Measuring the Preference of Image Content for Self-reported Consumers of Child Pornography

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Abstract. Research has begun to critically analyze the types of images collected by child pornography consumers. However, the collections of child pornography consumers may not necessarily be representative of their preferences. In addition, a literature review of the available scales or measurements, which assessed pornography preference, yielded scarce results regarding images of child sexual victimization. First, this paper will review some of the empirical literature on the various types of images collected by child pornography consumers. Next, this author will discuss the development of the Child Pornography Image Preference Scale (CPIPS), a self-report measure of child pornography image preference. Finally, the results of a preliminary test of the CPIPS will be discussed along with the study's limitations. Overall, by introducing this scale to the academic and law enforcement community, further validation through empirical testing may be achieved for the Child Pornography Image Preference Scale (CPIPS).

Keywords: child pornography, image content, measurement, self-report.

1 Content of Child Sex Abuse Images

Research has begun to critically analyze the types of images collected by child pornography consumers. In 2003, research was conducted by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, which became known as the National Juvenile Online Victimization (N-JOV) study. The N-JOV study nationally sampled law enforcement agencies regarding the number of arrested cases involving Internet crimes against children between July 1, 2000 and June 30, 2001 [1]. Of the estimated 2,577 arrests, 36% were for possession, distribution, or trading of Internet child pornography. According to the report, the majority of the child pornography images collected by the offenders depicted young, prepubescent children between the ages of 6 and 12 years with some of the offenders possessing images of children younger than 3 years of age [1]. In addition, the content of the child pornography images were graphic in nature, such as the sexual penetration of a child and sadistic violence including rape and torture. Overall, the authors concluded the majority of child pornography images seized by law enforcement depict the explicit sexual and/or violent abuse of prepubescent children [1].

In a follow up analysis, Wells, Finkelhor, Wolak, and Mitchell examined the law enforcement cases identified from the N-JOV study in which no arrest was made by any U.S. law enforcement agency [2]. Wells et al. yielded a final sample of 68 non-arrest cases, and 34 of those cases involved Internet child pornography. Of the 34 child pornography cases, 70% involved images depicting graphic sexual abuse with nearly half of the images showing penetration. In addition, 44% of the images were of an adult engaging in a sexual act with a child [2].

In a study conducted by Webb, the pornography collections of 90 men convicted of Internet child pornography offences were analyzed using the COPINE continuum. The number of images was 16,698 but the collections ranged in size from 2 to 921,000 child pornography images. For 72 of the men, information was available regarding the age of the victims in their collections, and 86% of these cases included images of children under the age of 10 years [3]. 31% of the men collected images at the highest level of child sexual victimization (sadistic/bestiality) with the majority collecting images categorized as explicit erotic posing (71%), explicit sexual activity (71%), assault (80%), and gross assault (76%)[3]. Overall, the study suggested the majority of the offenders are collecting images of young children with higher levels of child sexual victimization.

More recently the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), which is a part of the United Kingdoms' law enforcement, focuses on child sex abuse crimes. In their 2007-2008 strategic report, the centre reported an increase in the number of noncommercial sources depicting babies and toddlers in child sex abuse images [4]. In addition, law enforcement has witnessed an increase in the number of images depicting children of different racial backgrounds and locations, such as South America, and South Korea. This trend in the increased number of non-White child victims was noted in the 2009 report as well [5]. Overall, the reports suggested this trend in atypical racial diversity might be related to the increase in traveling child sex offenders, who commute abroad and record their abuse [4,5].

The CEOP also noted an increase in the severity of images being posted by commercial sources. Traditionally, less sexually graphic images are posted to entice customers to provide payment for the more sexually explicit and violent images of child abuse [4]. However, according to the CEOP's Behavioral Analysis Unit, commercial sources are responding to an increased desire for images depicting sadistic sexual violence and younger victims [4]. In other words, the content of the initial images being posted to entice the consumers are depicting increased levels of graphic sexual and physical victimization of younger children.

In addition, a report by the Internet Watch Foundation supported previous research in that the images depict severe forms of sexual abuse with over half (69%) of the child victims appearing to be under the age of 10 years [6]. Of those images, 24% appear to be under the age of 6 years with 4% of the child victims appearing to be to be under the age of 2 years [6]. Lastly, over half of the images were also classified as level 4 (penetrative sexual abuse) or 5 (sadism or

bestiality), which are the two most severe levels of child sexual victimization according to the UK's Sentencing Guidelines Council [6].

Finally, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection analyzed the tips received between September 26, 2002 and March 31, 2009 from cybertip.ca, Canada's tipline for reporting Internet crime against children. Of the 35,111 websites reported to the tipline, 15,662 hosted images of child sexual abuse [7]. According to the report, 35.9% of the images depicted sexual assault and 64.1% showed the victim in sexually provocative poses [7]. Over half of the images depicted children under the age of 8 years, and some of the pictures were of babies and toddlers with roughly 1/3 of these images depicting sexual assaults. In addition, 68.5% of the sadistic sexual assault images, which includes bestiality, bondage, and torture, involved children under the age of 8 years. Finally, the majority (83%) of the children in the images were female [7].

After examining 800 commercial websites reported to cybertip.ca, three pornographic themes were identified: innocence, adult sexuality and pornography, and darkness and depravity [7]. The websites using the "innocence theme" tended to have images of younger children (toddlers to elementary school age) posing rather than being sexually abused, and the website utilized bright colors, toys, and words like "angel" and "pure." The adult sexuality and pornography themed websites used sexually explicit and slang terminology, such as "slut" and Nymphet," and the children were depicted as promiscuous and willing sex partners. In addition, the images were likely to be of children provocatively posing and being sexually abused. Finally, the darkness and depravity pornographic theme used words such as "pedophile" and "sick," and focused on images depicting the sexual abuse of children by either other children or adults. Also, these websites sometimes posted sexually explicit abuse images of babies and toddlers [7].

2   Child Pornography Image Preference Scale

A literature review of the available scales or measurements, which assessed pornography preference, yielded scarce results regarding images of child sexual victimization. A few surveys in the area of media preference or sexual abuse attitudes included: Sexual Opinion Survey [8], Internet Sex Screening Test, Attitudes toward Sexual Abuse [9], and the Internet Behaviours and Attitudes Questionnaire [10]. However, the majority of the media preference scales only included one item, if they included one at all, related to child sex themes, thereby measuring a general genre of child pornography rather than any specific content or themes within child pornography collections [c.f., 11]. In addition, the scales assessing sexually deviant attitudes tended to focus on the relationship between violent adult pornography and violence toward women or attitudes regarding hands-on child sex abuse [c.f., 9].

Therefore, a new questionnaire was developed to assess the respondent's level of preference for various content-specific forms of child pornography, such as the

choice of victimization, age, and sex of the child. The items included for the newly developed Child Pornography Image Preference Scale (CPIPS; see Appendix) was selected based on their face validity, and the author developed the survey with the assistance of a local law enforcement agency in order to better understand the range of images routinely discovered in child pornography collections. As previously discussed, a literature review identified some recent trends in the types of child sex abuse images available on the Internet, so all of these resources were considered in the development of the survey.

The CPIPS was a likert rating scale [12], which asked the respondents to rate their level of agreement or disagreement to each statement. Since some respondents might be ambivalent regarding their preference to certain forms of child pornography, the author used an odd numbered likert scale (5-point) in order to provide an ambivalent or "neutral" item response. The CPIPS included 21 items scaled from 1 (Strongly Do Not Prefer) to 5 (Strongly Prefer).

The newly devised scale was pilot tested and reviewed by professionals in the field who provided preliminary feedback regarding the nature of the statements (clarity, simplicity, ambiguity). Feedback suggested the CPIPS had strong face validity, and the items appeared to be measuring the desired constructs.

3   Empirical Test of the CPIPS

Participants. Respondents were voluntarily recruited via the Internet by publicizing or advertising the study using various online resources including chat rooms, bulletin boards, discussion forums, and social media websites. This sampling methodology, often referred to as snowballing, allowed the author to target respondents from the "general population of Internet users." In addition, Internet-based research designs increase the likelihood of self-disclosure since the respondents feel anonymous when completing online surveys rather than studies involving face-to-face interaction. In order to participate in the study, the respondents had to indicate on the demographics questionnaire that they were at least 18 years of age or older and were currently permanent residents of either the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, or Canada. The participants were required to provide consent, and they were able to quit the survey at anytime.

Design and Procedure. The Child Pornography Image Preference Scale was a part of a larger study assessing the personality characteristics of self-reported child pornography consumers [see 13]. However, this scale was only available online for approximately 2-weeks. Those respondents who self-reported any of the following behaviors were linked to the CPIPS: "knowingly accessing, viewing, downloading, exchanging and/or sharing pornography images of individuals under the age of 18 years."

The online survey started with a home page, which acted as a consent form to which the respondents had to agree or decline to participate. If the prospective respondents agreed, they had to click on the "I Agree" button in order to participate.

After clicking on the "I Agree" button, the respondents were asked to complete the questionnaires, which would take approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete in total. Once the questionnaires were completed, the participants were taken to the survey's "Debriefing" page were the study's true intentions were revealed, and the respondents had to decide whether to submit (opt-in) or withdraw their responses (opt-out) from the final dataset.

At no time were the respondents asked for any identifying information (e.g., name). In order to protect the respondents' anonymity and confidentiality, they were provided with an ID number, which the database randomly assigned to the participant's responses. Thus, the responses to the questionnaires were not linked or matched to any particular individual, which was extremely important to increase the participant's confidence in self-disclosing criminally-sanctioned behaviors (e.g., exchanging child pornography). As for the questionnaire items, the items were forced choice; however, the respondents could respond by endorsing, "decline to answer," to each survey item in order to meet the Institutional Review Board's requirements.

4   Results

As stated in the methodology section, all respondents reporting some level of intentional child pornography use were linked to the CPIPS in order to assess their preference for child pornography images. For the two weeks this scale was available, two child pornography users (n = 2) completed and submitted their responses to the CPIPS. Due to anonymity, the two child pornography users were randomly assigned an ID number, and they will be referred to as #2488 and #297.

As shown in Table 1, child pornography user #2488 was more likely to prefer pornographic images of teens. In addition, #2488 was indifferent towards nonsexual and sexual images of children posing and did not prefer pornographic images of children perform sexual acts on themselves (e.g., self-masturbation) or pornographic images of children from different racial or ethnic backgrounds. Overall, this respondent appeared to prefer pornographic images of teens, regardless of whether the child was posing in a nonsexual or sexually provocative manner.

However, child pornography user #297 self-reported stronger preferences for a wider range of image content. As shown in Table 8, #297 strongly preferred all of the child pornography image content except pornographic images of children who are developed (e.g., pubic hair) and non-pornographic images of children posing, both of which received a rating of 1 (Strongly Do Not Prefer). Overall, this respondent preferred a wider range of image content except those images, which depicted older, post- pubescent children, and images that were less sexual or nonpornographic in nature.

Table 1. CP images preference ratings for CP User #2488 and #297

Image Content	CP User	
	ID #2488	ID #297
Infants	1	5
Toddlers	1	5
Pre-Teens	1	5
Teens	4	5
Developed	1	1
Boys	1	5
Girls	1	5
Child-Only	1	5
Adult-Child	1	5
Nonsexual Posing	3	1
Sexual Posing	3	5
Genitals	2	5
Child w/ Child	1	5
Child w/ Adult	1	5
Child w/ Self	2	5
Child w/ Animals	1	5
Power Over Child	1	5
Bondage	1	5
Violence	1	5
Racial or Ethnic	2	5
Novel or Unusual	1	5

Note. Values represent respondent's self-reported preference for certain types of child pornograpy images. Values scaled 1 (Strongly Do Not Prefer), 2 (Do Not Prefer), 3 (Indifferent), 4 (Prefer), and 5 (Strongly Prefer).

5   Discussion

Based on the limited data collected, this author was unable to draw statistical inferences from the results of the Child Pornography Image Preference Scale. However, there were notable descriptive differences in the types of images preferred by child pornography user #2488 and #297. In general, respondent #2488 appeared to prefer pornographic images of teens, regardless of whether the child was posing in a nonsexual or sexually provocative manner, while respondent #297 preferred a wider-range of sexually explicit image content.

Although data was collected from two self-reported consumers of child pornography, this study provides preliminary evidence that individuals are willing to self-report deviant image preferences in an online, anonymous environment. In addition, the face validity of the CPIPS appears promising since the responses to the CPIPS for #2488 and #297 yielded a different pattern of endorsements, which suggest a different pattern of interest. In future studies, this pattern of interest or preference in the child pornography images may reflect different motivations and personality characteristics.

Again, research suggests child pornography users collect sexualized images of children for a variety of reasons. Interviews with child pornography users have suggested some offenders move "thorough a variety of pornographies, each time accessing more extreme material" [14, p. 343] as a result of desensitization or appetite satiation, which lead to collecting and discovering other forms of deviant pornography [15]. Also, some of the consumers stated they downloaded the images simply because they were available and accessible, making the behaviors primarily a result of compulsivity rather than a specific sexual interest in children [16].

Child pornography consumers exhibit a complex array of sexual interests, which may be representative of a more general level of paraphilic tendencies rather than a specific sexual interest in children. Research suggests the majority of Internet child pornography users are collecting a wider range of deviant pornography, which may reflect a general level of sexual deviance rather than a specific paraphilia, such as pedophilia. The extent to which a child pornography user is likely to be a pedophile or a "dissident" expressing a wide range of sexual interest will best be understand through rigorous, empirical research. Overall, with future replication and empirical validation, the Child Pornography Image Preference Scale may be the first measure of people's preferences for child pornography images.

6   Conclusion

This study demonstrated that respondents are willing to report their level of preference for various types of child pornography. Understanding the types of images preferred by child pornography users may assist in understanding their motivation for engaging in this illegal behavior. After all, previous research suggests those individuals who possess child pornography images are not at a greater risk for becoming child sex offenders [c.f., 17, 18]. Therefore, the size and content of their collections may indicate a general need or addiction to sexual stimuli, such as other

forms of deviant pornography, rather than an intense sexual arousal toward children (pedophilia). Finally, future research may be able to identify whether personality characteristics (i.e., aggressive) are predicative of image preference (i.e., violent, sadistic images) for child pornography consumers.

Overall, Internet-based research will continue to increase in popularity due to its advantages over more traditional forms of methodology, such as the accessibility of target populations with narrow interests. With regards to child pornography research, the Internet may be the best place to analyze both the users and behaviors due to the perceived anonymity and cloak of safety offered by the Internet. This type of research will continue to be a socially sensitive topic, but further empirical validation within the law enforcement and academic community is needed for the Child Pornography Image Preference Scale.

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Appendix: Child Pornography Image Preference Scale (CPIPS)

Below are a number of items related to your preference for sexually explicit websites. You will probably find that you like some of the items and dislike some others and that is okay. We realize that everyone is different, so please respond as honestly as you can.

Remember, this survey is completely confidential and anonymous, meaning there is no way that your responses will be linked back to you.

STRONGLY DO NOT PREFER		*indifferent*		STRONGLY PREFER
1	2	3	4	5

1 if you *strongly do not prefer* the item
2 if you *do not prefer* the item
3 if you feel *indifferent or neutral* about the item
4 if you *prefer* the item
5 if you *strongly prefer* the item

1. Pornographic images of infants.
2. Pornographic images of toddlers.
3. Pornographic images of preteens.
4. Pornographic images of teens.
5. Pornographic images of children who are developed (e.g., pubic hair).
6. Pornographic images of boys.
7. Pornographic images of girls.
8. Pornographic images featuring only children.
9. Pornographic images featuring children with adults.
10. Non-pornographic images of children posing.
11. Images of children posing sexually or provocatively.
12. Pornographic images of children that focus on the genitals.
13. Images of children performing sexual acts on other children.
14. Images of children performing sexual acts on other adults.

15. Images of children performing sexual acts on themselves
(e.g., self- masturbation).
16. Images of children performing sexual acts on or with animals.
17. Pornographic images depicting power or control over the child.
18. Pornographic images of children depicting bondage (e.g., being tied-up).
19. Pornographic images of children depicting violence (e.g., hit, kicked).
20. Pornographic images of children from different racial or ethnic backgrounds.
21. Pornographic images of children that are novel or unusual.