

# How child molesters justify their actions

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Men who sexually abuse children generally blame external factors to explain their actions and diminish their guilt. "Every reason they give is a cognitive distortion," says Sarah Paquette, a student who investigated the issue as part of her master's thesis at the Université de Montréal School of Criminology.

To confirm the rationale often cited in the scientific literature Paquette interviewed more than twenty men convicted of sexually molesting children. Some of the men had been violent and others had not. The semi-structured interviews were conducted under the supervision of professors Franca Cortoni and Jean Proulx.

"Molesters admit to raping and know it is wrong," says Paquette. "But they rationalize their actions to cope with the situation they find themselves in. These rationalizations are cognitive distortions that allow them to act on their impulses, and there are as many rationalizations as there are molesters."

However, all reasons given can be grouped into six major categories.

First, the alleged impossibility to control one's urges: hormones, stress, alcohol, drugs or God are all factors deemed uncontrollable by the molester. "It's always because of something else," says

Paquette.

Second, the right to do as one pleases. Those who use this argument believe their status, as head of the family for instance, bestows upon them certain privileges that must be satisfied by others. The example of Roch "Moïse" Thériault comes to mind. "These people also believe that sexual relations with children will one day be accepted by society, like they were in ancient times," says Paquette.

Third, some claim the act didn't harm the child in any way. Those who invoke this argument often highlight their restraint: "I touched, but there was no penetration;" "I didn't sodomize;" "She didn't bleed;" "It didn't last long," or "she was asleep."

Fourth, some believe adult women are either "dangerous" manipulators or out-of-reach given their beauty and purity. This belief often goes hand in hand with a very positive image of children who are non-threatening and easier to control.

Fifth, some molesters perceive children as sexual beings capable of consent. They believe children appreciate sexual contact and need it, as it is part of life's pleasures.

Finally, Paquette defined a sixth category overlooked in previous studies. This category suggests that molesters see themselves as [children](#). They feel they have the mental age of a child and believe they are living a reciprocal love with the child.

Provided by University of Montreal

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