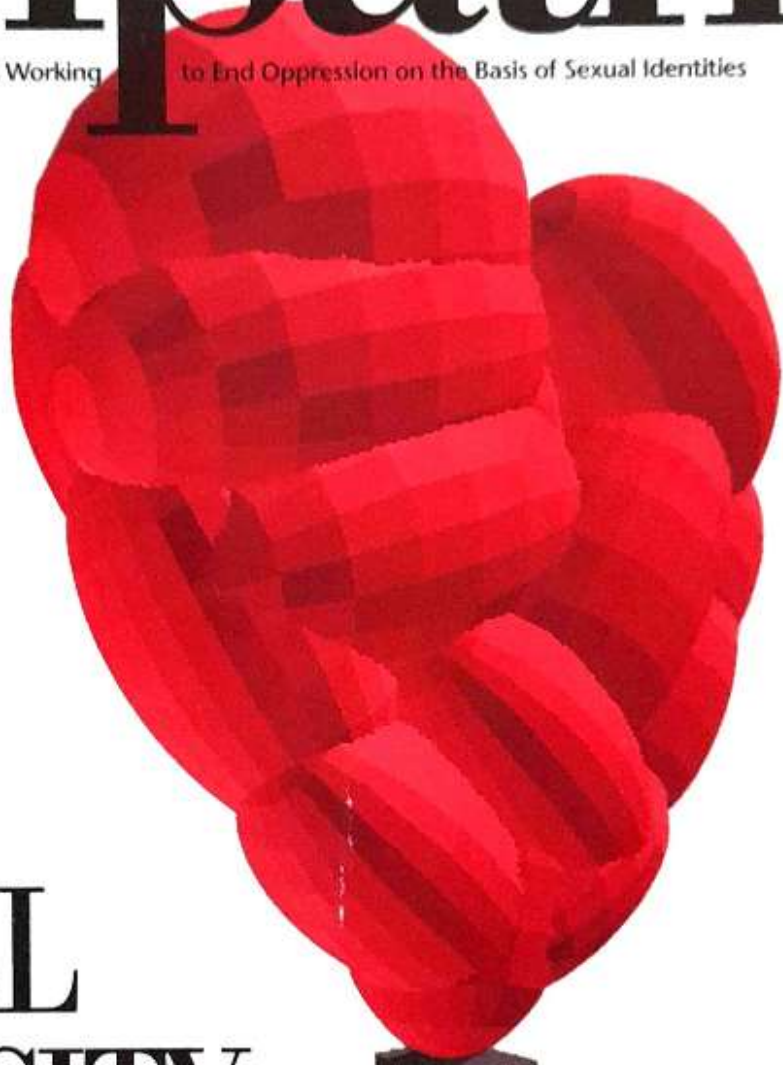


Empathy

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THE
POLITICS
OF
**SEXUAL
DIVERSITY**

WORKING TOWARD PERFECT


BALANCE



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Intergenerational Intimacy

Andrew Nilsen

For 20 years I have examined the issue of intimacy between the generations, particularly what men refer to as "man-boy love." Let me say at the outset that I owe no allegiance to any vested interests, nor have I any tolerance for those "experts" who repeat bromides they have heard from others. Repeat them often enough, and people believe what may *not* be the truth.

As an elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educator since 1964, I interviewed more than 7,000 persons about topics in human sexuality for home, school, and church; many of these were children (ages 7+). I am also co-author of a book on morality, *Morality in Curriculum*, an editor of a book for college human sexuality classes, *Human Sexuality*, and author of a manual to help gay-lesbian youth live productively, *Youth Want to Know: A S.U.P.E.R. Manual*. Given this background, I will share some of my thoughts regarding the often discussed issues of childhood trauma and informed consent.

Issues of Trauma and Consent

Firstly, I believe we need to put aside the hyperbole, the labeling, and the hysteria that the media and courts feast upon in order to get at truth. Time and again when man-boy relationships are publicized and police or courts get into the act with social workers, psychiatrists, and other members of the "helping professions," the childhood trauma *begins*. The child was not traumatized by the sex between consenting partners or he wouldn't have been involved in it, he wouldn't have defended the "perpetrator," and he wouldn't have refused to cooperate with authorities. Parents, educators, friends, siblings, and ministers hover over the child indicating that something horrific has happened. Shame, guilt, and fear cascade before the child's eyes. It's when others get involved and the pejoratives come down, when arrests are made, lives are shattered, and relationships disintegrated that the trauma, the loss, and the shame are heaped upon all. The public is so frightened over this issue today that if they recall such acts from years back they are shaken up enough to visit a counselor. The government exploits us here.

It is strange that a parent or a relative can psychologically or physically mangle a child through hate or violence with near impunity, but just touch the child's "private parts" and all hell breaks loose. Armies of police, social workers, reporters, and psychiatrists attack what the child saw as a loving, caring adult/child relationship. No one acknowledges this is the care Plato and other greats showed those of tender age. No

one acknowledges that the child knows the difference between love and hate, caressing fingers and violent hands; beatings are not love, sex is not violence. Kids know more about love than we do!

Children know what it is they want; they can make the choices. Adults should let them be more in control or have the power and dominance in their tete-a-tetes. The pedophile, of course, calls this real love: he is there for the boy in every way, for whatever the occasion demands. He also shares sexual moments with the child. He asks the boy, he does not overpower him. The boy consents.

Informed consent means nothing if a child has no choices. He can say no, and many do say no to the pedophiles. But he can also say "Yes." The child doesn't need to know that 10 years down the road he may be traumatized if anyone knows he made love to an adult — that's the onus put on by society and has little to do with the child's desire or the adult's intimacy. The child is often delighted to learn about the body and what it will be as he views the adult. In that way, it is natural to share such moments with a man like he'll become. This is the way it was in colonial America, in the days of ancient Greece and Rome, at the temples in Biblical days, with the great philosophers, with many South Sea societies, to be sure, many of the Popes dabbled in man-boy love relationships, as the clergy seems to still do in our time.

One day I pondered deeply this topic in my own life and decided that I wish that I had had a mentor as a child — preferably a female — but little boys do identify more with their own sex at those tender ages (John Money's "rehearsal play"). But if I could go back now and have a young woman of 25 "baptize" me into the world of sexual feelings and techniques at age 10 or 12, I would opt for it in a heartbeat! It would have been far more wonderful than the furtive, guilty, sin-ridden teachings of my church, family, and school. Why did I allow my relatives, friends, teachers, and ministers to govern my sex life?


These adult reflections would not have been possible without the childhood insights I have gained through my thousands of interviews. Let me highlight just a few cases that I encountered.

Children Speak for Themselves

A boy of 8 had sexual relationships with an adult man of 42. This boy said, "He treats me great; I like it a lot. He's nicer than my own father." A girl of 10 with a man of 39 said: "I love seeing his body, he's so powerful and I enjoy kissing him all over." A 14-year

old boy responds: "My male friend is a real man. My daddy, a cop, plays at being a man but a real man doesn't beat his kid. My man friend lets me have sex with him when I want and sex with my girlfriend when I want that, I'll have sex with anyone that I like — man or woman, boy or girl — it makes no difference 'cause I just like it."

Emotional intimacy between men and younger males is a means to enhance the socialization of boys through relationships that are both psychologically and developmentally sensible.

 At a New York City apartment some years ago I observed and interviewed a 17-year old boy French kissing and fellating his 37-year old lover. When I asked why he was doing that he just said "Because I want to." Simple question and simple answer. I witnessed another adult make love to a 16-year old boy. The boy was all over him, couldn't get enough of this older man. At the time, this boy also dated girls and now is married with children of his own.

Then there is my interview with Ramón, age 8:

I have only had sex with a guy this year. He's 35 and is my Sunday School Teacher. He likes for me to be in his house and we go to bed a lot. He teaches me about sex and that makes me glad because then I know how he likes it and I know what to do.... I try it on girls and they like it. But I ask permissions. I can't tell them how I learn so I say I copy the movies. He is so nice to me. But, he'll yell at me if I do something wrong. I can ask him things my parents have no time for. He sits down with me and helps me out.

Lastly, I offer a statement from Mark, a member of the North American Man-Boy Love Association:

I am 20. I have had gay thoughts in sex since I was about seven. Nobody told me about these, but I not only thought about them, I even had pictures of certain acts in my head. However, due to our society's extremely oppressive attitudes about homosexuality, my thoughts stayed only thoughts till my last year of public school. When I finally began experimenting, nobody pushed me.... I had a rather mediocre home situation and had few friends. Oh, do I wish another guy had approached me! Age would not have made any difference. Just having a friend that cared about me would have made my growing up so much easier.

Why Child-Adult Sexual Relationships?

While the Government extends adolescence into the third decade of one's life, we ignore the question of just what is it about children that makes them such desired sexual objects. And, conversely, what is it that makes an adult, far into the years, a desirable sex object for a youth? To label such relationships "sick" or "perverted" explains nothing. And, in my opinion, they are neither.

At the time I write this piece I am also contributing some lengthy case material to a book on clergy-child experiences. I cannot begin to tell you how common this is. And, yes, it is true whether you want to hear it or not — boys often cruise the adults and snare them in much the same manner. Boys have told me they know almost right away by staring a man down if he's into "getting it on with me." This often happens at malls, sports meets, or other stadium-type happenings.

One must ask oneself, "Just what sex objects will I allow myself to entertain?" If no one knew, would I try a gay person? Would I try a threesome or an orgy? Would I try some toys or other gadgetry? Would I try S/M-B/D just once? Would I try a transvestite and do a role play? Can I try a young person? All these are questions one asks before the first time and, if that first time is great, this will lead to subsequent times and perhaps a romance. But what will I allow? Or, shall I deliberately decide not to think of such and such and suppress such thoughts? Whatever you do, however, never tell a counselor you had relations with or even touched a minor since confidentiality is no longer respected by the law.

Kids are seen by most of us as cuddly and cute, innocent, happy-go-lucky, and so forth. Some adults may add to that, sexually attractive, in addition to all the other ways kids can attract. I know of a man who was never sexually excited by kids until he was 41: then, it happened. A year later he acted on his thought. He loved it and so did the boy. They had a relationship one might say patterned a bit after Plato's... for three years. The boy went on to manhood and to women with no regrets.

Emotional intimacy between men and younger males is a means to enhance the socialization of boys through relationships that are both psychologically and developmentally sensible. Real two-way social relationships of men and boys, when boys are focused on same gender oriented friends/role models, is advocated. Can there be any argument that boys need qualitatively more from men than they have been getting? Ageism keeps society from fully grasping the import of the lives of older children and adolescents and young men, as well. Many may say, "Oh, childhood is so innocent (asexual)." But it is likely true that responsible, dutybound, probing children intimidate parents and other adults. I offer that postponing developmental behaviors is inconsistent with psychology.

Kids need that period of trial and error practice and real rehearsal play to attain the gradual acquisitions of the requisite components of complex behavior.

Surely in the interpersonal skills area, one grows incrementally to the complex-responsible relationships once one becomes more proficient at tasks repeatedly practiced. Yet lack of intimacy is the very hallmark of traditional manliness. We simply must now put away "protecting" boys and put on preparing them BEFORE adolescence comes. We actually protect when we provide the chances for boys to experience and to try out their interpersonal relations, including those with men if they so incline.

Today it is vital for adult-child interactions since we are losing two-parent families and adolescence itself is being elongated. Consequently, kids are kept from the existing, functioning society until their early 20s when there exists a critical period for the interpersonal skills and self-awareness realizations.

Adult contacts satisfy such needs — not in replacing the family but actually enhancing it. We seem to regard those not yet adult as inferior, passive objects to exploit and manipulate (and who exploits children more than their own parents?). We say we need to shield them from the horrors of the "real world." Children are treated in the United States as property with next to no socio-legal rights that are cherished by other people; yet, when grown, we demand that they function fully prepared. This is why we need real interpersonal interactions for kids as an alternative to scripted heterosexual romance. Allow them to freely choose that which *they* wish to investigate, for themselves, with appropriate information and responsibilities.

The media and courts call overt sexual contact "abuse," as if that was all there was to the adult-child relationship and as if that was the only thing that occurred in it. This is nonsense. Yes, the sex is a possible manifestation but one which most likely takes a back seat to the communication, sharing and trust that are involved — according to the players in these dramas.

As we get older in the United States we touch less, and Prescott's work (1975; 1979) shows the less touch, the more violence in a society. Since we don't have intimacy, we don't have much touch. Intimacy could be possible if one develops the ability mentally to take the role of another, and this starts about the age of seven or eight. If the same-sex parent is the more important for identity development it stands to reason their out-of-family same-sex contacts also fit that mold.

Friendship prepares the young for adult love, which the family is not prepared to offer. Friendships are the most intense in adolescence, which is why high school youth have so many ambisexual contact of an erotic nature. But the performing of intimate behaviors provides tools to enhance intrapersonal functioning and interpersonal relationships. There should be no

doubt that close intergenerational relations help tide an adolescent over a difficult period in life.

The American Indian berdache and the Hawaiian mahu often began lifelong relations with adult males, including sex. Anthropologist Gilbert Herdt (1981) tells us that 8 to 20-year olds sexually interacted as a requirement for a boy's advent into manhood. Indeed, there are many lonely pedophiles who would love to take in a boy lost to "the streets," who is also same-gender oriented. Gay youth who hystle or are unwanted by their family could be adopted by a man who loves boys. But, no, we fear that sex will ruin the boy while the alienating milieu will not. Ironically, many persons prefer these kids to remain homeless, unloved, and at risk of AIDS rather than embraced in a loving relationship with a man.

We need to scrap this arbitrary chronological age designation for a more realistic and measurable social age concept. Even if sex does take place, we should focus on other authentic factors that bridge boyhood to manhood: intimacy, tenderness, caring, bonding. Such things last a lifetime and make lives better.

Parker Rossman (1976) studied 1000 pederasts and 300 adolescents in relationships, finding that the boys were involved because they elected to be. They spoke of being cared about and loved by these men and modelled themselves after the admired qualities of the men.

The very fact that intimacy exists with one of your own sex only serves to assure the youngster that this is nothing to fear. It is this fear that the child-abuse industry exploits as they dogmatically state that intergenerational sex is traumatic and non-consensual. As professionals, we need to be more circumspect in our unhesitating embrace of such a position. Let us consider the rights of children to no longer be chattel, to be truly free to choose with whom they want to have sexual learning, to be free to be gay or bisexual, and to in general have control over a greater part of their lives and profit from self-direction. We can help them, and certainly should help them, but we should not be depriving them, cheating them, or "protecting" them from that which will actually make them independent, healthy persons.

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