



How Journalism Abuses Children

by Andrew Vachss

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As far as journalism is concerned, child sexual abuse didn't exist thirty years ago. Once its existence was acknowledged, journalism made up for lost time—indeed, journalism has been the single greatest force for justice and progressive social change. But a sordid undercurrent to modern journalistic language has undermined those gains, resulting in nothing less than the decriminalization of child sexual abuse. Certain pernicious myths—not, it should be noted, "cliches," which often contain at least a core of truth—have so permeated journalism that they have become, in the minds of many Americans, "facts." Here are some glaring examples:

- *A Wisconsin judge spares a child molester a prison sentence on the ground that the five year old victim was "seductive."*

There is no denying that children are sensual—not "sexual"—beings. Their physical senses are a major means of determining the limits of their world. But some of those limits must be taught by adults. A child's natural desire is to please those who assume the parental role. This drive may be deliberately perverted—children may be easily "trained" to please their abusers by "initiating" sexual activity. And when corruption of sensuality doesn't work, there is always the pedophile's other option: pain so unrelenting that

its avoidance becomes the dominant drive-force in the victim's life. To blame the child (or excuse the molester) for the "performance" that results is to compound the perversion.

- *Actor River Phoenix, in an interview given before his drug-overdose death, describes how he "lost his virginity" when he was three or four years old.*

Infants don't "lose" their virginity—they are molested or raped. The damaged adult who continues to see himself as a "participant" in his own childhood victimization is tragic—for journalism to endorse it is inexcusable.

- *A teacher is arrested for sexual intercourse with a tenth grade student.*

The news accounts describe him as "having an affair" with the girl. The reason children can't "consent" to sexual activity—the reason we have so-called "statutory rape" laws—is because of the vast power differential between victim and perpetrator and the emotional dominance inherent in such situations. "Affairs" are between adults. The term implies not only consent, but the capacity to make informed decisions. The imbalance of power between students and teachers is so profound that all sexual conduct between should be reported for what it is: sexual exploitation.

- *Incest is reported as a "non-violent crime" (that is, of course, when it isn't being described as a "social problem" requiring "counseling" instead of incarceration).*

In fact, incest, even when no physical force is used, is rape-by-extortion—a major abuse of the deepest power relationship of all; a gross violation of a

species-specific duty to protect one's own child.

But perhaps the greatest journalistic offender of all subsumes and exalts all the foul myths about children and sex: the term "child prostitution."

"Prostitution" is the exchange of sex for money. Often called a "victimless crime"—in itself, a moronic statement—the public perceives the word "prostitute" as pejorative. Indeed, we call a person who "sells out" their moral convictions in exchange for personal gain a "prostitute." The essence of "prostitution" implies consent. So when pedophiles talk about "child prostitution," they (deliberately) further the lie that little children are "seductive"; that they "volunteer" to have sex with adults in exchange for cash (which, of course, they never see); that they "lose their virginity," and they "have affairs." Pedophiles know if they can succeed in placing "prostitution" on a continuum of sexual activity involving children, they will have established a beachhead from which to launch their other assaults. Once the public accepts that children can "consent" to sex for money, it will be easy to accept that they can consent to sex for "love."

If we allow the term "child prostitution" to gain a sufficient foothold in our language, we surrender precious, hard-won ground to the enemy. There is no such thing as "child prostitution." That term contradicts itself, "proving" a lie. Trafficking in prostituted children as done in Thailand and the other "kiddie sex tourism" countries is slavery—any other description is a grotesque euphemism or an outright lie.

Soon there will be a national boycott against all goods made or manufactured in Thailand. Its goal will be to stop the reprehensible "kiddie sex tours," and punish those countries which continue to provide a safe harbor for predatory pedophiles. And a good way to start is to banish

the term "child prostitution" from our language.

If journalism has a God, it is Truth. If child sexual abuse is the ultimate evil, to continue to perpetuate child-destructive myths so beloved of predatory pedophiles is the ultimate sacrilege.

It's time for the truth.

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How Many Dead Children Are Needed to End the Rhetoric?

by Andrew Vachss

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Megan Kanka was 7 years old when she died. Jesse Timmendequas, a twice convicted sex offender, has been charged with rape and murder. When the child was first reported missing, Timmendequas volunteered to sketch posters with the child's likeness. It was the neighborly thing to do—Timmendequas lived right across the street.

As usual, the public gets the facts about a recently released sexual predator about the same time the autopsy is performed on his victim. Yes, child molesters were in the neighborhood—not just passing through as they stalked their prey, but living there, openly. Another predator released on an unsuspecting society. Another dead child. Another desperate search for solace and solutions.

As public outrage builds, politicians remain calm—they know (from long experience) that the public is easily appeased by naming (still another) hollow law after (still another) dead child. Remember the "Little Lisa" law? If you don't, I rest my case. And if you do, tell me what impact it has had on child abuse. The law, named after Lisa Steinberg, attacked bogus adoptions rather than the child abuse that led to her death.

Absent the cash-oiled machinery of a special interest group, no politician ever feels that much pressure to actually perform. There is one exception to this rule: When the media adopt a cause, the cries for change echo immediately throughout the back rooms where politics is actually practiced. Soon, there will be "action." Let no citizen sleep easy at this prospect. A new law requiring "community notification" of the release of a previously incarcerated child rapist will provide plenty of "anti-crime" publicity for politicians. But although such a law is overdue, its passage should not fool us into believing that we have de-fanged the beast.

No matter what voodoo statistics are employed, it's beyond dispute that previously convicted sex offenders constitute a significant risk to children.

Even if their recidivism rate was less than 50 percent—a claim only the most deluded would make—there is no question but that a previously convicted child rapist is a ticking bomb. All that is in question is the target.

Even the most rabid retailers of "rehabilitation"—and make no mistake, sex offender "treatment" is *the* growth industry of the '90s—no longer claim they can "cure" sex offenders, especially those who target children.

Today, the claim is that, with proper treatment, the behavior of some of the offenders will change. Do they know which offenders will change their behavior? Well, not exactly. The way they find out is to release them and see what happens. No community should be forced into becoming a testing laboratory for the assessment of sex offender "treatment."

The real problem with "treatment" for sex offenders is that they like what they do. Psycho-babble aside, the motive for sexual assault *is* sexual assault. So sex offenders don't volunteer for treatment unless it will avoid prison or

shorten their sentence (which it often does), and they don't continue "treatment" a minute longer than the law requires. An offender can "max out" his sentence and be released without the annoyance of a parole officer to monitor his conduct.

Without supervision of the released offenders, notice to the community is likely to produce a few isolated demonstrations ... and no change. What is the "community," anyway? Where does the "notice" get posted? Will we tie up our already over-burdened courts with claims that such "notice" laws discriminate against released felons?

The National Child Protection Act of 1993, better known as the "Oprah Bill," provides for a national registry of all those convicted of crimes against children. But while that law, properly utilized, will guard against the highly stylized stalking of pedophiles who use employment or volunteer activity as cover, it will have no effect on the anonymous predator living in a dense urban environment who pounces without warning.

It's not only politicians who fear the media. Prosecutors do, too, especially those prosecutors who are politicians in disguise. How many rapists are allowed to plead guilty to "burglary?" How many child molesters are allowed to plead to "endangering the welfare of a child?" How many predatory pedophiles are allowed to serve their sentences for dozens of separate crimes concurrently?

If the media continue to abdicate its responsibility and cover only the high profile cases or those which actually go to trial, if the media continue to ignore plea bargaining, if the media continue to report so-called "conviction rates" and print a district attorney's press releases without any investigation of their own, we will continue to have a

system where a prosecutor can give away the courthouse and claim it as a "victory."

It's all well and good to say Timmendequas maxed out (completed his sentence) to explain why no parole officer was involved. But the truth can be found in the length of his original sentence. Any time you see a sex offender plead guilty, beware—they don't call them plea bargains for nothing.

The death of Megan Kanka demands two fundamental changes in the way we deal with sex offenders:

- For certain designated crimes—and this means actual criminal conduct of the offender, not whatever crimes he was allowed to plead to—there must be specialized post-release surveillance, ideally by parole officers familiar with sex offender patterns and trained in the warning signs.
- A "community notification" law for the maxed-out sex offender will only protect the community to which he is first released. When the predator moves on, he takes his cloak of anonymity with him. This is not a "civil liberties" issue. The idea that those who prey upon children have "paid their debt to society" by serving their sentence is as ludicrous as confusing a politician with a public servant. Sex offenders are no more entitled to privacy than stalkers are to camouflage.

We must begin to attack the enemy at both ends of the continuum. Sexual psychopaths are not born to their evil—we make our own monsters, and we build our own beasts. If there is one compelling theme in the backgrounds of sex predators, it is early, chronic, intense child abuse. The connection between today's abused child and tomorrow's predator is ignored at our peril. Child protective services are the front line of the war against

predators, but still we continue to send the troops out with inadequate training, supervision and support.

We can no longer tolerate empty rhetoric—the stakes are too high. Child protection is crime prevention. We cannot have one without the other.

The only rational response is two-pronged: a massive, focused, properly funded child protective effort aimed at saving abused children before some grow up to prey upon us. And whenever individuals demonstrate by their conduct that they are sexually dangerous to children, our response must be incarceration for a lengthy period, followed by surveillance upon release. Close surveillance.

If Megan Kanka's death is to have meaning, so must any political response be meaningful. Politicians are counting on the public's anger to subside ... until the next child's death. Yes, we need surveillance of sex offenders, but we also need surveillance of politicians. This is not a parochial issue. It's not about neighborhoods, it's about our future. What good is a "community notification" law if there is no "community?" Take a few minutes tonight. Look up the names and addresses of your political representatives. Then sit down and write them a letter. Tell them you want an increase in the child protection budget. Together with enhanced penalties for sex predators, together with lifetime surveillance when they are released. And, on Election Day, *remember their names*.

If our community accepts another media-genic "solution" to the horror of dangerous sex predators targeting our children, we have only ourselves to blame.

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Please Read: **Megan's Law Deceptive,**
Experts Say 'It Tends To Give People A False Sense Of

Safety'

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