

‘Querying’ the Limits of Queering Boys Through the Contested Discourses on Sexuality

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Abstract Presentations of boy’s sexuality within man–boy sexual relationships have shifted considerably over the past three decades. We document this through analyzing three very different constituencies: ‘boylover’ (adult men sexually attracted to boys) activist movements, three research case studies, and male survivors of abuse. We examine the specific ways boy’s sexuality has been constructed within each of these positions, how these have changed over this period, and what insights all this can shed on wider social and cultural (re)conceptions on age, gender, and sexuality. Studying these diverse perspectives provides a series of contrasting assumptions and frameworks which will yield invaluable insights on wider transformations in the production of narratives on child and intergenerational sexualities. We hope to illuminate this through drawing out the complex interplays involving power dynamics and fluctuations in the epistemological hierarchy delineating boy’s sexuality (in terms of more normative and transgressive forms this may take). We conclude this critical engagement with a discussion of the likely impact any ‘queering’ of, or fractures in, age/generational boundaries might have for the future narrating of boy’s sexual stories within man–boy sexual relationships.

Keywords Man–boy sexuality · Boylovers · Male survivors · Sex research · Queer theory

Introduction

Writing at the commencement of the period we cover, Michel Foucault developed the notion of a discourse on sexuality moving out of silence and speaking on its own behalf (see Foucault 1978). Since then, the previously silenced, or at least

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marginalized, voices of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and ‘trans’ peoples have increasingly vocalized a series of social, economic, and political demands, leading Giddens (1992) to proclaim the triumph of the speaking pervert; and Weeks to pen in 2007, *The World We Have Won: The Remaking of Erotic and Intimate Life*. The new millennium has further accelerated this seemingly momentous trajectory towards equal citizenship for all—nearly all!

This proliferation of sexual minority discourses of ‘liberation’ has, perhaps unsurprisingly given the marked historical tendency of ‘liberation struggles’ to leave other groups out in the cold, produced an in-egalitarian series of outcomes. It has severely marginalized intergenerational sexualities, in particular, defined here as adult sexual relationships with children and adolescents (see Yuill and Evans 2007). Indeed, a crucial transformative precondition for the flourishing of mainstream sexual minorities—namely co-optation through liberal notions of citizenship rights (see Evans 1993)—has produced, in turn, the very impetus for the recent intense problematization of adult sexual attraction to children and adolescents. Here, the dominant paradigm governing late modern intimate relationships is perhaps best summed up by Giddens (1992) as involving ‘self-reflexive and self-determining’ agents (p. 185) who possess the capacity to deliberate and judge, and where conditions of realization such as ‘equality in influence, preference, [and] effective participation’ prevail (p. 186).

This context inevitably looms large in any attempt to frame the debates around man–boy sexual relationships. The last three decades has seen significant shifts in the way boy’s sexuality has been presented within such relationships, reflecting in large part changing societal attitudes on conventional approaches to age, gender, and sexuality. Consequently, substantial expressions of man–boy sexual relationships remain, as Dowsett (2000) suggests, often exploratory and conducted in a ‘social lacunae’ in which a ‘sexual culture’ develops before any formal definition (p. 32). A similar point was made by Parker Rossman (1979) who observed how male pederasty and teenage street culture regularly mixed in similar, mutually beneficial, subterranean sub-cultures within contemporary US society.

In this article, we cover three diverse micro-terrains and discursive constituencies: boylovers (adult males primarily attracted to males under 18), three research studies on man–boy sexual relationships, and male survivor stories of child sexual abuse (CSA). We demonstrate how these wider changes have impacted upon the positioning of boy’s sexuality within man–boy sexual relationships, but also the multiple ways this specific area has, in turn, significantly affected wider debates concerning the production of ‘sexual truths.’ We conclude with a brief critical engagement on attempts to queer child and intergenerational sexualities and how far such epistemological radicalism can proffer insights on the shifting positioning of boys within man–boy sexual relationships.

Part One: Boylovers

Although clearly articulated within many of the earlier homosexual rights movements in Western Europe and the US, pederastic advocacy of man–boy

relationships has enjoyed an uneasy and problematic status within contemporary gay organizations and cultures, culminating in recent ostracization and expulsion (see Rubin 1992; Thorstad 1998).

Pre-Stonewall articulations of pederasty, especially in Germany and the UK from the nineteenth century on, drew heavily from a resurgent interest in classical Greece. This facilitated a myriad flourishing of artistic, literary, textual, and even embryonic polemical celebrations of 'manly' forms of 'boy love' (see D'Arch Smith 1970; Eglinton 1971; Kaylor 2006). In contrast to medical-psychiatric and imperial moral warnings of risks from premature sexualization, masturbation, and effeminacy, adolescent boys were regularly depicted in such refashioned expressions of 'Greek love' or 'Pedagogical Eros' as aesthetic reincarnations of gods, 'love objects' of 'noble passions,' and as 'willing' but often chaste protégés of male mentors.

Such nascent expressions of pederastic subjectivity failed to adequately detail a convincing notion of boys as self-actualizing sexual subjects, and were, perhaps as a result, simply critiqued as crude rationales for men to have sex with boys (Jeffreys 1990). Although newly formed pedophile and boylover activist organizations (e.g., the Pedophile Information Exchange in the UK, the North American Man-Boy Love Association in the US and other groups throughout Europe) did, to varying degrees, engage with, and address such concerns, they have had severe difficulties articulating with any coherence a convincing counter-narrative. *Boy Love World* is a Dutch publication that offers an example of an attempt on the part of such groups 'to inform, educate, and liberate all concerned with boy-love' (Boy Love World 1986). In the second edition we read:

It is ironic that societies that claim to be free, and proclaim the liberty of individuals, appear now to be among the most oppressive in the world as far as minority groups are concerned. [...] In the name of love, let us not give in to those who wish to control us, make us conform to their narrow dogmatic beliefs. Let us peacefully fight for our rights and those of the young people we love (p. 4).

Writing at the same time, Michael Davidson (1997) openly likens his desire for pubertal boys to 'motherliness' and 'passionate protectiveness' (p. 31), describing himself as an 'eternal adolescent' who shares the same interests as a boys (pp. 1, 346). The simultaneous rising dominance of a largely feminist interest in power and power imbalances within sexual relationships (see Angelides 2004), however, made such pleas and accounts appear, in simple terms, abusive—as a blatant example of an adult male wishing to 'abuse' a male child.

In as much as there was condemnation of these groups, however, within the context of newly emerging forms of gender and identity sexual politics such groups did, in fact, add age to the mixture of radical change. They established demands for child liberation, abolition of age of consent laws and toleration for intergenerational sexual relationships (see Tsang 1981). Archaic and paternalistic eulogizing of boys as love objects of curiosity through an adult male lens was hereby displaced with a dynamic reinterpretation of man-boy relationships and of the subject status of boys therein. The North American Man Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) dismissed 'Greek Love' as sexist, racist, and paternalistically stultifying. This exemplified a

shift, whereby it could now be argued that age-barriers thwarted the empowerment of young people (Tsang 1981, p. 10) while also being responsible for criminalizing potentially positive experiences (NAMBLA 1981, p. 97). Man–boy sexual relationships were, therefore, reconceptualized as a ‘liberating alternative’ because they offered boys escape from chattel status within families (O’Carroll 1980), stifling control within pedagogical institutions (Reeves 1992), and the opportunity to express their sexuality openly and devoid of cultural taboos and stigma.

Some campaigning gay organizations also developed a more accommodating position towards boylovers. The London gay Workshop Collective, for example, expressed their view that the idea that children cannot consent to sexual activity ‘is based on the denial of children’s sexuality and the waiving of their rights in favour of parents or of the state.’ They further suggested that, in the long term, ‘the gay community could help paedophiles by raising the important issue of the rights of children and by campaigning for the decriminalisation of consenting sexual activity’ (London Gay Workshops Collective 1982).

In this, boylovers have, to some extent, appropriated the Freudian–Marxist ideas of Marcuse and Reich in which dramatic transformations in bourgeois normative patterns of intimacy affect revolutionary social and political change. This constitutes a dramatic shift away from paternalistic conceptions of boys towards one where they are conceptualized instead as *de facto* equals with their adult partners. For these more recent boylover activists, man–boy relationships are the very epitome of a transgressive sexual ethics involving an effective ‘proto-queering’ of generational boundaries and the repositioning of boys at the vanguard of such a shift. The position of the boy in this relationship is to take the ‘first step in the direction which ultimately leads to giving power to the young; the power to effect their own decisions’ (Middleton 1986, p. 141).

Boylover activism, however, has remained bedeviled by mounting feminist and gay criticism that such calls for child liberation were nothing other than the patriarchal sub-cultures of adult men demanding sex with boys (see Jeffreys 1990). Despite regular inputs from gay youth groups at the Pedophile Information Exchange (PIE) and NAMBLA meetings, and their ability to garner boys’ opinions on their experiences of man–boy relationships (see the Alhoute and Moffet’s accounts in Tsang 1981), boylovers have, in general, been unable to offset the growing hostility over the past two decades towards such relationships. Nor have they been able to change the widespread and popular perception that boys are inevitably exploited and harmed within such relationships.

Part Two: Male Survivors of Abuse

Coterminous with the epistemological shifts within boylover activist politics, the issue of male victims of CSA increasingly began to define the political agenda in this area. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, feminist agitation—coupled with a heightened media, political and academic focus—drew public attention towards the problem of CSA (see Rind et al. 1998). As well as drawing on a widespread consensus in contemporary Western societies that such relationships violate deeply held socio-

cultural beliefs, such theorists and researchers emphasized 'inherent' power imbalances within sexual relationships between adults and children or adolescents alongside children's incapacity to comprehend the full meaning of sexual activities with adults (Finkelhor 1979). Renvoize (1993) articulates the paradigmatic case for child protection by writing that 'as long as any person anywhere is bigger and stronger than another he/she will be in a position to impose his/her needs on a smaller/weaker person unless society in the form of law or morality intervene' (p. 29).

Researchers then complained that the initial focus on female CSA produced a neglect of the sexual abuse of boys (Bolton et al. 1989). Finkelhor (1984) put this down to a climate of non-disclosure due to hegemonic masculine values of self-reliance and autonomy, and taboos surrounding homosexuality (p. 156). However, by the 1990s an increasing body of research (see Coxell et al. 1999) and media reporting provided evidence of the widespread abuse of boys, especially within traditionally homosocial institutions such as the Catholic Church, care homes and sports clubs. Here, the literature on rape, and especially statutory rape, emphasized the inability of minors to consent to sexual activities, regardless of gender, and became incorporated within the frameworks of many Western countries. This led to pressure for more attention in the CSA literature to male sexual abuse and for greater organizational support and political funding.

A consistent theme running through the male survivor literature—and this is in stark contrast to boylovers' claims—is the very *immutability* of adult-child sexual boundaries. Here, boys are defined as 'utterly dependent, powerless, and unable to understand about sexuality' (King 1995, p. 20) and consequently vulnerable to adult imposed notions of sex (p. 21). Boy's sexuality is conceptualized through 'age-appropriate' natural developmental stages. King states, for example, that 'any boy naturally gives great power to his male role model' (p. 55) and that CSA constitutes an 'intrusion' into both a boy's 'natural developmental progression' (p. 68), and his 'own natural sexuality' (p. 99). In contrast to acts of benevolence, man-boy sexual relations are defined as 'expressions of power, compulsiveness, a desire for control, or an act of vengeance, which comes masked as an act of love' (Hunter 1990, p. 3); an 'aggressive, destructive violation of another human being' (Lew and Bass 1990, p. 54); and stifling 'a man's fullness of being and experience of self in the world' (King 1995, p. 5).

These views clearly resonate with popular 'commonsense' understandings—bolstered through media, political and research agendas—of the effects on boys of sexual contacts with adult males, subsequently elevating the position of professionals working with male survivors and those of male survivor accounts themselves to an ascendant, privileged and virtually unchallengeable 'truth status' on man-boy sexual relationships. Consequently, CSA researchers find it problematic to discuss CSA as a social, cultural and political construction at all as opposed to its universal applicability (see Atmore 1999). Wise (1999) too recognizes that 'problematising [its] existence as a social construction' inevitably involves interrogating the very 'foundational and absolutist notions of truth and reality' which CSA has assumed (p. 2). We, however, do not share such concerns. This has nothing to do with a lack of empathy towards victims or survivors; nor do we suggest that such accounts lack validity. They clearly hold considerable significance both for those presenting such accounts and for the wider debates as we show in part four when we critically

engage with the limits of queering this debate. Instead of adopting a defensive position we simply counter: why should such CSA professional assumptions and survivor narratives have to be accepted as the only truth on man–boy relationships?

Part Three: Researching Man–Boy Sexual Relationships

Sex research in general has enjoyed a checkered and difficult passage throughout most of the 20th century from Hirschfield, Freud and Kinsey, and more recently through to those hapless researchers now focusing on children’s sexuality. Indeed, the latter have encountered problems through strictures imposed by research ethics boards, sensationalist media intrusion, and political concerns from religious, conservative and professional groups (Durber 2006; see Rind et al. 2001; Yuill 2004). The pressure to *not* conduct research on this topic suggests that even such research itself in some way undermines the very cultural taboos surrounding child sexual ‘innocence’. Such reactions were most starkly and publicly revealed through the political and academic attacks against research conducted by Bruce Rind, Robert Bauserman and Philip Tromovitch in their 1998 ‘Meta-Analytic Examination of Assumed Properties of Child Sexual Abuse Using College Samples.’¹

Theo Sandfort conducted PhD research in the Netherlands during the late seventies/early eighties, later published in 1982 as *The Sexual Aspects of Paedophile Relations* and further in 1987 as *Boys on their Contacts with Men*. At the outset Sandfort made clear his intention ‘to show that sexual relations with adults could be also experienced by boys in a different way’ (Sandfort 1987, p. 29), directly contradicting the theoretical underpinnings of CSA by criticizing the ‘contemporary preoccupation with power imbalance’ for creating ‘suspicions which blight social interaction’ (p. 26). The ages of his sample of 25 boys ranged between 10 and 16, all of whom were involved exclusively in relationships with adult men at the time of interview. Sandfort was able to recruit participants through direct and snowball contacts with Dutch sexological organizations (see Sandfort 1982). Throughout the interviews, the boys discussed the sexual acts they performed with their adult partner, qualitative aspects of the relationship, and general commentaries on parental and societal reactions to sex. Sandfort summarizes the boys’ experiences of man–boy sexual relationships within his study as significantly positive, but accepts the non-representativeness of this sample (Sandfort 1987).

The significance of Sandfort’s study does not lie so much in the methodological or research design. Critics, for example, suggest that testimonies from boys could have been given under pressure (Mrazek 1991). The fact that it was conducted in the Netherlands during a relatively less hostile period to pedophilia and adult–child sexual relationships, and at a juncture when male sexual abuse was not as well known, also questions its generalisability. However, Sandfort’s study constitutes the first comprehensive peer-reviewed qualitative research on man–boy sexual relationships.

¹ These events, along with the substantive issues surrounding CSA research and the specific political and academic fall-out from the Rind et al. ‘Meta-Analysis’, were covered in a special issue of the *Journal of Sexuality and Culture* in 2000 (see Rind et al. 2000).

In a second study, Terry Leahy interviewed nineteen respondents drawn from personal social networks in Australia who had been involved in intergenerational sexual relationships when they were under eighteen (see Leahy 1992). He analyzed how the interviewees positioned themselves in relation to the dominant CSA discourses, noting that while some respondents saw their relationships as an essential precondition of their sexual identity, others conceptualized it within frameworks of 'autonomy and citizenship' (p. 82). He concluded that amongst 'both sets of interviews'² there was an emphasis on these events as sexual emergence as discovering sexuality in adolescence and initiating sexual relationships as a response to the manifestation of inner sexual needs' (p. 86).

Leahy's sample of boys involved in man-boy relationships appropriated essentialist discourses, enabling heterosexual respondents to 'refute the discourse of homosexual seduction' by claiming an essentially heterosexual identity (p. 74) and gay-identified interviewees to view their participation as 'an explicit rejection of hegemonic masculinity' (p. 76) coupled with a conscious self-fashioning and confirmation of their homosexuality (p. 78). Respondents consciously rejected CSA labels of seduced 'victim' in favor of positive appropriations as an 'active agent pursuing the blossoming sexual desires of adolescence' (p. 76), viewing their involvement in man-boy relationships as an 'individual's right to sexual expression' (p. 21) against what they perceived as oppressive control by straight people and adults in 'restricting the sexual rights of children and those with a different sexual orientation' (p. 22). Finally, although some respondents rejected the applicability of CSA's central tenets of harm and informed consent by minimizing age categories (Leahy 1996, p. 40) and refusing child status through adopting a proto-adult subject position as consenting individuals (p. 41), others clearly recognized adult-child power imbalances. Rather than view this as problematic, however, they highlighted multiple ways in which the 'power of the adult can be used to the benefit of the younger party' (p. 18).

One of the authors of this article, Richard Yuill, conducted research on male age-discrepant intergenerational sexualities and relationships in the UK from 1999 to 2004 (see Yuill 2004). He highlighted how CSA has been uncritically applied in academic and professional approaches to the relational dynamics and subject positions within adult-child/adolescent relationships. His research involved analyzing the inter-relationship between contexts, subjectivities, and power dynamics within such relationships; implications (especially in relation to dominant CSA theorizing and research paradigms) of adopting a plurality of meanings on man-boy sexual relationships/identities; and exploring the multiple ways boys and men experience such relationships within the micro-terrains and socio-cultural contexts in which they occur.³ Six gay youth respondents recounted sporadic experiences

² Those involved in man-boy and man-girl relationships, respectively.

³ Interviews were conducted between 2000 and 2002 across a number of geographical locations in public and private settings in the UK. Respondents were recruited through requests in gay and lesbian publications, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) organizations and email groups. They included a focus group interview with ten gay and lesbian youth, eleven separate interviews with gay male delegates at a youth conference, and a series of other ad hoc individual interviews gained through snowball contacts.

(either as encounters or short-term relationships) of man–boy sexual encounters. Many recalled generally a range of responses ranging from positive affirmations of their gay identity to less flattering accounts that it was all that were available. Respondents also referred significantly to child sexual attraction to adults, assertive child and youth sexual initiation of intergenerational sexual encounters, and generally held a less condemnatory perspective on such relationships.

One particular respondent (Philip) drew on a series of encounters and relationships with men from ten through to seventeen. This respondent is especially important for this paper because, unlike many gay youths who had ad hoc and sporadic sexual experiences with adult men, Philip experienced both short-term and lengthier relationships with adult men throughout his childhood and adolescence. This gives both a longitudinal aspect to how these experiences affected him through childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, and also provides thick descriptive data for how an individual can reflect on these experiences today in a very different way to conventional understandings of survivor experiences of inevitable harm. In recounting his experiences with adult men, Philip appropriated diametrically opposing constructions to mainstream CSA discourses, positioning himself as seducer and in charge. At various points in the interview, he reflected on his childhood experiences, which he summed up as less selfish, playful, and pleasure seeking, and less fearful of rejection. He saw his sexual experiences with adult men as seduction, but firmly embedded within child understandings of sexuality. In all cases, he reiterated his assertiveness in initiating the initial encounters, coupled with his careful pre-planning of the event (see Chap. 9 in Yuill 2004).

Throughout the interview, Philip emphasized the positive impact of family and cultural context in Africa for scripting his early sexual experiences. He placed his positive experiences within a libertarian sexual discourse, in which the family and cultural contexts empowered him. Philip's narrative challenges dominant notions of age-appropriate interaction by contending that the central component of his sexuality throughout his life course was a substantial attraction (physical, emotional, and intellectual) to adult men as opposed to his peers. Philip clearly recognized physical power differences between adults and young people, but maintains he was always able to distinguish consensual from coercive sexual experiences. He also stressed that within and through such relations, he was able to satisfy a range of his own needs (physical, educational, emotional and social).⁴

Part Four: 'Queering' Boys (Age/Masculinity) in Man–Boy Relationships

In focusing specifically on the topic of boy's sexuality within man–boy relationships, we recognize the bigger picture of how child and adolescent sexuality has been widely presented within Western pedagogical, political and cultural discourses

⁴ Philip recounted two attempts to disseminate his story in a public forum, but explained how a radio presenter and children's charity figure deliberately censured him on both occasions. These incidences highlight the severe obstacles placed in front of individuals articulating and disseminating non-victimological positions on man–boy sexual relationships (see Chap. 9 in Yuill 2004).

over the past two decades. Indeed, we argue that it is those very shifts in notions of gender, sexual identity, and attitudes to the family that have, in turn, led to the increasing problematisation of man–boy sexual relationships. Furthermore, despite early theorists' attempts (see Jackson 1982; Finkelhor 1984) to institute clear demarcation lines between positive encouragement of children's sexual relations with each other and continuing rejection of adult–child sexual relationships, we see from the previous three sections of this paper a proximate relationship between the two. Indeed, as Angelides (2004) posits, there is a link between the ascendant political status of CSA and the effective 'erasure' of child sexuality.

However, we see a rather more nuanced inter-relationship between generic child sexuality and the position of children with respect to sexual relationships with adults—one preconditioned by the contrasting fortunes of boy love and male survivor positions recounted earlier, but also developed through the complex interplay between power, knowledge and truth claims, culminating in a series of social and cultural 'mixed messages.' In this article, we focus exclusively on man–boy relationships because we understand how established (albeit contested) gender and cultural systems contribute towards the production of differing views held on woman–boy, woman–girl, and man–girl relationships. While these latter three also involve issues of power and, accordingly, are considered under CSA guidelines and power-related feminist thought to constitute abuse, we suggest that man–boy relationships in particular continue to raise more aggressive negative reactions given the continuing cultural disapproval of male homosexuality. In this 'queerer' section of our article, therefore, we examine the following interrelated areas: firstly, child sexual innocence, power, and rights; secondly, refraction of boy's sexuality through an adult gaze; and finally, the (im)possibility of queering age/generational boundaries.

Firstly, James Kincaid (1998) provocatively argues that contemporary mainstream Anglo-American culture (through film, media, advertising, and even documentary story-telling) effectively endorses 'a sexual discourse that inevitably links children, sexuality, and erotic appeal' (p. 101). Contrary to conventional professional scripting of child sexuality and pedophilia, Kincaid claims that an uneasy cultural 'denial' exists whereby the pedophile is scapegoated as marginal, pathological, and dangerous, thereby offsetting any critique of mainstream culture's conscious and subliminal sexualization of children. This leads perversely to enthusiastic cultural sexualization of childhood, whilst simultaneously assigning it innocent characteristics (p. 13). Kincaid concludes that the 'child's sexual and erotic appeal, along with our evasion of what we have done [...] now structures our culture' (p. 14).

Such opinions may provoke counter-reactions, as the political furor created in the UK over Kincaid's earlier work in 1992, *Child-Loving: the Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* highlighted. However, such dichotomies, perhaps in more muted form, have been identified by others, including CSA professionals and researchers. For example, Kitizinger (1997) suggests that the very 'images of frightened children' put across in CSA literature actually promotes a 'fetishistic glorification of innocence' (p. 165) which 'excludes those who do not conform to an asexual ideal,' thereby denying them 'access to knowledge and power' (p. 167). Elsewhere

(Kitzinger 1988) she counters that CSA images of children as passive not only stigmatize ‘knowing’ children, but commodify sexual innocence in the form of an ideology (p. 77).

The position of boylovers on child rights and empowerment is equally confused. Whilst many advocates (see Riegel 2000) ridicule mainstream (especially conservative and religious) presentations of boys as ‘sexual innocents’ and school sex education for proselytizing abstinence programs, it is unclear whether this is, in fact, more than a self-serving strategy. An intractable problem for boylovers is that if boys are not innocent but rather empowered and confident (as boylovers now claim), why do they need adult boylovers to guide them? Indeed Jeffreys (1990), Finkelhor (1991), and Archard (1998) produce this very claim in order to characterize such advocacy as contradictory. Boylover attempts to legitimize their message by co-opting the voices of boys are fraught with difficulties. The absent voices of the boys means that the man–boy love ‘movement’ speaks with only one voice: adult men. Certainly, we can see that man clearly comes before boy in the title; we do not speak about ‘boy–men’ relationships.

Furthermore, the attempts by boylovers to destroy the perception of boys as innocent can often result in a contradictory reaffirmation of this very perception. Wilson and Cox (1983) were able to collate questionnaire returns (77) and follow-up case interviews with a number of self-identified pedophiles who belonged to a self-help group in London.⁵ Although such respondents relayed a number of reasons for their attraction to boys, many identified the innocence of boys as a significant factor in their sexuality. More recently, boylover respondents in Yuill (2004) have emphasized their role as adult guide and mentor to boys. Even attempts to portray boylovers as potential ‘liberators of boys’ (see O’Carroll 1980; Brongersma 1990) by removing them from the stifling paternalism inherent in familial and pedagogical institutions, fails to explain convincingly how this would avoid substituting a series of dependent relationships for another, never mind the absence of liberating girls from their chattel status. Here, as in much of the activist literature, essentialist and naturalistic understandings are often appropriated to define an essence of boyishness as opposed to manliness. By identifying these as binary opposites, man–boy sexual relationships become characterized not by their social and erotic equality but ones where boys are consciously eroticized as ‘other.’

However, as we have already noted, gay youth groups and individuals did participate in campaigns against age of consent laws. Any lack of interest/voice by children and adolescents in political campaigning does not necessarily imply a lack of interest in sex per se or in intergenerational sex specifically. Within the current climate, even if boylover groups were able to attract boys to their meetings, the legal authorities would no doubt intervene immediately, offering yet another example of how outcomes in this subject area tend to be tautological and self-fulfilling. The implications of this for boys involved in man–boy relationships are obvious. Firstly, they *cannot* speak for themselves as to whether they want to enter a sexual relationship with a man; and secondly, it involves both a de jure and de facto

⁵ They all belonged to P.I.E. (Paedophile Information Exchange), an organization based in the UK which effectively wound up in 1984 due to legal and social pressure (see O’Carroll 1980).

sequestration of decision-making to adults, parents and professionals. In their respective critiques, Jeffreys (1990); Finkelhor (1991) and Archard also not only confuse rival positions within boylover activist politics (mentor versus child liberationist), but additionally neglect the fact that conflicts regularly arise within mainstream theoretical and policy frameworks generally over the limits of child rights/empowerment and adult protective frameworks (see Evans 1993; Yuill and Evans 2007).

In our discussion so far we have consciously avoided defining sex/sexuality or how boys are chronologized and demarcated from men. We present these now to highlight seriously problematic presumptions within the current debates on man-boy sexuality and how these have been compromised by the failure of queer theorists to mount a detailed queering of age boundaries. We do this to help inform and suggest some potential ways to move the debate forward.

Admittedly, it is beyond the scope of this article to go into every facet of social life where children and young people are tacitly or, in significant cases, expressly deemed capable of having agency and/or the ability to consent. Nor do we have the space here to consider what 'agency' means for a child within specific cultural or national contexts. However, what is increasingly being questioned across a wide range of policy making areas is the immutability of ages of maturity as defined by the acquisition of rational, subjective capabilities, and age/generational boundaries (see Waites 2005). Recent critical approaches have placed greater emphases on children as subjects of agency. Here it is argued that children and young people should be treated as subjects with participatory status rather than being processed through an 'adult gaze,' or positioned as 'socially out of play' (Bourdieu 1993, p. 96).

Sociological approaches to age-transitions have provided significant critical insights into how age is undergoing transformation in the areas of education, employment and the family.⁶ In regards to the positioning of the child as capable of conscious criminal behavior, for example, the boundary that demarcates innocent child from knowing subject is already well in dispute (Kincaid 1998, p. 151). The assumption of a fixed understanding of what constitutes a child and how this child can be differentiated from the adult is also undergoing change in the crucial area of 'consenting' to medical operations (see Alderson 1992). Despite trends identified in the 'Youth Transitions' literature suggesting a prolongation and, indeed, extended infantilization of youth brought about by their structural position in relation to changes to education and the labor market, employment laws have also allowed young people limited incorporation in the labor market (Evans 1993, p. 226). In contrast to the demand within the CSA discourse that the child is vulnerable, therefore, the theoretical and policy implications of re-positioning children and young people as competent interpreters of their social world has, at least, already been addressed to some degree.⁷ As Neil Postman (1994) has argued, 'the dividing line between childhood and adulthood is rapidly eroding' (p. xii).

⁶ For a useful overview of the literature on youth transitions see Andy Furlong, et al. 'Complex transitions: Linearity in youth transitions as a predictor of success', (Paper presented to the British Sociological Association Annual Conference, University of Leicester, 2002), 25–27 March.

⁷ See, Wyness (2000), *Contested Childhood*.

Pre-existing, problematic categories also already exist within the generic literature on CSA, namely ‘sex offending children’ and ‘gerontophiles’—defined as child sexual attraction to an older person (see Sandfort 1987, p. 31). The issue of child sex offenders has received significant recent attention in popular US programs such as ‘Law and Order Special Victims Unit.’ Erooga and Masson (1999) identify the 1990s in particular as the period when sex-offending children ‘emerged as a problem,’ and state that by 1997, of the total number guilty of sex offences, 23% were aged between 10 and 20 (p. 1).

Okami (1992) criticizes current approaches to ‘child perpetrators of sexual abuse,’ for conflating sexual behaviors deemed ‘unusual’ with abuse (p. 112), and for attempting to establish a moral hegemony over the expression of childhood sexuality (p. 114). Child and adolescent attraction to adults has received significantly less attention, often problematically minimized in professional CSA discourses as explained by ‘collusion with their abuser’ or ‘denial.’ In fact, Mirkin (1999) sees the very idea of young people being seen as ‘partners or initiators or willing participants’ as contrary to late modern dominant conceptions (p. 13).

The above social and sexual case-examples severely challenge viewing late and/or postmodern age categories and boundaries as constituted within an immutable and undeconstructable realm, suggesting that the very attention Western states have invested—morally, politically, and economically—into maintaining age/generational sexual boundaries is reflective of an increasing difficulty of policy-makers and mainstream theoretical approaches to maintain stable and fixed subjectivities. This consequently offers the possibility of an alternative lens for viewing age categories more generally as well as within the specific dynamics of man–boy sexual relationships. Consequently, a readymade instability exists around the category of childhood in many areas of contemporary society. To put this in simple constructionist terminology: there is no singular fixed notion of ‘the child’ or ‘adolescent’, and, indeed, ‘adult’.

This proliferation and seeming acceptance of instability stand in sharp contrast to our earlier critique of the way modernist, enlightenment essentialist discourses have been able to maintain a continuing influence (even stranglehold) on late modern sexual agendas on pedophilia, child sexuality, and man–boy sexual relations. Within this particular debate, the ‘child’ continues to be a sacred site. Crucially, attempts by dominant discursive formulations on child and intergenerational sexualities to emphasize (and then isolate the sexual sphere) that the child is constituted, in Foucauldian terms, as ‘an especially dense transfer site’ around which power-knowledges can coalesce (Foucault 1978, p. 42). Although producing diametrically opposing normative implications on man–boy sexual relations, by constructing fixed and stable child subjects, both CSA theorists and boylovers alike effectively buy into the same position. The former constructs the child as a potential victim of abuse worthy of their protection and the latter as a potential loved object worthy of their desires. Moreover, the discursive presentations and preservations of the child as unknowing and incapable have maintained an ascendant position.

Many of the narratives written by self-identifying boylovers even emphasize the naturalness and usefulness of the love shared between men and boys. Riegel (2000), for example, looks to evolutionary sociobiological explanations for boy love,

arguing that the contemporary form of boy love is a 'genetic heritage, passed down due to successful adaptation' (p. 6) and that 'pedosexuality' is 'genetically predetermined' (p. 7). However, these self-identified boylovers seek the removal of ageist barriers at the same time as they identify the objects of their desires as 'boys' in contrast to themselves as 'men.' Such signifiers not only work to reposition the self and the other within a dominant discourse of gender, but also to re-establish naturalized and dominant identifiable positions of age for both. They deny the bodies involved any right or possibility to be excluded from the dominant discourse on age as a trajectory of human development and, thus, sexual maturity. They speak within the same space that already identifies the objects of their desires as always illegitimate objects of desire. This position also leaves unanswered other gendered forms of intergenerational relationships such as women-boy and man-girl, suggesting an inability to work through the complex inter-play of age categorization, gender, and sexuality.

Furthermore, the burgeoning literature on male survivors of sexual abuse relies on naturalistic conceptions of sexual development for the boy, whereby a child comes into a natural and fixed state of sexual being. In this regard, King (1995) states that 'any boy naturally gives great power to his male role model' (p. 55) and that CSA constitutes an 'intrusion into his own natural developmental progression' (p. 68) and 'his [the boy's] own natural sexuality' (p. 99). In a further attempt to construct a fixed sexual position for the minor involved in any intergenerational relationship, Finkelhor (1979) argues 'that children, by their very nature, are incapable of truly consenting to sex with adults' as they lack essential information and 'are ignorant about sex and sexual relationships' (p. 697). In contrast, Angelides (2004) applies aspects of queer theory to the contested positions on intergenerational sex, problematizing, not only the political colonization (through particular strategies of prescriptive delimiting children's sexuality) by CSA and radical feminist theorists, but also their very assumptions such as one-way formulations of power. He puts forward more nuanced micro-analytical conception of power within such relations, coupled with a possible redefining of children's, and especially adolescent's, positioning within intergenerational sexual encounters/relationships (p. 167).

If we are to seek to construct a new framework in which to understand man-boy relationships specifically, we can no longer rely on viewing sex and sexuality as immutable and natural components of the human experience. It is the normative body of modernity that knows about and/or does sex and sexuality. In contrast, a post-Foucauldian theorizing of the body emphasizes how 'bodies, sensations, pleasures, acts, and interactions are made into 'sex' or accrue sexual meanings by individuals, groups, discourses, and institutional practices' (Seidman 1997, p. 81). 'Sex,' therefore, is not what certain corporeal acts essentially are, but rather what we think they are. What comes to be defined as 'sex' differs across cultures and histories. What we read as 'sex' is specific to our own cultural and historical location (Rupp 2001). In regards to finding evidence of sex, it is not the genitalia, but rather the head that is our 'most erogenous zone' (Caplan 1987, p. 2). It is the mind—in Western culture, necessarily separated from the body through the deployment of Cartesian dualism to control the wayward flesh—that demands the

existence of a corporeal form that can be understood within the context of its experiences and disciplined accordingly. The interpretation of all activities involving intimate physical contact as 'sex' demands conformity of the body to established systems of knowledge concerning its actions and specifically its intimate engagements with other bodies (Durber 2005).

Similarly, 'sexuality' does not occur naturally within the human subject. In contrast to the essentialist acceptance of a limited number of reasons for why we do the kind of sex we do—heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, etc.—sexuality is an attempt to understand corporeal pleasures in simple and containable terms. Halperin (1990) has defined it as the conceptualization of 'the total ensemble of physiological and psychological mechanisms governing the individual's genital functions and the concomitant identification of that ensemble with a specially developed part of the brain and nervous system' (p. 41). He adds that from the nineteenth century onwards, sexuality is understood to be 'a mute force that shapes our conscious life according to its own unassailable logic and thereby determines, at least in part, the character and personality of each one of us.' First used as a signifier in 1800 (Caplan 1987, p. 2), 'sexuality' therefore emerges as 'the consciousness one has of what one is doing, what one makes of the experience, and the value one attaches to it' (Foucault 2000, p 142). It too is not natural, but rather came into existence as a conjunction of strategies for ordering social relations, authorizing specialized knowledges, licensing expert interventions, intensifying bodily sensations, normalizing erotic desires, multiplying sexual perversions, policing personal behaviors, forging political resistances, motivating introspective utterances, and constructing human subjectivities (Durber 2005). Sexuality, in the last analysis, is thus an apparatus for constituting human subjects (Halperin 1994, p. 22).

This insistent labeling of bodies as sexual—the compulsory sexualization of the body—reveals a conscious awareness by the culture of its desire to discipline all bodies. Such a system of discipline seeks to penetrate ever deeper into the actions of the body in order to discover ever new forms of corporeal pleasures and types of sexualized beings. This it does in order to maintain the 'perpetual spirals of power and pleasure' that grant the discourses of sex and sexuality knowledge of and over the body (Foucault 1978, pp. 45–47). This compulsory memorization of sex is not undermined in the expansion of legitimate forms of sex within the culture. The discourses of sex and sexuality do not concern themselves with any possibilities of deviation from preferred norms. Such deviations do not affect the corporeal control these discourses assume. To the contrary, a proliferation of sexual acts and sexual identities only reaffirms the belief that one's sexual experiences are an important part of self and an indicator of one's true and natural sexual identity. Irrespective of whether the body becomes a normal or an abnormal sexual type, irrespective of whether the body engages in morally defined good or bad sex, therefore, so long as the subject recognizes the body and specific parts of the body as sexual, the disciplining required by these discourses is achieved. The chaste body, the pedophile body, the reproductive body, the homosexual and the heterosexual: these are all examples of successful constructions of a docile being who knows the body as sexual (Durber 2005).

But the body of the adolescent boy—that which the boylover claims is his true object of desire—can be viewed as neither that of a child nor that of an adult, but somewhere in the middle: a transitory body. With its enforced social status as 'adolescent,' it already exists in a marginalized space of dangerous mutability. It is already capable of refusing and/or refuting identification. It has the potential to become other, to become a desiring machine capable of refuting the culture's required and preferred organization of its fragmented parts into a normative and wholesome adult, man, homo/hetero 'I.' Indeed, the boy does not have to—and often does not—read sexualized acts in the way the culture requires (see Virkunen 1981, p. 131). This is not a matter of the boy with a natural sexual desire being left adrift in a culture that refuses to allow him to speak of or act out his sexualized desires without fear or shame. It is not the role of any other body—the parent, the teacher, the law, the psychologist, the protector, the boylover—to establish self as an expert to help the boy discover the truth of his feelings. Such differing and powerful attempts to 'teach' the boy the meaning of any sexual intimacies in which he is involved merely reflect the intensity of the desire in the culture to ensure that all bodies comply with current available understandings of the sexual.

A body of pleasure is not located in the struggle for power in the new postmodern world order. Such a body does not seek to offer any greater truth about what the correct sex should be. Such a body exists outside the battle between already established modes of being and the new forms of wanting to be. Instead, it is interested in exploring the gaps not covered by the discourses of sex and sexuality as they continue to work, albeit now with multiplicities, on the assumption of an either/or, of being either with penis or without, taking it or giving it. Becoming a body of pleasure signifies a queerer refusal to participate in a culture that demands visibility of bodies and their pleasures through sexual identification. The adolescent boy has the capacity to occupy the space of being with/in such a body. In the current climate, however, this kind of body is hard to claim, enjoy and hang on to. Indeed, it is under attack by those—both CSA professionals and boylovers—who want to use it for their own gains; who want to discipline the boy's body to support the pre-written endings of their own narratives.

Conclusion

The man-boy relationship has been reformed and redefined over the past three decades—in keeping with a supposedly more 'egalitarian, democratic age'—as one consciously distant from previous archaic and paternalistic justifications of pederasty. It has been defined by its very anarchic character: a non-prescriptive, transgressive, and dynamic loving friendship of 'equals.' This strategy became increasingly problematized through the 1980s to the 1990s through emerging male child sexual abuse (CSA) survivor stories, whereby activist positions appeared as crude self-serving rationales which merely refracted boy's sexuality through an adult male gaze.

The emergence and dominance of male victim narratives (especially within the Catholic Church and residential care homes) continue to undermine at least

eulogistic celebrations of man–boy sexual relationships within boylover polemics, whilst also problematizing any critique of CSA perspectives. However, such discourses have to be located within the increasingly hostile environment and temporal locale in Western society towards pedophilia and the sexual abuse of children—a context which only allows for the production of a particular, monolithic construction of abuse, and consequently the dissemination of particular subject positions and narratives from boys on man–boy sexual relationships. This construction of boys within man–boy relationships is further promoted through carefully scripted versions through popular media, academic journals and campaign groups, reinforcing the ‘universal truth’ of abuse; a process which clearly leads to the distinct privileging for some stories at the expense of other, non-victimological accounts of, and from, boys in man–boy relationships.

We recognize that boy’s sexuality within man–boy relationships will, in all likelihood, remain circumscribed by a range of social and cultural forces hostile to any substantial modifications for the foreseeable future. The very outcomes of the power-knowledge ‘truth games’ will likely largely define the discursive parameters of boy’s sexuality within man–boy sexual relationships. Yet what co-exists alongside these master narratives of what it means for a boy to be engaged in a sexual relationship with a man are the debates that have arisen within queer theory about sex, sexuality and pleasures in general. The public and, indeed, academic ‘queer’ voices may still be reluctant or too timid to apply their own political agendas and intellectualisms to the narrative of sexual active boys. But what we hope to have encouraged here in this article is an interest in the application of queer ideas to this topic—theoretically, at least, at this stage. In the short-term and practically too we would like to see greater attention given by sexual theorists, researchers and CSA professionals to listening to the accounts of children and young people when documenting, presenting and analyzing not only man–boy sexual relationships but also the wider area of intergenerational relationships. This is not couched as a plea. Rather, it stems from a recognition of both the potential and reality that such relationships can be experienced and viewed differently to what current dominant narratives seek to allow.

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