

The truth about child sexual abuse and homosexuality

Anti-gay organizations and leaders falsely claim that gay people, particularly gay men, are more likely to abuse children. They posit an intrinsic link between homosexuality and pedophilia. In the early years of the gay rights movement, we saw this with Anita Bryant's "Save Our Children" campaign in Miami in 1977, which portrayed Miami-Dade County's sexual orientation nondiscrimination law as a threat to children. In 1978 Californians voted on whether or not to ban gay men and lesbians from teaching in the state's schools. Today we see it when politicians compare homosexuality to "man on dog, man on child" sex.¹

The false view that gay people pose an inherent or disproportionate threat to children persists in the highest decision-making circles of the government. During the March 2003 Supreme Court hearing on a challenge to the Texas sodomy law, Chief Justice William Rehnquist asked whether an equal protection finding would require municipalities to hire gay people as kindergarten teachers, as if gays are an intrinsic threat to five-year-olds. Justice Antonin Scalia mentioned this in his scathing dissent in *Lawrence v. Texas*, joined by Rehnquist, when he claimed that many Americans do not want homosexuals to be "scoutmasters for their children" or "teachers in their children's schools."

Distorting data

Anti-gay groups distort statistics to back up their claim that there is an intrinsic link between homosexuality and pedophilia. The Family Research Council (FRC) notes that "almost all child sexual abuse is committed by men" and claims that "less than three percent of American men identify themselves as homosexual; yet nearly a third of all cases of child sexual abuse are homosexual in nature (that is, they involve men molesting boys). This is a rate of homosexual child abuse about ten times higher than one would expect based on the first two facts." This is evidence, FRC claims, that "homosexuality is a significant risk factor for this horrible crime."² FRC's Web site promotes a number of reports portraying homosexuality as fundamentally connected to child sexual abuse and as a threat to children.³

The Traditional Values Coalition (TVC) claims that "since homosexual couples can't reproduce, they will simply go after *your* children for seduction and conversion to homosexuality [...] As homosexuals continue to make inroads into public schools, more

¹ Associated Press. (23 April 2003). Sen. Rick Santorum's comments on homosexuality in an AP interview.

² Sprigg, P. (2003). Question and answer: What's wrong with letting same-sex couples "marry"? *Family Research Council in Focus*. Issue No. 256.

³ These include "Homosexuality and child sexual abuse" and "Homosexual parenting: Placing children at risk." Ibid. Other reports include *Dark obsession: The tragedy and threat of the homosexual lifestyle* and "The negative health effects of homosexuality." All of these reports are authored by Dr. Timothy Dailey.

children will be molested and indoctrinated into the world of homosexuality. Many of them will die in that world.”⁴

What the social science research has found

In fact, any alleged link between pedophilia and homosexuality is completely unfounded. A 1998 article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* notes one study that found that 90 percent of pedophiles are men and that 98 percent of these individuals are heterosexual.⁵ Michael Stevenson, Ph.D., a psychologist at Ball State University, explains this statistic by noting that “gay men desire consensual sexual relations with other adult men. Pedophiles are usually adult men who are sexually attracted to pre-pubescent children. They are rarely sexually attracted to other adults.”⁶ Stevenson also observes that cases of pedophilia by adult lesbians are “almost non-existent.”⁷

About four in five cases of child sexual abuse reported to child protection authorities involve a girl who has been abused. But because sexual abuse of boys is less likely to be reported, it is estimated that one-quarter to one-third of all sexually abused children are boys, while two-thirds to three-quarters are girls.⁸ Because most child molesters (90 percent) are men, anti-gay organizations such as FRC have argued that “homosexual” child abuse is widespread and that homosexuals abuse children at a rate higher than their proportion of the population, which is somewhere around three to seven percent of the population. Such claims are based on the false belief that men who sexually abuse boys are homosexual. In fact, peer-reviewed research has consistently found that the overwhelming majority of men who sexually abuse children live their lives as heterosexual men.

For example, two peer-reviewed studies of convicted child molesters, published in *Pediatrics* and *Archives of Sexual Behavior* respectively, found that less than one percent in one study and zero percent in the other were lesbian or gay.

The first involved a review of 352 medical records of children evaluated for sexual abuse during a 12-month period at a Denver children’s hospital. It found that less than one percent had been abused by a gay man or a lesbian. Of 269 adult perpetrators of child abuse identified among the 352 cases of abuse, only two were gay or lesbian. The vast majority of the children in the study (82 percent) “were suspected of being abused by a man or a woman who was, or had been, in a heterosexual relationship with a relative of

⁴ Sheldon, L. (nd). Homosexuals recruit public school children. Activists use issues of “safety,” “tolerance,” and “homophobia” as tactics to promote homosexuality in our nation’s schools. *Traditional Values Special Report*. 18(11).

⁵ Holmes, W.C. and Slap, G.B. (1998). Sexual abuse of boys: Definition, prevalence, correlates, sequelae and management. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 280 (21): 1855-1862.

⁶ Stevenson, Michael R. (2000). Public Policy, Homosexuality and the Sexual Coercion of Children. *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*. 12(4): 8.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Finkelhor, D. (1994). Current information on the scope and nature of child sexual abuse. *The Future of Children: Sexual Abuse of Children*, 4(2), 31-53. See also: Stevenson, M. R. (2000). Public policy, homosexuality, and the sexual coercion of children. *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*, 12(4), 1-19.

the child.” Lastly, the review concluded that in this sample, “a child’s risk of being molested by his or her relative’s heterosexual partner is over 100 times greater than [the risk of being molested] by someone who might be identifiable as being homosexual, lesbian, or bisexual.”⁹

In the other study of convicted male child molesters in Massachusetts, none of the 175 men were found to be exclusively or primarily attracted to other adult men.¹⁰

Conclusion

Child sexual abuse is not caused by, nor is it intrinsically linked to, homosexuality. The peer-reviewed social science research on this topic shows that gay men and lesbians are not more likely than heterosexuals to engage in child sexual abuse. In fact, they may be less likely. Activists and politicians who say otherwise are simply appealing to ignorance and fear to mobilize anti-gay bias for political gain.

About the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force:

The mission of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force is to build the political power of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community from the ground up. We do this by training activists, organizing broad-based campaigns to defeat anti-LGBT referenda and advance pro-LGBT legislation, and building the organizational capacity of our movement. Our Policy Institute, the movement’s premier think tank, provides research and policy analysis to support the struggle for complete equality and to counter right-wing lies. As part of a broader social justice movement, we work to create a nation that respects the diversity of human expression and identity and creates opportunity for all. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., we also have offices in New York City, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis and Cambridge. Our Web site is www.theTaskForce.org.

⁹ Jenny, C., & Roesler, T. A. (1994). Are children at risk for sexual abuse by homosexuals? *Pediatrics*, 94(1), 44.

¹⁰ Groth, A. N., & Birnbaum, H. J. (1978). Adult sexual orientation and attraction to underage persons. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 7(3), 175–181.