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## **Sociopolitical Biases in the Contemporary Scientific Literature on Adult Human Sexual Behavior with Children and Adolescents<sup>1</sup>**

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*"Reality must not be twisted to suit ideological needs."*

—Diana Russell (1986, p. 312)

### **Introduction**

This chapter explores certain tendencies within that body of victimology-based literature sometimes referred to as the "new research" and writing on the subject of incest and child sexual abuse.<sup>2</sup> The group of professionals associated with these writings—a group that includes researchers and clinicians as well as political activists and popular writers—characteristically employs polemical devices and research methods that blur the line between social science and social criticism.

Most of the writers in question view themselves not only as social scientists but also as social critics. An assumption of moral purpose, sometimes bordering on self-righteousness, repeatedly emerges from a reading of their work. Indeed, these writers typically display many of the attitudes associated with what Becker (1984) terms "moral entrepreneurs."

Highly subjective and untested assumptions regarding childhood experience and human sexuality abound in these writings. Sexual behavior is viewed overall as comprising a particularly "treacherous" sphere of activity from which children in particular, but also adult females, need special

protection (Finkelhor, 1984, pp. 19, 188). Male sexuality is condemned for its inherently "predatory" and "exploitive" nature (Russell, 1986, pp. 173, 210, 392; 1984, pp. 262-263; see also Bass, 1983, pp. 25, 58; Herman, 1981, pp. 3, 62-63). Heterosexual relations are characterized as adversarial virtually by definition and analyzed within political paradigms that emphasize the unequal distribution of social power along the lines of biological sex and age.

Somewhat predictably, researchers and writers who favor descriptive, empirical, or phenomenological models and who may wish to establish a relative degree of objectivity in this difficult field and avoid the rhetorical excesses typical of much of the new research often are attacked by victimologists for "contributing to the disinhibition of child molesters," "condoning adult-child sex," "blaming the victims" of abuse, and even, as in the case of Judith Reisman's charges against Alfred Kinsey, engaging in child molestation (see Russell, 1984, pp. 246-248; 1986, pp. 64, 389; Transcript, 1983 [Reisman]; Herman, 1981, pp. 3-4, 22-25; Bass, 1983, pp. 25-26). Through personal attacks, the victimological paradigm is aggressively promoted as the one and only theoretical structure that can explain the "truth" about incest and sexual abuse.

Although a substantial body of research exists whose data contradict the findings and conclusions reported in the new research (see Kilpatrick, 1986, 1987) and although a few short articles have appeared criticizing the philosophical premises underlying victimological approaches to sex research and clinical practice (e.g., Money, 1986; Schultz, 1980a), virtually no in-depth critiques of the victimological paradigm, or of the research and writings supporting it, have appeared to date in the professional literature. While this critical reticence is understandable—few authors look forward to being branded "condoner of child molestation"—it remains that the writings being considered here under the rubric of the new research have had a striking influence on social policy and public consciousness. This influence pervades current professional discourse, education, medical and psychological services, mass media, and general social climate concerning childhood and sexuality. When the potential effects of such influence are considered, it becomes apparent that a critical examination of the "new research" is urgent and timely.

## Origins of the Political Ideology of the "New Research"

During the late 1960's and early 1970's, in response to sex-biased treatment of rape victims at the judicial, enforcement, and treatment levels, many feminists and other activists organized to effect a radical transformation of the manner in which rape was understood in its social, psychological, legal, political, and moral aspects (Rose, 1977).

In their analyses, these activists pointed to the frequency with which rape was interpreted—even by many professionals—as more of a sexual "misunderstanding" than the frequently violent sexual crime it actually is. They dissected socially entrenched imagery regarding women that encouraged this trivialization of rape and exposed the complex process by which rape victims came to be blamed for their own victimization.

Victim advocates then enlarged their focus, drawing parallels between rape and other forms of male violence against females. Finally, connections were drawn between these acts of violence and the sexual abuse of children and adolescents (Rush, 1980; Russell, 1984; Brownmiller, 1975). However, virtually all research in this field, including studies conducted by the victimologists under discussion (e.g., Russell, 1986), documents the low incidence of violence or forceful coercion in cases of adult human sexual behavior with children and adolescents. From an empirical point of view, then, it is incongruous to categorize such interactions as violent crimes, to study them as such, and to engage in discourse permeated by vocabulary and imagery appropriate to the study of violence.

Bass (1983), for example, describes the warning about sexual abuse that she issued her 4-year-old daughter: "There are some grown-ups . . . that if they see a child's vagina or penis, they may want to hurt it. That's why I want you to wear underpants when you're on the street alone" (p. 58). Since data suggest that "hurting" does not characterize the large majority of cross-generational sexual interactions, this contextual association of adult human sexual behavior with children and adolescents with violence appears to be based on the subjective moral principle that any sexual interaction between an adult and a child or an adolescent is a fundamental violation of the younger interactant simply because of the sexual nature of the interaction. Underlying this principle is a powerful, sometimes explicitly articulated conviction that a child or an adolescent is incapable of experiencing a genuinely sexual desire or response. This conviction attributes participation in peer sexual behavior to "curiosity" and participation in adult/nonadult sexual behavior to "coercion."

Herman (1981) succinctly advances this position: "Any sexual relationship between [an adult and a child or an adolescent] must necessarily take on some of the coercive characteristics of rape" (p. 27). Psychologist Henry Giaretto (in Crewdson, 1988) puts it even more colorfully: "Adult-child sex is like putting a high school boxer in the ring with Muhammed Ali" (p. 252).

Statements like Giaretto's and Herman's underscore the general view of sexual behavior that characterizes the new research—that sex consists in essence of a power struggle between its interactants, the consequences of which, for adult females in heterosexual interactions and children and adolescents in adult/nonadult sexual interactions, are those consequences that result from their being the less powerful "combatant" in some sort of battle. Such beliefs, characteristic both of victimology and what this author will

term "cultural feminism,"<sup>3</sup> tend to discount the subjective experience of individuals for whom sexual activity more often than not serves as an expression of affection and pleasure, rather than of conflict.

### The Social Purity/Feminist Alliance and Its Inheritance

The beliefs and assumptions underlying the new research have sometimes come under attack from sexologists, sexual libertarians, feminists, child psychologists, anthropologists, and radical children's rights activists for representing a form of that particular Western cultural outlook that Rubin (1986) and others have termed "sex negativism" (see also Constantine, 1981a,c; Ramey, 1970; Yates, 1978; Money, 1986; Currier, 1981). Since both victimology and cultural feminism have their roots in the same 1960's radical left and counter-culture movements that also gave birth to "children's liberation" and contemporary sexual libertarianism, the victimologists and cultural feminists under discussion take pains to portray their work as representing a "progressive" stance on sexual matters.

Finkelhor (1984), for example, claims that his position "is not part of a Victorian resurgence. It is compatible with the most progressive attitude toward sexuality currently being voiced" (p. 22). Despite this reassurance, there is evidence to suggest that the current moral crusade against sexual abuse does, in fact, bear a great deal in common with Victorian beliefs, values, and sexual ideology.

As Snitow (1985), Burstyn (1985), Pivar (1973), and others have pointed out, from the powerful feminist voices of the late 1800's, two major currents eventually emerged. The more influential of these, swayed by class interests and the ideology of the social purity movement with which it eventually allied itself, accepted the traditional Victorian view of males and females as utterly disparate beings residing in separate spheres of psychological and social existence. These activists judged adult males' nature as essentially base and violent. Adult females were seen as the standard bearers of a higher, chaster morality. Adult females' sexual life was characterized as consisting virtually in its entirety of danger and victimization, and reforms were sought to protect adult females, adolescents, and children from the bestial nature of the male (DuBois and Gordon, 1984).

Although the fundamentally paternalistic measures advocated by the social purity feminists drew attention to the genuine victimization of adult females and also allowed a small group of privileged adult females to gain economic advantage or political power, these measures had the disadvantage of restricting adult females' mobility and possibilities for true economic liberation or sexual exploration. For example, adult females—particularly during adolescence or young adulthood—who did not conform to the social purity prescriptions for proper sexual behavior were condemned by these feminists with a hostility comparable to that accorded male violators. Such

sexual "delinquents" eventually constituted the largest category of female reformatory inmates in late 19th century America.

The second force in feminist activism, lesser in number and influence, emphasized adult females' equality with adult males and sought reforms that would free adult females not only from adult male domination and violence but also from the very paternalism inherent in the platform of the social purity/feminist alliance. Some of these activists involved themselves in sexual freedom movements or socialist politics (Rubin, 1986).

The social purity tradition in feminist activism was well representative of Victorian sexual culture. Both the movement's ideology and its tactics—forming alliances over specific issues with powerful, male-dominated groups themselves opposed to any genuine social or political empowerment of adult females—have been carried forward into the 1980's in the work of the antipornography activists and those feminists for whom the dangerous and exploitive aspects of sexual behavior are the primary areas of focus for discourse and activism (Snitow, 1985; Burstyn, 1985; DuBois and Gordon, 1984). A review of the literature demonstrates a connection between the antipornography movement and that part of the antisexual-abuse movement reflected in the new research that is so strong as to make the two virtually synonymous.

For example, both Diana Russell and Florence Rush (the latter whose work is considered among the earliest and most influential of the new research on sexual abuse) are as well known for their antipornography activism as for their work in the field of sexual abuse. In Russell's writings and lectures, she discusses "pornography-related victimizations" of adult females, adolescents, and children (1986, p. 173) and refers to what she terms the current "pornographic reign of terror" (in Nobile and Nadler 1986, p. 71). Along with Finkelhor (1984, p. 180), she claims that exposing children to pornography itself constitutes child abuse (Russell, 1986, p. 310) and, again with Finkelhor's and also Bass's (1983) concurrence, cites pornography as a probable contributory cause of the sexual abuse of children (1986, p. 82).

In these pronouncements and in the use of slogans such as "Pornography is violence against women," the equation is once again being made between **moral violation** and **physical violence**. This equation, while conceivably defensible as metaphor, has apparently been taken literally both by antipornography activists and antisexual-abuse activists.

Russell's "pornography-related victimizations" are viewed by her as characteristic manifestations of what she terms "predatory" male sexuality. Adult males are said to be "pre-disposed to violence, to rape, to sexual harassment, and to sexually abusing children" (1984, p. 290). Feminist critics of this point of view note that antipornography activists, and others subscribing to this general ideology, portray all adult male sexual behavior as "inherently aggressive" (Ellis et al., 1986, p. 6) and, in fact, display a clear revulsion to heterosexuality—a revulsion that serves as the "thinnest of

covers for disgust with sex itself" (Willis, 1986, p. 56). Considering this expressed revulsion, Russell's placement of adult/nonadult sexual interaction in the same category with imprisoning children in basements or abandoning them (1986, p. 9), Finkelhor's portrayal of such interactions as morally analogous to slavery (1984, pp. 16-17), and Herman's claim that incest is as destructive to women as the mutilation of their genitals (in Russell, 1986, p. 3) become more easily comprehensible.

Anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1986) analyzes the writings of the antipornography and associated feminist movements in the following manner:

This discourse on sexuality is less a sexology than a demonology. It presents most sexual behavior in the worst possible light. Its descriptions of erotic conduct always use the worst available example as if it were representative. It presents the most disgusting pornography, the most exploited forms of prostitution, and the least palatable or most shocking manifestations of sexual variation. This rhetorical tactic consistently misrepresents human sexuality in all its forms. The picture of human sexuality that emerges from this literature is unremittingly ugly (p. 301).

About Robin Morgan, whose work well typifies these writings, Ellis (1986) comments, "A situation in which male sexual arousal, however achieved, might elicit a complementary response in a woman, and be a source of pleasure to her, is to Morgan simply inconceivable" (p. 45). (Morgan has defined rape as existing "any time sexual intercourse occurs when it has not been initiated by the woman.") There is an implicit suggestion here that, on a fundamental level, even gentle and loving, adult/adult heterosexual interactions are considered violent assaults. Andrea Dworkin (1986), a major antipornography activist and also an outspoken antisexual-abuse activist, makes this explicit by stating that "intercourse is punishment."

As a logical complement to the rather pessimistic view of male sexual behavior expressed in the new research, and in accord with Victorian tradition, adult females, adolescents, and children—children in particular—are painted in highly idealized hues. The Victorian idealization of children as sexless innocents is clearly apparent in victimologists' repeated, unsubstantiated assertions that children are by definition incapable either of desiring or voluntarily cooperating in a sexual interaction with an adult (cf. Russell 1986, pp. 392-393; Bass, 1983, pp. 24, 27, 30; Herman, 1981, p. 27; Rush, 1980).

For example, Russell (1986) contends that children are incapable of experiencing incestuous sexual longings themselves, but can only be victims of a (male) relative's projection of his own desires (p. 393). She goes on to discuss the seduction of daughters by their fathers, adding:

Even the widespread use of the word "seduce" in this context is an offensive misnomer. It assumes a mutuality—if not initially, then once the child has submitted. But the notion that a father could seduce, rather

than violate, his daughter is itself a myth. And the notion that some daughters seduce their fathers is a double myth (pp. 392-393).

While the question of whether or not some daughters seduce their fathers may be arguable, to refer to the seduction of daughters by their fathers as a "myth" is clearly a rhetorical ploy that violates common sense as well as rules of evidence. The use of the term "myth" to refer to phenomena that have been well established is a characteristic rhetorical device both of the new research and political propaganda. While such tactics may be useful and appropriate in the political arena, they are simply out of place in the context of scientific investigation.

Bass (1983) reveals a similar idealism when she claims that "[in every sexual interaction between an adult male and a child or an adolescent] there is coercion" (p. 27) and that, by definition, a child cannot desire a sexual interaction with an adult and therefore cannot be the initiator of such interaction (pp. 24, 30). Indeed, Bass refers to sexual interaction between an adult and a child as the "desecration" of the child, unwittingly stating in literal terms the view both of children and of sex propagated by many of the writers with whom this chapter is concerned.

## Sex and Danger

While these writers' association of sexuality with violent assault is strongest in their discussions of adult/nonadult sex, it is by no means limited to such discussions. Warnings of all sorts highlighting the destructive potential of sex not only for children and adolescents, but also for adult females, pervade the literature.

Moreover, childhood sexual experiences even among peers come under sharp scrutiny by victimologists for signs of potential abuse—a development consistent with this author's impression that it is childhood sexual activity, rather than childhood sexual abuse, that represents the ultimate target of concern of some of those responsible for the new research. Several recent victimological studies, for example, have "identified" a new group of "perpetrators of child sexual abuse": other children. Johnson (1988) includes the following in her criteria for subject inclusion in her sample of 4- to 13-year-old "offenders":

- 1) They had acted in a sexual way with another child; and 2) they had used force or coercion in order to obtain the participation of the other child, or the victim was too young to realize he/she was being violated and did not resist the sexual behavior, or it was an offense such as exhibitionism; and 3) there was an age differential of at least two years; and 4) there was a pattern of sexually overt behavior in their history (p. 221).

Johnson's definitions of coercion are vague and include terms such as "verbal cajoling." These definitions are also excessively dependent upon her

own interpretation of what may have transpired based on repeated interrogation of "suspected perpetrators" at the Children's Institute International (C.I.I.)—an organization that specializes in "uncovering" "hidden" instances of sexual abuse.<sup>4</sup>

Leaving the question of coercion aside, then, when a small child who has "acted in a sexual way" in the past "acts in a sexual way" in the present with a child two years younger who does not resist because, in Johnson's opinion, the child is "too young" to know he or she is being "violated," then according to Johnson's criteria, the older child becomes a "perpetrator of sexual abuse" and the younger child a "victim." And again, even should no "coercion" be suspected, one is left with instances of "exhibitionism" by a 4-year-old being referred to by Johnson as "offenses." Johnson warns that ". . . The behavior of these child perpetrators must not be ignored any longer" (p. 219).

Cantwell (1988), also investigating child "perpetrators of sexual abuse," urges parents to "report and investigate incidents of sexual interaction between children," and to encourage children to "tell someone if anyone, even a same-age child, approaches them initiating sexual play." She then challenges what she construes to be a generally benign societal view of childhood sex play by wondering whether engaging in such play is "normal."

Possible consequences of this line of investigation are evident when one looks at the manner in which Johnson's results have been reported in the popular press and the influence such reports may have on the dissemination of information to the public about childhood sexuality. For example, Curtin (1988) opens her *St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times* article on Johnson's study with the following:

For a long time most people wrote it off as just "playing doctor." Now we know better. Children as young as 4 and 5 are sexually abusing other children.

In his widely publicized mass-market book on sexual abuse, Crewdson (1988, p. 207), taking his cue from articles such as Johnson's and Cantwell's, shrilly warns that childhood sex play may be a breeding ground for pedophilia and future sexual abusers and thus should be closely monitored (as though it were not already!). Finkelhor (1979) also seems inclined to issue warnings of the destructive potential of peer sexual experiences in childhood.

Many cultural feminist and victimologist writers in fact seem unable or unwilling to conceptualize heterosexuality itself as including any sort of affectional component at all. They present what they term "non-exploitive" sex as the only context for sexual activity that is relatively free of damaging effects. However, since they define male sexuality itself as "inherently exploitive," it is unclear how this criterion for nonexploitation can possibly be met in any sexual interaction that involves an adult male.

They furthermore assume the existence of a clear line of demarcation between erotic feelings and affectional feelings and without substantiation suggest that, in the case of adult/nonadult relationships, these feelings are mutually exclusive (see Finkelhor, 1984, p. 12; Russell, 1984, p. 236).

Assumptions such as these, and the consequent exclusive use of negatively loaded terminology such as "abuse," "assault," "attack," "molestation," "exploitation," or "victimization" to refer generically to all adult human sexual behavior with children and adolescents, confound attempts to understand such interactions and may reflect, as Kilpatrick (1987) suggests, a serious conflict of interest between scientific inquiry on the one hand and enforcement of social norms or propagation of political ideology on the other.

## Failures of Methodological Integrity

While the preceding material was intended to present an overview of the general discursive tone and ideology of the new research, what follows is an analysis of specific abuses of research methodology that occur as a logical consequence of ideology.

### Structural Bias

Rosenthal (1976) and others have noted the powerful effects of expectancy bias and demand characteristics in research involving human subjects. Such biases are rarely intended, however, and thus may be referred to as methodological "weaknesses." To see how methodological weakness becomes true failure of methodological integrity—that is, where these biases are intentional, structural, and ideologically rationalized—one may turn to several current studies, notably Russell's (1984, 1986) major National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)-sponsored study of the sexual abuse of female children, adolescents, and adults.

#### The Russell "Incest" Study

Throughout her book *The Secret Trauma—Incest in the Lives of Girls and Women* (1986), Russell initiates the claim that her study is the most valid, indeed, perhaps the only truly valid and informative study on the subject of intrafamilial sexual behaviors, which she terms "incest" or "incestuous abuse" (p. 137). (Russell apparently considers all types of sexual behaviors between individuals related even distantly or by marriage to constitute "incest.") She sees her study as the "first opportunity to evaluate some of the contemporary controversies surrounding incest on the basis of a scientifically selected non-clinical population" (p. 10) and asserts that "it is the methodology of our survey that sets it apart from all previous studies" (p. 19).

With the exception of Wyatt (1985), which used a research approach similar to that of Russell and obtained similar results, Russell's reported combined prevalence rates for intra- and extrafamilial sexual abuse greatly exceed those of all other studies reviewed. These studies include nine investigations, reviewed by Peters, Wyatt, and Finkelhor (1986), that used various types of random sampling procedures. Among these nine was the investigation by Lewis (1985), the first, and thus far the only, study of sexual abuse to use a random national sample. To bring the extent of variance between Russell's or Wyatt's work and virtually all other major studies into sharper relief, it should be noted that Russell's and Wyatt's prevalence figures are a full 32-35 percentage points above Lewis's—which are in turn considerably higher than those reported in eight out of the nine studies reviewed by Peters, Wyatt, and Finkelhor, as well as several others reviewed by Russell herself and by this author.<sup>5</sup>

Russell devotes quite a bit of space attempting to unearth the deficiencies in all these studies that might account for the disparity between their results and her own. The idea that there may have been something amiss in her research is not considered. However, problems in her methodology are immediately apparent.

Along with her sampling techniques, Russell's claims to the superiority of her study rest primarily on what she terms the "training" and "sensitization" of her interviewers to the subject of incest and sexual abuse. It is this lack of "sensitization" that she claims is responsible for the supposed inaccuracy of all previous studies. Referring, for instance, to a previous study whose 1% prevalence rate for intrafamilial sexual abuse of females differed sharply from her 19% figure, Russell comments, "Since [the interviewers were] not educated in this fashion, they can therefore be assumed to subscribe to common myths about women who are sexually abused" (p. 25).

According to Russell, her training regimen gave interviewers a "better sense of what questions encourage disclosure" and "what types of resistance to expect" (p. 20). Interviewers were specifically chosen for their "non-victim-blaming attitudes," thus weeding out what she terms the "bigotry" of those who might not view all of the younger interactants in adult/nonadult sex as victims (p. 21). Indeed, she repeats that she used "careful selection of interviewers who did not subscribe to the usual myths about sexual abuse." If one recalls that among these "myths" Russell counts the idea that a child might willingly engage in a sexual interaction with an older individual and later self-report that this interaction was benign—a "myth" that has been established as factual by empirical, cross-cultural, and anecdotal data<sup>6</sup>—it is clear that interviewers were "carefully selected" to include only those who were unwilling to acknowledge the existence of these data.

It may reasonably be concluded from all of the foregoing that Russell equates "training" and "sensitization" with passionate ideological

indoctrination of interviewers who have been preselected for their receptivity to the indoctrination. These interviewers are then charged with the duty to collect only certain kinds of data. Such mandated selective disregard of undesirable facts becomes obvious when one looks carefully at several of Russell's interviewing techniques. For example, she declares:

The widely held notion of the child taking the initiative in sexual liaisons with adults<sup>7</sup> is a classic case of the victim blaming so common in sexual abuse mythology. How can children initiate acts of which they have little or no understanding? To avoid propagating this myth we did not specifically ask who took the initiative (p. 124).

Since it has never been demonstrated that all individuals under age 18 or 16 or even 14 have "little or no understanding" of sexual acts, or that even if they did not, that they would therefore be unable to "initiate" these acts through proceptive expressive behavior, Russell's statement—rather than reflecting a desire to avoid propagating a myth—probably reflects a general disinclination to collect data that might contradict a political or moral position.

In a similar effort to guide response in an approved direction, Russell asked the following to elicit data on the important question of subject affect during and following the sexual interaction:

Overall, how upset were you by this experience—extremely upset, somewhat upset, or not very upset? (p. 138).

Set off from these choices by parentheses on the interviewer's sheet was the designation "(not at all upset)." Russell explains that it was left up to the "interviewer's discretion" whether to include this parenthetical choice in her interview schedule. The alternatives offered to respondents, then, ran the gamut of the negative, and the one comparatively neutral response (still utilizing the negatively loaded word "upset," however) was in an unspecified number of cases not even presented. Russell defends this practice with the following:

The reason this final choice was put in parentheses [and only presented at the interviewer's discretion] is to prevent the respondent from experiencing this part of the question as insulting or insensitive (p. 138).

Russell considers it an "insult" to allow for the possibility that a respondent may not have been upset by her experience, and the possibility of overtly positive affect is structurally disallowed. One possible subject response to this kind of interviewer bias is described by Germaine Greer (1975) when she relates the experience of one of her school friends:

[She] enjoyed sex with her uncle throughout her childhood and never realized that anything was unusual until she went away to school. What disturbed her then was not what her uncle had done, but the attitude of her teachers and psychiatrist. They assumed that she must have been traumatized and disgusted and therefore in need of very special help. In

order to capitulate to their expectations, she began to fake symptoms she did not feel, until at length she began to feel truly guilty for not having felt guilty. She ended up judging herself quite harshly for this innate lechery. (Page number not given.)

In defending such research techniques, writers in Russell's theoretical camp borrow from conflict theory and point to the manner in which mainstream social science methodology has fallaciously been promoted as "objective" while in actuality it reflects prevailing cultural biases and protects the interests of specific groups or classes. Some of these writers indict the very idea of "value-free" research as itself representing an ideological bias.

While there is evidence to support this view, "affirmative action" bias such as is found in much of the new research is hardly a solution. A difference must still be noted between the methods of committed science and those of political persuasion. One may have strongly held values and still use every safeguard available to prevent those values from obscuring an accurate understanding of phenomena. In the case at hand, it would seem that accurate information is primary and essential for the creation of effective strategies not only for the prevention of sexual abuse of children but also for the maintenance of their sexual health.

### Finkelhor

Similar, if less overt, examples of the sort of ideologically based structural bias found in Russell's work can be found in the work of Finkelhor. For example, in the instructions presented to respondents in his study of childhood sexual experiences among a sample of college students (1979), Finkelhor describes the experiences being studied in the following manner: "Some of these [childhood sexual experiences] are very upsetting and painful and some are not." This statement seems to set the stage for the expected negative reports. One might well imagine Finkelhor's critical response should some other investigator have instructed her or his respondents, "Some of these experiences are very delightful and pleasurable and some are not." It should be emphasized that Finkelhor's study was ostensibly designed to examine childhood sexual experiences in general, not sexual abuse in particular. The use of "very upsetting and painful" to refer by implication to the larger portion of these experiences is therefore quite revealing of the investigator's bias.

A further inflation of negative reports in this study results from the fact that sexual experiences about which Finkelhor's respondents reported having felt "neutral"—a designation that may include mixed as well as truly neutral feelings—were graded by coders as constituting **negative** experiences if an age discrepancy of more than five years existed between the participants (1981, p. 141). The rationale for this apparent disregard of the subject's sense of her or his own reality is simply the investigator's

**personal moral belief** that any and all sexual contacts between minors and those more than five years older (including older children) are abusive (1984, pp. 14-21).

In Finkelhor's investigation, co-authored with Redfield (Finkelhor and Redfield, 1984), of how the general public defines sexual abuse, the investigators designed a series of vignettes of potentially abusive sexual situations with variables dissociated and crossed in as many patterns as seemed practically feasible. Their idea was to explore the "boundaries of people's definitions of sexual abuse" by proposing even the most "unusual and unlikely" sexual situations involving adults and nonadults to see whether or not respondents considered each incident to be abusive and, if so, to what degree of abusiveness the incident was rated.

Out of the representative list of vignettes reproduced in Finkelhor's report, only 3 (out of 14) are not explicitly described in negative terms, and in these 3, an adolescent male is seen simply "agreeing" to perform a sexual act on an adult female or "asking" an older individual to perform a sexual act. No adjectives are used to describe affect or outcome in these neutral descriptions; a typical one reads: "A 40-year-old woman had intercourse with her 15-year-old son. The boy asked her to do it" (pp. 126-127).

In contrast, the remaining 11 vignettes describe overtly coerced, unpleasant experiences. Unlike the three neutral reports, these vignettes include descriptions of negative outcome and affect. In the appendix to this study, Finkelhor and Redfield list all independent variables related to outcome; that is, they present all the alternatives appearing in the vignettes as descriptions of the effects of the experience on the younger participant/victim. The list consists of the following:

[Note: (V) = victim]

1. Nothing [no effect] (50% of the vignettes)
2. One of the following (50% of the vignettes)
  - a. Later (V) had nightmares about it
  - b. Later (V) was upset it had happened
  - c. (V) was ashamed about it for many years afterward.

Thus, Finkelhor and Redfield's pool of possible outcomes—when outcome is noted at all—consists entirely of negative variables. Not surprisingly, respondents in this study rated all of the vignettes as sexually abusive, providing Finkelhor and Redfield with evidence that the average person agrees with victimological characterizations of adult/nonadult sex as constituting abuse regardless of the degree to which a child appears to voluntarily participate.

This study also serves a second function for the authors, one that is emphasized in the victimological literature: education. The reader, like the respondent, is presented with a circumscribed universe of experiences—a continuum with a severely truncated positive end—while being told that this universe is "inclusive of even the most unusual and unlikely" experiences.

Thus, the reader is educated to the "truth" about adult/nonadult sexual interactions.

When respondents in a retrospective study whose data are under analysis as of this writing (Okami, unpublished data) were asked to describe their responses to childhood and adolescent sexual interactions with adults, they spoke of "fear," "disgust," "anger," "contempt," "confusion," and "hatred." They also spoke of "ecstasy," "gratitude," "warmth," "desire," "tenderness," and "love." Clearly, then, Finkelhor's vignettes are not representative of the full range of possible sexual experiences involving adults and nonadults, inclusive of "even the most unusual or unlikely." Considering the accessibility of data that do describe this full range, it seems unreasonable for social scientists to employ methodologies structured to ignore or suppress these data simply because the phenomena they describe are not compatible with a political paradigm.

#### Kilpatrick (1986): A Contrasting Model

So that the potential power of structural bias may be fully appreciated, and a contrasting model of responsible research in this field presented, Kilpatrick's (1986) investigation of the effects on adult females of childhood sexual experiences will be reviewed.

Kilpatrick took deliberate care to avoid structural bias. Experiences being studied were referred to in respondent's instructions simply as "sexual experiences engaged in during childhood years" with no further comment. This description contrasts with Finkelhor's use of "very upsetting and painful," as already described. (Wyatt's [1985] instructions to her subjects were virtually identical to Finkelhor's.) Kilpatrick's protocol also compares favorably, from both scientific and ethical standpoints, with Russell's "foot-in-the-door" explanation to potential respondents that her study was concerned simply with "crime." Russell's interviewers made no mention of sexual abuse until entry was gained into the respondent's home and demographic data already obtained.

Kilpatrick's subjects were offered a wide range of choices with which to rate the positive or negative qualities of their experience, the extent to which it was perceived as voluntary or forced, and the perception of who initiated the interaction. This study also measured written self-report of level of adult functioning using the Hudson scales. Cook and Campbell's (1979) deliberate sampling procedure was employed to assure heterogeneity, and 501 adult females participated.

Kilpatrick found that 68% of her sample had positive self-report responses to their experience, 38% self-reported that it was mostly or entirely pleasant, and 67% of the respondents stated that the contacts were "voluntary." Only 25% of her sample self-reported that their experience was essentially unpleasant, and 33% reported that they were to some degree coerced into participation.

Although this study included peer experiences, and Kilpatrick's initial report (1986) does not specifically isolate adult/nonadult interactions from intragenerational ones, she subsequently conducted sophisticated analyses of variables such as the respondent's age at the time of the experience and the age of the other interactant. These analyses found no significant differences in self-reported outcome according to age differential. While certain types of adult/nonadult experiences were significantly more likely than others to result in self-reported negative outcomes—as were certain types of peer experiences—the adult/nonadult interactions as a whole were no more likely than peer experiences to result in self-report of negative outcomes (Kilpatrick, personal communication).

### Utilization of Legal, Moral, and Political Criteria, Rather Than Empirically Based Criteria, in Establishing Operational Definitions

Terms such as "abuse" and "victimization" appear in the new research in very different senses than they are normally understood. Moreover, victimologists alternate between their own specialized usage and common usage at will as a rhetorical technique. So then, after first defining **sexual victimization** or **abuse** as any sexual experience between an individual under age 18 (or 16) and a person five or more years older—a definition that would indict a large portion of marriages in the majority of human societies throughout history (Frayser, 1985)—victimologists may, in virtually the same paragraph, report catastrophic sequelae of **sexual victimization** or **abuse**, this time implicitly defining such terms in their commonly understood meanings (i.e., force, coercion, physical or emotional brutality). The reader is left with the impression that these catastrophic sequelae are intrinsic to any sexual interaction between an individual under 18 (or 16) and someone five or more years older.

Moreover, "victims" of such "sexual abuse" are often referred to as **survivors**, or even more fancifully in terms such as "the walking wounded" (Blume, 1986). The reader thus concludes that individuals under 18 who experience sexual interaction with someone five or more years older globally suffer psychological or physiological effects normally experienced by those emerging alive from a life-threatening encounter. When one notes that victimological definitions of sexual abuse frequently include activities such as the making of suggestive remarks, even by a peer (e.g., Wyatt, 1985), it becomes even more difficult to defend the use of terms such as **survivor** in this context.

These practices and the analyses underlying them create serious problems in establishing workable operational definitions or even informal definitions. The victimological paradox is exemplified in the following statement from Wyatt (in Crewdson, 1988):

[Some persons report that their sexual abuse] was done in such a loving and warm way, that the child never knew that this was something inappropriate until years later when someone labelled it for them. It was a pleasurable experience, not traumatic; there was no physical coercion involved. But you can look at someone else who had that very same experience—being fondled by an uncle every time the uncle came over for a holiday—and that woman might say it was one of the most horrendous experiences of her life, shaped her attitude toward men, created difficulty in her relationships, and on and on (p. 209).

If experiences such as the former described above are to be defined as **sexual assaults, abuse, or victimizations**, as they are in the new research (including Wyatt's 1985 study), then for Wyatt to describe them as "loving," "warm," "pleasurable," and "lacking coercion" would seem to present a contradiction in terms.

But if it is true that some adult/nonadult sexual interactions are perceived and self-reported as "positive" by the younger interactant in the manner described by Wyatt, then there is no empirical basis, at least, for automatically and categorically defining them as abuse and victimization; and if there is no empirical basis for so defining them, then there is no rationale for doing so that does not originate in the realms of law, sexual politics, or sexual morality. While law, politics, and morality present important issues for social debate and activism, they should not pervade empirical research unless it is made clear that such research is to be judged as polemic.

While extensive and convincing evidence has been gathered indicating that unwanted sexual experiences (like many other kinds of unwanted childhood experiences) can result in serious short- and long-term consequences for the interactants (Kilpatrick, 1986, 1987; Money, this volume) and while this evidence presents solid grounds for enacting effective legislation to protect children and adolescents from such experiences, the evidence presents no rationale whatever for studying adult/nonadult sex in a scientific context while utilizing definitions drawn from such legal, political, or moral constructs. O'Grady (1988) refers to such practices as "slippage" (p. 360) and notes their "serious" threat to construct validity.

To use an analogy, simply because alcohol use by children and adolescents is illegal and is considered by many to be immoral, and because some young people may not be as competent as some adults to make decisions regarding their use of alcohol, professionals in the field of substance abuse would not operationally define "juvenile alcohol abuse" as "any use of alcohol by juveniles." Powerful empirical evidence would first have to be presented to demonstrate a structural difference between the nature of alcohol abuse when the drinker is below the legal drinking age and when he or she is above that age. Writers such as Finkelhor and Russell offer no reasonable explanation why such an empirically based

structural difference should not also be demonstrated before one labels as "sexual abuse" a voluntary interaction that would—were the younger interactant age 18 rather than 13, for example—be labeled "sexual experience" or "relationship."

This paradox is resolved in two ways in the new research. The first is to admit that political or moral criteria are being used to establish operational definitions, but to defend this practice as resulting in reduced, rather than increased bias—a technique that can be termed "affirmative action bias." Victimologists taking this approach claim that to study the issue from an empirical rather than an "ethical" viewpoint is itself a form of bias, and a morally unacceptable one (Finkelhor, 1984).

Since these writers use moral and political criteria to define abuse—criteria usually drawn from considerations of the problems of informed consent and unequal distribution of social power—they dismiss self-reports of inconsequential adult/nonadult sexual interactions as representing an individual's politically and morally incorrect and invalid interpretation of her or his own experience (e.g., Finkelhor 1984, pp. 16-17).

A second, less philosophical and more psychological tack taken by victimologists to resolve the paradox presented by reports of nonabusive "sexual abuse" is to attribute such reports to distortions of memory resulting from a subject's alleged "denial" or "repression" of what the victimologist claims must have been, in fact, a negative experience with harmful effects (Russell, 1986, pp. 43-44, 53, 138; Blume, 1986; De Mott, 1980).

While repression or confabulation of this sort may well occur in some portion of cases, to assume that any given self-report of a positive experience is the result of distortions of memory, simply because one believes for ideological reasons that such an experience should not be thought possible, is a line of reasoning that hardly merits critique.

Using arguments such as the above to reduce all sexual interactions between adults and children and adolescents to "sexual abuse" also results in frequent contradictory assertions from victimologists. For example, Russell (1986) complains that the extent of harm to the child in adult/nonadult sexual interactions has been greatly underestimated because measurements have been taken only of a child's subsequent levels of impairment, ignoring the harm caused simply by having participated in an "unpleasant experience." "Her [the victim's] feelings must be counted as important," writes Russell. This is a compelling point. However, at the same time, she asserts that any intrafamilial sexual interaction involving children or adolescents should be considered abusive if one of the participants was five or more years older than the other "regardless of whether or not the respondent considered it a neutral or positive experience" (p. 55). Apparently a child's self-reported feelings about a sexual experience are only considered "important" if they are negative.

Another natural consequence of the use of legal, moral, or political criteria for the establishment of definitions for sexual abuse and incest is the increased broadening of such definitions that one can see occurring. For example, Russell's (1986) definition of **incestuous child sexual abuse** would include an incident of tongue kissing between a 13-year-old and her second cousin's 19-year-old husband.

Similarly, Wyatt's (1985) definition of **child sexual abuse** would include the making of suggestive remarks by one 17-year-old to another or the employment of a 17-year-old as a nude model or dancer. While not minimizing the possible unpleasantness of unwanted verbal propositions or the problems that may result for young females working as nude models or dancers, one must seriously question the inclusion of these phenomena within the same definitional category as, for example, the anal rape of a 3-year-old by a parent. One must particularly wonder whether the sexual harassment by peers of sexually mature individuals past the age of consent should be used to help produce the kind of alarming prevalence statistics for "child sexual abuse" reported by Wyatt.

This broadening of definitions in the victimological literature sometimes reaches a point of near absurdity, as when Blume (1986) defines incest as inclusive of sexual interaction between an individual and her dentist. Definitional criteria such as these degrade the experiences of individuals who have suffered actual sexual abuse or incest by diluting the terms **abuse** and **incest** to such an extent that they are rendered virtually meaningless.

## Failures of Integrity in Discourse

While the validity of the methodological practices outlined above may be debated from a scientific point of view, the rhetorical tactic, common to the new research, of misrepresenting the positions taken by nonvictimologists and making character-related accusations against such people is difficult to defend in this author's view.

Proponents of paradigms that are incompatible with the tenets of victimology—paradigms that soon may include the "biosocial" perspective—are condemned in the new research in two ways. First, by implication, as when Russell (1986, p. 3) juxtaposes harrowing accounts of traumatic sexual abuse of female children by their fathers with Wardell Pomeroy's out-of-context quotation acknowledging the "beautiful and mutually satisfying" nature of "many" father/daughter incestuous relationships that have "no harmful effects." The effect of this juxtaposition is to suggest that Pomeroy callously disregards the suffering of children who are genuine victims of sexual victimization or violent rape by a parent. However, Russell neglects to inform the reader that Pomeroy was referring specifically to **consensual relationships in adulthood**.

Although it is true that Pomeroy (1976) has acknowledged that data gathered during the Kinsey investigations suggest that in certain cases adult/child incest can also be "an enriching experience" (p. 10), he emphasizes the relative rarity of such an event and in fact explicitly condemns adult/child incest in a source from which Russell (1984, p. 247) extracts several other quotations but ignores the following: "The trouble with incest isn't incest at all, it's pedophilia. There are real problems with a thirty-five-year-old father having sex with his thirteen or fourteen-year-old daughter because of his one-up position" (Pomeroy in Nobile, 1977). Pomeroy's statement is incompatible with Russell's (1986) claim that he "overlooks the whole issue of children's powerlessness in relation to adults who want to have sex with them" (p. 8).

Researchers are also explicitly indicted, as when Russell (1986) without justification takes Karin Meiselman to task for "belittling—if not condoning—adult-child sexual contact in general" (p. 389). Russell similarly accuses all other professionals who do not accept the victimological analysis of "contributing to the reduction of internal inhibitions against acting out sexual desires directed toward children" (1984, pp. 246-248).

Herman (1981) characterizes commentators who have advocated relaxation of the human-created and culturally transmitted incest taboos as belonging to a group she refers to as "pornographers and others" (p. 4). She describes the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, for example, as being "closely allied to pornographers," and then, as the ultimate castigation, erroneously refers to it as the "all-male Institute for Sex Research."<sup>8</sup>

Reisman (who recently received a \$734,000 U.S. Justice Department grant to study "child-related imagery" in cartoons appearing in magazines such as *Playboy* and *Penthouse*) continues in this fashion when she refers to Alfred Kinsey's research (Kinsey et al., 1948, 1953) as "pedophile-biased," and accuses Kinsey of involvement in "the vicious genital torture of hundreds of children" (Transcript, 1983). She reports that her in-press manuscript describes Kinsey's work as "in the best case falsified data and in the worst case it was inhumane and malevolently harmful child sexuality experimentation" (Transcript, 1983). Reisman has thus far provided no evidence to document her claims.

Finally, de Young (1982) proposes the existence of an "organized" and "powerful" group of researchers who "support" adult/child sex, in effect blaming this group for the continued existence of such abuse (p. 162). However, none of the small group of investigators named by de Young, with one possible exception, has ever written anything that could reasonably be interpreted as promoting adult/child sex. Each has simply noted the empirical fact that some individuals who experience childhood sexual interaction with older children or adults do not consider themselves to have been abused or victimized, do not describe the interaction in terms that would normally warrant the use of words such as **abuse** or **victimization**,

and do not appear to have suffered any sort of functional impairment as a result of their experience.

Furthermore, none of these "powerful" researchers has ever obtained substantial funding or support (consider Reisman's \$734,000 or Russell's NIMH grant) for research aimed at the study of any positive aspect of childhood sexuality—certainly not for studies designed to "support" adult/child sex.

## Iatrogenic Correlates of the "New Research"

Virtually all researchers and serious commentators in this field, while they may debate the extent of harm caused by certain social and institutional responses to sexual abuse, have noted the occurrence of such harm. This statement applies to all of the victimologists under discussion. Parental overreaction or lack of support, insensitive police interrogation, grueling judicial proceedings, and social alienation have all been cited as in some cases contributing to, or possibly even exceeding, the damage caused to the child by the abuse itself (Finkelhor, 1984; Constantine, 1981b).

Schultz (1980a) discusses iatrogenic response by mental health and social work professionals in the following manner:

Much of the [sexual abuse] literature is couched in acceptable access, where well-meaning emotional noise masks statistical reality. We seem to arbitrarily create "norms" for minors and then justify departures from them as traumatic. Such fabrication is professionally unethical and possibly damaging to minors involved in sexual behaviors with others. What inappropriate trauma ideology does is pit the professional (true believer) against the child or the parents who may feel differently. The risk is that a type of self fulfilling prophecy emerges that manages to produce the problem it claims to abhor, but which it, in fact, must have in order to sustain the ideology it is based upon (p. 40).

Professionals who adopt the ideology reflected in the new research may therefore tend to remain unreceptive to the self-reported subjective realities of individuals who do not define their experience in negative terms. Nelson (1984) cites the following complaint from one respondent in her study of the effects of incest experiences: "My therapist is so opinionated against child molesters that she wouldn't be able to understand if I told her I enjoyed it. I'm sure she'd kill me" (p. 220).

Horror stories related to false allegations of abuse or hysterical response to the threat of abuse also abound (Hentoff, 1984; Nathan, 1987). While many such stories involving wrongful imprisonment, children hastily and traumatically removed from homes and placed in foster care, suicides, financial ruin, and so on may be said to occur sporadically to a limited number of individuals, some of these negative social consequences may have become structural, affecting a larger number of individuals.

This author was somewhat disturbed, for example, to discover that in the wake of the McMartin preschool sexual abuse allegations, the San Francisco Child Development Agency had passed down "suggestions" to (particularly male) child care workers that they (1) not remain alone in a room with a child for any reason and (2) refrain from hugging, kissing, or holding on the lap (as while reading a story) any child over the age of 3.

Moreover, in spite of victimologists' frequent accusations of societal denial to children and adolescents of the right to say "no" to sexual touching, a look at the current (1986) SIECUS (Sex Education Council of the United States) selected bibliography counted more than 80 books and 25 films and videos geared to children and adolescents, with *It's Okay to Say "No!"* being a keynote title. Books such as *Private Zone; Red Flag, Green Flag People; My Body is Private; and I Like You to Make Jokes With Me But I Don't Want You to Touch Me* teach children, according to their blurbs, about "good" touches and "bad" (i.e., sexual) touches, "uncomfortable" (i.e., genital) touches, and "private zones" that no one should touch other than "parent or physician" (and one wonders whether, in later editions, the word "parent" will be removed). In a society where the operative word in answer to most sexual requests or desires is "no," the publishing of books such as *It's Okay to Say "No!"* does not seem to constitute a major act of social rebellion.

Other possible consequences of this sort of response to sexual abuse are alluded to by sociologist and incest researcher James R. Ramey (1979):

There is a huge group of individuals who are being damaged by our drum beating—those who have not been involved in incest. American families have been so imbued with prohibitions against incest that they bend over backward to avoid any possible incestuous involvement or possible accusation that they might become involved. This results . . . [among other things] in complete and total abandonment of parent-child physical contact at puberty, just when the child needs its reassurance most (p. 7).

While the paper from which this quote was drawn has been vilified by victimologists over the years, Ramey's point intuitively seems valid at least for a substantial number of families.

Finally, Bullough (this volume) and Schultz (1980b) have commented on the alarming disappearance at the judicial level of concern with the physical abuse of children—a development reflected in popular media where, despite the flurry that accompanies sensationalistic coverage of particularly gruesome cases of death due to physical abuse, the term **child abuse** has passed into usage to signify **child sexual abuse**.

According to Schultz, prosecutors find convictions for sexual abuse much easier to obtain<sup>9</sup> because defendants are generally male, whereas defendants in physical abuse cases are often mothers. Although judges and juries are perfectly willing to award men custody of children in divorce cases, neither wishes to challenge the sanctity of prevailing images of

motherhood, and doing so within the context of physical abuse proceedings is often a thankless and unproductive task for all concerned.

Knowing the difficulty of obtaining convictions in these cases and the consequent risk of lawsuits brought by acquitted defendants, medical practitioners have become reticent about reporting physical abuse and have instead focused on sexual abuse—where the professional rewards for disclosure are less ambiguous. Acquitted defendants in sexual abuse cases generally do not bring lawsuits but, rather, attempt to disappear under the nearest rug.

In a related study (Okami, 1988), college students rated sexual abuse of children the most serious crime from a list of 14, significantly more serious than either murder or the physical or emotional abuse of a child. Physical abuse was, in fact, ranked alarmingly low in seriousness.<sup>10</sup>

The new research reflects and encourages such attitudes. Sexual abuse is portrayed by many of the writers with whom this chapter has been concerned as the most devastating experience a child can endure. For example, Russell (1986, p. 231) refers to father/daughter incest as "the supreme betrayal" of the child. On the other hand, at least as destructive and probably more prevalent (Avery-Clarke, 1981), physical abuse of children is, with certain exceptions (e.g., Finkelhor, 1988), virtually ignored.

In accord with the current author's view, Katz (1984) specifically attributes the decline in concern over physical and emotional abuse of children to the "hysteria" surrounding the issue of sexual abuse. However, one must also take into account a general cultural tendency toward greater acceptance of violent feelings and behaviors over sexual ones. For example, children and adolescents are permitted to view graphic media depictions of sadistic murder, torture, and mutilation, but they are not permitted to view realistic depictions even of affectionate sexual interactions.

In summary, policy decisions must evaluate both the damage caused by child sexual abuse and the damage caused by iatrogenic response to actual abuse or to the threat of abuse. While the new research has had the positive effect of making vivid the general political powerlessness of children and the alarming pervasiveness of sexual abuse, it may have had the negative effect of fueling what many observers have characterized as a generally hysterical and counter-productive social climate.

## Conclusions

A careful review of the new victimology-based literature in the field of child sexual abuse provides ample evidence to suggest that a portion of these writings, and a portion of the outrage frequently expressed within them, may be generated by factors not specifically related to concern over the actual effects on children and adolescents of sexual interactions with adults. Indeed, the marked similarities between the writings discussed in this

chapter and works of political propaganda suggest that children are being used by some of these writers largely as symbols for rhetorical battles in the theater of sexual politics.

Cultural feminists and victimologists are able to advance with impunity, "under the cover" of considerations of child sexual abuse, fundamentally reactionary and sex-negative propositions—propositions that might meet with sharp critical response were they to be applied to adult sexuality. This impunity is no doubt the result both of Western societies' traditional unwillingness to examine or even acknowledge childhood sexuality (Masters, 1986; Howells and Cook, 1981; Lee, 1980) and the stigmatization within the professional community associated with appearing to be "soft" on the issue of sexual abuse. Finkelhor's assertion that the point of view expressed in the new research is "compatible with the most progressive attitude toward sexuality currently being voiced" must therefore be questioned.

It has not been the intention of this chapter to belittle the suffering caused by the actual sexual abuse of children and adolescents, which, like physical and emotional abuse, is a major social problem. Nor is this chapter implying that adult/nonadult sexual interactions are generally benign. On the contrary, there is strong evidence presented in other chapters in this volume and elsewhere to suggest that a substantial number, possibly a substantial majority, of such interactions in Western societies are at best unpleasant and unhappy and at worst severely traumatic—resulting in short- and long-term impairment on many levels. However, it must also be pointed out that data exist that suggest that a significant number of these interactions appear to be neither unpleasant nor traumatic.

Much of the new research, then, however well meaning, shares the basic flaw of most polemical work: Moral and empirical truths are ignored, suppressed, or distorted in the interests of furthering the cause. In this case, there seems to be a danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater—the bathwater here being child and adolescent sexual abuse, and the baby, his or her own affectional life, normal sexual curiosity, and erotic impulse. Both the suppression of childhood and adolescent sexuality and the transmission to children and adolescents of fearful and negative messages about sex that is indirectly encouraged in the new research may well constitute a form of sexual abuse affecting a great many more children than are victimized in the traditional sense.

## Summary

This chapter examined the manner in which sociopolitical biases pervade and compromise much of the current victimology-informed research and writing on the subject of adult human sexual interactions with children and adolescents. It was the author's contention that the strong social-activist

posture taken by many of the professionals responsible for this new research, combined with their implicit or explicit endorsement of specific sexual-political ideologies, has engendered a body of literature that could more properly be described as social criticism than as social science. Seriously flawed research methods and discursive practices similar to those found in works of political propaganda were analyzed. It was noted that the victimologists' use of legal, moral, and political criteria to supplant the use of empirical or phenomenological criteria in the design and conduct of research on sexual abuse has served to obscure an accurate understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Iatrogenic correlates of the "new research" were also discussed, and a contrasting model (Kilpatrick, 1986) of productive and comparatively bias-free research design and conduct was reviewed.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>A version of this chapter was presented at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sex (SSSS), which was held November 11-13, 1988, in San Francisco, California.

<sup>2</sup>This chapter does not explore the other end of the sociopolitical spectrum, which advocates lowering or abolishing the age-of-consent laws. The literature is confined to a few out-of-the-mainstream publications (Brongersma, 1986; O'Carroll, 1982; Tsang, 1981), and the point of view is represented by only one organization in the United States, the North American Man-Boy Love Association (NAMBLA), whose membership numbers less than 500, and by several smaller organizations in Europe, among them *Stichting Matijn* in the Netherlands. There is no public funding for research on or advocacy of this position, and simply being on a mailing list to receive information from NAMBLA is politically dangerous in this country. If simply judged by number of publications per year, the "new research" group outpublishes the "age of consent lowering" group by a ratio of approximately 1,000:1. The political tactic of the "age of consent lowering" group, which is composed mainly of pedophiles, ephebophiles, and self-defined sex-radicals, is to argue for the "sexual rights of children and adolescents."

<sup>3</sup>The designation "cultural feminist" is used here to distinguish this group from other feminists, such as those who have been associated with radical politics or sexual libertarianism. These classifications are analogous to those used to describe the major split in black activism during the late 1960's between "cultural nationalists" and radical socialists.

<sup>4</sup>An example of the kinds of interrogation techniques favored by this organization may be found in this portion of an interview conducted by Kee McFarlaine of C.I.I. (quoted in Coleman, 1986, p. 3). Here, McFarlaine is attempting to get a little boy to describe the so-called "naked movie star game" that defendants in the McMartin daycare center sexual abuse trial were alleged to have played with children at the center. The reader should bear in mind that McFarlaine is interviewing a possible victim, not a perpetrator:

KM: I thought that was a naked game.

Boy: Not exactly.

KM: Did somebody take their clothes off?

Boy: When I was there no one was naked.

KM: Some of the kids were told they might be killed. It was a trick. Alright, Mr. Alligator [meaning the boy], are you going to be stupid, or are you smart and can tell? Some think you're smart.

Boy: I'll be smart.

KM: Mr. Monkey [the puppet the boy had used earlier] is chicken. He can't remember the games, but you know the naked movie star game, or is your memory bad?

Boy: I haven't seen the naked movie star game.

KM: You must be dumb.

Boy: I don't remember.

<sup>5</sup>The one study reviewed by Peters, Wyatt, and Finkelhor that found a higher prevalence rate than Lewis still reported a rate of 25-28 percentage points lower than Russell's and Wyatt's. This study also included unwanted verbal propositions and exhibitionism in its definition of "sexual abuse."

<sup>6</sup>A partial listing of sources supporting a continuum model of adult/nonadult sexual interactions—a continuum whose points range from the involuntary and traumatogenic to the voluntary and benign—would include the following: Bagley, 1969; Bauermann, 1982; Bender and Blau, 1937; Bender and Grugett, 1952; Bernard, 1981; Burton, 1965; Brunhold, 1964; Constantine, 1981a,b,c; Elwin, 1968; Farrell, 1977; Ford and Beach, 1951; Frayser, 1985; Friday, 1975; Gebhard et al., 1965; Geiser, 1987; Geisler, 1959; Henderson, 1976, 1983; Ingram, 1981; Kaplan, 1982; Kinsey et al., 1953; Landis, 1956; Lukianowicz, 1972; Martinson, 1976; Meiselman, 1975; Menninger, 1942; McCaghy, 1985; Mohr et al., 1964; Nelson, 1981; Okami, 1987; Powell and Chalkley, 1981; Revitch and Weiss, 1962; Rascovsky and Rascovsky, 1950; Rogers and Weiss, 1953; Schultz, 1980a; Symonds, Mendoza, and Harrell, 1981; Virkunen, 1981; Weiss et al., 1955; and Yates, 1978.

<sup>7</sup>Russell presents no evidence to support her contention that this notion is "widely held." Rather, the opposite is clearly the case, as reflected both in the scientific literature and in the popular media and folklore.

<sup>8</sup>June Reinisch is the Director of the Kinsey Institute. Cornelia Christenson was a member of Kinsey's original research team. Sue Hammersmith co-authored the Kinsey report on homosexuality. The percentage of female researchers associated with the Kinsey Institute has steadily increased since its inception to its currently largely female-constituted staff (Kinsey Institute, personal communication).

<sup>9</sup>In 1985, of every 100 persons arrested for sexual offenses against minors, 90% were prosecuted, 65% of those prosecuted were convicted, and 13% of those convicted spent more than one year incarcerated (testimony of Representative Dan Coates, Department of Justice investigation, 1985).

<sup>10</sup>This cultural posture—which characterizes adult/child sex as a crime without equal in hatefulness—is succinctly expressed by Norman Podhoretz (1987), who writes of such sexual behavior: "Nothing in the realm of human abominations seems so self-evidently evil."

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