Measures of emotional valence within a model of online grooming.

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1. Background

•The online grooming of children and young people is a prevalent offence with 200 million girls and 100 million boys sexually victimized before adulthood (International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, 2014). Yet little has been done to empirically evaluate its linguistic characteristics.

•One of the few studies available developed an online grooming communicative model that highlights the complex and interlinked nature of the grooming process, see below (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016).
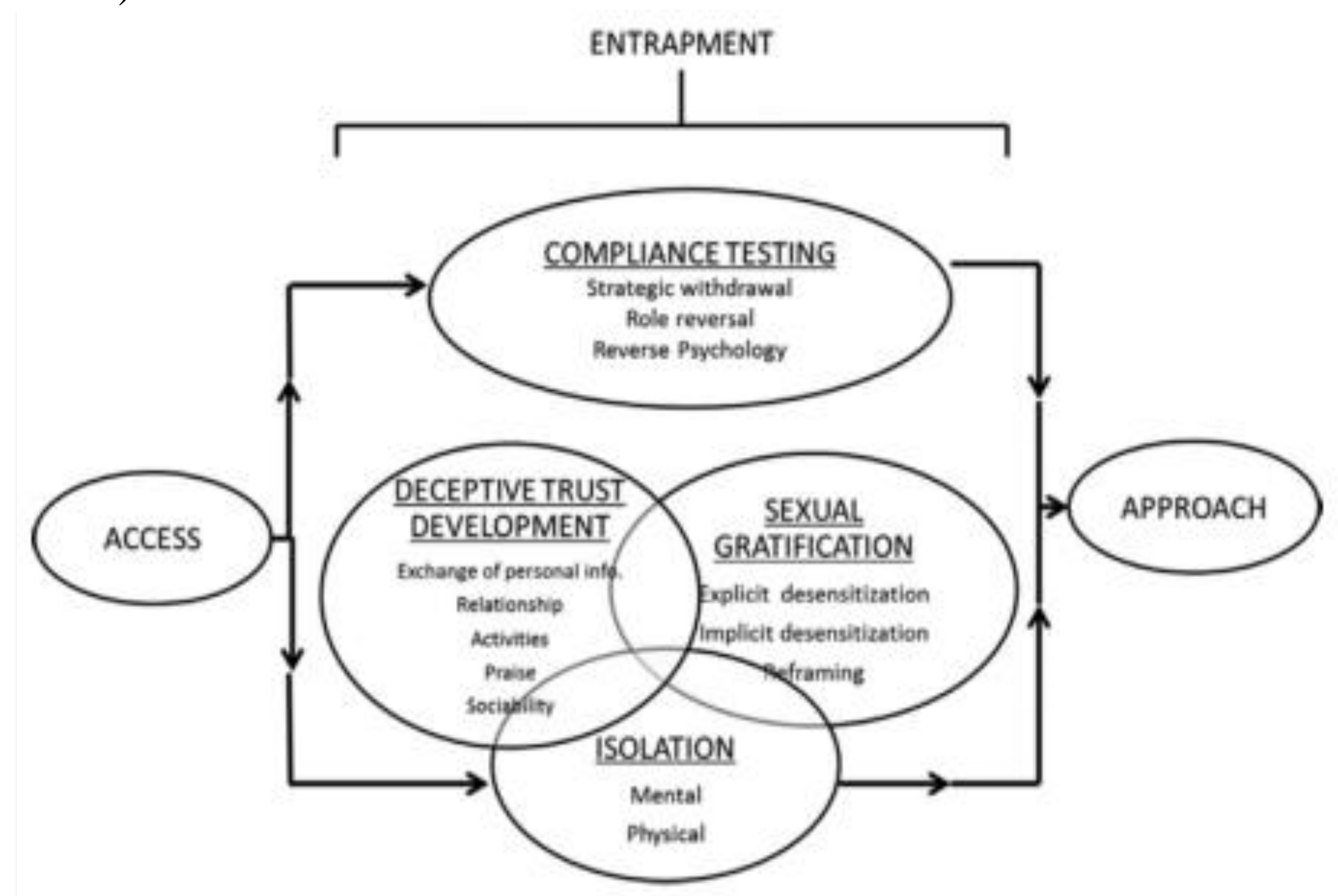
•Deceptive trust development is considered core components of the model. Here, the groomer deceives the child to gain his/her trust.

•Negatively loaded words have been associated with deceptive language (Newman et al., 2003), and positively loaded words with trust development (Cano Basave et al., 2014).

•Investigating the emotional content of the words used within online grooming conversations may give insight into how groomers view and strategically plan their interactions.

2. Study Objectives

•To explore potential differences in the frequency of occurrence of emotional loaded words as they appear in the entrapment network of the Online Grooming Communicative Model (OGCM) (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016). This will contribute towards our understanding of the role of emotion in online grooming.

•To examine the relationship between OGCM strategies and measures of emotional valence, advancing our knowledge on grooming tactics used within each process.

3. Methodology

•Twenty five chat logs downloaded from Perverted-Justice.com (c. 75,000 words) were analyzed against the OGCM.
•Perverted Justice is a non-for profit organization dedicated to the apprehension of online groomers. Volunteers posing as adolescent children (decoy victims) engage in online conversations with adults, exposing them to law enforcement when the conversation becomes sexually explicit.
•The Linguistic Enquiry Word Count (LIWC) was used to examine word frequency measures of valence, defined as positive or negative emotion words.
•LIWC categories were limited to those relating to emotional evaluation (overall affect, positive emotion words and negative emotion words (anxiety, anger, sad).
•The Kruskal-Wallis test of mean ranks was carried out to explore differences in word frequencies between grooming processes.
•Chi square analysis with adjusted residuals were calculated to examine the relationship between grooming strategies and positive-negative affect words.

4. Results

•A Kruskal-Wallis H test showed a significant difference in the frequency of use emotional words across grooming processes ($x^2(4)$, 1918.86, p<.05) (graph 1).
•Following Bonferroni corrections, a significantly higher frequency of affect words were used during deceptive trust development compared to all other processes (p<.005).
•After deceptive trust, higher frequencies of affect words were also used during sexual gratification compared to all other processes (p<.005).
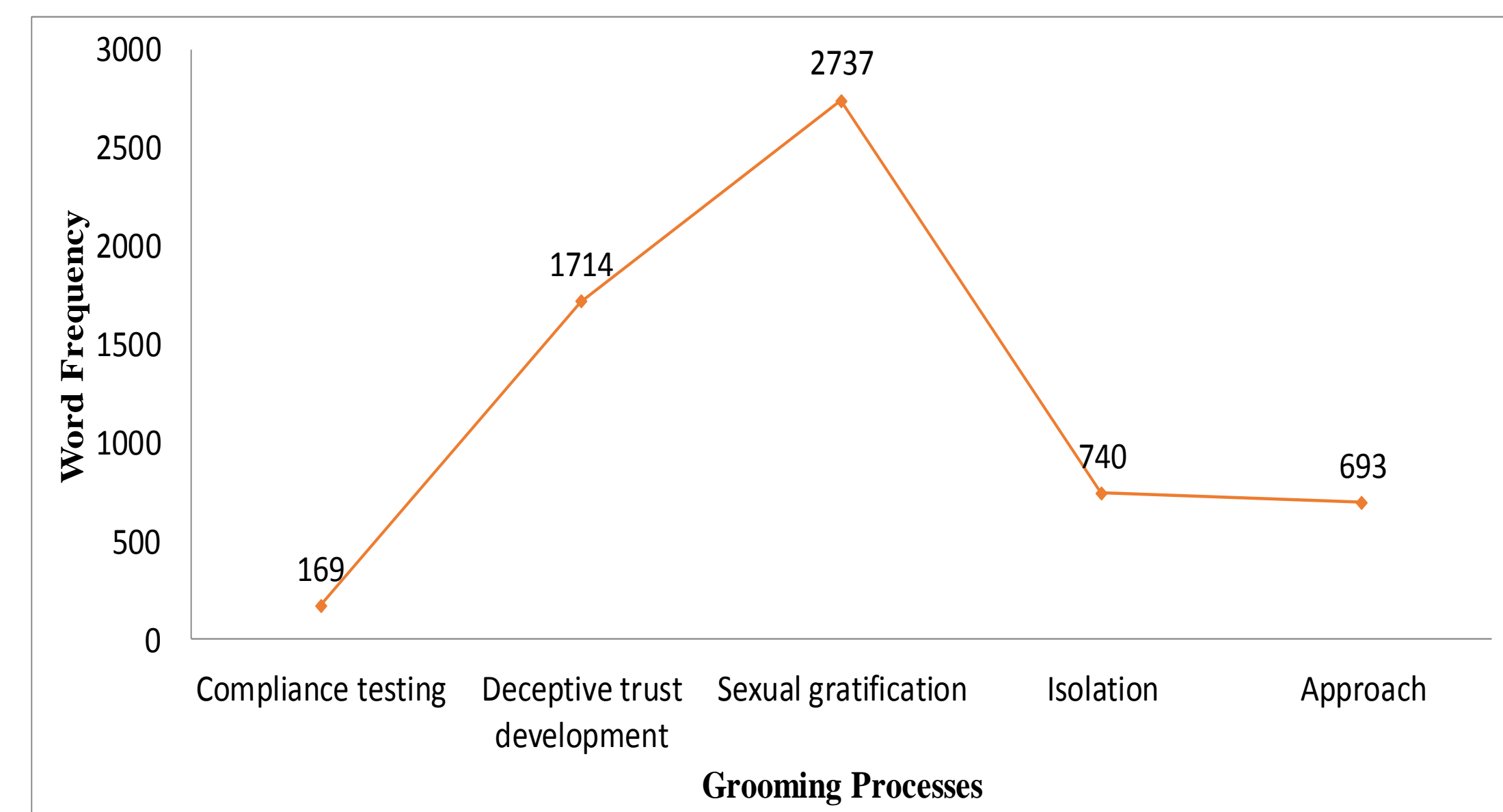

Graph 1: Mean rank frequency of emotional words over the OGCM processes

•Chi square analysis showed a significant difference in the frequency of occurrence of positive and negative affect words across grooming processes ($x2(4)$, 181.81, p<0.05).
•Following Bonferroni corrections a significantly higher frequency of positive emotion words were used during deceptive trust development (p<.005) and sexual gratification (p<.005).
•A significantly higher amount of negative emotion words were used during isolation (p<.005).
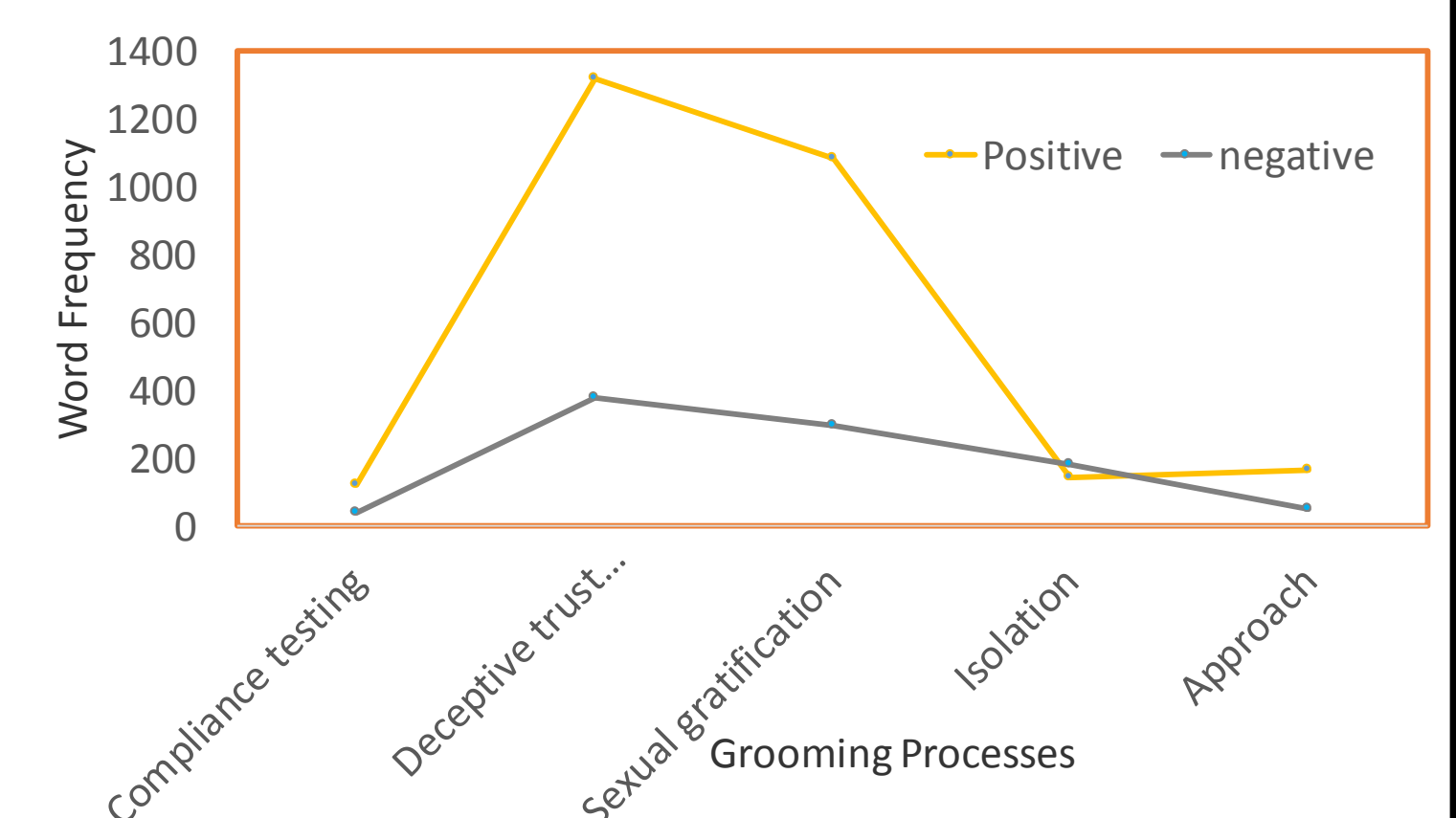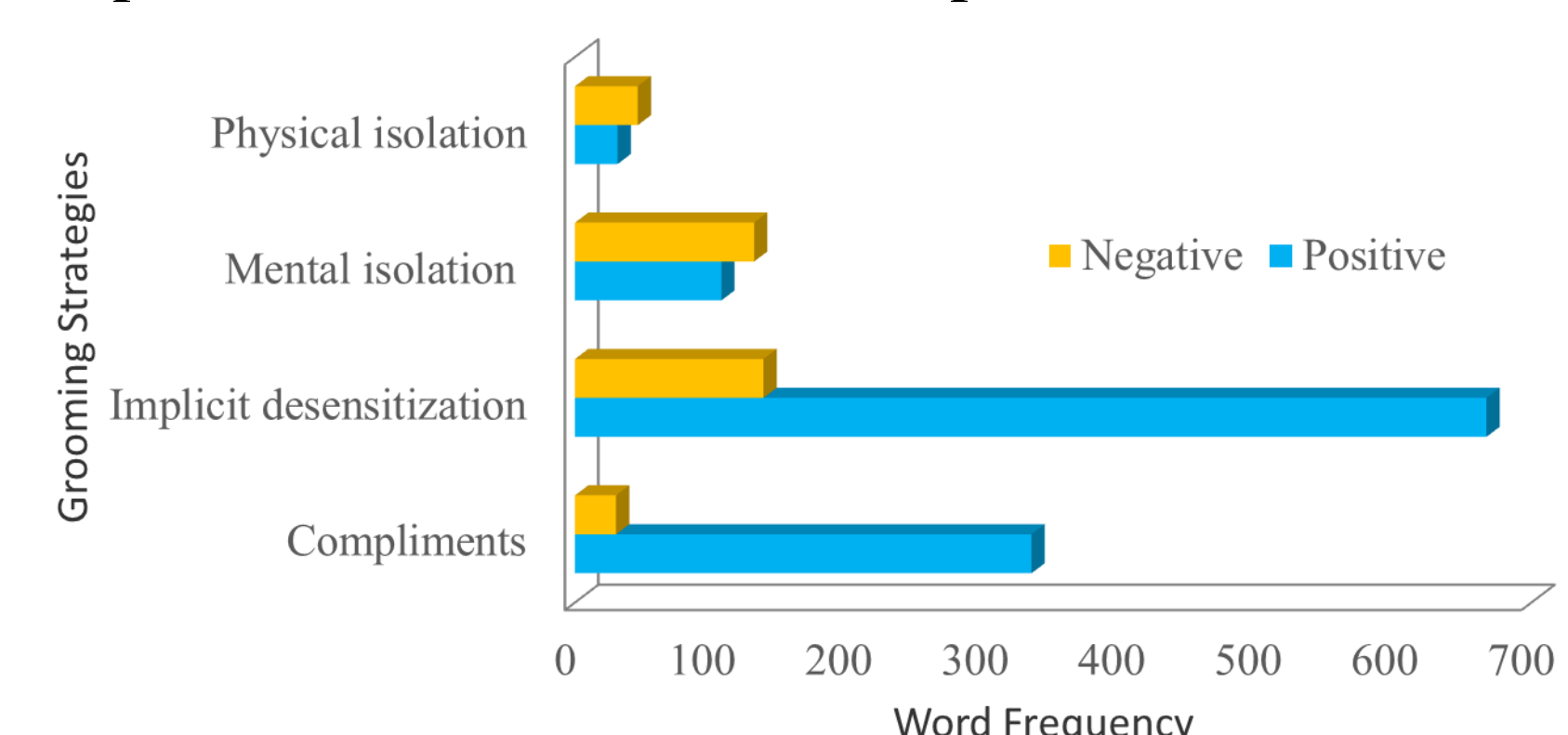

Graph 2: Frequencies of positive and negative loaded words over the OGCM processes

•Further differences in the frequency of affect words were found within the communicative strategies used within the OGCM processes ($x^2(13)$, 265.02, p<.05) (graph 3).
•A significantly higher frequency of positive emotion words were used in compliments during deceptive trust development (Bonferroni correction; p<.004).
•A significantly higher frequency of positive emotion words were also found in implicit desensitisation during sexual gratification (p<.004).
•Frequencies of negative emotions words were significantly higher in explicit desensitisation during sexual gratification (p<.004) and mental isolation (p<.004).

Graph 3: Frequency of positive and negative words over the OGCM strategies

5. Conclusions

•Online groomers appear to use positively valenced tactics more frequently during deceptive trust development (e.g., compliments).
•Sexual gratification shows a combination of affect words used; positive emotion words were used when employing indirect or romantic tactics (implicit), with negative words used when engaging the victim in explicit behaviour.
•Negative emotion words were also used during mental isolation, whereby victims are psychologically isolated from their support network and encouraged to forge a relationship with the groomer.
•The OGCM identifies deceptive trust development as a core and dominant phase of the grooming process. Additionally deceptive trust was found to positively correlate with sexual gratification and isolation (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016).
•Results from the present study support the OGCM proposed by Lorenzo-Dus et al (2016), signifying how groomers use emotional language to manipulate victims into sexual engagement.

References:
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