Exploring Sex Offender Grooming

by

Jim Tanner, Ph.D.
KBSolutions Inc.
www.kbsolutions.com

Stephen Brake, Ph.D.
Stephen Brake Associates
www.stephenbrakeassociates.com

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Introduction

Grooming is a term used by a wide range of professionals working with sex offenders. Despite its common usage, there is little definitive material written about this behavior. This paper attempts to fill a void and create a baseline understanding of sex offender grooming. For the purposes of this paper we define grooming as

> "patterned behavior designed to increase opportunities for sexual assault, minimize victim resistance or withdrawal, and reduce disclosure or belief".

In this definition, "patterned" means the behavior is commonly seen across multiple offenders. Patterns are detected by removing individual offenders and the specifics of their assaults from the analysis, then examining commonalities among behavior in the cases. What emerges from this process is a schematic of approaches utilized by sex offenders to manipulate others.

Grooming is a complex set of behaviors which can target both the victim and other individuals in the victim's life (the victim's environment). In this paper, we will use the term "victim grooming" when discussing behavior directed toward the victim of the assault. Heretofore the term "grooming" has generally meant victim grooming. There is, however, another form of grooming which is equally important in many sexual assaults. This is the grooming directed towards individuals other than the actual victim. In many sexual assaults, the victim's environment must be groomed prior to, during, and after the assault to ensure continued access to the victim and minimize discovery or disclosure of the assault. The term "environmental grooming" will refer to the behavior focused on manipulating the perceptions of individuals in the victim's life.

All sexual assault involves grooming in some form, although the actual elements of grooming vary across the age of the victims and the length of the grooming period. Power rape, for example, has a very brief and violent period of grooming which is designed to quickly obtain victim compliance through fear and force with very little concern for environmental elements. On the other hand, some forms of assault on child victims involve lengthy periods of victim grooming combined with particular attention to environmental elements.

Our goal in this paper is to establish an understanding of the process and elements of victim and environmental grooming for both adult and child victims. Sexual assault takes many forms. We cannot, in a single paper, fully explicate the nuances of grooming for every type of assault. Our intention in this paper is to provide a solid understanding of the major grooming approaches that will allow the reader to identify the manifestations in a particular case.

Grooming The Environment

Grooming is commonly thought of as targeting only the victim of sexual assault. However, sex offenders often groom other individuals in the victim's environment as much as the victims themselves. The purpose of environmental grooming is to find victims, reduce the probability of being reported, and if reported, reduce the probability of the victim being believed.

Finding victims involves establishing oneself in the victim's environment such that both the victim and the others in the victim's life see the association between the offender and the victim as positive and valued. In fact, successful environmental grooming results in the environment actually pushing the victim into association with the perpetrator. For example, establishing oneself as a skilled soccer coach in a community league will result in parents actively seeking to place their children under the offender's tutelage. Increased attention of the offender towards the victim will be viewed positively rather than with suspicion.

Establishing a valued position in the victim's environment also reduces the probability of offenses being reported. This will be explained in detail below, but essentially the value derived by the environment through the victim's association with the offender makes it difficult for the victim to report assaults. The fear of losing the benefits of the association is reinforced by the victim's environment and works to keep the victim in the abusive relationship.

Environmental grooming also makes it difficult for the victim to report out of fear of not being believed. Victims understand that reporting behavior antithetical to the collective perception of others is less likely to be heard or accepted and can result in negative consequences for the victim.

Grooming Victims

Potential victims are groomed prior to an assault. While the frequency, intensity and duration of grooming varies across assault types, the purpose of victim grooming is always threefold:
      A) overcome resistance
      B) maintain access
      C) minimize disclosure

Overcoming victim resistance.

People resist being sexually assaulted. Coercion is one way to overcome this resistance (e.g. power rape). In this case the grooming is brief, violent, and intense. A more common way of overcoming resistance is through a more gradual grooming process. Using careful and planned progression, offenders can often get victims to succumb to sexual advances. Normalizing the assault, for example, is one way of grooming a victim. By convincing a potential victim that "everyone does this" or that "others enjoy it," victims can often be persuaded to engage in behaviors that they would otherwise reject.

Stepwise progression to assault is another way of grooming a victim. Starting with appropriate behavior and systematically moving to inappropriate behavior desensitizes victims to assault. Victims can find themselves slowly slipping into unwanted behaviors.

Some victims are persuaded to engage in unwanted or uncomfortable behaviors because of their desire to maintain the relationship with the offender. This form of grooming underlies the primary goals of grooming discussed in the next sections.

Maintain access to victim.

A second purpose of victim grooming is to maintain access to the victim. It is time consuming to groom a victim and the offender wants to keep the victim available. Systematic steps are taken to keep the victim engaged with the offender and to keep the victim submitting to the assaults. These steps are covered in the next sections.

Minimize victim disclosure.

The third purpose of victim grooming is to reduce the probability that the victim will disclose or report the assaults. Through a blend of guilt and fear, offenders keep the victim silent. In many ways, it is this aspect of grooming that produces the most salient and destructive effects of being a sexual assault victim. More on this later.

Grooming the Child's Environment.

A child's environment consists of those individuals who interact routinely with the child as well as those with responsibilities toward that child. Typically a child's environment includes:

- Parent(s) - biological, step, foster, guardians, in loco parentis, etc.
- Family members - siblings, extended family (e.g., uncles/aunts, grandparents, cousins)
- School - classroom and specialized teachers, administration & support, PTO, etc.
- Peers and friends
- Social organizations
    - Church (e.g., clergy, congregation, lay staff)
    - Sports (e.g., coaches, team members, team members' parents, referees.)
    - Interest groups - participants and instructors (e.g., dance, art, music)
    - Membership groups - participants and sponsors (e.g., scouts, 4H, clubs)
- Significant others (e.g., neighbors, friend's parents, service providers, therapists, or others involved in victim's life)

While few sex offenders have access to the entirety of a child's environment, the more of the environment that can be groomed, the greater the success of the offender in obtaining and maintaining the victim.

Goals of Grooming A Child's Environment

There are three primary goals in grooming a child's environment: A) access, gaining and maintaining access to potential victims, B) allure, making the environment interested in or at least accepting of the offender's relationship with the child, and C) alibi, promoting a believable rationale for the offender's contact with the child.

Function	Purpose
Access	To provide entrée or continued access to a pool of potential victims.
Allure	To draw potential victims into a relationship with the perpetrator.
Alibi	To reduce the probability of being reported and lower the probability of a reporting victim being believed.

A) Access

To groom the victim, offenders must gain unsupervised time with the child. Parents have unfettered and unquestioned contact with their children. Other individuals, even related adults, have to position themselves in the lives of a child such that spending significant amounts of unsupervised time with the child is not suspect. An offender might, for example, become a coach, tutor, child care worker, or scout leader as a way of gaining access to potential victims. Grooming the environment allows the offender to gain access to children without raising suspicions. Environmental grooming is distinguished from victim grooming because it provides access to a potential victim pool of numerous children before the grooming of the individual victim(s) begins. Additionally, grooming the environment provides continued access to the victim pool "under the radar" of others in the children's lives.

B) Allure

Gaining access to children is not always sufficient to lure victims into relationships. Sex offenders manipulate the environment to generate an interest or desire on the part of the environment to have the

child spend time with the offender. For example, a coach might develop a reputation for producing winning teams, a tutor may promote student achievement, a scout leader might provide more badge achieving experiences than typical.

More than simply allowing contact, one of the goals of environmental grooming is to establish the offender as an individual who is attractive to both children and others in the child's environment. Thus, the child's environment often serves as a force moving the potential victim toward interaction with the offender. The environment actually pushes the child into the relationship, thus reducing the offender's efforts to find potential victims. Secondly, if the offender has made themselves valued enough in the eyes of the environment, the adults in the child's life will not want the child to sever the relationship. This does not go unnoticed by the child victim and reduces the probability the child will report.

C) Alibi

A central purpose of environmental grooming is to reduce the probability of being reported and lower the probability of a reporting victim being believed. By establishing a reasonable explanation for their contact with the child victim, offenders reduce the probability the child will report. Establishing the alibi takes several forms, including:

> First, and foremost, establishing a believable reason to interact with children under less supervised situations. Skill acquisition requires practice, so frequent less supervised contact during lessons or team practices are expected and unquestioned.

> Second, establishing rationale for isolated individual attention. A coach might tell parents "your child is capable of moving to the next level, but requires individual lessons to get there." Parents are willing to allow less supervised, individual attention in exchange for the hope of achievement.

> Third, promoting a believable reason for behavior that might otherwise be questioned. Coaches, for example, might justify joining teams in the shower to "reduce horseplay" or explain physical contact with genitalia during "hygiene checks." They might justify spending more "alone time" with the adult (hanging out at the adult's house) as part of team building or individualized tutoring.

Children are not stupid, and will easily pick up on and understand the regard their environment holds for the offender if (s)he has properly groomed the environment. This provides impetus for keeping the child from reporting uncomfortable behaviors on the part of the offender. Moreover, by building a reasonable explanation of their behavior with the child, the offender increases the chance the environment will believe that rationale rather than believe the offender is engaging in illicit behavior if the child does report. In some cases alibi is generated by fear. The environment is willing to excuse or ignore behavior if it fears reprisals for raising the issue (their child being thrown off a team or out of a group, for example).

The table below summarizes the four primary factors which assist the offender in grooming the environment of children.

Factor	Element	Example
Position	Social – status derived from occupation or role	Clergy, Police, Teacher, Coach, Parent
	Personal – status derived from deeds or ability to reward	Philanthropist, Coach, Advocate, Parent
Charm	Personality – affect, looks, verbal skills, listening ability, etc.	"Con-man," "huckster," classic groomer, "great guy"
Power	Political – power derived from position or role	Authority, Respect, Deference. Cop, Politician, CEO
	Fiscal – power derived from wealth or control of resources	Steward, Parent, CEO, Philanthropist
	Absolute – Physical or tyrannical power	Thug/Pimp, Dictator, abusive parents or husband
Celebrity	Fame – allure derived from notoriety	Media, cultural or athletic "Star," Philanthropist

Position is the first factor in environmental grooming. Position can be social or personal.

> **Social position** is derived from the <u>occupation or role</u> one plays in the environment. These positions are held in higher regard and provide a form of immunity from suspicion. While the public is aware that some in respected social positions can engage in child abuse, individuals occupying certain positions are given the 'benefit of doubt' in most cases. Examples of social position would include being a parent, a police officer, member of the clergy, and a teacher or coach. Despite recent episodes of abuse of trust, these positions are generally held in high regard in the social environment. Commonly, children are told if they are lost or in trouble to find a police officer for help. Clergy are often sought out to provide counseling, guidance, and solace. We are pleased when a coach or teacher gives our child extra attention. In brief, certain roles in our society engender contact with children, and sex offenders can use this as a "smoke screen" to move toward the goals of access, allure, and alibi. Individuals with an interest in abusing children often seek these types of social positions. It should not surprise us that an individual who seeks to have sex with children makes career choices that place them in close contact with children.

> **Personal position** is <u>status derived from deeds</u> or the ability to reward. Parents, teachers, and coaches could fall into personal position as well as social position. An individual who demonstrates special interest and concern for children gains trust within the environment. Individuals who have created or support services for children are esteemed in the community and are less likely to be suspected. The individual who starts camps, schools, and services that serve underprivileged children or champions

others rights gain uncommon access and allure for potential victims and their environment. Philanthropy and the fact that an individual has "dedicated their life to helping children" provides alibi and lessens the probability they would be suspected of inappropriate behavior. Despite recent cases of gross violation of trust, the politics and economics of personal position remain a significant contributor to environmental grooming.

Charm is the second factor in environmental grooming. This is simply "personality." Environmental grooming often involves an individual who has a warm affect, good verbal skills, and good listening skills. They use these skills to engender themselves to the environment. In short, people like them. This provides access and allure because people want to be around them. It provides alibi because nobody can bring themselves to believe "such a nice guy" could do such a thing.

Power is the third factor in environmental grooming. If available, power is actively used by offenders to suppress examination of their behavior. Power comes in three primary forms: political, fiscal, and absolute.

Political power is derived from the offender's position or role. It is related to, but different from, the status gained from social position discussed above. Social position gains its influence from the belief in the "goodness" of those in the position. Political power gains its influence through authority, deference or respect for the position. Anyone who can wield power over the child or the guardians of the child has the ability to mask inappropriate behavior or minimize the willingness of the environment to raise an issue. Children and families are hesitant to confront those in authority ("take on city hall"). Examples of political power include politicians, CEOs, law enforcement, and those who control the media. Political power enhances access and allure directly. It indirectly provides alibi through fear of retribution.

Fiscal power is derived from the ability to control money. Anyone who can control funds, especially funds needed or desired by the child's environment has the ability to sway opinion or at least stifle concern about behaviors with a child. Stewards of funds, philanthropists, CEOs, "bosses," and parents are examples of those who can have fiscal power in a child's environment. The environment has to decide if the fiscal impact is worth the risk of raising questions or concerns over behavior with a child. Fiscal power gives access and allure and indirectly affects alibi though fear. For example, a doctor who donates large sums of money to a hospital is less likely to be confronted by the institution about questionable behavior with patients.

Absolute power is the ability to control another through fear, through physical or tyrannical might. All adults have absolute power over small children. We are bigger and stronger. Dictators have tyrannical power over their subjects. Individuals willing to use violence can suppress the environment from questioning their behavior. Superiors in any situation have the ability to stifle questioning or reporting of illicit behavior. If raising a question about behavior would place one in danger, the likelihood of raising an issue drops precipitously whether one is the victim or part of the victim's environment. Absolute power provides access and can be very alluring to some. It provides alibi indirectly through fear of reprisal, people will 'overlook' behaviors rather than feel threatened.

Celebrity is the fourth factor. It provides allure through notoriety. People like to be around celebrities and like the secondary status derived from this access. Individuals who are stars in music, film, athletics, or are cultural icons have tremendous draw power. Victims and their environment will ignore or minimize transgressions to keep access to these individuals and their associated status derived from that access.

A Word of Caution About Labeling People

Some of the factors described as elements of environmental grooming are exactly what we want from individuals who genuinely seek to help children. We want individuals who are personable, have and wield power and resources, have the ability and desire to dedicate their lives to children and who demonstrate these factors through ongoing behavior. We do not want to cast suspicion on innocent, well meaning, caring individuals. We also do not want to pursue someone who is benign, but has low or awkward social skills.

How do we differentiate between a person who genuinely cares about children, or a person who is simply a "weird old man" but not dangerous, from those whose intent is to groom the environment and abuse children? There are three factors which help us differentiate the offender from the non-offender with regard to environmental grooming: boundary violation, secrecy, and isolation.

The primary indicator that seemingly pro-social behavior is actually environmental grooming is the existence of **boundary violations**. Simply put, **people who genuinely care about children do not violate children's boundaries**. Unfortunately, while boundary violation is a clear indicator the seemingly pro-social actions of the adult were grooming, it is identifiable only <u>after</u> a boundary violation (and likely after an assault). Identifying boundary violations does little to prevent abuse, but does allow us to hold abusers accountable by offsetting the effects of environmental grooming. If boundary violations have occurred, we should carefully examine previous behavior as environmental grooming.

A boundary is a 'line' that when crossed causes discomfort or anxiety to the person whose boundary has been violated. Boundary violations also generally cause a reaction within the environment. In simple terms, any behavior you would not want an individual to engage in with your child is probably a boundary.

There are four clear boundaries we need to keep in mind when we consider the grooming of a child's environment. The appearance of any of these four boundary violations with a child indicate the previous, seemingly innocent behavior of the adult should be carefully reconsidered as environmental grooming and not pro-social behavior.

- Exposure of genitals with children - whether it is the victim's, perpetrator's or other's.
- Touching of genitals with children - whether it is the victim's, perpetrator's or other's.
- Exposure to sexual content (showing or giving a child sexually explicit material).
- Age inappropriate sexual content in conversation.

Somewhat less clear are social boundary violations which are disturbing but not necessarily an indication of potential sexual abuse. This would be, for example, the "weird old man" who gets too close to children (or adults) when talking or has low social skills with adults and children. Absent any of the four sexual boundaries listed above, caution should be exercised when leaping to the conclusion that he might be grooming the environment.

A second indicator that an individual's behavior needs to be examined or re-examined in light of grooming is the **level of secrecy**. Environmental secrecy is different from the secrecy commonly attributed to sex offenders (secrets between the offender and the victim). As used here, environmental secrecy means the level of knowledge <u>the environment</u> has regarding the behavior of the adult. For example, imagine a clergy is meeting alone with a specific youth on a regular basis. Environmental secrecy reflects the pool of individuals that know the meetings are occurring. Do the parents know? Do others in the child's life know? Does the church staff know? Does the congregation know? Who knows the purpose of the meetings? Who should know the purpose of the meetings? While there are obvious reasons for some secrecy surrounding the existence or content of the meetings (e.g. potential privacy issues), <u>someone</u> in the environment should at least know the meetings are

taking place, the frequency of the meetings, and possibly the general reason for the meetings. Moreover, specific efforts by the adult to hide the meetings from the environment should be considered an indicator of environmental grooming. Keeping secrets with the victim (discussed later) is a necessary, but not sufficient, cause of environmental secrecy.

A third indicator of environmental grooming is the level of **isolation** of the child from the environment when engaging the child. There are two aspects of isolation: isolation from the public view and single individual isolation.

Isolation from public view is related to, but not the same as, environmental secrecy. Environmental secrecy is keeping others in the environment from knowing of the activity. Environmental isolation is action taken to remove the activity from 'public view' independent from who knows of the activity. For example, a coach working on an individual basis with an athlete can conduct the training sessions at a gym, ball park, sports field, etc. (where others are present), or at the coach's house. The coach's house is obviously more isolated and should be more closely examined.

Single individual isolation refers to the number of individuals selected for special attention. Does a coach, for example, work with only one athlete individually, or does the coach work with more than one? Does a tutor have several clients or only one? Is a clergy seeing only one child or several? Does the scout leader take only one child on a camping trip versus the troop? Obviously the number of children 'in need' has some effect on how many children an adult might be engaging individually, but the pattern of isolation should be part of the equation when considering the existence of environmental grooming.

Boundary violations, secrecy and isolation obviously also play a part in the grooming of child victims. This is discussed in the next section on victim grooming. It is environmental grooming that establishes the circumstances which allow victim grooming. Our focus here is to help the reader identify indicators which should cause a reassessment of seemingly pro-social behavior in the environment (directed at adults, not the children) as potential environmental grooming while guarding against inappropriately labeling innocent behavior as suspect. These indicators are behavior toward children but are discussed here as signals which should trigger a re-examination of our perceptions of the adult's motives.

Grooming Child Victims

<u>Goals of Grooming Child Victims</u>

The goals of grooming <u>victims</u> are similar to the goals of grooming the victim's environment; A) gain access, B) generate allure, and C) create an alibi. In brief, the offender wants to be in a position to engage the child without generating suspicion. The relationship needs to be attractive to the child, thus luring the child into increased interaction with the offender. Lastly, the offender tries to make the offensive behavior appear to be benign to the child and if it can't be defined as benign, to use other means to trap the victim into continuing the relationship.

<u>Actions of Grooming Child Victims</u>

Targeting Child Victims

Children tend to fall into two basic target categories when offenders choose victims:

> A) Proximity. Victims are children the offender has access to on a regular basis as a result of relationship (e.g. parent-child, teacher-student, coach-athlete). The offender may pick the child as a target simply as a matter of convenience. Offenses from positions of trust are frequently victims of proximity.

> B) Vulnerability. The perceived vulnerability of the child is used to select a victim from a pool of potential victims. If, for example, a teacher has access to a classroom of children (proximity), the victim will most likely be chosen from this pool based on vulnerability. There are numerous forms of vulnerability, but the quintessential element is lack of meaningful relationships with adults in the child's life. Offenders can spot vulnerability like a feral dog spots fear. They have a 'sixth sense' of a child's separation or isolation from meaningful relationships with other adults. Offenders have told me they select victims based on watching the child interact with their parents. The offender seeks children who are ignored or emotionally unsupported by parents. This allows the offender to initiate the four steps of the child grooming process.

<u>Child Victim Grooming Process</u>

In general, grooming children is a four step process. The intensity and duration of each step varies across offenders and children, but these steps are found in almost every child abuse case. The four steps are remembered by the acronym BRAT and are:

> **B**ond - form a special bond with the victim.
> **R**eliance - cause the victim to rely on the offender.
> **A**ttenuate - reduce the child's resistance to offensive behavior.
> **T**rap - keep the child in the victimizing role for as long as one can.

Target	Action

Bond: Form a special Bond	Treat like an adult
	Keep secrets
	Lures
	      Adolescent Males – 4Ds
	            Driving, Drinking, Dirty Pictures, Desires
	      Females & Younger Males – LISTS
	          Love, Interest, Support, Things, Status

Reliance: "push – "pull"	Become center of child's emotional support Isolate child from other adults
Attenuate resistances	Progression – slow, step by step introduction Explanation – justify, rationalize, and normalize
Trap – prevent disclosure or escape	Groom – special friend, slips and rewards Threaten – harm, belief, others will know, protect others. Guilt / Fear

Bond

The offender seeks to form a special bond with the child victim. The goal of the bonding process is to become the child's primary or sole source of emotional support. The offender wants to become the child's "best friend". There a number of approaches offenders take to accomplish this task.

1. Make the child feel special.   Offenders seek to make the child feel like they are the center of the offender's universe. They will give the child gifts, take them places, listen to the child and "be there" for the child. In short, they will do whatever it takes to make the child rely on the offender as a key source of support. This increases the loss the child will experience if they disclose the abuse and increases the likelihood the child will submit to abusive behaviors.

2. Engage the child as an adult. All children want to be older. A 13 year old wants to be 16, the 16 year old wants to be 18, the 18 year old wants to be 21. Offenders engage the child as if they are older. This adds to the child feeling special and endears the offender to the child. One thing that "older people" do is sex. Giving the child knowledge about sex increases the child's status among peers because they know something other children don't... something "older people" know.

   A key factor in treating the child as an adult is keeping secrets. This sends the message to the child that they can be trusted, that they are 'special' and have access to something others don't. Keeping secrets is one of the prime indicators of inappropriate behavior between adults and children. We are not talking here about benign secrets like surprise parties, what someone is getting as a gift, or withholding from younger siblings the truth about cultural icons (e.g. Santa).   The secrets we are talking about here are those between adults and children about behaviors in their relationships. Offenders keeping secrets with children is one of the major avenues by which they create and maintain the "special bond".

3.	Lures. Offenders tend to use a common set of lures to engage children and keep them in the relationship. For adolescent males these lures tend to focus on behaviors providing access, primarily the '4 Ds'.

1)	Driving. Taking the child places and, more importantly, allowing the child to drive a car. The car is a significant status symbol for adolescent males. Allowing the victim access and use of a car is a simple way to establish a special relationship.

2)	Drinking/Drugging. Giving adolescent males access to alcohol or drugs is another way offenders form special relationships with victims. The offender becomes, essentially, the child's dealer. Getting the child high also lowers the child's resistance to sexual behavior.

3)	Dirty Pictures. Providing adolescent males with access to pornography serves two purposes. It establishes the special relationship - the offender becomes the child's 'dealer'. It also generates emotional/physical response and craving to the sexual content. The child's response to sexual content lowers the threshold needed to engage the child in sexual contact.

4)	Desires. Providing the child with an avenue to achieve desires helps establish the special relationship. If the child is into sports, for example, providing them access, encouragement, training, equipment, transportation and support in their interest draws the child closer to the adult. If the child is interested in music, providing them with digital players, giving them iTunes or digital albums, taking them to concerts, teaching them how to play an instrument, providing them with an instrument - all of these enhance the special relationship with the child.

For younger males and all aged females, the lures focus more on the emotional goal of affirmation, and tend to fall into five categories remembered by the acronym LISTS.

1)	Love. Telling the child they are loved. Meeting their emotional needs, being there to comfort them, showing affection - all of these behaviors engender a special relationship with the offender.

2)	Interest. Taking an interest in all things the child does and says. Listening to them, encouraging them, making the child think you are 'into' what they are interested in. This draws the child into the special relationship as the offender becomes the child's "best friend".

3)	Support. Taking the child's side in their daily drama is a key way to convince a child they are special. Always being on their side engenders a child to an adult and causes them to become increasingly dependent on the relationship.

4)	Things. Giving presents to the child. Essentially this is hedonistic calculus, giving the child things - even simple things - draws the child closer to the adult and makes the termination of the relationship impact the child more. For younger children of either gender, the gifts might be toys, candy, games, etc. For older females, it is often clothes, makeup, music... whatever the girl is interested in or makes them feel special.

5)	Status. Primarily with adolescent females, the status she acquires through the relationship with the adult offender can be a strong incentive to remain in the relationship. All children seek to be older than they are. Having a special relationship with an adult is one way to feel older.

Separating good bonds from bad bonds.

Similar to environmental grooming discussed above, some of the things offenders do to groom child victims are the same behaviors we want from adults in children's lives. How do we distinguish good and bad bonding behaviors? The indicators vary across the nature of the relationship, but essentially involve violations of the role or relationship boundaries. There are several behaviors by adults that help us determine inappropriate bonds between an adult and a child:

A. Keeping secrets with a child. As discussed previously, secrets between adults and children are generally an indicator of grooming. This excludes, of course, "benign" secrets such as surprise parties, what someone is getting as a gift, or withholding from younger siblings the truth about cultural icons (e.g. Santa). The secrets we are talking about here are those between adults and children <u>about behaviors in their relationships</u>.

B. Allowing illegal behavior (e.g. unlicensed drivers, drugs/alcohol, pornography, etc.).

C. Role inappropriate statements of affection. A parent or relative should be telling a child they love them, a teacher or coach should not.

D. Inappropriate support. While adults should support children in their lives, it is inappropriate for any adult to <u>always</u> take the child's side in the daily drama of their lives. This kind of support is a good indicator of grooming.

E. Role inappropriate presents/gifts. While it is appropriate for family and some others (e.g. peer friends at parties etc.) to give children presents, others (e.g. teachers, coaches, etc.) generally should not. "Secret presents" are always suspect regardless of who gives them.

F. Isolation from other adults. Isolating a child from parents or other significant adults in the child's life is an indicator of grooming. Concerned individuals want to foster, not supplant, relationships between children and their significant others.

Reliance.

Offenders seek to make the child dependent on the offender. Often this involves a push-pull approach with the child.

Pull. By forming a special bond with a child, the offender draws the victim into a more dependent relationship. The ultimate goal is to become the center of the child's support system. The offender wants to be the sole provider of emotional support for the child - the child's "best friend."

Push. At the same time the offender draws the child into a closer and closer relationship, they push away other adults in the child's life. Isolating the child achieves three objectives relating to disclosure. A child who is isolated is less likely to report abuse because:

1. The offender is the only important adult in the child's life. Severing the relationship would mean severing their ties to the adult world. The child would feel alone and abandoned.

2.   The child has no adult they feel comfortable talking to. Disclosing sexual abuse is embarrassing and awkward for a child. By separating the child from other adults, the offender removes potential confidants and reduces the probability the child will tell anyone.

3.   Even if the child does disclose to an adult, the child is less likely to be believed because the child is seen as distanced from others. The isolated child is often labeled as 'strange' or 'weird' by adults in the child's life. Keeping this distance through isolation reduces the chance the child will be believed if they muster the courage to tell anyone.

By using a push-pull approach, sex offenders draw the child into an ever tightening circle of relationships which increases the value of the offender and reduces the value of other adults. This assists the offender in progressing the child into abusive behavior.

Attenuate Resistances

Systematically reducing the child's natural resistance to sexual assault is a key factor in grooming. This attenuation takes two primary forms: A) progression and B) explanation.

A) Progression.

Progression is, essentially, desensitization to sexual contact. The offender begins with appropriate touch and systematically moves to inappropriate touch. This is often facilitated by disguising this progression as play. Wrestling, tickling, inappropriate hugging, or any form of physical contact that allows the offender to "accidently" touch inappropriately allows them to desensitize the child to that touch.

B) Explanation.

A second way offenders attenuate victims is to offer explanations of the behavior that indicates it is not inappropriate. Performing "hygiene" is a common theme found in explanatory attenuation. Suggesting that the behavior is normal and that others do it is also a common theme in explanation. Child victims may not even realize they have been assaulted if the offender is successful in establishing a sufficient explanation.

A second function of explanation is to assist the offender in keeping the victim in the abusive relationship. "I slipped" or "it was a one time thing and will never happen again" explanations, combined with substantial reward to the victim, can be used to attenuate the victim to abuse. This approach also traps the victim in the relationship as discussed below.

Trap

Grooming a victim can be time consuming and labor intensive. Once a victim has been groomed, offenders want to retain that victim in the abusive relationship. Trapping the victim in the relationship generally takes one of two forms: A) Ongoing grooming and B) Threats.

A) Ongoing Grooming.

Continued attenuation through explanation is a form of ongoing grooming. A typical pattern would be the offender telling a first time victim that (s)he "slipped" and didn't mean to abuse the victim. The victim might be told they were so beautiful the offender couldn't resist. Excuses that the offender was

drunk or high might also be proffered. Regardless of the excuse, the victim is told that it will not happen again and the victim is thanked for being a special friend by receiving special rewards. This pattern is repeated to the point that the victim becomes acclimated to the abuse and the reward.

A particularly heinous element of this ongoing grooming is the assertion by the offender that the victim must have wanted it or enjoyed it because their body responded physically to the assault. This mental hook can cause tremendous anxiety in the victim and can have long lasting effect in the victim's life.

B) Threats.

Threats can also be used to keep the victim in the relationship. These threats take one of several forms.

1. Direct -the victim is told that if they tell, they will be hurt or killed. Sometimes the threat may be against the victim's family members, friends, pets, etc.

2. Reflexive - the victim is told that if they tell, the offender will get into trouble. If the offender has successfully manipulated themselves to a position of value (e.g. best friend, sole source of emotional or financial support, or a source of substantial reward), this threat can have significant impact.

3. Belief- the victim is often told that if they tell, nobody will believe them. This is exacerbated by the isolation of the victim and any environmental grooming the offender has done. A well respected coach, for example, telling a 14 year old girl that nobody will believe her because she is a child and the offender is an adult can have enormous suppressive effect on the victim's ability to report abuse. The belief that "nobody will believe me" may be more traumatizing than the actual abuse in the long run.

4. Shame - offenders point out that if the victim tells, everyone will know what they have been doing. This shame approach works well when the motive to disclose comes from a position of guilt in the victim. The offender may also evoke shame by pointing out that the victim "must have liked it" because they responded physiologically to the sex act (e.g. became aroused or climaxed). The guilty or "dirty" feelings of the victim are cathected to keep the victim quiet and trapped in the relationship.

5. Protection - offenders can plant the thought of protecting others as a way to keep current victims in the relationship. Some victims report they remained in the abusive relationship because they figured if they let the offender abuse them, the offender would leave their younger siblings alone. This thought does not spontaneously appear in the victim's mind. It is systematically suggested by the offender. What the victim doesn't realize, of course, is that (s)he will likely age out of the offender's interest and the sibling may become a victim anyway - or that the sibling is already being abused and is attempting to protect the current victim using the same logic.

It should be noted that offenders who use belief and shame as their primary methods of trapping children in sexual abuse generate substantial, long lasting emotional and psychological trauma in the victim. These approaches to entrapment are particularly heinous.

Grooming the Adult's Environment

Environmental grooming also occurs in sexual abuse of adults. Often this phase of the assault is overlooked with adult victims.

An adult's environment includes those individuals who interact routinely with the adult or who hold a significant relationship with the adult. Typically an adult's environment includes:

- Parent(s) - biological, step, or foster.
- Family members - siblings, extended family (e.g., uncles/aunts, grandparents, cousins)
- Work - colleagues, supervisors, customers, etc.
- Education - classmates, research associates, study groups, etc.
- Friends.
- Social organizations
  - Church (e.g., clergy, congregation, lay staff)
  - Sports (e.g., coaches, team members, team members' parents, referees.)
  - Interest groups - participants and instructors (e.g., dance, art, music)
  - Membership groups - participants and sponsors (e.g., scouts, 4H, clubs)
- Significant others (e.g., neighbors, service providers, therapists, or others involved in victim's life)

While few sex offenders have access to the entirety of an adult's environment, the more of the environment that can be groomed, the greater the success of the offender in obtaining and maintaining the victim.

Goals of Grooming An Adult's Environment

There are three primary goals in grooming the environment of an adult: A) affiliate, gaining access to potential victims by joining social circles, B) accept, get the environment to accept the offender, C) assure, generate disbelief of offending behavior within the environment. These are closely related to the goals of

Function	Purpose
Affiliation	To provide entrée or continued access to a pool of potential victims
Accept	To get environment to approve the relationship
Assure	To generate disbelief within the environment

grooming a child's environment (Access, Allure, Alibi), but differ primarily because an adult's environment pays less attention to potential victimization. A child's environment is more vigilant about potential abuse.

A) Affiliate

An offender has to gain access to potential adult victims. The easiest way to gain access is to affiliate with the victim's environment. Joining social groups, feigning shared interests, and participating in group activities all serve to promote the offender as a part of the social network surrounding the adult victim.

B) Accept

At the environmental level, acceptance means the offender manipulates perceptions so (s)he is accepted as an appropriate member of the social group. Feigning shared values, promoting group goals, and taking leadership roles are all examples of increasing acceptance. Ideally, the offender seeks to be seen as a valued individual within the group and a good "match" for the victim. The goal is to get the environment to support and approve of a relationship between the victim and the offender. Properly groomed environments actually push the victim toward the offender. Acceptance minimizes the chance the environment will raise difficult questions and serves to keep the victim in the relationship with the offender. Secondarily, in ongoing abuse situations, the offender manipulates the environment to accept the victim withdrawing from historical associations with the group.

C) Assure

A third goal of environmental grooming of adult victims is to assure ongoing access to the victim. This is generally accomplished by the offender generating disbelief within the environment that (s)he could be doing or would do anything harmful. Thus, the environment repeatedly supports the relationship, and thus, serves to diminish the ability of the victim to escape it or be believed.

Actions of Grooming Adult's Environment

The offender behavior (action) which supports environmental grooming in adults is almost identical to those that support it in children; position, charm, power, and celebrity.

Position is the first factor in environmental grooming. It can be social or personal.

Social position is derived from the occupation or role one plays in the environment. These positions are held in higher regard and provide a form of immunity from suspicion. While the public is aware that some in respected social positions can engage in sex abuse, individuals occupying certain positions are given the "benefit of doubt" in most cases. Examples of social position would include being a police officer, member of the clergy, social worker, advocate, or "leader" in the group. Despite recent episodes of abuse of trust, these positions are generally held in high regard in the social environment. Clergy and the "helping professions" are often sought to provide counseling, guidance, and solace. The President of the PTO is less likely to be a suspect than an "ordinary member". In brief, certain roles in our society engender trust, and sex offenders use this as a diversion when moving toward their goal of sexual assault. Offenders often actively seek positions or roles which are generally held above reproach.

Personal position is status derived from deeds or the ability to reward. An individual who demonstrates concern for vulnerable populations gains trust within the environment. People who create or support services for the needy are esteemed in the community and are less likely to be seen as threats to others. The individual who champions the rights of others gains uncommon acceptance from the environment. Philanthropy and advocacy foster both acceptance and assurance, which lessens the probability the offender would be suspected of inappropriate behavior. Despite recent cases of gross violation of trust, the politics and economics of personal position remain a significant contributor to environmental grooming.

Charm is the second factor in environmental grooming. This is simply "personality." Environmental grooming often involves an individual who has a warm affect, good verbal skills, and good listening skills. They use these skills to engender themselves to the environment. In short, people like them. This provides

affiliation and acceptance because people want to be around them. It provides assurance because nobody can bring themselves to believe 'such a nice guy' could do such a thing.

Power is the third factor in environmental grooming. If available, power is actively used by offenders to suppress examination of their behavior. Power comes in three primary forms: political, fiscal, and absolute.

Political power is derived from the offender's position or role. It is related to, but different from, the status gained from social position discussed above. Social position gains its influence from the belief in the "goodness" of those in the position. Political power gains its influence through authority, deference or respect for the position. Anyone who can wield power over the environment has the ability to mask inappropriate behavior or minimize the willingness of the environment to raise an issue. Victims are hesitant to confront those in authority ("take on city hall"). Examples of political power include politicians, CEOs, law enforcement, and those who control the media. Political power affiliation and acceptance directly. It indirectly provides assurance through fear of retribution.

Fiscal power is derived from the ability to control money. Anyone who can control funds, especially funds needed or desired by the environment has the ability to sway opinion or at least stifle concern about behaviors with a victim. Stewards of funds, philanthropists, CEOs, "bosses," and parents are examples of those who can have fiscal power in the environment. The threat of withholding funds, whether directly expressed or only implied, gives the offender significant control. The environment has to decide if the fiscal impact is worth the risk of raising questions or concerns over behavior with a victim. Fiscal power gives affiliation and acceptance, and indirectly affects assurance through fear. For example, a benefactor who donates or generates large sums of money to a foundation is less likely to be confronted about questionable behavior with clients or staff of the agency.

Absolute power is the ability to control another through fear by using physical or tyrannical might. Dictators have tyrannical power over their subjects. They control the elements of force in the environment. Physical might is more personal. Individuals willing to use violence (e.g. thugs and 'brutes') can suppress the environment from questioning their behavior. Intimidation and the resulting fear can keep the environment from acting on or even acknowledging abuse. If raising a question about behavior would place one in danger, the likelihood of raising an issue drops precipitously whether one is the victim or part of the victim's environment.   Superiors in any situation have the ability to stifle questioning or reporting of illicit behavior. Absolute power provides forced affiliation (you can't stop them) and can be a draw into acceptance for some (willing to overlook transgressions in exchange for the benefits of association with power). It provides assurance directly through fear of reprisal, people will ignore behaviors rather than feel threatened.

Celebrity is the fourth factor. It provides affiliation and acceptance through notoriety. People like to be around celebrities and like the secondary status derived from this access. Individuals who are stars in music, film, athletics, or are cultural icons have tremendous draw power. Environments will ignore or minimize transgressions to maintain access to these individuals and their associated status derived from that access.

A Second Word of Caution

With child abusers, we must be careful to guard against widening the net (suspecting well meaning, non-offending individuals). With adult victims it is somewhat different; we must guard against assuming victim resilience. The purpose of grooming an adult victim's environment is to build a two fold belief:

• The offender is a great person or perfect match for the victim and cannot be seen as a threat or harmful.
• The victim, as an adult, would be capable of removing themselves from a harmful situation.

Within adult environments we rarely widen the net because we tend to see adults as capable of taking care of themselves and do not readily suspect abuse against an adult. Therefore, it is this second belief, the assumed resilience of the victim - the ability of the victim to remove themselves from harm - which we must guard against. The grooming of adult <u>victims</u> (covered later in the next section of this paper) is designed to reduce resilience in victims and minimize their ability to remove themselves from harmful relationships. When victim grooming is combined with environmental grooming, it can lead to a false impression <u>within the environment</u> that the victim is a well functioning adult with the ability to make good decisions and protect themselves. In fact, decisions that are forced upon the victim will often appear to be voluntary to the environment. The problem with adult environmental grooming is not us seeing bad guys when they don't exist (as with children victims), but rather us not seeing bad guys when they do exist because we assume the victim is resilient.

Offenders often systematically promote the impression of victim resilience. The attribution of victim strength is enhanced by the offender's portrayal of the victim to the group as resilient. The offender then systematically increases the victim's isolation from the group, while continuing to portray the victim as resilient. The decreasing contact between the victim and the group combined with the on-going messages of victim resilience by the offender, continues the environment's assumption of victim resilience.

Unfortunately, there are no clear indicators that help the environment differentiate victim isolation as a result of victim grooming from voluntary withdrawal from existing social networks. A shift in focus, priorities, and affiliation is common in situations of infatuation and "whirl-wind romance". However, radical, sudden and persistent departure from established affiliations should always be considered as potentially the result of both environmental and victim grooming.

Grooming Adult Victims

Goals of Grooming Adult Victims

The goals of grooming adult victims are similar to the goals of grooming the victim's environment: A) affiliate in the victim's social circle, B) generate acceptance of the abusive behavior, and C) assure the victim stays in the relationship. In brief, the offender wants to be in a position to engage the potential victim without generating suspicion. The relationship needs to be attractive to the victim and the offender needs to persuade the victim the abusive behavior is acceptable or should be tolerated. Lastly, the offender tries to trap the victim into continuing the abusive relationship.

Actions of Grooming Adult Victims.

Targeting Adult Victims

Grooming adult victims is focused on two primary vulnerabilities related to the desires of the potential victim:

A) Emotional
B) Physical/Cultural.

Grooming directly addresses these desires by suggesting a means to the end sought by the victim.

A) Emotional vulnerabilities result from the state of mind of the victim and fall into three major categories:

Vulnerability	Approach(es)
Emotional	Desires – provide means to valued end for victim. 1. Escape 2. Worth 3. Companionship
Physical / Cultural	1. Size/Age differences 2. Disability 3. Language 4. Economic

1. Escape: the potential victim is trying to escape their current living conditions - or - avoid harm (e.g. succumbing to rape) .

2. Worth: the potential victim has low self-esteem.

3. Companionship: the potential victim feels isolated and lonely.

B) Physical/cultural vulnerabilities focuses the offender on the position or circumstance of the potential victim. Essentially there are four vulnerabilities commonly available to an offender seeking to exploit physical or cultural exposure of an adult victim:

1. Age/Size: the offender is significantly older than the victim or is physically bigger and stronger. In the first instance (age), the offender utilizes deference to wisdom, experience, or social standing to manipulate the victim into a relationship. Physical size can also be used to attract and subsequently intimidate potential victims. Physical prowess is a key factor in the intense, and often violent grooming in cases of rape.

2. Disability: some offenders focus on emotionally, physically, or developmentally disabled individuals. The disability makes the victim more susceptible to the manipulation and coercion of the offender.

3.   Language: victims who do not speak the dominant cultural language are at a distinct disadvantage and easily victimized. Offenders can easily become the "middle man" for these individuals, thus establishing the offender as the sole means of survival in a foreign land. If the victim can't speak the language of the local authorities, they can't report. If the offender keeps the victim isolated such that they cannot easily learn the local language, the victim is more easily trapped in the victim role. Language is commonly found as a vulnerability in human trafficking.

4.   Economic: victims who can be made dependent on the offender for income or cash flow are trapped in the victim role. Controlling a victim's fiscal life is an easy way for offenders to recruit victims and keep them compliant.

Process of Grooming Adult Victims

In general, grooming adults is similar to that of grooming children. It is a four step process. The frequency, intensity and duration of each step varies across offenders and adults, but these steps are found in almost every adult abuse case.   The four steps are remembered by the acronym BRAT and are:

Bond - form a special bond with the victim.
Reliance - cause the victim to rely on the offender.
Attenuate - reduce the adults's resistance to offensive behavior.
Trap - keep the adult in the victimizing role for as long as one can.

Grooming Adult Victims

Target	Action

Bond: Form a special Bond	Provide means to an end
	        Escape
	        Worth
	        Companionship

Reliance: "push – "pull"	Isolate
	        Socially
	        Economically

Attenuate resistances	Progression Coercion
Trap – prevent disclosure or escape	Hopelessness Guilt / Fear

Bond.

Building a special bond with an adult victim is similar to the process used when grooming child victims. The offender seeks to become a special friend who is the center of the victim's support system. The offender finds a desire in the victim that lends itself to manipulation. Three commonly found desires sex offenders focus on with adult victims are the previously mentioned: escape, worth, and companionship.

Escape: the potential victim is trying to escape their current living conditions. They may be trying to escape poverty, oppression, abuse, or any of a myriad of issues. Regardless of the situation they are trying to escape, the offender will offer them an apparent means to escape. Increasing reliance on the offender is required to obtain escape. This draws the victim into a dependent role with the offender. In the case of rape, the victim succumbs to the assault to escape future or threatened harm.

Worth: the potential victim has low self-esteem. The offender will engage in behaviors that apparently work to build the victim's self esteem. The victim might be told how special they are and/or how only the offender sees the "true value" of the victim. This process is carefully managed such that only the offender is a source of self-esteem. The victim is drawn closer to the offender as a means of supporting this new found worth.

Companionship: the potential victim feels isolated and lonely. The offender will fill the role of companionship but work to maintain the victim's isolation. Thus, creating need for the offender in the victim's life.

Reliance.

When building the bond with an adult victim, offenders work to increase the isolation of the victim from other avenues of support. Drawing the victim in while isolating them increases the need of the victim to have the offender in their life. Whether it is keeping the victim hidden in the house, controlling the victim's finances, or shrinking the victim's circle of friends, the goal is to make the victim reliant on the offender and estranged from other 'outside' contact.

Attenuate resistance.

Similar to grooming a child victim, resistance of adult victims is attenuated through two primary processes: A) progression, and B) coercion.

A) Progression

Deviant sexual behavior may be introduced gradually and over time. The victim might be pressed to expand the boundaries of their sexual behavior. Each time a boundary is crossed, the offender presses for further "exploration." Assimilation of new behaviors is easier when the distance between the boundary and the new behavior is small. Victims can be trained into previously unwanted or unconsidered sexual activities in a relatively short period of time by a skillful offender. Rationalization or normalization of the new behavior is a common approach by offenders.

B) Coercion

If the offender has power over the victim (e.g. physical, fiscal, or emotional), the victim may be forced into new behaviors through fear the offender will exercise this power. Victims often submit to abuse out of fear of invoking the offender's wrath, being unable to survive without the offender's funds, or losing emotional connection with the offender. Ultimately coercion boils down to the victim deciding the price of submission is less than the price of resistance. This holds true whether the coercion is blatant and direct or subtle and indirect.

Trapping the victim.

Adult victims are held in the abusive relationship through two primary means: A) a sense of hopelessness and B) feelings of guilt/fear. Offenders purposefully manipulate the victim to generate these feelings. In no small measure it is these feelings that make sexual abuse so devastating and enduring in the victim's life.

A) Hopelessness

The progressive isolation of the victim not only limits their ability to seek assistance, but it also generates a sense of hopelessness. Offenders frequently tell or intimate to the victim that they 'cannot get away'. Victims are led to believe that there is no chance of life without the offender or that life will be worse than what they are experiencing with the offender. Essentially, victims are groomed to believe there is no escape.

B) Guilt/Fear

Adult victims are easily trapped by their own feelings of guilt. Victims generally know or suspect they are being abused. Offenders use this knowledge to their benefit. Victims are led to believe they want or enjoy the abuse. Victims struggle with the fact that if they disclose, others will know what they have been doing and are fearful others will judge them as complicit, weak, or worse yet - deviant. Adults are loathe to admit mistakes, and offenders leverage this fear as a method of keeping victims trapped in the relationship. These feelings of guilt and fear intensify the sense of hopelessness felt by the victim.

Table 1 summarizes the goals and actions of grooming across the domains of environment/victim and child/adult and provides a framework for this paper.

Table 1
Grooming Summarized

	Children	**Adults**
Environment Grooming: Purpose is to find victims and reduce the probability of being reported or victim being believed.	**Target:** Parents/Family, Teachers, Social Organizations, Peers, Significant Others, etc.	**Target:** Family, Social Network, Significant Others, etc.
Goals of environmental grooming	**Access**: provide entrée **Allure**: create interest **Alibi**: minimize risk	**Affiliate**: generate contact **Accept**: approve relationship **Assure**: generate disbelief
Actions of environmental grooming	**Position:** Social, Personal **Charm:** Personality **Power:** Political, Fiscal, Absolute **Celebrity:** Fame	**Position:** Social, Personal **Charm:** Personality **Power:** Political, Fiscal, Absolute **Celebrity:** Fame
Victim Grooming: Purpose is to overcome resistance, maintain access, minimize disclosure.		
Goals of victim grooming 　　Access/Affiliate 　　Allure/Accept 　　Alibi/Assure **Actions** of victim grooming 　　**B**ond 　　**R**eliance 　　**A**ttenuate 　　**T**rap	**Target Vulnerabilities -** emotional **1. Bond** – form a special bond 　　Keep Secrets 　　Lures 　　　　Adol. Males – 4 Ds 　　　　Females & young males – LISTS **2. Reliance** – "push / pull" **3. Attenuate** resistance 　　Progression 　　Explanation **4.Trap -** prevent disclosure 　　Groom / Threaten - Guilt / Fear	**Target Vulnerabilities** 　　Emotional 　　Physical / Cultural **1. Bond** – escape, worth, companion. **2. Reliance** – isolation **3. Attenuate** resistance 　　Progression 　　Coercion **4. Trap** – prevent escape 　　Hopelessness 　　Guilt / Fear