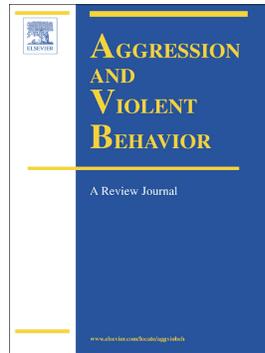


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Jessica R. Blalock, Michael L. Bourke



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## **A Content Analysis of Pedophile Manuals**

Jessica R. Blalock and Michael L. Bourke

United States Marshals Service

### **Author Note**

Jessica Blalock is now at Nova Southeastern University

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Michael Bourke,  
Investigative Operations Division, Behavioral Analysis Unit, United States Marshals Service,  
Washington, DC, 20530-0001. Contact: [Michael.Bourke@usdoj.gov](mailto:Michael.Bourke@usdoj.gov)

**Abstract**

Of great concern is the existence of instructional manuals circulating online that provide pedophiles with guidance on how to sexually abuse children. To better understand the role this material may play in the exploitation of children, the United States Marshals Service's Behavioral Analysis Unit conducted a qualitative analysis on the content of all known pedophile manuals. From the cumulative content of these manuals we derived a model of victim selection and identified specific strategies used by this population to harm children. The manuals reveal that while external situational factors are given consideration during victim selection, the internal vulnerabilities of the victim are emphasized for active exploitation. The graphic content found within the documents and the ability to obtain these manuals anonymously exacerbate the danger these manuals pose by reinforcing cognitive distortions, fostering networking opportunities, and normalizing the sexual abuse of children. The "education" provided in the manuals may also bolster pedophilic identification as well as increase criminal efficacy. In the current paper we present important insights we obtained about the mentality and methodologies of pedophiles and other individuals interested in sexually exploiting children.

*Keywords:* pedophilia, manual, victim selection, distortions, sex offender, grooming, child exploitation

## A Content Analysis of Pedophile Manuals

Pedophilic disorder is a condition characterized by “recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors involving sexual activity with a prepubescent child or children (generally age 13 years or younger)” (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013, p. 697). While minors may be abused by individuals who do not meet criteria for the disorder, and not all pedophiles sexually abuse children, the presence of pedophilic interests should be of significant concern given the strength of sexual drives, the innate vulnerability of the potential victim pool, and the significant consequences that result from child abuse.

Since there is no cure for deviant sexual predilections, effective sex offender treatment programs use a model based on management – providers attempt to help sex offenders gain insight into precursors and risk factors with the goal of minimizing the chances the person will act out on his or her impulses. Pedophilia only becomes a crime if the individual acts upon his or her urges, fantasies, or sexual preferences in a manner the prevailing laws proscribe (Miller, 2013). It is therefore useful for evaluators, treatment providers, law enforcement professionals, and others involved with child protection to better understand how pedophiles<sup>1</sup> move from “mere thoughts” to intentional action. Acquiring greater insight into how pedophiles think, as well as their fantasies and motivational pathways, may allow us to more effectively protect youth by intervening before harmful behavior occurs.

### Background

While it is well known that sex offenders use the Internet to distribute abusive and exploitative files of children (Durkin, 1997), members of the public may be less aware of the extent to which they converse and electronically share criminal intelligence with other like-

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<sup>1</sup> For ease of reading we use only the term “pedophile,” but we wish to point out that, to the best of our knowledge, the observations contained herein apply equally well to hebephiles.

minded individuals. Communication between adults who possess similar deviant predilections serves to validate paraphilic desires, mitigate feelings of guilt and trepidation, and reinforce the belief that sexual contact with minors is harmless or even beneficial (Durkin & Bryant, 1999). Within their circumscribed online communities, pedophiles are able to disseminate otherwise unavailable information to share techniques and strategies for sexually abusing children (Durkin, 1997).

Research examining online forums and discussion boards suggest pedophiles have a distorted understanding of their interactions with children, often associated with denial of guilt, blaming society for being treated unfairly, and the minimization of responsibility and victim harm (De Young, 1998; Durkin & Bryant, 1999; Nunes & Jung, 2013; O'Halloran & Quayle, 2010; Pogrebin, Poole, & Martinez, 1992). Hanson, Gizzarelli, and Scott (1994) note that pedophiles often perceive children as motivated and willing participants in sexual activity with adults. Similarly, Stermac and Segal (1989) found convicted pedophiles were more likely to blame victims for the occurrence of the abuse and were more likely to view the behavior as beneficial to the victims. Untwisting such cognitive distortions often proves challenging in treatment settings, particularly when these maladaptive beliefs are strongly entrenched.

One of the first researchers to examine the writings of pedophiles was sociologist Mary de Young (1988), who observed that publications produced by pedophile organizations contained “neutralization” techniques first observed by Sykes and Matza (1957). Neutralization involves overriding the natural desire to follow moral obligations by justifying and rationalizing antisocial behavior. Sykes and Matza identified five specific strategies used by juvenile delinquents to justify their criminal acts: *denial of responsibility*, *denial of injury*, *denial of the victim*, *condemnation of the condemners*, and *appeal to higher loyalties*. In her review of the pedophile

publications, De Young (1988) observed the latter four techniques also were used by pedophiles to justify their deviant behavior. In a subsequent analysis of an online support forum for self-identified pedophiles, Durkin and Bryant (1997) found the most common distortion offered by pedophiles was denial of injury - the assertion that sexual behavior between adults and children is not harmful. The second most common account, condemnation of the condemners, refers to the attempt by offenders to redirect negative stigma back onto the larger society they believe treats them unfairly.

In a replication study of Durkin and Bryant (1997), O'Halloran and Quayle (2010) returned to the pedophile support forum studied by Durkin and Bryant and noted there had been a near-tenfold increase in the size and activity of group the since the publication of the original study. The 2010 analysis of the forum revealed the same two justifications were most commonly used: condemnation of condemners, followed by denial of injury. In fact, the researchers observed that "more than one-third of the sample gave multiple examples of denial of injury in their postings, a result that reflects the findings of previous work" (p. 82). The dominance of these justifications suggests self-proclaimed pedophiles in both studies did not consider sexual activity with children to be wrong; rather, they believed it was merely viewed negatively by society. Clinicians and researchers agree such maladaptive beliefs and distorted thinking play a significant role in facilitating sexual offenses (Abel et al., 1989; Bumby, 1996; De Young, 1988; Durkin & Bryant, 1999; Hayashino, Wurtele, & Klebe, 1995; Murphy, 1990; Neidigh & Krop, 1992; Stermac & Segal, 1989).

### **The Pedophile Manuals**

Several years ago, the United States Marshals Service's Behavioral Analysis Unit (USMS BAU) became concerned about "pedophile manuals" electronically circulating via the Internet.

Investigators from Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) task forces, a national network of more than 4,500 law enforcement officers, informed USMS BAU researchers these “how to” manuals were rife with distortions, and they worried the material might encourage pedophiles to act on their predilections. To learn more about these documents, the USMS BAU contacted the 61 ICAC taskforces in the United States to request copies of all known manuals. In response to this request, six distinct manuals were provided to the USMS BAU for educational and research purposes by various law enforcement agencies. In total, the manuals consist of 775 total pages of graphic pedophilic content in PDF and interactive website formats.

The existence of these manuals provides insight into the process by which pedophiles engage in criminal networking. Previous research suggests pedophiles organize distinct online communities within the virtual world that provide a supportive context for the anonymous dissemination of information conducive to sexual assault (O’Connell, 2001). They seek like-minded individuals in chat rooms and online forums where they share stories and exchange child abuse images, sexually exploitative video files, and information they believe will help others avoid detection by law enforcement. In essence, they form online support groups to help them normalize deviant fantasies and minimize the harms that result from child exploitation.

The written communications of offenders, particularly their online posts, have been studied by researchers to better understand how they discuss their predilections, as well as how they identify and groom victims (Durkin & Bryant, 1999; Kierkegaard, 2008). In one such study, Durkin and Bryant (1999) noticed pedophiles re-labeled their objectionable behavior differently when they were writing online posts versus when they shared written information offline. Specifically, while offline writings were compromised solely of *excuses* for their pedophilic behavior, online postings were dominated by *justifications* for their deviance. The shift from

arguing for diminished responsibility to claiming pedophilia is a positive and valid sexual variant was attributed to online empowerment (Durkin & Bryant, 1999). This finding is significant, for if online anonymity fosters networking, enhances criminal effectiveness, and empowers offenders to move from fantasy to acting out, it seems reasonable to assume these manuals exacerbate the danger pedophiles pose.

### **Analysis of the Manuals**

The pedophile manuals were analyzed by the first author (JB) in a secure law enforcement setting. The texts describe strategies for, and risks associated with, abusing intra- and extra-familial children aged 2 to 15 years. The manuals do not contain child sexual exploitation images; this is likely a conscious decision by the creators of the manuals to avoid the legal consequences from distributing illegal material. There are numerous innocent photographs of young children, however, and when viewed alongside the accompanying written text, the otherwise unassuming photographs become sexually suggestive.

The authors of the manuals, one of whom claims to be a pediatrician, essentially provide tips and “best practices” for other pedophiles who are interested in acting on their deviant desires. There are detailed instructions for carrying out pedophilic fantasies with a child as well as pragmatic advice on where to locate ideal victims, ways to groom them, and suggestions on how to ensure their silence. There is also advice (albeit misguided) on how to avoid detection by law enforcement authorities.

The prefaces of the manuals are veritable manifestos for the practice of sexual exploitation. The authors denounce the sexual mores endorsed by the rest of society and instead promulgate distorted pedophilic views. Ironically, one of their primary arguments is that existing laws to protect children from child exploitation neglect the “sexual needs” of children. Their

premise is predicated on the notion that children are not only sexually aware, but that they have sexual desires that should not go unfulfilled. A related thinking error involves attempts to re-interpret their abusive acts as a form of “sex education.” The manuals contain numerous suggestions that acts of exploitation, molestation, and even rape can be healthy if conducted in a particular manner (e.g., without overt coercion or force). They also inaccurately state that minors (or certain children whom offenders have decided are exceptionally “mature”) are able to “consent” to sexual activity despite significant evidence that, from a developmental perspective, all children lack this capacity.

Within the texts the importance of semantics is apparent. The authors emphatically use minimizing language such as “sexual play” and “child love” to rationalize deviant sexual behavior. These terms focus the reader’s attention on idealized fantasies and the seemingly innocuous grooming behaviors that often accompany abuse. For example, the term “sexual play” could be used as a manipulation term to convince victims the acts are harmless, or even normative. Other terms, such as “child love,” are intended to distract the reader from considering the myriad physical and emotional sequelae that often follow victimization.

It is logical that if someone was going to write a manual justifying criminal activity, he or she also would have to dismiss or minimize criminal *intent*. Acknowledging malevolence makes it more difficult to claim the resulting outcome is harmless. Our analysis revealed that indeed the manuals fail to mention any of the motivational pathways that often underlie crimes against children (e.g., paraphilias, selfishness, sadism, psychopathy, self-gratification, criminal opportunism, hedonism). Instead, the motivations of anyone sexually interested in children is assumed to be a benign desire to give and receive physical and emotional fulfillment. As a result,

the driving force behind all forms of child exploitation typically is generically reframed as “love,” a warping of the emotional construct society typically views as positive and healthy.

While the moral warp of these distortions would immediately come across to most of society as disturbing and ridiculous, these reconceptualized depictions of predatory child assault appear to have the opposite effect on pedophiles. Just as racist propaganda appeals to White Supremacists, or myths about the harms caused by vaccinations are accepted as truth by “anti-vaxxers,” the reframed and baseless contentions about the sexual needs of children appear to comfort, and perhaps even reinforce, those with pedophilic impulses. The material seems designed, at least in part, to mitigate cognitive dissonance. “We are not monsters,” the authors try to communicate, “if the acts are not monstrous. We are simply misunderstood.” One can understand why abusers would much rather see their behavior described as harmless “play” than as the harmful manifestation of pedophilic desires.

The manuals also romanticize the long-term abuse of children through the use of terms like “your little spouse.” Again, a normative societal construct (marriage) has been forcibly twisted onto abusive behavior, resulting in a skewed description of the “relationship” between the perpetrator and the child. It would seem cognitive distortions are more easily accepted, may have a more powerful impact, and may be more intractable when they are viewed as a “shade” of a known truth. In other words, they may be more likely to take hold if they are presented a slight departure or a minor variation of something commonly accepted (love, marriage), rather than as a completely new, aberrant way of thinking. While the authors of the manuals attempt to keep their views closer in alignment with accepted mores by presenting the abuse of children as minor variants of healthy sexuality, there are places in the manuals when they cannot maintain the façade. For example, in chapters dealing with “penetration training” the authors are forced to

acknowledge the severe physical pain that can result from abuse, and in such sections their disregard for the detrimental impact on the child's wellbeing cannot be disguised.

### **Victim selection**

Analysis of pedophilic online communities and studies of incarcerated sexual offenders reveal perpetrators select victims based on several factors: ease of access, perceived vulnerabilities, and appeal/attractiveness (Lanning, 2010; McAliden, 2006; Mooney & Ost, 2013; Olson, Ellevold, & Rogers, 2007). Interestingly, these categories are a conceptual match for a model proposed in a 2008 FBI monograph describing the victim selection processes of serial murderers. According to the FBI's monograph, the victims of serial homicide are likely to be chosen based on three criteria: a) *availability*, or the offenders' access to victims; b) *vulnerability*, the situations and circumstances in victims' lives that offenders exploit; and c) *desirability*, the attractiveness of potential victims or their ability to meet offenders' other intrinsic needs (p. 25).

According to this model, predatory offenders place potential victims on a low- to high-risk continuum for each of these characteristics; the more available, vulnerable, and desirable the targeted individual is, the more likely he or she is to become a victim. The current authors were curious which, if any, of these criteria were reflected in online pedophile manuals.

#### ***Availability vs. Accessibility***

We first explored whether the manuals addressed how to find available children. We discovered very little attention was given to this topic. We realized this was not an oversight, but rather is attributable to the ubiquity of children; they are available, for example, in any mall, park, or playground. The authors of the manuals therefore focus on a more nuanced distinction – where to find children who can be easily acquired. We call this construct *accessibility*.

Availability, from the Anglo-French *availler*, refers to something or someone that, at least in theory, can “be of use or advantage” (Merriam-Webster, 2019). On the other hand, from the same dictionary, accessibility is defined as “capable of being reached” or “capable of being used.” We hypothesized that the distinction of “capability” is what makes all the difference to pedophiles – if the children are within reach, fantasies become more attainable. As an analogue, a lion may be uninspired by the passing of a large herd of wildebeest yet may quickly rise to attack when one of the creatures becomes mired in mud. The potential victim has moved from a state of availability (i.e., in existence and even observable) to one of accessibility (i.e., able to be reached or accessed).

In the present investigation, we decided to focus on whether the manuals addressed not simply how to get *close* to children, which anyone can do without difficulty, but how to get *close enough* to commit an act of abuse or exploitation (referred to in the manuals as “kiddie hunting”). Our preliminary analysis found this was the case; the manuals explicitly observe that while children may be regularly and easily observed in everyday life, gaining physical access to them is more difficult. The documents focus on providing information designed to circumvent the natural protective practices adults employ that serve as barriers to abuse. First, the manuals note that minors, especially very young children, are rarely unsupervised for extended periods of time. The authors also point out that suspicions are raised when an adult who is not known to the child initiates contact with him or her. Similarly, they warn that even when an adult is familiar to the family, care should be taken not to appear overly interested in the child, since eagerness may stand out as unusual.

Many of the manuals highlight the vulnerabilities of children and provide suggestions on how an offender can best exploit immature defenses. For example, the authors opine that rather

than focus on circumstantial vulnerabilities, one should consider exploiting children's susceptibility, trust, and naiveté. This recommendation is consistent with the findings from Budin and Johnson's (1989) study of 72 incarcerated pedophiles, in which offenders were asked about their preferred type of victim. Most respondents noted that they attempted to move their victims from the category of "available" to that of "accessible" by becoming familiar to the children or, more ideally, becoming trusted adults within the victims' inner circles.

### ***Vulnerability vs. Approachability***

The construct of vulnerability is present in any predator-prey dynamic, so we were not surprised to find this construct was noted in the manuals we reviewed. Conte, Wolf, and Smith (1989) found adult sexual offenders sought, and claimed to be able to identify, vulnerable children. In their study, offenders described ideal targets as children who were quieter and more withdrawn. In similar research with a sample of 91 sex offenders, Elliot, Browne, and Kilcoyne (1995) found nearly half of the abusers "... chose a child who seemed to lack confidence or had low self-esteem" (p. 574). But while we found this second variable from the FBI's serial homicide model was present, it seemed the manuals focused on a more specific predatory feature - the need to have a way to approach the child. As the author of one of the manuals wrote, "It does not matter how or where you want to find children, but sad and lonely children are the children who you would want to look for. This will not only make your search and approach very convenient, but in addition to that: extremely safe."

As a victim pool, children are much more difficult to approach than adults. An adult can walk over to another in a coffee shop and introduce himself, or strike up a conversation with a fellow business commuter on a train, and passers-by would not give the interaction a second glance. In contrast, the actions of an adult who attempts to interact with a child whom he does

not know would typically stand out. So the serial murderer has a pool of accessible adults from which he must identify the most vulnerable, while a child molester has a pool of vulnerable children from which he must identify the most approachable.

### *Desirability vs. Suitability*

Offenders who assault adults often indicate their victim was simply “at the wrong place at the wrong time.” As mentioned above, the victims were available (e.g., alone in an isolated area) and they seemed vulnerable (e.g., intoxicated). But according to the FBI model, potential victims also possess a third characteristic: they fit a general profile or “type” of victim the offender likes (e.g., a certain race, body type, professional status, or even hairstyle). For murderers, “desirability” is often the fit between the potential victim and the “type” the perpetrator finds interesting, and it is almost always based on physical appearance.

In the text of the pedophile manuals we did not find a significant focus on the “desirability” of potential victims. This could be attributable to the apparent assumption by the manuals’ authors that the reader is sexually attracted to children, generally. Pedophiles often are aroused by children in a particular age range or gender, although there can be departure or “crossover” (see Bourke & Hernandez, 2009). In other words, the distinction “desirability” is understood – the tomes are written from the perspective that such attraction is a given. We therefore decided to engage in a deeper inquiry to determine if (and if so, why) the authors felt a particular type of child was a better “fit” than another for victimization.

As indicated, the authors of the manuals appear to assume any child of the preferred gender, and in the ideal age range, will be sufficiently desirable to a pedophile. Additional specific physical characteristics, while perhaps preferred, are assumed nonessential for carrying out an abusive act. This differs from, say, a “blitz attack” rapist, who can merely step back into

the shadows and wait for another potential victim if the individual he first targets lacks a certain physical characteristic. But this predatory luxury is not given to those who hope to sexually abuse a child, especially if significant time and energy have been spent grooming a specific child (discussed in greater detail below). Thus, it seems the more important construct for pedophiles is closer to *suitability* than desirability.

Suitability, as derived from the manuals, is the determination a child possesses specific characteristics that make him or her an ideal target. It is based on a complex combination of variables intended to help the offender determine which child is likely to submit to the abusive act without attracting the attention of authorities. This includes gauging the child's reaction to interactions he or she has with the offender. Suitability also depends on the pedophile's desired length of the relationship, and is subjectively determined based on alleged compatibility. The manuals suggest suitability assessments should be conducted in private settings where key factors can be ascertained, such as the child's ability to keep secrets and the type of resistance the subject should anticipate. Children who show lonely, detached behavior or behavioral problems are considered, in the words of a manual's author, "the easiest to seduce and they are usually not believed when they tell."

The authors of the manuals clearly believe suitability is mutually determined. As one author advises, "You should not find a child, but a child should find you." Of course, if an offender is merely interested in committing a singular offense, the need to determine suitability is significantly less relevant. Since very young children are generally unpredictable and unstable with regard to their ability to maintain secrecy, if an offender does not intend to establish an ongoing relationship with a child, the manuals recommend engaging in what they refer to as a

“hit and split,” whereby the offender grabs a child, abuses him or her, and departs the scene within a short period.

**Sustainability.** For offenders seeking longer-term periods of abuse, however, the key suitability elements are determined during a “grooming” process when boundaries are tested and the child’s personality features (e.g., self-esteem and self-confidence, intellectual functioning, naivete, curiosity, trust of adults) are identified. While not all pedophiles seek long-term interactions, the manuals appear written for readers who want to find a selected child with whom they feel a perceived mutual connection. This writing facilitates their fantasy of establishing a lasting “child love relationship.” Sustainability is a subjective assessment by the offender that things will go as planned (or as fantasized), that the abusive relationship will be fulfilling to the offender, and that it is likely to persist over time. We identified several facets to this construct:

*Secrecy/silence.* The first facet of sustainability collectively described by the authors of the manuals is the offender’s confidence in his or her ability to keep the victim from disclosing the abuse. The manuals suggest various pathways to ensure silence, including physical incapacitation and various forms of psychological manipulation. These tactics are discussed in greater detail later in this paper. Note that the use of overt or subtle threats, while certainly common in the world of sexual offending, are not explicitly mentioned in these manuals. We suspect these techniques are contrary to the fantasies of these offenders which include, perhaps most importantly, the distorted belief that the exploitation and abuse is consensual, or at least not harmful.

*Cooperativeness/compliance/control.* The second facet is the need to ensure the child complies with requests without resistance. There are various methods described in the manuals to solicit children’s cooperation, to ensure their compliance, or – at last resort - to control them.

According to the material, however, if the victim is unwilling or unable to engage in the target behavior, or if other factors make the attempt likely to end in failure, the offender would be wise to move to a different target or setting.

*Compatibility.* The third facet of sustainability is ensuring the identified child will behave or react in a manner consistent with the offender's expectation and fantasy. Put more crudely, the offender must determine if the child is his or her "type." While physical characteristics enter into this assessment, the authors of the manuals leave those subjective predilections to the reader and instead focus on characterological and behavioral factors the child should possess. For example, if the offender's fantasy is that children "enjoy" acts of sexual abuse, the victim should be capable of conveying this message (or, at a minimum, effectively taught to refrain from communicating emotional or physical discomfort).

To meet the threshold of compatibility, the exploitative or abusive experience must meet the basic needs (e.g., pleasure, safety, fantasy fulfillment) of the offender. The abuser's goal is to come away from the event with the belief the essential "positive" attributes were present with no unexpected or unacceptable factors that increased the "negative" aspects (e.g., guilt, shame, cognitive dissonance).

**Opportunity.** For offenders who are not interested in establishing a long-term abusive relationship with a child, several pieces of advice are given to increase opportunities and decrease risk. The manuals advise the reader to be cautious given the "small margin of error when hunting for a child" in most neighborhoods. The specific advice offered includes techniques to avoid being identified (e.g., traveling far from home to avoid encountering people who are familiar with to the offender and to lessen the risk of running into the child at a later date), and decreasing one's risk of apprehension (e.g., identifying escape routes). The fear of

getting caught is apparent throughout every manual. In fact, fears of apprehension are so pronounced that each manual specifically advises the reader to thoroughly review the entire manual at least twice before acting on its content.

If an offender is only interested in a one-time abuse scenario, the manuals note that much of the advice they give on grooming children is nonapplicable. Instead, they suggest abusers attempt to locate a victim who is simply unable to provide a meaningful disclosure to a caregiver or law enforcement officer. They suggest victims with physical impairment, such as those who are drugged, or victims who are very young.

### **The Victimization Process.**

Once an ideal victim is identified, the offender begins the process of preparing that child for future exploitation and/or abuse. The manuals describe two processes which we refer to as the active and passive pathways. Both can be broken down into subcomponents, as described below.

**Active pathway.** The general steps taken under an active pathway are: (a) gaining access, (b) making an approach, (c) abusing and/or exploiting the child, and (d) conducting outcome management.

*Gaining access.* One method by which offenders are able to access children is by purposefully inserting themselves into circumstances in which they have positional authority over the children. Children are more likely to be trusting when the pedophile is in an authoritative position (Kaufman et al., 1998). Sometimes referred to as “community heroes” in the manuals, these roles include youth coaches, school staff, church or temple lay clergy, and childcare workers. The children observe when their parents interact with these adults, and the

respect their parents show persons in these roles facilitates the building of trust between the offender and the child.

The authors of the manuals note the “easiest” life situation for accessing potential victims is to become a formal caregiver (e.g., parent, stepparent, foster parent, grandparent). First, the home provides considerable privacy. Second, the home provides many opportunities to groom children, especially since the strengths and weaknesses of each child are known and can be carefully exploited. Third, when the offender possesses clear positional authority, he or she has full control over all punishers and reinforcers. Finally, parenthood provides opportunities for regular contact with other children (e.g., the friends of one’s children) in various settings.

*Making an approach.* The second step in the active pathway is to find a way to approach a potential victim. One of the suggested methods involves developing what Ken Lanning (2005) refers to as “compliant victims” using various grooming techniques. Other active methods include drugging children so they are unconscious or are likely to suffer significant memory impairment, as well as methods for convincing victims of the necessity of keeping secrets. With regard to the latter, the authors suggest “practicing” secret-keeping with less significant secrets, such as giving the child prohibited items (e.g., candy) and asking them to keep the information to themselves. Nondisclosure is reinforced by providing more candy during subsequent visits. When children become complicit in keeping minor secrets from their caregivers, the offenders escalate to behaviors involving physical touch. These games are intended to test limits, reinforce compliance, and erode resistance.

The manuals suggest offenders introduce children to sexual activity in the context of a “game” they can play together. The pedophile can incrementally progress from touching innocent parts of a child’s body to fondling or penetrating their genitals. Although the use of this

technique makes the offender less able to rationalize his role as a passive participant who merely “gives in” to the desires of the child, he still benefits from the distortion that the acts were mutually agreeable and beneficial. In his eyes the responsibility is shared, and any guilt may be quickly mitigated.

In addition to assessing victim characteristics and utilizing grooming tactics, pedophiles also consider the availability and quality of community resources when determining whether to approach a child. More specifically, the manuals encourage them to look for children who lack sufficient parental care or adult supervision, institutional settings with insufficient or absent screening processes, and at-risk families (i.e., those with histories of domestic violence, neglect, substance abuse, mental illness, etc.). This advice is consistent with academic studies that find these conditions facilitate access to potential victims (Leclerc et al., 2011).

*Abusing or exploiting the child.* Once the pedophile is comfortable with the bond they have formed with their potential victim, they may move along the pathway toward abuse. This may be done in a “two steps forward, one step back” process, whereby the offender constantly tests and pushes appropriate interpersonal boundaries and retreats if the child resists or appears too uncomfortable. After retreating, the offender is encouraged to re-assesses his approach to determine if he needs to adjust his tactics to fit the particular situation or child.

*Conducting outcome management.* Following any act of abuse or exploitation, the offender engages in a form of risk management whereby he attempts to eliminate any risk of disclosure. This may involve telling the child that what they have done would not be understood by others, and that certain parties might even become angry at the offender and the child. The offender may use fear of punishment, instill guilt, or exploit the child’s emotional attachment to the abuser (“You wouldn’t want me to go to jail, would you?”). Alternatively, they might focus

on what the child stands to lose in a more pragmatic sense (“If your mom finds out, we won’t get to go on any more trips like this where I buy you things”).

If the offender is unsure the child is convinced of the need to remain silent, overt threats (e.g., “If you tell anyone, I’ll send these photographs to your entire school”) or implied threats (e.g., “We could get in trouble if anyone found out”) may become necessary. This is treated as a last resort within the manuals because it ruins the fantasy the abusive “relationship” is consensual. Of course, if the offender has selected very young children or those who lack the capacity to conceptualize or verbalize what has occurred, outcome management becomes much easier.

If they are caught in the act, the manual encourages offenders to cry, acknowledge they have a serious problem and need help, beg to handle things internally, and emphasize the negative consequences of involving law enforcement. These reactions parallel those identified by Kenneth Lanning (1987) in an analysis detailing predictable responses of a pedophile when accused or identified: denial, minimization, justification, fabrication, mental illness, sympathy, and attack.

**Passive pathway.** The general steps taken under the passive pathway are: (a) surveilling for suitability, (b) making a passive approach, (c) building trust, and (d) abusing or exploiting the child.

*Surveilling for suitability.* Some pedophiles are more passive in nature and rely on surveillance near what they refer to as “kiddie hot spots” (e.g., schools, playgrounds, parks) where they plan and wait for an interaction with a child. In addition to being enjoyable target-rich environments for them to view and fantasize about certain children, these sites can serve as hubs to lead pedophiles back to where a child lives.

*Making a passive approach.* The authors of the manuals encourage pedophiles to reside alone within a child-friendly neighborhood with minimal distances between homes to increase interaction with neighborhood children. They also suggest posting advertisements seeking young helpers for work considered suitable for children, such as household chores, gardening, or pet sitting. Owning a dog, specifically, is seen as a cover or “passport” for a pedophile to walk freely and safely around neighborhoods, while also acting as a “kiddie magnet” to bring the offender to the attention of children. By using a passive approach, any encounter may appear natural and coincidental. If the child becomes accustomed to seeing the pedophile in a familiar and routine setting (e.g., a bike path home from school), the pedophile can use a ruse to gain their attention or otherwise create a situation that allows the child to initiate contact.

*Building trust.* Once a child is sufficiently familiar with the pedophile and expresses a willingness to continue communication, the manuals advise establishing a “secret place” or location where the offender can maintain a great deal of control in a context of adequate privacy. After an ideal abuse location has been established and the antecedent behaviors have been shaped to the pedophile’s satisfaction, a *trigger* may be employed. Triggers are attempts by pedophiles to prompt the child to do something that can be interpreted as sexual in nature. The trigger reduces the likelihood the child will tell someone what has happened because the offender makes the child believe he or she is responsible for the behavior that has taken place, and because the behavior has become something embarrassing. Trigger tactics include alluding to the child’s interest in sexual topics, referencing the child’s sexual behavior (including his or her online behavior), and/or implying there could be rewards for engaging in sexual activities.

*Abusing or exploiting the child.* The passive initiation process starts when a pedophile determines a child has begun to sexually “seduce” him. Since children are incapable of seducing

adults, this is a distorted interpretation of normative child behaviors such as a simple smile, prolonged eye contact, or squirming on the adult's lap. When viewed through the distorted lens of cognitive distortions, however, these sexualized interpretations strengthen the myths abusers believe and promulgate. These thinking errors include the belief that children want to be molested or raped, and that the abuse of children is harmless. This part of the passive abuse process, therefore, occurs when the offender determines a child is sufficiently sexually "curious" or is otherwise amenable to engaging in sexual activity.

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Insert Figures 1 and 2 About Here

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### **Discussion**

The benefits to understanding the factors that guide and "fuel" sexual offending cannot be overstated. It is critical to identify motivational pathways, ascertain key inhibiting (and disinhibiting) factors, and learn more about reinforcers. Since the overwhelming majority of sex offenders do not seek treatment until they are identified by law enforcement (Johnson, 2007; Levenson, Willis, & Vicencio, 2017) it would seem that gaining insight into their *modus operandi* would improve our ability to prevent children from being harmed and perhaps could identify potential offenders before their crimes take place.

But we cannot learn about the true motivations and behaviors of offenders -- especially those that are subtle or were kept hidden by the offenders -- from even the most comprehensive police records or the most robust assessment instruments. The most accurate information about the offenders, including what they wanted to do and how they went about getting from point A to

point B, can only come from interviewing the offenders and/or from analyzing their correspondence and written fantasies when they believe they cannot be identified. The existence of these manuals presents a unique opportunity to analyze communications between offenders in which they directly address their own criminal behavior. It is a chance to peer inside their thought processes as well as observe criminal networking within the pedophilic population.

A strength of the current paper is it considers only the techniques derived from materials written by pedophiles in a context of anonymity, a situation that presumably freed them from any need to present biased or dissimulated writing. It also avoids potential confounds that can affect criminological research (e.g., subject bias, external gain, voluntariness). The manuals were intended to be disseminated among like-minded pedophiles, where judgment for these ideas is presumably absent. To our knowledge, this is the first analysis conducted of criminal “intelligence manuals” of this type.

Limitations also exist. Our inquiry is exploratory, intended merely to provide insight into the mentality and methodologies of pedophiles for consideration by researchers and law enforcement personnel. While we believe we are currently in possession of all known pedophile manuals regularly disseminated via the Internet, the universe of manuals is (thankfully) relatively small (i.e., six documents). We also cannot be certain the views contained in our six manuals are generalizable to all pedophiles, or even to all child predators.

These manuals put forth instructional guidelines for skillful manipulation of both children as well as the community to hide deviant intentions and avoid detection. It appears the individuals who produced these manuals attempted to provide successful strategies from personal experience. Not surprisingly, they have chosen to remain anonymous, and there are no indications the material is anything less than a sincere effort to assist other like-minded

individuals to be more successful in their attempts to abuse children. Providing this population with strategies for offending and evading detection increases their criminal confidence, and most likely serves to facilitate offending. The variations within these detailed instructions may be applicable to, and therefore utilized by, a myriad of pedophilic offenders. The ability to develop personalized tactics, account for challenges, and prepare appropriate responses may weaken natural deterrents a reader of these materials may have with regard to committing an offense.

The fantasy-derived interactions described within the manuals relay incidents of sexually-motivated, willing children who approach adults to engage in sexual activity. Such stories support the pedophilic conceptualization that there exists a “natural” sexual attraction between adults and children. Because the material is clearly intended for others with pedophilic interest, there are no attempts to disguise or otherwise alter the tone of the observations and advice contained within the documents. The distortions are apparent and – for lack of a better word - raw. The authors describe in a matter-of-fact manner how they perceive the process of identifying, grooming, and exploiting minors.

Interestingly, and perhaps not surprisingly, the manuals are rife with evidence of cognitive distortions used by sex offenders to minimize, justify, rationalize, and deny the harms of sexually exploitative behavior. These thinking errors are problematic since they serve to invalidate and circumvent what otherwise would be inhibiting forces; including the sense of right and wrong most refer to as their *conscience*. It is this ability to circumvent morality and logic that place offenders at even greater risk. Further research should consider the victim selection and sexual initiation methods described herein to determine whether there is a relationship between these behaviors and the likelihood of contact sexual offending.

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Appendix

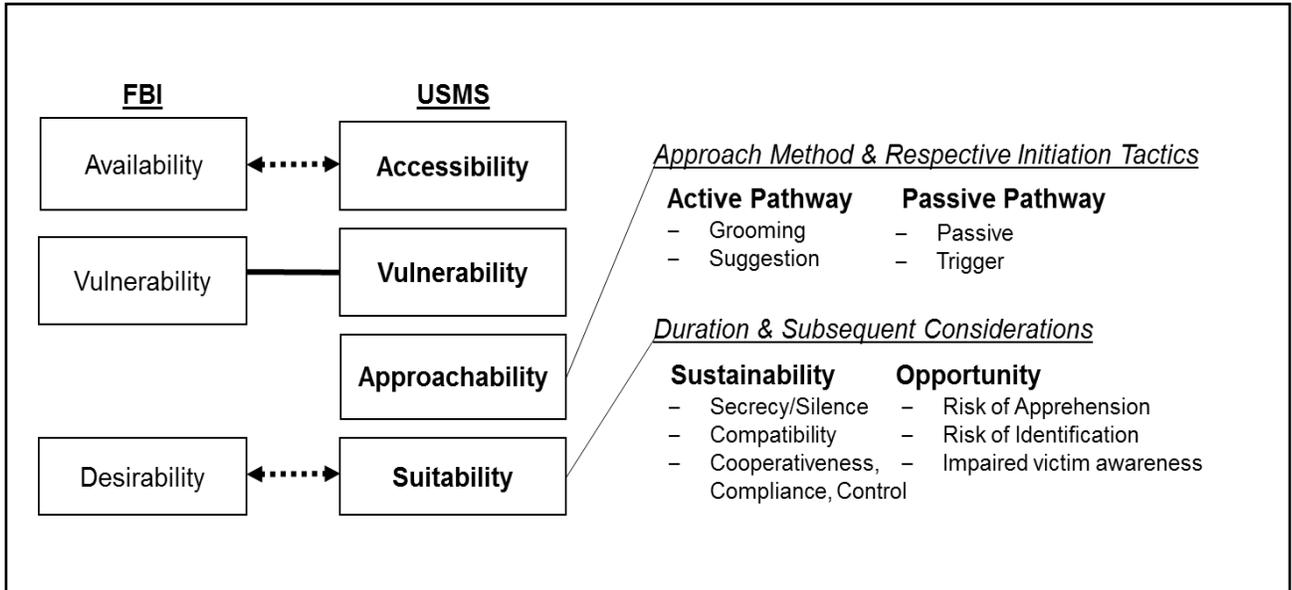


Figure 1. Derived from the FBI’s Victim Selection Process Model for Serial Homicides, the USMS created the Victim Selection Model for Pedophiles/Child Exploitation.

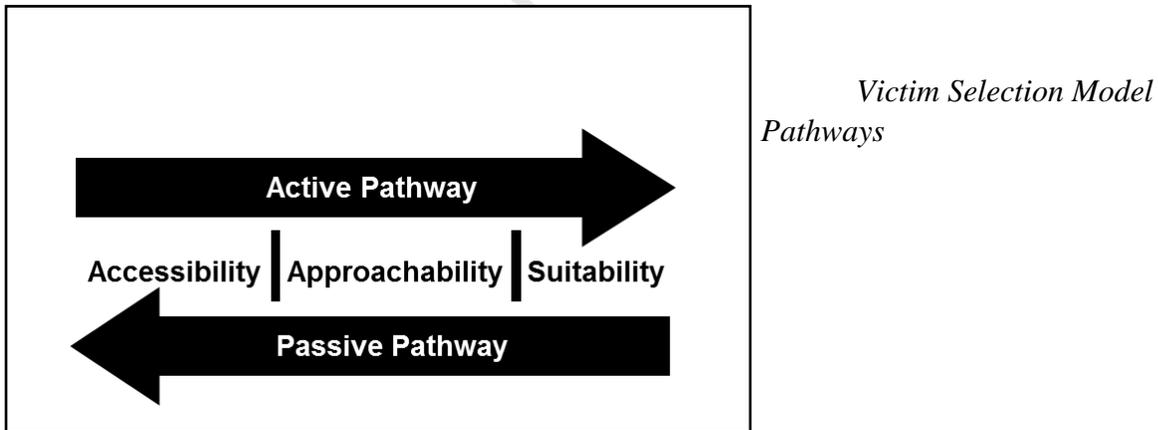


Figure 2. Offenders utilize active and passive pathways to progress through each step of the victim selection process, however, they do so in the opposite direction. Offenders who use the active pathway first gain access to their victims, using their established trust to approach and

determine suitability. Offenders who use the passive pathway surveil for suitable victims before approaching and then build trust to gain access.

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