

Predators: Pedophiles, Rapists, & Other Sex Offenders: Who They Are, How They Operate, and How We Can Protect Ourselves and Our Children¹

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[O]ver and over we confuse likability with trustworthiness, familiarity with safety, warmth with caring. Niceness is a decision . . . Predators, we think, should at least have the decency to be rude.²

I. Introduction

Every day, as we read newspapers, watch television, or scan the Internet, sexual assault cases catch our attention. Coaches, priests, and other respected people are accused of sexually assaulting numerous children over several years. The conviction of Jerry Sandusky, a former assistant football coach at Penn State, on forty-five counts of sexually assaulting ten boys over a fifteen-year period is just one recent example.³ Over the past twenty years, clergy in the Roman Catholic Church have faced multiple allegations of sexual abuse.⁴ These are just the predators who are caught. The reality is that “one in three girls and one in six boys will have sexual contact with an adult,”⁵ and “the average child molester victimizes between 50 and 150 children before he is ever arrested (and many more after he is arrested).”⁶ That is where *Predators* steps in—to explain these numbers and help us get inside the heads of the men⁷ who abuse children. Although written almost ten years ago, *Predators* continues its relevance today, offering valuable insights into how and why predators commit their crimes and how they escape prosecution.

Child sexual abuse grabs the headlines, but *Predators* goes beyond just child molesters; Anna Salter discusses the behavior of rapists, sadists, and psychopaths as well.⁸ She is able to cover such an expansive topic in detail because of her extensive background and experience. Having received a Master’s Degree in 1973 and a Ph.D. in 1977, she began work as a therapist and has been treating victims ever since.⁹ She has conducted training in forty-six states and ten countries, has evaluated sex offenders for court proceedings, and has testified as an expert witness in trials.¹⁰ She has made several educational films in which she has taped predators in prison describing how and why they committed their crimes.¹¹

Salter sets herself an ambitious goal in writing this book. Her ultimate aim is to “make it harder for sex offenders to get access to you or your children. . . because knowing how they think and act and operate is the best protection that we have.”¹² She achieves this goal by meticulously examining the various psychological studies that others have done and detailing her own experiences. Her extensive quotations taken directly from the mouths of the predators she has interviewed are particularly valuable. She explores the world of these men, looking at the double lives they live and how they deceive people into giving them access to their children. She also outlines practical advice on how to stay safe.¹³ Although countless psychologists have studied the subject matter of *Predators*, Salter brings the material together in one easily read volume, masterfully weaving in her own wide-ranging experiences.

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¹ ANNA C. SALTER, *PREDATORS: PEDOPHILES, RAPISTS, & OTHER SEX OFFENDERS* (2003).

² *Id.* at 189 (internal quotation marks omitted).

³ Joe Drape, *Sandusky Guilty of Sexual Abuse of 10 Young Boys*, N.Y. TIMES, June 23, 2012, at A1.

⁴ See generally *Roman Catholic Church Sex Abuse Cases*, N.Y. TIMES, http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/r/roman_catholic_church_sex_abuse_cases/index.html (last updated June 1, 2013).

⁵ Gavin de Becker, *Foreword* to ANNA C. SALTER, *PREDATORS: PEDOPHILES, RAPISTS, & OTHER SEX OFFENDERS*, at ix, ix (2003); cf. SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 10, 241 (describing studies and statistics on child victims in greater detail); REBECCA M. BOLEN, *CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE* 4 (2002) (citing two studies finding between 38% and 44% of females “were victims of contact sexual abuse by the time they were 18”).

⁶ de Becker, *supra* note 5, at x (italics omitted); cf. SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 11–14, 26 (describing studies, statistics, and the author’s own experiences).

⁷ When necessary, the author will use the masculine to refer to predators, as Salter does throughout the book, “[b]ecause the vast majority of offenders are male,” SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 243 n.1. Salter does spend several pages in the book discussing female child molesters. *Id.* at 76–78.

⁸ The title of the book uses the term “sex offenders” following pedophiles, rapists, and predators. Not all sex offenders are necessarily predators and some States have recognized this. Compare FLA. STAT. § 775.21 (2011) (sexual predators), with FLA. STAT. § 943.0435 (2011) (sexual offenders).

⁹ *Biography*, ANNASALTER.COM, <http://www.annasalter.com/annasalter/BIOGRAPHY.html> (last visited June 4, 2013); SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 1–2, 7, 13.

¹⁰ *Biography*, *supra* note 9.

¹¹ *Id.*; SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 5–6 & 243 nn.2–3.

¹² SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 4.

¹³ *Id.* at 223–42.

Given her impressive background, it is no surprise that there is a discrepancy between her target audience, the general public, and parts of the book that are written more for those involved in investigating, interrogating, or professionally studying sexual predators.¹⁴ She devotes an entire chapter to how predators seduce the staff in prisons.¹⁵ Portions of the book go into detail about analyzing facial expressions, ones that are visible for “as little as 1/25 of a second,”¹⁶ using a coding scheme that no “ordinary mortal[] can make use of in the real world.”¹⁷ She discusses the value of using polygraphs¹⁸ and how to analyze statements for falsehoods.¹⁹ This information may be interesting to the general public, but it is most useful to professionals in the field. Most parents would not find themselves in a position to be seduced by an incarcerated predator, to use a polygraph, or to try to decipher fleeting facial expressions or analyze word choice in daily conversations.²⁰ Nevertheless, these forays into more nuanced areas help all categories of readers know the skills of predators and understand how difficult it is to detect the use of those skills. Thus, we must deflect predators instead of trying to detect them.²¹

¹⁴ Others have made similar arguments. See Margery E. Capone, Book Review, 35 J. PHENOMENOLOGICAL PSYCHOL. 131, 131–32 (2004) (“Although the book’s intended audience seems to be the general public, much of the information shared is more likely to be helpful to the criminal justice system in its attempt to determine profiles for sexual predators and to detect deception in the course of interrogation or litigation.”); Book Review, PUBLISHERS WKLY., Feb. 17, 2003, at 67 (“[T]he subject matter is likely to appeal more to police or psychology professionals.”). At least one reviewer disagrees on the intended audience. See Anne-Marie McAlinden, Book Review, 44 BRIT. J. CRIMINOLOGY 986, 987 (2004) (stating that the “usual reader” will be “policy makers, practitioners, academics, and students,” but that the book is also useful to “parents and educators more generally”).

¹⁵ SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 139–56.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 209.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 216. The coding scheme “involves coding forty-four muscle groups in the face for contraction in every frame of film, and it can take up to ten hours to code a single minute of behavior.” *Id.* (footnote omitted).

¹⁸ *Id.* at 17, 73, 205.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 217–22.

²⁰ See Capone, *supra* note 14, at 131–32 (“Parents and potential targets would not be likely to either learn such tactics or have the time and space to utilize them *in vivo*.”). A portion of the book relates the story of an ancient Athenian general, Alcibiades, and his relationship with Socrates, under the premise of describing the historical existence of psychopathy. SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 128–35. While interesting, this section is especially detached from the purpose or target audience of the book. See Wendy A. Walsh, Book Review, 11 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN 139, 140 (2005).

²¹ SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 222.

II. The Difficulties of Detection: How We Are Deceived

The primary lesson for the reader is that predators have an uncanny ability to deceive by manipulating how we perceive the world and ourselves. Salter discusses and applies this theme throughout the entire book, ensuring that we never forget the deceptive skills of these predators. From the beginning, Salter warns that predators are not the monsters or strangers one would expect; they are the polite and likeable friends, coaches, and priests people willingly include in their lives.²² She details case after case where the evidence pointed to the predator, but someone—an evaluator, a psychiatrist, or frequently the family—refused to believe the allegation because the offender was forthright and kind or interacted well with the victim.²³ What is even more frightening is that molestations are often well-planned,²⁴ and most molesters are not caught.²⁵

The problem is that when people observe behavior, they assume that the observed person always acts in accordance with that behavior.²⁶ Predators often lead double lives, maintaining “socially responsible behavior in public.”²⁷ From that, people infer that predators are moral, upstanding men in all aspects of life. When they then commit a crime, we refuse to see beyond their public persona.²⁸ Predators prey on this

²² *Id.* at 4–5 (“Sex offenders only very rarely sneak into a house in the middle of the night. More often they come through the front door in the day, as friends and neighbors, as Boy Scout leaders, priests, principals, teachers, doctors, and coaches. They are invited into our homes . . .”).

²³ See, e.g., *id.* at 16–17 (describing psychiatrists who watched the alleged perpetrator interact with the child and found the perpetrator credible); *id.* at 20–21 (describing a case where the child specifically identified the perpetrator, but since the perpetrator denied the allegations and was “forthright,” “the examiner concluded that she could not determine the identity of the perpetrator”).

²⁴ See *id.* at 42 (“Such careful planning is not unusual with sex offenders.”).

²⁵ See, e.g., Theodore P. Cross et al., *Prosecution of Child Abuse: A Meta-Analysis of Rates of Criminal Justice Decisions*, 4 TRAUMA, VIOLENCE, & ABUSE 323, 324 (2003) (finding on average only 26 of 100 hypothetical perpetrators would be incarcerated); Gene G. Abel et al., *Self-Reported Sex Crimes of Nonincarcerated Paraphiliacs*, 2 J. INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE 3, 17–19 (1987) (estimating three percent chance of being caught). After repeatedly escaping arrest, predators begin to feel “invincible.” SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 27 (quoting athletic director who molested over 1,250 children over twenty years, despite “several outcries by children”).

²⁶ Psychologists call this the fundamental attribution error or correspondence bias. See, e.g., MALCOLM GLADWELL, *THE TIPPING POINT* 160–63 (2000); Daniel T. Gilbert & Patrick S. Malone, *The Correspondence Bias*, 117 PSYCHOL. BULL. 21, 22 (1995) (“When people observe behavior, they often conclude that the person who performed the behavior was predisposed to do so—that the person’s behavior corresponds to the person’s unique dispositions—and they draw such conclusions even when a logical analysis suggests they should not.”).

²⁷ SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 38.

²⁸ Salter relays the story of a well-liked, nice adolescent who abused a child at his mother’s home day care. Neither the local police, nor an independent psychologist, thought he was guilty. The medical examiner said that he “did

error by presenting themselves as extremely charming. They are practiced liars, maintaining good eye contact and not fidgeting,²⁹ further feeding our attribution of good character. Ultimately, predators not only take advantage of our weaknesses, but they also “turn our strengths against us.”³⁰

Most ordinary people alter reality to minimize negative facts and emphasize positive facts, a process referred to as “positive illusions.”³¹ These positive illusions are an important source of psychological strength for individuals, allowing us to be happier, healthier, and better able to endure illness.³² The positive illusions we hold include overly positive views about the strength of our abilities, how well we control our lives, and how rosy our future will be.³³ For example, although plenty of research shows that people cannot reliably spot liars, most believe that they can.³⁴ Predators take advantage of our positive illusions, one of our strengths, by playing upon our dangerously optimistic view of the world to evade recognition as a threat.

Additionally, our positive view of the world also explains why some people blame victims. We have a strong desire to believe that we live in a “just world” that is predictable and rational.³⁵ Thus, we blame victims for the way they dress, where they go, and with whom they interact.³⁶ However, Salter herself fails to distinguish between blame and practical advice. She devotes an entire chapter to describing how to deflect predators with advice on avoiding high-risk situations.³⁷ By her own terms, she is blaming victims for their choices on how to live their lives, though that is not her intent. Nevertheless, one might argue that advising someone to avoid risky situations—even if the advice comes after the person has become a victim—is not blaming the victim, but offering that victim practical advice on reducing the likelihood of future crimes.

not fit the profile of a child molester.” *Id.* at 24. However, the teen confessed. *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.* at 38–41.

³⁰ *Id.* at 177.

³¹ *Id.* at 160, 176–77.

³² *Id.* at 176.

³³ *Id.* at 160. *But see* Justin Kruger et al., *(Not So) Positive Illusions*, 32 BEHAV. & BRAIN SCI. 526, 526 (2009) (arguing that the evidence for positive illusions is mixed).

³⁴ SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 20, 40, 161–62.

³⁵ *Id.* at 173–74. *See generally* MELVIN J. LERNER, THE BELIEF IN A JUST WORLD (1980).

³⁶ SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 174–75.

³⁷ *Id.* at 223–42.

Further, Salter’s harsh treatment of opposing arguments also detracts away from her otherwise excellent analysis. She lays out in detail what the current research and her own experience show about child molesters.³⁸ She shatters some common myths about why men molest children, including alcohol, stress, and abuse as a child.³⁹ However, she precedes her analysis with an extensive discussion on how those who hold different views are wrong and biased.⁴⁰ From the beginning, she argues that her opponents’ theories lack research and are mere “rationalizations for child molestation.”⁴¹ Later, she accuses her opponents of deliberately twisting or ignoring facts,⁴² or she simply calls their claims “absurd,”⁴³ “shameful,”⁴⁴ or “foam-at-the-mouth” hostile.⁴⁵ Ultimately, Salter successfully details the faults in the arguments of those who claim that the child seduces the offender.⁴⁶ Throughout most of the book, her lifetime of direct exposure to both victims and predators reinforces her credibility and gives more meaning to her words than just the dry studies. However, this personal experience can undermine her objectivity. While most of her criticisms are accurate and well-supported, her excessive criticism often makes her arguments appear personally motivated and not scientifically objective. The author could increase her persuasiveness by pointing to the flaws in other studies and the reasoning behind those studies without the invective and inflammatory language.

³⁸ *Id.* at 68–76.

³⁹ *Id.* at 71–74.

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 51–68. At eighteen pages, this section is longer than six of the eleven chapters in the book, and even longer than her analysis of the accepted literature of why some men molest children.

⁴¹ *Id.* at 51. *See generally* BOLEN, *supra* note 5, at 28–35 (providing a summary of the history of child abuse theories, including some discredited in *Predators*).

⁴² SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 54 (“A basic tenet of science is that if the facts don’t support the theory, the theory should give way. It often simply does not happen. Sometimes the facts are twisted to fit the theory or if that fails, they are simply ignored.”). She calls one author’s views “bewildering,” “puzzling,” “astonishing,” and “surprising,” all within three paragraphs on the same page. *Id.* at 52.

⁴³ *Id.* at 56 (“This line of reasoning sometimes went to absurd lengths (if you don’t think it was there already).”); *see also id.* at 54 (“Putting aside for a moment the absurdity of such claims . . .”).

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 57 (characterizing some theories as part of “a sorry chapter,” “shameful,” and “puzzling”).

⁴⁵ *Id.* (“Hostility toward child victims and adult women leaks through this literature like poison. What accounts for the kind of foam-at-the-mouth hostility expressed by [one] Professor . . .”).

⁴⁶ *See id.* at 51–68. Psychologists call the theory that the child seduces the offender “seduction theory,” which originated with Sigmund Freud. *E.g.*, BOLEN, *supra* note 5, at 13–35 (describing history of seduction theory).

Predators is not an easy book to read. Salter's extremely vivid and dramatic approach purposefully invokes fear and panic in the reader. She repeatedly details sick and disturbing offenses, describing them in graphic detail.⁴⁷ One wonders whether she "intended to educate or incite the reader."⁴⁸ However, as you read these terrible stories, you begin to wonder if the predators are lying to her, or at least exaggerating their stories. After all, they are practiced liars⁴⁹ who can adapt to the person to whom they are talking.⁵⁰ Salter eloquently explains how good these men are at lying,⁵¹ how their reports are "dubious,"⁵² and how they try to traumatize vicariously,⁵³ brag, or get a reaction.⁵⁴ When it is convenient for her argument, she even admits that they lie to her.⁵⁵ Besides, Salter only quotes those predators who have been convicted and are serving time,⁵⁶ whereas most do not go to prison.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, their stories, even if exaggerated, are valuable. These stories are necessary to accomplish her goal of making it harder for predators to get access to children. Quoting directly from these men, even if they are only a subset, builds Salter's credibility because she possesses firsthand interview knowledge about what they actually think, instead of some detached academic's interpretation. The descriptions may shock the conscience, but they give a taste of what these men are capable of and make the reader think twice before leaving a child with that "nice coach." After recounting these horrors, she assures the reader that "the answer is not terminal pessimism, suspiciousness, and

⁴⁷ See, e.g., SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 98–99 (quoting a predator who would tape a Ziploc bag over his son's head and molest him until he turned blue and passed out).

⁴⁸ Fabian M. Saleh, Book Review, 55 PSYCHIATRIC SERV. 727, 727 (2004). Salter invites the reader to skip the chapter on sadists because the material "has the power to traumatize." SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 98.

⁴⁹ See *supra* note 28 and accompanying text.

⁵⁰ See SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 35 ("The persona will often shift . . . depending on what the person in front of him wants to see.").

⁵¹ *Id.* at 40–41, 202.

⁵² *Id.* at 73 ("[O]ffender self-reports have dubious validity . . .").

⁵³ *Id.* at 100 ("[S]ome of them see interviews as an opportunity to traumatize the interviewer vicariously.").

⁵⁴ *Id.* at 144 ("I know he will feed off almost any reaction I have. Alarm, disgust, anything of the sort will make him feel powerful and likely give him a high. After all, did he not agree to this interview just to brag about his cleverness?").

⁵⁵ See *id.* at 111 ("Despite his statement, do not be tempted to think he is telling the truth . . .").

⁵⁶ *Id.* at 5.

⁵⁷ See sources cited *supra* note 25.

fear."⁵⁸ The answer is to deflect predators.

III. Putting It All Together: Deflecting Predators

Predators are frightening, causing many people, especially parents, to recoil with discomfort. Our positive illusions give predators an opening, but we can help close that opening by learning how to deflect predators. Unfortunately, much of Salter's advice is impractical. Her avoidance strategy, combined with the graphic nature of the book, can make the reader become overly cautious. Salter admits that one cannot be everywhere.⁵⁹ Ultimately, one has to find a balance in life between living in fear and living in peace.

Salter provides suggestions that illustrate a level of detachment from society. She recommends accompanying children on overnight trips or refusing to drop them off at activities. This assumes that parents have the time or ability to do so. In particular, a single parent would find it difficult to be at all activities and overnight events, especially if she has more than one child. Who is going to be at work or watch the other children? As Salter informs the reader that child molesters are more likely to target single parents, they are the ones who most need useful and practical advice.⁶⁰ Salter also cautions the reader us on several occasions to avoid men who work with children, focus their lives on children, and have no adult love interests.⁶¹ The only way one can know this information is to ask. Imagine asking your son's coach about his outside life or adult love interests upon your first meeting. But even if you do ask, Salter tells us not to believe his answer if all the information that you have is what he tells you.⁶² Due to this somewhat circular reasoning—ask the question, but don't believe the answer—the reader is left wondering what to do with this advice.

IV. Conclusion

In writing this book, Salter contributes to our understanding of predators and helps to shift the debate from "the legal, policy or conceptual frameworks[] towards the day-to-day operational context."⁶³ The detailed psychological analysis of predators is especially valuable to the military reader, who works in that day-to-day operational context.

⁵⁸ SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 189.

⁵⁹ *Id.* at 226.

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ *Id.* at 223, 227.

⁶² *Id.* at 231.

⁶³ McAlinden, *supra* note 14, at 988.

Understanding that most of us cannot spot liars, and that we often have a stake in believing a liar,⁶⁴ will help the military reader, particularly those in the legal or law enforcement professions, to have a natural suspicion regarding what people say. This knowledge can help drive the analysis in sexual assault cases and other crimes, and guide interactions with the accused, the victim, and witnesses. Eventually, this knowledge can help the military improve its handling of

sexual assaults cases and respond to the congressional scrutiny of the military justice system that has resulted from a series of sexual assault scandals.⁶⁵ Reading *Predators* will help leaders at all levels manage sexual assault cases. Beyond that, knowing who predators are and how they operate can help everyone learn how to protect themselves and their children.

⁶⁴ SALTER, *supra* note 1, at 203.

⁶⁵ See generally Donna Cassata & Richard Lardner, *Sexual Assaults Force Changes to Military Justice*, STARS & STRIPES (June 4, 2013), <http://www.stripes.com/news/sexual-assaults-force-changes-to-military-justice-1.224212> (discussing congressional scrutiny of the military justice system in sexual assault cases and pending bills); Jennifer Hlad, *Military Leaders Argue for Commanders' Discretion in Sexual Assault Cases*, STARS & STRIPES (June 4, 2013), <http://www.stripes.com/news/military-leaders-argue-for-commanders-discretion-in-sexual-assault-cases-1.224307> (describing statement from Senator Claire McCaskill that the military has a problem with sexual predators).