

Reply: Is There Nothing Special About Adult–Child Sex?

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In my brief response, I wish to reply in particular to the harsh, vehement criticism expressed by *Okami* and *Rind*. In my view, the central question in the debate regarding pedophilia is this: What is special, in both a quantitative and a qualitative sense, about adult–child sexuality? This question can be discussed at a number of different levels—for example, in terms of the consequences of sexual actions, from the standpoint of distinctions between adult and child sexuality or, as I approached the issue, in the context of the aspect of consensus. I came to the conclusion that, because of the power imbalance, the fact that a sexually fully scripted person encounters a nonscripted or underscripted person, thus producing a “disparity of scenarios,” makes sexual consensus between a child and an adult highly problematic and, as a rule, impossible. And I conclude as well that this represents an essential difference between adult–child and adult–adult sex.

Okami and *Rind* pursued two lines of argumentation or analogies to refute this statement: first, that all of the unique characteristics I emphasized apply to sex between adults as well, that is, that they are universal aspects of sexual relationships and that dyadic power is always unstable and multidimensional; second (a consideration that also plays a role in the commentary by *Ng*), that nonconsensual interaction with children is standard practice in nonsexual adult–child relationships. After all, children are hugged and kissed without being asked, baptized without their consent, and forced to eat salad instead of hamburgers. In other words, *Okami* and *Rind* argue that we are upset by this lack of consensus only when sexuality is involved, and this they regard as an ideological reaction.

Neither argument can be effectively refuted. Yet, both *Okami* and *Rind* fail to make it clear whether their reference to these truisms means that they recognize no special characteristics of child–adult sexual interaction (as

opposed to adult–adult sex or to nonsexual contact between adults and children) and that they consider the fundamental distinctions I have pointed out as insignificant. That would indeed be an interesting position worthy of discussion; but both remain insistently vague. And thus, they avoid the central question underlying the debate on pedophilia: Is there anything special about adult–child sexual relations?

Rind contends that my argumentation is based upon a hypothetical case (the “back-rub” episode). The “case” I discuss is empirical fiction, distilled from many interviews I have had with pedophiles in a clinical context and from scenes described by *Lautmann* (1994) in his study of a nonclinical sample of pedophiles. The “case” described an “idealtypische” situation (in the sense defined by *Max Weber*) and was intended to illustrate a pattern of interaction that is, in my opinion, highly typical of child–adult sex and the product of the “disparity of scenarios.” *Rind*, on the other hand, cited five case vignettes from five different countries on three different continents (are they geographically so universal or so rare?). In these examples, prepubertal boys were the initiators of child–adult sexual actions or relationships. But so what? As if there were not exceptions to every rule. But perhaps the apodictic tendency that emerges here and there in my essay does not make this sufficiently clear. Yet, must we really elevate the boys and men in question to the status of heroes in the battle against convention? A 10-year-old boy is “horny” on his father. The well-meaning father submits to the advances of his son, and the two experience a harmonious sexual relationship that lasts for three years—a relationship guided by the boy’s initiative. Responded to in this way, the boy develops a strong sense of “sexual self-confidence.” The relationship has served “pedagogic functions.” That is breathtakingly simple and naïve. No context, no family dynamics, no presexual father–son relationship, no mother and no siblings, no consideration of motivations and meaning of the son’s desire, no discussion

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of the question of whether the father should have better resisted the boy's advances. The issue is sexual pleasure, nothing else. The notion of *pure, innocent child sexuality* stifled and laid in chains by society (Okami's "naturalistic child") that underlies this kind of thinking is as fantastical and fairy-tale like as the concept of the *asexual innocent child*, which Okami quite rightly questions. "Innocent child sexuality" and "innocent child asexuality" are naturalistic, twin narratives.

Rind's vignettes were intended to show evidence of variance. They do so, and in three cases they raise the question of the specific situation involved in an early homosexual coming-out—an important matter that I do not consider in my essay. But the question is How great is the variance? "Sometimes it does not occur, sometimes it does," says Rind, remaining vague on this point as well. What does that mean? Just as often? More often than in other relationships? In different ways than in other relationships?

Rind argued that I propagated a universal morality and gave it the weighty status of the "natural." With all due respect, that is nonsense. Any application of the terms "nature" or "natural" to sexuality or even morality sounds strange to me. Indeed, I make it sufficiently clear in my essay that my observation does not apply to all ages and all cultures but instead to a very limited social and temporal spectrum: the late modern, postfeminist industrial societies of the West. And like all sexual scientists, I am well aware that, in certain cultures, explicitly pedosexual forms of interaction are culturally scripted essential experiences in the process of passage to "mature," "healthy" competent adulthood and that their absence would presumably be tantamount to a personal sociosexual catastrophe for boys in these societies. But the people of Sambia can help us no more in dealing with this question than our missionaries, who seek to change their cultural scenarios, can help them.

In spite of my skepticism with regard to the arguments offered by Okami and Rind, I have a great deal of respect for their contributions. They sow doubts about positions that have come to be taken for granted in Western societies, and they keep the discussion open in a

direction to which too little attention is given today: fairness against pedophiles. And they demonstrate admirable courage. Some 10 years ago, I wrote two articles on pedophilia (Schmidt, 1989, 1990) in which I took positions that were much closer to those of Okami and Rind than my present views. What has happened in the meantime? Am I bowing increasingly to the pressure of convention that has grown stronger? No one could reasonably rule out this possibility? Yet, there is something else as well. I do not share the antifeminist sentiments that come to the surface, often explicitly, in Okami's writing. In spite of the agitation, the one-sidedness, the idiosyncrasies, the provocations, and the "sissiness" that characterizes some feminist discourse, the discussion of power and violence triggered by the feminists has heightened sensitivity to transgression, oppression, exploitation, male dominance, and control in the sexual sphere, aspects that were effectively obscured in the patriarchal system. This heightened sensitivity has also had a significant impact on the discussion regarding pedophilia and on my own position as well.

The dilemma of the pedophile always embodies a dilemma of sexual science: the goals of reducing the burden of discrimination and repression for sexual minorities, on the one hand, and protecting potential victims, on the other. Faced with this dilemma, we presumably have nothing but wrong answers. But perhaps some answers are less wrong than others.

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