**First Round Cognitive Pretesting
on the Proposed Internet Predation Questions
for the National Crime Victimization Survey:
Results and Recommendations**

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FINAL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), in conjunction with the Census Bureau's Demographic Surveys Division (DSD), requested that the Statistical Research Division (SRD) conduct cognitive pretesting for the addition of internet predation questions to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). These additional questions will collect data on any contacts with a sexual connotation that children between the ages of 12 and 17 years old might have from people they interact with only online.

In October and November of 2006, SRD staff conducted cognitive interviews with 10 children between the ages of 12 and 17 from the Washington DC metropolitan area. We administered a paper mock-up of the automated instrument that included the individual respondent screening and employment sections of the full NCVS questionnaire (excluding follow-up questions for any reported victimization incidents), followed by the proposed Internet predation questions.

Results and Recommendations
Overall, our cognitive pretesting suggests that these questions are quite problematic for respondents. Because of the widespread problems with these questions, our overall recommendation is to delay fielding these questions until additional pretesting can be conducted to address these problems. Below we have summarized our key findings from the cognitive pretesting:

❖ Respondents potentially could report some of these activities in the Individual Screener and Crime Incident Report.
The preceding individual household screener questions ask about sexual assaults and any other incidences (regardless of uncertainty that it was actually a crime) respondents may or may not have reported to the police. Respondents could report these internet experiences in these preceding sections of the interview. If respondents report these experiences in the Individual Screener, it is not clear if they would report these same experiences again in the Internet predation questions.

❖ Some respondents did not pay attention to the reference period when reporting any online contacts.
In most cases, respondents interpreted the reference period too broadly, resulting in overreporting.

❖ Respondents had difficulty describing and reporting online contacts.
When answering Question 2, respondents may be overreporting online contacts because multiple response options could apply to a single online contact. Respondents also may misinterpret some of the response options and report some online contacts that are out of scope.

❖ Respondents are concerned about confidentiality.
Respondents indicated that they have significant concerns about confidentiality and topic sensitivity. They indicated that were afraid of getting in trouble or felt uncomfortable talking about these types of contacts. Respondents may not answer these questions truthfully.

❖ There seems to be ambiguity in respondents' conceptualizations of internet activities.
While respondents did seem to have a clear understanding of what "being online" meant, they often blurred the lines between their definitions for online activities. For example, some respondents viewed their online community pages as personal web pages or did not differentiate e-mailing from instant

messaging. They also did not seem to have a clear concept of some online activities, such as "blogging."

The remainder of this report details the question-by-question findings and results. The Bureau of Justice Statistics concurred with our recommendation to delay fielding these questions and SRD will be conducting additional pretesting activities. We provide some recommendations for these additional pretesting activities within this report in our detailed question-by-question findings and recommendations.

Introduction

The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), sponsored by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), is a national household survey of personal victimization and property crimes. The Demographic Survey Division (DSD) within the Census Bureau collects this data on the type and frequency of crimes people experience and the characteristics of these victims and any perpetrators. The survey consists of a household level interview and individual level interviews for all residents over the age of 12 living within a selected household.

In October of 2006 BJS proposed the addition of questions on Internet predation to be administered to all members of a selected household between the ages of 12 and 17 years old. These questions would collect information about online contacts of a sexual nature (such as receiving links to X-rated materials) that kids may have experienced. This information would include the nature of the contact, what kids were doing when it happened, and if they reported it to anyone. BJS and DSD asked the Statistical Research Division (SRD) within the Census Bureau to conduct cognitive pretesting of these proposed questions. This report summarizes these cognitive pretesting activities.

Method

Participants
For this study, SRD recruited 10 children between the ages of 12 and 17 who lived and attended school in the Washington DC metropolitan area. We were able to recruit a fairly diverse set of respondents. Eight of the respondents attended public school and two of the respondents attended a private school. The demographic description of the respondents can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Cognitive Interview Respondents

Age		Sex		Race and Ethnicity			
12-14	15-17	Male	Female	African American	Asian	White	Hispanic
4	6	5	5	1	2	6	1

Questionnaire
To limit respondent burden in these interviews, we administered an abbreviated version of the automated NCVS questionnaire that only included the individual respondent screening and employment sections of the full NCVS questionnaire, and excluded the Crime Incident Report. . If a household respondent reports experiencing a crime in the Individual Screener, he or she answers a series of detailed questions (the Crime Incident Report) about each crime. These questions would immediately precede the proposed internet predation question series.

It is also important to note that there is the potential for respondents to report incidents in the Individual Screener that are relevant to the new question series. Some of these questions ask about crime of a sexual nature. Given the abbreviated questionnaire and the overlap of questions, it is not

possible to generalize the results of this cognitive pretesting beyond the understanding and workability of the proposed questions.

BJS drafted an initial set of proposed Internet Predation questions. SRD staff reviewed this initial draft and suggested wording and format changes. After this review process, BJS finalized the question wording and format for pretesting.

Cognitive Interviews
Interviews took place during October and November of 2006. SRD staff trained in cognitive interviewing techniques conducted these interviews at Census Bureau headquarters, the private residence of the respondents, or at a local school.

Since we did not have access to the automated instrument of this survey, we instead used a paper mock-up of the automated instrument and proposed Internet predation questions for the cognitive interviews. We tape recorded all interviews to help with the analysis of the results.

Because the respondents were under the age of 18, we required parents or legal guardians to sign a consent form authorizing their child's participation and the tape recording of the interview. Children gave assent to participate and be recorded at the start of the interview.

The interviews followed a standard think-aloud procedure. We administered the abbreviated screener questionnaire and Internet predation questions. Respondents were asked to think out loud while answering these questions and to talk about how they came up with their answers. After each Internet predation question, respondents were asked a series of concurrent probes in an attempt to gage their understanding of the question and any terms in the question. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked a series of retrospective probes, following-up on any online contacts they might have reported, and their overall thoughts ands impressions of the questions. At the end of the interview, we also presented respondents with a series of vignettes depicting hypothetical online contacts and asked respondents whether these would be types of contacts they would report in the proposed question series.

Question-by-Question Results

In this section, we discuss our detail findings and recommendations for each individual Internet predation question. For each question, we summarize the findings across all 10 participants.

Question 1
Introduction: "The next set of questions is about YOUR Internet activities during the past 6 months. Any information you provide is strictly confidential and will not be given to anyone."

> **Q1.** During the last 6 months, how often were you online, for example using email, instant messaging, in chat rooms, blogging, or doing other Internet activities ... (*Read answer categories until respondent answers yes.*)
>
>   1. Almost every day (or more frequently)?
>   2. At least once a week?

| 3. At least once a month? |
| 4. Less often? |
| Never - END |

Summary of results:

- Almost all respondents (9 out of 10) reported "almost every day" in response to this question.

- Respondents did not seem to have any major problems understanding what this question was asking.

- Many respondents understood what "blogging" meant. Two respondents were less confident they knew what the term meant. One respondent did not have a clear understanding of the term at all. For this particular question, not having a clear concept for "blogging" did not seem to affect respondents' ability to answer the question. However, this term appears again in Q3a, where having a clear concept of the term is important. Our recommendations additional pretesting for Q3a would address problem with the definition of this term.

Recommendations:

- Although respondents did not indicate any problems answering this question, we suggest modifying the first response option by removing the parenthetic reference.

Question 2

Q2. This question pertains to contacts you have had with individuals you know or have met **ONLY** online. During the last 6 months, during any of the times you were online did anyone you knew or met **ONLY** online … (*Read answer categories.*)

1. Send you email or instant messages containing x-rated material or links to x-rated websites?	Yes No
2. Ask you to take off your clothes in front of a webcam?	Yes No
3. Ask you to meet somewhere for the purpose of having sex?	Yes No
4. Ask you for sexual information about yourself?	Yes No
5. Ask you to talk about having sex?	Yes No
6. Request that you send digital photos of yourself posed in certain ways?	Yes No
7. Encourage you to run away from home to meet them?	Yes No
8. Ask you to engage in cybersex?	Yes No
9. Ask or tell you anything else that made you feel uncomfortable? Please specify_____	Yes No

Interviewer Check Item   Are any yes boxes marked in Q. 2?

Yes -→ go to Q. 3a

No - → END

Summary of results:

- Three respondents gave positive responses to this question. Are all of these situations that the sponsor wants to be reported?

    1. Girls playing around get in a chat room where someone requests photos; they go to google and send photos of other people (ugly people) as a joke (request that you send digital photos of yourself posed in certain ways).

    2. Girl gets message in MySpace containing a website link and an invitation to take off her clothes, click on the link and join them (ask you to take off your clothes in front of a webcam).

    3. Boy gets IM containing a link to an x-rated website (send you email or IMs containing x-rated material or links to x-rated websites).

- In hypothetical vignette situations presented to respondents, they indicated that they largely would not report an x-rated "pop-up" if they had misspelled a word in a search engine, or even if they had not misspelled a word and were directed to an x-rated website. Respondents indicated that these situations were accidental and did not interpret them to be in-scope. They were not from someone respondents only knew online, they were from someone respondents did not know at all.
- Preliminary discussion with BJS staff indicated that the first situation mentioned above, the request to send a picture, might not have been in scope. This may be due to the ambiguity of the response option. A respondent could easily interpret any request to send a picture, even a school photograph, as falling under this category. This response option seems somewhat inconsistent with the other options which seem to be asking about contacts that have a sexual connotation.

- Respondents may interpret this question as "mark all that apply" for a single contact. This interpretation could result in overreporting. Although the three respondents who reported a contact in this question only answered "yes" to one category, some survey respondents could classify their experiences in more than one category. For example, in our hypothetical vignettes, respondents indicated that they would report someone asking if they had ever had sex, or if they had "big boobs" (for females) or "sexy muscles" (for males) in more than one category (in "ask you sexual information about yourself," "ask you to talk about having sex", and "anything else that made you feel uncomfortable"). It is unclear if these contacts in Q2 are meant to be mutually exclusive or if more than one category could be used to describe a single contact.

- Respondents did not seem to be limiting their recall to the 6 month reference period. Some thought back to when these contacts happened; others thought back over the entire time span when they have been getting online. This lack of attention to the anchoring time frame will likely result in overreporting.

- Respondents have concerns of confidentiality and topic sensitivity, which are likely to result in underreporting. Respondents clearly indicated hesitation to answer these questions because

they would not want their parents to find out about their online activities or because they did not want to talk about this subject matter. Two respondents said they would not answer these questions in a survey because they found the topic to be too sensitive. Two other respondents said they would answer the questions, but not truthfully. Even respondents who said they would answer the questions truthfully expressed concern that their peers might not answer these questions or answer them truthfully. Almost all of the respondents felt that other kids would not want to talk about experiencing these kinds of contacts.

- A few respondents had never heard of "cybersex." Some respondents had heard of the term but were not sure what it meant.

Recommendations:
- Consider eliminating the term "cybersex" and substituting a description of the intended meaning.

- Change the wording of response option 6, "Request that you send digital photos of yourself posed in certain ways", to be less ambiguous. We recommend:

"Request that you send sexual photos of yourself."
Although there was some concern that this wording could be too sensitive, the wording does not seem to be any more sensitive than any of the other response options. Being more specific within this response option could reduce misunderstanding of the question and overreporting.

- Wording should be added to the preamble of this question that reinforces the confidentiality of any information kids report. We recommend moving the statement about confidentiality from the introduction before Q1 to immediately before this series of questions (immediately before Q2) as follows:

*"Next I am going to ask you some questions about contacts you may have had with individuals you know or have met **ONLY** online. Some of these questions may be hard to answer. However, anything you say will be kept strictly confidential. Your answers to these questions will not be shared with anyone."*

    Q2. *During the last 6 months, during any of the times you were online…*

- Since these questions are very sensitive, computer assisted self interviewing (CASI) would be preferable to having the interviewer administer these questions. This may not be feasible now, combined with the initial move to automation. But we would strongly recommend that it be considered if these questions are administered in the future.

- We strongly recommend adding respondent debriefing questions at the end of the interview to gather more details on anything respondents might have reported in Q2. The debriefing will help to determine if respondents are attending to the reference period and if they are reporting on one contact or on multiple contacts. The debriefing could also collect more information on the type of relationship the respondent had with the online contact.

- Finally, we recommend additional pretesting in the form of focus groups to more fully explore the types of contacts respondents might report. Focus groups would allow more pointed discussion of some of our hypothetical vignettes and also potentially could reveal different types of online contacts not already included in the question that might be of interest to the sponsor.

Question 3a

Q3a. When you had these kinds of contacts online, were you ...		
1. Visiting an online community such as MySpace, Facebook, or Xanga?	Yes	No
2. Visiting your personal webpage?	Yes	No
3. Instant messaging?	Yes	No
4. Emailing?	Yes	No
5. Surfing the Internet?	Yes	No
6. Visiting a chat room?	Yes	No
7. Blogging?	Yes	No
8. Sending or receiving text messages on a cell phone?	Yes	No
9. Doing something else? Please specify _____	Yes	No

Summary of results:

- One respondent who said yes in Q2 interpreted this question as referring to all the activities she does online, not connecting it to the incident she previously reported.
  - Girl1 reported "visiting an online community ... ," "visiting your own personal webpage," "instant messaging," "emailing," "surfing the Internet," "visiting a chat room," and "sending or receiving text messages on a cell phone," because she does all those things on the computer.

- Other respondents who said yes in Q2 interpreted the question as being a "mark all that apply" for the incident.
  - Girl2 reported MySpace as "visiting an online community..." and "visiting your own personal webpage".
  - Boy reported being in a Yahoo chat room as "visiting an online community..., " instant messaging," "emailing," "surfing the Internet," and "visiting a chat room".

- Multiple reports in this question could describe multiple activities within a single incident (as above), or they could reflect activities taking place during multiple incidents

- Respondents have trouble differentiating between these online activities, leading to over-reporting for each activity.
  - Girl2 provided multiple reports because she considers her MySpace page to be her own personal webpage.

      - Boy provided multiple reports because he thinks of emailing and IM as the same thing; he thinks of Yahoo as an online community; also he said "surfing the Internet" because he gets pop-ups, but this seems to be an error that needs to be explored further.

- Several respondents mentioned that "gaming" was not included on the list.

Recommendations:
- Add "Gaming" to the list of response options.

- We recommend adding a fill to the automated instrument to repeat the activities reported in Q2. This will focus the respondent on the reported activities, rather than everything they do on the computer.

- Immediately after a Yes response in Q2, ask follow-up questions to help determine if these constitute separate incidents and how many times the respondent experienced each type of contact.

- To reduce the potential burden of reporting on many instances of the same type of contact (i.e., someone asking the respondent to talk about sex on more than one occasion), we also recommend asking only about the most recent occurrence for each type of contact. Including the reference period in the question also will eliminate reporting of out-of-scope incidents.

      Making these changes would result in the following series of questions:

First "yes" response in Q2:

> **Q3a1 "You just told me [autofill Q2 'yes' response]. How many times did [autofill Q2 'yes' response] in the last 6 months?"**
>
>   _____ *(or could have individual categories...1,2,3, etc.)*

If [Q2 'yes' response] happened only once:

> **Q3b1 "Now, thinking back over the last 6 months to when [autofill from Q2] happened…**
>
> *What were you doing? Were you….*
>
> | | | |
> |---|---|---|
> | 1. *Visiting an online community such as MySpace, Facebook, or Xanga?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 2. *Visiting your personal webpage?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 3. *Instant messaging?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 4. *Emailing?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 5. *Surfing the Internet?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 6. *Visiting a chat room?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 7. *Blogging?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 8. *Gaming?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 9. *Sending or receiving text messages on a cell phone?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 10. *Doing something else? Please specify _____* | *Yes* | *No* |

If [Q2 'yes' response] happened more than once:

> **Q3b2 "You just told me [autofill from Q2] happened [autofill number of times] in the last 6 months. I'd like you only to think about the most recent time [autofill from Q2]. Thinking back over the last 6 months to the most recent time when [autofill from Q2] happened…**
>
> *What were you doing? Were you….*
>
> | | | |
> |---|---|---|
> | 1. *Visiting an online community such as MySpace, Facebook, or Xanga?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 2. *Visiting your personal webpage?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 3. *Instant messaging?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 4. *Emailing?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 5. *Surfing the Internet?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 6. *Visiting a chat room?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 7. *Blogging?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 8. *Gaming?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 9. *Sending or receiving text messages on a cell phone?* | *Yes* | *No* |
> | 10. *Doing something else? Please specify _____* | *Yes* | *No* |

For each subsequent "yes" response in Q2:

> **Q3a2 "You also told me [autofill second Q2 'yes' response]. How many times did [autofill Q2 'yes'response] in the last 6 months?"**
>
> _____ *(or could have individual categories…1,2,3, etc.)*

Repeat Q3a and Q3b1/Q3b2 for each subsequent incident reported in Q2.

- However, this structure will be quite unwieldy for a large number of contacts and does not solve the problem of ambiguity among these activities. It also should be noted that these suggested changes may not differentiate a single contact that respondents reports in more than one category in Q2. For example, if while instant messaging, the respondent's online contact asks if they have ever had sex, the respondent could report this contact in both category 4 (sexual information) and category 5 (talk about having sex), reporting "instant messaging" for both Q2 responses in Q3a. From a data standpoint, it would appear that the respondent had two separate online contacts through instant messaging. Although this type of reporting error may be rare, it will still result in the "overreporting" on some contacts. Our earlier recommendation of using respondent debriefing would help to determine if respondents are reporting multiple descriptions of the same contact and therefore, help differentiate this type of reporting.

- We *strongly* recommend more pretesting of the list of online activities. Focus groups would be helpful to determine how fluid and interchangeable these concepts are, and perhaps suggest ways of combining them to eliminate over reporting. It would enable discussion of "pop-ups," which came up frequently and resulted in one respondent (incorrectly?) including "surfing the Internet" as one of the activities he was doing at the time of the incident.

Question 3b

> **Q3b.** When you had these kinds of contacts online, were you ...
>
> 1. At home in your bedroom?   Yes   No
> 2. At home in a family area?   Yes   No
> 3. At School?   Yes   No
> 4. At a friend's house?   Yes   No
> 5. At a recreational center?   Yes   No
> 6. At a public library?   Yes   No
> 7. At a coffee shop or other public establishment?   Yes   No
> 8. Somewhere else? Please specify _____   Yes   No

Summary of results:
- One respondent who reported an incident was at a friend's house; another was in her mother's office (where the computer is) at home, which she reported as "at home in a family area;" the third was at his bedroom at his grandmother's house (he also has a bedroom at home, but he spends a lot of time at his grandmother's house) – he reported this as "at home in your bedroom"

- Respondents did not have trouble understanding the question.

Recommendations:
- Consider adding a category for "at a relative's home" if this is desirable.

- Following the modifications to the previous question, treat Qs 3a and 3b as a series, inserting the above question after each occurrence of the revised Q3a. The question would now be Q3c. It would look like this:

Q3c Read if necessary:
"And thinking back over the last 6 months to (the most recent time when/when)
[autofill from Q2] happened…

Where were you when [autofill from Q2]? Were you ...

1.	*At home in your bedroom?*	*Yes*	*No*
2.	*At home in a family area?*	*Yes*	*No*
3.	*At School?*	*Yes*	*No*
4.	*At a friend's house?*	*Yes*	*No*
5.	*At a recreational center?*	*Yes*	*No*
6.	*At a public library?*	*Yes*	*No*
7.	*At a coffee shop or other public establishment?*	*Yes*	*No*
8.	*Somewhere else? Please specify _____*	*Yes*	*No*

Question 4a

Q4a. Did you tell anyone about any of these contacts?

1. Yes-Ask 4b
2. No - END
3. Don't know - END

We did not probe this question, and it was not problematic for the three respondents who answered it.

Question 4b

Q4b. Did you tell ...

1.	Your parents?	Yes No
2.	Family members under age 18, such as brothers, sisters, or cousins?	Yes No
3.	Adult family members, such as brothers, sisters, aunts, or uncles?	Yes No
4.	Friends?	Yes No
5.	Police officer?	Yes No
6.	Teacher, coach, or school counselor?	Yes No
7.	Clergy member such as a minister, priest, or rabbi?	Yes No
8.	Someone else? Please specify _____	Yes No

Summary of results:
- Of the respondents who answered this question, one told her friends of the incident and the other two did not tell anyone.

- Respondents did not seem to have any problems with this question.

- Respondents thought the list was complete.

Recommendations:
- We have no recommended changes for this question.

General Recommendations

Overall, these questions did not seem to work well for our respondents. There was ambiguity to what respondents should report, how they should report it, and how to describe online activities. Given the high potential for reporting errors and the fluid conceptualization of online activities, we recommended that BJS delay the fielding of these questions as part of the NCVS. BJS concurred with this recommendation and has asked SRD to conduct additional rounds of pretesting. In the additional rounds of testing SRD staff will conduct focus groups. Following the focus groups, additional changes will be made to these questions and an additional round of cognitive interviews will test these changes. The results of these later evaluations will be issued in separate reports.