

## Persistence of Suppression of Childhood Sexuality

Over the centuries many questionable hypotheses have been proposed and embraced in the sexual sciences and then subsequently repudiated; one of the oldest and most enduring was the masturbation insanity hypothesis (Hare, 1962). Other examples were "multiple personality disorder" (Piper & Merskey, 2004), "repressed/recovered memory" (Loftus & Ketcham, 1994), and "Satanic ritual abuse" (Nathan & Snedeker, 1995). Homosexuality as a mental illness, beginning perhaps with Hooker (1957), has been discarded, while various other Augustinian taboos, such as sex outside of marriage, have quietly gone away. The one taboo that persists to this day as social science dogma is the suppression of childhood sexual involvement with older children and adults, which perhaps most often makes its way into public consciousness in the form of boyhood sexual exploration with older males.

The suppression of child/older person sexuality is generally based on postulated "harm" to the younger partner, but any empirical evidence of this harm is tenuous at best. One of the more prominent victimology-oriented studies (Finkelhor, 1979) has been criticized by Bauserman as having used a "loaded questionnaire seemingly designed to preclude the possibility of reporting consensual . . . relationships with adults" (1991, pp. 305-306), and the data from this research has been characterized as having a "near fatal skew" (Global, 1987, p. 9). Clancy referred to the claimed initial trauma of childhood sexual encounters with older persons as a "myth" (2009), and admitted that she "cannot offer a clear theoretical model as to exactly how and why sexual abuse damages victims" (p. 142). There are many other examples of the lack of objectivity in this "harm hypothesis," but for the sake of brevity no more will be cited here.

Zuger noted that any threats to assumed trauma paradigms "had the potential to undermine a host of expensive treatment and prevention projects" (2010, p. D5), so it is possible that the persistence of the harm hypothesis within the victimological faction of the social sciences may have to do with defending institutional – and especially pecuniary – interests. And while boys, ". . . obviously lacking access to publication outlets and having no other public voice of their own, are completely dependent for consideration in this debate on those who honestly try to understand, represent, and advocate for them as they really are, sexual and otherwise, . . ." (Riegel, 2011, p.166), one often hears the pejorative allegation that anyone advocating for the sexual rights of children is in reality advocating for the rights of adults to have sex with children. But it perhaps is more appropriate to question if those advocating for the continuation and enhancement of the harm hypothesis and the suppression of childhood sexuality are in reality protecting their positions and pocketbooks.

Those who claim to support the sexual rights of children seem to have made little progress in exorcizing this last taboo, which shortfall may to some degree be due to overemphasis in attempting to rebut the child sexual abuse/pedophilia hypotheses and their social ramifications for older persons, while only addressing children's needs and rights peripherally at best. In their 1998 paper, Rind, Bauserman, & Tromovitch spent 31 pages analyzing retrospective studies of child sexual abuse, and showed that psychological harm was relatively uncommon as well as associated more with "Family Environment" (p. 38) than sexual contacts with adults. But these authors' rather weak conclusion concerned itself with changing labels from

"child sexual abuse" to "adult-child sex" (p. 46) rather than calling for reconsideration of the suppression of childhood sexuality. In a more recent article, Rind, again failing to speak to the situation of children, dwelt on the "social response to age-gap sex involving minors", and even tried to justify adult sex with children by citing similar activities in primates (2010, p. 119). As above, various other examples (e.g. Brongersma 1986, 1990), could also be cited.

Proponents of reexamination and possible revision of the current state of the suppression of childhood sexuality might do well, then, to ask if the best course of action is to give less emphasis to reacting to child sexual abuse/pedophilia/hebephilia/paraphilia proponents (e.g. Blanchard et al., 2009), and instead to proactively argue independently for the understanding and acceptance of the intrinsic and inalienable rights of children to explore, experiment with, and enjoy their own sexuality with anyone they choose, with the only caveat being that these children do no *real* (as opposed to culturally imagined or imposed) harm to themselves or to others. Levine put it well:

Sex is not harmful to children. It is a vehicle to self-knowledge, love, healing, creativity, adventure, and intense feelings of aliveness. . . . Our moral obligation to the next generation is to make a world in which every child can partake safely, a world in which the needs and desires of every child . . . can be marvelously fulfilled (2002, p. 225).

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