Controversy: Should Pedophilia Be Classified As a Sexual Orientation?

The American Psychiatric Association's upcoming fifth edition of the DSM has created quite a stir.

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When the American Psychiatric Association published the first edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in 1952, the clinician's bible listed 106 diagnosed mental illnesses. By the manual's fourth edition, DSM-IV, the manual's pages numbered 886 and its listing of mental illnesses soared to 365. Over the course of the book's growth spurts, controversy reigned. Amidst constant criticism from both within and without the profession, diagnoses were excitedly embraced then summarily discarded like hot passion grown cold. Soon to publish, in May 2013, the DSM will mature into its fifth edition, the DSM-V. One of the new manual's biggest controversies focuses on expanding the definition of pedophilia, the sexual attraction of adults to physically immature children. What's disturbing to many people is the reality that pedophilia has no cure and research confirms that adults who are hardwired this way are unlikely to change their sexual preferences. As a result, a growing number of researchers now view pedophilia—previously classified as a perversion in the DSM—as a sexual orientation.

According to a paper published in the Archives of Sexual Behavior, historically, the sexual use of young children was an accepted social practice in almost all cultures. And even today, interest and indulgence in adult-child sex flourishes in all parts of the world. To date, mental health professionals still can't say what causes an adult to sexually desire a child. In February 2011, psychologist Vernon Quinsey, PhD, a professor emeritus at Canada's Queen's University, told the country's parliament that pedophilia should be classified as a sexual orientation. "As far as we know—and many people have tried—these sexual interests are not modifiable by any method that's been tried yet," Quinsey told Good, an online magazine. But not all pedophiles act on their urges, and unless the person is particularly at high-risk of harming a child, these people should not necessarily be tossed into jail, he added.

Instead, Quinsey and other mental health professionals suggest that society focus more on effective ways to help pedophiles control their urges. Many of them agree the first step toward doing just that will start with the DSM-V reclassifying pedophilia as a sexual orientation.

And so the controversy continues.

(Please share your opinion. Click here to take the poll.)

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