

Healing the wounds of child molestation

By David Vergun

The Oct. 6 arrest of Charles A. Walls III, of Lonoke, charged with six counts of rape, two counts of violation of a minor in the first degree, and two counts of solicitation of murder, has focused attention on child molestation.

If Walls is convicted, he may fit the category of people known as "preferential child molesters," according to Dr. Deborah Laufersweiler-Dwyer, assistant professor of criminal justice at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR).

AVERAGE OF 200 VICTIMS

"The preferential child molester is typically an authority figure who has had an average of 200 victims," Laufersweiler-Dwyer said. "You will probably find there are more victims than are willing to come forward in most cases that go to trial."

Betty Dickey, special prosecuting attorney in the Walls case, said more charges are possible.

Some of Walls' alleged victims are former Boy Scouts and members of his troop. Walls was a unit leader of Explorer Post 160, Order of Arrow adviser and assistant Scoutmaster of Troop 103 in Lonoke.

"It is often hard to spot a child molester," said Margaret Matthew, counselor and executive director at Rape Crisis, Inc. in Little Rock, a private, non-profit organization. "He may be an authority figure such as a preacher, Boy Scout leader, or a piano teacher. Some child molesters even marry women just to molest their children."

Running background checks on all people entrusted with the care of children is something Matthew fa-

vors.

SEXUAL OFFENDERS MUST REGISTER

The Arkansas Sex and Child Offender Registration Act of 1997 requires persons to register with a local law enforcement agency if they have been found guilty of a sexual offense.

Sex offenders moving to Arkansas from another state are also required to register with a local law enforcement agency that has jurisdiction over the city or county where they plan to live.

Once registered, sex offenders must verify their place of residency every six months. They must also notify the Arkansas Crime Information Center 10 days before moving to a new address.

A person who fails to register or fails to report changes of address will be guilty of a Class D felony, punishable by up to six years imprisonment and up to a \$10,000 fine.

GET HELP RIGHT AWAY

Matthew's advice to victims of child molestation is to "get help early — the sooner the better. If you haven't yet gotten help, get it now, because it's never too late.

"For some victims, it may take just a couple of sessions; but for others, it may take years of counseling before they can get their lives back to normal," she continued.

Matthew, who has counseled many victims, characterizes their behaviors as "going to extremes in everything they do. It's like light and dark," she said, citing some examples:

■ "Some may become high achievers, trying to prove they are good people, while others may be-

come worthless, dropping out of school and unable to hold a job.

■ "Some may become submissive to authority figures, while others may become angry with authority figures.

■ "Some may sleep with the lights on, vigilant for whomever may come in, while others may sleep with the room pitch black, remembering how they hid under the covers, fearing another attack by a molester.

■ "Some may be obsessively neat in appearance, while others will look like total disasters."

She said some bosses who are "total control freaks" — the ones you can't stand — may have been molested as children.

"Although the effects of child molestation are different for every victim, being abused *does* mess up their lives," she added.

Some victims of child molestation later become child molesters themselves. "However, I want to stress that not all people who were abused become abusers," she emphasized.

GUILT COMPLEX NORMAL

Many victims feel guilty because their experiences may have felt pleasurable. "It was probably their first sexual experience," Matthew said. "They felt good. They may have hated what was happening but their bodies responded anyway."

She used an analogy to describe the feeling. "If you are cut and bleed, you may want the bleeding to stop. Yet, you cannot stop the bleeding merely by wishing. So too, a victim of child molestation may

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ejaculate and feel good, even if he wishes not to."

STAGES OF COUNSELING

Dr. Ralph Hammond, UALR psychology professor, agrees with Matthew's advice to get help early. He added that counseling is most effective when the parents come in with the child.

"The counseling process itself is similar to that of dealing with the death of a significant person," he said. "There are stages of fear, anger, and acceptance must be worked through." Hammond said he does not think psychotherapy nor hypnosis is the best counseling method.

NATURE VS. NURTURE

What makes a person a child molester? "If I had the answer to that question, I'd be retired and driving a big shiny car," Hammond said. "Some say it's nature [genetic], others say it's nurture [learned], and some say a combination. I personally suspect it's more nature; like you're programmed for it."

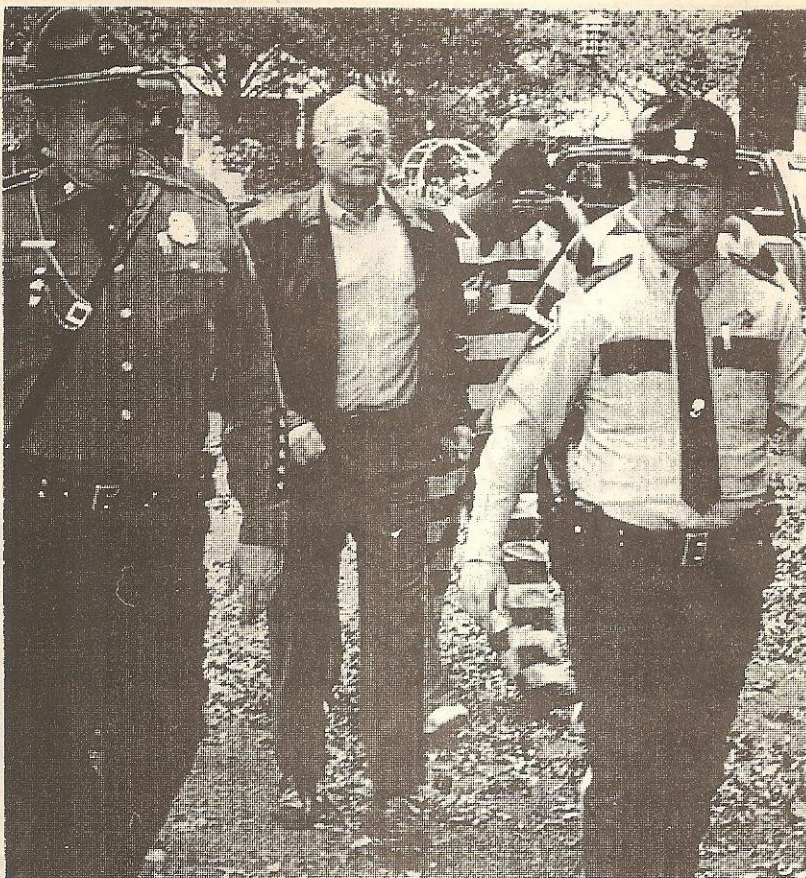
The answer to the nature, nurture question might never be answered. "It would be unethical to do an experiment to determine causality," he said.

IS THERE A CURE?

Will child molesters ever be cured? Hammond, who has interviewed child molesters, said, "To answer that question, you need to make the distinction between child molestation as a personality trait and child molestation as a behavior. Child molesters probably won't be cured of their personality, but with treatment, they *might* be able to alter their behavior. No one really cares about personality; it's the behavior that causes concern. A child molester will probably die that way, even if he is castrated or sterilized. However, he may not necessarily die a practicing one."

The needs of a child molester go beyond sexual gratification. "A child molester is meeting his emotional as well as sexual needs with young children," he said. "In his mind, it's a love relationship; an emotional void that must be filled."

If child molestation is found to be something programmed into a person — and that is by no means



EASY QUESTIONS, HARD ANSWERS: Charles A. Walls III is escorted by law enforcement officials to his Nov. 18 arraignment on six charges of rape and two of violation of a minor. Allegations against Walls have spurred many to puzzle over what may lead to child molestation — and to consider the effect on victims.

certain — then why should the molester be punished? "It's a bind that we as a society must face," Hammond said. "The reality is that we *do* have laws that must be followed and others must be protected. If you took a poll, I bet 90 percent of the people you ask would say that child molesters should be locked up for good."

HELP JUST A CALL AWAY

Adult survivors of child sexual assault and adult rape victims can receive help by calling the Rape Crisis Center at 1-800-813-5433.

To report a case of child maltreatment, call the Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-482-5964.

For information and referrals for any type of sexual assault, call the Department of Human Service's Children and Family Services division at 501-676-3113.

All calls will be treated with strict confidentiality and anonymity, and each agency is required by law to follow up on each call.