The Psychology of Adult Sexual Grooming: Sinnamon's Seven-Stage Model of Adult Sexual Grooming

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Grant Sinnamon

Bond University, Gold Cosat, QLD, Australia; Bela Menso Brain and Behaviour Centre, Varsity Lakes, QLD, Australia

CHAPTER OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

There are several proposed models of grooming that are posited to apply to both child and adult sexual grooming. In this chapter, the author proposes an adult model of sexual grooming that, while possibly having some application in the description of child sexual grooming, has been developed to explain the specific character of predatory sexual behavior involving the targeting of vulnerable adults, the engagement in the preparatory processes characterized as grooming, and the instigation and maintenance of sexually exploitative and abusive relationships with adult victims by sexual predators.

While the character of adult grooming is well understood, the prevalence and offense statistics surrounding adult sexual grooming and the consequent abuse and exploitation remains elusive. This is primarily due to what are believed to be extremely low rates of reporting by victims, and the challenge to differentiate what associated behaviors are actually illegal as opposed to unethical or immoral. Indeed, when it comes to child sexual grooming and abuse, any behavior that involves sexual interaction with a minor is readily identifiable as illegal and can be treated as such by the justice system. However, the process of dealing with predatory sexual behavior against adults can be far more difficult to identify and prosecute. For the eventual victim, the initial stages of grooming typically involve substantial emotionally and/or physically rewarding experiences at the hands of the perpetrator. Later in the process, as the manipulation increases and the exploitation commences, a predator's behavior may or may not cross the line between exploitation and abuse. While both are deviant, reprehensible, unconscionable, and never acceptable, the ability to distinguish between them is, in reality, extremely difficult.

ADULT SEXUAL ABUSE: THE STATISTICS

Across Australasia, North America, and Europe, it has been estimated that only 4–8% of adults who are abused or exploited as a result of sexual grooming behaviors come forward and report their abuse (www.rainn.org). This statistic comes largely from research conducted into grooming and abuse conducted at the hands of perpetrators in the helping professions, and therefore may not be readily generalizable to the broader population of victims. According to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) in the United States, a number of reasons have been provided by victims for not coming forward including shame and guilt; fear of their abuser; fear

of hurting family, friends, or other elements of their social community (e.g., church congregation, sporting club, school community); fear of not being believed or of being blamed; the stigma associated with sexual abuse; not knowing whom to turn to; feeling of being isolated (a tactic of the abuser is often to isolate the victim from their social supports); not feeling emotionally and psychologically capable of "dealing" with the fallout that they perceived would come with reporting the abuse; and not realizing they had been a victim until a substantial period of time had elapsed after the experience (www.rainn.org). The lack of reporting makes any broad examination of the prevalence difficult and speculative at best.

In general, the lifetime incidence of sexual abuse of women over the age of 15 years is disturbingly high. In Australia, the Personal Safety Survey results for 2012 indicated that almost 1:5 women aged 18 years or over had experienced sexual assault since the age of 15, and that almost 90% of these women knew their perpetrator (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). In the United States, the estimated percentage of women who have experienced sexual assault is similar, with about 75% of assaults involving a perpetrator known to the victim (Kilpatrick, Resnick, Ruggiero, Conoscenti, & McCauley, 2007; Truman, 2011). The reported incidence of male sexual assault is much lower at approximately 4% of the adult population experiencing sexual assault after the age of 15 years in Australia. However, the rates of perpetrators who are known to the victim remain high at around 75% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Once again, statistics from the United States are very similar with an estimated 3% of adult men having been a victim of sexual assault with around 75% of perpetrators known to their victims (Truman, 2011). While these statistics do not report on grooming, they do show high rates of sexual assault in adults and, in particular, high rates of acquaintance perpetration.

WHAT IS GROOMING?

The word *grooming* has a variety of meanings. In the context of this chapter, to groom or the process of grooming, refers to an act of preparation. In this context, the online *Oxford Dictionary* defines grooming as "preparing or training (someone) for a particular purpose or activity". Grooming is synonymous with terms such as preparing, priming, making ready, conditioning, tailoring, coaching, training, instructing, tutoring, drilling, teaching, educating, and schooling. In this way, this meaning is not unique to sexual predation or sexual abuse, but rather can be applied in any situation in which an individual prepares another for a specific purpose. It may be a positive process, for example, a young executive may be groomed for leadership, or a young athlete may be groomed for the professional ranks. However, grooming is not always motivated by a desire to prepare the person being groomed for positive opportunity. Grooming is often used as a means to prepare an individual or to place an individual into a position in which they are unwittingly subjected to abusive and/or exploitative behavior. It is an insidious form of predatory behavior that is a characteristic practice of con artists, sexual abusers, and antisocial and narcissistic personality types as a means to target and manipulate vulnerable people,

and may be motivated by a pursuit of power, revenge, financial gain, or sexual gratification. Sexual, elder, and financial abuse; extortion; human trafficking; and slavery (including sex slavery), are several examples of the unsavory consequences of objectionable grooming endeavors. The challenge with "grooming" behaviors is that, at least in the early stages of the process, the actions undertaken in a honorable versus nefarious interaction may be indistinguishable. This is because exploitative grooming often takes the shape of a deliberate process of creating a strong, positively reinforced relationship, in which trust is garnered and intimate interactions are normalized.

WHAT IS SEXUAL GROOMING?

Sexual grooming is the process of deliberately establishing a connection with an individual in order to prepare that person for sexual exploitation and/or abuse. Sexual predators are often very considered in their approach to their selection of, and the tactics they employ to engage with, both the abuse environment and their intended victim. This deliberate consideration and associated behavior is the grooming process. Offenders have consistently stated that they identify and target vulnerable individuals and systematically set out to ingratiate themselves into the person's life. Establishing trust with the target and their family and social network, normalizing intimate interactions, blurring the lines of what is and is not appropriate behavior, desensitizing their victim to the warning signs of abuse or exploitation, and creating a psychologically, socially, emotionally, and often physically reinforcing experience as an integral component to these processes are all a part of the systematic preparation of a victim. As abusive interactions are slowly introduced into the relationship, the victim, while feeling some surprise or discomfort, is generally desensitized and habituated to the intimacy, such that the intensification of sexual contact does not elevate the victim's threat response sufficiently to instigate defensive behaviors. Further habituation can then result in increased acceptance of the abuse. Grooming is an effective tool for a sexual predator as it creates a space in which the grooming process and often the abuse itself, at least initially, may be identified by the victim as a positive experience. Later, confusion, guilt, fear, or some other overt or implied threat by the abuser are consistently reported by victims as factors that acted to prevent them from reporting the abuse.

WHAT IS "ADULT GROOMING"?

The vast majority of the extant literature on grooming is focused on child sexual abuse and exploitation. However, personal and environmental grooming can and frequently does occur in the course of sexual exploitation and abuse of adults. Adult sexual grooming is analogous to child sexual grooming, and can be defined as any situation in which an adult is primed to permit themselves to be abused and/or exploited for sexual gratification of another. The grooming process used by sexual predators on children and adults is essentially the same, focusing on emotional and psychological manipulation tactics.

THE GROOMING PROCESS

Generally speaking, adults have a greater potential than children to make use of their own experiences, the experiences of others, personal cognizance, and to reach out to any number of familial, social, and professional supports for advice and assistance. Therefore, in preparing adults for sexual exploitation, grooming the victim and the victim's environment are both essential components of the preparatory sexual predator's tactics, and the perpetrator's behaviors manifest within the grooming process include the deliberate manipulation of both areas.

Grooming may involve weeks, months, even years of preabuse preparation. The grooming process generally progresses through a series of stages during which the sexual predator uses a number of specific techniques to mask their intentions and prime their target for abuse. Often these two objectives—masking and priming—involve the same behaviors and are aimed at both the individual target as well as the target's social environment. Many sexual predators ingratiate themselves with the social environment, establishing themselves as a trustworthy, dependable, upstanding person in the community, who is never suspected of being an offender because they are "just too nice." They are seen as the helpful neighbor, the caring professional, the dedicated teacher or coach, and the devoted minister, counselor, or other form of "spiritual" advisor. This is a very powerful and effective tactic as it embeds an offender into the community, removes suspicion, provides a ready excuse for personal contact with victims, breaks down barriers, and can provide secondary rewards for the narcissistic or antisocial personality type who craves adoration (narcissistic personality) or receives perverse pleasure in successfully deceiving those around them (antisocial personality). It is these characteristics that result in people dropping their guard and allowing an increased amount of intimate contact to occur.

The predator's conscious efforts to ingratiate themselves to both the target as well as their family and social environment means that the victim will often also lose their external monitors and/or access to their usual "sounding boards." Given that the perpetrator is often an influential person in the victim's life, they may also lose access to the advisory role that they had come to fill, further isolating the victim from a supportive place to "check in" and obtain feedback about the escalation of intimacy and the appropriateness of these behaviors. In cases of sexual abuse where grooming is a feature, it is important to note that, in the vast majority of cases that are not undertaken solely within the domain of cyberspace, perpetrators are well known to the victim's family and social network. The sexual predator's ability to insert themselves into the victim's life is based on the use of charm, ingratiation, and manipulation, as a deliberate and calculated tactic. Victims and perpetrators alike report that a sexual predator's presentation as sincere, open, truthful, and "likable" are a primary factor in their ability to break down barriers and get close to their target without arousing suspicion in either the target or their family and social network. These tactics used by sexual predators fool many people and are often so effective that, even when the sexual abuse is brought to light, many of the victim's family and friends will not believe that the perpetrator is capable of

such acts. In many cases families, congregations, schools, clubs, and whole communities have been torn apart by the division caused by the belief by some and disbelief of others.

WHO GROOMS THEIR VICTIMS: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SEXUAL PREDATOR

The predator that uses grooming in the pursuit of their adult victims can possess numerous variations in personal characteristics. There are, however, several common traits that can usually be identified as a part of the personality characteristics of this type of sexual predator. Predatory sex offenders are characteristically motivated by a desire to maintain or restore their self-esteem through the manipulation and control of others, and by the prospect of excitement and the opportunity to deviously exhibit their dominance and superiority (Petherick & Sinnamon, 2013). Using the personality disorder pathology types as a stereotypical template for deviant personality characteristics, these primary traits are endemic in the narcissistic and the antisocial personality types, respectively. While other personality types may be manipulative and devious in various elements of their behavior, they are, generally speaking, not as likely to become sexual predators as are these two personality types.

The Narcissistic Sexual Predator

The narcissistic sexual offender uses sexual predation and gratification as an external source of restoration and/or maintenance of their amplified self-esteem needs. This fits with the assertive-oriented typology of perpetrators and victims proposed by Petherick and Sinnamon (2013). Ultimately, this type of predator is likely to have either a high, but fragile, or a low self-esteem. Compensatory behaviors aimed at dominating others and being the center of attention are sexually channeled into the predation and exploitation of others. The narcissistic belief that they are better than others, and therefore that their needs and desires are ultimately more deserving of fulfillment, are not necessarily supported by their low or high-fragile self-esteem, and this incongruence fuels their motivation and behavior. Fantasies about power, success, and their own attractiveness and value to others blur reality and exaggerations about personal achievement, success, and talent may be made. The individual may increasingly seek out praise and admiration from others, placing themselves in positions where these rewards are readily available. Sexual predation occurs when these fantasies and exaggerations are sexualized by the narcissist. In this way the need for praise and admiration are sexualized and the drive for recognition and dominance are synthesized into sexually oriented objectives. The narcissistic predator will thrive on the elements of the grooming process that involve fulfilling the needs of the victim and receiving the accolades, acceptance, and adoration of the victim and their social network. These actions provide the narcissist with the artificial restoration of self-esteem that is a fundamental requirement of their personality type. In the sexual relationship, the narcissist may attempt to genuinely provide mutual sexual

gratification to the victim as a means of receiving further confirmation of their superiority and prowess.

However, if the narcissistic personality is underpinned by an unarticulated anger, as is common in narcissistic personality disorder, there may be a component of the sexual predation and exploitation in which the predator is motivated by the need to emotionally dominate and humiliate the victim in some sexualized manner. This is usually due to a retaliatory motivation on the part of the predator whereby they believe that they are owed more than they have received from either society at large or an individual or group more specifically. In this instance, the victim may be selected in part as a proxy for those whom the predator is angry with and seeks retribution (Petherick & Sinnamon, 2013). When this occurs, it is not enough that the predator should receive sexual gratification from the exploitation, but that the interaction also provides the predator with the opportunity to restore their own self-esteem through deliberately dominating the victim during their sexual encounters in a manner that is degrading and contrary for the victim. For example, if the victim is shy, the narcissistic predator may coerce them into performing solo sexual acts while being watched. This retaliatory motivation is often incongruent with the narcissist's need for adoration and the sexual relationship may be typified by inconsistent sexual behaviors by the predator toward the victim, creating significant confusion.

The Antisocial Sexual Predator
The antisocial sexual predator lacks any empathy for their victims and is focused entirely on successfully obtaining their own objectives. According to Petherick and Sinnamon (2013), this is consistent with the excitation-oriented perpetrator typology in which the pleasure and pain of others is secondary to their own desires and sexual gratification. The antisocial personality type will thrive on the elements of the grooming process that involve pretense and deception. These actions provide the antisocial predator with a sense of domination of others and an opportunity for them to exercise their devious superiority, and to exhibit their contempt for others and to show the manner in which all others are no more than playthings to be toyed with at the predator's discretion. Of course this display is for the benefit of no one but the predator as they are unlikely to share their devious plans with another, unless as a further means of dominance and manipulation for the achievement of yet more personally rewarding objectives.

Personal Power Characteristics of the Sexual Predator
All factors associated with the grooming, exploitation, and abuse undertaken by the sexual predator are motivated by a desire to exert power over another. The extent to which the predator is able to wield power over the victim and their environment is dependent on several personal characteristics of the predator: notoriety, charisma, social status, personal standing, and the predator's willingness and ability to translate the potential power they have from these factors into action. Ultimately using personal power to exploit the vulnerable comes down to the ability to exert control. For the predator, power will be used either through covert manipulation via personality

and circumstantial factors that influence the relational dynamics or through overt coercion using fear and intimidation.

Manipulation involves numerous tactics that seek to subvert the victim's own moral, ethical, and social compass in favor of accepting the predator's objectives as appropriate, legitimate, and even desirable aims. Fear and intimidation may occur through physical coercion or through despotic means. Physical coercion is a more intimate means of the exercise of power in which the predator directly engages the victim with physical methods of enforcing compliance, control, and relationship maintenance. Domestic violence is an example of this form of predatory control.

Alternatively, despotic tactics are a more tyrannical means of exercising power by the predator. In the exercise of despotic power, the predator exerts their power onto the environmental factors surrounding the victim in order to isolate the victim, enforce compliance, and control and maintain the progress of the predator's plan and/or the continuity of the sexual relationship once it is instigated. Turning the victim's social group into the predator's own allies; preventing the victim from accessing other individuals or services that could support them or advocate on their behalf; withholding resources, finances, transportation, social connectivity, medicines, or other items; and establishing the victim in a particular light so that others will interpret their claims or behaviors in a manner favorable to the predator, are all examples of the despotic use of power. Physical and despotic power take away the victim's resolve and force compliance. The victim will often feel that they cannot get out of the situation and therefore feel that going along is the lesser of two evils. Fear of the consequences of not complying outweigh the distasteful actions and guilt or humiliation of acquiescence.

Notoriety: (Celebrity)

Positive notoriety provides immediate acceptance, trust, and affiliation, as people like to associate with success, fame, and celebrity. People feel special when they are associating with celebrities or individuals of note. Additionally, celebrities are stereotyped as often being "quirky" or weird and so people will often ignore, minimize, and forgive the transgressions of celebrities. This is done either due to an error of attribution in which victims and their peers interpret the behaviors as "eccentric" or "harmless misunderstanding," or they will ignore or permit the behavior in order to maintain access of association with the famous person because of the "importance by association" that they receive. The power of notoriety is a characteristic in predators who are musicians, actors, television personalities, sports stars, or other cultural personalities who are well known to the wider public. The power of notoriety may also be wielded by individuals who are well known within a specific sphere and therefore they have celebrity status to a specific subcultural group. For example, a scientist may be a celebrity to a specific group of students and academics within their own discipline and so may wield power of notoriety if they target victims that come from within this same environment.

Charisma: (Charm)

Charismatic individuals have been responsible for some of history's greatest calamities. This is because charisma is attractive and acts like a magnet to people who are looking for guidance and are therefore open to manipulation by such people. Adolf Hitler, Idi Amin, Pol Pot, Napoleon Bonaparte, Benito Mussolini, Joseph Stalin, Al Capone, Ted Bundy, Charles Manson—these individuals were all charismatic and this trait enabled them to lead people into major chaos and turmoil. Of course charisma can also be a trait used by positive leaders and history has many examples such as Theodore Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, George Patton, Charles de Gaulle, John F. Kennedy, Nelson Mandela, Boadicea, Eva Peron, Joan of Arc, Martin Luther King Jr, and this list could go on. However, in the hands of a predator, charisma is a tool used with devastating effect to amplify personal power and manipulate victims and their environment. The charismatic predator exhibits warmth, friendliness, exceptional communication skills, and a "presence" that commands attention. They are usually full of charm and wit, and, in short, present themselves in a manner that is very likable. Charisma tends to engender trust, affiliation, and acceptance as a matter of course, and therefore people want to be around them and will find it hard to believe that such a "great person" could ever do anything unsavory.

Social Status: (Social Position, Including Political Power)

Notoriety and charisma are made more powerful when the predator combines these traits with the added power of a well-respected and trusted social position in the community. There are certain positions in society that, by virtue of their role and responsibilities, tend receive a level of inherent trust, authority, and/or respect by the community. These positions include the helping professions, allied health, medicine, education, clergy, coaches, charity workers, politicians, law enforcement, and employers. While the vast majority of people in these positions are honorable, dedicated individuals, if they are able, predators will select these positions as a way of deflecting suspicion, and in order to establish themselves into a position that results in a greater power differential between them and the victim. The former is obtained due to the communal belief in the inherent "goodness" of the position (doctor, minister, psychologist, coach), while the latter is derived from the authority and respect bestowed on the position by others. Social status provides significant power to the predator as a person who holds a position of authority and respect will generally receive acceptance, trust, and affiliation automatically, will often be given the benefit of the doubt when called out for their actions, and it is a very intimidating prospect to call out and accuse these people of inappropriate behaviors due to the power differential and the fear of potential retribution.

Personal Standing: (Personal Position, Including Fiscal Power)

While social status provides power through the virtue of the position held, the personal standing of the predator provides power based on their personal achievements or the ability they have to provide benefit to others. If the predator is able to demonstrate an active concern for their community, and in particular the most vulnerable

in the community, the result is increased trust, acceptance, and affiliation both with those they help and with the wider community. Power may also come from the predator placing themselves into a position where they control or manage the flow of some benefit to the vulnerable, for example, working for an organization that provides emergency relief, food, health care, or some other necessity. Nongovernmental organizations, charities, philanthropic causes, and advocacy services may all appeal to the predator as a means of establishing themselves with personal standing in the community. These organizational types, and the personal standing the predator is able to receive through this environment, may also provide access to victims who are at the extreme end of vulnerability. Establishing a relationship with a victim and then using their position to control the victim is a common tactic used by sexual predators. Fear of losing access to services, assistance, resources, or other necessities can be a powerful motivator for a victim to remain in an abusive relationship with a perpetrator.

PREPARING THE VICTIM: GROOMING THE ADULT VICTIM

Once a victim is targeted, the predator sets out to make themselves, and the opportunity for any relationship between the predator and intended victim, both attractive and desirable. As power and control are as strong a motivator as sexual gratification, the predator will identify and target vulnerable individuals in the hope of using their vulnerabilities to manipulate and control the target, and maneuver the relationship toward an ultimately sexually exploitative liaison. This fills the power, control, and sexual gratification needs of the predator. However, the cultivation of any relationship necessarily involves the fulfillment of needs in both parties. The grooming process is an effective method of preparing individuals for exploitation and abuse precisely because the early stages of the process provides the victim with strong elements of reward. This is because the predator is adept at identifying potential victims (targets) who have needs or wants that make them vulnerable to anyone who can exploit them. An adult who is targeted by a sexual predator may have psychoemotional, physical, or financial needs or wants that make them vulnerable to exploitation.

Psychoemotional Vulnerabilities

Psychoemotional vulnerabilities stem from the mental and emotional characteristics of the victim, and can be broken down further into factors relating to desire, avoidance, and self-value.

Desire

As human beings we have the ability to look around and acknowledge that things could be different, for better or worse. For some who perceive they have less of a desired item, their circumstances collude with this realization to generate a longing for something more. Desire combined with a perception of a lack of means to obtain the object, position, or state that is desired makes an individual vulnerable to the ministrations of anyone who comes forward providing, or offering to provide, access to that which is desired. Desire may be derived from wanting to escape an existing

negative environment, or from a desire for more, even though current circumstances may already be quite favorable. Desire may also be emotional or physical. An individual may desire emotional connection and companionship, they may desire physical affection, or they may desire other material objects such as nice clothes and personal jewelry. Whatever the desire, if an individual lacks the capacity or willingness to obtain it through their own endeavors, they become vulnerable to the manipulations of others who see this desire as a vulnerability to be exploited.

Avoidance
When faced with regular negative experience, emotional expression, or other undesirable factors, individuals may use avoidance as a coping mechanism. Individuals who do not want to face current circumstances may seek ways to avoid them. This may be avoiding anxiety by avoiding people, places, or specific situations that provoke fear; it may be other issues such as having to work, live with a relative, take on the care responsibilities of another, or be cared for by a relative in the face of a loss of independence. Predators who identify this vulnerability may use the provisions of a means of escape as a way of garnering favor with the target, gaining trust, and establishing their credentials as "a true friend."

Self-value
Low self-esteem, self-worth, and self-efficacy are amongst the most vulnerable psychoemotional traits open to exploitation by sexual predators. Individuals with low levels of self-value are vulnerable to the actions of anyone who is able to provide a sense of value to them. If a predator helps the target to feel good about themselves, then that will go a long way toward enabling the predator to manipulate the target into increasingly greater levels of sexual behavior over time. This vulnerability can make the target highly susceptible to losing themselves and becoming codependent on the predator who will often manipulate the target into a position of complete reliance and servitude. This is similar to the manner in which a charismatic leader may manipulate a congregation in a cult. Eventually the target becomes the victim and gets to a point where they wrap their sense of self up within the relationship with the predator and become increasingly willing to do whatever is asked of them in return for edification from the predator. This vulnerability is particularly enticing to the narcissistic predator who establishes the victim as a "worshipper" of sorts, thus fulfilling the narcissistic sexual predator's needs for adoration, power, control, and sexual gratification.

Physical Vulnerabilities
The notion of physical vulnerabilities may apply to any number of factors that relate to perceived or real vulnerabilities associated with a victim's physicality. Age, size, disability, and cultural factors all come under this heading.

Age
A predator may use age differential as a vulnerability factor if the victim perceives their difference in age to that of the predator to be a factor that in some way gives the predator power over the victim. If a victim is much younger than the predator

and the victim identifies this difference as giving the predator some right of control, bestowed wisdom, or inherent trust, then the predator will make use of this vulnerability and exploit it to achieve their own objectives. The predator might use this age differential to fulfill a parental figure, mentor role, or advisory role for the victim. The victim may feel special that such a wise and "respected" person has taken the time to take them under their wing. Alternatively, the predator may be much younger than the victim. A younger predator may manipulate the older victim's ego by deferring to their wisdom, experience, or social position, and the older victim may be flattered by the attentions of a younger person. In both circumstances, the predator is able to manipulate the victim by using the victim's age-related insecurities against them.

Physical Size
Physical size, like age, can be used as a differential in both directions. A larger victim may be vulnerable to the insecurities about their weight. Alternatively, a smaller victim may be intimidated by a larger predator or be given a sense of security and protection if the predator acts as a guardian. Again, either way, the skilled predator identifies victims whose vulnerabilities match some need or want that they have the means to fulfill.

Disability/Physical Capacity
Both the physically and intellectually disabled are common targets for sexual predators. For a number of reasons these disabilities make the victim highly susceptible to the manipulation of predators. A physical disability may make an individual vulnerable either due to incapacity to defend against sexual advances or the psychoemotional elements associated with having a disability, such as social isolation, smaller opportunities to develop social and sexual relationships, and the potential for self-esteem and self-worth challenges. An intellectual disability may increase vulnerability due to the potential for reduced capacity to identify the manipulations of a predator.

Cultural Factors
Numerous cultural factors can create vulnerabilities that the predator is able to use to manipulate and exploit a victim. A new migrant is vulnerable as they may not have established social supports and are often reliant on advocates to assist them to navigate their new environment. Predators are able to insert themselves into this role and become an indispensable part of the victim's life. If the victim does not speak the dominant language, they are further disadvantaged. The predator may fulfill the need of interpreter for the victim thereby establishing themselves as the "gateway" for information and access to other assistance. Language and culture are, in themselves, strong social isolators for migrants. The predator can use these factors to keep the victim isolated and ignorant. Moreover, if the migrant is a female who has arrived from a country characterized by paternalistic cultural attitudes and customs, then they may readily succumb to a dominant "helpful" male predator who uses these

factors to reinforce and normalize their exploitative actions. The predator may also use fear as a control mechanism by using overt and/or veiled threats of deportation or other sanctions if the victim does not acquiesce.

Similarly, religion is a cultural factor well known to be used by predators to manipulate their victims. Submission to authority, gender-based roles, rights, and responsibilities, and fear of consequences if these religious "rules" are not adhered to, are powerful mechanisms that predators use to manipulate, exploit, and control their victims. Once the abuse has commenced, these same factors can be used to instill fear into the victim as a means of maintaining the relationship and ensuring silence. A victim may fear being judged by others within the religious group, being ostracized from the congregation or other religious social network, and may feel extreme shame and guilt over the sexual acts they have committed with the predator, seeing themselves as sinful and deviant. These are all factors the predator is able to reinforce in order to control the victim.

Within these religious or spiritual settings, if the predator is an authority figure they may claim divine insight and tell the victim that "God" has decreed they couple, or that it is a spiritual "duty" in some way. Cult leaders and other religious authority figures have consistently used this form of claim as a means to obtain compliance in their victims. In these circumstances guilt, shame, and fear are powerful motivators to ensure the victim remains compliant. Conversely, victims may also "buy in" to the predator's claims of divine insight, and feel that they have been "chosen" by God to fill an important role for the predator/leader. This sense of being special can go a long way to obtaining willing compliance in victims, sometimes for substantially extended periods of time.

Financial Vulnerabilities

Financial factors can create substantial vulnerabilities that are able to be exploited by a sexual predator. Having financial challenges can create immense pressure on individuals. The predator is able to exploit this vulnerability by fulfilling a financial need such as paying an overdue account or other financial obligations. Money and financial security has been established in society as a panacea, and we therefore tend to place significant weight on those who obtain it or who are willing to assist us to obtain it. Predators are able to use this to gain trust and credibility very quickly with their victims. If this simple meeting of a financial need is coupled with an element of additional material "gifting" such as expensive dinners, gifts of jewelry, or trips to desirable locations, then this trust and credibility is increased further. The victim may get used to these experiences, and as they are normalized and habituated to the lifestyle, they can be equally normalized and habituated to increasingly sexually exploitative interaction with the individual providing these things. Once conditioned to having greater financial security, the fear of losing it and returning to "the bad old days" becomes a strong mechanism for control and compliance.

Alternatively, an individual who finds themselves with financial resources but lacks experience in how to manage their money, or is not comfortable mixing within a changed social environment, can also become ready prey to a predator. Examples

of this scenario may be recently divorced or widowed individuals who receive a substantial financial windfall. A predator may present themselves as a helpful advisor or social guide to assist the victim to navigate their newfound circumstances. Relief at receiving assistance, and gratitude for acceptance within a new social environment, can quickly instill trust and credibility to the predator. Additional emotional support provided to the victim in the wake of recent divorce or death of a spouse, parent, or other close relative increases the predator's credentials and the victim's sense of obligation.

PREPARING THE SPACE: GROOMING THE ADULT VICTIM'S ENVIRONMENT

Preparing the space around the victim so that he or she will support, endorse, or at least not actively hinder, the predator's plans is as essential to the adult sexual grooming process as it is to grooming children for sexual abuse. In some respects, it may be even more important given that adults tend to have a greater capacity for self-propelled interaction with a wider social context, coupled with a greater capacity for experience analysis and reflective cognition. These factors, at least in theory, provide an adult with a greater capacity to identify the manipulations of a predator, to have others around them identify the predator's actions as irregular, and to seek assistance. For the predator, the greater their reach into the social and familial environment of their intended victim, the more influence they will have, and therefore, the greater the chance that they will be able to successfully groom the victim and their environment, instigate a sexually exploitative relationship, and maintain the liaison over time. In this way, the greater the intended victim's social affiliation and the wider their social network, the less vulnerable they are to the ministrations and manipulations of the sexual predator. Conversely, the greater the social isolation and the smaller or more restricted the diversity of the intended victim's social network, the greater their vulnerability to sexual predation.

The predator has three primary goals when grooming the intended victim's environment: insert, credential, and deflect.

Insert

The first objective of the sexual predator is to insert themselves into the victim's social affiliations. A predator needs prey, and the first step in the environmental process is for the predator to enter the intended victim's social space. The predator sets out to affiliate with the victim's social network and family. By joining social groups, claiming interest in similar activities, and engaging in social activities with the victim's family and social network, the predator begins to habituate the victim and the victim's supports to the predator's presence.

Credential

The second objective of the sexual predator is to credential themselves in the eyes of the intended victim's social network. In this way the predator sets out to

establish trust and credibility with those most likely to foil the predator's plans, and who will be potential unwitting allies during the grooming and exploitation process. This involves the predator manipulating the perceptions of the victim's family and social network so that they see the predator as not just an acceptable, but a desirable and valued, member of the victim's social group. Exaggerating connections; feigning shared interests, values, attitudes, and beliefs; pretending to buy into and promote group goals and objectives; taking on leadership responsibilities; and providing otherwise unavailable resources or support are all tactics the predator uses to establish their credentials with the victim's environment. Ultimately the predator seeks to establish the group as an unwitting support for their own agenda by having them welcome the predator's presence and condone and encourage the relationship (whatever it may be presented as) between the predator and victim. When a predator credentials themselves well, the victim's own environment will act as support and catalyst for the progression of the predator's plans, and ultimately will continue to act as an enabler and maintainer for the predator's sexual exploitation and abuse of the victim. Strong credentials are also important to ensure that the victim's social network accepts, supports, and facilitates the victim's progressive withdrawal from various interactions as the predator gradually isolates them from assistance.

Deflect

The final objective of the sexual predator in the environmental grooming process is to deflect attention, perspective, and suspicion in a manner that protects them from close scrutiny by the victim's social network. This essentially involves the predator redirecting the attentions of the victim's social network in a manner that alters their view from potentially seeing the predator's actions as manipulative, exploitative, and maleficent, to interpreting them as munificent, magnanimous, and benevolent. Establishing credible rationale for various actions, and using their established trust and credibility to frame behaviors in a positive and benign light, creates a perspective through which the predator's actions are interpreted in a way that garners belief in the predator's "genuine" care and concern. As a result, any suspect behavior is met with a "benefit-of-the-doubt" attitude that inherently disbelieves in the possibility of wrongdoing by the predator.

STAGES OF THE GROOMING PROCESS

There are a number of proposed models of the grooming process. While the models differ in the number of stages and the descriptions they use for various components of the process, all models agree that the grooming process involves a gradual, stepped, and calculated progression that entraps adults in a relationship that allows the perpetrator to engage them in an inappropriate, exploitative, and abusive sexual relationship. Fig. 16.1 shows the model of adult sexual grooming proposed by the author.
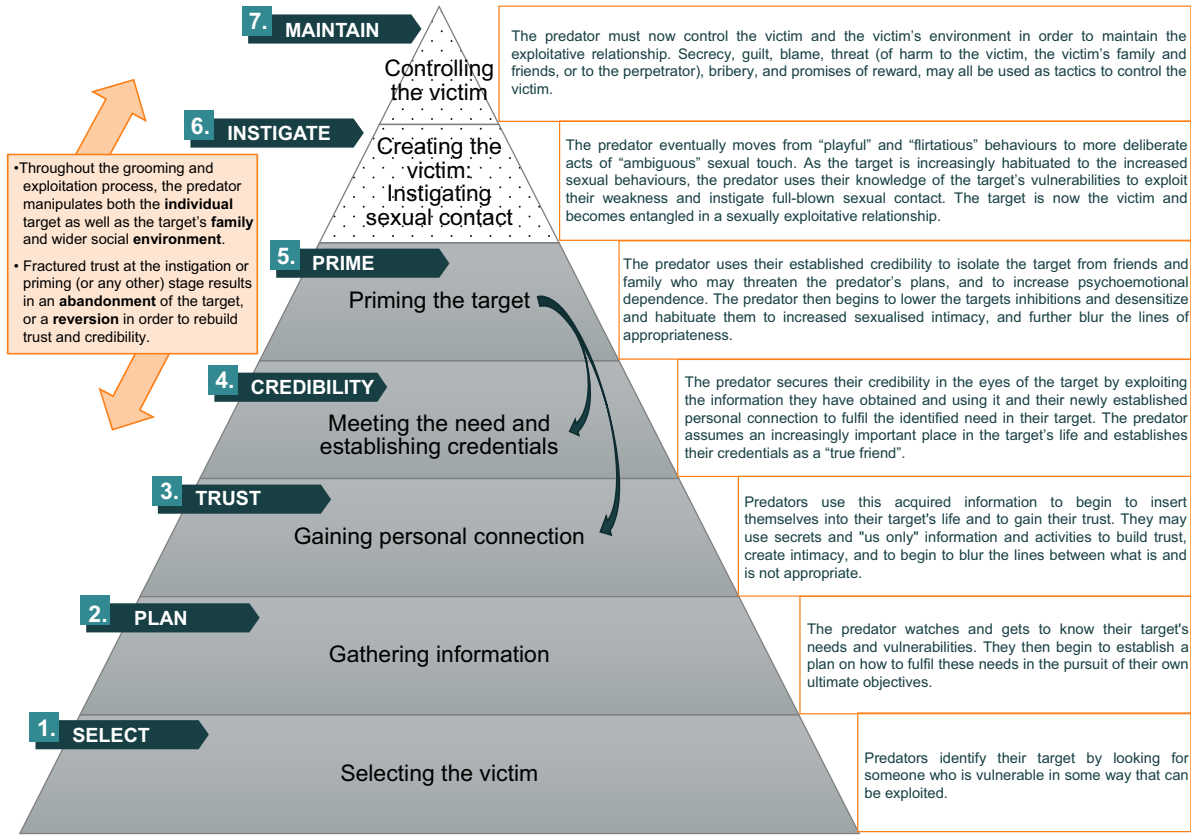
7. MAINTAIN

Controlling the victim

The predator must now control the victim and the victim's environment in order to maintain the exploitative relationship. Secrecy, guilt, blame, threat (of harm to the victim, the victim's family and friends, or to the perpetrator), bribery, and promises of reward, may all be used as tactics to control the victim.

6. INSTIGATE

Creating the victim: Instigating sexual contact

The predator eventually moves from "playful" and "flirtatious" behaviours to more deliberate acts of "ambiguous" sexual touch. As the target is increasingly habituated to the increased sexual behaviours, the predator uses their knowledge of the target's vulnerabilities to exploit their weakness and instigate full-blown sexual contact. The target is now the victim and becomes entangled in a sexually exploitative relationship.

- Throughout the grooming and exploitation process, the predator manipulates both the **individual** target as well as the target's **family** and wider social **environment**.
- Fractured trust at the instigation or priming (or any other) stage results in an **abandonment** of the target, or a **reversion** in order to rebuild trust and credibility.

5. PRIME

Priming the target

The predator uses their established credibility to isolate the target from friends and family who may threaten the predator's plans, and to increase psychoemotional dependence. The predator then begins to lower the targets inhibitions and desensitize and habituate them to increased sexualised intimacy, and further blur the lines of appropriateness.

4. CREDIBILITY

Meeting the need and establishing credentials

The predator secures their credibility in the eyes of the target by exploiting the information they have obtained and using it and their newly established personal connection to fulfil the identified need in their target. The predator assumes an increasingly important place in the target's life and establishes their credentials as a "true friend".

3. TRUST

Gaining personal connection

Predators use this acquired information to begin to insert themselves into their target's life and to gain their trust. They may use secrets and "us only" information and activities to build trust, create intimacy, and to begin to blur the lines between what is and is not appropriate.

2. PLAN

Gathering information

The predator watches and gets to know their target's needs and vulnerabilities. They then begin to establish a plan on how to fulfil these needs in the pursuit of their own ultimate objectives.

1. SELECT

Selecting the victim

Predators identify their target by looking for someone who is vulnerable in some way that can be exploited.

FIGURE 16.1

Sinnamon's Seven-Stage Model of Adult Sexual Grooming.

SINNAMON'S SEVEN-STAGE MODEL OF ADULT SEXUAL GROOMING

Sinnamon's model of adult sexual grooming, published here for the first time, proposes that the grooming and exploitation process can be categorized in seven stages. The first five stages involve the grooming tactics engaged by predators to prepare their targets for sexual contact. The final two stages describe the exploitation phase in which the perpetrator instigates and works to maintain the sexual predation.

Stage One: Selecting the Victim

Predators, irrespective of their end game, are exceptionally good at identifying the weak members of the herd. That is to say, predators can identify those individuals who have, for whatever reason, some kind of vulnerability that will make them more susceptible to their ministrations and manipulations. This is certainly true in nature and so it is in the human jungle. In the first stage of the grooming and sexual exploitation of adult victims, the sexual predator seeks out both a suitable environment and a suitable target. It is the environment that is usually the initial focus. Predators will be drawn to an environment in which there are likely ample targets as well as the opportunity to "hunt and catch" those that are targeted. Given that sexual predators who pursue adult victims are commonly characterized by narcissistic and antisocial personality types, environments in which they can also receive adoration, respect, and be seen as upstanding members of the community are commonly selected. For the narcissist, this environment provides an opportunity for strong reinforcement of their need for others to see them in a positive light. For the antisocial personality, this environment provides them with the challenge of deception and gives them the feelings of power and superiority they seek.

The selection of a "hunting ground" will often take the predator into the helping professions and other spaces in which they can use a position of power and trust to gain access to vulnerable targets. The clergy is one such example and has received much attention for this in recent years. Other "helping" professions such as counseling, social work, psychology, and other medical or allied health professions are also common. Teaching, coaching, and carer roles have also shown to be favored environments for sexual predators. The specific nature of a predator's predilections will then determine the more specific character of their preferred hunting ground. An environment that is generally seen as safe and nurturing presents the predator with potential targets who, by the fact that they are within this space, may have several layers of "armor" already removed. In this way, the predator is more readily able to identify, access, and exploit whatever individual vulnerabilities a specific target may have.

Predators identify their individual target by looking for those who are vulnerable in some way that the predator can exploit. Individuals who have low self-esteem, poor self-confidence, or feelings of inadequacy; who are isolated in some way (physically or emotionally); who are characteristically inclined toward codependence; or who may have been primed by previous experience such as childhood

abuse or other psychological trauma are often identified by predators as potential targets. These vulnerable individuals often turn to their pastor, a counselor, or other health professional to seek assistance for these vulnerabilities, and, if positioned within this space, the predator is able to readily identify their target and be in a position to move seamlessly into the second stage of the grooming process, which is to gather information.

In the early stages of the grooming process, the inherent trust given to individuals in the helping professions or other positions of authority and power means that it can be very difficult for a target or their social supports to perceive the behavior of a sexual predator as anything other than genuine care and concern. For this reason, many professional codes of conduct explicitly prohibit sexual relationships between patient/client and the professional as they argue that true consent to sexual interaction by the patient/client is impossible due to the inherent power imbalance between the two parties. Similarly, ethical standards of educational institutions, sporting organizations, and other groups in which there is an imbalance in the power relationship often prohibit or place very strict guidelines around sexual relationships between different groups within the setting—for example, teachers and students, coaches and athletes, managers and employees, professional athletes and staff or members of the cheerleading squad, and so on.

Stage Two: Gathering Information

Once a predator has selected a target, the next stage in the grooming process is to get to know the target personally, gather information about the target, and specifically, to gather information about their target's needs and vulnerabilities. With this information in hand, the predator then sets out a plan as to how they can exploit the identified vulnerabilities by "helping" the target to fulfill their needs, all the while in the pursuit of the predator's own nefarious objectives. If the predator has established themselves in a position of trust, they will use this position to find out as much as they can about the target and to increasingly insert themselves into the target's environment. They may already have an inroad into this space via their position, for example, as a member of the ministry team at the target's church, as a coach or other "helper" or support within the target's social, educational, or professional environment, or as a colleague, superior, or advisor in the target's place of employment. The careful selection of the "hunting ground" and a calculated process of preparing or grooming the environment generally means that the perpetrator moves within this space without generating suspicion and is therefore able to mix readily with the target, their family, and their friends and associates. This further enables the predator to gather information and observe the target without provoking qualms from the target or other would be protectors. For the narcissistic predator, this stage provides an opportunity to also feed their need for approval and admiration from others as they set out to present themselves as a caring and genuine individual who is concerned for the welfare of another. For the antisocial predator type, this stage is a game-like endeavor in which they identify their actions as analogous to a spy or an otherwise undercover "agent," and are able to revel in their own clever devious and deceptive behaviors.

Environmentally, this stage involves the predator seeking out, and ingratiating and credentialing themselves to the target's support network, and where appropriate to the plan and the circumstances, befriending them. This allows the predator to further position themselves to gather valuable information about the target, gain acceptance from the target's family and peers, and commence the process of desensitizing the target's potential protectors and supports to their increased presence.

From a victim interaction perspective, the predator cautiously begins to increase contact with the target. Feigning care and concern, offering to assist with simple tasks, and engaging in increased conversation are all a part of the process aimed to provide opportunity to gather information, identify vulnerabilities, and to commence the process of disarming the target.

Stage Three: Gaining Personal Connection

Once predators have obtained sufficient information so as to have insight into their target's vulnerabilities, and have created a plan to exploit those vulnerabilities, the next stage in the grooming process is to work on furthering the strength of their personal connection with the target. Personally, the acquired information is used to help further insert the predator into the target's life, to deepen the "friendship," and to gain their trust. They may use secrets and "us only" information and activities to build trust, create intimacy, and to begin to blur the lines between what is and is not appropriate. Secrets and "special" moments are a way for the predator to normalize the target to not disclose the activities they share and to positively reinforce the excitation and elements of fear felt by the target when their interactions begin to stretch the boundaries.

Environmentally, the predator will seek to make themselves increasingly seen as "the great guy/gal," the "true friend," or the dedicated and caring professional, in the eyes of the targets friends and family. This further disarms and distances the target's confederates, and increases the target's isolation and reliance on the perpetrator. Often, those friends and family that the target would generally be able to count on as their strongest supports and protectors are unwittingly enlisted by the perpetrator. These friends and family will encourage the target to spend more time with the perpetrator or to "open up" and trust them. In these situations, even if the target has some misgivings about the intentions of the predator, their vulnerabilities will generally result in them placing more credence in the judgments of their peers and family than in their own concerns. Predators may be so adept at this manipulation that they will be able to get the target's friends and families to take an active role in developing the relationship by facilitating the contact between the predator and target and/or giving the target some "tough love" by removing some supports in order to "force" the target to lean more readily toward accepting the ministrations of the predator. In the postexploitation environment, this component of the process adds a significant weight to the feelings of anger and betrayal that the target has, as well as to the feelings of shame, guilt, and anger experienced by those friends and family of the target who come to believe that they are a victim of exploitation and abuse. Remember that, in many cases, a considerable number of those in the target's network will not accept

that the perpetrator has engaged in any wrongdoing and will side with the predator and blame the victim for both the liaison as well as for any potential adverse fallout that the accusation of wrongdoing causes.

Stage Four: Meeting the Need and Establishing Credentials

In this stage of the grooming and exploitation process, the predator secures their credibility in the eyes of the target by exploiting the information they have obtained and using it and their newly established personal connection to fulfill the identified need in their target. In this way the predator assumes an increasingly important place in the target's life and establishes their credentials as a "true friend." This goes a long way to allaying any concerns or misgivings that the target may have had, and the target may even chastise themselves for having these feelings. Often any sense of apprehension that may have lingered in the target will be removed, and the fact that they had the feelings at all will create a sense of guilt that may result in a desire to "make it up" to the predator, producing personal devotion and feelings of indebtedness. These feelings collude with the target's vulnerabilities to produce an increasing loss of self in favor of amplified codependence and desire to "repay" the predator.

Environmentally, by fulfilling a need in the target, the perpetrator further ingratiates themselves to the target's friends and family. If the target is an overly needy individual and the predator is fulfilling this need, then friends and family may find themselves relieved that they do not have to invest as much time and energy into the target. If the target has some form of physical reduction in capacity that requires support and the predator fulfills this need, then the friends and family of the target may, once again, appreciate and come to rely on the release from obligation that the predator has provided them. This is also true if the predator has stepped in and provided financial support to the target. The predator may pay an overdue utilities bill or purchase a nice gift for/on behalf of the target. If, on the other hand, the predator has fulfilled a need through a counseling or advisory role, then the friends and family may see some psychoemotional improvement in the target that they attribute to the dedication and assistance provided by the predator. This further reinforces the predator's credentials in the eyes of the target's social network. This same result may be seen if the predator has taken on a spiritual advisor role. In cases where the predator is a member of the clergy or affiliated spiritual role, the benefits seen by others within the target's network may extend to other individuals, such as in the case that the predator is the minister at the family's church. When the predator has established themselves as a pivotal member of a small community of any kind, this is often the case.

This stage is the lynchpin for the predator's plan. If the predator is able to reach and successfully achieve this stage, the increased access and "room to maneuver" that they gain for themselves makes it highly unlikely that they will be "called out" for the escalated and increasingly sexualized behaviors that are a feature priming the target—the final preparatory stage in the grooming process. Indeed, when a predator is "called out" for their behaviors in the final stage of grooming, it is usually a result of new information or a new perspective from an "outsider" or a peer or family

member who visits or returns to the environment without having been manipulated or habituated by the predator's prior ministrations.

Stage Five: Priming the Target

The priming stage is the final stage of the grooming process before the predator moves to instigate full sexual contact with their target. In this stage, the predator uses their established credibility to increase the target's psychoemotional dependence, and to further isolate the target from any friends and family who are still seen as potential threat to the perpetrator's plans. The perpetrator's actions toward the target are aimed at lowering inhibitions, and desensitizing and habituating the target to increased sexualized intimacy. Interactions increasingly blur the lines of what is and is not appropriate, and break down the final barriers of resistance held by the target. The introduction of sexual behaviors has been introduced over time in a gradual and deliberate manner. Up to this point some nonsexual touching, dirty jokes, conversations (including "secrets" and "don't tell anyone else" disclosures) about sex, and some flirting and innuendo are likely to have been used to slowly habituate and disinhibit the victim to sexualized interactions. The predator may have engaged the target in several reciprocal conversations that make disclosures of a sexual nature to the target in order to get them to reveal information about their own sexuality and sexual experiences. These intimate conversations are then used to build the sexualized interactions over time.

During the priming stage, there is an escalation by the predator of the sexualization of the discourse, and this is accompanied by increased sexualized behavioral content. The predator may select movies to watch together that contain increased sexual content and use this situation to shape the target's arousal conditioning to situations in which the predator is present and in close proximity. The predator may use the film content as an opportunity to start to press the target for greater details about their sex lives or previous sexual experiences, or they may push the target to share their sexual fantasies. They may start to linger in the kiss or embrace hello or goodbye, increase the incidence and intimacy of touching, and begin to create opportunities for increased sexual exposure and time alone that can be increasingly sexualized. For example, they may wait for the target to arrive at their home before taking a shower and leave the door open to the bathroom or walk out in a towel or other state of semiundress, or they may suggest excursions to more isolated swimming locations and "playfully" suggest they swim without their bathing suits on. In this way the predator pushes the boundaries of their sexual behaviors with the target, all the while ensuring that any actions can be interpreted ambiguously and explained away as "misunderstanding" in the event they are called out.

If they are not called out and the priming is successful, then the predator will continue to escalate their behaviors and push the boundaries of sexualized interactions with the target. As boundaries are stretched, the predator continues to push toward greater and greater intimacy in their interactions with the target. At each successful pushing of a boundary, the skilled predator will consolidate their gains and allow the target to assimilate this new "norm" into their perceptions of the

character of the relationship. Small steps and patient consolidation of gains are the hallmark of this kind of sexual predator. Once again, this process allows the predator to shape the target's sexual conditioning by manipulating situations that provide opportunity for the target to become excited and sexually aroused while in the predator's company.

During this stage, targets and their family or peers may question some of the behaviors and wonder at the predator's motivations or intentions. However, the skilled predator will navigate this and placate any concerns with a reiteration of their genuine affection and concern for the target and a desire that they only want what is in the target's best interests. Intimations of hurt at having their actions "misinterpreted," or reminders about how they have "done so much to help" the target, can prey on the target's vulnerabilities and further erode any remaining resistance. The predator, when faced with this scenario, may also resort to veiled threats to further erode resistance. If the target has become codependent in some physical, emotional, or financial manner, then they may be further controlled and coerced through a veiled threat of removal of the predator's friendship, assistance, or resources. When this occurs, the victim may decide that the predator's behaviors, though somewhat disquieting, are worth putting up with due to the higher price of losing whatever benefits, real or perceived, they receive through the relationship. Coercion or fear-based submission may be blatant or it may be subtle, but either way it is an effective tool used by predators when priming their targets for exploitation and abuse. In this way, targets can be readily guided and conditioned to accept behaviors from the predator and to engage in behaviors themselves that they would have previously considered inappropriate or outright unacceptable. It is a short step from this point for the predator to instigate a full-blown sexual liaison.

Environmentally, the predator continues to reinforce their position as the caring friend or dedicated professional, and shore up their position within the target's social and/or support network. Having gained acceptance from the target's environment, during the priming stage, the predator's aim is to shore up this acceptance and to reciprocally provide assurance to any would-be foils that there are no disreputable motives behind their actions, or indeed any nefarious behaviors occurring between the predator and the target. The ultimate aim during this stage is to generate an environmental position that is disbelieving of any suggestion of maleficence or intent to maleficence, and thereby secure ongoing access to the target. This serves to establish the target's social network as confederates of the predator, and as the relationship continues to be reinforced and encouraged by the target's family and peers, the target loses any opportunity to escape.

Stage Six: Creating the Victim: Instigating Sexual Contact
In stage six, the predator moves to initiate more intense sexual engagement. Once the predator feels the target is adequately primed, and that the level of trust and emotional dependence is sufficient, increasingly overt sexualized interactions are introduced. As the interactions become overtly sexualized, the target becomes the victim. The crossover from priming to initiating full-blown sexual exploitation is usually a

carefully orchestrated seduction by the predator, however, to the target this will often look and feel like a spontaneous event that escalates from an otherwise "innocuous" interaction into an explicitly sexual encounter. The skilled predator will use an already established routine or previously undertaken activity as the foundation for the first sexual encounter. Typical scenarios may include a picnic to an isolated location at which they previously swam together naked, or a movie night together that has previously included mutual massages and movies with some element of erotic content. Events such as these can be sexually intensified through increased visually and kinesthetically stimulating elements. While swimming, the predator can orchestrate greater opportunity for the target to see them naked, to get closer while swimming to include greater touch, and to escalate the level of excitement and arousal through "playfully" daring the target to engage in some form of "juvenile" sexual behavior such as flashing genitalia or posing nude out of the water. Similarly, at an event such as a home movie night the predator may manipulate increased intimacy in the seating, and increased touch during any sexual content in the film. Initially, sexual content in films being watched is not likely to contain hardcore pornography but rather is likely to be more romantic or "arthouse" in nature. At the juncture of priming and instigating the sexual exploitation, the predator may, after watching a film together with some element of sexual content, suggest that they watch something a little more "adventurous." Introducing more hardcore pornographic content is then used as a means of further escalating arousal and providing a scenario in which moving into a sexual encounter will appear as a smoother, natural, and spontaneous transition that is undertaken with mutual consent.

Given the diversity that can characterize human interaction, any number of scenarios may be used by the predator to initiate the sexual relationship, the common point being that, generally speaking, the predator will use an established routine or previous experience as the platform, and will orchestrate the interaction so as to make it appear spontaneous and mutually consensual.

Environmentally there may be different scenarios in which the exploitative relationship is undertaken. The predator may, in certain circumstances, establish themselves as a legitimate partner of the target (now victim). They do not need to hide the relationship but rather work to place themselves into a position where the family and friends of the victim see them as an ideal choice of romantic partner. Alternatively, the predator may be in a position where, for whatever reason, they must keep the liaison secret. This may be true if the predator or the victim is already married, if the two have a professional relationship, or the predator is in another role such as the victim's clergy, teacher, or coach.

Stage Seven: Controlling the Victim

Stage seven involves the predator working to control the victim and the victim's environment in order to maintain the exploitative relationship. Secrecy, guilt, blame, threat (of harm to the victim, the victim's family and friends, or to the perpetrator), bribery, and promises of reward may all be used as tactics to control the victim. Generally speaking, the victim is controlled through negatively valenced

emotional motivations, even when promises of reward and bribery through benefits such as financial gain or material objects are involved. Using the victim's identified vulnerabilities, the predator will control the victim through fear and guilt, and/or by the predator generating a sense of helplessness, isolation, and despair in the victim. These emotional outcomes from the escalation of the relationship from a "friendship" to a sexual liaison are usually far different from what was inherently "promised" in the initial grooming experiences. This betrayal is often cited by victims as a significant basis of the psychological trauma caused by the abusive experience, and is commonly among the most enduring and difficult to treat psychological sequelae.

Guilt and fear are powerful behavior controls, whether internally generated by the victim's own vulnerabilities and realizations of the true nature of the relationship or whether externally cultivated by the predator as a means of control. Victims come to realize that they are being exploited and are often overcome by the feelings of shame, humiliation, and embarrassment that come with the realization of having been manipulated and used. Moreover, predators will often escalate the sexual activities to include increasingly deviant or humiliating (to the victim) encounters. This is a common element of the power and control personal motivations of the narcissistic and antisocial personality types who engage in this form of predatory behavior. The realization of having been exploited sexually in this way can generate strong emotions of guilt and shame, particularly in those who are already emotionally vulnerable. The predator understands this and uses it to control the victim by reinforcing the belief that the victim really wanted the sexual experiences and that if others "really knew what they were like" that they would judge them and reject them as being perverted or otherwise deviant in some way. The predator may use this to further isolate the victim and create greater dependence by suggesting that only the predator really understands the victim and that only the predator doesn't judge the victim and accepts them despite their depravities. In this way the predator encourages and increases the fear and guilt in the victim in order to maintain the relationship and keep control.

This serves to increase the isolation of the victim, increase the victim's reliance on the predator, and to exacerbate the victim's sense of self-loathing, all of which further limits the victim's access to help. Reducing the victim's escape options results in helplessness, hopelessness, and ultimately despair. Perpetrators will reinforce this point to the victim, and the victim comes to believe that there are no options for them other than to remain in the relationship, or that any alternative will result in a far worse scenario for the victim and/or their loved ones.

Environmentally, the predator will seek to control the perceptions of the victim's social network and to limit contact with situations and individuals who may be harder to control and therefore pose a risk to the predator. By controlling the access to the environment and by maintaining the positive perceptions (about the predator) of those within the victim's social environment, the predator works to ensure continued access to the victim and to fulfill secondary motivations. For example, the narcissistic predator does this to also obtain ongoing adoration and approval from others, while the antisocial predator receives rewards from the ongoing successful deception

of others. While the sexual exploitation of the victim is the ultimate source power and reward for the sexual predator, the characteristics of their personality type also gain substantial reward from these secondary sources of power and reward. These secondary sources of reward should not be taken lightly and can be very helpful in differentiating individuals who enter a person's life and are motivated by genuine care and concern, as opposed to those with more nefarious intentions. Indeed, early detection of sexual grooming for malicious intent rarely appears any different from genuine care and concern, therefore other potential indicators are an important element to early detection of potential maleficence.

FRACTURED PLANS: WHEN THE GROOMING PROCESS FALTERS

As adults generally have a greater potential to identify and halt the predator from progressing through the grooming process, a sexual predator who engages with adult victims will likely have their plans fractured regularly. A fracture may occur at any stage but is most likely to take place during the priming or instigation stage of the process when the sexualization of the interactions is intensified and the relationship change is greatest. Of these, the priming stage is probably the highest risk as, if the predator successfully primes their victim, then the transition to a full-blown sexual liaison is often seamless. Indeed, victims will commonly reflect that they could not determine exactly when the sexual component of the relationship commenced but they could pinpoint when the sexual behaviors escalated, for example, the first time the predator walked out naked or brushed up against the victim with an erection.

A fracture may occur in number of ways. The victim may self-identify inappropriate behaviors by the predator, or a friend or family member may identify "strange" or "unusual" behavior. The "fracture" occurs as a result of the damage to the trust the victim and/or others in the victim's environment have in the predator. As a result, the predator losses credibility. When this happens the predator cannot progress and has two options: abandon the target and start again with someone new; or revert back to earlier stages of the plan in order to rebuild trust and credibility with the target and/or their family and friends. Depending on the secondary personality factors of the predator, and the circumstances of the fracture, they may appear contrite and apologetic, or they may present as indignant and hurt that their actions have been "misinterpreted" or "misrepresented." Either reaction by the predator provides them with a platform to either cut and run or try to rebuild the relationship. If a predator has spent considerable time establishing themselves in a position of trust that provides ready access to victims, they may be reluctant to risk discovery for a single victim. The predator may decide it is better to claim there has been a "misunderstanding" and then remove themselves from the situation to avoid further scrutiny. Alternatively, the predator may choose to loop back to the earlier stages of the grooming process and attempt to reestablish the trust and credibility they lost as a result of the fracture. While this option may be challenging, if the predator has invested significant time and other resources in grooming the target, then they may feel that they are too committed to the plan to abandon it.

CONCLUSIONS

The grooming of adults for exploitation by sexual predators is more common than is generally considered. The process is similar to that followed by sexual predators who groom children, however, due to the different personal and environmental circumstances of adults compared to children, there are also some basic differences. Grooming involves the premeditated, ordered, and stepped manipulation of the intended victim, their family, and the intended victim's wider social network in order to pave the way for the sexual exploitation of the intended victim. The grooming process occurs in a seamless progression in which the predator's trustworthiness and credibility is established with the intended victim and their environment. Once the predator is seen as a "true friend" and a trustworthy, credible, and valued member of the victim's social network, the predator incrementally sets out to normalize intimacy with the victim and sexually disinhibit the victim so that the increasingly sexual contact does not threaten the victim but rather primes them for a full-blown sexual liaison. Finally, the predator instigates an exploitative sexual relationship with the victim and works to control the victim and maintain the ongoing sexual contact. At any time, the process may fracture and the predator may lose the trust and credibility they have built up. In this event, the predator will either choose to abandon their plans and move on to select a new target or they may choose to revert to an earlier stage of the grooming process and attempt to rebuild the trust and credibility they have lost.

SUMMARY

- Sexual grooming is the process of deliberately establishing a connection with an individual in order to prepare that person for sexual exploitation and/or abuse. Sexual predators are often very considered in their approach to their selection of, and the tactics they employ to engage with, both the abuse environment and their intended victim.
- Adult sexual grooming is analogous to child sexual grooming and can be defined as any situation in which an adult is primed to permit themselves to be abused and/or exploited for sexual gratification of another. The grooming process used by sexual predators on children and adults is essentially the same, focusing on emotional and psychological manipulation tactics.
- Generally speaking, adults have a greater potential than children to make use of their own experiences, the experiences of others, personal cognizance, and to reach out to any number of familial, social, and professional supports for advice and assistance. Therefore, in preparing adults for sexual exploitation, grooming the victim and the victim's environment are both essential components of the preparatory sexual predator's tactics, and the perpetrator's behaviors manifest within the grooming process include the deliberate manipulation of both areas.

- Predatory sex offenders are characteristically motivated by a desire to maintain or restore their self-esteem through the manipulation and control of others, and by the prospect of excitement and the opportunity to deviously exhibit their dominance and superiority (Petherick & Sinnamon, 2013). These primary traits are endemic in the narcissistic and the antisocial personality types. The narcissistic sexual offender uses sexual predation and gratification as an external source of restoration and/or maintenance of their amplified self-esteem needs. This fits with the assertive-oriented typology of perpetrators and victims proposed by Petherick and Sinnamon (2013).
- The antisocial sexual predator lacks any empathy for their victims and is focused entirely on successfully obtaining their own objectives. According to Petherick and Sinnamon (2013), this is consistent with the excitation-oriented perpetrator typology in which the pleasure and pain of others is secondary to their own desires and sexual gratification.
- All factors associated with the grooming, exploitation, and abuse undertaken by the sexual predator are motivated by a desire to exert power over another. The extent to which the predator is able to wield power over the victim and their environment is dependent on several personal characteristics of the predator: notoriety, charisma, social status, personal standing, and the predator's willingness and ability to translate the potential power that they have from these factors into action. Ultimately using personal power to exploit the vulnerable comes down to the ability to exert control. For the predator, power will be used either through covert manipulation via personality and circumstantial factors that influence the relational dynamics or through overt coercion using fear and intimidation.
- Once a victim is targeted, the predator sets out to make themselves, and the opportunity for any relationship between the predator and intended victim, both attractive and desirable. As power and control are as strong a motivator as sexual gratification, the predator will identify and target vulnerable individuals in the hope of using their vulnerabilities to manipulate and control the target, and maneuver the relationship toward an ultimately sexually exploitative liaison. This fills the power, control, and sexual gratification needs of the predator.
- An adult who is targeted by a sexual predator may have psychoemotional, physical, or financial needs or wants that make them vulnerable to exploitation.
- Psychoemotional vulnerabilities stem from the mental and emotional characteristics of the victim, and can be broken down further into factors relating to desire, avoidance, and self-value.
- The notion of physical vulnerabilities may apply to any number of factors that relate to perceived or real vulnerabilities associated with a victim's physicality. Age, size, disability, and cultural factors all come under this heading.

- Financial factors can create substantial vulnerabilities that are able to be exploited by a sexual predator. Having financial challenges can create immense pressure on individuals. The predator is able to exploit this vulnerability by fulfilling a financial need such as paying an overdue account or other financial obligation. Once conditioned to having greater financial security, the fear of losing it and returning to "the bad old days" becomes a strong mechanism for control and compliance.
- Preparing the space around the victim so that it will support, endorse, or at least not actively hinder the predator's plans is essential to the adult sexual grooming process. Adults tend to have a greater capacity for self-propelled interaction with a wider social context, coupled with a greater capacity for experience analysis and reflective cognition. These factors, at least in theory, provide an adult with a greater capacity to identify the manipulations of a predator, to have others around them identify the predator's actions as irregular, and to seek assistance. The greater the intended victim's social affiliation and the wider their social network, the less vulnerable they are to the ministrations and manipulations of the sexual predator. Conversely, the greater the social isolation and the smaller or more restricted the diversity of the intended victim's social network, the greater their vulnerability to sexual predation.
- The predator has three primary goals when grooming the intended victim's environment: insert, credential, and deflect.
- There are a number of proposed models of the grooming process. While the models differ in the number of stages and the descriptions that they use for various components of the process, all models agree that the grooming process involves a gradual, stepped, calculated progression that entraps adults in a relationship that allows the perpetrator to engage them in an inappropriate, exploitative, and abusive sexual relationship.
- Sinnamon's model of adult sexual grooming, published here for the first time, proposes that the grooming and exploitation process can be categorized into seven stages. The first five stages involve the grooming tactics engaged by predators to prepare their targets for sexual contact. The final two stages describe the exploitation phase in which the perpetrator instigates and works to maintain the sexual predation.
- The seven stages of the grooming process are: (1) selecting the victim; (2) gathering information; (3) gaining personal connection; (4) meeting the need and establishing credentials; (5) priming the target; (6) creating the victim: instigating the sexual contact; and (7) controlling the victim.
- As adults generally have a greater potential to identify and halt the predator from progressing through the grooming process, a sexual predator who engages with adult victims will likely have their plans fractured regularly. A fracture may occur at any stage but is most likely to take place during the priming or instigation stage of the process when the sexualization of the interactions is intensified and the relationship change is greatest. A fracture may occur in a number of ways. The victim may self-identify inappropriate behaviors by the

predator, or a friend or family member may identify "strange" or "unusual" behavior. The "fracture" occurs as a result of the damage to the trust the victim and/or others in the victim's environment, as in the predator. As a result, the predator losses credibility. When this happens, the predator cannot progress and has two options: abandon the target and start again with someone new; or revert back to earlier stages of the plan in order to rebuild trust and credibility with the target and/or their family and friends.

QUESTIONS

1. Define grooming, sexual grooming, adult sexual grooming; provide examples.
2. Describe the seven stages of Sinnamon's Seven-Stage Model of Adult Sexual Grooming.
3. What are the primary characteristics of the narcissistic sexual predator?
4. What are the primary characteristics of the antisocial sexual predator?
5. Describe the personal power characteristics of the sexual predator.
6. Describe the socioemotional vulnerabilities that attract a predator to a potential victim.
7. Describe the physical vulnerabilities that attract a sexual predator to a potential victim.
8. Describe the three stages of preparing the space that a sexual predator undertakes in the process of adult sexual grooming and exploitation.

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