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Voluntary and harmless affectionate relationships between minors and adults outside the family

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This is one of the pages of *Kritisch*, a series of articles written by T. Rivas, MA, MSc, Philosopher, Theoretical Psychologist and psychical researcher.

Introduction

One of the main contemporary Western societal taboos is the phenomenon known as "pedophilia". This concept is usually construed nowadays as an erotic orientation or nature which may lead to "pedo-sexuality", which is in turn seen as synonymous for sexual abuse of children. As children are usually more vulnerable than adults, the sexual assault and rape of children is rightly seen as an even greater crime than the abuse of adult victims. Convicted pedophiles are treated accordingly.

In recent years, pedophiles have been subjected to longer prison terms, and, in cases of recidivism, people are sooner sent to psychiatric institutions or subjected to chemical castration. Parents of children who have been abused often plead for even more severe forms of retribution. Some parents even demand that everyone be allowed to know if there is an convicted pedo-sexual living in their neighborhood. This has also been the background of a website with the macabre name "STROP" ('ROPE').

In this climate, which has even been worsened by extreme cases of child murder and child prostitution, there is hardly any attention anymore for the question whether 'pedophilia' is always and by definition a negative, destructive and traumatic phenomenon. It is even experienced as dubious whenever some one dares ask this question nowadays. As if only ruthless psychopaths and their truants would occupy themselves with such 'perverse' questions. I immediately run the risk of becoming suspicious by writing this article. But perhaps that is precisely a good reason to keep on reading.

Abuse of children

Are there any positive forms of pedophilia and perhaps even of pedo-sexuality? That is 'the taboo-ridden question I wish to discuss in this article. To find an answer to this question, we first need a definition of sexual abuse of children. Nowadays this concept is usually simply defined as "sex (of adults) with children" and if you define the concept like this, any further questions become of course superfluous as soon as such a type of sexuality is involved.

My question can therefore be partly rephrased as: "Is sexual abuse of children by adults identical to sex of adults with children?"

In order to be able to answer this question, we have to look to what it is we usually mean by "abuse". In general, this word refers to using a person against his or her will, or while this use can harm that other person, Applying this definition to "sexual abuse of children", this concept may be formulated as: "the use of children for one's own sexual pleasure against their will, or while this use may harm children psychologically."

If we construe the sexual abuse of children in this fashion, the question whether all sex with children is identical to sexual abuse of the children involved certainly becomes meaningful. Does any sexual or erotic contact with children equal sexual contact which takes place against the will of those children involved or contact that can harm those children psychologically?

By definition, this question does not change the fact that pedo-sexual contact that is involuntary or harms children psychologically, doubtless still remains very immoral. As a matter of fact, in my personal life I happen to know examples of people who were sexually abused and I have witnessed the traumas that were caused by this.

Voluntary relationships

For several decades now, sexologists have been conducting research into the phenomenon of voluntary "pedophile relationships". These are relationships which at least as long as they exist are experienced by the child as voluntary and in which there does not have to be any sexuality. We're talking about affectionate relationships between an adult with pedophile feelings (of erotic attraction or being in love) and a minor up to sixteen years of age.

One of the best known investigators in this field was Dr. Theo Sandfort of the State University of Utrecht. He studied children within voluntary pedophile relationships and reached the conclusions that they themselves experience such relationships as positive and really wanted them much more often than was generally believed.

Among other things he writes:

"The image that can be distilled from the stories of these boys and girls differs quite a lot from the way sexual contacts between adults and children are usually described in "scientific" literature. A-priori construing these as abuse and exploitation, adults and children are termed victims and offenders. It can't be doubted that there are children who fall victim to sexual abuse, the seriousness and frequency of this are possibly underestimated. The stories of these girls and boys are at the other end of the spectrum. (...) What's essential is that there are any girls and boys at all with other types of experiences that can't be conceptualized as abuse and exploitation. Whenever we are confronted by pedophilia or sex between children and adults in any way, we'd better take this into account."

(Meisjes over hun pedofiele vriendschappen met mannen, in Jeugd en Samenleving, Feb. 1983, 105-115, p. 114.)

An example of such a pedophile relationship is described in a book by Dr. F. Bernard, "Pedofilie" from 1975 (Bussum: Uitgeverij Aquarius). This book is about a boy from the western conglomeration of the Netherlands known as *the Randstad* who's having a steady relationship with a man of about sixty. He tells us:

"I find it beautiful, I like it, including the first time. I had a girl before but that isn't what I like. I always like doing it with my older friend. My parents don't know, but then they shouldn't know either. It is our secret. In my opinion they should change the law. That way there would be less assaults."

Voluntary pedophile relationships occur in all possible combinations, between girls and men, boys and men, and also between girls and women, and between boys and women. The child can be under or over 12 years old. There may be some type of erotic interaction, but in sharp contrast to cases of involuntary sexual contact, this interaction is always limited to what the child himself wants, based on his or her psychosexual development. In practice this often means just some cuddling, kissing and stroking, possibly combined with (mutual) masturbation or oral sex.

Voluntary pedophile relations aren't usually centered on a possible erotic dimension, but are first and foremost warm, reciprocal friendships with a lot of emotional intimacy. This emotional intimacy may therefore continue after the child has grown up, i.e. as a life-long friendship.

Harmless relationships

Now that we've seen that there are voluntary pedophile relationships, we have to ask whether this automatically implies that those relationships will also in the long run remain harmless for the children involved. Children sometimes want things they experience as positive, while those things may in reality harm their well-being, such as gambling or using hard drugs. This is the reason why gambling is illegal for minors in the Netherlands. We're talking about the age of consent, i.e. the minimum age you need to have to be able to consciously choose for something.

Fortunately, not everything children find agreeable is detrimental for them, so that it is worthwhile to ask ourselves whether pedophile relationships should be placed by definition within the category of all things "dangerous" or "damaging".

The best way to get an answer to this question is looking at the extent to which children who were voluntarily involved in pedophile relationships prospered later in life.

We can undertake this using several criteria of mental health and success and this has indeed been done by various researchers. Their studies indicate that if the pedophile relationships were voluntary, the child or youth will not suffer any negative consequences of it later in life, but exclusively neutral or positive consequences.

In the work by Frits Bernard I just quoted, he states at page 27:

"From a psychological investigation, which among other things used the ABV-test, no psychological damage could be established in these cases (...) We might generally say, that there is a number of children who doesn't suffer detrimental consequences from sexual contacts with adults and that there is a number among these, who is clearly influenced positively by these contacts."

A well-noted meta-analysis from 1998 which has confirmed this pattern was recently published by the investigators Rind, Tromovitch and Bauserman. They were quite heavily attacked by certain scholars and conservative groups because they would be justifying a dangerous perversion. Whereas in fact they just offer a survey of what is known on this subject.

Self-reports by adults who used to be involved in pedophile relationships as a child show the same results as the tests mentioned above. Adults turn out to report that they don't suffer any negative consequences from their voluntary pedophile relationships as children. An example of this is the testimony of a middle-aged woman:

"Perhaps you can't imagine this, but when I was twelve, I was deeply in love with a man of fifty and vice versa. I don't know who took the first step but we caressed each other and had sex with each other. It had a wonderful relaxing effect on me. One day my parents found out and called the police. The interrogation was horrendous. I kept on denying that anything had happened. Then I gave up. My older friend was arrested. After my parents had forced me to confess everything, they denounced him. After that, nothing could be done to reverse the course of events. I've never forgotten this. It was not fair. It could have been such a beautiful memory. Nowadays I'm married and have four children. I wouldn't object if they had [voluntary] contacts with adults. I consider it positive."

Ignorance

Well-informed sexologists have known for decades that there are voluntary and (even in the long run) harmless pedophile relationships. However, most social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists and other assistants seem to know nothing about this topic. This can't be a consequence of the literature on these relationships, which is readily available, especially in university libraries. Therefore, such prejudices will partially arise from negative experiences with sexual abuse of these aid workers themselves or their clients. If people don't distinguish between the concepts of "abuse" and positive "pedophilia" without such abuse it becomes quite senseless to study positive pedophile relations.

Against this background, a *bona fide* 'pedophile relationship' is not at all seen as a voluntary relation, in fact it is not even considered a relationship at all, but exclusively as a narcissistic form of exploitation of children by adults.

Other objections against positive pedophilia are founded upon religious or

philosophical conceptions, such as that only a heterosexual relationship can really be the will of God, or that only an adult partner can provide real erotic fulfillment, or that it is morbid and crazy to find children attractive, etc.

In any case these prejudices are conservative and reactionary, they stigmatize and create an aggressive atmosphere, pushing the discussion in the wrong direction for years. They associate adults within voluntary pedophile relations with child molesters, consumers or even producers of hard child pornography an child murderers.

An ingenious but all the same very negative comparison is that between investigators of *bona fide* pedophile relations and defenders of forms of enlightened slavery. The advocates of this comparison acknowledge that there may really be forms of pedophilia which do not have damaging consequences, but which are in fact built on the same principles of lack of free choice and manipulation that are seen in sexual abuse.

In both harmless and damaging relationships, dominance of the adult and the lack of freedom on the part of the child would be essential. The only difference would be that the child does not realize that the relationship is in fact involuntary and therefore he would not be hindered by it later in life. However, the principle would be the same in both cases: the child's lack of freedom. The problem is that scholars who endorse this view *a priori* start from the premise that there can't be any voluntary pedophile relationships. They ignore the reports of the children themselves and implicitly claim that children can never voluntarily choose for anything if there is also an adult involved.

Therefore they're using a circular argument: they start from the premise that children are never capable of engaging voluntarily in a pedophile relationship and then they explain all relationships away that according to the children themselves are voluntary. This has nothing to do with unprejudiced science. In fact it is an ingenious form of sabotage of solid research and in that sense it is related to the skeptical boycott of research in other controversial fields such as parapsychology or the psychology of animal consciousness.

Rather than equating voluntary pedophile relationships with abuse and *bona fide* pedophiles with abusers, it is important to make an abstract, collective distinction between these two very different phenomena. But how is this done in practice, meaning in concrete cases?

The first thing you need to be certain about if you're evaluating a relationship is that it is a voluntary relationship, meaning that it is really based on the will of the child. Of course, you won't find this out by pushing a child in a certain direction, for example by talking very negatively about the relationship and by encouraging the child to adopt the same negative attitude. As is the case for other issues within the relation between parents or tutors and children, you need to be open-minded towards what the child himself experiences and feels.

In addition, you also need to find out whether everything that happens within the relationship really happens voluntarily. I'm talking about important things which the child really doesn't like very much and which he exclusively does in order to please the beloved adult. As long as there is no real force involved,

this does not need to imply that the relationship should be ended immediately, but the child should certainly learn how to become more assertive.

Thus, safety works in two directions: the sexual abuse of children is certainly prevented but positive pedophile relationships also remain possible this way.

Let's hope that pedophilia in the positive sense in which I've used the term here will once cease to be the taboo that it still continues to be very often today.

Loving, harmless friendships between adults and children, even voluntary relationships with forms of erotic contact, are a reality which is still known to much too few people. And such friendships have nothing to do with child abuse.

Therefore it is really horrible if *bona fide* pedophiles (or more generally, persons with pedophile feelings) are associated with child rapists, because people who really love of children feel more shocked than average about the crimes of the real vice criminals.

Call

If you yourself have had positive experiences as a child with a so called "pedophile" relationship [send me an e-mail](#).

I will of course try to determine how reliable your account is.

You may describe the relationship, first of all in its non-sexual, emotional aspects, and only secondarily in its specifically erotic respects, if there were any. I'm collecting such self-reports for an article.

Personal background of the author

I am somebody who has always had a lot of contact with children and teenagers and who has always liked such contacts. For this reason I've been stigmatized more than once as a "child abuser". In one instance, I had a very close, tender friendship with a young girl, which wasn't classified as sexual abuse but which was stigmatized and sabotaged as harmful and burdening in the psychological sense.

This has affected me a lot and formed the reason why I decided to study the literature about these subjects. I don't have a criminal record and I've never had the intention to have 'real sex' with a child. However, I have met a few persons who had a voluntary sexual relationship and were convicted for this. Much to my naive surprise their voluntary friendships with children were (apart from the sex) much like my own friendships. That's why I feel strongly engaged with the issue of societal openness about positive friendships between adults and children, both with and without erotic contact.

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