CASE STUDIES & LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

CASE STUDY OF FORENSIC INVESTIGATION INTO CYBER-CRIME

In this session, Dr. Kreuter will present a fascinating case involving the investigation into an airline pilot’s claims that he was victimized by a psychopathic predator and later wrongly diagnosed as delusional by a forensic psychologist. A short documentary film of the victim and witnesses will be shown to vividly portray the facts of the case. A book, several book chapters (including a chapter in the ACFE’s recent Internet Fraud Casebook publication), and an article appearing in Fraud Magazine have dealt with various aspects of this unique case.

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CASE STUDY OF FORENSIC INVESTIGATION INTO CYBER-CRIME

Overview
This case study involves an investigation into the claims made by a victim of fraud. The investigation led to identification of the methods used by the perpetrator to defraud the victim as well as many other victims. Through interviews of victims and witnesses, review of documents, analysis of information, and direct dialogue with the perpetrator, much was learned about the fraud and the impact on the victims.

The case study concerns one particular victim, a former commercial airline pilot, Robert. Robert, now age 56, was a First Officer, flying 737s for a major domestic airline. He had a perfect flight record and passed without issue his routine and frequent physical, psychological, and technical tests. Robert was in his 40s when the criminal activity began. The perpetrator, Connie, is now age 56. She was in her 40s when she began to infiltrate Robert’s life. Based on good evidence, Connie has been identified as a psychopath. Her antisocial tendencies span almost her entire life. Research into Connie’s life extends to her early childhood. Information about Connie has been gathered from many sources, including her older sister and brother, her two adult daughters, her ex-husband, neighbors, over twenty victims, and others. Written records include court transcripts, letters, e-mail, and instant messages, and direct dialogue between the researcher and Connie.

The harm to Robert was severe, including the loss of money, ruination of his credit, destruction of his career as a pilot, and the loss of his future as a professional. Following the direct harm caused to Robert by Connie’s schemes, Robert was then harmed by others with Connie responsible for misleading professionals and governmental agencies into thinking that Robert was lying about events that took place. Connie was (and is) a mastermind at lying.
Connie served several years in various jails for her crimes and is currently living in a small town in Pennsylvania where she continues to exact harm on innocent people, albeit not to the degree she harmed Robert.

**How the Criminal Scheme Occurred**
The crimes occurred in 1995 when home use of the computer and the Internet were new. Connie established initial contact with Robert through an AOL chat room. Robert was new to the whole Internet scene, but wanted to meet people in Philadelphia, where he recently moved. Once Connie made contact with Robert, she slowly began to infiltrate his life. She introduced various personas into Robert’s life, all through the computer—referred to by the researcher as “cyber-identities.” These identities were all real people whose characters were used by Connie to play roles designed to confuse Robert and make him think that he was protecting Connie from harm. Through their voices, Connie was able to convince Robert to allow her to move in with him for a short period of time. That period of time lasted over seven months and became a nightmare for Robert.

The identities each served a different purpose, but they all instilled fear into Robert’s life. His money was being stolen from his bank accounts; credit was taken out in his name; he was becoming afraid for his life and the safety of his relatives. Threats were made to Robert’s young nephew. Though he had doubts about what was going on, Robert did not suspect that Connie was behind the events.

**Robert Reported the Criminal Activity to the FBI**
After suffering the impact of the loss of his money and the ongoing fear, Robert finally decided to file a report with the FBI that there was criminal activity involving Connie. The agents asked Robert for documentation, which he provided.
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They interviewed Robert and his father and then called Connie by telephone. She lied—convincingly—to them. They disbelieved Robert and wrote a letter to the FAA that Robert had reported a false crime and may be a danger to the public as a commercial airline pilot.

Faulty Psychological Assessment
Robert was required to undergo a psychological assessment of his mental functioning because his airline had grounded him based on the FBI’s report that he had reported a false crime. Because the reporting of a false crime may indicate psychosis, the FAA immediately grounded Robert and required him to have a psychological assessment. The psychologist who conducted the assessment interviewed Robert, Robert’s parents, and also, separately, Connie. Robert provided documentation confirming the theft of his money to the psychologist.

The psychologist did not believe that Robert’s report was credible, largely because Connie told him that Robert was lying and that she was not harming him in any way. The report issued by the psychologist was very damaging to Robert, labeling him delusional and recommending that he not be allowed to continue flying and that Robert should relocate.

Robert chose to seek out a Peer Review Forensic Report on the findings of the original psychologist. This Peer Review involved a thorough review of the background information as well as the testing protocols and conclusions reached. What was found by the Peer Review Forensic Psychologist was that the original psychologist violated the rules for conducting psychological testing and made serious errors, which led to misjudging Robert’s mental functioning. Robert provided this report to the original psychologist who chose not to amend his report.
Robert Proved Connie Was the Mastermind
By piecing together the various e-mail messages, which he kept, Robert was able to link certain speech patterns among Connie and the cyber-identities. This was enough to convince him that she was behind the scheme. His efforts from that point led to a civil judgment against Connie as well as her being jailed. However, Robert’s career continued to suffer due to the psychological report and the FBI letter.

Robert and the Researcher Met
After Robert and the researcher met, together they embarked on a mission to learn the truth. The investigation involved numerous interviews, review of documents, and, eventually, direct dialogue with Connie. The culmination of this effort led to various forms of assistance to Robert. Robert was able to file an amended tax return and claim a casualty loss for the theft of his money, resulting in a refund of taxes paid. He sued a psychologist who abused him following the initial assessment and settled on a sum of money. One of Robert’s two disability carriers settled Robert’s claim for cessation of benefits after the researcher’s intervention.

Robert at least now understood much more of the details of his victimization and also how he was harmed by a governmental agency and two psychologists. Continued attempts are underway to correct the improper psychological assessment, but, as of this date, the psychologist who made the improper assessment has avoided accountability. Robert has established a website to publicize his victimization.

The case study reveals much about the nature of a clever Internet fraud scheme and how an otherwise sentient person could have been duped. It also is useful as a tool to explain
how the forensic examiner can assist the victim of fraud in a multitude of ways. Of primary importance in this case was the maintenance of an objective viewpoint. The researcher reviewed documents and sought corroborating data prior to helping Robert. Once Robert’s story checked out, the researcher was only too glad to help.

While society often blames the victim, fraud examiners take the necessary time to evaluate the facts and determine how they can help.