

# On Positive Self-Reports of Adult-Child Sexual Relationships:

## Why They Are Misleading

by Dale O'Leary

In the fall of 1999, NARTH reported on a major study in the American Psychological Association's *Psychological Bulletin*<sup>(1)</sup> which found little or no apparent harm in consensual pedophile relationships between men and boys. Clearly, there had to be more to the story.

A study by Doll et al<sup>(2)</sup> produced findings which at first glance, seem to fit the *Psychological Bulletin* analysis. Of 1,001 homosexual and bisexual men surveyed, a disturbing 42% reported a history of sexual abuse—and only 39% of those men said they viewed the experience negatively at time of contact and again at the time of the interview.

Indeed, 27% reported that they had viewed the experience positively at the time of contact. The longer the pedophile relationship lasted, the more it was likely to be remembered positively.

However, Doll *et al* caution that positive self-reports should not be interpreted to mean that the experience was actually positive. As they explain:

"...many of our participants evaluated the contact neutrally or positively either at the time of the experience or as an adult. Clinicians have suggested that these responses may represent a reframing of the experience in a more positive light in order to deal with a potentially overwhelming negative experience."<sup>(2)</sup>

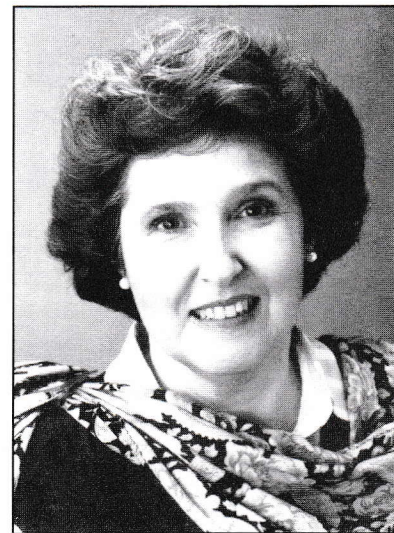
Another consideration omitted by the authors of the *Psychological Bulletin* article is the finding that homosexually active men who were molested are, in adulthood, subsequently more likely to be attracted to underage boys and to engage in sexual relations with them.

A 1992 study<sup>(3)</sup> looked at a random sample of 750 men, of whom 15.6% had experienced one or more unwanted sexual contacts (almost all of which was male-on-male) before their 17th birthday. Of those men who had experienced longterm sexual abuse, 11% were currently sexually interested in males younger than 13 years, and 8% had had sexual contact in adulthood with a male under the age of thirteen.

In addition, 23% were currently sexually interested in a male 13-15 years old, and 19% had had contact in adulthood with a male aged 13-15.

In contrast, none of those who had been free of abuse (or experienced only short-term abuse) had been involved with male children under the age of thirteen.

Commenting on the studies, Dr. Joseph Nicolosi observed, "It is not uncommon for victims to 'identify with the aggressor.' Therefore the fact that victims sometimes defend the system that victimized them—or even follow in the adult victimizer's footsteps—should not surprise us. In reality, of course, such a childhood relationship was a terrible betrayal of trust by the father figure the boy clearly wanted and needed."



Dale O'Leary

Some victims  
acquire a distorted  
understanding  
of relationships, and  
thus label the abuse  
positive

### Endnotes

<sup>(1)</sup> Rind, Bruce, Tromovitch, Philip, and Bauserman, Robert. (Temple U. Dept. of Psychology, Phila., PA), A Meta-analytic Examination of Assumed Properties of Child Sexual Abuse Using College Samples. *Psychological Bulletin*, 1998 (July), vol. 124 (1), 22-53.

<sup>(2)</sup> Doll, L., B. Barholow & J. Harrison, (1992) "Self-reported childhood and adolescent sexual abuse among adult homosexual and bisexual men," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 16: 855-864.

<sup>(3)</sup> Bagley, C., M. Wood & L. Young (1994) "Victim to abuser: Mental health and behavioral sequels of child sexual abuse in a community survey of young adult males," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 18, 8: 683-697.