

Peer Support and Professional Mental Health Services for Boy-Attracted Pedosexual Males¹: A Comparative Analysis

©2009 by David L. Riegel

Abstract

Males who are sexually attracted to boys younger than themselves may be reluctant to utilize the commonly available professional mental health services for fear that their orientation may become an issue. Prior to the advent of the Internet, these males were largely isolated from one another and unable to communicate, but in the last decade or so there has been a growing number of "peer" electronic web pages, forums, news groups, mailing lists, etc., which purport to offer fellowship and counsel. This paper reports on an Internet survey designed to evaluate the attitude of these males toward mental health services, as well as to examine the self-perceived nature and usefulness of electronic interchanges, the extent to which these lead to "real-life" friendships, and the associated benefits and problems. There were N = 192 respondents to the survey; some understanding of the extent, nature, benefits, and problems of on line and real life relationships was gained, and the hypothesis of avoidance of professional mental health services was supported.

A state of moral panic (Jenkins, 1998) currently exists concerning the sometimes sexually expressed mutual attraction between boys and older males, some of whom may still be minors themselves (Sandfort, 1987; Vanggaard, 1969). Exposure of any such relationships can bring the weight of public hysteria crashing down on the participants; even an unfounded accusation can be devastating. Given these conditions, it would seem prudent for Boy-Attracted Pedosexual Males (BPM) to carefully hide this aspect of their sexuality, a concealment which at the minimum could compromise the effectiveness of any professional mental health counseling, but which is more likely simply to eliminate any willing participation. This social hysteria was less strident two or three decades ago, and such organizations as NAMBLA and the shadowy Rene Guyon Society were able to provide some degree of peer support, albeit with varying levels of societal disapproval. Although no connection is postulated, the slide of these organizations into essential oblivion and the onset of increasing levels of moral panic occurred about the same time the Internet began to become a significant factor in social interactions.

The rise of the Internet over the past two decades has provided a welcome anonymous means of information exchange for the BPM community, and there are countless web pages, forums, newsgroups, etc., which are dedicated to various aspects of this sexual orientation. These are supplemented by "email" and various "instant messaging" services which provide one-to-one contacts. An examination of these "open" electronic resources indicates that they appear to be an important means of emotional and psychological support for BPM while also providing avenues for the building of "real-life" friendships. Conversely, the supposedly pervasive Internet

¹ The term "pedophile" has become hopelessly value laden and has been turned into a pejorative epithet in the media. Because it has thus lost its scientific objectivity as well as its public validity and usefulness, the term "Boy-Attracted Pedosexual Male" (BPM, singular or plural) generally is used instead in this paper.

"pedophile rings" of urban legend, while some no doubt have existed and a few may still be found if one has the right "connections," are not readily visible. This report is of a generalized Internet investigation into these resources and their self-perceived benefits and problems, as well as into BPM attitudes concerning professional mental health services.

METHODS

In today's sociopolitical climate, males who are sexually attracted to boys (BPM) and who are free from prison or clinical constraints constitute an almost totally hidden population, and as such currently are not available to traditional sampling methods. However, the development of the Internet opens up a new possibility for reaching such males. Krantz, Ballard, and Scher (1997) and Stanton (1998) reported the Internet to be a valid and suitable means of gathering behavioral data. Pettit (2002) and Cronk and West (2002) have made comparisons of web based and "paper and pencil" data collections and have concluded that there are no significant differences in the quality or validity of the data. Duffy (2002) and Rhodes, Bowie, and Hergenrather (2003) have commented on the ability to reach otherwise inaccessible respondents and populations through the Internet. For these reasons the Internet was the venue of choice for this investigation.

Recruitment and procedure

Potential BPM participants were recruited principally by requesting a link on the Internet site "Boylinks" (<http://www.boylinks.net>), a site visited by BPM and others interested in finding web sites that deal with "boy-love" issues. On the linked page, males who were of legal age in their place of residence, and who self-identified as BPM, were invited to respond anonymously to a brief questionnaire about their experiences with, and opinions of, professional mental health services, as well as their experiences, opinions, preferences, and hopes for both "on line" and "real life" friendships. It was emphasized that participation would be totally anonymous and that beyond date and time, no identifying information would be attached to the data or otherwise recorded. Respondents were informed that this study was being conducted by an independent researcher and was not connected with any professional organization or group, were presented a disclaimer in accordance with the American Psychological Association Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct, and were advised that by proceeding they were both identifying themselves as BPM and agreeing to the terms and conditions of the research project.

Before participants began the actual survey, they were once again reminded of the legal age requirement and the anonymity of the study. They were encouraged to answer truthfully, and were asked not to participate if they felt they could not be truthful. They then were instructed how to respond to the survey questions, and advised that if they failed to respond to any of the required questions, the processing software would not accept their submission until they responded; after which they were presented with the questions described below. The processing software also included a "lockout" that prevented multiple submissions in rapid succession.

Measures

The instrument designed for this study was an interactive online questionnaire consisting of 41 multiple-choice questions in seven sections. The first section asked the respondents' age

group (Under 15, 15-17, 18-21, 22-25, 26-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51 or more), their ethnic/racial identity, where they lived, about their mental health and problem solving capability, and their experiences with, opinions of, and likelihood of participating in, professional mental health services. The final question in this section addressed the respondents' degree of attraction to boys three or more years younger than themselves (almost exclusively to boys, primarily to boys, equally to boys and to other persons, primarily to others, or almost exclusively to others with only a very minor attraction to boys). It was not felt that the gender of the "other persons" was germane to this investigation, so that question was not asked.

The next section inquired into the overall importance, participation in, benefits from, and contributions to, electronic and/or real life friendships with other BPM. Questions in this and succeeding sections generally were based on various five or seven point Likert-type scales which are defined later when pertinent. The next three sections asked similar questions about (a) forums/newsgroups/instant messaging/IRC/etc., (b) "email," and (c) past and current "real life" interactions. Another section asked about the incidence of offers to exchange pornography or the discussion of the procurement of boys for sexual purposes through forums/etc., email exchanges, and real life contacts. The final section dealt with the qualities that the respondents expected and hoped for in current and future peer interactions. The latter five sections each included a "text box" for unstructured comments on that section, and an additional closing text box was provided for general comments.

Participants:

There were $N = 192$ responses. The mean age of participants was in the 26-30 range, while the median was in the 31-40 range. Over 91% of respondents identified as white, and more than half (54%) were from the U.S. and Canada, 28% from Europe, and 8% from Australia/New Zealand. Self-reported general mental health of the respondents, on a scale of 1 (*extremely poor*) through 7 (*excellent*) showed a mean of 5.00 (above average) ($SD = 1.49$), and coping with problems, on a scale of 1 (*poorly*) through 5 (*extremely well*) of 3.45 (between fairly well and very well) ($SD = 0.89$). As a precondition for participation in the survey, all respondents were to some degree sexually attracted to boys, and this attraction was reported as almost exclusive in 28%, primary in 50%, and equally to boys and other persons in 19%, while only 4% had greater attractions to persons other than boys.

RESULTS

Professional mental health services. Of the 80 who had been involved in professional mental health counseling, 68% described it as being of "little" or "no help, 20% as being of "some" help, and 12% as being "fairly" or "very" helpful. Whether having experienced such counseling or not, 43% expressed negative opinions and 33% were neutral, while 24% were at least somewhat positive.

General peer interactions. Of the 192 respondents, 60% reported that the ability to engage in electronic and/or real life interaction with peers was of moderate or greater importance to them. Occasional or more often participation was reported by 54%, while 29% participated

frequently or regularly. Moderate or greater support, counsel, or other benefits were reported by 63%, and 73% indicated they were willing to provide support and counsel to other peers.

Forums/newsgroups/instant messaging/IRC/etc. Of the 163 who reported some level of reading and/or posting in one or more of these media, 46% reported less than moderate levels of support, counsel, or other benefits, 43% moderate or greater, while 11% reported negative experiences.

Email. Of the 94 who reported currently exchanging emails with other BPM, 50% did so on a monthly or more frequent basis, 49% reported less than moderate amounts of support, counsel, or other benefits, 53% moderate or greater, while 8% reported negative experiences.

Real life interactions. There were 99 who reported one or more lifetime real life contacts; the modal number of these contacts was in the 1-5 group (None, 1-5, 6-10, 11-20, >20). Of the 64 who reported one or more such contacts in the preceding year, the mode was in the 1-2 group (None, 1-2, 3-5, 6-10, >10). Of these past contacts, 28% were described as neutral, 12% were reported as being of "only a little" positive benefit, while 45% were reported as being of moderate or greater positive benefit, and 14% were negative.

Of the 75 who reported current real life contacts, the modal number of these contacts was in the 1-2 group (None, 1-2, 3-5, 6-10, >10). Of these current contacts, 33% were described as neutral, 13% were reported as being of "only a little" positive benefit, while 43% were reported as being of moderate or greater positive benefit, and 8% were negative. The Internet was reported as the source of 65% of all past and current contacts, with "chance" or "other" as the source of another 20%

Boy erotica and procurement. The frequencies of being confronted with offers of boy erotica ("child pornography") or for procuring a boy for sexual purposes are shown in Figure 1. N is the number of respondents who had been or were currently engaged in the Source activity.

Table 1.

Source/Subject	N	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Constantly
Forums/etc. - Erotica	154	48.7%	27.0%	18.4%	3.3%	2.6%
Forums/etc.- Boy proc.	154	84.6%	7.7%	6.4%	0.6%	0.6%
Email - Erotica	132	48.9%	29.0%	16.0%	4.6%	1.5%
Email - Boy proc.	132	85.7%	7.5%	5.3%	0.8%	0.8%
Real life - Erotica	121	56.2%	24.0%	14.1%	5.0%	0.8%
Real life - Boy proc.	121	823.6%	8.2%	6.6%	1.6%	0

Current and future interactions. Regarding the qualities that the respondents expected and hoped for in current and future interactions, on a scale of 1 (*Not at all*) through 3 (*Moderately*) to 5 (*Extremely*), the mean for the importance of the simple satisfaction of being able to meet with a like-minded person in real life was 3.15 ($SD=1.21$). For the importance of being able to discuss negative societal attitudes, the mean was 3.29 ($SD=1.15$), for being able to discuss the mentoring of boys, 3.22 ($SD=1.21$), and for developing responsible relationships with boys, 3.09 ($SD=1.26$). When asked about the desirability of a hypothetical web site where BPM could specifically pursue potential real life meetings, 68% reported that it would be of moderate or greater importance to them, and 57% said they would participate on a moderate or greater basis.

Comments. Only a small minority of the respondents provided comments of more than a few words, but a few of these were quite lengthy and well written. Some expressed their desire for expanded peer contacts if these could be accomplished without compromising or endangering the participants, but most had to do with the difficulty and frustration of living in a society which they felt was willfully blind to what they perceive as the positive and beneficial nature of sexually expressed consensual relationships between boys and older male.

DISCUSSION

This report is based on an international Internet sample of completely anonymous self-identified BPM, a population which in all probability could not be sampled in any other manner. The respondents generally claimed good self-reported mental health and moderately high coping abilities, indicating that, unlike clinical and prison samples (Cohen & Galynker, 2002), by and large these were stable and reasonably well adjusted people.

A majority of the respondents to this survey reported non-negative impressions of various electronic interactions with other BPM, as well as of real life meetings and friendships. That a positive percentage was not larger would seem to be indicative of a fair number of contacts which proved, perhaps because of personality or other incompatibilities as much as ethical disagreements, to be unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, significant levels of desire for future electronic and real life interactions, and for web sites which promote and facilitate real life meetings, were also reported. Conversely, many reported less than positive experiences and opinions concerning professional mental health services, and indicated they would avoid these as much as possible.

It must be emphasized that these data are from a self-selected convenience sample, and the possibilities of various sampling biases, as well as social justification, must be recognized. The most obvious of these biases is that all respondents were self-selected by being computer literate, by being acquainted with the Internet and with the websites from which their participation was solicited, and by choosing to participate. Another potential bias is that some individuals might submit socially desirable answers in an attempt to present a positive self-image or to improve the collective image of BPM. However, these completely anonymous respondents, unlike clinical or prison subjects, had nothing personally to gain by such misrepresentations. Considering the mean age group was 26-30, and the fact that many of the issues are in the present, recall bias should be no more than a minor factor.

Electronic or real life meetings of two or more BPM tend to be depicted by law enforcement and the media as "pedophile rings" organized for the sole purposes of circulating boy erotica and procuring boys for sexual encounters, and purportedly employing password-protected and extensively encrypted web sites (e.g. Moss & Owen, 2009). This author has examined a large number of web sites over the past decade, and while some required free registration in efforts to exclude undesirable elements, no encryption has been encountered. As noted earlier, this is not to say that encrypted "porn exchange" sites do not exist, only that they appear to be a vanishingly small minority compared to the perhaps many hundreds of sites which, while perhaps to a greater or lesser degree offensive to some, apparently stay within the bounds of legality. In this present investigation, while the procurement of a boy for sexual

purposes rarely came up more than occasionally, instances of offers of boy erotica were somewhat more frequent. However, the widely assumed but empirically unsupported harmfulness of viewing boy erotica has been questioned (Howitt, 1995; Kutchinski, 1973; Matas, 1999; Riegel, 2004), so such interests cannot automatically be assumed to be objectionable.

Through the endeavors of what Money (1988, p. 9) refers to as the pseudoscience of victimology, the "psychology industry" (Dineen, 2001), and the influence of the media (West, 1998), a state of moral panic (Jenkins, 1998) has been generated. Victimological "child sexual abuse" assumptions almost universally are applied to both consensual and nonconsensual sexually expressed boy/older male relationships, a situation which may lead to the avoidance by BPM of potentially invasive professional mental health counseling. However, many authors argue that such relationships, so long as they are consensual, are neither intrinsically pathological nor traumagenic, but rather just another part of the normal and benign spectrum of human sexuality (e.g., Constantine and Martinson, 1981; Ford and Beach, 1951; Green, 2002; Hertoft, 1993; Murray, 2002; Sandfort, 1987; Tindall, 1978; Trobriands, 1993; Vanggaard, 1969; Wilson, 1981, etc.). Ongoing unbiased empirical investigations and open discussions not dominated by the current victimological fixation should be conducted in order to better understand these consensual relationships and their implications.

As long as such relationships and their participants are pathologized (Malón, in press), and a "punitive and draconian justice system" is inflicted on the older partner, which also "indirectly scapegoats [the] boy" and "does so with an impact that severely damages both" (Wilson, 1981, p. 133), BPM who are free from the control of clinicians or law enforcement will most likely minimize their use of professional mental health services, thus negating what could be an important source of qualified counsel for these adolescent and adult males.

References:

- Cohen, L., & Galynker, I. (2002) Clinical features of pedophilia and implications for treatment. *Journal of Psychiatric Practice* 8 (5) 276-289.
- Constantine, L. & Martinson, F. (1981). *Children and Sex*, Boston: Little, Brown.
- Cronk, B., & West, J. (2002). Personality research on the Internet: A comparison of web-based and traditional instruments in take-home and in-class settings. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers* 34 (2) 177-180.
- Dineen, T. (2001). *Manufacturing victims: What the psychology industry is doing to people*. Montreal: Robert Davies.
- Duffy, M. (2002). Methodological issues in web-based research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 34 (1) 83-88.
- Ford, C. & Beach, F. (1951). *Patterns of sexual behavior*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Green, R. (2002). Is pedophilia a mental disorder? *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 31(6) 467-471.
- Hertoft, P. (1993) Paedophiles don't hurt children. In Trobriands (Eds.) *Crime without victims*. Amsterdam: Global Academic.
- Howitt, D (1995). Pornography and the paedophile: Is it criminogenic? *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 68, 15-27.
- Jenkins, E (1998). Moral panic: Changing concepts of the child-molester in modern America. New Haven, CT: Yale University.
- Krantz, J., Ballard, J., & Scher, J. (1997). Comparing the results of laboratory and World Wide Web samples on the determinants of female attractiveness. *Behavior Research Methods, Instrumentation and Computers*, 29, 264-269.
- Kutchinski, B. (1973) The effect of easy availability of pornography on the incidence of sex crimes: The Danish experience. *Journal of Social Issues*, 29, 163-191.
- Malón, A. (in press). On the Iatrogenic Nature of the Child Sexual Abuse Discourse. *Sexuality & Culture*.
- Matas, R. (1999, April 27) Attitudes toward child porn could change, B.C. judge says. *Globe & Mail* p. A1(Canada).
- Moss, V. & Owen, N. (2009, January 4). Al-Qaeda using paedophile websites to plan British terror attacks. Retrieved January 6, 2009, from <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/top-stories/2009/01/04/al-qaeda-using-paedophile-websites-to-plan-british-terror-attacks-115875-21014087/>
- Money, J. (1988). Commentary: current status of sex research. *Journal of psychology and human sexuality*, 1, 5-15.
- Pettit, F. (2002). A comparison of world-wide web and paper-and-pencil personality questionnaires. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers*, 34 (1) 50-54.
- Rhodes, S., Bowie, K., & Hergenrather, K. (2003). Collecting behavioral data using the world wide web: considerations for researchers. *Journal of Epidemiological Community Health* 57, 68-73.
- Riegel, D. (2004) Effects on Boy-Attracted Pedosexual Males of Viewing Boy Erotica. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 33(4) 321-323.
- Sandfort, T. (1987). *Boys on their contacts with men*. Elmhurst, NY: Global Academic.
- Stanton, J. (1998). An empirical assessment of data collection using the Internet. *Personnel Psychology*, 51, 709-725.

- Tindall, R. (1978). The male adolescent involved with a pederast becomes an adult. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 3(4), 373-382.
- Trobriands (Eds.) (1993). *Crime without victims*. Amsterdam: Global Academic. Originally published in Danish (1986) as *Forbrydelse uden offer*. Copenhagen: Tiderne Skifter.
- Vanggaard, T. (1969). *Phallos*. New York: International Universities.
- West, D. (1998). Boys and sexual abuse: An English opinion. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 27, 539-559.
- Wilson, P. (1981). *The man they called a monster*. North Melbourne, Australia: Cassell.