

## Gay-Affirming Canadian Psychologists Propose Redefining What Constitutes Child Sexual Abuse

The most recently published issue of *The Journal of Sex Research* (November, 2004) features a study conducted by Kim Bartholomew, Doug Oram, and Jessica L. Stanley.

The study, "Gay and Bisexual Men's Age-Discrepant Childhood and Sexual Experiences," recommends that researchers redefine Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) to a modified definition that includes a consideration of the perceptions of the person who has been sexually abused.

The authors propose a new term, "Child Sexual Experience" (CSE) to more accurately describe the impact that a child sex experience has on the person. They do not believe that consensual, non-coercive sexual encounters between adults and child are necessarily harmful.

The authors sampled 192 gay and bisexual men to find out

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being abused.

"The age-based definition of CSA is based on an implicit assumption that CSA invariably leads to harm, an assumption that has limited empirical support," say the authors of the study. "Although on average, people with CSA experiences are slightly less well-adjusted than those without such experiences, CSA accounts for less than 1% of the variance in adjustment. Furthermore, young gay men who described an age-discrepant sexual experience between the ages of 12 and 17 were found to have equally well-developed self-esteem and sexual identity as young gay men without such experiences."

The researchers distinguish between younger males who are molested by older men and who view such encounters as coercive and negative and older teens who engage in consensual sex with older males. The older teens view their encounters in a more positive light and many do not consider themselves as victims of child abuse.

The authors urge researchers to adopt a new definition of adult/child sexual encounters: Child Sexual Experience (CSE). This new definition takes into account the positive, non-coercive experience that many young men feel during sexual encounters with older males.

The authors note that the redefining of Child Sexual Abuse to Child Sexual Experience has important relevance to

if they considered their sexual experiences to be abusive, positive, or neutral. Of the 192 interviewed, 50 (26%) reported a sexual experience before age 17 with someone at least five years or older. Of this 50 men, 24 (49%) perceived "their sexual experiences as negative, coercive, and/or abusive."

The survey was designed, in part, to test whether or not the person who perceived his sexual experience to be negative had more emotional adjustment problems. The study found higher rates of low self-esteem, problems with expressiveness, and problems with nurturance, among those who viewed their sexual experience as negative.

The current definition of Child Sexual Abuse is sexual interaction between a child or adolescent with a person who is at least five years older than the person who is

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young gay males. "Some in the gay community believe that some sexual experiences involving mature adolescents and older partners may be beneficial. ... These sexual experiences may provide these adolescents with the opportunity to explore their sexuality and feel affirmed by the gay community. ... It may be less threatening for young gay males to seek out an older gay male than to risk rejection and possible humiliation from making sexual advances toward a peer."

The authors conclude: "...the standard convention of defining age-based childhood sexual abuse as uniformly negative, harmful, and coercive may not accurately represent gay and bisexual men's sexual experiences. ... gay men with histories of nonnegative, noncoercive childhood sexual experiences with older people are as well adjusted as those without histories of age-discrepant childhood sexual experiences. ... Contrary to popular belief, negative outcomes do not inevitably follow from gay and bisexual men's childhood age-discrepant sexual encounters."

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Jessica L. Stanley, Kim Bartholomew, Doug Oram, "Gay and Bisexual Men's Age-Discrepant Childhood Sexual Experiences," *The Journal of Sex Research*, Vol. 41, Number 4, November, 2004: pp. 381-389

## Selected Quotes From NARTH Collected Papers, 2004

“As researchers, academicians and mental health professionals engaged in the study and practice of reparative therapy, we are in a challenging position. We face ignorance, strong resistance and rigid bias posed by an intellectual elite and, to an extent, a society that is often unwilling to examine the scientific evidence concerning the origins and treatment of homosexuality. Tragically, some who agree with us have been intimidated into silence.

“In this hostile cultural environment, NARTH members are in a uniquely demanding position because we must be both clinically capable in practice and strategically effective in advocacy. Our mission, per se, is not only to provide counseling, but also to defend the rights of people with unwanted same-sex attractions to obtain treatment, and to protect our professional rights to conduct research, speak and write about our work. Indeed, our professional survival and the future well being of our society may depend upon our efforts.” — *Edward “Ned” Stringham, Ph.D., “Advocating For Reparative Therapy And Traditional Moral Perspectives Of Homosexuality,” NARTH Conference, Washington, DC, November, 2004*

“Understanding the developmental nature of homosexuality is not only a better alternative to believing it is a choice, but it is also better in some ways than believing it is solely biological. Believing homosexuality is biologically based is actually quite limiting to homosexuals, and therefore has negative implications. For homosexuals who are not happy in the gay lifestyle, the biological explanation gives no hope for any other option. I have met countless homosexuals who were told by psychotherapists that their condition was unchangeable, despite the fact that they were very miserable and were seeking change. Believing that it is biologically based implies that change is impossible. In a society that highly esteems freedom of choice, it seems ironic that we accept and promote a theory of homosexuality that leaves the homosexual with no other options. Taking away all hope for change seems restrictive at best, detrimental at worst. On the other hand, when we educate we promote the truth that people can seek change if they so desire.” — *Julie C. Harren, Ph.D., “Educating The Public On The Causes Of Homosexuality,” NARTH Conference, Washington, DC, November, 2004*