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“Kind regards”: an examination of one buyer’s attempt to purchase a trafficked child for sex

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ABSTRACT

A call to awareness regarding sex trafficking has increased research, bolstered social justice efforts, improved education, and influenced federal laws that protect victims and prosecute traffickers. Federal laws on sex trafficking are now being used through undercover sting operations via the Internet to arrest and prosecute buyers who attempt to engage in commercial sex with minors. A narrative analysis was completed to create an in-depth case study outlining the correspondences between a buyer and an undercover agent advertising trafficked children for sex. Readers are afforded a rare opportunity to examine actual emails related to the purchase of a child for sexual exploitation. The emails were used against the buyer as evidence within the court of law. The authors assert that the following case study will contribute to the body of literature on the victim selection processes and cognitive distortions employed by buyers of children for sex.

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Human trafficking, or the exploitation of persons characterised by force, fraud, or coercion (U.S. Department of State, 2000), is a transnational crime that affects every region of the world (Chung, 2009). Human trafficking encompasses a wide range of forced labour including child soldiers, labour trafficking, organ trafficking, agricultural work, and sex trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2013). According to the U.S. Department of State (2015), sex trafficking refers to commercial sex acts induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform the sex act has not attained 18 years of age.

The International Labour Organization (2012) estimates that up to 21 million people are trafficked globally, 4.5 million of whom are victims of forced sexual exploitation. According to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center website, there were 12,490 new reports of domestic human sex trafficking cases in the United States in 2015. Despite the aforementioned statistics, the true number of trafficked persons remains unclear and few studies are based on extensive, empirical research (Fedina, 2015; Laczko & Gramegna, 2003). Additionally, flawed prevalence data sources are continually cited which may lead policy-makers and government advocates to misallocate anti-trafficking resources (Fedina, 2015). In an attempt to address the needs of domestic and internationally trafficked survivors, the Trafficking Victim Protection Act (TVPA) was passed by congress in 2000. This act defines human trafficking as the recruitment, harbouring, transporting, supplying, or obtaining a person for labour or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of involuntary servitude or slavery. Understanding the state and federal laws pertinent to human sex trafficking is critical to decrease the overall prevalence of the crime while providing victim support services (Jordan, Patel, & Rapp, 2013).

Historically, the justice system has vacillated in their treatment of prostituted juveniles because many states previously lacked the legislative framework to prosecute buyers of commercial sex with minors (Smith & Vardaman, 2010–2011). In order to extend federal legislation to all offenders associated with the commercial sexual exploitation of children, The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (2015) was passed by congress, which confirmed the application of the federal sex trafficking law 18 U.S. Code §1591 (*Sex trafficking of children or by force, fraud, or coercion*, 2015) to include the conduct of buyers. Under this federal law, buyers of children for commercial sex may be convicted as traffickers because of their participation in the prohibited conduct of “knowingly obtaining” a minor. The following case study examines one instance in which the federal sex trafficking law was used to prosecute a buyer.

Subgroups of child sex offenders

Although existing studies examined the victim preferences and demand factors of child molesters, child rapists, and other individuals who pursue illegal sex acts with children (Jung, Ennis, Stein, Choy, & Hook, 2013; McCarthy, 2010; Rebocho & Goncalves, 2012; Winder & Gough, 2010), little attention has been paid to the influences of demand and the victim selection processes associated with buyers of commercial sex with children (Hunt, 2013; McGloin, Sullivan, & Piquero, 2008). Kotrla (2010) asserted that if the demand for commercial sexual exploitation were eliminated, thousands of American children would not be trafficked. According to the Shapiro Group Study (2010), understanding the types of men who purchase minors for sexual exploitation is essential in order to prevent that demand.

Contrary to public opinion, the subgroup of child sex offenders who purchase commercial sex with minors are not typically paedophiles although they may have engaged in prostitution (Jordan et al., 2013). According to Hall (2011), buyers of sexually exploited children tend to be white males from varying socioeconomic strata originating from wealthy, industrialised nations. Preference data indicates that these individuals demand increasingly younger children believing that younger victims are healthier and more vulnerable (Smith & Vardaman, 2010–2011). Buyers of trafficked children can be categorised as *situational*, *preferential*, and *opportunistic* offenders (Smith & Vardaman, 2010–2011). Offenders who purchase commercial sex with minors solely due to availability and proximity are characterised as situational buyers. Those who exhibit a specific sexual preference for young children are considered preferential buyers, whereas opportunistic buyers are indiscriminate and not deterred by details such as age, gender, or sex (Smith & Vardaman, 2010–11).

Understanding the victim selection process exhibited by buyers of trafficked children may assist law enforcement officials to identify and prevent potential offenders from sexually exploiting children (DeGue & DiLillo, 2005). A comparative analysis conducted by Rebocho and Goncalves (2012) analysed the modus operandi, hunting behaviours, and geographic decision-making of 216 incarcerated rapists and child molesters, ultimately classifying offenders into three types: *manipulative*, *opportunistic*, and *coercive* (Rebocho & Goncalves, 2012). Child molesters are manipulative offenders (Rebocho & Goncalves, 2012). Manipulative offenders premeditate their crimes, are intentional in the victim selection process, and rarely use physical force or weapons (Rebocho & Goncalves, 2012). Rather than targeting and kidnapping strangers, manipulative offenders prefer victims encountered throughout their daily routine or pursue persons that enter the offender’s workplace or home (Rebocho & Goncalves, 2012). Opportunistic offenders do not premeditate their attacks, do not discriminate between known victims and strangers, and may resort to physical force (Rebocho & Goncalves, 2012). These offenders may also kidnap their victims (Rebocho & Goncalves, 2012). Finally, coercive offenders are individuals who do not premeditate their offenses, prefer to target strangers, and are likely to use both a weapon and physical force (Rebocho & Goncalves, 2012). These offenders tend to select victims within close proximity of their home or attack victims who present within their homes or workplace (Rebocho & Goncalves, 2012). Coercive

offenders typically stalk and follow their victims, may engage in verbal or physical force, and are likely to employ kidnapping as a means of control (Rebocho & Goncalves, 2012).

Studies examining the victim selection process of other subgroups of child sex offenders have explored victim preferences (Sim & Proeve, 2010), and the use of cognitive distortions (Conte, 1985; Pemberton & Wakeling, 2009; Winder & Gough, 2010) in child sex offenders. Sim and Proeve (2010) investigated the crossover and stability of victim type in 128 male child molesters and found relative stability within the preferred gender and relationship domain of their victims. According to Conte (1985), child sex offenders tend to employ cognitive distortions or flawed ways of thinking, to deny, minimise or rationalise the behaviour of engaging in sexual acts with children. Winder and Gough (2010) identified cognitive distortions in child sex offenders to include equating their victim's smiles as consent and preferring photographs of smiling children as a means to rationalise that no harm is being done. Child sex offenders abstract their thinking in order to self-distance or minimise their accountability (Winder & Gough, 2010).

In order to decrease the prevalence of child sex trafficking, further investigation on the underlying factors associated with demand and the victim selection process of individuals who purchase sex with sexually exploited children is necessary (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004; Chung, 2009; Hunt, 2013; Raphael & Myers-Powell, 2010). Conducting empirical research using actual instances of child sex trafficking is difficult because prisoners and children are considered vulnerable and protected populations (National Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). However, a wealth of information exists within publicly available, pre-existing court documents pertaining to the trials of individuals arrested and charged with domestic minor sex trafficking (Bach & Dohy, 2015). The following article presents an in-depth case study revealing the victim selection process of one individual, Paul (pseudonym), a buyer convicted of violating 18 U.S. Code §1591 (*Sex trafficking of children or by force, fraud, or coercion*, 2015) in a large Midwestern city in 2011.

Methodology

Researchers conducted a narrative analysis using existing correspondences from court documents pertaining to domestic minor sex trafficking within a midwestern city. Although the emails and testimonies examined within the analysis were obtained from publically available domains, the researchers attempted to protect the confidentiality of the defendant by using a pseudonym. Researchers completed a formal written request to the local clerk of courts to obtain narratives, names and court docket numbers of defendants charged with the *Sexual Exploitation of Children* (U.S.C. §18.2251) from 2010 to 2013. Once obtained, court transcripts were accessed and downloaded from Pacer.gov, the online repository for federal court electronic records. Case study subject Paul was selected for deeper examination due to the extensive documentation contained within his court file. Specifically, Paul's file included a detailed chain of emails between himself and a federal agent operating a domestic minor sex trafficking sting operation. A total of 27 emails were analysed with detailed correspondences beginning in June 2010 and continuing through March 2011. These correspondences were used as primary evidence to gain a conviction against the defendant. Of the 27 correspondences, 10 are presented that directly pertain to the process of buying a child for sexual exploitation. Seventeen correspondences were not included in the case study as they consisted of logistical information related to addresses, flight numbers, and personal contact information. The following correspondences are presented as were written by Paul and contain all original typographical, syntax, and grammatical errors.

Case study

At the time of his arrest, Paul was a 49-year-old Caucasian male employed as a medical doctor in Germany. He had been married twice, and fathered two sons from his first marriage. Paul enjoyed a close relationship with both his sons and they remained close following his divorce. Paul's

current wife had two of her own children aged 8 and 12. Paul was also the primary caretaker for his disabled brother who depended upon him for care and support.

According to court documents, Paul was a successful and well-liked high school student who attended medical school to follow in his father's footsteps, also a medical doctor. Upon completion of medical school, Paul enlisted in the German army where he served in Africa and operated within the field of tropical medicine. During his 27-year service with the German army, Paul held the rank of lieutenant colonel for nine years and was deployed on four active-duty military missions, including two tours in Afghanistan and two in Kosovo. After serving in Macedonia as the head of health services in 1999 for 40,000 refugees, he was honoured with the title, "Ambassador of Humanity" by his direct supervisor. After receiving an honourable discharge from military service, Paul returned to Germany where he began a successful private medical practice. He was promoted to clinic manager within the first six months of employment and was an esteemed medical doctor for 24 years. According to court documents, Paul was also a property owner with the equivalent of over one million US dollars in assets.

In June of 2010, Paul initiated contact with a website advertising international travel to a large Mid-western city to engage in sexually explicit conduct with children. This website was part of an undercover government sting operation to monitor and apprehend individuals interested in the commercial sexual exploitation of children. According to the special agent's court testimony, links and information advertising international travel for sex with children were placed months earlier in areas of the Internet frequented by child pornography viewers. The following section outlines the correspondences between case study defendant Paul and the undercover government agent, whom he believed to be a trafficker:

Paul: Hello, please send your offer and costs
Thanks

Several days after the initial contact, the special agent sent an electronic brochure to Paul and began to correspond with him to obtain evidence. According to the court testimony, the brochure included pictures of children and available packages for purchase. After several months of superficial and introductory correspondences, the defendant became more explicit regarding his sexual desires, expressing interest in photographic proof of the potential abuse victims.

Paul: Quite nice, but not very special ... Before planning I need to have more details concerning height, weight, development ... so I ask for informationed and new pics showing pure body before choosing, especially [names redacted] (age?), and what they are open to do and to be done with. Excuse me, face pics are not enough for proofing real options, for the trip would be quite long to your place and we don't know each other ...

Six days later, the special agent responded to Paul's inquiry for new pictures so that he could select a child. The special agent, acting in an undercover capacity, informed the defendant that trading such images could attract the attention of the police. At this time, the defendant asserted his confidence that such caution was being taken to avoid detection. With each correspondence, Paul became more detailed about his victim preferences and expectations for the encounter. The following email outlines Paul's specific requests regarding the child's age and body mass index. He also inquires about the possibility of purchasing other children, using a sedative, and filming the sexual encounter. Paul assures the children would not be visibly harmed and would not exhibit any marks or bruises after the encounter.

Paul: Thank you for the answer and for the description. I do understand that you are cautious; actually I am real and interested, but have to be sure of a few points. Probably You mixed it up with somebody else, but I did not receive "5 pics- not just face but the hole body". I received access to the web side [sic], showing 9 faces. It would be absolutely unsuspecting to send no-nude pics in underwear or even swimming suit to get an impression. Concerning stage of development [name redacted] would be good but obviously she is having overweight (BMI 24) which I don't like at all (it was important to ask?). I am planning to come in April between 16th and 20th, or perhaps already in March. Do you probably receive other ones till then? I

case of arrangement you would fetch me at a hotel near airport (probably "Best Western") and bring me back there the other day right? How can I be sure to return safely? And once more: Private vid/pic without handing over is possible I assume? Treatment without marks and bruises goes without saying. Smooth sedation can be brought if necessary, for I know how to do. Tell me which way you want me to transfer the deposit. Hoping to hear from you in order to start concrete arrangements.

In response to Paul's request for photographs containing the complete bodies of the potential available victims, the special agent sent two photographic files of children to the defendant and advised him on the procedure for reserving a child. The defendant discussed payment options delineating that half of the total cost would be paid up front, while the other half would be paid upon his safe return to the hotel. Seemingly more comfortable with discussing such scheduling items, Paul begins to end his emails with a signature, "kind regards".

Paul: it makes me a little bit worried that you mix me up with somebody else, and to consider safety is no proof of guarantee. Furthermore, the number of girls you can offer in a very short time has decreased from nine (websites 11.01.10) to three (11.01.18) to two (11.01.21), – how can I be sure to receive anything if I am going to arrange a trip in March? And the answer of private vid/pics without handing over is not answer yet. Anyway, both ones are not optional, but if at all it'll be [name redacted], hopefully beginning to start developing little t.s. and hairs until then ... if You have some more pics of her would be good. [name redacted] is not interesting for me. At now I plan to arrive at late evening of March 5th and leave again on March 8th. So I could be ready to be fetched in the morning of March 6th (which is Easter Sunday) and be brought back March 7th (this day would be the meeting I guess). What, if until then she isn't ready anymore? How many hours do I have and what location is it (hotel, house, bathroom ...)? Am I completely alone with her? Arrangement should be fixed soon, for the flight has to be booked, and is becoming more expensive every day. In case we can arrange it I will transfer deposit cash with risk of it getting lost, but keeping my privacy complete. Consider time of post transfer more than a week from my place. I suggest to pay the rest in two parts, first on arrival, last half on the spot when having been brought back safely to the hotel the other day
Kind regards.

Upon receipt of the special agent's email containing the photographs of new children, Paul completed his travel arrangements and selected the "8 hour package". In the following correspondence, Paul inquires about the 11-year-old girl's level of sexual development and willingness to perform specific sex acts. Additionally, Paul describes his desire to bring a gift for the girl and requests that she be photographed holding a sign with his name. Paul completes the email with another inquiry to film the event and again signs the correspondence, "kind regards".

Paul: Thank You for Your reply. So at least I am strongly interested in [name redacted], if she is the one described below (11 yo, 132 cm, 36 kg) and the girl on the pic. I would like to book her on March 7th, as I wrote, for the 8hour-package. I really want to come. Can You please tell me her stage of development (t...s, hair)? Will she do regular, anal (with condom), oral (without), soft bondage, been taken on vids/pics, toys playing, friendly smiling and not arguing or crying?? Which language does she speak, English? I take for granted that she is healthy and very clean, and has soft skin. (?) (If not please tell me to choose another). I'd like to bring her something ... is there something especially she likes as a small gift? Please let her carry a sign with "For Paul ..." and take a pic to send me to proof. 2 oder 3 further pics right now would be nice (as You wrote it to be possible), now, as I told You my choice. My question was whether I can take vid and pics as I wish and keep it for myself privately? ... It is the stage of arrangement ... and I'm ready for it.
Kind regards.

The special agent sent a photographic file corresponding to the purported child and responded to the defendant's questions. According to the special agent, the child's favourite colour was purple, she liked unicorns, and enjoyed painting and drawing. Additionally, the special agent informed Paul that the "company" scheduling and hosting the encounter planned to photograph and upload the digital images onto the Internet to disseminate for a much larger audience. The following email outlines Paul's concern about maintaining his confidentiality, describes his desire to bind the child's hands and feet, and induce a sedative. Again, Paul assures the child's safety and expresses his eagerness to meet her.

Paul: Thank you for the reply and the pic, which is very nice, and she seems to be e friendly little girl, whom I like to meet. No I understood: Private Video or photos are not possible, only such You will keep and upload, right? This is a pity but I can understand your point of view. If I gave you the video/pics of the experience, who is taking care of making it anonymus (face)? Do you provide camera to collect the data or should I bring one and memory card is handed over to you? Soft bondage means binding her or tying her hands/feet with very soft ropes (without hurting her or producing marks or bruises), cause I'd like to see and do her like this. If she should be scared I could bring some short acting slight sedative, which is doing no harm. Right now March 7 unfortunately from my side does not work any more (I thought you would not answer any more, but now I know You and Your offer is real), so have to postpone it for example 1 week, means meeting her an March 14. I'd like to transfer the deposit anyway right now to show You I am serious. Please tell me how and where to send. If March 14 is not open for [name redacted], I choose another day or even another girl actually I would not like to change the girl). Give my greetings to [name redacted] and tell her I will bring her something nice ... and am looking forward for the day with her.
Kind regards.

The next day, the special agent inquired about Paul's status as a medical professional due to his earlier comment about administering a sedative. Paul explained that he was a German medical doctor and that he intended to use Midazolam, a temporary and "sweet liquid" sedative. The special agent addressed the anonymity of recording the act, stating, "if you get caught, we get caught". The following set of correspondences includes the special agent's communication in [brackets] and Paul's responses outside and after the bracket.

Paul: [mr. Paul – we make sure to make the face anonymous because if you get caught we get caught and is much more worse for us so is in our best interest to make it that way. We suggest to customer to bring their own camera so they are comfortable with how to use it and you will give to us the card after.] Okay, then I bring my own camera and we do it like that.
[so you are a doctor that you know how to give the sedative? Which one is it do you use? And how do you use it?] Yes, I am. It will be Midazolam short acting (completely gone within 1–2 hour), and given as sweet liquid. Normally used for calming before operation. No problem at all. Don't worry a second.
[we can do for you 14 March.] It would be necessary to fix the day very soon because the flights are getting more expensive and tickets poorer
[as we tell to you before it will make difference how we plan and which address we give to you – you will send it from inside or outside usa? Passport is usa or euro?] I will send from outside USA, Passport ist Euro.
[and again, we must receive it within 1 week from time we will give it to you – this is for safety and their can be no exception with this.] I will try my best, probably it would be good to receive the address on Sunday night oder Monday morning in order not to have the weekend in between.
[we know you will be pleased with [name redacted]] hopefully, and if you have a few pics of her to be sent, would be nice
[and we look forward to business relation with you.] same if everything is working
kind regards"

The subsequent communication outlines the payment and logistics of the encounter. Paul planned to pay \$1043.00 USD for the "8 hour package", which included pickup and drop off to his hotel. There was however a bit of a mix-up as the special agent attempted to bill an additional \$100.00. Paul inquires about meals, drinks, and entertainment (i.e. television and music) for he and the child at the secondary location. Finally, Paul requests the child have access to a bathing suit, and requests that she be clean, healthy and in good spirits for their time together.

Paul: Thank You for Your work and plans. I just booked in [hotel name and location redacted], is already confirmed; as well Best Western is cancelled. So I will stay there from 12March till 15March. (Do they provide breakfast?) Thank you for fetching me at the airport. How do I recognize you? I will bring the receipt. There is a question concerning that: If I understood right, the deposit of 100USD is to be subtracted from the total amount. It then should be: $999,00 + 200,00 = 1199,00 - 100,00$ (Deposit)-56,00(1 night rate) = 1043,00USD, but you wrote 1143 USD to be paid at pickup. Is it my mistake? If not, please remember and better send a new receipt. For we have a long time together is there a chance to provide meals and drinks for her an me at the place You chose? Is there tv or music? Heating is okay I guess. Yes, I will bring everything needed. Please make sure that she is very clean (hair, teeth, body, nails, clean

underwear), well smelling, not tired or in bad mood, stays healthy, brings hair and teeth brush, if possible swimming suit. Okay we will be in contact within the time ahead. Looking forward to time at Your place.
Thanks
Kind regards.

The special agent sent another picture of the child, stating that the young girl was excited to meet him. In the following correspondence, Paul describes concern that he had not yet found a toy unicorn, her favourite animal, but that he managed to locate coloured pencils as he recalled the child enjoyed colouring and drawing. Paul describes his desire for the child to paint him a picture during their time together and discusses his preference that food be brought to avoid unnecessary interruptions:

Paul: Thank You for Your mail and the nice pic of [name redacted]. Tell her I'm as well looking forward to see her. Actually at now she still can tell certain wishes (up to a reasonable limit) what she would like as a present. I thought of bringing her something like soft toy (I was looking for a unicorn, what You told me she would like, but I sill did not find), but if she likes different I'm open for her ideas of course, for I want to see her smile. (But she should tell quickly for me time for buying is limited at now). Tell I am bringing coloured pencils, for she likes to paint and draw, and I like her to paint something for me during the time we have. Of course I do not want to spend the time by sitting in a restaurant for I want to be alone with her nearly all of the time. But I think she (and me) will be hungry at certain time and needed to have soft drinks or so. As I cannot go outside with her, perhaps it would be a good idea to buy take away on the way to the motel in the morning, so we stay in the room whole time. I was thinking about the question of sending a pic of me and I am hesitating for own safety reason. I will send You good description and will carry a pullover on the right arm, nobody else certainly will do; so recognizing will be very easy.
Thank You for today.
Kind regards

Before departing Germany, Paul sent one final message to the special agent ensuring that policies would be respected, the child would be treated well, and acknowledged that his own welfare depended on the compliance of previously identified guidelines. Additionally, Paul stated that he wanted the girl to "enjoy this and smile about it".

Paul: Thank for Your message.
I have the number and will not call if not necessary. You can tell [name redacted] I will bring her a nice present of even to ... taken from the list You gave me. I want her to enjoy this and smile about it. I just asked to make sure that she is not misunderstanding the reason of meeting. Of course Your policy is respected; she will be okay and save as well, don't worry, for I do know my safety is depending on this s well. I start tomorrow early in the morning, so If You have a further message, please write before today 11pm your time.
Thank You for Your work. Looking forward to see You.
Kind regards"

Immediately upon his arrival, Paul was welcomed by a member of the sting operation and arrested. According to the judge assigned to try Paul's case, the contents of his suitcase spoke to his intentions.

Judge: a mask for him, a blindfold for the girl, a variety of bondage implements, a variety of sexual implements, dildos of different sizes, different types of lube, gifts for the girl, bondage – bondage items, and a sedative, so that he could sedate the 11-year-old child when he engaged in bondage with her.

Paul pled guilty and was subsequently convicted of violating USC §18.1591, Attempted Sex Trafficking of Children, §18.2251 Attempted Exploitation of Children and, §18.1591 Travel with Intent to Engage in Illicit Sexual Conduct. During the sentencing phase of his trial, Paul explained that the incident was his first contact with the criminal justice system and provided an abundance of letters supporting his upstanding character including letters from his high school instructors, the German army, his college professors and his medical school. Paul's character support letters also included a correspondence from the king of Afghanistan, a patient of his during service in the German military.

Paul was sentenced to 211 months in prison (17.58 years), and 5 years of supervised release. He was also required to register as a sex offender and was ordered to pay a \$300.00 special assessment. Upon passing the verdict, the judge in the case addressed what appeared to be two different sides to one man.

Judge: "Dr. Paul has certainly a career of helping others it appears and he has a lot of letters he attached and a lot of people think very highly of him, but it's also pretty clear that he has a whole 'nother dark side that I would be willing to be that the people who wrote those letters didn't know that he wanted to tie up, bind – bound, drug, and have sex with an 11-year-old child while videotaping it".

Discussion

The present case study provides a rare glimpse into the correspondences exchanged between a buyer attempting to purchase a child for sex, and a perceived seller. The case study also illuminates the similarities between buyers of trafficked children with other subgroups of child sexual offenders. The following section provides a comparative analysis between the case of Paul and other subgroups of child sexual offenders. The cognitive distortions Paul may have used are also examined.

Critical analysis of Paul's correspondences appears to be consistent with previous research identifying the use of cognitive distortions in child sex offenders (Conte, 1985; Pemberton & Wakeling, 2009; Winder & Gough, 2010). Cognitive distortions, or flawed ways of thinking, allow sexual offenders to deny, minimise or rationalise the behaviour of engaging in sexual acts with children (Conte, 1985). As outlined throughout his correspondences, Paul's cognitive distortions supplement findings by Baumeister and Vohs (2004) that suggested coercive men rationalise the use of force to obtain sexual contact when feeling as though they are "owed" sex in return for their investment. Paul may have interpreted his gift giving behaviours as a form of coercive investment for which the child would need to repay in the form of sex. Furthermore, at the time of his arrest, Paul was in possession of four unicorn themed toys and one painting set. The extent to which Paul had acquired items specific to the believed interests and activities of the child further suggests that the defendant believed he was "owed" sexual reciprocation for his financial investments. This is also consistent with research conducted by Pemberton and Wakeling (2009), who identified two new themes of sexual entitlement thoughts: "I can offend because my victim owes me", and "I can offend because I have the power". The themes of sexual entitlement and coercive control appear to be consistent with the present case study as evidenced by the presence of unicorn toys, drawing supplies, and items representing methods of control (e.g. a mask, sedative, bondage items).

Also consistent with existing research, Chapleau, Oswald, and Russell (2007) posited how specific components of benevolent sexism may translate into the perception that women who violate this stereotype are partially responsible for making themselves vulnerable to sexual attack by wearing revealing clothes or trusting strangers. Chapleau's et al. (2007) theory is consistent with Paul's request for photographs displaying the child wearing a bathing suit. Paul also requested the child bring a bathing suit to the encounter. These requests may reflect additional cognitive distortions in which Paul attempts to rationalise his actions, displace feelings of guilt, and decrease a sense of accountability by equating revealing clothes with indicators of consent. To apply Chapleau's theory et al. (2007), Paul may have facilitated the abstraction of rational thought by interpreting revealing clothes as a violation of social norms, and thus, an invitation to offend.

Paul's request to obtain smiling photographs of the child further supplements existing research linking the presence of smiling children to an increase of self-distancing and rationalisation of deviant behaviour. A qualitative analysis conducted by Winder and Gough (2010) examined the cognitive distortions of 11 adult males convicted of possessing and/or distributing indecent photographs of children. Results from this analysis suggested that when viewing pornographic photographs of children, participants equated smiling with consent. Additionally, several participants reported a preference for images in which children appeared to be happy, misperceiving happiness to counter the

possibility of doing harm. The results presented by Winder and Gough (2010) are consistent with the case of Paul as evidenced by his request for his child victim to present as, "... friendly smiling and not arguing or crying". This is further reinforced in another email where Paul identified his desire that the child is, "well smelling, not tired or in a bad mood, stays healthy, brings hair and teeth brush, if possible swimming suit". Similarly, Quayle and Taylor (2002) interviewed 13 men convicted of downloading child pornography and identified themes which emerged from the discourse. Themes included the function of collectibles and cognitive distortions used to legitimise their deviant behaviour (Quayle & Taylor, 2002). Based on many of the convicted men's accounts, smiling children in pictures allowed them to self-distance and legitimise the photographs (Quayle & Taylor, 2002). Quayle and Taylor (2002) also examined the use of collectibles within the child pornography community explaining how photographs became an archive that could be easily accessed, traded, and collected. Collecting photographs of sexually exploited children in the same way, one might collect and trade baseball cards or stamps may function as a cognitive distortion allowing one to normalise the activity and make it appear innocent (Quayle & Taylor, 2002). Paul's frequent requests for more photographs, especially of the child smiling, provide additional support to the existing body of literature. Additionally, his desire that the child paint him something during their time together may represent his progression toward collecting more extreme material (Quayle & Taylor, 2002). The following case study is consistent with the existing body of research demonstrating how collecting images, self-distancing, and other cognitive distortions allow child sex offenders to rationalise their deviant sexual encounters with children.

Although some components of Paul's behaviour are consistent with literature regarding child sexual offenders (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004; Chapple et al., 2007; Winder & Gough, 2010), the existing research fails to adequately address other distinctive facets of Paul's behaviour. In a critical examination of his victim acquisition behaviour as outlined by Rebocho and Goncalves (2012), Paul most closely resembles the coercive offender although some differences exist. Consistent with the coercive offender, Paul targeted a stranger and the contents of his briefcase at the time of his arrest suggest likelihood that he may have employed a weapon or resorted to physical force. Unlike the coercive offender, however, Paul displayed markedly different geographic victim selection patterns. Specifically, Paul pursued a victim located in a different country, drastically opposing the expectation for coercive offenders to target victims encountered within close proximity of one's residence. The final salient distinction lies in Paul's lack of interest in kidnapping, stalking, and following his victim, characteristic behaviours of the coercive offender. Based on this examination, Paul does not adhere to the hunting typologies of child molesters and child rapists proposed by Rebocho and Goncalves (2012). Future areas of research should examine whether buyers of trafficked children demonstrate specific characteristics that require their own subgroup typology.

Limitations

The purpose of qualitative analysis is to present detailed experiences of individuals related to a phenomenon. As such, the findings from the present case study may not generalise to the larger population of buyers of sexually exploited children. The present case study is not meant to stand alone in academia and is instead intended to contribute to the existing body of literature related to sex trafficking.

The use of pre-existing court documentation to explore acts of child sex trafficking creates a new avenue of research, allowing academics unprecedented access to court interviews, testimonies, and applicable narratives. It is important, however, to note that these narratives are not without bias. The purpose of proceedings within the court system is to gain, or defend against, a conviction. Thus, court narratives, interviews, and testimonies are structured within an adversarial system, pinning one side against the other for the purpose of winning a court case. Within such a system, there is often an oversimplification of the relationships and situations that occurred so as to portray one particular side of the story as factual, over the other (Tannen, 1998).

Finally, although Paul states that this was his first illegal sexual encounter, it is unknown whether this is true. Reporting child sexual abuse is difficult because sexual trauma survivors rarely come forward to report their abuse (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2012). Additionally, only 30% of sexual assault cases are reported to authorities (Finkelhor, 2009). Thus, one cannot assume or infer that no prior sexual misconduct occurred. The function of child pornography and its relationship to contact sex offenders remain unclear (Pierce, 1984).

Conclusion

The sexual exploitation of children through distribution of child pornography existed long before computers and the Internet (Edwards, 1994). The Internet merely represents a convenient avenue for paedophiles to communicate with each other and connect with potential victims (Quayle & Taylor, 2002), resulting in greater access and choices for commercial sex and trafficked persons (Chung, 2009). In order to develop a stronger legislative framework to protect victims and convict offenders, The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (2015) was passed and confirmed the application of the federal sex trafficking law 18 U.S. Code §1591 (Sex trafficking of children or by force, fraud, or coercion, 2015) to include the conduct of buyers. Under this federal law, buyers of children for commercial sex may be convicted as traffickers because of their participation in the prohibited conduct of “knowingly obtaining” a minor.

The following case study presented the online correspondences between Paul, a German medical doctor, and an undercover agent offering packages of children for sex in the United States. Consistent with the existing body of literature on child sex offenders, Paul appears to engage in cognitive distortions, or flawed ways of thinking, to minimise or rationalise the behaviour of engaging in sexual acts with children (Conte, 1985). For example, Paul requests that the child smile, act as though she is enjoying their time together, and be clean. He also requests that she paint him a keepsake during their deviant encounter. These requests may have pointed to the use of cognitive distortions that allowed Paul to misinterpret the child’s behaviours as consent. Additionally, Paul’s desire to bring gifts (i.e. coloured pencils and a purple unicorn toy) for the girl may have represented his desire to earn the affections of the child. Another interpretation suggests that bringing the child’s favourite toys may have represented his attempt to coerce the child to engage in sexual acts for which he was “owed”.

The case study also examines the ways in which Paul demonstrates behaviours consistent with, and distinct from, other existing subgroups of child sex offenders. Although Paul engages in victim selection processes consistent with coercive offenders (Rebocho & Goncalves, 2012) such as targeting a stranger and using methods of force and coercion, he deviates from the expected geographic location within his *hunting ground*. According to Rebocho and Goncalves (2012), coercive offenders prefer to select victims located within close proximity of their own workplace or residence. Paul’s attempt to purchase a child internationally does not appear to be consistent with the existing victim selection processes presented by Rebocho and Goncalves (2012). Future areas of research must examine whether buyers of trafficked children demonstrate specific characteristics that require their own subgroup typology.

The researchers believe that the case study contributes to the existing body of research related to sex trafficking, by providing an example in which the TVPA was used to prosecute a buyer. Additionally, the case illuminates the possible cognitive distortions buyers of children for sexual exploitation may use in order to distance themselves from the true nature of their act. Finally, the researchers attest that examination of pre-existing court documents provide valuable information needed to learn more about the transnational crime of sex trafficking.

Future research

This case study has illuminated new methods of gaining access to testimonies and communications not normally afforded to the researcher, as both the perpetrator and victim of sex trafficking are

identified as protected individuals and as such, are difficult to access for in-person interviews. Within this case, there was juxtaposition between the polite business style of communication and the true nature of what Paul was attempting to do – secure a child for sex. Future research should expand the proximal and temporal limitations of this study so as to examine if offenders, who use mundane business methods and communication patterns for making purchasing arrangements to sexually assault children, may warrant a distinct type of typology of offender.

Disclosure statement

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