



Child Molesters: A Behavioral Analysis

**For
Law Enforcement
Officers
Investigating
Cases of
Child
Sexual
Exploitation**

In cooperation with the Federal Bureau of Investigation

1. Definitions of Terms

Child Molesters

The term *child molester* is fairly common and is used by professionals and nonprofessionals alike, including law enforcement officers. Although *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines *molest* as "annoy, interfere with, or meddle with so as to trouble or harm," when combined with the word *child*, it has generally come to convey sexual abuse of some type. In spite of its common usage, it is surprising how many different images and variations of meanings the term *child molester* has for different individuals. For many, it brings to mind the image of the dirty old man in a wrinkled raincoat hanging around a school playground with a bag of candy, waiting to lure little children. For some, the *child molester* is a stranger to his victim and not a father having sex with his daughter. For others, the *child molester* is one who exposes himself to or fondles children without engaging in vaginal or anal intercourse. Still others believe the *child molester* is a nonviolent offender. Dr. A. Nicholas Groth, one of the leading experts on sexual victimization of children, differentiates between nonviolent *child molesters* who coax or pressure the child into sexual activity and violent *child rapists* who overpower or threaten to harm their victims (see "Appendix II: References"). Most would probably not apply the term *child molester* to a man who utilizes the services of an adolescent prostitute. For law enforcement officers, the term *child molester* is more likely to conform to a legal definition of sexual molestation set forth in the penal code.

For the purposes of this book, a *child molester* will be defined as a significantly older individual who engages in any type of sexual activity with individuals legally defined as children. When using the term *child molester*, no distinctions will be made between male or female, single or repeat offenders, or violent or nonviolent offenders. No distinctions will be made as to whether the child victims are prepubescent or pubescent, known or unknown, related or unrelated to the offender. Finally, no distinctions will be made based on the type of sexual activity engaged in by the offender. Although such distinctions may have important legal and evaluation significance, they have no bearing on whether or not an individual is labeled a *child molester*. For law enforcement purposes, a *child molester* is simply an individual who engages in illegal sexual activity with children.

Pedophiles

Although the use of the term *child molester* is commonplace, recent publicity and awareness concerning sexual abuse of children has resulted in the frequent use of the term *pedophile*. At one time this term was almost exclusively used by psychologists and psychiatrists. Dr. Groth's categorization defines a *child molester* as having a sexual attraction toward prepubertal children (*pedophilia*) or sexual attraction toward pubertal children (*hebephilia*). The term *hebephile* (sometimes spelled *ephebophilia*) is rarely used today, even by mental health professionals. Although sexual attraction to pubescent children by

have sex with adults as part of their effort to gain or continue their access to preferred children. For example, one might have occasional sex with a single mother to insure continued access to her children. (See also *Child Sex Rings: A Behavioral Analysis* listed in "Appendix III: Additional Reading.")

Important Distinctions for Law Enforcement

What, then, is the difference between a child molester and a pedophile? For many the terms have become synonymous. The media frequently make no distinction and use the terms interchangeably. Labeling all child molesters as pedophiles is, however, confusing. There are clear differences between the types of individuals who sexually abuse children, and law enforcement officers handling these cases need to make such distinctions.

Are all pedophiles child molesters? No. A person suffering from any paraphilia can legally engage in it simply by fantasizing and masturbating. A child molester is an individual who sexually molests children. A person might have a sexual preference for children and might fantasize about having sex with them. That person is a pedophile. But if he does not act out, then he is not a child molester. Some pedophiles might act out their fantasies in legal ways by simply talking to or watching children and later masturbating. Some might have sex with dolls and mannequins that resemble children. Some pedophiles might act out their fantasies in legal ways by engaging in sexual activity with adults who look (small stature, flat chested, no body hair), dress, or act (immature, baby talk) like children. Others may act out child fantasy games with adult prostitutes. A difficult problem to detect and address is that of individuals who

act out their sexual fantasies by socially interacting with children or by interjecting themselves into the child sexual abuse or exploitation "problem" as overzealous child advocates. It is almost impossible to estimate how many pedophiles exist who have never molested a child. What society can or should do with regard to such individuals is an interesting area for discussion but beyond the role of law enforcement. People cannot be arrested for their fantasies. It is not clear whether any of these behaviors constitutes having "acted upon these urges" as required by the *DSM-III-R* criteria for pedophilia.

Are all child molesters pedophiles? No. A pedophile is an individual who prefers to have sex with children. A person who prefers to have sex with an adult partner may, for any number of reasons, decide to have sex with a child. Such reasons might include simple availability, curiosity, or a desire to hurt a loved one of the molested child. The sexual fantasies of such individuals do not necessarily focus on children, and these people are not pedophiles.

Many child molesters are, in fact, pedophiles, and many pedophiles are child molesters. But they are not necessarily one and the same. The law enforcement officer might argue that it is his job to arrest individuals who violate the law and that whether or not that offender is a pedophile is of no importance to him. Distinctions between the types of child molesters, however, can have important and valuable implications for the law enforcement investigation of child sexual abuse.

This book will set forth a model for law enforcement that divides child molesters into two broad categories and several patterns of behavior. These categories are not intended for use by mental health professionals or clini-

Preferential Child Molesters

The Preferential Child Molesters have a definite sexual preference for children. Their sexual fantasies and erotic imagery focus on children. They have sex with children not because of some situational stress or insecurity but because they are sexually attracted to and prefer children. They can possess a wide variety of character traits but engage in highly predictable sexual behavior. These highly predictable sexual behavior patterns are called sexual ritual and are frequently engaged in even when they are counterproductive to getting away with the criminal activity. Although they may be smaller in number than the Situational Child Molesters, they have the potential to molest large numbers of victims. For many of them, their problem is not only the nature of the sex drive (attraction to children) but also the quantity (need for frequent and repeated sex with children). They usually have age and gender preferences for their victims. Members of higher socioeconomic groups tend to be overrepresented among Preferential Child Molesters. More Preferential Child Molesters seem to prefer boy than prefer girl victims. Within this category at least three major patterns of behavior emerge (see also Table 2 on page 10).

Seduction. This pattern characterizes the offender who engages children in sexual activity by "seducing" them—courting them with attention, affection, and gifts. Just as one adult courts another, the pedophile seduces children over a period of time by gradually lowering their sexual inhibitions. Frequently his victims arrive at the point where they are willing to trade sex for the attention, affection, and other benefits they receive from the offender. Many of these offenders are simultaneously involved with multiple victims, oper-

ating what has come to be called a child sex ring. (See also *Child Sex Rings: A Behavioral Analysis* listed in "Appendix III: Additional Reading.") This may include a group of children in the same class at school, in the same scout troop, or in the same neighborhood. The characteristic that seems to make this individual a master seducer of children is his ability to identify with them. He knows how to talk to children—but, more important, he knows how to listen to them. His adult status and authority is also an important part of the seduction process. In addition, he frequently selects as targets children who are victims of emotional or physical neglect. The biggest problem for this child molester is not how to obtain child victims but how to get them to leave after they are too old. This must be done without the disclosure of the "secret." Victim disclosure often occurs when the offender is attempting to terminate the relationship. This child molester is most likely to use threats and physical violence to avoid identification and disclosure or to prevent a victim from leaving before he is ready to "dump" the victim.

Introverted. This pattern of behavior characterizes the offender who has a preference for children but lacks the interpersonal skills necessary to seduce them. Therefore, he typically engages in a minimal amount of verbal communication with his victims and usually molests strangers or very young children. He is like the old stereotype of the child molester in that he is more likely to hang around playgrounds and other areas where children congregate, watching them or engaging them in brief sexual encounters. He may expose himself to children or make obscene phone calls to children. He may utilize the services of a child prostitute. Unable to figure out any other way to gain access to a child, he might even marry a woman and have his own children, very

4. Identifying Pedophiles

Sexual exploitation is a term used to describe the sexual victimization of children, involving child pornography, child sex rings, and child prostitution. While offenders utilizing the services of a child prostitute may be either Situational or Preferential Child Molesters, those involved in child pornography and child sex rings are predominately Preferential Child Molesters. And, although a variety of individuals sexually abuse children, Preferential Child Molesters, or pedophiles, are the *primary* sexual exploiters of children. (For the purpose of our law enforcement typology, *pedophile* is used interchangeably with *Preferential Child Molester*.)

An important step in investigating the difficult cases of child sexual victimization is to recognize and identify, if present, the highly predictable sexual behavior patterns of Preferential Child Molesters, or pedophiles. First, it is essential that the law enforcement investigator attempt to determine if an offender is a Situational or Preferential Child Molester.

There are most likely more Situational than Preferential Child Molesters. Each Situational Child Molester, however, is likely to abuse only a small number of children in a lifetime. A Preferential Child Molester might molest ten, fifty, hundreds, or even a thousand children in a lifetime, depending on the offender and how broadly or narrowly you define child molestation. In his study of 561 sex offenders, Dr. Gene Abel found pedophiles who targeted young boys outside the home committed the greatest number of crimes with an average of 281.7 acts with an average of 150.2 partners. Molesters who targeted girls within the family committed an average of 81.3 acts with an

average of 1.8 partners. He also found that 23.3 percent of the 561 subjects offended against both family and nonfamily targets. Although pedophiles vary greatly, their sexual behavior is repetitive and highly predictable. Knowledge of these sexual behavioral patterns or characteristics is extremely valuable to the law enforcement investigator.

These highly predictable and repetitive behavior patterns make cases involving Preferential Child Molesters far easier to investigate than those involving Situational Child Molesters. If enough of these characteristics can be identified through investigation, many of the remaining ones can be assumed. Most of these indicators mean little by themselves. As they are identified and accumulated through investigation, however, they can constitute reason to believe a certain offender is a Preferential Child Molester. You do not have proof beyond a reasonable doubt, but you may have *probable cause*.

The Preferential Child Molester (Pedophile)

The four major characteristics of the Preferential Child Molester (pedophile) are 1) long-term and persistent pattern of behavior, 2) children as preferred sexual objects, 3) well-developed techniques in obtaining victims, and 4) sexual fantasies focusing on children. These characteristics, together with the listed indicators, will assist the investigator in identifying the Preferential Child Molester and collecting the evidence necessary to arrest and convict him. At the outset, it must be stated and emphasized that *the indicators alone mean*

little. Their significance and weight comes as they are accumulated and come to form a pattern of behavior. If the investigator determines the existence of enough of these indicators, there is probable cause to believe the individual is a Preferential offender. In order to identify these indicators, the investigator must be willing to go beyond the typical background check of date of birth and credit and criminal histories and learn everything legally possible. Indicators and counter-indicators must be identified and evaluated.

Long-Term and Persistent Pattern of Behavior In an investigation of child sexual abuse, in background indicators **Sexual abuse in background** Although almost all victims of child sexual abuse do not become offenders, research indicates that many offenders are former victims. It is well worth the investigator's time and effort to determine if a suspect had ever been the victim of sexual abuse and what was the nature of the abuse (age it occurred, relationship with offender, acts performed, etc.).

Limited social contact as teenagers The pedophile's sexual preference for children usually begins in early adolescence. Therefore, during his teenage years he may have exhibited little sexual interest in people his own age. But, as with several of these indicators, that fact alone means little.

Premature separation from military If an individual was dishonorably discharged for molesting children, there is not much doubt about the significance. It was far more common, though, for

this type of individual to be prematurely separated from the military with no specific reason given or available. The military, like most organizations, was frequently interested in only getting rid of such individuals and not necessarily in prosecuting them. Fortunately, this attitude seems to be changing.

Frequent and unexpected moves When they are identified, pedophiles are frequently "asked" to leave town by someone in authority, by the parent of one of the victims, or by an employer. This was, and still is, a common way to deal with the problem. The result is that pedophiles frequently show a pattern of living in one place for several years with a good job and then suddenly and for no apparent reason moving and changing jobs. Chances are the investigator will find no official record of what happened. The pedophile will usually have an explanation for the move, but it probably will not reflect the true circumstances. This moving pattern can sometimes be determined from examination of drivers license records.

Prior arrests In some cases, pedophiles have previously been arrested for child molestation or sexual abuse. Certainly, such an arrest record is a major indicator, particularly if the arrest goes back many years or is repeated. Investigators must also be alert to the fact that pedophiles may have arrest records for actions that do not appear to involve sexual abuse. These might include impersonating a police officer, writing bad checks, violating child labor laws, or

other violations that may indicate a need to check further. Any arrest of an adult in the company of a child not his own should be evaluated with suspicion. The investigator should attempt to get copies of the reports concerning the arrests in order to evaluate their significance properly.

Multiple victims If investigation reveals that an individual molested many different victims, that is a very strong indicator that the offender is a pedophile. More important, if other factors indicate that the offender is a pedophile then a concerted effort should be made to identify the multiple victims. If you know of only one victim, but have reason to believe the offender is a pedophile, then begin looking for the other victims. For instance, if a teacher who is a suspected pedophile molests one child in his class, the chances are high that he has molested or attempted to molest other children in the class as well as children in all the other classes he has taught. This is also true of incest offenders suspected of being Preferential Child Molesters.

Planned, repeated, or high-risk attempts Bold and repeated attempts to obtain children that have been carried out in a cunning and skillful manner is a strong indication that the offender is a pedophile.

2. Children as Preferred Sexual Objects

Over 25, single, never married By itself, this indicator means nothing. It has significance only when combined with several other indicators. Because they

have a sexual preference for children, pedophiles usually have some degree of difficulty in performing sexually with adults. Therefore, they typically do not marry. Some pedophiles, though, do enter into marriage for specific reasons, and these will be discussed below.

Lives alone or with parents This indicator is closely related to the above. Again, by itself, it has little meaning. The fact that a man lives alone does not mean he is a pedophile. The fact that an individual who possesses many of the other traits discussed here and also lives alone might be significant.

Limited dating relationships if not married A man who lives alone, has never been married, and does not date should arouse suspicion if he possesses other characteristics discussed here.

If married, "special" relationship with spouse When they do marry, pedophiles often marry either a strong, domineering woman or a weak, passive woman-child. In any case, they will marry a woman who does not have high sexual expectations or needs. A woman married to a pedophile may not realize that her husband is a pedophile but she does know he has a "problem"—a sexual performance problem. Because she may blame herself for this problem and because of the private nature of people's sex lives, most wives will usually not reveal this information to an investigator. However, a wife, ex-wife, or girlfriend should always be considered as a possible source of information concerning the sexual preferences of an offender. Pedophiles sometimes marry

3. Well-Developed Techniques in Obtaining Victims

Skilled at identifying vulnerable victims

Some pedophiles can watch a group of children for a brief period of time and then select a potential target. More often than not, the selected child turns out to be from a broken home or the victim of emotional or physical neglect. This skill is developed through practice and experience.

Identifies with children (better than with adults)

Pedophiles usually have the ability to identify with children better than they do with adults—a trait that makes most pedophiles master seducers of children. They especially know how to listen to children. Many pedophiles are described as “pied pipers” who attract children.

Access to children

This is one of the most important indicators of a pedophile. The pedophile will surely have a method of gaining access to children. Other than simply hanging around places children congregate, pedophiles sometimes marry or befriend women simply to gain access to their children. Pedophiles are frequently the “nice guys” in the neighborhood who like to entertain the children after school or take them on day or weekend trips. Also, a pedophile may seek employment where he will be in contact with children (teacher, camp counselor, babysitter, school bus driver) or where he can eventually specialize in dealing with children (physician, dentist, minister, photographer, social worker, po-

lice officer). The pedophile may also become a scout leader, Big Brother, foster parent, Little League coach, and so on. The pedophile may operate a business that hires adolescents. In one case known to the author, a pedophile married, had a daughter, and he molested her. He was the “nice guy” in the neighborhood who had the neighborhood girls over to his house for parties, at which he molested them. He was a coach for a girl’s softball team, and he molested the players. He was a dentist who specialized in child patients, and he molested them.

Activities with children, often excluding other adults

The pedophile is always trying to get children into situations where there are no other adults present. On a scout hike he might suggest the fathers go into town for a beer. He will “sacrifice” and stay behind with the boys.

Seduces with attention, affection, and gifts

This is the most common technique used by pedophiles. They literally seduce the children by befriending them, talking to them, listening to them, paying attention to them, spending time with them, and buying gifts for them. If you understand the courtship process, it should not be difficult to understand why some child victims develop positive feelings for the offender. Many people can understand why an incest victim might not report his or her father, but they cannot understand why a victim not related to the offender does not immediately report molestation. There are many reasons for a victim not

immediately reporting molestation (fear, blackmail, embarrassment, confusion), but the results of the seduction process are often ignored or not understood at all.

Skilled at manipulating children In order to operate a child sex ring involving simultaneous sexual relations with multiple victims, a pedophile must know how to manipulate children. The pedophile uses seduction techniques, competition, peer pressure, child and group psychology, motivation techniques, threats, and blackmail. The pedophile must continuously recruit children into and move children out of the ring without his activity being discovered. Part of the manipulation process is lowering the inhibitions of the children. A skilled pedophile who can get children into a situation where they must change clothing or stay with him overnight will almost always succeed in seducing them. Not all pedophiles possess these skills. The introverted Preferential Child Molester is an example of a pedophile who typically lacks these abilities.

Has hobbies and interests appealing to children This is another indicator that must be considered for evaluation only in connection with other indicators. Pedophiles might collect toys or dolls, build model planes or boats, or perform as clowns or magicians to attract children. A pedophile interested in older children might have a "hobby" involving alcohol, drugs, or pornography.

Shows sexually explicit material to children Any adult who shows sexually explicit material to children of any age should be viewed with suspicion. This is generally part of the seduction process in order to lower inhibitions. A pedophile might also encourage or allow children to call a dial-a-porn service or send them sexually explicit material via a computer as part of this process.

4. Sexual Fantasies Focusing on Children

Youth-oriented decorations in house or room Pedophiles attracted to teenage boys might have their homes decorated the way a teenage boy would. This might include toys, games, stereos, rock posters, and so on. The homes of some pedophiles have been described as shrines to children or as miniature amusement parks.

Photographing of children This includes photographing children fully dressed. One pedophile bragged that he went to rock concerts with thirty or forty rolls of film in order to photograph young boys. After developing the pictures, he fantasized about having sex with them. Such a pedophile might frequent playgrounds, youth athletic contests, child beauty pageants, or child exercise classes with his camera.

Collecting child pornography or child erotica This is one of the most significant characteristics of pedophiles, discussed in detail on pages 23-35.