'it's made me feel sad and confused. im scared to go to school and i feel humiliated and ashamed': Children's Emotion Discourse Triggered by Online Sexual Grooming.

Research into online child sexual grooming (OCSG) discourse has focused on offenders (see e.g., Chiang & Grant, 2017; Lorenzo-Dus, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2016, 2020, forthcoming). What is lacking is an understanding of how child victims of OCSG interpret offenders' discourse and its impacts. This study addresses this gap in knowledge through an analysis of children's emotions in a counselling context via a UK national helpline (counselling chats = 30; number of words ~ 35,000). The analysis adapts established Appraisal Theory frameworks (Bednarek, 2008; Martin & White, 2005), focusing on the Affect dimension (Benitez-Castro & Hidalgo-Tenorio, 2019). Results reveal that children's discourse of emotions (Affect) is directed towards one of three main 'entities': groomer; sources of support and themselves. Across all three entities, emotions that impact on the pursuit of personal, goals, needs and values (i.e., goal achievement emotions) are most frequently referenced and, within these, negative emotions linked to the Affect categories 'disquiet' and within that the sub-emotion 'insecurity' are the most frequent. When directed towards groomer and sources of support, insecurity revolves around the emotions of fear, anxiety and confusion; when self-directed, emotions of shame, self-blame, unhappiness and misery are most prominent.

The predominance of disquiet_insecurity emotions in children's discourse suggests the devastating impact OCSG has on their self-constructions at a fundamental stage in their development. The transition to adolescence sees fundamental neurophysiological shifts regulating affect, self-identity and governing the evolution of self (Gilbert & Irons, 2009; Shore, 1994). Moreover, sexual abuse and can result in a shame-self fusion (see MacGinley et al., 2019). This creates fertile ground for face fragility which shapes children's responses to OCSG. Our findings have implications for the development of child sexual abuse preventative and recovery approaches that recognise and repair children's face fragility through agency amplification and de-shaming discourses.

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