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Mimicry Deception Theory Applied To Grooming Behaviors Of Child Sexual Abuse

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MIMICRY DECEPTION THEORY APPLIED TO GROOMING BEHAVIORS

OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

MASTER'S THESIS

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Dedication

To my mom, my sister, my dad, and Peter. For believing in me always.

MIMICRY DECEPTION THEORY APPLIED TO GROOMING BEHAVIORS
OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

by

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Abstract

Mimicry Deception Theory (MDT) is a theoretical framework used to analyze deception in terms of long- vs. short-term strategies employed by the deceiver. Grooming behaviors used by sex offenders to access child victims and to prolong the abuse while minimizing detection are a specific form of deception. We conducted two studies, coding 121 and 164 court reports of sex abuse appeal cases with child victims. Grooming that was more complex in nature was associated with abuse that lasted longer and was more difficult to detect. Further, victim vulnerabilities contributed to a sense of confusion in the victim, and a decreased likelihood of disclosure. Thus, initial support emerged for finding the five components of MDT (victim selection, community integration, complexity of deception, resource extraction, and detectability) among victim grooming patterns in cases of sexually abused children. Recommendations for prevention efforts are discussed.

Keywords: sex offenders, grooming, Mimicry Deception Theory, pedophilia

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Mimicry Deception Theory applied to grooming behaviors in child sexual abuse

One in every five girls and one in every twenty boys will have experienced some form of sexual abuse by the time they turn eighteen (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2010). These figures are conservative because child sexual abuse is often not reported, and as such, experts agree that the real prevalence is likely much higher than these figures. Further, statistics on prevalence differ depending on how sexual abuse is defined. During their lifetime, 16% of children between ages 14 and 17 have been sexually victimized (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2010). Research suggests that children aged seven to thirteen are most at risk of becoming victims of sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1980).

The psychological consequences of sexual abuse of children are well-researched. These consequences include, but are not limited to: depression, anxiety, personality problems, low self-esteem, a deviant view of sexuality, and suicide (Beitchman et al., 1992; Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Chapman et al., 2004; Jumper, 1995; Kendall Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993; Paolucci, Genuis, & Violato, 2001; Romano, & De Luca, 2001; Spatz, Widom, DuMont, & Czaja, 2007). These effects can be seen in male and female victims and they persist into adulthood, often directly affecting development (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985). Of equal concern is the risk of revictimization (Spatz, Widom, Czaja, & Dutton, 2008). Russell (1986) found that in a sample of girls who had experienced at least one occasion of rape or attempted rape after age fourteen, 63% of these girls had previously been sexually abused by a family member, compared to 35% of these girls who had not been sexually abused by a family member. This finding has since been replicated in several studies (e.g. Humphrey & White, 2000; McGee et al., 2002), and

suggests that consequences of sexual abuse may create vulnerabilities in a child that an offender may target.

The majority of children are abused by people they know, rather than strangers; research shows that eight in ten victims of child sexual abuse know their abuser (Stop it Now, 2003, as cited in Craven, Brown, & Gilchrist, 2006). A National Institute of Justice Report (2003) found that three in four adolescents who had been sexually abused knew their abuser well. These figures contradict the commonly held myth of 'stranger danger', which can hinder effective prevention by focusing on the wrong potential threat (Finkelhor, 2009). In addition, it will make detection of abuse more difficult, as people near the child are not looking at other people close to the child as potential perpetrators. Further, Finkelhor (2009) points out that the majority of offenders do not have a criminal record for previous sexual offenses and thus several existing prevention strategies such as registers or neighborhood notifications do not actually prevent the majority of sexual abuse cases.

Research has examined specific behaviors used by the offender to select the child, make the child complicit with the abuse, and keep the child from disclosing the abuse to anyone who may be able to end it. When 'successful', these behaviors interlock to form an adaptive strategy that maximizes the benefits and minimizes the costs for the offender.

GROOMING

This study aims to investigate these behaviors to explore how they operate and thus where prevention efforts should be focused. A common term for these behaviors is "grooming". Grooming can be defined as any behavior exhibited by an adult that serves the purpose of increasing the likelihood of subsequent abuse taking place (Craven, Brown & Gilchrist, 2006). Unfortunately, this definition is imprecise, it is one of many, and no consensus exists as of yet

about one definition. For example, other researchers define it as a variation of adult courtship, but this specific behavior seems more likely in the context of an incestuous father-daughter relationship (Christiansen & Blake, 1990; Howitt, 1995).

Another problematic aspect is limiting grooming behaviors to pedophiles. Pedophilia, or pedophilic disorder, is a clinical diagnosis that involves intense and recurrent sexual thoughts or fantasies toward prepubescent children specifically. These thoughts or fantasies must have been acted upon by the person or cause them significant distress (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Unfortunately, the term has come to be almost synonymous with a sex offender who abuses children, including children who have started puberty. As such, any definition of grooming that limits itself to a pedophilic offender does not capture the full scope of the offense. A diagnosis of pedophilia is not a prerequisite to commit a sexual offense against a child, and vice versa. The problematic nature of using this diagnosis operates on two levels. First, it suggests to adults who are in a position to protect a child that only pedophiles are of concern. Second, the offender may not view his or her behavior as indicative of grooming if he or she does not self-identify as a pedophile. Gillespie (2002) provides a more complete definition, which avoids use of the term 'pedophile':

> The process by which a child is befriended by a would-be abuser in an attempt to gain the child's confidence and trust, enabling them to get the child to acquiesce to abusive activity. It is frequently a pre-requisite for an abuser to gain access to a child. (Gillespie, 2002, p. 411; based on van Dam, 2001)

However, even with a more inclusive definition, there is not enough information about what these behaviors look like. A lack of consensus on which kinds of behavior could be labeled

'grooming' hinders communication between researchers, and blurs the lines of the behaviors studied. Perhaps even more pertinent are the legal consequences discussed below.

Grooming behavior is illegal in several countries, even in the absence of actual abuse. In other words, behavior that is not illegal in and of itself, is against the law if the objective of that behavior is sexual abuse at a later stage. A federal law in the US for example, explicitly mentions showing a child pornographic material with the intent of having the child engage in illegal behavior such as sexual contact with an adult (18 USC § 2252A(a)(6)). Gillespie (2004) provides a background to how grooming became a part of laws surrounding sexual abuse of children. In England, grooming legislation was previously captured by the law of attempt (Criminal Attempts Act, 1981). Successful prosecution under this law required evidence that the accused had engaged in more than preparatory acts, which, as Craven, Brown, and Gilchrist (2006) point out, excludes grooming behavior, which is preparatory by definition. Such behaviors or acts prepare child, environment, and offender for abuse. A new law recently closed this loophole.

Initially, the law was intended to provide a means of prosecuting offenders who targeted children online and arranged to meet these children to abuse them. In this context, it is easy to trace back how the communication between offender and victim served the purpose of setting up eventual abuse. As such, online grooming behaviors are often more explicit and relatively easier to prove in a court of law. It is unfortunate that even in these instances, the law seems to target the intent to meet with the child rather than the communication beforehand. With an increased focus on sex offenders targeting potential victims online, the law's focus on this online behavior is sensible, but it only captures a small part of the problem. The majority of children who are abused are not actually targeted online, but rather by someone they know in person (Gillespie, 2004). However, by extending this grooming legislation to include offenders who target children

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in person, law enforcement must prove that these behaviors were utilized with the intent of abusing the child. To show intent, however, has been proven incredibly difficult and can usually only be done retrospectively, thus limiting the opportunity of prevention.

Research in the late 1980s and early 1990s started to consider specific behaviors employed by would-be sex offenders to target children and prolong the abuse by keeping the child quiet and complacent (e.g. Budin & Johnson, 1989; Elliot, Browne & Kilcoyne, 1995; Berliner & Conte, 1990). As with all research on sexual abuse, but perhaps even more so with sexual abuse of children, the research focuses on abuse that was detected. The number of undetected or unreported cases is difficult to estimate, but even conservative estimates are quite high (e.g. Finkelhor, 2009). Berliner and Conte (1990) suggest there may be a difference between an offender who gets caught, and one who does not. Further, they emphasize that some offenders may get caught but not reported. Because samples and studies have no way of tapping into this population, it is important to keep in mind that a 'successful sex offender' who avoids prosecution may be different from those who are caught (Budin & Johnson, 1989). Further, studies with convicted offenders may present challenges related to stigmatization and fear, both of which may keep offenders from freely disclosing details about the abuse. Despite assurances that there will be no repercussions provided no new sexual offenses are disclosed, this fear may still prevent offenders from speaking freely about their offense(s) (Budin & Johnson, 1989).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

To examine how child sexual abuse occurs, and what factors lead up to it, several frameworks have been proposed that attempt to explain and examine child sexual abuse. These frameworks were not developed with grooming in mind, as grooming is a relatively novel research area. Instead, most existing models have focused on offender motivation (Marshall &

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Barbaree, 1990), or vulnerability and opportunity (Hall & Hirschmann, 1992). Each of these models uniquely contributes to our understanding of sex offenses, and how or why they occur. For the purpose of the present study, our focus is on grooming specifically. Due to importance of grooming in the facilitation and continuing of sexual abuse of children, we will explore the existing models to determine if grooming can be incorporated in any of the existing frameworks.

Finkelhor's Pre-condition Model

Finkelhor's (1984) pre-condition model of sexual abuse was one of the first comprehensive theories aimed at answering questions about why adults would sexually abuse children (Ward & Hudson, 2001). According to this model, there are four pre-conditions that must be met before any sexual abuse will take place. First, there is the offender's motivation to sexually abuse, which may develop due to emotional congruence, deviant sexual arousal, and blockage. Emotional congruence occurs when the offender identifies more readily with a child, whereas deviant sexual arousal is associated with sexual attraction to children. Finally, blockage occurs when the emotional or sexual needs of the offender are not met by adults.

The second precondition is the ability to overcome internal inhibitors, such as the offender's own reasons for not acting on his or her motivations. The third is to overcome external inhibitors like environmental resistance that make engaging in abuse impossible, and the last is for the offender to overcome the victim's resistance to the abuse. This latter precondition could be interpreted as grooming behavior, but grooming involves more than just overcoming the victim's resistance. It requires continued acquiescence to allow the abuse to continue, as well as behaviors specifically targeted at ensuring the child will not disclose the abuse (Craven, et al., 2006). Although this model provides a useful framework in describing 'obstacles' to sexual abuse the offender may encounter, it cannot fully account for the complexity of grooming

behavior, and the multiple levels on which these behaviors operate. Further, this model does not necessarily account for an act of sexual abuse. All preconditions must be met, but they can be met in different ways. For example, the emotional congruence part of the motivation alone represents a need that can be met in a prosocial manner such as volunteering to help children in need or taking up teaching or coaching.

Marshall and Barbaree's Integrated Theory

Marshall and Barbaree's (1990) Integrated Theory was developed to explain all forms of sex offending, including sexual abuse of children. The theory suggests that developmental experiences in the offender's childhood result in certain vulnerabilities. Once the offender reaches puberty, these vulnerabilities leave him or her incapable of dealing with hormonal increases and make it difficult for him or her to understand the emotions of those around. As a result, the offender will seek to cope with these emotional and sexual needs in deviant ways that may include sexual abuse of children. Specifically, this model explains that aggressive sexual acts result from the sexual and aggressive drive becoming one singular drive because these constructs share a pathway in the brain. As Ward (2002) points out, this is a simplification because several functions overlap in the brain but this does not necessarily lead to such a fusion of impulses. Further, Craven, Brown, and Gilchrist (2006) explain how this then leaves no room for grooming behaviors in the model, since grooming is not aggressive in nature. However, we could take the view that since aggression includes behaviors intended to hurt someone, grooming behaviors are a form of aggression.

Hall and Hirschman's Quadripartite Model

Hall and Hirschman's Quadripartite Model (1992) was initially developed as a model for rape of adults, but then applied to sexual abuse of children. It poses that sexual abuse occurs as a result of four types of vulnerabilities combined with the opportunity to engage in abuse. These vulnerabilities are physiological sexual arousal, cognitive distortions serving the purpose of justifying the act of abuse, affective discontrol, and problematic personality factors. If one, or all of these vulnerabilities exceed(s) a threshold and the opportunity is present, this may lead the individual to commit an 'act of sexual aggression'. The idea of a threshold being reached before abuse takes place suggests sexual abuse is an act of impulsivity, which cannot account for the careful, planned strategy of grooming behavior (Craven, Brown, & Gilchrist, 2006). Further, the theory does not explain specifically why the individual would choose to offend against a child rather than an adult. As such, this model cannot account for grooming behaviors or for the persistence of this 'threshold' over longer periods of time.

Ward and Siegert's Pathways Model

Ward and Siegert (2002) attempted to take the strengths of each of the previously described theories, and combine them into a more comprehensive model of child sexual abuse. Their Pathways Model is based on the idea that for abuse to take place, one or more psychological mechanisms must malfunction. The mechanisms they describe are indeed factors that have been found to be maladaptive in offenders who sexually abuse children. The mechanisms are intimacy and social skill deficits, deviant sexual scripts, emotional dysregulation, and cognitive distortions. A pathway to sexual abuse is identified by any of these deficits being dominant; a fifth pathway occurs when all deficits are of equal influence. This deficit, coupled with a sexual need would result in a sexual offense. The model emphasizes the

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importance of opportunity but as Craven, Brown, and Gilchrist (2006) point out, one of the purposes of grooming is to create opportunity and the model does not account for that. As such, grooming would have to be an additional component which likely interacts with the existing components to produce an opportunity to sexually offend against a child. Further, this model does not describe the offense process, but is limited to etiological factors leading up to abuse.

In sum, rather than forcing an additional grooming component onto existing frameworks, perhaps a new theoretical framework that specifically captures grooming is more useful. The proposed theoretical framework to do so is Mimicry Deception Theory.

MIMICRY DECEPTION THEORY

Mimicry Deception Theory (MDT) is a theoretical framework that examines human deception in terms of a long-term versus short-term continuum (Jones, 2014). It is based on a similar distinction we see in biology, where viruses and bacteria, or non-human animals may attack quickly, or they may take their time. In doing so, the theory categorizes human deception as either employing a fast, opportunistic approach, or a strategy that takes time and requires earning the trust of the victim to maximize the ultimate gain.

MDT comprises four components, on which we can identify this long versus short-term distinction. The first is Community Integration. When applying MDT to viruses, we can think of the HIV virus as targeting itself to the individual, and being more difficult to pass on. On the other hand, the influenza virus is easily passed on between individuals, and it is nonspecific to its host. The second component is Complexity of Deception. Again, comparing the HIV and influenza viruses, HIV is more complex in deception; it mimics the body's cells, thus deceiving the immune system. The simpler influenza virus does not engage in such mimicry or deception. The third component is Resource Extraction. Influenza hits the individual hard and fast, taking

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resources quickly, whereas HIV slowly extracts resources from its host in a sustainable manner, over a long period of time. The final component is Detectability. The HIV virus may remain dormant in its host for years before any symptoms manifest itself, making it harder to detect than influenza, which immediately triggers the immune system. When applied to human deception, we can identify similar patterns with regards to the strategy employed by the perpetrator (Jones & de Roos, 2016). For example, we could distinguish between a short-term versus a long-term strategy to take money from someone. A short-term approach would be without much thought or effort, a quick crime of opportunity, whereas a more elaborate fraudulent scheme requires the person to integrate into the community, to deceive the victims, which would allow for slow but consistent resource extraction that would be more difficult to detect.

Mimicry Deception Theory as applied to Grooming

Grooming has been looked at in a variety of ways, and while implied, no one has yet defined it as a form of deception. I argue that grooming behaviors involve deception on multiple levels: deception of the victim, deception of the environment/community surrounding the victim, and self-deception on the part of the perpetrator him- or herself, which takes the form of cognitive distortions or justifications. For example, the offender deceives the child into thinking the sexual abuse is acceptable. The offender deceives the community into thinking he or she is a trustworthy individual who takes a genuine interest in the child. Lastly, the offender deceives him- or herself into thinking he or she is not doing anything wrong.

As such, the four components of Mimicry Deception Theory can provide a framework for categorizing grooming behaviors, as operating on these levels. Further, I argue that these components are initially temporally ordered. Community Integration and Complexity of Deception will operate before any abuse takes place, and as such, behaviors associated with these

components must serve a unique function. In the case of Community Integration, the aim is to earn the trust of the community surrounding the child. In the case of Complexity of Deception, the offender must earn the trust of the child and prepare them for an escalation into abuse taking place. The next stage is Resource Extraction, when abuse actually takes place. Behaviors associated with this stage directly facilitate the abuse and as such have to do with the specific offense, location, and perhaps most importantly, the first move made by the offender that escalates grooming to abuse. At this point, the offender must decide if the abuse of this victim will remain a one-time occurrence, or if the abuse will continue. Following Resource Extraction, the focus becomes Detectability. At this stage, behaviors are focused on making sure the child does not disclose the abuse and that others do not find out. At this post-abuse stage, offenders may cycle back and forth between the stages, such as from a focus on detectability back to resource extraction or actual abuse. I will discuss each of the four components in turn and how previous research supports behaviors related to each component.

Community Integration

The object of Community Integration in relation to grooming is for the offender to successfully earn the trust of the community surrounding the victim. Elliot et al. (1995) interviewed convicted sex offenders who had abused children and found that two-thirds of the offenders knew their victims either through friend of family connections or through a caretaking role such as babysitting. Of the offenders who knew their victims, nearly one-third were parents or stepparents of the victim. Further, one in five of the offenders who were interviewed said that they had worked at gaining the trust of the victim's family to ensure access to the child for abuse. One-third of offenders reported they recruited their victim by becoming welcome in the child's home. Berliner and Conte (1990) interviewed victims of sexual abuse. Roughly a third had

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known the offender their whole lives, 43% had known the victim between 1 and 10 years, and the remainder of victims had known their abuser for six months or less. These findings suggest that part of the preparation of sexual abuse includes integrating the community around the victim.

Complexity of Deception

Complexity of Deception refers to the behaviors exhibited by the offender that lead up to the sexual abuse. They 'set the stage' gradually by gaining the victim's trust. Commonly utilized behaviors found by Budin and Johnson (1989) include being friends with the victim, playing games with the victim, and giving the victim money. Victims retrospectively identified several 'red flags' (Berliner & Conte, 1990). These included the offender treating the victim differently from other kids, telling them they were different, special, or the only one who understands, not respecting their privacy, making excuses to be alone with the victim, asking sexual questions, and treating the victim like an adult or acting like a child themselves. It is important to note that children were able to see the warning signals in these behaviors retrospectively, but at the time it was happening they were unaware that these behaviors were inappropriate. This delayed realization suggests that the deception is efficient at luring the child into a false sense of security, before overstepping the boundaries of appropriateness.

Berliner and Conte (1990) emphasize the sexualization of the relationship, which also takes place at this stage. Specific behaviors that have been identified include 'accidental' touching, bathing, undressing, or the offender 'accidentally' exposing himself to the victim. A commonly reported strategy by offenders is exploiting a child's need to feel loved and appreciated by their parents. Where this need was not fulfilled, the child was particularly vulnerable to the attention and appearance of love given by the offender. Elliot et al. (1995)

similarly found some offenders (20%) said they used love, affection, and understanding to gain the victim's trust. Others reported using play or teaching activities (58%), or bribes (46%). Fewer offenders used stories, lies, or magic (14%), or asking the child for help (9%). At this stage, offenders reported misrepresenting the abuse as being educational or something people who love each other do. Thus, deceptive behaviors aimed at misrepresentation of the true intentions of the offender operate at this stage to gradually groom the child for subsequent abuse taking place.

Resource Extraction

Resource Extraction is the main goal of successful grooming. At this stage, a transition is made from grooming to actual abuse. As such, it is of interest to see what the first step was in crossing this line, how the offender progressed to this stage, and how the response of the victim played a role. Sixty-six percent of offenders reported that personal stress occurred before the abuse (Elliot et al, 1995). When asked about how they dealt with their own inhibitions about the abuse, a majority said they overcame inhibitions through fantasies about previous victims (49%), drugs or alcohol (22%), or pornography (21%).

Elliot et al. (1995) specifically asked offenders about the first illegal move made. In this context, illegal is defined as an act of abuse rather than grooming. A small minority of offenders interviewed reported they immediately used physical force (19%). Forty percent reported that they started with a sexual activity like touching or genital kissing, 28% took their time to desensitize the victim to sexual activities and nearly a third of offenders asked the child to help them with something like undressing or lying down. This initial act often escalated in more severe abuse over time, with 57% resulting in actual or attempted sexual intercourse.

Victims reported that offenders often made statements while the abuse was happening to justify what was going on (Berliner & Conte, 1990). Frequently reported statements suggest the offender tried to minimize his responsibility (e.g. "You like it", "I'm not really hurting you", "No one will find out"). Rather than using threats at this stage, offenders explained that they played on the child's specific vulnerabilities, which allowed them to feel like the child was consenting to the abuse (Elliot et al, 1995). If the child displayed fear or resistance, rather than using threats (39%), the majority of offenders reported taking a subtler approach of stopping and starting again, or using gentle coercion and persuasion. Nearly half of the offenders reported not seeing any distress in the victim (49%), and only 26% of offenders stopped the abuse when the child was distressed. A majority reported that seeing distress in the child made them worried about the abuse being detected (61%). One-third of offenders made no attempt to maintain the victim, but moved onto the next victim instead (Elliot et al. 1995).

In summary, at this stage of actual abuse, several deceptive behaviors still play a role. Especially the manner in which the abuse is initiated appears to continue this more subtle approach compared to outright physical force. Further, self-deception on the part of the offender appears to be especially salient at this stage as evidenced by justifications and an inability to see distress in their victim.

Detectability

In several studies, offenders or victims were interviewed by the researchers to identify steps the offender took to ensure the sexual abuse would not be detected. Budin and Johnson (1989) report that offenders used threats in 44% of cases. These threats ranged from mild requests not to tell anyone about the abuse to more serious threats of bodily harm. Berliner and Conte (1990) similarly found that some offenders used threats to make sure the victim did not

disclose the abuse. Some of the threats made, played specifically on the child's desire to be loved. Elliot et al (1995) found that 20% of offenders threatened the loss of the relationship.

However, some offenders approached the risk of detectability in a subtler way. Of the offenders interviewed by Budin and Johnson (1989), 16% used some form of bribe such as beer, cigarettes, money, or candy. When Berliner and Conte (1990) asked victims why they did not disclose the abuse, their responses seemed indicative of successful grooming. Over half of the victims made statements that suggested they loved, liked, needed, or depended on their abuser.

A majority of victims reported they did not realize the abuse was wrong. Victims indicated that their offender would make them feel as if they were just as guilty as the offender by saying things like "You didn't tell me to stop". Indeed, Elliot et al (1995) found 20% of offenders threatened to blame the child for the abuse. A further 42% continued to misrepresent the abuse as educational or beneficial to the child. Almost all victims who were interviewed talked about some form of coercion to prevent reporting (Berliner & Conte, 1990).

Results from these studies informed the present study about which behaviors to include in our examination of grooming strategies using an MDT framework. These studies were exploratory and qualitative in nature and thus did not use a theoretical framework that could have incorporated grooming.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE MDT FRAMEWORK

These four components must operate in a temporal order to an extent. For example, complexity of deception and community integration would occur before any resource extraction can take place. Similarly, detectability only becomes relevant when there is something to be detected. However, for the deception to have the desired effect of the perpetrator, all components

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must operate in tandem with each other. Whereas complexity and integration must occur first, they do not cease to occur once resource extraction has taken place. As such, behaviors associated with each component remain relevant for the duration of the offense, until it stops, whether that be through detection or through other factors like the victim or perpetrator moving away. This ongoing relevance highlights the flexibility and adaptability of the abuser, who likely places different emphasis on different components depending on the changes to the child, environment, and him- or herself.

Although Mimicry Deception Theory may provide a useful framework, I argue that there is an additional stage that takes place before any other stage: victim selection. Perhaps this is where we must depart the analogy with non-human animals or viral infections, because victim selection seems exclusively human in nature. Successful deception is not complete without selecting an appropriate victim, and several studies suggest this is definitely the case with sexual abuse of children.

Victim Selection

Craven, Brown and Gilchrist (2006) discuss an offender's seeming ability to identify a vulnerable child, who is likely to 'go along with' the abuse. Berliner and Conte (1990) pointed out that known sex offenders do not end up abusing every child to whom they have access. Rather, they will select victims who seem like vulnerable targets (Groth, 1979). Further, they discuss how the sexual abuse often filled a void in the victim's life or if the victim told anyone about the abuse this posed a threat to the victim or the victim's parents. Many victims experienced problems at home and could not necessarily rely on their parents to intervene. Budin and Johnson (1989) looked at victim characteristics and found that the majority of victims came from single parent homes and they described themselves as being alone and lonely.

Elliot et al. (1995) asked offenders why they selected their victims. Offenders had a preference for gender, with girls (58%) targeted more often than boys (14%), and a few offenders targeting both boys and girls (28%). More specifically, offenders mentioned seeing a lack of confidence or self-esteem in the victim. Forty-two percent of offenders described their victim as 'pretty' and 46% reported it was important to them to have a 'special' relationship with the victim. Other characteristics described by offenders included curious, "provocatively" dressed, trusting, young, and small.

Taken together, we then have five components of Mimicry Deception Theory that provide a framework for grooming.

Study 1

The aim of the first study was to explore how these four components of Mimicry Deception Theory are related to one another. We wanted to determine whether there is indeed evidence for this distinction in long-term and short-term deception, and to explore how different parts of a grooming strategy vary depending on age and gender of the victim as well as how the offender accessed the victim initially. Due to the exploratory nature of this first study, we did not have any hypotheses pertaining to the results.

METHODS

Power Analysis

Previous research has found that the four components of MDT, on average, correlate with each other at $r=.28$ (Jones & de Roos, 2016). Thus, we used this effect size to calculate the needed sample size for the present study. Using G*Power, a total sample size of 95 was needed to achieve 80% power to detect an average sample correlation among the four components of Mimicry Deception Theory of $r=.28$. The final sample size consisted of 121 cases.

Search and Inclusion Criteria

We used LexisNexis Academic® to find state and federal appeal cases, because a conviction for the original sexual offense had been reached in these cases. The grounds of appeal were unrelated to the original conviction. For example, appeals addressed issues related to the offender's incarceration, how offenses were grouped together, or minor details related to the admission of evidence in the original case. In none of the selected cases was the original conviction overturned. We selected 7-day time frames at the beginning of 2015 and reviewed all cases in the United States that were registered in this time period until power was reached.

We excluded cases if the victim was over the age of eighteen, or the offender was under the age of eighteen when the abuse began, if the offender was female, if the case did not pertain to sexual abuse, or if there was not enough information to code. For example, in appeal cases that were related to a minor detail, the sexual offense was often simply mentioned as the charge, without further detail about the specific circumstances or victim. Female offenders were excluded because the majority of sex offenders who abuse children are male. It is estimated that internationally, about 5% of sex offenders are female (Cortoni, 2009). Further, some research suggests when women do sexually abuse children, in the majority of cases they do so with a male co-offender (e.g. Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2010). As such, for this stage of the research we focused exclusively on male offenders. The selected cases were coded by two trained coders. Each coder attended an initial training session by the researcher to explain the codebook and how to fill out the coding spreadsheet. Following this, they attended another session where several practice cases were coded by the coders and researcher together, to practice using the codebook. These practice cases were not included in the study. Once the coders began coding by themselves, they could contact the researcher with any issues or a need for clarification. On any case where the coders did not agree on a coded variable, they met with the researcher to discuss the particulars of the case and why they had come to different conclusions about what to enter on the coding spreadsheet. This was sometimes the case with variables counting days (i.e. length of abuse in days), in which case the days were recalculated as a group to arrive at the correct number. The other variable that proved more subjective than anticipated was coding the complexity of deception on a scale of 1-10. Here, consensus was reached through discussion.

A detailed codebook is included in Appendix 1. It is based on a study looking at historic sexual child abuse and subsequent court proceedings (Read, Connolly & Welsh, 2006). A brief

breakdown of how the four components of Mimicry Deception Theory were assessed is provided below.

Community Integration

We measured the degree to which the offender integrated the community surrounding the victim in terms of how the offender 'found' his victim. The possible options were immediate family member, nonparent family member, family connection, employment, and other. We distinguished between offenders who encountered their victim through their employment from all other categories, as employment requires the greatest degree of community integration, compared to family or family connections that presumably are already in the child's community. Included in this category were offenders who encountered their victim through volunteer work, or churches, schools, etc.

Complexity of Deception

The complexity of deception was measured as a rating of the complexity of deception on a one through ten-point scale, where a score of one would indicate no deception took place, whereas a score of ten would indicate an elaborate scheme unfolded over a longer period of time. This variable turned out to be more subjective than anticipated, thus consensus on how to score this variable was often reached through discussion.

Resource Extraction

We assessed resource extraction by calculating the number of days the abuse went on for from the time of the first illegal act until the abuse stopped. The first illegal act was any behavior that crossed the line from mere grooming to actual abuse. Examples include, but are not limited to, touching, exposing oneself, asking the child to undress, and making the child watch

pornography. This variable proved difficult to extract from court cases and as such, resulted in missing data for a number of cases. Due to the incompleteness of the information, we averaged the length of abuse if more than one victim was listed in the court case.

Detectability

Detectability was examined by looking at any physical or psychological threat made by the offender to keep the victim from telling anyone about the abuse. In addition, we calculated the number of days between when the abuse started and when it was detected. Note that this may differ from the time the abuse stopped as in some cases the abuse stopped before the victim told anyone and, regrettably, in some instances the abuse continued even after detection. As such, this time frame is sometimes not the same as the time from the first illegal act until the time the offender was charged with the offense. As with resource extraction, this variable proved difficult to code from the information available in court cases. For the majority of cases, length of abuse and time until detectability were the same. For some cases, they were not. For a number of cases we had missing data for this variable.

RESULTS

Table 1 reports the basic descriptive statistics of the sample. Table 2 shows the correlations among the four proxy variables of MDT. Similar to previous research (Jones & de Roos, 2016), correlations were generally positive and moderate (with the exception of community integration and detectability).

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics of Complexity of Deception, Resource Extraction and Detectability for each way the offender accessed the victim (Community Integration)*

	M	SD	N	Min	Max
Complexity of Deception	3.24	2.009	110	1	9
Immediate Family	3.24	1.828	46	1	9
Nonparent Family	2.58	1.240	12	1	5
Family Connection	2.60	1.607	25	1	8
Work	5.00	2.614	13	1	9
Other	3.29	2.367	14	1	9
Resource Extraction	4.41	2.379	102	0	6.71
Immediate Family	5.25	1.590	46	0	6.71
Nonparent Family	3.34	2.966	12	0	6.24
Family Connection	3.76	2.639	23	4.69	6.63
Work	5.78	0.837	11	0	6.59
Other	1.84	2.538	10	0	6.08
Detectability	5.51	2.859	103	0	8.99
Immediate Family	6.52	2.015	46	0	8.94
Nonparent Family	4.41	3.965	12	0	8.54
Family Connection	4.65	3.113	24	0	8.79
Work	6.58	1.284	12	4.09	8.99
Other	2.68	3.004	9	0	8.38

Note: The differences in cases included across the variables is due to incomplete information in the court reports. Cases where it was impossible to determine how long the abuse went on for or how long it remained undetected were excluded from analyses.

Table 2 *Correlations between the four factors of Mimicry Deception Theory*

	1	2	3	4
1. Complexity of Deception	-			
2. Resource Extraction	.278**	-		
3. Detectability	.315**	.916**	-	
4. Community Integration	.323**	.201*	.137	-

Note: * p<.05, ** p<.01

Figure 1 shows that individuals who accessed victims through employment, which was a proxy for community integration, indeed used more complex deception. Further, offenders who accessed victims through family and work had longer abuse length and detection times when compared with other methods of accessing victims.
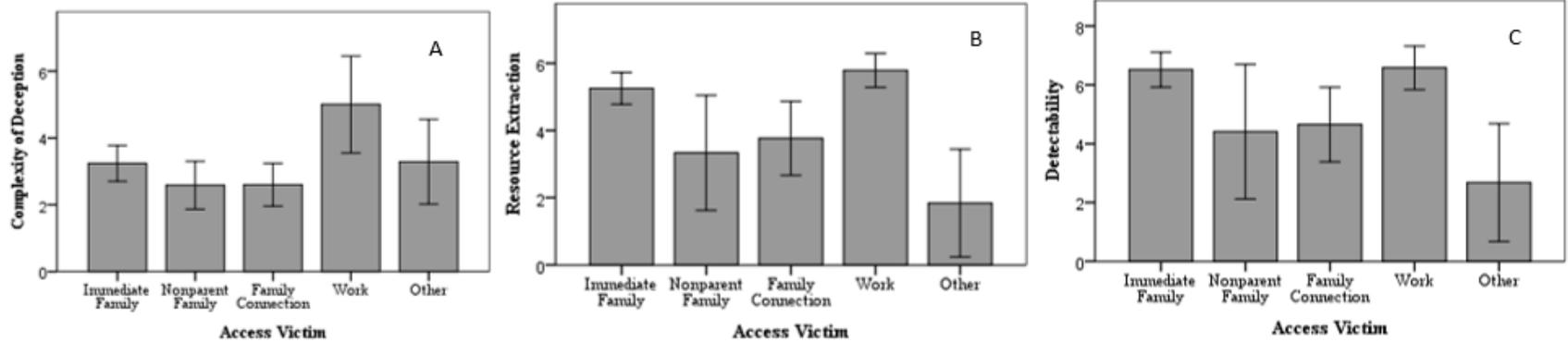
Figure 1. MDT components by how the offender accessed the victim

A. Complexity of Deception for each of the manners in which the offender accessed the victim. The Work category had a

significantly longer period of detectability compared to all other categories. B. Resource Extraction for each of the manners in

which the offender accessed the victim. The Work category had a significantly longer period of abuse compared to all other

categories except Immediate Family. C. Detectability for each of the manners in which the offender accessed the victim. The Work

category had a significantly longer period of detectability compared to all other categories except Immediate Family.

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Table 3 shows the correlations between the MDT components and the variables of interest. Specifically, deception complexity was correlated with male abuse, $r=.22$, $p=.023$, older victims $r=.22$, $p=.020$, and frequency with which the abuse took place, once or multiple times $r=.26$, $p=.006$. Further, we found that deception complexity was correlated with the victim protecting the abuser $r=.25$, $p=.005$. Importantly, however, the use of threats was not correlated with any of the MDT components, suggesting it is not associated with long-term deception.

Table 3. *Correlations between the four factors of Mimicry Deception Theory and several variables of interest*

	Victim Gender	Victim Age	Threat	Protect	Frequency Abuse
Complexity Deception	.215*	.224*	.125	.253**	.259**
Resource Extraction	.164	-.127	.067	.019	.731**
Detectability	.148	-.194	.128	.092	.715**
Community Integration	.412*	.199*	-.141	-.034	-.021

Note: the gender of the victim was coded as a zero for girls and a one for boys. The age of the victim denotes the age when offending began. Threat indicates whether the offender threatened the victim where a zero meant no threat, a one indicated psychological threat and a two physical threat. Protect indicates whether the victim protected the offender and frequency denotes whether the abuse occurred once or multiple times.

DISCUSSION

We found the MDT's four components of Community Integration, Complexity of Deception, Resource Extraction, and Detectability, were related to one another. Those offenders who accessed their victim through their employment were found to utilize more complex deception. In addition, the abuse went on for a longer period of time and it took longer for the abuse to be detected. Note that the only category of offender with a longer period of resource extraction were family members. Presumably, family members would have easier access to the

victim and usually already have earned the trust of the victim's environment so we would expect this abuse to go on for a longer period of time. Interestingly, we also found that offenders who abused boys took a longer time from meeting the victim to engage in the first illegal act. This extra time may be needed to overcome the victim's resistance to homosexual acts.

Conducting this initial study provided valuable insights for other behaviors we want to code for, relating to the components of MDT. For example, the realization that these components operate on different levels suggest we can distinguish between those levels. In addition, some of our variables proved very hard to code, as previously discussed, and as such, we need to think of other ways to assess these variables. Further, complexity of deception was measured on a scale of 1-10, introducing unnecessary subjectivity. This can be assessed in a follow-up study. We did not look specifically at victim selection, but will include this component in a follow-up study.

By analyzing court reports of appeal cases, we have found initial support for the application of Mimicry Deception Theory to grooming patterns of sex offenders who abuse children.

Study 2

This study followed from the initial study and took a similar approach using newly selected court cases, and coding these for behaviors that fit the five proposed components of Mimicry Deception Theory. A detailed codebook is provided in Appendix 2. Based on previous research we identified specific behaviors that serve the aims of the five proposed components of MDT. It is essential that each behavior is assessed in terms of whether it contributes to the component. As such, this follow up study provides a more objective and detailed analysis of the strategy employed by the offender.

Further, by paying attention to the sequence of behaviors, we hoped to be able to identify specific pathways and patterns. This will lay the groundwork for developing a comprehensive model that we hope to assess with offenders and victims at a later stage. Lastly, we want to see how specific components such as vulnerabilities in the victim as well as complexity of deception are related to different outcome variables of "successful grooming", such as the victim expressing love and affection for the offender, or the victim not disclosing the abuse.

METHODS

Power Analysis

As per the previous study, using G*Power, a total sample size of 95 was needed to achieve 80% power to detect a sample correlation of $r=.28$ between the MDT components. We coded 169 cases to account for any missing data.

Search and Inclusion Criteria

We used LexisNexis Academic® to find state and federal appeal cases, because a conviction for the sexual offense has been reached in these cases. The grounds of appeal were

unrelated to the conviction. For example, appeals addressed issues related to the offender's incarceration, how offenses were grouped together, or minor details related to the admission of evidence in the original case. In none of the selected cases was the original conviction overturned. We selected 7-day time frames at the beginning of June 2015 and reviewed all cases in the United States that were registered in this time period until power was reached.

We excluded cases if the victim was over the age of eighteen, or if the offender was under the age of eighteen when the abuse began, if the offender was female, if the case did not pertain to sexual abuse, or if there was not enough information to code. For example, the previous study showed that in appeal cases that were related to a minor detail, the sexual offense was often simply mentioned as the charge, without further detail about the specific circumstances or victim.

Each of the selected cases was coded by a trained coder. Coders were different from Study 1, but they were trained in the same manner. To establish inter-rater reliability, 20% of cases were coded by both coders. This is a common practice in studies of this nature (e.g. Connolly, Price, & Gordon, 2010). Average inter-rater reliability for variables included in analyses was $\kappa=.837$. Variables that proved difficult to code included those where specific time frames were required, such as length of abuse in days, or how long the offender knew the victim and the victim's family before abuse took place. If a case included multiple victims, we coded for each individual victim rather than averaging any variables for multiple victims. A detailed codebook is included in Appendix 2. It draws directly from the literature in selecting behaviors that have been discussed earlier in this document. A brief breakdown of how the five components of Mimicry Deception Theory were assessed is provided below.

Victim Selection

To assess Victim Selection we first looked at vulnerable characteristics that could be identified in the child, such as distress at home or at school, or low self-esteem. Further, in Study 1 we noticed that it was often a single mother's new partner who abused the mother's children. As such, we included any suggestion of the offender targeting a vulnerable mother to gain access to a child. This vulnerability was only coded if it pertained to the mother particularly. Examples include a history of abuse, instable employment, substance abuse, or previous incarceration. Each vulnerability was coded "1" if present, and "0" if absent. To create an index of total vulnerabilities in the victim, we added up the individual vulnerabilities, allowing for a range of zero to six vulnerabilities per victim. We separately assessed whether the offender expressed any preference for a specific victim, such as attractiveness, or the child being 'special' or provocative. We also coded the gender of the victim, and the age of the victim at the start of the abuse. This resulted in a total vulnerabilities variable, a preference indication, gender age, and gender victim for the victim selection component.

Community Integration

To assess the degree to which the offender integrated the community surrounding the victim, we first looked at how the offender 'found' his victim. The possible categories were: parent, stepparent, mother's boyfriend, nonparent family, friend of the family, professional capacity (including volunteers), and other. These were coded 1-6 respectively to indicate increasing degrees of community integration. To determine whether this integration was successful, we identified any indication that the parents/community trusted the offender with the child by coding whether they knowingly left the child alone with the offender on at least one occasion. Further, we assessed how long the offender was known both to the victim and the community surrounding the victim, by counting this time in days from first meeting until the

start of abuse. This resulted in a victim access variable, a family trust indication, and two time variables describing how long the offender knew victim and community surrounding the victim. The last two of these variables proved difficult to code for, as time known to victim or community is not often included in court cases. We coded for this variable where possible, but we had missing data for a number of cases on both of these variables.

Complexity of Deception

To assess the complexity of deception that took place, we first looked specifically at deceptive behaviors that occurred before any abuse took place. These behaviors included befriending the child, playing games with them, or bribing them. We then coded for specific stories the offender may tell the victim to further aid deception such as 'you are the only one who understands me', or expressions of affection. We included a final category of other deceptive acts to capture anything not covered by the previous categories, such as lies or magical stories. For each behavior or deceptive statement, we coded a "1" if the behavior was present, and a "0" if it was not. To create an index of total deception complexity, we summed these behaviors and statements, allowing for a possible range of zero to twelve. Lastly, we looked at behaviors that sexualized the relationship, such as not respecting the child's privacy, or casual touching that could still be mistaken for appropriate. These were also coded a "1" for present, or "0" for absent.

As a result, for this component we had a count variable assessing the total complexity of deception, as well as an indication of how the relationship was sexualized.

Resource Extraction

We coded several factors pertaining to resource extraction, or the actual abuse taking place. First, to assess the stage where the offender moves from grooming to actual abuse, we

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assessed any risk factors present within the offender that may have made him cross the line at that particular moment. Examples included direct stressors, or the use of drugs or alcohol leading up to the abuse. These were coded as a "1" if present, and a "0" if absent. These individual factors were summed into an index variable of total risk factors, with a possible range from zero to five. To determine how grooming escalated to abuse, we coded for the first move made by the offender. Here, we distinguished first moves categorically as use of physical force (0), touching or kissing (1), exposure (2), or a more indirect move such as showing the child pornography (3), to indicate increasing subtlety in escalation to abuse. Further, we looked at the final charge, distinguishing between the following categories: expose (0), fondle (1), masturbation (2), oral sex (3), simulate intercourse (4), digital penetration (5), attempted penile penetration (6), vaginal/anal penetration (7) to indicate increasing severity of the final charge. We coded the frequency of the abuse as once (1) or multiple times (2). Further, we counted the length of the abuse from when it started until it ended, in days. This variable was difficult to extract from court cases as such a specific time frame is often not provided, resulting in missing data for nearly half of the cases for this variable.

If any statements were made by the offender at the time of the abuse, we included those. Examples included any threats at this stage, or any statement to minimize his own responsibility, such as "I'm not really hurting you". These statements were coded as a "1" if present, or a "0" if absent. We coded for indication of victim distress at the time of the abuse, with "0" as no distress and "1" as distress. Lastly, we coded for the location where the abuse took place; the offender's house, the victim's house, or another location.

Detectability

For this final stage, we looked at behaviors that served the specific purpose of minimizing the risk of the abuse being detected. First, we looked for threats made by the

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offender with the specific purpose of keeping the victim from disclosing the abuse. We distinguished between physical and psychological threats, as well as threatening the loss of the relationship or that no one would believe the victim if they told anyone what had happened. These were coded as "1" if present, and "0" if absent. To create a total index of threats, we summed these individual categories into a composite, with a possible range of 1-5 threats. We separately coded for any statements or justifications made by the offender after the abuse had occurred, which may be more subtle but still achieve the desired effect of preventing disclosure on the part of the victim. These included blaming the victim for what happened, or suggesting the abuse served a benefit to the victim. Statements were coded as "1" if present, and "0" if not.

Grooming Outcomes

To assess the results of grooming, we coded four separate outcome variables. The first was whether the victim at any point after the start of abuse expressed feelings of love or affection for the offender ("1" if present, "0" if not). Second, we assessed whether the victim ever protected the offender from getting caught, for example by denying any abuse was going on when directly questioned ("1" if present, "0" if not). Third, we coded whether there was an indication that at the time the abuse occurred, the victim was unaware that the abuse was wrong ("1" if unaware, "0" if aware"). Lastly, we coded for disclosure by the victim. Immediate disclosure, as defined as disclosure at the earliest opportunity was coded "0". Delayed disclosure, which often took multiple years after the abuse began, was coded "1". In cases where the victim never disclosed the abuse but rather, it was found out in a different manner, we coded "2", indicating the highest level of "success" in preventing disclosure.

Descriptive Statistics

Sample Characteristics

A total of 169 cases were coded. Three cases were excluded because they did not pertain to sexual abuse. Another two were removed because the offender was a minor himself when the abuse started. This resulted in a final sample of 164 coded cases, for which a total of 211 victims were coded. The mean number of victims per case was 1.29, with a range from 1 to 5 victims.

Victim Selection

The age of the victim at the start of abuse ranged from 2-16 years old (M= 9.42, SD: 3.743). Of the 164 cases, 141 had only female victims (66.8%), 18 had only male victims (8.5%), and 3 had male and female victims (1.4%). Descriptive statistics of victim selection variables are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. *Frequencies of Victim Selection Variables*

	Frequency	Percentage
Any vulnerability (*M*=1.24, *SD*=1.07)		
Single parent home	99	46.9%
Distress at home	80	37.9%
Distress at school	17	8.1%
Low self-esteem	12	5.7%
Lonely	36	17.1%
Other	18	8.5%
Vulnerable mom	72	34.1%
Selection motivation		
Pretty/attractive	4	1.9%
Small/young	39	18.5%
Special	11	5.2%
Provocative	3	1.4%

Community Integration

Table 5 shows how the offender accessed his victim(s). Further, we found an indication that the family trusted the offender alone with the child in 167 cases (79.1%). We had several cases of missing data when determining how long the offender had been in the victim's and in the victim's family's lives. For the time the offender knew the victim, we had data for 100 cases. This time frame ranged from 0-5475 days (M=1007.61, SD=1303.29). An additional 55 offenders had known the victim since the victim was born. For the time the offender knew the

family, we had data for 88 cases. The time frame was the same as for time known to victim

(M=1251.73, SD= 1337.79). An additional 41 offenders had known the victim's family their

whole lives.

Table 5. *Frequencies of Victim Access Variable.*

	Frequency	Percentage
Parent	67	31.8%
Stepparent	27	12.8%
Mom boyfriend	12	5.7%
Nonparent family	36	17.1%
Friend of family	26	12.3%
Professional	23	10.9%

Complexity of Deception

To assess the sexualization of the relationship, we coded for acts that escalated the

relationship to a sexual one. These behaviors are displayed in Table 6. To assess complexity of

deception, we coded for specific behaviors and statements. Frequencies are displayed in Table 7.

Table 6. *Frequencies of Sexualization of the Relationship*

Sexualization (*M*=2.156, *SD*=1.647)	Frequency	Percentage
Not respect privacy	102	48.3%
Casual touching	124	58.8%
Expose self	74	35.1%
Show pornography	30	14.2%

Table 7. *Frequencies of Deceptive Behaviors, Statements, and Other Acts.*

	Frequency	Percentage
Deceptive Behaviors (*M*=.891, *SD*=.962)		
Befriending	96	45.5%
Playing games	40	19%
Teaching activity	16	7.6%
Favors	17	8.1
Deceptive Statements (*M*=.057, *SD*=.270)		
Child is special	8	3.8%
Child is different	2	0.9%
Only one who understands	0	0%
Other	2	0.9%
Other Deception (*M*=.104, *SD*=.336)		
Specific lies/stories	5	2.4%
Ask child for help	6	2.8%
Child's need for love	4	1.9%
Act like a child	1	0.5%
Treat like grown up	6	2.8%
Total Deceptive behaviors (*M*=1.052, SD=1.126)		

Resource Extraction

Table 8 displays characteristics of the abuse. For the final charge, we combined expose and fondle into one category as there were no cases where the final charge was indecent exposure. Further, we assessed the length of time the abuse continued. Abuse ranged from 1-

4380 days (M=854.30, SD=1049.85). Further, we examined statements made by the offender during the abuse. In 23 cases (10.9%), the offender made some statement to minimize his own responsibility. In three cases (1.4%) the offender stated that the abuse served an educational function. Threats were made in some instances. Physical threats were mentioned during abuse in 28 cases (13.3%), with psychological threats during abuse slightly more frequent than physical threats (36, 17.1%).

Table 8. *Frequencies of Resource Extraction Variables.*

	Frequency	Percentage
Offender Factors (*M*=0.37, *SD*=.606)		
Stress	7	3.3%
Fantasy	11	5.2%
Drugs/alcohol	31	14.7%
Pornography	29	18.5%
First move		
Physical force	26	12.3%
Touch/contact	132	62.6%
Exposure	16	7.6%
Indirect move	16	7.6%
Final charge		
Expose/fondle	31	14.7%
Masturbation	3	1.4%
Oral sex	19	9.0%
Simulate intercourse	2	0.9%
Digital penetration	32	15.2%
Attempted penile penetration	6	2.8%
Vaginal/anal penetration	102	48.3%
Abuse Frequency		
Once	53	25.1%
Multiple times	149	70.6%
Location		
Offender house	138	65.4%
Victim house	99	45.9%
Other	34	16.1%
Victim distress		
Yes	164	77.3%
No	25	11.8%

Detectability

When assessing detectability we distinguished between threats aimed at minimizing the risk of detectability, and justifications made by the offender that may more subtly prevent disclosure on the part of the victim. A summary of these variables is displayed in Table 9.

Table 9. *Frequencies of Statements and Justifications made by the Offender.*

	Frequency	Percentage
Any statement (*M*=.512, *SD*=.789)		
Physical threat	20	9.5%
Psychological threat	62	29.4%
No one will believe you	7	3.3%
Loss of relationship	19	9.0%
Any justification (*M*=.185, *SD*=.467)		
Blame victim	23	10.9%
Educational	4	1.9%
Beneficial	7	3.3%
Other	4	1.9%

Grooming Outcomes

The outcome variables of grooming are whether the victim expressed love or affection for the offender, whether at any point the victim protected the offender from being found out, if and when the victim disclosed the abuse, and whether the victim was aware the abuse was

wrong. The previous stages of grooming should lead to these factors associated with a lower risk of being detected. Frequencies of these variables are displayed in Table 10.

Table 10. *Frequencies of Outcomes associated with Reduced Detectability.*

	Frequency	Percentage
Outcomes		
Victim expressed love	21	10%
Victim protected offender	18	8.5%
Victim disclosed abuse immediately	34	16.1%
Victim disclosed abuse much later	95	45%
Victim never disclosed abuse	74	34.1%
Victim unaware abuse wrong	26	12.3%

Correlations

Correlations were used to explore hypothesized associations between variables. The correlations between the five components of MDT are displayed in Table 11. The more vulnerabilities were identified in the victim, the more likely the victim was to protect the offender from getting caught ($r=.215$, $p=.024$). Further, younger victims were significantly less likely to be aware that the abuse was wrong ($r=-.236$, $p=.013$). No significant gender differences were found. For total deception, more complexity was associated with the victim expressing love or affection for the offender ($r=.184$, $p=.008$), and the victim being unaware that the abuse was wrong at the time it happened ($r=.190$, $p=.006$).

A more serious first move such as physical force was associated with a decreased likelihood that the victim would immediately disclose the abuse ($r=-.344$, $p<.001$) and also with

the victim being unaware that the abuse was wrong (r=.221, p=.020). Abuse that led to a more severe final charge was associated with the victim being unaware that the abuse was wrong (r=.191, p=.046). Victims experiencing distress were more likely to know that the abuse was wrong (r=-.323, p=.001), and they were less likely to immediately disclose the abuse (r=-.305, p=.001).

The offender blaming the victim for the abuse was associated with the victim protecting the offender (r=.195, p=.041) and the victim being unaware that the abuse was wrong (r=.270, p=.004). Correlations between victim love and protect (r=.331, p<.001) and the victim unaware the abuse was wrong (r=.233, p=.014) were positive and significant, as well as the correlation between victim protect and victim unaware the abuse was wrong (r=.268, p=.005). A summary of all correlations is displayed in Table 12.

Table 11. *Correlations between MDT variables.*

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Victim Selection	----	-.191**	-.030	.098	.053
2. Community Integration		----	.370**	-.361**	-.090
3. Complexity of Deception			----	-.068	.045
4. Resource Extraction				----	.055
5. Detectability					----

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01

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Table 12. *Correlations of MDT Variables.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1.Victim Age	----	-.050	.017	-.109	.091	-.022	.071	-.279**	.023	.271**	.032	.003	-.109	-.236*
2.Vulnerabilities		----	.019	.010	-.101	-.009	.098	.119	.239*	.191*	-.037	.215*	.097	.055
3.Victim Gender			----	-.060	-.089	.109	-.115	-.143	-.083	.093	.006	-.078	-.160	.074
4.Risk Factors				----	.118	.035	.153	-.039	-.002	-.027	-.091	.001	-.056	.294**
5.Deception					----	.235**	.028	-.068	-.166*	.227**	.184**	-.104	.045	.190**
6.First Move						----	-.055	-.154	-.024	.203*	.185	.063	-.344**	.221*
7.Final Charge							----	.076	.036	.175	.129	.102	-.040	.191*
8.Length Abuse								----	.157	-.049	.073	.157	.153	.079
9.VictimDistress									----	-.061	-.168	.016	.305**	-.323**
10.Blame Victim										----	.101	.195*	-.111	.270**
11.Victim Love											----	.331**	-.143	.233*
12.Victim Protect												----	.124	.268**
13.VictimDisclose													----	-.151
14.Aware Wrong														----

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01

Model Analysis

Using four indicators of successful grooming as outcome variables, we analyzed whether variables associated with victim vulnerabilities, victim distress, first move, complexity of deception, and threats would predict these outcomes. Victim vulnerabilities were counted and added up to provide an index of total vulnerabilities present in the victim. Similarly, we added up all deceptive behaviors, statements and other acts employed by the offender to create an index of complexity of deception. Victim distress was coded as present or not present during abuse. Threats were summed to provide an index of how many threats the offender used against the victim. Lastly, first move was coded as immediate force (0), touching/kissing (1), exposure of self (2), or a more subtle first move such as showing the victim pornography (3). This variable represents increasing efforts in slower, more subtle resource extraction. Victim love, victim protect, and victim unaware the abuse was wrong, were coded as yes (1) or no (0). Victim disclosure was coded as immediate disclosure (0), delayed disclosure (1), or no disclosure (2).

We expected to see an effect of victim vulnerabilities and complexity of deception on victim love, victim protect, and the victim being unaware the abuse was wrong. Further, we expected victim love, victim protect, and the victim being unaware the abuse was wrong to predict delayed or no disclosure of the abuse by the victim. Further, we predicted a more subtle first move would result in less victim distress, whereas threats should increase victim distress. A more subtle first move should be predicted by more complex deception.

To run the hypothesized model in Figure 1, we ran a structural equation model in MPlus, using MLM as estimator. Satorra and Bentler (1994) suggest using Maximum Likelihood as an estimator as its scaled chi-square and robust standard errors are a good approach of dealing with nonnormality (Hu, Bentler, & Kano, 1992; Curran, West, & Finch, 1996). The overall model fit

was poor (CFI=.349, TLI=-.086). Closer inspection of the paths in the model shows that this could be due to the three hypothesized mediating variables of victim love, victim protect, and victim unaware the abuse was wrong not predicting disclosure. However, as displayed in Figure 1, several of the other hypothesized paths were significant. We did find that victim vulnerabilities predicted victim love, victim protect, and the victim being unaware the abuse was wrong. We also found that complexity of deception predicted victim love and the victim being unaware the abuse was wrong. Further, we found that complexity of deception predicted a more subtle first move.
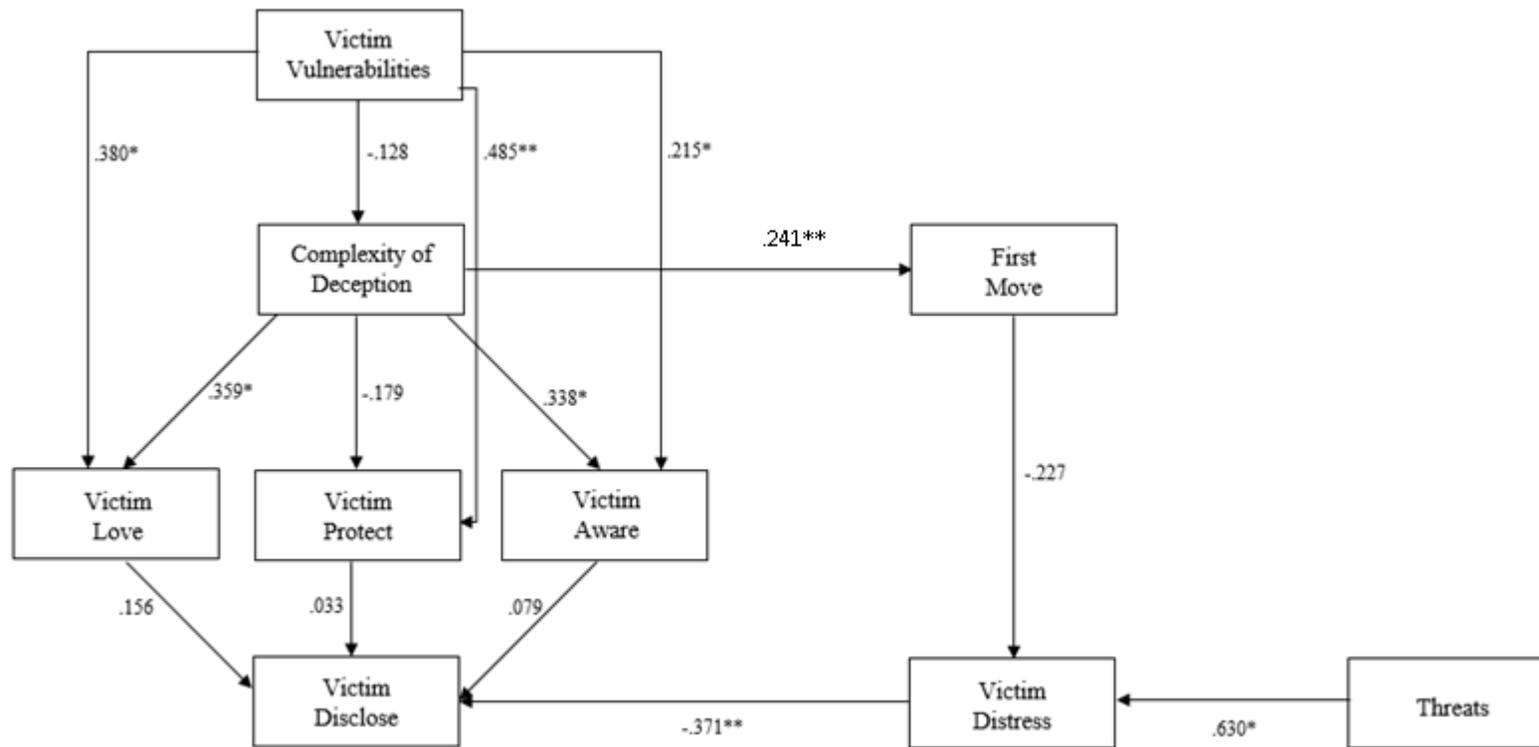
Figure 2. Hypothesized associations between MDT variables.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine how different components of Mimicry Deception Theory are related to each other and to different outcomes. We found several interesting associations. Our sample was similar to the sample used in Study 1. Unfortunately, some MDT components were difficult to code from the court cases, and as a result, these variables have been described in the results section but they were excluded from inferential analyses. These variables were community integration as measured by how long the offender knew the victim and the family of the victim, as well as resource extraction assessed through the length of abuse. Such specific time frames are often not provided in court reports, resulting in missing data on a number of cases for these variables

With regard to Victim Selection, we found that the majority of our sample were cases with only female victims, suggesting that this group is at a higher risk than males. Although it was difficult to identify preferential victim selection criteria from the court cases, it appears offenders tend to have a gender preference for their victims, in line with previous research (Elliot et al, 1995). Victim vulnerabilities were counted for each case and suggest that particularly distress at home and a single parent home were present in the victims in this sample. Further, a higher number of vulnerabilities was associated with the victim protecting offender from being found out. For the purpose of this study, we grouped all vulnerabilities together without distinguishing the degree to which an individual vulnerability may contribute to risk. For example, psychological vulnerabilities such as low self-esteem or loneliness may impact the risk of being victimized differently than external circumstances such as distress at home. Future studies should look at these vulnerabilities separately to determine which ones are most salient in putting a child at risk of being victimized. We found no gender differences but when looking at

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age, we did find that younger victims were less likely to be aware that the abuse was wrong at the time it was happening, highlighting an additional vulnerability in children too young to understand what behaviors are inappropriate from adults, even trusted adults.

To examine the level of community integration, we assessed how the offender accessed his victim(s). We wanted to include how long the offender knew the family of the victim as well as the victim to discern how much time was spent on actual integration, but this information is often not included in court cases. As such, we described the different ways in which offenders in our sample accessed their victims, but left this component out of further analyses. Interestingly, in most cases there was some indication that the family of the victim trusted the offender alone with the victim, which may indicate that adults do not see offenders as a threat until it is too late.

When examining complexity of deception, we summarized all behaviors and statements aimed at deceiving the victim into thinking that the offender's intentions were good. It appears that this deception works, as more complex deception was linked to the victim expressing love and affection for the offender, as well as the victim being unaware that the abuse is wrong. These findings highlight the effectiveness of deception in manipulating the child into believing the offender is not doing anything wrong, while abuse is ongoing. This discrepancy is likely to lead to cognitive dissonance in the child as he or she tries to reconcile feelings of affection for the offender with the psychological consequences of the abuse. The majority of research on cognitive distortions or cognitive dissonance in child sexual abuse has focused on the offender rather than the victim (e.g. Ward, Hudson, Johnston, & Marshall, 1997), but it seems likely that cognitive dissonance is also present in victims who have been "successfully" groomed by the offender. In the present study, we summed all deceptive behaviors and statements to create one complexity of deception variable. Future research might distinguish which behaviors or

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statements are particularly likely to produce desirable outcomes for the offender, such as the victim protecting the offender or the victim not disclosing the abuse.

With regards to Resource Extraction, we found a more subtle first move was associated with a decreased likelihood of disclosure, and also with the victim being unaware the abuse was wrong. This finding suggests that a gradual escalation from borderline appropriate behavior into sexual abuse may negatively affect victims alerting someone about the abuse. Confusion in the victim about the nature of the abuse may play apart, as well as a foot-in-the-door technique that may make it harder for the child to look back and identify when or how the abuse started. Those victims who were aware that the abuse was wrong tended to experience more distress at the time of abuse. A possible explanation is that they may blame themselves for what is happening, or they may be ashamed. This explanation would also account for a decreased likelihood of disclosure related to distress.

Lastly, when examining detectability, we found that if the offender blamed the victim for the abuse, the victim was more likely to protect the offender, and the victim was less likely to be aware that the abuse was wrong. This finding underlines how following abuse, blaming the victim seems to be an efficient strategy in making the victim feel responsible for what occurred, and even generating warm feelings for the offender.

These results shed some lights on how MDT's components are related to each other and to different outcomes. To examine this in a more comprehensive manner, we tested a model that hypothesized how some variables may affect each other in order to create specific outcomes. While the overall model fit was inadequate, we did find several significant pathways. Victim vulnerabilities predicted the victim expressing love and affection for the offender, the victim protecting the offender, and the victim being unaware that the abuse was wrong. This shows that

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vulnerable victims are especially likely to be uncertain about the appropriateness of the abuse while it is occurring. Protecting the offender or expressing love or affection for the offender suggests that children may have a particularly hard time integrating the negative emotional consequences of abuse with pre-existing warm feelings for the offender that may have been nurtured by the offender during the grooming stage. These opposing emotions may put them at a higher risk of being abused than children with fewer vulnerabilities. Research suggests that children who report experiencing negative events at home or in school are more sensitive to experiencing ambivalent emotions than their peers who do not report such negative experiences (Brown & Dunn, 1996). Taken together, these findings suggest it may be particularly difficult for a vulnerable child to experience and make sense of the conflicting emotions resulting from sexual abuse by someone they previously trusted. Further, complexity of deception predicted a decreased awareness in the victim that the abuse was wrong, and it was related to the victim expressing love or affection for the offender. This shows how deceptive behaviors and statements seem to be effective in misrepresenting the offender's intentions to the child, further adding to conflicting emotions in response to the abuse. None of the three mediating factors predicted disclosure, which is surprising. It may be that the manner in which we distinguished between immediate, delayed, and no disclosure is unable to capture this variable in this sample.

Predictably, offender threats led to victim distress, which was in turn linked to a decreased chance of disclosure. Threats appear to be very efficient in scaring the child into not alerting someone of the abuse. For the purpose of this study, we summed the number of threats made by the offender without distinguishing between different types of threats. A future study might explore if for example psychological or physical threats are most likely to keep the child from disclosing the abuse.

Overall, this model provides a good starting point of highlighting how different components of MDT are related to differential outcomes. The effectiveness of threats, as well as deception and selecting a vulnerable victim suggests that prevention efforts should focus on vulnerable children who are at a higher risk of becoming victims. In an extensive review of currently used prevention strategies, Finkelhor (2009) describes that educational prevention efforts tend to be focused on helping children identify potentially dangerous situations. As Finkelhor points out, educational prevention targets ongoing abuse as well, and attempts to promote disclosure. Unfortunately, doing so may make ongoing abuse more likely to stop but it does not specifically target abuse that has not begun yet. These prevention programs tend to be age-specific and part of a larger battery of health and safety programs. However, they do not appear to be tailored to specific groups of vulnerable children who may be at higher risk of being victimized, thus missing an early opportunity for prevention. Finkelhor points out that critics of such programs feel the responsibility of abuse should not be placed on the victim but on the offender. Unfortunately, it has proven difficult to identify a would-be sex offender before he or she offends, as a majority of sex offenders do not have a prior criminal record that helps identifying them. Indeed, only 10% of convicted sex offenders who abused children had a prior conviction for a sex offense with a child victim (Smallbone, & Wortley, 2004). These disturbing figures highlight the need for concentrating prevention efforts on potential victims.

Very few studies have examined whether participation in prevention programs actually reduces victimization (Finkelhor, 2009). However, research suggests that children understand the key concepts of the programs (Davis & Gidycz, 2000; MacIntyre & Carr, 2000), and children who completed a prevention program are more likely to display protective behaviors in a simulation of a potentially dangerous situation than children who did not participate in a

prevention program (Zwi et al, 2007). The question critics have posed is whether such programs are capable of equipping a child with the necessary skills to 'foil' a determined, manipulative offender (e.g. Kaufman, Barber, Mosher, & Carter, 2002). This is where the importance of examining the grooming behaviors these offenders employ is highlighted. Existing programs may indeed protect children in specific situations (Lanning, 2010), but as they are currently designed, they do not seem to include a focus on deception employed by the offender to facilitate abuse and prevent disclosure.

Due to the nature of this study, several limitations can be identified. Because we used court cases to get our information, it is likely that we have not captured the full extent of how grooming behaviors operate, as the court cases sometimes do not contain that specific information, or only to a limited degree. As such, these studies are a good first step in identifying how grooming behaviors operate and the types of outcomes they may produce. Further research should further expand on this by asking offenders and victims about their experience. Their perspectives will garner richer and more complete information that will allow us to refine Mimicry Deception Theory as applied to grooming. We are currently in the process of planning a study with convicted sex offenders as participants to do this.

Further, the offenders in our sample were all offenders who had been caught, and convicted. While this is typical of research of this nature, we have no way of knowing whether offenders who avoid getting caught, or who get caught but are never prosecuted or convicted, are qualitatively different from those who were caught and convicted.

Through examination of court appeal cases of sex offenders who had abused children we found support for several components of Mimicry Deception Theory that predict outcomes associated with continuing abuse and victim confusion about their relationship with the offender.

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APPENDIX 1: Codebook Study 1

Instructions for MDT Coding

Please complete the following steps for the MDT Coding; enter on sheet two of the excel document. Note the words in the beginning in parentheses are what that category is named in the excel document. If the information is not available in the court case document, enter "." In the excel spreadsheet.

1. (*Number*) Enter the number you assigned the court case
2. (*Name*) Enter the name of the court case
   - e.g., The state, respondent, v. Damon T. Brown, Appellant
3. (*RA*) Enter initials of the RA doing the coding
4. (*Date*) The date the case was Heard
5. (Outcome) What was the outcome of the appeal?
   - Affirmed (0)
   - Vacate, or reverse (1)
6. (*Charge*) Code the most extreme offense the offender was charged with
   - Expose, fondle (1)
   - Masturbate, simulate intercourse, oral sex, digital penetration, attempt penile penetration (2)
   - Vaginal or anal penetration (3)
7. (*Age_Begin*) Age of the victim when the abuse started
8. (*Age_Offend*) Age of the offender when the abuse started
9. (Freq) Frequency with which the offence occurred
   - When specified record the number of times
   - If a range was reported, report the average (e.g., 8 to 10 times, code as 9)
   - If described as frequency (e.g., "it happened a lot," "at every opportunity," "over and over again") record as (8888)
10. (*G_Vict*) Gender of the victim(s)
    - All girls (0)
    - All boys (1)
    - Boys and girls (2)
11. (*V_Find*) How did the offender find the victim
    - Immediate family member (parent, common-law, step, or foster) of victim – (1)
    - Nonparent family member (Uncle, Aunt, Cousin, Grandparent) – (2)
    - Family connection (friend of family, boyfriend of mother, boarder) – (3)
    - Met victim through offender's occupation (religious leader, mental health facilitator [e.g., psychiatrist, big brother], educator) – (4)
    - Other – (5)
12. (*Threat*) Did the offender threaten the child
    - No Threat (0)
    - Threat to psychological well-being (1)

- no one will help/believe/love you, people will think you are bad, people will be mad at you, it will hurt others, I'll leave you, you'll be sent away, you'll get into trouble, I'll tell lies about you, I'll take away privileges;
  - Threat to physical well-being (2)
    - I'll hurt you or members of your family, I'll kill you or members of your family, something bad will happen, you'll be sorry

13. (*Locat*) Location – did the offender have victims across different locales?
    - Yes – (1)
    - No – (0)
14. (*C_Decept*) Complexity of deception
    - Time (in days) from first meeting child to time of first illegal action
15. (*Decept_2*) Complexity of deception – level of grooming
    - Read the file and determine how complex the level of deception was using a 10-point scale with *1 representing not at all complex* and *10 representing very complex*
      - Think about how much effort the offender went to in order to groom the child
16. (*R_Extract*) Resource extraction – How long did the abuse go on
    - Definition: Time from first illegal act to charge – averaged for multiple victims)
17. (*Detect*) Detectability
    - Definition: Time first did anything (to any of the victims) to first time caught
18. (*Numb_Vict*) Number of victims
    - Number of victims included in the case
19. (*Psych_Warm*) Psychological Warmth
    - Did the child try to protect the offender
      - Yes – (1)
      - No – (0)
20. (*Admit*) Did the offender admit guilt
    - Yes
      - Before they were found guilty (1)
      - After they were found guilty (2)
    - No – (0)
21. (*Statements*) Collect any statements made by offenders
    - If multiple statements, separate by 3 semi-colons

APPENDIX 2: Codebook Study 2

Victim Selection

Child Characteristics ("1" if present, "0" if not)
- Single parent home
- Distress at home
- Distress at school
- Low confidence/self-esteem
- Alone/lonely
- Victim age start abuse, please specify

Gender Preference (select one)
- Girls only
- Boys only
- Girls and boys

Other preferences ("1" if present, "0" if not)
- Pretty/attractive
- Small/young
- Special relationship
- "Provocative"

Targeting vulnerable mom ("1" if present, "0" if not)
- Vulnerable mom

Community Integration

Victim Access (select one)
- (1) Parent
- (2) Stepparent
- (3) Nonparent family
- (4) Friend of family
- (5) Professional capacity
- (6) Volunteer
- Other

Indication of family trust ("1" if present, "0" if not)
- Left child alone with offender

Time known to victim
- Any time frame

Time known to family
- Any time frame

Complexity of Deception

("1" if present, "0" if not)
Specific behaviors

- Befriending
- Play games/teaching activities
- Bribes/special favors

Specific stories
- Special/different/only one who understands
- Statements of love/affection

Sexualization
- Not respecting privacy
- Casual touching
- Exposing self
- Show child pornography

Other
- Stories/lies/magic
- Ask child for help
- Indication of child's need to be loved
- Act like child/treat like grown up

Resource Extraction

Offender factors ("1" if present, "0" if not)
- Stress factor present
- Fantasies of previous victims
- Drugs/alcohol
- Pornography

First move (select one)
- (0) Physical force
- (1) Touching/genital kissing
- (2) Exposure
- (3) Indirect move
- Other, please specify

Final charge (select one)
- (0) Expose
- (1) Fondle
- (2) Masturbation
- (3) Oral sex
- (4) Simulate intercourse
- (5) Digital penetration
- (6) Attempted penile penetration
- (7) Vaginal/anal penetration

Frequency (select one)
- (1) Once
- (2) Multiple times

Length of abuse
- Use any described time frame

Statements ("1" if present, "0" if not)

- Minimize responsibility
- Threat (physical – aimed at victim)
- Threat (psychological – can be aimed at others)
- Educational benefits

Victim distress at time of abuse (select one)

- (1) Yes
- (0) No

Location of abuse (tick if present)
- Offender's house
- Victim's house
- Other, please specify

Detectability

Threats ("1" if present, "0" if not)
- Physical
- Psychological
- Disbelief
- Loss of relationship

Statements/justifications ("1" if present, "0" if not)
- Blaming the victim
- Educational/beneficial

Grooming Outcomes

"Successful" grooming ("1" if present, "0" if not)
- Victim expressed love/affection
- Victim protected offender
- Victim unaware abuse was wrong (at time of abuse)

Disclosure

- Immediate (0)
- Delayed (1)
- Never disclosed (2)

Vita

Melissa Samantha de Roos was born and raised in The Netherlands. She graduated from The University of Groningen with a BSc in Psychology in February 2010. During the last year and a half of her degree, she worked as an assistant psychologist in forensic psychiatric services.

Melissa graduated with an MSc in Forensic Psychology from the University of Portsmouth, UK, in September 2011.

As a graduate student in the US, Melissa has published three second authored papers in places such as the *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*, *Intimate Relations*, and the *Journal of Personality and Individual Differences*. She has also presented two posters at national psychology conferences such as the Society for Personality and Social Psychology.

Her research focuses on deception, including self-deception in sex offenders who abuse children.

During her time as a graduate student, she has taught a course writing psychological studies, and Introduction to Psychology.

Melissa will continue her studies as a doctoral student in the Legal Psychology program at the University of Texas at El Paso.

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