Child abuse and identity politics – the normalisation of abuse on such grounds

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It has become quite clear for an extended period how the monolithic categorisation of vast groups of people provided by some varieties of identity politics beloved of the liberal left is not only fatally dangerous but has demonstrably facilitated some forms of abuse of children, with liberal leftists preferring to allow children to continue to be abused when the alternative would be to indict some member of a group who they believe can never do any wrong. The journalist Eileen Fairweather, who broke the story of widespread abuse in Islington children’s homes for the Evening Standard, wrote of how one woman recalled being told openly by Righton at a social function in the 1970s how he enjoyed having sex with boys in children’s homes; Righton apparently assumed that as a lesbian she ‘wouldn’t break ranks’, and the woman went along with what she called ‘a typical gay man’s excuse – that he didn’t use force’ (she later gave a statement to the investigators) (cited in Christian Wolmar, Forgotten Children: The Secret Abuse Scandal in Children’s Homes (London: Vision Paperbacks, 2000)). Fairweather has written bravely elsewhere (see here, here and here) on how paedophiles exploited wilful blind spots from many on the left in order to get away with things, about about how Islington Council continues to resist the full disclosure of how sustained abuse could go on under a left-wing council administration.

In a similar vein, the journalist Hugo Rifkind, in a dismissive and negating piece about current revelations of widespread abuse, asks whether, because ‘our modern, online paedo-panic lists are so heavily populated by Jews’ (to the best of my knowledge, only two or three Jewish names appear with any regularity, perfectly statistically possible), this is not ‘age-old blood libel, cast anew?’, concluding ‘Definitely, there’s a taste of that’ (Hugo Rifkind, ‘The powerful are different. Must be perverts; The notion of a huge paedophile conspiracy is dreamt up by irrational people convinced that ‘they’ are out to get ‘us'', The Sunday Times, July 15th, 2014). I would be surprised if many abusers who are otherwise gay, lesbian, Jewish, Asian, female, or whatever, would not try and use these facts if they thought it would help them escape justice, and . Michele Elliot, who has researched female abusers, has detailed the vicious hostility she has encountered from some feminists for even addressing the issue – presumably those very same feminists would prefer for
the children to continue to go on being abused than to have to question the simple binaries upon which their particular ideological variety depends.

In *The Guardian*, in September 1993, an article was reprinted from *Shebang* magazine, which I reproduce here. It details underage teenage girls’ crushes on female teachers, in several cases which led to sexual abuse, here portrayed in a wholly innocuous manner, very much in the manner of other paedophile literature, including magazines such as *Magpie*.

Fiona Sandler, ‘TO MISS WITH LOVE; Why would a schoolgirl be celebrating the end of the summer holidays? Because she is in love with her teacher. Here, four lesbians recall their own teenage crushes’. *The Guardian*, September 21st, 1993

WHEN I first saw Sandy, I was completely overwhelmed by her. I was 14 and she walked into the classroom smoking a cigarette and wrote “Fuck” on the blackboard. She was American and that didn’t happen at our school. It was an ex-private boys’ school and we were only the second intake of girls. They had to ship in female teachers – and it was considered churlish not to have at least five boyfriends.

My crush started off slowly and got bigger and bigger. I would write her poems in my essays. One time I’d written a poem all about where she lived – I’d found out and looked in the window. She read out the whole poem to the class. At the end I’d written: “I worship you so much, I have you on a pedestal.” She said: “The only reason you’ve got me on a pedestal is to look up my skirt” and threw it at me. I was mortified.

She suffered it for a long time, about two years. After one school disco I rang her up, said I had a problem and that she had to come and pick me up. She did; it was about 2am and she took me to Safeway’s car park. I told her I was in love with her and that I didn’t care, I just wanted to kiss her – and I made her snog me in the back of her maroon mini. I told her that I knew I was always going to feel like this about her, I didn’t fancy anyone else and I couldn’t get her off my mind. She said: “Look, nothing’s permanent”, drove me back to my mum and dad’s, gave me two Polo mints, said, “You’d better suck these” and that was that.

We used to hang out a bit together but it was all in my head. She knew about it but kept me at arm’s length.

In the meantime, I had become friendly with my French teacher and her husband, who also taught at the school. She was 25 and had just made the transition from student to teacher. I really fancied her and we became closer. For about a month her husband turned a blind eye – but then he went back to Paris.
One day I was at my house with my French teacher when my mum unexpectedly came home and opened the door. Her hair literally stood on end. I was naked, changing a record, with my French teacher lying on the bed – the last time they’d seen each other was at a parent and teacher night. I thought it was hilarious – 15 and my whole world was shattered. My mum ran next door to get our neighbours, who were police, to arrest us. She wouldn’t let us leave the house until my dad got home. When he arrived, he threw her out and told me that either I changed or left; he didn’t want my little brother turning into a poof. I knew I couldn’t change, so I went and lived with my teacher.

At the time, I was adamant that I wasn’t gay. I didn’t think I was gay until I was about 19, even though I had slept with loads of women. I thought I was bisexual.

IN MY second year, when I was 12 or 13, a new teacher came along, Miss Rogers. She was just gorgeous and when she asked me to play for the hockey team, I immediately said yes. It meant playing three or four times a week after school and getting up really early on a Saturday. I hated the game but she was the coach, so I knew she would be there. I’ll never forget the one time when our school won, I’d scored both goals, and at the end she came up and gave me a big hug. She was so happy and I was on cloud nine for days and days.

All this constant hockey playing kept on until my fourth year, when she asked me if I would try out for the Edinburgh Young Ladies’ hockey team. The situation was totally out of hand. I was playing hockey all the time to impress her, but I never enjoyed the game. It was just to be where she would be. I said yes, of course, because she was going to coach me personally. The try-outs were between three and four months away, and it meant a lot of time with her.

I was constantly attempting to get her attention. I dyed my fringe red so she would notice me. The hockey uniform was long green socks and I would wear one long green sock and one long white sock just because I thought there might be the remotest possibility that she would one day come up and ask me why my socks didn’t match.

She was always so nice to me. She was a big Gerry Rafferty fan, so I went out and bought all his albums. I remember constantly listening to Baker Street and it still always reminds me of coming home from hockey practice.

A week before the try-outs, I went for a coffee with her after practice. I asked her if she was with anyone and she said yes, and that she and her boyfriend were building a house together. I couldn’t believe it. She had to repeat it all again and then she told me they were engaged and planning to get married. That moment was the end of my hockey career. I never tried out – I gave it up completely.
I was 15 and heartbroken but I’m pleased I went through it. It was my first serious thing for a woman and it did make me know I was a dyke – I went out with my first girlfriend a couple of months later.

I WENT TO a big comprehensive school in the north of England and stood out in some ways for being popular and quite bright. Getting towards 16, I had the usual traumas of being different – I knew what lesbians were, but I certainly wasn’t into the idea of being one.

I assumed that none of my peers knew what was going on but one teacher did and she kept me behind one day. I was nervous, thinking I had done something wrong. She said she had noticed I’d changed – I wasn’t laughing as much – and that she was concerned. Was anything wrong? I said no, she accused me of lying and I flounced off. This was reported and I was told to apologise for being rude. I went along and she confronted me: “Maybe I should put it to you like this – you’re not like the other girls, are you?”

This hit the nail on the head for me. I just sat there and went to pieces in front of her, I couldn’t string a sentence together. She thought I needed to talk to someone about it, so she set up us meeting under the guise of extra exam tuition. I went to her house after school once a week and she would literally talk at me for an hour. My parents thought it was brilliant that she was taking an interest.

After the third time, she said to me: “Maybe I ought to tell you that I find you very attractive.” I had mixed feelings about it – I felt very honoured but I didn’t have the emotional capacity to deal with it. I did have a crush on her, which is probably what brought me to her attention, and if it had been left to run its course, that’s all it would have been.

As it happened, we did have a relationship but I was a nervous wreck at school. Her O level was the only one I failed. We saw each other for about 10 months and not a soul knew, which was very stressful. I had to lie to my parents and my friends, and everyone wanted know who the mystery man was.

The relationship ended when she said that I had to choose – either live with her or go. She didn’t want anyone to know, she just wanted me to come and live in her house. At 16, I was too young to cope with it; she was 12 years older. I thought: “I just can’t live like that.” Basically I was scared. If I asked her what would happen if we were found out, she’d say: “Nobody will find out if you keep your mouth shut.” The power she had was amazing.

Looking back now, I view the relationship as a good thing. It made me realise there were other people out there like me. It enabled me to know that I could make the
choice but it also confused me in some ways. It was too much too soon. I was so young and inexperienced. I had moments, though, when I thought: “This is love.”

THE TEACHER I fell in love with seemed really young – she was 26 – had huge tits and was there when, at 14, I was feeling very vulnerable, just after my father had died.

I collected things she threw at me to shut me up, like bits of chalk; she threw a keychain once. I kept them in a little box in the attic. I had about 50 notes she’d written. I kept asking to go to the toilet to get them. I would trace her handwriting and smell the paper. I raked in her drawers at breaktime and memorised pieces of information about her. I knew all her registration numbers and the names and addresses of all the places where she had taught.

I would watch her play hockey – she was an international player. I was the only person standing and cheering in the rain. Once her clogs were stolen on a school outing and I lent her my trainers. I lied and said I only lived around the corner, and walked home in my socks just so she would have her feet in my training shoes for three whole hours.

When I told her I was in love with her, she said: “I’m very flattered but I’m not a homosexual. There’s nothing wrong with being one, though. When you leave school, you’ll meet more people like that but right now there aren’t any.”

I wrote massive passionate letters to her which I used to get her to read out loud to me at breaktime. She never got a break; I would always go up to the staff room to give her another letter: “I love you, I want you, I really fancy you. If I don’t spend my life with you, I will die. I need to have sex with you.” She’d then keep the letter, saying she was afraid of it falling into the wrong hands.

Summer holidays were the worst, I didn’t get to see her for six weeks, but I’d phone her four times a day. I would cycle to school to stare into the biology lab where she taught during termtime. I used to try to smell her in class and if I smelt her up close – she smelt of Rive Gauche perfume and tobacco – I’d want to faint, I was so in love with her.

I failed all my examinations because I loved her. Whenever she left the exam hall after supervising a test, I would leave as well, even if it was only 10 minutes into the exam, and follow her along the hall just to have three minutes alone with her.

We still meet up sometimes. She says it was the notes she couldn’t handle because she thought they would ruin her teaching career. She could cope when I was 13 or 14 but when I got to 16 and more mature, she couldn’t. We both went through such a lot together that we share a special place in each other’s hearts.
Being in love with her made me feel that being gay meant never being able to get who I wanted, any woman at all. It would always mean unrequited love, me in the background staring at some woman who was untouchable. I thought my whole life would be like that.

Interviews by Fiona Sandler.

This article first appeared in the June issue of Shebang.

Did the then-editor of the paper, Peter Preston (or that of Shebang), contact the authorities about these teachers, who might still be abusing other girls? Why was it all right to present these accounts in such an unmediated form?

I am not trying to deny the fact that those under the age of consent have sexual feelings – in my own case I can certainly recall such a thing from around age 8-9 – nor saying that when some explore such things with those of around their same age, it should always be viewed as wrong and criminalised. But the justification of adult sexual exploitation of children, on the grounds that the child wanted, enjoyed or consented to it, is odious in the extreme, and I see no difference between, say, the case of Michael Brewer towards the late Frances Andrade at my old school, or some of the cases detailed above, or that of Helen Goddard, trumpet teacher at City of London School for Girls, who groomed and exploited a girl at the school from age 13. One notorious apologist for this and child sex abuse was feminist Germaine Greer, who has also written a whole book on the subject (The Boy (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003)), and one proudly told the Sydney Morning Herald that ‘A woman of taste is a pederast – boys rather than men’ (see Greer in interview with Andrew Denton, September 15th, 2003). Of course, Greer’s paedophilia is of little consequence to her various acolytes and cheerleaders; if it amounts simply to her masturbating in old age over the types of stills from Death in Venice which adorn her book, this may not be so worrying, but she helps to legitimise the sexual abuse of girls and boys; it is at least a relief that she never had children herself. One of Greer’s acolytes, Beatrice Faust, contributed an important chapter to the paedophile volume Betrayal of Youth (London: CL Publications, 1986). Another contributor to this volume, Tuppy Owens, happily printed text from a publication entitled Girl Love, which featured pseudo-pornographic drawings of young children, in her Sex Maniac’s Diary, and would also make a point of listing PIE at every address it occupied (see Tim Tate, Child Pornography: An Investigation (London: Methuen, 1990), pp. 130, 161-162). Beatrix Campbell, in a wholly misguided defence of Harriet Harman from February, claims that only men advocated paedophilia, as if women were completely immune to this. Campbell is demonstrably wrong, in exactly the same manner as others involved in covering up for ‘their own'; to find women and some feminists who advocated or apologised for paedophilia, she need only look as far not only as Greer, Faust and Owens, but also Kate Millett, Gayle Rubin, Nettie Pollard,
Pat Califia, Lindy Burton, Gisela Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg and others, many of these figures greatly loved and acclaimed in writings by PIE members, whilst articles like that I posted earlier this week by Mary Manning goes well beyond simple humane concern for paedophiles.

At the time when PIE was at its height (c. 1977-78) I was aged 9-10. I was fortunate not to have fallen victim to paedophiles – though various people close to me of both sexes were (I was at a school where abuse went on on a huge scale, for girls during their teens, and for some boys when younger). But I could have been, very easily, and I remain to be convinced that the likes of Patricia Hewitt, Harriet Harman, Jack Dromey, Margaret Hodge, and others would have necessarily cared about my welfare if this involved people who were part of their own ‘chumocracies’ (which in the case of the NCCL people includes members of PIE). When I see the haughty, arrogant, me-me-me attitude of Harman on this, trying cynically to bring up the ‘Why oh why couldn’t I be Deputy Prime Minister’ at the very height of media attention on abuse, and receiving sycophantic tributes from her chums in the media, I am filled with poisonous loathing. Harman appears to care more about having her hair done, her bloated ego, and becoming Deputy Prime Minister than whether boys (such as myself) might have been anally raped by PIE members (as happened in the case of musician Alan Doggett, for example), and for that reason she is utterly unfit for any public life. I find it hard to believe Harman would have cared about the risk to me or some friends because we were not girls. She should resign not only from the Deputy Leadership but also announce that she will be standing down from Parliament next year. Even from a purely partisan point of view, her profile is a gift to the Tories.

I have also seen how in some male gay circles in the music world it is seen as provocative and ‘subversive’ to taunt others with a liking for young boys (something which, to be absolutely clear, bothers some other gay men as much as it does straight men like myself). And of course, as with Righton, to ever challenge this would be seen as homophobic. Just as to even look at the issue of female abusers of all types is to evoke either studied indifference or hostility from others. People who take these attitudes are not merely tactful or politically correct, they are amongst those who help abuse to continue.

Sexual or other abuse (or domestic violence, or any other type of violence) is not mitigated by the gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc of the perpetrator or victim; no-one who thinks so is fit to be any type of politician, or for that matter a parent or partner. We are talking here about acts, not means to indict whole groups of people by sexuality, gender, ethnicity, or whatever. Many on the liberal left – not least those who gave comfort to the Paedophile Information Exchange – have never looked more bankrupt than now. For too long paedophilia has been accepted by some purely on the grounds that it seems to have some ‘anti-establishment’ credentials.