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Stephen Linn, PhD, practiced psychology in the United States for 17 years and now leads workshops and seminars in Vancouver. Lynn was stung by a con artist once and recently began studying scams and situations that take advantage of people.

“We tend to defer to others who appear wealthy and speak well,” he says. “We generally believe these people and agree to their requests. Consequently, con artists who meet their victims in person are likely to be well-dressed, to present themselves as financially successful and to be particularly attractive and articulate.”

“Con artists have inevitably had painful, disturbed childhoods,” Linn explains. “As a result, they’ve developed strategies to deal with what they see as a hostile, uncaring world, a world to get even with. They see others as marks.

“They objectify people and – unlike most of us – are not concerned about the pain they cause others,” he continues. “They seek victims who tend to be trusting and obedient. If they don’t succeed with one person they just go fishing for their next victim. It’s an exciting game for them and their goal is to win.”

While many con artists operate in large urban centres some also prey on people living in rural communities. Malcolm Island is a small island off the northeast coast of Vancouver Island with a population of approximately 1,000.

When a physiotherapist opened for business on the island, residents were delighted. Many of his patients were women and they all found him friendly and interested in community affairs. He often asked questions about upcoming events and inquired if the patient planned to attend the next dance, wedding, etc.

It was only after he was arrested for a series of robberies that they discovered the real motive behind his questions.

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