' Insights into their World

Yin (2003) maintains that key informants contribute to the success of a study by providing insights and opinions on the subject being researched. The participants in this study were not only passionate about their work and the need to protect the children online, but they also provided insights garnered from their unique and extensive experiences with the perpetrators of Internet crimes against children and the dangers inherent on the Internet. In addition to providing in-depth descriptions of the perpetrators, their behaviors, and motivations, given later in this chapter, participants in this study also shared valuable insights into the world of an ICAC investigator which are presented in this section.

Fred, Joe, Alice and George indicated that they had been unaware of the enormity of the problem before they begin working with ICAC. They described the dangers as the accessibility and anonymity of the Internet, child pornography, the naiveté of the children, lack of knowledge of parents and the general public, and lack of monitoring. Fred expounded on the need to act to try to get some type of control: "It's a big problem.

It's out of control, and my opinion is, if we don't get a handle on it, we're going to be in same position we are with narcotics, where it's a never ending battle'.

Joe reported being surprised by the numbers of people who wish to harm children on the Internet, and referred to it as being *like fire through broom straw*. He further recounted how amazed and surprised he was by the boldness and audacity of the perpetrators:

If someone says 'leave me alone' or 'I'm calling the cops', they say 'whatever' and they will hit someone else up. It's such a mass of people. I've been told that at any one time there are 50,000 predators online. That may not sound like a lot if you consider our population, but if you consider the ones they will be harming, it's way too many. Like I said, I am amazed at how 'in your face' they are with it. It's a constant battle trying to stay ahead of the perpetrators, because we don't know what they are going to come up with next. Just when we think we have seen it all, you know, something new will turn up. First it was the Internet, and then it was the file sharing, and now it's the social networking. Each one presents a different challenge. So many people think that the Internet today is what the game stations and Nintendo was ten or fifteen years ago, what the TV was twenty or thirty years ago.

Fred expressed the danger as resulting in part from the children being so trusting and naïve:

So many of them are naïve and they live for the moment. They just don't think there's a danger from that person they are talking to. It's so easy for them to give information out, they just aren't afraid to do that. They need to be educated about the danger.

Al concurred, and added that the children, parents, educators and everyone needs to be made aware of the danger: "we need to educate the parents and the schools about keeping kids safe. Kids are putting all that personal information out there through MySpace accounts or other similar programs where they become victims". Frank's perspective, on the other hand, is that the danger has been made more ominous by a



combination of the tremendous growth and accessibility of the Internet, as well as the fact that computers are now a ubiquitous feature of our society:

Actually, I think it's the crime itself [the danger]. It's the many crimes involving child pornography or child enticement. In over seven years of doing this, it's grown tremendously. And I think a lot of it is due to the fact that people can buy a computer for a couple hundred bucks, rather than several thousand dollars. So, now we have a lot more people with computers and a lot more people online.

Joe, Alice, and Larry commented that one of the dangers was the parents' lack of computer knowledge that often prevented them from truly understanding the dangers.

Joe added that this deficit of the parents may prevent them from understanding the dangers and the extent of the danger:

Parents may think their child is safe because they are playing on the Internet, playing online games. But they can be victimized in their own home when parents think they are safe. They wouldn't let a child go to the mall by themselves at 8 or nine years old, twelve even thirteen or even go to the neighborhood playground down the street. So why would they let someone come into their home like that?

Alice agreed and reiterated the need for education which, in her opinion, is the key to decreasing, and hopefully preventing, children being victimized by online predators:

It's just all about educating the parents. The kids are so vulnerable, and there are so many children out there that don't have the knowledge, or don't really care. That's the biggest concern for me because they just don't know who they're talking to. And if they do, they just don't understand what could possibly happen if they actually meet somebody that's a predator. I would say, definitely the kids would be the number one. Not being monitored, and just not knowing. A lot of the time, the parents just don't know what they can and can't do with the computer. The kids today more often than not know more than their parents do.

Larry agreed with Alice and Joe, but added that it was society in general, and not just the parents, who needed to be educated on the dangers:

There is no control on the Internet, parents don't control the Internet. They don't see it as a threat. Society doesn't see it as a threat. Society knows that there is a lot of nasty stuff on the Internet, but nobody wants to address it. Parents know about it, but parents ... I guess I shouldn't say *all* parents, but a large majority of parents know the Internet is a wealth of information but they also know there are dangers. It used to be, you know the perverts, they kind of stood out, because they were the ones that were hanging around the school yards, hanging around the swimming pool, you know in the summer time. They might not have kids, like the soccer coaches or whatever that don't have kids. Now, with the Internet, they don't have to go out and look for targets, or look for victims, they can jump on the Internet and fish all night, and it's anonymous.

Alice, too, was amazed at how quickly the problem of Internet crimes against children has grown since she began doing this work:

I would have to say for me, it's incredible how rapidly it [Internet crime] has progressed; it has just exploded. When I first came, about four years ago, it was pretty much at the beginning stages, we'd do the online stuff, or the child pornography. It has progressed, progressed so rapidly, that now it's daily, we're getting phone calls about someone's daughter is being contacted online by someone who they believe is an adult, or they've received these pictures of child pornography or somebody soliciting us to send them pictures of our children.

Joe summed up the problem as well as the dangers quite succinctly and quite eloquently:

The Internet is what has brought them together. It's given them a meeting place, a hang out. It's just like in Africa during the dry season, when all the animals have to go to one source for water and there's the alligator, crocodile whatever. They are waiting for the animal to come down into the water. The animal knows that something is not right, but yet they go any way and out of nowhere the crocodile, alligator whatever will grab them and pull them under. You know, it's the same thing. They are drawn, the kids are drawn, to the Internet because it's freedom, it's information, it's sharing. The Internet pulls everything, everyone together. It's the good and the bad. It's a mixing bowl. The innocent can't help but come shoulder to shoulder with those who are less innocent. There is no way to identify the good and the bad.

## Summary

Safeguarding children and educating them and their parents about the dangers on the Internet was acknowledged by all the participants as being the purpose and goal of their work. These investigators are dedicated, passionate, and committed to keeping the perpetrators off the streets, off the Internet, and away from the children. Participant descriptions of these perpetrators, their behaviors and the motivations that drive them to do what they do are the focus of the remaining portions of this chapter.

### Description of the Perpetrators

At the outset of each interview, when queried regarding a description of perpetrators of Internet crimes against children, all eight participants unanimously related that these individuals could be anyone. All agreed that a perpetrator could be the person sitting next to you in church, in a restaurant, the theater, or at work. As the interviews progressed, the participants were asked to talk about the types of individuals they encountered online. Initially, their descriptions were primarily demographic; however, as each interview progressed, participant descriptions became more and more in depth.

### General Demographic Descriptions

Each of the investigators indicated that in their work they had encountered perpetrators of every age, ethnicity, marital status, occupation, social economic status (SES), and educational level. Larry emphasized the diversity and variety of individuals with whom he has come in contact:

We've had people who were unemployed; we've also had guys with PhDs who were pulling down a six figure income. It [the problem] knows no racial

boundaries, no socioeconomic status or gender boundaries. The people who offend against children can literally be the person sitting next to you at the movies. You would never know it.

George reiterated the point that these individuals are not easily identified: "We are at the point now, when we do our presentations, we say: look around you, it could be anybody". Alice agreed, but also acknowledged the possibility that commonalities might exist: "It is kind of broad [the description], but there may be a few things that are specific to each of them. You know, maybe something that they all have in common".

### *Gender*

One common characteristic that the participants unanimously agreed upon was that perpetrators of Internet crimes against children were predominantly males. Al, Fred, Bill, Joe, Alice, Larry and George reported that female perpetrators were rarely seen and that when they were encountered it was most often in a chatroom.

As George emphasized:

We haven't come across them [females] as much. What will happen is, we'll come across one and we'll do that because we're in a certain room or something then we'll realize, hey this is where we need to be because this is where the females are, trying to pick up young boys.

Alice agreed with Bill that females were seen less often than males and added:

"We just aren't seeing them [females] in the solicitation part of it. Maybe it's just not the right mix yet. Primarily we see more instances where women have kids and they're offering them up to engage in sexual activity".

Joe admitted that he was surprised by the incidences in which he had encountered female perpetrators and expressed that shock and surprise:

I have only had one woman and she had a daughter, not a son. She thought she was talking to a female child [online] and she wanted us all to get hooked up. She wanted this girl and her father to have relations with her and her son, a four-way. I'm thinking, wow!

### *Age and Ethnicity*

All participants described the perpetrators as being predominantly Caucasian, between the ages of 18 and 70. Several of the investigators indicated that they had encountered a few other ethnic groups, but only on rare occasions. Al, Bill, Alice, Fred and Frank reported that they had come in contact with very few African-American perpetrators. Bill has seen only two in the five years he has been working with ICAC, Al reported having encountered one, and Alice has encountered no more than four or five African-American perpetrators since she has been doing this kind of work. Al, Fred, and Alice did not provide exact numbers, but reported having come across "a few" Asians, and Hispanics. Bill investigated a case involving a perpetrator of Middle Eastern descent.

Significantly, all investigators indicated that they had discovered very, very few images of African-American children in the course of their work. Frank reported that he had encountered *a lot* of images of children who appeared to be from the Soviet bloc countries, but none of the other seven participants mentioned this or any other ethnic group by name.

### *Marital Status*

All the investigators indicated that they had discovered both married and single individuals to be perpetrators of Internet crimes against children. Al and Bill both mentioned that in their experience it is "pretty much a 50/50 split" between those who are single and those who are married. However, Bill offered this additional insight:

A lot of these people are married, but not happy. Because of the unhappiness at home, they are on the Internet 'hunting', seeing what they can find. The sad thing is that a lot of the time, there are children in the house. They have kids the same age as the ones they are trying to hook up with, sometimes even infants. When you ask them what they would do if somebody wanted to have sex with their child, they usually say 'I'd kill them!' So, then, what's the difference? I guess it's okay for them to do it with someone else's child, but not okay for someone to do it with their children.

### *Education/Occupation*

All of the participants reported a variety of occupations and educational levels among the perpetrators they had encountered. Larry stated that he had seen all types, from professionals to blue-collar workers and that the occupations included teachers, lawyers, policemen, clergy, and even diplomats. Both Alice and George indicated that these people are not *rocket scientists*, and most of them have been found to possess a high school education, or less. Alice commented that, in her experience, "ninety percent of them know just enough to be able to go online, and start chatting; but they do know to disguise their true identity".

Al provided insight on the level of knowledge and experience of the perpetrators, not necessarily equated with education:

They may not even have a GED or have finished high school, but I've had guys that still could build their own computer because they want to be able to do a certain thing. They know that building a computer could get them the satisfaction that they need. If they wanted to victimize a child maybe they couldn't. Maybe they were too scared for a hands-on contact, but they know that they could do it online. They would find a way to do that. Whether it was building their own computer, using somebody else's, using the library's computer or whatever they needed to do.

Alice, Bill and George indicated that many of these individuals with whom they come in contact with are employed, but are not career oriented. They indicated that only

a handful are professionals with careers. For the majority of these individuals, employment is only the means to end: to earn enough money to live. Bill commented:

These people live for the computer, not for their jobs. Their entire life centers around the computer. They structure their days so they can get started early, go to work, sometimes even get online at work. When they come home, it's the computer, the computer, the computer.

George agreed and added that the physical surroundings encountered when a search warrant was executed provided evidence that many of these individuals rarely left the computer:

They sit at home – we can tell from what we find in the house, some of the things they have around them, that they don't leave that computer. They get online and that's where their focus is – trying to hook a child, trying to hook a child.

#### Sexual Preferences

Based upon their experiences, investigators related the preferences for type of victim and sexual activity perpetrators of Internet crimes against children. The participants described three categories of offenders: preferential, situational and financial.

##### *The Preferential Offender*

The preferential offender, when referred to by that term, was described as being the most dangerous type of offender encountered. The participants described these individuals as being highly motivated, whose sexual interest was children. They not only have a sexual preference for children, but also a preference for a particular type of child. In the literature, a preferential offender included diverse offenders who may not have a strong preference for a child (Lanning, 2001). They were also described as sometimes

having latent sexual preferences which they acted upon when their inhibitions were lowered (Ferraro & Casey, 2005).

Bill's description of this type of offender provided insight into the types of victims these offenders desire:

They have a preference as to body type, what type of child they are looking for. They might like blonde haired, blue eyed little girls or brown hair, brown eyes. If someone is online chatting and if it doesn't strike the interest of that preferential offender, he will not talk any more. He might also have fetishes - foot, belly button, skin. Whatever his preference is, that is what is going to spark his interest and then and only then will he be interested in conversing with, or be interested in, a victim.

Although George did not use the term preferential, he alluded to it in his interview. He commented that, in his opinion, this type of offending and behavior did not just appear out of nowhere and did not happen only once:

These guys have a true desire to have sex with kids. It's not a onetime thing; it didn't just come 'out of the blue'. You know, they didn't just say: 'I'm going to try it and that's the end of it'. No, they've had that desire all along. It's probably been instilled with them all their lives.

Alice described the behavior of individuals who preferred a particular type of victim, but she also indicated that investigators usually did not know if the perpetrators desired a particular child, or type of child, until they were apprehended:

They [the perpetrators] most often are males wanting little girls. There have been a handful that would take either, it didn't matter. Most of the time we discover which gender they prefer when the computer is confiscated and the images on it are seen.

She went on to discuss a particular instance that demonstrated the danger involved with this particular type of offender:



There are two perpetrators that stick out in my mind. One of them had arranged to meet a twelve year old girl, - or at least someone he thought was a twelve year old. On his way, stopped and picked up a friend. They were both going to engage in sexual activity with the girl. But, honestly, I don't think either of them had enough on the ball to stop the other one, once the act began, or know to say 'no, stop, we shouldn't do that'.

### *The Situational Offender*

The situational offenders, although not always referred to by the technical term, were described by the investigators as having an extreme interest in anything of a sexual nature. These perpetrators exhibit no reservations about having sex with anyone, even animals. Bill and Fred described the situational offender as the type seen more often, the type that would react to visual stimuli, choose his victims, and try things to see what he likes and wants. Bill commented: "these guys are usually the ones who are referred to as 'dabblers'. They get involved in this whole new realm. They are testing themselves, testing the waters to see what they like".

Fred elaborated on this perspective:

I don't even know that it's so much that they want to have sex with a minor as it is they just have a sexual addiction. And they want it from anybody they can get it from. Whether it be a twenty-two year old, a forty year old, a twelve year old. Long as they can get their fix, it's what they want.

Bill goes even further in his description of the situational offender and expresses what he considers to be an evolution, as it were, of much more sinister behavior:

In my opinion the situational offender is not the true pedophile. This is a male, early twenties to say thirty, still sexually active. He will engage in sex with adults, children, anyone. He will try anything, and will dip his hand into every bucket. He may start out merely as curious, go to websites that are sexually oriented and begin "fishing" to see what he can find. He thinks below the waist rather than with his brain. It's all about his sexual gratification. I strongly believe, based on what I have seen in this job that the situational offender evolves into the

preferential offender. They may start out as a situational offender, but lose interest in the adult part of it. They begin to prefer the pubescent and prepubescent child. Just like a car needs gasoline, they need fuel for their fantasies.

Fred echoed similar views, but added an attention-grabbing perspective on the combination of the accessibility of the images coupled with the anonymity provided by the Internet, that propels these perpetrators to seek more and more excitement:

They can get on there (the Internet) and they can just get anything they want, it might not even be, as far as talking with a real victim, but you get the guy that's on the verge, does he want to do this or does he not want to do it. He starts seeing a few pictures, then he might take it a step further to talking with one. Then step further to actually trying to meet someone. It's just that it is so easy for this type of behavior to take place. They're in their own home, think nothing is wrong, they won't get caught because they're using a fake name. The next thing they know they're meeting a twelve year old at a park.

It was interesting to note that while George echoed Bill and Fred's views, he also went further and described some of the cognitive distortions so often exhibited by these individuals as well as the validation they receive from likeminded individuals:

There's a possibility somebody has, you know, a *little* desire, but they know right from wrong. They start dabbling in child pornography and then maybe they do get online, and they're chatting with other people that have that similar interest, and then they begin to think: well, maybe it isn't really wrong, because people are doing it, and look at all these pictures that are available (emphasis added)

### *The Financial Offender*

A new category of offender emerged during the interviews that was not found in the literature review. Larry and Bill referred to the individuals who profits monetarily from their activities on the Internet as financial offenders. These individuals are not only manufacturers and distributors of child pornography, but include people who set up web

sites and sell pornographic pictures of themselves or, worse, pictures of their own children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews. Larry stated that greed and greed alone drives these individuals:

A lot of people now want to make money and will use the Internet to make money, no matter how and no matter how bad or how dangerous it may be. They see an opportunity that technology has made possible to make money.

According to Bill, the financial offender is also quite often someone with whom the victim is familiar, perhaps even a close relative. He stated that the demeanor of the victim in the child pornography images provides an important clue as to the identity of the person taking the photograph:

The financial offender is mainly a person who is in it for the money. They can be a person hosting child pornography websites, or teen modeling sites, anything and any place they can make money. They are typically the parents or perhaps an aunt, uncle, or grandparent. Someone who is really close to the individual being victimized. In the child pornography images, the victim is smiling. This leads us to believe that these kids know the person who is taking their photograph. These people are exploiting their children, just so they can get richer and their bank accounts can grow. It has more to do with greed than anything else.

#### Summary

Participants described the individuals who commit Internet crimes against children in demographic terms as well as by their sexual preferences and activities associated with these preferences. Some of the participants also described individuals whose interest in sexual activity on the Internet was inspired by the opportunity for financial gain.

## Description of the Perpetrators' Behaviors

In addition to the descriptions of the more general demographic characteristics and sexual preferences of the perpetrators, participants also spoke of perpetrators' behaviors, including activities associated with pornography, grooming of victims, and Internet activities.

### *Pornography Activities*

Frank addressed the problem of pornography by asking: "what is the biggest business on the Internet? It's pornography". Joe responded, when asked about the types of activities he saw most frequently online, that for the most part it was pornography. "There's plenty of it out there" he stated, "and it's not like you've got to go through three locked doors to get it". He went on to explain further:

The adult porn is there and it's a teaser for child porn. There are so many places you can go to, that you can search and look and they will disguise adult porn under say, a twelve year old female doing whatever, knowing that this person is going to click on it, because they're interested in it. Like wonder what a twelve year old girl looks like? Or they'll have movies on bestiality. Wonder what that looks like? They click on it and then it will be just regular old adult porn.

Al resonated with Joe and Frank regarding the fact pornography on the Internet was an enormous problem and reported that for his unit it was the type of online activity seen most often, but cautioned that this did not mean it is the only activity discovered:

Most of our cases are child pornography cases - the possession, receipt, and distribution. The way they are coming to our attention is that they are using the Internet for child pornography. It's not hard to do, it's as simple as downloading, installing, and typing in a search term. They can get some pretty graphic file quickly with high speed connection.

He quickly added: "now, that doesn't mean they aren't trying to contact children or trying to contact other adults who have children that they are victimizing. It doesn't mean they're not doing that also"

Joe explained how the individuals who make the pornography available are adept at learning what does and does not appeal to people when they click on certain web sites:

The people providing this stuff do that, knowing that the curiosity is there. They will show you a free trailer, or sell you one, probably ten to twenty seconds, but they know that's enough to plant the seed. Sometimes they will disguise it under adult porn, like a twelve year old doing something. These guys are curious and will click on it and it's adult porn. But now they know he's interested. Then they sell them.

Bill pointed out that individuals who view these images, or trade them, have a tendency to feel that they are different than a child molester: "these guys think, because it's an image on paper, that there's nothing wrong with looking at it, and trading it. They think: 'it's not like we're actually hurting a real child'".

He went on to add:

What they [the perpetrators] don't seem to realize is that every time an image shows up, a child has been victimized. They had to be victimized for that picture to have been taken. They don't seem to understand that a child could have been brutally assaulted, raped, or even killed and that picture taken, just for their gratification. NCMEC's stats show that two out of five missing children are missing because of Internet activity.

Frank, Bill and George pointed out that perpetrators often have vast collections of pornography. Frank and George both reported that, in their experience, these individuals often possess "several thousand" images. Frank added: "I've seen them where everything is categorized and I've seen them where they are hidden in program files".

Bill alluded to collections as well and went further to say:

Trading of child pornography follows a pattern similar to collecting baseball cards. Like minded individuals will swap images and certain images are more valuable than others. One of them may have an image that is hard to find and not the ones usually seen every day. They will say: 'I'll send you five images for that one', so then it's a five to one ratio.

### *Grooming of the Victims*

Fred, Joe and Bill spoke of how much time and effort the perpetrators are willing to spend on building a relationship with their victims. Occasionally a perpetrator will become graphic in language and intent very quickly, at other times the grooming and seduction takes longer. Joe explained how this happens:

They use the Internet for children to sound off to them. They will act as another kid and buddy up with them. After they talk about common interests and stuff, they sooner or later start talking about sex. They'll talk for a while and then they become friends. They will get to know each other personally and that child says: wow, that guy with that screen name, he's pretty cool! Before you know it, he says: 'hey, I want to tell you something. I'm not really 17, I'm 24' and the child says 'that's okay. We've talked a lot and he's just somebody on the screen that I've talked to, it's okay'. Then they'll talk a little more, and that person eventually tells them his real age. He may be as old as their parents or sometimes even older, but the child doesn't see a danger there because it's been such a gradual process. They don't realize that the gate is open for danger.

Fred elaborated on the process of relationship building as well as the length of time the perpetrators take to develop the relationship before their conversation becomes sexual:

At first they just start talking. For months they just talk about anything, you know, like the weather, how school is going. It might be six months down the road before they turn it [the conversation] into a sexual nature. They try to become a part of the person's life, create a bond.

Bill also alluded to the bond that is often created during this period of relationship building that takes place during the grooming process:

They [the perpetrators] become the child's best friend. They start out telling the child that they are the same age, or near the same age. They build a relationship with that child and build up to telling them the truth about how old they really are. Then they'll ask: 'does it really matter how old I am?' and the kid will say 'no'. They feel like they have been sharing secrets all along, so nothing has changed just they found out the person they have been talking to is really older.

### *Internet Activities*

When queried as to the behaviors of perpetrators on the Internet, chatrooms were mentioned repeatedly as the place where the greatest amount of communication with victims begins. George provided insight on how the perpetrators will quite often try certain techniques to ascertain if they are talking to law enforcement or not:

Sometimes they'll have three different screen names going at the same time. So they're on as John Doe One, and then they have another screen name, John Doe Two, etc. It's the same person but they're chatting with you as if they're two different people. They know big brother is watching out there, so what they're trying to do is find inconsistencies. It's almost like they're doing counter surveillance and these people are seeing if they can trip us up or catch us.

Alice agreed and described her experiences with chatrooms and how perpetrators will often use these areas of the Internet as a starting point:

We see a lot of activity in chat rooms mainly because that's what we go into. We don't want to do any communicating in the chat room. And they usually don't either because there are so many other people in there that, who may question 'why are you saying that to a young girl'? Once they think they've verified who the person is they are talking to, or think they have, they just want to go in there and either get their kick or try to meet somebody.

The investigators reported that while a great deal of activity still takes place in the chatrooms, they have discovered that other venues such web cams, videos, Instant Relay

Chat, peer to peer file sharing, and social networking sites (e.g., MySpace and Facebook) are being used more and more frequently by these kinds of perpetrators. Joe specifically described the dangers presented in the social networking sites and the naïveté of the young people who frequent them:

The chatrooms are still a bad place, but so much more information can be gained from the social networking sites than anywhere else, in my opinion. It's almost like a contest for the kids, as to who can get the most "friends" on there. I'll say teenagers mostly, in junior or senior high. They will have upwards of 300 kids on their site. Again, it's like a contest to see who's the most popular, but they don't seem to realize that they can't always know who is out there.

He went on to explain how the perpetrators are taking advantage of this new technology and its popularity with younger people:

With the popularity of the social networking sites, these predators are going out and targeting certain school districts. They are going in and putting in like a school name, getting all the kids who have signed up and put that school as their name. So what they [the perpetrators] do then, is go out and click on every one of them and add them as friends, so they are hitting those contacts through the social networking sites. When we look on a predator's page and he doesn't have any adults on his page, but does have fifty or sixty minor females, the light bulb goes off, the red flag starts to wave - this is a predator here.

Alice concurred and expounded on the premise that, even though the social networking sites were trying to take measures to prevent this type of activity, she wasn't sure how successful they could be:

We've been looking on MySpace and Facebook and stuff like that. We see a lot more of the blogging where people are actually posting things. They make a comment on somebody's picture or, they don't. I know there's all this press on MySpace and Facebook right now about them trying to monitor their clients and find out if they're registered sex offenders, or whatever. But it's just so vast, there so much of it, I don't see how they can possibly keep track of everything.



The investigators reported that web cams and microphoning are being used more and more frequently by the perpetrators of Internet crimes against children. Alice responded when queried about the use of web cams: "We get invites all the time to view webcams. And nine times out of ten, they're not showing their faces!"

Larry agreed, but added:

Web cams are so cheap now and most of them are plug and play. You just plug them in. ,the computer automatically recognizes it and they're ready to go! There is more of that occurring, but the basis of all of it is the instant messaging, going online and actually chatting with other people, or going into rooms and chatting with other people.

The investigators acknowledged that the perpetrators were becoming more wary and cognizant of the fact that they may be talking with a police officer, so they were turning more and more often to the web cam. However, this is causing some concern and problems for the investigators because it is difficult for them to disguise themselves via web cam, so they try to insist on phone calls instead and then a decoy can be used for the phone call.

The investigators reported that perpetrators will try to avoid being detected by law enforcement by using Instant Relay Chat, or IRC. Instant Relay Chat is real-time chat that allows one to one communication via private messages and transfer to data. In file sharing using peer to peer (P2P), files are stored on an individual's computer and shared with another person who uploads and receives the files. These activities do not pass through a server and allows the perpetrators to share child pornography images, in pictures and video.

Bill commented on how on these technologies are used for the trading and collecting of child pornography:

You have the underground networks for child porn, the Internet relay chat - the IRC. In these areas of the net, trading child porn in code goes on. The perps go in and trade by ratios. Child porn is assigned a value through these collectors - kinda like baseball cards. You may have an image that is a hard to find image compared to images seen every day. So, this collector will go "hey, I'll send you five images for that one", so it's a five/one ratio. They will hit it up that way.

### Summary

The perpetrator behaviors observed most frequently by the participants were activities associated with pornography, grooming of victims, and specific Internet behaviors including use of chatrooms, blogging, social networking sites, webcams, videos, and Instant Relay Chat.

### Descriptions of the Perpetrators' Motivations

What could drive a person to commit these types of crimes against children? Do these individuals suffer from emotional illness, cognitive distortions, or sexual addiction? Participants in their interviews described three major motivations for this behavior that are categorized as follows: lack of social skills, sexual addiction, and the downward spiral associated with pornography.

#### *Lack of Social Skills*

Participants described perpetrators of Internet crimes against children as being primarily loners, introverts, adult males still living at home with Mom and Dad, with poor social skills, few friends, and suffering from low self-esteem. Their only interest is the Internet and the opportunities it provides as fuel for their sexual fantasies and perhaps

the only means of developing and maintaining relationships. The virtual world of the Internet is their world and they quite often have no idea of what is going on in their community, their neighborhood or the world and have no interest in finding out. Alice estimated that perhaps half of the individuals she had encountered still lived at home.

Bill elaborated:

These guys live on the computer. If you go to the house of this individual on an investigation and ask where the computer is, most often it will be 'it's downstairs in his bedroom'. His whole world is through that screen, through the Internet.

Fred, George and Bill all observed that these individuals usually feel more comfortable communicating with children than adults or someone their own age. The anonymity of the Internet allows them to be whomever or whatever they choose to be. They develop a persona, sometimes several, and form relationships based on this virtual self. They are empowered and emboldened, which compensates for their feelings of inadequacy in the real world. Bill explained further:

These guys would never be able to walk up to a female at the mall, or wherever and start a conversation. They wouldn't just walk up to someone they didn't know and ask 'are you a virgin?' So why do it on the Internet? Or ask in the first two lines of conversation: 'Do you want to have sex?' These guys would never do that in person, so why on the computer? The person they're talking to can't reach out and slap them or strangle them. If the person they are talking to says 'you're sick', or doesn't want to talk with them, they can just shut the door on her move to the next one. All they're doing is fishing. Eventually somebody will say yes. So they think: 'What the heck'. What do I have to lose?

Fred echoed Bill's description regarding the lack of social skills exhibited by the perpetrators:

In my opinion, they lack the social skills to go to the hang out and have a few drinks or whatever, and meet somebody their age or a female their age and talk. I

don't know if they're not comfortable doing that or they might not have the skills to do it. So they can use the Internet as a tool where they don't have to talk face to face. It's easier for someone to talk over the Internet where they don't even hear a voice. It's easier than the phone and the phone is easy. So they use it to meet people and feel comfortable while they meet them. And a lot of times you know, they might not be the best looking person or whatever.

For these investigators, this lack of social skills was exhibited by most of the individuals with whom they came in contact, but they also described sexual addiction and/or preoccupation with anything sexual as another possible motivator.

### *Sexual Addiction*

The perpetrators were described as being highly motivated, willing to go to any lengths to groom and prepare their victims. They also were described as often exhibiting compulsive and addictive traits. This apparent addiction to sex on the Internet was mentioned by Al, George, Fred, Bill, Joe, Larry. Alice and Frank's descriptions were evocative of addictive traits but not voiced quite as strongly. Additionally, the addictive nature of the Internet itself also played an important part in the descriptions.

As Joe remarked:

The Internet is a wonderful tool. The bad guys use it just like the good guys do except they exploit it for their use. These people are out there, they have their own little network and they have means, ways of sharing information that are not commonly seen in the general public. The Internet, is a huge void. I mean, it's like out in space.

The apparent obsession of these criminals was noted by George and Fred who relayed that they had seen individuals apparently unable to stop their unlawful activities, even though they were out on bond after being convicted and incarcerated for an offense.

Fred described one particular incident:

This guy had done some jail time, got released, wasn't supposed to be online or anything, but was actually back on My Space, contacting underage people again. He was picked up again, they revoked him, and he's back in jail waiting for trial again on the new ones [offenses].

He went on to add: "I have had a couple of incidences where individuals have been arrested, and their screen names would reappear where they were online again. I can't say exactly what they were doing, but they were definitely back online".

Remarking on the addictive nature of these individuals, George relayed how, in his experience, he had found that quite often perpetrators are completely absorbed in what they are doing and are oblivious to everyone - and everything - around them:

We've had instances where we've actually walked up on people, we had someone that was chatting and we knew where he was. We went to the site, stood over his shoulder while he was chatting. He didn't even know we were there until we tapped him on the shoulder. He had six or seven different screens up where he was chatting with six or seven different people at the same time.

Bill indicated that the addiction and preoccupation with sexual activity on the Internet became apparent to him when the homes of these individuals were entered:

I have only been in one house where I would eat off the kitchen table. They are nasty. They don't take the trash out. They have pets they don't care for, urine and feces around. They are so inclined to that computer world that they lose even the concept of cleanliness. Dishes stacked up, ants, flies, maggots whatever. It's really nasty.

He added that these individuals don't always fit the stereotype of an offender:

A lot of times these people are college professors, teachers, nurses, take care of other people, but can't, or won't, take care of themselves. They are educating my child? Taking care of my Mom in a nursing home? You can't help but wonder: what has it gotten to. The Internet is so addictive, it just reaches out and grabs them and won't let them out of the seat until they've accomplished what they are

going to do. Sometimes we want to wear a haz mat suit when we go into some of these places. You know what they have been doing on the web cam and you go into the house and you think: what biohazards are here? It's really nasty. They are sick in their mind; they're dirty in their mind and dirty in living habits, too.

Larry also discussed the obsession with the Internet to the exclusion of all other activities which became evident to him when he entered the homes of these individuals :

"You go in and they [the perpetrators] have pots and pans, everything piled up in the kitchen. Cock roaches running everywhere. They spend six, eight, ten hours a day online rather than taking care of their house".

Joe spoke of perpetrators with whom he had come in contact who were not only were lacking in their own personal hygiene, but also were not concerned about the personal cleanliness of the people with whom they were talking. He alluded also to the addictive behaviors and lack of morals these individuals exhibited:

When they're chatting, they will ask the person to perform sexual acts, like touching themselves or whatever. If they say 'I can't, my Mom is coming' the perp will say 'don't worry about it, do it any way'. They just don't care. They will ask for some really nasty stuff, too. They don't care about their health or anyone else's either.

Frank indicated that the behaviors exhibited by the perpetrators with whom he had come in contact appeared to be addictive in nature; however, he was somewhat reticent about labeling it as such:

I'm not a doctor, but I know it's an addiction. If people have set up over a hundred different group pages and one gets shut down, they will just open another one. They start chatting about the same things and trading images back and forth. They don't seem able to stop.

Alice alluded to the fact that the perpetrators have to be online, even at work.

Although she did not use the word addicted, she seemed to allude to that several times during her interview. She reported that in her experience, based on what she had observed online, that there appeared to be a sequence or progression associated with the viewing of pornography.

### *Downward Spiral of Pornography*

It was unanimous among the participants that pornography was the common denominator for these perpetrators, whether it was the pedophile, the preferential offender, the situational offender, the dabbler, the voyeur, or the trader, collector, manufacturer and/or distributor. There was somewhat of an overlap between descriptions of addictive behavior and the downward progression from viewing pornography. This downward spiral was described most often by all the participants as a commonality the perpetrators shared.

These individuals were most often described as being compulsive, highly motivated perhaps with addictive traits. The lure of sex on the Internet, as well the accessibility, the anonymity offered, the gradual progression and compulsive behavior associated with viewing pornography, was recounted by participants again and again.

Larry expressed his views on the availability of pornography and the apparent progression:

They (the perpetrators) start going online and more or less dabbling and then they realize that they have an interest, and their interest is peaked. Then they go 'full blown' into it. They start chatting online, they start looking at the web sites that contain the graphic images. They start buying the graphic images, they start buying the movies, DVDs that can be sent to them through the mail. They use the

Internet to facilitate everything that they are doing from viewing, to ordering, to receiving . We're talking predominantly about child pornography.

Frank echoed similar thoughts: “The way I see it, if a person looks at it enough, they'll want to fulfill the act they're looking at". Joe also described a progression from looking to doing, and provided insight into possible reasons for the behavior and agreed with Frank that pornography was only one step away from committing a contact offense:

They get looking at adult pornography and, that's good for a while. Then they move to mid-teens, little girls with the pompoms, slightly developed bodies or whatever. That does okay for a while. Then they have to look at prepubescent kids that haven't even started to mature or develop. That only works for a while, then they start going younger and younger. And ... it's like, where do you draw the line? Gathering the porn and looking at that stuff is only one step away from actually grabbing a child and living it out.

Bill was much more direct in his assessment of both the accessibility and availability of pornography online and its seemingly addictive nature:

I personally think they learn it. Stuff that they learn to do because of the Internet and the availability of porn that is out there. They get out there and get in it, it's an interest and a hobby that they acquire. All of a sudden this hobby turns into an obsession. I think that is where a lot of these people get into trouble is the fact that the fantasy turns into an obsession and suddenly the obsession turns into reality. That reality is victimizing a real child.

Alice's description of the numbers of people online perpetrating these crimes was interesting and colorful. It also provided an ominous point that was very well taken:

For a lot of them, [the perpetrators] the first time they talk to you they want to meet you. They've already gone to the point of solicitation and I mean it's just unbelievable how, even with all the coverage they've had in the news with the “To Catch a Predator”, they still are coming out. Studies have been done that indicate that if these guys have traveled one time, chances are that there are many others that they've done and we don't know about it.



Bill, Frank, Al and Joe agreed that these perpetrators may start out with adult pornography, but soon move on to other, more graphic images and the children portrayed in these images are younger and younger. Bill described the progression as being a gradual degradation:

They [the perpetrators] don't get the sexual excitement any more so they lower their inhibitions and move to teenage porn. They might be interested in that for two or three months. Then, they lose interest. So what do they do? They drop down even further, and get into the pre-pubescent and pubescent stages of child porn. They try to fuel the fantasy there for a certain amount of time. Soon that doesn't create the excitement.

Al echoed this observation based on his experience with perpetrators and their cognitive distortions and apparent lack of impulse control and described it as a *slippery slope*:

These guys are visual. They have looked at the adult stuff and, for some reason, the adult stuff just doesn't seem to do it for them. Others will tell you that they have gone from the adult stuff, to bestiality, to really deviant types of porn, and to child porn. They give me the line: 'Well, the adult porn just didn't do it for me anymore. It was just run of the mill stuff. I needed something more taboo, more stimulating'. They even tell me that they know it's illegal, it's children, but yet they can get it, look at it and get sexual gratification. They tell me that is why they crave it.

Joe emphasized that in the beginning the interest may be in adult pornography, but the interest in child pornography follows and is easy to spot: "These people may also have adult pornography, but we can see when the child pornography starts. When the computers are confiscated, they contain thousands of images of child pornography, sometimes hundreds of thousands of images, including videos".

Frank described the images and the ages of the victims he had observed and the shock and revulsion he has felt when encountering them in his work: "most people think

it's [the pornography] just dirty pictures of the Internet, but some of the stuff I've seen ... like two month old infants being sexually assaulted. It's horrifying to think this stuff is going on out there”.

George, too, addressed the issue of child pornography and its progression, but added that, in his opinion and experience, this progression could actually lead to committing contact offenses, some of which may never be discovered:

I believe there is a definite connection. The people that collect child pornography or produce child pornography and the ones that molest kids - there is a big connection. We'll have the cases where somebody comes to meet one of our investigators, we get their computer, probably 90% of the time, we find child pornography on those computers also. Very seldom do we not find some type of child, whether it's just the erotic pictures, or full fledged child pornography. We find images pertaining to the age group that we were portraying back there. He's got a collection on his computer. So there is definitely a connection. And as for the people that we get with just child pornography, I think there is a big correlation where they probably have had encounters with kids that we don't know about.

Alice echoed George, Bill and Frank's comments and added that she thinks the scourge of child pornography will continue to grow as technology grows:

I would say definitely that if they're viewing the images and the videos of child pornography, that it's almost a natural progression, especially if they don't really have really any other kind of relationship with anyone. They're going to start looking at those pictures and images and say: hey, you know, this is what I need to start looking for.

She went on to explain:

I've had maybe five or ten that have actually sent either images or videos of child pornography. So I think it's definitely going to keep going up and up, especially with the peer to peers. I think you're going to start seeing a lot more cases in the press and with people who are trading the child pornography. Think back fifteen, twenty years ago, when child pornography was magazines, pictures, you could send back and forth through the mail. Now it's, this is just so easy for them to use

the Internet to basically make their living, unless they're collectors, then they don't care, they just want the stuff. So I think it's going to start playing a much bigger role.

George's opined on the possibility of a progression from dabbling to actually offending against a child and saw pornography as playing a role:

I guess there could probably be a progression from dabbling in child pornography and maybe doing socializing on some of these sites, these pedophile sites, that may be enough to take somebody away from "well, it is wrong, but you know what, let me try it, why not? Let me try it.

Finally, Joe spoke about what can be done to stop these individuals from offending:

What should we do? Short of putting some of these people on an island all by themselves ... locking them away forever? Some of the perpetrators have wanted, have asked for that, because they know they have a sickness. They know they have an illness and it's not treatable, or not successfully yet.

#### Summary

When describing personal characteristics of the perpetrators of Internet crimes against children, the participants' descriptions included demographic information such as gender, age, marital status, ethnicity, education, socioeconomic status, and occupation. The gender of the perpetrator was reported to be predominantly male, with only a very few females. Those females with whom the investigators have come in contact were described as wanting to *hook up* with someone for sexual purposes for activities that included the children, or were offering up the children for sexual activity. The investigators indicated that there was a possibility that more female perpetrators were *out there*, but they had just not come in contact with them yet or perhaps had not found the areas of the Internet that these individuals are frequenting.

There was consensus among the participants that the ages of these perpetrators ranged from 18 years of age to age 60 and over. As for marital status the participants agreed that there was a fifty-fifty split between offenders who were married and those who were single. Those who are married were described as often being unhappy and their unhappiness led them to the computer where they *hunted* for something to fill the void. It was reported not to be unusual for children to be in the home as well, often in the same age range of the children whose images these perpetrators were viewing. All the investigators described the ethnicity of these individuals to be predominantly Caucasian. A few Asian and Hispanic perpetrators have been encountered, but very few African-Americans.

Level of education ranged from high school or below to college. However, the consensus was that most were not, to quote Frank and Alice, "rocket scientists", but rather possessed only enough knowledge to be able to get online and chat or download the pornographic images. Socioeconomic status was seen to vary as was occupation. Again, the consensus was that while most of them were employed, they were not career oriented but used their jobs as a means to an end - to furnish money to buy the necessities of life and also to provide the means to acquire a computer.

The sexual preferences exhibited by the perpetrators the investigators encountered online were also described. As mentioned previously, initially the participants' descriptions tended to be expressed only in terms of demographics, but as the interviews progressed, deeper insights into the types of personality traits the participants observe

most often began to emerge. Commonalities included ethnicity, gender, age, addictive characteristics, the lure of pornography and the downward spiral associated with it. The investigators were unanimous in their descriptions of the perpetrators as Caucasian males, and the ages of the perpetrators ranged between 18 and 75.

Alice commented even further regarding common characteristics of these perpetrators:

There's definitely some similarities. I would say they tend to kind of be kind of a loner, not a real social butterfly, stay at home a lot, on the computer a lot, whether to chat or just looking at other things, pornography, whatever they're looking at. You know, basically, they work, come home, get on the computer. That's what it seems like. I think that would be the most profound similarity with all of them.

On the other hand, Fred's view of the perpetrator was decidedly different and he indicated as much:

My opinion is different than a lot of people. In the time that I've been doing this work, I think I've arrested sixteen people, and each of them was different. I think they're totally different. A lot of people say it's the guy that lives at home with his parents, still and he's thirty. I think I might have had one that is really that. Obviously the pedophiles are out there looking strictly for the twelve year olds, and I have had a few of those. But there are also the ones out there that are just interested in sex anyway they can get it.

He went on to explain: "most of the guys I've arrested are in their twenties, nineteen maybe. They're not always the older guys. There's also the nineteen year old guy that is out there that is still looking for the twelve year old'.

The investigators unanimously agreed that pornography was the common denominator shared by these perpetrators of Internet crimes against children. Another common characteristic that appeared repeatedly in the interviews was the addictive

behaviors exhibited by these individuals. These behaviors were exhibited in the cognitive distortions of the perpetrators along with the compulsive behavior. The lure of sex on the Internet, the accessibility, as well as the gradual progression that accompanied viewing pornography, the lack of self-control and the downward spiral associated with obtaining and viewing child pornography were described consistently among the participants.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This study investigated perpetrators of Internet crimes against children from the unique perspectives of select ICAC investigators. The findings outlined in Chapter Four of this study were derived from the participants and framed by the following research questions: (1) How do select investigators describe perpetrators of Internet crimes against children? (2) What, if any, common characteristics do participants identify among the perpetrators and (3) How do participants' descriptions compare and/or contrast?

In this chapter, the descriptions provided by the participants were compared and contrasted with the literature. In addition, conclusions are drawn from the findings of the study and their implications considered. Lastly, suggestions are presented for future research to further understand perpetrators of Internet crimes against children, increase awareness of the problem, and offer possibilities to reduce or prevent these types of crimes in the future.

### Participants Descriptions Compared to the Literature

A significant degree of overlap was observed in the participants' descriptions of perpetrators of Internet crimes against children in this study and those identified in the literature. For example, all participants in this study described the perpetrators as being predominantly non-Hispanic, Caucasian males. This finding was supported in the literature (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000; Stanley, 2001; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2003; Fried, n.d; Protecting Children, n.d.; Internet Child Predators, n.d.).

The few females with whom the participants had come in contact were attempting to arrange sexual liaisons between themselves and their children with other adults, or with other adults and their children.

Moreover, it is of interest to note that very few African-American perpetrators have been encountered; very few images of African-American children have been discovered as well. Ages of these individuals observed by the investigators ranged roughly between 18 and 70 years of age. The age range in the literature was comparable, although individuals younger than 18 were reported (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003). The marital status of offenders was described by the participants as a 50/50 split between married and unmarried, which is also consistent with the literature.

Interestingly, in this study married perpetrators often were described as unhappy; thus their unhappiness compelled them to seek sex via the Internet. Many of them were described as having children living with them who were the same age as the children these individuals were attempting to meet online.

Furthermore, both educational level and type of occupation varied among perpetrators, according to participants. Participants also reported encountering college educated individuals as well as others with a high school education or less. Then too, they reported encountering perpetrators who were blue collar workers or unemployed. This is consistent with the literature that these offenders are a heterogeneous group.

Participants in this study related that providing a description of the perpetrators of Internet crimes against children was difficult because these offenders appear to cross



gender, socioeconomic, and occupational boundaries. As a result, a true typology or profile of these individuals has yet to be established (Tomison, 1995; Danni & Hampe, 2000; Smallbone & Wortley, 2001; Lanning, 2001; Taylor & Quayle, 2003; Ferraro & Casey, 2005).

This study further paralleled the literature regarding the sexual preferences of the offenders. Both indicated that not every person who sexually offends against a child is a pedophile; most have been classified as either preferential or situational offenders (Lanning, 2001; Ferraro & Casey, 2005; Fried, n.d.). However, for the most part, the participants described the perpetrators by their behaviors, rather than placing them in distinct categories. It is noteworthy that the participants in this study used the terms *preferential* and *situational* much less frequently and differently than in the literature

Lanning (2001) posited that online sexual offenders operated on a situational – preferential continuum. However, participants in this study expressed the view, based on their experiences that it was possible for situational offenders to evolve into preferential offenders. Thus, while not inconsistent with Lanning’s description of an offending continuum, the participants viewed the movement as quicker and more extreme.

The cognitive distortions manifested in the perpetrators’ apparent lack of concern for their victims as depicted in the literature (Stanley, 2001; Quayle & Taylor, 2003) are not inconsistent with the investigators’ descriptions of the thinking of these criminals. The participants described these individuals as self-absorbed and uncaring. Further evidence of cognitive distortion was evidenced by the fact that perpetrators often neither

show regard for their own health nor the health and safety of the children with whom they were communicating

Finally, findings of this study supported Gillespie's (2005) contention that the Internet has contributed to an explosion in the number of pornographic images that are now available. Participants attributed this rise to the easy accessibility of child pornography on the Internet and the anonymity the Internet provides. This escalation is apparent when a perpetrator's computer is confiscated and thousands, often hundreds of thousands of sexually explicit images are discovered.

In addition to these commonalities, some differences between the literature and the findings of this study were found. One of the most notable differences was whether sexual behavior on the Internet constituted addiction or simply problematic behavior. In the literature, the terms hypersexual disorder, problematic Internet usage, pathological sexuality, and pathological Internet usage were used to describe these behaviors rather than addiction (Quayle & Taylor, 2003; Stein et al., 2001). However, the participants in this study expressed, in very strong terms, that they considered the behavior of individuals with whom they came in contact online to be addiction. For example, Frank stated "I'm not a doctor, but I know it's an addiction ... They don't seem able to stop".

Griffiths (2001) cited Young's assertion that excessive Internet usage was a means to fuel other addictions and that individuals who have experienced sexual addictions were more likely to develop addiction to sex on the Internet. He also pointed out the lack of empirical data regarding online sexual behavior. Ferraro and Casey

(2005) also commented that the online characteristics and behaviors of perpetrators of crimes directed toward children also merited further study. It is hoped that this study will add to the literature by providing empirical data supporting these online behaviors as addictions.

In summary, it is noteworthy that significant overlaps between the findings of this study and the literature were discovered. Consistencies included demographic descriptions, sexual preferences, cognitive distortions of the perpetrators, and the exponential growth of online pornography.

#### Conclusions Drawn

The findings of this study suggest that a better understanding of perpetrators of Internet crimes against children should include: (1) general demographic descriptions of perpetrators, (2) descriptions of perpetrators' sexual preferences, (3) descriptions of their behaviors, including (but not limited to) their Internet behaviors, and (4) descriptions of their motivations.

#### General Descriptions of the Perpetrators

When describing the sexual preferences of the individuals with whom they come in contact online, participants occasionally used the term "preferential offender". It is noteworthy that the term preferential offender, as used by the participants in this study, was different than that found in the literature. The literature referred to a preferential offender as an individual who could possibly be a pedophile, but could also be a diverse

offender who may not have a strong preference for children (Lanning, 2001) or an individual who possesses a variety of abnormal sexual interests (Fried, n.d.)

The participants in this study reported that, in their experience, the preferential offender is an individual who desires to have sex with children and only with children. They have found this type of offender prefers a particular gender, body type, hair color, eye color, etc. They also described this type of perpetrator as being by far the most dangerous type of offender.

Unlike the preferential offender, who prefers sexual encounters with children, the situational offender was described by participants as an individual having an interest in anything and everything sexual. The participants related that these individuals were the ones seen most often and were also referred to as dabblers. Bill, for example, referred to them as “dipping their hand into every bucket” and “thinking below the waist”. These findings are not inconsistent with the literature.

Investigators indicated that they considered situational offenders less dangerous than the preferential offender. Nevertheless, the curiosity and interest in all things sexual that this type of perpetrator possesses can lead to much more sinister behavior. Specifically, investigators maintained the possibility that situational offenders could evolve into preferential offenders. This is a new, significant finding that differs from the description of situational offenders discovered in the literature.

Another significant finding of this study was a category used by the participants that was not found in the literature, the category of *financial offender*. Although the

literature mentions the manufacturing and distributing of pornography, which infers financial activities, the specific category of financial offender was not discovered. Participants in this study related that within the category of financial offender were individuals who victimize their own children, grandchildren, or other related children primarily for monetary gain. The investigators indicated that often the children in these pictures are smiling, which leads them to conclude that the children know, and are comfortable with, the person taking the picture.

In describing the motives of persons who commit Internet crimes against children, disinterest in adult pornography emerged as a precursor to viewing and possessing pornographic images of children. Not only were these individuals described as progressing—or perhaps more accurately digressing—in the type of images in which they were interested, but also moving towards more graphic images, and eventually, images of younger and younger children. Once this digression occurs it is not uncommon for perpetrators to begin to seek images of pubescent, prepubescent, and even infants being sexually assaulted.

In summary, perpetrators of Internet crimes against children were described as preferential, situational or financial offenders, with the preferential offender considered to be the most dangerous. The investigators' description of a preferential offender differed significantly from the definition discovered in the literature. The participants described a preferential offender as one who prefers sex only with children and who prefers a particular type of child. Additionally, participants maintained that it is possible for

situational offenders to evolve into a preferential offender. While this view is somewhat consistent with the position of Lanning (2001), who maintained that these individuals operate on a preferential/situational continuum, the participants indicated that the movement along that continuum is more rapid and extreme. The category of financial offender was not discovered in the literature, but described by the participants as an individual who victimizes children for monetary gain.

### Descriptions of Behaviors

#### *Pornography Activities*

Child pornography on the Internet was identified by the participants as the activity they encountered most frequently. The accessibility and the ease of obtaining pornographic images were cited as possible reasons for the rapid increase in downloading, possession, and trading of child pornography. As Joe related, “It’s out there and it’s not like you have to go through three locked doors to get it”. Possession, downloading, trading, and manufacturing of child pornography constitute criminal behavior and it is these types of activities that bring these perpetrators to the attention of the investigators.

The manufacturers and distributors who sell these images are business people and follow the laws of supply and demand. Joe explained that the individuals who provide the pornography are well aware of the curiosity and interest that these images incite: “They will show you a free trailer, or sell you one. They know that’s enough to plant the seed”. Once the seed is planted, the cycle of pornography is likely to begin. The more

images available, the more people will view them. The more people view the images, the more images the manufacturers and distributors will produce. (See Figure 1.)

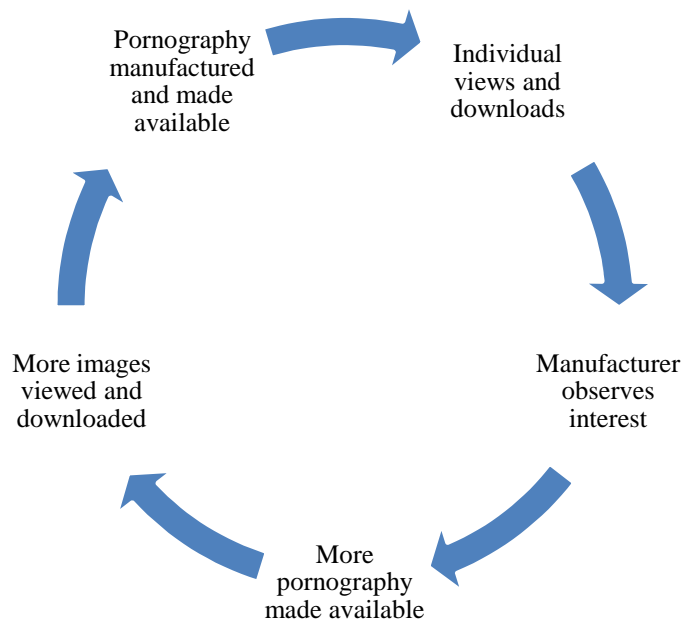


Figure 1. Cycle of pornography.

The participants were quite passionate in stating that every image of a child in pornography was a case of child sexual abuse. They did not consider this to be a victimless crime. Bill pointed out that “these guys think, because it’s an image on paper, that there’s nothing wrong with looking at it and trading it. They think ‘it’s not like we’re actually hurting a real child’”. The investigators maintained that children are victimized each time these types of images are downloaded and viewed.

A significant finding of this study was that the participants, based on their experiences, considered viewing child pornography and its subsequent progression to be a learned behavior. Computers have become extremely user friendly and, combined with the availability and accessibility of the pornography, individuals quickly become skilled at finding the images. They soon learn that their sexual fantasies can be easily fulfilled online.

The perpetrators often begin by viewing adult pornography, but eventually begin to experiment with other forms, including child pornography. This progression described by the participants occurred frequently and indicated a much stronger relationship between viewing and progressing to more sinister activity. As with any addictive behavior, it takes more and more to satisfy the addict's needs. Thus they move to communicating with a child and then attempting to meet a child for a sexual encounter.

Not only did the participants in this study describe a possible progression in the viewing of pornography, they also indicated a progression from situational offender to preferential offender. Participants related that these individuals begin to wonder how it would be to talk to one of these young people. From there, they maintain, it is a small step to desire direct contact. The perpetrator may start talking with someone online and then, as Fred stated "they step further to actually trying to meet someone. It's so easy". Frank also alluded to the dangerous progression from pornography to harming a child: "gathering the porn and looking at that stuff is only one step away from actually grabbing a child and living it out".



### *Grooming the Victims*

The perpetrators of Internet crimes described in this study were depicted as being adept at grooming their victims. Grooming by sexual predators is not a new phenomenon, nor is the amount of time devoted to this activity. However, the anonymity provided by the Internet facilitates the grooming process. Lanning (1992) reported that individuals who seduce children on the Internet were “willing to devote considerable amounts of time, money and energy to the process” (p. 89). Time and energy expended by the perpetrators to bond with their young victim was reported in this study as well; however, findings which add to the literature were also discovered.

For example, participants in this study provided more detail on the grooming process and indicated that it can, and often does, begin and progress very quickly. Some perpetrators begin using explicit sexual language almost immediately. They will ask for the victim’s name, age, and physical location, followed by an explicit question, such as “are you a virgin”? On other occasions, the process can take place over a period of months. The perpetrator gradually develops trust and bonds with the child over time. Regardless of whether this process develops over time or transpires quickly, the results are the same. The perpetrator breaks down the child’s defenses, builds a trusting relationship, and progresses to actually meeting them.

It should be noted that chatrooms serve as the initial contact between a child and the perpetrator. Participants in this study described this activity as *fishing*. The perpetrators are making contact, hoping that a *fish* will *bite*. Once the perpetrator finds a

person who is willing to chat with them about sexual matters, they move to more discreet areas where one on one communication can take place.

### *Internet Behaviors*

Chatrooms continue to be popular with young people, especially teenagers. They enjoy going online to chat with their friends and develop new relationships. The danger lies in the fact that those to whom they are chatting are not always who, and what, they appear to be. The anonymity of the Internet is a boon for individuals who seek to contact children for illicit purposes. These individuals develop a virtual persona self, and they can be anyone or anything they choose. In fact, not only do these predators have an online persona, they quite often have more than one. Investigators reported that it is not uncommon for perpetrators to have anywhere from three to six different screen names and portray themselves differently in each one.

Lanning (2001) noted that perpetrators have historically been the first to obtain and use the latest technology. His findings are consistent with descriptions of perpetrators' use of the Internet as indicated by the participants in this study. These investigators reported that they must constantly try to stay on the cutting edge of technology. They are basically forced to do so in order to keep up with the perpetrators.

For example, as mentioned above, communication with victims was described as occurring most frequently in chatrooms. However, participants in this study related that other areas of the Internet are becoming more popular and are thus even more dangerous.

Specifically, they identified social networking sites, web cams, Instant Relay Chat, and file sharing programs as the vehicles now being used more and more often by predators.

Then too, investigators have discovered that the predators are becoming more and more aware that the people with whom they are chatting could possibly be law enforcement officers. As George pointed out: “They know that big brother is watching”. They are cognizant of the fact that a question relating to anything sexual could raise suspicion by other chatters or even law enforcement. In order to protect themselves from detection, the perpetrators have begun taking greater care to verify the identity of the person with whom they are chatting. They may make initial contact in a chatroom, but move into one on one communication to avoid detection by law enforcement.

As a further means to prevent detection, participants indicated that these predators have begun to want either a phone call or a web cam image to make certain that they are communicating with a young person and not a police officer. Webcams are inexpensive and easy to use. These devices assist the perpetrators in ascertaining the identity of the person with whom they desire to communicate. By actually seeing the person with whom they are talking, they can be assured that it is not a member of law enforcement. These devices serve an even more diabolical purpose. The perpetrators are aroused by the knowledge that they are being observed, and are observing others engaging in sexual acts.

In addition to the social networking sites and web cams, investigators described even newer technological advances of which the perpetrators are taking advantage. Two

of them that are being used more and more often are Instant Relay Chat (IRC) and peer to peer (P2P). IRCs allow for private one on one communication and transfer of data. P2P is a file sharing software program that permits the user to receive files, neither of which goes through a server. The pornographic images can also be hidden in jpeg files.

#### Descriptions of Motivations of the Perpetrators

##### *Motivated by Lack of Social Skills and Sexual Addiction*

Participants described the offenders they encounter as often being loners, lacking in social skills, suffering from low self-esteem, and having difficulty in developing and maintaining relationships. The Internet serves to empower these individuals; it allows them to engage in activities they would be fearful of attempting in the real world. It should be noted that according to participant reports, not every offender fits this description. Perpetrators are often motivated by sexual interest and preoccupation.

Perpetrators were described by the participants as often exhibiting compulsive and obsessive characteristics. The participants related that they had encountered individuals who were so completely absorbed in their online activity that the participants actually walked up behind them, catching them in the act, and actually had to tap them on the shoulder to get their attention. Participants also related that they have encountered individuals who are so into sexual activity on the Internet that they live in filth. So strong is the compulsion and obsession that perpetrators are interested in nothing else, not even personal cleanliness. The compulsive behaviors are further evidenced by the fact that

these individuals often appear to be unable to stop their behavior even after being arrested and out on bail.

The medical definition of addiction, based on criteria from the American Psychiatric Association and World Health Organization (Melimis, n.d.) is any behavior meeting at least three of the following seven criteria during a 12-month period:

- Tolerance. Using more and more over time.
- Withdrawal. When you stop using, you experience at least one of the following symptoms: irritability, anxiety, shakes, sweats, nausea, or vomiting.
- Difficulty controlling use. Sometimes using more or for a longer time than you'd like.
- Negative consequences. Continuing to use even though there are negative consequence to mood, self-esteem, health, job, or family.
- Significant time or emotional energy spent obtaining, using, concealing, planning, or recovering from use.
- Putting off or neglecting activities. Reduced social, recreational, work, or household activities because of use.
- Desire to cut down. Repeated thoughts of cutting down or controlling use. Unsuccessful attempts to cut down or control use made (paragraph 2).

Five of the seven: tolerance, withdrawal, difficulty controlling use, negative consequences, significant time or energy spent, and putting off or neglecting activities were observed in perpetrators described by the participants in this study. Tolerance and difficulty controlling use were also indicated by the observation that perpetrators require more and more images of children and more graphic images of younger and younger children. In addition, these individuals were found to need sexually “taboo” images and practices to achieve and maintain arousal. Negative consequences and amount of time spent pursuing sexual activity on the Internet were demonstrated by the obsessive-compulsive behaviors of the perpetrators.

Additionally, Dr. Howard Shaffer of the Division on Addiction, Harvard University, described “the three Cs” of addiction as “behavior that is motivated by emotions ranging along the Craving to Compulsion spectrum, Continued use in spite of adverse consequences, and Loss of Control” (What is Addiction, n.d., paragraph 16). All three were observed and described by participants in this study. This study provided compelling evidence that the types of behaviors exhibited by perpetrators are addictions.

#### *Downward Spiral of Pornography as Motivator*

Of particular significance in this study is the downward spiral associated with child pornography. Participants indicated that, in their experience, individuals often begin by looking at adult pornography, but soon begin to experiment, looking for images that are more interesting and sexually stimulating. On other occasions, snippets of child pornography are mixed in with the adult porn, which in turn arouses a new interest. Joe commented that “these people may also have adult pornography, but we can see when the child pornography starts”.

Perpetrators were described as often being curious, wanting to experiment, perhaps not cognizant of a sexual interest in children. They start checking out different sites and different images. Initially, curiosity drives them to begin dabbling in child pornography. Once their curiosity and interest is aroused, a downward spiral begins. These individuals need more excitement and more graphic images to sustain and maintain arousal. They begin with pubescent, then prepubescent children, and eventually spiral down to viewing sexually explicit images of infants.

Photographs may be an area of interest initially, but soon the perpetrator progresses and wants video with sound. Not only is sexual gratification obtained from looking at the images themselves, but the sounds of children being sexually abused is a means of arousal also. The spiral can progress—or more accurately, regress—to the point where, as Bill explained: “Fantasy turns into obsession, and obsession turns into reality; that reality is victimizing a real child” (see Figure 2). They have progressed to the point that they want to act out the scenes depicted in the pornography. Previous research has revealed similar findings, but was based on data obtained from a case study of one individual (Quayle & Taylor, 2001).

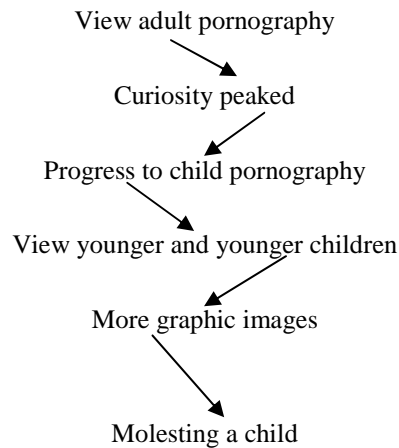


Figure 2. Downward Spiral of Pornography.

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate perpetrators of Internet crimes against children. From descriptions of these individuals provided by select ICAC investigators, it was anticipated that a narrative portrait would emerge. Although not a

typology or a profile, nonetheless a composite description of the individuals who perpetrate these crimes was generated from participant descriptions.

The following is a composite photograph of a perpetrator of Internet crimes against children. This photograph is similar to the police sketches rendered from descriptions of witnesses to a crime. Although it is neither perfect nor exact, it is insightful and noteworthy.

Perpetrators of Internet Crimes Against Children are mostly non-Hispanic, Caucasian males roughly between the ages of 18 to 75. Some are employed, some are not; some are white collar professional, others are blue collar laborers. These individuals cannot be spotted easily as there is not one physical description that applies to all of them collectively. They are, however, more readily identified by their behaviors, by their addiction to sex and pornography, and by their unrelenting dedication to their goal: to engage in sexual activity with children. These offenders may or may not be highly educated, but they are resourceful and creative. The Internet—along with its chatrooms, web cams, Instant Relay Chat, social networking sites, and peer to peer file sharing software—are the tools of their despicable trade.

Quayle and Taylor (2003) related the emergence of a new type of Internet offender, an individual who is more or less a voyeur. Lanning (2001) maintained that there are no new perpetrators, just perpetrators using more advanced technology. Based on the findings in this study, an even newer type of perpetrator is emerging. This individual may be a pedophile, a preferential offender who only obtains sexual



gratification with children. He may also, however, be someone who starts out as curious, interested in anything sexual, then evolves into a preferential offender.

Once the perpetrator is enticed by, and aware of, pornography, a downward spiral begins. Pornography in general—and child pornography in particular— is addictive. As with any other addiction, the addiction is progressive. The individual who begin the downward spiral soon needs not only more graphic images, but also progressively younger victims.

The participants also described a financial offender who victimizes children for monetary gain. Of particular significance, is the category of offenders described by participants in this study. Perhaps the most striking characteristic of these offenders is the interest that propels them to exploit children. They are sexual predators, they are dangerous, and they present a risk to children.

#### Implications for Counseling Practice

Research has shown that the tremendous growth of Internet usage for sexual purposes has resulted in growth in the numbers of individuals seeking counseling and therapy for problems associated with online sexual activity (Freeman-Longo, as cited in Griffiths, 2001). It has also been suggested that increased Internet usage will most likely result in more and more clinicians encountering patients presenting with problems stemming from, or manifested as, online sexual compulsivity (Cooper et al., 2000).

Exposure to pornography was described by the participants in this study as the first step in a downward spiral, a spiral with the potential to progress into the actual commission of a sexual offense against a child. Associated with this downward spiral is

the potential for becoming addicted. It is imperative that counselors be aware of the magnitude and complexity of the problem, to understand that pornography is seductive, but insidious, and to be vigilant for the warning signs in those presenting for care.

#### Proposed Model of Therapy

It should be noted that few successful treatments for individuals who sexually molest children have been discovered, nor is there a “cure” (Terry & Tallon, n.d.). It is imperative to keep children safe on the Internet and safe from those who wish to do them harm. That is the primary concern along with pursuing tougher penalties for the offender. Of secondary concern would be treatment for those who sexually abuse a child. If “radical change” does not occur with treatment, “incarceration becomes necessary” (Earle, Dillon & Jecmen, 1989, p. 49) to protect the children.

The findings in this study indicate that perpetrators of Internet crimes against children often display cognitive distortions, along with obsessive and compulsive behavioral traits, low social skills, inability to form and maintain relationships, and addictive behaviors. The lure and addictive nature of pornography, the downward spiral associated with exposure to pornography were also significant findings. Therefore, a treatment program that incorporates cognitive-behavioral therapy, individually and in groups, is suggested. Level, intensity, and length of therapy would be contingent upon the level of the downward spiral on which each individual was operating.

- Cognitive distortions are evident in the lack of empathy, rationalizations for inappropriate sexual behavior, and denial of a problem.

- Cognitive behavioral techniques could lead to the perpetrator understanding that thoughts and actions can be controlled and that thoughts and actions have implications for their lives (Jones & Butman, 1991).
- Using cognitive restructuring and other cognitive-behavioral techniques, individuals can be taught to identify triggers for their behaviors and, in so doing, alter behavior (Chou, Condrón & Belland, 2005).

Participants in this study described perpetrators as often being introverts, loners, lacking in social skills and the ability to develop successful relationships.

Recommendations to address these issues include:

- Using cognitive restructuring, perpetrators could learn to modify cognitive distortions, develop empathy (Earle, Dillon, & Jecmen, 1998), improve relationship skills, social skills, self-control, and self-confidence (Terry & Tallon (n.d.)
- Individual therapy should include family of origin issues such as abuse and/or patterns of abuse (Earle, Dillon, & Jecmen, 1998).
- Group therapy would be beneficial in assisting the perpetrator to develop interpersonal skills, communication skills, accountability and social skills.

It is important to understand that striving for tougher penalties for the offender and keeping children safe on the Internet is not totally incongruent with loving, and providing help for, the offender. Earle, Dillon and Jecmen (1989) pointed out that “one of the major challenges for many patients is alienation from self, others and God” and that “dealing with the patient in terms of developing authentic intimacy with self and

God is an essential part of treatment” (p. 54). In order to facilitate the development of authentic intimacy, it is recommended that the following tenets be included in treatment:

- Christian counselors should always be cognizant of the fact that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God.
- Spiritual brokenness, lack of self-worth, low self-esteem, impure and inappropriate cognitions displayed by individuals engaging in Internet crimes against children are indications of a broken relationship with Christ.
- Integration of cognitive-behavioral techniques with the building, or rebuilding, of an intimate relationship with God to restore completeness, deliverance, and freedom from pornography and/or sexual addiction.

#### Implications for ICAC and Law Enforcement

Implications for law enforcement would include ICAC investigators asking questions regarding family of origin issues, history of abuse, the role of pornography, and effect of exposure to pornography at a young age to their interviews with perpetrators. Using a team approach with psychologists, psychiatrists, and counselors would be helpful.

The findings of this study could be included in ICAC training programs. The characteristics, behaviors, and categories of offenders described in this study would be important to share with other ICAC units and investigators. Understanding what other investigators experience, understanding addictions and obsessive compulsive behaviors would be important in building knowledge of perpetrator characteristics, online habits, and personality traits to identify and apprehend these individuals.

The investigators indicated the lack of knowledge of parents and the general public as one of the dangers of the Internet. The findings and conclusions of this study could provide useful material for the investigators to use in their educational presentations to parents, children, schools, and other organizations. In addition, the findings of this study could be used as supporting documentation for future funding and requests for additional personnel. As the Internet continues to grow and as perpetrators become more and more technologically advanced, it would be important for the different ICAC units to share information that would assist in their identification, apprehension and conviction.

#### Suggestions for Future Research

Suggestions for future research resulted from the conclusions drawn from this study and resultant questions raised. For example, perpetrators of Internet crimes against children were described as being non-Hispanic, Caucasian males. Participants indicated very few African-American perpetrators have been encountered and very few pornographic images of African-American children. Research exploring explanations for these ethnic differences would seem to be highly beneficial.

The participants of this study indicated that female perpetrators were probably “out there”, but that they have not encountered them often. As George stated: “We [investigators] just aren’t seeing them in the solicitation part of it. Maybe it’s just not the right mix yet”. Future research into the characteristics and online behaviors of females is suggested to ascertain if females are just beginning to use the Internet to victimize children, and/or if they are using the Internet differently than their male counterparts.

This present study was a collective case study exploring perpetrators of Internet crimes against children from the perspective of eight select ICAC investigators. It is recommended that a follow up study be conducted in two to three years with the same participants, if possible to see if any changes have occurred in technology and online habits of perpetrators.

Both qualitative and quantitative measures should be employed in searching for questions emerging from this present study. For instance, comparing the findings of this study with other ICAC units utilizing a survey could be combined with interviews of perpetrators. However, it is suggested that referrals of select perpetrators from ICAC units and treatment programs should be solicited in order to attain a sample of reliable and credible informants.

Research on the relationship between pornography and offending is indicated (Ferraro & Casey, 2005; Hernandez, 200). Future research studies modeled after the Hernandez study with incarcerated individuals utilizing pre and post questionnaires to these individuals followed by individual interviews is suggested.

One wonders how the nature of the work in which these investigators are involved affects other areas of their lives. There was no doubt of their dedication and zeal to protect children from online predators. They described terrible and troubling images and activities that they encounter on a daily basis. A phenomenological study or an ethnography investigation of the experience of being an ICAC investigator could explore relationships with spouses and children, and the coping mechanisms that each

investigator has, and most likely must, develop in order to keep pursuing this type of work .

Investigators described offenders as quite often suffering from low self-esteem, inability to form relationships, and possessing poor social skills. Therefore suggestions for future research include studies of personality traits of the perpetrators. Specific personality traits of self-esteem, introversion, and antisocial disorder would benefit the helping professions as well as law enforcement.

#### Summary

This chapter discussed the implications of the findings of this study. Recommendations for further research were presented as was a suggested model of treatment. Cognitive-behavioral techniques integrated with Christian counseling to develop positive self-worth, positive regard for others, the development of empathy, stopping the cycle of pornography, and establishing and maintaining a relationship with a loving, forgiving God were recommended. Along with this model was added the caveat that treatment is not always successful and when it is not, incarceration may be necessary to protect the children.

#### Final Summary

This study explored perpetrators of Internet crimes against children from the unique perspective of select ICAC investigators. Chapter One included the background and purpose of the study, the research questions, definitions, and significance of the study. A review of the literature followed in Chapter Two. Next, the research method was presented in Chapter three. This chapter included a description of the collective case

study method, bounding of the case, the research questions, and explanation of data collection and analysis. Subsequently, in Chapter Four the co-researchers were introduced and findings of the study were compared and contrasted with the literature. Lastly, discussion of the findings and implications for counseling practice and law enforcement were presented in Chapter Five. A proposed model of treatment was provided as well as suggestions for future research.



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## LIST OF APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A: Informed Consent for Participation in a Research Study

APPENDIX B: Interview Guide

APPENDIX C: Categories of Themes

## Appendix A

### Perpetrators of Internet Crimes Against Children: A Collective Case Study

By

Janet M. Brown

Liberty University

#### Informed Consent for Participation in a Research Study

You are invited to be in the above research study. As a member of an Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force, you were selected as a possible participant. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

#### Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of perpetrators of Internet crimes against children, and to understand them from the unique perspectives of Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force investigators.

#### Procedure:

You will be interviewed for approximately one and one half to two hours. The interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed by the researcher and the transcripts read and analyzed. You can review your interview after it has been transcribed and before final submission of the study if you so desire.



#### Risks and Benefits:

There are always risks and discomforts associated with participating in a research study. These include, but are not limited to: (a) becoming fatigued from responding to the interview questions, (b) emotional stress from the content of the questions, and (c) discovery of your responses without your written consent. The risks are more than likely no greater than those you experience in daily life. To minimize the risk of discovery of your responses, your name will not be used in written or recorded records.

#### Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. Your name will never be used, only the code you have been assigned. In any sort of report that might be published, no information will be included that will make it possible to identify you and your responses. Research records, including tapes, will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to them. The tapes will be erased after transcription and the transcripts will be shredded after the report is completed. You can review the typed interview for accuracy if you so desire.

#### Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without prior notification. If you have already been interviewed, your response can be withdrawn from this study by contacting the researcher.

#### Contact information and questions:

Please direct any questions about this research study to me, Janet M. Brown, at (540) 947-5537 or jmbrown@liberty.edu.

Your consent to participate in this study will be indicated by your signature at the bottom of this form. Please submit a signed copy to the researcher before being interviewed and keep one copy for your records.

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Participant Signature	Printed Name	Date
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## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me about yourself, your job/work, what you do.

Prompts:

How long in law enforcement?

How did you get involved in law enforcement?

How long with ICAC?

How did you get involved in ICAC?

2. Describe a "typical" day at work.

3. What do you consider to be the purpose of your work and how do you go about accomplishing that goal?

4. Tell me about/describe for me your understanding of the individuals that are the focus of your work.

Prompts:

Marital status

Occupation/Activities/Hobbies

Education

Age/Ethnicity

Sexual preference

Drug use

Prior offenses

Other

5. Describe your understanding of how the computer/internet is used by the individuals who are the focus of your work.

Prompts:

Web page

Chatroom

Game sites

Pornography.

Web cam.

Solicitation.

6. What have you learned about these individuals who are the primary focus of your work?

7. Describe for me what, if any commonalities you have observed in these individuals.

8. Describe for me what, if any, differences you have observed in these individuals.

9. Based on your experience, what do you consider to be the biggest danger on the Internet?

Is there anything else significant to this topic that you would like to share?

10. Mention/request for a follow-up interview

## APPENDIX C

### Categories and Subcategories of Themes

#### Theme One: Demographic Descriptions

Age/Ethnicity

Marital Status

Education/Occupation

Sexual Preference

#### Theme Two: Descriptions of the Behaviors

Use of Pornography

Grooming of the Victims

Internet Behaviors

#### Theme Three: Descriptions of the Motivations

Lack of Social Skills

Sexual Addiction

Downward spiral of pornography