

# Continued Development of a Taxonomy of Clergy Sexual Grooming: Results from One Benedictine Abbey



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## RESEARCH METHODS

- Retrospective content analysis of 18 priest personnel files from Saint John's Abbey (MN).
- Inductive approach used to examine sexual grooming behavior.
- Alex and Alli read all 9,636 pages of documentation and identified instances of sexual grooming; 12 files each with 1,344 pages of overlap for reliability checks.
- Simple agreement was 90% across identified incidents in those 1,344 pages.

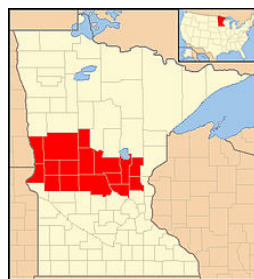


The Seal of the Diocese of Saint Cloud, 1889

## DESCRIPTION OF

### OF 18 ALLEGED OFFENDERS, 17 USED GROOMING BEHAVIORS:

- 135 incidents of documented sexual grooming; average of 7.9 per monk.
- Range of 1-6 behavior types used per monk; average of 3.76 per monk.
- Bi-modal distribution: 4 & 6 taxa.
- 8 monks are deceased.



Diocese of St. Cloud

## LITERATURE

### REVIEW

Personal Grooming	Family and Community Grooming	Victim Grooming
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose is for abuser to personally justify the abuse</li> <li>• Includes distorted thoughts of perpetrator including "entitlement, uncontrollability, children as objects" (Ward &amp; Keenan, 1999).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose is to lower the possibility of the abuse being detected and gain the trust of adults who may encourage interaction</li> <li>• Respect of perpetrator in community encourages communication (McAlinden, 2006)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose is to establish relationship and trust with the victim</li> <li>• Desensitizes the child leading to victimization (McAlinden, 2006).</li> <li>• Allows for the introduction of sexual or inappropriate ideas to the child</li> </ul>

- Grooming behaviors of clergy sexual abusers are similar to those of non-clergy sexual abusers (Terry, 2008) with the addition of abuse and misuse of respect (Spraitz, Bowen & Strange).
- Many grooming behaviors seem normal, do not appear to be ill intentioned (Lanning & Dietz, 2014).
- Sexual grooming behaviors of clergy have not been widely studied; this study seeks to fill that void.

## FINDINGS: TAXONOMY OF CLERGY SEXUAL GROOMING

### ALCOHOL, CIGARETTES, & DRUGS

- Documented in 9 files
- **Purpose:** Lowers victim's inhibitions, exploits child's curiosity, priest appears "cool" to child.
- "[Monk] offered [a 15 year-old victim] cigarettes and told him not to say anything about the incident."
- Eight of nine offered wine or other alcohol such as whiskey or brandy.

### PLAYING FAVORITES

- Documented in 2 files
- **Purpose:** Manipulate emotions (confusion, guilt, etc.), gain control.
- "I stood there, he stood in front of me, and told me I was very special to him and that God loved me."
- "[He] had numerous other...students that he pursued relationships with as well. At times I felt jealous when [he] would tell me about dates or things he had planned with those other students."

### PHYSICAL PLAY

- Documented in 8 files
- **Purpose:** Lower victims' inhibitions, obtain physical access that leads to abuse.
- "The physical contact began previously with hugs and went further from there."
- "[The monk] always wanted to hold hands and to provide and receive neck and back rubs."

### ABUSE OF RESPECT

- Documented in 15 files
- **Purpose:** Use innate respect to betray and avoid suspicion.
- "He came to know, trust, admire, respect and revere [the offender], his teacher and spiritual advisor."
- "[The monk] said 'If you say anything to your parents that will make them mad at me they will go to hell because it is a sin to be mad at a priest.'"
- "[The monk] told me it was a place he came to rest and relax. I was just a little nervous at that point. But knowing he was a priest I went to the building with him."

### ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS W/ PARENTS

- Documented in 5 files
- **Purpose:** Earn parents' confidence to gain access to child, avoid disclosure
- "[The monk] would ride his bicycle over to [the victim's] house and had dinner with his family on numerous occasions."
- "He would ask mom if he could hold me...In her mind it was likely an honor when the parish priest would visit as well as show appreciation for her daughter."

### GUISE OF FRIENDSHIP

- Documented in 14 files
- **Purpose:** Build trust, relationship, & mentorship.
- "[Priest] deceived [the victim] into engaging in sexual contact with him under the guise of providing emotional counseling."
- "They shared a nice conversation and [the victim] considered it the beginning of a friendship."
- "[Priest] groomed the boys by offering to tutor them in Spanish."

### OVERNIGHTS & TRIPS

- Documented in 8 files
- **Purpose:** Builds trust, secludes child, and toughens escape.
- "He used to enjoy taking children on outings...the Abbey owned a log cabin and he would usually bring between five and seven boys at a time for overnight trips."
- "He invited me to come spend the night at the rectory."
- "[The monk] invited [the victim] to the rectory where he lived."

### GIFTS AND OTHER "COOL" STUFF

- Documented in 4 files
- **Purpose:** Get victim to like and want to spend time w/ priest.
- "He was at his desk...and kinda hesitated and went to a different drawer and pulled out a sexual magazine. And he gave it to me and kept reassuring me."
- Priests were documented to have given some victims cash or helped others get out of parking tickets.



Saint John's Abbey, Collegeville, MN

## DISCUSSION

- Monks from Saint John's Abbey used grooming techniques similar to those used by clergy and other general sex offenders, as documented in earlier research.
- Building on findings from Joliet, some monks used the respect they received as clergy to condition their victims and others to not question their behavior.
- These findings support earlier research pointing to the existence of a taxonomy of clergy sexual grooming.
- The eight classifications are outlined in the Findings section.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

- Continued analysis of unsealed diocesan files of priests credibly accused of sexual abuse of minors.
- Refine the taxonomy, as necessary, with findings from future research.
- Develop a coding scheme to measure the behavioral taxa of clergy sexual grooming.
- Re-examine personnel files from other dioceses looking specifically for evidence of grooming.
- Analyze files of abusive priests from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Winona (SREU 2017 Project).