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Male Age-Discrepant Intergenerational Sexualities and Relationships

Richard Yuill, 2004

Abstract

This thesis examines the construction of male age-discrepant intergenerational sexualities and relationships (MADIS) - primarily in the United Kingdom. It analyses the way in which such relationships have been constituted within hegemonic child sexual abuse (CSA) discourses, and how these in turn have been influenced by late modern material, social and cultural conditions.

These include: the growing professionalisation of education and welfare institutions; the increasing problematisation of child and youth sexuality; and finally the popularisation of taboos on such relationships through a series of media and political campaigns. It also examines the varied ways such perspectives have been contested: ranging from liberationist claims for young people's sexual rights, to boylover identity groups stressing the positive and beneficial aspects of such relationships.

The theoretical approach will apply Foucauldian, Bourdieusian and Queer insights on social theory, evaluating how far they can provide a critical framework for explaining how CSA has achieved dominant status in relation to MADIS. It will also examine key contested paradigms on social power and sexual subjectivity, and open up discussions as to whether late modern transformations in the intimate sphere can be incorporated within this area.

The historical and cross-cultural components will address: the social and discursive origins of the current injunctions on MADIS; the growth of 'expert' knowledges and proliferation of highly specialised and localised centres of power around young people's sexuality and MADIS; and how these have affected the scripting of MADIS. It will also look at MADIS across a wide range of historical and cross-cultural case studies, focussing on the differing modes of representation, contested meanings, and the multiple ways these have been refracted through the criss-crossing interstices of gender, class, race, age and sexuality.

The empirical element utilises qualitative, semi-structured interviews as the main tool for data collection. Questionnaires were sent out to respondents, and follow-up semi-structured interviews of existing and retrospective gay MADIS were conducted. Other interviews were carried out with young gay men, male survivors, and boylovers. All the above tools were designed with the aim of exploring, and analysing the different meanings and experiences respondents articulated, in order to achieve a broader, more balanced account

of MADIS. In addition, child protection, sex offender and health professionals, and religious and political figures who were recently involved in recent controversies over a range of issues (Clause 28 and the gay male age of consent), were interviewed.

The above perspectives were analysed in relation to their impact on the contested and competing agendas on CSA and MADIS, and in explaining how certain sexual stories and narratives have achieved prominence within public and expert discourses, contributing to the subsequent marginalisation of both boylover perspectives and positively experienced accounts of MADIS from young people.

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