

## Commentary on NARTH's Fact Sheet, "The Causes of Male Homosexuality"

This reader argues persuasively that childhood seduction may turn otherwise heterosexual boys to homosexuality through habit, and also through a shift in self-identity. He cites several studies which support that possibility.

By Bruce Puleo

I want to make some comments with regard to NARTH's fact sheet "The Causes of Male Homosexuality." I agree with most of this fact sheet, but the brief section on early sexual seduction as a contributive factor to homosexuality leaves something to be desired.

The fact sheet makes it seem as if a boy must be *pre-homosexual* in order to be sexually seduced or abused by an older male. I do agree that boys who are developing homosexually are more vulnerable to homosexual seduction. Such boys are likely, in some cases, to put themselves in a position to be seduced due to their desire for male attention. However, many boys who are not developing homosexually also are seduced/abused. I believe that many of this second class turn out to be homosexual on the basis of the *seduction/abuse alone*, apart from any question of homosexual predisposition.

There are several studies I would like to call to NARTH's attention.

**JOHNSON, R.L., and D.K. Shrier. "Sexual Victimization of Boys: Experience at an Adolescent Medicine Clinic." Journal of Adolescent Health Care 1985:6.** Twenty-three of 40 (57%) pre-adolescent boys who had been molested by much older males became homosexual or bisexual during their teen years. Nineteen became homosexual and four bisexual. Mean age at time of abuse: 7.6 years. Thirty of 40 (75%) were between the ages of six and eight when the abuse occurred. During the survey, the boys were asked if they had ever been raped, sexually abused, or forced into a sexual act.

However, a comparison group of non-molested boys at the same clinic, only three of 40 became homosexual, and one bisexual (10% in all).

**JOHNSON, R.L., and D.K. Shrier. "Past Sexual Victimization by Females of Male Patients in an Adolescent Medicine Clinic Population." American Journal of Psychiatry 144:5, May 1987.**

The title of this study is something of a misnomer, because the study included boys who were molested by both females and males. The rate of homosexuality for female-molested boys was 3 of 11 (28%), far less than for male-molested boys.

Eight of 14 (57%) pre-adolescent boys who had been sexually molested by older males became homosexual or bisexual. Mean age at the time of molestation: 10. In a

comparison group of non-molested boys, only two of 25 (8%) became homosexual or bisexual. The same question about rape, sexual abuse or force was asked. In a follow-up study, Johnson and Shrier revealed that physical force or threats were used in half the cases of victimization in this study. Also, many of the boys linked their current homosexuality to their victimization experience.

**FINKELHOR, D. "The Sexual Abuse of Boys." Victimology: An International Journal. Vol. 6, 1981.** Five of 11 (45%) pre-teen boys who had been sexually molested by much older males practiced homosexuality in their more mature years. In a larger non-molested group, 19 of 174 (11%) reported homosexuality during mature life. Finkelhor did a regression analysis and found that *childhood sexual victimization was the strongest predictor of homosexual activity in later life*, even more important than childhood peer-group homosexual interaction.

Although he is cautious, he suggests that the superior authority of an older male may incline a boy into a process of homosexual self-identification at an early age. The use of force to gain compliance was reported by about half of the boys. There was little evidence of victim initiative. Most of the boys said the abuser took the sexual initiative.

*Comment:* Although the numbers in these studies are small, the studies are valuable because they employ comparison groups of non-molested boys. L. Doll's often-cited study (mentioned in the references of your fact sheet) considers a much larger number of homosexual males (1,001) and their childhood homosexual experiences. However, Doll does not use a comparison group of non-molested boys, and this makes all the difference.

It is instructive to keep in mind that not all boys who are homosexually molested become homosexual in later life, but the three studies above indicate that about half of them do. This might mean that only those who are pre-homosexual at the time of molestation turn out homosexual in later life. The other half, presumably, were developing heterosexually at the time of molestation and, therefore, evolve into heterosexuals in later life.

But I doubt this view is fully explanatory. Force is often used, as the studies indicate (including Doll's). Why should force and threats have to be used on a little boy when the relationship gets physical, if he was looking for homosexual attention? If all the boys were pre-homosexual, one would expect them to be receptive to homosexual play, and thus force would not be necessary.

Moreover, the comparison groups of non-molested boys show a much lower rate of homosexual outcome. **The molested boys become homosexual at a rate four to seven times higher than the non-molested boys.** This suggests that, in some cases at least, the seduction/abuse is the chief factor in determining homosexual issue. The fact sheet does not reflect this view at all and makes it seem that all molested little boys are like Greg Louganis who was looking for affection and was probably pre-homosexual.

**DIMOCK, P. "Adult Males Sexually Abused as Children." Journal of Interpersonal Violence. Vol. 3, No. 2, June 1988.** Although he does not specify ages or state exactly what he means by "children," Dimock studied a group of 25 men who had been sexually abused as children. The perpetrators were both male and female. Of these 25 cases, 16 reported gender-identity confusion. Eight of the men engaged in sexual relations with both men and women. Two claimed they were primarily homosexual but occasionally had sex with women. One professed to be heterosexual, but his sexual experience was limited to compulsive sex with males.

**SAGARIN, E. "Prison Homosexuality and Its Effects on Post-Prison Sexual Behavior." Psychiatry Vol. 39, August 1976.** Sagarin studied 9 former convicts, five of whom had been rapists in prison life, and four of whom had been victims of homosexual rape in prison. He found that the rapists maintained their heterosexual functioning intact after release from prison. But the four men who had been intimidated and raped reported that they had been heterosexual prior to incarceration, but emerged from prison as homosexuals.

*Comment:* A sad and astounding study. Would it be stretching things too far to suggest that if rape can make grown men into homosexuals, then its effect on little boys, at least in some cases, is probably even greater? Little boys are not just seduced (as your fact sheet would lead us to

believe); they are often raped, as the studies by Johnson/Shrier and Finkelhor indicate.

Other studies have shown that little boys who are raped sometimes become homosexual aggressors during childhood and rape those who are smaller and weaker than they are. From what I've read, the incidence of this sort of thing is as mind-boggling in juvenile institutions as it is in prisons. The aggressors may not be gay, but they have participated in homosexual behavior by way of having been raped themselves. One wonders in the light of Sagarin's evidence about the fate of their victims.

My view on the relation between homosexuality and seduction/abuse is best summed up by Dimock: "Men who engage in same-sex behaviors are not necessarily gay, and gay males may be more vulnerable to a variety of victimization experiences including sexual abuse."

S.M. Finch, a psychiatrist, ("Sexual Activity of Children with Other Children and Adults"; Clinical Pediatrics, January 1967) also expresses my outlook: "There are also youngsters who invite and even unconsciously welcome some type of sexual molestation by adults...or the latently homosexual boy who makes himself an available subject for adult homosexual males. In such cases, the adult is still legally the culprit."

Finch also points out what your fact sheet omits (and this is what I am protesting): "Not infrequently, the adult threatens dire consequences if the child tells anyone what is going on. *A boy may be led into homosexual orientation by repeated exposure to homosexual activities with an adult male, and conversely, a girl may be led into a future lesbian adjustment by long continued sexual contact with an adult woman [emphasis added].*"

NARTH's fact sheet, "The Causes of Male Homosexuality," is too polite with regard to the reality of what goes on in the world. ■