Appalachian
STATE UNIVERSITY®
BOONE, NORTH CAROLINA

Book Review -- *Sexual Predators: How To Recognize Them On The Internet And On The Street - How To Keep Your Kids Away* (Stephen Dean)

Reviewed by: **Catherine D. Marcum**

Abstract

A review of Stephen Dean's book, "*Sexual Predators: How to Recognize Them on the Internet and On the Street - How to Keep Your Kids Away*" (Silver Lake Publishing, Los Angeles, 252 pages, ISBN:1563437945), by Catherine D. Marcum.

Book Review of Sexual Predators: How to Recognize Them on the Internet and on the Street - How to Keep Your Kids Away

Catherine D. Marcum[1]

Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA

Stephen Dean, Sexual Predators: How to Recognize Them on the Internet and on the Street - How to Keep Your Kids Away, Silver Lake Publishing, Los Angeles, 252 pages, ISBN:1563437945

"Before all this, I thought a predator is someone who lurks in the bushes. I didn't think I was one. But then I realized the computer monitor was my bushes."

The above-referenced quote was made by serial child predator Jake Matthew Clawson in regards to his recognition of his online obsession. It was referenced as a demonstration of the common misconception many of us have regarding the tactics used by child pedophiles to stalk children. The stereotype of the dirty old man hanging out at the school playground in a dingy van waiting and watching for unsuspecting little girls and boys is being replaced by a different type of predator. This is the predator that hides behind false identities and personalities in chat room, instant messages or emails to gain the trust of the same unsuspecting, but now computer-savvy children. The book "Sexual Predators: How to Recognize Them on the Internet and on the Street – How to Keep Your Kids Away," written by Stephen Dean, is the latest book that provides a wealth of information on these new types of predators and the tactics that they use on the technologically confident youth.

Award-winning, investigative journalist Stephen Dean has had years of experience working with authorities investigating crimes against children. His current passion has led him to immerse himself in the world of Internet predators. He has posed as a child in chat rooms during multiple Internet investigations with the Houston Police Department and federal authorities to apprehend online predators. His work has been featured on ABC, NBC, CBS and CNN, as well as many local news stations. With these experiences, he describes in detail in his

---
[1] Doctoral Candidate, Department of Criminology – Doctoral Program, Indiana University of Pennsylvania 1117, Chestnut Street, Indiana, PA 15701, USA. Email: c.m.marcum@iup.edu

book, he hopes to educate parents of the dangers online and what we can do as responsible adults to keep our children safe.

Dean's book is not a psychological or empirical evaluation of the techniques and methods used by online predators. It is not a report of a quantitative or qualitative study performed regarding child predators or victims of these adults. Rather, this book contains large portions of text that are actual accounts and conversations recorded by Dean, complimented by reported statistics of adolescent online use and characteristics of their predators. Dean's purpose with this approach is to educate by real life experience and not through numbers and monotonous reports, as it can be assumed that he feels this would be the most effective way to reach his audience.

The first few chapters of the book provide examples of graphic conversations between persons posing as children and adults pursuing them for sexual encounters. Although readers may accuse the author of inserting these excerpts for pure shock value, the author's intention is to demonstrate to adult online consumers the actual tactics being used on children in the privacy of their own home. For example, claims of shared interests or deceptions of age by the predators are often used as seduction tactics. The identification of the perpetrators in the text establishes that these predators can be well-respected members of the community, such as the orthodontist that was exposed in one of Dean's investigations that tried to arrange a meeting for a sexual rendezvous with a 13 year-old girl. This further supports the notion that these prowlers are branching out beyond the stereotype.

The author spends an entire chapter discussing the concept of "grooming," which is basically friendly flattery intended to win the trust of the child. This is often considered to be the first step toward sexual abuse of the victim. Dean provides not only different examples of grooming techniques, but also signs parents should be aware of that would show the grooming process. For instance, receipt of money or gifts in the mail from unknown sources are indications that improper communications with adults is occurring during computer time. Other indicators of improper chat room conversation are also listed, such as graphic sexual conversations or questions regarding a child and her respective parent's daily schedule. Though many online consumers believe that these signs would be obvious to parent and child, there are many devious methods of developing a relationship with a trusting child that go unnoticed.

The book also reports on the various types of technology used by predators to gain access to children, some of which may not be expected by online consumers. Most users are familiar with chat rooms and instant messaging. Pedophiles tend to prey on adolescents in chat rooms by picking out screen names that would represent a young person. However, children often enter customized sexual chat rooms, such a homosexual or bondage room, basically under the premise of curiosity and adult prowlers quickly discover them. The sexual abuse that has resulted from these attacks has caused many chat room providers, such as MSNChat, to shut down or more stringently regulate its members and who is using its chat rooms. Instant messaging is a more private form of communication. Rather than using an arena where multiple persons are chatting on the same subject, instant messaging limits the viewing of a conversation only to its participants. Dean reported that over two-thirds of American teenagers use instant messaging, many of which are contacted by unfamiliar persons in search of more than just a friendly chat.

Information can also be gained in a more conniving and unexpected fashion, such as profiles posted on web sites such as MySpace.com and Facebook.com. Dean provided an example just by accessing a random teenage girl's profile. He was able to determine her address, daily schedule and when her parents would and would not be home. She had also indicated that she played basketball and posted her game schedule online, which was exactly how Dean located her one afternoon. He introduced himself and informed her of how he, a stranger, found her and although he meant no harm, the next time she may not be so lucky. Adolescents use these websites usually as a social tool, but are naïve to the amount of personal information a predator can access and use to locate a child. A representative from MySpace.com informed Dean that no one under the age of 16 could post a site; however, no form of identification is required when applying and any age can be entered to join. Therefore, the age limit requirement is basically useless.

Another technological device noted by Dean is the web cam. Although most people think that only they and the person they are chatting with can have access to their live images, anyone with a bit of hacking knowledge can gain entry into a personal computer and watch its users unnoticed. An example was given in the book of how an online predator watched a teenager girl's daily activities, from dressing to

doing homework, from the courtesy of her web cam perched on her computer. The girl never turned off the device, assuming only her friends could see her during chats, but this hacker proved her wrong.

An interesting point that Dean presents in his book is in regards to inadvertent corporate sponsorship of child sex chat rooms. Banner advertisements are purchased from Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and placed on the top or side of web pages. Since many corporations like to promote to younger generations (i.e. tennis shoes, soft drinks), a large portion of their advertisements are placed on chat rooms. The issue, however, is that they can appear alongside any chat room, despite the content or detail. The author gives the example of how a Brawny paper towel ad was placed in a Yahoo chat room named "Innocent Escapes," which was actually a child sex room. Once the corporation discovered this mishap, it immediately pulled all the advertisements from the Yahoo system, but any reputation damage had potentially been done. The goal of this example is to dismiss any assumptions made by Internet users that the endorsements by popular and trusted brand names does not mean that the associated web site is appropriate. Although most people would not have imagined a simple grocery item such as paper towels would be associated with lewd sex acts, it can occur.

The final portion of the book is dedicated to explaining how the law responds to child sex crimes, as well how parents can take protective action in their own homes. Many police investigations are facilitated by parental awareness and evidence collected from home computers of emails, Instant messages and chat room transcripts. Dean is quite straight forward when he states that children operate under multiple screen names and identities to fool parents into seeing material that they know is inappropriate or prohibited. As a parent, Dean insists you have the right to infringe on your child's computer privacy and should make every effort possible to stay on top of their computer activity.

Although this book could be an informative tool for children, the text is geared toward the education of parents that may be naïve and unfamiliar with the newest technologies and the dangers that lurk online. Dean should be commended on his use of true life experience to demonstrate to his audience what disturbing events can truly happen once an online predators gains access to your home and your loved ones. It can be assumed that while these stories may have been implemented in the book as a shock technique, they also demonstrate reality better than hypothetical situations.

The reader will also find it valuable to take under advisory suggestions from Dean regarding his thoughts on penalizing a child that has participated in lewd conversations or devious behavior with an adult online. As most of us realize, children and adolescents can be rebellious creatures and completely forbidding them from computer use is only going to fuel their desire to do just that. Dean suggests keeping the computer in a common household room with a lot of traffic, constant monitoring of activity and restriction of certain areas on the Internet. Children should be educated on safe online use through actual experience with the Internet under adult guidance so that when they are left to their own devices, they will continue to be cautious.

There are also shortcomings to the book that could be improved. As stated before, a large portion of the book is composed of his experiences with online predator investigations in Houston, Texas. Based on his knowledge and experience, the author gives his own analysis of predator techniques and opinions of safety precautions for parents to heed. While this information is invaluable regarding what can be learned from these occurrences, there is rare scholarly support; empirical or otherwise. Occasionally dotted throughout the text will be a statement from a clinical psychologist or Internet resource group. However, there is a true deficiency in the fact that there is not a great deal of corroboration from other scholars in the field presented to demonstrate that Dean's words have merit and are not just biased opinion.

Secondly, and although this lack may have been purposive by the author, suggested educational or therapeutic resources are absent from Dean's book. It is apparent from the text that Dean has become quite an expert on online predators and there techniques. However, now that his book has educated his audience on different mannerisms and techniques of these predators, he makes no suggestion of what resources to seek if an adult online has violated someone in your home. For example, a chapter or section dedicated to listing information of counseling services for victims and the appropriate law enforcement agencies to notify are not noted in the book. The author is obviously extremely familiar with the topic and therefore should be familiar with outlets to manage the consequences of such a crime. This knowledge is just as valuable as the other information presented in the text.

Despite its limitations, this book would be an excellent read for a student of crime and/or information systems. The field of cyber crime is

one that has yet to receive the attention and priority it deserves in academia and it is the responsibility of scholars to thoroughly understand this latest phenomenon in criminality. Advocates for the education of cyber crime are slowly influencing the incorporation of curriculum into degree programs. Dean's repeated emphasis on the importance of this subject in the text, as well as examples of the result of inadequate education on predatory practices online, only provides further support that college graduates need to be equipped with this knowledge. Cyber criminality is becoming more and more a part of our daily lives, especially for those working in the fields of criminal justice and technology.

Overall, Dean's book is a valuable contribution to the literature available to parents and all consumers on the dangers present on the Internet. Despite its similarity to other books published in the past, this book provides updated information, techniques and tactics that have just recently emerged into use by online predators. Legitimate computer programs and resources change on a daily basis, as well as the illegal aspects of technology that permit for the intrusion of privacy and safety; therefore, it is important for us as consumers to stay aware of the latest methods that are used. We cannot protect ourselves from entities we do not understand and Dean's text helps to gear us in the right direction.