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Content analysis of cognitive distortions in pedophiles' online forum posts

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CONTENT ANALYSIS OF COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS IN PEDOPHILES'

ONLINE FORUM POSTS

by
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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my mother, father, and sister, who have always

supported my decisions and helped me to achieve my goals.

To Robert, who has proven to be an invaluable support system, best friend, lover, and

with an open heart accepted my temporary insanity due to the thesis process.

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Abstract

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FORUM POSTS
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Historically, sexual encounters between adults and children were rarely reported to authorities, and thus considered a rare problem. However, as many as 33% of girls and 14% of boys experience sexual encounters with adults and as a result may experience consequences such as aversive feelings regarding the act of sex, substance abuse, and self-mutilation. Such consequences lead research to examine pedophile's cognitive distortions. This exploratory study examined pedophiles' website forum posts to determine if any posters demonstrated cognitive distortions. Four independent raters used content analysis to determine which cognitive distortions were demonstrated by the examined pedophiles. Results suggested that cognitive distortions were not prominently demonstrated by those posting on the examined forum. Results may also suggest that cognitive distortions are not evident in a supportive environment. Results cannot be generalized to the entire pedophilic population and future research could analyze posters' cognitive distortions over a period of time and examine which cognitive distortions have altered over time.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Literature Review

Historically, sexual encounters between adults and children were rarely reported to authorities, and thus considered a rare problem (Finkelhor, 1984). During recent decades, these encounters have become a prevalent fixture in the media. In the late 1970's, a dramatic flood of sexual abuse cases prompted professionals, parents and policymakers to begin attempts to understand the dimensions of these sexual encounters (Finkelhor, 1986). As many as 33% of girls and 14% of boys experience such encounters with adults during their childhood years (Briere & Eliot, 2003). Most child sexual encounters with adults occur between the ages of seven and thirteen (Finkelhor, 1994), and only 30% of these encounters will be reported to the authorities (Finkelhor, Hammer, & Sedlak, 2008).

Multiple factors may influence the long term consequences of sexual encounters on those who experience them as a child. For example, more serious consequences are associated with younger aged victims, female victims of male perpetrators, penetration, and a familial relationship between the perpetrator and the victim (Finkelhor, 1984). The Traumagenic Dynamics Model (Finkelhor, 1986) describes the potential psychological after effects of sexual encounters in children. The four components to this model affect the level of consequences and perception of the trauma, after a sexual encounter with an adult. The first component, *traumatic sexualization*, refers to the child's sexuality developing in an inappropriate and interpersonally dysfunctional fashion. For example, an adult showers a child with attention and gifts in exchange for sexual favors. As the child grows, *traumatic sexualization* can manifest into having aversive feelings regarding

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the act of sex, sexual identity problems, or hypersexual behaviors (Finkelhor, 1986; Gilliland, South, Carpenter & Hardy, 2011). The second component is *stigmatization*, which refers to negative connotations surrounding the sexual encounter(s). For example, those who experience sexual encounters may feel guilty, ashamed, and may believe he or she is "damaged goods." *Stigmatization* can manifest into behaviors of isolation, substance abuse, self-mutilation, or suicide. *Betrayal* is the third component and refers to the child discovering that they have been violated by an adult figure who failed as the protector. Individuals may express *betrayal* through anger, clinginess, delinquency, and may feel uncomfortable in intimate relationships. The fourth and final component is *powerlessness* which includes feeling vulnerable and unable to stop the sexual encounters. *Powerlessness* may manifest into anger, anxiety, eating disorders, or nightmares (Finkelhor, 1984). It is important to understand the consequences of sexual encounters with adults on underage and prepubescent children since these consequences have the potential to interrupt the proper development of future relationships and may require intensive therapy. In addition, recognizing the behaviors of such consequences may assist parents and professionals in establishing mental health treatment that assist the child in achieving resilience.

On the opposite side of the spectrum are the adult pedophiles that engage in sexual encounters with children. Adults are responsible for 80% of the 90, 913 yearly arrests for engaging in sexual encounters with children. Juveniles are responsible for the remaining 20% of such arrests (Center for Sex Offender Management [CSOM], 2004). In addition, there are 491,720 known registered sex offenders that may be classified and it is estimated that an average pedophile will offend against 360-380 children during a

lifetime (South Carolina Forcible Sex Crimes, 1999). Because there is a large number of registered sex offenders, understanding pre-offense beliefs of pedophiles may assist professionals in preventing sexual behaviors between an adult and an underage child.

That said, consequences exist for those who engage in sexual encounters with children. Of the registered sex offender population, 265,000 pedphiles are under a form of supervision (e.g., probation) and 150,000 pedophiles are incarcerated in either state or federal prison as a consequence of their sexual encounter (CSOM, 2008). In addition to facing incarceration for indefinite periods of time, convicted pedophiles are obligated to register as a sex offender, allowing registry information to be provided directly to the public through flyers and door-to-door police notifications (Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007; Walker, 2007). The aim of notifying the public about the presence of pedophiles is for the public to protect their families from potential sexual encounters (Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007). The nation's increased awareness of pedophiles has resulted in municipalities imposing restrictions on where convicted pedophiles can live (Tewksbury & Levenson, 2007). For example, the laws that reinforce these restrictions prohibit registered sex offenders from living at least a quarter mile from establishments intended for children, such as schools, daycares, playgrounds, public swimming pools, libraries and bus stops (Tewksbury & Levenson, 2007). Despite being banned from establishments intended for children, many pedophiles have gone "underground" and have continued accessing children, maintaining relationships with children and communicating with other pedophiles through the use of the internet (Durkin & Bryant, 1999). In fact, fourteen percent of children receive sexual advances over the internet (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006).

Since many pedophiles are able to go "underground" and avoid law enforcement, generalizability can be affected. Thus, a limitation in the literature is that the majority of data has been taken from the incarcerated population which affects the generalizability of any findings (Durkin & Bryant, 1999). Further, there are strict rules and guidelines put in place by the correctional institutions for the inmates and visitors that produce limited access to convicted pedophiles for researchers. Further, those convicted and serving a sentence may also be receiving mental health treatment that can influence the pedophile's belief system. Further, the sheer exposure to the correctional institution in term of restricted activities, exposure to other inmates, and the overall constrictive environment may also influence the belief system of pedophiles. Convicted pedophiles are removed from their natural environment when placed in correctional institutions (Durkin & Bryant, 1999). However, because pedophiles can access children over the internet, conducting a study utilizing the internet provides a unique opportunity to examine pedophiles who are not drawn from a clinical or correctional sample (Durkin & Bryant, 1999).

Cognitive Theory

Thinking processes appear to be developed during the early stages of life and can also be influenced by powerful learning experiences. For example, religion, being sexually abused or losing a parent can influence how one perceives future traumatic events (Keenan & Ward, 1999). While pedophiles appear to express their physical needs differently, they may collectively possess similarly impaired cognitive processes, ultimately believing that their behaviors are normal. Literature about cognitive theory was developed to provide an explanation for human behavior and may assist our

understanding of sexual deviance as well (Stinson, Sales, & Becker, 2008). The cognitive theory consists of schemas, cognitive distortions and automatic thoughts (Pössel, 2011).

Schemas assist people in interpreting what is going on around them, identifying important information, interpreting that information, and using it to predict future events and behavior (Stinson, Sales, & Becker, 2008). Pedophiles' understanding of the world and consequences may impact their execution of deviant behaviors. For example, if a pedophilic man's peers openly detest and condemn sexual encounters with children, he is more likely to keep his sexual preferences for children a secret, for fear of being ostracized.

Iterations of the cognitive model also focus on the formation of emotions and behaviors through repetitive and automatic thoughts (Pössel, 2011; Stinson, Sales, & Becker, 2008). Automatic thoughts can be explained as temporary and emotionless processed information. This temporary information is subjective and is seen as a possible result of a mood or event (Pössel, 2011). Pedophiles' automatic thought that sexually touching a child is permissible may stem from past events that acquaintances had or sexual urges being felt. For example, if a man hears of a sexual encounter between an adult and child that went unnoticed by authorities, he is more likely to think of acting on his urges and behave sexually with children.

Through the development of maladaptive thoughts, cognitive theory has also helped to explain behaviors. These maladaptive thoughts are better known as cognitive distortions, consistent thinking errors for which the person usually lacks awareness (Bumby, 1996; Stinson, Sales, & Becker, 2008). Cognitive distortions stem from one's

negative schema and often manifests into deviant behaviors (Keenan & Ward, 1999; Pössel, 2011). Cognitive distortions are integral to understanding why some adults abuse children (Howitt & Sheldon, 2007). That is, cognitive distortions are beliefs that some pedophiles utilize in preparation before the offense in order to overcome any guilt or anxiety about the offense that contradicts societal norms (Abel et. al, 1989; Howitt & Sheldon, 2007). Finally, cognitive distortions may explain childhood experiences of the pedophile. For example, if the pedophile was sexually abused as a child, their adult sexual behavior with children may simply reflect schemas developed during childhood (Howitt & Sheldon, 2007). Since each person is unique, it is likely that individual pedophile's cognitive processes differ from each other and may reflect each pedophile's experience.

Cognitive Distortions of Sex Offenders

Based on research conducted with convicted rapists of women, Keenan and Ward (1999) have developed five cognitive distortions that can be used to assist in understanding pedophiles' beliefs. Rapists tend to believe women are unknoweable, are sex objects, male sex drive is uncontrollable, men are entitled, and the world is dangerous (Mann & Hollin, 2010). These distortions have also been applied to those who offend against children (Mann & Hollin, 2010). Since cognitive distortions are components of one's thought processes, they can be viewed as pre-behavior beliefs that motivate pedophiles' behavior.

The first cognitive distortion is labeled *Children as Sexual Objects,* which refers to the general construct that people are primarily motivated by pleasure (Keenan & Ward, 1999). It refers to believing children are sexually active and desire, or seek sexual

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relationships with adults. The pedophile's claim of "the child initiated sex because she knows what she wants" demonstrates that the child is capable of sexual urges and expressing desires with the adult is beneficial and preferred by the child. Thus, behaviors such as, sitting on an adult's lap, exposing their pants while playing, or hugging the pedophile are interpreted as sexual (Keenan & Ward, 1999).

The second cognitive distortion is labeled *Entitlement,* which refers to believing one is superior and entitled to receive pleasure and gratification from inferior individuals. Superiority is often believed to be based on gender or socioeconomic status (Keenan & Ward, 1999). For example, a man might view himself as more powerful and important than a child or a woman, therefore, has the right to have his sexual needs met when he wants with whomever he wants. The needs and desires of the target child or woman are usually secondary to that of the man and are often ignored (Keenan & Ward, 1999).

The third cognitive distortion is labeled *Dangerous World,* which refers to believing the world is dangerous and adults are likely to be abusive and rejecting in order to promote their own interests (Keenan & Ward, 1999). Another aspect of this distortion is the belief that children are more dependable, accepting and able to be trusted, which leads the perpetrator to believe that children can provide love and put their needs secondary to the pedophile's (Keenan & Ward, 1999).

The fourth cognitive distortion is labeled *Uncontrollability,* which refers to believing that the world is uncontrollable and people are unable to control their emotions and sexual feelings (Keenan & Ward, 1999). Uncontrollable events are said to leave a pedophile with deviant preferences and impulses that he is unable to control, (Keenan & Ward, 1999) so the urges must be satisfied. This distortion can also be viewed as

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"external" to the pedophile, alleviating blame and assuming a "victim's role" because of submitting to factors beyond control. Thus, according to the pedophile, blame can be placed on the child for being desirable (Keenan & Ward, 1999).

The fifth cognitive distortion is labeled *Nature of Harm,* which refers to one believing that there are different levels of harm and that sexual behavior involving children is not harmful (Keenan & Ward, 1999); it may even be beneficial. Sex is seen to be a bonding act and is inherently a beneficial experience; therefore, any negative or distressful effects are a product of external factors, like society's reaction to a relationship with a minor (Keenan & Ward, 1999) or police involvement.

Although pedophiles are not behaving as perpetrators all of the time, these distortions assist some pedophiles in believing that their deviance is a part of a normal daily routine. As such, it is likely that the non-incarcerated pedophile population can add uniqueness to research because they have been able to function in society. One way to access the non-incarcerated pedophile population is through the utilization of online forums. As stated, the internet offers a unique opportunity to conduct a study involving a group of pedophiles who are not drawn from a clinical or correctional population (Durkin & Bryant, 1999).

In a novel study, Durkin and Bryant conducted a content analysis of pedophiles who posted about their sexual interest in young boys on an online forum (i.e. alt.support.boy-lovers) (Durkin & Bryant, 1999). The goal of this research was to examine how non-incarcerated pedophiles who use the internet account for their sexual deviance (Durkin & Bryant, 1999). A content analysis was performed on posts and feedback to identify justifications for pedophiles' sexual behaviors with children.

Justifications are post-behavior defense mechanisms one uses to acknowledge responsibility for behaviors, yet places negative blame on external factors (Durkin & Bryant, 1999; O'Halloran & Quayle, 2010). For example, if an impoverished mother was caught stealing a loaf of bread, she may readily admit to this behavior but claim no wrongdoing as the intent was to feed her hungry child. As a result of the content analysis, seven themes (account offered, condemnation of condemners, denial of injury, claim of benefit, appeal of loyalties, birging, and polythematic accounts) were identified that expressed justifications for the pedophiles' fantasies and behaviors. Pedophiles' cognitive distortions are beliefs that motivate sexual behaviors with children, suggesting they may be pre-behavior beliefs; while justifications are post-behavior explanations.

The internet is perceived as an anonymous platform allowing pedophiles to behave naturally without fear of consequence, making it an ideal research tool for deviant behavior. The current study is also novel and utilizes "Girl Chat," an online forum catering to non-incarcerated pedophiles preferring young girls. Although similar to the forum used by Durkin and Bryant, the current study used content analysis to determine how many of the aforementioned cognitive distortions are evident in the non-incarcerated pedophile population.

Through recognizing which cognitive distortions lead to specific behaviors, clinicians can help pedophiles express sexual desires through healthier outlets or determine proper treatment modality. In addition, identifying which distortions are evident in the non-incarcerated population can narrow the direction of future research by indicating which of the five cognitive distortions is demonstrated by such pedophiles.

The current study is exploratory in nature with the goal of discovering the

aforementioned cognitive distortions in the "Girl Chat" online forum posts.

Chapter 2

Method

Content for analysis were posts on an online public forum named "Girl Chat" (http://www.annabelleigh.net/). Members of this forum are anonymous individuals with a pedophilic preference for prepubescent females. Having a sexual preference for prepubescent females is a common factor among members; they are able to communicate and exchange their fantasies and experiences with female children by posting messages. In addition to exchanging posts about fantasies and experiences with female children, members also discuss topics that go beyond pedophilic interests (e.g., politics). The forum posts vary in length, detail and are organized in an archival fashion. The month of August 2012 was randomly selected to provide the data for the current study. All 1713 posts were used for content analysis (two posts were removed from the forum by website moderators).

Procedure

The procedure for content analysis consisted of multiple phases and included four independent raters (four trained research assistants) and the first author. During the first phase (preparation), the first author identified previous literature that documented cognitive distortions applicable to child perpetrators. Once distortions were identified, the first author created an operational definition for each, consisting of two to three sentences identifying what the distortion is and what it may look like in context. Next, the first author explored the "Girl Chat" website and collected archival posts to use as examples for each distortion during the training phase. Once sample posts were collected

the first author read the operational definitions and sample posts, indicating which

cognitive distortion was demonstrated in each sample post.

After the preparation phase was complete and training materials were established,

the second phase (training) involved four independent raters (four research assistants) and

the first author. The training phase occurred over two sessions. During the first session

each of the independent raters read an identical copy of the operational definitions and

example posts. The raters searched for content to indicate which cognitive distortion was

best demonstrated by the post. Next, the first author evaluated the distortion indicated by

each rater for overall agreement. The operational definitions were as such: *Children as*

Sexual Objects – posts which refer to believing that children are sexually active beings

and desire, or seek, sexual relations with adults. This category may describe a

misinterpretation of the child initiating sexual behavior by touching, kissing, hugging or

cuddling, although the behaviors are considered nonsexual (Keenan & Ward, 1999).

Entitlement – posts which refer to one believing that he or she is entitled to receive

pleasure and gratification from children. This category may include descriptions of

forceful or aggressive sexual behavior on the part of the adult or include words like

"should" to indicate the power is held by the adult. The individual may also ignore the

"inferior" individual's opinions and wishes (Keenan & Ward, 1999). *Dangerous World* –

posts which refer to one believing the world is dangerous. Posts may include narratives

about the adult seeking comfort, in the arms of a child, from the negative effects of

society's reaction to the sexual relationship between adult and child. Posters may also

discuss society condemning sexual activities with children or the poster directly (Keenan

& Ward, 1999). *Uncontrollability* – posts which refer to one believing that he or she is

unable to control their thoughts and behaviors when presented with sexual situations. The posts may also describe the adult struggling with urges and restraining their sexual behaviors toward children (Keenan & Ward, 1999). *Nature of Harm* – posts which refer to one believing that sexual behaviors involving children are not harmful and may even be beneficial to the development of the child. Posts may describe examples of children, involved in sexual relationships with adults, maturing into upstanding citizens. Posters may also be defensive about their relationships with children towards society, stating that nothing is wrong with having a sexual relationship with a child (Keenan & Ward, 1999).

If at least three of the four raters agreed, the post was coded as demonstrating the majority distortion. If only half of the raters agreed on a cognitive distortion, a discussion allowed the disagreeing raters to explain their rationale. A goal of ninety percent inter-rater reliability needed to be reached in order to begin actual data analysis. At least three of the four coders were able to agree on seventeen of the twenty-four sample posts. After the first round the inter-rater reliability was 71.3%, thus, raters were asked to reread the operational definitions, become familiar with the "Girl Chat" website, and reconvene to discuss.

The second training session was conducted identically to the first. The raters were asked to use the cognitive distortions' operational definitions again to indicate which distortion was demonstrated in each post. Raters were given a different set of twenty four archival "Girl Chat" posts to "analyze." At least three of the four coders were able to agree on twenty-two of the twenty-four sample posts. An inter-rater reliability of 92.7% was achieved and thus adequate to begin data collection.

Once the training phase was complete, the four independent raters were divided into pairs. The final phase consisted of data collection. *Pair one* was responsible for completing a content analysis on the odd numbers and *pair two* was instructed to complete a content analysis on the even numbers of "Girl Chat" posts. Once divided into pairs, the raters analyzed forum posts and the first author analyzed every tenth post in order to monitor consistency. If the paired raters could not reach an agreement with one another, the first author was the determinant in which distortion was coded. The first author became the determinant in 36 of the 42 posts that demonstrated a distortion, suggesting that the inter-rater reliability dropped to 14% throughout content analysis.

Chapter 3

Results

Eighty-four different posters supplied the 1713 posts during the month of August 2012. The frequencies of each Girl Chat member's exposed distortion are presented in Table 1. Of the overall 1713 posts, only 2.45 percent of posts contained cognitive distortions. All posts are reported verbatim from forum, see Appendix A for terms and acronyms used within forum posts.

Table 1

Number and Percentage of Cognitive Distortions Demonstrated in Forum Posts

Cognitive Distortion	Number Demonstrated	Percentage Demonstrated
Children as Sexual Objects	15	36
Dangerous World	9	21
Nature of Harm	5	12
Uncontrollability	3	7
Entitlement	0	0
Total	**42**	**2.45**

Note: Polydistortion was not considered a Cognitive Distortion

Children as Sexual Objects

The most common cognitive distortion identified was *Children as Sexual Objects*. Approximately 36 percent of posts that contained cognitive distortions demonstrated this distortion, which refers to believing that children are sexually active and seek sexual relationships with adults. The posts demonstrating *Children as Sexual Objects* seem to

alleviate the responsibility from the pedophile. The child seems to be initiating the

relationship or is expressing relativity new sexual urges with someone who can

empathize. The child is viewing the pedophile as a sexual mentor during confusing times

of newfound sexuality and the freedom to express it.

Examples of Children as Sexual Objects

One member posted,

> "I would argue that incest is not necessarily wrong. Perhaps bestiality isn't, either? But the others you mentioned are quite strange. Murder, rape, necrophilia, etc? I fail to see how this compares to a loving relationship between two consenting individuals. Again, your premise assumes that sex is inherently harmful to children…Yet we see the CL movement growing yearly, and it's also clear there are a great deal of kids who want to have sex, even if you want to blame that on society's promiscuity. There's a growing demand for it…You might poke holes into what I'm saying due to believing incest and bestiality should possibly be accepted, but still, that's hardly the same as condoning a consensual heterosexual relationship between a man and a young girl, or even a consensual homosexual relationship between a man and a young boy. And of course, there's female pedosexuality as well, which I can see no reason to condemn."

Another member posted about a relative,

> "…On the contrary, she was abused by being rejected by her parents for her sexuality - which is to say, she masturbated as a child (like many healthy children do) and her parents reacted in very negative ways. Because of the false presumptions in our society, she has accepted her parents' attitude toward sex, and so altered the narrative so that she could not be "guilty" of masturbating but instead is (most likely) falsely accusing her father of a different type of abuse."

A third post read,

> "…General concepts, though - such as associating shame with sex - are more likely to persist, and from this lady's report of what her father said on Facebook it seems likely that "teaching her about sex at age three" consisted of teaching her that masturbation is shameful and very, very wrong. Of course I am speculating, but taking cultural norms and her description into account, this sounds far more likely than her being sexually abused in other ways - which is to say, she was most likely

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sexually abused in the manner that is demanded by our culture, and in the manner which she demands children should be abused: by denying children their natural sexuality."

Dangerous World

Dangerous World was the second most demonstrated distortion amongst the posts. An estimated 21 percent of posts identified this distortion. The *Dangerous World* distortion refers to believing that adults seek comfort from the negative effects of society's reaction to the sexual relationship between adult and child. The posts demonstrating *Dangerous World* seem to relieve perpetrators of responsibility. The responsibility seems to lie with society for being dangerous and forcing perpetrators to seek safety in relationships with minors who are more accepting than adults.

Examples of Dangerous World

For example, one member posted,

"And these misandrists have done much to help demonize adult attraction to minors…it's unfortunate that so many people think of totalitarianism and state control of the economy whenever they see or use variants of the word "socialism," or child molestation whenever they use or see the word "pedophile."…That said, I will point out that this community has supporters and haters amongst both males and females in roughly equal numbers. Let's not forget the likes of Stitches, Judith Reismann, Dr. Laura, our friend Petra Luna, Oprah Winfrey, every other female talk show host you can think of in addition to their male counterparts, and the many other prominent female arch-enemies of the MAP community along with their many male counterparts before any of us are tempted to imply that men are far more likely to hate us than women are."

Another member posted,

"I don't see why these countries are so brutal and hateful to girls (other then the obvious fact that they are over-populated and feel that the space is better used for the "better gender ", as they seem to see women as relativly annoying nessessities) ,YET when it comes to pedophilia and hebephilia they MUST "defend" the girls against their OWN personal decisions. WOW !That is the most STUPID and TWISTED EVIL hypocrisy Ive EVER heard of , that pedophiles have a worst reputation then BABY

KILLERS ! I mean BABY KILLERS , that's gotta be like the worst possible crime ever, right ? But when it comes down to having consensual sex with girls under a certain age , one is "destroying their innocence" and must be stopped ! Why would they CARE about the innocence of the girl but its ok, hell, even TRADITIONAL to kill or abort the babies just because they are girls ? Why would they worry about a pedophile adopting them ? Heck, they could just SELL the girls to pedophiles as wives and kill 2 birds with one stone (make money and get rid of the child) and the girl may likely have a better life (or atleast LIVE one way or another).Peoples' view of "Good" and "evil " is pretty fucked up, I am starting to lose my respect for human life , if that is how they plan to waste it , or at least THOSE individuals lives .Makes me sick."

Nature of Harm

The next distortion *Nature of Harm* was identified in an estimated 12 percent of posts that contained cognitive distortions. *Nature of Harm* refers to one believing that sexual behaviors involving children are not harmful and may even be beneficial to the development of the child. The posts demonstrating *Nature of Harm* seem to allow perpetrators to explain their behaviors and alleviate some responsibility. Members acknowledge a relationship with a minor but also defend the relationship as being healthy and beneficial to the children and pedophile.

Examples of Nature of Harm

One member posted,

"The pro-contact--or as I prefer to call it, the pro-choice--stance, does not mean that you are actively breaking the law. The great majority of pro-choice MAAs are non-contact in behavior. This does not mean we feel that mutually consensual intergenerational sexual contact and relationships are inherently wrong or invariably damaging to the girl in some intrinsic sense; we don't…We don't want our hypothetical gf's dragged into therapy and mentally conditioned to feel shame for enjoying their relationship with us, and to hate us and believe we didn't care for or respect them, which would be totally untrue…all because we chose love and intimacy with the "wrong" person according to society's legally enforced cultural mores and customs. There is also the matter of the extreme social stigma and the

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powerfully entrenched nature of the sex abuse narrative that can serve to turn a girl we cared about and had a relationship with against us at some point in the future if she shares her experiences with the wrong people, who subject her to extreme condemnation until she (possibly) capitulates to the mainstream way of thinking, and suddenly retroactively decides that she was "betrayed" and "used" by us, when this was also not the truth."

Another member posted,

"I don't really care that a sexual relationship with the girl of my dreams is impossible, sex lasts maybe 15 minutes but true love can last a lifetime so why bother about it? GirlLove can be expressed in legal ways without the risk of harming her or yourself in any way, still being very meaningful. I found great pride and joy in raising a (now 14 yo) daughter. She got more freedom than the average kid during this process, youth liberation is no hollow phrase to me but something I take very serious."

Uncontrollability

The next distortion *Uncontrollability* was identified in approximately 7 percent of the posts demonstrating cognitive distortions. *Uncontrollability* refers to one believing that an inability to control sexual behaviors when in the presence of minors exists. The posts demonstrating *Uncontrollability* suggest that it is not the pedophile's fault sexual urges are being felt towards prepubescent children, which removes blame from the pedophile. The perpetrator does not have control over urges. It seems to be society's fault for dressing children in provocative clothing or the excited biological reaction's the body has in response to a prepubescent body.

Examples of Uncontrollability

One member posted,

"If I let myself I could get into a lot of trouble. A 10 yo girl that I know has been telling me that she is my girlfriend. And I have been telling her that she is my girlfriend too. She is just so very sexy and likes to tease and I think we may want the same thing. But I want to use my head and be safe for her and me. But what temptation she is. She will sit in front of me and open her legs and just look in your eyes. I have always been pro contact but am so afraid I will lose my resolve and do something that I

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hope we both enjoy. But will land me in so much trouble. I just needed to talk about it."

Another member posted,

"It really is strange... If you are so against your child being lusted over, don't put her in sexy clothing. How can you blame me for finding your daughter sexy when you are dressing her to look sexy? Of course, I do quite enjoy seeing LGs run around in sexy clothing, but still, the antis are rather silly when they get all upset at us for finding LGs sexy when they're the ones making them look sexy."

Entitlement

Entitlement, the cognitive distortion that refers to one's belief that it is the duty of a child to physically and emotional please an adult was not identified in any of the 1713 "Girl Chat" posts.

Polydistortion

Approximately 24 percent of the posts that contained a cognitive distortion demonstrated more than one distortion. *Polydistortion* is a compilation of multiple distortions evident in one post and is not considered a cognitive distortion itself. Interestingly, 70% of the posts that contained multiple cognitive distortions included both *Nature of Harm* and *Dangerous World*. In addition 30% included both *Nature of Harm* and *Children as Sexual Objects*. These posts also seem to alleviate the responsibility from the pedophile. The combination of these two distortions suggest the world is dangerous for the pedophile to live in so seeking a consoling relationship with a minor is not wrong or harmful; it may even be beneficial to both.

Examples of Polydistortion

A member, who is replying to a previous post, includes the distortions *Nature of Harm* and *Dangerous World* in his post,

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"…I was trying to say that a society that does not have laws against child rape does not have laws against child love, either. If a man can legally rape a LG, then another many can legally love a LG and take care of her…I was only trying to show that not every way of life fits the definition of "Anti". But I don't believe for a second that if a society within your grasp made it legal to rape kids and do whatever you want to them, you wouldn't go there so you could love a LG and give her freedom, and even protect her from the harm that could come to her if you weren't in her life. Something a long the lines of that has always been a dream of mine, even though I totally realize that a society that harms kids is not ideal…Come to think of it, I guess this shows us that often throughout history regarding tolerance of pedophilia, there has either been one extreme, or the other. There's either been all-out child abuse, or all-out Anti-ism…"

Another *Polydistortion* post demonstrating *Nature of Harm* and *Dangerous World*

read,

"…You are completely distorting what I believe and what I was saying. Is all I was trying to point out was that, to an extent, the Amish do accept sex with children. I wasn't making any moral judgment about if how they handle it is bad or good, or if it fits the definition of "true Child love". I never said a rape "charge" is an affirmation of love. I was trying to say that a society that does not have laws against child rape does not have laws against child love, either. If a man can legally rape a LG, then another many can legally love a LG and take care of her. Then again, none of this was the real point of why I brought up the Amish (point stated above). And I'm not making a moral judgment here, either. I was only trying to show that not every way of life fits the definition of "Anti". But I don't believe for a second that if a society within your grasp made it legal to rape kids and do whatever you want to them, you wouldn't go there so you could love a LG and give her freedom, and even protect her from the harm that could come to her if you weren't in her life. Something a long the lines of that has always been a dream of mine, even though I totally realize that a society that harms kids is not ideal. I am not saying it's good, and again this has nothing to do with why I brought up the Amish. Come to think of it, I guess this shows us that often throughout history regarding tolerance of pedophilia, there has either been one extreme, or the other. There's either been all-out child abuse, or all-out Anti-ism…"

Another "Girl Chat" member demonstrated a *Polydistortion* with Dangerous

World and *Nature of Harm*,

"Hi, the problem with most of what all the others said about this so far, no offense to them of course, is that it's exactly what the psychology, police and legal mafia want to hear or get from us, in the end they don't care about our feelings one bit, they want us to abide by the terms and conditions (laws) and be tamed…I (and many of us) on the other hand agree that yes there can be real abuse, but are also able to see beyond that, that there can be a good and positive side to sexuality with the young, and work things out in order to develop that proper context for the good to be able to manifest itself, and get rid of the bad (real abuse) as much as possible…I really loved little girls, that it's not just to "use them as sex objects", that some sexuality can be positive with them in a certain context etc...Things don't change, they stay what they are, even though we live in a lie it doesn't matter to them, that's what they want, the lie to be believed and perpetrated forever, and us like good little sheep we say "abide by the laws even if it hurts", or "it would hurt the little girl and we want to protect her first", not that I want her to get hurt, but the problem is that by doing this nothing advances, nothing changes...Sexuality with a child is natural even though this may shock many due to ignorance, fear or misinterpretation; Sex is part of life even before we're born, and it's a very important aspect of it, for EVERYONE; The skin is a sexual organ, it's ultra sensual and the vulva is exactly that, sensual and the center of pleasure; God or nature made it so, and I want to make the creature that I love feel good if she wants it also, this is also natural and an intrinsic right, and am capable of controlling myself, and I believe that it can be learned too for the ones who are afraid of their urges, and I also believe that if the young girls know what sex is about in an open and sane environment that they will develop the defenses necessary to stay within a certain boundary and make it be respected, and when she's older she'll know how to protect herself from getting pregnant, she'll have the necessary tools, while today's little girls are generally completely naive, ignorant, vulnerable and being easily manipulated on these things. Therefore keeping today's laws and insane context is not only dangerous for them, it's also criminal."

Chapter 4

Discussion

The findings from the current study presented a lack of posts that demonstrated cognitive distortions. Only 2.45% of posts indicated cognitive distortions, leaving 97.55% of posts that did not demonstrate any cognitive distortions. Of the small percentage that did demonstrate cognitive distortions *Children as Sexual Objects* was the most common, suggesting that more "Girl Chat" members believe that children actively seek out sexual relationships with adults. The second cognitive distortion demonstrated was *Dangerous World*, suggesting that "Girl Chat" members believe that society is against them. The third cognitive distortion demonstrated was *Nature of Harm,* suggesting that "Girl Chat" members believe that their interactions with children are beneficial. The fourth cognitive distortion demonstrated was *Uncontrollability,* suggesting that "Girl Chat" members believe their sexual desires towards children must be expressed. The fifth cognitive distortion that was anticipated to be demonstrated was *Entitlement*. However, *Entitlement* was not demonstrated in any "Girl Chat" posts. Since *Entitlement* was not demonstrated in any "Girl Chat" posts, it may suggest that pedophiles may not feel it is the "right" of the adult partner to receive sexual pleasure from a child. Posters often describe feeling honored when a child "chooses" them as a sexual partner and the love that exists between a pedophile and a child is a privilege, not a right.

The current study's findings also contradict some findings of previous literature. It was mentioned that the five cognitive distortions used in the current study were developed through previous research conducted with rapists of women and altered to

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apply to pedophiles. Previous research proposed that women are unknoweable, are sex objects, male sex drive is uncontrollable, men are entitled, and the world is dangerous (Mann & Hollin, 2010). However, when applied to those who engage in sexual encounters with children, the distortions (Children as Sexual Objects, Dangerous World, Nature of Harm, Entitlement, Uncontrollability) are not prominently demonstrated among others on the "Girl Chat" forum. The lack of posts indicative of these distortions suggests that these cognitive distortions may not be commonly used amongst the pedophiles in a supportive environment. Because offending against children is a common factor amongst the posters of "Girl Chat" and seems to be a prerequisite for membership, discussing such events does not appear to be necessary. The forum is a supportive environment that allows for validation from other pedophiles through discussions that go beyond descriptions of sexual experiences with underage girls (e.g., politics). However, when engaging in a conversation with those from a foreign environment (e.g., law enforcement officer), discussions may demonstrate an increased number of cognitive distortions. This may be because of the lack of support and validation from the foreign party and the pedophile's attempt to warrant support by providing evidence for why their behavior should be accepted.

In addition, the lack of demonstrated cognitive distortions may suggest more theoretical use than empirical use in an online environment. Because previous research developed the five cognitive distortions used in the current study through interviews and self-reports (Keenan & Ward, 1999), the results yielded little empirical validation. Interviews and self-reports often take place after a behavior has occurred, thus it is difficult to measure one's behavior based on one's beliefs and thoughts prior to the

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behavior, especially if a significant amount of time has passed from the behavior to the interview or self-report. Interviews and self-reports are also subjective and may not measure actual events.

Limitations

   While data was collected from a sample of the pedophilic population, the current study's findings cannot be generalized to the entire pedophilic population, incarcerated and non-incarcerated. The findings are reflective of the pedophilic adults that use the "Girl Chat" (http://www.annabelleigh.net/) forum as an outlet for their fantasies and experiences with children.

   Another limitation to the current study was that the drop in inter-rater reliability throughout the content analysis. Inter-rater reliability was 92.7% at the start of analysis; however, as content analysis progressed, inter-rater reliability dropped. In an attempt to monitor consistency, the first author analyzed every tenth post. However, analyzing every tenth post was not adequate enough to indicate drift among raters and retraining did not occur. The first author was the determinant in posts that were not agreed upon by the raters. The first author became the determinant in 85% of the posts that demonstrated a distortion, suggesting that the inter-rater reliability dropped to 14% throughout content analysis. For future research, the first author can have "retraining" sessions throughout data collection in order to reaffirm each rater's understanding of each distortion and what it may look like in context.

   Despite limitations the current study is novel and can be used to generate future studies and projects. Although there is limited research on using the internet to study pedophiles (e.g., Durkin & Bryant, 1999), the current study is a first to qualitatively

analyze cognitive distortions through content analysis of internet forum posts. The current study was able to explore new territory by using the internet to gauge the frequencies of cognitive distortions in a pedophile's post. This study may present a stimulus for new research into the use of the internet to study cognitive distortions.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could eliminate the use of *Polydistortion* in order to determine a more accurate frequency of the demonstrated distortions that were compiled within this label (i.e., *Nature of Harm*, *Dangerous World*, and *Children as Sexual Objects*). Eliminating this label may increase the frequency in which *Nature of Harm*, *Dangerous World*, and *Children as Sexual Objects* cognitive distortions were demonstrated. In addition, future research could also validate the use of *Polydistortion*. Research could focus on the *Polydistortion* classification to determine whether or not *Polydistortion* exists or if a trend in coupling of distortions exists. The most common of coupling of distortions was *Nature of Harm* and *Dangerous World*. Further examination of posts that demonstrated *Polydistortion* may expose a higher frequency of coupled distortions and validate the labels use. In addition, future research could reexamine the data and forum to determine which specific members posted more and what effect that may have, suggesting a longitudinal study. Future research could analyze posters' cognitive distortions over a period of time and examine which cognitive distortions have altered over time.

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Appendix A

Terms from "Girl Chat" Site

1. nt/nft – "no text"/ "no further text", this is used to indicate that the subject line is the entire post

2. OT – "off topic"

3. GL – "girl love"

4. GLr or GLer – "girl lover"

5. CL – "child love"

6. CLr or CLer – "child lover"

7. MAA – "Minor Attracted Adult"

8. MAP – "Minor Attracted Person"

9. LG – "little girl"

10. AG – "adolescent girl"

11. LGF – "little girl friend"

12. CP – "Child Porn"

13. LEO – "Law Enforcement Officers"

14. GM – "Girl Moment", this is used to indicate a description of a moment in which one has the opportunity to interact with an underage girl