

Promoting pedophilia

By Robert Stacy McCain
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A new book that says child molesters are not a major peril to children is part of a larger movement within academia to promote "free sexual expression of children."

The movement to legitimize sex between adults and children is "gathering steam," warns Stephanie Dallam, researcher for the Leadership Council for Mental Health, Justice and the Media in Philadelphia, an organization that deals with prevention and treatment of child abuse.

"Some people view children as the next sexual frontier," Ms. Dallam says.

Feminist writer Judith Levine's book "Not Harmful to Minors: The Perils of Protecting Kids from Sex" has been condemned by those who say she excuses sexual abuse of children—a charge she strongly denies.

Ms. Levine says she was "misunderstood" after a news article last month quoted her saying a boy's sexual experience with a priest "conceivably" could be positive.

"Do I advocate priests having sex with their child parishioners? No, absolutely no," she said in a telephone interview. However, she said, "The research shows us that in some minority of cases, young—even quite young—people can have a positive [sexual] experience with an adult. That's what the research shows."

Featuring a foreword by Clinton administration Surgeon General Dr. Jocelyn Elders, Ms. Levine's book condones a Dutch law passed in 1990, that effectively lowered the age of consent to 12.

Ms. Levine cites research about "happy consensual sex among kids under 12," and writes: "America's drive to protect kids from sex is protecting them from nothing. Instead, often it is harming them."

The book has sparked a political backlash against her publisher, the University of Minnesota Press.

The speaker of the Minnesota House of Representatives condemned the book and called for the university to halt its publication. Instead, the university press last week ordered a second printing of 10,000 copies after media attention helped drive Ms. Levine's book as high as No. 26 on the Amazon.com best-seller list.

But researchers and activists say the book is only the most recent in a series of academic arguments for "consensual" sex involving children.

In 2000, the Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality in San Francisco published an article, "Sexual Rights of Children," saying there is "considerable evidence" that there is no "inherent harm in sexual expression in childhood."

- San Francisco State University professor Gilbert Herdt, co-author of the 1996 book "Children of Horizons: How Gay and Lesbian Teens Are Leading a New Way Out

Attempts to legitimize adult-child sex on rise

of the Closet," said in an interview with the Dutch pedophilia journal Paidika that "the category 'child' is a rhetorical device for inflaming

what is really an irrational set of attitudes" against sex with children.

- John Money, professor emeritus of psychology at Johns Hopkins University, gave an interview to Paidika about "genuinely, totally mutual" sex between boys and men. In the introduction to a Dutch professor's 1987 book called, "Boys on their Contacts with Men: A Study of Sexually Expressed Friendships," Mr. Money wrote that opponents of pedophilia are motivated by "self-imposed, moralistic ignorance."

- Harris Mirkin, a professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, published a 1999 article in the Journal of Homosexuality complaining that boys who have sex with men "are never considered ... willing participants, even if they are hustlers."

He has also writ-

ten that "children are the last bastion of the old sexual morality."

- A 1998 "meta-analytic" study in an American Psychological Association (APA) journal argued, among other things, that "value-neutral" language such as "adult-child sex" should be used to describe child molestation if it was a "willing encounter."

Radio host Laura Schlessinger led a campaign against that study by Temple University psychology professor Bruce Rind and two other academics. Congress eventually voted unanimously to condemn the Rind study—which has already been used as evidence to defend accused child molesters in at least three court cases.

- Ms. Levine's book favorably cites the Rind study and, in a telephone interview, she defended the study as "methodologically meticulous." But Baltimore psychologist Joy Silberg, whose clinical practice

involves treating child-abuse victims, says the study is "horribly flawed."

"I can't call it science," she said. One co-author of the 1998 study was Robert Bauserman, now employed by the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. As early as 1989, Mr. Bauserman had written about "man-boy sexual relationships" in Paidika. He also co-authored a 1993 article with Mr. Rind about "adult-juvenile sex."

Academic defenses of sex between adults and children are not new. Indiana University professor Alfred Kinsey claimed in his famous 1948 and 1952 reports on human sexuality that "children are sexual from birth" and included charts of "data" gathered by pedophiles about the children they molested.

As early as 1977, author Judith A. Reisman says she learned of the existence of an "international academic pedophile movement" influenced by Kinsey's teachings.

Ms. Silberg, the Baltimore psychologist, agrees that the "whole academic movement" to legitimize sex with children "is growing."

"Many academics defended the 1998 Rind study, saying its authors were victims of a 'McCarthyite witch hunt,' and a number of groups, including the American Library Association, issued a statement saying they 'strongly support' the University of Minnesota Press for its 'courageous' decision to publish the Levine book.

Such reactions show that "the efforts of people who would like to legitimize relationships between adults and children are actually being successful," Ms. Silberg said.

Critics say that pro-pedophilia activism cannot be dismissed as an irrelevant fringe movement, because it has real-life consequences.

One connection between advocacy and action was revealed last week when court documents showed that a Catholic priest accused of repeatedly raping a boy was present at the founding of the North American Man-Boy Love Association (NAMBLA).

At a 1979 conference in Boston, documents show that the Rev. Paul Shanley claimed that a child had been "helped by a boy-lover" who had sex with him.

Intellectual defenses of pedophilia are "a huge concern" because they can function as "a green light" to would-be child molesters, says Claire Reeves, president and founder of Mothers Against Sexual Abuse (MASA).

"Adults who might have a propensity to hurt a child might say, 'See, it's not harmful, these people are Ph.D.s, they must know,'" Mrs. Reeves said, adding that she began warning about the pedophilia movement in 1995.

"I started saying seven years ago that there was a movement to make pedophilia an alternative lifestyle, and my colleagues looked at me like I was crazy," said Mrs. Reeves, who founded MASA after discovering that a relative had been sexually abused. "Here we are seven years later and ... that is exactly what's happening."



Illustration by Lucas Guryev
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