

Sex in Pedophilic Relationships: An Empirical Investigation Among a Nonrepresentative Group of Boys

THEODORUS G. M. SANDFORT

Abstract

Little research has been done on children involved in pedophilic relationships. Although there are many preconceptions about the nature of the "sexual abuse" occurring in these relationships, little is known about how the children involved actually feel about these sexual contacts. In this research the question of whether sexual relations with an adult can be a positive experience for a child is addressed. The subjects of the study were 25 boys (10 to 16 years of age) who were then involved in pedophilic relationships with adult males. These boys were located through their adult partners, who in turn were approached through pedophile workgroups. Although the boys were able to point to some negative aspects of their sexual contacts, most of them reported experiencing these contacts as predominantly positive. The sexual contacts were found to have had no negative influence upon the boys' sense of general well-being, nor did the boys perceive in these contacts a misuse of authority by the adult. Although there are some limitations to the general applicability of these results, they have relevance for further research, therapy, and legislation concerning pedophilic activities. These implications are briefly discussed.

The term pedophilia denotes feelings of adult attraction to children. Although pedophilic feelings can be experienced by individuals to a greater or lesser degree, a person who experiences these feelings in a very strong, or exclusive, way can be considered a pedophile (Sandfort, 1979b). Some authors stress the sexual aspect of the attraction

Theodorus G. M. Sandfort, MA, is an Assistant Lecturer at the Department of Clinical Psychology, Psychotherapy, and Prevention, State University of Utrecht, The Netherlands. This article is based on the report *Het Seksuele Aspect van Pedofiele Relaties, Ervaringen van Jongens (The Sexual Aspect of Pedophilic Relationships: Experiences of Boys)*, by the author, 1981. The author wishes to thank H. Hermans, B. Schraven, and R. Tielman for their comments on earlier drafts of this manuscript, and Francis D. Sheldon for his assistance in translating.

Requests for reprints should be sent to Theo Sandfort, MA, Instituut voor Klinische Psychologie en Persoonlijksleer, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, Trans 4, 3512 JK Utrecht, The Netherlands.

(Finkelhor, 1979a; Money, 1977), but for others these feelings also include an interest in how children feel and think (Brongersma, 1975; Eglinton, 1971; Howells, 1979; O'Carroll, 1980). Here, the term "pedophilic relationship" will be used when the older and the younger partner both feel attracted towards each other, are involved with each other, and meet each other regularly.

Pedophilic relationships can be very diverse. They have their own dynamics, are not always monogamous, and, although the duration can be quite lengthy, are by definition limited to the youth of the younger partner (Sandfort, 1979b). There are pedophilic relationships without sexual contact, and there can also be single pedosexual contacts without a relationship. Furthermore, pedophilic feelings do not necessarily play a part in every case of sexual contact with a child. In father-daughter incest, for example, pedophilia, as defined above, has seldom been found to be the motivating factor (Meiselman, 1979).

Although sexuality may or may not be a part of these relationships, most discussions about pedophilia are centered on its sexual aspect. For some people, laymen as well as scientists, sexual contact with children always involves sexual abuse, but others claim that such experiences can be pleasurable and positive to children (e.g., Eglinton, 1971; O'Carroll, 1980; Rossman, 1976). However, empirical data on the children's experiences seldom enter into such discussions. Most of the scanty data available are rather biased. For one thing, examples of sex between children and adults are mostly selected from cases involving sexual abuse. For another, these contacts, irrespective of the experience of the child, are a priori thought to involve abuse, and the child considered to be a victim (e.g., Brant & Tisza, 1977; Burgess & Holmstrom, 1975; Peters, 1976). However, Finkelhor (1970a) reports in a more representative, retrospective investigation that some of both the boys and girls in his sample reacted with pleasure and interest to the contact. As indicated by Finkelhor's "mean trauma scores," some of his respondents, especially the boys, said in retrospect that the experience was "neutral" or "mostly positive." Nevertheless, Finkelhor still speaks of "victimization." Here, as elsewhere, he does so on ethical grounds (Finkelhor, 1979b). Landis (1956) reports that in an unrepresentative, retrospective survey, boys in 39% of the cases and girls in 17% of the cases reacted with interest, or were surprised but not frightened.

To add to this small store of data, an investigation was conducted on a small group of young people to gain broader insight into the way

they experience sexual contacts in pedophilic relationships. The central question was whether sex with an adult can ever be a positive experience for a child, but the research was designed also to explore both the positive and negative components of this sexual experience. Because this sexual contact is but one aspect of the young person's experience world, it should be studied in the context of other things in his experience world which he finds important. By doing so, the relationships between the sexual contact and the young person's general sense of well-being can be established. Because of the widespread preconception that sexuality between children and adults always involves abuse or misuse, the study also investigated the interaction between both partners in the sexual contact.

The Self Confrontation Method (SCM) (Hermans, 1976, 1978) was found to be well suited to answering these questions. It can be used to gain an overview of what is important for a particular person at a certain moment of his or her life, and can also give some insight into the meaning of each of these aspects within that person's experience world. Although there are apparent similarities among the SCM, Kelly's Role Construct Repertory Test (Kelly, 1955), and Osgood's Semantic Differential (Osgood, 1952), because they all explore personal meaning, these methods have some basic differences. Kelly's test aims to collect the basic constructs with which a person intellectually interprets his world. The Semantic Differential, on the other hand, looks for the affective meaning that certain predetermined concepts have for a person. The SCM, however, leads a person to identify the basic aspects within his experience world around which he organizes his experiences (Hermans, 1976). The SCM is administered through an interview, and the subject has a substantial share in determining the course of the "self-investigation."

A person's experience world is not considered to be static. The basic aspects or so-called "value areas," as well as their affective and behavioral meanings, change over time. This change is termed the "experience process." Therefore, the method is usually employed more than once. By using the SCM, investigator and subject gain a deeper understanding of the subject's experience world, enlarging their comprehension of his or her entire life process. This makes the SCM useful in therapeutic as well as research settings. To the researcher, the SCM offers a richness of qualitative as well as quantitative data, and has proved to be a workable instrument in a variety of research and treatment applications (Hermans & Verstraeten, 1980). With

regard to the reliability of the different scales, Van Assen (1982) reports that the scales have "sufficient" internal consistency. Other research shows that some underlying concepts of the SCM have construct as well as discriminative validity (Hermans & Tak-Van De Ven, 1973, Ramzy-Saleh Guirguis & Hermans, 1973).

Method

The Research Group

Twenty-five boys participated in this investigation. At the time all were involved in a pedophilic relationship with an adult male in which sexual contacts occurred. It was not possible to find any boys who had relationships with adult females or girls involved in pedophilic relationships.

The boys were approached through their adult partners, who in turn were approached through the Pedophile Workgroups of the Netherlands Society for Sexual Reform.¹ This was found to be the only practical way to locate these children. Because the confidence of both the older partner and the child had to be gained, assembling the subjects was a time-consuming task. Not all the pedophiles who were approached actually participated in the research. Some did not do so because they did not have a relationship at that moment or because they had a relationship without sexual contact. In some cases the child was too young or too old (see below). Some people feared negative effects upon their young partners through their participation, whereas others were opposed to the research as such. The final decision as to whether or not to cooperate in the research was always made by the child. As far as the researcher was able to judge, none of the adults exerted any pressure on the children to cooperate. The older partner often stressed that, if the child did not want to participate, they were not going to persuade him. No specific selection process was used in composing the research group.

The boys varied in age from 10 to 16 years, the mean age being 13 years, 4 months. Physiologically, there were both sexually mature and

¹There exist about 12 such local groups in the major cities of The Netherlands. The members are mainly pedophiles. These groups have internal as well as external functions. Internally they help people who have difficulties because of their pedophilic desires and assist others in the process of "coming out" as pedophiles. They also organize meetings in which pictures are shown or lectures given, to confront a broader group of people with pedophilia, child sexuality, youth liberation, and related topics. A national group also undertakes action for legal reform and edits a monthly magazine.

immature boys among them. Ten years was taken as a minimum age because of the methodological demands of the SCM; the upper limit was taken as 16 years, because the Dutch Penal Code penalizes sex with a person up to that age. Within these limits, younger children were sought because sex with them is commonly seen to be more problematic.

The majority of the boys (16/25) lived at home with their parents; most of the others lived with divorced, sometimes remarried, mothers. The boys came from both small and large families, where they had different ordinal positions. According to their older partners, 15 boys came from the lower social classes, 8 from the middle class, and 2 from the upper-middle class. With one exception, none of the boys' parents were actively religious.

At the time of the investigation, the various relationships had been going on for from 2 months to 6 years, although it was not always possible to establish the duration exactly. The frequency with which the partners saw one another varied from once a week to almost every day. One of the boys lived with the pedophile in the pedophile's home.

Some of the adult partners had simultaneous relationships with more than one boy; five of them brought us into contact with two boys each. The ages of the older partners varied between 26 and 66 years, with the mean age being 39. Most of the men had had a great deal of pedophiliac experience, in monogamous or polygamous relationships, or as isolated sexual contacts. Of the 20 pedophiles, 12 had been in conflict with the law on one or more occasions.

Collection and Processing of the Data

The most important part of the research data was collected by means of the SCM (Hermans, 1976). In accordance with a procedure adapted for young people (Bonke, 1977; Sandfort, 1979a, 1981), certain so-called *value areas* were sought which at that moment were experienced as being important within the boys' experience worlds. These value areas refer to things the boy does frequently, things he enjoys very much, people with whom he gets on well, etc. If a boy did not spontaneously include the sexual contact as a value area in his self-investigation, he was invited by the researcher to do so.

Next, the affective and behavioral meaning of each value area was established. To do this, the frequency with which 14 specific positive and negative feelings were experienced with respect to each value area were indicated on a 6-point scale (0 = *never*; 5 = *very often*) (Bonke,

1977; Sandfort, 1981; see Table 2). On the same scale were measured how often the young person actually experienced each of these different feelings in general (General Experience) and how often he would like to experience these feelings (Ideal Experience).

Some value areas in which individual people were central were selected to be scored on their behavioral aspect also, using the same 6-point scale. The boys were asked to indicate how often a person implicated in that value area showed certain positive and negative behaviors toward them. Likewise, each boy was asked to report on his own behavior toward the same person. This procedure was used to gain insight into the interaction between the partners in their sexual contact. Use was made of a list of behaviors for adults, adapted and previously tried out for boys (Hermans, 1981; see Table 2).

After the first research session with each boy, standard indices were computed from the feeling and behavior scores of each value area (Hermans, 1976; see Table 1). These indices provide information about the affective and behavioral meaning value areas have within the experience world of a person. By establishing hierarchies for each index, the value areas can be compared.

In a second talk some insights about the boys' experience worlds already gained from the data were further discussed with the boys. At the same time, additional information was collected without using the

Table 1

Self Confrontation Method Indices, as Computed on the Feeling Scores

<i>P</i>	the degree to which a person has <i>positive feelings</i> with regard to a value area (the sum of the positive feeling scores; $0 \leq P \leq 35$)
<i>N</i>	the degree to which a person has <i>negative feelings</i> with regard to a value area (the sum of the negative feeling scores; $0 \leq N \leq 35$)
<i>C</i>	the degree to which a person is emotionally concerned in a value area; the <i>concernedness</i> of that area ($P + N, \leq C \leq 70$)
<i>Q</i>	the degree to which a person has more positive than negative feelings with regard to a value area; the <i>quality</i> of that area ($[P/(P + N)] \times 100$; $0 \leq Q \leq 100$)
<i>G</i>	the extent to which a value area concerning a person's way of experiencing (the specific pattern of feelings) is connected with the General Experience; the <i>generalization tendency</i> of that area (product-moment correlation; $-1.00 \leq P \leq +1.00$)
<i>I</i>	the extent to which a value area concerning a person's way of experiencing (the specific pattern of feelings) is connected with the Ideal Experience; the <i>idealization tendency</i> of that area (product-moment correlation; $-1.00 \leq I \leq +1.00$)

Note. *P*, *N*, *C*, and *Q* indices were also computed on the behavior scores. The meaning of these indices is more or less analogous to those of the feelings indices, although for each value area there is both an index for the behavior of the young person toward the other person involved in that value area and an index for the other way around.

SCM, particularly about the sexual aspect of the pedophilic relationship. Questions asked included how long the partners had known each other, when the first sexual contact had taken place and who had taken the initiative on that occasion, and who took the sexual initiative in the more recent contacts. Then the boys were asked about the place of the sexual contacts in their social environment: what people important to the boys thought about the relationships and the sexual contacts or what they would have thought had they known about them, and what that meant to the boys themselves. Finally the boys were asked their own opinions about having sex with their adult partners.

I conducted all of the interviews with the boys between July and December 1980. The average lengths of the first and second interviews were 90 minutes and 30 minutes, respectively. The interviews were conducted privately with only the interviewer and interviewee present and, with only one exception, took place in the home of the adult partner or in another environment familiar to the boy. The planned procedure worked out well in practice, although difficulties were sometimes encountered in the supplementary interviews because the younger partner was not used to talking about his own sexuality or lacked a broad enough vocabulary (in one case the boy had only a vague idea of sexuality as a concept), or because for many boys the sexual contact was still an experience upon which they had reflected but little. The ability of the researcher to talk about sexuality may possibly be significant here (cf. Lief & Berman, 1976). Everything was done to create a nonjudgmental atmosphere in the interviews, so that the boys could speak out freely. In addition the boys knew from their older partners that the interviewer did not have preconceived opinions about sexuality between adults and children.

It is possible that in the interviews the boys told certain things in order to please their adult partners or left things out to protect them. However, pedophiles assured me that they had not influenced the boys to say certain things or to leave other things out, and it was my impression that, as far as content was concerned, the boys participated unprepared in the interviews and were very spontaneous. Some boys actually told some unpleasant things about their partners. Furthermore, the boys were assured that nothing would happen with their data without their consent. A few boys did not want their data to be shown to their older partners.

The physical side of the pedosexual contact was discussed with the adult partners. Taking this up directly with the children could have

caused difficulties and inhibited their communication. The topics discussed were first sexual contact, taking of the sexual initiative, attitude of the boys during the contact, physiological sexual maturity of the boys, and kinds of sexual contacts which took place. The backgrounds of both the older and the younger partners were also discussed to get a clear picture of the people who participated in the research and to be able to compare the older and the younger partners. Efforts were made to create a nonjudgmental atmosphere for the pedophiles.

The interviews with the adult partners were held either before or after the first session with the boy or after the second session. In those cases where data had already been obtained from the boy about himself, the information was discussed with the older partner, if the boy gave permission to do so. Sometimes this helped the pedophile to provide further insights.

Results

The Nature of the Sexual Contacts

The sexual contacts began at different times in different relationships; the younger and older partners' statements about this differed somewhat on two occasions. This might be due to a different understanding of what "sexual contact" meant to each partner. Four boys could not remember the first contact. According to the older partners, in 8 of the 25 cases the first sexual contact occurred within the first encounter, in 9 cases after the partners had met several times, and in the remaining 8 cases after they had known each other a month or longer. The idea that the sexual aspect is introduced gradually into pedophilic relationships (Bernard, 1975; Schuijjer, 1978) seems not to have been the case here.

Only in a few cases did the younger person take the initiative to make the first sexual contact; more often the older partner took it. In 3 cases, according to both partners in each, a third person who was present at the first sexual contact took the initiative. In 12 of the other 22 cases, the answers of both partners agreed. Five of the other boys could not remember. In the remaining 5 cases both partners made different claims about who had taken the initiative; these differences were not systematic. These findings do not correspond to the image of children usually taking the initiative in sexual contacts (De Groot, 1979; Rossman, 1976). However, it appears that a number of the boys

took nonsexual initiatives to establish personal bonds with the adult men.

If, during the course of a pedophilic relationship, sexual contacts became more frequent, sexual initiative began to be shared more and more by both partners. According to both the younger and the older partners in 19 cases, the initiative then came either from both at once or varying from one or the other.

According to the older partners, masturbation occurred in all of the relationships, although in different forms. When the younger partner masturbated the older to orgasm, the older partner always did this to the boy as well, whereas the reverse was not always the case, and in these instances the older partner saw to his own orgasm.

Fellatio also occurred very regularly, although not within every relationship. The older partners did this more often to the younger partners than vice versa. Whereas the boys regularly ejaculated into the mouths of the older partners, the reverse never happened. Oral-anal contact occurred in almost a third of the relationships but always by the older partner to the younger partner, never the reverse. Anal penetration occurred in six of the relationships, and here it was mostly the boys who penetrated their older partners.

What the boys did sexually for their older partners was always equal to or less than what the men did for the boys, suggesting that the sexual feelings of the boy may have taken a central place in the sexual contact. The younger person appeared to have some freedom to decide for himself how far he wished to go, with the older partner allowing this freedom without placing demands upon him. The physical intimacy of the sexual contacts described in this investigation seemed higher than that which has usually been reported in research into sex between children and adults (Landis, 1956; Peters, 1976). This also suggests that the adults' answers are valid since they would be unlikely to exaggerate the sexual intimacy. This pattern of sexual contacts is in agreement with what 18- to 20-year-old boys report retrospectively about former pedophilic sexual contacts (Sandfort, 1983).

The Sexual Contact as Value Area

Of the 25 boys, 9 spontaneously defined sexual contact with their older partners as a value area. In six cases this occurred when the younger partner was asked what he liked a lot. In the other 15 cases sexual contact was included as a value area at the request of the researcher. The wording most commonly used by the boys was "Sex

with [the older partner]" and "Making love with [the older partner]." Less frequent was "Sexual contact with [the older partner]," and (once) "Going to bed with [the older partner]."

Most of the boys spontaneously formulated other nonsexual value areas which referred to the pedophilic relationship. These value areas mostly concerned the older partner, one of his qualities or the way he behaved, being with the older partner, or activities undertaken together. Occasionally the relationship itself was included as a value area. Examples of these value areas are: "Barend,² who thinks the same way I do," "Roel, who is nice and with whom I feel more free," "Ruud, with whom I can really talk," "The way Chris looks at other boys," "Robert won't put up with much and is quick to interfere," "Richard, with whom I have so many experiences," "Being with Joop," "Gerard, whom I love," and "My relationship with Albert." A final example concerns an external influence on the relationship: "The law, which prohibits the relationship between Albert and me."

Three boys at first formulated value areas only connected with the pedophilic relationship. Not until this was pointed out to them did they relate my questions to their total experience world. Value areas formulated by the boys which did not concern the pedophilic relationship referred, among other things, to the boys' home ("Parents, because you can take your problems to them," "My father, because he resents us a lot"), to other persons in the boys' environments ("The schoolmistress pays a lot of attention to us," "Micky, because he teases me sometimes"), to pleasant and unpleasant activities ("Sports, for fun and getting in shape," "Going out or to the disco," "Making my bed, setting the table, washing up," "Homework"), and to things which the boys thought about ("How it's going to have to go at home," "What I'm going to be when I grow up," "How I should act with my girlfriend"). In addition to these rather concrete value areas, some more abstract ones were also formulated: "Nature," "If I'm in trouble," "Living free of society." Value areas which do not refer in any way to the sexual contact are not discussed here except as they can be compared with those value areas related to the sexual contact.

The Behavioral Aspect of the Sexual Contact

In the opinions of the older partners, all of the boys behaved in a cooperative rather than a resisting manner in the sexual contacts. In

²To protect the respondents' privacy, the original names have been changed.

addition, the adults experienced 14 of the boys as predominantly active in the sexual contact, 5 as both active and passive, and 6 as predominantly passive. Sometimes reasons were given for the boys being more or less passive, for example, that the boy was still strongly directed toward himself or that his sexual preference was predominantly heterosexual (the heterosexual interests of some boys also appeared in the interviews).³ Although not unequivocal, there is a positive correlation between the boy being sexually mature and the amount of sexual activity in the relationship. The younger person's objective for participating in the sexual contact was not investigated. The idea that all younger partners always undergo the contact passively finds no support in the older partner's descriptions.

A crucial point in any discussion about pedophilia is the behavior of the adult in his sexual contacts as perceived by the younger persons. In this investigation the boys said that, in their sexual contacts, they experienced the behavior of their older partners as predominantly positive and found hardly any negative behavior. This resulted in a high *P* index and a low *N* index. In 21 of the 25 cases the boys said they experienced exclusively positive behavior on the part of their partners, whereas in the remaining four cases the highest frequency (2 cases) with which negative behavior occurred was "sometimes." The mean *Q* index for the behavior of the older partner toward the younger partner in the sexual contact was 98, which is exceedingly high. This composite index indicates that the sexual behavior was experienced as predominantly positive.

The kinds of behavior and feelings which the boys associated with the sexual contact and which resulted in the high *P*, low *N*, and high *Q* indices are shown in Table 2. Concerning the sexual contacts, the boys reported that the adult paid attention to them, considered their feelings, and cooperated with them. The mean frequency with which these kinds of positive behavior occurred lies between "often" and "very often" (4.64, 4.44, and 4.28, respectively). These kinds of positive behavior and the strength with which they were experienced almost excluded the negative kinds of behavior. Negative behaviors occurred with a mean frequency between "never" and "hardly ever" (.00 to .16). The mean correlation between the way the boys experienced the

³The boys were not explicitly asked about their other sexual interests or sexual contacts. Some raised this point themselves or formulated value areas about girlfriends or sexual contacts with other people.

Table 2

The Behavior Scores of the Adults and the Young People's Feeling Scores

Behaviors	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Feelings</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
to pay attention to (+) ^a	4.64	0.48	nice (+)	4.52	0.57
to make allowance for (+)	4.44	0.81	happy (+)	4.24	0.76
to cooperate (+)	4.28	0.92	free (+)	4.00	0.80
to give chances (+)	3.84	1.37	safe (+)	3.80	1.33
to help (+)	3.52	1.42	contented (+)	3.60	1.13
to consult (+)	2.84	1.64	proud (+)	2.80	1.96
to encourage (+)	2.24	1.82	strong (+)	1.24	1.17
to leave in the lurch (-)	0.16	0.54	naughty (-)	1.12	1.28
to coerce (-)	0.12	0.44	afraid (-)	1.04	1.34
to make fun of (-)	0.08	0.39	dislike (-)	0.64	1.09
to domineer (-)	0.08	0.39	shy (-)	0.60	1.26
to deceive (-)	—	—	angry (-)	0.52	0.90
to scare (-)	—	—	sad (-)	0.48	0.75
to mislead (-)	—	—	lonely (-)	0.32	0.62

Note. $n = 25$; the range of each scale was 0-5 (never-very often).

^aThe positive and the negative quality of the behaviors and the feelings is indicated with (+) and (-), respectively.

behavior of the older partner in the sexual contact and the way they experienced his behavior towards them in general was positive and high (.90). This indicates that the boys experienced a certain continuity in the adult's behavior and that the sexual contact was not an isolated aspect within the total relationship.

These data on the partners' behaviors are open to different interpretations, as is always the case in self-reporting. For example, the boys might have been unconsciously guided by the positive and negative qualities of the terminology used rather than the actual behavior of the adult partners. Elsewhere (Sandfort, 1981) I have shown that these and other possible explanations are unable in themselves to account sufficiently for the recorded scores.

These results conflict with the widespread idea of the adult misusing his authority in a sex contact with a child. They do not disprove the existence of differences in power between the boy and the older partner, which probably exist whenever children and adults interact, but do tell us something about how the older partner handled his relatively greater power. The boys never mentioned misuse of power in the sexual contacts. This is consistent with the description of the sexual behavior in which the boys appeared as subjects rather than objects, and that suggests that the boys' wishes and desires played a fundamental part in the contacts.

The Affective Aspect of the Sexual Contact

To determine how the sexual contact was affectively experienced by the boys, the 14 specific feelings listed in Table 2 were scored in the relevant value areas. Positive feelings predominated in the affective experience of the boys' sexual contacts. "Happy" and "nice" probably refer directly to the sexual contact. Another feeling which frequently occurred was "free," corroborating the older partners' reports about the behavior. Feelings such as "proud" and "strong," apparently of less importance, received low scores, but on the average they occurred more often than any of the negative feelings. "Pride" had the highest standard deviation and was seemingly the most ambiguous feeling in the experience of the sexual contact: For some boys the sexual contact was associated with strong feelings of pride, but for other boys it was not at all.

Negative feelings such as "distaste," "fear," and "guilt," some of which might be expected to have played a part here, occurred on the average from "almost never" to "never." Where negative feelings did occur they were not always directly associated with factors within the sexual contact, but sometimes with factors outside the contact (see below).

The indices computed from the feeling scores give a coherent picture of the affective meaning of the sexual contact. Here the boys experienced a great deal of positive feeling and very little negative feeling (a relatively high *P* index and low *N* index in comparison with other value areas). For some boys, however, there were other aspects of their experience worlds in which they experienced even more positive and even less negative feelings: These were value areas which concerned, for example, hobbies, parents, the older partner (apart from the sexual contact), or other persons. Moreover, the feelings the boys experienced in the sexual contacts were similar to the feelings they liked to experience in general (the mean *I* index of the sexual contact, .79, was high and positive). Thus positive feelings predominated over negative feelings in the sexual contacts. The mean *Q* index was 84 and five boys had the maximum value, 100. For one boy the *Q* index was only 50; as is explained at length elsewhere (Sandfort, 1981) this boy interpreted "sexual contact" in a rather broad way. While he liked the physical contact, he found the actual sexual contact less pleasurable and that is why he experienced positive and negative emotions equally. The *Q* index of the sexual contact for all the boys was high in comparison with that of their other value areas. In 17 cases sexual contact stood in the

upper half of the *Q* hierarchies. In most of the *Q* hierarchies where this was not the case, there were a great many value areas which were experienced as predominantly positive.

The boys were affectively involved in the sexual contact to varying degrees (i.e., the *C* index differed from boy to boy). For some boys sexual contact belonged with those value areas in which they experienced the greatest feelings, but for the majority there were other aspects within their experience world which they affectively experienced as being more important. For not one of the boys did the sexual contact stand at the bottom of the *C* hierarchy, which would have indicated that this area had only small meaning for him. For two boys the sexual contact was more affectively important than was the older partner; the *C* index differed 3 points and 10 points, respectively, for those two boys. These findings all indicate that the majority of the boys experienced the sexual contact as an important part of the relationship.

The correlation between the way a particular value area is experienced and the boy's general experience (*G* index) indicates how much that value area "colors" the way in which he feels in general (Hermans, 1976). Thus value areas can be delimited which have a negative influence on his sense of well-being. Though for each boy the *G* index of the sexual contact has a different value, for none of them did this contact seem to have had a negative influence upon their general well-being. In addition, where it was found to influence their well-being, it did so in a positive way.

In summary, for practically all of the boys their sexual contact with their older partners emerged as a predominantly positive experience. These indices also show that within the experience worlds of the boys the sexual contacts could have different meanings for each individual.

Positive and Negative Aspects of the Sexual Contact

For most of the boys, the pleasurable aspects of the sexual contact appeared to be self-evident and inherent in the contact. After extensive questioning, 23 of the boys formulated at least one positive aspect. Of the total of 29 value areas related to the sexual contact, most referred to pleasurable sensations experienced. Feelings of "friendship" or "love" were also mentioned. In most of the other value areas, this aspect of intimacy was formulated separately. Examples of the formulated areas were "Making love with Bert is pleasant," "It is nice," "Sex with the right person gives you fine feelings," and "With sex you show love for each other." For one boy sexual contact was

decidedly not a matter of personal intimacy but rather one of physical pleasure; he formulated as a value area "Because it is nice, not because I love him."

The positive aspects mentioned by the boys correspond with answers the older partners gave as to what the boys sought in the sexual contact. According to the pedophiles, the boys were seeking such sexual pleasures as the joy of doing it, the orgasm, the exciting tension, the adventure, and feelings of being physically comfortable such as tenderness and being caressed. The older partners also mentioned warmth, security, friendship, and love, and a few added that the boys liked to do favors for them or called attention to a sense of self-esteem which the boys derived from the sexual contact.

Of the 25 boys, 10 were unable, even after extensive questioning, to formulate any negative sides of the sexual contact. The other 15 boys formulated 17 negative aspects, 2 of them having formulated 2 each. Nine of the negative aspects referred to the boys' environments, for example, "Other people bothering me about my relationship with Peter," "I would be ashamed if my parents found out about it," "Danger from the law," and "It's a dirty trick on my girlfriend."

Six negative aspects related to the older partner. Examples were "He's often unshaved in the morning, and the whole day his tongue tastes dirty," "When Eric is being silly while we are making love," and "Saying no when he wants to do something I don't want to do." The remaining two negative aspects referred to the sexual contact itself; one was "Sometimes it can only happen once."

Because these negative aspects are of such differing natures, they cannot be compared very effectively. However, none of these negative aspects resemble the ideal experiences and sometimes are their opposites: The *I* index of these aspects varies from low (.09) to strongly negative (-.96).

The negative aspects formulated by the boys which were related to their environments closely correspond to the explanations they gave for those negative feelings experienced within the sexual contact. Negative feelings relating to the older partner or the sexual contact itself occurred less frequently.

The relative importance of the positive and negative aspects in the overall experience of the sexual contact can be assessed by looking at the correlation between them. A strong and positive correlation indicates that a particular aspect has a pronounced influence, while a low or negative correlation shows that this aspect is of small importance in

determining the global experience of the sexual contact. For the positive aspects, the mean correlation was .85. For the negative aspects, the correlation varied from .22 to $-.71$, with the majority of cases showing low or negative values. The overall experience of the sexual contact thus appeared to be determined mainly by its positive aspects. The small part played by the negative aspects especially stands out when one looks at the various indices in connection with the other value areas. The *C* index of the negative aspects for the sexual contact was generally low. For eight boys the *C* indices took the lowest place in the *C* hierarchies, while for the other seven boys who formulated a negative aspect the *C* indices were at the bottom of the *C* hierarchies, except in two cases. The negative aspects also appeared to have had hardly any influence upon the overall experience of the boys; the positive *G* indices were .06, .10, .39, and .45, respectively, whereas the other 13 negative *G* indices ranged from $-.04$ to $-.57$. One possible explanation of the minor role these negative aspects apparently played could be that they were formulated only after persistent questioning. In this way minor factors can be exaggerated. They still remain, however, aspects which the boys experienced.

The Place of the Sexual Contact in the Social Environment

In 7 of the 25 cases, according to both the younger partner and (independently determined) the older partner, the parents of the boy explicitly knew about the relationship and the sexual contacts. Nearly all of those parents accepted the relationship completely, and their sons appreciated this attitude, as one boy said, "Otherwise I would have to do everything in secret and I wouldn't like that."

In the other 18 cases the parents were not fully informed, although either the adult or the boy sometimes suspected that they knew about the sexual contacts because, for example, they were aware of the pedophilic preference of their son's older friend. In most of these 18 cases the parents accepted the relationship; some were indifferent; and in 2 cases, according to the older partners, the father disapproved of the relationship. Most of the 18 boys thought that if their parents knew about the sexual aspect of the relationship they would not approve, and a few thought their parents would react even more strongly. A few other boys did not know how their parents would react.

When it was thought likely that the parents would respond negatively, all the boys except two disagreed with the assumed reactions of their parents. The other two boys had no clear idea as to what they

would think about their parents' hypothetical negative attitudes. Some of the boys emphasized the feeling that they had the right to think for themselves about these matters. One boy said, "It's annoying to me, because I would rather put my cards down on the table with my parents." Two boys thought it possible that they would no longer be allowed to visit their adult partners if their parents learned about the sex contacts and the boys said that they would rather not take that risk.

Eight of the 25 boys said that they had some friends who knew about the sexual contacts; most of these friends also visited the older partner and "did it too." Some boys had other school friends who knew about it, and feared this could lead to unpleasant name-calling episodes. The fear of being called "queer" or "gay" was very salient for many of the boys. Only a few friends could be expected to cause no difficulties. The boys thought that most of the others would disapprove of the contacts if they found out. Although they could understand the feelings of their friends, the boys did not agree with them. Some of the boys pointed out that, since their friends didn't really know what the sexual contact felt like, they couldn't really have an opinion about it worth considering. One of the boys said, "If they just experienced it once themselves, they would speak differently about it," and seemed to admit that in the beginning he, too, had found it a bit strange. Some of the boys said that the negative reactions of their friends were "just jealousy."

Although some boys explicitly regretted not being open toward their parents and friends in these matters, they all said that they enjoyed the sexual contact. One boy did not understand why others made problems about it: "I have to decide whether I like it or not," he said. "To me it's not a problem, definitely not—otherwise I would have broken off the affair long ago."

Discussion

There are some serious limitations to the results obtained in this investigation. Only boys who had sexual pedophilic relationships with men were studied; these were probably the more accessible, "better" relationships. Neither the sample of boys nor their relationships can be considered a representative sample, which, for practical reasons, probably could not be obtained in any case. As a result these data cannot be generalized *in toto* to other pedophilic relationships. In addition only one kind of adult-child sexual contact was investigated here, namely

pedosexual contacts which occurred within a pedophilic relationship. Incestuous or single contacts or contacts which take place with manifest forms of abuse were not studied, and these data are not applicable to them. However, the findings are relevant to the question posed at the beginning of the research, and it is quite likely that there are other young people to whom these data *do* apply.

This investigation leaves many questions unanswered, such as the significance of sexual contact between child and adult in the further development of the child (see Constantine, 1981, for a review of this question). Also unanswered are the questions, "How sexual is the child?" and, "How, or in what way, is a child sexual?"

The major conclusion of this research is that some sexual contacts exist between children and adults which are experienced in a predominantly positive way by the children and which the children report as having no detrimental effects on their sense of well-being. The adults did not, in the opinion of these children, misuse their authority. This conclusion has a number of implications for further investigation, treatment, and legislation.

Future research into pedophilia should not a priori categorize the adults in pedosexual contacts as offenders and the children as victims, labeling all pedosexual contact as abuse or misuse. Pedophilic relationships may best be viewed by the researcher initially as simply another variety of human relationship. Furthermore, samples for research should no longer be drawn only from the judicial system and child guidance clinics.

These data call for a fresh look at the treatment of pedophiles. If pedophilia is not always harmful, then one must ask whether it is appropriate to try to "cure" pedophiles instead of helping them, if necessary, to deal with their feelings so they can be expressed in a socially responsible, or even constructive, manner.

In the area of child guidance, these results show that sexual contact in a relationship with an adult can, in some cases, be a positive part of a child's experience world. This is not to deny the existence of the serious problem of sexual abuse of children, but it argues for a kind of guidance which respects both the desires and the rights of the child.

Laws dealing with sexual contact between children and adults differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Certainly these data do *not* warrant the abolition of all such provisions, as this would only endanger children. On the other hand, some boys in this research viewed the current laws in The Netherlands prohibiting adult-child sexual contact as

threatening to children, rather than as offering them protection. In my opinion, provisions which provide extra protection to children should not interfere with their rights of sexual self-determination, and this should include the right to accept as well as to refuse the sexual initiative of an adult.

References

- BERNARD, F. (1975). *Pedofilie* [Pedophilia]. Bussum, The Netherlands: Aquarius.
- BONKE, P. (1977). *Een nieuw perspectief* [A new perspective]. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Catholic University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands.
- BRANT, R. S. T., & TISZA, V. B. (1977). The sexually misused child. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 44, 80-90.
- BRONGERSMA, E. (1975). Over pedofielen en "kinderlokkers" [On pedophiles and "child molesters"]. *Intermediair*, 11(18), 1-15; (20), 31-39; (21), 47-55.
- BURGESS, A. W., & HOLMSTROM, L. L. (1975). Sexual trauma of children and adolescents. *Nursing Clinics of North America*, 10, 551-563.
- CONSTANTINE, L. L. (1981). Effects of early sexual experiences: A review and synthesis of research. In L. L. Constantine & F. M. Martinson (Eds.), *Children and sex: New findings, new perspectives* (pp. 217-244). Boston: Little, Brown & Co.
- DE GROOT, D. (1979). *Pedofilie* [Pedophilia]. The Hague, Protestantse Stichting voor Verantwoorde Gezinsvorming (Protestant Foundation of Responsible Family Foundation).
- EGLINTON, G. Z. (1971). *Greek love*. London: Neville Spearman.
- FINKELHOR, D. (1979a). *Sexually victimized children*. New York: The Free Press.
- FINKELHOR, D. (1979b). What's wrong with sex between adults and children? Ethics and the problem of sexual abuse. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 49, 692-697.
- HERMANS, H. J. M. (1976). *Value areas and their development*. Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger.
- HERMANS, H. J. M. (1978). De aard van het waarderingsonderzoek [The art of valuation research]. *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor de Psychologie*, 33, 423-440.
- HERMANS, H. J. M. (1981). *Persoonlijkheid en waardering* [Personality and valuation]. Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger.
- HERMANS, H. J. M., & TAK-VAN DE VEN, J. C. M. (1973). Bestaat er een oorspronkelijke dimensie "positief innerlijk welbevinden?" [Are there arguments in favor of an original dimension "positive psychological well-being?"]. *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor de Psychologie*, 27, 731-754.
- HERMANS, H. J. M., & VERSTRAETEN, D. (Eds.). (1980). *Zelfonderzoek, waarderungen van mensen in diverse toepassingsvelden* [Self-investigation: People's valuations in diverse fields of application]. Deventer, The Netherlands: Van Loghum Slaterus.
- HOWELLS, K. (1979). Some meanings of children for pedophiles. In M. Cook & G. Wilson (Eds.), *Love and attraction: An international conference* (pp. 55-92). Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- KELLY, G. A. (1955). *The psychology of personal constructs*. New York: Norton.
- LANDIS, J. T. (1956). Experiences of 500 children with adult sexual deviation. *Psychiatric Quarterly Supplements*, 30, 91-109.
- LIEF, H. I., & BERMAN, E. M. (1976). Sexual interviewing of the individual patient through the life cycle. In W. W. Oaks, G. A. Melchiodi, & I. Fischer (Eds.), *Sex and the life cycle* (pp. 1-11). New York: Grune & Stratton.

- MEISELMAN, K. C. (1979). *Incest: A psychological study of causes and effects with treatment recommendations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- MONEY, J. (1977). Paraphilias. In J. Money & H. Musaph (Eds.), *Handbook of sexology* (pp. 917-928). Amsterdam: Excerpta Medica.
- O'CARROLL, T. (1980). *Paedophilia: The radical case*. London: Peter Owen.
- OSGOOD, C. E. (1952). The nature and measurement of meaning. *Psychological Bulletin*, 49, 197-237.
- PETERS, J. J. (1976). Children who are victims of sexual assault and the psychology of offenders. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 30, 398-421.
- RAMZY-SALEH GUIRGUIS, N., & HERMANS, H. J. M. (1973). Correlates of psychological well-being and emotionality. *Gedrag*, 1, 64-91.
- ROSSMAN, P. (1976). *Sexual experiences between men and boys*. New York: Association Press.
- SANDFORT, T. G. M. (1979a). De ervaringswereld van kinderen in pedofiele relaties [The experience world of children in pedophilic relationships]. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Nijmegen, The Netherlands.
- SANDFORT, T. G. M. (1979b). Pedosexuele kontakten en pedofiele relaties [Pedosexual contacts and pedophilic relationships]. Zeist, The Netherlands: Nederlands Instituut voor Sociaal-Sexuologisch Onderzoek (Netherlands Institute for Social-Sexological Research).
- SANDFORT, T. G. M. (1981). *Het seksuele aspekt van pedofiele relaties, ervaringen van jongens* [The sexual aspect of pedophilic relationships: Experiences of boys]. Utrecht, The Netherlands: Sociological Institute.
- SANDFORT, T. G. M. (1983). *Retrospektie als methode van dataverzameling: Een empirisch vooronderzoek* [Retrospection as a data-collection method: An empirical preliminary investigation]. Instituut voor Klinische Psychologie en Persoonlijksleer (Institute for Clinical Psychology and Personality). Utrecht, The Netherlands.
- SCHUIJER, J. (1978). De P.S.V.G. over seksueel contact tussen volwassenen en kinderen [The P.S.V.G. about sexual contact between adults and children]. *'t Heen en Weer*, 30, 5-8.
- VAN ASSEN, K. (1982). De betrouwbaarheid van de affectschaal in de zelf-confrontatiemethode [The reliability of the affect scale in the self-confrontation method]. *De Psycholoog*, 17, 82-84.

Accepted for publication January 12, 1983