

Pedophilia: Theory, Assessment, and Intervention, Second Edition

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This year's recipient of ATSA's Lifetime Significant Achievement award, author Michael Seto, truly needs no introduction. It suffices to say that he has published numerous groundbreaking studies, is the author of the authoritative book on people who sexually abuse via the Internet, and is the editor of Sexual Abuse (commonly known as the ATSA Journal).

Although the necessity of this book may seem manifestly obvious, it could not be more timely. On first entering the field of working with people who have sexually abused, many professionals have little idea how complicated issues around diagnosis, assessment, and treatment can become. Sexual offending against children, pedophilia, and incest are often conflated and further obscured by the moral judgments of professionals who may be understandably upset by the actions of the clients with whom they come into contact. Even parsing out the differences between thoughts, fantasies, urges, and behaviors can be a challenge under some circumstances. Michael Seto takes our understanding to new levels.

The first edition of this book quickly established itself as the single-most authoritative text in this area. This second edition not only adds to the knowledge, but also places it in the context of other advances in understanding sexuality. The structure is straightforward. After an introduction, Seto first explores the task of defining pedophilia. He places this in the context of what he has termed "chronophilias" and offers cogent reasons why this is important (for example, understanding pedophilia can inform our understanding of other age-related paraphilic interests, and vice versa). Seto next explores the history of empirical study and exploration of pedophilia and suggests that "Pedophilia can be seen as a disturbance in the mechanisms underlying sexual age preferences, that is, as a maladaptive exaggeration of the male-typical preference for youthful features in potential sexual partners" (p. 29).

Subsequent chapters explore assessment (including an overview of approaches such as viewing time, phallometry, cognitive assessment tasks, and the Revised Screening Scale for Pedophilic Interests). A chapter on different approaches to studying pedophilia explores possible sources for understanding pedophilia that exist (for example, self-identified persons with pedophilia or hebephilia, persons who are not interested in refraining from acting on their interest, criminal-justice samples, clinical samples, etc.) and gives consideration to questions about to what extent people who abuse are generalists (with a wider

variety of interests) or specialists.

Later chapters give further consideration to explanations of sexual offending against children (which contains an overview of Seto's motivation-facilitation model), the etiology of pedophilia, and incest (which includes discussion of areas, such as the Westermarck Hypothesis, that may seem arcane, but nonetheless advance the knowledge of the practitioner and can inform interventions). As the reader will see, understanding these variable elements, of what initially looks like the same behavior to the novice, is vitally important to successful prevention and public safety. Overviews of risk assessment and treatment interventions follow, along with a concluding chapter on prevention.

As one might expect from an American Psychological Association publication, the writing, editing, and production are all flawless. However, Seto's clear thinking and accessible style are what elevate this volume from good to truly excellent. He is able to discuss a serious and emotionally charged topic without a hint of judgement towards the people with pedophilia, and is able to review research, assessment, and treatment methods without any appearance of partiality. When he does offer an opinion, he makes his reasoning very clear.

For all of the above reasons, the only element I could hope for more of would be a deeper illustration of the internal world of people who have a sexual interest in children, perhaps through more case examples. Given the difficulties that so many professionals have in developing a clear and deep understanding of pedophilic processes, a broader exploration of this would be welcome. However, the volume does offer insight into virtually every facet of pedophilia, including specific youthfulness cues, emotional congruence with children, and attitudes and beliefs that support child molestation.

As a reviewer, I strive never to use shopworn sentences such as, "This book belongs on the shelf of every serious professional in the field." In this case, however, it fits. This edition is tailored perfectly to professionals of all backgrounds who study, assess, or treat people who have offended against children.

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