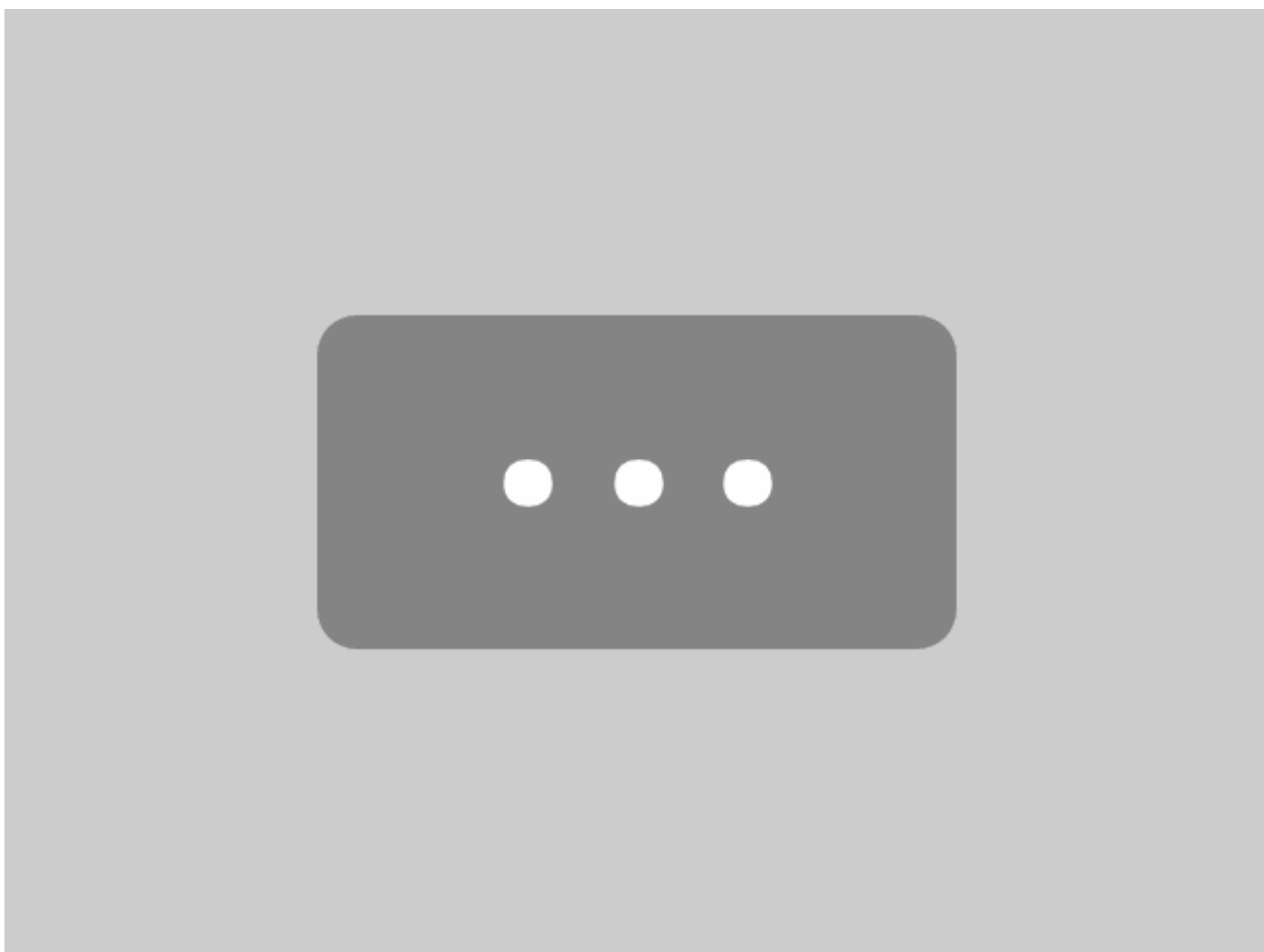




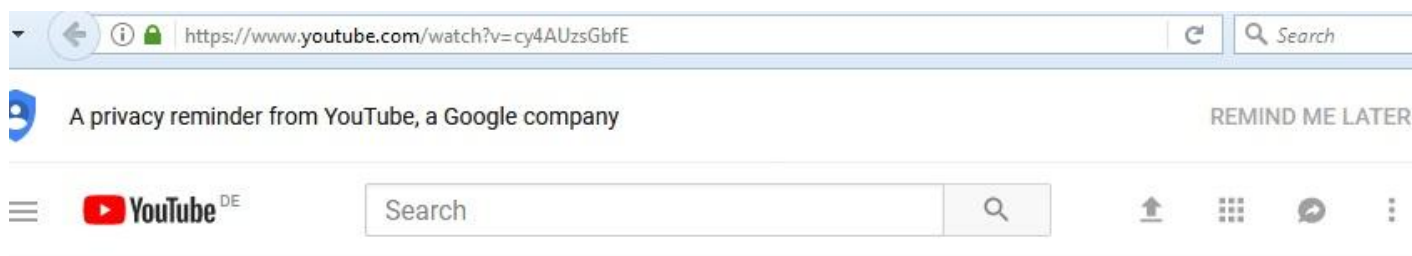
TEDx | Pedophilia is a natural sexual orientation | Mirjam Heine | University of Würzburg

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TRANSCRIPT



TEDx | Pedophilia is a natural sexual orientation | Mirjam Heine | University of Würzburg

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Let me tell you about Jonas. Jonas is 19 years old. He studies law in Munich. In his spare time, he likes to play soccer.

Jonas has a secret, which he thinks he cannot share with anyone. Not even with his best friend or his parents. He's just too afraid of anger, rejection and repulsion. Jonas knows that he has to suppress his sexual drive for his entire life. And he knows that there will never be a loving and fulfilling partnership that he can enter.

Because Jonas is a pedophile. He's only attracted to female children between the ages of 6 and 12 years. But since he's aware of the consequences for the children, he has never given in to his sexual drive.

What is pedophilia? And what is it not? In the ICD 10, the international classification system for illnesses, pedophilia is coded as the sexual preference for pre-adolescent children. It is listed under the sexual disorders. Whether the persistent occurrence of sexual thoughts and feelings for pre-adolescent children has been acted upon or not, is not relevant to the diagnosis.



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Like every other sexual orientation, pedophilia can have different characteristics. For example, it can be heterosexual, it can be homosexual, bisexual. Some pedophiles are exclusively attracted to children. Others are not exclusively attracted to children but they're also sexually interested in adults. But their main sexual interest lies within children. Only if this main sexual interest is given, we talk about pedophilia. The vast majority of all pedophiles are men, about 99%. Within the male population, 1 – 2% are considered to be pedophiles. This translates to about 60,000,000 people worldwide. This is as much as the population of Italy or of South Africa. Therefore, pedophilia is not an irrelevant phenomenon that we can simply ignore. Chances (that) every one of you knows at least one pedophile are higher than that you don't know any one.

We haven't found out yet why pedophilia occurs. There are biological, social and psychological factors to it. It occurs unrelated to socioeconomical status, and unrelated to educational level. So generally speaking, anyone could be born a pedophile.



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It is crucial to understand the difference between pedophilia and child sexual abuse, which is illegal and must always be. Pedophilia is only the sexual preference for pre-adolescent children. The difference between child sexual abuse and pedophilia becomes very apparent when we look at scientific studies. Think about it for yourself. What do you think? What percentage of child molesters are pedophiles? Have a guess. Is it 20%? 40? 60? – maybe even 80%?

In fact, scientific studies indicate that only 20 to 30% of all child molesters are pedophiles. The vast majority of perpetrators are not pedophiles, but they are sexually interested in adults. Children can easily become victims of child sexual abuse because of their loyalty and because of ease of access. For example, a stepfather might abuse a step-daughter because he feels anger or jealousy towards her mother.


Not every pedophile abuses children. And not everyone who abuses children is a pedophile. Differentiating between these two groups is essential.

Let me be very clear here. Abusing children is wrong, without any doubt. But a pedophile who doesn't abuse children has done nothing wrong.

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I want to quickly summarize where we are at the moment. According to current research, pedophilia is an unchangeable sexual orientation, just like, for example, heterosexuality. No one chooses to be a pedophile, no one can cease being one. The difference between pedophilia and other sexual orientations is that living out this sexual orientation will end in a disaster.

So, let's think about Jonas again. How can we help him not to cause such a disaster? How can we help him not to live out his sexual urges? How can we prevent child sexual abuse?

In fact, scientific studies indicate that one of the strongest predictors for child sexual abuse committed by pedophiles is social isolation. People who can't tell anyone that they're pedophiles logically won't get any help. For example, they can't tell their friends that they can't go to the beach because children in swimsuits might be there as well. They can't get support for situations they might not control entirely. And they can never be completely frank with someone else.

We can make a difference for Jonas. We, as a society, can be there for him.



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At the moment, we live in a world that already excludes pedophiles because of their preference alone. Someone who is lonely and excluded from society has little to lose and is at much higher risk to commit a crime, like, for example, child sexual abuse. We can make Jonas feel that he stays a valuable member of our society, even though he's a pedophile.

Right now, most of us feel discomfort when we think about this scenario, and most of us feel discomfort when we think about pedophiles. But just like pedophiles, we're not responsible for our feelings. We do not choose them, but we are responsible for our actions. And we must make a decision. It is in our responsibility to reflect and to overcome our negative feelings about pedophiles, and to treat them with the same respect we treat other people with.

We should accept that pedophiles are people who have not chosen their sexuality, and who, unlike most of us, will never be able to live it out freely, if they want to lead an upright life. We should accept that pedophilia is a sexual preference, a thought, a feeling, and not an act. We should differentiate between child sexual abuse and pedophilia. We shouldn't increase the suffering of pedophiles by excluding them, by blaming and mocking them. By doing that, we increase their isolation and **we** increase the chance of child sexual abuse. Only if they make

themselves recognizable because they're not afraid of punishment, of anger and rejection, can we better understand the causes of pedophilia and we can improve their treatment. We can help them accept their sexuality, and help them learn to refrain from acting on their sexual urges which cause harm to children. We can encourage them never to commit child sexual abuse. We can help them refrain from entering dangerous situations they might not control entirely. And we can prescribe medication.

This approach has already been successful. In the last ten years, more than 9,500 people have received help in a prevention network called 'Kein Täter Werden' – which means 'Don't Offend' in English – at university hospitals in Germany. The last survey shows that 98% have never committed child sexual abuse. Unfortunately, this program is not going to eradicate child sexual abuse, but it is the first step in the right direction. Pedophiles who have received treatment have a better understanding of who they can turn to in order to prevent abuse before it happens.

Most of you might ask themselves now, why is she telling us that? Five years ago, I first heard about Jonas's life. Prior to that, I have never really thought about pedophilia, and I had just adopted the prevalent societal view about it without ever really questioning it. I felt anger and disgust about pedophiles. My perspective has been completely changed by hearing Jonas's story, hearing about his cruel fate, and understanding the difference between child sexual abuse and pedophilia.

As a medical student with a background in psychology, I feel it as my responsibility to help others overcome and escape wrong stigmatization, and to have a positive impact on our future society. By changing our view about pedophilia as a society, and by offering them support and therapy, we can help millions of people to live better lives, and we can effectively reduce child sexual abuse.

No one is responsible for their feelings, but everyone is responsible for their actions.

I thank you very much.

Comment from poster:

Ms. Heine, the supporters of rational and compassionate approaches to preventing child sexual abuse commend your courage and integrity in giving this talk.