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Snagging The Online Sexual Predator: Descriptions Of Who And How

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SNAGGING THE ONLINE SEXUAL PREDATOR:
DESCRIPTIONS OF WHO AND HOW

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines law enforcement personnel who work undercover chatting investigations in order to catch online sexual predators. This topic is quite timely, and law enforcement efforts in this area are new. As such, there is a dearth of research concerning the use of the internet as a location for law enforcement investigations, particularly as a setting for undercover work. This research addresses such questions as who are these law enforcement personnel who try to snag online sexual predators, how do they feel about working in the virtual world, what do they think about doing this type of work, how did they get selected for this particular position, how their jobs affect their personal lives outside of work, and what specifically their jobs entail. Twenty law enforcement personnel were interviewed from different parts of the United States. The interview schedule covered six areas: respondents' careers, their home lives, any training they have received that is relevant for their current positions, details about their jobs, the undercover aspects of their jobs, and their demographics. Findings are discussed. This study is important because it offers a closer look at the individuals who put their time and efforts into neutralizing online sexual predators before they can harm additional children. This knowledge will add to the current literature in this area as well as aid policy developers on issues concerning law enforcement organization and personnel.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

ICAC   Internet Crimes against Children

UC   Undercover Chat

P2P   Peer to Peer

SNSs   Social Networking Sites

IP   Internet Protocol

INTRODUCTION

The virtual world has been increasingly encroaching on society and everyday life.

Computers are highly relevant in nearly all aspects of life and are frequently used for personal

relationships. For example, there are many individuals who now use the internet to join online

social networks and even to establish romantic and/or sexual relationships. This is particularly

the case with today's adolescents who use Facebook©, My Space™, Twitter™, and the wide

variety of network communities for socializing with hundreds, if not thousands, of others

throughout the world.

The internet offers a world of anonymity which can have both positive and negative

consequences. The internet offers individuals the privacy to explore possible problems (physical,

mental, sexual, social, etc.) and gain the support of others in the privacy of their own home. In

the same aspect, the internet also offers individuals the chance to explore interests that may or

may not be approved of by society. It goes to stand, while the virtual social world brings many

individuals satisfaction, there can be problematic social encounters. This is because even though

current preteens and teenagers are sophisticated in the use of technology, they are likely to be

fairly unsophisticated when it comes to social relationships and virtual communities. As such,

there may be many adolescents who can be easily duped by manipulative adults. These youth can

readily be ensnared in a world where the adolescents become victims of older predators

masquerading as the adolescents' peers.

Increasingly, these individuals have come to the attention of law enforcement agencies

that have developed task forces to catch predators or, at a minimum, make it more difficult for them to prey on young people. These officers often will go online, join social networking sites (SNSs), and pose as young teenagers in order to snag online sexual predators

It is the purpose of the present study to conduct interviews with individuals (referred to forthwith as law enforcement) who work to catch online sexual predators and examine their views about their jobs, their strategies, their training, and the effects their jobs have on their home lives. As such, this analysis seeks to describe the job of law enforcement personnel who work undercover online. The research will examine the characteristics of individuals who attempt to limit online predation, the training they receive, the strategies they use to snag the sexual predators before they can hurt unsuspecting youth, how their job affects their social and family lives, and whether and how they consider their job as undercover work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

<u>Sexual Offenders</u>

Because of the real and potentially serious consequences of sexual victimization, it is important to study how youth come to be online victims so that prevention actions are more successful. The United States had 716,750 registered sex offenders as of June 2010 (Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 2010) and, in recent years, research on these social pariahs has grown tremendously. There has been substantial research done concerning sex offenders in general. A great deal of this research focuses on restrictions and the impact these restrictions have on the offenders (Levenson & Cotter, 2006; Nieto & Jung, 2006; Mustaine, Tewksbury, & Stengel, 2006a; Tewksbury, 2005; Tewksbury, Mustaine, & Stengel, 2008b; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2009; Zandbergen & Hart, 2006; Zevitz & Farkas, 2000). For example, sex offenders and predators are often required to register their home addresses and are not allowed to live within certain distances of schools and parks (Levenson, D'Amora, & Hem, 2007; Levenson & Hem, 2007; Nieto & Jung, 2006; Mustaine, Tewksbury, & Stengel, 2006b; Tewksbury, 2004; Tewksbury, Mustaine, & Stengel, 2008a; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2006). As of August 2007, 30 states had enacted housing restriction statutes (Meloy, Miller, & Curtis, 2008), which prohibit certain sex offenders from residing in close proximity to children. Specifically, these state laws may forbid sex offenders from living in close proximity to schools, daycare centers, parks, and school bus stops (Levenson, Zgoba, & Tewksbury, 2007).

The length of registration varies from state to state depending on the characteristics of the offense and type of offender, and ranges from 10 years to lifetime registration (Schiavone &

Jeglic, 2009).   Not all sex offenders are the same. They do not all violate youth by harming them

and/or murdering them. Findings from Tewksbury and Lees (2007) suggest that although

registered sex offenders see potential for registration legislation to reduce reoffending, they have

serious concerns about the efficacy and application of such laws, especially the idea that sex

offenders are a homogenous group. By having a registration system, it tends to make people

assume that all sex offenders are equal and have done equally awful things. This can lead to a

stigma being attached to the individual that can often lead to reoffending. For example, sex

offenders ostracized by angry community members have been found to experience a significant

amount of stress, depression, and hopelessness (Tewksbury & Lees, 2006), which could affect

their ability to function as successful members of society (Schiavone & Jeglic, 2009). Tewksbury

and Lees (2006) also discussed that there have been reports of relationship problems,

employment difficulties, and persistent feelings of stigma and vulnerability by sex offenders.

Research has found a link between sexual offending in the "real" world and solicitation

for sex in the virtual world. Walsh and Wolak (2005) found that" more than a quarter of the

online sexual predators had prior arrests for nonsexual offenses, and nine percent had prior

arrests for sexual offenses against minors. Three percent of sexual assault defendants were

registered sex offenders at the time of their crimes" (p. 264), and the majority of the defendants

had met their victims on the Internet. These Internet-initiated crimes followed a common pattern

(Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2004) in which offenders met victims in chat rooms and

developed relationships, which were often romantic or sexual, lasted a period of a month or

longer, and involved communicating via chat rooms, e-mails, and instant messages (Walsh &

Wolak, 2005). However, even though a link has been researched, it is still important to note the

ability of law enforcement to police these offenders is not the same in each location. These virtual world solicitations are not caught as much as they are in the real world. In 2006 there was an estimated 615 arrests for sex crimes involving the internet (online meetings) between offenders and teenage victims, compared to 28,226 arrests for all sex crimes against teen victims in the same year (Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Jones, 2010). This is not to say virtual world solicitations of teen victims do not happen as much as they do in the real world; the offenders may just not be apprehended as often in the virtual world.

On-line Sexual Offenders

The Internet often is useful when trying to locate needed information or items. Whether the item of need is a friend to talk to, a group of anonymous supporters, images of interest, or information about myriad topics, the internet can provide what people are looking for. As the Internet is a common place for individuals to go to gather information about nearly everything, the same is true for online sexual predators. The Internet provides a mechanism for pedophiles to identify and talk with others through user groups, Web forums, and chat rooms (Durkin & Bryant, 1999; Lanning, 1992). These sites provide a way for pedophiles to come together to validate their sexual interests, share information about their habits, and find support (and perhaps outlets) for their behaviors (Durkin & Bryant, 1999; Jenkins, 2001).

The online sexual predators engaging in internet communities are aware of their differences from society. The findings from a study on pedophiles' online behaviors by Holt, Blevins, and Burket (2010) suggest that "four normative orders—marginalization, sexuality, law, and security— shape relationships between pedophiles in these forums and in the larger society" (p. 18) which often times help them to relate to one another, as well as, find acceptance and

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guidance in their desires. Regarding the order of marginalization, pedophiles typically delineated themselves from the larger society. They often recognize that they are different and have stigmas attached to them. Certain language was used in forums to differentiate the pedophile from the non-pedophile. For example, "antis, anyone who does not believe in child love, anti–child sex Nazis, and anti–pedophile haters was used to refer to those individuals who did not support their views on sexual relationships with children" (p.8). And some even went so far as to suggest that "nonpedophiles represented the real problem in society" (Holt, Blevins, & Burket, 2010, p.8). These orders define pedophilic identity as well as the boundaries of their subcultures. They also affect the attitudes and beliefs of pedophiles and justify involvement in deviance through a rejection of larger social norms (Holt,et al., 2010). Regarding the order of sexuality, Holt et al.(2010) found that pedophiles would realize that their sexual attraction to young individuals was not accepted by society, but that sexual interest is the single characteristic that defined them. They would use this characteristic to seek out other individuals interested in the same subculture as themselves and discuss fetishes, children, sexual encounters with young friends, videos of children performing normal activities, children making connections with them, and various polls (Holt et al., 2010). Another important order identified in the pedophile subculture is the law. This was reflected in discussions of law enforcement initiatives concerning pedophilia, legal definitions of pedophilia, child pornography legislation, as well as court cases. This order emphasizes the influence of law in shaping the ways that pedophiles relate to children and others within and outside of their subculture (Holt et al., 2010). The order of security is closely related to the order of law. Pedophiles would discuss what they could and could not say. They often advised one another on what was allowable and where comments should and should not be

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posted because they were convinced that their forums were monitored by the police (Holt et al., 2010). Here, then, we can see that for sexual predators, the internet not only provides a ready supply of victims, but also a community to rationalize their behavior as well as assist them in being smarter about it.

Research has also considered how sexual offenders obtain victims online. Recently, scholars identified five primary methods sex offenders use to commit their crimes: (a) seduction or grooming, (b) child pornography production, (c) arranging meetings and other communication, (d) rewarding victims, and (e) advertising or selling victims (Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2005). According to Mitchell et al. (2005), seduction and grooming are the most common ways the Internet was used by family and acquaintance offenders. This was done through "online sexual conversations, sending sexual pictures to victims, fondling or holding victims while jointly viewing child or adult pornography, and using online pornography to show victims how to perform sexual acts" (p. 54). "Child pornography production was used by almost half of the offenders (43% overall; 49% of all family offenders and 39% of all acquaintance offenders) to store or disseminate produced child pornography images to other offenders online" (p. 54). Another way the Internet was used was used by sexual offenders was to arrange meetings and communicate with victims. Rewarding victims is still another way the Internet was used; this is simply offering a reward to potential victims if they go into the offender's home. Finally, "advertising or selling victims is when offenders used the Internet to advertise victims in prostitution cases or sell minors to other offenders" (p.55).

Some sex offenders use the Internet in addition to their preexisting relationship with the child (Mitchell et al., 2005). For example, family members or face-to-face acquaintances may

see their victims daily, but still use the internet to exploit them. This makes online victimization especially difficult to prevent, because while it is common for parents and authority figures (teachers, sitters, tutors) to teach children the dangers of strangers, is not unusual for the perpetrator to be within the family, a close friend, or an acquaintance, and therefore not a stranger.

Regarding the methods used by both family members, as well as strangers, Mitchell et al. (2010), found that SNSs were commonly used by sex offenders in a variety of ways to facilitate crimes against identified victims. SNSs are commonly used among members of society in general, but especially by youth. They are a way to share information about oneself and stay connected to family and friends. These SNSs were used for a number of ways by sex offenders but some of the ways include: to initiate a relationship, as a form of communication with victim, for dissemination of information or pictures of the victim, for accessing information about the victim, or to get in touch with friends of the victim (Mitchell et al., 2010). These researchers (Mitchell et al., 2010), also found that offenders who used SNSs were younger than those who did not, were more likely to be single and never married, were significantly less likely than other online offenders to be registered, were less likely to possess and produce child pornography, and are less likely to have problems with drugs or alcohol as compared to offenders who did not use SNSs.

The grooming process has been described as a way of blurring the lines between appropriate and inappropriate behaviors (Fleming, Greentree, Cocotti-Muller, Elias, & Morrison, 2006). This process gradually shifts material or contact that a child or adolescent considers inappropriate to something they accept (Young, 1997). The predator attempts to gain the

affection, interest, and trust of the victim and is sometimes considered to be a friend or even a mentor to the young person (Conte, Wolf, & Smith, 1989; Young, 1997). Research has suggested that some children and adolescents are likely to find this attention appealing. They have a strong desire to form relationships, to belong, and to gain attention, validation, and acceptance (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Dombrowski et al., 2004), often because they are troubled in the "real" world. Young (1997) suggests that the process of normalizing sexual and inappropriate behaviors means that the victim is less likely to tell anyone, because they see the behavior as normal, and therefore the predator does not have to resort to threats to keep the victim quiet. This allows the predator to keep that friendly/mentoring relationship going. To achieve this online, a predator may first form an affectionate bond with a vulnerable youngster, then progress from chatting to sexual comments, and then to the presentation of pornographic material designed to desensitize the victim (Fleming et al., 2006). Once the predator has groomed the victim fully, the predator moves on to requesting a face-to-face meeting.

Catching Online Sexual Predators

In order to catch these online predators, law enforcement personnel must use similar strategies as those used by their targets. This means going undercover and using the internet as their investigative location. One question that emerges, then, is what are the important aspects of this type of new undercover police work? These may be psychological aspects (e.g., how officers fend off temptations, how they handle the isolation and secrecy involved in their jobs, how they use their available discretion, stress) as well as social aspects (e.g., relationships with their families, friends, the police subculture) Another emerging question is what are the similarities and differences between this newer form of undercover work – posing as a potential

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victim online – and the more traditional type of undercover work – posing as a potential

offender within a group of suspected offenders?

<u>Nature of Undercover Work</u>

Fuller points out that the undercover mindset is completely opposed to the functions

performed by the uniformed officer (Wexler, 2004). When law enforcement personnel are in

their uniforms, they have widely recognized authority, but when they go undercover, they lose

their uniforms and their authority. They are no longer on a different level as the criminal they are

trying to apprehend, but are considered to be one of the criminals. The key to achieving a

successful undercover operation is the ability to adopt a role that is absolutely convincing

(Wexler, 2004). Since law enforcement personnel are required to play the role of the offender, it

is essential that they have certain traits. According to an interview of Hammack as cited in

Wexler (2004) these traits include individuals who can let go of the military structure of police

work, are quick-witted, have a gift of gab, and are intelligent and flexible. Wexler's (2004)

interview of Redman adds that "individuals must have extremely high moral fibers, the highest

integrity, be very disciplined, yet able to think quickly on their feet, able to easily blend into any

environment, able to make conversation with people who are strangers, be personable and

likeable, and have extremely good memories because they have to document information and

details of events after they have happened" (p. 2).

Another difference between undercover and patrol work is that undercover situations tend

to be more fluid and unpredictable than is the case with routine patrol or investigative work

(Marx, 1982). There is greater autonomy for undercover agents, and rules and procedures are

less clear. Further, the financial costs of mistakes or failure are much higher than in conventional

investigations (Marx, 1982).

According to an interview of Fuller, cited by Wexler (2004), the typical undercover team comprises three entities --surveillance, cover or "ghosts," and the undercover officer. The surveillance team is responsible for keeping a watchful eye on the undercover agent and targeted offender or offenders, electronically recording the conversations relayed from the remote transmitter, and recording detailed and accurate notes about all the activity at the undercover agent's meeting place (Wexler, 2004). The cover or the ghost team is usually near the undercover agent and it is their job to discreetly blend in around, carefully listen and survey what is transpiring, be on the lookout for anything that will hinder the undercover operation, and help the undercover agent if need be.

The character of undercover police work, then, with its isolation, secrecy, discretion, uncertainty, temptations, and need for suspicion, is frequently drawn upon to explain (1) poor relations between police and the community, (2) the presence of a police subculture in conflict with formal departmental policy, and (3) police stress symptoms (Marx, 1982). And, unlike conventional police work, activities by the undercover agent tend to involve only criminals, and the agent is always carrying out deception; thus, a criminal environment and criminal role models assume predominance in the officer's working life (Marx, 1982). The agent is encouraged to pose as a criminal (Marx, 1982). These characteristics and difficulties associated with undercover work are often times even more pronounced in the cases of completely submerged undercover work. In fact, the law enforcement personnel ability to blend in, resemble a criminal, and be accepted is vital to the operation's effectiveness. It serves as an indication that they are doing a good job.

Traditionally, undercover work has been used in a targeted fashion as part of a criminal investigation after a crime has occurred; where there is a suspect and his apprehension is the goal. Today, its range is broader, as undercover work has become part of efforts to anticipate crimes not yet committed, where there is as yet no particular suspect, and where deterrence is an important goal (Marx, 1982). Also, relevant is the goal of infiltrating a criminal enterprise, in order to learn their operations and subsequently arrest as many members (particularly leaders) of these organizations as possible.

In recent decades, police use of coercion has been increasingly restricted (e.g., forced confessions, illegal searches and seizures), causing their use of undercover deception to increase. These types of restrictions concerning police investigations after a crime occurs , have increased the attention paid to anticipating crimes and undercover work that one may enter into in order to prevent the crime (Marx, 1982). As long as nothing illegal has been specified at the current time a police officer is using his/her particular strategy they can try it in the interests of preventing crime or apprehending criminals (Panzarella & Funk, 1987).

Although undercover work seems to be less restricting than traditional police work, there are perhaps greater ethical considerations involved in undercover work. Undercover work is associated with constantly lying. As previously mentioned, the undercover agent is inserting himself into the life of crime, living beside the criminals, and acting as they do. Panzarella and Funk (1987) discuss Sissela Bok's (1979) ethical treatise on lies: Bok proposed four ways of justifying lies. The first and most acceptable justification for lying is to avoid harm to oneself or to others. The second is lying in order to produce benefits for oneself or for others. Fairness is the third justification for lies in the sense that it is justifiable to deceive someone who is also

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trying to be deceptive. Finally, the most difficult justification to support is the claim that

deception is necessary to get at the truth or to protect some truth-lying for the sake of the truth.

Deceptions based on the sorts of justifications noted by Bok are somewhat common in regular

police work (Panzarella & Funk, 1987), but they are very common in undercover operations

since the law enforcement officer is literally taking on a false persona in order to fit in with the

target. Due to the stress of constant deception, as well as the risks associated with undercover

work, it takes a special kind of person to maintain themselves and their undercover identities

throughout the operation. These individuals must undergo extremely serious selection processes

and training, and often suffer heavy repercussions during and after the undercover operation.

Selection and Training

Undercover work is being increasingly viewed as an important and innovative police

tactic carried out by carefully chosen, elite units (Marx, 1982; see however, Wexler, 2004)[1].

Although some, like Wexler (2004), argues that undercover officers usually learn the ins and

outs of working undercover on the job or through a limited amount of formal training. Scholars

suggest that any undercover investigations require a great deal of training and the commitment of

significant amounts of agency resources (Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2005). Most individuals

considered for this type of work go through many steps in a selection process to help ensure that

they are able to handle the unique demands that this job brings. For example, Macleod (1995)

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[1] An opposing view is in an interview of Fuller, cited in Wexler (2004). He suggests that "undercover police officers rarely receive the kind of intensive training afforded to other tactics such as crime scene investigation and SWAT operations" (p. 1). Fuller funded Covert Operations Program Specialists (COPS). Wexler also says that COPS is a consulting firm that provides undercover training courses for federal, state and local law enforcement agencies across the country because of the lack of training. "COPS draws upon the expertise of nearly 20 active and retired law enforcement professionals with decades of experience in performing and supervising undercover operations for federal, state and local police agencies, clinical and a forensic psychologist and even a professional TV actor and teacher" (p. 1).

found the selection process for undercover agents was typically conducted by a panel consisting of police administrators involved in the undercover program, former undercover agents, former undercover operators, and the consultant psychiatrist. All of these personnel played a vital role in selecting individuals well-suited for the job.

Repercussions
The literature points out many different types of repercussions that are often associated with undercover work. These repercussions can be physical, involving injury; emotional, involving embarrassment; or career oriented, involving an inability to adequately return to their lives before they began the undercover work. Police personnel working undercover assignments risk detection and violent retribution. In addition to this ever present danger, this work is physically, intellectually, and emotionally demanding (Macleod, 1995). There are many unpredictable traumas encountered in this work, together with a multiplicity of interpersonal variables and stressors within the police organization and police work (Macleod, 1995).

Physical
When thinking about dangers faced by undercover agents, the first one that comes to mind is physical harm. Some of these physical dangers are related to detection and being exposed as a police officer in an undercover role. If an undercover agent's cover is blown, for example, that agent could very easily be put in a life threatening situation (Macleod, 1995; Marx, 1982). Even more common, however, are many happenings that occur as part of the agents' undercover role. Since the very nature of undercover work is inserting ones' self into the criminal lifestyle desired to halt, dangers could exist. These dangers may include fighting, drug use, and alcoholism, all of which are associated with various physical injuries and/or diseases (Macleod, 1995). Also,

because undercover agents are without their uniforms, and different agencies tend not to communicate with one another about their cases, agents may unknowingly enforce the law against one another or have it enforced against themselves, sometimes with tragic consequences (Marx, 1982).

Emotional

Not all the dangers of operations are related to detection and being exposed as a police officer in an undercover role, exposure to the fear of failure, with the associated embarrassment and 'loss of face' are also major risks that many agents face (Macleod, 1995). The pure idea of failing for most people will cause them distress. Being detected before the operation is completed can cost the agency the entire case. Also, since the undercover agent is immersed in the criminal lifestyle, personal relationships tend to form on some level with the targets of the undercover operation. As positive personal relationships develop with the targets, agents may experience guilt, and ambivalence may develop over the betrayal when it comes time for the agents to take down their target (Marx, 1982).

Sometimes, undercover work can start to interfere with one's personality, causing the individual to become narcissistic. Working undercover can at times be as addictive as taking drugs (Wexler, 2004) due to the adrenaline rush experienced. Since the work is always "on" and the undercover agent is always maintaining his alternate persona, the work itself can almost become addicting; especially as the undercover agent comes to enjoy the sense of power that the role offers and its protected contact with the illegal activity the agent is involved in (Marx, 1982). Wexler (2004) mentions that the more successful one becomes as an undercover agent, the more confident that person becomes and the more they are compelled to do undercover work.

At the extreme, undercover work may produce debilitating emotional injury. Agents can suffer traumatic experiences and may be reticent, or unable to acknowledge the need for assistance. Compliance with treatment is also often a major obstacle (Macleod, 1995). Undercover agents often times will not realize when they have become depressed or are in need of help, even if the agency has already set-up a psychologist to help with the affects of this type of work. These dilemmas are essentially symptoms of the disorder and the distress, and sadly, those who may require therapy most may be the most resistant to accept patient status (Macleod, 1995). For example, the majority of the individuals who suffered some type of emotional distress created by undercover work either declined offers of treatment or were reluctant, elusive, and unsuccessful attenders; this illustrates that the risks of undercover work not only involve psychiatric illness and readjustment problems, but also the rejection of the safety net in place to minimize these risks (Macleod, 1995).

Career Stability

Many times, the agents who went undercover and completed their assignments have problems with their subsequent careers. These problems may lead to medical leave or even early retirement. Persisting narcissistic reactivity and alcohol and/or drug misuse were the main clinical reasons cited for undercover agents' job termination (Macleod, 1995). Beyond the threat of physical danger from discovery, there may be severe social and psychological consequences for police officers who play undercover roles for an extended period of time. (Marx, 1982) Consistently being a criminal may increase cynicism and ambivalence about the police role and make it easier to rationalize the use of illegal and immoral means (Marx, 1982). This can be seen in examples given by Marx (1982):

"A northern California police officer who participated in a 'deep cover' operation

for a year and a half riding with the Hell's Angels. He was responsible for a very

large number of arrests, including heretofore almost untouchable high-level drug

dealers, and was praised for doing a 'magnificent job'; but this came at a cost of

heavy drug use, alcoholism, brawling, the break-up of his family, an inability to

fit back into routine police work after the investigation was over, resignation from

the force, several bank robberies, and a prison term" (p. 177). Other examples are:

a Chicago policeman whose undercover work involved posing as a pimp and

infiltrating a prostitution ring. He continued in the pimp role after the

investigation ended and was suspended. A member of an elite drug enforcement

unit in the Boston area became an addict and retired on a disability pension (p.

177-178.)

Online Undercover Policing

As noted, undercover work involves a lot of potential costs and benefits. The individual

may suffer physically, emotionally, or lose their career from beginning or completing an

undercover operation. An agency may have its operation exposed, waste the resources invested,

and/or lose a valuable employee. However, if the operation is successfully completed, the

criminal subculture or individual is apprehended and their future crimes are prevented. So,

although the costs may be high, undercover operations are able to apprehend a large number of

offenders and thus it is an import aspect in police work. Undercover operations are beginning to

appear in other areas of law enforcement. For example, agencies have been dabbling in virtual

undercover work. One of the most notable virtual undercover operations would be the units set

up to catch online sexual predators. It is important to note that while research has highlighted

some similarities between traditional and virtual undercover work, differences also exist. They

are similar because in both types of undercover operations, the agents are taking on other

personas, they are attempting to apprehend the "bad guy," and they both still face the

repercussions. The biggest difference is that in the traditional type, the law enforcement

personnel is face-to-face with the subculture—they are literally constantly living the criminal

lifestyle; in the other type, the law enforcement personnel is behind a computer—more removed

from the subculture. S/he is able to go home at night, go out in public without fear of detection,

and potentially converse with friends and colleagues while working undercover. In essence, the

very nature of this type of undercover work could be substantially different from more traditional

assignments. This almost certainly will affect the repercussions felt by the law enforcement

personnel as a result of their undercover assignments.

Online Units

Given the growth in and harm from online sexual victimization of youth, law enforcement

agencies have developed special units as ways to try and stop online sexual predation before it

reaches unsuspecting youth. Undercover investigations on the Internet can be conducted in a

variety of ways. These include: having investigators pose online as minors, often called proactive

investigations because the police may have an opportunity to capture suspects before a youth has

been victimized ; investigators may also pose online as mothers of young children who are

seeking men to teach their children about sex. Undercover investigations also occur when police

find out youth have been solicited by adults. These are often called reactive or take-over

investigations since investigators go online, taking over the youth's, who was solicited, profile or

posing as another youth, while still targeting the original suspect (Mitchell et al., 2005). Another way law enforcement personnel target offenders is by posing online as child pornography traders or sellers (Mitchell et al., 2005).

Undercover work involves a method where an investigator looks for criminal activity by inserting him or herself into the lives of people intent on engaging in illegal behavior (Girodo, Deck, & Morrison, 2002). The investigator pretends to be someone else by falsifying his or her true identity and developing a trust and acceptance by the targeted individual (Mitchell et al., 2005), almost as if they were grooming the predator. This undercover method is used in both the real world as well as the virtual world. As in the real world, there is a fine line law enforcement must walk to ensure they are catching only already ill-minded offenders and not entrapping naïve adults.

Not much research has examined how these investigations are carried out. However, Mitchell et al., (2005) found that most investigators posed as female adolescents with the majority posing as age 12 or older. Most investigators met their targets in chat rooms, through Internet Relay Chat, or through instant messages. Nearly half of all the investigations began in sex-oriented chat rooms. Multiple forms of online communication exists between targets and investigators and were seen in 87% of these investigations; typically these communications were through chat rooms, instant messages, and e-mail. The length of time the investigator communicated with the targets was typically short, lasting one month or less in more than half of the cases and between 1 and 6 months prior to the arrest in about a third of the cases. The number of online interactions between the investigator and the target was usually 10 or less, however in cases, the target was more demanding or weary causing online interactions to

increase. In these cases, the online interactions where between 11 and 30 times. "When meeting face-to-face, the targets often brought sex-related items such as contraceptives and/or lubricant or sexual devices (e.g., a dildo) with them" (Mitchell et al., 2005, p. 252).

Continuing, Mitchell et al., (2005) found that proactive investigations typically began in chat rooms or through instant messaging and developed rather quickly. When compared with cases involving juvenile victims, investigators appeared to be using appropriate age identities. They also used male identities, which is consistent with the pattern of juvenile victims. The majority of offenders arrested for sex crimes against juvenile victims and proactive investigations solicited through chat rooms. Those proactive investigations conducted through chat rooms tended to be clearly sexually oriented. "An estimated 644 arrests were made in the United States during proactive investigations on the Internet in the one-year period beginning July 1, 2000…represents 25% of all arrests for Internet sex crimes against minors, approximately 2,577 in the same time frame" (Mitchell et al., 2005, p. 251). For proactive investigations, this is likely linked to a higher likelihood of bringing up sex or sexual topics, generally in the very first online interaction. This raises the possibility that more successful offenders (i.e., those who do not get caught) work outside of sex-oriented chat rooms and are not being caught. It is possible that police are catching naive offenders in sex-oriented chat rooms who have not developed the grooming techniques necessary for pursuing a relationship with a teenager (Mitchell et al., 2005).

Another way law enforcement has attempted to combat the virtual world of online child solicitation is by using SNSs. According to Mitchell et al., (2010) "most of these cases were initiated in chat rooms (82%), whereas 7% were initiated through the investigator's SNSs, 1% through the offender's, and the remaining were initiated through other online venues (e.g.,

instant messaging, online want ads)" (p.3). Investigators typically had web pages or profiles on

SNSs that were used by offenders to: get information about the impersonated minors' likes and

interests, get information about the impersonated minors' whereabouts at a specific time, and

look at pictures of the impersonated minor (Mitchell et al., 2010).

THE PRESENT STUDY

There is a lot of research regarding who sex offenders are, the consequences for them of having to register (e.g., where they live, whether or not they are in violation of their registration restrictions) (Levenson & Cotter, 2006; Nieto & Jung, 2006; Meloy, Miller, & Curtis, 2008; and Mustaine, Tewksbury, & Stengel, 2006a), and some of the specific types of stigmas and informal social control they experience after release (Tewksbury & Lees, 2006; and Schiavone & Jeglic, 2009). What has not been studied as thoroughly are the efforts of law enforcement agencies to preemptively catch sex offenders. Other research has examined the nature of undercover work, and the law enforcement officers who assume false identities in order to catch offenders, particularly regarding crimes involving drugs, firearms, and criminal networks (Marx, 1982; Panzarella & Funk, 1987; and Wexler, 2004). What has not been studied in depth is the internet as a location for undercover work. Additionally, previous scholarly work has not brought these two somewhat disparate areas of research (at least until recently) together and addressed law enforcement efforts to catch online sexual offenders. Specifically, there is only minimal research answering such questions as who these law enforcement personnel are who try to snag online sexual predators, how they feel about working in the virtual world, what they think about their positions, how they got to their positions, how their jobs affect their personal lives outside of work, what kinds of training they go through, and what their jobs entail. Answering these questions is the intent of the present study. In doing so, the present study will contribute to the current literature in the areas of online sex offenders and how law enforcement attempts to catch them, as well as an examination of the internet as a location for undercover work.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Telephone interviews were conducted with 17 individuals who are members of the special units that law enforcement personnel use to catch online sexual predators. The sample comes from several areas in the United States and does not focus on one level of government enforcement over another. Individuals were obtained through snowball sampling and the use of the list of task force agencies provided on the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Website. The criterion for participation was that the individual worked (currently) with a sex crime unit, and that his/her primary realm of enforcement was the virtual world.

Data

This study was found to be exempt by the University of Central Florida's Internal Review Board (see appendix A and B). The responses of the sample to the interview instrument comprise the data for this project. Specifically, the interview schedule consists of forty questions (see appendix C). The interview schedule focuses on six aspects of the law enforcement personnel life: individual, home life, training, details about the job, undercover aspects, and demographics.

The first part of the interview contains 12 broad questions with more detailed follow-ups when relevant and focuses on the respondent. During this part of the interview, individuals answered questions concerning their backgrounds, how they became part of their units, their schedules, and the agencies for which they work. The next part of the interview shifts the focus to the law enforcement personnel home lives. In this section, questions focus on relationship statuses, children, and social lives. This section contains five broad questions with more detailed

follow-ups when relevant. The third section inquires about the law enforcement personnel

training. There are two broad questions with more detailed follow-ups when relevant in this

section that focus on where or from whom they received their training, as well as what type of

training it was and what the content was. The fourth section relates to the respondents' jobs.

Questions here contain strategies used, sites patrolled, and how the respondents identify their

targeted. There are 13 broad questions with more detailed follow-ups when relevant in this

section. The fifth section encompasses four broad questions with more detailed follow-ups when

relevant about the undercover aspects of the law enforcement personnel units and job tasks. The

questions here solicit respondents' thoughts on whether or not they think their jobs are

undercover, how their jobs relate to other undercover jobs, and if they consider their job to be

risky. The interview concludes by asking three demographic questions.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed so as to better search, review, and highlight the respondents'

answers. The interviews were conducted via telephone. The researcher typed the answers the

respondents gave during the interview and then cleaned up the typing afterwards. The interviews

were then printed and read through, compared, and analyzed the answers looking for patterns and

exceptions. The researcher highlighted responses to be used in this research and compiled the

statistics manually. Also, the researcher made an excel document that contains all of the

respondents answers to each question. As such, data analysis was qualitative, as patterns in

responses were identified, highlighted, and discussed. In order to underscore some of the

stronger or more important qualitative findings as well as provide summary descriptions, the

researcher used measures of central tendency and frequencies.

FINDINGS

The researcher interviewed individuals from the states of Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, New Mexico, Ohio, Texas, Wyoming, Maryland, Idaho, Virginia, Oregon, and Iowa. The researcher spent time working in a law enforcement environment and maintained contact with some coworkers. One of the previous coworkers supplied the researcher with a contact who was able to give the researcher more possible contacts who fit the criteria of this research. The research called these contacts and received the first interview. The first individual interviewed then referred the researcher to the ICAC website where there is a list of Regional ICAC Task Force Agency Contacts in the United States. The researcher went down the list calling each agency asking to interview an individual who met the criteria previously mentioned in the methods sample section.

The results of all the interviews provided some in-depth and highly interesting information about the job of law enforcement personnel who goes undercover in the virtual world in order to preemptively catch online sexual predators. Below is a full description of the stories and commentary provided by the law enforcement respondents concerning their demographics, their individual positions and histories, their home life, training, details about their jobs, and the undercover aspects of their jobs as well as the location of their work (the internet). Also below is Table One, which provides some brief information about all of the respondents.

Demographics

The interviewed individuals were between the ages of 31 and 58. The average age of respondents was 43 years old. Fifteen were male and two were female. Sixteen respondents were Caucasian and one was Hispanic. Forthwith, when discussion notes, "all respondents," this means 100% of the respondents.

Individual

All of the individuals interviewed were part of units that employed proactive undercover chatting (UC) with sexual predators. However, they all came to those positions from different sized agencies and different backgrounds. They all had some form of college education, and most, seven, had a Bachelor's degree. Even so, three did not complete a degree, two had an Associate's degree, and five had a Master's degree. Ten of the respondents had volunteered for their current positions with the UC units. Among the seven respondents who did not volunteer, six were placed or promoted to that position and one accidently fell into the position by being involved in a narcotics investigation that led into a sexual predator investigation. His unit caught a dope dealer on Myspace™. He had been watching the television show, To Catch a Predator, and decided to make a profile of a 13 year old girl. It did not take long before he started catching people and decided to take it all to the Attorney General. The Attorney General helped develop his new unit dedicated to catch sexual predators. All respondents agreed that this position is one that is sought after among those officers who have the drive and passion for solving these types of crimes. But all respondents noted that this position is not for everyone and a lot of law enforcement officers do not have any interest in it.

Respondents also noted that there is more to catching online sexual predators than simply chatting online with these offenders. It continues with issuing search warrants, holding and

attending meetings, making arrests, and conducting interviews/interrogations; all of the respondents also noted that child pornography is associated with this position, so horrific images are seen on a daily basis. It was a general consensus among those interviewed that a lot of officers do not know what this job entails until they are actually part of the unit. One respondent even mentioned that this position is glamorized just like CSIs (Crime Scene Investigators). For example, CSI shows are on the television constantly and always show beautiful people with expensive looking clothes and vehicles who perform their jobs so perfectly that just about every case is solved within the hour the show airs. This position is so extensively shown that there was a growth in desire to be a CSI. However, these glamorized accounts rarely show the truth behind the job, the actual stress that comes with caseload, the amount of cases usually being worked at one time, the horrific images, or the true outcome being that some things are not solved.

All the interviewed individuals were very content with their decisions to be on this unit, and all intended to stay with this assignment for as long as they were able. The most common reasons for their satisfaction were they felt they were making a difference and protecting youth. For example, John[2] indicated "I like the satisfaction of taking these perverts off the streets!" Patrick echoed this by stating, "I feel like I am making the internet a safer place for children". Dean commented, "It's about making a difference. Even if they haven't touched a child yet, I may prevent it from happening." One respondent mentioned that this unit is the most fun he has ever had because it is ever changing and always interesting. Respondents were also asked what they did not like about working the online chat unit. Eight respondents stated "Seeing the child pornography images over and over." Dean exclaimed, "Hardest thing to deal with is the high

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[2] All names have been changed.

quality video and audio of children being raped." Some other reasons were contacting the victims and learning how it affected them, contacting the parents of the child and explaining what had happened to the child, and not having enough resources or time to get all the perpetrators they know are out there.

Regarding the types of skills that officers on these units needed to have (or not have), most respondents noted that having a background with computers was not completely necessary to be hired into this type of unit. All of the respondents explained that while it doesn't hurt to have a general knowledge of computers, the specific technical aspects will be taught through training. Dean said, "You can learn it all when you get here." Matt said, "We can train investigators to work with computers, but few computer experts can become investigators." However, Chad explained, "You don't need to be a computer nerd or programmer but you do need to know something, the rest you will learn pretty quickly." Some other skills that were mentioned included having prior law enforcement experience, investigative skills, knowledge of the legal system, patience, mental stability, and the ability to work alone or in groups.

Concerning the work schedule for this type of position, all respondents explained that the majority of the officers on the unit worked Monday through Friday. However, the hours given were all different and ranged from 6:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The most common time given was 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. by three respondents. However a few officers have to work overnight shifts. It was also touched on that sometimes they needed to be online at different hours because, essentially, their case denotes their work hours. Therefore, their work hours are generally pretty flexible. Whether the work schedule was affected by the school schedule (since they were posing as children who would be in school during the day) was undecided among the respondents. Some

officers, five, agreed that it was most certainly affected, and it was much easier to catch these offenders in the summer, while others, twelve, maintained that most of the sexual predators never really bothered with the school subject. One respondent said, "All these guys have on their minds is one thing and one thing only. The question of why am I not in school rarely comes up and if it does, I just tell them I am home schooled or sick"

Respondents were also asked about their views regarding where they were allowed to conduct their job duties. All respondents agreed that they had to be in their office, a government building, or in another police department before they were allowed to perform any of the particulars of child exploitation investigations: UC, peer to peer (P2P), child pornography, etc. However, four individuals did say that they could perform their job duties from other locations. These locations included a police car or at home. All four did say that in order to perform their jobs in other locations, they had to get permission from their supervisors and there had to be a very good reason for it. Interestingly, five respondents also noted that their child exploitation investigations can never be done at home. When the job duties concerned paperwork, like writing reports, they could do it from any location they wanted.

Regarding length of time officers could be assigned to the online sex crime unit, only one officer interviewed said that his agency, had stipulations on how long they were allowed to be assigned to this unit. In this particular agency the stipulation was three years. This officer explained that this stipulation was not something that was required though; the stipulation was pretty much only there so that if a person was not pulling his weight after the three year mark, he could be reassigned to another unit. If the individual was working out well on the unit and the three years came up, he would just be renewed.

Since many undercover units require officers to attend periodic mandatory counseling, respondents were asked about this. Only two respondents worked in agencies where there was mandatory counseling. Both respondents told the researcher they are required to go through counseling every six months. Two respondents did not have any requirements. Nine respondents worked in agencies that did not require counseling, but did make it available if it was needed. Even so, three respondents were in agencies that recommended officers get periodic counseling, and one agency required counseling for any supervisors, but not for any other officer on the unit. Table One follows and is a description of the 17 respondents in the present study.

Table 1
Characteristics of Respondents

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Education	Married	Years Married	Number Children	Children Ages (in years)	Years in Law Enforcement	How on Unit	State
John	Male	42	Caucasian	Masters	Yes	3	1	1.75	20	Promoted	ID
Sean	Male	44	Caucasian	Associates	Yes	.25	2	23 and 17	23	Accident	NM
Sally	Female	41	Caucasian	Bachelors	Yes	10	2	9 and 5	14	Volunteered	NM
Danny	Male	51	Caucasian	Bachelors	Yes	27	1	22	29	Volunteered	TX
Stephen	Male	51	Caucasian	Bachelors	No	—	2	14 and 11	29	Promoted	DE
Dean	Male	36	Caucasian	Some College	Yes	13	2	6 and 3	16	Volunteered	MD
Timothy	Male	35	Caucasian	Bachelors	Yes	12	2	8 and 6	12	Promoted	OH
Fred	Male	48	Caucasian	Masters	No	—	1	22	23	Promoted	FL
Chris	Male	53	Caucasian	Some College	Yes	10	5	32, 30, 26, 24 and 22	27	Volunteered	OR
Matt	Male	58	Caucasian	Masters	Yes	30	No	—	31	Volunteered	WY
Patrick	Male	33	Caucasian	Bachelors	Yes	3.5	1	2.5	7	Promoted	KY
Frank	Male	53	Caucasian	Some College	Yes	34	3	25, 17, and 11	23	Placed	VA
Chad	Male	31	Caucasian	Masters	Yes	4	1	2	5	Volunteered	KY

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Education	Married	Years Married	Number Children	Children Ages (in years)	Years in Law Enforcement	How on Unit	State
Tony	Male	36	Hispanic	Masters	Yes	18	1	5	16	Volunteered	FL
Susie	Female	42	Caucasian	Associates	Yes	11	3	8, 6, and 4	12	Volunteered	IA
Jim	Male	37	Caucasian	Bachelors	Yes	8	1	3	10	Volunteered	FL
Scott	Male	45	Caucasian	Bachelors	Yes	23	2	7 and 12	20	Volunteered	TX
Mean		43.29				13.78	1.86		18.65		

Home Life

Fifteen of the individuals interviewed were married, but the length of the marriage varied from 3 months to 34 years, with the average length of marriage being 13.78 years. Two respondents were in relationships. All the married respondents agreed that their spouses respected their jobs and supported them. Most of the individuals explained that they did not share the content, or any of the details, of their work with their spouses, but that their significant others understood what their jobs entailed and were happy that somebody was getting these sexual predators off the streets. John stated, "My wife does not like the content of my work, but understands that somebody has to do it." Timothy said, "My wife is fine with me working this job because she knows it is something I enjoy doing and am passionate about." Dean mentioned that his wife is a dispatcher for the state police and he has even used her picture for his profiles. Sometimes he hangs up the predators' picture on the refrigerator so his wife "can see her boyfriend of the week," as he calls it. Another respondent, Chris, laughed and said, "Oh she doesn't mind it, but if you ask her what should be done with these guys when we catch them, she will tell you and it isn't exactly legal."

Concerning other members of the respondents' families, all but one individual had children. The ages of the respondents' children varied from 19 months to 32 years old. And, respondents had from zero children to six children, with the average being 1.86 children. When asked if having children made a difference with their job performances, mixed responses were received. Some, five, said not really. For example, Stephen said, "Not really, having children didn't influence me. What did was that I am targeting sick individuals; I am helping society by taking a bad offender off the streets. I do limit computer access more and go overboard a bit on

other protection issues, but that's because I know what goes on." The others just said it did not affect their performance. Nine mentioned that having children makes their jobs more personal and gives them more of a drive to catch these sexual predators. Sean mentioned that having a daughter has helped him know how to act. Timothy mentioned that, "It hits home more. I think about my own kids when I am conducting these investigations. Kids are constantly getting cell phones earlier and getting online earlier. Just the porn that I see gives me more of a drive knowing that I have children that age." John described that the first time he held his little girl he wondered how anybody could harm a child. "That is when it became more personal," he said. Sally explained that it helps her relate. "If anything happened to my child, I would want somebody to work the case." One respondent said having children both did and did not make a difference. "I would feel this work is important whether I had children or not but often do think of my children when interacting with the predators and how I would feel if this person were saying or doing some of the things I have seen to my own children" remarked Susie.

Concerning how their jobs affected their family lives, respondents had both positive and negative views. Many, 13, said that they were more protective of their children: they wouldn't let them go out to the mall alone, get on the internet without supervision, or talk or hang out with people they (the officers) do not know. Interestingly, 14 of the respondents were not sure if their jobs had a positive or negative effect on their families. One response that was viewed unanimously as having a positive impact on their families was that they are able to spend more time with their families.[3]

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[3] The numbers of respondents answering each question may not always total 17. This is because some respondents answered single questions in multiple ways, and some respondents answered questions in unique ways that did not fit the pattern noted and discussed.

All respondents agreed that they were able to keep work at work. Thus, they were able to come home after chatting with sexual offenders and viewing child pornography without letting it interfere with their family and social lives. Fourteen agreed that it was not hard to leave work at work because they could not conduct any of the investigations with which they were involved from home. Sally mentioned that it is sometimes hard because she wants to talk about her day with her husband, but can't. Further, six of the respondents also said that they were able to mentally switch gears and leave all their work behind because they had worked in the unit for so long that they were highly experienced in all aspects of the job. Chris said that it was just experience that taught him to separate the two. He tries not to bring anything home unless there is an interesting story.

However, five indicated that they were unable (or unwilling) to keep home at home. For example, they liked to have pictures of their families on their desks and to receive phone calls from their spouses throughout the day.

When asked about how their jobs influenced their social lives, eleven respondents claimed that most of their friends also tended to be in law enforcement. This was not thought to be a positive or a negative influence from the job. Three respondents noted that their friends will sometimes be curious and want to know about the investigations. This was generally not liked because law enforcement is legally not allowed to talk about open investigations, and the content of their investigations are often times horrific. However, all respondents claimed that with their flexible work schedules they were able to hang out with their friends more often than when they had worked in other law enforcement positions. This was positive just as it was for family.

__Training__

All respondents agreed that training was offered for this type of position; however, respondents felt that the training was weak in some areas but very expansive in others. Additionally, most training was a part of ICAC and offered in sessions at a yearly conferences and throughout the year. To elaborate, respondents noted that ICAC offers training in many different areas, but there is more emphasis for some of these areas than others. For example, at the annual conference, there were plenty of sessions on child pornography but not many on UC.

In all, respondents received many different types of training in conjunction with their assignments in the sex crimes units. The types of training that respondents received included: undercover chatting, techniques used by online sexual predators, strategies law enforcement can use to be more effective, Internet sites, cyber investigation, undercover machines, forensics, search and seizures, interviews and interrogations, evidence, search warrants, guidelines, legalities, information technology, internet protocol (IP) addresses, operating systems, computer hardware, file structure, data recovery, and many more. Regarding the form that their training took all of the respondents agreed that the training is face-to-face instruction. Further, within the face-to-face sessions, many (like the undercover chatting) offer hands-on learning so the participants can see exactly how to log into different chat rooms, or set up multiple profiles.

The length of time their training courses lasted varied. Some of the training sessions lasted a day, while other sessions that lasted three or four days. Then there is the annual conference that lasts a week or more. All of these training sessions are through ICAC and offered all over the United States. ICAC has an annual conference that is held each year in a different location. This is where there are training sessions on everything related to internet crimes against children and not just one specialized area like the couple-day-long trainings. All respondents also

mentioned that in addition to the ICAC training, they learn on-the-job. Many of the respondents also kept up with technology and youth by training on their own. Nine respondents read court cases, research articles, past chats, and studies. Media was another area focused on. This is how law enforcement personnel keep current on what children are interested in. One responded mentioned that his unit has subscription to teen and preteen magazines.

The amount of training officers received was highly varied, with nine individuals agreeing that they attended some form of training monthly or bimonthly for an annual total of perhaps 100 hours. One however, logged over 300 hours of training each year. Also, one respondent indicated that he had never had any formal training for chatting. The rest of the respondents stated that they receive training ranging from "as needed" to" all the time." All the individuals agreed that the training was helpful. Nevertheless, three respondents said that they found some aspects of training to be a hindrance. "Being away from home for as long as some (training) take is the only hindrance," explained Patrick. Stephen also mentioned that sometimes it can be too technical, or the speakers don't teach enough. Other things mentioned were glitches in the systems when the teachers are teaching, and that not everything goes according to plan.

Details about the Job

All of the individuals interviewed did more online than just chatting. They all also performed P2P investigations. This type of investigation is a way to find people who invest in child pornography. Respondents were also involved in traveling cases—which is when the target travels to meet the undercover officer, thinking he is a child. Other job duties noted by all respondents involved investigating tips forwarded to them from the cyber tip line, conducting reactive investigations—which is when they get a complaint, from a parent for example, that

some person has contacted a child. This type of investigation involves the undercover officer

taking over the child's instant messaging name and talking to the suspect to see what that

person's intentions are. Child exploitation cases involving the internet in anyway, are also part

of the job. And, of course, all respondents noted that they had to complete hours of paperwork.

One respondent told a story about an online website. He said, "Two young girls had been

reported for running away. One was fifteen and one was thirteen. The parents seemed very

concerned and wanted to get them back. As the case developed, he found out that one of the girls

was pregnant. This led to some investigation which is when they found that the father had been

using the internet to put them out. She was impregnated from one of those guys that the dad

made her have sex with. The parents wanted their daughters back so they could keep using them

for income." P2P cases involve file sharing sites like Limewire®. One respondent said he gets

thousands of images a day. Once somebody has these files and shares them, one can see what

they have. He also claimed, "These people don't accidently download child porn. If you go onto

LimeWire and type in child porn, you are not going to get many hits. The subculture has

acronyms they use and you won't know these acronyms unless you are one of us or one of

them!" UC will sometimes lead to a traveling case. This is when the sexual predator will travel a

distance to meet up with what they believe is a child. Sally explained that, "We often times use a

decoy house, but sometimes we just meet them where they want, but we generally make them

come to us. I have had guys travel four hours to meet me before. Often times they try to tell me,

when they find out I am not 13, that they were just going to talk!" Another respondent has set up

an undercover operation through Yahoo! Groups. He cleverly made a group and named it a name

that again, only the subculture would understand or know what it was. He made it so the group

creator, himself, had to approve or deny entrance into the group. The only way to be allowed in

was to send the creator three child pornography images. He claimed, "I had so many emails full

of child porn. It was the easiest bust we have ever done because every email has an IP address

attached. These guys are not the smartest!" Concerning reactive cases, law enforcement will

sometimes take over a child's screen name and keep chatting with the predator. However, often

times, they end up having to pose as moms and dads trying to solicit their son or daughter out, or

as moms or dads who are talking to somebody who is attempting to allow them to have sex with

their son or daughter. A respondent stated, "You know, I am not always a child. I would say

about 30% of the time I am posing as an adult. It kind of makes it easier, but it is more

aggravating. Children are naïve; adults generally know what they are doing!"

Nevertheless, one of the aspects of the respondents' jobs entailed online chatting to

search out potential sexual predators. The most common strategies for UC was entering a chat

room and waiting for someone to instant message them and maintaining a large online presence

through multiple Internet sites. Since all respondents were assuming the identity(ies) of

adolescents, keeping their covers believable and intact required the use of technology as well as

knowledge of the current youth culture. They all used pictures to keep their online images real.

Since these pictures had to be from individuals who worked in law enforcement, they could use

pictures that had been age regressed or pictures from the officer's youth. They all used chat

acronyms (lol-laugh out loud, rofl-rolling on the floor laughing, brb-be right back, etc.),

misspelled words, incorrect grammar (not capitalizing every word that should be capitalized and

not using proper punctuation) in order to appear more youthful.

Additionally, due to the fact that most, 15, of the respondents were male and portrayed

female youth, the majority did not contact sexual offenders by the phone, however, when they felt they had to talk to their targets, they used female coworkers to do the actual talking to the sexual predator on the phone. Only two individuals had used webcams to make contact with their suspects. These two were male. One accomplished this by putting duct tape over the lens and telling the person he was chatting with that the feed was showing up on his computer so it must be their computer that has a problem. The other respondent explained that he uses scotch tape over the lens to blur everything out. But, all respondents agreed that they would accept the invitation to watch a webcam. This way they could have a picture which most often makes their case against the perpetrator stronger. An email was also something many wanted because emails come with IP addresses. Although the respondents all agreed that chat rooms were where they spent most of their time, they also patrolled SNSs and other areas on the Internet. As examples, one individual set up a group in Yahoo® Groups to catch child pornography traders, another went into gaming sites like Second Life®, still one went into Craigslist®. When reactive investigations come up, often times gaming site (World of Warcraft®) or gaming platform (XBOX™) may be used.

Fourteen respondents agreed that it does not take multiple times of communicating to figure out if the person they are talking to is a sexual predator or not. For example, John said, "They are very direct with what they want." Chris echoed this, "They will bring up sex within the first few lines or at least in the first 10 minutes." Chad agreed that, "If they continue to talk with me after they know my age; I need to keep an eye on them and continue chatting." Two respondents agreed that it depends on the individual. Still, one respondent exclaimed "Sometimes the relationship has to develop a bit so they believe you are real." How respondents

knew they were talking to a sexual predator was more defined, eight said it was how they talked

and the questions they asked (a/s/l-age, sex, location; have you ever had sex, did you enjoy it,

etc.) and nine expressed that they know they need to keep talking when the guy knows their

"age" and keeps talking. Communication was facilitated through multiple methods. The most

common, 11 respondents, was through chat, followed by email, texting, phone calls, SNSs, and

webcams.

While there was a vast disagreement on what strategy was most effective, all but five

respondents said the various strategies were all at least somewhat effective. One respondent

noted an exception to this, however. His agency attempted an undercover proactive investigation

in Second Life®. Second Life® is a virtual environment where people are able to make an

avatar—a digital copy of oneself to reflect whatever physical traits one wishes to have—that

lives in a world where there are few rules or norms. In this investigation, officers made avatars

and tried to identify possible sexual predators. The respondent felt that this particular

investigation/strategy was ineffective because it took too long, used too many resources, and was

not as effective as simply locating online sexual predators via chatting sites. Other strategies

given that were not as effective were: portraying a boy is not as effective as portraying a girl,

portraying an individual that you are not familiar with (know the school you tell the person you

go to), being too aggressive with the conversation, and using SNSs to catch sexual predators

(they are good bolsters but not for catching).

Among all respondents, the average percentage of arrests that were made after

individuals became targets was between 90%-95%. This was most likely due to the fact that the

target had crossed the line at one point or another during their conversation with an undercover

law enforcement officer. This, then, permitted law enforcement to start a more official investigation to find out more on the individual via subpoenas and/or background checks. In order to be this successful in their investigations all respondents agreed that they had to adhere to the guidelines set forth by ICAC. All respondents also mentioned that they must, at all costs, avoid entrapment and enticement.

The legalities of investigations are crucial to the way that law enforcement officers were able to work online undercover. Officers are not allowed to initiate the first conversation with any person, but they are allowed to initiate any subsequent conversations (thus avoiding entrapment). Law enforcement officers are also not allowed to initiate any sexual talk or relationship talk, but they are allowed to respond to it if the person they are chatting with brings it up first (thus avoiding enticement). There are also state laws that they respondents must follow and ICAC guidelines. A general rule that was mentioned from eight respondents is that one cannot portray a child negatively. Regarding general strategies then, all respondents agreed that they did not target anyone in particular in their investigations; rather they waited for online individuals to engage them. When this happened, the officers paid attention to any signs that individual showed of potential sexual predation. Here, only at the point the officers began chatting with individuals that they suspected may be sexual predators, did those persons become targets. When they had stronger evidence that any particular target was indeed a sexual predator, they generally ended up arresting that person. However, in some cases the target avoided arrest because they stopped communication and "virtually" disappeared.

Regarding the amount of time it took to catch a sexual predator, all respondents explained that it was completely dependent upon the sexual predator. Patrick explained, "It depends on

how quickly they feel like they can trust that you are not a cop." Stephen agreed with, "It depends on the individual and how you click with him." While the most common response given by eight respondents was one day (one day was used in conjunction with another time period, giving a time period that it might take to catch an online sexual predator), the time ranged from four hours to two years. Danny stated, "There is no good answer for how long it takes to catch one of these guys, it takes as long or as short as it takes. A case is built upon obtaining evidence within the guidelines of the law and it can happen within a day or weeks."

Most of the respondents, 14, explained that the grooming process can be relatively short or nonexistent. Most often, if there is a grooming process at all, it lasts for only a short time (5 minutes or so). If the case is leaning more towards traveling, the chatting usually last over a longer time period, and the grooming process is a bit more substantial. The amount of predators caught by each unit was also completely divergent. The respondents all gave various answers that ranged from one to two predators per month to15 to 20 predators a month. Others respondent gave rates for the year and said four per year all the way up to 150 plus predators a year.

In the end, the respondents all agreed that online sexual predators are all over the internet; wherever children are, they are. They also all said they wish they had more resources and could catch all of them that they do not have time to go after or find.

Undercover Aspects

All of the respondents considered themselves to be undercover agents primarily because what they did on the job fit the definition: they are taking on the persona of somebody they are not. One individual took the definition a bit further and said, "We are investigating people who

do not know they are being investigated."

For further discussion, respondents were asked about their form of undercover work as it corresponded with more traditional law enforcement undercover work. The respondents noted that there were both similarities as well as differences. Some of the similarities noted included : taking on another persona, investigating individuals who did not know they were being investigated, being secretive, preplanning of events (search warrants, traveling, interviews), protection of officers (the perpetrators can be dangerous during meetings or arrests) , protection of perpetrators (neighbors, family, coworkers, inmates and the perpetrators themselves can harm them because of what they have done), needing to know the targets behaviors and desires in order to be able to snag them, undercover investigators have to be sworn, both types of undercover investigations are mentally involved, and the offenders can do research on the investigator.

Respondents also noted some important differences between virtual and real world undercover investigations. These differences include that in the real world law enforcement officers are face-to-face with their targets. This necessitates that they have to think on their feet quickly and can be dangerous. Additionally, in traditional undercover investigations officers typically use informants, they know who they are targeting before starting the investigation, and they may have to completely immerse themselves in a life of crime (taking drugs, producing drugs) in order to establish and maintain their covers. In contrast, with virtual undercover investigations, law enforcement personnel are hidden behind computer screens until it is time to issue search warrants, meet, or arrest their targets. This allows them to have time to think about their responses and consider their actions and takes away some of the danger. In virtual

investigations, respondents reported that they never used informants (unless the case is reactive—in which case while they are not using an informant per se, they are investigating a crime that was reported to them by a third party). Additionally, all respondents noted that with virtual undercover investigations, they are unlikely to have to commit criminal behavior; they are not going to have to produce child pornography, they are not going to distribute it (although they may send a corrupted file of nothing to a target in order for them to think they are receiving child pornography).

Still, some respondents had other contributions, as John noted, "Main difference between the two is the personality of the target once arrested, these people are well adaptive—grooming and manipulative. With drugs the perpetrators just buy and sell drugs so no need to be manipulative. This makes interview techniques very different…quite honestly I would rather interview somebody who killed somebody than interview somebody about what they have done or plan to do to kids, it is more difficult to get them to talk to you, they are generally ashamed."

Stephen noted, "You have to have the gift of gab when working undercover work, any undercover investigation. Remember that the perpetrator can search you, follow you, or hurt you on the streets (with traditional undercover work), but there is not a lot he can do if online. They are pretty naive about it."

Chad added, "It's much easier to do undercover virtual investigations and it is more effective because there is no middle man. We do not use informants and we can document everything right when it happens."

Respondents also discussed the psychological effects of being undercover online as opposed to being undercover in the real world. In this area, respondents were mixed in their

views about these types of effects. Four respondents claimed they do not feel like their undercover investigation has similar psychological effects. One individual said, "I don't think the psychological effects are even close to the same, we don't have to experience the same dangers and pressures a true undercover officer does. They have to live their role, we do not."

Four of the interviewed individuals said that they did not experience any ill psychological effects while being on this unit: "Working sex crimes hasn't affected me any differently than working as a road Trooper" said one respondent. Others agreed that they could see how it could affect some people, but thought it was more related to each particular individual: Chris noted, "It is a mental state of mind, when I leave work, work is gone. And, I don't personalize it. Every picture I see of a child, toddler, baby getting raped, it is a crime scene. I don't think of them as people, but a crime scene. If I thought of the people it would bother me. So I flip through the images, look for what will put these scum-bags away and move on to the next image."

Three respondents said it did adversely affect them. As one respondent noted, "We have to see pretty disturbing images that can be related to real life. For example, seeing a child, my own child, bend over while playing, it makes me remember the images and makes me think how somebody thought it was sexually gratifying. Or changing my sons diaper…how many people get sexual gratification from this? It doesn't bother me anymore; I am just aware of it and deal with. I am just glad I put these people in jail, it helps me justify it."

Another respondent explained, "Just bathing my daughter makes me hesitant, what if how I am bathing her is misinterpreted?"

Sally related, "It affects you mentally because you withdraw from your kids and spouse because you are constantly inundated with sexual content."

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All respondents reported that these aspects of undercover work in the virtual world can play heavily on the mental capability of individuals if they cannot find a way to balance them.

Regarding personal safety, the only dangerous aspect respondents mentioned for this type of position was when they issued search warrants, met with, or arrested targets. In these types of situations, targets can become violent. Respondents generally agreed that these could be dangerous events because basically the life of the person they are arresting is over. One respondent noted "It is only risky when it comes time for the actual arrest to take place because generally these people come from a family and have good jobs and an arrest will change their whole life, they will lose it all. We treat them as possible violent felons because of what they do have to lose."

Another respondent noted, "When it comes time for arrest and take down, we go after all kinds of people. The undercover narcotics unit only goes after druggies. In internet crimes, you don't know who they are; the people can be stupid to highly intelligent. In narcotics you aren't dealing with those types."

Still another respondent explained, "Child pornography and molesting children is a scarlet letter. Their life is over. So they have the potential to be dangerous. Other than that time, health wise, ours is greater."

As noted by Stephen, "Sexual predators go away for a long time; one image will get you minimum two years. This leads to embarrassment and embarrassment can equal danger. We can't be complacent. We have to have a tactical plan on warrant and seizure…anytime we going into house, there is a risk." Chad furthered this by saying "you can get five years for a few images!"

As noted above, there is always the risk of having one's cover blown (in both virtual as well as more traditional undercover work). All respondents said if their cover was blown online they would just delete the profile and start over.

Respondents also noted, however, that if this happened, they may lose their target, but often times they already have enough evidence on the person to get an arrest. Interestingly, two respondents questioned having their covers blown saying: "How would we know if our cover was blown? People accuse us of being cops all the time, but we don't tell them they are right. We usually just tell them to not talk to us if they feel that way."

As noted in previous literature, officers who participate in more traditional undercover work may have difficulty separating their real selves from their undercover personas. As such, respondents discussed this issue as it related to their virtual undercover work. None of the respondents noted having any problems separating their online persona from their real selves because, as one respondent noted, "I am not (really) a child." Another respondent indicated, "All I have to do is look in the mirror and I can clearly see that I am not who I am portraying." A further respondent noted, "I kind of keep it as a game. It is like fishing. I cast my line and wait for somebody to take the bait and then I reel and reel and reel until I catch the sexual predator. Then the game ends and I go home."

Regarding how the respondents were able to shake off their undercover work at the end of each day, all respondents provided activities that helped them debrief from the work day. Everybody said exercising was a strategy they used to come down from work. A few of the respondents, three, went hunting or fishing while nine kept busy with projects (woodworking, yard work, hobbies, etc.). Two respondents walked the dog, 14 played with their kids and spent

time with their family. One drank coffee with their spouse at a coffee house in town every day, three got together with friends, and one enjoyed a weekly cigar in his backyard. Two relied on religion, three said it was the light-hearted atmosphere at work, and 10 listened to sports talk, talk radio, or the radio on their commutes home.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

These interviews provided a wealth of information about the law enforcement personnel who go undercover in the virtual world and try to snag sexual predators before they can harm children. These respondents discussed many issues relating to their jobs, how their jobs affected their families, relationships with friends, how they felt about the undercover aspects of their jobs, and what kinds of characteristics they had to have to be successful at catching sexual predators online.

Respondents are law enforcement officers who were currently on units that went online to catch sexual predator; in these interviews, respondents discussed many issues relating to their jobs. First, regarding their individual skills and job histories, respondents indicated that one does not need a certain level of education to be considered for this unit, having a computer background is not necessary for this type of position because it can be taught, the work schedule is somewhat flexible, but usually a 9-5 workday, that is not necessarily dependent upon the school schedule. These positions are sought after but really only by those officers who have this certain motivation (apprehending sexual predators). Regarding their home lives, respondents basically indicated that their family life was not very disrupted. All of the respondents were married with all but one having children. This position affected some individuals' family and social lives somewhat and did not bother others. Also, having children had an impact on the way some performed their jobs, but not others. The way that the respondents talked about the effect their jobs had on their families is noteworthy, as it appeared to be opposite from the situation experienced by more traditional undercover agents. Here, the respondents basically stated that

their spouses were supportive, if not actually somewhat participatory in their investigations. Additionally, their views of their children and how they felt about their jobs as it related to their children was also appealing as it made them think about how someone could find children sexually desirable.

Concerning training, it was agreed by all respondents that ICAC offers many training opportunities throughout the year, as well as at its annual conference. In general, this training is helpful, but the amount of training any individual officer received varied. It is revealing that training for virtual undercover agents is so varied, while it is much more structured for traditional undercover agents.

Law enforcement officers also provided some details about their jobs and offered certain strategies that they typically employed in their efforts. They mentioned the speed at which they realized they were communicating with a potential sexual predator and gave the impression that grooming may not be as common as some previous research has found. This finding is particularly interesting since previous literature has discussed the process of grooming from the perspectives of the undercover officer as well as the sexual predator. Here, though, these respondents basically said that grooming really does not happen, or, if it does, it is very short. It may be that there is a difference in grooming strategy based on whether or not the sexual offender knows his target or not. Many of these officers were investigating sexual offenders using a more proactive strategy. In these cases, then, they would be more likely to catch predators who were strangers to their "victims". Previous literature (Young, 1997) has noted that predators that are family members or acquaintances to their victims are likely to use grooming as

a way to make their actions seem more appropriate, thereby minimizing the possibility that their victims will tell an adult what is going on.

From interviewing these individuals about undercover aspects, respondents all agreed they were undercover investigators as they were using a false persona to investigate crime and catch criminals. These respondents noted that there were many similarities between real world undercover investigations and virtual investigations, but just as many, if not more differences. Many thought psychological effects could be worse from virtual undercover investigations given the types of images they are exposed to on a daily basis, but many said they did not suffer any psychological distress from this position. All agreed that real world undercover work is more risky and hazardous with the exception of going to arrest the sexual predator. At this time, the virtual undercover investigations have the potential of being just as dangerous, perhaps because that is the point at which the investigation leaves the virtual world and enters the real world. These findings are interesting because they reveal the more difficult aspects of the undercover location of the virtual world. Respondents indicated that seeing horrible child pornography everyday was emotionally difficult, and while they did not face the same physical dangers as those officers who go undercover in the more traditional sense, their lives were affected by these psychologically disturbing images.

Implications

This research has shown that the training for virtual undercover agents targeting sexual predators is not consistent across all units or agencies regarding the content of it or how often it happens. It may be beneficial if there were requirements in place that made individuals required to receive a certain amount of training per year. That way, all agents could be up to date on any

legal changes or precedents, predators' techniques, computer technology, and knowledge of

youth culture. For example, agents could learn new ways to use webcams and ways to avoid

enticement. One respondent mentioned that he will often times use his webcam by placing scotch

tape over the lens to make the image come across blurred. Once, when he did this, the perpetrator

asked him to place the webcam between his legs and touch himself. The officer moved the

webcam to show his fingers, which to the perpetrator resembled a pair of legs. He then moved

the webcam and his fingers to make it look like there was movement. This may or may not be

misconstrued as enticement if a case such as this goes to court and it would be less risky (for the

successful prosecution of a case) if all agents received training about what actions they can

legally take and which they cannot. Also, of course, youth culture is ever changing, and with the

advent of new technology all the time, agents could receive annual training in the newest fads

and computer speak that has emerged in youth culture.

Additionally, this study reveals the possibility that virtual undercover agents may need

more psychological counseling than they may think they do. The respondents in the present

study noted that they did not have mandatory counseling, but at the same time, many admitted

that they were emotionally disturbed by the images they had to see on a daily basis. It may be

that periodic mandatory counseling would benefit these agents.

Limitations

This study was conducted with interviews of 17 individuals from all over the United

States. Seventeen individuals are by no means representative of the law enforcement personnel

who work on internet sex crimes units. Also, the demographics appear to be unrepresentative of

law enforcement in general (e.g.: all Caucasian except one Hispanic excludes all other

ethnicities, and only two females do not give a representation of gender). The individuals also were all associated with ICAC. It is not known to the researcher if there are law enforcement personnel operating these types of investigations outside of ICAC, but since ICAC offers the training and has guidelines, the sample tended to have more similar responses in some areas. Similar responses could also be a product of snowball sampling (people who know each other all have similar situations and views). Also, the interview ended up being quite lengthy, often times taking two or more hours a piece. This may have caused law enforcement to not answer questions as thoroughly by the end of the interview as they did at the beginning. A lot of the questions the researcher wanted to focus on were towards the back-end of the interview causing the researcher to constantly have to probe for more answers, where at the beginning of the interview, the law enforcement personnel would just talk about a question for a lengthy amount of time and give very thorough responses.

Future Research

Future researchers on this topic need to obtain more representative and larger samples from law enforcement agencies and possibly go outside of ICAC. It would be beneficial to focus on the grooming process that previous research has discussed but that the current research found to be nonexistent or much shorter. Future research should also focus more on the differences and similarities between real world undercover investigations and virtual world undercover investigations. Scholars may want to use samples containing officers who have gone undercover in both types of locations. Lastly, training would be another area of focus for future researchers, as clearly there is a discrepancy in the amount of training received as well as the content covered.

Nonetheless, this study has provided a fruitful description of the world of the virtual undercover

law enforcement agent targeting sexual predators.

APPENDIX A: IRB INITIAL REVIEW EXEMPTION

University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

University of
**Central
Florida**

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1
        FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Melissa J Tetzlaff**

Date: **October 22, 2009**

Dear Researcher:

On 10/22/2009, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Review
Project Title:	Snagging the Online Sexual Predator: Descriptions of Who and How
Investigator:	Melissa J Tetzlaff
IRB Number:	SBE-09-06501
Funding Agency:	None

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Joseph Bielitzki, DVM, UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Janice Turchin on 10/22/2009 10:07:46 AM EDT

Janice M Turchin

IRB Coordinator

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APPENDIX B: IRB MODIFICATION EXEMPTION

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Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Melissa J. Tetzlaff**

Date: **May 27, 2010**

Dear Researcher:

On 5/27/2010, the IRB approved the following modification to human participant research that is exempt
from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Modification Type:	Consent form revisions re: number of study participants, where they are from, and the focus of the interview.
Project Title:	Snagging the Online Sexual Predator: Descriptions of Who and How
Investigator:	Melissa J Tetzlaff
IRB Number:	SBE-09-06501
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should
any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the
exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research,
please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Joseph Bielitzki, DVM, UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 05/27/2010 01:59:07 PM EDT

IRB Coordinator

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APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Individual
1. Does your agency have a unit that focuses on online sex predators?
2. Are you part of the unit? If "No", terminate the interview, and thank for willingness to participate.
3. How big is your agency (# units, #officers)?
4. What is your educational background?
5. What is your work experience?
6. How many years have you been in Law Enforcement?
7. How did you end up in this unit (volunteer, placed, promoted)?
    7.1.   What sort of background is necessary to be considered for the unit?
    7.2.   If you volunteered, why?
    7.3.   If it is considered a promotion, why is this a sought-after position?
8. Are you content with your decision/placement?
    8.1.   What do you like about your job?
    8.2.   What do you dislike about your job?
9. Do you have any background working on or with computers?
    9.1.   Was this an important part of your selection to the unit?
    9.2.   What computer skills do you need for your job?
10. What is your work schedule (what hours, days)?
    10.1.   Is your work schedule dependent upon the school schedule? (why/why not?)
    10.2.   Where do you work?
    10.3.   Can you really be "off the clock", or must you maintain a relatively constant presence online?
11. Does your agency have any stipulations on the maximum length of time you can be on this unit?
    11.1.   What is it? Why?
12. Does your agency have any stipulations concerning counseling when working on units like this?
    12.1.   What is covered? Why?

Home life
13. Are you married? Are you currently in a relationship? If "No" skip to Q15.
    13.1.   How long have you been married/in this relationship?
14. How does your partner feel about your work on this unit?
    14.1.   The content of your work
    14.2.   Your working hours
15. Do you have children? If "No", skip to Q16.
    15.1.   How many?
    15.2.   Boys or girls?
    15.3.   What ages?
    15.4.   Does having children influence the way you perform your job?
16. How does your work influence your family or social life?
    16.1.   Positively? Negatively?

17. What do you do that keeps work life at work and home life at home?
    17.1.   Is it hard? Why/Why not?

Training
18. Do you receive training on how to catch these online predators? If "No" skip to Q19
    18.1.   What types of training do you go through (technology, how to behave like youth, methods used by offender)?
    18.2.   How do you undergo training (face-to-face, over the internet)?
    18.3.   How often do you go through training?
    18.4.   How has the training been helpful?
    18.5.   How has the training been a hindrance?
19. Do you do any training on your own (reading research, exploring how to behave like a youth)?

Details about Job

20. How would you describe your job and job duties?
21. What are your common strategies?
    21.1.   What clues you in that it is a sex predator that you are talking to?
22. How do you pass yourself off as young children/teenagers (Language used/slang/cute IM names/fake pictures/fake profiles)?
23. What strategies to you think are the most effective?
24. What strategies that you have used have been less effective?
25. What are the legalities you must adhere to?
    25.1.   Can you initiate a conversation (the first, or any there-after)?
    25.2.   Can you initiate relationship/sex talk?
26. Whom do you target?
    26.1.   Do you catch who you target?
    26.2.   Do you end up getting other people as well?
27. What types of sites do you "patrol" (facebook/myspace/chatrooms)?
28. Can you "spot" a predator early on in a conversation, or does it take several online "contacts" to figure out who might be a predator?
29. How do you maintain communication (chats, IMs, email, games)?
30. How do you get the target to take it to the next level?
31. What happens if your target requests communication like phone or webcam?
    31.1.   Do you ever make contact by phone?
    31.2.   What if they request a phone conversation?
    31.3.   Do you ever make contact with a webcam?
    31.4.   What if they request?
32. How long does it take to catch a predator?
33. How many predators has this unit caught on average per month or year?

Undercover Aspects

34. Do you consider that you are an undercover agent? Why/ Why not? If "No" skip to Q36.
    34.1. How are your experiences catching online predators similar to other undercover officers (e.g., prostitution, drug dealing)?
    34.2. How are they different?
    34.3. Do you experience similar psychological effects as other undercover officers? Explain.
    34.4. Talk to me about using the internet as a "location" for undercover work, vs. the real world.
    34.5. Did you have any undercover experience before being assigned to this unit?
    34.6. Do you think you will do different undercover work after you leave this unit?
    34.7. How do your family and friends feel about you working undercover?
    34.8. A lot of undercover work is hazardous, and risky. Do you consider your online work hazardous and risky? Why? Why not?
35. What happens if your cover is blown?
    35.1. What kinds of behaviors may cause this to happen?
    35.2. Has it ever happened to you or your agency?
36. How do you separate your online persona from your real self?
37. What methods do you use at the end of the work shift to debrief and relax?

Demographics

38. Age
39. Sex
40. Race/Ethnicity

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