

# **Online Grooming Communication: The Child's Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

Online child sexual abuse (OCSEA) is a global pandemic and constantly evolving threat and urgent child protection emergency. It is a crime that takes many forms including digital child sexual grooming (DCSG). DCSG is estimated to affect one in eight children at some point in their childhood. Yet research into children's perspectives and experience of DCSG remains scarce. Children's discourse within or about their DCSG interactions is yet to be systematically studied, effectively silencing their voices.

This thesis aims to address this important gap in knowledge by examining children's accounts of their DCSG experiences via data provided by a UK national counselling helpline. A qualitative discourse analysis approach was adopted, with a focus on facework and appraisal theory. Children's discourse provides vital insights into DCSG as a discursive process of goal (re)negotiation between communicative agents.

Findings simultaneously validate and enhance previous understandings of DCSG interactions built upon the study of groomer language and address the identified research gap of a lack of focus on children's discourse. Results evidence, in children's own words, how multi-directional constraints shape their behaviours and thus agency in DCSG contexts. They also show children's experiences and strategic efforts to navigate these constraints. The focus on groomer's tactical manipulative communication and accompanying facework, as represented in the child's discourse, uncovers new insights. For the first time the intersection of tactical manipulation, facework, emotion and their impacts on behaviour are explored. Research findings also emphasise the importance of future inquiry into children's discourse in DCSG contexts. The findings provide broad scope for application across a public health approach to combatting child sexual abuse in all its forms. A continued commitment to this research agenda is essential to ensure holistic understandings of groomer <-> child interactional dynamics.

## **Content Warning**

This thesis covers the sensitive and distressing topic of child sexual abuse (CSA), specifically digital child sexual grooming (DCSG). It includes examples from counselling chatlogs which provide children's accounts in their own words. It also includes chatlogs from law enforcement. Both contain explicit and sexual language. The examples have been carefully selected but may be upsetting to the reader. Please take care of yourself while engaging with the content.

## Declarations and Statements

Ethical approval was granted for this research by the Swansea University Research and Integrity Board and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) Research Ethics Committee in 2019.

### DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed



..... (candidate)

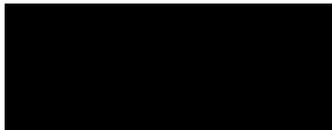
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### STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed



..... (candidate)

Date .....30/03/2025.....

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## **Dedication**

“Words have the power to change a child’s life forever.”

Lived Experience Expert Group – Project DRAGON-S

For those who have survived and are in recovery following CSA and are strong at the broken places. For those who didn’t survive. For those lost too soon and for those who continue to suffer. For everyone affected.

## Acknowledgements

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Here's to being the change!

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## Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
ACC	Access
AI	Artificial Intelligence
C	Child
CL	Childline
CCII	Coerced Child Intimate Images
CCIV	Coerced Child Intimate Videos
CEOP	Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command
CMDA	Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis
CSA	Child Sexual Abuse
CSAM	Child Sexual Abuse Material
CSEA	Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
DTD	Deceptive Trust Development
E2EE	End to End Encryption
EPI	Exchange of Personal Information
EST	Explicit Sex Talk
EU	European Union
FC	Further Contact
FC_Off	Further Contact Offline
FC_On	Further Contact Online
Gen-AI	Generative Artificial Intelligence
G	Groomer
GI	Gifts
GI_P	Physical Gifts
GI_V	Verbal Gifts
IS	Isolation
IST	Implicit Sex Talk
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, plus
MIS	Mental Isolation
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
OCSEA	Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
OG	Online Grooming
OGDM	Online Grooming Discourse Model
PIS	Physical Isolation
REF	Reframe
REL	Relationships
SG	Sexual Gratification
ST	Small Talk
TA-CSA	Tech-Assisted Child Sexual Abuse
TFSV	Tech-Facilitated Sexual Violence
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
VL	Vague Language
VR	Virtual Reality

# Chapter 1. Digital Child Sexual Grooming: A Child Protection Crisis

## 1.1 Introduction

Child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) is a global health pandemic (Childlight, 2024). It is prevalent in every country, complex, constantly evolving, and mushrooming in scale.<sup>1</sup> More than 300 million (12.5%) children a year are victimised, representing a clear and present child protection emergency (Childlight, 2024). CSEA encompasses a broad range of harms against children, including both offline and online abuse, and the two are not always neatly delineated. Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) represents a growing and increasingly complex threat in the digital age. It can take many forms: trading images, videos, or livestreams or it can involve a child being contacted by offenders attempting to solicit or groom them, or it can represent myriad permutations of these.<sup>2</sup> This is a hidden pandemic, the scale of which has been diffracted by a dearth of consistent data, common terminology, and coherent legislation or global governance (Childlight, 2024). This obfuscation is exacerbated by limited research focus on amplifying children's voices to understand their lived experiences. Children's victimhood is shrouded in silence.

This thesis positions the violence of OCSEA as communication (Lockwood-Harris, 2024; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016, 2020, 2023). Each of the facets of OCSEA listed above involve interaction between two or more communicative agents. An appreciation of OCSEA as a communicative practice has grown in recent years and, from a linguistics perspective, it has been predominantly built through the study of Online Grooming (OG) (Chapter Two), for the purposes of this thesis referred to as Digital Child Sexual Grooming (DCSG) (Section 1.4).

Crucially, this communication is mediated by the digital and technological contexts within which it occurs. Rapid technological evolution towards user-generated content and social interaction has occurred in the last 20 years. Digitally mediated

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. [Child sexual exploitation and abuse | OECD](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Ibid.](#)

communication pervades modern life. Its progression and expansion are continuously redrawing the boundaries of interpersonal communication. Social networking sites, world-building games, the metaverse,<sup>3</sup> and artificial intelligence (AI) are new frontiers of the evolving spaces mediating children’s interactions, socialisation, and search for their place in the world (Allen et al., 2022; Kidron et al., 2018; NSPCC, 2020, 2025; Ofcom, 2022; Thorn & WPGA, 2024). Despite this, research exploring children’s lived experience of OCSEA/DCSG remains limited.

This thesis aims to bring children’s experiences out of the shadows by applying new methods to the topic of DCSG to elevate their voices, to tune into their experiences, and to imprint them into published research. This chapter will place the research in context and outline how a language-based, discourse-driven approach to researching the child’s voice in DCSG will extend our collective knowledge in novel and crucial directions. Section 1.2 provides an overview of the current response to DCSG as a form of OCSEA. Section 1.3 provides a critique of current knowledge regarding the scale and nature of DCSG. Section 1.4 discusses key considerations and debates around definitions and terminology and introduces the rationale for the terminology used throughout this thesis. Section 1.5 describes the significance of the discourse-driven approach to raising children’s voices. Sections 1.6 and 1.7 outline the research aims and questions and the organisation of the thesis.

## **1.2 Towards a Global Public Health Response?**

While the digital age means children have access to new spaces and contexts in which to explore and shape their self and identity, these new spaces expose them to sexual harm at an alarming scale. Where the responsibility for this harm lies has been the subject of fierce debate and legal challenge.<sup>4</sup> Civil society and affected groups have campaigned for social media and technology providers to institute safety by design and ensure effective content moderation as well as meaningful and enforceable codes of conduct to ensure a duty of care (e.g. NSPCC, 2020).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Virtual reality (VR) augmented reality (AR) and mixed reality (MR).

<sup>4</sup> Section 230 of the US Communications Decency Act states that internet platforms hosting third-party content are not liable for what those third parties post. See also: [What you should know about Section 230, the rule that shaped today’s internet | PBS News](#)

<sup>5</sup> [UK-Online-Safety-Act-Policy-Briefing.pdf](#); see also [ECLAG | A Coalition Working to End Child Sexual Abuse On and Offline](#)

Governments around the world are starting to respond, moving away from laissez-faire attitudes to digital platform and technology growth by legislating and designing regulation to tackle identified harms.<sup>6</sup> With this comes fierce debates over state oversight and control. The concept of “digital sovereignty” has emerged in tension with techno-libertarian visions of an independent global internet of interdependence and interoperability (Afina et al., 2024; Hanson, 2017). An identified challenge is the diversity in approaches to platform regulation. Legislation has been developed piecemeal in the EU, UK, US, China, and Australia and there is no clear vision for establishing a global agenda and standard, leading to fears of entrenched fragmentation: “A jurisdictional, fragmented internet could emerge as a result, with the world becoming a vast “Venn diagram” of partially porous internets built around national languages, cultures and platforms, but accessible to all and controlled crudely” (Afina et al., 2024, p. 2).

The lack of cohesion begs the question of whether children are falling through the cracks at the edges of these “partially porous internets” (Afina et al., 2024, p. 2). OCSEA is global, spanning multiple platforms and crossing national borders. Technology companies face the complex challenge of distinguishing abuse from non-abusive content amongst billions of multilingual user-generated comments, updates, and photo uploads. Concerns have been levelled at too much reliance on AI trained on Western models and a concomitant reduction in human moderation (Hussain, 2025; Stockinger et al., 2023). Context is increasingly understood as the missing link, especially in when it comes to non-European or minority languages and culturally specific harms in the Global South (Hussain, 2025). This all represents a significant challenge for platforms and law enforcement.

A parallel debate concerns end-to-end encryption (E2EE), technology used by platforms to secure data so only sender and user see it. The E2EE dispute is framed as an all-or-nothing issue where privacy is pitched against child safety (NSPCC, 2021a).<sup>7</sup> Advocates argue E2EE is crucial to protect sensitive user data from hackers

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<sup>6</sup> The Digital Services Act by the European Union, the Online Safety Acts in the UK and Australia, as well as federal and state level bills in the US and China— aim to hold companies responsible for ensuring their platforms are safe, moderated and making them liable to fines and sanctions if that is not the case.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., [Signal Foundation](#)

and government overreach and to safeguard vulnerable groups.<sup>8</sup> Critics, including law enforcement and child protection campaigners, argue it enables child exploitation by shielding abuse from detection (NSPCC, 2021a, 2022).<sup>9</sup> Recent developments have seen governments push for access, while tech companies resist compliance, warning “backdoors” weaken security for all (Financial Times, 2025, para 5).<sup>10</sup> Private messaging and the opportunities it provides for cross-platform grooming has been highlighted as a primary channel for OCSEA/ DCSG (NSPCC, 2021a, 2022). There are also concerns regulatory approaches contain loopholes, which only require direct messaging services to remove content if it is “technically feasible,” which may represent a “safe harbour” where child abusers can operate without fear of detection.<sup>11</sup>

Phippen and Bond (2024) have criticised the “prohibitive mindset”, a zero-sum perspective that because harms online are facilitated by digital technology the solution lies solely in regulation and legislation. They argue this obscures a recognition of online harms as a social issue, resulting in poorly developed and piecemeal legislation which fails to take a victim, child-centric focus. The scale and complexity of the issue, lack of global response, and the prioritisation of prohibition has led to calls for a global, systematic, and coherent public health approach (PHA) (Childlight 2024; Cant et al., 2022; Higgins et al., 2019; Letourneau et al., 2014; Quadara, 2019; Smallbone et al., 2013). Public health concerns the health, wellbeing, and safety of communities and populations at a local, regional, national, and global level. It is an approach designed to harness prevention to bring the maximum benefit to the largest possible number of people.<sup>12</sup> Violence has been identified as a major and growing public health problem demanding an evidence-based approach to its prevention (Krug et. al, 2002). Attention is therefore turning to how a PHA can be extended and operationalised to design global responses to OCSEA to anchor the response within violence prevention across the whole spectrum of CSA and sexual

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<sup>8</sup> See, e.g. [The Case for Encryption | Open Rights Group](#)

<sup>9</sup> See also: The [No Place to Hide](#) Campaign

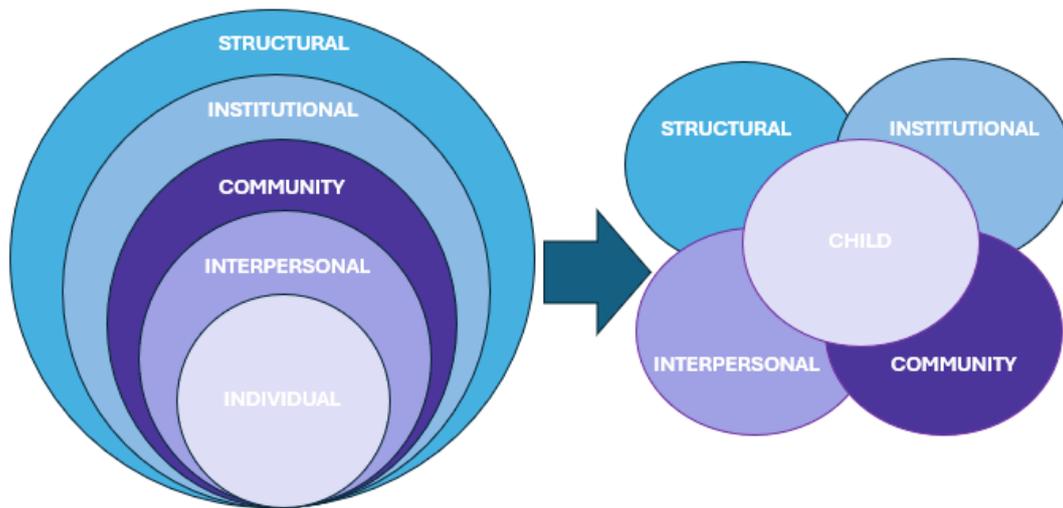
<sup>10</sup> Technology firm Apple took the unprecedented step of removing its newest data security tool from customers in the UK, after the government demanded access to user data under the Investigatory Powers Act (IPA), which compels firms to provide information to law enforcement agencies. See: [Apple pulls data protection tool after UK government security row - BBC News](#)

<sup>11</sup> ['Loophole' in law on messaging apps leaves children vulnerable to sexual abuse, says NSPCC | Science, Climate & Tech News | Sky News](#)

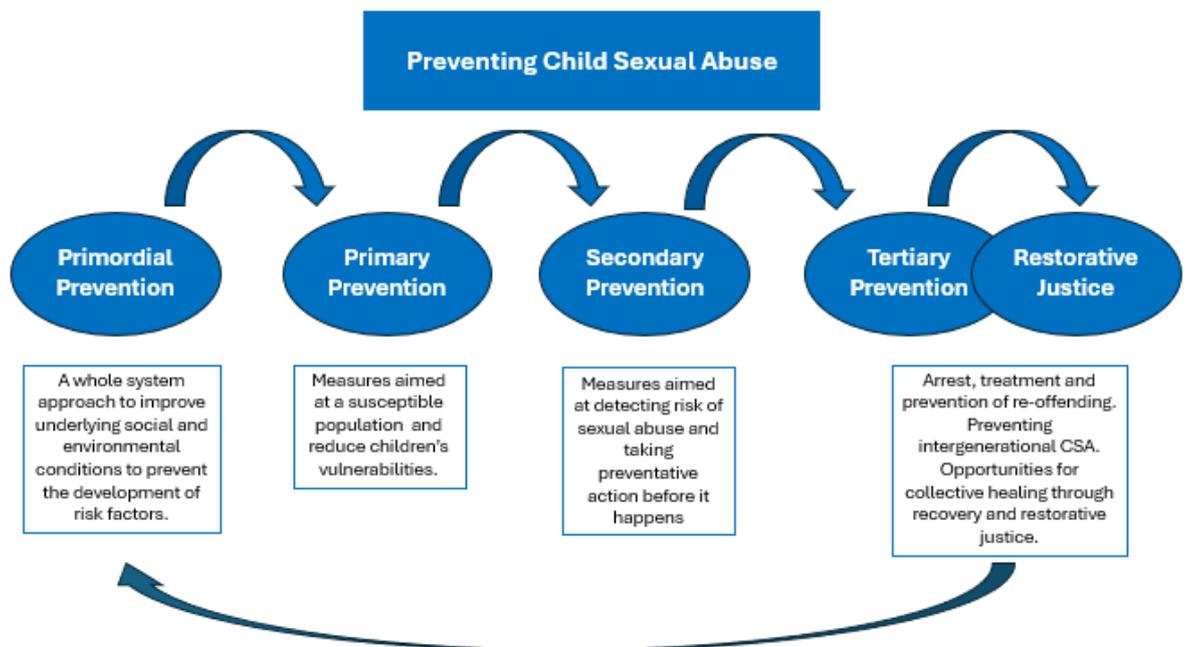
<sup>12</sup> See e.g. [Public Health Approach - Childlight](#)

violence (Childlight, 2024). Figure 1.1 and 1.2 present schemas of the proposed PHA.

**Figure 1.1** *An Intersectional Public Health Approach to Child Sexual Abuse Prevention (Maternowska et al., 2020, p.144)*



**Figure 1.2** *A Public Health Approach to CSA Prevention (Cant et al., 2022, p.576)*



A PHA challenges child protection narratives focused on risk factors, which tend to obscure the social ecology and particularly the determinants of much of the harm children experience (Maternowska et al., 2020). A PHA is inherently multi-disciplinary, requiring collective action and input from a spectrum of sectors.<sup>13</sup>

### **1.3 The Scale and Nature of Digital Child Sexual Grooming**

The attempt to fully understand the prevalence of children’s online victimisation has been a constant in the literature and is central to a PHA. In the 2000s, quantitative, often large-scale national surveys were favoured by many studies, drawing predominantly on clinical, high school, and university samples to measure prevalence (Davidson et al., 2016; Finkelhor et al., 2000; Greene-Colozzi, 2017; Jones et al., 2012; Livingstone et al., 2005, 2011; Palmer, 2015; Villacampa & Gómez, 2017; Wolak et al., 2004, 2006). Taking a more qualitative approach, child protection services and evidence derived from clinical samples or practitioner viewpoints and caseloads were also used to map prevalence (Mitchell et al., 2007; Palmer, 2015). Some attempts have been made to gain an overview and benchmark existing evidence (Bryce et al., 2023; Madigan et al., 2018). There is also a substantial grey literature developed by NGOs and privately funded organisations which aims to collate global data to measure the prevalence of the online threat to children and to advocate for legislative change and action by decision makers, technological companies, and law enforcement (Thorn, 2021, 2022; We Protect, 2019, 2021). Despite efforts to build a research base, there is a tension between global data and national or subnational/regional data, and there exists no consistent methodology for the recording, storage, collation, or dissemination of prevalence data.<sup>14</sup> In recognition of the need for transparency, accuracy, and availability of data, the Childlight initiative publishes an annual data index.<sup>15</sup> Figure 1.3 shows some of the key trends identified.

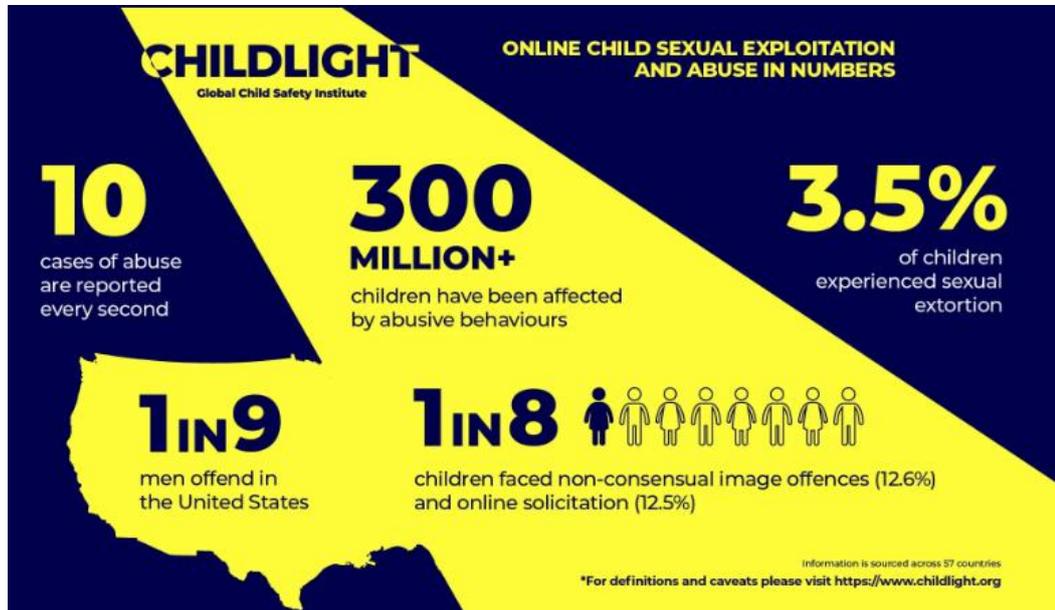
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<sup>13</sup> This would include health, education, academia, social services, justice, policy, private sector (including technology companies) and communities.

<sup>14</sup> Studies have highlighted that there is a dearth of comparable offence data available outside the US as many countries until recently have not disaggregated online sexual crimes from all sexual crimes against children and if they do, they do so variably (Quayle, 2016a).

<sup>15</sup> Childlight is a dual initiative: (i) the IntotheLight Index which aims to publish annual reports which will synthesise data to expose the scale of abuse globally and (ii) Searchlight, which investigates the nature of the pandemic, including identifying emerging risk factors to support early intervention and prevention. See: [About - Childlight](#)

**Figure 1.3** ChildLight Global Safety Institute – IntotheLightIndex – Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Numbers (ChildLight-Global Safety Institute, 2024, p.2)



In the UK, legislative changes and the establishment of new offences since 2016 created new prevalence data available from law enforcement sources, which were collated and amplified by child protection campaigners.<sup>16</sup> This enables a more focused estimate of prevalence of DCSG within the broader phenomenon of OCSEA. Available data appear to show the prevalence of children being sexually groomed has risen exponentially. UK charity the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) published statistics showing 7,062 Sexual Communication with a Child offences were recorded in 2024, an increase of 89% since 2017/18 when the offence first came into force.<sup>17</sup>

Taking a global view, the Childlight Index measures online solicitation, finding one in eight children globally have experienced some form of online sexual solicitation at some point in their childhood.<sup>18</sup> A systematic review and meta-analysis of studies

<sup>16</sup> Under Section 67 of the [Serious Crime Act 2015](#)

<sup>17</sup> Data was provided in response to a Freedom of Information request by all 45 police forces in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. 41,021 online grooming crimes have been recorded by police forces from across the UK since 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Online Solicitation is described as a sub-type of OCSEA and includes any of the following behaviours: online grooming, online solicitation, online sexual harassment, pressure to obtain images, voluntarily provided images in

conducted 2008–2021 showed a high variability in prevalence across studies, ranging from 1% to 37% for lifetime (during childhood) and from 3% to 34% for the past year (Childlight, 2024). High variability was also found across regions. However, beyond these broad patterns and fractured estimates it remains difficult to ascertain a clear picture of prevalence of online grooming because many countries are yet to define it in law which hampers consistent global legal definitions and complicates reporting and investigation at international level. A benchmarking exercise conducted by Economist Impact in 2020 to rank country responses to child sexual abuse revealed that of 60 countries examined, only 21 had legislation that outlaws online grooming for sexual purposes (Stewart, 2020). Furthermore, Article 23 of the Lanzarote Convention, criminalises the solicitation of children for sexual purposes through information and communication technologies (grooming) (Council of Europe, 2007).<sup>19</sup>

There is also a noted disparity in prevalence rates reported by the criminal justice and law enforcement figures and the national survey samples. Criminal justice agencies often underestimate the severity of this problem due to low rates of victim disclosure and formal reporting of cases (Leclerc & Wortley, 2015; Bellis, et.al., 2013; Chapter Two). Survey-based studies also mainly focus on high-income countries, so there is much less known about how children in low-middle-income countries experience DCSG, especially through the intertwined issue of the production and distribution of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) (Quayle, 2016). The result is a postcode lottery of data, a diversity of data sources, and the disparity between a broad (sexual solicitation and unwanted exposure) versus narrow focus on grooming. We therefore work within an incomplete understanding of the prevalence of DCSG, at best able to provide a partial picture of children’s victimisation online and the factors affecting it (Thorn, 2021).

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a statutorily impermissible relationship, unwanted/non-consensual/pressured sexting and unwanted sexual talk. Figures also span episodes involving peers and other youth, not just between adult perpetrators and child victims.  
<sup>19</sup> The Lanzarote Convention is a Council of Europe multilateral treaty whereby signatory states agree to criminalise certain forms of child sexual abuse.

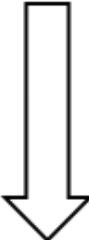
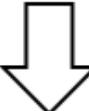
#### **1.4 Words Matter: Debates over Terminology and Definitions**

Debates around terminology are a prominent theme in the literature and there is a bewildering abundance of terms and definitions. Thus far, the terms CSA, CSEA, OCSEA, and OG have all been used. This is a conscious decision to help to ground and situate the research within current policy debates. However, the context of sexual violence and its attendant trauma requires a considered and thoughtful approach recognising terminology matters – we “do things with words” (Austin, 1962). Within a CSA context, terminology choices have tangible impacts on social understandings that shape the responses children receive (Beckett, 2019).

In the UK, the term “online grooming” is widely used with reference to its sexual nature variously included (Kloess et al., 2017). Other scholars use the term “sexual grooming” and avoid the online/offline distinction (Greene-Colozzi et al., 2020). The current lack of definitional clarity not only hinders understandings of what the phenomenon involves but obstructs effective and rapid identification and prosecution of crimes, creates confusion between practitioners, and leaves many children at risk of increased trauma and abuse (ECPAT International, 2016; Ortner, 2006; NCMEC, 2017; We Protect, 2021; Winters et al., 2020). Calls for consistent globally recognised definitions and precision in terminology are growing: “Communication is of critical importance in our efforts to respect, protect and implement the rights of the child...we need to use terms and concepts all actors understand and consider respectful” (ECPAT International, 2016, p. v).

There is also inconsistency and disagreement over what exactly is involved in the process of grooming, with current definitions coalescing around two key themes. These are (i) grooming as a preparatory process; (ii) grooming as manipulation. Table 1.1 depicts the evolution of debates over definitions of DCSG.

**Table 1.1** *An Evolution of Debates Over Definitions of Digital Child Sexual Grooming.*

Theme	Definition(s)	References
<b>Preparatory Precursor to Abuse</b>	“a process by which a person prepares a child, significant adults, and the environment for the abuse of this child.”	Craven, Brown, and Gilchrist (2006, p. 297)
	"sexual grooming characterizes the process of preparation for the abuse of a child, and it is therefore suggested that interactions which move beyond this process more accurately constitute sexual exploitation and abuse rather than grooming."	Kloess et al. (2017b, p. 3)
	“We do freely use the term ‘grooming’ and we recognise that engagement in less severe sexualised activity can groom a child for more severe actions but where possible we restrict our use of the term grooming to its preparatory meaning.”	Chiang and Grant (2017, p. 105)
	<p>See Also: Black et al., 2015; Drouin et al., 2017; Quayle &amp; Newman, 2016; van Gijn-Grosvenor &amp; Lamb, 2021; Williams et al., 2013a; Winters et al., 2017, 2020; Winters &amp; Jeglic, 2017</p>	“A subset of cybersexploitation is grooming, which may or may not involve explicit conversations of a sexual nature, or indeed online enactment of fantasies but still falls under the umbrella of cybersexploitation because the intention is to sexually abuse a child in the real world, but one of the points of contact occurs in cyberspace.”
<b>Manipulation</b>	“An individual builds a relationship, trust and emotional connection with a child or young person to manipulate, exploit and abuse them (facilitated, partly or entirely, by the internet or other wireless communications). There is not always an intent to meet in person.	We Protect (2021, p. 11)
	“the term sexual grooming typically refers to the process by which an offender skilfully manipulates a potential victim into situations in which sexual abuse can be more readily committed, while simultaneously preventing disclosure.”	Greene-Colozzi et al. (2020, p. 856)
	“...an internet-enabled communicative process of entrapment in which an adult uses language and other semiotic modes (e.g. images) to lure a minor into taking part in sexual activities online and, at times, also offline.”	Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2020, p. 16)
<b>Grooming Talk AS Harm/Abuse</b>	Digital Grooming is: “digitally mediated identity construction that manipulates a target into acting in a manner that both advances the groomers illicit goals and harms the target and/or others.”	Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2023, p. 32)
		

As Table 1.1 shows, despite some recognition of the harm caused by grooming as a process of manipulation, there remain few definitions which attempt to capture exactly what groomer manipulation entails and how it is mediated. This need for greater clarity has been attended to by Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2023, p. 8) who define online grooming as “a practice of communicative manipulation, specifically an adult’s use of technology-mediated communication comprising multiple modes to get a child to partake in sexual activities online and at times also offline.” This definition connects the groomers’ communicative manipulation using language and other semiotic modes to the harm it causes. Seeing the connections rather than the distinctions between the experiences of sexual abuse aligns with the PHA to situate grooming as part of a spectrum of sexual violence.

This grooming-as-harm perspective demands careful thought about “the language of victimisation” (Melrose 2013, p. 159). The choice between child, victim, target, or survivor is not straightforward. CSEA<sup>20</sup> literature highlights the word “victim” is fused with connotations of the child as “object”, thus passive, which undermines any conception of them possessing communicative and social agency (Melrose, 2013). Deleting the child’s agency constructs the victim as helpless, passive, and in need of rescue, unable to exert any degree of influence over their circumstance or experience (Beckett, 2019). Furthermore, the victim/object construction leads to a harmful individualistic perspective, whereby CSE is seen to hinge on individual morality/immorality. This leads to a focus on “individual redemption” (Pearce, 2009, p. 353) which places the onus either on the child to change their behaviour (Beckett, 2019) or on the scandal or demonisation of the perpetrator (Jewkes & Wykes, 2012a; McGlynn et al., 2021). It also suggests a homogeneity among CSA victims, which belies the research evidence (Dodsworth, 2022). This focus on the individuals involved occludes and detracts from the broader socio-ecological systemic view (Dodsworth, 2022; Hallett, 2016, 2017).

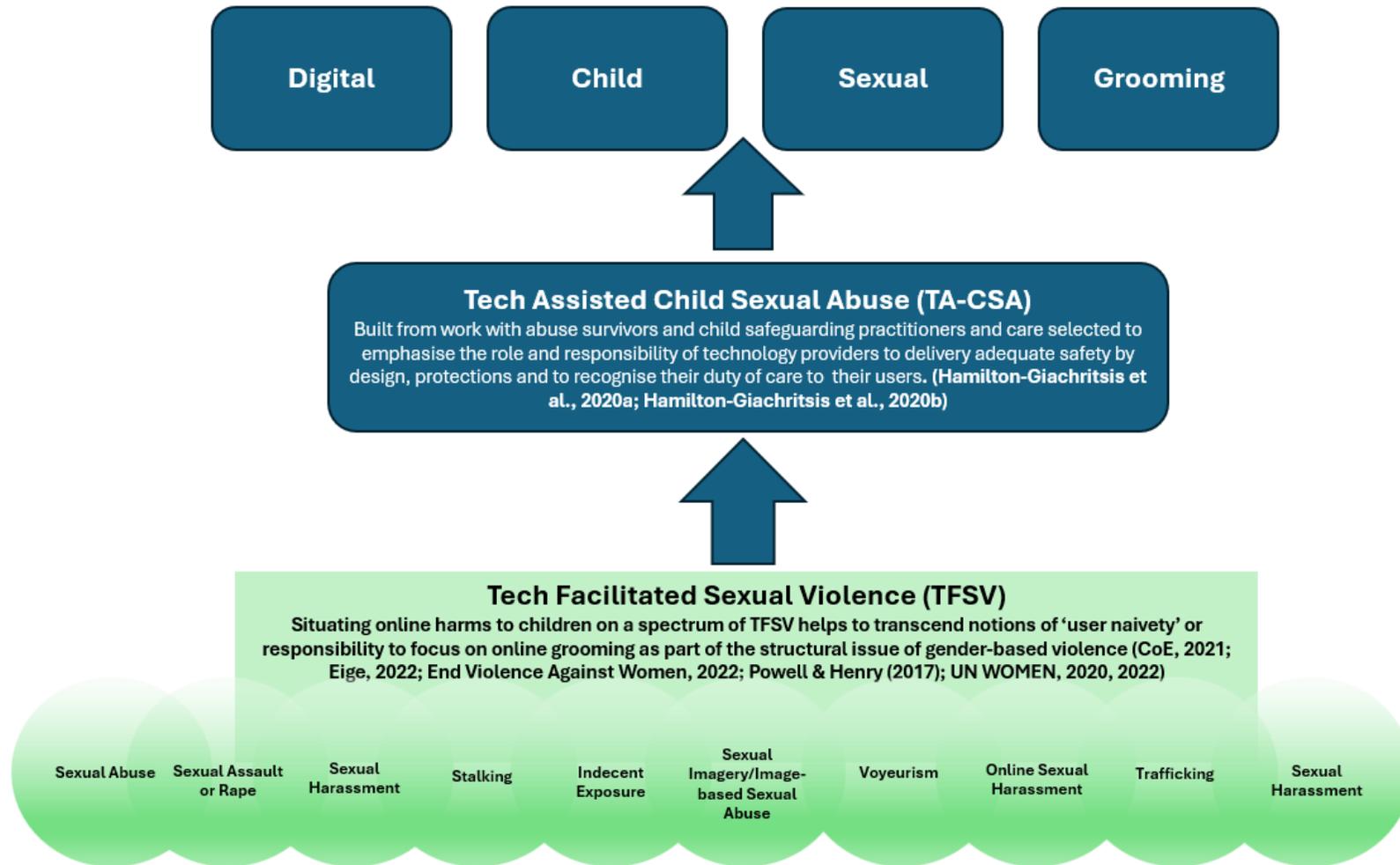
Set against this far from conclusive and heavily loaded definitional landscape, a conscious and carefully considered decision has been taken on the terms used

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<sup>20</sup> With CSE understood as a subcategory of CSA, which is also the focus of vigorous debates about terminology.

throughout this thesis. Figure 1.4 depicts the definitional layers underpinning the adoption of the term Digital Child Sexual Grooming (DCSG) as a form of Technology-Assisted Child Sexual Abuse (TA-CSA), itself a form of Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence (TASV).

**Figure 1.4** Terminology Selected for Use Throughout the Thesis



TA-CSA was chosen to build recognition of the term, and to stand alongside the movement to equip practitioners with clear terminology to accurately describe the realities and range of abuse involved, drawn from the child’s lived experience (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2020a, 2020b). This does not detract from the PHA’s system wide focus (Section 1.3) but rather helps to spotlight the role of technological providers as central players in the “system” surrounding the child and the need for them to recognise themselves as such. The use of “digital” in DCSG addresses some of the identified issues with the use of “online” to support understanding of the breadth of modes and platforms exploited by groomers. Secondly, the addition of “child” to extend Lorenzo-Dus’ (2023) conceptualisation of “digital sexual grooming” centres the child. It is also designed to emphasise the sexual grooming in question is perpetrated by an adult against a minor and is therefore illegal, an act of sexual violence (Tech-Facilitated Sexual Violence; TFSV) and a contravention of children’s fundamental rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).<sup>21</sup> To avoid confusion and to aid clarification of what DCSG constitutes (Jeglic, 2022), namely an abusive process on a spectrum of sexual violence against a child, this thesis uses the term “child” in line with the UNCRC definition: a person under 18 years of age.<sup>22</sup> “Groomer” is used to refer to an adult who, through children’s discourse, appears to have committed the offence of online sexual communication with a child. The broader terms “offender” and “perpetrator” are also used (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023). This terminology will be used henceforth.

### **1.5 Raising Children’s Voices: The Missing Perspective**

Much of the research and proposed public policy response to the social problem of TA-CSA, particularly DCSG, is limited by the failure to recognise it as a communicative practice (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023). As will be explored in Chapter Two, some research is starting to build a communicative focus. However, this thesis

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<sup>21</sup> **Article 19** (protection from violence, abuse and neglect). Governments must do all they can to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and bad treatment by their parents or anyone else who looks after them. **Article 34** (sexual exploitation) Governments must protect children from all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation. [UNCRC\\_summary-1\\_1.pdf](#)

<sup>22</sup> See UNCRC Definition: For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/unicef-convention-rights-child-uncrc.pdf>

builds on understandings and discourse-based definitions of DCSG as a *discursive* practice, which emphasise the centrality of the groomer's manipulation and therefore the interactional and relational dynamics at play (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2020). A discursive explanation of DCSG therefore requires close examination of the interactional dynamics between *all* social agents involved (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023). As will be examined in Chapter Two, work to date applies Goffman's concept of facework (1967) and relational work (Locher & Watts, 2005, 2008; Spencer-Oatey, 2000, 2005, 2008) to the context of DCSG to help frame the interrogation of communicative negotiation between social agents governed by wider structural and societal systems (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). In parallel, a PHA also requires consideration of how interactional dynamics are shaped by structural oppression (Childlight, 2024). Thus far, the study of interactants' agency in DCSG has almost exclusively focused on analysis of the *groomer's* wielding of manipulative communication, with little attention given to the child's discourse or communicative agency in DCSG contexts.

Ahearn (2010, p. 29) defines agency as the “socioculturally mediated capacity to act.” This definition emphasises the need to recognise human actions are fundamentally shaped by social structure (Ahearn, 2001, 2010, 2021). Actors are thus never “entirely free agents nor completely socially determined products” (Ahearn, 2010, p. 34). Language and its use are integral to the performance of agency and is a core means by which actors agitate and disrupt the systems and structures that produce them (Ahearn, 2001; Ortnner, 2006). The role of “intentionality” or goal-directed action is therefore highlighted by some scholars (Ahearn, 2010; Duranti, 2004; Ortnner, 2006). Kockleman et al. (2007, p. 375) see agency as a “relatively flexible wielding of means towards ends.”

The assertion “any act of speaking requires agency” (Duranti, 2004, p.451) suggests both groomer and child possess the agentive capacity to act. They are involved in a fluid process of assertion and negotiation in their performance of goal-driven agency, albeit structurally mediated and constrained to differing degrees. To fully understand DCSG as a *sui generis* process of manipulation and identity (re)negotiation (Lorenzo-Dus 2023), the agency of both groomer and child needs to be recognised and analysed.

Acknowledging child victims of abuse as social and communicative agents, however, is not straightforward and needs to be anchored in care and sensitivity. Discussions of children's linguistic "agency" need to be positioned within debates in child safeguarding, the nature of victimhood and agency, consent, and constraint for children who experience CSEA in all its forms (Beckett, 2019; Dodsworth, 2022; Pearce, 2019; Sidebotham, 2013; Taylor, 2020). The agent/victim dichotomy is increasingly being challenged, with a growing literature highlighting the negative impact it has on the levels of support children receive, leading to documented shortcomings in response to children (e.g., Beckett, 2019; Hallett, 2017; Jay, 2014; Ofsted, 2014, 2016). These dichotomies are criticised as leading to a "failure to recognise, and work with, the potential co-existence of both agency and constraint, both harm and gain" (Beckett, 2019, p.24).

While these positions were developed referring to a broad CSEA perspective, they have yet to be systematically explored and applied to the specific context of TA-CSA. The specific characteristics of the TA-CSA context makes challenging prevailing macro-discourses and social constructions of victimhood/agency particularly important. In the case of DCSG, this study aligns with the dialectic that both agency and blameless victimisation co-exist and are most usefully understood together (Dodsworth, 2022; Hanson, 2019; Hanson & Holmes, 2014; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023; Sidebotham, 2013). As Beckett (2019, p. 34) emphasises, in these contexts' agency is highly constrained and externally influenced: "it does however exist, and a failure to recognise this will lead to continued overlooking of potential harm in situations where the child may appear and/or feel themselves to be in control."

This study therefore views children as "reflexive knowledge agents", individuals whose agency is a "resource through which they can seek to minimise harm and maximise benefit, within the complex and difficult situations in which they find themselves" (Beckett, 2019, p. 34). Most children who experience CSEA, including TA-CSA, have the capacity to evaluate circumstances, identify goals, select preferred options (albeit from a possibly limited palette), and implement steps to pursue them (Beckett, 2019).

## 1.6 Research Aims and Questions

There are two overarching aims of this research. The first responds to the urgency set out in previous sections of adopting a PHA to combat the intensifying child protection crisis of TA-CSA and will bring missing perspectives to understandings of DCSG through the study of children's discourse. The second is to anchor findings in the current research landscape and explore how they add value and support a public health response to DCSG. The thesis predominantly draws on textual data from chat transcripts provided by a UK child counselling helpline and supplements the analysis with real-life child <-> groomer chats. This approach addresses a current research gap as no study has taken a discourse analytic approach to studying children's reflections and perspectives of their DCSG experiences through their own words and logic in the English language.

Each of the two overarching aims is broken down into two sub-aims and each of these is aligned to a research question.

Aim 1: To further validate existing linguistic models of groomer DCSG communication by exploring them through children's discourse.

*RQ1: How far do children identify communicative tactics and sub-tactics of the Online Grooming Discourse Model within the groomer's discourse?*

This aim focuses on validating and extending understandings of DCSG as a communicative practice of *sui generis* manipulation as set out in the "Online Grooming Discourse Model (OGDM)" developed and revised by Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2016, 2020, 2023). While the model has been empirically tested and validated across different datasets, it has yet to be explored from the perspective of the child.

Aim 2: To explore children's perspectives of groomer facework.

*RQ2: How far do children identify the facework work used by groomers during Digital Child Sexual Grooming?*

This aim is addressed by coding children's discourse against (im)politeness analytical frameworks (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Culpeper, 1996, 2010, 2016) to explore children's ability to identify and rationalise the facework used by groomers in DCSG interactions.

Aim 3: Capture and elucidate children's affective responses triggered by their experiences of DCSG and groomer communication.

*RQ3: What are the emotions expressed in children's discourse triggered by Digital Child Sexual Grooming and groomer communication?*

Children's emotion discourse is analysed using a goal-driven revision of the AFFECT domain in Appraisal theory (Benitez-Castro & Hidalgo-Tenorio, 2019; Martin & White, 2005). This fills a research gap as no study has reconciled the unique, self-altering impacts of TA-CSA, including DCSG, with how communicative agents use relational work to manage self-presentation and pursue goals.

Aim 4: To explore children's awareness of their own communicative behaviours in DCSG contexts and develop a framework to support its analysis in future research.

*RQ4: How far are children aware of their own communicative behaviours in Digital Child Sexual Grooming and how do they discursively reflect on particular features?*

A further contribution to linguistics scholarship is through the "remixed" application of various linguistics models to enable the study of children's perspectives and lived experiences of DSCG through their discourse (Markham, 2013). In many cases these models have never been applied to children's discourse, nor have they been combined to shed light on the complexities of lived experiences of sexual violence and how these may impact individual outcomes.

## **1.7 Organisation of the Thesis**

This thesis is structured to prioritise the child's voice. Chapter Two examines the existing literature, highlighting research gaps in understanding the child's perspective and employing a linguistic approach to studying DCSG. The review also underscores the growing interest in qualitative methods for capturing children's

voices and perspectives on their experiences. It emphasises the unique contributions a discourse-based approach can make to enrich and expand current knowledge. The methodology chapter (Chapter Three) outlines the counselling and law enforcement data sets studied and the procedure and frameworks used to analyse them. The four empirical chapters explore children's discourse about their experiences of DCSG to explore how the child's sense of self is (de)constructed through the manipulative process of grooming. Chapter Four begins by exploring RQ1, how far children identify the OGDM "tactics" (communicative strategies) used by groomers during DCSG. Chapter Five concerns RQ2 using (im)politeness theory to analyse children's discourse about the facework they identify to be used by groomers. Chapters Six and Seven place the child and their voice at the core of an extension of current research into DCSG processes. Chapter Six uses Appraisal Theory to study the affective impact on the child of the groomer's communication as manifested in their discourse. Chapter Seven concerns the child's reflections on their own communicative behaviour exploring how their discourse reflects their engagement and resistance communicative behaviours. The thesis concludes in Chapter Eight by drawing together the findings of the empirical chapters taking an applied view, suggesting how children's discourse may add further insights to enhance the project of building evidence-based public health responses to DCSG, as well as exploring research limitations and identifying avenues for further research.

## **1.8 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced the hidden pandemic of TA-CSA, a child protection emergency. It argued DCSG, as a communicative process, needs to be explored as core to the problem and the solutions required. Discourse Analysis of children's discourse about their DCSG interactions was outlined as a novel approach to gather missing insights to build a clearer picture of children's lived experience. The next chapter reviews extant literature to situate this study in the current research landscape to explore the research gaps this research contributes to addressing.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature concerned with children's language use in and about DCSG, specifically the extant research and key gaps in knowledge when situating DCSG as a discursive process. Section 2.1 begins by mapping current understandings of DCSG as an inherently relational process whereby both interactants, adult and child, engage in a complex process of performance of their communicative agency. This explores concepts of facework (Goffman, 1967; Locher & Watts, 2005, 2008; Spencer-Oatey, 2000, 2005, 2008) as they have been applied to DCSG to conceptualise the phenomena as communicative negotiation between social agents governed by wider structural and societal systems (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). Research in sociopragmatics is then "remixed" (Markham, 2016) alongside emergent thinking in social policy and child safeguarding about the concept of children's agency in TA-CSA contexts.

Section 2.1.1 provides an overview of extant research into groomer communicative behaviour. This looks at the evolution towards a linguistic focus on DCSG as a communicative process and then explores the main linguistic models of DCSG proposed, particularly highlighting the work of Lorenzo-Dus and colleagues (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016, 2020, 2023) who, over a decade of research, have pioneered the OGD, i.e., the first discourse-based, identity-foregrounded model of DCSG, as a process of manipulative communication.

The OGD was developed through extensive analysis of groomer communication. Section 2.1.2 therefore explores research into children's perspectives and communicative behaviours in DCSG contexts. The section starts with a review of children's experiences of DCSG, highlighting a focus within the literature on prevalence, risk, and vulnerability. Next, research using qualitative approaches to gather children's experiences in their own words is reviewed. This identifies three core research areas: (i) children's perspectives about the grooming process and groomer strategies; (ii) children's perspectives about their own behaviours (engagement, resilience, coping and resistance, and seeking help); (iii) the impacts of DCSG.

The final section (2.3) explores the research evidence about the various constraints shaping the communicative agency of children in DCSG interactions. This looks at how factors such as (2.3.1) adolescent development (2.3.2), sexualisation and sexual cultures (2.3.3), digitally mediated development (2.3.4), and characteristics of TA-CSA (2.3.5) may intersect to constrain and mitigate a child's communicative agency. Finally, a notion of a resulting face fragility is introduced (2.3.6), which suggests the need for analysing children's discourse to fill the current gap in understanding about the factors shaping a child's face in DCSG contexts.

## **2.2 Digital Child Sexual Grooming: Agents Involved**

Discourse-based definitions of DCSG emphasise the centrality of the groomer's manipulation and therefore the relational dynamics at play (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016, 2020). This has been achieved through application of concepts of face/facework (Goffman, 1967). The DCSG-as-communicative-manipulation approach spearheaded by Lorenzo-Dus combines linguistics theories such as politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987), impoliteness (Culpeper, 1996, 2011), rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2000, 2008), and relational work (Locher & Watts, 2005, 2008). When highlighting the relational dynamics involved in groomers' communicative manipulation, Lorenzo-Dus (2023) draws on the Goffmanian definition of face as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" and sees facework as referring to "the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face" (Goffman, 1956, p. 12). Face/facework provide effective concepts for researching how we present ourselves in our interactions through complex patterns of evaluation of the self, versus the other, tied closely to the lines or roles we think, intend, or desire our interactants to associate with us and the version of self we are aiming to present (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023).

Within the so-called "discursive turn" and subsequently "third-wave" approaches to (im)politeness, the "intrinsic synergy between face, face-work and identity" is increasingly recognised (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2022, p.2; see also Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Sifianou, 2017, 2019; Ogiermann & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich,

2019). This echoes calls by Hall and Bucholtz (2013, p.130) to recognise “face-work, at once rational and emotional, is fundamental to the workings of identity, as human positioning is always sensitive to the reflection of one’s image in the eyes of another.”

Within these third-wave understandings, context became core to conceptualisations of face, with scholars taking an increasingly genre-based orientation (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010, 2013). This saw face as “the authenticity/self-worth/self-efficacy attributes associated with one’s identity” and acknowledged that “the needs associated with it will change as different subject positions are intersubjectively co-constituted” (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2022, p.16). Although Hall and Bucholtz (2013) allude that (im)politeness and facework impact/are impacted by emotions, few studies within sociopragmatics have systematically explored the link between emotion and relational work (Alba-Juez, 2021; Langlotz & Locher, 2013; Spencer-Oatey, 2013; Terkourafi, 2005, 2019; Terkourafi et al., 2020). Culpeper (2011) argues impoliteness can almost universally result in feelings of anger and hurt, while politeness can lead to a diverse array of emotions. For an overview of work critiquing universality claims in (im)politeness theory, see Leech (2005). As a still under-researched area, analysis of how emotions shape and are shaped by manifestations of (im)politeness and facework within relational work is a useful research avenue to explore further in the context of children’s discourse within and about DCSG (Chapter Five).

When it comes to power, particularly differentials in power, its lack of systematic treatment within (im)politeness has been noted (e.g., Leezenberg, 2021, for an overview). Locher (2004) remains one of few studies to link politeness to power, while the growth of interest in impoliteness led some scholars to cautiously explore questions of how impoliteness may be used to exert power and coercion (Culpeper, 2011a; Leezenberg, 2021; Locher & Bousfield, 2008). Despite a scarcity of attention, within third-wave relational work, face, identity, emotion, and power are beginning to be understood as distinct but intertwined; to be fluid, relational, and context bound (Angouri & Locher, 2012; Angouri & Tseliga, 2010; Krikela, 2021; Locher & Watts, 2005). Within this growing appreciation of the interplay between facework/relational work enmeshed with identity and dynamics of power and emotion, the genre-based

approach adopted by this study, exploring children's perceptions and performance of relational work within the context of DCSG interactions, puts the research at the nexus of contemporary debates.

DCSG is a practice of manipulation of a child by a groomer. This manipulation entails complex self-and-other identity negotiation between two communicative agents who are differentially facilitated and constrained by societal and structural forces. The following sections therefore explore extant research and identify research gaps about (2.2.1) groomer communicative behaviour and (2.2.2) child communicative behaviour, respectively.

### ***2.2.1 Groomer Communicative Behaviours in Digital Child Sexual Grooming Contexts***

A core aim of this thesis is to address the lack of focus on the child victim in DCSG research. Much of the extant research on DCSG has drawn on decoy data (Chapter Three) rather than real-life groomer <-> child interactions. This scarcity of textual data of children's discourse may have contributed to the current imbalance towards analysis of groomer communication within the literature.

A core focus for research has been an attempt to profile and ascertain the motivations and reasons individuals sexually groom children online and has led to the development of various typologies based on offender's motivations (Briggs et al., 2011; Broome et al., 2018; Davidson & Gottschalk, 2011; Gottschalk, 2010; Gottschalk et al., 2011; Martellozzo, 2013; Seto, 2019; Webster et al., 2012) and the different modes of abuse they use (Beech et al., 2008). Within the grey literature, an emergent offender behaviour receiving focus is sextortion.<sup>23</sup> This has been defined as comprising threats to share nude or sexual images to coerce the victim into complying with certain demands, such as financial demands, sharing intimate images, or engaging in unwanted sexual acts (Ray & Henry, 2024). Some academic research is emerging, although it has generally focused on prevalence rather than the

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<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., [NCA issues urgent warning about 'sextortion' - National Crime Agency](#); [Two-thirds of Gen Z targeted for online "sextortion" - New Snap research - WeProtect Global Alliance](#); [Pressure builds worldwide for legal protection against sextortion | International Bar Association](#); [The rise of sextortion and responses to a growing crime - WeProtect Global Alliance](#)

nature and impacts of sextortion with studies suggesting that older children aged 14-17 and boys may be particularly at risk (Childlight-Global Safety Institute, 2024; IWF, 2023; Ray & Henry, 2024; Wolak et al., 2018). There have been some NGO attempts to capture children's perspectives of sextortion (NSPCC, 2024a). No study has yet explored sextortion as a communicative or discursive process, although there is some recognition of the behaviours as part of DCSG.<sup>24</sup>

Lorenzo-Dus (2023) highlighted groomer participation networks as a kind of “meta-perspective” providing a groomer-eye-view of the processes involved in groomer <-> interactions. The research differentiates between either (i) one-to-one participation frameworks (characterised and facilitated by the digital and technological context) which often use a so-called “scattergun approach”(Chiang & Grant, 2019) whereby groomers contact large numbers of children simultaneously and may adopt shape-shifting personas based on the child's response or (ii) digital communities of sexual groomers. Linguistic analysis of digital communities is scarce, but distinctive features of groomer's communication have been identified. Groomers are found to discuss their perspectives and motivations for DCSG, showing considerable added value and insights gleaned from researching these networks (Aldridge & Luchjenbroers, 2011; Chiang, 2021; Holt et al., 2019; Marsh-Rossney & Lorenzo-Dus, 2022).

**Grooming Models.** Most research into DCSG has attempted to model the steps, processes, and components involved, namely how the groomer entraps the child they target. This has led to the development of various models of DCSG derived from an analysis of groomer behaviour (see Winters et al., 2020, for an overview of “sexual grooming” models, online and offline). These models aim to deconstruct the components, including different combinations of what are variously termed “themes” or “tactics.” Tactics are often conceived as the pursuit of manipulative goals including building trust, separating children from support networks and loved ones, ascertaining their levels of compliance with groomer goals to induce the child to behave in particular ways, assessing the risk of detection and exposure, and at times arranging offline meetings to instigate contact sexual abuse

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<sup>24</sup> [Research Insights: Grooming and sextortion - Thorn](#)

(Egan et al., 2011; Joleby et al., 2021; Kloess et al., 2014a, 2017a, 2017b; O’Connell, 2003; van Gijn-Grosvenor & Lamb, 2021; Williams et al., 2013; Winters & Jeglic, 2017). This research is generally built on thematic and content analysis and tends to conceive of DCSG as a sequential, stage-based linear process (Black et al., 2015; Gupta et al., 2012). There have been some attempts to gain a panorama of existing knowledge about grooming strategies by comparing strategies pre- and post-internet (Ringenberg et al., 2022). These found some important differences but also increasing permeability between online and offline child sexual grooming aided by technology.

Scholarly attention to linguistic analysis of groomer’s DCSG communicative behaviour is more recent. As linguistic analyses of groomer communication developed, sequential understandings of the grooming process were replaced with perspectives of groomer communicative tactics as non-sequential, overlapping, and intertwined. Chiang and Grant (2017, 2019) adopted a genre analysis approach. Their work drew on 20 DCSG chatlogs from the Perverted Justice website (Chiang & Grant, 2017) and one transcript of a single offender interacting with 20 different children (Chiang & Grant, 2019). Their 2017 study identified 14 rhetorical moves deployed by groomers,<sup>25</sup> and their 2019 study identified two further moves – overt persuasion and extortion – which they ascribe to the authentic child discourse studied in the second study.

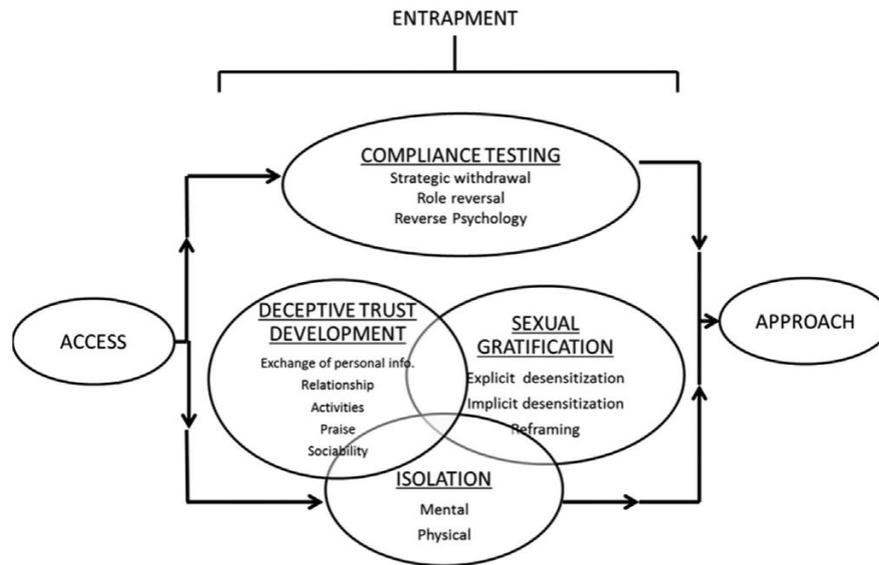
The first, and only attempt to date, to model digital sexual grooming discourse was proposed by Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2016). This model adopted a digital discourse analysis framework (Herring, 2004; Herring, 2013) underpinned by a focus on relational work (Locher & Watts, 2008). The model was initially derived from an analysis of Groomers’ language use in 24 Perverted Justice chatlogs (c.75,000 words). The original model (see Fig 2.1) conceived of grooming as occurring in three phases: access, entrapment, and approach. ACCESS concerned the groomer’s initial processes of contacting the child and approach concerned arranging a face-to-face meeting with the child. The entrapment phase was further divided into four main

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<sup>25</sup> These were: greeting, maintaining conversation, meeting planning, reprimanding, sign-off, rapport, assessing, likelihood and extent of engagement, assessing criteria fulfilment, assessing and managing risk, assessing role, sexual rapport, initiating sexual topics, maintaining/escalating sexual content, and immediate sexual gratification.

strategies: Deceptive Trust Development (DTD), Compliance Testing (CT), Sexual Gratification (SG), and Isolation (IS). These tactics each comprised a series of sub-tactics as outlined at Figure 2.1.

**Figure 2.1** *The Online Grooming Discourse Model (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016, p.44)*

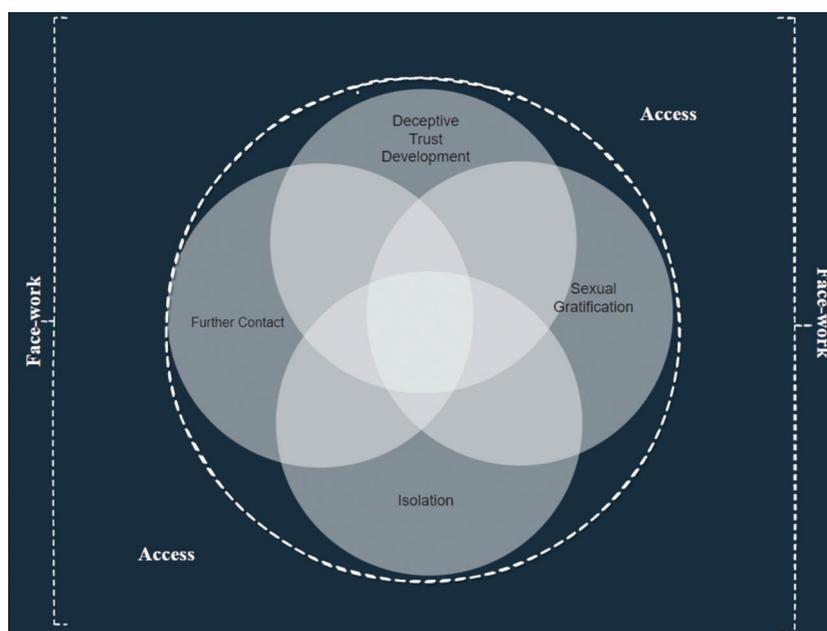


Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2016) conducted statistical tests to ascertain the frequency of these tactics in groomer discourse and the inter-relations between them. DTD was found to be the most frequent and was argued to be foundational since it allowed the groomer to pursue the other strategies. Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2016) emphasised an interdependent network of entrapment rather than previous conceptions of a stage-based, sequential process.

The model was extended and validated using a Corpus Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) methodology by Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2020) and Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2023) based on, respectively, an examination of the entire Perverted Justice dataset and approximately 80 law enforcement digital sexual grooming chatlogs (c. 120,000 words [tokens]) derived from DCSG (between 2014-2019). These were sampled from a half a million-word corpus, secured as part of a UK law enforcement data-sharing agreement for research purposes. This extended analysis renamed the strategies as tactics and sub-tactics and confirmed the presence of all but one of the tactics with salient frequency within both datasets. Compliance testing was found to

be more complex than initially identified.<sup>26</sup> The revised model of DCSG discourse is represented in Figure 2.2. Findings validating the OGDM reinforce DCSG (sub)tactics as non-sequential and highly intertwined; once contact has been established via access, groomers utilise their arsenal of sub-tactics in no pre-ordained order, and due to their multifunctionality, sections of discourse align to multiple sub-tactics simultaneously.

**Figure 2.2** *Digital Sexual Grooming Discourse Model (Lorenzo-Dus et al.2023, p.27)*



Having established and validated a replicable model for the analysis of groomer discourse it was extended and applied to different facets of the grooming process. A CADS methodology was used to analyse groomer language in the entire Perverted Justice dataset (Kinzel, 2021; Lorenzo-Dus & Kinzel, 2019). Request-realisation and how compliments function (Lorenzo-Dus & Izura, 2017) as well as keywords used by groomers were found to be operationalised to communicate and mask sexual intent (Evans and Lorenzo-Dus, Under Review). These were mapped against different linguistic realisation categories and pragmatic features.<sup>27</sup> Quality-

<sup>26</sup> It was found that rather than operating as a stand-alone tactic the groomer's assessment of a child's compliance and levels and likelihood of acquiescence to their communicative goals occurred throughout the interaction. It was aligned to all the tactics and was operationalised using facework.

<sup>27</sup> Five linguistic realisation categories (Zhang, 2011, 2013) were identified in digital child sexual groomers discourse: Approximator-Quality (like, hold, fun, bed, feel, love, kiss), Vague Category Identifier (stuff, thing), De-intensifier (cute, pretty, sweet, nice), General Verb (do, get), and Explicit-Vague Category Identifier (sex stuff, sexual thing).

Approximators, followed by Vague Identifiers were most frequently used. Findings about Groomers' use of vague language further evidenced the manipulative and covert nature of groomer's communication of sexual intent, deliberately aiming to deceive and confuse children. However, no study has yet explored how vague language is used by children in their discourse about DCSG experiences.

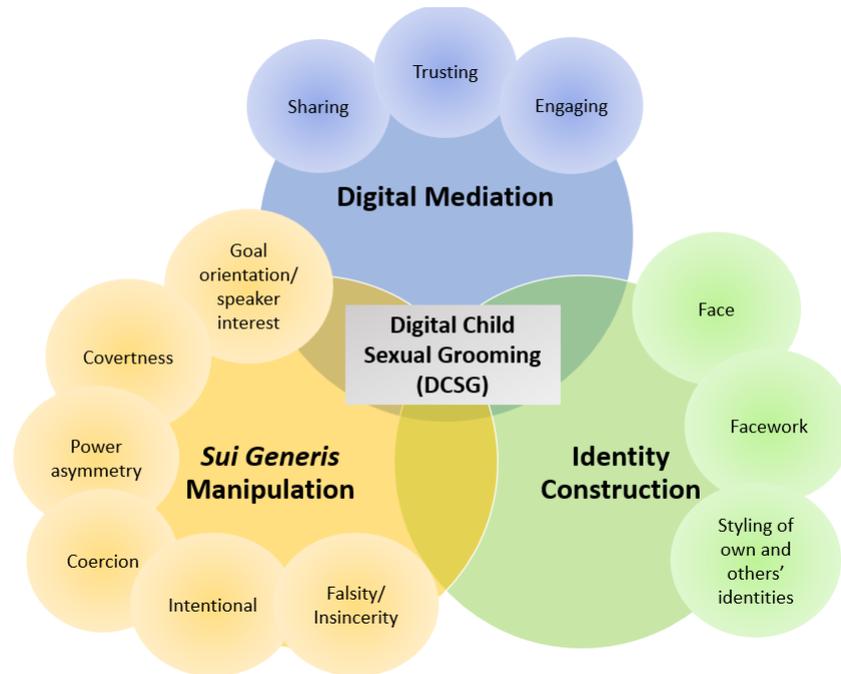
The discourse-focused analysis of DCSG also identified it was interwoven with complex facework (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2020, 2023). Groomer's facework was found to pivot rapidly between what Lorenzo-Dus (2023) calls "nice" and "nasty" talk realised by intricate discourse politeness (Brown & Levinson 1978/87) and impoliteness strategies (Culpeper, 2011).

Lorenzo-Dus (2023, p. 54) brings together almost a decade of research to argue the merits of a qualitative, "identity-foregrounded approach". The resulting proposed taxonomy presented in Figure 2.3 emphasises three interconnected core characteristics, digital mediation, manipulation, and identity construction, as core to the different types of digital manipulation identified.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> These are Digital Sexual Grooming, Digital Commercial Grooming and Digital Ideological grooming.

**Figure 2.3** *Taxonomy of Digital Child Sexual Grooming as One Form of Digital Grooming (developed based on Lorenzo-Dus, 2023)*



Lorenzo-Dus (2023) examines a process of identity construction from the perspective of the groomer: she explores the groomer’s intentional and careful construction of their social identities through self-styling and attempts to style their targets and perceived opponents. This approach extends previous studies which suggest online anonymity allows TA-CSA offenders to shape their online identities to present themselves positively (Choo, 2009; Webster et al., 2012). This is analysed through the identification of a suite of stances aligned to each of the styling acts identified. The manipulative nature of groomer communication in the combination of complex intertwining of tactics, pivoting between “nice” and “nasty” facework and pre-meditated veiling of sexual intent through vague language, are all hypothesised to be extremely challenging for children to rationalise and negotiate, and have been suggested to impact feelings of self-blame and contribute to substantial trauma (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023). However, a detailed linguistics discourse-based analysis of how these feelings and trauma manifest in children’s discourse has not yet been conducted and would be a core contribution of this present thesis. These approaches to profiling, modelling, and situating DCSG have greatly progressed knowledge about how the grooming process may operate and have been developed into applied practice improvement tools and training, notably through

Project DRAGON-S at Swansea University.<sup>29</sup> A growing recognition of grooming as a communicative process and a commitment to exploring it as a discourse-driven process of identity construction has created a conceptual and empirical platform of identifiable tactics replicable and testable in future research.

However, this empirical base has been predominantly built on an analysis of adult offender communicative behaviour. Although research into DCSG from the child's vantage point has been growing (Section 2.3), the same focused and systematic study of children's discourse in groomer <-> interactions has not yet been conducted. Recognising both adult and child as communicative agents, as set out in Chapter One, also suggests the need to assess how the interactional dynamics of alignments and tensions between groomer and child goals and intentions operate. Gaining a deeper understanding of how DCSG interactional dynamics operate and how they impact the child and shape their behaviours and thus outcomes has received little attention in research to date and will be a key contribution of this present research. The next section will consider the research landscape concerning children's communicative behaviour in DCSG.

### ***2.2.2 Child Communicative Behaviours: What do we know?***

The emergence of DCSG and TA-CSA as a pressing and still little understood social issue created a policy imperative to build an empirical evidence base about the characteristics, vulnerabilities, and risk factors associated with digital harm to children (See Chapter One). The resulting literature can be divided into three core research foci discussed in the sub-sections below namely: classification of risk; vulnerability and victim typologies; and understanding children's lived experience.

**Classifying Risk Online to Children.** The focus on better classifying the risks to children online was driven by a policy need to inform preventative approaches. The "4Cs" (Content, Conduct, Contact, and more recently Contract) classification is now

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<sup>29</sup> DRAGON (**D**eveloping **R**esistance **A**gainst **G**rooming **O**nline) is a digital technology innovation programme hosting a growing portfolio of research projects that improve practices to keep children safe from technology-assisted sexual exploitation and abuse, including online grooming. See: [Project DRAGON-S - Developing Resistance Against Grooming Online - Swansea University](#).

widely applied and understood (Hasebrink & Livingstone, 2009a; Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009; Stoilova & Livingstone, 2021).<sup>30</sup>

**Child Victim Vulnerability and Characteristics.** A related research focus has been to try to identify child victim characteristics underpinning vulnerabilities to TA-CSA including DCSG. The TA-CSA victim vulnerability literature, as on prevalence, represents a diverse and disjointed evidence base developed from diverse samples and methodological approaches. Several rapid and systematic reviews of TA-CSA victim characteristics have emerged (Ainsaar & Loof, 2011; Bryce et al., 2023; May-Chahal & Palmer, 2018; Ospina et al., 2010; Whittle, 2014). These reviews broadly identify an interplay between behavioural (“risk-taking” offline behaviours), interpersonal (i.e., relationships with parents and caregivers), psychological (such as mental health issues), and environmental (family structure; homelessness or running away from home; household socio-economic status; quality of relationship with parents; parental monitoring) as shaping vulnerability. As with prevalence and risk classification research, a focus on children’s vulnerabilities to the specific characteristics of DCSG as a communicative process remains rare.

Children’s vulnerabilities to DCSG have been analysed by some studies which emphasise the importance of focusing on the child’s perspective (Whittle et al., 2014, 2015; Whittle & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2013). This work was grounded in wider CSA research traditions and applied the socio-ecological model of child protection (see e.g. Figure 1.1).<sup>31</sup> Whittle et al. (2013) posit abuse rests on a complex meshing of overlapping factors: the child, the relationship with those around them, their community, and culture.

The various reviews help the researcher to navigate the diversity of studies into TA-CSA risk/vulnerability factors but each review (Ainsaar & Loof, 2011; May-Chahal & Palmer, 2018; Ospina et al., 2010; Whittle & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2013) provides

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<sup>30</sup> The introduction of a fourth ‘C’ (contract), has been added to reflect the development of digital technologies since the original typology was created. Designed to consolidate recent debates over risk classification and to capture new risks to children of commercialisation and datafication.

<sup>31</sup> The Ecological Model was first proposed by (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and developed by (Belsky, 1980; Lynch & Cicchetti, 1998) to explain the co-occurrence of vulnerabilities and to support the exploration of potential protective factors for offline child sexual abuse. It conceives the ecology or environment around the child as a series of interconnected spheres each representing contextual factors that are overlapping and set within each other.

different presentations of the empirical knowledge shaped by the perspective chosen by their authors. Different (if at times overlapping) categories of vulnerability and victim characteristics are presented. Despite this age, gender, and sexuality emerge as the most consistent indicators of vulnerability to TA-CSA/DCSG.<sup>32</sup>

Older youth/adolescents (aged 13–17 years old) seem to be at elevated risk to online sexual solicitations (Baumgartner et al., 2010; Finkelhor et al., 2009; Quayle et al., 2012). This represents a considerably narrower age profile than found in studies of offline CSA (Wolak et al., 2008). Access, higher levels of internet use, increased curiosity and experimentation about sex and sexuality, and a developmental predisposition to engage in risk-taking behaviour amongst this age group are all identified as key explanatory factors (Baumgartner et al., 2010; Livingstone et al., 2011; Quayle et al., 2012; Whittle et al., 2013; Wolak et al., 2008). It is important to note these patterns could have shifted in recent years due to the increased availability of portable devices with internet connectivity such as smartphones and tablets, and some of the youngest groups of children (3-4 years and 5-7 years) are now using devices to access the internet for a number of hours each week (Ofcom, 2017, 2022). Some studies show victims as young as 5 years old may be being exposed to these offences (Reeves et al., 2014, 2018).

With regards to gender, girls have been consistently shown to be at greater risk for all forms of tech-assisted sexual solicitation, abuse, and exploitation (Baumgartner et al., 2010; Davidson et al., 2017; IWF, 2020; Katz et al., 2018; Livingstone et al., 2017; Mitchell et al., 2007; Murthi & Espelage, 2005; NSPCC, 2021). There is growing international recognition of DCSG as “cyber gender-based violence” (Council of Europe, 2021; Eige, 2022; UN WOMEN, 2020, 2022).<sup>33</sup> It is argued to extend and manifest wider challenges of marginalisation, violence against women

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<sup>32</sup> A range of other youth characteristics (neurodiversity, disability, nationality, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status, relational (social problems, isolation, loneliness or estrangement from family/caregivers or friends) or emotional (low-self-esteem, personality traits, mental health issues, or history of sexual abuse trauma), and environmental (school issues) have been identified as potential factors affecting vulnerability (Livingstone et al., 2011; Mitchell et al., 2007; Noll et al., 2009; Olson et al., 2007; Quayle, 2016, 2017, 2020; Webster et al., 2014; Wells & Mitchell, 2008; Whittle & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2013; Wolak et al., 2004, 2006; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004a). The body of research is so fractured and disparate, however, it is difficult to draw any concrete conclusion about the reliability of these characteristics as indicators of enhanced risk of and vulnerability to TA-CSA or DCSG.

<sup>33</sup> See for instance: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cyberviolence/cyberviolence-against-women>; <https://www.iwf.org.uk/news-media/news/campaign-launches-as-new-report-finds-girls-at-worsening-risk-of-grooming-from-sexual-predators-online/>.

and girls, and oppression, reflecting a cultural landscape characterised by persistent gender disparities and sexualisation (Renold & Ringrose, 2011, 2013; Ringrose, 2009). However, some studies have also explored the prevalence and specific risks facing boys (IWF, 2023).

Sexual orientation and identification as LGBTQ+ have also been found in some studies to enhance children's risk to online sexual victimisation (Davidson et al., 2017; Livingstone et al., 2017; Livingstone & Palmer, 2012; Thorn, 2023a, 2023b; Whittle & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2013; Wolak et al., 2004).<sup>34</sup>

Research exploring the gendered difference in experiences between boys and girls is limited (van Gijn-Grosvenor & Lamb, 2016). The recognition of DCSG as a form of gender-based violence creates a research imperative for studies to explore girls' unique online risks, to build a knowledge base of their distinct victimisation experiences. As does the present dearth of research into the differential experiences of boys and girls. This argument applies to the spectrum protected characteristics under the UK Equality Act 2010, age, gender, race, sexuality, religion, disability. While this present study focuses on 'children' at a population level including both boys and girls in the sample, work is forthcoming that focuses on the experiences of girls within the dataset (Lorenzo-Dus & Mullineux-Morgan, Forthcomingg ). Research that takes a more intersectional approach to DCSG not only exploring differential experiences but how they may combine to intensify victimhood and impede recovery is much needed, representing a glaring gap in our collective understanding.

### **The Search for a Victim “Archetype” – Risk-Taking Typologies.**

Children's own risk-taking behaviours, both offline and online, have also been suggested to impact their vulnerability and likelihood of encountering harm online and specifically being digitally sexually groomed (Baumgartner et al., 2010; De Graaf & Vanwesenbeeck, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2007, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2001; Quayle et al., 2012; Whittle et al., 2014b; Whittle & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2013; Wolak et al., 2004, 2008; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004).

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<sup>34</sup> The acronym for lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, questioning and ace. See: <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/list-lgbtq-terms#n>

A focus on children's behaviours led to some attempts to develop TA-CSA victim typologies which aimed to move beyond a focus on single characteristics towards an attempt to understand behaviours/patterns of behaviours (see May-Chahal & Palmer, 2018, for an overview). EU Kids Online (Hasebrink et al., 2011) studied children across 25 European Countries, including the UK. They identified six clusters profiling children's use and risk. The two profiles of children most at risk were those who showed low use of the internet and those who went online for focused social purposes. The European Child Online Safety Project (Davidson et al., 2017) proposed four profiles of vulnerability to cybervictimisation of sexual solicitation using inferential findings derived via cluster analysis.<sup>35</sup>

However, very few studies specifically isolate a study of children's risk and vulnerability profiles to DCSG. Webster et al. (2012) used data from interviews with 33 offenders and 12 focus groups conducted with 6–12 young people in each group (n = 98) in three countries (UK, Belgium, and Italy). The researchers attempted to profile some characteristics of victims, but these were based on the perspectives of online groomers and their accounts of young people online (see Table 2.1).

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<sup>35</sup> The profiles were as follows: The adapted adolescent. The largest group showing the least number of risk behaviours online or offline, were the least vulnerable and least likely to receive sexual solicitations from an adult online; The inquisitive non-sexual group had lower risk taking offline but higher online risk taking. They were at low likelihood of receiving sexual solicitations or sending sexts. The inquisitive sexual group demonstrated the highest rate of receiving requests for sexual information. They had a high likelihood of receiving sexual solicitations from adults. It is concerning that this group also had the highest likelihood of meeting up in person to engage in sexual activity. The risk-taking aggressive group was the smallest. They exhibited the highest risk taking on- and offline and were most likely to both harass and be harassed. They demonstrated real-world antisocial behaviour such as problems with authority (parents and teachers), truancy, school exclusion, drug and alcohol misuse. They had the highest levels of online/offline aggression towards others, including peers. They also had a heightened level of experiencing online/offline victimisation at the hands of others.

**Table 2.1** *Typology of Young People Victimised by Online Groomers (Webster et al., 2012, p.15)*

Vulnerable victims	Distinguishing themes	Risk-taking victims	Distinguishing themes
Need for attention and affection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loneliness</li> <li>Low self-esteem</li> </ul>	Disinhibited, seeking adventure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outgoing</li> <li>Confident</li> </ul>
Relationship with parents and home lives difficult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Psychological disorder(s)</li> <li>Concurrent sexual abuse</li> </ul>	Young people (and offender) feel they have control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complicit and consenting to sexual contact</li> </ul>
Seeking 'love' online - believe they have a true relationship with groomer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offender as 'mentor'</li> <li>Self-disclosure and joint problem solving</li> </ul>	Less known about family, but less confident on meeting than online.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offender re-assessment on meeting</li> <li>Introverted or immature at meeting</li> </ul>
Resist disclosure - want to continue the relationship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loyalty</li> </ul>	Open to blackmail due to apparent 'complicity' – own behaviour used as evidence of cooperation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non disclosure of abuse, threats and computer intrusions</li> </ul>

The research was limited by being drawn from secondary data acknowledged to potentially distort findings (though triangulation from chat logs was highlighted). Two overarching DCSG victim types were identified: “vulnerable” and “risk-taking.” However, this binary risks perpetuating a “victim-blaming” perspective (Beckett, 2019; Woodiwiss, 2018) reminiscent of the deserving/undeserving-ideal/non-ideal victim dichotomies challenged in more recent literature (Chapter One).

**Researching the Child’s Lived Experience.** Critiques of the focus on prevalence, victim characteristics, and profiling as “pathologising” children (Cooper et al., 2016) have led scholars to explore methodologies designed to access and tune in to children’s lived experiences and perspectives across the spectrum of TA-CSA.

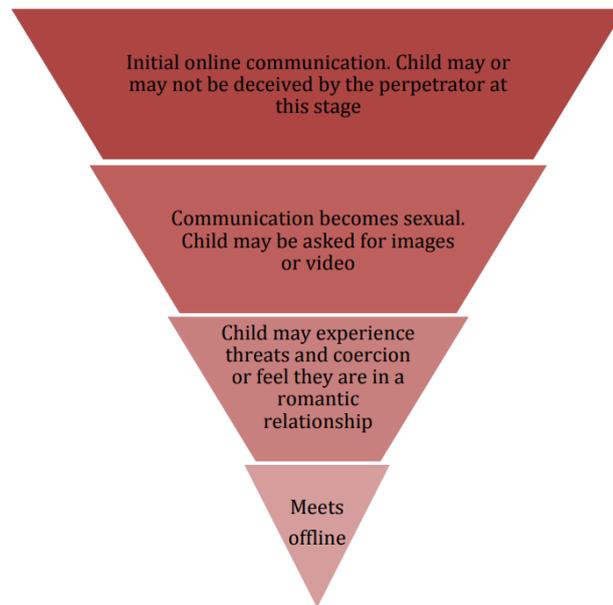
A growing body of research studies children’s lived experience and perspectives on DCSG. However, the diversity of methodological approaches reflects the complexity of the task. A number of studies have used qualitative semi-structured questionnaires and focus group methodologies to ask children directly about their experiences and to try to access the child’s “voice” (Davidson et al., 2017; Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2017, 2020; Quayle, 2016; Quayle et al., 2012; Webster et al., 2012; Whittle, 2014; Whittle et al., 2014a, 2014b; Whittle & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2013). Sample sizes are generally small, ranging between 10 (Davidson et al., 2016; Whittle et al., 2014) and 20 participants (Quayle et al., 2012; Webster et al., 2014). Other studies have

used transcripts of investigative interviews with alleged child victims of “internet-related” sexual abuse (Katz, 2013, 2014, 2014) and textual thematic analysis of diaries (Wisniewski et al., 2016). Some studies also adopt mixed-methods approaches, combining interviews, surveys, and screening data (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2020). Few studies use transcripts of online conversations between children and groomers to explore the child’s perspective (e.g., Kloess et al., 2017a; Kopecký, 2017; Kopecký et al., 2015; Leander et al., 2008; Seymour-Smith & Kloess, 2021). Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2023) includes a chapter on “child behaviour,” representing the only study thus far to focus on children’s discourse through an analysis of real-world chat transcripts of child–groomer interaction derived from law enforcement data. A sister project to Project DRAGON-S (discussed Section 2.1.1) is also analysing children’s discourse about their experience of DCSG, drawing on data from a child counselling helpline in Spain (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2021; Pérez-Sabater et al., 2022; Pérez-Sabater et al., 2024).

Several key clusters of findings emerge from the literature focused on children’s lived experience of online grooming: (i) children’s perspectives about the grooming process and groomer strategies; (ii) children’s perspectives on their own behaviours (which can be grouped into findings about children’s engagement and resistance); (iii) the impacts of DCSG. The following sections will review the existing empirical evidence about each of these categories. The attention afforded to gathering children’s perspectives across these themes varies and the following sections will discuss the gaps and the limitations in the existing empirical evidence base.

**Children’s Perspectives of the Grooming Process.** There is a notable scarcity of studies exploring children’s perspectives of groomer behaviours. In their rapid evidence review, May-Chahal et al. (2018, p. 77) collated findings from existing qualitative studies to propose a loose “typology of the grooming process from the victim perspective” presented in Figure 2.4.

**Figure 2.4** *Typology of the Grooming Process From the Victim’s Perspective (May-Chahal et al., 2018, p.77)*



The authors acknowledge the body of research exploring grooming from the child’s perspective is limited and Figure 2.4 does not represent a “typology”, *per se* but it shows how children’s perspectives of the grooming process could add value.

Katz (2013) analysed narratives from investigative interview data of children who were alleged to have experienced TA-CSA. Manipulation was widely recognised by the children in the sample, and they were also shown to broadly report a linear process, starting with physical and emotional isolation and graduating to a focus on building relational closeness and trust. The study also showed the groomers invested considerable time in manipulation before introducing sexual activity.

Whittle and Hamilton-Ghiacritsis (2013) and Whittle et al. (2014a) conducted qualitative interviews with eight children (six females and two males) to gather children’s own voices about the processes, impacts, and outcomes of online grooming and sexual abuse. Data were thematically analysed. Whittle et al. (2014a, 2014b) proposed three “super-ordinate” themes within children’s accounts based on timeframes or “stages” within the grooming process, namely, pre-offence, during

offence, and post offence.<sup>36</sup> Katz and Barnett (2016) found children tended to simultaneously reflect the emotional connection with the groomer and the threats made to expose the “relationship” to those close to the child.

Whittle et al. (2015) interviewed three female victims of online grooming and contact sexual abuse (aged 12–14 during the abuse and 13–18 at the time of interview) and the three adult offenders who abused them. Results indicated victim–groomer dyads disagreed in their accounts of the abuse, most commonly with regards to their perspectives on the sexual elements of the relationship. The study also emphasised the need to further research the dynamic between offenders and victims which, they identified, can be varied and complex. The differing perspectives identified in this research emphasise the importance of further research to examine the child’s accounts of their lived experience of DCSG.

Hanson (2017) and Hamilton-Giachritsis et al. (2017) developed this work and reviewed the extant literature to collate the types of TA-CSA categorised from the perspective of children’s experiences. Their findings are reproduced in Table 2.2.

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<sup>36</sup> A range of sub-themes was also identified within the ‘during the offence’ super-ordinate theme; these included (i) the grooming behaviour; (ii) victim feelings at the time; (iii) protective factors; (iv) risk factors; (v) perpetrator characteristics, and (vi) relationship status, all of which shaped the child’s experience.

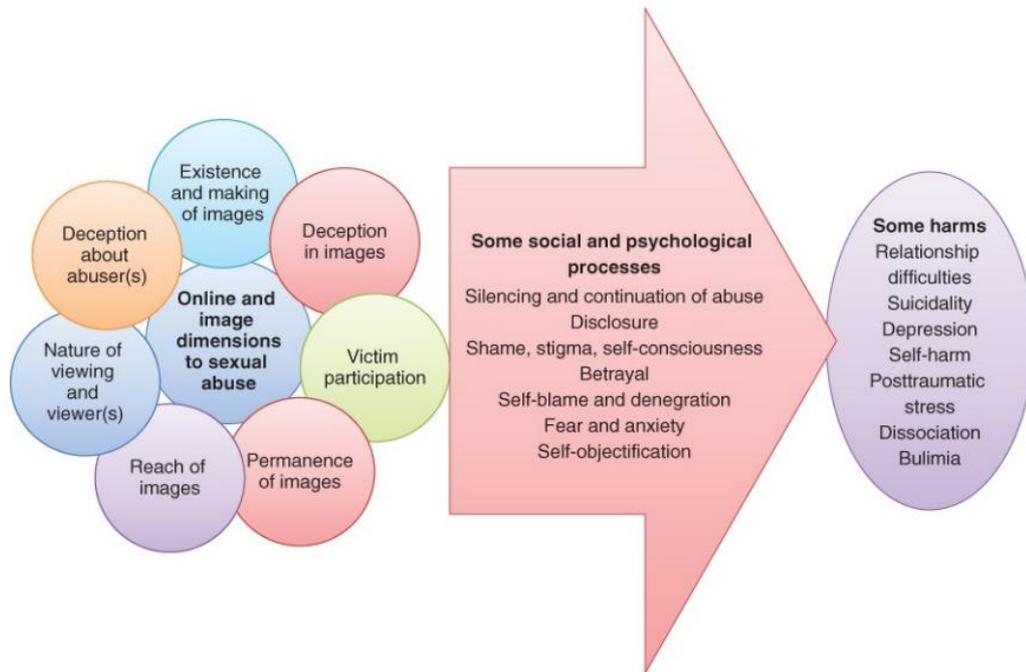
**Table 2.2** *Type of Technology-Assisted Child Sexual Abuse Identified from Children’s Experiences (Hanson, 2017, pp.2-3)*

<b>Type of technology-assisted child sexual abuse</b>	<b>Further description and/or example</b>	<b>References for further discussion or description</b>
1. Offline abuse shared with and viewed by unknown others	This is often the abuse depicted in child abuse images, also termed ‘child pornography.’ Example: Sexual abuse perpetrated by a victim’s father shared via images and video with others online.	Leonard (2010) Martin & Alaggia (2013) Mitchell, Finkelhor & Wolak (2005)
2. Abuse committed online or offline shared with others in the victim’s peer group	A young person (or persons) filming their abuse of a peer and sharing this with their friends for approval or status, or to shame (this includes male adolescents abusing female peers).	Beckett et al. (2013)
3. Contact abuse commissioned online	Perpetrators online direct perpetrators who are physically with the child to commit abusive acts. Example: Perpetrators in the UK watching and directing live streamed sexual abuse of children by perpetrators in the Philippines.	National Crime Agency (NCA; 2014)
4. Offline sexual blackmail (imagery as leverage)	Child or young person is abused offline, images are taken and used as leverage in the continuation of the abuse. Example: ‘If you tell, I will share this image with your friends and family.’	Gohir (2013)
5. Online sexual blackmail (imagery as leverage)	Sexual imagery of a child is ascertained online and then used as leverage in sexual abuse, which may be online, offline or both, Example: A child shares a sexual image with a person online; this person (the abuser) then threatens to share this imagery if the child does not produce further sexual images or comply with offline abuse.	Peachey (2013)
6. Online grooming	This term can include online sexual blackmail, but is more commonly used to describe perpetrators forging a close relationship with a victim online in order to gain the child’s compliance in and secrecy around subsequent sexual abuse. Example: Perpetrator shows care and interest in child online who subsequently ‘falls in love’ and consents to online and/or offline sexual activity despite perpetrator being an adult and/or coercive and/or the child feeling uncomfortable.	Whittle, Hamilton-Giachritsis, Beech & Collings (2013a)
7. Sexual activity bought from a young person online	A child acting on their own volition advertising sexual services online for payment.	Jonsson & Svedin (2012) as cited in Sigurjónsdóttir (2012)
8. Sexual images created consensually shared nonconsensually	Example: A young person shares images with a romantic partner, the relationship ends and those images are shared by their ex-partner with peers.	Wolak & Finkelhor (2011) Ringrose, Gill. Livingstone & Harvey (2012)

Note: Exposure of children to online sexually explicit material and sexual harassment or solicitations (e.g., a person starting up a conversation about sex online) have not been included in this typology as it was felt that the definition of online sexual abuse would become too wide (whilst recognising that exposure to such material and comments can be abusive and harmful). Additionally, children being sold by others online was not included as it was felt that this abuse is likely to either be captured in categories 1 and 2, or, if not, then the online/image element is likely to be less central to the victim’s experience than in the forms of abuse described here.

Hanson (2017) also provides a depiction of a chatlog between a perpetrator of sexual blackmail and his victim, to map the processes involved from the child’s perspective (reproduced in Figure 2.5).

**Figure 2.5** *A Depiction of a Chatlog Between a Perpetrator of Sexual Blackmail and His Victim (Hanson, 2017, p.3)*



Hanson’s (2017) work provides a useful benchmark. It strikes a balance between demarcating some of the processes involved in TA-CSA as viewed by the child while situating the child as an individual experiencing these multiple processes at the centre. The taxonomy provided (Table 2.2) does acknowledge the possibility category 6 (online grooming) could include category 5 (online sexual blackmail [imagery as leverage]) but their separation suggests the phenomena are viewed as distinct. An identity-foregrounded discourse focus on the groomer and child’s facework, and an analysis of the child’s perception of the groomer’s facework could add value. Lorenzo-Dus (2023) and Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2016, 2020, 2023) describe the groomer’s facework (of which sexual blackmail would be a core element) as intertwined with their manipulative communication tactics (grooming). Understanding how this operates from a child’s perspective through the analysis of

their discourse conducted within this thesis will be an important extension of existing work.

There is precedent for research on children's own discourse about the DCSG process in the context of a child counselling service in Spain (Pérez-Sabater et al., 2022). Data comprise all the child–counsellor conversations about DCSG made to the helpline between 2013 and 2019 (81 cases, 34,120 words analysed). The study centres on children's interpretation of offenders' manipulative tactics of entrapment aligned to the OGD (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016, 2020) combined with attention to the child's reported communicative behaviour within the grooming interaction generated in the counselling context. The study shows the child victim's communicative behaviour is driven by DTD (43%) followed by further contact (28%) while the child's accounts of groomer behaviour predominantly reflect groomer communicative tactics of SG (30%) and DTD (31%). When relaying their experience of DCSG to a counsellor, children felt they were/are in a relationship with the groomer, including romantically. Complex facework performed by groomers during DCSG is identified. The child's discourse also starts to show its impact. This is corroborated by Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2023) who show children struggle to rationalise and process their abuse, seeing themselves instead as engaged in a romantic relationship with the groomer.

Alongside the disagreement identified in children and groomer's accounts by some research (Whittle et al., 2015), the grooming processes perceived by children as reviewed in this section seem to indicate a perception of a linear, stage-based process. This indicates a disparity with findings about grooming processes identified in studies of groomer behaviour, particularly research focused on groomer communicative behaviours and tactics. As shown in Section 2.1.1, this research has challenged perspectives of a stage-based, linear process, providing evidence of an overlapping, interwoven complex process of manipulative tactical communication.<sup>37</sup> The current gap between academic, practitioner, and child concepts of the process

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<sup>37</sup> The more stage-based perceptions of groomer processes within the literature on children's perspectives could be explained by a lag in new conceptions filtering into practice which is reflected in research with practitioners and the children they support. It could also reflect the unconsciously biased conceptions of the researchers conducting the research, whose perceptions may have been shaped by perspectives prevalent in the literature. Conversely, it could of course indicate that this is how the grooming feels to a child.

likely intensifies the challenge children face in rationalising their experience. This arguably leaves them at greater risk and vulnerability to the impacts of DCSG and risks hampering their recovery. The disparity suggests the need for further research to explore children's rationalisation and interpretation of the grooming process and how it manifests in their discourse.

**Children's Engagement.** Existing research evidence indicates at least some level of engagement from children with groomer tactics and interactions. However, frustrations have been levelled at the dearth of research into children's behaviours and the ways in which children respond to groomer advances (Kloess et al., 2017a).

Quayle et al. (2012) interviewed 27 young people aged 11–17 years (at the time of the abuse) from a range of European countries<sup>38</sup> about their experience of online grooming. Approximately 82% of those interviewed were female. Using grounded theory, six categories were identified to attempt to explain children's online behaviour related to child sexual abuse.<sup>39</sup> While helpful in elucidating children's lived experience and referring to a relational process, the approach mixed motivations with actions and behaviours which limits its potential as a replicable taxonomy for examining children's engagement behaviours in DCSG contexts.

Kloess et al. (2017a) examined child behaviours in 29 transcripts (from five cases) of online grooming chat logs. All offenders were men aged 27–52. Victims were both female (n = 17) and male (n = 6) and were aged 11–15. Additionally, police reports of the five cases were reviewed for descriptive and case-specific information. Data were analysed using qualitative thematic analysis and five themes were identified in children's talk (see Table 2.3).

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<sup>38</sup> Sweden, UK, Germany, Italy, Denmark and Russia

<sup>39</sup> The categories identified were (i) something's missing from life; (ii) being someone who's connected; (iii) caught in a web; (iv) making choices; (v) other's responding; (vi) closing the box; and (vii) picking up the pieces.

**Table 2.3** Themes Identified Through A Thematic Analysis/Descriptive Account of Sexually Exploitative Interactions With Offenders in Online Chat Transcripts (Developed based on Kloess et al, 2017)

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Theme 1: Getting to know each other</b>	Victims telling offenders about school, hobbies, and leisure time activities; about their family and relationships. Victims see the groomer as a friend and someone to talk to (confide in) about relationship breakups and personal issues. Victims sought advice about clothing and sexual matters.
<b>Theme 2: Seeking assurance regarding relationship status</b>	Victims try to establish, gain (re)assurance about the exclusivity of the relationship and the groomer’s feelings about them.
<b>Theme 3: Levels of engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Different levels of engagement include:</i></li> <li>• <i>Fantasy enactment of a meeting</i></li> <li>• <i>Engagement in sexually explicit talk or behaviour;</i></li> <li>• <i>Requests to groomer to get webcam</i></li> <li>• <i>Requests to groomer to send sexual pictures</i></li> <li>• <i>Engaged with discussions with offender about a physical meeting</i></li> <li>• <i>Challenged requests by groomer to expose body parts (especially when not reciprocated by the groomer).</i></li> <li>• <i>Non-Compliance sexual activity - non-compliance included: (i) not responding at all; (ii) told offenders they were not in the mood or up for it; (iii) said ‘no’ (iv) reminded offenders they were in a relationship (v) explained that they were not interested; (vi) challenged offenders to the point of leaving the conversation</i></li> <li>• <i>Non-Compliance webcam use – reasons given were: (i) being in a public place (ii) not having a webcam/webcam being in use by another family member (iii) being in someone’s company (iv) not looking good.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Theme 4: Secrecy of Contact</b>	Keeping contact between victim and offender secret; secretly using the computer, change a profile picture to be ‘safer’.
<b>Theme 5: Victim Vulnerabilities</b>	Identification of various vulnerabilities of the children in the sample suggested to exacerbate the effectiveness of the grooming.

A core conceptual contribution of Kloess et al. (2017a) was to identify of both children's "engagement" and "non-compliance" behaviours. Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2023) draw on the dialectic (Chapter One) that agency and blameless victimisation co-exist in children's DCSG experience (Dodsworth, 2022; Hanson, 2019; Hanson & Holmes, 2014; Sidebotham, 2013). Their analysis uses chat logs containing online conversations between groomers and children to examine the interactional behaviour of children. It broadly "chunks" their talk into agency-based categories linked to the groomer tactics proposed in the DCSG model and compares it to the groomer's communication.<sup>40</sup> The findings showed children introduce topics in their interactions with groomers in under a third of cases. They primarily followed the groomer's lead (65%) and infrequently (8%) communicated "stop" behaviours. With regards to the prominence of following the groomer's lead ("go"), the children showed resistance, but this potential "stop" was unsuccessful, overcome by the groomer's manipulative facework.

**Children's Resilience, "Coping," and Resistance.** At various points throughout the DCSG process some children will make an agentive choice not to engage any further (Kloess et al., 2017a; May-Chahal et al., 2018). The scarcity of research on children's "resilience" or resistance attempts is identified as meriting closer research attention (May-Chahal et al., 2018). Concepts of "coping," "resilience," and "resistance" seem to be used interchangeably within the literature. Literature on resilience to harm from TA-CSA tends to frame analysis in terms of "not being bothered" or "distressed" by sexual content online or online sexual solicitations and in terms of identifying mitigating factors such as parenting, parental supervision, and other social support available to the young person (May-Chahal et al., 2018). However, there has not yet been any attempt to apply validated tools to measure resilience in TA-CSA contexts (May-Chahal et al., 2018). Findings so far are thus tentative. Whittle et al. (2013) explore the concept of "coping" in the specific context of DCSG. A range of research is discussed, beyond the scope of this

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<sup>40</sup> Categories are labelled as 'start,' 'go,' and 'stop'. 'Start' refers to when the child begins a sequence that is aligned to a groomer tactic – for example, if they were to volunteer a compliment; 'go' refers to when the child follows the groomer's lead; and 'stop' refers to when the child brings a sequence linked to a groomer tactic to an end.

review, which identifies coping as a highly complex process (e.g., Garcia, 2010, as cited in Whittle & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2013).<sup>41</sup>

Some studies describe ways in which children seem to operationalise a range of “coping strategies” or “portfolio of online skills” in response to different types of threats and risks (d’Haenens et al., 2013; Hasebrink & Livingstone, 2009; May-Chahal et al., 2018; Webster et al., 2012; Wisniewski et al., 2016). Research also distinguishes between “active” and “passive” strategies (Hasebrink et al., 2011; Schwarzer et al., 1995; Smahel et al., 2020; Wisniewski et al., 2016). Active strategies comprise blocking and deleting contacts that provoke unease and telling someone about what has happened (Thorn, 2021). Passive strategies include stopping online use or avoidance (May-Chahal et al., 2018). Combining two or more strategies, especially proactive ones, is common (d’Haenens et al., 2013). Most coping strategies were found to exclude the involvement by an adult, with some children being almost twice as likely to use online safety tools to combat harmful sexual interactions than they are to use offline support systems such as caregivers and peers (Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009; Thorn, 2021). Despite children’s strategies, Thorn (2021) highlights the groomer challenge of “recontacting,” whereby an individual who had previously been blocked or reported by a child seeks to establish re-connection with them.

There is a growing but still narrow literature into children’s resistance strategies to groomer manipulative tactics in DCSG contexts. Greater awareness of the children’s resistance strategies and the importance of researching them arose as scholars became able to work with transcripts of real interactions between child and groomer, rather than datasets drawn from publicly available groomer/decoy transcripts (Chiang & Grant, 2019; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023; Schneevogt et al., 2018a; Thomas et al., 2023). This has been corroborated within research analysing authentic groomer and child interactions (De Santisteban et al., 2018; Seymour-Smith & Kloess, 2021; Thomas et al., 2023). A key theme in the child resistance literature is the identification of a relational process whereby the child attempts to resist the groomer

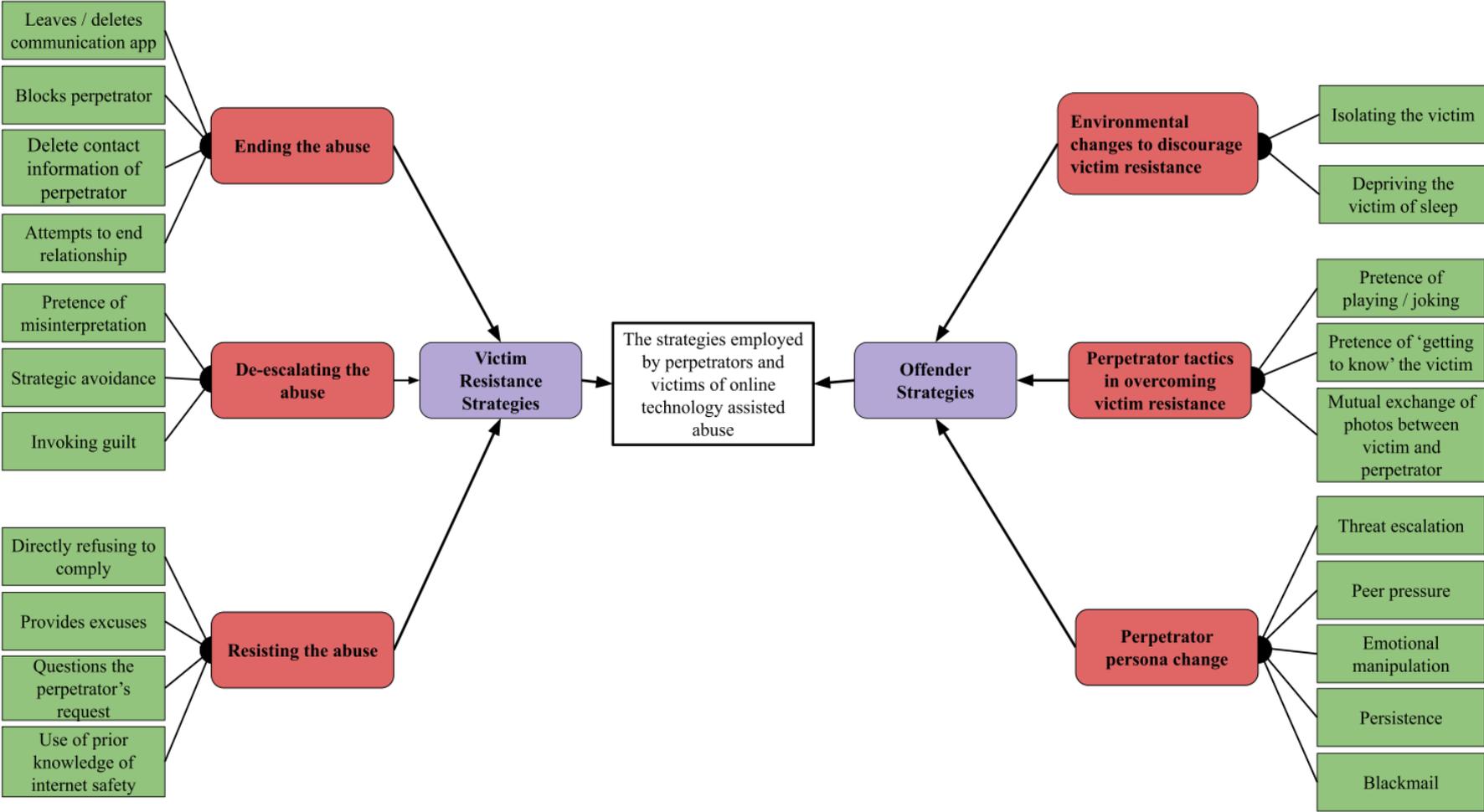
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<sup>41</sup> Whittle et al (2013) also identify a growing body of research which explore adolescent coping (Frydenberg, 2014) and highlight the Adolescent Coping Scale developed by Frydenberg and Lewis (1993), which identified 18 factors which they propose indicate adolescent coping, highlighting that adolescents may draw on a range of coping mechanisms in different combinations and the strategies they adopt may be influenced by age, gender and ethnicity.

using different strategies such as challenging the groomer (their identity and reasons for adding them, ignoring or blocking the offender), negotiating (Seymour-Smith & Kloess, 2021) or making excuses (Kloess et al., 2017a). Children might resist right away or at a point during the interaction if they begin to suspect the groomer's tactical modus operandi (Kloess et al., 2017a; Thomas et al., 2023; Webster et al., 2012). Kloess et al. (2017a) studied transcripts of chat logs of sexually exploitative interactions between offenders and children online. They found most children ended conversations and interactions when they progressed to "serious, sexually explicit" requests by offenders. Furthermore, amongst the children who did engage, the study highlights, many remained assertive, utilising a suite of resistance strategies. Kloess et al. (2017a, p. 627) allude to the relational work being used by the child: "these may have been genuine reasons or 'excuses' used by victims to get out of doing something they did not want to/feel comfortable with in a non-confrontational manner." The researchers also identify a change in the child's behaviour following the offender's use of manipulation (e.g., compliments, persistence/persuasion, threats), which is corroborated by Seymour-Smith & Kloess (2021) and Thomas et al. (2023).

There have been limited attempts to design replicable taxonomies of children's resistance strategies and how groomers overcome them (Kloess et al., 2017a; Thomas et al., 2023; Webster et al., 2012). Thomas et al. (2023) identifies this as an important gap within the current TA-CSA literature. They conducted secondary analysis on data collected by Hamilton-Giachritsis et al. (2020), supplemented by 10 semi-structured interviews with children (nine female, one male aged 9–15 at the time of the abuse). In all cases the offender was male. The thematic analysis identified two overarching themes ("victim resistance" and "offender strategies") and six sub-themes which were collated into a thematic map (Figure 2.6)

**Figure 2.6** Thematic Map Featuring the Strategies Employed by Children to Resist and Groomer Strategies to Overcome Resistance  
 (Thomas et al., 2023, p. 4)



As shown in Figure 2.6, Thomas et al. (2023, p.5) identified three “sub-themes” of children’s resistance.<sup>42</sup> The research provides a detailed map of children’s strategies, which provides empirical evidence of children’s use of diverse resistance behaviours in DCSG contexts. This also builds evidence that children are not “passively experiencing this abuse” (Thomas et al., 2023, p. 2).

Thomas et al.’s research (2023) falls short of a discourse-based analysis of children’s communicative agency and resistance language in DCSG contexts. Seymour-Smith et al. (2021) employed a discursive psychology approach to analyse chatlogs between one male offender (posing as a teenage girl) and five male victims under the age of 16 years to explore how victims attempt to resist groomer tactics and how offenders manage such resistance. The study found an escalation in the groomer’s use of threats and adaptation of strategies following children’s display of resistance. Findings identified 63 examples of “deals” being constructed, 43 initiated by the offender and 20 by the victim. The researchers highlight social dynamics such as deal-making and negotiating would benefit from study across larger datasets to examine whether these processes operate in the same way across offender and child genders. Both are discursive processes which suggest the need for further research.

Empirical evidence suggests child resistance and groomer tactics are a relational process of constant (re)negotiation, and groomers use various tactics to overcome resistance and achieve the child’s compliance. The section has reviewed research on children’s communicative behaviours of engagement and resistance and identified some studies have begun to explore a linguistic approach to analysing children’s communicative behaviours. However, while a slim literature has been identified, the child’s perspective of groomer <-> child interactional dynamics has yet to be studied within discourse-based understandings of genre-based relational work and identity construction. This thesis aims to address this gap in current research.

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<sup>42</sup> Namely “ending the abuse,” “de-escalating the abuse,” and “resisting the abuse.” Within offender strategies these were categorised into sub-themes of “environmental changes to discourage victim resistance,” “perpetrator tactics in overcoming victim resistance,” and “perpetrator persona change.” Each of these sub-themes contained a series of strategies or tactics employed by the child and groomer, respectively.

**Seeking Help: Children’s Disclosures of Tech-Assisted Child Sexual Abuse.** Beyond engagement and resistance or “coping” with the abuse, another action route available to the child is disclosure of the abuse, itself a form of resistance. Disclosure of CSA is one action route to bringing the abuse to an end or preventing the abuse of other children. However, disclosure can come at devastating personal cost to the child, including being confronted with the criminal justice system, and the reactions of family and peers (Hanson, 2017).

There is an expansive literature, largely within the disciplines of the social/behavioural sciences and psychology, on the dynamics of CSA disclosures, including various systematic and literature reviews of the core debates (Alaggia et al., 2019; Lemaigre et al., 2017; London et al., 2008; Morrison et al., 2018; Paine & Hansen, 2002; Reitsema & Grietens, 2016; Tener & Murphy, 2015). There have also been attempts to forefront children’s voices regarding disclosures. The limitations of various attempts to theorise and model<sup>43</sup> the CSA disclosure process have been widely acknowledged (see London et al., 2005; Paine & Hansen, 2002; Staller & Nelson-Gardell, 2005). The immense difficulty faced by children talking about their experiences of being sexually abused is a consistent and unifying theme in the literature (Bradley & Wood, 1996; Jensen et al., 2005; Katz, 2014b; Katz et al., 2012; London et al., 2008; Paine & Hansen, 2002; Pipe et al., 2013; Staller & Nelson-Gardell, 2005a). Research has therefore focused on exploring the facilitators and barriers to children and adult survivors’ disclosures of sexual abuse (see Alaggia et al., 2019 for a review; Collin-Vézina et al., 2013; Lemaigre et al., 2017; McElvaney, 2015; Schaeffer et al., 2011; Tener & Murphy, 2015).

When it comes to applying extant knowledge to the digital context, this is a research agenda still very much in its infancy with only a handful of studies focused on children’s disclosures of TA-CSA (Finkelhor et al., 2000; Katz, 2013a; Katz et al., 2018a; Katz & Barnett, 2016). The markedly low disclosure rate of TA-CSA has been identified (Finkelhor et al., 2000; Mitchell et al., 2005; Wolak et al., 2006). Research suggests TA-CSA disclosures are characterised by: (i) children’s reluctance to disclose to anybody, particularly adults and external agencies; (ii) high levels of

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<sup>43</sup> Key models critiqued in the literature include Bussey and Grimbeek (1995), Leonard (1996), and Summit (1993).

resistance and denial when presented with evidence of their abuse; (iii) their reticence to engage in therapeutic processes and recognise abuse despite considerable police evidence of TA-CSA having taken place; and (iv) the significant role of the police in TA-CSA disclosure processes (Katz, 2013a; Katz et al., 2018a; Katz & Barnetz, 2016). Evidence shows children who experience TA-CSA find it just as difficult, if not more difficult, to disclose their abuse (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2020).

There is a relatively small literature to draw on to explain the apparent reluctance and low self-disclosure rates amongst children of TA-CSA and the empirical evidence remains fractured and patchy. Echoing work on wider offline CSA disclosure barriers (Lemaigre et al., 2017), loyalty, dependence, or fear are factors that lead children to deny abuse even when there is strong evidence abuse occurred (Katz, 2013a, 2014b; Katz et al., 2012, 2018a; Priebe et al., 2013). Fear is further elaborated, suggesting victims may be worried perpetrators might spread intimate photos, videos, and messages (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2017; Hanson, 2017; McElvaney, 2015; McElvaney et al., 2014). The type and severity of incident is indicated to have an impact on children's decision to disclose (Priebe et al., 2013), and the literature into offline CSA suggests incidents are perceived to represent transgressions are also less likely to be disclosed (Pasupathi et al., 2009). This suggests feelings of shame or guilt may also influence children's decisions to disclose, which has been corroborated by Hanson (2017) and Thorn (2021). The child's perception of interactions and incidents as not serious enough, not abusive, or non-problematic is another potential explanation (Katz et al., 2018a; Priebe et al., 2013).

The relational aspects of children's emotions and feelings towards TA-CSA perpetrators are also a central factor suggested to explain a resistance to disclosing or reluctance to engage with subsequent intervention or recognise abuse has taken place. Katz et al. (2018a) hypothesise the bond and commitment the children feel towards the perpetrator may explain why none of the children in the study disclosed the abuse to their parents and why nearly half of them were reluctant to disclose any allegations at all during forensic investigations. This adds further weight to the need for research to focus more closely on the relational dynamics between the victim and

perpetrator in DCSG contexts and the ways this impacts children's perceived avenues of action for disclosure.

A central theme in the literature is the conceptualisation of CSA disclosure as a "fluid, ongoing and interactional" lifelong process unfolding over time, across diverse contexts (Alaggia et al., 2019; Bentley et al., 2018; Reitsema & Grietens, 2016). Allnock and Miller (2013) model disclosures as occurring verbally or non-verbally, directly or indirectly, partially or fully, also identifying they can be accidentally prompted. In a review of 33 studies on the barriers and facilitators to the disclosure of CSA published 2000–2016, Alaggia et al. (2019) emphasise the concept of disclosure as an iterative, interactive and relational process, rather than a discrete event. As Flåm and Hagstvedt (2013, p. 634) state, "children do not tell, delay, recant or reaffirm accounts of their sexual victimization in a vacuum." CSA disclosure is thus increasingly understood as a reciprocal, dialogic process (see also e.g. Alaggia et al., 2019; Cossar et al., 2013; Jensen et al., 2005; Lerner, 2018; MacMartin, 1999; Reitsema & Grietens, 2016).

Given the evidence of disclosure of CSA as an intensely and intricately complex dialogic process, it is surprising limited scholarly attention has been afforded to the analysis of children's discourse or communicative behaviours in CSA disclosures. There are very few studies, predominantly drawn from data obtained through therapeutic and counselling or helpline contexts, which take, to varying degrees, a linguistics or communication-focused approach to exploring the challenges children face in articulating their abuse (Jackson et al., 2015; Lerner, 2018; Mossige et al., 2005).

Mossige et al. (2005) examined 10 narratives given by children of their experiences of CSA within a therapeutic context. All children had disclosed sexual abuse. These narratives were compared to narratives of stressful events the same children produced in therapy sessions. Findings showed only four of the ten children studied narrated their specific sexual abuse experiences. The sexual abuse narratives were found to be more disorganised and less elaborate, contextually embedded, or coherent than the stressful event narratives. The authors also highlighted children struggled to produce "meaning configuring" narratives about sexual abuse (p. 400).

Jackson et al. (2015) conducted qualitative analysis of 2986 cases of self-disclosure of sexual abuse from children aged 5–18 years who contacted Childline Scotland. The study is one of few which aims to foreground the child’s voice to analyse CSA disclosures. Data were drawn from case notes and coding made by counsellors at the time of the call rather than verbatim transcripts of calls. This therefore did not allow a direct analysis of children’s discourse and there is potential subjectivity in how the child’s words were recorded by the counsellor. The findings offer a largely descriptive account of the narratives used by children and identified four distinct styles of communication: direct, indirect, explicit, and implied. While these styles were discernible, they were not found to be mutually exclusive; children were found to adopt multiple styles within each contact. Indirect communication increased with age. Explicit descriptions of their abuse, using sexually graphic language, were more frequent than indirect or implied styles across all ages and genders. The use of explicit language seemed to suggest a disinhibition effect of the counselling context and challenges the unwillingness to disclose identified by many studies in the CSA/TA-CSA literature.

Terminology used by children was also found to be distinct from adult constructs. While many children were found to use correct anatomical terms for sexual organs/body parts, euphemisms or childlike “innocent” language was much more common. Despite this, children of all ages were found to be capable of and competent in describing their experiences and their feelings around the abuse in considerable detail. The juxtaposition of explicit, detailed “mainstream” terminology for body parts with the use of more “innocent” language suggests children have sufficient understanding to disclose and describe what had happened to them, despite a lack of vocabulary or developmental experience of sex and the body to draw on.

Wubs et al. (2018) studied informal self-disclosures by children of previously unknown CSA within the context of foster care. Authors used an inductive thematic analysis of 40 children’s files to explore the children’s verbal and behavioural expression and found foster children’s disclosures could be categorised as “fragmented,” “spontaneous,” “narrative,” or “triggered” and often occurred during everyday activities of the foster family. They also found children tend to present their

agentive role as passive in sexual acts. Even if they were forced to reciprocate or to perform sexual acts, they did not talk about their involvement as suffering the abuse. Children's use of language was therefore suggested to help them to distance themselves from the trauma of the experience: "...children disclose their past but limit their own actions linguistically, possibly to reconstruct the abuse they suffered as well as their forced contribution in the abuse" (Wubs et al., 2018, p. 13). Social workers reported children's childlike language, disclosures were found in several cases to be made in a childlike vocabulary, and children were found to describe visual images of sexual acts using childlike words (Wubs et al., 2018).

Like Jackson (2015), Larner (2018, 2022) used Childline data to linguistically analyse how children disclose CSA. Data were derived from 40 verbatim transcripts from online chat sessions between Childline counsellors and 24 children and young people (female = 21, male = 3), aged 10–18 years old, who disclosed they had been sexually abused. The analytic framework includes genre conventions, the lexical choices made by children and young people and the Childline counsellors, as well as pragmatics analysis. Work with transcripts of real-time chats allows an analysis of children's language in a genuine and authentic disclosure context. Moreover, it is a disclosure context actively chosen by the child. Larner's (2018) analysis reveals a distinct genre of sexual abuse disclosures made to Childline, characterised through five identifiable and distinct moves.<sup>44</sup> Within this context the child's goal in communicating disclosures is argued to seek therapeutic support, with the disclosure itself forming a relatively minor part of the process. He concluded by arguing for a greater focus on the micro-mechanics of the interactive, dialogic, and discursive processes at play in CSA disclosures.

McElvaney et al. (2022) explore manifestations of shame in children's CSA disclosure narratives. They examined the interview transcripts of 47 young people aged 15–25 from Ireland and Canada. Participants were recruited from community-based sexual assault agencies, hospital-based specialised clinics, and a child advocacy centre. The data were examined for implicit manifestations of shame in order to focus on implicit shame (rather than conscious shame) through how children

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<sup>44</sup> Onset, nucleus, development, therapeutic discourse, and coda.

make sense of their experiences in their own language. Despite the recognition of shame as significant cause of psychological distress (e.g., MacGinley et al., 2019), a core barrier to disclosure and recovery, limited research has explored the experience of shame with children who have been sexually abused.<sup>45</sup> Three core themes were identified: ‘linguaging shame’, ‘avoiding shame’, and ‘reducing shame’. Avoidance was identified as a thread running through children’s CSA disclosure narratives. Children also voiced self-blame. Self-blame is highlighted as a potential coping strategy to defend the self against shame, depicted as attack-self in Nathanson’s compass of shame (1994, 2014). McElvaney et al. (2022) emphasise that in children’s manifestations of disclosure discourse, guilt expressed as self-blame may need to be understood more as an implicit manifestation of shame. Children’s rare use of “shame” or “ashamed;” was noted. Instead, they used terms like “dirty secret” or “disgust”. They referred to the self as “stupid,” or to the negative perceptions of others, feeling confused or isolated or not wanting to tell of their abuse. When children did disclose, they were also found to use words or phrases to communicate their experience, hinting at but not directly naming the experience as abuse, showing a strong avoidant response.<sup>46</sup>

Several studies also pick up on children’s tendency towards avoidance, thus emphasising the need to pay greater attention to the role of children’s non-verbal or indirect communicative behaviour as a key feature of children’s CSA disclosures. However, how children’s use of indirect and non-verbal behaviours translates to TA-CSA and specifically DCSG contexts has not yet been examined. Within the CSA context, non-verbal communications have been shown to include “conscious gestures” and “indirect verbal hints” (Alaggia, 2004, p. 1219) or acting out to communicate CSA disclosures (Allnock & Miller, 2013; Cossar et al., 2013; Flåm & Haugstvedt, 2013). Flåm and Haugstvedt (2013, p. 636) propose the concept of “test-balloons” or “moments of first signs,” arguing the signs children display to alert adults something is wrong should be understood as agentive attempts to explore their

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<sup>45</sup> As highlighted in the previous section, Hamilton-Giachritsis (2020, 2017a) and Hanson (2017) have identified emotions of shame and self-blame as particular impacts that are intensified by the specific characteristics of TA-CSA.

<sup>46</sup> The analysis identified responses from others and strategies used by participants which were found to be helpful in reducing the negative self-evaluations and the perceived negative evaluations by other experienced following the abuse. These included the facilitation of being able to express their needs and emotions, reaching out to others and the nature of support and validation received.

chosen recipient's understanding or to test the outcomes of telling. A departure from or conceptions of purposeful versus accidental disclosures is urged, instead arguing of the need to appreciate "moments of first signs" as embedded in dialogue: "when trusted adults provided door-openings, children used them; when carefully prompted, children talked; when thoughtfully asked, children told" (p. 633). They warned against an over-reliance on the identification of behavioural markers towards appreciating the adult's dialogical recognition of communicative behaviours of "test-balloons" as shaping the outcome of a child's disclosure attempt.

Research findings about the challenges children face in verbalising and articulating CSA disclosures and their apparent use of distinct indirect or behavioural communicative strategies in this context raise questions of children's "communicative competence" (Ervin-Tripp, 1977; Ervin-Tripp et al., 1977; Hymes, 1972) in disclosing child sexual abuse. Ochs' (1996) "Indexicality Principle" argues within language socialisation, indexical knowledge is at the core of linguistic and cultural competence and is the locus where language acquisition and socialisation interface. Jensen et al. (2005) emphasised the extreme challenge for children to initiate a conversation about something as secret, confusing, and distressing as sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is a topic rarely addressed in everyday situations or family discussions, so the normative reference points or conversational routines present in other contexts are absent. They also found when children did disclose it was often when CSA had been addressed or "activated." They argue these routines or "indexes" when it comes to the issue of sexual abuse are totally lacking, and children require a "supportive structure or scaffold" to allow them to reveal experiences of CSA, an issue Søftestad et al. (2013) argue is beyond their boundaries for coping.

Merely recognising disclosures as interactional therefore does not go far enough because it does not give sufficient attention to "specifically what children and adults say to each other and how they arrive (or don't) at a shared understanding of disclosure" (Larner, 2018, p. 6). Disclosure unfurls through an "interplay between children's signs and expressions and the reactions of the adults around them" (Reitsema & Grietens, 2016, p. 331). Moreover, children are highly attuned to the information they gain from how adults respond to them; they process and evaluate this information, and this is what shapes their reactions (Hershkowitz et al., 2007;

Petronio et al., 1997; Reitsema & Grietens, 2016; Staller & Nelson-Gardell, 2005). Lerner (2022) found counsellors play an instrumental role in identifying when a disclosure is being made and then eliciting and reframing the disclosure as sexual abuse. He argues understanding the role of those hearing the abuse is key to understanding why some victims of sexual abuse report having tried to disclose but feeling like their voices were not heard.

MacMartin (1999) identified frameworks for the analysis of children's CSA disclosures fail to recognise their discursive character. This work was unique at the time in applying a linguistics lens to the analysis of the process of disclosure of CSA, treating disclosure as "talk" (MacMartin, 1999, p.505). The tendency to see disclosure as an "individualistic phenomenon" was fundamentally challenged (MacMartin, 1999, p.503). The author's central contention was children's disclosures of sexual abuse need to be reframed from the perspective of an appreciation of their dialogic nature and viewed as socially co-constructed to understand the "historical cultural and communal processes involved in its production" (p.505). This perspective argues for a more systemic view, moving away from identifying the intrapersonal factors shaping the decisions of individual victims, towards a broader social-ecological, person-in-environment perspective to explain the highly complex interaction between individual, familial, and contextual factors involved in CSA disclosure. These constrain and influence children's disclosure decisions and how they are articulated. Understanding how the specific characteristics of DCSG influence this socio-ecological picture and thus children's disclosure discourse requires greater research attention.

Taking a social-constructivist view requires appreciation of the child's "complex and ambiguous agency" (Ahearn, 2001, p.116) in the CSA disclosure process.

Appreciating the importance of studying the child's communicative agency and the constraints acting upon it through their discourse supports a more nuanced understanding overcomes the "flattening" effect of the victim/perpetrator dichotomy (MacLoed, 1992 cited in Ahearn, 2001, p. 534). Petronio et al. (1996, 1997) argue children strategically regulate disclosure discourse. Petronio et al. (1997, p. 101) also stated children "locate a voice of logic" in their selection of disclosure recipients and in the measures, they take to regulate access to the private information they share.

They propose children make selections based on independently developed criteria and demonstrated intense “thoughtfulness, consideration of events, people and consequences before they talked about their sexual abuse” (p. 102) and “in choosing confidants who can be trusted, these children demonstrate their power and control” (p. 105; communicative agency). The authors argue individuals who are excluded by traditional power structures maintain and exert agency by developing “double vision” through which they can simultaneously see the obstacles they are facing but attempt to navigate possible routes to overcome these barriers (p. 105). Therefore, by carefully choosing only those confidants who fulfil the criteria they have established according to the boundaries they have set around their experience, child victims of CSA retain agency and “take whatever control they can muster and strategically choose who to tell about their abuse” (p. 111).

**Impacts of Digital Child Sexual Grooming.** While the literature documents the harmful impacts of CSA in detail (Collin-Vézina et al., 2013; Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2017; see Hanson, 2017, for an overview), there is relatively little exploration of how the digital and technological context may lead to differential impacts and create challenges for recovery. Hanson (2017) published an overview of knowledge about the impact of online sexual abuse on children, which focused on how the online and image-based elements of the abuse may worsen and/or complicate impact and drew together empirical evidence to summarise the ways in which sexual abuse via online grooming and blackmail has been found to impact children (Table 2.4).

**Table 2.4** *Impacts of Online Grooming as Reported by Children and Young People*  
(Hanson, 2017, p.6)

<b>Impact</b>	<b>Quotes from young people who have been sexually abused via online grooming</b>
Relationship avoidance/difficulties	‘I’ll never be able to be in a relationship . . . I mean, it would never work’ (Quayle et al., 2012, p. 94) ‘I can’t have a partner or children’ (Quayle et al., 2012, p. 95)
Depression	‘I was self-confident and now when this all happened, I got really depressed and it’s still present in my life now . . . It’s simply the case that I have to fight depression every day’ (Quayle et al., 2012, p. 94)
Hopelessness	‘I got to the point where I wanted to run into a brick wall and just keep running into it. I was crying myself to sleep and didn’t want to wake up’ (young person victimised by online sexual blackmail talking to CEOP) ‘I don’t know. I don’t see a future’ (Quayle et al., 2012, p. 94)
Self-harm	‘I was self-harming as well . . . I landed myself in hospital’ (Whittle et al., 2013, p. 62)
Shame, embarrassment, humiliation	‘I am embarrassed and humiliated and it’s horrible because now my mum and dad know what happened’ (Whittle et al., 2013, p. 62) ‘I felt so incredibly ashamed’ (Quayle et al., 2012, p. 57)

Note: All quotes from Hamilton-Giachritsis et al. (in press), Quayle et al. (2012) and Whittle, Hamilton-Giachritsis, and Beech (2013) throughout this chapter are from young people who had experienced technology-assisted sexual abuse.

Hamilton-Giachritsis et al. (2017, 2020) drew on qualitative and quantitative methods to research the impact of TA-CSA on children.<sup>47</sup> Both studies analysed data provided by 30 young people (interviews and/or questionnaires) and screening data from 230 young people (aged 17–21 years) and interviews with 52 child safeguarding practitioners. TA-CSA was found to be no less impactful than offline CSA, challenging some practitioner’s assumptions. The additional complexity of the technology and online aspects of TA-CSA were also highlighted arguing they intensify impact by triggering self-blame, anxiety, blame from others, and a sense of continuing trauma. Hanson (2017) articulates that the effects on the individual child of TA-CSA should be understood as shaped by “moderators” (the characteristics of

<sup>47</sup> This research is identified as a complementary study to Hanson’s (2017) chapter.

sexual abuse and its social context).<sup>48</sup> These, crucially, are “mediated” by social and psychological processes that connect the abuse to its subsequent impacts. Table 2.5 sets these out.<sup>49</sup> Moderators may worsen impact by heightening some or all mediators. The online and/or image element in TA-CSA is identified as a core negative moderator, as the technology dimension intensifies a variety of harmful social and psychological processes during and following the abuse.

As seen in earlier in this section, Hanson (2017) presents an illustration of a chat transcript Figure 2.5 between a groomer and an adolescent boy to identify at least seven interrelated features of OCSA (corroborated by survivor, therapist, and researcher accounts) that exacerbate impact.<sup>50</sup> Social and psychological processes are added which are proposed to shape and influence impact in the context of online and image elements of TA-CSA.<sup>51</sup> Identification of these features and the social and psychological processes they can trigger provides a helpful heuristic to navigate children’s lived experience. Other studies explore shame, guilt, and self-blame as core impacts of TA-CSA, specifically the image-based aspects (Gewirtz-Meydan et al., 2018a; Huber, 2023; McGlynn et al., 2021; McGlynn & Rackley, 2017). However, none of these studies explore how these social and psychological effects are constructed in children’s discourse, how they may affect the child’s sense of self and thus shape groomer <->child interactional dynamics. The attendant constraints on the child’s performance of communicative agency are discussed next.

### **2.3 The Child as Communicative Agent**

The review has shown two core pools of research when aiming to situate a discourse analytic approach to studying children’s communication during, and about, their DCSG experiences. On the one hand, research has demonstrated the added value of an identity-foregrounded discourse approach to analysing groomer’s talk, identifying

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<sup>48</sup> Core ‘mediators’ identified are: Shame; Self-blame; Dissociation; Social cognition difficulties i.e. compromised ability to detect violations in social relationships – core literature supporting these mediators are also cited.

<sup>49</sup> Core ‘moderators’ identified are the characteristics of the CSA, familial support, and interactions with the criminal justice system. The author also reviews the literature about emotions, beliefs, and coping mechanisms within the CSA literature to identify core mediators that link CSA and psychological difficulties

<sup>50</sup> These features are existence and making of images; deception in the images; victim participation; permanence of images; reach of images; nature of viewing and viewers; deceit about the abuser(s).

<sup>51</sup> These are: ‘silence and the continuation of the abuse,’ ‘disclosure,’ ‘shame,’ ‘self-blame and denigration,’ ‘betrayal,’ ‘fear,’ and ‘anxiety’

a communicative process of *sui generis* manipulation and proposing a discourse-based model of DCSG (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). This has yet to be extensively applied and tested via children's discourse within or about DCSG interactions. On the other hand, a still relatively limited body of qualitative research with children was identified to have explored children's perspectives on the process, its impacts, and the dynamics of their disclosures of DCSG. The review has therefore shown current research tends to explore either: a) how a groomer uses manipulative communication to seduce and do things to/get things from a young person, or b) how the young person behaves, reacts, or feels certain emotions in response. Although the previous section showed CSA disclosure is increasingly viewed as a dialogic process which takes a constructivist view to children's disclosure trajectories, this same dialogic perspective has not yet been fully applied to a study of children's communicative behaviours in DCSG contexts.

What both research into groomer DCSG discourse and the child's perspective of DCSG have thus far overlooked is a discursive analysis of children's accounts of the identified relational process (although Seymour-Smith & Kloess, 2021 explored one aspect, namely 'deals'). Close attention to groomer <-> child relational dynamics is required to explore how the groomer's manipulative, tactical communicative behaviours and the child's behaviours, perspectives, and responses may co-construct each other. There is still scarce research analysing both the child and the groomer's communicative behaviour to explore, for instance, how threats are built up, communicated, and managed by both interactants (see e.g. Seymour-Smith & Kloess, 2021). However, although still limited, some research has started to acknowledge the merits of studying both groomer and child communication in interaction (Kloess et al., 2017, 2017; Kopecký et al., 2015).

Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2023) highlight the importance of addressing the lack of research linguistically analysing children's communication in DCSG, asserting the current situation means children are effectively silenced. A child-rights and child-centred approach to safeguarding recognises the child as a "reflexive knowledge agent" (Beckett, 2019) with a right to be heard (UNCRC, Article 12).<sup>52</sup> Lorenzo-Dus et al.

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<sup>52</sup> [UN Convention on the rights of the child](#)

(2023) therefore take an explicit analytic focus on child discourse within and about their lived experiences of DCSG. Exploring how children's identities and behaviours within DCSG are realised discursively could offer a deeper understanding of their perspectives. A discursive approach recognises and respects a child's agency and humanity, amplifying their voices while appreciating they are co-constructed and constrained in interaction.

Children's agency as victims of CSA is deeply constrained (Beckett, 2019; Dodsworth, 2022). However, there is very limited research to help orient an analysis of how a child's presentation and preservation of self through facework/relational work may be shaped by multifarious structural constraints on their agency. There has been little attention to how this may be exacerbated by a complex and intertwined intersection of identity, societal status, and experiences of abuse and the groomer's use of manipulative, tactical communication. Within relational work/facework research traditions, while some scholars have conceptualised the fluidity of face (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2022; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Georgakopoulou, 2021; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Sifianou, 2017), little attention has been given to factors that disrupt an individual's face to warp processes of facework. No consideration exists on how extreme experiences like sexual violence corrupt communicative agency. This section explores threads from the literature to help explore the factors influencing a child's sense of self and thus shape their social and communicative agency in DCSG contexts or when recounting their abuse. The intersecting factors are (i) adolescent development; (ii) digital mediation of social development; (iii) sexualisation, structures of oppression, and violence; (iv) particular self-denigrating impacts of TA-CSA as a form of trauma and abuse (iv) the disclosure context. Next strands are drawn from the literature to aid discursive exploration of how a child victims' fragile/fractured face influence the dynamics of groomer <-> child interactions and shaping outcomes both during and following DCSG.

### ***2.3.1 Adolescent Development***

Adolescence is a transformative life stage and a period of intense self-shaping (Coleman, 2019). It is when we discover our autonomy, identity, and self-esteem. Work on neurodevelopment and the social sciences has shown the passage from

childhood into adolescence triggers fundamental shifts in the evolution of self, particularly the neurophysiological systems which regulate affect and self-identity (Gilbert & Irons, 2009; Shore, 1994). Evidence about adolescent brain development has grown in recent years and shows a predisposition for certain activities tied to the neurological development i.e. being more attuned to emotional cues, risk-taking driven by reward-seeking, and impulsivity development as well as a preoccupation with how they are viewed by their peers (Baumgartner et al., 2010; Byron, 2008, Coleman, 2019; Crone, 2016; Johnson & Leader, 2008; Hanson, 2019; Quayle et al., 2012; Steinberg, 2005, 2010; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Theories of adolescent egocentrism, particularly the “imagined audience” and “personal fable” also hold relevance (Elkind, 1967, 1985; Schwartz et al., 2008).<sup>53</sup> Several studies connect the developmental features of adolescence to a child’s potential heightened susceptibility to sexual victimisation online (Bryron, 2008; Quayle et al., 2012; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005). A primary function of so-called risk behaviours may therefore be in young people’s preoccupation with seeking affirmation (particularly from peers) and feeling seen, helping the adolescent to cement a sense of autonomy and maturity and to manage anxiety and frustration (Baumgartner et al., 2010; Quayle et al., 2012).

During teenage years, intimacy with peers, friendship, romance, and sexuality all undergo steep development (Hanson, 2019; Steinberg, 2014; Steinberg 2016). In this transitional stage, adolescents are often searching for others’ approval and validation to build a positive sense of self (Hanson, 2019). For young women particularly, social norms (conveyed via the media, discourse, and the actions of others) socialise girls to see their status and worth as inextricably bound to perceptions of their physical attractiveness. Social media operates as a vessel to amplify self-comparison. The combination of feeling unattractive while being socialised to believe attractiveness equals significance can propel girls towards people online who can manipulate and exploit this. When this is combined with factors damaging to an adolescent’s sense of self-esteem, such childhood abuse and neglect or previous experiences of harassment or other adverse experience, the need for affirmation is likely to be heightened (Hanson, 2019). Most social media platforms make it

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<sup>53</sup> Imaginary audience refers to the belief amongst adolescents that those around them are as concerned and focused on them as they themselves are. The personal fable refers to a self-belief that the individual is special, unique and not vulnerable to harm.

straightforward for children and adolescents to have sexual communication with people they have met online creating a unique space for “vulnerability to meet exploitation” (Hanson, 2019, p. 104).

### ***2.3.2 Sexualisation and Sexual Cultures***

DCSG, as with all forms of TA-CSA, has been found to predominantly impact girls (and those who identify as LGBTQIA+; Chapter One). Alongside the mounting evidence of *prevalence* of this sort of harm against girls, there is also the question of the gendered *impacts* of these types of abuse. The highly gendered nature of DCSG and TA-CSA has led to increased attention, within sociology and gender studies, to theorising TA-CSA as a form of TFSV (Chapter One). Furthermore, facework is found to intensify impacts of sexual stigma, shaming, and victim-blaming for girls because of so-called “sexual double standards,” a term referring to situations whereby digital sexual activity prestigious for boys is often positioned as shameful and detrimental to the social capital and reputations (face) of girls (Burén et al., 2022; Hunehall Berndtsson & Odenbring, 2021; Ringrose et al., 2013, 2021). These double standards underpin a “victim-blaming logic” permeating youth cultures (Ringrose et al., 2021, p. 2020).

A parallel and related moral panic identified in the literature is the “cyber-paed,” the construction of a dangerous stranger as the primary threat to children, situating both the paedophile and pornography in a virtual rather than physical/real space. It is argued this leads to a mediated construction of sexual abuse of children which leaves intact the institutions fundamentally implicated in those crimes – the family, patriarchy, and male heterosexuality (Jewkes & Wykes, 2012). In so doing, it shields the need to critically engage with the role these structures and institutions play in sexual crimes against children. This construction of the paedophile as other and abnormal jars with a culture which, in commercial arenas, such as fashion, beauty, and art, fetishises youthful bodies (Greer & Jewkes, 2005). As Jewkes and Wykes (2012, p. 947) point out, “cyber-paed discourses seem to comprise a classic moral panic serving many masters: state, capital and patriarchy.”

Ringrose and Renold (2011, p. 390) argue these moral panics create “tensions, assumptions and effects” of what they term a “sexualisation of girls (SoG) discourse.” Contemporary debates and the SoG discourse tend to “fix girls” in a dichotomy either as objectified innocent passive victims or agentic, knowledgeable “savvy” navigators of a “toxic” sexual culture (p. 390). Such a binary view obscures the complexity and “messy realities of lived sexual subjectivities” (Renold & Ringrose, 2011, p. 390). To make sense of this problematic, the concept of “schizoid subjectivities” explains the multiple pushes and pulls of “sexual innocence and sexual knowingness” describing how girls are regulated by but also “subvert (in micro movements), hegemonic codes of gender/class/race and sex/uality” (Renold & Ringrose, 2013, p. 392). Research also draws attention to “adultification” which means the experience of Black girls is “missing” in research on CSA, leading black girls to be constructed as a “jezebel” or hypersexual being (Cooke et al., 2021; Davies, 2022; Epstein, 2016; Goff et al, 2014; Ocen, 2015).<sup>54</sup>

Interrelated concepts of “adultification” and “schizoid subjectivities” encapsulate the complexities of sexuality and identity formation, the backdrop to DCSG and the societal context within which the groomer’s tactical grooming communication operates. It emphasises the need for an intersectional perspective as set out in the introduction to this thesis (Section 1.5). Ringrose and Renold (2011) argue for the appreciation of “multiple becomings”.<sup>55</sup> These “becomings,” or movements, are rhizomatic, whereby energies and affects can fire in multiple directions, thus “rupturing any linear transition or trajectory (e.g. of the innocent girl child to the sexual woman)”, showing individuals can affect and be affected simultaneously (Renold & Ringrose, 2011, p. 394). The deconstruction of “static, binary positions locating girls as either savvy sexual agents or objectified sexualised victims” creates

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<sup>54</sup> Evidence shows that in the context of CSA children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (B.A.M.E groups) are less likely to come to the attention of authorities, face additional barriers to accessing statutory support and when they do reach out, receive a lower quality of support (Children’s Commissioner, 2015). Use of B.A.M.E. as a singular category is also identified to obscure diversity, conflating and homogenising the experiences of girls that fit that grouping (Wilson, 2016). Some studies therefore emphasise the need to better understand how children from specific communities experience and disclose CSA, also identifying the paucity of research that explicitly addresses CSA in Black African/African-Caribbean communities. There are also calls to recognise and challenge that the collective understanding of the normative child- innocent, vulnerable and in need of protection is White.

<sup>55</sup> See Renold and Ringrose (2011) explanation of the notion of ‘becomings,’ or movements, rooted in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy of immanence, and reminiscent of the linguistic notion of performativity, see Butler (2004).

conceptual space to explore the complexities and challenges in navigating and performing “schizoid” sexual subjectivities, built on a “proliferation of competing and contradictory sexual assemblages” (Renold & Ringrose, 2011, p. 404). No studies consider the constraint children’s attempts to navigate “schizoid sexual subjectivities” places on the child’s agency, perception of self, and thus facework in DCSG contexts.

### ***2.3.3 Digitally Mediated Development***

Technology and communicating via social media pervade to modern childhood (Kidron et al., 2018; NSPCC, 2020; Ofcom, 2022). As highlighted by Lorenzo-Dus (2023) and Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2023), core to the process of identity co-construction within digital grooming is its digital mediation. The same is true for the processes of development and sexual “becoming” set out in the previous two sections.

In these contexts, the self is fluid and “ephemeral,” disentangled from the body, thus creating freedom from the normal constraints of corporeality open to constant negotiation, change, and manipulation (Jewkes & Sharp, 2003, p. 128). The self no longer needs to be constructed in real time or tied to reality, allowing young people to “craft and edit fictitious images and personas” through this process; adolescents are moulding their identities through these new medias while they are also able to fundamentally “challenge conventional notions of how children develop” (Cooper et al., 2016; Simpson, 2013, p. 695).

Children are thus using digital media as a forum for development and sexual experimentation (Cooper et al., 2016; O’Sullivan, 2014; Quayle et al., 2012). Mobile technology and the virtual spaces it provides has been compared to the “bike shed” (boyd, 2007) for previous generations, allowing young people to develop sexual and romantic relationships by “disclosing, sharing and exchanging sexual content” (Cooper et al., 2016, p. 710). Young people are now living at the intersection of four different subcultures (media, techno-culture, visual, and adolescent), which is shaped by a “multi-dimensional mediated life” within which individuals are simultaneously media makers and consumers and digital technologies and cameras are ubiquitous and embedded in daily life (Chalfon, 2009, as cited in Cooper et al., 2016, p. 712).

Children and young people are no longer seen as passive recipients but as active participants in online communities (Atkinson & Newton, 2010). Howe (2005) identifies the emergence of new norms of communicative behaviour amongst young people created by Social Networking Services (SNSs) "combination of immediacy, community, independence, and even rebellion. All of which allow new ways for young people to explore and shape their identities and sexualities, experiment with behavioural norms, and negotiate dating and friendships. Curiosity, identity seeking, and pushing the boundaries of normative behaviours (Chalfon, 2009, as cited in Cooper et al., 2016) are all driving forces within this new-normal where it is increasingly difficult for young people to distinguish between the offline/material world and the virtual one which has become an extension of their everyday lives (Ringrose et al., 2013; van Doorn, 2011). This also creates a fundamental tension for young people who crave the interconnectedness and human connection of voluntary sharing of personal information online (central to children's agency and identity exploration) but also deeply value their privacy (central to their safety; Livingstone et al., 2019; Thorn, 2021).

#### ***2.3.4 Characteristics of Tech-Facilitated Child Sexual Abuse***

The impact of sexual violence on the self, and how this may be exacerbated by unique characteristics of TA-CSA as a form of TFSV, represents another constraint on children's agency in DCSG contexts. Sexual violence is identified to represent a basal disruption of one's "being-in-the-world," having a deleterious impact on the self (McGlynn et al., 2021, p. 6). In their study of image-based sexual abuse McGlynn et al. (2021) show participants articulated the abuse as a marked and overwhelming breach – or rupture –radically disrupting their lives, fundamentally altering their sense of self, their identity, and their relationships with their bodies and others. This sense of "social rupture" was used to convey the utter devastation caused by their experience. Participants described feeling "completely, completely broken," characterising their experiences as "life-ruining," "hell on earth," and "a nightmare ... which destroyed everything" (p. 10). The experience of this form of TFSV thus led to a "radical undoing of the self – the fracturing and destroying of all points of reference and situated understandings of the self, the world and others" (p. 11).

The sexual violation therefore represented a point of “fracture” and discontinuity which generated far-reaching change, causing research participants to delineate their lives and sense of self as “before” and “after” the abuse (McGlynn et al., 2021, p. 550; see also McGlynn & Johnson, 2021). McGlynn et al. (2021, p. 543) use the concept of “social rupture,” not only to refer to the systemic violation of having their images shared without consent, but also how participants felt “degraded,” “mortified,” “ashamed,” “disgusted” with themselves, and “stupid.” It is highlighted these narratives reflect gendered social expectations and sexual scripts, as set out in Section 2.2.2.

The constancy of image-based sexual abuse is argued to often create a particularly “pernicious violation” (Stark, 2009, p. 1517), a sense of ongoing, existential threat. This effect is suggested to closely parallel the harms experienced by victims of other forms of sustained abuse, such as coercive control in domestic abuse situations (Stark & Hester, 2019) which occurs “along a broad spatial and temporal continuum” aggravated by the structural inequities of gender, race, and class (McGlynn et al., 2021, p. 553). The embodied nature of the TFSV experience has also been highlighted, namely the fact it is experienced in and through victims’ bodies, altering their “sense of bodily integrity, and their corporeal, social and sexual subjectivity” (MacGinley et al., 2019, p. 10).

The concept of TA-CSA posing an “existential threat” is used to explain how, in markedly gendered ways, the sense of living in a hostile world, pervaded by misogyny and underpinned by the possibility of sexual violence, constrained participant’s liberty and what has been termed their “space for action” (Vera-Grey & Fileborn, 2019, as cited in McGlynn et al., 2021, p. 546). Participants reported the abuse “narrowed down [their] world” making it “small and claustrophobic;” they felt like they had to “limit” themselves and their lives, to be “closed” and “put walls up” to “keep [themselves] safe” (McGlynn et al. 2021, p.556). Some also reflected this constituted a particular harm which shuts down the self and inhibits their everyday lives, undermining their sense of belonging and freedom in the world, their “horizons of possibility”, thus limiting their experiences and participation of citizenship (Vera-Grey, 2017, as cited in McGlynn et al., 2021, p.556; see also Powell & Henry, 2017, 2017).

In an online context, sexual violence victim-survivors were found to completely shut down their online profiles, with many others severely restricting their online information and interactions. When some returned to social media, it was an entirely different experience and practice compared to before the abuse, involving less interaction, reduced use, and fewer communications (Princenthal, 2019). Therefore, the tools many use for self-promotion and projection are effectively withdrawn. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of harm we need to examine not only what is “done” to victims, but also what they are stopped from doing (Stark, 2009; Stark & Hester, 2019). In this way TA-CSA can be seen to represent a “liberty crime” (Stark, 2009) with enduring impacts which restrict a victim-survivor’s “right to everyday life” (Beebeejaun, 2017, as cited in McGlynn et al., 2021, p. 556).

Such a fundamental altering and destruction of self, and of a “self-shame fusion” (Broucek, 1991) will have likely impact on children’s face and on the facework carried out within the relational dynamics of DCSG interactions. The role played by groomer communication and relational work as part of this picture of self-degradation is yet to be explored. Furthermore, as next section will show, very little research explores departures from an “everyday face” (Kozin, 2009, p. 219) and how these may impact and shape relational work in interaction.

### ***2.3.5 Face Fragility in Digital Child Sexual Grooming Contexts***

Sections 2.2.1 to 2.24 have outlined various intersecting factors that shape a child’s sense of self, goals, and intentions in DCSG contexts. However, there is scarce research explore how a developing, “schizoid,” and fractured sense of self may distort an adolescent child victim’s conception of the face they are trying to preserve and thus their facework in DCSG contexts. Prior work exploring the experiences of holocaust survivors has posited the existence of a state of “traumatic face” whereby “extreme experiences create extreme identities” and the “loss of everyday face” (Kozin, 2009, p. 219). Kozin (2009) emphasises Goffman’s position “in the situations of dire strain, we become vulnerable, that is, unable of controlling ourselves, unable to manage face” (Goffman, 1959, p. 19). For Kozin (2009, p. 221)

the testimony of the extreme leaves its trace in face “the extreme that collapses the self and the Other together...scars the human face with permanent ambiguity.”

This review has identified how the sense of self is fundamentally interpersonal; we define ourselves in relation to others. Therefore, sexual violence, or violence of any form, is always “an exploitation of that primary tie... in which we are, as bodies, outside ourselves and for one another” (Butler, 2003, p. 4). When we are violated by another “human vulnerability to other humans is exposed in its most terrifying way, a way in which we are given over, without control to the will of another” (Butler, 2003, p. 4). Scarry (2020, p. 19) argues torture needs to be understood as an assault on human connection; it is “language destroying.” Several authors have highlighted the “unspeakability” of the act of sexual violence (Langton, 1993; MacKinnon, 1993; Princenthal, 2019). Princenthal (2019), citing Virginia Woolf, highlights that extreme pain actively destroys language, “Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unshareability... through its resistance to language” (p. 12). Further, as the processes involved in the harms of TA-CSA/TFSV including image-based sexual abuse and DCSG are not widely recognised, victim-survivors struggle to understand and narrate/name their experiences. MacGinley et al., (2019) highlight in that in their research, participants knew their experiences had been profoundly devastating but struggled to rationalise this in society where abuse is so often excused, minimised and normalised (MacGinley et al., 2019).

## **2.4 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the existing literature to situate this study on children’s discourse in DCSG contexts. Firstly, the development of various profiles of online groomers and models of the grooming process were reviewed. This showed the evolution of understanding of DCSG as a process of *sui generis* manipulative communication whereby a groomer uses a non-linear process of intertwined and simultaneously communicative tactics and other semiotic modes (images/video) and complex facework to entrap their victims (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). This research agenda has focused on an analysis of the groomer’s discourse, largely ignoring children’s discourse either within or about the DCSG process.

The first section of the review (2.2.1) explored the current literature on children and DCSG. Most early research concerned efforts to establish prevalence, risk, and vulnerability profiles. Research has started to grow exploring DCSG from the child's perspective, mostly using qualitative approaches with some research drawing on chatlog data. This can be divided into research exploring children's perspectives of the grooming process, their own behaviours (how they engage, resist, and seek help), and the impacts of DCSG. Section 2.3 of the review explored research that underpins a discursive perspective of the child as a communicative agent in DCSG contexts. Due to a dearth of research from a linguistics discursive perspective, this section reviewed relevant literature from predominantly social policy and psychology disciplines to help identify the various contextual and structural factors that uniquely contort children's communicative agency in DCSG situations. Threads of thought in extant literature were applied to explore the concept children's face fragility which may shape DCSG interactional dynamics and needs to be further explored. A discursive approach to studying DCSG from the child's perspective derived from their discourse was argued to hold the potential to address identified gaps in current research and extend understandings of how children as communicative agents behave in DCSG contexts.

The next chapter explores how the chosen methodology for this study of children's discourse about and within DCSG contexts has been designed to address the identified research gaps, answer the research questions, and achieve the research aims. It provides discussion of the data source and size, ethical considerations, presents and outlines the rationale for the various linguistic frameworks selected, and the chosen procedure used for analysis.

## **Chapter 3. A Discourse-Based Methodology to Amplify Children's Voices**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will describe the methodology of the thesis and provide an account of the design and conduct of the research project. The metamorphosing contemporary contexts within which this research is situated, the trauma-infused life-and-death nature of the topic of inquiry, and my own positionality as a researcher make the selection of research methods for this highly sensitive project a deeply political and moral exercise that must be undertaken as transparently, reflexively, and critically as possible. This chapter will explain the chosen *crystalline* approach to inquiry, consciously selecting approaches designed to refract the prism of children's voices about DCSG bringing them together into hitherto largely unexplored focus (Richardson, 1997, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Section 3.2 introduces the dataset that underpins this thesis, namely children's counselling helpline transcripts concerning their DCSG experiences. Section 3.3 outlines a reflexive account of the various facets of research ethics of human dignity. Section 3.4 begins by introducing the Discourse Analysis approach taken. Section 3.4 continues by demonstrating how these interlaced contexts call for an innovative selection of frameworks for data analysis best suited to their exploration. Section 3.5 explains the procedures utilised to apply and inductively adapt the chosen frameworks by describing the processes of data collection and coding adopted.

### **3.2 Data**

The data sample for this thesis is institutionally situated, i.e., it was produced within – and according to the conventions of – an institutional discourse genre: online one-to-one counselling sessions within a UK child helpline, Childline. Data were provided to the researcher following a research agreement between Swansea University and the UK charity, the NSPCC, who run the UK child helpline counselling service, Childline.<sup>56</sup> The children who use the service make an agentic

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<sup>56</sup> Within the Childline service, counsellors are adults who undergo a 12-week training programme and assessment and follow a pre-determined interactional protocol and agreed counselling model.

choice to reach out for help either by phone, email, or using a 121 online chat function. These factors are reflected in and shape the resulting discourse. The counsellor <-> child interaction is also digitally mediated; counselling sessions consist of synchronous instant messages using a chat function accessed on a handheld digital device such as a smartphone or tablet or via a desktop computer. Children's accounts are set up and mediated by the Childline website. The digital and textual nature of the interactions also shapes the kinds of discourses about DCSG generated within the service.

The data for the present study consist of 30 online counselling chatlog transcripts from 121 counselling sessions with children that took place in 2018–2019. Each chatlog contains all the chat-based interaction between a child and a counsellor captured at the time of the chat. Transcripts were automatically stored and recorded in the helpline's case-management system. The dataset comprised 20 girls and 10 boys – broadly reflecting patterns of the prevalence by gender highlighted within Chapter Two. The decision not to focus solely on girls was intentional. It was taken in line with the concept of “patriarchal violence” which describes the societal acceptance of adults of both genders using force to maintain power and control over children (hooks, 2000, p.3). This aligns with the intersecting public health approach (PHA) and the context/genre emphasis of third wave (im)politeness studies which emphasise the need to appreciate pivotal role that hierarchical structures and oppression play in the phenomenon of DCSG. These factors influence grooming and lead to the victimisation of both girls and boys. The decision therefore was taken to reflect the differential but existing prevalence of DCSG amongst children of both genders in the sample and to include transcripts girls and boys in the dataset. The children's ages ranged from 12 to 17 years old (average age = 15; standard deviation = 1.36). The total word count of the sample was 38147 words (average word count: 1295.1; standard deviation: 527.01). Chat durations ranged from 00:18:50 to 01:28:16 (Appendix 1)

The core dataset was supplemented by an illustrative cross-reference of 10 DSCG transcripts which were provided as part of the data-sharing agreement between UK-based law enforcement and Swansea University. These transcripts all represent 121 chats between groomer and child and the sample comprised c.10,000 words, only

illustrative excerpts were selected against OGDGDM tactics. The data sharing agreement precludes sharing further details. Excerpts from transcripts were selected to aid cross-referencing children's retrospective discourse about their own behaviour in DSCG interactions with illustrative examples from actual, synchronous child <-> groomer interactions.

### **3.3 The Selection of Frameworks for Analysis: Amplifying Children's Experiences of Digital Child Sexual Grooming through Discourse Analysis**

The process of selecting methods for any given qualitative research project benefits from a range of methods manuals (Denzin, 2000; Denzin & Giardina, 2016b, 2016a; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gilbert & Stoneman, 2015; Ritchie et al., 2003) as well as the wealth of research that has gone before in the chosen field. Nonetheless, the fundamental question of how to "do" research is one that continues to be the subject of intense debate (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Confronted with never-before researched questions and contexts, a battalion of "*bricoleurs*"<sup>57</sup> are committed to make use of all the methods of collecting and analysing empirical materials at their disposal (Kincheloe, 2011; Rogers, 2012) and are remixing what it means to research social life (Leavy, 2015; Markham, 2016).

As Bolander and Locher (2014) point out, in the spirit of "bricolage," a linguist who "remixes" becomes a scholar who draws on whatever ontologies, tools, or methods are at their disposal, whether they are traditionally associated with linguistics or not. Remix is a way of (re)-envisioning research as "exploratory and creative, a mix of passion and curiosity," mixing methods to respond to new and ever-evolving social problems in a digitally mobile epoch (Markham, 2016, p. 65).<sup>58</sup> Researchers are remixing different theoretical perspectives, disciplines, or varied forms of data analysis (Kara, 2015; Lal et al., 2012; Proudfoot, 2023). Remix resonates particularly strongly with and reflects behaviours fostered within digital communication and

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<sup>57</sup> The application of the term 'bricolage' to research was conceived by Kincheloe (2005, 2011), and can include "drawing on theory from any discipline or disciplines, adopting multiple data-gathering and analytic techniques and adopting a similarly multifarious approach to the presentation and dissemination of research" (Kara, 2015, p. 27)

<sup>58</sup> The term 'mixed methods' is relatively broad but most often refers to research that combines both qualitative and quantitative methods drawing on more than one technique, usually a mix of surveys and interviews (Kara, 2015; Proudfoot, 2023).

interaction. Engaging online is the creation of momentary meaning structures, “mini remixes,” remixed over and over, each time with slightly different outcomes. These remixes are simultaneously produced by our own actions but also influenced by myriad other factors (Markham, 2016). The lens of remix disrupts an individualised focus to celebrate and explore complexity rather than chasing simplification and order; it captures the “flows and connection points between the ecology around the child and creates space to study how meaning and assemblages and imaginaries are negotiated in relation and (inter)action” (Markham, 2016, p. 71).

most aspects of internet-related phenomena occur across multiple platforms, media, devices. Interactions that seem cohesive or complete are just partial traces ... abstracted from lived experience, displaced in time and space... (Markham, 2016, p. 2)

This is done by adopting and exploring a novel combination of the various tools at our disposal within a Discourse Analysis approach.

Discourse Analysis refers to the approach of examining language (and other semiotic modes of communication, e.g., images) in its “naturally occurring” context(s) of use (Tannen et al., 2015, p. 5). It comprises a wide range of analytical approaches to support “the process of identifying, describing and explaining features of language use in texts and investigating patterns of these features that belong to the same type of language use situation” (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023, p. 15). The discourse studied is that of the child, not that of the counsellor nor their interactions with the child. The analysis thus focuses on children’s discourse about the groomer, the experience of DCSG, or their reflections on the impacts that it has had.

Context is thus core to the study of discourse and to understanding the social function of language (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023; Van Dijk, 2008). Current understandings of the centrality of context have, however, largely been built on research between adult interactants. Similar research focusing on children and young people’s language across diverse contexts is virtually non-existent. Within the digital context (see further discussion in Section 3.1), the surprising scarcity of suitable corpus data of child language and computer-mediated communication (CMC; given the ubiquity of children’s use of CMC) has been a source of frustration for linguistics

researchers (e.g., Baron et al., 2012). This is despite the acknowledged need in childhood studies to recognise the fundamental differences between research with children and research with adults (Punch, 2002).

Over the last 30 years, developments in childhood studies have progressively championed the importance of listening to children and young people's voices and experiences and highlighted their rights to participation and the expression of their views as recognised in the UNCRC (Powell et al., 2012). An argument that research should be open to and mindful of selecting methods that are best suited to children's level of understanding, knowledge, interests, and location in the social world is core to much of the literature (Greene & Hogan, 2005). The literature details key approaches to overcoming core challenges, particularly power imbalances and promoting understanding and representation of children and young people's views. This includes using participatory methods, both involving children throughout the research process and also research *by* children and young people as co-researchers or primary researchers (see Powell et al., 2012 for an overview of key literatures and approaches). A range of methods have been developed, operationalised, and tested to facilitate research on and with children, designed to support children in reporting on or in some way revealing or displaying their experience (Greene & Hogan, 2005; Lewis et al., 2004; Tisdall et al., 2008). A "turn to the visual" in "voice" research is noted (Mitchell, 2011; Pink, 2012; Spyrou, 2011, p. 153) leading to a proliferation of creative and arts-based methods (Kara, 2015; Leavy, 2015; Mannay, 2015).

This has developed so that the notion of "children's voices" has become core to the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies. Discourses of "giving voice" appear to offer a way of treating children as active agentive subjects that have distinct perspectives. By raising the silenced voices of children and giving them a platform to be heard, researchers strive to uncover hidden facets and perspectives (Spyrou, 2011). Critical reflection on the challenges of children's voice and representation in research is a prominent theme in the literature (Alldred & Burman, 2005; Freeman & Mathison, 2009; James, 2007; Komulainen, 2007a; Lewis, 2010; Powell et al., 2012b; Spyrou, 2011). Komulainen (2007, p. 13) emphasises the "ambiguity" of the child's "voice", identifying a "moral-pragmatic" tension inherent to "child-centred" debates whereby children seem to be positioned concurrently as (i) "dependent and

vulnerable,” in need of care, protection, and support and (ii) “agentic” subjects with distinct “voices”. Deconstructing the notion of “voice”, Komulainen (2007, p. 25) warns against an uncritical quest to access the child’s voice, which he sees as tending towards individualisation, a desire to “attribute autonomy, rationality and intention to the speaking child while simultaneously divorcing the production of the child’s voice from the context in which the interaction takes place.” Spyrou (2011, p.151) also argues for more nuance, emphasising that children’s voices are “fundamentally social and reflective of prevailing discourse even when coloured by each child’s particular understanding”. In a Bakhtinian vein (Bakhtin, 1981, 2014), echoing wider debates permeating Discourse Analysis voice should be understood as social and co-constructed rather than individual, fixed or linear (Komulainen, 2007; Spyrou, 2011). When children speak they are doing so in reference to and reflecting the reservoir of inherited social languages and speech genres as well as cultural norms which regulate what they can say: “children’s experience in other words is mediated by the discourses which they are able to access and this is what we, as researchers, are offered through their words” (Spyrou, 2011, p. 159).

Spyrou (2011, p. 158) warns against the “danger of equating children’s voices with their truth,” arguing that researchers need to move towards a more critical and reflexive view, one which interrogates the processes and endemic power imbalances which produce children’s voices in research. Jackson and Mazzei (2008) challenge the metaphysical assumption of a unitary subject with an authentic voice speaking the “truth.” They therefore urge researchers to pay closer attention to epistemologies and power relations in the process of data generation, advocating the need for more productive ways to achieve representation. The complexity behind children’s voices therefore needs to be analysed much more closely, necessitating a commitment to search for new methods to explore and uncover their “messy, multi-layered and non-normative character” (Spyrou, 2011, p. 151). The acknowledgement of the intersubjective nature of voice research, and the characteristics and limits of voice as an oft-used mediational tool for accessing children’s experiences and perspectives, means that we need to start exploring more creative ways of working with and thinking about research on children’s experiences (Spyrou, 2011).

Allred and Burman (2005) argue that Discourse Analysis bypasses the challenges of asking children directly about their experiences. Its tools reframe inquiry away from solely listening to children's voices, towards a conscious design of representative methods to access and analyse children's world. A discursive approach elevates lived experiences of children and the meanings they attach to these experiences from the individual level, to (re)-situate them at the cultural and societal level. Discourse Analysis thus challenges conventional models of the agentic individual, making it particularly relevant for researching traditionally marginalised groups like children. Feminist and post-structuralist thinking highlight children and women often deemed irrational are excluded from the notion of an ideal subject. A discursive approach treats each account as partial, shaped by social contexts and agendas, and avoids reinforcing disempowerment. It also creates space to examine silence or what goes unsaid which may say more than what is actually verbalised "all research involves secrets and silences of various kinds, and these secrets and silences matter" (Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2013, p. 1). Discourse Analysis is an untapped tool to capture "the voice in the crack," which is so important because it is hidden, hard to reach and interpret, and demands a recognition of its performative character (Mazzei, 2008, p. 48).

A discursive approach to understanding children's experiences is a deeply reflexive one that connects what happens at the individual level, the context of interaction between researcher (or any other adult), and the child. In celebrating processes of interpretation, Discourse Analysis provides researchers with an innovative and clearer "window" through which children's experiences can be seen (Allred & Burman, 2005, p. 175).

Ensuring the validity of such an approach demands a rethink of the rigid and two-dimensional concept of triangulation adapting it to draw on the revised imaginary of a crystal to take:

an approach to research which combines symmetry and substance. Crystals grow, change, alter, but are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms, externalities and they refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends upon our of angle repose.... (Richardson 1997, as cited in Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 242).

This prismatic metaphorical approach allows the metaphoric “solid object” (crystal/text), to be turned, viewed, and held up to the light in many ways. By applying different analytical frameworks in combination, the researcher reflects and refracts light (multiple layers of meaning), through which we can see both “wave” (human currents) and “particle” (elements of truth, feeling, connection), processes of research that “flow together” (Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 243).

The first step to this approach is to explore the intersecting contexts within which children’s discourses about DCSG are situated. The three next sections do this. Section 3.3.1 considers the computer-mediated digital context within which and about which children’s online helpline transcripts about DCSG were produced. Section 3.3.2 explores the second research context, namely the online child helpline counselling context within which children relayed their DCSG experiences. Section 3.3.3 explores the intersecting macro-structural and societal forces that underpin the research topic of DCSG as a form of TA-CSA/TFSV, and within which children’s experiences must explicitly be situated.

### ***3.3.1 Research Context 1: Computer-Mediated Discourse***

Researching digitally mediated social contexts has been argued by some researchers to require a radical adjustment of fieldwork methods, highlighting the challenges of transferring methods designed for physically situated contexts to digitally mediated spheres” (Bolander & Locher, 2014b; Markham, 2016).

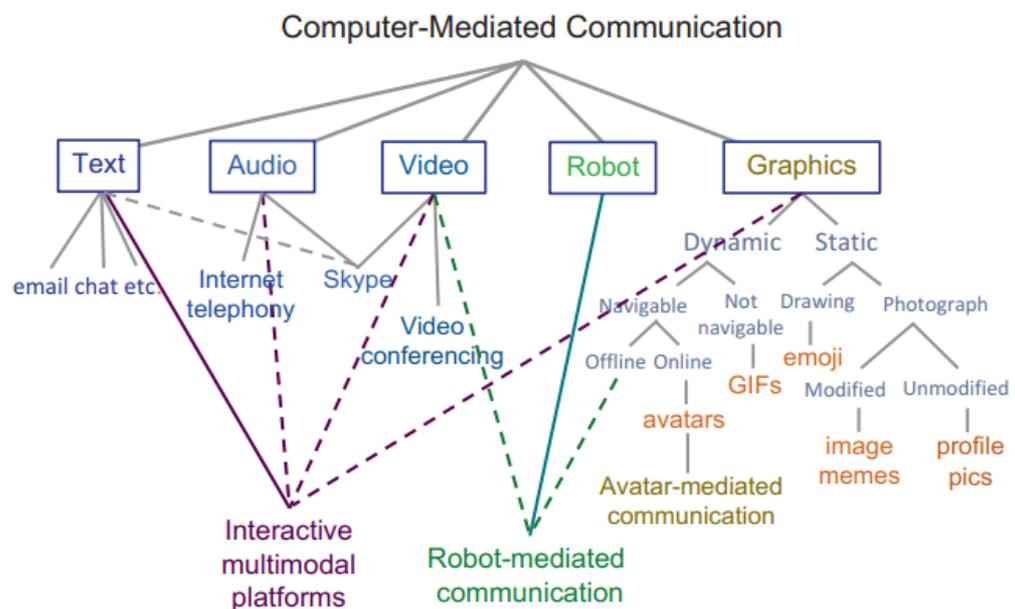
In response to this need for innovative methodological approaches, this thesis adopts a Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) approach.<sup>59</sup> CMDA was first conceived in the 1990s and emerged as a paradigm for the linguistic study of discourse in a digital context (Herring, 2019). The CMDA paradigm steadily evolved into a methodological “toolkit” which was organised around four linguistic domains, namely: structure, meaning, interaction management, and social behaviour (see Herring, 2019, p.26 for an overview).

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<sup>59</sup> CMDA is a specialisation within the wider study of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) which spans a range of disciplines.

Herring (2019) provides a useful overview structured around three historical phases of CMC (pre-Web, Web 1.0, and Web 2.0)<sup>60</sup>, identifying that the CMDA paradigm’s attempts to better incorporate multimodality have had only mixed success. Her approach to addressing this is outlined in Figure 3.1.

**Figure 3.1** *Computer-Mediated Communication as Inherently Multimodal* (Herring, 2019, p. 46)



Herring (2019, p. 46) emphasises that “regardless of the technology that mediates it, CMD can be analysed in terms of its structure, its pragmatic meanings, its interactional properties and the kinds of social behaviour it supports”. A key limitation of the revised paradigm is that although it includes robot-mediated communication, it does not account for emergent technology AI and VR which could both potentially reshape the boundaries and form of CMC, tilting conceptions of “reality,” with impacts that we are barely beginning to appreciate.

<sup>60</sup> Herring’s (2019) proposition for the evolution of the CMDA paradigm provides a useful orientation in research that has, to date, attempted this adjustment, comprising a review of over 200 ‘top’ articles to provide a detailed ‘state of the field.’

When it comes to the *sui generis* manipulative communication of DCSG (Chapters One and Two) that forms the focus of this thesis, the meaning, social phenomena, multimodality domains underpin the selection of analytical frameworks and the approach to studying children's discourse in DCSG contexts. Further, it could be argued that the evolution of CMDA not only needs to keep pace and follow the agenda set by technological advancement but also needs to follow each of the core domains of CMDA as they adapt and adjust to new and emergent genres of multimodal communication. The emphasis of this present research design on amplifying the child's perspective and spotlighting the discursive nature of the interactional dynamics occurring within DCSG through children's discourse makes an ontological contribution in exploring how the triad of social phenomena, interaction management, and multimodal domains can and should be hardwired into future approaches to a CMDA-based study of DCSG. This should draw from current thinking on the social phenomena of TA-CSA, TFSV, and DCSG and extant research findings about children's experiences.

### **3.3.2 Research Context 2: An Online Child Helpline Counselling Service**

Child helplines are unique as a confidential and child-led space in which agentic disclosures of DCSG may arise. A systematic review conducted by Mathieu et al. (2021) emphasised that the confidentiality provided by many child helplines means that they are uniquely placed to support children, providing an alternative to formal reporting routes, creating a safe space for those who are vulnerable or fearful of seeking help. TA-CSA has been identified as the most common issue children were seeking advice and help from helplines for across a range of jurisdictions (Mathieu et al., 2021). However, some helplines are designed to support younger children and have captured evidence of DCSG affecting children as young as five.<sup>61</sup> Considering these institutional contexts and how they shape children's discourse are vital to situating children's discourse within a socio-ecological view of children's lived experience and is core to understanding its multi-layered and complex nature (see Chapter One, Figure 1.1 and Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

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<sup>61</sup> See for example: [Online grooming crimes against children increase by 89% in six years | NSPCC](#)

### ***3.3.3 Research Context 3: Societal and Systemic Structures: An Intersectional Approach to Technology-Assisted Child Sexual Abuse***

Deconstruction of the victim/agent dichotomy (Chapter One) relies on extending current thinking in child protection to build a better understanding of DCSG as CSA, a form of TFSV. Situating DCSG as such is vital to support the analysis and theorisation of harm. Feminist phenomenological approaches support an explicit approach to situating children's discourses within their trauma and the embodied nature of their experiences of sexual harm (Vera-Grey & Fileborn 2018; McGlynn et al., 2021).

This study thus aligns with bell hooks' (2000, p. 5)<sup>62</sup> definition of Feminism, which describes it as "the movement to end sexism, sexual exploitation and sexual oppression." For this study, a feminist phenomenological approach is necessary to respond to the urgent child protection crisis of TA-CSA and because of what has not ended: sexism, sexual exploitation, and sexual oppression (Ahmed, 2017). Feminist phenomenological approaches have previously been applied to explore the impacts of rape (Brison, 2008, 2017; Cahill, 2009; McPhail, 2016) and street-based harassment (Vera-Gray & Fileborn, 2018). Their application to the context of TASV, including image-based abuse, is a relatively new development (McGlynn et al., 2021; McGlynn & Rackley, 2017) and such approaches have not yet been applied to the study of DCSG.

At its core, feminist phenomenology emphasises the holistic, situated, and relational nature of harms – relocating the locus of "harm" from the individual and/or their symptoms (as in medicalised trauma models), to the entirety of the social fabric of the victim-survivor's life, to the wholeness of their "being-in-world" (McGlynn et al., 2021, p. 256). This therefore aligns with the PHA set out in Chapter One and echoes the socio-constructivist positions that run through the CMDA frameworks selected for this study (Section 3.3.1). It moves away from constructions of a "pathologised subject," detached from the macro-systemic contexts of oppression (misogyny, racism, homophobia, etc.) which underpin sexual violence (Chapter

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<sup>62</sup> bell hooks adopted a lower-case spelling of her name to decentre herself to allow the focus of attention to rest on her work instead, to focus on her ideas not her identity. See also 'What's in a name' [danah michele boyd](#)

One), towards appreciating that experiences of sexual harms online cannot be divorced from other forms of harassment, violation, and abuse (McGlynn et al., 2021; McGlynn & Rackley, 2017). It prioritises amplifying the voices (in the case of this study through their discourse) of child victim-survivors as experts in their experience and perspectives on the interpersonal dynamics and harms caused (Harding, 2004, as cited in McGlynn et al., 2021).

An obvious critique of taking a feminist phenomenological approach is to ask about how this caters for boys who are victims of online grooming and to female perpetrators? Both categories occur in the dataset within this thesis (Section 3.2). hooks (2000) argues that the concern of the feminist movement should be to end all forms of violence, emphasising the concept of “patriarchal violence” conceived to be perpetrated by both adult men *and* women against children, underpinned by sexism. This definition of patriarchal violence encompasses all forms of adult violence against children (hooks, 2000) and therefore applies to CSA and DCSG.

“Patriarchal violence refers to the acceptance and perpetuation by both women and men in society that it is acceptable for a dominant party or group to maintain power and social control over the dominated by using coercive force whenever hierarchical structures come under threat” (hooks, 2000, p.3).

The pernicious prevalence of male violence against women requires it remain a priority but adopting a broader focus on “patriarchal violence” in all its forms contradicts any sense that this approach is an anti-men agenda (hooks, 2000). To support this, taking an intersectional lens is crucial (Carbado et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 2015). According to UN Women,<sup>63</sup> the concept of intersectionality, stands for the proposition that no phenomenon is adequately researched or understood without factoring in how race, gender, sexuality, ability status and class

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<sup>63</sup> A paradigm developed by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989: “Intersectionality is a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. People’s lives are shaped by their identities, relationships and social factors. These combine to create advantages and disadvantages depending on a person’s situation. Intersectionality is the acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression, and we must consider everything and anything that can marginalise people – gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc. Social factors such as patriarchy, ableism, colonialism, imperialism, homophobia and racism are all important factors to consider.” UN Women see: [Intersectionality Explained | Our Work | UN Women Australia](#)

interact and affect the topic under investigation or how those axes of oppression fuse together and overlap in the lives of the oppressed (Tong, 1998, franzke, 2020).<sup>64</sup>

### **3.4 Inductive/Deductive Hybrid Thematic Analysis: Remixing Discourse Analysis, Thematic Analysis, and Grounded Theory.**

The previous three subsections have outlined the challenges and considerations required for crafting co-evolutionary and co-creative approaches to researching children's discourse about their DCSG experiences as produced in a child helpline online counselling context. This section explores how this co-evolutionary approach has been remixed in the research design of this thesis. Both bricolage and remix research resonate with Thematic Analysis (TA)<sup>65</sup> techniques for data engagement, coding, and subsequent theme development (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2013, 2019, 2020, 2021). "Inductive/Deductive Hybrid Thematic Analysis" provides a heuristic to describe the remixed combination of analysis that inductively developed throughout this research project (Fereday et al., 2006; Proudfoot, 2023). It is an approach that is "theory-generative rather than confirmatory fashion" particularly useful where existing theory might be an incomplete fit for the research question at hand (Proudfoot, 2023, p. 309). The approach entails the generation of themes and adjustments driven by the data and so includes an inductive element. It is an inherently iterative and reflexive process (Fereday et al., 2006; Proudfoot, 2023). Researchers are seeing the benefits of combining the use of inductive and deductive approaches *to the same qualitative data*, in a hybrid approach (Fereday et al., 2006; Proudfoot, 2023). This hybrid, combined approach is beneficial for bringing research focus to children's talk about their DCSG experiences as it is particularly suited to "ensure that the voices of the participants are valued, while simultaneously allowing for more theory-led analysis" (Proudfoot, 2023, p.309).

The current study applies this inductive/deductive hybrid approach to refract children's discourse through three pre-existing first-order Discourse Analytical frameworks. These are (i) the (re)application of the OGDM to children's discourse;

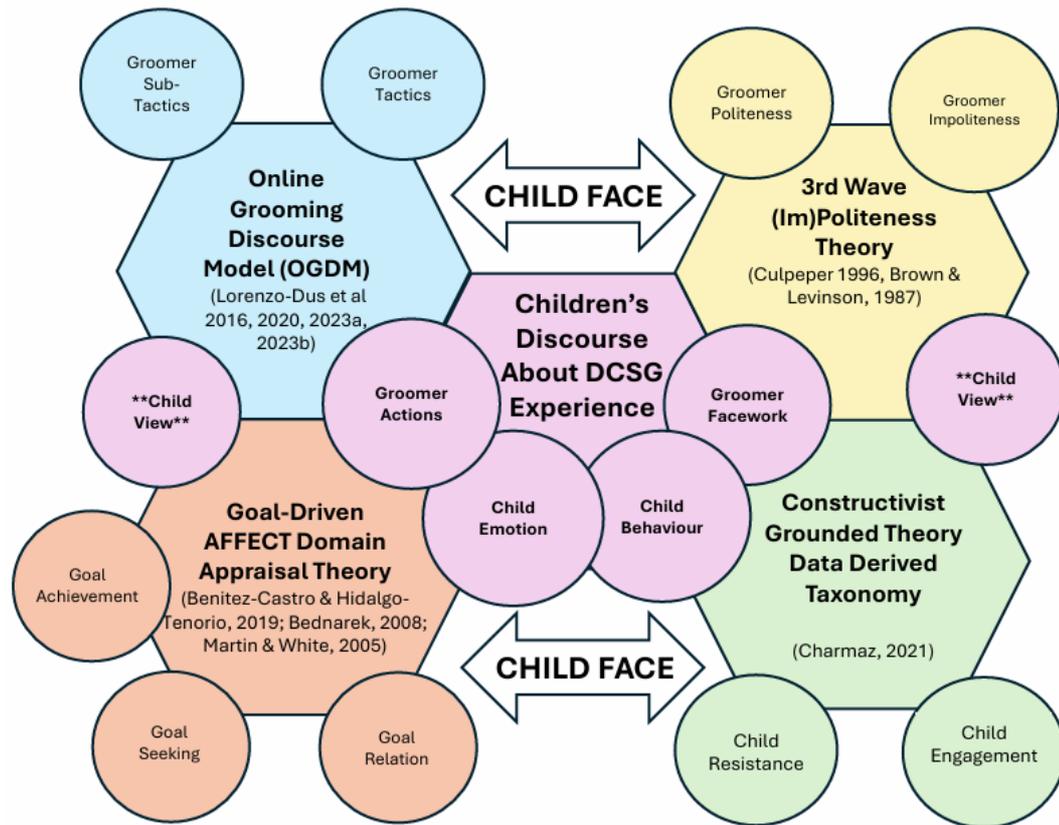
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<sup>64</sup> franzke similarly does not capitalise her name for feminist and activist reasons.

<sup>65</sup> TA has evolved and grown in popularity over the last 15-20 years and emphasises the *reflexive process* required for research which spotlights the researcher's subjectivity as an "analytic resource, which enhances and shapes their reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation" (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 4).

(ii) A facework analysis of children's discourse about groomer communicative behaviour inductively adapting (im)politeness taxonomies; and (iii) an AFFECT analysis and revision based on children's discourse of emotion (see Figure 3.3). Figure 3.3 also shows how a constructivist grounded theory approach addresses the research gap identified in the literature review of replicable taxonomies for the analysis of child discourse about their own behaviours in DCSG interactions. The approach proposes a new taxonomy driven by their discourse to explore children's perspectives on their own engagement/resistance communicative behaviours in DCSG contexts (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

**Figure 3.2** A Crystalline (Re)Mixed Bricolage of Discourse Analysis Theory for the Exploration of Children’s Own Behaviour Discourse About their Digital Child Sexual Grooming Experience



The blue schema shows how the OGDM is used to answer RQ1 of this thesis, to explore how far children’s discourse in a counselling context shows awareness and attunement to groomer actions, namely the tactics and sub-tactics identified by Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2016, 2020, 2023). Lorenzo-Dus’ (2023) conceptual framing of DCSG as entailing the three intertwined characteristics of digital mediation, *sui generis* manipulation, and identity construction provides a validated replicable taxonomy for the analysis of groomer discourse in DCSG contexts (Appendix 2). However, the success with which groomers achieve the perfect alignment of child goals, wishes, and needs with their own that they seek through their manipulative communication, is yet to be studied in detail (see Lorenzo-Dus 2023). Exploring the OGDM as reflected and refracted in children’s discourse allows an exploration of the attunement, tensions, and negotiations that may be present during groomer <-> child interactions.

Second, in the yellow space, third wave (im)politeness theories are depicted in the top-right side of the diagram. The theoretical and methodological toolbox known as (im)politeness has continually evolved during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and greatly expanded in scope (see overviews in Culpeper & Terkourafi, 2017; Ogiermann & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019; Terkourafi, 2019). Brown and Levinson's (1987) seminal work on politeness is seen as the catalyst which stamped it as a "distinctive theory of social interaction" (Coupland et al., 1988, p. 253) and is described as an enduring "ideal toolkit" (Watts, 2003, p. 112). Politeness theory is built upon a distinction between Goffmanian conceptions of negative and positive face (Goffman, 1967).<sup>66</sup> In response to politeness theory, and activated by Culpeper (1996), the notion of impoliteness started to emerge as a distinct, albeit parallel field of study to politeness research. Though the growth of research attention to impoliteness was slow compared to politeness, impoliteness research has grown at pace over the last 30 years (Dynel, 2015; Locher & Bousfield, 2008). The emergence of impoliteness theory identified limitations of Brown and Levinson's (1987) on-record politeness strategy to capture face attacks (Dynel, 2015). The central premise of impoliteness is that it is not merely an accidental failure of politeness to preserve the hearer's face, but it rather concerns active and intentional attacks that damage/aggravate it.<sup>67</sup> This led to recognition that the interrogation of the nature of impoliteness thus requires distinct theoretical attention and frameworks, which have been applied across a range of contexts (Bousfield, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Bousfield & Culpeper, 2008; Culpeper, 1996, 2005; Culpeper et al., 2003; Lachenicht, 1980; Locher & Bousfield, 2008). Culpeper (2010, 2011, 2016) published substantial revisions and clarifications, and the resultant taxonomy of conventionalised impoliteness strategies and formulae was reoriented to be based on Spencer-Oatey's (2005, 2007, 2008) conceptualisations of face and relational work, specifically organised around the proposed categories of Face (quality, identity, relational), Association Rights, and Equity Rights.

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<sup>66</sup> Negative face is defined as "the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others". Positive face was defined as "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" (Brown and Levinson, p.312).

<sup>67</sup> The broad agreement that impoliteness represents a distinct phenomenon was intensified with the advent of the internet and Computer Mediated Discourse (see section 3.5.2) which fundamentally shifted the nature and form of social interactions and a mushrooming of inherently face-attacking communicative behaviours (flaming, trolling, cyberbullying, hate speech etc.) (Terkourafi, 2019).

As Dynel (2015) points out, although they developed along different timespans, we can now take a panoramic view whereby the fundamental theoretical questions and conceptualisations span (im)politeness. These comprise: the distinction between first- and second-order approaches, i.e., lay user's own understandings vs. theorists' conceptualisations (Bousfield, 2010; Dynel, 2015; Locher & Bousfield, 2008a); the conception and boundaries of face (Arundale, 2006, 2010; Bargiela-Chiappini & Haugh, 2009; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2013, 2022; Haugh, 2009; Mey, 2003; O'Driscoll, 2017; Sifianou, 2011; Sifianou & Tzanne, 2021; Spencer-Oatey, 2008); and relational work (Langlotz & Locher, 2013; Locher, 2006; Locher & Watts, 2005, 2008; Ogiermann & Bella, 2021; Vásquez, 2021; Watts, 2008).

This thesis aligns with the so-called “third wave” of (im)politeness research, namely a bottom-up, data-driven, genre-aware approach to applying (im)politeness theories to frame analysis of interactional dynamics (Grainger, 2011; Ogiermann & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019). The central premise of third-wave approaches is that the “interplay of the initial conversation, in combination with the participants’ evaluations of politeness in the interaction and the analyst’s view, might lead to a second-order understanding of politeness and impoliteness”, (Van der Bom & Mills, 2015 as cited in Ogiermann & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019, p.7). In line with the hybrid inductive/deductive approach, the third wave thus takes “the best of the post-modern approach but retains a technical “second-order” conception of (im)politeness as a way of accounting for language in interaction” (Grainger, 2011, p. 172). To achieve this, this study applies Brown and Levinson’s (1987) taxonomy of Politeness strategies (Appendix 3) and Culpeper’s (2006, 2010, 2011, 2016) Impoliteness taxonomy (Appendix 4). The concept of facework provides a theoretical framing to interrogate, at an ontological level, children’s perspectives on groomer facework and to delve into how its manipulative nature may in turn mould children’s conceptions of and ability to manage their own face needs and wants. The identity-foregrounded genre approach to (im)politeness allows exploration of new perspectives on how groomer’s DCSG communication may fundamentally warp children’s understanding of the facework “rules” within the cognitively challenging manipulative, abusive, and violating context of DCSG interactions.

The orange-coloured element of the schema (Figure 3.2) represents the goal-driven AFFECT domain adapted by Benitez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio (2019) from the Attitude subsystem of the framework of Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005; Bednarek, 2008). Ludtke (2015, as cited in Alba-Juez & Mackenzie, 2019, p. 4) emphasise that:

language is no longer thought to be a totally objective and valid representation of reality: it is, in contrast viewed as an intersubjective expression of correlational “truth” where the expression of emotion plays a fundamental part.

In that sense, “language has a heart” (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989, p. 22). Discourse production and processing are increasingly recognised therefore as cognitive processes that need to be recognised as “always filtered through emotion” (Benitez-Castro & Hidalgo-Tenorio, 2019, p. 303; see also Alba-Juez, 2021; Alba-Juez & Mackenzie, 2019; Lachlan Mackenzie & Alba-Juez, 2019). The Appraisal framework constitutes three systems: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. Appraisal theories hold that our emotions derive from our evaluation of the impact of any event, entity, or situation on our general well-being, or on specific goals or needs (Hidalgo-Tenorio & Benitez-Castro 2019). Of the three systems, Attitude is identified as the core around which the other systems revolve (Bartley, 2020). As Bartley (2020) and Hidalgo-Tenorio and Benitez-Castro (2019) summarise, the system of Attitude according to Martin and White (2005) comprises various systems of meanings including:

Self and Other report emotion:

- (i) AFFECT, i.e., positive and negative emotions

Expression of opinion through emotion:

- (ii) JUDGEMENT, i.e., positive and negative evaluations of behaviours
- (iii) APPRECIATION, i.e., positive and negative evaluation of aesthetics

This study specifically draws on the AFFECT domain to examine children’s perspectives on their DCSG experience by applying it to the study of their discourse

of negative and positive emotion. There have been two notable attempts to modify the AFFECT domain within the Attitude subsystem. The first, proposed by Bednarek (2008), is seen as seminal in its development of a corpus-based refinement and adaptation to the AFFECT domain (Benitez-Castro & Hidalgo-Tenorio, 2019) (Appendix 5, 6). Most recently, Benitez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio (2019) incorporated psychological theories into the framing of AFFECT, arguing that it enriches and improves the taxonomy's accuracy in capturing and describing the complexity of emotion (Appendix 7). One of their main priorities was to deal with the “fuzziness” of areas such as un/happiness and dis/satisfaction and move towards seeing pleasure or the lack thereof as a crosscutting dimension that permeates all the categories forming what they term the “AFFECT continuum.” Within the trauma-laden context of TA-CSA, and specifically DCSG, this more detailed approach was well suited to capture the conflicting and complex nature of emotion children were navigating in the helpline counselling context. Benitez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio (2019) further contend the need to adapt AFFECT to acknowledge the “adaptive function of emotion” to underpin human survival and development. They argue that at the core of this constant evolution are human goals, needs, and values, which is particularly suited to the manipulative, power-imbalanced nature of DCSG interactions whereby the nature of relations is a process of negotiating over personal goals in tension (Appendix 7).

The final facet of Figure 3.2, in green, portrays the approach of layering the previous deductive approaches of applying and inductively adjusting a remix of three pre-existing linguistic theoretical frameworks with a bottom-up Constructivist Grounded Theory approach which co-evolves based on children's voices (Charmaz, 2006, 2017, 2015; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Grounded theory comprises several flexible strategies for constructing and elaborating theory through the analysis of qualitative data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It comprises an “iterative, comparative process” that involves “making conjectures and constructing hypotheses about your categories and checking them against the data” (Charmaz, 2017, p. 299). A recent reworking is the concept of “constructivist grounded theory” (Charmaz, 2017, 2015; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021), which moves away from the previous emphasis on a manual-like approach governing how to conduct the method, towards emphasising the importance of flexibility and reflexivity.

Each framework of analysis displayed in Figure 3.2 enables children’s discourse to be viewed from different perspectives and angles, holding the different angles of their discourse up to the light to refract and remix different elements of their experiences as they describe it. This kaleidoscopic approach brings their perspectives into focus to blend their distinct voices towards offering a clearer understanding of the phenomenon of DCSG from the perspective of its victims. The inductive, data-driven revisions to each of the analytical frameworks described in this section and depicted at Figure 3.3 are detailed in Section 3.6 which outlines the procedure for data analysis. The next section (3.5) explores the ethical considerations that underpin the approach of this research and the intertwined contexts within which children’s discourse about their DCSG experience is produced.

### **3.5 A Research Ethics of Human Dignity**

“Ethics is method – method is ethics.” (franzke, 2020, p. 4)

There are three core ethical considerations required for this study that are intertwined with and intensify the argument for the remixed, co-evolutionary and data-driven nature of the research design. Firstly, the distinct characteristics of CMDA outlined in the previous section also mean that distinct considerations regarding linguistic analysis in digital spaces need to be carefully considered (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Spilioti & Tagg, 2017). Secondly, there were a series of specific but interlaced considerations and safeguards required because of the focus of this thesis, particularly concerning consent, data management, and safeguards. The final area of consideration pertained to the fact that the phenomenon of study, DCSG, is a trauma-laden topic of child abuse and an existential, life-shattering violation, which raises crucial ethical questions to safeguard both the research subjects and the wellbeing of the researcher.

In line with an intersectional perspective set out in Section 3.3.3, research that emphasises a feminist ethics of care offers a helpful framework for working through the moral and ethical considerations that arise in internet research. As part of the IRE 3.0, franzke (2020), defines the ethos of feminist ethics:

It is more than just one movement. It is not an ideology, nor just one discourse. It is a multiverse of stories, lives and perspectives. It is too often a story of deaths and injustices, abuses and struggles within oneself, the community, the society, the system. So many voices of what it means to care, to keep going, to resist. When do we start to act for what reasons? Who is benefiting? How can we legitimise what we are doing? (p. 64)

A cornerstone of a feminist ethics of care approach is to use research to highlight the power of individual struggles (franzke, 2020). This means approaching questions about how we gain knowledge and emphasising that “knowing” as a fundamentally relational practice (franzke, 2020; Haraway, 2013). The pursuit of human dignity has thus been identified as the founding principle of feminist ethics; an emphasis on “dignity” demarcates a crucial boundary between caring and absorbing responsibility for everything (franzke, 2020; Nussbaum, 2013). The following sections outline how the principles of an ethics of human dignity have been woven through the research conduct adopted for this thesis from the outset and applied at each stage of research (Georgakopoulou, 2017; Markham & Buchanan, 2012).

### ***3.5.1 The Ethics of Internet Research: Key Considerations***

The first set of ethical considerations pertain to internet research, which represents a “new ecosystem of knowledge production” (franzke, 2020, p. 64) that fundamentally shifts preconceived frameworks for understanding how “identities, cultures and social structures are constructed”(Markham, 2011, p. 112). The same “socio-technical” affordances (Herring, 2019; Lorenzo-Dus, 2023) identified as requiring a recognition of CDMA as a unique multimodal genre of language production create intense and constantly evolving complexities and important questions in the ethics of its study. Nonetheless, while internet research demands an ongoing fundamental reassessment of how we conduct empirical inquiry, it has also been emphasised that the core ethical principles should endure and that there are a series of theoretical frameworks that can help to orientate our considerations (Barton & Lee, 2013; Bolander & Locher, 2020; franzke, 2020; franzke et al., 2020; Markham, 2011). Concepts of an ethics of care and human dignity are articulated within extensive and recently updated guidelines produced by the Association of Internet Researchers

(AoIR) (Ess & Jones, 2011; Franzke et al., 2020; Georgakopoulou, 2017; Markham, 2011; Markham & Buchanan, 2012).<sup>68</sup>

IRE 3.0 emphasises that ethical considerations need to permeate the research design and be frequently revisited throughout the research (see also British Association of Applied Linguistics, 2021). Now, more than ever, researchers must commit to a reflexive approach, asking questions at critical junctures throughout the project and owning a sense of accountability to be able to explain the journey that led to their decisions, both to themselves and their audience (Bolander & Locher, 2014b; Georgakopoulou, 2017; Locher & Bolander, 2019; Markham, 2011; Spilioti & Tagg, 2017). This is an act of commitment and activism; by sharing the application of ethical principles within our research, we model the importance of transparent reflexive ethics-related conversations within the field of internet research (Bolander & Locher, 2020; Stommel & Rijk, 2021).

These ground rules for an ethics of dignity were at the core of design and execution of the research design of this thesis. At the initial research design and process stage, the research study received approval from both the Swansea University research ethics board and the NSPCC Research Ethics Committee (comprised of a panel of peer academic reviewers and experts, Appendix 8). Additional considerations and safeguards were required such as signing research agreements between partner institutions (the NSPCC and Swansea University), and when it came to the illustrative law enforcement data (Chapter Seven), working within data-sharing agreements and protocols that applied to a wider research programme (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023). In accordance with data-sharing agreements, data were anonymised and redacted at source before transfer to the researcher, removing any personal identifying information. Any non-personal details such as place names and locations were similarly redacted. Each Childline transcript was provided as a reference number, and this was further anonymised by the researcher by using references such as C001, C002, etc., which can only be traced back to the original

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<sup>68</sup> The AoIR is composed of a global network of researchers with an expertise in ethics takes a 'guidelines rather than codes' approach to guide researchers to ensure their studies about the Internet are conducted in an ethical manner and to support ethical decision making as well as encourage collaborative consideration of key issues

transcript by the researcher. Anonymised data were password protected and saved and accessed via institutional secure networked servers.

At the analysis stage, as discussed in Section 3.3, the frameworks chosen for this thesis were selected for the various lenses on the data they provided, with the objective of elucidating and refracting children's experience through their discourse. This deconstruction of discourse into utterance-based excerpts further anonymised the data and aimed to uncover empirical patterns by coding children's talk against various categories across four distinct analytical frameworks and taxonomies. Quotations are, however, used for illustrative purposes throughout this thesis. With any discourse-based study it is important to be able to share extracts of children's talk to support the intricate analysis required of the discipline and to support the examination of the thesis by the examining board. A similar approach and adherence to a duty of care for the research subjects was applied to dissemination of work in progress at academic conferences. Illustrative quotations were kept to a minimum and if they were shared it was made clear that they were being shared on a confidential basis. It was always requested that the slides were not recorded in any way.

### ***3.5.2 The Ethics of Researching Children's Discourse about Digital Child Sexual Grooming as Tech-Assisted Child Sexual Abuse***

The second consideration of conducting research on children's voices through their discourses about DCSG was hardwired throughout the research design. Informed consent on digitally produced data and language texts is one of the key issues explicated by IRE 3.0, especially when it comes to big data, where gaining consent from every person is impractical if not impossible (franzke et al., 2020). While the data for this research fit the criteria of digital data in that by being digital text produced in an online counselling helpline instant messaging setting, the data were not big data.

The question of informed consent was therefore carefully considered at the outset of the project and during the process of applying for and receiving ethical approval via the NSPCC Research Ethics process. As the researcher did not receive any

identifying information about the anonymised transcripts provided, and in line with the approach advocated by IRE 2.0/3.0, it was neither possible nor appropriate to seek individual informed consent. The application to both NSPCC and Swansea University ethics boards outlined how this study would adhere to the Childline privacy notice in relation to the use of data for research purposes that appears on the Childline website, updated to ensure it covers research, which is conducted outside of, and not funded by, the NSPCC.<sup>69</sup>

The focus of this thesis on analysing online 121 chat transcripts where children talked about their experiences of TA-CSA meant it was also important to consider the process, should any child protection concerns arise within the process of transcript analysis. Childline 121 chat transcripts represent a record of a counselling chat that has already occurred in real time. The young person would have been informed of the Childline Confidentiality policy<sup>70</sup> at the point of creating their account with Childline and may have been reminded where appropriate during the counselling chat.<sup>71</sup> In the eventuality that there was an issue of concern or if the researcher was unsure, it was agreed that this would be raised with the relevant NSPCC line manager and/or NSPCC research supervisor, who would refer the issue to the relevant Childline member of staff for further exploration.

The sensitive nature of the topic of TA-CSA and DCSG requires careful consideration and a commitment that the research should “do no further harm” to participants. As discussed in Section 3.3.1, the most recent analyses of the ethical issues in CMDA advocate a flexible, responsive, and dynamic process approach

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<sup>69</sup> “We also use our database to collect and share anonymised information. We use this to help us improve Childline and to help understand what young people are telling us. This might include sharing anonymised information with researchers outside of Childline and the NSPCC so we can explore young people's experiences of particular issues.”

<sup>70</sup> The confidentiality promise is as follows: “Confidentiality means not telling anyone else about what you’ve said. So, whatever you say will be just between you and Childline. And you can feel safe talking to us, knowing that no one else will find out. But sometimes, if we’re worried about your safety, we may need to get you help”.

<sup>71</sup> If it was necessary to breach confidentiality during the chat due to immediate concerns about the young person’s safety or somebody else’s safety, this would have been explained to the young person during the chat. Childline counsellors alert shift Supervisors in real time if child protection concerns arise or chats are of a high-risk nature. Each chat is also risk assessed and summarised, coded and recorded via an advice note by the individual counsellor immediately following the chat. These notes and the content of the chat are individually risk assessed at the time by Sessional Supervisor on shift. Any concerns or issues that need to be raised are referred on to senior members of Childline staff. It is therefore highly unlikely that new child protection concerns would be present in any of the chat transcripts. Furthermore, due to the retrospective record that the transcripts to be studied represent, children would not be at immediate risk. However, if any concerns did arise it was agreed that the Research would inform her line manager at NSPCC in line with the organisational safeguarding policy.

(Bolander & Locher, 2014). This study was therefore designed with clear recognition of the need to strike the right balance between (i) carefully considering and adhering to guiding principles about ensuring ethical use of CMC data and (ii) the ethics of *not* seeking new ways to research young people's voices within a field where their perspectives are only beginning to be heard and within a research topic of DCSG/TA-CSA which is fundamentally silencing and shaming for the child victims who experience it (Bolander & Locher, 2020).

### ***3.5.3 The Ethics of Researcher Dignity and Care in Trauma Research***

Ethics committees seek satisfaction that the research is designed to mitigate any potential negative outcomes for the participants or researcher throughout the research process (Sherry, 2013). However, particularly when it comes to researching “distressing data” (Jackson et al., 2013), researcher-oriented considerations are not generally interrogated in detail. Processes often do not mandate serious reflection on how to mitigate harm and fall short of formal wellbeing planning underpinned by guidance on proven coping strategies. This is at odds with the ethics of care and dignity identified as being advocated at the beginning of this section. This anomaly has been spotlighted by the IRE 3.0 and is also the subject of increasing academic consideration (franzke et al., 2020).

The Goffmanian concept of emotional labour developed by Hochschild (1979, 1983, 1990) has been applied by several scholars to frame discussion of the emotion work involved in research (Bergman Blix & Wettergren, 2015; Jackson et al., 2013; Melrose, 2002; Sherry, 2013). The concept of emotional labour differentiates between feeling rules, which dictate appropriate emotions to feel, and display rules, which guide appropriate emotional expression (Hochschild 1979, 1983, 1990). Feeling rules underpin display rules and are vital for successful social interactions. Emotion work thus involves managing emotions to align with societal norms. The integration of feelings as integral to research is an important vein of interest amongst feminist scholars which challenges positivist notions of the “ideal” researcher who remains detached at an emotional distance to ensure objectivity in the pursuit of truth (Blakely, 2007; Campbell, 2013, 2022; Carroll, 2013; Hanna, 2019; Jackson et al., 2013; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992; Sherry, 2013). Work by these scholars has been

identified to have fostered a “research praxis for sensitive topics.” A key argument is to challenge the accepted dichotomy of thinking versus feeling, rejecting the imposed construct of researcher impartiality to accept the humanness of the endeavour (Campbell, 2013, 2022; Carroll, 2013). This has led to calls for a more proactive rather than reactive approach towards emotions in fieldwork and an appreciation of emotion as integral to rationality and reason: “Thoughts, actions and interactions are intrinsically emotional, and emotions are our inherently rational guides to the world” (Bergman Blix & Wettergren, 2015, p. 689). Emotional reflexivity, then, is intrinsic to high quality research, and emphasises the importance of supporting researchers to continuously analyse and reflect on the emotions that arise during research and to take an inter-relational standpoint (Bergman Blix & Wettergren, 2015; Gilbert & Slied, 2009). Channelling this reflexivity creates authenticity and “emotionally engaged research”(Blakely, 2007; Campbell, 2013, 2022).

The emotionally engaged researcher must recognise how both her and the research participants’ subjectivities are embodied and discursively constituted while being sensitive to how subjectivity is lived by the participant. (Blakely, 2007, p. 64)

The metaphor of a “gossamer wall” has been used to describe the relational aspects of emotional reflexivity to capture the sense of sheerness of the divide between the research and the self, emphasising the extent to which both self and research are at once “interactive and inter-subjective” (Carroll, 2013, p. 557). The inherent permeability means that “the problems, identities, thoughts of others, or even our past ghostly selves” (Doucet, 2008, p. 73) may intrude to become foregrounded and alter the identity of the researcher (Carroll, 2013). Despite this acknowledged permeability, experiential accounts of the emotional labour and the process of invoking emotional reflexivity remain rare. In part this is because they require the researcher to show uncomfortable “personal exposures” (Jackson et al., 2013, p. 11) of vulnerability that rock the feeling and display rules that govern the academic and professional spheres (Campbell, 2013, 2022).

While scarce, some research has explored the specific challenges of researching sexual violence as a process of bearing direct and indirect witness to participants’ abuse and trauma, which can result in secondary traumatic stress or vicarious trauma

for the researcher (Coles et al., 2014; Coles & Mudaly, 2010; Jackson et al., 2013). Vicarious trauma has been identified as transforming one's inner experience through empathetic engagement with trauma experiences and material (Campbell, 2013, 2022; Coles et al., 2014). Secondary traumatic stress is similar to vicarious trauma but is based on a set of clinical symptoms which reflect those seen in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and is largely identified as a natural response to exposure to trauma by working up close with other people's experiences and pain (Campbell, 2022; Coles et al., 2014). Frustrations and concern have been levelled at how little discussion there is in academia about the realities of conducting this type of "emotionally involved research" (Campbell, 2022, p.12; also Mallon et al., 2021; Mallon & Elliott, 2019, 2021; Sherry, 2013). Calls are emerging for scholarly attention to "researching the researcher" to better capture and amplify experiences of conducting "trauma" research and to put measures in place to minimise the harm identified as inherent in doing this work (Campbell, 2013, 2022; Mallon & Elliott, 2019).

While there is growing acknowledgement and exploration of the effects of vicarious/secondary trauma on researchers, there has been limited academic discussion on the impact of vicarious/secondary trauma experienced by researchers working with secondary data sources (Fincham et al., 2008; Jackson & Mazzei, 2008; Kiyimba & O'Reilly, 2016). There has been some research into the impact on transcribers of research (Kiyimba & O'Reilly, 2016; Sherry, 2013; Warr, 2004) and in the digital sphere, the impact of working with sensitive online TA-CSA data, particularly image-based abuse on content moderators and the development of recommendations for "coping".<sup>72</sup> Explanations for the dearth of research within the literature are two-fold: firstly, work with secondary sources has been presumed to be less emotionally demanding due to lack of interaction with participants and, secondly, work with secondary data sources remains an evolving avenue of qualitative research (Jackson et al., 2013).

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<sup>72</sup> See, e.g., [Secondary Trauma Research | Middlesex University \(mdx.ac.uk\)](#); [Invisible Risks – University of Middlesex – Safe Online](#); [Coping-Briefing.pdf \(mdx.ac.uk\)](#)

Despite the work on the specific impacts of working with secondary data, the impacts for discourse analysts of intensive study of the intricacies of the language of sexual abuse (drawing on textual online data) has barely been recognised let alone studied (Fincham et al., 2008; Jackson et al., 2013; Kiyimba & O'Reilly, 2016). Some research has acknowledged the “active reading” and “absorption” in the study of CMC (and CMDA) requires an intensity that can quickly lead to “emotional saturation” (de Maiti & Fiser, 2021, p.78; Hanna, 2019). Lorenzo-Dus (2021) spotlighted some of the issues at a British Association of Applied Linguistics New Media Special Interest Group dedicated workshop. Subsequent publications have highlighted some of the specific impacts of a discourse-based focus on digital grooming (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023). Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2023) challenged the assumption that linguists “only” deal with text and words, arguing that the analysis of language, particularly language in context can be a “fully immersive experience”(p.13). Other work has identified that with vicarious trauma, each of us may experience topics as distressing with differential impacts that play out in “highly unpredictable and uncertain ways” (Carroll, 2012, p.556). This emphasises the need to approach the exploration of the impacts of researching distressing and topics in a relative rather than a “one size fits all” approach, appreciating that impacts will be mediated by individual experiences, identities, and circumstances (Lorenzo-Dus, 2021, Carroll, 2012).

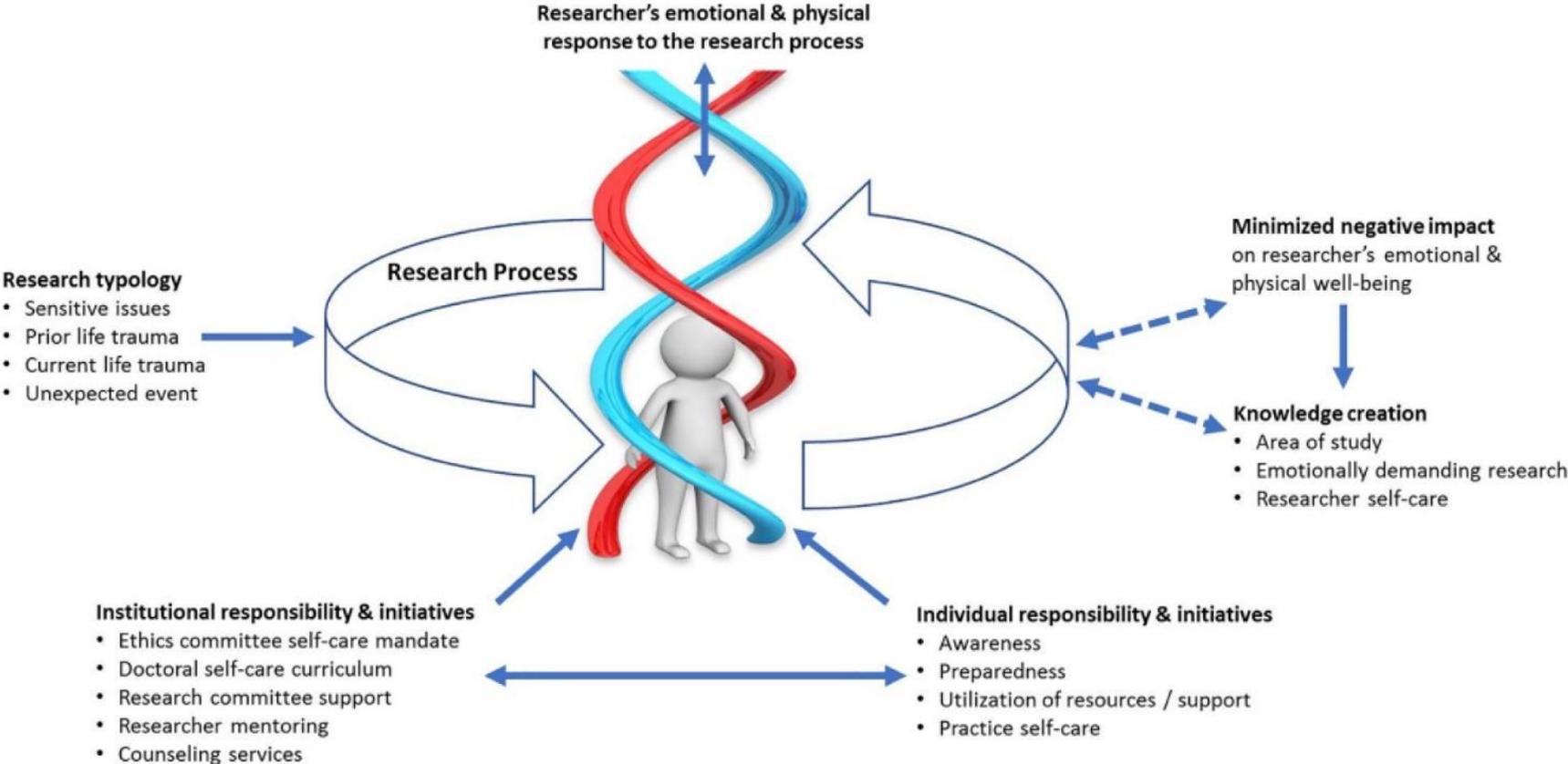
Despite this individuality of impact, several researchers stress the urgency of openly discussing, attending to, and adequately safeguarding the researcher from the “highly relational processes at play” and “inherent risks” of conducting this sort of research (Carroll, 2013, p.557; Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). Research is still limited but some scholars have started to examine the cost of “caring” as an emotionally engaged researcher (Campbell, 2022; Sampson et al., 2008). The argument is growing that the “ethic of care” integral to emotionally engaged research should extend to the researcher (Blakely, 2007; Campbell, 2002; 2022). This slow growth in attention to researcher wellbeing and self-care has led to several researchers making recommendations to outline best practice in coping and management strategies<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Recommended within the literature include, journal writing or recording of fieldnotes, peer or colleague debriefing, and counselling, maintaining balance between work and home life, exercise to reduce stress.

(Blakely, 2007; Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Kumar & Cavallaro, 2018; Sampson et al., 2008; Carroll 2012, p. 558). These guidelines are geared towards trying to mitigate the emotional labour and physical and psychological costs of researching “emotionally charged,” distressing, and trauma-laden topics (Blakely, 2007; Campbell, 2013, 2022; Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Rager, 2005; Sampson et al., 2008). Kumar and Cavallaro (2018) have proposed a conceptual framework for researcher care in emotionally demanding research which discerns between “Institutional responsibility and initiatives” and “individual responsibility and initiatives” (Figure 3.3).

**Figure 3.3** *Researcher's Emotional and Physical Response to the Research Process* (Kumar & Cavallaro, 2018, p. 655)



Following calls for an “active” reflexivity of emotion reason (Bergman Blix & Wettergren, 2015), it is important to include a reflection on the researcher’s experience within this PhD study. It was a privilege to work with helpline data where a child had found courage to speak out about CSA. It generated a sense of responsibility which was intensified within the chosen methodology of carrying out a discourse-based analysis of children’s own words in the form of their accounts of their deeply personal traumatic experiences and disclosures of abuse. As custodian of their voices, I feel a moral responsibility to contribute by adding my experiential account as part of the wider project of fostering honest academic dialogue about the emotional and traumatic impacts of working with distressing data. A reflexive account takes in my own biography and multiple identities.<sup>74</sup> It is critical to acknowledge how these multiple identities were “woven into the fabric” of my interpretations and that they can shift and change with the process of reflexive engagement and discussion carried out during the research journey (Jackson et al., 2013, p. 9).

During my research journey I experienced feelings of powerlessness and frustration of being unable to ‘rescue’ my participants or gain closure on their case. I felt a heightened responsibility to the children I represent through my analysis, to do their story justice, and create change. It is important to explicitly mention that this thesis was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and recurrent lockdowns. As a mother of a small child (aged 3–5 during lockdowns), attempting to juggle full-time childcare while studying this topic had unique and deep impacts. Myriad pressures, vicarious trauma, and sleep deprivation manifested as generalised feelings of panic, anxiety, and darkness, and I experienced periods of overwhelm and burnout. At times the overlap in subject area between my professional work and academic study was challenging to negotiate. For example, there was one 6-month period where I was directing a co-production project with a group of CSA lived-experience experts (survivors) which created a cognitive connection between the children’s voices in the

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<sup>74</sup> As an early career academic, a Senior Professional working fulltime across two roles (academic and within the NSPCC) both dealing daily with issues of CSA and neglect; a trained and at the outset of this thesis, a practicing Childline counsellor; a woman existing in a patriarchal society where sexual aggression and violence against women are the backdrop to daily existence; a mother of an adoptive care-experienced girl child with a complex birth history.

data being analysed and the adult survivors, embodied people with expressions, smiles, in front of me who gave my research subjects a “face.” Reflecting the experience outlined by Jackson et al. (2013), I also at times “heard” the voices that permeated my research, and on more than one occasion had visualisations where my mind conjured the experiences that were being relayed. This was a disturbing and challenging experience. It is not an overestimation to state that conducting this research has fundamentally changed me. Despite the dark and challenging emotions and sensations provoked by the research, having access to and being proactive in seeking support means that I complete this thesis having learned more about myself. I have learnt to navigate, conduct and design emotionally attuned research, and it chimes with the process of self-transformation discussed by other researchers (e.g. Campbell, 2022).

Drawing on Kumar and Cavallaro’s (2018) conceptual framework (Figure 3.3), in my research practice it is possible to identify both initiatives supported by my institution, spearheaded by the responsible, empathetic, and receptive action taken by my PhD supervisor/Project PI in taking concerns raised and observed within the research team seriously.<sup>75</sup> Throughout this doctoral study and wider research project, researcher wellbeing was openly discussed, fore-fronted, and integrated into the research design. The fusion of my professional role as Research Associate within the research team alongside my studies as a PhD student<sup>76</sup> was crucial to the support I was able to advocate for and receive. Our research team approach meant that I, with other doctoral colleagues, were instrumental in sourcing and establishing collaborative group training and support networks with other colleagues working with distressing data. Group working, briefing, and debriefing were built into coding and data analysis sessions. In March 2020, we benefited from group sessions run by an accredited psychotherapist with expertise in vicarious trauma and CSA. I requested and was provided with eight sessions of funded clinical supervision with a registered clinical psychologist who has expertise in working on child abuse.

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<sup>75</sup> The approach adopted included checking in and openly discussing our wellbeing and advocating on our behalf/ear-marking funding and time to put initiatives in place and to enhance/adapt them as necessary.

<sup>76</sup> There are specific and underexplored impacts on PhD students due to the length, depth and isolating nature of independent doctoral study as well as the low professional status, often on the first rungs of their career, thus feeling dependent on relationships for research contracts. This needs to be acknowledged as a potential barrier to recognise a need for and to ask for support.

Research Supervision meetings also routinely involved discussion of wellbeing considerations.

This institutional and therapeutic support and supervision and my prior training as a Childline counsellor also provided me with personal coping and trauma-management strategies which I was able practice and apply. This aligned with the “individual responsibility and initiatives” category in Kumar and Cavallaro’s (2018) framework. One of the key practices I adopted was to keep a daily reflective journal, which now runs to over 40,000 words, where I recorded thoughts, emotions, observations, and progress during the coding development and review process, analysis, and write up phases of the research.<sup>77</sup> Several researchers recommend a journal or the practice of recording “field notes” to debrief the research process and record observations as well as to reflect on how we are arriving at the insights and interpretations we make during research (Proudfoot, 2023; Richardson, 1994; Sherry, 2013). It has been described as tool for self-debriefing, a “safe ‘unloading zone’ for the emotionality that emerges” (Sherry, 2013, p. 285). I also operationalised advice from my clinical psychologist, which I believe carried me through this project. It was to actively create moments of light to counteract the darkness of the trauma.<sup>78</sup> The practices adopted created space to reflect and reorient focus on the positive impact and contributions that the research aims to deliver. However, it is vital to caveat that these practices take time, finances, and conscious effort to incorporate into research practice. I had to steel myself and rise above significant personal, familial, personal, and professional pressures to be robust that these practices were integral to the wider thesis project rather than a detraction.

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<sup>77</sup> My research journal provided a sandbox for trauma, somewhere to ‘park’ it and the practice of journalling at the end of each research session became a boundary-setting ritual which separated the research from my wider professional and personal life.

<sup>78</sup> She advocated techniques of consciously calming and regulating the nervous system. In my case this involved this using calming ambient music, meditation, actively seeking to write in natural or inspiring locations, cold-water immersion, swimming and running.

### **3.6 Procedure for Data Analysis**

#### ***3.6.1 Data Collection/Preparation***

In accordance with the full ethical approval received both from Swansea University and NSPCC Research Ethics Committee and subsequent research agreements, all chatlog transcripts were anonymised and allocated IDs by Childline before being shared for analysis.

The anonymised data were received as individual word documents. These were password protected, catalogued, and assigned research IDs as an additional layer of anonymisation. The chat transcripts were accompanied by an excel metadata spreadsheet (Appendix 1) that provided:

- Reference number (to allow the researcher to match with the transcript)
- Date Contact Made
- Duration of chat
- Age
- Gender

A sample of 50 anonymised transcripts of 121 online chats between children and counsellors was requested from Childline. To select the 50 transcripts, the following sampling procedure was followed:

- Only chats of a duration of +15 minutes were included (to ensure a substantive chat to analyse).
- Due to the fast pace of technological change and given recent legislative changes in England and Wales and the inevitable “lag to publication” issue in any research, chats were selected from the 12-month period prior to the commencement of the research project, i.e., spanning the 2017/18 date range.

Data were selected via coding tags or “main concerns and sub-concerns” that are assigned and recorded by Childline Counsellors as part of their standard advice note

recording and review process.<sup>79</sup> Within these agreed sample parameters, 50 chats were selected at random using an online dice (carried out by Childline staff – a process used by the team previously in chat transcript selection). It was agreed that this random sample would be allowed to govern the mix of age (within pre-agreed parameters) and sexual orientation of the children studied.

The original 50 transcripts provided were manually checked for relevance and length, and the content of the sub-concerns was reviewed. It was decided that 30 transcripts was a manageable and appropriate sample size for the breadth of analysis that would be conducted in this thesis. As a result, 20 transcripts were disregarded and a final sample of 30 transcripts (10 boys and 20 girls) was selected to reflect broad patterns of gender prevalence of victimisation discussed. It is acknowledged and emphasised throughout this chapter that this sample is not representative of all children who experience DCSG and did not intend to be. The randomised approach to transcript selection was designed to achieve a randomised snapshot of young people's experiences and their reflections on these experiences across a particular period, providing a unique sample for discursively analysing children's discourse about their DCSG experiences. Extracts are provided verbatim as originally provided and (mis)spelling in the data has been preserved to stay authentic to the child's voice.

### ***3.6.2 Coding Procedure***

Coding is often seen as the first stage in transforming data to analysis, underpinning the process of application to existing taxonomies and analytical frameworks and allowing the emergence of analytical themes (Woodby et al., 2011). As discussed in Section 3.4., the coding process for this research project was interpretive, inductive, and iterative: a "spiral" of reading, discussion, elucidation, thinking, questioning, note writing, and reviewing, consolidating, checking and rechecking (Woodby et al., 2011, p.832).

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<sup>79</sup> This represents a set list agreed and reviewed at intervals consistently available to counsellors. The choice of 'concern,' however, is subjective, and the system does not allow for adding multiple sub-concerns. All transcripts were selected from the Main Concern: Sexual abuse ONLINE+. Within this main concern, in discussion with Childline Managers, it was agreed that four sub-concerns were most likely to contain children's discussions of DCSG interactions: (i) Contact with a person who poses an online sexual abuse risk; (iv) Discussed removal of sexual images; (iii) Online sexual exploitation/grooming; (iv) Receiving sexual messages/images from an adult.

Coding against each of the chosen taxonomies was reviewed at intervals by the thesis supervisory team. This was an iterative process so any requirements to consolidate coding frameworks or resolve differences in coding were agreed through discussion.

### ***3.6.3 Application of the Online Grooming Discourse Model to the Analysis of Children's Discourse***

For the present study, the first step of analysis was to map children's discourse about groomer communicative behaviours against the OGDM as revised and presented in Lorenzo-Dus et al. 2023; Appendix 2).<sup>80</sup> This procedure involved making a series of data-driven adaptations to the OGDM at the tactic and sub-tactic level and resulted in a coding book used in analysis. The revised OGDM coding book for analysing children's discourse is presented in Appendix 9.

The first departure from previous analyses of the OGDM within this study was the decision to analyse children's discourse about the groomer's ACCESS tactic. The Perverted Justice Decoy data and Law Enforcement data comprised excerpts of groomer <-> child discussions which often would not have shown the onset of the interaction. Children's discourse within the online helpline counselling context, however, is characterised by being children's retrospective accounts of all parts of their DCSG experience and interactions with the groomer, including at times their reflections on the onset of the grooming. This enabled some insights into ACCESS which enrich understandings of DCSG dynamics contributed by the study of children's discourse.

When it came to DTD, children's discourse revealed discussion about the groomer giving physical gifts (money, travel tickets, goods such as clothes) as well as verbal gifts (praise, compliments). Given the inherent power imbalance between adult and child (see discussion Chapter Two), the giving of gifts by the groomer and its presence in children's discourse marked it as an important facet of groomer

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<sup>80</sup> Note that some of the final term and definitions for tactics and sub-tactics were further refined and adapted between the coding and analysis carried out for this present study and the publication of Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2023) but the substantive categories and definitions and discussions about the broader adaptations required underpinned the development of the codebook for this study.

communication and facework management. Gift-giving served a distinct pragmatic function within the groomer's wider tactic of trust and relationship building that needed to be captured. The DTD tactic within the OGDM was therefore adjusted to subsume the Praise category identified by Lorenzo-Dus (2023) and Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2016, 2020, 2023) into a sub-tactic of a revised tactic, namely "Gifts." Gifts thus comprised "Verbal Gifts" and "Physical Gifts." The pragmatic functions of "Verbal Gifts" were also adapted from those set out Lorenzo-Dus and Izura (2017) to include a new category of "Exclusivity/Specialness". These adaptations allowed both for the pragmatic function of praise to be more explicitly situated as contributing to the trust-building and relationship management process within a wider process of the groomer "giving" and "attending" to the child as part of their facework strategies (Chapter Five).

A second adjustment made to the DTD tactic involved a broadening of the definition of "personal information" within the EPI sub-tactic. The definition in the original OGDM was "Groomers engage the child in the reciprocal exchange of personal details, including actual whereabouts (town, city, state), ages/birthdays, real names, computer locations (address), mobile or land line telephone numbers and pictures."(Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016, p. 48, emphasis added). This definition coincided with the rapid evolution and almost blanket public (at least in Western societies) adoption of personal smart phones and other image/video production devices such as tablets with sophisticated and ever-evolving image and video-capture technologies. As highlighted in Chapter Two, this brought new social practices and cultural artefacts to the process of self-construction and projection, such as the rise of the "selfie," including the sharing of nude and semi-nude images. This practice clearly holds pragmatic communicative function and reflects the multimodality emphasised by the most recent revisions to the concept of CMDA (Herring, 2019) discussed in Section 3.3.1. However, while Herring's (2019) CMDA paradigm accounts for video in the form of videoconferencing, it does not capture the ubiquity of image and video/live streaming production that corresponded with smartphone technology evolution. While the reference to "pictures" in the original EPI definition can apply to children's taking and sharing of images, it does not explicitly cover the idea of self-produced images or video content or reflect the rapid evolution of digital and smartphone communication. To attempt to capture this as it occurred in

children's discourse, the EPI definition was broadened to also encompass references by the child to the sharing of self-produced images and videos (Appendix 9).

The normalisation and ubiquity of the communicative and social practice of self-produced image and video exchange in the CMC context of DCSG (and other CMC contexts), which fuses textual and semiotic communication, also required careful methodological consideration. When it came to the SG Tactic, during the finalisation of analysis and interpretation, the final taxonomy was influenced by the sub-tactic label revision used by Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2023) which renamed "Explicit Desensitisation" as "Explicit Sex Talk"(EST) and Implicit Desensitisation as "Implicit Sex Talk" (IST). This provides a neater distinction between the sub-tactic (what/speech act) and the purpose it served (how/why/pragmatic function/facework, Chapter Five), i.e., to desensitise the child. The groomer exploits children's socialisation to take and send selfies, to either expose the child to sexualised images of themselves, and/or encouraging the child to take and send self-generated sexualised images. It thus serves the dual function of increasing the child's exposure to sexualised content and achieving fantasy-driven gratification for the groomer. The EST sub-tactic used in the taxonomy applied for this study aligns with Lorenzo-Dus et al.'s (2023, p. 25) definition to include "sexually explicit images/media." References by the child of the groomer sending or requesting sexually explicit CCII/IV are therefore coded as EST as well as EPI.

The analysis of children's attunement to groomer tactical communication within the OGDM, specifically within the SG tactic, also included an analysis of how children discursively constructed the groomer's SG-oriented discourse. This was in part achieved by applying Lorenzo-Dus and Kinzel's (2021) taxonomy of vague language in DCSG (Appendix 10 and 11). The taxonomy is an adaptation of Zhang's (2011, 2013) classification of vague language in sensitive contexts. Although there were no revisions required to the categories included in Lorenzo-Dus and Kinzel (2021) taxonomy, children's discourse revealed a new category of vague language use which was termed Omission. Omission refers to instances where children used language to avoid references to sex entirely within their discourse. This was a new category of vague language identified within this dataset of children's discourse, not included in previous vague language analyses (Zhang, 2013; Lorenzo-Dus & Kinzel,

2021). This category was therefore added to the taxonomy and is a contribution that has arisen through the focus on children's discourse. See Appendix 12 for the revised and expanded taxonomy/coding book.

The adaption of the original OGD (Lorenzo-Dus, 2016) to reframe APPROACH as the Further Contact (FC; Lorenzo-Dus 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023) was also adopted in this thesis. This was to conceptualise FC as core to, rather than an endpoint of, groomer tactical communication and to create space for a distinction between FC Online and FC Offline, which both became new sub-tactics. This was important to attend to the prevalence of groomer behaviours discussed by children that were designed to extend or diversify their opportunities for grooming children and the pursuit of their sexualised goals. As shown in Chapter Two, the role of images and videos in sextortion has been identified in the grey literature but to date has not been studied from a CMDA or linguistics perspective. As such, children's discourse about groomer requests for or about sexually explicit images or videos were coded as FC.

Although providing a degree of amplification of children's discourse regarding images and videos, the decision to code utterances on this theme across three different sub-tactics reflects the intertwined nature and multifunctionality of image sharing and storage capabilities delivered by smartphones. It also reflects their ease of distribution unchecked, which is facilitated by the current operation of SNSs as well as the evolution of social practices instigated by the popularity of image-sharing sites such as Instagram and Snapchat. It is therefore argued that the amplification is justified to reflect the fusion of image-based and textual communication observed in children's discourse in DCSG contexts.

#### ***3.6.4 Application of (Im)Politeness Theory to the Analysis of Children's Discourse about their Digital Child Sexual Grooming Experiences.***

To analyse children's perspectives on Groomers' facework, a taxonomy and coding book was developed to record references to groomer (im)politeness in children's discourse. Children's references constituted (im)politeness assessments and evaluations, which, in line with the approach taken by Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2023) and

Lorenzo-Dus and Mullineux-Morgan (forthcoming), were mapped by the analyst onto (im)politeness taxonomies. Given the DCSG context studied and the strategic and manipulative nature of groomer communication (and that the term trigger is used in Chapter 6 of the thesis), the term strategy is used across both politeness and impoliteness taxonomies within Chapter Five to support conceptual clarity and consistency in working with multiple taxonomies across the thesis.<sup>81</sup>

In line with the objective of this thesis to amplify children's voices, children's utterances were allowed to "speak for themselves." This led to a series of proposed adaptations to both taxonomies to better capture children's perspectives on the groomer's manipulative communication. However, it is important to note that the asynchronous nature of children's retrospective accounts within the context studied placed a limitation on the study of interactional dynamics and thus the application of (im)politeness taxonomies. The asynchronous nature of children's discourse about their DCSG experiences means that these experiences are not necessarily representative of the range of (im)politeness strategies present in groomer (and for that matter child) discourse. However, given the research blindness to date towards children's perspectives of DCSG interactions, capturing children's perspectives as interactants in DCSG exchanges and identifying what and how they choose (or not) to emphasise and share their experience in a counselling context makes a significant contribution to current knowledge. It also offers a unique lens through which to further amplify children's voices about their experiences.

**Adaptations to the Politeness Taxonomy.** A series of adaptations were made to Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Taxonomy. These adaptations and the coding book devised is presented at Appendix 13. Adaptations include:

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<sup>81</sup> Culpeper (2016) discusses the choice of terminology ((conventionalised) strategies/formulae/triggers) explaining the challenge of mapping "logical, rational choices in order to achieve particular goals" and particularly addressing the "problem of directness". He therefore defines the term 'strategy' as "something that is routine, that is sociocultural knowledge within a particular community", and in line with a genre-based approach this should also include a particular context. Culpeper (2016) voiced concern about the "baggage" that surrounds the term "strategy" namely that it does not connote the sorts of bottom up approaches he advocates and instead opts for the term 'trigger'.

- The strategy noticing/attending to the child was adapted for this dataset to refer to the child reporting the groomer giving praise and compliments as well as listening, attending, and caring for them.
- The strategy “give gifts” was extended to encompass reference to both material (e.g., money) and symbolic (compliments) gifts and to mirror the Gifts tactic proposed in revisions proposed to the OGDM (see Section 3.6.3).
- The strategy “question, hedge” included instances where the child explicitly referenced the groomer using the verb “ask” to relay requests for information (questions) and for the child to engage in various behaviours. While the verbum dicendi “to ask” is rather generic in facework terms, its presence in the children’s discourse conveyed a distinction in children’s perception manifested in their discourse. Children were differentiating between the groomer sense-checking (“asking” as opposed to “demanding”). That is, making some attempt to mitigate face threat. It posed a challenge to the analyst that was not easily resolved but it was deemed important to capture. It was therefore decided that this groomer communicative behaviour fitted classification as negative politeness and was thus coded as “question, hedge.”

**Adaptations to the Impoliteness Taxonomy.** Within impoliteness, adaptations were more substantive and are outlined in the coding book in Appendix 14. Culpeper’s (2011) impoliteness taxonomy identified three core impoliteness orientations: (i) Face (any type), (ii) Association Rights, and (iii) Equity Rights. The adaptations concerned the Equity Rights Orientation of Impoliteness which comprises four strategies: (i) Patronising Behaviour, (ii) Failure to Reciprocate, (iii) Encroachment, and (iv) Taboo Behaviours. The adaptations required aligned to the Encroachment Impoliteness strategy. Culpeper (2011; 2017) defines encroachment as “producing or perceiving a display of infringement of personal space (literal or metaphorical).” In Culpeper’s (2011) proposed conventionalised impoliteness formulae (strategies), derived from his own datasets and cross-checked with the Oxford English Corpus (OEC), encroachment is realised primarily via “Threats” and the latterly added “curses and ill-wishes.”

Children's discourse about their DCSG experience occurs at the nexus of three core contexts which differ to the contexts and datasets upon which the original (im)politeness taxonomies were developed (Section 3.3). As such, three strategies were inductively added to the Equity Rights category derived from children's discourse. These have been termed (i) the Invasion of Digital Privacy, (ii) Ordering About, and (iii) Harassment.

The Invasion of Digital Privacy refers to the Groomers' non-consensual access to, interaction with, and use of children's digital content, typically information and data contained and publicly displayed by children's social media profiles and accounts.

Ordering About refers to Groomers' use of the speech act of commands to instruct or mandate the child to act in a certain way in accordance with their manipulative goals, such as CSAM sending, typically sending self-generated CCII and CCVI.

A final, new realisation of encroachment, Harassment, was identified. Harassment differed in that it was identified to be crosscutting. It was therefore not included as an Encroachment strategy *per se* but sits alongside Encroachment under Equity Rights. Harassment designates references by the child to the groomer pressurising and repeatedly making requests for contact, on and/or offline and using combinations of Equity Rights strategies, i.e., insults, threats, or offensive language to boost their Encroachment and intensify the illocutionary force of the strategies to ensure the success of their manipulative goals and to use communication to constrain the child.

### ***3.6.5 An AFFECT Analysis of Children's Emotion Discourse about Digital Child Sexual Grooming.***

A taxonomy and coding book was adapted from the reconceived goal-oriented AFFECT system for analysing the linguistic expression of emotion developed by Benitez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio (2019). Additionally, the initial inductive analysis revealed that children's discourse of emotion was triggered by three core entities: (i) the Self, (ii) Grooming and (iii) Other(s). Appendix 15 presents the coding book and definitions.

Two core adaptations were made to the taxonomy revised by Benitez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio (2019) of the AFFECT subsystem. Both adaptations concerned the Goal-Achievement category. The first adaptation concerned the prevalence of the emotion of Shame or expressions of feeling Ashamed present in children's discourse. The existing category of "Embarrassed" in the taxonomy devised by Benitez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio (2019) was insufficient to capture the discourse of emotion produced by children regarding Shame. A new category was therefore created, and embarrassment was subsumed into a new category of Ashamed, which was conceived to span a continuum of expressed feelings of being uncomfortable, guilt, shame, and self-blame (Appendix 16).

The second required adaptation regarded the category under Dissatisfaction: Unhappiness. Within the revised taxonomy by Benitez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio (2019), as shown in Appendix 7, Unhappiness comprised two sub-categories: (i) Anger and (ii) Sadness. Children's discourse within the TA-CSA context of DCSG showed a much more nuanced and complex expression of negative emotion which was not adequately captured by sadness. It was therefore decided to revert to Bednarek's (2009) Unhappiness subcategory, Misery, and to devise three sub-categories: (i) Loneliness, (ii) Regret, and (iii) Sadness.

The analysis and findings presented in Chapter Six are the result of a matrix analysis carried out in Nvivo which presents intersections of two axes: (i) references to each level of emotion categorised in Benitez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio's (2019) AFFECT taxonomy and (ii) the trigger of the child's emotion discourse.

### ***3.6.6 Devising a Taxonomy for the Analysis of Children's Own Behaviour Discourse***

The Constructivist Grounded Theory process proposed by Charmaz and Thornberg (2021; Thornberg et al., 2013) was adapted for this present study.<sup>82</sup> The initial phase included coding all data where the child referenced their own behaviour (i.e., I did, I said, I asked, I sent, etc.) against the OGDM framework. Each instance of children's discourse was coded against the OGDM tactics and sub-tactics. The coding book can be seen at Appendix 17.

However, while children's behaviour could be coded as to which groomer tactic/sub-tactic it aligned to, it also required a process of categorising and coding to work towards a replicable taxonomy for the analysis of children's own behaviour discourse in DCSG contexts. This began with a process of individually coding each reference to the child of their own behaviour by describing exactly what the child said they did, i.e., sent an image, gave information, did not send image, asked for advice, asked for help, etc. These codes were manually written onto Post-it notes and stuck on a large wall. The codes were then physically sorted into piles. This tactile, manual process helped to discern inductively that two broad categories had emerged: "engage" (i.e., the groomer tactics and manipulation had succeeded and achieved their goals) or "not engage" (i.e., the child showed resistance to the groomer tactical manipulation, thus obstructing or causing friction with groomer goals). A process of coding; comparison between data, codes, and discussion; checking during supervision meetings and through the process of write up; and interpretation and review of drafts led to iterative development and finalisation of three categories and attendant sub-categories. At this point, as with the other taxonomies used, the analytical framework was set up on Nvivo where substantive coding, revision and analysis took place (see Section 3.6.2).

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<sup>82</sup> Charmaz and Thornberg, p. (2021, p. 318) outline the application of the constructivist grounded theory process undertaken by Thornberg et al. (2013) which included a three step process of (1) constructing codes that fit the data by engaging in initial coding, this involved comparing data with data, data with codes and codes with codes, and stayed close to and remained open to exploring what they interpreted was happening in the data; (2) the provisional, initial codes were carefully compared with each other and with data, further elaborated; and (3) the elaborated codes were grouped together based on similarities and differences, leading to fewer but more focused and comprehensive codes.

There was also a continuous reflection and engagement with the importance of terminology (Chapter One). This conceptual development occurred alongside the iterative process of coding and re-coding on children's own behaviour discourse for this thesis and work was mutually inspired, enhanced, and revised as a result. The original overarching categories were conceived as "Submit," "Resist," and "No clear mention." However, ongoing reflexive consideration and enhanced engagement with key concepts led to a concern that "Submit" was victim-blaming. It also became apparent that there were various types of Resist behaviours occurring in children's discourse that needed to be better captured. Revised and refined coding therefore led to the inductive/deductively data-driven taxonomy (see coding book Appendix 18). However, during the process of interpretation that comes with the writing up of research findings, it was felt that the desire to be non-blaming had perhaps swung too far the other way and the neutral terms of Engage/Not Engage and Reflect flattened and did not adequately capture the communicative agency being shown by the children in the data sample. It was thus decided to alter the category labels to become Engage and Resist and to include Reflect behaviours within Resistance. Reflect (comprised of sub-categories of Suspect and Seek Help) emerged during the process of interpretation as a feature of children's resistance, albeit indirect. In turn, therefore, this led to a reconceptualisation within Resistance of Direct Resistance (i.e., directed at the groomer; sub-categories: Refuse, Negotiate End) and Indirect Resistance (i.e., directed towards/seeking support from others; sub-categories: Suspect, Seek Help). The final taxonomy and terminology used in Chapter Seven is therefore outlined in Appendix 18.

The study of children's own behaviour discourse within the transcripts studied was supplemented by a cross-section of law enforcement transcripts. In these transcripts both the Groomer (G) and Child (C)'s discourse was presented. These were likewise coded against the child behaviour OGDM and definitions (Appendix 17) and the devised Child Behaviour Discourse Taxonomy (Appendix 18). Illustrative examples of simultaneous groomer <-> child interactions were then manually selected to complement and enhance the interpretation and analysis of children's discourse.

### **3.7 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter has described the methodology of the thesis, namely a “remixed” CMDA Inductive/Deductive Thematic Analysis. Firstly, in Section 3.2, the data source and sizes were outlined, namely online child helpline chat transcripts (n = 30) of children’s discourse about their DCSG experience. It was highlighted that the use of such helpline data is underdeveloped in discourse-based studies on online grooming language and that it represents an untapped resource in accessing and amplifying children’s own voices about their lived experience. It was highlighted that most extant research focused on the analysis of groomer communication and either used corpus-based quantitative methods to the study of decoy or law enforcement transcripts or more recently combined this with qualitative discourse analytic approaches on the same datasets.

Section 3.3 of this chapter explained the selection of analytical frameworks for the thesis. It particularly explored how the identified research gap regarding children’s discourse in DCSG interactions can be addressed through design of a third-wave, genre-based approach to applying a “remix” of first-order discourse analysis frameworks to the same, underexplored qualitative dataset. The genre-based approach supported an exploration of the intertwined contexts within which children’s discourse about their DCSG experience is produced and situated. The chapter also presented the crystalline approach to bricolaging a co-evolutionary research design particularly suited to the specific careful considerations required and the research objective of amplifying children’s voices through the study of their discourse about the trauma topic of DCSG.

Section 3.4 introduced the concept of a research ethics of “human dignity” and explored how this has been adopted and applied throughout the research design and execution. Section 3.5 detailed the procedure adopted throughout the thesis. It explained the process of data collection and coding before describing the inductive and deductive adjustments made to each of the analytical frameworks used that were driven by children’s discourse. It also explored the constructivist grounded theory approach to devising a new taxonomy for the analysis of children’s own behaviour discourse reflecting on their DCSG interactions experience.

The next chapter presents the first empirical analysis results chapter which focuses on exploring the child's attunement to the groomer communicative tactics and sub-tactics that comprise the OGDM.

## **Chapter 4. A Child’s Eye View of the Online Grooming Discourse Model: Children’s Discourse about Groomer Communicative Behaviour**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Chapter Two showed that although scholars have started to apply linguistics to understand groomers’ use of manipulative tactical communication in DCSG interactions, a discursive analysis of children’s perspectives has yet to be conducted. This is the first of four chapters presenting and discussing the results of the empirical analyses conducted in the thesis. This chapter presents findings regarding children’s discourse about groomer communicative behaviours. The results address research question one of the thesis:

*RQ1: How far do children identify communicative tactics and sub-tactics of the Online Grooming Discourse Model (OGDM) within the groomer’s discourse?*

The analysis focuses on children’s discourse about groomer communicative tactics and sub-tactics comprising the Online Grooming Discourse Model (OGDM) (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016, 2020 and Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). Section 4.2 presents overall figures for children’s references to the OGDM within the dataset. Section 4.3 discusses overarching patterns observed across the core OGDM tactics – Access (ACC), Deceptive Trust Development (DTD), Sexual Gratification (SG), Isolation (IS) and Further Contact (FC). A more detailed exploration of children’s discourse at OGDM sub-tactic level is next (Sections 4.4-4.8). Section 4.9 concludes by summarising the core findings and themes identified.

### **4.2 Overview of Children’s References to the Online Grooming Discourse Model**

Overall, children made 505 mentions of groomer communicative behaviour aligned to the OGDM. OGDM tactic/sub-tactic references were found in the discourse of every child in the sample (30/30). Children were thus attuned to the tactical nature of groomers’ communication and able to relay their perspectives about groomer tactics

to helpline counsellors. A further 18 references, made by a third of the children in the data (10/30) were general mentions of groomer communicative behaviour, as seen in Extract\_4.1:

#### Extract\_4.1

1 C010 I was groomed for two years and I only had the courage to start telling people  
2 recently.

Of the 18 references, seven made direct references to being “groomed online” or the term “online grooming”, two referred to “sexual abuse online” and one to being “sexually exploited online”. The remaining general references included contextual information such as the duration of the grooming (Extract\_4.1). That such general references occurred with low frequency shows children were able, at least in a helpline counselling context, to be specific and clear in identifying and reporting the grooming process. Importantly, although categorised as “general” mentions, as Extract\_4.1 shows, children were clear in labelling their experience as “grooming”. Even if they did not always identify particular tactics/sub-tactics, children appeared to recognise what had happened as a form of abuse/exploitative behaviour. This is seen in the reference to “courage” (1), which indicated an appreciation of the abusive nature of the grooming that had been experienced.

The 505 mentions made by children to “specific” groomer sub-tactics all aligned to the OGDM. Chapters Two and Three explained that the communicative entrapment comprising the OGDM represents a network of interconnected tactics and sub-tactics (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016).<sup>83</sup> Each of the tactics is comprised of a series of sub-tactics, some of which have been adapted through the thematic analysis of children’s discourse (Appendix 2). The following analysis presents findings using this adapted taxonomy.

Table 4.1 shows the numbers of children mentioning OGDM tactics/sub-tactics, and the number and frequency of references made by children.

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<sup>83</sup> Access (ACC) represents the onset of grooming and concerns the processes and modes by which the groomer makes initial contact with potential victims. The subsequent ‘networked’ entrapment tactics are set out in the OGDM as: Deceptive Trust Development (DTD), Sexual Gratification (SG), Isolation (IS) and Further Contact (FC) (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016, 2020b, 2023).

**Table 4.1** Overview Table: Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency (n=/% ) of References to Online Grooming Discourse Sub-Tactics in Children’s Discourse<sup>84</sup>

OGDM Tactics and Sub-Tactics	Children		References	
	(n=)	(%/30)	(n=505)	(%)
<b>Access (ACC)</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>6.34%</b>
<b>Deceptive Trust Development (DTD)</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>97%</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>36.63%</b>
<i>Exchange of Personal Information (EPI)</i>	28	93%	123	66.49%
<i>Relationships (R)</i>	12	40%	29	15.68%
<i>Activities (A)</i>	3	10%	5	2.70%
<i>Gifts (G)</i>	15	50%	27	14.59%
<i>Sociability (S)</i>	1	3%	1	0.54%
<b>Sexual Gratification (SG)</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>97%</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>28.32%</b>
<i>Explicit Sex Talk (EST)</i>	29	97%	132	92.31%
<i>Implicit Sex Talk (IST)</i>	6	20%	11	7.69%
<b>Isolation (IS)</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2.57%</b>
<i>Mental Isolation (MI)</i>	3	10%	6	46.15%
<i>Physical Isolation (PI)</i>	5	17%	7	53.85%
<b>Further Contact (FC)</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>26.14%</b>
<i>Further Contact Online (FC_On)</i>	26	87%	116	87.88%
<i>Further Contact Offline (FC_Off)</i>	8	27%	16	12.12%

Table 4.1 shows that DTD was the most salient groomer tactic in children’s discourse, mentioned by all but one child (97%; 29/30), representing 36.63% (185/505) of references to the OGDM. SG followed, mentioned by all but one child (97%, 29/30), representing 28.32% (143/505) of OGDM references. FC was referenced with a frequency of 26.14% (132/505) and it was mentioned by 90% of children (27/30). These three tactics were found to be the triad around which children’s discourse within the counselling context about groomer OGDM communicative modus operandi revolves.

<sup>84</sup> For overview tables across the thesis macro-tactics/strategies or categories are highlighted in bold or, where there are multiple levels (e.g. AFFECT Taxonomy in Chapter Six) colour coded to help discern different coding levels. Macro Tactics total 100% with sub-categories/strategies/categories representing a percentage of their macro tactic/strategy/category total which are viewed as 100%.

The initial ACC tactic (used by the groomer to reach potential victims) represented 6.34% (32/505) of children's discourse. Although this figure was relatively low, some reference to ACC was made by 73% (22/30) of children.

Finally, IS was the least frequent OGDM tactic mentioned in children's discourse. Groomer behaviours aligned to IS were mentioned by 20% (6/30) of children in the sample with a low frequency of 2.57% (13/505). This may suggest that children were less attuned to the IS tactic aimed at separating them from sources of support, typically family/friends. The low recognition in children's discourse could also indicate the success of the groomer's IS attempts (explored in Chapter Seven).

As well as these overarching patterns, no new tactics outside the OGDM were identified. Findings from children's discourse showed the benefit of minor adaptations and additions to the OGDM at a sub-tactic level (Chapter Three). These are discussed within their relevant sub-sections 4.4-4.7. Overall, the findings provide validation of the OGDM as heuristic for examining this dataset of children's retrospective accounts of being digitally groomed. It is, however, important to acknowledge internal variation within these results. This is evident from the standard deviation figures for this dataset (Figure 4.1):

**Figure 4.1** Mean and Standard Deviation references to Online Grooming Discourse Model Strategies in Children’s Discourse

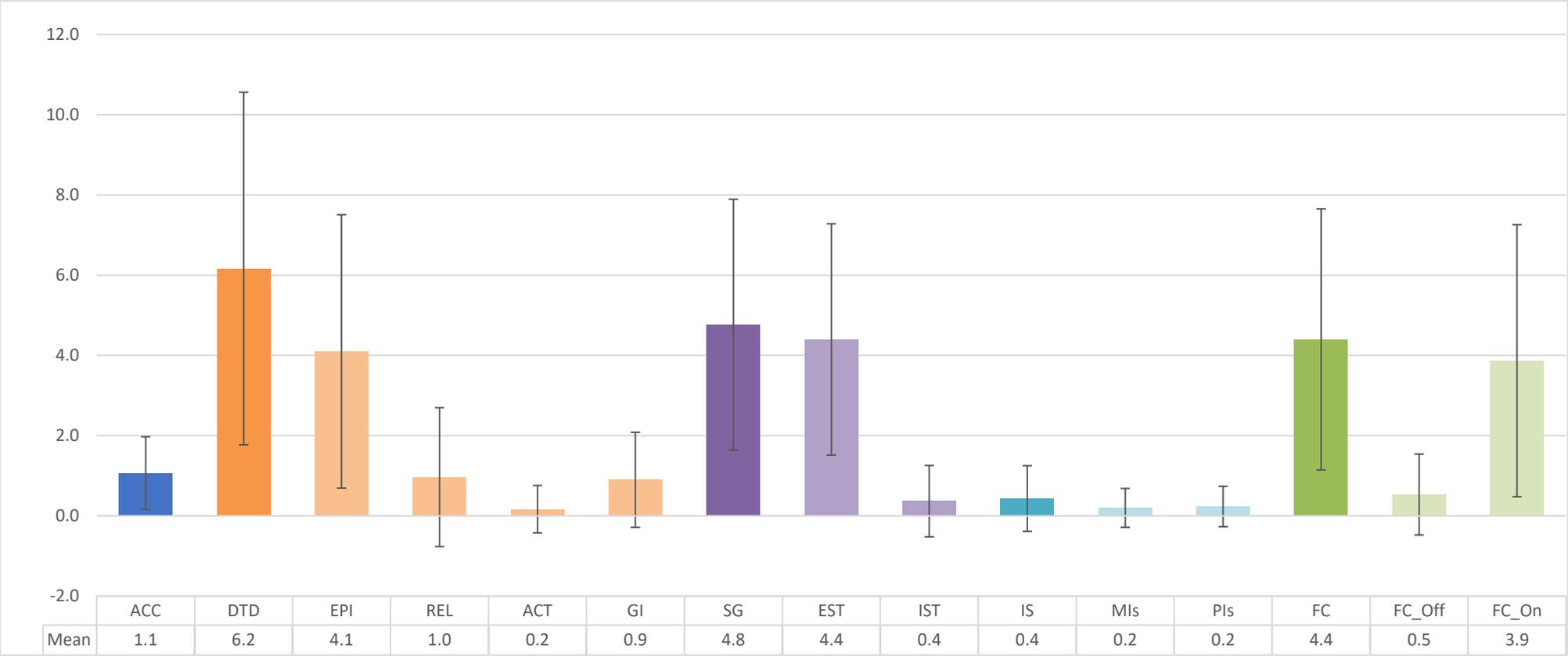


Figure 4.1 shows that SD figures were high across all three core tactics. DTD has the highest variation (4.395), followed by FC (3.255) and SG (3.126). The variation was higher for DTD, SG and FC than for IS (0.817) and ACC (0.907). The variation illustrates that children experience and recall groomer DCSG sub-tactics differently. It also reflects the variation in duration and depth of chats across the dataset. Nevertheless, there are some clear patterns, which are examined further at sub-tactic level in subsequent sections.

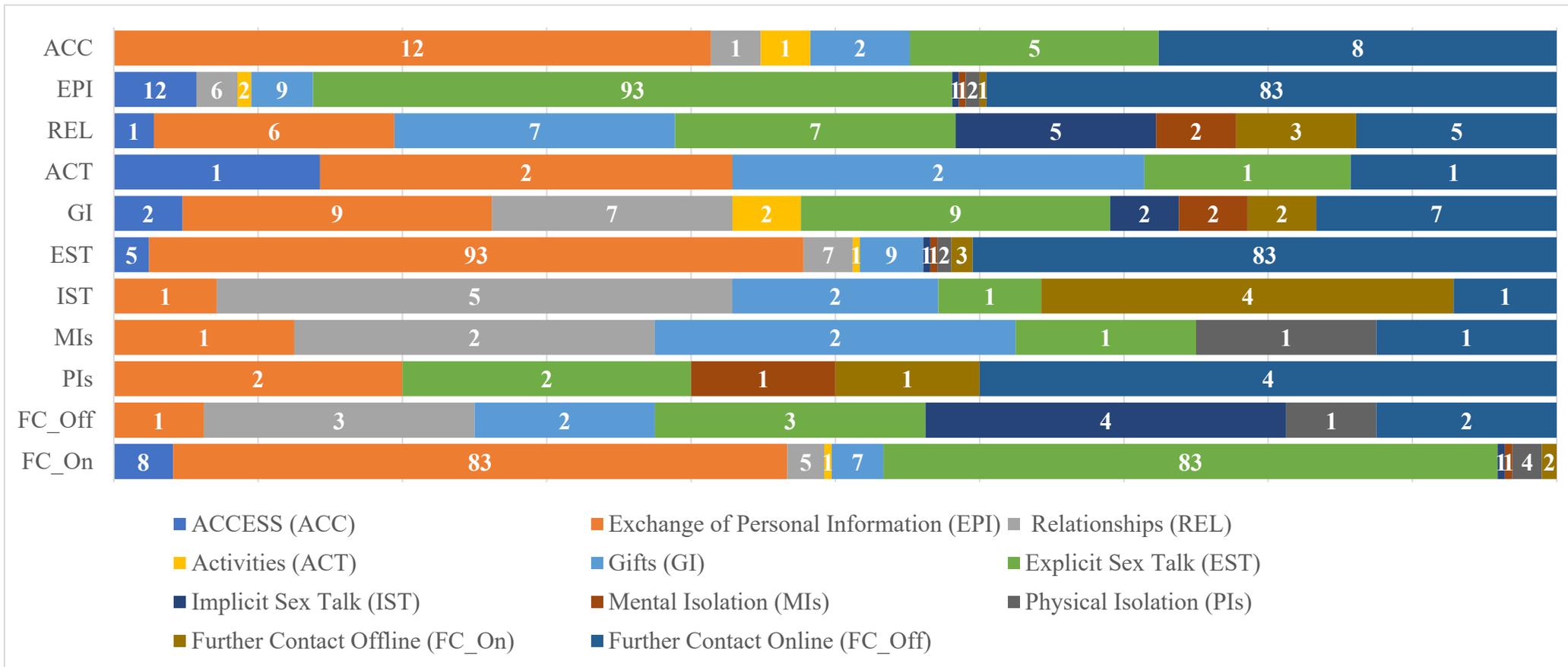
As highlighted in Chapter Two, a key contribution of the discourse-based approach of the OGDM is the identification of a high level of permeability and interdependence between groomer (sub-)tactics, which challenges previous understandings of a stage-based, linear grooming process. Figure 4.2 presents the results of a matrix analysis<sup>85</sup> showing the intersections present within children's accounts and the level of frequency with which they occurred.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Using the function in Nvivo each groomer sub-tactic was plotted against the other OGDM sub-tactics in the model to identify intersections present within children's discourse.

<sup>86</sup> Where sub-tactics intersected with themselves these were removed from the matrix analysis to avoid skewing the results.

**Figure 4.2** Matrix Analysis of Online Grooming Discourse Model Sub-Tactic by Online Grooming Discourse Model Sub-Tactic (n=) Referenced in Children's Discourse



As Figure 4.2 shows, groomer OGDM sub-tactics often overlapped in children’s discourse, to differing degrees. Except for two DTD sub-tactics – ST and REF- all the other sub-tactics overlapped with at least one other sub-tactic (MIS and PIS) and, in most cases, with >5 sub-tactics. Overall, this validates, within children’s discourse, the previously identified pattern of sub-tactic overlap (as opposed to sequential occurrence) in the OGDM (Chapter Two). It also suggests that extant literature which suggests children’s accounts reflect a linear process, (Chapter Two), would benefit from further exploration. Viewing this finding of sub-tactic permeability through a child’s perspective holds valuable insights. The complexity of OGDM sub-tactics may contribute to high levels of cognitive overload for the child during DCSG and during recovery. The specific patterns of overlap are further interrogated in sections 4.4-4.7.

### 4.3 Online Grooming Discourse Model Tactic: ACCESS

Table 4.2 presents results for the ACC tactic as it occurred in children’s discourse, specifically the number of children who mentioned it and the number/percentage of references made.

**Table 4.2** *ACCESS Tactic - Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency (n=/%)* of References

OGDM Tactic	Children		References	
	(n=)	(%/30)	(n=/505)	(%)
Access (ACC)	22	73%	32	6.34%

As Table 4.2 shows, ACC represented 6.34% (32/505) of children’s overall discourse about groomer communicative behaviour, although it was mentioned by most children (73%, 22/30). It is difficult to ascertain whether the figure within this data set is low or high because, so few studies to date examine the same variable (Chapter Two).

Insights about how children reported the groomer’s use of the ACC tactic are useful because in synchronous data of groomer <-> child interactions the initial approach often occurs in the background. In much extant research, including that which takes a

linguistic focus, it is not discussed overtly as part of the interaction (Chapter Two e.g. Kloess et al. (2014); Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2016, 2020, 2023)). This gap in current research was highlighted by Lorenzo-Dus et al (2023). Figure 4.2 shows that ACC primarily overlapped with the EPI sub-tactic but it also with discussion of relationships (REL), both comprising part of DTD, geared towards building trust with the child. Overlap with EST was also present in children's discourse, showing that in some cases groomers were introducing sexual communication at the very outset of their interactions with children. Figure 4.2 also showed that, from the onset of interactions, groomers maximized the tech-facilitated nature of the digital context and the access it provided to the child, to lay the foundations for the FC tactic and assure the continuation of their communication with the child.

Children's discourse about ACC in the data referenced the different digital platforms the groomer used including types of social media and websites. A diverse range of platforms and websites (SNS) were mentioned. These SNSs were used to achieve both ACC and FC. It was common for children to mention more than one SNS in their discourse (the mean platform mentions per transcript was two). This suggests groomers were operationalising the affordances of technology to facilitate access and the maintenance of contact with children. Table 4.3 shows the different SNS platforms mentioned and the number (n=) and percentage (%) of references they represented in children's discourse.

**Table 4.3** *Social Networking Sites Mentioned in Children’s Discourse: Total References (n=%)*

<b>Social Networking Site (SNS)</b>	<b>References (n=39)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>	<b>Function</b>
Snapchat	9	23.08%	Images
Instagram	7	17.95%	Images
Facebook	4	10.26%	Images
Texting	3	7.69%	Chat
Skype	3	7.69%	Video
Omegle	3	7.69%	Dating
Talk with Stranger	2	5.13%	Dating
Whatsapp	2	5.13%	Chat
Kik	1	2.56%	Chat
Facetime	1	2.56%	Video
You Tube	1	2.56%	Video
Xbox	1	2.56%	Chat
Tinder	1	2.56%	Dating
Yubo	1	2.56%	Dating

Table 4.3 shows Snapchat (23.08%) was the most frequently mentioned platformed with Meta-owned Instagram (17.95%) and Facebook (10.26%) accounting for 51.29% of all the references to a SNS in the dataset. This concurs with studies which consistently highlight the role the largest platforms play in facilitating TA-CSA/DCSG.<sup>87</sup> The findings corroborate the “technology-assisted” nature of DCSG, (Chapter Two). Figure 4.3 groups the SNSs mentioned by children according to the pragmatic function of the platform they described.

<sup>87</sup> [Snapchat most used social media platform for grooming, figures show as offences hit record high | The Independent](#); [Snapchat most-used app for online grooming, says NSPCC - BBC News](#)

**Figure 4.3** *Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of Social Networking Sites Mentioned in Children’s Discourse by Function*

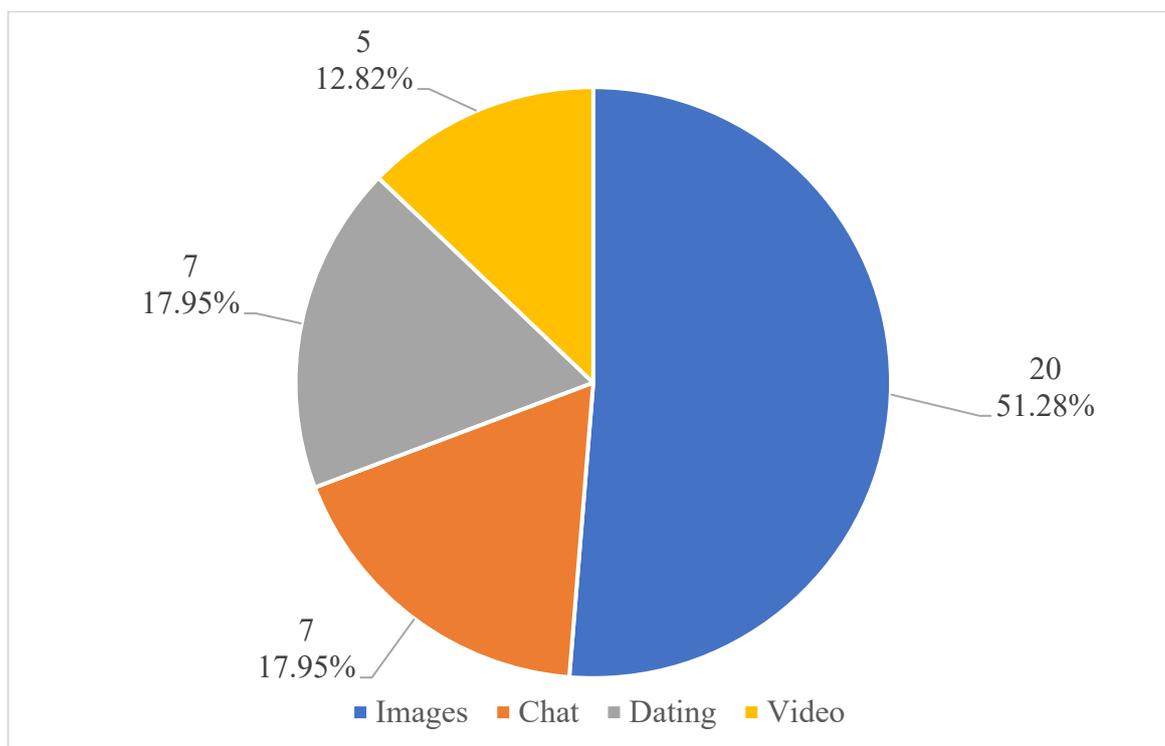


Figure 4.3 shows children described four distinct affordances of SNSs: images (51.28%); chat (17.95%); dating (17.95%) and video calling (12.82%). Within the “chat” function there was one mention of chat via a gaming platform (Xbox). Combined, SNSs facilitating image/video sharing and video calling capabilities represented 64.10% of children’s references to ACC. This shows images/video are core forms of visual communication in DCSG contexts constituting central leverage for groomer communicative entrapment (see Chapter Two e.g. Lorenzo-Dus, 2023, Hanson, 2017).

Analysis of children’s ACC references also revealed four further features: (i) who initiated contact online (32/32); (ii) strategic use of digital affordances (14/32); (iii) identity deception (7/32); (iv) strategic use of friendship networks (4/32). Table 4.4 shows that 73% of children (22/30) discussed who initiated the contact online within their discourse about the ACC tactic. This is shown in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4** *ACCESS* Tactic: Initiation Child/Groomer - Number (%) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency (n=/%) of References

OGDM Tactics	Children		References	
	(n=/22)	(%/30)	(n=/32)	(%)
<b>ACCESS</b>	22	73%	<b>32</b>	<b>6.54%</b>
Child Initiates	1	3%	1	3.12%
Groomer Initiates	18	60%	28	87.50%
Unclear who initiates	3	10%	3	9.38%

ACC initiation by the groomer was mentioned 60% of children (18/30), representing 28/32 references (87.50%). One child referred (1/32; 3.12%) to making the first contact with the groomer. References by three children within the sample (one reference each) (3/32; 9.38%), were unclear who had initiated contact. This was usually because children’s references did not include sufficient detail, as Extract\_4.2 illustrates.

Extract\_4.2

1 C007 I ended up speaking to a guy who told me he was 22

In this extract the emphasis was on the outcome of the ACC tactic: “ended up speaking to”. Children’s discourse about initiation was further coded, to record whether the information was volunteered by the child and/or elicited by the counsellor throughout the course of the child/counsellor interactions, see Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5** *ACCESS* Tactic: Child Volunteers versus Counsellor Asks - Number (%) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency (n=/%) of References

OGDM Tactics	Children		References	
	(n=/30)	(%/30)	(n=/32)	(%)
<b>ACCESS</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>6.54%</b>
Child volunteers	17	57%	19	59.38%
Counsellor asks	9	30%	13	40.62%

Table 4.5 shows the child volunteered information about how contact was made with the groomer in most references (19/32, 59.38%). This was the case for most children who mentioned ACC (17/22, 77%). Some children were volunteering information about what had happened, often at the very first turns of the counselling interaction, see Extract\_4.3:

#### Extract\_4.3

- |   |      |  |
|---|------|--|
| 1 | C003 | okay so i was on this app which is basically like tinder for teenagers, this boy |
| 2 |      | added me and he was 3 years older than me but really good looking and we         |
| 3 |      | were talking and i asked him for his snapchat and he gave me his username        |

In other cases the child was more hesitant (Extract\_4.4)

#### Extract\_4.4<sup>88</sup>

- |   |       |  |
|---|-------|--|
| 1 | C017  | I messed up last night really bad and im scared                            |
| 2 | CL017 | I can hear you feel scared. Maybe you'd like to talk some more about last  |
| 3 |       | night?   |
| 4 | C017  | So I started masturbating and I used a site called emerald chats for nudes |
| 5 |       | And then someone from the chat asked me for my instagram so I gave it      |

While the child immediately signaled something had gone wrong (“I messed up last night really bad”, (1)), they were more cautious about elaborating. Despite hesitating, they volunteered information (4-5). This followed empathy and an overt invitation from the counsellor to say more (“I can hear you feel scared. Maybe you'd like to talk some more about last night?” (3)). Where the child was not forthcoming the counsellor asked for details about groomer access, often later in the counselling interaction. This occurred within 9/22 of chatlogs (13/32 references).

Next, children were found to discuss (ii) strategic use of digital affordances (14/32), something that was mentioned by most children who referred to the groomer's use of the ACC tactic (13/22). The groomer's strategic use of digital affordances, and how they were providing ease of access to the child, featured in just under half (43.8%) of the children's discourse about the ACC tactic. Children talked about the groomer sending unsolicited messages and friend requests, adding them or finding them via

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<sup>88</sup> C=Child; CL=Childline Counsellor.

SNS'. As well as sending unsolicited friend requests, groomers were layering this with deception i.e. masking as younger than they were or of a different gender, as in Extract\_4.5:

#### Extract\_4.5

1 C011 he stole the pictures of another but not made a real account of his because  
2 I wouldn't of been friends with him cause he was grown up

In Extract\_4.5 child showed attunement to the illicit nature of the groomer's deceptive behaviour, as shown in their lexical choices ("stole"/ "real account", (1)). The child suggested the groomer's masked identity was their reason for engagement ("I wouldn't of been friends with him cause he was grown up", (01-02)). Extract\_4.5 also showed a clear distinction in the child's mind, between an adult "grown up" world and their own.

Alongside deception, children also referenced groomers making strategic use of the child's friendship networks to signal affinity and appear trustworthy by association. Some children (4/32) described the groomer befriending people around them (friends or school peers) via social media, as in Extract\_4.6:

#### Extract\_4.6

1 C011 i had a message on instagram and it was from someone that i didn't  
2 know but they was following all of my friends and everyone that i knew  
3 and the school close to mine and it was a girl and she had lots of posts  
4 on them from my friends and some people i did not know

Extract\_4.6 and other references within the data that talk about mutual friends showed that being part of an existing shared network of digital friends gave a sense of credibility within the context of the new digital relationship. Children's references to such groomer actions within the counselling context suggests their awareness of the groomer's strategic (i.e. manipulative) use of social media's seemingly transparent networking function, where strangers' contacts can be freely mined.

#### 4.4 Online Grooming Discourse Model Tactic: Deceptive Trust Development

Table 4.1 showed that DTD was the most prevalent groomer tactic referenced in children’s discourse, both in terms of overall references (185/505, 36.63%) and the number of children who referenced it (29/30, 97%). This aligns with research that points to the salience of groomers’ attention to building trust in actual groomer language (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016, 2023).

Figure 4.4 presents an overview of children’s discourse about the sub-tactics that comprise the DTD tactic namely: EPI, REL, ACT, GI and ST.

**Figure 4.4** *Children’s Discourse: Online Grooming Discourse Model Deceptive Trust Development Sub-Tactics – Frequency (n=/% ) of References the Deceptive Trust Development Tactic*

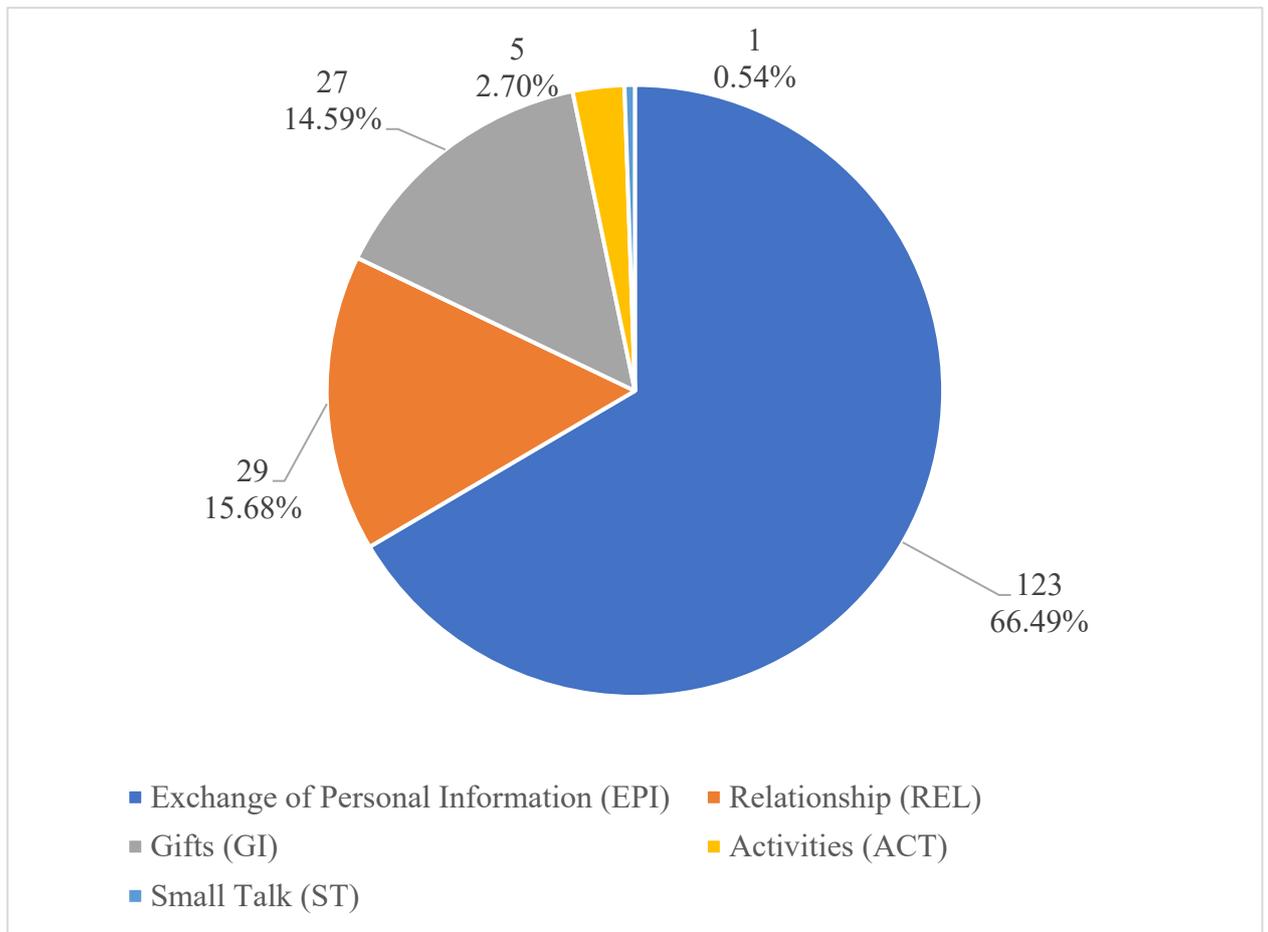


Figure 4.4 shows that children referenced the EPI sub-tactic most frequently (123/185, 66.49%), mentioned by 93% of children. REL (29/185; 15.68%) and GI

(27/185; 14.59%) were the second and third most frequently mentioned DTD sub-tactics. ACT (5/185; 2.70%) and ST (1/185; 0.54%) were seldom mentioned. Children thus appeared cognisant of the DTD tactic, but their discourse focused predominantly on the process of information gathering by the groomer. Results in Figure 4.4 show children were less able and/or willing to describe the groomer's other DTD sub-tactics in detail. There could be several explanations for this. Safety messages around the risks of sharing of imagery and personal information are prioritised in current DCSG prevention materials and in messages around data privacy.<sup>89</sup> Experiences of sending the groomer information or images therefore may be a topic children may want - and be better equipped - to relay in the counselling context via verbal scripts and scaffolding received through preventative education. This may not have been the case for other DTD sub-tactics that children are not routinely educated about. Reconciling the “nice” elements of groomer interactions (communication that makes them feel like the groomer is trustworthy) with risk and harm focused prevention and safety messages may pose a challenge for children. In addition, trust is an intangible concept, unlike sex. The more subtle and abstract nature of trust, generally used to smooth social interaction, might make some of the sub-tactics within the DTD tactic particularly difficult for children to notice and therefore navigate, making them challenging to recount to counsellors. A perception of the prevalence of the SG tactic in groomer communication could also cloud the child's ability to hear or engage with the range of trust building elements in groomer's discourse. Sections 4.4.1-4.4.3 present findings and analysis about each of the DTD sub-tactics to elucidate how they manifested in children's discourse.

#### ***4.4.1 Deceptive Trust Development Sub-Tactic: Exchange of Personal Information***

Table 4.1 showed that the EPI sub-tactic was mentioned by 93% (28/29) of children mentioning DTD. Figure 4.4 shows that EPI accounted for 66.49% of DTD references in children's discourse (123/185). EPI was the second most frequently referenced sub-tactic within the OGDM overall (Table 4.1), behind EST (132/505).

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<sup>89</sup> For example see websites such as: <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/>; <https://www.internetmatters.org/issues/online-grooming/resources/>

The children saw groomers' use of the EPI sub-tactic, as serving two purposes: relational and knowledge gathering. The former concerned attempts to find out about each other and create a social bond. The latter allowed the groomer to strategically elicit knowledge about the child, the information they gleaned acted as a lever for coercion.

The EPI sub-tactic also intersected with and facilitated other sub-tactics within the OGDM. As Figure 4.2 shows, EPI predominantly overlapped with EST (93/123) and FC\_On (83/123), showing just how central the groomer's gathering of information was to support their entrapment and sexualised goals in communicating with the child. To a lesser extent, as Figure 4.2 shows there was an overlap between EPI and GI (9/123) and REL (7/123). There was slight overlap with FC\_Off (3/123) and MIP (2/123) and hardly any with ACT, IST or MIS which represented 1/123 references each. This suggests that the child was perhaps not connecting the groomer's use of the EPI sub-tactic with some of the more implicit tactics used by the groomer, or that they were focused on recounting certain aspects of the information they shared, such as the sharing of Child Coerced Intimate Images (CCII) as discussed in the extracts presented below.

Seen through children's discourse, the content of the EPI sub-tactic could be grouped into four areas, namely:

- i. CCII/CCIV.
- ii. Digital contact details.
- iii. Personal (non-digital) information such as names, gender, ages/birthdays.
- iv. Actual whereabouts and physical locations.

Table 4.6 shows the number of references and percentages to each EPI area.

**Table 4.6** *Deceptive Trust Development Tactic: Type of Exchange of Personal Information – Number of Children Mentioning and Number of References (n=)*

<b>EPI type</b>	<b>Children (n=/30)</b>	<b>References (n=)</b>	<b>Example from the dataset</b>
Images / videos	26	89	C003: he asked me to send nudes
Digital contact details	10	19	C003: i asked him for his snapchat and he gave me his username
Personal (non-digital) information	11	13	C018: Yeah, they both knew [my age], we celebrated birthdays and stuff
Whereabouts/physical location	6	10	C016: He told me he’s from X and he lives in X, apparently his name is X but I don’t know if that’s real or not

There were some references to two areas of EPI simultaneously,<sup>90</sup> as shown in Extract\_4.7, and are, as such, double coded:

Extract\_4.7

- 1 C019 i met a person who wanted my phone number (EPI type ii) and
- 2 for me to send pictures (EPI type i)

Extract\_4.7 shows that the most frequent type of information children referenced being exchanged were images or videos (89/131). Of the 89 references to image or video sharing only two were images of the child’s face or a profile picture. The rest of the references were to requests for CCII, comprising nude or semi-nude images. Extract\_4.8 is typical of the way in which children discussed the sharing of nude images:

<sup>90</sup> References presented in Table 4.6 total 131, i.e. more than n=123 reflecting this double-coding.

## Extract\_4.8

- 1 C008 and then he started saying he wanted nudes...
- 2 ...and at least once or twice a night since that day he pressures me into sending
- 3 Them

Children’s discourse concerning exchanging CCII/CCIV with the groomer cuts across the dataset and their discursive representations of groomer communicative sub-tactics. References to images were coded across DTD\_EPI, SG\_EST and FC\_On sub-tactics (Chapter Three). When it comes to EPI, conceived by Lorenzo-Dus (2023; 2016, 2020) as a mutual process of sharing, children’s discourse regularly concerned groomer’s requests for CCII. Children’s perspectives on EPI therefore suggested a more skewed transactional process, which poses a challenge to a notion of mutuality captured by the term “exchange”. Viewed through children’s discourse, the groomer was putting the child in a position of “giving” and the groomer of “taking”. This finding therefore aligns with research emphasising images and videos as a core “lever” through which technology facilitates TA-CSA (e.g. blackmail using images) and complicates its impacts (i.e. permanence and loss of control of images) (Chapter Two, e.g. Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2017, 2020; Hanson, 2017). The different ways images were harnessed as a semiotic support to groomer verbal manipulative communication will be further discussed in Sections 4.5-4.7. Children’s discourse about their lived experience suggests that the images were core to the groomers’ *sui generis* manipulative communication. The findings presented in this chapter further underline the unique contribution of taking a discourse lens, which sees image-based abuse as intrinsic to communication and therefore the manipulative processes of DCSG, rather than viewing it as a distinct category of abuse as is often currently the case (for practical preventative, and criminal reasons). A discursive approach puts the child as an agentic individual at the centre of the picture, allowing a fuller appreciation of the complexity and messiness of the spectrum of TA-CSA which resists neat demarcation into distinct categories of abuse. Subsequent empirical chapters will explore further how groomer facework is central to this weaponisation of the technology-assisted affordances of digital smartphone technology and SNSs. Full appreciation of the symbiotic relationship between facework and digital affordances in TA-CSA is still underdeveloped and the findings

presented in this section emphasise the importance of closer consideration. Indeed, most references by children to CCII (as with Extract\_4.8 “he pressures me into sending them” (2)) show children were alert to groomer facework of pressure, harassment and threats (Chapter Five).

Within the EPI sub-tactic, it is also relevant to discuss references (6/89) to unsolicited sharing of images of the groomer to the child (Extract 4.9). This “cyber-flashing” behaviour and the encroachment that it represents on the child’s personal space by the groomer is facework not captured in prior definitions of EPI where the emphasis has been on reciprocity and mutuality in the exchange (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016, 2020). This represents a dissonance with research built through extensive analysis of groomer’s language, suggesting that what may appear “mutual” is received and heard by children as one-sided, transactional and coercive. This discord is vital to understanding the interactional dynamics of DCSG. Children’s references to groomers’ unsolicited sending of explicit images indicated unilateral decision-making on the part of the groomer, a clear face-attack which overrode the consent of the child. This is a stark example of where the groomer EPI sub-tactic not only overlaps with the tactic of desensitizing the child to sex but also carried impoliteness. This is further illustrated in Extract\_4.9 and Extract\_4.10:

#### Extract\_4.9

1 C013 he sent me his nudes and his sex tape on snapchat, even though he knows  
2 im 15 and was at the time

As shown in Extract\_4.9 children’s discourse suggested how one-sided and intrusive children perceived the groomer’s sub-tactic of EPI image exchange to be.

Extract\_4.10 constructed the groomer in the active role of “sender” and the child as the passive “receiver” (“he sent me his nudes and his sex tape... even though he knows”, (1)). Children also referred to the groomer saving or screenshotting the child’s images without their consent, as shown in Extract\_4.10:

#### Extract\_4.10

1 C027 I sent him over 100 images and videos of myself. He screenshotted them for  
2 safe keeping.

In Extract\_4.10, the child's choice of expression "safe-keeping" (2) references their understanding of an implicit threat issued by the groomer in a bare-faced, blatant betrayal of the very trust the groomer was purportedly building, and that the child had shown in sharing their images. It is here that the role of facework layered over the assistance provided by technology is crucial: the groomer does not actually need to realise their threat to screenshot the child's images. He just needs to say he did. The ability to screenshot the child's images, combined with the ability to amplify and distort the severity of the face threat to the child of exposure, shows the power imbalance between adult and child in DCSG contexts. Children's discourse thus shows that EPI, particularly in the form of CCII/IV, provided the groomer with strategic leverage (in terms of semiotic artifacts (images) combined with facework) to help force compliance with their goals and demands (Chapter Two, particularly Hanson, 2017).

The findings derived from children's discourse have revealed a distinct realisation of EPI, namely an imbalanced transactional process, rather than the mutual exchange represented in previous research. This is clearly still a matter of trust in that the child shows trust in engaging initially, sharing personal information or an image following a request from the groomer. This trust is then flagrantly undermined by the groomer, who acts against their consent. At least in children's accounts, groomers appear to display a blunt disregard and lack of preoccupation with building and maintaining trust, rooted in the security provided by the inherent power imbalance in the interaction aided by technology. This reflects findings by Lorenzo-Dus et al (2023) that highlight the pre-existing adult/child power imbalance intrinsic to DCSG (Chapter Two). Groomers take advantage of this pre-existing power imbalance which constrains children's agentic opportunities for action. Groomer <-> child interaction therefore represents a constant negotiation over the groomer's pre-meditated agenda of manipulation and their assertion and fixation on their sexualised goals (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). Screenshotting of images, an affordance of digital technology, adds a

layer of permanence and raises questions of semiotic ownership and privacy that are unique to the digitally mediated communication context (Chapter Two). The groomer's pre-meditated and strategic use of screenshotting seems to show no heed for the child's face needs and this suggests that the digital context of DCSG co-creates a mutation of facework norms that, without regulation and safeguards to keep these communicative patterns in check, are incubated and allowed to flourish.

Children's discourse also suggested an imbalance in this strategic use of technology between adults and children. Extract\_4.11, for instance, suggests children seemed to be less aware of or willing to use screenshotting than the groomer to create permanent records of images and chats that could be used as evidence of their abuse.

Extract\_4.11

- 1 C029 I cant save all the messages I cant save the pictures hes sent me as
- 2 they were snaps they only stay on my screen for so long before disappearing

Children's agency or awareness of screenshotting as an avenue of self-protection seemed constrained, ironically by the facework carried by such an act, which would be seen as impolite, an attack on the groomer's negative face needs. As in Extract\_4.11, the lack of permanence of Snapchat, for example, was mentioned as one of the reasons that precluded children's attempts to report the groomer (2).

The second most frequently referenced type of EPI content, ii) encouraging the sharing of digital contact details (Table 4.6), served two primary functions, namely: to gain initial access to the child; and to extend and deepen that contact, by moving children on to different platforms. This seems to provide further evidence that groomers benefitted from different affordances across platforms, allowing them to "pick and mix" depending on their present goal and requirements. This is shown in the extract in Table 4.6, whereby the groomer sought an exchange of personal contact details to make it easier to video call and further their contact with the child (C015: "she asked for my email because she wanted to chat with me on skype") and encourage the child to engage in sexual activity.

EPI\_iii concerned the groomer gaining an insight into children’s personal worlds, fostering familiarity and gathering information to provide hooks for relationship-building, for example, sharing non-digital information about birthdays, ages, or names. This seems to corroborate the groomer’s use of the process of “liking” (see Chapter Two e.g. Levano, 2020). The relatively low frequency of mentions of EPI\_iii suggests that it may not have registered strongly amongst children in their recollections of their grooming experience or that it appeared so normal that it did not warrant mention to their counsellor.

The least frequent type, EPI\_iv, concerned the groomer eliciting or sharing information about physical locations or whereabouts. Some children described this as part of the process of building a bond, another “liking” strategy. Others described a more coercive pattern of groomers eliciting information about physical whereabouts and location to threaten and control the child’s behaviour. Some children discussed the groomer attaining this information without their consent aided by the affordances of SNSs and the ability they provide to track and screenshot the child’s location, as shown in Extract\_4.12:

Extract\_4.12

- |   |      |  |
|---|------|--|
| 1 | C006 | he has a screenshot on maps of where I live...                             |
| 2 |      | he was saying he was going to smash my house up and do something to my mum |
| 3 |      | so I said okay I’ll do it as long as you stay away from my mum.            |

Extract\_4.12 showed how children referred to groomers finding and screenshotting information and combining it information gleaned about the child’s close relationships to threaten and coerce them to comply with their demands. The leverage role played by EPI is further evidenced given that this sub-tactic was shown in Figure 4.2 to predominantly intersect with EST and FC\_On. This emphasises that the groomer’s use of EPI was contingent not only on the groomer’s facework but also the child’s response to it based on their own perceived face needs and wants.

As for children’s willingness to share their personal information, children referred to the groomer using the anonymity afforded by the internet to mask their identity. Children’s discourse, (Extract\_4.13), suggested this “masking” and the groomer’s

duplicity in adopting a more palatable persona (a girl with a potential romantic interest) that made them feel comfortable sharing information.

#### Extract\_4.13

1 C011 i don't think the girl was real i think it was him all along

Extract\_4.13 the child's attunement to the groomer's identity deception, at least when reflecting on what happened retrospectively. These findings support research that shows that online anonymity allows groomers to present themselves positively and boosts children's willingness to take what the groomer tells them about themselves at face value (Chapter Two, e.g., Webster et al. (2012) and Choo (2009). They also support Livingstone et al's (2019) contention that SNSs have fundamentally reconfigured 's conceptualisations of privacy online. Findings support the concept of a "privacy paradox" (Barnes 2009) where, on the one hand, young people seem concerned about preserving their privacy and on the other they seemed to openly share personal information in the public arenas of SNS and see this as central to their identity construction and maintenance of face. This is exacerbated within the self-forming and experimentation phase of adolescent development (Chapter Three). These expectations of communicative reciprocity and heightened sensitivity to its facework implications among face-forming adolescents in the "age of sharing" (John, 2017) combine to impose subtle constraints on children's agency underpinning decisions to share information or images within DCSG (Chapter Two). Sharing tangible (i.e. files, images, videos) and intangible objects (feelings, experience, status updates) has become an expected social norm, central to contemporary facework, particularly in digital contexts and constitutive of Web 2.0 (see Lorenzo-Dus, (2023) and Chapter Three). This creates significant tension and cognitive challenge for children in navigating relational norms in DCSG contexts that are little understood but represent a core contribution of the discourse-lens adopted by this thesis.

Overall, the salience of the EPI sub-tactic within children's discourse supports previous studies which highlight the elicitation of personal information as a key strategy in offline grooming (Olson et al 2006) that is also used in the online context

(Lorenzo-Dus et al, 2016). Information gathering has been identified as central to the DCSG process (see Chapter Two, e.g. Lorenzo-Dus et al, 2016; 2020; Chiang & Grant, 2017) and imagery is identified as a core lever for DCSG (Hanson, 2017).

#### ***4.4.2 Deceptive Trust Development Sub-Tactic: Relationships***

As shown in Table 4.1, in terms of the overall number of references, children did not mention REL frequently, at 15.68% of DTD references (29/185). Also, groomer use of the REL sub-tactic was mentioned by less than half of children (12/30) (40%). For most children therefore, the groomer’s discourse about the groomer <-> child “relationship” or the child’s relationships with others seemed to be either deemed of less relevance to their discussion with a counsellor or something they did not want to or feel able to divulge within counselling interactions.

For those children who did mention relationships, their references can be divided into two categories: (i) their relationship with the groomer and (ii) the groomer discussing or referring to other people in the child’s life. More than half of mentions (19/29) referred to the child’s relationship with the groomer, see Extract\_4.14:

Extract\_4.14

1 C018: we had a deep emotional relationship

In such references children expressed their perceived “deep” (1) emotional connection with the groomer, reflecting how the relationship met their emotional needs for support and being listened to. Despite references to such emotional ties, the word “love” as used by the groomer was only mentioned by one child, on three occasions, see Extract\_4.15:

Extract\_4.15

1 C030: He says I’m special and im different to other girls and we had this good  
2 connection that I didn’t want to end, he says he loves me and wants me to  
3 be with him

The low frequency of references to “love” in children’s discourse is difficult to explain, it could indicate the children did not feel love towards or from the groomer. Alternatively, the child may not have felt it permissible to discuss feelings of love towards the groomer with their counsellor, as it opposed wider societal and preventive education narratives of DCSG/TA-CSA as illicit and abusive. However, this would suggest children’s reticence to raise certain topics in their counselling interactions would also apply to other “positive” features of the relationship referenced such as “support” and “caring”, which occurred in 12/29 of references, discussed by 6/30 children. There is a clear difference, however, between those “positive” feelings and the private and often deeply held feeling of love which may make it harder to express. This finding differs from research which suggests that children may be pursuing goals of romantic relationship building in grooming interactions (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016, 2023).

Groomers’ discussion of the child’s relationships with others was referred to less frequently (6/29 references). Children’s references in this category indicated how the groomer used the child’s relationships with others as leverage for their entrapment goals. Extract\_4.16 shows the groomer attempting to dismantle pre-existing relationships, in this case with a boyfriend.

#### Extract\_4.16

1 C030 he wants me to dump my boyfriend and keeps saying negative things about him.

As shown in Figure 4.2, REL overlapped with other OGDm sub-tactics. Interestingly the groomer’s IS tactic was barely mentioned with only 2/29 mentions of MIS (e.g. Extract\_4.16). This suggests children may not have recognised the Groomers’ use of REL to support their goal of inserting themselves between the child and their existing support networks (as suggested in Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016, 2020, 2023). Overlap with REL predominantly occurred within SG (9/29) where it interacted more with EST (7/29) than IST (5/29). There was also an overlap with the GI Tactic (7/29). In terms of the FC (8/29) tactic, this intersected more frequently with references to FC\_On (5/29) than FC\_Off (3/29). The groomer’s mention of other relationships in the child’s life was also described in children’s discourse as

one of the ways in which they tried to force compliance by threatening to harm or tell others in the child's life (see Chapter Five).

#### ***4.4.3 Deceptive Trust Development Sub-Tactic: Gifts***

Gifts (GI) is an adaption to the "Praise" category used in prior analyses of groomer discourse (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016, 2020, 2023) to account for children's references to the groomer giving verbal or physical gifts to the child to palliate their manipulative discourse. Iteratively developed through children's discourse, the GI sub-tactic was further divided into two sub-categories Gifts (Verbal) (GI\_V) and Gifts (Physical) (GI\_P). GI\_V concerned references by the child to the groomer complimenting them by congratulating and praising the child's physical appearance or other personal traits and GI\_P referred to groomer offers of money, material goods such as travel tickets, underwear or presents (Chapter Three).

Table 4.1 shows that GI sub-tactics accounted for 14.59% (27/185) of DTD references but were mentioned by 50% of children, a larger proportion of the sample than children mentioning REL (i.e. 40%). References to GI\_V were slightly more salient in children's discourse (14/27; 51.85%, mentioned by 9/30 children, 30%) than references to GI\_P (13/27; 48.15%, mentioned by 8/30 children, 27%). Despite this, the frequency of references to GI\_V represented in children's discourse was lower than previously identified in actual grooming discourse.<sup>91</sup> This could suggest children were not fully attuned to how groomers were using the GI\_V sub-tactic of complimenting to ease their manipulative discourse and mitigate their sexualised goals.

Several GI\_V categories referred to by children are shown in Table 4.7. Five compliment topics were mentioned by children in decreasing order of frequency: Exclusivity, ability-non-sex, performance sex, physical appearance-sex, physical-appearance-non-sex. These were adapted from the categories developed in previous

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<sup>91</sup> E.g. Lorenzo-Dus and Izura (2017) identified a ratio of c.19 compliments per 'grooming interaction', whereas 27 references to verbal gifts in 14 cases shows a considerably lower ratio (c. < 2) when reported in children's discourse within this data.

analysis of compliment-use (GI\_V) in groomer discourse (Lorenzo-Dus & Izura, 2017).

**Table 4.7** *Verbal Gift Categories* (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016) *Number (n=) and Frequency (%) of References*

<b>Gifts</b>  <b>(Praise, Verbal)</b>	<b>Children</b>		<b>References</b>		<b>Example from the dataset</b>
	<b>(n=)</b>	<b>(%/30)</b>	<b>(n=/14)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	
Other	4	13%	5	35.71%	C022: they said they liked my profile so of course I continued talking to them
Ability-non-sex	2	7%	4	28.58%	C030: he says im not a child in his eyes and that I am different and unique to other girls
Performance-Sex	1	3%	3	21.43%	C020: they say I'm good at <u>it</u> or that <u>it</u> made them feel good
Physical Appearance-non-sex	1	3%	1	7.14%	C001: well he start complimenting me and telling me i was beautiful
Physical Appearance-Sex	1	3%	1	7.14%	C015: She kept giving me 'compliments' e.g. you're looking very sexy baby, which I didn't actually like to be honest.

The most frequent topic referenced was Exclusivity/Specialness with five mentions. References that fell under this category predominantly concerned the groomer asserting the child's special (different and unique) status. Therefore, the most frequently referenced type of compliment "heard" by the child is that of being special or unique or of a sense of exclusivity in their relationship with the groomer, which falls outside the compliment categories used by Lorenzo-Dus and Izura (2017). This suggests children's preoccupation with the self-affirming nature of groomer discourse, indicating children's pursuit of personal goals in grooming interactions (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023). It also builds evidence that children's goals may revolve around self-construction and exploration, of feeling like they matter. However, this analysis suggests that the attention interaction with the groomer brought in DCSG contexts was interpreted as face-enhancing to the child engaged in a project of steep identity and self-construction (see Chapter Two). That the self-validating nature of

groomer discourse was something noticed by the child and deemed relevant to mention marks it as an effective grooming strategy. Ability non-sex follows with four mentions. Performance-sex is mentioned by one child only, who makes three mentions. Note here child's use of vague language ("it") for this topic – children's use of vague language in is further developed in Section 4.5.2. Physical-appearance-sex (1/10) and physical-appearance-non-sex (1/10) received one mention each.

Within the counselling context the "nice" elements of the groomer's communication, of which compliments are an illustration, seemed to be something the child felt less able to or was deemed irrelevant to mention. Children may not have registered the praise the groomer offered in interactions, or the self-praising compliments received jarred with an abuse-altered sense of self, already fragile due to the child's age and stage of development and wider structural constraints (Chapter Two). There is some, if limited, empirical evidence that suggests a child's face could be fundamentally altered and fractured during sexual abuse (Hamilton-Giachritsis, et al, 2020 and Chapter Two/Three). Another factor could be the retrospective nature of the counselling context. GI\_V may not be what stayed with the child meaning it did not surface during their interactions with a counsellor. The low frequency of references to the groomer giving appearance related compliments could also suggest that children's acceptance and reflection on these compliments are filtered through and connected to children's own self-perceptions which may have been distorted and diminished by DCSG (see Chapter Six on Self Intolerance).

Moving on to GI\_P, children's reference to this groomer sub-tactic in the counselling context was noteworthy. While physical gift giving has been identified as a core strategy in offline grooming (Craven et al., 2006), it is only mentioned in passing in studies of online grooming (Kloess et al., 2014) or not mentioned at all as part of analysis of trust or rapport building moves or strategies (Chiang & Grant, 2017, 2019; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016). Two types of physical gift-giving referenced in children's discourse were: the groomer buying them "nice things" or travel tickets or the groomer sending "gifts" of self-generated images. Extract\_4.17 is typical of children's discourse referencing the first type of GI\_P:

#### Extract\_4.17

1 C007 He bought me underwear. He asked me to take pictures in the underwear he  
2 bought me

In children's discourse the sub-tactic of giving GI\_P appeared to operate as a bridge between the online relationship with the groomer and the child's offline world. This emphasises the permeability between online and offline realms in DCSG communications. Online/offline porosity is often not sufficiently addressed by existing research which tends to distinguish between "online" and "offline" grooming (see Chapter Two, e.g. Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). Giving a physical gift in person, sending gifts or transferring money are all physical actions and tangible items that can be held, touched and experienced by the child, therefore symbolically and cognitively shifting the interaction from an online virtual one to a physical, real-life embodiment. This finding in children's discourse echoes research that explores language as symbolic power and the "transaction" of gift giving leading to a "reciprocity imperative" (Kramsch, 2020, Chapter Two). The obligation of reciprocity implicit in a gift-giving transaction is relationally loaded in that it threatens the negative face of the receiver by perforating their independence. The gift symbolically binds the receiver to the agenda and expectations of the giver. This is evident in Extract\_4.17, where the child talked about being asked to take semi-nude images. The child's mention that the groomer bought them underwear (1-2), immediately followed by the report of the groomer's request for pictures, suggested the child's perception that complying with a sex act was the expected way to "pay the groomer back" for the physical gift of the new underwear. Children are unlikely to be financially independent, unlike the adult offering the gift, which entrenches the inherent power imbalance which underlies adult/child DCSG interactions (see Lorenzo-Dus 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al, 2023). The child is unlikely to have the financial means to reciprocate on the same terms, representing a potential face-threat that needs to be managed. By providing material goods that the child would not otherwise have access to, the offender thus establishes and cements a relation of personal indebtedness (Thomson, 1991 as cited in Kramsch, 2020). Some of the gifts referenced in the data, such as underwear (Extract\_4.17) or money for travel or

tickets, served the purpose of expediting the groomer goals of sexual gratification and/or further contact.

The second type of GI\_P entailed reference by the child to the groomer sending them nude or explicit images as a sort of offering or “sick gift”, as Extract\_4.18 shows:

Extract\_4.18

1 C029 some of the messages are a picture of his dick with the writing

Most extracts merely referred to the groomer “sending” images without explicitly stating that the image is seen as a “gift” by the child. However, in line with Kramsch (2020), regardless of whether the child recognises a gift has been given, the perpetual cycle and notion of gift and counter-gift underpinned by a strong socialisation to share is a force that fundamentally threatens the child’s negative face, creating an almost subconscious drive and sense of obligation to reciprocate. The data also shows that the groomer was “giving” nude images as a vehicle to introduce nudity and sexual content into their communication with the child. Once images were sent, the groomer encouraged the child to reciprocate by sending CCII/IV. By exposing the child to unsolicited explicit images groomers infiltrated children’s worlds and psyche to leave indelible visual and physical markers or reminders of their presence.

Results in Figure 4.2 show how the GI sub-tactic predominantly interacted with EPI, REL, EST and FC\_On. There was also some overlap with MI and ACC, ACT, IST and FC\_Off. Essentially therefore, gift-giving appeared to be used effectively by the groomer as support to mollify other grooming tactics and sub-tactics and to intensify a pre-existing sense of deference and “owing” the groomer something. In line with Kramsch’s (2020) notion of gifts as “symbolic violence”, findings suggest that gift-giving may be used by groomers as a coercive relational strategy to mitigate the potential negative face impacts of other sub-tactics and to enhance the child’s compliance. GI thus seemed to be an effective tactic to overcome resistance and avoid disclosure, intensifying the cognitive complexity for the child.

#### 4.5 Online Grooming Discourse Model Tactic: Sexual Gratification

Sexual Gratification (SG) refers to any mention by the child of the groomer having prepared them to accept offline sexual contact and/or to engage in online sexual activities (Chapter Three). SG is comprised of three sub-tactics. EST which includes any reference by the child to the groomer using sexually explicit language and showing and sharing explicit images and videos. IST which covers any reference by the child of the groomer using indirect sexual language/images or the groomer having emphasised the romantic rather than the sexual nature of the child-groomer relationship. The third sub-tactic is REF which concerns the groomer reframing sexual activity to appear beneficial to the child such as learning new experiences, games or skills.

Table 4.1 showed that behind DTD, SG was the second most frequently referenced groomer tactic representing 28.32% of children's references to groomer communicative behaviour (143/505). Figure 4.5 presents overview results about the SG sub-tactics observed in children's discourse. This is followed by a discussion of how children referred to these sub-tactics.

**Figure 4.5** *Online Grooming Discourse Model Sexual Gratification Sub-Tactics, Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of References in Children's Discourse*

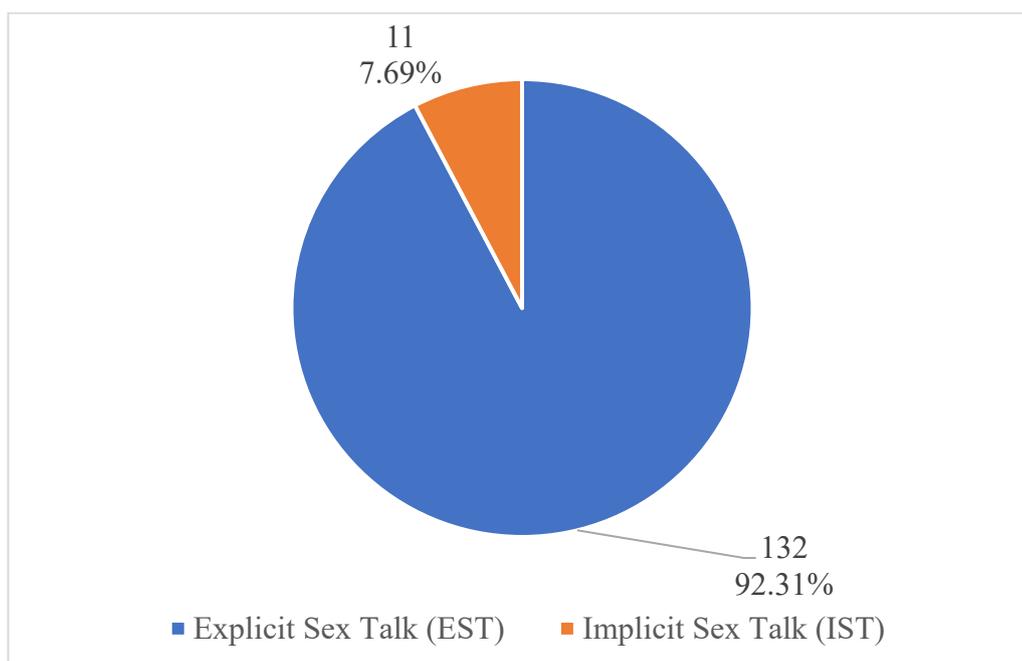


Figure 4.5 shows that most SG tactic references within children's discourse concerned EST (132/143; 92.31%). Note that this was also the most frequently mentioned sub-tactic by children overall within this dataset, mentioned by all but one child. IST was mentioned much less frequently (11/143; 7.69%), by 6/29 (20%) children. REF was not observed in children's discourse.

#### ***4.5.1 Sexual Gratification Sub-Tactic: Explicit Sex Talk***

EST refers to children's references to the groomer using sexually explicit language (e.g., sexual slang terms and graphic descriptions of sexual activities) and images (e.g., showing, sharing and requesting nude pictures, having erections on camera). Figure 4.5 showed that 92.31% (132/143) of children's mentions of SG concerned EST, which was mentioned by 97% of children. In this counselling context, therefore, children demonstrated that they were prepared to identify and discuss the sexual aspects of abuse they had experienced. The findings show they did so with a strong focus on the sexualised content of the groomer's communication. At first look, the children's willingness to talk about sexual aspects of the grooming process appears to contrast with the view (Chapter Two), of the specific characteristics of DCSG leading to a markedly low disclosure rate. It challenged findings about children's reluctance to disclose to anybody particularly adults and external agencies and the reticence of children to recognise their abuse and a resistance to engage in therapeutic support (Chapter Two, e.g. Hamilton-Giachritsis et al, 2020; Katz, 2013; Katz et al., 2018). Extant research, however, emphasises the role of the police in TA-CSA disclosure especially as safeguarding services often struggle to understand their role in supporting children with TA-CSA/DCSG. This finding adds a valuable additional perspective on the impact of DCSG on the child, showing that within a supportive counselling helpline environment, children could articulate their experiences of exposure to sexual behaviour in DSCG contexts.

The high number of references to EST in children's discourse could be partially explained by the retrospective and agentic nature of the counselling context. Sexual communication with an adult would be a category of high risk which would be explicitly pursued and explored by the counsellor. These findings may also indicate

the groomers' sexualised EST discourse is what "sticks" with the child, representing the most confronting and traumatic elements of the DCSG experience and therefore what they choose to prioritise during counselling. It could also reflect risk-focused cultural narratives, media discourse and preventative education messaging that emphasise sexual communication in societal understandings and approaches to DCSG (Chapter Two). This macro-discourse may provide children with scripts and communicative confidence to be able to discuss these aspects of their experience. All these factors could explain the emphasis on groomer's EST sub-tactic in children's discourse.

EST was mentioned by all but one child in the sample (29/30) although, as presented in Figure 4.1, the SD figure of 2.884 shows some variation in how often it was discussed by individual children. In the only counselling chat session in which ED was not mentioned, the child appeared to feel judged by the counsellor. This was due to discussion early in the counselling interaction about the age difference between the child and the groomer, in which the child closed themselves off from discussing their DCSG experience in much detail. This emphasises how important the counsellor's handling of the child's disclosure was and how it formed the wider context for the discourse studied across this thesis.

Children's references to the groomer's use of EST could be divided into three types:

- (i) CCII
- (ii) CCIV
- (iii) Sexualised Behaviour Talk.

Sextortion was identified in both EST type (i) and (ii). Viewing sextortion through children's discourse challenges the narrative of sextortion as a novel and distinct threat, rather validating research that identifies the process of (s)extortion as core to DCSG communication (see Chapter Two e.g. Chiang & Grant, 2017, 2019). Through the child's eyes, sextortion assisted by technology is not a distinct form of abuse, rather, the ease of image production, sharing and storing core to sextortion can be seen as an evolution of groomer manipulation. Sextortion thus represents a mutation and intensification of groomer facework that has been encouraged and fostered by

the unregulated technological affordances available. A discourse-focused analysis of children's accounts brings this into sharp focus and suggests the importance of starting to view sextortion as integral rather than distinct to the wider suite of complex facework deployed by the groomer in DCSG contexts (see Chapter Five).

Figure 4.6 shows the frequency with which the three types of EST were represented in children's discourse.<sup>92</sup>

**Figure 4.6** *Explicit Sex Talk Types -Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of References in Children's Discourse*

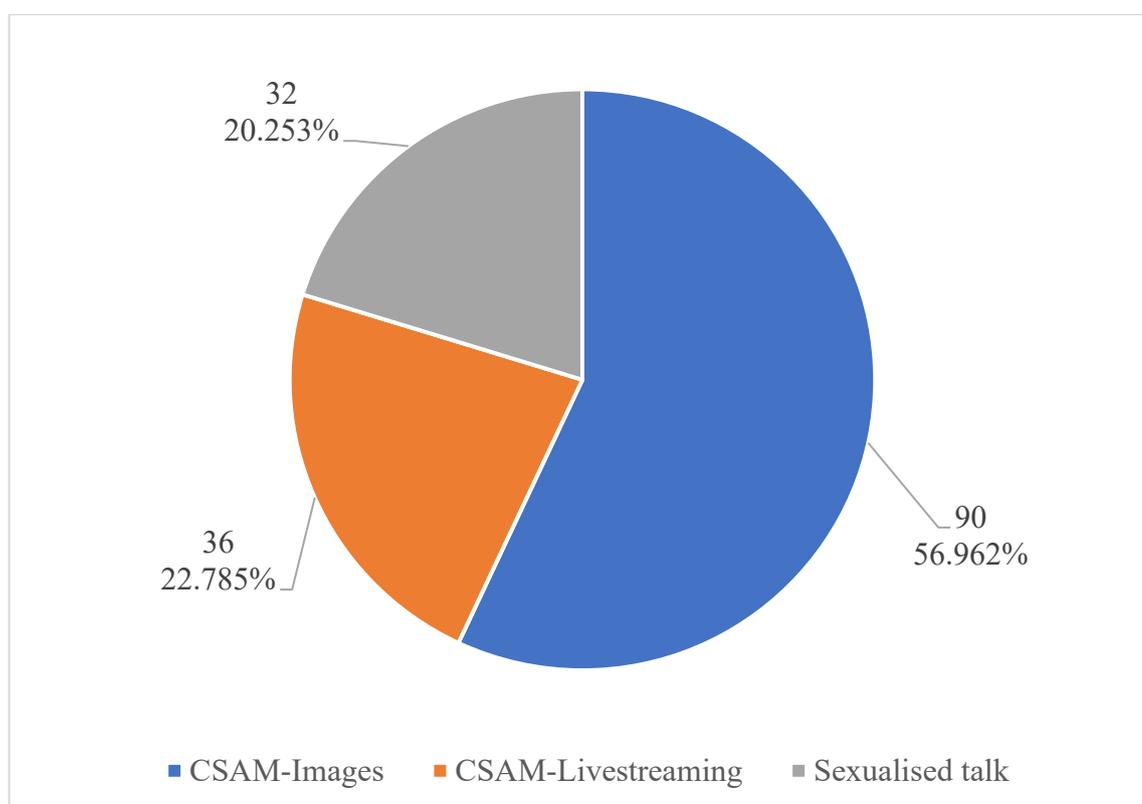


Figure 4.6 shows that CCII was the most frequently mentioned category (56.96%, 90/158); followed by CCIV (22.78%, 36/158). Sex talk represented 20.25% of children's references (32/158). Extract\_4.19 shows how children's CCII were used by the groomer to extend sexual contact:

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<sup>92</sup> N.B. The total number of references of each category is more than the total EST references presented at Figure 4.6 because at times children's references overlapped the categories i.e. images and sex talk.

#### Extract\_4.19

- 1 C015 Later i received a video call again but this time on Facebook and she showed me  
2 a recording of what she could see me as. It was very disturbing. After she showed  
3 me that video, I received a long message saying something along the lines of  
4 “underage masturbation”, gonna get reported so talk to me.

As shown in Extract\_4.19, the groomer exploited video call functionality to reflect back screenshots of sexual acts captured during live streaming. The child’s evaluation of the experience as “very disturbing” (2) suggests this form of EST sub-tactic was particularly distressing for the child. The groomer’s ability to possess and retain these screenshots was a key feature of the child’s discourse (Chapters Six and Seven).

In Extract\_4.20 the child talked about the threat and risk of exposure that limited their space for action:

#### Extract\_4.20

- 1 C012 i had to give up [YouTube] because of the risk of him posting nude pictures  
2 he’d screenshotted...  
3 CL012 ok he was forcing you to do things?  
4 C012 yeah, otherwise he’d post other images of me and stuff

In Extract\_4.20 the child agrees with the counsellors depiction of the groomer “forcing [them] to do things” (3) and connects it to the conditional threat (see Chapter Three) of exposure by posting and sharing on their nude images (“yeah, otherwise he’d post other images of me and stuff”, (4)). The risk of exposure threatened by the groomer sharing their nude images meant the child felt they had to abandon their YouTube account and curtail desired activities (“i had to give up [YouTube] because of the risk of him posting nude pictures he’d screenshotted...”, (1-2)). This concurs with research that discussed how TA-CSA, through actions such as shutting down online profiles, restricting online information and interactions or altering their engagement in the online sphere, serve to close off an individual’s agentic “horizons of possibility”, constraining and limiting their participation in public life and active citizenship (Chapter Two e.g. McGlynn et al., 2021, p.556).

Figure 4.2 showed EST predominantly overlapped with EPI (93/132) and FC (83/132). The salience of images within the EST category further emphasises how CCII were being used multifunctionally to support groomer SG, DTD and FC tactics. To a lesser extent (9/132), GI was also found to overlap with EST, indicating that gift giving was used by the groomer to help further their sexual gratification goals. The language used by children when referencing the EST sub-tactic showed some variation as regards the level of explicitness. Consider Extract\_4.21 and 4.22:

#### Extract\_4.21

1 C001 He asked me to go on facetime with him so he could masturbate

#### Extract\_4.22

1 C002 I would be told to do things that u didn't want to do

Both extracts show, while children were able to describe the sexual content of the grooming interaction, they did so using a combination of sexually explicit (Extract\_4.21: “masturbate”) and sexually implicit/vague (Extract\_4.22: “do things”) language. The next section provides closer analysis of the children’s use of explicit and/or vague/implicit sexual language in their discourse.

### ***4.5.2 Sexual Gratification Sub-Tactics: A Closer look at Children’s use of Explicit/Implicit Language***

Findings presented thus far suggest that children, at least within a counselling context, were cognisant of groomer’s communication of sexual intent particularly when explicitly encoded. However, variation was observed in how this and their own sexual discourse was expressed linguistically by children to their counsellor. Children’s references to the groomers’ use of IST and EST sub-tactics were further examined to ascertain how children discursively constructed explicit and implicit sexual terms, with what frequency, and in relation to which aspects of the Groomers’ use of SG sub-tactics. As regards children’s use of vague/implicit language, analysis entailed applying Lorenzo-Dus and Kinzel’s (2021) taxonomy of vague language in

DCSG, which is an adaptation of Zhang’s (2011, 2013) classification of vague language in sensitive contexts (Chapter Three).

When describing the groomer’s use of the SG tactic, children did one of three things (see Table 4.8):

- i. **used explicit sexual language.** This included use of sex terms like “fuck” or “masturbate”; as well as the words “nudes” and “naked”.
- ii. **used vague language.** Four categories of Lorenzo-Dus and Kinzel’s (2021) taxonomy were identified in children’s discourse.
  - a. Approximators (e.g. “inappropriate”, “dirty”),
  - b. Vague Category Identifiers (e.g. he’s going to send *them*)
  - c. Explicit Vague Category Identifiers (e.g. “sexual things, “sexual stuff”) and
  - d. General Verb (e.g. “*doing* things that i don’t want to do”)
- iii. **omitted references to sexual content.** This included avoiding either references to sex entirely or to explicit references of “pictures”, “images” or chats being sexual.

**Table 4.8** *Children’s Linguistic Realisations of Sexual Content in their Discourse about Groomers’ Sexual Gratification Tactic- Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency (n=/%)* of References

Sexual Gratification Tactic: Children’s Linguistic Realisations	Children		References	
	(n=)	(%/30)	(n=/149)	(%)
Explit language	19	63%	39	26.17%
Vague Language	23	77%	57	38.26%
Omission	19	63%	53	35.57%

Vague language references represented 38.26% (57/149) of references in children’s discourse about the groomer’s use of the SG Tactic.<sup>93</sup> Vague language use occurred

<sup>93</sup> The 149 figure is higher than the total number of references for SG presented inTable 4.1 (n=143) because, in some instances, the children combined the use of, for example: explicit and vague language or vague language and omission.

with similar frequency to that of omission of sexual content references (35.57%, 53/149), another linguistic strategy used by children to avoid explicit references to groomer's SG use. Explicit description of the SG tactic accounted for 26.17% (39/149) of children's references.

**Sexual Gratification: Explicit Language.** Most children in the sample (19/30, 63%) at some stage in their discussion with the counsellor used explicit language to describe the groomer's use of SG tactics, see Extract\_4.23:

Extract\_4.23

1 C005 Yeah he or she said to me am i horny and i said no and wanted my naked  
2 pictures

While references to “naked” and “nude” are coded here as explicit language use, are also the terms that children are specifically taught in internet and online safety curricula at school to refer to CCII (UKCIS, 2020; Welsh Government, 2020). Therefore, they may be more easily retrieved in the context of counselling than other sexual terms which could dilute their “explicit” status in children's discourse.

Albeit comparatively low, children's explicit references to sex are unexpected especially given research which identifies significant challenges for children in disclosing sexual abuse, particularly abuse that has occurred online (Chapter Two e.g., Katz, 2013; Katz et al., 2018). Children discussing sex as a topic, and the fact that sex between children and an adult is illegal, makes it a social taboo. Within the counselling context studied, children's apparent willingness and confidence to be factual and frank in descriptions of sexual abuse perpetrated by groomers suggests that children may be able to be clear in their disclosures when it is scaffolded within a supportive and facilitative environment.

**Sexual Gratification: Vague Language.** There are three potential interpretations of children's use of vague language (VL): avoidance; mitigation (to make their language more acceptable to the hearer); and finally, to manage the

challenges children find in articulating upsetting or traumatising experiences of the groomer's SG use.

Taking the first interpretation, children's VL appeared to function as avoidance within the counselling interaction. Children used VL to avoid the potential of self or other oriented face-threat (given the societal taboo of children openly discussing sex) triggered by describing the groomer's use of the SG tactic which they may have varying levels of awareness of as being illegal.

VL use could also carry a mitigation function, it could represent the child's attempt to make their language more palatable to the hearer. Children may find it difficult to articulate their experience due to societal norms and expectations that balk at and preclude children openly discussing sex. This may especially be the case with an adult (the counsellor) who holds a higher societal status, as a professional, than they do. Furthermore, the goals of vague language seem to differ between adult and child. As shown in Lorenzo-Dus and Kinzel (2021), vague language is used by groomers to facilitate their goal of masking and deceiving the child about their sexual intent. Conversely, in children's discourse, vague language mitigated the face threat of explicit language use. Its primary function was for softening sex talk, suggesting that the child may feel ill at ease and inhibited discussing the groomer's SG communication.

A further explanation for the prevalence of VL could be that children could find it too traumatic or challenging to fully articulate their experience of sexual abuse (Chapter Two). These findings suggest that children's use of vague linguistic realisations could be evidence of "test balloons" (Flåm & Haugstvedt, 2013), hoping the counsellor will pick up on their vague-language cues and further support them to articulate and unlock what has happened. This seems to validate research which identifies CSA disclosure as a reciprocal, dialogic process (Chapter Two, e.g. Alaggia et al., 2019; Cossar et al., 2013; Jackson, 2015; Reitsemma & Grietens, 2016).

Table 4.9 shows vague language realisations used by children when recalling what the groomer communication aligned to the SG tactic.

**Table 4.9** *Children’s Vague Language Realisations of the Sexual Gratification Tactic - Number (n=)/Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency (n=/%) of References*

<b>Children’s Vague Language Realisations of the Sexual Gratification Tactic</b>	<b>Children</b>		<b>References</b>	
	<b>(n=)</b>	<b>(%/30)</b>	<b>(n=/57)</b>	<b>%</b>
Vague Category Identifier (VCI)	14	47%	17	29.825%
General Verb	12	40%	17	29.825%
Approximator (AQual)	8	27%	14	24.561%
Explicit-Vague Category Identifier (EVCI)	6	20%	9	15.789%

Of the nine VL categories identified in Lorenzo-Dus and Kinzel (2021), four were identified in children’s discourse. In decreasing order of frequency, they were Vague Category Identifier (VCI) (17/57, 29.825%)<sup>94</sup>; General Verb (GV) 29.825% (17/57); Approximator-Quality (AQ) (14/57, 24.561%); and Explicit-Vague Category Identifier (E-VCI) (9/57, 15.789%).

In contrast to Zhang (2013) and Lorenzo-Dus and Kinzel (2021), which studied adult discourse, VCI was the most frequently used VL realisation in children’s discourse. Lorenzo-Dus and Kinzel (2021) suggest that VCI’s are used by groomers strategically to mitigate the potentially face-threatening and illegal act of engaging in sexual activity with a minor. In children’s discourse, conversely, terms such as “them/these” were used to refer to nude images and “anything, thing, it and stuff” to refer to sexual acts or sex talk. Children were using VCIs to mitigate their interpreted self or other (counsellor) oriented face-threat of breaking the taboo of a child discussing sex by introducing and openly discussing the topic with an adult. Children may also use it to mask their lack of confidence or under-developed communicative competence in broaching these topics, suggesting challenges faced in expressing themselves explicitly on sexual topics.

<sup>94</sup> Three decimal places needed to total 100% in this case.

The GV category had a higher frequency (29.825%) than in the findings of Lorenzo-Dus and Kinzel (2021), where General Verbs only occurred in 3% of groomer's actual discourse. This suggests that, despite the groomer using explicit language, children tended to filter their experiences through this linguistic shield in a counselling context. The main General Verb realisation in children's discourse, as shown in the Extracts in Table 4.15, was the verb "do" to refer to sexual activity. As shown in Extract\_4.24 the verb "do" was used alongside VCI ("stuff").

#### Extract\_4.24

1            C026            I had to do stuff on call with him

Next was the AQ category. This was used in children's discourse around half as frequently (24.561%) as actual groomer discourse (Lorenzo-Dus & Kinzel, 2021).<sup>95</sup> In the children's counselling discourse, the AQ served to avoid explicit discussion of genitals, sexual acts or nude pictures. Five main AQ terms were used: "private", "dirty", "inappropriate", "rude" and "adult". The child's use of the term "inappropriate/adult" served to indicate a demarcation between their world as adolescents/children and the "adult" sexualised world, demonstrating awareness that the groomer was doing something illicit and illegal. Similarly, terms "rude" and "dirty" were child-like descriptors of sex (Chapter Two e.g. Wubbs et al., 2018). The child's linguistic choices suggested a cognitive distancing where they did not fully identify as part of the differentiated "adult" world of sex that they had been exposed to by the groomer. This chimes with research identifying children's propensity to use childlike language to describe sexually abusive experiences, to "limit their own actions linguistically" and to distance themselves from the trauma they have experienced (See Chapter Two, e.g. Jackson et al., 2015; Wubbs et al., 2018, p.13).

EC-VI was least frequent in children's discourse (9/57; 15.789%) EC-VI displayed higher frequency than in the Lorenzo-Dus and Kinzel (2021) study where it had a 4% frequency. Groomer's use of E-VCI served to mitigate the face threat of engaging the

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<sup>95</sup> In the Lorenzo-Dus and Kinzel (2021) study, the category included words such as 'like, hold, feel, love, kiss' which largely conveyed the groomers approach to 'romance', as this vague language device allowed groomers to "broach and reference sexual activity covertly" (p.16).

child in illegal sexual activity. The higher frequency of EC-VI in children’s discourse suggests they may have used it to mitigate a perceived face threat of discussing and describing sex to the counsellor or to cover up their lack of assuredness in its discussion.

**Sexual Gratification: Omission.** Omission was the final way children referenced the SG process - children found ways to avoid references to sex entirely within their discourse. This was a new category of vague language identified within children’s discourse (Zhang, 2013; Lorenzo-Dus & Kinzel, 2021). As seen in Table 4.8 Omission accounted for 35.57% of references (53/149), mentioned by 19/29 of children. Extract\_4.25 is typical of how Omission was realised in children’s discourse:

Extract\_4.25

- 1 C006 Then later that day i said i don’t want to and i say it every time he messages
- 2 me and then he just says i have to

Omission carries similar linguistic effect to VL, blurring children’s references to sex for the hearer and/or themselves. Omission included lack of description of “pictures”, “images”, “chats” and “recordings” that, were inferred as sexual in the context of discussion, see Extract\_4.26:

Extract\_4.26

- 1 C008 And now he had saved image of me

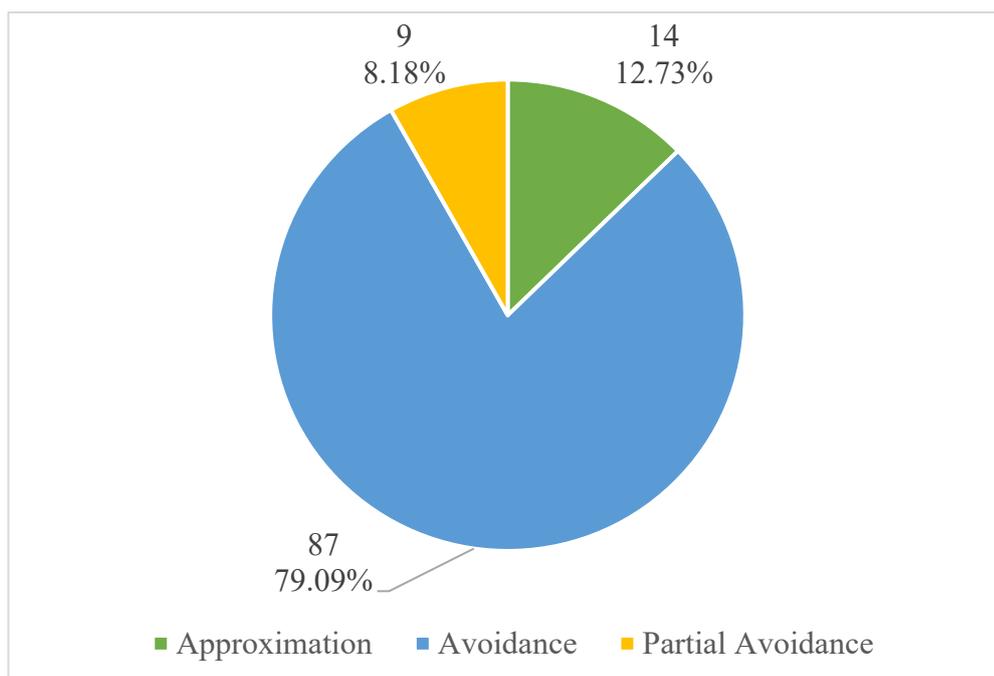
In referring to an “image”, explicit reference it being sexual is being omitted - left unsaid by the child. This concurs with research identifying children’s use of implicatures to describe their sexual abuse in a counselling context (Chapter Two, e.g. Jackson et al. 2015). Omission allows the child to avoid explicit reference to the sorts of images are referring to but strongly infers their sexual nature given the context of the rest of the counselling interaction. While children may want to discuss sexual interactions with the groomer, this may go beyond a mere struggle to articulate it. The child’s use of omission reflects the destruction of language in

children’s discourse about sexual violence shows how children harnessed and adapted their use of language to communicate these “unspeakable” experiences (Chapter Two e.g. Princethal, 2019, p.12).

The pragmatic function of the VL categories observed was also examined (following the approach of Zhang (2013) and Lorenzo-Dus and Kinzel (2021) (see Figure 4.7) Omission has not been included in previous VL analyses but also fulfils the function of avoidance. E-VCI represents a pragmatic function of partial avoidance (the child may flag a sexual reference but then use a vague category indicator to make the reference less explicit). A-Qual had a function of approximation (approaching sexual content implicitly).

Figure 4.7 shows the frequency of use of the pragmatic function that these vague language realisations fulfilled (vague language + omission, n=110): avoidance (87/110; 79.09%); partial avoidance (9/110; 8.18%) and finally; approximation (14/110; 12.73%).

**Figure 4.7** *Vague Language and Omission Categories Grouped by Pragmatic Function as Represented in Children’s Discourse - Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of References*



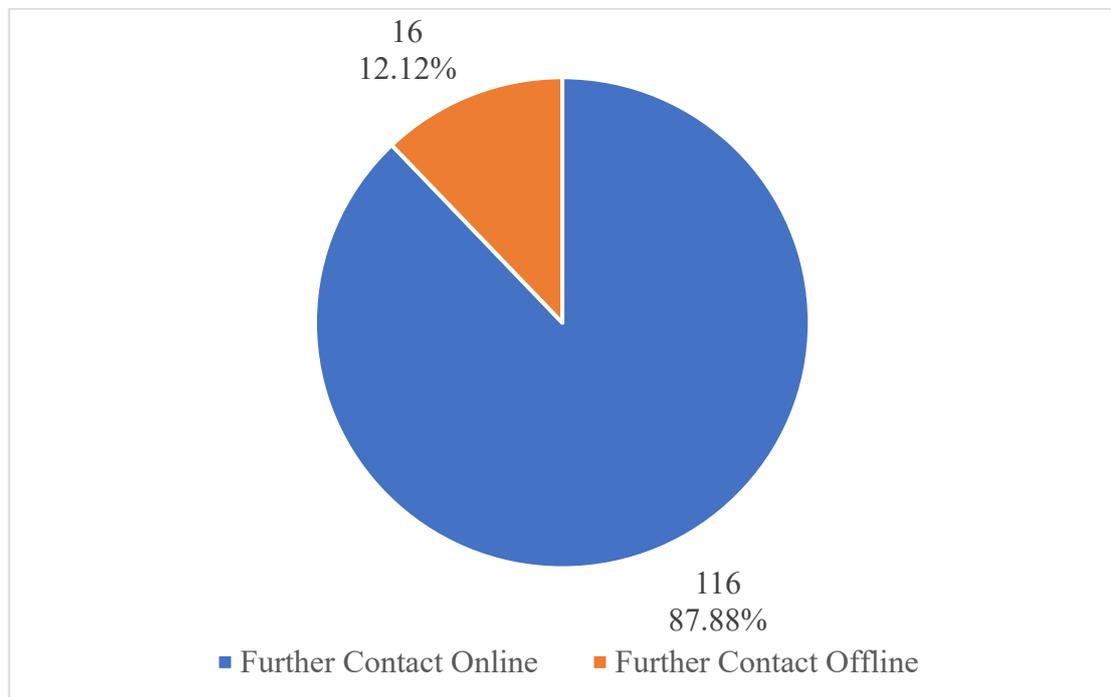
As seen in Figure 4.7, 79.09% of children's linguistic VL realisations when recounting groomer's sexualised communication had an avoidance function. Partial avoidance represented 12.73%. This contrasts with findings observed in Lorenzo-Dus and Kinzel (2021), where the primary pragmatic functions in the offender's use of vague language were approximation and down-toning. So, while children seemed to want to broach the sexual aspects of their experience and seek support and guidance during the counselling sessions, children were found to be utilising linguistic avoidance to reconstruct, temper and filter their representations of their experience (Chapter Two).

#### **4.6 Online Grooming Discourse Model Tactic: Further Contact**

The FC tactic refers to children's references to groomer use of language to get them to give an increased amount or type of contact with the groomer (Chapter Three). There were two types of FC, Further Contact Online (FC\_On) and Further Contact Offline (FC\_Off).

As shown in Table 4.1 FC was the third most frequently mentioned OGDM Tactic, just behind SG, constituting 26.14% (132/505) of references. Figure 4.8 presents results of children's discourse about the sub-strategies that comprise FC. It presents the number of children mentioning FC sub-tactics and the frequency of references.

**Figure 4.8** *Children’s Discourse: Online Grooming Discourse Model Further Contact Sub-Tactics, Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of References*



FC\_On represented 87.88% (116/132) of FC references in children’s discourse. Discussions of meeting in real life or accounts of having met with the groomer in person (FC\_Off) accounted for 12.12% (16/132) of children’s FC references.

#### **4.6.1 Further Contact Sub-Tactic: Further Contact Online**

FC\_On refers to any mention by the child of the groomer having tried to gain longer or new periods of online interaction. This includes reference by the child to the groomer having made further contact with them using different modes of communication i.e., by introducing images or video moving the child from one SNS platform to another to intensify or provide a different mode/affordance of contact (Chapter Three). Table 4.10 presents the number of children in the sample mentioning FC\_On and the number and frequency of references to the sub-tactic and shows that within FC\_On, children’s discourse can be divided into five types.

**Table 4.10** *Further Contact Tactic: Further Contact\_Online Type – Definition and Extract from the Dataset*

Further Contact_Online Type	Definition	Extract from the dataset
CCII/CCIV	Requests by the groomer to further contact by providing or asking for Coerced Child Intimate Imagery (nude or semi-nude images) or CCIV (videos or live-streaming).	C006: he asked me to send nudes. CL012: Ok, he was forcing you to do things? C012: yeah, otherwise he'd post other images of me and stuff.
Text-based FCOOn	Seeking further engagement via continuing text-based chatting/messaging.	C006: later that day I said I dont want to and i say it everytime he messages me then he just says I have to...if I block him he's going to come because I removed him before but then added me back, said if I do it again I'm in trouble
Platform migration	Platform migration/alternation to SNS' with increased functionality to facilitate further contact or to further sexualised goals.	C001: He asked me to go on facetime with him so he could masturbate
Screenshots	The groomer uses screenshots of nude images, contacts or information about the child to ensure further contact online	C017: He didn't save the photos he screen recorded is that possible to remove
Manipulative use of Personal Information	Using previously gleaned personal information either via the exchange of personal information or gleaned from the child's social media presence/digital footprint to ensure further contact	C017: Then the person recorded my nudes and checkd all of my family friends accounts and saved them and said if I don't pay him £500 he will send the picture, what should I do?

Each FC\_On type shows how the affordances of technology and the digital context were operationalised by the groomer to extend and maintain contact with the child. As Table 4.10 shows, FC\_On was not only the most frequent type of FC (116/132; 87.88%; referenced by 90% (27/30) of children, it is itself a frequently referenced OGDM tactic (see Table 4.1). FC\_On, which represented extended contact in the digital context, was therefore highly salient in the children’s discourse about grooming.

As Table 4.1 shows there were 116 references to FC\_On however, when this was further analysed to identify the *types* of FC\_On represented in children’s discourse there were 149 references to different types.<sup>96</sup> The figures presented in Table 4.11 and the extracts discussed throughout this sub-section show how the different types of FC\_On were overlapping and intertwined. This emphasised how the affordances of technology and social media were used by the groomer simultaneously. They also emphasise how the groomer’s facework was integral to their weaponisation.

**Table 4.11** *Further Contact Sub-Tactic: Further Contact Online - Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency (n=/%) of References*

FC_On Type		Children		References	
		(n=)	(%/30)	(n=/149)	(%)
(i)	CCII/CCIV	25	83%	83	55.70%
(ii)	Text-Based FCO <sub>n</sub>	13	43%	31	20.81%
(iii)	Platform Migration	7	23%	14	9.40%
(iv)	Screenshots	7	23%	11	7.38%
(v)	Manipulative use of Personal Information	5	17%	10	6.71%

Type (i) FC\_On was mentioned by 25/30 children in the sample (83%). As shown in Table 4.11, references to CCII formed the majority (83/149, 55.70%) of FC\_On references in children’s discourse thus forming the main technical affordance to support the groomer’s FC\_On tactic. This is illustrated by Extract\_4.27:

<sup>96</sup> The total number of references to different FC\_On types total more than 116 because children often referenced more than one type happening simultaneously (C006: he has a screen shot on maps of where i live i.e. type (iv) and (v) manipulative use of personal information).

#### Extract\_4.27

1 C001 He sent me pictures of his private parts and asked me to go on facetime with  
2 him so he could masturbate

As highlighted in the overview discussion (Table 4.1), references to CCII/CCIV are multi-coded as EST and EPI and FC-On. Viewing DCSG through children’s discourse crystallises the overlapping and intertwined nature of groomer tactical discourse enveloped in complex manipulative facework. This is particularly facilitated in the case of the semiotic function of CCII/IV. The affordances of smart phones and SNS combine to be harnessed by the groomer to facilitate their communicative goals. The findings in this section further suggest that the common thread of facework that runs through these “distinct” forms of TA-CSA is currently inadequately understood and appreciated. Further, the face-status of children and how this intensifies impact of groomer facework is under-explored, particularly to the lack of focus to date on groomer <-> child communicative dynamics. The ease of taking and sharing of images provides groomers with a highly effective currency of coercion and an effective lever for their strategic facework. In their references to FC\_On, as shown in Extract\_4.28, children’s discourse again showed the extensive sextortion of images and video recordings by the groomer were used to engender and force their compliance

#### Extract\_4.28

1 C006 well hes been messaging me for a week and just telling me to send him  
2 nudes

In Extract\_4.28 the child makes clear reference to the repeated contact and harassment (“hes been messaging me for a week and just telling me”, (1) (Chapter Five).

Type (ii) text-based FC\_On concerned references to the groomer’s ability to send text-based messages at any time granting them 24-hour access to the child, including control of the nighttime space (Chapter Two e.g. Hamilton-Giachritsis, et al., 2021).

Type (ii) FC\_On was mentioned by 43% of children (13/30) and represented 20.81% (31/149) of references. Children referenced the groomer using the affordances of SNSs to achieve unhindered access to them, using this maintain or extend contact, see Extract\_4.29:

#### Extract\_4.29

1 C006 ...later that day I said I don't want to and i say it every time he messages  
2 then he just says I have to ... if I block him hes going to come because I  
3 removed him before but then added me back, said if I do it again then I'm in  
4 trouble.

In Extract\_4.29 the child described the groomer using continual and repeated messaging and the ability to “add them back” (3) accompanied by threats, pressure and harassment (“if I do it again then I’m in trouble”, (4)) to engender compliance and ensure the child continued contact. This re-bounding of contact reflects patterns of groomer behaviour identified in previous research (e.g., Thorn, 2021).

Type (iii), platform-migration was mentioned by 7/30 children (23%) mentioning FC\_On and constituted 9.40% of references to the sub-tactic (14/149). Findings show the child’s discussion of the options and different affordances that the groomer has to migrate the child on to different platforms i.e. from messaging to video-calling (Extract\_4.30) or the diverse-access routes that children’s use of multiple SNS’ (Extract\_4.31) provides allowing the groomer to tighten their grip on the child.

#### Extract\_4.30

1 C015 She asked for my email because she wanted to chat with me on skype  
2 When she video called me she was entirely naked...

#### Extract\_4.31

1 C008 I've blocked him twice but he found me on other social media and  
2 messaged me and made me unblock him

Type (iv) Screenshots was mentioned by 23% of children (7/30), representing 7.38% of references (11/149). As seen in Section 5.4.1, screenshots were used as a way of making a permanent record of the children’s information or images that were then combined with threats and harassment to force compliance (See also Chapter Five).

Type (v), manipulative use of personal information, was mentioned by 17% of children (5/30) and accounted for 10/148 references to FC\_On (6.71%). It concerns the groomer's use of contact details or social media usernames they had elicited during their interactions with the child or information they had gleaned about the child by mining their publicly available social media accounts.

Extract\_4.32 shows how children described groomers using information about location, friends or family easily available via social networking sites or the different SNS platforms as ways to coerce them and to extend and deepen contact:

Extract\_4.32

1 C006: i feel like i cant do anything because he knows my address

In Extract\_4.32 the effectiveness of the groomer's strategy was in constraining the child's sense of agency to refuse FC ("i feel like i cant do anything"). The findings presented in this section have shown that the FC\_On sub-tactic is woven throughout DCSG, groomers utilise the many channels provided by technology to infiltrate and tighten their grip around the child, using face-attacking strategies to ensure continuing contact. The findings validate the central role that digital technology plays in facilitating and intensifying the groomer's communicative tactics (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2020). Technological affordances and the digital context not only assist DCSG, but they help to construct the facework inherent to the *sui generis* form of manipulation proposed by other discourse-focused research (see Lorenzo-Dus, et al. 2023).

#### **4.6.2 Further Contact Sub-Tactic: Further Contact Offline**

Further Contact Offline (FC\_Off) refers to any mention by the child of the groomer having made verbal lead-ins online such as requests to meet with the child offline for sexual purposes or any reference to the child having experienced contact sexual abuse by the groomer during or following a meeting in person.

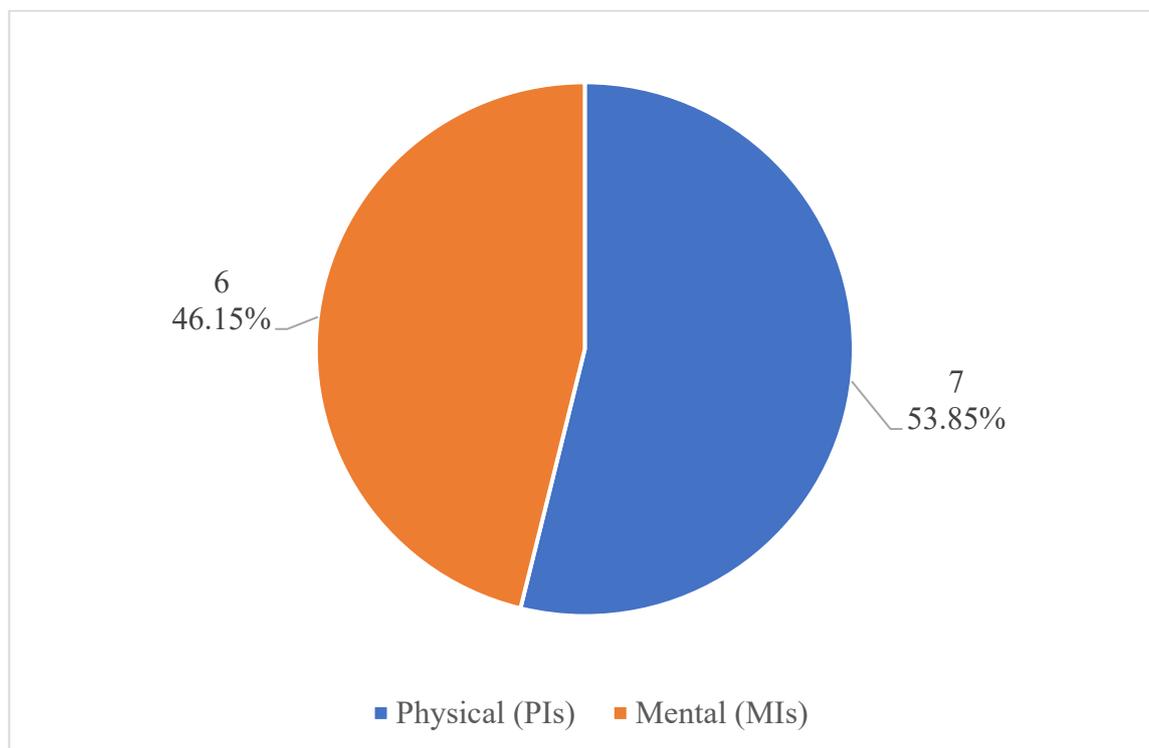
Table 4.1 showed that 27% (8/30) of children reported either meeting with the groomer in person or discussing plans to meet. Meeting with the groomer or discussing meeting with the groomer represented 12.12% (16/132) of all FC Tactic mentions.

The low frequency of FC\_Off, especially when set against the high frequency of references to FC\_On seems to further corroborate about how technology assists the abuse of children online and constructs new forms of communication by facilitating access, manipulation and maintenance of abuse. It could support the argument that meeting offline is not always a core goal of offenders (Chapter Two e.g. Broome et al., 2018; Chiu et al., 2018; Hamilton-Giachritsis et al 2020). The findings regarding FC, (online/offline), support arguments for a shift towards understanding the whole process of TA-CSA as sexual abuse rather than focusing on the groomer's goal as achieving offline contact sexual abuse. The online context has unique and additional abusive impacts on the victim which need to be much better appreciated and understood (Chapter Two, e.g. Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2020). FC findings emphasise the importance of more and better combined analyses into a) what the groomer does (communicative tactics + technological affordances) or b) how the groomer does it (complex, manipulative facework).

#### **4.7 Online Grooming Discourse Model Tactic: Isolation**

IS refers to any reference by the child about the groomer having attempted to arrange to spend time alone with the child online and/or offline (Chapter Three). Isolation comprises two sub-tactics, Mental (MIS) and Physical (PIS). Figure 4.9 shows the results of children's discourse about IS. It presents the frequency of references of the two IS strategies: PIS and MIS.

**Figure 4.9** *Children's Discourse: Online Grooming Discourse Model Isolation Sub-Tactics – Number (n=13) and Percentage (%) of References*



As Table 4.1 showed, groomer IS tactics were referenced by 27% of children (8/30) and with 13 references it represented a process that was infrequently mentioned in children's discourse. Of the 13 references to IS, 7/13 (53.85%) concerned PIS, and the remaining 6/10 (46.15%) MIS. The low frequency of references to the groomer's use of IS means that the MIS and PIS categories are not discussed in detail in this section (see Chapter Seven on children's own-behaviour discourse).

Figure 4.2 showed that MIS predominantly overlapped with the DTD sub-tactics of relationships and gifts. This was not surprising as the groomer's discussion of their relationship with the child and the child's relationship with others in their life and the act of giving gifts (verbal or physical) both serve the pragmatic function of emphasising closeness with the groomer thus supporting the aim to distance the child from those close to them.

IS tactics were found to have low frequency within actual groomer communication too (Lorenzo-Dus et al, 2016). The findings derived from children's discourse thus

validate understandings of how online grooming as communication operates. The low incidence of MIS in children's discourse could provide further empirical evidence for the argument introduced in Section 4.5, that children may struggle to distinguish attempts to mentally isolate them from the complex collection of other trust-building tactics employed by the groomer in pursuit of their sexualised goals.

#### **4.8 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter examined whether children's discourse about groomer communicative behaviour validates what we understand thus far from the literature about actual grooming communication, which to date has been predominantly focused on studying groomer discourse. It explored whether children's discourse reflected awareness of OGDM tactics and how. Children were found to reference all OGDM tactics. No new tactics were observed in their discourse. Furthermore, the intertwined and overlapping nature of DCSG discourse was borne out by the findings, which showed strong interconnected and multifunctionality in children's accounts.

While children were attuned to the groomer communicative tactics that comprise the OGDM, their ability to discern sub-tactics was less developed regarding some components than others. While references to SG broadly reflected findings in actual groomer communication, findings for DTD showed children were noticing EPI much more frequently than the other sub-tactics. The strong overlap between EPI, EST and FC\_ On crystallised the pivotal role that CCII/CCIV and other technological affordances play in DCSG interactions. This finding also indicated the child's prioritisation of discussing the sexually abusive elements of their DCSG interactions within counselling interactions. This challenges research that suggests children are less likely to disclose TA-CSA than other types of CSA. Rather, findings suggest that, in line with research on both online and offline CSA, given appropriate, attuned asking and listening scaffolded by trusted and trained adults, children do disclose abuse, and can provide detailed accounts of their experiences.

However, the results of the VL analysis show that, even when discussing groomer sub-tactics where children sought the input of the counsellor, they experienced a marked difficulty in articulating and "naming" their experiences. The prominence of

EPI, EST and FC\_On in children's discourse over other groomer sub-tactics (shown to be present in studies of actual groomer discourse) also raise the question of how far the groomer's trust-building tactics "landed" with the child.

Achieving a holistic understanding of children's lived experiences of DCSG relies on better understanding of the intersections between the triad of (i) groomer communicative tactics not only assisted by also constructed by technological affordances; (ii) groomer facework and (iii) children's perceptions and perspectives and the emotional and behavioural reactions they lead to. Groomer facework is explored in detail next, in Chapter Five by applying an (im)politeness analysis.

## **Chapter 5. Children’s Discourse: Interpersonal Dynamics During Digital Child Sexual Grooming**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter showed that children’s discourse was attuned to the groomer’s use of OGDG tactics and sub-tactics. Throughout the chapter it was also noted that children’s discourse about groomer communication referenced groomer facework during DCSG interactions. The OGDG, being discursively focused, accounts for groomers’ framing of their tactical communication through strategic (i.e., manipulative) facework. This was also found to pivot frequently and abruptly between the use of politeness and impoliteness (see Chapter Two). This pivoting has been suggested to be cognitively and emotionally and is argued to shape children’s evaluations of DCSG and the impacts on and responses of the child (Lorenzo-Dus 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al 2023, Lorenzo-Dus & Mullineux-Morgan, forthcoming). This chapter explores the groomer facework that children relate to the counsellor as having occurred in their DCSG interactions. Methodologically, the analyses take a third-wave approach to (im)politeness (Chapter Three). This integrates first-order (participant driven) and second-order (analyst driven) approaches to groomers’ facework and considers the genre-based features of the digital counselling discourse being examined.

The research question this chapter seeks to answer is:

*RQ2: How far do children identify the facework work used by groomers during Digital Child Sexual Grooming?*

The chapter begins in Section 5.3 with an analysis of children’s perceptions of the groomer’s use of politeness strategies in their discourse. Both positive politeness and negative politeness are discussed. This is followed in Section 5.4 with an exploration of children’s discourse about groomer use of impoliteness. The conclusion in Section 5.5 provides a summary of key findings and themes.

## 5.2 Overview of Findings

Table 5.1 shows the overall results within children's discourse about groomers' facework. It shows the frequency in children's discourse of references to groomers' communicative behaviour that is aligned to politeness and impoliteness.

**Table 5.1** *Overview Table: Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency (n=/%)* of References to Groomer Facework in Children's Discourse

Groomer Facework	Children		References	
	(n=)	(%/30)	(n=/371)	%
Politeness	23	77%	76	20.49%
Impoliteness	29	97%	295	79.51%

Table 5.1 shows that children were aware of groomers' facework. Reflections on groomers' use of Politeness and Impoliteness were present in children's discourse, albeit to differing degrees and were referenced by all but one of the children within the dataset. Groomer impoliteness was overwhelmingly what featured in children's discourse, representing 79.51% (295/371) of all children's facework references and was mentioned by 97% (29/30) of the children. This finding validates research which argues the need for greater focus on the coercive aspects of grooming communication (Chapter Two). Section 5.4 presents further discussion and breakdown of results concerning the children's discourse about groomers' use of impoliteness.

Table 5.1 shows that groomers' use of politeness was also noticed by children, representing 20.49% (76/371) of references, mentioned by 77% (23/30) of children. This study uses an adaptation of the Brown and Levinson Politeness taxonomy (1987) (Chapter Three). Table 5.2 (Section 5.3) shows that both main types of politeness within said taxonomy (Positive and Negative) were present in children's representations of groomer facework. The presence of references to groomers' use of Politeness, in particular Positive Politeness, in children's discourse validates the results of studies of groomers' tactical communication, specifically the salience of

DTD within the manipulation by the groomer (Chapter Two). Deceptive trust has been identified to be generally discursively encoded via Politeness, particularly Positive Politeness (see, e.g. Lorenzo-Dus et al 2020). Groomers' frequent and strategic complimenting of the children they target is a case in point (see Chapter Two, e.g. Lorenzo-Dus and Izura 2017). The representations of groomer Politeness identified in children's discourse seem to validate these findings (see Section 5.3).

### 5.3 Children's Perceptions of Politeness in Groomer Discourse

**Table 5.2** *Children's References to Groomer Politeness - Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency (n=/% of) of References in Children's Discourse* Table 5.2 provides an overview of the frequency with which children referred to groomer Politeness.

**Table 5.2** *Children's References to Groomer Politeness - Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency (n=/% of) of References in Children's Discourse*

Children's References to Groomer Politeness Strategies	Children		References	
	(n=/23)	(%/30)	(n=/76)	(%)
<b>Positive</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>67.11%</b>
<i>Notice, attend to H (their interests, wants, needs, goods)</i>	12	40%	19	37.25%
<i>Offer, Promise</i>	3	10%	4	7.84%
<i>Include both S and H in the activity</i>	1	3%	1	1.96%
<i>Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)</i>	11	37%	17	33.33%
<i>Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)</i>	1	3%	1	1.96%
<i>Intensify Interest to H</i>	1	3%	2	3.94%
<i>Presuppose, raise, assert common ground</i>	4	13%	6	11.76%
<i>Joke</i>	1	3%	1	1.96%
<b>Negative</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>25.00%</b>
<i>Question, hedge</i>	9	30%	10	52.63%
<i>Minimize the size of imposition on H</i>	4	13%	5	26.32%
<i>Give deference</i>	1	3%	1	5.26%
<i>Apologise</i>	2	7%	2	10.53%
<i>State the FTA as a general rule</i>	1	3%	1	5.26%
<b>Generic Politeness Reference</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7.89%</b>

As shown in Table 5.2, of all the Positive Politeness strategies within the taxonomy, eight were present in children's discourse about groomer communicative behaviour.<sup>97</sup> Of ten negative Politeness strategies (Brown and Levinson, 1987), five were observed in children's discourse.<sup>98</sup> That not all Politeness strategies were reflected in children's discourse is likely explained by the asynchronous nature of the counselling context: children reflect on the groomer's behaviour from a distance both physical and/or temporal. Further, the complex breakdown of relatively subtle politeness behaviours (particularly within Negative Politeness) would be very challenging for a lay person, especially a child, to observe and relay to a third party. However, the presence of politeness in children's discourse is significant, it suggests that groomers strategically used both face-enhancing and face-maintaining facework in DCSG interactions. At least some of these strategies were recognized and referenced by children. Lorenzo-Dus (2023) explored how groomer use of both Positive and Negative Politeness supported the styling of their identity and aided them in indexing stances of expertise, openness and avidity. The interactional, specifically facework dynamics between groomer and child, namely groomer's use of politeness alongside children's responses, have only begun to be analysed (see e.g. Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023, Chapter Two). Findings indicate children struggle to fully understand groomers' use of politeness in DCSG.

Table 5.2 shows that groomer use of Positive Politeness represented most politeness references in children's discourse (51/76, 67.11%). Children also recognised groomer use of Negative Politeness but referenced it to a lesser degree (19/76, 25.00%). There were also a few generic references to politeness (6/76, 7.89%).

Figure 5.1 presents a matrix analysis of how negative / positive politeness strategies intersected with the OGDM groomer tactics (Chapter Four).

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<sup>97</sup> The seven positive politeness strategies that were absent were: (i) give or ask for reasons; (ii) be optimistic; (iii) assume or assert reciprocity; (iv) use in-group identity markers; (v) seek agreement; (vi) avoid disagreement; (vii) assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants).

<sup>98</sup> The five negative politeness strategies not present were: (i) be direct, conventionally indirect; (ii) go on record as incurring a debt; (iii) be pessimistic; (iv) Impersonalise S and H; (v) nominalise.

**Figure 5.1** *Intersection of Children’s References (n=) to Groomer (Positive (+)/Negative (-) Politeness Strategies aligned to Online Grooming Discourse Model Tactics*

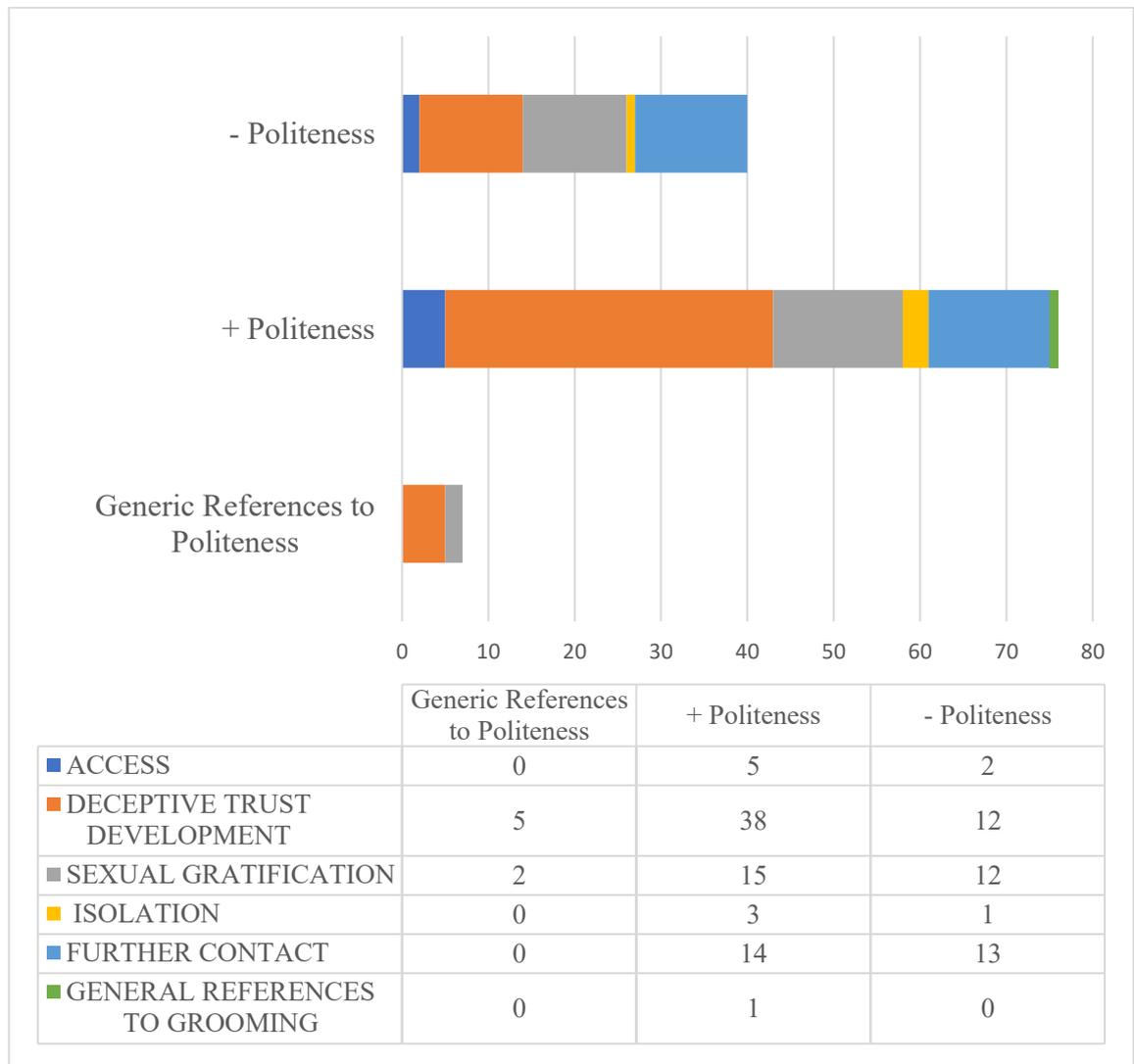


Figure 5.1 shows that children’s references to groomer Negative Politeness mostly aligned to FC (13 instances), closely followed by SG (12 instances) and DTD (12 instances). Within DTD all the instances referred to groomer attempts to elicit information in the form of nude images. Figure 5.1 therefore shows that children’s discourse mainly referenced attempts by the groomer geared towards attending to children’s negative face needs i.e. minimising the imposition of their pursuit of sexual goals, their requests for nude images or attempts at further contact with the

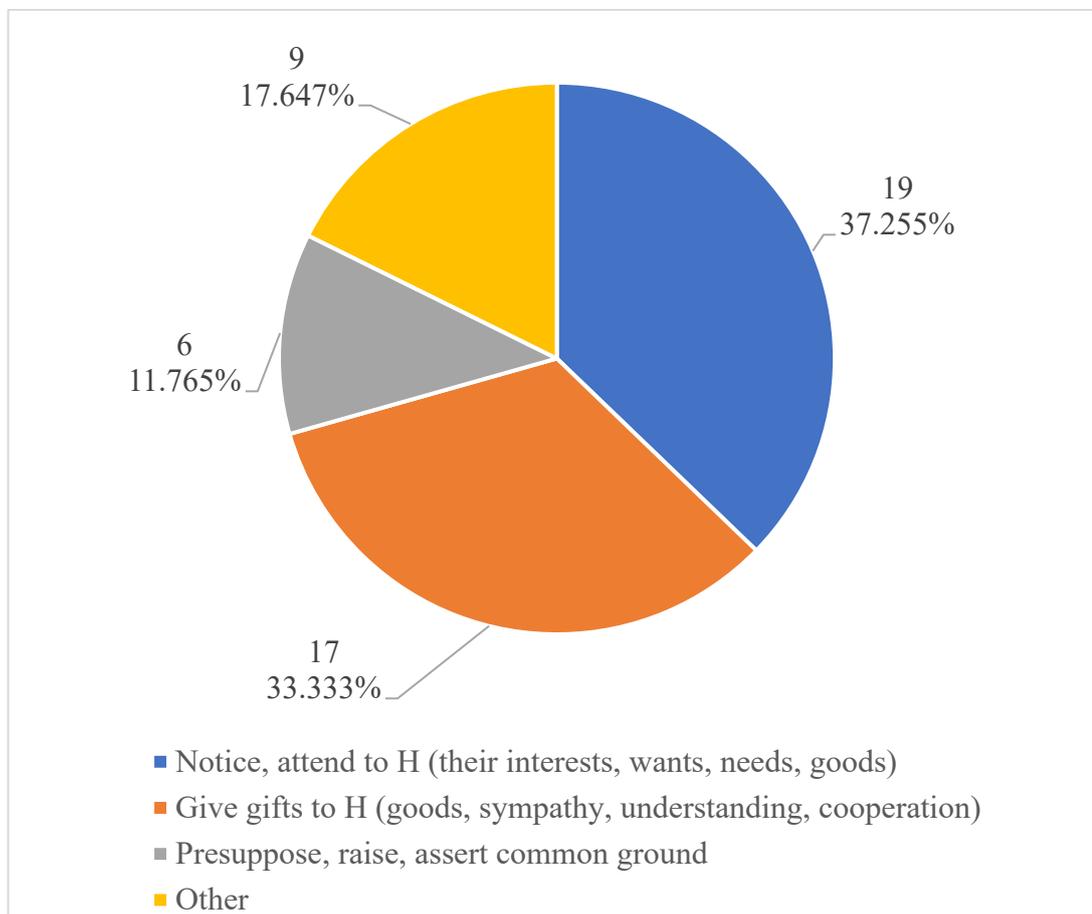
child. In some cases, the groomer used Negative Politeness strategies during attempts at isolating the child.

With regards to groomers' use of Positive Politeness strategies, children noticed them most often in connection to groomers' attempts to build trust (DTD) (38 instances). This further validated groomers' use of positive politeness strategies to support commonality and liking (Levano, 2020) and project a stance of "avidity" or of seeing and valuing the child as an important agentive individual (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023, p.83). Groomers' use of positive politeness strategies was also referenced by children aligned to the SG tactic slightly more frequently than Negative Politeness (15 instances compared to 12 instances for negative politeness). This suggests that children may have cognitively connected the groomers' use of sex talk with Positive Politeness strategies and attendance to their positive face needs. Children also noticed groomers using Positive Politeness strategies in attempts to gain initial access to them (5 instances) to a greater degree than in the case of groomers' use of Negative Politeness for gaining access (2 instances). Finally, children's discourse about the groomer's attempts at IS intersected with their references to groomer Positive Politeness infrequently (3 instances). Overall, these results show some children may have been aware of groomers' facework oriented towards heeding their positive face needs. Children's references to groomer Positive and Negative Politeness, are further examined in Sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 respectively.

### ***5.3.1 Perceptions of Groomers' Use of Positive Politeness in Children's Discourse***

As seen in Table 5.2 Positive Politeness received a total of 51 references in children's discourse and mentioned by 20/30 (67%) children. Figure 5.2 presents the results concerning children's discourse about groomer positive politeness strategies.

**Figure 5.2** *Groomer Positive Politeness Strategies - Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency (n=/%)* of References in Children's Discourse



The children's discourse about groomer communication was aligned to eight of the fifteen Positive Politeness strategies (Table 5.2). As Figure 5.2 shows, there were six positive politeness strategies accounting for less than 10% of references in the children's discourse about groomer behaviour.<sup>99</sup> The following discussion focuses on the two most frequently mentioned positive politeness strategies within children's discourse, namely Noticing/Attending to H's Interests, Needs, Wants and Giving Gifts.

<sup>99</sup> The six positive politeness strategies with low frequency in children's discourse were: Joke, Offer/Promise, Presuppose, Raise, Assert Common Ground. Intensify Interest to H, Exaggerate (Interest, Approval, Sympathy with H), Include both S and H in the Activity. These were grouped into an 'other' category and, for reasons of space, are not discussed in detail.

**Positive Politeness: Noticing/Attending to the Child’s Interests, Wants and Needs.** Figure 5.2 shows that 37.25% (19/51) of references to groomer use of Positive Politeness concerned children talking about the groomer’s facework of Noticing/Attending to the child. The strategy was adapted for this dataset to refer to the child reporting the groomer giving praise and compliments as well as listening, attending and caring for them (Chapter Three).

Children reported groomer’s use of this Politeness strategy as comprising two main realisations: (i) complimenting the child (11/19 references, illustrated in Extract\_5.1); and (ii) attending to the child’s wants, needs and interests (8/19 references), illustrated in Extract\_5.1:

Extract\_5.1

1	C015	She kept giving me “compliments” e.g., your looking very sexy
2		baby, which i didn’t actually like to be honest. Later, i received a
3		video call again but this time on Facebook and she showed me a
4		recording of what she could see me as. It was very disturbing.

In Extract\_5.1 the child’s placement of the word “compliments” in inverted commas (1) conveyed a sense of distrust and scepticism about the authenticity of the groomer’s praise. The child was explicit in expressing the negative reaction they had to the compliment (“which i didn’t actually like to be honest”, (2)). The child made a direct connection between the groomer’s use of the compliment and a strategic mitigation to offset the face-threat of showing the child a recording of themselves they would not want others to see. Using technical affordances, the groomer was able to showcase and illustrate the potential threat to the child’s face. The anxiety inducing effect of the groomer’s tactics was emphasised by the child’s use of the adverbial “very” and the adjective conveying the resultant distress (“it was very disturbing” (4)). This extract shows evidence of the groomer’s pivoting between “nice” (politeness) and “nasty” (impoliteness) talk (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023). The child’s unease suggests that they felt the jarring effect of the groomer’s combination of the two. While this pivoting is expected in certain institutional genres such as parliamentary debates, news interviews or criminal courts, it is unusual in socio-affective relations between individuals specifically at

the relationship forming stage. This suggests that, from a child's perspective, the groomer's use of politeness unexpectedly intertwined with impoliteness could have intensified feelings of disquiet (Chapter Six) rooted in a lack of experience of how relationships work, especially romantic/sexual relationships. This is amplified during adolescence when a child is formulating their comprehension of their face needs and learning the tenets of facework through experience (See Chapter Two e.g. Baumgartner et al., 2010; Quayle et al., 2012).

Extract\_5.2 shows how the child presented groomer compliments and flattery as part of attempts to influence the child's compliance with their sexualised goals:

Extract\_5.2

- |   |      |  |
|---|------|--|
| 1 | C020 | if i play along with the men i talk to they say things which make me |
| 2 |      | feel good about myself   |
| 3 | CL20 | What kind of things do people say that you find comforting and       |
| 4 |      | reassuring?  |
| 5 | C020 | they say im good at it or that it made them feel good                |

In Extract\_5.2 the child's utterance "if i play along with the men i talk to they say things which make me feel good about myself" (1-2) indicated a personal goal of self-realisation. However, their use of the conditional clause ("if I play along...they say", (1)) shows that the groomer's use of Positive Politeness was understood to be contingent on the child giving the groomer what they wanted or adhering to their wishes. The child referenced the face-enhancing effect of the groomer's politeness ("make me feel good about myself", (1-2)). In return for giving "the men" (1) what they wanted, the child received the attention and face-enhancement they craved, bolstering their sense of self. However, the child's use of the phrasal verb "play along" (1) implied a sense they were assuming a role or "acting", themselves showing politeness in heeding the groomer's face wants of sexualised interaction. The child's masking of their authentic self and trading one set of needs for another suggests a dissonance between groomer goals and child motivations for engagement. It evidences a lack of surety of the child's sense of self which could impact on their facework management in DCSG contexts.

In Extract\_5.3, the child stated that the groomer flattered them by suggesting, based on their online profile, they had model potential:

#### Extract\_5.3

- 1 C022 they have claimed to be a model scout looking for new models. They
- 2 said they liked my profile so of course, I continued talking to them.
- 3 They seem genuine for the most part but I still had my doubts,
- 4 however I wanted this opportunity as it seemed too good to be true.
- 5 They asked me to send photos, innocent first-however they got more dark

The manipulative effectiveness of the groomer's strategy in Extract\_5.3 is indicated by the child's emphatic discourse marker "of course" (2) which links the groomer's compliments as encouraging their continued engagement ("I continued talking to them", (2)). However, the child made their scepticism explicit ("seem genuine for the most part/had my doubts", (3) and "it seemed too good to be true", (4)). The face-enhancing effect of the combination of flattery and the promise of noticing and attending to the child's wants and needs was effective, shown in the child's statement that the desire for the opportunity alleviated their doubts ("I still had my doubts, however I wanted this opportunity as it seemed too good to be true" (3-4)). The child again connects the groomer's use of politeness to their attempts to mitigate requests for "darker" (5) photos. As Extract\_5.3 indicates, at least with hindsight, the child sensed the strategic motivations behind groomer politeness.

Turning to (ii) attending to the child's wants and needs, children discussed that this entailed the groomer talking and listening to them (Extract\_5.4) and being a source of support and someone who cared (Extract\_5.5).

#### Extract\_5.4

- 1 C011 we got talking and we was talking for ages and she was really nice
- 2 like we was speaking for months

#### Extract\_5.5

- 1 C018 he supported me through so much, and he always listened

In Extract 5.4, the child used temporal markers to give a sense of their perception of sustained engagement and interest on the part of the groomer (“for ages”, (1); “for months”, (2)). The child’s emphasis via the adverbial “really” (“she was really nice”, (1)) indicated the positive noticing effect for the child of such prolonged engagement. The groomer’s ongoing use of politeness seemed to persuade the child of the authenticity of their interest. This was potentially facilitated by the child pursuing a goal of receiving interest and avidity in the interaction leading to heightened susceptibility. In Extract\_5.5 child also directly linked the positive evaluation of the groomer being a supportive presence to their willingness to listen. The adverbial “always” (1) indicated the child perceived such support as being constant and secure, making the groomer appear someone they could count and rely on.

**Positive Politeness Strategy: Giving Gifts (goods, sympathy, understanding and cooperation).** When it came to facework “giving gifts” referred to the child reporting the groomer gave them physical goods (in this context nude images are counted as ‘goods’) as well as verbal gifts of sympathy, understanding, and cooperation. In Figure 5.2 giving gifts represented 33.33% of references (17/51) to groomer positive politeness, mentioned by 11/30 of children (37%).

The most frequent type of “gift”-giving (6/17) referred to the groomer sending (giving) nude images to the child representing a type of offering. It appeared to be perceived by the child as the groomer demonstrating “caring” though sharing (Chapter Four).<sup>100</sup> Extract\_5.6 is illustrative of how groomer “gift-giving” was realised via children’s discourse:

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<sup>100</sup> Within the OGDM the giving of nude images are double coded as Sexual Gratification (SG) and the revised tactic ‘Gifts’ to capture their dual purpose (i) of creating a sense of duty and reciprocity, of owing the groomer something, and (ii) supporting the explicit sexual desensitisation of the child via exposure to sexual content as well groomer deriving sexual gratification in the process of doing so.

## Extract\_5.6

1 C018 we developed a sort of relationship during which time they sent me quite a  
2 lot of adult-type pictures and we talked in a very adult way. The thing is X  
3 was 18-19 and I was 13-14. But I was agreeing to everything, I encouraged  
4 it and at times initiated it, so I don't know what to call it because I was (and  
5 acting felt) as though I was in a relationship.

Extract\_5.6 shows how the groomer's sending of sexual ("adult-type", (2)) pictures can be framed as a sort of perverse gift (Chapter Four). The mutual reciprocity of gift-giving on the part of the groomer was connected in the child's perspective as a marker of being in a "relationship" (1). This was intensified by the illicit nature of the "adult" nature of the images whereby the child appeared to feel special, that they had been granted access to an exclusive club attending to their goal of exploration and experimentation. The positive politeness strategy of "giving", was designed to communicate the groomer's generosity and willingness to share in the face-risk of sharing nude images particularly regarding potential exposure. This communicative act demonstrated vulnerability and openness (Chapter Two, e.g. Lorenzo-Dus, 2023) and mitigated the potential face-aggravating impact of seeking an exchange of sexualised content. The groomer's risk-taking lent a sense of mutuality to the sharing but also implied an expectation of reciprocity. For the child, the demarcation of these "adult-type" (2) images and talking in this "adult way" (2) created a distinction between the child and adult world and showed it clashed both with societal norms that dictate how a child should (or shouldn't) behave sexually and the child's relative sexual inexperience. The groomer giving these images offered the child access to exciting new experiences and pushed the bounds of the child's sexual awareness. These "gifts" thus destabilised the child's previous self-identity, fracturing their conception of face.

Extract\_5.6 also showed the disturbing effect of the groomer's nice/nasty pivoting between politeness and impoliteness on the child. The child's explanatory clause ("I was agreeing to everything, I encouraged it and at times initiated it", (4)) indicated the sense of responsibility and self-blame triggered by the groomer's fusion of the positive face-enhancing strategy of giving and sharing with the face-aggravating act of sharing illicit and sexualised images and content. The child's confusion ("I don't

know what to call it because I was acting (and felt) as though I was in a relationship”, (4-5)) demonstrated a sense of cognitive rupture and tension that led the child to internalise blame for participating in the exchange. (See also Chapters Six and Seven).

Other physical gifts referenced in the children’s discourse (5/17) were money and experiences/material goods that the child may not otherwise have had the financial means to afford, as Extract\_5.7 illustrates:

#### Extract\_5.7

1 C004 I have met this man from online and we have been dating and he buys me  
2 nice things...i can't talk to anyone bout it cos he's older and worried ppl will  
3 think im weird... I really like him, hes nice and funny and caring and listens  
4 to me and stuff he even buys me new clothes and we go out for dinner and stuff

In Extract\_5.7 the child described the gifts offered and the groomer buying dinner as evidence that they were “dating” (1). The adverbial “even” in “he *even* buys me” (4), indicated the effectiveness of the groomer’s “gift-giving” politeness strategy in persuading the child of the value of their relationship. The child’s connection of the groomer’s attention and noticing (“hes nice and funny and caring and listens to me”, (3-4)) to the gift giving strategy shows it was interpreted by the child as evidence of the authenticity their relationship (“I really like him” (3)).

Giving gifts also entailed the children referring to the groomer giving sympathy, understanding cooperation as shown in Extract\_5.8:

#### Extract\_5.8

1 C018 But X even told me, before we started dating, that he wouldn't pursue a  
2 relationship with me because I was too young. I pushed him, so I feel like it  
3 can't have been abuse or even his fault.

In Extract\_5.8 the child implicitly referenced the Politeness strategy of giving understanding, particularly the groomer knowing and accepting that that the child was “too young” (2). The child’s choice of the verb “pursue” (1) when talking about the relationship conjured up an image of the groomer hunting, out to take something

from the child. The child used the vague language term “relationship” (2) to refer to presumably sexual or romantic connotations. The vagueness is shown in the child’s linguistic omission of what type of relationship they were referring to, choosing a generic term instead (Chapter Four). The groomer’s Politeness strategy in openly recognising and asserting that a relationship with a minor was out of bounds seemed to have enhanced the sense of the child feeling understood and appreciated by the groomer. The groomer’s use of politeness here, therefore, despite their actions, helped to build a foundation of trust to foster the very relationship the groomer stated he would not pursue.

The extracts discussed in this section show the groomer’s Positive Politeness had the effect of maintaining and attending to the child’s face needs, thus supporting the groomer to secure ongoing engagement and sustain contact with the child. However, throughout this section, children’s discourses about Positive Politeness, within the counselling context studied, were tinged with doubt. This suggests, at least retrospectively, seeds of suspicion within children’s discourse whereby they recognised the manipulative function of groomer’s use of politeness within DCSG interactions. This is explored further in Chapter Seven which notes children’s awareness/suspicion as an underexplored form of communicative resistance.

**Intersection of Positive Politeness strategies with OGDM Sub-tactics in Children’s Discourse.** Figure 5.3 presents a matrix analysis of how positive politeness strategies intersected with OGDM sub-tactics in children’s discourse.

**Figure 5.3** *Intersection of Children’s References (n=) to Groomer Positive Politeness Strategies and OGDM Sub-Tactics*

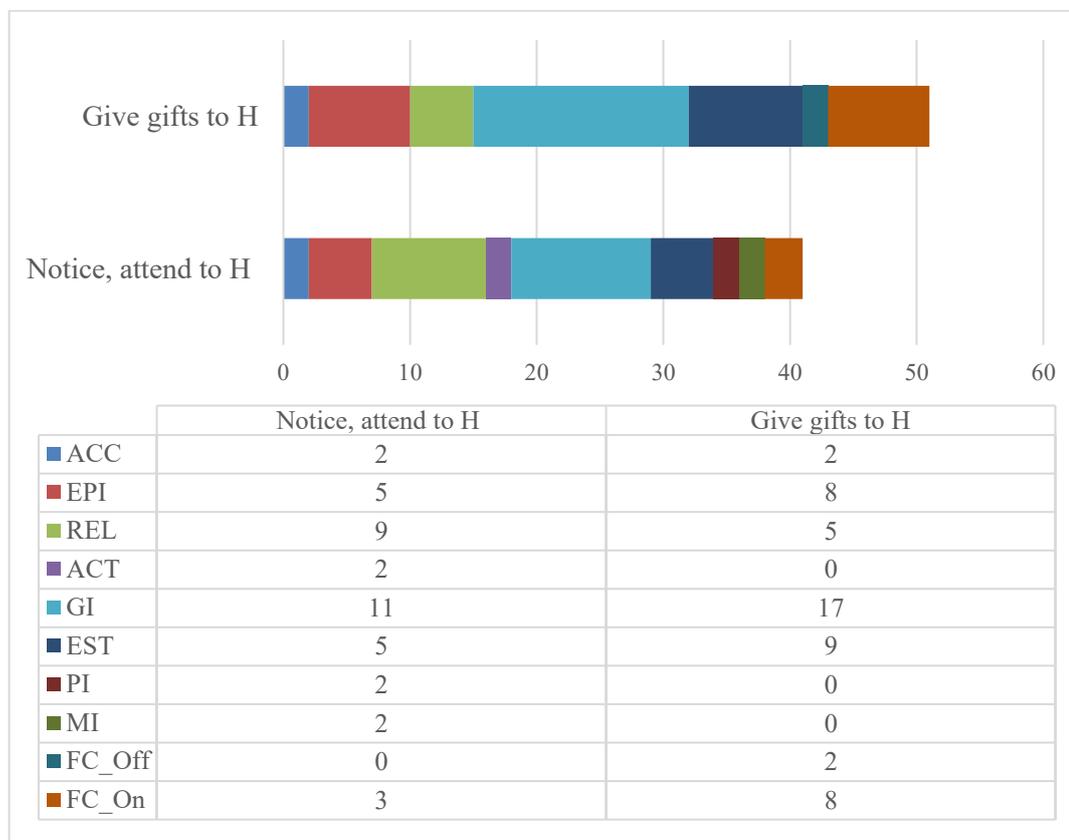


Figure 5.3 shows that references in the children’s discourse to the positive politeness strategy of noticing and giving gifts most frequently occurred in groomer sub-tactics aimed at building trust (DTD) (a total of n=57/94, 61.3% (notice, attend to H, n= 27; give gifts, n=30)).<sup>101</sup> The children also noticed the groomer using positive politeness in conjunction with initial attempts to access them and within EST and IST sub-tactics although not very frequently (ACC, n= 2; EST, n=5; IST, n=2). MIS also showed infrequent intersection in children’s discourse with positive politeness strategies of noticing and attending to H (n=2). Finally, some children referenced the groomer attending to the child’s needs, wants and interests as leverage to achieve FC\_On (n=3).

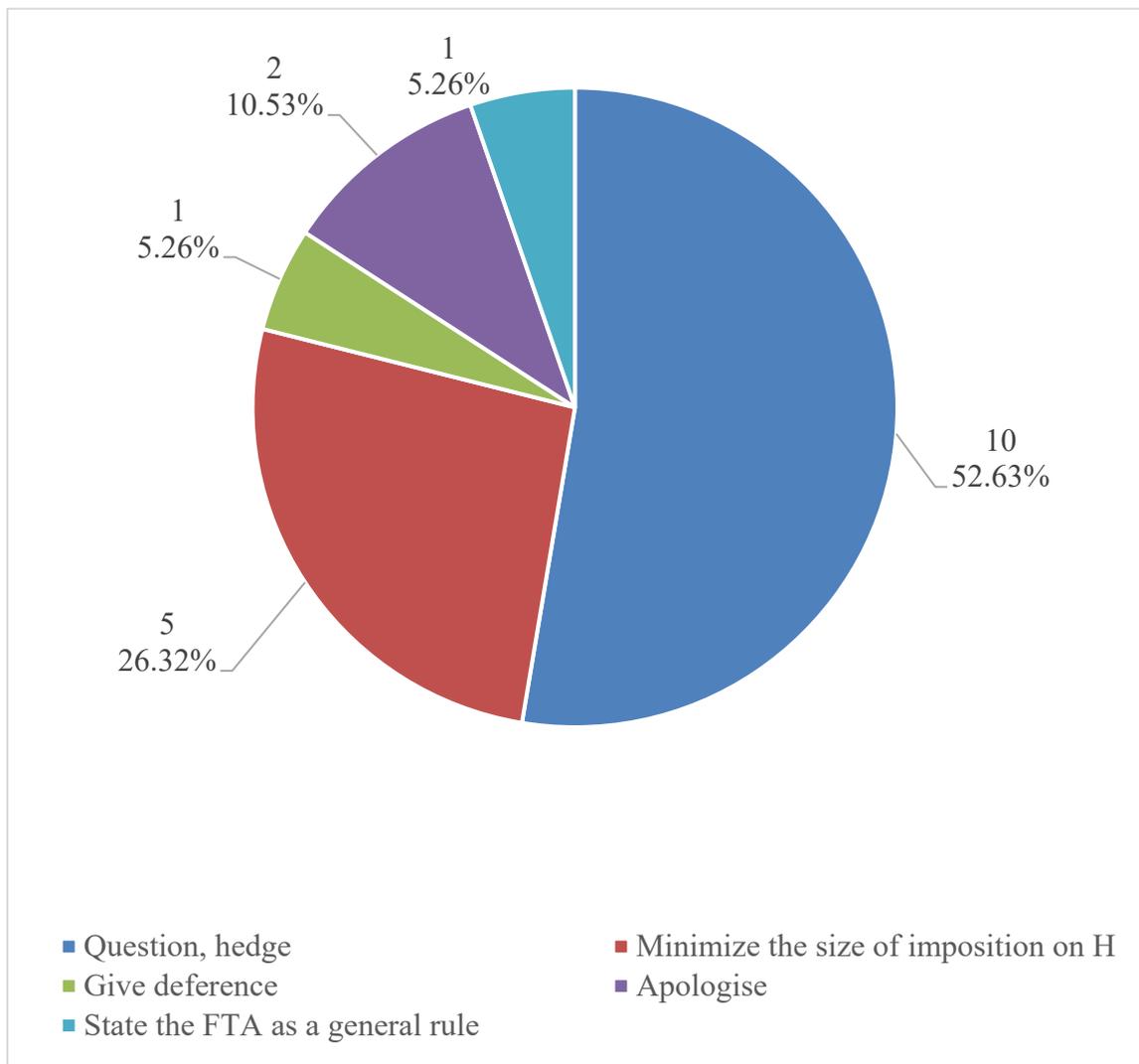
<sup>101</sup> N.B The Positive Politeness strategy of giving gifts is the same as the sub-tactic with the same name.

Expectedly, in children's discourse the Giving Gifts to H Politeness strategy primarily intersected with the DTD sub-tactic of Gifts (Physical/Verbal, n=17/30). Moreover, the Giving Gifts Politeness Strategy also occurred within the REL sub-tactic (n=5 intersections), EPI (n=7 intersections) EST (n=7 intersections) and FC\_On (n=8 intersections). This indicates that children noticed that groomers used Giving Physical or Verbal Gifts (nude photos, underwear, travel tickets, money or praise, compliments) as part of their facework. It suggests that children recognised at least at some level that this form of politeness was being used strategically by the groomer to advance and deepen their relationship with them.

### ***5.3.2 Perceptions of Groomers' Use of Negative Politeness in Children's Discourse***

As shown in Table 5.2, groomer use of Negative Politeness was recognised less in children's discourse than groomer use of Positive Politeness, representing 19/76 (25.00%) of references overall to politeness in children's discourse. It was mentioned by 13/30 children (43%). The 19 references were aligned to five different Negative Politeness strategies: (i) Question, Hedge; (ii) Minimise the Size of Imposition on H; (iii) Give Deference (iv) Apologise and (v) State the FTA as a general rule. Their frequency of use is shown in Figure 5.4.

**Figure 5.4** *Groomer Negative Politeness Strategies - Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency (n=/%)* of References



Two strategies received one mention each (Give deference and State the FTA as the general rule) and one received two mentions (Apologise). Their low frequency does not necessarily mean that groomers avoided these Politeness strategies. The finding rather indicates that children did not regularly recognise or notice the groomer's use of them, or that they did not feel they were relevant to mention when recounting their grooming experience. Politeness strategies Question, Hedge (n=10) and Minimize the size of imposition on H (n=5) were slightly more frequent in children's discourse and will therefore be discussed in the subsections that follow.

**Negative Politeness: Question, Hedge.** Question, Hedge included instances where the child explicitly referenced the groomer using the verb “ask” to relay requests for information (questions) and for different behaviours (Chapter Three). While the verbum dicendi “to ask” is generic in facework terms, it differed from references where the child indicated that the groomer was using coercion-based formulae (he made me, he told me, I had to – see Section 5.4). Its presence in the children’s discourse therefore marks a differentiation and conveys a perception by the child of the groomer sense-checking as opposed to demanding, that is, making some attempt to mitigate face threat and therefore fits classification as negative politeness (Chapter Three).

Consider the following example of children’s references to groomers’ use of the “Question/Hedge” (“ask”) strategy:

Extract\_5.9

1 C025 He asked me to do stuff

In Extract\_5.9 the child’s choice of the verb “ask” over “being told to/ made to” to describe the relational work carried out by the groomer when directing them to another SNS to further their sexualised goals. Within the frame of an adult grooming a child for sexual purposes online, the context of the power asymmetry provided a veil of permissibility around the adult to “asking” the child to participate in sexual activity. The child’s choice of the verb “ask” suggests a perceived deference to the adult, and reflects the socialisation discussed in Chapter Two that children do what adults tell them. It suggests the child’s perception that adults have a right to set the rules of the game and part of this is to do things against their will and behave how the adult sees fit.

**Negative Politeness: Minimise the size of imposition on the child.** As seen in Figure 5.6, the children also referred to groomer behaviours that seemingly aimed to minimise the imposition on them. This had the effect of seeming to put the child in control of decision-making, with the groomer overtly pulling away from that decision themselves, as illustrated in:

## Extract\_5.10

1 C003 and he said nothing even “whatever makes you happy”

In Extract\_5.10 the child explicitly absolved the groomer. The groomer is represented as a silent agent (“and he said nothing”, (1)), the imposition of the groomer’s abuse thus being minimised in the child’s discourse. Rather, the child focused on the groomer’s use of positive politeness, specifically his wanting to do “whatever makes you [the child] happy” (1). As already discussed, the groomer’s use of negative politeness in the coercive grooming context had the impact of not only mitigating the imposition of sexual abuse on the child but also allowed the groomer to manage and manipulate the child’s fundamental parameters of face. The difficulty of reading and cognitively processing the groomer’s manipulative use of Negative Politeness therefore appeared to have the effect of warping the child’s fundamental sense of self-image. The affective impact of the child’s internalisation and absorption of societal victim-blaming narratives is thus explicit in the child’s discourse (Chapter Two; and Chapter Six).

### **5.4 Children’s Perceptions of Impoliteness in Groomer Discourse**

As seen in Table 5.1 children’s references to groomer impoliteness were more frequent than those to groomer politeness, both in terms of the number of children who mentioned impoliteness (29/30, 97%) and the actual number of references (295/371, 79.51% of all facework references in the dataset). Table 5.3 shows the groomer Impoliteness strategies observed in children’s discourse.

**Table 5.3** *Children's References to Groomer Impoliteness - Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency (n=/%)* of References in Children's Discourse

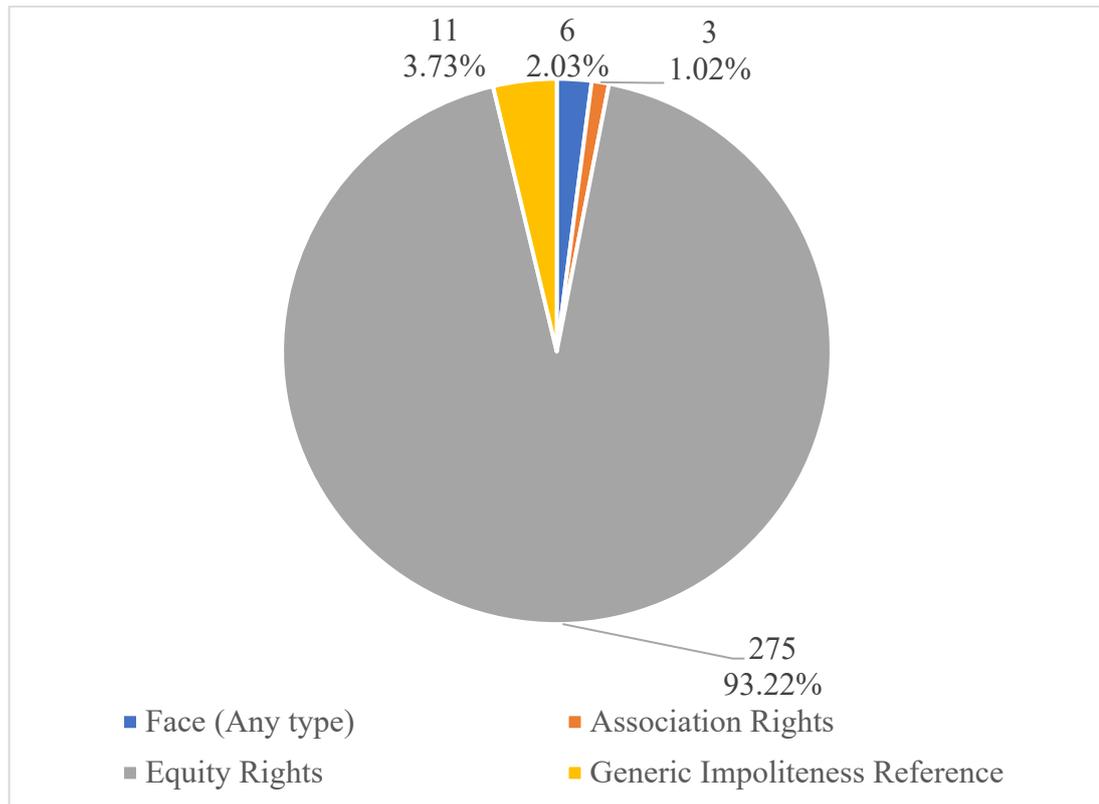
Groomer Impoliteness	Children		References	
	(n=/29)	(%/30)	(n=/295)	(%)
<b>Face (Any type)</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2.03%</b>
<b>Insults</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>33.33%</b>
<b>Pointed criticisms, complaints</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>66.67%</b>
<b>Association Rights</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1.02%</b>
<b>Exclusion</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Equity Rights</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>97%</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>93.22%</b>
<b>Patronising behaviour</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1.82%</b>
<i>Condescensions</i>	2	7%	2	40.00%
<i>Message Enforcers</i>	3	10%	3	60.00%
<b>Failure to reciprocate</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0.73%</b>
<i>Silencers</i>	2	7%	2	100.00%
<b>Encroachment</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>79.64%</b>
<i>Invasion of privacy</i>	20	67%	77	35.17%
<i>Threats</i>	14	47%	73	33.33%
<i>Ordered About</i>	22	73%	69	31.50%
<b>Harassment</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>13.09%</b>
<b>Taboo Behaviours</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4.73%</b>
<b>Generic Impoliteness Reference</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3.73%</b>

Table 5.3 shows that all three overarching impoliteness orientations proposed by Culpeper (2011) - Face, Association Rights and Equity Rights - were identified by children. Within the Equity Rights orientation three new proposed groomer impoliteness sub-strategies were observed in children's discourse about the DCSG context, specifically within encroachment (these were: Harassment, suggested to cut across Encroachment; Ordered About and Invasion of Digital Privacy). In line with third wave approaches to Impoliteness, these were incorporated into the analysis leading to a slightly adjusted taxonomy (Chapter Three). As with politeness, a category concerning generic references to groomer impoliteness was added.

As seen in Table 5.3 groomer impoliteness received a total of 295 references in children's discourse and groomer's use of impoliteness was mentioned by 29/30

(97%) children. Figure 5.5 presents the results concerning children’s discourse about groomer impoliteness orientations.

**Figure 5.5** *Frequency (n=/%)* of References to Groomer Impoliteness Orientations in Children’s Discourse

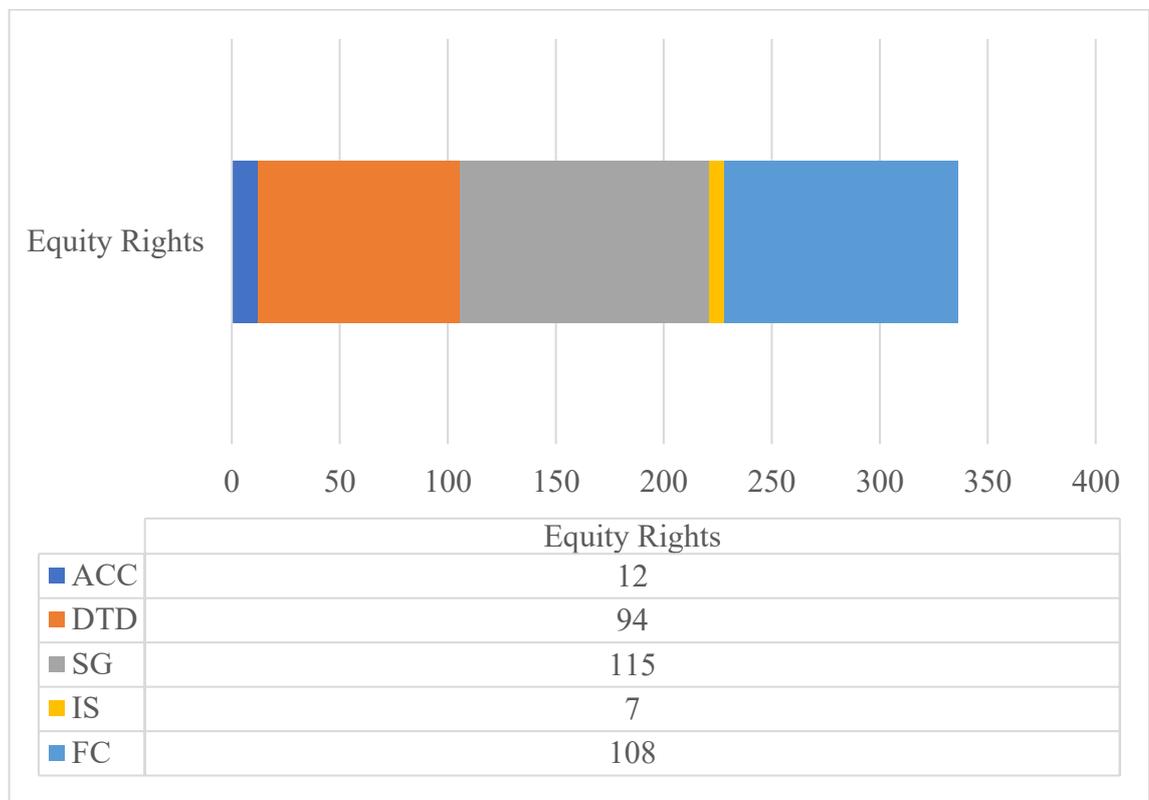


As shown in Figure 5.5 children’s perceptions of groomer impoliteness predominantly concerned perceived attacks on Equity Rights (Patronising behaviour, Failure to Reciprocate, Encroachment, Harassment, Taboo behaviours), which represented 93.22 % of references (275/295). Generic references to impoliteness represent 3.73% of the total (11/295, mentioned by 7/30 of the sample), showing that children were generally able to articulate and specify the types of face-attack carried out by the groomer to allow coding and classification by the analyst. The other impoliteness orientations - Face (any type) (Insults, Criticisms, Complaints) (2.03%, 6/295, mentioned by 3/30 children) and Association Rights (Exclusion) (1.02%; 3/295, mentioned by 3/30 of children) – were found to barely feature in children’s discourse and therefore results are not discussed in detail. Given these results, the

remainder of this section focuses on children’s discourse about groomers’ attack on their (children’s) Equity Rights.

Figure 5.6 presents a matrix analysis of the intersection of groomer Equity Rights-oriented impoliteness references with OGDM tactics.

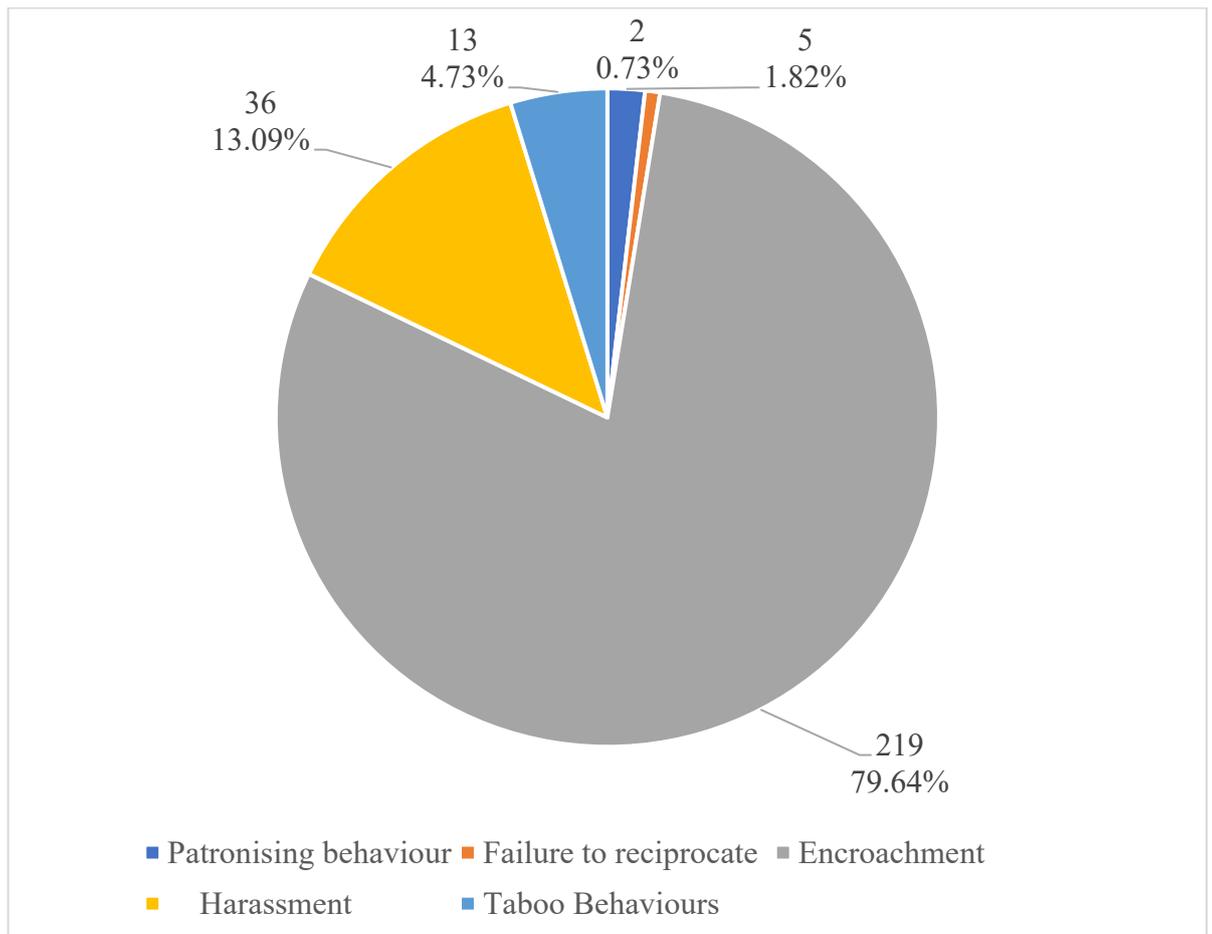
**Figure 5.6** *Intersection of Children’s References (n=) to Impoliteness Equity Rights Orientations Aligned to Online Groomer Discourse Model Tactics in Groomer Discourse*



As Figure 5.6 shows, Equity Rights-oriented impoliteness was referenced by children to be used by groomers across every OGDM tactic. It was most frequently perceived to be used in conjunction with the SG (115 intersections), FC (108 intersections) and DTD (94 intersections) tactics. As introduced in Chapter Three, within children’s discourse in the dataset, groomer Equity Rights comprised five impoliteness strategies: Patronising behaviour; Failure to Reciprocate; Encroachment; Harassment, and Taboo Behaviours.

Figure 5.7 presents the number and percentage of references to each of the groomer Equity Rights-oriented impoliteness strategies observed in children's discourse.

**Figure 5.7** *Frequency of Groomer Equity Rights-Oriented Impoliteness Strategies Identified in Children's Discourse (n=/%)*



As Figure 5.7 shows, all groomer Equity Rights-Oriented Impoliteness strategies were present in children's discourse. Encroachment (219/275, 79.64%) was the most frequent strategy referenced within Equity Rights, followed by Harassment (13.09%; 36/275). There were a small number of references to Taboo Behaviours (4.73%; 13/275), Patronising Behaviour (1.82%; 5/275) and Failure to Reciprocate (0.73%; 2/275).

#### 5.4.1 Groomer Impoliteness Equity Rights Orientation: Encroachment Strategies

Previous research on different contexts identified Encroachment to be realised primarily via “Threats” and “Curses and Ill-wishes” (Culpeper 2011) (Chapter Three). Within this dataset, there were no instances of “Curses and Ill-wishes” reported by children. As discussed above and in Chapter Three, new realisations of Encroachment strategies were found: Invasion of (Digital) Privacy and Ordered About. A further Equity Rights-oriented strategy, Harassment was found to be a crosscutting which appeared to be used by the groomer to intensify their use Equity Rights-Oriented Encroachment.

Figure 5.8 presents the number and percentage of references to Encroachment strategies within children’s discourse.

**Figure 5.8** Groomer Impoliteness: Encroachment Strategies Identified in Children’s Discourse (n=/%)

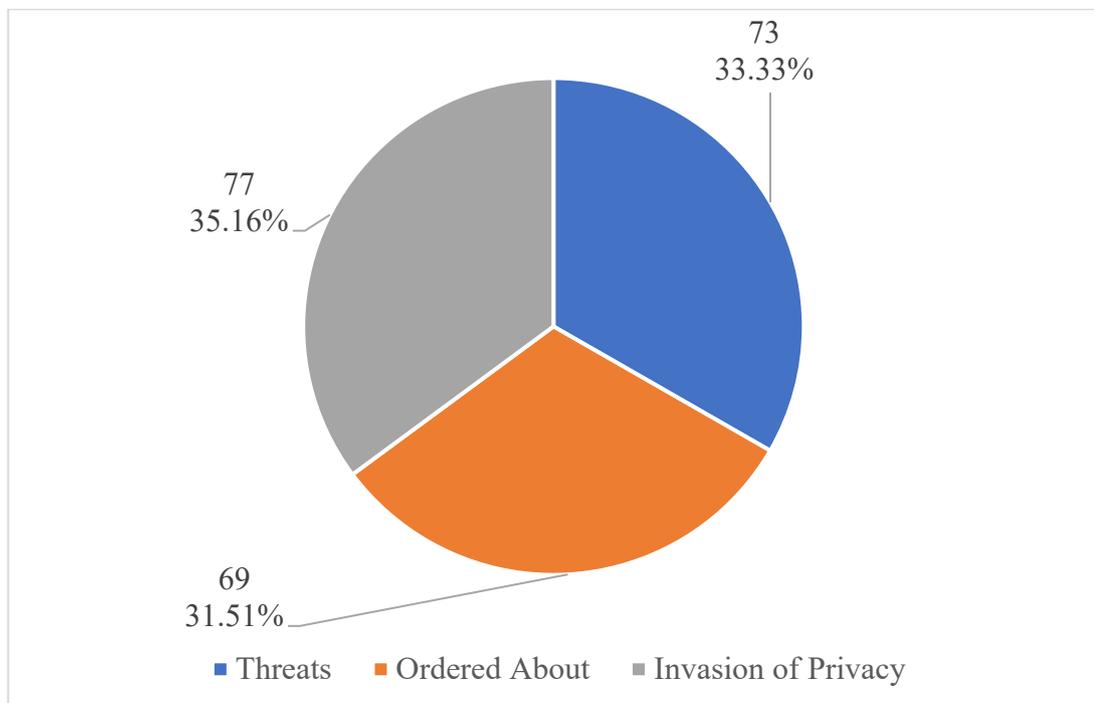


Figure 5.8 shows that the groomer Encroachment strategy of the Invasion of Privacy was referenced most frequently by children (77/219; 35.16%). This was followed by Threats (73/219; 33.33%) and Ordered About (69/219; 31.51%). The three groomer Encroachment strategies were present with similar frequencies in children’s discourse (representing around a third of children’s references each).

Figure 5.9 presents the results of a matrix analysis to show the intersections between groomer Equity Rights-Oriented Impoliteness Encroachment strategies and OGDM sub-tactics.

**Figure 5.9** *Intersections between Groomer Encroachment-oriented Impoliteness Formulae and Online Grooming Discourse Model Sub-Tactics (n=)*

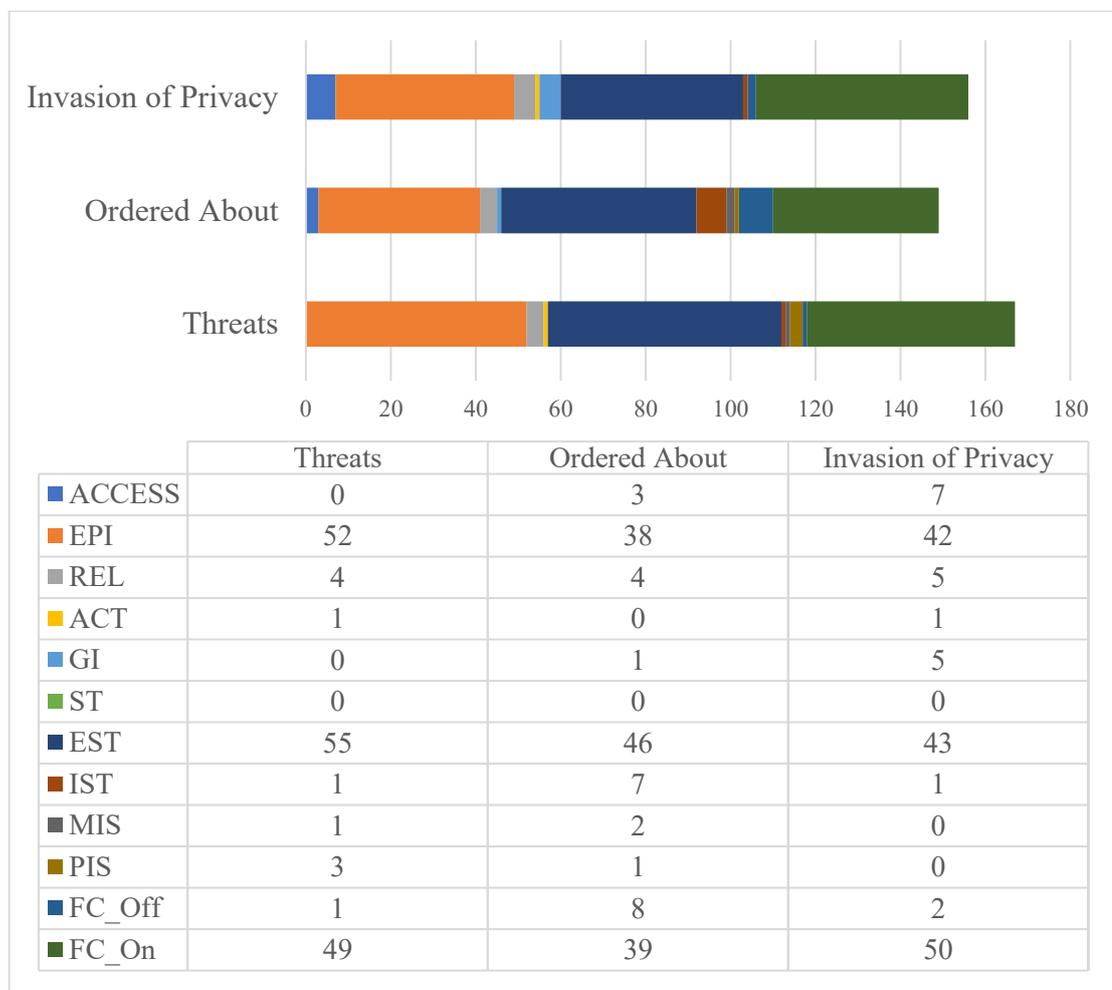


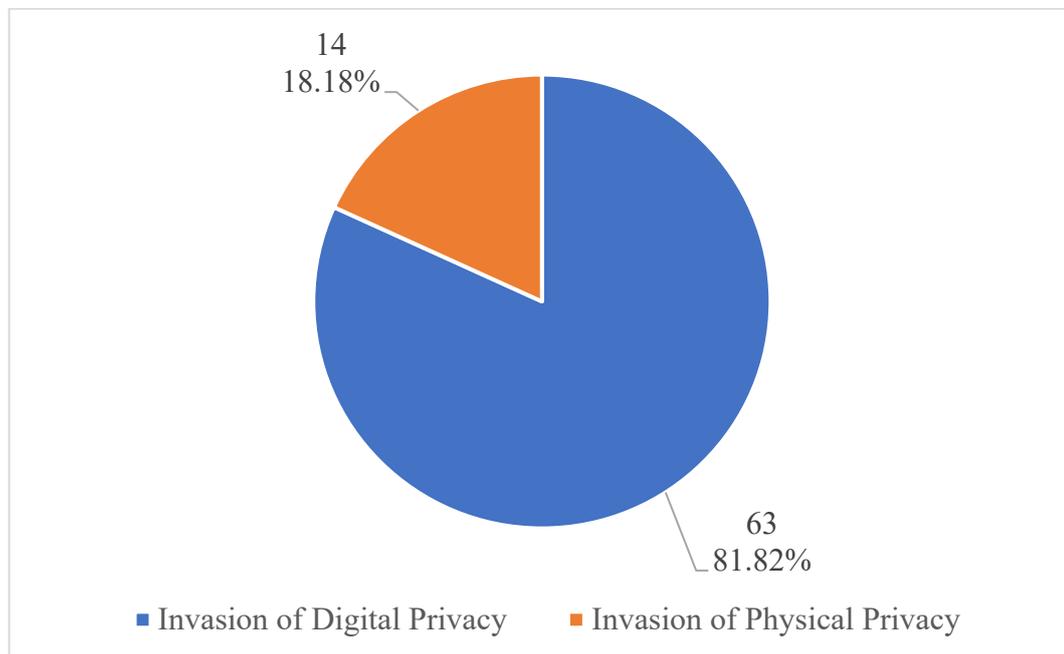
Figure 5.9 shows that children's discourse about Encroachment-oriented Impoliteness primarily concerned the groomer sub-tactics of EPI, EST and FC\_ON. When it comes to EPI (mainly nude images), Threats were used most frequently (52 intersections with EPI), followed by Invasion of (Digital) Privacy (42 intersections with EPI) and Ordered About (38 intersections). In pursuit of their goal of SG\_EST, groomers were most frequently reported to use impoliteness facework via Threats (55 intersections), followed by Ordered About (46 intersections) and Invasion of Privacy (43 intersections). Ordered About was mentioned (7 intersections) as being used to realise IST. Turning to FC\_On, here Invasion of Privacy (50 intersections) was reported by the child to be used by the groomer to secure further contact with them. This is closely followed by Threats (49 intersections). Finally Ordered About was used slightly less frequently (39 intersections). There was also some, if limited, overlap with DTD\_REL either with the groomer or others in their life across all three groomer encroachment strategies, within children's discourse.

**Encroachment Strategy: Invasion of Privacy.** As shown in Figure 5.8 groomer Invasion of Privacy represented 35.16% (77/219) of references within children's discourse about groomer Encroachment strategies, mentioned by 19/30 of children (63%).<sup>102</sup> Two types of Invasion of Privacy were found to be realised in children's discourse, shown at Figure 5.10.

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<sup>102</sup> The mentions total more than 50 because a number are double coded representing that the groomer was layering invasion of privacy strategies in their interactions with the children in this dataset.

**Figure 5.10** *Frequency of References to Encroachment: Invasion of Privacy Types (n=/77) in Children’s Discourse (n=/ %)*



As shown in Figure 5.10 Type (i) Invasion of Digital Privacy (63/77, 81.82%) was mentioned more frequently than type (ii) Invasion of Physical Privacy (space and physical environment) (14/77, 18.18%).

When it comes to the Invasion of Digital Privacy three different types were observed in children’s discourse. There were:

- (i) making unsolicited contact with the child and sending unsolicited messages or photos (sexually explicit or otherwise), this category includes the practice of cyber-flashing.
- (ii) saving images or stealing information about the child or family and friends as leverage with which to threaten them.
- (iii) making permanent records of photos, chats or information via screenshotting without the child’s consent.

Figure 5.11 presents the frequency of references to the different types of groomer Invasion of Digital Privacy as represented in children’s discourse.

**Figure 5.11** *Frequency of References to Encroachment: Invasion of (Digital) Privacy (n=63) in Children’s Discourse (n=/%)*

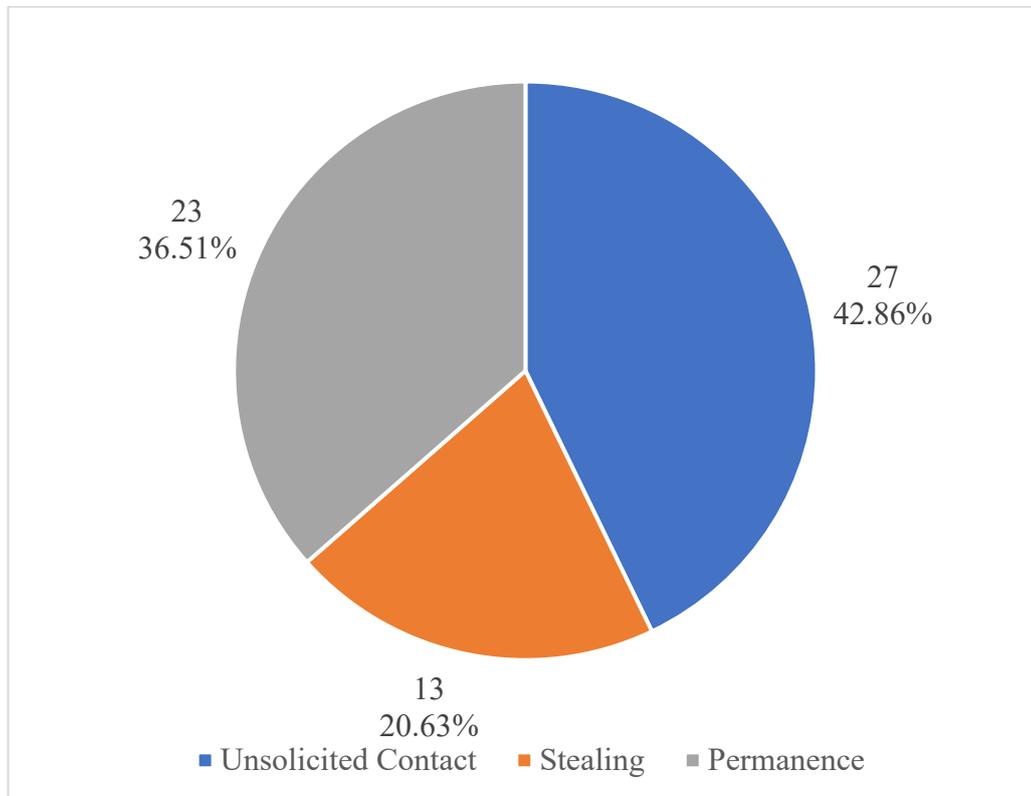


Figure 5.11 shows that children most frequently referenced Invasion of Digital Privacy type (i) making unsolicited contact with the child and sending unsolicited messages/photos. Type (i) represented 42.86% of references (27/63), and was mentioned by 16/30 children, 53%. Type (iii) making permanent records of photos, chats or information via screenshotting without the child’s consent represented 36.51% of references (23/63) and was mentioned by 23% (7/30) of the children). Type (ii) saving images or stealing information about the child or family and friends represented 20.63% of references (13/63) and was mentioned by 27% of children 8/30.

The first thing to note about these findings is the diversity of ways that groomers were able, facilitated by the operation of SNSs, to invade and encroach on children’s privacy in DCSG contexts. This shows not only that groomers were facilitated in their use of impoliteness strategies but also adds further weight to the proposition that groomers’ use of impoliteness may have been co-constructed within the

permissibility created by the technological affordances available (Chapter Four). As shown in Figure 5.11, the most frequently mentioned Invasion of Digital Privacy represented in children’s discourse was (i) the groomer making unsolicited contact. Children’s discourse showed how the affordances of social media direct messaging supported this and allowed the groomer to send multiple and repeated unsolicited messages. Consider Extract 5.11:

Extract\_5.11

1	C008	Ive blocked him twice but both times he found me on other social media
2		and made me unblock him
3		...
4		he kept messaging me on Instagram asking y i blocked him

In Extract\_5.11, the child explicitly referenced the groomer’s repeated unsolicited invasions of their privacy, describing how the groomer exploited multiple access routes to pursue them offered by different SNS platforms. The child described the groomer using these digital affordances and security gaps in existing SNS design to hound and pressurise them. The child referenced their multiple attempts at resistance (“Ive blocked him twice,” (1)) but indicated the force and oppression their attempts at resistance were faced with. The child reported that the groomer overcame their attempts at resistance in both instances (“both times he found me on other social media”, (1)). The choice of the verb “found” (2) creates the sense of the child being hunted, prey in the groomer’s sights. This groomer Encroachment strategy indicates how the groomer was exploiting the lack of safeguards in SNSs current operation (Chapter One/Two) to facilitate their agenda of pursuing and tracking the child. This is further illustrated by the child’s use of the past participle intransitive “kept” indicating the repeated nature of the groomer’s messages. The child also referenced the groomer’s interrogative tone, demanding an explanation (“he kept messaging me on Instagram asking y I blocked him,” (3)). This combination creates an atmosphere of oppression and coercion. The child’s discourse shows how the groomer’s invasion of privacy through unsolicited and sustained messaging constrained and undermined the child’s attempts at resistance. It also resulted in an effective realisation of the groomer’s goals of encroachment by creating a sense that attempts at resistance were futile. The child’s agency was fundamentally diminished by the affordances and

minimal regulation within which the Web 2.0 context functions, and the prevalence of smartphones and SNSs. The Harassment running through these examples was evident (see also Chapter Seven).

Within Digital Privacy type (i) unsolicited contact, children also talked about the groomer invading their digital privacy by virtually exposing themselves through unsolicited “cyber-flashing”. This represented 8/27 total references to type (i) unsolicited invasions of privacy, mentioned by 6/30 children (20%). The issue of “cyber-flashing” between adults has received increasing attention in recent years (Chapter Two). The child’s mobile phone or other smart device represents an extension of their private space. The groomer’s infiltration of that space using the practice of “cyberflashing” constituted an aggressive violation, forcing the child’s engagement with the groomer’s sexualised goals. Extract\_5.12 illustrates how this invasion of privacy was received by the child:

Extract\_5.12

1	C020	some of the men on there send me inappropriate pictures of themselves...
2		...
3		some men will send photos as soon as you connect

In Extract\_5.12 the child emphasised to the counsellor that they were confronted with (nude) photos immediately when engaging with certain sites (“as soon as you connect”, (3)). The child’s use of the adjective “inappropriate” (1) was a marker that the child found the groomer’s unsolicited sending of images unsuitable or improper in the circumstances, therefore recognising this communicative behaviour as impolite and violating.

Extract\_5.13 shows how the child interpreted the groomer’s use of the digital affordances of technology to invade both the child’s digital and physical space simultaneously.

### Extract\_5.13

- 1 C015 when she video called me, she was entirely naked. She could see my face  
2 which i didn't actually want her to see. She could also see my pubic area.  
...  
3 Later I received a video call again...and she showed me a recording of what  
4 she could see me as.  
5 After she showed me that video, i received a long message saying something  
6 along the lines of "underage masturbation", gonna get reported so talk to me."  
...  
7 She has the recording on her device  
8 [she] shared her screen to show me the recording

In Extract\_5.13 the child was coerced to reveal their nude or semi-nude body on camera and perform sex acts on themselves. The child described the groomer using video calling technology to invade the child's physical private space and direct and control the situation from a distance. Video-calling also allowed the groomer virtual entry to the child's private home environment, which created a powerful sense of intrusion and voyeurism. This violation led to a lack of control and therefore erasure of agency on the part of the child ("she could see my face which i didn't actually want her to see. She could also see my pubic area", (1-2)). The child's destabilised sense of agency and the confronting and potentially "freezing"<sup>103</sup> effect of this semiotic display by the groomer was indicated by the child's use of the adverbial "entirely" (1). The child's use of "entirely" showed shock and incredulity that an adult should expose themselves in this way. The child's ability resist in this case was negated by the invasion of their privacy by the groomer.

The child also described how, facilitated by technology, the groomer was able to share their screen and show the recording. The ability to reflect the child's abuse back to them facilitated the groomer's ability to blackmail and coerce them. In this sense technology not only granted access to the child and permitted the creation of a permanent record of the abuse, but it also - via screen sharing -created a mirror to allow the groomer to distort a constructed reality ("she showed me a recording of

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<sup>103</sup> When some is sexually assaulted, they may experience their body freezing during the event. This is known as "tonic immobility," describing the body's diminished voluntary mobility. This is not a failure to act or react. See e.g. [The Effects of Sexual Assault on the Brain and Body - Trauma and the Brain: Understanding Tonic Immobility](#)

what she could see me as, (3-4); “she shared her screen to show me the recording”, (8)). It is a digital affordance that was baldly used by the groomer to ensure further compliance and to silence the child. This semiotic use of video-calling technology and screenshotting suggests an extension of the affordance of replicability of CMC interaction (see Chapter Two e.g. Baym, 2015; boyd, 2010<sup>104</sup>; Scott, 2022). Within the DCSG context there is the additional affordance namely, the ability to capture a moment and reflect to the child the potential impact on their face by showcasing and manufacturing what others would “see them as” (3-4)). This is a bald and unflinching attack on the child’s future face. Being able to project to the child the likely disastrous impact of non-compliance on how they would be perceived by others, the groomer possessed a highly effective strategy to coerce and control the child.

In their discourse with the counsellor the child demonstrated awareness of this use of technology to facilitate and intensify the groomer’s control (“she has the recording on her device” (7)). By recording the child against their will, the groomer created a permanent record of the abuse. The child’s reference to the groomer talking about “underage masturbation” (6) and their threat that the child could get “reported” (6), show the groomer was bald in shifting blame on to the child. The groomer using the term “underage” (6) constructed masturbation as illegal, of a fatuous age restriction implied that the child touching and self-pleasuring their own body was illicit behaviour. The groomer’s fabrication of the child’s masturbation as wrong and taboo was a powerful tactic used by the groomer to shift the blame from their own illegal abusive behaviour onto the child.

An additional facet of the Invasion of Digital Privacy constructed by the digital discourse context, combined with the groomer’s framing of masturbation as illegal, is that while the groomer directed the child to perform sexual acts, it was the child’s embodied actions that were physically carrying out the groomer’s instructions. Offline, when the in-person interaction ends, the physical presence of the groomer recedes. There is an (at least temporary) reprieve from the physicality of the sexual abuse. In the context of online abuse, however, digital affordances mean the groomer

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<sup>104</sup> danah boyd, like bell hooks has made a political decision not to capitalise her name and to subvert convention “What’s in a Name” [danah michele boyd](https://danahboyd.com/2014/01/whats-in-a-name/).

was able to invade the child's physical space through virtual means, coercing the child to perform sexual acts and abuse on themselves. The child could thus not avoid the muscle memory and echoes of the abuse inflicted by their physicality. In this sense, within TA-CSA, the child's self is ceded to the groomer's instruction. The groomer thus achieves an ownership of personal pleasure, tainting it and robbing children of this private relationship with the self. This is a unique impact of the DCSG context on the conception and boundaries of the self that has yet unexplored impacts on a child's future and ongoing processing of face.

Invasion of Digital Privacy (ii), refers to the groomer researching the child on social media, stealing the child's personal information, details about friends and family, images or locations. Extract\_5.14 illustrates how this ability was used to threaten and coerce the child and shows the diversity of ways that SNSs greatly facilitate this process:

Extract\_5.14

1	C009	he has followed some of my friends and he said if i block him again like i
2		did on snapchat he will send them

In Extract\_5.14 the child's discourse gave a sense of the groomer hunting them by actively following child's friends to infiltrate their peer group. Note also how the groomer combined a Threat with the Invasion of Privacy.

In Extract\_5.14 the overlap of type (ii) stealing information with (iii) screenshotting and making permanent records of information, images, videos and conversations was evident. This ability to overlap and layer different strategies of Encroachment is a unique feature facilitated by the digital context and is a key affordance of the use of screenshotting technology. It also further suggests that the groomer's use of impoliteness may have been moulded by the opportunities and lack of sanctions for the behaviour in the digital discourse context. Children's discourse about the role that the ability to screenshot played in facilitating groomer manipulation is a salient finding in this dataset (Chapter Four). Making permanent records of people's

information without their consent constitutes a marked invasion of privacy.<sup>105</sup> It also serves the semiotic purpose of being able to appropriate traces of the groomer/child interactions (either images or conversations) and (mis)represent and distort them in reflection back to the child (as seen in the discussion of video-calling above). Grabbing images via screenshotting gives the groomer “an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal”... they help the groomer take “possession of the space” representing a facework act of aggression, a “soft murder” (Sontag 1977, p.9):

To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. (Sontag, 1977, p.14).

Screenshotting (and all the image-production affordances of CMC and digital smartphone technology) is arguably an extension and corruption of the semiotic affordance of the self-refracting and distorting act of image capture of individuals. Photography is no longer the only means to do so and in a CDMA context the semiotic affordance has been extended to the ability to make visual, textual records of groomer <-> child talk. A core affordance of the digital context in shaping utterance production and interpretation is the ability it offers for “storage and persistence” allowing utterances and images produced online to be eternally revisited and scrutinised (Chapter Two e.g. Scott, 2021; Baym, 2010, boyd, 2010). The manipulative exploitation of this affordance of persistence and storage of the digital context is taken one step further by the purposeful recording and capture of information, talk or images by the groomer via screenshotting. The pragmatics of this communicative act, and the boundary of ownership and agency that this behaviour crosses, remain a little explored strategy of coercion and control within the DCSG context. The impact that it has on our collective conception of self, identity and the “rules” of facework are still little understood. However, within the DCSG context, technological affordances appear to indicate a mutation of groomer impoliteness triggered by opportunities for their misappropriation within largely unregulated digitally mediated communication.

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<sup>105</sup> As seen in Chapter Two there have been attempts to model how the digitally mediated context of Web 2.0 with constantly evolving platforms and technology for communicating in different ways, interacts with utterance production and interpretation (Scott, 2021) Baym (2010) and boyd (2010).

Figure 5.10 also showed that children’s discourse included reference to the groomers’ invasion of their physical privacy, space and environment (14/77; mentioned by 7/30 children; 23%). This category included the groomer’s encroachment on the child’s physical space, either in person or by infiltrating their personal environment and networks. It also illustrates the permeability between the online and offline sphere and how digitally mediated communication can form a bridge to the child’s physical private space. The groomer was reported to have used information and knowledge about the child’s home and family environment to, even virtually, force a physical presence into the child’s offline lives. Extract\_5.15 and Extract\_5.16 are typical of how children referred to the groomer having used knowledge of the child’s physical location or family life to invade their privacy.

Extract\_5.15

1 C009 He said he was going to send them to my friends on instagram and  
 2 i asked him not to and i said ill do whatever

Extract\_5.16

1 C006 he has a screenshot on maps of where i live...  
 ...  
 2 i feel like i cant do anything because he knows my address

In Extract\_5.15 the groomer was described by the child to have mined their contacts via an SNS and combined this invasion of their privacy with a threat (“He said he was going to send them to my friends on Instagram”, (1)). The child demonstrated resistance (“i asked him not to”, (2)) but also attempted to bargain with the groomer, offering to do anything the groomer wanted to avoid the threatened attack on their face (“i said ill do whatever”, (2)).

In Extract\_5.16 the groomer had informed the child that they had taken a screenshot of where the child lived. The child’s discourse showed that they had sensed the implicit threat, with the child articulating how constrained their agentic action environment felt and making a causal link to the groomer knowing their address (“I feel like I cant do anything because he knows my address”, (2)). The groomer’s use of digital and technological affordances thus used the virtual world to penetrate the physical reflecting the indivisibility of the online/offline nexus. (Chapter Two).

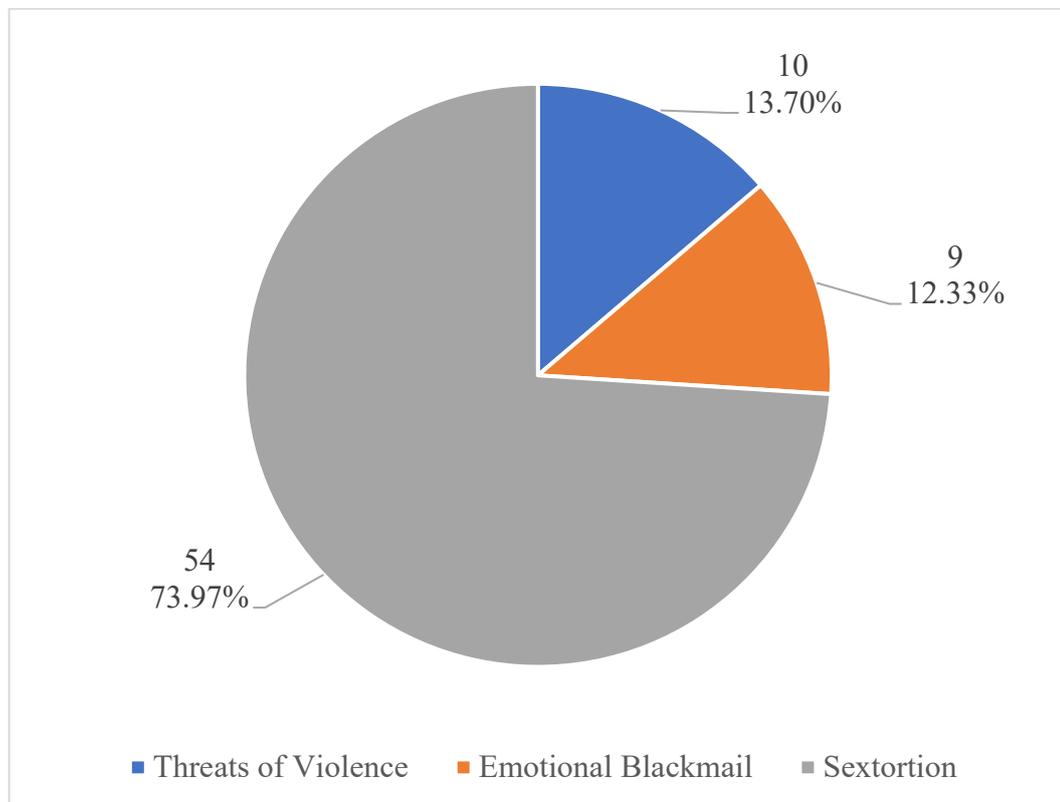
**Encroachment Strategy: Threats.** Threats were the second most frequently referenced Encroachment strategy within children's discourse about groomer impoliteness in the dataset (Figure 5.10). The information obtained by the groomer through various Invasion of Privacy (particularly digitally) strategies were also often used as hooks for the groomer's realisation of Threats. However, Threats were also used to obtain information or images from the child in the first place. The two strategies therefore appear to have a symbiotic relationship in groomer manipulative discourse and its interpretation by the child. Within the dataset studied, all threats reported were conditional (Chapter Three).

The inherently asymmetrical power context of and adult groomer grooming and manipulating a child is relevant here (see Chapter Two e.g. Lorenzo-Dus (2023); Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2023)). It is this context which may explain the salience of conditional threats, within children's discourse. Threats may have been used by the groomer to force and engender compliance in situations where groomer and child goals clashed. However, the content and formulation of the threat present in children's discourse varied.

With regards to threat content, three types were identified:

- **Sextortion:** concerning the threat of exposure of images to family and friends to extort further images, or to force the child to comply with sexual activity.
- **Emotional blackmail:** concerning the groomers' exploitation of the child's feelings of kindness, sympathy, or duty in order to persuade them to comply with sexual activity.
- **Violence:** concerning the threat of physical violence to the child's self or family and friends.

**Figure 5.12** *Frequency of References to Encroachment Threats (n= 71) – Types of Threat Observed in Children’s Discourse (n=/%)*



As shown in Figure 5.12 the most frequent Threat type was Sextortion (54/73; 73.97%) mentioned by 11/30 children, (37%). It is difficult to interpret the frequency of sextortion within children’s discourse due to a scarcity of research into this relatively recently identified “type” of TA-CSA (Chapter Two). These findings challenge the current positioning of sextortion as an emergent type of TA-CSA. Rather, children’s accounts emphasise sextortion as inherently relational and communicative in nature, part of a complex and intertwined pattern of Threat strategies and manifestations of groomer impoliteness in DCSG. The presence of sextortion as a form of impoliteness reliant on, and enabled by, the unregulated digital space and technological affordances seems to further emphasise how groomer impoliteness may be forged by the DCSG genre. This may explain the apparent evolution and intensification of harm often explained as the emergence of “new” threats.

In Extract\_5.17 the fusion of sextortion with the Encroachment strategy of Invasion of Digital Privacy is highlighted, showing the groomer to be exploiting the ease of sharing and (re-) distribution of CCII by SNSs (Baym, 2015; boyd, 2010; Scott, 2022) as a vehicle to threaten exposure of the child:

Extract\_5.17

1	C009	I made a mistake, i send nude photos to someone and they are threatening
2		to post them
		...
3		He said he was going to send them to my friends on instagram and i asked him
4		not to and I said ill do whatever...he wants nudes every day

In Extract\_5.17, the child explicitly identified the groomer's "threat" ("they are threatening to post them", (1-2)) showing the groomer's strategy was particularly marked. The threat was not only noticed by the child but reported retrospectively to the counsellor. The child's perception of a condition, whether realised in the groomer's discourse or not, was indicated by the intentional future anterior tense ("he said he was going to send them to my friends on instagram", (3)). The child's report of a direct request to the groomer to rethink their threat ("i asked him not to", (3-4)) shows the child tried to bargain. The child perceived that the threat was conditional, hinging on their next behavioural choice which influenced their compliance ("I said ill do whatever", (4)). The face threat of the groomer exposing them to their peer group eclipsed the risk of compliance for the child. Threats of exposure to the peer group represent a forceful attack on the face of an adolescent whose status within their peer group is often in construction (Chapter Two). This face fragility, due to the importance and insecurity of their social status, magnifies the intensity of the presentation of self and makes adolescent children particularly vulnerable to sextortion. The impact and force of sextortion as a threatening strategy was shown by the child's attempts to prevent this exposure through the use of two politeness strategies of requesting (negative politeness) ("i asked him not to", (3-4)) and offering/promising (positive politeness) ("I said ill do whatever", (4)). The child operationalised their only site of power (their ability to influence the groomer's behaviour through compliance) to try to regain control of their wider situation and prevent the perceived face destruction of exposure (see Chapter Seven). In this case (Extract\_5.17) the groomer appeared to interpret the child's politeness as weakness

and used it to push harder and attempt to gain further compliance. They did this demanding the child sent more images with more frequency (“he said he wants nudes every day”, (4)). Note the child’s discourse about the impact of sextortion on their conception of face. The child expressed self-blame, internalising what had happened as their own lapse in judgement, viewing themselves to be at fault for having trusted the groomer and sent the nudes in the first place (“I made a mistake I send nude pictures to someone”, (1) (also Chapter Six).

Extract\_5.18 shows how the affordance of being able to threaten wide distribution of CCII/CCIV previously shared by the child (stored by the groomer) was used by the groomer to extort further CCII from the child.

Extract\_5.18

- 1 C027: I sent him over 100 images and videos of myself. He screenshotted them for
- 2 safe keeping
- ...
- 3 but now he has started being persistant again. He says he wants the images by
- 4 the 6<sup>th</sup> April or he will spread the images
- ...
- 5 He is very manipulative and told me that if he told or showed someone my
- 6 photos nobody would see me as the same person anymore.

Extract\_5.18 shows the child was aware of the facework inherent to the groomer’s behaviour, specifically sextortion, and the impact of the threat to “spread the images” (3). The child’s explicit and astute judgement of the groomer as “very manipulative”-intensified by the use of the adverbial “very”- shows the child was attuned to the groomer’s bald use of face attack to force compliance (“he is very manipulative and told me that if he told or showed someone my photos nobody would see me as the same person anymore”, (5-6)). The child’s paraphrasing of the groomer’s threat suggested the groomer was direct and open in threatening potential damage to and erasure of the child’s face and existing social standing (“nobody would see me as the same person anymore”, (6)). This was used to constrain the child’s action environment and ensure that they complied with sending the desired CCII. The child also provided considerable detail about the dates by when the threat would be realised (“he says he wants the images by the 6<sup>th</sup> April or he will spread the images”,

(3-4)). This suggested that this condition was set by the groomer and interpreted clearly by the child. The child's use of the present + future conditional clause type ("he wants the images by...or he will spread the images", (4)) suggested a sense of certainty that, if the groomer's conditions were not met, then the threat would be realised. In Extract\_5.18, the combination of Invasion of Digital Privacy and Harassment was used by the groomer to intensify the force of the threat creating a three-pronged assault on the child's face.

Children's discourse also showed the presence of financial sextortion, the groomer aiming to extort money by blackmailing the child with threats of exposure as seen in Extract\_5.19:

Extract\_5.19

1	C019	he was threatening me by saying give me 1500 dollars or ill send these
2		everywhere i didn't
		...
3		the attitude changed and they demanded money i blocked it but then he
4		made another account and was still demanding the money

Extract\_5.19 shows that explicit references to groomer threats were made by children ("he was threatening me", (1)). The amount demanded ("1500 dollars", (1)) was likely an unattainable amount of money for a child. This imbalance strengthened the force of the threat. Extract\_5.19 also shows how sextortion was intensified by the groomer's persistence. The child referenced groomer repetition of the sextortion practice ("he was threatening me by saying give me 1500 dollars", (1); "they demanded money...", (3); "still demanding the money", (4)). This repetition intensified the illocutionary force of the threatening act. In this context, the affordances of the digital context were again obvious. The child demonstrated resistance by refusing to send the images ("i didn't", (2), blocking the groomer "i blocked it but then he made another account and was still demanding the money", (4) and by contacting the counselling helpline for advice (See Chapter Seven). The child's discourse also revealed awareness of the ease with which the groomer could challenge and undermine the child's resistance by retaining the child's details and setting up a new account to recontact the child (Chapter Two, e.g. Thorn, 2021).

The threat to turn the child's words against them, using the threat of exposing conversation screenshots is shown in Extract\_5.20:

Extract\_5.20

1           C003    I checked the app earlier and realised id only blocked him on snapchat and  
2                   not on there amd he jad messaged me saying he was going to expose me  
3                   cus id messed him around. he had a screenshot of oir conervation and a  
4                   screenshot of my profile photo on the app  
5                   ...  
6                   heks going to expose me cus he has my snapchat username and apparently  
7                   he does modelling and has 6/7k followers  
8                   ...  
9                   There's no dirty pictures or anything just our conversation screenshots  
10                  just knowing he has those screenshots that scares me

Extract\_5.20 showed the child's reference to the groomer's perceived elevated social status as a model (with thousands of followers). The child placed this status (albeit with scepticism– note the use of the adverbial “apparently”, (6)) as central to the discussion of the sextortion by the groomer. This suggested that the child saw the groomer's influential symbolic status in terms of numbers of followers and reach as contributing to the severity of the sextortion threat. The threat in this context therefore is reminiscent of online public shaming (OPS) (Blitvich, 2022), representing a threatened public exposure greatly facilitated by the reach and networking element of SNSs which was strategically amplified by the groomer (Chapter Two, Baym, 2015; boyd, 2010; Scott, 2022). Again, the power of the groomer's threats and impoliteness facework were aided by the habituation of screenshotting. This included a profile picture which allowed the child to be potentially identified and held to account (“he had a screenshot of our conversation and a screenshot of my profile photo on the app”, (3-4)). In this way the groomer could, via the affordances of the digital context, obtain a portfolio of spurious evidence of what the child had supposedly done and to magnify the consequences to blackmail and extort them. The permanence of the child's words and the groomer's possession of the screenshots of the conversations were perceived by the child as posing a significant face threat leading to exposure and the child getting in trouble for wrongdoing. However, despite the incubation of this type of impoliteness behaviour by the digital and technological affordances of contemporary digitally

mediated communication, the success of the groomer's tactics also exploited the face fragility of the child. Their lack of experiences and surety of self, leave children susceptible to groomer tactics and facework. The interactional dynamics of DCSG interactions thus create a toxic combination that is crucial to understand.

The second category of threat observed in the dataset was groomer use of overt threats of violence. These were mentioned by two children and represented 10/76 (13.70%) of overall threat mentions. In Extract\_5.21, threats of extreme force and violence seemed to be in response to the child's attempts to resist. They suggest an intensification and assertion of power on the part of the groomer suggesting no concern for mitigating the face threat of their actions:

Extract\_5.21

- 1 C027 He told me to send him a naked picture. When i refused he told me he
- 2 was a bad man who would get someone to hurt and rape me if I didn't. so
- 3 i agreed.

In Extract\_5.21 the child was explicit about their resistance attempt through a direct refusal to the groomer's request to send him CCII ("He told me to send him a naked picture. When I refused, he told me he was a bad man", (1-2)). The child referenced their refusal being immediately met with a threat of violence and sexual assault if they didn't comply ("a bad man who would get someone to hurt and rape me if I didn't," (2)). The child's statement ("so i agreed", (2-3)), shows the effectiveness of the overt force used by the groomer in overpowering the child's initial and ensuring compliance with their demands.

As well as threats of violence towards the child themselves, the use of threats towards the child's friends and family, were also present, as Extract\_5.22 illustrates:

Extract\_5.22

1 C006 Hes saying that I have to have sex with him else hes going to come to my  
2 house  
3 ...  
4 he says i have to do anything he says else hes coming to my house...  
5 ...  
6 if I say no then he says okay well im coming to your hosie  
7 and says that hell come with basically a gang and smash my house up...  
8 ...  
9 he was saying he was going to smash my house up and do something to  
10 my mum so I said okay ill do it aslong as you stay away from my house  
11 and my mum

In Extract\_5.22 the threat of violence was triggered in response to the child's resistance to groomer demands to comply with having "sex with him" (1). The child's indication that the groomer said they had to "do anything he says" (4) indicated how far they felt their action environment constricted by the threat. The threatened violence entailed the groomer going to the child's house (the groomer had obtained a screenshot of where the child lived) to exert extreme violence ("smash my house up", (7)) as well as threatening violence against the child's family ("and do something to my mum", (10)). The child's desire to protect their mother was used to force compliance. As well as direct physical threats, the groomer's threats of damage to the child's family and home (the bedrocks of their security) also carried a metaphorical threat of destruction of the child's self and the anchors of their being in the world. The force of the threat interpreted by the child is shown in their use of direct quotations to more vividly relay the violent language used by the groomer. The child referenced the groomer "coming to my house" six times (2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10) and threatening to "smash my house up" twice (7, 9). This reflection in the child's discourse indicates how forcefully and existentially the threat was received by the child. The extremity of the threat of arriving mob-handed with a gang was used by the groomer to intensify and hammer home the illocutionary force of the utterance. This extract also shows that despite the groomer's face attack, the child still attempted to use the only constrained agency at their disposal, which was to comply. The child appeared cornered by the groomer's coercion to feel that the only option to avert the undesired threatened actions was to manage the groomer's face needs

through compliance (“so I said okay ill do it as long as you stay away from my house and my mum”, (10-11)).

The groomer’s use of emotional blackmail, specifically threats of suicide, were the final type of conditional threat observed in this dataset, accounting for 9% (7/76) of references and featuring 10% of children’s discourse (3/30), see Extract\_5.23:

Extract\_5.23

1 C028 I said I was going to report him and he said if I did he would kill himself  
2 ...  
3 if I tell the police he will kill himself if I don’t message him he will kill  
4 himself.

In Extract\_5.23 conditions on which the threat was predicated were multiple, including blocking every direction the child may have thought of to turn for help (“I said I was going to report him”, (1); “if I tell the police”, (3) or cease contact (“if I don’t message him”, (3)). The threat of the groomer killing himself appeared so final and frightening that the child felt their agency constrained to complying with the demands. It also evidences the groomer’s use of the stance of vulnerability appearing to expose deep emotions such as feeling suicidal (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023, p.81-82). The solidity of the child’s sense of agency in the face of the threats and their assertiveness in standing up to the groomer and telling them they were going to report him (1) is striking. Nonetheless the groomer’s threat to end their own life represented a forceful groomer tactic. The inherent contradiction between the groomer’s threat to end their life combined with their pressure for continued contact would have been extremely cognitively complex to process, especially for a child who was building experience of facework.

**Encroachment Strategy: Ordered About.** Children’s references to the groomer ordering them about was an additional groomer Encroachment-oriented impoliteness strategy present in children’s discourse about DCSG. It constituted the groomer having issued a command or other formulation that mandated the child to comply with their goals (see Spencer-Oatey’s, 2000, 2008 conceptualisation of equity rights, Chapter Three). As seen in Figure 5.8 *Groomer Impoliteness: Encroachment*

*Strategies Identified in Children's Discourse (n=/%)*, Ordering About represented 34.7% (69/217) of references within Encroachment. Ordering About had three realisations when represented in children's discourse:

- (i) being "told" to do X
- (ii) "having" to do X
- (iii) being "made to" do X

Extract\_5.24 is typical of how the child framed being "ordered about" as being "told to", in line with realisation (i).

Extract\_5.24

1 C001 i would be told to do things that u didnt want to do.

In Extract\_5.24 the child's use of "i would" (1) indicated a sense of an ongoing situation, of the groomer regularly telling the child to "do things" (1) and implies that the child complied. In the case of Ordered About, it aligns with Lorenzo-Dus' (2023) observation that, by signalling expectations of the child's misalignment to their goals and using impoliteness, the groomer simultaneously implicitly recognises the child's negative face needs, thus acknowledging their agentic choice (even if the aim is to override this choice). The child's use of vague language "do things", rather than "do sex", communicated the child's uneasiness talking about the sexual acts they were ordered to comply with. The "u didn't want to do" (1) emphasised their interpretation of the face-threatening nature of the command, illustrating the perlocutionary force of the order in achieving compliance despite the child's assertion of disinclination. With regards to realisation (ii) "having" to do X, revisiting Extract\_5.22 in the previous section the child was explicit and direct in referencing the groomer's order concerning "having to have sex" (1). However, this was combined with and mitigated by vague language later when discussing the specifics of the groomer's request ("i have to do anything he says", 2)).

Realisation (iii) being "made to do", Extract\_5.25 indicates an intensification of the child's perceptions of the Ordered About strategy:

## Extract\_5.25

- 1 C008 and he now had saved image of me
- 2 ...
- 3 last night, he made me “fuck my bedpost” and my vagina started
- 4 bleeding but he didnt want me to stop and im so scared.

In Extract\_5.25 the child was explicit in both including a direct quote of the groomer’s highly explicit order to participate in sexual activity and in describing its painful and traumatic physical and emotional impact. Extract\_5.25 also infers that the groomer’s goal (“he didn’t want me to stop”, (4) was in opposition to their own wishes (to stop). Groomer Ordered About realisations narrowed the child’s agentic action environment and forcefully overrode their own wishes and needs. Here, the groomer showed disregard for the child’s negative face needs forcing their sexualised agenda. However, the process of forcing the child to act against their will, perversely recognises their negative face needs of having agentic will requiring challenge. Ordered about is therefore used in anticipation of the child’s goal misalignment and resistance and constitutes mind-spinning fluctuation between face attention/attack (see Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). The acknowledgement but disregard for the child’s negative face needs thus shakes their self-assurance and actualisation, representing further fracturing to the child’s formative conception of the rules of facework interactions.

**Encroachment: Intensification through Harassment.** Children’s discourse shows how the groomer was able to use the various affordances provided by smart technology and SNSs to intensify each of the Encroachment strategies discussed in the preceding sections via repeated and relentless contact (Chapter Two, e.g. Thorn 2021). This suggests a further evolution of groomer’s communication activated by unchecked technical affordances. Children’s discourse about groomers’ use of Harassment intersected with all the Encroachment strategies identified. Figure 5.14 illustrates this via the results of a matrix analysis showing the levels of harassment referenced by children against each Encroachment strategy (Threats, Ordered About and Invasion of Privacy).

**Figure 5.13** *Harassment Intersections with Encroachment-oriented Impoliteness Strategies as identified in Children’s Discourse (n=/%)*

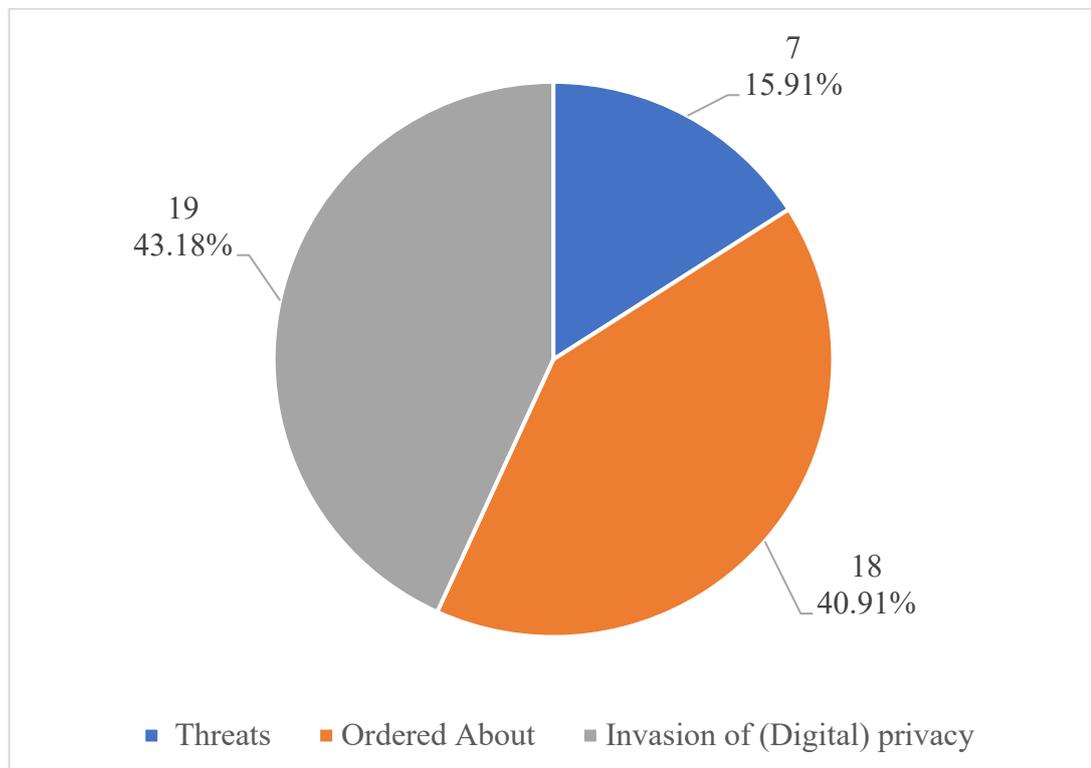


Figure 5.13 shows that groomer use of Harassment was referred to by children across all three Encroachment strategies. However, it was referenced to differing degrees. It was most frequently referenced in connection to that of groomer Invasion of Privacy (19, 43.18%). Next Harassment was used when children were ordered to behave a certain way by the groomer (18 intersections, 40.91%). Lastly and least frequently (7 intersections, 15.91%) Harassment was referred to by the child when they were threatened by the groomer. The relatively low levels of intersection of Harassment within Threats suggests that the illocutionary force of the threats may be sufficiently clear to “standalone”. This suggests that the Invasion of Privacy and Ordered About strategies meet more resistance requiring a Harassment booster to secure compliance. Strategies of Threats and Harassment may also serve a similar pragmatic function, used by the groomer to intensify the force of their utterance. These boosters challenge perceived or anticipated resistance on the part of the child.

Groomer Harassment was reflected in two main ways in children’s discourse. Firstly, as seen in Extract\_5.26, the use of the verb “to pressure” was typical of the way the child communicated an observation of groomer Harassment. The second realisation was via the use of temporal marker, creating a sense of repetition and persistence, as seen in Extract\_5.26:

Extract\_5.26

1 C030 He started pressuring me and guilt tripping me saying he will kill himself if  
2 i dont do sexual stuff on call with him or send him photos  
3 he says he will kill himself if I don’t send him photos or do sexual stuff on call  
4 ...  
5 every time i try to stop it he says he will kill himself and that

Extract\_5.26 was typical of the use of the verb “pressure” (1) which was here intensified by the child’s addition of the verbal phrase “guilt-trip” (1) which suggests they were recognising the groomer’s use of “pressure” as a manipulation tactic. Guilt-tripping is defined by the Cambridge dictionary as “to make someone feel guilty, usually in order to make them do something”. The child’s use of “guilt-trip” (1) indicated their awareness of the manipulative pragmatic function of the groomer’s harassment. The child’s connection of the impoliteness strategy of Harassment to the groomer’s order to “do sexual stuff” (1-2) was realised via the causal phrase “if i don’t do”. In this extract Harassment was effectively deployed as it was intertwined with the extreme conditional threat (“saying he will kill himself if i dont do sexual stuff on call”, 1-2)). The child’s repetition of the groomer’s threat to kill themselves three times shows both the force of the threat felt by the child and suggests the threat was repeated by the groomer. The groomer being able to hammer home these repeated threats was another affordance of digitally mediated discourse (Chapter Three). It also further suggests that groomer Harassment may have evolved as an intensification of the use of impoliteness due to these behaviours being unobstructed within an unregulated digital communication environment. The degree of perceived power and force the child felt they were attempting to withstand was shown in the child’s use of the temporal phrase “every time” indicating that the groomer was repeatedly issuing these threats particularly in response to signs of resistance (“every time i try to stop he says he will kill himself and that”, (5)). The

child's reference their attempts to resist the groomer ("try to stop", (5) shows how difficult Harassment made it for the child to stand firm and resist groomer threats.

Extract\_5.27

1 C006 well hes been messaging me for over a week...  
2 ...  
3 if i block him hes just going to come bevause I removed him before but then x  
4 He added me back, said if i do it again im in trouble

In Extract\_5.27 the child's use of the temporal phrase "over a week" (1) indicated the relentlessness of the groomer's messages, through which the child communicated their perception of being pursued by the groomer. Later in the interaction the child implied a fatalistic sense of resignation or feeling overpowered realised by the adverb "just" ("he's just going to come", (4)). The child's frequent use of temporal markers indicates the sense of pressure and suffocation they felt ("I removed him before, but then he added me back, said if I do it again", (3-4)). The communicative behaviour of adding and re-adding children, overrode the child's resistance actions of removing and blocking the groomer and was a core way that Harassment was facilitated by unregulated technology. This provides further evidence for the notion of groomer impoliteness being not only facilitated but fabricated in CDMA contexts.

Figure 5.15 presents the results of a matrix analysis showing how frequently groomer Harassment intersected with different OGDM sub-tactics in children's discourse.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Given the intertwined nature of the OGDM sub-tactics, there will be overlap in the categories and some references will have been double-coded.

**Figure 5.14** *Impoliteness Strategies: Harassment Intersections with Online Grooming Discourse Model Sub-Tactics as Identified in Children’s Discourse (n= Number of Intersections)*

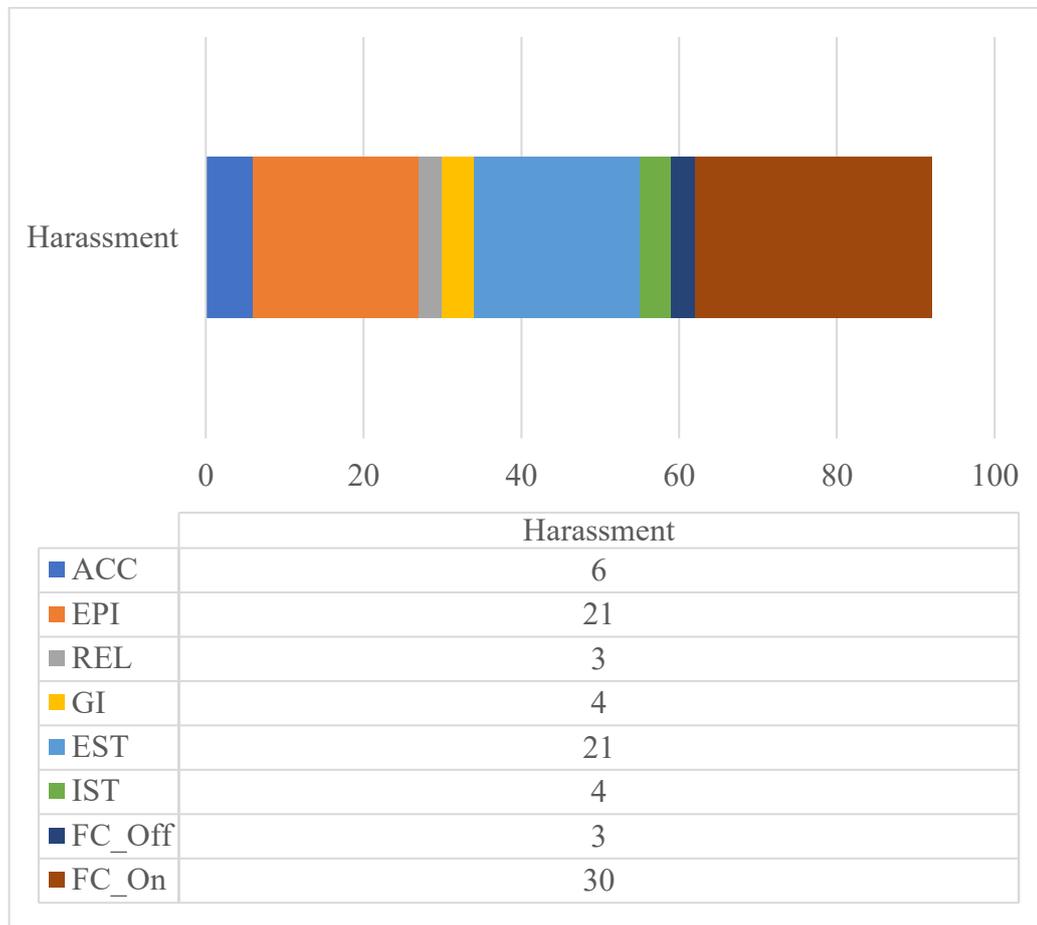


Figure 5.14 shows that the 36 references to groomer Harassment in children’s discourse, overlapped with several OGDM sub-tactics. Harassment was also described to be used across these strategies simultaneously. Children observed Harassment to be used by the groomer predominantly to ensure Further Contact and to sustain that contact with them online (30 references) and offline (3 intersections). Within DTD, the sub-tactic of EPI had the highest frequency of Harassment references (21 intersections), most often used in connection with the elicitation of CCII. There were fewer references within the Gifts (4 intersections) sub-tactic and Relationships (3 intersections) sub-tactics. There was a total of 25 intersections with Harassment for EST (21 intersections) and IST (4 intersections). Overt persuasion and extortion have started to gain attention as salient “moves” within groomer

discourse (See Chapter Two e.g. Chiang & Grant, 2017). However, analysis to date of overt persuasion has not explicitly explored how this may be realised via Harassment nor how it manifests in children's discourse about DCSG. The observed cross-cutting nature of Harassment suggests it was an adaptive linguistic behaviour, aided and abetted by SNS operation and smartphone technology, to intensify the persuasive effect of groomer's Encroachment strategies and to overcome resistance.

**Encroachment: A Contextually Coercive Combination.** This chapter has shown a cumulative and intertwined picture building of how groomers were described by children to be layering Encroachment strategies to coerce and constrain their action environments. This has been shown to be facilitated by the CMDA context, in particular the affordances of SNSs and smartphone technology current operation. The argument has also been building that within the specific context of DCSG mediated via SNSs and smartphone/digital technology lacking in safety design and accountability via regulation, groomer's use of impoliteness has particularly forceful coercive impoliteness has been co-constructed by the affordances of the contexts in which it occurs.

This context-created layering and intertwining of Encroachment-oriented impoliteness is illustrated in Extract\_5.28, where Invasion of Digital Privacy (i) stealing of information and (ii) permanence were recognised by the child to have been operationalised by the groomer in combination. This ease of Invasion of Privacy and the permanence also provided the semiotic levers for the Threats via sextortion/blackmail to coerce the child.

## Extract\_5.28

1 C017 Then the person recorded my nudes and checked all my family friends accounts  
2 and saved them and said if i dont pay him £500 he will send the picture what  
3 should i do?  
4 ...  
5 i don't hav enough money  
6 He is one button away from sending these pictures to my friends and family  
7 ...  
8 He said if i pay him today it will coz me £100 but if he jas to wait a week o  
9 hov to pay £400  
10 ...  
11 He is blacmiling me  
12 He didn't save the photos he screen recorded is that possible to remove  
13 My photo isn't online it is in someones gallery and its about to be sent to my family

### Key

	Invasion of Digital Privacy (i) stealing information
	Invasion of Digital Privacy (ii) permanence/screenshooting
	Threats
	Harassment

In Extract\_5.28 the child reported how the groomer appeared to have been systematic in their entrapment. The child's repeated use of the connector "and" (1-3) created a sense of a premeditated menu of actions the groomer was fulfilling. First, the groomer made permanent records of the nude images that the child had shared ("the person recorded my nudes" (1)). The suite of affordances at the groomer's disposal created a web the groomer was able to cast over the child cornering them and exerting powerful time-bound pressure to comply. The ease of creating permanent records was aided by the affordances of SNSs offering an easy gateway to children's social networks ("checked all my family friends accounts and saved them" (1-2)) and the ability to widely distribute via multiple SNSs at the click of a button ("he is one button away from sending these pictures to my friends and family", (6)). The added permanence of screenshooting was also referred to ("my photo isn't online it is in someone's gallery" (13)). Screenshooting allowed the groomer to not only create a permanent record but to store and take ownership of the child's images and contacts, leverage used by the groomer for many of their threats. The child described how the groomer intensified the threat through Harassment by putting time limits and attaching escalating financial demands ("he said if i pay him today it will coz me

£100 but if he has to wait a week or how to pay £400", (8-9)). The child's statement that the sum of money was unaffordable ("i don't have enough money" (5)) indicated the force of this combination of encroachment and the perlocutionary effect it had in making the child feel compliance was the only option. The child appeared prepared to do anything to prevent the face threat of exposure. Despite the force of the groomer's sustained face attacks the child demonstrated remarkable resistance (perhaps since the funds demanded were simply unattainable to them) by reaching out for help and support from the child counselling helpline.

## **5.5 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter offered a discursive analysis of children's assessments of groomer (im)politeness strategies recounted to the counsellor during helpline sessions. The findings show that children's assessments were more attuned to groomer impoliteness than to groomer politeness. Reference to groomer politeness was found to be frequently oriented towards positive than negative politeness. Although some children showed some awareness of the strategic and manipulative purpose of groomer's use of Positive and, Negative Politeness, this seemed underdeveloped and was not consistent across the dataset.

As for Impoliteness, children's discourse was primarily attuned to groomers' infringement of their Equity rights, especially Encroachment. This was achieved, in decreasing order of frequency, through strategies of Threats, Ordering About and Invasion of Privacy. A cross-cutting groomer Impoliteness strategy of Harassment was a further new finding that inductively emerged from children's discourse. Harassment was shown to be used by the groomer as a booster to intensify the force of Encroachment strategies used by the groomer. While Threats were already identified in the impoliteness taxonomy adapted for this study (Chapter Three) the specific use of threats as part of sextortion as well as the additionally observed strategies of Ordering About, Digital Privacy Invasion and Harassment seemed to be genre-based and greatly facilitated by the technical affordances of the CDMA, DCSG context. Furthermore, the analysis of children's discourse within this chapter showed a layered use of Encroachment strategies that appeared to show little concern

for children's face needs. This use of Encroachment-based face attacks appeared to be particular to the specifics of DCSG interactional dynamics.

This chapter has elucidated, from the child's perspective, the complex facework employed by groomers to envelop their manipulative, tactic driven communication. It has shown how the computer-mediated nature of DCSG is able to be exploited by groomers to intensify and strengthen the force of their facework via (Im)Polite strategies and to augment pre-existing power asymmetries to achieve children's compliance through coercion and control. The effectiveness of groomer facework was also found to be not only enhanced but engendered by technological affordances. The sanctioning of impoliteness in the specific digitally mediated genre of DCSG and the ease and availability of semiotic levers provided by technology were reflected in children's discourse. They were shown to support the groomer in exploiting and refracting children's face-fragility due to their developmental stage of navigating insecure self-formation. The following chapter investigates children's affective responses to groomer manipulative communication to explore the emotions triggered by the DCSG experience and recounted during their helpline counselling sessions.

## **Chapter 6. Children’s Discourse of Emotion: An AFFECT Analysis**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The previous two chapters analysed children’s attunement to groomer’s communicative behaviours by mapping their discourse about their DCSG experiences against (i) the OGDM (Chapter Four) and (ii) groomer facework (Chapter Five). This chapter aims to amplify the affective impact of children’s DCSG experience, by addressing the following research question:

*RQ3: What are the emotions expressed in children’s discourse triggered by DCSG and groomer communication?*

This chapter addresses this question by applying Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), specifically the AFFECT system for analysing the linguistic expression of emotion as revised by Benitez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio (2019) (Chapter Three). The chapter is structured around the main triggers for emotions that children identify in their discourse, namely the Self, the Grooming<sup>107</sup>, and Other(s) (Appendix 15).

The chapter begins, in Section 6.2, with a presentation of overview results showing children’s discourse of emotion. Then, Section 6.3 provides key findings regarding children’s Grooming-triggered emotions. Section 6.4 presents findings about children’s Other(s)-triggered emotions, predominantly concerning potential sources of support. Lastly, Section 6.5 explores children’s Self-triggered discourse of emotion. Section 6.6 concludes with a summary of key themes identified.

### **6.2 Children’s Discourse of Emotion: Overview**

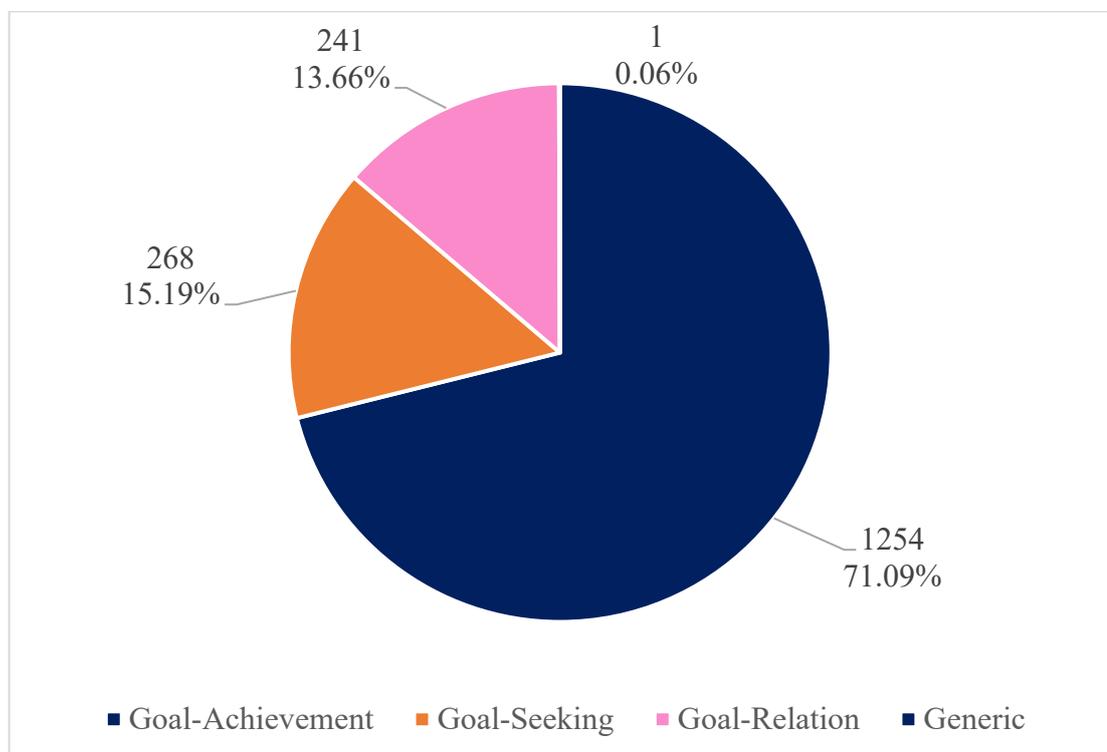
Figure 6.1 presents the overall number of references to each of the AFFECT categories: Goal-Achievement Emotions (GA), Goal-Seeking Emotions (GS) and Goal-Relation emotions (GR) and a ‘generic’ category whereby children’s references to emotion that were not able to be coded against the taxonomy categories were recorded. A total of 1764 references to emotions were made by all 30 children. A

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<sup>107</sup> ‘Grooming’ encapsulates references to the groomer and to the grooming experience.

matrix analysis presents the intersections of two axes (i) references to each level of emotion categorised in Benitez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio’s (2019) AFFECT taxonomy and (ii) the trigger of children’s emotion discourse. All instances of children’s emotions were coded to one or more categories within the taxonomy. Results show children’s ability to clearly articulate a range of complex and overlapping emotions.

**Figure 6.1** *Overview Children’s Discourse of Emotion Number (n=/1764) and Percentage (%) of References*



As shown in Figure 6.1, GA emotions were most salient in children’s discourse, representing 71.09% of references (1254/1764). According to Benitez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio (2019) the valence dimension of GA is inherent, as the category revolves around emotions of dis/pleasure, which arise from a reaction to events or situations that impact on the pursuit of our goals, needs and values. GS emotions, on the other hand, relate to our cognitive engagement with “happenings, situations and entities in our environment. These emotions therefore deal with how our psychic energy is directed at any one time” (Benitez-Castro & Hidalgo-Tenorio, 2019, p.

315). GS was the least salient category in children’s discourse within the counselling context studied, representing 15.19% of references (268/1764). Finally, GR emotions are more instinctive in nature, often transcending specific events or situations where entities in question towards a generalized valenced focus and stance. GR emotions represented 13.66% of references (241/1764). There was a single (1/1764) generic emotion reference. These overall findings validate the argument that children, as agentive individuals, pursue personal goals through interaction with the groomer. It is thus the alignment or clashes between children’s and groomer individual goals that trigger affective responses.

Findings for the three triggers identified in children’s discourse of emotion (Self, Grooming, or Other(s)) are presented at Figure 6.2. Where it was not possible to discern a clear trigger in children’s discourse, this was coded as a “Generic” reference.

**Figure 6.2** *Triggers for Children’s Discourse of Emotion: Number (n=/1764) and Percentage (%) of References*

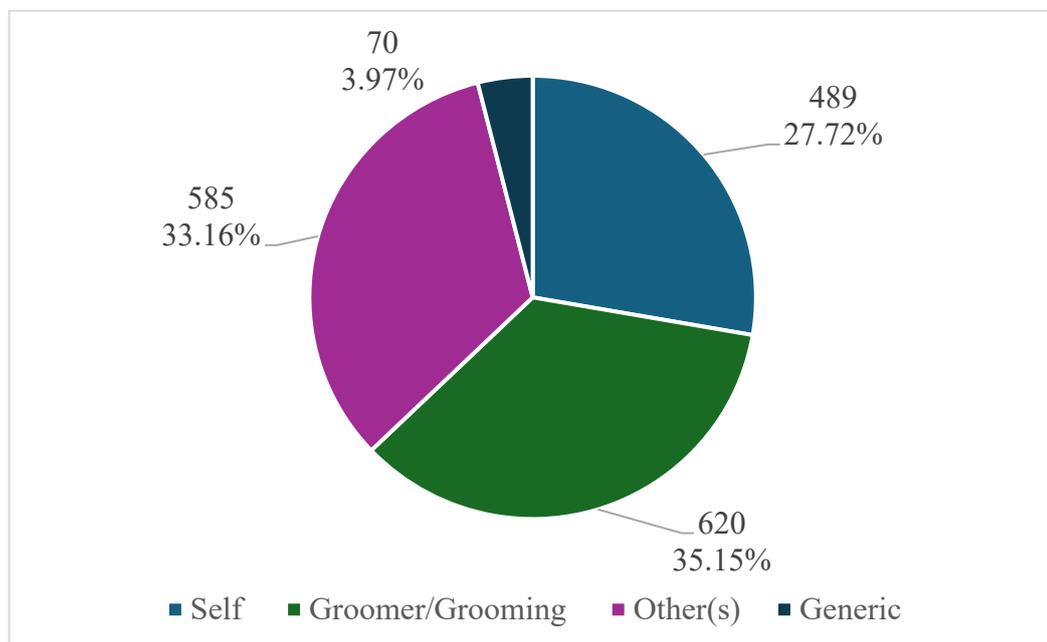


Figure 6.2 shows that children were able to clearly discern and communicate the triggers for their emotions. Unsurprisingly and attesting to the complexity of their emotions and the DCSG experience/counselling context, children often referenced emotions as triggered by different entities simultaneously, creating overlap in

children’s discourse. Children made Generic references to the trigger for their emotion in 3.97% of references (70/1764). Where the target of the child’s emotion was unclear or the children made global statements about emotions, the emotion could be aligned to GA and references were all negatively valenced. This suggests that children may have struggled to articulate the trigger for their emotions in cases where their GA felt under attack. Furthermore, they often represented the initiation of interactions where the child was guarded, evaluating whether they could trust the counsellor as shown in Extract \_6.1:

Extract\_6.1

1	C015	Hello
2	CL015	Hi, how are you today?
3	C015	Not too well, I have already unintentionally left the chat but I have copied
4		and pasted my notes for you.
5		...
6	CL015	Yes, of course... please take your time, I’m here!
7	C015	So basically, last night I never got a chance to speak. But what happened was...

In this extract the child responded to the counsellor’s common greeting structure (“Hi, how are you today?”, (2)) with a negative emotion feeling of “not too well” (3). Following encouragement and indication of patience and open listening by the counsellor (“Yes of course... please take your time, I’m here!”, (6)) the child started to recount their experience (7). Extract \_6.1 illustrates the role and importance of the counsellor’s listening and response in scaffolding and facilitating children’s affective expression.

Other than the small number of generic references, as Figure 6.2 shows, the most frequently referenced trigger for children’s emotions was the Grooming. This is not surprising given children were discussing their DCSG experience in a counselling context. However, affective references to the Grooming represented 35.25% (620/1764) of references. Next, and with similar frequency, children’s emotion discourse was found to be triggered by Other(s), this represented either references to various potential sources of support or to a generalized “other people” or public. Discourse directed at Other(s) was found to represent 33.16% (585/1764) of

children’s affective references. Finally, children were found to identify the Self as the trigger for their emotion in 27.72% (489/1764) of references. The finding of a relatively even split in children’s discourse between the trigger for their emotions within a DCSG context shows that children were not merely having affective reactions to the Grooming but that they were equally concerned with the wider implications of their experience. Children were expressing emotions about how others may react and about the impact their experience had on their sense of self and self-perception. That over a quarter of children’s emotion discourse triggered by the Self (27.90%; 489/1764) is salient and suggests, in line with previous research, (Chapter Two, e.g. MacGinley et al., 2019; McElvaney, 2022) children’s internalisation of their DCSG experience.

Figure 6.3 shows the number and percentage of children who referenced each AFFECT category by the trigger for the emotion identified.

**Figure 6.3** *Overview Children’s Discourse of Emotion Number (n=/30) and Percentage (%) of Children Referencing each AFFECT Category by Emotion Trigger*

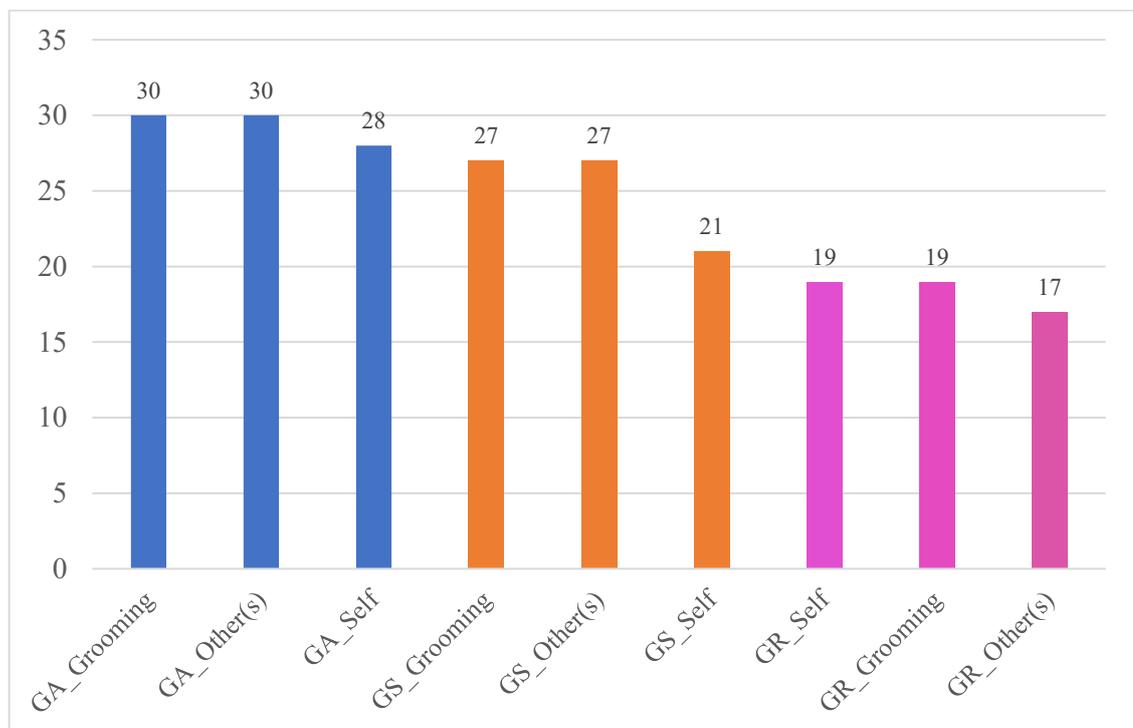
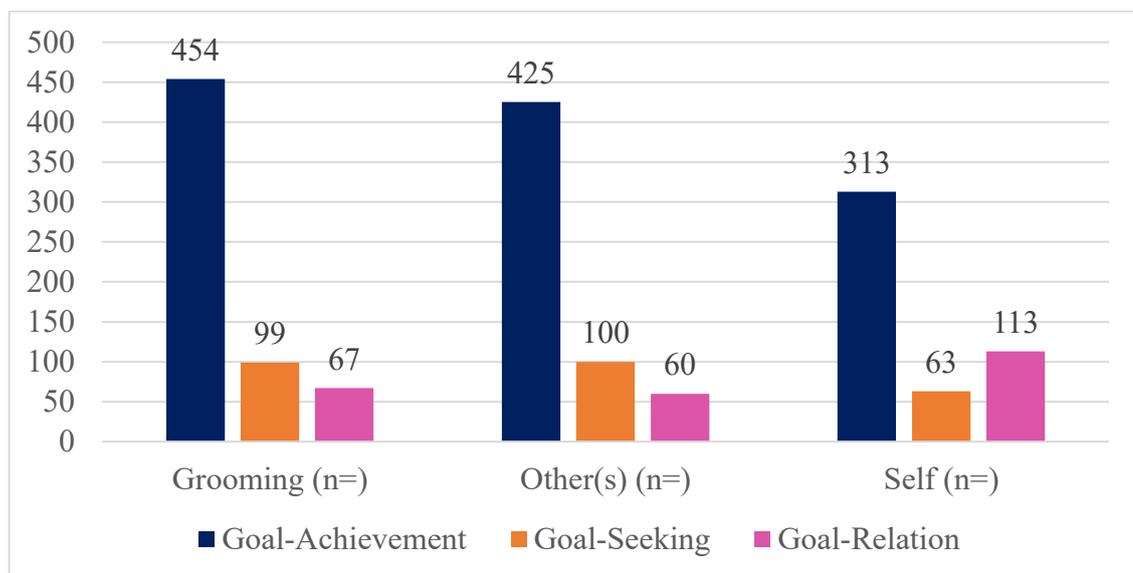


Figure 6.3 shows that, within GA, all children (30/30, 100%) made one or more reference to GA oriented emotions when discussing their Grooming or Other(s)-triggered emotions. Self-triggered GA emotions were referenced by 93% of children in the sample (28/30). Results for GS oriented emotions show that most children (27/30, 90%) referenced these emotions as triggered by the Grooming or by Other(s) (27/30, 83%) with 70% (21/30) of children referencing Self-triggered emotions within this category. Finally, when it comes to GR-oriented emotions most children stated their emotion was triggered by the Grooming or the Self (19/30, 63%, respectively) with references emotions triggered by Other(s), made by 57% (17/30) children. These findings indicate not only that children were able to articulate their emotions sufficiently clearly to be coded, but that most children within the sample were expressing emotions that spanned the proposed spectrum of goal-orientation proposed by Benitez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio (2019) presents the breakdown of children’s emotion discourse orientation across the three core triggers within their discourse.

**Figure 6.4** Breakdown of Children’s Discourse of Emotion Orientations across the Three Triggers for Children’s Emotions Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of References.

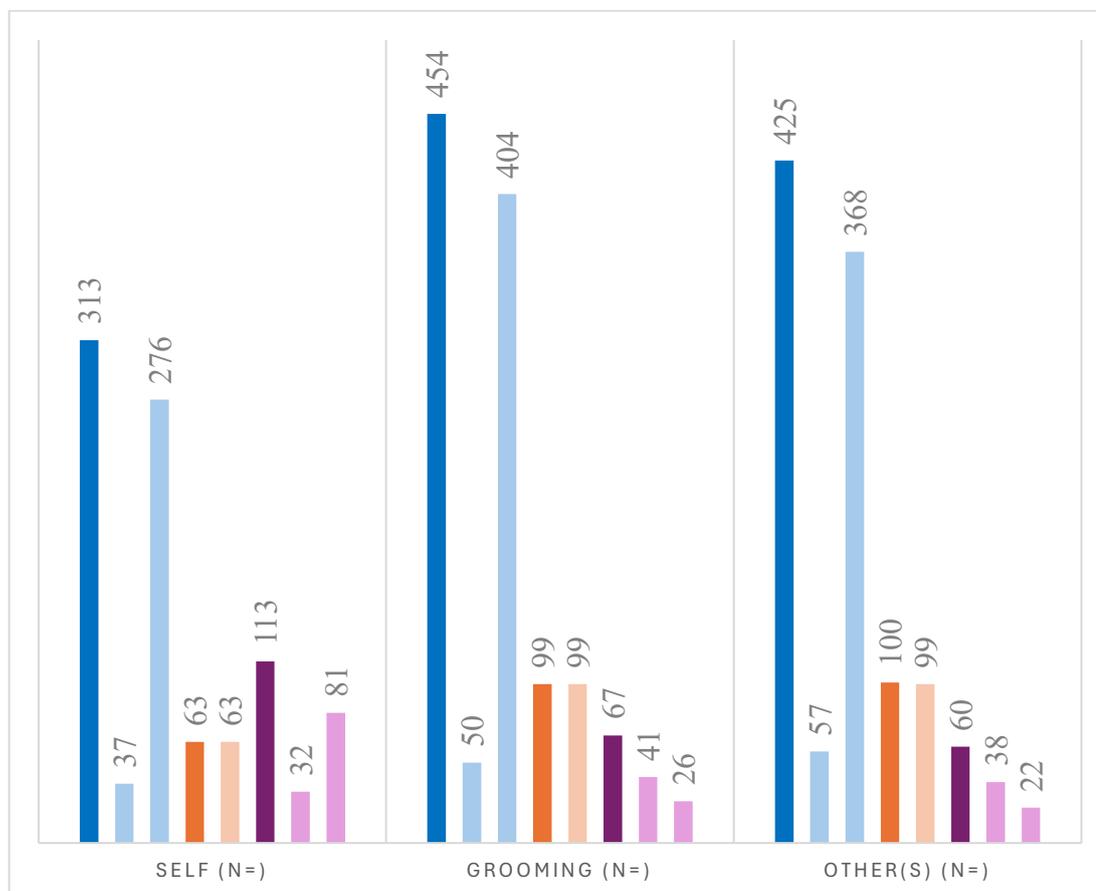


		Grooming (%)	Other(s) (%)	Self (%)
Goal-Achievement		73.23%	72.65%	64.01%
Goal-Seeking		15.97%	17.09%	12.88%
Goal-Relation		10.80%	10.26%	23.11%

Figure 6.4 reveals distinctions across the triggers for children's emotion discourse. When Grooming was the identified trigger, children most frequently referenced GA-oriented emotions in 73.23% of references (454/620), followed by GS in 15.97% (99/620) of references and GR represented 10.80% of references (67/620). When Other(s) were the identified trigger, children's emotions were oriented to GA sub-categories in 72.65% of references (425/585). GS oriented emotions comprised 17.09% of references (100/585) and Goal-Relation emotions 10.26% (60/585) of references. Finally, when the child referenced emotions-triggered by their Self-perception, these were GA-oriented 64.01% (313/489) of the time, showing children expressed high levels of self-dissatisfaction despite having been victims of abuse and the crime of DSCG (see Figure 6.5, below). Self-triggered GS and GR-oriented emotions inverted the pattern observed for Grooming and Other(s) triggered emotions. Children referenced GR-oriented emotions with 23.11% frequency (113/489) and GS least frequently at 12.88% (63/489).

Figure 6.5 presents an overview of findings of the Level 1 (L1) categories within Benitez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio's (2019) taxonomy. As shown in Chapter Three, the taxonomy works across different sub-levels. L1-4 of the taxonomy will be presented throughout the remainder of this chapter to enhance the depth and granularity of analysis.

**Figure 6.5** Overview Findings Children’s Emotional Discourse Trigger, Level 1, Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of References.



	Self (%)	Grooming (%)	Other(s) (%)
<b>Goal-Achievement</b>	<b>64.01%</b>	<b>73.23%</b>	<b>72.65</b>
Satisfaction	11.82%	11.01%	13.41%
Dissatisfaction	<b>88.18%</b>	<b>88.99%</b>	<b>86.59%</b>
<b>Goal-Seeking</b>	<b>12.88%</b>	<b>15.97%</b>	<b>17.09%</b>
Attention Grabbing	-	-	1.0%
(Dis)Inclination	100%	100.00%	99.00%
<b>Goal-Relation</b>	<b>23.11%</b>	<b>10.80%</b>	<b>10.26%</b>
Attraction	28.32%	<b>61.19%</b>	<b>63.33%</b>
Repulsion	<b>71.68%</b>	38.81%	36.67%

Figure 6.5 highlights that within GA, across all three triggers, the most frequent categories within children’s discourse of emotion were predominantly negatively valenced. Within GA, Dissatisfaction across all three targets for children’s AFFECT discourse (Self; 276/313, 88.18%; Grooming, 404/454, 88.99% and Other(s) 368/425, 86.59%) was significantly more frequently referenced than Satisfaction (Self; 37/313, 11.82%; Grooming, 50/454, 11.01% and Other(s) 57/425, 13.41%).

When it comes to both GS and GR, the valenced dimension was less clear cut. (Dis)Inclination accounted for almost all references within GS-oriented emotion discourse across all three triggers (Self, 63/63, 100%; Grooming, 99/99, 100% and Other(s) 99/100, 99.0%), with references to Attention-Seeking barely present. (Dis)Inclination comprises both Inclination and Disinclination (Chapter Three). Inclination is not necessarily positively valenced and may include the child wanting something not to happen or something to stop, which creates a certain fuzziness around the valence of dis/inclination utterances within children's discourse.

With regards to GR-oriented emotions, a different pattern was observed: the positively valenced AFFECT category of Attraction was more frequent in children's Grooming and Other(s)-triggered discourse than the negatively valenced category of Repulsion (representing 61.19%, 41/67 and 63.33% (38/60) of references respectively). When it came to the Self, however, Self-triggered Repulsion accounted for 71.68% (81/113) of references, whereas Affection towards the Self represented 28.32% (32/113) of children's GR-oriented discourse.

For reasons of space, within the remainder of this section, for Grooming-triggered and Other(s)-triggered emotion discourse, results for the most frequently referenced categories of GA and GS-oriented emotions are presented. For Self-triggered emotion discourse, results for GA and GR-oriented emotions are presented.

### **6.3 Children's Grooming-Triggered Discourse of Emotion: Goal Achievement-Oriented**

Table 6.1 presents the overview findings regarding children's GA emotions, triggered by the Grooming. Findings are presented both by the number of references to L1-4 of the Benitez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio (2019) AFFECT taxonomy and the percentage of the subtotal of L1-4 of the taxonomy. The number and percentage of children making the references is also presented.

**Table 6.1** *Children’s Goal-Achievement Emotions Overview Findings Grooming (Levels 1-4) Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency of References (n=454/%) of Children Referencing*

<b>GA_Groomer_Totaled Goal-Achievement Emotions</b>	<b>Children (n=/30)</b>	<b>Children (%)</b>	<b>References (n=/454)</b>	<b>References (%)</b>
Satisfaction	17	57%	50	11.01%
Security	12	40%	17	34.00%
Quiet	6	20%	7	41.18%
Trust	9	30%	10	58.82%
Confident	4	13%	5	50.00%
Trusting	2	7%	2	20.00%
Hope	3	10%	3	30.00%
Happiness	11	37%	33	66.00%
Hedonic	4	13%	5	15.15%
Eudaimonic	11	37%	28	84.85%
Dissatisfaction	30	100%	404	88.99%
Insecurity	30	100%	340	84.16%
Disquiet	30	100%	325	95.59%
Confused	24	80%	76	23.38%
Anxious	25	83%	85	26.15%
Fearful	24	80%	60	18.46%
Ashamed	25	83%	104	32.00%
Distrust	11	37%	15	4.41%
Doubtful	6	20%	7	46.67%
Mistrust	5	17%	8	53.33%
Unhappiness	19	63%	64	15.84%
Anger	4	13%	4	6.25%
Frustrated	3	10%	3	75.00%
Angry	1	3%	1	25.00%
Misery	18	60%	60	93.75%
Lonely	7	23%	9	15.00%
Regret	5	17%	6	10.00%
Sadness	16	53%	45	75.00%

As shown in Table 6.1 within GA, Grooming-triggered emotions of Dissatisfaction (404/454, 88.99%) were referenced by every child (30/30) and occurred more saliently than Grooming-triggered emotions of Satisfaction (50/454, 11.01%), which were referenced by 57% of children (17/30).<sup>108</sup> Satisfaction is made up of two sub-emotions and Happiness (33/50, 66.00%) was more frequent in children’s discourse than (ii) Security (17/50, 34.00%). However, Security was mentioned by 40%

<sup>108</sup> The high frequency of Grooming-triggered Dissatisfaction and relatively low frequency of triggered Satisfaction could reflect the context via which the data was obtained. Children have taken agentive action to reach out to the counselling service for help due to a sense that something has gone wrong or that they feel they need external help or support with their experience of grooming.

(12/30) of children, a similar number of children (11/30, 37%) referred to emotions of Happiness in their discourse.

Of the two Happiness sub-categories Eudaimonic Happiness was most frequently referenced by children in their Grooming-triggered discourse representing 84.85% of references (28/33) and mentioned by 37% (11/30) of children. Hedonic happiness on the other hand was much less frequently mentioned representing 15.15% of children's references to happiness and referenced by 13% (4/30) children. This suggests that children were more concerned with happiness linked to the fulfilment of social needs i.e. the presentation, construction and preservation of their formation of face i.e. building their public image, than the more pleasure-centred Hedonic Happiness. This concurs with previous work that suggests children's want and need to form relationships and the need to be positively received by others as part of their wider project of self-development may be a core personal goal they are pursuing when engaging with strangers online (Chapter Five, Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al, 2023). Due to the low frequency of Satisfaction-oriented emotions in children's discourse, these findings are not discussed in detail.

### ***6.3.1 Children's Grooming-Triggered Dissatisfaction***

As shown in Table 6.1 GA\_Dissatisfaction is made up of two L2 emotions (i) Insecurity and (ii) Unhappiness. Table 6.1 shows that children expressed emotions of Insecurity (340/404, 84.16%) much more frequently than Unhappiness (64/404, 15.84%). Insecurity was referenced by every child in the sample when discussing Grooming-triggered emotions (30/30, 100%). Unhappiness was referenced by 63% of children (19/30). Insecurity, as the most frequently mentioned emotion, is discussed first, followed by a brief discussion and analysis of findings about children's discourses of Unhappiness.

**Children's Grooming-Triggered Insecurity.** At L3 of the taxonomy, Insecurity is made up of two sub-emotions: (i) Disquiet and Distrust. Within Insecurity, 95.59% (325/340) of children's references referred to Disquiet, which was referenced by every child (30/30, 100%). It is salient that children infrequently

articulated emotions of Grooming-triggered Distrust (15/340; 4.41% of references to Insecurity). It shows that children, at the point of discussing their experience with a third-party counsellor, did not communicate a lack of trust or feelings of doubt about the groomer/grooming experience. Rather, their emotional discourse revolved around Disquiet and feeling ill-at-ease. Insecurity arises in situations where our well-being, or a specific goal, is threatened (Benitez-Castro & Hidalgo-Tenorio, 2019). Their revised system distinguishes several subtypes to provide more descriptive detail, coding for which provided important insights.

As shown in Figure 6.6 there are four sub-emotions of Insecurity at L4 of the AFFECT taxonomy. The taxonomy required some inductive revision of the themes present in children’s discourse within the DCSG context, namely the addition of the Ashamed category. L4 categories thus comprised children’s discourse of feeling (i) Anxious; (ii) Ashamed; (iii) Confused and (iv) Fearful.

**Figure 6.6** *Children’s Discourse Goal Achievement \_Insecurity Subcategories as a Proportion of Total Disquiet References (n=/325)/ Percentage (%)*

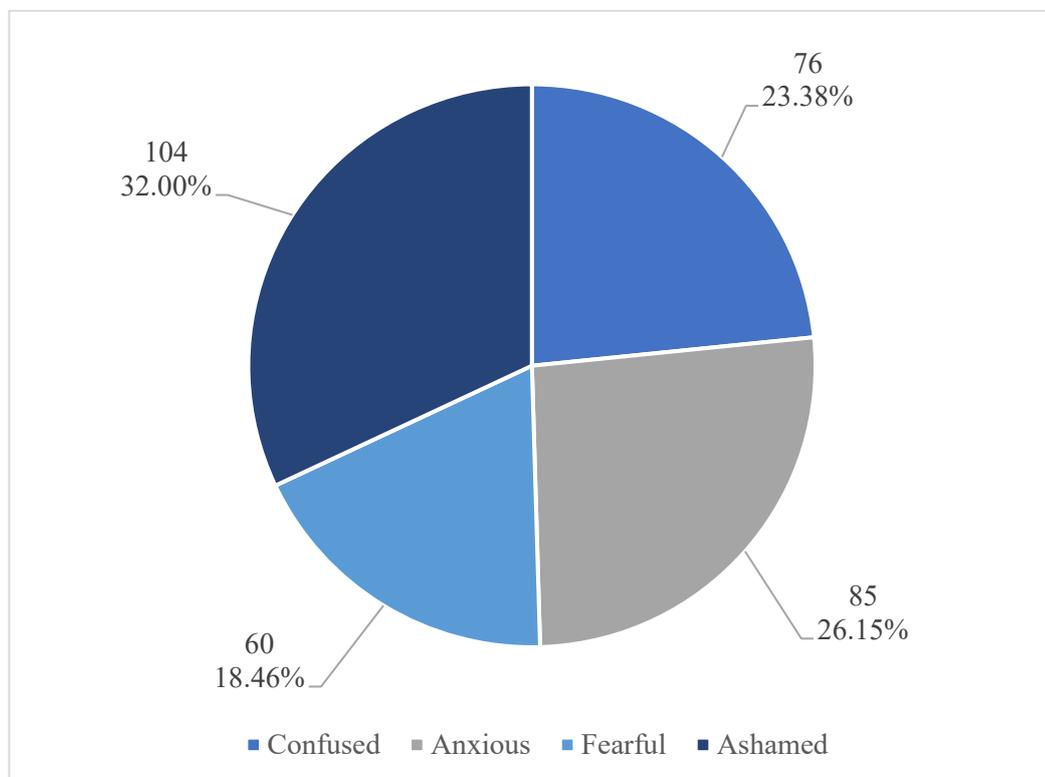


Figure 6.6 shows that children’s expressions of Insecurity sub-emotions were relatively evenly represented in children’s Grooming-triggered discourse. Feeling

Ashamed (32.00%, 104/325) was referenced the most frequently. Next children expressed feeling Anxious in 26.15% of references (85/325). Expressions of Confusion occurred slightly less frequently at 23.38% (76/325) and emotions aligned to feeling Fearful represented 18.46% (60/325) of children's expressed emotions. It was also notable that within the category of Insecurity, children frequently expressed a mixture of one or more emotions, i.e. Ashamed and Anxious/Fearful and Ashamed. Feelings of Insecurity were thus multi-directional, and expressed simultaneously, which led to frequent double coding. Children's discourse therefore showed the complexity of their Insecurity emotions.

*Children's Grooming-Triggered Insecurity\_Disquiet\_Ashamed.* As shown in Figure 6.6 feeling Ashamed was the most frequently referenced Grooming-triggered emotion (104/325; 32.00%) referenced by 25/30 children (83%). Children's shame-oriented discourse was inherently bi-directional as although children often referenced it as Grooming-triggered it is also inherently triggered by perceptions of the Self. There is thus a degree of blurring present. This seems to provide evidence of the self-shame fusion (Chapter Two, Broucek, 1991) and emphasises the turmoil of emotions children were attempting to navigate. The Ashamed sub-emotion was discursively realized in diverse range of ways in children's discourse.

While some children were explicit in naming their shame, the use of the noun "guilt"/adjective "guilty" were regularly used as synonyms for Ashamed feelings in children's Grooming-triggered discourse. The linguistic choice of "guilt/guilty" indicated a perception of responsibility and ownership by the child of what had happened, as seen in Extract\_6.2:

Extract\_6.2

1	C018	so i only sent him a picture of my breasts (even though he did
2		ask for more and i said no) but i feel so guilty and i know it was
3		so wrong but i felt as though i had to do it otherwise he get mad

Although guilt and shame are often used interchangeably research shows there are important distinctions that continue to be debated (Tangney, 1998; Tangney & Tracey, 2012; Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2018). Broadly, guilt is a feeling you get when

you believe you did something wrong (Blitvich, 2022). Shame is a feeling that your whole self is wrong, an emotion that may not be directly related to a specific behaviour or event (Taguey & Tracey, 2012). In Extract\_6.2 the child's use of "i feel so guilty" (2) showed they were claiming the action of sending the nude picture to the groomer as something they did wrong, further illustrated by "i know it was so wrong" (2). However, the child also communicated awareness of the constraints influencing their decision. Firstly, the child talked about how they attempted to resist the groomer's request, using resistance to attempt to bargain (Negotiate, see Chapter Seven) by sending the groomer less than they asked for ("i only sent him a picture of my breasts (even though he did ask for more and i said no"), (1-2)). Secondly the type of negotiation chosen demonstrated an awareness that the perceived attack on the groomer's face wants could anger the groomer. This appeared to make the child feel obliged to send the image to avoid the groomer's reaction by managing and partially attending to his face needs ("I felt as though I had to do it otherwise he get mad", (3)).

Self-blame was also typical of how children expressed Grooming-triggered Shame. Extract\_6.3 shows how this manifested in children's discourse.

#### Extract\_6.3

1	C018	The thing is, X was 18-19, and I was 13-14. But I was agreeing to
2		everything, I encouraged it and at times initiated it, so I don't know
3		what to call it because I was acting (and felt) as though I was in a
4		relationship.

A linguistic characteristic of children's internalization of blame for their abuse was the use of the first-person singular subject pronoun "I". The child regularly, as in Extract\_6.3 shifted the responsibility for their experience onto their own actions ("I encouraged it and at times initiated it", (2); "I was acting (and felt) as though I was in a relationship", (3)). The child here, because of their sense of self-blame, found it difficult to rationalise that their experience was grooming "so I don't know what to call it" (3). Other extracts show children asserting "I made a mistake"; "I was naïve"; "I'm messed up", turning the blame for their experience inwards.

*Children's Grooming-Triggered Insecurity\_Disquiet\_Anxiety.* Children's expressions of Grooming-triggered Anxiety were a mixture of direct references to feeling "anxious" and where the child's anxiety was indicated more implicitly by other linguistic markers in their interaction with the counsellor. Extract\_6.4 is typical of direct expressions of anxiety within children's discourse.

Extract\_6.4

1 C001 yea i feel like very very anxious and nervous and i start to think about  
2 what would've happened if i didn't tell my mum and it scares me you  
3 here about think like this in school or on facebook and you never think its  
4 gonna happen until it is you

In Extract\_6.4 the child's explicit articulation of their anxiety emotions, was achieved through their use of the adjective "anxious" and synonym "nervous" which provided an amplification effect ("yea i feel like very very anxious and nervous", (1)). The emphatic repetition of "very" (1) to further reiterate the sentiment showed the child's preoccupation with communicating the intensity of the emotion to the counsellor. In this extract, while the anxiety and "nervousness" expressed by the child was Grooming-triggered it was also mingled with what "would've happened" (2). This showed that the child's "telling" their mum what had happened marked a potential solution to halt the anxiety-inducing grooming experiences that had triggered the child's emotions.

However, despite some instances of children's explicit use of the noun "anxiety", children were also indirect in their expression of anxiety, as illustrated by

Extract\_6.5:

Extract\_6.5

1 C008 he gets angry with me easily and everytime he does i worry that  
2 hes going to send the images on

In Extract\_6.5 the child linked their anxiety to "worry" about the groomer's possession of images and videos that solicited during DCSG. Through children's discourse across the thesis thus far, visual artefacts such as CCII/CCIV (Chapter Two e.g. Hanson, 2017) are integral and powerful semiotic tools that serve as key

facilitators of DCSG. The ability to share but also to store and steal images from children using digital smartphone and SNS technology has been highlighted to be exploited by groomers across previous chapters. The analysis of children's discourse of emotion further underlines that this practice is inherently relational and communicative, it is central to instilling and perpetuating a sense of insecurity and fundamental to diminishing the child's sense of agency. In Extract\_6.5 this is evidenced by the child's explicitness in communicating the coercion they felt from the groomer, which triggered their "worry". Here the child connected the groomer's aggressive attitude ("he gets angry with me easily", (1)) with their anxiety ("and everytime he does i worry", (1)) showing the perceived threat the child felt of exposure ("hes going to send the images on", (1-2)). The child's use of the adverbials "easily" and "everytime" (1) communicates the child having felt at mercy of the combination of the groomer's shifting moods (facework) and the ease of distribution facilitated by smartphone technology/SNS platforms (sanctioned by unchecked technological affordances), which created a fundamental sense of lack of control and insecurity.

Despite some children being able to express their anxiety clearly using a range of synonyms to denote worry, for other children their anxiety was communicated in a more implicit manner through their linguistic presentation within the counselling interaction. In these cases, the child's expression of their feelings of Anxiety needed to be elicited and scaffolded by the counsellor. This validates the importance of supportive structures to aid children to disclose CSA, an experience that exceeds their boundaries for coping (Chapter Two e.g. Jensen, 2005). Children's discourse illustrates how, when supported by an attuned adult, children were able to articulate and express complex emotions. Extract\_6.6 shows an example of this type of presentation of an implicit expression of Anxiety:

#### Extract\_6.6

1	C017	Then the person recorded my nudes and checekd all my family friends
2		accounts and saved them and said if i dont pay him £500 he will send the
3		picture what should i do?
4		U can speak now i need your help
5		R u there?
6		...

7 CL017 It sound slike you're really worried that your family will get to see these photos  
 8 C017 Yes i am as i dont hav eneough money  
 9 I was awake all night  
 10 He is one button away frok sending thesw pictures to my friends and family can  
 11 you help  
 12 ...  
 13 Im shaking  
 14 ...  
 15 My photo isnt online it is in someones gallery and its about to be sent to my  
 16 family please i beg you help me  
 17 I knoe and i hav no time to waste 😞  
 18 Help me help me help me i feel like im dying

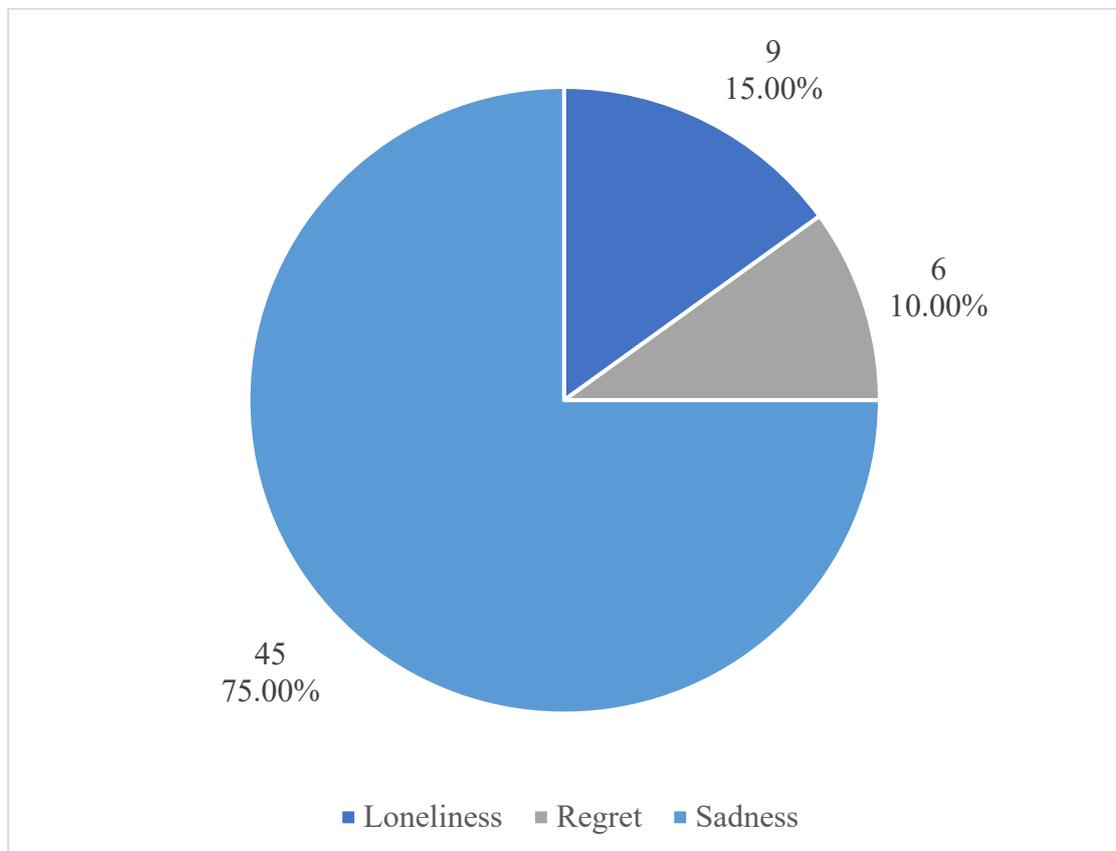
Extract\_6.6 begins with the child issuing five lines in quick succession (1-5). The child used a series of questions which show heightened anxiety and a sense of urgency to receive help and information (“what should I do?”, (3), “r u there?”, (5)). The child’s open request for help, and their use of the verb “need”, indicated their intense worry and sense of desperation (“U can speak now i need your help”, (4)). The child’s typographical errors indicated the speed at which they were likely typing (although potentially also an indicator of their age and stage of development and the text-speak context). The counsellor picked up these linguistic cues of the child’s anxiety and reflected it back to the child (“It sound slike you’re really worried”, (7)). The counsellor’s use of the intensifying adverb “really” indicates their having heard the intensity of emotion expressed. The child affirms this (“yes i am”, (8)) connecting it not having the financial means to meet the groomer’s sextortion demands (“as i dont hav eneough money”, (8)). The child reiterated their anxiety through discussion of the physical impact of anxiety-levels interfering with their sleep (“I was awake all night”, (9)). The child indicates extreme anxiety and panic (mixed with fear) imploring (“please, i beg you”, (16)) the counsellor to help (“i need your help”, (4); “can you help”, (10-11); “please i beg you help me”, (16); “help me help me help me”, (17) with urgency (“i hav no time to waste 😞”, (16)). The extremity of the anxiety felt by the child is illustrated by their statement (“i feel like im dying”, 18)).

**Children’s Grooming-Triggered Dissatisfaction\_Unhappiness.** The second L2 category within GA oriented Dissatisfaction is Unhappiness, which comprises two L3 sub-categories of unhappiness namely (i) Anger and (ii) Misery.

Within Grooming-triggered Unhappiness, children were found to predominantly reference Misery (60/64, 93.75%) mentioned by 63% of children in the sample (19/30). Grooming-triggered Anger, comprised of subcategories of (i) Frustration (3/64) and (ii) Anger (1/64), barely featured in children's discourse. This is salient as feeling and expressing Anger could be expected as an empowered response towards a sense of injustice, recognition of a threat to face or feeling undeserving of what somebody's behaviour towards you. Anger would suggest an individual's confidence in their own ability to exert agency to change their situation. Misery on the other hand is a disempowering and passive emotion, its expression suggesting individuals feel helpless or powerless to change their circumstances. The salience of Misery within children's Grooming-directed discourse therefore seems to evidence children's interpretation of constrained agency and their feelings of powerlessness in DCSG interactions.

*Children's Grooming-Triggered Dissatisfaction\_Misery.* Figure 6.7 provides a breakdown of children's expression of Misery showing three sub-categories of Loneliness, Regret and Sadness in children's discourse.

**Figure 6.7** *Child Groomer/Grooming-triggered Discourse \_Dissatisfaction  
Unhappiness\_Misery (n=/60)*



Figure\_6.7 shows that within Grooming-triggered Misery, children most often expressed Sadness, which represented 75.00% of references (45/60), mentioned by 53% of children (19/30). Loneliness (9/60, 15.00%) and Regret (6/60, 10.00%) occurred with low frequency mentioned by 23% (7/30) and 17% (5/30) of children respectively. Due to their low frequency, Loneliness and Regret are not discussed.

Analysis of children’s Sadness discourse shows this emotion may be more complex and intricate than the label “sadness” allows. This was the rationale for the adaptations proposed to the AFFECT Taxonomy, (Chapter Three), and the reversion to the term “misery” to better encapsulate the cline of intensity observed in children’s discourse within the coercive and trauma-laden sexual abuse context of DCSG.

Some children talked in general terms about feeling low or “down” with others more explicit in naming their emotions as akin to depression, as shown in Extract\_6.7:

### Extract\_6.7

1           C012    Hi there. Ive got an issue which might sound a bit silly but it's really  
2                           important to me and its slowly been worrying me more and more and  
3                           ive started to feel a bit depressed.

Some children, within Sadness, talked about more extreme feelings of despair, which manifested as a sense of being stuck or trapped, wanting to flee and escape their situation and emotions, as seen in Extract\_6.8:

### Extract\_6.8

1           C002    I feel like i cant stay here  
2           CL002    What do you mean when you say you don't feel you can stay here?  
3           C002    I feel like i need to go like disappear so he wont do it  
4           CL002    I don't understand, Can you tell me what you mean when you say  
5                           "disappear?"  
6           C002    Running away or just dying rn

In Extract\_6.8 the child appeared to have felt unable to stand the force of their emotions, their language showing that their fight or flight instinct was triggered ("I feel like i cant stay here", (1); "i need to go like disappear", (3)). The child's use of "i cant stay here" (1) may have been a vague reference to suicide ideation, the child's desperation leading them to feel that that physical escape by fleeing or ending their life is the only option available ("running away or just dying rn", (6)). This suggested the child's interpretation of a deep constraint on their agency and sense of self by the groomer's control over the decision whether to share images ("so he wont do it", (4)).

Some children's discourse also showed symptoms of trauma that bears an intensity not adequately captured by the term "sadness". These have in some instances, been double coded as anxiety due to the panic-type feelings expressed. However, given that they contribute to a sense of psychological distress it was decided they should also be classed as Misery, to capture and communicate the sense of deep unhappiness and trauma present in children's discourse of emotion. This suggests a blurring between misery and anxiety in children's discourse about DCSG that has not been

examined in detail by previous studies. An illustration of the types of intense expressions of “sadness” within children’s discourse can be seen in Extract 6.9:

Extract\_6.9

1           C002    ill think about it for one second and ill become really really hot.  
 2                            way too hot my head feels like it filling with water and i lose  
 3                            my balance sometimes i even lose sight for a few seconds

In Extract\_6.9 the child was capable of clearly articulating their physical reactions to the psychological trauma of the abuse (“ill become really really hot, way too hot”, 1-2)), an utterance reminiscent of panic attack symptoms. The child’s repetition of the adverbial “really” and their use of the colloquial intensifier “way too” show the extreme of emotion. The child’s description of potential panic attack or PTSD symptoms was clearly and imaginatively communicated using a metaphor for feeling overwhelmed and out of control (“my head feels like it filling with water”, (2)) and indicating the physical symptoms of feeling vulnerable and not on a sure footing (“i lose my balance sometimes i even lose sight for a few seconds”, (2-3)). Other children talked about suffering flashbacks, and difficulty sleeping as well as physical symptoms such as shaking and crying.

**6.4 Children’s Grooming-Triggered Discourse of Emotion: Goal-Seeking-Oriented**

Results regarding children’s Grooming-triggered Goal-Seeking oriented emotions are presented at Table 6.2.

**Table 6.2** *Children’s Grooming-Triggered Goal-Seeking Emotions Overview*  
*Number (n=/30) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency of*  
*References (n=/99 and %)*

GS_Grooming Goal-Seeking Emotions	Children (n=27)	Children (%/30)	References (n=/99)	References (%)
L1 (Dis)Inclination	27	90%	99	100.00%
L2 Inclined	19	63%	44	44.44%
L2 Disinclined	26	87%	55	55.56%

As shown in Table 6.2 all GS-oriented emotions (100%) concerned (Dis)Inclination. Disinclined (not wanting something) (55/99, 55.56%) was more salient in children’s



As indicated by Extract\_6.11 children were direct in communicating disinclination when groomer demands conflicted with their own goals and wishes. However, the constraints on the child's ability to enact and stand firm in their disinclination were also present in the dataset (Chapter Seven on children's resistance). In Extract\_6.11 the child's use of the explicit coercive verb "pressures" (1) and the temporal indicator of repetitions ("once or twice a night since that day", 2)) are the facework backdrop to the child's disinclination (Chapter Five). The child's discourse communicates that they felt forced into "doing things i don't want to do" (2). The child states that they were clear in articulating their disinclination to the groomer "ive told him i don't want to" (3) but that this was met with challenge, ignored and overridden by the groomer communicative tactics ("but he wont listen", (4)). Children's emotion discourse further evidences the cognitive complexity of interpreting the groomer's nice/nasty pivoting (Chapter Five) and emphasises the need to study the dynamics of child resistance and groomer challenge (see Chapter Two e.g. Lorenzo-Dus et al. 2024).

#### ***6.4.2 Children's Grooming-Triggered Inclination.***

Grooming-triggered Inclination comprised four types observed in children's discourse. Firstly, children referenced "wanting" to engage with strangers online. Secondly, children's discourse showed a desire to place boundaries around the type of relationship they had with the groomer, wanting/wishing to limit or stop the sexualised nature of the interaction. Thirdly, children expressed wanting to physically remove themselves and flee from their experiences. Finally, children's discourse showed a desire for the groomer to face retribution or consequences.

Despite societal narratives of children "making risky choices" while exploring their sexualities online (Chapter Two), children made few references to being inclined to pursue or "wanting" to engage with strangers online. Extract\_6.12 is typical of the few references by children to an inclination to interact with the groomer:

## Extract\_6.12

- |   |       |  |
|---|-------|--|
| 1 | CL028 | How do you feel now about going on the website, now that |
| 2 |       | Mum and Dad know more about it?                          |
| 3 | C028  | i don't know   |
| 4 |       | i don't know sometimes i regret it other times i want to |
| 5 |       | it makes me so messed up ??                              |

Extract\_6.12 shows the simultaneous conflict and compulsion the child felt towards visiting websites and talking to strangers online. In Extract\_6.12 the child's repeated "i don't know" (3-4) showed the child's hesitancy and internal conflict. The tension they felt was further demonstrated by their pivoting between inclination and disinclination/regret ("sometimes i regret it other times i want to", (4)). The pivoting possibly reflected the child's age and developmentally appropriate interest and impulse to explore, push boundaries and experiment in digital contexts (see e.g. Baumgartner et al., 2010; Livingstone et al., 2011; Quayle et al., 2012; Whittle et al., 2013; Wolak et al., 2008). This extract also shows the child's internalization of wider societal discourse that explicitly or implicitly blames them for taking risks that contradict messages about the importance that they "keep themselves safe". The child's absorption of these messages was reflected in the child's rhetorical question ("it makes me so messed up??", (5)). The emphatic double question mark gives the sense of how the tension triggered existential stress for the child which was extremely challenging to rationalise and navigate. From these two extracts we can see how the child's "inclination" to explore and experiment online was not straightforward and how it revealed their unease, highlighting feelings of disorientation, insecurity, and vulnerability.

The second category of Grooming-triggered Inclination did not reflect "wanting" to engage but rather the child wanting or wishing the experience to stop. It showed children's Inclination to reorient and boundary the relationship towards their own goals of relationship-building, self-formation and exploration. These goals were at odds with the sexualised nature of the groomer's communication as shown in Extract\_6.13:

#### Extract\_6.13

1           C008       how do i stop this  
2                        cos its going to ruin my future

Children, as in Extract\_6.13, expressed inclination through a call for help geared towards self-preservation. Their discourse showed inclination for the abuse to “stop”, articulated through clear questions and pleas for help (“how do i stop this”, 1)). The child’s sense of being trapped and powerless to halt the abuse was indicated by their causal subordinate clause (“cos its going to ruin my future”, 2)).

Children also showed inclination to physically remove themselves from their experiences, to escape. Articulating this desire represents a communicative representation of the fight or flight instinct that arises when individuals feel trapped or cornered or that their agency to influence their circumstance is heavily constrained, seen in Extract\_6.14:

#### Extract\_6.14

1           C011    i did something really dumb and its really embarrassing and i wish  
2                        that i never did it but now i cant change it anymore and noone will  
3                        understand they will hust laugh at me  
4                        and now i just want to run away from everything  
5                        ...  
6                        i had a message on instagram and it was from someone that i didnt  
7                        know but they was following all of my friends and everyone that i  
8                        knew from my school and the school close to mine and it was a girl  
9                        and she had lots of comments on them from my friends and stuff  
10                      ... we got talking and we was talking for ages and she was really  
11                      nice like we was speaking for months ans then she said that  
12                      she wanted to meet me

In Extract\_6.14 the child’s all-consuming desire to evade their situation, was expressed by their use of the indefinite pronoun “everything” (4). Here “everything” was a vague way to refer to the grooming and its impacts, however the child was more explicit in describing the grooming as the extract unfolded. The child’s use of a generic, all-encompassing term (“everything”, 4)) also gave a sense of

comprehensiveness to the child's desire to "run away" (4), that their desperation infected everything. The adverbial "just" (4) could have been used as a hedge, to temper the child's desire to escape which asserts a level of agency and choice that society often does not afford or expect from children. The inclination to run showed that children's discourse evidenced that when they felt cornered, and their agentive action environment closed off, they seemed to be perceiving that their only option was self-erasure through physical flight ('running away').

Children also expressed an inclination for retribution or for action triggered by the grooming. Extract\_6.15 shows how this manifested in children's discourse.

Extract\_6.15

- |   |       |  |
|---|-------|--|
| 1 | CL014 | Ok X. What you've told me is that you are talking to someone who you |
| 2 |       | suspect is a paedophile that you met on Tinder, and that he wants to |
| 3 |       | meet with you, and that you are talking to him on Whatsapp. What do  |
| 4 |       | you think your options might be?                                     |
| 5 | C014  | i dont know i want him to be stopped                                 |

Extract\_6.15 shows a vagueness in the child's expression, they were unclear of their options when questioned by the counsellor ("i don't know...", (5)). The child's active want statement ("i want him to be stopped", (5)) was clear but their passive construction that they wanted the groomer "to be stopped" (by someone else) rather than wanting to stop the groomer themselves suggested a perception blocked self-actualisation. The child was looking to the counsellor as a trusted adult to help them to navigate and set in train actions that would "stop" and halt the groomer's actions on their behalf. This indicated a rejection by the child of the responsibility implicitly placed by society on them to be resilient or keep themselves safe (Chapter Two). It also suggested that children could be looking (in line with their right to protection under Articles 16 and 19 of the UNCRC) to adults to provide the protection and solutions they need.<sup>110</sup> Children's search for help and support from the adults around

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<sup>110</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) **Article 16: Protection of privacy** Every child has the right to privacy. The law must protect children's privacy, family, home, communications and reputation (or good name) from any attack. **Article 19: Protection from violence** Governments must protect children from violence, abuse and being neglected by anyone who looks after them.

them is indicated by the salience of Other(s)-triggered emotions within their discourse, discussed in the next section.

### **6.5 Children's Other(s)-Triggered Discourse of Emotion: Goal-Achievement-Oriented**

As shown in Figure 6.2 affective references triggered by Other(s) represented 33.16% (585/1764) of references. Within children's Other(s)-triggered emotion discourse, two principal sub-triggers were observed. Children's discourse of emotion was either directed towards a variety of support sources<sup>111</sup> or triggered by children's affective response about a collective 'Other'.<sup>112</sup> In the discussion that follows these two sub-categories are combined to form the Other(s) category. The prevalence of Other(s)-triggered emotions in children's discourse is not surprising given the counselling context studied which was designed to offer support and talk through advice and sources of potential help with the child. However, it further validates that children had a heightened and fragile face within DCSG interactions, that children were articulating clear (and predominantly negatively valenced) emotions towards Other(s) in their discourse and that this was preoccupying children with as much frequency as discussion of their Grooming experiences.

Table 6.3 presents an overview of Children's GA\_Other(s)-triggered emotions observed in children's discourse.

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<sup>111</sup> References to parents/carers/family, safeguarding/advice services, police, school and peers (showing the multi-directional nature of children's support-triggered emotion discourse).

<sup>112</sup> A generalised category of "other people" or society.

**Table 6.3** *Children’s Goal-Achievement Oriented Emotions Overview: Other(s)-Triggered. Findings (Level 1-4) Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency (n=/425 and %) of References*

<b>GA_Other Goal-Achievement Emotions</b>	<b>Children (n=/30)</b>	<b>Children (%/30)</b>	<b>References (n=425)</b>	<b>References (%)</b>
L1 Satisfaction	24	80%	57	13.41%
L2 Security	16	53%	32	56.14%
L3 Quiet	16	53%	26	81.25%
L3 Trust	5	17%	6	18.75%
L4 Confident	3	10%	3	50.00%
L4 Trusting	2	7%	2	33.33%
L4 Hope	1	3%	1	16.67%
L2 Happiness	12	40%	25	43.86%
L3 Hedonic	2	7%	2	8.00%
L3 Eudaimonic	12	40%	23	92.00%
L1 Dissatisfaction	30	100%	368	86.59%
L2 Insecurity	29	97%	296	80.43%
L3 Disquiet	29	97%	283	95.61%
L4 Confused	23	77%	75	26.50%
L4 Anxious	25	83%	82	28.98%
L4 Fearful	20	67%	57	20.14%
L4 Ashamed	23	77%	69	24.38%
L3 Distrust	8	27%	13	4.39%
L4 Doubtful	1	3%	1	7.69%
L4 Mistrust	7	23%	12	92.31%
L2 Unhappiness	19	63%	72	19.57%
L3 Anger	6	20%	10	13.89%
L4 Frustrated	4	13%	6	60.00%
L4 Angry	3	10%	4	40.00%
L3 Misery	18	60%	62	86.11%
L4 Lonely	6	20%	17	27.42%
L4 Regret	4	13%	7	11.29%
L4 Sadness	15	50%	38	61.29%

As shown in Table 6.3, Other(s)-triggered Dissatisfaction (368/425, 86.59%) referenced by all children in the dataset was much more frequent in children’s discourse of emotion than Other(s)-triggered Satisfaction (57/425, 13.41%). Satisfaction, however, was still referenced by (24/30, 80%) of children. Of the two Satisfaction sub-emotions (i) Security (32/57, 56.14%) mentioned by 53% of children (16/30) was more frequent than (ii) Happiness (25/57, 43.86%), mentioned also by fewer children (12/30, 40%). This suggests that although they were frequently referencing Other(s) as triggers for their feelings of Dissatisfaction in their

discourse of emotion, children may also have seen the Other(s) in their life as potential sources of security and safety. For reasons of space and due to its low frequency children's Other(s)-triggered Satisfaction discourse is not discussed in detail.

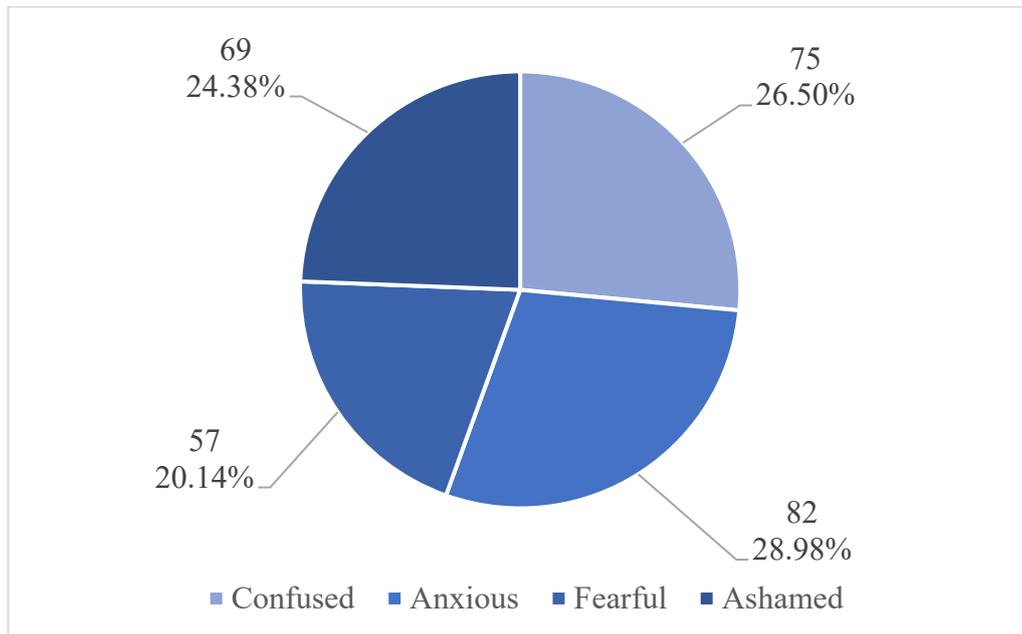
### **6.5.1 Children's Other(s)-Triggered Dissatisfaction**

Table 6.3 shows that the sub-emotion of Insecurity (296/368, 80.43%) was more frequently referenced and mentioned by more children (29/30, 97%) than Unhappiness (72/368, 19.57%) which was referred to by 63% of children (19/30). In the sections that follow, Insecurity is discussed first, followed by a brief discussion and analysis of findings about children's discourses of Other(s)-triggered Unhappiness.

**Children's Other(s)-Triggered Dissatisfaction\_Insecurity** At Table 6.3, L3 findings showed 95.61% (283/296) of children's references to Other(s)-triggered insecurity referred to feelings of Disquiet, referenced by 97% of children (29/30). Other(s)-triggered Distrust was barely present in children's discourse (13/296, 4.39%, referenced by 8/30 children, 27%). The finding that children discussed Distrust toward Other(s) less frequently than Groomer-triggered Distrust is worth noting. It suggests that potential barriers to seeking support or perceptions about the reactions of others were not being articulated as rooted a lack of trust or faith in the systems of support but rather in the barriers posed by internal feelings of Disquiet (Confusion, Anxiety, Fear, Shame). The prevalence of Disquiet emotions also suggests children's preoccupation with the reactions of Other(s) and suggests that alongside the cognitively complex navigation of the groomer's manipulative facework children were simultaneously trying to reconcile their own needs with the perceived face-wants of the Other(s) they were considering seeking support from.

Findings for the four Disquiet sub-emotions at L4 of the taxonomy are presented at Figure 6.8.

**Figure 6.8** *Child Other(s)-Triggered Discourse\_GA\_Disquiet, Number (n=/283) and Percentage (%)*.



As shown in Figure 6.8 children’s Other(s)-triggered Disquiet-oriented emotions were relatively evenly split across the four sub-emotions. Children referenced feeling Ashamed (69/283, 24.48%; mentioned by 77% of children 23/30), Anxious (82/283, 28.98%, mentioned by 83% of children, 25/30), and Confused (75/283, 26.50%, mentioned by 77%, 23/30 children) most frequently. Fear-triggered by Other(s) was less frequent, representing 20.14% of references (57/283, mentioned by 67% of children 20/30).

***Children’s\_Other(s)-Triggered Insecurity\_Disquiet\_Anxiety.*** Children’s references to Other(s)-triggered Anxiety predominantly intersected with sub-emotions triggered by discussion of potential support sources (i.e. parents/family/carers, practitioners or peers), as shown in Extract\_6.16:

#### Extract\_6.16

- 1 CL009 We can't stop him from posting the images unfortunately but we  
2 can help you report him and get the photos taken down from any  
3 social networks.  
4 How do you feel about these options?  
5 C009 I cant my family will find out  
6 CL009 What are you most worried about?  
7 My family finding out and my photos being sent

As shown in Extract\_6.16 the counsellor had introduced discussion about potential support options. The child rejected the proposed options (“I cant”, ( 2)) indicating a barrier to seeking support due to the perceived consequences. The emotion was triggered by the thought of their family finding out or the groomer exposing the child by distributing or “sending” (4) their intimate images. In this extract the child explicitly articulated the risk of their family finding out as one of the key blocks to seeking support. A preoccupation with a loss of face in the eyes of others thus represented a key trigger for children’s anxiety that could be exploited by the groomer in DCSG interactions. This jarring appeared to provoke anxiety which created a barrier to seeking help and support.

*Children’s\_Other(s)-Triggered Insecurity\_Disquiet\_Confusion.* Within the sub-emotion of Confusion, Extract\_6.17 is indicative of children’s references, which were predominantly directed towards sources of support within Other(s)-triggered discourse. Children were actively seeking advice, but their discourse suggested a prohibitively intimidating and complex system of reporting and support, which they needed to navigate to remove shared CCII or seek support for DCSG experiences:

#### Extract\_6.17

- 1 CL014 Ok X. What you’ve told me is that you are talking to someone who you  
2 suspect is a paedophile that you met on Tinder, and that he wants to meet  
3 with you, and that you are talking to him on Whatsapp. What do you  
4 think your options might be?  
5 C014 i dont know i want him to be stopped  
6 what can i do right now as in what do i do now  
7 will ceop be able to help me immediately  
8 CL014 It will be CEOP’s role to investigate it, and that might take some time. I

9                    can't really tell you what would happen immediately. Tell me what you  
10                    mean by immediately?  
11 C014            i am chatting with him now but i don't know where to go from here

In Extract\_6.17 the counsellor provided what would appear to an adult to be clear advice and practical steps to the child including accessing the police-run Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP) helpline. However, the child's response indicated their sense of confusion and how inaccessible the steps suggested by the adult counsellor felt to them. The child's response "what can i do now as in what do i do now" (6) did not acknowledge the counsellor's offer of advice to work through options and their lack of engagement suggested an implicit rejection. The child indicated their insistence by their repetition and reframing of their request for immediate help (6-7), communicating a plea for the counsellor to rescue them. The child's temporal markers served to communicate the urgency the child felt ("right now ...as in what do i do now", (6)). This suggests that for a child, seeking help from an organisation such as CEOP (especially denoted by an abstract acronym) that they had just learned about may have felt beyond their reach. This was emphasised by the child's clear articulation "will ceop be able to help me immediately" (7). The use of the adverbial "immediately" indicated a rejection and resistance of the option of reporting by the child, seeing this as something that may not help with the pressing crisis they felt. It also suggested that seeking support from an unknown online organisation felt like an unwanted delay. In the child's mind this risked them losing control of the situation and outcome of any report. The child's statement "i don't know where to go from here" (11) indicated their sense of powerlessness and diminished agency.

*Children's\_Other(s)-Triggered Insecurity\_Disquiet\_Ashamed.* Feelings of shame were also expressed by children in their discourse triggered by the perceived potential reactions of Other(s), as Exctract\_6.18 illustrates:

## Extract\_6.18

- |   |       |  |
|---|-------|--|
| 1 | CL009 | Why are you worried about people finding out?                  |
| 2 | C009  | I dont want to be seen as dirty or a hoe                       |
| 3 | CL009 | Why do you think people will judge you like this? This problem |
| 4 |       | is much more common than you probably think it is.             |
| 5 | C009  | Because im young and people will see me as dirty               |

In Extract\_6.18 the child repeated the adjective “dirty”, (2, 5). The use of dirty in this context could have two meanings. Firstly, the choice of “dirty” could be a linguistic device, a euphemism (albeit self-derisory), used to mitigate the potential face threat of the child discussing their sexualised activity during the DCSG interaction. Using a euphemistic adjective such as “dirty” may feel more palatable than explicitly providing a more detailed description of the sexual activity and abusive violation the child has experienced. Secondly, the use of the self-degrading adjective “dirty” could indicate the child of having internalised the responsibility of having interacted sexually with the groomer; feeling they would be judged as unclean, their face damaged in Others’ reactions. It is a loaded and judgmental term which straddles both the emotion triggered by an anticipation of Other(s) judgement which suggests that the child turns this inwards to the Self, suggesting an absorption of pervasive societal slut-shaming discourses, blaming women and girls for their victimization and sexual harassment (see Chapter Two). The child’s stated desire not to be seen as “dirty or a hoe” (2) echoes the societal Madonna/whore dichotomy (“hoe”, 2)).<sup>113</sup> The child’s use of the adjective “dirty” suggested a sense of shame was triggered by a preoccupation with Other(s) reactions and judgements that was internalised and re-oriented towards the Self.

**Children’s Other(s)-Triggered Dissatisfaction\_Unhappiness.** Table 6.3 shows that within Other(s)-triggered Unhappiness, children were found to predominantly reference Misery (62/72, 86.11%) mentioned by 60% (18/30) of children. Anger featured much less frequently in children’s Other(s)-triggered discourse of emotion (13.89%, 10/72). As discussed with regards to Grooming-

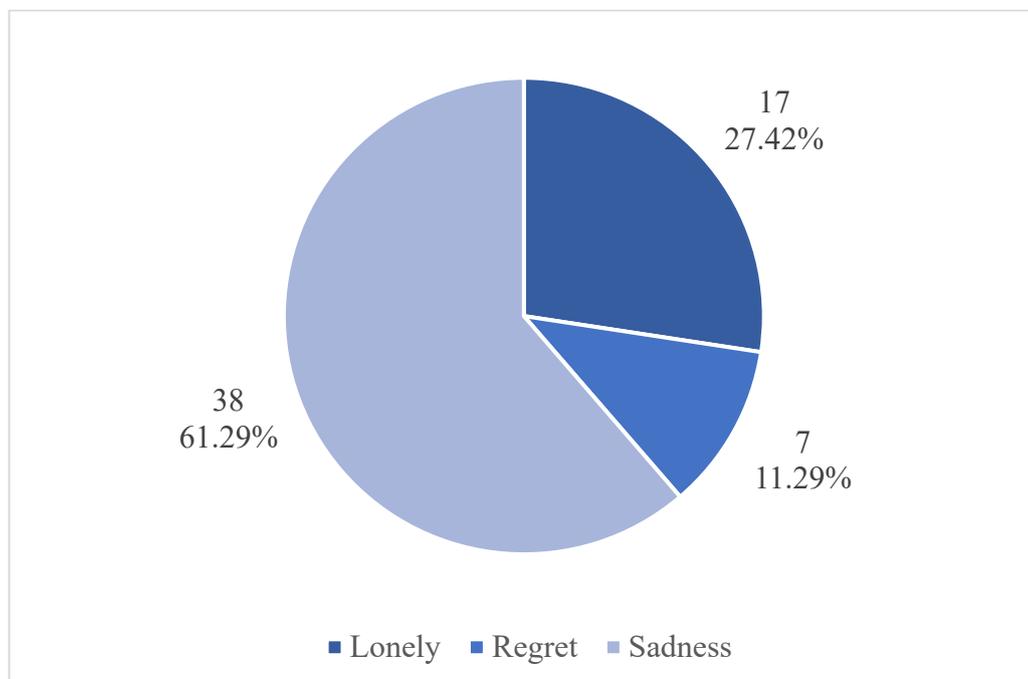
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<sup>113</sup> Whereby a woman seen to have undermined her purity by engaging in sex is polarized to be seen as a whore. The use of ‘hoe’ is colloquial for young people connoting prostitution. It is defined in the Urban Dictionary as ‘a term used to describe a person (usually a woman) who has sex with strangers/gives into flirtation from strangers and dresses extremely revealing.’

triggered Anger, it is an emotion that arguably requires a secure sense of self-esteem as a reaction rooted in a perceived injustice when one's sense of self is under threat. Children were not often expressing nor outwardly directing the self-asserting and preserving emotion of anger -triggered towards Other(s). That children were not found to express anger suggests that they either may not feel it or did not feel it sanctioned to express it within the counselling context. This finding suggests that children did not feel secure and justified in their right to be safe and protected online by the adults around them. It suggests that children's affective responses to DCSG and groomer manipulation were instead turning their emotions inward focusing on self-shrinking emotions of fear, shame and anxiety. Children did not seem to be educated or empowered to feel a sense of anger and injustice at the violation of their rights by being sexually abused in an environment that facilitates this by design.

Children's Other(s)-triggered Misery was distributed across the three categories of Loneliness, Regret and Sadness is shown at Figure 6.9.

**Figure 6.9** *Child Other(s)-Triggered Goal Achievement Dissatisfaction\_Unhappiness\_Misery Discourse.*



As shown in Figure 6.9 children's discourse of emotion referenced Sadness (61.29%, 38/62, mentioned by 50% of children 15/30) and Loneliness (27.42%, 17/63, mentioned by 20% of children, 6/30) most frequently within Other(s)-triggered Misery. Due to the relatively low frequency of Other(s)-triggered Misery it is difficult to discern clear patterns from children's discourse. However, Extract\_6.19 provides an illustration of two of the ways Other(s)-triggered misery was articulated in children's discourse.

#### Extract\_6.19

1 C032 Home isnt fun aswell. Sometime i dont want to be here anymore my  
2 parents know very well im lonely and always in my room tryna  
3 figure out who i am and why bad things happen (in general)

Extract\_6.19 the child's feeling of disconnection from sources of support and other people. The child felt lost ("tryna to figure out who I am and why bad things happen (in general), 2- 3), while these are also emotions triggered by the child's process of self-construction they were also implicitly directed at their parents. This was illustrated by the child's description of feeling "lonely", (2) followed by an articulation of a deep sense of sadness expressed as wanting to escape their family home and/or circumstances ("Sometime i dont want to be here anymore", (1). The child referred to problems with their family relationships ("my parents know very well", (2) and "home isn't fun as well", (1). The reference to not wanting to "be here anymore" could be a vague reference to suicide ideation or physical flight. The Misery (loneliness and sadness) therefore extended to the child's feelings towards their parents, giving a sense of the child having felt abandoned and unseen due to their parents not picking up on their emotional state. The child's discourse suggested the child's perception that their parents knew (or should have known) something was wrong (the child being withdrawn) but did not pick up on the child's cues or reach out them. This seems to validate research about the gap between children's perceptions of "telling" i.e. via test balloons and the failure of adults around them to listen and "hear them" in an attuned way (see Chapter Three, e.g. Jackson et al., 2015, Flam & Hagstvedt, 2013). Children's discourse thus suggested that the failure to pick up on their communicative cues posed a barrier for the child in feeling they

could turn to primary support sources in their life, intensifying their sense of loneliness/sadness.

## 6.6 Children’s Other(s)-Triggered Discourse of Emotion: Goal Seeking-Oriented

Table 6.4 shows that children also referenced Other(s)-triggered GS-oriented emotions within their discourse.

**Table 6.4** *Children’s Other(s)-Directed Goal-Seeking Emotions – Overview Findings (L1-2) Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency (n=/100 and %)*

GS_Other Goal-Seeking Emotions	Children (n=/27)	Children (/30%)	References (n=100)	References (%)
L1 Attention-Grabbing	1	3%	1	1.00%
L2 Surprise	1	3%	1	1.00%
L1 (Dis)Inclination	27	90%	99	99.00%
L2 Inclined	21	70%	44	44.00%
L2 Disinclined	23	77%	55	55.00%

As shown in Table 6.4 Other(s)-triggered GS Emotions were predominantly focused on (Dis)Inclination. At L2 of the taxonomy there was only one instance of Attention-Grabbing\_Surprise present and no references to Interest. Children’s Other(s)-triggered Disinclination (55/99, 55.00%) was more salient in children’s discourse than Inclination (44/99, 44.00%). Other(s) triggered Disinclination was referenced by 77% (23/30) of children and Inclination by 70% (21/30) of children.

### 6.6.1 Children’s Other(s)-Triggered Disinclination

Extract\_6.20 is typical of how Other(s)-triggered Disinclination manifested in children’s discourse.

Extract\_6.20

- 1 C009 No i dont want to disappoint anyone. Yes but he has followed some of
- 2 my friends and he said if I block him again like i did on snapchat he
- 3 will send them
- 4 CL009 What do you mean when you say you do not want to disappoint anyone?
- 5 I dont want my family to find out what ive done. They will be disappointed

Extract\_6.20 illustrates the nature of children’s Disinclination directed at Other(s), particularly sources of support. As with GA emotions, children’s Disinclination centred around anybody finding out what had happened or what they had “done” (5). This Disinclination was articulated by the child (“i dont want to disappoint anyone”, (1); “I dont want my family to find out what ive done. They will be disappointed”, (4)). The child’s explicit expression of their Disinclination through a negative want statement “I don’t want” (1) and its repetition (5) added a sense of weight and force to the child’s sentiment. The child’s articulation of their Disinclination concerning the “disappointment” of Other(s), represented a clear articulation (although expressed in vague terms) of the child’s desire to avoid loss of face in the eyes of Other(s) around them. The child’s use of “they will be disappointed” (4) projected into the future lending a sense of certainty to the child’s anxiety about how a negative reaction from their parents would lead to their face-deterioration in their parent’s eyes. This deterministic thinking contributed to the child feeling stuck and trapped with their action environment significantly constrained.

### **6.6.2 Children’s Other(s)-Triggered Inclination**

When it comes to inclination children were predominantly expressing a desire to report or to seek help and support, as shown in Extract\_6.21:

Extract\_6.21

1	C018	I tried to report it, but I didn’t know how and all the forms and legal
2		jargon confused me so I just blocked him everywhere instead, which
3		makes me kind of a coward but I panicked

As shown in Extract\_6.21 the child expressed a clear inclination to end their interaction with the groomer and to report what had happened (“I tried to report it”, 1)). Their use of the past tense of the verb “try” (“I tried to report it”, (1) suggests that the challenges the child faced in their mind meant that their attempt to report was over. The child expressed confusion (“I didn’t know how and all the forms and legal jargon confused me”, (1-2)) and a feeling of powerlessness to attain the support they wanted. The child clearly stated that the reporting processes available felt so inaccessible that they were prohibitive. The child suggested they felt comfortable

using the blocking feature (“so I just blocked him everywhere instead”, (2)). The choice of the minimizing hedge “just” suggested the child’s perception of a dilution of agency posed by this route. A sense of self-blame and negative-self talk (see Section 6.6) was also present in this extract (“makes me kind of a coward”, (3)) and shows how Self-triggered Dissatisfaction permeated children’s discourse. The child’s adversative clause (“but i panicked”, (3)) suggested the child’s detection of their diminished agency within the DCSG context and indicated the emotional tumult children were navigating.

Similarly to the pattern observed in children’s Grooming-triggered GS-oriented emotions, a pivoting between Inclination and Disinclination could be observed. This is illustrated by Extract\_6.22:

Extract\_6.22

1	C018	I still wouldn’t want to tell anyone. I mean, I want to talk to a therapist
2		because I’m pretty sure it contributed to how messed up I am, but I don’t
3		want to prosecute anyone, I don’t ever want to be back in touch with them.

In Extract\_6.22 the child indicated their Disinclination towards disclosing their abuse (“I still wouldn’t want to tell anyone”, (1)). The child followed their negative want statement with a statement of Inclination to seek therapeutic support for their experience. This was linked by the causal “because” (2) which referred to a desire to work through their experience (“because I’m pretty sure it contributed to how messed up I am”, (2)). However, the child tempered their desire for support using the adversative conjunction “but” (2), which communicated a tension between the child’s inclination for help and the obstacles they perceived to block this help. In this extract the barriers were the child’s connection between “telling” and the possibility that criminal prosecution could be brought against the groomer (“I don’t want to prosecute anyone”, (2-3)) or that they would have to face the groomer if the case came to court (“I don’t ever want to be back in touch with them.”, (3)). This extract thus shows a fundamental friction between the child’s Inclination and expressed need for support and their Disinclination towards the intolerable face-threat of disclosure. This tension deeply constricted the child’s perceived action environment.

The extracts presented in this section therefore indicate a fundamental tension between children wanting help and support and not wanting to get in or cause 'trouble'. This tension revolved around not wanting to suffer or cause the face injury of letting people down or disappointing Other(s) around them or to trigger retribution or consequences for the groomer. This preoccupation was deeply rooted in face fragility and heightened sensitivity (Chapter Two).

### **6.7 Children's Self-Triggered Discourse of Emotion: Goal-Achievement Oriented**

As shown in Figure 6.2, emotions-triggered by the child's Self-perception represented 27.72% (489/1764) of children's discourse across the three AFFECT orientations. Table 6.5 shows the number and percentage of references to each level of Self-Triggered GA-Oriented Emotion Discourse in children's discourse.

**Table 6.5** *Children’s Goal-Achievement Emotions Overview Findings Self-Triggered (Level-4) Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency of References (n=/313 and %)*

GA_Self Goal-Achievement Emotions	Children (n=/28)	Children (%/30)	References (n=313)	References (%)
L1 Satisfaction	13	43%	37	11.82%
L2 Security	5	17%	6	16.22%
L3 Quiet	3	10%	4	66.67%
L3 Trust	2	7%	2	33.33%
L4 Confident	2	7%	2	100.00%
L2 Happiness	11	37%	31	83.78%
L3 Hedonic	5	17%	7	22.58%
L3 Eudaimonic	10	33%	24	77.42%
L1 Dissatisfaction	28	93%	276	88.18%
L2 Insecurity	28	93%	228	82.61%
L3 Disquiet	28	93%	220	96.49%
L4 Confused	16	53%	34	15.45%
L4 Anxious	17	57%	38	17.27%
L4 Fearful	17	57%	27	12.27%
L4 Ashamed	27	90%	121	55.00%
L3 Distrust	6	20%	8	3.51%
L4 Doubtful	2	7%	1	12.50%
L4 Mistrust	4	13%	7	87.50%
L2 Unhappiness	15	50%	48	17.39%
L3 Anger	2	7%	5	10.42%
L4 Frustrated	2	7%	2	40.00%
L4 Angry	1	3%	3	60.00%
L3 Misery	15	50%	43	89.58%
L4 Lonely	6	20%	9	20.93%
L4 Regret	5	17%	7	16.28%
L4 Sadness	13	43%	27	62.79%

### 6.7.1 *Children’s Self-Triggered Dissatisfaction*

As shown in Table 6.5, Self-triggered Dissatisfaction was more frequent in children’s discourse of emotion (88.18%, 276/313, mentioned by 93% of children, 28/30) than Self-triggered Satisfaction which represented 11.82% of children’s discourse (37/313), mentioned by less than half of the children in the dataset (43%, 13/30).

**Children’s Self-Triggered Insecurity.** Of the two Dissatisfaction sub-categories children referenced Insecurity (82.61%, 228/276, mentioned by 93% of children 28/30) more frequently than Unhappiness (17.39%, 48/276, mentioned by

15/30, 50% of children). Insecurity is discussed first, followed by a brief discussion of children’s Self-triggered Unhappiness discourse. Figure 6.10 presents the findings for children’s Self-triggered sub-emotions of Disquiet at L4 of the AFFECT taxonomy.

**Figure 6.10** *Children’s Self-triggered Discourse Goal Achievement*  
Dissatisfaction\_Insecurity\_Disquiet References (n=/220)/ Percentage (%)

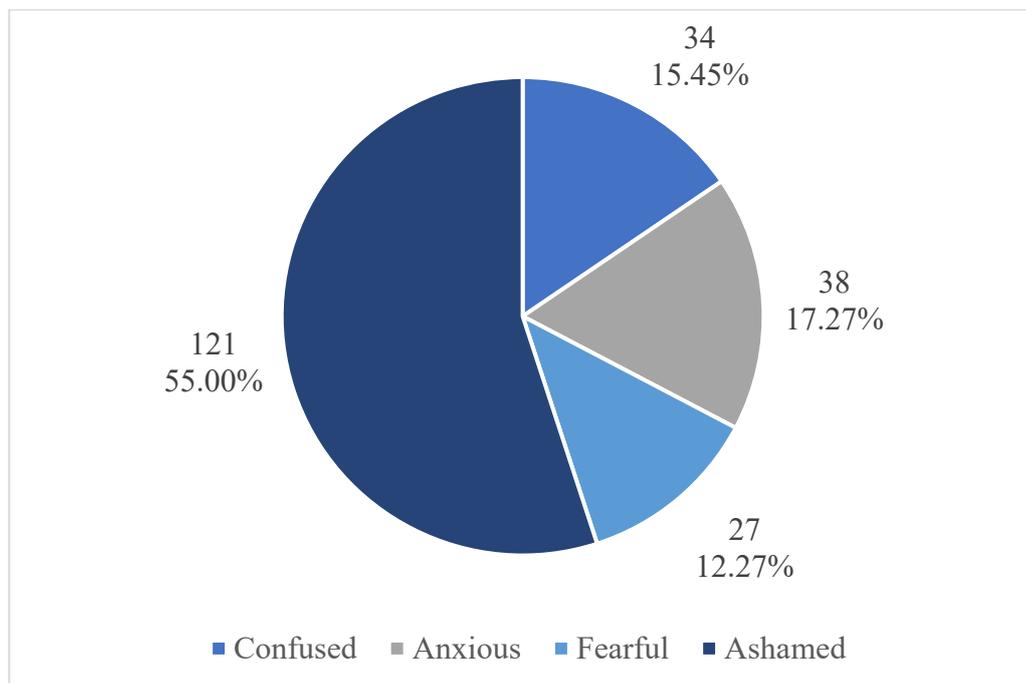


Figure 6.10 shows that when it comes to children’s Self-triggered discourse and in contrast to the findings for Grooming or Other(s)-triggered emotions, children’s Insecurity was predominantly Shame-based (Ashamed). Self-triggered Shame made up 55.00% (121/220) of children’s references and was mentioned by 90% (27/30) of children. Feeling Anxious was the next most frequently referenced Self-triggered emotion (38/220, 17.27%) mentioned by 57% of children (17/30). Confusion (15.45%, 34/220) and Fear (12.27%, 27/220) were least frequently referenced as triggered by the child’s self-perception and were mentioned by 53% and 57% of children respectively (16/30 and 17/30).

*Children's Self-triggered Insecurity\_Disquiet\_Ashamed.* Figure 6.10 shows that children's overriding Self-triggered emotion was Shame, with the other emotions occurring as bi-products and tangled with Grooming or Other(s) triggers.

An Extract of how Shame was intermingled with fear in children's discourse can be observed in Extract\_6.23:

Extract\_6.23

1 C029 I cant keep it to myself I cant protect him but if I tell the police he will kill  
2 himself if I don't message him he will kill himself...  
3 I felt guilty that im to blame, im the one making him feel that way im  
4 scared that he will do it I would never forgive myself

As seen in Extract\_6.23 the child expressed Fear ("Im scared he will do it/I would never forgive myself", (3-4)) that the groomer may realise threats to kill themselves. This fear was not only directed at the groomer and his potential actions but is also provoked by the child's interpretation of their own blame and being at fault in the situation. Extract\_6.23 is typical of a key pattern observed in children's discourse, that Shame was articulated as Self-Blame for what had happened to them. This propensity to internalise blame suggests children were absorbing responsibility for their abuse. The child's expression of Self-Blame at Extract\_6.23 also showed a skewed and over inflated sense of agency, at odds with the apparent blocked agency seen in the previous section towards sources or support. It suggests that the child believed themselves not only to be at fault and to blame for their interactions but, through the face attack of their rejection of the groomer, they possessed the power to provoke an abusive adult (especially in the context of the inherent power imbalance discussed throughout this thesis) to end their life. This deep internalization of a sense of responsibility and accountability on the part of the child was distorted into paralysing self-blame and evidences the imbalance in conceptions of facework 'rules' between adult groomer and adolescent child. It also shows the effectiveness of the groomer's manipulation and impoliteness-based threat attacks on children's Equity Rights (Chapter Five).

Furthermore, as shown in Extract 6.24, children were expressing narratives of having done wrong, of making mistakes, “falling for” the groomer’s tactics:

Extract\_6.24

1 C003 the thing is he didnt actually demand anything it was me and ive never felt  
2 more disgusting or guilty in my life i just did it because i felt special and no  
3 one in real life has any interest in me

In Extract\_6.24 the child squarely places the blame on themselves (“the thing is he didn’t actually demand anything it was me”, (1) expressing a sense of self-directed repulsion (“ive never felt more disgusting or guilty in my life”, (1-2)). The child’s use of the absolutist adverb of frequency “never”, in “ive never felt more” (1), communicated the extremity of their self-blame and loathing. The child’s utterance of a justification, boosted by the adverbial “just”, for their perceived unacceptable actions further validates that children may be acting in pursuit of a goal of being seen and valued which is at odds with the groomer’s sexualised goals (“I just did it because i felt special and no one in real life has any interest in me”, (2-3)) (see Chapter Five). This is further illustrated at Extract\_6.25:

Extract\_6.25

1 C018 The thing is, X was 18-19, and I was 13-14. But I was agreeing to everything,  
2 I encouraged it and at times initiated it, so I don’t know what to call it  
3 because I was acting (and felt) as though I was in a relationship.  
4 But I never felt like I was being groomed - I initiated stuff, I encouraged it, I  
5 was an active and enthusiastic participant. But I was also really young.  
6 So I don’t really know what it was. If anyone else described it to me, I’d call  
7 it grooming, or abuse, but I didn’t feel like I was forced, and I wasn’t.  
8 blackmailed or anything  
9 So yeah. I don’t know.  
10 I’m sorry, I know this must sound ridiculous. It can’t have been grooming if I  
11 consented, they must just have been messed up relationships

Extract\_6.25 shows the cognitive dissonance caused by the child’s inability to consent (the child showed awareness of being a minor and their groomer an adult) (“The thing is, X was 18-19, and I was 13-14”, (1)), and their sense of individual agency and the perceived “choice” the child felt they exhibited in the situation. The

child's use of the conjunction "but" ("but I was agreeing to everything", (1)) set the diminished capacity to consent given the child's underage status in tension with their perceived active role ("I encouraged it and at times initiated it", (2)). The binary and dichotomous thinking (Chapter Two) which pitches victimhood as diametrically opposed to agency is refracted in the child's discourse. Their internalization of this dichotomy was illustrated later in the extract ("But I never felt like I was being groomed - I initiated stuff, I encouraged it, I was an active and enthusiastic participant. But I was also really young.", (3-4)). The child's reference to their participation in interactions with the groomer as "active and enthusiastic" is perceived by the child to negate their victimhood (see Chapter Two see e.g. Beckett, 2019; Dodsworth, 2022). The child, however, acknowledged the constraints acting upon their "active" agency ("But I was also really young", (4)). The child's use of the adverbial "really" intensified the assertion of their age (which removed any ability to consent). The mind-bending contradiction that the pervasive conceptual impasse of binary agent/victim dichotomies causes children was evidenced by the child's assertion ("So I don't really know what it was.... yeah. I don't know", (6, 9)). Here the child showed an awareness that they didn't fit the mould of an "ideal" victim ("I didn't feel like I was forced, and I wasn't blackmailed, or anything" (7-8)). The child contrasted how they would judge the situation as an external observer ("If anyone else described it to me, I'd call it grooming, or abuse", (7)). However, they appeared unable to rationalise this when it came to judging themselves and their own behaviour ("I'm sorry, I know this must sound ridiculous. It can't have been grooming if I consented, they must just have been messed up relationships", (10-11)). This suggests the child saw consent as the axis on which their worthiness of victim status was spinning. Their skewed conception of "consent" and lack of awareness of the myriad and specific constraints acting upon it in a CDMA context led them to interpret themselves to be undeserving of victim status. This was shown by the extract ending with an apology which condemned their account of their experience as sounding "ridiculous" (10).

Extract\_6.26 further emphasises this point, showing that even when children were aware of their vulnerability or being "taken advantage" of, they blamed themselves for not protecting themselves or keeping themselves safe.

### Extract\_6.26

1 C023 i was vulnerable at the time so he took advantage and i knew that and didn't  
2 do anything about it so i still kind of blame my self

In Extract 6.26 the child's self-blame for not acting when they "knew" the groomer was "taking advantage" of them being "vulnerable" (1) suggested that they perceived they were individually responsible for taking action to keep themselves safe and that they did not put them at fault ("I knew that and didnt do anything about it", (1-2).

This morphed into a perception that they were deserving of the abuse they experienced, communicated by the utterance of the consequential "so" ("so i still kind of blame myself", (2). However, the child's use of the qualifier "kind of" (2), introduced doubt that the blame was entirely justified.

**Children's Self-triggered Discourse of Emotion: Unhappiness.** As shown in Table 6.4 within children's Self-triggered Unhappiness discourse children were predominantly mentioning Misery representing 89.6% of their Unhappiness-oriented discourse (43/48, mentioned by 15/30 children, 50%). Extract\_6.27 shows how Self-directed Misery manifested in children's discourse:

### Extract\_6.27

1 C009 I cant keep my self safe anymore  
2 CL009 Yes you can. Why do you think that?  
3 C009 I just cant.

Extract\_6.27 provides a sense of the child ceding their agency, feeling defeated and wanting an escape or rescue ("I cant keep my self safe anymore", (1)). It is unclear whether the child was referring to harming themselves but the sense of helplessness communicated resonates with classification as misery. The child's response to the counsellor's challenge that they can keep themselves safe and inadvertent use of the blaming wh-question "why"<sup>114</sup> is met with an encompassing ("I just can't", (3)) giving a sense of being trapped, their action environment blocked.

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<sup>114</sup> Helpline counsellors are explicitly trained not to use interrogative why questions as they can easily be interpreted as critical and blaming.

## 6.8 Children's Self-Triggered Discourse of Emotion: Goal Relation-Oriented

In contrast to findings for Grooming and Other(s)-triggered emotions where they occurred with low frequency, when it came to Self-triggered emotions Goal-Relation oriented emotions were more frequent in children's discourse. Table 6.6 shows the number and percentage of children referencing Goal-Relation oriented emotions.

**Table 6.6** *Children's Goal-Seeking Emotions Overview Findings Self (Level-1-2) Number (n=) and Percentage (%) of Children Mentioning and Frequency of References (n=/113 and %)*

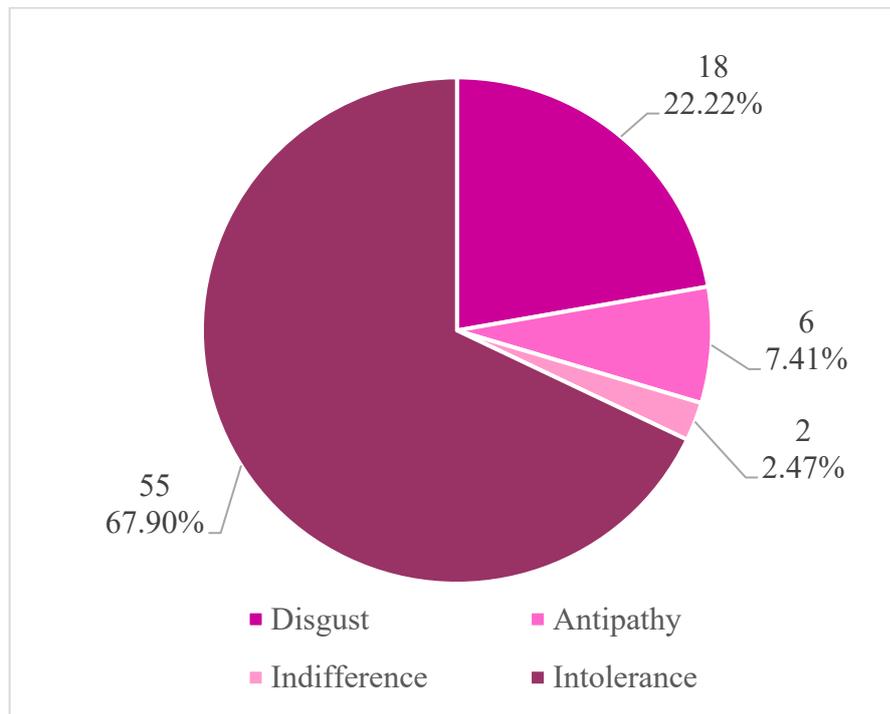
GR_Self Goal-Relation emotions	Children (n=/19)	Children (%/30)	Reference (n=113)	Reference (%)
L1 Attraction	13	43%	32	28.32%
L2 Liking	4	13%	7	21.88%
L2 Affection	3	10%	5	15.62%
L2 Respect	8	27%	10	31.25%
L2 Sympathy	4	13%	4	12.50%
L2 Tolerance	3	10%	6	18.75%
L1 Repulsion	18	60%	81	71.68%
L2 Disgust	10	33%	18	22.22%
L2 Antipathy	5	17%	6	7.41%
L2 Disrespect	0	0%	0	0.00%
L2 Indifference	2	7%	2	2.47%
L2 Intolerance	15	50%	55	67.90%

Table\_6.6 shows that children referenced Self-triggered Repulsion (71.68%, 81/113, mentioned by 60% of children 18/30) more frequently than Self-triggered Attraction (28.32%, 32/113 mentioned by 13/30, 43% of children). This contrasts with findings for Grooming and Other(s)-triggered emotions where children referenced more Attraction than Repulsion-oriented emotions.

### 6.8.1 Children's Self-Triggered Repulsion

Figure 6.11 shows the breakdown of Self-triggered Repulsion sub-emotions that occurred in children's discourse.

**Figure 6.11** Children's Self-triggered Goal Relation\_Repulsion, Number (n=/81), and Percentage (%) of References



Within Repulsion, the sub-emotions of Indifference, Disrespect, Antipathy, Disgust and Intolerance represented a cline of intensity. Figure 6.11 shows that children were expressing Self-triggered Repulsion at the highest intensity. Children predominantly referenced Self-triggered Intolerance, a sense of being unable to bear themselves, of an utter rejection of the self. Self-Intolerance represented 67.90% (55/81) of children's Self-triggered Repulsion references and was mentioned by 50% (15/30) of children in the dataset. The second most frequently referenced Self-triggered sub-emotion was Disgust which represented 22.22% (18/81) of children's discourse, mentioned by 33% (10/30) children. The less intense emotions of Antipathy (7.4%, 6/81 mentioned by 17%, 5/30 of children) and Indifference (2.47%, 2/81, mentioned by 7%, 2/30 of children) hardly featured in children's discourse.

**Children's Self-triggered Repulsion\_Intolerance.** Children's Self-Intolerance was tightly interwoven with their expressions of Shame and Self-Blame. A key feature of their Self-Intolerance was communicated using critical self-

descriptors (“stupid”; “dumb”; having been “an idiot” or having “messed up”).

Children’s use of self-critical language is shown at Extract\_6.28:

Extract\_6.28

1	C032	It was traumatising i dont know whats wrong with me... it was awfully
2		sexual...It was my fault going on that site in the first place
3		And now i went on it again, ive gotten myself in a mess [annoyed emoji]
4		I feel worthless and dumb. I cant let these feelings give in
5		And how do you feel that affects you X?
6		It makes me worthless ... I feel abnormal almost...

In Extract\_6.28 the child used the self-derogatory terms “worthless” (4, 6) and “dumb” to describe themselves (4). The child’s use of the adjective “dumb” represented a Self-triggered negative judgement laden with the child’s articulation that they had behaved inappropriately, and that the locus of blame was their perceived poor choice (“it was my fault going on that site in the first place”, (2)). This is intensified by the child’s continuation of blaming themselves for returning to the site (“And now i went on it again, ive gotten myself in a mess [annoyed emoji]”, (3)). The child communicated Self-directed judgement boosted by the emoji-use and the personal pronoun “i” whereby the child claimed ownership for their actions. This language choice suggested that the child was judging their behaviour as acting against safety advice they may have been given or societal expectations and it was this tension that triggered their feelings of shame and blame.

Extract\_6.28 also illustrates how children’s Self-Intolerance discourse indicated a sense of self-disassociation. Across the dataset, children’s discourse showed self-perceptions of being “abnormal”, “a mess”, “weird”. The child articulated that they believed themselves to be strange or lacking for the strong aversion and revulsion they felt towards the sexual communications they experienced on an explicit website (“It was traumatising, i don’t know what’s wrong with me”, (1)). At the end of the extract the child was explicit stating “I feel abnormal almost” (6) although this was hedged with their use of “almost” which diluted their utterance. This sense of “abnormality” of separation and divorce from the usual conception of the self, showed the fissure that DCSG represents in the child’s self-development and suggests how it may fracture their conceptions and ability to manage face.

In Extract\_6.28 the child also used and reiterated the self-descriptor “worthless” (“I feel worthless and dumb”, (4) and “It makes me worthless...” (6)). This Self-description by the child suggests diminished agency, believing oneself to have no value or to be utterly contemptible, which fundamentally detracts from a sense of agentive autonomy.

This is further illustrated at Extract\_6.29, which shows that at the extremes of Self-Intolerance was a sense of the child being unable to conceive of their own agency, feeling trapped, with their action environment totally diminished:

Extract\_6.29

1           C030    i dont like doing it but i feel trapped and he tells me to keep it a secret and  
2                   not save the messages and he says he loves me and respects me but i feel  
3                   trapped and pressured to doing this i feel sick in the stomach doing it

In Extract\_6.29 the child articulated the tension between their own goals and wishes and the feeling of being “trapped” (1-2), having their agency constrained by the groomer’s coercive communication tactics. The child communicated the impact of this tension with a physical description of an emetic reaction of nausea and vomiting, a sense embodied rejection of this violation and fundamental squeeze on their agentive choice (“i feel sick in the stomach doing it”, (3)).

In some cases, this sense of self-rejection led to the child conveying a fractured self, a disassociation between the Self and the DCSG experience. In some cases, Self-Intolerance, was exhibited as an explicit verbalisation of the challenges the child faced in reconciling their self-identity as shown in Extract\_6.30:

Extract\_6.30

1           C019    now a days i dont even know who i am anymore i feel like there are two  
2                   different sides to me

In Extract\_6.30, the child was explicit in articulating the rupture in their self-perception (“now a days i don’t even know who i am anymore”, (1)), articulating the

split in their self-cognisance following DCSG (“i feel like there are two different sides to me”, (1-2)).

Children’s Self-Intolerance also co-occurred with intense anxiety and despair, the feeling of being trapped manifested as feeling no alternative than to run away and escape. It is therefore helpful to reproduce Extract\_6.8 seen earlier in this chapter (Extract\_6.31):

Extract\_6.31

1	C002	I feel like i cant stay here
2	CL002	What do you mean when you say you don’t feel you can stay here?
3	C002	I feel like i need to go like disappear so he wont do it
4	CL002	I don’t understand, Can you tell me what you mean when you say
5	C002	disappear?” Running away or just dying rn

In Extract\_6.31 the child was referring to their worry about the threat of exposure. The child’s use of the modal verb “I cant” (1) communicated the child sensing a fundamental constraint on their agency and capacity to continue their existence in their current circumstances. The thought and threat of the groomer sharing their images makes any alternative feel untenable. The use of “I feel like” (1), however, diluted the illocutionary force and undermined the agency of the child’s utterance “i cant stay here” (2), indicating doubt. The use of the verb “disappear” indicated the child’s deep perception of lack of agency to affect their situation faced with the groomer threats. It could represent a vague reference to suicide, to ceasing to exist physically showing the child’s inability to tolerate themselves, ideating erasing themselves as an alternative to the threatened and perceived catastrophic loss of face. The desire to “disappear” is also triggered by the child’s perception of how the face violation it represented would fundamentally damage their ability to tolerate this version of themselves and their belonging in the world. However, the child’s apparent preference for self-eradication over the threatened exposure also evidences the child’s face fragility. Due to their age and stage of neurodevelopment, at adolescence, children’s sense of self and identity are in formation and unstable. They are highly attuned to external reflections of the self, and it is through this process that their conception of self is co-constructed (Chapter Two). This is a lifelong process but arguably it is during our childhood and adolescence that the foundations for the

self are developed and moulded. Sustained coercive manipulation, delivered through intricate communicative tactics, disrupts this process by distorting and limiting self-agency. These tactics compel compliance misaligned with personal goals. Inadequate life experience, maturity, and cognisance all magnify the perceived face consequences.

**Children’s Self-triggered Repulsion\_Disgust.** Also present in children’s discourse of emotion were expressions of children’s Self-triggered Disgust, which as shown in Figure 6.11 represented 22.22% (18/81) of children’s Repulsion discourse. Extract\_6.32 is typical of how children expressed Self-triggered Disgust:

Extract\_6.32

1 C042 i just feel uncomfortable to hug them and spend time with them knowing i  
2 have been so disgusting online.  
3 its just how i feel inside  
4 its silly

As well as explicit and frank references to feeling or being “disgusting” as seen in the previous section children also used the vague term “dirty” to describe their self-triggered feelings, as shown in Extract\_6.33:

Extract\_6.33

1 C026 i felt dirty espically when i had to do stuff on call with him

The choice of the adjective “dirty” (1) is a powerful descriptor, it gives a sense of the self as simultaneously being tainted but also of being contemptible and despicable to others. It is a term used to refer to indecent or obscene behaviour and shows how children’s self-blame mutated to self-repulsion in DCSG contexts.

## 6.9 Chapter Conclusion

The results presented in this chapter show children’s ability to clearly articulate a range of complex and overlapping emotions - all instances of children’s emotions could be coded to one or more of the emotion categories within the goal-based taxonomy of Affect developed by Benitez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio (2019).

Children's discourse of emotion was found to be predominantly triggered by three entities: the Grooming, Other(s) or the Self. Across all three triggers, Goal Achievement-oriented emotions were found to be most salient, namely emotions that comprise a reaction to events or situations that impact on the pursuit of our personal goals, needs and values. This validates previous research (Lorenzo-Dus et al. 2023, Lorenzo-Dus 2023) which points to an opposition and clash between groomer and children's goals however it also adds further weight to the extension of this argument outlined throughout this thesis that children's goals centre around self-construction and validation which can be exploited by the groomer in pursuit of their sexualised goals in DCSG contexts.

Within Goal-Achievement oriented emotions, GA Dissatisfaction was more salient in children's discourse than Satisfaction. Within Dissatisfaction children expressed Insecurity much more frequently than Unhappiness. Within Groomer and Other(s)-triggered Insecurity children predominantly articulated Disquiet emotions of Anxiety, Fear and Confusion. Shame was also noted and added to the taxonomy. GA\_Unhappiness was also present, predominantly showing emotions of Misery, particularly Depression. When it came to Self-triggered GA emotions, Disquiet\_Insecurity was most frequent and within that Shame and Self-blame were more frequent than Fear, Anxiety and Confusion, which were found to trigger intense emotions of Unhappiness\_Misery, particularly Despair and Helplessness.

GS-oriented emotions of (Dis)inclination were noted across children's discourse about their emotions triggered by the Grooming and Other(s). (Dis)Inclination showed a fuzziness which indicated a simultaneous conflict and compulsion in children's feelings both about Grooming about the responses of Others and the implications for seeking and receiving support.

GR-oriented emotions were the second most frequent category in children's Self-triggered emotion discourse and predominantly concerned Self-Repulsion. These showed an intensity of Repulsion predominantly concerning Self-Intolerance, showing children's preference for self-eradication than the risk of the face degradation of exposure. This further evidenced the self-shame fusion (Broucek,

1991) and face fragility proposed in Chapter Two. This suggests facework creates an enhanced susceptibility to groomer manipulation and communicative tactics amongst children whose are at a fundamental developmental stage of self-shaping and exploration.

The next chapter presents findings to offer insights into how the combination of groomer tactical communication and facework (Chapters Four, Five) and the affective responses they trigger, impact and shape children's own-behaviour discourse in the counselling context studied.

## Chapter 7. Children's Discourse: Own Behaviour

### 7.1 Introduction

The analysis in the previous chapter concerned children's discourse about their emotions triggered by the Grooming, Other(s) or their perception of Self. This chapter brings this analysis together with that seen in Chapters Four and Five about groomer's communicative modus operandi as a *sui generis* form of manipulation (discussion Chapter Two) combining sexually driven tactics with complex facework, which is harboured unchecked within TA-CSA contexts. This chapter adds a further layer to support deeper understanding of the interpersonal dynamics at play in DCSG contexts by examining the child's discourse about their own communicative behaviour. The chapter addresses the following research question asking, within the counselling context studied:

*RQ4: How far are children aware of their own communicative behaviours in DCSG and how do they discursively reflect on particular features?*

There is scant research which explores children's behaviours during DCSG or attempts to devise replicable models for analysing these behaviours (Chapter Two). There is currently no study which focuses on children's discourse about their own behaviour. Children's own-behaviour discourse provides a unique lens to view the impacts of groomer communicative manipulation and children's affective response on their performance of agency in DCSG contexts. Two categories of communicative behaviour were identified in children's discourse, namely Engage and Resist. Engage concerns children's discourse that demonstrated engagement with groomer OGDM tactics/sub-tactics. Resist concerns children's discourse that showed resistance towards groomer OGDM tactics/sub-tactics. Within children's Resist discourse two main types were identified: Direct Resistance and Indirect Resistance. Indirect Resistance concerned references where the child's resistance was not directly communicated to the groomer but referenced via two sub-strategies: Seek Help and Suspect. As these Resistance sub-strategies did not concern direct communication with the groomer, findings are presented but not discussed in detail. Within Direct Resistance three main strategies were identified in children's discourse. These were:

Refuse; End and Negotiate. The findings presented show the intersections between children's Engagement/Resistance discourse and how it aligned to the OGDM groomer sub-tactics (see Chapters Three and Four). This analysis therefore contributes the first discourse-based analysis of children's perspectives of their own behaviour including their resistance strategies in DCSG contexts and fills a gap in existing research.

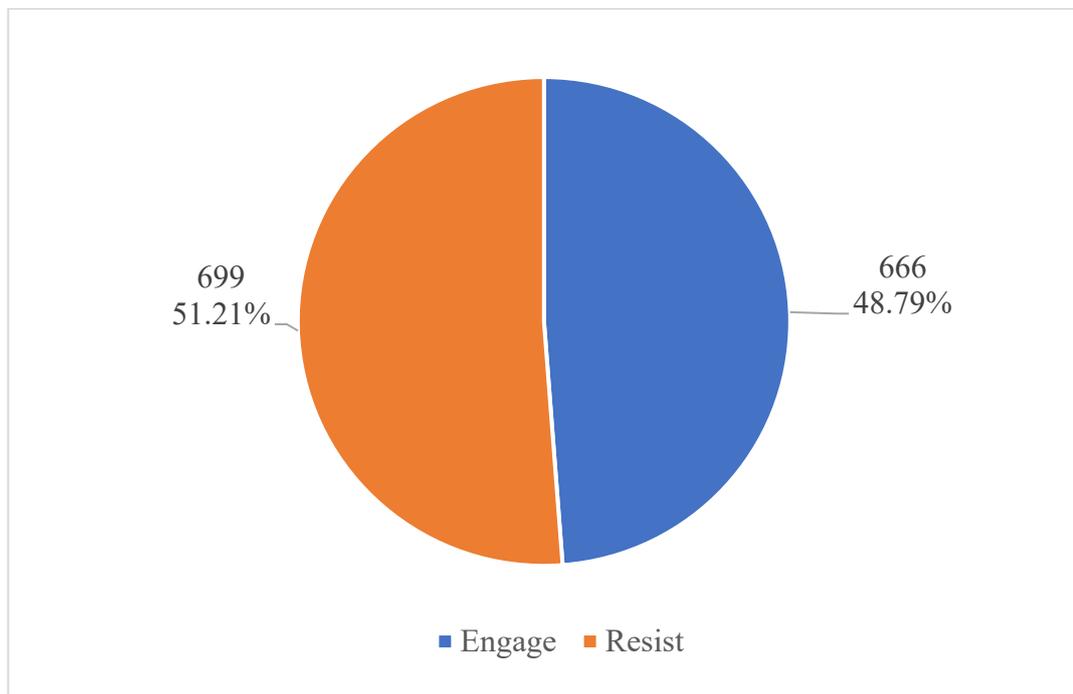
The findings enrich still under-developed understandings of how the pattern of multilevel constraints on children's agency identified in the literature review (Chapter Two) and explored in Chapters Four-Six may confine children's action environments and the agency (including communicatively) they perceive to be available to them. Throughout this chapter, illustrative extracts from child-counsellor transcripts are supplemented by excerpts from a selection of law-enforcement transcripts (Chapter Three). This approach spotlights children's behaviours in real-time to provide further contextualisation and analysis of children's discourse about their own communicative behaviours in DCSG contexts.

The chapter starts (Section 7.2) with an overview of findings showing the OGDM alignment of children's own-behaviour discourse against the two categories: Engage and Resist. Section 7.3 presents the findings about children's Resist discourse, presenting results pertaining to two categories identified, namely Indirect Resistance (7.3.1) and Direct Resistance (7.3.2). Within Section 7.3.2 the three strategies of Direct Resistance: Negotiate, End, and Refuse are presented through the lens of their alignment with groomer sub-tactics. Section 7.4 presents children's Engage discourse, discussing how it intersects with the most frequently referenced OGDM groomer sub-tactics. The chapter concludes with a discussion of key themes identified throughout the analysis.

## **7.2 Overview Findings**

There were a total of 1365 references by all 30 children to their own behaviour in DCSG contexts. Every reference by children to their own behaviour was coded to one of the identified categories: Engage or Resist. Figure 7.1 shows the number and percentage of Resist and Engage references identified in children's discourse.

**Figure 7.1** Overview Findings Children's Discourse Own Behaviour- Number (n=1365) and Percentage (%) of References



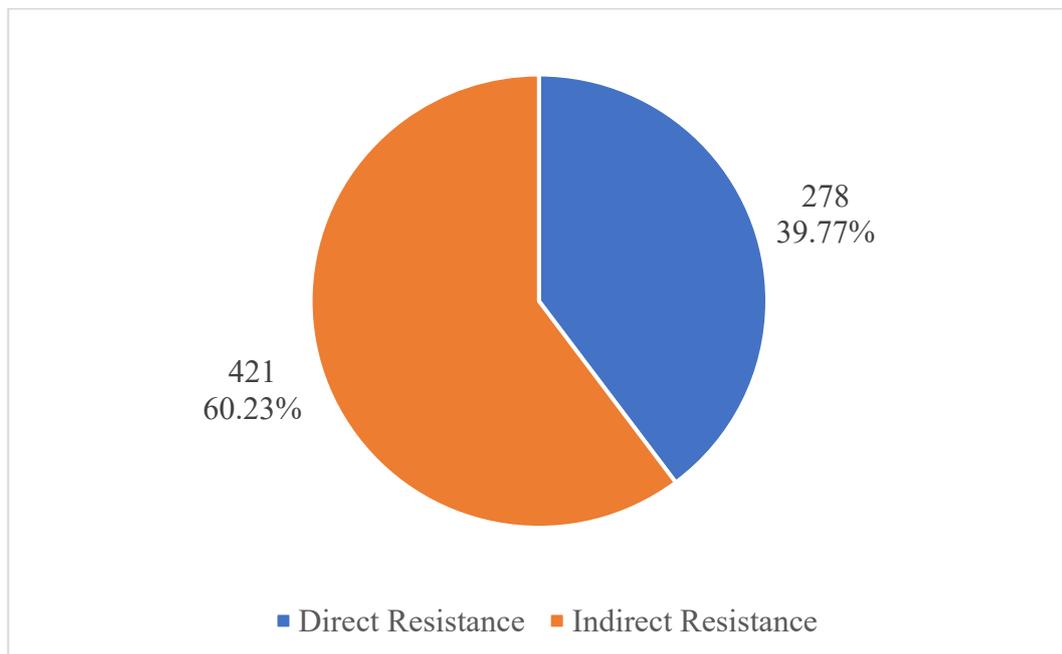
As shown in Figure 7.1, children's discourse could be aligned to the Resist category slightly more frequently (51.21%, 699/1365) than the Engage category (48.79%, 666/1365). Both types of own behaviour were referenced by 100% of children (30/30).

These findings show that, as well as being able to recount communicative engagement with groomer tactics, children slightly more frequently related attempts to resist groomer tactics and to reflexively cognitively process and rationalise their DCSG experience. This shows children demonstrated communicative agency to assert their own goals and wishes reflecting the dissonance caused by the intentionality at the heart of the groomer's manipulation (see e.g. Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). It also evidences children's attempts to communicatively redress the inherent power imbalance they were faced with in DCSG scenarios (Chapter Two).

### 7.3 Child Own-Behaviour Discourse- Resist

Two sub-strategies of children's Resist discourse were observed: Indirect Resistance and Direct Resistance. Direct Resistance refers to when children described directing communicative behaviour towards the groomer designed to show resistance to groomer tactics during DCSG interactions. Indirect Resistance on the other hand, referred to when children's discourse within the counselling context showed cognitive, private resistance to groomer manipulation (tactics and facework) that was not directly articulated to the groomer. This manifested in children's discourse either through demonstration of an ability to reflect on their abuse (Suspect) and/or to discuss seeking help or disclosing their abuse (Seek Help). Figure 7.2 presents the number and percentage of children's references to either Direct or Indirect Resistance strategies in children's discourse.

**Figure 7.2** *Children's Own-Behaviour Discourse\_Resist Number (n=/699) and Percentage (%) of References*

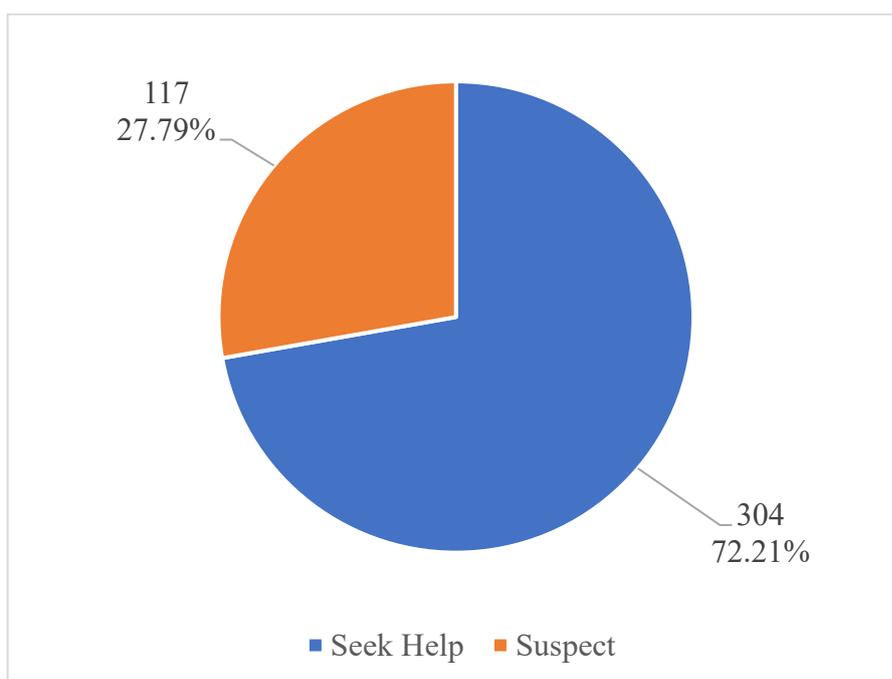


As shown in Figure 7.2 children referenced Indirect Resistance strategies with more frequency (421/699, 60.23%) than Direct Resistance (278/699, 39.77%).

### 7.3.1 *Child Own-Behaviour Discourse – Indirect Resistance.*

Within Indirect Resistance two categories were observed in children’s discourse: (i) discourse that referenced “seeking help” or (ii) discourse aligned to “suspecting”. Seeking Help refers to any instance where the child discussed having told somebody or intending to tell somebody about their DCSG experience. The second category, Suspect, covered instances where the child’s discourse indicated a cognisance of the groomer’s manipulative and coercive motivations, and their discourse showed awareness of being impacted by the groomer’s OGDM tactics and facework (Chapter Three). Figure 7.3 shows a breakdown of the number and percentage of references to each category of Indirect Resistance.

**Figure 7.3** *Children’s Own-Behaviour Discourse\_Indirect Resistance, Number (n=/421) and Percentage (%) of References*



As shown in Figure 7.3, children’s communicative behaviours were more frequently help-seeking (72.21%, 304/421) than showing suspicion about groomer tactics (117/421, 27.79%). All children in the sample discussed at least some help-seeking behaviours (30/30) which is not surprising given the counselling context studied whereby the child has taken an agentive decision to reach out for help. Children’s discourse about behaviours that could be aligned to Suspect were mentioned by all but one child (29/30).

These findings present further challenge to extant research that highlights children's marked reticence to disclose TA-CSA including DCSG (see Chapter Two e.g. Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2020, Katz, 2013; Katz et al. 2018). The findings instead seem to validate research that posits discourses of disclosure revolve not only around the child telling but how that telling is heard and understood, emphasising the inherently dialogic and discursive nature of the process (Chapter Two, see also discussion Chapter Six). Children demonstrated an ability, at least retrospectively and within a specifically designed supportive environment, to take agentive action to counter or to cognitively resist groomer manipulation and communicative tactics.<sup>115</sup> Research that argues children may not realise they have been groomed or struggle to rationalise their experience as abuse is based on chatlogs, potentially including children who had not yet or might never reach out for help (see e.g. Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023; Lorenzo-Dus & Kinzel (2021). Findings from this present dataset primarily show how Indirect Resistance was a key part of the picture of children's navigation and processing of grooming interactions and their responses to groomer tactical communication. However, as children's Indirect Resistance strategies do not cover children's direct communication of resistance to the groomer they are therefore not discussed in detail in the remainder of this chapter.<sup>116</sup> Arguably, it is understanding the emotional barriers or facilitators to children's ability to access these Resistance routes that is most relevant.<sup>117</sup>

### ***7.3.2 Child Own-Behaviour Discourse-Direct Resistance***

As shown in Figure 7.2, children's discourse about Direct Resistance behaviours represented 20.4% (278/1365) of references, made by 80% (24/30) of children. As explained in Chapter Three, Direct Resistance refers to instances where children referenced issuing communicative resistance directly to the groomer. Figure 7.4 presents results for the three categories of Direct Resistance identified in children's discourse (i) Negotiate (ii) Refuse (iii) End.

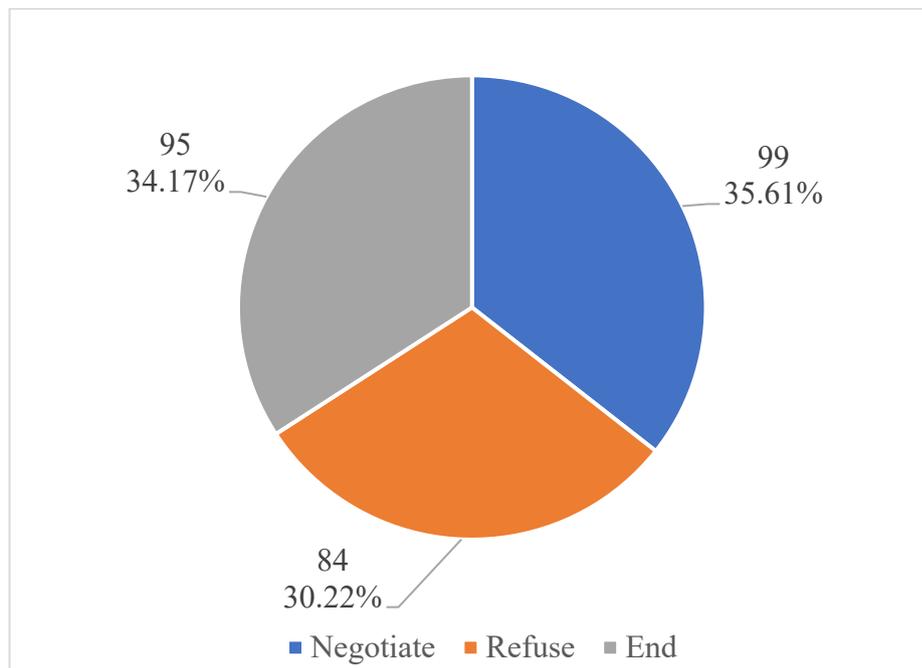
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<sup>115</sup> It is equally important to recall, as set out in Chapter Three, that the counselling context is one that is designed around providing help and support to children and geared towards the discussion of avenues of support and help as well as supporting reflection on experiences, which may shape children's discourse within this dataset towards references of Indirect Resistance.

<sup>116</sup> Children's emotions regarding accessing these routes of Indirect Resistance were explored in Chapter Six.

<sup>117</sup> However, detailed analysis of children's discourses of Indirect Resistance holds promise for future research and could enhance practice approaches to prevention and support messaging aimed at children.

**Figure 7.4** *Child Own-Behaviour Discourse Resist, Frequency (n=/278 and %) of References*



As Figure 7.4 shows, references to the three Direct Resistance strategies used by children were represented with similar frequency in their discourse. Children most frequently described negotiating with groomer attempts to engage them in their tactics, comprising 35.61% of children’s non-engage behaviors discourse (99/278). Negotiate strategies were referenced by 63% of children (19/30). This included communicative behaviours such as deflecting, bargaining, confronting, saying stop, making excuses, lying and deceiving and pretending to be someone else. Next children referred to refusing the groomer’s attempts to engage them including saying no, ignoring or muting the groomer. Refusing represented 30.22% (84/278) of children’s own-behaviour discourse, mentioned by 67% of children (20/30). Lastly children talked about ending their contact with the groomer, this included blocking the groomer or deleting accounts, this resistance communication represented 34.17% of references (95/278), mentioned by fewest children at 60% (18/30). The presence of these strategies further validates the early exploration carried out in Lorenzo-Dus et al (2023). Refusing and Endings both carry impoliteness (i.e. attacks on the groomer’s positive or negative face) and represented most children’s Resistance behaviours (64.39%) reflected within their own discourse. Findings regarding children’s Direct Resistance seem to resonate with a pattern of children adopting

complex and intricate facework attempting to manage the ophidian nature of groomer pivots and push/pulls while affording value to the groomer's face needs. This thus suggests not only is the digital and technology-assisted context of DCSG co-constructing and incubating groomer facework but children's exposure to it triggers adaptations in their own facework.

The sections below provide further analysis of each of the Resistance strategies observed in children's discourse and the intersections with children's reported own behaviours aligned to OGDM sub-strategies. Categories are discussed in decreasing order of the frequency with which they occurred in children's discourse.

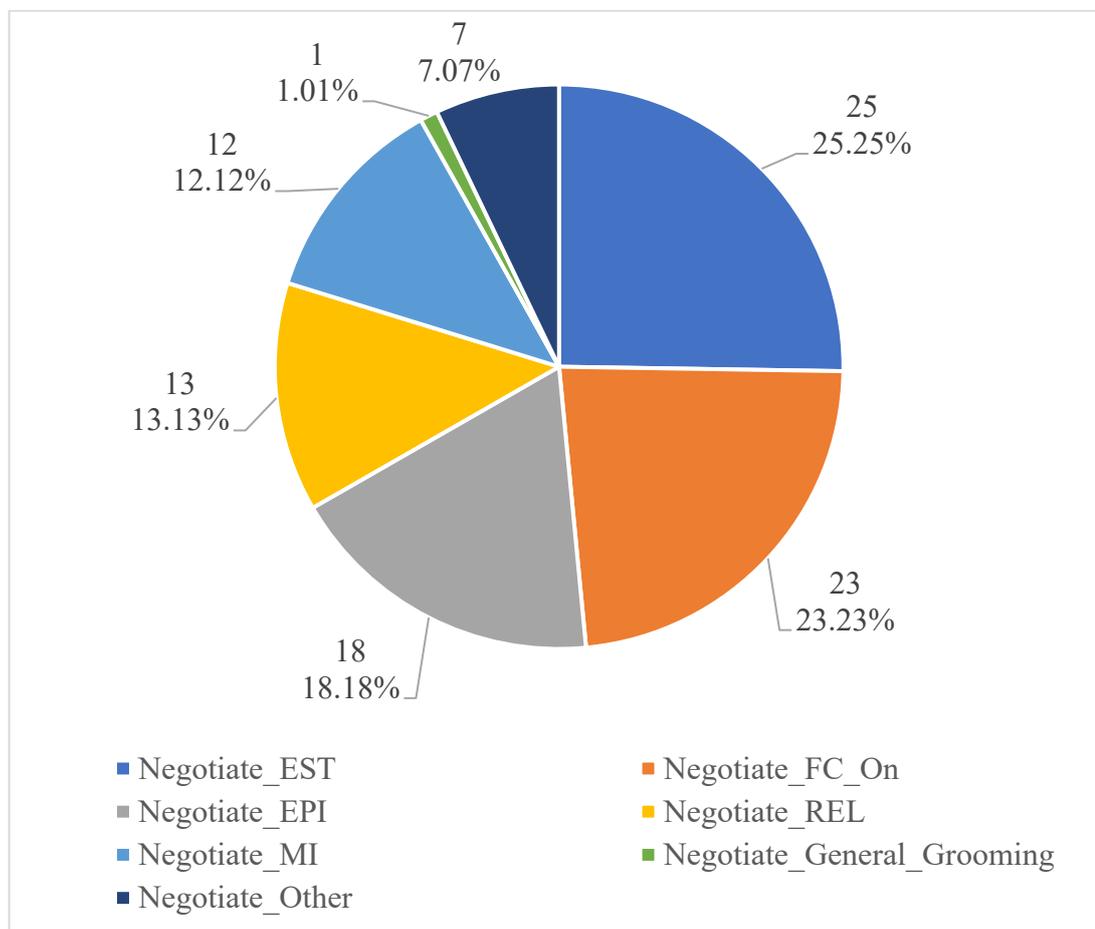
**Direct Resistance\_Negotiate.** Figure 7.5 shows that with regards to Direct Resistance\_Negotiate, children's discourse aligned to six of the twelve<sup>118</sup> groomer OGDM sub-tactics: (i) Exchange of Personal Information (EPI); (ii) Relationships (REL) (iii) Explicit Sex Talk (EST) (iv) Mental Isolation (MI) and (v) Further Contact Online (FC\_On), which were represented in children's discourse with a frequency above 10% of references. The "other" category refers to sub-tactics referenced with low frequency.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Those that received no mention were: groomer trust-building tactics of (i) Activities, (ii) Gifts and (iii) Sociability; Sexual Gratification tactics of (iii) Implicit Desensitisation and (iv) Reframing and finally the (v) Physical Isolation sub-tactic.

<sup>119</sup> Sub-tactics references with low frequency were: Further Contact Offline (FC\_Off) and Access (ACC).

**Figure 7.5** *Child Own-Behaviour Discourse Online Discourse Model Sub-Tactics Direct Resistance\_Negotiate, Frequency (n=/99 and %) of References*



As shown in Figure 7.5, discourse that could be aligned to Resist\_Negotiate totalled 99 references, made by 63% of children (19/30). There was only one mention to negotiation around grooming in general terms, showing children were generally able to be specific about how and in what respect they negotiated with the groomer. EST was the groomer sub-tactic towards which most Resist\_Negotiate communicative behaviours were aligned within children's discourse. This represented 25.25% (25/99) of references and was mentioned by 50% (15/30) of children. Next, children were found to be negotiating with the groomer attempting to resist FC\_On. This represented 23.23% (23/99) of their discourse about Negotiate strategies, mentioned by 40% (12/30) children. Negotiation over groomer attempts to elicit EPI were referenced by 40% of children (12/30) and represented 18.18% (18/99) of children's Resist\_Negotiate discourse. Children mentioned with similar frequency, Negotiate behaviours that could be aligned to the REL sub-tactic (13.31%, 13/99) and the

groomer's attempts at MI (12.12%, 12/99). Negotiation over these two sub-tactics were mentioned by 30% (9/30) and 17% (5/30) of children respectively. This suggests that children may not have resisted or seen the need to resist these groomer tactics, or they may not have recognised them in groomer discourse (see Chapter Four). The following sub-sections discuss, in decreasing order of frequency, extracts showing how children discursively presented their Resist\_Negotiate behaviours across the three most frequently referenced groomer tactics – EST, FC\_On and EPI.

***Direct Resistance\_Negotiate: Explicit Sex Talk.*** Children's Negotiate\_EST discourse predominantly concerned the child negotiating the groomer's introduction of, or the reciprocation of, overtly sexual linguistic or visual material. A key site of negotiation was in response to groomer requests for children to send coerced child intimate images (CCII). This is illustrated in Extract\_7.1:

Extract\_7.1

1	C003	we were talking and he asked me to send nudes. i didnt and i said i
2		wouldnt but as a joke i said i would talk dirty instead. i have never had a
3		boyfriend and real life is pretty crappy but he was really nice and i didnt
4		say much just a bit like "you make me horny" or whatever but then i
5		realised i fwlt uncomfortable and blocked him

In Extract\_7.1 the child discussed how they negotiated by batting away the groomer's request for intimate images by offering instead "dirty talk", which they constructed as humour ("as a joke i said i would talk dirty instead", (2)). The child's reference to their deflection of groomer attempts to persuade them to send intimate images through "talking dirty instead" (2) suggests the child's perception was that engaging in "talk" was less serious than sharing intimate images. Introducing humour and framing their behaviour as a "joke" (2) could represent an attempt to contain and minimise the potential face threat through positive politeness of admitting engagement with the groomer's EST sub-tactic to the counsellor. The child hedged their account, stating "i didn't say much just a bit" (3) and presented their "dirty talk" as superficial ("just a bit like "you make me horny" or whatever," (4)). The vague adverb "whatever" shows the child's attempt to minimise the use of sex talk ("horny", (4)) via vague language (see Chapter Four). By setting the terms of how far they would engage and attempting to divert the groomer, the child attempted

to reassert their personal goals by retreating to the initial relationship exploration “talk” with the groomer (2). However, the child’s perceived need to offer or share “something” suggests how challenging it was for the child to fully disregard the groomer’s requests and face needs.

The child’s affective response to the sexual interaction with the groomer, whereby the sex talk made them feel ill at ease (“i realised i fwlt uncomfortable and blocked him”, (5)) also demonstrated their Negotiate behaviour was in response to a struggle to reconcile the perceived requirement of mitigating the face threat of refusal to the groomer with the friction caused by the dissonance between the groomer’s intentionality and the child’s own face wants. This affective response appeared to trigger a stark assessment of their needs set against those of the groomer, resulting in the child wielding the power at their disposal to block the groomer and cease the interaction/contact.

Children were also found to Negotiate by making deals and bargaining by offering engagement and compliance with groomer requests to mitigate threats of violence aimed at friends and family as Extract\_7.2 illustrates:

#### Extract\_7.2

1	C006	i shown him what i look like wjen he first added me becaise i didnt know
2		recognised me or anything, and the other day because he was saying he
3		was going to smash my house up and do something to my mum so i said
4		okay ill do it aslong as you stay away from my house and my mum but
5		then later that day i said i dont want to and i say it everytime he messages
6		me then he just says i have to

In Extract\_7.2 the child indicated that their response to overt groomer threats of violence (“because he was saying he was going to smash my house up and do something to my mum”, (3)) to negotiate by complying with the groomer’s proposed sexual activity. The child’s resulting behaviour (“so i said okay ill do it” (4)) directly connected their compliance with an attempt to avert the groomer’s threats to hurt their family. This was indicated by the child’s negotiating phrase (“ill do it aslong as you stay away from my house and my mum” (4)), using their sexual compliance to bargain with the groomer and attempt to prevent harm to those they love and care

about. This reflects findings in other research (see Seymour-Smith & Kloess, 2021; Thomas et. al, 2023) that identifies this process of reciprocal deal-making in child resistance and groomer challenge, emphasising the discursive nature of children's resistance. The child's strain against the groomer's threat was indicated by their further attempts to Negotiate, with the child making explicit and repeated statements of refusal and assertion of their own face wants ("i said i dont want to and i say it everytime he messages me", (5)). However, these negotiation attempts seemed to be overridden by the groomer ("then he just says i have to", (6). Extract\_7.2 also evidences patterns of groomer intensification of Encroachment-oriented facework (here threats) in response to children's resistance which has been reflected in other studies (see Chapter Two, e.g. Seymour-Smith & Kloess, 2021 and Lorenzo-Dus et. al, 2023).

Another manifestation of children's Resist\_Negotiate behaviours was triggered by children's attempts to preserve their face by attempting to avert groomer sextortion and threats of exposure, as shown in Extract\_7.3:

#### Extract\_7.3

- 1 C009 He said he was going to send them to my friends on instagram and i asked
- 2 him not to and i said ill do whatever and she said he wants nudes everyday.

In Extract\_7.3 the child attempted to negotiate with the groomer who had them in predicament reminiscent of a finger trap.<sup>120</sup> If they pulled away, the groomer's grip tightened so they changed tack and tried to move towards the groomer in the hope that attending to his face wants and appeasing him through compliance would provide enough slack to secure their release ("i asked him not to and i said ill do whatever", (1-2)). This seems to show the inverse of the groomer "push-pull" strategy identified by Lorenzo-Dus (2023) and supports the argument that the intensification of groomer impoliteness incubated by the unregulated digital

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<sup>120</sup> Definition of a finger trap: "the finger trap is a puzzle that traps the victim's fingers (often the index fingers) in both ends of a small cylinder woven from bamboo. The initial reaction of the victim is often to pull their fingers outward, but this only tightens the trap. The way to escape the trap is to push the ends toward the middle, which enlarges the openings and frees the fingers. A single-ended version of the device, sold as a "girlfriend trap", has been available since at least 1870, back when it was recorded as a "Mädchenfänger" or "girl catcher". The first recorded use of the term finger trap to characterize the toy was in 1900 in an American newspaper. [Chinese finger trap - Wikipedia](#)

weaponisation of communicative affordances discursively and concomitantly leads to a mutation in children’s facework that skews expected facework norms. In this extract the child’s negotiation through offering to do “whatever” (2) showed their desperation to cater to the groomer’s face wants to avert the undesirable consequence of exposure. In this case the groomer saw the child’s attempt to negotiate as a chink in their resistance which they interpreted as an opportunity to push harder and force further compliance aiming to extort the child to send intimate images everyday (“and she said he wants nudes everyday” (2)). This extract provides more evidence for the affordances that image-based sharing, storage and dissemination provide to threaten further exposure to the child creating a cycle of extortion based on blackmail. This facework facilitated by lack of regulation has the vice-like effect of tightly constraining the child’s action environment (Chapter Two).

However, as shown in Extract\_7.4 even faced with groomer impoliteness and face attacks in the form of forceful sextortion, children were found to attempt to negotiate using excuses and evasion to delay the groomer:

#### Extract\_7.4

1	C009	I told him i was eating so i couldnt send them but i dont know what to
2		do because he gave me 5 minutes before he sends them

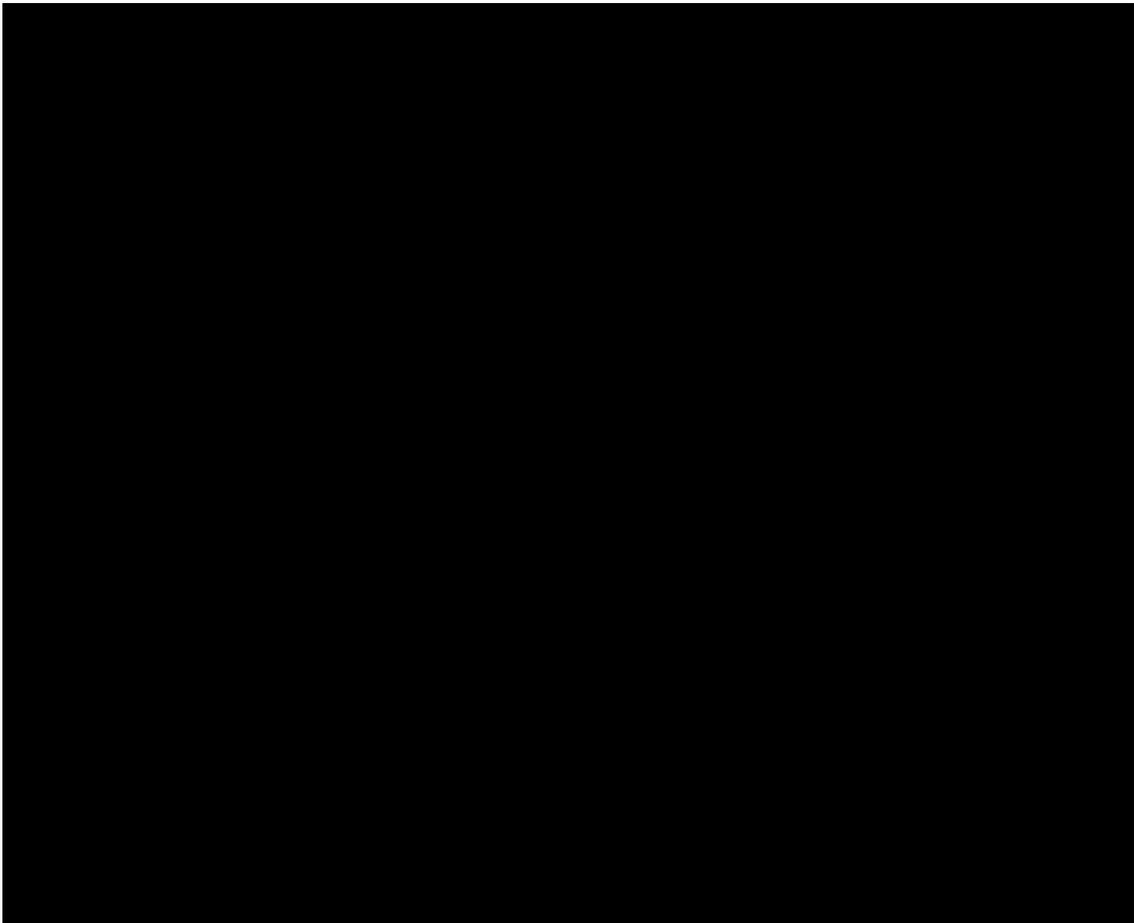
In Extract\_7.4 the child reported being engaged in a stand-off with the groomer, attempting to use excuses and falsehoods (“I told him i was eating”, (1)) to avoid complying with the groomer’s demands (“so i couldnt send them”, (1)). However, the child’s resolve appeared fragile, and their uncertainty was close to the surface (“i dont know what to do”, (1)) in the face of the groomer’s forceful and sustained face attacks (“because he gave me 5 minutes before he sends them”, (2)). The pressure and aggression of the groomer’s attacks makes the presence of negotiation and the tenacity of children in attempting to assert it particularly salient. Negotiation was one of children’s main tools of defence to resist the groomer but, as shown in Chapter Five, it was under sustained assault by the more powerful groomer’s relentless face-attacking facework as illustrated in Extract\_7.5:

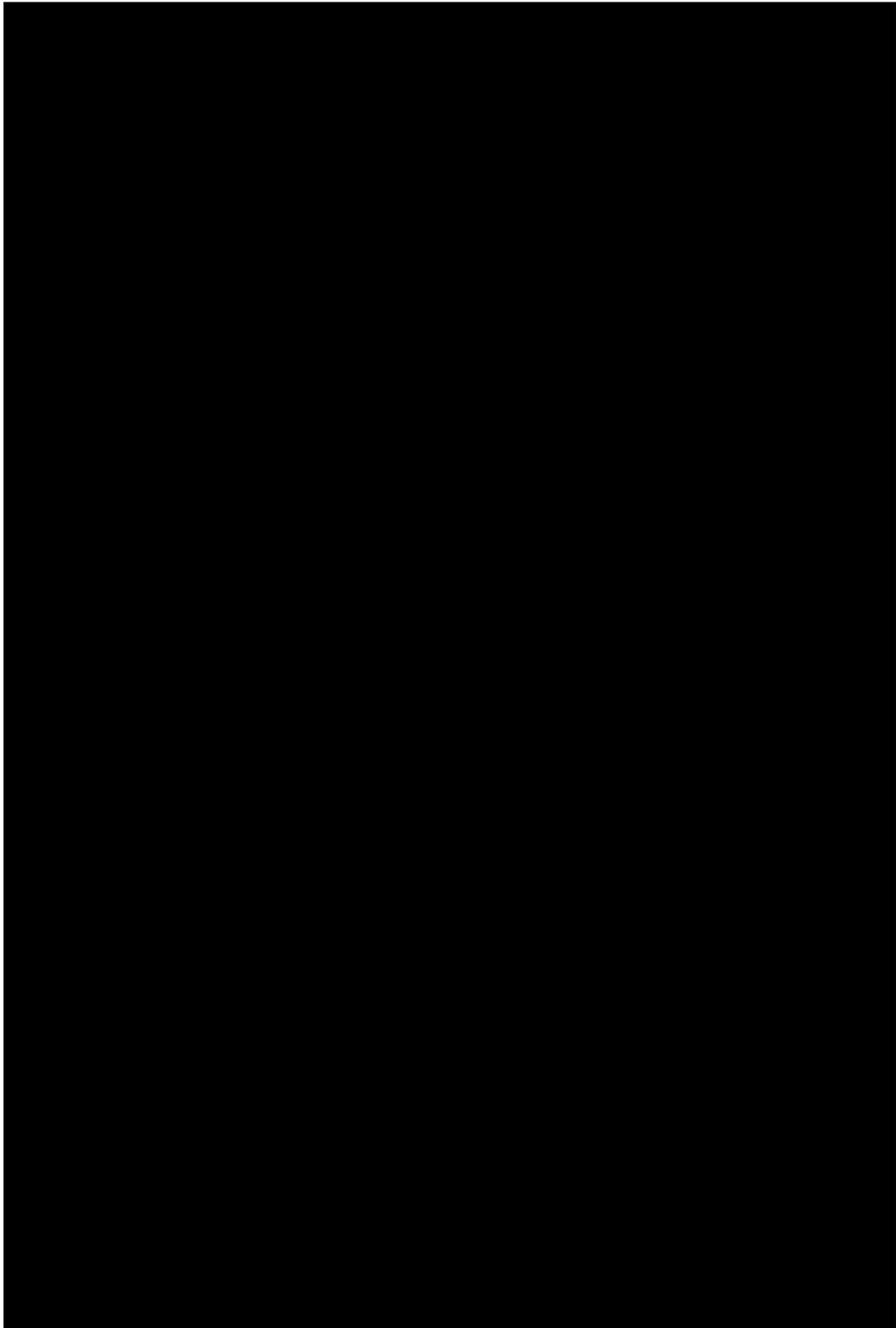
## Extract\_7.5

1 C022 I am trying to stall but they are pressing me more and more

The child's discourse in Extract\_7.5 shows a tenacity to stand firm ("I am trying to stall"). The choice of the verb "stall" showed the child's goal of avoidance, encapsulating the tension between the groomer's intentions and the child's face needs. The child's use of ("I am trying to....but"), suggests resignation to eventually being overpowered. The child's reference to attempting to withstand the pressure ("they are pressing me more") gives a finger-in-a-dam sense of the child trying to stand firm against a crushing force. The child's repetition of "more and more" communicates that the sustained intensity of the groomer's facework was wearing them down, making it extremely challenging to hold their ground.

The law enforcement chatlogs corroborated children's use of agentive choice to set parameters for compliance, negotiating over the boundaries of what they did or did not feel comfortable doing. This is illustrated in Extract\_7.6:





*Direct Resistance\_Negotiate: Further Contact Online.* Children's  
Negotiate\_FC\_On behaviours concerned instances of the child deflecting,

bargaining, confronting, saying stop, and making excuses to resist groomer attempts at continuing digital engagement. Children’s discourse about groomer tactics showed strong overlap between groomer EPI, EST and FC\_On sub-tactics, with the connecting thread being sextortion facilitated by the ease of sharing, storing and re-sharing CCII/IV within the digital discourse context (also Chapter Four). In this sense the facilitation of CCII/IV afforded by digital smartphone technology and SNS platforms is a tether freely available to the groomer, both to keep a hold on the child to ensure further contact and to keep pulling the child back. That this impacted children’s behaviour further corroborates previous research (see Chapter Two e.g. Hanson, 2017). Children’s discourse showed that they used negotiation to navigate the hold the groomer had over them, as shown in Extract\_7.7:

Extract\_7.7

1	C023	so i only sent him a picture of my breasts (even though he did ask for
2		more and i said no) but i feel so guilty and i know it was so wrong
3		but i felt as though i had to do it otherwise he get mad

In this Extract\_7.7 the child sent a partially nude image (“so i only sent him a picture of my breasts”, (1)) to negotiate over what and how much they shared in the context of the groomer’s demands. The child stated that the groomer tried to push the child to send more explicit photos, but the child explicitly refused (“even though he did ask for more and i said no”, (1-2)). However, the limited effectiveness of the child’s strategy was shown in their expression of feelings they describe using the noun “guilt” (see Chapter Six). Children’s discourse suggested they were trading CCII/IV as currency to preserve their face and assert their own personal goals to strategically manage the more powerful adult groomer who was employing manipulative tactics to coerce the child into alignment with their own desires. This extract shows evidence of how children’s attempt to appease and attend to three sets of face needs in direct tension simultaneously (Self, Groomer, Other(s)) created a contradictory cognitive complexity that was extremely challenging to navigate. In this extract the child was trying to manage the groomer’s impoliteness and their concern for what other people would think. Stretched to the limit by this tension, the child’s own face needs and sense of self are shattered. In Extract\_7.7 the child states their perception that they have flouted societal behavioural norms and expectations (“i know it was so wrong”,

(2)). The emphatic “so” suggested the perceived severity of their contravention. The child also referenced the coercion they felt from the groomer and the direct impact it had on influencing their behaviour (“i felt as though i had to do it otherwise he get mad”, (3)). The implicit fear instigated by implicit threat posed by the groomer’s demands was communicated by the child’s conditional threat clause (“otherwise ...”, (3)).

Conflict between the child’s goal of friendship and relationship building and the groomer’s manipulative sexualised goals was another focus for children’s resistance through negotiation that intersected with FC\_On. Extract\_7.8 was typical of how this friction manifested in children’s discourse:

Extract\_7.8

1	C008	he kept messaging me on instagram asking y i blocked him and i told him
2		that it was because i didnt like it and that i only wanted to be friends and
3		so he said that we could be friends and he would stop doing it and part of
4		me wanted to believe him cos I had just broken up with my boyfriend
5		who was also one of my closest mates and my family had just found out
6		that i was suicidal and so i liked the fact he didnt know what was going
7		so i unblocked him

Extract\_7.8 indicated the child’s response to the complex and intensive manipulative facework they were subjected to by the groomer. The child’s response mixed clear rejection of the groomer’s goals and an assertion of their personal boundaries (“i told him that it was because i didnt like it” [the constant messaging], (2)). The child used negotiation, mitigating the impoliteness of their clear rebuttal of the groomer with a partial engagement of offering friendship (“i told him ... that i only wanted to be friends”, (1-2)). The groomer’s adjustment of their face work showed politeness through apparently accepting the child’s position, attending to both their negative face wants, by hearing their wish to be “only” (2) friends, and negative face needs, by promising to cease the sexualised interaction (“and so he said that we could be friends, and he would stop doing it”, (3)). The child clearly asserted their need for attention from somebody not connected to what was going on in their life, which articulated a clear goal of friendship and connection which coloured their propensity to trust the groomer (“part of me wanted to believe him... i liked the fact he didnt know what was going on so i unblocked him”, lines 6-7). The child’s goal of

friendship led them to retract their resistance to the groomer illustrated by the child's statement that they "unblocked him" (7).

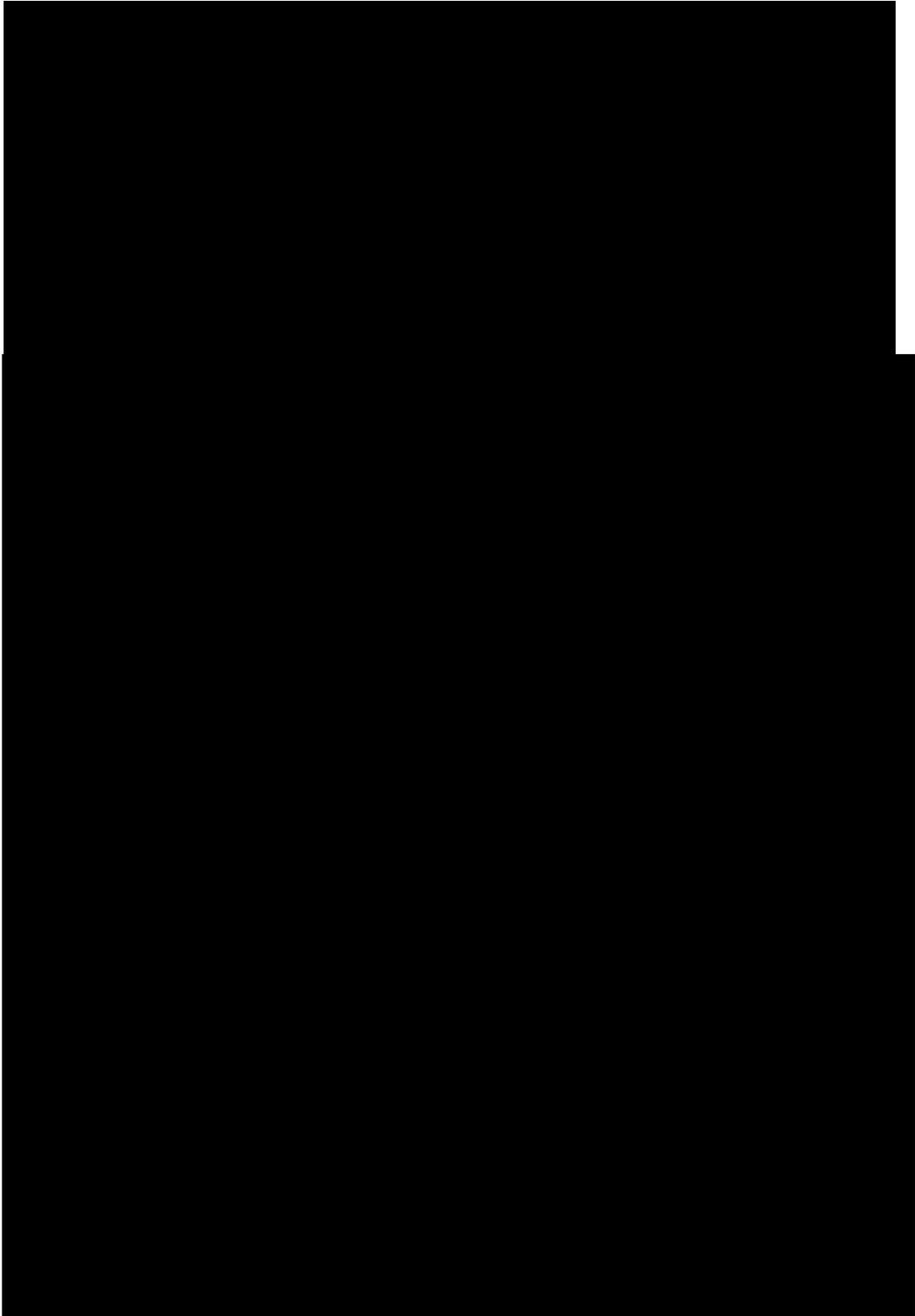
Children also discussed employing Resist\_Negotiate behaviours by choosing the muting function provided by many SNS' over that of blocking. Muting offered a way to attend to groomer negative face needs and mitigate the force of the face threat but in so doing diluted the effectiveness of the resistance. An example of muting was referred to in children's discourse in Extract 7.9:

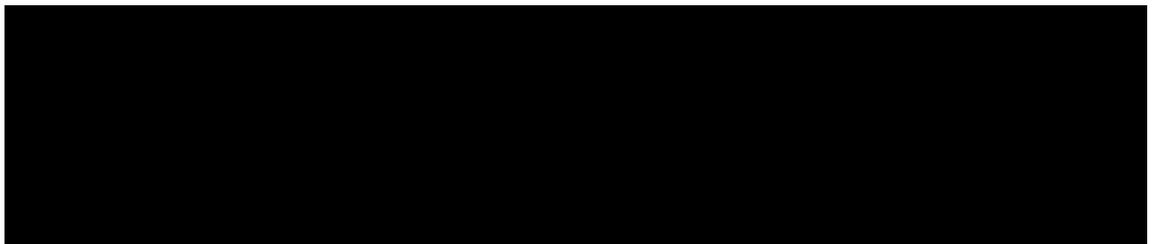
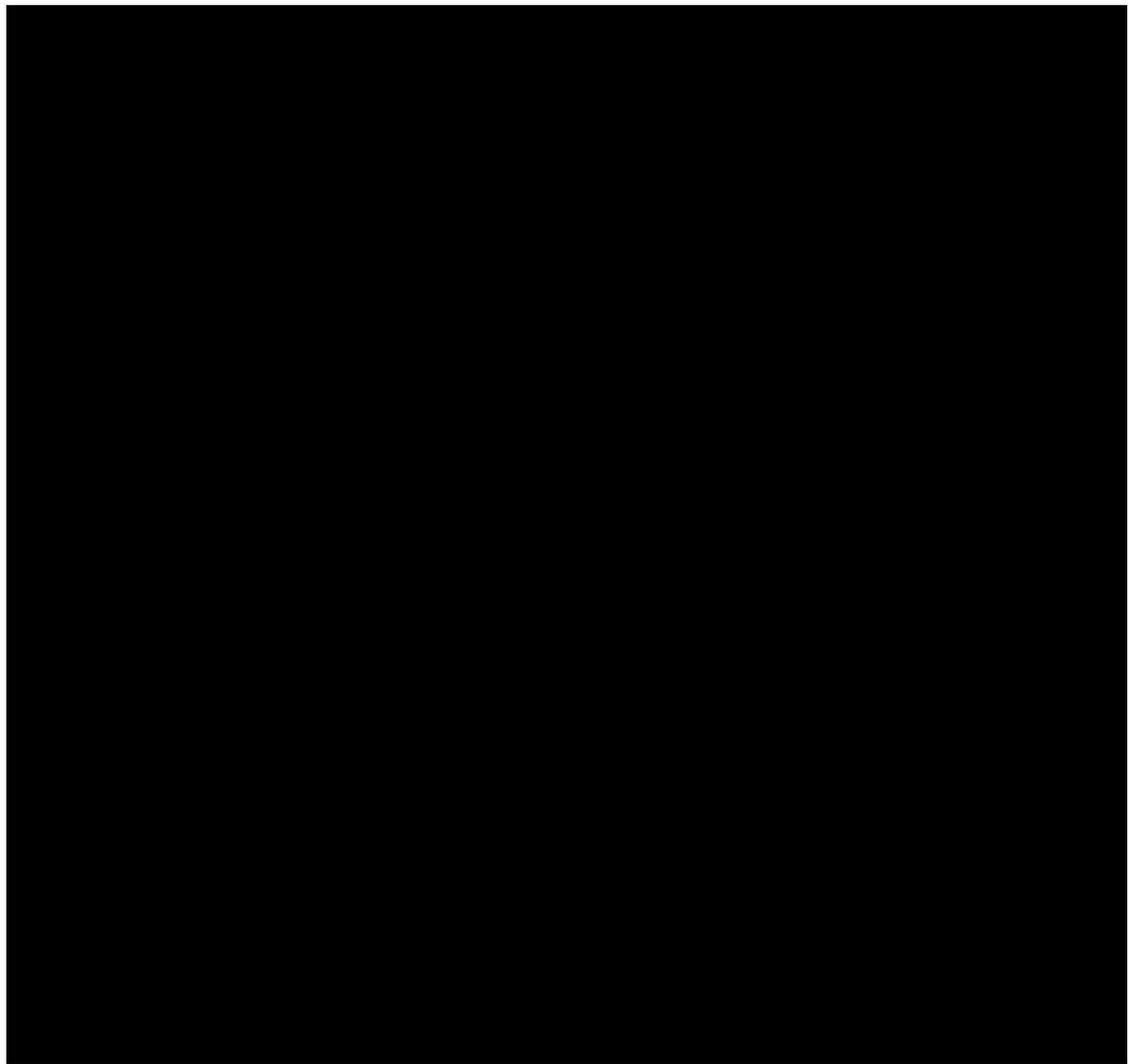
#### Extract\_7.9

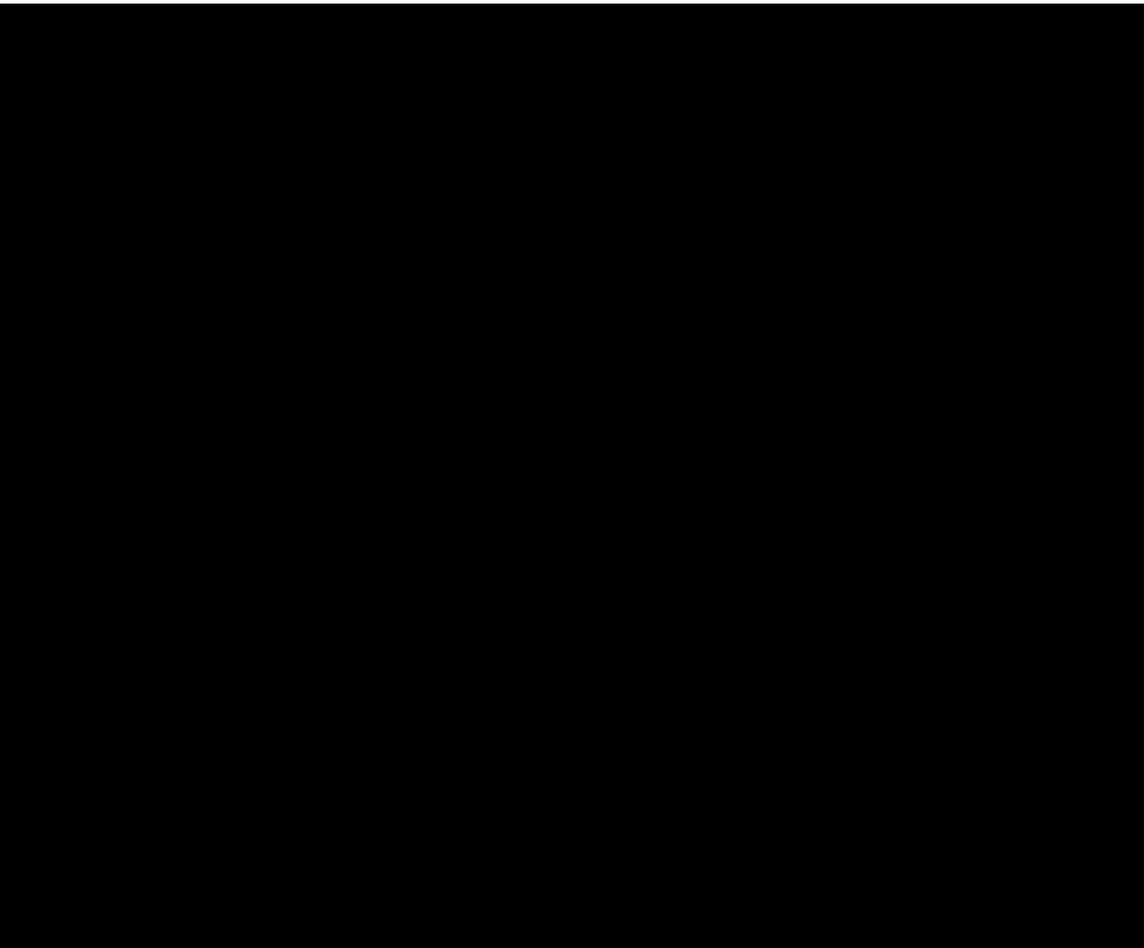
1           C014    Ok ill mute him and report the chat i wont block him because he will see  
2                           that i say i have to go and leave it at that.

Extract\_7.9 shows how the child chose the temporary option to mute and report the chat over the communicative action of blocking, which would have been a more decisive end to contact but carried impoliteness and constituted a substantial face threat to the groomer. The child's allusion to the face threat ("because he will see that", (2)) indicated the child was both concerned about the impoliteness of the blocking action but also the groomer's awareness of the face attack. This extract therefore shows how negotiation represented a manifestation of Politeness (both Positive and Negative) aimed at managing the constraints of the groomer's manipulative facework. This extract suggests children were attuned to the diverse affordances and challenges of different online support tools, indicating relational reasons for selecting one over the other. Muting the chat allowed a "soft" desisting of contact with the groomer managing the face threat it entailed. In this way the child used the functionality as an alternative Resist\_Negotiate strategy to try to free themselves from the groomer's rebounding of contact and overpowering of attempts to block them (see Chapter Two, e.g. Thorn, 2021). The child's indication that they would seek an ending and then stonewall the groomer ("i say i have to go and leave it at that", (2)) shows strategic agency and shrewd awareness of how to harness the physical distance afforded by the digital context.

In Extract\_7.10, from the law enforcement data, we can observe child's use of excuses and stalling tactics as a Resist\_Negotiate strategy in response to groomer attempts at FC\_On.





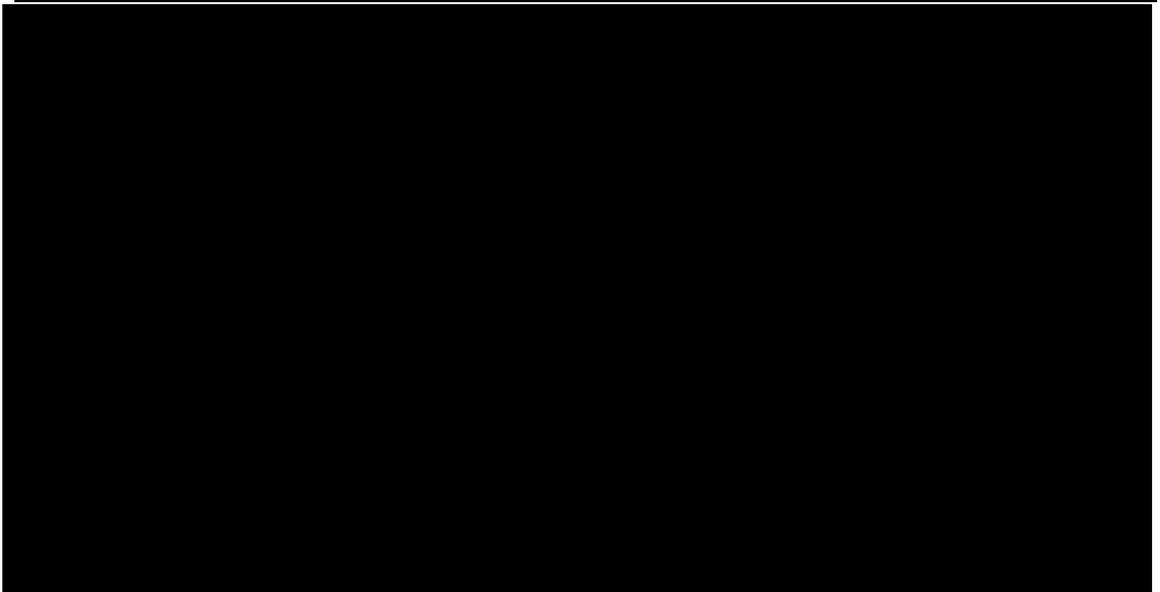
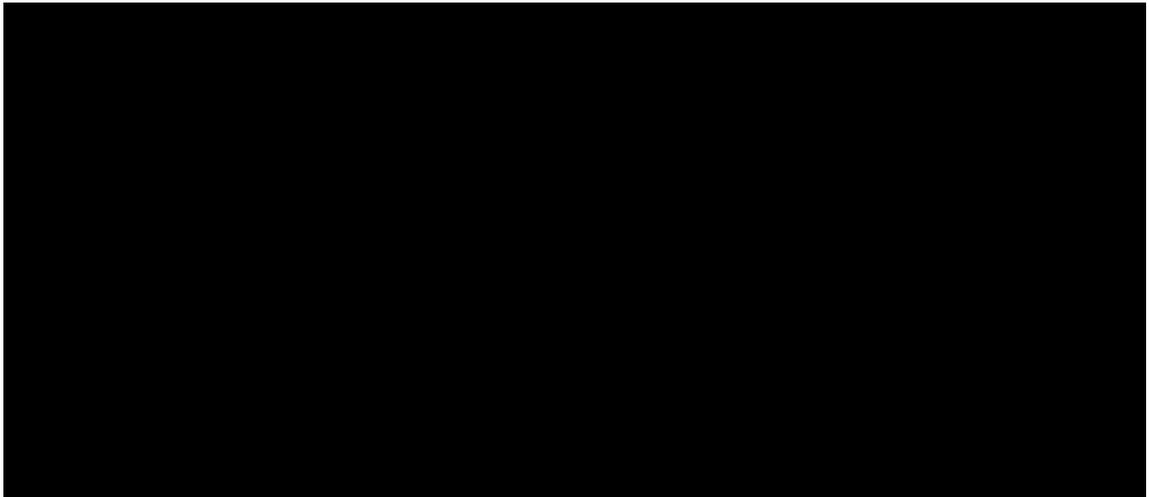


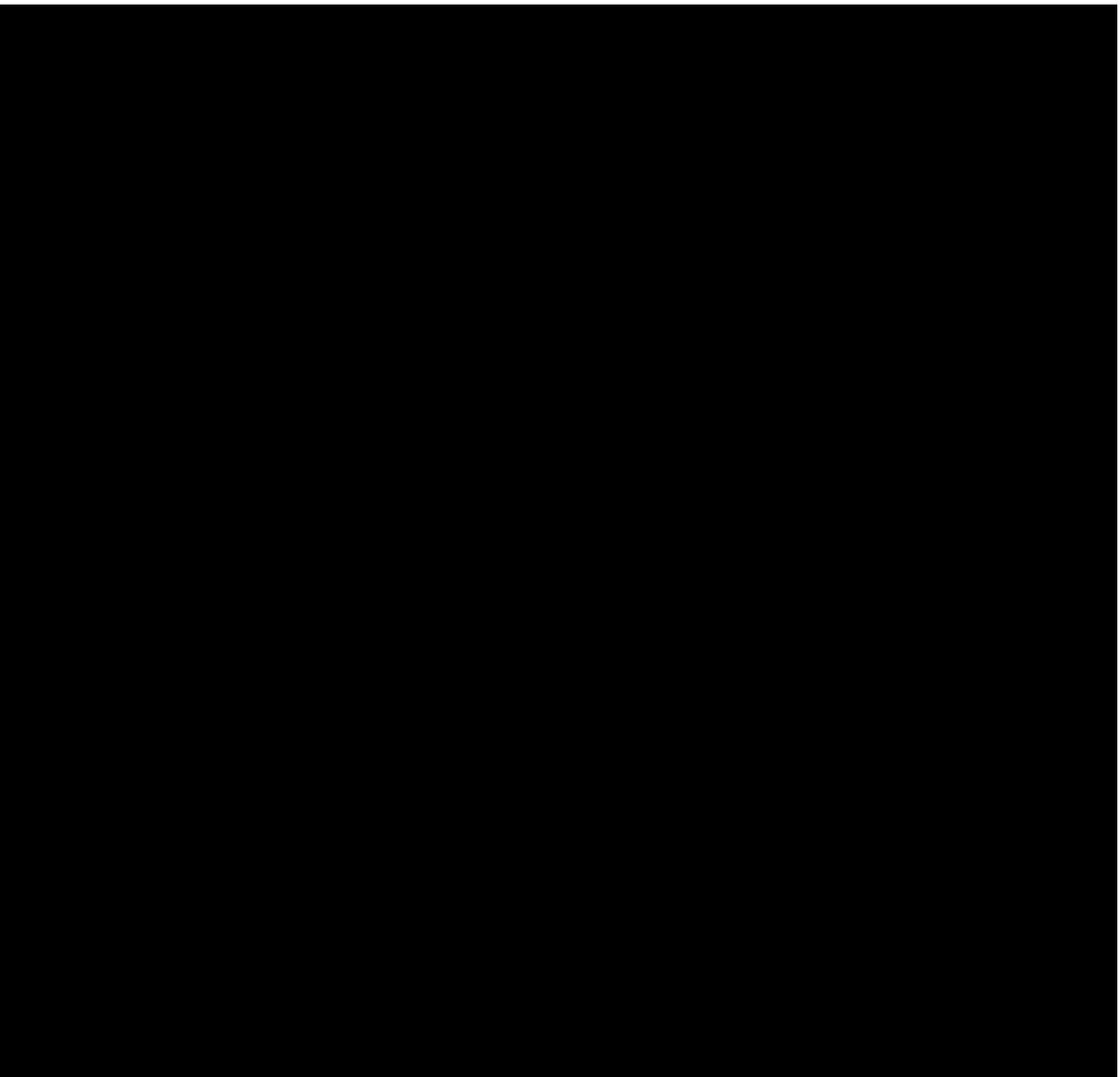
*Direct Resistance\_Negotiate: Exchange of Personal Information.* Within Resist\_Negotiate aligned to EPI one of the main strategies concerned references by children to giving false information and lying to keep information about their true circumstances and friends and family private. This is illustrated by Extract\_7.11:

Extract\_7.11

1 C027 when i was 12/13 i got a text from a man. I ignored it and the day i went  
2 to block him, a message he sent caught my eye. He told me to send him  
3 a naked picture. When i refused he told me he was a bad man who would  
4 get someone to hurt and rape me if i didnt. so i agreed. I sent him over of  
5 100 images and videos myself. He screenshotted them for safe keeping  
6 and found an old facebook page of mine. He knew the area I lived in and  
7 he saw a picture of my nan and knew i had a brother and sisters in the  
8 end, I lied to him and told him I didnt know them and that I was  
9 adopted/lived in a different area. He seemed to believe it  
11 ...  
12 but i am running out of excuses now...  
13 ...  
14 i lied about being adopted, i told him my sister was 3 (also a lie), one  
15 was 5 (a lie) he told me the three was too young but the rest were fine  
16 and to take pictures of them. of course i didn't.

Extract\_7.11 shows how the child attempted to deal with the groomer's impoliteness strategy of encroaching on the child's offline environment by stealing information on social media. The child described attempting damage limitation by lying about their actual circumstance to try to retain control of the information the groomer held about them ("I lied to him and told him I didnt know them and that I was adopted/lived in a different area, (8-9)). However, the groomer penetrated the child's attempt to shield themselves by twisting their constructed reality. The child's discourse showed how the groomer capitalised on the false information provided to feed their fixation, assert their own face wants and reintroduce sex talk ("i lied about being adopted, i told him my sister was 3 (also a lie), one was 5 (a lie)", (14-15)). The child's ability to sustain the constructed reality appeared to be worn down by the intensity of the groomer's face attack, indicated by the child's statement about their wavering resolve and sense of helplessness ("i am running out of excuses now", (12)).





**Direct Resistance\_End.** Within Direct Resistance\_End, as shown in Figure 7.4 children’s discourse aligned to three of the twelve groomer sub-tactics: (i) EST (ii) FC\_On and (iii) MIS.<sup>121</sup> Children were found to make few references to general grooming when it came to their discourse about End behaviours. Six groomer sub-tactics received no mention in children’s Direct Resistance\_End discourse.<sup>122</sup> The “other” category refers to sub-tactics referenced with low frequency.<sup>123</sup> Direct Resistance\_End refers to instances where the child referenced themselves or the support around them, having ceased the interaction with the groomer either

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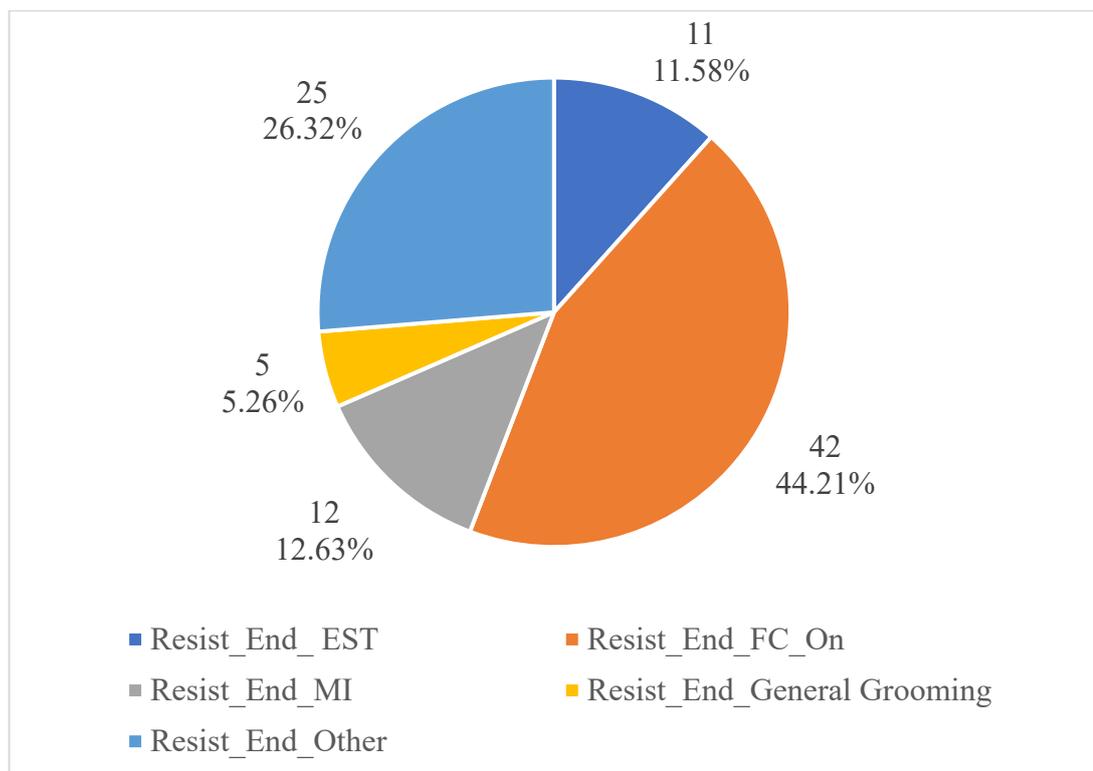
<sup>121</sup> These were represented in children’s discourse with a frequency above 10% of references.

<sup>122</sup> As with Active Resistance\_Negotiate these were groomer trust-building tactics of (i) Activities, (ii) Gifts and (iii) Sociability; Sexual Gratification tactics of (iv) Implicit Desensitisation and (v) Reframing and finally the (v) Physical Isolation sub-tactic.

<sup>123</sup> These were Refusal of an exchange of personal information, discussion of relationships and further contact offline. Refusal of Access also occurred with low frequency –due to the cohort of children included in the dataset having experienced grooming interactions.

temporarily or permanently or considering doing so (Chapter Three). This included communicative behaviours such as the child blocking or unfriending the groomer. It also included the child reporting, deleting their account or putting protections around themselves i.e. disabling location services.

**Figure 7.6** *Own-Behaviour Discourse Child Own-Behaviour Discourse Online Discourse Model Sub-Tactics Direct Resistance\_End, Frequency (n=/95 and %) of References*



As shown in Figure 7.6, within Direct Resistance\_End discourse children were generally able to be specific with general references infrequent, representing 5.26% of their discourse (5/95) and including references such as: C014: “I want to stop talking to him but I don’t want him to keep doing this”. Children’s discourse predominantly concerned reflections on strategies to end contact with the groomer and most frequently intersected with FC\_On, representing 44.21% (42/95) of their

references and mentioned by 57% of children (17/30).<sup>124</sup> Children referenced Resistance\_End through showing an intention to block groomer MIS in 12.63% of their discourse (12/95 references mentioned by 20% of children (6/30). The EST sub-tactic also triggered resistance through endings in 11.58% of children's references (11/95) mentioned by 50% of children 15/30. Given most children's Resistance\_End discourse was aligned to FC\_On, it is the focus of this sub-section.

Children referenced making use of the SNS functionality which allowed them to block users to obstruct groomer's access to them as shown in Extract\_7.13:

Extract\_7.13

1	C003	I realised i fwlt uncomfortable and blocked him
2		...
3		I've deleted my account and blocked him on snapchat
4		And ive deleted my yubo account

In Extract\_7.13 the child talked about using multiple online affordances intended to be a watertight approach to ending contact with the groomer. The child was unequivocal in communicating their agentic action to block the groomer and to delete their accounts on multiple SNS' to prevent the groomer recontacting them. The child connected this action to their feeling of unease ("uncomfortable", (1)), suggesting blocking was an efficient route to self-protection when the child sensed a threat. However, although the child's action suggested self-determination and agentic choice, one of the main ways the child could escape the groomer was to delete their account. This was a fundamental curtailment of the child's digital identity and freedom of movement, therefore in fact representing another way that children's agency and action environment was curtailed by the groomer's tactics (see Chapter Two e.g. McGlynn et al., 2021).

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<sup>124</sup> With low frequency children also referenced halting or attempting to halt their contact with the groomer at the initial Access stage, this represented 9/95 references (9.47%, mentioned by 20% of children, 6/30), this was similarly the case with EPI references (9.47%, mentioned by 17% of children, 5/30).

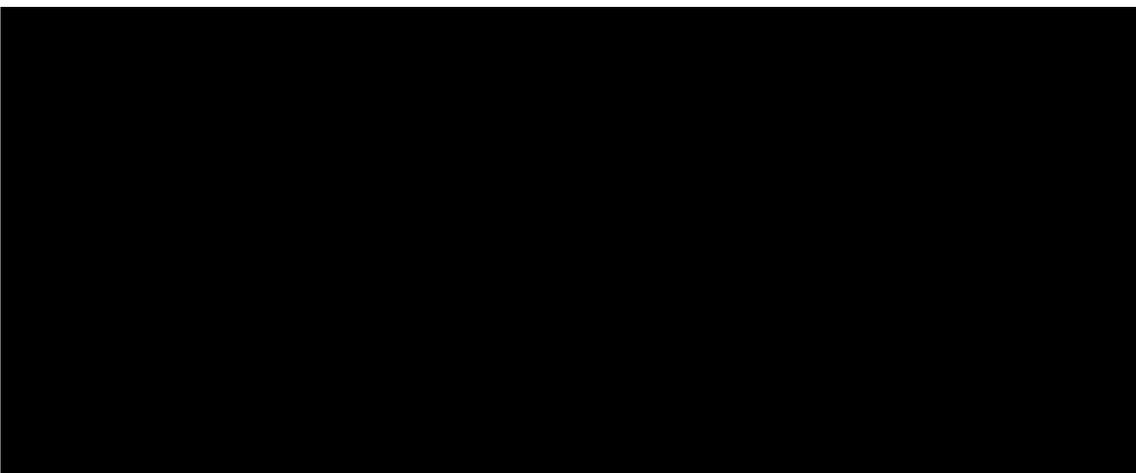
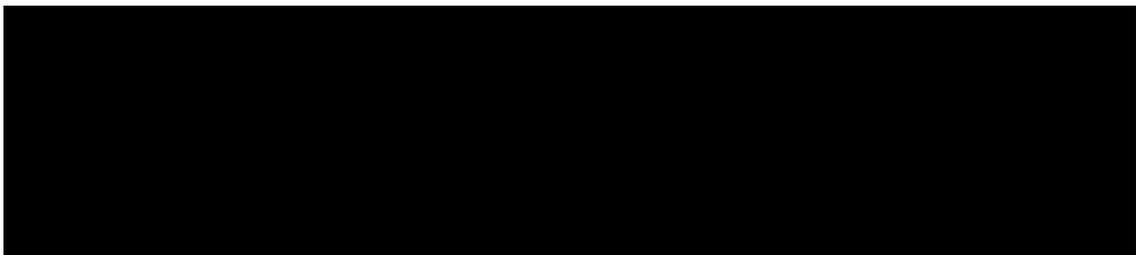
Despite these constraints Extract\_7.14 showed the child's discourse shows they exerted proactive agency to end contact with the groomer:

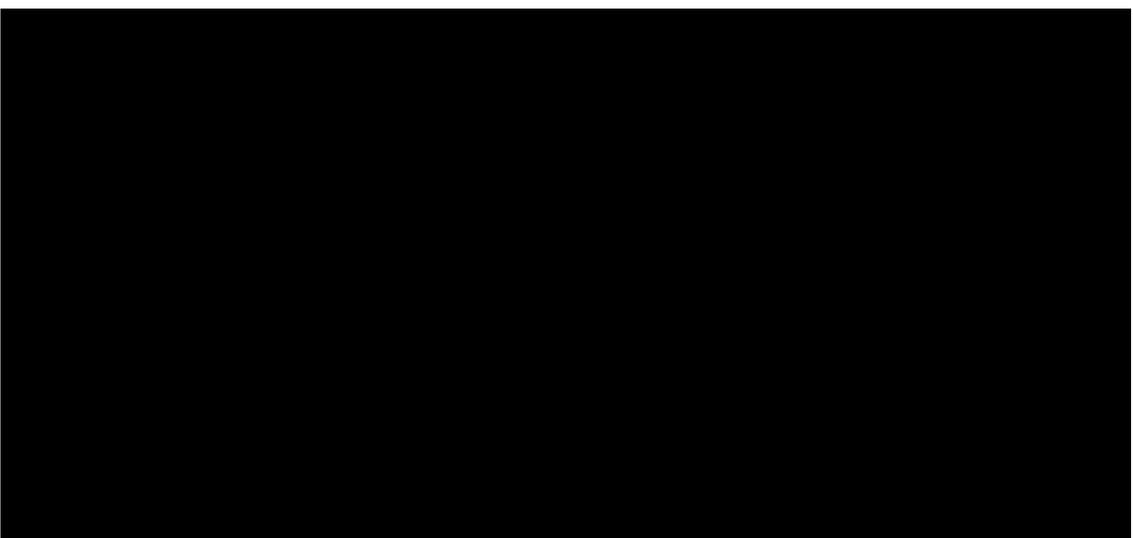
Extract\_7.14

1	C008	ive blocked him twice but both times he found me on other social media
2		and messaged me and made me unblock him
3		...
4		He kept messaging me on instagram asking y i blocked him
5		so i unblocked him

Extract\_7.14 illustrates how, despite children's pro-active efforts to end contact, the effectiveness of these actions was diminished by the ability of the groomer to exploit the functionalities of SNS' and the digital context to circumvent the blocking action to reconnect and recommence their manipulative facework. This shows evidence of the recontacting behaviours (Chapter Two, e.g. Thorn 2021). Children's discourse in this extract shows the crucial additional layer that the groomer's impoliteness facework (Chapter Five) played in securing this re-establishment of contact that is greatly facilitated the current operation of many SNS' ("he made me unblock him; he kept messaging me... asking y.... so i unblocked him", (4-5)).

Extract\_7.15 illustrates how children managed endings in synchronous interactions:





**Direct Resistance\_ Refuse.** Resist\_ Refuse was the least frequent of children's Direct Resistance strategies referenced in their discourse. As shown in Figure 7.7 children's discourse aligned to three of the twelve groomer sub-tactics.<sup>126</sup> Four sub-tactics received no mentions of child behaviour that could be aligned to Refuse.<sup>127</sup> Children were found to make general references to refusing grooming including: C007: "I said I don't feel comfortable around him". A further six sub-tactics intersected with Refusal with low frequency and have been combined into an "Other" category.<sup>128</sup> Refuse referred to instances where the child discussed explicitly communicating not acting on requests or demands issued by the groomer. This included saying no, refusal to send personal information, or to send image and children's threats to report the groomer. The strategy also included children communicating refusal by giving no response or being silent.

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<sup>125</sup> Mom I'd Like to Fuck [Urban Dictionary: milf](#)

<sup>126</sup> These were referenced with a frequency of more than 10% of references

<sup>127</sup> These were groomer trust-building tactics of (i) Activities and (ii) Sociability and Sexual Gratification tactics of (iii) Implicit Desensitisation and (iv) Reframing

<sup>128</sup> These were (i) Access, (ii) Further Contact Offline, (iii) Relationships, (iv) Mental isolation, (v) Physical Isolation and (vi) Gifts.

**Figure 7.7** *Child Own-Behaviour Discourse Child Own-Behaviour Discourse Online Discourse Model Sub-Tactics Direct Resistance\_Refuse, Frequency (n=/84 and %) of References*

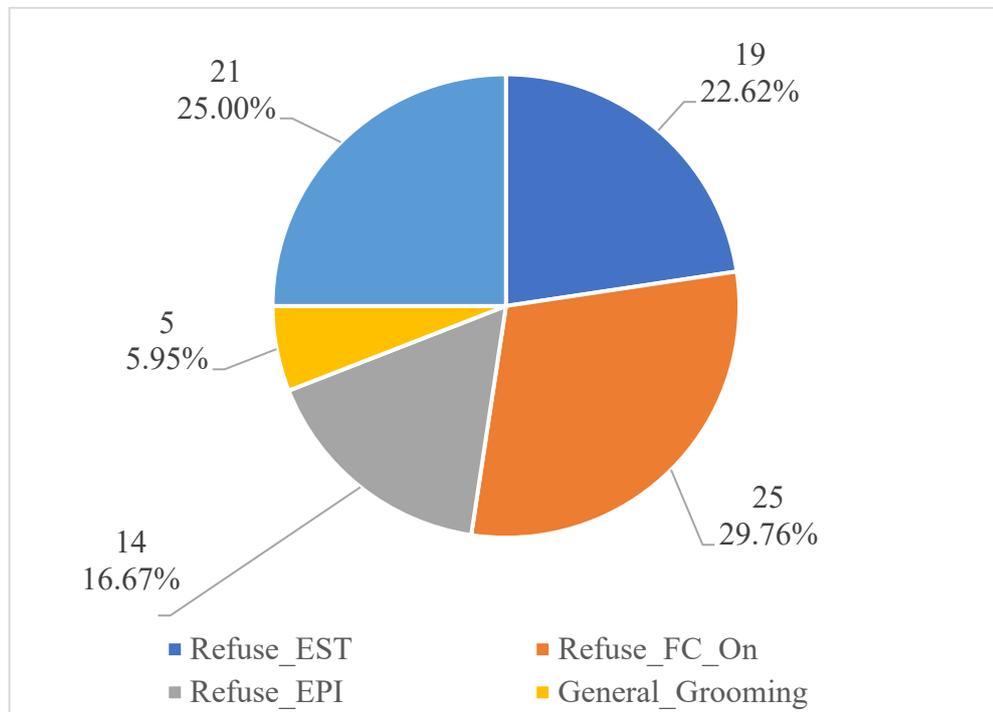


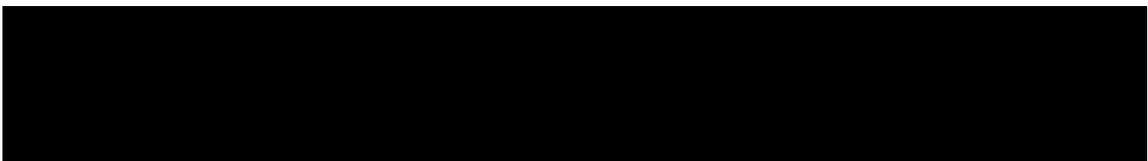
Figure 7.7 shows that children were discussing Refuse strategies aligned to seven groomer sub-tactics. Children also made general references to refusal, but the frequency was low at 5.95% (5/84), mentioned by 13% (4/30) of children. The “Other” category represented 25.00% of references showing that although the discourse pertaining to groomer sub-tactics that comprised the OGDGM individually were less than 10% of children’s discourse, children were attempting Refusals across the groomer’s tactics. Children were found to be most frequently refusing FC\_On which represented 29.76% (25/84) of Refusal references made by 50% of children (15/30). Next, children described refusing groomer sub-tactics of EST, representing 22.62% (19/84) of their Refuse behaviour discourse, mentioned by less than half of children (37%, 11/30). Refusal of the EPI sub-tactic represented 16.67% of references (14/84), referenced by 20% of children (6/30). The sub-sections that follow explore children’s discourse of Resist\_Refuse regarding the two most frequently referenced sub-tactics (i) FC\_On and (ii) EST.

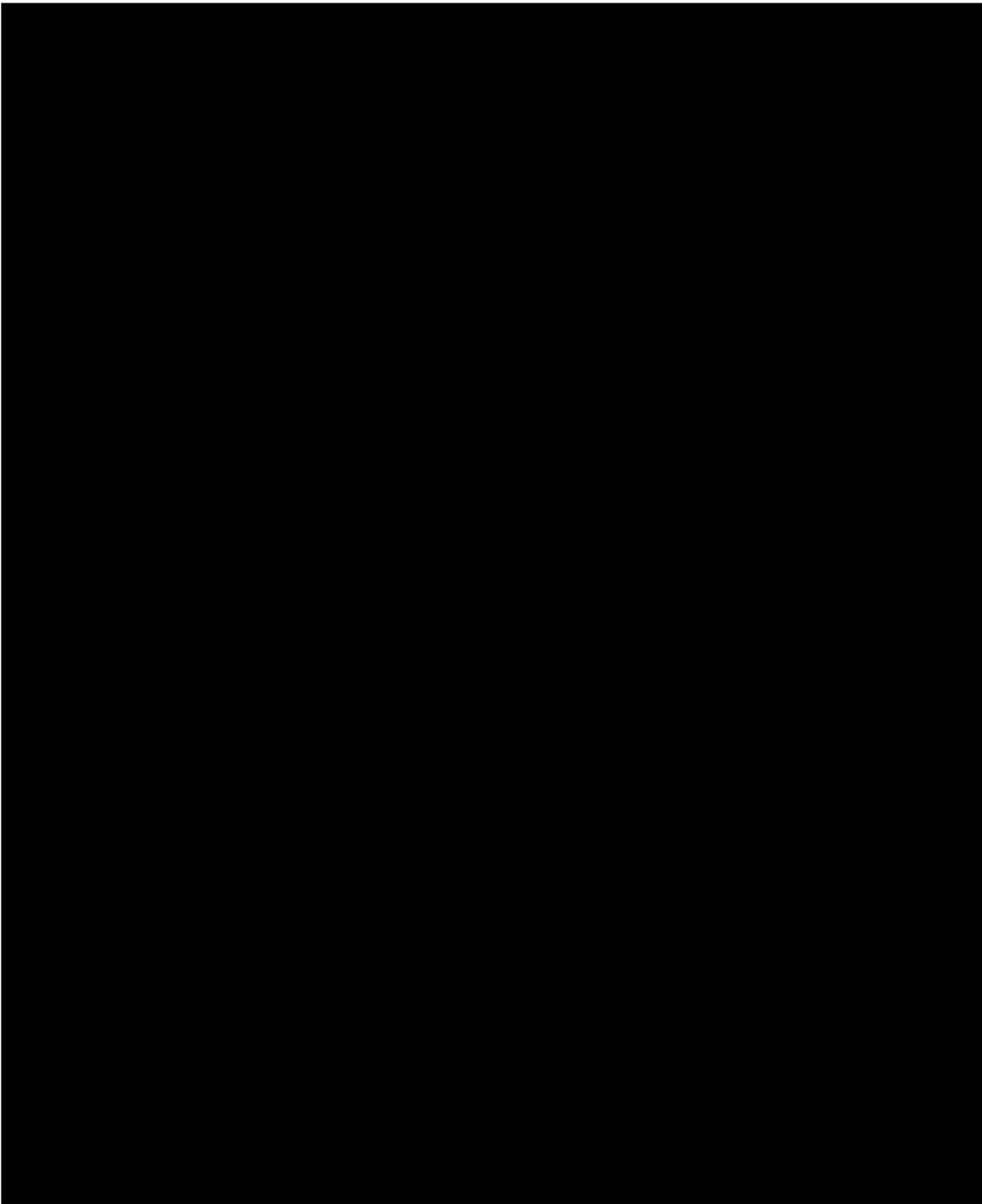
*Direct Resistance\_ Refuse\_ Further Contact Online.* Within FC\_On children's Resist\_ Refuse discourse concerned saying no to sending CCII/IV or to granting groomer requests to move onto other platforms. It also included ignoring the groomer using silence or giving no response. Children's use of refusals were perhaps not surprising given that the digital context allows a shield of physical distance not present in contact abuse. Children can suspend their engagement with the digital sphere and seek shelter in "real" life. Their ability to agentively maximise this affordance is illustrated by Extract\_7.16:

Extract\_7.16

1 C027 i removed them they. kept adding me so i just ignored 5 messaged  
2 came few so in the end block him

In Extract\_7.16 the child described an attempt to step away from communications with the groomer using a suite of refusal strategies in the face of the harassment they felt from the groomer ("they kept adding me", (1)). The combination Resist strategies was typical in children's discourse and reflects findings in other research (see Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023). The child indicated that that despite the initial agentive action by the child to remove the groomer, they continued to pester the child to reconnect ("removed them, they. kept adding me", (1)). The child's subsequent strategy was to ignore the repeated messages aimed at pressurising them to reply ("so i just ignored". (1)). This extract shows that the child's ability to withhold any response or ignoring messages was one of the principal ways they tried to refuse to engage with the groomer FC\_On sub-tactic. In this case the groomer intensified their harassment by sending multiple messages which led to the child changing tack and blocking the groomer ("5 messaged came few so in the end block him" (1-2)). This further evidences that children draw from a range of different Resist strategies and there may be variation in whether their use of use of impoliteness/politeness strengthens or weakens in response to groomer facework (see Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023).





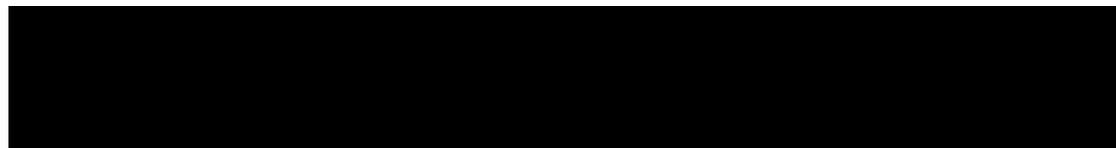


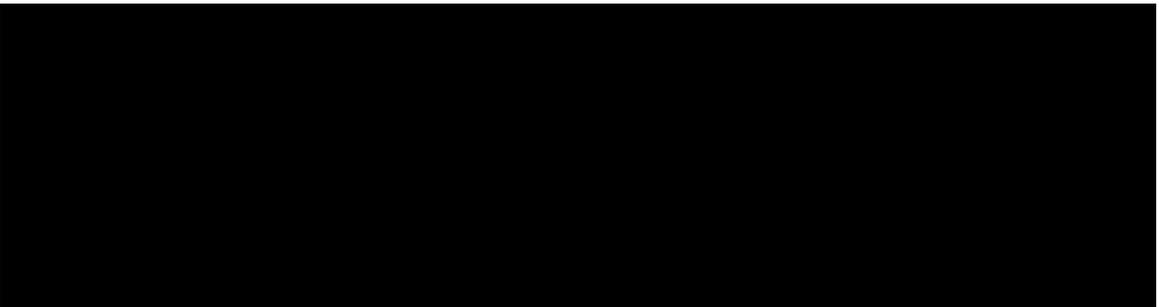
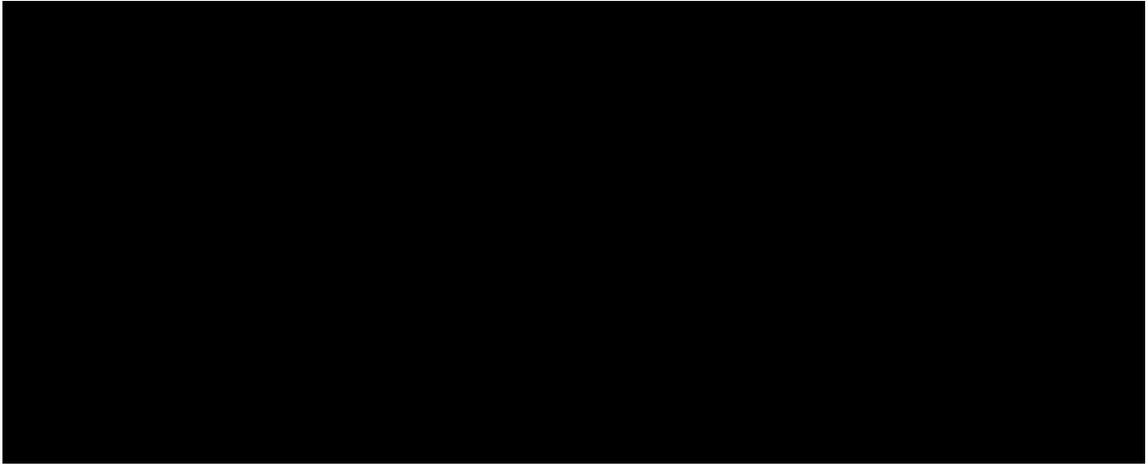
*Direct Resistance\_ Refuse\_ Explicit Sex Talk.* Findings for Refuse\_EST, showed some children were attempting refusals that were bald and assertive despite the inherent power imbalance and the groomer’s manipulative tactics (Chapter Two). This is illustrated at Extract\_7.18:

Extract\_7.18

1	C003	theres no dirty pictures or anythibg just our conversation screenshots
2		i told him i would never send any nudes or anything
3		i said straight up that i wasnt sending

In Extract\_7.18 the child stated that they had directly communicated their refusal to send CCII to the groomer (“i told him i would never send any nudes or anything”, (2); “i said straight up that i wasnt sending”, (3)). The child’s use of the adjective “straight up” (3), usually slang for being truthful, could also be an expression of being explicit in showing the child’s awareness of asserting boundaries and making an agentive choice. However, the child also indicated their cognisance of the groomer’s ability to overpower their resistance (“just our conversation screenshots”, (1)). The awareness of how the groomer could mobilise these screenshots showed that, despite their brave and forthright refusal to send the nudes requested by the groomer, the child recognised that all the groomer needed to do was up the stakes by taking a screenshot of their conversation to press for what he wanted. Possessing “evidence” in the form of a screenshot enabled the groomer to use the impoliteness strategy of threats of exposure and inflated consequences to constrain the child’s action environment thus ensuring ongoing engagement (Chapters Two and Four-Six)





#### **7.4 Child Own-Behaviour Discourse – Engage**

Figure 7.1 showed that almost half of children’s references (48.79%, 666/1365) could be aligned to Engage behaviours. Engage refers to instances where the child’s discourse showed engagement with groomer OGDM tactics, most often indicated through the child reporting actions such as “I did”, “I said”, “I asked”, “I sent” etc. All children were able to articulate Engage behaviours that intersected with at least one groomer sub-tactic. The Engage category needs to be viewed as anchored in the understanding that agency and blameless victimisation coexist and need to be much better understood together (see discussion Chapter One and e.g. Hanson and Holmes, 2014; Hanson, 2019 and Dodsworth, 2022). Figure 7.8 shows a breakdown of the number and percentage of children’s references to their Engage behaviours by OGDM sub-tactic.

**Figure 7.8** *Child Own-Behaviour Discourse Online Grooming Discourse Model Sub-Tactics Engage, Frequency (n=/666 and %) of References.*

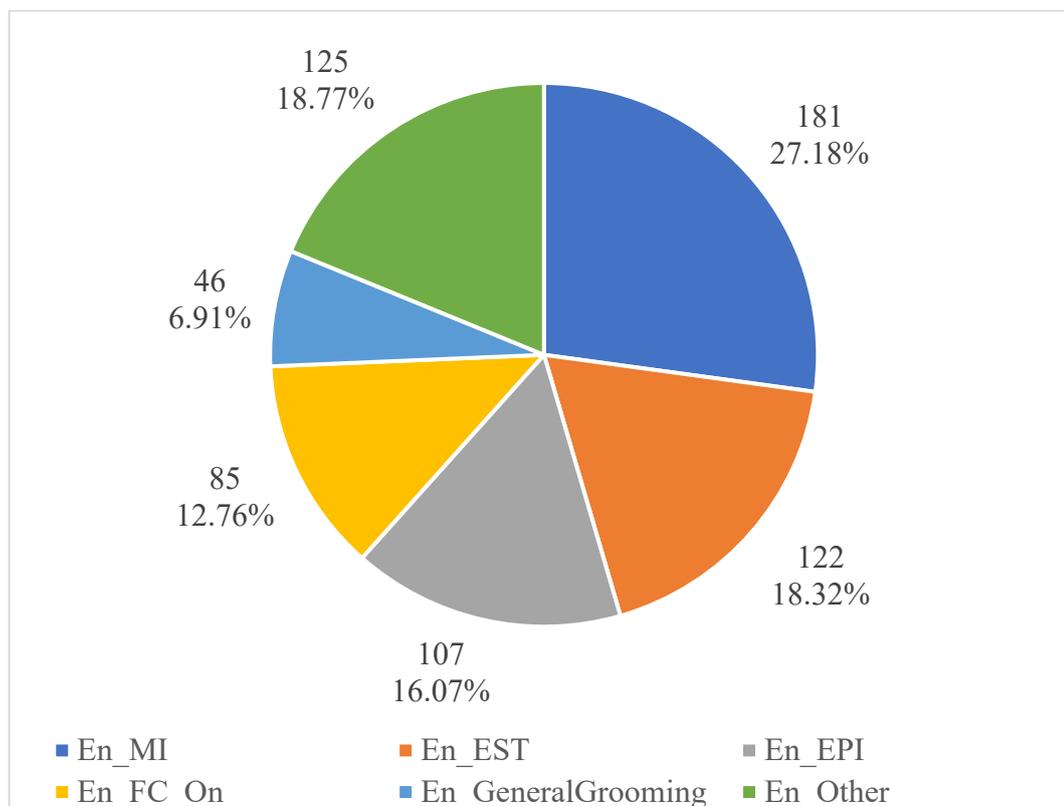


Figure 7.8 shows that children were referencing engagement with a range of groomer communicative sub-tactics in their discourse. Children made general references to the grooming experience in 6.91% (46/666) of references, made by 60% of children (18/30). These generic references were made either to engagement with (i) the global experience of grooming (e.g. C027: “the online grooming is still going on and the stress from it is increasing. when it first started, two years ago, i suffered from it bad and turned to whoever would comfort me” or (ii) to a non-specific child communicative behaviour (e.g. C030: “ive been on websites talking to people i shouldn’t have and doing stuff i shouldn’t”).

Most children’s references could be aligned to one or more OGDGM sub-tactic(s). Sub-tactics referenced with a frequency less than 10% have been grouped into an “Other” category, representing 18.77% of references (125/666).<sup>129</sup> Note that of these

<sup>129</sup> These were: PIS (n=3, 0.45%); ACT (n=3; 0.45%); GI (n=10; 1.50%); ST (n=1; 0.15%); IST (n=3; 0.45%); FC\_Off (n=17; 2.55%); REL (n=50, 7.51%); ACC (n=38, 5.71%).

“Other” references REL was the most frequently mentioned (50/666, 7.51%, mentioned by 57%, 17/30 children). Although low frequency this provides further evidence for children’s relationship-building goals. Engagement with MIS was the most frequently observed groomer sub-tactic observed in children’s discourse, representing 27.18% of references (181/666), mentioned by 93% of children (28/30). This is particularly salient as it was the least recognised groomer tactic in children’s discourse about groomer communicative behaviour (Chapter Four). Children referenced engagement with EPI in 16.07% of utterances (107/666, mentioned by 90% of children, 27/30). Engagement with EST represented 18.32% (122/666) of children’s own-behaviour discourse, referenced by 97% of children (29/30). Finally, children referenced engagement with FC\_On in 12.76% (85/666) of their own-behaviour discourse, mentioned by 87% of children (26/30). Children discussed engaging with one or more OGDM sub-tactics simultaneously throughout their discourse (Chapter Three). Given space limitations, children’s Engage discourse with the three most frequently referenced sub-tactics (MIS, EST, EPI) is discussed in the subsections that follow in decreasing order of frequency.

#### ***7.4.1 Child Own-Behaviour Discourse: Engage – Mental Isolation.***

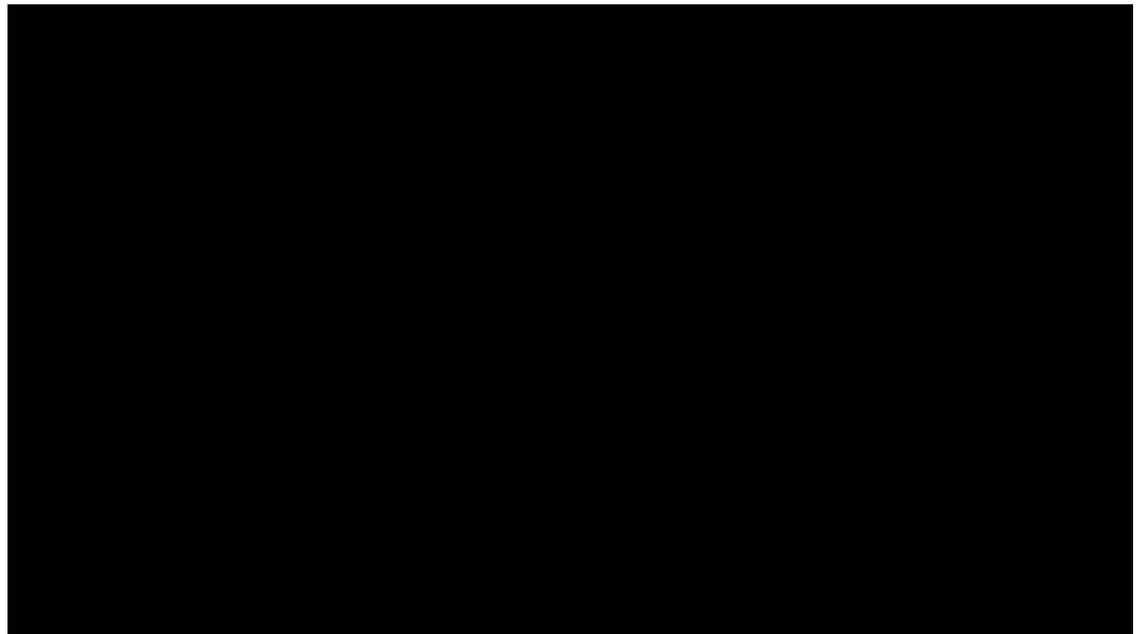
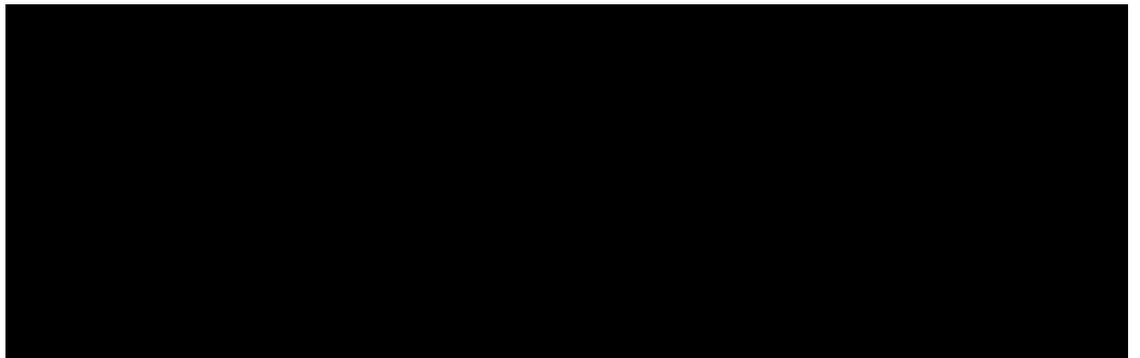
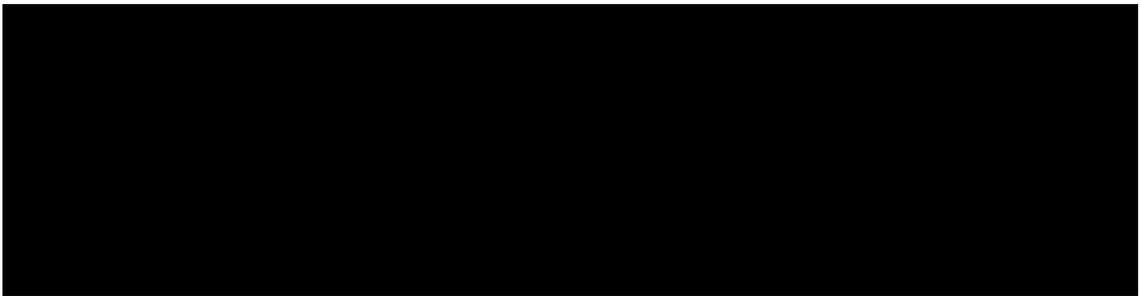
One of the main ways that children’s discourse indicated the success of the groomer MIS sub-tactic in shaping their behaviours and separating them from sources of support, concerned the act of not telling. Within children’s discourse this manifested through references to disinclination to disclose to their support network, or references to their denial of what had happened, see Extract\_7.20:

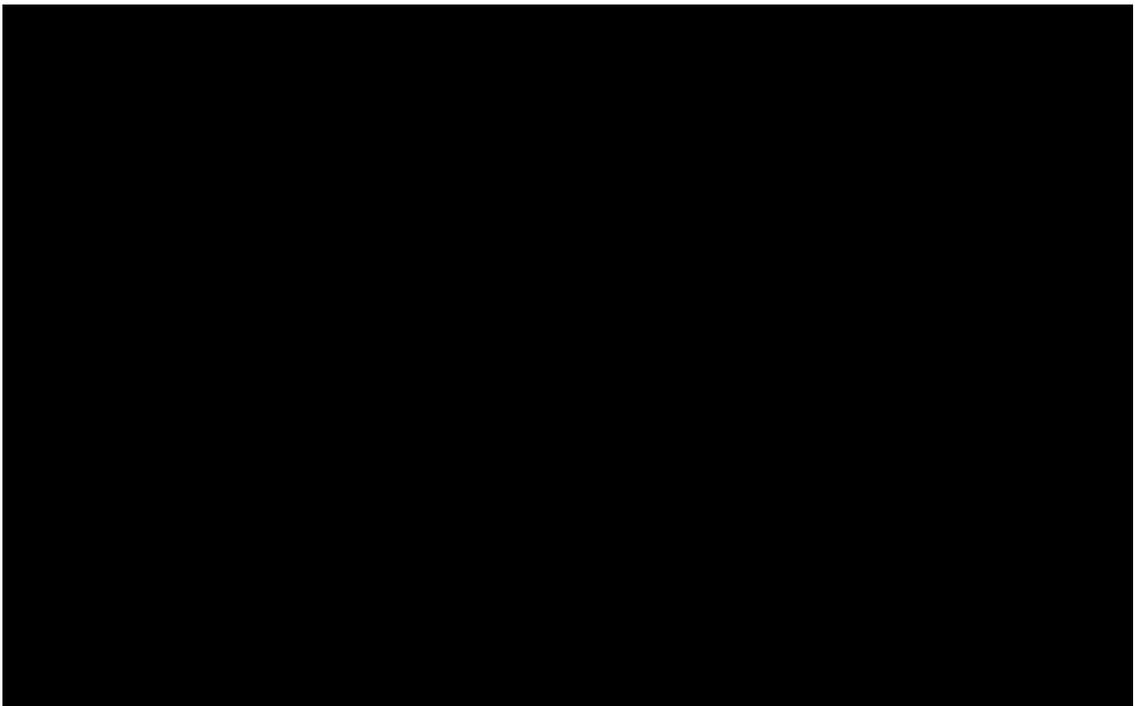
## Extract\_7.20

- 1 C007 Fast forward into the future. The police went to my dads house and  
2 said the guy in custody and they want to speak to me i am seriously  
3 thinking about leaving because I dont want my whole family  
4 to know what i have been up to  
5 CL007 You said that your parents are thinking that you might be involved in  
6 gang crime. Have you therefore talked to them either individually or  
7 together about it?  
8 C007 Nope. I said i don't know him

Within Extract\_7.20 the child's indication of their consideration of "leaving" was connected to their expression of fear and worry about family finding out what had happened ("i am seriously thinking about leaving because I dont want my whole family to know what i have been up to" (3-4)). This was explicitly linked to by the child to the denial of their experience ("I said i don't know him", (8)). This was typical of how children articulated engagement with MIS. Communicative behaviours such as secrecy and not telling may of course be a default for a child flexing their developmentally appropriate predisposition for curiosity and desire to explore. This self-exploration and its illicit nature in the context of sexual activity online concern the inner core of the individual. As previously discussed, adolescence is a vital stage in the nascence and evolution of self, in which a child may err towards being guarded and secretive, craving privacy (Chapter Two). When the self is under-construction and enveloped in uncertainty in this way, it is natural to feel unsure and hesitant about sharing this inner world. These are fundamental contextual factors that permeate any attempt to explore children's MIS engagement through their own discourse. That said, they are equally contextual factors that may support the groomer in landing this tactic with their targets. In Extract\_7.20 the police "outing" the child by visiting their father's house and informing them that they had somebody in custody stripped the child of agency and control over their situation. This triggered their flight instinct ("i am seriously thinking about leaving", (3)) (Chapter Six on Self-Intolerance). The child's discourse shows the power of the MIS sub-tactic in capitalising on the face threat of exposure and others finding out. The extent of the child's desire to avoid exposure is shown in the child's use of the adjective "whole" when referring to their family ("I don't want my whole family to know", (3-4)), which communicated fear of broad public ridicule, thus face degradation. The child's self-blaming discourse ("what i have been up to", (4)) showed a perceived sense of

wrongdoing (Chapter Six). However, the child's use of the vague phrase referring to their engagement with the groomer's OGDm tactics "what i have been up to" (4) suggested that the child was struggling explicitly state or rationalise the behaviour that they perceived to be wrong, indicating the success of groomer MIS. The child's assertion that they had denied knowing the groomer to their parents ("Nope. I said i don't know him", (8) suggested the child had been mentally isolated from their family and were not willing/able to articulate what the "something" they had done was, further communicating self-shame fusion and internalisation of self-blame experienced by the child (Broucek, 1991).





Children’s perception of the potential face threat of disclosure was also directed at a desire to not let people down or degrade the child’s standing in the eyes of people they were close to (Chapter Six) as shown in Extract\_7.22:

Extract\_7.22

1	CL009	Does anyone else know about this? Have you told anyone about what
2		happened? My immediate advice would be to not send anything and to
3		block him.
4		Do you know how to do that?
5	C009	No i dont want to disappoint anyone.

In Extract\_7.22 the child talked about their wish not to “disappoint anyone” (5). This suggested that the child was experiencing self-blame, which influenced not-telling behaviours (see Chapter Six).

Not telling to protect the groomer from getting in trouble or not wanting to undermine or betray their relationship was another way that children’s behaviour indicated the success of the groomer MIS sub-tactic, as shown in Extract\_7.23:

Extract\_7.23

1	C030	i dont want to let him down and id feel responsible if he did anything
2		stupid he says im special and im differnt to other girls and we had this
3		good connection that i dont want to end

Extract\_7.23 shows the influence of MIS on the child’s not telling behaviour. The child articulated a sense of responsibility and loyalty towards the groomer and talks about not wanting to “let him down” (1), stating that they would “feel responsible if he did anything stupid” (1-2).<sup>130</sup> The groomer’s pivoting between threatening to kill themselves and emphasising the exclusivity of their relationship with the child (“he says im special and im different to other girls”, (2)) secured the success of the MIS sub-tactic. As the child states they did not want to lose “this good connection” (3) they felt that they had with the groomer. This illustrates how the groomers MIS tactics were able to capitalise on the child’s face-fragility (see Chapter Two) and their

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<sup>130</sup> This was an implicit reference to the child having previously told the counsellor that the groomer was threatening to kill themselves if the child desisted contact.

personal goals of self-realisation and exploration and being valued and seen by others.

Resistance to help/support was another way in which the impact of MIS was observed in children's discourse. Extract\_7.24 is typical of how the groomer created a separation between the child and potential support networks:

Extract\_7.24

1	CL004	I am not judging you, what I am doing is explaining that what he is
2		doing is wrong I would encourage you to talk to your parents about
3		this man and the relationship you have with him
4	C004	i cant but it will be ok sorry for bothering you
5		im sorry i shudnt have said anything
6		hes the only one that gets me

As shown in Extract\_7.24 the impact of MIS also manifested in a predisposition to be suspicious of and show resistance to advice offered by the counsellor. The child had a forceful reaction to the counsellor's approach of confronting them with the abuse that they had observed through the child's account. The counsellor was explicit in stating their perspective on the groomer (CL004: "I am not judging you, what I am doing is explaining that what he is doing is wrong", (1-2)). They then provided advice about the action they believed the child should take (CL004: "I would encourage you to talk to your parents about this man and the relationship you have with them", (2-3)). The child rejected this advice outright, shutting down. The child's withdrawal was indicated by their issue of two apologies in quick succession ("sorry for bothering you", (4); "im sorry", (5)) and statements of regret for opening up ("i shudnt have said anything", (5), "i cant but it will be ok", (4)). The impact of MIS was shown by the child's statement "hes the only one that gets me" (6), emphasising the sense of alienation and isolation they felt and the perspective they were only understood and appreciated by the groomer.

A final way that children's discourse showed the impact of MIS was through a minimisation of what had happened, which manifested as a hesitancy to recognise their experience as abuse. This is shown in Extract\_7.25:

#### Extract\_7.25

1 C018 I'm sorry, I know this must sound ridiculous. It can't have been grooming  
2 if I consented they must just have been messed up relationships.

As shown in this extract, the child minimised their experience, highlighting the tension caused by trying to rationalise a perception that they had consented with feelings of unease at the abuse experienced. This was shown in the concern they expressed that their account and experiences may be received as “ridiculous” (2). This evidences how the nexus of societal discourses about gender, consent and sexuality and experiences of abuse collide to create fertile ground for groomer techniques of manipulation geared at inducing shame and blame that facilitate the success of MIS (Chapter Two).

As well as not-telling or minimising their experience, another way that children's discourse indicated the impact of MIS was through the child's articulation of their consideration of behaviours of self-erasure, of “leaving” (Chapter Six on Self-Intolerance). Extract\_7.26 (presented in Chapter Six as Extract\_6.8/6.31), shows how these feelings of an inability to endure themselves also led to the child's agency being constrained by the deep emotional separation and alienation from family and friends delivered by the MIS sub-tactic:

#### Extract\_7.26

1 CL009 What do you mean when you say you don't feel you can stay here?  
2 C009 I feel like i need to go like disappear so he wont do it

In this extract, the child's use of “I need to go” (line 2) indicated how imperative this felt to the child, as something they must do. The child's further explanation (“I need to go, like disappear”, (2)) showed the child's desire to escape their experience. As discussed in Chapter Six, the choice of the verb to “disappear” connotes a desire to cease existence, to erase the self and the expression was used to intensify the child's communication of how constrained their action environment felt. This illustrated the success of the groomer's MIS, ostracising the child and mentally exiling them from their environments and potential sources of support.

#### 7.4.2 *Child Own-Behaviour Discourse: Engage – Explicit Sex Talk.*

As shown in Figure\_7.8, children referenced their EST\_Engage behaviours in 18.3% of their discourse, made by all but one child. EST\_Engage covers any reference by the child of engagement with groomer-produced sexual content or reciprocated by sending or sharing self-produced sexual linguistic or visual content.

Children’s discourse about EST showed that they were both aware of their engagement and the constraints acting upon it. This is illustrated in Extract\_7.27:<sup>131</sup>

##### Extract\_7.27

- |   |      |  |
|---|------|--|
| 1 | C007 | So i met up with this guy and he bought me underwear. He asked me to       |
| 2 |      | take pictures in the underwear he bought me and I did. I sent him pictures |
| 3 |      | and I allowed him to do sexual things to me.                               |
| 4 |      | Because i just did not want to be lonely.                                  |

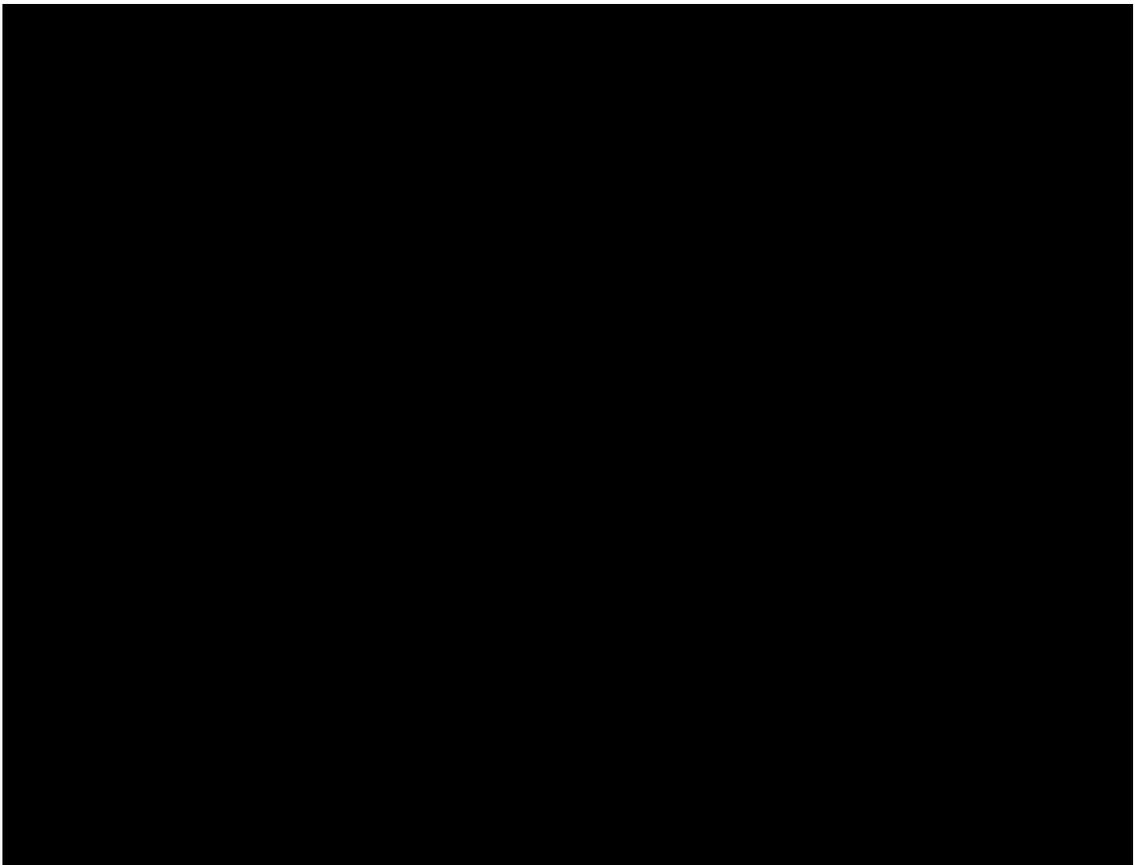
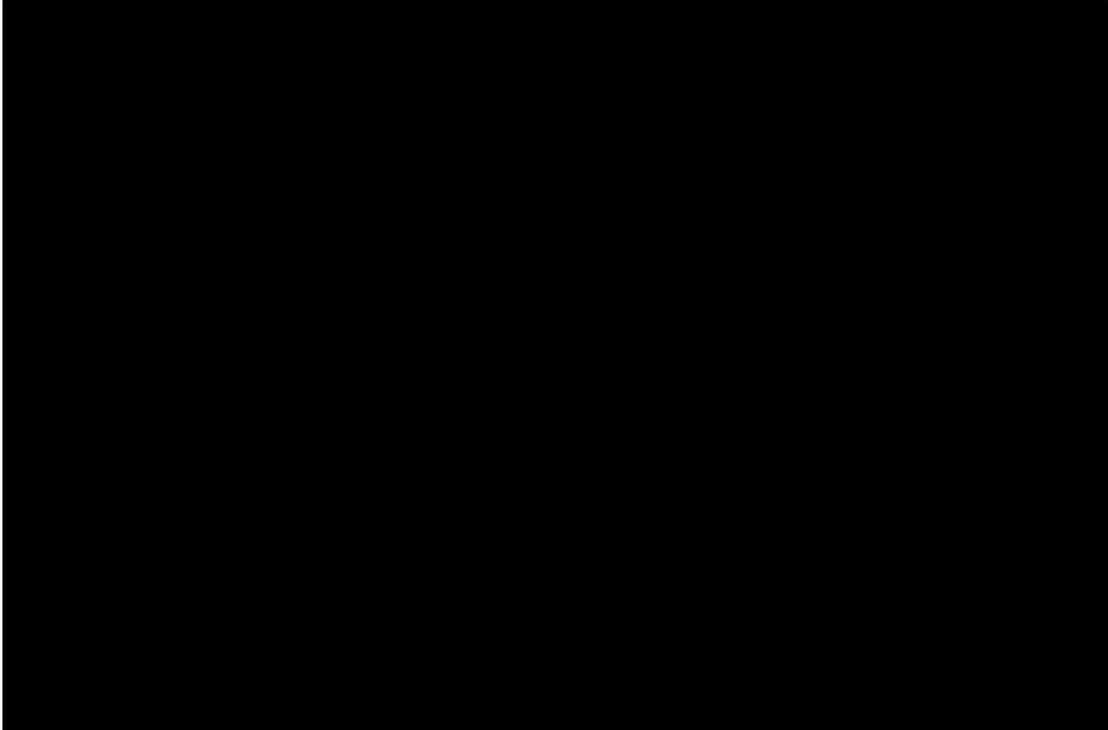
Extract\_7.27 was typical of how children’s discourse acknowledged that when it came to Engage\_EST their action environment was significantly constrained. Children did not describe a straightforward picture of engagement but a more clouded “tug of war” between their various Resist strategies and groomer communicative challenge (Section 7.3), showed a previously unexplored push-pull of engagement and resistance on the part of the child. This reflects and extends research findings which emphasise the importance of understanding the intricacies of groomer <-> interactional dynamics particularly when it comes to patterns of child resistance and groomer challenge (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023 & Seymour-Smith & Kloess, 2021). The child’s use of the vague term “sexual things” also showed the child’s unease at describing their experience (see VL analysis Chapter Four).

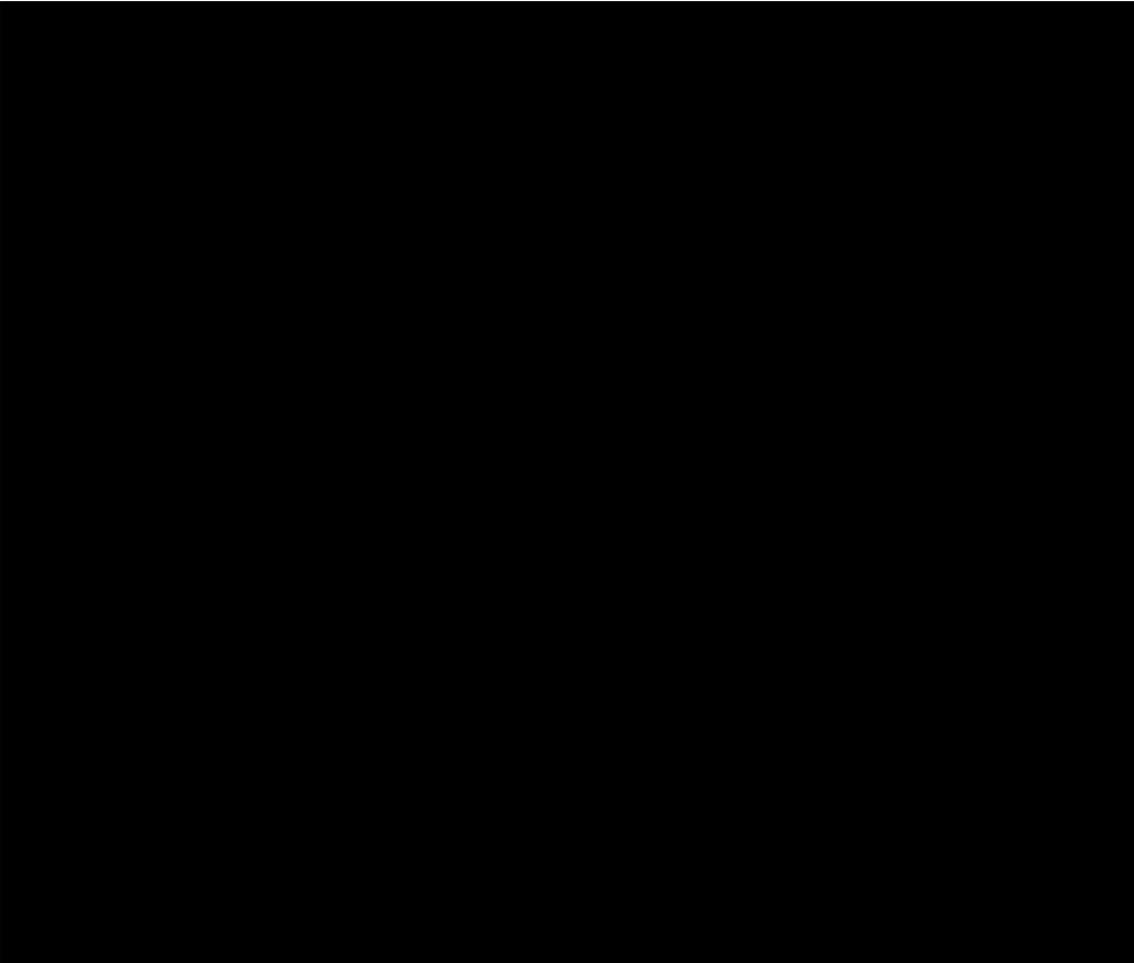
Children’s awareness of the constraints and contradictions that shaped their Engagement in response to EST is illustrated in the law enforcement data. Extract\_7.28 suggests that behaviours perceived by the child themselves or others around them as actively engaging or complying were in fact studded with micro-resistance and negotiation over the parameters and degree of engagement. This

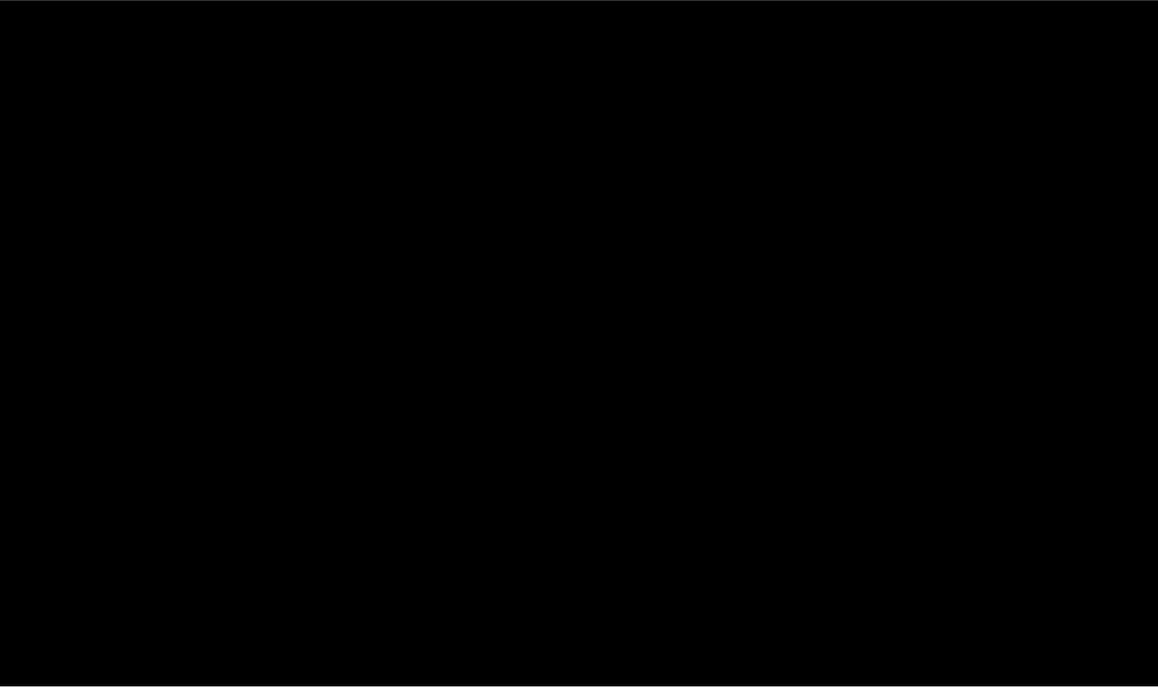
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<sup>131</sup> Partially presented already at Extract\_4.18

extract also illustrated how children's engagement behaviours were permeated by a consideration and awareness of self, their diminished agency and the tensions it held for their own goals of self-construction and exploration.







***7.4.3 Child Own-Behaviour Discourse: Engage – Exchange of Personal Information.***

As shown in Figure 7.8 children’s Engage\_EPI discourse represented 16.07% (107/666) of their Engage discourse, and it was mentioned by 90% of children (27/30). Within the counselling dataset, as shown in Extract\_7.9 it was within EPI that children were showing the most Self-directed agency. Children’s discourse suggests they were exploring the online environment and flexing their agentic choices to share personal information in pursuit of their own goals:

Extract\_7.29

1 C003 okay so i was on this app which is basically like tinder but for teenagers.  
2 this boy added me and he was 3 years older than me but really good  
3 looking and we were talking and i asked him for his snapchat and he gave  
4 me his username

Extract\_7.29 shows that children's navigation of the groomer's EPI sub-tactic was set against the entrenched social norm online of sharing basic personal information and details such as social media handles and usernames, seen as the basics of contemporary relationship building (see Chapter Two e.g. John, 2017; Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). It also reflects findings in Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2023) that it was during children's 'starts' that they were able to assert the highest degree of agentive choice. This present analysis extends this finding by highlighting the constraints acting on this apparent agency. This extract shows that despite the child showing awareness of the age difference being a potential risk ("this boy added me and he was 3 years older than me", (2)), this red flag was cancelled out by the groomer's physical attractiveness emphasised by the child's adverbial "really" ("but really good looking", (2-3)). This extract suggests that the child's desire to adhere to the norm of sharing and the desire to attend to people's face needs by not flouting this norm, could potentially override or drown out preventative education messages. At the very least it could place the child's attempts to navigate the groomer's requests for EPI and the attendant interpersonal dynamics and complex face work management in tension with risk-oriented prevention and safety messages.

As throughout this thesis, the exchange of images and groomer elicitation of CCII/IV was also a key feature of children's EPI discourse as shown in Extract\_7.30:

### Extract\_7.30

1           C008     and once i had sent one i thought he would realise how ugly i was and go  
2                     away but he didnt and at least once or twice a night since that day he  
3                     pressures me into sending them

As shown in Extract\_7.30 children's discourse showed their use of intimate images as a bargaining tool to attempt to regain control of their action environment. By sharing some of what the groomer wanted, children were attempting to avoid the face threat of impoliteness and extricate themselves from further engagement ("once i had sent one i thought he would realise how ugly i was and go away", (1-2)). As shown in this extract, however, this technique was often ineffective. Once CCII were shared, they were used by the groomer to intensify their grip on the child to extort further images and secure further and deeper engagement from the child ("once or twice a night since that day he pressures me into sending them", (2-3)). This reflects findings highlighting sextortion as key to TA-CSA patterns (Chapter Two). It further emphasises the need for sextortion to be better understood as rooted in and exploitative of the complex facework between adult groomer and the child whose conception of face rests on fragile foundations.

In the law enforcement data, it is possible to see how the exchange process inherent to EPI was used by the groomer to build trust and lay foundation for a social bond, as seen in Extract\_7.31:

### Extract\_7.31

1           C269     Can I see what you look like  
2           G0016    I'm too shy atm  
3           C269     What do you mean to shy lol okay what ever you say daddy  
4           G0016    Like I need to trust you first and see how serious you are

In Extract\_7.31 the child asked the groomer to share an image so that they could visualise who they were speaking to ("can I see what you look like", (1)). This was denied by the groomer who feigned shyness ("I'm too shy atm", (2)). The child challenged this statement indicating their assessment of the implausibility of the groomer's stated shyness shown by their use of "lol" (text abbreviation: laugh out loud) denoting amusement ("What do you mean to shy lol..." (3)). The child

appeared to accept the groomer's refusal if still dubious at the authenticity of their purported shyness and continued to engage in relationship building interaction by addressing the groomer using a sexualised role-play nick name ("okay whatever you say daddy", (3)). The groomer then used role reversal to put the child in the position of needing to earn their trust by asking them to demonstrate their commitment by showing compliance and adherence to the groomer's requests before they revealed their identity ("Like I need to trust you first and see how serious you are", (4)). This shows the groomer's 'push/pull' tactics once again, appearing to put the child in control and suggesting a stance of vulnerability (see Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). In this way children's discourse illustrates how EPI represented a dance, a reciprocal serve and return of information sharing which built trust as a basis for the groomer's sexualised goals.

## **7.5 Chapter Conclusion**

Children's discourse showed that that they were able to recount both communicative Engagement with groomer tactics, and Resistance to groomer tactics. Resistance behaviours were referenced slightly more frequently than those of Engagement in children's discourse. Findings explored in this chapter showed children's attempts to cognitively process and rationalise their experience. They also evidenced children's use of communicative agency to try to assert their own goals and wishes and counterbalance the inherent power imbalance they were faced with in DCSG interactions.

Two types of Resistance behaviours were identified in children's discourse; these were Indirect Resistance and Direct Resistance. Indirect Resistance comprised children's discourse that aligned to Seeking Help or Suspect behaviours and was found to be more frequent, which was not surprising given the counselling context studied. The behaviour of disclosure and telling represented a core behaviour of communicative resistance used by children within the dataset studied.

Within Direct Resistance, three main categories of communicative behaviour were identified in children's discourse. These were Negotiate, End and Refuse. References to the three Resist strategies used by children were represented with similar

frequency. Children most frequently described negotiating with groomer attempts to engage them in their tactics. Next children referred to refusing groomer attempts to engage them including saying no or ignoring the groomer. Children discussed ending their contact with the groomer least frequently, this included blocking the groomer or deleting SNS accounts or online presence. The analysis of all three of these Resist strategies showed a complex process of communicative deal-making, bargaining and often using varied and combined strategies to manage and contain the groomer's complex and Impolite encroachment-based face work. It also suggested that children chose Resist strategies that mitigated the face threat of their behaviour (across both politeness and impoliteness) more frequently than those that were more likely to attack the groomer's face needs. Findings thus corroborated the limited research thus far into children's resistance which shows both a variety of strategies used by children and that they respond and reflect the dynamics of groomer manipulative communication in DCSG contexts. A third perspective was also introduced, which was that both groomer and child communicative behaviour was discursively constructed by the digital discourse context of the interactions, that are facilitated and enabled by the lack of appropriate regulation and safeguards by design. The active assistance of technology in the digitally mediated context of DCSG, sculpted the conditions for their abuse. Despite this children were astute in selecting Resist strategies that demonstrated sophisticated relational management in the face of complex and fundamentally power-imbalanced interactions with the groomer. Nonetheless, findings also illustrated how deeply constrained children's attempts at resistance were.

When it came to Engage children's references could mostly be aligned to one or more of the OGDM communicative sub-tactics. Engagement with MIS was the most frequently observed groomer sub-tactic, followed by EPI and EST. Finally, children referenced engagement with FC\_On least frequently. Children discussed engaging with one or more tactics simultaneously. Throughout children's Engage behaviours the impact of groomer's tactical communication and facework was evident, presenting a picture of highly constrained and manipulated engagement that reacted to and mirrored groomer push-pull structures (see Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). A distinct pattern of children's communicative behaviour was identified as a process of

approach and retreat. It was identified that children used this process to navigate the interactions and manage the restraint of communicative/power imbalance towards a preservation of their own goals and needs in a context which conspired to fracture the self.

The findings presented in this chapter show that children's behaviour was fundamentally impacted and shaped by the unique manipulative communicative dynamics and technology-assisted context of DCSG but also by nature of facework that had evolved within these contexts (discussed Chapters Four-Six). The next, concluding chapter brings together the empirical results from across the thesis to explore how prevention and practice can benefit from applying the findings of this novel discursive analysis of groomer <->child interactional dynamics in DCSG contexts.

## Chapter 8. Conclusion

“Shame must change sides.”

Gisèle Pelicot

### 8.1 Introduction

This thesis concludes against the backdrop of the revolutionary decision by Gisèle Pelicot to waive her automatic right to anonymity to publicly share her experience of mass rape and sustained abuse orchestrated by her husband Dominique Pelicot.<sup>132</sup> This decision transformed Gisèle into a symbol of strength and resistance that challenged the stigma and silence faced by sexual violence survivors. The Pelicot case ignited widespread reflections about consent, victimhood, and cultural attitudes to sexual violence (Women’s Network for Change, 2024). It also unmasked the “banality” of gender-based violence (Wiseman, 2025) and underscored how deeply it is facilitated by technology (Hussain, 2025). Debates surrounding the trial have emphasised that demonising Dominique Pelicot as the “Monster of Avignon” masks the normalisation of these behaviours and obscures a view of this case as symptomatic of a global “culture that enables the abuse of women” (Sundaram, 2025).

We feel ripples after a crime like this- a rock falls in a lake and generations of people get seasick, or gasp, or drown. But ripples from a crime can help us sometimes to see things with a new kind of clarity (Wiseman, 2025, para 3).

The clarity catalysed by the Pelicot case extends to children’s experiences of DCSG. It brings into sharp focus that the children’s voices and perspectives at the heart of this thesis are not a mere ripple of the violence that underpins the rape suffered by Gisèle Pelicot perpetrated by scores of men, nor is the capture of the over 20,000 videos documenting the sustained abuse. Rather, the Pelicot case is *itself* the ripple, it is a seismic reverberation of patriarchal violence, namely the acceptance and perpetuation by both women and men in society that a dominant party or group

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<sup>132</sup> Dominique Pelicot orchestrated the drugging and rape of his wife Gisèle Pelicot by 72 men he recruited through the unmoderated Coco website. Dominique Pelicot was also found guilty of taking indecent images of his daughter and his daughters-in-law.

should maintain power/social control over the dominated through coercive force whenever hierarchical structures are threatened (hooks, 2000).

Globally, latest estimates show over 300 million children a year are victims of online sexual exploitation and abuse. Files containing sexual images of children are reported once every second, and one in eight of the world's children have been victims in the past year of non-consensual sharing and exposure to sexualised images and video (Salter et al., 2024). The scale of abuse is likened to a “pandemic” and “global health crisis” and yet public health responses and global governance remain de-prioritised, fragmented, and underfunded (Fry et al., 2025; Salter et al., 2024).

This thesis is finalised as we collectively size up a “coming wave” of technological advancement that shifts the parameters of our conceptions of digital mediation of communication – the rise and expansion of Artificial Intelligence (NSPCC, 2025; Suleyman, 2023). The extent of how intelligent machines may revolutionise social life remains unknown, but AI is already transforming the shape of social interactions. Significant concerns have been raised about the role of Generative-AI (Gen-AI) in perpetuating child abuse imagery and being used by groomers to disguise their identity and to blackmail children through the production of fake images and live streaming coercing children into further abuse (IWF, 2025). Communicative AI<sup>133</sup> extends our conceptions of CDMA beyond viewing digital media as channels of communication towards a world where machines are producers of communication (Natale, 2021). This has the potential to stretch our use of language beyond recognition and the bounds of human cognition.

Against this panorama, the findings presented across this thesis show that beyond mere mediation of human interactions, the digital context and the ever-expanding digital/technical affordances of smartphones, internet-enabled devices, and social networking/social media platforms (and now AI) have not only permitted a shift in the Habitus (Bourdieu, 1991; Wacquant & Bourdieu, 1992) of social interaction but

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<sup>133</sup> Communicative AIs include applications involving conversation and speech, such as natural language processing, chatbots, social media bots and AI voice assistance.

have catalysed and cultivated new forms of communication that are harnessed by groomers to abuse children.

This chapter will summarise the main findings from the empirical Chapters (Four-Seven) and will explain their significance. The contribution of the research and the implications of the research findings for policy and practice will be discussed. Directions for future research will also be explored. This will aim to raise children's own voices derived through the analysis of their discourse about DCSG to place their perspectives at the centre of approaches to prevention, protection, and support. The empirical chapters are discussed in subsections 8.2.1-8.2.4. The subsections will answer the respective research questions posed and summarise the main findings as well as orienting the findings within the extant literature. Section 8.3 will outline contributions made by the thesis, namely opening new spaces for the study of children's discourse in DCSG contexts as well progressing linguistics research into new and vital contexts. Limitations of the research and directions for future inquiry will be discussed in Section 8.4. Opportunities for the application of the findings to support innovation in collective efforts to combat DCSG will be discussed in Section 8.5 and Section 8.6 will draw overall conclusions.

## **8.2 Summary of Findings**

This thesis used a schema of a "crystalline bricolage of discourse analytical frameworks" crafted to combine different lenses to bring children's discourse about DCSG into focus (Chapter Three). The approach was designed to amplify children's perspectives, holding the different facets of their discourse up to the light to refract diverse elements of their experiences as they describe it. This kaleidoscopic approach was designed to blend their distinct voices to offer a clearer understanding of the phenomenon of DCSG from the viewpoint of its victims. Thus, a key overall contribution of this thesis is to showcase how such a hybrid, remixed approach to combining CMDA through different discourse analytical frameworks and paradigms can help bridge gaps in knowledge and open exciting new avenues for future research. The following subsections will outline the key findings observed within each of these aspects of children's DCSG discourse and experience.

### **8.2.1 RQ1: How far do children identify communicative tactics and sub-tactics of the Online Grooming Discourse Model within the groomer's discourse?**

Chapter Four tackled RQ1, which analysed children's discourse to ascertain how far they were able to identify the groomer's use of manipulative tactics and sub-tactics. RQ1 was designed to address the identified research gap that current linguistic-based models of online grooming communication are derived solely from the study of adult offender communicative behaviour with scarce research attention afforded to children's perspectives or discourse.

The analysis of children's discourse against the OGDM validated existing research findings but also showed some key areas of dissonance to reveal new insights into DCSG interactions. Firstly, children were found to reference all OGDM tactics in their discourse and no new tactics were observed. This validates the OGDM as a robust baseline model for exploring children's perspectives of their DCSG experiences. However, the analysis of children's discourse added new perspectives which emphasise the importance of paying greater attention to the *intersection* of the social phenomena, interaction management, and, crucially, multimodality domains of CDMA within DCSG contexts (see Herring, 2019).

Overall, the findings showed that, while children were attuned to the spectrum of groomer sub-tactics that comprise the OGDM, their ability to rationalise them was more developed regarding some elements of the model than others. DTD was found to be the most frequently referenced OGDM tactic in children's discourse. On one level this validates the patterns previously observed in actual synchronous groomer discourse (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016, 2020, 2023). Children were shown to reference the groomer's trust-establishing tactics, and their discourse manifested a cognisance of the groomer's tactical use of trust-building and bond-forming behaviours. However, at a sub-tactic level, analysis of children's discourse showed areas of divergence which challenged and extended current understandings.

Firstly, demonstrating the interconnectedness of the social phenomena and multimodality domains of CMDA, children's discourse showed their inclination to

discuss the sexual nature of groomer communication. Their discourse was found to predominantly revolve around three OGDGM tactics: DTD, SG, and FC. Within these, three core sub-tactics were most frequently referenced by children: (i) the Exchange of Personal Information (EPI), (ii) Explicit Sex Talk (EST) and (iii) Further Contact Online (FC\_On). The connecting thread between these three sub-tactics was found to be children's references to the practice of production, sharing, capture, and distribution of self-generated Child Coerced Intimate Images/Videos (CCII/IV) and uninitiated or reciprocal sharing of II/IV by the groomer. This finding of the multifunctionality of combining semiotic image-based communication with textual communication across sub-tactics validates previous findings of the intertwined and overlapping nature of DCSG but underscores the role of multimodality in creating intersections of communicative modes, under-emphasised in existing research (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023).

This finding showed that groomers were perceived and reported by children to be exploiting multimodality, namely the *combination* of a current lack of safety by design of SNSs and the affordances of image-producing, storing, and distribution of smart handheld technological devices (boyd, 2007, 2010b; Marwick & boyd, 2014; Scott, 2022). Moreover, this ability to seamlessly interweave textual utterances with semiotic visual artefacts (CCII/CCIV), was core to how children perceived groomer tactical communication in a CMC context. The findings gleaned through an OGDGM analysis of children's discourse therefore suggest that the current siloed approach of distinguishing between distinct classifications of TA-CSA does not reflect the child's lived experience. The same child may experience multiple layers of abuse simultaneously and repeatedly in different, interlaced permutations. The central role of CCII/CCIV and how it supports the groomer's manipulative pursuit of their sexualised goals, at first sight appears to challenge extant research findings that TA-CSA comprises specific features that make it particularly difficult for children to disclose, seek help for, and rationalise their experience (e.g., Katz, 2013, 2014; Katz et al., 2018). At least in the counselling context studied, children were willing and able to discuss sexualised communications that comprise DCSG and TA-CSA.

SG was the second-most-salient tactic observed within children's discourse, which broadly reflects patterns observed in actual groomer discourse (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016, 2020, 2023). However, despite children's references to the groomer sub-tactic of EST, they referenced IST much less frequently. The low prevalence of references to groomer's IST in children's discourse could suggest that attempts by the groomer to use implicitness to minimise the face-threatening act (FTA) of engaging a child in illegal sexual activities may be under-recognised by children. Children struggled to process and reconcile their experiences within their level of sexual maturity. Groomers were showing a lack of concern with mitigation of face threats, feeling sanctioned within the digital context to use Impoliteness-based explicit sexualised talk in pursuit of their abusive goals. This finding provides further rationale for a need to carefully consider the interaction management domain of CMDA alongside attempts to understand the social phenomenon of DCSG.

To address this challenge, children's use of sexually explicit/implicit language when referring to the groomer's use of SG sub-tactics was also analysed. While children occasionally used sexually explicit language to reflect the groomer's sexual talk/behaviour, they predominantly used vague language (VL). An additional VL formulation, that of linguistic omission, was established in children's discourse. This finding extends previous research into vague language used in DCSG contexts (Lorenzo-Dus & Kinzel, 2021) and is a novel contribution made by the study of children's discourse. The primary pragmatic function observed in children's use of omission/vague sexual language was that of (partial) avoidance. The identification of avoidance could reflect societal taboos that govern children openly discussing sex, or that they find it too traumatic or shameful to fully articulate experiences of TA-CSA. Children thus appeared to be using linguistic vagueness as a self-preserving/protecting mechanism, either to preserve face or to manage diminished or underdeveloped communicative and facework competence in navigating this topic, even within a supportive counselling context.

Within FC, FC\_On was referenced with greater frequency than groomer attempts to secure offline contact (FC\_Off). This supports, from a new dataset and the child's perspective, empirical evidence that technology plays a pivotal role in not only

facilitating DCSG but also ensuring its continuation (Hamilton-Ghiacritsis et al., 2021). Being able to harness the practice of II sharing was shown, from the child's perspective, to constitute a powerful tool for coercion and provided effective leverage for the groomer to secure sustained contact. The findings also accorded with previous research with children describing groomers moving them onto various digital platforms with different affordances to deepen their contact and further advance sexual goals (Thorn, 2022). FC\_Off was found to be less prevalent in children's discourse than patterns observed in actual groomer discourse, although its very presence showed that groomer DCSG tactics can and do result in offline meetings and contact abuse.

### ***8.2.2 RQ2: How far do children identify the facework work used by groomers during Digital Child Sexual Grooming?***

Chapter Five conducted an (im)politeness analysis of children's discourse about groomer facework in DCSG interactions. To interrogate RQ2, children's discourse was coded against taxonomies of Politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987) and Impoliteness (Culpeper, 1996, 2010, 2011, 2016). This provided a means to explore the groomer's *sui generis* manipulative, abusive, and violating communication (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023), from the child (hearer's) perspective. This allowed exploration of its impacts on children's own conceptions of and ability to manage their personal face needs and wants. Overall, the analysis showed that reflections on groomer use of Politeness and Impoliteness were both present in children's discourse, albeit to differing degrees. Children were found to reference groomer Impoliteness more frequently than Politeness.

Both main types of Politeness, Positive and Negative, were present in children's representations of groomer facework. The finding that children's discourse featured references to groomer's use of politeness, in particular Positive Politeness, seems to validate the findings of analyses of groomer discourse which show the salience of groomer's deceptive-trust-building in groomer synchronous communication (generally discursively encoded via Positive Politeness, see Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2020). Regarding Positive Politeness, children were found to reference eight of the

fifteen positive politeness strategies in Brown and Levinson's (1989) taxonomy.<sup>134</sup> Within that, the number of references in children's discourse were low. Noticing and Attending to H's Interests and Gifts were the two Politeness strategies that featured with slightly more frequency in children's discourse. With regard to Negative Politeness, children's discourse referred to five different strategies that they perceived or noticed to be used by groomers.<sup>135</sup> Overall, the low frequency of both types of Politeness in children's discourse shows an imbalance in the facework that children were "receiving" or perceiving as hearers to be used by groomers to that which has been previously observed to be present in synchronous interactions between adult and child (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2020, 2023). This therefore suggests that children may have been lacking in their ability to recognise and understand groomer use of politeness. Groomer's Politeness strategies may not have registered or landed with children due to the comparative force of groomer impoliteness, especially when magnified by age, developmental stage, and other intersecting power imbalances. The low saliency of groomer Politeness strategies within children's discourse could reflect the aspects of groomer communication that children, exerting their communicative agency, chose to articulate and represent (or not) within the counselling context studied. It could also represent the safeguarding perspective of the counsellor's attention during the discourse, which suggests a potential area for enhanced training based on the thesis findings about children's discourse.

Children's perceptions of groomer Impoliteness predominately concerned perceived attacks on Equity Rights.<sup>136</sup> Encroachment was the most frequently referenced Equity Rights orientation, and a key finding was that new groomer impoliteness sub-strategies were observed within children's discourse about the DCSG context. These were Ordered About, Invasion of Privacy, and Harassment, which was identified to cross-cut Encroachment. This diversity of encroachment observed in children's

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<sup>134</sup> These were (i) Notice, attend to H (their interests, wants, needs goods); (ii) Offer, Promise; (iii) Include both S and H in the activity; (iv) Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation); (v) Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H); (vi) Intensify Interest to H; (vii) Presuppose, raise assert common ground; (viii) Joke.

<sup>135</sup> These were (i) question, hedge; (ii) minimise the size of imposition on H; (iii) give deference; (iv) apologise, and (v) state the FTA as a general rule. These five strategies occurred with low frequency in children's discourse.

<sup>136</sup> This included patronising behaviour, failure to reciprocate, encroachment, and taboo behaviours.

discourse about their DCSG experiences differs from Culpeper's (2010, 2011) Impoliteness taxonomy based on the concept of "conventionalised formulae" (see also Terkourafi, 2015). This identified encroachment to be realised primarily via "Threats" and "Curses and Ill-Wishes." There were no instances of "Curses and Ill-Wishes" in children's discourse within the dataset studied. This finding suggests that there may be distinct patterns of groomer Impoliteness observed within DCSG context(s) that require further attention and extend existing research into the features of impoliteness use in digital contexts (Andersson, 2024; Blitvich, 2010; Graham & Hardaker, 2017; Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). Overall, findings showed that the groomer Encroachment strategy of the Invasion of Privacy was referenced most frequently by children, followed by Threats and Ordered About. All three Encroachment strategies were referenced with similar frequency in children's discourse.

Two types of Invasion of Privacy were found to be realised in children's discourse. These were Invasion of Physical Privacy and Invasion of Digital Privacy. Invasion of Digital Privacy took three forms.<sup>137</sup> These findings indicated the ease with which groomers, facilitated by technology (smartphone and digital handheld devices and the current operation of SNSs), were able to invade and encroach on children's privacy in DCSG contexts. Further, this provides added evidence for the proposition that groomers' use of Impoliteness may have been cultivated within the permissibility created by the technological affordances available. An example of this was the practice of screenshotting or recording of interactions against the child's consent. The Invasion of Privacy via screenshotting illustrates how technology has created a new social behaviour able to be operationalised by groomers to achieve their interactional goals. The ability to share and broadcast such footage intensifies the illocutionary force of this type of groomer impoliteness. Being able to project the face threat of non-compliance to the child was a marked evolution in the use of impoliteness that appeared to be characteristic of children's DCSG experiences. Further, the ability of groomers to use virtual affordances to invade the child's physical space, i.e., by directing the child to perform sexual acts on their own bodies,

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<sup>137</sup> These were, in order of frequency (i) making unsolicited contact and sending unsolicited messages, photos or images to a child; (ii) saving images or stealing information about the child or family, friends as leverage with which to threaten them; (iii) making permanent records of photos, chats or information via screenshotting without the child's consent, this was also found to include the practice of 'cyberflashing.'

created an embodiment of the abuse that violates the child's corporeal autonomy, ceding it to groomer instruction. The affordances of digital communication and technology were shown to enable the groomer to take possession of a child's personal pleasure. This was identified to be a unique impact of how the CMDA domain of multimodality splintered the conception and boundaries of the self in ways that destabilises a child's future formation and conception of face and its management in social interactions.

Threats were the second most frequently referenced groomer Encroachment strategy within children's discourse. It was found that the information or artefacts obtained by the groomer through various invasions of digital privacy were used as leverage to intensify groomer threats. Threats were also used to obtain the information and images in the first place. Children's discourse therefore showed the synergistic way that groomers intertwined threats with the multimodality afforded by technology, which allowed them to encroach on children's mental and physical environments. All threats referenced in children's discourse were found to be conditional. The inherent power imbalance between adult and child (intensified by intersectional structural inequalities) suggest that threats may have been used by the groomer in DCSG contexts in instances when groomer and child goals clashed, namely the groomer perceived or faced resistance from the child. Three types of threat were observed in children's discourse: (i) Sextortion, (ii) Emotional Blackmail; and (iii) Violence.

Children's references to (s)extortion validate research identifying it to be a facet of groomer communication neglected in early attempts to linguistically model groomer's DCSG discourse (Chiang & Grant, 2017, 2019). Children's discourse offered a more nuanced view of sextortion than occurs in extant research. The representations of groomer sextortion in children's discourse challenged the tendency, predominantly in NGO reports, to frame sextortion as an emergent type of abuse. Rather, children's discourse highlights sextortion as a mutation of groomer impoliteness enabled by the unregulated digital space and technological smartphone affordances within the CMDA genre of DCSG. References of groomer threats of exposure to family or peers were core to children's discourse. Findings suggested that the child's adolescence and lack of security in their social status created a face

fragility. This is posited to lead to enhanced susceptibility to face threats issued by the groomer, thus making children at adolescence particularly vulnerable to sextortion and coercion. The analysis of children's discourse extends our understanding to see sextortion as a communicative practice that needs to be better understood as relational in nature integral to the continuum of groomer manipulative impoliteness core to DCSG. Crucially, this Impoliteness strategy seems to have been engendered by the unfettered multimodality within the CMDA context.

The second category of threat observed in children's discourse was groomer use of overt threats of violence either directed at the child or at members of their family. The extreme force of these verbal threats of violence appeared to be in response to the child's efforts to resist groomer demands and a clash of goals. The presence of threats of violence in children's discourse suggests that in the CMDA context of DCSG groomers were showing an unusual and particularly marked disregard for mitigating the face threat of their actions. Once again, multimodality was shown to facilitate the groomer's use of this form of impoliteness; location services and screenshots of personal details obtained through children's public social networks were found to be used by the groomer to enhance the credibility of threats of violence to family and loved ones.

The groomer's use of emotional blackmail, particularly threats of suicide, was the final type of conditional threat observed in children's discourse. The groomer's willingness to use this extremity of threat to overcome children's manifestations of agency and resistance provides further evidence of the imbalance of power between adult groomer and child adolescent victim. Children's discourse also illustrated the cognitive complexity for an adolescent posed by the inherent contradiction between a groomer's threats of the finality of suicide with pressure for continued contact.

Children were also found to reference the groomer ordering them about as part of the encroachment strategies within the DCSG context. 'Ordered About' represented children describing instances of the groomer having issued a command or other formulation to urge compliance with their goals. The groomer's use of Ordered About indicated the groomer's lack of concern for the child's positive face needs of

being seen and respected by overriding the child's needs and wishes with their sexualised agenda. Conversely, the groomer's use of Ordered About appeared to be in anticipation of the child's resistance and misalignment to the groomer's sexualised goals. This was observed to create a complex pivoting between face attention and attack, which would have been extremely challenging to rationalise for the child, further destabilising children's conceptions of facework norms.

Harassment, was also identified to represent a crosscutting strategy which appeared to be used by the groomer to intensify their use of all three other Equity Rights-oriented Encroachment. Harassment was found to be most frequently referenced by children in connection to that of the groomer's use of the Invasion of Privacy strategy. Next it was used when the child was ordered to behave in a certain way. It was referenced least frequently when it came to threats, which suggested that threats may contain sufficient "standalone" impoliteness effect. It suggests that Harassment was used by the groomer as a booster, a means to intensify the force of their impoliteness to secure compliance. There were two main realisations of groomer Harassment reflected in children's discourse. Firstly, children were found to use the verb "to pressure" to denote groomer Harassment. Secondly the children used temporal markers which created a discursive sense of persistence.

Finally, it was observed that the children perceived groomers to be benefiting from technological affordances that enabled them to layer Encroachment strategies and to use them in combination to constrict children's action environments. Findings also validated the identification of push-pull tactics used by groomers in previous research (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). This finding was developed and extended by the observation that groomers appeared able to exploit facework and (im)politeness norms to persuade the child of a need to move towards the groomer in appeasement and facework management (also explored in Chapter Seven). Overall, findings support the proposal that DCSG is greatly facilitated by a contextually coercive combination whereby the groomer's use of impoliteness is fermented by the availability of technological affordances of SNSs and digital technological affordances across various devices. However, children's discourse also indicated that the force and intensity of groomer impoliteness went beyond that observed in

previous impoliteness studies in different contexts (Culpeper, 2010, 2011, 2016). This appeared to validate previous research findings that suggested that CMDA contexts may sanction impoliteness use in ways that are distorting the boundaries of societal facework norms (e.g. Blitvich, 2022).

### ***8.2.3 RQ3: What are the emotions expressed in children's discourse triggered by Digital Child Sexual Grooming and groomer communication?***

The results presented in Chapter Six showed that children were able to articulate and communicate a complex spectrum of emotions within a counselling context. A key contribution of this chapter was to illustrate how an application of the goal-driven adaptation to the AFFECT domain of Appraisal Theory (Benitez-Castro & Hidalgo-Tenorio, 2019) provides a framework to analyse how children communicate the intricate and overlapping emotions they experience during and after DCSG and the triggers for them within their discourse.

In answer to RQ3, children's discourse of emotion was identified to be predominantly triggered by three entities: (i) Grooming, (ii) Other(s) or (iii) Self. It was found that across all three triggers, Goal Achievement-oriented (GA) emotions were the most frequently referenced in children's discourse. This finding extended previous research which points to a fundamental tension between groomer and child goals in DCSG contexts (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). Previous research emphasises the sexualised intention behind groomer goals coupled with the power and experiential imbalance as the source of tension. Groomers seek sex while children seek relationships (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023). The findings presented in Chapter Six enriched this understanding by providing novel empirical evidence of children's personal goals from a discursive perspective.

Children's GA emotions centred around emotions of Dissatisfaction, particularly Insecurity. When triggered by the Grooming or Other(s) it was mainly expressed through Disquiet emotions of Anxiety, Fear, and Confusion. Shame was also noted and added to the taxonomy. Unhappiness was also expressed by children and was found to principally concern emotions of Misery, particularly feelings of Depression.

Children's self-triggered GA emotions, Shame and Self-blame, were more frequently referenced than Fear, Anxiety, and Confusion. These emotions were found to trigger emotions of Misery, particularly despair and helplessness. Goal-Seeking-oriented (GS) emotions of (Dis)inclination were also noted across children's discourse, particularly triggered by the Grooming and Other(s). Results revealed a conflict in children's discourse: a tension between Inclination and Disinclination about the groomer, the responses of others, and the implications for seeking and receiving support.

Within children's Self-triggered emotion discourse, the Goal-Relation-oriented (GR) emotion of Self-Repulsion was also found to be salient. A cline of intensity of Self-Repulsion was observed in children's discourse spanning Indifference, Disrespect, Antipathy, Disgust, and Intolerance. Children predominantly expressed Self-Repulsion at the highest intensity of Intolerance, a sense of being unable to bear themselves, expressing a deep sense of rejection of the Self. Children were found to favour thoughts of Self-eradication (expressed through thoughts of suicide or running away) over the risk of ruinous face degradation threatened by exposure. Children were also found to articulate emotions of Self-triggered Disgust, particularly describing themselves as "dirty" which showed how Self-Blame also mutated to Self-Repulsion in DCSG contexts. This finding provides further evidence of the Self-Shame fusion (Chapter Two, e.g. Broucek, 1991) and emphasises its relevance to the DCSG contexts and the impacts of groomer communicative manipulation on children (Broucek, 1991). This Self-Shame fusion is effective in magnifying groomer manipulation which combines tactical communication with sustained face attacks to engender compliance (Broucek, 1991).

#### ***8.2.4 RQ4: How far are children aware of their own communicative behaviours in Digital Child Sexual Grooming and how do they discursively reflect on particular features?***

Analysis in Chapters Four and Five, exploring children's awareness of groomer communicative behaviour, showed that children were able to reflect on the dynamics of communicative behaviour in groomer <-> child DCSG interactions. The findings

presented across these two chapters revealed a picture of children's agency and their self-awareness of possessing potential agency, at times able to operationalise it. Chapter Seven added a further layer to support understandings of the communicative dynamics at play in DCSG contexts by examining the child's discourse about their own communicative behaviour. Addressing RQ4, the analysis of children's behaviours as reflected in their own discourse provided a previously unexplored means to consider the impacts of groomer communicative manipulation. It allowed exploration of the affective responses it triggers in the child and how these combine to impact a child's perceived behaviours and options for action within DCSG contexts. Children's extracts from the counselling dataset were supplemented in this chapter by a selection of law enforcement transcripts which provided illustrative examples of children's behaviours in real time to further contextualise and enhance analysis.

Two categories of communicative behaviours were deductively derived from children's discourse about their DCSG experience. These were termed Engage and Resist. Children's discourse revealed that they were able to impart both communicative engagement with and resistance to groomer tactics. Children's discourse referenced Resist behaviours slightly more frequently than Engage Behaviours. This indicated that children were attempting to (i) cognitively process and rationalise their experiences and (ii) exert communicative agency to assert their own individual goals, wishes, and needs. Children's assertion of their communicative agency triggered a fundamental tension with the intentionality identified to drive the groomer's manipulation (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). Findings suggested that children, through their use of language and communicative behaviours, were attempting to manage this tension and redress the fundamental power imbalances that characterise adult <-> child DCSG interactions.

Turning first to children's Resist discourse, Indirect Resistance concerned references where the child's resistance was not directly communicated to the groomer but via two sub-strategies: Seek Help and Suspect. The behaviour of disclosure and telling was found to constitute a core behaviour of communicative resistance referred to by children. This was perhaps not surprising given the counselling context studied but

seems to suggest that, if supported through appropriate asking and scaffolding, children were able to disclose their experiences, a finding which added further nuance to existing research about children's disclosures of CSA, particularly DCSG.

With regards to Direct Resistance, three main strategies were identified in children's discourse: Refuse, End, and Negotiate. References to the three Resistance strategies used by children were identified with similar frequency in children's discourse. Children most frequently described negotiating with groomer attempts to engage them in their tactics. Next, children referred to refusing groomer attempts to engage them including saying no, ignoring, or muting the groomer. Ending their contact with the groomer was referenced by children least frequently; this included blocking the groomer or the child deleting SNS accounts or desisting from any online presence. The analysis of all three Resist strategies showed a complex and sophisticated process of communicative deal-making and bargaining used by children. Children were found to draw on varied Resist strategies to manage and contain the groomer's forceful and intricate impolite encroachment-based facework (Chapter Five). Moreover, the analysis showed that children chose Resist strategies that attempted to mitigate the face threat of their behaviour more frequently than strategies that were more likely to attack the groomer's face needs and trigger retribution. Findings thus corroborated the limited research thus far into children's resistance on two counts. Firstly, they show a variety of strategies used by children throughout DCSG interactions, indicating multiple and diverse attempts to resist groomer tactics (Seymour-Smith & Kloess, 2021; Thomas et. al, 2023). Secondly, they demonstrate that children's Resist strategies reflect and react to the dynamics of groomer manipulative communication. Children were found to be adept in selecting and alternating Resist strategies, showing sophisticated relational management in the face of complex and fundamentally power-imbalanced relations with the groomer. However, the findings also emphasised the deep constraints on children's Resistance efforts.

These constraints were further emphasised when it came to children's Engage communicative behaviours. All the children's references were found to align to one or more OGDM communicative sub-tactics. Children's engagement was

predominantly found to revolve around the groomer sub-tactic of MIS followed by the EPI and EST (within which, the exchange of CCII and CCVI was central). Children also discussed engaging with one or more groomer tactics simultaneously throughout their discourse. This finding evidenced the success of groomer manipulative communication in achieving its goals, despite children's shrewd resistance attempts. The groomers' MIS sub-tactic impacted children's engagement through "not telling" behaviours, feelings of exile and a need to flee from their experience, and sources of support, as well as internalisation of blame and shame. A complex pattern of 'approach and retreat' was identified for the first time, which echoed previously identified groomer push-pull tactics (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). Through these approach/retreat behaviours the child was found to relinquish their self-actualisation with their goal pursuit pulled into the orbit of attempts to appease and manage the groomer's complex facework.

Within EST, children were able to communicate their Engage behaviours but also discuss the constraints posed by the groomer's coercive tactical communication. A tug of war of resistance and eventual forced compliance was identified to shape children's Engage behaviours. This suggested a continuum of resistance in response to groomer push-pull discourse and a process of stretching children's boundaries of sexual exploration and experience by the groomer.

Children's EPI engagement showed the impact of entrenched contemporary norms of sharing on the rules of facework that children were attempting to navigate (John, 2017). These norms characterised their exploration of the online world mediated through digital, "smart" technology (John, 2017). The power of this norm and the attendant perceived impoliteness of flouting it was suggested to be in direct tension with existing prevention messaging. The exchange of II and the central role of CCII/IV was highlighted as the main way children discussed their "engagement" with EPI in the context studied. This echoed themes explored throughout the thesis of the central role that the semiotic currency of CCII/IV plays in groomer's tactical communication. The need to exercise caution about a siloed conceptualisation of children's TA-CSA experience was emphasised. Children's FCO engagement discourse underscored this showing that despite lower levels of child Engage

behaviours, this was forced by the groomer through inflated threats of exposure aided by CCII/IV and the textual nature of DCSG interactions. This was amplified through the technological affordance of being able to screen-capture tangible “evidence” of children’s engagement, constructed by the groomer as illicit and illegal.

### **8.3 Research Contribution**

The overarching contribution of these findings is three-fold. First, the range of empirical evidence derived from the analysis meets the objective of this research to address the identified research gap that previous linguistics research into DCSG had prioritised the study of groomer’s language, neglecting close analysis of children’s discourse and effectively silencing children’s voices in the process. Secondly, by bringing a focus to children’s discourse, the research has showcased the added value that applying a CDMA toolkit and, within that, a (re) mixed approach to layering discourse analytical frameworks, can bring to previous qualitative research efforts to gather children’s perspectives of their DCSG experiences. Thirdly, a novel focus on DCSG tactical manipulative communication and accompanying facework from the child hearer’s perspective uncovers some new insights and perspectives to benefit understandings of the intersection of facework, emotion, and resultant behaviour to ride the crest of third wave thought in CDMA (im)politeness research.

The benefits and importance of a focus on children’s discourse in DCSG contexts that emerged from this thesis are manifold. Findings show how both a focus on children’s discourse and recognition of DCSG as a discursive process of goal (re)negotiation between two communicative agents and an exploration of the constraints acting upon them simultaneously validate and enhance previous understandings of DCSG interactions (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023). This thesis has explored this research area in detail. Firstly, the analysis of children’s perspectives of groomer’s OGDM tactics and sub-tactics tested and confirmed the validity of the model and added nuance to the existing groomer-discourse derived model. Secondly, this thesis adds further empirical evidence to the position highlighted in the literature review that the agency of both groomer and child needs to be recognised and analysed. This thesis has extended the application of these ideas to the DCSG context and showed how both groomer and child are involved in a fluid and complex process

of assertion and negotiation in their performance of goal-driven agency. Previous research has tended to explore either (i) how a groomer uses manipulative communication to entrap the child into doing things or to get things from a child or (ii) through qualitative interviews/focus groups how the child behaves, reacts, or feels certain emotions as a result. This falls short of a dialogic, discourse-driven understanding of DCSG interactions that this thesis has been able to deliver.

When it came to enriching our understandings of DCSG interactions as an inherently relational process, the research findings offer a series of contributions to current understandings. Firstly, one of the key conceptual contributions of the OGDM was to challenge that there are no “signature words” or “smoking gun” for DCSG (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). Groomers vary widely in how they use language to manipulate and entrap children. However, at the core of the OGDM approach is the assertion that a series of linguistic patterns of communicative behaviours are discernible through the application of a CDMA toolkit which elucidates the indivisible role of context, facework, and affective reaction in underpinning DCSG interactional dynamics (S. Herring, 2018; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023). This aligns with a constructivist structuralism perspective (Wacquant & Bourdieu, 1992) that emphasises the symbiosis of structure and agency (Firmin, 2019). Work to model, validate, and refine the OGDM as representing a form of *sui generis* manipulation utilised by groomers has thus uncovered key patterns that transcend variations in style (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2023). This includes observed patterns such as groomer’s complex intertwining of tactics and sub-tactics, their frequent pivoting between ‘nice and nasty’ communication, their strategic use of vague language and their use of ‘push–pull’ structures to engender compliance and overcome resistance (Lorenzo-Dus, 2023). A core contribution of this thesis was the identification of children’s diverse use of Resist strategies, the systematic study of which has been neglected by extant research. The deduction, through children’s discourse, of a replicable taxonomy to support further analysis of children’s resistance behaviours is a primary offering of this thesis. New insights have been provided into patterns of children’s communicative behaviour that may equally transcend variation to provide additional perspectives on DCSG dynamics from a child’s perspective. A pattern of children’s oscillation between ‘approach/retreat’ behaviours was identified and suggested to

represent a complex process of engagement-as-resistance to appease the groomer. These behaviours are rooted in children's skewed apprenticeships in facework management in the DCSG context. It shows how children were responding to groomers warped facework utilising the limited palette of communicative behaviours available to them to mitigate the groomer's complex, forceful and sustained face attacks.

The affective impact of this complexity on children's emotions and how it influenced children's behaviours was also elucidated by the focus on their discourse. This was a further important contribution offered by this research. This study adopted an original (re)mixed approach to connecting facework and emotion layering (im)politeness and affect analysis alongside each other, an approach that has been underexplored in previous research. The use of Benitez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio's (2019) goal-driven reorientation of the AFFECT subsystem was a novel approach trialled within the research design of this thesis. The co-existence of Shame, Self-Blame, and Self-Repulsion identified through the analysis of children's discourse validated and extended previous evidence of heightened shame in TA-CSA contexts (particularly linked to the image-based, ergo, multimodal aspects) (Gewirtz-Meydan et al., 2018; Hanson, 2017; Huber, 2023; McGlynn & Johnson, 2021; McGlynn & Rackley, 2017). The presence and salience of 'Self-Intolerance' was a finding that extends current understandings to show, via their discourse, how children were affectively internalising their DCSG interactions. However, while previous studies identified the presence of these psychological and social impacts in TA-CSA, they had not been specifically applied to the communicative process of DCSG or to the *sui generis* manipulation argued to constitute it (Chapter Two). This research thus extends current analyses by exploring how these affective responses of Shame and Self-Intolerance were constructed in children's discourse and, crucially, reflected on *why* this is important. The discursive approach extended this vein of work by exploring *how* these feelings deeply impacted the child's sense of self and in turn shaped and distorted the interactional and facework dynamics between groomer and child that are the essence of DCSG. A major contribution of this thesis therefore was to introduce and explore a concept of children's 'face-fragility', shaped by the intersection of the cognitively corrupting nature of DCSG facework, children's stage

of neurodevelopment, and its affective impact. Groomers' ability to exploit and intensify this fragility was shown to significantly impact children's perception of their action environment and thus their communicative behaviours in DCSG contexts. Therefore, a further contribution of this thesis is that it not only adds empirical evidence to support a perspective that recognises children's communicative agency but crucially it brings the shape of this agency and the constraints acting upon it out of the shadows.

#### **8.4 Limitations and Future Research**

Two external contexts need to be considered as creating limitations for this research, namely researcher wellbeing and the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter Three outlined the increasing recognition of the impacts of conducting trauma research and the imperative of shifting away from narratives of "impact" and "coping" towards a human-centred safeguarding approach which builds systemic precautions on a recognition that the human reaction to getting up close to trauma will be trauma. The self-altering impacts of trauma research over more than five years of study were an obstacle. However, overcoming and managing them represents a site of self-evolution and growth achieved as a byproduct of this thesis (Jackson et al., 2013). Developing the recommendations of de Maiti and Fiser (2021) to cover the whole research cycle, including establishing systematic structures and carving space for the joy that counters trauma rather than placing the onus on the individual to "cope," would create a research environment where "healthy people can conduct research in a healthy" and protected way (franzke, 2020, p.71; franzke et al., 2020).

Regarding COVID-19, the two lockdowns during the early stages of the project data collection phase, impacted the study. The original research design included focus groups with practitioners aimed at testing the findings with a safeguarding audience.<sup>138</sup> The inability to travel or meet socially required a substantial redesign of the research project. This could be viewed as a limitation and the pandemic as well as several contractions of COVID-19 throughout the study period undoubtedly

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<sup>138</sup> This study had been subject to an extensive ethics proposal and had been approved by the NSPCC and Swansea University ethics panel, the methodology had been devised and a draft of the chapter written. Focus groups participants were about to be recruited when the first lockdown was announced.

impacted on the overall length of studentship. However, the resilience required to adjust the research design, the additional skills and expertise it built in building expertise in and applying new frameworks for analysis, and the novel combination of analytical tools combined within this thesis, as well as the findings they have delivered, all make the shift in direction required feel like the benefited the project in the long run.

One potential limitation of the research design concerns the retrospective nature of the counselling dataset; interactions were not observed in real time, so children's reflections on groomers' manipulative communication were filtered through their own perspectives and memory. Arguably, however, this also applies to other qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews or focus groups. Therefore, this should be reframed as a core strength. By tuning into the child's perspective, we observe a deeper and richer perspective to enhance observation of synchronous interactions. Combining that with the second-order analyst's view offers a unique perspective on DCSG interactions anchored in children's own words and discourse. While underutilised, other researchers have identified the potential of these sorts of retrospective counselling datasets for research on particularly sensitive topics such as CSA, not least because they shield the child from needing to relive traumatic experiences and resolve some of the methodological issues that surround capturing the child's voice (Jackson et al., 2015; Lerner, 2018, 2022). Children's discourse derived through counselling datasets therefore provides opportunities for diverse channels of future research.

The sample size could be viewed as a limitation of the thesis. A cross-section of 30 transcripts (10 boys and 20 girls) cannot claim to be representative or generalisable. There is definite potential to test and validate these findings against a larger dataset of transcripts as well as to explore the shift in children's discourse that may have occurred since the data analysis phase of this project (2021–2023). Both endeavours would be useful extensions of this research. However, the datasets studied provide a time-bound snapshot of children's experiences in a particular context. Throughout this thesis it has been made clear that the objective was not to identify typologies or models of children's behaviour but to use the various analytical frameworks within

the CDMA toolkit to help bring children's individualised experience into focus and to crystallise the systemic and structural factors that shape and constrain it. There is definite scope to explore children's experiences from both a more gendered and intersectional perspective and doing so using CMDA methodologies offers a rich seam of future research to be explored.

Chapter Seven of this thesis showcased the rich potential to extend the research into children's discourse in DCSG contexts pioneered by this thesis through continued analysis of synchronous real-time groomer <-> child DCSG interactions (although this would require access to data). Mixed methods could also be used, such as focus groups or research co-produced with children combined with Discourse Analysis on both counselling data sets and synchronous interactions. A focus on the interactional dynamics of child resistance *and* groomer challenge holds significant research potential. One limitation of this present research was that it did not conduct a cross-analysis of groomer facework with children's Resist and Engage behaviours. This sort of analysis was challenging when dealing with retrospective accounts providing a reflection of children's grooming experience through their discourse. The law enforcement extracts included in Chapter Seven demonstrated the exciting potential for future research exploring the dynamics of child resistance/groomer challenge using synchronous interactions between groomer and child. Findings about children's vague language use would benefit from further research with a larger sample of counselling data and would also benefit from being cross compared with analysis of children's language use in actual DCSG interactions.

One of the key lines of thought identified through the analysis of children's discourse was the question of children's cognitive development and adolescent proclivities (e.g., Hanson, 2019; Hanson & Holmes, 2014). This thesis develops these ideas to explore the impact of children's development on their conception of and construction of face. Despite the emphasis of the importance of context, the question of children's ongoing cognitive development at adolescence and the differentials this can cause in an adolescent's performance and interpretation of face has not yet been considered from a linguistics perspective in third-wave approaches to facework analysis. A lack of focus on the impact this has on DCSG interactional dynamics represents a core

shortcoming of existing linguistics models of online grooming discourse. The findings in this thesis therefore underscore and validate the importance of context and show the importance and urgency of continued research and testing of analytical frameworks in novel and diverse genres to continue to extend and enrich our understandings (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010).

A further finding of this thesis was that the CDMA context, the evolution of technology, and its affordances do not merely facilitate new forms of communication and human social behaviour central to DCSG and TA-CSA. Rather children's discourse shows the cultivation of new environments that incubate new, intensified forms of (im)politeness and facework dynamics that permit and sanction the abuse of children by adults through manipulation, coercion and extortion. This echoes and further validates Hanson's (2019) perspective that forces and cultures of "cyberlibertarianism" and "disruptive innovation" have fundamentally shaped the internet and our perspectives of it as a unique social space. It is a space where unethical behaviour (and within that human communication) has far greater licence and freedom than offline (Blitvich, 2022). This thesis has emphasised how the CDMA toolkit offers an underexplored avenue to help shift the scales and build a digital future where we take a concerted intersectional view to underpin direct action to ensure the structures and regulation are in place make sure shame switches sides.

## **8.5 Applications for Policy and Practice**

Calls for a crosscutting public health approach (PHA) to CSA are being heeded and progressed in some jurisdictions but until recently this has fallen short of incorporating TA-CSA as integral to the approach (Cant et al., 2022, 2022; Letourneau et al., 2014; Lonne et al., 2019; Quadara, 2019; Smallbone et al., 2013; United Nations Children's Fund, 2020). The holistic view of children's DCSG experiences provided by their discourse shows the benefits of a PHA underpinned by a child-rights centred approach (Childlight, 2024) and shows how the current adult "categorisation" of abuse occludes the complexity and interlaced nature of the child's experiences of TA-CSA (5 Rights, 2022; We Protect Global Alliance, 2022). TA-CSA driven by the cyber-libertarian and disruptive innovation paradigms identified have until recently been developed untethered to ethical codes and social governance

of the “real world” (Hanson, 2019). However, the results presented across this thesis could be practically applied to weave action on DCSG into a regulatory framework anchored within a PHA. Figure 8.1 briefly presents each of the core strands of a PHA and how findings could be applied to enhance practice at each level.

**Figure 8.1** *Applications of Research Findings within a Public Health Approach to Responding to Child Sexual Abuse*

PHA Strand	Group	Example	References
Primary Prevention	Governance and Scrutiny (Regulation/Legislation/Third Sector)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A child centred/rights-based approach to resist siloing of experience into adult constructed ‘categories’ of abuse.</li> <li>• Funded, dedicated children’s voice mechanisms to build their perspectives into decision making/regulation.</li> <li>• Explore how the CDMA toolkit can add value and enhance efforts to amplify children’s voices.</li> </ul>	Hanson (2019), (NSPCC, 2023)
	Technology Companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fund training resource development.</li> <li>• Grant access to data</li> <li>• Buy in and achieve pan-organisational roll out of mandatory modules and learning resources focused on children’s resistance discourse and communicative behaviours<sup>139</sup> to counter ethical drift/build organisational cultures on social responsibility.</li> <li>• Fund and build applications for research findings to enhance AI and machine-learning training models to enhance prevention.</li> </ul>	See Hanson (2019) for discussion of ethical drift.
	Law Enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to data.</li> <li>• Incorporate training on children’s resistance discourse/communicative to benefit investigative/forensics teams, and liaison officers on the frontline in relations with schools, families/caregivers and children.</li> </ul>	

<sup>139</sup> DRAGON-Shield has already showcased and evaluated the success of such an approach of developing research and evidence driven learning modules. There is potential to build new modules into DRAGON-Shield that take a focused look at child resistance and groomer challenge in DCSG interactional dynamics. [DRAGON-Shield - Swansea University](#).

Child Safeguarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disseminate findings through practitioner conferences and professional learning structures.</li> <li>• Practitioners co-produce applied solutions based on children’s resistance its constraints in DCSG contexts.</li> </ul>	
Parents/Caregivers/Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources for parents/caregivers/children to shift entrenched social norms to develop an ‘awareness principle’ and promote conversations.</li> <li>• Lesson plans and classroom resources on digital consent, victim blameless and agency.</li> </ul>	Hanson (2019)
General Population and Mass Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media guidelines informed by research findings to dismantle dichotomous blame/victim narratives.</li> </ul>	(We Protect Global Alliance, 2022)

PHA Strand	Group	Example	References
Secondary Prevention	Governance and Scrutiny (Regulation/Legislation/Third Sector)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children’s discourse about the role of CCII/IV in DCSG communication/screenshotting has relevance laws governing taking and sharing intimate images. Scrutinise current legislation and guidelines to ensure clarity/reduce scope for interpretation resulting in differential responses within/across jurisdictions.<sup>140</sup></li> <li>A National Training Framework to incorporate evidence-based training modules on children’s DCSG discourse.</li> </ul>	
	Law Enforcement/Judicial Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Insights into the dynamics of children’s resistance discourse will help to contextualise/anticipate groomer challenge as well as building understanding of the impact on children’s help-seeking behaviours.</li> <li>Findings about children’s vague language use when recounting DCSG experiences could inform judicial processes especially in countering victim-blaming and ‘active participant’ narratives in defense arguments.</li> </ul>	
	Technology Companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tech Safety Solutions: insights into the dynamics of child resistance and groomer challenge could help flag earlier intervention.</li> </ul>	

<sup>140</sup> In the UK the law was updated under the Online Safety Act in 2023 under the new intimate image abuse laws, the Law Commission guidance states: “Sometimes, images are copied to keep a permanent version of an image after access to the original would otherwise be lost; for example, screenshotting a Snapchat image that is automatically deleted in seconds. While the boundaries are tricky, we conclude that this is distinct copying behaviour that we refer to as “retention” and not “taking”. However, in contradiction the Law Commission report states that taking a screenshot of a videocall that is being shown in real time should fall within the definition of taking, because this conduct creates a “still” image that does not otherwise exist. It is more like taking an image “in real life”. When it comes to the legislation (England and Wales) on Indecent Images of Children (IIOC), under the Protection of Children Act 1978, Section 1 it is an offence to take, permit to be taken, make, possess show, distribute IIOC (anyone under the age of 18 years of age). While the IIOC offences of taking/recording/making should thus cover the act of screenshotting, this is not explicitly detailed and thus leaves room for interpretation.

- AI applications could be used to design chatbots based on research findings<sup>141</sup> to provide automated solutions that children can turn to for help to extricate themselves DCSG interactions. Such innovations could hold children in their resistance attempts and maximise their impacts, offering respite and clear adult-enabled exit routes from DCSG interactions.
- Child Safeguarding
- Children’s resistance discourse and communicative behaviours rolled out across all publicly funded sectors with child safeguarding responsibilities.
- Parents/Caregivers/Children
- Adaptations of resources and messaging for parents/caregivers and children about children’s resistance and help seeking approaches rolled out via national awareness raising campaigns.

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<sup>141</sup> While Project Artemis launched by Microsoft in 2020 aimed to utilise AI/machine learning to block online child grooming, the technology was based on scanning chats for sexualised content, and not focused on children’s discourse and attempts at resistance.

PHA Strand	Group	Example	References
Tertiary Prevention	Governance and Scrutiny (Regulation/Legislation/Third Sector)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fund recovery and support services that build responses based on findings about the differential impacts of DCSG and TA-CSA. Therapeutic recovery that works to dismantle the internalisation of abuse and the self-shame fusion identified.</li> <li>• Take down to stop the continued existence and/or sharing of CCII/CCIV.</li> <li>• Recognise the role of E2EE in exacerbating FC_On tactics and work with technology companies to prioritise child safety.</li> </ul>	NSPCC <a href="#">Report</a> <a href="#">Remove  </a> <a href="#">Childline</a>
	Technology Companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider research findings about the role of E2EE in exacerbating FC_On tactics and work with technology companies to prioritise child safety.</li> </ul>	
	Child Safeguarding/Therapeutic Approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop therapeutic interventions and resources informed by findings about children's discourse regarding destabilising self-shame fusion/face</li> <li>• Awareness of groomer &lt;-&gt; child interactional dynamics and the affective impact of children's attempts to navigate them and the diverse constraints acting on communicative agency in DCSG contexts can be applied to work with self-blame presentations.</li> </ul>	
	Parents/Caregivers/Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Therapeutic messaging adapted to support parents of children exposed to DCSG and supporting parents to process and rationalise their child's experience.</li> </ul>	

## 8.6 Concluding Remarks

We are failing children repeatedly. Prevalence studies scream of a “hidden pandemic” of TA-CSA that represents a global public health emergency (Fry et al., 2025). Yet, despite myriad efforts to counter it, over the last decade TA-CSA has increased exponentially and represents an ever-increasing diversification of abuse (IWF, 2025; Salter et al., 2024). Online grooming crimes against children are estimated to have increased 89% over the last six years (NSPCC, 2024). The findings presented across this thesis demand we examine our collective responsibility in silencing children’s experiences. Children’s voices amplified across this thesis show us loud and clear what is happening. We are choosing to ignore them, we avert our eyes and diffract their experience through adult preoccupations with prevalence, prototypes, and profit.

The findings across Chapters Four-Six of this thesis evidence how multi-directional forces constrain children’s behaviours and thus agency in DCSG contexts. Findings have harnessed discursive analysis to build novel empirical evidence of children’s strategic attempts to navigate these constraints. The third-wave discursive view taken throughout this thesis centralises context and results have shown that children’s agency is constrained on (i) a structural, societal level which exerts persistent systemic inequity and structures of oppression; (ii) the nature of technological development, which favours individualism over a duty of care, which in turn sanctions and ferments the (iii) novel and technologically-cultivated facework dynamics and extremes which thus (iv) influences the self-shattering range of emotions that characterise children’s affective response. The results in this thesis suggest that the combination and intersection of these contexts create an ever-constricting constellation of constraint on children’s agency.

Linguistics researchers need to turn their gaze to the question of children’s face in construction and the vulnerabilities and factors that can fracture its development. There is an urgent need for scholars to develop a richer and more nuanced understanding. There needs to be greater attention and accountability towards how technology companies, in their documented failure to implement safety by design and abide by their duty of care to children, have not only facilitated abuse but, when

it comes to patterns of communication and social relations, have cultivated ever-evolving, extreme forms of harmful human communicative behaviour that have barely begun to be studied. This thesis has emphasised how children's voices are fundamental to building a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of DCSG. Research across disciplines needs to prioritise novel methods to amplify children's experiences in ethical, meaningful, and impactful ways. As researchers and custodians of children's voices, we have a moral responsibility to find innovative ways to engage with policymakers and practitioners to co-produce solutions. We must ensure findings can be disseminated and applied to enhance and enrich prevention efforts and to shape solutions, recovery, and support. Our efforts need to be made possible by funding and investment and a commitment to granting access to data. DCSG is not inevitable; we can turn the tide. This thesis takes us one step closer to achieving this by showcasing how diverse discourse analytical toolkits can build empirical evidence about the interactional dynamics that propel the negotiations of communicative agency at the heart of DCSG.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Metadata Childline 121 Chatlog Transcripts

Child ID	Transcript (n=)	Age	Sex	Date of Contact	Duration of Chat	Main Concern	Subconcern	Word Count
C001	T001	13	Female	09/04/2018	00:31:44	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Contact with a person who poses an online sexual abuse risk	706
C002	T002	12	Female	22/04/2018	00:38:06	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Online sexual exploitation/grooming	1184
C003	T003	14	Female	23/04/2018	00:43:07	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Contact with a person who poses an online sexual abuse risk	1727
C004	T004	14	Female	07/05/2018	00:19:33	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Online sexual exploitation/grooming	681
C005	T005	16	Female	30/10/2018	00:52:53	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Online sexual exploitation/grooming	1183
C006	T006	14	Female	27/11/2018	00:41:53	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Contact with a person who poses an online sexual abuse risk	1266
C007	T007	17	Female	09/08/2018	00:48:53	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Online sexual exploitation/grooming	1539
C008	T008	14	Female	30/09/2018	00:55:23	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Contact with a person who poses an online sexual abuse risk	1387
C009	T009	15	Female	15/10/2018	01:02:27	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Contact with a person who poses an online sexual abuse risk	1622
C010	T010	16	Female	04/02/2019	00:38:38	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Contact with a person who poses an online sexual abuse risk	833
C011	T011	13	Male	15/04/2018	00:48:39	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Contact with a person who poses an online sexual abuse risk	1081
C012	T012	14	Male	26/12/2018	01:28:16	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Online sexual exploitation/grooming	2333
C013	T013	15	Male	03/02/2019	00:32:12	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Receiving sexual messages/images from an adult	1153
C014	T014	15	Male	13/05/2018	00:50:03	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Contact with a person who poses an online sexual abuse risk	1171
C015	T015	14	Male	01/07/2018	01:17:33	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Discussed removal of sexual images	1867
C016	T016	16	Male	05/08/2018	00:44:13	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Receiving sexual messages/images from an adult	1232
C017	T017	15	Male	02/09/2018	00:48:06	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Discussed removal of sexual images	1170
C018	T018	18	Male	24/09/2018	01:10:42	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Online sexual exploitation/grooming	1667
C019	T019	16	Male	07/10/2018	01:02:21	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Contact with a person who poses an online sexual abuse risk	2748
C020	T020	14	Male	16/11/2018	00:37:12	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Contact with a person who poses an online sexual abuse risk	925
C021	T032	15	Female	14/04/2018	01:23:12	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Receiving sexual messages/images from an adult	1599
C022	T033	14	Female	04/05/2018	00:19:19	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Contact with a person who poses an online sexual abuse risk	535
C023	T034	16	Female	15/06/2019	00:18:50	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Contact with a person who poses an online sexual abuse risk	845
C024	T035	13	Female	04/08/2018	00:26:31	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Discussed removal of sexual images	1026
C025	T037	15	Female	23/08/2018	00:26:31	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Contact with a person who poses an online sexual abuse risk	594
C026	T040	17	Female	22/02/2019	00:32:07	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Online sexual exploitation/grooming	781
C027	T041	14	Female	18/03/2019	00:39:43	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Online sexual exploitation/grooming	1746
C028	T042	15	Female	06/01/2019	00:23:51	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Online sexual exploitation/grooming	651
C029	T043	16	Female	20/01/2019	00:46:36	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Online sexual exploitation/grooming	1687
C030	T047	16	Female	07/02/2019	01:27:50	Sexual abuse ONLINE+	Online sexual exploitation/grooming	1914
<b>Total</b>								<b>38147.00</b>
<b>Average</b>		<b>14.87</b>						<b>1295.1</b>
<b>SD</b>		<b>1.36457648</b>						<b>527.010928</b>

### Appendix 2: Groomer Tactics and Sub-Tactics (Lorenzo-Dus et al, 2023)

<b>Tactic</b>	<b>Sub-Tactic</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Access (A)</b>		Groomers' use of language to contact children and engage them in conversation.
<b>Deceptive Trust Development (DTD)</b> Groomer's use of language to bond with a child to help them achieve their main goal of engaging the child in sexual activity.	Activities	When groomers attempt to build a sense of familiarity and commonality with children by talking about different kinds of activity. They do this by engaging children in talk about hobbies and interests or eliciting and sharing information about ongoing and planned activities.
	Exchange of Personal Information	When groomers elicit and provide personal information to engage children in a process of getting to know each other.
	Praise	When groomers compliment or congratulate children as a way of developing and maintaining good relations with them.
	Relationships	When groomers engage children in discussion about romantic and/or sexual relationships with others, and/or the groomer, to build a close personal connection.
	Small Talk	When groomers engage in informal conversation with no obvious communicative goals for the purpose of making children feel comfortable talking to them while keeping a conversation flowing.
<b>Sexual Gratification (SG)</b> Groomers' use of language to involve children in sexual activities online and/or prepare them for sexual interaction offline.	Explicit Sex Talk	When groomers seek to desensitise children to sexual acts by using sexually explicit language that may be accompanied by sexually explicit images/media.
	Implicit Sex Talk	When groomers seek to desensitise children to sexual acts through sexually implicit language.
	Reframe	When groomers use language to position themselves and children in roles intended to persuade children that sexual activity, including sexual talk, is beneficial to them.

**Isolation (I)**

Groomers' use of language to separate children from others in their support network, especially friends and family

Mental Isolation

When groomers attempt to make children feel emotionally disconnected from their support network and more emotionally dependent on the groomer. This can serve the purpose of discouraging children from telling others in their support network about the grooming relationship, thus reducing the risk– for groomers– of their abuse being discovered.

Physical Isolation

When groomers attempt to interact with children away from others, in situations where the child is available to engage in sexual activity and discovery of abuse is less likely. This can involve checking if a child is alone, encouraging them to physically separate from their support network and getting them to delete digital traces of their interactions with the groomer.

**Further Contact (FC)**

Groomers' use of language to get children to provide an increased amount or type of contact

Further Contact Online

When groomers try to gain longer or new periods of online interaction with children or try to establish different ways of communicating with them. The purpose of this is to create more opportunities for online grooming.  
When groomers try to get children to meet them in person for the purpose of engaging them in sexual activity.

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**Appendix 3: Positive and Negative Politeness Strategies (Brown and Levinson, 1987)**

No.	Positive Politeness Strategy	Negative Politeness Strategy
1	Noticing or attending to H (his/her interests, wants, needs, goods)	Be direct/conventionally indirect
2	Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)	Question, hedge
3	Intensify interest to H	Be pessimistic
4	Use in-group identity markers	Minimize the size of imposition on H
5	Seek agreement	Give deference
6	Avoid disagreement	Apologise
7	Presuppose/raise/assert common ground	Impersonalise S and H: avoid pronouns 'I' and 'you'
8	Joke	State the FTA as a general rule
9	Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants	Nominalize
10	Offer, promise	Go on record as incurring a debt/ not indebting H
11	Be optimistic	
12	Include both S and H in the activity	
13	Give (or ask for) reasons	
14	Assume or assert reciprocity	
15	Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy understanding, cooperation)	

\*H= Hearer/S= Speaker

#### Appendix 4: Overview of Conventionalised Impoliteness Strategies and Formulae Combined from Culpeper (2010, 2011)

<b>Conceptual orientation</b>	<b>Some impoliteness strategies (Culpeper, 2010)</b>	<b>Some impoliteness formulae (Culpeper, 2011, pp. 135-136)</b>
Face (any type)	<i>Insults:</i> Producing or perceiving a display of low values for some target	<p>Insults</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Personalized negative vocatives-</i> - [you] [fucking/rotten/dirty/fat/little/etc.] [moron/fuck/plonker/dickhead/berk/pig/shit/bastard/loser/liar/minx/brat/slut/squirt/sod/bugger, etc.] [you]</li> <li>2. <i>Personalized negative assertions</i> - [you] [are] [so/such a] [shit/stink/thick/stupid/bitchy/bitch/hypocrite/disappointment/gay/nuts/nuttier than a fruit cake/hopeless/pathetic/fussy/terrible/fat/ugly/etc.] - [you] [can't do] [anything right/basic arithmetic/etc.] - [you] [disgust me/make me] [sick/etc.]</li> <li>3. <i>Personalized negative references-</i> - [your] [stinking/little] [mouth/act/arse/body/corpse/hands/guts/trap/breath/etc.]</li> <li>4. <i>Personalized third-person negative references (in the hearing of the target)</i> - [the] [daft] [bimbo]- [she] [ 's] [nutzo]</li> </ol> <p>Pointed criticisms/complaints - [that/this/it] [is/was] [absolutely/extraordinarily/unspeakably/etc.] [bad/rubbish/crap/horrible/terrible/etc.]</p> <p>Challenging or unpalatable questions and/or presuppositions- why do you make my life impossible?- which lie are you telling me?- what's gone wrong now?- you want to argue with me or you want to go to jail?</p>
	<i>Pointed criticism/complaint:</i> Producing or perceiving a display of low values for some target	

Association Rights	<i>Exclusion</i> (including failure to include and disassociation): Producing or perceiving a display of infringement of inclusion	
Equity Rights	<p><i>Patronising behaviour</i>: Producing or perceiving a display of power that infringes an understood power hierarchy</p> <p><i>Failure to reciprocate</i>: Producing or perceiving a display of infringement of the reciprocity norm</p> <p><i>Encroachment</i>: Producing or perceiving a display of infringement of personal space (literal or metaphorical)</p> <p><i>Taboo behaviours</i>: Producing or perceiving a display of behaviours considered emotionally repugnant.</p>	<p>Condescensions (see also the use of “little” in Personalized negative references)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [that] [’s/is being] [babyish/childish/etc.]</li> </ul> <p>Message enforcers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- listen here (preface)</li> <li>- you got [it/that]? (tag)</li> <li>- do you understand [me]? (tag)</li> </ul> <p>Dismissals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [go] [away]</li> <li>- [get] [lost/out]</li> <li>- [fuck/piss/shove] [off]</li> </ul> <p>Silencers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [shut] [it]/[your] [stinking/fucking/etc.] [mouth/face/trap/etc.] - shut [the fuck] up</li> </ul> <p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [I’ll/I’m/we’re] [gonna][smashyourfacein/beattheshitoutofyou/boxyourears/bustyourfuckinghead off/straighten- you out/etc.] [if you don’t] [X]- [X] [before I] [hit you/strangle you]</li> </ul> <p>Negative expressives (e.g. curses, ill-wishes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [go] [to hell/hang yourself/fuck yourself]- [damn/fuck] [you]</li> </ul>

**Appendix 5: Revised AFFECT system by Bednarek (2008) which Underpins the Further Revisions Proposed by Benitez-Castro and Hidalgo-Tenorio (2019)**

Dis/Inclination	Desire	Non-Desire
In/Security	Security: trust Security: quiet	Insecurity: distrust Insecurity: disquiet
Dis/satisfaction	Satisfaction: interest Satisfaction: pleasure	Dissatisfaction: ennui Dissatisfaction: displeasure
Un/happiness	Happiness/cheer Happiness/affection	Unhappiness: misery Unhappiness: antipathy
Surprise	Surprise	

**Appendix 6: Modifications to the original AFFECT system (adapted from Bartley, 2020).**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Before (Martin and White, 2005)</b>	<b>After (Bednarek, 2008)</b>
Security/Insecurity	Security: confidence, trust	Security: quiet, trust
	Insecurity: disquiet, surprise	Insecurity: disquiet, distrust
Inclination/Disinclination	Inclination: desire	Inclination: desire
	Disinclination: fear	Disinclination: non-desire
		Surprise

**Appendix 7: The Revised Goal-Oriented Taxonomy of the Emotion Spectrum as Proposed by Benitez-Castro & Hidalgo-Tenorio (2019)**

<b>Goal-seeking emotions</b>	<b>Attention-grabbing</b>	Surprise		
		Interest Uninterested	Interested	
	<b>Inclination</b>	Inclined Disinclined		
<b>Goal-achievement emotions</b>	<b>Satisfaction</b>	Security	Quiet Trust	Confident Trusting
		Happiness	Hedonic Eudaimonic	
	<b>Dissatisfaction</b>	Insecurity	Disquiet	Confused Anxious Fearful Embarrassed
			Distrust	Doubtful Mistrustful
		Unhappiness	Anger Sadness	Frustrated Angry

<b>Goal-relation emotions</b>	<b>Attraction</b>	Liking Affection Respect Sympathy Tolerance
	<b>Repulsion</b>	Disgust Antipathy Disrespect Indifference Intolerance

## Appendix 8: Approval Letter NSPCC Ethics Committee.



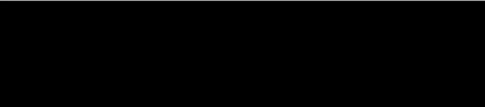
Ruth Mullineux-Morgan  
Senior Policy & Public Affairs Officer  
Children's Services  
National Centre for Wales  
NSPCC

The NSPCC Research Ethics Committee is happy to give your application ethical approval. It was impressed by your application and felt that it very thoughtfully addressed issues around data protection and safeguarding practices.

- You asked the Committee whether you should include the complaints information for Childline staff involved in production of the anonymized transcripts, which the Committee thought was appropriate. ~~As a minor point, it asks that you update the complaints email address to researchcomplaints@nspcc.org.uk.~~

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss these comments in more detail. Should you need any help, support or guidance whilst conducting your research project, please email Pamela Miller, Associate Head Research [REDACTED]

Kind regards



Dr Nicholas Drey  
Chair, NSPCC Research Ethics Committee

**Appendix 9: Coding Book: Revised Tactics and Sub-Tactics, Definitions and Illustrative Examples from the Children’s Discourse about their DCSG experiences**

Tactic & Definition	Sub-Tactic and Definition	Illustrative Example (s)
<p><b>ACCESS (ACC):</b> Any mention by the child of how the groomer initially contacted them and engaged them in conversation (via which mode of digital or non-digital contact), and whether it was the groomer or the child who initiated contact. This category also covers any mention of whether the child knew the groomer previously offline or whether this was a new contact.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p><b>“He sent me a request on facebook and he had mutal friends so i added him back”</b></p>
<p><b>DECEPTIVE TRUST DEVELOPMENT (DTD):</b> Any reference by the child about sub-strategies used by the groomer to cultivate a personal and friendly relationship and bond with them via digital communication. It includes one or more of the following groomer communicative sub-tactics:</p>	<p><b>Exchange of Personal Information (EPI):</b> Any mention by the child of the groomer engaging them in the reciprocal exchange of personal details, including actual whereabouts (town, city, ages/birthdays, real names, computer locations (address), mobile or land line telephone numbers or social media handles/gaming avatars. This also includes the exchange of visual material such as pictures, self-produced imagery and videos using handheld digital devices.</p>	<p>“i shown him what i look like wjen <b>he first added me</b> because i didnt know if he recognised me or anything”</p>

Tactic & Definition	Sub-Tactic and Definition	Illustrative Example (s)
<p><b>DECEPTIVE TRUST DEVELOPMENT (DTD) (cont):</b> Any reference by the child about sub-strategies used by the groomer to cultivate a personal and friendly relationship and bond with them via digital communication. It includes one or more of the following communicative strategies:</p>	<p><b>Relationships (REL):</b> Any mention by the child either volunteered or prompted about the groomer engaging them in discussion of feelings and attitudes towards maintaining, building, and dismantling their relationship with the child's friends, family and/or significant others. Any mention by the child about the groomer engaging them in discussion of their relationship or any mention of the child's reflections about their relationship with the groomer.</p> <p><b>Activities (ACT):</b> Any mention by the child of the groomer engaging them in the reciprocal exchange of information about favourite music, movies, books, sports, hobbies, foods, online behaviour and general likes and dislikes. The sub-tactic also includes any mention by the child that the groomer encouraged them to talk about what he/she and the groomer were doing during the online interaction as well as previous and planned activities.</p> <p><b>Gifts (GI):</b> Any mention by the child of the groomer giving verbal or physical gifts to the child, defined as:</p> <p><i>Gifts (Verbal) (GI_V):</i> Any reference by the child of the groomer having praised and/or congratulated their physical appearance or other personal traits (as disclosed by the child textually and/or visually during their online interaction with the groomer). This includes any reference to the groomer having told the child they were special.</p>	<p>“he saw a picture of my nan and knew i had a brother and sisters”</p> <p>“we met because we liked some of the same books (wildly age-inappropriate books that I really shouldn't have been reading, but such is the digital age)”</p> <p>“She kept giving me 'compliments' e.g., your looking very sexy baby”</p>

Tactic & Definition	Sub-Tactic and Definition	Illustrative Example (s)
<p><b>SEXUAL GRATIFICATION (SG):</b> Any mention by the child of the groomer having prepared them to accept offline sexual contact and/or to engage in online sexual activities. It comprises the following communicative strategies:</p>	<p><i>Gifts (Physical) (GI_P):</i> Any reference by the child to the groomer having bought them presents or having sent them gifts including offering them money for nude images.</p>	<p>“he even buys me new clothes and we go out for dinner and stuff”</p>
	<p><b>Small Talk (ST):</b> Any reference by the child to the groomer having engaged them in interactional exchanges that seem to have little informational or functional purpose but that help to manage interpersonal distance and to develop a stronger social bond with the child.</p>	<p>“i thought he was just playing along with the pineapple joke”</p>
	<p><b>Explicit Sex Talk (EST):</b> Any reference by the child to the groomer having sought to make them insensitive to sexual activities by using sexually explicit language (e.g., sexual slang terms and graphic descriptions of sexual activities) and images (e.g., showing, sharing and requesting nude pictures, having erections on camera).</p>	<p>“he sent me pictures of his private parts and asked me to go on to facetime with him so he could masturbate”</p>
<p><b>Implicit Sex Talk (IST):</b> Any reference by the child to the groomer having sought to make the child insensitive to sexual activities by using indirect sexual language (e.g., metaphorical references to orgasm) and images (e.g., provocative poses but no nudity or sexual acts) or the groomer having emphasised the romantic rather than sexual, nature of the child-groomer relationship.</p>	<p>"I want to see you in your school uniform"</p>	

Tactic & Definition	Sub-Tactic and Definition	Illustrative Example (s)
<p><b>ISOLATION (IS):</b> Any reference by the child about the groomer having attempted to make arrangements to spend time alone with the child online and/or offline such as having sought assurance from the child that they were communicating without adult supervision, and asking or instructing the child to eliminate previous chat logs, photos, email addresses, websites etc.</p>	<p><b>Reframing (REF):</b> Any reference by the child to the groomer having sought to persuade them to engage in sexual activities by describing them in different ways so as to appear beneficial to the child, for example as learning experiences, games or skills.</p> <p><b>Mental Isolation (MIS):</b> Any reference by the child to the groomer having attempted to induce psychological and emotional separation between the child and their support network to allow the groomer to step into that space. Any reference by the child of groomer attempts to increase the child's dependency on them for friendship forming. Any reference to by the child to the groomer that the groomer showed a marked interest in the child's social life providing sympathy and support and questioning parent's rules.</p>	<p>No example from dataset</p> <p>“he said to ignore everyone what he thinks about us”</p>
<p><b>FURTHER CONTACT (FC):</b> Any mention by the child of the groomer using language to provide an increased amount or type of</p>	<p><b>Physical Isolation (PIS):</b> Any reference by the child to the groomer arranging to spend time alone with them online and/or offline, such as seeking assurance from the child that he/she is communicating without adult supervision, and asking or instructing the child to eliminate previous chat logs, photos, email addresses, websites etc.</p> <p><b>Further Contact Online (FC_ON):</b> Any mention by the child to the groomer having tried to gain longer or new periods of online interaction. This includes reference by the child to the groomer having made further contact with them using different modes of communication i.e., by introducing images or video</p>	<p>“he makes me go on call when no one is home”</p> <p>“She asked for my email because she wanted to chat with me on skype”</p>

Tactic & Definition	Sub-Tactic and Definition	Illustrative Example (s)
<p>contact. This is comprised of two sub-tactics:</p>	<p>or moving the child from one Social Networking Site platform to another to intensify or provide a different mode/affordance of contact.</p> <p><b>Further Contact Offline (FC_OFF):</b> Any mention by the child to the groomer having made verbal lead-ins online such as requests to meet with the child offline for sexual purposes or any reference to the child experiencing contact sexual abuse by the groomer during or following a meeting in person.</p>	<p>“So i met up with this guy, I allowed him to do sexual things to me “</p>

## Appendix 10: Evolution of Vague Language Taxonomies for the Digital Child Sexual Grooming Context

(Lorenzo-Dus & Kinzel, 2021 adapted from Zhang, 2013)

Vague language category	Realisations	Example	Pragmatic Function
<b>Approximator</b>	Expresses an inexact amount, such as ‘about 50’, ‘50-ish’, ‘a few’, ‘many’, ‘several’.	‘I have many friends.’	Approximation
<b>Possibility &amp; Plausibility Indicator</b>	Expresses something possible or that could be valid, such as ‘possible’, ‘seem’, ‘appear’, ‘maybe’, ‘probable’.	‘I probably won’t be drinking’	Uncertainty
<b>Vague Category Identifier</b>	Indicates an unspecified category, such as ‘stuff’, ‘thing’, ‘and all that’, ‘things like that’, ‘or something’	‘I bought apples pears and things like that.’	Avoidance
<b>Intensifier</b>	Expresses vaguely a high intensity degree and increase the tone of speech, such as ‘very’, ‘really’, ‘extremely’	‘She is very smart.’	Strengthening
<b>De-intensifier</b>	Expresses vaguely a low intensity degree and decrease the tone of speech, such as ‘sort of’, ‘fairly’, ‘a bit’, ‘somewhat’.	‘You are a bit blunt’	Downtoning
<b>Subjectiviser</b>	Expresses speaker’s low certainty or commitment, such as ‘I think’, ‘I guess’, ‘we believe’, ‘it seems’	‘It seems that she wouldn’t mind doing that.’	Shielding

## Appendix 11: Pragmatic Function of Vague Language Use for the Digital Child Sexual Grooming Context

(Lorenzo-Dus & Kinzel, 2021)

Vague language linguistic realisation	Pragmatic function	Vague language terms	Illustrative example from the groomer corpus
<b>Approximator – Quality</b>	Approximation	Like, hold, fun, bed, feel, love, kiss	G: So you <i>like</i> older guys?
<b>Vague Category Identifier</b>	Avoidance	Stuff, thing	G: But I'll teach you about foreplay and other <i>stuff</i> if you wanna learn that
<b>Explicit Vague Category Identifier</b>	Partial Avoidance	Sex stuff, sexual thing	G: and do you want to do the <i>sex thing</i>
<b>DeIntensifier</b>	Downtowning	Cute, pretty, sweet, nice	G: Like I said before you are young but you are also <i>cute</i> if I may say so
<b>General Verb</b>	Avoidance	Do, get	G: Do you want to just <i>do</i> touchy feely stuff, maybe take some things off?

## Appendix 12: Coding Book for Analysing Vague Language Realisations in Children’s Digital Child Sexual Grooming Discourse

(adapted from Lorenzo-Dus & Kinzel, 2021)

Linguistic Realisation	Pragmatic function	Realisations in the dataset	Illustrative example from children’s discourse
Explicit Language	Clarity	sex terms: ‘fuck’, ‘masturbate’, and terms like ‘nude’, ‘naked’	“he told me to fuck my bedpost”
Vague Language <i>Approximator-Quality (A-Qual)</i>	Approximation	dirty, inappropriate, adult, weird	“he posted inappropriate pictures of me”
<i>Vague Category Identifier (VCI)</i>	Avoidance	them, these, anything, thing, stuff, it	“he pressures me into sending them”
<i>Explicit Vague Category Identifier</i>	Partial avoidance	sexual things, sexual stuff	“he started talking about sexual things”
<i>General Verb</i>	Avoidance	do it, do things, doing stuff	“I had to do stuff on call with him”
Omission	Avoidance	Omitting references to sex entirely or avoiding explicit reference to ‘pictures’, ‘image’ or chats being sexual inferring they are given the context but omitting language that would directly reference them as such.	“i said i don’t want to and i say it every time he messages me and then he just says i have to”

### Appendix 13: Positive and Negative Politeness Strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987)

Positive Politeness Strategies	Example from Children's Discourse
Notice, attend to Hearer (their interests, wants, needs goods)	"hes [sic] <b>nice and funny and caring and listens to me and stuff</b> "
Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)	"the guy keeps <b>saying he loves me</b> "
Intensify interest to H	"he then sent me screenshots ... <b>to prove I was special</b> "
Use in-group identity markers	(No examples identified in dataset)
Seek agreement	(No examples identified in dataset)
Avoid disagreement	(No examples identified in dataset)
Presuppose/raise/assert common ground	"we met because <b>we liked some of the same books</b> "
Joke	"I thought he was just <b>playing along with the pineapple joke</b> "
Assert of presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants	(No examples identified in dataset)
Offer, Promise	" <b>so he said that we could be friends and he would stop doing it</b> "
Be optimistic	(No examples identified in dataset)
Include both S and H in activity	(No examples identified in dataset)
Give (or ask for) reason	(No examples identified in dataset)
Assume or assert reciprocity	(No examples identified in dataset)
Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)	"he <b>even buys me new clothes and we go out for dinner and stuff</b> "
Negative Politeness Strategies	Example from Children's Discourse

Be conventionally indirect	(No examples identified in dataset)
Question, hedge	“ <b>He asked me</b> to take pictures in the underwear he bought me.”
Be pessimistic	(No examples identified in dataset)
Minimise the size of imposition on H	"and he said nothing, <b>even 'whatever makes you happy'"</b>
Give deference	(No examples identified in dataset)
State the FTA as the general rule	"he told me it wasnt wrong in some countries, <b>I just wan't brought up correctly"</b>
Apologise	"in the end messaged me saying " <b>im sorry I've been hard on you</b> "
Impersonalise S and H	(No examples identified in dataset)
Nominalise	(No examples identified in dataset)
Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H	(No examples identified in dataset)

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**Appendix 14: Coding Book (Im)Politeness: Modifications to Politeness and Impoliteness Taxonomies and Examples from Children’s Discourse (Culpeper, 2011)**

<b>Impoliteness Strategies/Formulae in Children’s Discourse</b>	<b>Example from Children’s Discourse</b>
<b>Face (Any type)</b> Insults Pointed criticisms, complaints  Negative expressives (e.g. curses, ill wishes) Unpalatable questions and/or presuppositions	<b>"he called me disgusting</b> and said I only wanted her for sex" "He told me it wasn't wrong in some countries, <b>I just wasn't brought up correctly</b> and that he turns 20 this year" (No examples identified in dataset) (No examples identified in dataset)
<b>Association Rights</b> Exclusion	when I deleted my instagram account <b>he made that account private, and blocked all of my friends</b> "
<b>Equity Rights</b> <b>Patronising behaviour</b> <i>Condescensions</i> <i>Message Enforcers (including bragging)</i>  <b>Failure to reciprocate</b> <i>Dismissals</i> <i>Silencers</i>  <b>Encroachment</b> <i>Invasion of Privacy</i> <i>Ordered About</i> <i>Threats</i> <b>Harassment</b> <b>Taboo Behaviours (including explicit language use)</b>	"she <b>said I was being a baby</b> not sneaking out" "then he started talking <b>about how he's done it to boys before</b> when he's come over to the UK" (No examples identified in dataset) <b>"he won't listen"</b>  "I had to give up because of him posting nude <b>pictures he'd screenshotted</b> " "Hes saying that <b>I have to have sex with him else ...</b> " "he says <b>I have to do anything he says or else he's coming to my house</b> " <b>“He also started harassing me</b> when I wouldn’t talk to him on facetime.” <b>“I want to play with your little bot cun*”</b>

## Appendix 15: Coding Book Children’s Emotion Triggers Observed in the Data – Definitions and Examples

Trigger	Definition	Example from the dataset
<b>Grooming</b>	Grooming-triggered emotions includes any reference by the child to their emotional response to interactions with the groomer, or emotions triggered by the impact of the grooming experience. It also includes any references to the digital, social media or tech-assisted context of the abuse and the emotions it triggers.	“well today a man sent me inappropriate messages i've told my mum but i fell quite down about it”
<b>Other(s)</b>	Other(s)-triggered emotions include any references by the child to emotions triggered by other entities around the child. This includes emotions triggered by concerns about parents/caregivers/wider family, peers, police, school or support services (comprising social services, the child helpline the data is derived from or therapists/counselling services). It also includes references to emotions triggered by concerns about the reactions of a generalised or collective ‘other people’ or public or society.	“im just worried someone i know may follow him”
<b>Self</b>	Self-triggered emotions include references to emotions triggered by the child’s reflections on their own behaviour or to any emotions linked to the child’s own self-image or self-perception. It also includes references to emotions triggered by how their sense or presentation of self may be impacted by the DCSG experience. Self-triggered emotions also comprise those emotions where the child doesn’t specify the external trigger and has internalised their experience to trigger emotions.	“the thing is, i feel guilty. i didnt tell anyone about it. my mum found out”
<b>Generic</b>	The generic category refers to references by the child where the trigger for their emotion was unclear or towards circumstances not directly concerning the DCSG context or adjacent to it.	“you hate me like everyone else”

**Appendix 16: Coding Book Appraisal Theory AFFECT Sub-System (Benitez-Castro & Hidalgo-Tenorio, 2019) with adjustments derived from Bednarek (2008) and Driven by Children’s Discourse**

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**Goal-Seeking Oriented Emotions:** Revolves around Panksepp's (1998) SEEKING system, which keeps us cognitively engaged with the happenings, situations and entities in our environment. To explain how our psychic energy is directed to particular stimuli there is a distinction between attention-grabbing and inclination emotional experiences. This suggests a cline from surprise; through interest; to inclination. The more marked cognitive focus of these affective states reduces the salience of the valence

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<b>Level</b>	<b>Emotion</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example from this dataset (L2)</b>
L1	Attention Grabbing	None	
L2	Surprise	Any instance where the child describes or communicates a perception of novelty and unexpectedness. Instances of immediate attentional focus on an unexpected stimulus	“Until then, you had no idea about the Police involvement?” “ <b>Yeahh it was so random</b> ”
L2	Interest	Any instance where the child describes or communicates a sense of attention and motivation. Where our attention is captured by novel and complex stimuli making us want to invest a sustained effort to learn more about them.	No Example in Dataset
L3	Interested		No Example in Dataset
L3	Uninterested		No Example in Dataset
L1	(Dis)Inclination	None	
L2	Inclined	Any instance where the child describes or communicates that their mind was set on obtaining a potentially pleasurable stimulus or positive outcome.	“scared. <b>I want to tell my parents</b> but they would go to the police and im scared i'd be in trouble too”
L2	Disinclined	Any instance where the child describes or communicates that their mind was set on preventing a potentially unpleasant stimulus or negative outcome.	“shes so nice and caring <b>i just dont want to worry her</b> ”

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**Goal Achievement Oriented Emotions:** In Goal-Achievement emotions, the valence dimension becomes essential, as the focus is on the feeling of dis/pleasure itself, derived from events or situations with a bearing on our goals, needs and values. A distinction is made between *satisfaction* and *dissatisfaction* emotion categories.

Level	Emotion	Description	Example from this dataset (L3/L4)
L1	Satisfaction	Any instance where the child describes or communicates a sense of success in attaining or maintaining our goals, needs and values.	
L2	Security	Any instance where the child describes or communicates Security feelings that occur whenever our outer and inner worlds are consistent with our goals.	
L3	Quiet	(Unchanged from Bednarek 2008, p.173) Any instance where the child describes or communicates 'assurance, confidence, ease, safety, relaxation' (Emotion terms: assured, blithely, confident, confidence, comfortable with, comforting, the ease, at ease with, reassuring, reassurance, relax, feel safe, solace, unashamed, untroubled)	
L3	Trust	(Unchanged from Bednarek 2008: 173) Any instance where the child describes or communicates 'trust in someone or in a future happening' (emotion terms: confident about, optimism that, optimistic, trusted)	
L4	Confident	Any instance where the child describes or communicates certainty and assurance as to the truth and/or likelihood of a particular event or situation	"i think <b>im</b> brave enough"
L4	Trusting	Any instance where the child describes or communicates a sense of secure attachment to people inspired by a belief in their honesty and goodness.	"like who? <b>there is a few teachers I trust</b> but im in 6 form so they don't care.
L4	Hope	Any instance where the child describes or communicates a sense of hope, a feeling of expectation or a wish for a particular eventuality.	" <b>thats what i hope</b> "
L2	Happiness	None	
L3	Hedonic	Any instance where the child describes or communicates fleeting sensory pleasures. Feelings of hedonic happiness are normally related to a human's most basic needs (e.g. food, drink, sex).	"kind of, <b>its fun to pretend to be somewhere else</b> but the conversations end up very strange and sexual, and i want to leave but always go back"

L3	Eudaimonic	Any instance where the child describes or communicates the pursuit of the fulfilment of more social needs (e.g. having friends, family, stability). Eudaimonic experiences trigger feelings of positive social fulfilment and purpose that transcend the mere pleasurable sensation linked to more basic hedonic states.	<b>“i just did it because i felt special</b> and no one in real life has any interest in me”
L1	<b>Dissatisfaction</b>	<b>Arises when there is an inability, threat or blockage in trying to pursue or keep our goals, needs and values.</b>	
L2	<b>Insecurity</b>	<b>Stems from situations where our well-being or a specific goal is threatened.</b>	
L3	Disquiet	Denotes unpleasant cognitive arousal. (Unchanged from Bednarek 2008: 173). Emotion terms include 'fear, worry, anxiety, puzzlement, confusion, embarrassment'.	
L4	<i>Confused</i>	<i>Any instance where the child describes or communicates confusion (e.g. puzzled, mixed up). A perceived inability to understand something (Storm &amp; Storm 1987: 813).</i>	<b>“scared because i dont know him i dont know of he will come to the house or not.”</b>
L4	<i>Anxious</i>	<i>Any instance where the child describes or communicates Anxiety (e.g. worried, troubled), revealing our ongoing ruminations on vague and, at times, unfounded threats (Power &amp; Dalglish 2008:177)</i>	<b>“yea i feel like very very anxious and nervous and i start to think about what would've happened if i didn't tell my mum ...”</b> <b>“im scared to sleep”</b>
L4	<i>Fearful</i>	<i>Any instance where the child describes or communicates Fear (e.g. scared, petrified), triggering a quick fight or flight response to an immediate or current menace (LaBar 2016: 751).</i>	
L4	<i>Ashamed</i>	<b>New category added.</b> <i>Any instance where the child describes a continuum of emotions linked to shame. This spans expressions of feeling uncomfortable or ill at ease, to expressions of guilt, references to shame or expressions of self-blame.</i>	<b>“its all my fault i led him on he didnt ask for pictures i said straight up that i wasnt sending”</b>
L3	Distrust	(Unchanged from Bednarek 2008: 173) Any instance where the child describes or communicates 'distrust, reserve, suspicion' (emotion terms: doubtfully, emotional withdrawing, reserve, suspicious of, suspicion about)	
L4	<i>Doubtful</i>	<i>Any instance where the child describes or communicates uncertainty and lack of assurance as to the truth and/or likelihood of a particular event or situation</i>	<b>“He kept saying he doesnt have any...but i doubt it”</b>
L4	<i>Mistrustful</i>	<i>Any instance where the child describes or communicates distrust or suspicion.</i>	<b>“I just feel like it is and i dont feel i can trust anyone”</b>

L2	<b>Unhappiness</b>		
L3	Anger	Any instance where the child describes or communicates thwarted attainment of a goal. This often results from an attribution of unfairness and deliberate provocation to a specific situation or person. Unlike sadness, where one feels incapable of changing the negative outcome, the angry person feels determined to confront the situation or person, in the believe that the obstacle can be removed (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones 2016: 776).	
L4	Frustrated	Any instance where the child describes or communicates a feeling of impatience derived from our perceived lack of control over a situation we thought to be manageable (Wierzbicka, 1999: 72; Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones 2016: 779). When frustrated, we unsuccessfully try to change the undesirable situation by putting some effort into it, leading to a kind of unpleasant contained annoyance. A sense of irritability.	<i>“he just made me feel like im going around in circles”</i>
L4	Angry	Any instance where the child describes or communicates sustained and having reached high levels of unpleasant arousal, our frustration may turn into anger, and subsequently aggressive behaviour (Roseman 2008: 357, Berkowitz 2009: 188).	<i>“my mom complains a lot its so annoying i get mad at her. I dont know how to explain how annoying it can be”</i>
L3	Misery	Any instance where the child describes a state of feeling of mental or physical distress, discomfort or suffering. Misery was found to comprise three key subcategories. These were Sadness, Loneliness or Regret.	
L4	Sadness	Any instance where the child describes a cline of sadness or feeling unhappy. This spans feeling down or depressed to intense feelings of suicide ideation.	<i>“at the moment am feeling down and sometimes i dont want to be alive because of what people say to me”</i>
L4	Lonely	Any instance where a child expresses feeling lonely or alone because of a lack of company.	<i>“. And i was feeling so lonely and depressed, so i decided to talk to people online. I ended up speaking to a guy who told me he was 22.”</i>
L4	Regret	Any expression by the child of a feeling of sadness, repentance, or disappointment over an occurrence or something they had done or failed to do.	<i>“i don't know somestimes i regret it other times i want to”</i>

**Goal Relation Oriented Emotions:** Goal-relation emotions signal more or less instinctive attitudes permeating our interaction with certain entities, often going beyond specific events and situations where those entities were involved (as in the goal-achievement emotions) to a generalised valenced focus and stance on the entities themselves. Two kinds of affective relations are distinguished: attraction and repulsion.

Coding Level	Emotion	Description	Example from this dataset (L2)
L1	Attraction	Encodes instances where X feels positively attracted to Y.	
L2	Liking	Any instance where the child describes or communicates Liking (e.g. like, fond of, keen on) applies to simple, sensory, aesthetic or intellectual preferences towards things, or people.	“im 14 hes like 36 i know its weird <b>but i really like him</b> and not had a proper bf before”
L2	Affection	Any instance where the child describes or communicates Affection (e.g. love, warm, attached to) involves a high level of personal involvement, leading to X's willingness to look after and nurture Y. Contrasts the sensory liking preference associated with sexual attraction with a tenderness and concern accompanying affection.	“and he said he is coming to england wants us to to meet in his hotel room and do stuff but i dont want to, i feel like i cant say anythig <b>i care about him a lot</b> ”
L2	Respect	Any instance where the child expressed a feeling of Respect (e.g. reverence, awe, worship) either for or emanating from one of the key triggers. Respect is more cognitive in nature; it implies our positive appreciation of another entity in terms of outstanding qualities, skills or achievements. Respect and affection frequently co-occur.	“I'm usually really shy but it's like easier to speak to people on it, like when they message me things I just feel appreciated in some way. I don't really do anything sexual about it but <b>I just like speaking to people that like me in that way, even if it's only for a bit</b> ” “ <b>hes the only one that gets me</b> ”
L2	Sympathy	Sympathy, bordering on sadness is any instance where the child describes or communicates a feeling of fond attachment towards a distressed entity (e.g. pity, compassion, empathy).	
L2	Tolerance	Tolerance, closer to the repulsion family, refers to any instance where the child describes or communicates they accept certain people or things even when feeling aversion (e.g. tolerate, accept, admit).	“my friend started dating this older man she met online <b>he also added me on snapchat and we would chat everyday</b> we became really close and he helped me through tough times i was having a few months ago but <b>then when they broke up the messages we had started to get uncomfortable</b> ”

L1	Repulsion	Any instance where the child describes or communicates that their aversion is apparent.	
L2	Disgust	Any instance where the child describes or communicates Disgust. Disgust features as the most visceral kind of aversion (e.g. squeamish, sickened, yuk). It draws on our appraisal of the trigger's potentially polluting and noxious nature, producing a nauseating sensation that makes us reject any physical contact with the entity. Rozin et al (2016: 817, 821) distinguish between the physical kind of disgust, termed core, and the moral subtype; this is linked to our evaluation of a person as "degraded, base, or subhuman" (2016: 822) labelling it as disgust proper.	"Because im young and <b>people will see me as dirty</b> "
L2	Antipathy	Any instance where the child describes or communicates Antipathy. Antipathy involves generalized hostility towards a person or thing, without the visceral component typical of disgust (e.g. hate, abhor, hostile). Although it frequently results from a series of angering events, we may hate somebody but not recall the cause, what stands out is a feeling of antagonism towards the "mere existence of the hated" (Miller 2009: 204). Unlike reactions of disgust which are more punctual, experiences of antipathy are normally more enduring (Power & Dalgleish 2008: 285).	" <b>He was really rude</b> so i blocked him"
L3	Disrespect	Any instance where the child describes or communicates Disrespect is a special type of antipathy derived from a strong belief in certain entities' inferior status, making us feel that these deserve no consideration (e.g. contempt, disdain, look down on).	No example in dataset
L3	Indifference	Any instance where the child describes or communicates Indifference. Indifference (e.g. insensitive, cold, unmoved) involves a lack of concern towards an entity that perhaps other people regard as being in distress.	"i dont love <b>i dont have feelings for him</b> "
L3	Intolerance	Any instance where the child describes or communicates Intolerance. Intolerance borders on antipathy and disinclination, as it expresses X's marked unwillingness to accept or to bear Y, often resulting in displays of contempt or disrespect, or loathing.	" <b>I feel like i need to go like disappear</b> so he wont do it"

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## Appendix 17: Coding Book – Children’s Own Behaviour Discourse Mapped Against the Online Grooming Discourse Model

OGDM Tactic/Sub-Tactic and Definition	Illustrative Example
<p><b>ACCESS (ACC):</b> Any mention by the child of their response/communicative behaviour when the groomer contacted them and engaged them in conversation (via which mode of digital or non-digital contact), and whether it was the groomer or the child who initiated contact. This category also covers any mention of whether the child knew the groomer previously offline or whether this was a new contact.</p>	<p>“He sent me a request on facebook and he had mutal friends <b>so i added him back</b>”</p>
<p><b>DECEPTIVE TRUST DEVELOPMENT (DTD):</b> Any reference by the child to their communicative behaviour in response to sub-strategies used by the groomer to cultivate a personal and friendly relationship and bond with them via digital communication. It includes the child’s response to one or more of the following groomer communicative sub-tactics:</p>	
<p><b>Exchange of Personal Information (EPI):</b> Any mention by the child of their communicative behaviour in response to the groomer engaging them in the reciprocal exchange of personal details, including actual whereabouts (town, city, ages/birthdays, real names, computer locations (address), mobile or land line telephone numbers or social media handles/gaming avatars. This also includes the exchange of visual material such as pictures, self-produced imagery and videos using handheld digital devices.</p>	<p><b>i shown him what i look like</b> wjen he first added me because i didnt know if he recognised me or anything”</p>
<p><b>Relationships (REL):</b> Any mention by the child either volunteered or prompted about their communicative behaviour in response to the groomer engaging them in discussion of feelings and attitudes towards maintaining, building, and dismantling their relationship with the child's friends, family and/or significant others. Any mention by the child about the groomer engaging them in discussion of their relationship or any mention of the child’s reflections about their relationship with the groomer.</p>	<p>“<b>we been friends for a year</b> we just argue sometimes”</p>

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**OGDM Tactic/Sub-Tactic and Definition****Illustrative Example**

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**Activities (ACT):** Any mention by the child of their communicative behaviour in response to the groomer engaging them in the reciprocal exchange of information about favourite music, movies, books, sports, hobbies, foods, online behaviour and general likes and dislikes. The sub-tactic also includes any mention by the child of their response to the groomer encouraging them to talk about what he/she and the groomer were doing during the online interaction as well as previous and planned activities.

“we met because we liked some of the same books **(wildly age-inappropriate books that I really shouldn't have been reading, but such is the digital age)**”

**Gifts (GI):** Any mention by the child of their communicative behaviour in response to the groomer giving them verbal or physical gifts.

*Gifts (Verbal) (GI\_V):* Any reference by the child of their communicative behaviour in response to or following the groomer having praised and/or congratulated their physical appearance or other personal traits (as disclosed by the child textually and/or visually during their online interaction with the groomer). This includes any reference to the child's response to the groomer having told them they were special.

“**well he start complimenting me and telling me i was beautiful then he sent me pictures of his private parts...**”

*Gifts (Physical) (GI\_P):* Any reference by the child to their communicative behaviour in response to the groomer having bought them presents or having sent them gifts including offering them money for nude images and references to the child accepting such gifts.

“he even buys me new clothes and **we go out for dinner and stuff**”

**Small Talk (ST):** Any reference by the child to their communicative behaviour in response to the groomer having engaged them in interactional exchanges that seem to have little informational or functional purpose but that help to manage interpersonal distance and to develop a stronger social bond with the child.

“**i soo realised he wasnt joking so i decided to follow along with it an keep going to see if he really was a predator**”

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**OGDM Tactic/Sub-Tactic and Definition****Illustrative Example**

**SEXUAL GRATIFICATION (SG):** Any mention by the child of their communicative behaviour in response to the groomer having prepared them to accept offline sexual contact and/or to engage in online sexual activities. It comprises the following communicative strategies:

**Explicit Sex Talk (EST):** Any reference by the child to their communicative behaviour in response to the groomer having sought to make them insensitive to sexual activities by using sexually explicit language (e.g., sexual slang terms and graphic descriptions of sexual activities) and images (e.g., showing, sharing and requesting nude pictures, having erections on camera).

**“I made a mistake, i send nude photos to someone and they are threatening to post them.”**

**Implicit Sex Talk (IST):** Any reference by the child to their communicative behaviour in response to the groomer having sought to desensitise the child to sexual activities by using indirect sexual language (e.g., metaphorical references to orgasm) and images (e.g., provocative poses but no nudity or sexual acts) or the groomer having emphasised the romantic rather than sexual, nature of the child-groomer relationship.

**“yes. everyone on that site wants to 'roleplay' and some people on there are very weird”**

**Reframing (REF):** Any reference by the child to their communicative behaviour in response to the groomer having sought to persuade them to engage in sexual activities by describing them in different ways so as to appear beneficial to the child, for example as learning experiences, games or skills.

None in Dataset

**ISOLATION (IS):** Any reference by the child to their communicative behaviour in response to the groomer having attempted to make arrangements to spend time alone with the child online and/or offline such as having sought assurance from the child that they were communicating without adult supervision, and asking or instructing the child to eliminate previous chat logs, photos, email addresses, websites etc.

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**OGDM Tactic/Sub-Tactic and Definition****Illustrative Example**

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**Mental Isolation (MIS):** Any reference by the child to their communicative behaviour in response to the groomer having attempted to induce psychological and emotional separation between the child and their support network to allow the groomer to step into that space. This includes their communicative behaviour in response to attempts to increase the child's dependency on the groomer for friendship forming; their communicative behaviour in response to the groomer showing a marked interest in the child's social life providing sympathy and support and questioning parent's rules. Any reference by the child that the mental isolation tactic of mental isolation and separation from sources of support has 'landed' i.e. not wanting or feeling able to tell anybody or being fearful of people finding out what has happened.

**“i just dont want anyone i know finding out”**

**Physical Isolation (PIS):** Any reference by the child to their communicative behaviour in response to the groomer making arrangements to spend time alone with the child online and/or offline, such as seeking assurance from the child that he/she is communicating without adult supervision, and asking or instructing the child to eliminate previous chat logs, photos, email addresses, websites etc.

**“he makes me go on call when no one is home”**

**FURTHER CONTACT (FC):** Any mention by the child of their communicative behaviour in response to the groomer using language to provide an increased amount or type of contact. This is comprised of two sub-tactics:

**Further Contact Online (FC\_ON):** Any mention by the child to their communicative behaviour in response to groomer having tried to gain longer or new periods of online interaction. This includes reference by the child to their response to the groomer having made further contact with them using different modes of communication i.e., by introducing images or video or moving the child from one Social Networking Site platform to another to intensify or provide a different mode/affordance of contact.

**“he kept messaging me on instagram asking y i blocked him and i told him that it was because i didnt like it ... ”**

**Further Contact Offline (FC\_OFF):** Any mention by the child their communicative behaviour in response to the groomer having made verbal lead-ins online such as requests to meet with the child offline for sexual purposes or any reference to the child experiencing contact sexual abuse by the groomer during or following a meeting in person.

**“So i met up with this guy and he bought me underwear”**

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**Appendix 18: Coding Book An Inductively/Deductively Devised Taxonomy for Exploring Children ‘s Own Behaviour Discourse about their Digital Child Sexual Grooming Experiences**

<b>Behaviour Category</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example from Children’s Discourse</b>
<b>ENGAGE</b>	Any instance where the child’s discourse showed engagement with groomer tactics, most often indicated through the child reporting actions (I did, I said, I asked, I sent etc). The child responded positively, engaged or appeared to initiate interaction. ENGAGE behaviours suggested that groomer sexualised goal-driven tactics had succeeded.	“I asked him for his snapchat and he gave me his username.”
<b>RESIST Indirect Resistance</b>	Any instance where the child referenced resistance behaviours that were not directly communicated to the groomer.	
<i>Seeking Help</i>	Any instance where the child referenced actively seeking help or the intention to seek help from offline or online help sources. Offline this included telling someone or asking for help and it also includes openness and discussion of the impact of grooming and requests for explanation and clarity. Online this included online reporting mechanisms and behaviours such as screenshotting evidence to support help-seeking. Seeking help also included to discussion of self-protective coping strategies.	“I was scared to tell my mum but i knew i had to”  “Could you also report it on my behalf? “
<i>Suspect</i>	Any instance where the child’s discourse indicated a cognisance of the groomer’s manipulative and coercive motivations and tactics. Includes the child clearly stating they were being or had been groomed. Any instance where the child’s discourse showed awareness of being impacted by the groomer’s OGDM tactics and manipulative facework. This includes if the child didn’t say anything to the groomer but mentioned it to the counsellor. If the child discussed voicing suspicions to the groomer in any way. Suspect included knowledge and awareness of how things work online and the consequences of engagement and interactions with adults online.	“i dont think the girl was real i think it was him all along and he stole the poctures of another girl but not made a real account of his because i wouldnt of been friends with him cause he was grown up”

<b>Direct Resistance</b>	Any instance where children referenced issuing communicative resistance directly to the groomer.	
<i>Negotiate</i>	Any instance where the child discussed behaviours such as deflecting, bargaining, confronting, saying stop, making excuses, lying, pretending to be someone else, or explicitly lying and deceiving the groomer, to assert their own agentive choice.	“I told him i was eating so i couldnt send them”
<i>Refuse</i>	Any instance where the child discussed not acting on requested behaviour. This included saying no or references to articulated refusals to send personal information or images. Refusal also included refusal to engage with grooming tactics, including threats to report the groomer. Refuse also includes refusal to engage using silence or giving no response and online behaviours such as ignoring or muting the groomer.	“I told him i would never send any nudes or anything”
<i>End</i>	Any instance where the child referenced that they (or support around them) ceased the interaction with the groomer either temporarily or permanently. This included behaviours such as the child blocking or unfriending the groomer or deleting their accounts or putting protections around themselves to end and resist contact i.e. disabling location services.	“I blocked him everywhere soon after”

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