

COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES OF ONLINE GROOMERS

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Our new article looks at how online child sexual groomers use specific language strategies to manipulate targets. We analysed 3.3 million words in over 600 grooming conversations and identified 70 recurring linguistic patterns that can be linked to groomer goals.

A GROWING PROBLEM

Reports of online grooming are on the rise. The pandemic will inevitably have increased incidence, as more young people have gone online for the first time, many unsupervised.

GROOMER GOALS

By using a corpus-assisted discourse studies methodology, we identified phrases that are used to further four core groomer goals: sexual gratification, isolation, deceptive trust development, and compliance testing. We examine two of these goals below.

DECEPTIVE TRUST DEVELOPMENT

Groomers pretend to pursue a friendship or a romantic relationship and hide their goal of engaging the target in sexual activity.

ISOLATION

Groomers isolate their target both physically and emotionally by moving them away from important people in their lives and emphasising the importance of the grooming relationship.

IMPLICIT LANGUAGE

Groomers use vague and sexually implicit language to further their sexual gratification goal, which may explain the underreporting of online grooming – victims cannot always easily tell that they are being groomed.

PREVENTION

This research is being developed further by Project DRAGON-S to create prevention tools for safeguarding professionals and detection tools for police forensic teams.

FIND OUT MORE

Website: www.swansea.ac.uk/project-dragon-s

Lorenzo-Dus, N., Kinzel, A., & Di Cristofaro, M. (2020). The communicative modus operandi of online child sexual groomers: Recurring patterns in their language use. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 155, 15-27.



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