



## What compels female molesters remains largely a mystery

By Marilyn Elias, USA TODAY  
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Women have been arrested this month in connection with two shocking child molestation incidents — one that ended in murder. The cases, which surfaced last week, are particularly notable because both are so unusual, experts say.

For one thing, only about 5% of adults who molest minors are women, says David Finkelhor, director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire. A common scenario is the "Mrs. Robinson" variety — an older woman having sex with a teenage boy who often feels some mutual attraction, he says.

Also, sexually abused children are rarely killed by their abusers, male or female, he says.

Melissa Huckaby, 28, of Tracy, Calif., has been charged with the kidnap, rape and murder of 8-year-old Sandra Cantu. The girl, a playmate of Huckaby's daughter, disappeared on March 27. Her remains were found in a suitcase 10 days later.

In the other case, an elementary school principal in Santa Maria, Calif., was arrested on charges of molesting a teenage girl for five years. Brookann Collier, 32, is free on \$100,000 bail. The Santa Barbara County district attorney has until April 27 to file charges.

A woman who would kidnap, rape and kill a little girl is more likely a psychotic than a true pedophile, says Frederick Berlin, a psychiatrist and founder of the Sexual Disorders Clinic at Johns Hopkins University. He says the delusions of this kind of murderer may be like those of Andrea Yates, who killed her own children.

"They may hear voices and think they killed to protect the children," Berlin says.

The other type of case is far more common, Berlin says. In many instances, adults who molest a child for years have been molested themselves in childhood. Although most abused kids don't grow up to molest children, for those who do, it's often "a bid to get control of their lives because as kids they had so little," Berlin says, or they may stay fixated on adult-child sex because that's how they first became sexual.

Still, women who abuse children are less likely than men to say sexual arousal impelled them, says John Bancroft, senior research fellow at the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction.

Unlike for men, sexual attraction — to men, other women or children — is secondary to relationship needs for women, so the pattern is less fixed, Bancroft says.

Little is known about the cause of pedophilia in men or women, Berlin says, and with so little research, effective treatments lag.

"What we do know is that it's not a voluntary choice," Berlin says. "Nobody chooses this life."