

Article

The Impact of Referencing Academics Who Have Defended and Exercised Pederasty

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Abstract: The scientific literature has shown an increasing demand by citizens and society at large to stop using people who have committed sexual violence against children as a reference in academia. However, research has not explored the fact that in some sectors of society, the rejection of individuals who have exercised sexual abuse against children is entirely deliberate. This study analyzes, for the first time, the incoherence of many academics when it comes to their positioning regarding different renowned authors who commit sexual abuse against children, and the consequences of such incoherence according to several citizens. To that end, social media analytics and interviews with 16 individuals aged 27 to 70 years from different professions, including university professors, construction workers and retired lawyers, were conducted. The results show three main consequences of the incoherence of academics who use as a reference authors who have defended and exercised pederasty: promoting social mistrust toward those academics, as there is no coherence between what they say and do; normalizing and promoting pederasty and impunity toward abusers, creating a sense that “anything goes”; and silencing and revictimizing victims, which creates a context of great vulnerability to develop a healthy sexuality.

Keywords: pederasty; academia; reference; incoherence; Foucault; Simone de Beauvoir



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1. Introduction

While the public and social support toward victims of child sexual abuse and against such violence is becoming more visible over the years, the authors of this paper have identified an incoherence among some groups in society, an incoherence that has terrible consequences for victims and, particularly, children. Many academics who state to be against child sexual abuse and sexual harassment have authors like Foucault, who openly defended and exercised pederasty, as a reference in academic works such as publications, conferences or lessons, among others. This study aimed to analyze a group of diverse citizens' perceptions on this incoherence and its consequences for society and, especially, children, as they are the most vulnerable [1].

Child abuse and neglect can have severe and long-lasting consequences for victims. Research has shown that individuals who have experienced maltreatment and domestic violence often suffer from poor psychological well-being, which is reflected in high levels of anxiety and depression, as well as a significant incidence of non-suicidal self-injury, self-harm and suicide attempts [2]. A study involving 1300 adolescents from two Eastern

Caribbean countries revealed that boys who experienced childhood violence within their families were more likely to develop attitudes that condone male physical domestic violence and consider physical violence against girls acceptable [3]. This suggests that childhood victimization can perpetuate cycles of violence and shape harmful social norms, highlighting the critical need for early intervention and support for abused and neglected children.

The MeToo movement and its antecedents have contributed great advancements in the fight against violence against women and children. Over the last years, more and more victims are breaking their silence and in different contexts [4], including individuals who were sexually abused when they were children [5,6], Hollywood actresses [7], and or university professors and students [8]. Despite the isolating gender violence that aggressors and their supporters exercise against the ones who support victims to keep them isolated [9], more and more individuals are publicly reporting the violence they have suffered [10]. The social and institutional response to such cases is also increasing and includes the provision of support to victims and the rejection of aggressors [11], with many people taking to the streets or social media to show their active stance on the victims' side [12,13]. Over the last decades, the demand by many social groups and individuals to stop supporting and promoting aggressors has gained visibility.

A much-talked-about case is that of Plácido Domingo. Considered one of the greatest tenors of our time [14], several women broke silence in 2019, publicly accusing him of sexual harassment [15]. A few weeks later, many concert halls, including New York's Metropolitan Opera, which had scheduled and publicly announced concerts by the tenor, published statements in which they showed their rejections of his alleged actions and, as a consequence, decided to suspend the concerts [16]. Although these decisions sparked debates on social media, many diverse citizens showed their agreement with them, arguing that the person and their acts cannot be separated from their work and, therefore, using them as a cultural authority would show a lack of condemnation of their violent behaviors.

There are also cases of child sexual abuse which have been made public in the media over the last years [4], generating a wave of social support toward the victims and rejecting the pederasts. Perhaps the most well-known and mediatic over the last years are those of priests from different congregations who have been reported for sexually abusing children [17]. People from very different backgrounds, of very different ideologies, religious and non-religious, have made public acknowledgements and social media posts condemning this sexual abuse and the lack of support the children have had from the institutions in which the abuse happened [18]. In Spain, for instance, many politicians and academics have spoken out on several occasions against cases of child sexual abuse within the Church and on the need to protect children from that ever happening again [19,20].

Nevertheless, in some sectors such as academia or the "intellectuality", there is a mainstream tendency to hide the violent acts of some considered great authors to keep having them as references in academic work. *El País*, the most read newspaper in Spain, published on 25 June 2023 the list of "10 most influential thinkers in the left" [21]. In order to create this list, they asked 37 experts—in *El País's* words—in politics, academia and journalism, along with newspaper editors, to vote for the academics they think have the greatest influence on the Left today. Based on the opinions of the 37 participants, the most influential academics, from most to least voted, are: Karl Marx, Judith Butler, Antonio Gramsci, Thomas Piketty, Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt, Simone de Beauvoir, Jürgen Habermas, Karl Polanyi and Walter Benjamin.

Among these, 10 there are individuals who have committed and defended sexual violence, including child sexual abuse. Michel Foucault and Simone de Beauvoir signed a manifesto published in "*Le Monde*" [22], in which they defended and demanded the release of three men condemned for sexually abusing minors; in their letter, they claimed that the children provided their consent. De Beauvoir herself had been accused of sexually harassing one of her 17-year-old students and was removed from teaching in 1943 [23–25]. Allegations that Foucault abused children in Tunisia are also widely known [24]. One could think that maybe the academics who have him as a reference do not know about

their abuses nor the Le Monde manifesto, but research shows that many who cite him do know about this but decide to hide it [26]. Some academics have tried to excuse their use of Foucault in their writings, lectures and conferences by saying that we need to separate the person from their work [27]. However, this stance makes it clear that they have not read or understood his work, as it clearly defends and promotes a sexuality that involves sexual violence [28], proposing to decriminalize pederasty and rape [27]. If this were not enough, there are academics who even consider these two authors as influential references in feminism [29,30].

People who have not read the works of these authors could think that the fact that authors who have committed pederasty or gender violence are still used as a reference can only be justified due only to their great theoretical contributions. However, research has already shown the lack of quality in these authors' work, who write about things they have not even read—as some have recognized [31]—and do not provide any evidence or arguments to support their claims [24,27]. Because of the lack of theoretical quality of their work, no evidence of any type of social improvement has been found whatsoever; on the contrary, the theoretical defense of pederasty and sexual violence some of them have made has generated terrible consequences for children, as some people have argued.

As shown in this introduction, there is research about the known pederasty committed by some authors considered an academic authority by many academics. However, research has not delved into the fact that some people criticize and condemn child sexual abuse in some cases and not in others. In addition to addressing such an incoherence, this study explores several participants' views on the consequences of the criticizing priests who have sexually abused children and, at the same time, claim that Foucault, who has defended and committed sexual abuses against children, is an important reference in academia.

2. Materials and Methods

In order to analyze some citizens' perspectives on the incoherence and consequences of academics who denounce some cases of pederasty and use authors who have committed pederasty as a reference, this study has followed the communicative approach due to the scientific, political and social impact achieved through the communicative methodology [32]. Within this frame, communicative interviews and social media analytics [33,34] were conducted, which has allowed researchers to gather a diversity of voices of citizens who have responded to El País's list of the most influential authors. Previous research has also adopted this methodology of social media analysis and in various ways, to better understand opinions surrounding sexual violence [35,36].

On the one hand, the comments that social media users made on El País's posts on Instagram regarding the list of 10 influential thinkers have been collected. Altogether, as of 30 June 2023, the Instagram post received 384 comments. On the other hand, one of this paper's researchers posted a post on X sharing El País's list and posed the following question to all users: "¿Qué consecuencias consideras que genera socialmente difundir como referentes personas que han defendido la pederastia y el maltrato?" ["What do you think are the social consequences of sharing people who have exercised and defended pederasty and abuse as a reference?"]. In the same post, the researcher asked users to reply to the post on X or via direct message. In addition, the researcher shared the same question via WhatsApp to several personal contacts who were over 18 years old.

The X post received 357 views and 5 reposts, but it did not generate any replies. However, several replies were obtained via WhatsApp, and 16 of the participants agreed to be interviewed on the topic. The interviews lasted around 15 min, they were held online and were either audio-recorded or written notes were taken. The interviews started with the same question the researcher posed on social media, including X and WhatsApp. Following the communicative methodology, this study was conducted. This methodology combines the egalitarian dialogue between researchers, who provide scientific evidence on the topic, and participants, who provide knowledge from their experience and reflections. In the interviews, interviewers shared information regarding some of the academics from El

País' list. More specifically, information about Simone de Beauvoir's and Michel Foucault's defense and exercise of pederasty was shared. Based on this information and participants' own perspectives and reflections on the matter, deep dialogues were established on those authors and the consequences when some academics have them as a reference.

Informed written consents were achieved from the interviewees. All data collection followed international ethical guidelines, such as those defined by the Declaration of Helsinki, the UNESCO Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. As specified in the consent forms, participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw their consent at any time, even after participating in the interviews. All personal information has been anonymized. The study received ethical approval by CREA's (Community of Researchers on Excellence for All) Ethics Committee, with approval number 20230629.

2.1. Participants

The sample comprised 16 individuals with diverse profiles. Their ages ranged from 27 to 70 years. Seven identified themselves as men and nine as women. Eleven had higher education degrees. Professions included university professors, teachers, construction workers or lawyers, among others. Ten had a leftist political tendency, and six had a center-rightist political tendency. Table 1 provides more details of the participants' profiles.

Table 1. Participant profiles.

Pseudonym	Profession	Gender	Age
Jorge	Teacher of language and literature	Male	38
Rocío	Retired early childhood teacher	Female	63
Julia	Retired kindergarten teacher	Female	65
Aurora	City council technician	Female	42
Miguel	Retired worker in the Ministry of Roads and Transport	Male	67
Leo	University professor of education	Male	37
Luisa	Feminist theorist	Female	54
Alberto	Wall painter	Male	60
Aitor	High school teacher	Male	57
Maria	Retired lawyer	Female	70
Clara	School director	Female	42
Laura	English philology professor	Female	27
Pablo	Professor of adult training	Male	53
Andrea	Sociologist	Female	48
Carlos	Historian	Male	32
Marta	Head of human resources of a multinational company	Female	53

2.2. Data Analysis

All the interview transcriptions, notes and social media comments were gathered and ordered in a single document for ease of analysis. All data were read through several times by the authors as a part of the analysis and several main themes emerged from a consensus through dialogue between the authors. Initially, nine categories emerged, reflecting participants' views on the consequences of academics referencing authors who have defended and engaged in pederasty. These categories included: (1) promoting an increase in pederasty and abuse, especially among youth; (2) normalizing violence and abusers; (3) generating social distrust toward ethical values that those academics say they defend; (4) reinforcing complicity with abusers instead of victims; (5) causing revictimization; (6) increasing impunity for abusers; (7) creating isolating gender violence against those

who break silence; (8) questioning victims' right to historical memory; and (9) silencing great theorists and academics who have made important contributions to society.

Then, following the communicative methodology, these categories were grouped into three main themes: (1) the fact that some academics and groups do not condemn pederasty exercised by the authors they use as academic authorities, but do condemn it when other people exercise it. This generates social mistrust toward those academics and groups, as there is no coherence between what they say and do. (2) Using authors who defend and exercise pederasty normalizes and promotes it because it generates impunity toward abusers, creating a sense that "anything goes" Finally, (3) having pederasts and abusers as a reference in academia silences and revictimizes victims, creating a context of great vulnerability.

3. Results

In this section, we present the results from the interviews and social media analytics based on the three main categories found in the analysis.

3.1. *The Incoherence of Some Academics Generates Social Mistrust*

Many of the comments in the Instagram post addressed Simone de Beauvoir's and Foucault's alleged child sexual abuse. One of those comments stated that authors like Simone de Beauvoir are a reference of pederasts. In responses to this comment and others that addressed these authors' defense and exercise of pederasty, several users pointed out that this list discredits the left. Along this line, several interviewees pointed out the incoherence of those academics between what they say—publicly condemning pederasty in some cases, such as when it is priests who sexually abuse children—and what they do—claiming that authors like Foucault or de Beauvoir are influential authors among the left. This incoherence, as some participants have stated, discredits academics and other professions related to the "intelligentsia":

To continue considering them as a reference discredits and smears the reputation of the profession: research, politics, cinema, etc. (Leo)

As Leo states, not only not condemning those authors, but continuing to have them as a reference discredits the profession and field from which they are drawn. In particular, when pederasts are used as a reference by academics who have a public discourse linked to non-sexist, non-violent and egalitarian ethical and moral values, many citizens lose their trust toward such values and the people and movements that promote them:

If these people who are important are not condemned and are still being used as a reference, this provokes a separation between the person and their discourse, this changes the trust towards ethics and morale. If people make intellectual and philosophical discourses about ethics and morale and their way of acting is completely contradictory, this can generate a very deep relativism or change at the social level. (Carlos)

Along the same line, Carlos goes on and highlights the loss of trust and credibility toward the sectors and institutions who have such an incoherence:

It generates a problem of credibility towards the institutions, organizations, movements that have them as a reference, and this generates a very strong loss of trust and, therefore, a huge decrease in the positive influence that these movements have for society. (Carlos)

As Carlos's quotes show, the positive influence of the ethical and moral values that certain movements and academics might generate in society are destroyed when they do not condemn pederasty, regardless of who commits it but, in turn, keep idolizing and having as referenced authors who have defended and exercised pederasty.

3.2. Normalizing and Promoting Pederasty: “Anything Goes”

One of the worst consequences of such an incoherence, according to most participants, is that sexual abuse against children is normalized and, therefore, promoted.

What can happen is that the society we are creating understands that everything is possible and that we can do whatever we want. This is what happens when you normalize certain attitudes. (Rocío)

As Rocío reflects, not condemning pederasty depending on who commits it sends the message that everything is possible, and that there are no limits when it comes to hurting those who are most vulnerable, as are children. Miguel highlights the current condemnation of sexual abuse of minors by priests or family members, while those committed by some authors a few decades ago are still not mentioned.

News about cases in the family or within the church continue to deserve general disapproval. I imagine that the fact that the victim is a defenseless and a minor being before his harasser will have something to do with it. (Miguel)

Participants highlight that this problem is especially serious when it is a public figure who has committed pederasty and who has not been rejected by certain sectors of society, such as the “intelligentsia”:

Disseminating the public image of someone who has defended these issues ultimately gives prestige to these practices [pederasty]. (Jorge)

Jorge reflects on the fact that promoting the image and prestige of someone who has exercised or defended pederasty undoubtedly promotes the prestige of pederasty itself. As Maria says, when an important section of society does not condemn such violence, this inevitably increases with greater impunity:

This means normalizing and trivializing very serious behaviors that can be reproduced with great impunity when, even if they don’t have social support, they do have some permissiveness or justification, especially when it comes to authors who have certain prestige in their scientific, artistic, political, social. . . field. (Maria)

Participants have found academics’ use of authors who have exercised and defended pederasty as a reference very worrisome, as they consider that this public support toward their work also provides support toward their violent behaviors, and therefore such behaviors get tolerated, normalized and promoted.

3.3. Victims Are Silenced and Revictimized

Normalizing pederasty is extremely harmful for victims and survivors, as some participants have highlighted. According to Carlos, this becomes problematic for victims:

It is a problem for people who have been victims of these situations, when someone has legitimized such violence and hasn’t been condemned, this also harms victims. (Carlos)

In addition to causing harm to victims, claiming that someone who has sexually abused children is among the most influential authors creates a sense that what the victims have gone through is not that serious or important:

This generates fear. Imagine someone who has been a victim, how scared they have to feel thinking that people who have an influence in the law consider that what happened to them is not so serious or bad. (Marta)

As Marta highlights, the people who have Foucault or Simone de Beauvoir as a reference are academics who can have an influence on people’s lives, for example, in legislation, and this is very troubling and fearful for victims of child sexual abuse. Leo states that this generates, in his words, victims of “first and second class”:

I consider that it plays down this type of abuse and crime, and that it makes people who defend these supposed academia and politicians see their crime as “less” harmful, because of who is the abuser. In this way, it creates victims of “first and second class”. (Leo)

In other words, when an intellectual or another public figure condemns a priest who has sexually abused children but does not condemn an author who has also sexually abused children and, worse, uses that author as a reference, the message sent is that some victims matter depending on who their abuser is.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The fact that some academics use authors who have publicly defended and/or even exercised pederasty as a reference is not new. In fact, previous research has already shown that many academics and university professors still use them as a reference, even knowing about the pederasty they defended and/or exercised [24,27]. However, in light of the list that *El País* published with the “10 most influential thinkers in the left”, among which several have defended and/or exercised pederasty, this study shows the incoherence of those academics when condemning some child abusers and worshiping others, and highlights the consequences of such incoherence from the perspectives of several diverse citizens.

Particularly in the Spanish context, this incoherence is very clearly seen whenever cases of child sexual abuse in the Church have emerged. Many politicians, academics, social scientists and other academics come out condemning the pederasty and other forms of sexual violence exercised by some priests, and blame the institutions for silencing the victims and protecting abusers. However, they do not show the same position with all cases of pederasty or gender violence. For instance, many have tried to silence gender violence when it has happened at Spanish universities by attacking those who have supported victims [37]. As this study shows, the same incoherence can be found even when we are talking about child sexual abuse.

The tendency of some intellectuals to ignore or excuse child sexual abuse perpetrated by academics within their field is not an isolated phenomenon but rather a reflection of a broader societal issue. Some authors selectively ignore or rationalize child sexual abuse or gender violence committed by prominent figures or colleagues [38]. Doing so, academia contributes to a culture of silence and complicity, which not only undermines the credibility of their condemnations, but also perpetuates the cycle of abuse by protecting abusers and marginalizing victims [39].

In this study, three main consequences arise from this incoherence according to participants. First, the fact that these academics hold this incoherence between the ethical values many of them claim to defend and their behaviors, promoting people who have exercised pederasty as a reference, makes many citizens lose trust in those ethical values and the social movements that defend them. Second, participants highlight that not condemning pederasty when it is exercised by one of their academic authorities normalizes such violence, promoting impunity among abusers and a general sense that there are no limits, not even when it comes to child sexual abuse. Third, interviewees have underscored that only condemning pederasty in some cases and silencing or letting it pass in others generates fear and revictimization among victims, as they feel unprotected by people who have great influence in society.

Overall, as participants in this study have reflected, having people who have defended and exercised pederasty as an intellectual reference not only hinders eliminating pederasty, but it actually normalizes, minimizes and strengthens it. Normalizing such violence causes negative consequences for victims and survivors, making children more vulnerable to it [40]. This matter is especially serious when the people who have authors who have exercised pederasty as a reference are academics who have great political and social influence. This can lead to children being unprotected, as those academics can even have an influence when it comes to developing legislations and public discourse. In turn, this can also leave

the people or groups who defend and support children unprotected, and isolating gender violence against them might increase [9,37].

Given this situation, it is especially important to create a context in which people can talk about these issues without being attacked. Creating these spaces of dialogue can help society, and especially future generations, reference people who are coherent between what they say and do, contributing to better protecting children and promoting healthy sexuality.

Some limitations of the study need to be addressed. On the one hand, the study has focused on the incoherence and consequences of Spanish academics who have authors who have defended and exercised pederasty as a reference. The driving forces behind diverse human behaviors remain a significant point of interest for the scientific community, influencing nearly all areas of psychological research [41]. Thus, future study should explore whether similar incoherences and consequences can be found among academics in other countries. Moreover, the study delved into the consequences of such incoherence according to diverse participants who have not necessarily suffered child sexual abuse. Future research should include the voices of victims themselves to better understand those consequences and, most importantly, how to mitigate and overcome them.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed written consents were achieved from interviewees. As specified in the consent forms, participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw their consent at any time, even after participating in the interviews. All personal information has been anonymized.

Data Availability Statement: Due to the personal information and narratives participants shared during the interviews, data will not be made publicly available. However, they will be available upon request when deemed appropriate by the participants themselves.

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