Perceptions of Law Enforcement Officers: Pornography as a Risk Factor for Peer-on-Peer Child Sexual Abuse

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ABSTRACT

Data on peer-on-peer child sexual demonstrates up to one-third of child sexual assaults perpetrated by other children and what the limited data suggest is that these rates are increasing. These alarming rates of sexual abuse take place alongside increased hyper-access to pornography, with the average first age of exposure at 11. Frontline workers who handle child sexual assault victims and perpetrators indicate that pornography creates a risk of sexual assault by and among children. Given that law enforcement officers will eventually see these same cases, what are their perceptions of pornography as a risk factor for peer-on-peer child sexual abuse? By interviewing law enforcement officers in the United States working directly on cases involving child sexual abuse, I examine law enforcement officer's perceptions of the connections between pornography and child sexual abuse. A sample of 11 law enforcement officers identify pornography to have a role in peer-on-peer child sexual abuse. Additionally, the sample distinguishes several differences between how pornography impacts peer-on-peer child sexual abuse versus adult-on-child sexual abuse. This study is essential given the confusion in the law and eventual prosecutions; law enforcement is struggling with legislation that does not fit the reality of the cases and results in prosecutorial issues.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This project explores the perceptions of law enforcement officers on pornography as a risk factor for peer-on-peer child sexual abuse. The data for this study originates from 11 semi-structured interviews with law enforcement officers with experience investigating child sexual abuse. This study identified that law enforcement officers do perceive pornography to be a risk factor for peer-on-peer child sexual abuse. The findings of this study indicate the importance for future research and attention to how law enforcement and the U.S. government approach pornography as a risk factor.

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Introduction

From 2010 to 2020, children aged 10 to 19 accounted for the perpetration of 24%, or 121,572, of sexual assaults in the United States (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021). Up to 90% of reported rapes in the United States involve a female victim (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021). Both perpetrators and victims are more likely to experience revictimization throughout their lifetimes and experience higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and suicide (D'Inverno et al., 2021; Papalia et al., 2021). These experiences occur alongside a digital landscape that provides free access to pornography to anyone, at any age, at virtually any time (Wright et al., 2018). As demonstrated through content analysis, the pornography most frequently accessed by youth depicts lack of verbal consent, verbal degradation, and depictions of risky, violent, sexual behaviors such as a slapping, strangling, and biting (Bridges et al., 2010; Willis et al., 2020). The average first age of exposure to pornography is 11, with an overwhelming majority of adolescents exposed to pornography during their teenage years (Allen et al., 2018; Mattebo et al., 2016). As most exposures to pornography occur on a digital device easily accessible within the home, pornography is a primary source of sexual education (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). Empirical studies demonstrate pornography's impact on sexual behaviors in various ways, including sexual violence (Burton et al., 2010). However, the current law on child sexual abuse (CSA) does not account for this factor, increasing the difficulty of investigating and prosecuting perpetrators. Research is beginning to examine the role of pornography as a risk factor for peer-on-peer CSA. A recent study found that frontline workers increasingly see pornography as a factor in their CSA cases (Johnson et al., under review). The growing concern of peer-on-peer CSA, the hyper-access that children have to pornography, and the inconsistencies in the adjudication of young sexual perpetrators (Block,

2019; Finkelhor et al., 2009; Schmitz & Siry, 2011), indicate a disconnect between the practices of the justice system and what is seen by frontline professionals.

Terminology Rationale and Framing the Paper

My goal with this study is to begin filling the research gap surrounding pornography as a risk factor for CSA. I do so by exploring the perceptions of law enforcement officers (LEOs) on the role of pornography as a risk factor in peer-on-peer CSA. In this paper, I use the term 'risk' as it is used in public health settings. Per the Center for Disease Control's National Association of Local Boards of Health (CDC-NALBOH), 'risk' is "the likelihood that in a given situation, the conditions or exposure will be adequate to cause the adverse consequence or effect" (CDC-NALBOH, 2011). Per the National Institutes of Health's Department of Health and Human Services (NIH-DHHS), risk doesn't have a causal relationship with negative consequences, but it does suggest a negative result is possible (NIH-DHHS, 2016). Based on these definitions, I describe the relationship between pornography and CSA as risk-driven rather than causal.

In this paper, I use the term "pornography" rather than its shorthand "porn" or the more general term "sexually explicit material." In this paper, pornography describes content that incites sexual arousal and is found on pornography aggregate sites such as PornHub, while sexually explicit material may be generalized to other forms of media such as erotic novels (Thornburgh & Lin, 2002). When describing those who commit sexual violence against others, I use the term "offender" when referring to legal information, but in my review of the literature and data analysis, I rely on the word "perpetrators," as it reflects what is used in sociological research (Cleary & Najdowski, 2020; Finkelhor et al., 2009). When describing the justice process for perpetrators of CSA, I frequently use "prosecution/adjudication." I use prosecution/adjudication to account for adult and juvenile perpetrators, as the processes differ

based on age group (Block, 2019). Finally, I use the phrase "child pornography" (CP) to refer to sexually explicit images or videos of individuals under 18. CP is the terminology used in United States statutes (Department of Justice, 2020). CP is also referred to as "child sexual exploitation material" (CSEM) or "child sexual abuse material" (CSAM) (Department of Justice, 2020). However, for consistency between the literature and terminology used by the sampled LEOs, I will refer to this material as CP.

In the following literature review, I overview the available data and research regarding peer-on-peer CSA, pornography use, and the adjudication process for juvenile sexual perpetrators. Then I will provide a background of the literature that has framed this study, beginning with empirical data about pornography in children's everyday lives. In this section, I outline sexual scripts theory, the driving theoretical framework of pornography risk-based literature. I then discuss the available literature on pornography as a tool to groom and pornography's relationship to desensitization and addictive behavior. Next, I will provide an overview of the pornography industry, including recent examples of exploitative material on popular aggregate sites. I will then discuss the type of content being frequently accessed by children and connect it to empirical data of pornographic content being mirrored in the sexual behaviors of adults and juveniles. The final section of my literature review discusses victims of CSA, which emphasizes the need to address gaps in the literature, given the adverse short- and long-term effects that victims of CSA experience.

Literature Review

Pornography is demonstrated to create risk for peer-on-peer CSA in various ways. The current technological landscape enables youth to access extreme forms of pornography for free at any time (Wright et al., 2018). Research indicates that children and adults learn sexual scripts by

viewing pornography and engaging in those scripts during sexual encounters (Willis et al., 2020). The content children are exposed to normalizes potentially harmful sexual behaviors (Sun et al., 2016). Sexually explicit media is available on virtually all social media platforms. Social media platforms act as a gateway to mainstream pornography among adolescents. More attention has been brought to the lack of accountability within the pornography industry, including the absence of age verification and the presence of both child and adult sexually exploitative material on pornography sites (Reynolds, 2021). The free pornography that most youths are likely to encounter on these sites sexualizes inappropriate relationships, does not depict explicit consent, lacks frequent condom use, and displays many violent sexual behaviors (Carotte et al., 2020; Prichard et al., 2021; Vogels & Sullivan; 2010; Willis et al., 2020). Given the content that youth are exposed to and the development of sexual scripts, pornography may create a risk for peer-on-peer CSA. It is crucial to understand how children are at risk for perpetration and victimization of peer-on-peer CSA, given the long-term effects that sexual assault has on health and happiness.

Peer-on-Peer Child Sexual Abuse: Prevalence Rates and Patterns

It is important to emphasize that the data surrounding sexual violence, and more specifically, peer-on-peer CSA is hard to navigate. This is due to several factors, including the redefinition of the term 'rape' in 2013. The FBI redefined the term, removing "the phrase "forcible" from the offense name and description" (Puzzanchera, 2021; p. 3). The updated definition also adopted a broader definition that made the offense gender neutral. Although this makes the definition of rape apply to a wider population, it poses problems for accurate reporting, due to the varied practices of LE agencies across the United States. Additionally, this signals an issue with the way that LE and its governing bodies address CSA.

Based on the available data, in 2020 there were 65,728 rape incidences reported in the United States, compared to 20,013 in 2000, demonstrating a significant increase in reported incidence (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021). In the past decade, the victim age has been significantly higher among 10-19-year-olds, with this age group accounting for 41% of reported incidents of rape in 2019 (D'Inverno et al., 2021; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021). The dominant age of perpetrators has consistently shifted back and forth between 10-19- and 20-29-year old's, with both age groups accounting for 46% of offenses in 2019 combined (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021). Juvenile arrest data demonstrate that children's perpetration of CSA is gendered similarly to adult sexual violence, with males accounting for 97.4% of rapes in the United States between 2000 and 2016 (D'Inverno et al., 2021; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2017; Helton et al., 2020). In 2019, 65% of the cases investigated by child advocacy centers (CACs) in the United States involved sexual abuse allegations (National Children's Alliance, 2022). CACs have identified peer-on-peer child abuse as a concern, with 20-25% of cases involving a child hurting another child (National Children's Alliance, 2022).

Although rates of violence perpetrated by juveniles suggest increased attention to peer-on-peer CSA, neither law enforcement (LE) nor CAC data specify the prevalence of this type of sexual abuse between younger juveniles. Different agencies have varying reporting practices, and as shown by the challenges faced with the redefinition of 'rape,' national estimates are challenging to calculate (Puzzanchera, 2021; p. 3). In three separate studies conducted by Finkelhor and colleagues, they concluded that rates of CSA victimization had seen significant declines of up to 40% as of 2011 (Finkelhor 2006; 2012; 2014). These studies do not reflect Emergency Department (ED) and LE data, which noted significant rises in CSA victimization. Specifically, a 2020 study of adolescent ED admissions revealed that CSA-related cases

increased from 44.37% in 2010 to 57.36% in 2016 (Helton et al., 2020). Uniform Crime Report data shows 10-to 19-year old's account for greater than 40% of sexual victimizations from 2007 to 2016, and another 2009 study identified adolescents to account for just under half of all sexual offenses against children (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021; Finkelhor et al., 2009).

The Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Program (OJJPD) provided detail on the prevalence of peer-on-peer CSA, stating that youth accounted for over 35% of CSA perpetrators known to LE (Finkelhor et al., 2009). According to the OJJPD report, children aged 12 to 14 accounted for 38% of juvenile sex perpetrators. Juveniles were 10.4% more likely to offend in groups and 8.4% more likely to offend against acquaintances than adult sexual perpetrators (Finkelhor et al., 2009). Despite these alarming findings, the 2009 publication was the last report released by OJJPD in their Crimes Against Children series, and rape arrest data was unavailable in the 2019 juvenile arrest report from OJJPD (Puzzanchera, 2021). The removal of rape arrest data was due to the redefinition of rape by the FBI; however, this data is still available for adult sexual perpetrators through Uniform Crime Reports, even with the redefinition of rape (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021). The OJJPD decision not to publish more recent studies seems questionable give that the final 2009 publication expressed concern regarding the growing prevalence of juvenile CSA (Finkelhor et al., 2009). The more recent study with frontline professionals emphasizes the prevalence of peer-on-peer CSA, despite the missing data from governing bodies in the United States (Johnson et al., under review). The lack of juvenile rape arrest data in the OJJPD report, inconsistent reporting practices amongst LE agencies, and observations made by frontline workers signal a potential gap between the law and LE reactions to peer-on-peer CSA and what other frontline professionals are seeing in their casework.

Pornography Use: Prevalence Rates and Patterns

Between 1996 and 2005, there was a 60% increase in pornography production, with the pornography industry surpassing Hollywood in the volume of content released (Bridges et al., 2010; p. 1065; Hardy, 2008). In 2019, pornography consisted of 15% and 20% of web and mobile searches, despite only accounting for 4% of websites on the internet (Buchholz, 2019). Studies show up to 70% of adult men and 40% of adult women have consumed pornography in the past year (Grubbs 2010; p. 88). Men have been found to self-report "pornography addiction," experiencing high-use rates, compulsivity, and increased access efforts despite the debate on pornography addiction as a clinical diagnosis (Grubbs, 2010; p. 90; Basson et al., 2015).

Technology is ever-present in the lives of adolescents, with most individuals having at least one device in their homes. The Pew Research Center reported in 2014 that three-quarters of American teenagers between the ages of 13 to 17 had access to a smartphone, with 92% of teens reporting daily internet use (Holoyda et al., 2018). This ease of access creates a perfect scenario for youth to experience unwanted exposure to pornography (Wolak, 2007). Empirical data demonstrates that 42% of 10-to-17-year-olds report unwanted exposure to pornography (Wolak, 2007). In a 2020 study, 58% of children under 13 were exposed to pornography, and 72% of those older than 13 were exposed (DeLago et al., 2020). Frequently, children exposed to pornography do so by misspelling web addresses, clicking links on websites, interacting with pop-up ads, and reading spam emails (Johnson et al., under review; Wolak, 2007). In many instances, youth exposed to pornography are too young to have received formal sexual education or online safety classes, which is associated with decreasing exposure to digital pornography (Wolak, 2007). In conjunction with high rates of unwanted exposure, verbal, and physical aggression such as threatening or coercive language, gagging, and strangulation dominate

popular pornography and is often what youth encounter (Herbenick et al., 2021; Vogels & Sullivan, 2019; DeKeseredy & Corsianos, 2015).

Exposure to violent pornography is linked with a higher prevalence of sexual aggression among adults and adolescents (DeLago et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2016). Research shows that high-frequency users of pornography are more likely to demonstrate high-risk personality traits, high-risk sexual behaviors, and a greater likelihood to perpetrate violence (Grubbs et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2019; Willis et al., 2020). A 2008 study with a sample of 341 adult male perpetrators of CSA found that frequent pornography use increased the risk for sexual aggression and recidivism (Kingston et al., 2008). Ryan & Otonichar (2016) conducted a critical risk assessment of juvenile sexual perpetrators, and the review demonstrated frequent pornography use to be associated with increased viewing of CP by juveniles (Ryan & Otonichar, 2016; Svedin et al., 2011). A 2018 study with a sample of 160 sexually reactive children and adolescents revealed that participants who used pornography were more likely to engage in coerced vaginal penetration and forced sexual acts compared to non-pornography users (Alexy et al., 2018). Longitudinal data revealed an almost six-fold increase in the odds of adolescents self-reporting sexually aggressive behavior toward others when exposed to violent pornography (Ybarra et al., 2011). Emerging data from frontline workers suggest that pornography is frequently present in CSA cases (Johnson et al., under review). To improve the approaches of frontline workers, LEOs, and the justice system concerning peer-on-peer CSA, understanding the role of pornography in the lives of youth in the cases that LE investigates is crucial.

The Adjudication of Juvenile Sexual Perpetrators

Although laws regarding CSA and child pornography (CP) have been revised over the years, they are still rooted in the late nineties and early 2000s. They do not fully consider how

the developing technological landscape may impact these instances of violence. The 1994 Jacob Wettterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act required "all persons convicted of sexual offenses register their personal information with local law enforcement agencies" (Cleary & Najdowksi, 2020; p. 487). In 1996, Megan's Law added community notification requirements (Cleary & Najdowski, 2020; p. 487). The Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act of 2006, a part of the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006, was the first legislation to require an online offender database and juvenile sex offender registration (Cleary & Najdowski, 2020; p. 487). Sex offender registries are grounded in deterrence theory, yet empirical data questions whether youth have the requisite policy awareness to be deterred from sexual offending (Cleary & Najdowski, 2020). It is unknown whether juvenile sex offender registration and notification discourage sexual reoffending, despite the broad implementation of sex offender registries (Cleary & Najdowski, 2020).

Adolescents experience rapid individual growth and often rely on technology to explore intimate relationships and sexuality (Holoyda et al., 2018). Children may be unknowing of the legal risk of engaging in "consensual" sexual behaviors with other minors. Sexting laws for minors call into question who and what they are meant to protect. "Consensual" sexual encounters or digital exchanges of self-produced pornography and sexually explicit messages are not illegal for adults and act as a status offense for youth trying to navigate their sexual and emotional exploratory years (Cleary & Najdowski, 2020; Holoyda et al., 2018). Legal definitions of consent create an oxymoron when discussing sexual behaviors among children because they have been deemed illegal because a juvenile is not legally able to provide consent. Laws surrounding CP criminalize behavior that would otherwise be legal if it occurred between two consenting adults.

The prosecution/adjudication of CSA cases relies on child victim testimony due to the frequent lack of physical evidence (Block, 2019). The involvement of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs), CACs, and forensic interviewers working collaboratively with LE has increased the rate of the cases that face prosecutions (Block, 2019). A Department of Justice-funded study found that despite 1 in 12 children experiencing CSA victimization, only 19.6% of their sample were prosecuted, including cases that ultimately did not result in a conviction (Block, 2019). The study identified that if the perpetrator was 16 or younger, the case was 70% less likely to face prosecution/adjudication (Block, 2019). No interaction with Child Protective Services, lack of forensic interviews, and lack of caregiver support significantly decreased the chance of prosecution/adjudication (Block, 2019). The prosecution/adjudication of juvenile perpetrators is inconsistent despite the indicated prevalence of juvenile sexual perpetration (National Children's Alliance, 2022; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021; Block, 2019; Finkelhor et al., 2009). The data indicates a gap in how the law and LE deal with sexual encounters with and between children compared to what is being seen by frontline professionals and LEOs in CSA cases.

A Perfect Storm for Creating Risk

The lack of data, clear paths for adjudication, and hyper access to violent adult pornography have created a perfect storm for increased risk of perpetration of CSA. CACs and other frontline professionals have shifted their attention to peer-on-peer child abuse, noting increased violence between children (National Children's Alliance, 2022). Sexual perpetration and victimization among 10-to-19-year-olds account for a significant portion of sexual assaults in the United States (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021). Recent federal crime reports do not break down ages any further, making it difficult to determine which age groups LE is most

frequently encountering in cases of CSA. However, frontline professionals suggest that sexual violence among younger members of this cohort is a concern (Johnson et al., under review). The development of the internet and smartphones has allowed our society to become interconnected despite the geographical distance; it also has allowed youth to have nearly unrestricted access to violent, pornographic material virtually anytime, anywhere, at any age (Wright et al., 2018). Emerging data from frontline workers denote pornography as a frequent component of peer-on-peer CSA accounts (Johnson et al., under review). LEOs are likely to work on the same cases as frontline workers, making LE's understanding of pornography as a risk factor for peer-on-peer CSA imperative to protecting children from future victimization. The perceptions of LEOs are vital to understanding the low prosecution, conviction, and adjudication rates of juvenile perpetrators despite the reporting of frontline workers and indications of CSA data, and although pornography use rates do not differ much by race, the legal response to sexual violence reflects the opposite, with black men being disproportionately represented on sex offender registries (Johnson et al., under review; National Children's Alliance, 2022; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021; Cleary & Najdowski, 2020; Block, 2019; Perry & Shleifer, 2019; Hoppe, 2016; Finkelhor et al., 2006). The current technological environment provides hyper-access to violent pornography, which occurs alongside a lack of precise data and struggles with adjudicating juvenile perpetrators of CSA. Given the concern regarding sexual violence among younger age groups, these factors create a perfect storm for creating risk for peer-on-peer CSA. In this study, I investigate if LEOs see a similar pattern concerning peer-on-peer CSA compared to other frontline workers.

Pornography in the Everyday Lives of Children
Social media and sexual scripts

Adolescents in the United States spend an average of 9 to 11 hours on social media daily (Lamb & Koven, 2019). High social media use among children occurs alongside increased rates of self-objectification and self-sexualization (Lamb & Koven, 2019). In a follow-up study to the 2007 APA Task Force Report on the Sexualization of Girls, young girls demonstrated higher self-objectification and self-sexualization rates than boys (Lamb & Koven, 2019). Self-objectification and self-sexualization can result in wearing more sexualized clothing at a younger age and a higher prevalence of body surveillance and shame (Lamb & Koven, 2019). Although young girls experience this at higher rates, both boys and girls learn body standards through the sexualized media and pornography that they consume (Shafer et al., 2012). In our technology-rich environment, youth rely on media for messages about sex, gender roles, and relationships and often turn to social media and the internet for sexual education (Alexy et al., 2009; Lamb & Koven, 2019). Although social media sites such as Instagram market themselves to be family-friendly and have established "no nudity rules," nothing is being done to block nudity or prevent juveniles on their sites from viewing it. Pornography sites use push marketing on social media sites such as Snapchat and Instagram, which children frequent (Berr, 2018). Adolescents can view millions of images and videos depicting pornographic content using a simple hashtag search (Berr, 2018). Since many children rely on social media for sexual education, they develop and rely on the sexual scripts developed through watching pornography (Sun et al., 2016).

In the study of pornography, 'sexual scripts theory' is the dominant theoretical framework. Sexual scripts theory holds that individuals are conditioned to understand sexual behavior and desire by viewing sexualized media such as pornography. This developed understanding shapes the individual's sexual behaviors, choices, interactions, and opinions on

sexuality (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; 1986; Wright, 2020). In other words, these scripts tell people what should or should not be happening in a sexual situation and how people should or should not respond in a sexual situation (Bridges et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2011). A 2016 study of adults supported the sexual scripts theory, demonstrating higher pornography use associated with higher engagement in or interest in trying sexual behavior consistent with pornography scripts (Bridges et al., 2016). There is limited literature regarding sexual scripts theory and pornography usage among adolescents. Still, the available literature demonstrates that adults with high consumption of pornography are at risk for engaging in problematic sexual behaviors such as lack of condom use, non-fatal strangulation, slapping, and biting (Johnson et al., 2019; Grubbs et al., 2010; Willis et al., 2020). Given the risk among adults, it is highly likely that adolescents are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of pornography exposure.

Grooming of youth

The grooming process is a series of events to prepare a child, the adults in their lives, and the environment for future abuse. Craven and colleagues defined grooming as:

> "a process by which a person prepares a child, significant adults, and the environment for the abuse of this child. Specific goals include gaining access to the child, gaining the child's compliance, and maintaining the child's secrecy to avoid disclosure. This process serves to strengthen the offender's abusive pattern, as it may be used to justify or deny their actions" (Craven et al., 2007).

In the past, pornography has been used to desensitize children to sexual behavior. Perpetrators would show a potential victim, both adult pornography and CP, so they could slowly normalize the behavior (International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, 2017). There is abundant literature describing how adult perpetrators have used pornography to desensitize their juvenile victims. However, there is limited information on pornography being used as a desensitization tool in peer-on-peer CSA (Boyle, 2010; Martellozzo, 2012; Ost, 2009).

Scholars also describe pornography as a tool to desensitize males and children to potentially violent and problematic sexual behaviors. In a content analysis of popular pornography, particularly in content marketed to heterosexual male viewers, acts of sexual aggression such as strangulation, gagging, slapping, biting, pinching, bondage, and spanking are common (Bridges et al., 2019; Vogels & O'Sullivan, 2019; Wright et al., 2021). With abundant violent pornography available for free online, accessing this material is straightforward. The algorithms and bots aggregate content on pornography sites and seek to maximize profitability and suggest content that is popular among their adult male heterosexual views (Johnson, 2010; Johnson et al., 2019; Whisnant, 2010). Children are exposed to pornography at an average age of 11 and spend their adolescent years viewing it without other forms of comprehensive sexual education or personal sexual experiences (Allen et al., 2018). Frontline workers have identified that pornography may be a normalization tool or justification for peer-on-peer CSA (Johnson et al., under review).

Lack of Accountability within the Pornography Industry

A technological company, MindGeek, leads the commercial digital pornography industry. MindGeek markets itself as a leading technology firm when they are one of the top streamers of digital pornography (Raustiala & Sprigman, 2019). MindGeek owns various pornography aggregator sites, such as PornHub, YouPorn, and Red Tube. Four websites that MindGeek owns are among the top ten pornography streaming sites (Auerbach, 2014). As of 2014, MindGeek's sites consumed more bandwidth than Twitter, Amazon, or Facebook, with over 100 million visitors to their site PornHub alone (Auerbach, 2014; Hassan, 2018). The structure of the commercial digital pornography network promotes an addictive experience, bombarding users with a series of clicks, links, and ads (Johnson, 2011). With MindGeek's foundation of software

design, they sought to employ machine learning and artificial intelligence to automate their content tagging of actors and categories (Vincent, 2017). Artificial intelligence also takes away a layer of vetting to ensure that the content uploaded to their sites is legal and consensual (Vincent, 2017).

A recent court case in Canada revealed that nonconsensual and child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is present on MindGeek's sites (Caruso-Moro, 2021). Forty victims of a sex trafficking operation called GirlsDoPorn filed a class-action lawsuit against MindGeek, claiming that the tech mogul promoted GirlsDoPorn as a content partner and profited from their content, knowing that it contained exploitative material (Cole, 2021). Another example of this was the testimony of a victim in a United States Congressional hearing, claiming that her boyfriend at the time uploaded a video of her (age 13) titled "13-year-old brunette shows off for the camera" (Caruso-Moro, 2021). Despite her claims of contacting PornHub multiple times to remove the content, they stated it is "impossible to know if she's contacted us" (Caruso-Moro, 2021). In another instance, over 68 CSAM videos were posted to PornHub, later identified as a missing child in Florida (Reynolds, 2021).

MindGeek has since implemented age verification procedures, although many critique that the methods are insufficient to protect individuals from being exploited on their sites. The age verification process involves the individual submitting an image of themselves while holding a paper with the individual's username and "Pornhub.com" (Reynolds, 2021). MindGeek removed all unverified content from PornHub to remove potentially exploitative material (Caruso-Moro, 2021). MindGeek claims to have a database to filter and tag words such as "teen" and "middle school" (Cole, 2021). MindGeek states that the terms on this list require further review because they may hold positive or negative connotations depending on how they are used

(Cole, 2021). MindGeek implemented these measures to prevent exploitative material and CSAM from being uploaded to their sites after the New York Times published articles and Mastercard and Visa suspended payments (Cole, 2021; United States House of Representatives, 2021). Despite the negative media attention that MindGeek has amassed over the past few years, legislators are hesitant to restrict the technology giant for fear of violating first amendment free speech rights. The lack of accountability within the pornography industry in protecting both adults and adolescents results from an industry that has gone unchecked for almost two decades.

Pornography as a Risk Factor
The eroticization of youth

Pornography sexualizes children in categories such as barely legal. Barely legal pornography is a category that seeks to create a fantasy that an adult actress is a minor by using child-like cues (Prichard et al., 2021). The most frequent form of cues identified in a content analysis of barely legal pornography was verbal from both the predominantly male "adult" actor and the "barely legal" actress (Jensen, 2010). Verbal cues include phrases like "good girl," giggling, and talking in a child-like voice (Jensen, 2010). The titles of barely legal videos often use terms such as "teen," "cute," schoolgirl," "tiny," and "young" (Jensen, 2010). Frequently, this category of pornography revolves around relationships such as "teacher" and "student," or "stepfather" and "stepdaughter" (Prichard et al., 2021). In these films, inappropriate relationships are normalized in a sexual context. Previous studies suggest that barely legal categories of pornography are a pathway to CP (Prichard et al., 2021).

Consent depictions

In pornography, it is not common for verbal, explicit consent to be depicted (Willis et al., 2020). Various content analyses of pornography have been conducted over the years to understand consent cues in the content (Cusack et al., 2013; Carotte et al., 2020; Willis et al.,

2020). In a 2020 content analysis regarding the representation of consent in pornography, 70.9% of consent cues were nonverbal. Women are 19.8% more likely to use this form of implied consent than men (Willis et al., 2020). Actors used nonverbal cues in over two-thirds of the scenes analyzed because explicit verbal consent didn't come naturally in the scene and would interrupt the "fantasy" that the actors attempted to create (Willis et al., 2020). Empirical studies demonstrate that compulsive pornography use was negatively associated with sexual refusal assertiveness among college-aged women and other groups perceived to have little importance (Téran & Dajches, 2020). Given the frequency of nonverbal consent cues in pornography, pornography can impact an individual's sexual scripts; they are more likely to go along with sex (Téran & Dajches, 2020; Willis et al., 2020). There is a gap in the research on this topic concerning juveniles. However, given the indication of increased sexual refusal among college-aged women who had recently grown out of adolescence, understanding the lack of consent depictions in pornography are essential to note.

Condom use

Actors in pornography rarely use condoms. In a 2020 content analysis, only 2-3% of scenes portraying heterosexual penetration involved using condoms (Carotte et al., 2020). Condom use protects both partners from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and decreases the chance of unwanted pregnancy in the case of heterosexual partners (World Health Organization, 2022). Condom use amongst college students demonstrated that individuals who watched pornography were more likely to engage in condomless sex during hookups (Braithwaite et al., 2015). Compulsive pornography consumers accounted for 32% of those who engaged in condomless sex while intoxicated during hookups (Braithwaite et al., 2015). Empirical data demonstrates that more frequent pornography use by heterosexual men is associated with less

frequent condom use (Wright et al., 2019). In addition to the low rates of condom use in pornography, only one-fourth of the videos reviewed depicted explicit verbal consent to insemination without a condom (Cusack et al., 2013). Ejaculation without permission in pornography demonstrates to viewers that consent to insemination is not required, despite the potential health risks and violation of an individual's sexual partner.

Verbal Degradation

Verbally degrading pornography dominates the mass market, and with the advancement of the internet and smartphones, this material is readily available for viewing (DeKeseredy & Corsianos, 2015). Pornography draws heavily on the verbal sexual degradation of women primarily through name-calling (Bridges et al., 2010). The use of terms such as *cunt, bitch, whore, slut* are among the most used forms of verbal sexual degradation in pornography (Bridges et al., 2010; Dines, 2010; Shor, 2018). However, in recent years, new terms have been adopted to degrade and objectify women, such as *cumdumpster, fuckhole, and money shot* (Ging, 2017; Ging et al., 2019). The use of degrading language in pornography perpetuates the practice of misogyny and dehumanizes female actors as objects for male sexual pleasure (Tranchese & Sugiura, 2021). A 2007 study revealed that within their sample, men experienced higher arousal to pornography depicting the verbal degradation of women than female participants (Glascock, 2007). In a study of United States college students, pornography use indicated that an individual was more likely to use degrading sexual language compared to non-pornography users (Murnen et al., 2021). The research findings suggest a relationship between pornography depicting verbal degradation and the arousal to and use of degrading sexual language (Glascock, 2007; Murnen et al., 2021). Individuals who view verbally degrading pornography develop sexual norms that perpetuate verbal sexual aggression against women. Given the available literature surrounding

the use of degrading sexual language, it appears that the repeated use and exposure to verbally degrading pornography impact the development of sexual scripts, contributing to the sexual behaviors of those who view it.

Risky sexual behaviors

Rough sexual behaviors such as hair-pulling, spanking, biting, and strangulation are common in popular pornography (Herbenick et al., 2021; Vogels & Sullivan, 2019; DeKeseredy & Corsianos, 2015). There are significant acute and long-term risks of sexual choking or non-fatal strangulation (NFS). Still, individuals do not understand how to safely engage in this behavior (Patch et al., 2021). Based on ED data, the NFS rate has steadily increased over the past decade (Cannon et al., 2020). Although other ED data reflect that NFS occurrences are not significant, the concern is that the data does not reflect the true prevalence, like intimate partner violence and sexual assault (Patch et al., 2021). NFS appears to be more common among female survivors of sexual assault (Cannon et al., 2020). Among men, compulsive exposure to rough sex pornography positively correlates with risky sexual behaviors (Téran & Dajches, 2020; Vogels & Sullivan, 2019). Twenty-three respondents in a 2019 study disclosed scary sexual situations involving strangulation (Herbenick et al., 2019). A 2021 study found that 14.4% of female college undergraduate students didn't want to be strangled but agreed anyways (Herbenick et al., 2021). Decreased sexual refusal among women has also been reported in conjunction with pornography exposure, while men demonstrate more coercive sexual attitudes and higher rates of sexual aggression (Marshall et al., 2021; Vega & Malamuth, 2007). A woman reporting NFS was 4.7% more common during penetrative intercourse than other sexual acts, which is also most often depicted in pornography (Herbenick et al., 2021).

Researchers conducted a systematic review in 2013 to study self-asphyxial behaviors among young people (Busse et al., 2015). Youth referred to this as the "choking game." Of the content reviewed, 90% of participants were male (Busse et al., 2015). The children engaging in this behavior sought to achieve a brief euphoric state caused by cerebral hypoxia, attributed to several short and long-term health concerns, including death (Toblin et al., 2008). The choking game did not occur under sexual circumstances. Still, frontline workers have noted concern regarding strangulation in peer-on-peer CSA cases (Johnson et al., under review). More specifically, frontline workers report that victims who had been non-fatally strangled did not view this behavior as out of the norm (Johnson et al., under review).

Risk of sexual violence

Adolescents account for about half of all sexual offenses against children (Ryan & Otonichar, 2016). Empirical studies demonstrate that by the age of 10, a significant number of children have been exposed to pornography (Burton et al., 2010). Boys view pornography more frequently than girls, and crime data reflects that males are the predominant perpetrators and females the predominant victims of sexual violence (Bonino et al., 2006; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021; Rostad et al., 2019). Violent pornography exposure is correlated with the perpetration and victimization of teen dating violence (TDV) (Rostad et al., 2019). Boys exposed to pornography are over three times more likely to perpetrate sexual TDV than females (Rostad et al., 2019). Among a sample of juvenile sex perpetrators, over 58% of the sample reported pornography use (DeLago et al., 2020). Problematic sexual behaviors have become deeply intertwined in our society, resulting in a lack of attention to these behaviors among adolescents. Within high schools, there is a lack of disclosure, lack of trust in faculty, and the normalization of sexual harm between peers (Allnock & Atkinson, 2019). Finkelhor and colleagues noted that

63% of juvenile perpetrators are acquaintances with their victims (Finkelhor et al., 2009). Frontline workers have recently stated that this relationship pattern is still relevant (Johnson et al., under review).

Victims of Child Sexual Abuse

Considering the long-term negative impact sexual assault has on health and happiness, understanding how children are at risk for CSA is critical. Victims of CSA experience short- and long-term effects in myriad ways. Many CSA victims describe shame and guilt, specifically when photographed or videotaped (DeJong et al., 2015; Gewirtz-Meydan et al., 2018; Olafson, 2011). Victims of CSA also display high rates of mental illness, including but not limited to PTSD, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and suicidal thoughts and ideations (DeJong et al., 2015). Victims' perceptions often include negative attitudes about themselves and distrust of others and the world (Olafson, 2011). In many instances, these psychological struggles are coupled with victim blaming and the perpetuation of rape myths in the victims' lives (Anderson & Overby, 2021).

Victims of CSA also display impaired adult functioning resulting in adverse life outcomes (DeJong et al., 2015; Olafson, 2011). Studies show that victims of CSA have lower engagement in higher education and often have lower incomes than those who were not sexually victimized as children (DeJong et al., 2015; Olafson, 2011). Higher arrest rates, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, exposure to STIs, and relationship violence have also been attributed to CSA (DeJong et al., 2015; Olafson, 2011). Girls experience higher rates of revictimization into adulthood, while boys who are victimized demonstrate higher sexual perpetration rates (Plummer & Cossins, 2018; Olafson, 2011).

Research Question

Previous research demonstrates the relationship between pornography exposure and problematic sexual behaviors among adults and adolescents, including violence. However, little to no research exists on whether pornography creates risk for peer-on-peer CSA. Those exposed to pornography, particularly young boys, and men, demonstrated a greater likelihood of exhibiting problematic sexual behaviors, including sexual offending. Children are sexualized in virtually all forms of media and eroticized in pornography by displaying child-like cues in sexual scenes. This hyper-sexualized environment is detrimental to youth, resulting in a higher prevalence of self-objectification and self-sexualization, particularly among young girls.

Children rely on the internet for sexual education, and empirical data suggests that exposure to pornography creates sexual scripts that do not involve a comprehensive understanding of consent and a lack of differentiation between safe sexual behaviors and risky sexual behaviors. In this way, pornography is a mechanism for grooming youth to be desensitized to violent sexual acts. Limited research has demonstrated that these youth may have a greater propensity for sexual violence. Considering the short- and long-term challenges of CSA victims, including higher rates of mental illness and more significant struggles in their adult lives, further research on this topic is necessary.

CSA is a national phenomenon, with 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 20 boys experiencing sexual abuse (Finkelhor et al., 2009). A constellation of data sources indicates that peer-on-peer CSA is a growing concern. These changes are taking place alongside a dramatic expansion of pornography in the everyday lives of adults and children. Frontline workers who manage CSA cases report pornography plays a role in CSA in various ways and point to a lack of clear understanding of parents, schools, and LE on addressing the changing technologies of CSA.

LEOs have the most frequent interaction with perpetrators and victims of CSA, yet their observations do not appear in empirical studies.

Given that the law and LE currently struggle to define and manage less severe forms of sexual misconduct among children, it is vital to understand LE's view of the role of pornography in CSA cases. This study grappled with the impact of pornography on child sexual abuse from a LE perspective. It was guided by the question: What are LEO's perceptions of pornography as a risk factor for peer-on-peer child sexual abuse? This question is broken into two parts: First, do LEOs perceive pornography to be a risk factor for peer-on-peer CSA? Second, in what ways do LEOs perceive pornography to be a risk factor for peer-on-peer CSA? The research question attempts to identify the gap in available research regarding peer-on-peer child sexual abuse from the LE perspective.

Methods

Data Collection and Sampling Techniques

The data for this study consists of 11 qualitative, semi-structured interviews. These interviews focus on understanding what LEOs notice in CSA investigations. For this study, only LEOs with experience investigating CSA are included, as the study focuses on LE perspectives of peer-on-peer CSA. I chose to sample LEOs from local departments because they interact most with juvenile victims and perpetrators compared to federal LEOs. Due to federal age restrictions, federal LEOs may have limited investigative experience with juvenile perpetrators.

The study interviewed Florida, Iowa, North Carolina, and Virginia LEOs in September of 2022. Interviews with LEOs provide insight into what patterns they identify in peer-on-peer CSA related to pornography. Before selecting participants, interviewees completed a pre-interview survey, which collected basic demographics, including age, gender, race, education level, years of experience, and job title. As listed in Appendix A, questions addressing pornography and its

role in CSA are directly asked in the interview protocol. The interview protocol was developed to mirror a similar study of interviews with other frontline workers (Johnson et al., under review).

After I obtained approval from the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB #22-721), I recruited participants through my professional networks using a modified snowball sampling technique (Patton, 2002). My connections spoke to potential participants, and participants provided contact information if they wished to participate. These interviews were solicited using the email in Appendix A. Per my IRB protocol, consent was provided through the review of the Information Sheet (Appendix A) and confirmed at the end of the Eligibility Survey (Appendix B). Interviews were conducted via Zoom, allowing participants to reside in a different state than myself. Interviews ranged from approximately 45 minutes to one hour and 45 minutes.

Table 1 presents the respondent's demographics and provided pseudonyms. The median age of the respondents was 38, ranging from 28 to 47. All participants identified on the gender binary scale, with males representing most of the sample (9) and the remainder identifying as female (2). The median years investigating cases of child sexual abuse in a LE capacity was 13 years, ranging from 6 to 20 years.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race	Years in LE	Job Title	Approx. Jurisdiction Population
Eric Copeland	47	Male	Caucasian*	16	Captain/ICAC Task Force Commander*	4.25 million
Hudson Campbell	41	Male	Caucasian	18	Assistant Chief of Police	>10,000
James Banks	43	Male	Caucasian	20	SVU Detective*	>10,000
Luke Carlson	43	Male	Caucasian	15	SVU Detective	>10,000
Josie Davis	28	Female	Hispanic	6	SVU Detective	790,000
Mark Stone*	44	Male	Caucasian	6	SVU Detective/FBI Task Force Officer	99,000
Vincent Myers	39	Male	Caucasian	17	Patrol Lieutenant	200,000
Laura Boone	28	Female	Caucasian	6	SVU Detective	99,000
Justin Trevino	44	Male	Caucasian	19	SVU Detective	99,000
Brandon Carter	28	Male	Caucasian	6.5	Juvenile Probation Officer	98,000
Chris Tyler	35	Male	Caucasian	9	Sergeant	99,000

Note: Population data from United States Census Bureau, Quickfacts.
*ICAC = Internet Crimes Against Children
*SVU = Special Victims Unit
*Mark Stone only provided the number of years he has been in task force capacity, not his total years in LE.
*Race was an open-ended question in the eligibility survey, and the terms used in the table were how participants identified themselves.

Data Analysis

In this study, I used a grounded theory approach using the qualitative analysis tool, NVivo. A grounded theory approach allowed me to collect and analyze my data simultaneously while incorporating comparative analysis methods (Charmaz, 2000). A grounded theory methodology allowed theory to emerge from the data as I coded and analyzed it rather than theory being imposed upon it (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Grounded theory uses a three-step coding process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Blair, 2015).

Throughout the interviews, I kept notes of topics and points that commonly appeared or stood out among participants. I went about open coding by using interview notes and marking key phrases and issues from the interviews. I relied on my data rather than imposing concepts onto it, which is a unique feature of grounded coding (Charmaz, 2000). After the completion of two interviews, I began to compile my codebook. I used a previously defined codebook

involving frontline workers as a framework for my codebook (Johnson et al., under review).

However, I heavily relied on my interview notes when creating my codebook. Given the

difference in participants' professions, some codes from the guide were omitted, while others

were added. Codes were designed to align with common trends in the literature that I had also

noted in interviews. However, codes were added outside the scope of the available literature. For

example, I coded for instances where participants mentioned pornography on the technological

devices of victims or perpetrators of CSA. Compared to participants from the frontline worker

study, LEOs have access to these devices and are analyzed to assist in the investigative process.

During the transcription process, I added to those notes, emphasizing areas that appeared more

frequently; these were also added to the codebook. For example, participants differentiated

between contact CSA and noncontact, or internet CSA. The different types of abuse came across

in the transcription process, so I added them to my codebook.

Axial coding shows the relationship between two or more concepts (Strauss & Corbin,

1998). I could put several similar ideas under the same code during axial coding. For example, I

created a subcode titled "Pornography to groom." As you will see in my results section,

participants spoke about grooming in several ways, so using this code combined several ideas,

making the data more manageable to work with. Finally, I used the selective coding step of

grounded theory analysis. Selective coding allows theory to emerge because codes are organized

around a central explanation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To conduct selective coding, I used the

query feature in NVivo. Coding queries allowed me to query several similarly related codes,

creating an overarching explanation or theory. For example, one of the themes I will discuss in

my results section is titled "Technology and Hyper-access." This theory emerged when I

conducted coding queries involving codes that related to participants' discussion of access to

technology, pornography, and the impact that those factors have on CSA.

Human Subjects

This study focuses on the perceptions of LE and, therefore, will not involve interviews with juvenile sexual abuse victims, perpetrators, or their families. The sample consists of LEOs who investigate crimes against children, and we discussed their experiences working on these cases. There is minimal risk associated with this research as the content discussed is consistent with the daily risk of the sample's occupation. However, to minimize potential risk, I provided each participant with a pseudonym and redacted any information that could reveal their location, specific organization, and any identifying information about the children from the cases they have investigated.

Results

Law Enforcement Beliefs of Pornography as a Risk Factor for CSA

This study sought to identify if LEOs perceive pornography to be a risk factor for CSA and how they draw these connections. A significant number of children are sexually victimized, and rates of CSA appear to remain consistent, with the 10-19 age group experiencing higher rates of victimization compared to other age groups (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2021). Understanding LE perceptions is essential because academic literature demonstrates the variety of ways pornography can influence individuals. As reviewed previously, pornography marketed primarily towards adult heterosexual males is easily accessible by children and linked to violence and violent sexual behavior (Wright et al., 2018; Ybarra et al., 2011). The current literature lacks research about LEO perspectives, and this study provides a basis for further research with a larger sample of LEOs investigating CSA.

Out of a sample of 11 LEOs located in the United States, 100% of participants viewed pornography as a risk factor for CSA. Participants answered this question in myriad ways,

emphasizing the frequency with which they investigate cases of alleged CSA. Vincent Myers, a patrol lieutenant with over 17 years of experience, stated, "Our youth services unit probably gets the largest caseload in the department, and they could see anywhere from 900 [CSA] cases a year" (Vincent Myers). The sample expressed the high volume of CSA cases consistently coming into their departments. Luke Carlson, a special victims unit detective (SVU) with over 15 years of LE experience, spoke to this. "I would say the most difficult part [of this job] for me is how many cases we get. I speak for the last three months; we've been inundated with sexual abuse cases" (Luke Carlson). Individuals from smaller departments expressed their overwhelming caseloads, which was consistent across the sample. To better understand how many CSA cases participants typically handle, I asked them about their caseloads. Since most participants do not investigate only CSA cases, it is essential to understand that the number of cases they discuss pertains to CSA only and does not include other crimes they are investigating. Laura Boone, an SVU detective with over six years of LE experience, said, "You don't realize how prevalent [CSA] is. We're carrying probably 30, 25, 30 [cases] that are just child sexual abuse a piece, and that's between [three detectives] right now" (Laura Boone). In both instances, participants stated that these cases are primarily contact offenses and that internet offenses related to CSA often get put on the back burner because they do not have the staffing to support them. Justin Trevino, an SVU detective with over 19 years of experience, discussed this challenge.

> We don't, oh boy, my department doesn't support, and I say this in my opinion only, nothing coming from the chain of command. They don't support; they're not a big support of us working [child pornography/internet CSA] cases, so it makes it hard to make time to do those [internet] cases just because we're just so heavily loaded with the other [contact] cases that these [internet] cases sit a while. I probably have 35 active [CSA] cases. I have 60 [total cases] in my inbox right now (Justin Trevino).

Laura Boone and Justin Trevino cover jurisdictions under 100,000 people, as shown in Table 1. Considering that small communities are microcosms of more densely populated areas, it is appropriate to assume that high-density areas have larger caseloads (Barkan & Rocque, 2020). The frequency of CSA cases is not limited to contact offenses. Despite staffing and chain of command challenges, other participants express how overwhelmed their agencies are by internet CSA cases. Eric Copeland, an Internet Crimes Against Children Taskforce (ICAC) commander with over 16 years of explained this.

> We are currently averaging between, I would say, close to 500 to 700 [cases] a month coming through our office and then being forwarded to other agencies. And I'm pretty sure other ICACs have about the same, if not a little bit more, just due to the population density. So, at every single one of those is a case that has some potential evidence or something that caused the reporting person or company to believe that there's child sexual exploitation. But that doesn't include the amount of stuff that's reported directly to a local agency on the task force or that they go out and proactively generate if they have the time and means to do proactive undercovers investigation. But through our office, I want to say a 100 plus is a low-week minimum. (Eric Copeland).

Eric Copeland's jurisdiction covers over half of his state. Therefore, these rates reflect a population of approximately 4.25 million, based on U.S. Census Data (United States Census Bureau, 2023). However, the other ICAC in his state covers a much higher populated area, and Eric Copeland expressed that he believed the other ICAC receives even more cases. The frequency of participants investigating CSA sets the stage for understanding their perceptions.

Participants emphasized CSA's prevalence and how many cases they handle. As discussed above, more than half of the participants are in jurisdictions with populations of less than 100,000. When considering the population density of the jurisdictions where participants work, it is crucial to consider that higher population areas may see significantly more incoming CSA cases. Violent and property crimes in large cities are three to four times higher than in rural

areas (Barkan & Rocque, 2020). In most participants' departments, only 2-3 individuals are

working CSA, each with the same, if not more, number of active cases.

In addition to the frequency that CSA cases come into their agencies, there was also an

emphasis on the early and long-term exposure to pornography that children have today. Several

participants discussed this anecdotally, comparing their exposure to pornography to that of

children today. Chris Tyler, a police department Sergeant with nine years of experience, reflected

on this change.

> I remember back when I was a kid. I mean, there again, there was no cell phone.
> And so, your only means of access was like a video. Every kid tried it to where
> you'd go to the old like playboy spice channel, right, back when they were on like
> channel 99. And you'd wait for your parents to go to bed, and it was always
> staticky, but you'd always try to see if you could see something and never could
> see anything. Or you have, like, a Playboy or a Hustler [magazine] or something
> like that, which of course, a kid isn't going to have access to, hopefully, or
> anything like that. And so, you compare that to now and how different that is.
> (Chris Tyler).

James Banks, an SVU detective with over 20 years of LE experience, provided a similar

anecdote.

> Yeah, I go back to, like, you know, when I was a kid. You know, 15, 16 years old,
> you were snooping around, and you got a magazine. You gotta find a magazine,
> okay? And it was, it was a picture. You know what I mean? Now, these kids are
> able to download full videos, full pornographic videos, and more realistic stuff
> than what it was back, you know, 30 years ago when, when high-school boys
> were sneaking around looking at, trying to find a Playboy [magazine] (James
> Banks).

The excerpts above acknowledge the differences in exposure to pornography that they notice.

Children today have access to pornography from any device with internet access, compared to

more restricted access in the past. Participants also mentioned that previously, a child wasn't

typically exposed to pornography until they became a teenager, usually after some sexual

education. As noted in the literature review, the age of exposure today is often before a child

receives sexual education (Allen et al., 2018). Chris Tyler also discussed how long-term exposure to pornography and a lack of comprehensive sexual education potentially poses problems for children. "I think the more generations that go up and develop, they've been exposed [to pornography for] longer and longer, so they have more access to all these different types of things" (Chris Tyler). Pornography exposure occurs before a child has been taught about sexual behaviors and relationships in schools or by their parental figure.

Eric Copeland discussed the age of exposure, "and then because we know kids are exposed [to pornography] at such a young age, depending on what reports you look at. Eight to ten-ish for the first exposure. Then, when do mom and dad have 'the talk' with the kids?" (Eric Copeland). Compared to the reflections of Chris Tyler and James Banks' pornography exposure in their teenage years, participants are aware that the age of exposure to pornography has lowered in the past two decades. This shift in the age of exposure stands out to them as contributing to the risk children face of being victimized or even perpetrating CSA.

Participants also understand that exposure to pornography occurs in an environment flooded with the content, as said by Mark Stone, an SVU detective and FBI task force officer with more than six years of experience. "There's an overwhelming amount of pornography out there. I mean, we don't see the tip of it" (Mark Stone). Not only did participants speak to the prevalence of pornography in society, but also how they see it appear in their cases. James Banks discussed specialized experience analyzing phone data and reviewing the device content of CSA perpetrators.

> Now cell phones are a computer, and porn is just so easily accessible. I find that
> when we take cell phones from our juvenile perps, we get a ton of pornographic
> stuff off of them. But gosh damn, you get on this thing [motioning to phone], and
> you can have porn at your fingertips all the time. And like I said, the ones that
> we're noticing, our teenage perps to our early 20s perp, the amount of

[pornography], like holy, what is that? I'm like, holy shit. That is the most screwed-up stuff I've ever seen in my life. Graphic (James Banks).

James Banks has worked in LE for 20 years, with 15 of those as a Detective investigating child sexual abuse cases. With the advent of the internet and smartphones, technology, and pornography have advanced significantly during this time (Holoyda et al., 2018; Wolak, 2007). When discussing the content James Banks viewed on juvenile perpetrator's devices, he was highly emphatic in tone and body language. He provided extensive detail on specific cases, yet this point seemed to disturb him more than others. Luke Carlson had a similar background and provided a similar commentary on where he sees pornography come up in CSA cases.

> It surprises me when there's not pornography on the cellular devices. It's usually pretty prevalent with these extractions. And it's very common when it comes down to these sex abuse cases, and we do get access to the suspect's devices and sometimes the victim's devices that there is pornography (Luke Carlson).

CSA investigations often reveal pornographic material on devices, Mark Stone noted.

> If I'm investigating a sodomy case and we do a search warrant or what have you, either on the subject's phone or the subject's house. There can be ties, and there were ties found to say that pornography was on the [perpetrator's] phone (Mark Stone).

It was a standard procedure of LEOs to examine the phones. Many of the participants relied on information found on technological devices to guide their investigation and potential questioning of perpetrators. As stated above, many participants found it more shocking when pornography was not present on the device of a sexual perpetrator. Literature reflects the belief of participants that pornography is a risk factor for adults perpetrating sexual violence (DeLago et al., 2020). Participants also indicate pornography is a risk factor for CSA perpetration. Chris Tyler searched the devices of perpetrators for pornography across various crimes, not limited to CSA.

> One of the first things I would do, whether it was a shaken baby or an infant that had any kind of trauma done to it, or a fatality, sexual assault, or anything along those lines. One of the first things I would do is get the suspect's and the victim's

phones if they were old enough to have one. And I'd look at it because it is an absolute treasure trove of information and their viewing history online because that kind of helps to set a profile for them and what you're going to question them about and things along those lines if you haven't interviewed them yet, but just looking at their search history and the kind of porn that they look at (Chris Tyler).

Participants were not unfamiliar with pornography in connection with their investigations. The perceptions of LE participants are situated not only in what they observe in society but also in case-specific experiences. Participants found it more shocking when there was no pornography on the devices of perpetrators. LE frequently encounters pornography on perpetrator's devices and appear to use the information they find to create a profile and strategy as the investigation continues, as Chris Tyler exemplifies above.

Unlike data for adult-on-child CSA, empirical data for peer-on-peer CSA in the United States is limited. Therefore, this study examined what U.S. LEOs thought of pornography's role in peer-on-peer CSA. The age of exposure to pornography has lowered, and data revealed a six-fold increase in the risk of adolescents self-reporting sexually aggressive toward others after exposure to violent pornography (Allen et al., 2018; Ybarra et al., 2011). However, there is a gap in the current literature surrounding peer-on-peer CSA from the perspective of LEOs. These individuals are on the front lines, working various CSA cases, with perpetrators ranging from young children to older adults. The findings of this study demonstrate the importance of further research in this area to provide a more generalizable picture of the role of pornography in this type of abuse.

Like their perceptions of CSA perpetrated by adults, 100% of the sample believe that pornography does play a significant role in peer-on-peer CSA. When discussing sexual offending against children in general, several participants said it could be hard to pinpoint if they have seen

an uptick in juvenile offending because they see such a wide age range of perpetrators. Hudson

Campbell discussed this at length,

> I don't see any significant upticks as far as the ages of the victims and the
> suspects. Again, it's nothing really standing out as, oh, most of our suspects are in
> this range. Because it just really, it's happening all too often across all these
> different age groups, whether they're juvenile perpetrators or whether they're
> adults. Sometimes you're surprised by the age of the suspect and the age of the
> victim. And so, you have to dig a little deeper into, okay, what's the relationship?
> How did that, basically, trying to decipher how this happened (Eric Copeland).

The above quote exemplifies how participants commonly discuss the frequency of perpetration

by different age groups. Participants stated that so many cases are consistently coming from all

other age groups into their departments. However, participants also discussed that although they

are seeing an increase in younger offenders, there is not necessarily a decrease in adult offenders

because often, the perpetrators they investigate are repeat offenders of CSA. Eric Copeland

explained this observation,

> We're seeing more offenders begin at a younger age. And I think that's because
> they've been exposed to porn at such a young age. But, like, with adult offenders,
> they're still, they get older too because, I mean, if you're an offender at 20, you
> don't stop being an offender when you're 50. So that that group is not shrinking, it
> may grow because people start offending earlier, but they're just gonna get older.
> That's like in law enforcement. You know, when I was, when I got started 16 years
> ago, I was significantly younger than I am now [laughs], and I was close to the
> same age as a lot of the bad guys. But over a 20, 25-year career, we get older, but
> the criminals have tended to stay younger, if that makes sense. So, in the same
> with sex offenders, they're going to still be offenders their whole life, and that
> older group will constantly grow because you've got new offenders growing up
> and joining that. But yeah, we're definitely seeing younger people, especially even
> as kids themselves, becoming [sexual] offenders (Eric Copeland).

Eric Copeland and other participants who discussed similar ideas bring up an important

observation. LE data does not reflect a decrease in sexual offending among adults, but it does

suggest an increase among juvenile offenders. If perpetrators of CSA are more likely to be repeat

offenders, as the participants discussed, this could demonstrate why data does not reflect a

decrease in adult offenders of CSA. Eric Copeland explains that he believes they are experiencing a rise in juvenile perpetrators because of early exposure to pornography, which differs from the experiences of perpetrators within older age groups.

Out of the 11 participants, only one LEO did not perceive a significant difference between the impact of pornography on adult and juvenile offenders. Eric Copeland discussed how he sees pornography to impact juveniles the same way that it does adults,

> I really don't think there's a difference whether you're an adult or a kid if you're looking at pornography, that you're your mirror neurons in your brain are receiving that image. And then, if you're being sexually aroused to it and masturbating to it, regardless of your age, you're hardwiring yourself to that, and then it's not. You're just; you're just going to do what you've learned (Eric Copeland).

Eric Copeland illustrates how pornography can influence juvenile and adult sexual scripts. By viewing the content, becoming aroused, and receiving sexual gratification, these individuals are programming their minds and bodies to what they perceive to be normal sexual behavior. It is important to note that although Eric Copeland made this statement, he could still provide examples of differences between adult and juvenile offenders. According to participants, pornography plays a prominent role in peer-on-peer CSA compared to adult CSA when discussing the age at which juvenile perpetrators are exposed to pornography. Although many participants did not elaborate much, James Banks explained why he has come to this conclusion,

> Mostly with our our peer-to-peer our teenage kids perping on younger kids, you know, like so our maybe 15 our 14 to 17, 18-year-old kids, perping on younger children, you know, six you know four and up. Because now cell phones, cell phones are a computer, and porn is just easily accessible. So, easily accessible from a from a phone that I I, I find that when we take cell phones from from our juvenile perps, we get a ton of pornographic stuff off of them. Had they ever said that's what led them to perp? The child? I've not had not had them say that. But I I mean, I think that I feel that it has to play a factor. Mostly like I said, like in our our, that 14- to 16-year-old perpetrator range. I find a lot of pornographic stuff on their phones (James Banks).

Throughout the interviews, LEOs discussed peer-on-peer CSA when asked about patterns they may have noticed. However, participants often brought up juvenile perpetration of CSA without being prompted. When participants discussed juvenile perpetrators of CSA, it was common that pornography or technology was also discussed. Participants connected the early exposure to pornography and patterns of peer-on-peer CSA.

Several participants understood pornography as a part of a larger constellation of risk factors that interact to increase risk. Participants' understanding of risk fit in with the available literature, acknowledging that risk is not a predictor but an indicator of negative consequences (NIH-DHHS, 2016). Eric Copeland connects pornography and sexual abuse between adult partners, explaining how he had seen a victim's risk for other violence increase when pornography use, and alcoholism were also present.

> When I was teaching at the police academy a few weeks ago, [I was talking to] the new recruit class and was like, look, you're going to answer a crap ton of domestic violence calls between domestic partners. Typically, it is a male that is abusing the female partner. If that male partner is using pornography in his life, we have seen the chances of his partner becoming a victim of sex abuse on top of the physical abuse increases by a factor of two. And then, if she or if the offender is using alcohol and pornography, then the victim's chance of being sexually abused on top of the physical abuse increases by a factor of three (Eric Copeland).

CSA cases often have other risk factors besides pornography, according to Hudson Campbell, an assistant chief of police with over 18 years of experience.

> We typically don't see [pornography] alone. Whether it's in the presence of alcohol to juvenile victims or whether it's marijuana. You typically see a controlled substance and the presence of pornography as a combination rather than just the pornography (Hudson Campbell).

These statements are consistent with the definition provided for grooming in the literature review and demonstrate how these behaviors occur in real-life CSA instances (Craven et al., 2007). There are different grooming methods presented by participants, with some exclusively using

pornography and others combining other components, such as drugs or alcohol, to gain the trust of a potential victim. In both examples, pornography acts as a tool for perpetrators to slowly introduce sexual behavior to a child in a way that allows the perpetrator to manipulate the narrative of why it is okay for the child to engage in sexual acts.

The sampled LEOs were able to address various questions regarding their perception of pornography as a risk factor for child abuse. In many instances, they agreed with what the literature and data reflect regarding the importance of the study. Specifically, in the frequency of cases, they see juvenile victims and children's early, long-term exposure to pornography (Johnson, 2011). Although their ways of answering this question differed in some ways, among the 11 participants, data analysis revealed four main themes:

1. Digital advances have created a world with hyper-accessible pornography available anywhere, anytime.
2. Participants observed the increased presence of risky sexual behaviors in pornography, which they have seen in their CSA investigations.
3. LEOs reported that habitual pornography users might exhibit addictive behavior, with pornography acting as the gateway to the perpetration of sexual violence.
4. Pornography was cited as a factor explaining several differences between juvenile and adult perpetrators of CSA.

Technology and Hyper-Access
Access and lack of supervision

The advancement of technology has made it easier for society to access pornography at any time, and children are often exposed through a device in the home (Wolak, 2007). Children are often more knowledgeable about technology than adults because they have grown up with it, and participants often attributed technology to children's easy access to pornography (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). In some way, 100% of participants discussed technology concerning CSA. The rapid advancement of technology was mentioned by 9 out of 11 participants. Luke Carlson was among the participants that expressed their concern over the advancement of technology.

"It's scary. It's scary. I have kids, and you just try to do your best to protect them because, unfortunately, everything is a [children's] fingertips" (Luke Carlson). Children have access to pornography at any time, and participants see this in both their work and personal lives. Chris Tyler refers to his memory of technological advancement, comparing his experiences to those of children in recent generations.

> And I think that's a lot of it is that the longer that I was in [law enforcement], the younger the generation was that had access [to technology] because I remember when the first smartphone came out. I was a freshman in college, and that was back in 2006. And so, I think dating myself, I think that with [the advancement of technology], I think there has been a rise in all of these different kinds of apps and things that you can do and that you can meet up [with people] like Tinder and all that kind of stuff (Chris Tyler).

Justin Trevino presents another perspective on the rapid advancement of technology: children are the target audience.

> I think there's always that aspect of, you know, technology and it being so readily available, and children getting it at a younger age. It seems like that maybe, maybe that's a trend that's changed. It just seems like with the technology, it's more geared or user-friendly for an earlier or younger age. And they're getting it at an early age. So, [technology] makes it more accessible for an offender to be able to reach out to them because of that (Justin Trevino).

Not only are children able to access technology from a much younger age, but the devices they have access to have user interfaces that are easy for children to navigate. The current technological landscape creates an environment where children can access pornography through accidental searching, curiosity, or peer pressure. Participants' extreme emphasis was on children accessing technology at a younger age. The age of exposure is consistently a concern of participants when discussing pornography as a risk factor for CSA. Participants often didn't speak to the rapid advancement of technology alone and typically connected how children's access to devices and the internet goes unsupervised. Due to this lack of supervision, children may be exposed to pornography or encounter perpetrators, as said by Eric Copeland.

No, there's no real; there's no stereotypical average victim other than most of the kids that are victimized are they're obviously online through technology. Usually, because parents are not monitoring their social media app usage or gaming, all the gaming consoles now have internet capabilities, obviously for online gaming. And you can communicate through those systems. And that's where a lot of the stuff is happening at. A lot of it, especially from a gaming standpoint, is directly on the console or through Discord is how they communicate (Eric Copeland).

Eric Copeland discussed the lack of parental oversight over children accessing and using technology.

Most parents probably don't think it's going to happen to their kids. So, they're not as proactive in monitoring or educating their kids. Or they haven't talked about internet safety. If they talk about it at all, one time, it's one and done, and they think their kid's going to remember that or listen to them (Eric Copeland).

Parents or other parental figures may not have the comprehensive knowledge to educate their children on online safety. Or, as stated above, they may believe that nothing like CSA could ever happen to their children and do not deem education or follow-up education necessary.

Eric Copeland stated that victimization or exposure occurs not only on smartphones and computers. According to participants, devices such as gaming consoles are also frequently used. Children use these devices without understanding the importance of online safety in a digital landscape ideal for exposure to pornography and CSA victimization. 10 out of 11 participants discussed the unsupervised access children have to technological devices and connected this to exposure to pornography. Brandon Carter, a juvenile probation officer with almost seven years of experience, discussed how he relates the advancement of technology and the lack of parental supervision to a child's exposure to pornography.

And the phone, the electronic device, is the gateway to [pornography]. They're younger when they have phones. The parents do not monitor. The kids know it's out there. All it takes is a little prodding from somebody, and they're gonna go down a rabbit hole…Again, to pull the callback here, it comes down to parenting if, for whatever reason, it's a necessity, and I've told parents this before, that is not their phone. That's your phone. You should know everything that is being done on it. You should know the password; you should know the apps that they

have; you should know who they're talking to; you should know what they're talking about. But it's become a tool. When little Johnny's crying in the corner, here's your iPad kid. You know, entertain yourself. You gotta be careful (Brandon Carter).

In her response, SVU detective Josie Davis, with six years of LE experience, also emphasized that the parents and guardians of the children she encounters are often not supervising their use of technology.

I would say mostly all of them have a device. And most of the time, more than I would say about 75% of the time, the parents don't know the passcode. So, you know, it's important for parents to check their phones and to have access to the phones. But yeah, I would say mostly all the time, the kids have their own phones, and they know how to work it even better than myself (Josie Davis).

Laura Boone provided an example of using Pinterest in schools for children to send sexually explicit messages and images to each other.

No adult noticed that you can communicate on Pinterest, let alone that the kids are doing it in class. So, you think that these kids are getting around your firewalls that you set up getting on these websites? But they're not; they're just doing normal; they're just accessing a normal site that you don't have blocks on because you don't realize (Laura Boone).

Here we can see how participants link access to technology, the lack of adult supervision, and exposure to pornography to the victimization of CSA. As the rapid advancement of technology has demonstrated, children in recent generations have grown up with easy access to technology and the internet. Due to this, children are often more knowledgeable about technology than adults in their lives. Coupled with the access and knowledge of technology, participants perceive that parents and guardians do not monitor their children's use of these devices. Lack of supervision is demonstrated in several ways, ranging from a lack of online safety education to being unaware of what their children do online. Lack of parental oversight ultimately creates a more significant opportunity for youth to be exposed to pornography and potentially encounter sexual offenders at some point during adolescence.

How is technology used?

The sampled LEOs have identified social media as a component of CSA. Social media

exposes children to pornography, facilitates communication between victims and perpetrators,

and enables CP to be self-produced and distributed. 11 out of 11 participants discussed social

media in this way, expressing their concern over the level of integration that has occurred with

social media sites in the lives of children. Snapchat was among the most common social media

site discussed by LEOs. They emphasized both how it exposes children to potential offenders,

but also how it poses challenges in the investigative process. Consider the short passage from

James Banks below to understand how LEOs discussed social media in CSA.

> Some of it starts with the worst technology ever developed called Snapchat. I
> despise Snapchat even though I have it. I have it because I track what my kids are
> doing on it. But I hate Snapchat. I actually have a different name for it because it's
> terrible. You know, so kids get on there. I find my 11- to 12-year-olds sometimes
> end up; they are victims. They end up being coerced by older, older, 18, 19, and
> 20-year-olds to do things that they shouldn't be doing…I think it's terrible. There
> should be no app that stuff can be deleted within 24 hours. It's like when we get a
> case, if I get a case with kids and it's fresh, I mean, my next advice, if I hear from
> [the Department of Social Services] that it involved Snapchat, or they were
> talking on Snapchat. I mean, I'm immediately getting handles and sending out
> preservations to Snapchat as fast as I can to hopefully preserve some of it (James
> Banks).

James Banks additionally explained preservation requests and other terminology used within LE.

> It's basically a legally binding document that instructs social media sites. I'm just
> going to use Twitter, Facebook, and Snapchat. Those are the main ones. Some of
> the main three we use, I guess Twitter's kinda in there. But basically, it's saying,
> hey, you are being required to preserve the communications with this handle,
> which is the identification of the person, for the next 60 days. It's required prior to
> getting a search warrant. And usually, we put a date range on there. So, if we think
> there's gonna be continued communications, we might date range it. So, then we
> then that allows us, that means they have to hold that data because if you don't do
> [a preservation request], Snapchat then deletes it within its, I think they say a snap
> lasts 24 hours in their database (James Banks).

Considering Snapchat's marketing, perpetrators use Snapchat as a method of communication with victims. James Banks stated that it is public knowledge that Snapchat messages, images, and videos delete after 24 hours unless saved directly to the device. Luke Carlson also mentioned social media sites, demonstrating the most common way the participants discussed this topic.

> It's definitely communication via be at whether it's Snapchat, Facebook,
> Messenger, it's those chats. It's those platforms where [children] feel like they're
> safe with their communication (Luke Carlson).

The excerpts above provide direct examples of social media sites that LEOs encounter while investigating CSA. Although these are among the most common, other platforms commonly discussed by participants were those related to gaming. Most, if not all, gaming consoles have access to the internet, and chat platforms such as Discord intended for the gaming community are another method of access to child victims. Social media sites are becoming a more significant part of the development of children, given the advancement and accessibility to devices that have access to the internet. They are used to exchange mainstream pornography and produce and distribute CP. LE has legal methods to retrieve data from these sites and applications. However, participants expressed frustration with apps like Snapchat, which hold data for brief periods. Based on participants' experiences, the marketing of social media applications to youth, as well as the prevalence of communication between perpetrators and child victims, is indicative of the advancement of technology that has increased the potential methods of access to victims.

The Gateway to Child Sexual Abuse
Grooming, Sexual Scripts, and Risky Sexual Behaviors

Alongside the increased access to technology and the internet, participants discussed the rise of risky sexual behaviors depicted in pornography, how they see pornography grooming and leading to the development of sexual scripts and the overall impact of pornography exposure on violent sexual behavior. Participants commonly believed that pornography is a primary source of

sexual education for children. Brandon Carter expressed this like other participants. "It's usually their first sexual experience. It was through pornography somehow" (Brandon Carter). Eric Copeland provides another helpful take on children's early exposure to pornography.

> And once that exposure happens, especially with boys, if they're close to or in puberty. It's both traumatic and exciting at the same time. So, they're seeing something that they don't understand the context of. They haven't necessarily been prepped for, well, what sex is. Then, all of a sudden, they see these acts, which they have a 9 in 10 chance of being violent happening. So, their brain is like, holy cow; it's traumatic. But they're also because they're in that puberty stage. They all can be aroused by it, and that is such a powerful cementing force. Where it anchors that experience [of being exposed to pornography] in their psyche as they're developing. I mean, it is so powerful combining that excitement and trauma at the same time (Eric Copeland).

Participants acknowledge that this exposure to pornography often occurs before a child has sexual education. As shown above, participants state that they believe pornography is often a child's introduction to sexual behavior. Exposure to pornography combines trauma and arousal, which cements the experience in their minds in a way that encourages them to continue watching pornography.

The ease of access that youth have to pornography occurs alongside an increased presence of risky sexual behaviors appearing in pornography. Within the sample of LEOs, 73% described the changes they have seen in pornography over the years. It was common for participants to discuss specific examples of behaviors that they have heard of in mainstream pornography, as shown by Chris Tyler.

> Apparently, a new trend is that the guy will do the money shot, and he will ejaculate in the woman's mouth. But then also immediately pee in her mouth, which the female has no knowledge of this occurring. That's part of, I guess, the appeal for this because there was a podcast that was done. It was an interview with former and current adult film actresses. And what they were talking about is that it's the surprise on their face because they never knew it was coming, and basically, what happens is when you mix semen with urine, it becomes very thick and basically chokes them (Chris Tyler).

In this passage, Chris Tyler acknowledges both the more extreme and potentially degrading behaviors depicted in pornography and the lack of consent depictions in pornography. In this specific example, it appears that the female adult actresses did not consent to the male actor urinating after ejaculation, suggesting that these films are the documented violation of the female actresses' sexual boundaries. Actions in pornography are often demonstrated without explicit verbal consent (Willis et al., 2020). For children viewing the content, it may be challenging to differentiate between implicit and verbal consent, as well as understand the extent of potential risks of the behavior. Children can easily access pornography that normalizes potentially risky sexual behaviors. Not only are children able to access pornography with relative ease, but they are accessing pornography showing behaviors with potential safety risks without proper education. Without a clear understanding of safe, healthy sexual relationships, youth may not understand the potential dangers of engaging in these behaviors.

More than 70% of the sample discussed pornography as a tool for grooming. Participants frequently refer to grooming as how an individual develops sexual preferences. Participants often described pornography as the tool for creating these preferences, which aligns more with the sociological sexual script theory. Sexual script theory is the conditioning of a person to the behavior they view (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; 1986). Eric Copeland explained the ways he sees grooming occur in several ways.

> I absolutely see [grooming]. Pornography is used, whether intentionally or not; at first, it's used to prime and amp up the abuser. We see [pornography] whether it's child sex abuse, child sex trafficking, or just trafficking in general, even if it's an adult victim of prostitution. Absolutely. Pornography is also used to train the victims (Eric Copeland).

Eric Copeland approaches many areas in the excerpt above. First, he affirms that the use of pornography to groom is prevalent in his investigations. He also sees pornography being used to

prepare both the perpetrator and victim for sexual violence. Eric Copeland expands upon this point when discussing peer-on-peer CSA, referring to the engagement of sexual scripts as mimicking behavior.

> Suppose there's no adults involved, and it's just kids-on-kids, and you know. In that case, if the kids are not, they sometimes say if you have an offending child that is acting out on another child and it's not consensual, it may not necessarily be that an adult has victimized the child. They're mimicking what they're seeing in pornography. We do see that quite a bit. But yeah, it's whatever is popular in porn; we definitely see kids mimicking or being asked to participate in acts consistent with porn (Eric Copeland).

Josie Davis also discussed what motivates specific acts in CSA. "To a certain point, you know, it depends on what [the perpetrator] looks at or what their preference is to look at in porn" (Josie Davis). Both perceptions mirror academic literature surrounding pornography and sexual preferences (Bridges et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2011). An individual's taste in pornography may reflect their sexual preferences, such as inflicting pain (Sun et al., 2016; Dines, 2008). LEOs are experiencing firsthand what other empirical studies have found with samples of sexual perpetrators and habitual users of pornography. Given their exposure to pornography during investigations, participants are knowledgeable of what is popular in mainstream pornography, and they see these same popular themes being replicated in CSA.

One way that participants specifically connected actions or scenarios in pornography being acted out in CSA was by discussing categories of pornography, such as barely legal and family play. It is important to emphasize that when asked about patterns of child sexual abuse, 100% of the sample expressed that in instances of child sexual abuse, there is typically some type of familial relationship or connection between the victim and the perpetrator. About 45% of the sample linked this pattern to the popularity of "taboo" relationships in pornography. Participants frequently reference categories such as teacher-student or stepbrother-stepsister. Eric

Copeland discussed how many of the perpetrators of CSA he has encountered watched primarily barely legal pornography.

> And it might've started with the jailbait, barely legal, you know, 18, oh 17, well that's not that much different from a physical standpoint. Then it just starts going downhill younger and younger and younger because they build up a tolerance to it. And then we start seeing within child pornography; they start moving into child porn involving bestiality or sadomasochism (Eric Copeland).

In this short passage, Eric Copeland explains the process he identified in his experience investigating CSA. Perpetrators begin viewing mainstream pornography, and once categories such as barely legal no longer satisfy their sexual urges, they start to progress to CP and then into even more specific forms of CP. Chris Tyler also spoke about barely legal pornography and how the perpetrators he has encountered follow the same progression pattern.

> And typically, they usually follow the same pattern that it would be where it would start as, you know, the "teen" porn kinda stuff, you know, like barely legal kind of thing. Then it would always escalate into something more (Chris Tyler).

Mainstream pornography sexualizes an age group not legally capable of consenting to sexual acts with peers, let alone with adults. Despite the goal of the content to create a fantasy for viewers, it makes a fantasy that is inherently problematic and dangerous for juveniles. In addition to normalizing sex with minors, mainstream pornography normalizes sexual acts between stepfamily members. Eric Copeland brings up PornHub Insights and common categories of pornography viewed in the United States.

> In 2016, the top search term on PornHub for a type of pornography was stepmom. And that continues to be those sorts of the family abuse type stuff, or they call it family play. That tends to remain in the top couple of search terms used for pornography. So, when you've got a website like PornHub that has close to 100 million visitors a day going to their website, and one of the top categories for pornography is related to incest or family sex, why are we surprised when we know most offenders are familial? Most contact offenders are familial (Eric Copeland).

Eric Copeland identifies a connection between pornography and patterns of CSA. Stepfamily play in mainstream pornography is extremely common and normalized. Popular categories of pornography parallel the prevalence of familial offenders of CSA. James Banks asked me a question when discussing patterns of family play in pornography. "Did anyone ever tell you that you weren't supposed to have sex with your older brother?" (James Banks). It's difficult to recall being told this kind of relationship is inappropriate. However, it is implied by society that familial sexual relationships are incestual and not appropriate. James Banks followed this question by providing an example from his time as a detective.

> But no one, no one ever comes out and says that, right? You know, I arrested a guy for assaulting his sister. He was like, 'We're adults.' When I arrested him, he was floored. He was flabbergasted. 'What? I can't have sex with my sister?' He had no clue (James Banks).

Imagine children receiving sexual education from pornography without discussing appropriate romantic or sexual partners. Children rely on pornography to determine what is normative sexual behavior. Although mainstream pornography seeks to create a fantasy that is not reality, individuals lacking comprehensive sexual education may not have the understanding to realize what is safe sexual behavior. These findings suggest children exposed to barely legal and family play pornography are at higher risk for CSA perpetration and victimization.

When asked about pornography over the last decade, 100% of participants commented on the impact changes in the content have had on CSA. First, children have access to pornography at virtually any time with little to no sexual education. Children use the content that they view to form what they perceive to be normative sexual behavior. In addition to the ease of access to pornography, this content often depicts risky sexual behavior. It lacks affirmative verbal consent, which puts children at risk for CSA because they do not have a base of knowledge as to what the structure of a healthy sexual relationship is. Lastly, mainstream pornography normalizes

inappropriate relationships such as family play or incest. Alongside the lack of comprehensive sexual education, pornography puts children at risk for CSA by depicting these relationships as appropriate.

The impact of early and long-term exposure to pornography

Participants expressed that their concern with early and long-term exposure to pornography is the impact they see it is having on individuals engaging in violent sexual behaviors. Over 50% of participants discussed this concern, often referring to the impact of pornography on perpetrators and victims of CSA in forming sexual norms. Two participants referred to pornography as the 'gateway to child sexual abuse.' The two participants referred to pornography in this way when discussing taboo categories of pornography, such as barely legal and family play. Vincent Myers stated, "My concern is eventually they want the real thing. So, my personal opinion would be that [pornography is] kinda like the gateway to actual sexual abuse, like the hands-on sexual abuse of a child" (Vincent Myers). Although actors in pornography are of legal age, they portray dynamics that may be problematic or illegal. Pornography is an introduction to sexual content, and through continued use, individuals may seek out dynamics that mirror what they prefer in pornography. Several participants expressed this concern in different ways. Chris Tyler explained his experience looking at perpetrators' phones and how he has seen barely legal and family play pornography act as a gateway to CSA.

> If you look at their phone and you look at their [internet] history, that's who they really are. I think when people look at that kind of [pornography], they're looking for some level of; I guess not risky, I guess that would be the best term. They want something that's like. Taboo, I guess. It's forbidden, and it's not supposed to happen. It's a way of exciting them now; they know, of course, on a subconscious level that it's not real. That [pornography] is going to be staged because it's illegal to show incest. But still, it's presented as being real. And so, there's an element of excitement, I think, which I think makes some people want to look at it. And then that individual might want to try other things. Again, we're creatures of habit to a point, yes, but those dopamine receptors, after a period of time, the same

[pornography] isn't going to cut it. They're going to want something, do something different, something more taboo. And so, I think that we can see how [pornography] might push somebody on the edge over and want to try something with a child, maybe if there's other factors at play as well (Chris Tyler).

Chris Tyler sees pornography as the potential tipping point to perpetrating CSA if combined with other risk factors. Participants often emphasized that they worry about exposure to barely legal and family play because of the patterns they see in CSA. Although pornography seeks to portray fantasy, participants are concerned about individuals who cannot differentiate between fantasy and safe sexual relationships. Children who have not received comprehensive sexual education may be at risk for victimization because they are unaware of appropriate relationships, and pornography has normalized harmful ones.

Pornography may increase the risk of perpetration because juveniles viewing content do not have the sexual maturity to differentiate between healthy and harmful sexual behaviors and relationships. The sampled LEOs are concerned not only about child exposure to pornography but also the eerily similar patterns of mainstream pornography and sexual abuse they observe. Laura Boone provided her take on this topic, specifically concerning peer-on-peer CSA, emphasizing the impact of pornography-driven sexual scripts on understanding consent.

I think seeing [peer-on-peer CSA] happen, like kids that start watching [pornography] at an early age, just for the fact that they like seeing [sex] being acted out. And the victims [of CSA] aren't usually at a spot to say yes or no [to sexual acts], one way or another. And [they can't] really fully grasp what's going on. And so, all [these kids] are doing is repeating what they've seen. And depending on the porn they've been watching…if that is their standard, then when somebody says, 'I don't want to do that,' [the juvenile perpetrator] take it as like, 'oh you're just messing with me' (Laura Boone).

Laura Boone suggests that pornography shapes children's understanding of consent. Research demonstrates that victims may not feel confident about expressing their refusal (Willis et al., 2020). Laura Boone frames her understanding of peer-on-peer CSA in a way that suggests some

juvenile perpetrators may not view lack of verbal consent as a sexual refusal, or they may not take sexual denial seriously. As discussed in the literature review, explicit, verbal consent was not typically shown to retain the fantasy pornography seeks to create (Cusack et al., 2013; Willis et al., 2020). Children exposed to pornography at a young age are more impressionable when forming sexual scripts and potentially at higher risk for lack of confidence to refuse sexual acts or not understanding proper consent due to the pornography that is readily available to them. Participants connect consent to both victims and juvenile perpetrators of CSA. Victims may not be comfortable refusing sexual acts, and juvenile perpetrators may not wholly understand proper consent. Eric Copeland also spoke about children learning and developing sexual scripts through pornography.

> They're learning that what they see in porn they believe is normal and how [sex] is supposed to be. So, our boys are seeing this, and they're subconsciously being taught [to] be rough and violent with their sexual partner, and especially if [their partner] is a female (Eric Copeland).

Heterosexual adult men are the primary target market for pornography and typically display dominant behavior toward their female partners, and risky sexual behaviors are common (Johnson, 2011; Vogels & Sullivan, 2019). As said by Chris Tyler, "They would get more aggressive with [the sexual abuse] if the perpetrator and victim were [both] younger" (Chris Tyler). Given the early age of exposure, the perceptions of LEOs indicate that they see the impact of early and long-term exposure to pornography as one of the driving forces that increase the risk of CSA. Juveniles are exposed to pornography at a younger age due to the advancement of technology and the prevalence of digital pornography, so they develop sexual scripts based on the content they view. Participants see peer-on-peer CSA become more violent and rough compared to adult-on-child CSA, with many behaviors mirroring mainstream pornography.

Addiction?

Pornography addiction is a widely debated topic in sociological and psychological

research, as well as in public opinion and politics. Pornography addiction is not recognized in the

DSM-5, although sex addiction and internet addiction both are (American Psychiatric

Association, 2013). However, several studies agree that high-pornography users experience

increased compulsivity, impulsivity, and reliance on pornography for sexual gratification (Love

et al., 2015; Dines, 2010; Wetterneck et al., 2012). Over 90% of sampled LEOs expressed

concern over desensitization to pornography and patterns of addiction among chronic users and

perpetrators. All participants have interacted with individuals struggling with addiction at some

point in their LE careers. Their understanding of addiction is unique due to their professional

experiences, and Eric Copeland framed how most participants explained their perceptions of

pornography and addiction.

> We might see different types of ways of exploitation or things that might happen.
> We might see more [CSA] in one group than another if that makes sense. But
> overall, there's not one thing that we could identify as 'this is the main cause of a
> kid being exploited.' But that also hits it from different angles. Whether you're
> looking at the offender, a victim, or society as a whole, I couldn't sit here and say
> that the vast majority of our victims are 12-year-old, you know, African American,
> or 13-year-old Caucasian, or whatever. It's just the whole gamut. It's all over the
> place. But my personal [perception is], pornography, in general, is the foundation
> of most of it (Eric Copeland).

Most participants could not pinpoint the demographic patterns of victims and perpetrators of

CSA. However, as stated by Eric Copeland, almost all participants were able to identify

pornography as the common thread between CSA cases. Participants viewed pornography as the

foundation, gateway, or initial indication that an individual was at risk of becoming a victim or

perpetrator of CSA. Chris Tyler also contributed to this conversation, "I think if you have the

predisposition if you're already going to be like that, [pornography] can lead into it" (Chris

Tyler). Chris Tyler emphasized this concept of predisposition to offending,

> Do violent video games, do they cause mass shootings, school shootings, and things like that? Yes or no. To an extent, it does desensitize people, absolutely. But there's far more people that go and play violent video games that don't commit a violent crime than those that do. So, I think the thing you want to look at is what is it about these individuals that do commit crimes that maybe desensitizes them even more (Chris Tyler).

The three excerpts above contribute to conversations regarding causal arguments about

pornography and CSA. LEOs did not make causal arguments when discussing pornography and

CSA, and they often acknowledged that other risk factors play a role alongside pornography.

Participants did not believe that pornography single-handedly causes CSA. The combination of

risk factors increases an individual's chance of CSA perpetration or victimization. The

causal/risk factor argument parallels a lot of the discourse from participants when discussing

addiction and pornography use, such as the following statement from Eric Copeland.

> And like someone with alcoholism, you don't know you're an alcoholic until you're there. If you don't ever take that first drink, you don't get to the point where you become an alcoholic, but you don't know that until you start drinking. Same thing with [pornography and CSA]. Not everybody that looks at adult porn goes to child porn. But you don't know that until it's too late, and once you cross that line, you can't come back from that (Eric Copeland).

Brandon Carter also spoke of pornography in this way.

> You know, I think it's sort of an avalanche. It starts with one small stone. That's just where it starts. That's where the desensitization, the ideas. Sometimes the nerve, that's where it comes from, that's it. That's its origination point (Brandon Carter).

Participants describe pornography as an initiating event that increases the likelihood of someone

perpetrating or experiencing CSA. It is essential to recognize that participants emphasize that not

all who watch pornography will become addicted. Although not everyone who consumes

pornography will become addicted to it, there is no way to know until someone has that first

exposure. Justin Trevino also directly compared pornography use and addiction in the quote below.

> And I think it's just like pornography, whether it's the regular adult legal stuff or child stuff, it's like an addiction like drugs or alcohol. You start off getting your high or buzz with one or two drinks or one or two pills or whatever your choice is. And then you build up to eventually doing the hard stuff. Well, I think of pornography in the same way (Justin Trevino).

When individuals no longer receive sexual gratification from the pornography they view, they escalate to something more extreme or daring, which parallels how participants speak of alcohol or drug addiction. The individual will continue to seek the next best drug-induced high, or the highest sexual gratification. Eric Copeland exemplifies this by discussing young boys viewing pornography.

> They start to build up a tolerance for pornography. So, they start having to seek out more extreme types to get that same sense of thrill and satisfaction and urge, and then it can become overconsuming (Eric Copeland).

LEOs understand addiction uniquely, given their experiences on patrol and encountering individuals struggling with addiction. James Banks reflected on his struggle with smoking addiction,

> I started smoking at a young age, at like 15 years old. I quit almost 16 years ago now, but I'm telling you it got; it became so much that if I went out and smoked a cigarette now, it wouldn't just be smoking one. I'll go buy a carton, and I'd smoke every one of them because I developed an addiction. So, I think if you're seeing this pornography in that, it becomes your norm. And then, of course, you know what? Probably these young boys and stuff are masturbating to it. And that feels good. So, okay, well, that feels good; well, not I want to see, and I'm seeing all these people have sex on a regular basis, and they seem to be enjoying it, then I will have sex on a regular basis. And if I can't get it with someone my age, I'll get it from wherever I got to. At that point, it's not about it's not even about their age (James Banks).

When comparing addiction to pornography, participants framed their perceptions that individuals who become addicted to pornography begin with mainstream pornography. Like illicit drug use,

when mainstream pornography can no longer satisfy an individual's urges, they will start seeking

something that will. When discussing the self-production of CP among juveniles, Eric Copeland

emphasized the role of pornography in desensitizing potentially risky sexual behaviors.

> But I also think the early porn exposure to kids also drops down their inhibitions
> and reservations, so they're more likely to engage in that self-production in the
> first place because it's normalized because they see in the pornography that, well,
> that's what people are doing. And then that gets them into these positions now
> where they're compromised, and they're victimized even more (Eric Copeland).

This excerpt frames the impact of pornography exposure to reflect peer pressure by directing

children to behave a certain way because "that's what people are doing" (Eric Copeland). The

sampled LEOs see pornography addiction as a clear-cut relationship, despite widespread debate

among scholars. Participants drew direct comparisons between addiction and pornography use

and the progression from pornography use to the perpetration of CSA. They acknowledge that

this behavior occurs alongside a conglomerate of other risk factors but often refer to pornography

as the springboard that either sets someone on the path of potential perpetration of CSA or the

factor that pushes them over the edge. Participants compare pornography use to addiction by

acknowledging that once someone becomes addicted, they will always be chasing the best high

or the greatest sexual satisfaction. Participants also believe not all who consume pornography or

try drugs will become addicted. However, participants emphasize that there is no way to know if

someone will become addicted to pornography unless they have the first initial exposure or try

an illicit substance. The perception of sampled LEOs holds exceptional weight given their

experiences interacting with individuals struggling with addiction. Before investigating CSA, all

participants had experience out on patrol, where encountering drug or alcohol-addicted

individuals is common in their day-to-day profession.

Differences between adult and juvenile perpetrators
Solicitation and Distribution of CP

With the advancement and increased access to technology, the exchange of self-produced sexually explicit images has become more prevalent among adults and juveniles. Juvenile sexting research is oxymoronic because juveniles aren't legally capable of consent, so even if 'consent' was provided, producing and distributing sexually explicit images is still illegal. (Cleary & Najdowski, 2020; Holoyda et al., 2018). Discourse on youth sexting behaviors highlights a common sexting scenario where girls feel pressured to send boys CP. Boys who view online pornography are more likely to send or request CP, and many juveniles distribute self-produced CP without the producer's consent (Stanley et al., 2018; Englander & McCoy, 2017). Pornography profoundly impacts gender attitudes and boys' sexuality, and sexting may reproduce the humiliation and control typical of mainstream pornography (Stanley et al., 2018). When discussing the techniques used by juvenile offenders of CSA, over 90% of the sample discussed solicitation of self-produced CP. Solicitation of CP was more common in CSA peer-on-peer instances, as Josie Davis stated. "Juveniles, mostly juveniles on juveniles, but there are adults on juveniles as well, but I've seen that mostly with the juveniles" (Josie Davis). It is important to note that LE does see solicitation with adult offenders. However, they tend to see it more frequently with juvenile offenders. Patterns of sexting among juveniles signify a difference that the participants identified between the two age groups. Eric Copeland stated that in cases where there has been solicitation for self-produced CP, it is common for the perpetrator to be a peer.

> Yeah. I would say, I would guess that right now, the most [common thing] that we're seeing is solicitation for self-produced images. You know, whether the kid is willing, they are [a] willing, compliant victim where they have no problem [sending images], and they think it's fun and exciting or whatever. They're doing it with their friends, not an adult (Eric Copeland).

Participants consistently emphasized the frequency with which they investigated the solicitation and distribution of CP between juvenile peers. With the increased access to technological devices, the sampled LEOs discuss how peer-on-peer CSA occurs. Legally, the 'consensual' sharing of images would be considered the production of CP for both parties. However, over 45% of participants differentiate between status offenses of CP production between 'consenting' juveniles and the perpetration of CSA. Where adult perpetrators soliciting CP try not to draw attention to their actions, LEOs perceive juveniles as too sexually naïve to do the same. Children often talk about, or share the CP content with friends, whereas participants do not see that occurring with adult perpetrators of CSA. Participants expressed that while the initial communication between juveniles is 'consensual,' it is common for the 'consensual' images or videos to be nonconsensually distributed. Consider the following quote from Justin Trevino.

> We have cases where they mentioned that pictures were taken, and then it gets sent out. And you see that; you'll see that more often in, like, the, you know, high school teenage years where that picture might be taken, and it's Airdropped (Justin Trevino).

Chris Tyler made a similar statement; however, he focuses on documenting sexual acts rather than self-produced solo images.

> A big thing is, with kids that you see in high school, especially is that they might have sex together, and they would record it, and the person might like Airdrop that until then everybody has it. Well, that gets sent to everybody, and now they have child porn as well (Chris Tyler).

Josie Davis compares the two perpetrator age groups when discussing the public distribution of CP in instances where CSA has been documented on video.

> I see it more with the juveniles than with the adults. But I mean, I guess, how can I say it? Juveniles don't think it all the way through; I guess with adults, even though they do take [images or videos of the abuse], they're a little bit smarter about keeping it safe and not sharing it with everybody rather than teenagers wanting people to know what they did or sharing it with people (Josie Davis).

In their experience investigating CSA, participants indicated that the distribution of self-produced images, 'consensually' recorded sexual acts, and the documentation of CSA are more common among juvenile perpetrators than adult perpetrators. As participants noted, juvenile perpetrators are perhaps sexually naïve. Sexual naivety is a critical difference between the age groups. Juveniles do not understand the full scope of the behavior they are engaging in because they are being exposed to adult sexual behaviors well before they are mature enough to handle them. Children frame their understanding of sexual behaviors based on the pornography they view, which participants believe may manifest in peer-on-peer CSA.

Pornography on the Devices of Perpetrators

There is an apparent gap in the literature regarding the content found on the devices of juvenile perpetrators of CSA. However, adjacent to this, there is an abundance of literature expressing how the rapid advancement of technology has resulted in easy access to pornography (DeLago et al., 2020; Holoyda et al., 2018). Sexting among juveniles is prevalent, and within the sample, 3 out of 11 participants expressed extensive knowledge and experience with digital forensics. When asked about content found on the phones of CSA perpetrators, participants identified differences between the content found on adult perpetrators compared to juvenile perpetrators. One difference was the type of content found on juveniles' phones, as stated by Laura Boone.

> Usually, you will find porn on the suspect's phones. The kids, now, their phones will usually have it on there too, but not so much in the sense of going to PornHub—more of like the videos and pictures being sent back and forth between them (Laura Boone).

This finding is consistent with what other LEOs discussed regarding self-produced content and the distribution of CP among juveniles. This most frequently occurred between juvenile peers.

Eric Copeland provided a specific case where something similar had happened, where neighborhood kids had perpetrated against others.

> And those kids that committed the initial offenses against this family members kids ended up having child pornography on their phones that someone had shared with them (Eric Copeland).

Eric Copeland discusses the presence of self-produced CP on the phone of a juvenile perpetrator. James Banks spoke extensively about the differences in content between adult and juvenile offenders. First, James Banks described an industry tool used to extract the content from technology devices, specifically discussing an instance where the content was downloaded from a juvenile's phone.

> Okay. So, we have a Cellebrite machine. We, my partner, my partner put our last juvenile sex perp's phone on Cellebrite. It took a day, like we had to wait until the next day to analyze it because it took that long to download. And I'm like, what is on there? And he's like, the amount of porn on here is unbelievable. So, then we have to go through it all. Because we have to see if we are looking at child pornography. Are we looking at manufactured pornography, you know, or is he getting girls to send him pictures? So, we had to look at all that disturbing crap, too (James Banks).

James Banks expressed several times that with juvenile perpetrators, there tends to be a significantly more considerable amount of pornography on their devices. Of the three participants who said experience with digital forensics, they clarified that phone taking over 24 hours was common if there were a lot of photos or videos on the device. Typically, a significant amount of the photos and videos were pornographic. Not only do sampled LEOs see an abundance of mainstream pornography on the devices of CSA perpetrators, but also self-produced and solicited CP. Additionally, they suggested that the content they extract from the devices of juveniles also varies from adults, primarily in the amount of self-produced CP.

The sampled LEOs identified two primary differences between adult and juvenile offenders of CSA. First, the participants emphasized the frequency with which they see juveniles

distributing CP. Juveniles are exposed to adult sexual behaviors in pornography before they reach the level of sexual maturity needed to differentiate between safe and risky sexual behaviors. This finding suggests that juveniles are sexually naïve to their sexual behaviors. More specifically, they are sexually naïve to the risks and consequences of either self-producing or distributing CP. Second, three participants with extensive experience in digital forensics conveyed their concern over the pornography they found on the phones of juvenile CSA perpetrators. Juvenile perpetrators tended to have significantly more self-produced CP than adult perpetrators, and the sheer amount of pornography was greater on the devices of juveniles. Children are exposed to pornography at a young age and are naïve to the potential consequences of producing CP. This combination has normalized the self-production and distribution of CP by and among juveniles.

Law Enforcement in the Thick of CSA

Aside from the findings of LEOs within the sample, it is apparent that their role in investigating CSA takes an emotional toll on them. All hierarchical levels of LE may be exposed to traumatic events, distressed individuals, high workloads, and organizational pressures (Turgoose et al., 2022). Combining high-stress levels without sufficient coping mechanisms can lead to burnout (Turgoose et al., 2022). There are several available psychological studies surrounding burnout among LEOs. Police officers are at high risk of burnout due to the potentially dangerous nature of their role (Faulkner et al., 2020). Mental health and the impact of the participants' work came across during the interviews in many ways. Although all participants suggested that there are struggles in investigating CSA and other sex crimes, only a few discussed the extent of their struggles. When talking about self-care and mental health in this line of work, James Banks expressed why he believes LEOs are not very open with their struggles. "Well, let's face it, there's still, there's still, unfortunately, a stigma with mental health. And in

law enforcement [it's] because we're not supposed to have feelings or let stuff bother us" (James Banks). When asked about self-care and mental health when investigating CSA, most participants gave short and vague answers. It often took several follow-up questions before an answer was provided. Over 90% of the sample revealed they had not sought professional help outside of what their employers may have mandated. Participants have not sought professional help despite the acknowledged trauma of being exposed to CP and CSA, which Justin Trevino expressed was the most challenging part of the job, "So, I also do like the ICAC cases, the child porn cases, and those can kind of be some of the worst parts [of the job] to have to open up those files and see those [images and videos]" (Justin Trevino). Later in the interview, Justin Trevino referred to his work as "dirty." Research surrounding mental pollution and PTSD symptoms involving victims of sexual assault indicate that victims express feeling unclean or dirty after they have been assaulted (Olatunji et al., 2008). This parallel is significant given the connection between police, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue, which results from exposure to and taking on the suffering of others who have experienced extreme trauma (Russo et al., 2020). Several participants, like Eric Copeland below, had trouble describing the impact that viewing CP has had on them and frequently resorted to explaining that if you haven't been exposed to CP, you cannot understand what it is like.

> I had no idea about the, just the extremely depraved depths that child pornography has gone into and, even back then, had gone into the actual level of abuse. I mean, if you haven't been exposed to it, it's really hard to describe and have a somewhat understanding of what it is. We've had judges, attorneys, defense attorneys, and even spouses of offenders that are like, 'they're just pictures. What's the big deal?' It's a crime scene photo of a child that was raped. You know, and a lot of people think, oh, child porn is a 16-year-old girl exposing her breasts. That's not what it typically is. It's violent assaults, you know, on children. So yeah, seeing the depths of the [assault] and even the justification that a lot of offenders try to convince themselves and others of what they're doing and how it's okay. It's horrible. And you see that now some groups in society are trying to soften the terms for child sex offenders by calling them 'minor-attracted persons.' That's just

trying to take the edge off it a little bit and help legitimize it or reduce the stigma. So those are the things that until you're in [CSA investigations], you don't really know because you haven't seen [CP] or been exposed to [CP] (Eric Copeland).

Participants emphasized that they would never be desensitized to CP. Even after years of experience and countless exposures to CP, its impact does not lessen on LEOs from the study. It was emphasized throughout the interviews that there is no way to fully comprehend what CP is and what it entails unless you have been exposed to it yourself. Seeing the sexual abuse of a child is something they will be engrained in their minds forever, and among only a small portion of the struggles they face in this line of work. Participants were often motivated for the same reason that the job was challenging for them. There is frequently a contradiction among participants with children, as their children are their motivations for continuing to investigate CSA. However, working CSA was even more challenging for them mentally because, at times, it is hard to differentiate between their children and the victims they encounter. Eric Copeland's kids are one of his motivations to continue this work despite a 16-year career.

My kids are my motivation. If I can do something to intervene and either prevent the offender from crossing that line to contact abuse, or [prevent] it from occurring again. You know, I would hope that there's someone out there willing to do the job if one of my kids was in that situation. But, I mean, there's there's [cases with] videos of kids being abused that I've had to work on that look like my own kids. That was hard. And I had to tell my Sergeant that day, 'I need to take the rest of the day or two off. I just need a break to get away from this' (Eric Copeland).

Eric Copeland poses this juxtaposition above. On the one hand, he is highly motivated to investigate CSA because he hopes someone would do the same for his children. On the other hand, Eric Copeland experiences the repeated trauma of being exposed to material that documents the sexual abuse of a child while also being a father. Chris Tyler recounted conversations with his mentor surrounding their jobs and how it has been hard to separate his children from those he has seen sexually victimized during his career.

It can be rough. You know, one of my former partners and mentor, before he left, he put it well and said SVU is probably the most needed department or unit and most underappreciated unit in the department, [and] I think he's right there. There's a lot of stuff that you deal with. So, self-care is very important; I think it is also very challenging if you, like me, I have two kids. I have a seven-year-old boy and a two-year-old girl. And it's hard not to project onto them. It's really hard not to apply them in your cases or take it home with you. And then, to this day, there are still cases that stand out that I think about quite frequently if not every day (Chris Tyler).

Chris Tyler no longer investigates CSA and explained the impact that cases involving children had on him and his mental health, as well as what drove him to leave SVU.

And I think one of the reasons I promoted out was I wanted to advance my career, but I was also burnt out. I just had my second daughter. Or, I just had my second child, my daughter, and then it didn't help that right after coming back from baby leave, you know, I had a dead baby [case]. I had a shaken baby and [another] almost dead baby; they were all girls all around [my daughter's] age (Chris Tyler).

James Banks also talked about how working in CSA has impacted his family.

I've come home before and been short towards my wife and short with my kids because I'm stressed out; I'm tired because I'm on call 24/7, 365 days a year I'm on call. There's been times when I've been up for 72 hours and not slept, not showered, eaten maybe a fast-food, nasty hamburger. And you know, you come home, and you might get a little short, or usually, it's the days after that where you've come home, you're worn out, and the kids are wanting attention or needing this or needing that, and I have snapped [at them] a little bit (James Banks).

Having children while working CSA cases was why many participants questioned or chose to transition out of these investigations. When sampling participants for this study, I struggled to find individuals with the years of experience I sought. Based on the accounts from the sample, investigating CSA has a high turnover rate, given how challenging the work can be and the lack of available mental health support. According to participants, some departments mandate quarterly or yearly check-ins with a mental health professional. However, several factors outside work contribute to an officer seeking help independently. James Banks spoke about the

challenges of living in a small community while investigating CSA and how this has impacted

the chances of officers around him seeking professional help.

> If you're gonna go [get help], no one's going to want to go within an hour of here because someone's gonna know you. Yeah, mostly in my position because I'm in the media. You know, I've worked cases all over the Midwest. I wouldn't want to go anywhere within at least an hour to see someone if I chose to do that (James Banks).

Although most participants didn't appear interested in seeking mental health help, in some

instances, such as James Banks, mental health assistance is not easily accessible because these

officers do not feel comfortable speaking with someone in their community. Often, especially

with higher profile cases, officers may be in the media, whether in local news stations or

newspapers. In an already small community, officers feel unsafe confiding in mental health

professionals regarding their struggles when working on extremely traumatic cases. Given that

participants were not interested in seeking professional help, coping mechanisms are something

they actively must work on independently. James Banks disclosed reaching a low point early in

his career before he was able to find healthier coping mechanisms.

> I started getting in a bad spot. I got in a bad spot. I've had so many sex abuse cases, and my my supervisors don't even know this. No, no one really knows this except one of my other close friends here at the police department. I started hating life. I started thinking there's no hope for society; I started really having a negative view on life. I still have a pretty negative view on society just because our jobs; we see, we see it all—the worst of the worst. I had a bad incident one time involving some children that died, and I went on a binger, and I started to drink. And it wasn't until they did a debriefing with some medical professionals and they're like, 'the worst thing to do is drink,' and I'm like, 'listen, I've been drinking every day since that happened,' and they were like 'knock it off.' It was when I went to my liquor cabinet and [realized], holy shit, I really drank a lot in that four- or five-day period. I went away; I went away from that. Now, if I have something like that, that's a very traumatic experience; the last thing I do I don't go home and drink (James Banks).

The most common coping mechanism participants discussed was compartmentalization and not

bringing their work home. Vincent Myers was among the participants who disclosed that he

relied on compartmentalization to cope with the things he has been exposed to at work. "I

probably compartmentalize. I think for the most part it's probably very much

compartmentalization" (Vincent Myers). Luke Carlson was also among the participants that used

compartmentalization to cope with the trauma of his job.

> My, my way of dealing with these [cases] is keeping them out of my brain. I just
> have a way of closing things off, and I just kind of shut it off when I'm not
> working. I mean, I'm never not working [because] I'm on call 24/7, but I do my
> best to try to just not think about these things and just shut these out of my head.
> And it seems like it works for me. I guess I'm able to do that, and I don't really
> have to verbalize it or talk about it with anybody outside of work. I mean, I'm
> able to cope with it and just kind of shut my brain off (Luke Carlson).

Justin Trevino also prefers to compartmentalize by not bringing his work home.

> I try to leave it here when I leave work. Like, all together. There's obviously some
> cases where you might be hung up. But for the most part, like when I leave here,
> like I'm done, it stays here, and I go home. I don't talk about it. And just, work is
> work, and outside of work is outside of work (Justin Trevino).

Most participants preferred to separate their work and personal lives, but they expressed how

doing so can be challenging if they came from a smaller community. James Banks lives and

works in his community and discusses the challenges of having young children while also

investigating CSA in his area.

> We come from a community where it's not unusual to see my victims throughout.
> You know, I have children in the school district, so I go to plays, I go to sporting
> events, activities, and I run into a lot of the victims. You know, and then and then,
> like if they're in one of my kids' classes and the kid's like, 'Oh, I know your dad,'
> or they come up and talk to me, then my kids are like, 'well how do you know
> them?' And it's like, well, you know, it just, I worked a case involving them, you
> know? But it's just so hard living in a small community. Because, like I said, I see
> these kids (James Banks).

LEOs investigating CSA in small communities have a higher chance of encountering victims

daily. This makes it challenging for officers to separate their personal and professional lives.

Officers working and living in small communities attempt to separate their personal and

professional lives. However, they have more difficulty doing so than officers working in higher-population areas.

One of the reasons that participants sought to separate their personal and professional lives and preferred compartmentalization over other coping mechanisms was to avoid burdening their families with the trauma of their work. Josie Davis said, "I don't want to bring it home where I'm with family. You don't want to bring that environment to your home" (Josie Davis). Hudson Campbell said, "I don't want to burden my family with, with some of the stuff that we deal with" (Hudson Campbell). Participants try to limit their families' exposure to their work and often rely on their colleagues to be their support network. All participants relayed that their coworkers and work environment heavily contribute to their ability to continue working. Participants may not disclose the details of their day-to-day work to their families, but they seek support from their fellow officers.

> For me, what was really helpful was the unit. We had a good unit together. We relied on each other, we talked to each other, and we decompressed with each other. So, I think having a good support system that you feel safe with and that you can talk with about this stuff is extremely important (Chris Tyler).

Although LEOs investigating CSA may not be motivated to seek professional help or openly discuss their work with their families, having a support network allows them to decompress. A supportive work environment benefits LE at all hierarchical levels (Rubim et al., 2020). Being surrounded by people who understand what they are being exposed to makes it easier for participants to divulge their thoughts and emotions surrounding their CSA investigations because those colleagues also have the exposure.

Summary

The research examined the perceptions of law enforcement officers (LEOs) on pornography as a risk factor for child sexual abuse (CSA) and, more specifically, as a risk factor

for peer-on-peer CSA. Through qualitative interviews with 11 LEOs with experience investigating CSA, participants identified that they do view pornography to be a risk factor for peer-on-peer-CSA. I also sought to understand how LEOs see pornography contribute as a risk factor for CSA.

Participants provided context for understanding pornography and CSA, framing their perceptions of pornography and risk. The 11 sample LEOs emphasized the large number of cases they are working at any given time, despite living in lower population areas. This aligns with the data available on CSA, suggesting that children experience sexual abuse at higher rates than adults (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021). Participants frame their perceptions by comparing their exposure to pornography to that of children now, highlighting the early and long-term exposure that children experience today, specifically in an environment where children have access to immeasurable amounts of pornography at any given time. (Holoyda et al., 2018). LEOs within the sample frequently encounter mainstream pornography in their investigations and use this information to guide their process.

When asked about peer-on-peer CSA, participants noted that they see CSA perpetrated by juveniles more frequently and believe juveniles learn their sexual behaviors through pornography. Although data is limited on peer-on-peer CSA, there are indications that violence perpetrated by other children is rising (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021). Although all the participants view pornography as a risk factor for CSA, several participants understood pornography as a collection of factors that increase risk. Participants' understanding of risk aligns with public health use, where risk does not determine a causal relationship but indicates the possibility for negative consequences if the determined factors are present (NIH, 2016).

Several themes emerged relating to how the sampled LEOs perceive pornography to be a risk factor for CSA. The first way that participants saw pornography as a risk factor for CSA was through the rise of technological devices and hyper-access to technology and the internet. Children have unsupervised access to technological devices from a young age (Holoyda et al., 2018). Participants discuss how access to technology from a young age, combined with a lack of parental supervision, creates an environment prime for exposure to pornography and victimization of CSA. Not only did participants see technology as a method of exposure, but they also identified applications such as Snapchat. Snapchat is marketed towards juveniles, and only stores data for 24 hours, creating the perfect platform for children to be victimized by sexual perpetrators. This was a unique perspective of LE and was not available within academic literature. It emphasizes the need for parental supervision but also the accountability of social media sites to protect children from potential victimization (Caruso-Moro, 2021; Lamb & Koven, 2019).

The second theme that emerged was pornography as the gateway to CSA. Mainstream pornography that is widely accessible depicts risky sexual behaviors such as strangulation and unclear depictions of consent (Herbenick et al., 2021; Willis et al., 2020). Participants perceive that pornography is a child's introduction to sex, and the content they are being exposed to consists of potentially harmful behavior. Given that children are frequently exposed to pornography before they have had sexual education, pornography is a primary source of sexual education (Alexy et al., 2009; Lamb & Koven, 2019; Sun et al., 2016). The sampled LEOs expressed their concern about children accessing pornography without sexual education. Participants have worked on investigations where juvenile perpetrators have mimicked behavior typical in mainstream pornography. This closely aligns with sexual script theory, where an

individual learns sexual norms by viewing pornography (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; 1986; Wright, 2020). Participants emphasized this point when discussing categories of pornography, such as barely legal and family play. The sampled LEOs typically see a familial relationship between victims and perpetrators of CSA, so acknowledging that family dynamics in pornography are common is troubling for them. Ultimately, sampled LEOs do not believe that pornography models healthy sexual relationships and behaviors and have experienced firsthand the impact of early and long-term exposure to pornography marketed toward heterosexual adult men. Specifically, participants noted more violence in peer-on-peer CSA cases than in adult-on-child CSA.

Although pornography addiction is not recognized in the DSM-5, participants frequently compared habitual pornography use to addiction. In their roles, participants have had frequent encounters with individuals struggling with addiction. Despite the outside discourse surrounding pornography and addiction, participants draw apparent connections. Not everyone who consumes pornography will become addicted, but there is no way to tell if an individual will become addicted unless they have the initial exposure (Dines, 2010; Love et al., 2015; Wetterneck et al., 2012). Participants provided firsthand experience of the progression of pornography to the perpetration of CSA, comparing it to alcoholism, illicit drug use, and smoking. Once exposed, an individual is constantly seeking their best high or sexual gratification, which pushes them to try a different drug or view a more extreme form of pornography as they build a tolerance to what they are currently using. Participants signaled a lack of sexual satisfaction to contribute to an individual seeking out child pornography (CP). Even once exposed to CP, participants discussed perpetrators who continued to seek sexual gratification by physically perpetrating against a child.

LEOs within the sample also identified several key differences between adult and juvenile perpetrators of CSA. First, participants emphasized the prevalence of solicitation, production, and distribution of CP among juveniles. Distribution of CP without 'consent' has become almost as common as the self-production of CP (Englander & McCoy, 2017; Lee & Crofts, 2015). Participants linked this behavior to sexual naivety, as they did not see adult perpetrators distributing CP as publicly as juveniles. This finding suggests that children do not understand the risk of the behavior because they have been exposed to pornography well before they are mature enough to handle it. Second, participants identified a gap in academic research on content on juvenile CSA perpetrators' technological devices. Juvenile perpetrators had significantly more self-produced CP, as well as more pornography in general, on their devices compared to adult perpetrators. This demonstrates the normalization of self-production and distribution of CP due to early and long-term pornography exposure.

Although outside the scope of the research question, LEOs were asked how they manage self-care in their work. LEOs are at high risk of burnout due to traumatic events, distressed individuals, high workloads, and organizational pressures (Turgoose et al., 2022). LEOs within the sample discussed vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue when investigating CSA. LEOs within the sample struggled to describe their work, explaining that people will never understand unless they have experienced it. Participants' framing of the trauma they experienced at work mirrored outlooks common among victim's sexual abuse, describing their work as "dirty" (Justin Trevino; Olatunji et al., 2008). Participants discussed the juxtaposition of being motivated by their children while also struggling to remove them from the violence in CSA investigations. The sampled LEOs relied on compartmentalization to cope with the trauma of their jobs. Although effective for some, participants in small communities struggle to separate their personal and

professional lives because they frequently encounter victims daily. Small communities also contributed to participants' willingness to seek professional help. Most participants did not express interest in speaking with a mental health professional about their work outside of what is mandated by their department. A supportive work environment appeared to indicate a participant's ability to continue working CSA because they feel safe decompressing with individuals who have also been exposed to the trauma of working CSA cases.

Implications

Based on the reviewed literature and findings of this study, the main policy implication that I identified was the failure of the justice system and its governing bodies to take pornography seriously as a risk factor for peer-on-peer CSA. There were three primary ways that this was identified, first through lack of proper terminology in U.S. statutes, second through the lack of preventative measures, and third through the lack of resources for LE agencies. Participants discussed their preference for the phrase CSAM/CSEM, or child sexual abuse material/child sexual exploitation material, because they felt as though the phrase CP lessens the impact of the term. However, CP is the terminology used in U.S. statutes, so in official settings, it is the terminology to be used. Participants also acknowledged differences in their exposure to pornography versus that of children today, and frequently focused on the importance of preventative measures such as internet safety and sexual education to protect children from victimization. This point not only nods to the lack of preventative measures, but also poses another potential point, the generational differences between investigators, legislators, and juveniles committing sexual offenses. This emphasizes the importance of updating our understanding of pornography as a risk factor for CSA, because we are in an environment of older generations commenting on the experiences of younger generations. Finally, departments

may be overwhelmed by the number of cases incoming, and not have enough resources to manage them equally. Participants expressed that they do not have enough detectives, or other resources to properly manage the number of cases they receive. The lack of appropriate terminology, underdeveloped preventative measures, and failures of resource allocation signify the lack of attention that the justice system, government, and society pay to pornography as a risk factor for CSA, and more specifically, peer-on-peer CSA. Many of the LEOs ended the interview by informing me that they plan to incorporate pornography use-related questions in their discussions with alleged perpetrators of CSA, which I found to be a very empowering moment in this study, because it demonstrated the positive impact that this research could have on addressing weak points of our justice system in terms of addressing pornography as a serious risk factor.

Limitations

This study is limited in its ability to generalize the opinions of LE regarding pornography as a risk factor for peer-on-peer sexual abuse. The sample consisted of 11 LEOs recruited from four states in the United States. My population is predominantly Caucasian males between the ages of 28-47, which does not allow for national generalizability. Participants did not note race as a factor of perpetration or victimization but given the available information surrounding racial minority groups being disproportionately incarcerated and represented in sex offender registries, future research is needed. Given the limited research on the perceptions of LE, this study could provide a foundation for future research on the topic with a larger, more comprehensive sample of LEOs. Another limitation related to sampling was the years of experience. Although all officers have extensive experience investigating CSA, some of this experience occurred in a patrol capacity compared to a detective role. Based on my sample, the turnover rate of

individuals investigating CSA posed challenges when selecting participants, as many do not investigate CSA for extended periods. I used a semi-structured interview protocol to guide our conversation lightly. However, I provided follow-up questions in several interviews that did not appear in every interview. These follow-up questions revealed interesting findings that require further research and more intentional questioning to understand more fully.

Conclusions

Some strengths of this study were the large age range and years of experience of my participants. My sample consisted of primarily of men between the ages of 28-47 with careers ranging from 6-20 years. Before starting this study, I had several years of experience working with LE and investigating CSA. This provided me with insider knowledge that allowed me to communicate with my participants from a place of understanding rather than as a fully separated researcher. Despite this understanding, I am a 22-year-old female graduate student in Southwest Virginia. Before completing my interviews, I was concerned that my position and identity would hinder my participant's responses, given that I am the same gender and close in age to many of the victims they encounter. However, this did not appear to be the case, as participants were motivated to discuss their perceptions of pornography as a risk factor for CSA based on their investigative experience, perhaps due to my understanding and experience with investigating alleged CSA. Participants hadn't been given a platform outside their colleagues to discuss their work. This study demonstrates a need for a more extensive and generalizable sampling of LEOs investigating CSA better to understand their perceptions of pornography as a risk factor.

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Appendix A. Recruitment Materials
A1. Recruitment Email

INVITATION: Study on Perceptions of Law Enforcement on Sexualized Media and Child Sexual Abuse

Gianna Amabile <gianna18@vt.edu>

Dear ▮▮▮▮

We are currently conducting a study exploring the perspectives of law enforcement officers regarding what role, if any, pornography plays in the abuse of children, and would like you to participate. Your name was provided to us by ▮▮▮▮ who felt your expertise would be beneficial to the study.

Due to ease of accessibility, pornography is now a normative experience beginning in early adolescence. However, the research literature is woefully sparse regarding pornography use and child sexual abuse which severely hampers efforts to understand whether and how pornography use may be associated with the sexual abuse of children. We aim to begin to fill this gap in the literature.

Participation in this study titled *Perceptions of Law Enforcement Officers on Pornography as a Risk Factor for Peer-on-Peer Child Sexual Abuse* involves:
- An individual interview that is estimated to take between 1-2 hours.

The interview will be conducted by Gianna Amabile, a graduate student in Sociology in the fall of 2022. The purpose of this study is to fulfill the requirement for a master's degree in Sociology at Virginia Tech. Participation in the study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please fill out this brief survey on QuestionPro to determine your eligibility for participation.

An information sheet is attached to the body of this email. For more information about this study, please contact the co-investigator, Gianna Amabile, at gianna18@vt.edu. The IRB # for this study is 22-721.

Thank you for your interest in this study. After you fill out the study screener, Gianna Amabile will be contacting you regarding your eligibility to participate in this study.

Best,

Jennifer A. Johnson, PI

Gianna S. Amabile, Co-PI

VT

VIRGINIA TECH.

Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jennifer A. Johnson
IRB# and Title of Study: Perceptions of Law Enforcement Officers on Pornography as a Risk Factor for Peer-on-Peer Child Sexual Abuse; IRB #22-721

You are invited to participate in a research study. This form includes information about the study and contact information if you have any questions.

➤ WHAT SHOULD I KNOW?

If you decide to participate in this study, you will complete an individual interview.

As part of the study, you will be interviewed Gianna Amabile, a graduate student in Sociology, regarding your professional experiences as a law enforcement officer. You will be asked questions about your experiences in this profession, about changes you have seen over the years in the abuse of children, and your impressions of what role, if any, pornography may play in the sexual abuse of children. You will also be asked to provide your opinions about what researchers need to learn about this topic and what efforts should be prioritized to help prevent child abuse. This interview process is expected to take approximately 1-2 hours.

The interviews will take place via Zoom and will be video recorded for transcription purposes.

We do not anticipate any risks from completing this study.

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

A3. Invitation to Schedule Interview

INVITATION: Schedule Interview - Law Enforcement Study `External` ✕ 🖨 ⧉

Gianna Amabile <gianna18@vt.edu>   ████████████ ☆ ↩ ⋮

Dear █████████████████

Thank you for taking the time to complete the study screener. The research team has determined that you meet the qualifications to take part in this study. As noted previously, the interview process is expected to take between 1-2 hours. We would also like to note your recognition of your desire to not be video recorded. Just to confirm - would you be willing to be audio recorded? This is solely for the purposes of transcription and coding and is only accessible to the research team. Please let us know so we can discuss options amongst the team to best fit both the study needs and your comfort/privacy.

About the interviewer: Gianna Amabile is a second-year graduate student at Virginia Tech, seeking to fulfill the requirements for a Master's degree in Sociology. She has assisted with another study on pornography and child sexual abuse. Gianna has experience working with law enforcement and is seeking to fill the gap in literature from the perspective of individuals working on investigations of crimes against children.

Gianna Amabile's availability can be found here.
Gianna's availability is relatively open; she is available to meet during or outside of typical working hours.

These interviews will take place via a Zoom link which will be provided once the interview has been scheduled. For any questions, comments, or concerns regarding scheduling, please contact the co-PI and interviewer, Gianna Amabile at gianna18@vt.edu.

Thank you again for your time and we look forward to hearing from you.

Warmly,
Jennifer A. Johnson, PI
Gianna S. Amabile, co-PI

Appendix B. Eligibility Survey

Thank you for your interest in this study. Please answer the following questions to determine your eligibility for this study. This screener takes approximately 5 minutes to complete. If you are eligible for the full study, you will be contacted by a researcher and asked to participate in the study. Participation involves an individual interview that will take approximately 1 hour to complete. The researchers will review with you the results of their analyses and ask for your feedback. You will also have an opportunity to ask questions and provide more information if you'd like. Your name and email will be requested for eligibility purposes but will not be included in the final data set.

1. What is your name?
2. What is your email address?
3. What gender do you consider yourself?
4. What race do you consider yourself?
5. What is your age?
6. What is your highest level of education?
7. In what state are you located?
8. What is your primary profession (e.g., nursing, law enforcement officer, mental health provider)?
9. What is your current occupation (e.g., Detective, Task Force Officer, etc.)?
10. How long have you been in your current job?
11. Do you work directly with children who have been (allegedly) sexually abused? (That is, does your job involve direct contact with youth sexual abuse victims)?
    a) Yes
    b) No
    c) Other
12. How long have you been working directly with youth who have been sexually abused?
13. In what capacity have you worked directly with youth who have been sexually abused?
14. Are you able to share with the researchers your opinion, based on your professional experiences and observations, about the role of pornography in the abuse of children?
    a) Yes
    b) No
    c) Not sure
    d) Other
15. The interview session will be recorded. Would you prefer that your camera be off during the recording?
    a) Yes
    b) No
16. Is there anything you will need us to do for hearing, visual, etc. accommodations for an interview on Zoom?
    a) No
    b) Yes
17. If yes, what accommodations are needed?

By submitting these answers, I am indicating an interest in being considered for study participation and agree to have a researcher contact me regarding my eligibility status.
    o I understand.

Appendix C. Interview Protocol

Steps	Detail of pre-interview checklist
A. Background and Warm-up	A1. What is your name? A2. Tell me about your job. How long you have been in the current job? A3. How did you get started with your work with sexually exploited children? A4. Do you work with the victims or perpetrators or both? A5. What other jobs have you had prior to your current job that were related to the sexual exploitation of children? A6. Overall, how long have you been at jobs that deal with sexual exploitation of children? A7. In general, what would you say is the most rewarding part of your work, and the most difficult?

B. Patterns of child sexual abuse	B1. In your current job, in an average week, how many cases do you handle that are related to sexual exploitation of children? (Both your personal workload and the program/division as a whole)
	
	 B2. Have you noticed any patterns regarding the identities of the child survivors in terms of gender, age, class, race, etc.?
	
	 B3. Have you noticed any patterns in the cases/experiences of the children with whom you've worked?
	
	 • What kinds of abuse and/or exploitation have you come across?
	
	 • Which types are most frequent in your experience? Least frequent? (% of types, even rough guesses)
	
	 • Have you noticed any patterns regarding the identities of the perpetrators?
	   • Other children? Age range?
	   • Family members?
	   • Other adults they know? Strangers?
	
	 • Before this job, what patterns did you expect to see?
	   • Now that you are in this role, do the patterns differ from your expectations?
	
	 B4. Have you observed any trends or changes in these patterns in recent years? (For example, if there is any change in the range of the victims' and perpetrators' ages, types of abuse perpetrated or the context of the abuse, use of technology/social media, etc.)
	
	 • If not addressed: ask specifically if interviewee has noticed an increasing, use of technology and social media as a component of the abuse in any way?

C. Pornography connection to child abuse	C1. In your work, does pornography come up in the accounts of the victims' (or perpetrators') experiences? If so, how often? In what way(s)?
	
	 C2. Do you think there is any connection between pornography and child abuse?
	
	 • In what way(s)?
	 • possible prompts or examples, if needed:
	   • making pornography (images or videos) of the abuse,
	   • distributing/sharing images/videos of the victims,
	   • asking the victims to send naked photos or "nudes",

	- using pornography to "groom" or desensitize victims, - using pornography to pressure the victims for certain sex acts, - using the language or phrases typical of pornography, - perpetrator behavior mimicking pornography, etc. - presence of pornography on devices of the victim or perpetrator. C3. Have you seen any trends or changes in abuse that you feel are related to pornography? For example, are there certain acts or examples of abuse have become more frequent? (Choking, gagging, anal sex, gang rape?) C4. Have you noticed any changes over the years in the physical presentation of the abuse (for example, bruising on the neck/signs of strangulation, bruising more generally, trauma to particular body parts, etc.)? - If yes, and not already addressed: how do you make sense of that? C5. What actions need to be taken to best address this issue? Possible prompt, if needed – - for example, can you think of any possible changes or interventions that might be needed in the context of intake and screening in your work, or something much broader?
D. Self-care	D1. How do you manage self-care in the context of the work that you are doing? (Follow up, depending on answer: Have you ever felt the need to seek out support for yourself in relation to your work?)
E. Personal views on pornography	E1. In a follow-up survey, we are going to ask you to complete a brief questionnaire about your attitudes towards pornography. The goal of this survey is to help us describe our key informants in a succinct way in future publications or reports (No names will be shared). You are free to skip any questions in the survey or decline to participate in the follow up survey all together. But before we wrap up and before you answer those questions in the survey, is there anything you would like to share with us about your views on pornography? - Has your work with children informed or changed your views about pornography in any way? How so? - If your feelings have shifted, is that related to anything you've seen in the context of your work? How so?
F. Wrap up	F1. Finally, is there anything else you would like us to know? Anything relevant we did not ask about? F2. Can you think of anyone else with whom we should speak that can help us with our questions? F3. Remind the interviewees the info that you would like them to provide. Remind them that the link to the post-interview survey is in the chat and will also be emailed to them. Remind them that this is one way in which they may inform the team of other potential participants. Thank you so much for your participation.
G. Ending the Interview	G1. Give farewells and allow the interviewee to leave the meeting. G2. After interviewee has left, at the bottom of the Zoom call, click to "End the meeting".