

The background of the entire cover is a blurred, out-of-focus image of a crowd of people, likely at a public event or transit station. The colors are muted, with a lot of greys, blues, and soft oranges, creating a sense of motion and anonymity.

THE SOCIALLY SKILLED CHILD MOLESTER

Differentiating
the Guilty
from the
Falsely Accused

Carla van Dam, PhD

**The Socially Skilled
Child Molester**
*Differentiating the Guilty
from the Falsely Accused*

This page intentionally left blank

The Socially Skilled Child Molester

Differentiating the Guilty from the Falsely Accused

Carla van Dam, PhD

First published by
Haworth Press, Inc., 10 Alice Street, Binghamton, NY 13904-1580.

This edition published 2013 by Routledge

Routledge	Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group	Taylor & Francis Group
711 Third Avenue	27 Church Road, Hove
New York, NY 10017	East Sussex BN3 2FA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, microfilm, and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

PUBLISHER'S NOTES

The development, preparation, and publication of this work has been undertaken with great care. However, the Publisher, employees, editors, and agents of The Haworth Press are not responsible for any errors contained herein or for consequences that may ensue from use of materials or information contained in this work. The Haworth Press is committed to the dissemination of ideas and information according to the highest standards of intellectual freedom and the free exchange of ideas. Statements made and opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Publisher, Directors, management, or staff of The Haworth Press, Inc., or an endorsement by them.

Case studies in this book are composites based on thousands of interviews. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Cover design by Jennifer M. Gaska.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

van Dam, Carla, 1950-

The socially skilled child molester: differentiating the guilty from the falsely accused / Carla van Dam.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7890-2805-1 (hard : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-7890-2805-0 (hard : alk. paper)

ISBN-13: 978-0-7890-2806-8 (soft : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-7890-2806-9 (soft : alk. paper)

1. Child molesters—Psychology. 2. Criminal behavior, Prediction of. 3. Child sexual abuse—Prevention. I. Title.

HV6570.V36 2006

616.85'836—dc22

2005018236

CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction	xi
Chapter 1. Understanding the Problem	1
Child Molesters As Addicts	1
Sexual Dependence	4
Chapter 2. Child Molesters in Their Natural Habitat	7
The Social Psychopath	10
The Eager Beaver	14
The Saint	23
The Curmudgeon	25
Crude Groomers	27
Chapter 3. Current Practices	31
Teaching Children to Protect Themselves from Being Abused	35
Taking Offenders to Court	36
Chapter 4. Not All Child Molesters Are Alike	41
Groomers	43
Grabbers	44
Chapter 5. Common Misperceptions	47
Definition of Child Sexual Abuse	48
Explanations	51
Chapter 6. Accurately Differentiating Danger	59
The Unchanging Nature of the Groomer's Pathology	61
False Allegations	64
Gray Areas in Terms of Age and Consent	66
Age Cutoffs That Decriminalize Child Sexual Abuse	69

A Groomer Profile: Differentiating Thoughtful from Manipulative	70
Recognizing the Manipulative	72
Chapter 7. A Framework for Understanding Child Sexual Abuse	75
The Underlying Pattern	75
Making Information More Visible	78
How Information Remains Buried	79
The Framework	81
The Iceberg	81
Chapter 8. Interviewing Child Molesters	103
Identifying Lies	105
Phony Remorse	108
Creating Relationship	108
Inconsistencies	109
Rehearsed Speech	110
Too Much Information	111
Going on the Offensive	112
Chapter 9. Predicting Risk	113
Community Notification	114
What Is Actuarial Data?	115
Defining Recidivism	118
Base Rate	120
Determining Risk	121
Corroborating Data	122
The Problem with Numbers	123
Chapter 10. Incorporating Corroborating Evidence	135
Victims	138
Parents	140
Groups, Organizations, and Officials	141
Custody Battles	146
Conclusion	148
References	151
Index	155

Preface

Socially skilled child molesters use predictable strategies to ingratiate themselves into communities in order to abuse children. By unmasking their operating techniques, the differences between those who molest and those who do not can become visible. This book provides all adults responsible for protecting children with the necessary tools to make the invisible visible and collaborate meaningfully to stop child molesters.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carla van Dam, PhD, is a clinical and forensic psychologist who has practiced in both the United States and Canada, and has taught at several universities. Her focus has been on developing a balanced approach to protecting communities by better understanding those who sexually molest children. In addition to extensive forensic work and innumerable evaluations on known child molesters, she has trained professionals, done public speaking, worked with the legal system, consulted with various organizations, and helped community groups manage this complicated terrain. Past publications include journal articles, a first aid manual for helping those who have been molested, and a book on how to stop providing potential molesters with access to children titled *Identifying Child Molesters: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse by Recognizing the Patterns of the Offenders* (Haworth). For the past twenty-five years Dr. van Dam has focused on primary prevention strategies to help end child sexual abuse.

Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the help of many different people. Ongoing appreciation goes to my mother. Her support, loyalty, and strength of character are an inspiration. Special thanks to Roger Wolfe, a pioneer who has been steadfast in setting admirable standards and maintaining integrity in this field. Sincere thanks go to Chuck Bates, PhD, for his ongoing willingness to discuss the ideas presented in this book and his cheerful continued help in clarifying, fine-tuning, and editing the material presented here. Without his assistance, this book would never have been possible. Ongoing appreciation goes to Linda Halliday-Sumner, who originally introduced the topic to me in 1980, and who has enacted many of the ideas presented here, thereby demonstrating the importance of empowering those who have been molested. Thanks also go to a number of colleagues for their editorial assistance and mentoring, including Iris E.V. Rucker, PhD, and Jan Lewis, PhD. I am also grateful for the initial editorial assistance provided by The Haworth Press' Editor Bob Geffner, PhD, and the superb copyediting done by Mary Beth Madden of The Haworth Press. A number of other people have helped fine-tune this project through their knowledge of community concerns and their experiences with the dilemmas faced by those encountering the challenges created wherever child sexual abuse occurs. Thanks also go to Mary Anne Harrington, as well as to Laina Berry for coining the name "Marvelous Marvin." Most of all, this project has been made possible by the hundreds of people who shared their personal experiences and who have shouldered the onerous task of trying to protect children against overwhelmingly complex obstacles.

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

This book is intended to identify the habits of socially skilled child molesters, referred to in this book as “Groomers,” who successfully ingratiate themselves into the hearts and homes of adults in order to sexually assault children with impunity. Their habits are so predictable, their activities so constant, and the harm they cause so extensive, society cannot afford to continue inadvertently enabling their misconduct. They are responsible for most child sexual abuse cases, yet can only be stopped when communities become trained and educated to recognize the problem, know what to do, and collaborate meaningfully to make the world less safe for child molesters. Communities that correctly recognize the grooming patterns of these molesters will have children who are less vulnerable to abuse.

To stop these socially skilled child molesters, adults need to ensure that the clues seen in isolation by various community members become known rather than remaining invisible or compartmentalized. Molesters, whose manipulative manners charm or intimidate adults into believing them to be above reproach, can often be identified by those familiar with their stereotyped operating methods. While socially skilled child molesters continue to successfully target whole communities, often molesting hundreds of children without being stopped, educated adults can make entire communities unsafe for them. This can be done by empowering victims, and collaborating effectively with community members to ensure that all relevant information is incorporated into investigations, thereby sending a clear message that preying on children will not be tolerated.

Identifying their methods and recognizing the danger they present will be done through a number of case studies that let the reader see exactly how they operate. Recommendations are then made on how to stop giving these molesters access to children.

The book is organized into ten chapters outlined as follows:

Chapter 1, “Understanding the Problem”: This chapter focuses on recognizing that the well-socialized child molesters, namely the Groomers described in this book, behave as if they were addicted to

having sex with children. Understanding this is crucial to improving prevention and intervention strategies. Recognizing the addictive nature of their conduct also becomes a necessary underlying component to more effectively investigating the cases and more appropriately managing community safety precisely because the behavior is much more frequent than would be readily visible to those relying only on conviction data to ascertain risk.

Chapter 2, "Child Molesters in Their Natural Habitat": In this chapter a number of representative cases help familiarize the reader with the operating styles of the well-socialized child molesters. Becoming familiar with the often predictable practices of the Groomers under study creates the framework for more effectively preventing child sexual abuse, as well as intervening earlier in child sexual abuse cases.

This chapter introduces the reader to a number of child molesters to see how they typically operate. Such firsthand information reveals why they are so successful, and builds the foundation for changing management and safety practices.

This book is based on information from innumerable cases representing child molesters who successfully operate in every community. Readers unfamiliar with the more sordid aspects of child sexual abuse may find these stories both unbelievable and unsettling. Even those professionals who work with the victims of child sexual abuse and the families of these victims often lack detailed information on how the child molesters operate, information crucial to working more effectively. Many of the cases in this book are composites based on thousands of interviews with child molesters. These individuals will be referred to by first names only to remind the reader that they are composite cases. Relying on composite cases was done because the information revealed in the thousands of interviews with offenders, with various family members, and with community groups was consistent. Composite profiles, therefore, are seen as a more efficient method to convey the information.

A few stories provided in this book refer to specific offenders. Because the cases are a matter of public record, these offenders are named. The reader should be warned, however, that the composite cases are as real as the information revolving around named offenders, and the composite cases should not be perceived as being fictional. The consistency of the practices and strategies of the well-socialized Groomers being examined in this book are successful be-

cause of continued public ignorance. Recognizing their operating methods is essential to unmasking them.

The reader will learn of four composite cases whose stories are clichés: Bold Businessman Bob, Marvelous Moving Marvin, Cranky Coach Carl, and Divine Dr. Dan. Bottom-feeder Buddy will also be introduced to show that not all the child molesters under discussion are equally sophisticated. Their stories will be referred to throughout the book to exemplify the concealed operating strategies of the Groomers.

Chapter 3, “Current Practices”: This chapter provides the reader with information on how child sexual abuse is currently addressed, and how Groomers are now managed by the community and the legal system. This is essential to showing how the inadequacies of current practices spring from key misapprehensions of the Groomer phenomenon. Eliminating child sexual abuse requires additional prevention and intervention strategies that can only happen once everyone becomes familiar with the true dynamics of child sexual abuse.

Chapter 4, “Not All Child Molesters Are Alike”: This chapter presents a closer focus on the vocabulary used to describe sexual misconduct to provide greater clarification for examining various kinds of risk. Much of the damage to children results from child molesters who first carefully groom adults in order to gain access to children. This chapter extends and deepens the understanding needed to recognize this Groomer profile to correctly differentiate Groomers from Grabbers.

Chapter 5, “Common Misperceptions”: This chapter addresses how current practices allow behaviors and stories often used by the Groomers to be excused. Such events are often misunderstood, too frequently ignored, or even accepted. Groomer excuses and explanations, when their conduct is challenged, are hackneyed clichés that are often misconstrued as sincere. Everyone needs to know them well enough to recognize them when they occur.

Chapter 6, “Accurately Differentiating Danger”: This chapter will provide the framework to understand how the behaviors of those who are Groomers often vary from those whose conduct should not be considered worrisome. Unfortunately, innocent individuals are sometimes falsely accused of being child molesters. Behavioral patterns of successful Groomers frequently vary significantly from those who are not child molesters. An informed investigation will usually reveal

these differences. Managing such an investigation requires knowing what to look for and where to look. This chapter helps the reader differentiate the Groomer child molester from someone whose behavior should not be considered suspect.

Much as one can tell where a slug has been by following the trail of slime, those who are truly guilty of sexually molesting children typically leave a slime trail of evidence. Understanding how to follow that trail will be further accomplished through additional case studies utilized throughout the rest of the book to help the reader learn to better recognize the behavior habits of Groomers as well as to compare them to individuals whose behavior is not dangerous. Again, some of the cases used will be composites.

The reader will see Predictable Peter, finally unmasked after fifty years of sex-offending conduct, whose addictive behavior represents the patterns typically seen among Groomers. On the other hand, both Truthful Tim and Innocent Isaac are cases based on innocent people mistakenly caught in the pedophile dragnet. Although Innocent Isaac is labeled a child molester because his girlfriend is underage, Gary Little's story reveals how a careful operator can use those same legal limits to his advantage, successfully molesting hundreds of boys, and using his knowledge of the law to skirt legal danger while using his position of power to access victims. The story of Helpful Harry will allow the reader to better differentiate between the helpfulness of the kind-hearted person as opposed to the manipulative assistance such Groomers as Slippery Sam use, thereby further revealing the Groomer Profile.

Chapter 7, "A Framework for Understanding Child Sexual Abuse": In this chapter, the iceberg is provided as an illustration to reveal not just the tip, but the "underwater" data as well. Revealing the iceberg in its entirety includes more of what is actually known about child molester behavior by those who encounter them, evidence that rarely becomes officially identified but should be incorporated in decision making and risk management planning. In other words, rather than merely looking at the tip of the iceberg, this framework provides an underwater exposure of the larger body of evidence that revolves around the phenomenon of the Groomers' operating strategies responsible for most child sexual abuse. Understanding this framework is essential to making necessary changes for more effectively protecting children.

Chapter 8, “Interviewing Child Molesters”: This chapter helps the reader understand that despite the fact that the grooming child molesters under study are incredibly successful liars, the lies they tell can be identified. In fact, their explanations and their strategies are often predictable. Becoming familiar with these patterns will allow the reader to know that such stories should ring alarm bells and suggest the need for closer scrutiny. By learning to listen carefully, knowing the questions to ask, and paying close attention to the discrepancies and inconsistencies, those who encounter child molesters in their homes and communities or work with them professionally will be less gullible.

Chapter 9, “Predicting Risk”: This chapter examines current practices used for determining continued risk of known child molesters. These methods are more closely examined within the context of how the Groomers operate, utilizing the framework introduced in Chapter 7, and delineating how much of the behavior associated with child sexual abuse typically remains invisible to the authorities. Tools currently used to differentiate convicted offenders who are dangerous from less dangerous individuals rely on evidence that fails to incorporate the rich qualitative information known by those who live with the offenders. This information is necessary to more thoroughly understand the dilemma, more effectively manage the offenders, and more accurately predict the risk for further danger.

Chapter 10, “Incorporating Corroborating Evidence”: This chapter will help the reader chart a course of action by reviewing principles offered in the previous chapters. It provides strategies that can be used by investigators to better access the information about known child molesters, and includes a proposal for making the public’s knowledge more readily available to the authorities. Community networking is necessary to help everyone gain access to all the pieces of the puzzle that are crucial for protecting children. Such knowledge is essential for investigating cases and should be incorporated into treatment planning. Knowledge is important to determining management guidelines, and is required to more accurately assess ongoing risk.

Finally, each sexual abuse victim holds the key to ending the abuse of others. Their information can correctly identify offenders whose conduct need not be protected, tolerated, or supported. By working together with clarity and support, they can help reveal what is truly below the tip of the iceberg.

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 1

Understanding the Problem

CHILD MOLESTERS AS ADDICTS

To more effectively stop children from ever being abused means better understanding child molesters, recognizing how they operate, and learning how they think and feel. The kinds of child molesters described in this book, those who commit most of the sexual assaults against children (Salter, 2003; Bolen, 2001), behave as sexual addicts who continuously fantasize about having sex with children, are sexually aroused to children, and enjoy getting away with it (Carnes, 1983, 1996; Flora, 2001). Viewing their compulsive behavior as being like an addiction, in this case being addicted to having sex with children, in the same manner as one would view heroin addicts who are addicted to heroin, helps provide a framework to more accurately understand the behavior. Those familiar with addictions recognize that the addiction drives the behavior because every act is directed at obtaining greater access to the drug of choice. For that reason, addicts primarily associate with people who can help them facilitate that goal, and do not tolerate those who interfere with that goal. The child molesters described in this book similarly primarily associate with adults who can provide them with access to children, or who can help them polish their image with parents so they can have access to children.

The child molesters described in this book are no different from any other addict, but in this case everything about their behavior is ruled by their desire to have sex with children; every encounter with adults facilitates that goal. Every activity is designed to get better access to children. The smarter, richer, more socially skilled these child molesters, the greater success they experience. The addictive nature of their behavior ensures that they continuously engage in activities to access children, to molest children, and to avoid getting caught.