Case Study
Chapter 1

A group of vigilantes work to entrap pedophiles online by posing as under-age youth and arranging for in-person meetings. Once a member of the group meets with the individual, they take photos and post the photos online, sometimes with the person's name.

Police caution against vigilantism, urging the public to report these individuals to them instead. The vigilantes argue that there are not enough officers and resources to monitor the internet for sexual predators who prey on children and teenagers.

1. **Sociologically speaking, why does online shaming occur?**

2. **How is online shaming different than face-to-face shaming before digital technology and social media became prevalent?**

3. **Is online shaming appropriate in any case?**

4. **What are the inherent dangers in online shaming?**

5. **Do you think that online shaming is effective to curb or change behaviour?**

Sample Answers:

1. Predators go online to find victims; vigilantes use the same technology to find and punish the perpetrators, thus enforcing societal values and beliefs to protect young people from sexual exploitation. Online shaming occurs to reinforce traditional social values and beliefs.

2. In online shaming, the person being shamed may not know who is shaming them or why. This anonymity protects the accuser. Online shaming is also more widely disseminated, so more people can view the information, and more permanent, since digital information lasts longer and is harder to erase and forget.

3. Answers will vary. Students should consider the next question.

4. Dangers include irreparable damage to the victim, who may or may not be guilty of a crime or any wrongdoing. In some cases, such as the vigilante group, the wrong person may be identified or someone with the same name and similar appearance may be wrongly accused. If a mistake is made, it's difficult to retract and revise the misinformation, and the consequences can be severe. Vigilante members could be prosecuted for libel and slander. Also, the vigilante members are putting themselves in physical danger as an altercation may occur.

5. Answers will vary. Students may want to consider possible outcomes of online shaming, such as divorce in the case of the Ashley Madison hack as discussed in the text, or suicide, such as the case of the Canadian teenager Amanda Todd who was shamed online when explicit photos of her were posted. If students argue that online shaming is effective in curbing pedophilia and sexual predators online, they should be encouraged to find evidence to this effect.