

A Strange and Terrible Unicorn: The musings of a non-offending, female pedophile

This is terrifying. Even to write this anonymously makes my heart beat faster. What I'm talking about right now is very difficult for me, because everyone who loves me has told me never to talk about it.

You may call me Emma. I am a woman, approximately 30 years old, and I am a pedophile. Yes, really.

Let's get a few things out of the way, first. I don't have POCD, this isn't a phase, and I'm not saying this in order to get attention. I am not physically repulsive, or socially inept, and I am not a man masquerading as a woman online for kicks. While I feel I shouldn't have to say any of this, apparently I do, because I have been accused of all these things at one point or another in my life. I should also point out that I am not a child molester, do not look at child pornography, and do not drool or act otherwise inappropriately when a child enters the room. It is not part of my nature to be predatory. The word 'pedophile' does not equal 'child molester'. So, please, get that notion out of your head immediately. The two are not synonymous; one does not necessarily indicate the other, and if this were a mathematical equation, the sum of both would not equally come to '42'. A pedophile is a person, either teenage or adult, whose primary or exclusive sexual attraction is toward prepubescent children (usually under the age of twelve).

While—psychiatrically speaking—a person must be at least 16 years old to be considered a pedophile, many of us, myself included, are aware of our attractions before that age. Whereas a child molester is a person who molests children. It's really quite simple; but I digress. This is information you can find anywhere, if you are so inclined to do the research. I am trying to paint my own unique picture here, to give you a glimpse into my own fun little life. Starting with this:

I was never sexually abused as a child. I was not abused as a child, period. My childhood was really quite nice, aside from the constant, all-consuming anxiety that plagued me for much of my young life. I had social anxiety, separation anxiety, bathroom anxiety, and abandonment anxiety. I was terrified of blindness and brain injuries. I would compulsively wash my hands until they bled, and pick my skin raw. But, I was never abused. When I've revealed my pedophilia to others in the past, it was common for them to tell me that there must have been abuse in my childhood—must have been—and that I just couldn't remember it. I spent a long time wracking my brain, trying to remember something that I'm now convinced was never there. I spent an even longer time searching through books, on the web, trying to learn everything I could about my condition, to learn WHY my brain worked the way it did.

I found no solid answers, because there are none. No one knows what combination of factors cause the many variations of human sexuality, and I'd bet it's a complicated meld of nature and nurture. While a seemingly disproportionate number of pedophiles report having been abused as children, and feel that abuse may have contributed to their psycho-sexual development, I personally am not one of them. After years of research and soul-searching, I have come to accept that mine may just be a case of 'faulty wiring'.

For the most part, mine is the same sad old story as the majority of pedophiles whose coming-of-age tales I've read (and, by this point, I've read quite a few). That is to say, as a child I was

attracted to other children my own age, or slightly younger. I grew up, but my attractions did not. Textbook, really. During childhood, there were always one or two girls in gymnastics class, at camp, or in school, who inexplicably drew my eye. The forms of their bodies intrigued and excited me, and I wanted to get to know them, even though I was far too shy to do so. At first, I did not understand why this was, but by the time I was eleven, it occurred to me that these 'fascinations' with particular girls might be crushes, and that I was probably a lesbian. I wrestled with that idea until I was fourteen, which is when it started to really dawn on me that the girls I was drawn to were significantly younger than myself. My friends all gushed about high school boys and hunky, 20-something heart throbs, while I found myself hopelessly attracted to the younger sister of one of my classmates.

When I was 11, the girl I had a crush on was 11. When I was in Girl Scout camp at the age of 13, the girl I had a crush on was 11. When I was 14, also at summer camp, the girl I had a crush on was... you guessed it, 11. And, that's only because 11 was the youngest age one could be in order to attend said summer camps. Eleven is actually at the very top of the age bracket I find myself attracted to. Seven through ten are the optimal ages, and I admit I am drawn to girls as young as four. Over twelve, and they simply cease to catch my eye or stir my imagination. Why? No fucking clue. It wasn't until I was 15 that I learned that mine was an actual sexuality with a name, and that it was not particularly smiled upon by... well, by anyone.

This is not a nice sexuality to have. As the late, great Terry Pratchett would have put it, when God was handing out the sexualities, I must have been at the back of the line; or maybe out taking a whiz. First and foremost, being a pedophile means that if you want to live your life as a law-abiding, morally decent person, you must never even so much as flirt with someone you find sexually attractive. Don't flirt, don't kiss, don't touch, and mostly definitely don't fuck. There is enough evidence to indicate that, while adult/child sexual relations are not always harmful, the risk of causing serious damage to a child's psyche is just too great a thing to ignore. It is because of this undeniable risk that I feel those pedophiles who strive to abolish age of consent laws are speaking from a place of selfishness; but again, I digress. For someone like me, who is pretty much exclusively attracted to children, romantic and sexual relationships with acceptable partners can be quite difficult. And, yes; I have tried it. I have had sexual relations with both men and women, and my responses have ranged from "Ok, but not that much fun" to "this is revolting and I want to scrub myself with bleach". I confess that I envy people who can have fun, happy sex with consenting partners.

But, sexual frustration is only part of it. Tons of people are sexually frustrated. After all, no one is entitled to sex with those they find attractive, regardless of orientation. For us though, there is also the crippling stigma to contend with. See, being a pedophile means that you spend your life from adolescence onward constantly, and from every direction, absorbing the message that "people like you are bad". You absorb it from the news, from the media, from your friends and family, from people who call themselves progressive, and champion the expression of sexual diversity. You begin to feel that if the people you love and respect really KNEW you, they would abandon you in an instant. You begin to project the message "you are bad" onto yourself, until you start agreeing with everyone else: that you are the scum of the earth, subhuman, unworthy, and worst of all, doomed to become the monster you're accused of being from the very start.

While it is extremely isolating to be a pedophile of either sex, being a woman with this sexuality adds a whole other layer of isolation that is seldom explored. I've been Google-searching

'female pedophiles' ever since I first started realizing I was one, and very, very little turns up on the subject. In fact, most of what turns up is people speculating on whether or not we actually exist. Even the experts tend to ignore the existence of pedophilia in women. Not so long ago, I listened to an interview with renowned clinical psychologist and sexologist Dr. James Cantor, who has made the research of the pedophilic brain the main focus of his work (and, for this, I respect him immensely, even though to my knowledge his research has thus far not extended to non-offenders). He and his interviewers began discussing which methods are most effective in distinguishing those who are truly pedophiles from those who are not. Dr. Cantor spoke of phallometry—the measurement of blood flow to the penis as a means of measuring sexual arousal—as a very effective method for diagnosis. I kept waiting for someone to bring up the inevitable follow-up response: "well, obviously this is not an effective method for detecting pedophilia in women. How do you diagnose female pedophiles?" At least, I thought it was the inevitable follow-up question. But no one, neither the doctor nor the interviewers, even brought it up. The unspoken message resonated loud and clear with me: that I, and the presumably few women out there like myself, are so invisible that not even the leading researchers in the field feel it necessary to address our existence.

There are many examples of this. In both scientific and lay narratives discussing pedophilia, the language generally excludes women with the condition, or briefly mentions us as an afterthought. In Germany, there is a rather revolutionary program entitled Prevention Project Dunkelfeld (which translates literally as 'Dark Fields', because I guess that's where pedophiles lurk?) The purpose of the program is to evaluate and treat minor attracted folks, both pedo and hebe, who have not offended but fear they might, in order to help equip them with the mental tools to live an offense-free life. They run public advertisements making people aware of the program, so that those who are struggling with pedophilic attractions know where to go. Which sounds like a pretty fantastic and altogether logical approach, from where I stand. In this context, go Germany! Anyway, the first time I went on their website, I checked out their FAQ, on which was posed the question of how many of their patients are female. The words originally used to answer this question were these: "pedophilia in women is irrelevantly rare". Not just rare, but irrelevantly rare. I'll be perfectly honest with you: that one hurt. To be told that, in the context of research and treatment, you are irrelevant, is very disheartening indeed. Now, since first time I read the FAQ, the language has changed, and I can only imagine it is because more female patients have been accepted into their program. I hope so. I certainly wouldn't want to think that women who come to them for help might be turned away due to a lack of familiarity with how pedophilia in women presents. Which is a question unto itself; are we really any different from our male counterparts? Why is this paraphilia (and paraphilia in general) so much more common in men than in women? I would really, truly like to know. If researchers ever decide to conduct a study on the etiology of pedophilia in women specifically, I will gladly participate in the interest of better understanding the mystery that is my own mind. Just give me the opportunity: I'll pimp my brain for science in a heartbeat.

On the flip side, our seeming rarity, coupled with society's desire to see women as nonthreatening individuals, protects us. When a woman shows interest or affection for children, she is likely to be perceived as motherly, whereas a man who does the same is likely to be perceived as a sexual predator. When a woman comes across a lost child and tries to help, she doesn't need to fear being misread as a nefarious person, while a man does. Hey, if tomorrow I decided to go loitering around playgrounds and schoolyards, I could probably do so without raising much suspicion. By the way, I would never do such a thing. It strongly violates my

internal guidebook, "Don't Be a Creep: 101". The point is, I probably could. I feel this idea of women as maternal, faultless figures not only protects us from being perceived or believed as pedophiles, but makes the stigma upon us far less severe than that which befalls our male counterparts. The female pedophile is thought of as a rare, unfathomable creature, like some strange and terrible unicorn. While a great many pedophiles are not sexual predators, and studies show the majority of child sex abusers are not, in fact, pedophiles (look it up if you don't believe me) there ARE female pedophiles who are predatory, and it is dangerous to act like they don't exist. While it is psychologically traumatic for a child to be pulled away from her father and interrogated by police because they mistakenly think he is molesting her simply by daring to appear with her in public without a mother figure present, it is also traumatic for a child to feel his or her abuse is not being taken seriously because the perpetrator happens to be female. The two scenarios are flip sides of the same coin when it comes to how gender affects perceptions of child abuse. I'm sure there are many who exploit the public perception of women as harmless motherly types, and get away with terrible things. In any case, my speculations about the perceptions of pedophilia in relation to gender is just that—speculations. I cannot speak for the experiences of a male pedophile, a trans pedophile of either gender, or anyone, in fact, who isn't me. Personally, I'd guess it's easier to be invisible than to be villainized: but, neither are fantastic.

You may read this and immediately perceive me as sick in the head. That's OK. I have a lot of glitches in my brain besides this one, and to describe my mind as 'disordered' is not inaccurate, nor does it offend me. There is a lot of speculation over whether pedophilia is best described as a sexual orientation or a mental illness, but I personally don't understand why the two have to be mutually exclusive. I mean, it behaves like a sexual orientation in every way. It is my sexual orientation. I don't have another one hiding somewhere underneath that can be coaxed out through careful training and self-inflicted conversion therapy; although, believe me, I've tried. However, at the same time, it isn't functional. It is not a sexuality that can lead to equally satisfying and beneficial partnerships, and therefore it is flawed: a dead-end sexuality. A great many pedophiles are unhappy people, and it's not just the social stigma that makes us that way, but also the knowledge that such a fundamental chunk of our personhood is effectively a dead-end. I therefore think of it as a 'disordered sexual orientation'. But, that is just my interpretation. Many in the anti-contact camp—meaning pedophiles who feel adult/child sex is innately abusive, and don't act on our desires—have different interpretations. In any case, I am a good person, which to me is more important than being a definitively sane-in-every-way person.

I've noticed that whenever someone even attempts to start an intelligent discussion about pedophilia, they are immediately accused of trying to 'normalize' it. Please understand that this is not my goal, nor is it the goal of anyone I know who speaks on our behalf. The goal here, at least in my eyes, is not to make others view us as 'normal'. It is to help you build an understanding of who we actually are, and make you aware of the unique issues we deal with. We are human beings, which means we come in all shades of moral character; not just 'bad' and 'worse'. Perceiving us to be no more than monstrous caricatures benefits no one: not us, not you, and certainly not your children. You've probably heard it before, but the more we are demonized and silenced, the less likely we are to reach out for help when we need it, which in turn creates pedophiles who feel depressed, anxious, and alone. Say you have two teenagers who both realize to their horror that they are sexually attracted to children. One feels comfortable talking to his parents, who are supportive, and help him find a qualified therapist, who provides him with the coping skills to get through life without offending or getting himself

into situations in which he'd be more likely to offend. The other teen is too scared to talk to her family about it. She tries to push it away and pretend it's not there, and becomes hopeless and depressed when denial doesn't seem to be working. Because she is 'so good with children' she eventually allows others to pressure her into babysitting jobs, even though she is not entirely sure she trusts herself to work in such a position. Given these two scenarios, which one of these teenagers do you think is more likely to offend? Please understand that, by trying to lessen the stigma surrounding pedophilia, and by allowing people who are struggling with these desires to access support, we are attempting to prevent instances of child abuse. We are on the same side! I don't know how to put it any more clearly than that.

There is so much more I wish I could say. I wish I could share particular events from my life, or bring up the other mental issues I struggle with, or tell you about the methods I use to cope with my unfortunate attractions. But, I'm frightened to release any information that could be used to identify me. In the end, I hope this narrative will serve its intended purpose, which is to add my voice to the ever-growing number of non-offending pedophile voices online. The more of us share our stories, the more difficult it will be for the world to ignore that we are capable of existing as morally decent, law-abiding humans. I will not be complicit in the silence surrounding this issue. In silence, people become isolated, and suffer, and I refuse to be part of that. Most of all, I hope that my particular narrative might provide some comfort to a teenage girl out there somewhere, who is just noticing her pedophilia and turns to the web for guidance. I want that girl to come across my story and know she is not all alone in the world: that other female pedophiles do exist. That we are rare, but we are real, and we are not irrelevant.

Thanks for reading.