

Adult Sexual Orientation and Attraction to Underage Persons

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A random sample of 175 males convicted of sexual assault against children was screened with reference to their adult sexual orientation and the sex of their victims. The sample divided fairly evenly into two groups based on whether they were sexually fixated exclusively on children or had regressed from peer relationships. Female children were victimized nearly twice as often as male children. All regressed offenders, whether their victims were male or female children, were heterosexual in their adult orientation. There were no examples of regression to child victims among peer-oriented, homosexual males. The possibility emerges that homosexuality and homosexual pedophilia may be mutually exclusive and that the adult heterosexual male constitutes a greater risk to the underage child than does the adult homosexual male.

KEY WORDS: pedophile; homosexual; rape; sexual assault.

INTRODUCTION

In seeking his civil rights, the homosexually oriented individual is confronted with the accusation that he constitutes a particular risk to the physical and sexual safety of underage persons. Although there have been a number of studies published on the child molester (e.g., Mohr *et al.*, 1964; Gebhard *et al.*, 1965; Karpman, 1964), none has directly addressed this issue. In the course of our professional work we have had an opportunity to study men who have sexually assaulted children. Our aim here is to examine some of the psychosocial characteristics of the child offender with particular attention to the relationship between the offender's choice of victim in regard to sex and his adult sexual orientation.

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METHOD

According to Massachusetts law, anyone convicted of sexual assault may be referred to the Center for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Sexually Dangerous Persons in order to determine whether or not this individual's behavior

indicates a general lack of power to control his sexual impulses, as evidenced by repetitive or compulsive behavior and either violence, or aggression by an adult against a victim under the age of sixteen years, and who as a result is likely to attack or otherwise inflict injury on the object of his uncontrolled or uncontrollable desires. (*Mass. Gen. Laws*, Chap. 123A, Sect. 1)

During the years 1970-1975, 175 subjects were examined who had been convicted of sexual assaults against children. This group constitutes our sample. All these offenders were male, and in every case there was direct physical and sexual contact between offender and victim. We did not see any offenders who had *only* exposed themselves to children.

Our sample was initially subdivided into two groups on the basis of whether the offender's sexual involvement with a child represented a fixation or a regression in his sexual orientation in regard to age preference.

CLASSIFICATION

"Fixation" is defined as a temporary or permanent arrestment of psychological maturation resulting from unresolved formative issues which persist and underlie the organization of subsequent phases of development. A fixated offender has from adolescence been sexually attracted primarily or exclusively to significantly younger persons. Sexual involvement with peer-age or older persons, where this has occurred, has been situational in nature and has never replaced the primary sexual attraction to and preference for underage persons.

Clinical Example of a Fixated Offender. Scott is a 20-year-old, white, single male of average intelligence, serving a 2-year sentence for indecent assault. He entered a house where he found an 11-year-old boy asleep. He pulled the boy's pajamas off, fellated him, and ordered the boy to "blow" him. When the victim refused, Scott struck him and forced his penis into the boy's mouth. The victim's parents interrupted the assault. Scott has been attracted to young boys throughout his sexual development beginning at age 13 when he became sexually involved with a 6-year-old neighbor. He would kiss and fondle him, and the boy would masturbate Scott. During adolescence Scott "would run around making every kid in sight — anyone younger than I was. I'd talk them into it. I'd masturbate just looking at a kid or fondle them, play with their ass, kiss them, and blow them. It was mostly 'hit and run' — no deep attachments. I'd like them to suck on me or jerk me off, and I wanted them to like it too." Beginning at age 17, Scott earned a living as a male prostitute and as a model for pornographic

pictures. Although he engaged in sexual relations with adult males and, on a few occasions, with adult females, he found himself attracted only to young, pre-pubescent boys.

“Regression” is defined as a temporary or permanent appearance of primitive behavior after more mature forms of expression had been attained, regardless of whether the immature behavior was actually manifested earlier in the individual’s development. A regressed offender has not exhibited any predominant sexual attraction to significantly younger persons during his sexual development – if any such involvement did occur during adolescence, it was situational or experimental in nature. Instead, this individual’s sociosexual interests have focused on peer-age or adult persons primarily or exclusively.

Clinical Example of a Regressed Offender. Ted is a 29-year-old, white, divorced man serving a 1-year sentence for indecent assault. He offered a 10-year-old neighbor boy a ride, drove to a wooded area, and forced the boy to fellate him. He then gave the boy a dollar, offered to buy him some pizza, and drove him home. Ted’s earliest remembered sexual experience was that of mutual sexual play with his brother and sister around age 5. He began to masturbate at 15 while looking at pictures in magazines such as *Playboy*. He began dating at age 18 and first experienced intercourse at 20. He would engage in intercourse three or four times a month with various girls until, at 25, he met his future wife. They went together for a year before marriage and engaged in premarital sex. Ted’s wife had a 4-year-old son from a previous marriage and bore him a daughter a year after their marriage. He states that their marital and sexual adjustment was good for the first year, but that after the birth of their daughter his wife went to work nights, and “that’s when it all went downhill. She found somebody at work she liked better. I felt rotten.” Within a year Ted’s wife separated from him and his first sexual offense occurred.

Of the 175 subjects, 83 were classified as fixated offenders and 92 as regressed offenders. In addition, these two groups were further subdivided into three categories on the basis of the sex of their victims: those who chose female children, those who chose male children, and those who chose both. Descriptive data were collected in regard to the offender, his offense, and his victim through clinical interviews with these subjects together with a study of pertinent case material. These data are summarized in Table I. None of the subjects was psychotic or seriously retarded.

RESULTS

A number of observations can be made from these data:

1. The subgroups of fixated and regressed child molesters are approximately equal in size, with the average age for the fixated group (in their late 20s)

Table I. Comparison Between Fixated and Regressed Child Molesters

	Fixation				Regression			
	Female victim	Male victim	Female and male	Sum	Female victim	Male victim	Female and male	Sum
Offender								
Total sample (n = 175)	28 (16%)	35 (20%)	20 (11%)	83 (47%)	65 (37%)	15 (9%)	12 (7%)	92 (53%)
Age of offender								
Mean age	28 years	27 years	29 years		33 years	36 years	32 years	
Range	17-61	15-50	17-52		15-56	20-64	20-48	
Marital status								
Single	22 (13%)	33 (19%)	18 (10%)	73 (42%)	16 (9%)	6 (3%)	1 (1%)	23 (13%)
Married	6 (3%)	2 (1%)	2 (1%)	10 (6%)	49 (28%)	9 (5%)	11 (6%)	69 (39%)
Adult sexual orientation								
Heterosexual		Does not apply			62 (67%)	5 (5%)	3 (3%)	70 (76%)
Homosexual		Does not apply			0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Bisexual		Does not apply			3 (3%)	10 (11%)	9 (5%)	22 (24%)
Victim								
Age of victim								
Mean age	8 years	11 years	9 years		10 years	11 years	10 years	
Range	3-15	2-16	3-15		2-16	6-16	3-14	
Offense								
Offender-victim relationship								
Stranger	12 (7%)	12 (7%)	10 (6%)	34 (19%)	15 (9%)	6 (3%)	2 (1%)	23 (13%)
Acquaintance	7 (4%)	21 (12%)	7 (4%)	35 (20%)	12 (7%)	4 (2%)	4 (2%)	20 (11%)
Friend	6 (3%)	2 (1%)	3 (2%)	11 (6%)	17 (10%)	4 (2%)	4 (2%)	25 (14%)
Relative	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (2%)	21 (12%)	1 (1%)	2 (1%)	24 (14%)
Type of act								
Nonpenetration	16 (9%)	19 (11%)	10 (6%)	45 (26%)	31 (18%)	6 (3%)	3 (2%)	40 (23%)
Penetration	10 (6%)	13 (7%)	8 (5%)	31 (18%)	23 (13%)	6 (3%)	6 (3%)	35 (20%)
Both	2 (1%)	3 (2%)	2 (1%)	7 (4%)	11 (6%)	3 (2%)	2 (2%)	17 (9%)
Modus operandi								
Sexual-entitlement	7 (4%)	11 (6%)	7 (4%)	25 (14%)	20 (11%)	5 (3%)	3 (2%)	28 (16%)
Intimidation-threat	16 (9%)	13 (7%)	9 (5%)	38 (22%)	31 (18%)	7 (4%)	9 (5%)	47 (27%)
Force-attack	5 (3%)	11 (6%)	4 (2%)	20 (11%)	12 (7%)	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	15 (9%)

being slightly younger than that for the regressed group (in their middle 30s). The regressed group would necessarily have to be older since they would need to have achieved a sexual adjustment in adulthood prior to their regression.

2. Although, overall, a majority of offenders (67%) were known to their victims, the majority (83%) of the fixated offenders were either complete strangers or only casually acquainted with their victims, whereas the victims of the regressed offenders were equally distributed among relatives, close friends, casual acquaintances, and complete strangers. This might suggest that the sexual offense is premeditated by the fixated offender, who selects victims who are relative strangers in order to reduce the risk of identification and apprehension, whereas for the regressed offender the offense may be relatively more impulsive and opportunistic.

3. The most predominant method of engaging the victim in the sexual act, by both groups, was through intimidation or threat (49%). Typically, this involved either physically overpowering the victims or threatening to harm them if they resisted. The next most frequent approach was through seduction or enticement (30%), where the victims were bribed, tricked, or pressured into the sexual activity by means of rewards and/or adult authority. A smaller number (20%) of offenses were characterized by a brutal and violent attack on the victims in which the specific aim was to hurt or harm them.

4. The offenders in general appeared to be highly specific in regard to both the sex of the victim chosen and the type of act committed. The majority of offenders, both fixated and regressed, selected either female victims (53%) or male victims (29%) rather than both sexes (18%), and they engaged in sexual acts which either were confined to sexual play (49%) or involved sexual penetration (38%) rather than both (13%). This seems to imply that the sexual attraction to children has particular and specific psychological dynamics underlying it rather than being the result of either situational opportunity or an indiscriminate, unorganized, polymorphous sexual desire.

5. The victims for both groups were predominantly prepubertal children, with a mean age of 10 years. Although the operational definition for "child" is anyone 16 years of age or younger, the large majority of victims for both the fixated group (74%) and the regressed group (69%) were 12 or under. Within this range, male victims appeared to be slightly older on the average for both groups.

6. Female children ($n = 109$) were victims of sexual assault almost twice as often as male children ($n = 66$), but in comparison to the proportion of individuals in the general population who are attracted to persons of the opposite sex, the male child appeared to be overrepresented as a victim. There were more male victims (42%) than female victims (34%) in the fixated offender group, and more female victims (71%) than male victims (16%) in the regressed offender group. What this might suggest is that one of the dynamics underlying pedophilic behavior is an identification with the child. This would account for the overrepresentation of male victims since all the offenders are men.

7. The large majority (88%) of the fixated offenders never married, whereas the large majority (75%) of the regressed group did marry. This is consistent with our definition of the regressed offender as a person who establishes peer-age, sociosexual relationships. About half of the marriages ended in divorce or separation, which is consistent with current national trends. The few (12%) fixated offenders who did marry did so for other than sexual reasons and continued to prefer children sexually.

8. Those offenders who regressed to children from adult sexual relationships were, for the most part (76%), exclusively heterosexual in their life-style. There was a small group (24%) who were classified as bisexual, meaning that in their adult relationships they engaged in sex on occasion with men as well as with women. However, in no case did this attraction to men *exceed* their preference for women, and in every case the sex partners, male and female, were adults. There were no men who were primarily sexually attracted to other adult males found among the group of regressed child offenders.

DISCUSSION

The child offender is a relatively young adult either who has been sexually attracted to underage persons almost exclusively in his life or who turns to a child as the result of stresses in his adult sexual or marital relationships. Those offenders who are sexually attracted exclusively to children show a slight preference for boys over girls, yet these same individuals are uninterested in adult homosexual relationships. In fact, they frequently express a strong sexual aversion to adult males, reporting that what they find attractive about the immature boy are his feminine features and the absence of secondary sexual characteristics such as body hair and muscles.

Those offenders who established adult sexual relationships and turned to children for sexual gratification only when their adult relationships became stressful are predominantly heterosexually oriented. These child offenders select girls much more often than boys as victims.

In summary, based on a random sample of those convicted child offenders whom the Massachusetts courts deem a substantial risk to the community and adjudicate as dangerous, we find that female children are victimized almost twice as often as male children, and that those offenders who select male child victims either have always done that exclusively in their lives or have done so after regressing from adult sexual relationships with women. There were no peer-oriented homosexual males in our sample who regressed to children. Homosexuality and homosexual pedophilia are not synonymous. In fact, it may be that these two orientations are mutually exclusive, the reason being that the homosexual male is sexually attracted to masculine qualities whereas the heterosexual male is sexually attracted to feminine characteristics, and the sexually immature child's

qualities are more feminine than masculine. Although there may be some homosexual men who prefer effeminate male partners, the lack of legal bonds and responsibilities for sexual unions between men may more easily allow these persons to replace such sexual partners when relations become strained rather than regressing under such stress to children. In any case, in over 12 years of clinical experience working with child molesters, we have yet to see any example of a regression from an adult homosexual orientation. The child offender who is also attracted to and engaged in *adult* sexual relationships is heterosexual. It appears, therefore, that the adult heterosexual male constitutes a greater sexual risk to underage children than does the adult homosexual male.

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