

while remaining attentive to the fallibility and indeterminateness of any account of sexual life. The following account attempts to enact this charge insofar as it can apply to a general analysis of pedophilia.

Let us assume for the sake of argument that the position articulated by Foucault, Hocquenghem, Danet, and Rubin is grounded in a genuine concern to transform the conditions of sexual oppression in which children live. In the context of the United States where a brilliant surgeon general can be fired merely for mentioning masturbation and sex education in the same sentence, we should all share this concern. The question then becomes, What is the best way to enact this transformation?

In their view, the liberation of children's sexuality must necessarily include an end to the repression of consensual sexual relations between adults and children. This assumes that we can demarcate sexual relations based on physical violence and overt manipulation from sexual relations that are in some sense consented to by the children themselves. But this assumption is difficult to maintain. Verbal consent can be easily produced by background structural conditions such as economic and emotional dependence. When children are involved there is also a significant possibility of real confusion about how to describe the experience. Many adult survivors from childhood assaults recall that in the beginning they were not clear on what was happening to them or what the other person was doing; this further complicates consent. One man relates, "He showered me with gifts and attention. And he knew how to get both of us going. . . . I fought him at first. But he excited me. And soon I was hooked."<sup>20</sup> When such a seduction is practiced not on an adult but on a child, the effect is a manipulation that takes advantage of the child's susceptibility and confusion.

Consent can be produced in a variety of ways, from seductive manipulation to coercion. A woman writes:

Then one afternoon when I was just waking up from a nap, he sat next to me on the side of the bed. He put his big heavy fingers in my pants and began rubbing my clitoris. I had no idea what he was trying to do. He asked, yet sort of told me, "It feels good, doesn't it?" All I knew was I couldn't say no. I felt powerless to move. I said Yes. . . . He told me never to tell anyone. But I already knew I wouldn't say a word. My mother adored him,

idealized him, and I felt I needed to protect our image of our great Daddy.<sup>21</sup>

Consent alone can never serve as a sufficient means to ensure that the child or young person is safe.

I would agree with Foucault that a consensual/contractual model makes little sense when applied to sexual relations, no more than applied to love. This is not because desire does not admit of a yes or no expression, but because the nature of sexual expression is not an exchange or a trade, but (ideally) a mutual engagement. Desire is enacted and enhanced in the performance of sexual practices, and not simply lying there inert beforehand ready to be exchanged. The concept of consent is a sometimes useful abstraction that can help to clarify what happened and to articulate the presence or absence of coercion, but it has only a limited ability to capture the nature of sexual experience.

Furthermore, from a position of moral concern over the well-being of the participants in a sexual encounter, what one needs to know is not whether there was stated consent, but whether the actions performed represented the authentic desires of each participant. I fully acknowledge how problematic the concept of authenticity is, given the fact that neither desires nor selves are ontologically independent in the way the concept has historically implied, and yet it is the authenticity of the children's desires that is at stake here. A concern with the presence or absence of consent is derivative on this more basic consideration. If a child does express consent, we must still ask whether or not it is an "authentic" expression.

The concept of authenticity may imply that there is an essential sexual desire (or lack of desire), intrinsic to an individual prior to social interactions or cultural influence. Such an implication is highly dubious, but it is not a necessary part of any and all accounts of authenticity. The criticism of old accounts of authenticity is that they presume an essential self with essential desires and needs prior to the cultural, social, and discursive insertion of the individual; but this criticism is directed at concepts of essentialism, not authenticity. For example, a distinction between authentic and inauthentic forms of consent might be based not on a concept of the essential or the natural but on the particular configuration of the existent relationship among power, desire, and discourse in a given situation. Such a configuration as typically exists in

a psychiatric relationship, for example, suggests to many of us that the desire of the patient for her therapist (or vice versa) is in some sense problematic. The concept of authenticity captures this sense, by suggesting that without that configuration of power and discourse, the desire would not be the same. This argument presumes no essentialism.

Foucault's analysis suggests that desire must be analyzed in terms of its location with respect to power and discourse, and he implies, even on a critical reading, that there is no desire that is not "historically occasioned," to use Butler's words. The problem with the desire of the patient for her therapist is not that it is historically occasioned, but the kind of occasion that prompted it. Given this, the question we must ask is, What are the kinds of historical occasions that prompt desires between adults and children? This question calls for an exploration of the interconnections between adult-child sexual practices, discourse and power, or a genealogy of particular occasions of pedophilia.

It is obvious that children are disempowered relative to adults in both discursive and extradiscursive ways. Their discourse is subordinate and subjugated, and their actions are constrained within systems of possibility set out beforehand without their participation. This is not to say that they cannot resist or articulate new positions discordant with dominant regimes, but that they are positioned differently than adults and subject to more strenuous and invasive techniques of domination.

In every culture that exists children are dependent on adults for their very survival, though this dependence can vary in degree and form. Children are usually most dependent on the adults in their family or the adults who care for them but they are also dependent on the adults in their community generally. Their position vis-à-vis adults can therefore be characterized by its dependency, vulnerability, and relative powerlessness. This results not simply from the fact that children are usually smaller and physically weaker but because they are economically dependent on adults for their livelihood, and for a thousand other things like the quality of their education, the adjudication of their fights with other children, their sense of security and well-being, their hygiene, and their health. The very range of actions within which they may maneuver is set out for them, though children continually contest this range, sometimes successfully. Their relationship with adults is not reciprocal, mutually interdependent, or equal: children have a vastly reduced ability to get away or fight back, to talk or argue back, and to maintain their sense of self against adult mediation. Most children are not complete victims of

adult power, but neither is their power equal to ours, either individually or collectively. As one survivor wrote, "a victim doesn't know he has a choice. That's the problem. If nobody else knows what's going on, then we don't know what to do."<sup>22</sup>

Some have argued that all of the above is correct but remediable. For example, Jamie Gough uses a Marxist analysis of oppression to suggest that children's subordination is socially constructed, and therefore the solution should be empowerment rather than paternalism.<sup>23</sup> It is true that the position of children is analogous in important respects to the position of slaves, insofar as both are disempowered, vulnerable, and dependent with respect to the adult or master. Would Rubin or Foucault countenance a view that masters can have sex with their slaves when the slaves "truly" desire it? Does the notion of a slave's authentic desire for sex with her master make any sense or have any credibility? If we are against sexual relations coerced through manipulation, the structural features of a master-slave relationship calls into question any assertion of desire for the master on the part of the slave, since such an expression may be too easily overdetermined by her position of dependence, either economic or psychological dependence or both in combination. Gough is certainly right that the solution to this situation is to eradicate the position of the slave through eradicating slavery, but here is where slavery and childhood are disanalogous. The institution of childhood can be radically altered, and children can become significantly more empowered than at present, but the vulnerability, dependency, and relative powerlessness of children vis-à-vis adults cannot ever be completely eradicated.<sup>24</sup>

Despite this, the analogy Gough suggests between children and other oppressed groups remains instructive. For example, the laws and social structures designed (purportedly) to protect women from violation have resulted in an increase in women's vulnerability. Those women who were "protected" from the dangerous public sphere of waged work were left more vulnerable to male violence in the home, without an effective escape route. Such "protections" of children have often had similar results. The lesson here is that children's rights must be extended, not curtailed, and they must have access to power outside the scope of their family or immediate caregivers.

The issue of power is precisely, though oddly, what Foucault leaves out of his analysis. When he speaks of "precocious little girls" he is blind to the way in which young girls who are often subject to multiple forms

of domination based on their class, race, and gender have very few avenues by which to get their basic needs met. Sexual behavior is a common avenue that the dominant structures which favor adult men provide for girls and sometimes for boys as well. The "seductive," coy, or coquettish behavior of young girls must be analyzed in the context of a system of differential power relations and domination. When we leave the constitutive role of power aside we end up with the version of liberal or libertarian pluralism Rubin adopts, where sexual practices are treated under a descriptive model like a natural variety of plant species.

Power, as Foucault helped us to see, is not only often linked to discourse; it is constitutive of discourse. When adults interpret children's behavior, verbal or otherwise, as expressions of desire to have sex with them, the adults are assimilating that behavior within an economy of meaning to which it may very well not conform. They are interpreting the children within an economy based on sameness, incorporating the child's expressions within a system of meaning based on the adult's. Grubman-Black puts this point as follows:

We were children whose rights and needs were denied. We were required to meet someone else's definition of us and of him. We were unable to escape the dream that was not of our making or choice. Whatever we sought, for whatever reason, we were met with one fixated response. I needed to be held and hugged, not fondled or aroused. We needed companionship and guidance, not sexual initiation. For many of us, there was emptiness in our lives. The offender chose to fill his own emptiness, his own needs, leaving us to feel even more barren.<sup>25</sup>

Grubman-Black describes a scenario too many of us can remember and identify with: a situation in which a child's entreaty is met with a kind of misresponse from an adult. The child wants and needs one thing, perhaps affection, attention, closeness, warmth, love, companionship, guidance, or affirmation, and the adult responds with his or her own agenda involving genital stimulation and erotic desire. Such missed communications may of course result from willful ignorance and manipulation on the adult's part, but they are also exacerbated by the disparate economies of meaning between the discursive and gestural practices of children and adults.

My claim is not that the world of children and the world of adults is

absolutely incommensurable. It is not necessary to claim that children and adults can never communicate with each other in order to argue that every communicative interaction between them is mediated by the vulnerability, dependence, and relative powerlessness of children. My point is that the adult interpretation of children's behavior and expressions will always be structured by this ubiquitous inequality, and given the intrinsic connections among meaning, power, and truth, the discourse of children will always be distinct in significant ways from the discourse of adults, structured as it is around a different set of relationships.

Linguistic styles and practices emerge out of lived realities, which are themselves structured and filtered through language. But significantly different lived realities will correspond to significant differences in the metaphysics and epistemologies embedded in language; that is, the ontological assumptions and patterns of discursive authorization operative in a language. Who gets to speak, who will be accorded authority or at least presumption in their favor, what it is possible to express and what ontological objects (such as "desire") it is possible to entertain will all vary between such linguistic practices as exist among, say, Western scientists, gay Latinos, or lower-class children. These group demarcations can be drawn in multiple ways, as discrete, as overlapping, through the criss-crossing grids that can exist within the complexity of group exchange and relations in multivocal and multilayered societies. But substantive epistemic and semantic demarcations persist among adults, youth, and children. Adults who interpret children's behavior and linguistic practices as "consent" are imposing their own usage of "consent" across a linguistic border over which meanings can change drastically. Children certainly have the ability to consent to any number of things, but the meaning of that consent may shift in important respects when it is transported from an adult's to a child's context. We can use Foucault's expanded conception of a discourse, as embodying both meanings and ontological commitments as well as practices to identify the existence of a different discourse between adults and children, not incommensurable discourses but organized around a different set of strategic rules. Once we follow Foucault in acknowledging the relationship between power and discourse, we must also acknowledge that a significant difference in one's positioning with respect to dominant structures of power will result in a significant difference in the strategic rules by which discursive moves can be made.

When we incorporate the discourse of children with our own, and translate their desires within an economy of adult sexuality characterized by genital, orgasmic sex, we are exerting our force once again to eradicate any possible difference that may be there. The only way to avoid this is to leave children alone sexually, and thus allow the development and maintenance of their own sexual differences, either with themselves or with each other.

The possibility remains that children sometimes authentically consent to sex with adults, and this possibility is real, not merely logical or technical. Indeed, the male survivor literature often includes some accounts of pleasure. In my own experience of support groups, I remember one woman who said that she enjoyed her sexual relationship with her older brother. The simple infrequency of such narratives should not cause us to deny their validity and might in fact be the result of the current discursive prohibition against such statements. There are also victims of childhood sexual abuse that appear to be asymptomatic of traumatic aftereffects. This apparent absence of trauma is a difficult issue for those of us who are symptomatic survivors to face.

The existence of asymptomatic victims (whose status as "victims" is obviously problematic here) is insufficient to establish that adult-child sex is nonharming. There might be any number of alternative explanations before we confirm this hasty conclusion. For example, we need to look carefully at the widely variable context of sexual abuse, from sustained activity with a family member to a brief incident with a stranger. The type and degree of sexual interaction is relevant, as are the relations between those involved, the child's prior state of self-esteem, the general context of her security and well-being, her ability to be heard and believed about the incident soon afterward, her age, and so forth. In some cases negative aftereffects are immediate but responded to so effectively that they quickly diminish. Or the child herself is strong and secure enough to incorporate the event without being traumatized by it. Sexual experiences that children have with adults are so variable that the existence of some asymptomatic adult survivors in and of itself does not disconfirm the general harm of adult-child sex unless we were to find out more information about the patterns and contexts of symptomatic responses.

The issue of stated consent or felt pleasure needs to be assessed separately. There are several different ways one might understand such reports: (1) on the Freudian model, that the child is enacting an

authentic desire of its own for a parent or parent figure; (2) that such stories indicate the possibility that adult-child sex is innocuous, and it is only the feminist or psychological literature that influences adults to reconstruct their experiences as damaging, painful, and coercive (in which case the narratives I have drawn from will be held invalid); (3) that no analytic model can account for all cases, and these are the exceptions to the rule; (4) that such accounts represent a kind of false consciousness where the survivor is still participating in the common tendency among children to protect the adult and rationalize his or her behavior. Taking (1), (2), or (4) as the full story strikes me as too simplistic, each assuming a monolithic analysis. The problem with (3) is that, while not assuming a monolithic analysis, it offers no explanation of the variability. And none of these options address the issue that desire and pleasure can be structurally and discursively constituted.

An alternative option would be one that allowed for variability in lived experience, but that also maintained that pleasure and damage can coexist in a single event. Children often "authentically" ask for things which would harm them if they got them. A desire for  $x$  does not make it harmless. This is not to say that the question of children's authentic desires is no longer relevant, but that it must be supplemented by an exploration of the issue of harm. In the narratives contained in *Broken Boys/Mending Men*, for example, the instances where pleasure and desire on the part of the boy are reported present seem to in no way mitigate against the trauma and harm that resulted. "It felt good," and yet the negative aftereffects make a long list: fear of trusting anyone, feeling like everyone who expresses concern ultimately wants only sex, self-destructiveness, self-loathing, shame, humiliation, fear of abandonment, and a host of pathological emotional and psychic disorders.<sup>26</sup>

Foucault argued that codes of morality comprise forms of subjectivation; I would argue the same for sexual practices. Sexual practices are self-constituting; that is, they affect the constitution of psychic life, the imaginary construction of one's self, and the structure of internal experience. A child's sexual practices with an adult will have an effect on that child's psychic structuring and subjectivity. All such constituting effects occur within specific discursive contexts, and for this reason some might claim that the harm of adult-child sex results from a disapproving social context rather than the event itself. But this claim is implausible if only because of the phenomenology of sex itself, which involves uniquely sensitive, vulnerable, and psychically important areas of the

body, a fact that persists across cultural differences. Thus sexual experiences have the capacity to impart crucial meanings concerning one's body and, therefore, one's self. This capacity does not establish that sexual acts have uniform meanings, but that they have in any case significant subject-constituting meanings rather than an absence of meaning. It is not social context alone that makes sexual acts significant, but social context in relation to the phenomenology-of-embodiment.

Moreover, sexual practices are profoundly intersubjective and relational, and impart meanings also about the limits and possibilities of one's relationship to others. (Given the role of fantasy in masturbation, even it can be seen as intersubjective, though of course one cannot harm others in an act of private masturbation.) NAMBLA argues (similarly to Rubin) that the state is motivated to repress sexuality because sex represents the ultimate individualism, and thus a kind of inherent resistance to state control.<sup>27</sup> But this argument betrays NAMBLA's own belief that sexual practices are fundamentally a sphere of the individual rather than the social. I believe the truth is exactly the reverse: the fact that sexual practices are intersubjective rather than individual suggests that the intersubjective and relational aspects of sexual practices can never be set aside in one's analysis.

In my own case a relatively brief series of assaults at a young age led to fairly fundamental alterations in my sense of self, my construction of intersubjective relations, and my experience of embodiment. I had many of the negative feelings discussed above, including a deep sense of shame (despite the fact that, in my case, there was no semblance of consent). It was terrifying to be dragged about against my will, to have my body poked and prodded and used for purposes I only dimly perceived, to have my screams and pleas ignored, and to have all this done to me with impunity. This gave me a profound message about my status as a social subject in the community. If I could be harmed to this degree with no one seeming to care, I thought it must be because I deserved it. Thus I came away from this experience with a self-image of worthlessness that I have struggled with ever since.

Such a narrative as I just gave is, of course, a reconstruction. At the time of the events, I remember clearly feeling only terror, pain, confusion, and a kind of shock. My grades went from A's to D's, I became withdrawn, and I cried so incessantly that my parents thought I had started puberty (at nine!). My current understanding of both the events and their full effect on me was produced through therapy, feminist

consciousness, talking with others who had had similar experiences, and a number of other experiences and readings. Such processes of reconstructing and reassessing events is an inevitable part of any childhood traumatic experience (indeed, of any childhood). One alters one's understanding of events on the basis of the enlarged discursive domain one develops and on the basis of a constantly changing self. The point is not to suspect all such reconstructions as fictional overlays, nor to posit a pre-discursive, pre-theoretical experience that can be simply discovered once and for all when one is an adult. Experience is always reconstructed in memory, and memories are not pure representations, but we can make evaluative distinctions between better and worse reconstructions.

What I resist is the notion that it is possible to "interpret away" sexual trauma. Psychic harm is not a spiritual substance that can remain locked away as if in Descartes's pineal gland. If it exists, it makes itself manifest, though of course the "signs" of such manifestation will themselves require interpretation, admittedly a fallible and difficult enterprise. One man writes, "It took me years before I realized that I had been lied to, manipulated, and taken advantage of. . . . I avoided most people, had no friends, and I was a mess."<sup>28</sup> Such phenomenological descriptions belie the claim that trauma is produced after the fact. It is certainly possible for reconstructed narratives to be adversely influenced by dubitable theories or even political motivations. But we cannot reduce this possibility by denying that reconstructions are an inevitable part of all childhood memories. A better approach would be to explore the ties between institutional discourses of knowledge and power, using Foucault's critique as a starting place.

For all the reasons given above, I believe that the dangers of adult-child sex are significant enough to warrant a general prohibition. I realize that my position might be seen to validate an undesirable maternalism (or paternalism, but I will use the feminine form since there seems to be no neutral equivalent) that would reinforce the powerlessness of children. The concern here is that, if we do not allow for children's authentic consent to sex with adults, and always interpret children as not "truly" or "authentically" desiring to have sex with adults, perhaps we are silencing them once again, and restricting their desires. But we must disentangle a repudiation of sex between adults and children with a repudiation of children's sexuality. These have usually been linked. "Unnatural" sexual relations between children have often been theorized

as the result of sexual relations with adults, and therefore the former were condemned as deviations caused by adult violation. Although this may be the case some of the time, it is clearly not the case that all sexual relations between children (even genital ones) are a deviation brought on by adults. Separating these issues will help to avoid an unnecessarily restrictive maternalism that would police and repress all sexual practices by children. I would argue that the latter would not be a true maternalism but rather, as Foucault suggests, a domination of children aligned with pleasure—the pleasure of observing their sexual actions and forcing their confessions—and the regulation of children as a population of docile, manipulable bodies. The intervention into children's own sexual behavior should be restricted to violent or coercive behavior or sexual relations between children from disparate ages, in which case a power differential exists analogous to the one between adults and children.

M(p)aternalism is a relationship between unequals, and so is often rejected by feminists and anticolonialists on the grounds that maternalistic support can never bring about or instantiate relations of equality or freedom. I agree with that analysis. But relations between adults and children can never achieve complete equality and freedom, and children require care from adults in order to survive and flourish. It is a self-serving illusion for adults to believe that we can completely avoid maternalistic relations toward children or renounce the responsibility that all adults have toward all children.

It might be objected that if we dismiss our ability to interpret accurately the linguistic utterances of children we will restrict their ability to have any input into our behavior toward them. I would agree that such a result is highly undesirable, and despite the arguments I made above, I would disagree with the view that our languages are so different that any communication is unreliable. And yet when the risks are exceedingly high, as in the case of sexual abuse given the depth and longevity of its traumatic aftereffects, and when the possible gains are almost inversely low, surely the best course of action is to hedge our bets and prevent the possibility of such aftereffects from occurring.

The problem of adult sexual relations with children is not a problem of the "violation of innocence." This is one of the most prevalent traditional reasons given, and it is linked to the notion that the rape of a virgin is somehow worse than the rape of women who are not virgins, so that the rape of prostitutes and of married women by their husbands is not accorded the seriousness of the rape of "innocents." Historically,

the concern with sexual "innocents" was a result of the commodification of virgins: once raped, they stood to lose substantial market value as marriageable property. The rape of women already deflowered was therefore of less importance because it would not alter their market value.

The argument that adult-child sexual relations are wrong because children are "innocent" is also mistaken for at least two reasons. First, it puts a presumption of value on the absence of sexual experience over its presence, such that "innocence" should be maintained as long as possible because it is inherently desirable. Such a presumption is surely false, and makes sense only when one has a negative orientation toward sexual experience generally, as for example, in Christian dogma. Moreover, the argument assumes, and mandates, that children are properly asexual. This is again patently false, and in that sense children are not innocent. Children have a variety of sexual feelings and some act on them in various ways. Therefore, the reason for opposing adult-child sex should not be the innocence of children. It is that logic which leads to the practice of asking rape victims about their sexual past, of taking the rape of sexually active persons less seriously, and of judging sexually active or knowledgeable children as "bad" and therefore necessarily complicit in their violation.

But to the extent that the concern with "innocence" includes a concern with those who are especially vulnerable, there is a kernel of truth here. Children are not innocent of sexuality, though their sexuality may significantly diverge from adult manifestations. But children are more vulnerable, whether or not they have acted out sexual feelings and desires. Children are still in the process of forming their sense of themselves, of sexuality, and of embodied relations with others. This process never stops completely, but it is more significant and dramatic during childhood, with more long-lasting effects. Because children have less experience, they are more flexible and suggestive to mediations that would construct their subjectivities. It is easier to "season" a young girl and turn her into a prostitute than an older woman. Therefore, when children are raped and violated, it is likely that such an experience will more deeply and profoundly affect their sense of their self, their worth, their future possibilities, their relations with others, and their sexuality. This has nothing to do with their innocence of sexuality; it results from the fact that they are more actively and intensely engaged in self-creation and world-interpretation than adults, and that their developing

account of themselves and their world is more open, fluid, and flexible, since it has enjoyed fewer repetitions and developed less into a practiced habit of belief.

Some might object to the line of reasoning presented here on the grounds that, if this argument stands that power differentials adversely affect the possibility of "authentic" consent, then a lot of adult-adult sex should not be engaged in either, such as student-teacher, husband-housewife, employer-employee, and so on. I would agree: all such sex is extremely dangerous, though we can note that in adult-adult situations in many cases, the subordinate adult will still have more options to fight back and get away than a child would.

Michael Alhonte has written an interesting essay, as an eighteen-year-old "boy" in a man-boy relationship who began his involvement with men at the age of thirteen, defending his legal right to man-boy love.<sup>29</sup> He argues instructively against an ageism that stereotypes both boys and men and works against perceiving individual differences. But his article spends most of its time criticizing problems in man-boy relationships. He talks about the problems of inequality, the "unpleasant imbalance" caused by finances, and says that boys in such relationships come to feel embarrassed and irritated by their own maturation processes, which diminish the source of their attractiveness to men. He points out that in most of these relationships the boy is expected to play a submissive role. And he offers a rather negative portrait of "the problem of objectification":

Too many men adore boys as abstract sexual beings, but refuse (or are unable) to deal with them as people. If they do pretend to show interest in what a boy has to say after sex, it is usually in a patronizing, superior manner; often it is punctuated with degrading estimations of the boy's sexual value—as if this were the only level on which a boy can be valuable—perhaps intended as sincere compliments but more likely to be the only statements the man can honestly make, since he is not bothered in the slightest to get to know something about the boy. (158)

He also argues that a desire based solely on youth is damaging:

one must never allow the desire for youthfulness to obstruct the avenues for growth and self-expression in a relationship. To

identify the factor that enchants a man with a boy as merely the boy's youth is to ageistically negate the whole range of positive traits that the boy has. (159)

He says that the result of such attractions based solely on youth is to keep the relationship from evolving as the boy matures and even to stagnate the boy's metamorphosis into an adult in order to retain the basis of desire. In the cases Alhonte discusses, the youth in the relationship is not a child and is hardly powerless. Such cases might seem to be best-case scenarios, least likely to inflict psychic damage on the youths involved. Perhaps the damage is small in some instances, but Alhonte's descriptions actually support many of my concerns.

I have tried to show that the problem with the "excess of significance" view is that it assumes a more primordial sexual experience below the discursive overlay of power/knowledges, and it assumes that at this deeper level sex is light, inconsequential, relatively trivial. But sexual practices, like codes of morality, comprise forms of subjectivation: that is, they are self-constituting. A normative account of sexual practices such as pedophilia could begin here, not with an attempt, like Rubin's, to disinvest pleasure from power (a hopeless project), but with an analysis of the modes of subjectivation produced by various configurations of pleasure, power, and discourse.

In the first blush of the second wave of feminism, there was a period in which it was very important to begin to envision the contours of a future nonsexist society, to create a new imaginary possibility for women. During this period, feminist theorists such as Andrea Dworkin, Shulamith Firestone, and Kate Millett envisioned a future utopia in which children would be empowered enough to choose who they lived with, what kind of lives they would lead, and to engage in sexual relations with each other as well as with adults and family members. These works were written from an impulse toward envisioning a better future for children. But it is not transformative to posit a future where children have sex with adults: this is our uninterrupted past and present. A truly transformative future would be one in which children could be, for the first time, free from the economy of adult sexual desire and adult sexual demands. Only this future will be truly new and unknown, and the sexuality of children that emerges from it, and that we indeed have no way to predict, will be determined then and only then by children themselves.

1. I thank Raja Halwani, Joy Rouse, Margaret Himley, Robert Praeger, Steven Seidman, Tom Wartenburg, Linda Nicholson, Laura Gray, and Ingeborg Majer O'Sickey for their helpful criticisms and comments on this paper.
2. Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 279.
3. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 31–32.
4. The first title appeared in *Recherches 37* (April 1979): 69–82; the second, in Michel Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977–1984*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Alan Sheridan et al. (New York: Routledge, 1988), 271–85. Subsequent references will be to the second text, cited as PPC.
5. PPC, 278. Perhaps one of the working assumptions here is that discourses of sexuality must always or necessarily end up constituting figures of identity; for example, the "pedophile," the "homosexual." But consider the efforts of (some of the) safer-sex discourses to resist such identity-talk in favor of practices-talk: for example, "anal sex" rather than "the gay male."
6. Foucault, *An Introduction*, 31–32.
7. Foucault refers to "preocious little girls" on page 40.
8. Judith P. Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 218.
9. *Ibid.*, 228 (emphases in original).
10. Here is an issue where I find her reading of Foucault implausible: she interprets the right-wing crusade as simply anti-sex, whereas Foucault would surely say, at the very least, that a more complicated relationship between desire and rightist discourses exists than one characterized by a flat negation.
11. See, for example the justifications of patriarchy used by Rousseau in Linda Bell, *Visions of Women* (Clifton, N.J.: Humana, 1983), esp. 196. Here he tells us, "the husband ought to be able to superintend his wife's conduct, because it is of importance to him to be assured that the children, whom he is obliged to acknowledge and maintain, belong to no one but himself."
12. Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths, and Modern Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1985), 228.
13. Ellen Bass and Louise Thornton, eds., *I Never Told Anyone: Writings by Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), 30–31.
14. Eric Presland, "Whose Power? Whose Consent?" in *The Age Taboo: Gay Male Sexuality, Power, and Consent*, ed. Daniel Tsang (London and Boston: Gay Men's Press and Alyson Publications, 1981), 75.
15. Florence Rush, *The Best-Kept Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), 173.
16. Do adult women practice pedophilia and pederasty? Yes, certainly. To the same degree as adult men? It is doubtful. Jamie Gough suggests that the general denial of women's sexuality accounts for the fact that women are rarely considered capable of pedophilia. It could also be that women's sexuality is different or has developed differently from men's; it certainly has been treated differently by societies. See Gough, "Childhood Sexuality and Pedophilia," in *The Age Taboo: Gay Male Sexuality, Power, and Consent*, ed. Daniel Tsang (London and Boston: Gay Men's Press and Alyson Publications, 1981), 67.
17. See Tom Reeves, "Loving Boys," in *The Age Taboo: Gay Male Sexuality, Power, and Consent*, 25–37.

18. Pat Califia, "Man/Boy Love and the Lesbian/Gay Movement," in *The Age Taboo: Gay Male Sexuality, Power, and Consent*, 138.

19. An impressive exception is Steven Seidman's *Embattled Eros: Sexual Politics and Ethics in Contemporary America* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

20. Stephen D. Grubman-Black, *Broken Boys/Mending Men: Recovery from Childhood Sexual Abuse* (Blue Ridge Summit, Pa.: Tab Books, 1990), 25.

21. Bass and Thornton, *I Never Told Anyone*, 180–81.

22. Grubman-Black, *Broken Boys/Mending Men*, 92.

23. Gough, "Childhood Sexuality and Pedophilia," 65–71.

24. I make this case for classes, not for every individual. Consider the child of a slaveowning plantation master vis-à-vis an adult slave. Even though power in this case may reside more with the child, she or he is still developmentally unequal.

25. Grubman-Black, *Broken Boys/Mending Men*, 15–16.

26. See Grubman-Black, *Broken Boys/Mending Men*.

27. NAMBLA, "The Case for Abolishing the Age of Consent Laws," in *The Age Taboo: Gay Male Sexuality, Power, and Consent*, esp. 95.

28. Grubman-Black, *Broken Boys/Mending Men*, 90.

29. Michael Alhonte, "Confronting Ageism," in *The Age Taboo: Gay Male Sexuality, Power, and Consent*, 156–60.



---

# Dangerous Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Pedophilia

Linda Martín Alcoff

The use of the word ["sexuality"] was established in connection with other phenomena: the development of diverse fields of knowledge . . . ; the establishment of a set of rules and norms . . . ; and changes in the way individuals were led to assign meaning and value to their conduct, their duties, their pleasures, their feelings and sensations, their dreams.

—Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*

In a post-Foucauldian academic world, most of the traditional theoretical grounds for evaluating sexual practices are no longer viable. If we accept Foucault's account of the discursive constitution of sexuality, his counterargument to the thesis that "sex constitutes our innermost truth," and his reconfiguration of the relationship between domination and discourse, then we are forced to question many standard theoretical and methodological approaches to the study and evaluation of the politics of sexual practices.<sup>1</sup> Foucault argues compellingly against the assumption that bringing sexual activity into discourse and studying it "scientifically" will stay the hand of prejudice and liberate sexual desire. He argues against any general presumption about the liberatory nature of discourse and the law, or the belief that theoretical and legal