

‘It’s an epidemic out there’: Constructing the online solicitation of children as a social problem

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Abstract

Social problems emerge when a behaviour, individual, or group is collectively defined as problematic. Online child solicitation is explored as a behaviour that has been defined as a social problem. This paper analyzes and explores the claims and claimsmaking process of one advocacy group, *Perverved Justice*. Their use of rhetorical strategies designed to persuade are of particular importance. In addition, the definitions, examples, and estimates they use to construct the problem are explored. *Perverved Justice* constructs the Internet as an inherently dangerous space, asserts that all children are at risk, and that online solicitation is a significant social problem. Furthermore, law enforcement, parents, and advocacy groups cannot protect children. Criticisms are rendered illegitimate through the use of rhetorical strategies. The way in which *Perverved Justice* constructs online child solicitation and their role in solving this issue incorporates elements of neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism, and vigilantism, reflecting the wider regulatory framework.

Abstrait

Les problèmes sociaux apparaissent lorsque un comportement, une personne ou un groupe est défini collectivement comme étant problématique. Sollicitation des enfants en ligne est explorée comme une étude de cas d'un comportement qui a été définie comme un problème social. Cet article analyse et explore les réclamations et le processus du «claimsmaking» d'un groupe de défense, *Perverved Justice*. Leur utilisation de stratégies rhétoriques visant à persuader revêtent une importance particulière. En outre, les définitions, les exemples, et les estimations qu'ils utilisent pour construire le problème sera étudié. *Perverved Justice* construit l'Internet comme un espace dangereux en soi, affirme que tous les enfants sont à risque, et que la sollicitation en ligne est un problème social important. En outre, des groupes d'application de la loi, les parents, et le plaidoyer ne peut pas protéger les enfants. Les critiques sont rendus illégitime par l'utilisation de stratégies rhétoriques. La manière dont *Perverved Justice* construit à la fois la question de la sollicitation des enfants en ligne et leur rôle dans la résolution de cette question reflètent une plus large cadre réglementaire, intégrant des éléments du néo-libéralisme, le néo-conservatisme, et justiciers.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

It has become a relatively common refrain to hear that paedophiles are lurking online, attempting to meet minors in order to solicit sexual activity. This issue came to particular attention in North America, as concern about this sort of behaviour enveloped both Canada and the United States. For example, in the US, there are claims that anywhere from one in five to one in seven minors who use the Internet are solicited (Cassel & Cramer, 2008).

In February 2012, Canada's Minister of Public Safety, Vic Toews, introduced Bill C-30, intended to provide police and other law enforcement agencies with greater capacity to investigate, access, and intercept electronic communication.¹ The Bill is called the *Protecting Children From Internet Predators Act*. This short title indicates the perceived concern and danger that online predators constitute to children. While many elements of the Bill have stated goals that focus on areas other than online child solicitation,² the choice to refer to this Bill in such a way helps to emphasize the perception that online child solicitation is a significant social problem, requiring attention and a response.

Furthermore, news stories about individuals attempting to solicit children are not rare in Canada. In the first two weeks of April 2012 alone, reports of child luring online could be found in Toronto³, Hamilton⁴, North Bay, Ontario⁵, Sydney, Nova Scotia⁶, and Calgary⁷, among others. These stories reinforce the perception that online child solicitation is a social problem that affects a significant number of people (Bryce, 2010).

Online solicitation was brought to attention primarily by *Dateline NBC's "To Catch a Predator"* specials, exposés designed to illustrate the extent of this social problem. The episodes of *To Catch a Predator* followed a specific formula. A "sting" was set up, where individuals representing themselves as minors communicated with adult men online. These decoys "...lured the men to a sting house with the promise of sex, but they were met instead by a camera crew and, ultimately, the police" (Adler, forthcoming, p. 5). When the men arrive, they

¹Public Safety Canada. (2 February 2012). Protecting children from Internet Predators Act.

² For example, terrorism and national security.

³ Canadian Press. (6 April 2012). Alleged online Bieber imposter charged with luring.

⁴ O'Reilly, N. (12 April 2012). Hamilton man facing more Internet luring charges. *The Hamilton Spectator*.

⁵ Internet luring victim shares story: North Bay police hope Ontario woman's experience will educate students about dangers of online predators. (4 April 2012). CBC News.

⁶ Man gets conditional sentence for Internet luring. (11 April 2012). *Cape Breton Post*.

⁷ Slade, D. (12 April 2012). Calgary man jailed for trying to lure girl online for sex. *The Calgary Herald*.

are confronted by the host, Chris Hansen, who reads aloud the most graphic excerpts of the chat before revealing his identity and leading the men to believe that they are free to go (Adler, forthcoming, p. 6). As the men leave the house, they are arrested and detained by the police who are present behind the scenes at the sting house. This format serves to humiliate the potential predator, and provide a visual and emotional representation of the type of behaviour that the Internet can facilitate, and the type of individual who will take advantage of this facilitative technology.

Beyond these visual aspects, *To Catch a Predator* also served to provide one of the more lasting estimates of the extent of the problem. It was Chris Hansen who estimated that, at any moment, there are 50,000 paedophiles online looking to interact with minors (Glassner, 1999/2009). The most widely-cited estimate of the extent of the issue, then, came not from official sources or statistics, but from the host of an “infotainment” (Kohm, 2009) program.

In Canada, meanwhile, some individuals were so concerned that they decided to act on their own in order to deter these online predators; one group created and posted a series of videos on the Internet in November 2011. Calling themselves “To Troll a Predator” in an homage to the *Dateline NBC* specials, a group of teenagers from Chilliwack, British Columbia, pretended to be minors online and agreed to meet older males in public, where they surprised the solicitors by arriving in superhero costumes with video cameras.⁸ These videos led to a minor media craze, with the teenagers appearing in a number of media stories and interviews and creating a fan page on Facebook.

This fan page provides an interesting snapshot of some responses to the actions of the teenagers. Many of the comments made were supportive of the teenagers, critical of the police, and served to reinforce the perception that the claims about these online dangers needed to be heeded. For example, one post states that “Law enforcement isn't enough to lure and catch child predators so the world could use more heroes like these young guys. I fear for their safety, but as a parent, I really appreciate what they're doing” (December 9, 2011). Another poster voiced hope that these actions would provide an impetus to police and politicians: “Bravo. Very sad that Canada is a haven for perverts and child predators. Stay safe though. There are enough victims

⁸Woo, A. (16 November 2011). Teens staging online predator stings dressed as Batman draw RCMP attention. *The National Post*.

out there. I just hope that seeing your bravery and commitment to making the streets safer will shame our politicians and police into doing something more about the problem” (December 13, 2011). The responses and attention the teenager’s actions received reflects a particular perception of online solicitation: it is a significant problem, and one that official sources, such as police and politicians, have not adequately responded to.

Another group also emerged in Canada as a response to the perceived danger of online paedophiles. Stoppedohpiles.ca launched April 20, 2012, with the goal of making the Canadian sex offender registry as public as possible.⁹ The majority of the information available comes from news reports and collects names, images, and conviction or accusation reports of anyone who has committed or been accused of sexual assaults, primarily against children.

Based on the attention that online child solicitation receives, it would be easy to assume that this behaviour constitutes a significant social problem. However, child solicitation remains a relatively rare event. While official police-reported statistics are not without their problems (see, for example, MacDonald, 2002; Coleman & Moynihan, 1996, Skogan, 1977, 1975, 1974), nor presumed to present an objective “truth” of the issue, they can provide context and further inform the discussion.

The offence of luring a child via the Internet is defined¹⁰ in section 172.1 of the *Criminal Code of Canada*:

Every person commits an offence who, by means of a computer system within the meaning of subsection 342.1(2), communicates with

(a) a person who is, or who the accused believes is, under the age of eighteen years, for the purpose of facilitating the commission of an offence under subsection 153(1), section 155 or 163.1, subsection 212(1) or (4) or section 271, 272 or 273 with respect to that person;

(b) a person who is, or who the accused believes is, under the age of 16 years, for the purpose of facilitating the commission of an offence under section 151 or 152, subsection 160(3) or 173(2) or section 280 with respect to that person; or

⁹ Massinon, S. (20 April 2012). New Calgary-based Christian advocacy group’s website aims to identify pedophiles. *The Calgary Herald*. This group was also highlighted on the front page of *PJ’s* website (accessed April 23, 2012).

¹⁰ The definition is important as, according to social constructivist perspectives of crimes, behaviours become crimes when they are defined as such.

(c) a person who is, or who the accused believes is, under the age of 14 years, for the purpose of facilitating the commission of an offence under section 281 with respect to that person.

Accordingly, it is a criminal offence in Canada to use the Internet to communicate with a minor – or, a person who is believed to be a minor – in order to arrange or facilitate the commission of a sexual offence.

Given this definition of child luring via the Internet, Table 1 shows the number of incidents for the two most recent years of available data, while Table 2 shows the number of victims over the same period. Official statistics show that there are relatively few incidents of child luring via the Internet that come to the attention of police, and even fewer victims. For example, in 2010, there were twice as many victims of homicide, 12 times more victims of aggravated assault, and 75 times more victims of sexual assault than the 289 reported victims of child solicitation (Table 2; Brennan & Dauvergne, 2011).

Table 1 – Incidents of child luring via the Internet, by clearance status, Canada, 2009 and 2010

Clearance status	2010	2009
Cleared by charge ¹	144	137
Cleared otherwise ²	58	37
Not cleared ³	325	279
Total	527	453

1. Refers to those incidents where at least one accused person has been identified and charges have been laid or recommended in connection to the incident.

2. Refers to incidents where an accused has been identified, and there is sufficient evidence to lay or recommend charges, but other means are used to clear the incident. Examples include the complainant declining to lay charges or police discretion.

3. Refers to those incidents where a suspect has not been identified.

Note: Includes all incidents of child luring, regardless of whether or not child luring was the most serious offence. As a result, this table will not match other *Statistics Canada* releases, as they are calculated using only the most serious offence in a criminal incident. See the Uniform Crime Reporting Incident-Based Survey Guide (2010) for further elaboration.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Incident-Based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, February 2012 extraction.

The discrepancy between the number of incidents and victims (Table 1, Table 2) also provides some context. Having significantly more incidents than victims is likely the result of

police-led “stings”, where members of law enforcement enter chat rooms and social networking sites for the purposes of identifying and discovering individuals attempting to solicit children. In these cases, there is not a “victim” in the legal sense. Other cases where accused are not identified reflect the relative anonymity that the Internet can provide (Tomich & Liipfert, 2004).

Table 2 – Victims of child luring via the Internet, by sex, Canada, 2009 and 2010

Sex of victim	2010¹	2009
Female	251	238
Male	37	26
Total	289	264

1. The total for 2010 includes one victim whose sex was reported by police as unknown.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Incident-Based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, February 2012 extraction.

While these numbers are likely underestimates based on the number of incidents that come to police attention (MacDonald, 2002; Coleman & Moynihan, 1996), they *do* provide further context to the claims that are prevalent in the media. Furthermore, I do not mean to disregard the seriousness of these offences or trivialize the victimization in any way by comparing these sources of information. However, it does raise an interesting question: why is this issue receiving such intense focus when it is, relatively speaking, rare?

Conceptual framework

This question underlies my entire research project. My research goal is to analyze the strategies that are used to construct certain behaviours as social problems, in terms of the claims that are made, and the words, connotations, and examples that are used, using online child solicitation as a case study. There are a number of important concepts that will be used to develop an understanding of the way in which online child solicitation has been constructed as a significant social issue.

Social constructivism

First of all, this project was undertaken from a social constructivist understanding of social problems, which assumes that issues or behaviours become social problems as a result of a

collective defining process (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Blumer, 1971). That is, social problems arise not because of a characteristic that is inherently problematic, but because something comes to be defined as a problem (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009). This definition can arise through the work of institutions, advocacy groups, or any other individuals who work to raise awareness of an issue and persuade others that it is problematic and requires attention or awareness. These individuals or groups are claimsmakers (Best, 1990, 1987).

Claimsmakers attempt to persuade others of a condition or behaviour that they wish to define as problematic (Best, 1987); the activities undertaken to this end constitute claimsmaking. The processes of defining the issue, estimating its extent, determining a course of action, and persuading an audience of these claims are important to examine in order to help understand how social problems emerge. Another important consideration in claimsmaking is the type of language that is used. Claimsmakers often invoke particular rhetorical strategies in order to persuade.

Thus, rhetoric is also an important element of claimsmaking. The way claims are structured, the types of examples used, and the connotations of words have important persuasive effects (Aristotle, 1924/2004; Best, 1990, 1987). Understanding these strategies, then, can contribute not only to an understanding of how specific social problems claims emerge, but also more generally to the types of strategies that are used in order to persuade.

This project will focus on one particular group that has been active in the attempt to define online child solicitation as a social problem. Their claims, strategies, examples, and rhetorical strategies will be analyzed in order to understand some of the ways in which advocacy groups structure arguments so as to persuade. Furthermore, by analyzing their various strategies, I will be able to contribute to a further understanding of how particular social problems claims are constructed, organized, and presented to an audience.

Perverved Justice

As previously mentioned, *Dateline NBC's To Catch a Predator* specials were one vehicle for the transmission of these claims and rhetoric. Alongside *Dateline*, though, Perverved Justice (henceforth *PJ*) was working to raise awareness about child solicitation online. It was through their partnership with *NBC* that the *To Catch a Predator* “stings” were organized and orchestrated. This advocacy group is central to this research project.

PJ was established in 2003, “...inspired by a conversation between site founder Xavier Von Erck and another individual who chatted in the same Portland Regional Room” (*Perverted Justice*, 2012). The two founders noted the “apparent and overt” problem of “strange and creepy chatters” frequently making “general solicitations” (*Perverted Justice*, 2012). After initial testing, the Perverted-Justice.com website was launched in summer 2003, attempting to dissuade individuals from using chat rooms and social networking sites to solicit minors and to obtain convictions for those that continue to do so (*Perverted Justice*, 2012). As of April 2012, *PJ* has provided evidence that has contributed to 550 convictions – the earliest in June 2004, and the most recent on March 28, 2012 (*Perverted Justice*, 2012).

PJ notes that their primary work involves maintaining a volunteer presence in chat rooms and on social networking sites, with a twofold goal of discovering and reporting individuals who use these sites to solicit minors, as well as deterring those who might otherwise consider doing so. Interestingly, these individuals attempting to solicit youth online are labelled interchangeably as “predators” or as “pedophiles”, a strategy that takes advantage of pre-existing beliefs, fear, and public opinion despite not being medically accurate.¹¹

In addition, *PJ* states that they provide training to law enforcement detachments throughout the United States, working to instruct police officers about their developed “best practices” for investigating cases, communicating with potential predators, and ensuring that chatlog evidence is sound. They also claim that they work to educate parents and children about the “dangers” that exist on the Internet. Because of this active and wide-reaching presence, *PJ* positions itself as “the largest and best anti-predator organization online”.

While *PJ* is best known for their partnership with *Dateline NBC*, their stand-alone website¹² also contains a significant amount of content. Their website acts as their virtual office, containing 550 full chat transcripts as of April 2012, along with Opinion pieces, frequently asked questions, links for media and law enforcement, links to media stories relating to online child solicitation, and links to other projects with which they are involved. The public accessibility of their organizational material, combined with their relatively high profile thanks to their television exposure, makes *PJ* an interesting choice for a case study. As such, their claimsmaking activities

¹¹ See p. 80 for further discussion.

¹² www.perverted-justice.com

will be analyzed, in an attempt to further understand how claims are made and therefore how social problems are constructed and come to public attention.

Importance of project

This project is intended to meet three specific goals. My first goal is to understand how *PJ* has constructed online child solicitation, by analyzing the claims that they present of their website. This, then, will help meet my second goal: to further understand the sorts of strategies that claimsmakers use in order to make a successful social problem claim. For example, by analyzing where the underlying grounds, data, and examples (Best, 1987) come from, how they are used, borrowed, constructed, or (re)defined, and how they are presented, I intend to illustrate how claims manifest within the discourse and rhetoric of a particular organization. Finally, this project intends to provide an example of how social problems are constructed by advocacy groups by analyzing how the problem is defined, which sorts of behaviours or individuals are included, and how critics are neutralized. An understanding of these strategies is important when it comes to understanding how and why particular issues emerge as social problems in particular contexts.

Before analyzing the material, though, it is important to highlight important themes in the literature as well as theoretical and methodological considerations. Chapter 2 refers to and outlines a number of significant concepts, ideas, and debates within the relevant literature. Then, Chapter 3 discusses social constructivist research, qualitative case-study methodology, and the techniques of rhetorical analysis. Chapter 4 presents the analysis and discussion. In Chapter 5, I summarize and reflect on the research project as a whole, as well as suggest directions for future research.

Chapter 2

Exploring rhetoric, the construction of social problems, and regulatory frameworks

The main subjects that inform my understanding and analysis of *PJ*'s claims and rhetorical strategies are discussed below. First, how rhetoric is constituted in both the classical and the digital age is discussed. Next, I discuss elements of social problems, such as their socially constructed nature, claims, and the claimsmaking process. The real/virtual spatial nature of the Internet is another important consideration. Moral panic is then discussed, in terms of its definition, its relation to fear¹³ of sex offenders and of technology, and its role in the decivilizing process. Finally, regulatory or governing implications and rationalities, both unofficial (vigilantism) and official (neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism) are outlined.

Elements of rhetoric

The study of rhetoric is by no means new; Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*, a detailed description and discussion of the use and components of rhetoric, dates back to the 4th century B.C. In the over two millennia since then, various elements of speech, text, and style have been introduced into the lexicon of rhetoric. Some elements dating back to Aristotle have become largely "arcane" (Selzer, 2004, p. 284), while others remain popular today and can be supplemented by relatively more recent terms. My strategy will be to use elements both from classical rhetoric, such as ethos, pathos, and logos (Aristotle, 1924/2004; Selzer, 2004). More recent characteristics of rhetoric, such as resources or situation (Selzer, 2004), digital delivery (Porter, 2009), or the rhetoric of graphics and images (Hampton, 1990) will also be considered.

The canons of rhetoric emerged from classical rhetoricians (Selzer, 2004, p. 284). In their simplest form, they "...generally describe the actions of a rhetor, from preliminary planning to final delivery..." (Selzer, 2004, p. 284). The author or speaker would plan a strategy, decide upon the best arrangement, use a particular style, take advantage of other's successful rhetorical strategies, and ultimately publish a text or give a speech (Selzer, 2004). Of these, the arrangement, style, and memory will be of interest. Generally, written texts have been prepared with a particular end in mind, and thus their arrangement should serve to provide information about the author's goals. *PJ*'s official discourse may rely upon the same type of style and the

¹³ It should be noted that when I refer to "fear" within this thesis, I am referring to fear as an abstract concept.

same use of common rhetorical strategies in order to persuade their readers.

Ethos, pathos, and logos are all concerned with how a text or argument demonstrates its credibility (Aristotle, 1924/2004; Selzer, 2004). Credibility in terms of one's ethos comes from "...the personal character of the speaker" (Aristotle, 1924/2004, p. 7). Depending on the contextual/textual nature of rhetorical analysis, this ethos can come from different places. From a contextual perspective, ethos can be established externally from the text, in terms of reputation (Selzer, 2004, p. 294). Textually, it can come from different strategies, such as relating to the audience, appealing to expertise, or presenting a balanced account (Selzer, 2004). In either case, an author's ability to present him/herself as credible will result in a greater likelihood that listeners/readers are successfully persuaded (Aristotle, 1924/2004; Selzer, 2004).

Pathos refers to credibility that is gained from appealing to emotions or entrenched values of the audience (Aristotle, 1924/2004, pp. 7-8; Selzer, 2004, p. 284). This is often established by speaking to shared values or fears – for example, of sex offenders who target children – and by relying on images and connotations that result (Selzer, 2004, pp. 287-291). Connotations of words are also important in terms of the "emotional charges" that are associated with them (Selzer, 2004); calling someone a "predator" or a "monster" evokes a different reaction than calling them an "offender", for example. Metaphors are often a valuable rhetorical strategy in establishing pathos; the essence of a metaphor is that it causes the reader to draw associations between two concepts that previously would not have been considered together, often resulting in a new image or link being created (Eubanks, 2004; Selzer, 2004; Alvesson, 2002; Glucksberg, McGlone, & Manfredi, 1997).

Best (1987, p. 103) illustrates the force of this appeal to emotion by pointing out that a large part of the success of defining missing children as a social problem occurred only after "[o]rganizations like Child Find clearly found it advantageous to link their cause to the widespread sympathy for parents whose children were abducted by strangers". Particularly when children or other "defenceless" populations are involved as victims, "[p]eople respond empathetically to the horrors experienced..." (Best, 1987, p. 114). Indeed, persuasion can occur and credibility is established with the audience when "...the speech [or text] stirs their emotions" (Aristotle, 1924/2004, p. 7). Before the emotional and empathetic connection with a wider audience based on the horrifying experiences of some parents, the "missing children" problem had little traction; once the emotional connection was made, attention to the issue increased

significantly (Best, 1987, pp. 103-104). In many cases, social problems claims are successful based on their ability to connect with an audience's emotions above and beyond any other factor (Loseke, 2003).

The third way an argument can gain credibility is through logos, or "...proof, or apparent proof..." (Aristotle, 1924/2004, p. 7). Using evidence to support statements provides "hard evidence" that reinforces statements or claims (Selzer, 2004, p. 288). To return to the rhetoric of missing children as an example, there were typically three types of logos (or grounds) that were used: definitions, examples, and numeric estimates (Best, 1987, p. 104). So, the problem is framed and defined in concrete terms. Examples of similar situations can be used to underscore the prevalence of the issue in question, and numeric estimates can serve to highlight the "real" nature of the problem and also to illustrate significance, either through growth or through a large number of people being affected (Best, 1987). This condition for credibility does not imply that the author's claims are a singular, objective truth, but simply that "...the facts are what the supporter of a measure maintains they are" (Aristotle, 1924/2004, p. 4).

Rhetorical resources and the rhetorical situation are also important considerations. (Selzer, 2004, p. 282). Rhetorical resources refer to "ideas, phrases, cultural symbols, even gestures and clothing and intonation" (Selzer, 2004, p. 282). These resources can each be mobilized for persuasive purposes, drawing on the broader meaning that they have in particular cultures and contexts (Eubanks, 2004, p. 35). As my research involves solely text, gestures, clothing, and intonation will not be accessible (Travers, 2009, p. 173; James & Busher, 2006). However, a prepared written text offers some other persuasive cues, such as order, syntax, or quality (Selzer, 2004, pp. 282-286). Rhetorical resources, then, generally pay attention to the factors found within the text, whether through explicit or implicit meaning, content, or delivery (Selzer, 2004).

The rhetorical situation considers many of the more contextual factors, namely the "...circumstances of subject, audience, occasion, and purpose" (Selzer, 2004, p. 282). Depending on each of these factors, the speaker or author will employ particular strategies to increase the influence or persuasiveness of their discourse (Selzer, 2004, p. 282). Situation, speaker, and audience comprise some of the fundamental considerations, concepts, and terminologies in rhetorical analysis (Selzer, 2004, p. 283).

While much of my focus is on classical – largely based on Aristotelian definitions – of

rhetoric, the element of delivery is also an important consideration, especially when it comes to the nature of my material. Delivery in terms of a website differs from classical delivery (Porter, 2009). Rhetoricians following Aristotle recognized that delivery can and often does have an enormous impact on the effectiveness and persuasiveness of an argument or text (Porter, 2009; Selzer, 2004). Porter (2009) notes that, traditionally, delivery has been regarded almost as a synonym for the physical practice of speech or speaking. However, because a large proportion of the rhetoric individuals encounter is in print form, there is a need to reconceptualise delivery as a component of rhetoric in terms of digital and printed texts (Porter, 2009).

In the digital age, the level of interaction and interactivity is a significant part of delivering a rhetorical performance. When designing a rhetorical piece and then circulating it, an important consideration is getting the audience to engage (Porter, 2009). What was originally considered interactivity included things such as hyperlinks, polls, or forms to fill out (Porter, 2009, p. 217) – or, to use an example from *PJ*, the “slimy scale”, where readers vote on how “slimy” a “busted” individual is on a scale from 1 to 5. Porter (2009, p. 217) argues that, while these options are commonly considered to be interactivity, they simply create a perception of interactivity; options and choices are highly constrained. True interactivity, then, comes from collaboration, co-production, and participation (Porter, 2009, p. 218). This could potentially be a function of the *PJ* forums; rhetorical work that “...calls upon [readers] to actively participate...seem[s] to be more effective than those designs that position the audience as passive consumers of information” (Porter, 2009, p. 218).

These rhetorical elements and strategies are particularly present in public works designed to persuade (Aristotle, 1924/2004; Selzer, 2004). Social problems claims are an example of the public texts that rely on rhetorical strategies in order to convince an audience about the nature, extent, or solution to a social problem (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Best, 1990, 1987). As such, the following section discusses the constructed nature of social problems and the processes and components of claims.

Constructing social problems

Much contemporary work analyzing social problems and social problems claims has been informed by social constructivism (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009, 1973; Best, 2002, 1993, 1990, 1987; deYoung, 1996; Schneider, 1985; Gusfield, 1981; Schoenfeld, Meier, & Griffin, 1979;

Pfohl, 1977; Kitsuse & Spector, 1975, 1973; Lemert, 1974; Blumer, 1971). This particular view of social problems focuses on the *process* rather than any objective or inherent condition of the issue in question.¹⁴ It is the claimsmakers, claimants, or moral entrepreneurs who are attempting to define a particular issue as a social problem that become the focus of analysis; the claims themselves, rather than some issue or condition with which the claims are concerned, are of the most importance (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009, 1973; Best, 1990, 1987; Blumer, 1971; Becker, 1963).

From this perspective, “[s]ocial problems...are conceived as products of social processes in which members of a group, community, or society perceive, interpret, evaluate, and treat behaviors, persons and conditions as problems” (Kitsuse & Spector, 1975, pp. 584-585). A social problem is constituted not by a condition, individual, or behaviour, but rather by the claims that are made about it. In this sense, social problems are created by members of society: “The existence of social problems depends on the continued existence of groups or agencies that define some condition as a problem and attempt to do something about it” (Kitsuse & Spector, 1973, p. 415). These groups or agencies that are able to define an issue as a social problem do so using rhetorical techniques in order to persuade the audience that their particular issue is indeed a problem and requires attention (Best, 1990, 1987).

Claims, claimsmaking, and claimsmakers

The statements used to define an issue as a social problem can broadly be summarized as claims (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Best, 2001, 1990, 1987). Claims are statements that are designed to persuade an audience, advance a definition of a particular issue, illustrate the extent of an issue, or advance a preferred course of action in order to effectively solve or treat a social problem (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Toulmin, 2003; Best, 2001, 1990, 1987). Any argumentative, persuasive, or demanding statement can be a claim (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Toulmin, 2003; Best, 1987). For social problems specifically, a claim:

... is basically an argument with four elements: (a) that some condition exists; (b) that it is problematic (i.e., that it is troubling and ought to be addressed); (c) that it has particular characteristics (e.g., that it is common, has known causes or serious consequences, or is a problem of a particular type); and (d) that some sort of action should be taken to deal with it (Best, 2001, p. 8).

¹⁴ A fuller discussion of the constructed nature of social problems follows in Chapter 3.

Claimsmakers use a variety of rhetorical strategies to attempt to persuade an audience that their particular issue involves each of these components. Best (1990, 1987) provides a rhetorical framework of a claimmaking campaign using the example of missing children claimsmakers in the 1980s. These claimsmakers relied primarily on a framework of claims that involved defining the issue, justifying it based on a sense of shared or common values, and calling for certain actions designed to eliminate the social problem. These statements, then, illustrate claims.

Claims

Taking into consideration their rhetorical purpose, claims that are designed to persuade an audience involve a number of distinct components. Claimsmakers use a variety of rhetorical strategies and techniques in order to convince their audience that their particular issue deserves attention. The main components of a claim are grounds, warrants, and conclusions (Best, 1990, 1987).

Grounds

The grounds of a claim “...provide the basic facts which serve as the foundation for the discussion which follows” (Best, 1987, p. 104). In the context of a constructivist analysis of social problems claims, these basic facts of the argument are themselves socially constructed (Best, 1987, p. 104). However, it is these grounds that illustrate, contextualize, and exemplify what the social problem constitutes and why it deserves attention, according to claimsmakers. Generally, three categories of grounds are used for rhetorical purposes: definitions, examples, and estimates (Best, 1990, 1987).

Definitions, quite simply, identify the problem. Claimsmakers define what constitutes the social problem – and, by extension, what is not relevant to the discussion (Best, 1987; Gusfield, 1981). These definitions are often very broad, so as to create an inclusive definition of the social problem (Best, 1987). Rhetorically, this broad definition is a strategy designed to appeal to a wide variety of audience members – including a wide range of behaviours, issues, or phenomena in the definition of a social problem increases its scope. Defining statements also help to solidify a problem’s domain and orientation (Best, 1990, 1987; Pfohl, 1977). Domain statements refer to the boundaries that claimsmakers draw around an issue, working to define what is and what is not part of the problem (Best, 1990, 1987). Orientation statements examine what the type of

problem is and to which field it belongs (Best, 1987). For example, while domain statements often serve to define the boundaries of a new or emerging social issue, orientation statements serve to create a new frame for understanding an issue (Best, 1990, 1987).

Whether claimsmakers use primarily domain or orientation statements, then, depends on the issue they are attempting to bring to attention. For example, discovery movements (Pfohl, 1977) rely on domain statements to either seek to define a new issue or to “...describe the problem as something which presumably has existed for some time but has only now been recognized for what it is (e.g. child abuse)” (Best, 1987, p. 104). Orientation statements, on the other hand, identify what type of problem a particular phenomenon is; for example, many claimsmakers have argued that certain social problems, such as addiction, should be reconceptualised as diseases and therefore belong to the medical field (Best, 1990).

Examples of the problem also serve to ground claims (Best, 1999, 1990, 1987) and provide a human dimension to a social problem. Rhetorically, using examples also helps to create an emotional connection with the audience: “By focusing on events in the lives of individuals, these stories make it easier to identify with the people affected by the problem. Selecting horrific examples gives a sense of the problem’s frightening, harmful dimensions” (Best, 1987, p. 106). Particularly horrific examples, or atrocity tales (Best, 1990, 1987), also serve to typify the social problem. By linking the particular social problem claim with an example involving individuals, claimsmakers create a link between that particular example and the social problem as a whole. For example, missing children claimsmakers focused on a select few cases of particularly violent stranger abductions; these cases came to serve as the referent for general understanding of the issue, even as claimsmakers themselves acknowledged that such cases were rare (Best, 1987, pp. 105-106). Some claimsmakers in the 1980s and early 1990s attempted to establish Satanic ritual abuse of children as a social problem (Cohen, 2002, p. xvii; La Fontaine, 1998; de Young, 1996, p. 56), spreading across the U.S. and the U.K. (Best, 2001, p. 7). de Young (1996, pp. 60-61) notes some of the examples that were used to typify this issue to the audience. For example, one self-identified survivor of Satanic ritual abuse testified that she “...was forced to watch as they killed [her] baby sister by decapitation in a ritual sacrifice. The sacrifice was followed by a communion ritual, during which human flesh and blood were consumed” (Rose, 1993, p. 42 as cited in de Young, 1996, p. 60). These examples typify the issue and connect with the audience emotionally (Best, 1990, 1987). They also serve another

purpose; they “...are so emotionally evocative that they also detract attention from any skeptical counterclaims” (de Young, 1996, p. 60). Not only do these atrocity tales or typifying examples help the rhetor establish pathos, they also serve to preclude skepticism, as the emotional dimension is sufficiently disturbing to allow for the suspension of disbelief.

Estimates attempt to address the size or magnitude of a social problem (Best, 1990, 1987). Estimates of a problem’s extent can take a number of forms; Best (1990, 1987) noted three distinct types of estimates used by claimsmakers attempting to establish missing children as a social problem: incidence estimates, growth estimates, and range claims.

Incidence estimates attempt to approximate the number of cases or the number of individuals who are affected (Best, 1987). These estimates can come from any number of sources and will generally depend on how broadly the boundaries around the social problem are drawn; including a broader number of behaviours or actions as examples of the social problem in question will necessarily increase the estimate of the number of incidents.

Gardner (2008) notes the use of incidence estimates in a number of claimsmaking campaigns. For example, the organization Innocents in Danger claims that “[r]ecent figures suggest some 50,000 paedophiles are prowling the Internet at any one time” (as cited in Gardner, 2008, p. 37). Other claimsmakers took up this estimate and modified it to suit their particular claim. Some added more precision: these 50,000 were active worldwide, only in America, or only on MySpace (Gardner, 2008, p. 38). Some qualified the 50,000, using the terms precisely, at least, or up to. This estimate, though, was repeated in a wide range of sources across Canada, the United States, and Britain, illustrating the transference that such estimates can have, and the impact that they can have in terms of framing social problems (Gardner, 2008; Best, 2001, 1990, 1987). Incidentally, the source of this estimate was not official statistics, but *Dateline* personality Chris Hansen (Gardner, 2008, pp. 39-40) – the host of *Dateline’s To Catch a Predator*, *PJ’s* primary media partner. This illustrates the role that the mass media can play as secondary claimsmakers, simply through (re)presenting claims made by primary claimsmakers, as well as the role that the media plays in shaping social problems and public perception thereof (Altheide, 2006, 1997; Best, 1990).

Growth estimates claim that the problem is growing, whether in terms of the number of people affected, the degree of harm or deterioration being caused, or both (Best, 1990, 1987). A common technique used by claimsmakers to this end is the epidemic metaphor (Jacobs & Henry,

1996; Best, 1990, 1987), which implies that the problem is spreading and will affect more and more individuals as it grows. For example, a number of American claimsmakers in the 1990s referred to hate crime as an epidemic, which served to establish the issue as “...a crisis, a calamity that *demand*s immediate political and social action” (Jacobs & Henry, 1996, p. 367, emphasis original). Issues such as bullying (Cohen, 2002, p. xii; Furedi, 2001), indiscriminate highway shootings (Best, 1999, pp. 31-32), the emergence of various drugs such as crack cocaine (Reinarman & Levine, 2003), and road rage (Roberts & Indemaur, 2005; Best & Furedi, 2001) have been characterized as epidemics and subsequently received significant attention.

Range claims attempt to determine the population who is at-risk, building upon the epidemic metaphor commonly used to establish the growth of a problem (Best, 1987). Social problems claimsmakers often find it useful to argue that social problems can and will affect anyone, regardless of any characteristic (Best, 1990, 1987). By doing so, claimsmakers are able to illustrate the importance of their issue: “[b]y arguing that anyone might be affected by a problem, a claimsmaker can make everyone in the audience feel that they have a vested interest in the problem’s solution” (Best, 1987, p. 108). Thus, broad definitions of social problems are favoured so as not to limit the types of behaviour that can be considered in scope, and range claims tend to identify a wide range of groups or individuals as potentially affected by the issue (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009, p. 88; Best, 1990, 1987).

This grounding of claims is done rhetorically and serves an important purpose (Best, 1987, p. 114). The examples, estimates, and definitions used are constructed in a particular and conscious manner and are designed to persuade an audience. Atrocity tales create empathy, estimates illustrate the scope of the issue, and the use of metaphors, such as the epidemic metaphor, uses certain connotations to create an image of the problem. Typifying examples can also come to represent the problem in the public’s eye:

...where the Federal Bureau of Narcotics once personified marijuana smokers as homicidal drug fiends, advocates of decriminalization describe users as well-adjusted, otherwise law-abiding citizens; where pro-choice advocates insist that abortions be available for victims of rape and incest, pro-life crusaders portray women who callously abort for their own convenience; and where welfare advocates focus on the deserving poor, their opponents speak of welfare Cadillacs. (Best, 1987, p. 114)

It is common for claimsmakers to present typifying examples or atrocity tales in order to construct the issue as uncontroversial (Best, 1990, 1987). These examples, when they are particularly riveting or emotionally charged, can come to serve as the foundation for all discussion of the issue that takes place. For example, when the missing children problem was framed by claimsmakers using select examples of stranger abductions, sexual assaults, and murders, the issue took on a particular context. When presented in this simplified and highly emotional manner, the problem became uncontroversial (Best, 1987); what Beckett (1996) calls a “valence issue”. These valence issues are defined by lack of conflict; there is an underlying view that is practically universal. This compares to position issues, which are characterized by conflict, i.e. there are two (or more) sides to the issue, with distinct alternative and adversarial views. Given the frames and example used by missing children claimsmakers, their claims had few opponents – it became a valence issue, given that individuals and groups were unwilling to appear as though they were in favour of or defending child sexual abuse or violent victimization (Beckett, 1996; Best, 1990, 1987). Grounding claims through the use of rhetorical strategies such as examples, estimates, and definitions, then, can allow claimsmakers to present an uncontroversial issue – and claims that are uncontroversial (or do not invite obvious contention) have a greater chance of success for the claimsmakers (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Best, 1990).

Warrants

Best (1990, 1987) and Toulmin (2003) set out the importance of warrants in an argument. Warrants are “...statements which justify drawing conclusions from the grounds” (Best, 1987, p. 108). There are a number of important considerations about warrants to keep in mind. Toulmin (2003, pp. 91-92), in discussing some of the complexities of language, notes that in many cases statements can serve more than one purpose, and, as such, can contain both grounds and warrants. There are a number of ways in which claims can be supported or justified; Toulmin (2003) categorizes these justifying statements as warrants. A successful, well-justified claim has persuasive warrants (Best, 1990; Schneider, 1985). Warrants often take the form of propositions: ...which can act as bridges, and authorise the sort of step to which our particular argument commits us. These may normally be written very briefly (in the form ‘If D [data, or grounds], then C [conclusion]’; but, for candour’s sake, they can profitably be expanded,

and made more explicit: ‘Data such as D entitle one to draw conclusions, or make claims, such as C’, or alternatively ‘Given data D, one may take it that C’. (Toulmin, 2003, p. 91)

Another important feature of warrants hints at the difficulty that the audience can have in perceiving them: their implicit nature (Toulmin, 2003; Best, 1990, 1987). One of the most significant differences between grounds and warrants is that:

...data [or grounds] are appealed to explicitly, warrants implicitly. In addition, one may remark that warrants are general, certifying the soundness of *all* arguments of the appropriate type, and have accordingly to be established in quite a different way from the facts we produce as data. (Toulmin, 2003, p. 92)

As Best (1987, p. 108) explains, “...for an argument to be persuasive, the individual to be persuaded must ordinarily belong to a field which deems the warrant valid”. Conclusions that are made on certain grounds are framed in a particular way so as to use the same types of justification that are accepted by the target audience.

Spector and Kitsuse (1987/2009, pp. 92-93) similarly highlight the role of these types of statement or justification; however, they are referred to as values rather than warrants. These values “...are those statements that express *the grounds or the basis* of the complaint. They are used to justify a demand, to explain not simply what is wrong, but why it is wrong” (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009, p. 93). Values and warrants are rhetorical resources (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Best, 1987); as a result, they are not inherent to the problem or the issue but are chosen by the claimsmaker depending on their intended audience (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009, p. 93). These values “...are a constituent feature of social problems activities that are observable in what participants do and say” (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009, p. 93). Generally, then, warrants and value statements are left implicit (Toulmin, 2003, p. 92). In other words, social problems claimsmakers generally avoid explicitly stating their warrants (Best, 1987); however, they are observable in the claims that are made through analyzing the grounds that are used and the conclusions that are made (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Best, 1987).

The implicit nature of warrants may be by design (Best, 1987, p. 109). Indeed, there is a rhetorical purpose to be found in *not* mentioning the warrants that are being used to justify conclusions (Best, 1987, p. 109). Disagreeing on the *grounds* of a social problem does not necessarily mean that the conclusions are rejected (Beckett, 1996; Best, 1990, 1987); for

example, a debate on whether there are ten thousand children abducted each year or one hundred thousand (Best, 1987, p. 108) does not necessarily cause a dispute in terms of the conclusions that are ultimately made. Rhetorically speaking, it is much easier to reconcile a debate regarding grounds than it is to “...defend a warrant which one’s audience refuses to validate” (Best, 1987, p. 109).

For example, an individual who believes that the present policies are sufficient is not likely to be persuaded by the warrant that the present policies and programs cannot adequately deal with the issue at hand (Best, 1987). Using this as a warrant could alienate a portion of the audience who does not believe that conclusions can be justified using this line of reasoning. Toulmin (2003, p. 93) uses the example of certain philosophers who oppose the idea of predicting the future based on the present and the past, and, as such, reject any claims that are made using this type of “past-to-future warrant”. As a result, by *not* mentioning warrants or values, the rhetor can “...circumvent the discovery that the audience belongs to a different argument field” (Best, 1987, p. 109). In this sense, there is a greater likelihood that more people are persuaded.

Best (1990, 1987) identified six types of warrant that emerged most frequently in the rhetoric concerning the missing children problem: the value of children, blameless victims, associated evils, deficient policies, historical continuity, and rights and freedoms. These warrants were most often relied upon as justification for claimsmakers to put forward the types of conclusions or calls for action that they did. Because, as Best (1987, p. 109) notes, “...references to warrants may be oblique or implicit...”, capturing each of the warrants used is difficult. As such, a selection of the most prominently featured warrants is much more manageable (Best, 1987, p. 109).

Conclusions

Finally, social problems claims reach and present conclusions. These conclusions are “...typically calls for action to alleviate or eradicate the social problem” (Best, 1987, p. 112). Depending on the goals of the claimsmakers, these calls for action can constitute raising awareness, working to prevent the issue from continuing or spreading, establishing new forms of social control, such as introducing legislation, or other objectives such as examining the role of popular culture in the issue in question or reinforcing social norms by illustrating the sorts of

individuals or behaviours which are perceived as inappropriate or unacceptable (Garland, 1990; Best, 1987). Conclusions in claims can be considered in the same sense as conclusions in other arguments (Toulmin, 2003; Best, 1987). They synthesize the grounds and warrants into a final position – if the claimsmaker has successfully persuaded the audience of the grounds and warrants of an issue, the conclusion represents the claimsmaker’s proposed solution or course of action.

Real/virtual nature of the Internet

In terms of social problems claimsmaking involving the Internet, establishing the virtual space of the Internet in the same sense as the “real world” is important. For those who conceptualize the Internet as a virtual space detached from reality, the issue of online solicitation – particularly the grooming element – becomes detached from the real world and therefore is not understood as “real” victimization (Williams, 2006, p. 98). A number of theorists have thus emphasized the interconnectivity and theoretical inseparability – even, the redundancy – of the “real” and the “virtual” worlds (Miller, 2010; Gies, 2008; Aas, 2007; Finch, 2007; Jewkes, 2007; Williams, 2006; Pauwels, 2005; Markham, 1998).

Theorists of spaces who emphasized the separation between the “real” and the virtual, such as Baudrillard (1998) and Jameson (1991), have been criticized because emphasizing the separateness fails to take into account the nature of experience (Aas, 2007, pp. 162-163; Williams, 2006, p. 99). Assuming that the virtual and the real are intrinsically linked means that “...both acts of deviance and experiences online are inexorably linked to the ‘real’ world” (Williams, 2006, p. 99). As information and communication technologies have become more prevalent, the Internet has evolved such that it is no longer “...a sphere situated at the outskirts of society, proverbially populated by nerds and deviants, but rather is woven into central aspects of contemporary social and economic life...” (Aas, 2007, p. 161). As Markham (1998, p. 120) notes:

Whether online or offline, everything that is experienced is real, and everything that is not experienced is not experienced. Real becomes a double negative; simply put, when experiences are experienced, they cannot be “not real”...our experiences are not easily separated into these binary oppositions.

This definition falls within the social constructivist understanding of the world (Finch, 2007); there is meaning to and importance in our interactions and our experiences (Titscher et al., 2000, p. 75; Blumer, 1971). These experiences help to constitute worldviews and collective understandings, definitions, and symbols, regardless of “where” they occur (Aas, 2007; Williams, 2006; Pauwels, 2005). So, it must be kept in mind that:

There are many complex interactions and connections between off-line and online worlds, and both are part of the contemporary social life of an increasing number of people... ‘Virtual’ too often seems to imply ‘imaginary’ or ‘fake’. Surely all mediated interactions are ‘constructed’ in a very literal sense, but then our whole conception of society is a series of constructs. (Pauwels, 2005, p. 605)

Rather than providing a different world, then, the Internet simply adds “...an additional layer to already densely structured social identities” (Gies, 2008, p. 327). These different forms of construction then add to the already constructed nature of the social world in its more traditional sense.

Moral panic

Social problems claims are often (but not always) related to moral panics (Altheide, 2009; Cohen, 1972/2002). The concept of moral panic has grown in its use and range since its inception (Altheide, 2009; Garland, 2008). Indeed, most contemporary social problems claims are labelled by opponents as “merely” moral panics (Garland, 2008, p. 9). A number of facets of claimsmaking strategies are similar to elements of moral panic. Moral panics, as characterized by Cohen (1972/2002, p. 1), occur when:

A condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians, and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible.

Goode & Ben-Yehuda (1994, pp. 156-159) identified five elements characteristic of moral panics: concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility. The first, concern, simply refers to an increase in the attention paid to or fear of a particular issue. This

characteristic is tied closely to social problems construction: “[a]s with social problems, this concern is manifested or measurable in concrete ways, through, for example, public opinion polls, media attention, proposed legislation, action groups, or social movement activity” (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 157). The actions of claimsmakers in defining or bringing attention to social problems mirror the actions of those who bring about moral panics; while a social problem claim does not necessarily involve a moral panic (Cohen, 2002, p. xxviii), the two often overlap (Garland, 2008, p. 15; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

Hostility refers generally to the dichotomy that is created between the concerned citizens or agencies on one hand, and the alleged problem group on the other (Cohen, 1972/2002; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). This type of claim is also present in rhetorical constructions of social problems, as the claimsmakers portray the groups or individuals involved in the particular issue as others, or folk devils (Jewkes, 2010a, 2010b; Cohen, 1972/2002; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994), dividing the issue in terms of good (society) versus evil (the folk devils) (Jewkes, 2010a, 2010b; Altheide, 2009, 2006; Cohen, 1972/2002; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Best, 1987). This criterion is particularly effective in social problems claims or moral panics surrounding sex offenders. As these individuals are already feared, considered deviant, and constructed as absolute others (Jewkes, 2010a, 2010b; Spencer, 2009; Wright, 2008; Jenkins, 2001), it is easier to portray them as significant and real threats to society. Therefore, it is easier to advance social problems claims or generate moral panics, as the hostility towards the group in question is already established (Cricher, 2011; Garland, 2008, p. 14). Sex offenders fit the criteria of a group that is marginalized and therefore easy to portray as folk devils (Garland, 2008; Cohen, 1972/2002).

The third criterion, consensus, refers to “...a certain minimal measure of agreement in the society as a whole or in designated segments of the society that the threat is real, serious, and caused by the wrongdoing of group members and their behavior” (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 157). Consensus does not require total agreement across society, but simply some level of agreement across certain populations. In this sense, the consensus has already been built when it comes to issues of sex offenders who victimize and/or target children (Wright, 2008; Beckett, 1996). Similar to how hostility has already been built up against these individuals, there is already a consensus against child sex offenders, in the sense that there are no public defenders of the behaviour, or, for that matter, the individuals involved in the behaviour (Beckett, 1996).

Both social problems claims and moral panics are more successful when they are delivered to “...an already primed, sensitized public audience” (Garland, 2008, p. 14). Contemporary understandings and fears of sex offenders, then, lend themselves well to the creation of moral panics and social problems claimsmaking activities.

The fourth criterion, disproportionality, involves the “panic” element of moral panic. It refers to the reactions to the issue that are out of proportion to the objective condition in question (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). Of course, though, this seems to presume that sociologists know or can access the real or objective nature of the problem in question – otherwise, how could it be known whether or not the response to the “real” problem is out of proportion? However, this is not irreconcilable with social constructivism or the construction of social problems. As Garland (2008, p. 13) notes, “[s]trictly speaking, the ‘extent’ of a problem is never simply ‘revealed’. Like the problem’s character, or causes, or consequences, it is a property that is subject to dispute and collective negotiation”. Whether these collective definitions result in further conflict or general consensus, they can give a sense of the nature of the reaction (Garland, 2008).

The criterion of disproportionality depends largely on constructed definitions and collective responses rather than objective conditions (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1996, p. 158). For example, if a wide range of behaviours is included in an estimate of the number of incidents of a more specific behaviour, the reaction can be considered disproportionate (Cohen, 1972/2002; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, Best, 1990). Including short-term runaways and parental abductions, then, in estimates of the missing children problem (which was rhetorically typified, through the use of examples, by stranger abductions) serves to create an exaggerated estimate which, while it serves a function rhetorically, amplifies the scope of the problem (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Best, 1990, 1987). Furthermore, the term disproportionality does not necessarily refer solely to just the problem and the reaction; it also involves values, emotions, signs, and symbols that cannot be quantified (Cohen, 2002, pp. xxxiv-xxxvi).

Volatility, the fifth characteristic, refers to the sudden rise and fall of moral panics (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). While certain behaviours and groups reoccur as subjects of moral panic, often in a cyclical nature (Cohen, 1972/2002; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994), the fear and concern do not generally last long. Similarly, a number of issues become the focus of social problems claims, creating significant interest and attention, and subsequently retreating (Cohen, 1972/2002; Jenkins, 2001). Some social problems (and moral panics) are responded to and

become institutionalized (i.e. through the creation of legislation, agencies, or other ways of meeting demands or responding to concerns), while others simply fade away (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Cohen, 2011, 1972/2002; Best, 1999, 1990, 1987; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

Garland (2008, p. 11) adds two elements to Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994) examination of the characteristics of moral panics: "(i) the *moral dimension* of the social reaction, particularly the introspective soul-searching that accompanies these episodes; and (ii) the idea that the deviant conduct in question is somehow *symptomatic*" (emphasis original). These two added dimensions, then, reemphasize the moral nature of moral panics. Beyond the characteristics Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) identify, which exemplify panic, the moral characteristics added by Garland (2008) supplement the full dimension of Cohen's (1972/2002) moral panic concept. Those that are reacting to a problem or behaviour are not simply hostile and overreacting; they are doing so because of a belief that said problem or behaviour is a reflection of something larger and a threat to some established value or order (Garland, 2008, p. 11; Cohen, 1972/2002). Successful moral panics, as well as successful social problems claims, succeed because they are able to align themselves with a wide range of issues, concerns, and fears (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Garland, 2008; Cohen, 1972/2002; Best, 1990, 1987).

Moral panics and social problems claims share a number of key features. In addition to the role of individuals and agencies in constructing and defining both moral panics and social problems, the role of fear is also important when it comes to social problems claimsmaking and moral panic. Particularly in the context of *PJ*, the contemporary fear of sex offenders (Gardner, 2008; Hunter, 2008; Wright, 2008; Jenkins, 2001; West, 2000) and the fear of new technology (Gies, 2008; Cassell & Cramer, 2008) intersect to allow for a certain type of social problem claim to be successful.

Fear of sex offenders

Fear of crime is a significant, yet difficult to quantify, aspect of everyday social life. Many individual and state actions are specifically designed to curb this fear of being victimized (Critcher, 2011; Simon, 2003). While the fear of crime is generally fractured along several different lines, highly dependent on individual context and circumstance, a relatively uniformly feared figure is the sex offender who targets children (Gardner, 2008; Hunter, 2008; Wright;

West, 2000). In many cases – such as paedophiles online, road rage, or Satanic cults – these fears become panics (Gardner, 2008, p. 7).

Altheide (2006, pp. 417-418, 1997) illustrates the rise of the politics of fear in contemporary society. With specific reference to social problems that can fall within the orientation of crime and victimization, constructionist analysis of social problems and claimsmaking demonstrate the role fear plays: narratives, claims, or examples serve to “...decontextualize rather complex events to reflect narratives that demonize and offer simplistic explanations” (Altheide, 2009, p. 82, 2006, p. 417). These simplistic explanations – relying on dichotomies of good and evil – work to foster the hostility that characterizes moral panics and social problems claimsmaking campaigns (Altheide, 2009, 2006; Cohen, 1972/2002; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Best, 1987). These narratives, then, underpin the role of fear in contemporary society; these simple explanations demonize a certain group, who become the object of fear, while law-abiding citizens become constructed as potential victims (Altheide, 2006, p. 418). Social problems claims or moral panics lead society to fear becoming the victim of random violence (Best, 1999), child predators (Glassner, 1999/2009; Gardner, 2008, West, 2000; Best, 1990), Halloween sadists (Glassner, 1999/2009, pp. 38-39; Best & Horiuchi, 1985), or some other indiscriminate form of victimization. Much of this fear evolves due to secondary claimsmakers (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Best, 1990), chief among them the mass media (Critcher, 2011; Glassner, 1999/2009; Best, 1999, 1990; Altheide, 1997).

Altheide (1997, p. 647) implicates the media in both the dissemination of social problems claims and in the production of this fear:

...there are numerous issues presented to citizens. Often cast as ‘problems’, these issues are produced by entertainment-oriented media machinery. The mass media in general, and especially the electronic news media, are part of a ‘problem-generating machine’ geared to entertainment, voyeurism, and the ‘quick fix’, rather than the understanding and social change envisioned....

Furthermore, the mass media has a central role in the creation of moral panics (Cohen, 2011, 1972/2002; Critcher, 2011; Garland, 2008; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994) and a similarly significant role in social problems claims and claimsmaking activities (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Best, 1999, 1990). Disseminating these familiar themes regarding the nature and

prevalence of predatory paedophiles reinforces the fear of sex offenders, which can then be combined with other familiar fears.

Fear of technology

Another oft-implicated object of moral panic is new technology (Cassell & Cramer, 2008, p. 59; Gies, 2008, p. 325; McLoughlin, 1995). Best (1990) notes that associated evils such as popular culture, media, and technology are often implicated in claimsmaking activities. This claim reinforces the seemingly common fear that “[n]ow in the age of technology, children are being stalked and seduced online in the privacy of their own bedrooms. They are lured into a world of sexual maturity by predators using techniques of manipulation and deception” (Marcum, 2007, p. 100). It is the Internet itself that provides access to children.

Tropes revolve around the inability of adults in positions of supervision to fully comprehend new and emergent forms of technology – from the more recent development of the Internet, to the invention of the telegraph over a century ago – while portraying youth as simultaneously savvy users and vulnerable victims-to-be (Cassell & Cramer, 2008, p. 60). Each subsequent technological development, particularly those that facilitate or allow for greater ease of communication, brings about similar senses of fear. Claims that these new avenues of communication will threaten traditional values and ways of life, provide opportunists with a new space to commit crimes, or challenge structural features of society, have been advanced similarly by critics of the telegraph, the radio, the telephone, the television, and the Internet (Cassell & Cramer, 2008, pp. 59-61).

Combining the two

Where fear of sex offenders and fear of technology meet, the issue of online solicitation of children emerges. While fear of sex offenders is not a new phenomenon, when combined with the relatively new technology of the Internet, an opportunity to stoke fear and “discover” (Pfohl, 1977) a social problem appears: “Representative Bill McCollum of Florida made the customary claim: ‘Sex offenders who prey on children no longer need to hang out in parks or malls or school yards’. Nowadays...child pornographers and pedophiles are just ‘a mouse click away’ from their young prey” (Glassner, 1999/2009, p. 33). Because of this fear of sex offenders, and claims that predators abounded on the Internet, a moral panic surrounding children’s –

particularly young girl's – use of the Internet emerged (Cassell & Cramer, 2008, p. 64; Yar, 2007). The Internet itself is then problematized: “Instant messaging, social networking sites, and chat rooms provide a semi-anonymous gateway for online child predators to reach their underage victims” (Tomich & Liipfert, 2004, p. 126). The cyclical nature of social problems claimsmaking and moral panics (Cohen, 2011, 1972/2002; Garland, 2008; Jenkins, 2001; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Best, 1990, 1987), such as those focused on sex offenders, when combined with new technology can lead to the creation of a re-emergence of fear: “[t]he use of the Internet for facilitating online abuse of children remains one of the most feared phenomena of the late-modern age. The predatory paedophile is the bogeyman of our time...” (Jewkes, 2010b, p. 525). While each of these fears resurfaces separately from time to time, they combine in the form of the online child predator.

This particular social problem claim relied heavily on growth estimates and range claims rather than incidence estimates (Glassner, 1999/2009; Best, 1990, 1987). As there were relatively few instances to serve as typifying examples, claimsmakers instead argued that “as the number of children who use the Internet continues to boom ...pornography and pedophilia grow along with it” (*New York Times*, as cited by Glassner, 1999/2009, p. 33). News media outlets cited a frightening statistic (despite not being able to provide a source): one in five youth who use the Internet had faced solicitation attempts (Cassell & Cramer, 2008).

The familiarity the public has with fear of and moral panic about both sex offenders and new technology, combined with estimates about a growing problem with a wide range of potential victims, allows for a relatively simple development of a fear of this novel cyberpredator. Because of this fear, a number of specific approaches to punishment can be developed and justified (Petrunik, 2002; Jenkins, 2001).

Moral panics and decivilization¹⁵

Rohloff and Wright (2010:411-412) explain how moral panics can contribute to a decivilizing process in society. This process, elaborated by Norbert Elias (1939) is a theoretical construct, referring to the way in which “civilized” societies emerged (Pratt, 2000, pp. 420-421).

¹⁵ While I am aware of the somewhat loaded implications of the term “decivilizing”, I adopt Pratt’s (2000, 1998) framework for identifying processes and procedures that are characteristic of “decivilizing” trends because of his emphasis on the relationships between these trends, the role of rhetoric and language (Pratt, 1998, p. 555), and the emergence of regulatory frameworks, such as neo-liberalism (a fuller discussion of which follows at page 32 and footnote 16).

The process itself is not linear or irreversible (Pratt, 2000); societies can civilize at one time and decivilize at another, or even do both simultaneously in regards to different issues or specific approaches (Rohloff & Wright, 2010; Pratt, 2000, 1998). The process is based in “...increasing interdependency among people, that inculcated behavioural restraints and encouraged sympathy for others” (Vaughan, 2000, p. 72). The state assumed a central role in the lives of individuals, and as it became civilized, overt displays of physical power and violence decreased while more covert mechanisms of control emerged (Pratt, 2000, 1998; Vaughan, 2000). These overt displays did not necessarily cease, but they were removed from the public eye (Pratt, 2000, 1998; Vaughan, 2000). In terms of criminal justice, the language of punishment became more neutral, the processes became standardized, conditions were generally improved, and the spectacle of punishment relocated to out-of-the-way institutions rather than open, public spaces (Pratt, 1998).

Because the civilizing process is not a strictly linear one, however, decivilizing can occur in modern societies (Rohloff & Wright, 2010; Pratt, 2000, 1998; Vaughan, 2000). Recent trends in punishment seem to exhibit some of these decivilizing processes (Garland, 2001, p. 184; Pratt, 1998). Initiatives such as the publication of offender’s names and addresses, public registries, particularly severe punishments (such as chemical or physical castration), boot camps, three strikes laws, and other similar trends reflect a change in the previous trend of punitiveness in modern, “civilized” (primarily Western) societies (Pratt, 1998, pp. 499-505). These practices that are evidence of a decivilizing process, then, serve to

...reverse some of the penal themes that had become predominant in modern society, particularly during the welfare era. Thus: punishment is made to be a public spectacle again; punishments are to be made more unpleasant rather than ameliorated; much of the rhetoric and ideology associated with them is based around brutalizing language and images; there is a sense of anxiety, crisis and fear which allows non-modern and *explicitly* coercive and punitive strategies such as curfews to gain acceptance as a crime-fighting strategy; and, by encouraging community involvement and invoking public opinion by means of an increasingly pervasive mass media against those thought to constitute the more significant crime risks...(Pratt, 1998, p. 505, emphasis original)

Decivilizing trends in punishment, then, play on many of the same factors that lead to the creation of moral panics (Rohloff & Wright, 2010; Garland, 2008; Cohen, 1972/2002; Altheide, 1997; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). Pre-established public sensibilities and a fear discourse

promoted by mass media, which can often incite panic (Critcher, 2011; Young, 2011; Glassner, 1999/2009; Garland, 2008; Cohen, 1972/2002; Altheide, 1997), are also used to justify the implementation of harsh, “anti-modern” punishment (Garland, 2001, p. 184; Pratt, 2000, 1998). Punishment re-emerges in the public sphere in the spectacular form of visible shaming campaigns (Ashenden, 2002; Bell, 2002; Ronken & Lincoln, 2001) and mass-mediated infotainment programs (Kohm, 2009). Those constructed as “significant crime risks” – such as paedophiles (Lave, 2011; Webster, Gartner, & Doob, 2006; Zgoba, 2004) – are more often than not the targets of this punitive shift. Kohm (2009, pp. 188-189) implicates *To Catch a Predator* as an example of a punishment spectacle: the show “...is organized around the spectacle of humiliating putative pedophiles on network television in partnership with local police agencies and...Perverved Justice”.

Decivilizing processes may emerge during moral panics, where “...there need only be a *perceived* increase in danger, with a perceived failure of the state to reduce those dangers” (Rohloff & Wright, 2010, p. 412, emphasis original). These perceptions, then, can lead to official and unofficial responses: “For example, panics over paedophiles have witnessed both the resurgence of vigilante movements...and the (re)introduction of laws that would, at other times under other conditions, be viewed as ‘uncivilized’” (Rohloff & Wright, 2010, p. 412). These official and unofficial responses, in addition to their ties to moral panics, social problems claims, and decivilizing processes, can also be understood through theories of governance and regulation, most notably vigilantism, neo-conservatism, and neo-liberalism.

Unofficial responses: Vigilantism and paedophile panics

Vigilantism is generally a response to the (real or perceived) failure of the state to meet the demands of its citizens (Dumsday, 2009; Hine, 1998; Johnston, 1996; Sederberg, 1978; Burrows, 1976; Rosenbaum & Sederberg, 1974). This end differentiates vigilante action from other types of collective action, such as rebellion or terrorism (Senechal de la Roche, 1996; Sederberg, 1978). Typical vigilante action is a collective reaction (Sundar, 2010; Dumsday, 2009; Johnston, 1996, Sederberg, 1978) or an individual reaction (Hine, 1998; Shotland, 1976) to a threat – or perceived threat – to established norms. This threat can come in the form of breaking state laws, or violating social rules or norms that are not necessarily governed by the state (Dumsday, 2009). Vigilante action can also arise as a response to conduct that is seen as

deviant (Senechal de la Roche, 1996) or as a means to uphold the status quo (Sederberg, 1978; Ingalls, 1977; Rosenbaum & Sederberg, 1974). The ultimate aim of vigilante action is to control or curb what is perceived as problematic, deviant, or innovative behaviour (Johnston, 1996; Sederberg, 1978). Rosenbaum and Sederberg (1974) define three different aims of collective vigilantism: to control crime, to control a certain social group, or to maintain a regime or established system. These ends are similar to the types of solutions that are recommended in the conclusions of social problems claimsmakers (Cohen, 1972/2002; Best, 1987).

Vigilante action is not necessarily directed at criminal behaviour. It is the specific or perceived threat in question that provides the motivation for vigilantism (Sederberg, 1978). Vigilante action is generally justified through the perceived necessity (Dumsday, 2009; Weisburd, 1988) or utility (Hine, 1998; Rosenbaum & Sederberg, 1974) of the vigilante's particular reaction to a real or perceived problem. For example, vigilantes often justify their actions as a "last resort" (Burrows, 1976) or as a "desire to 'do something'" (Johnston, 1996) in the face of the real or perceived failure of formal or state mechanisms. Justifications for vigilante action and violence resemble the justifications for other types of organized violence – they appeal to the greater good or argue that the ends justify the means (Hine, 1998; Sederberg, 1978; Rosenbaum & Sederberg, 1974).

Recently, paedophiles have been the focus of moral panics (Rohloff & Wright, 2010; Zgoba, 2004; Critcher, 2002), social problems claims (Hinds & Daly, 2001; Best, 1990), and vigilante action (Rohloff & Wright, 2010; Evans, 2003; Ashenden, 2002; Bell, 2002; Critcher, 2002; Pratt, 2000). For example, in 2000, a British tabloid called *News of the World* both incited panic and made a social problem claim through their publication of "...the faces, names and whereabouts of individuals with previous convictions for sex offenses against children" (Ashenden, 2002, pp. 197-198). The underlying idea rested on individual responsabilization in the face of state inadequacy, as the tabloid "named and shamed" the individuals in an attempt to provide the community with information and awareness (Ashenden, 2002; Bell, 2002), but also in order to publically shame and humiliate the individuals. Ultimately, these publications led to the so-called Paulsgrove Riots (Williams & Thomas, 2004), a week of violence targeting suspected paedophiles (Ashenden, 2002; Bell, 2002). The tabloid created "a storm of controversy" (Bell, 2002, p. 85) given the spectacle that was created via the publication of

personal information and the subsequent violence that erupted. These actions, then, reinforce the role of the spectacle in punishing these offenders.

This action can also be understood as a performance intended to reinforce social norms, values, and the status quo (Gordon, 2004, pp. 360-361) and act as a spectacular method of social control (Kohm, 2009; Gordon, 2004, p. 362; Bauman, 2000, p. 215). The vigilante spectacle can be even more effective when it is dealing with a “new” sort of deviant behaviour: “It helps, of course, if...a new kind of crime is brought to public attention and found to be particularly repulsive and horrifying as well as ubiquitous...” (Bauman, 2000, p. 215). The initial impact of the spectacle is more important and lasting than any questions about long-term effectiveness or residual effects (Gordon, 2004; Bauman, 2000). Public awareness of vigilante action is required in order for the “...symbolic statements about the social order...” (Gordon, 2004, p. 362) to be transmitted; the audience plays a role that is ultimately just as active as the vigilantes themselves (Gordon, 2004). Legitimacy is derived not from questions of right or wrong, justice, fairness, procedure, legality, or necessity (Sundar, 2010; Dumsday, 2009; Minogue, 2009; Goldstein, 2003; Hine, 1998; Kowalewski, 1996), but from “...getting people to participate, even passively as onlookers” (Gordon, 2004, p. 362).

Official responses: Neo-conservative and neo-liberal implications¹⁶

Beyond the unofficial responses implicated in moral panics and decivilizing processes, there are also official responses that emerge (Rohloff & Wright, 2010; Pratt, 1998). Emerging from the civilizing process whereby the state took an increasingly central role in the day-to-day governance of the lives of its citizens (Pratt, 2000; Vaughan, 2000), it becomes part of the state’s role to respond to these concerns when it is deemed necessary (Vaughan, 2000, p. 76). In cases where the state fails (or is perceived to have failed), vigilantism can emerge (Dumsday, 2009; Sederberg, 1978; Burrows, 1976). In other cases, though, the state does respond to concerns.

These official responses can be linked to both neo-conservative and neo-liberal techniques and rationalities of governance. While neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism can lead to “...penal policies...[that] have been formed by regimes that amalgamate and combine rather

¹⁶ When I refer to neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, I draw primarily on Garland (2001), O’Malley (1999, 1996), and Hatt, Caputo, & Perry (1992, 1990). While a more detailed analysis of the phenomena is outside the constraints of a Master’s thesis, I acknowledge that some scholars disagree with the prefix “neo”, as these worldviews can be aligned with or traced back to broad historical trends (see Dumenil & Levy, 2004, for example).

contradictory governing rationalities” (O’Malley, 1999, p. 188), creating alliances between the two rationalities, there are two key features that I wish to highlight in terms of their roles in fostering and facilitating moral panics and social problems claims: the moral dimension of neo-conservatism and the risk management approach of neo-liberalism.

One hallmark of neo-conservatism is its tough-on-crime, law-and-order approach (O’Malley, 1999, p. 190; Hatt, Caputo, & Perry, 1992, p. 246). Much of the basis for this approach emerges from the neo-conservative emphasis on the role of the state in re-establishing a certain set of lost morals or “punishing wickedness” (Garland, 2001, pp. 184-185; O’Malley, 1999, p. 190). Neo-conservatism “...implies that the character of the state is defined through both its underlying concept of morality and the moral quality of its institutions and its citizens” (Homolar-Reichmann, 2009, p. 182). Moral panics then, which invariably involve a certain concept or construct of morality (Garland, 2008), can be used as justification for more punitive sanctions (O’Malley, 1999; Hatt, Caputo, & Perry, 1992), as society improves due to the reinforcement of particular values and morals (Homolar-Reichmann, 2009, p. 182). Garland (2008, p. 15) argues that the objects of moral panics can be understood as cultural scapegoats; that is, the folk devils society identifies represent individuals who can be blamed for the current state of society, thus alleviating guilt that may be felt. So, moral panics centered on paedophiles may “...be connected to unconscious guilt about negligent parenting and widespread ambivalence about the sexualization of modern culture” (Garland, 2008, p. 15). In this sense, then, the neo-conservative strand that underlies a number of contemporary penal policies (O’Malley, 1999, p. 186) advances a moral basis for increasingly punitive sanctions for sex offenders. This moral basis again is furthered by contemporary fears of, hostility towards, and consensus about paedophiles – features that are important to the development of moral panics and social problems claims (Cohen, 1972/2002; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

The neo-liberal worldview emphasizes the “...responsible and rational individuals who take command of their own lives, and bear the consequences of freely-made decisions” (O’Malley, 1996, p. 198). The end goal of a neo-liberal state is to create prudent risk-managers in place of citizens (O’Malley, 1996, p. 199); one where dominant strategies of government become internalized to the point that individuals begin to self-govern (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 56-57; Foucault, 1977, p. 176). The role of the state becomes one of providing rational and responsible risk calculators with the information they require in order to make the most

appropriate decisions or actions in order to minimize or mitigate their particular risk (O'Malley, 1996, p. 201).

Many of the same punitive responses to perceived threats which are justified through the morality discourse of neo-conservatism can be similarly justified through a neo-liberal risk management lens (Garland, 2008, 2001; Pratt, 2000; O'Malley, 1999). In this sense, proponents of different political rationalities can be supporters of the same policies, albeit with different underlying reasons for supporting them (O'Malley, 1999). So, while neo-conservatives can justify offender registries or public notification by referring to the need to protect values or a moral code, neo-liberals can justify these same approaches through appeals to the need for individuals to have sufficient information to gauge and manage their own risk (O'Malley, 1999).

Given the overlap between neo-liberal and neo-conservative policies, however, there is sometimes interplay between the justifications (Hier, 2008; O'Malley, 1999). Discourses that focus on individual risk management – a primary feature of the neo-liberal worldview (Garland, 2001, p. 124; O'Malley, 1999) – also often involve references to some sort of collective (Hier, 2008, p. 174). So, neo-liberalism also serves to advance a particular notion of morality through interplay with the more neo-conservative notion of the collective (O'Malley, 1999): “The transmission of moralization through risk-based problems under neo-liberalism entails the conjoining of privatized forms of risk management – the responsabilization of the self – with a collective definition of harm” (Hier, 2008, p. 182).

This moral dimension is particularly important in the context of the discourse surrounding children in contemporary society (Meyer, 2007; Kleinhans, 2002). The innocence, vulnerability, and value of children is enshrined in societal values; children are priceless and must be protected (Meyer, 2007; Kleinhans, 2002). Social problems claims and moral panics, then, emerge as a response of perceived state or official shortcomings in protecting children (Hier, 2008; Kleinhans, 2002; Best, 1990; 1987). Particularly in the case of child sexual abuse, discourses concerning morality “...continue to individualize responsibility so as to manage risk in a world of harmful others (e.g. parental use of webcams to monitor babysitters), the grievances associated with the increasingly common volatile moralization of child sex abuse generates collectivising effects by allocating responsibility for harm to specific others” (Hier, 2008, p. 184). So, strategies such as community notification ostensibly serve to meet the ends of both neo-liberalism (by providing required information for individuals to calculate and manage risk)

and neo-conservatism (by reinforcing collective values and the role of the community, as well as punishing the offender for his/her moral transgression). Each of these political rationalities can also serve to justify vigilantism; neo-liberalism promotes individual responsabilization, which can manifest in the form of vigilante action (Warren, 2009, p. 275). Furthermore, vigilantism is often constructed as a duty or an action designed to “do the right thing” (Dumsday, 2009; Johnstone, 1996), in a sense relying on a shared conception of moral obligation similar to neo-conservatism.

Summary

A wide range of literature was consulted during this project; significant themes, concepts, and debates have been outlined and discussed above. These considerations inform my construction of a theoretical framework and a methodological approach, and ultimately help inform the lens through which I analyze *PJ*'s source material. Next, then, I will discuss my theoretical framework in terms of its epistemological and ontological assumptions, followed by a discussion of my methodological approach and research plan.

Chapter 3

Theoretical and methodological concerns

This research project has the specific goals of analyzing claims, representations, and value statements to understand and explore how *PJ* constructs the issue of child solicitation online, the solution to this issue, and their role in carrying out this proposed solution. My three main research goals, then, are:

1. To analyze how *PJ* has constructed online child solicitation,
2. To understand the strategies used to make successful social problem claims, and
3. To explore how claimsmakers construct social problems and their role in (re)solving them.

To meet these goals, the content of the *PJ* website was analyzed using rhetorical analysis. My specific strategy will be discussed below; first, it is important to note the ethical, paradigmatic, ontological, and methodological considerations that are involved with this project. It should also be noted that the strengths and limitations of each of my strategies (a social constructivist, qualitative, case study using rhetorical analysis) will be discussed within the broader discussions of the approaches themselves.

Ethical considerations

In all research, ethical considerations are paramount. I must take steps to ensure that, in the case of textual analysis, words are not misrepresented. Some qualitative researchers take the step of including interview transcripts or documentation as an appendix, as a means to ensure transparency, an acknowledgement that their interpretation is but one possible interpretation, and as a way to demonstrate that the text was not misrepresented or selectively quoted (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). As the material that I am using belongs to the public domain, anyone who is interested is free to access and read the source. This will allow others to create their own interpretations of the material, as well as ensure that I have not misrepresented *PJ*'s words.

Some researchers view ethics as a formalized process where their project is approved and they can then move into the field as "ethical researchers" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). However, because my research does not involve interviewing or observing human participants, I am not required to have my project reviewed and approved before I begin. For me, ethics will involve reflexive considerations about how I am representing *PJ*'s voice and the potential impact that my

research project could have. Rather than coming from outside approval, the ethics of my project will come from within (Manning, 1997). It will also involve reflexivity in terms of my own use of rhetoric (Leach, 2000); the persuasive nature of language and its potential effects is a constant consideration.

Social constructivist approach to research

Social constructivism and symbolic interactionism share a number of assumptions, among them the idea that there is meaning to and in interactions and how individuals interpret their interactions (Titscher et al., 2000:75; Katz, 1988; Lemert, 1974; Blumer, 1971). As such, social constructivism's ontological perspective is relativist (Frauley & Pearce, 2007). In other words, there is the underlying belief that there are multiple realities that are constructed by and experienced by multiple individuals. Research that is done under this paradigm, then, does not presume to be able to "uncover" data or reflect reality (Allen, 2010; Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Prior, 2004; Alasuutari, 1995). Instead, the researcher presents one possible interpretation of the data, leaving the audience to decide whether to agree with the researcher's representation or come up with their own interpretation. Knowledge is produced or constructed through interactions between the researcher and the participant or material, rather than possessed and distributed by an "expert" researcher (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Best, 1995).

When researching issues defined as social problems – such as *PJ*'s attempt to situate child solicitation as a problem – the focus is on understanding the language and social context in which social problems arise, rather than anything "empirical" or "observable" about the issue itself (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009). In other words, the act of solicitation itself or *PJ*'s immediate responses are not of concern; I am more concerned with how *PJ* presents child solicitation than with actual instances of child solicitation itself. *PJ* will be treated as one particular claimsmaker (Best, 1987), making a particular set of claims about a particular behaviour in a particular situated, historical, and political context.

Social constructivism

My research project was undertaken from a social constructivist perspective. Social constructivism, as elaborated by Berger and Luckmann (1966, pp. 78-79), concerns itself with the dialectical relationship between society, people, and the internalization of the

institutionalized, or created, social reality. The social world *appears* real to its members, but only because routines, structures (i.e. temporal or spatial limitations or divisions), and seemingly common-sense knowledges have become deeply internalized. In essence, “[s]ociety is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 79, emphasis original). What is taken for granted as objective reality is rather an amalgamation of a number of assumptions, agreed-upon signs and symbols, and body of shared experiences that are internalized, institutionalized, interpreted, and transmitted between members of society to the extent that they become simply given or common-sense (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This process can result in a number of shared knowledges, symbols, and experiences, but it also means that, depending on one’s particular interpretation(s), experience(s), and the like, that there is not a single, objective, “true” reality; multiple realities can and do emerge. So-called objective conditions “...are seldom so compelling and clear in their form that they spontaneously generate a “true” consciousness” (Gusfield, 1981, p. 3). Thus, a plurality of realities emerges (Gusfield, 1981; Lemert, 1974; Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Any number of factors come to help us organize and understand our experiences and thus frame our worldview. However, the emphasis on the dialectic nature of social reality implies that what is taken as objective reality are those components of social life that are transmitted through signs, symbols, and language. When we agree upon a definition of these elements, we are socially constructing it – therefore, even that which appears to refer to something objective or grounded in reality is, by definition, constructed.

This constructivist perspective was used to inform the development of what Spector and Kitsuse (1987/2009, 1973) call the sociology of social problems. Social constructivism provides a specific lens for understanding and studying social problems (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Schneider, 1985). While a variety of lenses can be used to study social problems (Schneider, 1985), social constructivism provides a particular lens that allows for an understanding of social problems in and of themselves (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009, 1973; Schneider, 1985; Kitsuse & Spector, 1973; Blumer, 1971) – that is, the processes and activities implicated in various social problems become the focus, rather than approaching social problems with a focus on the objective behaviour (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009). According to de Young (1996, p. 55), “...the constructionist perspective redirects the focus of analysis from what the purported social problem is, to the kinds of claims that are being made about it”. Constructivist research, then,

looks at social problems in terms of the types of activities involved in creating and defining them, rather than the objective conditions themselves (Best, 1987; Schneider, 1985; Spector & Kitsuse, 1973).

Labelling theory is also closely related to the formulation of social problems as an object of study under social constructivism (Kitsuse & Spector, 1973, p. 416). In particular, Becker (1963, p. 9) situates deviance as “...not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an ‘offender’. The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label”. This perspective is similar to the construction of social problems; both formulations move beyond any conditions of a person, behaviour, or issue, and focus instead on how they are labelled, understood, and referred to. Certain issues, then, can become labelled as social problems because that label is ascribed to them, whether by sociologists, members of society, or claimsmakers themselves. The interactional component of social problems is thus reinforced; it is the actions of members of society (not solely or exclusively social problems claimsmakers) that define social problems.

Social problems theory

Prior to the development and articulation of the social constructivist perspective, the study of social problems was rather disjointed. The presentation of social problems, absent of a unifying theoretical and epistemological framework, was one that pertained to such a large spectrum of data, issues, and subject matter so as to render it practically impossible to define (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Fuller & Myers, 1941; Fuller, 1937). This problem did not go unnoticed; sociologists prior to the Second World War referred to “...a pressing need for rethinking the relationship between sociological theory and social problems” (Fuller, 1937, p. 496).

For some time, this need for a coherent link between theory and social problems took the form of functionalism (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009, p. 23; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). This perspective differs significantly from the constructivist perspective. The functionalist perspective considers social problems as a reflection of dysfunction, pathology, or disorganization in a society; the sociologist can examine the social problem in question with an end goal of “curing” or solving it (Merton, 1968, pp. 50-55). This approach presupposes that the

condition alleged to be the social problem (or, the condition that is the subject and focus of claims) objectively exists. Indeed, the word “pathology” in the conceptualization of earlier functionalist approaches provides a hint as to how social problems are perceived. Merton (1968, pp. 49-50) uses the example of coronary thrombosis to illustrate how, sometimes, diseases cannot be cured because the field necessary to find cures or solutions is underdeveloped. To complete this analogy, then, social problems are concrete issues and *do* have cures; if we cannot recognize them, it is because the tools of the field at our disposal – in this case, sociology – are not quite fully developed.

What the functionalist approach ultimately aspires to when designating a particular condition a social disorganization or dysfunction is a model that shows “...that the condition interferes with collective purposes and individual objectives and undermines some fundamental societal institution or support, [and also] that this *need not happen*” (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009, p. 26, emphasis original). This requires demonstrating that the particular condition objectively exists as it is said to exist. It also requires demonstrating that it interferes with collective and individual purposes – but, this requires defining what and who the collective is, what these collective purposes are, and how this social condition is preventing the attainment of these collective purposes. Furthermore, in many cases conditions exist where the condition or outcome – or function, or result – is advantageous for some and disadvantageous for others (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009, p. 26). There is also the matter of determining how society could, in each particular social problem case, be organized more efficiently and effectively.

Merton and Nishbet (1971, p. 820) note that “...diagnoses of social disorganization are often little more than moral judgments, rather than confirmable technical judgements about the workings of a social system”. This statement belies the positivist underpinnings of the functionalist perspective (Williams & McShane, 2004, p. 102). Social problems research undertaken from this perspective looks to find objective conditions that will uncover some truth about the particular society in which they emerge; it is these conditions themselves and how they cause disorganization or dysfunction that are of interest to the researcher. The desire for confirmable, technical judgements also indicates an adherence to traditional, positivist types of research (Ezzy, 2002).

As my research falls within social constructivism, the functionalist perspective of social problems necessarily does not align with my perspective or my theoretical framework. This

functionalist perspective was also seen as inadequate by a number of other social problems researchers. As a response to the perceived failings of the functionalist approach, Spector and Kitsuse (1987/2009, 1973; Kitsuse & Spector, 1975, 1973) along with Blumer (1971) associated social constructivism with a theory of social problems. This approach was primarily a response to the objectivist stance that social problems analysis – which includes particularly, but not exclusively, functionalism – tended to take (Best, 1995, p. 337).

Blumer (1971, p. 298) took exception with the typical (at that time) understanding and analysis of social problems, which “...presumes that a social problem exists as an objective condition or arrangement in the texture of a society. The objective condition or arrangement is seen as having an intrinsically harmful or malignant nature...”. Social problems, through the social constructivist lens, are understood in a vastly different way, and as such the focus of analysis also shifts. While Blumer’s (1971) work did not advance a complete and coherent theory of social problems (Kitsuse & Spector, 1975, p. 584), it did help to lay a foundation for an understanding of the nature of social problems as something rooted in the social construction of reality rather than in some objective condition or characteristic.

In essence, the conceptualization of social problems from a constructivist perspective holds that “...social problems are fundamentally products of a process of collective definition instead of existing independently as a set of objective social arrangements with an intrinsic makeup” (Blumer, 1971, p. 298). In other words, to understand social problems, it is first necessary to understand the various subjective elements and processes that lead to conditions being defined as problematic. What makes a social problem is not any objective condition, but rather the way any issue or condition is defined, referred to, understood, and discussed. Spector and Kitsuse (1973, p. 158) use the example of the “crime problem” to illustrate this perspective:

...the evidence that there is, for example, a crime problem is not that there is a high rate of crime or that the rate is higher than it used to be. Rather the evidence is that there are many individuals and groups complaining about the various aspects of crime...and the activities of the myriad agencies that are mandated to do something about those complaints. The so-called “crime problem”...is generated and sustained by the activities of complaining groups and institutional responses to them.

Social problems cannot be explained by something that is inherent to or “real” about them; instead, they are a result of language and the actions of groups or individuals who seek to define

certain behaviours as problematic (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009, 1973; Best, 1987; Schoenfeld, Meier, & Griffin, 1979; Blumer, 1971). Behaviours are not inherently social problems, but they can *become* social problems by being constructed in particular ways (Best, 1987; Pfohl, 1985; Schneider, 1985; Kitsuse & Spector, 1975, 1973; Spector & Kitsuse, 1973). Becker (1966, p. 6) highlights the logic of this, using examples of social problems constructed around what he calls non-existent conditions: “[i]f any set of objective conditions, even nonexistent ones, can be defined as a social problem, it is clear that the conditions themselves do not either produce the problem or constitute a necessary component of it”. As Spector and Kitsuse would later note (1987/2009, 1973; Kitsuse & Spector, 1975), this means that objective conditions are not necessary or sufficient to have a social problem. They *can* be taken into consideration, but it is the claims themselves that are necessary for social problems; they are also sufficient in the sense that, as Becker (1966) noted, objective conditions need not necessarily exist. Furthermore, “[t]he pages of history are replete with instances of dire social conditions unnoticed and unattended in the societies in which they occurred” (Blumer, 1971, p. 302). So, from a constructivist understanding of social problems, it is therefore the claims that constitute the social problem (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009, 1973; Best, 1993; Blumer, 1971).

So, for Spector and Kitsuse (1987/2009, p. 75), social problems refer not to the particular behaviour or issue being discussed, but rather “...the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions”. Not only do Spector and Kitsuse emphasize that the focus of social problems theory should rest on the activities and actions rather than any particular behaviour or condition, their use of the word putative in their definition of a social problem reinforces the idea that social problems can (and do) come to exist regardless of any sort of objective “truth” about the claims that are being made (1987/2009, p. 76). In this sense, the question of “truth” becomes irrelevant to social problems theorists: “...the significance of objective conditions...is *the assertions made about them*, not the validity of those assertions as judged from some independent standpoint” (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009, p. 76, *emphasis original*). So, acknowledging the social construction of social problems does not necessarily deny the existence of social problems, but rather focuses elsewhere: “[i]t draws attention to a meta debate about what sort of acknowledgement the problem receives and merits” (Cohen, 2002, p. xliii).

Criticisms of constructivism

As with the criticisms of the objectivist approach to studying social problems, the constructivist approach has also lead to considerable criticism (Best, 1995, 1993). These criticisms apply both to the theoretical and the methodological applications of social constructivism; both the theoretical and methodological implications of constructivism are important to this project. Best (1995, pp. 338-341) outlines the four general categories which criticisms of constructionism fall within: constructionism and objectivism are complementary, constructionism's subject is relatively unimportant, constructionism has moral or political biases, and constructionism is merely debunking.

These criticisms, though, are somewhat off-base. Many of these criticisms are countered simply by noting that constructivism is asking and attempting to answer a different set of questions than other types of research (Best, 1995, p. 339). For example, constructivists generally reject models that attempt to unite constructivism and objectivism, because the ontological and epistemological assumptions that each perspective makes are fundamentally opposed (Frauley & Pearce, 2007; Best, 1995, p. 338). In particular, constructivist ontology reflects the idea that "...social reality consists of shared meanings and understandings" (Frauley & Pearce, 2007, p. 16), while epistemologically, constructivism advances the position that we derive knowledge about social reality by understanding these shared meanings, claims, and interpretations (Frauley & Pearce, 2007, p. 16). The claim that the subject matter of constructionism is unimportant, then, depends on the types of questions being asked. Best (1995, p. 339) also points out that studying objective conditions of social problems failed to set out the coherent foundation for a sociology of social problems, such as the one advanced by the constructivist work of Spector and Kitsuse (1987/2009).

The issue of moral and political biases is raised by those concerned that constructionist research, with its focus on claims rather than objective conditions, will lead to the powerless – those without the ability to make wide-reaching, visible claims – will go unnoticed (Best, 1995, pp. 339-340). However, this criticism relates to the more general positivist criticisms that the traditional, positivist, "objective" forms of research and knowledge are capable of reaching the truth, rather than the constructionist forms of research which are inherently subjective (Frauley & Pearce, 2007; Ezzy, 2002). However, this ignores the biases and subjectivities which are

inherent in *all* kinds of research, regardless of epistemological or ontological perspective (Ezzy, 2002). Best (1995, p. 340) also points out that social problems research that focuses on objective conditions is equally as likely to miss those problems that affect largely marginalized or subjugated populations. Objectivist research may be *more* likely to miss them, as “...social conditions become topics for objectivist research only when they have been subjectively constructed as problematic” (Best, 1995, p. 340).

The claim that constructivism is merely debunking “...equates social construction with error, and defines social constructionist analysis as a method of exposing mistaken or distorted claims” (Best, 1995, p. 340). In other words, critics believe that all social constructivism can do is allow individuals to determine whether a social problem is “real” or merely a social construction. However, this criticism also makes the assumption that objective forms of analysis involve truth, while other forms of analysis involve falsehoods or *mere* social constructions (Best, 1995, pp. 340-341). However, this ignores the fundamental understanding of knowledge in constructivism: *all* knowledge, no matter how it is obtained or what it is about, is socially constructed (Best, 1995; Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Another criticism levied at constructivist researchers is that of “ontological gerrymandering” (Woolgar & Pawluch: 1985), by which researchers refer to objective conditions when discussing claims about a particular social problem, despite also stating that there is nothing particularly relevant about the objective nature of an issue or condition when it comes to definitions of social problems. For example, Woolgar and Pawluch (1985, pp. 216-217) refer to social problems researchers Spector and Kitsuse (1973), Gusfield (1981), and Conrad and Schneider (1980) assuming that definitions of particular conditions, objects, or behaviours have changed while the conditions, objects, or behaviours themselves have not. This, as Woolgar and Pawluch (1985, p. 217) point out, is itself a reference to objective conditions that relies on a particular definition, thus rendering “...the claims and the constructive work of the authors...hidden and...to be taken as given”.

Despite the concerns raised by Woolgar and Pawluch (1985), constructivist research of social problems is still possible. Best (1995, 1993) identifies two factions of constructivist research: strict and contextual. Each of these approaches has a specific strategy for avoiding ontological gerrymandering while not losing the focus on the study of social problems as a study primarily of claims, claimsmaking, and claimsmakers.

Strict and contextual constructivism

Strict constructivists focus only on the claimsmaking activities, and attempt to avoid explicit and implicit assumptions about objective conditions (Best, 1995, pp. 341-342, 1993, p. 137). However, this approach is both incredibly difficult and incredibly limiting in practice; if no assumptions can be made about any sort of objective condition, then the same types of questions must be asked about *every* claimsmaking activity (Best, 1993). Each social problem claim is taken strictly for the language and claims involved, and not for any sort of objective condition. So, as Best (1993) notes, social problems analyses concerned with the spread of AIDS in the 1980s and social problems analyses concerned with Satanism would look similar, in practice. For example, “[a] strict constructionist can no more assume that AIDS exists than presume that there’s probably no large, satanic blood cult at work” (Best, 1993, p. 137). At some level, though, assumptions are brought into all analyses: “Analysis requires the analyst to use language, and a culture’s assumptions are build into its language” (Best, 1995, p. 344). Strict constructionism, then, fails to live up to its own strict standards.

Because of the difficulty of strict constructivist research, analysts need to approach constructivist social problems research in a different manner. The furthest extreme, then, is what Best (1995, p. 345) calls vulgar constructionism; this position aligns itself with the “debunking” criticism, assuming that constructionism is merely a study of mistaken claims. However, this is not constructionism, as it purports to know the objective reality of the condition which the claims pertain to – hence, the perception that the claims are mistaken.

Somewhere in between the positions of strict and vulgar constructivism is contextual constructivism:

...contextual constructionism seeks to locate claimsmaking within its context. Claims emerge at particular historical moments in particular societies; they are made by particular claimsmakers who address particular audiences. Claimsmakers have particular reasons for choosing particular rhetoric to address particular problems. Such specific elements form claimsmaking’s context, and contextual constructionists argue that understanding social problems claims often depends upon their context. (Best, 1995, p. 345)

So, in practice, to return to the earlier example of social problems claims about AIDS and Satanism, contextual constructivists are able to doubt claims made about Satanism on the

grounds that there is no evidence to support it, while they may also generally accept claims about AIDS on the grounds that, while official statistics may be distorted, there is likely some limit to the extent of distortion (Best, 1993, p. 139). However, the focus of analysis remains the claimsmaking: questions that emerge about these particular claims may ask why social problem claims about Satanism were successful (deYoung, 1996; Best, 1993) despite the absence of evidence, while social problems claims about AIDS emerged slowly despite the evidence that was available (Best, 1993, p. 139). For contextual constructivists, an issue of interest is *why* certain issues become objects of concern when others do not, particularly when those issues that become problematized may seem relatively benign compared to other issues (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 152).

My research will use the contextual constructivist perspective. So, the focus will be on how the problem is constructed. The issue is not whether the claims *PJ* makes are “true” or reflect objective conditions, but rather how they mobilize their evidence, support their claims, respond to criticisms, and choose rhetorical language and examples. However, there is context involved that cannot be ignored. For example, contemporary fears of sex offenders and traditional fears of new technology combine to create a particular context in which claims about online solicitation can be successful.

Claims, claimsmaking, and claimsmakers: The theoretical framework

When using a social constructivist lens, behaviours are constructed as social problems through the claimsmaking process (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; deYoung, 1996; Best, 1987; Schoenfeld, Meier, & Griffin, 1979; Spector & Kitsuse, 1973). The goal of claimsmakers is to persuade others that “...X is a problem, that Y offers a solution to that problem, or that a policy of Z should be adopted to bring that solution to bear” (Best, 1987, p. 102). Not all claims made by claimsmakers subsequently become social problems; sometimes demands are met or claimsmakers are unsuccessful in establishing their claim as an issue (Spector & Kitsuse, 1973). However, when and if claimsmakers are successful, others are persuaded to join them, thus creating a collective definition of the issue as a social problem (Schoenfeld, Meier, & Griffin, 1979; Blumer, 1971).

Many analyses of social problems have focused on claimsmakers and on the process of claimsmaking, often at the expense of the claims themselves (Best, 1987, p. 101). For this

project, rather than understanding the claims made by *PJ* as objective statements or as simply “a given” (Best, 1987, p. 101), I want to explore them as a particular rhetorical strategy intended to persuade or convince. Ultimately, I will also explore the claimsmaking process as well as the limits *PJ* attempts to place on who can and cannot be a claimmaker. However, the first step will be to understand the rhetorical strategies employed by *PJ* in their main point of contact with the public (the media, namely their website).

It is important to define exactly what I mean by a “claim”. In any instance where something is asserted, there is necessarily a claim being put forward (Toulmin, 2003, p. 90). Spector and Kitsuse (1987/2009, p. 83) define a claim, in its simplest sense, as “...a demand that one party makes upon another”. Claims must also be examined for their rhetorical function (Best, 1987). As claims are designed to persuade, their use of rhetoric must be a focus, above and beyond simply their role as evidence or objects of analysis (Best, 1987, p. 101; Gusfield, 1981). Thus, practically any statement can be considered a claim. Any statement which serves a rhetorical purpose or elaborates a demand or assertion being made by *PJ* will be considered a claim for the purpose of analysis.

A significant element of the claimsmaking process involves those groups or individuals who engage in claimsmaking activities. These claimsmakers (Best, 1990, 1987) – or claimants (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009), or moral entrepreneurs (Becker, 1963) – are those making demands, highlighting issues, and working to ensure that *their* issue is given appropriate attention.

Claimsmaking itself, then, is the process by which claims are made (Best, 1987). Spector and Kitsuse (1987/2009, pp. 78-79) set out a number of activities that constitute claimsmaking:

Mundanelly, claims-making consists of demanding services, filling out forms, lodging complaints, filing lawsuits, calling press conferences, writing letters of protest, passing resolutions, publishing exposes, placing ads in newspapers, supporting or opposing some governmental practice or policy, setting up picket lines or boycotts; these are integral features of social and political life.

Broadly, participating in these activities in any sense also means participating in defining social problems. Those involved can be moral entrepreneurs (Becker, 1963), professionals, victims, members of the media, agencies, or organizations (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Best, 1990).

A distinction can also be drawn based on the role that these groups or individuals play in the claimsmaking process. Those involved in constructing and defining the social problem from the outset are primary claimsmakers; those that further the claim by reporting on it or illustrating it are secondary claimsmakers (Best, 1990). In general, then, the moral entrepreneurs, advocates, or activists – those with some sort of specialized or expert knowledge – act as primary claimsmakers; news media, when it reports on the issue once it has been brought to attention, and popular culture, when it uses storylines relevant to or reflective of contemporary social problem claims, then act as secondary claimsmakers (Bartkowski, 1998; O’Neal, 1997; Best, 1990). News media and popular culture are secondary claimsmakers rather than simply reporters because of the role they play in “...translating and transforming claims and in offering convincing constructions of social reality” (O’Neal, 1997, p. 337).

PJ is a primary claimsmaker when it comes to the issue of online child solicitation. However, secondary claimsmakers may also be important to the analysis of the social problems claims made. For example, there are media sources – namely, the *Dateline NBC* program *To Catch a Predator* – that are associated with *PJ*. While *PJ* is present in many of these episodes, they retain their status as primary claimsmakers due to the specialized knowledges they purport to have throughout their claims. However, the way in which the issue is framed on these episodes is different and can contribute to general understanding of the social problem claim; hence, secondary claimsmakers are important. In addition, other media sources discuss *PJ*, their methods, and their claims. These media sources are also secondary claimsmakers; some of them are discussed and responded to specifically in *PJ*’s discourse.

Methodology and “conceptual baggage”

The constructivist approach to understanding the nature of reality and research will also force me to be fully aware of the assumptions that I have prior to and during the research process (Best, 1995, p. 345). Given that I accept my research as but one possible interpretation of the data, I will not (and cannot) claim to be neutral or objective (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Manning, 1997; Best, 1995). On the contrary, subjectivity will be inseparable from my work. However, because I am forced to acknowledge any pre-existing beliefs, I must consider how manifestations of these beliefs affect my work to a much greater extent than a researcher who claims to be objective or “unbiased” (Best, 1995).

Stating these beliefs and biases does not imply a limitation of the research (Verschuren, 2003; Best, 1995). Rather, acknowledging and examining subjectivity can strengthen the research, because claiming to be unbiased or to have neutralized bias ignores the multitude of subjective or contextual factors that are present in *any* research setting, no matter the paradigm or the methodological approach (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Shenton, 2004; Verschuren, 2003; MacPherson, Brooker, & Ainsworth, 2000). Presenting these beliefs also allow the audience to better understand the research and analysis process, as the lens the researcher is using becomes explicit (Verschuren, 2003; Best, 1995).

As such, I feel the need to be explicit about my beliefs (Kendall, 2007; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Shenton, 2004; Verschuren, 2003; MacPherson, Brooker, & Ainsworth, 2000; Best, 1995) and my “conceptual baggage”, the existing meanings or significances that I am bringing into my interpretations (McConnell-Ginet, 2008, p. 500) which will shape every aspect of the research project, from design to analysis (Manning, 1997). Conceptual baggage is not simply what is said or who says it, but can be understood as “...encyclopedic knowledge, stereotypes or prototypes, and background assumptions, as well as knowledge about social practices in the course of which the word [or words] gets used” (McConnell-Ginet, 2008, p. 512). These views, then, will frame the issue in a particular way; being aware of this will allow me to mobilize other lenses or frames to analyze the data (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Peshkin, 2001). This means that I can ask more questions and come to different conclusions by approaching the data in various ways.

Social constructivism informs both my ontological views and my belief that it is important to be honest and transparent about my pre-existing beliefs (Frauley & Pearce, 2007; Best, 1995). It also informs the perspective that I will take in terms of the nature of online child solicitation. Following a number of social problems theorists (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009, 1973; Best, 1990, 1987; Blumer, 1971, Becker, 1966), I am concerned with the constructions and definitions of the issue being put forward, as opposed to anything “objective” about online child solicitation. For the purposes of this project, the “real” or “actual” nature of this particular social problem is irrelevant; the claims that are made about it are my focus. I do not intend to trivialize or minimize the issue or victims of solicitation; rather, I am looking to understand how social problems claims come to receive widespread attention from a perspective that emphasizes the subjective and collective use of signs, symbols, definitions, and language. I am also not “pro-paedophile” nor necessarily “anti-*PJ*” (though I remain skeptical of a number of their claims);

the issue was chosen because of its prevalence in the public spotlight, and the organization was chosen because of its significant role in the construction and definition of online child solicitation.

Beyond that, the choice of paradigm also helps to inform other significant research decisions, such as the type of methodology, research design, and analytical strategies that I will use (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). For my research, I used a qualitative methodological approach to conduct a single-case case study of *PJ*. Their organizational goals and beliefs (as presented on their organization's website) were analyzed using rhetorical analysis. Each of these decisions, as well as my ethical considerations and evaluation criteria, will be discussed in the following sections.

Qualitative methodology

The social constructivist paradigm lends itself quite well to qualitative methodological approaches (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Charmaz, 2000; Best, 1995;) In qualitative research, the researcher is central to the phenomenon being studied and the analysis being performed (Lloyd-Jones, 2003, p. 2). Qualitative research has a different set of goals and objectives than more traditional, quantitative research (MacPherson, Brooker, & Ainsworth, 2000, p. 50). Qualitative researchers aim to produce a particular, contextualized type of knowledge, while quantitative researchers typically value generalizable, statistically significant, broad-based knowledges (MacPherson, Brooker, & Ainsworth, 2000, p. 52).

Qualitative research ideally results in deep understandings about a particular phenomenon in a particular context (Wainwright, 1997; Alasuutari, 1995, p. 111). This type of methodology is useful when conducting exploratory research about a "new" or "under-understood" phenomenon (Tight, 2010; Tracy, 2010; Gerring, 2004; Golafshani, 2003; Kiser, 1997; Eisenhardt, 1989). As my goal is to explore and understand *PJ* as an organization, qualitative methods are the most appropriate choice for my research. This approach will allow me to analyze and frame the different types of discourse that are used, contributing to a much different type of knowledge production than, for example, evaluating their existence by tracking official statistics about instances of child solicitation, or by performing quantitative content analysis on the available documents.

Qualitative research is subject to a number of criticisms. It was traditionally seen as the “inferior” methodology (Tight, 2010; Wainwright, 1997), especially when held to the same standards as quantitative research, namely reliability, validity, and objectivity (Shenton, 2004; Golafshani, 2003; Halldorsson & Aastrup, 2003). These types of criteria are situated in different theoretical frameworks, ontological beliefs, and research values and thus cannot and should not be transferred (Tracy, 2010; Shenton, 2004; Golafshani, 2003; Halldorsson & Aastrup, 2003; MacPherson, Brooker, Ainsworth, 2000; Wainwright, 1997). This does not mean, though, that qualitative research is simply “anything goes” (Travers, 2009; Halldorsson & Aastrup, 2003). Instead, qualitative methodology has developed its own unique set of criteria that better reflect its goals and assumptions. For example, instead of reliability and validity, qualitative researchers are concerned with credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Tracy, 2010; Shenton, 2004; Golafshani, 2003; Halldorsson & Aastrup, 2003; Kiser, 1997; Manning, 1997). Some researchers, recognizing the credibility that is attached to quantitative measures of quality, use the same terms but redefine what they mean; Titscher et al. (2000, p. 83) use “reliability” to refer to whether or not a different researcher, taking the same theoretical perspective, following the rules that the original research sets out, and given the same contextual conditions, could identify the same concepts and explain them in the same way. Regardless of what they are called, qualitative evaluation criteria reflect a different set of research objectives and values that, if met, help ensure that research is trustworthy and credible.

Evaluation criteria

Tracy (2010, pp. 837-840) presents eight criteria that, if reflected in research, will help ensure quality: having a worthy topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, a significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence. Having a worthy topic means that the phenomenon being studied is relevant, significant, and interesting. Rich rigour refers to having appropriate and complex theoretical constructs, data, and collection and analysis processes. Sincerity in research is simply another term for reflexivity and transparency in the research design, theoretical and methodological framework, and the researcher’s biases. Credibility refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources, the representation of multiple voices or perspectives, and thick, concrete description and detail of the phenomenon. Resonance refers to the capability of transferring the conclusions of the research to other situations or cases, as well

as paying particular attention to the aesthetics of the final written report. The research can significantly contribute in any number of areas, including conceptually, theoretically, or practically. Good qualitative research is also ethical in that it takes into consideration human subjects, contextual and situational ethics, and relational ethics. Finally, having meaningful coherence means ensuring that the final study is actually about what it is intended to be about, and also uses methods, processes, and decisions that align with the particular theoretical and methodological approach – in other words, that it is consistent throughout. Although living up to these standards will require a large degree of self-critique and effort, I will hold myself to these criteria throughout the research project and when evaluating the final product.

While these considerations will be an ongoing, reflexive process within my research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Manning, 1997) it is still possible to set out how they can and will be met. For example, I certainly view my chosen topic as worthy of study; as Tracy (2010, p. 840) states, “...contemporary controversies can spark research”. As online solicitation of children continues to warrant public interest, *PJ*’s methods have certainly been called into question (Adler, forthcoming; Kohm, 2009) at the same time as harsher treatments, including public notification and shaming approaches, are being implemented (Comartin, Kernsmith, & Kernsmith, 2009; Simon, 2003). In order to ensure that my project has resonance, I have attempted to avoid rigid, “cold” language without losing sight of the clarity that academic writing requires (Tracy, 2010, p. 845). This improves both the aesthetic appearance of the text and the likelihood that naturalistic generalization¹⁷ will occur. While this will require multiple drafts and focused editing, the end product will ideally have more “staying power” with the audience (Tracy, 2010).

Furthermore, if this writing process is expanded to include the description and analysis, it will certainly add to the rich description that is required for research to be seen as credible (Tracy, 2010; Gerring, 2004; Charmaz, 2000). I also plan to keep a research journal documenting processes, feelings, initial thoughts and reactions, and decisions so as to increase sincerity and promote my own self-reflection throughout the research process (Ortlipp, 2008). The fact that my source material is completely accessible to the public will also allow me to demonstrate my credibility and ethical considerations (Kendall, 2007; Halldorsson & Aastrup, 2003); if there are

¹⁷ Naturalistic generalization refers to the idea that it is the reader, not the author, who applies specific concepts or ideas to more general phenomena (Tracy, 2010, pp. 844-845).

any doubts as to the honesty, believability, or plausibility of my conclusions, it will be easy for readers to check the source for themselves and come to their own interpretation.

Qualitative methodology contributes to my evaluation criteria, helps me meet my research objectives, and aligns and agrees with my theoretical framework and is the appropriate choice for this project. Beyond these advantages, qualitative methodology also offers a number of research designs that can be adopted. The research design that I will use is the single-case case study.

Doing case study research

Within the available qualitative research designs, the case study is often referred to as the “weak sibling” (Tight, 2010, p. 332). Many researchers confuse the use of case study as a research design (Tight, 2010; Kohlbacker, 2006) with the pedagogic use of the case study (Kohlbacker, 2006, p. 5). Its pedagogic use is intended to illustrate a theory in practice; as a qualitative research design, the goal is not to test theory, but to understand or explore social complex phenomena (Kohlbacker, 2006, pp. 5-6). Case study research is often criticized as being overly simplistic (Baxter & Jack, 2008), lacking rules (Tight, 2010), or inadequate as a research design on its own (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Indeed, there is no consensus among researchers as to what a case study is or how it is done (Verschuren, 2003); it does not imply the use of one or more particular methods, nor does it automatically discount any (Yin, 1981, p. 58). This is often seen as a disadvantage of doing case study research. However, it can be an advantage; it allows the researcher a higher degree of freedom, as there are no “set” methods that need to be applied in a case study (Tight, 2010; Verschuren, 2003). This allowed me to apply as many different methods as were appropriate and manageable in order to strengthen my research.

As with qualitative research in general, the case study is often criticized because the researcher is highly involved in the interpretation and production of particular knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Verschuren, 2003; Yin, 1981). Again, there are reasons to believe that this is *not* a disadvantage at all, and there are ways to counter these criticisms. First of all, claiming that the case study is any more or less subjective than other research methods ignores the inherent researcher involvement in all types of research, and reinforces the assumption that non-case study designs are objective (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Shenton, 2004; Best, 1995). Because this is such an oft-criticized characteristic of the case study, researchers who follow this design are

more aware and more engaged with their subjective involvement with the material and the case, and therefore better equipped to identify and recognize instances of this in their work. Being open and transparent in research serves to enhance the credibility therefore, so long as the researcher's decisions are open and explicit, involvement is not a disadvantage (Shenton, 2004; MacPherson, Brooker, & Ainsworth, 2000). Yin (1981) suggests keeping a "chain of evidence" of research and analytical decisions, which allows readers to trace the decisions made and understand the conclusions that are reached, even if they do not agree. The purpose is to allow other researchers to understand the conclusions and the phenomena in the same way as the researcher, given the same theoretical framework, methodological approach, and specific context (Halldorsson & Aastrup, 2003, p. 328). Shenton (2004) and Halldorsson and Aastrup (2003) refer to this criterion as dependability.

The case study is also criticized due to its lack of generalizability (Tight, 2010; Flyvbjerg, 2006). Generalizability, though, is not a goal of qualitative research nor of this project; criticism on this ground is a reflection of the traditional, scientific values of research (Flyvbjerg, 2006; MacPherson, Brooker, & Ainsworth, 2000). It is also not a particular concern of qualitative case study research; the case is selected not to be representative of other cases, but because there is something particularly interesting about it (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Tellis, 1997). Choosing the case implies that you are also choosing what the case is *not* (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Typically, the case study accepts a more narrow focus and sacrifices breadth (and generalizability) in favour of depth, allowing for more rich, complete, and detailed data analysis (Gerring, 2004, pp. 347-348). Despite this, criticisms based on this lack of generalizability are often countered by case study researchers using the concept of transferability and the value of context-situated knowledge (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Prior, 2004; Golafshani, 2003; Halldorsson & Aastrup, 2003; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Taylor, 2001). Transferability refers to the extent to which general claims about the world can be made (Halldorsson & Aastrup, 2003). The purpose, though, is not to generalize conclusions across populations, but to provide context for certain experiences (Halldorsson & Aastrup, 2003). Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 228) offers a different rebuttal to these criticisms: generalization is over-rated because of its role in the traditional understanding of science. The example provided by a case study can be *more* valuable than generalized conclusions by providing contextual information or by falsifying dominant theories.

Despite the limitations and criticisms of case study research designs, there are many advantages of doing this type of research. When done rigourously, case study research allows for an in-depth understanding of individuals, organizations, events, relationships, or communities (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The case study also allows the researcher to observe and to see how different concepts or themes interact in a particular context, placing the focus not only on the themes and the context themselves but on a particular relationship between them (Gerring, 2004, p. 348).

Furthermore, *PJ*'s unique space contributes to my decision to use a case study design. Their organization is completely virtual; their only "office space" is the website's message board. This mediated setting is the site for their action and their organization. It is also a social artefact, in that it is situated within popular culture thanks to its blurring of the roles between enforcement, humiliation, and entertainment (Kohm, 2009). This context is so intertwined with *PJ*'s actions, values, and statements, that they cannot be analyzed separately. Case study research is especially valuable in this context, as it pays attention to the phenomenon as it exists within a specific context (Verschuren, 2003). *PJ* is embedded within its context; understanding the organization without taking into account its situated and contextual location (cultural, historical, and otherwise) would be difficult, if not impossible.

Grounded theory

Grounded theory is associated with social constructivist research, and is typically applied to textual analysis (Charmaz, 2000; Titscher et al., 2000). As with the case study, there is no consensus as to how to conduct grounded theory (Titscher et al., 2000). However, a grounded theory approach works well with case studies, as the goal is to allow concepts and understandings to come from the material; in other words, to begin as "theory-less" as possible and build or generate theory based on the material (Eisenhardt, 1989). Glaser and Strauss (1967) first suggested grounded theory as an approach; since then, other researchers have adapted the approach using various theoretical frameworks and lenses (Allen, 2010). The underlying shared perspective among grounded theory researchers is that coding is done according to how they appear in the text, rather than according to pre-defined categories (Charmaz, 2000; Titscher et al., 2000).

I applied Charmaz's (2000) social constructivist approach to grounded theory. In this approach, concepts that are external to the data can still be useful, although the goal remains consistency with and openness to the participant's language. In other words, a grounded theory analysis uses broader conceptual theories or ideas to generate new and different questions about the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2000). Furthermore, the concepts are not imposed on the data; they are simply considered as tools which may (or may not) help in understanding and engaging with the material (Allen, 2010; Charmaz, 2000; Titscher et al., 2000).

The grounded theory approach that I took means that, ultimately, the concepts that I used to explore *PJ* were determined by the material I analyzed, and not the other way around. This approach was beneficial because it allowed me to understand and explore *PJ*'s various constructions in their own language and through their own lens (Peshkin, 2001; Charmaz, 2000; Titscher et al., 2000).

Rhetorical analysis

I used rhetorical analysis to explore *PJ*'s website. Practically any text or speech can be analyzed using a rhetorical approach, as all language is at least somewhat rhetorical (Linstead, 2001, p. 218). Rhetorical analysis is particularly useful when the researcher is attempting to understand persuasive or argumentative techniques within a text, conversation, or discourse (Selzer, 2004; Leach, 2000, p. 208). Whenever an individual or group is attempting to influence others in a particular way, rhetorical analysis is an appropriate strategy (Leach, 2000). So, *PJ*'s website will be read with a focus on rhetorical strategies that are employed to persuade readers to agree with their conceptualization of and solution to the problem, with Best's (1987) discussion of claims, claimsmakers, and claimsmaking taken into consideration.

As with all research methods, rhetorical analysis has advantages and disadvantages. One unique challenge is the rhetorical process of *all* writing (Leach, 2000). It is important to be aware of the rhetorical devices and strategies employed in our own writing, because ultimately even research and academic writing aims to persuade the reader (Leach, 2000, p. 208). Part of the process of research, then, involves self-reflexive thought about the structure and strategy involved in our own texts. Furthermore, part of the rhetorical tradition is the idea of the "unending conversation" (Selzer, 2004, p. 303); rhetorical analysis, then, can never be complete. Any attempt to look at the meanings produced by the combination of text and context, as well as

the multitude of resources, situations, and strategies that are involved in a persuasive text, is a large project (Selzer, 2004). Rhetorical analysis “trains” researchers to identify some elements of discourse, often at the expense of others (Selzer, 2004, p. 302). As such, it would be impossible to take into account all of the possible elements of rhetoric identified by rhetoricians from Aristotle to present (Leach, 2000, p. 218). It falls to the individual researcher to select the “canons” that will be of most use (Leach, 2000, p. 218).

Rhetorical analysis reaches its full potential when analyzing “...complete, conventionalized, and socially purposive discourses” (Leach, 2000, p. 218). The main strength is the distinct lens it applies to understanding discourse, intended to identify the components of the most effective persuasive language (Selzer, 2004). While it is traditionally focused on text and speech, rhetorical analysis is useful for understanding any type of public discourse where there is shared meaning or an attempt to argue or influence (Selzer, 2004, p. 281). So, this includes advertisement campaigns, popular culture artefacts, personal style, or even architecture (Selzer, 2004, p. 281). Rhetorical analysis, then, allows for a diverse number of claims and claimsmakers (Best, 1987) to be analyzed, with the aim of understanding how argument works (Selzer, 2004; Leach, 2000).

Rhetorical analysis can be understood as existing along a continuum (Leach, 2000), with textual rhetorical analysis on one end and contextual rhetorical analysis on the other (Selzer, 2004). Textual rhetorical analysis looks at the rhetoric in question as a representation of a particular debate or point of view; who, when, or why it was delivered or written is not significant as the analyst focuses on the detail, structure, and strategies within the text (Selzer, 2004, pp. 291, 302). Contextual rhetorical analysis places more importance on factors that occur *outside* the text, such as social status of the author, socio-political climate, location of the delivery, or a particular text’s position within a larger debate or “unending conversation” (Selzer, 2004, pp. 291-303). These two strategies place the focus on different aspects of rhetoric, although they “...should not be understood as mutually exclusive” (Selzer, 2004, p. 302). As such, my approach was not strictly textual or contextual; elements of both were considered, as they emerged from the material.

Furthermore, rhetorical analysis also suits my choice of source material. Rhetorical analysis works well with online data (Mathison Fife, 2010; Weaver, 2010; Mitra & Watts, 2002; Warnick, 1998). Indeed, just as with traditional texts, the various elements of rhetoric, rhetorical

strategies, choice of language, and descriptions can create a rhetorical work, regardless of the source; for example, Mathison Fife (2010) notes that Facebook profiles can be used to teach rhetorical analysis strategies by drawing attention to the production of self/identity in a virtual space. Weaver (2010) used rhetorical analysis, particularly of the forms of humour, to explore the rhetorical strategies involved in the telling of racist jokes on various websites. Weaver (2010) also noted that the relative lack of censorship provided by the Internet makes online texts of particular interest for rhetorical analysts. The Internet has also provided individuals whose views would otherwise be marginalized with a “discursive space” to publish their views (Mitra & Watts, 2002, pp. 490-492). The role of identity, ethos, and the use of metaphors, important considerations for rhetorical analysis, can also be enhanced in online texts; often, the anonymity provided by the Internet means that establishing character (as will be discussed below) must be done within the text, rather than the rhetor relying on reputation to establish trustworthiness (Mitra & Watts, 2002, p. 491). Ultimately, the focus of rhetorical analysis remains the same: it is “...the study of specific communication practices” (Warnick, 1998, p. 74).

Ultimately, paying special attention to the rhetorical situation allows me to place a degree of distance between myself and the *content* of the delivery; my role as the analyst is “...not so much to react to these rhetorical acts as to understand them better...” (Selzer, 2004, p. 282). So, similar to the overriding theoretical assumption that social problems are not defined by an objective or “real” condition, *what PJ* is saying is not as important as *how* they are saying it. My goal is to understand how *PJ* attempts to convince readers that their position is somehow better than a different position. Similar to the attempt to understand the construction of the missing children problem (Best, 1987), my goal is to understand which strategies allow claimsmakers to be successful in making their claims, rather than determining any basis in reality for their argument.

Selzer (2004, p. 281) describes rhetorical analysis as a type of critical reading, which results in “...heightened awareness of the message under rhetorical consideration, and an appreciation for the ways people manipulate language and other symbols for persuasive purposes”. However, there is no consensus as to the definition of rhetoric; indeed, there are several ways in which it can be conceived, ranging from the stylistic elements of text to merely a synonym for dishonest or manipulative speech (Selzer, 2004). As such, an important first step in conducting rhetorical analysis is to clearly define what exactly is meant by rhetoric.

What is rhetoric?

As noted, there is a general misunderstanding of rhetoric: “[t]o the general public, *rhetoric* most commonly seems to denote highly ornamental or deceptive or even manipulative speech or writing” (Selzer, 2004, p. 280, emphasis original). However, rhetoric is much more broad; while it can refer to these types of speech or writing, it can also apply to *any* type of speech or writing (Selzer, 2004). For Aristotle (1924/2004, pp. 5-6), studying rhetoric is equated to studying various modes of persuasion. Furthermore, the study of rhetoric is transferable to any speech or writing regardless of subject matter. So, for the purposes of this research, “rhetoric” is defined as any writing, text, or image with persuasive ends, i.e. that is designed to convince a reader of a particular argument or line of reasoning or to accept a particular conclusion or solution.

Research design

Now that a working definition of rhetoric and appropriate evaluation criteria have been established, the elements of rhetoric and rhetorical strategies that have been discussed can be operationalized in order to design a specific design for the research. This design involves planning how material will be chosen and used and how the analysis will be carried out.

First of all, it was imperative to ensure that I did not lose access to *PJ*’s website at any time, whether through server issue, closure, or crash, during the research process. As such, various screenshots were captured and saved in order to allow me to view the images and layout of the website’s various components. Furthermore, the content of the home page and each main link (as displayed along the top of the home page) was copied, saved in Word documents and stored on a USB key. The chat transcripts and any attachments or images that were accessible were also been saved.

Having the material saved off-line has its benefits, the most obvious being should the *PJ* website cease to exist for whatever reason, I have a record of its contents. Another benefit is that having a physical record of the website as it existed on a particular day will aid in my goal of ensuring credibility and believability in my research (Kendall, 2007; Halldorsson & Aastrup, 2003).

The strategy itself was relatively straightforward. I read each of the 24 articles posted in

the “Opinions” section of the *PJ* website in-depth, with specific attention paid to the elements of rhetoric and claimsmaking that were contained within. This required multiple readings of the same sections of text; for example, I read through looking for instances of ethos, pathos, and logos, then for the types of claims that are made, then for the grounds and warrants used to support these claims, and then the conclusions that are suggested. I read the articles in chronological order at first in order to understand the range of claims that were made and rhetorical strategies that were used. Then, I read the sample by bringing together similar claims in an attempt to organize the claims thematically in order to analyze principle claims and strategies and the relationships with and between each other.

The first step of this analysis was conducted using hard-copy versions of the Opinion articles as printed from the *PJ* website. Reading through the claims in this format allowed for the quick highlighting and notation of claims or rhetorical strategies, as well as the ability to make notes directly on the source material. This also facilitated the second step of analysis, which was the organization of the material in a series of Word documents.

I maintained a research journal and a series of Word documents during the coding and analysis process. The journal allowed me to catalogue particular reactions or ideas throughout the process, serving both the end of reflexivity and transparency as well as allowing me to keep track of developments throughout the process. The Word documents provided me with my organization system for the initial coding and subsequent analysis. For example, all examples of a particular technique of claimsmaking or rhetorical strategy were copied and pasted into the appropriate document. This system allowed for easier recognition of the components of rhetoric and claimsmaking that emerge from the material; it also allowed me to keep track of the sources and compare the instances within and between categories.

Elements such as the physical layout of the website, or the manner in which external content is linked – i.e. by bringing the reader straight to the source, thus leaving the *PJ* website, or by opening a new window, allowing the reader to view external content without physically leaving the cite – also serve a rhetorical purpose, and were included in the analysis.

Sampling

It is also important to explain my choice of case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Verschuren, 2003). For several reasons, I chose *PJ* as the focus for this project. As previously mentioned, its

unique, virtual location makes it an interesting culturally and socially embedded artefact; the blurred roles (Kohm, 2009) *PJ* plays make for an interesting case study. Furthermore, while there are other examples of sites in similar veins, *PJ* is the best known. A Google search for “anti child predator organization”, for example, yielded over 6 million results; the top three hits were different subsections of the *PJ* website. Furthermore, *PJ*’s partnership with *NBC* and *To Catch a Predator* led to even more exposure for the organization; for example, a January 25th, 2006, televised sting drew 11 million unique viewers, as well as 3 million unique visitors to *Dateline NBC*’s website.¹⁸ Furthermore, *PJ*’s website is ranked 667,925th globally and 177,808th in the US, by amount of traffic received by unique viewers.¹⁹ By comparison, *Dateline NBC*’s main web page ranks 23,691,194th globally.²⁰ Television ratings combined with the relatively high traffic the website receives means that *PJ* has more cultural relevance and prevalence than other similar projects. Prevalence of a particular idea, organization, or solution in the media often has an effect on how it is presented or accepted in terms of public opinion (Muzzati, 2004). While the traffic statistics and ratings themselves do not serve to make *PJ* significant, they certainly help demonstrate the relative awareness the public has of *PJ*, as well as *PJ*’s presence within public debate or opinions surrounding the issue of solicitation of minors online.

In-site sampling

PJ’s website contains a substantial amount of information. There are 550 full-text chat logs between decoys and individuals attempting to solicit, along with conviction reports or sentencing information for each of the cases. There is an exhaustive frequently asked questions section, along with links to information for media or law enforcement looking for information about *PJ*. There is an “Opinions” section, where the organization’s perspectives are outlined and discussed. Because of the amount of information available on the website, I needed to choose particular sections in order to have a manageable sample.

The format of the Opinion pieces allows for the development and elaboration of a number of claims in an explicit manner. The full-text article format is more conducive to a developed, structured argument than other areas of the website, such as the chat transcripts, where *PJ* staff makes explicit arguments in a more limited fashion. Because the focus of my project is to

¹⁸ Johnson, P. (2006, February 14). ‘*Dateline*’ roots out predators. *USA Today*.

¹⁹ <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/perverted-justice.com#>

²⁰ All traffic statistics are taken from www.alexa.com.

explore how *PJ* frames online child solicitation and attempts to define it as a social problem, I chose the Opinions section of the site as it contains full elaborations of their claims and constructions.

General Description of the Sample

23 of the 24 articles are represented on the site as being written by *PJ* staff. The exception is article 9, which is attributed to the Parents for the Online Safety of Children, with the note that “[s]ince they do not currently have their own website and because we believe the quality of this release is high, we have decided to post it on our PeeJ Opinions page”. Article 9 also includes a 620 word “PeeJ take” following the reprint of the release.

One opinion piece (Article 6) is not available in full by following the links on the *PJ* home page. However, a search for “perverted justice opinions” brings up two pages: <http://www.pjfi.org/?opinions=all> and <http://www.perverted-justice.com/opinions/>. With the exception of article 6, the content is identical. The snapshots with which I am working are all taken from the first link, with the exception of the portion of article 6 that was cut off.

The length of the articles ranges from 1,166 words (Article 1) to 23,096 words (Article 20), with an average word length of 4,298 and a median word length of 2,934. The earliest post was made in June 2005; the most recent in April 2008. In 2005, *PJ* posted 10 opinion pieces, followed by 6 in both 2006 and 2007 and 2 in 2008. In all, a total of 112 pages were collected. The opinion pieces are described by *PJ* as “[f]ull-length articles about what [they] do and the issues surrounding [their] work”. Some opinion pieces contain excerpts of media articles, quotes from prosecutors, police, or media sources, and emails from individuals that both praise and criticise *PJ*. For the purposes of analysis, any text that is included in the Opinion pieces will be read and used for analysis. For example, when *PJ* reprints or quotes a significant excerpt from an outside source, it is still a claimsmaking activity or a rhetorical strategy. These excerpts are either used to support a claim or to provide an example which *PJ* can use to bolster their claims or, alternatively, to illustrate the lack of validity they ascribe to certain claims. In some cases, *PJ* uses other sources to introduce claims that they later adopt or include in their official claims.

Table 3 – *PJ's Opinion pieces*

Article	Date posted	Word count	Title
1	June 2005	1,166	Burnett reality show idea a winner
2	June 2005	4,468	Why we don't do things the "Posey" way
3	June 2005	1,809	Lessons and Accomplishments in Kansas City
4	June 2005	13,803	Sham, lies, and fraud: TeamAmberAlert.net in action
5	June 2005	2,401	The invaluable positives of Followup
6	June 2005	5,188	A lesson in Media Ethics
7	June 2005	1,463	Yahoo Chat more dangerous today than last week
8	November 2005	4,120	How Fairfax County dropped the ball
9	December 2005	3,721	Online Encyclopedia is a Gathering for Internet Predators
10	December 2005	2,512	Dealing with Stupid People
11	March 2006	3,117	Why we will always exist
12	September 2006	2,553	One leader of the pedophile movement, four companies that support him
13	October 2006	1,469	Mark Foley case typical of Internet predators
14	November 2006	2,004	A Problem They Don't Have?
15	December 2006	2,426	Two common myths embodied in one unique example
16	December 2006	3,815	Ten things you likely don't know about Perverted-Justice.com
17	January 2007	5,405	The Fact-Checking Game
18	June 2007	2,329	Regarding the Collin County prosecutor's office
19	June 2007	2,426	Collin County: The biggest lie ever told about us
20	July 2007	23,096	Essay contest: What they've learned from <i>To Catch a Predator</i>
21	August 2007	2,750	Eichenwald: A tale of Media-ocrity
22	September 2007	3,742	20/20 needs a new prescription
23	February 2008	3,295	Counterpunching counterpunch
24	April 2008	4,066	One last look at the Murphy, Texas sting

Summary

This research project uses social constructivism as the epistemological and ontological framework. I employed a qualitative case study design in order to explore and understand the claims and claimsmaking activities of one particular social problem claimsmaker, *PJ*. The 24 articles in the "Opinions" section of *PJ's* website make up my sample. I then applied the strategies and techniques of rhetorical analysis in order to analyze the sample.

Chapter 4:

Analysis and discussion

Once I had chosen the sample, I used a two-step coding process during my data collection. During the first reading, all uses of rhetorical strategies and all claims were coded in the hard copies of the articles. The first coding process was largely inductive. While I had a general idea of the types of statements, cues, and words for which I was coding, the first reading was done from a grounded theory perspective in that specific claims and rhetorical strategies were not exclusively or particularly looked for or coded. All examples of claims (including grounds, warrants, and conclusions) and rhetorical strategies were coded directly on the hard copy. In cases where a statement included more than one element of a claim, it was noted as well.

Coding

Once I had read through each article in the sample, I began the second stage of my coding process. Using the examples of the themes that had emerged from the first in-depth reading, I further coded the claims and rhetorical strategies. Here, I took the examples of claims I had identified in the hard copies in the first step and organized them based on the main themes that emerged (Table 3).

From this second reading, a number of main themes and categories emerged. Table 3 illustrates the themes that I identified, along with the number of articles in which these claims constituted a primary theme. Defining the problem (theme 1) includes claims that reference grounds, warrants, estimates, or range claims in an attempt to construct the definitions of and boundaries around the online solicitation problem. Some articles featured claims about current events, whether directly or indirectly related to the organization (theme 2), while others responded to media stories that were critical of *PJ* (theme 3). Another prevalent category of claims involved defining, describing, and exemplifying *PJ*'s work and role (theme 4). In many places, *PJ* made claims that were critical of other advocacy organizations as well (theme 5). Other themes, such as advocating solutions or calls to action, also emerged from the sample but were not primary themes of any articles. Themes 1, 2, 3, and 4 were each the primary theme of

six articles²¹, while theme 5 was the primary theme of two articles.

Table 4 – Second-step coding categories

Theme		Primary theme
1	Defining the problem	6
2	Current event commentary	6
3	Responses to media	6
4	<i>PJ</i> 's role, techniques, and work	6
5	Criticising other advocacy organizations	2

I collected the hard-copy version of the sample on November 12, 2011. Since websites change over time, I printed the full-text of each opinion piece contained in this section on that day, to concretize the sample and capture the texts as they appeared on the site on that date. I captured each of the 24 articles that are posted in the Opinions section (Table 4). These 24 articles constitute my sample.

A discussion of the themes that emerged from the sample is presented below. First, the main claims asserted by *PJ* in their construction of online solicitation will be discussed. Within these claims, a number of rhetorical strategies are integral and will be discussed along with the claims. After discussing the claims, other rhetorical strategies that are significant within *PJ*'s discourse but not closely tied to one main claim will be discussed.

Unless otherwise noted, excerpts from the sample are represented exactly as they appear on *PJ*'s website. Spelling, grammatical, and other errors have not been corrected so as to preserve the material as it appears in the sample. Changes have been made (and noted) only where confusion would arise as a result of not noting the error, or when I wish to draw particular attention to a portion of the excerpt.

Claims

22 of the 24 pieces in the sample are centered around one main theme or event and features *PJ*'s understanding or arguments regarding this theme, as well as supplementary themes

²¹ There are 24 articles in total. Categories 1 and 4 each include two articles where the primary theme fell within both category 1 and 4.

and claims. Article 10 and article 20 are the two exceptions; these two articles had two primary themes: defining the problem and defining and exemplifying *PJ*'s role. They are designed to inform the readers (i.e. article 16), call the *PJ* community to action (i.e., article 12), illustrate the incapability of other similarly-focused organizations (i.e., article 4), comment on current events (i.e., article 13), or to "set the record straight" with media sources or stories that have been published (i.e., article 22). Every article contains more than one claim. Furthermore, all 24 articles follow the format of making a main claim at the beginning of the piece, and providing an example (or examples) of this claim for illustrative purposes.

There are six main claims that are indicative of *PJ*'s understanding of and approach to the issue of online child solicitation:

1. The Internet is inherently dangerous.
2. Adult male predators use the Internet to solicit, groom, and eventually meet and abuse underage children.
3. This kind of online child solicitation is a serious social issue
4. Law enforcement officers, parents, and child advocacy organizations are unwilling or unable to effectively protect children from these online predators.
5. *PJ* is the only organization that can effectively protect children from online predators.
6. Criticisms of *PJ*, whether they come from media or non-media sources, are biased and illegitimate.

It should be noted that these claims, as they appear in the sample, are both implicitly and explicitly present in no particular order. That is, they are heavily intertwined and interconnected; they mutually reinforce each other. Claims (1), (2), and (3) are foundational claims; it is these claims upon which *PJ*'s entire conceptualization of the issue of child solicitation rests. They also serve to raise awareness and set the boundaries of the issue. The other claims serve to supplement and justify *PJ*'s existence. *PJ* makes many of these claims simultaneously. As such, many of the warrants that are used to justify one claim are used to justify the others, as the claims emerge together.

Claim 1: The Internet is inherently dangerous.

This claim is foundational for *PJ*. Without establishing the danger of the Internet, none of their following claims resonate. Before establishing their other foundational claims, *PJ* needs to

construct the role that the Internet plays in facilitating this problem. By doing so, *PJ* draws on pre-existing moral panic around new technologies in general, and the Internet is particular, to help legitimate this claim (Cassell & Cramer, 2008, p. 59; Gies, 2008, p. 325).

PJ plays on this fear, constructing the Internet as an associated evil (Best, 1990; 1987) of the child solicitation problem. Fear of new media/technology is not novel, particularly when children are involved. New developments in technology and media have been seen as “...succession of threats...to Western civilisation by the ‘penny dreadfuls’ of the late 19th century, the EC horror comics of the 1950s, videos in the 1980s, the Internet...” (McLoughlin, 1995, p. 499). *PJ* plays on this recurring fear of new media/technology and links it to the ultimate folk devil, the paedophile (Jewkes, 2010b), to reinforce the dangerous nature of this new technology.

This claim defines the boundaries broadly, relying on a “discovery” movement (Pfohl, 1977). In this specific case, it is implied that *PJ* as a claimsmaker is bringing attention to something that has existed, but has not yet been recognized for the problem that it presents. While foundational, this claim is not as explicit as many of the other claims that are made. However, *PJ* needs to establish the facilitating role that technology plays in order to give their claim merit; the use of technology to solicit children is what gives the claim its novelty and thus makes it worthy of attention.

Internet companies and complicity

PJ asserts that it is media and technology in the form of the Internet that make the actions of predators possible. Included in *PJ*'s definition of this claim is more than simply the role of the Internet in facilitating communication between predators and children. *PJ* also invokes a particular construction of the role of online companies, websites, and service providers as further exacerbating the problem. Indeed, *PJ* explicitly states that certain companies or sites are complicit in the solicitation of children: “To allow pedophiles to use their services to advocate child-rap is to be an accessory to organized pedophilia” (Article 12).

Not only do companies facilitate the behaviour, they are accessories to it. In other words, they are responsible for the actions of those who use their services because they provide indiscriminate access to the online spaces in which predators can attack children. For example, *PJ* claims that Google is hosting blogs with such titles as “The Ministry of Boylove”, “Little Girls in my Heart - (A Girl Lover's Life)”, “Defending the Paedoerotic”, and “My Pedo

Attraction”, and that “[e]very second on Yahoo, there are older males in teen rooms looking to prey upon underage females and males” (Article 7).

Moreover, *PJ* argues that these companies simply do not care about the harms to children because they do not restrict access to non-paedophiles. For example, “Yahoo is the most irresponsible Internet company on the planet” (Article 7), Wikipedia allows paedophiles to edit their articles to contain a more pro-paedophile point of view (Article 9), Blogspot.com “...does not remove pedophiles from their network, even when these individuals have already been brought to their attention”, and Google, Blogspot’s host, is indifferent to the content they are hosting, even though “Blogspot is crawling with pedophiles...” (Article 12). To underline the criminality inherent in the corporation as accessory, *PJ* labels companies that fail to censure, exclude, or remove paedophiles as Corporate Sex Offenders (CSOs).

An implicit value in the claim that the Internet is facilitating this problem and various providers are not only aware but complicit is that some sort of oversight and, necessarily, censorship, must take place. The claim that Internet companies and websites with user-created content are responsible for the content and the actions of those who use and/or contribute to their services works to construct those companies that fail to monitor and censor individuals who advocate certain views as immoral and more concerned with profit than with the safety of children.

Certain things, such as the blamelessness of children, are so valued that failure to protect this state is constructed in the same way as being an accessory to crime. Here, the value implied is that children must be protected above all else; those who disagree side with the predators. This claim is also constructed so as to imply conclusions about how these online companies should change their behaviour.

Conclusions generally take the form of calls for action; steps that can be taken, immediately or in the future, to eradicate or alleviate the social problem (Best, 1990, 1987). Best found that these conclusions typically took the form of advocating awareness, prevention, or social control policies. *PJ* calls for parents and other “responsible Internet users” to raise awareness and take action to protect the(ir) children:

We urge parents to add Wikipedia to their Internet filtration block list and we once again call on individuals to lodge their complaints with the Wikimedia foundation, though we doubt that will do any good, they've made their position clear. (Article 12)

We, advocates of a responsible Internet, are not asking or advocating government intervention. We want **YOU**, other responsible Internet users to hit these companies where it hurts. Hit their pocketbook, hit their public image. Publicize these issues, because the more consumers that are outraged will mean the more responsible companies are in the future. (Article 12, emphasis original)

These conclusions rest on some of the fundamental assumptions of neo-liberalism. One of the calls is directly to parents, providing them with certain information and urging them to act so as to minimize the risk that their child will come into contact with an Internet predator. Neo-liberalism is often focused on individual-level actions and prevention measures; individuals are constructed as rational risk calculators who need to take action to minimize their, or their family's, risk of victimization (O'Malley, 1996). This outlook is different than previous welfare-oriented state-centered models, where some responsibility for risk management was assumed by the state (Pratt, 1998, p. 509). Instead, as the political climate has shifted from one based largely on social welfare to one based on risk management, this responsibility has been largely placed with the individual rather than with the state (Pratt, 1998; O'Malley, 1996). So, the state no longer has all the answers (Pratt, 1998) to a number of problems, particularly social ones such as crime.

Within this construction, the inherent danger of the Internet is redefined as the failure of certain companies to recognize – or, recognizing but failing to care about – the potential for abuse that is provided by their products. It also takes advantage of the connotation of the “sex offender”. While offenders as a whole are generally viewed negatively (Adams et al., 2003; Lemert, 1974), sex offenders in particular are especially stigmatized (Spencer, 2009; Hinds & Daly, 2001). By attaching the label of sex offender to these companies, *PJ* is also directly ascribing a certain set of characteristics and a level of responsibility.

The real/virtual nature of the Internet

Ultimately, for *PJ*, it is the chat room, and by extension, the Internet, that allows individuals to solicit and eventually abuse children. For example, *PJ* states that there are “teens abducted from Yahoo chat-rooms” (Article 7). This interesting turn of phrase serves to make the victimization aspect of online solicitation both real and virtual. *PJ* makes the claim that it is real

by focusing on abduction; it is also virtual because it happens in online spaces. Accordingly, *PJ* claims that the Internet not only facilitates communication between adult predators and children, but it leads to real, tangible victimization.

This language also locates the abduction specifically within the chat-room. This further highlights the role of the Internet and collapses the differences between real and virtual spaces. The Internet not only brings a predator's words into a child's home via the computer screen; the real/virtual space allows for abductions to occur and is literally where the abduction happens:

As a teacher I see many parents that just think of the computer as a place for their child to get information needed for schoolwork and reports. I do not think many people, including myself, realized just how having a computer is like having the front door to your home open in many ways. (Article 20)

The "open-door" simile creates a particular image; the computer allows virtual predators to enter the real world home and access real children. The technology itself is therefore something with its own inherent characteristics: it is not so much that it has the potential to *become* harmful, depending on how it is used, but that it *is* harmful. The computer itself allows victimization to happen. This plays on both the recurring fear of new technology (Cassell & Cramer, 2008; McLoughlin, 1995) as well as the blameless nature of the victims (Meyer, 2007). The technology is at fault as it both figuratively and literally provides predators with inside access to the home and the innocent children who live there

PJ emphasizes the links between virtual space(s) and their nature and relationship to the "real world" (Aas, 2007; Williams, 2006, p. 99). Williams (2006) notes that, on the one hand, there exists a conception that the "real" and the "virtual" are separate, while on the other hand, the "virtual" has been conceptualized as an extension of the "real" – not something different or separate, but something that reflects (and is reciprocal with) the nature of the "real" world. *PJ* takes the latter side of this debate, presenting online solicitation as an issue rooted in the "real" world.

The way this position is constructed allows *PJ* to claim that this new media is a threat to society as well as claim that what happens virtually is real in its effects and consequences. *PJ* is trying to establish online child solicitation as a serious problem with tangible consequences, and therefore they must collapse the distinction between the virtual world and the "real" world. Constructing the issue as one that is rooted in the "real world" is important to claimsmaking, as it

can preclude criticism that because victimization occurs in a virtual space, it is not “real” victimization (Williams, 2006, p. 98). Demonstrating a problem’s “real” or tangible consequences is an important part of claimsmaking, as it provides justification for why attention should be paid to the issue (Best, 2001, p. 8). Thus, *PJ* constructs the Internet as a space that is not solely virtual; it is a space that is so closely linked to the “real” world that actual, tangible victimization can – and, they argue, does – occur.

Claiming that the Internet is intrinsically linked with the real world somewhat weakens the underlying claim that the Internet represents a new sort of threat. Social problem claims generally seek to highlight a new type of behaviour; however, in many regards, there is nothing fundamentally new about online solicitation if the virtual realm is considered to be intertwined with the “real” world: “[o]ne hears anecdotes about children who have been lured from the safety of their homes by paedophiles after an initial encounter in an Internet chatroom... But is this really new? Cyberspace serves the same function as the busstop, the schoolyard or the disco” (Grabovsky, 2001, p. 244). In other words, the Internet may be representative of relocation rather than revolution. The techniques may be different, but the fundamental behaviour is the same (Jewkes, 2010a, p. 4; Grabovsky, 2001).

To counter this discourse, *PJ* emphasizes the novelty of using the Internet to solicit children. In this sense, they are making a discovery claim (Pfohl, 1977); part of the success of their claim is based on being able to justify the attention of the public and the subsequent resources that *PJ* argues should be deployed in order to raise awareness and “solve” the problem. One common strategy for claimsmakers, then, is to emphasize that the issue at hand is somehow new, and therefore worthy of attention (Best, 1990). For example, there are references in the sample to “...the new craze of computer technology and Internet predators...” (Article 20) and the role of webcams in facilitating solicitation and abuse.

This rather complex debate regarding the location, so to speak, of the Internet may be best resolved by looking at the rhetoric that surrounds it. One significant factor that contributes to the understanding of any realm or medium is “the grammar which defines it” (Drucker & Grumpert, 2000, p. 133). Thus, talking about the Internet in a manner that reflects the role of the Internet as a space where “real” victimization occurs allows *PJ* to simultaneously define the online realm as a “real” space.

Claim 2: Adult male predators use the Internet to solicit, groom, and eventually meet and abuse underage children.

This is another foundational claim, and along with their first claim, it serves as the basis for *PJ*'s existence, approaches, and purpose. This claim is also important for persuasive purposes, as it allows *PJ* to add a highly emotional dimension relying on images of child victims (Best, 1990) to the first foundational claim.

The domain is similar to that of the first claim made by the organization. It is a discovery claim (Best, 1990; Pfohl, 1977) in that it involves a behaviour that is not necessarily new, but has not previously been recognized or defined as a problem. As such, *PJ* is working to raise awareness of the problem of online solicitation and bring it to public attention; their particular issue deserves attention because it affects so many children and because it has not yet been recognized.

Best (1990, 1987) notes that in the construction of the missing children problem, estimates of the number of children affected were common. These examples were often given in the form of numerical estimates of the number of children affected annually. However, *PJ* avoids making numerical estimates for the most part, instead using examples and estimates that rest on the inherent dangers of technology that face children. So, rather than basing their estimates on the number of children who have been affected, their examples and estimates focus instead on the number of children who *could* be affected.

The rhetorical use of the epidemic metaphor

PJ uses the word “epidemic” to refer to the issue of child solicitation several times within the sample:

Our organization numbers 11,000+ strong, filled with concerned individuals addressing the problem of online grooming by exposing predators, working with law enforcement, and bringing attention to this epidemic-level issue. (Article 1)

It's about who these predators are, what they do, their backgrounds and the overall epidemic of Internet solicitation in general. (Article 17)

The word “epidemic” has a number of connotations that create an impression that the problem is growing and spreading uncontrollably. Best (1990, p. 31) notes that “epidemic” is a common

way claimsmakers present an issue, as it implies that the problem will affect a growing number of people the longer it remains ignored or untreated.

Beyond characterizing it as an epidemic, *PJ* also uses range claims to illustrate the type of children who are at risk of being a victim of online solicitation:

The epidemic of Internet sex predators stretches across all boundaries. No matter if you're rich, poor or in-between, predators will attempt to prey on your kids. Internet predators have struck rural areas to wealthy areas. Examples? Hell, we have too many of them. (Article 14)

It does not matter to a predator if you live in a "nice area" where "things like this shouldn't happen." What matters to a predator is that there is a target in that area, an underage target for them to have sex with. The only town without this problem is a town with no children. (Article 14)

PJ furthers the epidemic metaphor and also defines the potential victims as any child who uses the Internet, regardless of gender, location, or social status. All children are at risk of being victimized. Any town with children residing within risks having predators live among them or having predators travel there in order to have sex with children. Thus, without having to provide a numerical estimate of the problem, *PJ* estimates the range as all children who use the Internet.

Furthermore, *PJ* makes the claim that all males are potential predators: "Predators come in all shapes and sizes, parents need to beware of any adult male who has immediate oversight of a minor" (Article 13). This attitude towards interactions between adult males and children is not unique to *PJ*. Some airlines, for example, have adopted policies that do not allow unaccompanied children to sit beside adult males while travelling (Hodgetts & Rua, 2008). The underlying assumption of policies such as these or outlooks such as the one espoused by *PJ* is that all men pose a direct threat to children, if left unattended (Hodgetts & Rua, 2008, p. 528).

Constructing predators

Elsewhere in the sample, *PJ* uses this widespread societal fear to reinforce their argument that all men could potentially place children at risk:

It's definitely important to show that the old "hollywood" depiction of sexual predators isn't accurate, they can look great, have a nice car and come from a respectable background too. (Article 20)

Indeed, the most underrated aspect of the series is the fact that for the first time in moving images we can see that ol' "Uncle Peto" as you call him isn't just the creep with the combover. Movies for many years showed the same type of "character" as the lecherous pedophile. Now people can see it's not just the stereotype, but every type. (Article 20)

Although *PJ* criticizes the "Hollywood" construction of paedophiles, Green and Goode (2008) found that portrayals of paedophiles in film are more nuanced and complex than portrayals in news media, focusing on thought processes and techniques of avoidance, as well as helping to shift the focus away from the relatively rare but much-feared "stranger danger" and reintroducing the more frequent occurrences of child sexual abuse that happens within the family. However, society at large is more comfortable with a portrayal that implies "others" commit child sexual assault (Jewkes, 2010a; Green & Goode, 2008), as it allows us to ignore the significant instances of abuse that are committed by so-called "ordinary people": parents, uncles, colleagues, and so on (Green & Goode, 2008, p. 74).

However, at the same time *PJ* decries the Hollywood treatment of paedophilia, they are also moving away from the portrayal of the paedophile as absolute other (Jewkes, 2010a). While the paedophile is still effectively "othered" as a result of his actions and attractions, he is not portrayed as identifiable – he is, potentially, anyone. In this sense, *PJ* continues to other paedophiles, but also removes the comfort that is taken in restricting understandings of paedophiles as dangerous strangers. Without implicating specific family members, *PJ* implies that it is not only strangers that need be feared.

The failure to mention instances of familial abuse within the sample serves a twofold purpose for *PJ*'s rhetoric. First of all, it plays to the specific fears of strangers that seem to be a ubiquitous feature of contemporary society (Wright, 2008; Gardner, 2008; Hunter, 2008; Zgoba, 2004; Petrunik, 2002; West, 2000). The unknown stranger victimizing children is a popular claimsmaking trope, dating back at least as far as the 1930s, when the Lindbergh child abduction and homicide dominated the news (Zgoba, 2004, p. 388). Secondly, though, it avoids implicating parents in sexual abuse. This is an important consideration for *PJ*, given that a significant amount of their rhetoric is directed towards parents and how they need to act in order to protect their children from this danger. Beyond the potential that discussing parental abuse would have to alienate parents as audience members, it also serves to keep the focus on their

relatively narrow focus: if presented with the more widespread estimates of parental abuse, the child solicitation issue would seem less important. It could even be regarded as an endeavour that is diverting resources from a larger problem. Therefore, keeping the focus on the non-familial stranger danger element of solicitation and child abuse allows PJ to make a rhetorical claim that does not challenge the audience to dispel preconceived notions of who should be feared (Jewkes, 2010a; Green & Goode, 2008).

Examples

Interestingly, many of the examples and estimates that *PJ* uses do not involve real children or solely online solicitation. Again, the link between the virtual and the real becomes important (Aas, 2007; Williams, 2006). The first foundational claim made by *PJ*, which sets out a certain conceptualization of the Internet and of communications and behaviours that occur online, also help to validate certain kinds of evidence for *PJ*. Indeed, much (if not all) of their reputation comes from their work with *Dateline NBC* and other non-media “stings” or “busts”. These “busts” provide *PJ* with the detailed chat transcripts they use to illustrate the nature of the problem of online solicitation of children.

PJ frames these conversations in chat rooms as evidence of the child solicitation problem, even though there are no children involved in the chat transcripts they post. However, by aligning the real with the virtual in earlier claims, *PJ* is able to make the same sort of logical transfer: if the Internet is not virtual, then those who are victimized on the Internet cannot be ignored as simply “virtual” victims (Williams, 2006). So, these “virtual children” (the *PJ* “decoys”) *become* children in the sense that the individual soliciting them perceives them to be children. It is not the actual underlying mechanics of the situation that matter (otherwise, the issue would be framed as consenting adults acting out particular roles); it is the intent and the beliefs of the solicitor that constitute the social problem.

The key to making their claimsmaking successful is implying that real children are being victimized and that this victimization *begins* with online solicitation but progresses to physical abuse, molestation, abduction, and rape. *PJ* makes use of a relatively small number of real-world cases that involve adults soliciting children and ultimately meeting with and sexually assaulting or abducting these children. These examples are interspersed with excerpts from selected chatlogs with decoys. Generally, the most heinous examples are used to illustrate the nature of

the problem. The rhetorical purpose this serves is to link these examples, where no actual child is involved, to the real-world cases where children have been abused. The implication is that the safety of real children is at stake if this problem is not paid sufficient attention. The examples used generally belong to one of three categories: real-life incidents involving real children, especially explicit or graphic excerpts from chats with decoys, or hypothetical instances involving a typical child.

Real-life incidents

Examples of real children focus on behaviour that began with luring online but progressed further. In one example, *PJ* discusses an incident in which a 13-year-old Catholic schoolgirl was lured, raped, strangled and killed, and had her body subsequently dumped in a remote area (Article 14). This draws on embedded stereotypes of an innocent, wholesome girl who was lured by a predator and then suffered through a terrible assault. However, sensational examples such as this – which involve stereotypically blameless victims, luring, paedophilia, rape, homicide, and mistreatment of a young girl's body after the fact – become powerful as symbolic representations of the social problem itself (Best, 1990, p. 28). Cases such as these, which have an obvious and powerful emotional dimension, resonate with the public and can come to define public understanding of the issue (Best, 1990, pp. 28-29). Best (1990, 1987) refers to this type of example as an “atrocious tale”. Atrocious tales attract attention, help to typify or define the issue for the audience, and affect how it is perceived (Best, 1990, p. 29). These examples, although recognized – even by the claimsmakers themselves – as relatively rare, become the reference point.

These examples also serve to reinforce the “reality” of the problem. One strategy for making a successful social problem claim is to demonstrate that a certain behaviour (i.e. solicitation) has serious consequences (Best, 2001, p. 8). In this case, child solicitation becomes not simply a matter of children receiving sexually explicit and/or offensive messages; it may (the implication is that it *will*) lead to sexual assault and even death.

Chat transcripts

Another way that the reality of the problem is reinforced is through the use of chat room transcripts. *PJ* states that their website is “...unique in being the only website you can visit to

view the actual text your kids will face online if they enter a chat room” (Article 2). In this vein, particular chat excerpts are highlighted to demonstrate what types of content this entails. For example, the following excerpt between va_breitling and becca_rox_ur_socks (a *PJ* decoy) presented in article 8 illustrates the sort of sexual content that *PJ* states children will face if they use the Internet:

va_breitling (4:03:02 PM): so going to let me lay you down and dive my tounge into your pussy? hehe

becca_rox_ur_socks (4:03:16 PM): lol if u want 2

va_breitling (4:03:44 PM): maybe push the tip in? haha

becca_rox_ur_socks (4:04:08 PM): i dont wanna get pregnant

va_breitling (4:04:23 PM): no long as i dont cum in you

becca_rox_ur_socks (4:04:43 PM): kewl lol

va_breitling (4:05:26 PM): so address? or cell ?

This example in particular represents the twofold threat that *PJ* states faces minors online. First of all, they will face the advances of adults looking to introduce them to sexual activity, by asking to “dive their tounge” or “push the tip in”. Secondly, it demonstrates the “real” consequences. This passage implies that the predator, if given reason to believe that sexual activity is a possibility – such as responses along the lines of “if u want 2” or “kewl” – will move to locate the child or communicate offline with the child in order to follow through with the actions that have been suggested and discussed. This again reinforces *PJ*’s notion that child solicitation is a significant social issue not just because of the graphic nature of the text and material that children may encounter online, but because of the tangible consequences: these predators that gain access to children will attempt to meet them offline – in “real” life.

Some examples involve individuals who participated in a chat with a decoy who proceed to show up at one of the sting locations. However, it is again the most sensational of these appearances that are used to construct an image of the predator. One particular “bust” that is highlighted by *PJ* as a signifying example involves a police officer who showed up to meet a “decoy” armed with “...two assault rifles, a shotgun, two handguns, rope, duct tape, knives, restraints, sexual materials, a chainsaw and a boat anchor” (Article 17). Immediately after presenting this example, *PJ* moves to preclude any reader skepticism or questions regarding whether this particular predator is representative of predators as a whole: “Are Internet predators

really that dangerous? Of course. Well...if you do the slightest amount of research, that is” (Article 17). The most sensational and disturbing case is again used as the signifying example around which discussions of online child solicitation are centered.

Personalized examples

Other examples seek to personalize the problem. Rather than leaving the generic child faceless, genderless, and otherwise nondescript, as with the range claims, *PJ* creates a child that a particular segment of their readers – parents – will react to. The way they do this is simple, yet powerful: the use of “your” rather than the use of the non-specific “a”. For example:

Let’s say you’re letting your child research a historical topic on Wikipedia. Rookiee, the editor at Wikipedia, edits historical-based article. So now your kid sees this in the history tab and clicks on Rookiee’s name, which takes him to Rookiee’s user profile, advertising pedophilia and soliciting for an underage boyfriend. Or, perhaps your 13 year old uses the “discussion” page to put in his two cents regarding an article on, oh, biology or culture. He will then be interacting with a man whose stated intent online is to rape children.
(Article 12)

In these examples, it is no longer the broad spectrum of “children” that are portrayed as at-risk. *PJ* brings together an image of the reader’s child(ren) using the Internet for seemingly benign tasks such as “us[ing] social networking websites, blogs, hav[ing] message board accounts or us[ing] Internet chat-rooms”, while reframing these activities as dangerous, stating that “Your child will at some point be solicited if they engage in any of those activities”. Regarding these activities as normal or harmless is irresponsible, as predators are everywhere – both overtly and covertly – on nearly any sort of Internet site; therefore, the reader’s child(ren) always remain dangerously close to Internet predators while online. The persuasive function of rhetoric is often more pronounced when the rhetor (or orator) can make an emotional connection with the audience (Aristotle, 1924/2004; Selzer, 2004; Best, 1987).

The use of atrocity tales and typifying examples is a rhetorical strategy that helps meet this goal of emotional connection. The tendency of social problems claimsmakers to use examples has been demonstrated in other social problems claims; for example, missing-children

claimsmaker John Walsh's comments about who should be considered a missing child were particularly effective when a personalized example was used:

If it was your daughter, Mr. McCloskey, and you were waiting for her and she didn't come home for 4 hours and after that time she came home with bloody underpants and she had been raped, was she a missing child? Damn well she was". (U.S. House, 1985, p. 18 as cited in Best, 1990, p. 27)

These examples serve to make the problem "real". By providing explicit or graphic examples of chats with decoys, particularly frightening examples to come out of the "stings", real-world examples involving actual cases, and hypothetical examples involving the reader's own child(ren), *PJ* is making links between the chats, other children, and the reader's children.

The rhetorical weight of the "pedophile" label

Beyond the use of these typifying examples to demonstrate their claims, *PJ* also takes advantage of the fear of sex offenders in our society – specifically, the fear of paedophiles (Gardner, 2008; Wright, 2008). In the sample, *PJ* creates a conflated group of offenders by using the blanket term pedophile to refer to the individuals they construct as predators. This characterization serves to disregard a number of more precise definitions of individuals and their sexual preferences.

In medical terms, a paedophile is an individual who is sexually attracted to children who have not yet reached puberty (Brown, Grey, & Snowden, 2009). In North America, the average age of onset of puberty is 11 for girls and 11.2 for boys (Blanchard et al., 2009). However, the examples that *PJ* uses to construct online child solicitation involve older children. They refer to the 14-year-old girl that *PJ* staff located following an abduction (article 2), the hypothetical 13-year-old coming into contact with predators on Wikipedia (article 12), or the 13-year-old schoolgirl who was murdered following an offline meeting with an older male she met in a chatroom (article 14).

Hebephilia is the medical term for individuals who are sexually attracted to post-pubescent yet pre-adulthood children (Cartor, Cimboric, & Tallon, 2008). Generally, hebephiles are most sexually attracted to those between the ages of 12 and 15 (Brown, Grey, & Snowden, 2009). Accordingly, the examples that *PJ* draws upon to construct the issue of online solicitation more accurately refer to hebephiles than paedophiles.

For example, as of June 2012, there were 548 chat transcripts that involved a single decoy. Of these transcripts, less than one percent ($n=2$) involved decoys alleged to be less than 12 years of age, and both of these decoys were alleged to be 11. The vast majority (92%) of the transcripts involved a decoy who was alleged to be 13, 14, or 15-years of age.

Nowhere in the sample does *PJ* differentiate between the medical definition of pedophilia on the one hand, and what they label pedophilia on the other hand. Instead, they characterize the individuals who attempt to solicit children as various types of pedophiles – for example, “seedy”, “pervasive”, or “predatory”. By failing to make this distinction, all perpetrators are collapsed into the far more stigmatized, ostracized, and socially castigated group of “the paedophile”.

In contemporary society, the paedophile has been constructed in a very particular way – as evil, dangerous, or inevitably recidivist (Jewkes, 2010a; Spencer, 2009; Webster, Gartner, & Doob, 2006). On the other hand, no such typification exists for the hebephile. The term hebephile, in addition, is less recognizable to the general public and does not have the same connection to fear and panic as the term paedophile. In problem claims, these pre-existing images and negative connotations help to create the sense of hostility and the relative consensus that is a component of both social problems claims and moral panics (Cohen, 1972/2002; Beckett, 1996; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

Should *PJ* use the medically precise term hebephile, the link between much of the hostility towards and the consensus that has been constructed around paedophiles would be lost. It is possible that, through their claims, *PJ* could develop the central components of hostility, concern, and consensus with hebephiles. However, with the pedophile label, *PJ* is able to draw on a number of images, connotations, and examples that already exist in contemporary society (Jewkes, 2010a, 2010b; Gardner, 2008; Wright, 2008).

Claim 3: This type of online solicitation is a serious social issue.

While online child solicitation is the organization’s focus in a narrow sense, *PJ* defines the boundaries around it more broadly. Other social problems claims, such as those around missing children (Best, 1990, 1987) or child abuse (Pfohl, 1977), had success when the definition of the problem was inclusive of a wide range of issues and behaviours. For example, while the missing children problem relied on sensational images of stranger abductions to solidify claims (Best, 1990, p. 28, 1987), they also included more common (yet less emotionally charged) issues,

such as runaways, short-term missing children, or parental abductions to maximize their estimates and include as many cases as possible. Broadening what is considered part of the issue is a strategy designed to maximize support; including a wide array of individuals and behaviours as part of the problem increase the likelihood of a successful claim (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009; Best, 1999, 1990, 1987). One example of this technique of broadening discussed above in the use of the paedophile label to refer to individuals who would more accurately be labelled as hebephiles. Beyond that strategy, though, *PJ* broadens the scope of this issue in a number of other ways.

Cabalism and organized paedophiles online

In later opinion pieces, *PJ* makes references to the problem of organized paedophile networks working to disseminate pro-paedophile propaganda and legitimize paedophilia. This is a rhetorical strategy that extends the boundaries of the problem, while also ensuring the legitimacy of *PJ*'s case beyond simple solicitation. It is also evidence of the first claim in action; the Internet is facilitating communication not only between predators and children, but also between fellow paedophiles, allowing them to organize and disseminate information to Internet users of a wide variety of sites.

The pedophile subversion of Wikipedia is just another "front" where they try to advance their "lifestyle" as normal online. (Article 9)

Pedophiles online are organized, in many cases, more organized than law enforcement. What you're looking at is a snapshot, nothing more, a small window into the world of organized pedophiles online. (Article 12)

Paedophiles, of course, have a vested interest in normalizing their behaviours. de Young (1988) analyzed how publications of pro-paedophile organizations, such as those of the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA), included techniques of neutralization in order to help legitimize their behaviours and deny the harm that was caused to children. The difference between NAMBLA's publications and attempts to neutralize their behaviours and what *PJ* claims paedophiles are doing now is the dissemination. According to *PJ*, organized paedophiles today rely on covert methods, such as editing Wikipedia articles, to disseminate their views and attempt to normalize their behaviours, while in the past these sorts of discussions were restricted largely to like-minded individuals and contained within publications directed to a specific

audience. This element of the third claim made by *PJ* builds on the first element: it is the Internet that is providing paedophiles with the channel to reach broader society, allowing them to interact with and manipulate an audience that earlier paedophiles could not.

This particular element of the claim therefore expands the problem beyond solicitation itself. The image of online paedophiles as “organized” serves to create a different sort of problem. Not only are the paedophiles who are attempting to corrupt children and society at large with their information and perspectives a serious issue, but the technology that has become ubiquitous now allows these individuals to do so by reaching into a wider range of social intercourse and social spaces that were previously closed to them. Thus, for *PJ*, all three of their foundational claims are intrinsically linked.

This underlying theme of an organized and covert network of actors is a common theme of moral panics, termed cabalism (Cohen, 1972/2002, p. 63). Cabalism is present when “...the behaviour which was to a large degree unorganized, spontaneous and situational, is seen as having been well planned in advance as part of some sort of conspiratorial plot” (Cohen, 1972/2002, p. 63). In this case, *PJ* is presenting the actions of Internet predators as coherent, organized, and oriented towards a particular end. This serves to make this particular social issue that much more frightening; not only are there predators out there looking to solicit and abuse children, but they are organized and working together.

This particular claim relies on the popular image of children and childhood that suggests that children are priceless and must be protected. The innocence and vulnerability of children are so deeply entrenched as societal values (Meyer, 2006) that it becomes difficult to criticize any sort of policy that ostensibly protects children due to the risk of being viewed as callous or disinterested in the well-being of children. Although childhood itself is a relatively recent concept, it has come to dominate the ways in which children and childhood are understood: “The construction of children as innocent, passive and vulnerable is a powerful tool in correctly identifying the perpetrators of abuse and in mobilizing popular consensus for action against such people” (Oswell, 1998, p. 280). Because of the widespread acceptance of this understanding of childhood, this warrant does not need to be made explicit.

Moral panic

The concept of moral panic beyond cabalism is also implicated in a significant portion of *PJ*'s discourse, both in the foundational claims and the supplemental claims, and the rhetorical strategies used within each. Moral panic is embedded within the language used in *PJ*'s construction of online child solicitation; it is implicit throughout the sample, rather than being made explicit in any individual articles or passages.

One key element of a moral panic is a sense of hostility directed towards the perceived problem group (Cohen, 1972/2002; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). In addition, this hostility is often fostered based on stereotyped and sensationalized images (Cohen, 1972/2002, p. 1). *PJ*'s construction of online predators reflects these characteristics. For example, the grounds upon which *PJ* bases their understanding of the social issue illustrate the condition and group of persons who threaten social values and interests. The ways in which they present the offenders are both stereotypical and an attempt to break stereotype:

One of the best results of this essay contest was seeing how **people really have learned that these guys can be anyone**. That's so very comforting to hear, without a doubt.

(Article 20, emphasis added)

The show [To Catch a Predator] brings me awareness of real child predators out there and they seriously can be anybody out there. I never really knew there was a problem as big as it is. (Article 20)

By stating that anyone (any male, at least) is a potential predator, *PJ* moves beyond the stereotype of the "creepy old man", but reinforces the more recent construction that every man is a potential predator. In this sense, the group of persons that threaten society (and thus create moral panic) are even more frightening because their typicality very mundaneness allows them to blend seamlessly with the environment.

Paedophiles are constructed as folk devils in *PJ* discourse – which is unsurprising given how frequently paedophiles are constructed as folk devils in other discourses (Spencer, 2009; Jewkes, 2010a; Zgoba, 2004; ; Hunter, 2000). Interestingly, though, they are not characterized as "absolute others". While the behaviour of the solicitors is certainly constructed in this sense, those who engage in this behaviour are constructed as typically common and dangerous:

If these four examples don't frighten any parent reading this, then we really don't know what it will take to make people realize just how insidious and offensive Internet predators are. (Article 11)

This contributes to and is reflective of the general trend towards the distrust of adult males in society (Hodgetts & Rua, 2008). *PJ* makes no effort to counter this distrust; instead, their rhetoric serves to accentuate the social anxieties that exist surrounding adult males and children.

Claim 4: Existing groups/organizations cannot effectively protect children from online predators.

With the problem established in the earlier claims, *PJ* now moves to establish their role as the organization that can solve it in the most efficient and effective way. To do this, *PJ* first highlights the deficiencies of existing organizations and individuals who *should* be part of the solution, but have not been willing or able to protect children from these predators.

Law enforcement

The first of these groups are police, prosecutors, and other members of the criminal justice system. Police are sometimes criticized as being initially disinterested in cases involving Internet solicitation:

Not finding any LE [law enforcement] to take the case, followup moved into action, alerting his employer and those in his community about his actions. An outraged community moved detectives into action, and Broadley was then arrested. Without followup, Broadley sits on the main page without movement. With followup, they inform an interested and attentive public who help rouse police interaction. (Article 5)

In this example, it is *PJ* and the public who are “interested and attentive”, while the police fail to act until the public places pressure upon them. It is therefore implied that, without the efforts of *PJ* to bring attention to this issue, employers and community members may be unaware of the presence of an Internet predator. Not having this information means that these individuals cannot adequately manage their risk. Furthermore, it portrays the police as failing to fulfill their duty to protect.

PJ also problematizes prosecutors, constructing them as uncooperative:

Mary Ann Jennings [a prosecutor] wants you to believe that the same evidence which has held up in twenty-three different states, twenty-three different counties... under twenty-three different statutes is not good enough for Fairfax County. She wants you to believe that the same practices we used in Virginia twice, that have led to **two convictions in Virginia already** are not good enough for this specific county in Virginia. To this, there is little more to say than "Bullshit." (Article 8, emphasis original)

Finally, according to *PJ*, the entire criminal justice system cannot properly deal with the child solicitation problem because of a lack of resources as well as a disinclination to incapacitate accused sex offenders:

Unfortunately, the law in California and the nation does not treat sexual solicitation of a minor as an offence that requires an abnormally high bail, nor do any state [sic] require such a criminal to remain in law enforcement hands until trial. Equally unfortunate is the system itself, damaged to allow multiple delays...meaning a predator like Chan can be out in the community nearly immediately after his arrest and depending on his attorney's tactics, possibly awaiting trial for years, not months. Potentially years without registered sex offender status, without any oversight. That's our criminal justice system, and there are no resources to keep up on these people as they await trial. (Article 11)

These claims about the ineffectiveness of prosecutors and the criminal justice system lead to a number of conclusions. The damaged system that allows predators to be released into the community, combined with prosecutors who fail to act, even in the face of compelling evidence, provides *PJ* with a case for system-wide reform. Cases such as these should be publicized, with the end goal of making changes to current approaches, giving "...an added impetus to push forward crucial anti-predator legislation through not only the federal government, but through individual states as well" (Article 13).

There are a number of implicit warrants that support this claim. The same warrants that support the first two claims are also present here: children are valuable and thus need to be protected, and this behaviour harms blameless victims. Beyond these, this claim includes a number of assumptions about the nature of law enforcement and the problem itself.

Traditionally, police have been perceived as the "thin blue line", working to keep law-abiding society orderly and safe from dangerous others (Goldsmith, 2010). Clark (2010, p. 39) notes that, increasingly, police and law enforcement are being faced with new challenges, such

as child exploitation, child luring, and child pornography, facilitated by the Internet, as well as public pressures to respond to these concerns. This reflects the view that police have a responsibility to be aware of emerging issues and adapt so as to be able to protect society and maintain order. This line of argument further reflects a specific set of values that emphasizes the traditional role of police as “gatekeepers” or protectors of order (Goldsmith, 2010).

The warrant used here is one that Best (1990) identified as a common one raised by missing children claimsmakers: deficient policies. In other words, the current approach is not sufficient to solve the problem, whether due to a lack of resources, ability, desire, or awareness of the extent of the problem. In this case, police are unable to fulfill their duty to protect using traditional methods; hence, they need to adapt or other organizations will need to emerge in order to effectively approach this problem (Brenner, 2007).

This claim and the examples used to support it also demonstrate a further warrant. The examples used present cases where *PJ* believes police, prosecutors, or the criminal justice system acted in a way that was inadequate to protect children. These examples are cases where police failed to take allegations seriously, where prosecutors failed to proceed with charges, or where the criminal justice system failed to set an adequate bail or provide more resources to keep track of these offenders. This implies that a more punitive approach is needed, one which values deterrence, incapacitation, isolation, and incarceration and which reflects the general trend over the past few decades towards more punitive social attitudes in general (Pratt, 1998).

Comartin, Kernsmith, and Kernsmith (2009) conducted a public opinion survey regarding types of punishments that are suitable for sex offenders and found that support for harsher punishments is positively correlated with fear and being a parent. As such, the warrants and examples that justify *PJ*’s second claim also provide warrants for this claim. Many of the examples were designed to play off of fear and of the risks that a reader’s child will face online; once these certain connotations were established, the rhetorical move to support for harsher punishment was facilitated.

There is one further value that underscores this particular claim: police and law enforcement need to have an active and visible presence on the Internet. The protective arm of the police needs to extend beyond traditional conceptions of space; as more and more communication and activity occurs online, more police activity also needs to take place in this space. Furthermore, according to *PJ*, police and law enforcement need to take a more active

interest in the content that is being created, shared, and disseminated online, and make investigating the sources and channels of some of this content a priority. Ultimately, as per their first claim, PJ asserts that service providers and online companies need to be more accountable. This also reinforces the inability of the criminal justice system to deal with a specific sort of corporate crime – an idea that *PJ* makes explicit through their labelling of certain companies as CSOs.

The ultimate value underlying this claim is that police have a duty to protect children, and that this duty extends to *all* spaces including virtual ones. Given *PJ*'s conceptualization of the nature of the Internet and virtual space as it is related to physical space, this value is understandable. Since they have discussed and constructed the Internet as a “real” space, it follows that this space needs to be treated in a similar manner as more traditional spaces. Without an active presence online to discover and apprehend solicitors and to discourage potential offenders from acting, children will continue to be put at risk every time they use the Internet. This claim is legitimized by the value that is associated with children and with the traditional beliefs of the role of police and law enforcement.

Parents

PJ also asserts that parents cannot effectively protect their children. *PJ* presents a complex picture of children who are on one hand technologically-savvy, yet on the other hand not fully aware of the dangers of technology, and parents who are oblivious to both.

I have come crashing into the startling realization that that they [children] are far smarter and more technologically advanced than most adults, especially their parents, give them credit for. So we have these super technologically savvy babes online who don't always have the judgment skills to make the best decisions in the first place, making adult conversation and adult decisions with adults who know better and lurk out there just waiting to find them. Scary. (Article 20)

Most adults, especially parents, try to preserve the innocence of youngsters because that's part of the 'magic' children have about them that's wonderful. There is no excuse now for parents, who have computers, to be computer illiterate while their off-springs are computer savvy and surfing the net. Responsible adults have to place the computers in

common areas, limit the time their kids are on the computer and know what sites they access on the Internet. (Article 20)

Not only is the Internet dangerous (reinforcing one of the organization's foundational claims) but parents are not taking appropriate actions to curb this danger. A closely related aspect of this claim reinforces what "good" parents do. They take the information that is given to them by *PJ* and they act in order to protect their children. "Responsible" adults need to take action to move the computer and limit time and activity in order to minimize the risk and danger that is faced.

What your show has taught me is that we parents, must do our part and be diligent and ever present in our children's lives. (Article 20)

Being a parent is the hardest job that there is. I have learned from this show that the best defense against predators is a family that is in each other's business. A computer that is in a common area such as a kitchen. Parents checking e-mail accounts and the computer as a whole. From reading the transcripts at *PJ*, it is clear that these offenders thrive and target kids that seem to have parents not involved in their lives. So parents have to make it their business, regardless of work and schedules, to be involved, very involved. (Article 20)

However, it is this information provided by *PJ* that allows a subset of parents to become, according to *PJ*, adequately equipped to protect their children., *PJ* is able to demonstrate that parents *need PJ* in order to protect their children. They reinforce the utility of their organization by providing examples of parents who have followed *PJ*'s advice and, hence, have made their children safer from online predators.

This claim is largely implicit in many of the Opinion pieces. It relies on the neo-liberal ideal of information leading to risk management and conscious decisions – such as moving the computer to a shared space – in order to minimize risk. It is also justified using the organization's foundational claims. The Internet is inherently dangerous for children, because of the prevalence of predators. The threats are so widespread that, on their own, parents cannot possibly provide adequate protection for their children.

Other advocacy organizations

Other groups also do not effectively protect children from online predators. One component of this is directly implicated in a foundational claim: the role of Internet companies

and service providers. As previously discussed, they are portrayed as having both the opportunity and the ability to help protect children from dangerous predators. However, due to their selfish motivations, they fail to act. Because these companies and providers are more interested in profit than protection, they will not effectively protect children (or, protect them at all).

Child advocacy organizations are also presented as ineffective. Two of the first four Opinion pieces are devoted in their entirety to discussing the shortcomings of Julie Posey and TeamAmberAlert.net, which have created some sort of online presence in the name of protecting children online. While these two organizations leave much to be criticized, the use of two full opinion pieces to attack their credibility demonstrates *PJ*'s attempts to place itself at the forefront of the issue of child solicitation.

In these early pieces, *PJ* compares its own efficiencies and accomplishments to those of the other organizations/advocates. Interestingly, *PJ* uses a real-life abduction case to maximize their credibility and effectiveness while minimizing that of others. In fact, the two passages in which *PJ* most strongly demonstrates their claim to being the most efficient organization begin nearly identically:

Unlike Julie Posey, the administration of this website has actually located an abducted child. In September of 2004, site admin Del Harvey and Xavier Von Erck worked together to help locate a missing Camas 14 year old. She was held by a sadistic man named Stanley Sadler. (Article 2)

TeamAmberAlert.net has never actually located an abducted kid. Perverted-Justice.com has located an abducted kid. No, not a kid taken by a parent who believes they are exercising their legal right to have custody, but a monster. A 47 year old sadist-predator who committed unrepeatable acts upon his victim. Perhaps TeamAmberAlert.net should exercise more action and less talking...perhaps doing that may lead to something positive, tangible, rather than their attempts to attack those who have done what Beistle and Plemmons lack the intellect to be able to do. (Article 4)

Other organizations are constructed as unable to *really* help protect children; *PJ*, on the other hand, can protect *real* children. This is a signifying or typifying example (Best, 1990, 1987) in a different sense. Generally, typifying examples serve as atrocity tales designed to reinforce the nature of the problem. At the same time, these examples serve as a reference point and

framework for the issue. In this sense, the success story acts like the atrocity tale. It is still a sensational example that relies on emotional impact in order to resonate – in this case, the story of a young girl abducted and victimized by a “sadist-predator”. This example, then, becomes the typifying example of *PJ* as an organization. While other organizations are talking rather than acting, *PJ* is out locating abducted children. As such, other organizations are superfluous and simply distract support and resources from organizations (like *PJ*) that are constructed as being able to act to protect children.

Claim 5: *PJ* is the only organization that can effectively protect children from online predators.

Through the foundational claims and claims regarding the ineffectiveness of other organizations or groups to protect children, *PJ* moves to establish themselves as the only organization able to protect children from online predators. Much of this particular claim is either implicit or evident through the manner in which *PJ* discusses other organizations.

Establishing character

For example, in their criticisms of law enforcement, parents, online service providers and companies, and other organizations, it is consistently implied that these groups are not like *PJ*. While “activists” such as Julie Posey are motivated by profit and recognition, *PJ* is motivated by a selfless desire to protect children. While police officers are disinterested, *PJ* is attentive and cares about the welfare and future of all children. While service providers are ambivalent to the content that they host, *PJ* is working to ensure that children can use the Internet without having to face such graphic and explicit content.

Connecting with the audience at an emotional level, or pathos, is an important component of persuasion (Aristotle, 1924/2004; Selzer, 2004). Best (1987, p. 103) illustrates the force of this appeal to emotion by pointing out that a large part of the success of defining missing children as a social problem occurred only after “[o]rganizations like Child Find clearly found it advantageous to link their cause to the widespread sympathy for parents whose children were abducted by strangers”. Particularly when children or other “defenceless” populations are involved as victims, “[p]eople respond empathetically to the horrors experienced...” (Best, 1987, p. 114). Indeed, persuasion can occur and credibility is established with the audience when “...the speech [or text] stirs their emotions” (Aristotle, 1924/2004, p. 7). Before the emotional

and empathetic connection with a wider audience based on the horrifying experiences of some parents, the “missing children” problem had little traction; once the emotional connection was made, attention to the issue increased significantly (Best, 1987, pp. 103-104). By including examples of particularly sensational cases or transcripts involving children (or representations of children), *PJ* creates an emotional attachment to the story.

Ethos, which refers to trustworthiness or character (Aristotle, 1924/2004; Selzer, 2004) is established both inside and outside of the text. Inside the text, ethos is established by appeals to expertise, attempts to relate to the audience, or presenting multiple accounts or sides to an issue. Outside, or contextually (Selzer, 2004), ethos comes from established reputation. This is evident in the sample. Many pieces contain references to *PJ*’s relationship with law enforcement, their roots, and links to original sources of stories or criticisms. In some cases,²² *PJ* offers individuals who are quoted or discussed in an article an opportunity to respond to the opinion article within the text of the piece. Once *PJ* established a reputation as an “anti-predator” organization, these specific references become less common, while specific references to *PJ*’s reputation become more common:

We are proud of our 100% conviction rate on cases brought by prosecutors using evidence supplied by our organization, literally hundreds of sexual predators convicted and sentenced (Article 22)

Our efforts to educate parents, our history of providing speakers to events in order to get the word out, our material being supplied gratis to educators and education developers so they can create better programs warning kids, our work against organized pedophiles online, the watchdog aspects of the Corporate Sex Offender area, the testing out of parental software by our software challenge team... hell, you name it, we're working on it. (Article 16)

However, *PJ* could not simply refer to a reputation as a means of establishing ethos immediately; this reputation first had to be justified, and second had to be reinforced. This was done through three rhetorical strategies to establish character.

The first way involved relating to the audience. A common rhetorical move by *PJ* involved reminding the audience of the organization’s “grassroots” nature and the composition of the organization’s members and volunteers:

²² See article 1 for an example of this.

We're not above you. We're college students, we're parents, we're retired detectives, we're blue collar workers, we're teachers, doctors, lawyers, reporters, day-care providers, tech support specialists, cab drivers and we're you. Most importantly, we're organized, professional, and effective. (Article 2)

Our organization is not some huge corporation, it wasn't pre-planned by a committee of businessmen...hell, it was the idea of a few Portland, Oregon chatterers who decided to make a small poorly-coded addition to a rarely visited blog. (Article 16)

We are not a fatcat organization that gets thousands of dollars in grants. We do not have an office building. Our volunteers are trained, but unpaid. We are volunteer in every sense of the word (Article 8)

Self-descriptions such as these reinforce a connection between the organization and its audience: "we" (*PJ*) are the same as "you" (the audience). This establishes a certain level of trustworthiness for *PJ*, as they present themselves as an altruistic group of "regular" people who are involved with the organization because they are concerned parents, citizens, and professionals with a desire to protect children from predators. They also rely on the negative connotations that accompany large corporations or for-profit groups, such as a focus on profit or losing sight of their roots and original goals.

Sometimes, *PJ* combined these sorts of references to their roots with references to their entrenched reputation. For example, the following passage from article 16 illustrates how *PJ* makes the complex rhetorical move of referring to their reputation to support their character, while at the same time *further* establishing and entrenching this reputation-based ethos by relating to the audience by referring to their roots and the work of volunteers:

From those small roots, the organization grew because people knew of the problem of predators and wanted to help create and evolve a solution. We started off with one single solitary forum called "PeeJ General Discussions." That forum still exists, but it has been joined by dozens upon dozens more... all dealing with various volunteer positions and topics never imagined by the small cadre of people who created the website.

Since late 2003, the organization has worked to become a conviction machine. It's been a long road, it's taken a lot of work and a lot of fresh ideas brought forth by new volunteers... but it has happened. We are a conviction machine. We are the foremost anti-predator organization on the planet. It has happened because we're the very definition of a

grass-roots movement, something we've never forgotten. We're not corporate suits nor are we going to become what we like to term "Grandpa." People responded to our aggressive anti-predator and anti-pedophile stance, a stance we will always maintain no matter who winces. (Article 16)

Secondly, *PJ* references their partnerships and/or relationships with traditional law enforcement, emphasizing their character and trustworthiness through their work with police and prosecutors. However, *PJ* also constructs police and prosecutors as ineffective, which creates a certain tension. In order to both criticize law enforcement and rely on it to establish character, *PJ* implicitly distinguishes between “good” and “bad” police and prosecutors. Similar to their construction of the role of parents in helping to protect children from online predators, *PJ* asserts that police and prosecutors are only effective in conjunction with *PJ*'s resources, approaches, and expertise. The police and prosecutors that are criticized are those that do not cooperate with *PJ*. Those that do cooperate are constructed as effective law enforcement; it is the partnerships with “effective” police and prosecutors from which *PJ* attempts to draw credibility:

We have over 100+ agreements with law enforcement across the nation with our “Information First” program. (Article 2)

You can make the best change for yourself by not attacking the largest anti-pedophile organization on the Internet in the future, an organization which has agreements with over 100+ Law Enforcement departments, detectives, cybercrime units and agencies across the Unites States. An organization that has located an actual abducted 14 year old, an organization which continues to rack up arrests, indictments and convictions at a rate that you could never reach on your own. (Article 2)²³

These examples also play on *pathos*, in that they rest on an assumption that the audience places value in these traditional forms of law enforcement and social control. *PJ*, by aligning itself on the side of “effective” law enforcement, is attempting to gain legitimacy in the eyes of its audience and broader society by entrenching their organization (and, implicitly, their values) with those of the responsible police and the prosecutors, while reinforcing the ineffectiveness of those members of law enforcement that have not yet cooperated or supported *PJ*. This alliance with what *PJ* constructs as “good” police, media, or parents typically leaves many of these perceived values and responsibilities implicit.

²³ Note that this passage was directed specifically at Julie Posey, but was included in the full text of the article.

Techniques of governance/regulation and implications on society

PJ also presents their organization as an important and effective partner in governing and regulating society, regardless of the underlying political rationality. O'Malley (1999, p. 185) notes that contemporary discourses around deviance and punishment tend to focus on neo-liberal explanations and worldviews. However, the role of neo-conservatism, while often ignored, is significant, particularly when it comes to understanding issues of deviance, punishment, and social order and control (O'Malley, 1999, pp. 185-187). As I will establish below, *PJ* illustrates the interrelated nature of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism in issues surrounding social order. Beyond these particular ideological worldviews, there are also undercurrents of vigilantism in *PJ's* discourse – not traditional notions of vigilantism as an unruly, pitchfork-and-torch mob relying on violence, but an interesting type of vigilantism geared more towards neo-liberal ideals of risk management and individual responsibility and neo-conservative ideals of morality and obligation.

Neo-liberal ideas are mostly present in the form of the education and information dissemination role that *PJ* claims to play:

One of the primary purposes of the content on this [PJ's] website is to present the reality of Internet chat-rooms to parents. The real logs and real pictures taken during these logs are used to educate millions upon millions of parents to the dangers of Internet chat. (Article 4).

Countless parents are now watching their kids closer online, buying filtration software or disallowing computer privileges altogether due to our website content. (Article 4).

An implicit warrant in *PJ's* discourse – indeed, in most rhetorical discussions about children – is the inherent value of children. Along with this, *PJ* emphasizes the need to better protect children in order to ensure that their value and potential is ultimately maximized in order to justify its existence and tactics. The “risk society” that emerges is one where decisions are “...approached as, and couched within, the terms of risk, with effect that in order to make and articulate a decision in life, individuals receive and respond to abstracted forms of knowledge, calculate risk, and respond according to that calculation” (Bell, 2002, p. 88). The underlying assumption is that, if not given certain knowledge, such as the knowledge of the dangers that exist online, then individuals cannot sufficiently or accurately calculate and respond to risk.

This sort of danger and risk-based mindset is evident in the discourse and rhetoric surrounding the responsibilities of parents to protect their children, both in *PJ*'s claims²⁴ and in those of other social problem claimsmakers. For example, the News of the World "naming and shaming" campaign of 2000 included the following demands:

In order to be good parents and to safeguard our children, they argued, we need the hard facts – the who and where – of individual threats, not the interpretation of aggregated national statistics and expert guidelines for creating good parenting techniques and safe neighbourhoods. (Bell, 2002, pp. 89-90)

PJ justifies their existence by stating that they are able to provide this sort of information to parents and communities where the state and/or law enforcement cannot or will not. Then, these parents and community members become information consumers, using their knowledge in order to gauge the risk they and their children face and to act accordingly:

Because of your show my daughter does not have a MySpace. We have no Web Cam. I have the passwords to her two AOL accounts and she knows that if that changes she will no longer have access to the Internet. We have our computer in the family room and I often read IM's my daughter is responding to over her shoulder. Sometimes I am even on my daughter's screen name and she will receive an IM and I will tell her friend that it is me rather than my daughter so even her friends know she is not functioning in "total privacy" on the computer. I pick up my daughter's cell phone - often without her knowledge and read text messages she has sent and received. I just appreciate how your work with Dateline has made me a more proactive parent than I was prior to your television shows (Article 20).

PJ asserts that, given knowledge and information about online child solicitation, parents can evaluate the level of risk and act to minimize it. In the case of online solicitation, these risk management activities can take the form of keeping the computer in the family room, reading and checking email and chat accounts, and keeping a watchful eye over children's online activities.

The neo-liberal ideas present in the sample also reflect the increasing marketization of security (O'Malley, 1999; Pratt, 1998). For example, filtration software is presented as a means

²⁴ For example, see claim 4. Two divergent themes emerge: that parents cannot protect their children from the dangerous predators online (hence the need for *PJ*); and that parents *can* protect their children, so long as they have access to the sort of information that is provided by *PJ*.

of increasing security; it is also a commodity that the individual is responsible for purchasing. As risk management strategies are increasingly shifted to the individual, items that provide security, such as specialized software, become another tool for individuals to use as they manage their risk and take action to minimize it.

Neo-conservative ideas, however, are intertwined with an emphasis on morality, in the sense of good (*PJ* and their supporters) versus evil (predators and critics) and on the need for a greater ability to maintain social order and control:

There's definitely no reason to forgive the monsters that committed those acts. Far too many people are all too willing to try to pretend that "turning the other cheek" does anything more than encourage people to continue their pattern of victimization. (Article 20).

It is an epidemic out there in the chat-rooms and social networking websites across the Internet and as experience has shown us, it will be an epidemic until government gives everyone stronger tools to incarcerate and isolate these people from legitimate society. (Article 11).

PJ concludes that the solution for stopping the "epidemic" of child solicitation is for the government to implement new legislation, policies, and practices designed to remove dangerous online predators from the rest of society. These approaches "...seem to hark back to the 19th century, with its emphasis on self-denying virtues of conformity, 'moral character' and obedience" (O'Malley, 1999, p. 177). The favourable attitude towards increasing the tools of the state to isolate, incarcerate, and otherwise punish individuals is one of the contradictions evident in what Cohen (2011, p. 241) calls "the new right":

...they are against state power that takes the form of regulation over health, welfare, disease, risk protection, 'hate' and the environment, but private morality (sexuality, abortion, lifestyles) should become even more the business of the state. They also have few problems with the extension of the correctional system.

At the same time the state is moving away from previous welfarist approaches, they are also increasingly attempting to regulate and direct moral issues, creating a sort of tension in that individuals call for the government *not* to interfere on issues such as health or risk management, but to involve themselves further in matters such as governing sexuality or abortion. In this sense, neo-liberal trends are evident as well, despite the distinct element on morality. There is an

idea that it is no longer up to the state to manage or evaluate risks for its citizens. A good citizen is a good risk manager, and vice versa.

However, many of these punitive trends cannot be explained adequately using only neo-liberalism (O'Malley, 1999, p. 185). Many of the strategies that are emerging in contemporary criminal policy do not align well with the principles of neo-liberal governance – for example, “...is not punitive criminal stigmatization at odds with reintegration?” (O'Malley, 1999, p. 185). Reintegration of offenders, in a neo-liberal society, reflects an inherent trust in individuals and communities, as well as demonstrating that these individuals and communities can be – and are to be – trusted more than the state (O'Malley, 1999, p. 184; Cohen, 1985). However, contemporary sex offender policies, and those advocated for by *PJ*, rest more on questions of morality, vengeance, and populist punitivity (Griffin & Miller, 2008; Zgoba, 2004; Tonry, 2001).

These apparent discrepancies, however, disappear when the impact of neo-conservatism is introduced to this understanding. What is assumed to be one coherent political rationality, neo-liberalism, is more accurately a rationality combining (sometimes seemingly contradictory) elements of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism (O'Malley, 1999; Garland, 1990). As O'Malley (1999, p. 185) contends, what we see is “...a neo-conservative *social authoritarian* strand, and a neo-liberal *free market* strand” (emphasis original). Due to this interrelated nature, *PJ* is able to rely on images and symbols that reflect both a greater need for information so as to manage risk, as well as a need for more punitive approaches in order to effectively approach and solve this social issue.

Vigilante ideals are also present through emphasizing the role of private citizens in ensure that the “pervs” face “justice”:

These two men illustrate the need for strong community notification, strong follow-up on their cases. They are great examples of the urgent need to make sure those in their communities know all about their activities online. (Article 11)

Followup is the area where the posted pervs are then investigated by forumites in every way possible. Once an identity is known, Followup springs into action with self-directed individuals alerting the “busts” neighborhood, friends, and family about what the individual tried to do online (Article 5)

Vigilantism is generally a response to the (real or perceived) failure of the state to meet the demands of its citizens (Dumsday, 2009; Hine, 1998; Johnston, 1996; Sederberg, 1978; Burrows,

1976; Rosenbaum & Sederberg, 1974). In this case, *PJ* implies that the state is not providing citizens with enough information to make informed risk-management decisions. Therefore, citizens need to take action in order to attain the conditions that they desire (Johnston, 1996). When it comes to *PJ*'s method, the issue at hand is community notification. *PJ* asserts that notification is something that needs to be done in order to allow individuals to act rationally and responsibly – and, if the state will not provide this notification, it is up to private citizens. In this sense, vigilantism shares some fundamental assumptions with the neo-liberal rationalities discussed above: namely, that individuals and communities are more trustworthy and dependable than states and governments.

Vigilante action can also be understood as a performance intended to reinforce social norms, values, and the status quo (Gordon, 2004, pp. 360-361) and act as a spectacular method of social control (Gordon, 2004, p. 362; Bauman, 2000, p. 215). *PJ*'s cooperation with *Dateline NBC* to broadcast the stings, then, is evidence of a spectacle of social control and social values (Gordon, 2004; Bauman, 2000; Schattenberg, 1981): it relies on images and individuals who are presented as abhorrent. Indeed, many of the examples used in the sample contain shocking passages; the impact of these examples and images is more important when it comes to awareness and reinforcing values than the effectiveness of *PJ* as an organization is.

PJ takes explicit steps to respond to the vigilante label. For example, in article 5 (on the function and value of their “followup” initiative) *PJ* notes that followup: “...is an unjustly attacked arm of PeeJ, an arm that pro-pedophiles attempt to paint as ‘vigilante’ or ‘harassing’”. *PJ* also acknowledges “...idea has been thrown around that we're an unaccountable crew of lawless vigilante wild west outlaws!”. Immediately, though, they move to counter this idea, stating that “Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth” before presenting examples of steps the organization takes to ensure accountability and legitimacy.

One reason for these explicit rejections of the vigilante label is concerned with maintaining a particular ethos, or character. For the most part, vigilantes are stereotyped as dangerous and violent (Dumsday, 2009). *PJ* emphasizes that, “...in the history of Followup, not one instance of violence has ever been presented or reported...”. Rather, their work serves to notify individuals and community members as to risks and danger. Their rejection of the vigilante label also serves to reinforce support for the law, something that is present in both neo-liberal (due to security) and neo-conservative (due to morality) discourses (O'Malley, 1999).

Since vigilantism, by definition, requires that laws are broken (Burrows, 1976:7), an organization looking to position itself as an important member of a new regulatory framework may not want to be portrayed as acting in illegitimate or illegal ways.

While *PJ*'s concerns are highly politically charged, *PJ* is able to (as in other areas) portray their organization as aligned with either side of the political spectrum. Again, it depends on the values and leanings of the reader, making the Opinion pieces very well written in a rhetorical sense. Furthermore, the blurring of boundaries between neo-liberal and neo-conservative rationalities (O'Malley, 1999) makes it easier for *PJ* to appeal to each side without appearing to favour or represent either one explicitly or exclusively.

A common feature of *PJ* from each of these three frameworks demonstrates one particular common link: support for increased punitiveness. Pratt (1998) attributes this sort of shift towards more punitive measures as an indication of decivilization. The trend towards neo-liberalism in recent years is one contributing factor to an increased public appetite for more punitive measures; this change in rationality from welfarist to neo-liberalist "...not only leads to individual citizens providing for their own security in a number of ways, but also seems likely to lead to popular support for tougher measures against those who would put this at risk" (Pratt, 1998, p. 510).

Claim 6: Criticisms of *Perverved-Justice* are illegitimate

In addition to establishing organizational legitimacy in the sample, *PJ* also takes the step of demonstrating why external criticisms of the organization are not valid. While law enforcement is sometimes implicated in these claims as supplemental to their claim that law enforcement cannot adequately protect children, there are two particular groups that *PJ* focuses on when it comes to debunking criticisms. The first is media, while the second is paedophiles. Interestingly, the latter group is not made up of solely paedophiles, but they are linked together using rhetorical strategies.

Countering media criticisms

PJ's claims about media are particularly interesting given its location in and as a media source. One-quarter (six of twenty-four) of the Opinion pieces are devoted to criticizing media sources critical of *PJ* or media and journalism as a profession. This claim is closely related to their first foundational claim regarding the dangers of new media. However, it is presented in a

different form with different ends. For example, rather than referring to media in the form of the Internet as a conduit for predators to take advantage of, this claim references media as a source of misinformation:

Nothing will disillusion you more about print media than having years of experience being covered by print media. It is typically a medium filled with misquotes, inaccuracies, and poor fact-checking. (Article 17)

As always, when examining the media, take a look at the people behind the write-ups. What is their agenda? Stop buying the propaganda that “alt” media is somehow more truthful or less compromised than corporate media. At the end of the day, “journalism” is typically a corrupt and dishonest profession where agendas hold sway. (Article 23)

However, this misinformation may be as damaging as solicitation itself, as according to *PJ* it creates a society that is unaware of the “truth”. In this sense, the deniers or critics are grouped together with those who belong to the problematized group (Cohen, 2011). Criticism or disagreement is not based on legitimate reasons; rather, it is the product of hidden agendas or market competition. This serves to delegitimize a number of media criticisms. Furthermore, *PJ* reminds the audience that media sources are often inaccurate, implying that stories that portray *PJ* negatively are the result of shoddy journalism, misquotes, and a lack of investigation.

The main argument being made within this claim is that media cannot be trusted. What is interesting, though, is *PJ*’s role as a media source. Despite claiming that neither mainstream nor alternative media can be trusted, *PJ* also states that they are unique in that they *can* be trusted:

Hey, we’re not saying we’re Edward R. Murrow or that we’re even Bill O’Reilly, but we are pretty much your only credible outlet for digging into and exposing pedophile and child-rapе activism for the ugly beast it is. (Article 16)

This excerpt follows a short discussion of media work as activism, meant to justify and solidify *PJ*’s status as self-described anti-paedophile activists. The examples they use represent a distinct rhetorical strategy, using cultural references as rhetorical resources (Selzer, 2004). Here, the example is designed to appeal to all political sensibilities rather than one over the other. By using such figures as Murrow and O’Reilly, *PJ* ensures that both sides of the political spectrum are represented and referred to; Murrow is regarded as an exemplar of fearless, objective, truthful journalism (Cull, 2003; Godfrey, 1993), while O’Reilly is often characterized as a partisan ideologue (Norton, 2011). *PJ* references these two as examples of media activists; Murrow for

“leading the fight against McCarthyism by uncovering it's [sic] insidious nature”, and O'Reilly for “uncovering and castigating judges for inappropriate sentences” (Article 16).

The reputations of the two men *PJ* chooses to reference are quite different. However, *PJ* is linking their organization to both in the sense that it is *PJ* who is not afraid to speak the “truth” about child solicitation, similar to how they view Murrow as courageous enough to speak out against McCarthyism and O'Reilly as willing to criticize sentencing decisions. The implications are that most media are unwilling to report on certain issues due to the contestable or undesirable nature of the “truth”; however, *PJ*, like the rare breed of “some of the best media in the United States” (Article 16) is willing to discuss these unpleasant “truths”. This willingness to speak out about these issues becomes a source of credibility for *PJ*.

Countering other criticisms

With media criticisms framed as a matter of competition, jealousy, and unprofessionalism, *PJ* next moves to counter criticisms that come from sources other than media. These criticisms require a different lens to neutralize, given that non-media sources have no real vested interest in the financial or ratings success of any given network. *PJ*'s strategy for countering these criticisms therefore takes a more personal form. Where journalists are criticized for caring more about profit than issues, non-media individuals who criticize *PJ* or its methods are constructed as paedophile enablers, paedophile sympathizers, or paedophiles themselves:

Daily, pedophiles and their sympathizers try to comb our forums and volunteer base in hopes of trying to find some new volunteer's phone number to threaten and harass via the phone or via instant messenger. (Article 16)

Some of them [the people who email criticisms] are straight-up pedophiles, trying to pass off their "child lover" propaganda like we're going to suddenly say one day, "Oh, wow, we've been so wrong to expose Internet predators!" Not going to happen, and the amount of email we get from these sorts of idiots would actually shock you. Let's be blunt:

They're stupid. (Article 10)

Which are worse, the predators out there trying to rape children they befriend online? Or ignorant elitists who enable their attempts by trying to stop law enforcement from dealing with this issue? (Article 14)

In contemporary society, paedophiles are the ultimate folk devils (Jewkes, 2010a), stigmatized to such an extent that they are regarded as in- or sub-human (Spencer, 2009). Aligning critics with this group, then, is an effective strategy for neutralizing their points of view. *PJ* attributes a number of characteristics to critics, reflecting a particular type of social issue claim. Some contemporary moral panics become what Cohen (2011, p. 241) calls “anti-denial” movements. In these types of moral panic, acknowledgement of the issue is a main goal of the claimsmakers; by the same token, then, “...the denial – cover-up, evasion, normalization, turning a blind eye, tolerance, and so on – of certain social conditions, events, and behaviours is morally wrong and politically irrational” (Cohen, 2011, p. 241). These types of claims can also be referred to as awareness claims (Cohen, 2011); *PJ*’s use of warrants regarding deficient policies and the inability or unwillingness of politicians, law enforcement, and media to address this perceived issue indicate an implication that lack of awareness is a significant element of the nature of the child solicitation issue. *PJ* also makes use of this sort of anti-denial stream of argument in their claims, as they frequently reference how their organization has brought “awareness to parents and society regarding Internet predators” (Article 16). As a claimsmaker, *PJ* is attempting to bring this issue into the public eye and public consciousness, instead of allowing it to remain unseen and unacknowledged.

Presenting themselves as the organization that is bringing this issue to light is one element of this type of claimsmaking. Beyond that, claims that are made in this vein also seek to portray sceptics or deniers as folk devils themselves (Cohen, 2011, p. 241). Those who disagree with a claimsmaker’s views of an issue are grouped with those who belong to the group that is being perceived as problematic. Cohen (2011, p. 241) uses the example of how so-called “deniers” are treated by those involved in claimsmaking concerning climate change: “Sceptics are indeed folk devils: treated like retarded or crazy persons, people who just don’t get it – like flat earthers – or who are on the payroll of oil corporations”. Those who dare disagree with the claims made by claimsmakers either do not understand what the issues are, or their disagreement is not genuine or sound; rather, it is based on economic gain.

PJ presents those who criticize their claims in the same manner. First of all, simply by referring to themselves as an “anti-predator” organization, they are implying that anyone who does not support them is, by definition, pro-predator. This rhetorical move to align critics or opponents with the group being problematized is particularly apparent in moral panics regarding

children (Green & Goode, 2008, p. 73), as a result of the emotional images surrounding child sexual abuse. In the sample, there are specific references to the “pedophiles and their sympathizers” who organize and work in order to silence or shut down *PJ*. This reinforces both sides of their anti-denial claim.

First, it illustrates that *PJ* is working to spread information and knowledge in order to prevent individuals, politicians, and organizations from continuing to ignore this particular social issue. *PJ* implies that its critics are similar to the flat-earthers in Cohen’s climate change example (2011, p. 241). Critics are portrayed as simple-minded individuals who are irredeemably biased. The views of critics or deniers become lumped together with the positions that are held by the most extreme or fringe critics: climate change sceptics become flat-earthers, and critics of *PJ* become paedophiles. Criticisms are thus obscured, as regardless of who the critic is or what the criticism is, *PJ* reduces it to an essential matter of somebody being blinded by a particular set of beliefs (in this case, paedophilic or pro-paedophilic), which, in turn, prevents them from being able to recognize the “true” – according to *PJ* – nature of the issue. *PJ* claims that paedophiles can never present a valid criticism of *PJ* or an “unbiased” view “...not simply because they're pedophiles (*though that should be enough of a reason to disallow them*) but also because each Wikipedia article is supposed to be NPOV. Neutral Point of View. Pedophiles do not have a Neutral Point of View” (Article 9, emphasis original). Thus, the critics or deniers become the same as the participants or actors, and become similarly ostracized, othered, and constructed as folk devils.

Neutralization and ad hominem

These responses to criticisms also demonstrate a particular technique of neutralization (Sykes & Matza, 1957) that is often present in rhetorical texts. Ad hominem attacks (Janack, 2006), or what Sykes and Matza (1957) would refer to as “condemning the condemners”, are typically used in rhetoric. Ad hominem argument strategies usually counter criticisms or opposing positions by attacking “...the person holding a position or advancing an argument, in terms of background, motivation, or other personal considerations” (Brinton, 1985, p. 50). Rather than debate the issues or content of the arguments or criticisms, it is often easier to simply demonstrate that the criticisms are invalid due to particular characteristics of the individual, organization, or even entire profession that is making the criticisms. In this way, *PJ* does not

have to respond or even make a cursory acknowledgement of the criticisms. Janack (2006) notes that ad hominem attacks are frequently used to control messages rhetorically; labelling and attacking the critic rather than the criticisms is a common way to undermine the credibility of opposing viewpoints and thus implicitly demonstrates the standards of credibility that are required. In this case, *PJ* sets the standard of credibility as being in favour of their methods and perspectives, as well as being motivated for unselfish reasons.

The second element of anti-denial claimsmaking presents critics as motivated by profit or economic gain (Cohen, 2011, p. 241), rather than as members of the group that is perceived as problematic. While these individuals can also be constructed as folk devils in the sense that they are aiding in the continued ignorance or denial of a social problem (Cohen, 2011, p. 241), their motives and reasons for denying or criticising are different. Rather than being blinded by a particular core belief that prevents them from understanding the issue, they are blinded by something different: profit.

There are two groups that *PJ* refers to in this sense, thus allowing them to rhetorically delegitimize criticisms without having to label the critics as (pro-)paedophiles. These two groups are Internet companies/service providers (as discussed in claim 1), and members of the media (as discussed in claim 4):

As "Pedologues" is promoting child-rape and pedophilia in explicit terms, they are advocating illegal activity. Yet, this popular pedophile podcast is allowed to stay up. Why? Because Libsyn.org profits from pedophiles, who pay for their service. (Article 12)

The media smelled an opportunity to attack a successful show on a competing media news magazine in the form of Dateline NBC. Corporations in direct competition had their news departments pull out every attempt to smear and tear down the productive efforts made. Facts and objectivity be damned, the media went, as usual, with sensationalism and stupidity in order to try to convince the public that there was great controversy to be had. You'll never see the points and facts above disseminated in defense of ourselves or the "To Catch a Predator" specials, because there is no vested interest, no monetary value in the truth when it comes to issues involving the 21st century media wars. (Article 24)

Both groups, while different, are portrayed in the same sense. Libsyn.org, as representative of other online service providers and hosts, disregards the well-being of children because they profit off of the material that they host; they "profit from pedophiles". Similarly, media sources

disregard the “facts and objectivity” of *PJ*’s claims simply because they are in competition with *PJ*’s partner network, *NBC*, for ratings and profit. These groups are portrayed as selfish and profit-oriented, as opposed to the grassroots, volunteer-based, altruistic construction of *PJ*.

Because of the rhetorical move that is made to present deniers and critics as immoral or irresponsible and on the same level as the more traditional folk devils (i.e., the participants or members), presenting these critics as being aligned with groups that are criticising or denying helps to delegitimize their criticisms. These strategies also combine with other rhetorical claims that present *PJ* as motivated by altruism, creating an illustration of the altruistic organization (*PJ*) on one hand, and paedophiles and greedy individuals on the other. By taking a figure that is universally detested and regarded as the ultimate folk devil, the paedophile, and linking this individual with all critics or deniers, whether they are motivated by their (pro-)paedophilic beliefs or by profit, *PJ* further portrays the issue as one of good versus evil. This builds upon the war metaphor framework (Best, 1999) that is also drawn upon to portray the issue as one that requires all of society to work together to overcome the issue. It also expands the identifiable enemy (the evil, or the “them” to respectable society’s “us”) to include not only those who participate in the behaviour, but those who criticize efforts, particularly those efforts of *PJ*.

Rhetorical strategies

There are a number of rhetorical strategies that are involved in each of *PJ*’s main claims. Some of these strategies, such as the use of typifying examples, the attempts to develop ethos, or the formal logic used to connect opponents with paedophiles, are intrinsic to the claims being made and have thus already been discussed. However, there are a number of other rhetorical strategies employed over the course of the sample that are also worthy of discussion. In particular, the rhetorical use of warrants, the problem-as-war metaphor, the use of witnesses to establish character, the utility of foils or bad examples to deflect criticism, and the illusion of transparency that is created through engaging with criticism strengthen the persuasiveness of *PJ*’s claims.

Rhetorical use of warrants

Interestingly, the implicit nature of most of *PJ*’s warrants may be by design (Best, 1987, p. 109). Indeed, there is a rhetorical purpose to be found in *not* mentioning the warrants that are being used to justify conclusions (Best, 1987, p. 109). As some theorists have noted, disagreeing

on the *grounds* of a social problem does not necessarily mean that the conclusions are rejected (Beckett, 1996; Best, 1990, 1987); for example, a debate on whether there are ten thousand children abducted each year or one hundred thousand (Best, 1987, p. 108) does not necessarily cause a dispute in terms of the conclusions that are ultimately made. However, warrants, when used in social problems, imply a particular set of values (Best, 1987, p. 109; Spector & Kitsuse, 1987/2009). Rhetorically speaking, it is much easier to reconcile a debate regarding grounds than it is to “...defend a warrant which one’s audience refuses to validate” (Best, 1987, p. 109).

The rhetorical advantages to not mentioning warrants are evident in several sections of the Opinion pieces. In several places, *PJ* is able to maintain a balance of appearing objective while simultaneously criticizing and relying upon other organizations to provide legitimacy and credibility. Rather than an indication of incoherence, this can be read as a deliberate rhetorical strategy.

Interestingly, the same types of rhetorical strategies are used with parents and with media. Each of these three groups – police, parents, and other organizations, particularly media – serve as the basis for one of the organization’s main claims – that it is their inability and inefficiency in protecting children from online predators that justifies and necessitates *PJ*’s existence. Despite these main claims, *PJ* also returns to these organizations to respond to questions of character: it is their cooperation with police and law enforcement that demonstrates their accountability and professionalism; it is their positive feedback from parents that encourages them to continue; and it is their work with media that helps spread awareness of the issue of online child solicitation.

To use the references to their relationship with law enforcement as an illustration of this strategy, the ways in which *PJ* successfully avoids explicit warrants can be highlighted. *PJ* relies on their partnerships with law enforcement to demonstrate and support their claims as to their legitimacy and credibility. These relationships and partnerships draw upon traditional conceptions of authority and the nature and understanding of police to, by proxy, transfer these characteristics to *PJ*. In other words, *PJ*, by making explicit their relationship with police, is able to claim – and support their claim – the same sort of legitimate position as agents of social control that police have traditionally been afforded. However, despite this reliance on law enforcement, *PJ* does not come out in praise of *all* law enforcement. In many places, they are extremely critical of the actions of particular departments or officers, or even the criminal justice

system as a whole. Furthermore, a significant basis for their organization's legitimacy, as set out in their claims, is that traditional law enforcement is not sufficient for dealing with child solicitation.

What these examples do is allow *PJ* to appease some audience members who may not believe that traditional law enforcement is adequate. Additionally, it allows them to make the rhetorical move of entrenching their organization on the side of police without contradicting their organizational legitimacy or their claims that *PJ* is *necessary* to solve the child solicitation problem. By using these examples of uncooperative authorities²⁵, *PJ* is able to maintain their alliance with *most* police services – the ones that, in the words of *PJ*, are “competent”. At the same time, they are able to establish character and trustworthiness among audience members who believe either that the police and prosecutors are not doing enough to solve the problem or do not represent legitimate symbols of character and authority.

In the same sense, *PJ* also uses their cooperation with media as a means of establishing character and organizational legitimacy, despite their numerous claims that media is inherently corrupt:

We have worked with national media news sources to illustrate the dangers of online chatting for teens. We have appeared on Dateline NBC, CNN, CBS National News, The Abram's report on MSNBC, the aforementioned “Dayside” program on Fox News, the documentary “Katie.com” on CourtTV, educational programming designed for school-children, Parenting Today, The Montel Williams show, the CBC, the BBC, NHK TV in Japan, along with literally hundreds of local radio and television interviews warning people of Internet dangers. (Article 2)

Similar to how *PJ* relies on the authority derived from traditional law enforcement at the same time as they criticize traditional law enforcement for lack of action or competence, *PJ* uses positive media experiences on a variety of different networks and programs to illustrate to the audience that they can be trusted, while at the same time using negative experiences or criticisms as an opportunity to remind the audience that not all media sources or stories are unbiased or trustworthy. *PJ* is also making a rhetorical move by establishing boundaries: good, legitimate, unbiased, and trustworthy media are those sources that cooperate with *PJ* and/or present online child solicitation in a way that *PJ* perceives as correct. Conversely, those sources that disagree

²⁵ See, for example, articles 18 and 19.

with *PJ* are framed as biased, greedy, or corrupt, a rhetorical move that places these “corrupt” media sources firmly in the same camp as the Internet predators themselves.

The reason *PJ* is able to make these criticisms without appearing contradictory or hypocritical is because they do not make explicit their warrants. The warrants involved in *PJ*’s claims for legitimacy can, in their most basic terms, be summarized in two opposing statements:

- 1) Traditional law enforcement is a source of authority and social control that can be completely trusted to oversee *PJ*’s actions, ensuring that *PJ* will act accordingly; the reason that *PJ* is needed is simply a matter of resources; or,
- 2) Traditional law enforcement is unable or unwilling to recognize the problem and take appropriate action; therefore, an organization such as *PJ* must act as well as hold the police and prosecutors accountable for their inaction.

An audience member may ultimately agree with *PJ*’s conclusion that something needs to be done about the child solicitation problem. However, if *PJ* relied exclusively on position 1) or 2), audience members who fell into the opposite camp could become alienated. In other words, if a reader of the site believes that traditional law enforcement is inadequate, yet the *PJ* Opinion pieces reflect exclusively and explicitly the warrant that *PJ*’s role is to provide resources under the oversight of this body of law enforcement, then this reader is not likely to afford *PJ* the credibility which they are trying to obtain.

As it is, *PJ* is able to avoid the issues that arise when an audience disagrees with a warrant by simply not mentioning them. By leaving the conclusions on their face without providing whatever their particular warrants may be, *PJ* allows the reader to take the conclusion at face value, and justify the legitimacy using whichever warrants they agree with. The idea that “something needs to be done about the child solicitation problem” is not an idea that creates divisions based on warrants. In this case, disagreement will come from those who do not believe that there is such a thing as a child solicitation problem, or from those who believe that enough is being done. For these individuals, *PJ*’s rhetoric in claimsmaking is not likely to persuade. However, those individuals who agree with the conclusions that the problem exists and something needs to be done will not be dissuaded from agreeing with *PJ* on the basis of warrants. By not mentioning warrants explicitly, *PJ* is tailoring their rhetorical message to each individual audience member: given the conclusion, it is up to the reader to justify or accept it based on any warrant they believe is adequate. This rhetorical technique, then, allows for the

creation of a larger support base; fractures are not created based on differences in lenses or values. This allows the claims made by *PJ* to potentially appeal to a diverse audience with diverse interests.

The problem-as-war metaphor

The war metaphor is a common rhetorical strategy invoked in social problems claims (Best, 1999, p. 143). Throughout the sample, *PJ* refers to a “war against Internet predators”:

Today is a tragic day for anti-predator advocates, as we now have to fight two battles.

The war Yahoo doesn't want to fight against Internet predators... (Article 7, emphasis added).

When metaphors such as this are drawn, counter-images are also produced (Cohen, 1972/2002, p. 64). That is, the war – or the fight, in Cohen’s example – is reciprocal. For Cohen (2002, p. 64), the publicized “fight against crime” in the height of the Mods and Rockers era lent itself to a closely related image of the problematized group engaging in its own fight, simply reversed: a fight against law and order. Similarly, when *PJ* declares that there is a war against Internet predators, they conjure up a counter-image of these predators declaring their own war against society. This constructs an image that is not a war *on* paedophiles, but “...a “war” *between* pedophiles and society...” (Article 20, emphasis added).

There are some distinct elements that are *deliberately* implied when claimsmakers use the war metaphor:

the problem is an enemy of society at large; society is justified in fighting this enemy; society’s members should rally to this cause; and they should be willing to make sacrifices for the war effort. Declaring war, then, is a call for a united, committed campaign against a social problem. (Best, 1999, p. 147)

The use of metaphors is a common and effective rhetorical strategy (Eubanks, 2004; Glucksberg, McGlone, & Manfredi, 1997; Bryan, 1986), and declaring war on an issue is a prevalent rhetorical statement made in social problems claims – examples of this are numerous in contemporary society, from the “war on drugs” to the “war on terror” (Best, 1999). Metaphors succeed in rhetoric because they create explicit links between concepts that may have appeared unrelated to the reader (Eubanks, 2004; Selzer, 2004; Alvesson, 2002; Glucksberg, McGlone, & Manfredi, 1997). Linking war and social problems (in this case, online solicitation) therefore

serves to link not only the issues, but to constrain the way the issues and the potential solutions are conceptualized (Best, 1999).

The problem-as-war metaphor also limits the nature of the strategies that can be used to solve the problem: if the problem is like war, then solving the problem requires war-like efforts (Best, 1999, p. 145). Indeed, the dramatic nature of the war metaphor is one reason for its success (Best, 1999, p. 156; Glucksberg, McGlone, & Manfredi, 1997). At the same time, though, the drama evoked by the war metaphor necessarily constrains the solutions that can be conceptualized (Best, 1999, pp. 156-157). For supporters of the “war” effort, the most apparent solution to policy failures becomes escalation, the idea that the current approach is only failing because not quite enough is being done. This mindset means that paradigm shifts or alternative policies are incredibly difficult to implement or even conceptualize (Best, 1999:156). For critics of the “war”, redefining the issue is likewise challenging; the war metaphors are often co-opted to indicate displeasure (i.e. the U.S. “war on poverty” being reframed as the “war on the poor”), instead of the issue itself being reframed. Declaring the problem as a matter of a societal “war” against paedophiles and/or Internet predators is a rhetorical claim that, if successful, would limit the types of solutions that can be conceptualized.

One main implication of creating explicit links between war and the social problem in question is the dehumanizing function that occurs: war implies that there is some enemy who is inherently evil, and thus war is justified (Best, 1999; Aho, 1994). In *PJ*’s case, their war metaphor is drawn relatively easily given contemporary understanding and fears of paedophiles (Jewkes, 2010b, p. 529). Indeed, with a declaration of war, there is a presumption that the target of the declaration is something (or someone, or some group) that is (or is perceived as) a threat to society as a whole (Best, 1999, p. 147). If this common threat element is not present, then the claimmaker’s audience may not be willing to expend the efforts that are implied by the images and connotations of “war” (Best, 1999).

Where *PJ* is not explicitly declaring a war against Internet predators, references are made to other similarly militarized concepts, a technique that demonstrates social problems claimmakers’ tendencies to use generalized comparisons to the concept of war (Best, 1999, p. 144):

To borrow a phrase from the military, the efforts of the group media bust last year and stepped-up police efforts afterwards was the chat-room equivalent of "shock and awe."
(Article 3)

Referring to their techniques as "shock and awe" as well as other such militarized language, combined with references to their forum members as the "PeeJ Army" (Article 11) reflect Best's (1999, p. 144) assertion that, when it comes to social problems and social policy, war metaphors are frequently invoked.

This type of language also clarifies an element of the grounds of this claim: its orientation. A problem's orientation refers to its frame; it is a particular *type* of problem (Best, 1990, 1987). A problem that relies on militarized rhetoric is framed as an adversarial or confrontational one (Best, 1999). This metaphor reveals the way that *PJ* conceptualizes the problem and the sphere to which it belongs: for example, it cannot be conceptualized as a public health issue given its rhetorical construction. Indeed, the problem is conceptualized as an issue equivalent to that of national defence (Best, 1999) – after all, it is likened to war. As such, the problem is one that, if left unattended or unsolved, would place society as we know it in serious danger. This orientation lends itself to a particular set of policies and conceptualizations of the problem behaviour (and the problem individuals).

The witness factor – *PJ*'s essay contest and its rhetorical value

PJ's Essay Contest piece (Article 20) represents a particular rhetorical strategy. It is this section where many of the claims about the roles of parents are explicitly made. *PJ* could simply state that their organization is required because parents cannot adequately protect their children on their own. However, instead of taking that confrontational stance, *PJ* instead presents this claim through the voice of parents themselves, via their entries to the essay contest.

By doing this, *PJ* increases their own credibility and further establishes their ethos and pathos. The claims are presented not as accusatory or top-down (i.e. *PJ* telling parents that they need help protecting their children) but as arising organically, as parents come to recognize the danger and welcome the work of *PJ* as something that will help them protect their children.

At 23,096 words, the Essay Contest is the longest Opinion piece on the *PJ* website. It contains 41 separate entries, reprinted in full. Rhetorically, this demonstrates value. By reprinting a number of reader-submitted stories that portray *PJ* and their partnership with

Dateline NBC, *PJ* is illustrating the positive outcomes their organization has created for ordinary parents and citizens. In essence, the submissions serve as witnesses designed to enhance the credibility and thus the persuasiveness of *PJ*'s rhetoric and claims (Aristotle, 1924/2004, p. 54).

In rhetoric, “[t]he evidence of witnesses may refer either to ourselves or to our opponent; and either to questions of fact or to questions of personal character” (Aristotle, 1924/2004, p. 54). The entries contained in article 20 serve to support both questions of fact and questions of character. Questions of fact refer to the sorts of passages referenced above, where parents and concerned citizens support *PJ*'s claims that risk and danger are everywhere and that certain strategies will work to minimize these factors.

Questions of character are also addressed in the entries. The majority of entries contain passages thanking *PJ* for their “...diligent work in keeping all of our children safe and making this world a little bit safer to be in!”, or for “...all the children [they] have and are saving”. *PJ* rhetorically draws upon numerous examples of readers thanking them for their work and stating that they are making a positive difference in the world. By including passages such as these, *PJ* provides witnesses who are supporting a common theme (Aristotle, 1924/2004; Spigelman, 2001).

Good examples of bad examples – criticizing other organizations

PJ chooses specific examples in order to illustrate the inefficiency of other organizations. The two organizations specifically chosen as topics of criticism (Articles 2 and 4) become important as typifying examples; it is implied that *this* is what other organizations are like. *PJ* chose to profile Julie Posey, a woman who conducted the same sort of work as *PJ* – going into chat rooms, posing as a minor, and providing law enforcement with a transcript as evidence. However, Posey is also portrayed as having let her “success” inflate her self-perception, and turning her work into a vehicle for self-promotion and profit:

Unfortunately, Julie lost sight of her roots. She had seven years to organize the public and fight this problem. In those seven years, she instead concentrated on writing a book promoting herself, helping a movie promote herself, and using her Internet presence to, that's right, promote herself. We find it unfortunate that a woman who had such an opportunity chose the selfish route. (Article 2)

Interestingly, Posey is used as a foil for many criticisms that *PJ* itself has faced as an organization. *PJ* criticizes Posey for using the problem of online solicitation to seek fame and

glory, using specifically the example of a Lifetime movie profiling Posey. *PJ* constructs their organization, on the other hand, as one that is altruistic; not involved in the problem in order to become well-known or to make money, but because it is the right thing to do. Posey serves as a lightning rod for criticisms of this variation, as *PJ* demonstrates how an operation solely designed for profit and fame would function. *PJ* presents itself as having been forced to step into the void that was left when Posey failed to adequately “fight” the problem.

TeamAmberAlert.net is also portrayed as an organization that is motivated by money rather than the protection of children:

Unlike other groups, we will not sit idly by while Beistle and Plemmons try to bully good people online. Their dysfunction is a cancer upon the good, well-intentioned volunteers. Their presence simply cannot be tolerated by genuine activists. We encourage you to share this article with others and always stay vigilant against quick-talking people like Jim Beistle online, who would seek to take advantage of you. They are predators as dangerous to the cause of child protection as the people we uncover in chat-rooms across the nation. (Article 4)

TeamAmberAlert.net serves as an example of other organizations. *PJ* equates their practices to those of online predators, asserting that organizations that divert attention and resources from good organizations (such as *PJ*) are actively victimizing children. The lead-in this excerpt is also an implicit criticism of unspecified child protection and/or advocacy groups: *PJ* is “unlike other groups” in that they will not “sit idly by”. *PJ* is then constructed as active, as opposed to other groups who are idle. Without having to name other organizations, *PJ* uses their criticisms of one organization perceived as particularly problematic as a way to criticize other organizations for their practices.

Controlled transparency: Engaging with criticisms

PJ does engage with certain criticisms in places. Readers are encouraged to investigate criticisms and form their own opinions. For example, some criticisms from the organizations that *PJ* attempts to discredit are included, along with a call for readers to explore. Of course, these prompts to investigate often involve direction to other official *PJ* opinions or literature:

We welcome you to research what we do. Read our [FAQ](#). View our [Convictions](#). Check out [media coverage](#) of arrests and the problem in general. Join our [Forums](#) and observe exactly what it is that we do. And once you do, you will be what Julie Posey terms “vile”

and “filthy” because then you’ll start on the road to volunteering with the largest anti-pedophile group in the nation, which continues to rack up arrests, indictments, and convictions at one great rate....(Article 2)

The underlined words in the above passage are hyperlinks in the text as displayed on the *PJ* website proper. These links direct the user to four separate pages, each of which are different sections of the *PJ* website: the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page, where *PJ* staff answers upwards of 60 questions; Convictions, where *PJ* compiles reports of each of the convictions they claim credit for; media coverage, which includes a collection of and links to media stories related to child solicitation, whether *PJ* was directly involved or not; and a link to the Forums where individuals can choose to register for the messageboards.

While this gives the appearance of openness and transparency, should the reader take the advice of the opinion piece, *PJ* is still in full control of the material available and therefore how the issue will be framed. For example, while the links provided are to external sources and websites, the stories that are included on the list of media coverage are selected so as to reflect *PJ*’s points of view. The material contained in the Convictions reinforces *PJ*’s arguments by highlighting the sentence received and, often, a particularly graphic excerpt from a chat transcript. The FAQ section presents opinions written in the same style and tone and containing the same information as the Opinions pieces. *PJ* is therefore able to rhetorically establish their trustworthiness by leading the reader to believe that they are arriving at an opinion on their own; however, the opinion is constrained by the material that *PJ* is linking to. This illusion of interactivity serves to heighten the credibility and trustworthiness of the source (Porter, 2009), despite not actually providing any interactivity or opportunity to provide feedback.

In other areas, rather than encourage readers to investigate, criticisms are posted and refuted point-by-point. While this could be seen as an engagement with criticisms and an attempt to have a dialogue with individuals and organizations with divergent points of view, the end result is not a discourse but a reemphasis of *PJ*’s values, legitimacy, and ethos. The criticisms that are reprinted in full are generally incoherent, rambling, or unreasonable, featuring individuals who fear that they are going to be posted, or launch into diatribes blaming children for being too provocative and therefore at fault, or advocating that various governments “outlaw porn, chatrooms, messengers, the Internet, phones, tv, satalite, cable” (Article 10) in order to adequately solve the child solicitation problem. This allows *PJ* to give the appearance of

engaging with dissenting opinions (and thus appear to present the issue from multiple sides, adding to their ethos) while also implying that these sorts of criticisms are representative of *all* criticism of *PJ*.

Furthermore, the connotations of certain words that are used have a significant contribution to the effectiveness a rhetor will have in establishing pathos. Certain images or fears come to mind when certain words are used (Glucksberg, McGlone, & Manfredi, 1997). *PJ* takes advantage of these connotations in terms of both the extent of the problem and the nature of those who perpetrate it.

The common references to their existence as an “anti-predator” and “anti-pedophile” organization contain connotations that serve to establish *PJ*’s character. Simply by using these adjectives to self-describe, *PJ* precludes a significant amount of criticism. The reason for this is, by extension of the terms and their connotations, if you are not supportive of *PJ*, then you are anti-“anti-pedophile”, or, pro-pedophile. Given the incredibly stigmatized figure of the paedophile in modern society (Spencer, 2009; Jenkins, 2001), most individuals want to avoid being labelled or perceived as pro-paedophile or sympathetic to paedophiles. *PJ* also takes advantage of rhetorical strategies to illustrate that cases that can be perceived as failures reinforce the legitimacy of the organization. For example,

There will never be a shortage of predators. Even some of the predators we’ve already arrested will be back out there again, continuing to keep out volunteers busy. (Article 11)

Yeah, this problem definitely won’t be going away anytime soon. We used to think that there would be an end in sight, but even our organization has learned from the Dateline episodes...no end in sight. The amount of predators we’ve re-caught has been sobering. (Article 20)

While these statements could be taken as an indicator of the lack of effectiveness of *PJ*, they are framed either as indicators of success or as further justification for the organization’s existence. By treading the line between being an adjunct of the criminal justice system and being an advocate for harsher punishments for Internet predators, *PJ* is able to paint these sorts of failures not as reflective of *PJ*, but of larger failures of the criminal justice system as a whole. These failures also reinforce a number of myths about sex offenders specifically, and offenders in general, such as the propensity to reoffend (Webster, Gartner, & Doob, 2006) and the idea that we are constantly at risk of being victimized (Glassner, 1999/2009).

PJ also relies on the role of technology to ensure their objectivity and accountability and therefore trustworthiness, despite the prevalent distrust of technology that is both implicit and explicit in several of their claims, and certainly in the overall discourse surrounding online child solicitation in its present construction. Despite problematizing media and technology in the form of the Internet to the extent that it becomes a foundational claim, *PJ* also refers to the role technology plays in creating and maintaining a certain level of organizational trustworthiness:

Every keystroke and every conversation any contributor has in a chat-room is logged on our “proxy server.” This server resides in a different state from the contributor and is a required log-in before any contributor goes into a chat-room. The conversations are not only recorded on the contributor’s computer, but additionally on our secure server in another state. It’s just one of the many ways we ensure chat-log credibility (Article 4).

This reflects the constructed duality of yet another central element of *PJ*’s claims. Similar to how *PJ* constructs divisions between “good” and “bad” police, prosecutors, parents, and media, a division is constructed between “good” and “bad” technology. New technology is inherently dangerous because it provides predators with access to children, but it can also provide safety. This safety comes in the form of providing credibility to chat logs, which assuages fear in two ways. First of all, it constructs the transcripts as undeniable evidence; they become objective material in the sense that they are not tampered with or altered after the fact. It also serves to diminish any misgivings about the potential to use this technology in conjunction with the stigmatization that accompanies accusations of paedophilia (Jewkes, 2010a; Spencer, 2009; West, 2000) in order to make false accusations.

Summary

PJ advanced six main claims in their construction of online solicitation. Three of these claims related to online solicitation, as *PJ* constructed and defined the issue in a particular way. The Internet is constructed as a “real” space in their discourse, so as to allow for the logical acceptance of “virtual” or “hypothetical” victims of online solicitation to come to define or exemplify “real” victims. Next, *PJ* asserted that adult males actively use this new and “real” space to gain access to children, who they then solicit, groom, and eventually abuse. Through the use of range claims, estimates, examples, and metaphors, this behaviour is constructed as a significant social problem.

The other claims help position *PJ* as a crucial member of a new regulatory framework by asserting their expertise and efficiency – and minimizing that of law enforcement, parents, media, and other advocacy groups – in “solving” the child solicitation problem. They also delegitimize criticisms of the organization by associating critics with the main folk devils of their social problem claim, paedophiles. Through establishing their character and emphasizing their ties with non-violent vigilante, neo-liberal, and neo-conservative regulatory frameworks and techniques of governance, *PJ* also reinforces their values and their role in solving the online solicitation problem.

Chapter 5:

Conclusion

This project aimed to explore the construction of social problems, using the issue of online child solicitation and the organization *Perverted-Justice* as case studies. My specific goals were to analyze *PJ*'s construction of online child solicitation, to explore the rhetorical strategies used by claimsmakers, and to understand how claimsmakers construct social problems and their role in (re)solving them moving forward.

Claims and rhetorical strategies were the particular focus in an attempt to understand the ways in which advocacy groups can construct issues into social problems as well as solidify their role in raising awareness or solving these social problems. To this end, I read each of *PJ*'s twenty-four Opinion articles. The "Opinion" section of the *PJ* website contained the most fully developed and explicit construction of their main claims, and also allowed for the most space to develop arguments and use rhetorical strategies. The process involved multiple readings of these articles due to the number of claims and rhetorical strategies that were present in each of the articles. The articles were first read vertically – organized by chronological order – and then horizontally – by theme – as I brought together the main claims and rhetorical strategies that *PJ* used.

PJ advances six main claims in their construction of the problem of online solicitation and their role in (re)solving it. They construct the Internet as an inherently dangerous and "real" space. Blurring the boundaries between the "real" and the "virtual" allows for online solicitation to be constructed as an issue, regardless of whether actual minors are involved. *PJ* also asserts that adult males use the communicative aspects of the Internet to solicit and eventually meet and abuse children. *PJ* uses definitions, examples, and estimates to construct an image of online child solicitation. Atrocity tales and typifying examples are used to create an emotional connection with the audience and demonstrate the serious consequences of disregarding online solicitation. The boundaries around online solicitation are also extended to include organized paedophiles online, who work together and covertly in an attempt to legitimize paedophilia. This boundary extension serves to justify *PJ*'s existence regardless of any cases of solicitation.

PJ claims that online child solicitation constitutes a significant social problem. By drawing on the examples and estimates that were used to construct the problem, *PJ* portrayed online solicitation as growing and indiscriminate. Risk and fear discourse is prevalent, both in

the construction of online solicitation as it affects children, but also in the way that online predators are constructed. In *PJ*'s construction, all children are potential victims and all males are potential predators.

These first three claims act as foundational claims, in that they define the extent and the nature of the problem and serve to typify it. The following three claims, then, help to solidify *PJ*'s role in solving this problem as it is constructed.

PJ reinforces their role by constructing police, prosecutors, the criminal justice system, parents, media, and online companies as unwilling and/or unable to protect children from these online predators. In cases where these groups are unwilling, *PJ*'s role is constructed as one of raising awareness of the issue and ensuring accountability. Issues of inability are constructed in two ways. When it comes to police and the criminal justice system, inability is constructed as a lack of resources and expertise, which *PJ* can provide. For parents, inability is constructed as a lack of information and awareness of the issue, which are also constructed as elements *PJ* can provide.

PJ further claims that they are able to effectively protect children, using success stories, examples, and rhetorical strategies such as establishing ethos in order to support this claim. A number of claims regarding techniques of regulation and governance emerge here. Ideas of individual responsabilization, risk management, information and education, obligation, and support for harsher punishment schemes are used in order to portray *PJ* as an important member of a new regulatory framework moving forward. The sixth main claim constructs their critics as biased, either by profit or by (pro-) paedophilic views, and therefore unable to legitimately criticize *PJ*. Media sources are framed as in competition for ratings and profit and therefore simply looking to raise controversy where it does not exist. Non-media critics are labelled as paedophiles or paedophile sympathizers. This ad hominem rhetoric serves to neutralize criticisms of the organization, regardless of the source of the criticism.

A number of rhetorical strategies and moves supported these claims made by *PJ*. Atrocity tales serve to demonstrate the nature of online solicitation, typifying the problem and defining it for their audience. Real-life, chat log, and personalized hypothetical examples and estimates serve to characterize online solicitation as an "epidemic", and risk is constructed by claiming that all males are potential predators. Moral panic is evident in the way that this risk is constructed, and furthered with the cabalistic take on organized paedophilia online. *PJ*, as part of a new

regulatory framework, establishes itself as the only effective measure to help solve the online solicitation “epidemic”, drawing on neo-liberal and neo-conservative discourse to do so. Certain elements of the claim are anti-denial movements, in that they focus on raising awareness and attention and neutralize their opponents through ad hominem and othering strategies.

The use of metaphors (such as the epidemic and war metaphor) serves to further characterize online solicitation. Supportive messages, such as the entries in article 20, reinforce *PJ*’s claims about the character, altruism, and utility of the organization. Engaging with certain criticisms beyond labelling the critics as biased serves to create an image of transparency and interactivity that ultimately lends credibility.

PJ’s twenty-four Opinion articles ultimately construct an image not only of the nature of online child solicitation, but also of the central role the organization itself will take in “solving” the issue. Complex rhetorical strategies are used in order to allow *PJ* to avoid ostracizing audience members based on pre-existing beliefs. *PJ* constructs an image of an uncontroversial social problem, despite the many controversies and seeming contradictions within the Opinion pieces.

PJ’s position in and as media made it an interesting choice for a case study. Their “virtual” office was useful for analysis purposes, as it facilitates both ease of sampling and transparency due to its public nature. The attention *PJ* received as a result of *To Catch a Predator* also served to publicize *PJ* and therefore create a sense of cultural relevance. The transmission of Chris Hansen’s “one in five” estimate, combined with the tributes to the episodes (i.e. *To Troll a Predator*) reflect the emotionally charged and attention-grabbing elements of online child solicitation. *PJ*, as claimsmakers, helped to shape the dimensions and the boundaries around this social problem.

As one claimsmaker among many, *PJ* represents an interesting case study for analyzing how online solicitation of children has been constructed and brought to public attention. I have analyzed *PJ*’s construction of online child solicitation and subsequent social problems claimsmaking activities, in order to contribute to the understanding of how social problems are collectively defined and constructed, the role advocacy groups as claimsmakers play in this process, and the rhetorical strategies that are used in order to persuade audiences. However, *PJ* is but one particularly situated organization located within a specific context. A next step in research, then, would be to examine the claims made by other organizations to help further

understand the ways in which claims and arguments are structured and constructed so as to persuade. Future research should also examine how claimsmakers interact with other official and non-official claimsmakers asserting the same sort of social problem. Furthermore, an analysis of Canadian claimsmakers would serve to further inform knowledge surrounding how claims are transmitted across national borders as well as how they develop domestically.

I intend to take these next steps in my doctoral research. I will build upon the foundation I have established within this paper by exploring *how* advocacy groups construct certain issues, position themselves as authorities, and advance certain solutions. Furthermore, I have noted a number of techniques that are used by claims-makers to position themselves within a larger regulatory framework and align with other groups and institutions that are generally perceived as legitimate. The next step, however, will be to expand this work further.

I also want to engage in and with emerging qualitative research trends looking at online feedback, comment sections, and forums in the context of online solicitation. A number of researchers, for example, have analyzed the recruitment and dissemination strategies of hate groups using data collected from forums. For example, the white nationalist movement's strategies have been documented by Bowman-Grieve (2009) and de Koster (2009) through the *Stormfront* website and its public forums. In this sense, I can explore how official and non-official claims are represented in a small subset of public opinion, as well as how certain online communities attempt to persuade others not in their camp, similar to how Bowman-Grieve (2009) analyzes *Stormfront* members' techniques for getting "non-believers" to accept their racist doctrine.

Given the prevalence of social media, some work has looked at Facebook groups as a way to gauge popular sentiment, depending on the size of the group and the amount of activity. Burke and Goodman (2012), for example, used qualitative data analysis of eight Facebook groups to discuss prevalent attitudes towards asylum seeking. A cursory search on Facebook indicates that there are a number of groups on Facebook dealing with the issue of online solicitation that could potentially provide interesting data.

For example, the page for the Canadian National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has 26,110 likes, meaning that the Center has opened up another area for discussion which can be used to supplement official documentation and perhaps look at how the general public communicates with the center itself and with its messages. The To Troll a Predator fan

page (created about the “superhero” teenagers in Chilliwack) is also still active and fairly popular online, with almost 45,000 likes.

An examination of a variety of sources will allow for the comparison between different types of groups and the claims that are made. This wide variety of sources, including Hansard debate transcripts, official statistics and policy papers, Canadian advocacy groups, the news media, and a subset of public opinion as measured through website’s feedback functions will provide rich data for analyzing the construction of online solicitation in Canada.

Furthermore, an important next step is to move beyond how issues are constructed and what the claims are, to *how* and *why* these claims are persuasive. In this sense, I also wish to reflect on, interact with, and contribute to the recent developments in social psychology and heuristics. Indeed, during the analysis of *PJ*, a number of fallacies were identified in their claims. However, it was beyond the scope of this project to fully explore why these fallacies work to persuade. In future work, then, I intend to explore this dimension of social problems claims.

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