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## **The Pattern of Sexual Politics: Feminism, Homosexuality and Pedophilia**

Harris Mirkin[1]

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Though American social conservatives and gay/lesbian activists view sexual issues as central, politicians, journalists and academics usually view them as distractions from political controversies about money, class, power and race. For example, the major academic political science journals have ignored the subject [2] However, sex and sexuality have followed gender issues in moving from the private to the public and political spheres. Traditionally there was little political conflict in these areas. Of course there were laws, but the laws reflected a social consensus and were not very controversial. The federal government first became seriously involved in sex and gender issues at the end of the 19th century, with the passage of the Comstock and white slavery laws. These were supported by many of the first-wave feminists, reflected the anti-sexual attitudes of the time and were largely directed against lower class women and immigrants.[3]

In the twentieth century sexual policy debates have become increasingly shrill. Various groups have rejected the social classifications that stigmatized them, and there have been major disputes about the rights of gays and lesbians, sex education courses, the distribution of condoms in schools, pornography, and the nature and scope of sexual harassment. Public policies have vacillated, sometimes protecting the traditional moral order and at other times expanding sexual freedoms. There are legal protections of sexual speech and practice that go beyond what many social groups would tolerate on their own, and legal restrictions that others find intolerable.

The current political battles in the sex and gender area are grounded in the 1960's. To the ire of conservatives, many activists claimed that standard school curriculums had class, racial and gender biases, and said that communities and

not elite boards ought to control the schools. They thought that changes had to be initiated by the state so that individuals were protected against community sanctions. Traditional attitudes towards sex and pornography were also attacked. When the Christian Right mobilized to fight these issues the battles that are characteristic of the new politics were joined.

This article will develop a model of sexual politics by discussing the struggles over feminism and homosexuality, and then use the model to clarify the current political situation of pedophiles. Though the issues have shifted from the new woman, sodomy and masturbation in the early part of the century to current concerns with promiscuity, homosexuality and pedophilia, the general patterns of sexual politics have remained remarkably stable. The politics of sex differs from normal interest group politics because of the intense feelings and the high visibility of the issues, and differs from racial or ethnic politics both because of normative issues and because open identity with a sexually disadvantaged group is largely a matter of choice. Sexual issues, together with racial controversies and anti-subversive activities, have been the major ones that have caused a suspension or diminution of constitutional rules and of normal political and Bill of Rights protections. They affect the way millions live, have led to the development of new political organizations, often involve significant amounts of money, and have generated a large body of law.[4] Additionally, conflicts over sexual/cultural issues currently underlie many of the disputes over more traditional political issues, making compromise harder and generating a great deal of rancor.

### **Background: The Central Political Conflict**

As in all politics, in the sexual arena some groups are more privileged than others and get more of what there is to get. Their views are entrenched in the laws, reflected by the media and articulated by a multitude of experts. Sexual power positions are fiercely held and outcast groups, like those defined as political subversives, have little political protection. Discussion of whether gender roles and categories are natural or whether they are social creations has been central to feminist theory, and a similar dialogue about sexual roles has taken place among gay and lesbian scholars and activists.

Historically the bourgeoisie thought of themselves as sexually virtuous, and tried to distinguish themselves from an effeminate corrupt aristocracy and immoral lower orders.[5] As the New Women began to threaten male gender roles at the



turn of the century, male commentators argued that gender distinctions were rooted in biology. Carol SMITH-ROSENBERG observed that by defining the New Woman as physiologically unnatural and the symptom of a diseased society, "those whom she threatened reaffirmed the legitimacy and the 'naturalness' of the bourgeois order."

Through metaphor and symbol, bourgeois myth invests the sociologically contingent with the characteristics of the inevitable and unquestionable. What is bourgeois becomes 'natural,' all else 'unnatural.' Male modernists, by fusing gender and genitals, by insisting that to repudiate gender conventions was to w against nature, had joined with sexologists in constructing a classic bourgeois myth. They had clothed gender distinctions specific to late nineteenth century industrial countries in the unchangeability of human biology. Feminist modernists, by rejecting the 'naturalness' of gender, insisted that society's most fundamental organizational category, gender, was artificial, hence 'unnatural,' changeable as dress. From this first principle, it then followed that nothing social or political was 'natural.' Institutional structures, values, behavior, were all artifact, all relative, all reflective not of nature but of power.[6]

Essentialists, fundamentalists and Natural Law advocates claim that their categories reflect an underlying physical or moral reality, a right order that may not be completely achieved in practice. Social Constructionists and multiculturalists argue that the categories are social creations, and that realist conceptions simply protect the sexually privileged. This difference in approach sets up a political conflict, though there are widely divergent views of sex and gender roles in both groups. Additionally, theorists and political leaders of subordinated groups frequently apply social constructionist concepts to themselves, but are reluctant to apply them to others. Thus some feminists discuss gender issues in social constructionist terms, while using naturalist categories to discuss sexual issues, and gays and lesbians apply a constructionist analysis to their own practices while using naturalist categories for other sexual deviants. In practice, most gay/lesbian activists treat words like "gay," "lesbian," "queer" and "dyke" as social constructions, while "abuser" and "molester" are used as natural categories.

This article will argue that, like homosexuality, the concept of child molestation is a culture and class specific modern creation. Though Americans consider intergenerational sex to be evil, it has been permissible or obligatory in many cultures and periods of history. Sex with male youths is especially widespread.



Alternatives of "boy or woman" occur frequently in Greek and Roman literature. In early modern Japan men were expected to have sexual love with both youths and women. The male samurai lover was to be a model for the youth, and lovers of youths were considered to be even more virile than lovers women. Many non-western cultures consider age-asymmetrical relationships to be a "transient and natural stage in the lives of both adults and youths." It is a duty, a part of the adult's job of educating children.

In Europe, prior to the 17th or 18th century, sex with men and boys was simply considered one variant on sex. Between 1600 and 1750 Europe switched from a pattern in which it was acceptable for adult male libertines to have sex with boys and women to a world divided between a majority of men and women who desired only the opposite gender and a minority of men and women who desire the same gender. Subsequently it became much more difficult for a boy to be passive and then switch to the active role. Men had to be active at every stage in order to establish male status.[7]

In the twentieth century Americans have moved in contradictory directions about childhood sexuality. Like nineteenth century women, children are viewed as innocent and non-sexual, and in the process of protecting this innocence we have expanded the concept of sex so that many types of touching and behavior that were previously thought of as non-sexual are now considered sexual.[8] Ironically, in trying to protect children from sexual exploitation we have so eroticized them that almost any picture of a naked child is likely to be considered sexual and pornographic.

### **The Ideological Struggle: The Battle to Prevent the Battle**

Battles about sexual ideologies occur in two phases. The second phase is a visible political fight like the current melee over gay and lesbian rights. Phase I struggles exist before the issues become politically visible, and are harder to detect. They display a similar pattern, and have been characteristic of the early contests over feminism and women's sexuality, of homosexuality in the 1950s, and of the politics of pedophilia today.

During Phase I struggles there is initially an overwhelming emotional and intellectual consensus around sex and gender issues. Sexual dissidents (deviants) are not heard by the dominant society, and are not conscious of themselves as a group that has a right to make political claims. For reasons that vary with

historical circumstance and technology, members of the subordinate group beg to identify with each other and to think of themselves as oppressed rather than evil or inferior.[9]A rhetoric of power often develops at this point. The groups talk as though they can force the dominant society to change, and they tend to challenge and demonize it, attaching labels like patriarchy or the white power structure.

But, despite the rhetoric, the weak cannot simply take power away from the strong any more than the Jews could take power from the Nazis. They can only raise the issues, and then need to convince a significant portion of the dominant group to join with them or give them power. Thus, American women got the vote because an all- male establishment passed a constitutional amendment, and black civil rights were granted by white courts, legislatures and executives. Dominant groups sometimes divide when they are presented with a strong argument by subordinate activists, and an audience receptive to the claims is brought into existence. It is normally only under these conditions that the deviant group can improve its status. Conversely, there are times when a permissive power structure or dominant culture withdraws freedoms previously given. In the sexual area this happened when the Roman empire began to Christianize. It also occurred in Germany after the Weimar Republic, in the Soviet Union after Stalin came into power, and in America and western Europe during the depression of the 1930's.

Several areas need to be examined:

- 1. the means dominant groups use to preclude challenges in the sex and gender area,
- 2. the conditions under which minority groups become conscious of themselves and make claims,
- 3. the patterns of sexual politics, including a study of the conditions under which a portion of the majority group (or audience) becomes receptive to these claims, and
- 4. the conditions under which the the majority group becomes hostile to th claims of a sexual group and withdraws rights previously granted.

Most gay, lesbian and feminist theorists have focused on the second category and sometimes argue, or assume, that the minority group forced the majority to accede to its wishes. The 3rd and 4th categories involve issues of political culture, but little comparative work has been done in this area [10] This article



focused on the first and third areas.

Ideologies are at their strongest when their correctness is simply accepted, and treating existing ideological categories and divisions as though they are objectively right serves the interests of groups that are considered legitimate. When a core of deviant group members begin to identify with each other and reject the dominant culture's assessment of their worth, as some women did in the first and second waves of feminism, as blacks did in the 1950's and 60's, and as gays and lesbians did in the late 60's and 70's, and as some pedophiles are doing now, the claim is made that the dominant categories are incorrect and changeable social creations. At this point there is a pre-debate. Dominant group deny that there is anything to discuss, asserting that existing arrangements are self-evident and intuitively good, usually claiming that they reflect nature and natural order. Dissenters are dismissed as "radical," "crazy," "evil," or "cult" figures.

Phase I conflicts are frequently framed as public health crises. The terminology of epidemics is used, with the various forms of illegitimate sex characterized as diseases that prey upon the innocent. Constitutional niceties become less important when a disease is being fought, since microbes and diseases have neither constitutional rights nor moral stature. The subordinate group is viewed as nihilistic, and sharp limits are placed on their speech and art on the grounds that they are disgusting, pornographic, dangerous to the social order and seductive of the innocent.

The mass media produce a plethora of articles that assume the correctness of the dominant paradigm, demonizing and ridiculing those who question it and trivializing their arguments. Jokes, which serve as a mechanism to preclude serious discussion, are a major rhetorical device. Forbidden sexual worlds are portrayed as bleak and dangerous areas inhabited by psychopaths and criminals; devoid of any redeeming characteristics or emotional richness. "Attempts to counter negative propaganda with more realistic information generally meet with censorship, and there are continuous ideological struggles over which representations of sexual communities make it into the mainstream media." [11]

The battle to prevent the battle - the attempt to preserve the vision of the existing order as natural and unquestionable, and thus prevent its maintenance from being seen as a political question - is probably the most significant and hard fought of the ideological battles. At issue is the question of the legitimacy of the



subordinate groups, since illegitimate groups are not recognized as putting forth valid claims. Thus black theorists argue that black culture and life was largely invisible to both blacks and whites in the pre-civil rights period, feminist theorists claim that male categories marginalized and delegitimized women, homosexuals were ridiculed and dismissed in the 1950's, and pedophiles are vilified today.

Challengers of the dominant sexual order are demonized, as were advocates of sexual freedom for women at the end of the 19th century. At that time women were seen as largely asexual creatures responsible for controlling male lust. Sexual enjoyment was permissible only when it led to procreation within marriage. As the sexual order broke down it was blamed on men who seduced innocent females and lured them into prostitution, immigrants, and the sexually promiscuous lower class. There was a white slavery panic, similar to later panic about homosexuality and the current fear of pedophilia. Seducers were everywhere: "dark and sinister alien looking" procurers stalked the countryside looking for innocent girls; while movies, restaurants and even ice cream parlor came to be viewed as dangerous places. The local, state and federal government responded.

Government studies reflected the mounting concern. They described an extensive international business in women's bodies... Foreigners became scapegoats... Federal investigators claimed that "large numbers of Jews scattered throughout the United States... seduce and keep young girls. Some of them are engaged in importation... [and] they prey upon the young girls whom they find on the streets, in dance halls, and similar places." The traffic in women... "has brought into the country diseases even worse than those of prostitution." Diseased alien women, through their male clients, had infected "innocent wives and children" and "done more to ruin homes than any other single cause." [12]

Middle class women organized to control sexuality, engaging in campaigns to impose political controls on prostitution. The issue spread to a battle against obscenity, commandeered by Anthony Comstock, and to a campaign against literature that might corrupt the morals of the young and of innocent women. Finally sexuality became a weapon of class warfare, used as a "vehicle for exercising control over the lower classes, especially immigrants in the urbanized North and blacks in the rural South." [13]

~~A similar pattern was followed after homosexuality was named and became~~



visible. In the beginning only silence existed. Information not hostile to homosexuality could not be placed in the public arena:

Commentators composed their remarks according to a formula that discouraged further amplification... The purity crusades of the 1870s and later added... statutes that prohibited the importation, mailing, production, distribution, sale, and possession of obscene literature...

Although the diffusion of Freudian psychoanalysis in the 1920s helped foster a rapidly growing discourse on sexuality... [it] was an exclusively heterosexual upheaval... Censorship forces... succeeded... in holding the line against acceptance of homosexuality as an artistic theme. In the mid-1920s purity advocates... won passage of a theatrical padlock bill outlawing the portrayal of sexual ``perversion"... Publishers and newspaper editors engaged in a form of self-censorship that kept homosexuality virtually out of print. In 1934 the motion picture production code prohibited any depiction of homosexuality in films. Although the ``conspiracy of silence" surrounding sex was losing its force, on the eve of World War II it still placed powerful inhibitions on the flow of any information that did not conform to the most negative, condemnatory views of same sex eroticism.[14]

There was an even more profound silence about lesbians since most people didn't believe that women wanted, or could have, sex without a man. Reference to same sex passion and sex were regularly ignored in biographies or when the letters of important female authors like Emily Dickinson were published. There was little public discussion of gays and lesbians prior to the Stonewall riot in 1969 (though there was ferment within the gay community itself), just as in the 1990s there has not been a debate about the threat of child molesters. It was simply assumed that homosexuals were sick.[15] Indeed a debate was precluded by the terms ``queer," ``pansy" and ``fag" in the same way as any current discussion of intergenerational sex is stopped by the terms ``molester" and ``abuser." There were few defenders of homosexuality, and even the ACLU agreed that sexual freedoms were not protected by the constitution.

Journalistic coverage of deviant sexual groups has always had an implicit negative frame. Typical was a June, 1964 Life photo essay on the ``sad and sordid world" of homosexuals in America. It began by asking if homosexuals, like Communists, intended to bury us. The problem was that homosexuals were furtive, and for every obvious homosexual there were probably nine undetecte



ones.[16] Lee EDELMAN notes that Life engaged in ``the ideological labor of constructing homosexuality as a problem or social concern.... [T]he magazine.. [makes] the 'secret world' of homosexuality visible... in order to encourage thei [reader's] internalization of the repressive supervisory mechanisms of the State." [17]

Psychology has been the primary site for disputes about normalcy, health and human nature in the 20th century, though an equivalent of HEILBRONER's *The Worldly Philosophers* has not been written for the discipline. It has been central in debates about sex and gender policy, and in Phase I debates has almost always functioned as a supporter of the dominant ideology. The negative attitude of psychology towards the ``new women" and feminists has been extensively written about.[18] The reverse of position on homosexuals is more recent. Traditionally psychologists thought that heterosexuality was natural, while homosexuality was an aberration that needed to be explained. The research on homosexuals was done on people who were under psychological care or who had been jailed and (obviously) a high incidence of unhappiness was found. It focused on the spectacular and the unhappy, took them as the norm, and traced all evils experienced by the group back to the cause under investigation.[19]

A stunning event in the transformation of the social evaluation of homosexuals and a signal that the ideological battle was moving into Phase II, was the reversal of the psychiatric diagnosis. Prior to the adoption of DSM III in 1973, homosexuality was classified as a disease, and homosexuals were viewed as thwarted individuals who emerged from families with weak fathers and overpowering mothers. DSM III reflected a dramatically different view. Homosexuals were no longer ``inverts" with unhealthy or immature personality traits, just as their families were no longer considered dysfunctional.

During a Phase I sexual debate the overwhelming majority of the deviant group accepts the dominant group's negative judgment, and traditionally homosexuals went along with the efforts to cure them. With the exceptions of the small Mattachine Society and the tiny Daughters of Bilitis, there was no organized homosexual community, and they were not viewed as a minority group but as individuals who were sick or weak.[20] Most Americans did not think that homosexuals were the victims of social persecution, and if they thought about it at all they would have believed that social discrimination was an appropriate response to behavior that was offensive and threatened the welfare of society. ``Rather than liberation, Americans... including many gay men and women,



would have preferred elimination." [21]

Phase I sexual issues are not viewed as legal conflicts. Sex is viewed as separate from politics, and the deviant group is not seen as being entitled to legal or political rights. The legal structure usually amplifies and legitimizes the dominant sexual ideology, and in the 1950s it reinforced the assumption that homosexuality was subversive and unnatural. In 1952 Congress passed a law to prevent homosexuals from entering the country, since they were "afflicted with a psychopathic personality." Homosexuals could be deported if found after they entered, and Eisenhower acted to prevent the federal government, or any firms that did business with the federal government, from employing homosexuals. The Court rarely challenges the dominant ideology during a Phase I debate, and does not protect deviant sexual speech and action. There was little Court protection for the early 20th century feminist advocates of birth control who wanted sexual pleasure without having babies, or of homosexuals during the 1950s, just as there has been almost no protection of pedophiles in the 1990s.

Since homosexuality was viewed largely as an epidemic carried by people who were believed to be difficult to identify and could act as a fifth column to seduce and pervert innocent men and boys, officials instituted extraordinary measures. Police had stakeouts in men's rooms, peeping into toilet stalls through holes drilled in the walls, or looking over the tops of the partitions. [22] The FBI instituted widespread surveillance of gay meeting places and of the Daughters Bilitis and the Mattachine Society. The post office placed tracers on the letters of gay men, and passed evidence of homosexual activity on to employers. Urban vice squads invaded private homes, entrapped gays, and fomented local witch hunts. [23] One, The Ladder and Mattachine Review (primarily political magazines expressing the views of the tiny homosexual organizations of the time) were closely monitored by the post office and the FBI. Subscribing to the magazines was viewed as likely to get people into trouble, and only a few bookstores and newsstands that specialized in pornography would sell them. [24]



By the time of the Stonewall Rebellion conditions had changed. There was a pr emergent gay community that only needed a catalyst to crystallize, and the non gay population had become more urban and secular. Though the gay rebellion started in the U.S., in many European countries the audience has been more receptive to their claims. A comparison of the conditions that gave rise to different audience reactions in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, the U.S., France, and other countries has yet to be done. Interestingly, the United States

has been more supportive of feminist arguments than Sweden and Denmark, but less supportive of gay and lesbian rights.[25]

The political debate on gays and lesbians in the U.S. has moved into Phase II. The issues are visible and publicly debated. The opposing groups are organized and articulate as they attempt to convert a significant portion of the political audience. But the Phase I patterns that were present in the original battles against homosexuality and women's sexuality can be seen in the campaign against child molestation and child abuse. This campaign became politically important in the late 1970s. Those viewed as child molesters are zealously pursued and entrapped just as homosexuals were, and most of the discussions closely parallel earlier discussions about homosexuals and feminists. Though the targeted causes of the evil have shifted, the perceived evil effects of sexual perversions, and the formulas used to discuss and understand them, have remained remarkably stable.

As is usual in sexual politics issues are framed in terms of nature, and of absolute good and evil. Real discussions of pedophilia, as opposed to ritualistic condemnations, are almost non-existent. There are no commonly used neutral labels, and words like "child molestation," and "child abuse" are used in the same way as "fag" and "queer" were: to preclude discussion. In sexual politics definitions are characteristically vague, so that statistics from the mildest activities can be blended with images from the most atrocious. Six and thirteen year olds are grouped in the same category ("child") and images of intergenerational sex acts that take place with pubescents and post-puberty teens are routinely projected back onto very young children.

In the same way as adolescents are merged with little children, all sexual activity is equated with violent or coerced sexual activity. Issues of control in the sexual area are treated differently from those in other areas. Pubescents and adolescents are usually thought of as hard to control, and attempts to mold their behavior and initiate them into legal and enjoyable adult activities are considered valuable. However, in the sexual area these assumptions are reversed. It is asserted that they are easily controlled, and they are conceptualized as little children who have no sexual desire of their own and can only be passive victims. According to the dominant formulas the youths are always seduced. They are never considered partners or initiators or willing participants even if they are hustlers.

It is only legitimate to coerce pubescents and teens not to have sex. It is argued that they cannot give consent,[26] that they cannot enjoy sex even if they think



that they do, and that they suffer physical and psychological harm even if they are not aware of it. Contradictory symptoms (like heightened or reduced sexual desire) are attributed to childhood sexual experiences. All future evils will be attributed to past experiences of child abuse, while all future good things that are done will be attributed to overcoming the effects of child abuse, incest or molestation. The evidence for this position comes from people in therapy or in jail - a repeat of the discredited data gathering process used in the 1950s to prove that homosexuals had dysfunctional personalities. It is obvious that when people who have problems are studied they are found to have problems, while people who do not suffer ill effects are unlikely to be included in this type of survey. Moreover, harmful effects that come from social attitudes towards intergenerational sex are confounded with harmful effects that come from the acts themselves.

The formula embodies the nineteenth century conception of the innocent child unaware of poverty or sex, and parallels the construction of women as innocent and non-sexual. Victorians believed that any sexual activity would cause women grave psychological harm, whether or not they realized it, since women would never initiate, consent to, or desire sex - especially outside marriage. They could only be seduced. It was also denied that women could enjoy sex even when they said that they did.[27] Subsequently masturbation was seen as producing various terrible (and contradictory) symptoms. Later it was thought that homosexuals had to be guarded against. In all of these campaigns there was a plethora of books and articles by various experts on the harmful effects of the particular sexual practice that was being condemned. As the debates on homosexuality make evident, the views of the different sexual practices reflect ideology and politics, and research is molded to fit the dominant paradigm.[28]

Though there is little evidence to support the view that there has been a major increase of child molestation, there is a perception that there is an epidemic. According to survey data American sexual practices have changed far less than American sexual talk, but the change in sexual talk has led to the perception that there has been a major change in sexual practice.[29] There is no evidence that child molestation is in a different category.

Information that does not focus on the evils of child abuse is extremely difficult to get. The electronic newsgroups that discuss intergenerational sex are excluded by many commercial and academic newsservers or have restricted access, and the NAMBLA Bulletin, Paidika and other pedophile publications are unavailable



in public libraries, most research libraries, large bookstores, or even in many gay and lesbian bookstores.[30]

There is an intense struggle over definitions. Those who simply touch children are verbally associated with people who kill and rape as child abusers and molesters, and even teachers are strongly cautioned about touching children. Pedophile organizations like NAMBLA (North American Man-Boy Love Association) disown and oppose both physical and psychological coercion, and insist on consent. They argue that pedophiles need to be separated from those who hurt children in the same way as adult lovers need to be separated from rapists. Mainstream media dismiss these arguments as self serving - only arguments that condemn pedophilia are viewed as legitimate. Politicians and the media deny that there are individual variations and view all intergenerational sex as coercive and violent.[31]

If this area is to be discussed, distinctions need to be made. Rape and other non-consensual sexual activities need to be separated out in this as in all other sexual categories, and acts involving young children need to be separated from those involving youths. Distinctions need to be made between incestuous relationships with parents and other types of relationships. Information about intergenerational sex with boys is better than information about girls, but accurate statistics are extraordinarily difficult to come by. Still, it seems that well over 90% of child molestation involves children between 11 and 16, and less than 5% involves intercourse or penetration. Most events involve looking, showing and touching. Some involve fellatio on the boy, some involve masturbation, and a small percent involve mutual masturbation.[32]

Texts favorable to pedophiles are difficult to find in bookstores or libraries, but are not legally restricted in the United States. But First Amendment protections for images in this area are very weak. Despite the fact that many young people have had sexual experiences, and other societies have viewed them as sexual, it is barely permissible to portray nude youths as erotic or sexually attractive. Major photographers like Sturges and Mann have had their photographs and equipment seized by federal agents because they did this.[33] Pictures of youths having sex or masturbating, or pictures of boys with erections are certainly prohibited, and simply possessing pictures of naked youths who are not involved in any sexual activity can cause serious legal problems. Taking the photograph or trading them or sending them through the mail or over the Internet is much more troublesome, and the Post Office has been involved in several sting



operations. Even pictures of clothed children can be forbidden - the Supreme Court refused to review a case in which a video of clothed girls playing volleyball, in which the camera paused on the genital areas, was held to be obscene.[34] The only permissible view of youths is as sexual innocents. It is alleged that children who are photographed naked are harmed by the experience though there have not been credible studies. It is also alleged that children are harmed if they see sexual images, and in the same way as the original obscenity laws were written in order to protect innocent women against sexually explicit images, censorship of the Internet is advocated in order to protect innocent teenagers and children.

Though pedophile organizations were originally a part of the gay/lesbian coalition, gay organizations distance themselves from pedophile organizations the same way as feminist leaders sought to separate themselves from lesbians. (Betty Friedan originally thought the lesbian movement was a CIA plot to discredit the feminist movement.[35]) In a quest for respectability and political acceptance, calls for a radical rethinking of sexuality have been muted by the gay, lesbian and feminist movements. Gays and lesbians now claim to be just like straights, except that the consenting adult partner is a member of the same sex.

While the U.S. has moved in the direction of restricting child sexuality, countries like the Netherlands have moved in the opposite direction by lowering the age consent for boys. There are no adequate studies examining how these policy differences developed, or studying why the anti-pedophile movement in the U.S. acquired such momentum and strength. One facet is that portions of the feminist movement, striving for respectability, joined with the Christian Right in a crusade that was seen as morally respectable and linked up with the traditional women's sphere.[36] Political groups consistently exploit the fact that people can be mobilized if they perceive that children are in danger. The protection of children has always been a popular theme in the U.S., since it gives a patina of morality to legislation and politicians. It is possible that being against child abuse has functioned as a way for Americans, who are often accused of ignoring their children in their quest for success and money, to feel virtuous - especially since it is often the caretakers of children that are accused of abuse. As men and immigrants were seen as corrupters of virtuous women, and homosexuals were viewed as seducers of vulnerable heterosexuals, so pedophiles are seen as corrupters and seducers of the innocent. In a Phase I sexual battle the enemy is

always viewed as evil incarnate.

### **The New Politics of Sex: Consequences of a Paradigm Shift**

Though most American journalists and academics still view sexual issues mainly as diversions from more serious political issues, the boundary between the two spheres has been destroyed by the new politics, and sexual issues are now central rather than peripheral. Our lagging conceptualizations of this shift have hindered a full examination of its implications.

Several areas need to be examined. Sex is a visible political issue, and sexual policy decisions often have a high impact on people. Arguments are highly charged and personal, and opinions are strongly held. Sexual panics directed against discrete groups have been a recurrent phenomenon. In Phase I sexual battles the issues are implicit rather than explicit, and dominant groups carry on a campaign of moral vituperation in their attempt to reaffirm and reinforce notions of the naturalness of their own sexual ideology. Government response to sexual issues is different from that on other issues, and sexual coalitions cut across traditional political lines. The dominant ideologies have been largely formulated by religious people, feminists and psychologists rather than by traditional political groups, and the major debates have taken place within these groups. Much more attention needs to be paid to the patterns of sexual politics, and to the pressure groups that are active in the area.[37]

The literature of sexual politics is not the same as other political literature, and this raises constitutional questions. The Court uses different criteria in evaluating censorship of sexual and political publications, and material that is censored is called obscene rather than subversive. Images of youths do not even have to meet the obscenity standard before their possession can be banned. But sexual images also serve to define and unite sexual communities. Male pornography has been attacked by some feminists who argue that it is used as a weapon used to keep women in a subordinate position.[38]

Others argue that it erodes and attacks traditional values and roles, or that it degrades people and turns them into sexual objects. But all of these effects are political, since they affect structures of power and dominance. Since sex has been brought into politics, the criteria for judging sexual speech and art need to be re-examined. If sexual categories are recognized as political categories it raises the question of whether sexual speech and writing should be judged by the



same criteria, and have the same protection, as other forms of political speech. Also, there are especially restrictive rules regarding the exposure of children and teens to sexual issues, from books that discuss gay and lesbian issues in school libraries to pornography. If sexual speech is just another type of political speech these restrictions need to be reconsidered.

A third set of questions focuses on the political audience. Some research has been done on the creation of sexual communities, but little has been done on the ways in which their messages are received by the wider society, and of the conditions under which a sympathetic (or hostile) audience is created. Why did the audience change in its reaction to the claims of gays and lesbians, and is it likely to change in its reaction to the claims of pedophiles? Why and when did the strong campaign against pedophilia develop, and why is it so much more important in the U.S. than in many other industrialized countries? Why were the audiences in Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands more receptive than Americans to the claims of gays and lesbians, and more tolerant of adult/boy relationships, and less receptive to the claims of feminists? Is there a connection between the two? Under what conditions is the relatively tolerant attitude that has characterized most western nations in the past few decades likely to change or is the change a fundamental part of modernity, a result of a significant cultural shift?

Marshal McLuhan wrote that we adapt to new technologies by first framing them in categories that were created for the old technologies - that we drive forward while looking out of a rear-view mirror. This article has argued that we have done that with sex. It has entered politics and become a central issue. But despite the popularity of the phrase "sexual politics" the dominant political concepts still reflect a time when sex and politics existed in separate spheres. Those outdated concepts distort our vision and need to be replaced.

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He sees the hoped-for shift as taking place in two stages. During the first stage, the opponents of pedophilia control the debate by insisting that the issue is non-negotiable--while using psychological and moral categories to silence all discussion.

But in the second stage, Mirkin says, the discussion must move on to such issues as the "right" of children to have and enjoy sex.

If this paradigm shift could be accomplished, the issue would move from the *moral* to the *political* arena, and therefore become open to negotiation. For example, rather than decrying sexual abuse, lawmakers would be forced to argue about when and under what conditions adult/child sex could be accepted. Once the issues becomes "discussible," it would only be a matter of time before the public would begin to view pedophilia as another sexual orientation, and not a choice for the pedophile.



In a recent lead article of the *Journal of Homosexuality* (1), for example, Harris Mirkin says the "sexually privileged" have disadvantaged the pedophile through sheer political force in the same way that blacks were disadvantaged by whites before the civil-rights movement.



Mirkin, whose academic specialty is the politics of sex, wrote in a 1999 article published in *The Journal of Homosexuality* that society perceives youths as seduced, abused victims and not "partners or initiators or willing participants" in sex with adults, "even if they are hustlers."

In an interview, Mirkin said the outrage surrounding the Roman Catholic Church's pedophilia scandal illustrates how the public views acts of intergenerational contact as "one big blur" of child abuse when it's likely "very, very mild stuff."

"We say if someone touches or molests or diddles or whatever a kid it will ruin the rest of their life. I don't believe it. I think kids are more likely to laugh at it more than anything else -- unless the whole culture says this is the most horrible thing that can happen to you."

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<http://www.startribune.com/stories/384/2126968.html>