The child

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A STUDY of the child partner in paediatric encounters is essentially an inquiry into human vulnerability. But it is vulnerability of a somewhat unusual kind. The lure of glowing generalities is strong, and we are almost bound to think in sweeping terms of ventures in social engineering that will make at least our own nook or segment of the world a better and less hazardous place for children to live in. But blunderbuss projects of this order are doomed from the beginning, since the only worthwhile measures are those which are modest but possible—not the reverse. In the present area of concern—that of sexual assault—one can hope to do little for 'the child' as a species, but as elsewhere in child psychiatry one has to search for and identify the children at risk. Some children are more vulnerable than others, and the most rewarding line of inquiry is to ask what makes the difference. So we have to find out first whether there is such a thing as a child particularly liable to fall prey to sexual encounters, whether there is a 'natural victim'.

Some studies suggest that there might be, others do not—but most research on the topic is altogether unreliable. In the first place, however, we can greatly improve the value of our conclusions by ignoring all studies by groups with a declared or self-evident interest. That is, groups searching for evidence to bring about some change in public attitudes or even in the law. Most of their population samples are selective or hopelessly skewed, and any conclusions thus quite unwarranted. Apart from this, reliable answers to some of our key questions are difficult enough to find without our adding the additional variable of strong observer bias. This leaves precious little hard evidence—but some does exist; further, even in an age when figures and statistics are revered above all else, I have, when trying to reach conclusions, consistently preferred the clinical impressions of experienced but uncommitted professionals to figures from spurious 'surveys'.

I have also included a number of illustrative case histories. Isolated cases prove nothing, of course, but one or two have seemed to me to be exceptionally vivid examples of behaviour patterns that I have found
to be common. Names have of course been changed, as have other details that would identify anyone.

So, back to the question: is there a typical child subject of sexual approach, one more at risk than his friends, or than his classmates? *Vulnerable Children* is the title of a seminal work by Dr Lindy Burton, a psychologist who studied 20 children who had encountered a range of accidents and misadventures (Burton, 1968). She found that such children regularly came from homes where they were emotionally rejected; the fathers were frequently absent and the mothers illness-prone. The children 'felt unwanted and sought out substitute relationships'. Their misadventures, she thought, 'could represent attempts at wrestling sympathy and love from an indifferent environment' (Burton, 1973). The mini-science of 'victimology' has steadily gained ground since: there has been at least one international conference devoted to the subject. In 1973 I was able to show that of children exposed to environmental stress only a small proportion suffered, and these were children with, *inter alia*, the handicaps of an insecure or broken home. This is a consistent finding in wartime and has been demonstrated both in England and the USA and more recently in Israel and Africa (Fraser, 1973; Ayalon 1979). But—and here we come nearer to the present area of concern—the vulnerability was rarely an altogether negative, passive quality. In other words, the encounters with stress and the 'accidents' were almost never true accidents at all—but there was commonly an actively stress-seeking, almost self-destructive drive originating in the child himself that contributed to the final outcome. Children would *place themselves in a position* where they were likely to confront hazards.

This dual determination, these two elements in vulnerability, apply particularly to sexual encounters between children and adults. For example, these are often partly explained on the grounds that the child has been a relatively active participant, a 'willing victim'. But I shall try to show that even when the child makes the first advances, or is even the actual seducer, it is not therefore a different matter in any degree, since the child too is responding to stresses, invisible though they may be, that need seeking-out and examination. If we can do this, we are likely to have as a result potent and widely applicable means of preventing damage.

Where is one to begin? There is, of course, a wide range of deviant adventure covered by the phrase 'adult-child sex' and, while overclassification is tedious, we can proceed best by defining a few broad categories. Which type, then, is the most common? We think, here more than anywhere, in hard stereotypes—the loiterer in the park, the 'evil' schoolmaster beloved of the Sunday press, the wild-eyed campaigners for 'children's sexual liberation'. Such people do exist—
but there is no doubt that the great majority of adult-child sex encounters (probably about 80%) take place within families and between close relatives (Burton, 1968). Traditionally paedophilia and incest are classified separately but, when we are considering girls under the 'age of consent' and also prepubertal or teenage boys, the term paedophilia is appropriate for sex both inside and outside the family; any distinction is artificial, and on this a number of authorities agree (RCP, 1976; Honoré, 1978; Summit and Kryso, 1978). In the first place, the circumstances that make for one are those which make for the other; also, one individual is very often a party to both—and the behaviour can span two or more generations. A somewhat extreme example may indicate what I mean.

Jack is 27. He was born in Switzerland of English parents. The parents intermittently lived apart; this, combined with the nature of the father's job, led to Jack's having some 12 different addresses before he was aged ten. He was then sent as a boarder to a prep school in England but was unhappy, was bullied, and complained of attempted sexual assaults by older boys. They also, apparently, had the pleasant habit of applying heated dinner-knives to the bottoms of new first-formers as 'initiation rites'.

Jack was removed from the school by his father, who was again separated. At the time he was, he recalls, utterly lonely and miserable. On the first night at home he crawled into his father's bed; his father fondled the boy's genitals, then masturbated him. Over the next year Jack had repeated sex with his father, who penetrated him on a number of occasions. He says that he felt ashamed and repelled by these advances; he told an elder brother who made light of it and said that the father had in the past done the same to him.

He was sent back to England again; this time he succeeded in gaining a scholarship to a famous cathedral choir and became a boarder in the choir-school. While there, between the ages of 12 and 17, he had a total of six sexual relationships with older boys in which he says he was always the passive, but reluctant, partner.

Jack now owns his own business, but is depressed and totally confused about his sexuality. He is unmarried, but has had a number of girl friends and has had sexual relationships with them all. But he is sometimes unable to sustain an erection and fears impotence; in desperation, he has developed the habit of finding prostitutes with whom he can repeatedly prove his 'manhood'. Sometimes, though, he has masturbation fantasies about boys he knew at school. He feels that he is totally heterosexual, but is angry both with his father and with the schoolboys for making him 'feel like a pool'. He would like to marry and have children, but thinks this would be unfair on his wife, because he thinks he is becoming impotent. Also, he fears that he
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might be tempted to use the children sexually as his father used him.

Jack's story illustrates two key points. First, one can only be rather cynical about an account of someone's having been sexually 'assaulted' repeatedly, and by so many people. If he did not actually make advances to older boys himself, he must at any rate have become known as a most cooperative subject. Yet, even if he did actively participate, he was nevertheless a victim throughout. We will remember the corollary—that that young tearaway in society is displaying vulnerability as much as is the child with depression or other emotional symptoms, and even though sympathy is more usually canvassed for the latter. Here the willing catamite is in an unhappy situation—more so indeed—than the child who is repelled or resists. Also, it shows that there cannot be true subdivisions within paedophilic experience. Here is the predominant pattern of the lonely male being consoled by the passive small boy, and the boy consoled too, perhaps—though at a cost. The pattern was in due course replicated outside the family as well as inside; these perhaps did not begin with Jack's father, and they did not end with Jack.

An equally pervasive theme is evident in the story of Richard, now aged 50. His father was a sailor who had separated from his wife when the children were young, and Richard soon learned that he was regularly having sexual relationships with the two teenage daughters; at one stage he also made advances to Richard. At the age of 18 Richard became disgusted with the situation and, in an impulsive wish to leave home, he married the village prostitute; she bore him three female children within the next few years, then left home to return to her original calling. Richard found himself increasingly attracted to each of his daughters in turn as they approached adolescence and he had sex with all of them. He took up photography and began to circulate pornographic shots of the girls to a growing clientele; soon school friends of his daughters became 'models' too. He paid them all and he had sex with them all. The inevitable discovery followed, and he was sentenced to five years imprisonment. When I saw him later he was quite unrepentant about the children he had used; life, he said, had handed him a raw deal in the beginning, and he saw no reason why he should not follow his own inclinations now. When he was free to do so, he expected to go on as before.

Here again deviant sexual behaviour patterns affected at least a couple of generations and was evident both inside the family and outside. So when we come to look more closely at incest the major qualification will be that we are not dealing with an isolated form of deviation, but just one facet of a whole that is larger and more complex.

In two classic studies of incestuous relationships, Lukianowicz
agrees with earlier researchers, such as Maisch and Gebhard, in his conclusion that father-daughter incest is by far the most common single type (Honoré, 1978; Summit and Kryso, 1978; Lukianowicz, 1972). In his series there were 700 unselected subjects; 55 had had incestuous experience in childhood. Of these 26 were cases of father-daughter incest. Five were grandfather-granddaughter, four were uncle-niece, three were mother-son, two were aunt-nephew. Gebhard's cases were distributed in roughly the same proportions. In this country about 300 cases a year are reported to the police annually; Walters in the USA found that out of 412 college students, 17% had had some kind of sexual contact with adults (Burton, 1968). Again the majority of these were father-daughter contacts. All researchers record a strong impression that in instances of father-daughter incest, more than in any other kind of illegal sex, only a tiny minority of cases ever come to light outside the family.

To consider father-daughter incest first—there is a rare degree of consistency between the data from a variety of sources (even though interpretations vary). Most of the families are large, the father is working-class or unemployed and there is housing or financial hardship (all but three of Lukianowicz's families were overcrowded). Most marriages are unstable; Maisch repeatedly found a 'deeply disturbed mother-father relationship'. The daughter in question is most usually in early adolescence, around 13 or 14; a family history of incestuous behaviour is common and incest often occurs with more than one daughter. The father is frequently of aggressive personality type, usually comes from a broken home, and is much more likely than the average male to have had a criminal conviction. He has frequent sex with his wife, and is sexually demanding. Summit and Kryso (1978), reviewing a wide range of opinion and research, find that 'lack of impulse control' is the most conspicuous feature in fathers. Others who have published extensive studies refer to 'role distortion' in the father's substitutive use of an adolescent daughter in place of a wife who is commonly menopausal or frigid (Henderson, 1972; Giaretto, 1976). Lukianowicz says that the 'typical' incestuous father 'comes from a broken home; his parents were seldom employed; he had little schooling and left home before the age of 15; but worked only sporadically at various labouring jobs.'

The 'typical' mother does not emerge quite so reliably; Lukianowicz found most of them fairly unremarkable, though he notes that only two charged their husbands with incest whereas ten, at the very least, knew about it. Henderson also refers to the numerous instances where the mother's connivance is an unmistakable factor (Henderson, 1972); Maisch also found this and, going further, Heims and Kaufman say that most of such mothers are 'infantile persons pushing the daughters
prematurely into the mother role, including the incestuous relationship' (Heims and Kaufman, 1963). My own clinical experience suggests that this general interpretation is unwarranted; mothers are indeed usually aware of the relationship but hesitate to act because they fear their husbands, or because they know that the subsequent legal attentions would lead to break-up of the family and dire economic and other consequences.

In *Web of Violence*, Jean Renoise follows what seems to me the most logical line of inquiry. She develops the general thesis that violence and child abuse are learned habits that persist in some families for years, and which can span three or more generations. Incest, she says, is a behaviour that comes squarely into this category. The father himself comes, very commonly, from a family where the daughters were sexually abused; the mother also may have experienced it as a child. She also quotes Masters and Johnston, who believe that incest is not confined to the lower income groups; she feels that ‘know-how and money may enable the more privileged to keep themselves out of the research statistics’.

So the full consequences could be evident many years later; among the daughters there was a high incidence of delinquency, neuroticism and promiscuity—problems that must have affected at least another generation. In the experience of an Israeli authority (Ayalon, 1980), the psychic damage comes relatively late, as the child in an incest-prone family is relatively secluded from her peers; so awareness that a rigid taboo has been broken, with the ensuing sense of shock, may be delayed till middle or late adolescence. On the other hand she knows that renunciation and exposure will destroy the precarious family system finally. Whatever way the child turns, writes Ayalon, she cannot win. She describes the only possible therapy as one directed towards the pathological family system rather than towards any one individual. Awad (1976) in a single case-study, and reports of two others, writes of a precisely similar and rewarding therapeutic approach, this time to the problem of incest between father and son.

Selby *et al.* (1980), in a review of virtually all published research on father-daughter incest, find a strong consensus to the effect that incest is rarely limited to one or two sexual encounters, but more usually becomes a stable part of the family life—also that daughters are ‘timid, submissive, passive’, fathers are ‘dominating, impulsive and use threats’, and mothers are ‘weak and fail to provide help for their daughters’. They conclude that ‘the picture of the family in which father-daughter incest occurs is one in which unhappy people are unable to establish satisfying human relationships’. Renoise also provides a corrective to the rather more rosy views of other researchers, who failed to take the necessary long-term views. But she is
also, rightly, hesitant to see the incestuous relationship as the cause of the later promiscuity and delinquency; rather, it is one symptom of a group of serious economic and social deprivations. But the question of whether incest is truly a symptom or a cause is almost impossible to answer with certainty in the present state of our knowledge. We have all seen families where there has been enormous shame, upheaval and disruption, but our results and conclusions come from two almost completely artificial sources. First, from families who have been discovered or found it necessary to seek help—the persistent Catch-22 of psychiatry. Then, from instances of 'harm' based on the recollections of patients who have been harmed. The trouble is that none of the studies is controlled. Until a group of children of incestuous parents are compared with a group of families under the same kind of social pressures, but without the sexual experience, we will not have complete answers.

Still, here is a prime example—perhaps the prime example—of a child vulnerably placed. And even more so when the girl—as did many in the studies—accepted the advances readily. Lukianowicz quotes one of his patients as saying, 'Most fathers have intercourse with their daughters. You just have to accept it.' But those who suggest that incest is fairly harmless on the grounds that many children don't object to it do forget that a young child has no concept of sexual norms against which to evaluate her experiences; there is no such thing in her mind as an 'incest taboo' and she may well think that this is a fairly usual aspect of the father-daughter relationship. Later, the child's sense of shame and dissonance is the greater. It is pointless to ask whether the sexual encounter in itself is damaging, or whether it would be damaging on a desert island. Sloane and Karpinski found, as did Ayalon, that incestuous relationships were more emotionally upsetting as the child approached adolescence and the behaviour was seen more and more as socially inappropriate. Whatever we may think of it, children have to conform to society's major norms as they are—otherwise they will become ill, depressed or delinquent. And, as a result, the cycle is likely to continue.

Stresses leading to the other types of incest are, according to Lukianowicz, broadly similar, though they vary in degree (Lukianowicz, 1972). There is general agreement that the brother-sister type is the most nearly 'normal'; a fairly common consequence of isolation from the usual sources of family affection. In his novel First Person Plural, Richard Wiseman writes of a brother and sister, Andrew and Jennifer, orphaned and living with an elderly aunt. In this very lonely household they become more and more obsessed with each other's bodies, and childish games and rituals change to half-innocent naked romps in the bathroom, then to slightly more daring exploration, then
with adolescence, Jennifer writes, 'The pattern changed (again); the games changed—and the rituals.' In an atmosphere which she calls 'claustrophobic' there was a couple of years of more adult sex, leading in the end to pathological jealousy and murder.

Leaving aside its conclusion, the story points up very clearly the way 'normal' childhood sex play can develop and change in this kind of emotionally deprived context. Lukianowicz, however, found no significant ill-effects among his 15 brother-sister incest cases, and there is little doubt that a degree of sex play in childhood is a passing and benign phase. But there is also little doubt that long-standing emotional problems will supervene if there are other difficulties in the family, or any factors that prolong or intensify the relationship. Renvoise considers a wide disparity in age—particularly where the sister is the elder—to be most damaging.

In contrast to the general run of childhood physical encounters within families, mother-son sex is generally considered to be the most malign form of incest, comparatively rare though it is. In his three cases, Lukianowicz found the mothers respectively widowed, very unhappily married, and single. One was schizophrenic and of low intelligence. Masters and Johnston confirm the traumatic quality of mother-son sex; the mother progressively isolates the boy from his peer-group and is excessively demanding and possessive. The pattern of seduction, Renvoise says, usually takes one of two forms:

In one common pattern the mother continues washing the child in his bath long after he is capable of bathing himself, during which she stimulates him sexually. The second pattern is for the mother, having been widowed or left without a husband for some reason or another, to take her son into her bed. Probably no overt sexual contact will take place between them, but they are likely to abandon the habit of wearing night-clothes and they will certainly be sexually aware of one another, so that as the boy grows up and begins to have sex dreams they will relate almost entirely to the woman lying beside him.

Summit and Kryso also refer to the increased likelihood of mother-son sex when the father has died or left home, and refer to the common pattern of 'mother and son sleeping together till the boy is 12 or later, where both seek comfort in the loss of the father'. (Summit and Kryso, 1978). The mother, they say, denies the erotic potential of the situation, but the boy can remain exclusively attached to her and have difficulties with sexual object choice in adulthood. The mother, it seems, can be much more 'innocent' in such situations than the child. One mother, they report, was used to share the shower with her ten-year-old son, and was considerably taken aback when he asked,
'Mummy, when Daddy did it to you before I was born, did he do it in bed or was it here in the shower?'

There is also, I think, a faint echo of the same innocence in most writers on the topic, who ignore this 'active' element in the child's vulnerability, and which I have found to be as consistently evident in mother-child sex as in other deviations that involve children. Here we see the boy without a father, lacking what would be his main source of appreciation of himself and of his maleness, eager as a result for physical attention in almost any form and on almost any terms. Within the past couple of years I have seen three mothers who were alarmed in varying degrees by the provocative behaviour of their fatherless sons. One, a 13-year-old son of professional parents, had taken to wandering around the house with no clothes on, and on occasion would rub against his mother's body or sit on her lap. Another, an intelligent and sensitive boy of 12, had taken to masturbating in a fairly blatant way when his mother was present. None of these mothers believed they had given the boys any encouragement, and each was perplexed by her son's behaviour. Here, though, I think we do again have clear evidence of a mutual search for some kind of substitute fulfilment.

Homosexual incest—as in the first case-history—is rarely described, but has at least once recently been called an 'under-reported problem' (Dixon et al., 1978). In a series of six families whom they saw over four years Dixon et al were impressed by the accidental finding of father-son incest in each. In all cases the boy, usually in early adolescence, was referred to the clinic for a behavioural problem—truancy, for example—and the account of intra-familial sex emerged as part of the history. In one family, the father regularly used all six of his children sexually, sometimes engaging them in sadistic beating rituals. It had been a custom in the family that when the husband was angry or in a bad humour the eldest child would 'offer' himself to placate his father and protect the younger children. Legal proceedings were dropped as none of the family appeared to testify against the father in Court. The therapists' only subsequent knowledge of the family was that the elder brother rang them some years later to ask for advice about 'impotence' with his girl-friend. But he did not want to come and talk to them for fear of 'opening old wounds'. He had originally been referred to the clinic with headaches, depression, insomnia and loss of appetite.

The authors conclude that the pattern in these families is remarkably similar to those in which there is father-daughter incest. They say that—a ringing phrase, this—'the stereotypic ingredients conducive to incest' included paternal alcoholism, impulsiveness and impaired judgement. There also seemed to be 'a high degree of complicity on the part of the mothers'. In several cases they had known about the sexual
activity for some years before some kind of confrontation with the child and his problems forced them to take action. These boys represented 0.4\% of their child psychiatry male patients, 'since our patient population is not untypical in other regards' they say, 'it seems reasonable to expect that the frequency of father-son incest in the overall child psychiatric population is higher than has been assumed'. (Dixon et al., 1978). Awad (1976) reports three cases of father-son incest, again with surprisingly consistent inter-family patterns.

There is a psychiatric axiom that if you don't ask the right questions you don't get the right answers; questions out of context, particularly in this area, would be absolutely crass—but when a problem presents and the causes are not apparent, it can never be wrong to consider a wide range of possibilities.

Outside the family, paedersasty in varying degrees is of course more common—or at least more visible. I would guess that possibly the great majority of readers have in their youth experienced some kind of approach by an adult. Schofield found that 2\% of boys admitted having had sexual experience with an adult and that 35\% recalled sexual advances (Schofield, 1965). In a retrospective study of 1200 college-age females Gagnon found that 26\% had had sexual experience with an adult before age thirteen. Only 6\% of these were ever reported to authorities (Gagnon, 1975). Mrazek extracts from her 1980 review a consensus that between one-quarter and one-third of all male and female children and adolescents have at least one sexual experience with an adult.

Figures on the actual incidence of paedophilia in the adult population vary widely. Curran and Parr in 1957, found in analysing 100 male homosexuals that 17 were predominantly attracted to boys. (Curran and Parr, 1957). West estimates that 3\% of homosexuals are paedophilic (West, 1965). From all accounts, the real figure would seem to be about 1\% of the total population—which scarcely makes it a 'rare' deviation, though it is often thus described. The causes—or fancied causes—of paedophilia have been scrutinized several times, and a re-examination is not the purpose of this chapter. At the same time, when we again seek out the susceptible child we shall see that, in this area as in the others, cause and effect, user and used, can merge and be indistinguishable.

Take the case of John, who was 25 when his aunt came to see me; she was his only confidante, and John, who lived abroad, was in the habit of writing her long letters. The most recent, filled with fairly unexceptional family gossip, ended with the following:

P.S. I have decided that most of all I would like to go and live on a desert island with no-one there but boys between the ages of 8 and
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13. If I owned the world I would get rid of everybody else. I have an uncontrollable attraction to BOYS. I can think of nothing but BOYS. There is nothing worth thinking about but BOYS.

Love, John.

The aunt asked whether I thought that he was going mad. I wondered whether he was indeed a little mad to write to his aunt (a JP and in public life) in such picturesque terms, but I said very little and agreed to see him.

It was a very odd interview; John was an intensely nervous, almost terrified young man. As soon as he sat down he shifted his chair to the far wall and sat flattened against the chair-back, his arms half-raised as if I might at any moment rise and attack him. His story emerged only gradually. A son of diplomatic parents, he had been born in Italy; his father was by all accounts an impetuous and explosive man, greatly disliked by John from infancy. The father and mother were estranged (though they lived together for the sake of appearances); they all moved around a great deal and John was brought up by a succession of nannies and 'helps'. When he was eight he was sent to school in England; he told me that on the first night in school he wished he was dead, and cried so much that a master took him into his own bed to comfort him. He slept with this master on a couple of occasions and, although no sexual contact took place then, he became used to sharing a bed with other boys at night, and there were a few fumbling explorations from time to time. In his early teens he went to a public school and, as the equivalent of a fag, he once or twice 'offered' himself to a prefect to escape punishment for jobs neglected; otherwise his early adolescence was relatively untroubled as he became absorbed in schoolwork and games.

Then, as a prefect himself, he became alarmed to find that he was developing erections when supervising the younger boys in the showers, or when they were swimming naked in the school swimming-pool. He had to give up taking charge of football and swimming as he feared that his erections would be noticed, and he missed promotion as a result. Others were puzzled by his apparent change in interests; also, he found that he was having 'crushes' on successive, personable juniors and, although there was no overt contact other than some touching and note-passing, he became preoccupied with vivid sexual fantasies, all depicting younger boys.

He dropped out of school and declined a college place, much to his father's rage, and took a residential position in child care, saying that he wanted to be 'of some use in the world'. There, while he supervised the boys at bed-time and bath-time he engaged them in increasingly daring sexual and 'spanking' games, and on a couple of occasions
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masturbated a boy to a climax. All this was never discovered, but his work became less and less efficient; he was down-graded from care assistant to gardener, then sacked—oddly, with references alluding in glowing terms to his ‘potential’ ability. He is indeed a highly intelligent and capable young man, but he is deeply embittered because of the preoccupations that have ‘ruined’ his life, and extremely ashamed of their content.  

I have chosen John’s case as an example because it features a progression that is in my experience absolutely classic. Paederastic encounters are of many kinds, and the instances where a child is forcibly assaulted are mercifully rare; the commoner reality is much more complex. It is also, yet again, one that often persists and is replicated as the seduced becomes, years later; the seducer. Sexual behaviour is not just a matter of deep unconscious urges, but equally one of habit, of learning, of a need to recall first remembered attentions. So if we ask whether early homosexual experience can ‘make’ a boy homosexual, the answer is that it can, especially if repeated—in spite of received wisdom to the contrary.

How, then, are we to define this doubly vulnerable youngster? Does he exist as a type at all? No fully structured study has been addressed to this question, but the opinions of experienced observers are, yet again, remarkably alike. This applies also to fictional treatments of paedophilia and—as writers often have more acute insight than psychologists—we can best commence our search with these.

Here the child’s emotional solitude, his isolation, is the most prominent common factor. In virtually all the well-known novels or short stories in which children were the objects of paedophilic attention, the child was orphaned, without one parent, or at best had families whose behaviour was blatantly uncaring and unaffectionate. Miles in Henry James’ The Turn of the Screw (orphaned), David in J. M. Barrie’s The Little White Bird (fatherless), Nabokov’s Lolita (fatherless) and Bel in the same author’s Look at the Harlequins (motherless), Edwin in F. W. Farrar’s Eric or Little by Little (orphaned), Wilfred in Bloxham’s classic The Priest and the Acolyte (orphaned), the hapless young boys in Tournier’s The Erl-King (orphaned), Herbert in Swinburne’s grotesque Lesbia Brandon (fatherless), Hyacinth in Pater’s Apollo in Picardy (orphaned), and many more. In Thomas Mann’s Death in Venice, although the family of the coquetish Tadzio appears in the narrative many times, there is no mention of a father. Stories in which the parents ignore or reject the child include Henry James’ The Pupil, Howard Sturgis’s Tim, and several of Hugh Walpole’s novels.

But this is scarcely even a beginning. While these views on the susceptible child show a remarkable degree of convergence, they are...
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fictional, and one must bear in mind a possibility that the common
factor may have been the emotional needs of the author, rather than
what he actually observed; he could simply be making the imagined
child conform to some necessary archetype of his own (Fraser, 1977).
So one must pursue the enquiry further—into what is known of real-
life paedophilic attachments, and especially into what is known of the
children who were their objects. To begin with, some of the authors we
have listed were themselves, together with many others of their period,
well known for their obsessional interest in the younger element. The
most outre of paedocrats was of course Oscar Wilde, still remembered
for his predilection for the urchins and beggar-boys who haunted the
streets of London, and later of Paris. Three other literary rakes of the
time with a fondness for small unattached girls were Ernest Dowson
the poet, extravagantly in love with the 12-year-old Adelaide, George
Selwyn with his fatherless little ‘Mimi’, and Francis Kilvert the
country curate, whose physical interest in orphaned and rejected small
girls, such as the exotic Gypsy Lizzie, is detailed with rare candour in
his famous diaries. Dealing with the same period, Ronald Pearsall in
The Worm in the Bud has a harrowing account of the many deprived
small girls who were sold into prostitution in London, and of the
downfall thereby of the worthy but gullible W. T. Stead. The story of
J. M. Barrie, the celebrated playwright and begetter of Peter Pan, has
been told many times; recently The Lost Boys, Andrew Birkin’s
distinguished TV trilogy, portrayed Barrie’s obsessional love for the
five parentless Llewellyn-Davies boys—especially Michael, Peter
Pan’s original. Nude photographs that Barrie took of the boys still
exist, although the precise form of his affection for them is still a matter
for conjecture; some of his writing, however—especially in The Little
White Bird—leaves little doubt about the physical quality of his
paedophilia. He took at least two other fatherless boys under his wing
at different times, and tried to adopt one.

Nearer to our own time—it was noteworthy that the majority of
boys in the Johnny-go-Home programme (a series about boy prostitu-
tion) were runaways from broken homes; introducing the Pro-
tection of Children Act, Mr Cyril Townsend MP told the House of
Commons of the large number of children from one-parent families
who are drawn into pornography and seduction networks. Again, one
must emphasize that it is not just a matter of children getting into
trouble because of lack of supervision—which is much too simple an
analysis—but also of children seeking substitute affection, deviant
though it may be. One 15-year-old patient of mine, included in the
television series, had run away from home like the others, and said that
the two men he was living with were the only people who had ever been
‘kind’ to him. Unfortunately, the kindness included their teaching him
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how to remove radios from parked cars—ineptly, as it happens, since he reached my clinic via the juvenile court. Again, quite a number of reported sex cases in the past few years seem to have involved children in statutory care; one member of a now-defunct organization to legalize adult-child sex was reported as saying that orphanage children were 'a good bet'. There does seem again, here, a hint of children seeking for substitute 'affection'. This kind of pattern is replicated world-wide; reports published in the last year or so tell of the 'export' and seduction of alienated youngsters by the 'chicken-hawks' of Los Angeles, the rape and prostitution of abandoned children in Brazil, of a large prostitution ring in the Eastern United States where the boy victims were 'generally fatherless youngsters' and of the young delinquents and runaways who haunt the notorious homosexual playgrounds of Times Square and 42nd Street. A recent and comprehensive study by Rossman, a Yale lecturer, describes a number of rings world-wide into which parentless urchins are drawn in order to be used for sexual purposes (Rossman, 1976).

In a careful study in England in 1973, probably the only study of its kind, Fr Michael Ingram of the International Catholic Child Bureau analyzed the cases of 91 pre-pubertal boys who had been the subjects of sexual abuse by adults. He found that 27% of the boys were fatherless and 59% were motherless. In only 9% were both parents rated as 'satisfactory'. The study suffers from the lack of a control group, and the 'satisfactory' judgement is an individual one, but the hard figures relating to parental absence are still extremely telling.

I have made no statistical study, but have in the past few years seen several dozen children who have encountered sex with adults in varying degrees; I have also found that a heavy preponderance of such children came from one-parent homes. Usually the same-sex parent is the absent one. I have also found a distinct tendency towards homosexuality in the fathers. The father may not have had incestuous relations with his son—as in the first example—but he may often admit, reluctantly, that he himself has had homosexual experiences or fantasies, and he may relate them to experiences of molestation in his own boyhood.

Jim, aged 13, had been on a Scout camp and during it had been felled on a couple of occasions by the Scout Leader; this became known to his parents later because of gossip among his school friends. It turned out that the affair had gone on for some months. Jim told me that his father had recently left home and gone to Italy; the parents had been having rows for years and had finally split up—this shortly before the sexual episodes between the boy and his Scout Leader. Jim said that his father's going had upset him greatly and that he still cried himself to sleep on some nights.
Jim's mother said that shortly after marriage she had discovered that her husband, a television actor, was 'bisexual'. In the months before they finally separated his behaviour had become more and more intolerable, and he had been bringing boy-friends to their home. Jim, too, had known about this for a long time.

The father, when interviewed, recalled a homosexual seduction of his own youth, similar to the one Jim had experienced, and blamed his own confused feelings largely on this. He had reacted explosively when hearing about the Scout-camp incident, declaring that he didn't want Jim to be 'turned the way I am'. He said that he wouldn't put up with it—then went back to Italy.

Jim wondered whether his father was right and whether he had indeed been 'turned queer'. He said that he sometimes couldn't help watching other boys when they shared the school shower, and that he sometimes got an erection.

So these affairs are often desperately entangled, and I have no doubt that, while the sexual use of children can be related to psychological abnormalities in the adult, it can also be favoured by some that pre-exist in the child. In its memorandum to the Williams Committee the Royal College of Psychiatrists draws attention to the wide spectrum of such abuses, and says that it is a 'fortunately very rare man who sets out to find a child who will be a complete stranger to him and whose welfare and feelings he utterly disregards'; much more common is the sexual liaison that evolves in an outwardly 'normal' setting—as between a lodger and the child of, say, a single landlady who leaves her alone for long periods. As is the case with incest, many people participate in the chain of events that leads to the deviant sexual act. It is a symptom of disordered relationships and is, again, rarely confined to a single generation.

Can we possibly construct a 'risk index' for children who might be exposed to sex with adults, and how? The kinds of families in which incest is likely to occur have already been well recognized and described, but can we make the same kind of predictions for paedophilia outside the family? This is indeed possible to an extent and, from the evidence, it appears that the children at risk fall into two distinct categories that do not often overlap. Typical of the first category is the boy whose sexual willingness is only part of a general pattern of delinquency. He has probably run away from home at least once, and comes from a home where one parent is either absent or chronically ill, or where at least one parent has a record of alcoholism or violence. The boy may form a relationship with an 'uncle' or be drawn into a prostitution ring. The attraction for him will be the money and the degree of security, for which the sexual attentions will seem to him a small price to pay—but it would be optimistic to suppose
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that such a boy would necessarily return to 'normal' sex when rescued from his adverse environment. First, his parents will not change overnight, or at all. More important, the homosexual incidents will have taken place in a setting where he was given rare status and affection—of a kind—and this link is likely to steer his future interests powerfully.

The second younger at risk is timid, conforming, and either parentless or lacking the parent of the same sex. At the very least he is given very little warmth or attention at home and he is sent to a boarding-school at a fairly early age or gravitates to an authoritarian youth organization. There he is drawn into an emotional relationship with an older child, teacher or leader; this relationship soon gains a sexual quality, and the story may emerge when the child shows anxiety or other symptoms, long afterwards by accident or, as is most usual, not at all.

There is no suggestion here that most children who fall victim to sexual encounters actually invite them, but, outside of the rare violent assaults, it must be recognized that such children are more receptive than the average child; in particular, one must be wary when 'repeated assault' over a long period is claimed. We usually concern ourselves, and rightly, with the effect on the child after the event, but should be looking much more carefully for the susceptibility factors in his child and his family that preceded the event. Again, we should give much more attention to the child who accepts sexual approaches passively than to the one who is repelled and resists—but we still seem to have it the wrong way round. The reality, however, is that the former child is the one more likely to be the 'traumatized' one, the one with the most profound emotional needs. The latter, if handled sensibly, will have forgotten about it in a day or so, but the other has indeed got problems if he or she has had to resort to 'paying' for adult affection, and in this way.

Other contributors to this book will be writing in detail about the after-effects on children of sexual encounters; here I shall only touch on these briefly, in so far as the question of protection arises. The danger uppermost in the minds of most rational people is, in my experience, that a child's developing sexuality will be distorted or diverted—that a girl may become promiscuous, or that a boy may become at least partly homosexual as the result of these experiences. This latter possibility, in particular, is discounted (partly based on a misunderstanding of Freud) and homosexual tendencies in a growing boy are looked on as a 'phase', to be left behind with developing maturity. But this is not necessarily the case; such an analysis is far too simple. The trouble is that the factors that draw a youngster into adult-child sex are virtually the same as those known already to predispose to sexual deviation in
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adulthood. Adapting Bancroft's valuable concept of 'push factors', these are an absent father (less often a mother), a loose family structure, and an insecure attention-seeking personality (Bancroft, 1974) together with an environment in which homosexual relationships can flourish, such as a boarding-school, a summer camp, a boys' choir or one of the youth organizations.

So what comes first? Fortunately a member of the 'caring' professions does not need to find an answer to such a question before intervening effectively, which is probably just as well. The sweeping solution—as to most questions of child delinquency—lies of course in attention to the repair and maintenance of the existing social protective care-givers—the family, the school, the foster-home or residential home. But the most any professional worker can do is maintain a lively awareness of the kind of child who is primarily at risk and of the 'push factors' that may be operating. Their cumulative effect can often be minimized. For example, a single-sex boarding school does not in itself predispose to homosexuality, but might do so where a boy was already handicapped by risk elements such as precious loss of his father, unusual timidity, or effeminacy behaviour (Zuger, 1978; Stoller, 1967). In such cases a day school might be better. Again, if a parent is anxious about a close relationship between her son and an older boy or man, one might advise her to ignore the affair unless other 'push factors' were evident.

Furthermore we must, when an instance of sexual abuse comes to light, find ways of dealing with it in ways that do not make matters worse. This is of extreme importance, and at present such means just do not seem to exist. But the opinion of most experienced professionals in the area is that children are usually much more emotionally traumatized by the uproar and questioning that follows discovery than by the sexual encounter itself (Renoise, 1978; RCP, 1976; Summit and Kryso 1978; Gibbens and Prince 1963; Mrazek 1980). Brongersma (1980), a senior Dutch jurist, argues that the evidence of damage from the sexual 'offence' is so weak and the evidence of damage from the judicial process conversely so strong that adult-child sex should be decriminalized, and any problems that arise therefrom dealt with in some other way. Mrazek also writes that retrospective studies of non-clinical populations have failed to show long-term adverse consequences. West (1980), the British forensic psychiatrist, supports Brongersma in his basic contention that criminal proceedings should follow only 'sexual molestation of unwilling, reluctant and complaining children'. I have myself seen two determined attempts at suicide by children following questioning and examination. Avoidance of this would be quite possible, and I would strongly recommend that the statutory responsibility for investigating such cases should rest
primarily with the Social Services; a procedure similar to that for the investigation of physical abuse of children should be followed, in which the responsible Social Worker chairs a multi-professional case conference to decide on all aspects of future management, and where criminal procedures are only brought to bear when something agreed to be harmful in that case cannot be prevented in any other way. Punishment of either party in the first instance will neither protect nor 'normalize' the child. Much more likely, the anxiety created will inhabit and distort his own evolving sexuality, giving rise to fears that may themselves be later expressed as deviance. The guiding principle is, yet again, that attention should be directed towards the factors that precipitated the child into his unhappy situation in the first place. But this, unbelievably, almost never happens—which is a fairly reliable way of ensuring that the child’s state of vulnerability will persist or worsen.

Notes

1. Terminology varies. Here I have used 'paedocrasy' to mean relationships that are primarily physical. 'Paedophilia' is the broader term, including both physical and emotional attraction—but it is not always possible to be precise.

2. The case-histories all appear to end half-way through, but I do not want to convey the impression that one’s interest finished there, or that no support or treatment was given. This would be far from the truth—but the treatment of sexually deviant adults is being dealt with in other chapters, not this one.

3. Again, this chapter is not for philosophical discussion about homosexuality as a ‘legitimate life-style’ or anything similar. Times have changed, but I have taken it as axiomatic that one would on balance wish a child to grow up without unusual sexual preferences.

4. The Guardian. 3.10.76
5. The Times 12.10.74
6. The Sunday Times 4.12.77
7. Time 11.9.76
8. Time 5.6.72
9. Daily Mail 31.5.78