

Science or Propaganda? An examination of Rind, Tromovitch & Bauserman (1998)

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Summary

An article, "A Meta-analytic Examination of Assumed Properties of Child Sexual Abuse Using College Samples," published in the July 1998 edition of the *Psychological Bulletin* resulted in an unprecedented amount of media attention and became the first scientific article to be formally denounced by the United States House of Representatives. The study's authors analyzed the findings of 59 earlier studies on child

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sexual abuse (CSA) and concluded that mental health researchers have greatly overstated CSA's harmful potential. They recommended that a willing encounter with positive reactions no longer be considered to be sexual abuse; instead, it would simply be labeled *adult-child sex*. The study's conclusions and recommendations spawned a debate in both the popular and scholarly press. A number of commentators suggested that the study is pedophile propaganda masquerading as science. Others claimed that the authors are victims of a moralistic witch-hunt and that scientific freedom is being threatened. After a careful examination of the evidence, it is concluded that Rind et al. can best be described as an advocacy article that inappropriately uses science in an attempt to legitimize its findings.

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The Controversy

A study entitled "A Meta-analytic Examination of Assumed Properties of Child Sexual Abuse Using College Samples," published in the July 1998 edition of the prestigious *Psychological Bulletin*, resulted in enormous social controversy and debate. The study's authors, Rind, Tromovitch and Bauserman, analyzed 59 studies of college students and concluded that mental health researchers have greatly overstated the harmful potential of being abused.

Despite finding that students who reported a history of child sexual abuse (CSA) were less well adjusted in 17 of the 18 types of psychological adjustment examined, Rind et al. (1998) suggested that the relationship may be spurious due to the confounding of CSA with family dysfunction.

Rind et al. also reported that "men reacted much less negatively than women" (p. 22) and that "consent"

was an important moderator of adjustment in males. They later summarized their findings, stating: “We showed that for boys in nonclinical populations, willing relations are generally experienced positively or neutrally and are not associated with maladjustment” (Rind, Bauserman, & Tromovitch, 1999, p. 2185). Rind et al. (1998) went on to suggest that when labeling events that have “heretofore been defined sociolegally as CSA,” scientists should focus on the young person’s perception of the experience: A willing encounter

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with positive reactions would no longer be considered to be sexual abuse; instead, it would “be labeled simply *adult-child sex*” (p. 46).

Not surprisingly, the study was immediately embraced by pedophile organizations. The North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA), a political and educational organization that advocates for the decriminalization of “consensual” pedophilic relationships, stated that the study confirmed that, “the current war on boy-lovers has no basis in science.” NAMBLA also publicly thanked the American Psychological Association (APA) for “having the courage” to publish the paper (Saunders, 1999).

The study did not come to the general public’s attention until almost 9 months after its publication. Alerted by a listener, popular radio talk-show host Dr. Laura Schlessinger discussed the study’s findings on her show. On March 22, 1999, she told her 18 million listeners that she feared that the study “could be used to normalize pedophilia, to change the legal system” (Duin, 1999). Soon after Schlessinger aired her concerns, a number of other public commentators severely criticized the study and the APA’s role in printing it. For example, in an article titled “Lolita Nation,” newspaper columnist Debra Saunders (1999) stated that “the APA showed appalling judgment in printing this pedophilia propaganda.”

Political leaders were also disturbed by the study’s conclusions. Dr. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) stated:

As a practicing physician trained in science, I am shocked that the Psychological Association would publish a study that is clearly pedophilia propaganda masquerading as science.... The APA has brought itself and the entire psychological profession in disrepute by failing to filter junk science from a scientific journal. (Myers, 1999, p. 11)

In Alaska, Rep. Fred Dyson introduced a resolution (HJR 36) ^[*1] calling on the APA to repudiate the study. The resolution was unanimously passed on April 30, 1999 and became a model for similar efforts in California, Delaware, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and the U.S. Congress.

Negative publicity resulted in a number of press releases and statements by APA leaders. On March 23, 1999, APA released a statement that reaffirmed its strong historical stand against CSA and stated that, “publication of the findings of a research project within an APA journal is in no way an endorsement of a finding by the Association” (American Psychological Association, 1999). However, on May 14, 1999, APA Chief Executive Officer Raymond D. Fowler, Ph.D., defended the study on national television (MSNBC), stating: “It isn’t a bad study, it’s been peer-reviewed . . . it’s a good study.” On May 25, 1999, Fowler defended the study again in a letter emailed to APA division offi-

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cers. Fowler said that the study passed a rigorous peer review process “and has, since the controversy, been reviewed again by an expert in statistical analysis who affirmed that it meets current standards and that the methodology, which is widely used by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to develop guidelines, is sound.” Suggesting that politicians and members of the media were misrepresenting the study’s findings to further their political agenda, Fowler assured the officers that the APA was, “working hard to try to correct the record with those politicians and members of the media who care about the facts.”

The study was also criticized by several scientific organizations. On May 24, 1999, the Leadership Council on Mental Health, Justice and the Media, whose mission includes ensuring that the “the public receives accurate information about mental health issues,” issued a press release noting that Rind et al. improperly generalized from studies of predominantly noncontact experiences during adolescence in formulating some of their conclusions about the relative harmlessness of sex between adults and children. A few days later (May 27, 1999), Steven M. Mirin, MD, Medical Director of the American Psychiatric Association, expressed the Psychiatric Association’s disagreement “with the implications of the authors’ conclusions.” Mirin stated, “From a psychological perspective, sex between adult and child is always abusive and exploitative because the adult always holds the power in the relationship.... Academic hair-splitting over whether the act should be considered adult-child sex or child sexual abuse . . . is not in the public interest and obfuscates the moral issues involved” (“Psychiatric Association Criticizes,” 1999).

Apparently, the continued negative public reaction led Fowler to reconsider his support of the study. On June 9, 1999, Fowler hand-carried a letter to Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex) in which he admitted that the APA failed to “evaluate the article based on its potential for misinforming the public policy process.” Fowler also acknowledged that “some of the language in the article when examined from a public policy perspective is inflammatory” and includes opinions “inconsistent” with APA’s policy on child protection issues. Fowler pledged that in the future his organization would be more cognizant of the potential for publications to misinform the public on important issues. Fowler also announced that for the first time in its 107-year history of publishing it has sought independent expert evaluation of the scientific quality of an article. The next day, Fowler (June 10, 1999) announced that the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) had been asked to do the review, “because its credibility is unquestioned.”

In July 1999, the meta-analysis by Rind et al. became the first scientific study to be formally denounced by the United States Congress. The House of Representatives and Senate both unanimously passed a resolution which re-

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jected “the conclusions of a recent article published in the *Psychological Bulletin*, a journal of the American Psychological Association, that suggests that sexual relationships between adults and children might be positive for children.” The resolution explained that “elected officials have a duty to inform and counter actions they consider damaging to children, parents, families, and society” (House Con. Res. 107).^[*2] In response to criticism of their study, Rind, Tromovitch and Bauserman released a number of statements vigorously defending their results and conclusions. They claimed that their research “brought methodological rigor into an area that needed this” (Rind, Tromovitch, & Bauserman., November 6, 1999), and suggested that they had “an ethical duty” to report their findings (Rind, Tromovitch, & Bauserman, May 12, 1999). Claiming to be victims of political persecution, the authors characterized their critics as “religious and moralistic zealots” (e.g., Rind et al., November 6, 1999). A flyer for a continuing education workshop about the controversy offered by Rind and Carol Tavris stated:

The enemies of Galileo and Darwin, the enemies of the natural science model are alive and well.... Not only are the “offending” data dismissed or trivialized, but the messengers can themselves be pressured into silence, recantation, or more simply be vilified by organs of academe and government alike. (“When Politics Clashes with Science,” 2000)^[*3]

Concerned that the denouncement by Congress posed a threat to scientific freedom, a number of psychologists rushed to the study’s defense (e.g., Berry, 2000; Tavris, 1999; Woll, 1999). For example, Stanley Woll (July 26, 1999), Professor of Psychology at California State-Fullerton, suggested that Rind et

al. were victims of a “McCarthyesque witch hunt” which represented “a dangerous assault on the process of scientific research in general.”

The AAAS’s Committee of Scientific Freedom and Responsibility ultimately declined APA’s request for a review of the study saying they saw “no reason to second-guess the process of peer review used by the APA journal in its decision to publish the article in question” (McCarty, 1999, p. 2). AAAS also reported that they “saw no clear evidence of improper application of methodology or other questionable practices on the part of the article’s authors” (p. 3). However, they added that, “if there were such problems, uncovering them would be the task of those reviewing it prior to publication or to readers of the published article” (p. 3). AAAS further noted, “The fact that the Committee has chosen not to proceed with an evaluation of the article in the *Psychological Bulletin* should not be seen either as endorsement or criticism of it” (p. 3). Despite the disclaimer, Rind and Tromovitch viewed the AAAS’s

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decision as a vindication of their work. Tromovitch stated: “Their comments indicate to me that they consider our work to be up to par” (Burling, 1999).

The APA indicated that it had no plans to ask any other organization to review the study. In early December 1999, Ray Fowler went on a protracted sick leave citing stress. The debate over the study’s merit remained unresolved. The purpose of the present article is to examine whether Rind et al. (1998) is best characterized as unpopular science or pedophile propaganda.

THE SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

When anybody makes a claim that is surprising or seems to be unlikely, science demands evidence. Thus, the first step in evaluating the conflicting views of the merit of Rind et al.’s (1998) work is to evaluate whether their findings are supported by appropriate data. Some have suggested that the results of the study by Rind et al. must be correct because the study passed peer review; ^[*4] however, it is important to note that passing peer review is no guarantee that a study’s results are correct. Without access to the original data, peer reviewers are often unable to determine the validity of a study’s results (Whitely, Rennie & Hafner, 1994). There are really only two ways to determine whether the results of a study are valid: (1) replication of the study’s findings using equal or higher quality methods, and (2) critical examination of the investigators’ data and methodology.

Comparisons with Studies Using Equal or Superior Methodology

A review of the empirical literature examining the long-term consequences of CSA call into question the validity of many of Rind et al.’s (1998) key findings and conclusions. For example, Rind et al.’s conclusion about the relative harmlessness of CSA conflicts with the findings of three previous meta-analyses of the relationship between CSA and maladjustment (e.g., Jumper, 1995; Neuman, Houskamp, Pollock, & Briere, 1996; Oddone & Genuis, 1996). In addition, little support can be found for Rind et al. conclusion that the significant relationship they found between CSA and maladjustment was likely spurious due to confounding between CSA and family environment. **Table 1** summarizes the results of large scale representative studies, prospective studies, and co-twin studies using nonclinical samples. These studies, which are considered the gold standard in terms of validity and reliability, almost uniformly reported significant associations between reporting CSA and a wide variety of mental, physical, behavioral problems which persist even after controlling for family dysfunction.

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Table 1.

Results of Well-Designed Nonclinical Studies Which Controlled for Family Dysfunction

Study	Method	Results
Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor (1995)	Random, nationally representative probability sample of 2,000 youths aged 10-16 years	After controlling for family dysfunction, significant associations were found between CSA and increased levels of PTSD symptoms and school difficulties. Abused boys reported significantly more sadness than other children.
Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor (1996)	Longitudinal: Reinterviewed 1995 sample 15 months later	Sexual abuse during the 15-month interim was associated with PTSD-related symptoms and depression not present prior to the assault.
Dinwiddie et al. (2000)	Co-twin: Examined twins discordant for CSA drawn from 5,995 Australian male and female twins	The twin reporting CSA consistently displayed more psychopathology than their nonabused co-twin. However, only a single outcome reached statistical significance - the association between CSA and suicidal ideation in males.
Fergusson et al. (1996)	Prospective study of a birth cohort of 1,019 male and female youths	After controlling for family dysfunction, significant associations were found between CSA and higher rates of major depression, anxiety disorder, conduct disorder, substance use disorder, and suicidal behavior. Those whose abuse involved intercourse had the highest risk of disorder.
Fleming et al. (1999)	Subsample of 710 women selected from a larger study involving women randomly selected from electoral rolls in Australia	After controlling for family dysfunction, significant associations were found between CSA and higher reports of domestic violence, rape, sexual problems, mental health problems, low self-esteem, and problems with intimate relationships. CSA involving intercourse was associated with the highest risk of disorder.
Johnson et al. (1999)	Prospective study of a representative community sample of 639 youths	After controlling for family dysfunction, significant associations were found between CSA and increased rates of personality disorders during early adulthood.
Kendler et al. (2000)	Co-twin: Examined twins discordant for CSA drawn from a sample of 1,411 adult female twins	The twin reporting CSA was consistently at higher risk for lifetime psychiatric and substance use disorders compared to their nonabused co-twin with odds ratios generally increasing with the severity of the abuse.
Mullen et al. (1993)	Stratified, random community sample of 1,376 adult women in New Zealand	After controlling for family dysfunction, significant associations were found between CSA and higher levels of psychopathology, along with higher rates of substance abuse and suicidal behavior. A dose-response relationship was found with those suffering the most severe forms of

abuse having the greatest level of psychopathology.

Stein et al. (1988)	Random community sample of 3,132 male and female adults.	After controlling for family dysfunction, significant associations were found between CSA and meeting diagnostic criteria for at least one lifetime psychiatric disorder, especially substance abuse disorders, major depression, phobia, panic disorder, and antisocial personality.
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Rind et al.'s (1998) finding that men react less negatively to CSA than women is another result that has not been supported by large scale studies of nonclinical populations. In this instance, Rind et al.'s conclusions are limited by the fact that studies of college students have almost exclusively examined internalizing behaviors such as depression, anxiety, or eating disorders.

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Studies which include measures of externalizing behaviors have demonstrated that the aftermath for abused boys may be worse or more complex for boys than for abused girls. For instance, Chandy, Blum and Resnick (1996) studied over 3,000 high school students. They found that sexually abused male adolescents were at higher risk for poor school performance, delinquent activities, and sexual risk taking. Sexually abused female adolescents, on the other hand, showed higher risk for suicidal ideation and behavior as well as disordered eating.

Similar findings were reported by Garnefski and Arends (1998) who studied a large representative community sample of adolescents. They reported that the experience of sexual abuse carried far more negative consequences for boys than for girls regarding the use of alcohol, aggressive/criminal behavior, use of drugs, and the amount of truancy, as well as regarding suicidal thoughts and behavior.

Critical Reviews of Rind et al. (1998)

Critical reviews of Rind et al. (1998) have raised serious concerns with the study's design, statistical analyses, and conclusions. Some of the major criticisms are summarized below (also see Whittenburg et al. in this issue).

Sample bias.

A number of critics have noted that by restricting their analysis to convenience samples of college students, Rind et al. introduced a systematic bias in favor of their conclusion. Spiegel (2000) noted, "By design, Rind et al. ignored those so mired in drug abuse, criminal activity, prostitution, or financial and educational hardship, that they could not get it to college" (p. 64).

Dallam et al. (in press) raised similar concerns and cited research showing a strong relationship between CSA and academic difficulties or dropping out of high school. Dallam et al. also demonstrated that Rind et al.'s contention that "the college data were completely consistent with data from national samples" (p. 22) was erroneous and was based on the misleading presentation of data from selected studies.

Duncan (2000) tested Rind et al.'s (1998) contention that studies of CSA in college populations should be considered generalizable to the population as a whole. She compared the semester-by-semester enrollment of college students with and without histories of abuse and found that students with a history of CSA were more likely than their nonabused peers to display symptoms of post-traumatic stress and to prematurely

drop out of college, especially after only attending one semester. Duncan concluded that it was likely that investigators using college samples see “only the healthiest of survivors” (p. 987).

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Measurement problems.

Several critical reviews faulted Rind et al. for not standardizing their treatment of either their independent or dependent variables. For instance, Dallam et al. (in press) noted that Rind et al. uncritically combining data from studies of CSA with data from studies looking at other phenomena including consensual peer experiences, sexual experiences that occurred during adulthood, and homosexual approaches during adolescence.

Holmes and Slap (1999) noted that Rind et al. uncritically combined psychological outcomes measured by different instruments with varying validity, relevance, and different interval scaling and cut points. After reviewing the Rind et al.’s study, Holmes and Slap concluded, “meta-analysis is not appropriate when methodological rigor, let alone the question asked, is so varied” (p. 2186).

Statistical analyses.

Dallam et al. (in press) demonstrated numerous problems with Rind et al.’s statistical methods. For example, they noted that Rind et al. eliminated from analysis the studies of CSA which showed the highest degree of harm, while including studies that did not even purport to examine CSA. Dallam et al. also documented numerous instances in which Rind et al. misreported or miscoded the original data from the studies they analyzed. Moreover, these errors were consistently in the direction of CSA being portrayed as less harmful than the findings of the original study suggested.

More importantly, Dallam et al. demonstrated that many of the findings that Rind et al. reported as being significant were actually statistical artifacts caused by their failure to correct for base rate differences in the rates of CSA in male and female samples. In this case, lower base rates of CSA in male samples caused effects sizes estimates for males to be attenuated and created the illusion that males were less harmed by CSA. After correcting for base-rate attenuation, Dallam et al. demonstrated that effect sizes for male and female samples were nearly identical. [\[*5\]](#) In other words, contrary to Rind et al.’s claims, males were not less affected by their abuse.

Dallam et al. also found serious problems with Rind et al.’s moderator analysis of “consent” by gender. Based on their analysis, Rind, Bauserman and Tromovitch (1999) reported that with abused boys “willing relations . . . are not associated with maladjustment” (p. 2185). Dallam et al. reviewed the analysis and found that Rind et al. claimed to have measured a variable (i.e., willingness) that was not examined in the original studies. To get around this fact, Rind et al. *assumed* that detectable amounts of “willing” sexual experiences were included in any study that did not explicitly state that the student should report *only* unwanted experiences. Dallam et al. examined the original studies and replicated the moderator analysis. They found no evidence to support Rind et al.’s assumption that the studies in the “consent” group contained significant amounts of willing CSA. Moreover, after correcting for miscalculated effect

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sizes and base rate attenuation, Dallam et al. found no significant effects for male gender and “level of consent.”

EVIDENCE FOR ADVOCACY

Rind, Tromovitch and Bauserman’s attitudes toward sexual relationships between adults and children are

important to evaluate for several reasons. First, the authors have claimed to be objective scientists who have suffered political persecution for publishing unpopular findings (e.g., Rind et al., November 6, 1999). Also, supporters of the study have claimed that critics are trying to suppress their article's important findings by unfairly tying the authors to pedophile groups (e.g., Tavris, 1999). To evaluate these charges, it is necessary to determine whether there is substance to the concerns raised by commentators who believe that their paper is better characterized as propaganda than science.

Second, as the Rind et al. themselves noted, research findings can be skewed by an investigator's personal biases. Rind et al. (1998) stated, "Reviewers who are convinced that CSA is a major cause of adult psychopathology may fall prey to confirmation bias by noting and describing study findings indicating harmful effects but ignoring or paying less attention to findings indicating nonnegative outcomes" (p. 24). The fact that Rind et al.'s results differed from those of most other researchers who have studied CSA raises the possibility that Rind et al. may have exhibited a confirmatory bias in the opposite direction. (i.e., they ignored or downplayed findings indicating harmful effects).

Finally, critical reviews of Rind et al.'s paper have invariably found evidence suggestive of bias. For example, after reviewing the study, Ondersma, Chaffin and Berliner (1999) stated,

"We believe that the primary flaw in the Rind et al. manuscript is not the science that it used, but its use of science. Through emphasis on certain key points and the omission of others, this article could be interpreted as using science to inappropriately question key moral and legal assumptions about CSA" (p. 3).

Erikson (2000) found evidence of bias in the fact that when the meta-analysis indicated evidence of harm, Rind et al. immediately looked for an alternative explanation. Conversely, as Dallam et al. reported, when the findings went in the direction of the authors' personal beliefs (e.g., as in their analysis of "consent"), Rind et al. ignored confounding variables and measurement problems. Moreover, as previously noted, Dallam et al. (in press) found most errors

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in Rind et al.'s paper to be in the direction of portraying CSA being less harmful than the original studies' findings suggested.

By itself, however, evidence for bias does not support the inferential leap that Rind et al.'s paper should be considered pedophile advocacy. To make this determination, one must first clarify what it is that people supportive of pedophilia are advocating.

THE GOALS OF PEDOPHILE ADVOCATES

Brief History of the Modern Pedophile Movement

The origins of the modern pedophilia movement can be traced to the social changes that occurred during the 1960s and '70s. Encouraged by the increased tolerance for minorities and alternative lifestyles, underground pedophile groups began to go public in an effort to garner greater social acceptance (Schuijjer, 1990). However, the simultaneous rise of feminism led to greater public awareness about the negative consequences of sexual abuse. Recognizing the futility of seeking decriminalization of pedophilia at a time when abuse victims were speaking out, pedophile groups changed their focus. By the early 1970s, pedophile groups began to portray themselves as champions of children's sexual emancipation (see Schuijjer, 1990, p. 219). They conceded that sexual abuse was wrong but questioned whether all sexual contact between adults and children should be regarded as abusive. Claiming that children often initiated and benefited from sexual relationships with adults, pedophile groups such as NAMBLA condemned the

use of force and only advocated for the decriminalization of “consensual” relationships.

Although no formal “agenda” has been published by organizations supporting pedophilia, the overall goals of pedophiles can be gleaned from a number of sources. Sociologist Mary DeYoung (1989), for example, reviewed the literature that pedophile organizations such as NAMBLA published for public dissemination. She found that pedophiles sought to make their unpopular philosophy more palatable to the public by using four main techniques to justify and normalize their philosophy and practices (see Table 2).

Strategies for normalizing pedophilia have also been discussed in articles and books written by pedophile advocates and apologists. These strategies are summarized in Table 3 and briefly reviewed below. Because psychology is one of the primary sites for determining “normalacy” in our culture, changing the views of mental health professionals has been recognized as an important predecessor of the lifting of legal restrictions on deviant sexual behaviors (e.g., Mirkin, 1999, p. 10).

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Table 2.
How Pedophile Groups Justify Having Sex with Children

Techniques of Justification	Description
1. Denial of Injury	The use of anecdotal accounts of children who appear to enjoy sex with adults to demonstrate the benefits and advantages of such relationships to children. Culpability for any harm that occurs to an abused child is displaced onto the reactions of others, such as the child’s parents, and the criminal justice and mental health systems.
2. Condemnation of the condemners	Those who condemn sex between adults and child are portrayed as engaging in even more victimizing or exploitative acts than those for which pedophiles are accused.
3. Appeal to higher loyalties	The assertion that they serve the interests of a higher principle: the liberation of children from the repressive bonds of society. Also, the attempt to align with other, less stigmatized, organizations such as the woman’s movement or the gay rights movement.
4. Denial of the victim	The conceptual transformation of children from victims of adult sexual behavior into willing partners.

Strategies of Normalization

1. The adoption of value-neutral terminology.

One of the fundamental steps that has been identified as necessary to change how society views pedophilia, is to change the language used to describe pedophilic relationships. Harris Mirkin (1999), Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, suggested that before pedophiles can advance socially, “neutral labels” must replace “words like ‘child molestation,’ and ‘child abuse’” (p. 12).

A similar point was made by Gilbert Herdt, an anthropologist who has studied sex between adults and children in other cultures. Joseph Geraci, chief editor of *Paidika*, asked Herdt, “Is there a social acceptance process that paedophiles can engage in and nurture to improve their situation? A normalization process?” Herdt responded, “One of the steps would be the deconstruction of the language and categories being used. Buried in them are very, very old prejudices, fears and moral approbations” (Geraci, 1994, p. 17). According to Herdt, pedophile advocates need to replace “dull and reductionistic” terms like *pedophilia* and *abuse* when discussing sex between “a person who has not achieved adulthood and one who has” (p. 15). Moreover, words like “child” or “childhood” should be “resisted at all costs”:

. . . as soon as the category “child” is invoked, everything is completely slanted and biased. It is suddenly no longer possible to have a rational

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discourse. Indeed, you could say that the category “child” is a rhetorical device for inflaming what is really an irrational set of attitudes. We would certainly have to use some other term. As I have said what we are discussing is desire, and the desire is for a person who is not yet an adult (p. 14).

The importance of terminology was also discussed in the introduction to a special double issue of the *Journal of Homosexuality* devoted to “Male Intergenerational Intimacy.”^[*6] The special issue was guest edited by three members of the editorial board of *Paidika: The Journal of Paedophilia*. In their introduction, they noted that “the choice of labels is never without political grounds or consequences” (Sandfort, Brongersma, & van Naerssen, 1990, p. 8). Because of its negative connotations, they avoided using the term *pedophilia*. In its place they used the terms *man/boy love* and *intergenerational intimacy*. They explained that they chose the term *man/boy love* as it stresses the “unproblematic affectional side of the phenomenon,” and the term *intergenerational intimacy* was used because “it gives man-boy contacts a less dangerous outlook” (pp. 7-8).

Table 3.
Strategies for Normalizing Pedophilia

1. The use of value-neutral terminology when describing “intergenerational” sexual relationships. Also, avoiding terms that have negative connotations (including terms such as “pedophile” or “pedophilia”), and avoiding terms which call attention to the fact that the sexual “partner” is a child.
2. Doing away with the term <i>child sexual abuse</i> or restricting its use to behavior that is demonstrably harmful.
3. Promoting the idea that children can consent to sex with adults.
4. Questioning the assumption that sex with adults is harmful to children. a. Blaming harm on those who intervene after CSA is discovered or disclosed. b. Publishing work showing positive or neutral effects. c. Proponents of man-boy love: Promoting the idea that studies showing harmful results are not applicable to boys; suggesting that boys are able to handle sex with adults at an earlier age than girls.
5. Promoting the “objective” study of sex between adults and children free of moral and ethical considerations.

2. Redefining the term “child sexual abuse”.

Another recurring theme among those seeking to normalize pedophilia is the need to redefine or restrict the usage of the term *child sexual abuse*. For example, Gerald Jones (1990), an Affiliated Scholar in the Institute for the Study of Women and Men in Society at the University of Southern California, suggested that “intergenerational intimacy” should not be considered synonymous with child sexual abuse: “The crucial difference has to do with mutuality and control” (p. 278). Jones suggested, “Intergenerational attraction on the part of some adults could constitute a lifestyle ‘orientation,’ rather than a pathological maladjustment” (p. 288). However, before society could come to recognize the potential benefits of

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intergenerational intimacy (p. 283 the use of the term *child sexual abuse* must first be limited to behavior meeting a strict definition of abuse (i.e., behavior that is demonstrably harmful).

3. Promoting the idea that children can consent to sex with adults.

The reconceptualization of children as willing sexual “partners” along with the decriminalization of “consensual” sexual relations is perhaps the key change sought by pedophile advocates. For example, on their website NAMBLA advocates for the decriminalization of “consensual, loving” pedophilic relationships, but “condemns sexual abuse and all forms of coercion” (<http://www.nambla.org/index.htm>).

To counter arguments that children cannot give informed consent, some have suggested that with children consent should be understood as the simple willingness that an event should take place (e.g., Graupner, 1999, p. 31). Others suggest that a young child’s ability to form and vocalize preferences is sufficient evidence that they are capable of providing informed consent. For example, in his book *Understanding Love Boys and Boylovers*, David L. Riegel (2000) stated, “Anyone who holds to the idea that a young boy cannot give or withhold informed consent has never taken such a boy shopping for new sneakers” (p. 38).

4. Questioning the assumption of harm.

One of the greatest barriers to the decriminalization of sex between adults and children are the hundreds of studies demonstrating a consistent association between CSA and negative outcomes. Advocates of pedophilia have attempted to deal with this problem in a variety of ways.

For example, they often any negative outcomes on parents or professionals who seek to prevent or intervene in the abuse. Riegel (2000), for instance, asserted: “The acts themselves harm no one, the emotional and psychological harm comes from the ‘after the fact’ interference, counseling, therapy, etc., that attempt to artificially create a ‘victim’ and a ‘perpetrator’ where neither exists” (p. 21). Similar arguments are made by SafeHaven Foundation, an organization for “responsible boylovers.” On their website, they wrote, “The child abuse industry . . . takes a boy who has enjoyed pleasurable and completely consensual sexual experiences with another boy or man, and traumatizes him in an attempt to convince him that what he did was ‘wrong.’” In addition, SafeHaven argues that, “many of the supposed traumas elicited by psychotherapy turn out to be nothing more than the result of the False Memory Syndrome” (SafeHaven Foundation, 2001).^[*7]

Another way that pedophile advocates seek to counter negative research findings is through the publication of positive ones. For example, Paidika advisor Theo Sandfort (1987) joined with members of the Dutch National Pedophile Workshops and studied sexual “partners” referred by the organization’s members. The pedophiles helped fund the study and boys provided

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glowing reports of the benefits they received from the relationships.

More recently, a brief article titled “A New Approach to the Societal Emancipation of Affectionate Relationships between Minors and Adults,” was published in the October 1997 IPCE online newsletter. The author, Titus Rivas (1997), stated that “It is necessary to find adults who as a child or adolescent experienced a positive relationship with an adult, and who after having grown up, still maintain that they have not suffered because of that relationship on a long term basis, but rather keep cherishing the memory of it.” He solicits positive stories and cautions that it would be best if the referred adults were not now pedophiles. Rivas says that upon its publication, the report can be used it as “a tool of emancipation.” One of the ways that advocates of “man-boy love” deal with negative research findings is by claiming that they are not applicable to boys. *Paidika* board member Dr. Edward Brongersma^[*8] (1990), for example, has suggested that research showing CSA to be harmful is unreliable because results involving female samples have been improperly generalized to males. According to Brongersma, “Conclusions based on studying sex between men and girls should never be applied to sex between men and boys” (p. 152). Contending that boys are better equipped to handle sex at an earlier age, in his book *Loving Boys: A Multidisciplinary Study of Sexual Relations Between Adult and Minor Males* (Vol. 1), Brongersma (1986) asserted, “A boy is mature for lust, for hedonistic sex, from his birth on; sex as an expression of love becomes a possibility from about five years of age” (p. 40).

5. Promoting “objective” research.

Those who advocate normalizing pedophilia often argue that investigations of CSA have been distorted by our culture’s bias against sex between adults and children (e.g., Brongersma, 1990). As such, they frequently call for a less emotional and more “objective” and scientific approach to the subject (e.g., Geraci, 1994, p. 17; Jones, 1990).

A study that is frequently cited as embodying the type of “objective” research needed is Theo Sandfort’s (1987) research on boys’ relationships with pedophiles. Although the *Paidika* advisor’s study is considered the epitome of objectivity by advocates of intergenerational sexual relationships (e.g., Brongersma, 1990, p. 168; Jones, 1990, p. 286), critics have pointed to strong evidence which suggests that the study was “politically motivated to ‘reform’ legislation” (Mrazek, 1990, p. 318).

Ethical concerns have also been expressed over the apparent lack of human subject safeguards and the fact that the boys were studied without the permission of their parents, many of whom were unaware of their child’s (often illegal) relationship with the pedophile (pp. 317-18).

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THE WORK OF RIND, TROMOVITCH AND BAUSERMAN

A review of the Rind, Tromovitch and Bauserman’s work reveals numerous intersections with pedophile advocacy organizations, along with frequent instances in which they have promoted the same changes advocated by those seeking to normalize pedophilia.

Intersections with Advocacy Groups

Both Bauserman and Rind have published in *Paidika: The Journal of Pedophilia*, a scholarly journal published in the Netherlands. The journal’s purpose was made explicit in its first issue: “Through publication of scholarly studies, thoroughly documented and carefully reasoned, we intend to demonstrate that paedophilia has been, and remains, a legitimate and productive part of the totality of human experience. (“*Paidika*: Statement of Purpose,” pp. 2-3).^[*9]

Bauserman’s (1989) article in *Paidika* reviewed the historical and cross cultural literature on sex between

men and boys, and reported that “man-boy” relationships have traditionally provided boys with positive male role models and teachers.

Bauserman also contributed an article to the *Journal of Homosexuality*’s special double issue on “Male Intergenerational Intimacy” that was edited by members of *Paidika*’s editorial board.

Bauserman’s (1990) article consisted of a spirited defense of Sandfort’s research on boys’ relationships with pedophiles.

Rind’s (1995a) contribution to *Paidika* was a favorable book review of *First Do No Harm: The Sexual Abuse Industry*, a book which promotes the notion of “false memories” being a major problem while at the same time arguing that sexual abuse is not necessarily harmful to children and that the age of sexual consent should be removed from the statute books (Goodyear-Smith, 1993). Rind (1995a) described Goodyear-Smith’s book as “excellent” and argued that CSA is “a social problem much less serious in size and scope than an unwitting public has been led to believe” (p. 83).

After the publication of their meta-analysis in *Psychological Bulletin*, Rind, Tromovitch and Bauserman were the keynote speakers for an advocacy conference in the Netherlands.

According to an announcement in the *International Pedophile and Child Emancipation (IPCE) Newsletter*,- [*10] the conference was being convened “expressly to throw light on the more positive side” of “adult-nonadult sexual contacts” (“The Other Side of the Coin,” September 1998). The conference was hosted by the Foundation for Church Social Work in Paulus Kerk, Rotterdam, an organization headed by outspoken pedophile advocate Rev. Hans Visser. [*11]

An overview of the conference appeared in an article in the local Rotterdam newspaper titled: “Dominee Visser Pleit voor het

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Aanvaarden van Pedofilie [Reverend Visser Pleads for the Acceptance of Pedophilia] (“Dominee Visser,” December 18, 1998). The conference also featured talks by two members of *Paidika*’s editorial board, Drs. Gert Hekma and Alex van Naerssen.

In their keynote address, Rind, Bauserman and Tromovitch (December 18, 1998) claimed that their research demonstrated that little if any harm can be attributed to CSA and blamed the erroneous assumption that CSA causes intense and pervasive harm on child abuse “hysteria”. [*12] After suggesting that the label of “child sexual abuse” should be reserved for instances when “early sexual episodes are unwanted and experienced negatively,” the authors concluded their presentation with the following disclaimer: “We want to emphasize that our presentation should not be taken to advocate behaviors *labeled* [italics added] as CSA”. The full text of Rind et al.’s keynote address was reprinted in the *International Pedophile and Child Emancipation Newsletter* (Number E 4, January 1999) and is available online. [*13]

The Author’s Views and Positions

A review of Rind, Tromovitch and Bauserman’s professional work shows that, at some time or another, the authors have recommended or enacted at least some portion of each of the actions outlined in **Table 3**. For example, Rind et al. (1998) recommended that professionals use value neutral terminology when discussing “willing” sex between adults and children.

Rind and Bauserman expressed even stronger views in prior writings. In 1993, they conducted research to determine how terminology used to describe the relationships between and adult male and a boy affected college students’ perceptions of sex between adults and children. They concluded that the indiscriminate use of terms suggesting victimization and harm when describing “adult-nonadult sexual relationships” can create a biased perception; “researchers can give their readers the impression that . . . these relationships are

abusive even when the evidence . . . points to neutral or even positive outcomes” (Rind & Bauserman, 1993, p. 266).

In another paper, Rind (1995b) reviewed human sexuality textbooks’ coverage of the effects of CSA, or what he termed “psychological correlates of adult-nonadult sex” (p. 219). Rind objected to the use of terms such as *victims*, *survivors*, *offenders*, and *perpetrators*, as these terms confuse, “harm done to children or adolescents with violations of social norms” (p. 219).

In their 1998 paper, Rind et al. recommended restricting the usage of the term *child sexual abuse* to sexual episodes that are unwanted or experienced negatively. Such a recommendation appears to imply that Rind et al. believe that sex between adults and children can be noncoercive and that children can consent to sexual contact with adults. [\[*14\]](#)

It should be remembered that this

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reconceptualization was first proposed by Jones (1990) who suggested the change would help professionals recognize the “possible benefits of intergenerational intimacy” (p. 276). [\[*15\]](#)

Bauserman and Rind (1997) argued that negative feelings are not inherent in sexual contacts between boys and adults, “but depend on cultural views of these behaviors.”

In the absence of social taboos and moral condemnation, negative feelings such as guilt and shame and doubts and conflicts about masculinity should not arise for children and adolescents who experience such contacts. The cross-cultural and historical literature provides examples of societies where sexual contacts between boys and adults, rather than being condemned and pathologized, instead were approved of, encouraged, or even regarded as necessary for healthy development” (Bauserman & Rind, 1997, p. 135).

Rind (1998) suggested that “willing man-boy sex accompanied by positive reactions may be better informed by the ancient Greek model [i.e., sexual relationship in which the older male also acts as a teacher and guardian] than by models based on the female experience (e.g., rape and incest models)” (p. 399).

In addition to suggesting that sexual abuse is rarely harmful, Rind et al. have also blamed negative outcomes on those seeking to protect or treat abused children. For example, Rind et al. (December 18, 1998) blamed exaggerated beliefs about the harmfulness of CSA for child abuse hysteria, implantation of false memories, and iatrogenic creation of symptoms, which they claim “researchers in the child abuse industry” have seized upon “as further evidence for the pathogenicity of CSA.”

Rind (1995b) asserted that the consequences of CSA “is debatable because the traumatic behaviors attributed to the actual or fabricated sexual contact may instead have been induced by the interview tactics of the therapists and child abuse workers” (p. 82).

Rind et al. (1998) suggested that the current prohibition of sex between adults and children is based primarily on a cultural taboo, and advocated using empirical criteria in conceptualizing “early sexual relations,” rather than legal or moral criteria (p. 46).

In his defense of Sandfort’s research on boys’ relationships with pedophiles, Bauserman (1990) criticized those who believe that sexual relationships between men and boys “are by their very nature abusive and exploitive,” or “that the younger partner is automatically incapable of consent” (p. 310). Bauserman stated, “It remains to be seen whether scientific objectivity can prevail against the need to defend the current

dogma on man-boy sexual contacts” (p. 311).

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CONCLUSION

In response to criticism, Rind, Tromovitch and Bauserman have cloaked themselves in the authority of science, implying that the controversy over their ideas is purely political, and that their data are unimpeachable. This review suggests that this is a serious misrepresentation.

A number of researchers have demonstrated that the Rind et al.’s (1998) data either fails to support their case, was presented in a misleading or biased way, or equally supports alternative explanations. A review of the authors’ previous writings reveals that Rind and Bauserman formed many of their opinions about the relative harmlessness of sexual relationships between adults and children years prior to performing any meaningful research into the issue.

In addition, the authors’ views on sex between adults and children have more in common with the ideology of advocates of “intergenerational” sexual relationships, than the reasoned opinions of most other scientists who have studied this issue. After reviewing the available evidence, Rind et al. is perhaps best described as an advocacy paper that inappropriately uses science in an attempt to legitimize its findings.

As the public and political reaction to Rind et al.’s paper demonstrated, there are prices to be paid for faulty science. Poorly constructed or morally repugnant studies may shake public confidence in science and lessen the public’s willingness to base public policy on legitimate scientific research.

In addition, unless it is challenged and corrected, erroneous social science research has a way of infiltrating into legal and social structures where it may adversely affect all of our lives. To safeguard both scientific integrity and the public’s welfare, professional bodies should be more strident in their insistence that research articles adhere to the ethical and scientific standards set forth by their profession and do not take “extra-scientific” leaps to promote personal agendas. As Ondersma et al. (in press) noted, “Both credibility and progress are jeopardized when scientific efforts are revealed as advocacy rather than a process for refining knowledge.”

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