

# Sex Isn't Just for Adults Anymore

BY ROBERT STACY MCCAIN

A controversial new book is part of a movement in academia to promote 'sexual expression of children.'

**F**eminist writer Judith Levine's book, *Harmful to Minors: The Perils of Protecting Children from Sex* (University of Minnesota Press, \$25.95), has been condemned by those who say she excuses sexual abuse of children — a charge she strongly denies. Levine says she was misunderstood after a news article in March quoted her as saying that 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 says. However, she adds, "The research shows us that in some minority of cases, young — even quite young — people can have a positive [sexual] experience with an adult."

Featuring a foreword by Clinton administration surgeon-general Joycelyn Elders, Levine's book endorses a Dutch law passed in 1990 that effectively lowers the age of consent to 12. "America's drive to protect kids from sex is protecting them from nothing," she writes. "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 recently ordered a second printing of 10,000 copies after media attention helped drive Levine's book as high as No. 26 on the *Amazon.com* best-seller list.

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," Dallam says. She and other critics point to 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."

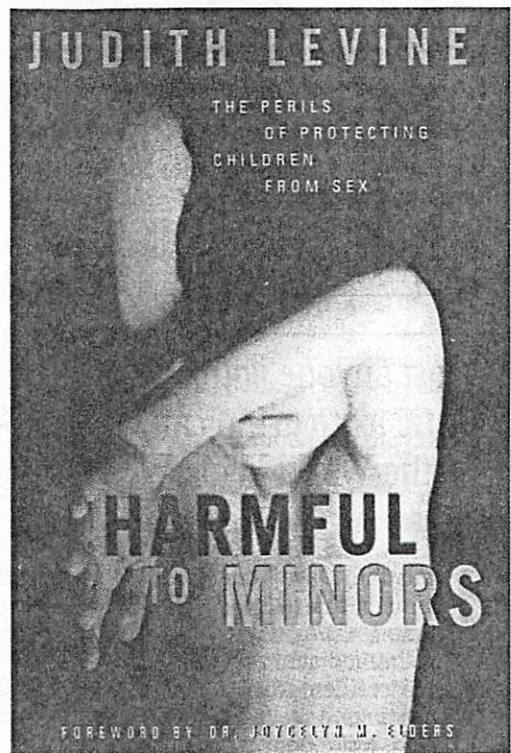
- San Francisco State University professor Gilbert Herdt, coauthor of the 1996 book *Children of Horizons: How Gay and Lesbian Teens Are Leading a New Way Out of the Closet*, told the Dutch pedophilia journal *Paidika* that "the category 'child' is a rhetorical device for inflaming what is really an 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*, 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 also has written that "children are the last bastion of the old sexual morality."

- A 1998 "meta-analytic" study in the *American Psychological Association Journal* held 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 the study, conducted by Temple University psychology professor Bruce Rind and two other academics, and Congress voted unanimously to condemn it — although it already has been used as evidence to defend accused child molesters in at least three court cases.

Academic defenses of sex between adults and children date back at least to Alfred Kinsey's famous 1948 and 1952 reports on human sexuality, in which the Indiana University professor



claimed that "children are sexual from birth." 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 in April 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. 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,'" Reeves says, 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," says 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."

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