



Quotes from:

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Sociopolitical Biases in the Contemporary Scientific Literature on Sexual Behavior with Children and Adolescents

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Introduction

[p.91] 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. [...]

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

(Russel, 1986, pp 173, 210, 392; 1984, pp 262-263; see also Bass, 1983, pp. 25, 58; Hermann, 1981, pp.3, 62-63).

[...]

Somewhat predictably, researchers [...] who may wish to establish a relative degree of objectivity [...] 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.

[...]

Origins of the Political Ideology of the "New Research"

[...]

[p.93] 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. [...]

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

[p.94] The term "cultural feminism," 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 a conflict.

The Social Purity/Feminist Alliance and Its Inheritance

[...]

[p.95] A review of 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 term 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 harrassment, 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 basement 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) analyses 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 women, and be a source of pleasure to her, is to Morgan simply unconceivable" (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 interaction 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. 392-392; 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).

[...]

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 (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

[...]

Moreover, childhood sexual experiences even among peers come under sharp scrutiny by victimologists for signs of potential abuse - a development consistent with the 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":

- ◆ They had acted in a sexual way with another child; and
- ◆ 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
- ◆ there was an age differential of at least two years; and
- ◆ 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 be 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.

[...] 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).

