

The Problem of Pedophilia

Adult-Child Sex Is Not Necessarily "Abuse," Say Some Psychologists

For centuries, Western society—under the influence of its foundational Judeo-Christian roots—has considered adult-child sex to be legally, morally, and psychologically taboo. Pedophiles have been judged criminal by the courts, sinful by theologians, and disordered by the mental-health profession.

Slowly, however, that situation is changing.

A Fringe Element Begins to Enter the Mainstream

NAMBLA—the North American Man-Boy Love Association—was once the lone voice lobbying for the normalization of pedophilia. NAMBLA representatives marched in gay-pride parades as a fringe element of the gay-rights movement.

Then in 1990, the highly respected *Journal of Homosexuality* produced a special double issue devoted to adult-child sex, which was entitled "Male Intergenerational Intimacy" (1). One article said many pedophiles believe they are "born that way and cannot change" (p. 133). Another writer said a man who counseled troubled teenage boys could achieve "miracles. . .not by preaching to them, but by sleeping with them." The loving pedophile can offer a "companionship, security and protection" which neither peers nor parents can provide (p. 162). Parents should look upon the pedophile who loves their son "not as a rival or competitor, not as a thief of their property, but as a partner in the boy's upbringing, someone to be welcomed into their home..." (p. 164).

A British university professor writes: "Boys want sex with men, boys seduce adult men, the experience is very common and much enjoyed" (p. 323). A professor of social science at the State University of New York said he looks forward to the day when Americans will "get over their hysteria about child abuse" (p. 325) and child pornography.

A.P.A. Publishes a New Study Opening the Way to the Normalization of Pedophilia

The American Psychological Association did not denounce the positions advanced within that journal. **In fact, just recently, the A.P.A. published a new, major study (2) written by one of those same *Journal of Homosexuality* writers.**

This latest article appears in the A.P.A.'s own prestigious *Psychological Bulletin*. It provides an overview of all of the research studying the harm resulting from childhood sexual abuse.

The authors' conclusion? That childhood sexual abuse is on average, only slightly associated with psychological harm—and that the harm may not be due to the sexual experience, but to the negative family factors in the children's backgrounds. When the sexual contact is *not coerced*, especially when it is experienced by a boy and is enjoyed, it may not be harmful at all.

The article proposes that psychologists stop using judgmental terms like "child abuse," "molestation," and "victims," using instead neutral, value-free terms like "adult-child sex." Similarly, they say we should not talk about "**the severity of the abuse,**" but instead refer to "**the level of sexual intimacy.**"

The authors conclude that behavior which psychotherapists commonly term "abuse" may only constitute a **violation of social norms**. Religion and society, these writers argue, are free to judge behavior as they wish. . .but psychiatry should evaluate behavior by its own set of standards.

If It Feels Good, It Must Be Good

In fact, the authors of the *Psychological Bulletin* article propose another way of understanding pedophilia:

that it may only be “abuse” **if the child feels bad about the relationship**. They are in effect suggesting a **repetition of the steps by which homosexuality was normalized**. In its first step toward removing homosexuality from the Diagnostic Manual, the A.P.A. said the condition was normal as long as the person did not **feel bad** about it.

Few laymen are aware that the American Psychiatric Association has already set the stage for this same transition—in the case of pedophilia—by quietly redefining it. NARTH first made this story public in its membership publication (3). According to the latest diagnostic manual (DSM-IV), a person no longer has a psychological disorder simply because he molests children. To be diagnosed as disordered, now he must also feel anxious about the molestation, or be impaired in his work or social relationships. **Thus the A.P.A. has left room for the “psychologically normal” pedophile.**

Theology and the Law Are Led By Psychology

If psychology indeed recognizes consensual pedophilia as harmless, then civil law and social norms will be under pressure to follow the lead of social science. . .as indeed they did on the issue of homosexuality. When psychiatry declared homosexuality normal, our courts and theologians began to rewrite both *civil law* and *moral theology* based on what psychiatry said it had discovered through the medium of empirical science.

But What is a Psychological Disorder?

The problem with the law and society being a *follower* of psychology, is that the majority of psychological conditions considered to be disorders are not disorders *per se*, but socially undesirable character traits. What is categorized as a “psychological illness” depends on **psychiatry’s view of the good life, and of human nature**. And today, **there is grave disagreement on those subjects**.

So when psychiatry decided to redefine homosexuality as normal, it simply moved the condition from one category labeled “undesirable” to another category labeled “desirable.” (4) It did so based on a study showing that some homosexual individuals evidence no obvious psychological abnormality (5), and, also, as a result of listening to personal testimony from gay advocates. In essence, these individuals said, “We aren’t psychologically unbalanced or distressed, and we’re happy being gay. . .So psychiatry has no right to label us disordered.”

Psychology Yields to the Authority of Personal Experience

The A.P.A. agreed with them. In doing so, it surrendered its authority to contradict personal experience. At the same time, it relinquished the age-old conviction that human beings are governed by certain immutable laws of nature.

As psychiatry becomes detached from its foundations, we hear more opinions such as these—expressed by world-renowned, Professor Emeritus (Johns Hopkins U.) sexologist Dr. John Money:

“If I were to see the case of a boy aged ten or eleven who’s intensely erotically attracted toward a man in his twenties or thirties, if the relationship is totally mutual, and the bonding is genuinely totally mutual. . .*then I would not call it pathological in any way*” (6).

And so we can see that a door has been opened.

Psychiatrist Jeffrey Satinover reflects on the *Journal of Homosexuality’s* “Male Intergenerational Intimacy”:

“This special issue reflects the substantial, influential, and growing segment of the homosexual community that neither hides nor condemns pedophilia. Rather they argue that pedophilia is an acceptable aspect of sexuality, especially of homosexuality. Indeed, the *San Francisco Sentinel*, a Bay Area gay-activist newspaper, published a piece arguing that pedophilia is central to male homosexual life” (7).

Gay advocates correctly state that most child molesters are heterosexual males. But this is a misleading statement. **In proportion to their numbers** (about 1 out of 36 men), homosexual males are more likely to engage in sex with minors: in fact, they appear to be **three times** more likely than straight men to engage in adult-child sexual relations (8). And this does not take into account the cases of homosexual child abuse which are unreported. NARTH’s Executive Director Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, for example, says that about one-third of his 400 adult homosexual clients said they had experienced some form of homosexual abuse before the age of consent, but only two of those cases had been reported.

While no more than 2% of male adults are homosexual, some studies indicate that approximately 35% of pedophiles are homosexual (9). Further, since homosexual pedophiles victimize far more children than do heterosexual pedophiles (10), it is estimated that approximately 80% of pedophilic victims are boys who have been molested by adult males (11).

Homosexual Men Were Often Childhood Victims

Dr. Nicolosi says that many of his clients' childhood sexual contacts occurred with a trusted older person, and were perceived at the time of the abuse as loving. Other sexual-reorientation therapists report similar high rates of molestation among their clients (12, 13).

Tragically, the abused child is then more likely to become an abuser in adulthood (14). Thus, it is not surprising that we see more pedophilia among homosexual men: since they are more likely to have been victims of abuse, they are also more likely to initiate a repetition of that abuse with a same-sex child.

Which Child is Most Likely to Become a Victim?

Certain children are especially vulnerable to abuse—especially the boy who is predisposed to homosexuality. The prehomosexual boy is very often lonely, alienated from his father, and experiencing frustrating same-sex peer relationships. He quite naturally craves male attention, affection and approval.

Often the same boy is also experiencing an overly intense and intimate relationship with his mother, which makes normal masculine individuation difficult. An intimate relationship with a man is one place of separation and individuation "where Mother cannot go" (15).

When this lonely boy receives flattering attention from an older male, then a link is established between love and homoerotic sex. The boy comes to believe, "If I want love from men, I must have sex with them." Thus the **normal and natural developmental need of same-sex love and approval** has become eroticized. The boy may then develop a compulsive, promiscuous sexual habit pattern, which in gay life is seen fairly frequently.

Many Gay Biographies Tell the Story

In his life story, *Breaking the Surface*, Olympic diver Greg Louganis tells the poignant tale of his own experience with adult-child sex. He was an unusually sensitive boy, with an intense closeness with his mother, and a distant, fearful relationship with his father. Lonely and starving for male affection, he was molested by an older man he encountered on the beach. In his childish neediness, Louganis—like many victims of man-boy molestation—perceived that relationship as loving.

Who is Likely to be an Abuser?

Psychoanalysis recognizes the child abuser as typically

an immature man who wants to "give love" to a boy. He makes a narcissistic identification with the child, seeing him as an idealized version of himself, and perceives himself as giving the same love which he wishes he had received from his own father. Thus the pedophile cannot understand that he is inflicting emotional damage.

Gay Fiction Presents Pedophilic Relationships Positively

Popular gay and lesbian fiction often portrays adult-child sexual relationships as fondly remembered, tender "coming-of-age" stories. Much of this fiction is pornographic—aimed specifically at teenagers—and is **recommended to them** on reading lists distributed by gay-advocacy groups such as P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) (16), or offered to them in public-school libraries (17).

What is the Harm of Childhood Seduction?

Dutch psychologist Gerard van den Aardweg points out that "non-coerced" sex is a misnomer because there is always an element of coercion—involving a misuse of adult authority, and a misuse of the child's need for affection. If a researcher sees no harm, "it may be because he is using the wrong glasses. . .not because there is nothing to see." Even adult-child sex which is mutually enjoyed, he says, is always an **intrinsic injustice to the integrity of the person** (18).

Dr. David Finkelhor, a leading U.S. researcher in the field of child sexual abuse, similarly disputes the conclusions of pedophile advocates.

He describes some of the consequences of seduction: confusion about sexual identity and sexual norms; inability to differentiate sex from love; confusion between care-getting and care-giving, with lowered respect for adult authority; guilt, shame, anxiety, lowered self-esteem, depression, vulnerability to drug and alcohol abuse, and impaired ability to judge the trustworthiness of others. We also see an age-inappropriate sexual knowledge, and sex acts sometimes compulsively reenacted with other children (19).

Victims of sex abuse also appear to be at higher risk for suicide (20), and may repeat the sexual abuse in adulthood, in order to gain a feeling of psychological mastery over the experience (21). Children who experience prolonged abuse are more likely to view the abuse as positive or neutral, suggesting that as the molestation continues, children eventually identify with the molester (22).

If the abuse was homosexual, the boy is likely to question his sexual orientation; if the abuser was a male and the child a girl, she may defensively turn to lesbianism (23).

But even if pedophile advocates proved to be *right* that children don't often suffer psychological damage in adulthood (and Dr. Finkelhor believes they're *wrong*), the impact of pedophilia must not be judged simply on the basis of empirical findings.

"Ultimately," says Dr. Finkelhor, "I do continue to believe that the prohibition on adult-child sexual contact is primarily a moral issue. While empirical findings have some relevance, they are not [to be] the final arbiter."

Some slaves, he says, experienced slavery as good; likewise, many child sweatshop workers said their work was beneficial. Despite this, we know better than to conclude that either slavery or child labor are ultimately good, he argues.

Similarly, research reveals that the birth of children is correlated with a drop in marital satisfaction for several years. Yet in spite of that empirical evidence, we do not declare childrearing to be "bad for marriage." We know that psychological distress, or the lack of it, only gives us a partial understanding of any particular life issue.

Dr. Finkelhor concludes: "Some types of social relationships violate deeply held values and principles in our culture about equality and self-determination. Sex between children and adults is one of them. Evidence that some children have positive experiences **does not challenge these values**" (24).

Endnotes

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- (3) Pedophilia Not Always a Disorder? *NARTH Bulletin*, April 1995, page 1.
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