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150 people turned up for the day-long series of panels discussing the issue of man-boy love; organizer Tom Reeves expected several dozen.

MEN & BOYS

THE BOSTON CONFERENCE

Anura Bryant would not have been amused. Nick Kelley, 16, was explaining why he wanted to be with an older man, an adult. "He had so much to offer, and what really bothered me was the fact that someone was actually concerned about the fact that I had been in his car, and that someone somewhere would not like it." The event was the first ever semi-public gathering in North America of men who are involved in relationships with male youngsters, of the boys themselves, as well as of assorted other "professionals" in some way connected with the issue of man-boy love. 150 people turned up for the invitation-only conference, held at Boston's Community Church December 2, 1978, for a day-long series of panels discussing psychological, ethical, political, and legal problems involved in such relationships.

The overwhelming turnout exceeded the expectation of conference organizer Tom Reeves, who had only expected several dozen people. Reeves, a political science professor at Roxbury College, is spokesperson of the Boston/Boise Committee, formed last year after the indictments of two dozen men in the so-called Revere cases. The men were charged with separate violations of the law for illegal sexual acts with (mostly teenage) minors.

The range of views expressed by the panelists and conferees were, by and large, generally supportive of man-boy relationships. Different people from different backgrounds and careers appeared to agree that the legal problems faced by the men arrested in such cases were appalling, and that the punishment was worse than the crime. (In Massachusetts, one could be committed for life as a sexually dangerous person.)

The audience heard one of the Revere defendants, Ed Mede, describe himself as a "homosexual Buddhist" stoically facing a possible life sentence for sexual acts with a teenager. The teenager had embraced Mede at an earlier Boston/Boise meeting, but later turned state's witness, as a result, Mede's supporters have argued, of pressure from the police.

If Mede was philosophical about his fate, so was Kelley, who tried to

explain the opposition to his relationship with an adult: "I guess the problem is that parents want very much to protect their children, and I really don't think that protection is necessary." That brought laughter from the audience. Kelley continued: "It's not—kids basically know what they're doing, they know what they want and they are not that easily manipulated as people would like us to think they are."

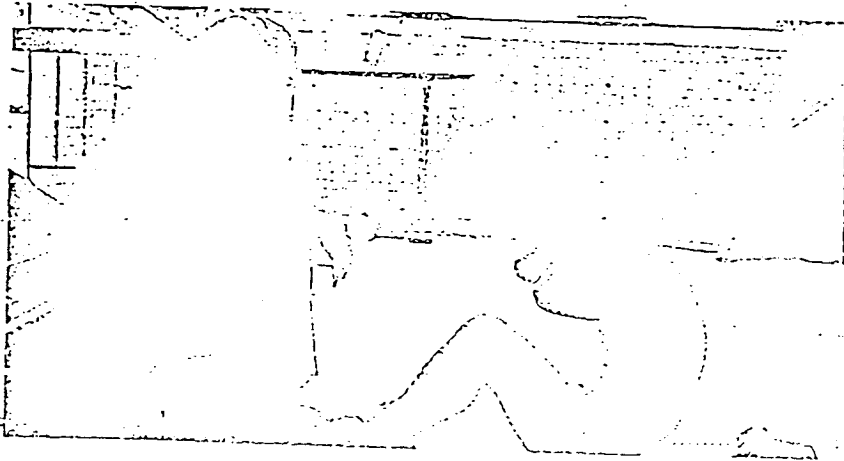
Another Boston gay youth, Rich McDougall, of Fag Rag, derided teenage hustling: "For most youth, it's the only way to get exposed, the only way to get sex with men. I knew I was a homosexual at nine years old, I knew what I wanted, but the only way I knew how to get it was to go to the theater and ask for money. Maybe that's hustling, but it was very fulfilling—it served its purpose."

McDougall said he "was never seduced by any man." Instead, "it was kind of fun to go to the Combat Zone and make a few dollars by sitting in a movie theater and getting your cock sucked. It's really a good way to make a few bucks."

McDougall was one of many speakers to lash out at the Judeo-Christian tradition of treating sex outside procreation as bad. Fellow Fag Rag writer Charlie Shively, who had burned a bible at a recent gay pride rally, argued that gay people are "engaged in sex for pleasure, not procreation." Sex is fun, he said, and "doesn't lead to diseases, not even skin cancer."

Even speakers representing various religious beliefs voiced their endorsement of love between man and boy. Canon Canon Jones, pastor of Christ Church Cathedral, Hartford, Connecticut, described a Roman Catholic priest who was a friend of his, and who was "a beautiful person because he was loved by a man as a boy." He expressed concern for men who are arrested for child-molestation: "They become marked men so often for the rest of their lives, and that I think is a terrible imposition of society." He described one such person who was sent back to prison just because he was in the same room with a boy. "No genital sex took place—this man went back for four more years. That is awesome to me; it's very tragic."

BY DANIEL TSANG
PHOTOGRAPHED BY WALTER FRIEDMAN



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Father Paul Shanley, representative of Boston's Cardinal Madeiros for outreach to sexual minorities, told the story of a boy who was rejected by family and society, but helped by a boy-lover. When his parents found out about the relationship however, the man was arrested, convicted, and sent to prison. And here began the psychic demise of that lad," Shanley commented. "He had loved that man... it was only a brief and passing thing as far as the sex was concerned, but the love was deep and the gratitude to the man was deep, and when he realized that the indiscretion in the eyes of society and the law had cost this man perhaps 20 years... the boy began to rot from within," Shanley concluded. "We have our convictions upside down. If we are truly concerned with boys... the 'cure' does far more damage."

Dr. Robert Wheatley, from the national office of the Unitarian Universalist Church, described being propositioned by a 15-year-old boy recently. "If you don't think that was rather a shot in the arm for one who is 50, well, you're mistaken," Wheatley observed.

The conference was also an occasion for many to come out as boy-lovers. David Thorstad, spokesperson for New York City's Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights, said he was retracting his earlier statement (in *Gay Community News*) that he was not a pederast. "I am very happy to say that over the summer that has changed, and it wasn't due to my own initiative either, but just as it is with many men, I was seduced and picked up by a boy and I'm very glad he did it."

Joe Owens, who had been a labor organizer in Jamaica and a social worker in the black community in Boston before that, said he was speaking for the first time in public as an acknowledged boy-lover. "As a white man relating to a black community it was an extremely liberating effect, and the reason why I think I was able to do it where many another white person may not be able to do it successfully was precisely because of this psychological orientation that I had." That permitted, Owens argued, "an immediacy (in the relationship between myself and boys, and there was a level of communication which threw aside completely all the cultural and racial differences which separated whites from blacks in the society."

Sidney Smith, a black artist from New York City, spoke about the rage he felt at having to sublimate his needs for relationships with boys. He said he resented "having to live in a culture where things that seem natural and right to me, have to be... fearful."

Many in the audience did not or could not come out. One panelist identified himself as "Don," explaining that he would immediately lose his social service job with a religious organization. He spoke of having to draw back from helping boys out of fear of exposure of his double life.

Tom Reeves, who had come out as a boy-lover a year ago, said over 500 men had spoken with him since then, most of whom were struggling with their attraction to boys. "Sex is everywhere between men and boys," Reeves asserted. The men with whom he spoke "are not open at all... and who are they? Almost to a man they are teachers and boy scout leaders and boys' clubs leaders!" he shouted, pounding the podium with both hands. "The men who work with boys—many of them, and this obviously can be used against everybody, but I think we have to say it—the motivation behind that work (has) a sexual and erotic element."

Reeves continued: "Since possibly a third of the boy scout leaders and teachers and boys' clubs leaders and big brothers and all of these other people that work with youth have either these feelings or they are acting on them, there must be enormous oppression out there which could cause all kinds of things."

"It would cause the creation of the duckhawk who roams the streets; it would create boy prostitution; it would create manipulative situations and engineering situations." However, boy love is "healthy and good," when the men act responsibly and ethically," Reeves argued.

Other panelists also spoke of how the issue of boy love had caused them to rethink their own attitudes toward child sexuality. Dr. Richard Piliard, Chairperson of the Department of Psychiatry at Boston University Hospital, reminded conference attendees "Freud pointed out 70 years ago that sexuality begins in childhood and even in infancy, and that

by the age of four, five, and six, boys know that their feelings come from playing with their penis, and this is a discovery which they seek out, eager to share with their friends." Piliard then criticized adult society for restraining sexuality by investing it with fear and guilt and for placing children in institutions and schools where they are regimented and encouraged to enter into mindless competition which is seen as a way of preventing them from having the time and the opportunity to explore their secret and tender feelings toward one another." Piliard concluded: "Men and the boys who love each other are engaging in a social experiment."

Lois Johnson, President of Boston's Daughters of Bilitis, described the change in her attitude from "outrage" at boy-lovers to "outrage at the violation of the civil rights of both the men and of the boys" involved in the Revere cases. She said she started questioning things when "Blaine Meade came out in favor of the hotline—I said, 'Good God!'" Gay activists had feared that the hotline, for complaints to the police about sex crimes, would form the basis of a witchhunt. The hotline idea was eventually squelched.

Johnson asserted, "It is difficult for women to come to grips with man-boy love, simply because of the fact that women, as far as their own sexuality is concerned, are conditioned in such a way that they are not as expressive of it as men are, even in a heterosexual sense."

But a big uproar erupted when Jon Schaller, a founder of Youth Liberation of Ann Arbor, raised from the audience a question regarding power differences between the parties in a man-boy love relationship. Schaller, who now runs *Carnier Pigeon*, a Boston-based distributor of radical and feminist publications, said that issue had not been referred to at the conference. "At this point we still live in a society which is dominated by adults, where adults make laws and regulations and where young people don't have much practice making decisions about their lives, and they don't have experience assessing themselves against adults," Schaller argued. "Any relationship between an adult and a young person, where the adult is not consciously trying to overcome that power differential, is going to be ageist, and that's the important issue for anybody in that kind of a situation to deal with."

Both Charlie Shively and Rich McDougall supported Schaller. Shively reacted: "When people are denied power, they're given love," particularly in regard to children and quoted the *Dilemma*. "He so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son," Shively said. "I think we need to examine what that means—I don't want my father to be crucifying me! This love business is, it seems to me, a creeping form of Christianity!"

McDougall responded: "Boys don't have power over men... but they do go out and seduce men."

But Reeves reacted angrily, saying, "It's ageist to say that the man necessarily has the dominance and the upper hand." He argued that the boy "has the dominance" in physical, emotional, and spiritual terms and "has the power over the man." Reeves added: "It's a false view to think all of the power is on the side of the man. A great deal of power is on the side of the boy and it could go either way."

"When I become oppressive it's when I either try to reform a boy from prostitution or whatever else he's into, or when I try to get him into the [gay] movement." That was "much more manipulative than having sex with them," he asserted.

Reeves also criticized the tendency of many boy-lovers (including himself) to show off the boys. "We become possessive... we want to show them off in the bars... it's those kind of things that get us into trouble, and it's those kind of things that are oppressive to the boys and to each other and to ourselves."

A woman from the audience reacted: "It's adult men saying that the boys have power, and that the men are in a position of being manipulated. Personally it's bullshit for an adult to say a kid has more power given the way we're structured in this world and the fact that it's not your right to say it."

Ed Mede, arguing that a teenager's word could put a boy in a prison, and blaming his 15-year-old former lover for ruining his life, became embroiled in a shouting match with Schaller.

With Mede interrupting him, Schaller responded: "I think that's the whole issue. The point is that in this society adults have power, physical, economic... I think you can take any oppressed group in our society and find some way in which they have power." The issue center other moderator David Thorstad said, "I'd like to cut down on cross discussion, and recognized another conference."

At the end of the conference, 32 men and two teenagers came out and formed the Man Boy Lovers of North America. A newsletter and a future meeting in New York City are planned.

The group can be contacted by writing them care of *Gay Reg.*, Box 220, Kenmore Station, Boston, MA 02115.

