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Sexual Alignment: Critiquing Sexual Orientation, The Pedophile, and the DSM V

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The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders is currently under its sixth revision, and the current proposed changes put forth major revisions on how pedophilia is defined, diagnosed and understood. This paper approaches these revisions from within the critiques made by queer youth activism as well as feminist and anti-racist scholarship, framing the upcoming changes to the DSM with apprehensive praise and critical ambivalence. Within it I shall challenge normative assumptions about sexuality, personal and political identity, and childhood, both within the DSM and within wider society.

One of the major changes attempts to establish a clear distinction between pedophilia as a non-diagnosable ascertainment, and pedophilic disorder as a diagnosable, distressing and non-normative disorder that requires psychiatric intervention. Allowing for a form of non-diagnosable minor attraction is exciting, as it potentially creates a sexual or political identity by which activists, scholars and clinicians can begin to better understand Minor Attracted Persons. This understanding may displace the stigma, fear and abjection that is naturalized as being attached to Minor Attracted Persons and may alter the terms by which non-normative sexualities are known. Furthermore, this paper argues that this distinction is potentially another step towards the complete re-thinking of paraphilias within the DSM – a step that follows historically and theoretically from the removal of homosexuality.

However, when approached with the queer and feminist lenses of mis-recognition and unintelligibility, the positive prospects of this division become quite muddled, exposing their entrenchment in problematic discourses of sexual ontology and deviance. Far from arguing for a total embrace of the upcoming changes, this paper works through the DSM's struggle to understand "the pedophile" through an investigation of the highly questionable and deeply assumptive clinical, empirical and theoretical studies it cites (Blanchard, 2009). These studies, some of which are the basis for the upcoming revisions, ignore or disregard their own limitations, and yet continue to make claims to truth and objectivity through problematic frameworks. Many tend to begin with the linkage of pedophilic desire to harmful and abusive relationships and acts, and end up proliferating, rather than questioning, normative gendered and sexual intelligibility.

Finally, this paper frames the upcoming changes through a theory of sexual alignment – critiquing the DSM for theoretically and empirically forcing connections between the blurry lines that connect (and separate) acts, desires, fantasies, and understandings of the self (Ahmed, 2006). The primary lens of critique for this paper is an in depth textual, discursive and theoretical critique of the DSM and its surrounding body of knowledge on children and pedophilia, focused on exposing the ways in which sexual acts and identities gain meaning and become known.

References

Blanchard, Ray. 2009. "The DSM Diagnostic Criteria for Pedophilia." in *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 39. American Psychiatric Association.

Ahmed, Sara. 2006. "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology" in *GLQ* 12:4. Duke University Press: Durham, NC.