

5 Ways We Misunderstand Pedophilia (That Makes it Worse)

By [Robert Evans, Anonymous, David Prescott, Dr. James Cantor](#) | February 08, 2015

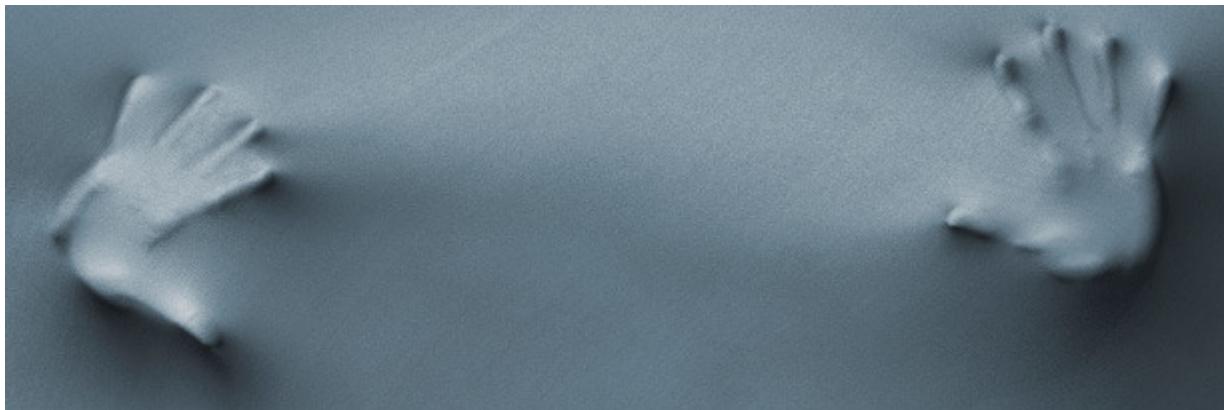


Before we get started, can we all agree that there's a difference between trying to understand something and condoning it? There's nothing on Earth so awful that we should avoid talking about it completely. If anything, the more scared you are of a thing, the more you should try to understand it. Talking about a subject like pedophilia isn't going to make it worse. But *refusing* to talk about it -- or accusing those who do of glorifying it or normalizing it -- definitely will. No problem has ever been solved with ignorance.

And we *are* ignorant; pedophilia is almost a total mystery to modern science. We don't know what causes it, or how to prevent it, or how to cure it (short of [a form of castration](#)), because the moment a test subject admits they're a pedophile, they're ruined for life. Why would anyone ever come forward? Thus, society's insistence on taking the harshest possible position winds up exacerbating the problem.

So, here it goes: We sat down with several self-professed (but non-offending) pedophiles, as well as David Prescott (a therapist who specializes in sex offenders) and Dr. James Cantor (a scientist who studies their brains). They said ...

#5. Not All Pedophiles Molest Children



Erik Snyder/Photodisc/Getty Images

This is going to be the most controversial statement in the article, so let's rip the Band-Aid off right now: There are pedophiles in the world who don't molest children, and never will. No one disputes that fact. So what portion of pedophiles actually victimize kids? We have no fucking idea. That is, in fact, the point.



Jupiterimages/Goodshoot/Getty Images
"Ehhhhh?" really isn't the kind of answer you want for a question like this.

Hell, we don't even know what percentage of the population are pedophiles -- [estimates range from one percent to an astounding 20 percent](#). Most people aren't going to freaking admit they're a pedophile on a survey, and we haven't yet developed magical scanners that can reads people's sexual desires from afar (note: society will *profoundly change* the day such a device is invented). So let's lay out some numbers that are going to blow your fucking mind:

In surveys, [18 percent of males admitted to having sexual fantasies about children](#), eight percent said they'd masturbated to those fantasies, and four percent said they'd have sex with a child if they could get away with it. "But that's just a survey!" you say, "They could be lying in either direction!" True. So the researchers took a bunch of subjects and [hooked them up to boner detectors](#). Depending on the experiment, the percentage of subjects who got turned on by naked children (under age 12) ranged from 17 percent to 50 percent.



Michael Seto/Indiana University
Not factoring in the number of men turned on by boner detectors.

"But those results are all over the place! Surely it can't be that high!"

All right, how about this: there are enough pedophiles to keep [four million child porn websites in business](#), and enough paying customers to build an international industry worth as much as \$20 billion. Ten years ago, [the feds shut down a single site that was getting a million hits a month](#). Throw in the fact that not every pedophile is looking at kiddie porn, and it starts to look like there are *way* more adults with sexual urges toward children than you'd think.

And we don't know shit about them, because they can't admit it openly.



Junko Kimura/Getty Images News/Getty Images
Yet we have rigorous statistical analysis on almost [a thousand Pokémons](#).

What data we do have is skewed, because pedophiles can't come forward to be studied for fear of being burned at the stake. So the only studies have been done on prisoners -- meaning our subjects are limited to those who A) acted on their desires and B) got caught.

But they can't be representative of the whole group, by any means. It would appear that the vast majority of pedophiles don't actually commit sex crimes, for the same reason the rest of us don't: if given the choice between "no sex" and "victimizing an innocent person," most people choose the former. But since "child molester" is literally the worst thing you can be in our society, these abstaining pedophiles don't dare speak up.



lofilolo/iStock/Getty Images
It's like you not talking about that one fantasy of yours, but 10,000 times moreso.
Yeah, *that* fantasy. You know the one.

The source we'll call "J" told us: *"In the online community, most people use the acronym MAPs -- minor-attracted persons. But pedophile ... the way that's supposed to be used is for someone who is attracted to children, people of a certain age -- and by that definition, yes, I'd refer to myself as a pedophile. But the media uses that for child molester."*

And if that person wants to reach out for help, to make sure they don't harm anyone? Too bad. For you see ...

#4. Society Has No Idea What to Do With Non-Offending Pedophiles



moodboard/moodboard/Getty Images

Weirdly enough, while we (correctly) vilify people who diddle kids as the predators they are, basically no one is willing to take the time to help pedophiles who *don't want to do that*. Which is nuts, because that would, you know, save freaking children from being victimized.



Tanya Constantine/Blend Images/Getty Images
Think of the children. Seriously, *think of the children!*

David Prescott is a therapist who has spent much of his career working with "minor-attracted persons" and says, *"If we think of people who wind up with a sexual interest in children ... it's a little like growing up and realizing there's something about you that makes it impossible for other people to love you. Imagine growing up under circumstances where you can never truly give love in a way that is legal or considered normal by others."*

At the moment, Germany seems to be the only country making any real progress on helping pedophiles who dedicate themselves to not molesting kids. Say hello to [Prevention Project Dunkelfeld](#), which provides "confidential treatment, free of charge" for anyone who is attracted to kids and/or teenagers and is trying their damnedest not to act on it. Again, it's German, so of course it comes with terrifying ad campaign:



[Kein Taeter Werden](#)

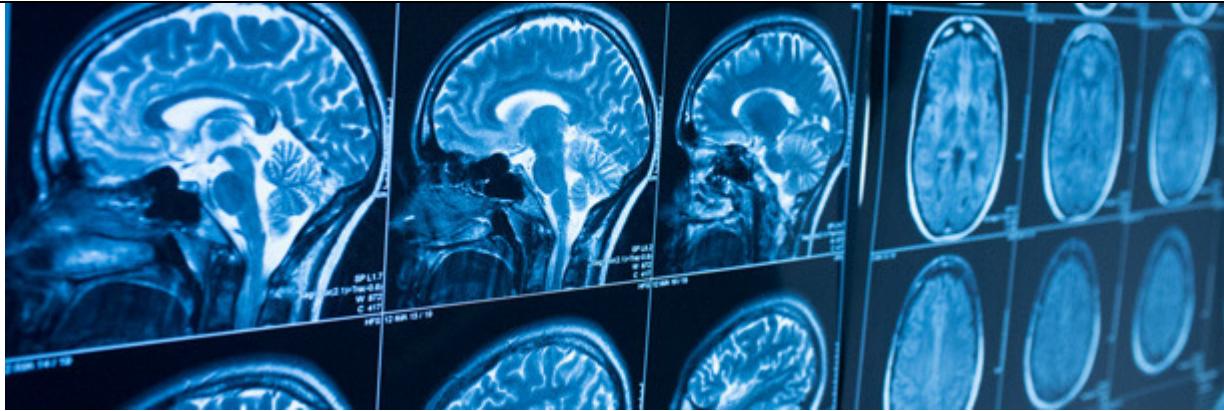
We guess that's one way to kill a sex drive.

But over here in the non-Teutonic chunks of the world, people attracted to kids have to rely on each other for help. They've formed an organization called "Virtuous Pedophiles," or Virped. We got in touch with most of our sources through that site -- and the professionals we talked to spoke highly of them. Mr. Prescott compared it to Alcoholics Anonymous:

"One thing that impresses me about Virped ... it goes back to the early days of alcohol treatment. Human services did not respond well to alcoholism back in the day. So people took it upon themselves and said, 'we don't have professional training, but we're going to try and help.'"

And that's about all they can do, because ...

#3. Society Doesn't Recognize It as an Illness ... Even Though Science Does



Movous/iStock/Getty Images

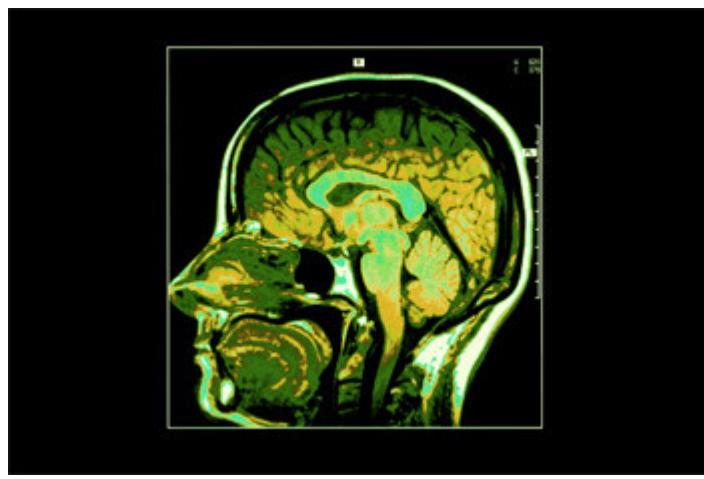
Dr. James Cantor is one of -- if not the -- world's leading scientists on a wildly under-studied subject: the brains of pedophiles:

"Our culture is hysterical over the issue. The U.S. will spend enormous amounts of money to lock a person up, but not spend a fraction of it to learn how to stop pedophilia from developing in the first place. I don't think any modern politicians have the cojones. The amount of money I needed to run my MRI experiment is less than what it takes to keep just one person in jail."



Levent Konuk/iStock/Getty Images
"Sorry! There's no rehabilitation-industrial complex."

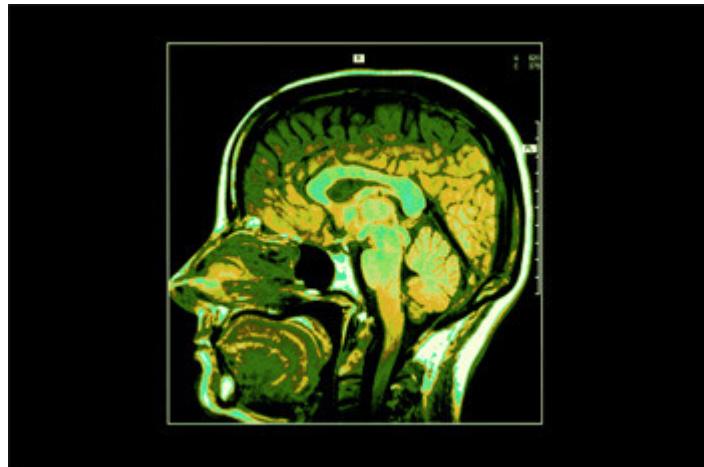
Yeah, about those MRI experiments -- he and his team have [successfully identified](#) physical differences in the brain matter of pedophiles, and demonstrated that being into kids isn't a choice, or necessarily the result of abuse. "So really, what it seems like ... is that there is a kind of cross wiring. Portions of the brain are responsible for our social instincts -- responsible for figuring out 'this is a person I take care of,' 'this is a person I run away from,' and 'this is a person I flirt with.' To most of us, a child naturally evokes our nurturing instincts. It's as if, when there's not enough connectivity, the instincts get a bit fuzzy ... and when a pedophile sees a child, instead of their brain triggering nurturing aspects, it triggers sexual arousal."



Thinkstock/Stockbyte/Getty Images
You think someone would *want* to choose these thoughts?

Mr. Prescott didn't disagree with Cantor's findings, but he did point out that a lot of pedophilia comes from exactly where you'd stereotypically expect -- abused kids:

"... there are people directly sexually abused as children, and may experience that abuse as the closest thing they experienced to love. And it's possible the person abusing them had genuine warm feelings for them, even though the behavior is completely unacceptable. So that person may develop some belief that there is something genuine [in pedophile/child relationships]."



Thinkstock/Stockbyte/Getty Images

Once again, you think someone would *want* to choose these thoughts?

Dr. Cantor countered by pointing out that most of the evidence that sex offenders commit sex offenses due to some past trauma comes from interviews of *sex offenders* -- that is, people with motivation to make themselves look like victims. He pointed out a study by the hilariously-named scientific duo of [Hindman and Peters](#) in 2001, who quizzed sex offenders and found that 67 percent reported suffering from sexual abuse as children. But when those same offenders were polygraphed, only 29 percent were willing to claim they'd been abused.

Confused yet? Now try this on for size: [some studies claim that only half of molesters](#) are actually pedophiles -- the rest have some other disorder or a violent streak, and the young victims (often family members) just happened to be what was available to them.



#2. There Are Supposedly Victimless Forms of Child Pornography ... But the Law Has No Idea How to Deal With Them



OcusFocus/iStock/Getty Images

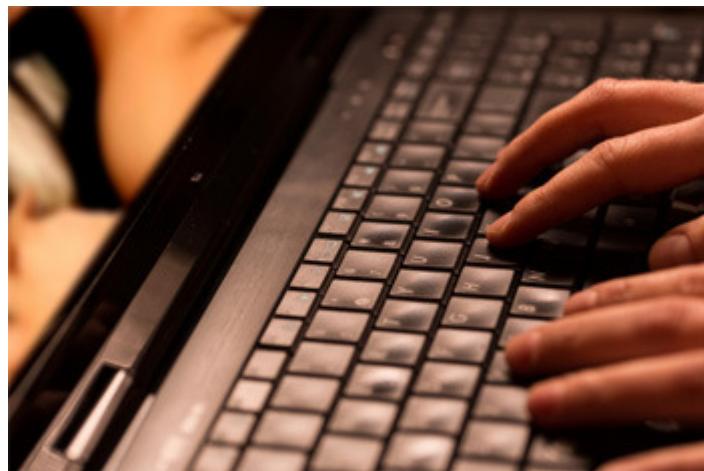
It makes sense that non-offenders would try to find a victimless outlet for their urges. That brings us back to child pornography, but that's hardly victimless. The subjects of photos/videos are exploited, and paying for the material -- or just giving websites traffic -- supports the industry that exploits them.



Medioimages/Photodisc/Photodisc/Getty Images
\$20 Billion. B.

So what about when someone draws or digitally renders child pornography? That's ... still pretty fucked up, if you ask us. But should it be illegal? "Well," you might say, "That all comes down to whether or not it results in kids getting hurt -- for instance, does it encourage pedophiles to go after real kids, when they tire of the porn?"

Good question! That's precisely the kind of data the world would love to have, if only anyone was able to collect it. There is some evidence from the Czech Republic that an increased availability of child pornography leads to a drop in [actual child abuse](#). But that's far from settled. As a result, so is the law -- the USA made "simulated" child porn illegal back in 1996, but the Supreme Court struck down that law in 2002. Then a new law was passed in 2008, then part of it was struck down, and now exists in a nebulous legal gray area in which it [depends on the laws of your particular state](#).



scyther5/iStock/Getty Images

So use safe search when Googling fan art of any Disney cartoon ever.

Even the two experts we talked to disagreed. David Prescott, the therapist, did not recommend porn for abstaining pedophiles:

"The most important thing ... reasonable people can disagree, my thinking is, 'I'm sorry, that's too close' -- it's a little like saying, 'I'm going to use a drug that'll kill me in ten years, rather than in five years.' 'I am suffering from a terrible situation, and to stop myself is to stay as far away as possible. I cannot look at any images of children being abused. I need to understand ... I'm always going to feel a tingle of arousal at children.' It's not fair, but life is unfair to lots of people."

Meanwhile, Dr. Cantor says:

"... the science is pretty neutral. We're never going to have a scientific answer to an ethical question. Both hypotheses are reasonable. I have to take my scientific hat off for a second -- I'm an old fashioned, 'first do no harm' kinda guy. I don't like banning things if I have no evidence that it causes harm."



Fuse/Fuse/Getty Images

If we banned everything that *might* lead to molestation, [the Supreme Court would ban candy](#).

Our pedophile sources reported varying ways of dealing with their urges without possessing hard drives full of pornography. The question, "What do you think of child porn?" itself was fairly frightening to them:

Y: *"I find a lot of fictional stories online that are very good. That's a very dangerous question to ask, to be honest ..."*

E: "... from what I gather, a fair number of our 400-plus pedophiles in the support group have struggled with CP going cold turkey, but drawn back again, relapsing."

"CP," by the way, was their preferred way of referencing child pornography without (presumably) alerting the NSA.



Ethan Miller/Getty Images Entertainment/Getty Images
"Sorry for the mistaken subpoenas, fans of Coldplay."

So if you don't have some kind of outlet, what do you do? According to J:

"Coping strategies. First and foremost, one way I cope is to try not to get involved with events involving a lot of children. It's not like I can't see my niece, but when she's got a ballet recital, I try to avoid that. Aside from that ... I try to keep my mind off of it. I have my own hobbies, I've got a full-time job, and I try to spend the rest of my time programming. Basically, I find if I keep my mind off it, it's not too distressing a thing. If I hang out around children a lot, it's distressing, but I don't live a lifestyle where that happens enough."

Again, it sounds just like an alcoholic trying to stay dry. But where an alcoholic can check into rehab tomorrow ...

#1. The Law Prevents Treatment of Pedophiles ... Until It's Too Late



shironosov/iStock/Getty Images

The thought of pedophilia icks most of us out so much that we pretty much just turn a blind eye and wait for something terrible (and prosecutable!) to happen. The deck is heavily stacked against therapists like Mr. Prescott, who try to make any sort of positive difference:

"So say a guy calls, saying, 'Help, I'm sexually attracted to children and I don't want to act on it. Please, can you help me?' On one hand, yes I want to help. But according to the law, if I have any reason to believe this person has abused a child, I'm bound by law to report this to the authorities. If he says, 'I haven't acted on it. I have looked at videos of something that might be child sexual abuse,' I'm not required to report it in Maine, but in California, they've passed a law where confessing to viewing child porn is now a mandated report. So I might think to myself, 'I understand there is nothing to report ... but can I guarantee to this client that there might not be something in what he says that would be a mandatory report?'"



Purestock/Purestock/Getty Images

"You can talk to this lawyer in confidence."

"But I don't need *legal* help!"

"You will."

The non-offending pedophiles we spoke to hadn't all sought professional help, but one who did -- the one we call "Y" -- had a generally positive experience over in the UK. But even then, the "support" he got was mixed at best:

*"I even met with a forensic psychologist once, and after an assessment, he said I was 'low-risk,' like I'm supposed to be flattered that he thinks I'm not a child rapist. He added, 'But obviously, you can't be **no-risk**,' which I think was an unnecessary thing to say."*

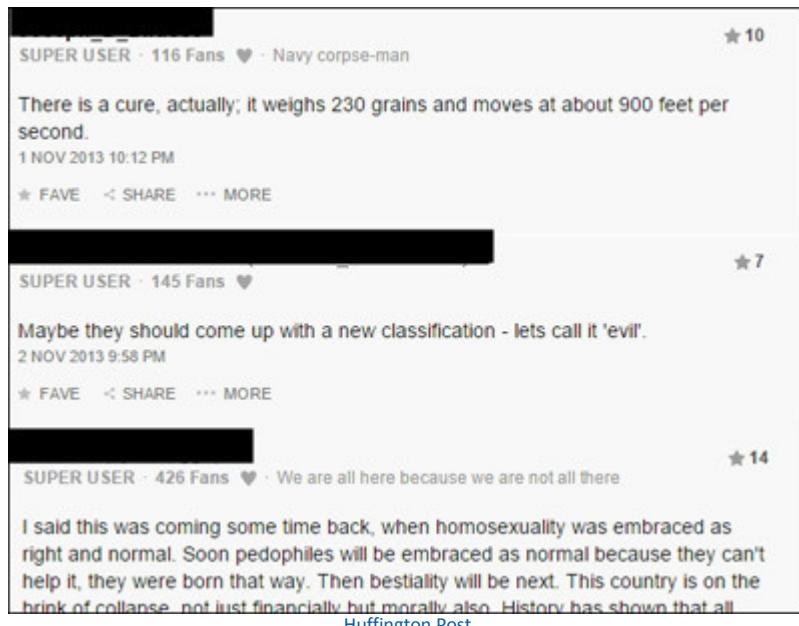


MSPhotographic/iStock/Getty Images

"Never even *look* at a box of Thin Mints again."

Remember what we said about Germany's Prevention Project Dunkelfeld? Well it's only possible because, unlike most countries, Germany has [no mandatory reporting law](#) for pedophilia. Does it work? Well, it's kind of impossible to know right now. But it's worth noting that for every two kids who die of abuse in Germany, [27 die in the United States](#).

And that's really what society has to ask itself: is it more important to save children, or to nail pedophiles? Because it looks like you have to pick one or the other -- driving them further underground just makes them more dangerous. Just to be clear: the goal isn't to make the world safe for child molesters, but to make the world safe for pedophiles *to seek treatment to prevent themselves from becoming child molesters*. But when the comments under any article about pedophilia tend to look like this ...



... that world isn't coming any time soon.