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PÆDOPHILIA & THE CONSTRUCTION OF CHILDHOOD

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In this article I want to put forward some reasons for supporting some kinds of pædophile relationships — as aspects of resistance to capitalism and patriarchy, and more generally, as a way of making children's and adults' lives more enjoyable. Mainly, I am going to look at those pædophile relationships where children are willing and keen participants, and where the pædophiles are genuinely "lovers" of children. The fact that many such pædophiles and ped relationships do exist is amply demonstrated by books such as Tom O'Carroll's *Pædophilia: The Radical Case*, Theo Sandfort's *The Sexual Aspect of Pædophile Relations*, and Paul Wilson's *The Man They Called a Monster*. These books report many studies based on interviews with children who are willingly involved in pædophile relationships. They show that these children certainly did not suffer from the relationships and that they regarded them as a positive experience.

Since a lot of people's most justified worries about pedophilia are in relation to man-girl relationships, I will make a few comments about this before going on to discuss some of the positive aspects of pædophiles' relationships. My views about this have been strongly influenced by reading Ellen Bass and Louise Thornton's book *I Never Told Anyone*, which contains the reports of women who, as children, were the victims of sexual abuse. Women that I have spoken to about this topic have heard of or experienced situations similar to those described in the book. It seems that most man-girl sexual contacts are initiated by men without the willing participation of the girls involved. In that sense they are rapes, and their political meaning is quite clear.

They are an aspect of men's control over women's lives. They do nothing but harm the girls involved.

On the other hand, there do seem to be a very few man-girl relationships that have been willingly entered into. Tom O'Carroll reports one case at length, and I have heard of a few women who have had similar experiences. It is likely that such relationships might suffer from some of the same problems that bedevil heterosexual relationships between adults -- the expectation that the man will take a leading role in the relationship and so on. While these aspects of such relationships should be criticized, I think that girls should be free to enter into sexual relations with adults if they are keen to do so. They should not be in a situation where a willingly entered relationship can result in their lover going to jail, and/or themselves ending up in an institution.

Incestuous relationships have special problems. An incestuous relationship between a father and a daughter is inevitably affected by the fact that the father has a very real control over the daughter's economic and emotional security. This makes it particularly difficult for a daughter to exercise power in the relationship, since the father is in a good position to put pressure on her. This is, of course, the context in which most coerced relationships between men and girls occur. This situation is like that of many marriages, where husbands control their wives' economic security. In both cases, the sexual coercion by fathers or husbands is just one aspect of their control.

Most man-girl relationships reflect the way in which this society encourages men to prey on women sexually. In acting out this predatory role, men consolidate their power over all aspects of women's lives -- not just their sexuality. This predatory construction of male sexuality also means that most girls will fear male sexuality and are not very likely to want to get involved in sex with men. This situation is also affected by the sexual double standard.

Although sexuality is repressed in children of both sexes, it is much more repressed in girls because they are destined to become god's police as adults. This is another reason why very few girls are likely to be willing participants in sex with

adults. This in itself does not explain the large amount of unwilling man-girl sex. If men weren't rapists, it wouldn't happen. But it does explain how it can be the case that so much man-boy sex is the result of willing participation by boys, while so little man-girl sex is like this. The fact that boys are allowed out of the home unsupervised by their parents also has a big effect on this. They are much more likely to be in a position to meet adults who are not part of their family circle, and to form independent friendships with adults. They are more likely to be seen by men as political equals and will, themselves, expect their wishes to be respected.

To me, all this means that the best basis for a man-girl relationship is where the girl meets the man outside of her family circle, and initiates and continues the relationship on her terms. Such relationships are probably most common between adolescent girls and their older boyfriends.

I will now go on to look at some of the benefits that willingly-entered pædophile relationships may confer. To me, there is no doubt that children in this society are sexually repressed. To discover sexuality for oneself as a child is no great task. That so many children never masturbate while so many adults enjoy it is not some accidental lack of interest on the part of children. They are told very early on that the genitals are dirty and not to be touched; that it is embarrassing to be naked in front of others and so on. As a result of such pressures children learn to be a-sexual. Most children of the ages between five and ten will say that they wouldn't like to fuck, and that sex is disgusting. Boys tend to see sex in terms of heterosexuality and say that girls are yukky and think of nothing but love, love, love. I don't really know what girls say about sex when boys aren't around. On the other hand, these expressions of sexual denial in kids are only half the story. At the same time, children spend huge amounts of time when they are together telling dirty jokes, making jokes about being undressed, pissing in public, or having sex. They are just as preoccupied with the subject as adults are. Half the time, their expressions of lack of interest in sex are the subject of great hilarity and excitement -- with an obvious sexual content. Most adults are totally unaware of all this, as their own responses have closed off this kind of communication with children.

Counter-cultural children are just as caught up in this culture of sexual repression. Many adults within these circles have made some attempts to let children express themselves sexually with other children. The result of this has been a fair amount of sexual experimentation by children under five. In my experience, counter-cultural children under five are, to a limited degree, open in their sexual expression -- although usually making some attempt to hide this from adults. Often, sexual play is between children of the same sex. It is not unusual for children to invite other kids to their bedroom and shut the door for sexual games. As these counter-cultural children reach the ages of 4, 5 or 6 they begin to be influenced by older children who are quite well aware that the culture does not allow children to be sexual. The culture of sexual repression comes from older kids down. The efforts of counter-cultural parents to say that kids can be sexual are fairly minimal. They are massively contradicted by the culture at large -- by regiments of straight teachers and parents supported by the media, which of course never shows kids in sexual situations.

From my own experience with counter-cultural boys, I have no doubt that this sexual repression is closely tied into a rejection of girls and of femininity generally. The first and most insulting phrase that was used by older boys (of six) to attack 4-year-olds was: "You fuck your mother." Girls were attacked as yukky and interested only in love. Later, boys started to accuse other younger boys of being "dick wankers." By the ages of seven or eight, all the boys I know from this scene have stopped having any kind of sexual contact with other children, not to mention adults! This process has been so effective that quite a number of parents of these eight year olds now see their children's asexuality as something totally voluntary and a natural part of childhood.

The sexual repression of childhood is even more obvious in the adolescent period, when children start to be allowed to experience sexual desire -- but not to express it.

What are some of the effects of this all-pervasive sexual repression of children? Sexual pleasure is, in itself, something which -- repeated often enough -- can give you

a warm feeling of being loved, can relax you and take away life's cares, and so on. [A natural "high" without the cost & side effects of drugs.] Children are denied all this. As well, the constant sexual rejection by adults is a message to children that they do not measure up – *they don't make the grade in ways that are really important to adults.* In the long run, adults prefer their relationships with their sexual partners over their relationships with the children – whom they uniformly reject sexually. Children have the appearance of people who feel deprived of full emotional and sensuous support from other people. They respond to this either with a brash bravado, or an awkward shyness. Adults tend to see these responses as "cute" and as part of the nature of children as such. In fact, the whole culture basks in the sick pleasures of adults looking at kids as cute a-sexual playthings. When I go to a school play or gym display, it always makes me distinctly uneasy to see the warm glow of approval on the faces of the adults as the kids play at adult relationships and friendships, with the sexual element safely removed.

All this experience of sexual repression in childhood has some very obvious effects on their sexuality as later adults. Adults are sexually obsessed. They are in constant fear of not getting enough sex. They cling desperately to failed relationships, fearing that they are the only hope they have. They are scared to ask for sex and convinced they will be rejected. They run to the security of marriage with the illusory belief that they are buying the right to a continuous sexual relationship; and later reconcile themselves to the sad conclusion that at least they don't have to think about sex any more. In my view, this constant fear of not getting enough sex reflects the reality of a childhood in which you didn't get any sex. There is no way that you can take sex for granted as an adult when you lived through childhood in a state of sexual frustration.

More generally, the political effects of the sexual repression of children are totally conservative. The sexual repression of children is a necessary prelude to the sexual repression of adults. The sexual repression experienced by children sows the seeds of docility and subservience in all areas of life. It trains people for a life of self-denial and for being told that not getting what you want is really "for your own good." Its hidden nature, the fact that it is treated as a voluntary state, as a product

of the natural innocence of childhood, means that the repression is unconscious and totally mystifying. It helps to create people who are unable to know what they really want since at a conscious level, **they have been trained to ignore some of their deepest desires.** All this fits in well with a hierarchical society that requires people to believe that their servitude is voluntary. It fits well with a work discipline that requires people to work long hours of boring, alienated labor. The fact that children are always sexually rejected by adults they love means that **they feel they never quite measure up.** They are eager to jump through hoops to prove their willingness to obey. This propensity is useful to any kind of boss.

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More than any other adults, pædophiles have an ability to break down the sexual repression of childhood. It is in their interest to awaken sexuality in children and to undermine the taboos that prevent children from expressing their sexuality. They are adults who will not uniformly reject the sexual approaches of children. The example of their relationships can help other children to see themselves as sexual beings, and to explore their own sexuality. Their example may help other adults to see that sexual desires for children are not some nightmare monster to be squashed, and allow these other adults to develop and understand their own sexual feelings for children.

In society as it is now, childhood is a period when your close affectionate relationships are all non-sexual, and when you are in fact barred from expressing affection in sexual ways. As well, early childhood is a period when you are particularly dependent on the care and affection of adults. What is stamped indelibly on one's mind is **the sense that sexuality is not a normal aspect of affectionate relationships.** Your mother and maybe, in some cases, your father give you your main source of affectionate emotional support. But this is not allowed to be experienced or expressed sexually. It seems likely that this makes it quite difficult to merge affection and sexuality in later adult relationships.

It would be a lot easier for adults to combine sexual interest and affection if these hadn't been so thoroughly separated in childhood. Pædophile relationships provide a way in which this can occur. *Pædophiles can be both loving and sexual in their relationships with children.* At present, I think children are much better off if they have these relationships with friends they choose, who are outside the family. If the family was effectively demolished, children would presumably relate to a number of caring adults. Their basic economic security would be vested in society at large, rather than being tied down to a particular set of people. In such a situation children might have lovers amongst the adults they knew in the same way that adults did, and children might experience the care that they need from a variety of sources. **It is my view that adults would be much better able to enjoy their sexuality if, as children, they had experienced both love and sex from a variety of caring adults.**

The modern asexuality of childhood is closely tied to the "Victorian" role for women, which developed at the same time in history. The view that women were innocent of sexual desire was part of the whole package which went with their role as the educators and guardians of a sexually innocent and greatly prolonged childhood. A mother's love for her children was definitely seen as asexual. The children were to be protected as much as possible from all manifestations of sexual desire. And women were supposed to be devoted, above all else, to their role as mothers. So it is not surprising that it came to be thought that women were also asexual, to an extent; and certainly should be as much as possible. They were supposed to be above sexual desire and devoted to their mothering role -- as if to some celibate religious order. **All this baggage is still around today.** The double standard by which men are expected to have sexual desires, and women are not, still exists.

The activities of pædophiles challenge some of the assumptions that underlie this double standard of sexual morality. If children can be sexual, and if this is OK, there is no reason why women have to spend their time policing the asexuality of childhood. So there is no special reason why mothers have to keep the lid on their own sexuality.

In modern society, childcare is a particularly heavy burden on women. There are a whole host of reasons for this. It is unpaid. All the work is placed on the shoulders of women in a certain age range. Men hardly do anything – and certainly few of the more burdensome aspects. Childcare is performed to a large extent in the nuclear family home, with all the isolation that this implies. Despite all this, women are urged to do this maternal work *out of a sense of duty and altruism*. Feminists aim to share with men the burdens of childcare more evenly and also to reduce these burdens, where possible.

Pædophiles show one way in which this can be done and, more generally, point to a different way of structuring relations with children. In the course of their sexual relationships with children and adolescents, pædophiles perform some of the same sort of work (of caring for children) that people normally see as part of the burdens of motherhood. Yet this work is not done out of an "altruistic sense of duty", but as an aspect of a relationship clearly entered into by the adult for their own reasons. In general, this suggests that relationships between children and adults *can* be based on mutual pleasure and interest. At present, the prolonged dependence of children on adults is used to create a sense of obligation in people. A childhood in which you are taken care of *as a duty*, and are perceived as a burden, must make people very uncertain of their rights to anything. Politically, this contributes to the general acceptance of self-denial that is fundamental to the capitalist work ethic. Pædophiles suggest a totally different kind of relationship between children and adults.

A lot of pædophile relationships of the voluntary kind are between boys and men and these are certainly the ones I know most about. These relationships can undermine the competitiveness that is considered normal in relations between men and can create an acceptance of the nurturing qualities in men's personalities.

Nancy Chodorow has argued that the aggressive and competitive aspects of male personality are related to the fact that in this and most other societies, women do most of the caring and nurturing of young children. Young children see adult men as somewhat distant and remote from everyday life and from emotional connections

with them. She argues that little boys, like little girls, originally identify emotionally with their mothers. At some stage they are brought to realize that they have to "become" men. Men are absent from their lives to a great extent and they are not present to be a daily model of adult practice. As a result, boys regard "becoming a man" as a difficult problem. It is difficult to know how to behave to "be" a man.

To the young boy, one thing is certain. Men are different from the women that they do know well. Men are a bit aloof. What boys come to believe is that they must reject women and all the qualities associated with women and their own relationship to women. St they reject the "feminine" qualities of nurturing, caring and so on. As well, they feel that to show they are really men, they must struggle with other men to prove their manhood. In competition with adult men, young men can prove that they have really made the grade. This psychological pattern is reflected in such widespread and common statements as "separating the men from the boys" and "it's no kindergarten".

Potentially, pædophiles can make a big dent in this cultural structure. Firstly, they are men who relate closely to children and give children *emotional support*. In this they are breaking down the separateness of children from adult males. They are also contradicting the male role when it says that men should not give emotional support. They provide an example to children of men who do give emotional support. Boys and adolescent males who are likely to feel that they have to compete with men to gain acceptance are given an experience of a non-competitive and supportive relationship with a man. My own experience and my reading about ped relationships makes me see this as a reality of the way boys develop within them: **they become more secure, less anxious to prove their maleness, more gentle, and more able to cope with adults.**

Lesbian pædophiles could have another sort of impact on the male power structure. Adrienne Rich argues that girls' experience, as children, of sensuous and emotional care from women could normally be expected to predispose women to lesbian relationships. This possibility is not allowed by men who want to prevent

solidarity between women and to preserve their own sexual access to women. Lesbian pædophiles make an obvious challenge to this.

A great many ped relationships, and probably most of the ones that are willingly entered into, are outside the family. The pædophile is basically a friend of the child. *This situation is an attack on the normal compartmentalization of emotional life within the nuclear family.* The pædophile forms an important emotional bond with the child that is separate from and, to a large degree, independent of the child's ties to the parents. The nuclear families that are so strongly emphasized in bourgeois culture actually fragment society into a host of competing units struggling against each other to get ahead. Pædophiles challenge these aspects of the nuclear family by forming affectional ties outside it.

Pædophile relationships can also be seen as challenging the power of fathers in families. When the pædophile has sexual relations with a child, this is a challenge to the power of fathers over their children's sexuality. There is a sense in which the children's sexuality is owned by the father. Clearly, there is a lot of father to daughter incest, most of which is unwillingly entered into by the daughters. In this case fathers are exercising their sexual ownership of their daughters directly. But as well as this, the socially approved situations in which fathers protect their daughters from sex is also a form of sexual ownership. This is most obviously revealed in the practice of fathers "giving away" their daughters in marriages. The idea behind this is that the father saves the daughter to give her away for some other man's exclusive use when she has grown up. The daughter's sexuality is most clearly owned in the sense that she has no rights to decide anything about it. With the son we may see the taboo on incest with the mother as a way in which the father protects his sexual property in his wife. *The father is too concerned with having power over the son as an ego extension to allow himself to become too emotionally close to his son.* On the other hand, he wouldn't want any other male to develop a relationship with his son that might jeopardize his control. Through the Oedipus complex the father conveys these messages to the son: that the boy's mother is the father's sexual property; that if he learns the lesson set by his father he will be rewarded with sexual access to women when he grows up. The son is being taught that the adult male's right to

sexual access is earned by proving, during an asexual childhood, that you have the stuff that men are made of. In this way, the enforced sexual abstinence of sons becomes a way for fathers to control their sons. Pædophiles from outside the family undermine all these processes.

The last point I want to make is a fairly general one. Many radicals are aware that childhood is historically constructed in specific ways and that *the current separation of childhood and adulthood is one of the bulwarks of the capitalist and patriarchal order of things*. In a whole lot of ways they attempt to treat children in ways that are similar to the ways they treat adults. They swear in front of children; they allow children to choose their own clothes. They are in favor of children having more of a share in deciding when they will go to bed or get up, and what they will eat. They are in favor of children sharing the housework when they can, and in that sense being expected to take on "adult" responsibilities. Although adults disagree about the extent to which one can go in implementing these changes, there is a general acceptance of the view that children should not be kept in a state of artificial isolation from adult life.

However, when it comes to the matter of sex, a sudden wall goes up. It may be fine to suggest that kids share in the washing up, but to suggest that they share in the sex raises hackles all around! We don't consider practicalities, but favor a total ban. What does this tell us? Firstly, that this is a very puritanical culture and we all treat sex very differently from anything else. But then secondly, to me, it is related to the way that the taboo on pædophilia is seen by society at large. It looms in the public mind as the very cornerstone and epitome of all the other ways in which children are separated from adults. It has a mythological power in people's consciousness that is much greater than its real importance, important though that may be. It is similar to the way the word "poofter" is used in this culture to refer to every kind of effeminacy in men. In the same way, the taboo on sex between children and adults is seen as the accepted sign of the irreducible differences between children and adults.

To me, it is this fact which makes it so hard for us to attack the taboo on pædophile sex. *It is much easier to tinker with other matters like washing up and bedtime*. Our reluctance to accept child-adult sex is like a drawing of this line

between children and adults that cannot be crossed. But in doing this we call into question some of the other things we are doing in our relations with children. It's like a statement that all these other changes are not to be taken too seriously. Children are still children, and the socially accepted "key sign" of this is kept in place. I tend to think kids see this in a similar way - why should we wash up when we are not really treated as adults in any important ways?

This paper has presented a number of reasons for supporting these pædophile relationships in which children are the *willing* participants, and in which the older partner is, *genuinely*, a lover of children. I have mentioned various benefits for the participants, and also looked at some ways in which pedophilia might be considered as part of a political resistance to patriarchal and capitalist society.

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