



Insights into sexual assault perpetration

Giving voice to victim/survivors' knowledge

Haley Clark and Antonia Quadara





Australian Government

Australian Institute of Family Studies

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Anne Riggs
Soul Boat, Ceramic
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Contents

Acknowledgements	v
Report summary	vii
Background	vii
Project rationale	vii
Methodology	viii
Findings	ix
Conclusions	xi
Future directions	xii
Summary	xiii
1. Introduction: The Giving Voice project	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Report structure	2
2. Sexual assault perpetration: The current evidence base	3
2.1 Reviewing the literature	3
3. Victim/survivor narratives	11
3.1 Giving Voice participants	11
3.2 Victim/survivors on perpetrator strategies	26
4. Implications of Giving Voice for sexual assault prevention	51
4.1 Conclusions and future directions	51
5. Appendices	61
Appendix 1: Participant recruitment and ethical requirements	61
Appendix 2: Plain language statement	63
References	64

List of tables

Table 1	Participant locations	15
Table 2	Participant relationship with the offender	16
Table 3	Perpetrators' resources and strategies in sexual offending	45

List of figures

Figure 1	Overlapping contexts enabling sexual assault	52
Figure 2	Situationally targeted perpetration	54

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Dr Antonia Quadara

Coordinator, Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault

Background

Significant proportions of women in Australia have been sexually assaulted: national victimisation surveys consistently estimate that around one in six women experience sexual assault from the age of 15.¹ At local, state and national levels, reducing the incidence of sexual violence is a pressing concern and a core focus of policy development. However, those responsible for developing prevention strategies face the challenge that there is a lack of knowledge about sexual offending. Research has established that women are primarily assaulted by people they know, often in contexts of trust and familiarity. We also know that this acts as a barrier to disclosing sexual assault and many offences therefore remain hidden (Lievore, 2003). Few victim/survivors report offences to police and fewer still see their perpetrator convicted.

Most of what we know about male sexual offenders is based on the small minority who have been detected. The research base suggests that these men may not be representative of undetected offenders or the types of sexual offences regularly perpetrated. To date, the sexual offending literature has emphasised instances involving adult sexual assault where perpetrators and victims know each other. Relatively little is known about the situational circumstances in which sexual assault occurs, the factors that facilitate or inhibit it occurring, the use of strategies by offenders, and how these aspects all fit together.

The Giving Voice project adds to our understandings of sexual offending by asking victim/survivors how the sexual assault(s) they experienced happened; what factors they thought facilitated it; and what strategies, behaviours and tactics perpetrators used to offend against them. Building the evidence on how sexual assault occurs, and particularly the strategies used by men to perpetrate, can assist in the development of prevention initiatives.

Project rationale

The Giving Voice project was conceived as a first step towards addressing the gap in our understanding of sexual assault perpetration. As part of the work plan for the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault² (ACSSA), the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs commissioned the Australian Institute of Family Studies to undertake a research project that would document female victim/survivors' insights about sexual offending.

We initially identified three broad reasons for the limitations in the current evidence base on sexual offending:

- *The narrow target of research participants.* Current explanations for sexual offending generally arise out of work with detected and convicted offenders, which is a very small percentage of sexual offenders overall. The offences with which they are charged and

1 Although there has been a slight decrease in reported prevalence rates between the Women's Safety Survey in 1995 and the Personal Safety Survey in 2005

2 ACSSA is part of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and is funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. It was established in 2003. Its purpose is to improve access to information on sexual assault for the key sectors in the sexual assault field.

convicted do not reflect the majority of sexual assaults as described by victimisation surveys. There remains a significant question about what this group has in common with undetected, unreported sexual offenders in general.

- *Individual focused theories and frameworks for understanding perpetrators' behaviour.* Sexual offending models often focus on individual-level factors for offending. A large body of literature aims to identify particular psychological traits or disorders that may lead to sexual offending. Within these models, sexual offending is viewed as an aberrant or abnormal behaviour (for a review, see Chung, O'Leary, & Hand, 2006).
- *The lack of integration of victim/survivors' perspectives and knowledge in the sexual offending literature.* There has been little integration of women's perspectives or empirical studies on sexual assault victimisation into the sexual offending literature. The result is a fragmented field in which sexual offending literature and sexual victimisation literature seem to describe two very different phenomena. This has an impact on the development of effective social responses (e.g., justice responses, social reactions, treatment responses and prevention work).

Victim/survivors of adult sexual assault provide an important and under-utilised perspective on perpetration.

Methodology

Research questions and design

Two key questions drove the research:

- What can victim/survivors of sexual assault tell us about the behaviours, strategies and tactics that offenders use to perpetrate sexual offences?
- How can this knowledge be used to inform policy and practice responses to sexual offending?

Using a qualitative research design, the aim of this project was to address the gap in our understanding of the tactics used to perpetrate sexual assault by drawing on the insights of a directly relevant population: victim/survivors of sexual assault.

The intention was not to generate generalisable findings. In-depth qualitative methods are used to identify the meanings that individuals bring to their experiences and to explore how these meanings can inform, shape or challenge current knowledge. The methodological literature on researching sexual violence supports this approach and its suitability for the research questions in this project. Further and different types of research would need to be undertaken to develop generalisable findings.

The project involved:

- a review of the national and international evidence base on sexual offending strategies;
- qualitative interviews with 33 victim/survivors of sexual assault about the tactics and strategies that the perpetrators used to offend; and
- consultations with those working in the sexual assault field with whom implications of emerging findings were discussed.

Data collection

Reviews of the literature were undertaken to inform the research approach and the interpretation of key themes. Of particular relevance to the project was the available research on:

- causes of adult sexual offending;
- causes and correlates of sexually coercive behaviour; and
- perpetrator strategies and tactics.

In-depth interviews with 33 women from across Australia were undertaken from March to July 2009.³ Participants were recruited using ACSSA's electronic communication channels and selected sexual assault services across Australia.

³ Participants were asked about sexual assaults that occurred over the age of 18. Chapter 1 and the appendices provide information on selection criteria, ethical requirements and the plain language statement we used to assist in recruiting and supporting victim/survivors during the interview process.

Only women who had been assaulted by men participated in this study. It is not clear whether or how the experiences of same-sex sexual assaults or male victim/survivors would be different. Participants were asked about an experience of sexual assault and to describe what they saw as the key facilitators of their assault, in particular what behaviours the offender engaged in that enabled perpetration.

Interviews were conducted with care and sensitivity, giving priority to the safety of the participant, and every attempt was made to keep the conversation at the participant's own pace and intensity in order avoid being intrusive or otherwise contributing to further distress and trauma. Chapter 3 describes the projects methodology in more detail.

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed and analysed as individual case studies to identify recurring and important themes.

Findings

Participant and perpetrator characteristics

Participants

The sample comprised participants from five different states/territories across Australia, and also included participants from regional and rural areas. Two victim/survivors identified themselves as Aboriginal and four participants were born outside Australia (three of whom identified that English was not their first language). Two participants disclosed a physical disability, one disclosed that she had an intellectual disability and two participants said that they had been diagnosed with a psychiatric illness. Participants were aged between 18 and 68 years, with the majority aged in their late 20s and early 40s.

Nine participants had experienced multiple incidents of sexual assault as adults and 10 participants had experienced child sexual abuse in addition to adult sexual assault. The influence of prior experiences of childhood sexual assault was acknowledged where the participant saw it as relevant. Among the 33 participants, multiple sexual assault incidents were reported.

All participants had been, at some stage, in contact with a counselling service (as was required in the participant selection criteria). Twenty-two of the participants reported at least one incident of sexual assault to police. Five of the perpetrators had been convicted and sentenced for their offences.

Perpetrators

Participants described the perpetrators variously as: charming, skilled at exploiting people, controlling, talkative and engaging. They were men with whom victims had a relationship, worked alongside, or with whom they had recently become acquainted. Most of the perpetrators were respected by their friends and peers. In some cases, the perpetrators were highly respected and/or authoritative members of their communities.

The majority of the perpetrators were identified as being professionally employed, including: large business owners, a pharmacist, a police officer, a military officer and an academic working in the field of preventing violence against women. Two perpetrators were identified as being religious leaders. Most offenders were identified as having an Anglo-Saxon background, three were identified as Aboriginal, two European, two Asian and one Pacific Islander. Most offenders were identified as being slightly or significantly older than the victim/survivors. Many participants described the perpetrators as having personas that were “nice”, “normal” and “charming”, although others also thought the perpetrators were “below average”. Two offenders were identified as having “high profile serial rapist” status in the media. Overall, however, the descriptions of the offenders challenged stereotypes and preconceptions around the profile of a man that “typically” offends.

Relationship between participants and perpetrators

The sexual assaults occurred within a variety of offender–victim relationships. Thirty-four of the reported assaults were perpetrated by a person known to the victim. The most regular scenarios

discussed by participants were sexual assaults that occurred within a marriage or intimate relationship and those that were perpetrated by an acquaintance.⁴ Ten women were sexually assaulted by their husbands or partners, and nine by an acquaintance. Other perpetrators included friends (6 participants), work colleagues (6 participants), strangers (5 participants) and others, such as family members and spiritual or community leaders (4 participants).

Circumstances of sexual assault

In this study, sexual assault occurred in a range of contexts, such as:

- professional contexts (e.g., working with colleagues);
- social contexts (e.g., socialising with friends);
- familial contexts (e.g., interacting with family members); and
- public/community contexts (e.g., interacting with members of the public/strangers).

In addition, they occurred in a variety of settings/locations, such as:

- professional settings (e.g., in the workplace, at conferences);
- social settings (e.g., in a pub or restaurant);
- private settings (e.g., in their own or someone else's home); and
- public settings (e.g., in a car park).

In themselves, none of these constitute a “risky” setting. The interpersonal, situational and social contexts described by participants provided the perpetrators with a range of opportunities and tools that enabled them to set up, carry out and conceal the assaults.

Perpetrators’ resources and strategies

Participants’ accounts revealed significant similarity in the types of resources (or facilitators) that enabled the opportunity for offending. These were: trust, social norms, control, alcohol and surprise. We regard these as “resources” because: (a) most—if not all—of them are a feature of social life; and (b) they function as an asset or material that assists perpetrators in accomplishing their goals. The five resources are examined in detail in Chapter 3 of this report.

In most of the sexual assaults described, perpetrators’ strategies involved using a combination of these resources in order to:

- isolate the victim/survivor;
- control the situation; and
- impose their own desires, intentions and perspectives on the interaction.

The continuum of planning and opportunity

Participants’ narratives suggest that there was not a clear distinction between planned sexual assaults and those that appeared opportunistic. It was often only in hindsight and with considered thought that victim/survivors saw how they had been targeted, how alcohol and drugs were used and that the manipulation of their trust was a purposeful strategy to set up the sexual assault. Together, the victim/survivors’ accounts suggest that the level of planning and opportunity taken by a sexual offender may be located on a continuum; the decision to offend could be made moments, weeks or even years after meeting a woman, and the level of conscious effort made to do so varied.

Whether the behaviour appeared to be “planned”, “opportunistic”, or even an apparent “misunderstanding” of the situation, the particular steps that perpetrators took to pursue their desire for or expectation of sexual interaction with the women were deliberate and calculated in that the perpetrators used the resources present in any given situation to minimise the women’s capacity to refuse sex—that is, to reduce their capacity to provide “active consent”.⁵ The perpetrators also took active steps to conceal or excuse the offence.

4 In this report, an acquaintance is defined as someone the victim/survivor met socially for the first time on the day of the assault. A stranger, on the other hand, is someone with whom the victim/survivor had no social interaction at all before the assault.

5 “Active consent” is required under definitions of consent in sexual assault legislation in most jurisdictions in Australia.

Motivations, goals and rewards of sexual offending

Victim/survivors were asked about the rewards, goals and motivations they saw as driving perpetrators' behaviour. Many had mixed thoughts. In particular, they were reluctant to speculate about the individual motivations of perpetrators. Sexual jealousy and a pre-occupation with sex were commonly referred to as motivators for rape.

In reflecting on the goals and rewards that perpetrators sought to achieve through sexual assault, participants identified the following goals of perpetrators:

- *Achieving power and control over the victim/survivor.* A number of participants felt that sexual assault was situated within broader violence and control—that it was one of a variety of effective mechanisms used to maintain power and control over them.
- *Reaffirming heterosexual masculine sexuality.* This was particularly the case in situations where the women knew of their husbands' sexual secrets, such as extramarital same-sex liaisons. Rape became a vehicle to simultaneously express a heterosexual male sexuality and punish or threaten the women.

Participants also described what they saw as being the rewards for perpetrators of sexual assault. Reflecting the existing research with sexual offenders on the rewards of offending, excitement, sexual gratification, boasting and bonding with other men were seen as the rewards of rape.

Conclusions

On the basis of these findings, the following two conclusions about sexual assault perpetration can be made:

- strategies, behaviours and decisions are shaped by context; and
- perpetrators make deliberate choices.

Strategies, behaviours and decisions are shaped by context

Sexual offenders' strategies, behaviours, and decisions to offend are shaped by the interpersonal, situational and social contexts in which they occur; their strategies are context-dependent.

The women's narratives about when, where and how they were offended against demonstrated that the opportunities for sexual offending were present in ordinary, everyday contexts. Sexual assaults occurred in contexts such as working with colleagues, socialising with friends, interacting with family members and meeting with members of the public. For the participants, the particular geographic location of the sexual assault itself, such as in a parked car or the perpetrator's home, was less relevant than the type of relationship they had with the perpetrator, the reason for their interaction and the setting in which it occurred, and the broader meanings attached to gender and gendered interaction.

Based on participants' accounts, three key ways in which perpetrator strategies were context-dependent were identified:

- the opportunity for sexual offending was embedded in interpersonal, situational and social contexts;
- the overlap of interpersonal (e.g., work relationship), situational (e.g., work function) and social contexts (e.g., social norms about gender difference and power) provided perpetrators with resources and flexibility in exploiting those resources; and
- socio-cultural norms about gender, heterosexuality and seduction shaped perpetrator and victim/survivor interactions before, during and after the offence.

Perpetrators make deliberate choices

We also concluded that perpetrators make deliberate choices and enact "situationally targeted" strategies to secure sexual interaction with the victim/survivor.

Acknowledging that opportunities for sexual assault perpetration are shaped by contexts external to the offender does not diminish the agency, accountability, voluntariness or foresight of the offender. Whether the behaviour appears to be "planned", "opportunistic", or even an apparent "misunderstanding" of the situation, the particular steps perpetrators take to realise that opportunity are deliberate and calculated. Perpetrators use the resources present in any

given situation to minimise women's capacity to refuse sex; that is, to reduce their capacity to actively consent (as required by most legislative definitions of consent in Australia). Perpetrators also take active steps to conceal or excuse the offence.

Future directions

Bringing violence against women and social inclusion frameworks together

The interpersonal and situational contexts the participants described demonstrated that the sexual assaults took place across a range of intimate, familiar and social relationships. Although 10 incidents were perpetrated by partners and husbands, approximately 20 were perpetrated by friends, colleagues and acquaintances. The remaining eight incidents were perpetrated by strangers.

The adverse physical and mental health consequences of sexual assault upon women can significantly affect their social participation (Vos et al., 2006). A relatively under-examined aspect of this is the role of trust in facilitating sexual offending. Except for those who had been offended against by strangers, all participants identified trust as being a central—if not the key—resource that men exploited. We concluded that this demonstrated the function of trust as a social, not merely an interpersonal good, and raised the issue of the ongoing effects of sexual assault on women's participation in civic life. Given the significant interest in social capital as a concept and policy direction, it seems pertinent to make connections between the incidence and nature of sexual assault and social exclusion.

Addressing perpetration in an ecological framework

The antecedents for sexual assault are multi-factorial, being located within individual, interpersonal, community and societal contexts (Heise, 1998; VicHealth, 2009; World Health Organization [WHO], 2002). These can be combined to produce a general theory of violence against women. It is unclear how the opportunities and drivers of perpetration map against this.

Box 1: Prevention strategies

Primary prevention—preventing violence before it occurs

Primary prevention approaches are those that seek to prevent violence before it occurs. Interventions can be targeted to the whole population or to particular groups. Some primary prevention interventions (such as social marketing campaigns) focus on changing behaviour or building the knowledge and skills of individuals. However, primary prevention can also focus on changing environments so that they are safer for women. Interventions that do not have a particular focus on violence, but address its underlying causes (such as gender inequality and poverty), are also primary prevention interventions.

Early intervention (secondary)—taking action on early signs of violence

Early intervention approaches are targeted to individuals and groups who exhibit early signs of perpetrating violent behaviour or of being subject to violence. They can be aimed at changing behaviours or increasing the skills of individuals and groups. Early intervention may also be targeted to environments in which there are strong signs that violence may occur or has begun to occur (e.g. subcultures, such as peer groups or sporting clubs in which there is a strong culture of disrespect of women).

Intervention (tertiary)—providing support and treatment to victims of violence and adopting measures to prevent re-offending and repeat victimisation

Intervention strategies are implemented after violence occurs. They aim to deal with the violence, prevent its consequences (such as mental health problems) and to ensure that violence does not occur again or escalate. Intervention includes things such as crisis accommodation and social support for victims of violence and criminal justice and therapeutic interventions for perpetrators.

It is therefore unclear how perpetration is specifically addressed across the various contexts, or what kinds of interventions work best at which levels of prevention (i.e., primary, secondary, tertiary; see Box 1). There is a need to integrate existing knowledge within fields such as criminology, psychology and sociology to fully develop a robust, multi-factorial model of sexual assault perpetration.

Directions in this domain include:

- addressing attitudes, beliefs and social norms about heterosexual masculinity;
- managing “risk” and risky settings; and
- supporting and educating key players within the criminal justice process (including juries) about the relationship between context and perpetrator decision-making.

Summary

This research sheds light on how interpersonal, situational and social contexts can overlap when a sexual assault occurs and how individual men control, manipulate or exploit the opportunities afforded by these overlapping contexts. Preventing sexual assault perpetration therefore needs to be multilevel. It needs to address:

- relevant factors within these contexts;
- the ways in which they affect and influence each other; and
- which combination of contexts and factors are more risky for the perpetration of sexual assault than others.

Most significantly, this research revealed the very ordinary situations in which sexual assault occurs—and the often very ordinary, trusted and familiar men who perpetrate it. Public debate about sexual assault, particularly following high profile incidents demonstrates a lack of understanding about who perpetrators are and how they offend, with the compulsive, predatory sexual offender imagined as the typical offender. The findings from this project challenge this view and provide an important starting point for public education initiatives about sexual offending.

1

Introduction: The Giving Voice project

1.1 Background

Our knowledge about sexual assault perpetration—who perpetrates, under what circumstances, and how they carry out their offences—comes from a variety of sources. Victimization surveys, such as the Personal Safety Survey, are the most accurate sources on the extent of sexual assault in the Australian community (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2006). They provide national data on sexual victimisation, including whether or not these offences have been reported to police. From these data we can infer that perpetration is apparently relatively common. Another source of statistical information comes from criminal justice administration records, such as police statistics and court and corrections data. There is also the research evidence generated from working with convicted sexual offenders, which has sought to explain the causes of and motivations for sexual offending, their offence pathways and effective interventions to reduce re-offending. To a much lesser extent, a research base exists that considers what victim/survivors' experiences tell us about sexual offending and sexual offenders.

However, these diverse sources of knowledge do not, as a whole, tell a coherent story. The population upon whom much sexual offending research is based comprises a very small population relative to the population of known victim/survivors: few incidents are reported to police and fewer still result in convicted offenders (Gelb, 2007). Cases that are more likely to be reported to police and successfully prosecuted involve perpetrators unknown to the victim/survivor and evidence of additional physical injury (Heenan & Murray, 2006; Lievore, 2004). Yet, the national victimisation data show that almost 80% of sexual assaults involve perpetrators known to the victim, and additional physical injury may not be sustained (ABS, 2006).⁶ This suggests an apparent quantitative and qualitative disjuncture between sexual offences described in the criminal justice domain and the sexual offences experienced by women. It is not yet clear what similarities there are between detected and undetected perpetrators, the types of contexts in which assaults occur or the strategies perpetrators use. This lack of knowledge represents a significant challenge for sexual assault prevention.

In addition to gaps in the evidence base, there are also fairly entrenched misperceptions about sexual offending in the general community. The latest survey on Australian attitudes to violence against women indicates that many regard sexual assault as the result of an uncontrollable sex drive in men and that false allegations are regularly made (VicHealth, 2009). There are also beliefs about the “coyness” of female sexuality, stereotypes about “typical” victim behaviour, and beliefs about women's responsibility to control male lust (by being demure, not drinking, dressing conservatively, not being too friendly and so on). Such views not only result in the high attrition of sexual offences from the justice system but also severely restricts obtaining accurate information about how an incident of sexual assault unfolded.

The question of “what happened?” appears to be a fairly simple one, but it is exceptionally fraught. Misperceptions such as those above make it very difficult for victim/survivors' responses to that question to be heard. More difficult still is it to understand what women are telling us about offending behaviour. As their words are repeated through the news media and scrutinised during cross-examination at trial, it is easy to lose sight of the offender. These domains arguably

5 Such findings have been repeated over time (for example, in the Women's Safety Survey) and across countries. New Zealand, Canada, the US and the UK all report similar patterns of sexual assault.

focus too much on “truth-telling” and who appears to be most credible, at the expense of the offending itself.

The Giving Voice project undertook to use adult women’s accounts to develop a picture of how sexual offences are set up, carried out and concealed. This project used a qualitative research methodology. In-depth interviews with 33 participants from across Australia were undertaken from March to July 2009. Participants were asked about their experience of sexual assault and to describe what they saw as being the key facilitators of their assault; in particular, they were asked about what behaviours the offender engaged in that enabled him to perpetrate the sexual assault. We were interested in why the assault occurred, but more so in how it occurred—that is, the strategies, tactics and behaviours that the perpetrators used to facilitate the assault. This was a difficult process for many participants. As they shared their accounts, there often came the realisation that the men they had at one time regarded as friends, colleagues or partners had deliberately created situations in which the opportunity for sexual assault could emerge.⁷

Very few of the incidents relayed by the participants resulted in convictions. Many women did not report them to the police in the first place. Although this is a small, self-selected sample, the women’s stories shed light on numerous hidden offences. This report privileges these accounts, to provide the empirical base for our conclusions about the resources, strategies and contexts that facilitated sexual offending.

1.2 Report structure

This report brings together research literature, victim/survivors’ knowledge and theories about perpetration to establish key insights about sexual offending. Chapter 2 examines what the current evidence base tells us about who perpetrates sexual assault, under what circumstances and the strategies they use to do so. National and international research was reviewed. This is then considered against insights from the Giving Voice participants.

Chapter 3 focuses on the accounts of sexual assault perpetration that participants told us. Thirty-three women from different parts of Australia described their various experiences of sexual assault. Interviews were semi-structured, allowing victim/survivors to tell us about their experiences in their own ways. The first part of Chapter 3 provides descriptive information about the participants and considers some of the ethical issues involved in undertaking research in this sensitive area. This chapter also provides a narrative excerpt from the interviews for each participant. It then explores what victim/survivors’ accounts tell us about strategies of perpetration.

Chapter 4 integrates this evidence with the knowledge gleaned from our participants to:

- suggest a contextualised model of sexual offending;
- link this to the social-ecological framework currently informing prevention; and
- identify gaps in the research that limit our ability to further develop these ideas.

The appendices provide more detail about the research methodology.

⁶ These men may not all have intended—in the legal sense—to commit sexual assault per se, but they *had* intended to create situations in which women’s capacity for voluntary consent to sex was greatly diminished. This does not make them less criminally liable. Indeed many jurisdictions have increasingly turned to considering what steps the accused perpetrator had taken to ensure free agreement to sex.

2

Sexual assault perpetration: The current evidence base

2.1 Reviewing the literature

There are several types and sources of knowledge about who perpetrates sexual assault and the circumstances in which they do so, namely:

- criminal justice and correctional administrative data;
- research with convicted offenders;
- victimisation surveys;
- research with victim/survivors; and
- surveys of community samples on sexual assault perpetration.

When compared to each other, these sources of research evidence provide an inconsistent, even contradictory picture about sexual offending. However, there are also points of cross-over and resonance, which we identify later in the chapter. These would seem to be the most productive lines of enquiry to follow in developing a comprehensive understanding of perpetration.

Criminal justice and correctional administrative data

Sexual offenders in the Australian correctional system

At 30 June 2009, there were 3,597 prisoners (sentenced and unsentenced) for whom the most serious charge was sexual assault and related offences (ABS, 2009). This is the second-most prevalent offence among Australian prisoners, representing 12% of charges.⁷

Lievore (2003) reviewed the literature to consider factors that may be relevant to the population of sexual offenders. These factors included:

- socio-demographic characteristics;
- sexual deviance;
- criminal history;
- substance use;
- cognitive and affective deficits;
- psychiatric disorders; and
- age.

Some studies noted by Lievore (2003) found low levels of education and unstable employment histories in low skilled work among sex offenders, while others found that sex offenders were more likely than the general offender population to be employed at the time of arrest. Other analyses suggest that “the criminal histories, psychosocial and socio-demographic characteristics of most sex offenders do not differ greatly from the general offender population” (Lievore, 2003, p. 41). Indeed, many studies have found that adult sexual assault offenders (such as rapists) tend to have fairly broad criminal histories (see Lievore, 2003). One possible explanation for this is that the demographics of convicted perpetrators may be reflective of the kinds of people

⁷ The most prevalent offence (counted as the most serious charge) is acts intended to cause injury.

whom the criminal justice system targets rather than indicating that particular categories of men are more likely to perpetrate sexual offences.⁸

However, more recent analysis of justice administration data suggests that sexual offenders do comprise a fairly distinct population: they are more likely to be in full-time employment, be married, have a substantially older age of onset of offending in comparison to other offenders, and have their own place of residence (Laura Beacroft, personal communication, 2010).

Profiling sex offenders: Research with convicted offenders

Based on studies of detected—usually convicted—sexual offenders, researchers conclude that they are a heterogeneous group (Robertiello & Terry, 2007). There have been various efforts to generate classification systems or typologies of sex offenders; for example, distinctions are drawn between child molesters or rapists, or adult and juvenile offenders. Other research has focused on understanding the motivations for sexual assault; for example, whether it is sexual or non-sexual in nature and/or motivated by hate, revenge, power and so on (e.g., Barbaree, Seto, Serin, Amos, & Preston, 1994, as cited in Robertiello & Terry, 2007). A significant body of research has also aimed to identify the causes of sexual offending. This has been based on research with sexual offenders who are in custody or in treatment. In their review of this literature, Chung et al. (2006) noted that this area of study is very much influenced by the tradition of scientific enquiry in the disciplines of biology, psychiatry and psychology. These disciplines are concerned with the psychological, behavioural and cognitive causes of sexual offending; that is, they aim to identify and subsequently treat the individual-level factors that cause individuals to sexually assault others.

Characteristics

Robertiello and Terry (2007) reviewed the literature on sex offender typologies and identified a number of similarities in individuals who have committed sexual assault. These include:

- having negative views of women;
- endorsing rape myths;
- condoning the use of violence;
- displaying hyper-identification with the masculine role;
- having a sense of worthlessness, low self-esteem and substance abuse problems;
- being unable to manage their mood states; and
- coming from “broken homes”.

The typologies reviewed by Robertiello and Terry are summarised in Box 2. They concluded that “the most common type of rapist is one who is motivated by power and control” (p. 511). This reflects the broader sexual assault research literature and, indeed, the experiences of Giving Voice participants. However, it is disappointing that, in reviewing the typology literature, Robertiello and Terry did not question—and in fact repeat—social norms that minimise perpetrators’ violence (e.g., calling them “gentlemen rapists”) when their offending is apparently motivated by sexual desire.

⁸ In the criminal justice system, there is an over-representation of people with a disability, people of Indigenous, ethnic or low socio-economic background, those with a low level of education and those who have prior police charges and convictions.

Box 2: Typologies and classification of types of sexual offenders

(adapted from Robertiello & Terry, 2007)

Power-reassurance rapists—These individuals doubt their desirability, have feelings of inadequacy, and may have poor social skills. They experience “‘courtship disorder’ meaning that they lack the ability to form a normal relationship with a partner of the same age”. They are characterised as not being overly aggressive in their behaviour and are sometimes referred to as “‘gentlemen rapists’ using only enough force to accomplish the rape ... compliant victims might receive ‘pillow talk’ after the assault” (pp. 509–510).

Sexual rapists—Those people who are preoccupied with sex, aggression and physical inadequacy. They may also have violent sexual fantasies.

Opportunistic rapists—These rapists’ sexual assaults are committed on impulse in order to achieve immediate sexual gratification. Aggression may be present in response to victim resistance. They may be further categorised as having high or low social competence.

Power-assertive rapists (pervasively angry)—These individuals use aggressive but non-lethal behaviour to restore the offender’s inner fear about his masculinity. They are geographically mobile, and often use drugs and/or alcohol before the assault and exhibit low impulse control. Their *modus operandi* is to “rape their victims on the day they meet them at a public place (such as a bar). Because of their impulsive tendencies, their attacks are often unplanned and they are not likely to use a weapon” (p. 510).

Anger-retaliation rapists (vindictive)—These individuals are motivated by power, anger and aggression. Their assaults use high levels of physical and sexual aggression and are attempts to “get even with women by using sex as a weapon to punish them” (p. 510). It may be premeditated against someone in particular or against someone who has triggered their rage. They may display either high or low levels of social competence.

Anger-excitation rapists (sadistic)—These rapists are sexually excited by the pain and fear they cause their victims. They “have a high level of planning in their offenses, the victims are almost all strangers, and the offenders show no remorse for their acts” (p. 510).

Motivations and rationalisations

Psychological theories around sexual offending have considered the role of neurology, cognition, emotion regulation, social skills and intimacy deficits, family background and child development, and attachment insecurities (see Boyd, 2007, and Chung et al., 2006, for reviews of key work). Psychopathology models of sexual offending consider the causal role of deviant sexual object relations, fixations and sexual sadism (e.g., Knoll & Hazelwood, 2009). These perspectives have been taken up in many treatment and relapse prevention programs for sexual offenders. Evolutionary psychology has also put forward explanations for offending, locating it in the evolutionary adaptations of human behaviour and the imperative of reproduction (Buss, 1994; Thornhill & Palmer, 2000; Thornhill & Thornhill, 1992).

Ward, Polascheck, and Beech (2006) distinguished between three levels of theory: multifactorial, single-factor, and micro-level or offence process. Multifactorial theories aim to provide a comprehensive account of sexual offending. For example, integrated theory posits that early developmental experiences are “especially significant in the formation of psychological predispositions to behave in sexually deviant ways” (Marshall & Barbaree, 1990, as cited in Ward et al., 2006, p. 34). These negative experiences result in insecure attachment with its attendant consequences of poor emotional coping, impulsivity, poor judgement, and impaired problem-solving. Being exposed to antisocial and misogynist behaviour in a child’s or young person’s immediate environment would be an added factor since, from these researchers’ perspectives, “the acquisition of attitudes and behaviours during childhood sets the stage for the developing male to respond to the sudden onset of strong desires characteristic of pubescence with a prosocial or antisocial mental set” (Marshall & Barbaree, as cited in Ward et al., 2006, p. 35). Finally, there are situational factors that further inhibit or facilitate sexual offending. These can include loss of a relationship, extreme loneliness, social rejection and substance use.

Multifactorial models have also been developed by Hall and Hirschman (1992) and Malamuth (1981, 1986, 1996). Single-factor theories focus on a single feature thought to be especially relevant to sexual offending, such as the presence of empathy deficits. Process theories are descriptive models of the offence chain or relapse process (Ward et al., 2006; see, for example, Beaugard & Leclerc 2007; Beaugard & Proulx, 2002).

Perpetrator decision-making and strategies

Perpetrator decision-making and strategies comprise a much smaller aspect of research endeavours with sex offenders and has been predominantly the work of Beaugard and colleagues in Canada.⁹ In the Australian context, research has focused predominantly on the sexual abuse of children (see Smallbone & Milne, 2000; Smallbone, Wheaton, & Hourigan, 2003; Smallbone & Wortley, 2004). Indeed, those exploring sexual offenders' decision-making have noted that it has received very little attention in comparison to investigations into the psychology of offending (Beaugard & Leclerc, 2007; Murray et al., 2001).

Situational factors concern issues such as alcohol use in dating situations, particularly if the individual has a history of coercive behaviour in sexual encounters. Rational choice theory describes the weighing up of risk and reward in undertaking action. Alcohol use/abuse in conjunction with sexual arousal can hinder rational choice and lead to the perpetration of sexual assault (Bouffard & Bouffard, 2010; Dudley, 2005). In a study of perpetrator decision-making, Beaugard et al. (2005) found that individuals who indicated sexual interest in non-sexual violence show levels of organisation in their *modus operandi*. Alcohol consumption prior to the offence led to higher levels of coercive behaviour, and a low emotional state before the assault correlated with higher levels of injury to the victim (Beaugard et al., 2005).

Methodological issues

Aside from the tendency to individualise sexual offending, a key issue has been researchers' reliance upon convicted offenders as the subjects from which the research base proceeds. Empirical research reveals that men who are convicted of sexual offences comprise a select minority of those who perpetrate. Most sexual assaults are never reported to the police and those that are represent an atypical profile of sexual offences. This has been acknowledged by researchers for some time (Kelly, 1988; Scully, 1990); however, generalisations about sexual offending and rapists are often argued on the basis of research with incarcerated or clinical groups. Given what is known about the under-reporting of sexual assault, it cannot be assumed that these men are representative of men who sexually offend (Bergen & Bukovec, 2006). As was noted earlier, the attrition process significantly affects both the number and type of sexual assaults that are adjudicated and convicted by the courts.

Another constraint of relying on sex offenders as subjects for research is the accuracy of the information that they share and the possibility for response bias. Some researchers argue that sexual offenders are also likely to deny or downplay their offending and to provide responses that gain the approval of researchers and clinicians (Johnson, 2007; Scully, 1990). Researchers using polygraphs have questioned the reliability of the information that sex offenders give regarding their offences (Wilcox & Sosnowski, 2005).

Participants for research on offending have typically been recruited through offender treatment programs. This creates further methodological difficulties, to the extent that both the research and the treatment may have profound influences on the offenders and how they will be represented or represent themselves as research participants. For example, the influence of a particular therapeutic milieu (such as a prison-based program, versus a community-based program or a particular therapeutic model) can have important effects on offenders' accounts of themselves and their offending (Waldram, 2007), and participants may be influenced to provide socially desirable answers to questions about empathy (Hanson & Scott, 1995) or motivations. Even if they have not received treatment, many offenders are aware of the comparative social acceptability of some motivations compared to others (see, for example, Mann & Hollin, 2007).

Four points can be made at this stage about these attempts to explain sexual offending. First, they identify faults or deficits in sexual offenders in order to explain their actions. Sexual offending is thus an aberrant, abnormal behaviour. Related to this is that these theories seek

⁹ See, for example, Beaugard & Leclerc, (2007); Beaugard, Proulx, & Rossmo, (2005); Beaugard, Proulx, Rossmo, Leclerc, & Allaire (2007); and Beaugard, Rossmo, & Proulx, (2007).

to distinguish sexually offending men from “ordinary” or “normal” men. For instance, some researchers consider offenders’ beliefs, values and attitudes about women, sex and violence to be “cognitive distortions” about gender roles or sexuality (e.g., Locke & Mahalik, 2005; Polaschek & Gannon, 2004). The link between these distortions and “traditional patriarchal ideas” (Polaschek & Gannon, 2004, p. 301) is also sometimes noted in the literature. Generally, however, these are presented as aberrant ways of thinking about men, women and sex; culture and social structure are not part of these explanations. Situational factors extend to the interpersonal circumstances of the offender, but it is unclear from this approach whether and how the common beliefs and social norms about masculinity, women, class, sex and race influence sexually offending behaviour. These “individual psychopathological perspectives” (Chung et al., 2006, p. 3) have also been criticised for the way in which they shift attention away from the offender’s deliberate decision to use violence, or that the criminality of the violence is de-emphasised.

Researchers who have challenged these perspectives have instead investigated what the offender is skilled at doing (e.g., verbal coercion) (Livingston, Buddie, Testa, & VanZile-Tamsen, 2004), or what they “gain” from offending (Scully, 1990). Others have pointed out the political consequences of framing gendered violence as a form of individual deviance by obscuring the extent to which male violence towards women is a social and political problem (Kelly, 1988).

Some authors have responded to this question by constructing a continuum of rape-supportive values, in which all or most men participate but are widely recognised as being problematic only at the extreme (e.g., Kelly, 1988; Salter, 2003). For Salter, rapists do share many characteristics with many men in general (e.g., “hostile attitudes to women, a sense of entitlement, callous indifference to others, and self-serving excuses”, p. 93), but these characteristics only become problematic when acted upon or taken to the extreme. Nevertheless, it is not clear that these are attitudes, beliefs or values that distinguish men who rape from other men.

Research with men in community samples

Traits and attitudes

Nearly all the literature on the “tactics” of sexual assault perpetrators includes an acknowledgement that they are affected by multiple factors. In a broad sense, these could be described as either individual personality traits and situational factors. Individual personality traits (which could be psychological or social constructs) might include early childhood experiences of violence and pornography (Hunter, Figueredo, & Malamuth, 2010), or sexual assault (whether as a witness or a victim) (White & Smith, 2004). An introduction to sex at a young age is also indicated as a possible factor in the future perpetration of sexual coercion (Westerlund et al., 2010). Attitudes such as those listed below have also been found to play a role in the perpetration of sexual coercion and/or violence (Abbey, Parkhill, Clinton-Sherrod, & Zawacki, 2007; Bouffard & Bouffard, 2010; Jacques-Tiura, Abbey, Parkhill, & Zawacki, 2007; Vega & Malamuth, 2007):

- hostility to women/hostile masculinity;
- misperception of women’s sexual intentions;
- attitudes (of both men and women) that are supportive of rape;
- attitudes about casual sex;
- sexual dominance;
- peer approval of forced sex; and
- heavy pornography consumption.

Some of the literature has attempted to identify in community samples predictive factors, such as women’s rape scripts, for women’s possible future victimisation (Turchik, Probst, Irvin, Chau, & Gidycz, 2009) or different types of assault perpetration (Abbey et al., 2007; Mumford, Kelley-Baker, & Romano, 2009). Researchers have argued that predictive factors then be utilised towards the design of prevention programs (Abbey, McAuslan, Zawacki, Clinton, & Buck, 2001; Bouffard & Bouffard, 2010; DeGue, 2006; Turchik et al., 2009; White & Smith, 2004).

Research with victim/survivors

The accounts and knowledge of women subjected to men’s violence have been instrumental for researchers trying to understand sexual assault, rape and domestic violence over the past few decades (Bergen & Bukovec, 2006). For example, early studies with women who were

sexually assaulted by their male partners were important in understanding sexually abusive men (Bergen, 1996; Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985; Frieze, 1983; Russell, 1990). However, there has been limited use of victim/survivors' insights into sexual offending within the criminal and forensic fields.

There has been some overseas research on understanding offenders through the accounts of adult victim/survivors regarding, for example, the "rape tactics" of offenders (e.g., Cleveland, Koss, & Lyons, 1999) and the use of alcohol in rape (Brecklin & Ullman, 2001), as well as some research with child victims of sexual abuse on the *modus operandi* of offenders who had abused the children (e.g., Berliner & Conte, 1990). A number of earlier studies have also drawn on information about sexual assault provided by women victim/survivors (such as Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985; Kelly, 1988; Russell, 1990; Silbert & Pines, 1983, as cited in Monto, 2001; Tyler, Hoyt, & Whitbeck, 1998); however, the contribution of victim/survivors as a source of knowledge about sexual offending appears to have waned in more recent years. Australian primary research by Easteal and McCormond-Plummer (2006) and smaller scale research conducted by Parkinson (2008) offer some insight about offending from victim/survivors' perspectives; however, their primary focus was on understanding the experience of the victim/survivor rather than understanding sexual offenders and the tactics they use to offend.

Research findings from victim/survivors' knowledge

Early studies of rape in marriage were notable for their use of interviews with victim/survivors. Russell (1990) discussed a 5-tier typological scheme of husbands, based on the accounts of women participating in the research:

- those who preferred rape to consensual sex;
- those who had no preference for either rape or consensual sex, but engaged in both;
- those who preferred consensual sex, but who raped their wives when she had not consented;
- those who might have liked to rape their wives but did not; and
- those who had no interest or desire to rape.

Finkelhor and Yllo (1985) also interviewed women survivors of rape in marriage and came up with a 3-tier typology of rapes within relationships:

- battering rapes—extensive, direct physical violence and other abuse, of which sexual violence was one aspect;
- non-battering rapes—where the violence or force was typically sexually violence; and
- obsessive rapes—where the men seemed to be obsessed with sex and made heavy and often unusual sexual demands on their wives/partners.

Frieze (1983) claimed that rape in marriage was usually characterised by extensive physical violence and, similarly, Bergen and Bukovec (2006) argued that husband rapists are typically "domineering, controlling, physically abusive patriarch[s]" (p. 1377). These positions were criticised because they neglected the importance of verbal coercion, emotional manipulation, and especially enforced financial dependence in the *modus operandi* of sexual offenders who rape their wives/partners (Russell, 1990). This reflects the recruiting strategies used in the research, as Frieze's participants were actually recruited on the basis of having been physically assaulted by their partners, making the findings inevitable.

Wiehe and Richards' (1995) study of acquaintance and partner rape was based on survey questionnaires completed by women victim/survivors. The women described the offenders as angry, aggressive, preoccupied with sex, controlling and possessive. The perpetrators displayed disrespect for women in general and for the victim in particular, and tended to prioritise their own "needs" without regard to the feelings or wishes of others. The authors also found that when the offender used drugs and/or alcohol, there were increased levels of aggression. Offenders generally did not respond to the participants' attempts to "dissuade the perpetrator when [his] behaviour was out of line" (p. 20).

A more recent study involved interviews with Australian women who had been sexually assaulted by their male partners (Easteal & McCormond-Plummer, 2006). The general dynamics of power and control were found to be integral to sexual assault occurring in relationships. Their discussion of perpetrators does not attempt to offer "individual psychopathological" explanations for why some men rape. Rather, men's motivations are linked to broader ideas about sex, masculinity and relationships. As suggested earlier, such ideas can be understood

as not just individual psychological traits, but, as is the case in much of the literature on sexual assault, socially or culturally structured patterns of gendered relations saturated with power. This places intimate partner rape in a social context, which is also linked to the difficulty that women face in gaining recognition and acknowledgement that rape by a partner is “real rape”. The rapists used this as part of a strategy to avoid the consequences of their actions, drawing on this social discourse to claim that coercive or violent sexualised behaviour cannot be rape when committed by a husband against his wife.

Research with sex workers has highlighted that for some men, violence adds to sexual gratification (Silbert & Pines, 1983, as cited in Monto, 2001). Ethnographic research with women sex workers suggested that sex offenders who assault sex workers operate in a highly rational and selective manner, identifying and exploiting vulnerability by targeting street-based workers, younger workers and isolated workers (O’Neill, 2001). Research with sex workers has illustrated how the organisation of sex work can either facilitate or discourage violence against sex workers (Quadara, 2008).

In the domestic violence sector, the Duluth Power and Control Wheel, widely used in perpetrator behaviour change groups, is a model for how research with women subject to men’s violence can be used to inform treatment (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Research interviews conducted with 200 women provided the basis for the development of this model, which is now used in programs to challenge men to recognise the planned and deliberate tactics of control in domestic violence. Thus, it has had direct therapeutic use in challenging the position that men “lose the plot” or that their violence is the result of an inability to “self-regulate” difficult emotions, or do not have the capacity to establish and maintain appropriate intimate relationships (as attachment theory would suggest, for example).

Nonetheless, this discrepancy between what a perpetrator “should” look or act like and the reality of the perpetrators’ outward personas also applied to participants whose perpetrators were identified as being high-profile serial rapists by the media, and whose public images were thus in line with stereotypes. This may be explained through the labelling of a perpetrator as “deviant” or a “brutal monster” retrospectively by media (or criminal justice officials), and consequently may be disjointed from the lived experience of individual women whom they assaulted. These archetypes of the sexual offender are perhaps also based on the level or extent of offending and whom they target (for example, they may be more likely to target strangers in a public place), rather than any real difference in tactics employed at the time of the offence or their presentation to the women against whom they perpetrate the offence.

Men sexually assault women in a wide range of contexts, and this has important implications for understanding the *modus operandi* of offenders (Pazzani, 2007). Notably, the context in which sexual abuse occurs (including the relationship between victim and offender) has a profound influence on the descriptions and information that women give about their assailants. For example, the use of sexually coercive tactics is context-dependent; husbands have many situations in which they are able to act in a sexually coercive manner that do not require the use of either overt physical force or alcohol and drugs. Acquaintances do not have these kinds of contextual opportunities (Cleveland et al., 1999). The accounts of sex workers who have been sexually assaulted give a different picture of sexual offenders (O’Neill, 2001) when compared to women raped by their husbands/partners, which is again different to situations of “date rape”. Bourke (2007) noted that in explanations of rape during war, the “individual psychopathology” model of the rapist is almost entirely absent.

Gaps in the evidence base

Research paradigms greatly influence the focus of projects. For example, those who approach the issue of sexual offending with an interest in the “cognitive distortions” of offenders may well ask very different questions to researchers who are interested in a gendered analysis of sexual violence. Therefore, the knowledge or views of women victim/survivors will be represented very differently. Stark (2007) pointed out that in the United States, women’s advocates have opposed batterer intervention programs because (among other reasons) it is based on the presumption of some kind of deficit (emotional, educational or personality) rather than the benefits gained by controlling women. The same point applies to the literature on sexual offender treatment: the majority of the literature looks for, and therefore finds, various emotional and psychological characteristics in which offenders display deficits, rather than the benefits men gain from their sexual violence and the social norms that contribute to and facilitate their abusive behaviour.

The treatment and clinician-focused literature on sexual offending tends to place problematic beliefs and behaviours at the level of the individual. On this point, it is worth noting the differences between the offender treatment research literature, and some of the sexual assault prevention literature that is informed by a gendered analysis of sexual violence, such as Katz (2006) and Funk (2006). Both sets of literature are concerned with preventing men from committing sexual violence, and both identify similar sets of beliefs and attitudes as being problematic, yet they offer different accounts of their pervasiveness and the level at which they can be addressed (from individual therapy to social activism).

Two rather distinct bodies of knowledge have developed about why sexual assault occurs, the circumstances in which it occurs and how it should be prevented:

- victimology—which is informed by what we know about victimisation obtained through surveys, sexual assault service data, and research with victim/survivors of assault; and
- sexual offenders—a research base that has been developed through studies involving sexual offenders (generally restricted to those who have been convicted and/or those in treatment settings).

Although these two broad knowledge areas examine the same phenomenon—sexual assault—they do so on the basis of different knowledge paradigms, disciplines, methodologies and participants. Because of this, and as we demonstrate in Chapter 3, there are significant gaps in our knowledge about how offenders perpetrate assault. Indeed, a question arises about whether there is a mismatch between what is known about victimisation and what is known about sexual offending.

3

Victim/survivor narratives

3.1 Giving Voice participants

Thirty-three women provided accounts of sexual assault perpetration. In this chapter, we provide information about the project's research design for recruiting participants, descriptive information about the participants and the circumstances of their assaults. We also provide a narrative summary of the accounts of some participants. Chapter 3 draws out the key issues emerging from their stories.

Research method

An inductive qualitative research design informed the methods of this study.¹⁰ It used in-depth interviews with victim/survivors of sexual assault drawn through a purposive sampling method. The research design was not intended to uncover generalisable statements about the nature of sexual offending or to claim that this was a representative sample. Rather, the approach facilitated the project's aim to increase our understanding of sexual offending and, ultimately, to help inform strategies that reduce the occurrence of victim/survivors' experiences and expert knowledge about sexual violence in Australia and elsewhere.

Research purpose

Two key questions underpinned the research design:

- What can victim/survivors of sexual assault tell us about the behaviours, strategies and tactics that offenders use to perpetrate sexual offences?
- How can this knowledge be used to inform policy and practice responses to sexual offending?

The aim of this project was to address a gap in our understanding of the tactics used to perpetrate sexual assault by drawing on the insights of a directly relevant population: victim/survivors of sexual assault. We had three objectives:

- to collect and document the knowledge and expertise that victim/survivors hold about sexual offending;
- to identify key themes in the accounts of victims/survivors regarding the dynamics of sexual offending; and
- present and disseminate this new information about sexual offending in a way that contributes to the overall knowledge base about sexual offending, in order to ultimately reduce the incidence of sexual assault.

10 Inductive research “builds up” theories or hypotheses about phenomena from data, whereas deductive designs begin with hypotheses that data either confirm or invalidate. An absolute distinction between these designs is not possible; an inductive method will combine some initial hypotheses or “hunches” about what might be important and, similarly, deductive methods use their findings to further inform research design (Berg, 1995). However, an inductive research design favours emergent research processes, and is based on the premise that the patterns and themes that emerge from the literature and interviews will form the basis for further knowledge-building about sexual offending. This approach is particularly suited to this project, given that there is little known about victim/survivors' knowledge of offending. The iterative element of the research design refers to a cyclic (rather than linear) process of generating, testing, analysing and refining research findings throughout the duration of the project.

Recruitment and sampling method

Participants were recruited using ACSSA's electronic communication channels and selected sexual assault services across Australia (see Appendix 1). We deliberately sought heterogeneity in the sample. Service providers were selected on the basis that they represent a diverse range of circumstances and clientele, so that participants reflect, for example, a diversity of ages, backgrounds, relationship to perpetrators and experiences with the criminal justice system. Services in rural and remote areas, and those that provide services to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and Indigenous communities were approached, as well as those located in central cities.

In addition to circulating a recruitment advertisement through ACSSA's distribution lists, we asked sexual assault and community services to assist in recruiting clients. Service providers were asked to invite clients to participate on the basis of meeting the selection criteria and representing diversity in age, geography and life circumstance. The selection criteria for inclusion in the study were that the participant:

- was female;
- was over 18 years old;
- had experienced sexual assault (self-defined) as an adult (after the age of 18);
- was receiving or had received counselling in relation to the assault/s; and
- resided in Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia, the Northern Territory or Victoria.

Table 1 (on page 15) provides a summary of participants' geographic location. Appendix 2 provides the plain language statement used to recruit participants.

Scope, structure and analysis of interviews

Participants were asked about an experience of sexual assault and to describe what they saw as the key facilitators of their assault; in particular, what behaviours the offender engaged in that enabled perpetration. The primary emphasis in the interviews was on:

- participants' knowledge of tactics, strategies and motivations in sexual offending; and
- participants' perception of what is important to understand about sexual offenders.

The interviews were semi-structured, in-depth and narrative-based, which allowed participants to identify in their own words the aspects of their experiences and their perceptions of the offender's behaviour and/or characteristics that they believe to be relevant to understanding sexual offending. The interview schedule was informed by the available literature on tactics and strategies in sexual offending, as described in the previous chapter.

Qualitative data analysis consists of identifying, coding and categorising patterns found in the data (Richards, 2005). A transcription service was used to transcribe the interviews. The transcripts were then analysed to identify recurring and important themes utilising the tools of grounded, narrative and thematic analytic methods. This analysis was both vertical (analysis was initially conducted within each individual transcript) and horizontal (themes were brought together from across transcripts). A matrix and a mapping program, C-MAP, which visually displayed like and interconnecting themes, aided the analysis. From this analysis, accounts of sexual offenders and sexual offending were developed. Consistency of interpretations was gained through:

- initially discussing and agreeing upon key categories and phases of analysis (i.e., descriptive thematic analysis);
- examining analyses over time (sample unmarked transcriptions were reanalysed at a later point in time to compare and confirm interpretations) and between researchers (two researchers analysed the same transcript and checked for consistency); and
- discussing differences in interpretations, what these suggest and how these interpretations should be incorporated into the analysis.

The findings were then linked to relevant research on sexual offending and compared to the explanations and descriptions of sexual offenders and offending that emerged from the literature review.

Protecting participants' anonymity

The interview transcripts were de-identified and a non-reversible de-identification process was used. Participants were assigned pseudonyms. All other identifiable information was removed or changed—names, places, dates and locations, as well as other specific/unique aspects that might lead to identification. Victim/survivors' names were not recorded—verbal consent was provided and this did not include their names. Correspondence with participants has been kept separate from any interview material. To overcome the increase in risk that comes with including individual narratives (as opposed to aggregated data), the narratives have been further modified where it was felt that specific details posed any risk of identification.

Asking victim/survivors to speak about sexual offending: Ethical dimensions

Sexual assault is by its nature a sensitive and potentially distressing issue. It has been recognised that victim/survivors may experience emotional and psychological distress as a result of participating in research and that some may find the process re-traumatising. Other risks include the potential for participants to be identified by the research. Researchers themselves may also experience distress during the course of the project. The interviews for this project were conducted with care and sensitivity—giving priority to the safety of the participant—and an attempt was made to keep the conversation at the participant's own pace and intensity in order to avoid being intrusive or otherwise contributing to further distress and trauma (intrusive questioning is considered to be one of the major causes of the re-victimisation of rape victim/survivors in police interviews; see Maier, 2008). Appendix 1 provides details on the mechanisms that were put in place to ensure the safety of all parties and protect participants' anonymity during the course of the project.

The methodological literature on researching sexual violence supported this approach, and its suitability for the research questions in this project. The commitment to "give voice" to research participants is important in researching women who have experienced violence. Renzetti (1997) noted the importance of recognising the expertise and knowledge of research participants, and exploring this expertise was an explicit aim of the research. Semi-structured interviews also provided participants with greater control over the process and content of the interview. This methodology supported a social justice agenda, which seeks to give voice to victim/survivors in the debates around understanding and treating sexual offenders.

During the interviews, many participants volunteered information about the value of telling their stories. Formal feedback was also sought from participants about their involvement in the study after the main fieldwork had been completed. Feedback was gathered through a 5-minute survey completed by email and, in one instance, over the phone. Eight participants completed and returned this survey. Both the information provided by victim/survivors during interviews and their reflections provided in the feedback forms regarding their experience of participating in the study are discussed below.

Many participants found that recalling details about the offence(s) was emotive; however, overall, they were positive about their participation in the study. On an individual level, many felt that speaking out about their experiences was personally valuable, feeling, for example, that it would contribute to their healing:

Having been able to tell my side about rape in marriage has been one of the best that [sic] thing that has helped me in my recovery. I didn't think it was possible for me to do something like that. I would do it again so that women who have gone through this realise that they can say NO, even in marriage.

More generally, participants hoped to help other victim/survivors who had experienced sexual assault and many anticipated that their stories could help professionals better understand the nature of sexual assault and ultimately to contribute to its elimination:

I feel I contributed to prevent possible crime by giving insights.

It felt draining initially, but I felt like I did society a favour, sharing my story for people to learn. If it helps just one person it was worth it.

Indeed, one participant reiterated that the utilisation of their voices by policy-makers was what would determine that their involvement would be ultimately worthwhile:

I think that it is imperative that our stories be heard and that we don't continue to suffer in silence. I truly believe that if sexual violence and violence against women is to be curbed, then we need to start by putting women's experiences on public record

... I [hope] our voices are heard and valued and that our input is taken on board when developing future policy.

Reinharz (1992) has argued that woman-to-woman conversation, where researchers listen with care and attention to participants, creates an environment where women can develop meaning for their unique experience. Participant feedback appeared to support Reinharz's contention, demonstrating that the interaction with the interviewer was important:

Thank you for the opportunity to participate. The questioning process was respectful and appropriate at all times.

[It] was valuable because I had a voice and someone listened without bias.

[I] think it's actually quite empowering to have your experience heard and valued, and for those reasons I'd do it again.

Participating in the research enabled some participants to develop some meaning about their own experience. In some instances, this was both challenging and rewarding:

During our discussion, I became aware I was so gullible and I had been groomed. It was disturbing to me at first, and then I came to accept that he's a predator with a plan. You're not alone! News flash: I did nothing wrong. Sharing the story can ease the shame.

It [was] an opportunity to look at the situation from a position of contemplation and understanding, not fear.

It allowed me to reflect on my own experiences and it challenged me to think about them in different ways. It also allowed me to feel as though my experiences, however negative, could usefully contribute to public debate.

Brison (2002), herself a survivor of rape, reiterated the importance of empathetic listeners to victim/survivors' accounts:

The communicative act of bearing witness to traumatic events not only transforms traumatic memories into narratives that can then be integrated into the survivor's sense of self and view of the world, but it also reintegrates the survivor into the community, re-establishing bonds of trust and faith in others. (p. xi)

Overall, victim/survivors' comments emphasised that participating in the research was a positive experience. Their responses indicated their altruism in sharing their stories—a generosity that enabled us to learn from their insights—and that they too had benefited from participating. For them, the fundamental benefit of this research project lay in the uses that will be made of their stories: broadening our understanding, developing policy changes that improve the situation for victim/survivors, and promoting the prevention of sexual offending.

Boundaries in reading participants' accounts

Although the research approach described above is partly inspired by what might be described as the tradition of feminist standpoint theory, we are not suggesting that the accounts of the victim/survivors represent a totality about sexual offenders. Most obviously, there is no "one account" or master narrative that encapsulates the experiences of all victim/survivors (indeed, some individuals may reject the use of these terms; see Young & Maguire, 2003). Just as there are complex pathways through which offenders describe their own behaviour, and psychologists, social workers or prison officers explain offending, so too the perspectives of individual survivors have their own context for understanding and explaining offending. For many survivors of sexual assault, this meaning-making process is shaped in profound ways by their experience of therapy (see Naples, 2003; Reavey & Gough, 2000, both of which focus on adult women survivors of child sexual abuse, but the same considerations apply). In light of this, some researchers have deliberately sought out the views of women who were not in therapy (Wood, 2001), although the capacity to do so in this study was restricted by the need to balance ethical considerations when approaching victim/survivors who have not engaged with a counselling service.

When women recount information related to their experience of sexual assault, there are important cultural issues at stake that are implicated in their own process of survival, identity and meaning-making. For example, by defining the behaviour of a male partner as "rape",

women implicitly define themselves as a “rape victim”. This is a loaded identity that some women seek to avoid (Wood & Rennie, 1994). Women may also seek to construct aspects of their own behaviour as contributing to the assault, in order to retain a sense of control over their current and future risk (Zinc, Jacobson, Regan, Fisher, & Pabst, 2006). Women’s accounts of violence have often been used to classify and problematise the behaviour or personality of the victim, rather than that of the offender (Stark, 2007), a practice that can draw attention away from the offender’s responsibility.

A victim/survivor’s definition of an experience as sexual assault is also influenced by stereotypes and misconceptions about what constitutes sexual assault. These circumstances contribute to what is referred to as “hidden rape”. Large-scale surveys can go some way to include women who have not identified or labelled their experience as sexual assault, by asking questions about specific behaviours and experiences that constitute sexual assault. In this way, the woman’s own definition of the experience does not exclude her from participating in the research.

Cultural language also restricts participation. For example, Allimant and Ostapiej-Piatkowski (in press) highlighted that in some cultures that do not recognise rape in marriage, women can have physical and emotional responses to their experiences that do not reflect the cultural language. Thus, when recruiting for a small-scale qualitative research project, the naming of sexual assault may unavoidably result in the exclusion of some women.

A final limitation involves recognising the difficulties of asking any person to interpret the behaviours of another. While the advantages of asking victim/survivors to report their knowledge of the offender(s)/offence(s) have been outlined throughout this report, their accounts are, of course, interpretations—interpretations that should be accorded no less status than the accounts of offenders, clinicians or researchers.

Such considerations should not exclude the use of victim/survivor accounts in understanding men who sexually offend. Rather, these reflections emphasise the importance of gaining knowledge from a range of sources, of which women’s personal accounts are one. When we keep in mind these research limitations and boundaries, the interpretation of the research findings is positioned in a way that strengthens the contribution of the study to our body of knowledge on sexual offending behaviour. Moreover, these boundaries emphasise the valuable contribution that victim/survivors can make to improving our current understandings of offending.

Participants and the circumstances of their assault

Participant characteristics

As shown in Table 1, the sample comprised participants from New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and the Northern Territory, and included participants from regional and rural areas.

Two victim/survivors identified themselves as Aboriginal and four participants were born outside Australia (three of whom identified that English was not their first language). Two participants disclosed a physical disability, one disclosed that she had an intellectual disability and two said that they had been diagnosed with a psychiatric illness. Participants were aged between 18 and 68 years, with the majority being in their late 20s and early 40s.

State	Rural	Regional	Metropolitan	Total
NSW	3	1	6	10
QLD	3	1	6	10
SA	0	1	5	6
VIC	1	0	5	6
NT	0	0	1	1
Total	7	3	23	33

All participants had at some stage been in contact with a counselling service (as was required in the participant selection criteria). Twenty-two of the participants reported at least one incident of sexual assault to police. Five of the perpetrators had been convicted and sentenced for their offences.

Nine participants had experienced multiple incidents of sexual assault as adults and 10 participants had experienced child sexual abuse in addition to adult sexual assault. The influence of prior experiences of childhood sexual assault was acknowledged where the participant saw it as relevant.

Offenders

All the sexual offenders were male and were employed in a range of occupations and industries and came from a range of socio-economic, ethnic and educational backgrounds.

The majority of the perpetrators were identified by participants as being professionally employed, including large business owners, a pharmacist, a police officer, a military officer and a professional working in the field of preventing violence against women. Two perpetrators were identified as religious leaders. Most offenders were identified as having an Anglo-Saxon background, three were identified as being Aboriginal, two European, two Asian and one Pacific Islander. Most offenders were identified as being slightly or significantly older than the victim/survivors. Most participants described their perpetrators as having personas that were “nice”, “normal” and “charming”. Two offenders were identified as having “high-profile serial rapist” status in the media. Overall, however, the descriptions of the offenders challenged stereotypes and misconceptions around the profile of the predatory sexual offender.

Relationships and offending circumstances

As shown in Table 2, victim/survivors’ narratives included sexual assaults that occurred within a variety of offender–victim relationships. The most regular scenarios discussed by participants were sexual assaults that occurred within a marriage or intimate relationship and those that were perpetrated by an acquaintance.¹¹

Most incidents of sexual assault discussed by participants involved a single assailant. Three victim/survivors were sexually assaulted by multiple offenders in a single incident, one of whom was assaulted on two separate occasions by the same group of multiple offenders. A further three victim/survivors suspected that a second person was directly and actively involved in setting up the assault with their perpetrator.

Offences were perpetrated in a range of locations—the most frequent was at the victim/survivor’s home or the offender’s home. Other locations included public places, hotels and in a car. Around half the victims spoke about offences that had happened within the last year and around a quarter of victims referred to offences that had occurred many years ago.

Relationship with offender	Number
Husband or partner	15
Acquaintance	8
Stranger	5
Friend	6
Work colleague	6
Other*	4
Total	44

Notes: Total adds up to more than 33 as participants provided accounts of more than one experience of sexual assault in adulthood, some of which involved different offenders; others were repeat assaults by the same offender.

* “Other” includes incidents of sexual assault perpetrated by other family members, such as son or brother-in-law, or by religious leaders.

The following pages provide a narrative summary for some of the victim/survivors who participated in the Giving Voice project. To protect the confidentiality of participants and to ensure that they are not identified by the perpetrator, some of the specific details within the narratives have been changed.

¹¹ In this report, an acquaintance is defined as someone the victim/survivor met socially for the first time on the day of the assault. A stranger, on the other hand, is someone with whom the victim/survivor had no social interaction at all before the assault.

Participant narratives

Husbands, partners and boyfriends

Isobelle

I was 20. I met a guy who had a job and car, which was a little bit more than what I had been seeing in the past with most men. We started a relationship and it wasn't sexual because I decided that I wanted to do it correctly. The right way: picket fence, house, stuff like that. So based on that, we didn't sleep together. At that period, because I'd come from a very dysfunctional house, I wasn't living anywhere directly and generally didn't know much ... So this relationship was picket fence.

I was at his house one night while he went out with his mates and he came home drunk and raped me. He [did it] in a violent way and he was just stronger than me so that's why he could do it ... During the assault ... he didn't listen, become aggressive and pinned me down and forced my legs apart ... I tried head-butting him and stuff like that, but I suppose I could've, I suppose a lot of people say this, but maybe I didn't want to fully hurt him really bad because we already had the connection there. He justified it by saying he was drunk. I think in his mind he was justifying because when he was finished, he smiled, cuddled me, went to bed and got up in the morning. So he hadn't done anything wrong in his mind because that was just, it happened. He had no, he didn't think about the consequences at all. There was to be none in his mind. So generally he thought it was his right and the next step, yeah. I ended up marrying him, having children, then divorced him a couple of months ago.

Amanda

I was going out with a guy, we actually met at [a religious college]. We'd been going out and when I first started going out, we went out—we went out for six weeks and got engaged. Everyone thought he was like sweet and kind. Our relationship was very much conducted in public I suppose. You know, there were always people around. So it seemed very unbelievable that he would do anything.

He first raped me in a car park of the college and it was anal sex and I had grown up in a Christian family with very strong beliefs. For me, having had sex with him kind of meant I was obligated to marry him. I felt trapped at that point, that I had been tainted or broken or whatever and that I was trapped in a relationship with him. We had a very short engagement and then the abuse continued [for 20 years].

And as the marriage progressed, I got increasingly disturbed by his behaviour and the incidents got increasingly horrific. He got excited, the torture part excited him, physically excited him and I had the sense at first that it was to make me compliant. But I've realised since, that it's actually, that was the way he got himself excited. It was normally out of anger, so the lead up, he would be angry. I'd know he was angry and I'd be terrified. A lot of my compliance was that I was frightened he was going to hurt the children ...

The way he treated me was so shameful and humiliating, it made it less and less likely that I would speak. I'm sure he was very conscious of that. He did such horrendous things. If he just punched me, that would have been so much easier. There were never bruises. That would have been so much easier because that's something you can say to people ... It's something that is acknowledged in the community.

He was a minister and because of his profile in the church, and it made it—I couldn't have spoken out. Most of my family and friends are Christians and I couldn't have spoken. I felt it was so shameful and that one would ever believe me that he could behave in that way.

Mae

I was raped at 18 by my first real boyfriend. There's a pattern of abuse, sexual abuse. Then when I got married 10 years ago it happened again with my husband. My ex-husband used to deprive me of contact with other people. He would withdraw money

from my bank account, so that I had nothing to fall back on for my child. He would conceal things from me, like bills and things like that. The abuse is mental as well as physical. It's so controlling and it's just so all-enveloping. It's not just the physical and sexual abuse, it's how they get to your mind as well. I wasn't able to talk to anyone. The phone was incoming calls only, and it was his mother all the time. The financial side—just no money, always taking money out of my account and I was stuck at home with a newborn and unable to do anything to get away.

It's hard to explain. I just couldn't do anything to try and stop the erosion of how I felt and what I was thinking. I had no one I could check with to see whether it was just my perception on things. I was so well-controlled; I didn't know up from down.

My husband knew all about me, we'd talked a lot before we got married, and he knew exactly what was important. He knew I'd been raped. He knew that the sexual abuse in my past had really affected me, because I felt completely disconnected from my family. We weren't close. I had no real back-up. No sense of self to build from basics. I had nothing to really fall back on. There was only a lot of bad memories and a lot of stuff that I'd been trying to sweep over and get past. And to have someone you believe who really loves you and cares about you and wants you to have their child, turn around and use a weapon that was calculated to cause the most distress. He knew I had flashbacks all the time and I would wake up in the middle of the night screaming. He could see that distress, he could see what I was remembering and he still used sexual abuse to hurt me. He knew. He knew. It was so obvious that that was the best way to bring me down even further and he came so close.

Trudy

I was never allowed to live anywhere close to my family. So that was a big no no. We always had to live far away. I had to follow him about because his career always came first. At the beginning, he wasn't as controlling as he was, so it was over a lot of years that it slowly happened. We were married for more than 20 years. As the years went past, I sort of stopped and said yes, okay, yes, you're right, you're right, that I just gave up on myself and sort of thought it was easier to say yes, yes, yes, and so it was the control that he had over me that he was right all the time. I had the kids and had nobody, it was very hard to talk to other people about being married and things like that.

He loved watching porno. It didn't matter what time of the day—because he worked shift—what time of day, he'd have porno on, day, night, he'd have porno on. He talked to strangers that I didn't even know about me over the 'Net, and it was just something that I had to put up with. I had no say whatsoever. I'd end up just laying there. I wasn't going to fight him because I didn't have the strength to fight him, and if anybody thinks that a woman can fight off a rapist, they can't. It is too hard and you end up worse. So I'd end up just laying there, and when he'd finished, I'd cry myself to sleep and wished that I was dead. The rapes used to scare the hell out of me because I had already told him no, but I was supposed to be a good wife. He thought it was funny when he tied me to the bed. I didn't find it funny.

Outside, he was such a wonderful helper, he'd help anybody and everybody. And his workmates, they could protect each other, and of course him being such a good bloke on the outside. He was always self-satisfied, as if "she got what she deserved". You know, really smug and it never worried him that I said no. He just kept on going with life. It never worried him. As long as he got what he wanted, he was happy, and it didn't matter how he got it. It truly didn't.

Brooke (I)

I'd been dating a guy for a few years, prior to this incident occurring—after we broke up, which was my choice, for a number of reasons. He had never been violent or anything like that. There'd been a couple of spats of jealousy that, at that stage, I interpreted the jealousy as being he cares. I didn't see it as a warning sign.

There were a few occasions [after the break-up] when I came home late that he would actually jump out from behind bushes and jump out at me. On this particular evening, when I drove back to the house and I pulled up, everything looked reasonably okay. I

got ready for bed ... [and] I was just about asleep and I hear this, "Where the fucking hell have you been?" really loudly. I got out of bed and peered out the window as I thought he must have been outside. Unable to see him, I crawled back into bed, only to have his voice repeated—at which point I thought, "It feels closer than that." I went and turned on my bedroom light and he jumped out. He then just literally pulled the covers off me, jumped on top of me, pinned me down and then digitally raped me, the whole time saying, "I'm going to find out whether you've had sex with anyone else".

After this, I moved out [of my house], and he continued to stalk me at the new address. He ended up finding out where I was, and the stalking behaviour continued, but I could never prove it.

Brooke (II)

I never had another experience of sexual assault again until when I was separating from my husband. When I was married, I left because of domestic violence. And I know that domestic violence can involve sexual abuse, but there was no sexual abuse in my violence experience with him, if that makes sense.

One of my strategies to try and keep myself safe in all of that was to just keep the peace and not challenge him on anything. Obviously he's still trying to woo me back, which is one of the patterns of this kind of behaviour.

What happened on one particular night was that he said to me, that he wanted me to make love to him for the last time. He knew the marriage was over, but he wanted to make love to me for the last time, to which I said, "But it's not making love because I'm no longer in love with you". Now, because I was too terrified of him, that if I didn't say yes to that, that he would rape me, I agreed to it. But it wasn't really agreeing, because I was agreeing under fear. It was always about controlling me, the theme through the whole thing had been depowered [sic]. No one could believe that my ex-husband and I were actually splitting up, let alone that he'd been violent towards me, because he loved me so much, in their mind, and he was such a nice guy.

I think my ex-husband and my ex-boyfriend basically knew my routine, they knew my pattern, they knew my vulnerabilities. They had access to intimate information. They had access, for example, to ways earlier that they could get the key. I mean that's quite calculated—at some point earlier he's got the key just in case, for whatever. That's quite calculated, because that would have had to have occurred before we broke up.

Holli

I was dating a guy for maybe about a year and a half and he was extremely emotionally manipulative. I wasn't really aware of that because I hadn't really—I'm not a manipulative person myself. I haven't really been exposed to that sort of thing before. So it was really quite easy for him to sort of gain control over my self-esteem sort of slowly over the relationship. It started out really fantastic. Everything was fantastic and all my friends really liked him.

Then, as time went on, you know, things sort of got worse and worse. I'd had an abnormal pap smear and I had HPV—which causes the cancerous cells—and I had to have an operation to have those removed. So after I had this operation, he still would make me have sex with him and I was just not really ready to do that, because I was just feeling really, you know, it's a really personal thing to go through to have that sort of operation done. He made me do it anyway, not with physical force but just emotional manipulation. Once someone can break down your self-esteem, and they can start to control you, and they can start to control the things you think and what you do. They can basically make you do whatever they want, which is what he did.

Then I had another boyfriend who was quite good for me and sort of helped me a lot with that kind of stuff. But then one time—it was just the once, near the end of our relationship—we were both on LSD. He must have had some sort of freak-out or something and he tied me up and had sex with me anally while I was screaming and protesting against him. It was really quite scary because we were both on drugs. He'd obviously lost his mind and I just didn't know what he was going to do because he wasn't him.

Gaiana

The violence didn't start until about nine months in and there was a whole grooming process that I now, on reflection, was aware it was going on ... but while I was in it didn't realise. It wasn't probably until about three or four years after that that I started to really reflect on what had happened and what that had meant for me and the situation. We started dating very harmless. At about the five-and-a-half/six month mark he started to become slightly more controlling. He changed the phone number and made it a silent number because he was very big about protection. The only thing I didn't have protection from was him. His basic rule was that I had three orifices and one of them was going to get used and that was every day without fail, whether I was interested or not, whether I wanted to or not, whether I was sick or not, whether I had my period or not. That was the deal.

But because he was my boyfriend, I assumed that he had that right. I had no—I kind of knew that if I didn't want to I should be allowed to say no, but I also felt obligated and he had played on that. He would come back and say, "Look at all the things I've done for you. You can do this one thing for me". It was easier to give in because that way it would be over quicker, it would be less painful and then life could go on. So that was just a habit I developed—that you do what you have to do—and I just learnt to read him. I could read his moods. I knew when it was okay to approach him, when it wasn't okay to approach him, when you just did it and when you backed off.

Colleagues and work associates

Erica (I)

I was working as a young journalist and of course I got to know other journalists working on similar issues. One of these was a man who was in his mid-thirties, a lot older than I was. I was invited by him to get together at his house. I would never have located him as a sexual partner—I was 18 or so and he was in his mid-thirties. He would have recognised that—that I was not really sexually available to him in any way—because he didn't try any other way. He didn't try to chat me up or invite me out—it wasn't a date. It was, "Oh come round, it will be lots of us", and so you are lulled by the notion that there are lots of people. I had a few drinks, which I think he would have offered me and got for me. I hung out for a bit and then felt woozy. He said, "Oh come up love, you can lie down", and I went and lay down in his bed.

[He was] very hospitable. He would get you a drink and was hospitable to all the guests. And then of course I felt all woozy and had to go and lie down, but they located that as my failure, my silly and reckless drinking of alcohol—you know, being a bit inexperienced relatively to older people—so I just located it as my problem. I was really deliberately drugged I think and he has gotten away scot-free and, probably, the fact that he used drugs to make me unconscious meant that he knew very well what he was doing and what he intended to do. I am located in his bed, in his house, drugged and unconscious, and then everybody goes home. The way he managed the witness thing was, yes I was there but I had been drunk and he kindly helped me to lay down. So nobody would have seen that as sinister in the way it had been established.

It was a belated recognition that I had been deliberately drugged, deliberately set up and deliberately assaulted. I never recorded it because at the time, of course, it was all my fault, in my head. I had not been "raped", I had been stupid and suffered a consequence.

Erica (II)

Later, I was writing and reporting. A friend of a man I knew rang up. He said that the guy I knew had "suggested I give you a call because I'm working in the area you're writing on. Perhaps we should meet to talk about it". So I said okay. We made an arrangement to have coffee or something in the early evening. He said he would come and get me. He picked me up and he said, "Look, I just have to go past my house first, I haven't fed the cat" ... The intention was to go to a public place to have a meal or a coffee. We got to his house, he fed the cat. Then he put some music on and I was thinking "Well, it's about time to go". I stood up and said, "Well are we going to go?" He said no.

He stood up to block me as I went to move out. He made it very clear—he explicitly stated—that he intended to have sex with me and was not going to let me leave until we did. I said, “Okay, well, we better get on with this”. I stood up, took my dress off, took my pants off, put them next to me, laid down and said, “Come on then, let’s go”. He started sort of scrabbling out of his tie and his shirt and as he was taking off his underpants and standing on one leg, I grabbed my dress, pulled it on and ran out the door with everything and escaped and drove away. He called me on a professional pretext, took me to his home, ostensibly because he had a hungry cat, oh, but of course in reality to get me alone.

The next day he rang me and said, “Do you want to go out to dinner?”

Aimee

It happened in the business function dinner and drinks with one of the clients of work—in the restaurant and when I was on [the] toilet. And the client came in. I thought I’d locked the door but I didn’t. Then he assaulted me. I went to the table to pick up my bag to leave the place and I just said to my boss and another client that the fact he tried to rape me. I didn’t say much details. I was just panicking and I left the restaurant. I went straight to the police station. The police came later, two hours later or something, and found his glasses and he got arrested the following morning. So I don’t think he concealed everything. The toilet was somewhere that people don’t go through much. It was a small corridor, and in between the front part of the restaurant and the back part of the restaurant. So the only time people go through there was the people in the back part leave the restaurant and we were the only one in the back part. So that situation might have helped, that no one was there. I think he thought he didn’t expect me to speak out what happened. He thought I would just pretend nothing happened. Most girls don’t say anything. But I’m not one of those. So, unlucky for him.

I don’t think he did a lot of planning. He probably is experienced. Like, he’s probably known how to do it because that dinner and drink thing just came out suddenly on the very night. But they know exactly what, when, how, what sort of girls and in what situation, in the vulnerable or physical gesture is the sign of easy target.

Acquaintances

Jenny

It happened New Year’s eve. My friend and I spent ages trying to figure out something to do New Year’s Eve. I’ve only gone out the last two years, before that I never went out ... We wanted somewhere fun, so we decided to go to [this] place because it sounded fun. We got motel rooms there for cheap.

We got our first drinks and the only chairs available were in this, like, outdoor area, like a beer garden, next to these two guys. So we started chatting to them and we ended up spending most of the night with them. And, yeah, one of them was buying me lots of drinks. I had all intentions of going home with him, absolutely.

I took him back to the motel room but, like, as soon as we got there; he turned me around and sort of took me from behind ... I had no way to react and because he was so quick, the moment I opened the door, he was, yeah, he was starting ... And, yeah, like pulled my clothes off and sort of went, yeah, he just took me from behind and straight away with the anal sex. He was really rough. I don’t know how long it went on for.

[The perpetrator raped Jenny twice more over the course of the night.]

When he finishes, he goes and has a shower and he comes and sits on the bed and says to me, “So I’ll see you?” Like a question. And I just looked at him and said no. And so he went. When he went, I found out that I had actually bled some time during the night.

He was just an average guy. We were just having fun. We were all just talking. Talking about everything and anything and, yeah, there was nothing, nothing. I mean I knew he was single and I knew his mate was single. It was just a normal conversation. Nothing, no alarm bells rang or anything. I thought he was a nice guy. Because I was taking him

back to the room, I didn't feel like I could report it, because I was planning to sleep with him anyway. So yeah, I never reported it.

Stacy

I went through it [sexual assault] as a kid quite frequently. The incident that happened was pretty recent. I was 18. I was having a really bad day and I had a pretty heavy drinking problem back then. I decided to go out and get drunk at the local café. I was outside in the smoking area and this guy came and sat down beside me. He asked to borrow my lighter to light his cigarette and we started talking—about the weather, about what he did for work. It was just general conversation.

I had to go to the toilet and asked him to mind my drink and bag. I came back and I finished off my drink. I didn't see any danger. There was just nothing there—until I started feeling weird after that drink. Then I just started feeling dizzy and sick.

He invited me back to his place for a drink. We went back there. When I tried to get up to go outside to go home and he locked the door and put the keys in his pocket and he said I am not going anywhere. At the café he was fine. He was bright and bubbly and friendly and talkative. When we got to his house all that changed. He just started getting snappy and jumpy and screamed at me.

He had the TV on. Then he had the music on really loud. I blacked out, passed out. I don't remember. When I woke up, he was raping me, and he had tied me to the bed. I remember asking to go to the toilet so he would untie me. I really needed to go. Then, when he wasn't looking, I tried to sneak out the back door. He grabbed me, threw me back down onto the bed and tied me back up and I was kicking ... But he hit me again and it was just, like, it wasn't worth fighting any more. It started again. I just cried and I kept asking, "Why me? What did I do?" He just laughed and smiled.

[Stacy was raped several more times that evening.]

I don't remember anything else until I woke up the next day. He was beside me passed out and I snuck out ... I saw him a couple of times after that down the street. The first time I saw him he smiled at me. He came up behind me and bumped into me and stuff, and he said, "We should catch up again some time".

Emma

A few years ago I was at a pub and I had—it was never confirmed but I'm pretty sure my drink was spiked. I woke up across the street in a park. It was pretty obvious to me what had happened even though I didn't actually remember the actual act of it. There was a guy that helped me out that I'd been talking to that I sort of knew. He was kind of related to a friend of a friend sort of thing. He said to the people that I was with that he'd give me a hand to get into a taxi, but I never made it there. It all got blurry and I was never sure that it was him, but it was pretty obvious after a while that it happened with him. He was really only an acquaintance at the time.

There were a lot of people there at the time and the fact that he deliberately went out of his way to isolate me from my friends—like he said, "No she'll be alright, I'll help her get into a taxi". So he was able to get me in that place.

Because I was sort of not really upright, that probably made it easier for him, because if I'd been right I wouldn't have left with someone I barely knew. I think he knew and he planned, once he got me outside, he knew what he was going to do then, but I think everything was opportunistic up until then, because I couldn't remember enough to tell people what I'd seen.

He was really nice to me and my friends, particularly to me. He was very willing to talk and wanting to chat to me and stuff. I just thought he was being friendly. He just seemed—people were saying, "Oh he's nice", so I thought, okay. The person that if you saw him in the street, you wouldn't think he was capable of doing that, which is like what I said before—they don't all come with a warning label, you know? If they did, it would be a lot easier.

Dana (I)

It was a guy who I had met out that night. I liked him. We were drinking and getting along really well and flirting. We had met after he came up to me and said how much he respected me for speaking publicly about my experience of sexual assault.

We were with a group of friends. We had stopped off at his place to put down all our bags and books after uni and then to go out. I think right from the beginning of that night, [he was] orchestrating it so that my stuff would be left at his place, so that I would have to go back there. I felt I was in a trusting environment, because we were out with a whole group of friends. I was watching how he was interacting with those friends, and the fact that he was seemingly really nice.

At the end of the night, we had had a few cheeky kisses and that sort of thing. Then I said to him, “Okay, I need to go back to your place to pick up my stuff, but I really need to go”—like, “I’m not going back to your place to stay; I’m coming to pick up my stuff”.

We got into his room. He shut the door and we started making out a bit. It wasn’t until that point where I was actually in his room alone that it even dawned upon me that I was in, like, a vulnerable position. I said to him again, like, “I don’t want to do it”. Then he said, like, “Come on”, or whatever. He just kept going. Then he used the same method of overpowering me as I’d described in my speech. I just was frozen. It’s like I could not come to terms with the fact that that could have happened to me again.

I don’t think he even thought that what he did was wrong. I don’t think that he even—because you know how people have different words for rape? Some people call it unwanted sex. Some people call it coerced sex. Some people call it pressured sex. I think he would have thought that it was rough sex.

Keilah

At the time I was 18. I had run away from home and was staying in a shelter. I went for a walk at night and a group of—I think there were about four—men in a car drove past me and they said, “Show us your tits”. And I turned around and I went over to the car and we started talking and they asked me did I want to go for a ride and I was like, “Yeah, okay”. So we were driving around and things got a little bit crazy and they were speeding and stuff, and that was a little bit scary and they took me back to where two of the men—the two men who raped me worked in the main street. Like they were just showing me around and told me what they did and everything. Then they took me around the back, they had like a kitchen and a bedroom set up where they could stay and they asked did I want to have sex and I said no. I said no on several occasions and managed to run out. I got back to the hostel and I told the staff member who was on duty that night what had happened and she rang the police and the police basically didn’t care—thought I was making the whole thing up, blah, blah, blah. I ran into the two men again who, this time, forcefully took me back, and back to the back room and raped me twice. Then they went out to buy beer and stuff and they’d left me there, and so I just ran out and I went to the hospital and I told them what had happened and they rang the police.

The two men were arrested and they were brought in for interview. They said that I had consented to sex and the police believed that these men were telling the truth because I have a mental illness. So I have had dealings with the police and because of these such dealings they think that I make up stories and they thought that I was making it up. So the whole thing was swept under the carpet and then that was the end of it.

They were really happy with what they’d done. They were happy. Thought they were big shots. On the outside, if you were to meet them, you’d just think they were any normal person. You wouldn’t know that they’d be the type of people that go around hurting other people. On the inside, I think that they’re calculating the fact that they’d planned a lot of it.

Friends

Natasha

The assault happened when I was probably in my 20s. It was someone I knew reasonably well through having shared a house with them. We had a friendship, as did a number of people who lived in the house. [Later], this person moved out of the house. But we remained on friendship terms—at some point we slept together. And so that was sort of historically there.

One time, about six months later, we were hanging out, having a few drinks. I had basically said I wasn't interested in spending the night with him again. I did end up staying at his place. But I had been pretty clear that it wasn't anticipated that it would be a sexual event. And I remember being incredibly tired, and whether that was because I was drunk or because of something else, I don't know. But I remember falling asleep and waking up.

When I woke up, he was trying to have sex with me. At a certain point, I started to laugh because what he was doing was so—so inept and so unappealing and like being handled like a piece of meat. That is when it escalated into something more violent ... I remember I was screaming. The overwhelming feeling was like I was a lump of meat. I don't know how long that went on for, I felt like I was looking on from outside and that sort of was my memory of it.

I did get away from him. I got my clothes and got out straight away and walked home in a very, very distressed state. This was someone I knew—at that stage I guess would have called a friend—but he didn't appear to be anyone I knew. I mean the fact of his lack of connection with me as a person, or even as someone he knew, with someone with any right to respect, I suppose.

Later, I approached him and told him what I thought of what he'd done. And he denied it. I told him it was completely unacceptable, that his sexual violence was unacceptable and he denied it. He said, "I've never been sexually violent to you", but I very emphatically told him he had been. His response was interesting, because it wasn't a denial, it was, "Oh well, I was drunk".

Gail

The incident happened about 10 years ago. He was a friend that I'd known for a year. This man was introduced to me by a friend and he was part of a group [involved in community work]. We had gone out for dinner. He was pretty keen to have a relationship with me from the beginning. I wasn't, but I was interested in him as a friend and as somebody [involved in community awareness]. [It] was a relationship where he was willing to be challenged around his masculinity and his behaviour. I was taken in by the sort of notion that he was prepared to look at his behaviour.

We went out to dinner and he was harassing [me] about having sex with him. At the time I thought of it as him negotiating and trying to be open and honest about how he felt and where he was at. Now I see it as sexual harassment.

He then said to me, "Oh, there's something up at my house that I really want you to see" ... I still trusted him. I actually thought that he was safe. So I got in his car. When we got to his house I was actually feeling quite out of it. He had a spare bedroom and so I thought I would just crash there. He then told me that there was nowhere to sleep, that the spare bedroom was empty. He didn't want to drive me home. I couldn't afford a cab home from there. I didn't have the money and he didn't offer it.

I was drunk and I trusted him, but he kept pressuring me to have sex. He kind of turned it into this self-esteem thing for him where I was really hurtful by not having sex. I ended up saying to him, "If we have sex tonight, it's not going to be because I want to, it's because I'm so sick of fucking arguing with you". He said, "Oh, shall I get the condom then?" And that's all I remember. [Later] I sort of came to and realised that he was having sex with me. I asked him to stop, but he didn't and I blacked out again.

[The next morning] I literally couldn't stop myself crying. He kept saying to me, "It's just your perspective of the situation. It's your perspective that's really mucked up and you

clearly have a problem with intimacy and I really hope that you get that together”. When it turned for me was when he said to me, “If you’d said ‘no’ louder the second time, I might have taken more notice or might have taken you more seriously”.

The next day I found out that the spare room wasn’t empty—there was a bed in there.

Stefanie

He was always welcome here anytime. I used to share things with him. I used to treat him like an older brother or father figure. When I was upset I was telling him about things, I was crying and he held my hand sometimes. Sometimes he would say, “Okay, cry. It will make you feel better”. So we really were good friends. There was no other relationship between us. When I asked for help he was always there to help. Eventually he told me he was in love with me and he wished that things were different. We were just good friends and I said, “This is not going to happen, ever, so forget it. Either we stay friends like we are or, if you don’t want to, we don’t have to see each other”.

Anyway, that evening I had a couple of friends [over] because I tried to make some friends around the area. Anyway, people started leaving. He had alcohol and, of course, everyone had wine or vodka or whatever ... and he said, “Gee I can’t drive” ... I said, “Look, no problem you can sleep on the sofa”. He asked me if he could sleep with me and I said, “No one sleeps in my bed ever. Only my daughter”. I said, “What are you talking about? Are you crazy or drunk? What’s happened to you? What’s got to you?” Then he started sort of being pushy and physically aggressive. That’s it. That’s what happened.

I don’t think I had in Australia anyone I trusted so much like I trusted him. So that hurt me so much, because to me the relationship between men and women is okay and it’s a normal thing, but friendship is more important to me than any other thing. So he betrayed that and that was very painful for me. I’m afraid to trust men now. I think they all want to have sex.

Family members

Amber

The person who sexually assaulted me was a family member’s partner. I was going to a friend’s place and he turned up and blocked my car in my driveway. He said that he had been fighting with [his partner]. Could he use my telephone to ring his family? I said, “You can only stay for ten minutes”. I thought it was strange in the first place that he came to my house, because he would never come to my house without [his partner]—and the fact that my husband wasn’t home either. So I felt funny there and then, like, I wish I had have, you know, acted on instinct then.

I kept trying to message my husband to come home and he got cranky with that. I said, “Look, you have to go”, but he came back into the kitchen and got another beer out and started sculling it and he just changed. As soon as I challenged him about the beer he said, “Don’t fucking talk to me like that. You sound like [my partner]”. And that’s when the assaults just started happening. I will live with the image of his eyes in my mind for the rest of my life. It was like a monster. His whole personality changed. He grabbed my mobile off me and smashed it. He then pulled the home phone out of the wall and threw that, and that’s when he assaulted me first in the kitchen. He then assaulted me a number of times.

I managed to get away from him and I ran sort of along the hallway in my house and he crash-tackled, you know, pushed me down like a football player and dragged me. He denied everything [to police]. He says that he came here and had a beer and he fell asleep on the lounge and he woke up and I was in the bathroom screaming.

He knew me and he came to my house and was drunk and I was at home on my own and he assaulted me over a period of two hours. He knew that I was home on my own, that my husband wasn’t here and my children were away on holidays. I think it is because he knew me. He was physically a lot stronger than me as well. He knew

the layout of my house and different things like that. You don't expect this to happen in your own home or anything, especially by someone—I mean, you don't go around in life thinking you are going to be raped, but you should feel safe in your home and answering the door to a family member.

Strangers

Judith

I was asleep on the night it happened. I was awoken to somebody kissing me. Initially, I opened my eyes—the feeling came first and I opened my eyes, someone was on my lips. It was like my guts just fell out of me and then just complete fear took over. I just knew I was going to be raped because of the kissing. And I guess it's every woman's fear really ... and I just thought, "No, I'm going to be raped".

I tried to get up. He smacked a hand on my mouth, he shoved me back down and then he proceeded to—as I was getting up and as he was shoving me back down he kept a hand on my mouth and he grabbed my left arm and twisted it behind my back. He was becoming very rough and very violent and I was scared to scream. I became very frightened to scream. I started to talk to him because I'd just had an operation and I was terrified of what was going to happen because I'd just had surgery. I kept saying I'm bleeding, I'm bleeding, please don't touch me.

I said my son's upstairs and he said, "You lie, I've checked". He kept shoving me. It just went on—it just seemed to go on and on and on—the struggle and him. He went and got a knife from my kitchen. I don't know how I did it, but I somehow managed to get away from him and through the door. I later went on to find out that he'd stolen my mobile phone, which was on the charger above where I was sleeping. He went through my phone and he called three women and told them what he'd done, threatening to find them.

Dana (II)

I was coming home from the pub near my place. It was late in the evening, I was walking home and listening to music. I live in, like, a really safe neighbourhood. I was walking down my street, and I do it all the time. No one was following me ... Then, all of a sudden, I just felt this weight on my shoulders. It was a guy, and he was grabbing me from behind. He then took a blade and held it to my throat. He dragged me into the park next to where I was walking and then he came and stood in front of me. He said, "I'm going to rape you and kill you". He made a fist and he started hitting me on the left side of my face.

He began strangling me with one hand and repeatedly bashing my face. He told me again that he was going to rape me and kill me. I thought that I was actually going to die. Then he began tearing at my clothes and pulling at my top. He then indecently sexually assaulted me. I began thrashing at his face, scratching at him and trying to yell. I think he realised then that I wasn't going to passively submit. He then got off me and ran.

3.2 Victim/survivors on perpetrator strategies

Five resources for sexual offending

Participants' accounts revealed significant similarity in the types of resources (or facilitators) that enabled the opportunity for offending. These were: trust; social norms about gender, sex and seduction; control, power and domination; surprise; and alcohol (and other drugs). We regard these as resources because: (a) most—if not all—of them are a feature of social life, and (b) they function as assets or materials that assist perpetrators to accomplish a goal.

These victim/survivors' accounts provide extremely rich information about the strategies perpetrators use to sexually offend, how social and situational contexts influence these strategies and the role of shared socio-cultural meanings in facilitating perpetration. Their narratives show that the perpetrators had a range of strategies to secure these resources to:

- pursue sexual interaction with a woman;
- disregard the lack of free agreement from the women and have sex anyway;

- intimidate and terrify the women; deliberately incapacitate them;
- and silence them following the assault.

Trust

Trust may be viewed at the individual level as reflecting concepts of sincerity, honesty and individual values; however, this view has been criticised for being “far too simplistic in [its] lack of attention to social context” (Misztal, 1996, p. 14). Luhmann (1979) argued that trust is neither psychological nor institutional, but shapes both dimensions. Positive micro-level contact with individuals (e.g., a doctor) can contribute to more generalised social good (e.g., increased confidence in the medical system). The social capital literature has been particularly interested in the way trust facilitates, and is an indicator of, social cohesion (Putnam, 2001). This idea of social trust is significant because it shifts understandings of sexual offending—how it occurs and the nature of its harm—from the individual, or even the interpersonal, to the social.¹²

The use and exploitation of trust was identified by nearly all victim/survivors as being key to the perpetration of sexual assault. All victim/survivors, except for those assaulted by a stranger with no interaction in the lead up to the offence, had trusted and felt safe around the offender before the assault(s).

Although trust was a central and consistent theme, how perpetrators used it as a resource varied considerably depending on the social, situational and interpersonal context of the sexual assault. Here, we describe how trust was used by the perpetrators in different interpersonal and social contexts, namely:

- intimate relationships and long-term friendships; and
- casual social settings and interactions.

Perpetrators used trust in these circumstances to achieve particular outcomes, such as presenting themselves as not being sexually interested in the women and influencing community responses to sexual offenders and victims.

Intimate relationships and long-term friendships

In friendships, trust tended to develop gradually, building closeness (or intimacy) between the women and perpetrators. Some participants likened this to a kind of “grooming” behaviour—if not of the woman, then of the type of relationship the women thought they were having with the perpetrator:

So we've become like family friends almost. He was always welcome here anytime. I used to share things with him. I used to treat him like an older brother or father figure. When I was upset, I was telling him about things. I was crying, and he held my hand sometimes. Sometimes he would say, “Okay, cry. It will make you feel better”. So we really were good friends. There was no other relationship between us. When I asked for help, he was always there to help. (Stefanie)

This trust was subsequently used by the perpetrator to facilitate his assault. Stefanie recalled:

That evening, I had a couple of friends [over] because I tried to make some friends around the area ... Anyway, people started leaving. He had alcohol and, of course, everyone had wine or vodka or whatever. I think the last person was [name] to leave, and he said, “Gee, I can't drive”, because it was about 1.00 or 2.00 that night. I said, “Look, no problem, you can sleep on the sofa”. (Stefanie)

Harriette described the perpetrator as “no stranger. He was in our home many times, both as a client and a friend of my husband's, who he'd known for 20 years. He'd been in our home for lunch, dinner many times”. Her trust was built over many years and was reinforced by the ties the perpetrator had with her husband and her children. She saw him as a father figure. Gail observed that despite the pressure for sex from the perpetrator, the fact that they had been friends for a year and invested in the same social issues was the principle factor she used to guide her actions that night:

¹² See Morrison, Quadara, and Boyd (2007) for a summary of the available research on the collective harm of sexual violence on the social fabric. Public health research has also investigated how trust as a form of social capital is an important determinant of the health of populations (see Veenstra, 2002, for a summary of key research).

“No” should have been enough. He then said to me, “Oh, there’s something up at my house that I really want you to see”. I can’t remember what it was. I still trusted him. I actually thought that he was safe. So I got in his car. (Gail)

In each of these situations, participants had been friends with the perpetrators long enough for there to be not only a level of mutual trust between them, but also the same expectations about the nature of the relationship.

Trust was also a resource for perpetrators in intimate relationships. In these cases, being married to or living with someone automatically meant that trust was part of the relationship. However, the dynamic was slightly different in that, once involved, the perpetrators’ “true” self and expectations became apparent. The task was then to appear trustworthy to others. Perpetrators extended their trust-building efforts to participants’ families, friends and, in some instances, to their whole community. They created distinct public and private personas:

He’s Mr Nice Guy. Everyone thought he was, like, sweet and kind. Yeah, so it seemed very unbelievable that he would do anything, even aggressive. It just wasn’t kind of the persona that he had ... He is the sort of person who appears as charming and thoughtful. (Amanda)

This was echoed by Trudy, who talked about her husband’s authority in the community and with his colleagues. This outward presentation of trustworthiness and being of good character enabled both women’s husbands to perpetrate grave sexual assaults precisely because no one would believe it. The social meanings of matrimony (described in the next section), combined with this cultivation of the community’s trust, meant that little effort was required in order for them to maintain a more respected, powerful status than the victim/survivor. Other research with victim/survivors of partner rape has also noted that perpetrators develop community-level trust, which similarly increased the victim/survivors’ vulnerability within the relationship, effectively silencing them from speaking out (Easteal & McCormond-Plummer, 2006; Parkinson, 2008).

Acquaintances and associates: They don’t carry a warning

In situations where the victim and the perpetrator have only just met, victim/survivors described how the offender presented himself as a non-threatening, socially “normal” person. He may have engaged in friendly conversation with the victim and her friends and appeared to be “nice”, “friendly” or “charming”. This outward disposition promoted a sense of safety, minimising the victim/survivor’s feelings of threat and/or danger. This effectively enabled the offender to isolate, trap and sexually assault the woman. The victim/survivor may have accepted drinks from the offender, invited him into her home or have willingly gone back to his home with no concern about her safety and no knowledge of the perpetrator’s agenda. Indeed, the women generally felt comfortable in being alone with their offender right up until the moment of assault. In retrospect, victim/survivors saw their offenders’ personas as a deliberate manipulation strategy used to isolate and gain access to them:

He was, like, really grooming me in a sense, like, luring me into this sort of false sense of the belief that I could trust him. And, yes, just making me think that he was a really, really good guy so that I would do something like lower my guard and allow myself to get into a situation where I thought it would be fine. (Dana)

In instances where the victim/survivor was particularly intoxicated, the offender might have offered support to the victim; for example, by volunteering to get her home safely or offering to “care” for her at his place. Emma, Erica and Olivia were each offended against by perpetrators using this strategy:

Everybody thought, “Oh, he’s nice or he was a nice dude”, and he was, in a way—he was a nice fellow. So, yes, I guess that made it easier for him to talk to people and get people on side and it made it easier for him to convince people that I’d be okay with him. It was like, “Oh, you can trust him, he’s cool”. I know that he knew that I was out of it as well, so it was easy for him to do it. Because I was sort of not really upright—well, with it, at the time—so that probably made it easier for him, because if I’d been right I wouldn’t have left with someone I barely knew. (Emma)

Erica observed that the perpetrator coming across as altruistically concerned about her welfare after she became “woozy” at a house party was not only for her benefit:

I had to go and lie down, but they located that as my failure, my silly and reckless drinking of alcohol. You know, being a bit inexperienced relatively to older people. So I just located it as my problem, until years later I went “No, actually, I was raped”. I was really deliberately drugged, I think, and he has gotten away scot-free. And probably the fact that he used drugs to make me unconscious meant that he knew very well what he was doing and what he intended to do ... The way he managed the witness thing was, yes, I was there [at his home], but I had been drunk and he kindly helped me to lay down. So nobody would have seen that as sinister in the way it had been established. (Erica)

Perpetrators used the customs of the social environment or situation; for example, that it was normal in the context (such as a bar or nightclub) to buy a drink for and talk to a woman that they didn't previously know. If the woman was with her friends, he appeared to them as he did to the victim/survivor—as being trustworthy. Some perpetrators went to great lengths to present themselves as a person of good character to their victims. One victim/survivor's long-term boyfriend fallaciously told her that the perpetrator was a police officer. Another woman was told a range of lies by a man whom she had just met—that he was professionally employed, possessed a nice car and had just broken up with his girlfriend.

Outcomes of using trust as a resource

There were several outcomes that the perpetrators achieved through the use of trust. Most obviously, this moved both victim and perpetrator into a location or situation in which a sexual offence could be perpetrated with relative ease. Other outcomes, further discussed in this section, included: counteracting the heterosexual script and expectations about men, women and seduction; and silencing the victim.

Disabling the heterosexual script: Removing sexual threat

Some participants talked about how the perpetrator minimised the sexual threat he represented. This was a strategy that worked in conjunction with the social scripts of heterosexual seduction by *not* using it. Instead, perpetrators presented themselves as a kind of antidote or opposite to the “typical” guy. For example, offenders emphasised their ill health or other weakness to the victim:

He's [a] 65-year-old businessman who seemed harmless enough because that's what I was told. He was a very sick person. He had a defibrillator in his heart to keep him alive. He had several bypasses and his wife's a lovely person ... He told my husband that he was suffering erectile dysfunction. (Harriette)

In two cases described by participants, the perpetrator had invested efforts into advocating women's rights and one perpetrator was active in the field of preventing violence against women. Such positions set the perpetrator up with knowledge about sexual assault and enabled them to assume an elevated non-threatening identity. According to victim/survivors, this helped equip them to sexually offend:

His perspective of himself as [committed to addressing violence against women] was so powerful for him. He just didn't have any other way of thinking about his behaviour. So I don't know whether it was deliberate or not. I think that it's convenient. Telling [our friends] his version and what he thought was going on, and relying on his reputation as a [women's rights advocate] to do that. (Gail)

Olivia was raped by someone she had met at a club. He too attempted to minimise his status as a sexual pursuer:

I'd been drinking and so he was concerned, like he was—oh, I can't remember all of it. But I know it was sort of, like, oh, he talked about the fact that he had had a fight with his girlfriend that night. That made it seem like he was someone who was normal enough to be in a relationship, I guess. I didn't have any alarm on that because I thought, well, he's not trying to pick me up then because he's got a girlfriend. (Olivia)

Woods and Porter (2008) found that offenders who knew their victims were more likely than strangers to display a less violent and more personal, compliance-gaining offending style. Ben-Yehuda (2001) argued that deception devices such as secrecy, manipulation, lying, cheating or concealment and the specific and deliberate motivation to do so are involved in trust-breaching

offending practices. Our participants found these strategies to be effective, not only because they facilitated contact between victims and perpetrators, but also because they “scrambled” the women’s ability to interpret cues of risk that the men may have represented.

Securing victims’ silence through self-blame and shame

Exploiting victim/survivors’ trust had significant implications for their sense of self-blame and shame. They felt that that they had been complicit in their own victimisation rather than simply engaging with the perpetrator as he had represented himself to be: father-figure, surrogate brother, a guy getting over his girlfriend, a good friend. Consequently, following the assault(s), victim/survivors were inclined to reflect critically on whether they contributed to their victimisation, rather than identifying trust as being a deliberate compliance-promoting strategy operationalised by the perpetrator. In this way, presenting himself as a nice, weak or “regular guy” not only facilitated the assaults, but also effectively silenced victim/survivors by damaging their self-confidence, promoting self-blame and delaying their disclosure:

At the beginning, I was blaming myself more, because I thought how stupid I must be not to have picked up on this and his intentions? I normally considered myself to be a very intelligent woman and someone who has insight into people and their motives etc., objectively. But when it comes to you, you can be an absolute idiot, especially when grooming becomes involved. (Harriette)

Victim/survivors also feared that others might not believe that the perpetrator was capable of an act such as rape, given that his “trustworthy” image often extended to the wider community. As Amanda highlighted, “I just felt no one would ever believe me—that he could behave in that way”. This view of the perpetrator—as one of high credibility (or at least more credible than themselves)—and the related fear (and reality) of being judged by others, influenced the victim/survivor’s interaction with the perpetrator, their interpretation of the assault and their decision to remain silent.

The use of trust secured the women’s compliance and enabled the offenders to perpetrate the crimes. The perpetrators’ “trustworthy” personas also assisted with deceiving and gaining collaboration with communities, institutions and society more broadly. By reiterating that perpetrators used trust as a mechanism to secure the women’s cooperation and commit the offences, these study findings confront victim-focused notions of risk and perceptions of victim culpability.

Presenting as “nice” enabled offenders to create an environment of disbelief and silence; for example, by influencing victim/survivors into thinking their experience was not a crime and by cultivating an atmosphere of disbelief that they could be capable of being perpetrators. Indeed, recipients of disclosures, including family members, peers and teachers have a crucial role in supporting victim/survivors (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, Wasco, & Sefl, 2007; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). By aligning themselves with family, friends and the community more broadly, perpetrators effectively take away victim/survivors’ access to a support network. As such, victim/survivors may be more likely to withhold disclosure or, if they do disclose, they may be met with scepticism and blame rather than belief and support, and this is what prevailed in many of the participants’ experiences.

Social norms about gender, sex and seduction

Social norms are the general, often implicit, social rules that guide how we behave in any given social situation; that is, they are the shared understandings of “appropriate” and “normal” behaviour that allow us to interact in socially acceptable ways (Young, 2007).¹³ These are informed by shared beliefs and assumptions and by overarching discourses in which such beliefs, assumptions and attitudes, over time, become naturalised bedrocks of common knowledge. Gavey (2005) argued that “everyday taken-for-granted normative forms of heterosexuality work as a cultural scaffolding for rape” (p. 2). Elsewhere, research has shown that social expectations and norms about masculinity and femininity, and the manifestation of men’s power in everyday

¹³ They can also be context-dependent, and may change over time, space and culture. Thus, the social norms guiding sexual interaction in a nightclub may vary from those guiding sexual activity within a relationship. Adherence to social rules is not a passive process, and norms may be actively challenged (for example, through feminist critiques of normative heterosexual practices) or rejected within a culture or sub-culture (leading to the development of another set of more acceptable norms).

interactions, have been identified as major contributors to sexual assault (Flood & Pease, 2009; Kelly, 1988; Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002). In addition, shared understandings of normative heterosexual sex and beliefs in “rape myths” foster an environment in which abusive behaviours are normalised, ignored or excused (Violence Against Women Community Attitudes Project, 2006).

This section discusses how norms and scripts have played a fundamental role in perpetrators’ strategies to offend, particularly in instances of casual sexual encounters. The participants’ narratives identified three main ways in which social norms were resources used by perpetrators to:

- create and facilitate “seduction” encounters;
- demand or expect sex; and
- silence victim/survivors and conceal the offences.

“Seduction” encounters: Social scripts of heterosexuality

The shared discourse of heterosexual seduction, and gender roles within it, include a number of assumptions:

- the male sex drive is an almost overwhelming drive over which men have little or no control—once it is in motion it must be gratified;
- this sex drive is “activated” by women (or pictures of women);
- women are not interested in sex per se, but in intimacy—they use sex to get intimacy whereas men use intimacy to get sex;
- men are the pursuers in courtship, women the receivers and gatekeepers to sexual interaction;
- women need a bit of persuasion to consent to sex; and
- sex equals a penis and penetration.

Such ideas have been expressed in most sites of Western cultural production over the last few centuries, such as literature, art, film, science and medicine, law, popular culture, media and advertising (Ehrlich, 2001; Fine, 1997; Larcombe, 2005; Powell, 2008). They also find expression in community and organisational settings, such as military institutions, fraternity settings and sporting clubs. Among the study participants, perpetrators used these ideas to set up, carry out and conceal sexual assaults.

Casual encounters

Jenny was out for New Year’s Eve. She was ready to celebrate and relax after several years of responsibilities that had limited her socialising:

It happened New Year’s eve just gone ... And, yeah, I remember we got our first drinks and the only chairs available were in this like outdoor area, like a beer garden next to these two guys. So we started chatting to them and we ended up spending most of the night with them. And, yeah, one of them was buying me lots of drinks. And then I remember, I mean I had all intentions of going home with him, absolutely. I took him back to the motel room but, like, as soon as we got there, he turned me around and sort of took me from behind. (Jenny)

As Jenny’s account shows, the perpetrator had come across as friendly and engaging and she had clear intentions of having consensual sex with the perpetrator. However, this was not the intention of the perpetrator, who overwhelmed her the minute the door was opened. Following two more painful anal rapes, he used her shower and proposed that they catch up again. Erica’s account describes the perpetrator’s rather drawn-out contrivance to get her at his place. He had appealed to her professional identity as a journalist by telling her he had a story. He was a friend of friend:

[He] had all of these little—feed the cat, drop by the [workplace] to do a job—different kinds of reasons. He took me to his home ostensibly because he had a hungry cat; oh, but of course in reality to get me available to him alone. I think he had imagined that once I was back at his house ... he would magically become this hugely sexually exciting person that I would swoon for, perhaps. (Erica)

Post-refusal persistence

A number of women felt that their sexual unavailability or rejection of sexual interaction with the offender spurred perpetrators to insist on sex:

I don't know why he imagined that I would think he was somebody I would want to sleep with—a married man with kids ... He would have preferred that it be consensual, but he was unwilling to give up his plan ... So I think he didn't quite believe that I wouldn't really want to have sex with him and, as I say, I don't think he saw himself as a rapist. (Erica)

We went out to dinner and he was harassing about having sex with him. At that point [in my life] I was going through this process of thinking maybe I should start thinking about relationships with men [I already have a friendship with]. But his version of it was—I've waited long enough and it's about time it happened. (Gail)

As Gail's account in Chapter 3 shows, the perpetrator's expectation of Gail "putting out" went "on and on" for several hours, and shifted from persistence to outright emotional manipulation and, later, to a tacit acknowledgement that Gail had not actually consented to the sex, saying, "If you'd said 'no' louder the second time, I might have taken more notice or might have taken you more seriously".

In their study with US college students, Struckman-Johnson, Struckman-Johnson, and Anderson (2003) likewise found a pattern of engagement in what they call "post-refusal sexual persistence". Their study participants used a range of coercive tactics, such as compliments, touching and emotional manipulation, and then force tactics, such as physically overpowering or intoxicating their target. Although the study considered both men and women, the more forceful tactics were those used predominately by men.

Normative femininity: Being polite

Socialisation processes and shared discourses construct femininity as being passive and empathic (Connell, 1995; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Expectations of normative feminine behaviour reduced victim/survivors' resistance to pressure. In relationships, the women's impetus was loyalty and obligation to satisfy their husband or partner. In friendships or with acquaintances, women who felt their power was compromised engaged in "polite speak" to preserve their relationship with the perpetrator, or to negotiate away from a potentially more physically violent interaction:

I think the fact that he milked the ambiguity of the situation and he milked the fact that ... I think women are so often afraid of offending others—by, like, really strongly verbally asserting ourselves—that we try to politely get out of these situations. He was using that to keep pushing a boundary. (Dana)

Here, Dana observed that women's roles in social interaction are expected to demonstrate a receptiveness to others and a desire to not offend. This was seen by Dana as enabling the offender to push boundaries. Such norms around ideal womanhood can affect women's abilities to resist sexual violence (Katz & Tirone, 2008; Marcus, 1992; Stark, 2007). Or it can make it difficult for others to "see" resistance and refusal. Women may indirectly refuse sexual or romantic interaction with men because being assertive is not often open to them in social encounters (see, for example, Fileborn, 2008; Hochschild, 1979).

Men's sexual demands and expectations

Participants identified men's sense of entitlement to sex as being particularly relevant to facilitating non-consensual sex. Historical, political and social contexts have shaped the relations between men and women (as social categories) and, more specifically, have shaped women's inferior status and men's sense of entitlement (including sexual entitlement) to women. Conventions like marital immunity for rape (formally removed in 1991 when the High Court ruled that it no longer existed in any Australian jurisdiction) and the law of coverture are some examples of socially sanctioned mechanisms that have provided for men's entitlement to "rule" women, particularly in the private domain.¹⁴ These social norms about the relations between the sexes

¹⁴ Coverture was as a common law doctrine whereby, upon marriage, a woman's legal rights were subsumed by those of her husband (see Zaher, 2002).

in the domestic sphere are particularly relevant in intimate relationships and marriages. Men commonly use routine, pressure and coercion to sexually assault their partners.

In creating a routine, the men described in this study were able to set up regular sexual access to their partners, while avoiding the capacity for mutual desire and consent. The use of routine also provided space for the men to excuse their reactions (often comprising frustration, anger and violence) to the women's unavailability, should the women resist their request:

Like, every Sunday morning. If I didn't give it to him Sunday morning, he would make me pay all day for that. Like, he'd just be really shitty, find an excuse to hurt me or break something. It all revolved around sex. Our whole life, it seemed to me, like, it revolved around that. (Liza)

It was—it had been primed in the rest of the day that this is what happens at the end of the night when you love me. It would always be presumed that it was going to happen ... So it was easier to give in, because that way it would be over quicker, it would be less painful and then life could go on. So that was just a habit I developed—that you do what you have to do. (Gaiana)

Participants described how traditional beliefs about matrimony and the view that a woman should make her husband happy were also used to sexually offend. Victim/survivors who experienced sexual assault within their relationship often did not identify the behaviour as sexual assault until months or years after the assault occurred; rather, they attributed it to male entitlement and marital/relationship obligation, a position that their partners communicated to them:

And also him telling you that it's his entitlement. So it's a kind of brainwashing to make you believe that's what you're supposed to do, because you're his wife and that once you're married you haven't got the right to say no anymore. It was mainly those verbal things. (Amber)

I'd break down and cry, but hey, good wives don't do things like that. We're brought up to do as we are told and obey him. (Trudy)

Parkinson (2008) also found that women believed that their partners would not have recognised their behaviour as rape, even in cases that were accompanied by violence, and even when the violence was extreme. Husband-perpetrators felt a strong sense of entitlement and right to sexual access to their wives. In this study, the women in intimate relationships found it difficult to identify and label their experiences as rape, and their partners were particularly effective at establishing their right and entitlement to their bodies. Similar to these findings, past research has also found that women in relationships are less likely to identify and are reluctant to label their experience as sexual assault than women who are assaulted outside of relationships (Russell, 1990; Walklate, 2004).

After the assault: The role of social norms in silencing victims

Social norms about gender, sex and seduction continued to be useful after the assault in two key ways: by reinterpreting the event as a consensual encounter, and recasting the victim/survivor as being loose, a bitch, or unhinged.

Reinterpreting the event

Perpetrators used a range of strategies to reinterpret the assault after the event. In some cases they played the role of suitor or lover some time after the assault had ended. In Dana's case, she had been clear in saying no. The perpetrator had physically restrained her during the assault:

I went home and, yeah, there was like, there were text messages and stuff. Just like, "Hey I had a really great night", like that sort of stuff, which was also why I was quite confused because I was, like, well his intentions couldn't have been bad then because, you know, rapists aren't meant to send follow-up text messages saying, "I had a great night". [And I thought] oh well, I must have misinterpreted him. I must be in the wrong here. (Dana)

The perpetrator's adherence to the script despite perpetrating a deliberately brutal assault was extremely powerful. The victim herself was prepared to momentarily give him the benefit of the doubt. Other men asked to see the victim/survivor again (for example, Jenny).

In other cases, particularly where the victim/survivor had been intoxicated or "out of it", with little memory of what had happened during the night, the perpetrator furnished her with a version of what had happened. They instigated or dominated conversations about the assault, actively translating the experience into a consensual sexual encounter through the use of "date talk", as in Olivia's experience, or saying that the victim had been really "up for it" or "wild".

Solicitous behaviour following the assault(s) was seen by victim/survivors as a deliberate ploy to confuse or control them in order to get away with the assault. Indeed, offenders did little else to conceal their crimes. Instead, they relied on victim/survivors' silence, the victim/survivors' lack of memory or inability to identify them (in cases of strangers or acquaintances), the offenders' ability to influence their public persona, negative stereotypes about the victim/survivors, and normative sex scripts.

Recasting the victim: The whore, the shrew and the madwoman

Perpetrators also used negative stereotypes of victims (and women more broadly) to conceal their crimes; for example, offenders claimed that the women lied about the sexual assault or that they were mentally unwell:

Because he's done such a great job at convincing people that have known me for years that I'd gone crazy and he was the poor guy that wasn't loved. So my reluctance in speaking out ... people just see me as the bitter ex, you know. But maybe it's going to have to be—it will have to be me that speaks up. (Amanda)

He called me schizophrenic and I thought I was, but I saw a psychiatrist and psychologist and they'd all told me, "No, you're not". He told me how I thought and felt. (Trudy)

Indeed, women's complaints of sexual assault have historically been met with scepticism. Jordan (2004) suggested that women's complaints of rape lack credibility because a woman's very being has historically oozed deceit or unknowability.¹⁵ Although the perception that women routinely lie about sexual assault or are delusional in their accusations has been undermined by research, these misconceptions remain commonplace in community and criminal justice responses today. Confidence that women's complaints wouldn't hold—together with circumstantial factors surrounding the offence that normalise the assault—may be a reason why perpetrators may feel no need to take extra lengths to conceal the crime.

Control, power and domination

In the victim/survivors' accounts, control, power and domination emerge as central but complex aspects of perpetration. Having control over the victim/survivor was a clear resource for perpetrators. It was also a necessary condition for offending, and a range of other resources, such as alcohol, were used to secure this control. Finally, having control or power over the victim was also seen as a goal or reward of sexual offending. That is, it was something that sexual offending produced or enabled. This is quite different from the other resources identified in this research. This section illustrates how securing control was a strategy for perpetrators. The following strategies of control are considered:

- isolating the victim/survivor;
- humiliation; and
- dominating the victim/survivor and her environment.

15 Since its inception as a discipline, criminology saw women as inherently deceitful (e.g., Cesare Lombroso and Ernest A. Hooton, described in Henry & Einstadter, 1988). Freud called woman the "dark continent" and unknowable. The criminal justice system, until recently, had a direction that women, like small children, were an inherently unreliable class of witness. For discussions on the symbolic representation of woman in politics, philosophy, law and criminology, see Gatens (1996) and Young (1996).

Isolation

In intimate relationships, the perpetrators isolated victims socially over time, a process that was aided by the historical construction of the family as a man's private domain and by the women's responsibilities of primary child care:

Being a mum, it's very easy because you seem a lot more isolated. You're in the home. You don't get out so much 'cause it's a big ordeal to pack the kids up. So you're more likely to not be involved with other things. (Liza)

Trudy was isolated from her family—"seeing them was a no-no"—and she had no control over the finances. Inverse to this isolation was her husband's growing power and authority in the community and his workplace. This affected her sense of agency:

It's not something that happened very quickly or a few years. This was over a long time. We were married for more than 20 years. As the years went past, I sort of stopped and said, "Yes, okay, yes, you're right, you're right", that I just gave up on myself and sort of thought it was easier to say yes, yes, yes. And so it was the control that he had over me that he was right all the time. I had the kids and had nobody. (Trudy)

Where the offender was an acquaintance or a stranger, isolation commonly involved physically isolating the victim from the others that she may have been with or isolating her in his territory:

At the café he was fine. He was just—he was bright and bubbly and friendly and talkative. When we got to his house, all that changed. He just started getting snappy and jumpy and screamed at me. (Stacy)

One fairly common strategy to isolate the victim was to either approach them when they were quite drunk and/or to spike their drinks in order to incapacitate them.¹⁶ Olivia, Emma and Fay described situations in which the perpetrator presented just at the time they were becoming incapacitated and steered them towards a setting of perpetrator's choosing:

I so remember that pep talk that I gave myself—it's time for you to go home now, it's time for you to get into a cab, you don't have to say goodbye to anyone, you'll see them all tomorrow—and I was just quite prepared to walk straight from that ladies room straight into a cab and go home and he just got me in between. (Fay)

Gail described how the perpetrator—a friend she knew well—simply lied. After dinner, drinks and inviting her to his place, he then told her "that there was nowhere to sleep, that the spare bedroom was empty. The next day I found out it wasn't empty; there was a bed in there".

Humiliation

An additional dimension to social isolation in intimate assaults was the use of humiliation. Several victim/survivors had experienced extremely degrading, sadistic forms of sexual assault at the hands of their partners. As participants found, this effectively silenced the victim/survivors, distancing them from family and community members to whom they may have turned for assistance:

The way he treated me was so shameful and humiliating, it made it less and less likely that I would speak. I'm sure he was very conscious of that. He did such horrendous things. If he just punched me that would have been so much easier. There were never bruises. That would have been so much easier because that's something you can say to people. (Amanda)

Domination

In her research on sexual assault victimisation and survivorship, Jordan (2008) argued that:

The act of rape involves not only the physical violation of another body, but an attempt to secure total control and dominance. What many rapists are seeking is a sense of their own power, their ability to subordinate another to their will. Sensing fear in their victims

¹⁶ Some victim/survivors suspected drink spiking because they felt so "out of it" and woozy, and had no recollection of what had happened. This did not accord with their usual experience of intoxication. Others knew their drinks had been spiked either through having tests or because their drink tasted different.

can serve as an aphrodisiac, an indication that their mastery of the situation is being achieved. Most rapists need no other weapon to secure victim compliance. (p. 6)

By the stage of the assault, the women knew that the offender had control over the situation. He had set it up (often in a familiar environment) and he had emotional, situational and physical tools to carry it out. Beauregard and Leclerc (2007) argued that sexual offenders consider a range of strategies to overcome the victim's resistance, and often consider applying more force than may be necessary to overcome a victim. In a review of literature around force and resistance, they concluded that there are mixed findings on the implications of victim/survivor resistance, and argued that the perpetrator's personality, motivations and the situational variables all contribute to the amount and type of force employed by an offender. The victim/survivors' narratives show that a range of strategies was used to secure domination over the situation.

Physical restraint, fear and intimidation

Fear is enough in itself to secure the victim into compliance (Corbett, Larcombe, & Real Rape Law Coalition, 1993; Hazelwood & Burgess, 1999; Jordan, 2008). Three offenders described in this study used weapons against the women to intimidate them and three perpetrators physically restrained the women by tying them up. For example, Justine recalled, "He had me taped and cable-tied. I couldn't move". However, physical size or strength alone often instilled enough fear into victim/survivors to secure their compliance:

Then usually he probably would just pin me down. He wasn't violent; he just would hold me down. But if I tried to get away he would increase the pressure in order to keep me there so then it would hurt more. (Ingrid)

He'd just use intimidation really. That's all ... because he was so big, he could. (Liza)

Similar to the experiences of Liza and Ingrid, research has found that perpetrators take advantage of individuals' responses to fear and trauma that may render them immobile and incapable of physically responding. This enables them to overpower their victims and secure compliance (Hazelwood & Burgess, 1999, cited in Jordan, 2007).

Threats

Some perpetrators provided threats of repercussions should victim/survivors report their crimes.

He had me held like a hostage and he made a lot of threats and I don't think he would have thought I would have reported it ... Like I don't know, really, I don't know what—I think he thought that he would get away with it and he thought that I would have been nice enough and not to tell anyone but—and I promised that I wouldn't tell anyone—but that time I lied and I don't care. (Dana)

I, at the time, was very much—I don't want to be—I don't want to be associated with that, I don't want any part of that. He knew that about me. And so then after we'd done all these things in the bedroom, he would then turn around and tell me that he was going to tell people about them and he was going to use that against me and almost like emotionally blackmail me. (Gaiana)

The threats given in Dana and Gaiana's cases demonstrate how perpetrators mobilised social norms about expected and acceptable feminine behaviour—that Dana would "be *nice enough* and not tell anyone" (authors' emphasis) or Gaiana's good reputation would be harmed if others found out she had been involved in certain kinds of consensual sexual activities.

In relationships, violent and abusive repercussions were inferred from past experiences and did not need to be made explicit by the perpetrator. The victim/survivors' knowledge and fear of their partner's forceful and violent capabilities was often enough for them to comply with the offender:

After he'd started to become violent with me, then I think that my fear of that violence would mean that I would just comply because I'd already experienced it outside of a sexual situation, and obviously I didn't want to be in a situation where it was violent and sexual. (Gaiana)

I was really scared of saying anything or doing anything wrong because he would have gone off his tree again and blamed me. I couldn't do anything right anyway, so it didn't matter. (Trudy)

A number of victim/survivors in family violence also complied out of fear of physical or sexual abuse that would otherwise be directed to their children. For example, Ada's son also made threats against her daughter:

Then he says, "Oh, I'll go for a walk over to [Australian town], [where] my daughter is [sic]". Then when I said, "No, you're my son, I'm your mother". He said, "Oh, I'll just go for a walk over to [Australian town]" and I knew what he was saying. He knew I had that all clear, so that was a threat. (Ada)

In the book *Real Rape, Real Pain* (2006), Eastal and McOrmond-Plummer similarly reported that women would oblige to prevent the events escalating into a more violent situation. These women knew their husband's capabilities and submitted to sexual assault out of fear and through their husband's controlling behaviour. Their responses reflected an attempt to minimise greater suffering that would arise out of outward resistance to the sexual assaults.

Reward and punishment

Some victim/survivors also identified that they received rewards for providing sex, and punishments for not being available:

It's so easy ... Yes. You find someone that's vulnerable. Then you offer to give them what they want, and you offer to be that thing that they want. In return, there's a tiny, tiny price, and that's this little thing. That's it. It's scary how easy it is. (Alice)

These reward–punishment exchanges were often exacerbated in “routine” sexual assaults within intimate relationships, and were particularly difficult for victim/survivors to break away from.

Religious beliefs

Two participants in the study also discussed how their intimate partner used and abused religious beliefs and spirituality in gaining access to them and maintaining compliance:

Okay, and he raped me in a car park of the college and it was anal sex and I had grown up in a Christian family with very strong beliefs and, for me, having had sex with him kind of meant I was married to or obligated to marry him. I felt incredibly ashamed and humiliated by the anal sex and it was against—there was no—no consent given. And I felt trapped at that point that I had been tainted or broken or whatever, and that I was trapped in a relationship with him. And he's the guy I ended up marrying. (Amanda)

Alice also echoed this. For both women, the rape initiated the onset of a relationship (for Amanda into a 20-year marriage; for Alice into a year-long intimate relationship).

The victim/survivors' accounts revealed that in intimate relationships—marriages, de facto relationships, and long-term intimate partnerships—sexual assaults were perpetrated in different ways. In many instances, the sexual assaults fell within a broader pattern of power, control and violence. In other instances, the sexual access and assault drove other forms of violence. In line with other research (see, for example, Koss, Bachar, & Hopkins, 2004), perpetrators extended their power and control through multiple ways over an extended period of time, often escalating in intensity over time—isolating her, controlling money, physically assaulting her and emotionally abusing her. For some victim/survivors the assaults were regular; for others, it was a one-off event that was used to send a specific effective message of power and control. Children may have been witnesses to the abuse or the threat may have been made of deferring the abuse to them in order to secure the women's compliance.

Surprise

The element of surprise has been associated with sexual assaults by strangers. Burgess (1983) referred to “the blitz” as an attack strategy offenders used to overwhelm victim/survivors. However, a key finding of this research was that the “surprise attack” was not only employed in stranger assaults, but was also in contexts where the perpetrator and victim/survivor were known to each other. In these situations, victim/survivors talked about both a physical overwhelming

and a sense of shock at the change in interactional and behavioural styles of the perpetrator. This differs somewhat from the stereotype of a stranger jumping out of a bush in a dark isolated area. In our sample, the women were often simply stunned. Here, the role of trust intersects with surprise: victim/survivors who were friends, colleagues, associates or acquaintances of the perpetrators did not expect their sexually coercive behaviour. As Marion so clearly put it:

It is like the lioness in the grass; until she pounces, the camouflage is just so good, and you just don't see it. (Marion)

In other situations, surprise was a way to achieve control or domination over the event. Participants described various ways in which perpetrators used or achieved the element of surprise, namely:

- as a “blitz” (i.e., physically overwhelming the victim/survivor);
- as “Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde” (i.e., sudden changes in the perpetrators’ disposition or behaviour); and
- as a radical departure from, or conflict with, the perceived and/or public persona of the offender.

These strategies were used by perpetrators across a range of interpersonal contexts: unknown assailants, acquaintances, friends, colleagues and partners.

Blitz

Strangers

The use of surprise as a strategy for sexual offending has been associated with stranger perpetrators in sexual offending literature, often described as a “blitz” approach to overpower and control their victims (Jordan, 2009). Indeed, all of the victim/survivors in this study who were assaulted in public by a stranger ($n = 5$) all were caught by complete surprise:

I live in, like, a really safe neighbourhood. I was walking down my street, and I do it all the time. Then all of a sudden I just felt this weight on my shoulders. It was a guy and he was grabbing me from behind. (Dana)

As demonstrated by Dana, victim/survivors felt secure and safe in the physical space within which the assault occurred. This was particularly apparent in cases where the assault occurred in the victim/survivor’s own home or neighbourhood. It was in situations with which they did not associate being assaulted that they were targeted by a stranger—in daylight, in their own home while asleep, in their neighbourhood when walking home.

Known perpetrators

In Jenny’s situation, a sudden physical attack was used by the perpetrator to secure control:

I had no way to react and because he was so quick, the moment I opened the door he was, yeah, he was starting. So, definitely with how quick he did it and then taking me from behind and the overpowering. And then when he came back, the surprise, you know, holy shit, he’s there! (Jenny)

This perpetrator’s strategy was particularly effective because of the interactions between him and Jenny throughout the New Year’s Eve festivities and Jenny’s intention to have consensual sex with him. It is also revealing of the perpetrator’s deliberate choice—and strategy—to secure non-consensual sex.

Other ways of physically surprising victim/survivors

Finally, offenders were also able to take victim/survivors by surprise by commencing an assault while victim/survivors were asleep or unconscious. This was experienced by 13 of the participants in the study, including those who were assaulted by strangers, acquaintances and intimate partners. In these circumstances, victim/survivors realised they were being assaulted once they awoke or regained consciousness, either during the assaults or the following day, which often resulted in shock and confusion.

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Of the victim/survivors who were assaulted by someone known to them, many attributed their lack of anticipation of the assault to the offender's efforts to create a (false) sense of safety around him. A number of victim/survivors described the offender as having a "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" character, recalling a sudden and radical change in disposition once they were physically isolated:

I had operated on the principle that most guys probably don't like rejection and so they sort of test that. But it wasn't like that. It was just bang, he grabbed me and he had me in this vice-like grip. One of my strongest memories is how strong he was. It was like Jekyll and Hyde stuff. One minute it was just right and the next minute he has got like a steel bar wrapped around me and he was trying to kiss my neck. (Marion)

His eyes, his face, like, his whole—I don't know how to describe it. It wasn't like him anymore. It was like he had turned into a monster. He was just terrifying. I don't know how to explain it. It was a look I'd never seen from anybody. (Amber)

The abrupt changes in the perpetrator from amicable to aggressive meant victim/survivors were not able to anticipate the assaults and were caught off-guard. The sudden onset of the assault confused, delayed or inhibited victim/survivors' responses to the situation. In a sense, the "Jekyll and Hyde" switch was as effective as a physical blitz; indeed, the way participants described a rapid shift in disposition suggests that it operates on the same principle as the blitz.

The experiences of Marion, Jenny and Amber suggest that the sexual assault was not a result of some kind of "miscommunication" about consent. Perpetrators were deliberate in their desire to totally dominate the victim and the event, and actively disregard the issue of consent. This diverges quite significantly from public discussions about the "grey area" of sexual assault (that is, sexual assaults that occur in social, casual and dating scenarios and where consent is said to be "complex" or "ambiguous").

Shattering the public persona and breaking the rules

Victim/survivors who were assaulted by known perpetrators—family, friends, acquaintances, work colleagues and partners—experienced surprise at the offender's behaviour:

Like, you don't expect this to happen in your own home or anything, especially by someone—I mean, you don't go around in life thinking you are going to be raped, but you should feel safe in your home and answering the door to a family member. (Amber)

With the exception of incidents involving victim/survivors who were asleep or unconscious and of attacks by strangers, victim/survivors felt secure and in control of their interpersonal interaction with the offender right up until the moment of assault.

In friendships and with longstanding acquaintances, victim/survivors were taken aback by the behaviour of the offender, whom they regarded as "normal" or of good character and standing within their community. Victim/survivors subsequently questioned their experience of the assault(s) and lost confidence in their judgement of people. The shock and confusion delayed their processing of and disclosing the assault(s):

I still find it hard to say that he deliberately did it, that he knew what he was doing. But then when I hear about how he treated his wife, I think he knew exactly what he was doing. So it's like—it's that thing of [him saying], "I'm not like those men". I'm not like the convicted rapists; I just misunderstood what was going on. (Gail)

Some victim/survivors challenged the perpetrator and confronted him afterward. They were generally met with denial and dismissal of the assault, or an attempt by the offenders to absolve themselves of blame as a result of being intoxicated:

The more I thought about it, the more it didn't feel right. So I remember confronting him a day later and saying, "Look, that just wasn't on. I don't know what that was". He just was very quiet and cold towards me. (Fay)

Indeed, in the same way that perpetrators react in this way, some researchers have suggested that communities are also often complicit in sexual offending; for example, by being dismissive of wrongdoing through their reluctance to consider date rape as unacceptable, serious and criminal (Russo, 2000).

Where sexual assaults occurred within the context of a relationship, victim/survivors were also taken off-guard, and not only by the initial assault, but also as it occurred throughout the relationship. Although the assaults often (but not always) became routine within the relationship, the unpredictability of the offender's moods and sudden changes in behaviour kept victim/survivors off-guard and in a state of constant fear. Despite the assaults being common, the unpredictability of their timing allowed the offender to maintain power and took away the women's feelings of control over their personal safety:

Yeah, it was definitely in a pattern. That pattern wasn't as predictable as some of his mood swings. It's not so much his moods, because you could never predict his moods, but you could read them. (Gaiana)

One victim/survivor who was assaulted daily within her 12-year marriage said that she was surprised each time she was raped by her husband:

That's why it really tricked me. It really tricked me because I thought he came from a good family. His brother's a doctor. So everything he did still surprised me. Whenever he did something, it took me into shock that he'd be doing that, yeah. (Liza)

Another victim/survivor began to recall the assaults only once she left the relationship. She was so shocked by her memories that she sought a psychiatrist's opinion of whether they were real:

It wasn't until he left three years ago that I started getting memories of what he'd done. And so I've recovered memories since he's left and I had to go to mental health and get checked out. I'm not delusional. (Amanda)

These findings indicate that surprise was experienced by the women in two distinct ways—firstly, the women were kept off-guard and therefore unable to control their safety within the relationships and, secondly, the women's faith in their husbands meant that they remained personally shocked and surprised by his ill-treatment of them.

Overall, participants' perspectives on surprise extend our understanding of how it assists sexual offending by strangers, acquaintances, "friends" and intimate partners. The element of surprise helped all kinds of offenders keep control of the situation and kept their victims off-guard. They were unsettled and unprepared and therefore unsure how to handle the aggressor. It was in situations where they did not associate being assaulted that they were targeted. Victim/survivors' observations of the sharp change in the men's physical disposition directly challenges the notion that sexual assaults occur as a result of some form of "miscommunication", particularly where the victim/survivor and perpetrator are known to each other. Rather, the perpetrators in these women's accounts perpetrated with determination and disregard, not misunderstanding. As such, focusing on women's behaviour change or "risk aversion" as a strategy to prevent sexual assault would be ineffective. This is because perpetrators capitalise on women's sense of safety to sexually offend.

Alcohol (and other drugs)

Alcohol was seen as a key resource, present in 20 instances of sexual assault within participants' narratives. Illicit drugs (both recreational and drink spiking) were present in at least four incidents. This section details the insights provided by the women in this study about how alcohol featured in their experience of sexual assault, including:

- the social use of alcohol as enabling and facilitating the assaults;
- alcohol (and recreational drugs) fuelling the perpetrator's confidence;
- the excusing nature of alcohol-related sexual offending;
- the after-effects of alcohol—reinterpretation of the assault, manipulation of women's memories, the perpetrators' control of the story and victim-blaming responses; and
- alcohol in intimate relationships.

Recent Australian, UK and US literature suggests that alcohol is a relevant factor in approximately half of all sexual assaults. In a significant proportion of these, both perpetrators and victims were drinking (Zawacki, Abbey, Buck, McAuslan, & Clinton-Sherrod, 2003). In specific contexts and populations, drink spiking is also an issue (CASA House & Watson, 2001; Heenan & Murray, 2006; Sturman, 2000). Although the prevalence of alcohol in sexual assault has been demonstrated by various sources, the specific nature of the relationship between alcohol consumption and sexual assault perpetration is less clear.

Abbey (2002) suggested that the relationship between alcohol and social factors tends to be conceptualised in one of two ways. In the first, alcohol is treated as the central contributing agent in sexual offending. Research examining this has looked at both the psychological beliefs about alcohol's effects and the pharmacological effects of alcohol. The second way sees the desire to sexually offend as the central contributing agent. This way of looking at alcohol's role in rape produces a model in which rape emerges as an "accident", a "misinterpretation", as "regrettable" or as predictable; there are neither rapists nor victims. Indeed, men who self-reported sexually coercive behaviour and sexual assault did not describe themselves as "real rapists" (Abbey, 2002).

The other model is the drink-spiking narrative; that is, the deliberate use of alcohol to incapacitate potential victims. In this research, participants' narratives revealed that this social context is a central enabling component of sexual assault, indicating that individualist models of alcohol consumption and sexual assault are insufficient to comprehensively conceptualise behaviours that are present within complex social norms and expectations.

Alcohol and drugs were identified as contributing to the perpetration of sexual assault by many victim/survivors in the study. Alcohol contributed to sexual offending in a number of ways:

- getting victim/survivors intoxicated or unconscious in order to gain sexual access to them;
- enhancing offender confidence to perpetrate the crime;
- reducing culpability and minimising accountability;
- increasing victim/survivor blame; and
- affecting the memory of victim/survivors.

Drugs were utilised in drink spiking, and one victim/survivor was sexually assaulted after having taken illicit drugs in a social setting together with her perpetrator-boyfriend. Many victim/survivors recalled that the offender was liberal in the amount of alcohol he supplied to them. The level of deliberateness to which victim/survivors assigned the perpetrator's use of alcohol in executing the offence varied among victim/survivors. For example, some participants felt their drinks had been spiked by the perpetrator with the purpose of sexually assaulting them, while others felt it was obvious that getting them drunk was a deliberate strategy to make them weak, submissive or unconscious. Yet other participants felt that offenders realised the already intoxicated state of the woman and took advantage of that vulnerability to perpetrate an assault, while others saw alcohol consumption occurring alongside the assault (without linking it to the offending behaviour). Finally, some participants held the perpetrator less accountable because he had been drinking.

Alcohol in the social context

Alcohol was present in the lead up to many of the assaults discussed by victim/survivors in this study. Regularly, alcohol was consumed in a general social context: at a social gathering, at a pub or nightclub or during dinner. The role of alcohol was multifaceted. Some women were unsure of the role of alcohol in the assault, while others were confident that alcohol was the key tool in the offender's strategy to set up the assault.

Social standards, such as buying rounds or hosting or taking the woman on a date, shifted the control of alcohol consumption away from the women, and regularly placed the perpetrators in a position of power over victim/survivors' alcohol intake. This position of power was subtle yet insidious. Offenders buying drinks or otherwise supplying alcohol to victim/survivors often resulted in victim/survivors not keeping track of the content or number of drinks they consumed. In this way, location and social environment set up the norms of behaviour around alcohol consumption:

Yes, he would have been having a drink, but again, because I was in his house and he was the host and I was the girl, you know, I hadn't supplied the drinks and I didn't get the drinks. I just drank the drinks and, of course, everybody was having a good time: "Drink some more, drink some more". But it would have been him getting the drinks, so he was controlling obviously how much he drank and how much I drank. (Erica)

He probably thought that—I don't know, in one way I think maybe he thought, well, he shouted me a few drinks, so he's entitled to do what he wants, sort of thing, or get his way. Or in another way it could be just filling me with alcohol to—I mean it can make

you weak. You know, drinking alcohol can often make you weak and sort of not think too much about things. So I don't know. (Leanne)

The role of social components in alcohol consumption is evident in the participant's comments above. For example, Erica emphasised the social etiquette around hosting as well as how gender role expectations—"he was the host and I was the girl"—compound alcohol consumption to facilitate sexual offending. In Leanne's situation, a general understanding linking courtship or seduction with alcohol—specifically buying the drinks and getting the woman drunk—are synonymous with sexual entitlement. Johnson (2007) labelled the use of alcohol, as described by these women, as a type of planning; there is a conscious effort to get the woman drunk to gain access to her, and therefore he must have had some fore-thought.

Intoxication meant victim/survivors were less able or unable to respond to the assaults. A number of victim/survivors were unconscious or semi-conscious during the assaults. Many victims believed their drinks had been spiked and two victim/survivors had forensic examination results that revealed illicit drugs were present in their system:

The fact that he used drugs to make me unconscious meant that he knew very well what he was doing and what he intended to do. (Erica)

I guess he used the drugs to sort of disable any kind of defence and taking away the opportunity to say no. That's pretty scary to think that someone could set out to do that. (Olivia)

Others felt that the offender acted more opportunistically; that they used their already intoxicated state to sexually assault them. For example, Belinda described a chain of events that led to the perpetrator encountering her in an intoxicated, isolated state:

So it was weird, it was really a strange night because it was like there were three different things. Like, my drink getting spiked, or just getting totally drunk, which, I don't think that was the case, but we can't prove my drink got spiked either. Then the taxi-driver not taking me home and making me jump out, and then [the perpetrator]. (Belinda)

Some women felt that although alcohol was consumed before the assaults, it was a part of the social interaction and did not contribute significantly to the assaults:

He had had a couple of bottles [of beer] before dinner. I'm not sure, but I think he might have had a drink during dinner and he had one after that, but it wasn't enough for it to take away his moral sense, I wouldn't think. It just wasn't enough alcohol for it to be what I would consider a factor. I would think you would have to drink a lot, like those binge-drinking episodes, to really be able to say that you had lost your sense of what is right. (Gail)

Some victim/survivors observed that the offender maintained sobriety and that enabled him to maintain control, sometimes despite being in a social setting that involved drinking:

Yeah, [it] was actually worse because he actually knew what he was doing. I'd rather that he was a bit drunk and, you know, you can sort of maybe think, oh well, he's a bit drunk, you know. But when he knows exactly what's going on, it's very scary. (Liza)

He actually wasn't [drinking]. I noticed that he wasn't drinking that much. He maybe had a couple here and there, but what he was doing—oh my God, I've never thought of this before—he was buying other people drinks. Yes, that's really interesting. I hadn't remembered. I had noticed that. I just didn't think anything of it. It was part of the friendship thing—you know, what people do. He maybe had a couple here and there, but he definitely wasn't drunk. He was sober. That was part of that whole getting people on side and just the friendliness over-the-top thing that he was doing. That's weird. (Emma)

Maintaining sobriety provided offenders greater control over the situation, and was often used while simultaneously providing the woman with liberal amounts of alcohol. In Emma's situation, he was able to capitalise on the drinking culture of "shouting rounds" as a means of socialising and exhibiting generosity in order to sexually offend.

Alcohol in intimate relationships

The role of alcohol was given less emphasis by the women in this study who experienced assaults within a domestically violent relationship. Victim/survivors who were assaulted by

their partners did not identify alcohol or drugs as being a particularly significant contributor to the sexual offences. One exception involved a victim/survivor whose first sexual encounter with her partner was a rape following a drunken night out with his mates. She felt that the consumption of alcohol during a night out with his male friends, together with his knowledge of her sexual history and beliefs of entitlement, contributed directly to the perpetration of rape.

In relationships, perpetrators have other effective tools at hand to sexually assault, such as power, control, threats and coercion, and so do not necessarily need to draw on alcohol to sexually offend.

Alcohol (and recreational drugs) fuelling confidence

Offenders who did drink before the assault may have done so to fuel themselves with the confidence to perpetrate an assault.

I think there was some sort of hedonistic thing almost, that he was drunk and he felt good and he just did what he felt like. But maybe there was a thing too of his control of his impulses was reduced and so he did just what he felt like then, I don't know exactly. I guess he did. But on the other hand, I did know him, so I have a fair idea of his character, I guess. (Natasha)

One victim/survivor believed that the offender's consumption of alcohol was the main cause of the assault—triggering significant changes in his personality and accounting for the offender's uncharacteristic behaviour during the assault. Similarly, one victim/survivor felt that her offender's illicit drug consumption induced the assault by significantly altering the offender's state of mind:

For him to be stronger and to go through all this—because when he was sober he was a quiet mouse. It's got a lot to do with the drink. (Ada)

We were both on LSD. He must have had some sort of freak-out or something and he tied me up and had sex with me anally while I was screaming and protesting against him. It was really quite scary because we were both on drugs. He'd obviously lost his mind and I just didn't know what he was going to do because he wasn't him. So there's that. (Holli)

Alcohol as excusing and enabling denial

The perpetrator's consumption of alcohol was likely to reduce others' perceptions of the level of his culpability. In some cases, victim/survivors believed that the offender also deliberately used his consumption of alcohol to excuse his behaviour or to reduce his culpability. A few of the participants made comments about alcohol being used by the perpetrator to excuse or mitigate his behaviour in some way:

I think his alcohol consumption was a way of maybe denying his own behaviour. You know, that he could do these things and then he could say he was drunk ... That was almost as though that meant that he was not as responsible, well, obviously wasn't being responsible, but he somehow wasn't—it was as though the alcohol was to blame, not him. (Natasha)

When I came back out he was sitting there and he was calm and he apologised and said that he was just really drunk and didn't know what he was doing. (Amber)

Still other perpetrators used alcohol consumption or intoxication to deny the assault completely:

He said he'd just been to bed and I just went to sleep, and that I had to go to work in the morning. (Belinda)

Despite victim/survivors feeling that the perpetrator controlled or influenced their alcohol consumption (by spiking their drinks or deliberately getting them drunk) or that they were unconscious at the time of assault due to alcohol intoxication, victim/survivors regularly felt a level of self-blame because they had been drinking before the assault:

Even, like, that whole, that whole—because alcohol was involved. Because then, of course, I then feel responsible for it. (Olivia)

[It was] another much-belated recognition that I had been deliberately drugged, deliberately set up and deliberately assaulted. And I never recorded it because at the time, of course, it was all my fault in my head, which I actually think was a very protective mechanism because I didn't subjectively feel like a rape victim. I had not been "raped", I had been stupid and suffered a consequence. (Erica)

Victim-blame and perpetrator-excusing in cases of sexual offences that occurred with the presence of alcohol are not only restricted to victim/survivors, as is particularly demonstrated in people's responses to victim/survivors in the aftermath of sexual assault. It appears to be a broad societal response to blame the victim and excuse the sexual violence when alcohol is involved.

After the assault: The effects of alcohol

Intoxication also affected victim/survivors' memories of the assaults. Many felt that their perpetrator played upon their memories and tried to reframe the incident as a "normal" and consensual encounter, particularly where the women suspected drink spiking. Victim/survivors who were unable to remember the assault or had patchy memories of the assaults because of their intoxication found that they were often subjected to the offender's version of events. This is demonstrated through juxtaposing Vanessa's reflection on how she felt about the assault against how her perpetrator communicated the experience to her the following morning:

I remember just laying there and him doing what he wanted and I couldn't stop it because I couldn't move and I couldn't talk. All I could do was cry. I started saying, "Don't do this to me, don't do this because it's not what I came in here for". He goes, "I know". He goes, "Everything will be alright, you've just had too much to drink". I passed out and I woke up and I passed out and I woke up. And every time I did, he was doing something different to me.

[The next day] he came in and he laid on the lounge and started saying stuff. That I was wild and that I enjoyed it. He was winking and smiling at me and I was just dry retching again, thinking, "What the hell have I done?" He was talking softer [sic] to me, like, "It's okay, no one has to know what happened, it just has to be between me and you". And the way he was wording things made it seem like I'd consented to what he did, like he was trying to justify what he did. Because I remember not being able to really think straight, walk straight. (Vanessa)

Here, the way Vanessa's perpetrator reconstructed the assault through dialogue and behaviour was clearly effective in influencing her interpretation of the assault, and it was further compounded by her own consumption of alcohol and illicit drugs prior to the assault and her disjointed memory. In addition to the perpetrator construing victim/survivors' understandings of their own experience, alcohol-affected memory of events has been found to contribute to the responses of blame, disbelief and discredit of the victim/survivor. At a personal level, victim/survivors may feel responsible for the offending, locating the blame within their own behaviour (putting themselves "at risk"), rather than identifying how the perpetrator was able to use alcohol to offend:

I hadn't even heard of people's drinks being spiked. I wouldn't have even—and I didn't wake up thinking, "Oh, my drink must have been spiked". I woke up thinking, "Fuck", I'd been out drinking too much. I would have been like, "Oh my God", thinking, "Hangover, what have I done. I've got to really watch what I'm drinking". Any other time, even going out binge drinking kind of thing, that kind of thing has never happened. I didn't report it to the police until quite a long time—you know, six months or something afterwards. (Olivia)

Delayed reporting, inconsistent accounts and disjointed recollections of assaults have been associated with the justice system and police disbelieving and discrediting victim/survivors and cases not progressing through the justice system (Frohmann, 1991; Jordan, 2002; King, 2009). Jordan (2002) argued that the assumptions associated with not being consistent or lacking memory contribute to exaggerated police beliefs in the prevalence of false rape allegations. A recent Australian survey of community attitudes towards violence against women revealed that community members are more inclined to excuse the perpetrator while holding the victim more accountable where alcohol was involved (VicHealth, 2009). This suggests that women are generally more likely to be blamed for their drinking behaviour while men are blamed

less. In this study, however, alcohol was frequently consumed by the women in the context of normal social situations, where the consumption of alcohol is commonplace, if not expected (for instance, in a pub or at a house party). Often the women had limited control over the amount of alcohol they consumed, or were misled by the perpetrator as to how much alcohol they had consumed. Still others had their drinks deliberately spiked, unbeknownst to them. Consequently, they had little control over (or knowledge of) what they had consumed.

These findings demonstrate that there are multiple uses of alcohol as a tactic to sexually offend. The way in which alcohol was used was culturally and situationally dependent, and perpetrators capitalised on (gendered) social understandings around alcohol consumption in order to sexually offend.

Sexual offending resources in everyday contexts

The women's narratives about when, where and how they were offended against demonstrated that the opportunities for sexual offending were deeply embedded in ordinary, everyday contexts. These contexts provided perpetrators with numerous resources, such as trust, which they were able to manipulate or exploit. Opportunities appeared as being more or less planned, depending on:

- the interpersonal relationship between the victim/survivors and perpetrators;
- the location or setting in which they were interacting; and
- socio-cultural norms about gender and heterosexuality.

In all the sexual assaults described, perpetrators' strategies involved a combination of these resources in order to:

- isolate the victim/survivor;
- control the situation; and
- impose their own desires, intentions and perspectives on the interaction.

Table 3 summarises how perpetrators used the resources available to them to achieve these outcomes.

Table 3 Perpetrators' resources and strategies in sexual offending		
Resource	Perpetrator strategy	Outcome/effect
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Build closeness and intimacy ■ Demonstrate trustworthiness to others ■ Create a certain type of relationship ■ Demonstrate social competence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Disable "heterosexual script" ■ Secure victim's silence ■ Victim surprised or stunned by assault
Social norms about gender, sex and seduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Create a "seduction" encounter ■ Demand or expect sex ■ Reinterpret assault as "consensual sex" ■ Invoke negative stereotypes of women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Victims see themselves as complicit ■ Perpetrator seen as "confused" rather than deliberate ■ Victims fear disbelief ■ Perpetrators deny the assault
Control, power and domination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Socially isolate victim ■ Physically isolate victim ■ Incapacitate victim ■ Humiliate victim ■ Restrain, threaten or intimidate victim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Victim has no social supports or outside perspectives ■ Victim too ashamed to speak out, especially where perpetrator has built trustworthiness with community ■ Fear and terror in victim who complies
Surprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Shock, stun or catch victim off-guard ■ Keep victim on "tenterhooks" because of unpredictable behaviour ■ Break "rules" of established relationship (e.g., colleagues or friends) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Gain and maintain control over event, victim or environment
Alcohol (and other drugs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Aid flirtation and seduction ■ Intoxicate or incapacitate victim ■ Increase own confidence ■ Diminish sense of responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Denial of event ■ Denial of responsibility ■ Reinterpretation of event

Giving Voice participants on perpetrators and their goals

The literature review in Chapter 2 showed that much of the research done so far has focused on *why* men perpetrated sexual offences. The Giving Voice research, on the other hand, focused primarily on the strategies perpetrators used to sexually offend against 33 women; that is, the focus was on *how* the offences occurred. However, in this study we did ask victim/survivors to describe the perpetrator (What kind of person was he?) and to consider what the rewards may have been for the perpetrator. In this chapter, we draw out the key points these narratives made.

Who were the perpetrators?

It is well established that sexual assault is perpetrated predominantly by men known to the victim/survivor, such as current or former partners, work colleagues, or friends and acquaintances (ABS, 2006). Statistics of victimisation reflect the last 40 years of feminist scholarship and socio-cultural, ecological models of violence (Heise, 1998; Walklate, 2004).

The accounts of victim/survivors provide extremely important complementary information about who perpetrators are. They were, for all intents and purposes, sincere, familiar and ordinary, including:

- work colleagues;
- business associates and connections;
- friends and acquaintances in social networks;
- established friends;
- family members (immediate and extended); and
- partners.

As previously described, perpetrators were involved in a whole range of occupations and industries and came from a range of socio-economic, ethnic and educational backgrounds. It is this knowledge that challenges stereotypes of sexual offenders as being obviously socially inept, deviant or psychologically deficient. As Dana observed:

Women don't get into cars with bogeymen, or accept drinks from bogeymen. You know, like, it is precisely because they are nice guys and they have excellent interpersonal skills that they're able to get you into a position where they can assault you. It's not like that. Now when I hear somebody go, "Oh yeah, but he's a really nice guy", I'm like, "Well, yeah, that works against him. Yeah, he's probably more guilty than, like, than if he was a horrible guy, because most of them are nice guys". (Dana)

Why did they sexually offend?

When victim/survivors' reflections moved towards considering the reasons for the perpetrator's behaviour, many had mixed thoughts. In particular, they were reluctant to speculate about the individual motivations of perpetrators. Participants were more readily able to reflect on the rewards and goals that perpetrators sought to achieve through sexual assault.

An effective control mechanism

A number of participants felt that sexual assault was situated within the broader violence and control context; it was one of a variety of effective mechanisms used to maintain power and control over them:

He did actually say to me once, not long after we separated, he admitted it wasn't about sex—it was about having power and control. (Ingrid)

Indeed, other researchers have situated sexual assault and intimate partner violence more broadly within a man's need to demonstrate masculinity and securing control over their partner and their family environment (see, for example, Hearn & Whitehead, 2006; Umberson, Anderson, Williams, & Chen, 2003). In this way, sexual violence is a particularly effective mechanism for reaffirming their masculinity and dominance over their intimate partners.

Reaffirming “masculine” sexuality

Three participants linked their husband’s sexual offending with his “secrets” surrounding his sexuality; for example, that he engaged in cross-dressing or extramarital relationships with men. All three participants identified their husband’s fear and anxiety about their insider knowledge with an increased level of abuse, control and violence toward them:

I had gone to bed and I got up because I wondered where he was. And I caught him and this [male] schoolteacher together. They weren’t doing anything sexual, because I got up. And things started to change from there. (Trudy)

According to the narratives, when the women became privy to their husbands’ behaviour, the husbands’ fears of being exposed for engaging in behaviour that challenged conventional heterosexual masculine behaviour contributed to an escalation in the frequency and severity of the sexual assault against their wives. This may be attributed to the husbands having hatred and resentment towards their wives for knowing about their secrets, and therefore having power over them. Hyper-masculine behaviour (i.e., rape) reinstated both their power and domination over the women, thus helping to ensure the women’s silence while at the same time reinforcing their hegemonic masculinity.

Hearn and Whitehead (2006) argued that understanding how violence protects a man’s “ideal masculine self” is central to understanding motivations for violence. This “ideal self” is located in a number of domains, including gender and sexuality, that define “being a man”. The instances described by three of the participants in this study reflect a crisis of threatened masculinity for the men. As such, the need for the husbands to reinstate an “ideal”, heterosexual, masculine self may have been exaggerated, and rape was the ideal weapon with which to do so.

Rewards of rape: Excitement and power

The women were surprised by the determination and confidence exerted by the offender during the assaults. More than disregarding their non-consent, victim/survivors felt that the offender was pleased or excited by his power during the assault:

And because I was struggling, he’d be saying, “I get really turned on when you put up a fight”. I was actually really scared because I thought he was going to hurt me, and the more scared I got—and I was sweating because I was scared—it just seemed to increase what he was doing. But I couldn’t just lie still and not struggle, because I was scared. And it just seemed to make him worse. He seemed to enjoy the fact that I was frightened. (Ingrid)

The contention that perpetrators get enjoyment out of sexual offending has been reported elsewhere (see, for example, Scully, 1990). The observation of enjoyment emphasises the direct emotional reward some perpetrators get during sexual assault. According to Estel and McOrmond-Plummer (2006):

Many men understand that invading a woman’s body against her will affords them a sort of ultimate power over her. The ability to subjugate a woman with his penis gives the rapist a sense of mastery over feelings of inadequacy and weakness; it reaffirms his masculinity. (p. 67)

“Putting me in my place”

Three of the four victim/survivors who were assaulted by a work colleague or associate suspected that their status or assertiveness was a key motivator for the assault—that the perpetrator committed the assault to reaffirm his masculinity, power and dominance over them:

I think that he didn’t like the fact that I knew more stuff than him. He didn’t like the fact that I was smarter than him and I was a first-year uni student, but I could talk to him equally on his level around his PhD thesis. He didn’t like that I had my own opinions, and I think that in some ways I was a woman to be controlled. I was a woman that needed to be put in my place. I think that in a lot of ways he was quite intimidated by how smart I was, and there was a certain level of putting me in my place with what he did to me. (Gail)

Things that I felt in hindsight that were indicators of his inability to cope with assertive women or any feelings he has about women being dominant. They are so subtle; it is only after the event that you sort of think maybe they amount to something ... I'm not a psychologist, but it feels to me like he was putting me in my place. [From] the things that I put together, the only rationale I can see for it is that he wanted to dominate me. (Marion)

The motivation to sexually offend for reasons of power and conquest, as put forward by these participants, has been established in past research and analyses of offending behaviour, particularly as it relates to dominant forms of masculinity, and the specific use of penetration to dominate women. For example, in their interviews with convicted sexual offenders, Scully and Marolla (1993) identified a range of motivators, including the motivation to put women “in their place”. A number of researchers have linked this idea of sexual conquest and control to a culture of attitudes towards sex and aggression that is embedded in masculinity (Cameron & Fraser, 1987; Scully & Marolla, 1993; Walklate, 2004) or “hypermasculinity” (Pazzani, 2007). In their study of stranger rapists, Greenall and West (2007) found that sexual desire and opportunism were motivating factors and that the offenders’ behaviours could be categorised as either sexual or violent.

Gratification

Many participants also observed their perpetrators expressing satisfaction and gratification after the completion of the sexual assault:

I could see when he did it, there was gratification, because his mood changed. Before that, he was in a very bad mood ... That was actually scaring me to cheer him up, and that if I didn't, God knows what's going to happen? I could see he changed from when he was angry. And then after he assaulted me, there was a sense of gratification and his mood became lighter. (Liza)

After physically and sexually assaulting her in a restaurant toilet, Gwen observed that the offender (a work client) simply returned to the table, gratified:

When I escaped from the toilet, I went to the table to just tell me boss, and I just grabbed my bag. He came back to the table, sat where he was sitting before and, like, was so relaxed and satisfied. I was like, “What? Okay, he's back”. I just couldn't believe how he could be here ... He was just sitting at the table relaxed, just as if he was satisfied with the fact he assaulted me. (Gwen)

The reaction of satisfaction emphasises the pleasure and reward the men obtained by sexually offending against the women, rather than any fear, regret or remorse they might have.

Boasting and bonding

Both of the victim/survivors who were sexually assaulted by multiple offenders at once were surprised at the casual and “entertainment” approach taken by the perpetrators:

They were laughing and saying, “But we're really enjoying what we're doing” and “I've finished with you now, go to the other person”. They were really happy with what they'd done. They were happy. They thought they were big shots. Oh, and they were just laughing and just talking about what they'd done and just thinking that it was alright to do what they did and that they were going to get away with it. They were both fairly happy with what they had done. You know, “Look at us, we're such wonderful people” and “This is a story for the mates” and “We're such good people. More people should be like us”. (Keilah)

These descriptions offered by the study participants suggest a level of male bonding achieved through sexually assaulting the women. These instances of sexual assault may represent a demonstration of the men attempting to prove their masculinity through rape, and not just to the women victims, but also to other men. Having power and control over the women through sexual assault provided them with a way to collectively preserve their masculine image for themselves among other men (see Hearn & Whitehead, 2006, for a discussion on masculinity and men's violence against women). As Keilah stated, “they thought they were big shots”.

Four of the offenders boasted to others about sexually assaulting the women:

My arms and my legs were tied and he was on top of me. My phone rang and [he] answered it. It was my friend calling to find out where I was, and she knew that I was

hurt ... He was still going—he was raping me while I was talking to my friend on the phone and he wouldn't stop. It hurt and I just kept asking him to stop. Then I was still talking to my friend and he threw my phone on the floor. He kept going. (Stacy)

My daughter came racing in hysterical and my mind was starting to think, "How on earth does she know?" I later went on to find out that he'd stolen my mobile phone, which was on the charger above where I was sleeping. He went through my phone and he called three women. The first one was my daughter. She said, "Mum why are you ringing at this hour?" He then went on to tell her what he did to me. (Judith)

These comments suggest that some perpetrators may have enjoyed telling their victim/survivors' loved ones that they had raped her and that they were confident that there would be no consequences for their actions, or at least they were dismissive of the chance. Offenders' feelings of invincibility were reaffirmed by others' disbelief of victim/survivors and the criminal justice system that frequently failed to hold the offenders accountable. Indeed, of the two offenders mentioned in the quotes above, one was convicted for his crime but the other was not. Of the instances describing multiple sexual offenders, none of the men were charged and both the victims were accused of making false reports to the police.

Sexual jealousy and preoccupation

Sexual jealousy and control was also identified as a motivation for sexual assault, particularly in instances of rapes that occurred after the women had left the relationship. For example, one participant attributed the rape by her ex-partner directly to sexual jealousy:

He then just literally pulled the covers off me, jumped on top of me, pinned me down and then digitally raped me, the whole time saying, "I'm going to find out whether you've had sex with anyone else. I'll see what you've been doing, you dirty slut". Those kind of words. Then basically putting his head down between my legs as well, to smell basically, to see whether he could smell signs of me having sexual relations with anybody else. (Brooke)

Three victim/survivors felt that their husbands' pre-occupation with sex—including regular and insistent requests for sex, watching pornography, visiting sex clubs and engaging in sadistic acts against them—was the main reason for the sexual offending. This association is in line with the arguments put forth by radical feminists such as Andrea Dworkin (1981, 1987) and Catherine MacKinnon (1987, 1989). Frequent exposure to pornography and sexual objectification was, to the women in this study, integral to the sexual offending:

My ex-husband, he loved watching porno. It didn't matter what time of the day, because he worked shift—what time of day. He'd have porno on—day, night, he'd have porno on. He used to jerk himself off in front of the computer, and then I'd have to clean up. So he must have thought I was one of those on the pornos, and if I said no—I was supposed to be the good wife and just let him help himself. (Trudy)

One participant felt that continual sexual access to her was a motivator and a trigger for other forms of violence within the relationship. In this case, sex was central to her partner, and her sexual unavailability or autonomy was central to other abuses:

That was what it was all about. Yeah, the violence was from the sex ... It all revolved around sex. Our whole life, it seemed to me, like it revolved around that. And I didn't know that about him. Not a lot of people understand about it either. It's not something that you really talk about—domestic violence. I mentioned the sex thing a couple of times before. I've been to court with lawyers and they've said that it makes me look bad if I mention it [the rapes]. So that's really frustrating to me, to not be heard. (Liza)

Research has shown that some men's use of sexual violence against women expresses in part a persistent quest for sexual encounters and a highly sexualised view of women. This position has been used in the psychology literature to explain sexual offending based on "sexual deviance". However, persistent and demanding requests for sex may also be explained by social rather than biological factors, reflecting aspects of masculine socialisation and sexist peer cultures rather than deviance per se (Carr & Vandeusen, 2004).

The public persona of the perpetrator, from the victim/survivors' perspectives, regularly contrasted with societal stereotypes of an offender profile and general understandings of how

sexual assault happens. These include perceptions that perpetrators are pathological, deranged and socially incompetent, and that sexual assault happens in dark and unfamiliar locations, generally because of a women's provocation or "risky" (hence blameworthy) behaviour. Labelling an outsider or "other" as a rapist rather than someone "regular" may help women function in society without constant fear of rape. The disjuncture and hence impact of this effect was greatest on those women who were assaulted by "normal" and "nice" men.

4

Implications of Giving Voice for sexual assault prevention

4.1 Conclusions and future directions

In this chapter, the key conclusions we have drawn from victim/survivors' knowledge about sexual offending are considered alongside their implications for preventing sexual assault, particularly in the early intervention and tertiary forms of prevention.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1

Sexual offending was context-dependent. Offenders' behaviours and decisions to offend were shaped by the interpersonal, situational and social contexts in which they occurred.

Walklate (2004) situated sexual offending within the ordinary rather than the extraordinary:

Rape is the ordinary product of ordinary (male, heterosexual) behaviour. It touches upon all our experiences, both male and female. It is its ordinariness that renders it so difficult to grasp and embrace. It challenges us all to examine our relationships and ourselves very carefully. In doing so it can make us all uncomfortable: and so it should. (p. 123)

Prevalence statistics reiterate its “everydayness” and the Giving Voice project, alongside the voices of victim/survivors in other research, also points to this. The women's narratives about when, where and how they were offended against demonstrated that the opportunities for sexual offending were deeply embedded in ordinary, everyday contexts. Sexual assaults occurred in the contexts of relating to partners, family members, professional colleagues, and friends and acquaintances, including the perpetrator. For the participants, the particular geographic location of the sexual assault itself, such as in a parked car or the perpetrators' home, was less relevant than the type of relationship they had with the perpetrator, the reason for their interaction and the setting in which it occurred, and the broader meanings attached to gender and gendered interaction.

These contexts can be distinguished as interpersonal, situational and socio-cultural contexts and are briefly described below:

- interpersonal context—the nature of the relationship between the victim/survivor and the offender, such as work colleague, friend, acquaintance, partner, which is guided by certain social rules and expectations (e.g., work colleagues interact with each other according to a professional, non-intimate standard of behaviour);
- situational context—the physical location or circumstance in which the offender and victim meet and/or interact, which are also guided by rules, expectations and rituals (Goffman, 1959); and
- socio-cultural context—shared or collective factors that inform behaviour and interaction; for example, in our study, participants identified social norms about men, women, seduction and alcohol as being relevant factors.

Participants' accounts identified three key ways in which perpetrator strategies were context-dependent:

- the opportunity for sexual offending was embedded in interpersonal, situational and social contexts;

- the overlap of interpersonal (e.g., work relationship), situational (e.g., work function) and social contexts (e.g., social norms about gender difference and power) provided perpetrators with the resources and flexibility to exploit them; and
- socio-cultural norms about gender, heterosexuality and seduction shaped perpetrator and victim/survivor interactions before, during and after the offence.

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of these points and how they overlap, and how the participants' narratives located the opportunity for offending and the tactics and strategies used by offenders.

Victim/survivors' accounts showed how social norms and expectations about gender, sex and seduction were exploited by the perpetrators. It was also clear that social norms acted as a kind of superstructure, over-coding other standards of social interaction. For example, in situations where the perpetrator was a colleague or the victim/survivor was liaising with them for work-related reasons, from the victim/survivor's point of view they were precisely and only colleagues or work associates. In that interpersonal context, certain rules and expectations are expected of others and practised. However, from the perpetrator's point of view, the social rules and norms of collegiality and professional relationships or of friendships were displaced by beliefs in male sexual entitlement, and the traditional heterosexual script.

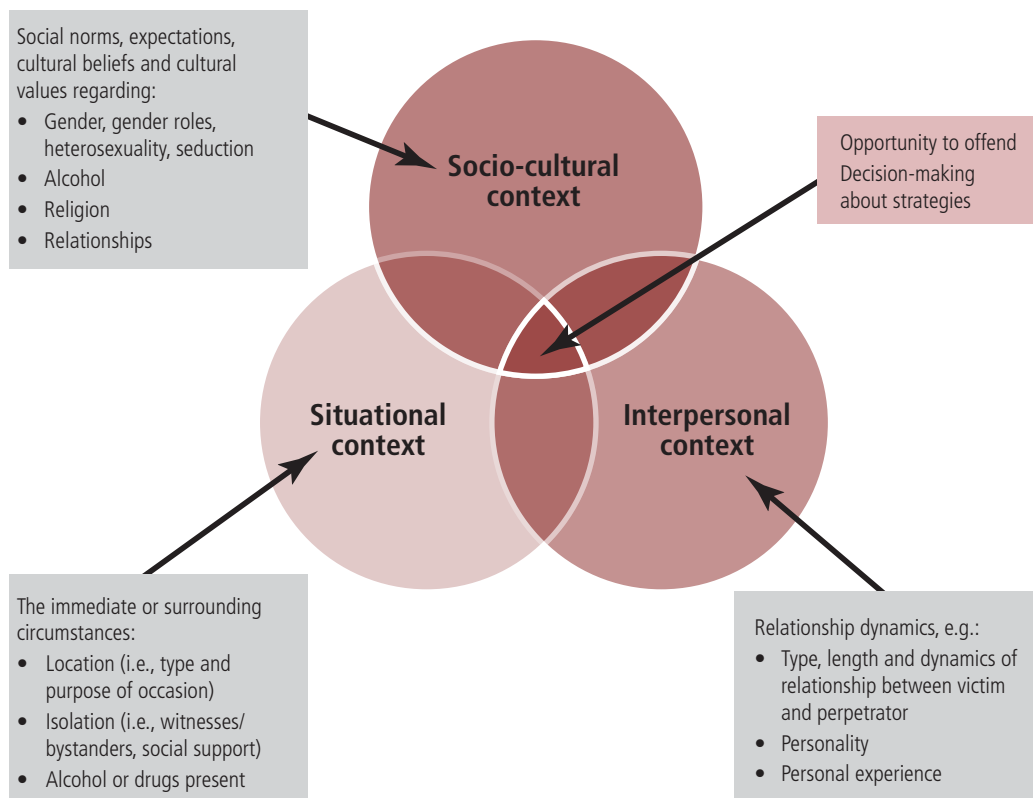


Figure 1 Overlapping contexts enabling sexual assault

The way in which these contexts intersect in everyday life meant that the men in this study did not have to work very hard to isolate the victim or gain control over the situation and/or victim. Once these were achieved, the imposition of their own desires and expectations, although not necessarily planned, was possible. Shared beliefs, norms and discourses about men, women and sex appeared to victims as being central to the perpetrators' behaviour and why they seemed uninhibited in being sexually coercive. Perpetrators provided powerful and plentiful justifications for their behaviours, desires and attitudes. However, to say that perpetrators' strategies were context-dependent is not to suggest that perpetrators were not acting deliberately, calculatedly or purposefully, or to suggest that social norms determined the perpetrators' actions and desires.

Conclusion 2

Perpetrators made deliberate choices and enacted “situationally targeted” strategies to secure sexual interaction with the victim/survivor. Although actions appeared more or less planned, there were no “grey” sexual assaults.

Acknowledging that opportunities for sexual assault perpetration were shaped by contexts external to the offender does not diminish the agency, accountability, voluntariness or foresight of the offender. Whether the behaviour appeared to be “planned”, “opportunistic”, or even an apparent “misunderstanding” of the situation, the particular steps that perpetrators took to realise that opportunity were deliberate and calculated. Perpetrators used the resources present in any given situation to minimise the women’s capacity to refuse sex; that is, to reduce their capacity to actively consent (as required by most legislative definitions of consent in Australia). They also took active steps to conceal or excuse the offence.

This reflects the research base on both the “grooming” of victims and sexual offenders’ decision-making processes. Broadly, work with sexual offenders suggests that there are two phases in grooming victims. Phase 1 involves establishing power, control and authority. As the participants’ accounts demonstrated, perpetrators undertook a whole range of actions to secure these. They socially isolated women from their family and friends, they lied about the lack of a spare mattress, they used physical force. The actions were very diverse but were used to achieve similar outcomes. Phase 2 involves constructing or imposing the perpetrator’s own world view and desires on the situation. Offenders often spent effort on making their behaviour look less deliberate.¹⁷ This is evidenced by efforts the men made in these accounts to reframe the sexual assault as consensual, as a romantic liaison, as a matter of the heart, or as their conjugal entitlement.

The level of deliberation and “rational choice” in which an offender engages when deciding to perpetrate has been considered in some of the sexual offending literature (Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007; Ward & Hudson, 2000). For example, Beauregard and Leclerc argued that sexual offenders, like other types of offenders, engaged in rational or calculated decisions and that this was situated within a particular location/setting/event.¹⁸ Ward and Hudson contended that offenders display either implicit (“premeditated opportunism”) or explicit planning (such as conscious, deliberate steps). However, a situational approach to sexual offending remains fairly underdeveloped in work on adult sexual offences. Beauregard and Leclerc limited their participants to 69 men who were convicted serial sex offenders (of both women and children). The role of the broader social context—so central to current ecological models of prevention—is often narrowly defined.

The Giving Voice study adds to this thinking by:

- drawing on accounts in which victim and offenders knew each other—other research, such as by Beauregard and Leclerc (2007), focused on strangers;
- drawing on “hidden” accounts (i.e., those that do not result in conviction); and
- considering how broader social and situational factors—such as setting or the type of relationship between victim and offender—interact with perpetrators’ decision-making.

Figure 2 sketches out a temporal “event” model of sexual offending based on victim/survivors’ narratives. It is not intended to be representative of sexual assaults in general. Its purpose is to identify key steps or phases in perpetrators’ strategies and represent them in a linear flow. As shown below, the offence pathway typically involved:

17 We are grateful to Patrick Tidmarsh (personal communication, 11 June 2010) for so clearly articulating this process.

18 This is an approach somewhat informed by two major theories of crime—rational choice theory and routine activities theory. Rational choice theory posits that anyone could engage in criminal activity if they thought that the rewards outweighed the risks. It assumes that individual behaviour is internally willed and based on rational deduction. It also argues that this is a limited or situated rationality—risks and rewards are crime-specific (i.e., a bank robbery versus a convenience store robbery, or sexually assaulting a stranger versus someone familiar)—and takes into account the particular skills and weaknesses of the offender. Routine activities theory is closely connected to this perspective. The essence of this theory according to Felson (1994, p. 11) is that “crime does not need hardened offenders, super-predators, convicted felons or wicked people. Crime just needs an opportunity”, and that opportunity is a product of everyday life. When a “likely offender”, a suitable target and an absent guardian come together, the opportunity for offending is created. Both perspectives have deeply informed concepts of deterrence in law and situational crime prevention.

- interacting with victim/survivor—the offender interacts socially with the woman, during which trust is performed, developed or confirmed;
- isolating the victim/survivor—the victim and offender are isolated from others, often physically;
- making the victim/survivor vulnerable—deliberately putting the victim in a vulnerable position (e.g., saying there are no spare beds, using alcohol or drugs to disinhibit or incapacitate victim);
- interacting further with the victim/survivor—further interaction takes place; for example, making threats, pressuring for sex or contact, physically intimidating the woman, or “snapping”;
- engaging in an act of sexual assault—the offender perpetrates sexual assault while the woman is incapacitated, in shock or in fear, or by using force or pressure;
- concealing the assault—the offender leaves, attempts to reinterpret the assault by sharing the “blame” with the woman, excuses or denies the assault, or threatens the victim; and
- responding after the assault—this phase refers to how the sexual offence is responded to by the victim, the offender and others (including friends, institutions and services).

Each step is influenced by the dynamics at play within the interpersonal, situational and socio-cultural contexts relevant to incident.

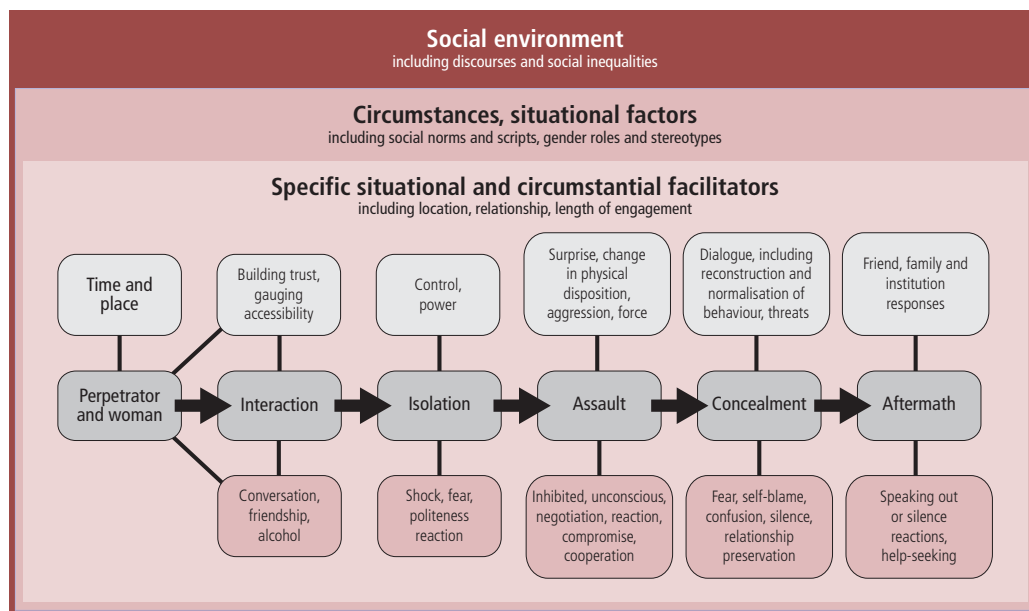


Figure 2 Situationally targeted perpetration

Contribution of victim/survivors' insights to sexual assault prevention

Victim/survivors provided extremely rich accounts of the circumstances in which the assaults occurred and the strategies perpetrators used to aid their offending. Together, their experiences create an important perspective about who perpetrates, under what circumstances, and how they carry out their offences.

The participants' accounts challenge stereotypical ideas that are prevalent in public understandings of sexual assault. These stereotypes represent the sex offender as either monstrous and pathological, or as an “inadvertent” offender; that is, someone who simply misread the romantic cues.

Contrary to the popular perception that sexual offences are the outcome of “risky” situations or the acts of risky individuals, offending for these participants often took place in very mundane, ordinary settings, such as opening the door to a family member, attending work functions, and catching up with friends.

Perpetrator strategies appeared more or less planned not because they were more or less predatory, but because they adapted strategies to the particular circumstances, settings and relationships. In this sample, those sexual offenders who were later named in the media as “serial” or “monstrous” predators used offending strategies similar to other perpetrators described by the women. It was in retrospect that they became “predators”, as a result of media reporting, the severity or extent of the injuries caused during the offence, or because more victims were identified.

Future directions

There are potential implications arising from this project that weigh on both sexual assault prevention strategies and the evidence base required to inform these interventions. These future directions are summarised in Box 2 and discussed in turn following that.

Box 3: Future directions summarised

Responses to sexual offenders are often considered to be tertiary interventions in that the sexual assault has already occurred. Such interventions include criminal justice responses (prosecution, conviction and sentencing), and treatment programs for offenders. The Giving Voice project focused on perpetration; that is, an action or set of actions engaged in by an individual. The findings and conclusions demonstrate that interventions can also be located at early intervention and primary prevention levels.

Tertiary intervention initiatives suggested by the project include:

- broader conception of what counts as evidence at the investigatory stage of police responses; in particular, it suggests a longer “event frame” may assist in gathering relevant information about perpetrator planning and strategising; and
- reconsidering the nature and gravity of offences, and the accused’s good character; for example, as Table 3 shows, trust was a key resource individuals exploited to offend, yet it is unclear how the criminal law weighs this as a facilitator during sentencing.

Based on incidents presented in the current study, appropriate early intervention approaches would include:

- undertaking situational crime prevention for “risky” settings or activities such as licensed premises and alcohol consumption; and
- identifying and working with at-risk men or at-risk settings on attitudes about masculinity, sexual entitlement and sexual coercion.

Primary prevention or population-level interventions include identifying problematic social beliefs and representations of masculinity, heterosexual seduction and courtship and sexual objectification in sites such as the news media and popular culture and providing alternative social norms

Bringing violence against women and social inclusion frameworks together

The interpersonal and situational contexts the participants described demonstrated that sexual assault took place across a range of intimate, familiar and social relationships. Although 15 incidents were perpetrated by partners and husbands, approximately 20 were perpetrated by friends, colleagues and acquaintances. In Australia, the Personal Safety Survey shows that a significant proportion of women are assaulted by family friends, colleagues, acquaintances and neighbours and that “stranger rape” represents only a small minority of all sexual assaults (ABS, 2006).

The adverse physical and mental health consequences of sexual assault upon women can significantly affect their social participation (Vos et al., 2006). A relatively under-examined aspect of this is the role of trust in facilitating sexual offending. Except for those who had been offended against by strangers, all participants identified trust as a central, if not the key resource that men exploited. This suggests that trust plays an important role in the perpetration of sexual assault, and the ongoing effects of sexual assault on women’s participation in civic life. Although we have come a long way in recognising sexual violence in intimate, dating and romantic relationships, this may have been at the expense of developing a comprehensive

understanding of sexual assault in women's broader social lives, and its impact on their social participation (Morrison, Quadara, & Boyd, 2007; WHO, 2002).

Linking social participation, sexual assault and trust

One interpretation of participants' invocation of trust is that they were naïve. Social institutions such as the justice system, the media and the general community attribute greater responsibility to women who have been raped by offenders they know (for "putting themselves in that situation") than those who have been raped by strangers (Flood & Pease, 2009; Suarez & Guadalla, 2010; VicHealth, 2009). The expectation is that they should have weighed the possible risks and dangers of their acquaintance with the perpetrator. However, this contradicts the research on trust as a social good, or current public policy developments in which social inclusion and social capital are (a) seen as desirable policy outcomes, and (b) understood as being connected to people's levels of social trust (McAlinden, 2006; Newton, 2001; Wolff, 1950).

That participants so commonly identified trust as a component of sexual offending suggests that it is not simply an individual judgement about another person, but a central, pervasive aspect of the social domain (Misztal, 1996). The expectation of positive, or at least non-harmful, behaviour and interaction of others is legitimate—it is both the reason society exists and the "glue" that makes it function. In our research, perpetrators were long-time family friends, friends, an old housemate, colleagues and work associates, and a partner of a sister-in-law. These are social relations in which a degree of trust is a given, both because from the victim/survivors' point of view trust had been built (as with friends), but also because "some social relationships might be deemed trusting relationships, regardless of whether or not the participants in the interaction tend to bring trust to other interactions" (Veenstra, 2002, p. 550). That is, trust is more "than a rational calculation of risks and dangers" (Veenstra, 2002, p. 552); it is a continuous dimension of social and civil relationships. Trust is a legitimate and necessary component of civil societies. As women now enter the realms of work, study, leisure and independent living in their own right (i.e., not as dependants, wives or sexual objects), trust is similarly a social given of the contacts they make in these domains.

Given the significant interest in social capital as a concept and policy direction, it seems pertinent to make connections between the incidence and nature of sexual assault and developments in social capital. This would complement the "other half" of sexual assault that is not well addressed in the violence against women prevention framework and its emphasis on intimate partner violence.

Addressing perpetration in an ecological framework

The ecological framework currently informing much work in the sector is focused on determinants of "violence against women" and based on the research evidence about both victimisation and perpetration. The antecedents of sexual assault are multifactorial, located within individual, interpersonal, community and societal contexts (Heise, 1998; VicHealth, 2009; WHO, 2002). These are then combined to produce a general theory of violence against women. It is unclear how the opportunities and drivers of perpetration map against this. It is therefore unclear how perpetration is addressed specifically across the various contexts, or what kinds of interventions work best at which levels of prevention (i.e., primary, secondary, tertiary). If, as it suggests, "human behaviour is reciprocally shaped by factors at multiple levels" (Casey & Lindhorst, 2009, p. 92), then both the determinants of sexual violence and how individuals rationalise their behaviour, need to be better understood. There is a need to integrate existing knowledge within fields such as psychology, criminology and sociology regarding crime, and deviance more generally, to fully develop a robust, multifactorial model of sexual assault perpetration.

Addressing attitudes, beliefs and social norms about heterosexual masculinity in primary, secondary and tertiary interventions

Walklate (2004) argued that traditional heterosexual scripts of seduction are problematic. For example, date-related activities, such as going for a coffee or having a goodnight kiss, may be used and construed to infer consenting to sex when interpreting accounts of sexual assault. Developments in sexual assault prevention are fairly unanimous about the centrality of rigid, traditional gender norms across individual/interpersonal, community and societal levels in underpinning sexual violence (VicHealth, 2009; Violence Against Women Community Attitudes Project, 2006). Indeed, research indicates higher levels of blame are attributed to victims and

offenders are excused in cases where women breach conventions of gender-appropriate behaviour or engage in some consensual sexual activity before the sexual assault (see, for examples, Cassidy & Hurrell, 1995; Clark, 2007). This not to say that normative expressions of heterosexuality are sexual assault, but that “the way that normative heterosex is patterned or scripted permit[s] far too much ambiguity over distinctions between what is rape and what is just sex” (Gavey, 2005, p. 2). It is exactly this ambiguity over what “just sex” is that respectful relationships education programs try to address.

A key element of the traditional social script about heterosexuality is the construction and expression of normative masculinity. The US literature on sexual coercion demonstrates a significant relationship between scoring highly on “hypermasculinity” and “hostile masculinity” scales and self-reported sexual aggression among young men (Malamuth & Dean, 1997). The sexual offending research literature also identifies the implicit theories or “world views” of offenders that inform their behaviour. Most frequently identified in this population are beliefs that: women are dangerous, powerful and vindictive; women are sexual commodities; and the offenders are entitled to sex and/or control over women (Polaschek & Gannon, 2004).

However, the relationship between individual beliefs or attitudes, and socio-cultural “supports for, or weak sanction against gender inequality and rigid gender roles” is not clear (VicHealth, 2007, p. 34). Certainly, there is agreement across the research that certain types of attitudes and beliefs are correlated with sexually coercive behaviour. There appears to be less discussion and agreement about the reasons for these attitudes (e.g., developmental experiences or collective Western cultural production). As such, a holistic response to normative masculinity and coercive sexuality is lacking. Possible directions include:

- identifying problematic social beliefs and representations of masculinity, heterosexual seduction, and courtship and sexual objectification in sites such as news media and popular culture and provide alternative social norms; and
- developing strategies for and indicators and measures of socio-cultural change in the representation of gender, sexual assault and sex in media and popular culture settings.

Managing “risk” and risky settings

Of themselves, none of the sites identified in the women’s accounts of the sexual assault constituted a “risky” setting. Indeed, the activities surrounding the sexual assault were consistent with the type of setting they were in and the relationship between victim and perpetrator (e.g., friends often catch up at dinner and have a drink and a chat). The clear implication of these women’s experiences is that it is difficult or impossible to expect victims to be aware of and manage risk (even in settings such as licensed premises). According to these accounts, it would have required women to: remain untrusting of male friends, despite having lived with them or shared 20 years of friendship; not network with colleagues on work trips and related functions; not let family members into their homes; not talk to friends of friends at parties, and so on. “Risk” was assessed by these women within the apparent relationship they were in and with the understanding that they were an equal within it.

Considering how settings and situations produce risk may be a more profitable direction and expands prevention strategies. This is especially relevant where alcohol is involved. The theoretical and empirically tested models about the role of alcohol in sexual assault are possibly not complex enough to capture the different meanings of alcohol consumption across interpersonal, situational and social contexts. In Australia, drinking is a social and symbolic activity. In victim/survivors’ accounts, alcohol consumption intersected with a variety of other social and demographic factors in facilitating sexual violence, such as:

- social meanings of masculinity and femininity;
- the nature of the relationship between victim and offender (e.g., professional familiarity, social acquaintance);
- class;
- the purpose of socialisation;
- physical location;
- generosity and gift-giving; and
- marketing of bars, clubs and pubs, and the types of alcohol and how it is consumed.

A possible direction is to integrate this knowledge and its concepts into sexual assault prevention and response strategies that can be targeted at particular settings. In the context of alcohol and licensed premises, the following factors are worth considering:

- the role of the alcohol marketing industry in linking gender, alcohol and sexual expectations;
- the combination of the spatial layout, marketing strategy, clientele, internal “vibe” and alcohol-serving practices on inhibiting or amplifying sexually coercive behaviours;
- the role of bystanders and others in witnessing excessive drinking, drink spiking or intoxication in social situations; and
- the role of workplaces in promoting sexually safe drinking spaces and practices for their employees.

Criminal justice responses

Addressing perpetrators’ accountability, choice and criminal liability

Criminal law is often harshest with those offenders whose crimes suggest premeditation. The level of planning is used as a proxy for intention (an extremely difficult legal concept to prove “beyond reasonable doubt”). In terms of the accounts of perpetration provided by victim/survivors in this project, the distinction between opportunity and planning, and intentional versus accidental offending, is less apparent precisely because of the location. What the visual representation of perpetrators’ strategies in Figure 2 does show are the points at which they make a choice to pursue one set of actions over another. Each step offered perpetrators the option to choose another, non-offending pathway. Instead, in participants’ accounts, they chose to offend.

Challenging the idea of “grey” sexual assaults

The idea of “grey” sexual assaults has been debated since “date rape” or acquaintance rape became a focus of research and law reform in the 1980s. A number of commentators (e.g., Roiphie, 1994) have argued that this is really just a case of “regretted sex”, the result of miscommunication or a muddling of the heterosexual seduction script and not predatory behaviour. Criminal justice decisions can reflect that sexual assaults that occur in dating situations may be considered to be of diminished seriousness, with lesser penalties, judicial interpretation and rulings resulting. Community attitudes reflect concern that what looks like “normal sex” can easily be “confused” with rape. This notion of “grey”, or “not really” sexual assault was not reflected in participants’ accounts. Although there were gradations of physical violence used and the injuries sustained, in victim/survivors’ accounts, perpetrators were deliberate in their choice of strategy to create and/or maximise their opportunity for sexual activity, regardless of whether the women were consenting or not.

The use of trust as a strategy in the perpetration of adult sexual assault

Trust has received relatively little attention in the adult sexual offending literature (Walklate, 2004). Abuse of trust has featured to some degree in child sexual offending, particularly as it has been linked with “grooming”. Drawing on the work of Ben-Yehuda (2001), McAlinden (2006) argued that the betrayal of trust that is evident in adult sexual assaults (such as described in the present study) is similar to “grooming” in child sexual offending. In referring to child grooming, McAlinden argued that constructs such as reliability, faithfulness, responsibility, belief and the creation of loyal relationships are necessary pre-conditions that a sexual offender must use to establish intimate and social relationships with those he wants to groom. The offender pretends to be friendly and trustworthy, promoting shared interests to his audience to deceive them. It is this sense of belongingness or “shared membership” of the group that makes the betrayal possible (p. 345).

In the victim/survivors’ accounts presented in the current study, it is readily apparent that trust, being of good character, and being “a nice guy”, without signs of “weirdness” or instability, were enabling factors. However, there are also important divergences from how grooming is understood in child sexual offending literature, most notably adult women’s agency. Nevertheless, it remains important to acknowledge in the criminal justice process, particularly in jury deliberations and judicial interpretation at sentencing, that “trustworthiness” is actually a resource for offenders in setting up, carrying out and silencing the victim. It is not clear the extent to which current practices consider the role of “trust” and other social scripts as factors

that facilitate the sexual assaults of adults and how this influences decisions regarding laying criminal charges, case outcomes or penalties.

Evidence gathering by police to enable prosecution

Developments in sexual assault investigation practice are exploring investigative interviewing techniques and other strategies for developing evidence briefs that are as comprehensive as possible to assist the Office of Public Prosecutions to pursue a case (Read, Powell, Kebbell, & Milne, 2009). This is often called a “whole-story” approach. Eliciting narrative detail and asking effective questions of both victim and suspect could be enhanced by a situational representation of perpetrators’ strategies as steps. It places the sexual assault in a temporal and situational context, allowing questions to be asked beyond the narrow event of the sexual assault itself. The participants’ narratives in this study have revealed that the offending strategy went beyond the assault itself, both “pre-assault” by setting the situation up, and “post-assault” through the use of certain strategies to conceal, deny or reframe the assault. This is a significant finding because it shows how offenders’ behaviour after the assault may be a continuance of the offence—that is, by retrospectively reframing the event as something consensual or unintentional.

Possible directions in the criminal justice arena involve disseminating these and similar research findings to legal practitioners, including judges, to support their decision-making, and developing educational or informational resources for juries about the contexts and methods of sexual offending.

Challenges

The current evidence base in Australia is not comprehensive enough at this stage to properly support and monitor trends or patterns in perpetrator behaviours. In reviewing the literature for this project, the two most important gaps relate to our knowledge about the perpetration of sexually coercive behaviour—including sexual assault—within community samples (i.e., non-criminal populations), and situational perspectives on sexual offending.

Limited data on sexual assault perpetration in community samples

We could infer perpetration rates from instruments such as the Personal Safety Survey (ABS, 2006), but this would not provide a complete picture. In the US context, by contrast, there are a number of surveys conducted with men in the community (often college men) to obtain information about their sexual experiences, including sexually coercive behaviour (this includes acts that meet that legal definition of rape). Such surveys provide information on the types and frequency of sexual assault perpetration, correlations with other life circumstances, particular tactics such as the use of alcohol, and some longitudinal studies. At this stage, we have no comparable Australian data. This lack of data affects our ability to:

- demonstrate the effectiveness of social marketing campaigns and primary prevention education;
- target social marketing campaigns and primary prevention education in the most effective manner;
- identify behaviours and social settings for early intervention; and
- assess the similarity or not between detected and un-detected offenders.

A number of ethical and legal issues present themselves, however, as demonstrated above research on sexual offending in the community is possible. Consideration of how such an Australian research agenda would develop in light of these issues is the next step.

Limited analysis of situational offending

In the context of adult sexual assault, there is one study in Australia that we are aware of that examined the situational factors influencing sexual offending (a PhD thesis by Murray, 2007). It looked at Director of Public Prosecution files and court transcripts, and interviewed sexual offenders in Queensland. Murray’s findings echo ours, in terms of the level of foreplanning (very little) and the prominence of socialising time for offenders echo this project’s findings. Such an approach using existing criminal justice data could be undertaken in other jurisdictions to provide further insight into, for example:

- which offending tactics and behaviours are associated with particular settings, ages, or relationships; and
- which offending strategies and tactics are most likely to progress through the criminal justice system.

Summary

Sexual assault perpetration occurs at the nexus of interpersonal, situational and social contexts. They are the sites of our everyday interactions and social experiences. The current study sheds light on how interpersonal, situational and social contexts can overlap when a sexual assault occurs and how individual men control, manipulate or exploit the opportunities afforded by these overlapping contexts. Sexual assault perpetration is both an event, which is shaped by these contexts, and an individual behaviour or choice of behaviour.

Because both the experience of being sexually assaulted and the ability to perpetrate it are so embedded in these everyday contexts, there are many tools, sites and strategies to be able to address and prevent perpetration. Preventing sexual assault perpetration therefore needs to be multilevel. It needs to address:

- relevant factors within these contexts;
- the way they affect and influence each other; and
- what combination of contexts and factors are more risky for perpetrating sexual assault than others.

Somewhere between the stereotypical serial, predatory sex offenders and non-violent men are those who are more likely to engage in sexual coercion and sexual assault. The findings from the Giving Voice project provide an important starting point for developing early intervention strategies and identifying linkages with relevant areas for intervention, such as alcohol consumption.

Appendix 1: Participant recruitment and ethical requirements

Participants were recruited through sexual assault and community service provider networks and referrals directly from ACSSA's website and email list. The selection criteria for inclusion in the study were that the participant:

- was female;
- was over 18 years old;
- had experienced sexual assault (self-defined)¹ as an adult (after the age of 18);
- was receiving or had received counselling in relation to the assault(s); and
- resided in Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia, the Northern Territory or Victoria.²

Service providers were selected on the basis that they represented a diverse range of circumstances and clientele so that participants reflected, for example, a diversity of ages, backgrounds, relationship to perpetrators and experiences with the criminal justice system. Organisations that provide services to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and Indigenous communities and those in rural and remote areas were approached, as well as those located in central cities.

The following steps were undertaken to promote a safe and supportive environment for victim/survivor participation:

- Participants' free and informed consent—A plain language statement (Appendix 2) was made available to all potential participants. The statement explained the precise nature of the research, its purpose and what the research would be used for. The contact details of the Project Manager and the AIFS Ethics Committee were included should anyone have had questions or concerns about the research. The interviewer explained to participants that they could withdraw from the project at any time (up until the transcript de-identification and analysis process), stop the interview as needed and could refuse to answer any question. The interviewer confirmed that the participants understood what the research was about before the interview commenced. Participants were reassured that their decision about whether or not to participate would have no bearing on any counselling or other service they were receiving. A consent form repeats these points and was verbally agreed to or signed by the participant before the interview began.
- Selection criteria and a recruitment strategy that promotes a supportive research process for participants—Victim/survivors of sexual assault who have previously discussed the assault in a supportive context do not find participating in research as distressing as individuals who are discussing the assault for the first time. As such, the selection criteria for participation included *that women were receiving or had received counselling in relation to* the assault(s). Participants were recruited through sexual assault counselling and other support services. Participants who had completed counselling (but did not have a current ongoing counsellor)

1 Kelly (1988) stressed that it is important to allow women to define their own experience as sexual assault because researchers' analytic definitions do not always reflect those of research participants.

2 Given the project time and resource restrictions, participants were restricted to those living in the major cities and rural districts of five states and territories.

were offered details of support services, and were encouraged to inform their past counsellor of their involvement in the research (where appropriate). Debriefing support was offered to participants following the interview, and participants could bring a support person with them to the interview.

- Participants' anonymity—All participants were de-identified in the transcription, analysis, and writing up and dissemination of research results. As is standard practice, where extracts are quoted, a pseudonym has been assigned. Any other personal information that could potentially identify the individuals involved (the participants and/or the offender, or any other person involved), such as locations, were removed or altered. All voice recordings were destroyed following transcription.
- Participant feedback—Participants were encouraged to express informally how they found the interview. Where possible, participants were contacted and given the opportunity to provide formal feedback about their involvement in the study.

Appendix 2: Plain language statement

Information sheet for participants

Giving Voice to Victim/Survivors' Knowledge of Sexual Offending

Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault Research Project

The Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA) is seeking participants for a research project. We would like to speak with adults who have experienced sexual assault/s in adulthood (i.e. the assault/s happened when aged 18 or over), and who are able to discuss the assault/s with an experienced researcher.

The purpose of the research is to draw on the knowledge of people who have been sexually assaulted to expand understandings of how sexual assaults are perpetrated, better inform the community about this, better equip police to respond to this crime, inform therapists who work with sex offenders, and overall stop sexual violence from happening. We are doing this project because we believe people who have experienced sexual assault have important knowledge about how this crime is perpetrated. But they are not often asked to share this knowledge. When they are asked, it is usually in a police interview or in court, where they may not have control over what is discussed, or how it is discussed.

The focus of the interview will be to hear from you about the assault/s, the perpetrator/s of the assault/s, and how they did it. We are also keen to hear what you think would have to happen to stop the perpetrator/s from committing further assaults.

Participation in this research will involve either doing an interview with a researcher from ACSSA, or being part of a group discussion with other participants, facilitated by ACSSA. If you currently have a counsellor, we encourage you to discuss your decision to take part with them. You can also have your counsellor with you for the research interview if you would like. The researchers involved in the project are experienced at talking with people about sexual assault, and you will have control over the interview (you can stop it at any time).

So, if you:

- are a female aged 18 or over;
- have been the victim of sexual assault that happened as an adult (18+ and how you define "sexual assault" is up to you);
- have received counselling or are receiving counselling which involved speaking directly about the assault(s); and
- live in the Northern Territory, Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia or Queensland

we would like to hear from you.

If you would like to take part in this project, please contact Haley Clark in the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA), housed at the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) by 29 May, 2009. If you have any questions about the research you can also contact ACSSA co-ordinator Antonia Quadara or the AIFS Ethics Committee.

AIFS also has a toll-free number you can call. Dial — and use the shortened "Giving Voice" to AIFS reception so they can transfer you to Haley, Antonia, or the Ethics Committee.

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