Heroes, monsters, and ideal victims: A narrative approach in understanding online child sexual exploitation investigators' perceptions of perpetrators and victims

by

Christopher Glenn Brewer

B.S., The University of Southern Mississippi, 2014
M.A., The University of Southern Mississippi, 2017

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work
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Abstract

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The development of information communication technologies (ICTs) has led to a growth of the production and consumption of child sexual exploitation materials (CSEM). The enforcement of these crimes has largely fallen upon policing agencies and specialized units dedicated to investigating internet-facilitated crimes against children. Unfortunately, little research has been conducted on individual cybercrime units despite their importance and notable imperative in combatting child exploitation. Specifically, there has been no examination on how ICAC investigators understand their fellow investigators, CSEM perpetrators, or victims of child exploitation. With the help of narrative criminology, this research explored how stories and storytelling help us better understand (1) ICAC investigators' sense of occupational identity, (2) their understanding of offenders, and (3) their understanding of victims. Analysis revealed three core narratives from the stories of these investigators: (1) the "Misunderstood Hero," (2) the "Incorrigible Menace," and (3) the "Ideal Victim." To answer these questions, this study analyzed a dataset of 47 qualitative interviews with ICAC detectives, civilian analysts, and administrators gathered as part of a National Science Foundation (NSF)-funded study on cybercrime policing (Award # 1916284). A narrative criminological approach best informed the analytical development of perceptions through the power of language and storytelling.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

The Internet has not only affected how we see the world, but also how we engage with it. This new "Cyberspace"—a term popularized in William Gibson's (1984) novel, *Neuromancer*—has now become an integral part of our daily routines: convenient online commerce, instant communication with friends and family, and near limitless access to entertainment and information. For children that grew up during the mid- to late-1990s, they quickly adopted such tech and became a generation of "digital natives" where technology became a seemingly natural component of their socialization, communication, and thinking (Prensky, 2001, p. 1).

Yet, just as Gibson's (1984, p. 6, 43) world was filled with dark corners and shady dealings within the Sprawl—a dystopian, cyberpunk, "ferro-concrete" haven painted by the aroma of hyper-consumerism, stratification, and "techno-criminal subcultures" —so too can the Internet feature a wide array of insidious and harmful acts. Children and teenagers, specifically, are increasingly becoming victims to certain types of deviant and criminal behavior—more so today since access to this technology is ubiquitous. In fact, teenagers and young adults represent one of the fastest growing demographics online. Today, 95 percent of 3- to 18-year-olds have access to a smartphone, and many are online "almost constantly" (45%) or "several times a day" (44%) (NCES, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2018). Information and communications technologies (ICTs) have precipitated "new" forms of fraud, piracy, hacking, stalking, and—relevant to this study—the production, distribution, and consumption of child sexual exploitation material, commonly known as "child pornography" (Burke et al., 2002, p. 80).

Before the Internet, access to child sexual exploitation material (CSEM) was more limited—only available in locations withdrawn from the public eye (e.g., backrooms of adult stores) and in some sort of tangible media (Jenkins, 2001; O'Donnell & Milner, 2007; Marcum

et al., 2011). Yet the internet and other advances in computer technologies have allowed for such content to be easily, rapidly, and widely produced and distributed at an unprecedented scale (Salter & Whitten, 2021). Online communities dedicated to CSEM can be quickly and anonymously formed, can dynamically shift in size with little interruption, and can evade police pursuit easier (Martellozzo, 2015). Online sexual solicitation, specifically, has reportedly increased for various demographics—from adolescents to young adults (Marcum & Higgins, 2011). For instance, a meta-study sampled children (ages 12 to 17) regarding their experience with unwanted online sexual solicitation and found that "one in five youth experience unwanted online exposure to sexually explicit material, and one in nine youth experience unwanted online solicitation of a sexual nature" (Madigan et al., 2018, p. 133).

The growth of CSEM offending is reflected in available statistical measures as well: there has been "a dramatic increase in cases of child sexual exploitation in the US, including a 230% increase in the number of documented complaints of online solicitation of children from 2004 to 2008" (DeHart et al., 2017, p. 77). In 2014, it was found that over 840,000 computers had participated in multiple peer-to-peer (P2P) networks trading CSEM (Bissias et al., 2016). By 2021, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (2022) received over 29.3 million reports (up from 21.7 million in 2020) of alleged CSEM material, online enticement (i.e., "sextortion"), and child sex trafficking and molestation—all from either civilians or electronic service providers (NCMEC, 2022). Additionally, law enforcement agencies who work closely with NCMEC sent 3,220 reports to the organization, resulting in more than 15 million images and videos of past and potential victims of child abuse imagery. A similar organization, the International Association of Internet Hotlines (INHOPE), has also contributed to the fight against this abusive material in the form of hotlines. One of the tools they developed, called "I see Child

Abuse Material," or ICCAM, processed over 267,000 URLs containing illicit child abuse material in 2020 alone (INHOPE, 2020). At times when offenders do get caught, the prevalence of child sexual exploitation can be seen in several metrics within the criminal justice system as well. Since 2000, annual arrests for CSEM trafficking, possession, and receiving has been above 1,400 each year since 2000 (USSC, 2018; Wolak et al., 2012a, 2012b).

While children have run the risk of being abused for centuries, this problem has only started being taken seriously as a social issue (see, for example, Martellozzo, 2015; Salter & Whitten, 2021; Wells et al., 2007). Several reasons exist why we should be concerned about the production, exchange, and consumption of these materials as a significant social problem, posing harm and other negative effects to those vulnerable that fall victim to these crimes. For one, CSEM requires the abuse of a child to produce (Taylor & Quayle, 2003). Grooming strategies, for instance, may be employed in the production or elicitation of these materials. Grooming involves gradually obtaining the trust and emotional dependence of a child with the aim of manipulating them for sexual purposes (Finkelhor, 1984; Webster et al., 2012). When grooming occurs, the child's body, privacy, and dignity are violated through both contact (e.g., the physical violence done to children) and non-contact (e.g., the recording and distribution of such attacks) means (Finkelhor, 1984; Ost, 2018). In terms of the latter (i.e., non-contact), these images serve two additional functions: they (1) remind the child of the abuse, causing perpetual psychological harm if this material is readily accessible, and (2) are used during the grooming process to sexually desensitize their victims to help facilitate seduction and harm (Durkin, 1997; Taylor & Quayle, 2003). In the age of the Internet, these materials can then be digitized and uploaded, not only allowing the endless reproduction of such materials, but also creating a market for such

materials to be traded (Taylor & Quayle, 2003). In sum, CSEM and its production and exchange has inflicted significant physical and psychological harms on children.

The responsibility of investigating these crimes has largely fallen upon law enforcement agencies and their initiative to funnel resources into cybercrime investigations and prosecutions (Broadhurst, 2006; Hinduja, 2004). This law enforcement priority has long been fueled by (1) the growing number of children and teens online, (2) the increase in the online availability in CSEM, and (3) the heightened awareness of online offenders attempting to solicit harmful materials from underaged victims (Medaris & Girouard, 2002). In assessing the needs and challenges of law enforcement agencies in the US, scholars have found that the most frequent computer-mediated crime that law enforcement encounter and pursue is that of CSEM (Burke et al., 2002; Hinduja, 2004; Jewkes & Andrews, 2005; Jewkes & Yar, 2008); thus, in response to the growing problems of online CSEM and solicitation, law enforcement agencies have increasingly adopted specialized units and personnel dedicated to examining internet-facilitated crimes against children. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) created the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force program and implemented it in 1998 under the Department of Justice (DOJ) to cull the "online enticement of children by sexual predators, child exploitation, and child obscenity and pornography cases" (34 US §21112, para. 1). This response encouraged state and local law enforcement cooperation in the pursuit of catching consumers, producers, and distributors of CSEM. Currently, all 50 states participate in this effort with a combined total of 61 ICAC Task Forces across more than 4,000 law enforcement agencies and prosecutorial agencies in the US (ICACTaskForce.org, 2021).

Third-party organizations also collaborate with law enforcement to help with CSEM investigations and programs, including NCMEC and the CyberTipline (which is operated by

NCMEC) (Detrick, 1998; Mitchell et al., 2010). These units also offer educational seminars within their communities for parents, teachers, and similar figures to increase media literacy and internet safety, or "e-safety" educational seminars (Barnard-Wills, 2012, p. 239). These e-safety lessons are geared primarily around the "online predator or sexual abuser" (Barnard-Wills, 2012, p. 243). Supplemental organizations should be noted in the fight against CSEM as well, including the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) and INHOPE. Understanding the nature of digitizing CSEM, the IWF dedicates resources to "find, remove, and disrupt the availability of child sexual abuse material" (IWF, 2021, p. 100). The aforementioned INHOPE (2020)—similar to the CyberTipline under NCMEC—provides a way for the public to anonymously report any content (via ICCAM) they deem as CSEM.

Much like offenders who quickly adapt to new technology, ICAC units' integration of new technology for their investigations have produced positive outcomes. In 2018, 71,200 investigations were conducted into individuals involved with CSEM, ultimately resulting in the arrests of over 9,100 offenders (Fowler et al., 2020). Additionally, technology has given ICAC units more options and efficiency during their investigations, including digitizing their evidence, adopting social media for leads, and the potential for undercover work (Mitchell & boyd, 2014). On a larger scale, ICAC has led several high-profile takedowns—their identification and prosecution—of individual offenders and loose crime syndicates. Notable examples of individuals charged for the possession or distribution of CSEM include Jared Fogle, Pete Townshend, and Larry Nassar (Yar & Steinmetz, 2019). Local and metropolitan police departments were responsible for efforts that took down these figures. Large-scale takedowns have also garnered attention, with federal authorities working internationally to identify, prosecute, and remove large swaths of criminal rings distributing and possessing CSEM. These

include takedowns such as Operation Cathedral, Operation Pacifier, and a robust, internationally cooperative investigation of the "Welcome to Video" (W2V) darknet site (see Broadhurst, 2020; Broadhurst & Ball, 2021; Jenkins, 2001; Jewkes & Andrews, 2005; O'Donnell & Milner, 2007; Ormsby, 2018). A significant number of individuals were identified and arrested—across multiple different countries—as a result of these investigations, while hundreds of abused or at-risk children being identified and removed from those environments.

Still, it should be noted that significant problems remain with cybercrime units and ICAC investigators responsible for handling these crimes, along with corresponding gaps in the literature that have yet to be addressed. It should also be noted that the problems facing ICAC investigators are the same issues being confronted by cybercrime units more generally, including reporting and awareness of cybercrimes, jurisdictional issues, a lack of resources and training, and police culture (Bhaskar, 2006; Boes & Leukfeldt, 2016; Bossler & Holt, 2012; Burns et al., 2004; Button & Cross, 2017; Hinduja, 2004, 2007; Holt & Bossler, 2012a; Holt et al., 2015; Jewkes & Andrews, 2005; Leukfeldt et al., 2013; Martellozzo, 2015; Mitchell & boyd, 2014; Willits & Nowacki, 2016; Yar, 2013; Yar & Steinmetz, 2019). ICAC investigators encounter additional, unique obstacles in the form of (1) the type of *daily* sensitive and/or violent content they process and (2) the resulting secondary trauma (Bourke & Craun, 2014; Burns et al. 2008; Burruss et al., 2018; Craun et al., 2015; Perez et al., 2010; Stewart & Witte, 2020; Tehrani, 2016). Despite the concerted effort by law enforcement in combatting CSEM, research has, just recently, commenced in studying aspects of cybercrime in police departments, but even less has been conducted on ICAC units, specifically, since their inception in the late-90s. As stated by Marcum and colleagues (2010, p. 517): "Currently, there is a gap in the literature investigating

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the efforts made nationally by law enforcement agencies to target resources towards cybercrime investigation and arrest."

Importantly, a significant factor that could act as a barrier to change or improvement in issues plaguing ICAC personnel and adjacent policing problems is police culture as uncovered by narrative and ethnographic criminologists. "Police" or "cop" culture, specifically, has a significant effect on all aspects of policing, including what constitutes "real" police work, case prioritization, and case outcomes (Hinduja, 2004; Holt et al., 2015; Jewkes & Andrews, 2005; Jewkes & Yar, 2008; Nhan & Huey, 2013; Yar, 2013). Additionally, this culture (or cultures) impact how police interact with their colleagues, with offenders, and with victims (Alpert et al., 2015; Bowling et al., 2019; Jordan & Kouchaki, 2021; Kappeler et al., 2015; Kurtz & Upton, 2017a, 2017b; Manning, 1977; Reuss-Ianni, 1983; Schaefer & Tewksbury, 2018; Skolnick, 2011; Van Maanen, 1973; Waddington, 1999; Zvi, 2021). Though police culture can be beneficial to officers by providing informal socialization for recruits and promoting solidarity among officers, scholars have found that police culture contributes to many problems including the promotion of (1) a masculine ideology that excludes (or harms) certain populations and civilians, (2) a sense of social isolation among officers, one that results in a code of silence that enables police to skirt accountability, and (3) a collective, defensive tendency to reject anything that "challenges the status quo" (Alpert et al., 2015; Bowling et al., 2019; Kurtz & Upton, 2017a; Loftus, 2010, p. 2). Viewing these issues through the lens of police culture is where the three guiding research questions for the current study was conceived.

First, police culture is a significant factor in shaping officers' occupational identity and their interactions with one another. As mentioned previously, scholars have found that the overall institution of policing has generally endorsed a more cynical, suspicious, masculine, and

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aggressive style of policing—one that is marked by promises of excitement, danger, and a willingness to use force toward more crime-oriented activities (Loftus, 2010; Reiner, 2000; Skolnick, 2011). Any challenges to their exaggerated sense of mission, or any activities that do not conform to these characteristics which comprise their occupational identity will be met with skepticism and/or hostility, including specialized units housed within their own agency. In fact, the literature has shown the non-monolithic nature of police culture in line officers' indifference (or hostility) towards specialized units and non-conforming policing tactics. Strategies such as community-oriented policing (COP) and integration of civilian investigators (Garcia, 2008; Rice, 2023), to specialized units such as domestic violence (Garcia, 2008) and cybercrime units (Holt et al., 2015; Jewkes & Andrews, 2005; Jewkes & Yar, 2008; Nhan & Huey, 2013), have all been stigmatized by line officers who endorse existing traditional core characteristics of policing and view these types of activities and endeavors as not "real" police work. Such constructions by line officers devalue the more "social service" style policing and may very well hinder agency support for these units and, therefore, inhibit effective policing of such crimes (Garcia, 2008). The first research question this study investigates is in exploring how ICAC personnel have constructed their occupational identities against these traditional characteristics of policing. The stories they tell will inevitably reveal whether or not these otherizing attitudes exist between and among ICAC personnel and, possibly, how these narratives further inform us on the departmental dynamics between officers.

Second, germane to the current analysis, members of police cultures tend to share and promote stories, worldviews, and myths about offenders. This is especially the case for perpetrators who harm children. Such offenders are frequently viewed as criminal monsters in our cultural imaginary, resulting in the curation of criminal justice strategies to handle these

"unchangeable pariah" and to expel these "beasts" entirely (Marshall, 1996, p. 318; Spencer, 2009, p. 219). In fact, these individuals have been convenient scapegoats for any social disorder that occurs (Douard, 2008; Kearney, 2003). Worse, the view is that these monstrous *others*, specifically those who have committed sex offenses against children, are inhuman and cannot be reasoned with nor rehabilitated; so, rather than strict banishment and harsh incarceration being one option of many, hunting, maiming, or killing these monsters (metaphorically or literally) become the *only* solution (Douard, 2008; Kearney, 2003; Neocleous, 2016; Walker, 2021; Werth, 2022). As a result, criminal legal strategies for handling crimes against children cases, especially those involving sexual abuse, tend to reflect these harsh or shame-inducing strategies including potentially lengthy prison sentences and efforts to track and expose former sexual offenders (e.g., Megan's Law). Similarly, police tend to have unforgiving attitudes toward those arrested and accused of such crimes (Simon, 1998; Spencer, 2009; Werth, 2022). Notably, belief in the monstrous depiction of offenders can affect how law enforcement interact with them. For instance, Werth (2022) found that, regardless of sex offenders' compliance and "good behavior" while on parole, personnel *still* sought any minute reason to return these offenders to prison based on their endorsement in the cultural construction of the "monstrous" sex offender. For this reason—as well as the lack of examination whether or not similar constructions exists among ICAC personnel who have direct contact with these offenders—this dissertation investigates the perceptions of offenders held among online crimes against children investigators and the possible implications of those depictions.

Lastly, police perceptions of victims could be equally problematic. For instance, the police do not have the best track record of handling and caring for victims in certain cases. Law enforcement have adopted certain stereotypical beliefs about sex workers, sexual assault, and

rape that have, unfortunately, lead to victim-blaming behaviors during investigations (Bieneck &

Krahé, 2011; Slakoff & Fradella, 2019; Zvi, 2021). Such beliefs have consequences as well.

Specifically, non-empathetic approaches not only discourage victims from reporting their

victimization as they do not believe that the police will help them (and only experience

*re*victimization), but the attitudes from the police likewise hinder investigative efforts as

officers' beliefs in rape myths could dramatically influence decision-making processes during an

investigation (Maier, 2008; O'Neal, 2019; Zvi, 2021). Notably, however, research has found that

officers do become more empathetic and emotionally involved when it comes to *child* victims

(see, for example, Oxburgh et al., 2015). Considering these consequences, the final research

question will explore the stories told about CSEM victims from ICAC investigators and how

these constructions affect, if at all, their interactions with these victims.

This study involves an in-depth examination of interviews with 47 of sworn and civilian

investigators gathered as part of a National Science Foundation-funded study[1] on cybercrime

policing. To make sense of the connection between crimes against offender investigators, their

stories, their sense of occupational identity, views toward offenders, perceptions of victims, and

police culture, the analyses contained herein employ narrative criminology, a relatively nascent-

yet-powerful approach to making sense of stories and storytelling. Prior narrative and

ethnographic criminological accounts have shown how stories and storytelling within the

department can significantly affect police culture, which is a powerful force in dictating how

officers interact with their colleagues, with offenders, and with victims (for example, Beek,

2016; Brookman et al., 2022; Campeau, 2015; Garcia, 2008; Ingram et al., 2018; Kurtz & Upton,

2017a, 2017b; Manning, 1977; Rice, 2023; Schaefer & Tewksbury, 2018; van Hulst, 2013, 2017,

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[1]Award # 1916284

2020; van Hulst & Ybema, 2020). Narratives not only "[help] officers to get a sense of what is going on" (van Hulst, 2013, p. 636), but they can also be a significant driving force of either positive or negative action within police departments and officers therein (Presser & Sandberg, 2015). Since narrative criminological scholarship represents a significantly growing area of research (see, for example, Presser, 2009; Youngs & Canter, 2012), a narrative criminological approach is used here to better understand the accounts of ICAC investigators, their stories of fellow colleagues, CSEM offenders, and CSEM victims, and what type of work and function these stories serve (e.g., Riessman, 2008). Central to this study is how police stories and storytelling influences police culture and the corresponding attitudes and actions within. This study applies a narrative approach to better grasp not only how ICAC investigators understand their sense of occupational identity, but also how they understand and interact with CSEM offenders and victims. Three research questions guided this analysis:

1. How do stories and storytelling shape ICAC investigators' understanding of their occupational identity?

2. How do stories and storytelling shape how ICAC personnel understand CSEM offenders?

3. How do stories and storytelling shape how ICAC personnel understand CSEM victims?

The findings here revealed three core narratives for the three research questions. For the first core narrative, ICAC investigators were depicted as the "Misunderstood Hero" whose occupational identity was influenced by (1) investigators as crime fighters and saviors and (2) their particular role being marked by strong solidarity and support. Additionally, their occupational solidarity was managed and reinforced in two ways: (1) through the navigation of

other officers' labels towards their occupation and (2) through (war) stories that built solidarity via emphasis on the absurdities of this particular role. For the second core narrative, stories from ICAC investigators illustrated the archetypical CSEM offender as an "Incorrigible Menace" whose image emerged from a dialectical discussion of offenders as both monsters and "normal" people. Finally, the analysis of stories and storytelling produced a core narrative of victims depicted as "Ideal Victims." These findings not only reveal more nuances in the "street cop" culture and masculine ethos of policing, but they also expose how certain narrative depictions of CSEM offenders and victims further justify the existence and expansion of these ICAC investigations.

What follows hereafter is a robust collection of current literature pertaining to CSEM, ICAC investigations, and current stories, myths, and perceptions about offenders and victims. First, to better contextualize the work of ICAC personnel, the following review of the literature will initially define what is meant by child sexual exploitative material, as well as the terminology that will be used in this study. Secondly, there will be a brief history of how cybercrime units were developed before covering the inception and persistent issues of those units, in general, then ICAC units, specifically. Third, in setting up the rationale for the three guiding research questions, the literature on existing stories, myths, and perceptions of offenders and victims will be given. Likewise, the last section in the literature review will cover existing stories and storytelling found in policing. The methods of this study will then be explained and how the utilization of semi-structured, open-ended interviews via stories and storytelling helped to acquire insight into the work and life of ICAC investigators. Finally, the findings will be told in three separate "stories" via the aforementioned core narratives before discussing the broader implications of this study.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The following section includes a robust review of the literature regarding (1) the history, formation, and purpose of ICAC units, personnel, and their existing challenges; (2) CSEM offenders, victims, and the social constructions of them; and (3) narrative criminology and its application to the policing literature. First, the formation and purpose of specialized units, specifically cybercrime and ICAC units, will be discussed to give the reader a foundation of the entity and personnel central to this study. Understanding their work will also help in contextualizing their occupational identity in relation to the police department at large. Next, since the last two research questions focus on CSEM offenders and victims, a review of the literature will be given regarding what is known about offenders and victims versus existing social constructions of them. In short, how individuals and institutions perceive, or frame, certain issues not only influences interactions with them, but also influences actions taken to solve those problems. Often, these perceptions can fall under crime myths that—either purposefully or ignorantly—result in applying "ready-made" solutions that (1) ultimately fail to adequately address the issue while (2) those crime myths persist and continue to shape our thoughts and reactions to these issues (Kappeler & Potter, 2017, p. 3); therefore, adequate attention will be given to the perceptions of CSEM offenders and victims. Finally, attention will be given to the literature on narrative criminology. Seeing as narrative criminology is the methodological and theoretical framework of this dissertation, such framework allows for the proper analysis of ICAC personnels' stories in how they have interacted with fellow colleagues, CSEM offenders, and CSEM victims. In this section, special attention will be given to police culture, with which stories and storytelling are intimately intertwined (Kurtz & Colburn, 2019; van Hulst, 2013).

Policing Cybercrime

Historically, police were created with the intent of solving problems developed collaterally by the technological advances of the industrial revolution. Over time, law enforcement became an all-encompassing emergency service with support, legitimacy, and independence bestowed to them by the public (Wall, 2007b). This increasing legitimacy projected the police into becoming a more developed, bureaucratic institution ingrained with the duty to protect and serve the public (Wall, 2007b). This service involves protection from *any* issue brought forth by the public, including the increasingly complex issue of cybercrime and, specifically, CSEM offending. The following section will detail the growth of ICAC investigations, as well as the literature detailing the many obstacles confronting cybercrime units in general. First, a brief discussion must be provided for *why* such specialized units exists in the first place—the problem of child sexual exploitation materials.

Defining CSEM

Since ICAC personnel are responsible for identifying, investigating, and apprehending offenders of CSEM, defining the crime helps to contextualize the challenges of its investigation, offenders, and victims. Searching for a universal definition, however, remains difficult due to inconsistencies in classifying such material. As Taylor and colleagues (2001, p. 95) state: "any image can be sexualised and fantasized over, and what makes that image of the child important to the adult is the psychological role it plays in arousal and masturbation." The complexities of the Internet have placed an additional burden on defining CSEM due to its cultural, legal, and moral differences across the globe, throwing yet another wrench into preventative, prosecutorial, and legal efforts against child sexual exploitation. Legal pluralism, especially, is a well-documented issue (see Wall, 2007a; Yar & Steinmetz, 2019). CSEM transcends physical

boundaries, complicating not only the investigation of such material, but also revealing how some jurisdictions either (1) do not have the resources dedicated to processing CSEM crimes or (2) might not prioritize these types of cases (even though child exploitation crimes are the priority for a majority of cybercrime units) (Holt et al., 2015; Jewkes & Andrews, 2005; Jewkes & Yar, 2008; Nhan & Huey, 2013).

First, a discussion of terminology is warranted. Children are the victims of these types of crimes where they are exposed to sexual exploitation and/or abuse. Researchers and practitioners alike have slowly moved away from the more general description of "child pornography" to language that more accurately describes these acts, phrases including indecent images of children (IIOC), child sexual exploitation material (CSEM), child sexual abuse material (CSAM), and/or child sexual abuse images (CSAI) (Broadhurst, 2020; Kloess et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2001; Yar & Steinmetz, 2019). For the purposes of the present study, the phrase "child sexual exploitation materials" (CSEM) will be applied to this type of content since it more accurately describes the acts and materials under investigation. Additionally, these terms are also in line with international organization and their descriptions (e.g., Interpol). These newer classifications, rather than the ambiguous "child pornography," are used to better translate the visceral nature and gravity of these crimes when discussing the production, distribution, and/or consumption of these materials (Broadhurst, 2020; Kloess et al., 2021). Cybercrime personnel also use CSEM when classifying these materials, allowing content to be consistent across both the literature and practitioners.

The Growth of ICAC Investigations

The ICAC Task Force was a government response to the growth of children and teens accessing the Internet along with "the proliferation of child sexual abuse images available

electronically and heightened online activity by predators seeking unsupervised contact with potential underage victims" (ICACTaskForce.org, 2021). The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) created this program in 1998 and subsequently reauthorized through the 2022 fiscal year. Their track record boasts significant numbers in combatting CSEM, gathering over one million reports and over 100,000 arrests made since their 1998 inception (ICACTaskForce.org, 2021). In 2020 alone, and of the 100,000 investigations conducted, over 9,000 suspects were arrested. These numbers track as researchers have found a correlation between the number of arrests and the presence/increase in law enforcement personnel (see Marcum et al., 2010, 2011). These efforts have been positive in the past as well. For instance, Huff-Corzine and colleagues (2017) recognized the prevalence of multi-agency task forces in the 1990s and tested to see if their creation led to more human trafficking arrests. Indeed, they found that the strongest predictor of arrests was the presence of a task force. When looking at ICAC Task Forces, specifically, a similar result was found. Marcum and colleagues (2011) found that the presence of specialized task forces, along with more police officers, resulted in an increase of CSEM investigations and arrests. Specific factors also made these units more successful. Marcum and Higgins (2011) found that more trained personnel and the number of arrests dictated the success of ICAC investigations.

Whereas the Internet has provided opportunities for individuals to engage in harm against children, law enforcement is likewise privy to these opportunities and has allowed them to combat such illicit behavior in various ways. For participating police departments, probes into CSEM offenders involve both proactive and reactive investigations in hopes of obtaining a criminal prosecution and sentencing (Broadhurst & Ball, 2021; Gaines & Miller, 2018). Being the bulk of investigations, reactive investigations are conducted when harm against a child (or

children) has already occurred, and law enforcement investigate that suspect (or suspects).

Proactive investigations involve detectives establishing a presence in the spaces potential

offenders occupy, typically in the form of undercover (UC) work. Historically, police have

conducted undercover operations for a variety of street-level crimes to large-scale operations,

such as narcotics sting operations (Gaines & Miller, 2018, p. 135). Undercover work has been

adapted to the online format where the purpose is to prevent child sexual exploitation or abuse

before it occurs via impersonation as a child, teen, or adult with children (Fowler et al., 2020).

This role involves several attributes that lead to a successful investigation, including patience and

adaptability in building legitimacy with an offender (Fowler et al., 2020). Problems still persist,

however, as UC investigations involve heavy preparation and convincing offenders of their

online persona, all while contending with the rapid growth and change of ICTs and social media

platforms (Martellozzo, 2015). Regardless, both types of investigations involve everything from

"old fashioned" police work (e.g., gathering evidence, questioning suspects, and talking to

victims) to digital forensics. Lastly, in terms of investigative priority, police departments are

more likely to pursue the traffickers of CSEM, or those persons or entities that harbor large

numbers of exploitative content of children, to more effectively abate these illicit exchanges

(Wolak et al., 2013).

Challenges for ICAC Units

Unfortunately, problems still persist when conducting these investigations. Again, it

should be noted that the problems facing ICAC investigators are the same issues being

confronted by cybercrime units more generally, including reporting and awareness of

cybercrimes, jurisdictional issues, a lack of resources and training, and police culture (Bhaskar,

2006; Boes & Leukfeldt, 2016; Bossler & Holt, 2012; Burns et al., 2004; Button & Cross, 2017;

Hinduja, 2004, 2007; Holt & Bossler, 2012a; Holt et al., 2015; Jewkes & Andrews, 2005; Leukfeldt et al., 2013; Martellozzo, 2015; Mitchell & boyd, 2014; Willits & Nowacki, 2016; Yar & Steinmetz, 2019, Yar, 2013). ICAC investigators encounter additional, unique obstacles in the form of (1) the type of *daily* sensitive and/or violent content they process and (2) the resulting secondary trauma (Bourke & Craun, 2014; Burns et al. 2008; Burruss et al., 2018; Craun et al., 2015; Perez et al., 2010; Stewart & Witte, 2020; Tehrani, 2016). The following sections will discuss these obstacles in detail.

Under-Reporting and Awareness

Like "traditional" crime, cybercrime still falls victim to the "dark figure" of crime that is a well-known problem plaguing law enforcement (Yar & Steinmetz, 2019, p. 13). Even though this dark figure is likely more substantial for cybercrimes, tens of thousands of victims see no help from the police (Wall, 2007b; Yar & Steinmetz, 2019). Within the literature, under-reporting stems from two major considerations: the lack of prioritization from the criminal justice institution and factors affecting the victim. First, law enforcement, until recently, has prioritized gathering statistics of more traditional crimes, largely neglecting the impact of cybercrimes (Button & Cross, 2017). The disregard for cybercrimes has also negatively affected the opinions of law enforcement responsible for handling these cases. For instance, victims of both investment fraud and romance fraud have felt high levels of stigma whenever attempting to report such crimes (Button & Cross, 2017, p. 132). Corporations also stray away from reporting their victimization, though their motivations are fueled by avoiding negative publicity that could potentially ruin their credibility. Regardless, businesses also doubt that law enforcement can effectively combat cybercrime (Goodman, 1997; Hinduja, 2004; Jewkes & Yar, 2008; Wall, 2007a; Yar, 2013). Thus, the disregard of such data, along with the immense shame and

embarrassment from victim-blaming attitudes on behalf of law enforcement, has resulted in cybercrimes going largely under-reported (Jewkes & Yar, 2008).

Second, the features of cybercrime present challenges on behalf of the victim. Technology, especially the Internet, has given criminals new, easier avenues for offending, making it harder to detect illicit activity; thus, victims of cybercrime may not realize that they have been victimized (Button & Cross, 2017; Hinduja, 2004; Jewkes & Yar, 2008; Leukfeldt et al., 2013; Wall, 2007b). Even if individuals realize they have been victimized, some deem reporting the crime as fruitless, opting to just accept their losses. Others, including businesses, who are not sure where to report their victimization will often confide in private or non-government entities (Button & Cross, 2017; Jewkes & Yar, 2008). This confidence in private security has produced a belief that (1) privately-operated security companies better understand these issues than law enforcement and (2) individuals should take a more neoliberal approach to their safety and use software (e.g., firewalls, encryption, and virus protection) to prevent further victimization (Jewkes & Yar, 2008; Wall, 2007b).

Awareness about the risks and hazards of online interaction is lacking for parents and communities as well. In Medaris and Girouard's (2002) summary of ICAC Task Force issues, they stated that "many children, teenagers, and parents are not sufficiently informed about the dangers and possible repercussions of releasing personal information or agreeing to meet individuals encountered online" (p. 6). They then recounted an experience from an ICAC investigator that was able to successfully meet with a 13-year-old girl in only 45 minutes. Even though this report was released two decades ago, the online landscape and establishment of social media platforms make public awareness more important due to the improved convenience

of communication offered by the accessibility of both hardware (e.g., smartphones) and software (e.g., numerous social media platforms).

Jurisdictional Issues

Jurisdictional complications can also hinder police effectiveness in responding to cybercrime. The global reach and capability of the Internet allow criminal behavior to go beyond terrestrial borders, which presents a significant problem for law enforcement agencies who are limited within their own geographical area. In other words, the location of the victim, offender, and crime can vary across state or national boundaries, causing complications over which local, state, or federal law enforcement agency takes the lead on a particular case (Jewkes & Andrews, 2005). Legal treatment of cybercrimes—especially CSEM—can vary between state and national boundaries (Wall, 2007b; Yar & Steinmetz, 2019). For example, the International Center for Missing and Exploited Children (2016) assessed 196 countries and their CSEM laws and found that 35 of them lack proper legislation to address CSEM. Even though the overwhelming majority of police departments prioritize CSEM over every other type of cybercrime (see, for example, Jewkes & Andrews, 2005), state law—including differing criminal justice systems— could complicate investigations and prosecutions that may not meet the expectations of one or more collaborating law enforcement agencies. Simply, cooperation is more likely to be successful if the investigation is deemed to yield a definite conviction with ample evidence (and departmental priority) to do so (Wall, 2007b). Regardless, successful and effective multi-jurisdictional cooperation is needed between cybercrime units to combat a national and global problem as online CSEM.

Resources and Training

Certain sectors of the law enforcement organization are affected by limited resources, training, and expertise (Leukfeldt et al., 2013; Yar & Steinmetz, 2019). Investigations and prosecutions can be costly, and the perceived return on investments for cybercrimes are lower than that of "street crimes," crimes with which police departments place higher priority (Nhan & Huey, 2013). Furthermore, factors that inhibit effective police response to cybercrime include time, money, and staffing (Bhaskar, 2006; Burns et al., 2004; Goodman, 1997; Hinduja, 2004; Holt & Bossler, 2012a). Another obstacle occurs when suspects are found to reside outside the jurisdiction of an agency, causing more resources to be invested, such as collaborating with other departments and units (Wall, 2007b). Due to the limited available resources, departments are likely to investigate cybercrimes only when they meet what Wall (2007a, p. 161) describes as the "*de minimis trap*." Latin for the "law does not deal with trifles," this essentially means that agencies will only conduct investigations when they meet a certain standard of seriousness and likelihood of apprehension.

Many officers feel like they do not have the expertise and/or knowledge necessary to handle cybercrimes (Bossler & Holt, 2012; Burke et al., 2002; Goodman, 1997; Hinduja, 2004, 2007; Jewkes & Andrews, 2005; Leukfeldt et al., 2013; Wall, 2007b; Willits & Nowacki, 2016). These officers also preference the more "traditional approaches to policing" which may not always be effective in combating cybercrimes (Nhan & Huey, 2013, p. 79). This is compounded by officers' lack of knowledge regarding the exact nature and detection of online activity (Boes & Leukfeldt, 2016); therefore, it is likely that most departments will gravitate towards "low-hanging fruit," or crimes that require fewer resources, less complex investigations, and/or better assurance of conviction (Jewkes & Andrews, 2005, p. 51). Bond and Tyrrell (2018) found that line officers in the U.K. lacked knowledge and comprehension in what constituted revenge

pornography. They concluded that this deficit likely "lead to ineffective management of cases as well as increased victim dissatisfaction and suffering" (Bond & Tyrrell, 2018, p. 2178).

Finally, ICTs and the Internet place new burdens on law enforcement investigations and forensic resources. Simply, technology from the 90s have changed and look vastly different than technology today. To law enforcement in the late 90s and early 2000s, the changing technological landscape made it seem like a hefty overhaul was needed to compensate for offenders that quickly moved to adapt these new advancements for the sake of exploiting children (Medaris & Girouard, 2002). This rapid transformation also meant that technical training and assistance were needed to stay ahead of the curve (Mitchell & boyd, 2014). Today, technology is almost always used in some fashion in ICAC investigations (Mitchell & boyd, 2014). According to Mitchell and boyd (2014), the ICAC investigators they surveyed said that not only do they frequently encounter tech in their cases, but when involved, "[technology] plays a very (33%) or extremely (60%) important role in the case" (p. 8).

Police Culture

Our understanding of the perceptions police harbor between one another, offenders, and victims can be largely attributed to police culture—a force that exerts a significant amount of influence over the dispositions of officers. Although a bit reductionist, "police culture" is a broad term used to cover an array of police attitudes, beliefs, and practices that are shaped by variety of forces, including (1) outside social, political, and economic processes and (2) internal stressors, pressures, and demands of policing (Bowling et al., 2019; Loftus, 2010; Reuss-Ianni, 1983; Waddington, 1999). First, police culture can shape the interpersonal interactions between officers. Researchers that have spent time within departments have identified a catalogue of prominent characteristics that have come to define the policing role, including: exaggerated

views of the police role's mission; hedonistic cravings for crime-oriented work; overt displays of masculinity and readiness to use force; perpetual suspiciousness, cynicism, and pessimism accompanied by living socially isolated lives and solidarity with colleagues; and conservatism in the context of politics and morality (Bowling et al., 2019; Reiner, 2000). Police culture acts, in a sense, as a thick membrane which tends to reject any change that may be introduced to the policing role or anything that "challenges the status quo" (Loftus, 2010, p. 2). Lastly, the police worldview is constructed and reinforced through daily socialization, only then to be passed down to new recruits.

Within the context of ICAC officers and victims of CSEM, police subculture often conflicts with the successful combating of cybercrime, especially those that involve child predation and pornography. Scholars note that police subculture has power in determining what constitutes "real" police work which, historically, has prioritized the prevention and investigation of street crimes (Holt et al., 2015; Jewkes & Andrews, 2005; Jewkes & Yar, 2008; Nhan & Huey, 2013). The literature suggests that cybercrimes fall outside the jurisdiction of "real" police work, and therefore receive less attention and interest from departments (Bossler & Holt, 2012; Holt & Bossler, 2012b). The only significant cybercrime that garners attention are crimes that involve child predation and/or CSEM (Hinduja, 2004; Yar, 2013). An explanation can be found in Yar's (2013, p. 482) "hierarchies of standing." This framework involves assessing a crime's level of risk and harm which would then directly influence its priority. Crimes that involve women and children, for example, have a higher likelihood to catch the attention and engagement of law enforcement. This is perhaps why the literature suggests that the primary cybercrime of an overwhelming majority of police departments is CSEM (see Burke et al., 2002; Hinduja, 2004; Jewkes & Andrews, 2005; Jewkes & Yar, 2008).

Disturbing Content and Secondary Trauma

Certainly, line officers can sometimes encounter volatile situations when on call or patrolling their beats. For ICAC personnel, their job requires them to view CSEM *on a daily basis*, running the risk for these officers potentially developing adverse conditions both inside and outside the workplace (Bourke & Craun, 2014; Burns et al., 2008; Burruss et al., 2018; Perez et al., 2010; Tehrani, 2016). Generally, individuals who are exposed to another person's disturbing or traumatic experiences can result in mental and emotional affects similar to that of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Burns et al., 2008). Other terminology for this condition includes compassion fatigue, vicarious traumatization, and secondary traumatic stress (STS) (Burns et al., 2008; Figley & Kiser, 2013; Stamm, 1997). STS is the most appropriate term used for diagnosing ICAC personnel since this disorder is specific to those who are actively helping those suffering from the traumatic event (i.e., ICAC investigators who are trying to help the children being exploited) (Figley & Kiser, 2013; Stamm, 1997).

The literature consistently shows that frequent exposure and interaction with disturbing imagery and hazardous materials yields higher STS scores among ICAC personnel (Bourke & Craun, 2014; Brady, 2017; Burns et al., 2008; Burruss et al., 2018). Notable side effects of STS include having higher distrust of the world, lower job satisfaction, and more intentions about leaving the job (Bourke & Craun, 2014). Wolak and Mitchell (2009, p. 3) found that some investigators experienced insomnia, depression, weight gain, decreased productiveness, and even one detective who might have had "an overly intense attraction to the images." This disorder can have detrimental effects outside of the workplace as well with symptoms such as "irritability, marital difficulties, and withdrawing from friends and family" (Craun et al., 2015, p. 398; see also Perez et al., 2010; Stewart & Witte, 2020). For investigators who are parents, they have

reported behavioral changes in their parenting as a result of frequent exposure to CSEM (Stewart & Witte, 2020). These results suggest that exposure to this type of material prompts investigators who are parents to be more protective of their family (Perez et al., 2010; Stewart & Witte, 2020). Research has found gendered differences as well. Female investigators have yielded generally higher scores of STS while being more likely to engage in coping strategies than their male counterparts (Burruss et al., 2018; Tehrani, 2016). Despite the risks, most ICAC personnel feel good about their job, recognizing that their contributions are helping to combat CSEM (Bourke & Craun, 2014; Brady, 2017)

Although ICAC personnel are exposed to disturbing imagery daily, several factors exist that help mitigate and/or prevent symptoms of STS during their work. Social support (e.g., friends and family) outside of the workplace has been found to be a significant coping mechanism in reducing both burnout and STS (Bourke & Craun, 2014; Burns et al., 2008; Craun et al., 2015; Perez et al., 2010). Reliance on others is not limited to friends and family; often, line officers who work closely together use humor—in particular, "dark" or "gallows" humor—to cope with stressors of the job (Crank, 2004; Kurtz & Upton, 2017a, 2017b; Loftus, 2010; Waddington, 1999). Humor used between ICAC investigators was also shown to be effective in bonding and coping mechanisms, releasing much of the stress and toxicity during work (Burns et al., 2008). Help from structural and departmental forces can also help investigators cope. Supportive supervisors and administrators, available opportunities for training and education, routine psychological assistance, and the appropriate equipment for the job are all vitally important for the continued occupational health of ICAC investigators (Burns et al., 2008). Having automated identification systems to recognize known prints could help in the processing of CSEM images and reduce onset of STS as well (Burruss et al., 2018). Otherwise, the lack of

understanding regarding ICAC's significance could lead to less funding, weak investigative responses, and a breakdown in multijurisdictional cooperation that could greatly hinder efforts to combat child exploitation (Burns et al., 2008).

CSEM Offenders

Now that ICAC personnel and their purpose, work, and issues have been established, attention must be paid to the reason they exist: to combat CSEM offending. Despite its scarcity, there is an emerging literature that has investigated the characteristics, interests, and motivations of ICAC offenders (Burke et al., 2002; Christensen et al., 2021; Fortin & Proulx, 2019; Nielssen et al., 2011). It is not truly known how many individuals consume CSEM, but we do know some common demographics: ICAC offenders are typically white, older men who are employed and who typically do not have a criminal history (Fortin & Proulx, 2019; Seto et al., 2010). Taylor and colleagues (2001, p. 97) categorizes them along a spectrum, from those who simply download CSEM to those who engage in the sexual assault of children. For those individuals who download CSEM, these "offenders" can quickly become "producers" and "distributors" due to the ease in transferring these digital materials (Taylor et al., 2001, p. 97). For those individuals who accumulate this material, examination into these collections can give good insight into their preferences. Fortin and Proulx (2019), for example, tracked convicted possessors of CSEM and their hard drives (n = 40). They found that collectors gathered CSEM imagery of six- to twelve-year-olds more so than any other age group (pubescent children under the age of sex was rare, for example) with most of these offenders having just this one age group they were interested in.

Considering the motivations of offenders, several studies have examined the both the predictors of CSEM offending and possible explanations (Babchishin et al., 2019; Marcum, 2007; Nielsen et al., 2011; Seto et al., 2006; Taylor et al., 2001). Babchishin and colleagues

(2019), for instance, studied whether a criminal's parental characteristics predict CSEM

offending. They found that individuals who had younger parents with lower education, but

higher rates of violent crime, were more likely to engage in CSEM offending. Other studies

found that power dynamics and the pursuit of controlling another person is one explanation

(Dombrowski et al., 2004; Marcum, 2007). These desires can be explained by their common

histories, such as offenders' "histories of early sexualised behaviour, inadequate adult

socialization, dissatisfaction with current persona and an acquisition of computer and Internet

skills" (Taylor et al., 2001, pp. 97-98). Abuse and mental disorders (i.e., an abnormal sexual

interest in children, or pedophilia) are also a contributing factor for these offenders (Seto et al.,

2006). For example, studies have found that online sex offenders have histories of being abused

themselves (Marcum, 2007), though that is not always the case (see Nielsen et al., 2011). As far

as the usual timeline for these offenders, they usually start early with pornographic viewing,

followed by increased online behavior (ergo reduced time outside socializing) and immersion in

these virtual communities where it becomes easy to search for, collect, and trade CSEM (Taylor

et al., 2001).

Some research suggest that motivations are not strictly limited to pedophilic intentions,

opting rather to seek content for its taboo-like or generally deviant qualities (Quayle, 2020;

Seigfried-Spellar & Rogers, 2013; Seto, 2010; Steel et al., 2021). Seigfried-Spellar and Rogers

(2013, p. 2001), for instance, found that some CSEM users do not view sexually deviant

materials of children exclusively, incorporating other types of content in their library such as

"nondeviant adult and animal pornography." Steel and colleagues (2021) even found that 74

percent of their respondents—self-reported CSEM viewers—looked at more adult deviant

pornography than CSEM. These studies support the idea that CSEM offending is a gradual

process sometimes independent of strictly pedophilic interest, as described by Quayle and Taylor (2003, p. 103):

> Offending is a dynamic, rather than static process, with individuals moving along a range of potential continua, related to satiation of sexual arousal, processes of engagement with both collecting and communities, and the exploration of different online personas.

In other words, it may be that, over time, offenders become desensitized, wanting instead to seek out more extreme content that may or may not include CSEM (Fortin & Proulx, 2019; Quayle & Taylor, 2003). Other factors such as pornography addiction and unhealthy, compulsive Internet habits could also exacerbate CSEM engagement aside from pedophilic motivations (Quayle & Taylor, 2003; Seto et al., 2010).

Lastly, how offenders perceive children online versus offline may be a significant factor in why these offenders engage with CSEM as well. Rimer (2019), for example, conducted an in-depth ethnography interviewing 31 CSEM users regarding their social construction of children and childhood. Specifically, they asked respondents how they defined children/childhood, how they are different from adults, and whether or not children online were different from children offline. Rimer (2019) found stark differences in their perceptions. These CSEM offenders viewed children offline through typical Euro-American norms, indicating that they were "in need of protection, irrational, inexperienced, asexual, and innocent…" (p. 169). Their views of "online children," however, were more detached, viewing children within CSEM in a sexual light and not "real." Rimer (2019) concludes that constructions such as these significantly aid the facilitation and continuation of CSEM offending.

Perceptions of Offenders

Now that we know the profile and realities of CSEM offenders, perceptions of them are equally as valuable. In fact, the following section will detail how public, media, and law enforcement perceptions of offenders have made CSEM perpetrators more inhumane. Even though there is established literature in how the public and media depict child sex offenders (e.g., Douard, 2008; Marshall, 1996; Spencer, 2009; Wurtele, 2021), there has been limited inquiry specifically investigating law enforcement's perceptions of offenders who perpetrate child sexual exploitation and abuse. A particular characterization of crimes against children offenders is especially relevant for the current analysis—*offenders as monsters*. For this reason, it is worth considering prior research and theorization on the monstrous and how the current research addresses this gap. This section will first (briefly) discuss the origins of the *monster*. It then considers prior research and theorizing on the relationship between crime, criminality, criminal-legal systems, and monstrosity. In particular, this review considers how the monster label has been constructed and connected to child sex offenders. First, examining the etymology of *the monster* which will help contextualize its cultural, social, and political uses throughout history.

Monster Etymology and Utilization

The word "monster" is derived from the Latin word *monstrum* with the root *monere*, meaning "that which reveals" or "that which warns;" therefore, "to be a monster is to be an omen" or a portent of future events (Asma, 2009, p. 13; Cohen, 1996, p. 4). As will be investigated later in this section, the term "monster" remains a rather illusive one. Generally, monsters can be referred to either in the literal sense or metaphorically. In tracing the genealogy of "literal" monsters, these creatures have been a feature across cultures, from the mythological (e.g., the great beasts of Greek mythology such as the Chimera, the Scylla, and the

Cerberus) to the scriptural (e.g., the powerful creatures within the Bible such as the Behemoth and the Leviathan) (Asma, 2009, p. 64; Kearney, 2003). Importantly, not all monsters are evil, per se, whether discussing the beloved dragons in China to Mary Shelley's most famous "gentle-hearted giants gone bad" monster (Asma, 2009, p. 11). These creatures could be construed as dangerous though they might not be intentionally.

On the other hand—through a lens that is more useful to this research—monsters can be symbolic and metaphoric. In fact, monsters as metaphors are significant in shaping the public imaginary's thoughts and beliefs of people and behavior (Asma, 2009, p. 13; Douard, 2008). Theorists Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 455) state metaphors' connection to experiences, succinctly: "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another;" in other words, the use of metaphors give individuals a better conceptual structure and understanding of everyday phenomena, including how we perceive events and/or relate to other people. For example, in academia when referring to an asymmetrical relationship where a colleague "uses" another for their work and "feeds" excessively upon their labor, one can refer to them as a "vampire" (Asma, 2009, pp. 13-14). Here, the metaphor helps to understand one action through another: the mental illustration of a vampire drinking blood helps the audience's understanding of exploitative working conditions. Similar metaphoric depictions have been used for those engaging in heinous acts. Today, the "metaphor of the monster" evokes a certain type of "fear and loathing" whenever used for these types of heinous behaviors (Douard, 2008, p. 32).

Despite its pervasiveness in popular and political discourse, the conceptual parameters of the monster remains elusive—this is no coincidence. Theoretically, Cohen (1996, p. 3) states that there are reasons for the monster label being relatively amorphic in his seven theses of "monster

culture." Cohen (1996, p. 20) personifies monsters as a way of understanding "why we have created them." Simply put, monsters are imaginary figments used alongside cultural and political movements to demarcate cultural boundaries that cannot be crossed (e.g., miscegenation, described below). As Cohen (1996, p. 7) states, monsters "dwell at the gates of difference;" they not only establish the acceptable boundaries of "good" and "evil," but they are also used as political fodder to justify some action. For the former, monsters enforce cultural lines which serve to keep existing hierarchies in place, such as depicting miscegenation as an abomination to enforce historically white, patriarchal ideals. For the latter, monsters are scapegoats, getting the body politic to believe that *they* will destroy "the very cultural apparatus" of society and play a significant role in creating more social disorder (Cohen, 1996, p. 12; Douard, 2008; Kearney, 2003). Placing blame on the ostracized *other* is found numerous times throughout history, from Nazi Germany's "Final Solution" in catalyzing existing, historic anti-Semitism towards Jews, to the analogous, xenophobic reactions the United States and the English had towards the Irish in labeling them as low-class drunkards, "non-people" (Kearney, 2003, p. 72), and "a most filthy race… sunk in vice" contributing to society's problems (Cohen, 1996, pp. 8-10). Lastly, the convenience of offloading social ills to a victimized *other* can also enhance solidarity and reunification among the "normal" population in a type of shared prosecution (Kearney, 2003).

The Monstrous Offender

Within the context of Western media, "monster" has been applied rather liberally to myriad deviant and criminal behavior. For example, when *Time* magazine headlined the Columbine shooters as "The Monsters Next Door" (Gibbs, 1999, p. 1), readers conceptually construct an image in their mind of some *thing* possessing inhuman qualities. Serial killers and sex offenders, specifically, have been notoriously given this label. Other examples include a

Dekalb County killer where a police chief stated that the shooter was "a monster among us" to the sex offender Paul Beart sadistically mutilating a waitress to the point of unrecognizability— even Asma (2009, p. 204) suggested that a "monster" label was too underwhelming for this case.

The literature on sex offenders, specifically, has found similar results when examining how these individuals have been perceived as monsters and the political and criminal justice ramifications of that imagery. Essentially, our criminal justice system has been persuaded by and appeals to the populist idea of sex offenders as monsters—the dark, shadowy figures that peruse the playgrounds, alleyways, and, more recently, online chatrooms in attempts to sexually coerce children (Simon, 1998; Walker, 2021). One position within the criminal justice system this imagery has affected is those involved in parole. For instance, Werth (2022) examined parole officers' monstrous depictions of sex offenders and their subsequent behavior towards these offenders. They found that no matter how well behaved, or in-compliance, sex offenders were on parole, personnel consistently pursued a revocation of sex offenders from the community. Here, the spectrality of sex offenders placed them in a state of imagined recidivism: even when offenders were not actively recidivating, the imagined imminent threat was enough to revoke their parole. As this imagery persists in our legal system, Kearney (2003, pp. 4-5) states that society has two choices when confronting deviant or criminal behavior: (1) attempt to understand the other (in this case, those with sexual attraction to children and why they have those proclivities) or (2) "repudiate" them, further otherizing strangeness where empathy is absent and exile immanent. Unfortunately, our legal system has been adopting the latter route for decades. Even though punitive experts do not officially label sex offenders as monsters, Douard (2008, p. 32) argues that they still classify them as individuals who are "unable to control their impulses." As discussed previously, the culmination of these beliefs adds to our conceptual understanding of

sex offenders as a "lesson in the intransigence of evil" (Simon, 1998, p. 452) while affecting laws and regulation of this population.

Simply put, these beliefs result in the creation of a class of human beings unable to be rehabilitated and unworthy of certain rights afforded to the rest of society (Spencer, 2009). For instance, recent legislation reinforces the idea that these monsters can neither be reasoned with nor rehabilitated; rather, Simon (1998) says that current laws are based within the "new penology" (see Feeley & Simon, 1992) that *manages* the risk of dangerous populations rather than *transform* them.[2] Neoliberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s have bolstered this criminal justice framework, labeling sex offenders as "irredeemable subjects" (Spencer, 2009, p. 219). These policies combine with the monstrous classification of these individuals to result in sex offenders as *homo sacer*, outlaws and those in exile where the state and media sources institute exclusionary and spatial bans on sex offenders with policies such as Megan's Law and GPS monitoring (Simon, 1998; Spencer, 2009). Spencer (2009, p. 220) further argues that these laws affect our conceptual understanding of sex offenders as "life without form and value, stripped of political and legal rights accorded to the normal citizen."

It should be emphasized that, while plenty of research exists examining public and media perceptions of sex offenders (e.g., Douard, 2008; Simon, 1998; Spencer, 2009), the Werth (2022) study was the only article found that directly examined the perceptions of sex offenders from criminal justice actors. The current research seeks to expand upon this literature. Again, even

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[2] Feeley and Simon (1992, pp. 451-452) map the move from the "old" penology, which focused on the individual responsibility and the assignment of guilt while diagnosing and treating individual offenders, to our current, "new" penology, which is more of an actuarial model to classify and sort populations based on their dangerousness. In other words, our "new" penological system is less with diagnosis and treatment and more towards surveillance and control.

though the established literature does well in explaining monstrosity, public opinion, and even the perceptions of some criminal justice actors regarding (child) sex offenders, there is still a gap in examining those personnel in direct contact with child sex offenders: cybercrime investigators that process these internet crimes against children. If the previous literature rings true, this research will further support that ICAC investigators harbor much of the previously established monstrous rhetoric; therefore, this research examines and analyses the stories that ICAC personnel tell, how they understand CESM offenders, and whether these narratives may give us further insight into how we might handle CSEM offenders.

CSEM Victims

Just as our perceptions about child sex offenders are socially constructed and have wide-reaching implications regarding those depictions, so, too, are our perceptions about victims. Of course, it was only until the 1970s after much criticism of (1) the academic field and the police, (2) a lack of representation of victims, and (3) a push by feminist criminologists and victim's movement that that victims were included and seriously considered in criminal justice and criminological research (Rock, 2002). Even then, as Rock (2002, p. 11) explains, our ideas and beliefs about victims were "prefabricated in sites outside criminology before they were imported." Luckily, there has been an emerging literature about the demographics, characteristics, and harm that has come to victims over the past half century; therefore, the purpose of this section is to, first, clarify what we do know about CSEM victims. Then, this section will cover narratives and conceptual maps of the victim before exploring how these stories have affected law enforcement's interactions with them.

CSEM Victimization

An emerging literature is uncovering the demographic trends and characteristics found among CSEM victims. In terms of the demographics of victims, they tend to be prepubescent, white or Asian girls below the age of twelve (IWF, 2021; Seto et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2001). Additionally, it is assumed, for children who are deliberately posed in an erotic or sexual way, that they have been or will be sexually assaulted (Taylor et al., 2001). Generally, this victimization usually comes from an acquaintance or someone they know personally, such as a family member, where "stranger" assault is more rare (Lalor & McElvaney, 2010; Seto et al., 2018). Unfortunately, children are becoming increasingly more at-risk due to (1) the growth and capabilities of ICTs and (2) the accessibility of online media. Around 95 percent of teenagers in the United States state that they either own or have access to a smartphone in their household, while 45 percent of them frequently engage in online content (Fowler et al., 2020).

Even though the unfortunate reality is that more attention in the literature has been paid to offenders rather than victims (see, for example, Seto et al., 2018, p. 6; Taylor & Quayle, 2003, p. 210), there are several immediate psychological effects of child sexual abuse. For many victims, there are reported feelings of guilt, shame, anger, anxiety, low self-esteem, and vulnerability resulting from instances of child sexual abuse and subsequent CSEM production (Gewirtz-Meydan et al., 2019; Lalor & McElvaney, 2010). Behaviorally, being sexually abused as a child could also result in substance abuse, sexual difficulties, problematic urinary symptoms, and self-injurious behavior later in life (Lalor & McElvaney, 2010; Yildirim et al., 2011). Guilt and shame are notably the initial (and main) emotions felt by victims after the abuse.

Risk factors are also an important area of study for the purposes of harm reduction for the child and their experiences later in life. Several risk factors have been identified in the parental

unit, both with the father (e.g., having a stepfather and/or a lack of physical affection from the father) and the mother (e.g., a mother who is emotionally distant, not present, and/or "sex-punitive") (Finkelhor, 1984). Still, the single, most consistent risk factor for children found in the literature is social isolation (Domhardt et al., 2015; Finkelhor, 1984; Taylor & Quayle, 2003, p. 50). Though the literature is fraught with varying effect sizes and rocky causal linkages, the literature supports some evidence of victims being at risk of developing negative psychopathologies as an adult (Finkelhor, 1984; Hillberg et al., 2011; Lalor & McElvaney, 2010).

In terms of content, a major concern is that of the material's persistence and use after the fact. As a reminder, CSEM assumes the victimization of a child in its production (Taylor & Quayle, 2003). When CSEM is produced, it not only serves as "a permanent record of actual acts of abuse" (Yar & Steinmetz, 2019, p. 176; emphasis in original), but this material can also be in perpetual circulation online, revictimizing the individual (Taylor & Quayle, 2003). These captured moments in time means that victims who grow to be adults have to constantly confront or accommodate their past victimization. Offenders also use CSEM to sexually desensitize their victims during the grooming process (Durkin, 1997). Still, there remains a lack of understanding and research of victims, the extent of their victimization in CSEM, and their relationship to their abuser (Seto et al., 2018).

It is important to note that CSEM solicitation and distribution is not only a top-down issue (i.e., older offender to younger victim), but children can also victimize their peers as well as engage in CSEM distribution (Barnard-Wills, 2012; Falligant et al., 2017; Leukfeldt et al., 2014; Skilling et al., 2011; Wolak et al., 2012b). For example, Barnard-Wills (2012, p. 240) states: "Children are a population who are constructed as both potential victims and potential

offenders in online settings." In an analysis of police files of CSEM in The Netherlands, Leukfeldt and colleagues (2014) found that 35 percent of cases involved perpetrators below the age of eighteen. In half of those cases, however, teens were actively exchanging photos with each other, posing problems for law enforcement looking for the "stereotypical 'dirty old man'" (Leukfeldt et al., 2014, p. 9). Wolak and colleagues (2012b, p. 2) clarify this content as "youth-produced sexual images" where teens engaging in "sexting" during romantic relationships. In their typology, Wolak and colleagues (2012b) distinguished this content between three categories: adult-involved (cases perpetrated by adults soliciting CSEM from children), youth-only aggravated (cases where youth engaged in the sexual abuse and/or photography distribution of other youth), and youth-only experimental incidents (cases where youth who are romantically involved, or seeking sexual attention, exchange images). Law enforcement, however, takes a more educational approach rather than prosecutorial one (i.e., arresting children/teens) when informing middle and high schoolers of the dangers of trading such material with one another.

The Construction of the Victim

Setting aside the legitimate harm that can be done to victims, the issue remains of a concise definition and conditions of what makes someone a victim. In taking a social constructionist point of view, "victim" is a rather malleable term. "Victim status," specifically, is something that is affixed to an individual based on the interaction that occurred, witnesses involved, and interpreted by mass media, criminal justice actors, and the cultural attitudes in which it happened (Daly, 2014; Rock, 2002). As Daly (2014) describes, victimization is a process that requires investigation of the relationship between the offender and victim. This relationship is mutual: for someone to have been victimized, another person must have committed the crime. For example, there has been an expectation for victims to have obvious

symptoms of their abuse, conditions that must be "long and severe," else they should lose their victim status (Lamb, 1999, p. 113). Sexual assaults of children, especially, has been viewed as most heinous due to them suffering an egregious and violent violation of their bodies and respective damage to their mental health (Ring, 2018). Even though these harms are legitimate, such reactions largely exist due to how we have constructed the victim through media and other sources.

Some scholars have argued that obtaining "victim status" is easier and more immediate to assign for certain populations than others. Relevant to this research, children, in particular, are of interest when considering who is most immediately labeled as a victim—or, as Christie (1986, p. 18) states, an "ideal" victim. Simply, ideal victims are those individuals that, whenever a grievance or violent act has been done to them, are almost immediately given complete victim status. Generally, these characteristics involve those who are perceived as non-threatening and can garner sympathy easily while being viewed as somewhat "incompetent" (e.g., those without capacity to defend themselves) (Bosma et al., 2018, p. 29). Specifically, individuals who are perceived as weak, young, sick, and/or old are the ones usually given ideal victim status— virtually those who cannot be blamed for their own victimization. Likewise, it should follow that those who do not meet these criteria (e.g., the exact reverse of all the aforementioned characteristics), the "non-ideal" victim status is more likely to be assigned. In other words: "sufficient strength to threaten others would not be a good base for creating the type of general public sympathy that is associated with the status of being a victim" (Christie, 1986, p. 23). These characteristics are made clearer in relation to the offender. The ideal victim is usually paired with the "ideal [monstrous] offender," often described as "big" and "bad" with no previous knowledge of their victim (Christie, 1986, p. 25). Lamb (1999, p. 118) succinctly states

this relationship as well: "The victim is pure, innocent helpless, and sometimes heroic. The perpetrator is monstrous and all powerful."

Perceptions such as these are important to assess, especially when such views have real-life implications that affect responses to victims from both the public and the hands of the police (Gray & Wegner, 2011; Jordan & Kouchaki, 2021; Zvi, 2021). Moreover, narratives of this caliber can affect law enforcement response and treatment of victims. Zvi (2021), for example, assessed the perceptions of police officers toward an offender and rape victim in two vignettes: one setting where the victim was a sex worker and the same setting where the victim was not. They found evidence that police officers, being swayed by stereotypical beliefs of sex workers and rape, engaged in victim-blaming views toward these victims. These reactions, of course, are not surprising as there is a long history of victim-blaming behavior where victims have been afraid to come forward in fear of being doubly victimized (i.e., harmed by both the offender and equally blamed by the public and police). Similar results have been found by scholars such as Bieneck and Krahé (2011) who found that, when participants responded to a vignette about a female victim and male perpetrator, more blame was placed on the victim for being robbed and subsequently sexually assaulted than the perpetrator. Slakoff and Fradella (2019, p. 88) even state that seeing women and certain types of work, such as sex work being "salacious," could contribute to victim-blaming behavior. The consequences of such non-empathetic perceptions can unfortunately affect (1) aspects of an investigation and (2) the outcomes of those cases (Zvi, 2021). Lastly, these reactions can affect the process of achieving justice for the wrongdoing as well. Research has found that individuals who see victims as "virtuous" or morally good encourages more justice-restorative action (Jordan & Kouchaki, 2021, p. 5). This worldview encourages punishment of offenders while pushing more help for victims. This study hopes to

expand upon this literature in (1) discovering how ICAC investigators perceive victims and (2) how this perception affects (if at all) their investigations and case outcomes.

Narrative Inquiry

Important and interesting findings about police culture, occupational identity, and police officers' views, opinions, and beliefs about offenders and victims have largely been through scholars sitting down with police officers and listening to stories. Though these have been uncovered largely through ethnographic qualitative analyses, one could argue that the mechanics involved in such studies translate well to narrative criminology. Narrative inquiry was catalyzed in the early 1980s by Thomas Mitchell (1981) and other literary scholars, only to then be adopted as an emerging area within criminology during a similar timeframe. Simply stated, narrative criminology attempts to explain deviant and criminal behavior by examining stories and storytelling of the criminalized, criminal legal agents, victims, and related parties (Presser, 2009; Presser & Sandberg, 2015). This type of qualitative research "focuses on the story as the basic unit of analysis" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 27). Close observations of meaning- and sense-making are taken during storytelling in attempts to understand how individuals articulate their experiences and produce individual and collective identities (Andersen et al., 2020). In other words, narrative inquiry involves closely examining the various elements within stories and how they are structured to uncover knowledge and/or patterns of experiences and individuals' interpretations of them. Even though narrative criminological analyses have been geared mainly towards crime and criminal behavior, a robust literature has emerged over the past half-century that applies narrative inquiry to criminal justice actors, such as law enforcement (e.g., Bacon et al., 2020; Beek, 2016; Brookman et al., 2022; Fletcher, 1996; Keesman, 2023; Kurtz & Upton, 2017a, 2017b; Schaefer & Tewksbury, 2018; Smith et al., 2014; van Hulst, 2013, 2017, 2020;

van Hulst & Ybema, 2020; Van Maanen, 1973; Waddington, 1999; Wieslander, 2019). The current study argues that a narrative criminological approach is most appropriate when considering how stories and storytelling can affect how ICAC personnel construct their occupational identity and how they understand offenders and victims. This section will detail the etymology of narrative inquiry, the delineation between narratives, stories, and storytelling, and ending with how criminology has integrated narrative inquiry in the current literature and why this method has been deemed the best approach for this research.

Etymology of Narrative Inquiry

Etymologically, "narrative" is derived from the Latin words *narrat* ("related," "told"), *narrare* ("to tell"), and *narrativus* ("telling a story") while being derived from *gnārus* ("knowing") and ancient Sanskrit *gnâ* ("to know") (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 93; Kim, 2016, p. 6); therefore, a narrative is knowledge that marries both *telling* as well as *knowing*. One of the oldest types of narrative, genealogically, is the "myth" (or, in Greek, "story"), which is a feature across almost every society or culture (Kearney, 2003; Kim, 2016). Previous societies have used myths to preserve their cultural identity and legendary ancestors, including Greek, Native American, Asian, and several other cultures. Additionally, these stories have existed to recount historic events, both as a factual recounting of events as well as an embellishment to those past epochs using metaphors, allegories, and other techniques that have, inadvertently, developed numerous literary genres (Kim, 2016).

To readers, a narrative, then, should closely resemble a more common word to reference narratives—a story (Riessman, 2008). Although this research will use both interchangeably (as they have been in the literature), a story can be defined as "a detailed organization of narrative events arranged in a (story) structure based on time" (Kim, 2016, p. 8). An important distinction

is made here: stories contain elements of a beginning, middle, and end, giving a full, thick description (e.g., Geertz, 1973) of someone's experiences rather than a partial or incomplete recounting in a narrative. They also contain what would normally comprise a traditional story, filled with a sequence of events, relevant actors involved in the story, and the setting where these events occur (Riessman, 2008; van Hulst, 2013). Stories are told between two or more people and not only serve to recount events, but also fulfill several other functions, such as entertainment, emotional provocation, communication of messages or moral points, soliciting empathy and understanding, and even promoting certain worldviews by highlighting (*or leaving out*) different elements of a story (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 93; Kim, 2016, pp. 9-10; Riessman, 2008; van Hulst, 2013).

Of course, stories need to be *told* as well (hence, "storytelling"). "Tellability," or the act and art of telling a story relative to the people involved, is rather nuanced: speakers must prepare the story; stories take time to tell; and there is usually a "hook" to grab the attention of the audience (e.g., "I came across a dead body last night") (van Hulst, 2013). Importantly, tellability depends on situational context and awareness. In other words, to whom the stories are being shared is crucial in *what* and *how* a story gets told. Within the culture of law enforcement, for example, police are acutely aware of using discretion when telling stories; tailoring their narratives according to the people and environment in which they tell it. Essentially, this means that stories are "coproduced" (Presser & Sandberg, 2015, p. 95).

Narrative Criminology

Even though narrative criminology has previously focused on criminals and criminal behavior (see, for example, Copes et al., 2014; Dickinson & Wright, 2017; Dollinger, 2018; Kruttschnitt & Kang, 2021; Youngs & Canter, 2012), there is a robust literature of narrative

inquiry that has focused on actors involved in the criminal justice system: policing. Moving from individuals who violate the law to actors that enforce it has proven insightful for the study of police culture in both positive and negative ways. Scholars have established the importance of storytelling to several aspects of policing, including the informal socialization of recruits into police practices and values, the enhancement of solidarity among officers, and as a mechanism of coping with on-the-job stressors (Bacon et al., 2020; Fletcher, 1996; Kurtz & Upton, 2017b). In fact, one of the earliest pioneers to explore stories and storytelling in policing was Van Maanen (1973). He connected both storytelling and police culture, specifically the socialization process of new recruits, especially with the dissemination of "war (or "sea") stories" (Van Maanen, 1973, p. 410). Officers both new and old are exposed to hours of stories that convey the department's organizational history, any notorious crimes or criminals that have happened in the area, and legendary police personalities that have either survived or fallen during the line of duty. War stories, as van Hulst (2013, p. 636) states, "help officers to get a sense of what is going on in the district" both in a sense of what they have encountered and how they made sense of it; though, caution should be taken as stories can always be exaggerated and embellished over time (Kurtz & Upon, 2017a, 2017b; van Hulst, 2020). Additionally, stories in the police *canteen* (or a more relaxed, backstage area of policing taking place "around the water cooler" separate from street settings) are quite different—and serve different purposes—than those told in the briefing room or the squad car (Schaefer & Tewksbury, 2018; van Hulst, 2013; Waddington, 1999). Stories do often showcase the more peculiar, deviant, or violent acts that occur during police work as well (van Hulst, 2013).

Likewise, narrative criminological inquiry has critically revealed the ways in which stories have sustained more negative worldviews that exist in policing (Fletcher, 1996; Kurtz &

Upton, 2017a, 2017b; Schaefer & Tewksbury, 2018). For instance, Fletcher (1996), through the "apocryphal tale of the '250lb man in an alley'," found stories told in the police department exclusionary towards women, upholding the masculine ethos of policing. Likewise, Kurtz and Upton (2017a) revealed how, decades later, war stories have continued to perpetuate existing masculinist ideologies in erecting barriers of participation for female officers (e.g., excluding women from binge drinking events and placing female officers in an audience role when stories are told). "Canteen" narratives can also be problematic as Schaefer and Tewksbury (2018) have found that stories told in the backstages of policing tend to justify use of force while perceiving media and public critique as attacks on police officers and their institution. Wieslander (2019, p. 314), in what he called a "high ceiling but close to the door" repertoire[3], also found a plethora of stories about officers enduring retaliatory efforts from their colleagues should they ever voice their opinions in opposition to the policing institution and/or leadership. In total, these narrative analyses demonstrate the relationship between story and action, and how storytelling in policing circles has implications both within and beyond the department.

Narratives in Police Culture

Another vital research topic that is inextricably bound with stories, storytelling, and narrative criminology is the literature on police culture—an important topic that has been demystified over the past half century. First, when scholars refer to "cop culture" or "police culture," they are relatively broad terms that seek to understand the beliefs, attitudes, and overall worldview of police officers and how they are woven into police work, intradepartmental dynamics, and civilians (Bowling et al., 2019; Loftus, 2010; Manning, 1977; Reuss-Ianni, 1983;

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[3] This suggests that some kind of sanction or punishment will be administered if an employee gives their honest opinion.

Waddington, 1999). Manning (1977) stated that not only does police culture contain the images law enforcement have of their role and occupational identity, but also that these images can affect their assumptions about individuals and society that will ultimately shape their behavior towards them. Early pioneers slowly began to carve out major themes within this subculture, such as Skolnick (2011) and Van Maanen (1973), to name a couple. Skolnick (2011) found that danger and authority, along with a compulsion to be efficient from civilians, were central to the police role. In fact, Van Maanen (1973, p. 408) noticed that these officers viewed law enforcement as "performing society's dirty work." This mode of thinking, along with "[donning] their uniform" (Van Maanen, 1973, p. 408), creates a gap between the public and the police where they are viewed as outsiders, reinforcing what is observed today as the "us vs. them" mentality. Decades of ethnographies thereafter has identified more core characteristics of policing, such as police harboring (1) an overdramatized sense of mission; (2) cravings of excitement, hedonism, and crime-oriented work; (3) a masculine ethos, old-fashioned machismo, and propensity to use force; (4) myriad senses of suspicion, cynicism, and pessimism accompanied by alienation from the public and solidarity with their colleagues; (5) an inclination to lean morally and politically conservative; (6) racial prejudice; and (7) intolerance to outsiders who seek to change or overly critique the policing institution (Bowling et al., 2019; Kurtz & Upton, 2017a; Loftus, 2010; Reiner, 2000). Core characteristics are both reinforced through numerous mechanisms and equally transmitted to new recruits as they become familiar and socialized into police culture.

Special attention should be given, though, to the non-monolithic culture of the police. Although the "us vs. them" mentality between the police and the citizenry has been well supported, considerable variation and otherizing of individual officers and units who do not (or

even appear to not) endorse the more traditional core characteristics of policing have been explored by researchers (Bittner, 1967; Brewer, 2022; Garcia, 2008; Muir, 1977; Reuss-Ianni, 1983; Rice, 2023). For example, an early exploration of this lack of complete, uniform harmony was done by Reuss-Ianni (1983) who found that individual subcultures exist within the *intra*departmental politics of the police station, including differences among "street cops" vs. "management cops," male and female officers, white and black officers, and heterosexual and gay officers. In reference to street vs. management cops, Reuss-Ianni (1983) stated that, even though both cultures aim to address criminal activity, street cops may sometimes deploy measures that may not conform to the standards set by administrators who represent the more bureaucratic, political side of policing. Line officers, importantly, are more cynical of the rules set forth by the higher-ups and, instead, default to specific "cop codes" that look out more for their fellow line officers than administrators. As police departments began to add more specialized units, scholars also recognized that these units may not be as valued as, or even seen as conflicting with, the traditional policing ideology of the rank-and-file members. Garcia (2008), for instance, found that a third of officers involved in community-oriented policing (COP) felt stigmatized by their own department. She noted how COP strategies may not fully endorse the more valued methods of crime-fighting, which usually contain traditionally masculine and aggressive tactics (see also Cordner, 2015). Similar "us vs. them" ostracization has been noticed with domestic violence units (Garcia, 2008), between civilian investigators and detectives (Rice, 2023), and among personnel in internal affairs divisions (IADs) where officers have referred to these members as the "rat squad" and "toe cutters" (Brewer, 2022, p. 1200). These differences extend to *inter*departmental relationships as well: as van Hulst (2013, p. 625)

states: "the countryside is not an urban area; the 1950s are not the 1990s; and Officer John is not Officer Frank or Judy."

Even though police culture is often cultivated by myriad social, economic, and political factors, van Hulst (2013) states that police storytelling has been relatively understudied as a significant factor that influences police culture. Technically, early police ethnographers were exercising the fundamentals of narrative criminology by observing and talking with police officers in attempts to discover what they do and why they do it. As Kurtz and Colburn (2019, p. 321) state: "the American criminal justice system, at its core, is a collection of stories, and much of our societal understanding of crime, criminal justice, and policing is grounded in the narratives of workers or those found in popular culture." Scholars have recognized the importance of storytelling and how they "do work" in departments, from something as mundane as curing boredom, to more complex purposes, such as how officers learn and master their profession, how they construct individual and collective identities, and even how (using the "canteen") they repair these identities (Shearing & Ericson, 1991; van Hulst, 2013; Waddington, 1999).

Present Study

Clearly, there are many issues plaguing police departments and personnel involved in ICAC units, and more research is needed. Specifically, this study fills a theoretical and methodological gap in the current literature. Most research involving cybercrime personnel uses survey instruments featuring fixed questionnaires or hypothetical scenarios (see Bossler & Holt, 2012; Hinduja, 2004; Holt & Bossler, 2012a, 2012b; Holt et al., 2010; Marcum et al., 2010, 2011). Although quantitative research design can reveal valuable statistical insight into cybercrime units, qualitative methods bring with them their own unique contributions to social

scientific research. Specifically, qualitative methodologies, such as interviews, can offer equally valid, if not more in-depth, results by unveiling the internal states and detailed, thick descriptions of the subject in question, leading to more meaningful conclusions (Becker, 2001; Geertz, 1973; Small, 2009; Weiss, 1994).

This research additionally seeks to inform both narrative criminological inquiry and police culture. As encouraged by Presser and Sandberg (2019), narrative criminology is a noteworthy approach to critically analyzing the structure and content of stories as well as gesture toward potential collective and wide-reaching harms of stories, especially those that are cultivated within the policing space and police culture. Acute observation should be given not only to what is said, but also what stories, comments, and/or descriptions *are not said or elaborated upon* by police officers. As established earlier, certain stigmatizing narratives cultivated around the department and about CSEM offenders could inhibit treatment and rehabilitative efforts and, therefore, future prevention of internet crimes against children. Narratives also affect how officers understand CSEM victims. In fact, there's been a "narrative turn" in victimology that adds nuance to victimhood and victimization data (Cook & Walklate, 2019, p. 239). During an investigation, victims share their stories in police interviews and in victim impact statements which, in turn, allows officers and the public to learn about the harm done; therefore, storytelling not only is important to crime and criminal justice actors, but also to the "healing and resilience in the aftermath of crime" for victims (Hourigan, 2019, p. 259).

In sum, narrative work is important; as stated by Sandberg (2022, pp. 12-13): "criminologists will be particularly interested in the societal impact of narratives and studying the work stories do…" Narrative criminology views stories and storytelling as a function for future action. Whether stories are "true" or "false" is inconsequential: stories motivate action

(Presser & Sandberg, 2015); therefore, this research asks how ICAC officers use stories and storytelling to understand themselves, CSEM offenders, and CSEM victims in attempts to uncover existing cultural labels and stories while exploring the possible, larger implications of these narratives that reach beyond the department. Before justifying the current research design and methodological approach, this section will reiterate the three guiding research questions for this study, along with its justification on why these questions are important.

1. How do ICAC officers use stories and storytelling to convey their sense of occupational identity?

2. How do ICAC officers use stories and storytelling to understand CSEM offenders?

3. How do ICAC officers use stories and storytelling to understand CSEM victims?

Chapter 3 - Methods

To assess how perceptions affect the work of ICAC, this research explored how stories and storytelling help us better understand (1) ICAC investigators' sense of occupational identity, (2) their understanding of offenders, and (3) their understanding of victims. A cross-sectional, non-experimental research design was deemed the best approach to collecting this data. Employing a cross-sectional method means observing a particular group at a point in time that is used to serve as a representative sample of this group (Hagan, 2010b, p. 83; Miller, 1991; McGaw & Watson, 1976). This approach is most appropriate since descriptive, cross-sectional strategies are designed to collect a substantial amount of information that can be analyzed in a variety of ways (Miller, 1991). Specifically, the data were collected by using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to solicit information about the perceptions of cybercrime personnel. Interviewing is an effective methodology for gathering rich, nuanced information with the ability to probe the internal state (e.g., thoughts, feelings, and emotions) of a respondent (Weiss, 1994). Flexibility is a highlighted benefit as well, allowing interviewers to explore unexpected topics or comments that might arise during the interview. Interviewing has been used for—and an integral part of—policing research as well (see, for example, Ericson, 1981; Hawk & Dabney, 2014; Innes, 2002; Sanders, 1977); therefore, this study found interviewing methodology the most appropriate for gaining insight into these investigators.

Data Sampling and Collection

The current study is using data that was collected with help from a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant.[4] The support from this grant was used to sample the variety of

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[4] Award # 1916284

established cybercrime units in the US. Specifically, this study used both purposive and snowball sampling strategies in the collection of interviewees. To jump-start requesting participation in the study, scholars who helped with this data collection had connections with organizations such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police—specifically, their Computer Crimes and Digital Evidence Committee (a significant authoritative body in the area)—and the non-profit Public Safety Information Sharing and Analysis Organization. After letters were distributed to these organizations for solicitation of participation, scholars then pursued their own connections made during the course of data collection. Additional interviews were gathered through internet searches of LEAs who had some mention of units or personnel who dealt with cybercrime investigations. The names of these units varied, with LEAs having specific cybercrime divisions labeled as Computer Crimes Units or Cyber Crime Units (CCUs), Special Crimes Units (SCUs), and/or High Technology Crimes Units (HTCUs), to name some of the most common titles.

In terms of the sample size, criminology scholars suggest several numerical thresholds to satisfy the objectives of qualitative research, many of which coming from grounded theory studies. For instance, Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommend 10 interviews, at minimum, to achieve detailed observations and thematic saturation while Guest and colleagues (2006) recommend as few as 12 interviews. Even the median sample size in the field of criminology and criminal justice is 35 interviews (Copes et al., 2011). Regardless, there was not a "hard" target sample size for this project, aiming instead to collect as many interviews as possible. Ideally any sample size would be satisfactory if theoretical sampling is used to help reach thematic saturation. Charmaz (2014, p. 192) defines theoretical sampling as "seeking and collecting pertinent data to elaborate and refine categories in your emerging theory." This process involves refining data collection based on the development of properties of categories until no *new*

categories emerge from the data, at which point, "thematic saturation" has been reached (Charmaz, 2014, p. 213). According to grounded theory logic, this is the point where scholars should have—as much as possible—a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation enough to create a comprehensive theory and/or primary theme(s) of the research. Fortunately, this study gathered a total of 47 interviews, which greatly satisfies even the more robust minimums of suggested numbers of interviews while being confident that thematic saturation has been reached.

The 47 interviews were collected (see Table 1) included sworn officers, civilian analysts, and administrators. These interviews were conducted over the course of two years with the first interview occurring on October 10, 2019, and the last interview on July 14, 2021. Of those 47 interviews, 36 were specifically ICAC. The rest of the interviews ($n = 11$) involved personnel assigned to other cybercrime units, though, they all dealt with online crimes against children cases on occasion. Originally, these interviews were conducted in-person; however, due to the unforeseen consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews had to be conducted online. Other than our interviews with federal agents, the remaining interviews that were conducted after March 2020 were conducted with voice over IP (VoIP) software—specifically, Zoom ($n = 27$). Lastly, 46 of the 47 interviews were recorded and transcribed. The total interview time was 71 hours and 37 minutes while the average interview lasted about 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Cybercrime Personnel

Variable	n (%)
Age	Range: 27-65 ($\bar{x} = 42.7$)
Race	
White	42 (89.36%)
Black	1 (2.13%)
Indian	1 (2.13%)
Multi-Racial	3 (6.38%)
Gender	
Male	38 (80.85%)
Female	9 (19.15%)
Role/Rank	
Detective	19 (40.43%)
Trooper	3 (6.38%)
Detective Sergeant	11 (23.40%)
Lieutenant	1 (2.13%)
Captain	1 (2.13%)
Civilian	6 (12.77%)
Other	6 (12.77%)
Education	
High School	2 (4.26%)
Some College	3 (6.38%)
Associate's	8 (17.02%)
Bachelor's	32 (68.09%)
Master's	1 (2.13%)
Doctorate	1 (2.13%)

As detailed above, the initial objective of this data collection was oriented toward gathering respondents from "cybercrime units" more generally. As we began conducting interviews and pivoting to different departments suggested by participants, we realized that most cybercrime pursuits and resources are dedicated to child sexual exploitation. This, of course, was no surprise as most departments devote the most time and energy to investigating and prosecuting crimes involving child sexual exploitative materials, whether due to public sentiments of the heinousness of these types of crimes or due to the stigmatization of offenders who harm children (Hinduja, 2004; Holt et al., 2020; Jewkes & Yar, 2008; Marcum & Higgins, 2011).

Data Analysis

In terms of my theoretical framework, a narrative criminological approach was deemed the best analytical strategy. For narrative scholars, story and storytelling are essential to human meaning (Lewis, 2011). In its simplest form, narrative inquiry is a framework that quite literally situates the "story" as the fundamental unit of analysis; etymologically, it is a way of "telling" and "knowing" (Bhattacharya, 2017; Kim, 2016). A narrative acts as a methodological framework to help connect events within a story, signifying contextualized meanings that a speaker in that story wants to embed in the listener (Riessman, 2008). Since these data (i.e., interview transcripts) capture the personal musings of individuals through their own experiences, this narrative inquiry will be guided by a phenomenological framework with the epistemological underpinnings of subjectivity (Crotty, 1998; deMarrais & Lapan, 2004; Kim, 2016). Subjectivity is an orientation of knowledge where the knower assigns personal meaning to the known via their own past experiences, dreams, trauma, and general outlook on life and reality (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004; Kim, 2016).

In the criminological literature, specifically, narrative analysis has offered scholars theoretical richness to be extracted from the data, offering deep insight into areas such as life histories of offenders and media portrayals of criminal behavior (Peelo, 2006; Peelo & Soothill, 2000; Presser, 2009, 2010; Sandberg, 2010; Stevens, 2012; Youngs & Canter, 2012). For most of the narrative criminological literature, this type of analysis has been mainly applied towards criminals and criminality (see, for example, Copes et al., 2014; Presser, 2009; Presser & Sandberg, 2015; Youngs & Canter, 2012). Narratives have also helped scholars identify and comprehend the specific mechanisms of framing involved in illegal acts. These types of narrative frameworks date back to scholars like Sykes and Matza (1957), for instance, who found that some criminals justify their acts through techniques of neutralizations.

While most narrative studies fix their gaze towards offenders, narrative methods are suited towards criminal justice practitioners—including cybercrime personnel—as well. For instance, Kurtz and Upton (2017a, 2017b) used a narrative framework in analyzing the stories police tell to understand various aspects of policing. The results of their work join many others who recognize the significance police storytelling plays in the positive and negative construction of law enforcement culture and organization (Fletcher, 1996; Ford, 2003; Schaefer & Tewksbury, 2018; van Hulst, 2013; Waddington, 1999). For instance, police storytelling is not only important in the education of new recruits into the police worldview, but it also acts as informal training where officers are taught the skills necessary to perform the job (Ford, 2003; van Hulst, 2013).

Even though narrative analysis can be operationalized in myriad ways, this study applied Presser's (2009) conceptualizations of narratives to the stories told by cybercrime personnel. In summarizing the conceptualizations set forth by Presser (2009), the interpretation and analysis of

narratives can be guided in three ways: (1) narrative as record, (2) narrative as interpretation, or (3) a constitutive view of narrative. First, narratives could be construed as a formal record of events that had transpired and considered, for the most part, factual. Second, the interpretive framework treats narratives not so much as "accurate" record of events but as a subjective "*rendering*" about what has happened (Presser, 2009, p. 182). Here, emphasis lies more on the essence of stories and storytelling rather than a "factual" chain-of-custody of events. Third, narratives could be analyzed through a constitutive lens to show how linguistic devices and meaning-making mechanics within stories influence future behavior; therefore, in applying these three conceptualizations to the current study, investigators' narratives were treated as (1) official records or accounts of ICAC work, (2) ICAC investigators' interpretations of their world, and/or (3) a function of how stories within ICAC units shaped their behavior future realities of this line of work. Lastly, these interpretations will be supplemented by identifying what Presser and Sandberg (2015, p. 86) refer to as the "nuts and bolts" of stories and storytelling, including the subject and verb descriptors, the "genre," and contextual elements of narratives.

Although the following describes a rather general strategy that researchers use, this study will engage with Kim's (2016) coding guides for qualitative methods using a narrative framework. This process includes coding which links patterns, categories, and themes altogether. Specifically, the primary researcher will engage in initial coding of the raw interview data, line-by-line, and identify any terms, phrases, and/or statements from cybercrime personnel regarding their colleagues, offenders, and victims. Once the initial coding walkthrough is done, patterns and codes that are similar will then be combined to construct relevant categories. Lastly, these categories will be iterated upon enough to where themes will emerge relevant to each research question. Ultimately, the main objective in the application of this process is to find

comprehensive, exhaustive themes that emerge from the data that explain how narratives from cybercrime personnel shape how they perceive their colleagues, offenders, and victims.

Limitations

Caution should be taken, however, as these police stories could slowly drift into the fictional realm as officers could exaggerate and/or outright fictionalize their work-life experiences. Logically, this problem with authenticity has been a topic of contention within the criminological field. Presser (2009) clarifies this by describing how narratives can be (re)conceptualized for criminological inquiry. They explain that, indeed, the mainstream approach to narratives has been that of treating stories as record—an authentic documentation of events that occurred in an individual's world; however, this is strict perception regarding "validity" ignores other, fruitful extractions from narrative data. In other words, treating narratives as "record" is but one of three ways to conceptualize narratives. Another route could be treating narratives as interpretations. Since one's perceptions are, arguably, more important than "real" circumstances in studying how people act, this conceptualization heavily leans into the subjective biases present in *any* narrative; therefore, the importance lies within the individual's *rendering* of what happened (Presser, 2009). So, instead of considering police stories as factual retellings of police experiences, scholars should frame stories more as "police parables," or artifacts that function as gatekeepers of police values and socially acceptable behaviors within policing (Ford, 2003). Stories can even serve additional functions as (1) a distraction from the mundaneness of police work and as (2) a background for police to construct identities that parallel pop culture interpretations of police work. Lastly, significance can also be derived from what the police *do not* explicitly state or discuss in their interviews.

Chapter 4 - Results

To reiterate, three research questions guided this analysis: (1) how do stories and storytelling shape ICAC investigators' occupational identity, (2) how do stories and storytelling shape how ICAC personnel understand CSEM offenders, and (3) how do stories and storytelling shape how ICAC personnel understand CSEM victims? In keeping with the "storytelling" spirit, the reader might think of the three research questions as three separate books with shared settings and characters, but each has their own story to tell. This analysis revealed three core narratives for the three research questions. For the first core narrative, ICAC investigators were depicted as the "Misunderstood Hero" whose occupational identity was influenced by (1) investigators as crime fighters and saviors and (2) their particular role being marked by strong solidarity and support. Additionally, their occupational solidarity was managed and reinforced in two ways: (1) through the navigation of other officers' labels towards their occupation and (2) through (war) stories that built solidarity via emphasis on the absurdities of this particular role. For the second core narrative, stories from ICAC investigators illustrated the archetypical CSEM offender as an "Incorrigible Menace" whose image emerged from a dialectical discussion of offenders as both monsters and "normal" people. Finally, the analysis of stories and storytelling produced a core narrative of victims depicted as "Ideal Victims."

ICAC Investigators and Occupational Identity

Crime Fighters and Saviors

For ICAC investigators, their occupational identity can be summarized through the narrative of the *crime fighter*. Notably, a central feature of law enforcements' occupational identity in the literature has been officers viewing themselves as crime fighters with an exaggerated sense of mission towards their role (Loftus, 2010; Reiner, 2000). This framing was

particularly evident when participants responded to questions regarding whether their work in CSEM investigations changed, in their minds, "what it meant to be a police officer." For some participants, this work reinforced or otherwise did not change their understanding of the police identity as craving work that is crime-oriented (e.g., Loftus, 2010). Even though the image of a police officer involves "the car chases, shootin' people," and "catchin' bad guys" (Interview #46), this investigator expressed how they "don't do the first two anymore at all but… I still catch bad guys but… it's behind the scenes." ICAC investigators see their unit as merely a different type of role that still satisfies the crime fighting identity, only, their main objective is to find, arrest, and convict child sex offenders rather than drug dealers or burglars. For example, one investigator expressed how all roles within policing are important and strive toward the same goal:

> So I've had this conversation before. Every, in my opinion, every aspect of law enforcement is important. There's guys that really enjoy going out and doing traffic stops and finding guns and drugs and all the other stuff that can go on with that. I've done that. It was not my niche, I guess, for the, (chuckle) for the better way of putting it… I found this and I have not been more motivated in any other spot that I've been in (Interview #23).

For many of these officers, this job was "just another important area" of police work that "needs to be addressed and it needs to be addressed swiftly" (Interview #24).

Even though both the stories and organizational directives of these investigators align with the historically established "crime fighting" identity of policing, investigators made sure to emphasize how their particular role is distinct and augments more "traditional" policing in several ways, specifically within another core narrative involving helping and saving children.

This mentality was observed in their responses on what the most rewarding aspect of their job was—either locking away the criminals (the "crime fighters;" n = 22) or rescuing children (the "saviors;" n = 14). For example, several investigators insisted that this role made them feel like they were making an either real or perceived difference relative to other roles they have fulfilled (n = 11). For example, one investigator elaborated upon this difference using road work as a comparison:

> I mean, this may sound bad, basically what troopers do every day on the road, as far as our basic function, which is, obviously, to annoy the public with tickets and warnings, it's like almost nothing. It doesn't seem like you're accomplishing anything. Because I can write somebody a ticket and they're gonna drive five miles down the road and speed again. Did I really accomplish anything? No, probably not. Here, I feel like you're doing something worthwhile and makin' a difference. And I know you joke, everybody jokes and say, "Why did I become a police officer? I wanted to make a difference." Well, in some of the work that we've done, we have made a difference. So that's, I guess you see the difference (Interview #9).

Some officers felt as though their efforts were wasted in previous positions involving non-ICAC work, from individuals who would continue to speed on the road after a ticket (Interview #9) to offenders that would be "back out" on the streets regardless of the hours of paperwork submitted (Interview #39). In this capacity, describing their role as a defender or savior was a complimentary characteristic of the "crime fighting" police identity—the "preservation of a valued way of life, and the protection of the weak against the predatory" (Reiner, 2000, p. 89).

In fact, several investigators recounted how this unit reinvigorated their initial objective in saving lives and the satisfaction it brought them. For instance, one officer commented on this "protector" role after being asked if this position altered their police identity:

> I think, I think I've stayed pretty consistent throughout the years. I mean, it reinforces my beliefs that, you know, it's, it's our job to protect the vulnerable, especially kids. It, it's, yeah, I, I don't think it's really changed me other than just re-emphasizing the things that were important, you know, the reasons I got into law enforcement in the first place (Interview #30).

Being able to either stop the active abuse or prevent victimization, altogether, in rescuing the child victims brought personal and occupational fulfillment to investigators. One investigator depicted a vivid conclusion for these cases as "bringing that light to that dark place… Bringing hope back into that child's life" (Interview #18). For example, this investigator shared several cases involving both biological and stepfathers sexually assaulting their own daughters and the relief brought to both the child and those families when they were caught, prosecuted, and imprisoned:

> Again, you know, these people are just walking around doing these things, and then you're bringing that light to that dark place and you're hopeful that the child victims can, they get a chance to maybe gain some innocence back or grow up without these people in their lives. And that's, that's the rewarding part for me.

In this capacity, investigators found fulfillment in this guardian role, protecting those most vulnerable (i.e., children), and restoring innocence while carrying out justice.

Solidarity and Support

Research on policing has documented a strong "us versus them" or "we versus they" world view pervasive throughout policing (Reuss-Ianni, 1983; Van Maanen, 1978). In other words, there is a tendency to view the police as a tight-knit confederacy characterized by a strong sense of occupational solidarity toward fellow officers and a distrust of those outside the policing profession (Kappeler et al., 2015; Skolnick, 2011). Study participants, however, noted that—while they may view their job as fundamentally a policing role—they did feel a sense of alienation from their fellow officers because of the nature of their work.

Though ICAC investigators described their role in noble or valiant terms, they also lamented the various challenges specific to their charge, including the exposure to exploitative, abusive, and violent content during CSEM investigations. The resulting product is another core narrative told by investigators in constructing their occupational identity as having strong, defensive solidarity with fellow colleagues. From the literature, police solidarity stems from multiple facets of police work, including demographic and occupational homogeneity, on-duty stress carried into off-hour spaces, and stigmatization and hostility from the citizenry (Bowling et al., 2019, p. 173; Loftus, 2010; Van Maanen, 1978). Here, this occupational solidarity was managed and reinforced in two ways: (1) through the navigation of other officers' labels towards their occupation and (2) through (war) stories that build solidarity via emphasis on the absurdities of this particular role.

Identity Management from Alienation

To better contextualize the defensive solidarity from ICAC officers, there were times where investigator felt alienated from non-ICAC personnel. Normally, these exclusionary attitudes (i.e., "us vs. them") have been observed between the public and the police mostly due to law enforcement's "working personality" and occupational identity as aggressive enforcers of

the law (Kappeler et al., 2015; Skolnick, 2011). Here, narratives from ICAC personnel highlight

that the exclusion came not from the citizenry, but from non-ICAC officers who did not

understand the nature of CSEM investigations. This perceived hostility, as Skolnick (2011)

would describe, seemed to promote further solidarity and dependence within ICAC units while

isolating ICAC investigators further from non-ICAC circles. The two opinionated ends of the

spectrum extracted from the stories told about non-ICAC officers ranged from mystified

appreciation for ICAC to us-versus-them-styled ostracization.

First, ICAC investigators stated that non-ICAC officers simply do not know what ICAC

work entails, sometimes choosing to remain willfully ignorant of these types of investigations.

Again, perhaps the most common story ICAC investigators heard from non-ICAC regarding

their investigations: "I could never do that," "I could never do what you do," "I don't know how

you look at that shit all day," or some variation of that sentiment (n = 14). Some non-ICAC

officers understand both the gravity of these crimes and the significance of their investigations,

even though they will still remain purposefully distant from its content. For instance, there were

several aspects of the job ICAC investigators commented on which non-ICAC officers are

oblivious, including caseloads and the investigation processes (n = 9).

Second, some ICAC personnel had experienced forms of ostracism from non-ICAC

officers. At its worst, ICAC investigators were seen as the outcasts— "a pariah, even among

other cops" (Interview #35). Plenty of nicknames reinforced these exclusionary boundaries as

well. Disintegrative labels for these officers included the "nerds," "weirdos," "porn police," and

the "chomo police," while unit labels consisted of being called the "kiddie porn unit," the "child

porn dudes," (n = 7). The "porn king" was one label applied to a sergeant for one department's

ICAC unit (Interview #18). Another officer described a sort of "ten-foot pole" banishment from

the rest of the department, a sentiment that harkened back to historic societal treatment of leprosy:

> That's what, nobody wants to come in. They, they look at us like a bunch of lepers. They don't want to touch anything. They don't want to have anything to do with ya. You start tellin' stories and everybody's response is, 'Man, I don't know how the fuck you do that kind of stuff.' And they change the subject. I can take a hint. They don't want to talk about it, you know, they don't want you to even start talkin' about it" (Interview #21).

This same investigator described their unit's office as entering the "gates of hell" considering non-ICAC officers neither want to touch anything in their office nor even enter their space if not required. A supervisor commented on this type of vocal exclusion, hoping his ICAC investigators would not feel "broken" or that they are doing "somethin' wrong" (Interview #18). Some officers tried to rebuff this division. One ICAC officer recounted a story where he wanted to put an officer's bravado in "check" by explaining how this job requires a different framework through which to view strength:

> And you could talk a lot about that. But what I have found, and I never really saw this that much until you come to ICAC or you start dealin' with child sex offenders, is one of the ways that you can identify weakness is by that false sense of bravado of like, "Oh, yeah," and again, this is the standard, "Oh, I could never, I could never work ICAC because if I sat across from a child sex offender, I'd just kill 'em." Like, "Oh, okay. Well, yeah, you're really tough, right? You're really tough. You're so big that, yeah, you are, you are so strong that you would just have to use brute force." That's a friggin' cop out, right? So you're tellin' me that you're so strong but you're not strong enough to sit across

from somebody who makes you feel uncomfortable. It's like, well, that just requires a

different type of strength (Interview #35).

Here, these investigators engaged in defensive solidarity and justification of their role,

specifically by attempting to reframe the idea of a "crime fighter" to include attitudes or

behaviors that may not have been traditionally seen as the "strong" or "masculine" way to handle

potential offenders, like always displaying a willingness to use physical force (Reiner, 2000).

Overall, being an ICAC officer involved the need to constantly confront and navigate

exclusionary labels, requiring them to respond either by abstaining from engaging with such

labels or by justifying their occupational identity as one that still fits within the policing role.

Identity Management from War Stories

Another mechanism through which officers reinforced solidarity with others in their unit

was the telling of war stories. Generally, these types of stories function as a way for officers to

"get a sense of what is going on" (van Hulst, 2013, p. 636) and to better understand the potential

realities of their particular role. Remembering that stories are complete with plot, characters, and

settings, ICAC investigators told several stories that highlighted the absurdities of their job,

including the "sick" offenders they encountered, and the bizarre materials found within the

places they searched. For example, the more "tame" stories revealed that many offenders were

into science fiction (sci-fi) content, such as Star Wars, Star Trek, Marvel, and anime, among

others (n = 13). As an introduction into the more extreme stories, however, one investigator

described a pornographic video found during an investigation called "Shit Gang Five":

But, but like I had, (sigh) oh, god, this, this guy had a video, it was called Shit Gang Five,

and it's five Brazilian women poopin' on each other and eatin' it and everything, and it's,

it's terrible. (chuckle) But you had to laugh. I'm like, "Hey, I got the record now"… You

know, and of course, everybody's got to come see it (Interview #20).

Briefly, some of the more unusual or extreme stories involved offenders who: consumed feces as

foreplay (Interview #38), tried to cover up an assault by stabbing the victim and setting the house

on fire (Interview #20), masturbated with the bladed side of a chef's knife (Interview #38), and

harbored repulsive videos, such as a snake anally penetrating a human (Interview #9).

Notably, the details within these stories would only be shared with fellow ICAC while

seldom (if ever) be told to non-ICAC personnel, the public, or even close friends and family due

to their graphic, violent content (n = 21). Stories became relics that could only be shared,

understood, and appreciated among fellow ICAC investigators while outsiders would not

understand and/or "cringe" if exposed to these stories. For instance, investigators engaged in

constant reminders that these stories "stay within the community" (Interview #44) and that "you

can't talk about what you see" with your family (Interview #21). Most importantly, war stories

would contain (oftentimes vulgar and dark) humor to release the tension, stress, and trauma these

investigators experienced that, again, only ICAC-affiliated personnel would understand (n = 20).

These interactions were succinctly stated by one investigator:

A lot of it is discussion within the office, and to be honest with you, some of it is just

dark humor and, and, you know, joking about things in the office. You have to have

humor about the thing, about things within a reasonable amount (00:30:49 inaudible) and

you have to joke about things once in a while within the confines of our office to, to kind

of keep levity up and keep spirits up 'cause it can, a lot of this stuff can really bring you

down (Interview #29).

In other words, these stories had the capacity to both reenergize investigators in continuing to fulfill their crime fighting/savior role while acting as a relatable coping mechanism with the ability to increase occupational solidarity and bonds among ICAC investigators.

The Misunderstood Hero

The story communicated by officers is that despite getting involved in a form of crime that lies outside of the norm for most officers—various kinds of street crime—that ICAC investigators retain a strong sense of identity and affiliation with the policing occupation. They remained *crime fighters* par excellence. Further, because their job involves crimes against children, they also tended to view their role as *savior* of the helpless. Yet, their story is fraught as well. Though many of the participants noted that they felt supported by administration and that their duties were taken seriously, they also felt a sense of alienation from their fellow officers and investigators. Many noted that many officers expressed distaste or even disgust for the ICAC role. Some were said to crack jokes—using humor as a way to denigrate the kind of work they do. At the same time, participants also noted that many of their law enforcement colleagues did recognize the need for such investigations and the heinousness of the crimes that they combat. In this sense, participants seem to experience some degree of role conflict. They *are* officers but also *not* officers. In other words, they felt a strong sense of occupational identity but also some tension regarding their place within policing culture. They are crime fighters and saviors but also potentially misunderstood by their colleagues.

ICAC Investigators and Offenders

Monsters Among Us

Investigators told an overarching story about CSEM offenders in a particularly otherizing manner, ranging from "messed up" (Interview #5) to "monsters" (Interview #18). Much of their

language resembled that of existing cultural myths regarding sex offenders in monstrous depictions (Asma, 2009; Renfro, 2020; Finkelhor, 1984). One investigator walked us through, essentially, the "monster's lair" during one of his stories:

> So we finally go in and we get his address, go to his house, and we do a knock and talk on him 'cause we don't really have anything other than these anonymous people sayin' he's creepy. And we start talkin' to him and he starts to admit that he has child pornography on his phone, and then so we kind of stop at that point and ask if, you know, he'll give it to us on consent. So he walks to his bedroom, and this guy is like seven-foot-two, and he's as ugly as he is tall. I mean, he's like just a horrible, monster-lookin' guy… He was a horrible, horrible person, needless to say (Interview #10).

About a quarter of participants used negative to hostile captions to describe these offenders, including the following: "bad," "bad egg," "bad guy," "bat shit crazy," "crappy," "creep," "dangerous," "evil," "horrible," "messed up," "monsters," "psychotic," "perverts," "pedophiles," "screwed up," "sick people" and "sickos" (n = 11).

Nowhere was this dehumanization of offenders more visible than in conversations about offenders' physical and mental conditions. In the eyes of some investigators, these offenders were simply irredeemable and some of whom should be removed from existence entirely. One investigator described these feelings within the context of offender suicide: "A self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head is always for me… they can't be rehabilitated, that's my opinion. They're just, they're just evil-evil-evil people who don't need to walk this earth (laughter)" (Interview #6). Here, investigators revealed a bit of the "backstages" of policing; in other words, investigators bluntly expressed what they truly felt about offenders, even though these statements were only revealed by a few officers (Goffman, 1971). For example, one investigator and his unit

would barely "blink an eye" if an offender were to end their own life during an investigation (Interview #12). In fact, the most irritating part of one of their cases was that the offender died before they were able to convict him:

> I got a call from the [redacted] Police Department, and they said, "Hey… you serve a search warrant down here by [redacted] School?" Gave me the address. And I go, "Yeah. About a month ago. Why?" And he goes, "Oh, well, the guy that lives here just killed hisself." I didn't get to arrest him; that's what I'm frustrated about… I had 17 charges and had done all that work and the guy kills hisself (Interview #12).

Similar sentiments regarding offender suicide were echoed by another unit where investigators were either (1) disappointed that they were unable to convict an offender in seeking closure to a case, (2) frustrated that all their investigative work was wasted, or (3) satisfied that the offender could no longer violate children and would even "save the taxpayers money, save me paperwork" (n = 5).

The "Normal" Deviation

Interestingly, a few investigators described offenders in a way that did not completely conform to the harsher monster depiction of other investigators. In fact, these investigators took a more sympathetic approach in humanizing offenders and their issues. For instance, one officer indicated this conscious decision when they jokingly retracted an otherizing label he placed upon a CSEM offender:

> So that, that'll dedicate a ton of our time. Now I had a guy who's just crazy, he was psychotic – (chuckle) no – he wasn't psychotic; I can't put that label. (chuckle) But he was, he was having issues, he had issues, right (Interview #33).

Although these feelings were marginal in comparison to the majority of officers, some investigators profiled offenders as "normal" people with "dangerous" problems (Interview #37) who have "a lot to lose" (Interview #38). Again, these depictions offer a slightly different frame against the cultural narrative that "monster-lookin'" (Interview #10) child sex offenders might appear a certain way, such as the isolated "hypothetical basement dwelling offender" (Interview #12), or some variation of that sentiment (n = 4). As summarized by one investigator:

> And, you know, and, and the other part of it, in our world, this runs the gamut of, you know, completely rich, poor, it doesn't matter what your demographic is, to, you know, prominent doctors, lawyers, you know, professors, even police officers and public servants. I mean, it, we've had 'em all, you know (Interview #5).

Careers extrapolated from investigators' stories about offenders reiterated the "normalness" of offenders—jobs such as band teachers, babysitters, football coaches, janitors, members of churches, vice principals, and even criminal justice actors, including a firefighter, a school resource officer, and a law enforcement director of information systems (n = 8). Even parents had the capacity to not only abuse their own children, but also could "pimp" them out to fellow offenders (Interviews #18 & #30). Though this worldview was only marginally represented, a few officers felt as though these offenders were "normal" people with dangerous problems that needed immediate intervention (Interview #36).

There was, however, a specific utilitarian reason why investigators engaged in the more sympathetic approach: information extraction. During their tenure, investigators are trained using the "Reid Interview" technique (n = 4). Specifically, this method calls for investigators to deploy a "softer" method via sympathy, dignity, and respect when interviewing CSEM offenders to better extract information from them (n = 11). Investigators explained that CSEM offenders are

"not necessarily proud" of their actions, nor do they explicitly talk about their pedophilic attractions due to cultural stigma (Interview #18, #39). This perceivably helpful disposition offers a sort of "olive branch" to these offenders:

> As far as these guys, I think that a lot of it comes from the fact that they haven't told anybody and now you're this person that's just not judging them, not specifically on what they've done because of the legality of what they've done… you're just listening to them… (Interview #39).

As a result, officers take a more relaxed, conversational approach to create environment that feels like "you're sittin' down around a campfire with a bunch of people you don't know" (Interview #21) establishing a connection in a manner that leads offenders to believe that "you're their friend" (Interview #38). Conversational beats involve, in a sense, expressions and phrases that try to erode emotional walls that offenders have built, telling offenders things like "You know, we're all human. We all have desires" and "You're not a bad guy," among other "nice," diplomatic phrases that attempt to "humanize" offenders while making the investigator seem "understandable" (n = 6). Here, offenders "open up," they are more willing to talk, and most importantly, this allows investigators to possibly obtain a confession (n = 3).

The Incorrigible Menace

Regardless of whether investigators had tempered or radical feelings about offenders, they told an overarching story about the *incorrigible menace*. Of particular interest is the contrast between the stories and descriptions about offenders and the reality of investigations that were discussed. Specifically, these investigators either explicitly told or alluded to the belief that these types of offenders were irredeemable individuals who were "vile and nasty, particularly bad folks" (Interview #1) with monstrous depictions; they are "incorrigible" in that they cannot be

cured. Yet, despite these outwardly monstrous depictions, virtually *anyone* could be a child sex

offender. The archetypical child abusers that seem to be described here, then, are veiled monsters

who live among us. This illustration was echoed by one investigator:

> "This guy's not going to continue down the same path, victimizing people, or hurting
>
> people, or is a dangerous person that's just walking in our midst. We know there's
>
> hundreds of 'em, thousands of 'em. You know, the ones that we'll never find, those are
>
> the ones that are really scary (Interview #18).

Individuals who appear normal yet hide dark secrets have been portrayed in several works of

fiction—one of the most famous literary characters that comes to mind: Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Dr. Jekyll was a doctor well-regarded by society and known for his upstanding behavior, much

in the same fashion that offenders could come from any noble occupation in society and, at least,

"appear" normal; yet, he harbored a darker, more sinister side of his personality, Mr. Hyde, who

acted upon his evil desires without remorse. The duality of this character is a fairly close

representation of how these investigators view and understand CSEM offenders.

ICAC Investigators and Victims

The Ideal Victim

The final story told in this analysis was that of the *ideal victim*, directly in reference to

Christie's (1986) seminal work. In expanding upon the social construction of crime, Christie

(1986) explains how assigning the "victim" status to an individual or group is a consequence of

both our societal values/social norms and the person's definition of the situation. Christie (1986)

uses this rationale to construct a category that has more cultural and political ramifications

known as the "ideal victim." Simply, this is "a person or a category of individuals who – when

hit by crime – most readily are given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim"

(Christie, 1986, p. 18). Typically, the ideal victim is someone who is weak, young, sick, and/or old and who virtually cannot be blamed for introducing or catalyzing their own victimization. Simultaneously, the ideal victim is defined in reference to the offending party—in a sense, the "ideal victims need – and create – ideal offenders" (Christie, 1986, p. 25). Such offenders are described as "big and bad" and has no relation to the victim.

To begin, the synopsis of this particular story was encapsulated by one investigator's explanation of "true" victims:

> And, so saving these kids, these are *true* victims who didn't do anything to anybody; it's not like it's two drunks pushin' each other and it's mutual combatants and nobody deserves to get hands put on 'em. But this is a true victim when you save the kids. So that's, that's the best part (Interview #21; italics added).

Here, a "true" victim is one who poses no immediate threat and could not possibly be guilty of putting themselves in a precarious situation (i.e., Christie, 1986), such as the two "drunks" described in that investigator's story. These children are seen as "vulnerable" and unable to either defend themselves and/or articulate the harm that has been done to them (Interview #30). Another investigator with similar sentiments stated how it's "more rewarding to find those folks who have… done what they done with, with children that don't have the ability to say no or can't do anything" (Interview #5). This rhetoric is reminiscent of how, culturally, children are seen as "weak" and "blameless" for their victimization (Ring, 2018, p. 144). One investigator even asserted that not hurting children was seen as a type of cultural axiom, a social fact:

> And especially when you ferret out, you know, somebody that's a, you know, person that, you know, was getting away with this for a long time or having, basically, you know, no regard for anything. You know, we would all subscribe to this social contract that we

don't hurt kids and, and this person's just flaunting it, you know, in somebody's face

(Interview #18).

Additionally, society frames these acts as one of the worst and most heinous infringements and abuse of power: the violation of bodily autonomy and the infliction of significant trauma on the mental health of the victim (Ring, 2018, p. 143).

In the case of sex crimes against children, the two aforementioned frames combine to produce what is the most rewarding part of investigators' job: saving victims from abuse or further victimization, separating them from their abuser, and providing resources for care (n = 14). For these investigators, the awards are "so immediate" to be able to not only see offenders sent to prison, knowing that individual "is not gonna do that to anybody else," but also being able to separate that child from that environment and further victimization (n = 3). The age of victims within their stories ranged from eight-month-old infants to fifteen-year-olds. Several officers even recounted children being victimized by either their own family (e.g., parent, stepparent, stepsiblings, uncles, cousins), or their parents "pimping them out" to other offenders (n = 10). To investigators, these are "true" victims they are able to save.

Another way this story was told was within a traditional storytelling context of "good" versus "evil" or "light" vs. "dark." Investigators vividly expressed how it felt to rescue victims of these crimes, stating that ICAC were "a voice for those victims" (Interview #2) and that they were "bringing that light to that dark place" (Interview #18). One investigator described a couple of cases where the arrest of these offenders could have possibly restored the purity of those young victims' humanity:

Again, you know, these people are just walking around doing these things, and then

you're bringing that light to that dark place and you're hopeful that the child victims can,

they get a chance to maybe gain some innocence back or grow up without these people in

their lives. And that's, that's the rewarding part for me (Interview #18).

These stories of good versus evil also necessitate a hero (albeit a "misunderstood" one as

established earlier) who ultimately saves the day; in this case, the saviors are the investigators, in

part due to every "true" victim needing a "big and bad" (or monstrous) offender (Christie, 1986,

p. 19). Several officers not only commented that helping children was their main directive, but

also that "saving" and "rescuing" them from offenders was an extremely satisfying and

rewarding endeavor (n = 19).

Chapter 5 - Discussion

As the majority of prior criminological narrative analyses have been towards the offender, the analysis of these data further supports storytelling as a critical framework in uncovering the worldview of criminal justice actors and what that means for our current criminal justice system. The narratives presented by ICAC investigators help in providing a multifaceted understanding of their occupational identity and their attitudes, beliefs, and, therefore, treatment of CSEM offenders and victims. Notably, each of the three main stories told about the "Misunderstood Hero," the "Incorrigible Menace," and the "Ideal Victim" have broad implications for not only the existing literature, but also meaningful commentary on historical and current politics; therefore, this section will detail how these three core narratives further shape our understanding of police culture and what this means for police behavior and policy.

Implications of the "Misunderstood Hero"

This study began its inquiry by investigating how stories and storytelling were important elements in police culture—specifically, how stories helped investigators get a sense of their occupational identity. The current study adds more nuance to police culture, especially to the previous literature that has established the non-monolithic nature of cop culture and how the "we-they" dichotomy forms within the agency. Again, scholars have found that those who adopt the "traditional" core characteristics of policing (e.g., the masculine, aggressive, traditional approach) have often otherized units that differ or conflict with these existing principles. Due to the interactions ICAC investigators had with non-ICAC line officers, the evidence here suggests that those who engage with ICAC work are yet another position that is prone to being otherized by line officers. The existence of this othering further supports previous literature suggesting that cybercrimes fall somewhat out of the realm of "real" police work (Bossler & Holt, 2012; Holt &

Bossler, 2012b). Even though ICAC work involves the core elements of "old fashioned," offline police work, such as gathering evidence and questioning suspects (e.g., Fowler et al., 2020), line officers still find ICAC work to not completely align and be somewhat different from the more traditional strategies of policing. It should be noted, however, that non-ICAC personnel were grateful for the job ICAC investigators were performing, but they still felt ostracization due to the content of their investigations (for example, being called "perverts," the "porn police," and the "kiddie porn unit"). Harsh opinions of specialized units that have otherized fellow officers, such as ICAC being labeled as a "pariah" (Interview #35) or the "red-headed stepchildren" (Interview #21), have, again, been established in the literature (see, for example, Brewer, 2022; Garcia, 2008; Rice, 2023). Such rhetoric not only has otherizing and isolating effects for these units, but it also would not be far-fetched to suggest that these attitudes could contribute to further disaffection, stress, and mental fatigue for ICAC investigators.

These stories also reveal how ICAC investigators may not completely conform to and modify one of the core characteristics of policing: the masculine ethos (Loftus, 2010; Reiner, 2000; Waddington, 1999). In short, police stories told by line officers often celebrate and promote a more aggressive, provocative approach to policing (Waddington, 1999). This behavior was seen in the narratives of ICAC investigators when they described how non-ICAC personnel would have "handled" CSEM offenders. Such responses were abundant, such as:

(1) "How can you sit in a room and talk to one of those people? I would just choke 'em out" (Interview #12).

(2) "I don't know how you can do it. It's gross. I couldn't do it. I'd kill the guy" (Interview #8).

(3) "How do you not beat the shit out of these?" (Interview #1).

(4) "Wow. I can't believe you don't want to choke 'em, or shoot 'em, or do…"

(Interview #7).

(5) "I'd want to come across the table and strangle [the offender]" (Interview #10).

Expressions of animosity towards these types of offenders were common and, again, indicative of strong and aggressive masculine culture that pervades policing. ICAC investigators seem to be reframing what masculinity could mean in policing. One investigator explained what "real" strength meant to him:

> But what I have found, and I never really saw this that much until you come to ICAC or you start dealin' with child sex offenders, is one of the ways that you can identify weakness is by that false sense of bravado of like, "Oh, yeah," and again, this is the standard, "Oh, I could never, I could never work ICAC because if I sat across from a child sex offender, I'd just kill 'em." Like, "Oh, okay. Well, yeah, you're really tough, right? You're really tough. You're so big that, yeah, you are, you are so strong that you would just have to use brute force." That's a friggin' cop out, right? So you're tellin' me that you're so strong but you're not strong enough to sit across from somebody who makes you feel uncomfortable. It's like, well, that just requires a different type of strength (Interview #35).

As a reminder, the main reason for this deviation seemed to radiate from the training ICAC investigators received. Specifically, their interview techniques and how they extract information from offenders necessitated a more sympathetic approach. For officers, the interview is the "most critical part" of the investigation: "they want to get a confession of the child pornography, I want you to say you possessed it, I want you to say that you sent it, and once I have that, I'm

done talkin' to you" (Interview #35). In fulfilling an important role of the criminal justice system, this is the ultimate goal:

> Yeah, we have the evidence but we don't know who put that evidence on that computer. So if we don't get a confession, it's gonna be harder for prosecution. And to get that confession, you gotta get, you gotta be, have the smooth talk, you gotta be able to emphasize with people; get them to open up and make them understand, "I'm not gonna judge you. We're just two guys havin' a conversation" (Interview #21).

Additionally, these investigators did not treat offenders as monsters that should be hunted but, rather, individuals to understand if given the space:

> I think, personally, after speaking with, 'cause I'll talk to a lot of the guys that I arrest, "Hey. What made you confess? Why did you do this?" Or, "What made you think?" And they all say the same thing, they had a weight on their chest that they couldn't tell anybody about and they wanted to tell somebody… What we do is we give them a socially acceptable way to tell the truth. There's not a social, there's not usually a socially acceptive way to say, "Hey. I like havin' sex with a nine-month old. Okay? That's what turns me on." So what we do is we make it a little bit soc, more socially acceptable, say, "Hey, look. I don't understand, but explain to me what's going on. Explain to me how you feel" (Interview #21).

Importantly, there is not enough to say here, however, that ICAC investigators felt *genuine* sympathy for CSEM offenders; rather, the "empathetic" approach was merely a façade—an illusion to extract information underneath the true feelings of ICAC investigators. A couple of investigators encapsulated this approach metaphorically: "… you get more flies with honey than vinegar…" (Interview #3, #21). The "vinegar" method—or, in other words, the

aggressive policing under the masculine ethos—is one that ICAC investigators stated would not

work with these types of offenders. One investigator described this mindset:

> And like I said before, you know, if I would have registered sex offender 15 years ago…
>
> I would have probably had the mindset of, you know, "You piece of shit. You need to tell
>
> me what you did and why'd you do that?" And so on and so forth, you know, whatever.
>
> But you don't, now I don't look at it that way. You know, I look at it like, okay, I can sit
>
> down, I can humanize this for a moment because I know that the end outcome is not
>
> about me. It's not about me feelin' like I said my piece and told that person what I think
>
> about 'em or whatever (Interview #5).

This, again, is a notable deviation from how these officers described the more "traditional,"

aforementioned emotional response to offenders. Some investigators revealed that they are, of

course, "pissed" and "angry" when hearing confessions from offenders committing their acts

(Interview #7). The same officer even said that he was "lying through his teeth" in telling one

offender during an interview that he was not a "bad guy." Regardless, ICAC investigators realize

that, if officers come across as aggressive, judgmental, or closed-off, offenders will be hesitant to

divulge information that would potentially help or save victims (Interview #5). For these

investigators, strength does not come from "brute forcing" their suspects; rather, the *mental*

fortitude of conducting these interviews, applying the training they have received, and remaining

steadfast and unphased in the presence of horrifying stories is a type of strength that would

otherwise be disregarded as a "soft" approach, and thereby an unacceptable form of policing.

Importantly, these findings create an identity crisis for ICAC investigators and may have

significant implications informing officers about the way they not only talk with one another, but

also in terms of department dynamics. For their occupational identity, Waddington (1999, p.

295) discusses how stories told in the backstages of policing (e.g., the "canteen") not only act as a sort of "repair shop" for officers, but also serve to recall versions of events that reinforce existing worldviews. Here, the stories told by investigators reveal a departure from the traditional, more machismo version of policing. There is constant tension between existing modes of thought within policing—particularly, the masculine ethos and brutality of dealing with offenders—in how line officers think they should be handling offenders versus how ICAC investigators interact with offenders. This dynamic may create a type of discursive feedback loop where the usual treatment and feelings in dealing with "monstrous" and inhuman child sex offenders via street justice or beat downs is not being reciprocated by ICAC investigators, creating somewhat of an "us vs. them" dichotomy between them and the rest of the department. As a response, the stories ICAC personnel told were that of active resistance to the slights of line officers in attempting to subordinate the charge of their unit and (re)negotiation (and justification) of their position within the department. In other words, the story of the "Misunderstood Hero" is that of convincing line officers and the rest of the department that their job is important *and in line with* the dominant cultural values of policing. For instance, ICAC personnel made explicitly clear that they are *crime fighters* first, consistent with the more traditional core characteristics of policing in having a sense-of-mission drive attitude towards crime-oriented work (Bowling et al., 2019; Loftus, 2010; Reiner, 2000). It is suggested here that stories were used as a tool for realignment for the occupational identity of these officers; in other words, despite the otherizing rhetoric of line officers, ICAC personnel constructed their identity and position as one that still conforms to and aligns with the dominant cultural narratives of policing.

What currently remains is ICAC investigators' deviation from the aggressive masculine ethos, along with being teased and, sometimes, bullied due to the nature of these crimes, and further ostracization from non-ICAC line officers. The narrative criminological approach has allowed us to navigate the nuances of the occupational identity of ICAC investigators and how their "Misunderstood Hero" identity was functionally successful in executing the duties of their position while, unfortunately, being a Scarlet Letter in not completely conforming to the masculine ethos of policing. At the same time, the narrative approach has allowed us to understand how ICAC investigators have attempted to restructure and modify the masculine ethos through the stories they told. Perhaps informing departments about these conflicting worldviews could not only lead to better cooperation and cohesiveness between ICAC investigators and line officers, but also it could provide more mental and emotional relief for ICAC investigators who are already coping with the daily intake of violent material to which they are exposed. The potential impacts of not supporting or understanding ICAC work could, again, lead to weaker investigative responses and a possible breakdown in effectively combating CSEM offenses (Burns et al., 2008). Specifically, training and exposure would be beneficial here, as learning more about the importance of ICAC work (and their daily exposure to vile content) could erode more of the we-they dichotomy while improving attitudes and understanding of that work.

Implications of the "Incorrigible Menace"

The second research question examined how stories and storytelling help us to understand ICAC investigators' perceptions of offenders. Of particular interest is how the "incorrigible menace" archetype emerged from depictions of offenders as, essentially, phantom monsters who live among us and could be anyone. Starting with the broader implications, such

nebulous characterization has implications beyond the department. Neocleous' (2016) comes to mind with his discussion of the "universal adversary." This label originated from the United States Department of Homeland Security in describing any potential attacks from both international and domestic terrorists. Neocleous (2016, p. 4), however, examined how this ambiguous, "ghostly" term was a crucial function for the justification and expansion of universal police power and other aspects of the nation's security apparatus. Political actors specifically constructed an "Enemy" that is "'monstrous', 'alien' or 'demonic'" in bolstering national fear for the purposes of reinforcing police power (i.e., constructing a vague problem that necessitates a solution from state powers).

An analogous argument is made here from analyzing the stories told by ICAC investigators regarding both offenders and police administration. First, recall that several investigators described offenders using monstrous imagery—offenders who could appear at any time and be anyone: "we know there's hundreds of 'em, thousands of 'em… the ones that we'll never find, those are the ones that are really scary" (Interview #18). Such constructions are not only similar to Neocleous (2016) but also to the historic, national hysteria surrounding the fear of "stranger danger" offenders (O'Donnell & Milner, 2007; Renfro, 2020). Secondly, a good portion of ICAC investigators felt as though their immediate bosses (i.e., lieutenants in charge of these cyber or ICAC units) were unequivocal in their support of ICAC's mission. One of the avenues through which the administration showed this support was through funding for tools and training for ICAC investigations. Completely denying any one of these requests were uncommon, as recounted by Interviewee #2: "They've pretty well bought me anything I've ever asked for… I don't think anybody's ever told me no. You know, they always provide the resources and make it happen." Investigators stated that police administration viewed ICAC

work as a valuable resource (Interview #29), a necessity in crime fighting (Interview #47), and, particularly relevant here, "politically good" (Interview #34) for the department. Arguably, the existence and expansion of ICAC work is a consequence of the (real or perceived) national fear of CSEM offenders where these depictions are used for securing funding and resources for these investigations.

Additionally, as initially expanded on previously, investigators' stories provided insight into the question: what do we do with these offenders and how do we further protect children? These questions are a part of the larger, historic conversation of the criminal justice system and our administration of punishment. Specifically, these narratives helped to illuminate the changing tides between the punitive and rehabilitative ideologies. To, perhaps, oversimplify the past half century, the United States has shifted dramatically from the "rehabilitative ideal" that President Roosevelt established to a more punitive model (e.g., War on Drugs) that President Reagan catalyzed from the late 1970s onward (Gottschalk, 2013; Hagan, 2010a, p. 114). This "tough on crime" era harshened criminal penalties, grew the carceral state, and, pertinent to this conversation, embedded a tough, "law and order" worldview in policing[5] (Bowling et al., 2019, p. 98).

The "Incorrigible Menace" core story is, therefore, a likely biproduct of the punitive orientation, from exclaiming that offenders should "never be out again" (Interview #18), to encouraging more time behind bars for these offenders (Interview #5 & #10), to even more Punisher-style retributive justice with one investigator remarking, "I would have gladly thrown

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[5] The militarization of the police also coincided with the "hardening" and further aggressiveness in modern policing, even though the original purpose of militarization was to "professionalize" the police to root out political and internal corruption (see, for example, Bittner, 2006; Kraska & Kappeler, 1997).

[the offender] over a river bridge and not batted an eye" (Interview #7). Take this one interaction

with an investigator that is demonstrative of this worldview:

> *Respondent*: I, and I don't think there's any treatment possible to fix this. But, yea…
>
> Maybe the electric chair – sorry.
>
> *Interviewer*: (chuckle) oh, gotcha. Oh, that's, that's pretty much what you think in terms
>
> of the offenders, like all these heinous crimes is really, really no redemption?
>
> *Respondent*: I, no… I'm sorry, but if you are doing something to a child that is, there's
>
> no, there's no coming back from that.

Investigators highlighted several repulsive stories that tended to justify both their emotional

reaction and punitive "lock 'em up and throw away the key" philosophy, such as one offender

that was using the tightening of his pant leg to masturbate to an investigator's earlobe during an

interrogation, prompting the officer to ask: "how much damage do you think this person's gonna

do if he doesn't get the maximum amount of time" (Interview #33). To them, rehabilitation is

simply unfathomable for these monsters where the only solution would be to imprison these

offenders or for them to not exist.

There was, however, a small number of officers that instilled humanity sufficient enough

to warrant a rehabilitative approach. To highlight the feelings of these investigators, one officer

called for a "happy medium" between the two spectrums:

> There's, you can say this with the entire criminal justice system – there's two ways to
>
> look at it. It's the liberal point of view is hugely, we want to do a mental health, they need
>
> to be, it's more of a mental health thing that needs to be done rather than a punishment
>
> thing. The conservative side is throw 'em all in jail, throw away the key, it's a
>
> punishment side. I believe there should be a happy medium. Yes, they need to be

punished for the crimes that were done but they also need to be, at least, try to rehabilitate

or try to teach 'em ways to mitigate this so they can be a functioning person in society

rather than someone who's hiding in the shadows, waitin' to find a kid.

Even though there is still acknowledgment of administering some punitive measures, the

investigator leaves room for a more restorative justice strategy to these crimes. As more of a

relational, reintegrative form of justice, this method is where "the focus is upon problem-solving,

dialogue and restitution (where possible), mutuality, the repair of social injury and the

possibilities of repentance and forgiveness" (Sarre, 2015, pp. 97-98). Essentially, offenders atone

for their wrongdoing through both community and criminal justice actors to ensure that they

understand the harm done to the victim. These rehabilitative mechanisms, then, are the

foundation for a more integrative solution rather than *solely* a disintegrative, punitive one. Some

of these investigators highlight similar sentiments when they acknowledge the humanity of these

offenders rather than just as monsters that should be hunted.

To reiterate, this study adds to the sparse literature in criminology that specifically

examines the perceptions of criminal justice actors who directly interact with these offenders.

Internally, the multivocality of monster stories adds to the continuing discourse of monster

rhetoric among ICAC investigators. Indeed, the parables that ICAC investigators told conforms

to much of the same imagery as depicted in media and held by the public: sex offenders as

monsters (e.g., Douard, 2008; Simon, 1998; Spencer, 2009). For ICAC personnel, though,

CSEM offenders represent something more than a monster. Similar to Werth's (2022) study,

these offenders take somewhat of a spectral form—one that hides (like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde)

among the population while harboring a dangerous tendency for offending; however, in adding

more nuance to previous studies that have referred to offenders or the *other* who drifts in and out

of temporal space haunting communities (see, for example, Linnemann, 2015), the CSEM monster is one that inconspicuously occupies the body of "normal" people. Analogous tropes are found in movies as well, such as *Men in Black* where federal agents are responsible for surveilling and uncovering extraterrestrial lifeforms living secretly on Earth, or John Carpenter's *They Live* where the nefarious social elite blend in with the populace, only to be uncovered with a special set of sunglasses. Here, ICAC personnel represent yet another entity tasked with hunting down and revealing these hidden monsters. Altogether, these stories represent a more mutated, nuanced version of the archetypical monster found in media and public opinion.

    Yet, there is some conflict that should be mentioned where some ICAC personnel realized (perhaps, unintentionally) this type of imagery may not bode well for a more reintegrative approach. Argued here is that by (re)creating the monster trope and choosing stories that revolve mainly around the offender, these monster motifs may be hurting further chances for rehabilitation, treatment, and restorative justice for both the offender and victim.[6] Instead of depicting offenders as monsters or beasts "beyond repair" that should be hunted (e.g., Marshall, 1996; Spencer, 2009; Walker, 2021; Werth, 2022, p. 2), ICAC personnel should re-examine the *incorrigibility* of offenders and view them as an "everyman" (Marshall, 1996, p. 322) as this would be more worthwhile and effective in risk mitigation and harm reduction to victims. Previous literature has found that extreme stigmatization and hatred can lead to internalized shame, depression, loneliness, and even interpersonal problems—all of which have not only limited the alternatives for offenders to cope with this behavior but have also been deemed risk

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[6] Stories told by ICAC investigators also revealed that most individuals committing these offenses were known by the victim (i.e., consistent with previous literature; see, for example, Lalor & McElvaney, 2010; Seto et al., 2018); however, officers chose stories that satiated more of the monstrous rhetoric that has pervaded our flawed understanding of these types of crimes.

factors in the commission of sex offenses (Lasher & Stinson, 2017; Walker, 2021). While these crimes do involve violations of deeply rooted social taboos, caution is warranted: by engaging in disintegrative practices and storytelling, these constructions may contribute to an environment conductive to such offenses via stigma-related stress. As larger political or cultural ramifications may be beyond the scope of this study, the findings here, nonetheless, suggest that ICAC personnel should be encouraged to see each offender as those who could possibly be rehabilitated. Luckily, such attitudes are already present in some of the stories ICAC told as some of the officers indicated with offenders being "normal" people with "dangerous" problems (Interview #37).

The narrative criminological approach used in this study has allowed us to suggest that, perhaps, the pendulum between rehabilitation and punishment has not fully swung to the latter orientation. Furthermore, these marginal voices allow for potentially better solutions (such as rehabilitation) to be implemented rather than strictly punishing these offenders since, according to another investigator, that "we just don't have anything better to do with them so this is, this is what we do" (Interview #36). A rehabilitative approach certainly seems possible as prison for these offenders would only serve to possibly heighten their criminogenic tendencies, especially since recidivism rates are relatively lower than other violent crimes (BJS, 2021).

Implications of the "Ideal Victim"

Lastly, recall that the purpose of the third research question was to examine how stories and storytelling shape investigators' understanding of CSEM victims, including what elements or rhetoric used in stories were *not* stated. For CSEM victims, one issue of policing that was noticeably absent was victim-blaming behavior from investigators. The role and function of policing has notoriously been "to protect and serve," but this mantra has fallen short when

examining the robust history of the police that have engaged in highly dismissive (or, at its worst, guilt-tripping) behavior when investigating certain crimes and the lack of care for those victims. For instance, victims of domestic violence have failed to receive adequate support in comparison to victims of other violent crime (Bowling et al., 2019, pp. 134-135). Not only can this be attributed to police culture viewing domestic violence calls as unworthy of falling under "real" police work (see Reiner, 1978), but also women do not qualify as an "ideal victim" since they could be seen as partially culpable for their abuse or, at least, contributing towards their own victimization (Christie, 1986); therefore, the police have deemed these calls less worthy of their attention. These attitudes have also extended to police investigating sexual assault, revenge porn cases, and even sex workers (Citron & Franks, 2014; Vitale, 2021, pp. 113-114; Zvi, 2021). For instance, Citron and Franks' (2014, p. 367) conversation with victims revealed that police hesitated or refused to investigate revenge porn cases insisting that "they are to blame for the whole mess, since they chose to share their intimate pictures." Again, these victim-blaming attitudes appeared in none of the interviews with investigators—no indication that these children are guilty of placing themselves in harm's way.

Lastly, it would not be too far-fetched to consider how the "ideal victim" framing is being used politically within the context of ICAC investigations, similar to the aforementioned discussion regarding the "universal adversary" (Neocleous, 2016, p. 3). According to Christie (1986), sympathy for children (i.e., the "ideal victim") can be garnered much easier since they are seen as "weak" and "blameless," and this sympathy has the ability to catalyze substantial legal action; such movements have been observed with the highly publicized Jacob Wetterling and Adam Walsh cases that exponentially harshened the federal penalties for those deemed sexually dangerous to children, regardless of either the effectiveness of such laws or the validity

of the "stranger danger" rhetoric upon which these laws were based (Renfro, 2020, pp. 11-13).

This type of unfettered support was observed when investigators told stories about their immediate bosses. A good number of investigators told an overarching story of a tremendously supportive administration that prioritized cybercrime investigations, especially when it came to asking for training, software, and equipment, regardless of whether they fully understand ICAC work (n = 25). Even though a few investigators commented that this priority and growth has been due, in part, to technology's exponential growth and involvement in a majority of crimes, a couple of investigators have emphasized that these investigations are, again, "politically good" (Interview #34), especially when told to their superiors. For instance, another investigator highlighted the political power the stories about children could have:

> I think we have the support of our, of our higher-ups, our, at least like the highest stuff within, within our unit, does a good job of, of letting the even higher-ups know the work that we do. And when we have stories about, let's say, children, I think that really hits home with some of the other command staff, that, that we serve and important function within our, within our department (Interview #19).

While keeping in mind that these crimes are indeed vile and impact victims severely, it is argued here that the "ideal victim" narrative serves as a noticeable part of the justification for not only justifying the existence and charge of these units, but also in securing whatever funding, software, or resources are needed to carry out the duties of their job.

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Appendix A - Cybercrime Investigations Questionnaire

Personal Background

1. How long have you worked in law enforcement? 7 years and 3 in NC
2. How long have you worked in investigations?
3. How long have you worked in cybercrime investigations specifically?
4. How did you get involved in cybercrime investigations?
5. Did you have prior experience working with technology (ex: working in an information technology role in an organization) prior to taking your current position?
6. What sorts of trainings have you received in cybercrime investigations?
   a. Most influential training (in terms of subject)?
   b. Does your agency provide adequate training? Please elaborate. Investigations
7. What is the specific charge of your office or unit?
   a. What sorts of crimes are you responsible for investigating?
   b. What cybercrimes/cases are most common within your department? Least common? Cases you never investigate?
   c. What components of the investigation are you involved in?
   d. How would you describe a "typical" case?
8. Are you able to choose which cases you pursue? (previously Q12)
   a. If so, what characteristics do you look for in a case that will make you likely to pursue it?
   b. If so, what characteristics do you look for in a case that will steer you away from pursuing it?
   c. Do your administrators or the organization in general have any impact on your decisions in this regard? If so, please elaborate.
   d. Can you estimate what percentage of your job is dedicated to certain types of cases? (e.g. what percentage of your job is dedicated to cases concerning child exploitation? Fraud? Etc.)
   e. When conducting investigations do you use an online persona?

        i. How did you pick your persona?

9. How do you decide how much time to dedicate to a case? (previously Q13)

    a. How do you prioritize cases?

10.   What is your preferred type of case?

    a. Type of offender?

11.   What tasks occupy the greatest amount of your time?

12.   What sorts of tools do you use in your job (hardware and software specifically)?

    a. Do you enjoy working with these tools?

    b. Do you feel as though your department has the necessary tools/resources to conduct cyberinvestigations? If not, please elaborate.

    c. What sorts of challenges

13.   What do you find to be the most rewarding part of your job? If none, please elaborate.

14.   Please walk me through a case you found to be the most rewarding.

    a. Please tell me about the crime.

    b. Please tell me about the offender.

    c. Please tell me about the victim.

    d. What sorts of technologies were involved?

    e. Why was it so rewarding?

15.   What do you find to be the most challenging part of your job? If none, please elaborate.

16.   Please walk me through a case you found to be the most challenging.

    a. Please tell me about the crime.

    b. Please tell me about the offender.

    c. Please tell me about the victim.

    d. What sorts of technologies were involved?

e. Why was it so challenging?

17. How do you manage or cope with these challenges?

18. How do officers talk to each other about these challenges?

19. Please walk me through a case you found to be the most disappointing.

   a. Please tell me about the crime.

   b. Please tell me about the offender.

   c. Please tell me about the victim.

   d. What sorts of technologies were involved?

   e. Why was it so disappointing?

Organizational

20. What would you change about your job if you could? If nothing, please elaborate.

   a. Do your administrators or the organization in general have any impact on your decisions in this regard? If so, please elaborate.

21. Your job is specialized in policing. Has doing this sort of work changed how you view police work? Or what it means to be a police officer? How does your job compare to traditional patrol work? Traditional investigations? Do you talk about your job differently?

22. What stories do cyberinvestigators tell about their job? Do you have a story that you think captures the work you do?

23. How do you think cybercrimes and cyber-investigations are viewed by other officers?

   b. By administrators?

24. Does your agency/organization prioritize cybercrime investigations? If so, how would you characterize the role of cyberinvestigations in the agency? What areas of law enforcement receive greater priority, if any?

25. Are there dimensions of your job that you feel other officers or administrators don't understand? If so, would you please elaborate?

Collaborations

26. What challenges do you face in taking a case to court or presenting a case at trial?

    a. Prosecutors (local, state, federal)

    b. Judges (local, state, federal)

    c. Juries

27. Do you cooperate with other government agencies (including law enforcement) in your investigations? If so, what does this cooperation generally involve?

28. Do you cooperate with non-profit organizations in your investigations? If so, what does this cooperation generally involve?

29. Do you or your colleagues cooperate with private organizations or contractors in your investigations? If so, what does this cooperation generally involve?

    a. What are the primary companies you work with for investigations? Elaborate.

    b. What are the biggest challenges you face when seeking evidence from companies? Elaborate.

30. Do you participate in cybercrime tasks forces? If so, could you describe what this participation generally looks like?

31. Do you participate in cybercrime fusion centers? If so, could you describe what this participation generally looks like?

32. How long do you plan on staying in cybercrime investigations?

    a. Do you have plans for your "next steps"? If so, what are they?

    b. Do you plan on moving to the private sector in the future? Elaborate.

33. Do you engage with cybercrime-related materials outside of work? (e.g. memes on Facebook, Reddit/Twitter conversations, group chats, etc.).

    a. If so, what kinds of material?

Demographic Characteristics

34.   Age: _____

35.   Race: _____

36.   Gender/Sex: _____

37.   Rank: _____

38.   Education level: _____

Exit Questions

39.   Is there anything that we did not talk about that you feel is relevant for our study that we should know about?

40.   Do you have any questions for me?

Based on your experience with our study, are there other persons or agencies you feel we should reach out to?