

PREDATORS PEDOPHILES, RAPISTS, AND OTHER SEX OFFENDERS

**WHO THEY ARE, HOW THEY OPERATE,
AND HOW WE CAN PROTECT
OURSELVES AND OUR CHILDREN**

"Predators gives parents and educators the best kind of defense against sexual offenders: wisdom. On behalf of all the children and adults who will, because of this book, never become victims at all, I would like to say: Thank you Anna Salter."
—from the foreword by Gavin de Becker, bestselling author of *The Gift of Fear*

ANNA C. SALTER, PH.D.

Child Molesters

Mention “child molesters” to the average audience, or even to most professional audiences, and they will immediately suggest “Colt .45 therapy” or castration. Once a cab driver in Dallas gave me his opinion: execution for a first offense.

It is a strangely comfortable answer for those who give it, and it absolves them of the harder work of thinking of something we might actually do in this country. The strangest part of this answer is that those who see child molesters as monsters seem the quickest—when their neighbor, friend, or family member is accused—to say that it is definitely a false report. After all, child molesters are perverts, creeps, and monsters, and their nice neighbor/minister/father/uncle/friend/priest is not a monster. Ergo, he is not a child molester.

Once this kind of denial locks in, no amount of evidence will change their minds. A cab driver said to a colleague of mine, “Child molestation! I know all about child molestation. My father was accused of child molestation, and the children lied—all twenty-six of them.”

Even a confession by the offender will be dismissed. A long-term molester of boys tried to tell his own minister he was offending. “Someone said I was a child molester,” he began tentatively.

“Well, that’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard of,” the minister said quickly. “You’re the last person I’d believe that of.” End of conversation.

But it is a misconception that child molesters are somehow different from the rest of us, outside their proclivities to molest. They can be loyal friends, good employees, and responsible members of the community in other ways. The psychiatrist Fred Berlin has noted:

PREDATORS

People often confuse issues of traits of character with issues of sexual orientation or the type of sexual interest an individual has. People who may be compulsive pedophiles, for instance, may obey the law in other ways, may be responsible in their work, may have concern for other persons.¹

What is different about child molesters is only this: They have sex with children. They molest them for a variety of reasons that may leave no telltale signs in their public behavior. The priest who works tirelessly for the parish may be a nice man in his everyday dealings with people, but that has nothing to do with whether he is or isn't privately a child molester.

Even angry child rapists (a minority of child molesters, to be sure) may behave normally in public. They may have a girlfriend or wife, may be well liked. No one may see the grinding anger that drives them except their victims. The child rapist below is a six-foot-tall Marlboro man with a crooked smile and a soft crinkle to his eyes. He is good-looking, and, more than that, he looks like a kind man. Not surprisingly, he has a long history of girlfriends. Indeed, with his looks and his soft and reasonable manner, he has had no difficulty attracting women. He tells me that:

First victim, I was staying with a guy. . . . His daughter had come to live with them, and I was living with them at that time. And I was angry. She had done a lot of things, like I'll just give you an example. The very first time I had a Zippo lighter, and I'd get it hot and just play with it. . . . She came in one day, and she was playing with it and got it hot, and I was laying on the couch and I was asleep. She brought it over to me and put it on my forehead and burned my forehead, which made me very angry. I didn't say much to her then. But that afternoon, or that night, when her mother was at work, I raped her that night. Which it was anally at the time. And it went on for quite some time before I, I called it an accident because she wasn't able to endure intercourse. . . . And it ripped her.

Child Molesters

In fact, he tore her anus through to her vagina, and the eight-year-old child was injured so badly she was hospitalized. He was incarcerated for that offense and later served a second incarceration for a separate offense. In between there were numerous offenses he was reported for but for which he was never charged. He shrugs and tells me:

People, in general, they're going to think what they want to think. And that's just basically all there is to it. If they want to think bad of you they're going to think bad of you. If they hear something bad of you they're going to believe it, and if they don't, they don't. In the business I was in, you know, this guy works around children all the time. If he was molesting children, there's no way you couldn't get caught.

It was perhaps an exaggeration for him to say he worked around children all the time. He was night manager at a grocery store, and there were probably fewer children in the store at night than during the day. Still, despite enough anger and callousness to rip an eight-year-old from vagina to anus, he appeared perfectly normal to those who worked with him. I do not believe anyone in the world, including myself, could have picked him out as a child molester.

But even if you and I couldn't see it in casual conversation, the anger and the intimidation were there—in his case, only for children. And he used it right in front of us and got away with it. He tells me how he handled disclosures by the children:

Basically if you stay calm and look whoever it is in the eye, and especially if the mother of the victim or the victim is there, if the victim is anywhere that you can look at her and make her nervous or him, whichever one it might be, then the more nervous that you make them, the more it makes them seem like they're lying. If they're around. Most of the time they're not.

Q. How do you make them nervous?

A. By staring at them. You know, it's like, I'm going to get you. I'm just, it's just basically, you know, just that kind of look. Like

you've had it. To a child that's, you traumatize them just by looking at them.

Court is just another opportunity for intimidation in his view.

If we went to the court and we both had been in the courtroom at the same time, then I could have made her nervous enough to make her lie or make her stumble to make people think she was lying. . . . It's really just a simple look to a child is traumatizing. If you believe it or not, it really is. Especially if the adult is molesting the child.

He does not have to convince me that offenders will try to intimidate witnesses in court. I was on the witness stand once against a man who had raped and murdered a nine-year-old neighbor child who came to his door on Halloween night. He was scheduled for release, and I was testifying that he was still dangerous and should be civilly committed, a case that was lost. I'm not sure it would have been lost had the jury been looking at him rather than me. He glared at me throughout my testimony as though he would take my throat out with a spoon. A part of me wanted to interrupt my testimony and just point to his sullen, rage-filled face.

I could not do so, of course, and unfortunately almost everybody in the courtroom was looking at me. The spectators had no choice: They were sitting, as usual, behind the defendant. There was, however, a single correctional administrator who was sitting far enough on the side to see the defendant, and she was looking at him while I spoke. She was so taken aback by his obvious hostility and his attempt to intimidate me that she came to talk to me about it afterward.

If it was sobering for me to testify with a predator glaring at me, imagine what it is like for a child. It is easier than you think for offenders to intimidate witnesses in open court and get away with it. Now you see it; now you don't. Child molesters, angry rapists, predators of all sorts only show the face they want you to see, when they want you to see it. And sometimes, they give you the message they want you to have, even though no one around you sees a thing.

Making Sense of Child Molestation: Blind Allies and Hidden Bias

Why do men—and some women—molest children? It makes no sense to the rest of us. Our collective difficulty in believing someone we know would molest a child is partly because of our difficulty in understanding why anybody would do such a thing. Most adults are simply not sexually attracted to children. When an adult is in an amorous mood, a child is a nuisance at best. "What would a child have to do to be sexually attractive to you?" an instructor asked a class rhetorically.

"Grow up," one man replied.

Most of us feel that way. Sex with children strikes us as deeply reprehensible and utterly unappealing. If that's how most people feel, why do child molesters risk jail for something the rest of us wouldn't do if it were legal?

In the past one hundred years, psychology has twisted itself into pretzels developing theories to answer this question. Few of these theories have any research at all behind them, and many of them are little more than excuses and rationalizations for child molestation. I am not talking now about Freud's failure to accept the victim accounts given by his patients and his turning them into "Oedipal fantasies" to avoid ostracism by his peers. That has been too well documented to deserve further comment.² Nor am I talking about cases where memory of abuse was lost and then recovered, although there is considerable evidence that this can occur.³

What is actually more perplexing in the history of psychology is the attitude toward cases in which it was known and acknowledged that the abuse took place. In the early part of the century, psychoanalytic writers maintained steadfastly that sexual abuse was the fault of the child, not the adult, that it occurred because aggressive children "seduced" innocent men. Dr. Karl Abraham, for example, wrote an article entitled "The Experiencing of Sexual Traumas as a Form of Sexual Activity" in which he declared that "in a great number of cases the trauma was desired by the child unconsciously, and we have to recognize it as a form of infantile sexual activity."⁴ His reasoning was that "in all of them the trauma

could have been prevented. The children could have called for help, run away or offered resistance instead of yielding to the seduction."⁵

It is bewildering, of course, that Abraham would not recognize the existence of psychological coercion or just plain submission to adult authority, but after all, it was 1907. It is more puzzling that he would not apply the same logic to the offender who, after all, could have called for help, run away, or offered resistance. Yet Abraham did not call his article "The *Inflicting* of Sexual Traumas as a Form of Sexual Activity."

What is truly astonishing, however, is his response to a case of violent assault in which the child did call for help, run away, and offer resistance. In fact, she resisted so much she escaped. It was the case of a nine-year-old girl who was enticed into the woods by a neighbor who Abraham admits "attempted to rape her."⁶ The child fought off her attacker. Rather than admit that responsibility for this attack rested solely with the attacker, Abraham states that the child

Had allowed herself to be seduced. She had followed the neighbor into the woods and allowed him to go a long way in carrying out his purpose before she freed herself from him and ran off. It is not to be wondered that this child kept the occurrence secret.⁷

It is most surprising that Abraham could ignore the difference in strength between a nine-year-old girl and an adult male. In his view, no matter what the circumstances, all sexual assaults on children occur because children have "an abnormal desire for obtaining sexual pleasure and, in consequence of this, undergo sexual traumas."⁸ Women assault victims fared no better in his hands. They were labeled "hysterics" and were described as

Those interesting people to whom something is always happening. Female hysterics in particular are constantly meeting with adventures. They are molested in the public street, outrageous sexual assaults are made on them, etc. It is part of their nature that they must expose themselves to external traumatic influences. There is a need in them to appear to be constantly exposed to vi-

olence. In this we recognize a general psychological characteristic of women in an exaggerated form.⁹

If Abraham's views were not echoed elsewhere, he would be simply a historical oddity. On the contrary, his views were widely shared within the psychoanalytic community. For more than fifty years, from the first quarter of the twentieth century onward, there was a significant school in psychology that held that sexual assault victims were responsible for their own victimization.¹⁰

The psychiatrist Laretta Bender was a strong supporter of this point of view and wrote in 1937 that such children derive "fundamental satisfaction from the relationship" and "do not completely deserve the cloak of innocence with which they have been endowed by moralists, social reformers and legislators."¹¹ As proof, she offered her observation that the children were "unusually charming and attractive"¹² and asked the reader to consider that the child was "the actual seducer rather than the one seduced."¹³

The concept of "participating" or "collaborative" victim was developed.¹⁴ In many of these writings, a participating victim was anyone who knew the offender prior to the attack and/or was assaulted more than once. However, this rule wasn't ironclad. The researcher John Gagnon characterized 12 percent of his sample of children assaulted by total strangers as "collaborative," whatever that term means to him.¹⁵

Incest victims seem particularly singled out for this blaming of the victims. Dr. Irving Weiner wrote that the "absence of any complaints on the part of the daughters indicates that these girls were not merely helpless victims of their fathers' needs but were gratified by the relationship, if not . . . active initiators of it."¹⁶

Of course, many victims did complain. Nonetheless, Weiner dismisses such reports by saying that "it is quite likely that many incestuous daughters avoid guilt feelings by denying their enjoyment of the sexual experience."¹⁷ It is not at all clear what victims could have done to convince Weiner of their innocence. In his writings, we find that whether victims endured silently or complained loudly, they were nonetheless deemed to have been "gratified" by the incest.

A basic tenet of science is that if the facts don't support the theory, the theory should give way. It often simply does not happen. Sometimes the facts are twisted to fit the theory or if that fails, they are simply ignored. For example, Atalay Yorukoglu and John Kempf described two children who were victims of incest with a parent.¹⁸ Between them, the two children had the following symptoms: setting fires, vandalism, stealing, aggressive behavior, sexual abuse of boys, anxiety, exhibitionism, social withdrawal, and suicidal ideation. They were kept in residential care because they were too aggressive to be maintained in a foster home. Nonetheless, the authors titled the article "Children Not Severely Damaged by Incest with a Parent" and described the children as "not seriously affected."¹⁹ Dr. Mary de Young wondered if the children would have agreed.²⁰

The most extreme view in this area was that of Matilde W. Rascovsky and A. Rascovsky, who declared that incest was actually good for the child. "The actual consummation of the incestuous relation . . . diminishes the subject's chance of psychosis and allows better adjustment to the external world."²¹ It is not clear what "facts" that statement was based on, but this view was shared by at least some writers. In 1979, a West Virginia social work professor announced that "incest may be a positive experience or at worst, neutral and dull."²²

Putting aside for a moment the absurdity of such claims, what is particularly puzzling is that the adult offender was effectively erased from these descriptions as though he had no responsibility—indeed as though he wasn't even there. When offenders are mentioned, their responsibility for their own behavior, their harmfulness and aggressiveness, are described in terms that are strikingly benign.

"Gentle, fond of children and benevolent" was the way Virkunnen described the pedophile.²³ He was a "timid person, usually without adult contact, childish and immature."²⁴ Drs. Eugene Revitch and Rosalie Weiss called such offenders "harmless individuals and their victims . . . aggressive and seductive children."²⁵ These authors complained that a group of children "*exploited*" a pedophile "through accepting his gifts and money" (*italics mine*).²⁶

This blaming of children for child sexual abuse began to fade for a

time in the 1970s and 1980s, although it has never died out entirely and is currently making a comeback. Witness, for instance, the legal defense filed by Cardinal Bernard F. Law in Boston in 2002, claiming that "negligence" by a six-year-old boy and his parents contributed to the fact that the child was sexually abused by a priest.²⁷ One wonders what kind of negligence he's talking about on the child's part.

Note too that a California judge, also in 2002, sentenced a thirty-three-year-old teacher to probation instead of prison after she was found guilty of having sex with a fifteen-year-old boy. The judge stated that "the relationship may have been a way for the boy to 'satisfy his sexual needs.'"²⁸

To the extent that making the victim responsible for abuse did wane, however, its waning brought with it a shift of responsibility, not to the offender, initially, but to the nonoffending spouse and the family instead. Blaming the mother has actually been embedded in the incest literature for some time, although it began to achieve much greater prominence as blaming the child began to fade. The incest offender was said to be "placed in the position of compensating the oral frustrations inflicted by the mother."²⁹ Irving Kaufman et al. wrote that incest was the child's response to abandonment by the mother,³⁰ whereas Lillian Gordon declared that the child committed incest as revenge against the mother for pre-Oedipal frustrations.³¹

Where was the father? Captain Noel Lustig and his colleagues considered the father little more than a "vehicle" for "unconscious homosexual strivings in the mother."³² They wrote of the father's "psychological passivity" while calling the mothers the "cornerstone of the pathological family system."³³

Mothers supposedly gave permission for the incest, unconsciously if not consciously. Some authors felt that the percentage of mothers who knew about the incest approached 80 to 90 percent.³⁴ Blair and Rita Justice disagreed, insisting that *every* mother colluded with the abuse in some way.³⁵

In the late 1970s, a child sexual abuse treatment was developed by Hank Giarretto in San Jose, California, that became nationally famous and served as a model for the development of many other treatment programs. The statement of philosophy for the program declared that

"Incestuous behavior is one of the many symptoms of a dysfunctional family."³⁶ Giarretto proudly published figures that showed the percentage of mothers who felt responsible for the incest rose from 0 percent at intake to 50 percent at termination. This was considered success.

I attended a training at that treatment program in the 1980s. The culpability of the family, including the victim, was stressed so much that I finally raised my hand.

"If I was an offender in this program and I reoffended," I began, "I'd just say, 'Guess the family's not doing too well.' How are you going to hold people responsible for this if you tell them it's not their fault, it's the family's fault?" There was a lot of scrambling but no answer given that made sense to me.

This line of reasoning sometimes went to absurd lengths (if you don't think it was there already). Yvonne Tormes, for example, described a group of incest offenders, some of whom had been extremely violent.³⁷ They had burned children with hot irons, locked a mother in a closet while abusing the child, and broken a radio over a mother's head. One would think the offenders might have some responsibility for their behavior in these cases, but Tormes wrote that the cause of the abuse was "the mother's failure to protect her child."³⁸

Today, the notion that the family is responsible for incest is far more alive than the notion that children are responsible for seducing grown men. There are still numerous treatment programs that use family therapy to treat incest. Whereas some use family therapy responsibly, as an adjunct to offender treatment, others state openly that they consider incest to be caused by family dysfunction and that treatment should address the family problems, not the offender's proclivity to offend.

Of course, considering the family the source of the abuse inevitably means reducing the culpability of the offender. In 1989 Clinicians Terry Trepper and Mary Jo Barrett described their method of doing family therapy with offenders.³⁹ They recommended telling the family, "The incestuous abuse may indicate that your family loved each other too much."⁴⁰ Child sexual abuse is thus redefined simply as "loving too much." Could it be a little confusing for a child to have incest labeled as "love"?

A colleague of mine described an adolescent victim's reaction to treatment such as this. He was in individual therapy with my colleague as well as family therapy with another therapist. One day he said to my colleague, "Is there some rule in family therapy that you can't point the finger at anybody?"

"Sort of," my friend acknowledged.

"Because sometimes," he went on, "I think that therapist forgets who is the fucker and who is the fuckee." Point well taken.

The history of psychology in the past one hundred years has been filled with theories that deny sexual abuse occurs, that discount the responsibility of the offender, that blame the mother and/or child when it does occur, and that minimize the impact. It constitutes a sorry chapter in the history of psychology, but it is not only shameful, it is also puzzling. Hostility toward child victims and adult women leaks through this literature like poison. What accounts for the kind of foam-at-the-mouth hostility expressed by Professor of Law Ralph Slovenko in 1971, when he railed against the laws that held offenders responsible for sex with a child and quoted a 1923 judge's ruling with which he evidently agreed?

This wretched girl was young in years but old in sin and shame. A number of callow youths, of otherwise blameless lives as far as this record shows, fell under her seductive influence. . . . She was a mere "cistern for foul toads to know and gender in." Why should the boys, misled by her, be sacrificed?⁴¹

He added that "the male offender in the case of statutory rape has no special pathology; the girl is usually more in need of psychiatric care or other attention."⁴²

If these views seem dated and extreme to you, you might want to consider Judith Levine's new book, *Harmful to Minors*, or an article by Bruce Rind et al. on the impact of child sexual abuse, or a recent paper by Professor Harris Mirkin,⁴³ all three of which have received enormous press—much of it positive—and all of whom minimize child sexual abuse and its impact. Levine, in fact, wants to lower the age of con-

sent to twelve. Rind and Mirkin both question whether sexual abuse harms the child, and Rind, in fact, would like us to quit calling it abuse.

These views bear looking at more closely. Levine's book, particularly, is troubling. The case she makes is flawed by numerous inaccuracies and misstatements of fact. Levine claims there is simply no large-scale problem of child sexual abuse. She argues that most normal men are attracted to adolescents, and therefore the attraction isn't deviant at all. She minimizes or even ignores the fact that some men are attracted to children far younger than adolescence. It is not clear, she contends, that there is any such thing as a pedophile,⁴⁴ and to prove her point, she cites the true fact that some men who are attracted to children are also attracted to adults. According to her, therefore, they are not pedophiles.

However, whether someone is attracted to adults is irrelevant to whether or not they are a pedophile. The diagnostic manual of the American Psychiatric Association states that pedophiles are adults who are sexually attracted to prepubescent children, and they may or may not be attracted to other adults as well.⁴⁵ As someone who has interviewed a number of men who have raped infants as young as five months of age, men who have sexually abused preschoolers repeatedly, men who have targeted children under the age of ten, and men who *admit* to being sexually attracted to them (some of them obsessively so), I can only wonder why Levine would make this claim.

What would she say, for example, to the three brothers I interviewed last week who were molested by a priest when they were children. One of them remembers vividly the last time the priest molested him. The priest was fondling the boy's nude genitals when he noticed the boy had begun to sprout his first pubic hair. The priest stopped immediately.

"What's this?" he demanded.

"It's hair," the child said. "It's been there."

"I never noticed it," the priest said, and got up immediately. That was the last time he molested that child. But he continued to molest his younger brothers.

But it is not just Levine's denial that pedophiles exist that makes this book troubling. She believes that even if pedophiles do exist, they can

be "cured."⁴⁶ That is certainly news to me, and it will be news, I suspect, to all who treat offenders. It will be news as well to the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA), the largest professional organization on the treatment of sex offenders in the world. ATSA states plainly on their website that, "although many, if not most, sexual abusers are treatable, there is no known 'cure'. Management of sexually abusive behavior is a life-long task for some sexual abusers."⁴⁷

The best estimates today, based on a analysis of forty-three studies of treatment and reoffense rates, is that current methods of cognitive-behavioral treatment can reduce sexual offending by close to half in the relatively short run.⁴⁸ The impact of treatment can be summed up in an odds ratio of .60. Not every offender would reoffend without treatment, of course, but for those who would, treatment can make a difference. Out of every one hundred offenders who would have reoffended, sixty would still reoffend with treatment. This reduction in reoffending is actually heartening. Being able to reduce reoffense rates by nearly 50 percent certainly makes treatment worthwhile in my book. The forty out of one hundred offenders who would not molest again after treatment translates into numerous children who will be spared abuse if offenders get proper treatment. Certainly treatment is more efficacious today than it's ever been in the past.⁴⁹

But sixty out of one hundred sex offenders would still reoffend after the most effective treatment available today, and that means we are a long way from "curing" pedophilia or rape. Note also these results were for the short run. No one really knows the impact of treatment in the long run.

No one in my field today even speaks of a "cure," any more than alcohol and drug counselors speak of a cure for alcoholism or drug addiction. Given all that, I looked with interest for the source of Levine's optimism, but she offered no research, no support whatsoever for her notion that pedophilia is curable, except her own interpretation of research on reoffense rates.

Contrary to politicians' claims, the recidivism rates of child sex offenders are among the lowest in the criminal population. Analyses

of thousands of subjects in hundreds of studies in the United States and Canada found that about 13 percent of sex offenders are rearrested, compared with 74 percent of all prisoners.⁵⁰

But her comments about 13 percent reoffense rates are only accurate to a point, and the point is a big one. The major meta-analysis she cites only studied reoffense rates for all sex offenders (treated and untreated combined) in the first four to five years after release.⁵¹ The implication Levine makes that these are lifetime reoffense rates is wrong.

Research on long-term reoffense rates finds considerably higher rates.⁵² Dr. Robert Prentky, for example, found that the long-term reoffense rate for rapists was 39 percent and for out-of-home child molesters, 52 percent.⁵³ Conservative estimates from across studies show that it is likely that no fewer than 40 percent of child molesters and rapists reoffend in the long run. These are average reoffense rates, and they refer to *detected* offenses. Obviously, we don't catch people for everything they do. In fact, the rate of detection of sexual offenses looks quite low, as noted earlier. But even ignoring the issue of underreporting, close to half of child molesters are likely to reoffend in the long run, most certainly not 13 percent as Levine claims.

Certain subgroups of sex offenders are known to have even higher rates of reoffending. The Canadian researcher Karl Hanson found that those offenders who were never married, had boy victims, and had previous offenses demonstrated a detected reoffense rate of 77 percent in the long run.⁵⁴ Any group with a detected rate of reoffense that high means that virtually all offenders in those groups are likely to reoffend, given what we know about undetected offenses.

Did Levine not know all this? Did she really misread the research so completely that she believed that 13 percent was the lifetime reoffense rate of sex offenders, or did she simply feel it would not help her case to state accurate figures? Her case states that pedophilia doesn't really exist, that even if it does, it can be easily cured, and that—not to worry—child molesters don't reoffend very often, anyway.

But what is very troubling about this book is that Levine goes far beyond inaccurate figures, naïve assessments, and a poor fund of infor-

mation; she goes on to give advice to parents and legislators, specifically that we should lower the age of consent to twelve. In Levine's world, there is no problem with twelve-year-olds having sex. And it is not just sex per se that Levine encourages for young teens, it is specifically sex with older men.

Teens often seek out sex with older people, and they do so for understandable reasons: an older person makes them feel sexy and grown up, protected and special; often the sex is better than it would be with a peer who has as little skill as they do. For some teens, a romance with an older person can feel more like salvation than victimization.⁵⁵

Despite the rosy picture that Levine paints of sex between young adolescents and adult men, read her book carefully, and you will discover she cites research that found negative consequences to adult/child sex. Girls in relationships with older men often agree not to use a condom; they also frequently drop out of school and/or cut off ties with friends and families. These same girls later on often speak negatively of these early relationships and "regretfully of their choices."⁵⁶ Levine hastens to inform us, however, that the same thing might have happened with younger lovers. But the same thing wouldn't have happened with no lover.

Other studies have found similar results. A study by the National Campaign to End Teen Pregnancy found that two-thirds of sexually active twelve- to seventeen-year-olds wished they had waited until they were older: 72 percent of the girls and 55 percent of the boys.⁵⁷ Although Levine tells us repeatedly to listen to children when they say they want to have sex with adults, here she tells us not to listen. The teens don't know their own minds, she informs us. Their regrets can be traced to societal attitudes. "Teens get the message that the sex they are having is wrong, and whenever they have it, at whatever age, it is too early."⁵⁸ Maybe, but maybe they were too young, just like they said.

Apparently, we should not listen to our children, to what happens to their lives when they get involved in sex too early, to what happens when they become involved with older men. We should not listen to

their regrets or their health problems or their young pregnancies. Instead, we should only listen to what twelve-year-olds want in the heat of the moment.

Levine is not alone today in minimizing the effects of child sexual abuse and in trying to redefine it. In 1998, Rind et al. published a meta-analysis of studies that looked at the impact of child sexual abuse on college samples.⁵⁹ Despite the fact that the samples they used were all from college populations, they use their findings to make statements on child sexual abuse in the larger population, although later they claimed they were only saying it was “relevant,” not representative or generalizable.⁶⁰

Their conclusions were—although victims were more maladjusted in seventeen of eighteen categories of maladjustment—that the maladjustment was slight and due to family dysfunction, not child sexual abuse. When family dysfunction was controlled statistically, the difference in maladjustment supposedly disappeared.

Boys in particular, they felt, were not affected by child sexual abuse. Although Rind et al. admitted that that impact could be separated from wrongfulness, they nonetheless recommended dropping the word “abuse” and calling sex between adults and children simply “adult-child” and “adult-adolescent” sex instead. The term “abuse” would only be used if “a young person felt that he or she did not willingly participate in the encounter *and* if he or she experienced negative reactions to it” (italics mine).⁶¹

Presumably, then, forcible rape of a child would not be considered abuse even if the child did not “consent,” provided the child later said the abuse had made her or him stronger (a positive reaction) or the child minimized the impact as adults have repeatedly been shown to do with traumatic events of all sorts.⁶²

Likewise, the seduction or manipulation of a child into sexual activity would not be considered “abuse” by definition, even if trickery, bribery, or conning was used and even if the child had a severe reaction. According to Rind et al., unless there is violence, the child “consented.” Rind makes no distinction for children under twelve in these definitions. Presumably, a four-year-old—or even an infant—is able, in

their view, to give “consent” because consent is simply defined as the absence of overt violence.

The study kicked up a storm in two very different quarters. First of all, experts in the field were surprised, to say the least—I among them. I had read the literature on the impact of child sexual abuse carefully for some time, particularly so for a book I did on treatment of victims.⁶³ I initially planned on reading *all* the literature on the sequelae of child sexual abuse, but that grandiose plan faded as I read for months on end without being able to tap into all the research. At the end of several months, however, I was convinced of one thing. Child sexual abuse was like getting bitten by a rattlesnake: Some kids recovered completely, and some didn't, but it wasn't good for anybody.

But if scholars familiar with the literature were surprised by the study, others were outraged. Dr. Laura came across the study, and nine months after its publication told 18 million listeners on March 22, 1999, that it was “garbage research with a dangerous statement at the end.”⁶⁴ She added that she thought the study might be used to normalize pedophilia and to change the legal system, which is certainly exactly how certain groups have used it.⁶⁵

The publicity resulting from Dr. Laura's radio address was so great that even Congress got involved. In July of 1999, they passed a resolution condemning the study, a first to be sure. Unfortunately, for many academics, the issue then became a question of academic freedom. In defense of the study, academics pointed to the fact that it had survived peer review, supposedly a rigorous process.

But had it? It was later revealed that it had been rejected by the first set of peer reviewers, and the authors were told the study was so flawed it should not be resubmitted. However, after a change of editors, Rind et al. tried again. This time at least one reviewer also turned the study down. Because the others have not come forward, it remains unclear as to who actually recommended the study for publication, if anybody.⁶⁶

The study has been repeatedly criticized on methodological grounds. Apparently some who read it think the original reviewers got it right. Critics have charged that Rind et al. excluded relevant outcomes, included studies with primarily noncontact offenses (such as exhibition-

ism), used inappropriate statistics, and generalized their results inappropriately, among a host of other flaws.⁶⁷

Rind et al. have put up a vigorous defense.⁶⁸ As a key element in that defense, they have attacked everyone in sight for bias. They have called their critics “religious and moralistic zealots.”⁶⁹ They have portrayed themselves as representing “science” and their critics as representing “moralistic psychiatry,” “politics,” and “orthodoxy.”⁷⁰ They have even compared themselves in workshop flyers to Galileo and Darwin.⁷¹ They have accused everyone else of bias, but nowhere have they mentioned their own.

But the fact is that Rind et al. were pro-pedophilia long before their meta-analysis was published. Take, for example, their articles in *Paidika: The Journal of Pedophilia*. *Paidika* is not your typical objective academic journal. In fact, *Paidika* does not pretend to be objective at all. It is published in the Netherlands, where the age of consent has been lowered to twelve, and its purpose was summed up in its first issue as follows:

The starting point of *Paidika* is necessarily our consciousness of ourselves as paedophiles. . . . We intend to demonstrate that paedophilia has been, and remains, a legitimate and productive part of the totality of human experience.⁷²

I came across this journal some time ago, when I discovered that a psychologist who frequently testified for the defense in child sexual abuse cases, Ralph Underwager, had given an interview to this journal in which he said pedophilia was a “responsible” choice, called it, “God’s will,” and stated it was about “closeness and intimacy.” The cover of that issue had a drawing of a nude adolescent boy on it.⁷³

Both Rind and his colleague Bauserman had published articles in *Paidika* long before their meta-analysis appeared, Bauserman arguing that pedophilia has traditionally provided boys with positive role models, and Rind commenting favorably on a book that attacked the “child abuse industry.”⁷⁴ After the meta-analysis appeared, they were keynote speakers for a conference on pedophilia in the Netherlands, sponsored by an organization whose head, Reverend H. Visser, is a long-term advocate for pedophilia.⁷⁵

In addition to his writing for *Paidika*, Bauserman also wrote a spirited defense of Theo Sandfort’s work in another article. Sandfort had contacted pedophiles who then selected from their current victims those he could interview. Sandfort spoke with the children, then reported that they experienced the relationships and the sexual contacts positively. Despite the fact that the activity was illegal in the Netherlands at the time (where the study took place) and despite the fact that many of the parents did not know their children were being abused, Sandfort did not inform the authorities or their parents but colluded with the pedophiles’ secrecy and deception.⁷⁶ Understandably, Sandfort’s work has been attacked on both methodological and ethical grounds.⁷⁷ Bauserman’s article attacked Sandfort’s critics and justified Sandfort’s methods and his conclusions. Bauserman was barely out of college at the time and was about to enter graduate school. His meta-analysis was eight years away.

It does not appear that these are objective, neutral scientists here doing a let-the-chips-fall-where-they-may study. At least two of the three original authors were writing positively about sex between men and boys long before their meta-analysis “discovered” there was “little harm” attached.

But their own biases aside, the real question is whether the study is any good. The statistical arguments fly back and forth, and for any reader who would like to follow them, I refer you to the citations above. But two things are clear: The first is that their findings are truly an outlier. As Stephanie Dallam points out, other meta-analyses have obtained very different results.⁷⁸ In addition, a series of studies controlling for family dysfunction have found that when you remove the impact of other social variables, including family dysfunction, the negative impact of sexual abuse remains.⁷⁹

The second fact that’s clear is that, one more time, the offender has disappeared. In Rind and his colleagues’ view, kids are either forced into sexual acts through violence or they “consent.” The underlying assumption is that children and adolescents are equal matches for adults. Presumably either adult pedophiles are *not* trying to manipulate and con children for sex, or it is a “buyer beware” situation in which the kids can and should fend for themselves.

But the former is absurd, and the latter is unfair. It is surely not just my own observations that offenders manipulate children. Lucy Berliner and Jon Conte interviewed twenty-three child victims of child sexual abuse, aged ten to eighteen years.⁸⁰ Half of the children described being given special favors, money, or clothes. The process of moving from normal physical affection (for example, hugs) to overt sexual acts was subtle and accompanied by rationalizations. The children were told that the behavior was acceptable, for example, that it was a way to show love or that it was a form of sex education. Most of the children had developed strong emotional ties to the offender. According to Berliner and Conte, more than half said they "loved him, liked him, needed or depended on him."⁸¹ Then, too, almost all of the children were threatened with harm either to obtain their "consent" or to prevent them from telling. The threats were various: cutting fingers off, cutting the child's throat, killing the child, or abandoning them.

Sex offenders themselves will tell you that they use techniques deliberately to seduce and entice. Jon Conte, Steven Wolf, and Tim Smith found that offenders believed they were skilled in identifying vulnerable children.⁸² They quote from their sample of twenty sex offenders as saying:

I would probably pick the one who appeared more needy, the child hanging back from others or feeling picked on by brothers and sisters.⁸³

I would find a child who doesn't have a happy home life, because it would be easier for me to gain their friendship.⁸⁴

Look for a kid who is easy to manipulate. They will go along with anything you say.⁸⁵

Choose children who have been unloved. Try to be nice to them until they trust you very much and give you the impression that they will participate with you willingly. Use love as bait. . . . Give her the illusion that she is free to go with it or not. Tell her she is

special. Choose a kid who has been abused. Your victim will think that this time is not as bad.⁸⁶

Other research agrees. British researchers Michele Elliott, Kerin Browne, and Jennifer Kilcoyne found in a sample of ninety-one offenders that nearly one-half said they chose children who "seemed to lack confidence or had low self esteem."⁸⁷ They manipulated the child's affection through bribes, gifts, and games.

This process of manipulation is based on important differences in maturity levels, without which the manipulation wouldn't work. The child is at a disadvantage here: He or she has no idea of the offender's intentions, no way to know that the affection expressed isn't genuine, and no recognition of the techniques used to manipulate him or her. Most writers who defend pedophilia—Rind, Bauserman, and Levine, for example—simply pretend this kind of manipulation does not occur and that children and adolescents are equal partners with adults in sexual activities.

However, Harris Mirkin takes a different view. An associate professor at Kansas State University, he wrote an article that compared the "oppression" of pedophiles to the oppression of women and homosexuals. Evidently aware of the extent to which pedophiles manipulate adolescents, he simply justified it.

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

It is only legitimate to coerce pubescents and teens not to have sex. It is argued that they cannot give consent, that they cannot enjoy sex even if they think that they do, and that they suffer physical and psychological harm, even if they are not aware of it. . . .⁸⁸

In other words, why not manipulate adolescents into having sex, much as we put pressure on kids to do their homework or brush their teeth?

The old gang would be proud—Abraham, Virkunen, Revitch and Weiss, Bender and Blau, Lukianowicz, Henderson—everyone who minimized child sexual abuse, denied the role of the offender, and put all the responsibility on the children for “participating.” Child sexual abuse is once again “infantile sexual acting out.” Besides, sex between men and children—these new advocates tell us—doesn’t do any harm, anyway, and we’re just being moralistic by calling it “abuse.”

Even the old invective is back. This time it is less often attacking the children or even the mothers, although some have done so. This time the invective is mostly for those who evaluate or treat abused children or advocate for them. In Rind’s world we are “religious and moralistic zealots” attacking the modern equivalents of Galileo and Darwin.

In Levine’s world, Andrew Vachss, the attorney and mystery writer, becomes a “sex-thriller writer,”⁸⁹ although if there is anything Vachss doesn’t do, it’s describe sex with children in any way that makes it “thrilling.” Joyanna Silberg, a former president of the International Society for the Study of Dissociation, is described as “discredited,” although she’s never even had a board complaint filed against her, and her reputation is solid among her peers.⁹⁰ And when referring to Adam Walsh, a six-year-old boy whose head was found floating in a canal, Levine writes that his case “helped spur the creation of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and (some say) the career of his father,”⁹¹ a comment that is as callous as it is offensive.

The hostility to children and those who advocate for them continues. The attempt to minimize and deny the reality and impact of child sexual abuse is alive and kicking.