Depriving Boys of Mentors

While boys are growing up, they are typically involved with multiple older male role models. Some of these, such as their father and other older male relatives, are part of their immediate environment, and others come from social structures such as schools, organized sports, etc. But a boy may also feel a need for an older male role model who is not a de facto authority figure, a mentor of his own choosing with whom he can feel comfortable in freely discussing and exploring anything he wishes.

But as has been noted by several scholars such as Drs. Alan Hayes (2008) and Frank Furedi (2008), older boys and men who could and would serve as mentors are discouraged by what Dr. Philip Jenkins (2008) has described as the "moral panic" of society regarding the possibility that explorations of sexual issues may take place as part of such relationships. So a boy may have resources for everything from baseball to xylophones, but is deprived of the opportunity to inquire into his sexuality with knowledgeable older males beyond the banal parental "birds and bees" lecture and vacuous public sex education classes.

There is a false assumption that sexual investigations involving boys and older boys or men are almost invariably initiated by the older partner. But various authors have given examples of boys who independently solicited such explorations with an older male friend (Bender & Blau, 1937), and others have described the willingness with which boys take up such opportunities when they occur (e.g. Gebhard, Gagnon, Pomeroy, & Christenson, 1965; Sandfort, 1987; Tindall, 1978; Trobriands, 1993). Additionally, there is no evidence that such experiences "cause" homosexuality or are otherwise intrinsically harmful; Larry Constantine has commented on how it is societal interference with these consensual relationships that is "psychonoxious," rather than the interaction itself (1981, p. 241). This, of course, does not excuse the atypical predatory older male who seeks out sex with boys principally for his own pleasure and gratification. While they are actually quite rare, the media fascination with situations like the recent Sandusky case tend to mislead the public concerning the scientifically researched realities of boyhood sexual inquisitiveness.

The world might do well to take note of the informed observations that Dr. Paul Wilson of Bond University in Robina, Queensland, Australia, made some thirty years ago after investigating some 2500 documented cases of boy/man sexual contacts: "Young boys are sexually active from a very early age and will pursue their sexuality whenever they can find an opportunity to do so, . . . young people . . . feel sexually repressed [and] alienated from adult company, . . . the reality is that boys have come to men and will continue, for time immemorial, to come to them in order to have their sexual and emotional needs met . . . "(1981, pp. 133-135).

"Moral panic" and "pedophile hysteria" seem to have blinded society to the need for boys to explore their sexuality; and the frantic impulse to "protect" boys tends instead to alienate them from the very culture that purports to care about them. At the very least, these legitimate questions deserve open-minded and thorough investigation and discussion, rather than the summary dismissal and gratuitous condemnation they currently tend to receive in academic, social, and media discourse.
References


