

The DSM and Stigma

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This talk will present an analysis of ways in which the DSM has contributed to the stigmatization of people who are attracted to minors (MAPs), discouraging them from seeking mental health services when they are needed. This will proceed in four parts.

First, I will note the important role the DSM has in professional discourse about MAPs. Even though many MAPs may not meet the diagnostic criteria for pedo(hebe)philia (as given in either DSM-IV-TR or the proposed DSM 5), the only description of attraction to minors found in the dominant professional literature is that devoted to pedophilia. That literature frequently repeats the information found in the DSM (e.g., no author, 2010). Therefore, the DSM provides the sole official definition of minor-attraction endorsed by, and disseminated to, the mental health professions.

Second, I will examine those features of the DSM entry for pedo(hebe)philia that stigmatize MAPs. These include specific claims, found in the DSM-IV-TR's accompanying text (APA, 2000), about the behavior and motives of people with pedophilia. These claims are based on forensic samples and include inferences about motives. They suffer from the absence of any description of MAPs who do not violate the law, scientific support for claims regarding motives, and recognition that MAPs may have a variety of motives similar to those who are attracted to adults. As a result, the text provides a distorted and needlessly stigmatizing portrait of MAPs.

The overarching problem with the DSM is its predominant focus on legal violation, thus defining MAPs solely as criminals. While the DSM 5 diagnostic criteria do not require illegal behavior, in practice such criteria have been interpreted as illegal behavior, and the literature review used to justify the proposed revisions (Blanchard, 2010) suggests that this is the intent. The review focuses on illegal behavior, and a new legal criterion has been added: use of child pornography. There is little or no discussion of non-criminological aspects of or behaviors related to pedo(hebe)philia.

Third, I will present results from surveys of MAPs that demonstrate the process of stigmatization due to the DSM. These results show that large numbers of MAPs believe that MAPs could benefit from mental health services but are afraid to seek them. Their fears include those of being perceived as criminals or potential criminals whose feelings must be reported to others in their social sphere, and fears that professionals will make incorrect assumptions about their behavior and motives suggested by the DSM. These results will also show the extent to which MAPs perceive the DSM and related literature to focus on social control rather than therapeutic goals, further alienating MAPs from the mental health professions.

Fourth, I will suggest ways in which MAPs, researchers, and clinicians can work together to transform the DSM into a document that more completely and accurately portrays MAPs and focuses on mental health goals. This includes involving MAPs in the revision process, basing research on non-forensic samples, and involving non-forensic researchers from a wide variety of disciplines and perspectives--advice the APA itself advocates, but the paraphilias subworkgroup has yet to heed. Unless the DSM radically changes its focus, MAPs are unlikely to voluntarily seek mental health services from clinicians who take the DSM seriously.

References

American Psychiatric Association (APA). (2000). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-IV-TR Fourth Edition*. Washington, DC: Author.

Brief descriptions of presentation at:

Pedophilia, Minor-Attracted Persons, and the DSM: Issues and Controversies
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Blanchard, R. (2010). The DSM diagnostic criteria for pedophilia. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. Sept. 16 [Epub ahead of print]. DOI 10.1007/s10508-009-9536-0

No author. (2010). Pessimism about pedophilia. *Harvard Mental Health Letter*. July, 2010. Retrieved May 22, 2011 from https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletters/Harvard_Mental_Health_Letter/2010/July/pessimism-about-pedophilia