

The pedophiles



The Internet has brought much convenience to the lives of people in today's modern times. With just the click of a mouse, one can complete bank transactions, order groceries, download the latest music, connect with friends and business contacts and do all the research they need for school, work and personal use right from the comfort of their own home. There is however, a group of audience who also benefits from the convenience of the Internet but for much more dangerous and evil purposes the Internet pedophiles. Pedophiles are lexically defined as adults with sexual preference for pre-pubescent children.

These children are typically between the ages of 13 and younger. They usually indulge in sexual fantasies, fondling, sexual contact and collecting pornographic material featuring children. While there are pedophiles who can content themselves with just collecting and fantasizing with child pornography, to some, this is just serves as a prelude to actual sexual contact with children. (Taylor, and Quayle 75) For pedophiles, the Internet has become a virtual " community" where they can share tips, photos and videos with other pedophiles. An estimated 25-50% of these have already committed sexual acts with minors. (Morgan 53) In an interview with Insight into the News magazine (2000) Donna Rice Hughes, author of Kids Online and senior adviser to Familyclick. com, says that while most parents express concern about the " openness" of the Internet, most are not aware of just how dangerous the Internet can be for unmonitored children.

Children can easily be exposed to pornographic material, not to mention be in actual contact with pedophiles through online chat rooms, peer support groups, and messaging systems. (Edwards 14) Lt. Mike Harmony of the

Bedford County Sherriff's office and member of Operation Blue Ridge Thunder, one of the nation's leading task forces on crimes against children says: "" The exploitation of children on the Internet is a huge and growing problem. The public just doesn't realize how bad it is," (" Blue Ridge Team Nabs" B01) Lt. Harmony was part of the team that handled the case of a 13-year old girl whose former boyfriend pasted her picture onto that of picture of a naked woman and posted it online along with her address and phone number. This attracted calls from several pornographers including one who threatened to come to her home and hurt her entire family if she didn't come out of state to make a home movie.

Nowadays, there is a growing awareness of the very real threat that the Internet brings in the person of online predators such as pedophiles. Law enforcement groups in each state has started building up teams and file sharing systems specifically for the purpose of tracking and catching pedophiles and child pornographers. Even agencies such as the FBI, Department of Homeland Security and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children are helping out by setting up a database of images of those they can prove are real children.(Ryan 1) In April 2000, the Child Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 (" COPPA") was enacted . The COPPA allows parents by to choose whether or not their children can access certain sites on the Internet.

Authorities have issued appeals to schools, parents and communities to be more vigilant and actively help in the eradication of cyber-pedophilia and the online traffic of child pornography through monitoring of computer internet usage by children and reporting of suspicious messages and communications

directed at their kids. When all is said and done however, the primary people who should be keeping tabs on the Internet usage and safety of the children are the parents themselves.

With proper monitoring and guidance, children would be less exposed and susceptible to the blandishments and threats of these online predators. "" The Internet is a dream come true for a pedophile," said Arlington County police Detective Paul J. Reid. " It takes the playground from the street and puts it into their home where they can cultivate victims in privacy.""(Fagan 3)