

# CHILD SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION

by Jim Clemente

Based on my education, training, and experience, and the institutional knowledge of the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit, the following traits and characteristics are generally found to exist and be true in cases involving individuals who sexually victimize children.

With respect to their victims, child sex offenders typically fall into three general categories: strangers, acquaintances, and family. Their motivations for offending are evaluated on a continuum. The two ends of that spectrum are represented by situational and preferential offenders. Situational offenders are those who victimize children but who do not have a definitive sexual attraction to children. As a result, their sexual offenses against children tend to result from circumstantial access to children rather than a methodical effort to pursue sexual encounters with children. Their offenses can generally be described as opportunistic and/or impulsive in nature; however, their sexual desires and fantasies typically involve adults.

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*Five Categories of Child Sex Offenders continued on following pages*

# 1

## PREFERENTIAL CHILD SEX OFFENDERS

Preferential child sex offenders (PSO), on the other hand, have a definitive sexual attraction to children, usually of a particular age range, gender, body type, personality, vulnerability, other set of characteristics, or any combination of the above. Despite their specific sexual interest in these particulars, preferential offenders may at times offend outside of their preference due to availability or circumstances. Acquaintance PSOs typically gain access, authority, and/or control over their intended victims through a process known as “grooming.” The grooming process is typically aimed at the intended child victims and those who are responsible for their wellbeing as well as the community that they operate in. Grooming is a constellation of otherwise innocent appearing behavior that is intended to give them ongoing access to children for sexual purposes, as well as, preventing discovery by others.

Though it is often misused by those in the public and law enforcement alike, the term “pedophile” is actually a paraphillic mental disorder that must be clinically diagnosed. This diagnosis results from a full clinical evaluation by a psychologist or psychiatrist who finds that the person being evaluated has recurrent and intense, sexually arousing fantasies, urges, or behaviors aimed at prepubescent children, typically under the age of 13. Absent such a finding, law enforcement professionals use the term preferential child sex offender to designate those who are sexually attracted to children and who commit sexual crimes against them. This criminal typology has been extensively researched and written about by my colleague, retired Supervisory Special Agent Ken Lanning and it has been utilized world-wide in the law enforcement community.

Unlike “normal” adult/adult sexual relationships, preferential offenders cannot develop lifelong sexual relationships with the object of their sexual desires. This is because the children they are sexually interested in always grow up and “age-out” of their desired age range. This drives these offenders to periodically search for and groom new children. Their sexual behavior with children therefore, is typically repetitive and predatory in nature. This phenomenon is typically referred to as “the grooming pipeline.” That is, they are simultaneously involved in various stages of grooming multiple victims at the same time in order to enable concurrent or sequential victimization.

Grooming behaviors can be used by an offender against children across a spectrum of relationships. That is, they may target children within their family, acquaintances, e-acquaintances (those they met on-line), neighbors, and/or complete strangers. Since the purpose of grooming is to gain access, authority and control over their intended victims, the more parental the relationship is between the offender and the victim, the easier it is for an offender to use “normal” parenting as a grooming tool.

A preferential offender’s sexual attraction to children may be either exclusive or non-exclusive. That is, their sexual attraction may be focused solely on children, or it may be more diverse, including a variety of sexual interests in addition to children.

It is not uncommon for these offenders to engage in multiple paraphilic behaviors. A paraphilia is the recurrent and intense sexual arousal to inanimate objects or non-consenting parties (pedophilia is one example of a paraphilia). Individuals who engage in one paraphilia are likely to engage in more than one. Also, some preferential offenders can be sexually attracted to adults and children at the same time and can engage in sexual activity with adults as well as children concurrently.

Although it is impossible to accurately predict human behavior with absolute certainty, the best predictor of human behavior is a past pattern of behavior. Preferential offenders tend to engage in highly repetitive and predictable patterns of behavior. In order to satisfy their sexual desires, these offenders devote substantial amounts of time, effort, energy and/or money to the pursuit of sexual and/or non-sexual contact with children, child pornography and child erotica. They also typically discover their sexual attraction to younger children in their own late adolescence and may begin to act on this attraction soon thereafter.

The four hallmarks of preferential child sex offenders are: 1) long term persistent patterns of behavior; 2) specific sexual interests; 3) well-developed techniques; and 4) fantasy and desire driven behavior. These characteristics may be identified by some or all of the following behaviors: long-term persistent patterns of behavior demonstrated by a willingness to commit significant time, money, and energy in furtherance of their sexual interest in children, often resulting in multiple offenses; an interest in children as sexual objects and the development of a rationale to justify that interest (e.g., "I would never hurt a child, I love children," and/or "I never did anything the child didn't want me to do"); well-developed techniques for gaining access to victims and/or sexualized child-related material, characterized by the ability to skillfully manipulate the situation, the victims, and/or other individuals necessary for gaining access to children for sexual purposes; and a significant fantasy component featuring children as sex objects and often supported by the collection and organization of child-related material, writings, and/or child pornography. Although no single factor delineated above is determinative in and of itself, the most telling factor in determining whether an individual is a preferential child sex offender is the collection of child pornography.

Individuals with a sexual preference for children may derive sexual gratification from actual physical contact with children as well as from fantasies involving the use of sexual depictions of children or literature describing sexual contact with children. Preferential child sex offenders gravitate to employment, activities and/or relationships which provide access or proximity to children; and frequently persist in the criminal conduct even when they have reason to believe the conduct has come to the attention of law enforcement. These are desire driven behaviors to which the offender is willing to devote considerable time, money, and energy in spite of the risks and contrary to self-interest.

## 2 NICE-GUY ACQUAINTANCE OFFENDERS <sup>1</sup>

“Nice-guy” child sex offenders are much more prevalent, effective, and prolific than the stereotypical “stranger danger” type offender. In fact, the vast majority of children who are sexually victimized are offended against by someone they know. We call those offenders “acquaintance offenders.” The category of “acquaintance offenders” includes any non-stranger and any non-biological relative. One particularly insidious sub-category of acquaintance offenders is “nice-guy” offenders (sometimes referred to as the “pillar of the community” or “man of the year” offenders).

These are offenders who are friendly, normal, helpful, giving, loving people who no one would suspect are harboring sexual attractions to children. These cases are very difficult to investigate because a number of these offenders have high social status or are authority figures, such as: “teachers, camp counselors, coaches, clergy members, law-enforcement officers, doctors, judges . . . . Such offenders are in a better position to seduce and manipulate victims and escape responsibility.” And, equally important, “[t]hey are usually believed when they deny any allegations.”<sup>2</sup> Both their status in the community and their affable personalities make it difficult to make a case against them for sexual victimization of children. “Convicting an acquaintance child molester who is a ‘pillar of the community’ is almost impossible based only on the testimony of one confused 5-year-old girl or one delinquent adolescent boy.”<sup>3</sup>

The above passages underscore the fact that even when it comes to trained law enforcement officers, it is very difficult to determine whether a person, who everyone in the community knows and respects, is a child sex offender. Sandusky is a textbook preferential child sex offender, as well as being a textbook example of a “nice-guy” offender. However, I would put him in the top one percent of effective groomers in this country. This is based on the fact that he was so bold in his high-profile “altruistic” public persona, founded a youth serving organization, and he was caught in the act of grooming and sexually assaulting children in the showers before, yet he still did the same thing in the same place again in 2001.<sup>4</sup> Both times Sandusky was able to deceive his way out of it. He built his reputation both professionally and interpersonally over many years of hard work and sacrifice. Drive, determination, selflessness and altruism were his calling cards. He motivated others to give millions to needy children at The Second Mile. Sandusky was lauded and celebrated for his work. He effectively groomed most of the people who came in contact with him, including child care experts, psychologists, professionals, celebrities, athletes, coaches, friends and family. And most notably, he was approved numerous times over thirty years as both a foster parent and an adoptive parent by child care professionals.

Sandusky loved children, and it showed. But he effectively hid from everyone in the community that his love for boys extended into criminal sexual activity with those boys. One reason why he was so effective at hiding this is because people find it very difficult to believe that someone as nice, as giving, as personable, as charismatic, as altruistic, as friendly, as caring, as fatherly, and as successful as Jerry Sandusky could possibly be the kind of hideous monster that is a child sex offender. Now, of course,

everyone who knew Sandusky knows they were wrong. They all know that he fooled them for decades. With the degree and duration of his access, authority and control over vulnerable and needy boys and his “pillar of the community” social status, I can state there is a high degree of probability that the majority of Sandusky’s victims have not yet come forward. Many of them never will. It is simply too risky, too stigmatizing, too embarrassing, too misunderstood, for them to make the huge leap of faith required to tell the world that they were sexually victimized, and worse yet, by a man.

If, as a society, we are going to help these boys and men overcome their victimization, we have to have an ongoing open and non-judgmental public discussion about male sexual victimization. This is a problem that I faced for many years even within the FBI. Some of my colleagues did not want me to speak publicly about being victimized as a teen. They said it would embarrass the Bureau. That it was unprofessional. Eventually, I stopped listening to them and I spoke out at conferences across the country and around the world. Almost every time I spoke out, one or more men and women quietly approached me and disclosed that they too were victimized as a child and had not disclosed to anyone before. One of the detrimental things that child advocates, investigators and lawyers do that is meant to help child sex crime victims but ultimately hurts them is overstating the resultant effects of child sexual victimization when they speak publicly about it.

Many, including the writers of the SIC report use terms like, horrendous, heinous, devastating, ruined, and other extreme words to describe what happened to the child victims. I’m sure the speakers mean well, however, those very same victims, and future victims, are hearing and reading those words and it fills them with a sense of hopelessness. It robs them of their future. They feel that they are doomed, damaged, and worthless. As responsible adults, we should make sure we temper our rhetoric and give victims the hope for a better day.

I trained hundreds of FBI agents and law enforcement officers who worked child sex crimes undercover investigations on the internet under the banner of the FBI’s Innocent Images major case undercover operation. I participated in, consulted on, and testified as an expert witness on these cases for more than a decade. And I found that male agents and officers, almost to a person, preferred to create undercover personas as girls instead of boys. This, despite the fact that the statistics are very clear that offenders who target adolescent boys are, by far, much more prolific than those who target girls. It is not unusual to discover a male sex offender who has gotten away with molesting boys for thirty or more years and has amassed a victim pool in the hundreds.

However, the majority of offenders who are caught in these undercover operations are those who prey on girls, mainly because male investigators would rather pose as a young girl rather than engaging in undercover conversations posing as boys talking with adult male offenders about sexual activity that the undercover officers consider to

be homosexual activity. I have lectured many thousands of law enforcement officers across the country and around the world and have pleaded with them to overcome their inhibitions and insecurities so they can address the cases with these statistics in mind. I hope that perhaps with the infamy attached to the Sandusky case and the more open dialogue that has begun as a result of it, that law enforcement officers will take the lead and investigate the offenders who prey on boys with at least the same fervor as those who prey on girls.

The rationalizations and justifications in the SIC report about the janitors who witnessed and/or were told by co-workers of acts of sodomy against a boy by Sandusky were unfortunately part of the problem. They, as well as any other adult who witnessed a child being victimized, should have acted immediately to extricate the child from the situation, bring him/her to a hospital for forensic evaluation and do what ever is within their power to identify and report the offender to the police. If in fact those janitors were frightened of the ramifications to their careers, imagine how frightened those boys were of the ramifications to their lives. Children already grow up in a “land of giants.” From the perspective of children they find themselves living in a world populated by people who are bigger than Shaquille O’Neal is to the smallest adult. Children are surrounded by adults who dwarf them in size, have freedom to do what they want, have the ability to order them around with impunity, and have ultimate authority and control over them. They find themselves helpless against the whims and wishes of those who control them. Adults who come in contact with children in any way or forum should be acutely aware of their responsibility towards those children. This means that they have a responsibility to learn proper boundaries, red flag warning signs, and resources available to help children who are or may be victimized.

### 3 GROOMING <sup>5</sup>

In the context of child sexual victimization, grooming is a dynamic process utilizing a constellation of seemingly innocent behaviors aimed at gaining the cooperation of the child to achieve sexual gratification for the offender. In other words, it is a pattern of activity employed by preferential child sex offenders to gain access, authority, and control over children for sexual purposes, to ensure their silence, and to keep them in a position in which they can be repeatedly victimized. This dynamic process is aimed at potential child victims, their parents or guardians, and the community that surrounds them. Those who are closest to the child victims or the offender are precisely the ones who are most affected by grooming practices.

Offenders who “groom” typically seek out needy, isolated, or disadvantaged children and provide both emotional and tangible things to fill the needs of those children. They do this by providing: attention, recognition, affection, kindness, romance, gifts, money, trips, jewelry, clothing, staples, food, shelter, drugs, alcohol, privileges, driving, and/or smoking. They also break down the boundaries that usually exist between adults and children by lowering

inhibitions, by being overly physical and playful with them, by talking about or encouraging masturbation and/or sex, by giving sexual instructions, or by supplying pornography. They are very careful to do only those things that will be viewed in a positive light in public, and typically reserve the sexual behavior for one-on-one private encounters.

Offenders will many times touch, hug, embrace, pat, and tussle the hair of targeted children in front of their parents, guardians, or other adults to desensitize the child to touch and to surreptitiously imply that the parent or other adult tacitly approves of such behavior. That way, when the offender is alone with the child, it is much easier to take the physical interactions to the next level. Sandusky used these behaviors very commonly, as well as using invitations to attend games or work out, followed by trips to the locker room to change clothes (desensitizing the child to being undressed in front of him and vice versa) and to shower with him (desensitizing the child to being naked with him and vice versa) and horsing around in the shower (desensitizing the child to touch while naked) all of which were grooming tactics aimed at sexually victimizing the child.

On the other side, the offender rationalizes his abusive behavior by telling himself that the child's need for nurturing is really an invitation to get close and become sexual with that child. This is one of the fundamental ways in which offenders who actually "love" children, justify in their own minds that they are not hurting a child, or not doing anything the child didn't want them to do. In fact, it is typically a shock and surprise to the child when the offender who has been so nice to them suddenly turns their interactions into something sexual.

The results of effective grooming are both far-reaching and long-term. They include: continued access to the child, initial cooperation of the child, isolation of the child, feelings of love, loyalty, and a debt of gratitude on the part of the child towards the offender. Then, when the sexual activity occurs, the child can experience intense feelings of shame, embarrassment, guilt, and confusion. They typically have strongly ambivalent feeling for the offender at this point, wanting to believe that he truly loves them and not wanting the positive things that he is providing to stop, while at the same time they do not want the sexual activity to continue.

This results in behavior by the child that we call "compliant victimization." Some victims are so grateful for the positive things the offender is doing for them that they actively participate in or enjoy the sexual activity. Others feel so shamed and guilt-ridden, or compromised and trapped, that they simply put up with it. Either way, the situation is such that it enables the revictimization of multiple kids over a long period of time. And typically, none of them want anyone to find out what they have been subjected to. This is especially the case when the offender is male and the child victims are male.

Most people in the general public believe offenders are "monster predators," evil people who are so despicable, so offensive, so heinous, that they must be horrible people, who are strangers, who look weird, act unusually, and most importantly,

deliberately hurt children. However, the vast majority of offenders who sexually assault child victims are known to the victim, may be related to them, are seen as harmless, helpful, kind people who are considered “nice-guys.”<sup>6</sup>

One of the nefarious consequences of effective grooming is that the offenders’ motives are seen as altruistic, loving, and kind. He is seen to be sacrificing his time for the benefit of the children he helps. He is seen to be a person who would “never hurt a child.” In fact, in most cases of “nice-guy” offenders, the perpetrator actually loves children, enjoys their company, and has convinced himself that the sexual interactions he has with the children he feels close to are merely expression of love and not harmful to the child. This is an example of rationalization and minimization that help a child sex offender grant himself permission to commit the offenses. The “nice-guy” persona is so diametrically opposed to that of the “monster predator” most people believe embodies any person who would sexually assault a child, that those who personally know the offender cannot reconcile the thought that they could possibly be one in the same. Simply put, people who know a “nice-guy” cannot believe that he could possibly be a reviled offender.

Faced with thousands of examples of kind, altruistic, friendly, fatherly, loving, interactions with a person who you know and trust, it is actually very difficult to undo all that experience based on a couple of incidents that you hear about second or third hand, and now believe something completely different. This is likely why McQueary has stated that he had to look again and again into the shower to make sure that what he thought he saw was actually what he saw.

## 4 COMPLIANT VICTIMIZATION<sup>7</sup>

One of the most counter-intuitive aspects of child sexual victimization investigations is embodied in the concept of compliant victimization.<sup>8</sup> Children who are groomed into sexual victimization typically do not call out to be rescued or disclose when questioned about possible victimization because of a complex set of physical and psychological factors, including the fact that they don’t want anyone to know what has been done to them or what acts they had to do with the offender. For some, this is because they have finally found someone (the offender) who treats them well or tells them they are special; someone who grants them entrée into a world they never had a hope of entering before the offender. Typically, this creates a feeling of intense ambivalence on the part of the victims. On one hand, they love the offender for the things he has done for them. On the other hand, they hate the offender for the things he has done to them. That’s why the boy in the shower in 2001 kept silent even though McQueary witnessed him being groomed and assaulted by Sandusky. That’s why the nine victims who testified, or were testified about in Sandusky’s trial, never made an immediate outcry. Even when investigators first came to some of these boys and asked them direct questions, most of them remained silent or denied anything sexual occurred. They claimed that they had not been victimized, when in



fact they had. Eventually, most of them made partial or incremental disclosures, and then over time gave a fuller, more detailed account of their victimization. It's called the "conspiracy of silence" that surrounds child sexual victimization. It is the opposite of an "active agreement to conceal."

## 5 HIGH RISK SITUATIONS

There are certain high-risk situations that arise in investigating acquaintance exploitation cases. Unfortunately certain youth organizations inadvertently provide the child molester with almost everything necessary to operate a child sex ring. A scouting organization, for example, fulfills the offender's needs for access to children of a specific age or gender, a bonding mechanism to ensure the cooperation and secrecy of victims, and opportunities to spend the night with a victim or have a victim change clothing. The bonding mechanism of the scouts is especially useful to the offender. Loyalty to the leader and group, competition among boys, a system of rewards and recognition, and indoctrination through oaths and rituals can all be used to control, manipulate, and motivate victims. Leaders in such organizations should be carefully screened and closely monitored. Another high-risk situation involves high-status authority figures. As stated above, child molesters sometimes use their adult authority to give them an edge in the seduction process. Adults with an added authority (e.g., teachers, camp counselors, coaches, clergy members, law-enforcement officers, doctors, judges) present even greater problems in the investigation of these cases. Such offenders are in a better position to seduce and manipulate victims and escape responsibility. They are usually believed when they deny any allegations. In such cases the law-enforcement investigator must always incorporate understanding of the seduction process into interviews, take the "big-picture" approach, and try to find multiple victims or recover child pornography or erotica in order to get a conviction.<sup>9</sup>

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## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth V. Lanning, *Child Molesters: A Behavioral Analysis* 23-34 (5th ed. 2010)

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 77.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 140.

<sup>4</sup> In my experience, because people do not want to talk about the topic of male on male child sexual victimization these types of "close calls" happen regularly with "nice-guy" offenders, but witnesses either do not believe what they see, do not know how to handle it, misinterpret what they see, or do not think anyone will believe them if they told.

<sup>5</sup> Lanning at 26-28.

<sup>6</sup> Although there are a percentage of offenders who are female, I will use the masculine pronoun in my analysis to generalize about offenders.

<sup>7</sup> See Lanning at 24-26.

<sup>8</sup> Compliant victimization is such a difficult concept for people to understand and accept that when my colleague Ken Lanning first attempted to add the concept to his monograph (see *supra* note 1), the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) repeatedly asked Lanning not to use it in his publication because they believed it would sound like he was blaming the victims. This concept does not blame the victims; it explains their behavior.

<sup>9</sup> See Lanning at 137-67 ("Investigating Acquaintance Sexual Exploitation").