

# PAIDIKA

The Journal of Paedophilia



Issue 8: Special Women's Issue

# ON AN OLD BICYCLE

## **Erotic and Sexual Relationships between Women and Minors**

*“You learn better on an old bicycle.”*

Dutch saying

Edited by

Marjan Sax  
&  
Sjuul Deckwitz

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## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

### When You Change the Gender, Reality Changes Too

Marjan Sax and Sjuul Deckwitz

Some feminists may still feel that it would be easier to attain their goals without the liability of perceived "sexual deviance" of any sort. In the current sex debates, some fear that the women's movement will come to be identified with issues even more stigmatized and threatening than female homosexuality. Thus, feminists' fear of sexual difference manifests itself as a concern with public relations, an attempt to keep the women's movement respectable and free of pollution.<sup>1</sup>

Sex and the erotic between women and boys and women and girls is virgin territory for scientific research. When *Paidika* Editor Joseph Geraci asked us to edit a special issue on women and paedophilia we were rather surprised. *Women* and paedophilia? Never heard of it. None of the discussions we had participated in had touched upon the adult woman as the partner of a child. The contribution of women to the dialogue on paedophilia has been to argue that it is harmful for the child,<sup>2</sup> or guardedly to describe childhood sexuality.<sup>3</sup> Female "paedophiles" have been conspicuous by their absence. Alice Schwarzer questioned whether there could even be such a thing as a female paedophile. Her theory was that a woman was incapable of expressing power through her sexuality.<sup>4</sup> The reason most often cited for the supposed non-existence of female paedophiles is that women in their social roles of mother and guardian have developed a special bond with children which is

non-sexually caring, loving, and protecting. It is argued that these qualities simply do not mix with the erotic.

It is surprising that contacts between women and boys and women and girls are certainly dealt with in novels and films. Helène Perrin described in *De nauwe weg* (The Narrow Path) the increasingly erotic attraction a woman in her twenties felt for a boy of ten in her care.<sup>5</sup> *Twee vorstinnen en een vorst* (Two Countesses and a Count) by Peskens is about the erotic feelings of a 15-year-old boy for his aunt.<sup>6</sup> This theme recurs in the same author's *Mijn tante Coleta*.<sup>7</sup> *Olivia*, written by "Olivia" (the pseudonym of Dorothy Strachey Bussy), deals with the love of a 16-year-old girl for the female director of a French boarding school.<sup>8</sup> The films *Mourir d'aimer* by André Cayette<sup>9</sup> and *Kung Fu Master* by Agnes Varda<sup>10</sup> show the love of adult women for respectively 17-year-old and 15-year-old boys. The well-known movie *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931) by Leontine Sagan tells of a mutual, intense love between a boarding school girl and one of her female teachers.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of its occurrence as a literary theme, women and paedophilia as a phenomenon is hardly ever noted, and even when it is, it is seldom considered "paedophilia."

Several questions presented themselves when we began to examine the subject. Are such contacts and relationships limited to films and novels? Do they exist in real life? If they do, why are they not labelled paedophile? Are the sexual contacts between the (usually) male young per-

son and women regarded as healthy and thus outside most people's understanding of paedophilia? Is the sexual behavior of women in these situations so motherly and non-threatening that it attracts no attention?

As we dug more deeply into our subject we discovered that erotic and sexual contacts between women and children under the age of consent do indeed occur. In speaking with female friends, once the shock of embarking on a discussion of the concept of paedophilia wore off, countless stories came out: love for male and female teachers, early lesbian experiences with older women, adult women's fantasies about having sexual escapades with innocent boys. The mutual attraction between women and minors was certainly not only an academic matter; but neither was it a subject much discussed.

Sex is a difficult issue and female sexuality only became a topic of general discussion among women after the second "feminist wave" in the '70s. Child sexuality is a taboo subject for many, and paedophilia is a forbidden subject in some circles. Perhaps these combined factors help to explain the general lack of attention paid to the phenomenon we are discussing in this volume. A search of the scientific literature yielded very little. With the exception of studies of sexual abuse where female perpetrators were cited (e.g., Finkelhor, Wakefield et al),<sup>12</sup> it seems that not much exists about women's sexual relationships with minors.

### **The Concept of Paedophilia**

One thing quickly became clear to us — paedophilia was not generally associated with women. Most people who identify themselves as paedophiles are men. Nearly all research into paedophile experience is about males; the eroticism and sexuality described is male. Perhaps more importantly, although in the '70s in the Netherlands, and among certain experts today, the term has simply meant sexual relations between an adult and someone under the age of consent, paedophilia has everywhere gradually taken on more negative connotations.<sup>13</sup> For

many people, and the media too, it has also become synonymous with incest and/or the sexual abuse of small children.

As we have come to understand the subject from a female perspective, we have found it irrelevant, even counter-productive, to label the similar eroto-sexual experiences of women "female paedophilia." This would only place it in that frame of reference defined and described by the male perspective. The fact that we were unable to find many traces of so-called "female paedophilia" strengthened our feeling that we should reject the use of the term. Women make up virtually no percentage of the membership of existing paedophile groups, possibly because there are indeed very few women who call themselves paedophiles, or, more probably, because women who engage in adult/minor sexual relations seldom see their experiences reflected in the way that men with comparable experiences describe them. In addition, most paedophile groups consist largely of homosexual men, and it may be that women having heterosexual adult-minor relations do not feel comfortable in such groups.

In the course of our interviews, speaking with many women, it became evident that, as a concept, paedophilia was alienating, and prevented women from recognizing their own experiences. Another drawback we felt was that the term favors the position of the older person who feels attracted to the younger. The perspective of the minor is not implied by the term and sometimes in the discussion seems irrelevant. The study of the paedophile phenomenon is almost always centered on the adult.

The negative connotations of the term, the fact that it is largely associated with men, the fact that it usually connotes only the adult, have convinced us to avoid its use. We especially do not want to place the experiences of women in a frame of reference almost universally described in terms of male sexuality. We will thus speak about "erotic and sexual experiences between women and boys or girls, and vice versa." That is hardly a pithy phrase, but we would rather use it than a word that would automatically create misunderstandings.

## Definitions

What experiences are described in this book? As we sat down to define them we found ourselves in a mine field. There were the different definitions of paedophilia: the majority involved sexual attraction which the older person feels for children. Brongersma describes someone with paedophile feelings as "an adult with a clear, conscious sexual preference for boys and/or girls."<sup>14</sup> As a simple rendering of the law, there is also the more formal definition of "sexual contact with a young person under the age of consent." Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg defines paedophilia as "sexual contact with pre-adolescent children who have not yet reached biological sexual maturity."<sup>15</sup> The trouble for us with these definitions is that they are all explicitly sexual.

Without wanting to over-simplify male sexuality, even male researchers propose that mature male sexual experience is chiefly directed towards orgasm through either masturbation or penetration.<sup>16</sup> When we consider the contacts women have with minors, and vice-versa, some of which are described in the following interviews and articles, we see immediately that this genital description is inadequate. For many women, sexuality does not imply orgasm per se; sexuality for women and girls is a much less clear-cut thing; it is open to question. Are caressing or affection "sexual"?

We suspect that many contacts women have with boys and girls, and vice versa, are erotic; that is, although there might be an obvious attraction, it might not result in sexual acts. Perhaps nothing actually "happens"; perhaps those involved put their arms around and hug one another. We wanted, nonetheless, to include this kind of behavior in our study, and we did not wish to set limits as to what counted as a sexual or erotic act and what did not. We have therefore kept our concept as broad as possible: erotic and sexual relations of women with girls or boys and vice versa.

## Age

Age limits are a recurrent issue in discussions about paedophilia. At what age do adult Dutch

people find it acceptable for a young person to have sexual relations with someone older? The lower the age of the youth the greater the objection to a sexual relation. Sexual maturity and age of consent are the most frequently cited criteria for judging the acceptability of a sexual relationship. There is a considerable difference between the two, although they are sometimes confused with the discussion of the child's ability to consent. One objection to using age of consent as a standard is that it varies so widely from country to country. It is further complicated by the fact that there are usually different consent ages for homosexual and heterosexual acts. In The Netherlands the legal age of consent for both is 16; in the United States it varies from state to state; in Japan it is 13; and in England it is 16 for heterosexual and 21 for homosexual acts.

In determining the contents of this Special Issue we decided not to use age of consent as a criterion for inclusion or exclusion. The whole discussion about the age at which the age of consent should be fixed did not strike us as a very useful discussion. The more relevant questions for women/minor relations is whether they were occurring at all, and, if so, what form they were taking. We set neither an upper nor a lower limit to the age of the younger partner. Most reports and interviews, however, concern adolescents older than 12. We also have more concerns about intergenerational relationships when the children involved are very young, but we have not, at this stage in our research, come across experiences between women and pre-pubescent children. Our sentiment, finally, was that if all experiences were to be examined, age boundaries seemed too limiting.

## Concepts of Female Sexuality

Sex and eroticism, it is now generally accepted, are not the same for women as for men. Male needs and male experience of sexuality have commonly been used as the standard of sexuality. Dyer says, "Male sexuality is a bit like air: you are breathing it all the time but you are not conscious of it."<sup>17</sup>

In the last 20 years a new idea has gained ground: that the male norm for sexual behavior is inappropriate for women. Women may wish to deal with sex in a different way—not necessarily a better way—and want the latitude to experiment with their own wishes and ideas.

In sexual politics, female sexuality is less and less frequently depicted as the shadow side, mirror image, or extension of male sexuality. What the forms of female sexuality are is not so easily described. Certainly we can at least state that because of the different socialization processes and upbringing of women, they have learned to deal with sexuality in a different manner.

One aspect of sexuality which has received a great deal of attention in the last few years is sexual violence against women and girls. The women's movement has continuously complained about, and given examples of, incest and sexual abuse. It is one of the visible changes which feminism has brought about: thinking about sexuality is impossible without recognition of that violent side of (male) sexual behavior.

The campaign against pornography, which directly linked it to sexual violence against women,<sup>18</sup> was in the 1980s an important focus of feminism and received a lot of attention both inside and outside the women's movement. In the United States, attempts by MacKinnon and Dworkin to have pornography banned forged a monstrous bond between feminists and the New Right. Faithful to reactionary thought, MacKinnon and Dworkin targeted not just pornography but also all forms of sexual activity other than monogamous, loving sexual relations between lesbian women. Other forms of sexual behavior were condemned as phallogentric and demeaning. In most European countries the anti-porn campaign was milder, but the link between it and the struggle against sexual violence certainly existed.

Pornography and sexual violence have dominated much of the discussion about women and sexuality, to such a degree that for many people outside the women's movement this segment of the discussion appears to comprise the entire feminist view of sexuality.

There was, however, another current of

thought which, influenced by ideas about women's right to sexual self-determination, placed more emphasis upon the positive aspects of sexuality. It included lesbian groups experimenting in sado-masochism, prostitutes who were advocating their own "workers' rights," women from the butch-fem world, and feminists in the academic world. In the United States these groups coalesced into an effective lobby against the anti-pornography efforts of MacKinnon and Dworkin.<sup>19</sup> The starting point for these "pro-sex" groups was the insistence that the fight against sexual violence revealed only one side of the coin. They emphasized that women must also pay attention to what they *did* want; what experiences were they having with their own sexuality and eroticism; what longings did they cherish?<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, these two approaches to female sexuality have in the last years become polarized. Feminists have been preoccupied either with sexual violence and their sexual repression by men, or with the fight for sexual freedom and sexual self-determination. In The Netherlands, certainly, many feminists feel that a more nuanced approach has been abandoned.

We do not intend here to support one side or the other in this disastrous division of opinion and effort. An analysis which leads to the exclusion of certain groups, because their viewpoints on the issue of sex differ radically from the mainstream, is one-sided and counter-productive. Patriarchal mechanisms, sexism, and abuse do exist, but so do desires and pleasure.

### Positive Experiences

In assembling the articles for this Special Issue we wished to do justice to diversity. We were certainly aware that sexual violence and sexual abuse occurred in relationships between adults and young people, and such violence must never be denied nor covered up.

When we embarked on this study we were also surprised that so little consideration had been given to the positive, fruitful side of relationships between adult women and minors. In conversations with female friends, we heard so



many happy stories, related with genuine pleasure, that our feeling was strengthened that presenting a positive view of relationships between women and young people was indeed justified. Some of these stories we have included here as personal interviews. They are good memories of a kind one seldom hears. That is not to say that we closed our eyes to the negative side which such relationships can have, but an even-handed discussion is only possible when both kinds of experience can be examined.

One of the objections made by opponents of adult-child relations is that, because of the difference in ages, a relationship between a minor and an adult is necessarily characterized by too great a power imbalance. The basis of this objection is that young people cannot always foresee the consequences of their actions, and that creates an opportunity for adults to use, or abuse, them. The wishes of the child are subordinated to those of the adult.<sup>21</sup> A counter-argument is that there is a power differential in every relationship. With children, great power differences play a role in their relationships with their parents, teachers, and even sometimes with their peers. We are dissatisfied with condemnations based on power imbalances.

In our minds, to demand of a relationship an equality of needs and desires is chasing after an illusion. In the majority of relationships one person is usually more dependent upon the other. What is important is that the partners create a formula which they both find sufficiently satisfactory. Under what circumstances this happens, or does not happen, differs from case to case. There is no lack of information about the extent to which there are power differences in these relationships between women and minors. In our interviews we discovered differences in ages and life experience, differences in sums of money available to the women or child, differences in circles of friends, and differences in social position, as for example between teacher and student. Each relationship seemed to ascribe its own degree of importance to any one or all of these differences. In our view it is much more fruitful to examine a particular relationship as it really is rather than to make generalizations about power.

We have not examined the experiences of girls with adult men. We suspect that in many of these relationships male sexuality determines the character of the relationship. In traditional heterosexual relationships, the man's behavior usually determines what sexually takes place, unless the female partner consciously sets herself against it. We question whether young girls, with very little experience, are in any condition to oppose a man's wishes. There is little research on the subject, however, to confirm either a negative or a positive view. We fervently hope that further research will shed light on the nature of these relationships.

These are the parameters for the discussion in the articles that follow. Adult-minor relations do not play themselves out in a vacuum. In the following paragraphs we will sketch our understanding of the social setting in which such relationships must be placed. We are, for the most part, speaking from a Dutch perspective, but we maintain that this is a sound basis for an international, if Western, discussion.

### **Social Images**

Sexual contacts between women and boys are generally less condemned than those between men and boys. "It's better to learn on an old bicycle" is a cheerful old Dutch saying often applied to contacts between an adult woman and a boy. It does not imply real approval, but neither is it malicious.

Indeed, the initiation of boys into sexual love by women is often seen as a loving, and certainly not aggressive, act. The cliché of the experienced older woman teaching a boy how to perform the love act is non-threatening because such an initiation serves the purposes of male sexuality: the sexual sculpting of a boy into a man. The attention here is primarily focussed on the boy. The loving behavior, inherent in the woman, is seen as a sufficient guarantee of a responsible initiation without damaging side effects.

There is less social approval of relations between a woman and a girl, mostly because of prejudices against lesbianism. Erotic contacts between women imply a sort of sexual auton-

omy and are still not well regarded. People fear that the sexual feelings of the girl will be so misdirected that she will become lesbian herself.

Despite grudging tolerance verging on mild disapproval, erotic and sexual feelings in women for minors are not much considered. The bonding that goes on between women and children (and even adolescents) is generally regarded as natural. The image of motherhood rubs off onto all women, even those who aren't mothers. Women have such constant contact with children that people seldom stop to consider that there might be a sexual element in it. Women and children are a normal combination. But normal here means non-erotic and non-sexual. The erotic side of motherhood may reveal itself to a certain limited extent, as can be seen in a mother's letter to the Dutch women's magazine *Libelle* in which she gives a lyrical description of how in love she is with her baby.<sup>22</sup> Women can express erotic feelings for children by hugging them. But there are limits on the discussion of this expression. For example, there is a taboo on the discussion of the eroticism of breast feeding. Is it because the physical sensations stimulate unmentionable sexual feelings?

### **"Female Perpetrators"**

Recently, some attention has been directed to adult-minor relations involving women, but unfortunately it involves only abuse. Some articles have been published about the old mother-son incest taboo.<sup>23</sup>

It seems, from research on the sexual abuse of children, that female perpetrators do exist. In The Netherlands, until recently, that fact was not reflected in available statistics; thus it is remarkable that in these studies one does come across women perpetrators. A 1989 Dutch study found 12% of the perpetrators were women.<sup>24</sup> A number of explanations have been offered for the appearance of women in recent sexual violence studies. One is that sexual abuse reveals itself in stages: first one sees abuse carried out by men; later, once people's eyes have been opened to the fact that sexual abuse is more common than is realized, attention turns to women. In

contrast, Gianotten attributes the increase in female perpetrators to the growing emancipation of women, through which they have gained more power and along with it the potential for abusing that power.<sup>25</sup>

The purpose of this Special Issue is to bring to light positive experiences, and for that reason, no tales of sexual abuse are included, and no forms of parent-child incest are examined.

### **The Sexuality of Children**

Ambivalence about sexuality can often be observed when the subject of the sexuality and sexual education of children comes up. It cannot be denied that children have sexual feelings, but this is such a delicate subject to most people that they would rather leave it alone. Certainly the Western world has a great deal of difficulty dealing with it. Plummer describes how the sexual experiences of children are molded by the adult's reactions to them.<sup>26</sup> Children have a fine appreciation of other people's feelings; they quickly pick up an adult's uneasiness about sex. They perceive that adults don't know how they should talk about it, don't even know the right words to use; they see how awkward adults become. They notice that many adults find sex unpleasant and dirty, are secretive about it, talk around it, or quickly change the subject. And so children learn, without adults being aware of it, that sex is not a "normal" thing. The child learns to avoid the subject, learns that talking about sex is something you just don't do. Sex becomes categorized as something "done on the sly."

To some extent there is a general, ill-defined attitude—more a feeling than an idea—that the sexual feelings and longings of children may be allowed some expression with age-mates, but within what limits these acts may take place is not clear. Anxiety about abuse in recent years has sharply increased and sometimes reaches bizarre proportions. Instances of real or assumed sexual abuse have made it difficult to examine the sexual behavior of children in a positive manner.

A case recently came to light in which a 12-year-old Dutch boy was supposed to have "abused" more than 200 children over an 18

month period.<sup>27</sup> The extent to which the children were really victims remains unclear. Experts expressed doubts about the alarming tales which the police told; it was calculated that during those 18 months the boy must have approached three different children every week in order for the total to top 200, a statistic that seems quite impossible. Questions were raised about official examination methods which often give children ample opportunity, by means of suggestive questioning, to tell their examiners what they wish to hear. This was discussed in an article by Benjamin Rossen and Jan Schuijjer in the *Volkscrant*.<sup>28</sup> The furious reaction against this article by one mother whose children were supposed to have been abused by the 12-year-old "perpetrator" shows how clouded discussions of children and sex can become.<sup>29</sup> That is highly unfortunate, for very often in these so-called juvenile sex cases something other than the sexual is going on, something that can better be handled in a way that does not criminalize the child. This boy seems to have been a bully who frightened and forced other children to do what he wanted. But in the media he was labelled a "mini-pervert," and painted exclusively as a "sexually disturbed" individual.

In the United States there have been frequent panic reactions where children were thought to have sexually abused other children. In 1989 in Santa Cruz, California, a teenage boy was arrested because he was supposed to have had sex with playmates 4 to 10 years of age.<sup>30</sup> At Children's Institute International in Los Angeles, there is a special treatment program for children who have sexually abused other children.<sup>31</sup> It may be true that such children have acted violently but it is questionable whether arresting them, taking them out of their homes and branding them as criminals is an effective way to correct power games which are out of hand. Adult panic reactions give rise to irresponsible prosecutions of invented sexual abuse. The discussion about protecting children from abuse is not only about protecting children; it is also about adults' ignorance about their own sexuality and the sexuality of children. Adults can transmit their anxieties and projections about sex to children.

To the question of how the sexual behavior of children can develop most positively, there is no easy answer. Experiments in communes with free sexuality are isolated occurrences. Few in the feminist movement have given much thought to the position of children and only a handful of feminist visionaries have also pleaded strongly for the freedom of children. They link the repressed position of children in their homes, at school, and in society as a whole, to their lack of sexual freedom. In 1970 Shulamith Firestone called attention to the dependent position of children in modern Western society.<sup>32</sup> Kate Millet in an interview in 1980 (reprinted here) pleaded for children's rights. Her argument was that children, too, have a right to sexual freedom. Some argue that in fact children should have control, not just of their own sexuality, but of their lives.

A more recent complaint comes from the Kanalratten group, whose "manifesto" we include here. They see the authoritarian structure of the family as suppressing children. Despite its ideological rigidity and not very subtle formulation, we decided to include a part of their document. The Kanalratten, as well as Firestone and Millet, are among the few feminist women who have argued for the right of children to decide for themselves their own sexual lives and sexual behavior.

### **Childhood Innocence**

In our society we view the years of childhood as a time of innocence. Innocence here has a double meaning: on the one hand it is taken to mean that children can not yet be held responsible for their (at times bad) behavior because they cannot foresee its consequences; on the other hand it implies a state of virginity, an absence of sexual impulses and desires, or at least, an absence of sexual knowledge or experience.

This view of innocence, we believe, can be interpreted as an attestation of sexual guilt. Sexuality and sexual behavior are perceived in Western societies as among the most symbolic of all human activities. In a not-so-innocent world

we have a strong need for symbols of innocence. In former times we projected this onto women; today it is onto children. The notion of the "in-born" chastity of women in the 19th century is equivalent to the notion of the innocence of the child today. The symbolic, "unsullied by experience," child figure is regularly used in campaigns for the New Right. As the American historian John D'Emilio said in an interview:

Anxiety about the sexuality of the young is the binding factor which unites the various right-wing morality campaigns. If you examine the rhetoric of the campaigns against abortion, pornography, gay rights, sex education and other such issues, you'll find fears about the autonomous expression of sexuality among the young as a motif that runs through all of them. Anita Bryant, for instance, called her anti-gay campaign "Save our children." The right-wing, anti-pornography campaign in the 1970s began with the issue of kiddie porn. In the Nineteenth Century, conservative moralists focused on the purity of women as their key symbolic concern. . . . So now, the line that is being defended is the "innocence" of youth.<sup>33</sup>

We certainly do not disagree with the protection of children from sexual abuse or any other kind of abuse. But it is inexcusable that the innocence of youth is used as a means to achieve other ends, such as denying homosexuals or lesbians equal rights. The innocence of children appears to be the sacred symbol for a moral battle which is being fought not just over children but over the territory and social position of sexuality itself.

### Moral Panic

We think it is important to examine the ideology and tactics of some of those who have fostered these moral panics, because the discussion of child sexuality does not take place in a vacuum. It is a loaded subject, dressed up in monster clothes, and subject to all kinds of insinuations.

Gayle Rubin stated that sexuality is more than

a frivolous pastime when problems of poverty, hunger, racism, and war assail us:

Contemporary conflicts over sexual values and erotic conduct have much in common with the religious disputes of earlier centuries. They acquire immense symbolic weight. Disputes over sexual behaviour often become the vehicles for displacing social anxieties, and discharging their attendant emotional intensity. Consequently, sexuality should be treated with special respect in times of great social stress.<sup>34</sup>

In times of social uncertainty, excitement about sex serves as a kind of lightning rod. We have known such "moral panics" here in The Netherlands. "Oude Pekela," a Dutch town, has become symbolic as the Dutch example of child sexual abuse hysteria, in which not a single shred of evidence came to light.<sup>35</sup> It is not just children who are caught up in these panics; adults who are falsely accused of abuse, kidnapping, and abduction are stigmatized for the rest of their lives. It is remarkable that now *women* are starting to be accused of the most gruesome crimes against children. In the last years there have been numerous trials of female day-care center workers and kindergarten teachers in the United States accused of raping and torturing children and carrying out Satanic rituals.<sup>36</sup> The pogroms which are carried out in the name of child protection have still more in common with "moral panic" as defined by Jeffrey Weeks:

Moral panics are flurries of social anxiety, usually focusing on a condition or person, or group of persons, who become defined as a threat to accepted social values and assumptions. They arise generally in situations of confusion and ambiguity, in periods when the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate behaviours seem to need redefining or classification. Classic moral panics in the past have often produced drastic results, in the form of moral witch-hunts, physical assault and legislative action.<sup>37</sup>

## Sexuality as a Social Construction

Until the second half of the 19th Century, sexuality was the concern of the courts and the church. They determined the boundaries between permitted and forbidden conduct, and they carried out corrective actions. With the standardization and professionalization of medicine, operating from the assumption that prevention was always better than cure, sex came more and more into the domain of doctors. Doctors separated sexuality from other aspects of the person, set up categories of deviant or disparaged behavior, and provided explanations of them. Homosexuality was defined as moral madness caused by degeneration. According to such writers on sexuality as Jeffrey Weeks, Gayle Rubin, and the philosopher Michel Foucault, "created" sexuality and especially homosexuality. Medical science created sexual identities to conform to the sexualities they had created. The identity of individuals depended upon their sexual preference rather than on other things of importance, such as the work they did or the social classes to which they belonged.

Sexuality, supposedly a unity of conduct, bodily reactions, desires, and emotions, is, according to these writers, not inborn; it is a cultural, social construction. It is the result of political activity, different power positions, and the oppression of stigmatized groups and peoples excluded from conventional society, and their opposition to this oppression. No single bodily action, nor desire is in itself sexual, but becomes so in its historical and cultural context. Plummer said:

The central point really is that there is nothing intrinsically given in sexuality, or as we now call them, sexualities. Or gender for that matter. And that children aren't fixed either, nor are men and women fixed. The whole thing is basically a flux which we encode, on which we put whole sets of categorizations in order to regulate lives and control them and our experiences. It allows society to function.<sup>38</sup>

Women also are punished for stepping over the boundaries of permitted sexual behavior, but

their deviant sexual activities are less well recorded and taken less seriously than is the case with men. Lesbian acts, for example, are not so frequently reported, and thus not so frequently punished, as male homosexual behavior. Because of its greater invisibility, part of the sexual behavior of women remains undescribed, and so it has, to a certain extent, escaped medicalization. The sexual activities of women with children have for this reason also remained hidden. We can argue that, at least in the popular mind, female paedophilia does not exist.

This is more of an advantage than a disadvantage. On the one hand little is known about sex and the erotic between women and boys or girls; on the other hand it may obviate the need to deconstruct a dangerous medical stereotype. We certainly do not wish in this Special Issue to create a new category for women who form sexual bonds with minors. We *do* want to investigate a forgotten aspect of female sexuality, so we decided simply to set down a description of experiences. We offer no presupposed descriptions or definitions.

## Women and Sexuality

When examining erotic and sexual experiences between women and minors, the question arises as to the nature of women's sexual behavior and to what extent it differs from men's. There is no simple answer, but we can look at the findings of recent years. Because of the dominant position of male sexuality and associated research (which mostly utilizes male definitions of sexual activity), the experiences of women have been neglected. Women until recently have conformed to the male norm.

This is not surprising. A bit of the inheritance of the Victorian era falls upon female sexuality. Women are still somewhat burdened with the 19th Century image of the "pure" woman who has no sexual needs. Women were thought to be passive, patient; male lust, on the other hand, was insatiable, a natural force which man could not resist. On women fell the thankless task of taming the beast of male lust.

The reward for the "good" woman was male

protection. If a woman did not conform to the norms of decency, she was thought dissolute, and if she made a misstep, she “got what she asked for.” The price of “indecent” for women was the risk of sexual violence and rape.<sup>39</sup>

Although these 19th century concepts of “good” and “bad” women seem now rather old fashioned, they are still held, consciously or unconsciously, by many women. Fear of sexual violence is an effective means of denying women their right to sexual self-determination. But what sexual wishes women do have is still rather unclear. They have not yet learned to separate their own sexual needs from those of their (male) partners, let alone formulate them and make them known. If, during the course of making love, one asks one’s female partner what she wishes to do, she will often say, “Do what you like—I’ll like it too.” Many women are better at saying what they don’t want than in revealing what they do want; expressing their own sexual wishes is thought of as shameless or embarrassing.

In the last decades, however, much has happened within the women’s movement regarding female sexuality: publications about the clitoral orgasm, sexual experiences, investigations into sexual fantasies, critical evaluations of psychological and sexological research, studies about existing stereotypes, erotic literature and pornography produced by lesbians, female S&M clubs, etc. From both a theoretical and a practical perspective, the search for the grail of female sexuality is in full swing, but the search has not generally produced clear results. *The* sexuality does not exist for women; what has come to the fore is different preferences and sexual diversity. It can be seen that differences in class, ethnic background, and milieu act to influence the sexual opinions and lives of women, just as they do men.

An increasing amount of statistical research is being done. A fairly consistent picture of female sexuality emerges from such investigations. For most (heterosexual) women, sex and love belong together. According to Shere Hite, 83% of women want a kind of sex where they feel emotionally bonded to their partners.<sup>40</sup> This is not surprising in a society which teaches girls from their very early years that a woman who wants pure

sex is a slut. The idea that coitus leads directly to orgasm in women has been relegated by modern research to the realm of myth. This means that women can and ought to be open to varied forms of sexual activity, such as masturbation, clitoral stimulation by a partner, and the use of vibrators. But “coming” is not the most important thing. The idea that you *may* have an orgasm and utilize these techniques to achieve it is in and of itself fine, but orgasm does not mean total satisfaction. According to de Bruijn, one out of five women say that orgasm is the finest thing that happens in love-making; the other four find such factors as intimacy and emotional closeness at least as important.<sup>41</sup> From an investigation by Scheurs of lesbians, it emerged that for them, too, the most important thing was physical and emotional closeness; sexual lust played a lesser role.<sup>42</sup> \*

The image which emerges from these statistical studies confirms something everybody already knew: for many women, sexuality expresses an emotional bond and is not primarily directed towards coitus and orgasm. The sexual feelings of women are directed more towards intimacy and physicality than at orgasm per se.

This research reflects, not surprisingly, the social conditioning of women. Since women carry out many nurturing and caring activities, this colors their sexual feelings as well. We suspect that the steps which women take on the path towards sexual autonomy will have consequences for intimacy and nurturing. Although prediction is risky, the existence of lesbian S&M groups and experiments with female-oriented erotica and pornography point to a growing diversity in women’s sexual behavior. We hope that this growth will bring with it the chance for women to expand their sexual feelings beyond the traditional role women have had to play. We might hope that achieving greater freedom for themselves will also lead to greater tolerance towards the sexual behavior of others.

### Girls and Romance

Little investigation has been done on girls. Researchers have usually devoted their energy to the broader area of the problems of youth.

**\*Schreurs  
(see p.14, note 42;  
other sources corroborate)**

In practice, most research is done on boys, boys who are criminal and who behave badly, boys who make trouble for the world about them. For this kind of research there is usually more money made available than for studies of something so ordinary as the normal schoolgirl who, if she is unhappy, just goes and lies down in bed where she disturbs no one, or who refuses to eat as she normally does. Girls have to be heroin prostitutes at the very least, or victims of incest rape, in order to become "interesting."<sup>43</sup>

Romance fills a special place in the experiential world of girls. Between ten and fifteen years of age, girls create a culture of their own, full of crushes and fantasies, played out in their own bedrooms and those of their friends.

When women look back upon their teen years, they remember the hours and days in which they sat in their rooms dreaming; they don't think of that time of their lives as a period of sexual development. To them, their sexual history began when outright sexual contact entered their lives. The disregard of this romantic phase by themselves and by the world around them is related to the problem mentioned above: erotic and sexual experiences of women have always been viewed from the male perspective, from which the differences between men and women are neglected. The sexual development of boys is different from that of girls. The research suggests that, from puberty onwards, boys are usually more sexually oriented; they secretly buy porno magazines, talk about their sexual experiences, and masturbate, alone or with each other. Boys dream and fantasize, too, but the preponderance of their fantasies are unmistakably sexual. Plummer describes the difference in this way:

Girls are led to connect their sexual meanings much more readily to a complex set of relationships and emotions, whereas boys are led into a much more specific concern with the doing of limited acts often divorced from the complexities of emotional life. Boys seem more prone, for instance, to create their own exploratory masturbatory

circles, and to develop an interest in pornography and specific fetishistic sex acts.<sup>44</sup>

Anatomic differences are important. A boy's sexual arousal is a visible act; the urge is to do something about it. Girls on the other hand can much more easily hide their sexual feelings—and that is what they have been brought up to do. It is very difficult for girls to express their sexuality.

That girls transfer their erotic and sexual feelings to romance must be taken as an important phenomenon in the adolescent world.<sup>45</sup> They experiment with their own appearance and that of their friends, trying on clothes and make-up. They write letters to one another and swoon over teen idols. The dream-world of girls consists of romantic love for horses, boys, pop stars, teachers of both sexes.

Love of horses scores high, for that majestic animal radiates a powerful kind of sensuality. Horses smell nice and it is wonderful to be able to control them. Stables are primarily populated with teenage girls who hang around hour after hour doing odd jobs. It is not surprising that there are impressive numbers of girls' magazines exclusively devoted to horses and ponies, stables, exchanges of pony pins, and posters. There are horse comic books in which the poor but talented horse-loving girl wins over her snobbish contemporaries from a higher social class.

Pop and film stars cause an enormous romantic commotion; girls sit in giggling ecstasy at concerts by New Kids On The Block (NKOTB), George Michael, or Gloria Estefan. One girl wrote about a NKOTB concert, "Then a man from the band stepped up on the podium and I immediately started to cry. I cried for a total of 2 hours and 40 minutes!"<sup>46</sup>

Women remember dreaming about or falling in love with their teachers. Tales of adoring one's female gym teacher are common in lesbian circles, but girls who later become heterosexual are likewise prone to fall in love with a woman teacher. In girls' boarding schools in England around the turn of the century it was thought normal for the students to adore their teachers; it was regarded as a kind of rehearsal for dealing with emotions and the erotic, a kind of prepara-

tion for the demands marriage would one day make upon them. Being in love with a teacher was openly discussed. The girls gave their beloved teachers little gifts, such as a flower, competed to show the adored one who loved her the most, and studied harder in order to impress her. In Germany, in the girls' movement, pedagogical Eros was used to lead the girls towards a "healthy" (hetero-) sexuality.

Nowadays girlhood romance—love for a horse, weeping for hours while a pop idol sings—is not recognized as a way girls define their emotional and sexual feelings. It is a serious oversight to neglect this aspect of their lives and not consider it a subject worthy of sexological research.

### Conclusion

We make no plea for erotic and sexual relations between women and minors. We do plead for a realistic appraisal of every form of sexual behavior. Sexual relationships between people are vulnerable; that is certainly true of adult/minor relations which all too often are met with a lack of understanding, even aggression. Every relationship is unique and deserves to be accorded respect.

This is a collection of personal stories and reflective articles. We have tried to investigate the subject from many different points of view. The emphasis is on Western women. The observations of Gloria Wekker about Surinam Creole culture is a ground-breaking attempt to describe adult/minor non-Western relationships from a woman's perspective.

The women whom we have interviewed about their personal experiences came in part from our own circle of acquaintances and partly from those of friends and colleagues. It was not so difficult to find women who had something to say about such relationships; it certainly was difficult to persuade them to give us an interview. Without exception, they would not allow us to use their real names.

The interviews were very tense sessions: all of those being interviewed found it difficult to tell their tales. They were not accustomed to talking about such matters; often the interview was the first opportunity they had had to analyze their

experiences. By the second or third session they were remembering incidents which they had thought they had forgotten.

We would like to thank those interviewed for their trust in us. Our thanks also goes to the one male and many female writers of the various articles, and for the very fact that they were willing to participate in the creation of this Special Issue.

Without Joseph Geraci, whose idea it was to devote an issue of *Paidika* to the theme of women and their sexual and erotic relationships with minors, this would never have happened. His patience, tenacity, and constructive criticism were a great support. We would also like to thank the Editor of the Schorer Imprint, Robertine Romeny, for the work she has put into the creation of the Dutch book version. Pattie Slegers has our gratitude for her critical reading of this introduction. Theo van der Meer has stood beside us through thick and thin and deserves very special thanks for so generously making his special knowledge and insight available to us.

This volume does not pretend to be more than a reconnoitering of new terrain. We surely hope it will stimulate discussions about erotic and sexual relations between women and boys or girls. As such, it raises more questions than it provides answers. It is an invitation to further study.

### Editors' Note:

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*Translated by Frank Torey.*

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NOTES

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## INTERVIEW: JUDITH

I tried as much as possible not to hurt her, because she was so vulnerable. All her peers did was beat each others' brains out and mentally torment each other.

Judith is a youthful looking thirty-nine, and has sensitive eyes. She is well built, dresses in sporty clothes, and is fashionable. At first she was a bit reserved, but she gave the impression that she was certainly someone who knew what she wanted.

**Judith:** I met Jacqueline when she was thirteen, in the early '80s. A friend of mine, Flo, had a catering business serving appetizers or whole meals for parties, and I worked with her. One day, we were doing a large party at which there were a lot of well-known people, among them Jacqueline's mother. I was vaguely acquainted with both her and Jacqueline. At the party Jacqueline began to court me in little ways. We were serving champagne, and Jacqueline presented her glass to me with a rather grand gesture. I just said "thank you" in a normal way, not aware that it meant anything special.

After the party she went along with us to the house of one of my girlfriends where we were going to have a little something to drink. There was a whole group of us, and it was really her first acquaintance with our lesbian circle; I think she was very impressed by it. When we were saying goodbye she asked if I would be willing to give her a call if we had another catering job somewhere, because she thought it would be interesting to see how it was done.

An opportunity presented itself soon afterwards. A new shop for designer goods was opening and we were hired to provide the snacks. I phoned her, and she was pleasantly surprised; she clearly hadn't counted on hearing from me again. She came, but I was very busy with the work. After the party, as I was packing and carrying the equipment out, Jacqueline began to

help. When we were finished we were standing outside and all at once, just like that, she kissed me on the lips!

I said, "What's that all about?" And she replied, "I think you're great!" I nearly fainted with surprise and was totally perplexed. I'd never had it happen that someone so young made advances to me. I'd been entirely unaware of it, and I really hadn't seen it coming. It seemed to me spontaneous, the reaction of someone who apparently had taken a liking to me. Just that moment her father arrived to pick her up. A good thing it was too. Who knows what sort of crazy things I would have said. I was completely bewildered and didn't know what I should do. I did ask if she wanted to go with me on a catering job the following week in Amersfoort.

On the way to that job, the three of us were sitting stuffed into the little car that Flo and I always drove around in with all our catering things. She sat on Flo's lap while I drove. It was just as though we suddenly had a kid. Flo found her very nice too.

Jacqueline was so beautiful, a kind of budding flower. That was the punk-era; at thirteen she looked sturdy and really sharp. There was a band playing, and we danced together; she asked me. That was all right, but I was supposed to be working. It put a bit of a dent in my relations with Flo: our work was being disrupted by a girl who was in love with me.

Afterwards we brought her home again. I was pretty impressed by her, and found it all very exciting. Back then I wasn't much thinking things through, just living very much day to day. I had a little girlfriend and an affair going, and was very busy with my work; I just went from one to the other.

Two days later I was leaving for a winter vacation. She asked if I would see her before I left. The evening before I left, I went around to see her, but before seeing her I went past my other girlfriend's and broke it off with her.

Jacqueline lived in this big house, with high-ceilinged rooms and antiques, a bit run down and cluttered, but with great atmosphere. She was home alone. I still remember what I had on, a white shirt and leather Levi pants. There was a definite tension between us. I was terribly shy and didn't dare do anything. I was also a bit anxious to get home because I still had to pack. I told her I should get going and we began kissing. It didn't go any further. I didn't know what I should do. My heart was pounding as I went down the steps, dazed at everything that had happened.

When I got home I found a letter she had stuck in my pocket. She must have written it before I arrived. She poured out her heart. It was heavy for her, and for me too. I found her really fine and wonderful. On the train I wrote a reply to her, and mailed it quickly at the border. I would rather not have gone away, or would have preferred to have taken her with me. During the vacation I wrote her often, and when I got back she was at the station waiting to meet me. I went with her to her house, and she introduced me to her mother. Jacqueline asked her mother if I could sleep over with her. Her mother was very friendly, but when she asked how old I was, I didn't dare to tell her my true age. I was 31, but said I was 29. Her mother said, "Look out. I could turn you in to the police." It was her way of telling me to behave myself. She said it in a half-joking way and it seemed clear to me that she didn't really intend to do it. I slept over, and we had sex together.

That week it was bitter cold, and we went skating with a whole club of girls. It was very romantic, with the clear weather and clean air. Jacqueline couldn't skate very well with racing skates, but she thought it was worth the blisters to go long-distance skating with me. Everybody was very friendly, and took it in stride. "So, Judith has a nice new young friend," was the only comment.

### **Pressures**

When I wasn't working I was at her house, even sleeping over there. Her parents were divorced,

and she lived with her mother who was always working and away a lot of the time. Her mother had a girlfriend who also had a crowded schedule.

It was a hectic time. Catering with Flo was very heavy work, and swallowed up all my energy, emotional too. We had a job every day, and were travelling all over hell's half acre. Jacqueline still came around. Looking back, I think Jacqueline must have had difficulty with this: at that age, she expected that you'd be with her day and night, that's the way first love is. She couldn't quite comprehend that somebody my age had a busy job. With somebody your own age you can skip school and do the same things. But I was terribly busy.

Her mother didn't have time to cook and we ate out a lot, sometimes the four of us, with her mother and her girlfriend, but during that time I saw comparatively little of her mother. I think she was happy that I was there, because she was away nearly every evening with her work. I was her baby-sitter. At least when she was with me, Jacqueline spent less time in the hash cafés, where she otherwise hung out. Thinking back on it I'm sure it suited her mother just fine.

After school she came around to my place and did her homework. In the daytime she'd be with me, but she slept at home, because her mother wanted to see her every day. When she came from school, I had to get bread and butter with chocolate sprinkles ready for her. I bought special things for her: candied fruit, sprinkles, cola. I bought "kids' stuff" like she had at home, too.

We had a lot of sex. She soon started looking older; she bloomed, matured through all that sex. She hadn't gone so far with boys. I held back a bit, I didn't take the initiative so much, but left that up to her, because I didn't want to force anything.

She wrote things in my date book, scribbled down between my appointments: "I love you"; "We've been going with each other three months today"; "Today we've been together four months." She even wrote little poems. She did it when I wasn't watching, and then I'd open my calendar and there they were, all so sweet. She did it for a long time; for more than a year

my calendar was full of these nice messages. It seems that her feelings for me were very strong for a very long time.

### **To Bed on Time**

Jacqueline and I didn't talk much; we gave each other little presents. I bought her little gifts that fitted her age that I wouldn't have given to somebody my own age: Snoopy dolls for example, toys from the second hand shops, very touching things.

I was very surprised how adult she was in her reactions to me, how adult her feelings were, even her body language. I think I could even say she was teaching me a thing or two, bringing out something archetypically female in me. She provoked me, was kittenish, teasing. She acted the way you usually see girls do with boys, running hot and cold. I was quite moved to see her do it, because she did it so beautifully, so entirely innocently.

Jacqueline had to be in bed on time, so we really didn't have evenings together to speak of. Usually it was eating out, or eating home, and then to bed. If I didn't have to be away, I went to bed early with her. That seemed entirely natural. I found it marvelous, to be all warm and cozy together in bed; and up early too. I was the one who heard the alarm clock and got us up. I took her to school and then went on to my place and to work. For her age, she had been going to bed quite late—that is, before she got to know me—at eleven or eleven-thirty.

Sometimes it could be difficult. Once, at a birthday party, she had to go to bed because she had school the next day. It was a warm, friendly party, all kinds of interesting people, but I went upstairs with her out of solidarity. It was very tempting to stay with the adults. It would have been easy to separate myself from Jacqueline, but that's not what I did, even though it's obvious I could have stayed longer at the birthday party. I was choosing her one hundred percent.

While I was going with Jacqueline, I focused my attention completely on her, and didn't have much contact with her mother. That was deliberate. I didn't want to be on an equal footing

with her mother, because I was afraid Jacqueline would have problems with me if I tried to be her second mother. One time her mother did have dinner at my place with her girlfriend, and that was pleasant. I liked having them there; they were both very friendly. I wanted to have more to do with her mother, because I rather liked her. After all, she *was* Jacqueline's mother and very much resembled her. But I simply couldn't do that. We would have talked about Jacqueline as two adults, and it couldn't be that way.

### **The Outside World**

When Jacqueline and I were courting, I developed the habit of taking her everywhere with me. I was proud to be seen with her. She was terribly pretty and very spontaneous. My women friends probably found it was a bit strange, but they weren't unfriendly. They were rather curious, but that didn't bother me. It was Jacqueline who felt that she was regarded strangely, but I think that was a sort of natural uncertainty, because she was suddenly being placed in a world of adults.

That feeling became stronger when she began to use makeup, and dress more like a woman. In my lesbian circles most of the women wore pants and dressed like men. That was the reason she gave for not feeling at home with them, that and being younger than everyone else.

Jacqueline took me with her when she saw friends from school, both girls and guys. She also played in a band, and naturally I had to watch them perform. I even went with her to a disco. I was dragged back into a world that I had long since left behind. Being thrown back into that school world began to make me feel a bit like a teenager myself.

At first she was very proud of our relationship, because she was terribly in love with me. That changed quickly though, because she experienced such resistance at school. Her friends thought she was strange. If I was with her they'd act like she didn't exist. She found it difficult to have to be the one who always took the initiative to get together with them. Naturally, that tears you up. It began to bother her more and more.

If I picked her up from school, I didn't stand in front of the door. I knew that would cause her trouble. I stood instead by the corner, spared her a bit. It wasn't a big deal for me, but I could imagine how she felt, and didn't want it to become an issue. When we went out, it was mostly to the disco where her friends from school hung out. I did feel strange there. I also realized that I was jealous. If she stood around talking with others I couldn't bear it. I felt the end looming at such moments.

From her mother I never felt any resistance whatsoever. I kept strictly to the rules. If her mother said, "You two have got to be home by midnight," I did it. With a friend her own age, Jacqueline would probably have paid less attention to her mother's word, and got in trouble for it. But I felt responsible, and also felt I didn't want to take any risks. Jacqueline could sometimes be very difficult, but after we met she settled down and took on a more regular schedule. I never could talk about this with her mother.

When Jacqueline began to dress more like a woman, she also attracted more attention from men. I didn't like that at all. I myself liked the way she looked without making herself look older. Regardless of whether she looked boyish or feminine she was still beautiful to me. When she started dressing like a woman, I got the feeling that I was in competition with the men, particularly older men. I became jealous, I got furious with those old fogeys. They knew that I went around with her and had a relationship with her, but they really didn't take me seriously. They just made advances while I was standing there! I was just a woman; they didn't consider me a threat.

### Teen Years

Jacqueline was acting like the total teenager: moody, liable to inexplicable outbursts of crying and hysterics. That all began after about a year. I think that she couldn't handle the conflict between me and her friends. I wasn't sitting around in the coffee shops all day with her either. She led a sort of double life. At first glance it all

seemed to flow smoothly, but that wasn't really the case. She was so young, and still in school.

Often she didn't want to go to school, and then I had to try to persuade her. I was a bit divided about this: as far as I was concerned she didn't have to go to school, but I also felt responsible to her mother. I had the idea that she had more or less entrusted Jacqueline to me, and that I had to honor that. I knocked around her house as "her daughter's fiancée," and nobody made any trouble about it. If there was a problem, I went to her mother to discuss what I had to do. I was kind of caught in the middle between them, but I tried hard not to act like her mother. As much as it was possible, I tried to stay her equal, but that was hard.

It was very special with her. I was in love; it was a strong, caring feeling. When I saw her all alone I found her so pathetic that I always melted. It was not something physical, it was rather an inner feeling of tenderness. When she had problems, I found it very emotional, and felt entirely in sympathy with her. She would see gigantic problems in things that I myself no longer experienced that way because I had long since put them behind me. I often suspected what her moods were all about, but I usually didn't know how to deal with them. Often she didn't know what was going on herself, so she couldn't talk it through. I realize now she must have been wrestling with problems about her identity: did going with me really make her "lesbian"; was she attached to me as a person, but did she also want relations with boys?

My tenderness for her was entirely different from that for someone of my own age. If she did something wrong, even if it was at my own expense, I would find the way in which she did it such that I hadn't the heart to blame her for it. If she was angry, I wasn't hurt by it. I took her seriously; I knew that the world of her experience was totally different from mine because she was so young.

I know I am a bit naive but I think that one of the things that attracted me to her was her show of concern for me. She definitely wasn't looking for something motherly in me; actually I had the impression she wanted to protect me. We were

friends: she teased me a lot; absolutely didn't look up to me; had no automatic admiration for my age or status. She teased me a lot, called me "dumbo" and "dope," as if I was a kid, a friend her age. But she defended me if somebody else tried to put me down.

She was jealous though: especially of my other acquaintances, but even of someone discussing work with me for too long. Everything revolved around her feelings. Perhaps all girls at that age are like that, jealous of everything they have going with somebody. I didn't dare to tell her that she had to make a distinction between the relation I had with her, and the way I dealt with the acquaintances that I had before I met her. I didn't want it to seem as if I didn't take her feelings seriously. Naturally, I was remiss. It was terrible that sometimes I couldn't steer things along the right path. But that happened because I hoped things would work out all right.

Slowly everything changed. Outside pressures were so great that she began to see our relationship through the eyes of others. At first she was so proud to go around with me, but later she felt ashamed. She felt that the outside world, the world in which she moved, disapproved.

## Signals

Jacqueline began to push away from me. She tried to find a way out, a way of calling it quits. She began to lie about what she had done, or about what she was going to do. I can well imagine her uncertainty; she knew that I was crazy about her and didn't want to cause me any pain. I didn't know what I should do myself, but if I was indifferent, that would also be bad.

She blamed me for all sorts of things. It was getting more and more difficult to react to her properly. She was turning into an opponent, but an opponent much younger than I. If you are going to defend yourself you want to defend yourself against an equal. Of course, she wasn't an equal. But it was easy to forget that at some moments. My greater experience gave me the advantage. She couldn't match that, but I handled it wrong. I was trying my best to pro-

long our relationship, but that meant that I was also misreading the signals she was sending me.

I had never criticized her. When she began to wear adult looking dresses, I didn't say, "They're awful, what do you see in them?" I have to admit that I had found them beautiful without realizing that wearing these dresses was a signal that she had begun to distance herself from me, that she wanted to express her heterosexual side. I should have sensed things were changing. I could have asked her simple questions like, "Is something wrong?" To tell you the truth, I really didn't want to know what was happening. I knew that she probably didn't know either.

Then it began to get so difficult that I really felt I had to talk it over with her mother in order to find out what I had to do to keep her with me. I didn't do it at first, although I really needed to. Finally we were at a party once with her mother and it was bothering me so much that I finally asked her what I should do. The only thing she could say to me was, "Let go of her." It was just as if Jacqueline herself had said to me, "I'm breaking it off." It was a real blow, but everything was now crystal clear, as if a light had gone on in my mind. I'd really needed to hear her mother say that.

Looking back on it all, I think that I didn't want to talk to her mother earlier because I knew what she was going to say. Something like, "You should have known it would go this way." Naturally, she saw what I saw, that her daughter was feeling desperate. I had hoped against my better judgment that her mother might have helped me stay with her daughter.

Jacqueline had difficulty saying to me that we should break it off, so she communicated it through her behavior. In the normal course of events that happens often enough in relationships, that someone breaks things off without words.

It was over all of a sudden. I had seen it coming, but it was still a terrible blow. I never saw her again; I had a real breakdown. All in all, our relationship lasted about a year and a half.

## Looking Back

As I look back on it now, I think that the fact that such a relationship was possible at all—that alone was a great triumph. It is the only relationship I've had that gave me something very special, and left no negative feelings behind. For her it was the first experience. Yes, she caused me pain, but not consciously; she didn't want to hurt me.

Jacqueline matured awfully fast in that year and a half between her thirteenth and fifteenth birthdays. Perhaps that is normal for that age; she changed from a girl into a woman. That was very beautiful to watch, and I experienced it from close up; I saw her bloom. Normally you only see that as a mother, but in my case it was totally different, it happened under my hands. Perhaps our relationship was possible because her mother was having a lesbian relationship, so it wasn't such a big step for Jacqueline. She wanted to know how it was; she wanted to experience it too. The relationship didn't have to be hidden, which made a difference too.

My feeling for her differed from that for earlier girlfriends. It felt as if I had a child myself, though it went much further than that. All relationships are complicated but this one was complicated in a completely different way. I was maneuvered into a nurturing position. I felt responsible; I had to be the wiser one. With girlfriends my own age, I went much more my own independent way.

It was so different with her because so much responsibility was involved. I was very sympathetic to her moods, and for my part gave her as much room as I could. I really was pretty much under her thumb because I was so crazy about her. I never opposed her. If I took the initiative and organized some activity for us I constantly worried about whether she was enjoying it or not. Everything was completely centered around her: was it to her liking; was it making her happy?

She really had much more power in the relationship. The power that I in fact had, as the older one, I never used because I found it unfair. In the back of my mind must also have been the

suspicion that if I did come down hard on her, it would have ended sooner.

I still go with women who are younger than I, but not with anyone as young as Jacqueline. I would now find that too complicated. It was so confusing, demanded so much of me, that I couldn't cope with it now. She wanted every last little thing out of our relationship, including sexuality, which for her was naturally still completely unexplored territory. That's not the case with women my own age. They've gone a step further, know better what they do or don't want. The responsibility is not so great.

It's difficult to say why I felt so attracted to Jacqueline; it wasn't that I was out looking for such a relationship. It came because she took the initiative. I let myself be drawn into the situation. But once we had a relationship, I tried as much as possible not to hurt her, because she was so vulnerable. Among her peers all they did was beat each others' brains out and mentally torment each other.

Now that I've had this experience with Jacqueline, I think I have more awareness of the budding feelings of young girls. Before I couldn't even guess their age; couldn't tell if a girl was thirteen or fifteen. Now, if a girl of that age acts insufferably, I can still see, despite her being insufferable, something endearing and beautiful. All because of Jacqueline.

*Translated from the Dutch by Words and Pictures.*

## INTERVIEW:

### GISELA BLEIBTREU-EHRENBERG

Dr. Gisela Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg holds doctorates in comparative religion and ethnology. She has worked as a journalist and is the author of several works in the field of ethno-sexology. She has written about transvesticism, transsexualism, and prejudices and fears concerning AIDS. Her studies also include cross-cultural analyses of institutionalized paedophilia. After reading her article, "The Paedophile Impulse" (*Paidika*, vol. 1, nr. 3), we visited her to discuss her ideas about intergenerational relationships and cultural attitudes concerning paedophilia.

**Marjan Sax and Sjuul Deckwitz:** *In the discussions about relationships between grown-ups and minors, the age of the minor always plays an important role. What are your thoughts on the age question? Do you consider it so important?*

**Gisela Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg:** Certainly the age question is important. In order to understand it we must first make a clear distinction between biological maturity and social maturity. They are almost always considered as distinct from one another. Sometimes, however, they are very emphatically linked together for polemical or moral reasons.

Boys are considered biologically mature, that is, no longer children, when orgasm with ejaculation is possible. With girls, the onset of the first menses is an even clearer indication. Just when this occurs, in either boys or girls, is dependent on factors that still have not been completely researched. It is generally accepted that people from warmer climates, the Mediterranean region for example, are biologically mature earlier than those from the colder, northern regions.

From at least the turn of the century we've known that in middle and northern Europe the

first menstruation of girls took place as early as twelve. Some researchers have conjectured that artificial light, which is, in a way, a form of artificial sunbathing and is now common everywhere, influences not just the growth rate of individuals but their biological maturation rate as well. Improved nutrition, especially the increased intake of vitamins, could also influence the advance of biological maturity. We may not know the decisive reasons for early maturation of both sexes in Europe but the fact that it is early isn't disputed anymore.

These biological findings are often ignored in discussions regarding the social maturity of children as they grow into adolescence. Social maturity usually means the age at which children are considered by their individual societies to be adult. In middle and northern Protestant European regions the custom survived into modern times that after Confirmation—which usually took place at age fourteen or fifteen—the child officially became an adult. Confirmation meant becoming an adult member of the church. It was a precondition for marriage. Only after it were girls considered marriageable, provided a suitor could be found who was wealthy enough to afford the costs of the new household. It signalled the onset of social maturity and was obviously identical with financial independence or, as the case may be, the power to dispose of inherited wealth.

Social maturity is usually defined as "capable of being responsible for oneself." It should be viewed as separate from marriage ties. When individuals were judged, for whatever reason, to be incapable of taking this responsibility, they were deemed unfit for marriage, regardless of whether they were at that time an adult or a child.



In antiquity, the Roman Catholic Church in southern European regions, perhaps in recognition of early maturation, fixed the marriage age for girls at twelve and for boys at fourteen. In fact, many such marriages of what we would consider by today's standards as extremely young partners were not merely contracted, but also consummated. In France the canonical marriage age was not abolished until Napoleon raised the legal age. The other European states followed suit.

At present, that moment of social maturity, when people can financially stand on their own feet, is higher than ever before. In some academic disciplines, for example, a person might be closer to forty than to thirty before receiving a doctorate.

You have to understand these factors before you can properly understand the importance of age in the discussion about intergenerational relationships.

*How do biological and social maturity relate then to intergenerational relationships?*

I would say that the separation of biological from social maturity is the essential cause of the present generational conflict. The split stirs up so much anxiety and confusion that it is easy for the moral crusaders to rally opinion against "child corrupters." In their oratory even sixteen year old boys, tall as trees, and teenage girls, long into their child-bearing years and whose voluptuous figures adorn the front covers of magazines, are described as "children being corrupted."

*You say that the Protestant and Catholic churches had an influence on the social understanding of age, and even the law. In your article, "The Paedophile Impulse," in Paidika Issue 3, you suggest that the way we think about sexuality, and the way it is regarded in society, is strongly influenced by Christianity. Religion seems to be an important theme for you. Could you elaborate on your view for us?*

In contrast to many primitive people and the inhabitants of ancient non-European empires, we live in a civilization that is guilt ridden about

sexuality. Christianity teaches that all evil—that is, original sin—came into the world through the fall in the Garden of Eden. This "evil" came to be understood not as the transgression of a prohibition. Rather, the evil resulted from the sexual intercourse practiced for the first time by the "first human couple." In other words: it is sex that makes one evil. Sex is the root of all evil.

The apostle Paul was responsible for the transformation of the Garden of Eden story. He created for himself a memorial with a long lasting effect. He preached that the Fall brought death into the world. "The wages of sin is death," and sin was sex. The doctrine of original sin was his: every one at birth inherited the continuing effect of the first evil act. We could only be redeemed from original sin by Christian Baptism.

The doctrine of original sin was especially fascinating to the church father Augustine. Although Christianity "redeemed" it by baptism, Augustine relativized Redemption, that is divested it of universality, by saying it was presumptuous to believe that everyone would be saved. Despite baptism we can never be certain of God's grace and love. His main argument is that we continually sin sexually. Sexuality is the source of all earthly sorrows, of death itself. Lust, concupiscence of the flesh, is the key to Augustine's theology.

Augustine's elaboration of the doctrine of original sin and the negative value he ascribes to sexuality heavily influenced St. Thomas Aquinas, who's enmity to sexuality was no less than Augustine's or Paul's. Since the writings of the ancient Greeks have been rediscovered in the meantime, we can now see that Aquinas added a lot of confused, pre-scientific ideas about man and woman, procreation and life, to his theology, most of which he had extrapolated from the works of Aristotle.

The trio Paul-Augustine-Thomas has distorted the Christian attitude towards sexuality to such an extent that what was meant as a religion of love has been reduced to a catalog of rules that permit only certain sexual acts within marriage and forbid all others. The consequences of this attitude are borne by us today.

The timid attempts in recent times to affirm sexuality as a good gift of God, and not something diabolic, do not find an echo in the churches. Popular opinion still considers sex somewhat wicked, fraught with lies, and circumscribed by taboos. The ends of sex are not religious. A society which finds sexuality so questionable must naturally feel strong doubts about whether something so dubious should be permitted to children, or—horrible thought!—be taught to children by adults. From a social perspective the fear of paedophilia can be seen simply as a sexual fear.

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*The fear of paedophilia can be seen simply as a sexual fear.*

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Although, in general, Western Europeans no longer feel themselves bound by the laws of Christianity, they do feel, on the basis of their own socialization in a Christian culture, that one should not take sex too lightly. It is a vague emotion which one occasionally senses, but which one personally no longer tends to follow unconditionally. This vaguely negative attitude is, however, precisely what is passed on to children. The message is, "Sex is dangerous." They are burdened with an attitude that they only rid themselves of by in turn passing it on to their children. And sex education, at least in Germany, normally so zealous when it comes to exposing religious prejudices, fails to expose this deepest of all the religious prejudices.

*If "sex is dangerous" for children, isn't the converse the notion that children are innocent? Has the idea of the innocence of children, discussed so much since the Enlightenment, also added to the prohibition of sexuality for children?*

According to Rousseau, children issue "pure from the hand of God" and as long as possible, preferably until they are eighteen, they should remain "pure." Of course, purity here means free from any sexuality, what is known as "the state of innocence." The expression, "God-

given purity of the child," is new and thoroughly modern.

The Middle Ages emphasized original sin. It was the inherited human burden for everyone, even newborn infants. Rousseau, reacting to this, preached the opposite. Pure by nature, pure at birth, children are able to retain this heavenly innocence for a long time. Sexual feelings and drives are not innate, they are brought to them from the outside, from the evil world of adults, a secularized version of the Garden of Eden myth.

The good, loving, pure, and innocent child, free of all sexual drives, was the child every man and woman wished to have. To drive out sexual stirrings from children who might not fit this ideal picture, hard discipline, hunger, and beatings were recommended and used. Nowadays, sexual pedagogy, influenced by this "discipline-pedagogy," until quite recently sought to extend its influence over a wider and wider range of individuals by continually advancing the definition of childhood to a later and later age. Now, we consider biologically mature young people to be "adolescents," that is no longer children.

In the discussion of paedophilia, this advancing of age reaches absurd proportions. When we speak about paedophilia it should be about the form that really deserves its name, aimed as it is towards sex with pre-pubescent children. Of course, I'm not speaking here about incest, which for social reasons I think should be dealt with in a separate manner.

*These ideas about sexuality and children, are they different in non-Christian, non-Western cultures?*

As far as sexuality in general goes, well we could say that everything is contained in the panorama of humanity. If we look at non-Western cultures we find that in many of these cultures, the sexual stimulation of children, even infants, occurs. It is usually treated as something irrelevant, as another native custom. At the same time there are also population groups that consider such things to be as harmful and pedagogically wrong as we do.

In Micronesia and some regions of the sub-continent of India, free sexual contacts were al-

lowed in the so-called adolescent "club houses," in which the village boys slept from their sixth year until marriage. Verrier Elwin writes about it in his book about the Murias of India. The initiation of small children into a sexual life by older adolescents was the rule, conduct we would call paedophile. Sexual contacts between adult women and very young boys was especially frequent in Australia. Lesbian contacts, which only reached European ears through rumor, are said to have made up part of the initiation of girls in wide parts of Africa, whose explicit goal was the preparation, also bodily, of girls for marriage. These contacts were not only permitted by the societies, but were considered a normal part of daily life. There was no social stigmatization, and therefore no individual psychic injury. Psychic injury might rather have occurred if the children had been excluded, for example, from the "club house" activities.

Actions we classify as sexual, and reject as being paedophile—sexual play, masturbation of little boys or even nursing infants, or clitoral stimulation of immature girls—were often carried out by older adolescents or adults, sometimes even by their own parents. The young girls' participation took place mostly in the seclusion of their own households and therefore was only noticed by European researchers if these acts occurred publicly.

Observations about cross-cultural sexual phenomenon have often shocked European ethnologists. In their zealous search for so-called "natural sexual behavior" (which they imagined would best be found preserved among the "primitives"), they regularly came away empty-handed. The first European ethnologists who studied sexual practices different or opposite from ours, considered these peoples less than human and their customs atrocious. Sexuality among these so-called primitive cultures that was "deviant" according to European standards was considered animal. This was, of course, an extremely racist train of thought. It was not science: it was ideology.

The followers of Rousseau at the same time also created an ideology, of the "natural innocence" of people, you know, "the Noble Sav-

age." They tried to find proof for their theories among non-European peoples, and did. There is a well known phenomenon we could call selective perception. That is, you see what you want to see, you see proofs where you want to see proofs. In other words, they were blind to facts and observations that might have contradicted their theories. When they got to know the peoples they were studying better, they were usually disappointed. The noble savage was just as much a theoretical, Western construct as the animal savage.

If the sexual customs of non-Western peoples can give us anything at all, it is a deepened insight into the enormous range of possibilities for human sexual behavior. Cross-cultural studies can also give us an increased knowledge of the situationally-determined plasticity of the sexuality of our own species.

*You mentioned in passing that incest was a totally separate discussion. You have, however, also indicated that intergenerational sexuality and incest in non-Western cultures sometimes cross. Do you see any connection in our own society between a relationship of an older woman with a minor and an incestuous relationship?*

There are many factors you have to take into consideration when you look at the relationships between women and minors in our society. There is for example the relationship between an older woman and a younger boy. In the French newspaper *Liberation* of 21 October 1979 there was a letter from a woman, signed "Noelle," who asked: "Am I the only woman who loves little boys?" Noelle candidly describes her sexual contact with a ten-year-old boy. I can read it to you—I have it here.

She writes: "Am I the only one who has a ten-year-old 'lover.' I say 'lover' because between us there is obviously nothing like a mother-child relationship. It is a sensual, absolutely bodily relationship. What I love in Stephen is not the picture of some kind of 'childish innocence,' which he has not played for a long time. I love his mouth, his laugh, the movement of his fingers, his arse, and that tidbit which, each time under a

different name, he offers to my mouth and which always has the same taste of moonstone."

I don't know the reaction to Noelle's letter, but I am assuming that she is by no means the only woman who makes the "facts of life" known in a nice way to very young boys.

The boy was in a sense privileged to be introduced to love by an adult, experienced, and loving woman. Such preferential treatment was granted in earlier times mostly to the sons of the rich. In their capacities as scions of the bourgeoisie, fathers and uncles took care that growing boys were well informed about and even introduced to heterosexual sex. They were especially instructed in how to protect themselves from venereal diseases. In Germany there were women called 'Lebedamen,' well educated prostitutes, who specialized in such initiations.

This kind of "introduction into love" should be strongly distinguished from a incestuous relationship between, for example, a mother and a son. In our culture incest is strongly condemned and forbidden. Because of the social condemnation (after all it is thought to be very offensive socially), an incestuous relationship can have grave effects on a child: it can, for example, put a child into a situation in which he has no practical way out. An atmosphere of lies, fear, uncertainty, and distorted ideas about sexual relationships does not foster either wholesome sexual or social development.

It is a widespread misconception that incest and paedophilia are related or even identical phenomena. This is not the case. Incest can be problematic as well when it concerns two biological adults. Paedophile contacts are not usually incestuous as well. Confusing these two very different phenomena with one another prevents the realistic analysis of either of them.

#### Editors' Note:

*The author has kindly supplied us with a list of further readings into topics discussed in the interview. We have added further writings on intergenerational relationships by Dr. Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg.*

*Translated from German by Dr. Hubert Kennedy*

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## INTERVIEW: HEIDI

Heidi is an attractive Danish woman of 24, a mixture of shyness and tomboyish behavior; slim, blond, with an intense interest in the world. The interview took place in her house in Copenhagen, in the fall of 1990.

**Heidi:** When I was thirteen I wasn't particularly interested in school, just going there like everybody else. I was a bit fast, a tomboy. I liked to party and have fun.

One day our teacher was sick and we got a new substitute teacher. She was cute and very charming; rather young too, at least in my mind. I think she was 28. She had a strong personality. The whole class talked about her; the boys were madly in love with her, and I fell in love with her too.

After substituting for us she was given another class, of retarded children with learning problems. Every morning I'd arrive an hour and a half before school started just to see her walk into the school yard, and say hello to her. I tried to be wherever I thought she would be. I knew I had to do something, so I made a plan. I became good friends with one of the retarded children in her class. We got along so well that the school asked me if I could help him with his homework. That was a good opportunity for me to get close to her, because I could go to the class when she was teaching them. We started taking the children to the park for their exercise.

I remember, sitting there as usual before school, waiting for her to come. She knew I was sitting there and waiting. She came through the gate and there was this big flagpole in the middle of the school yard. I was waving and saying "Hi!" She turned and looked at me and waved and kept looking at me while she was walking on. And so she walked right into the flagpole. And broke her glasses! It was funny, but it was also important to me because it was a sign; it made me realize that something was going on also for her.

I had an hour off in the middle of the day and that is when, almost every day, I went to the park with her class. I would put my arm in her arm, or we would hold hands. Then one day in the park, when the kids were playing soccer, I don't know how it happened, we started to hug. That was wonderful, I felt very good about it.

I made sure we saw each other as much as possible. What I did, for example, was tell my history teacher that I had an awful headache and asked if I could go for a walk. Then I would go to the class where she was substituting and she would tell the children that I had been bad in my own class and she would let me sit an extra hour there. We would flirt a bit. She'd walk over to where I was sitting, stand behind me and put her hands on my shoulders looking at my work. She would say "No, that is not the right way; you can do it better like this." It was a way for her to show me that she liked me. It was exciting, because nobody else knew and we shared a secret. Teachers in Denmark are not allowed to have relationships or anything like it with the pupils outside school, so we met in the school building or in the park. Not just in the classroom though. There was a school recreation room where there was a ping-pong table, and billiards. We met and talked together in a corner, even holding hands.

Sometimes I bumped into her during the day. For instance, I would go upstairs to the bathroom and then by accident she would come upstairs too. I was the chairwoman of the student council and I made sure I always had something to do in the teachers' room. I'd stand around while they were drinking coffee and she'd come up to me and talk to me a bit and touch my arm or my shoulder. Not much, just a little. I could feel that she also wanted to be with me, which was a wonderful feeling.

By final exam time I couldn't concentrate at all. I was dreaming about her. I saw her everywhere; I couldn't think of anything else. During the math exam I took a compass and scratched

the first letter of her name in my hand. It's still there, you can see it when it's cold. I was so in love with this woman! I told everybody I was in love with a teacher and all the other students tried to figure out who it was, all the men's names that started with "E", but they couldn't find out. She knew, of course.

One day when I had gone to the park again with her and her class, we started hugging and kissing. I think she started it but I didn't say no. I had kissed boys, but I was never in love with them. This was totally different. I was in love with her, so it felt much more intense, more exciting, because it was so secretive. We were in a public park and somebody might see us. The kids might come running over any moment. We were hiding behind a tree, kissing. It was exciting, but also a little scary. I had this strange feeling in my stomach I didn't understand or know what to do with. But it was wonderful to be so close to her, to feel her body and her warmth. To hug and be hugged, and be touched by her. It was all physically exciting. I wanted to be close to her. But I never thought about having sex with her or anything like that. That was not what was going through my mind.

The hugging and kissing also meant that we had moved to another stage in our relationship. The kids in her class knew about the hugging; we would hug them and each other, that was all right. But to kiss was something else. We became more careful, because we were afraid the kids would find out and scream, "They are kissing each other!" It went on for a couple of months. We wouldn't kiss all the time, but when we couldn't stand it any more we'd hide in the bushes and kiss while the kids ran ahead.

During this whole period I felt a lot of excitement. I was so attracted to her, I had to see her, speak to her. But I also felt good about school in general; got to love it. Even when I was sick I'd go to school in order to see her. I couldn't get her out of my mind.

### **Trust and Separation**

I had a lot of problems at home at that time. She paid a lot of attention to me and took me seriously.

As I look back on it, I think that it was the fact that I could trust her and that she treated me like an adult, that made me fall in love with her. I needed someone to trust, somebody who did not treat me as a child. It's easy to fall in love with someone who gives you that. She was also willing to take a big risk because of me. I was a minor, a girl, a student. It was all forbidden. Her taking a risk for me also made me trust her. It made her special. She thought I was important enough to take such a big risk. We were very close, we were in it together and that gave me a strong feeling. The contact we had was special, really because there was so much trust. She told me about her life and she wanted to hear everything about mine. I told her about my problems, about everything. That's how she helped me.

Of course I knew I was doing something "wrong." Not because I was underage, but because it was a woman I was in love with. That made it more complicated. It was why I felt I couldn't tell anybody. But I never felt guilty about it, even though I knew it was "wrong."

One day, all of a sudden she told me she couldn't do it anymore. She was afraid the school would find out and she would be fired; that it probably was best for us to stop. I asked her why and she said it was too dangerous, she couldn't be with a student the way we were.

I was very, very sad; my world fell apart. I had been dreaming that she was also in love with me, and then suddenly she stopped it. I tried to get in contact with her, but she pulled away. So that was that. It was the biggest fiasco of my life. I thought to myself that it must have been only a flirtation for her. It hadn't meant enough to her for her to continue. But now, looking back, I realize that maybe it was not just a flirtation for her, the way I thought it was then. Maybe we had become too close and she didn't know anymore how to handle it. Maybe it had grown into something bigger and she wanted more, which was impossible with a student under 15. I don't know, we never talked about it again.

I continued seeing her in school and in a way I was grateful that I could still see her, look at her, know that she hadn't gone away or been fired. I did try to talk to her, when she had to correct my homework at home, I would write her notes.

But she never answered, she kept her distance. It was the fact that she broke it off so abruptly and completely that hurt me so much. She had been the light of my life and by losing her I had to go back to everyday reality.

It had been a wonderful summer and a very important episode in my life. I had always had feelings for women, but through her I realized that I might be gay. I had had such strong feelings, I hadn't slept or eaten. It was so clear to me that I was in love, which meant to me that I must be gay. After the fiasco with her, for about four years I had boyfriends. What was left if I couldn't get her? I didn't want to get hurt again. Then, when I was about 18, I made a clear choice for women.

### Looking Back

Looking back, I think I would have liked to have had sex with her. At that time it was not the most important thing for me. I don't know how much I knew about sex at the age of thirteen. I think I would have been afraid-afraid, that is, of not knowing how to do it or how to do it right. I had read about sex and heard about it on TV. But to actually do it? On the other hand, she was so gorgeous, it would have been wonderful if we could have been close, to feel her without her clothes. She meant everything to me. I really regret that we didn't do it.

I did masturbate, while imagining being with her. I would build up stories in my head when I masturbated. Before I met her it had been fantasies about anonymous women, somebody without a head. After we met I would think about her; my anonymous person had a face. I felt closer to her.

The other side is that maybe it was better that sex didn't happen because of the mess it might have caused. I already had enough problems with my parents and if they had found out we were having sex, it would have made things more difficult with them; for me and for her. She might be fired.

I wanted to take the risk, and in fact I did take some risks, like kissing in the park, and hugging. But nothing more. I was too frightened to go

further. I didn't know whether I was gay or not. I tried to talk to my mother a bit about being in love with a teacher without telling her whether it was a man or a woman. She was nice about it. She said it was normal for kids at that age to have feelings for a teacher and she told me that she had been in love with one of her teachers, a woman. And that it would pass. She never knew though that it was a woman I was in love with until just a short time ago. I told her now, because we were having the interview. She was surprised I had had these feelings for women at such an early age. She had always thought that I had become gay when I was 18 even though I had told her that it had started much earlier. She never wanted to hear that, and I think mothers in general don't want to hear that kind of thing. She had the idea that something had to happen to become gay, like being seduced by another woman; that I had had a weak moment and a woman had come by and seduced me. She couldn't think of me as the seducer.

It is amazing how much this teacher meant to me and how strong the memories still are. I saw her again about six years later. I went back to school one day to say hello to my old teachers and I saw her. I just saw her; we didn't talk at all. I thought, is this the woman I had been so much in love with? Was this the woman I had all these fantasies about, was this my dream-princess? I still think of her sometimes, still have loving sexual memories of her. If I met her again today, and we talked, I don't know, maybe I would try to come on to her; to get to know her sexually, since I am still very curious. We would talk and get to know each other, talk about what had happened and, well, who knows? Today it wouldn't be forbidden; I'm older and out of the closet.

I have also been asking myself whether the teacher seduced me, but she didn't. She didn't have to say much to encourage me to come on to her, and she certainly didn't have to do much to get me to hug her and kiss her. I would have loved to have walked hand-in-hand with her in the streets and have our arms around each other, to show the whole world that I loved her and that somebody loved me.



## INTERVIEW: MARTHA VICINUS

Martha Vicinus is Professor of English Literature and Women's Studies at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and is an editor of *Feminist Studies*.

She has edited and introduced several collections of writings, notably *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (1972) and *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (1977). Her latest work is a collection of articles, edited with Martin Duberman and George Chauncey Jr., *Hidden from History, Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (1989).

Knowing her work on girls in boarding schools and her radical ideas on this topic, we traveled to Denmark, where she was on tour, to interview her.

The interview is enriched with quotes from her chapter "Women's Colleges, an Independent Intellectual Life," in *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (1985).

It can hardly be called a disease unless it reaches a feverish and inflamed condition. Unfortunately this is nearly always brought about by the clumsy fingers of the unloving, which, in school, as well as outside, must always interfere with what they do not understand. In truth the world has always been afraid of love, and until it can be made to realize that here is the one thing that is right and beautiful in all its shapes, persecution followed by distortion is bound to carry on its work.<sup>1</sup>

**Martha Vicinus:** The English upper-classes have always sent their children away to school for varying lengths of time. Historians have long noted the strong homosocial bonds created among "Old Boys" from such famous public schools as Eton, Harrow and Rugby; as adults they have loyally supported each other, whether in the military, foreign service, politics, or the professions. For many

Englishmen, the emotional bonds formed as children in school have remained their strongest and happiest relationships; marriage has paled in comparison with these friendships.

Traditionally, girls were sent away later and for a shorter period of time. Nevertheless it is well worth looking at boarding-school experiences as a source of information about cross-generational love between women and girls. During the second half of the nineteenth century, reformers founded new schools which rejected the family model of an earlier age, when a small number of girls of all ages lived and studied together under the close supervision of one or two women. These new institutions were larger, divided pupils by age-specific grades, and taught an academically demanding curriculum. Older, domestic ideals continued, but the new woman teacher and the girl student were both expected to take a broader view of their responsibilities, and to combine school loyalty, public service, and study.

Within these schools we find a new kind of passionate homosocial relationship between teachers and students. A study of the elite boarding schools—those most influential in defining girls' education for late Victorian England—reveals a closed world that encompassed a heady mixture of intellectual opportunities, emotional growth, and personal development. Like the better-known boys' schools, intense homosocial bonds were the backbone of corporate life. Young adolescent girls, freed for the first time from immediate family constraints, were encouraged—within limits—to lavish their affections on an older student or teacher. The admired, unmarried teacher, sometimes herself involved in a long term relationship with another teacher, was expected to nurture the moral and emotional life of the young girl.

Often, intense friendships developed between teacher and student. Inevitable tensions also arose: the girl's mother might be jealous of the

teacher, the teacher hurt by the capriciousness of the girl, and the girl herself baffled and disoriented by the conflicting emotions she had aroused both within herself and those she loved. Late Victorians viewed these friendships, whether between two students or a student and a teacher, as a natural prelude to marriage. They were a kind of education of the senses which prepared a girl for entry into heterosexual love. As one etiquette writer explained, “. . . perhaps not even her acceptance of a first lover is a more important era in the life of a young girl than her first serious choice of a friend.”<sup>2</sup>

*Marjan Sax and Sjuul Deckwitz: Your book deals with the Victorian and late Victorian era. How would you describe the attitudes towards love between women and girls during this period?*

Ideas about “love” between women were certainly different from what they are nowadays. Not only were “Boston marriages” between mature unmarried adult women tolerated, but cross-age relations were an accepted part of growing up. Their danger came only from excess. Aside from the pioneering sexologists, such as Havelock Ellis, lesbianism was classified with prostitution, as a sexual deviancy that befell the lower classes. Nevertheless, if you define an emotion as valuable only as long as you don’t go too far, you face the difficulty of defining what is “too far.” The Victorians were often uneasy about excessively intimate relationships between middle-class women.

*What influence did notions of “excess” and “going too far” have on cross-age relationships?*

In my book, *Independent Women*, I suggested that both the girl and the teacher admired self-control as a means of intensifying their love for each other. In effect, self-control became the ideal solution to the much-debated problem of emotional excess.

At the end of the nineteenth century, educated women were especially eager to prove that they were able to control their feelings, that they were not irrational. This generation of teachers, who were more educated and had chosen a career in

education, wanted to prove that women were capable of using their minds and of being self-controlled. They were reacting against the emotionalism, the excessive maternalism, of the old-style family-based schools and also against the popular notion that a woman could only think with her feelings. The girls were repeatedly encouraged to subsume their personal desires to the greater good of the school, for the cause of women’s education, or for England’s role as a world leader.

Emotional self-control taught you how to be a better woman. The reward was an intensification of your own feelings and a sense of becoming a better, more effective woman in the world. It was almost as if love were defined as a special treat that could not be consumed lest it be lost. Yet, by savoring one’s feelings, indeed, exploring them verbally—through the exchange of letters and private conversations, that love would become even more intense, more pleasurable. There’s a passage in a letter I found by the devout Evangelical, Constance Maynard, that really captures this combination of love and self-discipline, of satisfaction through the suppression of desire, that characterized the period. The “her” she is referring to is one of her students:

I told her how the capacity for loving always meant the capacity for suffering, & how I should expect the utmost self-control from her; I should expect it continuously, I said, & never say “Thank you,” for I belonged to the cause, the object, not the individual, & all students must be alike to me.

And then, coming closer yet, I told her that self-control was not needed for the sake of appearances only, but for our own two selves, for real love, “the best thing in the world,” could be a terribly weakening power. . . We both agreed that a denial such as this, enforced upon a part of our nature, was a sort of genuine satisfaction to another part, to the love of order, of justice, of doing something great & public.<sup>3</sup>

*What was the reaction of the young girls to this kind of advice?*

The students would sometimes take the initiative. The interesting thing is that what the Victorians called a "rave" or a "pash"—for passion—began with a series of services, often secret, on the part of a student who hoped the beloved teacher would eventually reciprocate. The girl would bring her beloved flowers, clean the blackboard for her, remember her favorite books. Now, obviously, such small acts of homage were rarely sufficient to satisfy a young girl who was, in the slang of the day, "gone on" a teacher. When her feelings became more than just admiration, what would happen next?

I think we can assume that the admiration sometimes translated into something more, into sexual gestures, but we don't really know. There were relatively few opportunities for a sexual relationship. The girls were always in large dormitories, though of course that doesn't mean that a girl couldn't steal into a teacher's room. I think some of them did.

There was also a good deal of mutual surveillance among the pupils. Quite frequently, particular teachers were singled out for admiration by several girls; they would spend delicious hours discussing their favorite's clothes, mannerisms and habits: a kind of sharing of one's rave, saying "Isn't she wonderful," and then they would all talk about what she wore and what she did, did she look at me, that sort of thing.

The girls openly discussed their feelings, as, I think, a way of gaining attention. By bragging about how much they were in love, they gained status among their peers, who were also in the process of discovering their erotic desires. But something was also held back, perhaps as a form of self control: the secret kiss or the special look when you gave her flowers. Falling in love, you want to tell the whole world, but you also want to keep some things to yourself.

There were also holidays, which were a setting away from school where teachers and pupils could nonetheless be together. I know of an occasional case of a girl going on vacation alone with a teacher, but she was usually part of a small group—a tour of France to improve your French

or to see the cathedrals. Here too there would be group control, but common sense tells you that where there is a will, there's a way—provided both sides are willing. A lot of girls also begged their raves to write to them during the holidays, to give them advice while they were away from school and in the midst of numerous worldly temptations.

This balance between closeness and distance took other forms. Private talks between the teacher and student could offer intimacy without loss of distance. The teacher, or an older student who sometimes taught a younger girl, retained her privileged position of moral instructor. Minor sins, school infractions, and spiritual struggles could be discussed at great length, encouraging a self-examination that became fertile ground for further intimacies, confessions, and avowals to do better. Passion was transferred to a spiritual realm, which made it more accessible, more manageable, and somehow more satisfying.

*In these women-girl relationships, was the distance that you are describing always maintained?*

It's an interesting question, but there isn't much evidence about what would happen if the love of the younger girl was reciprocated by the older woman. Everyone then, as now, assumed that a crush was a temporary stage for the girl. She was an object of concern: not that she would become fixated on a particular teacher, but rather that she would start on the downward path to lesbianism. You know, what if they continued in that relationship into adulthood?

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***As soon as the woman in any way capitulates, the power then moves to the younger partner.***

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The teacher was always regarded as the powerful figure in the setting. But my theory is that as soon as the woman in any way capitulates, the power then moves to the younger partner. This comes about I think because the younger

partner is the explorer. She is changing, moving between different worlds; she is about to enter society, and leave school behind. And, of course, any sign from the beloved teacher is a victory for the young girl; she has won because her admiration has been rewarded.

The consequences for the teacher seem more obvious. As the experienced adult, she was expected to understand the waywardness of the young, and to use her love to guide the girl during her brief infatuation. But she was clearly taking risks in opening herself to the young girl. Probably most teachers did so very rarely. A woman might already be involved with a fellow teacher, or be engaged to a man. Perhaps she enjoyed the admiration, but avoided any sexual contact. I haven't met a teacher yet who doesn't want to be admired! Whatever the case, the teacher had to be prepared for rejection, for the brutal callousness of the young.

*How did the woman deal then with the attentions of the young girl?*

They very often spiritualized it. Constance Maynard, whom I used as an example before, became deeply involved in the spiritual life of her favorite student, Mary Tait. Mary was an adolescent who found her life at home distasteful and boring. She hated her family obligations. Maynard wrote to her encouraging her to develop greater self-discipline, to be more self-sacrificing. Their correspondence gives a sense of moving out of the mundane into the rarefied atmosphere of spiritual strivings. Just before the end of the Christmas holidays, Mary wrote back to her teacher to tell her how thrilled she was with her teacher's approval:

You can't think how delicious it is to know you are pleased. It is awfully severe sometimes to do what is right, but I always think of you & it becomes quite easy to do it.<sup>4</sup>

Maynard, the Evangelical, prayed for Mary. She carried Mary's letters with her and felt, as she described it, "a secret unaccountable gladness of heart." Mary however, began to wilt

under the pressures exerted by her teacher. After Constance reprimanded her for a poor effort on her drawing class exam, Mary wrote back:

I was not aware that drawing was a subject of such extreme importance. . . I AM indifferent to everything except that you should not take everything I do so much to heart.<sup>5</sup>

Constance was heartbroken, interpreting her rejection not as stemming from the fickleness of an admittedly spoiled girl, but instead as involving the loss of a soul. Maynard then wrote in her diary:

Oh Mary, Mary, I loved you, love—do you know what that means? . . . Oh my child my child, are you lost to me indeed? and I was the link through which you were dimly feeling after a higher life—are you lost to that too?<sup>6</sup>

I think this is an important example of what went on in woman-girl relationships. Mary wanted to overturn the discipline of her family life. Of course, she was naturally reluctant to embrace the discipline Constance's love offered her. She escaped into her circle of adolescent friends, leaving Constance as forlorn as any rejected mother or lover. Idealized self-control and spiritual seeking could not be very satisfying to Mary, but that's precisely what Maynard was basing her emotional life on.

*Now, what would happen if the girl were a disturbing force who interrupted a happy relationship?*

The teachers may have encouraged self-control, but their pupils may not have obeyed! The accounts I know of that describe such a situation—a kind of classic love triangle—are all from the perspective of the young, naive girl. Then too, they date from the twentieth century, and present the situation negatively. For example, Dorothy Strachey Bussy's famous tale of a tragic adolescent crush, *Olivia*, written in 1933, ends in the suicide of one of the teachers and the

breakup of the school. It is not clear from the text whether Olivia is the cause of the breakup between the adored headmistress and the unstable Mlle. Cara, or whether she is the precipitating factor in the breakup of an already precarious relationship. The intriguing question is why Bussy distorted her actual experience at a French boarding school around the turn of the century, so as to create a tragic conclusion that did not actually occur. In the following quote, the head mistress equates victory with self-control, and defeat with starting a "forbidden" relationship.

It has been a struggle all my life—but I have always been victorious—I was proud of my victory." And then her voice changed, broke, deepened, softened, became a murmur: "I wonder now whether defeat wouldn't have been better for us all—as well as sweeter." Another long pause. She turned now and looked at me and smiled. "You, Olivia, will never be victorious, but if you are defeated"—how she looked at me! "When you are defeated"—she looked at me in a way that made my heart stand still and the blood rush to my face, to my forehead, till I seemed wrapped in flame.<sup>7</sup>

*You describe the boarding schools as a threat to the nuclear family around the turn of the century. As you wrote in your book:*

The schoolgirl-teacher friendship fell under attack for numerous reasons. It was . . . deeply threatening to the nuclear family, for it fostered a very different kind of relationship from the traditional one a girl had with her mother or a wife with her husband.

The schools failed to replicate the family atmosphere they praised because the self-control they advocated was not equivalent to the suppression of self recommended by mothers. The latter was an unconscious sacrificing of personal wishes and desires to the ambitions and goals of husbands and families. But self-control implies a conscious control of impulses that have reached awareness through an atmosphere conducive to self-examina-

tion. The result of this process was self-knowledge and self-development.

*As you yourself summarize this process:*

Put simply, these single-sex homoerotic friendships undercut the family. The heightened self-knowledge implied by such a relationship pointed in the direction of personal autonomy and independence, an independence that few heterosexual relationships . . . could sustain.<sup>8</sup>

*Were the homosocial relationships between teachers and pupils the only threatening force to the nuclear family?*

We know so much about life within the walls of girls' boarding schools because they were very visible, upper-class institutions at the end of the nineteenth century. There were very few other places where women could have so much power, as rulers of an all-female world. They were a training ground for women. Of course the etiquette books that warned girls about "pashes," mentioned Sunday School teachers, aunts, cousins or friends, and later, Girl Guides. But the elite schools were supposed to be training girls to become wives of England's elite—and civic or philanthropic leaders. Thus, their potential danger as an attractive alternative to heterosexuality was taken quite seriously.

*There is another aspect I want to ask about, and that is the adult woman's perspective. You wrote:*

On the surface it might have seemed to the Victorians that adult women's homoerotic friendships were, as they have been labeled by psychoanalysts, immature. Rather, they should be seen as an effort to balance three problematic areas: sexuality, spirituality, and power. All three existed in highly disguised forms for a Victorian single woman.<sup>9</sup>

*Could you also describe for us how the same attitudes might have changed, or not have changed, in the twentieth century?*

Homosocial relationships between women probably increased in the twentieth century, at least through World War II, because the number of opportunities grew dramatically. Adolescent

girls were channeled into high schools, the Girl Guides, sports teams, etc. More girls and young women were spending time away from their families, in women's organizations, where they might meet an admirable older woman. Cross-generational bonds were becoming more visible at the same time that women were demanding a larger public role and the new theories of Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, and Sigmund Freud were being popularized.

The so-called advanced novelists of the twentieth century, like D.H. Lawrence, were subjecting the cross-age push to a Freudian interpretation. In Lawrence's novel, *The Rainbow*, published in 1915, he describes the heroine's "sick" relationship with a school teacher, and her feeling of freedom when she casts the woman off, and finds a man. He even gives her a number of false heterosexual starts, as if he were trying to document the variety of sexual experience a modern woman could have before finding her real self. That is a self, however, whose deepest identity is dependent upon sexuality.

You might also say that Lawrence's negative view of the teacher-pupil relationship was a kind of discrediting of the admiration/love complex. But Lawrence wasn't alone in trying to discredit it, there was a lot of outside pressure about this, not only by novelists and psychologists, but also at a more popular level, through the press. This occurred, we must remember, during the years of the militant suffrage movement. No wonder commentators were frightened! I think that the spinster school teacher was especially powerful, but also especially vulnerable at this time—she was economically independent, and her private life did not depend upon heterosexuality. Thus, anyone trying to shore up the family and fight the demands of the suffragettes would see her as dangerous. One journalist decried the fact that the influence of mothers has been largely superseded by what he called "female celibate pedagogues."<sup>10</sup>

We have to be careful, though, not to put the whole blame on so-called "outside forces," on politics, psychoanalysis, the media, for distorting and redefining teacher-student relations. The evidence is much more conflicting than that kind

of simple interpretation. Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor, for example, have done some very interesting work on the American Women's Party, a very small group that carried the feminist torch in the forties and fifties. They found in the Party's archives letters from women to the leaders of the Party using practically the same language as the nineteenth-century girls in my study.<sup>11</sup>

#### *And the present?*

Things are surely different now, though I assume teenagers still have crushes. But both England and the United States encourage co-educational activities from a very early age. The danger now, as these societies see it, is not premature heterosexual activity, but homosexuality. The way to insure against it is to have boys and girls together all the time. Although England was much slower than other countries to become coeducational, recreational activities became much more coeducational following World War II. And there has been the heterosexualizing of girls through advertisements, the media and a variety of popular images throughout European and American cultures. Girls don't have a period any more in which they are not relating to boys, so the homosocial surroundings are disappearing. Homosocial networks are relatively few—indeed, even the Girl Guides organization is more frightened by homosexuality than by heterosexuality. In the US, all the scouts' organizations have become coeducational. To me this is a very conscious effort to stop these relations.

I don't want to sound nostalgic, but schooling in the late nineteenth century can be seen as a historical period in which homosocial bonds could flourish in a very simplified world—and we will never return to that anymore!

## NOTES

1. Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (London: Virago Press, 1985), p.194.
2. Matilda Pullen, in: *ibid*, p. 188.
3. *Ibid*. p.197.
4. Constance Maynard, unpublished diary, 1879, in *ibid*, p. 196.
5. *Ibid*. p. 196.
6. *Ibid*. p. 196.
7. Dorothy Strachey Bussy, *Olivia* (London: Hogarth Press, 1949).
8. Vicinus, *op cit.*, p.208.
9. *Ibid*. p. 200.
10. Ethel Colquhoun, quoted in Vicinus, 1985, p. 206.
11. Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doll-drums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987)

# A CRUSH ON MY GIRL-SCOUT LEADER

**Nora de Ronde**

When I was about fourteen, I had a crush on my scout leader. Her scout name was Ramita. For a whole school year I was under the spell of a woman twenty years older than I. Even though we lived only five minutes from each other, we wrote lengthy letters, at first at least one a day. She picked me up from school, organized her family life (she was married and had children) so that we could go out and walk along the beach, and went dancing with me.

I joined the scouts because my classmate, Judith, took me with her once to a meeting. During summer camp Judith and I turned out to be good scouts. Our troop's tent, with six scouts in it, was always tidy. The sink and table-top stove in our kitchen were solidly lashed down with rope and posts as thick as your wrist. They didn't collapse as in other kitchens. We checked everything every day.

We were well disciplined. We kept the fire burning under the huge kettle all day so there was always warm water for everybody; especially our leader. We managed to use the right knot to tie the guy rope to the tent peg. When walking through camp we picked up candy wrappers and loose objects: pieces of rope, tent pegs, tin mugs, and stored them away. We did whatever needed to be done. We didn't like simple, silly songs with no harmony line, like *"She'll be Coming 'Round the Mountain"* but were fond of complex German rounds like *"Alles ist eitel, du aber bleibst."* We wanted to be good scouts: pure in thought, word, and deed. We wanted to earn our camping merit badge, but more importantly, we wanted Ramita to see us and pay us compliments. After all, she saw everything, didn't she, even when we thought that nobody was noticing.

There was always a lot to talk about in our troop of twenty infatuated and fretful thirteen-fourteen- and fifteen-year-old girls. Some had had their first period, others hadn't. Some were rich, some poor. Some girls were college prep students, some attended vocational trade schools. Some were from strict Protestant families, others had atheist parents.

Despite the disparities, we shared one common fascination. As if spellbound, we discussed the intimate friendship between our two leaders, Ramita and Orion. There was a lot for us to fantasize about. They never let on that there was much more between them than an especially close friendship. Yes, we knew they sometimes sat up all night talking. But what else did they do besides talk?

Judith and I didn't hang around with each other all the time, and like everybody else we added in our own way to the miracle of turning a motley bunch into a coherent, summer camp community in ten days' time. What was it that inspired us, not just Judith and me, but the other scouts as well? It was the "magnificent, unsurpassed" Ramita, as she was called in one of the log books. We were building-blocks in Ramita's hands. She it was who cemented us into a close-knit structure. She knew how to create a special atmosphere with little things. At night, when it was dark and we were in our tents, she and Orion sang us quiet, peaceful songs. When they prepared a nice dinner for us and someone asked her what ingredients she had used, Ramita replied, "It was made with love."

Even though Ramita was twenty years older, she was much more our equal than our school teachers. Whatever she taught us, she taught



with great enthusiasm, whether folk dancing or braiding a lanyard for a whistle. When dealing with a serious issue, like the morning service (something that should never be taken casually), or when talking to us about insensitive behavior towards each other, she was always sincere and wise, convinced of the values she instilled in us.

Ramita was someone we liked to listen to. She talked to us in a different way than did our teachers and parents. She made us feel that we could discuss anything with her. One of the ways to gain her complete attention was to have a "problem." Having a problem provided you with the opportunity to be alone with her, to go for a walk outside the campsite. You could win this special privilege by remaining silent for a long time, staring pensively into nothing, hoping against hope that she would ask, "What's troubling you?" That was the ultimate in intimacy!

She expected a lot from us, but, unlike our other educators who just nagged us, she challenged us to fulfill the expectations she had of us. We ran around doing anything for her. She energized us. There's nothing as highly charged as a bunch of adolescents looking for a way to get rid of their tension.

As the camp days wore on, I became more and more obsessed with being a good scout in order to win a special place in Ramita's heart. Moreover, she was my *Manitou*. At the beginning of camp everybody drew a name by secret lot and then that person became your *Manitou*. You had to keep an eye on her and do nice things for her. At the beginning of the ten long days of summer camp I didn't know quite what I was expected to do. But halfway through I got the hang of it: Does Ramita want another mug of tea? I had poured it before she even realized that she wanted it. Is she warm enough? Does she want to wear my sweater? (My sweater against her body, that's what I wanted!) Does she look worried? If I thought she did then I could ask her if anything was wrong. That was how I became intimate with her, how I got to see her in the morning when I served Orion and her their breakfast in their tent. She whispered to me to be very quiet because Orion was still sleeping.

They had been talking well into the night.

During the last campfire evening everybody had to guess who their *Manitou* had been, and then sit down next to her. So Ramita sat down next to me. The whole evening! The whole troop was being so sentimental. It was so terrible that camp was nearly over. Besides, it was also Ramita's final evening. This camp would be her last: she was leaving scouting. We all knew how hard it must be for her to part from us. She was addicted to us. At the end of the campfire it all became too much, and I burst into tears. Then, sweet comfort, she put her arm around me and pulled me tight against her. I was already sharing her blanket, because I was cold.

When camp was over I felt desperate. We had had such a good time together, had managed to make this camp into a little piece of heaven on earth. Ramita had given us so much. It wasn't just Judith and I who wanted to hold on to the camp atmosphere and talk about Ramita and Orion. During the last week of summer holidays, we campers kept looking each other up. We went for walks on the beach at six o'clock in the morning, until we couldn't walk any further. We paid nervous little visits to Ramita, and went biking in the woods with her and her small children. The only ray of hope to us was that in the end Ramita would somehow remain the leader of our scout troop.

By the time I had to return to school in September, I was suffering from loss and even feigning illness. While my mother cleaned out my closet and while my classmates were learning French, I was in bed writing letters to Ramita. Because of my illness, of course it was impossible for me to look her up. She just had to know everything about me, but where to begin? "Dearest Ramita"—no, that was no good. For me, in the past, everything dearest was stupid and sentimental, not how I felt about Ramita. "Dear" was completely impossible, and a simple, "Hello" was much too lighthearted.

I finally decided on "Dearest" and then told her everything—why animals were my best friends and how that happened. Until then I had told everything to my pony, stabled in a nearby, run-down barn. I told Ramita how I felt

about life, how unreliable people were, about my time at camp, and my feelings there.

It was at camp that I began to think about myself, maybe provoked by all the talking and singing the campers did together. Had my spiritual deepening come through the scout ceremonies? For the first time in my life I felt awakening in me a consciousness of something deeper. I wanted to tell her all about it: she was the one who had started the whole process. All day I thought about her; carried on imaginary conversations with her. The vague emotions I felt were so intense that I simply didn't understand what was coming over me. For the first time in my life I needed another person to whom I could express my feelings. A human reaction to what I am going through—her reaction—was now to me indispensable. Weakened by passion, I yearned for her support, needed her to balance the crises in my school life: homework, bad grades, peer pressure, wearing nylons, attending dance classes. Everything was a crisis only she could solve.

I also started to write letters to the other scouts who were attending the same school, and they to me. Our hidden purpose was to imitate Orion and Ramita, who wrote letters to each other all the time. My letters were a subterfuge for discussing her. The letter-writing mania began to infect girls in my class who were not even scouts. The letters, sometimes written on test paper, sometimes in our school note book, were mostly composed during class. We didn't mail them—that took too much time for an answer—but hand-delivered the letters to each other during breaks. Ramita also preferred to hand her letters to me in person. Her secret words thrilled me, "I took this letter back home again because you were not around and I did not feel like handing it to your sister. Not everybody needs to know that we write to each other." The whole affair was exhausting me.

Of all my other scout friends, I was most in touch with Gonnie, not because we were really friends—in fact I thought she was quite detestable—but because she was trying to get involved with Orion the way I was with Ramita. I could think of nothing except Ramita and certainly

could not concentrate on school and homework. At the end of the school year, I knew I would be kept back. I wrote the following advice to Gonnie, who suffered the same problems with Orion: "It's terribly annoying to have to constantly think of Orion. It makes you an outsider in class, because your mind is so busy on something they can't understand, because they have never experienced anything like it. They can't understand that you can love somebody so much that it almost drives you crazy. (Of course I experience the same with Ramita). There is nothing to talk about with your classmates and you keep your distance from them. I'm almost over it now, at least when I am at school, but at home it's impossible to keep my thoughts together. I can't even do my homework. You really have to try to put Orion out of your mind and think of something else. I know it's incredibly hard, but I'm sure you will manage, otherwise you will end up all cut up about it."

I longed for the intimate friendship with Ramita that she had with Orion. I was in love with their friendship, the intimacy I sensed at camp that they had together. That was my goal: to take Orion's place. I dressed like her, went to Amsterdam to buy the same unfashionable orthopedic shoes she wore, tried to find the exact same skirt, even imitated her handwriting.

The letters we scouts wrote to each other touched on all kinds of superficial subjects: the French lessons I was taking, the latest record by Françoise Hardy, "Dis moi que tu as." In my letters to Ramita I set myself a different standard: not to drivel on. I dared to touch on more subjects in writing than I was willing to share in her presence. The tone of her letters to me was a mixture of seduction and scout leadership. Distance only increased the tension, required countless drafts. On the back of an envelope, which had contained one of her letters, I wrote in a clear hand: "Oh Ramita, how I long to tell you everything, but I am not sure how. You are so terribly sweet. If only you knew how much I love you, and how incredibly much I appreciate you." I never had the courage to send it.

As soon as one of her letters arrived I read her closing. At first she simply wrote "love," fol-

lowed soon by "lots of love" and then "lots and lots of love," or "bye, little darling, *all* my love."

We devised plans to meet each other outside our daily exchanges, for instance by attending a song-fest weekend with the whole scout troop. I corresponded with her about where she wanted to sleep and was beside myself with joy when she wrote, "I want a bed next to you." I wrote her name on all the pages of my notebook. I lived for the moments I could see her or receive one of her letters. Often, on my way from school, I joined her for tea and handed her that day's letter. Every now and then she picked me up from school, with one of her small children seated on the back and one on the front of her bike. I held the handlebar and when her hand closed over mine I felt violent shocks. Perhaps what I felt was the same as what Carla, a classmate, felt when Hans, a twelfth grade student she went steady with, touched her. I could hear myself telling her, "I know what that feeling is you're having with Hans. I feel the same when Ramita touches me." And the feeling was getting stronger all the time.

Saturday afternoons I visited the church community center where Ramita ran a folk-dancing group. She had insisted that I join the group. We danced the polka together a zillion times. She grabbed me firmly around the waist and made me float all over the tiny dance floor. We spun around and around and I was perfectly happy. I looked deeply into her eyes, in an agony. Later, at home, I couldn't do anything except gaze aimlessly for hours trying to recapture the slowly waning electricity of the moment.

Then, quite suddenly, in mid-October, after a month and a half of feeling this way, the situation changed quite dramatically. Ramita informed us that we should no longer write or visit her, but she continued to correspond occasionally with a few of us scouts, and with me daily. I was more convinced than ever that she had something special with me. In early October she had even written that she missed me terribly when I wasn't at a scout meeting. "Sometimes I just miss you. Then I am inclined to look you up and ask you to do I-don't-know-what with

me." I remember clearly, it was a Monday evening. She had picked me up from my confirmation class. She told me that, for the time being, she was renouncing all contact with us. Suddenly too, there I was, all lumped together with the other scouts. "All of you," she said devastatingly.

I thought I had enough to distract me. Besides homework and tests, I was busy preparing for the school musical revue. It involved half of my classmates and almost all the scouts in the school. But I missed Ramita terribly. I went to our front door twenty times a day to check the doormat for any white envelopes, and ran as many times to my room to hide my disappointment from the rest of the family.

Judith had to run an errand to Ramita's house and I told her to give Ramita a note saying to get in touch with me. One evening Ramita picked me up at my confirmation class and handed me a letter. It was stern, "It is indeed the right decision to break off visits and letters with all of you. I hope you feel about this the same way I do. In every respect it's better to put a stop to this highly emotional behavior and all this clinging to each other." She went on then, treating me like an adult, sharing with me the emotional confusion between her and Orion: "Sadly, I have hardly seen Orion, and the times I really could and had the time to, Gonnie was there. All of midterm break she sat there clinging tooth and nail to Orion." At least her letter gave me the chance of answering, and so our correspondence started again, but not as frequently as before.

In November Ramita kept completely aloof. The school revue was claiming all my attention. Everyone in the musical was so worked up about it: the cheering crowds, the lights, the costumes, the make-up. I could rid myself of all that weighty, sentimental business!

When I saw Ramita in church I was the one who was now aloof, even surly. She couldn't stand that. Just after Christmas I received two letters in one envelope. One was so sweet it was almost too much so, but the other was frank, "There must be something wrong. I want to know the truth. You act as though you no

longer appreciate my company. I think this is terrible and I can't bear it any longer. I've been laying awake all night thinking about it. What have I done to hurt you?" In my reply I kept my distance. I didn't feel any more like carrying on. I didn't have the stomach, or cruel streak, to hurt her.

But the old fire flared up in me again. Where did she stand? What attitude should I adopt? It was time to call her by her first name, not her scout name, I thought. So, I wrote a passionate letter to explain it all to her.

During Christmas holidays, Ramita and Orion went off on a trip together. When they got back, Ramita confessed to me that she had never informed Orion about our friendship or correspondence. "I had no special reason to tell her," she wrote by way of excuse. I had my own theory, that she was afraid that Orion would be jealous of the intensity of our friendship. About a month later, when she and I were making plans to bicycle to summer camp together, she asked me not to tell Orion about our plans. Their friendship was tough going again. I knew it was. But, when I saw Ramita and Orion dancing together at the festivities on Baden-Powell day, I was madly jealous. She never paid any attention to me at all. Afterwards, she wrote lamely, "Darling, I know it's little or no use to explain. I know what it feels like from bitter experience. You shouldn't be jealous of Orion. Please try to get over it. Don't ever forget that I love you very much and wouldn't let you down for 30 Orions!"

By March, however, our letters were gradually becoming more level-headed. Ramita was becoming less superior, less the adult writing to the adolescent, less tense. She writes, "I feel that our relationship is steady enough now for us not to slide back into the foolishness of September and October. Our friendship is real now, much less sentimental. You've seen enough of my follies to know that I am just a human being, with all the accompanying faults and failings."

That summer bike trip we spent endless moments fantasizing about is suddenly cancelled. She is pregnant, constantly busy with her pregnancy. She keeps telling me how happy her

husband and she are about it. I don't want to hear anything about it. Last year my mother had played the same trick on me. You just can't do that to a girl in puberty. Our relationship begins to trail off.

. . .

Now, more than twenty years later, I am amazed that we never had sex together, or even kissed. It might have relieved the intensity. In a way though, writing about it here, and thinking it over, I am also glad that we did not. I felt confused enough as it was. I felt that I had gained insight into her life, but to what avail? It had only left me impotent, jealous, filled with yearning, filled with obscure but nonetheless intense emotions. Hadn't our relationship been erotic enough already? Would I have been able to deal with adult sexuality? To me even kissing seemed frightening, dirty. My erotic fantasies about boys did not go far. A little walking hand in hand with a boy down a busy street was enough to excite me. I knew about sex though. My friend Judith's family subscribed to one of the Dutch sexological magazines and there were articles about fucking. I loathed the idea that my parents had actually done something like that, or, even worse, still did it.

My desires were certainly sexual; sexuality must have been one of the motives for doing everything for her, why I waited so expectantly for every meeting and every letter. I don't think that I then had the slightest idea of how I could have fulfilled those desires.

In a certain way, not having sex made things clear. She was married and had children and a busy social life. I had to adjust to the facts. My rights in the friendship were not so clearly defined. Without sex I was not in the position to claim anything from her. All I could do was confront her with my expectations, as for instance when I had asked her why she had danced with Orion and not with me. She pulled the strings, set the limits, had the upper hand.

My view of those scouting years has changed. In the seventies, when I first hung out in women's cafes, having been a scout appeared to be an advantage. Some of the best feminists had

also once earned their merit badges. Now I suddenly understood the hot-blooded atmosphere at the camps, the constant longing to see each other afterwards. Without ever having been there I experienced the sensation of the women's camps at Femø, where women fell in love with each other in huge numbers. In those days we feminists put everything into a lesbian perspective.

I looked back upon my scouting years and all of a sudden I noticed all kinds of crushes. Many of us were in love with Ramita, especially me; but Judith and I were in love with each other, and Gonnie with Orion. Ramita was a lesbian woman who was channeling her desires. She had had her favorites before. There had been, in the years prior to my knowing her, two scouts who were always circling around her, even outside of scouting. They were referred to as her paladins. I was now convinced that she and Orion had had an affair. My infatuation with Ramita acquired a clarity and a label that it had not had before: my first lesbian experience.

But now, after another fifteen years have passed and I have had the chance to reread the letters, I doubt whether it ever occurred to her that making love to another female person was even possible. Did she merely enjoy our adoration? Was she a lesbian who didn't know it herself? Did scouting provide her only with an opportunity to spend time away from her husband and children? Or was it that, as she herself told me, that she felt more comfortable with female companionship? And about her affection for Orion she once said, "I know there are people who get annoyed, and more than annoyed, at Orion and me. We just ignore it. We have a special kind of affection many people don't understand."

*Editor's Note:*

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## “GIRL, IT’S BOOBIES YOU’RE GETTING, NO?”:

### Creole Women in Surinam and Erotic Relationships with Children and Adolescents: Some Impressions

Gloria Wekker

*For Maggy*

Riding in the bus with Misi Juliette, my 84-year-old landlady, our attention is caught by a three year old sitting next to her mother in the seat in front of us. Perfectly in tune with the beat of the kaseko, reggae, and bobbling music that is crashing through the bus, the girl is writhing, shaking, and moving. Misi Juliette looks at her intently and sighs audibly. I think I understand why, but occasions like these are perfect to check on preconceived notions, so, as the “eternal asker-of-the-obvious,” I prod my companion to tell me why she is sighing. Patiently she explains. Children with such strong sexual feelings get themselves and adults in trouble by their tempting behavior. I must realize that children, from their earliest days on, are sexual beings through and through. It does not show so clearly in all children, nor is the feeling equally strong in all children, but they all have a *firi dati*, “that sexual feeling.” It is not taught to them, they are born with it. Once, Misi Juliette had an experience in which a six-year-old girl, lying on a couch, her legs up and far apart, made inviting movements in her direction. As it happens, Misi Juliette does not have predilections in this area, but according to her there are enough women who do.

I have been able to connect the idea that children have distinct sexual feelings to a notion of reincarnation, also prevalent among the Creole working class population. In the Afro-American folk religion, *Winti*, there is no absolute boundary between the world of the living and of the

dead.<sup>1</sup> It is believed that children can possess the “spirit” of a person who has died. So, for example, when a little girl is acutely sexually interested and inclined, it is thought that she is actually someone who has inherited the “spirit” of a person who has died. She has all the deceased person’s experiences at her disposal, including the sexual ones. According to the way people perceive her—as a mature person or as a child—they will judge how to react to her sexual overtures. Most of my informants strongly rejected such contacts with children, which are illegal under Surinam law. Only one woman indicated that she had obliged a seven year old girl who propositioned her.

It has been over a year now that I have resided in the country where I was born, Surinam, to do my doctoral dissertation research concerning self-conceptions and survival strategies of working-class Creole women. Having left Surinam when I was only one year old, I returned only three times in the intervening years for vacations and family visits before I went to do my research. My stay was a fascinating journey into the realities of women, but more so, it often seems, into my own realities. And so it should be with anthropological research: a continuing dialogue between one’s self and the other.

How do I broach this subject of “eroticism” between women and children/adolescents, without ending up in a endlessly reflecting hall of mirrors? Let me name just a few of the difficulties involved: here is a Caribbean country

that comprises many different, co-existing ethnic groups each of which seems to experience its own special brand of eroticism. Let me resolve this particular issue immediately by stating that I will concern myself here only with the Creole group, the urban descendants of the slaves. What it is that sexually excites Maroons, Amerindians, Hindustani, Javanese, Lebanese, Chinese, and other groups, will have to await further investigation.

The next issue is both thornier and more fundamental: can I assume a priori that what I, with my predominantly Western viewpoint, find erotic among the Creole population is also experienced as such by the people themselves? Eroticism is a terribly evasive concept to discuss in an Afro-Surinamese context. Sex is something concrete, and, in a different way, love as well. Could it be that eroticism is a Western invention, initially needed to bridge the gap between that which is desired and that which is allowed in Judeo-Christian cultures that do not take kindly to the easy and quick gratification of sexual needs? Sublimation, as maintained in Western theory, for example by Freud, can lead to artful and powerful cultural edifices, but what if a culture condones the easy gratification of needs? In general in Surinam, there is an attitude of doing one's thing, but not bothering others with it and certainly not talking about it.

This question is further complicated by the fact that neither in Sranan Tongo, the language of the Creoles and the lingua franca of Surinam, nor in Surinamese Dutch, a local variety of Dutch, is there a single concept that covers the same meaning as what we in the West normally understand by "eroticism." I am referring here to the concept, eroticism, in a very broad sense, as used by Audre Lorde, who states that eroticism is that which affirms the energy of women, the embodiment of everything that is love, the capacity to experience joy.<sup>2</sup> It seems safe to assume that the erotic domain in Afro-Surinam does not look the same as in the Netherlands, and this can be called an understatement.

On deeper probing, I discovered that working class Creole women do have a language to talk, in depth even, about sex. The subject of eroti-

cism between adults and children is quite a different matter. What several informants have told me holds true: *Lobi na wan tiri sani*, "love is a silent thing." Words, certainly Dutch words, are too harsh to contain so much tenderness. In embarking on this endeavor, I find myself confronted with a clash of two worlds: the "privileged" text, the Western written word, crushing the "unprivileged" text, the Caribbean oral tradition. As if an oral form could be pushed into a square mould. As if bougainvillea, without artifice, could thrive on Dutch soil.

There is a further important reason for caution when writing about Creole women's eroticism with children. I left the Netherlands recently enough that I remain acutely aware of the deeply ingrained racist prejudices that surround black women: how warm, erotic, hot, and uninhibited they are. Unfortunately, this way of thinking enjoys a currency beyond the circles of racist political parties and their followers. It must be made clear that it is not my intention to fuel existing prejudices by discussing my impressions. With all these caveats in mind, let us proceed to see what is knowable about female Creole eroticism and children/adolescents.

### Comparative Proxemics

Let me start to paint a picture of the local scenery using the broadest possible brush. Certain fundamental things in life—small, trivial, but so vital for the quality of one's existence—one *knows*. Not necessarily because you have done research into the matter, but simply because you have experienced it by living. As far as I know, for example, there has never been comparative proxemic research done between the Netherlands, the United States, and Surinam. Proxemics is, among other things, concerned with the normative distances people must observe in social interaction, e.g. in public transport and elevators. Even without such research I know that, with my mental well-being in mind, I would do best to live in Surinam. In public transport, aggravated by a chronic parts shortage and thus available buses, we are heaped on top of each other. But apart from that, there is in general a lot of

proximity, of body contact, of touching between people. It is rare that people will excuse themselves for inadvertent touching: that would be a lot of work. I am not maintaining that this bodily contact is always pleasant—let's be frank about it—but in general I do not complain.

Certainly not all body contact in Surinam is welcomed. It is the prerogative of older Creole women, for example, to teasingly touch the breasts of younger women. It is widely believed that with a young girl the women are able to feel whether she is still a virgin. Thus, I have frequently seen Misi Juliette, when in a good mood, touch the young, doe-like breasts of her twelve year old granddaughter, Lucia. To Lucia's great distress, she accompanied this gesture with the rhetorical question: "*Meisje, na bobi i'e kisi, no? A no poisi*"? "Girl, it's boobies you're getting, no? You're sure they're not pimples?" This prerogative of older women is not limited to the very young; witness the fact that I myself have been subjected to it. On one of these occasions, when she commented loudly on her own gesture to one of her neighbors—"Ee-hee, m'e fas' en bobi!!" "Hey, I'm touching her breasts!!", it became clear to me that her joking was a public, not a private, intimate moment. Asked whether she would tease her sons or grandsons in comparable fashion, Misi Juliette responded indignantly to such an unspeakable suggestion.

### Charting the Afro-Surinamese Linguistic Landscape

As I stated before, even though there is no single concept in Sranan Tongo that covers the same meaning as Western eroticism, there is a wide array of interpersonal linguistic expressions that bespeak a lively cultural interest in the sexual area. Language mirrors a culture, and the extensiveness, the fineness, and the nuance of linguistic categories in particular domains of a language show its cultural preoccupations. The well-worn example of the Eskimo and the many different words they have for snow, comes to mind here, as well as the less well-known cultural preoccupation of Afro-Americans, in the broadest sense, with hair and skin color.<sup>3</sup> Sranan, like other creoles, is a language in

which verbs, not nouns, predominate. Its universe thereby immediately takes on a much more active image. Linguistically charting the Afro-Surinamese domain, in which "pursuit of the other" is structured, can very literally be compared to charting a landscape. I am not yet capable of definitively demonstrating the contours of that landscape, nor the precise location of mountains, lakes, tropical forests, or oases within it. What I can do is give a handful of expressions, out of the multitude, that indicate the linguistic and cultural preoccupation of Afro-Surinamese with the erotic.

There are various idioms that express a sweet, tender, horny feeling for somebody:

*Korkori wan sma.* To please somebody, to cuddle somebody. Also used for children, but without any sexual option implied.

*Prèy nanga wan sma.* To fondle somebody, to pet somebody. With sexual option.

*Suku wan sma.* To be after someone; to try to seduce someone.

*Firi switi gi wan sma.* To be sweet on someone.

*Tyallans wan sma.* To be after somebody persistently.

*Mekmeki gi wan sma.* To spoil, pamper someone.

*Koti pangi gi wan sma.* To go out of your way for someone, to show very clearly that the person is special.

*Tyari sma ede gwe.* Literally: to carry someone's head away.

*Drai sma ede.* Literally: to turn someone's head scandalously.

*Go gi wan sma.* To go for someone.

*Mi skin e tek'i.* My body takes you.

*Mi jeje e tek'i.* My spirit takes you.



*Poti wan sma.* Literally: satisfying somebody completely.

Especially in mati circles, the scene of women who also love women, there is a characteristic flavor to the expressions:

*M'e fir' wan gril na yu tapu.* Literally: I am feeling capricious towards you; I want to make love to you.

*M'e fir' wan lichtie gebruik.* Literally: I am feeling horny, wet.<sup>4</sup>

The latter two indicate a measure of sexual stirring; speaker feels that her pants are already getting wet.

### **Eroticism, Afro-Surinamese Style**

In discussing eroticism between Creole women and children or adolescents, I have in mind bodily contacts that both parties find enjoyable. But eroticism actually covers more; while touching is possible, it is not necessary. Looking only can be very erotic. I know a woman who intensely enjoys looking at the bodies of her two adolescent daughters, their long legs, their breasts, and their buttocks that rise like the dark islands in the upper Surinam River. Certainly this is what Audre Lorde is describing as the "energy of women, the embodiment of everything that is love, the capacity to experience joy." In this vein, I find very erotic the care that Creole women bestow on their own and their children's appearances. Sometimes, when a woman is very poor, that care can only consist of keeping her whole family well washed, starched, and ironed, and without holes and rents in their clothing. Other women love to dress up their little girls like miniatures of themselves, complete with puffed sleeves, belts, and a big bow in the hair. There is a lot of ironing, sewing, polishing, straightening, relaxing, pomading, adorning with artful headdresses, squeezing into narrow shoes, laying on of accessories, and gold-inlaying going on. All of this is done in a collective endeavor to please oneself and others. Pre-

sentation of self in an Afro-Surinamese universe starts and ends with a well-attended appearance, with special emphasis on the hair.

The role that food and drink play in a budding love affair also is not without erotic content. The moment a woman offers a plate of food to the person who is seeking her out, is significant and symbolizes her wish to be further pursued, and that the attentions are appreciated. Within an existing relationship, whether it is between lovers or in a mother-child dyad, the serving of food is a sign of continuing love. When, one bad day, the beloved has to serve her/himself, there is storm on the horizon.

It is also erotic to me when I am watching a walkathon with my friend Humbert, six years old, and he tries to get my attention by softly touching my breasts. He feels that I am talking too much to his mother and so he knocks on my front door. His mother starts cursing him right away: "*Soso handtammigheid!!*" having something of the meaning that he has gotten pretty forward to go around pawing a woman. Together with another ancient Dutch noun *vrijpostigheid*, boldness, sauciness, these are two key concepts in describing, from an adult point of view, "mature" behavior of children. *Handtammigheid* and *vrijpostigheid* strongly, though not exclusively, imply sexuality. The younger the child, the softer the implication inherent in the use of the terms. But when the words are used in connection with children who have passed the age when they can freely and without punishment express themselves sexually, then the connotation is harsher. According to most of my informants, that age is about six years, when the child has started primary school: a watershed for the tolerance with which the child's sexual utterances are treated.

### **The Mati Work**

There are two well known *odo's*, "proverbs," that allude to situations where there is a considerable age difference between two partners. One is: "*Yongu kaw e njan owru grasi,*" "The young cow is eating old grass." And, "*Owru kaka e bor' krakti supu,*" "An old cock boils strong

soup." As far as I have been able to ascertain, these proverbs are used for adults who are involved with other adults (though of a much younger age), or adults involved with adolescents. I have not heard them used in connection with adults and children. Relationships with large age differences are common both in a heterosexual context, an older man with a young woman and, somewhat less frequently, a mature woman with a young man, and in the mati world, both male and female.<sup>5</sup>

Mati are women who have sexual relationships with women, but they do not necessarily limit themselves to women. Surinam is unique in the openness with which the institution of mati-ism is displayed in its own environment—the Creole working class—and in the apparent frequency of these relationships. Mati-ism has been documented in the literature since the beginning of this century. Mati cannot be equated with (black) lesbians, because the former are part of a different, Afrocentric world view and come predominantly from a working class background.<sup>6</sup> A typical mati will have children, and often has relationships with men. Men are necessary in their lives, because they beget children and are deemed more desirable economic partners than women. This is especially true in the childbearing years. There is often a marked gender division in a female couple, where one will act as if she were "the male" and the other as "the female." The equivalent literal terms are used in Sranan, *man nanga uma*, man and woman. A true male-identified mati absolutely never can play the female part, but the "female" partner can, if need be, take the male role in another relationship. It is important that it should be known at the outset of a relationship who is to be whom; sometimes negotiations have to take place. Leaving all frills aside, according to the insiders, the essence of being "the male" is that she is the one who lies on top.

Many mati have been initiated into "*a wroko*," the mati work, at age 14 or 15 by women in their forties or sometimes even older. To the older woman—let's assume she plays the male part—there is the advantage that she can mold the girl to her own wishes. This pertains both to the

transfer of sexual knowledge, for example the different popular positions, and to the behavior of the girl, at home and when they are out together in public. It is vital that, especially in public, the girl treats her with the respect usually due an older person. She will want to be addressed, for example, not just by her first name, but as *tant' Coba* or *s'a Mina*, i.e., aunt Coba or sis Mina. When the older woman is well-off economically, either because she has grown children who support her or because she has a profitable job of her own, she will typically spoil the young girl, often with clothes and gold jewelry. On the other hand, she will demand strict fidelity, while she may not herself obey the same rules.

The younger partner in this relationship is typically indicated as the older woman's *yong' doifi* or *yong' fowru*, "young dove" or "young chicken." One informant, Orsy (age 43), in hindsight, explained her preference for older women in this way:

I really did not see much in girls my own age when I was fifteen years old. Problems with men and jealousy all the time. I saw how girls would try to take each other's boy-friends away and would always want to have what you had. I loved older women. You did not have to tell them anything, they knew everything already and taught you. They also helped you get stuff for your house, and when you did not have any money.<sup>7</sup>

In Orsy's circle, this pattern is still perpetuated: women of her age now transfer "the work" to the younger generation. When the learning process has ended, the young mati may find a partner or partners of her own age. There are also women who prefer to remain with a much older woman. It is not at all unusual to find women in their twenties having relationships with women in their sixties. Women of the oldest generation of mati, those in their seventies and eighties, explain that when they were young it was an unwritten rule that an older woman should not deflower a young girl. This

activity was reserved for the first man she was to have sex with. To many, having sex with women was pure pleasure, without worries about pregnancy. "Sporting," as it is called in Sranan, was engaged in with passion.

### By Way of Conclusion

As we have seen, it is common to presuppose age-old sexual knowledge in children within an Afro-Surinamese universe. This notion corresponds very well with another set of observations.

Responsibility, volition, insight, and motivation are often attributed to very young children. It is a maturity that does not correspond to their real capabilities. If the universe shows itself in a garment, where children, from a very young age, are believed to have their own sexual desires, to have maturity, insight, and volition, then one could expect a favorable climate for sexual contacts between women and children/adolescents. This might be so, whether it bears a name or not. Words are often too hard, too angular to contain so much tenderness. August 1991.

### Editors' Note:

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### NOTES

1. See C. Wooding, *Winti. Een Afro-Amerikaanse Godsdienst In Suriname* (Meppel: Krips Repro, 1972).
2. Audre Lorde, "The erotic as power," in: *Sister Outsider* (New York: The Crossing Press, 1984).
3. See G. Wekker and H. Wekker, "Coming In From The Cold: The Translation of Black English Vernacular Literary Texts into Surinamese Dutch," in *Babel: Revue Internationale de la Traduction*, Gent, 1991.
4. For the Sranan Tongo expressions I thank Misi Juliette, Edje van der Hilst, Maggy, Siene, Jetje and Dr. Hein Eersel.
5. See G. Wekker, "On Mati-ism and Black Lesbianism: Two Idealtypical Expressions of Female Homosexuality in Black Communities of the Diaspora," in *Journal of Homosexuality* (Binghamton, N.Y.: The Haworth Press, forthcoming). \*
6. The word *mati* is the generic term for friend in Sranan, both in a heterosexual and a homosexual context. Within the homosexual sphere it pertains both to men and women. The term *matisma*, literally "mati people," refers to homosexually involved women only.
7. For this and other material see my forthcoming dissertation, working title: *Mi Na Af' Sensi, No Wan Man Kan Broko Mi: I Am Half A Cent, No Man Can Break Me. Gender Consciousness and Survival Strategies of Creole Working Class Women* (UCLA, Los Angeles, expected date: Winter 1992).

**\*Binghamton, N.Y.  
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## INTERVIEW: MIMI

Mimi (48) met Bert (34) for the first time at the junior high school where she was teaching. While they have known each other for twenty years, they have had a relationship only for the past fourteen years. For the first several years Mimi consciously maintained a distance between them, because she wanted a relationship based on equality.

**Mimi:** An age difference in a relationship makes me think of two horses in a meadow; as night falls they stand together so that each one can rest its head on the other's back. Together they can watch in both directions. I was born during the war, and my outlook was shaped by the generation in which I was raised. The same is true for Bert. Our combined experiences give us greater possibilities.

The way I was raised had a very direct influence on my sexual relationships. As children we received a lot of information about eroticism. My parents were involved erotically with each other when the children were present. My mother told us very early—I think that I was eight or nine—how good it could feel to have sex with someone. I remember that very well, that my mother indicated that she enjoyed it so much herself. She was a very physical person. She's old now, but exactly the same. Certainly, given the times we were living in, we had a rather progressive sexual education. I think that my sense of passion was awakened by it. In a way, that was paradoxical, for my mother also had great anxiety about sex, at least about the consequences and the problems it could cause for you. A consciousness of the consequences couldn't be communicated very well, so we got two messages: passion exists, and the consequences of it should be feared. Passion won out: it was what was most clearly visible.

My mother got a lot of pleasure out of getting carried away with her passions. Now that she is seventy-five it still happens despite herself. And

her anxiety about the consequences is still as great. I have been considerably influenced by this positive emphasis on passion. Something was opened up for me; I was able to think about it. To think and to do, because I have always been rather quick to try things out. As a young teenager I had relationships with girlfriends; very early I felt people up, and it wasn't always rejected. Not that I turned into some kind of siren, you understand, not at all. I experienced passion as a great liberation, but when I acted on that liberation, my parents would turn against me quite terribly. That was the paradox of passion: while it brought people together, it also brought them into conflict with themselves and with others.

You could say that the messages I got from my parents resulted in some strange experiences. For instance, I was married to a much older man for thirteen years. The relationship started when I went away to school at the age of seventeen. My husband was ten years older, and when you are a teenager that is an enormous difference. I had just begun school, and he had dropped out of university. In my current relationship, the age difference is reversed—my friend Bert is fourteen years younger than I, and I now experience the difference as being smaller than I did then.

My parents strongly opposed that marriage, so much so that we were married privately by a judge when I was twenty-one. I didn't see my parents for a year and a half. But the world was different then than it is now. That might have been one of the reasons that my parents were so against the relationship. I come from a bourgeois family. It was the usual argument: this is not a good match; nothing good will come of it. But on the other hand they were enormously vital people sexually. In raising and educating us, that vitality had been very important. But their reality and the social reality have always been at odds with one another, with all the difficulties that go along with that.

I have to say that my sexual education gave me a certain erotic self-confidence, that is, I came to trust my instincts. If it feels good physically, it's OK. What I myself experience as most problematic is dealing with power in relation to the erotic. In my marriage I had a kind of passive power. I had a lot of power, but I also let myself be influenced by my husband.

With Bert I was clearly conscious of this power problem. Even before I actually got into the relationship, for a long time I had the feeling that it couldn't be because my power was too great. This was mainly because I first met him in school. I clearly felt there was an erotic tension between him and me, but when I was his teacher the power imbalance between teacher and pupil prevented me from acting on my feelings.

I noticed this erotic tension early on. He was in the Dutch equivalent of junior high; he was fourteen and I was twenty-eight. I described my feelings in my diary, but not very clearly. I was repressing them a bit because they were too difficult.

After that year I didn't have him in my class until he was sixteen. Bert could see clearly that I harbored erotic feelings for him, as he did for me. He couldn't understand it when I gave him signals that a relationship between us was impossible. The signal for him to go away was so strong that it must have been completely baffling for him. My experience of the power difference was not at all the same as his.

In my daily life at school I maintained the same distance from Bert as I did from all the other pupils, but in his case I deliberately avoided meeting him alone. Naturally, that created a tremendous tension. I felt like having a tantrum when it seemed that he would not be in my class in his final year. The school administrators had really made a mess of it for me; I wanted to see him every day. Bert sought me out, coming to ask about little things every now and then. That strengthened our connection. We had to live with a tension which became greater because we didn't express it.

My feelings started provoking strong reactions in me. For example, when I had to admit to myself that my whole life was beginning to revolve

around this situation, I resigned my job. I divorced, and I went travelling for two years. I was fleeing from the situation.

Bert was not uncomfortable, as I was, about the teacher-pupil power issue. We've often talked about why we couldn't have had a sexual connection then. I couldn't have had an erotic relationship and a teacher-pupil relationship at the same time. I don't think that I have any moral reservations about it, but for me an unequal power relationship is dangerous. I don't know if my reservations come through something in the environment, or through a real understanding of what power is in such a situation. I enjoy myself most when I make love with an equal. Of course, you can have a superficial, erotic relationship with a much younger person, but that's not what I wanted. I wanted much more.

When I returned after those two years of travelling, he came to visit me all the time. He pursued the contact, not I. I merrily moved from one place to another, without leaving a forwarding address behind. But he followed me every time. I have this ability to just push things aside and move on, you know. But whenever he found me again I was terribly happy. It's very flattering if someone goes to all that trouble; it's beautiful, and romantic. It's also frightening. I knew intellectually what it was to be romantic, and at the same time I found myself living in the middle of a Harlequin romance! I thought, "Just look at me!" I don't think I was ready for such a relationship. I had ended a marriage. Getting my act together was the first order of business, not playing mind-games with myself.

After high school, Bert went on to the conservatory. It was only then that I had the feeling it could develop into something. He had more autonomy; he could do his thing without my sitting on top of him and saying you've got to do this and you've got to do that. I had learned enough about myself by then to know I could be very dominant and demanding in a relationship. I want my partner to be responsive. In retrospect I see that he always *was* responsive, but I didn't see or feel it then.

Five years passed from the time we first met,

when he was fourteen, until we began a real relationship. During that time I had other relationships, and I was by myself for a while, which I really needed. I had also gone back to school and gotten an advanced degree. I had quieted down, and I think that that made it possible for me to take the risk of beginning something with Bert. I am reasonably monogamous; that is to say, a relationship makes a very deep impression on me, it has to have space and quiet.

I thought it over as carefully as I could. You sit with someone and think, "It should happen now; we are really going to make love, and stay together for a couple of days." I had to think it over very deeply, in order to be sure it was not happening because of any power I held; that I wasn't heavily influencing or taking over someone, or playing those sorts of games.

My first marriage had been to someone much older. I hadn't thought at all about the reactions of those around me. Which is crazy. At that time, at school, I had understood the implications of the power relationship between teacher and pupil, but I didn't realize the significance of an older woman going out with a younger man.

When you asked to interview me, I thought, well, hell yes, you *are* with somebody much younger than yourself. After a while you don't realize it any more. Every now and then it suddenly comes up: in a conversation, or when running up against someone's prejudice. Then you think, "Oh, yeah, that's me they're referring to." But it's not always in the front of my mind.

At some times the age difference is more obvious than at others. Bert and I often go shopping for shoes together, and then somebody suddenly says, "Your son wants you." I kind of react, you know, "Who do you mean? That can't be me." The other person usually feels more embarrassed than I do.

When we were first together I was living in Amsterdam, in a neighborhood where everybody knew everybody else's business. The "Buttinski's," who were always hanging out their window, lived across the street. Almost immediately they were shouting at Bert loud and clear, that old Dutch adage, "You gotta' learn to ride on an old bicycle! Ha, ha, ha." At

first I didn't even understand it! At the same time they could be really sympathetic. Once, when I suddenly had to go into the hospital, they were the very first to come by with flowers. The "old bicycle" reaction was just a kind of a joke.

The strongest reaction we got was from my parents. My father, who has since died, said, "Are you sure you know your responsibilities toward Bert?" And I replied that I certainly did. Later he took it back, that's the way he was. They knew perfectly well that I would do just what I wanted. After a while he also said that I was the only one in the family who had really become independent. He saw that we had a very good relationship, and he understood my choice. That pleased me.

My mother was also dubious about it. I think that she understood the erotic pleasures in it. On the other hand, she thought that if I'd married an older, richer man, then I'd have had something to show for it.

Of course, that was my side of the story. For Bert it was simpler because his friends are mainly from musical circles where out-of-the-ordinary relationships are more common, including quite a few relationships between teachers and students. Furthermore, I have always gotten along well with Bert's mother, whom I first met at parent-teacher meeting. His father had died, which meant that I had a more intense contact with his mother than I might have had with other families. So, things with his family went fairly easily, which was nice. Why exactly that should have been so—well, if you were a psychologist you might be able to tell me.

One of the most unpleasant incidents involving us and my family took place during a dinner at my brother's house. One of my nephews, who was still very small, was sitting next to Bert and kept staring at me. Finally, he said, "Really, how can you put up with such an old bag?" Obviously, such a young child must have heard that from someone else, and my brother didn't correct him. Since then my relation with my brother has cooled. My reaction in such cases is, what an unbelievable meat-head. A sort of angry scorn comes over me when people are so unfeeling about what is going on.

Other things annoy me too, for example, when people don't take the younger partner in a relationship seriously. I find that terribly nasty. A colleague in my department sometimes says, "Such a young kid, what can you find to talk about with him? Has a kid like that got any opinions?" Then I think, "Damn it, take a look at your own relationship." Sometimes I hear something from a child of six that fascinates me, that I find very worthwhile. We also know what bullshit PhD's can spew out. It's a matter of perspective. It leaves a sour taste if people don't take seriously something that is an essential part of you. You'd better believe that a great deal of your being is wrapped up in the knowledge that someone fits you perfectly!

There are social affairs that you really should go to with your partner, but I don't do that. I've come to detest them. Some colleagues know Bert and I rather well, but I seldom turn up with him as the others at school do. All you hear is "Oh, that one's with so and so," and "My God, did you see that?" I don't see any sense in putting myself on display in such circumstances.

I've always sought situations where I can have a relationship with someone without hesitation or preconditions. According to our bourgeois upbringing, all kinds of things should take precedence: steady jobs, houses, possessions, children, just name them. To me these are limitations. I enjoy freedom in my relationships. It provides both of us with more room.

When I see a colleague tied down with a husband and children, then I realize how lucky I am that I'm divorced and not in that trap. I've not trapped myself in a cage; people don't immediately realize that we belong together, and that has advantages.

I don't think that you can teach anyone how to think their way beyond those preconceptions. I say to my students: try to get back to who you really are, but don't try frantically to stay there; try to develop. Take responsibility for yourself.

I've probably also been fortunate. It's still amazes me that I've gotten hold of the right person; it's so romantic. He just happened to be there. How? Dumb luck. If I had looked for

work at another school, I would probably never have met him.

My relationship with Bert has worked because we fit perfectly with each other, and that has nothing to do with age. As far as I am concerned, basically it has nothing to do with sexual orientation either. We are talking about an individual's "being;" if Bert had been a woman, I think I would also have fallen in love with her.

Early on my mother recognized Bert as my possible lover. When he was in my class, in the '70s, it was the custom that pupils visit you in your home. My parents were visiting once when Bert and some students came by. My mother instantly picked Bert out. She said, "Let me take a good look at you; take off your glasses for a moment; let me really see you." She meant that as a very erotic request. She really wasn't so surprised when I brought him home.

*Translated from the Dutch by Words and Pictures.*

# FEMINISM, PAEDOPHILIA, AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

**Pat Califia**

In 1980, I published a two-part article that was a critique of American age-of-consent laws. The pieces appeared in the national gay news-magazine, *The Advocate*. They were extremely controversial, but they did hit print and spur discussion about the sexuality of young people, intimate relationships between men and boys, and the dangerous implications of banning all erotic images of minors. I am writing this piece 11 years later. It will be translated into Dutch and published abroad. This is partly because I support *Paidika* – and enjoy working with the editors of this special issue. But it's also because I probably could not get anything on this topic published today in the American gay and lesbian press.

One of my books, *Doc and Fluff*, a science-fiction novel, has been banned by women's bookstores because it depicts a cross-generational lesbian relationship, and I've been attacked as "an advocate of child molestation" in the feminist press. This happened despite the fact that I made it clear that the younger character, Fluff, had reached the legal age of consent. She initiates all the sexual activity. If I had made Fluff 14 or even 16 instead of 18, the book probably would not have been published at all.

The American government's campaign against the sexual rights of young people has been so successful that most gay men, lesbians, and feminists are convinced that the movement to repeal age-of-consent laws was nothing more than an attempt to guarantee rapacious adults the right to have access to vulnerable child victims. The North American Man-Boy Love Association has been banned from so many annual gay pride

marches that people are astonished when they appear.

The adult gay community here has been cut off from its next generation. We are afraid to reach out to young men and women who are coming out. A teenager who has suffered abuse from parents, peers, and teachers for being homosexual often finds that adult gay men and lesbians will not offer him or her sanctuary from homophobia. We do not because we dare not. We have been terrorized and made ashamed.

And yet I know very few lesbians, and even fewer gay men, who waited until they were 18 to come out. Most of us were aware well before puberty that we wanted to be close to or sexual with members of our own sex. I've heard countless stories from women about their attempts to seduce their high-school gym teacher or a camp counselor. Not all of these attempts were unsuccessful. Our real-life experience does not jibe with our politics on this issue. In this case, at least, the personal does not seem to be political.

It's impossible to sum up 30 years of American politics in a short article. But a sketchy chronicle of this background is important for anyone who wants to understand the suspicion and hatred that most American gay-rights activists and lesbian feminists display toward paedophilia.

During the '60s, several popular radical movements developed. The military draft which sent young men to war in Vietnam was the impetus for their formation. Because the draft was age-linked, the campaign against it used age ("sending young men to fight an old men's war") as a rallying point. Movements for the liberation of blacks, women, and homosexuals appeared. And



there was a nascent movement for the liberation of young people. High school students fought for the right to publish underground newspapers, wear their hair long, and join in antiwar protests by wearing armbands and other political symbols to school. They contested searches conducted by school officials, and seizure of their property.

In the early days of the women's movement, feminists criticized all the institutions of a male-dominated society. The traditional family was under siege. It was common to talk about how young women were oppressed by the public schools and received an inferior, feminized education. There was agitation for reproductive rights (access to birth control and abortion) for all women, including teenagers.

The antiwar movement collapsed when the draft was repealed and the war in Vietnam ended. Few of its members had developed a sophisticated critique of the American state. The feminist movement was deflated by the Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*, which granted American women the right to abortion in 1973. Ironically, because of this major victory, American feminism lost its intense radical focus. It was also divided by bitter struggles over the presence of lesbians in the women's movement and their eventual departure from it. Mainstream feminism became bogged down in a doomed campaign to pass the Equal Rights Amendment. Litigation against sex discrimination in the areas of employment, education, etc., made significant gains for women but was difficult to use as a rallying point for a mass movement.

### **Anti-Porn Movement**

Feminism did not regain its fervor until the anti-porn movement emerged in the late '70s. This campaign almost immediately won a large number of adherents. Antiporn activists were successful in attracting both lesbian and heterosexual feminists. All women could unite against misogynistic violence. Because the antiporn movement quashed discussion of private sexual practices that might conflict with their critique of sexually diverse imagery, it became much easier for women with diffe-

ring sexual orientations to work together. Their leaders were excellent public speakers who allowed their followers to be titillated by pornography without giving up their righteous indignation about it.

This social purity movement promised to do away with discrimination and violence against women by simply eliminating porn. It also made street action and protests viable once more, instead of focusing on boring legal cases. Closing adult bookstores is much easier than changing the power relations between the sexes. And it allowed women to take action within the private sphere, politicized something we are accustomed to doing—regulating other people's sexual conduct.

The feminist antiporn movement routinely trashed their critics within the feminist movement by attacking them as perverts, advocates of rape and battery, and advocates of child abuse. Today, the antiporn movement has been so successful that most people—including the press—assume that they represent the only feminist position on issues of sexuality, censorship, pornography, violence against women, and the sex industry.

The feminist antiporn movement mirrored a growing conservatism in American society about all sexual matters. As economic conditions here got worse, people began to look toward "traditional values" to provide a feeling of security and safety. It became much harder for women to survive economically outside the nuclear family or criticize it. Plenty of evidence exists to show that the traditional family is not a particularly nice place to grow up. Sexual abuse is a common experience for girls (and not so uncommon for boys) in the family. Federal law enforcement figures indicate that five children per day (mostly infants and young children) are murdered by their parents in the United States. Yet the nostalgia for this ideal, safe, loving, nurturing, patriarchal family persists.

The panics over child pornography and paedophilia that have racked American society from the '70s until today are an inseparable part of the denial our society is in about the shortcomings and failure of the family. These moral

crusades have also been used to attack both feminism and gay rights, and neither of these progressive movements has been very successful at defending itself against these attacks or presenting a complete analysis of them.

### **Child Pornography**

Child pornography has been a special category in American law since 1977, when Congressional hearings were held on the sexual exploitation of children. This was the year when Anita Bryant began her infamous campaign against gay-rights legislation in Dade County, Florida under the slogan, "Save Our Children." The most flamboyant agitators against kiddy porn included Judianne Densen-Gerber, manager of a chain of drug rehabilitation centers, and Los Angeles cop Lloyd Martin, who had received city funding to head the Sexually Exploited Child Unit. Densen-Gerber brought to the hearing a trunk full of kiddy porn which she claimed had been purchased by her 17-year-old daughter and a friend. Then New York State Attorney General Robert Abrams conducted a two-year investigation of her Odyssey House drug-rehabilitation centers and concluded that federal, state, and city grants had been diverted to pay for her private expenses. Densen-Gerber had to agree to repay the money, and Odyssey House was placed on probation, to avoid criminal charges. Lloyd Martin was eventually transferred out of the Sexually Exploited Children Unit to a less visible and powerful position. Activists speculated that this transfer was the result of remarks Martin had made alleging that the Big Brother program and the Boy Scouts of America did not screen their volunteers carefully enough and were full of paedophiles. After this transfer was announced, Martin went on "psychiatric sick leave" and finally resigned from the police department.

Witnesses' claims that the child porn industry grossed billions of dollars and involved the abuse of millions of children were never substantiated. In fact, even in its heyday child porn was not a popular genre of sexually explicit material. One expert has estimated that no more than 5,000 to

10,000 copies of each magazine were sold worldwide.

In 1978, a federal law took effect that made it a felony to photograph anyone under the age of 16 in the nude, engaged in sexual activity with another person, or masturbating. By that time, most distributors and bookstores had stopped handling the controversial material. The only child pornography left was produced by amateurs, usually for private use. Since 1978, the law has been amended to make penalties more severe, and the definition of a minor now includes all persons under the age of 18. Subsequent court decisions have determined that material depicting minors does not have to meet the same strict criteria that adult material has to meet to be defined as obscene and therefore proscribed. If a boy-lover has a nude photograph of his 17-year-old boyfriend in his wallet, that photograph—even though it was not commercially distributed and does not depict sex—it is child pornography. It is illegal to transport across state lines, and in many states it is even illegal to possess it.

In 1990, the Supreme Court upheld an Ohio state law which criminalized the possession and viewing of child pornography. Many other states then passed similar legislation. In the U.S., it is illegal to be in the business of producing or distributing obscene matter, but it is not illegal for a private citizen to possess this material to view in his or her own home—unless it depicts minors.

Despite the fact that child pornography is no longer commercially available, law enforcement efforts against it have escalated. Special task forces to combat it have been set up by U.S. Customs, the FBI, the Justice Department, and state and local police. In order to justify their swollen budgets and manpower rosters, the cops have created a series of expensive entrapment schemes. Ironically enough, the only kiddy porn now produced in the U.S. is paid for by taxpayers' dollars and hawked by the guardians of our legal system.

Between 1978 and 1984, only 67 defendants were indicted for federal child-porn crimes. But since May 1984, about 600 defendants have

been indicted as a result of sting operations conducted by U.S. government agencies. This is how it works. The post office mails brochures soliciting orders for child porn to people who are unlucky enough to have landed on a mailing list compiled by U.S. Customs. The list comes from many sources. Adult porn businesses that get raided also have their mailing lists confiscated, even if their customers have committed no crime. The Post Office and Customs keep track of people who order sexually explicit material through the mail. Police have even confiscated the membership list of a gay computer bulletin board that was shut down because its operator was accused of violating age-of-consent laws. Some of the brochures are vaguely worded and do not make it clear that the customer is ordering contraband. Law enforcement officials sometimes become penpals, pretending to be paedophiles or sexually active children, and solicit the correspondent to send them child porn through the mail or receive it. If the targeted individual seizes the bait, he or she is arrested, and the odds are overwhelmingly in favor of conviction even if they have never ordered this type of material before.

One such operation, Project Looking Glass, conducted in 1986, involved more than 200 U.S. Customs inspectors and state and local cops. The government paid millions of dollars to obtain a mere 100 indictments.

Strict child-porn laws have created a chilling effect upon any discussion of child sexuality. The excellent sex-education book, *Show Me*, was withdrawn by its publisher, St. Martin's Press, after the 1978 law went into effect because nude photos accompanied the text. Art photographers like Robert Mapplethorpe or Jock Sturges who display non-erotic, nude portraits of children have been threatened with prosecution. Since film developers are required to notify police any time they see negatives that feature nude minors, parents have been charged and even convicted of child-porn offenses for taking nude pictures of their own children at play or in the bathtub. There have been so many wrongful accusations regarding pornography and sexual and physical child abuse that an organization of

child-care workers and parents wrongfully accused has been formed, Victims of Child Abuse Laws (VOCAL).

The government has also tried to use child-porn law against adult material. American magazines that publish nude photographs are required to keep files on their models which show proof of each model's legal age and name. These files have to be kept available for inspection by law-enforcement personnel.

When most people think of child pornography, they imagine full-color movies and magazines that show adults raping prepubescent children. In fact, most of the material was black-and-white photo magazines. The bulk of the imagery was of nude children or teens. A minority of the images showed young people being sexual with each other, and a very tiny proportion of it showed adults engaged in sexual conduct with minors. Since the pictures were so hard to obtain, they were usually pirated by rival magazines and reprinted.

It's certainly true that some of the young people who appeared in this material were coerced into modeling and were damaged by that experience. But it would be a mistake to characterize all child porn as "a record of child abuse." Sometimes it was a record of children's exhibitionism and free erotic play with one another. Sometimes it was a record of adolescent vanity, pride, and budding sexuality. Sometimes it preserved a moment of exceptional trust and pleasure between partners whose ages would normally have kept them apart.

To simply speak this truth is very dangerous today. But we do not serve ourselves—or children—very well when we interpret all sexual experiences in the most negative terms possible. Sex is not simply a matter of violence or danger. And issues of consent, autonomy, and power are never simple to sort out, especially in the realm of the senses. Adult panic and disgust about young people seeking pleasure for themselves is responsible for much of the trauma that minors experience when they are caught behaving "inappropriately" for their ages, even in a consensual context.

## Missing Children

The campaign against child pornography was fueled by a related moral panic—hysteria about missing children. During the early '80s, the American media was full of melodramatic accounts of the millions of children who were kidnaped and then sexually abused by strangers. A representative article appeared in the women's magazine *Family Circle* in 1986, headlined "Every Mother's Fear: Abduction" with the subhead, "An estimated 1.8 million children will be reported missing this year. What can you do to protect your child?" Photos of children who were missing and supposedly in grave danger appeared everywhere—on grocery bags, milk cartons, billboards, and flyers. Public fear about missing children grew to such a pitch that in 1984 the Justice Department awarded a \$3.3 million grant to set up the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

It took a while for the facts to emerge, still longer for the panic to fade. An alarming 1983 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services statistic that there were 1.5 million missing children reported each year was widely quoted. But this huge number was hardly ever broken down into appropriate categories. About 95% of those children were runaways, most of whom returned voluntarily within days; throwaways (children abandoned by their parents); or had been kidnapped by parents or guardians involved in custody battles. Jay Howell, executive director of the Justice Department-funded center, often told the press that he estimated that 4,000 to 20,000 children were kidnapped by strangers each year. But other child advocates such as Bill Treanor, executive director of the American Youth Work Center, put the figure closer to 100, and the F.B.I. logged only 67 stranger-abduction reports annually.

Even after the scare about missing children had begun to abate and its credibility wane, it continued to color public policy. The U.S. Dept. of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention released a report entitled *America's Missing and Exploited Children: Their Safety and Their Future* in March of 1986.

While acknowledging that many so-called missing children were actually abandoned by their parents, had run away "to flee from intolerable conditions of emotional or physical abuse at home" or were "victims of family abduction," the report still called up the specter of

"paedophiles, serial murderers, or those who want to sell abducted children on the black market. . . They photograph children engaged in sordid, explicit sexual activity and sell the photos on the international market that is available for the exchange of such pictures."

Rather than analyzing why young people might prefer a precarious life on the street to the dangers of remaining at home, the advisory board recommended giving police the authority to detain anyone under the age of 18. The report says primly that minors "do not have a right to freedom from custody." Both runaway and throwaway children should be returned to their parents as soon as possible. The report blames "violent and sexually explicit facets of the popular culture such as art, rock music, lyrics, and video games" and "preadolescent peer culture" for young people's desire to escape from the family and asks,

"Would children be less vulnerable to running away, to sexual exploitation, to sex rings, and destructive cults if they were more sheltered from lurid, everyday depictions of perversion?"

In other words, teenagers who leave home or are thrown out have been tainted by sexual deviance. And, in fact, the sexuality of young people often provokes violence within the family—a demand for birth control or sex education, discovery of a minor's sexual activity, a need for treatment for a venereal disease, pregnancy, or coming out as bisexual or homosexual. But the Justice Dept. report does not suggest that adults need to accept the reality of youthful sexuality and give young people the information they need to cope with it, including access to birth

control and abortion. No mention is made of alleviating poverty, providing better health care or mental health services, or making it easier for families to deal with substance abuse problems. It's much easier to jail the young man whose father beats him up for being a fag and buy him a bus ticket home. It's much tidier to ship the pregnant high-school junior back to the hometown where her mother does not want her to be seen in public.

### **Attack on Feminism**

In the late '80s, a series of scandals about child abuse which supposedly occurred in daycare centers represented a major assault on feminism and the increasing numbers of American women with children who worked outside their homes. These scandals also created the myth that organized rings of Satanists were preying on America's youth.

What one author has called "the ritual sex abuse hoax" began in 1983, when Judy Johnson noticed that her two-year-old son's bottom was red. Her son attended the McMartin preschool in Los Angeles. She told police he had named a man at the center named Ray, but it wasn't clear what Ray had done. In the next few weeks, Johnson's accusations grew more complex and colorful. Eventually she accused Ray Buckey, whose family owned the school, of making her son ride naked on a horse, wearing a Santa Claus suit while abusing him, jabbing scissors into his eyes, and putting staples in his ears. She accused Peggy Buckey, Ray's mother, of killing a baby and making her son drink the blood. She also said that an AWOL marine and three models in a health club had raped her son, and that her family's dog had been sodomized. Johnson was eventually diagnosed as psychotic, and defense attorneys would claim her son had been abused by his own father. But her wild stories set the most expensive criminal case in U.S. history in motion.

Police sent about 200 letters to families whose children attended the McMartin preschool, asking if their children had been molested. The letter suggested that families take their children to Children's Institute International (C.I.I.), an abuse therapy clinic, for therapy. There, children

were questioned by social workers plying anatomically correct puppets. The therapists at CII assumed that children who denied being abused must be lying and encouraged them to prove they weren't "stupid" by telling "the yucky secret." The children began to tell stories about being assaulted in hot-air balloons, on the shoulders of busy freeways, and used in Satanic rituals in tunnels beneath the school. Teachers supposedly mutilated and killed animals in front of the children to persuade them to keep silent about the abuse. Eventually, several members of the Buckey family, including a 77-year-old, wheelchair-bound grandmother, and three female teachers were accused of committing hundreds of acts of sex abuse against children.

The case wasn't resolved until 1990. None of the defendants was convicted, mostly because it became apparent that the child witnesses had been coached and there was a lack of hard, physical evidence to support their claims. For example, no tunnels were ever found below the school. But many people caught up in ritual abuse cases have not been that lucky.

From 1984 to 1989, some 100 people nationwide were charged with ritual abuse crimes against children. About half of them were tried, and half of this number convicted, usually with no evidence but testimony from children, parents, experts who testify the children seem traumatized, and doctors who were willing to make a definitive diagnosis of sexual abuse even though this is very difficult to detect in any victim regardless of age. These convictions were made possible in part by laws enacted around 1986 in many states that were intended to make it easier for child victims to win justice. In some states, it wasn't necessary for the children to even be in court—parents could testify as hearsay witnesses or the children could appear on videotape or closed-circuit TV. Of course, this also makes it more difficult to confront one's accusers and present a defense.

F.B.I. agent Kenneth Lanning, who initially believed allegations of Satanic abuse, today says, "If the cults were real, they would constitute the greatest conspiracy in history." Yet law-enforcement personnel continue to receive government

funding to attend conferences where experts tell them how to detect Satanic child pornography and prostitution rings, and government-funded publications warning parents about the phenomenon have been published in several states.

These cases have been used, not very subtly, to make parents who need to use daycare feel guilty for leaving their children in other people's hands. For the first time, women are being labeled as paedophiles. This increases the public's paranoia. If children aren't safe with female caretakers, there must not be any safe place for them except home with Mommy.

This moral panic conveniently locates the source of child abuse outside of the home. It also precludes demands for increased government subsidization of childcare or more frequent state safety inspections since neither measure can prevail against child-hating witches who can kill babies without leaving bodies around for the cops to find and covens that skewer toddlers' private parts with swords, film the ritual for sale on the international paedophile market, and leave no telltale negatives or wounds behind. People can wax indignant about the "selfishness" of mothers who endanger their children by placing them in daycare and ignore the economic reality that most mothers have to work if their children are going to have shelter and food.

### **Cross-Generational Relationships**

American society has become rabidly phobic about any sexual contact between adults and minors. In this social climate, very few lesbians will admit to having cross-generational relationships or defend even the abstract idea of them. Within the lesbian community, other forces exist that prevent girl-lovers and underage lesbians from telling their own stories. We encourage incest survivors to break the silence and tell family secrets about violence and sexual abuse. But this sisterly support turns to outrage and cries for silence if a woman wants to talk about being a sexually active child or even a teenager who was not traumatized by the experience. Lesbian feminism supposedly empowers women, but we are reluctant to see young women's

sexual experiences as anything other than victimization.

Lesbians work constantly to undo their racism, classism, able-bodyism, looksism, coupleism, and every other form of prejudice. We give lip service to confronting ageism, but we do not really include underaged lesbian and bisexual women in our community. The simple truth is that we are afraid to. We are afraid the state will come down on us, brand us as child molesters, and put us in jail.

Why should a woman have to wait until she turns 18 or 21 to be sexually active with other women? You may argue that adolescent dykes should experiment sexually and romantically with each other. But when you are trapped in a school, a neighborhood, a church, and a family where being called a queer means you are targeted for harassment and assault, how many young lesbians can afford to come out or seek out others like themselves? The adult lesbian community is much easier to find than gay peers. Not all younger dykes are interested in older women. But if they are, I cannot think of one good reason—apart from the persecution of cross-generational lovers—why either woman should deny herself such a relationship. Each generation of lesbians winds up to some extent recreating the wheel—rediscovering the possibilities of women's sexuality, relationships, and culture. We could save each other so much time and pain if we were not so deeply divided.

Opposing the state is a fearful thing. Nobody wants to go to jail, be blacklisted, or experience the violation of a tapped telephone and mail opened by strangers. But sometimes the injustice is too huge to ignore. I cannot blot out the memory of my own adolescent struggle to become a lesbian, how hard it was to persuade adult dykes to move over just a few inches and let me stand with them at the bar, how few of them were willing to talk to me, much less sleep with me. I cannot forget how freakish and alone I felt because other deviants were afraid to acknowledge me, how guilty I felt because I seemed to threaten them and make their marginal lives even more perilous. I understand why those gray-haired women and the younger

women in their twenties turned their heads away from me, but it was wrong. Self-hatred and cowardice often conceal themselves as self-preservation. I wish I could believe that fewer adult dykes would make those mistakes today.

Our government is happy to spend millions of dollars to put paedophiles in jail and keep the bogeyman of kiddy porn before the public eye to justify inflated law-enforcement budgets and increasingly draconian enforcement of obscenity laws. But the government is not willing to make sure people have enough money to support their children or create safe and affordable daycare. Funds for education still take a back seat to defense. The state is not willing to take the radical action that would be necessary to protect child victims of abusive adults. That would mean challenging parents' ownership of their children. It would mean providing viable alternatives to the family. Minors who are given the power to say "no" to being sexually used by an abusive parent or relative are also going to assume the right to say "yes" to other young people and adults whom they desire. You can't liberate children and adolescents without disrupting the entire hierarchy of adult power and coercion and challenging the hegemony of anti-sex fundamentalist religious values.

#### *Editors' Note:*

*For the past twenty years Pat Califia, as political activist and writer, has worked for the rights of "perverts." She is a sharp critic of repressive American attitudes towards sexuality and pornography. Her well-known columns in the Advocate and other homosexual journals, which she has been writing since 1981, were recently anthologized under the title, The Advocate Adviser (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1991). She has also written, The Book of Lesbian Sexuality (Tallahassee: Naiad Press, 1983), and, Doc and Fluff: The Distopian Tale of a Girl and her Biker (Boston: Alyson, 1990).*

## INTERVIEW: INGE

# Uncertainty and Manipulation Can Occur in Any Relationship

Sjuul Deckwitz interviewed Inge, a 18-year-old high-school student who, after high-school graduation, wants to go abroad for a year and then do Dutch studies at university. She lives with her father, but leads an independent life. Her parents are divorced and she has a good relationship with her mother and brother. When she was 16 she fell in love with Martina, then 32, a teacher in her school. Their relationship lasted two years, although the relationship only became sexual during the second year. According to Inge the age difference was a contributing, but not the primary, cause for their break-up.

**Inge:** When I was twelve and in the sixth grade, I fell in love with "Ellen," an older woman, my gym teacher. I don't know exactly how old she was, but in any case she was much older than I. During gym class I was really scared of blundering, and I hardly dared to look at her. Perhaps that's why I can't quite remember her face. I have retained more the image of her charisma. She was a very athletic and self-confident woman. I simply didn't think about the age difference.

I was brought up in a very liberal environment. It was quite normal to discuss and assert your feelings and desires in my family. I didn't have to hide them from my parents, or friends. I discussed my infatuation quite frankly with my mother, but mentioned it only in passing to my dad.

I finally decided to write my gym teacher a letter. In the end I didn't send it, though I did keep it.

Dear Ellen: It's very hard for me to write about this, but I'll do it anyway. For a long time I felt I've been in love with you. I

have spent hours thinking about how to tell you this. Eventually I decided to tell you in a letter. I have discussed this with many people, but now I would like to know how you feel about it. Could you write me back about this? I would very much like an answer.

Soon after I entered junior high school, on an impulse, I wrote a little article for the school paper about my crush on the gym teacher. I wanted to know how other kids were reacting.

Being in love! I myself was in love with a teacher. It was my first time. It's great to be in love, but it can also be difficult. When I was in love I told my mother and two girlfriends – that it was with a woman, and I am a girl. They encouraged me to tell my teacher. After thinking it over for a long time, I decided to write her a letter. After wavering for a long time I decided, however, not to send it.

In the last week of sixth grade I finally decided I had to tell her.

She came into our classroom to ask our teacher about something or other and left again right away. I saw her and thought, "This is my last chance. I have to tell her." I ran after her and asked her if she had a moment to spare. I started to tremble, my cheeks flushed, and I got all tearful. I stumbled over my words. She asked me whether I felt relieved, and some other things, but I can't remember now what they were. Then it was all over. I went back to my class, my cheeks still tear-stained, and went



on with my lessons. I would like to hear or read more stories like mine: whether other people told the one they were in love with, whether they also fell in love with somebody their own sex, how the people they told about it reacted. I'm really curious.

Fortunately for me my girlfriends from my primary-school days kept it a secret. The word got around, nonetheless, that I was the one who had written the article. They really pestered me about it. They had always thought I was odd because I had rather feminist ideas; I was more progressive than most of the others, and I didn't wear all the latest things popular with the kids. They really teased me. Little by little they started to forget, but I never really felt comfortable there. After three years I transferred to another school. When I was in high school I realized for the first time how strange people thought homosexuality was.

At the new school I met a girl who was preparing a paper about homosexuality in the United States. I felt I could confide in her, and told her what had happened at my previous school. She asked me if I wanted to go out with her to a women's disco, the Labyrinth. It was the last night it was going to be open before they closed down for good. There was a huge, last-night party. I liked it there, I felt at ease. My friend told me she expected Martina, a teacher at our high school, to be there later, and from that moment on I was on pins and needles. Would she come? Wouldn't she? I had seen her around school and run into her a few times but I hadn't realized that I was already in love with her. Finally she arrived and right away, WHAM! It seemed to be love at first sight, but these feelings had already been brewing unconsciously in me. Right there, in the thick of all the party hubbub, we talked all night.

Martina was 32 years old, I was 16. Although we were in love, she didn't want a sexual relationship with me. She was very clear about this. As long as she was teaching at our school, nothing could happen between us. If the two of us were going to enter into a relationship, she wanted to be open about it. She didn't have a

permanent position, and she worried that people at the school would have trouble with her homosexuality. She didn't cherish being branded a paedophile either; a lesbian with a young partner would be doubly odd and doubly negative. We went out sometimes to a bar or a restaurant, but more often we stayed at her place, sitting at opposite ends of the couch, longing for one another. I remember thinking, "I want to, I want to." It was all very hard, but exciting at the same time. I thought she was very beautiful, and because she was a teacher I put her on a pedestal. We could talk so well together, about feminism for instance, or politics, or being a lesbian. She taught me how to reason, and through our conversations I began to understand how society was structured, something I had never realized before.

Her refusal to have a relationship was hard for me, but I trusted her saying it was impossible for her. I wanted to be as close to her as possible and was afraid of losing her by making the mistake of pressuring her into anything. This lasted for about a year, but then she got another job. If she hadn't changed jobs I might have become more insistent.

She phoned me one day not long afterwards, and we had this very intense discussion on the phone. I was floored. I hadn't expected things to ever change between us. I really had to catch my breath. We arranged a date. We were both very much in love, and there was no longer any reason to deny ourselves. Our relationship really began when we started to make love.

My parents didn't mind that I now had this full-blown relationship with a woman, and a much older woman at that. They were pleased for me, and showed interest in its development. My brother was fairly quick to accept it, though at first he had some difficulties with the fact that I am a lesbian. Most of my friends reacted positively, but I felt I still had to hide it from my other acquaintances whom I knew simply would never understand it. At school I only told a few girlfriends I trusted. I didn't have the nerve to walk hand in hand with her in the streets. Perhaps, with someone my own age, it wouldn't have bothered me.

When we went shopping, people sometimes thought we were cousins. Once, when we were in a women's bookshop, somebody asked us whether we attended the same school. Sure, the two of us thought, but not the way you think!

We met three times a week and I slept over at Martina's. We spent almost the whole weekend together. I was terribly in love, completely focussed on her. My friends complained that they could never reach me at home, but they understood that I was simply in love.

Right from the beginning, Martina said that she knew how it was going to end. When you get into a relationship at an early age there will always come a time when you start looking for someone else. I heard her saying it, but I didn't really take it in. I was too much in love.

There certainly were problems. I was living with my father and there was this third person to deal with, so there was less privacy. Martina and my dad got along very well and we tried sleeping together at my place. The three of us ate dinner together too, but this didn't really work, and we ended up mostly at Martina's.

You have to remember that I was still at school, living at home, and had little of my own money to spend. We didn't share all the same tastes either. We both enjoyed the theater and the movies, but Martina preferred dances for women over thirty. We saw a lot more of Martina's friends than of mine, and I didn't make my own friends at those dances. I didn't know the music and just stood around feeling self-conscious. Sometimes I got drawn into conversations that went over my head simply because those women lived in a different world. They talked about their jobs, literature, or politics, and sometimes used expressions I didn't understand. At moments like that I didn't feel I could ask what they meant.

Her friends were kind to me, maybe unconsciously a little condescending: whenever they talked with me they always asked me about school. That really made me feel different, so young. I realized that I wanted to be more in touch with my peers, that I wanted to fool around and just have some good old fashioned fun. Sometimes I went to the girls' group, for the under-26, at the local gay and lesbian center.

Martina was too old to join me there, but I did take her along to parties. I was proud to show her off. But I felt so terribly responsible; I always watched carefully to see if she was having a good time. On several occasions we talked about my not seeing enough of my girlfriends. Sometimes I felt our relationship cramped my style. I wanted to feel free; to flirt; to have one night stands; to try out everything. It all had to do with being young.

After the relationship had ended, Martina said that we should have spent more time at my place, in my world. She also said that it would have made a big difference if I had been living on my own because I hadn't liked it when she had had to pay for me. Of course I had sometimes paid for myself, but whenever we did something expensive, she paid. It's great to go to the theater, but I also thought: why not skip this time, it's so expensive, and then on the other hand I thought: why not make use of the money that's available? I offered to pay her something monthly to help cover my share of the expenses, but she didn't want me to. She always paid for the groceries. Ironically, she told me that she should have paid more often for me. She thought I spent too much money on the two of us. Martina was very much aware of my situation, because she herself had had a relationship with an older woman when she was young.

Sexually, I didn't experience the age difference. I had already had sexual experiences with girls my own age and knew what I liked and didn't like. When I was about 13 years old, I had a girl friend who was, just like me, preoccupied with sex. We bought porn and cut up old pantyhose into erotic lingerie. When you can't afford to buy that stuff you've got to do it yourself. I experimented with her and other girls. I even practiced kissing because I was afraid that I wouldn't be good at it. I had read somewhere that you should practice on your hand. I practiced every night. When it came to sex I was pretty well prepared, though I think that with every new relationship you have to start all over again. You always feel a bit insecure at first. When someone is ready for sex they look for it. It's probably better if they have some kind of a basis, experience with their peers. That way

they can find out what they want. Most kids know very well what they want. When it comes to sex, they sense when something is not quite right. They'll withdraw. Certainly, kids in relationships with older persons, and who are not yet so sure of themselves, can be manipulated. But uncertainty and manipulation can be a part of any relationship.

At present I have a relationship with a woman eight years older than I, so there isn't that much of an age gap. Maybe, as I grow older, I'll take more and more to people my own age. I do notice that she's younger than Martina. We like the same kinds of entertainment; it's just great, having fun and making love. I think equality is very important; to listen to each other, to help one another, to appreciate each other. But I can still imagine myself in a relationship with somebody in their thirties or forties. I haven't yet fallen in love with somebody my own age. You can never know, it could happen any time.

My mother asked me once why I didn't look for somebody my own age. I took it as a criticism, as if she were warning me that I made it too hard for myself. She didn't want to see me hurt, especially because of differences in age. Now I realize I can have very satisfying conversations with my peers. I also really like to live it up.

The age difference wasn't the primary cause of our splitting up, though I'd have to say it did contribute to it. My being all wrapped up in her life finally began to bother me, and all of a sudden I put an end to our relationship. It seemed sudden of course, but I had been nursing these feelings for some time, and she had felt it coming.

When I look around me I notice that age differences are pretty common in the lesbian world. I don't want to label something, "the lesbian world," as if it were as a place where these relationships happen a lot, but girls look up to an older woman as an example, and the older woman helps the girl's coming out. If I could relive my relationship with Martina, I wouldn't hesitate for one second. I look back on it now with great pleasure.

*Translated by Gertjan Cobelens.*

# “THE WORLD IS BURSTING WITH ADULTS, SO I’M ALWAYS GLAD TO SEE A LITTLE GIRL”: A Young Woman’s Account of her Paedo-Erotic Interests

Theo G.M. Sandfort

Sexual diversity among females seems to be less widespread than among males. The discussion in the literature of female sexual “deviancy” is mostly confined to prostitution and homosexuality.<sup>1</sup> Men, on the other hand, are noted in almost every conceivable predilection.<sup>2</sup> This applies to paedophilia and ephebophilia; paedophilia being the condition in which sexuo-erotic arousal and the facilitation or attainment of orgasm are dependent upon having a juvenile partner of prepubertal or peripubertal developmental status, and ephebophilia the same condition in which the partner is postpubertal and adolescent. However, for the purposes of this essay the term “paedophilia” will indicate a sexuo-erotic attraction to children younger than the Dutch age of consent of sixteen.

Most of the people who identify themselves as “paedophiles” are male. As far as their organized subculture shows, these desires are mainly directed by men towards boys.<sup>3</sup> The fact that in the United States there is no heterosexual equivalent to NAMBLA (North American Man/Boy Love Association) might indicate the relative absence of girl-lovers, although another possible explanation is that, compared to male boy-lovers, girl-lovers experience less pressure to identify themselves as paedophiles. Sexual attraction towards girls seems to be a well-recognized phenomenon among male adults, even if acting out the attraction seems to be less accepted. Homosexual paedophiles, both male and female, discover that they neither belong to

the category of “normal” heterosexuals, nor to the category of peer oriented homosexuals.

Whatever the reason for the supposed scarcity of male girl-lovers, female paedophiles, whether heterosexual or homosexual, seem to be totally missing in the psychological literature.<sup>4</sup> The fact that they are rarely (or never) discussed does not, of course, imply that they do not exist.

That there might be some women who are sexually attracted to children and young adolescents is suggested by the fact that sexual involvement between female adults and children is a recurrent theme in pornography. In 1973, the Dutch pornographic magazine *Chick* published an illustrated interview with a woman in her early twenties who was involved in a sexual relationship with a twelve-year-old boy living in her neighborhood. Although the story may be true, one may assume that this and similar stories are included in pornographic magazines to please and excite the male readership. This is at least suggested by the interviewer’s statement at the end of the interview: “I think that a lot of men would like to see themselves in the boy’s place.”<sup>5</sup> Certainly, from a male perspective, it is not difficult to consider what psychodynamic motives a man might have for sympathizing with the image of an older woman seducing a young boy, and that only underlines the plausibility of the interviewer’s remark.

According to Bradley there is a feminine equivalent of “Greek love” in modern fiction, a term generally referring to pedagogical eros.<sup>6</sup>

The typical theme in these novels, some of them written for adolescents themselves, is that of the strong emotional attraction between a mature woman and her female student.<sup>7</sup> These novels do not ordinarily deal with overt sex. "There are exceptions, but in general the pattern of Greek love between woman and girl is one of emotion rather than sensuality, involving heroine-worship, admiration, emulation. Frequently there is a strong maternal element in these attachments."<sup>8</sup> Bradley claims that these novels can be taken as a valid picture of Greek love relationships between women and girls. However, one must be careful about positing direct links between fiction and reality. There is the further problem with respect to definition. Bradley conceives woman-girl love in a broad sense, including pedagogical aspects. She presupposes the presence of a sexual aspect by stating that in the novels it is often deeply sublimated. The question is, however, whether this sexual aspect really is present, and further, whether or not it is the sexuo-erotic aspect itself which distinguishes paedophilia and ephedophilia from other forms of love of children.

Criminological literature, on the other hand, suggests the existence of female paedophiles. Groth reports that 50% of the incarcerated sex offenders whom he studied had been "sexually traumatized" during their formative years.<sup>9</sup> In 27% of these 500 cases an adult female had been involved. The exact nature of these adult-child encounters is not specified. Finkelhor and Russell warn against misinterpretations of reported cases of "sexual abuse" in which females are involved, because the criteria for including women are often too broad.<sup>10</sup> In some studies women were included even when they had not themselves engaged in sexual contacts with the child but were only aware of the "abuse" and had failed to stop it. In situations in which a male "perpetrator" had been involved, the female partner frequently participated under duress.

Finkelhor and Russell give national estimates for the United States indicating that in 14% of the cases involving boys, the adult is female. For women involved with girls the figure is 6%. However, because there are more girl victims

than boy victims, this implies that women are more frequently sexually involved with girls than with boys. According to Finkelhor and Russell, retrospective studies based on self-reported incidents among more general populations also show that sexual contact between children and older women forms a distinct minority of child-adult contacts.<sup>11</sup> Exceptions are studies based on special populations, such as the study mentioned above among incarcerated sex offenders, and Bell, Weinberg and Hammersmith's study of a homosexual sample.<sup>12</sup> In the latter, 22% of the female homosexuals who had had a childhood sexual experience with a person over 16, reported this to have been with a woman.

Criminological studies, as well as studies based on reported cases and self-reported incidents, do not specify the kind of involvement women had in their sexual contacts with children. It is unclear to what extent these cases may be classified as paedophile, the criterion being the presence of feelings of sexual attraction towards children and young adolescents.<sup>13</sup>

By these introductory remarks I have attempted to show that little is known about female paedophilia. Given the scarcity of information, I welcomed the opportunity to get in touch with a young woman who had published a diary about her paedo-erotic desires.<sup>14</sup> While studying children involved in paedophile relationships, I became interested in the part the adult played in these affairs.<sup>15</sup> I wanted to present at least one case study of female paedophilia, in order to complement a study at the University of Utrecht of male paedophiles.<sup>16</sup> In doing so I hoped to broaden the knowledge of female sexual diversity. In this study my main interest was not the origin of female paedophile desires or the psychodynamic motives behind these desires. Rather, I wanted to find out how these desires are experienced and acted upon.

I met Cindy, as she will be called here, through a mutual acquaintance. At that time (1987) she was twenty and had been involved in a relationship with a man her own age, Albert, for about four months. Even though she said she did not expect the relationship to last for a long time, it was playing an important, positive role in her life.

One of the reasons Cindy valued her friend so positively was that he gave her what she called "a crash course in social skills." Up to the time of meeting him she had kept very much to herself and could be suddenly aggressive or sarcastic. He made her think about these things. Although Cindy was afraid of losing the possibility of living her own life, she said that Albert was important to her because he was the first person with whom she really could be herself: "...even when you compare it with being with little girls."

That sounds strange. But he invests a lot in the relationship. He doesn't want to lose me. With girls it's the other way around. I'm afraid to lose them so then I'm more indulgent. It pleases me to know I can have a relationship with a man my own age. I think he is a rather unique person. When I compare him with other men I had affairs with, he is totally different. Most of the time other men only take, but Albert also gives a lot. We're also interested in one another intellectually. When people are of like minds, it helps the physical part, I think. When this relationship is over, though, I don't think I'll start something new with another man.

## Method

To structure the interview and to tap deeper layers of meaning, an adapted version of the so called Self-Confrontation Method was used.<sup>17</sup> The objective of this method is to inventory various kinds of feeling that are important to an individual at a certain moment in her or his life. To assess the affective meaning of each of these affects, a person is asked to relate each aspect to a standard list of "affect terms," which include such feelings as powerlessness, love, anxiety, joy, etc. (see Table I at end). Further insights into a person's experiences are gained by relating the resulting scores for feelings to each other and by then asking the person to explain these relationships.

The following is a description of Cindy's current experience world, especially as it relates to paedophilia. Statements from different parts of

the interviews have been put together when they were clearly related to the same theme. Verbatim citations are included because, by their idiosyncratic formulation, they are more informative of her situation than a summary would be.

## Content of Paedophile Desires

For Cindy, paedophilia meant a special feeling of attraction for certain little girls. This feeling of attraction included a physical aspect:

There is a difference between finding a girl very beautiful and having sexual feelings for her. It is not just sexual for me. I would like to do everything with girls. But that's impossible because they live quite a different life from mine. I think it would be ideal when, on some very ordinary day, a sweet little girl would stand on your door step without a roof over her head and with no parents. She would just move in with you, never get older and share in all the things you normally do everyday. That would be really wonderful. I want as much of that as possible, and the small things too: hobbies, hugging. Of course she would get her own room. Mostly you can only see little girls for a limited time, and, just because you don't see each other that often, the physical aspect is emphasized more than other activities, like taking long walks together.

She described the girls she felt attracted to in the following way:

They are about 9 or 10 years old and have long blond hair and blue eyes. Their character is something you only get to know afterwards. They have a certain kind of aura. I can't describe it. Maybe they have a kind of physical awareness, a precocity perhaps.

When asked what it was she wanted with children, whether sexual excitement or something more than the mere pleasure of physical intimacy, she replied:

Both. If the relationship is reciprocal, I want both of those things. If the girl herself wants them. People ask me sometimes where I draw the line between physical and sexual. I think that, especially for girls, this line is difficult to draw. These things knit so close together that, without knowing, you get from one thing into the other.

It is different with boy-lovers and little boys. I had some contact with little boys. Almost from the beginning these contacts are sexual. But having a little romp can also be exciting. I think that girls are better able to understand other feelings. Compared with boys, it isn't so easy with girls to draw a clear sexual line. I feel different myself when I'm with girls instead of boys. I think that is being caused by the boys. My physical feelings for girls are much more diffuse. They are not directed at one or two parts of the body. I want to hug the whole body. Boys are much less sensitive at a lot of other places.

Asked to compare herself with male paedophiles, Cindy remarked:

It is my experience that male paedophiles are more sexually directed. Sex seemed to have first priority. Other things were secondary. That is really the only difference I see. For the rest it's much like what I have experienced. But maybe I'm wrong.

She was asked whether it was easier for her, being a female paedophile.

In the beginning I thought it would be more accepted, because I was a female. But that isn't true. The men say it is easier for me, but I don't experience it as such. Maybe other women do. There will always be unpleasant parents who want to know what you are doing and where you're going. There will always be suspicion. You notice it when you visit people. My girlfriends' mothers want to know

who you are and why their daughters want to spend time with you. And they'll interrogate you. That happens when the girls start to talk about you at home. And they invariably will ask you if you have a boyfriend and so on.

Maybe getting in touch with children is easier for a woman because you are allowed more range with strange kids. But when the relationship starts to develop there will be problems. There won't be any problems as long as you keep things superficial. But that's not what you want. It has to do with falling in love, you know.

About the origin of her paedophile feelings, Cindy remarked:

I used to think about that sometimes. How did it all come about? How did I happen to grow up this way? I can think of some causes. A sickly birth, the kind of education I had, my twin brother who dominated the whole atmosphere at home, my father who was drunk a lot, and so on. Maybe my home situation really screwed me up. It made me socially incompetent and hypersensitive, I think. Anyway I'm less spontaneous when I'm with peers or older people than I probably would be otherwise.

I don't think about this any more. It isn't important any longer to find a cause. I mean, I don't want to get rid of those feelings any longer. Maybe that's the difference. Now I think these paedophile feelings are wonderful. At least when people don't make such a fuss about them. I no longer need to know where they come from.

### **Affective Meaning of Children**

What do children mean to Cindy? She clearly experienced positive feelings more intensely for children than for adults, especially: *joy*, *love*, and *warmth*. (Italicized terms in the text will appear in Table I at the end.) With respect to girls to

whom she feels erotically attracted, these positive feelings were still more intense.

One would expect, therefore, that adults would elicit stronger negative feelings than children. However, it was not that simple. Some negative feelings were equally experienced towards children and adults (*powerlessness, unhappiness*). Some negative feelings occurred more frequently with respect to children in general or, specifically, towards little girls to whom she felt attracted (*worry, anxiety*). Feelings such as loneliness, inferiority, and anger were more strongly experienced towards adults.

In order to gain a better understanding of the meaning children had for Cindy, the differences in the intensity of the feelings elicited by the different affect value areas were discussed with her. In particular, Cindy was asked to elucidate why children elicited different feelings than adults did.

I don't know very many adults well. Some parents of kids, some teachers, that's almost all. People I meet in the supermarket don't mean a lot to me.

I think it is true that I feel more positive about children. Children are much more lively, compared with adults. They look happy, do the things they want to do. Children are more beautiful too. Adults are dull most of the time. Children accept me as I am more than most adults do. Adults make you do things, always have an opinion about you. When I am much older maybe I'll have to deal with adults differently. Except for dealing with the authorities, I haven't had much to do with adults till now.

Compared with adults, children gave Cindy a stronger sense of *love* and *joy*:

In general, children radiate life much more than adults. It is much more fun to see kids pass by than adults. Most of the time children are more beautiful. Children just have it. I think that's very important. Something you think is beautiful you

value much more. When you see a fat man you think: "Well mister, some jogging won't do you any harm." Maybe it is also because there are more adults than children. The world is bursting with adults. So I am always glad to see a little girl.

Children also gave her stronger feelings of *enjoyment* and *solidarity*:

That is probably because of the things I do with them. What do you do with adults? Some talking, hanging around in bars, lingering in front of the television. I'm a lot more creative with children. I'm doing different things with them. That creates a feeling of solidarity, and enjoyment too.

Compared to adults, children gave Cindy a stronger sense of *freedom* and *self-esteem*:

Children aren't inhibited. They don't have fixed manners like adults. That makes me feel free. Adults are always courteous, listen obediently to one another. When I'm with children I don't have to prove myself so much. Adults always think they know best. In my experience, when I am with children, I can just be who I am. That is not to say that I'm worth more than the child. There is a basis of equality. There is always inequality with adults. You're always less.

How did she compare herself to people her own age, in her class at school?

Adults are all different. That makes me feel insecure. The school classes change a lot. Each term you meet new faces. There is also a rather competitive atmosphere. But maybe that's because I hardly know them.

What did adults have, and children lack, that made her feel *lonely*?

When I'm with children I don't have the problem that they don't understand me.



Important ideas, my ideals for example, I don't discuss easily with children. There are other people to discuss these with. But my experience with adults is that they understand very little of what I want to say or what I'm doing. I think they live in separate worlds. I especially feel that with my parents. There are exceptions of course, but now we're talking in general. But I do care about adults. You live with them, they live with you. Especially people like my parents, who are hard to ignore.

However, compared with children, adults gave her less intense feelings of *trust* and *inner warmth*:

The adults with whom I have associated often didn't give me the sense that I could trust them. I didn't have positive experiences with them. Up until now I've only been at odds with them. That doesn't give you a warm feeling. With children I clearly have good experiences. So that feels different. Maybe when you ask me these questions a few years from now things might have changed. They won't be big changes, but maybe adults will score more positively by that time. I hope so.

A negative feeling which she experienced more strongly with children than with adults is *anxiety*:

That's because there is more commitment. You are also more at risk. The risk of losing someone, of making a mistake, or of the outside world intervening, these kind of things. You don't have these with adults. Besides, children with whom you can build a relationship are few and far between. That special girl is even rarer. That creates anxiety. I'm lucky that I'm into girls rather than boys. That way I'm not bothered by other paedophiles. I don't have to be afraid that they will try to steal my girlfriend.

Differences between children in general, and especially those to whom Cindy feels erotically attracted, are not so clearly defined. These differences have mostly to do with the pleasure and the danger of a special bond with someone. When she was in a group of people, for example, she felt more *stress* when there was a special girl to whom she was attracted:

You don't know if you can get in touch or if it will click. With such a girl, there is more *anxiety*. Because you know it is not allowed. The outside world keeps an eye on you. I don't associate so easily with my neighbors. Sometimes there is also doubt: Am I allowed to do this? Sometimes I feel rather ambivalent about it.

Of course, there is always the chance that you can get a special bond with such a girl. That is why they make me feel *happier*. I don't have that much to do with children in general. So I am looking for happiness with these special girls. Because you have these loving feelings, these girls also give you more energy. You also have to invest more in them than in girls who don't move you so much. Besides, some children whine a lot. I don't see them all as so fantastic.

She was asked what would happen when she felt erotically attracted to a whiny child:

That would be a negative point for them. Once I had a girl as savage as a wild cat. Well, there can be advantages and disadvantages to that.

### **Discovering Paedophile Desire**

Cindy discovered her paedophile feelings when she was 13 or 14 years old:

By that time I already had boyfriends. Even a steady one, actually. It was very exceptional to be in love at that age. I was the only one. They treated me differently; some boys called me names.

I discovered that boys didn't move me a lot. Girls meant a lot more to me emotionally. At that time they were still the same age as me. Other girls didn't feel the same as me, I found out.

Until I was 15 I had been thinking that I was a lesbian. They called me that, although in the beginning I didn't know what it meant. I got in touch with some lesbians to sort things out. They introduced me to some lesbian peers. That was utterly wrong. It didn't click. They were rather militant dykes.

I had read a lot of books about homosexuality by that time. I found out that I was attracted to a special kind of girl: fragile, and small for her age. After several crushes I noticed that the girls I preferred to play with were younger. They called me a granny then. I met those girls in the Scouts.

About the same time I met Peter. He was a radio ham like me, and also a paedophile—right in the middle of it! There was a lot of strange talk on the radio about child molesters, about things they were doing to children. I was fifteen then, and had a girlfriend of twelve. I saw a lot of Peter, saw him almost every day. At first radio hacking was my excuse. I had to meet him on the sly because of my parents. But I didn't know what I was looking for with Peter. Maybe it was unconscious.

Peter was mentioned by Cindy as an important aspect of her life. She described him as a very good friend “who stimulated me emotionally.”

I came across the word “paedophilia” for the first time in a magazine. I thought it related to men who go for boys—that is the stereotype—and also men, maybe not so many, who are attracted to girls. At that time I knew about as much about paedophilia as my parents did. Peter gave me some articles to read. I recognized a lot in them that related to me, though none of them were about women. I couldn't im-

agine that paedophilia was applicable to women. So I didn't know whether what I was reading was applicable to me. It took a long time before I dared to pose this question. But I had the very same feelings I saw described for the girls I played with. In a way I felt comfortable with this label. I didn't know all the terrible things associated with paedophilia.

The moment at which I clearly recognized that what I felt were paedophile feelings was during a scouting weekend. My little twelve year old girlfriend was cuddling with me in my sleeping bag. When I awoke I felt very happy. It made me think of my other crushes. It became clear to me that this must be paedophilia.

She was then asked what paedophilia, at that time, meant to her.

Actually nothing. I had been having these feelings for some time. But I was glad that I didn't have to think about being lesbian, and what went with that. I knew boys didn't mean a thing to me the way they did to other girls my age. I didn't really belong to the lesbian world. When I discovered that what I felt was paedophilia, it made me feel good. You want to be part of something at that age. In the beginning there were no negative feelings; they came later, because of the outside world.

### **First Experiences, First Conflicts**

Because of her friendships with very young girls, Cindy was expelled from the Scouts. Her parents reacted with great hostility. They told her, among other things, that she was no longer their daughter. She ran away from home but returned after a while and had to conduct her friendships with little girls secretively. She could not keep this up, ran away again, and started to live on her own in another city. She was, by then, eighteen.

Her first new contacts with young girls were at a hobby club, and made her rather nervous. She

hardly dared to look at them. Cindy said that the rejection she had endured from her parents and the Scouts made her refrain from starting new relationships. She also felt that these rejections made her come out as one of the few self-acknowledged female paedophiles. In response to the question why there were so few known female paedophiles, she answered:

I've been thinking about that for some time. I think they are there, paedophile women. But I don't know why they don't come out in the open. Maybe they can cover it up, creep into a profession where a lot is possible.

I think that I came out so openly because right from the beginning the issue gave me a lot of problems with people around me. If my parents and the Scouts hadn't reacted so vehemently then I wouldn't have experienced myself so consciously as a paedophile. Before all those people started to ask questions, I didn't see those experiences as strange. Other people felt differently, but I was okay, my way.

If you're in a nice atmosphere in which people think of you, "ah, motherly feelings," then you don't have to come out so openly. But I'm sure they are there, paedophile women.

### **Affective Meaning of Paedophile Feelings**

Paedophile desires were for Cindy a part of her character:

A lot of my daily experience is influenced by my paedophile feelings. At the same time there are a lot of other things which have nothing to do with it. First of all I'm just Cindy and then second, or third, or even fourth, I also have paedophile desires. I don't put them in first place.

Paedophile feelings gave Cindy almost as many positive as negative feelings. The most intensely experienced positive feelings were *joy, love, warmth, and enjoyment*. The most frequent

negative feelings were: *powerlessness, stress, and loneliness*. Cindy attributed the differing occurrence of these feelings to the way the outside world viewed her feelings:

The situation makes me feel tense. I'm not so negative about the paedophile feelings themselves. I don't want to get rid of them. The outside world makes a mess of it. They tell me that my feelings are no good. And sometimes I'm stupid enough to believe it too! The moment I don't accept my feelings is when I have a lot to do with the outside world, which doesn't accept them. Then I even start to wonder whether maybe children really are harmed and all that bullshit. Usually I know that my relationships won't be harmful, because I know how I interact with children. But it is the outside world which makes you doubt. It gives you all those negative feelings.

During the interview, when Cindy reflected on her position in society, she stressed that she did not understand society's rejection of paedophilia. This societal attitude caused her problems by making her feel rejected. Her opinion of society predominantly stemmed from the negative reactions she had experienced regarding her first paedophile friendships.

This is important to me, because I don't get why people are so rejecting. I just don't see the problem. But that may be because it is me who has these feelings. Nothing is the matter until people get to know that you have paedophile desires. That is difficult to accept. Things become totally different for them. In their eyes you suddenly become a totally different person.

Maybe I could accept the rejection if I could understand why people react this way. If, for instance, the girls I have been in touch with suddenly turned neurotic and ended up in an asylum, then you could say the people are right. I still could have these proclivities and act upon them or not, but at least their reactions would be understandable.

She found it hard to accept that the outside world could determine the things she might or might not do.

I've seen that they are able to ruin your life in such a way that you hesitate to start new relationships.

These negative reactions formed something Cindy could oppose, which could explain why the societal rejection also gave her such positive feelings as *self-esteem* and *energy*.

### Future

With respect to the future, Cindy hoped that she would once again come across a little girl with whom she could start a relationship:

If she is 7 when we start a relationship, then it will last for some years. I'm really longing for that. I've been talking with my friend, Albert, about what will happen when a little girlfriend joins in. He said that he will accept it as long as it doesn't jeopardize our relationship. But where to draw the line? When it happens I think I'll choose in favor of the girl. I think he is aware of that. But I'm not going to keep him dangling. That's not my style. Children would be able to do so. And I think I'll really put up with that, when a girl does it. I'm sure there will be a girlfriend once again.

### Editors' Note:

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### NOTES

1. See: J. James, N.J. Davis, P. Vitaliano, "Female Sexual Deviance: a Theoretical and Empirical Analysis," *Deviant Behavior*, 3:2, 1982, pp. 175-195; and K. Rosenblum, "Female Deviancy and the Female Sex Role: a Preliminary Investigation," *British Journal of Sociology*, nr. 25, 1975, pp. 169-185.
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3. G.D. Wilson and D.N. Cox, *The Child-Lovers. A Study of Paedophiles in Society* (London: Peter Owen, 1983).
4. K. Freund, "Pedophilia and Heterosexuality versus Homosexuality" (Publisher and place not available, 1984).
5. J. Wenderhold, "Pedofemie; een visie van Jan Wenderhold," *Chick*, 5:31, 1973, p. 11.
6. M.Z. Bradley, "Feminine Equivalents of Greek Love in Modern Fiction," *International Journal of Greek Love*, 1:1, pp. 48-58. (no date). For a discussion of pedagogical eros, see: Th. G.M. Sandfort, E. Brongersma, and A.X. van Naerssen, "Man-Boy Relationships: Different Concepts for a Diversity of Phenomena," *Journal of Homosexuality*, 20:1/2, 1991, pp. 5-12.
7. Ibid, p. 57. For a discussion of women-girl "Greek love," see the following novels: Colette, *Claudine at School* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1957); Margaret Ferguson, *Sign of Ram* (Philadelphia: Blakiston, 1945); Pamela Moore, *Chocolates for Breakfast* (New York: Rinehart, 1956); Christa Winsloe, *The Child Manuela* (New York: Farrar, 1933).
8. Bradley, op cit. p. 48.
9. A.N. Groth, *Men Who Rape* (New York: Plenum, 1979).
10. D. Finkelhor and D. Russell, "Women as Perpetrators: Review of the Evidence," in D. Finkelhor (ed.), *Child Sexual Abuse: New Theory and Research* (New York: Free Press, 1984), pp 171-185.
11. Ibid.
12. A.P. Bell, M.S. Weinberg, and S.K. Hammersmith, *Sexual Preference. Its Development in Men and Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981).
13. Th. G.M. Sandfort and W.T.A.M. Everaerd, (1990). "Male juvenile partners in pedophilia," in M. Perry (ed.), *Handbook of Sexology, vol. 7: Childhood and Adolescent Sexology* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1990) pp. 361-380.
14. D. Vandenbosch (pseud.), *Daar sta je dan . . . . alleen!* (Eindhoven: JEP, 1984).
15. See: Th. G.M. Sandfort, *The Sexual Aspect of Paedophile Relations* (Amsterdam: Pan/Spartacus, 1982); Th. G.M. Sandfort, "Sex in Paedophilic Rela-

tionships: an empirical investigation among a non-representative group of boys," *Journal of Sex Research*, 20:2, 1984, pp. 123-142.; and Th. G.M. Sandfort, *Boys on Their Contacts with Men*, (Elmhurst NY: Global Academic Publishers, 1987).

16. Th. Lap, *De binnen- en buitenkant van kinderen. Wat pedofielen aantrekkelijk vinden in kinderen* (Utrecht: privately published, 1987).

17. One of the ways to study "meaning" is with the so called Self-Confrontation Method. This method was developed in the Netherlands by Hermans, on the basis of the so-called "valuation theory." (See: H.J.M. Hermans, *Value areas and their development: theory and method of self-confrontation* (Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger, 1976); H.J.M. Hermans, (1987). "Self as an Organized System of Valuations: Toward a Dialogue with the Person," *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 34:1, 1987, pp. 10-19; and H.J.M. Hermans, R. Fiddelaers, R. De Groot, and J.F. Nauta, "Self-Confrontation as a Method for Assessment and Intervention in Counseling," *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 69:2, 1990, pp. 156-162.)

The aim of the method is to find the central aspects that are important to a person at a certain moment in his or her life, the "valuations," and the affective meaning of these valuations. In the first session, the valuations are elicited by a series of open-ended questions, covering several dimensions of human life. The valuations are then listed and the individual relates each of these to a standard list of affect terms and also says to what extent he or she is experiencing that affect in relationship to a particular valuation. A value ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much) is chosen by the subject. The scores which result from this procedure are used to calculate several indices, and these are used to study the interrelations between the valuations. After tabulation, the results of the first session are discussed with the person in a second session.

The method can be used in diagnostic, evaluative, or therapeutic ways. When used therapeutically, the outcomes from the first two sessions form the "input" for a

process of validation and invalidation of the structure of valuations. The results can be applied to further sessions.

The standard method was slightly adapted with Cindy to meet the special purposes of a single case-study. To supplement the standard valuation categories, Cindy was also asked to assign values to certain supplemental categories regarding paedophilia. To get a picture of the part paedophilia played in her life, she was asked to include as a valuation in her self-survey: "My paedophile desires." She was also asked to include three other valuations. It was assumed that, because of her attraction, children would have a special meaning to her. Her attraction could concern children as a class as well as a special kind of child. Therefore, she was asked to include the valuations: "Children in general" and "Children to whom I feel erotically attracted." To put the resulting data in relief, she was also asked to include as a valuation "Adults in general."

In Table 1 the scores for the affect terms are correlated against the valuations. By using an adapted version of the Self-Confrontation Method, it was expected to tap deeper layers of meaning than by posing such simple questions as: "What do children mean to you?" This might easily have resulted in superficial, unauthentic stories which were only partly related to the way she experienced her world.

In the second session, the valuations were compared with the findings from the first session. The subject was asked to associate on the possible "causes" for the affects she often experienced in relation to her paedophile desires. With the remaining three valuations, the scores belonging to the same affect label had been compared with one another. When the difference between two scores was large, the subject was asked to give an explanation for this. This was done with questions such as: "What kind of features do children have that they give you this special feeling more often than adults do?" or "What is the difference between children you feel erotically attracted to, compared to children in general, that the former make you feel safer?"

	Girls I feel erotically attracted to	Children in general	Adults in general	My paedophile desires
Joy	4	1	4	5
Powerlessness	3	1	1	1
Self-esteem	2	2	4	4
Anxiety	2	1	3	3
Happiness	3	1	3	5
Worry	2	2	2	3
Stress	3	3	2	3
Enjoyment	4	2	4	5
Love	5	2	5	5
Self-alienation	2	2	1	1
Unhappiness	2	1	1	1
Guilt	2	0	0	1
Solidarity	1	1	3	4
Loneliness	3	4	2	2
Inner warmth	4	1	4	5
Trust	1	1	3	4
Inferiority	2	2	1	1
Security	1	1	2	3
Anger	2	2	1	1
Despondency	2	2	1	2
Energy	3	3	3	5
Disappointment	2	3	2	2
Inner calm	1	1	2	3
Freedom	2	2	4	3

**Table 1: Valuations and Affect Scores**

# THE DOMAIN OF THE WANDERVOGEL GIRLS:

## Pedagogical Eros and the Utopia of a Holy Island

Marion E.P. de Ras

The Wandervogel youth movement, originally established by boys and young men, had as early as 1905 to reckon with the formation of the first girl's groups. Certainly, after 1911, their presence could no longer be ignored. That year, two hundred enthusiastic girls, decked out in brightly colored clothing, had shown up for a walking tour of Berlin. At first, opposition to their growing participation came less from parents, leaders, and teachers, than from the boys themselves. They considered the girls' participation as an "invasion," labeled the young women who acted as leaders of the girls' groups as "nuns" or "aunties," and labeled those girls who wished to hike along with them as "unfeminine."

The girls themselves had little or nothing to say in response until about 1918. By then, many of the boys, and with them the most important figures in the leadership, had gone off to the front in the First World War, and the girls had de facto inherited the Wandervogel movement. One consequence was that they underwent an "awakening." It set them thinking about what they themselves, as girls, wanted from the movement. Pronouncements such as this began to appear:

And girls! Do you not already feel that pure feminine domain? We must once again become conscious of that pure and bright spring welling up within. We must seek this feminine realm and her holy oracle. Deep within us, it is she who binds

us with our sisters. Only through her can we have love for one another. Here you have the essence of our bond: finding anew that which is female within yourself through love of one another. Do you understand now why we can admit no boys to our feminine realm?<sup>1</sup>

Roughly between 1918 and 1928, the female branch of the German youth movement was dominated by the ideals of "women's culture," of a return to nature and the physical. These elements fused together into a specific image of Eros; they formed the foundation for an erotic utopian vision of a community of girls and women. This erotic utopia was described in many ways, as a "spiritual experience," a "quest for the source," or a "realm." It was expressed still more strongly as the "island," or sometimes even the "holy island."<sup>2</sup> All these terms had the same referent: a domain that could not really be named nor rationally comprehended, yet which could be "felt" and "experienced." It was mystical and eternal, rooted in the primeval, and belonged exclusively to women and girls. It was the secret of womanhood, the seed at the center of the feminine. The driving force in finding and cultivating this seed was pedagogical Eros. Writers credited pedagogical Eros with being the source of creativity. This Eros was also the pre-eminent bonding force in the community of girls and women.<sup>3</sup> Eros between women and girls was seen as the catalyst for the process of be-

coming a woman.<sup>4</sup> A clear distinction was made between Eros and sexuality. Whereas Eros represented order, art, and culture, sexuality was the realm of chaos and uncontrolled passion.

This pedagogical theory, in which Eros would come to take such an important place, was first expounded during the origin and flowering of the great youth movement at the beginning of this century. The theories about adolescence and puberty went hand in hand with the definition of youth as youth, and with the practices and social organizations that followed from this. Medical science with its determinist perspective of the various physical phases in the process of becoming a mature adult, was developing rapidly. However, this clinical perspective was too narrow for the humanistic psychology and pedagogy which were also arising. The concept of pedagogical Eros, as a component of humanistic pedagogy and developmental psychology, dominated enlightened circles. It also influenced the education reform movement with its alternative educational systems in the German *Landschulheime*. Eduard Spranger, a phenomenological, child-centered pedagogical theorist, and Charlotte Bühler belonged to the circles in contact with the youth movement. These youth psychologists set out to analyze the Infatuation (*Schwarm*) that girls may experience for someone older, generally an older fellow student, a woman teacher, or other female. They did, however, also think that this platonic Eros could flower between an adult male and a girl.

At the beginning of the 1920s, Charlotte Bühler, a well known Viennese youth psychologist, wrote in her book, *Das Seelenleben des Jugendlichen*, in the chapter "Führer und Schwarm":

The infatuations (*Schwärmen*) which I have discussed here are a developmental factor, and are as important ethically as they are psychologically. Only in the form in which we have described them do they become a fulfilling and rich experience. These infatuations can be found in cases of deep inner development, and they can become the most important factor in self-realization.<sup>5</sup>

Regarding the nature of this infatuation, for which she used the descriptions "Eros" and "erotic," she remarked that it was free of sexuality. Eros could, if properly directed, function as an enormous force in the acquisition of self-control, self-discovery, and self-sacrifice by young persons. In saying this, she labeled this Eros as the driving force in the adolescent's process of becoming an adult. It became the foundation for her view of love, desire, and sexuality. Second perhaps only to Eduard Spranger, she was one of the most important pedagogues to incorporate the theory of pedagogical Eros in developmental psychology. Moreover, she also developed a new vision of the role of Eros in pedagogy and the psychology of youth.

The discussion of Eros within pedagogy and psychology was not a disembodied idea about caring child-rearing methods which suddenly appeared from nowhere. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Eros and sexuality were the subject of debate, analysis, and praxis that were being played out in the sciences, in parliaments, and in lawmaking; in social movements and among middle-class liberals; and in artistic circles. The Sexual was one of the preoccupations of German science around the turn of the century. Medical science and the natural sciences (and the emerging psychoanalytic movement) emphasized human biology, from which character, actions, and future development could be inferred. People were examining themselves to discover the nature of mankind, as well as searching for the truth about their own nature and being. That which was chaotic and unknown about mankind had to be discovered, classified, set out in orderly fashion, and controlled. It was a time of measuring skulls, genetics, and eugenics. It was also an era of preoccupation with the healthy human body: with physical culture, sanitation, and hygiene. And it was a time of sexology and sexual definitions.

The body of thought regarding the female, pedagogical Eros, the return to nature, the physical, and the creation of a women's culture did not exist solely within the youth movement. These preoccupations had their roots in a number of intellectual and cultural currents which



were specific to that time and place, such as the emerging developmental psychology and education reform movements; the medical and social concepts and praxis surrounding sexuality, homosexuality, and health; the influence of the middle-class women's movement, and political and social developments in the party system of the democratic Weimar Republic (though this last was rejected by most of the youth and girls' movement). To an important degree, this thought was characterized by the influential and widespread ideology summed up in the slogan *Kultur statt Zivilisation* (Culture over Civilization).

Paradoxically enough, it was this slogan that insisted that good (culture) and evil (civilization), the healthy and the unhealthy, the pure and the perverse, continually be set in opposition to each other. Paradoxically, because the slogan was intended to represent a pursuit of unity, including the unity of body, mind and soul; the unity of the individual and the community; the unity of womanhood and the girls' movement; and the oneness of women's *Kultur*.

*Kultur* represented the indivisible, the whole, German history, and the German longing for a German empire. It was the traditional, the rural, the natural, and the pure. It was Eros as a classical ideal of contemplation of, empathy with, and love for the whole person. *Zivilisation* represented industrialization, hectic modern times, the mechanical, and the big city with its down-trodden, perverted, and unnatural individuals. It was scandalous Parisian fashion, the prostitute, the modern short-haired girl, the perverse, and the sexual. It was sexual lust as a selfish, genitally-centered animal passion, a part of the person rather than the whole person. Eros, on the other hand, represented the ideal of pure friendship and high culture; of aesthetics and the contemplation of persons, the innocence of nature, the world, and the cosmos, each as a whole; of the beauty of a body united with soul and mind; of ethical attitudes and conduct in relationships; of pleasure of the senses – providing of course that it was raised to the level of Apollonian order and art.

Countless elements were placed in opposition to each other in the ideology of "Culture over

Civilization," including nature and culture, body and mind, Eros and Priapus. While Eros denoted the ideal of pure friendship and edifying culture, Priapus denoted sexuality, bodily lusts, and uncontrolled passion. Thus good was brought into direct opposition to evil.

### Psychology and Pedagogical Eros

A clear line of demarcation was drawn between Eros and Priapus, that is, Eros and sexuality. This line was also to be found in those educational and psychological theories which were founded in part upon pedagogical Eros.

Eduard Spranger, who wrote his *Psychologie des Jugendalters* in the early 1920s, dealt explicitly with pedagogical Eros.<sup>6</sup> The book ran to numerous editions and had great influence in The Netherlands. Spranger believed that Eros stands at the point of intersection between aesthetics and ethics. Spranger's concept of Eros was based on Plato's definition of Eros as that love rooted in the contemplation of the whole, inner contemplation, the spiritual, the love of ideal form. For him, erotic *Schwärmerei* were the Apollonian light side, and Priapus the Dionysian dark side. With the expression of this theory, Spranger rejected modern scientific concepts of sexuality, namely that everything, even human identity itself, could ultimately be reduced to sexuality. According to him, Eros and sexuality had different roots. Eros belonged pre-eminently to youth, beauty, and desire. Therefore the basis of his pedagogy was not the analysis of the youth or the girl, but the *Verstehen*, the understanding, empathy, and sympathy towards adolescents one needed in order to understand them.

While Charlotte Bühler also worked with the concept of Eros and the practice of *Verstehen*, she dealt with them in a more clinical and empirical manner than Spranger. However, when it came to what she called the *Seelenleben* (soul-life) of the adolescent, she imputed great power to Eros. Moreover, she spoke from experience, because, as she said in an interview, she worked by choice with younger female assistants who were a little in love with her.<sup>7</sup>

Bühler's accomplishment was to expand the discussion of youth by explicitly concerning herself with girls. This was relatively new, considering that until then youth and adolescence had primarily been interpreted as a phase of life belonging to males only. Among other activities, she collected and analyzed girls' diaries.<sup>8</sup> In these diaries, Infatuation was expressed in all its heat. In practically all cases these crushes were directed toward an older girl or an adult woman. Bühler saw this as a positive phase during adolescence. The girl's experiences of these crushes aroused powerful and previously unknown emotions. They were literally on fire. Expressions like *Himmelhoch jauchzend zum Tode betrübt, Sehnsucht, Schwärmen, Melancholik, Erleben* (from heavenly bliss to deadly depression, longing, infatuation, melancholy, and experience) were used. These were not experiences from childhood, but the elemental human emotions of passion, love, hate, approach, and rejection. According to Bühler, this experience of existential human processes would, providing it were properly guided, create a strong individual. This eroticism – which also, according to her, had nothing to do with sexuality – would ultimately lead to a healthy, heterosexual adulthood. The essence of the erotic relationship between master and pupil lay precisely in bringing the manhood of the boy and the womanhood of the girl to flower.

According to Bühler there were also detrimental sides to this Eros. It could, for instance, degenerate into *Liebelei* (love as a game), or more serious yet, into mass hysteria, such as still appears to happen at English boarding schools. Bühler cited Gertrude Bäumer's lyrical description of her physical education teacher as an example of just such mass hysteria. Bäumer, who maintained a life-long relationship with Helene Lange – both were well-known feminists in the middle-class women's movement – knew first-hand the force of pedagogical Eros:

When I spoke a moment ago about the cool relationships with male and female teachers, I left out of consideration one brilliant and unusual star which shone, not only in my firmament, but in the school

heavens of many of my fellow schoolgirls: the physical education teacher. She awakened in many of us the experience of Infatuation, an emotion that I know not if any others than schoolgirls between the ages of thirteen and sixteen can comprehend. For three years she was the center of our being. Not an hour went by – literally – that you did not think of her; you never crossed the street without cherishing the silent hope of meeting her. The two hours of physical education each week, the only hours that you were in her presence, were quite simply the high point of existence. The most terrible expeditions were undertaken in order to find out where you might meet her, the strangest occurrences were invented in order to get something to do with her. If it froze, you went outside in a thin cotton gym suit just so that she would chase you in again; you threw the shuttlecock over the wall into the neighbor's yard, so that you could ask her if you could climb over to get it; you tore your clothing to shreds so as to be able to ask her to mend it. The whole school literally sank into nothingness, into an indifferent twilight, compared to this all-consuming interest.<sup>9</sup>

Bühler, however, rejected this form of Eros. For her, pedagogical Eros (the psychologically ideal Eros) had nothing to do with hysteria, or with mass epidemics of falling in love, even if she also found these expressions a normal part of the pubertal phase. Her point of departure was leadership, responsibility, and self-discipline in the interplay between an older and a younger partner, preferably of the same sex. The foundation of this interplay, which deserved to be taken seriously, lay in the relationship between two persons, through which selfhood and intimacy (the I and the Thou; *Ich* and *Du*) could flourish, and in which the self of the younger could grow in a relationship characterized by a chaste distance and longing. Bühler argued that in this relationship, womanhood and manhood could develop freely. Because she believed that the being of a man and manhood were different

from the being of a woman and womanhood, she believed that Eros between boys and men was different from that between girls and women. In the interplay between boys and men, one could already see what were, according to her, the pre-eminently manly qualities such as self-awareness and the will to power, that later could lead to the ability to rule. Eros between women and girls displayed such typical feminine characteristics as devotion (*Hingabe*) and freely chosen obedience to the adult.

### **Pedagogical Eros in the Girls' Movement**

Womanhood and the fostering of womanhood by Eros was also a topic of discussion within the girls' movement. It usually began with the idea that female nature had been buried in the garbage heap of civilization. Culture was the means of clearing away that rubbish, and the slogan, *Kultur statt Zivilisation*, was adopted without exception by all the girls' groups.

The Platonic notion that there might be an already existing, true source of womanhood which did not have to be created or shaped, did not influence these discussions. What excited the imagination within the movement was the idea that it was possible to create, or instill, the core of womanhood, another of the underlying notions of pedagogical eros. Who but the older female leaders would be more suited to the task of bringing the germ of womanhood in a young girl to a flowering maturity? Mature young women could teach young girls how to discover the source of their own womanhood.

The belief in this idea of fostering maturity by the older woman had the effect within the girls' circles of lessening the conflicts between old and young that characterized the boys' groups after the First World War. The boys' groups, even before the war, had already become polarized by arguments over the role of the older leaders and the inclusion of girls and Jewish boys. After the war these debates created schisms in the boys' movement, though this did not happen in the girls' groups. Whereas the boys wanted to be rid of their older leaders, the girls cherished them. Young women above 25 were much esteemed as

leaders. They had a special place in this ideal feminine culture, this holy island on which womanhood could flower so wonderfully through mutual love and affection. It was they who could guide their younger friends to their proper identity as women.

The body of ideas surrounding the holy island (the germ of womanhood and pedagogical Eros) was sometimes problematic. The sometimes nasty discussion about the relationship between pedagogical Eros and homosexuality that rent the boys' movement was never as great within the girls'. At most, in the girls' movement there was some tension between the ideal of Eros and its practice, which surfaced in the discussions of how to realize this holy island. Marie Buchhold, who became the leader of a women's dance and gymnastics school in the agricultural settlement of Schwarzerden, reported that when she was 27, the girls' group in which she was then involved experienced a clear schism between the maternal and the "unfeminine." Maternal individuals were those who saw their leadership role as a spiritual motherhood, and later through marriage as actual motherhood. Unfeminine leaders were those who made mind, intellect, and physical culture the goal of their leadership, and not marriage, wedded bliss, and motherhood. Buchhold was one of the unfeminine. With her later life-partner Elisabeth Vogler, she established a true holy island where Eros could be given free rein. The elder pair of friends could cultivate in the girls and young women their new female identity. Schwarzerden was such a great success that it still exists today.

Another tension in the girls' movement was that between the erotic and the sexual. Although this was never publicly discussed by any of the girls' groups, it is clear in the descriptions of camping trips, especially in descriptions of being and sleeping together. Eros provided a reservoir for sexual desires and sexual acts. The veneration of the body, culture, and Eros created many opportunities for contemplating the body of a girlfriend in nude dancing or nude swimming, for touching her body in the countless gymnastic exercises that were conducted in the open air, or for snuggling up to her at the rituals by the camp-

fire, on the hikes, and at the innumerable celebrations that took place in the encampments. As was written in one journal:

What did we care about the rocks we tripped over in the darkness, or the many ravines and crevices we might have fallen into? . . . Klara and I held tight to each other's hands, one in the other . . .

Can you understand how deeply we experienced the events of that night? That it appeared to us as a symbol of a time in which we really encountered one another and we alone? I believe that every girl has hidden deep within her a secret something she carries with her – not expressed, indeed hardly known – that allows her to find her way. Like a heavenly song or some half-forgotten, primeval melody, it beckons us onward. Only if we have complete inward calm, if we find peace within ourselves to listen to our soul, shall we hear it, at first softly and trembling. But wonderfully beautiful in purity and simplicity.<sup>10</sup>

Eros was the god of order, and control, an invitation to accompany someone on a life's journey. The girl's love, her being in love, must be transformed by the leader, the older or more mature friend, into creativity, culture – women's culture. What this women's culture was precisely, no one knew. Each group had its own ideas on the subject. What Eros was, no one knew either, and everyone had her own ideas about this as well. Whether it was sexuality, or lesbian sexuality, as we are now inclined to think, was not a question that overly occupied these girls. They certainly did not call it lesbianism, which was associated with the city, perversity, and Priapus.

There was one person who clearly understood his own interpretation of Eros (including pedagogical Eros) and sexuality. For the "erotomaniac" (as he was labelled) Hans Blüher, the "infamous" chronicler of the Wandervogel movement, it was all crystal clear. His view is best seen in a description he gives of an event that took place shortly after the first World War. It is

in the revised edition of his book *Werke und Tage*.<sup>11</sup>

He had hiked up a rugged mountain where a group of girls clad in hooded capes awaited him. They silently escorted him to a place where he would speak to the leaders of a colony of women and girls. According to him, these women and their followers had made their nest, in the wilds of nature, like "queen bees in a swarm." They had created an agricultural community and their own special dances. The outside world thought that the community was based on a love of nature, vegetarianism, dance, and the ideals of the Wandervogel movement, but as an insider he knew that the driving force was mutual love between females, that is, the holy island and pedagogical Eros. Interpreting this pedagogical Eros presented no problem at all for him.

On the slopes of a low German mountain range in the region of the great Hanseatic cities, the women had established themselves, as figures of express beauty and grace, or if not that, then certainly of impressive energy. They are surrounded and waited upon by girls who would spill their heart's blood for them, creating works and institutions which those around them who pluck the fruit of their labors little suspect are secretly ruled over by the goddess of lesbian love.<sup>12</sup>

## Summary

One can say that Eros within the girls' circles was viewed as salvational. It played a role in the process of an individual becoming an adult. It fused women and girls into a community. It was expressly *not* the binding element between girls and boys – at least not in this phase of puberty and adolescence. It was the creative force by which the lost germ of womanhood could be discovered and nurtured into life.

Eros also contained two aspects which could be seen as mutual opposites. The ideal of Eros created a freer group space for those whose public and private lives were severely restricted. In the first half of the twentieth century, girls still

had to clear away some of the obstacles which stood in the way of their being able to lead relatively free lives. The creation of a holy island – at least under certain circumstances and conditions – meant a revolution in the very middle class circles from which the girls were fleeing.

While the discussion of Eros was often liberating, the construction of a dichotomy between Eros and sexuality, (seen as two distinct, conflicting areas of the person) could be said to constrain Eros. This dichotomy, coupled with the emphasis on morality in the discussion of Eros, set them in opposition to one another. Eros had to be the controlling passion, a part of culture and our common heritage. In contrast, sexuality was seen as animal, as genital lust, as demonic and destructive, as chaotic and hedonistic.

The ideals of the girls' movement changed after 1928. The call for social and political involvement became steadily stronger. The right wing, nationalistic boys' groups recruited girls for their own girl sections, strictly segregated from the boys, but nonetheless under male supervision. The girls' groups which advocated the ideal of a community of girls and women slowly but surely crumbled away. There were no new disciples (*Nachwuchs*), and interest evaporated. Social interchange lost some of its aura, became more businesslike, and the politics ever more polarized. The somewhat naive idealism of the early days of the girls' movement was now criticized, and in place of separation on holy islands, people wanted to take part in social and political life. Somewhere in the midst of this, the ideal of Eros was buried. But the call for a unified realm, the call that is for a *Reich*, persisted. After 1933 it would take on a much more sinister tone than the playful ideal shared by the girls in the Weimar era.

#### *Editors' Note:*

*Marion E.P. de Ras (1953) is a social scientist presently investigating the construction of "girlhood" in The Netherlands since 1600. She works under the auspices of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences.*

*Translated from Dutch by Words and Pictures.*

## NOTES

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# SEXUAL REVOLUTION AND THE LIBERATION OF CHILDREN:

## An Interview With Kate Millett By Mark Blasius

**Mark Blasius:** *How would you envision a sexually free society? Do you think any limitations should be placed upon a sexual revolution, and what role would cross-generational sex play in a sexual revolution?*

**Kate Millett:** A sexual revolution begins with the emancipation of women, who are the chief victims of patriarchy, and also with ending of homosexual oppression. Part of the patriarchal family structure involves the control of the sexual life of children; indeed, the control of children totally. Children have virtually no rights guaranteed by law in our society and besides, they have no money which, in a money-economy, is one of the most important sources of their oppression. Certainly, one of children's essential rights is to express themselves sexually, probably primarily with each other but with adults as well. So the sexual freedom of children is an important part of a sexual revolution. How do we bring this about? The problem here is that when you have an exploitative situation between adults and children as you have between men and women, cross-generational relationships take place in a situation of inequality. Children are in a very precarious position when they enter into relationships with adults, not only in a concrete material sense but emotionally as well, because their personhood is not acknowledged in our society.

*Do you think that a tender loving erotic relationship can exist between a boy and a man?*

Of course, or between a female child and an older woman. Men and women have loved each other for millennia, as have people of different

ages. What I'm concerned about is the iniquitous context within which these relationships must exist. Of course, these relationships can be non-exploitative and, considering the circumstances, they are probably heroic and very wonderful; but we have to admit that they can be exploitative as well – like in the prostitution of youth.

*Don't you think that age-of-consent laws are barriers to exploring possibilities for non-exploitative cross-generational relationships and, more importantly, serve to further deny the right of youths to sexual expression?*

Well, they were originally meant to protect the child from exploitation. But what's interesting is that the right to child sexuality is not being approached *initially* as the right of children to express themselves with each other, which was the issue in the '30s with the early sexual liberationists. Instead, it's being approached as the right of men to have sex with kids below the age of consent and no mention is made of relationships between women and girls. It seems as though the principal spokespeople are older men and not youths.

*That's probably because children or youths have no political voice. But most gay male youth groups seem to support lowering or abolition of the age of consent as a first step. How prevalent are erotic relationships between women and girls, do you think?*

In general, women are given more freedom than men within patriarchy to love across generations. But I don't see the correlative of man/boy

relationship existing in lesbian culture as I know it. There's a lot of cross-generational contact among lesbians and even heterosexual women – for example between older and young women artists – but they're mainly as friendships or as mentor relationships. And cross-generational sexual relationships are more of a topic within the male homosexual movement than the female homosexual movement and women in the movement often condemn its advocates. As women, we're probably more protective of children. Also, having been exploited, we're more sensitive to the possibility of exploitation – we've been minors all of our history. We're more sexually repressed than men, having been given a much more strict puritanical code of behavior than men ever have. Men engage in sexual activities that women often regard as promiscuous – it's as though men don't have the defenses that women have against mutual exploitation – against sexual use to the degree of abuse. So as women, we've experienced a great deal of sexual repression; at the same time, we're less exploitative. It's possible also that the condition of lesbians has been so repressive that it prevents them from seeing female people below the age of consent as sexual partners. There's still, I think, a holding back among lesbians from converting that Platonic mentor relationship across generations into an erotic one because of the enormous and potentially catastrophic complications involved in doing so. Catastrophic not only in the personal sense but also in terms of the persecution inflicted by the outside world.

The dialog about these issues within the lesbian and homosexual male movements raises very interesting issues. Have you thought about incest as an issue too? I've always wondered about the power of the incest taboo because, as child and adult sexuality reaches out to greater and greater freedoms, the proximity of family members makes one experiment and challenge this taboo. The incest taboo has always been one of the cornerstones of patriarchal thought.

We have to have an emancipation proclamation for children. What is really at issue is children's rights and not, as it has been formulated up to now, merely the right of sexual access to children.

*But shouldn't one of the rights of children be that of choosing to have an erotic relationship with an older person?*

Oh sure, part of a free society would be that you could choose whomever you fancied, and children should be able to freely choose as well. But it's very hard to be free if you have no rights about anything, if you're subjected to endless violence – both physical and psychological, if you're not permitted to speak, if you have no money, if you're already governed by a whole state system whether you want to be there or not. I would think that, given the conditions under which you're a young person in this society, many things would be at least as important to you as your sexuality.

*It strikes me that there is a contradiction in supporting children's liberation while maintaining paternalistic age-of-consent laws and stigmatizing adults who have erotic relations with young people.*

If you don't change the social condition of children you still have an inescapable inequality. That's like the story of the 1917 revolution. Men and women were declared equal one morning and everybody could divorce each other by postcard. It's just that the women had the babies and getting divorced by postcard when you've been given no means to earn a living and no education and you're in an enormously inferior economic situation meant that you were only being *declared* equal while not being given the *substance* of equality.

I can see how gay youth groups would be very interested in abolishing the age-of-consent law because it must be very oppressive for them. But it just seems to me that this has been mainly an issue for older men rather than for gay youth.

*The rhetoric of pedophilia—that of older men speaking out for the sexual freedom of boys—reflects the underlying powerlessness of children. One could say that it is symptomatic of this powerlessness. Boy lovers are directly and acutely cognizant of the social and economic conditions which crush kids. But it is these same conditions which prevent kids both from having a*

*real political visibility and from acting on their own behalf.*

But what is our freedom fight about? Is it about the liberation of children or just having sex with them? I would like to see a broader movement involving young people who would be making the decisions because it's *their* issue and *their* fight. *Theirs* is the authentic voice.

*Editors' Note:*

*Kate Millett wrote Sexual Politics, Prostitution Papers, Flying, Sita, and most recently, The Basement. Mark Blasius teaches politics at Princeton. This interview, untitled, first appeared in "Loving Boys," Semiotext(e) Special, Intervention Series #2, Summer 1980. Reprinted with permission. Copyright © Semiotext(e) Inc., 1980. It also appeared in Daniel Tsang (Ed.), The Age Taboo: Gay Male Sexuality, Power and Consent (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1981).*



## SPEAKING OUT ON “WOMEN/GIRL LOVE”— OR, LESBIANS DO “DO IT”

**Beth Kelly**

It's time. For years now I've thought I believed in the feminist credo “the personal is political.” But until the current commotion in GCN [*Gay Community News*] over women's reactions to the issue of boys loving men (or vice versa), I never really understood what it could mean to know that your most intensely private moments were nothing more than the threads in the widely woven fabric of political experience that enfolds us all. I'm in my late twenties, have been lesbian all my life, and have been “out” for about five years now. I feel compelled to respond to Nancy Walker's ambitious statement that “gay women. . . hardly ever want anything to do with girls” and to Amy Hoffman's gut level—albeit later modified—reaction of “Lesbians don't do that!” to the Revere case.

Both Walker and Hoffman are, simply, wrong in their assumptions. I know, because I've “done it” — as a girl and as a woman. Now, the time has come when I must share some of my memories and experiences with the larger community. Things I had preferred to think of as too impossibly personal to speak of with anyone have become highly charged, politically volatile issues affecting us all. Taboos on childhood sexuality when it blossoms at all, or on adolescent sexuality that crosses age boundaries, are so deeply entrenched in our culture that for years I was ashamed and afraid to admit, even to myself, that I was involved in an explicitly lesbian relationship when I was between 8 and 11 years old.

The first woman I ever loved sexually was my great-aunt; our feelings for each other were deep, strong, and full. The fact that she was more than fifty years older than I did not affect the bond that grew between us. And yes, I knew what I was doing—every step of the way—even

though I had not, at the time, learned many of the words with which to speak of these things.

Aunt Addie was a dynamic, intelligent, and creative woman—who refused, all her life, to be cowed by convention. In an extended family where women played out “traditional” housewifely roles to the hilt, she stood out, a beacon of independence and strength. She was a nurse in France during the First World War, had traveled, read books, and lived for over twenty years in a monogamous relationship with another woman. Her lover's death pre-dated the start of our sexual relationship by about two years. But we had always been close and seen a great deal of each other. In the summers, which my mother, brother, and I always spent at her seashore home, we were together daily. In other seasons, she would drive to visit us wherever we were living, and often stayed for a month or so at a time.

She taught me to knit and do embroidery. But she also encouraged me to run races and climb trees and dared me to swim out past the breakers, as she did. Addie was *exciting* to me, a child of the middle fifties. I was desperate for female role models who could show that there were alternatives to my mother's situation. I had begun to observe my parents' stormy and stultifying marriage close at hand, and was becoming keenly aware of my mother's mounting frustrations and the complex ways in which she took out her resentment on those closest to her. I didn't want to be like her. I craved the proof of other possibilities that Addie demonstrated, and even inspired outright.

I was precocious, intellectually and physically. At eight my breasts were budding; by nine I needed a bra. Puberty was well behind me before I turned ten. Tall for my age, and clumsy,

I was no good at team sports, and most of the kids at school considered me “too brainy” or “weird” to associate with. I was generally out of synch with my time and my peers. I don’t know what I gave Addie in return for the loving affections I know I received. Perhaps I symbolized promises that something of her would live on, carrying dreams for a future that she wouldn’t see. I think that the time we shared, the love we felt and expressed for each other was something of an idyll for each of us as we grew in different directions. Addie was clearly aging; her lover was dead, and she had to face the possibility that her own days could end very soon. I was fast approaching what was to be a turbulent adolescence. For a while, we found refuge—together.

I adored her; that’s all there was to it. I had never been taught at home that heterosexual acts or other body functions were dirty or forbidden, and I’d been isolated enough from other children to manage to miss a lot of the usual sexist socialization learned in play. It never occurred to me that it might be considered “unnatural” or “antisocial” to kiss or touch or hold the person I loved, and I don’t think that Addie was terribly concerned by such things either. I *do* know that I never felt pressured or forced by any sexual aspects of the love I felt for her. I think I can safely say, some twenty years later, that I was never exploited physically, emotionally, or intellectually — in the least.

Unfortunately, my mother took a rather different view. One summer night when I was eleven, she happened upon Addie and me together in my bed. There was an ugly, violent scene. I learned, for the first time, how it felt to feel real shame, the physical and mental anguish of guilt. I also began to learn how to hate myself. I was confused and withdrawn; I shunned Addie’s attempts to smooth things over with my mother, to draw me back into trust, if not into love. I hurt her deliberately, and probably cruelly. I pushed her, and what we had been to each other, far into the background of my life, where she remained until she died. I did my best to repress all memories of our physical relationship, even as I embarked on lesbian liaisons with other young women.

We never had the chance to talk about any of these things, and I’m sorry about that. Addie died when I was twenty, and barely on the threshold of affirming the self that I am now. I had left her completely alone. I can only now admit that I never really stopped loving her, regardless of the time and energy I spent trying to deny what we had been to each other. The analytic adult in me would like to compile reasons, to categorize the emotions in hindsight, checking off reactions, as though life were lived by multiple choice alone. The child I was so many years ago had the wisdom, it seems, to let such worries be, and trust only in what was simple, natural, and real.

It has always seemed to me that people know when sex is a right thing for them to be doing, when mutually consented to, regardless of who else may or may not share or understand that knowledge. It took some hard object lessons before I finally learned how unusual such logic is in this world. Despite the cultural messages to the contrary that I eventually *did* receive, I knew that it was possible for a person to be aware of her own physicalness in a sexual way long before the social timetable of “maturity” says she should be—and to be able too to act on her awareness. And I know that now, with all my “grown-up” being. Although for several years I succumbed to social sanctions against lesbian and childhood sexuality, and felt ashamed for having had such experiences, I have come to realize the need to affirm them as part of the rich texture of both human experience in general and my own conscious reality in particular.

Growing up was difficult for me. I was often confused by and afraid of my own sexuality. But even the cultural pressures and the problems I was faced with at adolescence, when all I know from experience came into open conflict with what I was being taught (or pressured into doing by my peers), could never negate the wonder and beauty that marked my earliest sexual feelings and the expressions of love that they found. Whom I had loved, and when, and whom I would choose to love were not at the heart of my troubles. And in learning to say “yes” to myself as a lesbian, and to live without self-hatred on my own terms, I found that I could only af-

firm my memories, and take from them a private strength and joy, regardless of what other people could understand—or not.

One night a couple of years ago the woman I was seeing asked me how old I'd been when I realized I loved women. I answered "about nine or ten," which seemed to shock her slightly, but she pressed for details, wondering how I could have "known *that*, so young." I responded as honestly as I could. She was disgusted, and told me so very quickly. At first I was hurt and confused by her reaction, but a bit later I realized that her repulsion reflected more on our shared situation as women in a masculinist, patriarchal culture than it did on my past history.

If, in a cultural context, women *qua* women are devalued because of our sexuality, it is hardly surprising that we often feel compelled to deny the heart of our oppression. I have found sex, and sexuality, to be very threatening to many lesbians, perhaps most insidiously among those of us who are politically active and aware. It's a real double whammy. First we're told we're worthless as women—next we become *twice* so for loving each other. Women have had to say "no" to sensuality for two thousand years (at least); lesbians have had to put up with such things as clitoridectomies and public burnings as punishments for expressing our sex. A collective female urge to deny much of what we understand as sexual, and concomitantly painful when "out of the bedroom," becomes understandable, if not necessarily desirable.

It is extremely difficult for me to write about these things, knowing that what I say may and probably will be misread and mistaken by people whose lives haven't run parallel to mine. Part of the point that needs to be made, I think, is that we cannot ever judge others on the basis of our own experience, which is of necessity limited in many different directions at any given time. That similar sorts of judgements have been made in the past, are being made daily all around us, and are in many instances made *against* us as lesbians or gay men only serves to reinforce the painful potential that's inherent in setting up individuals as arbiters over each other's lives. The more we remain isolated in our own histories, afraid to

speak of things that cut against the grain of all we have been taught, but are nonetheless valid elements of our common human experience, the more we encourage oppression in all its forms.

The dangers of silent isolation were brought home to me in a different, but graphic, context recently. Shortly before Christmas, a graduate seminar that my friend Kevin (who is gay) and I had attended met for the last time prior to the holiday break. As usual, five or six of us gathered in the professor's study; someone had brought in a tub of homemade eggnog laced with rum, others had brought good things to eat, and the atmosphere was rather festive. When Dr. Smith's twelve-year-old son, Brian, interrupted with a telephone message, his father asked if he would like to stay and taste the eggnog.

Brian ended up sitting with us until the meeting ended. His presence was familiar; throughout the term, Brian and his older brother had sat in on several of our meetings. Members of the seminar, including Kevin and myself, had also stayed for dinner with the family on several occasions.

We had come to know Dr. Smith's sons fairly well and to enjoy their company — they were bright, easygoing kids, fun to have around, especially among graduate students, who are sometimes inclined to take life a bit too seriously. For instance, a couple of weeks earlier, Kevin had talked at length with Brian at the dinner table one night after class. He mentioned to me afterwards that it was a refreshing change from the anxiety-laden discourse that prevails among aspiring scholars. Now, as our discussion of minute historical points progressed, I began to notice a sort of electricity in the air, with the "current" running from Brian in Kevin's direction.

I looked closely at the boy. His face was alive with interest and aware sensually, and the physical point of his intentions was clear. This was obviously more than a schoolboy crush; it was clearly sexual in ways we might ordinarily consider "adult." I was stunned. A twelve-year-old? Sexually attracted to my "grown-up" friend? What was I watching? My mind spun — until I caught myself up quickly. A second glance at Brian showed that I was looked through a mirror, telescoping time and space, seeing somehow

not just the boy, but myself as well, long ago—realizing, with a rush of memory, that I'd once shared the same sort of feelings.

Almost immediately, my eyes met Kevin's. He is a gentle, sensitive man who likes children, and relates well to them. He once taught fourth grade, and has worked in a day care center. I knew that he was both aware of Brian's signals and very disconcerted by them. As soon as the seminar ended, the two of us went off to talk about what had happened.

For all of his contact with children, Kevin had never before been in such a situation, and he was confused and frustrated by what had just occurred. He wondered how it would be possible for him to continue to deal with Brian, supporting the validity of the boy's feelings, when the basis of what had been a completely casual, friendly relationship was clearly changing, at least in Brian's eyes. And while any sexual involvement in his relationship with Brian seemed unimaginable, it was not impossible for Kevin to picture only slightly different circumstances where explicitly sexual issues would arise and would have to be faced.

How to deal with that, should it happen, remains a troubling—and yet unanswerable—question. Kevin and I agreed that there is nothing inherently wrong with a sexual facet being added to a relationship between an adult and a young person, if that is what both individuals involved desire. Problems arise, however—mostly out of the social climate of our time. "Cross-generational" relationships often cause strong overreactions in others, who judge them from the outside. This can have disastrous consequences for the people involved.

In fact, given the double force of the common stereotype of gay men as child molesters and cultural taboos on childhood sexuality, a mere notice of Brian's interest by another member of our seminar could have led to trouble. The boy's feelings would have been held against Kevin, who, as an adult, would be considered responsible. Even worse, Brian would have been told, in no uncertain terms, that his feelings were wrong and that he was no good for holding them—just as I had been, twenty years earlier.

Where does all this leave me? Leave us? I can only empathize with all of the young women and men out there now, who are being and will be sold short by adults who will not or cannot face these issues. Although much has changed for lesbians and gay men in twenty years, we seem to be so hung up on trying to protect ourselves and our hard-won gains that we are willing—and quick—to deny powerless others the right to be and affirm themselves sexually. I don't think that the issues involved in childhood, adolescent, or cross-generational sex can ever be considered on anything other than an *individual* basis—by people whose minds are open to a just possibility.

In sharing my own experience here, I don't intend to imply *in the least* that children and teenagers are *not* used and abused exploitatively and cruelly in sexual relationships by older individuals. Nor do I condone or forgive such actions; they are simply reprehensible. What I *am* trying to do is present another, less sensational side, on which silence has been kept for far too long. No issues as serious as those now at hand can be fairly judged without a balanced view.

I would like to see more rational explanation and exploration of the points I've tried to raise here, in a climate more conducive to reciprocity and communication than currently seems to exist. I would like Nancy Walker and her supporters, who would rather sweep sexual relationships under the rug of adult privilege, to read this with open minds. I must reiterate that lesbians have no room for righteous indignation.

It's time for gay men and lesbians who have had no experience with these matters to take their cue from Marshall McClintock, "shutting up, listening, and learning" from those of us who *do*. The issues are delicate and difficult, there's no denying that. But we cannot avoid them, like it or not. Nor can we continue to oppress others as we have been—or *are*—oppressed ourselves. It's time to stop selling out young people, and to begin being honest, with ourselves and with each other.

Reprinted from *Gay Community News*, Boston, 30 March 1979.

TEXT AUS DEM ♀♀ KALENDER '89

# ES GIBT KEINE BEFREIUNG DER FRAUEN, OHNE BEFREIUNG DER KINDER

weibliche pedofilie heißt für uns liebe zwischen mädchen und erwachsenen frauen, die freiwillig ist und sexuelle befriedigung miteinschließt, keine herrschaft über andere menschen ist und ne lebensform, in der wir uns nicht nötig haben, kinder zu beherrschen oder zu besitzen.

wir wollen leben ohne macht über kinder und ohne tote erwachsenensexualität. erwachsenensexualität heißt zerstörung von lebendigkeit und umwelt. der zerstörung der umwelt geht die zerstörung der kindersexualität voraus. beziehungen mit kindern, die nicht in eine der erlaubten familien- schul- heim- und erziehungsschubladen passen, werden gar nicht erst zugelassen, bzw. kriminalisiert. jedes ausbrechen aus dieser todesmaschine wird verhindert.

für uns sind be-  
ziehungen, die mit  
druck, nötigung, er-  
pressung und ent-  
mündigung ablaufen,  
nicht pedofilie, son-  
dern gewalt. wer miß-  
handlungen, vergewal-  
tigung und sadistische  
gewalt als pedofilie

bezeichnet, fördert die faschistische  
diskriminierung pedofiler liebe.  
ebenso ist es für uns faschistisch,  
kinder in familien einzusperren,



so daß keine anderen  
beziehungen für sie  
mehr möglich sind/  
sein sollen. pedo-  
fille ist die einzige  
möglichkeit, sich gegen

mütterlichkeit, die ausschließlich zugelas-  
sene form fürs zusammenleben mit kindern  
- zu wehren. wir greifen die vergewaltiger-  
väter in den familien an, wollen uns aber  
deshalb schon gar nicht in ein mütterliches  
gewaltverhältnis/abhängigkeit reinpressen  
lassen. wir fordern, daß kinder rechte  
bekommen sollen statt schutz, damit sie  
aus familien  
flüchten  
können, wenn  
sie dort miß-  
handelt werden  
oder es ihnen  
dort nicht  
gefällt.

befreiung von frauen ist nicht ohne befrei-  
ung von kindern und kindheit möglich.

befriedigende sexualität kann nicht  
erreicht werden ohne auseinander-  
setzung mit der verbotenen/verdrängten  
(lesbischen und) kindersexualität, ohne  
die trennungen aufzuheben von irgend-  
welchen körperzonen, von sexualität und  
zärtlichkeit, von sexuellen und nicht-  
sexuellen bereichen, altersunter-

und arbeit. sie versuchen, jedes  
mädchen, jede frau von ihrer  
sexualität abzutrennen, so  
daß sie später nur noch als  
samenempfängerin und  
gebärerin funktioniert.

mädchen werden von erwaxe-  
nen kaputtgemacht, solange  
bis sie sich als opfer behan-  
deln und schützen lassen, bis  
ihr widerstand gebrochen ist.

sie sollen sich alles gefallen lassen, bis  
sie resignieren und unfähig sind, sich  
gegen mackerstaat zu wehren. diese  
unfähigkeit geben sie dann später an

andere mädchen weiter, statt mit ihnen zu-  
sammen widerstand zu leben.

mißhandelte kinder werden eingeteilt: um  
die integrerbaren wird sich gerissen, kin-  
der, die sich wehren, auch gegen die wider-  
lichste sozialarbeiter/Innenschleimerel, -  
kriegen keine unterstützung. sie werden  
auf die straße getrieben, in die droge, auf  
den strich, in den selbstmord oder landen  
ziemlich schnell in heimen, in der kinder-  
psychiatrie oder werden erneut in den fa-  
milien kleingemacht.



auch freiwillige  
beziehungen enden

vor gericht und jugend-

amt, mit kontaktverbot und psychothera-  
pie, in helmen, psychiatrien und knästen.  
kinder werdengezwungen mit erwaxenen  
zusammenzuleben in verklemmten  
beziehungen, wo keine sexualität stattfin-  
den darf.



das steht nicht  
als mißhandlung  
zur diskussion.  
wenns anders  
läuft, wird plötzlich  
die verlogenheit  
sichtbar, wird von

manipulation, abhängig-  
machen, macht usw gere-  
det, ohne die beziehung-  
en zu hinterfragen, in  
denen die erwaxenen  
selbst stecken.

frauen, die zärtliche und  
sexuelle gefühle und be-  
ziehungen zu kindern  
wollen/kennen, haben  
fast alle angst, ihren  
wünschen und bedürfnis-  
sen nachzugehen und auf  
die von mädchen einzu-  
gehen. denn die bezie-  
hungen werden juristisch  
verfolgt und sozialthera-  
peutisch kaputt gemacht.

die zur zeit laufenden kampagnen, die an-  
geblich gegen "sexuellen mißbrauch" ge-  
richtet sind, unterstützen die zuspitzung  
von moral, unterdrückung unserer sexuali-  
tät und kontrolle der kinder. Isohaftmäßig  
wirst du als mädchen daran gehindert,  
erfahrungen zu machen,  
selbst auszuprobieren, was dir gefällt und  
was nicht und stattdessen bekommst du  
völlig entfremdete bedürfnisse aufgestülpt,  
und das alles mit der begründung, dich zu  
beschützen.

sie wissen von der sexuellen erregung von  
kindern und jugendlichen, aber verbieten  
ihre befriedigung.

familien, schulen, heime und die ganze  
dazugehörige moral werden "natürlich"  
nicht bekämpft, sondern sogar noch mehr  
ausgebaut.

spezialkurse

für lehrerinnen

neinsage-  
trainings-  
programme

in kinder-  
gärten und

andere derartige kinderschützerinrichtungen  
sind hilfs- und schutzeinrichtungen für die  
erwaxenen und den staat,  
weil sie die möglichkeit aus-  
schliessen auch "JA" zu sagen.

sie zementieren

männergewalt, denn sie sind deren verfei-  
nerte ergänzung oder ersetzung.  
wir sind betroffene, wenn von wildwasser-

damen, emmas und anderen kampagnentrei-  
berinnen nicht zwischen einverständlichen  
und aufgezwungenenbeziehungen unterschieden  
wird, sondern danach, wie wir nach  
ihren vorstellungen zu leben haben und  
nach unserem alter. wir wollen nicht  
staatsknete-beschafferinnen für die wild-  
wassers sein und nicht pädagoginnen helfen  
uns zu verwalten, sondern mit kindern  
leben.

die auseinandersetzung geht weiter.



# THERE CAN BE NO EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN WITHOUT THE EMANCIPATION OF CHILDREN

## The Kanalratten Manifesto

At the end of the 1980s, the kanalratten (Canal Rats) formed an anarchist women's and children's commune in Berlin that agitated for the rights of children. The kanalratten were part of a larger network of "liberated zones" in West Germany, the Indianer-communes, the largest of which still exists in Nürnberg.

For the kanalratten, the unequal power relationships within the family and the dependency of children are the cause of social oppression. They advocate the right of children to engage freely in sexual relations, including those with adults. During the 1987 "Lesbenwoche" (Lesbian Week) in Berlin, the kanalratten sought a confrontation with the women who ran the Wildwasser refuge for girls. They accused Wildwasser of itself adopting a "paternalistic" attitude toward the girls and denying them their right to freely choose to have a relationship with an adult. According to the kanalratten, again the refuge only served to prepare the girls to live in families, and in this manner perpetuated their oppression.

For their part, in a response in the paper *Blattgold* (April and November, 1989), the women who organized the *Lesbenwoche* accused the kanalratten of refusing to see that equal relationships between children and adults are impossible, and suggested that the kanalratten were seeking only to indulge their own perverse lusts. They also excluded the kanalratten from any further participation in the *Lesbenwoche* activities.

The text which follows is a very strongly worded political manifesto from the kanalratten, reprinted in the *Autonomer Frauenkalender 1989*. They set out their views regarding children, sex-

uality and patriarchy. Although it is not subtle, it is one of the few expressions of a feminist women's group regarding the right of children to sexuality.

The original German text does not capitalize initial letters of sentences or proper names. We have kept to this style in the translation.

### The Manifesto

we define female paedophilia as love between girls and adult women which is voluntary and includes sexual satisfaction; it is not a form of domination over other people since it is a form of life in which we have no need to dominate or possess children.

we wish to live without power over children and without the lifeless sexuality of adults. adult sexuality means the destruction of life and the environment. the destruction of the environment precedes the destruction of child sexuality. relationships with children other than those in the permitted categories of family, upbringing, home, and education are either not allowed or criminalized. any attempt to break out of this machine of death is prevented. we consider contacts which involve pressure, coercion, extortion, or prohibition to be incidences of violence rather than paedophilia. those who claim that paedophilia consists of abuse, rape, and sadistic force are furthering the fascist discrimination of paedophile love. for us, however, it is fascist to imprison children in families so that no other kinds of relationships are possible. paedophilia is our only means of preventing motherhood from being the

only permitted form of living together with children. we attack the rapist father, but in no way allow ourselves to be forced into a motherly power relationship/dependency. we demand that children be given rights rather than protection, so that they can escape from families which they do not like or where they are mistreated.

the emancipation of women is not possible without the emancipation of children and childhood. a satisfying sexuality cannot be achieved without discussing the forbidden/suppressed topics of lesbian and child sexuality, without abolishing the divisions between body zones, sexuality and tenderness, sexual and non-sexual areas, age differences, and work. they try to separate every girl and woman from her sexuality so that they can later only function as sperm receptacles and mothers.

girls are destroyed by adults so that their resistance is broken and they let themselves be treated as victims and protected. they must put up with everything until they give in and are no longer able to resist the macho state. they then pass on this inability to other girls, rather than joining with them to offer resistance.

abused children are divided into categories: a great fuss is made over those who can be reintegrated into society, but children who resist even the most obnoxious social workers or unwarranted meddling in their private lives receive no support. they are put out on the street, get involved with drugs, prostitution, attempt suicide, or they wind up rather quickly in homes, the child psychiatry circuit, or they are again destroyed by families. even voluntary relationships end up in court or under the control of the child-protection agencies, who then forbid all contact, put children into psychotherapy, or place them in homes, psychiatric institutions, and prisons. children are forced to live together with adults in stifling relationships where no sexuality is allowed.

none of this is considered abuse. when things turn out otherwise this lie becomes visible and there is talk of manipulation, the creation of dependency, power, etc., without questioning the nature of the relationships in which the adults themselves are trapped.

almost all women who have tender and sexual feelings for children are afraid to pursue their wishes and needs and to respond to those of children, because these relationships are legally prosecuted and their social therapeutic nature is destroyed. the current campaigns which are supposedly directed against "sexual abuse" underscore the tightening of conventional morality, the suppression of our sexuality and the control of children. by being placed in solitary confinement a girl is prevented from having experiences, trying things out for herself to find out what she likes and does not like. instead she is burdened with completely alien desires, all of this supposedly to protect her.

they know that children can become sexually excited, but they forbid sexual gratification. no opposition to families, schools, homes, and the whole moral world remains; rather their influence is becoming ever more widespread. special courses for teachers, training programs to teach kindergarten children to say "no" and other such devices to protect children are contrivances to help and protect adults and the state, because they do not allow children to say "yes." they are the complement to or the substitute for male violence. *we* are the victims when the "wildwasser" women,<sup>1</sup> the emma journalists<sup>2</sup> and other campaigners make no distinction between relationships based on mutual consent and relationships based on force. but they force us to live according to their ideas which they think are suitable for our modern times. we do not want to give any state money to the "wildwassers" nor do we want to help the pedagogues to control us, but we do want to live with children.

the discussion will be continued.

kanalratten, berlin, 1989

*Translated from German by Eric Wulfert.*

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## NOTES

1. Wildwasser is a shelter for "sexually abused" children.
2. "Emma" is a German feminist magazine.



## FILM REVIEW

*Kung Fu Master*, directed by Agnes Varda; starring Jane Birkin and Mathieu Demy, 1989. Reviewed by Gonnie Lubbers.

I'll tell you a little secret. When I was your age I was in love with a man fifteen or sixteen years older than myself. It was very difficult for him, but he never touched me. We would meet in the afternoons, and then we would talk for hours with one another. It was wonderful to feel I was so important, so unique.

This scrap of dialogue between mother and daughter is from the film *Kung Fu Master*, the theme of which is the love between a 40-year-old woman and a 15-year-old boy. The French director, Agnes Varda, made the film because of a remark made by her close friend, the actress Jane Birkin. In the documentary film *Jane B. par Agnes V.*, Varda and Birkin discuss an idea for a film similar to that which eventually became *Kung Fu Master*. Birkin says that she would like to make a film about a woman in a panic about growing old, and the love she feels for a young boy. Varda's son, it is suggested, might play opposite Birkin, but Varda says she has to be careful how she handles such a film because "Mathieu is only fourteen."

*Kung Fu Master* was intended as a low-budget film, perhaps because there was a genuine lack of money, or perhaps because Varda wanted to keep the story line as close to home as possible. Most of it was filmed in Birkin's home; two of Birkin's daughters and even her parents had parts in it; and Mathieu Demy, Varda's son, plays the boy with whom the woman falls in love. How "careful," then, was the director in the film?

### The Story

Marie-Jane (Jane Birkin) is a divorced woman with two daughters, 15-year-old Lucy and 14-year-old Lou. At a party for Lou, Marie-Jane

meets Julien (Mathieu Demy), her daughter's classmate. Julien has had too much to drink and Marie-Jane helps him throw up so he will feel better. Later, while Marie-Jane is singing a love lullaby to her daughter she notices that Julien is watching her intently. She is very affected by his look and from that instant on she realizes that she is attracted to Julien. She drives to his school on the chance of meeting him but is so stirred up that she almost runs him over. They go to a café, and while she recovers from the shock of the near accident, Julien plays his favorite video game, "Kung Fu Master." The boy's intensity and quick reactions awaken dormant feelings in her.

Julien, in the meanwhile, begins to realize that he likes Marie-Jane. In a third meeting, Marie-Jane visits him when he is sick in bed. He tells her that he has had enough of being a kid; he wants to become an adult as quickly as possible. He puts first his hand and then his head on her breast. Later he telephones Marie-Jane and wants to celebrate with her the fact that he no longer has to wear his braces. He has a key for a hotel room and makes an appointment to meet her there. In the elevator he starts to smoke a cigarette and act macho. Marie-Jane slaps him and tells him to stop. Julien slaps her back, and she leaves.

Over Easter vacation, Julien accompanies the family to London, where Marie-Jane's parents (played by Birkin's own parents) live. Marie-Jane's daughter, Lucy, sees her mother and Julien kissing and is shocked and angry. Marie-Jane's mother seems, surprisingly, to be very understanding and gives Marie-Jane the opportunity to escape for a few days with Julien (and daughter Lou) to a cabin on a small island.

### AIDS and Sex Games

Varda's point of view seems to be that many of today's pubertal boys affect detachment. In addition to their fixation with clothing, motorcycles, and such, in the last few years they have

been gripped by a new passion: video games.

Julien is clearly a boy of his time. He plays his favorite video game with an intensity that subordinates even love. The structure of the game can be seen as emblematic of what love is to him: a karate hero must free the beloved maiden by overcoming many obstacles and evil creatures. Marie-Jane becomes the maiden who must be freed from the malignant threat of growing old. Or is the battle already lost?

When Julien returns to school after their time together on the island, he brags to his classmates that he has had sexual relations with an older woman, the mother of two teenage daughters. He says that he only did it as a favor, because she wanted it and wouldn't let go of him. His remark suggests that for him their affair might only have been a game to learn about love. At the end

of the film he succeeds in winning the video game; that is, he frees the maiden, but, when he wants to tell Marie-Jane about his victory, he makes such a half-hearted attempt that the message never reaches her. Julien has won his game. Marie-Jane, on the other hand, has been saved only temporarily. At the end she is still in the grips of the monster of growing old.

Besides video games, and symbolic romantic love, there is another theme in the movie: fear of sickness and death. It is notable that AIDS education material is seen throughout the film. Varda said in an interview that when she was in London shooting the film, she was struck by the openness in England about AIDS. According to her, the existence of the problem had not yet penetrated French society, and there was certainly no active AIDS education campaign.



*Jane Birkin with Mathieu Demy*

Much attention is paid to AIDS matters. At the daughter's birthday party at the beginning of the film, the boys play with condoms. Julien fills them with water and drops them out of the window onto the heads of his friends. Later, when Marie-Jane leaves the video arcade, where she has been looking for Julien, the camera lingers on a condom automat. When they are in London, we are obviously meant to see the large anti-AIDS billboards, and the whole family, including the grandparents, watch a short TV film on AIDS and talk about it.

This openness about AIDS is sympathetic, even if it is overdone, and it is not clear how it bears on the relationship between Julien and Marie-Jane. Perhaps Varda wanted merely to say that we should be more concerned with AIDS than with a love affair between a 40-year-old woman and a 15-year-old boy. Perhaps she was hinting at the fact that sexual relationships today are constrained, or even might be dangerous. The disease is a menacing element in the background of the film.

### Sexuality

The sexual activity between Marie-Jane and Julien is never made explicit. In an interview in a Dutch weekly Varda said,

I wanted to depict the secrecy of sexual passion. . . . Not just adults but young people, too, are being slowly satiated with extremely crude images. I asked myself what would be more exciting if you were twelve or fourteen: to see love taking place or to imagine it.

And so, I found it essential not to depict it but rather to emphasize that the intimacy, the mystery, the tranquillity of those who are in love, and the love which is experienced between this boy and this woman, remain their own personal secret.<sup>1</sup>

Another French film which centers upon a relationship between an adult woman and a boy is *Mourir d'aimer* (1971), by Andrea Cayette, with Annie Girardot and Bruno Pradal in the main

roles. The film is based upon the "Russier affaire," which stirred up a controversy in France in the late 1960s. Gabrielle Russier (32), a teacher, and her pupil, Christian Rossi (17), fell in love with each other during the turbulent days of May 1968. Following a complaint from the boy's parents, the teacher was fired. According to the *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant/Handelsblad* (19 February 1971), the boy's parents were extremely left-wing, and had previously made a holy cause of revolution and sexual freedom. Russier was brought before the court and jailed after being charged with kidnapping and seducing a minor. At her trial in July 1969, she was given a suspended sentence of twelve months. The Public Prosecutor felt this was too lenient, and appealed. The appeal was never heard, because Russier committed suicide in September 1969. Rossi was placed in a special school and later in a psychiatric clinic. "It is a modern drama of intolerance and cruelty, that reminds one of medieval witchcraft trials," wrote Eric Boogerman in the *NRC/Handelsblad* on 18 February 1971. Various books appeared on this "drama of bigotry," and in September 1969, French President Pompidou gave his opinion of the affair on television, during which he cited love poetry by Paul Eluard that gave the impression that his sympathies lay with the teacher.

The film *Mourir d'aimer* was based on the Russier affair. It was initially banned by French censors, but later received the Grand Prix du Cinéma Français. Unfortunately, the film is no longer in distribution, but reviews published in Dutch newspapers in 1971 indicate that not everyone found the film convincing. According to *NRC/Handelsblad*,

The rancor of the boy's parents against the teacher arose from their failure to understand an out-of-the-ordinary love affair. The judge who zealously used unsound laws against Gabrielle Russier, no less the parents, are fellow players in a drama where they made caricatures of themselves.

On the other hand, in a letter to Cayette, Christian Rossi let it be known that he could

fully agree with the representation of the affair in the film, but reproached him for treating his parents so cautiously.<sup>2</sup> Cayette said to *Het Parool*, "As a consequence of my film, questions are now being asked in parliament, so that perhaps changes in the law can be made." That would have been the wish of Gabrielle Russier, who wrote in her last letter, "I hope that this nightmare can at least be of use to someone."

### ***Kung Fu Master as a Film***

*Kung Fu Master* has its own particular point of view and unmistakable charm, but it is not in every respect successful. Some scenes are too slow and dull to maintain the viewer's attention, while others might better have been longer to allow us to better know the characters. Furthermore, the faces of the two lovers reveal very little. This could be a matter of casting, or perhaps a characteristic of French films. It is difficult to imagine that behind those cool, restrained faces there are longings and erotic needs.

Despite Varda's defense of her method in the documentary film previously mentioned, it is not enough that the love between the woman and the boy remain such a personal secret. In order to identify with the two lovers, the viewer needs a more profound depiction of all those turbulent emotions of love: joy, sadness, anger, fear, disappointment, and arousal.

Marie-Jane is revealed a little more fully than Julien; her thoughts are at least occasionally articulated. About Julien we only know that he lives with his grandmother, his mother is abroad, and he is crazy about video games. Only once does he allow us to see how he really feels about something: when he tells Marie-Jane how tired he is of being thought a child.

The two lovers are portrayed so superficially that the question arises how or why Julien responds to Marie-Jane's love. Perhaps her loving attention makes him feel important, more mature, just as Marie-Jane, years before, had been made to feel unique by an older man, as she admits in the citation with which this article begins.

### **Desires**

In the same interview Varda says,

The end of childhood for the boy coincides with the end of youth for the woman. That interests me: the sexuality of a woman living alone, and the longings of a boy who is almost a young man. It seems to me these are two very crucial moments in life, moments filled with desire. In the film all aspects of sexuality are to be found: dreams about it, longings, what actually happens, what others make of it. And sadness when it ends badly.

What gives the film its charm is the subtle change which takes place in the relationship between Marie-Jane and Julien. In the beginning it is one of mutual interest, that of a child for its mother and a mother for her child. Steadily, it becomes more erotic. The absence of Julien's mother is stressed and this gives us a means of interpreting their initial feelings. The elevator scene, mentioned above, is important because Varda is trying to show us how their position relative to one another and their image of each other is altering. When Marie-Jane forbids him to smoke and strikes him, their relationship clarifies. Julien defies her, and they reach a kind of equality.

A similar confrontation between mother and child would create tensions; between Marie-Jane and Julien, it releases tension and shifts their relationship onto another level.

When Julien and Marie-Jane go with Lou to the island, the tension further dissipates. As a couple they draw closer together. Julien, as a kind of father, cares for Lou, while Marie-Jane enters into the children's games and playfulness. The boy is moving toward adulthood and the woman re-enacts her youth. Their love relationship is a wonderful discovery, as Varda says, "two moments filled with desire."

To me, this is the strongest part of the film. Because the relationship, especially in the island scenes, is depicted so sympathetically, we empathize with the main characters when their re-

relationship ends so abruptly and cruelly. Varda knows how to show things in such a natural and inoffensive way—without the love scenes being too explicit—that the bad ending seems all the more unjustified.

Since this sequence on the island is given so much importance, the question arises as to whether or not this is a “paedophile” relationship. All that is made explicit on the screen is the erotic desire between Marie-Jane and Julien. Varda’s claim that the film depicts “all aspects” of sexuality is simply not true. What actually happens is left to the viewer’s imagination.

### Questions

The film raises many questions in my mind. How would it have been if some actress other than Jane Birkin had played the leading role? Jane Birkin, in her forties, still has the body and manner of an older adolescent, so that the age difference between her and Julien is less apparent. Would an actress with a more feminine, “fuller” physique have given the film a different slant?

I also wonder whether the relationship between a 40-year-old woman and a 15-year-old boy is comparable to that of a 40-year-old man and a 15-year-old girl or boy? Would such relationships elicit the same sympathy and ring as true?

The film suffers from a credibility problem. The “cool” expressions on the faces of Marie-Jane and Julien do not support the supposed depth of their love. Furthermore, Marie-Jane’s mother’s complete understanding of the situation, enabling their withdrawal to the island, seems all too fortuitous. The fact that the mother doesn’t even take the trouble to discuss the situation first with her daughter but simply hands over the key to the cabin is most peculiar—and I wasn’t the only one who thought so: the audience in which I sat laughed at this.

Marie-Jane’s daughter Lucy runs away furious when she sees her mother and Julien kissing. The close juxtaposition of this scene with the idyllic episode on the island is jarring because the mother and daughter do not discuss the sit-

uation or the nature of Marie-Jane’s and Julien’s relationship.

Despite these weaknesses, the film must be applauded. It is a worthy attempt to depict as worthwhile a different sort of relationship.

*Gonnie Lubbers (1954) did her university studies in Dutch language and culture. Since 1986 she has worked for Cinemien, where she compiled the catalogues for the “Cinematheca” film festivals. She has also written for the Dutch film magazine, Skrien. Together with three other women, she prepared a translation of the collected prose and poetry of the Russian poet, Marina <sup>\*</sup>Tsvetayeva, entitled, *Jouw tedere mond – één en al kus*. (Your tender mouth – one and all kiss).*

*Translated from the Dutch by Frank Torey and Words and Pictures.*

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### NOTES

1. Interview with Agnes Varda in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 1988, by Aafke Steenhuis and Kiki Amsberg.
2. Ab van Ieperen, *Het Parool* (Amsterdam, 9 March 1971).

**\*Tsvetayeva**

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