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Children's Narratives of Alleged Child Sexual Abuse Offender Behaviors and the Manipulation Process

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CITATION

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Objective: The aim of the current study is to examine offender behaviors and manipulation tactics described by children using a mixed method analysis. *Method:* The sample consisted of 95 randomly selected investigative interviews with children (aged 5 to 13 years) in which external evidence indicated a high probability that abuse occurred. An initial qualitative phase that aimed to identify key offender behaviors and manipulation tactics was followed by a quantitative phase, which explored the frequency of these tactics and their relations to children and abuse characteristics. *Results:* In the qualitative phase, the children described the emotional rapport offenders exhibited with them, the manipulation of their families, and the use of temptation and coercion immediately before or after the abuse. In the quantitative analysis, the establishment of emotional rapport and manipulation of the families were the most frequent offender behaviors. Girls more frequently reported emotional rapport, and children who experienced multiple incidents reported the manipulation of families more often. *Conclusions:* In the current study the children's reports focused more on the establishment of rapport and threats to family members and less on the offering of temptations than past research on offenders' descriptions of manipulation tactics. This suggests children focus more on the interpersonal aspects of offenders' manipulation efforts, and this could be a focus of investigation and intervention. Moreover, these interpersonal aspects strengthen previous studies regarding the importance of communities in the prevention of child abuse. Communities must be a central component in understanding children's safety and well-being.

Keywords: child sexual abuse, investigative interviews, mixed methods, offenders' behavior, offenders' manipulation

An investigation of child sexual abuse (CSA) offenders' behaviors and manipulation tactics has the potential to increase the existing knowledge in this area to modify prevention and intervention programs for children, families, communities, and societies. The exploration of this matter is highly challenging given the nature of child abuse, in which both offenders and children typically remain silent following reluctance. Most of the literature regarding this issue has predominately been generated from the offenders' narratives, perspectives, and reports. The current study seeks to shed light on CSA while focusing on the children's narratives, experiences, and perceptions with respect to the offenders' behaviors and manipulation tactics. Mixed method analyses were conducted to enhance understanding with respect to these tactics, as well as to describe their frequencies and relations to both children and abuse characteristics.

CSA and the Importance of Studying Offenders' Behaviors and Manipulation Tactics

Over the previous 30 years, theory and research have increasingly focused on the causes, prevalence, correlates, and conse-

quences of CSA. The American Psychological Association Committee on Professional Practice and Standards (American Psychological Association, 2013) defines CSA as "contacts between a child and an adult or other person significantly older or in a position of power or control over the child, where the child is being used for sexual stimulation of the adult or other person" (p. 30). Jones (2002) notes that contact sexual activity is characterized as penetrative (penile, digital, or object penetration of the vagina, mouth, or anus) or nonpenetrative (touching or kissing sexual parts of the child's body or the child touching sexual parts of the abuser's body). Furthermore, noncontact sexual activity includes exhibitionism, child pornography (which involves the child in the production or consumption of pornographic material), and/or the encouragement of children to engage in sexual activity with each other.

The literature suggests that the impact of CSA differs depending on the child's characteristics, the type of abuse experienced, and the child's familiarity with the abuser (Malloy, Lamb, & Katz, 2011; Lamb, La Rooy, Malloy, & Katz, 2011). The relationship between the child and the abuser has been identified as critical in the assessment of the child's emotional state, disclosure patterns, and potential recovery following the abuse (Malloy et al., 2011; Lamb et al., 2011). The child's relationship with the abuser is greatly affected by the offenders' behaviors and manipulative tactics.

Offender Behaviors and the Manipulation Process

Research regarding offender behaviors is fraught with controversy. A basic issue concerns the definition of the manipulative,

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exploitive behavior, which is often coined the grooming process in the literature (Canter, Hughes, & Kirby, 1998; Craven, Brown, & Gilchrist, 2006). Early definitions addressed the process of manipulation from a theoretical perspective; for example, Finkelhor's precondition model viewed manipulation as a means to overcome the child's resistance (Finkelhor, 1984). Additional definitions have viewed the nature of sexual manipulation as the creation of an opportunity to offend (Ward & Siegert, 2002) or as a term that describes the offender's actions during the preparatory stage of sexual abuse (McAlinden, 2006).

McAlinden (2006) claims that the process of manipulation refers to the situation in which a potential offender establishes the opportunity for abuse by gaining the child's trust as laying the groundwork for the abuse. Based on a comprehensive review of the literature regarding offender behaviors, Craven and her colleagues offer another definition that seeks to capture the complexity of the phenomenon:

> A process by which a person prepares a child, significant adults and the environment for the abuse of this child. Specific goals include gaining access to the child, gaining the child's compliance and maintaining the child's secrecy to avoid disclosure. This process serves to strengthen the offender's abusive pattern, as it may be used as a means of justifying or denying their actions. (Craven, Brown, & Gilchrist, 2006, p. 297)

This definition is the first to acknowledge the three types of sexual manipulation that have been discussed in the literature: self-grooming, manipulation of the environment and significant others, and manipulation of the child. Based on these findings, Craven et al. (2007) suggest an alternative definition that identifies the offender's objectives, such as gaining access to the child, ensuring the child's compliance, maintaining secrecy, and avoiding disclosure. The manipulation process can continue over days, weeks, or years. This behavior can occur both when individuals are in close proximity or distant, for example, over the Internet (Craven et al., 2007).

Improved understanding of offender behaviors is important to promote prevention and child and parent awareness efforts, improve the therapeutic processes that deal with offenders and victims, and improve the legal process (Whittle, Hamilton-Giachritsis, Beech, & Collings, 2012). However, improvements in our understanding of the manipulation process present challenges because it is difficult to acquire information from the three sole sources: offenders, who are typically reluctant to cooperate; external evidence, which is typically rare in CSA cases; and children, who exhibit developmental and emotional barriers that impair our ability to communicate with them (Lamb et al., 2011; Malloy et al., 2011).

Offender Behaviors: The offenders' Perspectives

Most studies in this area have relied on offenders as the source of information (Craven et al., 2007; Ward, Hudson, Marshall, & Siegert, 1995; Whittle et al., 2012). Craven et al. (2006), who investigated different types of manipulation, determined that self-grooming was rare, whereas van Dam (2001) noted that during treatment, offenders described "grooming themselves" to justify or deny their abusive behavior. Most studies have investigated the manipulation of the child. These studies have indicated that the process of child manipulation begins with the identification of a vulnerable child (van Dam, 2001; Conte et al., 1989). Children may be vulnerable because of a poor relationship with their parents, the lack of many friends or previous victimization. Following the identification of a target, perpetrators often verbally and physically desensitize the child to sexual contact (Olson et al., 2007). Communicative reframing often co-occurs with desensitization. Communicative reframing refers to perpetrators who describe their sexual actions toward the child as play between individuals who are close that will benefit the child later in life. Some children are told that they will become "better lovers later in life" or that their bodies will mature more quickly if they engage in adult sexual acts.

Further investigation of offender behaviors has identified physical and psychological aspects, including physical manipulation that involves the gradual sexualization of the relationship and psychological manipulation that is used to promote increased sexualization. During the manipulation process, offenders test the child's receptiveness by examining the child's reaction to forbidden touch during play (Elliott, Browne, & Kilcoyne, 1995; Lang & Frenzel, 1988). They also exert efforts to get to know the child and use this knowledge to entice the child into sexual contact (Singer et al., 1992).

In addition, isolation is another significant phase of the manipulation process (Lang & Frenzel, 1988). Two forms of isolation have been identified: physical isolation and psychological isolation. Physical isolation refers to the perpetrator's efforts to place the child in intimate contexts that avoid the presence of potential witnesses. Psychological isolation refers to the establishment of an intense emotional rapport with the child that enhances his trust in the perpetrator and reduces or prevents the child's emotional access to other significant individuals in his life (Irenyi et al., 2006; van Dam, 2001).

Perpetrator reports indicate that they devote substantial effort to avoid detection by other individuals and prevent disclosure by the child (Brown, Gray, & Snowden, 2009). To isolate the child and assure the child's reluctance to expose the abuse, perpetrators not only manipulate children but also families and sometimes communities (McAlinden, 2006). The creation of a relationship with the parents promotes the abuser's access to the child (Elliott, Browne, & Kilcoyne, 1995; Lang & Frenzel, 1988). Offenders may gain insider status long before they begin to abuse a victim. The manipulation of the environment and significant others may occur as a result of implicit or explicit planning. This strategy involves the key factor of creating a relationship of trust.

Offender Behaviors: The Children's Perspective

Children's perspectives regarding offender behaviors and manipulation tactics are extremely important; however, there are only a few studies which have addressed this aspect. One way to investigate children's perspectives is to analyze children's narratives during forensic investigations. It has been established that forensic interviews that are performed in a manner that is developmentally and emotionally appropriate can provide significant information (Katz & Barnetz, 2014). Katz' recent study (Katz, 2013) qualitatively analyzed the narratives of children who were alleged to be victims of CSA that occurred over the Internet. A key category identified in the children's narratives involved the ma-

nipulation process. Children described a linear process of manipulation that was initiated with physical and emotional isolation and continued with the establishment of emotional rapport and trust. Based on the children's narratives, the alleged abusers devoted several months to the manipulation process; once they judged that the children felt comfortable with them, they escalated the relationship to sexual touch followed by sexual abuse. However, the study sample was small (20 children) and investigated only Internet CSA.

van Gijn and Lamb's (2013) study also relied on children as a source of information for the manipulation process. They analyzed 104 forensic investigations with children who were alleged to be victims of CSA. Although their analyses included both the pre- and postoffense phases, they only focused on the behaviors of persuasion and coercion. The study defined persuasion as rewarding the victims, verbally encouraging them to cooperate or promising bribes. Coercion was defined as alleged abuser behaviors that involved verbal threats, physical force and violence. For multiple incidents of abuse, behaviors were more likely to involve persuasion than coercion. The study also found no significant association between perpetrator age and the use of coercion; however, older perpetrators were more likely than younger perpetrators to use persuasion.

Berliner and Conte (1990) performed 23 semistructured interviews with 10- to 18-year-old children who described their experiences of CSA. The children described age-inappropriate behaviors of the perpetrators (giving gifts and money), verbal persuasion to perform the sexual act, and the use of threats and physical coercion before and after the abuse.

This literature review emphasizes that there is considerable information regarding offender behaviors and manipulation tactics from the offenders' perspectives. In contrast, the children's perspectives have only been addressed by a few studies, including two qualitative studies and a third quantitative study that was limited to persuasion and threat behaviors. It is clear that additional research must be conducted to understand children's perspectives and to identify the complete range of behaviors and tactics that children experience, their frequencies, and the relations between children and abuse characteristics to better modify prevention and intervention programs.

Current Study

The current study was designed to improve our understanding of offender behaviors and the manipulation process based on children's reports during forensic investigations. The present study is unique because it involved a relatively large sample of forensic investigations (95 interviews) that were performed by trained forensic interviewers following the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) protocol, and it also used a mixed-method model for analysis.

To accurately capture the children's perceptions and experiences of the offenders' behaviors and the manipulation process, a qualitative approach was used for the 95 investigative interviews with the children during the initial phase of the study. A comprehensive thematic analysis addressed the following research questions: How did the children describe the offenders' behaviors and the manipulation process during the investigative interviews?

What type of tactics and behaviors did the children describe in their testimony?

Following the qualitative phase, the second phase of the study involved quantitative analyses of the forensic investigative interviews. In this phase, the analysis focused on the frequency of occurrence of the offenders' behaviors and manipulation tactics and the relative frequency of these behaviors in relation to the characteristics of the children (age and gender) and the abuse (severity of sexual abuse, suspect familiarity and occurrence).

Method

Sample

The current study focused on 95 investigative interviews with children who ranged in age from 5 to 13 years (M = 9.01, SD = 2.84). All alleged abusers were male; more than half of the suspects were known to the children but were nonfamily members, such as friends and neighbors, and more than half of the incidents comprised multiple occurrences. Table 1 elaborates on the sample characteristics. With respect to the severity of the abuse, the cases of abuse involved exposure (n = 2), touching (n = 72), and penetration (n = 21), with 7 cases in which the severity of the abuse was not identified.

The inclusion criteria for the current study were as follows: (a) The child was interviewed as an alleged victim of sexual abuse; (b) This was the first forensic investigation that involved the child; (c) External evidence suggested a high probability that the abuse occurred (e.g., there was eyewitness testimony and/or the alleged perpetrator admitted the abuse to the police); (d) The child made allegations of abuse and disclosed the alleged incidents; (e) The child's language was Hebrew; and (f) The child did not exhibit developmental disabilities.

The 95 interviews were randomly selected from all investigations conducted in Israel in 2011. The interviews were performed by 14 trained investigative interviewers with similar professional backgrounds (a degree in social work and at least one and one half years of experience as a forensic interviewer with children). All interviews followed the NICHD protocol, which is required for investigations that involve children in Israel.

Procedure

Data coding and analysis were performed in two stages because of the use of the mixed-method model. Consequently, the initial

Table 1
Sample Characteristics

Variable	Values	n	%
Gender	Girls	85	89.47%
	Boys	10	10.52%
Suspect familiarity	Family member	47	49.47%
	Known suspect outside of the family	48	50.52%
Occurrence of the alleged incident	Single	42	44.21%
	Multiple	53	55.78%
Severity of abused	Exposure	2	2.10%
	Touching	72	75.78%
	Penetration	21	22.10%

analysis was qualitative and the second analysis was quantitative. In the qualitative phase, two independent researchers analyzed the interviews using a thematic analysis based on a phenomenological approach to analyze child narratives with respect to the offenders' behaviors and the manipulation process. In the current study, the manipulation process was defined as any action performed by the alleged abusers toward the children or their families before or immediately after the incidents of abuse.

Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Because the focus is the content of the speech, the analysis interprets what is said by focusing on the meaning that any competent user of the language would identify in a story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Reissman, 2008). Thematic analysis based on a phenomenological approach focuses on the subjective human experience (Morse, 1994). This approach emphasizes participant perceptions, feelings, and experiences as the paramount objects of study.

To capture the children's authentic experiences in the current study, the data analysis was inductive rather than deductive. In an inductive approach (Reissman, 2008), the themes identified are strongly linked to the data because the assumptions are data-driven. Thus, the coding process occurs without attempting to fit the data into a preexisting model or frame. In addition, the thematic analysis used in the current study was semantic rather than latent. For semantic themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Reissman, 2008), the researcher attempts to identify the explicit and surface meanings of the data and does not examine beyond what was said.

Each researcher independently identified and analyzed the children's narratives regarding their experiences of the offenders' behaviors and the manipulation process. The researchers subsequently met to discuss the themes that had been identified and to identify the optimal set of categories. Based on the comprehensive thematic analysis, the following categories were identified: the establishment of emotional rapport with the child, the manipulation of the child's family, the use of temptation and coercion immediately before the abuse, and the use of temptation or coercion after the abuse.

The children's narratives were translated to English and then back to Hebrew by a professional. This process was conducted to ensure that the translation process would not deficient the children's authentic voices in any way. After the qualitative phase, the researchers used the identified categories to perform the quantitative analyses. Statistical analyses were performed to explore the characteristics of the offenders' behaviors and manipulation tactics described in the children's narratives. The coding agreement for 20% of the transcripts was assessed to ensure the reliability; the intercoder agreement was higher than 98%.

Measurements

The NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol. The NICHD protocol includes three phases. In the initial introductory phase, the child is introduced to the interviewer to enable the interviewer to become acquainted with the child. During this phase, the interviewer explains the ground rules, emphasizes the need to tell the truth, and the child is encouraged to say "I don't know" when appropriate. The second phase primarily consists of the establishment of a supportive relationship with the child, the establishment of rapport and the simultaneous introduction of the preferred

interviewing techniques. When the child appears to be relaxed and comfortable, the interviewer then proceeds to train the child's episodic memory using a neutral experience to enable the child to become familiar with the interviewer's questioning style, which emphasizes open-ended questions. In the final phase, the primary focus of the interview is the incident of abuse. Interviewers are instructed to use open-ended questions as often as possible. Open-ended questions include initial invitations (e.g., "tell me everything that happened to you from the beginning to the end as best as you can"), follow-up invitations (e.g., "and then what happened?"), and cued invitations (e.g., "you mentioned a cream, tell me everything you can about that"). Interviewers employ direct questions (e.g., "when did this happen?") only after the open-ended questions appear to have exhausted the child's recollection. Option-posing questions (e.g., "did he touch you under your clothes?") are asked only when essential forensic information is unavailable and only at the end of the interview. Interviewers do not ask suggestive questions (e.g., "he stuck his fingers in, right?"). At the end of the interview, to help children relax, interviewers are instructed to shift the focus of the conversation to neutral topics (e.g., "what are you going to do after the interview?"; Lamb et al., 2011; Malloy et al., 2011).

Coding. For the abuse characteristics, the following measures were used:

1. Severity of abuse: Exposure was defined as the exposure of intimate body parts of the offenders in front of the children. Touching was defined as any touch of the offender on the child's intimate body parts over or under the child's clothes. This categorization was performed by two of the coders, and the reliability was 100% with no disagreements.

2. Occurrence of abuse: When the child indicated that the incident occurred only once and elaborated on one incident, it was coded as a single incident. When the child indicated that the incidents occurred more than one time and elaborated on several incidents, it was coded as multiple incidents. This categorization was performed by two of the coders, and the reliability was 100% with no disagreements.

3. Offender familiarity: For parents, siblings, and members of the extended family (uncles, grandparents), it was categorized as a family member. For the offenders who were known to the children but not family members, such as teachers or neighbors, it was coded as a known offender outside the family. This categorization was performed by two of the coders, and the reliability was 100% with no disagreements.

As for the offenders' behaviors and tactics in the quantitative phase, each time a category of the recognized behaviors in the qualitative phase (the establishment of emotional rapport with the child, the manipulation of the child's family, the use of temptation and coercion immediately before the abuse and the use of temptation or coercion following the abuse) was identified in the text, it was coded as 1; if the child did not refer to the category, it was coded as 0.

Ethical Approval

Because the study was based on confidential files that contained highly personal information, the author made a concerted effort to perform the research following ethical standards and requested authorization for the study from the research board of the Ministry of Welfare in Israel. The application presented the aims and rationale of the study and asked that investigative interviews be provided without the identification of the names or features of the children, parents, or other individuals and places involved in the incidents to ensure privacy and anonymity. The application was approved by the manager of the investigative interviewing unit in Israel and the ethics committee of the University of Tel Aviv.

Results

Thematic Analysis

The initial phase of the current study was a thematic analysis of the key themes in the children's narratives with respect to the offenders' behaviors and the manipulation process. The manipulation process in the current study was defined as any action performed by the alleged abuser before or immediately after the incident of abuse. The thematic analysis identified the following categories: the establishment of emotional rapport with the child, the manipulation of the child's family, the use of temptation or coercion immediately before the abuse, and the use of temptation or coercion after the abuse. Figure 1 illustrates the offenders' behaviors and the manipulation process as described in the children's narratives. The figure illustrates the linear process for the single incidents and the round process for the multiple incidents; after offenders terminate the incident with coercion and temptation, they continue their manipulation tactics with the children and their families.

Establishment of Emotional Rapport With the Child

This category referred to the alleged abuser's efforts to establish emotional rapport and an intimate relationship with the child. The children's narratives provided detailed descriptions of these efforts:

> He told me that he loved to stay up with me and watch TV together.

> He was waiting just for me with my favorite drink, asked me about my day at school, and walked me home.

Moreover, in their narratives, the children stressed the way this manipulation tactic made them feel:

> I saw he was so caring, he was really upset when I told him about the way my friend hurt me at school. He cared much more than my best friends, not to mention my parents.
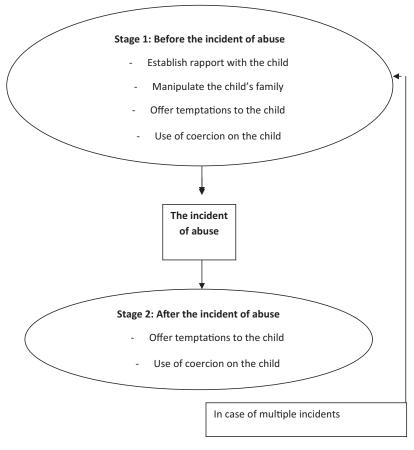

Figure 1. Offender behaviors and the manipulation process described in the children's narratives.

We were laughing together and we had a real good time. I can see that he cared for me and I felt that way as well.

Establishment of Rapport With the Child's Family

This category referred to the alleged abuser's efforts to offer assistance to the child's family and establish a close relationship with them. The children spontaneously provided this information in their descriptions of the alleged abuser's actions and attempts to fit into the family dynamic:

He always came and helped my mom with me and my siblings so she could rest or helped her make arrangements.

He often helped my parents around the house and helped us with our homework.

In their narratives, the children also referred to the way their family trusted the offender:

One time, when my mom was sick, I remember that she asked me to phone him so he will come and help me with my siblings. I told her I can manage that, but she told me that she will feel safer if he is here.

Coercion and Temptations Before the Incident of Abuse

The children's narratives identified how the alleged abuser approached them prior to the onset of abuse. The two tactics identified within this category were the use of temptation or coercion. Some children reported that the alleged abuser promised or provided presents and treats:

He told me that I was his favorite and gave me these earrings. He then took me to his room and closed the door.

He remembered I was so sad for not having these jeans like my other friends, and then he came over with these jeans as a present.

Some children reported that when the alleged abuser's attempts to tempt them failed, force was used to perpetrate the abuse:

He gave me this doll and asked me to go to his room and take off my shirt, but I told him no. So he pushed me into his room and took the doll away.

Other children reported that the alleged abuser used force to perpetrate the abuse:

He pushed me into the room and locked the door.

He threw me on the bed and told me now it is your turn to be a friend.

Coercion and Temptations After the Abusive Incidents

The children's narratives described the alleged abuser's actions after the abusive incidents. Some of the alleged abusers promised or provided treats:

You know what I will buy you if you won't tell?

This is your money for being such a great friend to me so you will know how much I love you.

Other children reported the use of threats to keep the abusive incident a secret:

He told me not to tell anyone and that if I did tell he would hurt my little sister.

He grabbed my face really tightly; it was really painful and told me you know you should keep this a secret? I told him yes, and he said do I need to tell you what will happen to you if you tell on me? So I told him no, don't worry I won't tell.

After the comprehensive thematic analysis of the children's narratives, the second quantitative phase of data analysis was performed. Each manipulation tactic and combination of categories are presented and described, followed by an exploration of the extent to which child characteristics (age and gender) and/or abuse characteristics (familiarity with the alleged abuser, severity and frequency of abuse) were related to differences in the offenders' behaviors and manipulation tactics.

Quantitative Analysis

Descriptive statistics. To fully capture the children's experiences of the offenders' behaviors and manipulation tactics, the descriptive analysis aimed to profile the exact behaviors and tactics that were reported for each child. Thus, for some of the children, only one behavior or tactic was reported, whereas for other children, the report was more complex and addressed two, three or four of the identified behaviors and tactics. Table 2 presents the number and percentage of children whose narratives identified a particular manipulation tactic or combination of tactics prior to the abuse.

The data indicate that the most frequent tactic was manipulation of the family, in which 15 children reported this tactic and an additional 50 children mentioned this tactic in their narratives combined with other tactics and behaviors (68.42% of the sample). The second tactic that was frequently reported by the children was the establishment of emotional rapport, in which 9 children solely reported this tactic and an additional 47 children reported it combined with additional tactics and behaviors (58.94% of the sample). The use of coercion was reported by only 3 children; however, an additional 34 children described this behavior combined with other tactics (38.94% of the sample). Providing treats was not described as a single tactic; however, it was combined with other tactics in 16 children (16.8% of the sample).

Table 3 presents the number and proportion of children whose narratives identified a particular manipulation tactic or combination of tactics after the abuse. As Table 3 indicates, coercion was the most frequent offender behavior after the abuse that was reported in the children's narratives; 24 children (25.3% of the sample) reported experiencing coercion. Only 3 children (3.2% of the sample) reported that the alleged abuser employed the manipulation tactic of offering or providing treats.

The mean frequency of occurrence of each variable was calculated (codes of 0 indicate that no information for this tactic was provided and 1 indicates that the tactic was reported). Univariate analyses of variance were performed to explore the extent to which a particular child or abuse characteristic was related to offender behaviors and manipulation tactics. It is important to stress that for

Table 2

Number and Percentage of Children Who Described a Particular Manipulation Tactic or Combination of Tactics Before the Abuse

Offender behaviors and manipulation tactics	Number of children who reported the tactic	Percentage of children who reported the tactic
Emotional rapport + family + coercion	16	16.8%
Family	15	15.8%
Emotional rapport + family	13	13.7%
Emotional rapport	9	9.5%
Family + coercion	7	7.4%
Emotional rapport + family + treats	6	6.3%
Emotional rapport + coercion	6	6.3%
Family + treats	4	4.2%
Emotional rapport + family + treats + coercion	4	4.2%
Coercion	3	3.2%
Emotional rapport + treats	1	1.1%
Emotional rapport + treats + coercion	1	1.1%
No description	10	10.5%
Total	95	100%

the subsequent analyses, each offender behavior and manipulation tactic was independently addressed.

The relation of child and abuse characteristics to the manipulation tactic of the establishment of emotional rapport with the child. Univariate ANOVAs were conducted; the child's age, severity of the abuse, frequency of abuse, and familiarity with the alleged abuser were not significantly associated with the manipulation tactic of the establishment of emotional rapport with the child. However, there was a significant effect for child gender, $F(1, 93) = 3.94$; $p < .050$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.041$; girls reported this tactic ($M = 0.62$, $SD = 0.48$) more often than boys ($M = 0.30$, $SD = 0.48$).

The relation of child and abuse characteristics to the tactic of the manipulation of the child's family. Univariate ANOVAs were conducted; the child's age, gender and severity of the abuse were not significantly associated with the tactic of the manipulation of the child's family. However, there was a significant effect for the frequency of abuse, $F(1, 93) = 5.62$; $p < .005$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.109$; the children who reported multiple incidents of abuse identified this tactic more often ($M = 0.82$, $SD = 0.38$) than the children who reported a single incident of abuse ($M = 0.54$, $SD = 0.50$). There was also a significant effect for familiarity with the alleged abuser, $F(1, 93) = 7.002$; $p < .010$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.070$; the children who reported abuse by a family member identified this tactic more often ($M = 0.80$, $SD = 0.39$) than the children who reported abuse by nonfamily members ($M = 0.56$, $SD = 0.50$).

Additional analyses. The relations between child and abuse characteristics with the offender behaviors and manipulation tactics of coercion and temptation either before or after the abuse were not explored because of the low frequencies of these categories within the children's narratives.

Discussion

The current study explored offender behaviors and manipulation tactics based on children's narratives during forensic interviews. The study used a mixed-method model that consisted of an initial qualitative phase and a second quantitative phase, which aimed to capture the whole range of offender behaviors and tactics as described by the children. This analysis was followed by the assessment of the frequencies of these tactics and the relations between these tactics and child and abuse characteristics. The 95 children who were alleged to be victims of CSA were interviewed following the NICHD Protocol, which made it possible to perform standardized evaluations of the narratives.

The initial qualitative phase provided a unique opportunity to focus on the children's voices in terms of their own perspectives and perceptions. Their narratives provided a coherent picture of the offenders' behaviors and the manipulation process. The linear process that was provided by the children regarding the single incidents of abuse was similar to the model described in Katz's (2013) study of the manipulation process in cases of CSA over the

Table 3

Number and Percentage of Children Who Described a Particular Manipulation Tactic or Combination of Tactics After the Abuse

Offender behaviors and manipulation tactics	Number of children who reported the tactic	Percentage of children who reported the tactic
Coercion	24	25.3%
Coercion + treats	3	3.2%
Treats	3	3.2%
No description	65	68.4%
Total	95	100%

Internet. In both studies, the alleged abuser devoted time and effort to the development of an emotional relationship with the child. The current study differed from the Katz (2013) study with respect to the tactic of the manipulation of the family. However, this difference may be related to the nature of the abuse (Internet vs. noninternet) and the familiarity of the alleged abuser (strangers vs. family members/individuals known to the child). In addition, in cases of multiple incidents, the process was not linear but rather circular, with the offender maintaining the manipulation with the child and his family after each abuse incident; this approach was most likely to ensure silence, hamper potential disclosure, and assure the continuity of the abuse, as previously elaborated by Craven and colleagues (Craven, Brown, & Gilchrist, 2006).

The main manipulation tactic that aimed to achieve these goals and was reported by the children is the tactic of the establishment of rapport with the child, which is consistent with McAlinden (2006)'s finding that perpetrators go to great lengths to obtain the opportunity for abuse by gaining the child's trust as a preparatory step. In the current study, the girls identified this tactic more often than the boys; however, this finding cannot be compared with the results of other studies because the previous studies did not investigate these manipulative tactics based on child reports. What may explain this finding? Because Olson and colleagues (2007) demonstrated that perpetrators tell children that they become "better lovers later in life" or their bodies mature more quickly if they engage in adult sexual acts, it may be that prevalent social norms and stereotypes regarding girls motivate these behaviors or made the girls more aware of these behaviors and then more likely to report them.

In an exploration of the additional offender behaviors that aim to secure silence and ensure compliance from children, it was interesting to determine that children rarely reported the use of temptation before and after the abuse, which contradicts previous findings that identify this behavior as a key manipulative tactic used by abusers; van Dam (2001) demonstrated that abusers initially enticed children by providing them with gifts, trips, and other favors. It might be that children rarely reported this behavior because it was not central for them or they did not recode it in their event memory. This finding represents an important gap between the offenders' and children's perspectives of the offenders' manipulation tactics. In addition, coercion was mentioned in the child narratives; the children reported that the abuser threatened them to ensure that the abuse was not disclosed. This finding is further described by Whittle and colleagues (2012), who identified several goals of offender behaviors and manipulation tactics, which included gaining access to the child, obtaining child compliance and maintaining the child's secrecy to avoid disclosure. Other studies in the literature state that perpetrators go to substantial lengths to ensure that the victims of abuse do not report the offenses committed against them and develop obscure strategies to avoid detection (Brown, Gray, & Snowden, 2009).

The children in the current study often reported the tactic of the manipulation of the child's family. It is interesting to observe that this tactic has previously been reported by offenders (Elliott et al., 1995; Lang & Frenzel, 1988) who indicated they exert considerable effort toward the establishment of rapport with the family. Although the main aim of this manipulation tactic is clear, that is, ensuring access to the children through their families, it presents a challenging issue: to what extent is it possible for families to become aware of these behaviors? The current findings suggest that it might be unreasonable to expect parents to determine when a family member or a friend's motivation for providing assistance is suspicious. These findings strengthen the previous conclusions from Finkelhor's studies (e.g., Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Holt, 2009), who highlight the challenging nature of the identification of offenders and the exposure of children from multi problems and dangerous communities to abuse, which indicate a need for a more holistic approach in the prevention of child abuse.

Limitations of the Current Study

It is important to note that although the findings of the current study significantly contribute to the literature regarding offender behaviors and the manipulation process, the present study exhibits certain limitations. First, the study data were obtained solely from child narratives. Although the narratives were supported by external evidence that suggested a high probability of abuse, it is possible that some portions of the narratives were inaccurate, or conversely, that the narratives omitted significant information; either possibility undermines the study's contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon.

In this context, it is important to discuss that the children in the current study highlighted fewer offender tactics compared with the previous literature. This finding may be because the children did not code this information during the alleged incidents, deficits occurred in the coding process because of the possible stress in these alleged incidents or they did not understand or were familiar with what they experienced (Malloy et al., 2011). Another possible explanation was embedded in the fact that the forensic investigation did not solely focus on understanding offender behaviors but rather on other core information regarding the alleged incidents (e.g., time, location, witness). It may be that if the questions were more focused on the offenders' behaviors, additional information may have been provided by the children.

The current study was also limited with respect to the cultural context; although the sample was randomly selected to control for cultural homogeneity, it is possible that the manipulation process presents different characteristics in other cultures. In addition, the current sample was limited with respect to the family context, community context, and representations of boys. Thus, this information may promote a better understanding with respect to offender behaviors and the manipulation process, which should be further explored. Finally, it was not possible to explore the relationship between the tactics of coercion and temptation and other characteristics of abuse because of the low frequency of these behaviors. These findings suggest that future research should better address these tactics and explore the possible mechanism for the gaps that were identified between the children's and offenders' reports.

Research Implications

Future studies should further explore children's experiences and perceptions regarding CSA. These studies can continue to assess forensic investigations or other formal interviews conducted with children following CSA and interview children following the disclosure learning based on their experiences. Targeted interviews or questionnaires for children that aim to capture their experiences

and perceptions with respect to offender tactics and the manipulation process can promote understanding in policymakers, practitioners, parents, and other children. These interviews or questionnaires for children should take into account gender (representation for both girls and boys), family and community context, as well as cultural context to investigate this phenomenon and better understand CSA. Future studies should also aim to capture potential gaps in perception and experiences between offender and children reports.

Most studies regarding offender behaviors and manipulation tactics were conducted with offenders, whereas few studies included children; thus, it will also be extremely important to assess the perceptions and knowledge of practitioners from various contexts regarding this matter. It will be particularly important to assess the way practitioners within the legal context capture information with the potential to shape their expectations from the testimonies and effect their decision making process.

Clinical and Policy Implications

The current study underscores the view that children's voices and experiences are important and serve as a crucial source of information for researchers and practitioners. This finding calls for a more holistic approach with respect to the forensic investigations that are carried with children, as these interviews typically focus on the production of testimonies for the legal process. However, as the current study illustrates, forensic investigations can and should be a source of assessment for more practitioners, such as child protective services or clinicians who can use the information gathered from children to modify interventions. Furthermore, the information gathered from these interviews has the potential to promote policymakers' efforts to better modify prevention and intervention programs for children.

With a focus on the children's narratives of their experiences with respect to offender behaviors and manipulation tactics, the current study indicates that alleged abusers are not individuals who children are typically warned about, that is, strangers who force physical violence and provide treats; instead, they are rather sophisticated predators who can understand and read the child's environment, community, and family and manipulate these systems to secure the CSA. The offenders' manipulation tactics of the establishment of emotional relationships based on trust with the children and their families predominately illustrate that the responsibility of keeping children safe is on the society, and more specifically, on the children's communities.

The findings of the current study stress that the identification of offender behaviors and manipulation tactics is inherently complex because of the difficulty of distinguishing sexually motivated behaviors from behaviors that are not sexually motivated. Because identical behaviors may have different underlying motivations, it is difficult to determine whether profiling suspects is a feasible or realistic option. This conclusion calls on efforts for prevention and intervention programs that will consider this developing notion.

As most prevention programs focus on children or their parents, the current study emphasizes that the maintenance of child safety is a challenging and complicated phenomenon. This finding only strengthens Finkelhor's conclusion that offenders will be more evident in dangerous neighborhoods and environments with multi problem families (Finkelhor et al., 2009). Thus, a more holistic

approach to intervention and prevention programs is still needed (Finkelhor, Ormorod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005), and it is important to stress that child abuse is associated with several systems, which include family, community, and social–cultural levels (Sabol, Coulton & Korbin, 2004).

In addition to the importance of prevention strategies, based on the ecological approach, the current study also stresses the importance of knowledge acquisition and adaptation of the intervention according to the knowledge gained. In the clinical context, children often display self-blame, guilt, and difficulties in disclosure. The information regarding the offenders' tactics and the manipulation process should be incorporated into practitioners' knowledge and practice; thus, it has the potential to better modify the intervention with the children and their families. Beyond the clinical context, the information gathered from the current study can promote the decision making process for children, as offender behaviors and manipulation tactics can shed light on the whole dynamic and shape the decision making process within the legal context.

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