

Emotional language use within a model of online grooming.

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Communicating a message is a conscious process by which we elaborate a given story. But importantly, in each word of that story we also expose our true emotional and psychological state.

The Research Group at Swansea University used the Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (LIWC) (Pennebaker et al., 2011) to measure the extent emotionally loaded words are used throughout online grooming conversations. Results were considered alongside Lorenzo-Dus et al (2016) Online Grooming Communicative Model (OGCoM).

Study Aim

The aim of the study was to explore the way and frequency with which emotionally loaded words are used by groomers to lure children online.

Methodology

Twenty five online grooming chat logs were downloaded from Perverted-Justice.com (c. 75,000). Frequencies of positively and negatively loaded words were analysed against the OGCoM to examine how groomers use emotional language to manipulate victims into sexual engagement.

Results

A high frequency of positively loaded affect words (i.e. calm, nice, heart) were used throughout the conversation, particularly during the processes in which the groomer deceptively develops the trust of the child and introduces sexual terms/ ideas into the conversation.

Negatively loaded words (i.e. scared, nervous, underage) were used when attempting to mentally isolate and engage victims' in explicit sexual behaviour.

Conclusions

These preliminary findings illustrate differences in the use of emotionally loaded words when engaging children in online sexual behaviour.

An interesting finding is the frequency of positive emotion words used during deceptive trust development. Deceptive language has previously been categorised by the use of negative emotion words, suggested to be a reflection of tension or guilt (Newman et al., 2003). The frequency of occurrence of positively loaded words during this phase shows how effective groomers are at building trust with victims and deceiving them about their long term intentions.

Assessing frequencies of emotional language during an online grooming conversation can enhance our understanding of groomer tactics and profiles. Considering the emotion based elements of the conversation can aid in the detection and prevention of online grooming and contribute to a typology of online sexual predation.

References

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