

Two Tiers of Social Extraction: Public Hunters, Covert Social Predators, and the Sovereign's Shield

siistrategic.com/two-tiers-of-social-extraction-public-hunters-covert-social-predators-and-the-sovereigns-shield/

lockekdauch

April 14, 2026

Author: David Humble

Affiliation: Sovereign Integrity Institute (SII)

Date: April 2026

Abstract

Social extraction—the depletion of attention, emotional energy, and material resources through interpersonal dynamics—operates across a spectrum of visibility and sophistication. This paper proposes a two-tier model distinguishing between (1) *public hunters*, who pursue overt, short-term transactional exchanges, and (2) *covert social predators*, who employ relational embedding, emotional manipulation, and delayed exploitation. Drawing on literature on narcissistic traits, love bombing, coercive control, and relational aggression, the paper analyzes how covert extraction operates through mechanisms such as idealization, triangulation, and gradual entanglement (Strutzenberg et al., 2016; McMullan, 2021).

The paper further introduces the concept of the *sovereign individual*—a person characterized by emotional self-regulation, reduced dependency on external validation, and strong boundary maintenance—and argues that such individuals are less susceptible to exploitative relational dynamics. Practical implications for detection, disengagement, and resilience are discussed.

Keywords: social extraction, narcissism, love bombing, triangulation, coercive control, relational aggression, boundary-setting, interpersonal manipulation

1. Introduction

Interpersonal relationships exist along a continuum from mutual exchange to exploitative extraction. While overtly transactional dynamics—such as explicit financial or sexual exchange—are widely recognized, more subtle forms of extraction often go undetected (Beri, 2025; McMullan, 2021). These covert dynamics rely on emotional investment, social embedding, and delayed reciprocity expectations.

This paper proposes a distinction between two functional categories:

1. **Public hunters** – overt, high-frequency, low-investment extractive actors
2. **Covert social predators** – relationally embedded actors employing delayed and psychologically mediated extraction

This framework builds on existing research in narcissistic abuse, relational aggression, and coercive control, which demonstrates that manipulation often emerges through gradual escalation rather than immediate exploitation (Strutzenberg et al., 2016; Reiser, 2024).

2. Two Tiers of Social Extraction

Feature	Tier 1: Public Hunters	Tier 2: Covert Social Predators
Method	Direct, transactional	Indirect, relational
Context	Public venues, dating apps	Social networks, workplaces
Initial Strategy	Overt signaling	Idealization and bonding
Timing of Extraction	Immediate	Delayed
Detection	High visibility	Low visibility
Exit Cost	Low	High
Mechanism	Explicit exchange	Psychological entanglement

Public hunters operate through explicit signaling and short-term exchange, consistent with research on transactional dating behaviors in digital environments (Figuerola et al., 2026). In contrast, covert predators align more closely with patterns documented in narcissistic and coercively controlling relationships, where exploitation follows emotional investment (McMullan, 2021).

3. Tactics of Covert Social Predation

3.1 Love Bombing and Idealization

Love bombing refers to an early phase of excessive attention, affection, and validation used to rapidly establish emotional dependence (Strutzenberg et al., 2016). Linguistic analyses show that this phase often includes:

- Intensified emotional language
- Premature declarations of closeness
- High-frequency communication

These behaviors align with narcissistic self-enhancement strategies and are frequently followed by devaluation once attachment is secured (Beri, 2025).

3.2 Triangulation

Triangulation involves introducing third parties to manipulate perception, induce jealousy, or destabilize the target (McMullan, 2021). This tactic:

- Reinforces dependency
- Creates competition for validation
- Obscures relational clarity

Digital environments amplify triangulation through visibility (e.g., social media interactions), increasing psychological impact (Figueroa et al., 2026).

3.3 Gradual Escalation and Commitment Entrapment

Research on coercive control demonstrates that exploitative relationships often develop through incremental boundary violations rather than abrupt demands (Reiser, 2024). Small requests normalize compliance, creating a progression toward deeper entanglement.

3.4 Victim Signaling and Role Reversal

Covertly manipulative individuals may adopt victim narratives to deflect accountability and induce guilt in others (McMullan, 2021). This aligns with findings on covert narcissistic traits, where vulnerability presentation coexists with manipulative intent (Grannon, 2019).

3.5 Intermittent Reinforcement

Alternating phases of reward (attention, affection) and withdrawal reinforce attachment through mechanisms similar to variable reward conditioning (Beri, 2025). This unpredictability increases emotional dependency and reduces likelihood of disengagement.

4. Resistance and Psychological Boundaries

Rather than framing immunity in absolute terms, research suggests that vulnerability to manipulation is moderated by:

- Emotional regulation capacity
- Attachment style
- Boundary clarity
- Dependence on external validation

Individuals with stronger self-regulation and secure attachment are less susceptible to exploitative dynamics (Bowlby, 1969; Reiser, 2024).

The concept introduced here as the “*sovereign individual*” aligns with established constructs such as:

- Secure attachment
- High self-differentiation
- Low external validation dependence

These traits reduce responsiveness to manipulative reinforcement cycles.

5. Detection Framework

Evidence-based indicators of potentially exploitative dynamics include:

5.1 Disproportionate Early Intensity

Rapid escalation of intimacy or commitment (Strutzenberg et al., 2016)

5.2 Boundary Testing

Small violations followed by normalization (Reiser, 2024)

5.3 Emotional Volatility

Alternating idealization and withdrawal (Beri, 2025)

5.4 Induced Obligation

Use of gifts or support to create implicit debt

5.5 Social Manipulation

Use of third parties to influence perception (McMullan, 2021)

6. Discussion

The distinction between overt and covert extraction highlights an important gap in public awareness. While overt exploitation is easily recognized, covert relational manipulation is often normalized within cultural narratives of romance, care, or emotional intensity.

This aligns with broader research showing that harmful relational patterns frequently operate within socially accepted frameworks, making them more difficult to detect and disrupt (Halpin, 2022).

The model also suggests that resilience is less about identifying specific “types” of people and more about strengthening internal regulatory capacity and boundary clarity.

7. Limitations

- Conceptual framework not yet empirically tested as a unified model

- Reliance on interdisciplinary synthesis rather than primary data
- Terminology (e.g., “covert predator”) is heuristic rather than clinical
- Variability in individual intent and behavior complicates categorization

Future research should examine:

- Longitudinal patterns of relational manipulation
- Digital platform effects on extraction dynamics
- Intervention strategies for improving detection and resilience

8. Conclusion

Social extraction operates across multiple levels of visibility and sophistication. While overt transactional behaviors are easily identified, covert relational manipulation presents a more complex and often more damaging form of extraction.

Understanding these dynamics requires:

- Differentiating between overt and covert mechanisms
- Recognizing gradual escalation patterns
- Strengthening individual psychological resilience

Rather than focusing solely on identifying external threats, effective protection lies in cultivating internal stability, boundary clarity, and reduced dependence on external validation.

9. References

Beri, R. (2025). A study on love bombing, narcissism and emotional abuse among young adults. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Approaches in Psychology*, 3(6).

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment*. Basic Books.

Figuroa, J. M., et al. (2026). Recognition of digital dating abuse behaviors among adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*.

Grannon, R. (2019). Covert narcissism. *Psych Central*.

Halpin, M. (2022). Weaponized subordination and gender hierarchy. *Sociological Perspectives*, 65(4), 712–729.

McMullan, E. (2021). Narcissistic abuse and coercive control. In *The New Normal of Violence* (pp. 173–192). Springer.

Reiser, V. M. (2024). Narcissistic abuse and relational manipulation. Cerritos Library Catalog.

Strutzenberg, C. C., Wiersma-Mosley, J. D., Jozkowski, K. N., & Becnel, J. N. (2016). Love-bombing: A narcissistic approach to relationship formation. University of Arkansas.

Institutional Note

This paper is published by the Sovereign Integrity Institute (SII) as part of its research into interpersonal dynamics, manipulation, and resilience.

Citation:

Humble, D. (2026). *Two Tiers of Social Extraction: Public Hunters, Covert Social Predators, and the Sovereign's Shield*. SII Working Paper Series.

Comments
