

**CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE SEXUALLY AT-RISK CHILD:
A NEVERENDING STORY?**

Last but not least, the mythic form of danger-ideas is important in terms of the question of the future of the 'sexually at-risk child.' In answering it, it is important that we draw a distinction between the fate of the danger-mythos itself and its current particular manifestation(s). As we have seen, after nearly three centuries, the traditional danger-model finally lost the social acceptance it had long enjoyed -- only to be

'replaced' by a new model just a decade later. Given a (progressive-optimistic) belief in the increasing adoption of ever more 'rational' and 'scientific' ways of looking at 'reality,' one might be tempted to assume that even this new form of mythos (as an admixture of magical, moralistic, and scientific thematizations) would not be able to hold on for long. In my opinion, however, an analysis of how this 'modern' form came to be adopted points in a rather different direction.

We saw that, in a charge that had primarily been levelled against the mass media of the 1960s and '70s [F1], even in the case of abuse-model scandalization, the thematization in the specialized journals has been criticized as a "distortion of reality" as well. [F2] That the origin of ever-expanding "waves" of reality-construction (Baudrillard 1991: 20) is, in fact, science (see Lamnek 1987: 227) is something which has always -- in a much more banal sense -- been accepted by scientific sociology, should become apparent upon the presentation of the following -- particularly obvious -- example: the trade in statistical-criminological figures. This example was not selected in order to 'refute' in any way a standard assumption [296] of the abuse-discourse, but rather, in order to show how, even as paragons of objectivity, **any and all** prevailing figures are constructed -- in fact, by breaking all sorts of 'rules of the (scientific) profession,' without fear of being contradicted by the scientific community.

Since almost the very beginning of the recent discourse (but at least since 1987), specialists as well as the media have been of one accord that, every year in the Federal Republic, at least 300,000 children become victims [F3] of sexual abuse. If one were to go by the number of reported cases and early 'dark-number' estimates in this area [F4], the above figure would appear to be remarkably high. What is striking is that, oftentimes, it remains unclear precisely which experts postulated the underlying 'light-/dark-number' ratio. All of the present author's attempts to trace back the sources referenced (including in essays which are outside the scope of the journals examined, as well as those appearing in books), the road always ended at the founding document of the Federal German campaign, "Father as Perpetrator," by Kavemann/Lohstöter, from the year 1984. [F5] It is true that this figure is first mentioned (and also subsequently repeated in the 1991 edition), with a reference to "estimates" 'verified' by the BKA [Bundeskriminalamt, or Federal Police Bureau].

"Moreover, a 'dark-number' ratio of **between 1:18 and 1:20 was arrived at**, which means that, out of every 18 to 20 sexually violent acts perpetrated against girls, only one is reported to the police. (Baurmann 1978, pg. 183)." (pg. 29 -- emphasis added)

However, when one verifies the details in the volume cited, it quickly becomes apparent that the 'magic number' resulted from combining a transcription error with obsolete crime statistic case numbers and a factual misrepresentation. In the essay in

the BKA volume "Advice from the Criminal Investigation Department," which is cited as the source for this, things initially look a lot more ambiguous:

"General surveys in the sphere of sexual research in the United States and in Germany **have, on occasion, intimated** that a larger proportion of adults questioned recalled crimino-legally relevant [297] sexual contacts having occurred during their childhoods. The 'dark-number' ratios for the sexual abuse of children that is derived from these lies **somewhere between** approximately 1:12 and 1:18." (Baurmann 1978: 183, FN 5 -- emphases added).

Even if one were to accept the 'rounding up' to 1:20 of a ratio that can never represent anything more than an estimate in any event, using the actual crime statistics from the early 1980s, one would still 'only' arrive at a figure of some 200,000 cases; meaning, approximately 220,000 affected children. [F6] But even this number -- as we already saw above -- is the product of a gross factual error (which, though admittedly somewhat less obvious, would nevertheless have to be noticeable to experts).

Specialist journals and books are merely the initial 'hotbed' of social problems; from there, they 'migrate' to the mass media -- taking the pre-made expert assessments along with them. Continuing, for the moment, with the above-selected example, in the research materials themselves, one finds texts which, upon a cursory reading, give the impression that the 300,000 figure actually refers to the number of cases which come to light, which would then be multiplied by double-digits to arrive at a 'dark number' estimate. [F7] Independent of the question of whether what we are dealing with here is merely a lack of linguistic competency or deliberately ambiguous statements, it was only logical that the mass-media would then have corresponding misconceptions. Thus reported "The Lunchtime Courier" (a radio broadcast on NDR II [North German Radio] on 9/19/91:

"Officially, 300,000 children are sexually abused every year in the Federal Republic -- 'officially,' because this is the figure provided by the Federal Criminal Police Bureau. The 'dark number' is many times that." [F8]

The fact that such 'truths' are the order of the day in the Bermuda Triangle formed by slipshod journalistic inquiry, media constraints, [298] and interest-driven manipulation of the mass-media was and is the subject of traditional media criticism. At the same time, however, what is usually overlooked is that the origin of these 'systematic misconceptions' might be the specialist scientific disciplines themselves. Mass-media distortions of the current status of scientific knowledge and ethical judgments are -- at least in our case -- a (predictable) consequence of the specialist-public itself employing the techniques of moralization and scandalization.

The ritualized deployment of these sorts of 'puffed-up' numbers in nearly all of the contributions is -- based on the

experts' above-described personal interests -- all too understandable. But it seems to me that, even more remarkable (and more alarming) than the existence of such strategies is that such a misconception (not the abuse model's only one, in my opinion) could become widely accepted as a 'fact' amongst the specialist public within a period of just a few years. To the best of my knowledge, this figure's putative intellectual 'father' (a scientific collaborator with the Federal Criminal Police Bureau) only corrected the underlying calculation error in 1991.

"However, as of this point, in the 'sexual abuse of children' sphere (§176 StGB), most publications use a faulty 'light-number' figure as their point of departure (...) and then multiply this by twenty. But the latter is actually based on the dark-number estimate for 'sexual abuse via the exploitation of a relationship of dependency.' Following that, these authors then assume that 300,000 sexually violent acts against children occur annually in the Federal Republic. Consequently, this figure is the product of numerous arithmetical as well as factual errors. A more accurate dark-number estimate for the sphere of §176 StGB would be something in the neighborhood of 50,000 cases of attempted as well as completed, violent as well as non-violent, cases." (Baumann 1991: 236)

Therefore, even the **Federal Criminal Police Bureau** -- which, due to its relative independence, has neither a vested interest in scandalization, nor to directly reckon with one or another [299] interest group [F9] -- has, for years, allowed to circulate figures which are obviously inconsistent with its own level of knowledge. In fact, other institutions and specialists active in this field are similarly culpable: With few exceptions -- e.g., Lachmann 1988 -- criminologists (and representatives of related disciplines) have refrained from asking questions about and publicly declaring their misgivings concerning what they must have regarded -- based on their own studies and/or specific knowledge -- as, at the very least, the 'improbability' of this fictitious number. [F10]

The upshot of this is that, not only does the discourse among the specialist public -- due to, among other reasons, the interests of professional groups, which profit from the problem -- not unfold on the basis of 'scientifically-grounded findings,' but also, that there are no controls here on members of the corresponding scientific community who are less concerned about such matters. On the one hand, the abuse debate shows what immense power experts wield vis-à-vis the construction of social problems; but on the other hand, it also makes clear that this probably only holds true for those whose views are in harmony with the publicly-dominant humanitarian crusaders of the time. Holders of divergent opinions appear to be afraid of either losing their scientific reputations or of being publicly condemned, if they were to express [300] dissent regarding a topic which has become so strongly emotionalized, and is dominated by a form of myth. [F11]

Therefore, the opportune moment for objections may be when the mythos has just passed the peak of major media attention in

the relevant discourse. However, perhaps here as well, one might be inclined to agree with Roland Barthes's assessment that any hopes one may have had that the mythos could be curbed, via 'scientific counter-evidence,' are doomed to disappointment:

"The mythos can get to anything, corrupt everything, even efforts intended to get out from under it, so that, the more initial resistance achieved by the object language, the greater will be its eventual prostitution." (Barthes 1964: 171)

Luhmann's postulated "unanswerability" of a communication, in a society whose social facts are based on moralizing and scandalizing, would appear to apply to 'scientific discourse' as well. Admittedly, this begs the question as to precisely how it earned this reputation. That is to say, in borderline cases, any attempt to draw a distinction between mythical and scientific forms of knowledge is obsolete. The social problem of 'the sexually at-risk child' would then consist of nothing more than various layers of a discursively-generated cocoon, from which each of its own particular 'truths' is fashioned. Put together, they would have resulted in a media 'reality' which lacked even a kernel of truth, in which the

"real is eclipsed not by the imaginary, but rather, by that which is more real than real: the hyper-real. 'Realer than real': which is simulation." (Baudrillard 1991: 12)

Whether one chooses to view this simulacrum-sans-core-phenomenon as bad or good, not the least of those answerable for its coming into being is a scientific establishment which unreservedly devoted itself to the interests of moral entrepreneurs and the sexual-political zeitgeist. Certainly, it cannot [301] be expected to contribute to the de-constitution of the social problem of 'the sexually at-risk child.'

Now that, with the above observations, we have reached (or perhaps even gone beyond) the limits of the realm of moralization, it is high time that we break off our examination of the current abuse-model, and turn to the question of the future of the danger-mythos generally. A comparison of the traditional danger-model with the current one shows that all ideas viz children in particular being sexually at-risk are based on three premises, which themselves -- in turn -- take the form of myths:

First Mythos: The Deficient Nature of the Child. Children appear to have cognitive as well as moral deficits. [F12] They cannot control their impulses and emotions; nor are they in a position to be able to assess the potential consequences of their own activities, or to understand the actions of adults. Therefore, because children are not in a position to be able to decide what is good or bad for them, much less carry through with their decisions in the face of their own contrary impulses, as far as areas which have been deemed risky are concerned, they should not be granted any room to maneuver whatsoever. Precisely because it is in the child's **nature** to be at-risk of becoming a victim, it is the 'natural' task of adults to protect children against this.

Second Mythos: Dangerous Sexuality. The second prerequisite of any risk-idea is an interpretation of 'sexuality' as something which is accompanied by a driving force that is **fundamentally** dangerous to individuals as well as society (and therefore, must be strictly controlled). This universal verdict is probably the most momentous consequence of the compulsory process of increasing individual self-discipline within bourgeois society. The sexual sphere attained [302] its apex of dangerousness with Freud's postulate that the sexual impulse was only **seemingly** able to be controlled: As a 'dark force' from the mythical realm of the "id," its effects unfolded in seemingly downright magical (and therefore also apparently threatening) ways. This 'elucidation' amplified bourgeois individuals' anxieties about sexual matters even further, by transfiguring the 'repression' of the impulse into a trans-historical necessity. The child's sexuality is just as menacingly depicted by the traditional danger-model as 'male sexuality' is by the abuse-model.

Third Mythos: Guilt-Laden Sexuality. It is no accident that, in both danger-models, the argumentation is inextricably linked with moral reproaches against at least one of the parties involved. An association between sexuality and guilt, which dates back to old Judeo-Christian traditions, is (still) deeply embedded in the minds of modern-society individuals, as a mechanism for shoring up sexual prohibitions. What this means is that any and every human sexual thought, desire, and act -- on the part of children as well as adults -- is associated with guilt. In the older discourse, the child was saddled with guilt when he or she showed an interest in sex, whereas in the more recent one, he or she must be denied sexuality (in the adult sense) in order to be able to remain free of guilt. The contributions' authors and readers were only able to remain innocent if -- and so long as -- they rejected the incriminated sexuality themselves, and condemned it in others.

It is no accident that the emergence of the social problem of the 'sexually at-risk child' coincided with the ascendancy of these childhood- and sexuality-related myths. Danger-models are simultaneously both a result of tying these myths together, as well as one of the most important ways in which the latter are socially disseminated (or more precisely: pushed through). Therefore, one of the primary reasons why there is such a close connection between modern models of childhood and sexuality and the perception of danger is because the categories of 'childhood' and 'sexuality' emerged in the same way: from the creation of separate (adult) spheres of day-to-day life. The reason why the connection between them seems so laden with conflict and danger is because this splitting-off occurred in (apparently exclusively) **opposite** 'directions': While sexuality was being reduced to procreation, and the child was -- at the same time -- being defined as [303] one who was incapable of procreating, it seemed only **natural** that the two should be strictly segregated into separate spheres of human activity.

[F13]

Militating against a speedy end to the danger-mythos are the ongoing benefits it provides to the collective psyche. Tying together the above-mentioned childhood- and sexuality-related myths in the form of ideas about risk enables adults -- afresh each day -- to wall off their own insecurities and interpret them as 'wicked' acts of their own psyche, in which it is 'the other' [F14] that is to be rebuked and mastered: either the **wicked child**, or **wicked adults**.

Reproaching **other adults** makes it possible to offset any fears of hurting a child who has (more or less) been entrusted to one's own care. The danger-mythos provides the individual with the certain knowledge that any injury or harm he or she may have inflicted on (their) children was necessary, in order to protect them against the harmful actions of wicked adults. Because this person sees him/herself as the one to protect the child from dangers posed by others, this person could not possibly -- so goes the inverse of the argument -- have harmed or be harming the child him/herself. Thus, any self-blame concerning improper or inattentive child-rearing -- e.g., guilt over having failed as a parent, which is a particularly big issue for mothers -- could simply be shifted onto others.

Reproaching **the child** appears in the dual category of the endangered and dangerous child. (In the traditional model, it is directed at all children; however, in the abuse-model, it is gender-bifurcated -- i.e., directed only at boys.) The notion of the wicked child strengthens protections against morally disapproved-of desires in adults: Sexual impulses which adults -- due to their (successful) civilization -- are not entitled to, are combatted in children. The fact that this battle also involves the use of physical or psychological pressure (e.g., in the obligation to confess and with interpretations imposed by others) [304] not only points to the possibility that what we have here is a morally legitimized way of living out one's own desire for power over children -- because, for their own protection, the 'proper' definitions of sexuality, violence, and the forbidden must be imposed upon children -- but is also evidence of a fear that the example of the child could jeopardize one's own already shaky impulse-control. [F15] Consequently, children are dangerous because they are living proof that the high degree of self-control in our culture is not a natural thing, but rather, something which is socially manufactured. When impulse-control is not attained, the child becomes a 'reverse role-model' for adults, an indication that individuals are -- at the very least -- in fact able to live without strong self-discipline.

What this likely indissoluble connection between danger-mythos and the psycho-social order that underlies modern society means for the question of the latter's future evolution is this: The idea that the child is at particular risk from the sphere of the sexual will always be a social problem, in one form or another, so long as these childhood- and sexuality-related myths

continue to exist in the forms described. Therefore, the notion of the sexually at-risk child will be consigned to history only when the sexual sphere finally stops being 'the dangerous thing' and 'the morally reprehensible thing' in terms of social theory and practice, or, when -- in the context of fundamental changes in the ways that we live and work -- the modern category of childhood is, itself, done away with. [305]

Sources and Bibliography

For better clarity, sources and secondary literature are grouped based on the chapter section in which they are cited. As far as the journals examined are concerned, only those articles which are quoted from or directly referenced are itemized. The following table, which also lists the abbreviations used, constitutes the entire corpus of the research material.

Listing of Journals Examined (Source-Corpus)

- BW = Blätter der Wohlfartspflege [Journal of Social Work] [F1]: Vols. 97 (1950) through 138 (1991)
- DJ = Deutsche Jugend [German Youth]: Vols. 1 (1953) through 41 (1991)
- DPWV = DPWV-Nachrichten [DPWV-News] [F2]: Vols. 1 (1951) through 41 (1991) [Trans. note: DPWV may be the acronym for the German Public Welfare Association (Deutsche Publike Wohlfartsverein)]
- EE = Der evangelische Erzieher [The Protestant Educator]: Vols. 2 (1950) through 43 (1991)
- HK = Herderkorrespondenz [Shepherds' Correspondence]: Vols. 4 (1950) through 45 (1991)
- JS = Jugendschutz [Youth Protection] [F3]: Vols. 1 (1955) through 36 (1991)
- JW = Jugendwohl [Youth Welfare]: Vols. 31 (1950) through 72 (1991)
- KB = Katechetische Blätter [Catechist's Journal]: Vols. 75 (1950) through 116 (1991)
- PKK = Praxis der Kinderpsychologie und Kinderpsychiatrie [Child Psychology and Psychiatry Practice]: Vols. 1 (1952) through 40 (1991)
- RdJ = Recht der Jugend und des Bildungswesens [Youth Justice and the Educational System] [F4]: Vols. 1 (1954) through 38 (1991)
- SoA = Soziale Arbeit [Social Work]: Vols. 1 (1951/52) through 40 (1991)
- SP = Sozialpädagogik [Social Education]: Vols. 1 (1959) through 33 (1991)
- TP = Theorie und Praxis der sozialen Arbeit [Social Work Theory and Practice] [F5]: 1950 through Vol. 42 (1991)
- UJ = Unsere Jugend [Our Youth]: Vols. 2 (1950) through 43 (1991)