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Emotional Congruence in Sexual Offenders Against Children

Robin J. Wilson¹

The tendency of some sexual offenders against children to display an exaggerated cognitive and emotional affiliation with childhood has been labeled "emotional congruence" by Finkelhor (1984) and as overidentification with childhood by others. This study consisted of an evaluation of emotional congruence in 194 men—homosexual and heterosexual pedophiles (N's = 41 and 31), heterosexual nonpedophilic incest offenders (N = 62), sexual offenders against women (N = 27), and nonsexual offender criminals (N = 33). A revised version of the Child Identification Scale (CIS-R) was used in combination with a semistructured interview (SSI) also intended to measure the construct. Maximum-likelihood factor analysis of the CIS-R generated eight factors. All subjects, particularly the nonsexual offenders, scored high on a factor indicating a wish to restart their lives. With respect to emotional congruence, results showed that only the homosexual pedophiles' scores indicated a preference for interacting with children on the child's level, while the incest offenders seemed to prefer to elevate their victims to adult status rather than fixating on the child role themselves. The group of heterosexual pedophiles, however, seemed to be motivated more by sexual gratification than by an emotional or relationship interest in their victims or children.

KEY WORDS: emotional congruence; childhood overidentification; pedophilia; child molesters; heterosexual pedophiles; homosexual pedophiles; regression; sexual offending.

INTRODUCTION

The ability to assess reliably a sexual offender's cognitions and perceptions with regard to his relationships with child victims would present

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treatment professionals with valuable information to use in targeting distortions and inappropriate lifestyle choices. This information would also be valuable to researchers attempting to construct comprehensive typological models regarding child sexual abuse.

The purpose of this investigation was to develop a scale to measure emotional congruence and to use it and other indices in the evaluation of the construct. In light of the difficulties in cognitive distortion scale development (see Langevin, 1991), an attempt was made to avoid a focus on sexual behavior with children and to avoid items that might be biased by social undesirability response set.

The investigation detailed below explores the nature of the emotional bonds formed by the different types of child sexual abusers with the children against whom they offend. The study consists of an examination and application of a revised version of the Child Identification Scale (Watson & Langevin, 1995). A semistructured interview was also used in the exploration of patterns of relations between offenders and victims.

METHOD

Subjects

Five groups of men were targeted for investigation in this part of the study: (a) heterosexual pedophiles, (b) homosexual pedophiles, (c) nonpedophilic and heterosexual incest offenders; and two control groups—(d) nonpedophilic sexual offenders against women and (e) nonpedophilic, nonsexual offender criminals. Subjects were solicited through one of five sources: (a) a private psychological clinic contracted to provide services to federally sentenced sexual offenders, (b) community-based relapse prevention group treatment programs, (c) a provincial correctional treatment center, and (d) federally sentenced men on parole, or (e) from federal correctional institutions. In all cases, informed consent was obtained and status in treatment programs or institutional privileges were not contingent on participation in this study. All persons found in each of the five sources noted above were fully aware of the research nature of the programs in which they were involved. No remuneration was offered.

At the time of solicitation, every subject included was in treatment, with all programs based largely on the relapse prevention method described by Pithers (1990). At the provincial correctional center where the fifth group of men (nonsexual offender controls) was recruited, all offenders routinely engage in treatment programs together [for a more detailed outline of the treatment program in use at this center, see Watson & Stermac

(1994)]. It was hypothesized that this group of nonsexual offenders would be more knowledgeable about issues pertaining to sexual offenses and would comprise a more suitable control group than would nonsexual offenders who were not in close contact with sexual offenders.

The sexual offenders included in this study were required fully to acknowledge their offenses. However, for the purposes of this study, offenders classed as "admitters" were those who admitted to a sexual *preference* for, or a pervasive sexual interest in, children. The incest offenders were those who offended against female victims only within a father/daughter-type role. Their status as nonpedophiles was confirmed by phallometric testing (Freund & Watson, 1991).

Questionnaires

Child Identification Scale—Revised (CIS-R). The CIS originally reported by Watson and Langevin (1995) was expanded and then investigated with the subject groups in the study. It was believed that adding more items would increase the reliability and potentially provide a more complete picture of the target construct through factor analysis. A total of 35 new items derived from clinical experience was added to the questionnaire, including 13 items scored in the opposite direction from the original items. The items of the CIS-R are presented in Appendix A.

Semistructured Interview (SSI). In order to gather data about the experiences and emotions the offenders felt with respect to children, in general, as well as how they felt with regard to relationships with their victims, a short, semistructured interview was employed, presented in Appendix B. This interview was divided into two sections: one asking general questions about demographic information and nonsexual involvement with children, the other asking questions with regard to sexual activities with children. As the two control groups had no known child victims, the majority of the questions in the second section was not asked of these men.

Procedure

Once a subject was admitted to the study, the questionnaires were explained and an envelope given addressed to the principal investigator marked "Confidential." The participant was instructed to place the completed questionnaires in this envelope and to deliver them, by hand or mail, to the investigator. After this explanation, and after the subject had a further opportunity to ask questions, the SSI was administered.

RESULTS

Evaluation

The SSI was hand-scored by two raters in order to permit assessment of interrater reliability. Data were then entered into a Digital Micro-VAX 3100-95 mainframe computer. All statistical evaluations were accomplished by the SPSS computerized program; statistical significance was observed at $p < .05$, with the exception of correlational comparisons, in which significance was observed at $p < .01$ due to the larger number of tests completed.

Analysis of Group Differences. Subject groups were compared for differences due to demographic variables: age, years of education, occupation, race, reported ethnicity, marital status, number of victims, victim gender, victim age, and recruitment source. Results of comparisons on demographic variables are given in Table I. Potential influences due to social desirability, naive lying, response set, and intelligence were investigated in a subset of the full sample ($N = 40$) using MMPI-2 validity scales and WAIS-R IQ scores. No significant effects were found.

Child Identification Scale—Revised. The CIS-R was subjected to a reliability analysis. Four items were deleted because they were scored more than 90% of the time in one direction, generating virtually no variance. A further 10 items generating communalities of less than .20 were also deleted. The reliability analysis was completed on the resultant 40-item scale, yielding a standardized item alpha of .866.

Chi-square results indicated that an eight-factor solution would be appropriate [χ^2 ($df = 488$) = 537.339, $p .05$] for the Maximum-likelihood analysis. The eight factors identified by Varimax rotation accounted for 44.2% of the variance. Using item loadings of $\pm .30$ or greater on the rotated factor matrix and highest item loadings, the factors were labeled as follows.

1. *Start Life Over.* Items loading strongly on this factor included Nos. 16, 20, and 27. These items reflect a wish on the part of the subject to restart his life.
2. *Immaturity.* Items contributing to this factor included Nos. 13, 3, and 8. These items suggest that a person is inclined to interact with children on the child's level.
3. *Mentoring.* Items loading strongly on this factor included Nos. 17, 15, and 11. Endorsement of these items indicates an interest in helping children in their activities.
4. *Isolation.* Items contributing to this factor included Nos. 31, 32, and 22. Items on this factor generally support a tendency for subjects to keep to themselves.

Table 1. Comparisons of Demographic Variables

	Heterosexual incest (N = 62)	Homosexual pedophiles (N = 41)	Heterosexual pedophiles (N = 31)	Offenders against women (N = 27)	Nonsexual offenders (N = 33)
Age*	45.76 (11.32) ^a	41.88 (13.75) ^{a,b}	41.43 (14.94) ^{a,b}	38.26 (9.48) ^b	29.29 (8.55) ^b
Education*	11.40 (3.97) ^a	13.31 (3.76) ^b	11.14 (2.09) ^a	13.44 (3.40) ^b	10.67 (2.51) ^a
Median	SL	SL	SSL	SSL	SL
Occupation level	87.5	97.2	85.7	76.9	90.9
% Caucasian	75.9	97.1	85.7	68.0	85.7
% Canadian					
Marital status**					
Married	33 (53%)	8 (20%)	10 (32%)	12 (44%)	8 (24%)
Was married	22 (35%)	11 (27%)	12 (39%)	8 (30%)	11 (33%)
Never married	3 (5%)	19 (46%)	7 (23%)	4 (15%)	10 (30%)
Victims					
Number	1.98 (1.16) ^a	10.43 (15.2) ^b	5.96 (7.27) ^{a,b}	—	—
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Female	—
Age	9.96 (2.69) ^a	9.86 (2.85) ^{a,b}	8.46 (2.67) ^b	Adult	—
Source***					
Federal	18	15	8	11	1
Provincial	21	10	11	5	30
Community	23	14	10	11	2

Note. Means sharing like superscripts are not different at the $p < .05$ level (Duncan multiple-range tests).

*ANOVA, $p < .01$.

**Kruskal-Wallis, $\chi^2 = 23.602$, $p < .0005$. (Percentages do not necessarily sum to 100%.)

***Comparison of sexual offender groups by source: $\chi^2 = 5.52$, $df = 6$, $p > .45$.

5. *Enjoys Children's Activities.* Items loading strongly on this factor included Nos. 39, 38, and 36. This factor denotes an interest in activities engaged in by young persons.
6. *Longing For Childhood.* Item Nos. 29 and 37 loaded highest on this factor. These items identified individuals believing they have failed as adults.
7. *Empathy for Children.* Items contributing to this factor included Nos. 5, 12, and a negative loading on No. 34. Individuals scoring high on this factor would be inclined to retain their adult status with children while possibly elevating children to adult status.
8. *Abused as a Child.* Items loading strongly on this factor included Nos. 18 and 22, and a negative loading on No. 21. These items indicated a difficult childhood, including child abuse.

The factor structure of the CIS-R was more complex than that generated by the original scale and included elements of many childhood-oriented constructs: (a) emotional congruence as defined by Finkelhor (1984), (b) an inclination to interact with children while retaining an adult role, (c) a tendency to elevate children to adult status, and (d) factor definitions that indicate the offender's perception of his life rather than any relationship style with children.

The responses given on the 40-item CIS-R by the five groups of subjects were further analyzed by one-way ANOVA and Tukey's honest significant difference (HSD) multiple range tests, first, on full scale scores and, then, on each of the eight factors identified by the maximum-likelihood analysis, as presented in Table II. For the full CIS-R scale score, ANOVA revealed significant differences among groups [$F(4,157) = 5.95, p < .001$]. Multiple-range tests showed that the nonsexual offenders scored significantly higher than both groups of offenders against girls and that the homosexual pedophiles scored significantly higher than the group of incest offenders. Analyses of variance revealed no significant differences between the groups on each of Factor scores 4 to 8; however, significant differences were revealed in the first three factor scores [$F(4,139) = 4.21, p < .005$; $F(4,139) = 5.32, p < .001$; $F(4,139) = 4.47, p < .005$, respectively]. Tukey-HSD multiple-range tests indicated that the group of nonsexual offenders scored significantly higher on Factor 1 (Start Life Over) than did the two groups of offenders against girls and the group of nonchild sexual offenders. On Factor 2 (Immaturity), the homosexual pedophile group scored significantly higher than all other groups. Multiple range tests for Factor 3 (Mentoring) showed that the two nonchild molester groups scored significantly higher than the group of incest offenders. There were no other significant differences found on factor scores.

Table II. Mean (Standard Deviation) for Full CIS-R and Factor Scores by Group

	Heterosexual incest	Homosexual pedophiles	Heterosexual pedophiles	Offenders against women	Nonsexual offenders
Full CIS-R	13.75 (5.00) ^a	18.98 (8.11) ^{a,b}	15.23 (7.56) ^a	15.36 (5.86) ^{a,b}	20.76 (8.21) ^b
N	51	38	27	22	24
Factor scores					
N	46	34	24	19	21
1	-0.19 (0.89) ^a	0.02 (0.94) ^{a,b}	-0.09 (0.92) ^a	-0.20 (0.77) ^a	0.68 (0.67) ^b
2	-0.15 (0.52) ^a	0.58 (1.19) ^b	-0.21 (0.70) ^a	-0.18 (0.85) ^a	-0.21 (0.89) ^a
3	-0.39 (0.62) ^a	0.11 (0.86) ^{a,b}	-0.03 (0.90) ^{a,b}	0.31 (0.91) ^b	0.43 (1.13) ^b
4	0.06 (0.97) ^a	-0.12 (0.91) ^a	0.06 (1.04) ^a	-0.12 (0.88) ^a	0.10 (1.00) ^a
5	-0.07 (0.95) ^a	0.15 (0.78) ^a	-0.25 (0.89) ^a	0.08 (0.80) ^a	0.14 (0.78) ^a
6	0.02 (0.95) ^a	0.27 (1.05) ^a	-0.06 (0.92) ^a	-0.20 (0.88) ^a	-0.24 (0.77) ^a
7	0.04 (0.79) ^a	-0.13 (0.90) ^a	0.08 (0.71) ^a	-0.24 (0.78) ^a	0.26 (0.83) ^a
8	-0.07 (0.85) ^a	-0.03 (0.83) ^a	0.13 (0.74) ^a	-0.04 (0.80) ^a	0.08 (0.78) ^a

Note. Means sharing like superscripts are not different at the $p < .05$ level (Tukey-HSD multiple-range tests).

Semistructured Interview. The interview items were scored by each rater according to the scoring protocol given in Appendix B. Evaluation of the spread of scores for each item suggested that scores groupings for certain items could be collapsed so that items were dichotomous in nature. Respective ratings for each item were cross-tabulated, yielding percentage agreement data and kappa values (Fleiss, 1971); significance levels were calculated in order to establish interrater reliability. Significance of kappa was calculated by, first, converting the kappa value into a standard score according to the following formula:

$$Z_{\text{kappa}} = \text{kappa}/SE_{\text{kappa}}$$

Probabilities were then calculated using the Z-score data, and interrater agreement was significant at $p < .05$ or better for all SSI items; agreement ranged from approximately 85% to 100%.

There were a number of statistically significant correlations between the CIS-R factors and individual SSI items, at both the $p < .01$ and the $p < .05$ levels. In general, each of the correlational findings was supportive of the factor definition. For example, Factor 1 did not relate to emotional congruence, and thus, it did not correlate with the SSI, which was intended to measure emotional congruence. Further, Factor 2 was correlated with items that relate to the construct under investigation (e.g., job choice—adult or child focus, amount and type of time spent with children, and whether or not he has been in love with a child). Factor 3 was correlated with items relating to the subject's choice of leisure activities and the types of activities in which he might engage with children. Factors 4 through 8 were not significantly correlated with the items of the SSI.

DISCUSSION

Emotional Congruence

Until recently, the emotional congruence construct was based on clinical observations of child sexual abusers. Both immaturity and an interest in helping children with various tasks or games would be seen as indications of emotional congruence. The results of this investigation suggest that emotional congruence is a considerably more complex and multifaceted cognitive structure.

Expansion of CIS and Assessment of CIS-R. The CIS-R exhibited higher internal consistency than did its predecessor. The factor structure was also more discrete and easier to interpret and label, due partly to the increased number of items from which to analyze each factor. The first,

and strongest, factor was one of wanting to be able to Start Life Over. The men included in this study had been incarcerated for having committed criminal acts. Perhaps there were aspects of their lives they wished they could change. These offenders were all involved in treatment programs focusing on acceptance of criminal responsibility.

The nonsexual offenders scored highest on the Start Life Over factor. As these offenders were serving time for property and minor substance-related offenses, one possible reason for expressing such sentiments may be that they are habitual criminals with long histories of involvement with the criminal justice system. Criminals of this type also tend to come from particularly troubled backgrounds. The sexual offenders against women typically scored similar to the nonsexual offenders, confirming earlier results (Wilson & Lagace, 1998) suggesting that sexual offenders against adult victims demonstrate more procriminal sentiments than do their child molesting counterparts. With respect to sentencing practices, sexual offenders are more likely to be sentenced to reformatory or penitentiary terms after a first offense.

The second factor revealed by the analysis represented that of Immaturity. These items suggest that the offender interacts with children on their level, as if he was also a child. The third factor, while also appearing to be closely related to emotional congruence, suggested a different approach to the construct. Whereas the Immaturity factor suggested that persons scoring high on that factor preferred to interact with children as children, the third factor, Mentoring, suggested that persons scoring high on this factor preferred to interact with children while maintaining their status as adults. Among child molesting subjects, the homosexual pedophiles scored highest on this factor.

Most of the sexual offenders in this study were, at the time of inclusion, involved in treatment. Participation in treatment might bias subjects to an extent that could invalidate these findings. The treatment programs in which subjects were involved strove to diminish any interest individuals might have had in children. Therefore, participation in treatment would decrease offenders' acknowledgment of any significant interest in children. As such, it is possible that the presence of the emotional congruence construct would be substantially diminished by participation in treatment. That this construct continued to be a variable capable of distinguishing between groups of offenders under such treatment conditions only strengthens the argument for its validity.

The homosexual pedophiles and the offenders against women were better educated than the nonsexual offenders, which may be a result of an influence on education due to the troubled upbringings of the latter group. The homosexual pedophiles were less likely to be, or to have been, married

(Groth, Hobson, & Gary 1982). The nonsexual offenders were also less often married; however, this is possibly related more to their younger age than to any crime-related factor.

Limitations

While every effort was made to ensure that individual subject groups were homogeneous, it is possible that offenders of one type managed to contaminate another type's group. For example, incest offenders can, at times, be difficult to distinguish from heterosexual pedophiles, especially based on criminal records and self-report data. Phallometric test results were used to discriminate between pedophiles and nonpedophiles in the heterosexual incest group; however, the phallometric test may be susceptible to faking (Freund, Watson, & Rienzo, 1988; Wilson, 1998).

There was also no way to ensure that the sexual offenders against women had not also offended at some point against children or that the nonsexual offenders had not committed sexually abusive acts without being detected. Future researchers may wish to focus on better means of distinguishing between different groups of offenders before comprising groups. In general, difficulties of this nature require that generalization of results be done with caution.

Implications for Clinical Practice

The results of this study suggest that further work about classification, and that elements such as sexual preference and mode of interaction with children, need to be examined in tandem. There appears to be some difficulty with labeling regressed pedophiles as such—they do not seem to meet the necessary criteria for this diagnosis. In addition, it would appear that gender preference in pedophilia is more important than previously thought, particularly when the nature of the emotional bond between the offender and his victim(s) is examined. With incest offenders in this investigation, the relationship was most often of the surrogate type suggesting that the offenders had cognitively elevated their victims to adult status.

Changes in typological models can often result in changes to treatment models. The results of this investigation show that, although there are many similarities between groups of sexual offenders, there are also some key differences. These differences could require alternate treatment approaches for different types of offenders. While it would be financially taxing to attempt to tailor precise treatment programs to well-defined groups of offenders, it may be appropriate to treat homogeneous groups

of sexual offenders together. For instance, it seems that incest offenders, as well as heterosexual pedophiles, have difficulty establishing appropriate intimate relationships with women. They may benefit from programs with a greater focus on interpersonal and social skills training.

Homosexual pedophiles seem more persistent in their interest in children and childhood. They may require treatment to assist them in developing a more suitable adult orientation. This might result in a significant reduction in the amount of behavioral risk.

APPENDIX A: CHILD IDENTIFICATION SCALE—REVISED

Child refers to someone under 12 years of age.

1. I often wish I could have remained a child and not grown up.	T	F
2. I prefer to socialize with people my own age.	T	F
3. I enjoy myself most when I am playing with children.	T	F
4. My family and friends cannot understand how I am so patient with children.	T	F
5. Adult responsibilities are just too stressful.	T	F
6. I like to treat children as equals.	T	F
7. I often find it difficult to act my age.	T	F
8. My family and friends think I am immature.	T	F
9. I have difficulty relating to adults.	T	F
10. I have been in love with a child.	T	F
11. I would like to work with children as a babysitter, camp counselor, or teacher.	T	F
12. Most parents are too strict with their children.	T	F
13. I feel closer to children than to adults.	T	F
14. I enjoy teaching children how to do new things.	T	F
15. I enjoy coaching sports with children.	T	F
16. I often wish I could be young again.	T	F
17. I like to organize activities for children, such as games or selecting toys for them.	T	F
18. I was an abused child.	T	F
19. When I am with children, I feel like I am one of them.	T	F
20. I often wish I could start my life over again.	T	F
21. I like to look through toy stores.	T	F
22. Childhood was a difficult time for me.	T	F
23. I love a good game.	T	F
24. I like to listen to children's music.	T	F
25. I wish I had fewer responsibilities.	T	F
26. There is nothing I like better than seeing a child having fun.	T	F
27. I am unhappy with my life as it is.	T	F
28. Adults should listen to children more.	T	F
29. Most of my best memories are from my childhood.	T	F
30. I am afraid of growing old.	T	F
31. I was a loner as a child.	T	F
32. When I was a child I always played with lots of other children.	T	F
33. I have had few friends as an adult.	T	F
34. I find children are a bother to have around when adults are trying to talk.	T	F
35. I dislike having children's toys around.	T	F
36. I secretly love re-visiting my favorite childhood surroundings.	T	F
37. My best memories are childhood ones.	T	F
38. You never outgrow amusement parks.	T	F

39. You are never too old for the roller coaster.
 40. I hate playing children's games.

T F
 T F

APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW (SSI)

In the interview that follows, I would like to ask you some questions about the children in your life. (scorings of items are presented in *italics*.)

Section A: General Information on Relationships with Children

1. Are you currently employed?

Hollingshead & Redlich (1958) occupational status code

2. What do you do for a living?

Adult-oriented = 0 Child-oriented = 1

3. When you are not working, what do you do to pass the time? (e.g., hobbies, memberships in clubs, etc.)

Adult-oriented = 0 Child-oriented = 1

4. Are you married?

Yes = 0 (include common-law) Never = 2 Formerly = 1 (separated, divorced, widowed)

5. Do you have any children?

none = 0 1 = 1 2 or more = 2

6. How old are they?

Enter average (1 to 11 = 2; 12 to 15 girls or 17 boys = 1; over 16 = 0)

7. How do you get along with them?

*Excellent = 4 Good = 3 Neutral = 2 Fair = 1 Poor = 0
 (0 to 2 = 0; 3 = 1; 4 = 2)*

8. Do you prefer to look after your children or would you rather your wife do it?

Self = 2 Wife = 0 Both = 1

9. Are there any other children in your life? (e.g., nieces, nephews, babysitting friend's children)

none = 0 1 = 1 2 or more = 2 code "3" if says "many"

10. How old are these children?

Enter average (1 to 11 = 2; 12 to 15 girls or 17 boys = 1; over 16 = 0)

11. How do you get along with these other children?

Excellent = 4 *Good* = 3 *Neutral* = 2 *Fair* = 1 *Poor* = 0 (0 to 2 = 0; 3 = 1; 4 = 2)

12. Do you prefer to be with one child at a time, or with a larger group of children?

One = 2 *Many, or no preference* = 1 *With adults* = 0

13. Would you like to have more time to spend with children?

Yes, or already does = 1 *No* = 0

14. What kinds of things do you do with children?

Adult-oriented = 0 *Child-oriented* = 1

15. Do you have any hobbies or interests that you share with the children in your life?

Yes = 1 *No* = 0

16. When you are in the company of children, how do you feel?

Comfortable (somehow "good") = 1 *Uncomfortable (somehow "bad") or neutral* = 0

Section B: Relationships with Victims

I would like to ask you some questions about the children with whom you have had sexual relationships.

17. How many children would you estimate you have had sexual relationships with?

none = 0 *1* = 1 *2 or more* = 2

18. Were these children mostly boys or girls or both?

Girls = 1 *Boys* = 2 *Both* = 3

19. How old, on average, were these children?

Enter average, or age at onset if only one victim
(1 to 11 = 2; 12 to 15 girls or 17 boys = 1; over 16 = 0)

20. What initially attracted you to the child(ren) with whom you had a sexual relationship?

Sexual trait, or something that permitted sexual activity (e.g., control) = 0
Other trait of child = 1

21. What did you like most about the child(ren)?

Sexual quality, or something that permitted sexual activity = 0
Something "child-oriented" = 1

22. How much time did you spend with the child(ren)?

Just enough to have sex = 0 Just a little more = 1 ... Many activities besides having sex = 5 (0 to 3 = 0; 4 = 1; 5 = 2)

23. Did you do things with the child(ren) other than having sex?

Yes = 1 No = 0

24. Was your time with children spent looking for sexual opportunities or were you involved in other ways with them?

Sexual = 0 Other = 1

25. Have you ever been "in love" with a child?

Yes = 1 No = 0 Unsure = 1

26. If society allowed it, would you have a "love" relationship with a child now?

Yes = 1 No = 0 Unsure = 1

27. If there was no sexual attraction to children, do you think you would spend time with them?

Yes = 1 No = 0

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