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**Abstract** | We analysed chat log communications between 38 adult males and children who were accessed by the men via social media for sexually exploitative purposes. Our goal was to understand how sexual offenders engage with children online and the dialogue they use to elicit compliance with sexual requests. Results revealed 72 discrete linguistic tactics, contained within eight overarching dialogue-based 'moves'. Tactics were non-sequential (ie dynamic) and focused mainly on requests for sexual activity. Three distinct subgroup patterns of tactic use were evident. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

## Online child sexual offenders' language use in real-time chats

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The development of effective criminal justice responses to online sexual offending against children requires a good understanding of how these crimes occur. In this study, we examined the offending process through the lens of typed communication between offenders and child victims within web-based and instant messaging conversations ('chat logs'). Our aim was to better understand how offenders engage victims through written dialogue and how they attempt to elicit children's compliance with sexual requests.

From an intervention and prevention perspective, understanding the content and style of offender dialogue in chat logs could assist in several ways. First, it provides psychologists with an ecologically valid, generic snapshot of offenders' drives and cognitions immediately prior to and during offending, as opposed to relying on offender self-reports about their behaviour and strategies. Second, a comprehensive understanding of dialogue tactics assists software developers in working out what words or phrases should be used in broadscale message scanning designed to identify offenders. Third, understanding offenders' verbal tactics and requests assists covert law enforcement officers who play the role of children to anticipate the types of requests and dialogue they will confront, so they can plan useful responses.

Child Sexual Abuse Material  
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To date, little prior research has analysed online sex offenders' discourse tactics in chat logs. As such, theories or frameworks describing online offender communication are unrefined and there is ambiguity around the online grooming construct (Bennett & O'Donohue 2014). Researchers in online offending have tended to conceptualise and interpret their work against frameworks originally developed to explain offline (contact) offending. One frequently cited example is the grooming subset of O'Connell's (2003) typology of 'cyberexploitation' (Aitken, Gaskell & Hodgkinson 2018; Bennett & O'Donohue 2014; Black et al. 2015). This subset proposes five sequential stages that precede sexual abuse: friendship forming, relationship forming, risk assessment, exclusivity, and sexual act (ie the 'innocuous' introduction of sexual themes to develop trust). However, online grooming researchers that have relied on the model have not always found the five stages present (Williams, Elliott & Beech 2013) and some have reported a cyclical rather than sequential pattern (Lorenzo-Dus & Kinzel 2019; but see also Chiang & Grant 2017).

The problem with continued reliance on O'Connell's (2003) model is that online technology (as a forum for sexual gratification) has evolved over the past two decades, potentially changing offenders' expectations and ways of engaging with victims (Wager et al. 2018). While grooming has remained integral to contact offending that occurs within a known relationship, it may not feature at all in online sexual offending against children (Kloess, Hamilton-Giachritsis & Beech 2019). Indeed, it is possible to request or transmit sexual exploitation material without building a relationship with a victim at all (Henshaw, Darjee & Clough 2020). To guide the field further, researchers need to take a broad conceptual approach to online chat log analysis. A bottom-up perspective (as opposed to 'retrofitting' data interpretations to pre-existing models of offending) is warranted, while acknowledging the rapid way in which online technology can allow offenders to operate. Further, research needs to acknowledge changes in legislation over time such that language use in itself, such as requesting an image, can constitute a sexual offence, provided the person requesting the image believes they are talking to a child (see, for example, *Criminal Code Act 1899* (Qld), s 218B; *Criminal Law Consolidation Act 1935* (SA), ss 63A, 63B).

## Research sample and methodology

We analysed the chat logs of 38 convicted child sexual offenders who had accessed victims through various social media sites for sexually exploitative purposes (Griffith University ethics approval Ref no: 2019/132). Three research questions guided our investigation: First, what verbal tactics or strategies did the offenders employ in their dialogue when engaging with children? Second, how were these verbal tactics sequenced within the individual chats? Third, were there any distinct patterns of tactic use within the cohort of individual offenders?

## Sample of chats

The chat logs ( $n=38$ ) were provided by two Australian police organisations and included offenders aged between 18 and 65 ( $M=30.57$ ,  $SD=8.96$ ) who were convicted of child grooming and sexual procurement of a child under 16 years of age. Each chat formed part of a police brief of evidence that led to the offenders' convictions. They were created between March 2017 and September 2019, and the duration of each chat (beginning to end) varied from one day to 174 days ( $M=41.11$ ,  $SD=47.39$ , median=16 days). Offenders were located across Australia, the United States, United Kingdom, Europe and Asia.

All chat logs were in English and involved an offender corresponding with a single child victim after making a random friend request through a social media site (eg Facebook), social network post (eg Locanto) or group chat room (eg Kik). Each chat consisted of a group of discrete messages between the offender and victim, and the number of independent communication sessions ranged from one to 17. Sixteen offenders (42%) indicated a desire to make face-to-face contact. Child victims were 36 girls aged between 13 and 15 years ( $M=13.69$ ,  $SD=0.58$ ) and two boys aged 13 and 14 years. All offenders were aware of the child's age and gender from the exchange (it was typical for them to request this information).

## Move analysis

When deciding the method of discourse analysis to use in this study, we scanned and debated the various approaches used in previous research. One approach—thematic analysis—classifies broad patterns in the text (themes) in accordance with their underlying meanings (eg Aitken, Gaskell & Hodkinson 2018; Kloess, Hamilton-Giachritsis & Beech 2019; Williams, Elliott & Beech 2013). An example of a theme might be 'emotional connection', which could be defined as dialogue that attempts to foster a close emotional bond with a victim (Aitken, Gaskell & Hodkinson 2018). Another approach includes the classification of individual words (eg 'boyfriend', 'erection') or phrases such as 'would you touch yourself?' (Black et al. 2015; Lorenzo-Dus & Kinzel 2019). All of the above-mentioned units of analysis have been used in past research to shed some light on the communicative function of language within grooming and sexual exploitation. For example, we have learned that offenders often, through their choice of words, reframe sexual assault as 'romance' and as 'beneficial to the victim' (see Lorenzo-Dus & Kinzel 2019: 4). These units of analysis, however, do not address offender dialogue as a *tactical manoeuvre* within an ongoing interchange between an offender and victim. We were particularly interested in the cognitive or functional elements of the offenders' messages within a sequence of dialogue crafted by each offender to gratify his sexual desires (Bhatia 1993).

Another form of analysis we observed, more suitable for our purpose, is ‘move analysis’ (Swales 2011). This method was used by Chiang and Grant (2019, 2017) to understand the communicative functions associated with the grooming process. A ‘move’ is a segment of text that after initial analysis is deemed to perform a single communicative function (eg ‘defining the relationship’). Each move comprises lower-level strategies or steps (ie tactics). For ease of presentation, moves can be presented in colour-coded ‘move maps’, providing visual, sequential representations of the rhetorical exchanges (ie linguistic framework) between offenders and their victims, and variations in the order and frequency of the moves (see Chiang 2018).

Move analysis provides an ideal foundation for driving new conceptualisations of online offending because outcomes must be based on what emerges from the data rather than relying solely on comparing the findings to a pre-existing framework. For example, while Chiang and Grant (2017) found some overlap with O’Connell’s (2003) grooming model using transcripts from perverted-justice.com, new findings were revealed even with their small datasets. Of particular note was the high frequency of sexually abusive behaviour in transcripts specifically selected to illustrate grooming. In their later study, Chiang and Grant (2019) reviewed 20 transcripts from genuine victims of a single offender and found two previously unreported behaviours—namely, overt persuasion and extortion. We suspect that the new findings may have emerged from the more sophisticated methodological approach, and that adopting this approach with a larger, more representative sample would greatly advance our understanding of the phenomenon.

## Data coding

Our analysis followed a modified version of the 10 steps outlined by Biber, Connor and Upton (2007). The first two authors individually read a random sample of five transcripts and then collaborated to determine the purpose of the chats and function of segments of text. The unanimous agreement was that the rhetorical purpose of each offender’s behaviour was persuasion, and this in turn shaped our interpretation of chat log text. A random sample of 10 new chats were then reviewed to develop a list of offender intentions (hereby referred to as ‘tactics’). Seventy-two separate tactics were identified, with unanimous agreement on definitions achieved after four iterations. The full set of chat logs were then coded by the second author. The coding manual, containing all the tactics and definitions, is available on request.

Next, individual tactics were grouped according to the similarities or patterns that emerged, resulting in eight overarching moves in the offenders’ behaviour. These moves are listed in the first column of Table 1. The same table also provides exemplars of tactics associated with each move.

Due to our prescribed manuscript word limit, we do not list all 72 tactics but rather a reconfigured (condensed) version of 38 tactics created for the purpose of an analysis reported later in this paper.

## Results

### Prevalence of moves and tactics

Table 1 lists the offender ‘moves’ in descending order of prevalence across the 38 transcripts, with the prevalence of each tactic given in the second column. The tactic ‘Indicates need for sexual activity’ was most prevalent (35% of all moves). Tactics in this category were highly explicit (in some instances tending towards sexual aggression—for example, making reference to having anal sex with a child) and extended beyond grooming into the realm of sexually abusive behaviour. There appeared to be acute interest in the children’s virginity.

The next most prevalent move was ‘Manages resistance’ ( $n=490$ ). This move often co-occurred with ‘Indicates need for sexual activity’ such that it directly preceded (11%,  $n=53$ ) or followed (56%,  $n=273$ ) exchanges focused on sexual activity. The apparent function of these messages was to mitigate the intensity of a request (eg preceding a sexual request with flattery or an apology) or to appease a victim who had responded negatively to a request in an attempt to keep them engaged. These moves showed that offenders were engaging in a form of self-monitoring, recognising when the limits of boundary pressing had been exceeded.

Table 1 also lists the tactics associated with each move, along with examples of each tactic. Tactics were defined as either grooming behaviours or sexual exploitation/abuse, with half (19/38) meeting the latter criteria.

**Table 1: Offender moves and tactics in order of prevalence**

Move	<i>n</i> (%)	Tactics	Example
Indicates need for sexual activity	1,135 (35)	Hooks sexual reference into exchange (G)	My hobbies are travel, movies ... and sex
		Implies need for sexual gratification (S)	Getting horny just looking at your picture
		Requests sexual act (S)	Can you hold my dick when we meet?
		Offers to engage in sexual act (S)	I would be gentle if we have sex
		Refers to engaging in own sexual act (S)	I’m watching porn and stroking my cock
		Refers to victim-only sexual act (S)	Rub yourself and tell me how it feels
		Refers to child’s potential enjoyment in sexual activity (S)	You will really enjoy it .. you’ll get horny as hell
Manages resistance	490 (15)	Checks child is OK (S)	Are we still good?
		Apologises, retracts statement, shows empathy (G)	Yeah sorry just curious; I understand. It’s a big step to take
		Exerts pressures on victim to comply with sexual request (S)	You just have to tell me. Are we having sex when we meet? Yes or no
		Promises future relationship with child (S)	We could date as boyfriend and girlfriend

**Table 1: Offender moves and tactics in order of prevalence**

Move	n (%)	Tactics	Example
Establishes victim attributes	377 (12)	Asks child's age (G)	When did you turn 14?
		Checks child is alone (G)	Are your parents in the house?
		Asks if child has masturbated or been aroused (G)	Do you like to rub yourself and get turned on?
		Asks about child's genitalia and sexual attributes (G)	Do you have hair down there? What size are your breasts?
		Asks if child is a virgin (G)	Random question ... have you had sex?
		Asks about child's clothing (G)	What colour panties are you wearing?
		Asks if child has interacted with a penis (G)	Have you ever touched a guy's dick?
		Asks about sexual activity with others (G)	Ever had your pussy eaten?
Defines relationship	326 (10)	Knowledge of/familiarity with offender (G)	I thought I knew you when you came up
		Refers to victim as sexually attractive (G)	Any picture of you would be sexy
		Uses non-sexual terms of affection (G)	You got it hunny
		Asks if victim is sexually attracted to him (G)	What do you think about me?
Acknowledges wrongdoing	254 (8)	Seeks victim's consent or expresses concerns about consequences (G)	You have to be in charge of saying what you want to try, ok?
		Indicates awareness of age differences or that victim is below age of consent (G)	Because I'm over 18 and you are under 14, its illegal
Transmits sexual materials	252 (8)	Requests image with clothes on (S)	Send me a pic. Anything.
		Requests image with clothes off (S)	I want to see what you look like naked.
		Sends image with clothes on (S)	That's me (on left) with my mates.
		Sends image with clothes off (S)	Big aren't I? [after image sent]
Seeks contact	230 (7)	Sends other sexual content (S)	Want to try this? [after video sent]
		Requests alternative electronic contact (S)	Can I call and teach you?
Asserts offender attributes	171 (5)	Seeks a meeting in person (S)	I need to meet you in person
		Mentions offender age (G)	Hello I'm 27 male from US
		Promotes sexual abilities and genitalia (S)	Yeah that's my big dick little miss
		States sexual preferences (S)	Tiny and tight is good

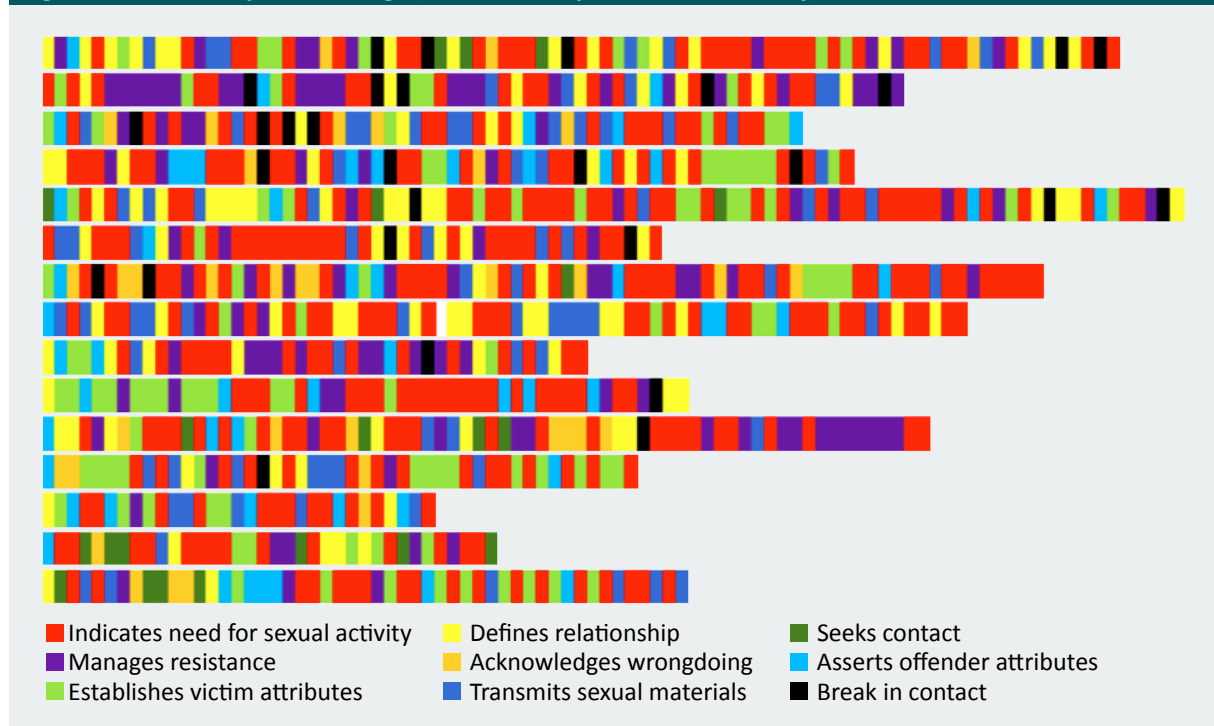
Note: G=Grooming; S=Sexual exploitation/abuse. Examples have been modified to enhance their meaning in isolation from the surrounding text

## The move map

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the sequencing of moves for 15 randomly selected chat logs out of the 38. Each of these bars, read from left to right, represents an offender's entire interaction with the child from the beginning until the end of contact. Moves (which incorporate the various tactics) are colour-coded and breaks in contact are denoted by a black line. Each move map is read as an individual case. For example, the first case, on line one, shows the offender had six exchanges with the victim while the last reveals a single exchange. In both instances, the 'Need for sexual activity' move (represented by the colour red) was introduced early and constituted a considerable proportion of the exchange.

The sequence of moves shown in these move maps also demonstrates that the chats were dynamic in nature. Engagement in sexual activity—played out in the 'Need for sexual activity' move—was quite rapid for some chats and there were constant shifts between moves. Even when offenders began their exchanges with efforts to gather information about their victim or define their relationship, chats quickly shifted to sexualised moves, and other exchanges were seemingly used to support or maintain access to or involvement in this move.

**Figure 1: Move map of chat logs (random sample of 15 cases only)**



## Cluster profiles

We conducted further analysis to determine whether there were distinct offender subgroups in terms of tactic use. This analysis required a reduction in the number of tactics, which was done by combining similar tactics—for example, all comments made by offenders boasting about sexual prowess or genital size were recoded into the single tactic of ‘sexual self-promotion’. The final pool consisted of 38 tactics, which are listed in column 3 of Table 1.

Cluster analysis, a method of data reduction, was then conducted (using hierarchical agglomerative variable clustering with furthest-neighbour linkage and Euclidean distance). The clustering of variables at each stage of the data reduction was first inspected to identify large increases in coefficients between each step. Next, the cluster profiles were examined for meaningful cluster differences to determine the simplest cluster solution. A three-cluster solution was both simple and interpretable, offering the clearest explanation for distinguishing between patterns in the dialogue used by offenders to manipulate victim behaviour.

To determine how the clusters differed with respect to the tactics, we explored how the pattern of dialogue was expressed as a function of cluster membership. A one-way between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted using the 38 recoded tactics as independent variables and cluster membership as the dependent variable. The ANOVA revealed significant differences between the three groups with moderate to very large effect sizes for 24 of the 38 tactics (63%; eg from  $F(2,35)=78.23, p<0.001, \eta^2=0.82$  for ‘Requests sexual act’ to  $F(2,35)=3.83, p=0.03, \eta^2=0.18$  for ‘Hooks sexual reference into exchange’). Given the lack of homogeneity of variance on half the recoded tactics, Blanca et al.’s (2018) procedure was followed to ensure robustness of the  $F$ -test to control for potential Type I errors. Once established, post hoc analyses were applied to find the source of between-group differences. This information, together with a qualitative analysis of individual cases within each cluster (performed by the second author), was used to develop the cluster profiles. The cluster profiles are described as follows.

### *Cluster 1—Impetuous (n=20)*

These offenders, representing the largest group, engaged in ‘hit and run’ style behaviour. They spent the least amount of time online ( $M=2.85$  communication sessions,  $SD=2.23$ ; range=1–3 sessions). Their concern was *immediate* gratification of sexual needs, with sexual references and requests for images being introduced early—sometimes at the first point of contact. These offenders boasted about their sexual prowess, had little interest in meeting offline, and showed little concern for the legal consequences of their behaviour.



### *Cluster 2—Opportunistic (n=13)*

These offenders, who spent the medium amount of time online ( $M=7.23$  sessions,  $SD=4.29$ ; range=2–15), displayed similar tactics to the other clusters. However, their behaviour seemed less overbearing and they appeared to have fewer preconceptions about how the relationship should progress. For example, if the relationship did not escalate beyond the initial sexual dialogue, these offenders seemed content to move on. The nature of the exchanges suggested they were more isolated and lacking in social skills than the other cluster profiles. Manipulative behaviours included low-level bribery, petulance, use of empathy to establish trust, promises not to disclose images transmitted by the victim, and passive-aggressive dialogue ('Oh well, if you don't want to, I'll go'). These offenders seemed just as focused on their own masturbatory and sexual practices as on the child's sexual interests and behaviour. They made more requests to meet offline than Cluster 1 offenders (although there was minimal planning), and they showed some concern for the legal consequences of their behaviour.

### *Cluster 3—Devious (n=5)*

These offenders appeared fixated on the idea of having an underage sexual partner, and they had clear expectations about their victims (eg a young virgin willing to engage in particular fantasies). They spent the most amount of time online ( $M=13.40$  sessions,  $SD=2.70$ ; range=10–17). Offenders in this cluster used more intense descriptions of sexual engagement with the child, including offers to teach masturbation. The chat logs often included long commentaries of both imaginary (future) and contemporaneous sexual encounters. The offenders became aggressive when their needs were not met, but this aggression was interspersed with empathy, apologies and concern about the child's reactions. These offenders insisted on secrecy, made sophisticated plans to meet and were more acutely aware of the legal consequences of their behaviour.

## Discussion

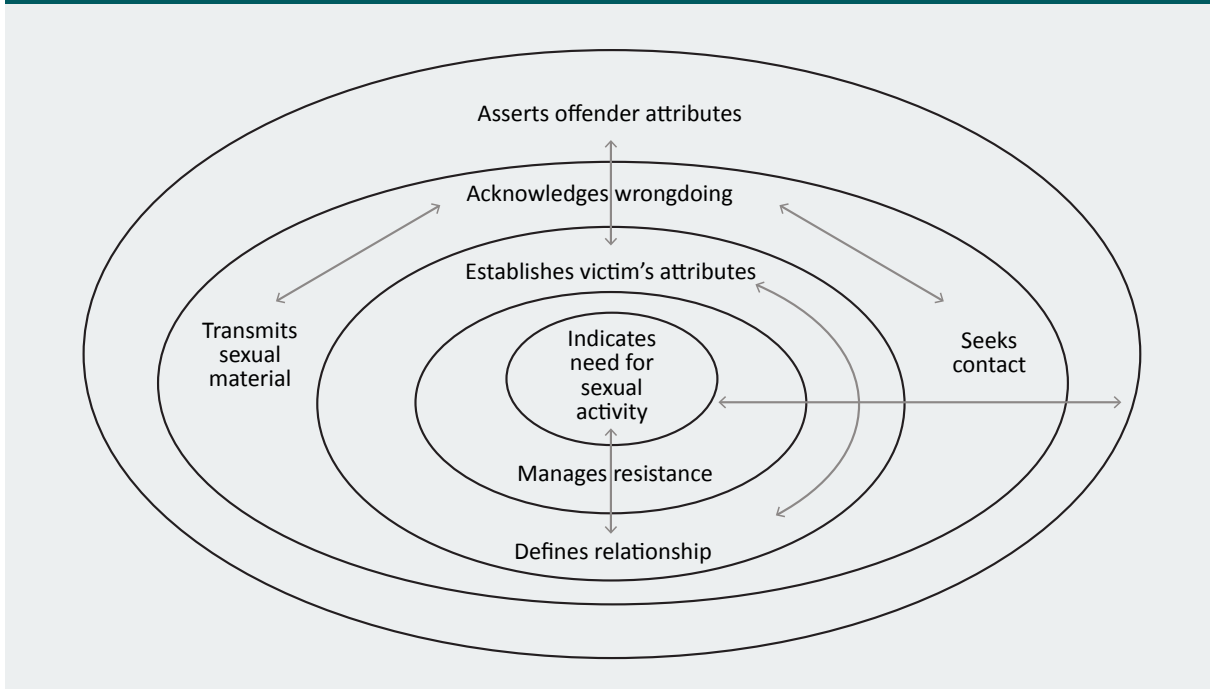
This study, which used move analysis and a large contemporaneous sample of chat logs to better understand how sexual offenders engage child victims online, revealed findings that are both similar to and distinct from those of previous research. One salient finding was the heavy emphasis on highly sexualised acts that would be classified as abuse, as opposed to grooming (eg friendship building). Although there was also evidence of grooming tactics similar in content to those discussed in prior literature (eg defining the relationship with the victim in affectionate terms, gathering information about the child's prior sexual experiences and assessing risk; Aitken, Gaskell & Hodgkinson 2018; Black et al. 2015; Chiang & Grant 2017), the tactics relating explicitly to sexual activity were used most frequently throughout the chat logs (at least twice as often as any other tactic, including individual grooming tactics). The sexual content of the offenders' dialogue was frequently aggressive, describing violations that included oral and anal sex and submission to the offender as an authority figure. It is the intensity and centrality of abusive content in our offender–victim exchanges that distinguishes the dialogue from that described in prior work (but see also Kloess, Hamilton-Giachritsis & Beech 2019).

Further, this study found that offender tactic use was intermittent, without a clear structure or progression of steps. This finding differs from that of prior research, where themes or categories have been confined to progressive stages in each exchange. O'Connell's (2003) model, for example, proposes that offenders progress in a linear fashion from grooming to sexual exploitation. Subsequent researchers (who failed to replicate the linear model) proposed that offenders' strategies progress in a more cyclic fashion (Lorenzo-Dus & Kinzel 2019; Williams, Elliott & Beech 2013). In contrast, the progression of tactics in our chat logs is best described as haphazard. Many offenders showed rapid engagement in sexual content, reflecting an immediate need for gratification, with frequent shifts between tactics and no clear pattern or evidence of planning.

The shifting of tactics was due, albeit in part, to the use of a move which co-occurred (in close proximity) to the sexual content: 'Manages resistance'. When victims did not engage with extremely explicit or perverse requests, offenders displayed signs of self-monitoring. The offenders recognised that boundaries had been exceeded, leading them to retract statements, apologise, or promise not to disclose any images transmitted by the victim. If appeasement failed to elicit compliance, pressure became more overt (eg the offender threatened to break off contact or post any previously obtained images of the victim on a public website). At other times, sexual requests were preceded by the offender acknowledging that requests were 'wrong', which sometimes led victims to experience guilt and to revert to participating in sexual exchanges. This pattern of tactics was not predictable, as shown in the move maps. In other words, managing resistance sometimes preceded and sometimes followed sexual content, and was sometimes interspersed with other tactics associated with seeking contact or asserting offender attributes.

Rather than stages, we conceive the online child sexual offending process to be more of a gravitational pull towards sexual activity. We illustrate this process in Figure 2, borrowing the idea from the socio-ecological approach of Bronfenbrenner (1979), where shifts occur across system elements based on whether they are more or less involved with the individual. Specifically, Figure 2 indicates 'Need for sexual activity' is the core motivation at the centre of the model's concentric circles. The remaining seven moves are placed according to their prevalence, as represented by their distance from the centre. The further away from the move 'Indicates need for sexual activity', the less important that move is overall. This new model retains the interplay between moves (the doubled-headed arrows) to illustrate the dynamic nature of shifts between moves.

**Figure 2: Dynamic interplay of moves used in chat logs**



There are several implications arising from our findings. First, the findings highlight an important distinction between online and offline offending, where grooming in an online environment constitutes a smaller component of the offender–victim interchange (see also Kloess, Hamilton-Giachritsis & Beech 2019). Indeed, from a theoretical perspective, our findings challenge models that see grooming as central to online discourse and imply a need to move away from using O’Connell’s (2003) model as a framework to interpret and compare results based on discourse analysis of online chat logs.

Second, our findings have implications for methods of detecting offending behaviour through broadscale message scanning. They suggest that, rather than searching for isolated words or phrases, it may be more effective if scanning systems target the close association between (a) explicit sexual content and (b) phrases or words designed to assuage victim distress or reluctance. Third, our findings suggest that people who work in covert operations (pretending to be the child) should anticipate requests for explicit sexual acts at any time during the interaction and be equipped with a range of useful and admissible responses. Conceptualising chat logs as merely a series of eight interchangeable overarching moves enables a more analytical focus on the content and minimises cognitive load on the person pretending to be the child, thereby reducing burnout. This analytical focus, combined with the knowledge that sexually explicit content can occur early on in an interaction (so that officers are not caught off guard), could reduce the risk of harm associated with exposure to child sexual exploitation material (Powell et al. 2014). Figures 1 and 2 may help with that.

A final contribution of our study is that it confirmed distinct offender subgroups. This was the first time a cluster analysis had been conducted on ‘moves’, and three patterns were revealed. The Impetuous pattern involved immediate gratification, greater exchange of sexually explicit images and little concern with the consequences. The offenders labelled as Opportunistic focused more on desensitising, normalising and manipulating behaviours. Those labelled as Devious were more sexually aggressive and fixated on specific attributes of the child. Caution needs to be exercised in drawing generalisations given the limited sample size and uneven groups, but nonetheless, if these clusters are found to be robust, they would be helpful from a range of perspectives.

Any fine-tuned characterisation of offending patterns enables personalisation of treatment and guides more reliable prognosis of the risk of harm the offender poses to others. From a rehabilitation perspective, for example, Cluster 3 (Devious) would be of greatest concern to psychologists. This group was the most manipulative and aggressive, and their messages showed high levels of sexual deviancy, sexual preoccupation and distorted cognitions. Such characteristics have been found to be associated with the highest levels of recidivism among offline offenders (Mann, Hanson & Thornton 2010; Mann et al. 2007). Knowing the actual discourse-related tactics used by online sexual offenders provides insights needed to challenge offender distortions about how online interactions unfold. Cognitive distortions serve to diffuse responsibility for harm (eg ‘I just wanted to teach her about her body’, ‘I said it was illegal, but she sent an image anyway’, ‘I didn’t know she was underage’), which is why disputing and correcting such misconceptions is key to promoting offender accountability and self-awareness.

## Differences to prior research

We speculated about why our study revealed new findings not previously reported. First, our sample of chat logs is quite distinct from those used in prior work in both its size and the way in which offenders accessed their victims. Our sample of 38 offenders accessed children through individual social networking sites. When the number of offenders has been reported in prior work, it has typically been small (eg 5 to 8 offenders; Aitken, Gaskell & Hodgkinson 2018; Chiang & Grant 2017; Grosskopf 2010; Kloess, Hamilton-Giachritsis & Beech 2019; Kloess et al. 2017; Williams, Elliott & Beech 2013). Further, considerable prior research has relied on transcripts obtained from perverted-justice.com, where offenders unknowingly engaged with trained adult volunteers who posed as children in regional chat rooms (but see also Chiang & Grant 2019; Kloess, Hamilton-Giachritsis & Beech 2019; Kloess et al. 2017). Such chat rooms—where children interact with like-minded peers—were popular in the 1990s and early 2000s but are rarely used now. The sample of chats in the prior research would not have had the same level of diversity as ours nor been reflective of the current era, where instant messaging and online live chatting (with built-in cameras) is entrenched in the mainstream culture of children and adults.

Second, our sample relied on a method of analysis that allowed us to (a) consider the discrete elements of each offender's dialogue and (b) use these to develop offender moves and associated tactics designed to influence victim behaviour. Unlike the broad themes that emerged from other forms of discourse analysis, these moves were sequenced to determine the flow of interactions, and the associated tactics were used to specify offender subgroups who engaged in different patterns of online behaviour. The next step for researchers is to try to replicate these findings across samples and determine whether the coding method was driving the differences or whether the current outcomes were a function of the offender chat logs to which we had access (Open Science Collaboration 2015; Schneevogt, Chiang & Grant 2018).

## Conclusion

Online sexual exploitation of children was depicted in this study as having a central focus on offenders' sexual gratification. Offenders' requests for sexual activity often occurred early in the communication exchange, with frequent shifts in discourse strategy to elicit compliance, as opposed to the gradual methods of 'seduction' observed with offline offending (Ospina, Harstall & Dennett 2010). New theory development is clearly needed to explain the aetiology and progression of online sexual offending against children, as distinct from offline offending. This will be facilitated by using large and diverse contemporaneous samples of offender chat logs, analyses that consider offender dialogue as a tool to influence children's behaviour, and acknowledgement of the potential for distinct offender subgroups.

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