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Man-Boy Relationships:

Different Concepts for a Diversity of Phenomena

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Introduction

to
Journal of Homosexuality Volume 20, 1/2, 1990
Male Intergenerational Intimacy

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In contemporary Western society, intimate and sexual relations between men and boys are considered as immoral, unlawful, psychologically deviant and damaging to the boys involved, regardless of the emotional contexts in which they occur. By almost exclusively studying these relationships as forms of sexual abuse, the social sciences have narrowed our view of this subject. The current social climate makes it rather difficult to look at these relationships in an objective way.

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Although historical and anthropological sources show a lot of instances of intimate involvement between men and boys, the wealth of material on these relationships is often simply not known or, if known, is suppressed or neglected. Even nowadays, man-boy relationships are not uncommon. As in homosexuality, man-boy sexuality occurs and not seldom in a context in which both partners consent, even in societies that strongly condemn. In these relationships a diversity of feelings are or can be expressed: affection, attachment, desire, domination and submission, masculinity and femininity. The way these relationships are realized is, of course, limited by the rejecting attitude and the sanctions of society. Men who feel attracted to boys have to legitimize their feelings toward themselves as well as towards society .

Against this background, the purpose of this special volume is twofold:

- first, we want to contribute to the documentation of the diversity of phenomena held together under the label of man-boy relationships or man-boy love;

second, we want to further the discussion about the place of man-boy relationships in contemporary Western society.

The contributions we brought together come from a variety of fields, not seldom beyond the limits of the editors' own specific scientific discipline. The authors don't see man-boy relationships as necessarily pathological. This collection of articles should not be considered as an exhaustive treatment of the subject. With this issue we hope to establish a climate in which a less emotional and a more open and scholarly discussion of these phenomena is possible.

Man-boy relationships is a concept which we believe encompasses divergent phenomena. Judged on outer appearances, these phenomena have some resemblances: in every society men and boys are in one way or another involved with each other. However, differences between the phenomena become clear when one looks at the social functions of these relationships, cultural and juridical regulations, and the ways in which in some relationships the sexual desires are experienced and expressed. For example, for us it is difficult to understand what feelings were involved in and what meanings were attached to the ancient relationships we used to call *Greek Love*.

As the position of boys in society and the view about sexuality

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change, the phenomenon acquires different forms and contents. Even if the Renaissance was inspired by classic antiquity, the relations of artists like Da Vinci or Celini with their boyfriends were not the same as those between the Emperor Hadrian and his Antinous. So the statement "Man/boy love is from all times and all places," frequently used in defense of such relationships, is only true if we neglect the profound diversity that these relationships assume. Besides, even within a given period and culture the attitudes of men who experience attraction to boys vary .

The diversity of the phenomena is reflected in related concepts conceiving man-boy relationships. These concepts are: pedophilia, neophilia, philopédie, pederasty , ephebophilia, hebephilia, Greek love, pedagogical eros, man/boy love, and intergenerational sex. The meaning of all these terms differs slightly, partly in coherence with the age limit of the persons to whom attraction is experienced and with the gender.

All these concepts are relatively new and have their own history. The meaning of these terms is not constant but has changed over time. For instance, pederasty has been used as synonymous with homosexuality; likewise, the meaning of the concept of homosexuality has changed over time.

The meanings and connotations attached to concepts also differ depending on the social climate in which they are used. In The Netherlands, where homosexual contact with minors from the age of sixteen is allowed, pedophilia became a well-accepted term to denote feelings of attraction to persons up to the age of sixteen. Adopted by those who promote the liberation of man-boy relationships, this term doesn't have the negative medical connotations common in the United States. In the United States, pedophilia, as one of the sexual disorders in DSM III-R, is much more associated with psychiatry .

The choice of a particular label is not without consequences. It gives a particular representation of the phenomenon, stressing certain features above others. In the psychiatric use of *pedophi[la,* the phenomenon is represented as a (pathological) individual proclivity, characterizing people instead of relationships, with much stress on the sexual aspect of these feelings; the boys involved and their possible motives disappear from the picture. In *man/boy love* the

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unproblematic affectional side of the phenomenon is stressed, suggesting reciprocity or even symmetry between the parties involved; it is understandable that boy-lovers in the United States adopted this term to further their goals.

The choice of labels is never without political grounds or consequences. These labels also have consequences for the people who use them for their own self-understanding and influence the way they deal with their desires and express feelings.

Some of the labels obscure the phenomenon to which they refer. So, because intergenerational sex is also applicable to sexual contacts between young and old adults, it gives man-boy contacts a less dangerous outlook. The same applies more or less to Greek love. This term is used to show that the interest in children is not only sexual but entwined with the so-called pedagogical eros, to the intention of the adult to guide a boy on his path life and to further his development. Although man-boy relationships can have pedagogical benefits, it is clear that these pedagogical intentions are not by definition inherent in sexual interest in children. If Greek love is used to stress the platonic component and to disguise the sexual aspect, the term is misleading.

In this collection several labels are used alternatively. The context in which the labels are used will elucidate their contemplated meaning.

The way in which concepts related to man-boy relationships are currently used, is hot suitable for understanding historical examples and cultural practices classed under the concept of man-boy

relationships. Without intending to be exhaustive, we brought together some historical and anthropological examples from different times and places.

Gisela Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg discusses the institutionalized forms of man-boy sexuality in societies where these contacts are accepted under certain specified, culturally-scripted conditions. Within these societies, the sometimes close bonds between men and boys fulfill a distinct, accepted and integrated societal function. They were part of religious practices or initiation rites, making someone a *real* man. These forms of man-boy relationships correspond to a distinct view of social reality in which manhood, sexuality , sperm, and divinity have specific meanings.

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It is not always easy to detect the meaning of historic instances of man-boy involvement. This is shown in the ongoing discussion about the inscriptions found on the face of a rock on the Greek island of Thera. Edward Brongersma summarizes this discussion and argues why the inscriptions shouldn't be seen as vulgar pornographic graffiti but a testimony to ritualistic sacred acts with a clear sexual component.

Not only do practices of man-boy involvement and attitudes toward it change over time and place but the position of children also changes, in line with the development of society. Martin Killias develops the theory that the introduction of an age of consent into the penal codes, a rather recent phenomenon, unthinkable in a former phase, was provoked by the changed position of children in society. If the achievement motivation in a society is accentuated and the educational standards rise, the age of consent consequently rises.

Much closer to our contemporary experience than the man/boy sexuality in primitive societies are the man-boy friendships based on the concept of pedagogical eros. In the first decades of this century , the idea of pedagogical eros had been propogated by the German teacher Wyneken. As shown by Thijs Maassen, the various reactions to his conviction for acts of vice with minors shed light on the prevailing viewpoints then being held with regard to man-boy friendships. As a result of these discussions, the Platonic model of these friendships came to be replaced by a medico-sexological model which still dominates the current views on man-boy involvement.

In the *Zeitgeist* at the beginning of this century, the concept of pedagogical eros was not restricted to man-boy relationships. It also expressed the promise of and belief in a new world. This is shown in the study by Will Ogrinc, in which a new approach to the study of *the boy in art,* a theme to which serious attention scarcely has been paid, is developed. He describes the manner in which the Swiss artist Hodler depicted his son in a series of paintings, and he analyzes the symbolism of pedagogical eros behind it.

Ralph Nicholas Chubb, a writer, painter and boy-lover inclined to spiritualism, is the object of a study by Tariq Rahman. Analyzing his writings, Rahman shows how Chubb created an exonerative

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myth to reconcile his sexual interest with his desire for spiritual fulfillment. Chubb's conception of his sexual orientation is an example of a self-definition by a boy-lover not yet influenced by the psychiatric discourse.

Although the psychiatric conception of pedophilia influences how contemporary boy-lovers look at themselves, they still create their own personal view of their desire and its history. Some divergent personal conceptions are described by Chin-Keung ti, who analyzed the personal accounts of pedophiles to find out how these individuals understand themselves and how they construct their sexuality. Current scientific research in general doesn't stay that close to the pedophile's experience. According to Edward Brongersma, in his contribution on *Boy-lovers and their influence on boys,* current research is all too often unreliable for several reasons: one can often learn more about man-boy relationships from novels. Based on anecdotal observations, Brongersma shows the potential influences a pedophile relationship can have for a boy.

On a theoretical level, pedophilia has become an exclusive sexual orientation, classified as one of the sexual disorders. This assumption dominates the diagnosis and the treatment of *pedophiles*. We don't exclude the possibility that in some cases pedophile practices result from a pathological development, as, in fact, can happen in all sexual orientations. However, we believe that a lot of the problems people with pedophile desires are confronted with result from societal rejection. So, in the contributions of Alex van Naerssen and Gertjan van Zessen on individual and group treatment, a different viewpoint is taken. A distinction is made between identity and relationship problems. The pedophile identity formation is viewed as parallel to the homosexual's, a process in which a person goes through several cognitive phases to define himself as a sexual, emotional, and intellectual being. One of the relationship problems discussed is that at different ages sexuality can have different meanings for the partners. This can make it difficult to express and cope with it.

Characteristic of our contemporary society is the disapproval and rejection of man-boy relationships. However, even in our times, one can observe differences in the attitudes of people, groups and societies. In this respect The Netherlands, next to some Third

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World countries, is often seen as a paradise for boy-lovers, or, depending on the perspective taken, as a Sodom and Gomorrah. In fact, the climate in The Netherlands used to be more tolerant. Penalties for men who have had sex with people below the age of sixteen are less severe in The Netherlands than those meted out in the United States for the same behavior. In his contribution to this issue, Jan Schuijer explores the possible causes for this more accepting climate in The Netherlands and describes the Dutch juridicial debate on the age of consent.

As Kenneth Plummer shows in his more theoretical contribution, the contemporary discussion about pedophilia and child sexual abuse rests upon uncritical and underdeveloped concepts of childhood sexuality as dangerous or pleasurable. Plummer develops the social *constructionist* alternative to these unreflected views and sketches some central dimensions which guide the child's scripting of the sexual world.

Boy-lovers, especially after they began to organize themselves, also experienced rejection from other stigmatized groups, which from historical points of view can also be seen as potential allies. This applies to the gay-movement, especially when it doesn't conceive its goals solely as promoting its own interests, but as part of a broader personal and sexual liberation.

In The Netherlands the national gay organization, the COC (Cultureel Ontspannings Centrum, Cultural and Recreational Centre), declared pedophilia to be a gay issue. In the United States the gay movement and the boylovers are less close to one another. David Thorstad documents the collisions that have taken place in the United States between the North American Man/Boy Love Association {NAMBLA) and several branches of the gay movement and also shows the cooperation between both movements.

It is difficult to predict what will happen in the future with respect to man-boy relationships, child sexuality, the position of children in our society. Will pedophilia become a lifestyle for some people, based on their personally designed sexual orientation? Will society allow people to adopt such a lifestyle, or will society persist in seeing them only as child molesters? Can sexual involvement between adult!: and children be only conceived as child sexual abuse, or will the professionals and the public come to realize that there are

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various kinds of intimate involvement between adults and children and that distinctions between voluntary involvement and forced involvement can be made? Will children get more possibilities to construct their own sexualities, unrestricted by parents, professionals, the church, and pedophiles?

Questions like these are hard to answer. Discussion and thinking about these topics should continue. By bringing together contributions, showing historical and ethnological examples of man-boy involvement, and documenting and discussing the current situation, we want to stimulate this discussion.

In a contribution which closes this special issue, Gerald Jones presents his ideas about the possible role the social sciences could play. By criticizing the contemporary narrow focus on child sexual abuse and its often biased literature, supportive of popular beliefs, he proposes a much broader approach, which could help to understand more accurately the diversity and possible benefits of intergenerational intimacy. This special volume can also be seen as an attempt in that direction.

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