

Deviants and Dissidents: Children's Sexuality and the Limits of Liberation

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## Dedication

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This dissertation is dedicated to Seth and Pearlana Patters with love.

## Abstract

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My dissertation takes the child as its focus to understand both liberation politics and social conservative movements in the postwar United States. I reveal that, even as leftist social movements viewed children as possessing “sexuality” and argued for the liberation of children’s sexual expression, they simultaneously invoked the child as a vulnerable figure who must be protected from sexual abuse and violence in a dangerous postwar culture. Ultimately, the protectionist rhetoric about children’s sexuality proved more powerful and influential than the liberatory rhetoric, in large part because it shared features with the burgeoning rhetoric of the religious right, who found political power in a broad call to “save the children.” My analysis of these competing rhetorical frameworks reveals the ways in which the child came to structure late-20<sup>th</sup>-century political discourse by marking the limits of liberation. Using children’s sexuality as a point of entry into postwar political activism, my dissertation sheds light on the evolution of political identities. Ultimately, my work highlights the shrinking of progressive political possibilities and the emergence of a consolidated conservative political discourse.

This dissertation argues that 1970s social movement groups’ attention to and use of the figure of the child, particularly children’s sexuality, was central to their efforts to advance liberatory frameworks. I trace the ways that three Boston groups—the Boston Women’s Health Collective, the Elizabeth Stone House, and the North American Man/Boy Love Association—organized around issues of children’s sexuality. Each adopted seemingly altruistic child-focused agendas that were used to benefit the groups’ adult members. In advancing these agendas, group members participated in the creation of a symbolic child-victim whose invocation would become a means of foreclosing political debate and establishing a cultural consensus of protection in the 1980s. In the end, the figure of the child that was so central to liberatory movements of the 1970s was the very thing that limited their vocabularies and contained their agendas by the 1980s. Rather than focusing on a single movement, this project demonstrates that the child repeatedly emerged as a political tool in leftist activism and argues that this figure shaped the boundaries of liberation and the content of radicalism.

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## Deviants and Dissidents: Children's Sexuality and the Limits of Liberation

On the opening page of her controversial text, Judith Levine described a mounting panic about children's sexuality announcing, "In America today, it is nearly impossible to publish a book that says children and teenagers can have sexual pleasure and be safe too."<sup>1</sup> The heated debate in which Levine found herself after the publication of *Harmful to Minors* supported her assertion.<sup>2</sup> This dissertation attempts to address how children's safety came to be defined in terms of their removal from sexual subjectivity.

This dissertation argues that 1970s social movement groups' attention to and use of the figure of the child, particularly children's sexuality, was central to their efforts to advance libratory frameworks. I trace the ways that three Boston groups—the Boston Women's Health Collective, the Elizabeth Stone House, and the North American Man/Boy Love Association—organized around issues of children's sexuality. These seemingly altruistic child-focused agendas were used to benefit the adult members of each of these groups. In advancing these agendas, they participated in the creation of a symbolic child-victim whose invocation would become a means of foreclosing political debate and establishing a cultural consensus of protection in the 1980s. In the end, the figure of the child that was so central to libratory movements of the 1970s was the very thing that limited their vocabularies and contained their agendas by the 1980s.

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Levine, *Harmful to Minors: The Perils of Protecting Children from Sex* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2002), xix.

<sup>2</sup> After facing difficulties securing a publisher for her book, Levine got a contract with the University of Minnesota Press. Both the Levine and the Press encountered resistance from conservatives. For Levine, this included being vilified in conservative publications and on conservative talk shows, including *The O'Reilly Factor*, on which she was a guest. The Press was picketed and threatened with budget cuts and the implementation of an oversight board to approve all publication decisions. For more information on the controversy surrounding the publication of the book, see the afterward by Levine in the paperback edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).



Scholars have long accepted that the 1970s and 80s represented a time of political transformation for the American left as well as the broader political society. In the '70s America's continued participation in Viet Nam and Nixon's resignation of the presidency furthered public disillusionment with the government even as grass roots feminist and civil rights groups' messages began being reflected in wider cultural circles.<sup>3</sup> By the 1980s, Reagan's election signaled the growth of American conservatism and marked a broader turn away from the radical politics of the preceding decades.<sup>4</sup> The years between 1969 and 1990 also witnessed profound sexual reorganization in the U.S., which has not yet been adequately examined for the ways that its attention to children reshaped sexual discourse. Sociologist Joel Best noted, "Most historians agree that modernization has increased adults' concern for children's well-being...However, during the 1970s and 1980s, child-victims began receiving a larger share of public attention."<sup>5</sup> The close of the sexual revolution, the ascendancy of its conservative backlash, and academic and political culture wars all centrally positioned sexuality. Indeed, the social and political upheaval that characterized the period may account for the increased focus on sexuality within popular discourse. As feminist scholar Gayle Rubin noted, "Disputes over sexual behavior often become the

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 2001). See also Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of the Eighties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Bruce Schulman, ed., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Joel Best, *Threatened Children: Rhetoric and Concern about Child-Victims*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 5-6.

vehicles for displacing social anxieties, and discharging their attendant emotional intensity.”<sup>6</sup>

Issues of children’s sexuality in this period came to dominate national and local media, as sexuality became the battleground on which culture wars were waged within grass-roots political organizations as well as the academy. Defending against an increasingly conservative political regime and navigating a fractured political landscape, varied leftist groups attempted to advance their own frameworks of sexual freedom. I challenge established narratives about both the waning of the New Left and the rise of the New Right advanced by Ruth Rosen, Gregory Schneider, Nigel Young, and others who oppose the factioning and discontinuity on the left with the establishment of a coalition between social and economic conservatives on the right.<sup>7</sup> Instead, I argue that attention to children and youth was at the heart of the collapse of leftist sexual politics. I contend that groups on the left were unable to advance cohesive agendas when faced with applying their libratory frameworks to children. The figure of the child became central to group efforts to perform radicalism, even as its deployment was increasingly linked to more conservative protectionist political paradigms.

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<sup>6</sup> Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality” in Carole S. Vance, ed., *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Sexuality* (1984) reprinted in Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, David M. Halperin eds., *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 4.  
<sup>7</sup> On the consolidation and rise of the New Right, see Gregory Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of the Contemporary Right*, (New York: New York University Press, 1999). Jason Michael Stahl, *Selling Conservatism: Think Tanks, Conservative Ideology, and the Undermining of Liberalism, 1945-Present*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2008. Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*; and Bruce Schulman, ed., *Rightward Bound*. On Feminism in this period, see Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000) and Sara Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century’s End* (New York: Free Press, 2003). For scholarship on the New Left see: John Patrick Diggins, *The Rise and Fall of the American Left*, (New York: W.W.Norton, 1992); McMillian and Buhle, eds., *The New Left Revisited*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003).

At the heart of the project is my analysis of the activists and social movement groups whose strategic maneuverings centered the child within anti-violence rhetoric and liberatory frameworks. A range of social movement organizations from feminist groups like The Boston Women's Health Collective and The Elizabeth Stone House to radical queer groups like the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) focused on issues of children's sexuality as part of broader contests over the nature of violence and the meaning of liberation. Activists' skirmishes over a variety of sexual issues including pornography, inter-generational sex, and mental health diagnostic criteria reshaped the political landscape by redefining radicalism and redrawing the boundaries of the left.

Inspired in part by a feminist ethos that encouraged women to claim ownership of their own bodies, the Boston Women's Health Collective applied the feminist doctrine, "the personal is political," to women's health care, arguing that when a woman learned about her own body, it was a political act that both empowered the woman and challenged the patriarchal system of medical experts.<sup>8</sup> The group's first major publication, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1973), was credited with starting a global women's health movement, and the group itself was the on vanguard of patients' rights advocacy.<sup>9</sup> Though their primary educational work was directed at women, the Collective nevertheless participated in debates about children with their endorsement of alternative birthing and child-care techniques as well as their belief in early and

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<sup>8</sup> For scholarly treatments of the Collective and *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, see: Kathy Davis, *The Making of Our Bodies, Ourselves: How Feminism Travels Across Borders* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); and Wendy Kline, "The Making of Our Bodies, Ourselves: Rethinking Women's Health and Second-Wave Feminism," in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*, ed. Stephanie Gilmore (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 63-83.

<sup>9</sup> Sheryl Ruzek, "Transforming doctor-patient relationships," *Journal of Health Services Research and Policy*. Vol. 12 No 3, July 2007.

comprehensive sexual education. Indeed, their attention to sexuality and to children, even more than their challenges to the medical establishment, was considered by contemporaries on both sides of the political spectrum to be among their most radical positions. This radical attention to children was couched within a maternalist framework in which empowered mothers could liberate themselves and their children from a culture of repression.

Similarly invested in patients' rights, women's health care, and motherhood, the Elizabeth Stone House was another feminist health organization in Boston. The product of a 1973 conference on women and madness, the Stone House opened in 1974 to provide women with an alternative to state institutionalization.<sup>10</sup> The only residential psychiatric facility that allowed women to maintain physical custody of their children, the Stone House reframed women's "madness" as a rational though distressed response to the pressures of living in a violently sexist society. That it did so while maintaining mothers' custodial rights was viewed by staffers as a particularly radical act. Since many Stone House clients were victims of sexual violence, the organization had a particular stake in and approach to sexual politics that was reflected in many of its programs and policies. Because it housed the children of women facing emotional distress, the Stone House developed protocols for everything from educational play to guidelines for and restrictions on dating for older children. In as much as the Stone House rejected psychiatric diagnostic criteria, established alternative frameworks for

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<sup>10</sup> The Stone House is discussed in greater detail in chapter two of this dissertation. For Stone House sources, see: Ann Beckert, Deborah Linnell, and Katrina Pope, *The Elizabeth Stone House Handbook: Sheltering People in Emotional Distress*, (Jamaica Plain, 1991); and Elizabeth Stone House Staff, *Women & Crazy: Oral Histories by the Residents of the Elizabeth Stone House*, (Jamaica Plain, MA, 1986).

care, and linked women's mental distress to broader issues of poverty and violence, it situated itself within several leftist struggles.

In opposition to the maternalist frameworks advanced by the Boston Women's Health Collective and the Elizabeth Stone House, the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) challenged ownership models that gave parents absolute authority over their children, claiming that American parents were unable to provide for the social and sexual needs of their (boy) children.<sup>11</sup> Positioning themselves as part of a gay liberation movement, NAMBLA's 1978 inaugural conference identified the platform of the group as bringing an end to the repression of consensual sexual relationships, particularly those between adult men and minor-aged boys. Because of the intensity of political opposition it faced as well as its virtual inability to create successful coalitions with other groups on the left, NAMBLA founders argued that their group represented the most radical position in sexual liberation.

Because of their proximity to each other and their particular aims, these three groups provide ideal case studies in a project that seeks to reveal the centrality of the child both to activism on the left and to the shrinking possibilities of that activism. Founded in Boston in the 1970s each was equally invested in local and national politics. In their efforts to effect cultural change, members of the groups linked their fate with that of the child. For the Boston Women's Health Collective, this translated into advancing specific parenting and educational models. For the Stone House it meant recognizing both the possibilities and the limitations of motherhood while attempting to

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<sup>11</sup> For first-person accounts of NAMBLA history, see: John Mitzel, *The Boston Sex Scandal* (Boston: GLAD Day Books, 1980); and David Thorstad, *A Withchunt Foiled: The FBI vs. NAMBLA*, (New York: NAMBLA, 1985)

change a culture that was hostile to women and children. NAMBLA members sought to free gay boys from the repression that constrained their abilities to act on their sexual desires. In their efforts to advance social change, these groups rallied around an imperiled child, one that was victimized by sexual violence, poverty, and repression. Indeed, I contend that these groups used the figure of the child to advance agendas from which members would benefit.

Together these three groups, each with a different understanding of radicalism and its own contribution to leftist politics, offer a window into the multiple ways that the tenets of the sexual revolution were applied to children and the extent to which contests over the sexuality of children forged or broke alliances in activist politics. This study analyzes the ways that the politics of the left in the 1970s and '80s were shaped by debates over children's sexuality. The very idea that children have sexuality is politically contentious, and the frequency with which politicians, reformers and other activists rally around issues of child sexuality suggests that the stakes of the debate are particularly high.<sup>12</sup> Political discourse that seeks to address children's sexuality has much work to do: it must clearly define the figure of the child; it must successfully engage with the emotional intensity attached to that figure; and it must identify the figure as innocent or incorrigible and in so doing establish a need to protect children from the dangers posed by society or protect society from the dangers posed by

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<sup>12</sup> By Freud's own account *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) was one of his two most significant intellectual contributions. The 1915 addition of "the sexual theories of children and the pre-genital organizations of the libido" in which Freud concluded that "sexual impulses operated normally in the youngest children without any need for outside stimulation" was considered to be among his most controversial premises. See: Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1962), xiii-xviii. For more recent examples of repercussions faced by those who publicly discuss children's sexuality, see: Joycelyn Elders, "The Dreaded 'M; Word'" *Nerve* 1997; and Judith Levine, *Harmful to Minors* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), especially introduction.

unchecked youth. Each of the movements examined in this study performs this work. Moreover, their use of the child to advance their own libratory agendas highlights the lasting political significance connected to the figure as well as the ways that it was used to define the politics of the left throughout the 1970s.

The figure of the child that drew the attention of politicians and reformers in the 1970s and 80s was the focus of American labor, educational and moral reformers throughout the century. These activists, along with medical, developmental and psychological experts, defined the child with increasing numbers of attributes and vulnerabilities. Some argued for an acknowledgement of sexuality in infants and children, while others demanded recognition of the particular emotional and psychological needs of children, and still others advanced sweeping educational reforms to address the physical, intellectual and moral character of children.<sup>13</sup> In each of these cases, the figure of the child was expanded to include sexuality, rationality, sensibility and the vulnerabilities associated with their mishandling.

Not surprisingly, given its place in the politics of reform, the figure of the child was the object of emotional intensity in the American psyche. The developments of the modern world at the turn of the century and the changing political landscape near century's end both contributed to transforming cultural attitudes about children. As children's labor was regulated, as their education was expanded, and as young people of greater ages were (re)categorized as "children," both personal and public perceptions of

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<sup>13</sup> See especially chapter one of this dissertation. For specific "expert" opinions, see: Emmett Holt, *The Care and Feeding of Children*, (New York: D Appleton and Company, 1929) 14<sup>th</sup> ed; John B. Watson, *Psychological Care of Infant and Child*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1928); see also: Geoffrey H. Steere, "Freudianism and Child-Rearing in the Twenties," *American Quarterly* Vol. 20, No. 4, 759-760; and Thomas S Popkewitz., ed., *Inventing the Modern Self and John Dewey: Modernities and the Traveling Pragmatism in Education* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

the child were sites of contest. Indeed, Viviana Zelizer argued that the emotional attachment to children increased as their economic value to the family declined.<sup>14</sup> Invested with greater emotional intensity, the figure of the child was the object of an increasing amount of public reform measures.

So-called “youth crises” erupted throughout the century, leading politicians and reformers to grapple with innocent and vulnerable children on the one hand and incorrigible delinquents on the other. To address the perceived causes of child corruption, disruptive moral influences like comic books, pornography and rock/rap music had to be contained, while education and family structure were constantly scrutinized for deficiencies.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, youth participation in activist politics from newspaper boys’ agitation in the 30s to adolescent anti-war protesters in the 60s and 70s also raised questions about vulnerability and delinquency. To the extent that young dissidents were exploited, they required protection and intervention. However, when their dissident practices became disruptive, children and youth were transformed from a vulnerable population into a threatening one. That is, as young people began to agitate on their own behalf rather than being passive recipients of adult reform movements, the “deserving vs. delinquent” binary was further complicated. At times when the broader atmosphere was suspicious of dissident politics, the conundrum posed by youth activism became a serious political issue that invigorated two kinds of political

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<sup>14</sup> Viviana Z. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> For public debates and controversy surrounding comic books, see: Andrea Friedman, *Prurient Interests: Gender, Democracy, and Obscenity in New York City, 1909-1945*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). For treatment of the danger pornography and rap music pose to youth, see: Drucilla Cornell, ed., *Feminism and Pornography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).



approaches from adults: the first a politics of protection, the other a politics marked by fear of disruption.

Though typically associated with conservative movements, these protectionist and fearful political positions were advanced by groups on the left when they dealt with children. Paradoxically, leftist groups often adopted several of the models of children advanced by their right-wing contemporaries. On the right, groups like the Moral Majority focused on protecting children, couching their agenda not only in terms of child vulnerability but also in terms of the inherent innocence of children. At the same time, activists like Anita Bryant frequently cited how dangerous “corrupted” youth were.<sup>16</sup> Leftist critiques of these right-wing political approaches often claimed that innocence was most frequently applied to affluent, white children while children of color and those living in poverty were perceived as dangerous.<sup>17</sup> Despite some rhetorical overlap with right-wing models of the child, the groups examined in this dissertation were part of a broader leftist investment in conservative models of childhood innocence and protection.

To say that the figure of the child was a rhetorical tool that found its way into so much political organizing in the twentieth century is not to ignore the realities of (sexual) exploitation and erasure that faced American children. Rather, it is to acknowledge the ways that political discourses of children’s sexuality participated in and indeed sometimes produced that exploitation and erasure. Foregrounding

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<sup>16</sup> Anita Bryant, *The Anita Bryant Story: The Survival of Our Nation’s Families and the Threat of Militant Homosexuality*, (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1977).

<sup>17</sup> It should also be noted that within this framework the “dangerous” populations required higher levels of surveillance and intervention to contain the threat they posed to the broader society and to encourage them to conform to the standards set by affluent whites.

children's sexual victimization established a paradigm in which children's sexual subjectivity was virtually unthinkable, just as fighting against children's sexual repression endorsed ideas of sexual precocity that made allegations of abuse less credible.<sup>18</sup> For example, when they replaced the precocious *Lolita* nymphet with an exploited and abused incest survivor, feminists merely substituted one paradigm with another. The "child-victim" around which they rallied assumed great cultural purchase and was codified in several new laws including the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974.<sup>19</sup> Through an investigation of the groups that advanced these positions, this study exposes the ways that debates about child sexuality were used to shape the project of American political dissent.

This, then, is a study of dissident politics. Focusing on radical movements for liberation and their organizing around issues of children's sexuality, I unpack the ways that debates about children, sex and violence within leftist politics in the 1970s contributed to the narrowing of leftist politics in the 1980s. It is the central claim of this dissertation that the child came to mark the limits of liberation. That is, despite their rhetorical reliance on the figure of the child, liberatory movements in the United States were unable to apply their principles across boundaries of age. As they advanced different models of liberation, social movement groups fought to (re)define the child in terms of victimization, both active and repressive. These efforts often relied upon anti-violence rhetoric that expanded the cultural meaning of violence. Through their approaches to liberation, each of the groups that I investigate coalesced

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<sup>18</sup> Steven Angelides, "Feminism, Child Sexual Abuse, and the Erasure of Child Sexuality," in *GLQ* 10:2, 141-177.

<sup>19</sup> In addition to lobbying for the introduction of new laws, several groups fought to increase the criminal penalties attached to existing statutory rape and incest statutes.

around a rejection of the violence that was visited upon it and the figure of the child it deployed. The role of child protector thus became central to the libratory agendas of these social movement groups.

Members of these groups were not alone in centering issues of children's sexuality within popular and political culture. Indeed, beginning in the 1960s when several states adopted lower age of consent laws and continuing through the much-publicized sexual abuse trials of the 1980s, children's sexuality captured popular imagination and shaped political discourse.<sup>20</sup> On the one hand, the controversy and publicity that surrounded the McMartin pre-school trial on the west coast, allegations of ritualistic satanic sexual abuse in Jordan, Minnesota and the prosecution of a father and son for pedophilia in Philadelphia suggests that cities and towns across the United States were equally subject to the hysteria of child sex scandals.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, however, the median age of models dropped and beauty pageants for younger children expanded. Television, film, radio and fiction writing reflected this cultural ambivalence about the role of the child in a modern world.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> As early as the 1960s, six states (New York, Hawaii, Illinois, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and South Dakota) began to recognize children's sexual behavior through the implementation of lower age of consent laws. By the 1970s, these laws were joined by new federal and state statutes designed to protect children from physical and sexual misuse—i.e. Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974 and the Kildee Murphy (Child Pornography) Bill of 1977. The development of these two sets of laws parallels increasingly public intellectual and political debates about children's sexuality. At the same time, child abuse scandals like the McMartin Preschool Trial, the controversy with the Minneapolis Children's Theater, and others reveal the cultural tension associated with expanding young people's sexual freedom.

<sup>21</sup> Phillip Jenkins, *Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); and Joel Best, *Threatened Children* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

<sup>22</sup> The McMartin Trial was made into a TV movie, *Indictment: The McMartin Trial* (1995); the case in Jordan Minnesota became the subject of a song, "Jordan Minnesota" performed by Big Black; and the documentary film, *Capturing the Friedman's* (2003) outlined the Pennsylvania case. In the two films, produced years after the originating scandals, the accused are presented as victims of public hysteria rather than perpetrators of crimes against children. The song, for which an original performance date is

The body of this project uses a local community—Boston—to elaborate on this broader cultural preoccupation with children’s sexuality. Boston has functioned as a prominent site in public discussion of children’s sexual exploitation and liberation. For the years under examination, Boston’s children consistently receive national attention because of the implementation of school busing, the sexual misconduct of members of the Boston Catholic archdiocese, the publishing of the Boston Women’s Health Collective’s *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, and the emergence of the North American Man/Boy Love Association in response to the prosecution of an alleged pedophile ring. My own interest grew not only from these defining features of the city, but also from my belief that a close study of a particular region would offer historicized and contextual grounding for an object of inquiry—children’s sexuality—that is most often embedded in abstract theoretical discussion.

Cultural understandings of and scholarship about sexuality have long been inextricably linked to shifting concepts of childhood (and age in general) in the United States. Despite this, historians have been reluctant to examine these linkages. This avoidance is particularly troubling given that debates about children are situated at the center of popular contests over the meaning and regulation of sexuality and sexual behavior. By historicizing these issues, I shed light on processes usually clouded by scandal—the performance of radicalism, the narrowing of political participation, and the use of the child to achieve these ends.

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not apparent, dates closer to the event it commemorates and is far more condemning of the accused. These pop-cultural cases follow the same trajectory as scholarship, which was initially protectionist and then became increasingly suspicious of the abuse claims of the 1980s.

Historians have written about the emergence of childhood as a developmental or chronological category, about its subsequent conflation with innocence, and its eventual location in the center of a realm of protection. As an ideological construct, childhood has been examined for the ways it interacts with labor, economic and gender systems, while the child himself has been identified as a site of cultural reproduction.<sup>23</sup> Despite this scholarly attention to children and childhood, and despite recent scandals in the Catholic Church and a proliferation of high-profile kidnapping/sexual assault cases that have re-centered debates about children and sex, few have undertaken an historical analysis of children's sexuality and the problems and possibilities its recognition inspires.

Histories of childhood were originally pursued as part of studying families. The child emerged as an independent object of study, and childhood itself was scrutinized when historians investigated the changing experiences of children and shifting attitudes directed towards them. In the 1960s, when new social history turned scholarly attention to the "private side" of life, histories of childhood changed from earlier accounts that focused on labor to include the child's role in the family structure, the cultural and emotional meaning attached to children, and the expansion of developmental categories to define as children people of greater ages.<sup>24</sup> Even the study of childlessness became an opportunity to investigate the ways that having children

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<sup>23</sup> On constructions of children's purity, see: Levine, *Harmful to Minors*. On age of consent laws, see: Philip Jenkins, *Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). On sexual panics and male sexual deviance, see: Lisa Dugan and Nan Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* New York: 1995; and Estelle Freedman, "Uncontrolled Desires": The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960" in *The Journal of American History* 74 (1987): 83-106.

<sup>24</sup> See especially review essays and contents in *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* as well as Leena Alanen, "Review Essay: Visions of a Social Theory of Childhood," in *A Global Journal of Child Research* (November 2000) vol. 7 no. 4, 493-505

aided the performance of mature adulthood.<sup>25</sup> Most recently, studies of childhood have contended with the political origins and significance of changing models of childhood.

Like the history of childhood, the history of sexuality developed as a field interested in “private life” and emerging from older studies of family. With its interest in courtship and reproduction, the history of sexuality had to contend with age from its inception. Despite this, attention to children’s sexual subjectivity remains limited.<sup>26</sup> Instead, historians of sexuality moved from studying ideologies propagated by elites to investigating the behaviors practiced by real people.<sup>27</sup> Just as the history of childhood examined the emergence of new developmental categories like adolescence, the history of sexuality explored the development of sexual identity categories like homosexual and heterosexual. For historians of sexuality, however, this attention led to studies of resistance and political activism.<sup>28</sup> Recent scholarship in the history of sexuality borrows from queer and cultural studies to investigate “normal” and “natural” meanings attached to sexual behavior. Moreover, scholars have understood these questions as part of broader structural apparatuses like law, policy and medicine.

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<sup>25</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Barren in the Promised Land: Childless Americans and the Pursuit of Happiness*, (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> For an exception to this, see Angelides, “Feminism, Child Sexual Abuse and the Erasure of Child Sexuality.” It should be noted that recent scholarship in cultural studies has begun to explore children’s sexuality, though literary rather than historical methodologies are usually employed. See: Steven Bruhm and Nancy Hurley, eds., *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Early studies focused on Victorian life and its attendant sexual repression. Eventually, scholars moved away from prescriptive literature to use an alternative set of sources (letters, diaries, etc.). This move prompted them to challenge older interpretations of Victorianism and to push the “sexual revolution” further back in time. For review essays, see: Estelle Freedman, “History of the Family and of Sexuality,” in *The New American History, Revised and Expanded Edition*, Eric Foner, ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).

<sup>28</sup> See especially: Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr., eds., *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: NAL Books, 1989); George Chauncey, Jr., *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

Building on this scholarship, my project situates children and sexuality at the heart of public controversy and political change. At the same time, however, my project breaks with existing scholarship in several important ways. Since it is not, strictly speaking, a history of childhood, this dissertation does not concern itself with detailing the lived realities of American children. Instead, I use children's sexuality as a point of entry to understand the evolution of national and political identities and to explain the relationships between violence and liberation, and between radicalism and deviance. Intervening in the historiography of the left, I put histories of sexuality, childhood, and social movements into conversation with each other and with cultural studies discourse analyses. While historians have undertaken discursive analysis of social movements, most have placed the rhetoric of children's sexuality on the periphery, failing to explore the ways that it was deployed to expand discourses of violence while contracting discourses of liberation. Rather than focus on a single movement, this project demonstrates that the child repeatedly emerged as a political tool in leftist activism and argues it shaped the boundaries of liberation and the content of radicalism.

Before I describe the organization of the chapters that follow, I must introduce the concept of "radicalism" that informs this study. Each of the groups that I examine claimed membership in a radical leftist political community, however, the content of radicalism from its political extremism to its cultural performance, was contested by these groups. The women of the Elizabeth Stone House eschewed not only NAMBLA members' political agenda but also the validity of their claims to be brothers in a leftists struggle. For their part, the men of the North American Man/Boy Love Association

were reluctant to ally themselves with feminists whose politics they saw as almost universally conservative and narrow. Nevertheless, the label “radical” was as central to each group’s political identity as the figure of the child was to its programmatic reforms. In my analysis of their rhetoric and activities I pay particular attention to their understandings of and approaches to radicalism. At the same time, I also foreground what I call the pathologization of radical protest: the paradigm that defines dissent as pathology. The title *Deviants and Dissidents* acknowledges the import of this process on the perception and history of dissident activists in general and those engaged in activism around children and sexuality in particular.

Neither “violence” nor “child,” though used repeatedly, can easily be defined here. In fact, this study will reveal the contests that erupted over the definitions of those two terms. The actors examined herein sought to define violence so that they could be perceived as persecuted radicals, and to define the child in ways that would further that perception and curtail opposition to their political agenda. My examination of these debates draws heavily from the scholarship in queer studies which critiques stable binaries—male and female, gay and straight—and allows me to challenge naturalized assumptions about the distinction between child and adult.<sup>29</sup>

With this project, I establish the emergence of the modern child whose modernity is linked not only to its ability to symbolize progressive nationalism but also, and importantly, to its existence as a sexualized being. Broadly exploitable, this new modern child was seized upon by feminists, boy-lovers, anti-pornography activists, and

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<sup>29</sup> Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Lisa Duggan, “Making It Perfectly Queer,” *Socialist Review* 22, no. 1 (1992): 11-31; and Donna Penn, “Queer: Theorizing Politics and History,” *Radical History Review* 62 (spring 1995): 24-42.



the newly consolidated moral majority. Through their attention to children's sexuality, each of these groups grappled with expanding public perceptions of what constituted violence while advancing distinctive libratory frameworks. My analysis of these competing frameworks reveals the ways in which the child came to structure political discourse by marking the limits of liberation. Thus, my dissertation reveals the shrinking of progressive political possibilities and the emergence of a consolidated conservative political agenda. I use the child to expose both the legacy of progressivism and the rise of conservatism, arguing that violence compelled libratory activist groups to act while the figure of the child marked the boundaries of their actions.

The following chapters spotlight my interest in understanding how discursive contests over children's sexuality came to define the contours of radical leftist political activism. In each chapter I examine the language and actions of particular groups to expose the ways that the child functioned to authorize libratory agendas and to legitimize claims to radicalism. Organized chronologically the first three chapters introduce the modern child and the groups whose activities revolved around it. The final chapter considers the ways in which anti-violence rhetoric was used to shape debates about children and liberation. Taken together, these chapters demonstrate that debates about children's sexuality are central to an historical understanding of post-WWII feminism, domestic dissent, and American attitudes about violence. My examination of social movement organizations in the 1970s and '80s exposes the ways that ideas about children's sexuality shaped local politics by redefining what constituted violence and advancing new ideas for liberation from it.

Chapter 1: *'The Century of the Child': Expert Literature and the Modern Child*

roughly spans the years from the 1890s to the 1940s to explain the conceptual symbol of this dissertation: the modern child. In this chapter I examine the development and dissemination of competing models of childhood by placing experts' advice about the regulation of children's sexuality in conversation with broader social and political changes in early twentieth century America. I use child development literature as an entryway into changing ideas about the child, and I focus on sexuality as a particularly modern problematic in discourses of development. Ultimately, I argue that attention to children and sexuality was politicized and used as part of broader efforts to imagine a progressive narrative of American national development.

I begin in the progressive era not because the groups examined in this dissertation replicate programmatic reforms from the earlier period, but because the intellectuals and reformers of that era introduced debates that continued to shape the language of politics to century's end. That is, in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, activists and reformers advanced competing definitions of liberty and community in their efforts to address the problems of modern, industrialized society. These debates framed subsequent generations of activists, reformers, politicians, and intellectuals.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, conceptual arguments about the redefinition of liberty and community were centrally concerned with education and welfare, systems that necessarily focused on children and families. My examination of this earlier period establishes the contours of political debate and introduces the contested terms that ground the larger work—child, liberation, violence.

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<sup>30</sup> Marc Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problems of the State*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Chapter 2: *Women and Children First: Second-Wave Maternalism and the Politics of Health* looks at The Boston Women's Health Collective and The Elizabeth Stone House, two feminist organizations involved in the women's health movement, to argue that "second-wave" feminist activism made strategic political use of the figure of the child and the role of the mother. By arguing that fulfilled women—those who had access to education, careers, birth control, and other means of equality—made better mothers, these groups connected many of the feminist causes of the 1970s and 80s with a revised vision of maternalism. This new maternalism abandoned earlier moral and biological arguments to focus instead on women's fulfillment. This shift eased the tension between maternalist particularity and feminist equality by making individualism the central component of motherhood. With a maternalist rhetoric the primary focus of which was on women rather than children, activists in this period were able to radicalize maternalism instead of using it to contain pre-existing radical politics.

I argue that second-wave feminists, though not typically understood as maternalist, attempted to recast victimhood, to re-imagine familial bonds, and to reshape dominant models of health as part of a particular understanding of the child and of a maternalist rhetoric that united women and children. Focusing on debates about sexual development, parenting and the sexual vulnerability, I trace the ways that feminist approaches to the politics of health and the body were steeped in a maternalist pairing of women and children. Within their educational and social service agendas, members of the Boston Women's Health Collective and The Elizabeth Stone House advanced a radical politics of health that nevertheless had to contend with the conservative treatment of children. I argue that their coupling of women with children

was symptomatic of a broader crisis within leftist politics where increasingly protectionist narratives about children undermined broader leftist liberatory agendas.

Chapter 3: *Save the Children: The North American Man/Boy Love Association and the Politics of Rights* unpacks NAMBLA's mission and actions to demonstrate the ways that the group's definition of liberation challenged the politics of the left and the boundaries of dissent. Beginning in the late 1970s, the nascent North American Man/Boy Love Association argued that the modern child should share fully in the rights, privileges, and liberties of democratic citizenship. Presenting the child as an autonomous agent, NAMBLA challenged family and state ownership models that focused on safeguarding children rather than ensuring their freedom. In addition to fighting to liberate children from state endorsed sexual repression, NAMBLA members also fought a battle to be recognized by other groups on the left as participants in a shared radical struggle. Rejected by other homosexual groups as pathological and by feminist groups as exploitative, NAMBLA members nevertheless framed their political mission as the hallmark of radical leftist activism. In as much as NAMBLA members imagined themselves as the proper saviors of boys, they challenged the province of reformers, legislators, doctors, politicians and even parents to provide for the social and sexual needs of children.

I argue that NAMBLA capitalized on cultural ambivalence about the proper treatment of children to introduce frameworks that disrupted the foundations of American social and political life. The group highlighted the inadequacies and hypocrisies of a system of laws that rested on erroneous assumptions about gender and the universality of heterosexuality. NAMBLA also challenged the role of the family as

a political and economic unit and sought to undermine the authority of parents therein. In so doing, NAMBLA represented an articulation of liberation that called for an extreme transformation of American culture and politics.

Chapter 4: *The Rise of the Child-Victim: Children's Vulnerability and the Changing Politics of Victims and Saviors* examines the ways that the groups from the preceding chapters framed themselves and the figure of the child as victims of violence and argued that their groups' missions contained the solution to the widespread cultural problem of child exploitation. I reveal the ways that the libratory politics involved not only battling persecution but also redefining what constituted violence within popular and political culture. That is, through the groups' various libratory strategies, violence against children became a site to illustrate the victimization of group members. For example, feminists framed poverty and rape culture as violent to women and children, just as NAMBLA presented the repression of child as a violation of both children and the men who loved them. Despite their investment in libratory politics, group members' use of the child to establish legitimacy forced them to adopt protectionist stances in addition to libratory ones.

To understand the coexisting liberation and protectionist stances, this chapter sheds light on the ways that "the victim" was described, defined and deployed on the American political stage and the extent to which children factored into political responses to and interpretations of victimization. By positioning themselves as both saviors of children and victims of the same violence that persecuted children, members of these social movement groups staked their legitimacy on occupying savior and victim positions simultaneously. This tension forced them to grapple with a radical politics of

liberation on the one hand and a conservative politics of protection on the other.

Finally, I explore the broader implications of this rhetorical shift toward protectionism by examining day-care abuse panics of the 1980s as evidence of a national consensus regarding child-victims. Ultimately, the figure of the child framed the limits of the libratory discourses advanced by these social movement groups, and their rhetorical reliance on that figure contributed to a broader shift towards a culture of (sexual) conservatism.

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This dissertation's investigation of the dissonance between the rhetoric of innocence surrounding childhood and attempts to acknowledge children as sexual beings locates the child at the center of a web of censorship, psychology, and (mis)education. These tensions refigure cultural mandates to protect children by differentiating between sexual innocence, which is celebrated, and sexual ignorance, which increases vulnerability and acts as a dangerous impediment to "appropriate" development. Thus the child exists as a sexed, if not wholly sexual, being; its erotic identity emerging slowly in response to carefully monitored stimuli, safeguarded from potential perversion. However, it is the space where sexuality in the child and the adult meet, the moment (or even the possibility) of a sexual encounter between the two, that is the locus of cultural anxiety. Adult-child sexual relationships, the eroticization of children for adults' sexual or consumer gratification, and the recognition of children's own sexual appetites crystallize American uneasiness with sexual maturation, desire, and the fragility of their own constructions of purity and innocence. This project focuses specifically on the ways that children's sexuality was defined in relation to

purity, sexual orientation, agency and victimization. By exploring the discursive and political battles waged by a varied cast of political actors in Boston, my research offers an analysis of the child's relationship to sexual discourse is centered within political debates and social movements. This is a study of the ways in which varied activist communities attempted to advance frameworks of sexual freedom while navigating the fractured landscape of the New Left and an increasingly conservative political regime in the 1970s and 80s.

## ‘The Century of the Child’: Expert Literature and the Modern Child

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*[N]othing will be different...[until] the whole of humanity awakens to the consciousness of the “holiness of generation.” This consciousness will make the central work of society the new race, its origin, its management, and its education; about these all morals, all laws, all social arrangements will be grouped. This will form the point of view from which all other questions will be judged, all other regulations made.*

—Ellen Key, *The Century of the Child*<sup>31</sup>

Originally published in German in 1894, Ellen Key’s *The Century of the Child* was translated into English and distributed on the American market by G.P. Putnam’s Sons in 1909. This text, like several others that crossed the Atlantic in the decades surrounding the turn of the century, positioned children at the center of numerous public debates. Social theorists and political activists argued that the resolution of societal ills depended upon *proper* attitudes towards child care. Strident disagreements arose about sex, emotional expressiveness, education and family structure, but it was the broader discourse itself that awakened the American public to the “holiness of generation” by making children “the central work of society.” American approaches to children, families, and sex transformed significantly as this public discourse linked categories of sexuality with child care in new and important ways. This new attention to children and sexuality was part of a broader shift in understanding and representing children and childhood. The figure of the child was reframed to address shifting ideas about and approaches to a host of issues from families and sex to labor and education. The modern child that emerged in this period maintained its cultural prominence throughout the twentieth century, in part because of its abilities both to represent and to address the concerns of a modern nation.

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<sup>31</sup> Ellen Key, *The Century of the Child* (New York: GP Putnam and Sons, 1909), 2-3.



The figure of the child that was centered within public discourse underwent significant transformation in the early decades of the twentieth century. Early-modern models of childhood which imagined the child as a kind of neutered, miniature adult were supplanted by a new model that focused on the special needs and vulnerabilities of children.<sup>32</sup> Children's particular emotional and psychological sensitivities were given increasing attention by a growing cadre of child development, child care, and parenting experts. At the same time, changing attitudes about human sexuality were evident in ways that these experts described the child's physiological development in relation to its psychological development. In fact, the prominence of sexuality—from sexual development to sexual desires—in narratives of child development represented a major shift in popular understandings of children, one that marked the modern child as a sexual being.

A series of cultural and historical developments combined to give rise to new kinds of experts on children and to provide these experts with an expanding audience of American parents. Authors of child care manuals benefitted from the widespread faith in science that characterized the progressive era and its celebration of a culture of experts. The proliferation of advice literature for parents was part of a broader trend of social-scientific reforms that promised remedies for social ills. The writings of Emmett Holt in the 1890s and those of John Watson in the 1920s were part of this progressive era effort to create a better society, and they offered new parenting methods as a means to achieve that end. Beyond the reach of progressivism, however,

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<sup>32</sup> See especially *The Journal on the History of Childhood and Youth*. See also, Tamara Hareven and Adrejs Palkans, eds., *Family History at a Crossroads: A Journal of Family History Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Peter Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth Century South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

child care manuals provide a way to trace shifting attitudes about the modern child. For example, Benjamin Spock, whose child care manuals gained prominence in the 1950s, provided an emotionally expressive alternative to the stark regimentation of Watsonian behaviorism, but the figure of the child he described did not deviate from that used by Watson. Despite shifts in approaches to child care, the figure of the child was remarkably stable.

This chapter traces the history of the figure of the child from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century in order to reveal how the child was being produced as an object that was subject to protection and management. I uncover the emergence of a new category of childhood, distinct from those that preceded it and marked by changing notions of sexuality and shifting family, state, and economic models. The figure of the child that surfaced in this period was a vulnerable one that had to be *nurtured* into a productive participant in American democratic capitalism. This new child was also understood as a sexual being, and its sexuality was a central factor in both its vulnerability and its management. Sexuality, as a category, has a long history of management. To the extent that the figure of the child was now understood to possess sexuality, its management assumed great purchase within social and political debates about childhood.

Child development manuals provide an ideal site to trace this process. These texts simultaneously define the figure of the child and its development while making prescriptions about its management. These manuals advance a model of progressive development from vulnerable child to mature and productive adult that are achieved through the proper management of children in infancy and early childhood. Through a

reading of experts' advice about managing children's sexual expression, I argue that management prefaces protection, that it operates on rhetorical and institutional levels to establish a language of vulnerability through the explication of childhood as a developmental process.

I begin my study with an examination of turn of the century child care literature in order to trace the emergence of the modern, sexual child that figures so centrally in the activism pursued by groups in the 1970s and '80s. These activists used the figure of the child that was developed at the opening of the century to advance their reforms, and writings about the child from the first half of the century operated as objects against which they defined their (radical) political orientation. Even their efforts to refine the contours of the figure of the child necessarily linked them to the earlier period and its texts about the role of children in the modern world. Put another way, the figure of the child that was popularized by child care experts at the beginning of the twentieth century maintained its cultural foothold, continuing to influence public discourse and political rhetoric to century's end.

My examination of the child as a managed entity owes much to debates within the history of childhood, the broader field of childhood studies, and recent scholarship on sexuality and age. To the extent that I reveal the ways in which the figure of the child was produced to meet specific cultural ends and was used as a political tool, I both draw from and expand upon existing scholarly literature. These bodies of scholarship make clear the distinctions between children's lived experiences on the one hand and the production and deployment of the figure of the child on the other. My work, which focuses primarily on the latter concern, is nevertheless steeped in an understanding of

the lives and actions of real children that is charted by the scholarship on the history of childhood.

As a field, the history of childhood is primarily concerned with uncovering children's lives and experiences and, when possible, their words. Indeed, historians of childhood are cautioned against producing work that Peter Stearns characterized as "involv[ing] adult filters...[and] be[ing] mainly centered on what adults were doing or saying about this or that aspect of children's lives, including, of course, what they were doing in such areas as law and policy."<sup>33</sup> In this regard, my study of the figure of the child as a rhetorical and political tool is not, strictly speaking, a history of childhood. However, despite my limited attention to the lived experiences of children, this discussion of the child as a managed entity is founded on existing scholarship that locates children at the center of national identity and cultural formation, focusing on children as students, as workers, and even as political participants.<sup>34</sup>

Beginning with the 1960s publication of Philippe Ariès's *Centuries of Childhood* historians of childhood have posited the child as a subject of cultural self-reflection and located children at the center of nation-building and national identity.<sup>35</sup> For example, essays contained in Herndon and Murray's edited volume argue that school and apprenticeships functioned to socialize young people into the demands of productive citizenship, while M.J. Maynes sees children's agency even within the

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<sup>33</sup> Peter Stearns, "Challenges in the History of Childhood" in *Journal on the History of Childhood and Youth* 1 (2008): 35-42, 36.

<sup>34</sup> Barbara Beatty, Emily D. Kahn, and Julia Grants eds., *When Science Encounters the Child: Education, Parenting, and Child Welfare in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2004)

<sup>35</sup> Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Knopf, 1962).

broader structural apparatuses of school and work.<sup>36</sup> I am deeply informed by this scholarship that both recognizes the nationalizing efforts applied to children and also highlights the ways that children (and families) resisted those efforts or shifted their focus. Indeed, my examination of child development manuals parallels much of the work on the history of education by focusing on efforts to institutionalize child-rearing in the home.<sup>37</sup>

Because children rarely leave records of themselves, historians and other scholars of childhood find evidence of children in prescriptive literature about child-rearing or education, in laws that legislate young people's behavior, in material culture that reveals children at play, and in a variety of other likely (and some less likely) places. My work is informed by this creative reading between the lines and by the example of women's historians who have long found evidence of women's presence within and influence upon institutions of power that rarely recorded their activities.

Though I share children's historians' interest in and methodological approaches to exploring the ways that institutions understand and respond to children, I am theoretically informed by the broader field of childhood studies. With roots in cultural studies, this interdisciplinary field of scholarship accepts the child as a construction the

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<sup>36</sup> Ruth Wallace Herndon and John E. Murray, *Children Bound to Labor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Stephen Lassoode, "Age and Authority: Adult-Child Relations during the Twentieth Century in the United States" in *Journal on the History of Childhood and Youth* 1 (2008): 95-105; Mary Jo Maynes, "Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood," in *Journal on the History of Childhood and Youth* 1 (2008): 114-124.

<sup>37</sup> Indeed, John Watson, whose child development manuals are discussed at length in this chapter, saw his manual as offering the next best thing to the formal institutionalization of child-care. See especially, John B. Watson, *Psychological Care of Infant and Child*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1928). See also Dewey's writings on education as national and social: John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Free Press), 81-99.

constitution and meaning of which vary depending upon time and place.<sup>38</sup> Scholars in this field claim that what constitutes a child and who can be considered one shift over time. Moreover, the construction and use of the figure of the child is understood to be embedded in broader cultural, political, and economic concerns.

Of particular interest to me are queer theorists like Lee Edelman whose concept of “reproductive futurism” describes the ways in which the Western concept of the political is dependent upon future-oriented progress symbolized by “the Child.” Edelman argues for embracing non-reproductive capacity as a social good and, consequently, driving political imperatives into the present rather than resting them on promises of future good.<sup>39</sup> The child development manuals discussed in this chapter as well as the examination of social movement rhetoric that follows bear out Edelman’s “reproductive futurism,” revealing again and again the social consensus that requires everyone to be “on the side of” children.

In recent years, historians of sexuality have also turned their attention to children. Complementing the work of queer theorists like Edelman and children’s historians like Stearns, this cohort of scholars has focused on the ways that age, particularly childhood and youth, intersect with sexuality. These scholars attend both to the production of childhood innocence and to its opposite, the presumed sexual precocity of children. Egan and Hawkes, for example, explore dominant Western constructions of the child and its sexuality in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,

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<sup>38</sup> See especially: Steven Mintz, “Reflections on Age as a Category of Analysis” in *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1 (2008): 91-94 in which Mintz argues that age, like gender, has categories and constructions that have shifted over time, and contains relationships of power. But Mintz also sees age as a more historically fluid category than gender.

<sup>39</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

arguing that discourses of protection eliminate the possibility of imagining children's sexual agency.<sup>40</sup>

My examination of child development literature reveals both the production of the figure of the child and also the ways that that figure was subject to management in order to ensure its future participation in capitalist democracy. Indeed, I read these texts not to find real children, as a historian of childhood might do, but to find the space between real children and adult imaginings of them. As such, I rely heavily upon the methods of historians of childhood to achieve a goal more appropriately located in the broader field of childhood studies. Finally, because I am focused on the figure of the child as a managed entity, I turn my attention to sexuality—a site in which management is the operative frame. For it is this idealized child, whose physical, psychological, and sexual development have been properly managed, that becomes central to our abilities to articulate our national and political identities.

### The Progressive Era, Sexual Education, and the **Creation of “the Child”**

I begin in the progressive era, then, not because the groups examined in this dissertation replicate programmatic reforms from the earlier period, but because the intellectuals and reformers of that era introduced debates that continued to shape the language of politics to century's end. That is, the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century in which statist and anti-statist advanced competing definitions of liberty and community in their efforts to address the problems of modern, industrialized

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<sup>40</sup> Danielle R. Egan and Gail Hawkes, “Imperiled and Perilous: Exploring the History of Childhood Sexuality,” in *Journal of Historical Sociology* 4 (2008), 355-367; see also Egan and Hawkes, “Girls, Sexuality, and the Strange Carnalities of Advertisement: Deconstructing the Discourse of Corporate Pedophilia,” in *Australian Feminist Studies* 57 (2008), 307-323.

society framed subsequent generations of activists, reformers, politicians, and intellectuals.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, conceptual arguments about the redefinition of liberty and community were centrally concerned with education and welfare, systems that necessarily focused on children and families. It is through an examination of this earlier period that the contours of political debate are established and the debates surrounding the terms that ground the larger work—child, liberation, state, violence—are introduced. In this chapter I examine the development and dissemination of these competing models of childhood by placing experts’ advice about the regulation of children’s sexuality in conversation with broader social and political changes in twentieth century America. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, scholars attempted to establish an empirically based category of sexual normalcy. Many addressed children and youth by focusing both on (psycho-) sexual development and young people’s actual sexual experiences. Indeed, Freud’s 1915 assertion that, “sexual impulses operated normally in the youngest children without any need for outside stimulation” paved the way for new thinking about children and human sexuality.<sup>42</sup> Beyond merely breaking with the past, this new “sexual modernism” emerged as a kind of enthusiasm that broadened the range of legitimate sexual behaviors, acknowledged female sexuality, and interrogated the institutional context for sexual life.<sup>43</sup> Though the

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<sup>41</sup> Marc Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problems of the State*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>42</sup> One of the most controversial aspect of Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (originally published in 1905) was the 1915 edition of the sexual theories of children and the pre-genital organizations of the libido. See: Sigmund Freud (Strachey translation), *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1962), xii.

<sup>43</sup> I borrow this term “sexual modernism” from Paul Robinson who uses it to describe theories, produced on both sides of the Atlantic from 1890-1910, which “represented a reaction against Victorianism.” That is, sexually modern thinkers “held that sexual experience was neither a threat to moral character nor a drain on vital energies...they considered it an entirely worthwhile, though often precarious, human



pioneers of sexual modernism like Sigmund Freud and Havelock Ellis hailed from Europe, their followers in the States would eventually break from them to establish and implement distinctive theories of sexuality.<sup>44</sup> The development of an American approach to psychoanalysis and the eventual popular dissemination of the work of American sexologist, Alfred Kinsey both suggest the emergence of a cultural and intellectual orientation unique to the States.<sup>45</sup>

Even before Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* became the first academic text to reach number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list, research on children's sexuality did not remain buried within obscure academic tomes nor was its dissemination limited to medical and psychological professionals. Indeed, one need look no further than the popular, expert literature on child development to find evidence that this new attention to sexuality in the life of the child made its way into thousands of American homes in the early decades of the twentieth century. When read in the context of the broader cultural and intellectual transformations of the time, child development literature reveals the emergence of a modern child whose modernity is linked not only to its existence as a sexualized being, but also and importantly to its ability to symbolize progressive nationalism. Thus, the centrality of the figure of the

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activity, whose proper management was essential to individual and social well-being" (2-3). For more see: Paul A. Robinson, *The Modernization of Sex* (New York, 1976). For a treatment of this in the United States, see Janice Irvine, *Disorders of Desire* (Philadelphia, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> For the spread of psychoanalytic and sexually modernist thought in the United States see: Nathan Hale, *The Origins and Foundations of the Psychoanalytic Movement in America, 1900-1914* (Berkeley, 1965, c1966 Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1970); and *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). See also Elizabeth Lunbeck, *The Psychiatric Persuasion: Knowledge, Gender, and Power in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>45</sup> See especially, Nathan G. Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Judith Reisman, *Kinsey: Crimes and Consequences* (Arlington: Institute for Media Education, 1998).

child to reform efforts—from education to labor—is tied not only to the inherently reproductive nature of the state, but also to the cultural imagination of the nation.

The attention of child development experts and sexual modernists to sex education increased the sphere of their influence by placing them in conversation with broader movements for educational reform. The educational reforms demanded by Freud, Havelock Ellis and other modernists were at least partially echoed in child care experts' calls for (more) comprehensive sexual and physiological education. This call for educational reform promised that future generations would be freed from the crippling side effects of repression and better equipped to establish families, to work, and to be good citizens. It should not come as a surprise, then, that liberal reformers, intellectuals and politicians claimed stakes in a debate heavily invested in the transformation of children's education. The attempts of sexual theorists and developmental experts to place the child at the heart of intellectual and political reform positioned them (and the figure of the child they represented) within larger conversations about the moral and spiritual transformation of the nation.

In addition to the intellectually driven “sexual revolution” at the turn of the century, the United States was also undergoing dramatic demographic, economic and cultural transformation. Industrialization continued to change labor conditions and the accumulation of capital as the “robber barons” of the nineteenth century gave way to the corporate moguls of the twentieth. Unprecedented immigration transformed urban landscapes and populated rural hinterlands in the west.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, modern technologies produced automobiles and motion pictures, both significant to a new

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<sup>46</sup> The decade from 1900 to 1910 brought the largest number of immigrants in a single decade to the country, nearly 9 million.

culture of amusement, particularly for young people. The rise of sweat shops and urban tenements, the realities of racial and ethnic tensions, and the development of a public youth culture all gave rise to a series of reform efforts.<sup>47</sup>

In the period conventionally known as the Progressive Era, roughly from the 1890s to 1920, reformers responded to the developments of the modern world. At the center of progressive reforms were active labor movements that fought for the rights to collective bargaining and pressured government to regulate big business. At the same time, widespread faith in science gave rise to a culture of experts and a belief that the principles of science could be used to ameliorate social ills. Social-scientifically informed domestic reform efforts addressed everything from public sanitation and reproductive rights to child labor reforms and women's suffrage.

Whether at the heart of an agenda or on the periphery, the child repeatedly surfaced as an unavoidable part of winning progressive reforms. Protective labor legislation established minimum age requirements for employment, provided children with breaks and mandated school attendance. Many believed that gains won for children, like those won for women, would open doors for broader labor reforms. In other arenas, attention to children led to reform in public education like those pioneered by liberal pragmatist, John Dewey. Young people also served as the center of several vice crusades which sought to shut down dance halls and movie theaters, outlaw alcohol

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<sup>47</sup> For an overview on America in the Progressive Era, see: Lewis Gould, *America in the Progressive Era* (Harlow: Longman, 2001); for the relationship between progressivism and corporate capitalism, see: Andrea Tone, *The Business of Benevolence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); for a treatment of developing youth culture and shifting social spaces, see: Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); and for a discussion of race in the period, see: Noralee Frankel and Nancy Dye, eds. *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991).

because of the dangers it posed to family life, and protect women and children from the perils of prostitution.<sup>48</sup>

Competing models of childhood and family life emerged from the various reform efforts and intellectual innovations of the era. Many of them shared an investment in determining the extent to which sexuality defined the human experience and marking the boundaries of sexual normativity. While bohemian radicals encouraged permissiveness and comprehensive sex education to instill in children a flexibility that would serve them well in the modern world, American psychoanalysts found in children and families evidence of sexual passions, drives, and desires.<sup>49</sup> These models, which sought to expand the sexual imaginary, encountered opposition in vice crusaders who found fault with the new permissiveness.

One uniquely American approach to this reform spirit was the liberal pragmatism articulated by John Dewey. Dewey's participation in making the New Education tapped into modern changes that revised the citizen and the figure of the child.<sup>50</sup> His progressive educational models, like the pragmatic principles on which they were based, privileged positivist science finding in it a developmental teleology that could describe the child and the nation. That is, Dewey "built an infrastructure for a pragmatic philosophy which took as 'natural' the functional unity, evolutionary and developmental processes, and progressive teleological direction of the modern liberal

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<sup>48</sup> See especially: David McLeod, *The Age of the Child* (New York, 1998); Alice Boardman Smuts, *Science in the Service of Children* (New Haven, 2006); and Leigh Ann Wheeler, *Against Obscenity* (Baltimore, 2004)

<sup>49</sup> See especially Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), and *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>50</sup> Thomas S Popkewitz., ed., *Inventing the Modern Self and John Dewey: Modernities and the Traveling Pragmatism in Education* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), viii.

worldview.”<sup>51</sup> Like popular child care expert, John Watson, Dewey’s framework shunned the sentimental in favor of modern scientific methods.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, Dewey’s investment in modernity as the logical and natural end of human history promoted continued expansion of individual freedom that may have resonated with sexual modernists. Bridging the gap between these perspectives, Dewey’s modernity united the child and the nation in the service of liberal progressivism.

Typically, progressive reforms addressed the conditions of the urban north: factories, mines, loose morality, etc. However, the Progressive Era was more than a series of reform efforts aimed at the material conditions of urban life. It was also an attempt to drive the development of a national culture. Thus, the demographic reality that the majority of the nation’s population continued to live in rural southern or mid-western communities did little to diminish the goals or even the reach of progressivism.<sup>53</sup> Outside of the urban north where alternative models of the child and the family may have prevailed, the ethos of progressivism was nevertheless a force with which communities had to contend. Perhaps the legacies of the Progressive Era extend beyond the reforms of the day into the ultimate success of particular models of children, families, and the nation.

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<sup>51</sup> William Andrew Parringer, *John Dewey and the Paradox of Liberal Reform* (New York: State University Press of New York, 1990), 4.

<sup>52</sup> Though it was presented as objective and value free, this scientific critique of sentimentalism was nevertheless a loaded and evaluative move that often affirmed class and race hierarchies.

<sup>53</sup> David I. Macleod, *The Age of the Child: Children in America, 1890-1920*, (New York: Prentice Hall International, 1998), xi.

### **Early Child Care Manuals and the Regulation of Children's Sexuality**

Prior to the 1890s, few child development tracts were published, and those that did circulate were produced primarily by members of the clergy.<sup>54</sup> Emmett Holt, a Massachusetts doctor, became one of the first lay authors of advice for parents to achieve broad circulation with the 1894 publication of *The Care and Feeding of Children*. Holt's text focused heavily on hygiene and physical development, a reflection both of his medical training and of increasing public confidence in scientific methods that typified the Progressive Era. This attention to the body represented a shift from earlier clerical sources whose primary concern was moral training, though the spirit of strict regimentation remained constant.<sup>55</sup> By the 1920s, both of these earlier styles would be supplanted by psychological and behavioral models of understanding child development. This new focus on the mental life of the child (rather than its spiritual or physical life) would place child care experts in direct conversation with sexual modernists to produce American theories and politics of children's sexuality.

If intellectual ideas and cultural attitudes about children's sexuality were undergoing a revolution, professional approaches to child-care during the same period underwent more modest adjustment. Despite shifting paradigms within the field, the supportive and intelligently permissive approach associated with Freud would not become dominant for several decades. Indeed, the behavioral psychology that overtook child development literature in the early decades of the twentieth century stood in direct

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<sup>54</sup> Michael J. Geboy, "Who is Listening to the 'Experts'? The Use of Child Care Materials by Parents," *Family Relations* April 1981.

<sup>55</sup> Geboy, 205.

opposition to Freud's psychoanalytic theory, while the firm routinization it advocated reified the sexual repression that bohemians sought to dismantle. Even if, as Alfred Kazin claimed, "the greatest and most beautiful effect of Freudianism [was] the increasing awareness of childhood as the most important single influence on personal development," the ways American child care experts responded did not reflect the broader goals of psychoanalytic or sexually modern thought.<sup>56</sup> Put another way, though Americans had already entrusted their psyche and sense of self to Freudianism by the 1920s, they wouldn't entrust it with their children until Benjamin Spock gained prominence in the 1950s.<sup>57</sup> The continuities and changes within expert literature as well as the ways that they intersected with debates about sexuality are most easily seen through an examination of masturbation.

Public interest in masturbation in the States did not begin with the Progressive Era or its influence on child development literature. Indeed, discourse and activism surrounding "the solitary indulgence" had a long history rooted in religious scripture and social reform. By the nineteenth century, masturbation became an issue of great concern to many prominent health reformers and politicians while retaining its interest for religious activists. Statesman Benjamin Rush, building on eighteenth century beliefs, argued that masturbation would lead to disease and insanity in his 1812 text, *Diseases of the Mind*. Perhaps the best known anti-masturbation spokesmen were Sylvester Graham and John Kellogg, both of whom advocated restrictive diets,

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<sup>56</sup> Geoffrey H. Steere, "Freudianism and Child-Rearing in the Twenties," *American Quarterly* Vol. 20, No. 4, 759-760.

<sup>57</sup> Here, I'm referring to the claim that, "since at least the 1920s middle-class Americans have been educated into understandings of self and psyche shaped by mainstream concepts of psychoanalytic thought." Nancy Schnog, *On Inventing the Psychological* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 4.

calisthenics and chastity as necessary for the maintenance of good health. Not all anti-masturbation campaigners were as extreme in their beliefs as Graham and Kellogg, nor was the anti-masturbation lobby limited to medical reform or utopian movements. Nevertheless, as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, belief in the dangerous and degenerative nature of masturbation was commonplace.<sup>58</sup>

Masturbation was seen to pose a unique threat to children not only because of their unlimited access to their own bodies, but also because the troublesome behavior could emerge in the earliest stages of childhood. While nineteenth and early twentieth century anti-masturbation literature charged adults (especially men) to exercise their will and reason to control the baser instincts that threatened overall health, such arguments could not easily be translated to children. This dilemma was further complicated because the women in whose care children were entrusted often were not believed to suffer these base desires and were therefore ill equipped to detect and manage masturbatory behaviors in children. Restraints and specialized mittens were developed to ensure that children “respected their bodies,” and newly available advice literature for mothers and wet nurses devoted increasing space to dealing with this “great terror.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> For more on the discourse surrounding masturbation, see Jean Stengers and Anne Van Neck, *Masturbation: The History of a Great Terror* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Thomas Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003); Diane Elizabeth Mason, *The Secret Vice: Masturbation in Victorian Fiction and Medical Culture* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2008); and Frederick M. Hodges, “The Antimasturbation Crusade in Antebellum American Medicine,” *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 5 (2005): 722-731. For a brief history of anti-masturbation activism in eighteenth and nineteenth century America, see John D’Emilio and Estelle Freeman *Intimate Matters*.

<sup>59</sup> Daniel Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby: A Popular History of the Theory and Practice of Child Raising*, (West Port, CT: L. Hill, 1977), 123.



Holt defined masturbation as “the habit of rubbing the genital organs with the hands, with the clothing, against the bed, or rubbing the thighs together.”<sup>60</sup> The first edition of Holt’s *Care and Feeding of Children* was divided into three sections: the care of children, infant feeding, and miscellaneous. In the table of contents, each section was further partitioned with topical subheadings and corresponding page numbers. It was in the last section of the book, under the subheading “bad habits,” where Holt’s definition of and advice for dealing with masturbation was located. According to Holt, masturbation was far worse than sucking, nail-biting, and bed-wetting.<sup>61</sup> In fact, Holt advised parents to deal with the problem “as early as possible,” and closed the first edition of his book with the following paragraph:

Masturbation is the most injurious of all these [bad] habits, and should be broken up just as early as possible. Children should be especially watched at the time of going to sleep and on first waking. Punishments are of little avail and usually make matters worse. Medical advice should at once be sought.<sup>62</sup>

Though Holt’s argument for the futility of punishment seemed to ally him with sexual modernists, his treatment of masturbation nevertheless marked it—and the children who practiced it—as particularly problematic, cementing his ideological ties with the anti-masturbation ethos of the nineteenth century. Not only was masturbation singled out as “the most injurious” bad habit, but unlike bed-wetting which was classified as “more of a disease than a habit,” or sucking and nail-biting which could easily be remedied with moderate intervention, masturbation was described as a willful behavior so addictive in

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<sup>60</sup> Emmett Holt, *The Care and Feeding of Children*, (Boston, 1894) 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 65. In subsequent additions, Holt would continue adding techniques children used to masturbate including the description found in the 14<sup>th</sup> edition “Sometimes a child sits upon the floor, crosses his thighs tightly and rocks backward and forward” (233).

<sup>61</sup> Holt, 64-65. In later editions, Holt added dirt eating to this, but masturbation continued to be classified as the worst (and hardest to break) of the bad habits.

<sup>62</sup> Holt, 66.

nature that it made punishment ineffectual and required expert involvement. This negative reaction to sexual behavior in children despite the acknowledgement of new theories of children's physical and psychological development would become typical of how late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century child care experts integrated the new sexual theorizing into their work.

### **John Watson and Children's Psychological Health**

The combination of his medical training, lay status and wide circulation make Holt significant in the history of expert literature on child-care. As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, however, a background in psychology would become increasingly important within the child development field. Arguably the man most responsible for this change was John Broadus Watson. Watson assumed a place of prominence within the psychological discipline with his pioneering animal psychology studies which eventually led to his 1915 election as president of the American Psychological Association. However, it was his establishment of behaviorism, and not the study of animals for which he was trained, that would bring him the audience that allowed him to become "the first American 'pop' psychologist."<sup>63</sup> In the 1920s, with Holt's book in its 28<sup>th</sup> edition and at least three American psychoanalytic societies celebrating tenth anniversaries, Watson followed his 1914 text, *Behaviorism* and its 1919 and 1925 revisions with an even more widely read, *The Psychological Care of Infant and Child*, originally published in 1928.

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<sup>63</sup> James Reed, "A Psychologist of the '20s." *Science* 244 (1989), 1386.

“Man” Watson claimed, “is a machine.”<sup>64</sup> With his theory of behaviorism, Watson ushered in what *The New York Times* referred to as “a new epoch in the intellectual history of man.”<sup>65</sup> In the first edition of *Behaviorism*, Watson applied the methods of animal psychology to the study of man insisting that all human thoughts and actions were best described in terms of stimulus and response.<sup>66</sup> These claims allowed Watson to position psychology as a valid, objective science and were well received by his colleagues who were equally concerned with transforming the (perception of the) discipline from speculative art into empirical science. By 1919, Watson’s arguments in favor of the use of behaviorism turned into assertions that “his was the only valid psychology, that all psychologies not stemming from the study of the human animal were spiritualistic and not valid scientifically.”<sup>67</sup> This more strident approach cost him his position at Johns Hopkins and led him into industry where he promised to produce good workers using behaviorism and good consumers by applying psychological principles to advertising. With academic credentials providing legitimacy and his new vocation supplying a broader audience, Watson was primed to publish the book that would make him a household name.

In *The Psychological Care of Infant and Child*, Watson applied his behaviorist theories to the figure of the child, filling what he saw as a gap in the expert literature available to parents. Indeed, Watson opened his text with the following observation:

Ever since my first glimpse of Dr. Holt’s “Care and Feeding of Children,” I hoped someday to be able to write a book on the psychological care of infants. I believed then that psychological care was just as important as physiological care. Today I believe it is

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Lucille C. Birnbaum, “Behaviorism in the 1920’s” *American Quarterly*, 7. (1955), 15.

<sup>65</sup> *The New York Times*, LXXOV: 24,662 (August 2, 1925), Sec. 3, 14.

<sup>66</sup> Birnbaum, 15.

<sup>67</sup> Birnbaum, 17.

in some ways more important. Healthy babies do grow up under the most varied forms of feeding and bodily care. They can be stunted by poor food and ill health and then in a few days of proper régime be made to pick up their weight and bodily strength. *But once a child's character has been spoiled by bad handling which can be done in a few days, who can say that the damage is ever repaired?* [Emphasis mine.]<sup>68</sup>

By implying the potentially irreparable psychological damage an ill-informed parent could inflict on a child and offering his book as the first step toward avoiding such tragedy, Watson made his text (like Holt's) "as valuable as the Bible."<sup>69</sup> *Psychological Care*, like the second and third editions of *Behaviorism* before it, furthered Watson's decline within the psychological discipline leading one colleague to write, "from the popular lectures on 'Behaviorism' and in increasing measure in [*The Psychological Care of Infant and Child* and *The Battle over Behaviorism* (1929)], the strident, advertising tone of irresponsible statement at times gives way to, at times flaunts and overrides the scientific contributions...scattered among his cavalierly [sic] pronouncements."<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, Watson's baby book was "the most prominent source of store-bought directions for child-rearing" until it was displaced by Benjamin Spock's texts in the late 1940s.<sup>71</sup>

At its core, *Psychological Care* argued for an institutional approach to child-care. Watson's promise that, with behaviorism, he could transform any physically healthy infant into the adult of his choosing—"doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and yes, even beggarman [sic] and thief regardless of his talents, tendencies, abilities, vocations and race of his ancestor"—accompanied his 1925 postulation that

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<sup>68</sup> John B. Watson, *Psychological Care of Infant and Child*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1928), 3.

<sup>69</sup> Watson, *Psychological Care*, 4.

<sup>70</sup> Joseph Jastrow, "The Ways of Behaviorism," in *Science* 69 (1969), 456.

<sup>71</sup> Reed, 1386.

environment was the single most significant factor in human development.<sup>72</sup> By the time he published *Psychological Care* three years later, he completed the thought by claiming that “babies are made not born.”<sup>73</sup> Like the behaviorist principles that it advanced, the text provided strict rules designed to regulate the child and limit the amount of damage parents (usually the mother) could inflict upon him. “Never hug and kiss them, never let them sit in your lap. If you must, kiss them once on the forehead when they say goodnight. Shake hands with them in the morning.”<sup>74</sup> In order for Watson to reach his goal to help “the first mother . . . bring up a happy child,” he had to stop parents from “spoiling” their children with sentimentality.<sup>75</sup>

Holt and Watson situated the sexual theorizing of the period within older American debates about the health and safety of children and the proper nature of their sexuality even while they responded to sexual modernists. Indeed, the prohibition against kissing children was first articulated in Holt’s text. The differences between Watson and Holt were the origins of their prescription and the meaning that each gave to it. Holt, with his medical training, grounded his text in the public health debates of the period. For him, kissing was to be avoided because of its ability to spread communicable diseases like tuberculosis. Watson, on the other hand, expanded debates about social hygiene and argued against what he perceived as the emotional excess advanced by many theorists in the twentieth century.

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<sup>72</sup> Watson, *Behaviorism* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1925), 248.

<sup>73</sup> Watson, *Psychological Care*; and John Watson, *Behaviorism*.

<sup>74</sup> Watson, *Psychological Care*, 73-4.

<sup>75</sup> Watson, *Psychological Care*. The dedication to *Psychological Care* reads “Dedicated to the first mother who brings up a happy child,” implying that such an event had yet to occur.

By his own account, one of the major contributions Watson sought to make with *Psychological Care* was a prescription about “the kind and amount of sex instruction that should be given” to children.<sup>76</sup> Along with advice about proper daily care and the growth of emotional habits, the behaviorist approach to sex education makes up the meat of the text. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Watson believed that honest, objective information about sex should be provided to children as young as two years old and that the failure of parents “to prepare themselves to impart this knowledge is one of the greatest problems we have today in social hygiene.”<sup>77</sup> Though he lamented the difficulty faced by parents seeking such information, Watson used *Psychological Care* to provide guidelines and examples of conversations that parents should have with children rather than to provide any detailed information about sexual or reproductive development.

Behaviorism was often pit against what Watson referred to as the “demonology” of psychoanalysis, but the treatment of sexuality in *Psychological Care* paid small homage to Freud’s followers. When lamenting parents’ lack of sexual education, Watson did concede that unlike “the general mass of medical men”:

[M]ost of the psychopathologists (the medically trained psychoanalysts and the psychiatrists) had a thoroughly sane, wholesome and adequate point of view. My advice to any father or mother with children is to go to the psychopathologist for one, two, or more hours of instruction, if you feel that your own knowledge is inadequate.<sup>78</sup>

Despite this concession, Watson can be understood neither as a nineteenth century critic nor a modern enthusiast. He acknowledged both that masturbation could not be wholly prevented in the adolescent and that it “produce[d] little physiological harm” when

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<sup>76</sup> Watson, *Psychological Care*, 7.

<sup>77</sup> Watson, *Psychological Care*, 159.

<sup>78</sup> Watson, *Psychological Care*, 157-158.

practiced in moderation.<sup>79</sup> This position mirrored the culture into which it entered; it saw the flaws in nineteenth century models but was reluctant to embrace the propositions of twentieth century modernists. Nevertheless, Watson's articulation of the undesirability of masturbation placed him in opposition with the modernists' sexual enthusiasm and their beliefs in what constituted normal and pathological behavior. According to Watson, the most important reason for disrupting masturbatory behavior in children and youth was not because it distracted from learning, because it reduced the time one could devote to organizing life or because it could cause a withdrawal from society, all of which were important. Watson argued that, "the most important reason of all for breaking this habit is [that] if it is persisted in too long and practiced too often it may make heterosexual adjustment difficult or impossible. This is as true for young women as for young men."<sup>80</sup> This was a stark pronouncement from a man whose building block for a better future was the hetero-nuclear family.

### Behaviorism and the American Family

Behaviorism can be read as an intellectual refutation of psychoanalysis. Nowhere are the ideological differences of these approaches more apparent than in the treatment of homosexuality. In Freud's famous "Letter to an American Mother," he wrote that, "homosexuality...is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness."<sup>81</sup> Though Freud went on to say that homosexuality resulted from "a certain arrest of sexual development," he referred the American mother

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<sup>79</sup> Watson, *Psychological Care*, 177.

<sup>80</sup> Watson, *Psychological Care*, 178.

<sup>81</sup> Freud, "Letter to an American Mother" 1935.

to the books of Havelock Ellis so that she might be further persuaded of the injustice of homosexual persecution. Unlike Ellis who argued the congenital nature of homosexuality, or Freud who viewed it as a variation which could rarely be reversed, Watson had a different outlook. The behaviorists were “reasonably sure ... that homosexuality [was] an affair of nurture rather than original nature.”<sup>82</sup> This alone set them apart from Ellis and his followers, and behaviorists’ subsequent theorizing on the causes and effects of homosexuality further typified their distance from psychoanalysts. For example, Watson cautioned against single sex environments for children claiming that they would impede the child’s ability to enter into a satisfying companionate marriage later in life or, worse still, turn the child to a life of homosexuality.<sup>83</sup> Since the transformation of the human race which the behaviorist sought to achieve was based on a hetero-nuclear family, sexual “variation” had no place in a world shaped by behaviorism.

The hetero-nuclear family which Watson positioned as the foundation for a democratic future was beset by people from a variety of theoretical backgrounds. Sexual modernists’ acknowledgement and celebration of women’s sexual desire found its way into American political and artistic circles where it transformed existing models of family, domesticity and femininity.<sup>84</sup> These ideas about women’s equality led to a celebration of companionate marriage where each partner aroused the sexual and intellectual passions of the other.<sup>85</sup> Even as American bohemian, Floyd Dell was writing about marrying “a girl that can be talked to and can be kissed,” he and other

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<sup>82</sup> Watson, *Psychological Care*, 179.

<sup>83</sup> Watson, *Psychological Care*, 179.

<sup>84</sup> John d’Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 228.

<sup>85</sup> See especially the writings of Edward Carpenter and Floyd Dell.



American scholars and activists were also considering Ellis's reflections on marriage and the infeasibility of sexual monogamy. Dell and other Greenwich Village bohemians, advocates of free love, and opponents of sexual continence were quick to cite Emma Goldman, Sherwood Anderson, and other American activists in order to position erotic experimentation as an essential, innovative component of revolutionary struggle. The need for public, state sanctioned marriage and the desirability of sexual monogamy were both called into question by American radicals even as the emotional relationship between partnered men and women was celebrated.

While Ellis inspired bohemian radicals to investigate marriage, Freud's followers prompted an examination of the nature and function of family life. Pointing to childhood as a significant period in the development of personality, psychoanalysts located the origins of neuroses and other psychological complaints in unresolved or mishandled events between the individual and his or her parents. American psychoanalysts had no desire to dismantle the hetero-nuclear family. Nevertheless, their focus on eliminating sexual repression and examining the ways that the parent-child relationship might be unconsciously sexual in nature turned the family from a place of safety into one of suspicion.

Behaviorists sought to maintain the hetero-nuclear family as a refuge where stability of mind, body and labor would be observed and cultivated. They questioned the functionality of the family unit in a world where relationships were characterized by romantic and sentimental feelings or plagued by crippling psychological missteps. The regimentation that was the cornerstone of behaviorist child-rearing practices was often at odds with the sentimentalism of the nineteenth century and the emotional

expressiveness of the sexual modernists. Indeed, Watson questioned “whether there should be individual homes for children—or even whether children should know their own parents” believing that there were “undoubtedly much more scientific ways of bringing up children which [would] probably mean finer and happier children.”<sup>86</sup>

Recognizing the unwillingness of parents to relinquish fully their children to science, he ultimately concluded that, “the behaviorist has to accept the home and make the best of it.”<sup>87</sup> Thus, the behaviorist’s task was to train parents (especially mothers) as much as children so that the hetero-nuclear family might assume a position as sanctuary and training ground.

Watson’s ideal family, once transformed by behaviorism, would be primed to live out the American dream. Each member would be “so bulwarked with stable work and emotional habits that no adversity [could] quite overwhelm him.”<sup>88</sup> This behaviorist promise of a better future, which so appealed to liberals of the period, was defined conservatively in terms of discipline, productivity and personal control. The paradox of Watson’s behaviorism was a reflection of the contradictions of its time. Even as the “roaring twenties” cast off remnants of Puritanism from Prohibition to restrictive sex morality, Watson gained tremendous popularity by advancing a child-rearing regime that fit the decade’s stereotype of Puritanism. This duality was described by one scholar:

[T]he American image of the Twenties had two sides. One side of the image was the optimism in Watson’s view of the future of mankind. The other side was the pessimism which was inherent in Behaviorism’s rigid child rearing practices.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Watson, *Psychological Care*, 5-6.

<sup>87</sup> Watson, *Psychological Care*, 6.

<sup>88</sup> Watson, *Psychological Care*, 10.

<sup>89</sup> Birnbaum, 16.

Despite Watson's democratic rhetoric and the degree to which he was embraced by lauded liberals like John Dewey and Oliver Wendell Holmes, the mechanistic underpinnings of behaviorism relied on an almost Darwinian level of determinism. In a period that had outgrown nineteenth century values but had not fully replaced them, Watson's behaviorist worker appealed to the conservative's interest in business while his image of a self-determined, better future was a liberal's dream.

Notwithstanding their ideological differences, most theorists and activists agreed that the child was the solution to the crisis of the hetero-nuclear family. Watsonian behaviorists claimed that any child raised in their model would be ideally suited to establish a family immune to the deficiencies of sentimentalism identified by Watson as well as the sexual and emotional exploration valued by his opposition. Psychoanalysts, radicals and bohemians all believed that sexual education and exploration, however they defined it, would do much to alleviate problems arising from emotionally and sexually repressive environments. The "holiness of generation" celebrated by Key was at the center of all of these theories: transformation of the culture, the nation, and the race began in the family with the child. Thus, the concern surrounding children and families can be understood as an anxiety about the nation.

### Spock, Kinsey and the New Culture of Permissiveness

World Wars, economic depressions, increases in corporate influence, and the reshaping of political coalitions transformed domestic culture and reshaped liberal agendas. Models of family life, too, underwent dramatic changes as what Elaine Tyler May refers to as "domestic containment" eventually overtook home life in the Cold War

era.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, the child and its sexuality continued to frame public debate and national posturing. Sexual psychopath laws used fears about children's sexual vulnerability to connect medical and legal structures.<sup>91</sup> Once formed, the union of psychiatric medicine and criminal law changed the stakes of debates about (sexual) normalcy. The child was centrally figured in the resulting race to criminalize sexual pathology. As public debate changed, so too did popular models of child care.

In the years following the Second World War, as sexual psychopath laws continued to pass and the country experienced limited economic prosperity, Dr. Benjamin Spock championed a new model of child development. First published in 1946, Spock's *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* made him one of the country's most popular child development experts until his death in 1998. Heavily informed by psychoanalytic principles, Spock's approach to child care brought an end to the rigidity of the Watsonian era of the 1930s and early 1940s. Advising parents to enjoy their children, Spock wrote of the infant that, "he doesn't have to be severely trained. You may hear people say that you have to get your baby strictly regulated in his feeding, sleeping, bowel movements, and other habits—but don't believe this either."<sup>92</sup> Instead, Spock advocated an open and natural approach in which both infant/child and parent were encouraged to express their authentic selves.

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<sup>90</sup> Here, I refer to May's argument that domestic life in Cold War United States was marked by models of containment that paralleled the country's geopolitical ambitions. This "domestic containment" was marked by an elevation of the nuclear family, lowered age of marriage and birth of first child, as well as increased spending and consumption to fortify the home and celebrate the merits of US capitalism. See Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound* (New York, 1999).

<sup>91</sup> Estelle Freedman, "'Uncontrolled Desires': The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960," *Journal of American History* 74 (1987):83-106. See also George Chauncey, "The Postwar Sex Crime Panic," in *True Stories from the American Past* ed. William Graebner (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993)

<sup>92</sup> Benjamin Spock, *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pierce, 1946), 20.

Enjoy your baby. He isn't a schemer. He needs loving. You'd think from all you hear about babies demanding attention that they come into the world determined to get their parents under their thumbs by hook or crook. This is not true at all. Your baby is born to be a reasonable, friendly human being. If you treat him nicely, he won't take advantage of you. Don't be afraid to love him or respond to his needs. Every baby needs to be smiled at, talked to, played with, fondled—gently and lovingly—just as much as he needs vitamins and calories, and the baby who doesn't get any loving will grow up cold and unresponsive<sup>93</sup>

With these two passages, Spock dismantled behaviorism, naturalized emotions, and called for a “common sense” [read: pragmatic] approach to child care. Thus, he finally suggested the union of sexually modern thinkers, with their attention to emotional expression, and liberal reformers, with their calls for authentic individuality.

As Spock advanced this sexually modern liberalism, attention to the role of sex in human life and development was thrust under national spotlight with the 1948 publication of American sexologist Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, a text that was decades in the making. Though Kinsey was not the first scholar to undertake a scientific investigation of human sexuality, his body of research was (and remains) the most extensive of its kind. It reached an unprecedented audience and enjoyed a more favorable reception than its antecedents. “George Gallup reported that one out of every five Americans had either read or heard about the book, while five out of six of those interviewed judged its publication ‘a good thing.’”<sup>94</sup> The scope and breadth of the research were not the only factors contributing to the popular reception of Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* or its more controversial 1953 sequel, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. According to Regina Morantz, “What made

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<sup>93</sup> Spock, 19.

<sup>94</sup> Regina Markell Morantz, “The Scientist as Sex Crusader: Alfred C. Kinsey and American Culture,” *American Quarterly* Vol. 29 No. 5 Winter 1977, p. 564.

Kinsey different—indeed, what made him unique—was his confidence that Americans were ready for a confrontation with their own sexuality.”<sup>95</sup>

Because Kinsey’s surveys examined the entirety of their subjects sexual lives, his work revealed the prevalence of sexual activity before and during the onset of puberty. The material on the sexual lives of children was used to advance beliefs about children’s (particularly, girls’) sexual precocity by some. Later, feminists would use Kinsey’s work to challenge assumptions about sexually precocious girls by pointing to the pervasiveness of coercive incest, particularly as it related to girl children.

From Holt’s regulated child to Watson’s mechanical baby and Spock’s individuated personality, the American child presented by experts and sought by parents has been placed on dynamic sexual terrain. Moreover, the figure of the child that emerges from examining theories of sexuality and child development in this distinctly grounded American context is one that remains rooted in the rhetoric of liberal nationhood despite the paradigm shifts that transform the expert literature. Understanding the child, the ways that it is (or is not) sexualized and the resulting adaptation of cultural ideals reveals the imbricate nature of children sex and the liberal nation.

### Symbolizing the Nation

The variety of ideas about child development and the public attention they received led to expansions in the medical and legal regulation of children. These statutory and prescriptive revisions managed to incorporate new ideas about children’s

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<sup>95</sup> Morantz, 564.

sexuality in profoundly ambivalent ways. For example, the proliferation of sexual psychopath laws from the 1930s through the 1950s did more than solidify the link between psychiatric medicine and criminal law in its efforts to protect children from sexual victimization. Grounded in models of deviance and vulnerability that ran counter to the beliefs of sexually modern thinkers, sexual psychopath laws actually worked to expand public discourse on sexuality and heighten its importance as a component of modern identity.<sup>96</sup>

Public attention to children's sexual vulnerability took two forms: fears about their sexual victimization and anxiety about children's sexual precocity. While sexual psychopath laws attended to the first concern, the persistence of proscriptions against masturbation spoke to the second. Even some efforts at legislating child labor reforms responded to children's perceived precociousness. Efforts to remove boy ushers from nickel theaters, for example, relied on more than calls for productive leisure and education typical of child labor reform. Unlike the industries and mills that aged children and made education inaccessible, nickel theaters were "not merely passive or stagnating; [they were] expulsive and preclusive."<sup>97</sup> Since they enticed children and led them down a wayward path of artificial pleasure, nickel theaters were seen, by some, as exploiting children's natural affinity for sensual gratification.

The vulnerabilities of the child, though feared to be easily exploited, were figured into the nation-as-child symbol. The symbol proved effective not only because it created a space to celebrate the eternal promise of youth, but also because it contained

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<sup>96</sup> Estelle Freedman, "Uncontrolled Desire" *JAH* 1988, 106.

<sup>97</sup> Maurice Williams, "The Nickel Theatre," in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* Vol. 38, Supplement: Uniform Child Labor Laws (Jul 1911), 99.

anxiety about national vulnerability. This anxiety, which centered on the nation's ability to emerge structurally, intellectually and economically on par with other Western democracies, often got channeled into fears about sexual deviance or racial unrest. Indeed, Gayle Rubin argued that, "disputes over sexual behavior often become the vehicles for displacing social anxieties and discharging their attendant emotional intensity."<sup>98</sup> Children are central to this displacement. The figure of the child acted as a national foil in debates about race and sexuality. Thus, the ways that children were framed as particularly vulnerable to sexual misconduct or distinctly useful in understanding non-white racial 'others' operated to advance national agendas of expansion and cohesive self-definition.

The inevitable growth of the nation, like that of the child, was both promising and painful. The progressive narrative of national development mirrored that of human growth. As such, it was filled not just with accomplishment, but also with occasional missteps. The flexibility of the symbol and its ability to allow mistakes was steeped in the pragmatism that defined one branch of American liberal thought in the early twentieth century.

The nation-as-child symbol provided a frame with which one could celebrate and defend this national destiny. By eternally enacting the ideals of youth and believing in the inevitability of growth and development, the symbolic child represented a nation that always held both the curiosity and optimism of youth along with the timeless promise of expansion. In this way, the growth of the nation enhanced its connection to the nation-as-child symbol rather than diminishing it. The unavoidable development

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<sup>98</sup> Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" 4.



and maturity of children became a framework for the progressive narrative of the nation. As a child must grow, so must the nation, and as the nation expanded, so too did the category 'child'.

In the modern, industrial age, the very definition of the child was contested, as reformers and intellectuals of all stripes worked to expand its descriptive power. With labor, educational and moral reformers painting the dangers of the new era, youths of greater ages became children. As sexual theorists demanded acknowledgement of sexuality in the earliest stages of infancy, developmental experts advanced new emotional frameworks to understand children, and reformers of all kinds called for changes in education. In each of these cases, the child was imagined in broader terms—endowed with sexuality, rationality, emotional reasoning, and the vulnerabilities associated with mishandling them. Despite these vulnerabilities, the figure of the child continued to represent not only the future of the nation, but also the nation itself. As such, the vulnerabilities of children demanded the kind of public debate and intervention represented by different classes of reformers.

The figure of the child was constructed in sexually specific terms. The idealized characteristics with which it was endowed reflected not only the transformation of attitudes about children but also changes to ideas about the nation, both of which were grounded in older models of race and gender. Indeed, the emotional value of the child increased in proportion to the decrease in its economic worth. It was this emotional resonance that tapped the national imagination and lent the child symbolic power. In the decades that followed, the US continued to deploy the nation-as-child symbol to justify its foreign activities and domestic agendas. Thus, the child remained a figure of

political contention whose gendered, racial and sexual characteristics held significance far beyond the life of any real child. As the nation continued to symbolize itself through images of childhood, the political interests of the state and its dissenters became increasingly invested in reproduction. The next chapters will address the ways that post-War American liberalism continued to rely on the figure of the child as a way of articulating the country's development into a world power and will attend to the ways that this symbolic child was deployed on behalf of and in opposition to state authority.

## Women and Children First: Second-Wave Maternalism and the Politics of Health

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The figure of the child that so captured the attention of scholars and activists in the early decades of the century continued to operate as a strategic tool of public politics through the 1970s and '80s. The emergence of adolescence as a developmental category and the visibility of distinctive youth cultures combined to focus public attention on young people as both delinquency and vulnerability were used to describe the so-called 'youth crisis.'<sup>99</sup> The discourses surrounding children and youth often centered on development and education, health and safety, or rights and protection. The child's role within and status in relation to the family framed these discourses, and sexuality functioned within each to weigh the scale toward incorrigibility and delinquency on one side or innocence and vulnerability on the other.

Whether the figure of the child was imagined as innocent or incorrigible, the family played a crucial role in nurturing development, promoting health, and ensuring protection. Within the family, gendered stereotypes and cultural expectations rested the majority of this responsibility with the mother. As the presumed primary care giver, the mother emerged as the *de facto* representative for the child, with experts' literature addressed to her and credit or blame for the child's ultimate development cast in her direction. At the same time, the role of guardian and caregiver, however limited, allowed mothers to demand broader social reforms in the name of children and families. This maternalist orientation enabled women's participation in public politics,

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<sup>99</sup> See especially: Charles Acland, *Youth, Murder, Spectacle: The Cultural Politics of 'Youth Crisis,'* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995); Neil Campbell, ed., *American Youth Cultures,* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Elliot Currie, *The Road to Whatever: Middle-Class Culture and the Crisis of Adolescence,* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005).

established and maintained the child as a strategic political tool, and propelled a distinctive maternalist branch of activism and discourse.

In the 1960s and '70s several feminist groups latched onto maternalist rhetoric as a way to advance female independence and self-actualization. By arguing that fulfilled women—those who had access to education, careers, birth control, and equality—made better mothers, these groups connected many of the feminist causes of the period with a revised vision of maternalism.<sup>100</sup> This connection eased the tension between the particularity of maternalist rhetoric and feminist discourses of equality by making individualism the central component of motherhood. With a second-wave maternalist rhetoric the primary focus of which was on women rather than children, activists in this period were able to radicalize maternalism instead of using it to contain pre-existing radical politics. As a result, the lines between radical and reform-oriented activism were blurred, and this new discourse of motherhood found its way into the educational and consciousness-raising work of the Boston Women's Health Collective as well as the mental health paradigms of the Elizabeth Stone House.

Feminists in the period rarely understood or referred to themselves as involved in maternalist politics. Indeed, one of the distinctions between the so-called first and second waves of feminism was a rejection of advancing a self-consciously maternalist

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<sup>100</sup> This formulation of maternalist politics, though distinctive, had historical antecedents. For example, Benjamin Rush advocated for women's education as part of a broader investment in "republican motherhood." What makes second-wave maternalism new is the ways that it understood women's personal fulfillment as a necessary precondition for good motherhood rather than viewing education as a tool that women could then transfer to their children. For mother on republican motherhood, see Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

politics.<sup>101</sup> Maternalism was seen by second wavers as retrograde or limiting because it tied women inextricably to reproduction, privileged motherhood, and qualified women's claims to be politically engaged. Nevertheless, maternalist rhetoric and attention to the special role of mothers found its way into many second-wave feminist debates. From calls for motherhood stipends to demands for a more expansive approach to welfare rights, feminists in the period repeatedly returned to exploring and politicizing motherhood. However, feminists in the latter part of the century expressed a distinct version of maternalism that differed from earlier iterations.

This new second-wave maternalism centered women rather than children and families. It did not rely on women's roles as mothers to authorize their entrance into politics. Instead, it framed women's political demands as necessary steps to ensure the continued health of families, and by extension, of society as a whole. Second-wave maternalists argued that creating conditions that would encourage women's satisfaction served families and society because satisfied women made better mothers. This political rhetoric still highlighted women's roles as mothers, but it centered the particular needs of women as individuals.

Maternalist rhetoric had already found its way into many women's causes throughout the twentieth century. Locating much of women's authority within their roles as caregivers, early proponents of this political strategy held that women's

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<sup>101</sup> For overview of second-wave feminism, see Sara Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End*, (New York: Free Press, 2003); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*, (New York: Viking, 2000); and Stephanie Gilmore ed., *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second Wave Feminism in the United States*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008). For a treatment of maternalism in early feminism, see Molly Ladd-Taylor *Mother Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), and Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, eds., *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, (New York: Routledge, 1993).

experiences as mothers left them ideally suited to lead social reform efforts for the benefit of families. At times this was accomplished by reframing older arguments about women's purity and cleanliness rendering them better able to "clean up" the dirtiness and corruption of political life.<sup>102</sup> In other incarnations maternalist rhetoric allowed women to claim superior knowledge of how best to ensure the welfare of children and families.<sup>103</sup> Finally, by centering their culturally approved and gender appropriate care-giving work, proponents of maternalism could claim a measure of respectability not always afforded to women engaged in public activism, whether because of their gender, race, class, or ideological orientation.<sup>104</sup>

In the progressive era, this maternalist orientation was at the heart of temperance and anti-prostitution movements, protective labor legislation, public health and educational reforms as well as some approaches to women's suffrage.<sup>105</sup> Maternalist rhetoric was not used to advance gender equality in this period, relying as it did on women's particular roles as mothers. As such maternalist approaches were not always capable of establishing broad coalitions among women's movements. For example, advocates of protective labor legislation opposed the Equal Rights Amendment when it was first proposed in 1923, fearing that gains based on gender particularity would be lost if the equality of the sexes was codified.

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<sup>102</sup> For a theoretical overview of this approach, see Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, 18 (1966), 151-174.

<sup>103</sup> Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1847-1939*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>104</sup> Gail Bederman, "'Civilization,' the Decline of Middle-Class Manliness, and Ida B. Wells's Antilynching Campaign," in Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed eds., *"We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible": A Reader in Black Women's History*, (Brooklyn: Carlson Pub., 1995).

<sup>105</sup> For a treatment of the ways that women's care-giving roles motivated activism in the progressive era, see especially Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother Work*.

In the latter half of the century, the authority granted to women by maternalist rhetoric proved valuable when children's rights emerged as a distinctive branch of political activism. In this later period, the pairing of *women and children* assumed renewed cultural significance as movements for children's and women's rights and liberation garnered increased public attention. While young people organized to oppose the draft and to lower voting and drinking ages, mothers forged corollary movements for peace and emerged as spokespeople for younger children's causes. Youth movements of the period ranged from reform-oriented to radical as young people traversed a dynamic political landscape. When women organized as mothers, however, the range of their political and ideological options were somewhat more circumscribed than when they framed themselves solely as citizens.

At a time when civil rights claims were giving way to increasingly radical nationalist and liberation-oriented discourses, maternalism remained rhetorically linked to tradition and respectability due to its family-centered orientation. Unlike discourses that reimagined marital and familial relationships or de-centered the family as a unit of the state, those using maternalism reified the dominance of hetero-nuclear family models. In this way, the use of maternalist rhetoric was often understood as conservative regardless of the specific reforms it sought to achieve. Even within feminism, maternalist principals were fraught with their reliance on women's particular (sometimes articulated as innate or biological) role as mothers. Within a broader feminist discourse that increasingly moved away from articulating gender difference in

favor of advocating an “equality of sameness,” maternalism was often read as an approach that achieved short-term gains at the expense of long-term losses.<sup>106</sup>

In an effort to address these concerns, several leftist groups recast maternalism within more radical political projects. Rarely perceived as radical by itself, maternalist assertions were often used as a way to translate socially unpalatable positions into culturally normative language. As such, many of the movements of the post-War period contained some maternalist leanings.<sup>107</sup> Whether employed to contain women’s roles within a movement or to render a particular cause legible to broader audiences, maternalist rhetoric repeatedly emerged as a part of movements all along the political spectrum. Within reform movements, maternalism functioned both to authorize women’s participation and to forestall opposition by centering child and family welfare. At the same time, maternalist rhetoric often surfaced as the conservatism within radical politics, curtailing female involvement and elevating ideological reproduction.

Feminist health activism provides a perfect site to explore second-wave maternalism because its focus on holistic approaches to women’s bodies and lives aligns with maternalist calls for women’s fulfillment as individuals. That is, the rhetorical and ideological underpinning of both second-wave maternalism and feminist health activism were an attention to the needs of the whole woman. Moreover, since women often came to motherhood through physical reproductive processes, pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing were inevitable items on any women’s health movement

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<sup>106</sup> Patrice DiQuinzio, *The Impossibility of Motherhood: Feminism, Individualism, and the Problem of Mothering*, (New York: Routledge, 1999). DiQuinzio reads de Beauvoir, Kristeva, Chodorow and Rich to show that mothering has been and will continue to be an intractable problem for feminist theory.

<sup>107</sup> For arguments against reproductive-oriented female participation in radical activism, see Toni Cade, “The Pill: Genocide or Liberation?,” in Toni Cade ed., *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (New York: New American Library, 1970), 162-69. For an alternative approach to theorizing political activism, see Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).



agenda. Because of their institutional investment in “women and children,” the Boston Women’s Health Collective and the Elizabeth Stone House are ideally situated to provide a window into the development and use of second-wave maternalist rhetoric.

Both groups under examination in this chapter (the Boston Women’s Health Collective and the Elizabeth Stone House) advanced radical critiques of institutional medical authority while working to reform services and redefine ‘healthy.’ The educational work of the Collective and the services offered by the Stone House both sought to disrupt a culture of medical “experts,” and each relied on a specific understanding of women’s relationship with children. These groups in particular provide a useful lens through which to examine the ways that the union of women with children allowed feminists to redefine good health and transform the treatment of ill health. Using two groups that paired women with children to advance feminist politics, this chapter reveals the centrality of feminists’ use of maternalist rhetoric in their challenges both to medical authority and to cultural prescriptions about gender, sexuality, family and child rearing.

The Boston Women’s Health Collective grew out of a workshop in which twelve women at a 1969 Boston conference discussed women and their bodies.<sup>108</sup> As a result of continued meetings and conversation, the women turned their attention to research and writing, producing *Women and Their Bodies*, which was published by the New England Free Press in 1970 and served as the text book for a series of ten-to-twelve week classes offered by the Collective. By 1973 *Women and Their Bodies* had become *Our Bodies, Ourselves* and was being published for a broader audience by

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<sup>108</sup> Boston Women’s Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, (New York, 1976), 11.

Simon and Schuster, and in 1979 the second edition of the text became a national bestseller.<sup>109</sup> In its first two decades, the Collective incorporated and offered classes while continuing to revise, expand and translate *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, a text which has been credited for “igniting and sustaining a worldwide women’s health movement.”<sup>110</sup>

At the heart of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was an acknowledgment that the medical profession failed to take women’s concerns seriously or to treat women with the respect and consideration that should be afforded independent adults. Recognizing that a monopoly on information only served to further the power that medical “experts” could wield over women, the Collective sought to inform themselves and others about women’s bodies and patient’s rights as well as ways to maintain health and access humane care when it was needed. The text was at the center intense public debate not only because of the challenge it posed to the medical establishment, but also because so much of its content revolved around women’s sexuality, reproduction, and providing alternative models of child birth and child rearing. In the 1980s as each edition of the text expanded information about sexuality, abortion and child care, Jerry Falwell condemned the book as “obscene trash.”

While the Collective aimed to provide a general primer on women’s health that would empower and liberate women, the founders of the Elizabeth Stone House focused their efforts on learning, teaching and treating the causes of women’s ill health, particularly their psychic and emotional distress. Founded in 1974, the Elizabeth Stone

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<sup>109</sup> Sandra Morgen, *Into Our Own Hands: The Women’s Health Movement in the United States, 1960-1990*, (New Brunswick, 1992), 5.

<sup>110</sup> Sheryl Ruzek, “Transforming doctor-patient relationships,” *Journal of Health Services Research and Policy*. Vol. 12 No 3, July 2007.

House was a feminist-oriented, residential mental health facility for women and their children. It was proposed as a result of the 1973 “Women and Madness” Conference held in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The scholars, clinicians and former mental patients who participated in the conference believed that the foundation of a women’s residential mental health alternative was a necessary remedy for what they saw as the persistent failure of state institutions to help emotionally distressed women. Upon its founding, the Stone House took the position that, “it is not particularly therapeutic to separate mothers and their children,”<sup>111</sup> and became the first residential psychiatric facility that allowed women to maintain custody of their children.

Just as maternalist rhetoric positioned women to “clean up” society, its use could also signal a cleaning up or rehabilitation of women’s image. By linking calls for change to women’s roles as mothers, culturally stigmatized identity categories could be overshadowed. Indeed, in the case of the Elizabeth Stone House, relying on the pairing of women and children provided an opportunity to substantiate claims for broader reforms. As a residential mental health facility, the Stone House was charged with the double task of destigmatizing mental illness while also working to dismantle gendered stereotypes that cast women as frail or incapable. Since mothers were especially vulnerable to poverty and its resulting emotional distress, Stone House members argued that ameliorating these problems would strengthen families and empower women to fulfill their roles as mothers more ably. Thus, the Stone House positioned itself within growing anti-poverty, community mental health, and anti-violence movements, using their work with mothers and children to reframe good and ill health.

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<sup>111</sup> Beckert, et. al., 14.

The materials produced by and about the Boston Women's Health Collective and the Elizabeth Stone House reveal the ways that feminist politics, specifically second-wave maternalist rhetoric, used the figure of the child to advance a radical agenda. I argue that feminist attempts to recast victimhood, re-imagine familial bonds, and reshape dominant models of health were predicated upon a particular understanding of the child and of a maternalist rhetoric that united "women and children." Moreover, I contend that advancing the rhetorical link of women with children rendered discussions of sexuality even more contentious because they highlighted sexuality and desire within the figure of the child and situated it a part of the mother-child relationship.

### **(Re)Thinking Women's Bodies**

The Boston Women's Health Collective's focus on health grew out of feminist attention to the politics of the body. In as much as feminism in the period pursued reproductive rights, sought to differentiate between sex and gender, opposed sexual violence, and attempted to demystify female sexuality, the female body was often at the center of feminist politics. Even debates among different feminist groups about how best to balance celebrating the specificity of womanhood while simultaneously advancing an unequivocal call for equality often revolved around the particularity of the female body.<sup>112</sup> Thus a politics emerged around the body itself. Indeed, when they wrote that "body education is core education" and that with it, "we can be better friends and better lovers, better *people*, more self-confident, more autonomous, stronger, and

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<sup>112</sup> Stephanie Gilmore ed., *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second Wave Feminism in the United States*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

more whole,” the Boston Women’s Health Collective identified knowledge about and ownership of one’s body as the origin of a woman’s personal empowerment.<sup>113</sup> In this context, advancing new frameworks for understanding health—the proper way to interact with and care for bodies—became a political act, not just because these frameworks challenged institutional authority, but also because they made the body the locus of female power, rendering its care a series of political actions.

Attentive to the care and maintenance of the body, feminist health activists advanced holistic approaches to wellness. For them, good health involved everything from a satisfying sex life to personal safety and appropriate medications. This holistic orientation encompassed traditional approaches to physical health in addition to addressing women’s intellectual fulfillment and emotional stability. At the same time, feminist health reformers in the period were concerned with addressing social and cultural impediments to the health of the whole woman. Thus, both the services offered and the critiques advanced by these activists were multi-dimensional. For example, exposing the myth of the vaginal orgasm simultaneously educated women about their sexual physiognomy, empowered them to achieve a more satisfying sex life, and challenged the male-centered ethos that identified penetrative sex as the only “mature” or “fulfilling” experience.<sup>114</sup>

Feminist health activists began by taking women’s concerns seriously, by privileging women’s experiences of their own bodies and needs. Rather than

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<sup>113</sup> Boston Women’s Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A book By and for Women*, (New York, 1973), 3.

<sup>114</sup> Anne Koedt, “The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm,” in Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John MacMillan eds., *The Radical Reader: A Documentary History of America’s Radical Tradition*, (New York: New Press, 2003). The Koedt piece (1968) is both quoted and cited in the first edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. See especially the sections on masturbation and sexuality, pp. 30-34.

dismissing sexually unfulfilled women as frigid, new frameworks for sexual pleasure were deemed healthy. Similarly, women whose physical or emotional discomfort could not be easily or immediately identified were, nonetheless, believed to be in need of care, not merely menstrual, menopausal, or hysterical.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, a shared experience of dismissal from male physicians was one of the foundational impulses for developing *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. “We had all experienced similar feelings of frustration and anger toward specific doctors and the medical maze in general, and initially we wanted to do something about those doctors who were condescending, paternalistic, judgmental and non-informative.”<sup>116</sup> These experiences solidified feminist critiques of a patriarchal medical establishment and identified health (care) as a field in need of feminist political intervention.

In pursuing this holistic approach to women’s health, feminist health activists called for reforms in scientifically focused medicine as well as social and cultural attitudes about women. These activists were equally as involved in campaigns against sexual violence as they were in calling for new research and testing protocols for prescription medications.<sup>117</sup> Consequently, the critiques advanced by feminist health activists were not limited to the medical establishment. To be sure, women’s health advocates pursued reforms in medical care, but these activists also believed that social and cultural changes were necessary. In fact, many argued that the training of

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<sup>115</sup> For a treatment of how women’s health activists understood a prevailing culture of dismissal, see Sandra Morgen, *Into Our Own Hands: The Women’s Health Movement in the United States, 1960-1990*, (New Brunswick, 1992).

<sup>116</sup> Boston Women’s Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book by and for Women*, (New York, 1973), 1.

<sup>117</sup> Emily Friedman ed., *An Unfinished Revolution: Women and Health Care in America*, (New York, 1994).

physicians, the production of medications, and the classification of diagnoses merely reflected the male-centered ethos of US cultural life.

Under the heading “Growing Up,” The Boston Women’s Health Collective’s celebrated text, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* declared, “[w]e are born loving our bodies.”<sup>118</sup> Recognizing the import of socialization to children’s development, one of the missions the book undertook was to provide an alternative approach to thinking, talking and teaching about sexuality. “[W]e want to help our children grow up differently, with healthier feelings about their bodies and their sexuality. We are trying to be more open with our words and affection, more positive when they explore their bodies, more ready with information when they ask for it.”<sup>119</sup> The Collective was not alone in its efforts to change the way children (particularly girls) learned about their bodies, their desires, and the space where they met. The text had a consciousness-raising inspired format that interspersed anecdotal stories with secondary research information. The Collective emphasized the patriarchal politics that had continually prevented girls and women from accessing this information or sharing their stories with each other. In fact, the book pointed to systemic problems at the cultural level with the ways (girl) children were socialized, and it identified a series of far-reaching, widespread (emotional and material) consequences.

Feminist critiques of gendered socializing techniques took many forms. One strategy included advancing alternative ways of understanding (girl) children’s

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<sup>118</sup> Boston Women’s Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book By and For Women, revised and expanded.*, (New York, 1976), 40.

<sup>119</sup> *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, 41. (1976).

sexuality. In this new framework, sexual innocence and expressivity co-existed in the child. One of the anecdotes cited in *Our Bodies, Ourselves* read:

I watch my daughter. From morning to night her body is her home...When she rubs her crotch, there is no awkwardness, no feeling that what she is doing is wrong. She feels pleasure and expresses it without hesitation. She knows when she wants to be touched and when she wants to be left alone. She doesn't have to think about it—it's a very direct physical asking or responding to someone else. It's beautiful to be with her. I sometimes feel that she is more a model for me than I am for her!...I want to be a child again. It's so hard to get back that sense of body as home.<sup>120</sup>

In this case, the very purity and innocence of the child was used to showcase the flaws of socialization which had removed the adult woman from natural and healthy ways of relating to her body and desires. In this framework, innocence was not ignorance of sexual desire or pleasure, but rather it was seen as a natural and innate knowledge that had yet to be corrupted by external pressures. Understood this way, children's sexuality could be celebrated, even envied. Parenting now assumed the task of safeguarding children's natural sexual expressivity rather than molding it into appropriate patterns of gendered performance.

Imagining childhood innocence as its own kind of knowledge allowed the child to assume a teaching role within her relationship with her mother. That is, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* described a reciprocity in the mother-child relationship where each was taught, loved and enriched by the other. Though the Collective was not the first group to outline this mutuality, situating sexuality at the center of children's knowledge was an innovation that recognized the child as a sexual being while simultaneously arguing for the affirmation of women's sexuality. Thus the text located a pleasure-seeking,

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<sup>120</sup> Boston Women's Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves 1<sup>st</sup> ed.*, (New York, 1971), 24-25.



desirous sexuality, rather than a reproductively focused one, within the mother-child relationship and at the center of second-wave maternalist rhetoric.

*Our Bodies, Ourselves* was also filled with stories in which women enacted healthier and more progressive approaches to sexuality through their teaching relationships with their children. The other day I was taking a bath with my almost-three-year-old daughter. I was lying down and she was sitting between my legs, which were spread apart. She said, “Mommy, you don’t have a penis.” I said, “That’s right, men have penises and women have clitorises.” All calm and fine—then, “Mommy, where is your clitoris?” Okay, now what was I going to do? I took a deep breath (for courage or something), tried not to blush, spread my vagina apart, and showed her my clitoris. It didn’t feel so bad. “Do you want to see yours?” I asked. “Yes.” That was quite a trick to get her to look over her fat stomach and see hers, especially when she started laughing as I first put my finger and then hers on her clitoris.<sup>121</sup>

Pairing women with children in this context acknowledged both as complete sexual beings. Moreover, the featured stories situated sexuality as an opportunity for bonding as well as for teaching and learning. By marking these encounters as a healthy part of the maternal bond, Collective members could forestall allegations of abuse and objections about parenting practices. In as much as the maternal bond was seen as sacred, those activities that aided its formation and maintenance could be safeguarded from criticism.

The above story was juxtaposed with another in which the child’s curiosity garnered a very different response.

When I was six years old I climbed up on the bathroom sink and looked at myself naked in the mirror. All of a sudden I realized that I had three different holes. I was very excited about my discovery and ran down to the dinner table and announced it to everyone. ‘I have three holes!’ Silence. ‘What are they for?’ I asked. Silence even heavier than before. I sensed how uncomfortable everyone was and answered for myself. ‘I guess one is for pee-pee, the other for doo-doo and the third for ca-ca.’ A sigh of relief; no one had to answer my

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<sup>121</sup> Boston Women’s Health Collective, *Our Bodies Ourselves 1<sup>st</sup> ed.*, (New York, 1973), 27.

question. But I got the message—I wasn't supposed to ask 'such' questions, though I didn't fully realize what 'such' was about at the time.<sup>122</sup>

This story, where the child's natural inquisitiveness was met with disapproving silence, served to make the mother in the other anecdote all the more heroic for overcoming her nervous trepidation. Indeed, the story of silence stood in as a kind of normative template that the Collective sought to correct. Placed side by side within the text, the two stories posited physical and sexual development as an appropriate component of the maternal relationship, while arguing that silence around these issues was tantamount to neglect. Moreover, the authors suggested that these moments of neglect, taken together, ultimately left women with the feelings of shame and ignorance to which *Our Bodies, Ourselves* responded.

Placing sexuality within the context of maternal teaching was not an entirely innovative idea, but Collective members' approach to the issue went beyond this move. Though the authors of the various childcare manuals discussed in the previous chapter all endorsed some manner of sexual education for young people, none went so far as to include information or techniques for its dissemination within their texts.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, apart from Watson's suggestion that parents visit a physician to acquire information, no guidance was provided for adults seeking to teach their children about sexuality. In each of the child care manuals the authors decried adult ignorance of 'normal' or 'healthy' sexual development and argued that parents should provide some manner of sexual education to their children. Nevertheless, the information itself or advice about

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<sup>122</sup> Boston Women's Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book By and For Women, revised and expanded.*, (New York, 1976), 40.

<sup>123</sup> As discussed in chapter 1, both Spock and Watson argued for some measure of sex education for training. Even Emmet Holt, as early as the 1890s, thought that information about children's physical and sexual development should be shared with them.

making it age appropriate was always omitted. With *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, Collective members filled in this gap.

It is significant not just that *Our Bodies, Ourselves* included information about women's sexual development and desires, but also that this information was presented as a healthy and necessary part of parenting. That is, the text went beyond educating its adult readership about the workings of their own bodies to prescribe a "more open" approach to motherhood. In so doing, Collective members realized, in concrete terms, the advice of earlier child care experts while simultaneously taking sex (education) out of the home and making it public. Despite their promotion of sex education, Holt, Watson and Spock all charged parents with the job without providing them with the tools to accomplish it. Their silence, like that of the family who refused to engage with their daughter's three holes, contributed not only to women's ignorance about their bodies but also to a culture that made sexual development unspeakable. The Collective provided the information, its context, and examples of how to share it, speaking that which had gone unspoken. Moreover, with its publication and reliance on women sharing their stories, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* took sexuality out of the private realm of home and family moving it into the social world of education, empowerment and feminist politics.

With this expansive approach to healthfulness came a revised vision of what constituted ill health as well. The holistic approach to women's lives that served as the center of feminist health activism led to an interest in threats to women's emotional and psychological wellbeing as well as to their physical health. Women's health advocates highlighted the psychological trauma associated with sexual violence as well as the

emotionally damaging effects of sexism to women's self esteem. Here, too, feminist health activists sought reforms within the medical establishment while also pursuing a broader social agenda. Seeking cultural change was seen as a necessary step to ensure women's total health.

### **(Re)Thinking Women's Minds**

*"What is madness?"*<sup>124</sup>In its philosophy, the Elizabeth Stone House sought to answer that question; through the actions of its participants, the Stone House reflected the question back to what its founders perceived as an inadequate medical establishment, an ineffective political apparatus, and a violent patriarchal culture. As an alternative to state institutionalization the Stone House was positioned to provide a critique of state approaches to mental health services while it advanced competing models of care. Believing that the factors contributing to emotional distress were as varied as the women who suffered its effects, the staff, volunteers and residents of the Stone House enacted a model of total health care that used feminism both to advocate for the particular needs of women and children and to reframe the very meaning of madness. As such, an examination of the Stone House offers a unique lens through which to see the ways that the politics of pathology were contested and the extent to which children's sexuality and bodies framed those contests.

The Stone House emerged from proposals first made at an academic conference. Beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, a renewed academic interest in the origins of the asylum, the history of psychological professions, and the culturally

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<sup>124</sup> Ann Beckert, Deborah Linnell, and Katrina Pope, *The Elizabeth Stone House Handbook: Sheltering People in Emotional Distress*, (Jamaica Plain, 1991), 9.

and historically specific treatment of and attitudes towards the insane was reflected by a proliferation of scholarship attending to the dilemmas of the mentally ill. This intellectual boom was characterized equally by the birth of a ‘revisionist’ school wedded to a theory of deviance grounded in social control and the expansion of traditional meliorist claims of “the accidental and ‘nonmalevolent’ character of reform.”<sup>125</sup> Academic attention to the role of psychiatry and psychiatric institutions in maintaining the social order shaped and was shaped by the social activism and government policy debates of its time. At the heart of these academic debates was a desire to determine how best to define mental illness—as disease or social construction. Meliorists and revisionists took up their respective positions, and the scholarship they produced was as much a reflection of contemporary political debates as it was of the historical moments it sought to illuminate.

Part of a broader network of community mental health centers, the Stone House was founded as part of deinstitutionalization reform efforts. From the moment of its founding, the Elizabeth Stone House self-consciously advanced a critique of institutional (often explicitly state-run) approaches to mental health and positioned itself as an alternative much better able to understand and meet the needs of women and their children. The facility was named after nineteenth-century feminist activist and reformer, Elizabeth Stone who was institutionalized by her family after she converted from the Methodist to the Baptist Church. Upon her release, Stone became a mental health advocate and wrote prolifically of the horrors she witnessed and experienced in

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<sup>125</sup> Andrew Scull, *Social Order/Mental Disorder*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 40.

the estate asylum in Chelsea.<sup>126</sup> By choosing her as its namesake, the Stone House built a bridge from the asylum reform movements of the nineteenth century, argued that the abuses of those earlier asylums persisted in state hospitals, and held that women were particularly vulnerable to the vicissitudes of institutional authority. Indeed, in a 1986 publication, *Women and Craziness*, the staff made these links explicit, writing of Stone's work that, "many of these horrors still exist today."<sup>127</sup>

The push toward deinstitutionalization represented a major shift within lay and professional attitudes about mental illness. It is arguably the greatest American reform effort in the treatment of madness since the nineteenth century proliferation of the asylum from which it sought to liberate patients. The transition of these early mental hospitals from curative centers to custodial warehouses led to the Progressive era reforms that are partially responsible for the liberal use of insulin coma, electroshock, and lobotomy in treatment.<sup>128</sup> By the 1950s, exposés of conditions as well as the continued and over-prescribed use of these treatments once again turned public attention to reform. Like earlier efforts, however, deinstitutionalization, though grounded in good intentions, yielded dubious results.

Deinstitutionalization, for example, is the product of three concurrent developments in the 1950s and early 1960s: advances in psychopharmacology, the growth of the community mental health movement, and the expansion of federal

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<sup>126</sup> For a collection of Elizabeth Stone writings, see Jeffery L. Geller and Maxine Harris eds., *Women of the Asylum: Voices from Behind the Walls, 1840-1945*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1994).

<sup>127</sup> Elizabeth Stone House Staff, prefatory remarks from *Women and Craziness*, 5.

<sup>128</sup> Richard W. Shaedle, "Critical Ingredients of Intensive Care Management" Dissertation (CUNY, 1999), 6.

welfare entitlements to include persons with mental disabilities.<sup>129</sup> The idea behind deinstitutionalization is that “people with disabilities, including people with severe and multiple disabilities, show increases in independence, fewer problem behaviors, increases in choice making, increases in relationships with people without disabilities and increases in employment and earnings” when they are removed from large congregate facilities and returned to the community.<sup>130</sup> Politically, the idea was almost universally supported. It was sold as both recognition of patient rights and a cost cutting strategy that alleviated state burden by dispersing financial responsibilities for the mentally ill.

Using the language of a growing and more publicized civil rights movement, mental health groups in the period issued their demands in terms of equality and social justice. This focus on rights and equality allowed the mental health movement to engage in a national political discourse about Americanness and citizenship while also facilitating coalitions with women’s groups, gay liberationists, and the disabilities rights movement. Within this context the Stone House argued that gendered violence and poverty, both of which disproportionately effected women, contributed to the emotional distress that they suffered. Heavily rooted in feminist models, the Stone House critiqued the inadequacy of state care as part of a broader challenge to patriarchy.

What I call second-wave maternalism, the rhetorical reframing of the mother-child pair to focus on the fulfillment of the mother *as an individual*, was at the heart of the Stone House’s “good enough” parenting philosophy. Proclaiming that “any self-

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<sup>129</sup> Shaedle

<sup>130</sup> David Mank, “Deinstitutionalization in America,” *The Arc*, 2002.

help program should define ‘good enough’ parenting,” the Stone House offered this definition:

Along with the responsibilities of parenting, a mother will have the additional job of managing her own emotional issues, and also, consistently working on her goals that will hopefully affect her family in a positive manner. ‘Good enough’ parenting means taking into consideration the various issues associated with parenting, as well as its stresses.<sup>131</sup>

An approach that challenged the cultural construction of mothers as “always nurturing, patient, gentle, and accepting,” ‘good enough’ parenting acknowledged the stresses of motherhood while situating a woman’s consistent pursuit of her individual/particular desires as a necessary component of her life that affects her family “in a positive manner.”<sup>132</sup>

“Good enough” parenting was a product of the Stone House’s orientation as “a women’s organization that also worked with and for children.”<sup>133</sup> Like second-wave maternalism, both the Stone House’s organizational imperative and its programs viewed women’s health and wellness as a primary goal from which familial improvement could spring. Indeed, “good enough” parenting might be seen as the logical end of this individualized, woman-centered maternalist politics. That is, “good enough” parenting centered women’s particular needs, addressing familial health only as it grew from the total health of women.

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<sup>131</sup> Ann Beckert, Deborah Linnell, and Katrina Pope, *The Elizabeth Stone House Handbook: Sheltering People in Emotional Distress* (Jamaica Plain, MA, 1991), 18.

<sup>132</sup> Beckert et. al. *The Elizabeth Stone House Handbook*, 18.

<sup>133</sup> Ann Beckert, Deborah Linnell, and Katrina Pope, *The Elizabeth Stone House Handbook: Sheltering People in Emotional Distress*, (Jamaica Plain, 1991), 14.



The Stone House engaged in second-wave maternalism beyond its endorsement of good enough parenting. One former resident summarized what she learned from the program:

I would say probably the most important thing is for a woman to have a sense of her own—whatever her own is! Truly her own. Particularly in terms of some sort of career. Before she devotes time and energy to a husband and children and a family, she really needs to develop her own sense of who she is and what she wants to accomplish in life. Whatever it is, it doesn't have to be a professional thing, but some kind of career she can make a living at if she had to. Not a bare-bones living, but a comfortable living. That goes a long way in preventing a lot of things. My advice is to do the prevention before you get into trouble.<sup>134</sup>

Echoing Stone House programmatic language that centered women's goals for their lives as a means of fostering self-confidence and healing, this woman explicitly calls for women to ensure their ability to support themselves before (and while) engaging in adult relationships like wife and mother.

Though second-wave maternalism provides a useful framework for understanding Stone House policies and procedures, the population it served also shaped the feminist politics espoused by staffers. Unlike the Boston Women's Health Collective's far-reaching educative agenda, the Stone House's direct services placed it at made it an organization primarily concerned with *responding to* crises. Despite its investment in social change, the Stone House could not assume as proactive a posture as the Boston Women's Health Collective.

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<sup>134</sup> Elizabeth Stone House Staff, *Women & Crazyness: Oral Histories by the Residents of the Elizabeth Stone House*, (Jamaica Plain, MA, 1986), 18.

The Stone House was defined as “a women’s organization working with and for children.”<sup>135</sup> That is, the primary focus was on the needs of women, and children accessed services only as a result of their relationships with their mothers. Within the Stone House model of care, children’s presence was directly linked to the emotional health of their mothers. The Stone House took the position that, “it is not particularly therapeutic to separate mothers and their children,”<sup>136</sup> and this position was equally invested in aiding the distressed mother as it was in protecting the vulnerable child. Indeed, serving a distressed population led the Stone House to adopt a paradigm in which women and children were survivors of sexist patriarchy, already damaged by a constant barrage of poverty, violence and victimization. Steeped in feminist cultural critiques, this framework nevertheless differed from others in the period that highlighted women’s strength rather than their vulnerability. The Stone House approach required that women and children be protected, and its philosophy and programs provided this protection while empowering women to be better able to protect themselves and their families.

### **(Re)Thinking Women’s Health**

Feminist politics and a holistic orientation towards women’s health led both the Boston Women’s Health Collective and the Elizabeth Stone House to address external threats to women’s mental and physical health in addition to attending to chemical and biological imbalances. For the Boston Women’s Health Collective, this meant

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<sup>135</sup> Ann Beckert, Deborah Linnell, and Katrina Pope, *The Elizabeth Stone House Handbook: Sheltering People in Emotional Distress*, (Jamaica Plain, MA: Elizabeth Stone House, Inc. 1991), 14.

<sup>136</sup> Beckert, et. al., 14.

addressing rape and self-defense along side of reproductive health and nutrition. The Elizabeth Stone House framed sexual violence as an ever-present threat to women's emotional stability and encouraged women to overcome previous experiences of victimization while tolerating the persistence of "sexual terrorism."<sup>137</sup> Though both groups wrote about and organized programs dealing with sexual violence against women, the Boston Women's Health Collective's educative mission resulted in a more proactive approach while the Stone House's direct-service, crisis management led them to respond to rather than pre-empt assault.

*Our Bodies, Ourselves* defined rape as: "sexual intercourse without consent, or violent sexual aggression by a man (or men) against a woman (or child). Rape causes mental and physical damage."<sup>138</sup> This definition aligned women and children against male aggressors. Furthering this opposition the Collective framed legal and medical institutions as corrupted by the white, male-dominated status quo, and identified women as the people best suited to provide support and ensure conditions that would reduce incidences of rape. In a chapter entitled, "Rape and Self-Defense" the Collective argued, "rape is the fault of our cultural emphasis on 'sex and violence.'"<sup>139</sup> The chapter went on to tackle myths about race and rape and to offer advice to women who might face attack as well as to those who had already survived an assault.

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<sup>137</sup> Carole Sheffield defines sexual terrorism as: "a system by which males frighten, and by frightening, control and dominate women." It includes rape, wife abuse, sexual abuse of children, and sexual harassment. I employ this term here to capture Stone House understanding of patriarchal violence as constant and pervasive. See Carole Sheffield, "Sexual Terrorism" in Laura O'Toole, Jessica R. Shiffman, Margie L. Kiter Edwards eds., *Gender Violence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (New York University Press, 2007), 111-132. This concept also owes much to Susan Brownmiller's assertion that rape is "nothing more than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear." See Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, (New York, 1975), 5.

<sup>138</sup> Boston Women's Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, (1973), 92.

<sup>139</sup> Boston Women's Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, (1973), 92.

The inability of both legal and medical institutions to provide supportive, compassionate, or even adequate assistance to women who had been raped was repeatedly highlighted by the Collective. In response to questions about why as many as four to ten times more rapes are committed than reported, the following answer was provided: “The legal system represents the white, male-dominated status quo... a woman who want to prosecute for rape can usually expect little help from either the police or the courts.”<sup>140</sup> Moreover, the text cautioned women interested in pursuing prosecution to “be prepared to feel as though the police are raping you again. They will interrogate you, make you go through every derail of the action..., and in general make the experience very humiliating.”<sup>141</sup> Though the text did advise women to seek immediate medical help after a rape, it warned “in some cities only the city hospital will see you, and you my have to wait two to three hours before a gynecologist shows up. Since the gynecologist will probably be a male, he may have little regard to the revulsion that you might feel at being handled by a man just after being raped.” Calling a friend, a women’s center, or a local rape squad was offered as a way to reduce feelings of guilt and shame and to create a safe space to express feelings of anger within a community that recognized rape as a crime affecting many women. Where lawyers, police, and doctors could not help, women could come together to help each other. Such a step was more than a mere recommendation; it was framed as necessary to ensure positive social change. Indeed, the section on rape concluded with this proclamation: “It is not the police, the courts, or men who will stop rape. Women will

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<sup>140</sup> Boston Women’s Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, (1973), 93.

<sup>141</sup> Boston Women’s Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, (1973), 94.

stop rape.”<sup>142</sup> A book by and for women, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* emphasized the role women should play in maintaining their own safety and in offering support to each other as part of a holistic approach to general health.

The Boston Women’s Health Collective paired its discussion of rape with one of self-defense. In fact, more than half of the “Rape and Self-Defense” chapter dealt with self-defense, seeing it as a response to rape culture, rather than to actual experiences of rape. “As we spread [self-defense skills] around, and begin to defend each other, we will be on the way toward ending that oppression that will stop only when it becomes as dangerous to attack a woman as it is to attack another man.”<sup>143</sup> Beyond the physical benefits of self-defense training, the text emphasized the ways that such training could counter-act gendered socialization that left women feeling unable or unwilling to hurt others, even in defense of themselves. Thus, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* used the chapter on rape and self-defense to address the physical, emotional and cultural impediments to women’s health and safety, in accordance with their holistic approach to wellness.

Like the Boston Women’s Health Collective, the Elizabeth Stone House acknowledged the pervasiveness of sexual violence against women, the inability of existing institutions to offer meaningful response, and the necessity of women’s communities to offer support to women living with the aftermath and ceaseless threat of violence. Indeed, the organization’s founding narrative revolves around both an acknowledgement of the pervasiveness of violence against women and the inadequacy of state institutions in dealing with it.

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<sup>142</sup> Boston Women’s Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, (1973), 94.

<sup>143</sup> Boston Women’s Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, (1973), 97.

[T]he founders of the Stone House felt that traditional mental health services did not address the conditions which cause and compound emotional distress in women. These conditions include: violence against women as manifested through rape, incest, and battering.<sup>144</sup>

According to the Stone House's *Handbook*, ninety percent of the facility's residential population in the 1980s had abuse in their personal histories: "80% battering, 45% rape, 40% incest."<sup>145</sup> The oral histories of former Stone House residents referred frequently to these incidents. While the *Handbook* contained an outline of self-help approaches to dealing with experiences of violence and abuse, *Women & Crazyness: Oral Histories by Residents of the Elizabeth Stone House* offered first-person accounts of women's experiences not only with violence but also with Stone House's therapeutic community's assistance coping with violence.

Where *Our Bodies, Ourselves* saw female empowerment in terms of self-defense training that would make women less vulnerable to attack, the Stone House explicitly rejected this approach, declaring, "Society often examines violence by wondering what the victim could have done to prevent it."<sup>146</sup> Indeed, in her oral history, former Stone House resident, Ruth, stated:

The whole idea of control and responsibility is extremely distorted when you are a victim because, on the one hand, you don't have any at all and, on the other hand, you really do believe you are responsible for everything. So you end up taking responsibility for the wrong things. It never occurred to me that I had a responsibility to not take it and get myself out of the situation. Unless you've really been in that type of situation and understand what a victim is, the last thing that will occur to you is to leave.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Ann Beckert, Deborah Linnell, Katrina Pope, *The Elizabeth Stone House Handbook: Sheltering People in Emotional Distress*, (Jamaica Plain, MA, 1991), 9.

<sup>145</sup> Ann Beckert, Deborah Linnell, Katrina Pope, *The Elizabeth Stone House Handbook: Sheltering People in Emotional Distress*, (Jamaica Plain, MA, 1991), 8.

<sup>146</sup> Ann Beckert, Deborah Linnell, Katrina Pope, *The Elizabeth Stone House Handbook: Sheltering People in Emotional Distress*, (Jamaica Plain, MA, 1991), 126.

<sup>147</sup> Elizabeth Stone House Staff, *Women & Crazyness: Oral Histories by the Residents of the Elizabeth Stone House*, (Jamaica Plain, MA, 1986), 15

Rather than engage in victim blaming, Stone House staffers sought to provide an environment where women would be empowered to assume control of their lives *despite* the violence in their pasts. When residents completed the five-month program, they would be better able to tolerate the stresses of their pasts and the struggles of their daily lives, confident in their ability to make decisions for themselves and their children. Thus, the Stone House acknowledged the prevalence of female victimization while still refusing to define women solely in terms of their victimization.

Empowerment, according to the founders and staff of the Elizabeth Stone House was based on a model of autonomous self-help that acknowledged a woman's susceptibility to distress and believed in her ability to live an independent, productive life despite it. "Empowering the resident is accomplished by the staff's not assuming power over her."<sup>148</sup> This approach emphasized women's capability and accountability. Because the program assumed residents' ability to work on their goals, staff could "remain relatively uninvolved in the accomplishment of the resident's goals and, thus, her life. The resident therefore becomes more involved in her own life. As difficult or scary as this may be for her, there is little that is more ego-building than the accomplishment of a difficult task. Improved self-esteem is one of the results of empowerment and self-help."<sup>149</sup> Empowerment became a means by which women thrived in the face of sexual terrorism. Perhaps the program goals were best captured by the staff in the preface to *Women & Crazyness*:

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<sup>148</sup> Ann Beckert, Deborah Linnell, Katrina Pope, *The Elizabeth Stone House Handbook: Sheltering People in Emotional Distress*, (Jamaica Plain, MA, 1991), 15.

<sup>149</sup> Ann Beckert, Deborah Linnell, Katrina Pope, *The Elizabeth Stone House Handbook: Sheltering People in Emotional Distress*, (Jamaica Plain, MA, 1991), 15.

The Stone House doesn't perform miracles. It provides a safe space where the victim is not blamed, where others are not making the decisions for the residents, and where a woman can help herself and see that she is not alone in her experiences.<sup>150</sup>

Thus, the Stone House created a space that served as both safe haven and an alternative model of living, returning residents to the wider world confident in their ability to manage their own lives and create feminist communities based on respect.

Many of the oral histories ended with a discussion of what each woman gained from her stay at the Stone House. Several women referred to the responsibility they were able to take of their own lives as the aspect of the program that ultimately prepared them to return to "normal" life. Of her decision to seek help at the Stone House, Christine offered, "By going [to the Stone House] I was basically making a decision that I was going to take some responsibility for my life."<sup>151</sup> Intake followed the Stone House model of empowerment. Residents chose to seek help; they were not sent to the Stone House, nor were they compelled to stay once began the program. Getting help, like managing life stresses, was the woman's choice. The Stone House provided a safe space and an environment of support that encouraged women to believe in their ability to thrive.

Though the Boston Women's Health Collective's and the Elizabeth Stone House's approaches to empowerment differed, their visions of the potential and possibilities of women's lives were ultimately compatible. Both groups defined themselves as run by and for women. Both undertook holistic approaches to women's

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<sup>150</sup> Elizabeth Stone House Staff, *Women & Crazyness: Oral Histories by the Residents of the Elizabeth Stone House*, (Jamaica Plain, MA, 1986), 5.

<sup>151</sup> Elizabeth Stone House Staff, *Women & Crazyness: Oral Histories by the Residents of the Elizabeth Stone House*, (Jamaica Plain, MA, 1986), 34.



lives, focusing on health, safety, and the need for cultural change. Both groups acknowledged the prevalence of violence against women (and children), and both worked to provide resources to individual women while working for broader, positive social change. Finally, and of central concern to this study, both groups used motherhood and the pairing of women with children to push for reform. The Stone House worked to create a safe place for distressed women to heal and emerge whole while also trying to change attitudes about and treatment of mental illness.

It has always been important at the Elizabeth Stone House to provide primary emergency services while at the same time working to change the social and economic conditions that create or compound emotional distress in people... We must challenge ourselves to work for broad social change that does not blame 'craziness' on the individual, but addresses the social and economic factors that make it impossible for some people to live 'sanely' within the world we share and the reality we help to shape.<sup>152</sup>

Similarly, the Boston Women's Health Collective imagined women, empowered by knowledge of their bodies and their ability to learn about and advocate for themselves, transforming everything from patient care to child-rearing to cultural violence.

Someday we will have women rape squads and will be so strong that we won't be attacked as much. Someday we will have free medical care and more sympathetic doctors. Someday we will be able to retaliate, to either send rapists to rehabilitation centers (not prisons) or humiliate them by beating them up.<sup>153</sup>

The critiques of institutional authority, from the courts to the hospitals, were strikingly similar. With these summative statements, each group was acknowledging the inability of state-sponsored systems to provide adequately for the needs of women while contending that women themselves had the solutions.

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<sup>152</sup> Bekert *et al.*, *The Elizabeth Stone House Handbook*, (Jamaica Plain, MA, 1991), 19.

<sup>153</sup> Boston Women's Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, (New York, 1976), 94.

Similarities were also evident in the ways that both the Boston Women's Health Collective and the Elizabeth Stone House framed sexual violence (like so many other issues) as something of particular concern to women, children, and families. From the rape definition in *Our Bodies, Ourselves* that make rape a crime perpetrated *by men* against *women and children* to a central Stone House claim that separating mothers and children was damaging to both. The Collective argued that women had to see themselves and be seen by others as more than wives and mothers, that such a revision of femininity would allow women to fulfill those roles more effectively. The Stone House, on the other hand, argued, "the areas of stress a mother has experienced will affect the entire family."<sup>154</sup> In both cases, the needs of women as individuals—for better economic opportunities, personal safety, emotional fulfillment—were framed as essential for them to perform their roles as mothers. The holistic approach to women's lives undertaken by the Stone House and within the pages of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* repeatedly returned to this second-wave maternalism.

The Stone House's assertions that women's emotional distress was a rational response to realities of violence, poverty, and sexism taken together with the Collective's insistence on acknowledging women's (and children's) sexuality as healthy and natural worked to transform paradigms of women's health. The groups worked to bring cultural context (socialization, poverty, sexual violence) into a more holistic approach to understanding women's bodies, psyches and lives. No longer content to imagine women as frail, frigid or as deficient men, the feminist health activists represented by the Boston Women's Health Collective and the Elizabeth Stone House

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<sup>154</sup> Elizabeth Stone House Staff, *Women & Crazyness: Oral Histories by the Residents of the Elizabeth Stone House*, (Jamaica Plain, MA, 1986), 5.

demanded that women be understood on their own terms. Group members lived out this vision by decrying hierarchy in favor of enacting collectives and therapeutic communities where each person was responsible for providing care and information while being entitled to receipt of the same.

The organization and orientation of the two groups functioned to challenge the medical establishment and its state institutions by undermining the culture of experts that characterized late twentieth century health care. Moreover, by working, researching and publishing, Collective Members and Stone House staffers and residents demonstrated the ways that lay people could take charge of their medical needs. Thus empowered, both groups addressed what the Collective referred to as “feelings of frustration and anger toward specific doctors and the medical maze in general, and...[did] something about the doctors who were paternalistic, judgmental and non-informative.”<sup>155</sup>

Beyond providing a corrective for poor care, each group also advanced a systemic critique of institutional sexism. The Collective’s text, “a book by and for women,” and the Stone House’s programs, run “by and for women” were the feminist responses to patronizing medical care, to hospital and judicial systems more concerned with making a case than with the immediate needs of victims of sexual violence, and to a pervasive culture of sexism that left women vulnerable to poverty and violence. In their efforts to raise awareness and standards of care, however, they succeeded in advancing advance more expansive frameworks of health and more compassionate frameworks for illness.

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<sup>155</sup> The Boston Women’s Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book By and For Women* revised and expanded (New York, 1976), 11.

At the core of these new frameworks was the formulation of a radical agenda that relied on the pairing of women with children. This second-wave maternalism allowed the Boston Women's Health Collective and the Elizabeth Stone House to advance new ideas about familial relationships, cultural violence, and the politics of health. These reformulations simultaneously highlighted the strength and vulnerability of women, along with the desirous sexuality and empowered innocence of children. However, later chapters will demonstrate the ways that this strategic reliance on maternalism, despite its individualist bent and its use to advance radical political agendas, ultimately undermined the liberatory goals of the very groups that re-imagined the politics of women and children.

## ‘Save the Children’: North American Man/Boy Love Association and the Limits of Liberation

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In April 1975, at the age of 31, Dick Bavely committed suicide. A long-time employee of the Massachusetts Welfare Department, Bavely had been using state resources to place gay runaways in the homes of adult homosexuals for years. Sources close to him held that the refusal of the welfare department to acknowledge the special needs of gay teens forced Bavely, himself a gay man, to act outside of the prescribed boundaries of the state agency. The police and local press, on the other hand, claimed that Bavely stole money to finance a gay prostitution service that led to the suicide of a 15-year-old boy in his care.

Dick Bavely’s story highlights the ways that the state (along with the mainstream press) deployed the rhetoric of “saving children” in order to win bans on gay adoption, limit employment opportunities, and police the gender and sexual norms of children.<sup>156</sup> In this framework, children’s protection was based on a series of assumptions about developmental stages, vulnerability, and innocence where the child was understood to be easily corrupted. Bavely and others like him were perceived as particularly dangerous because they believed in children’s ability not only to understand “mature” topics, but also to engage in practices deemed inappropriate for children—from autonomous decision-making to sexual behavior.

Unlike the mainstream approach that often sensationalized “threats” to children in order to highlight its investment in protection, Dick Bavely and those who supported him viewed the constraints placed on children as particularly injurious to gay youth

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<sup>156</sup> Phillip Jenkins, *Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 145-163.

whose sexually marginal desires already left them isolated. An emerging movement of “boy-lovers” argued that rather than protecting children, as the state purported to be doing, the continued persecution of the Dick Bavelys of the world limited outlets available to young people. Turning the dominant discourse on its head, advocates of this perspective reframed protection as constraint and positioned themselves as the real champions of children. This approach would meet with opposition not only from the state apparatuses that it challenged, but also from other social movement groups that opposed the state but refused to advance an agenda based on the autonomous sexual agency of children.

In 1977 the fledgling North American Man-Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) emerged as a leading proponent of children’s sexual subjectivity.<sup>157</sup> Positioning itself as filling the need left by Bavely’s death to protect gay youth from the perils of homophobia, NAMBLA also fought to free boys to act on their “natural” sexual desires. Like Bavely, NAMBLA members engaged in a battle to (re)define threats to children and the actions needed to save them. In so doing, they articulated a very different approach to the act of saving children as well as the positions of stakeholders within the debate.

The emergence of intergenerational sex scandals involving males, and the movement that arose in response to these scandals and which advocated intergenerational sex among men/ boys (NAMBLA), played a major role in fracturing

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<sup>157</sup> In December 1977 a group of activist journalists from one of Boston’s gay periodicals, *The Fag Rag*, organized the Boston/Boise Committee to respond to a “witchhunt” targeting gay men and “boy-lovers”. One year later, in December 1978, the group organized a conference where they adopted the name North American Man/Boy Love Association. Though I attend to the ways in which the mission of the group expanded with the adoption of the new name later in this chapter, the similarities in membership, political orientation, and organizational strategy encourage me to use NAMBLA here as a short hand for both chronological moments.

the fragile alliance that existed between the feminist and gay movements in the 1970s. Many feminists, invoking the vulnerability of (girl) children as especially vulnerable to rape and other forms of sexual violence and therefore in need of protection, saw NAMBLA as a manifestation of patriarchal male violence against vulnerable individuals. Many gay men, who had built a movement in opposition to police harassment and persecution, and who had long been stigmatized broadly as child abusers, were suspicious of state-backed attempts to prosecute perverts. Some gay male activists (including famous individuals like Edmund White and Gore Vidal) came to the defense of NAMBLA and saw linkages between the persecution of those involved in intergenerational sex and adult homosexuals. However, it was the gay activists who flatly rejected NAMBLA's claims, labeled them perverted and improperly "gay," and moved to disassociate NAMBLA from the "gay movement" that ultimately gained dominance within the movement. Thus, NAMBLA's history reveals both the fracturing of feminist/gay left, as well as a turn away from radicalism in the gay movement.

### NAMBLA—Origins

It began in December of 1977. After the Boston police arrested several gay men in public bathrooms and parks, 24 professional, middle-class gay men were accused of being members of a sex ring that used a Revere apartment to "abuse" teenage and pre-teen boys (the youngest was 12). Few of these cases went to trial, and only one resulted in a trial conviction, but the negative publicity was professionally ruinous for the accused men and undermined both the establishment of a gay community outside of

working-class neighborhoods as well as homophile claims that homosexuality was not deviant.

Located five miles north of the city in Boston's Italian North End, Revere was one of the city's first suburbs. By the 1970s, Revere was home to working-class Italian immigrants, second and third generation Italian-American families and a growing population of gay men. With its reputation as a boy-town, Revere acted as (one of) Boston's gay ghetto, keeping homosexual men and activity contained in working-class, ethnic enclaves and centers of prostitution.

In the summer of 1977, Boston police arrested Richard Peluso. His arrest was the first step in establishing and prosecuting what came to be called the "Revere Sex Ring." The prosecution held, and the media reported, that Peluso's home was the site of numerous sexual assaults. A subsequent search of Peluso's apartment uncovered a collection of Polaroid photographs featuring male youths in sexually suggestive poses. Police, aided by the Suffolk County Investigations and Prosecutions Project, were able to identify 63 of the young people featured in the Polaroid collection. With cooperation and testimony from 13 of these individuals, 24 men were indicted for over 100 felonies including: "rape and abuse upon a child under 16, sodomy, unnatural acts, open and gross lewdness, and indecent assault."<sup>158</sup> On December 8, twenty of the indicted men were arrested.<sup>159</sup> Those residing in Suffolk County were picked up by Boston police, but arrests were also made in New York City, Baltimore and Atlanta with extradition orders bringing all of the defendants back to Boston.

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<sup>158</sup> "Who's who among the defendants in the sex case" *Boston Herald American* Dec. 9. 1977.

<sup>159</sup> Four men were never located. After 'fleeing' the jurisdiction, the D.A. made efforts to involve Interpol in their capture, believing that the abuse conspiracy might extend beyond US borders.



The arrest of Richard Peluso, the seizure of his photographs and the cooperation of some of the individuals featured in those pictures led not only to indictments and arrests but also to a moral panic. The Revere Sex Ring stirred up public fears about the safety of children, political battles over the nature of homosexuality, and media coverage that heightened the pitch of unrest. Participating in this panic Suffolk County District Attorney, Garrett Byrne, announced his “crack down” on child molesters and implemented a city-wide hotline that recorded anonymous tips about the sexual exploitation of children. Openly lesbian Representative Elaine Noble was quick to endorse the hotline, to denounce the accused men as deviant and to deny their claims to homosexuality. In response, a group of journalists from the *Fag Rag* began reporting that the hotline was little more than an attempt to generate records that could be used to intimidate homosexuals, and they formed the Boston/Boise Committee (B/BC) in an effort to stop the hotline and the panic that inspired it.

The events surrounding the arrest of several homosexual men in 1955 Boise Idaho became a precedent for the panic in Boston.<sup>160</sup> B/BC members explicitly referenced these happenings when they named the group. Employing Boise was more than a rhetorical move, however. John Gerassi, author of *The Boys of Boise*, was a featured speaker at B/BC fundraising and public awareness events. Moreover, his analysis of the “witch-hunt” tactics employed by Boise’s business and political establishment would all be echoed in the writings of B/BC and NAMBLA members.

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<sup>160</sup> In 1955, the gay underworld of Boise was purged. The vice campaign was a power struggle between the city’s political and business elites and was couched as a necessary measure for the protection of children. For a complete outline of events, see John Gerassi, *The Boys of Boise: Furor, Vice and Folly in an American City* (New York: MacMillan, 1966). Further summary of events and their subsequent political positioning can be found in Jenkins, *Moral Panic* and Mitzel, *The Boston Sex Scandal*.

Intent on revealing the political motivation behind the persecution of the Revere ring, the B/BC framed the 1977-78 panic as part of a broader narrative of oppression. The group adopted a three part agenda: 1) Investigating the facts behind the hysteria. 2) Contacting the accused, making sure they had proper counsel and were not being pressured into deals against their wills. 3) Working with the media to check their rampant homophobia and try to correct some of their more egregious errors.<sup>161</sup>

Though the B/BC, along with the Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts, was able to bring sufficient pressure to bear that the hotline was stopped, the group remained divisive. Group members encountered opposition from other leftist activist groups, the mainstream press, law enforcement, and legislators. This conflict did little to halt the B/BC's continued development of an agenda that brought it into direct conflict with elected officials and many aspects of the judicial system.

Despite the aims of the B/BC to ensure proper representation for the arrested "victims" of the panic, several accused men actively resisted any association with B/BC members. For those men who claimed never to have had sexual contact with under-aged persons, affiliation with the group intent on positively reframing such relationships may have seemed counterproductive. Moreover, B/BC efforts to position the accused men along side the boys as victims of the police could not always withstand scrutiny. After all, the state's case rested on the cooperation and testimony of several boys identified in Peluso's photographs. By the time Mitzel's book was published, NAMBLA was characterizing the state's star witnesses as, "two 15-year old hustlers in Revere who had been occasionally selling their sex to men they met at Peluso's apartment, as well as elsewhere in Revere and Boston."<sup>162</sup> Instead of framing these two youths as victims of societal homophobia or as young people exploring their natural

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<sup>161</sup> Mitzel, 43.

<sup>162</sup> Mitzel, 22.

sexual curiosity, Mitzel adopted an uncharacteristically hostile attitude toward these gay youths. Clearly communicated are the ways that the state was railroading gay men for engaging in consensual acts, less clear was the well-being of the youths involved and the terms under which that consent was obtained.

In spite of the resistance of some of the accused, the B/BC continued organizing. They organized fundraisers featuring prominent speakers like John Gerassi and Gore Vidal. They worked to generate support for new candidates in an effort to oust incumbents D.A. Byrne and Representative Noble.<sup>163</sup> Fueled by victories in Boston, but unwilling to calm their vigilance, members looked to the future.

What is now clear—at least in Boston—is that there is no gay person whose rights won't be supported by mass action, be they accused of 'child molesting,' 'public sex,' or, even from within our own community, 'radicalism.' We have shown that by organizing within the gay community alone, and not relying on the comforting and false promises of only-too-hostile legislators, foundations, priests and pols [sic], we can stop a witchhunt, make it rebound upon those who initiated it, and use this as one more way to politicize gay men and women.<sup>164</sup>

Finally, in December 1978, they hosted an international conference where a new name (North American Man/Boy Love Association) and a new mission statement were adopted.

Though group publications hail this as a time of growth and triumph, B/BC and NAMBLA participation in events became increasingly polarizing. Public demonstrations outside the Copley branch of the Boston Public Library following the arrest of over 100 men presumed to be homosexual brought greater visibility to the group and publicly situated them within a broader gay movement. For those groups intent on separating the interests of gay activists from those of "boy-lovers," this

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<sup>163</sup> Both Byrne and Noble lost their bids for reelection.

<sup>164</sup> Mitzel, 78.

posturing was particularly problematic. B/BC alienation from other progressive groups came to a head around the September One demonstration organized to protest Anita Bryant's arrival in Boston. A group of "200 people from the gay and women's communities," to protest an Anita Bryant fundraising concert in downtown Boston, the September One Coalition was celebrated by Mitzel as a moment when the B/BC enjoyed broad support from the progressive community.<sup>165</sup> However, more than fifty groups and individuals, including State Representative Elaine Noble, the Boston Chapter of NOW and the Gay Business Association, signed a "Why We Can Not March With You" petition. Expressing sympathy with those who objected to Anita Bryant, petition signers nevertheless felt "unable to participate" because:

For some of us, the broadened scope of the march, which includes causes other than gay rights, makes participation in the demonstration a violation of conscience. Some of us object to the strategy of confrontation, which we feel feeds all too well into the Bryant plan of hysteria. Some of us feel strongly that the planned activities will unnecessarily jeopardize the safety of a large number of lesbians, gay men and their supporters. Others hold that the strategizing meeting was hastily called, chaired and dominated by a particular philosophy and, despite rhetoric supporting "unity" within the gay community, was itself one of the most divisive and insensitive gatherings of gay people in Boston to date.<sup>166</sup>

Denounced as "good gays" by Mitzel, those who protested the actions of the B/BC were described as dupes to a conservative, state-sponsored agenda who were completely out of touch with popular feelings in the community.

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<sup>165</sup> Bryant's concert was later cancelled, though the September One Coalition held their rally in Copley Square as scheduled.

<sup>166</sup> Brian McNaught, "Why We Can Not March With You" petition opposing participation in September 1 Anita Bryant protest demonstrations.

John Mitzel closed his autobiographical polemic, *The Boston Sex Scandal*, with the declaration that, “The so-called molestation of the young *is* the start of politics.”<sup>167</sup> When he did so, he was not only re-imagining molestation, but also identifying children as agents within sexual politics. That is, the North American Man/Boy Love Association sought not merely to liberate children so that they could be more sexually expressive. Its goal, and one of its claims to membership within a gay struggle, was to liberate *gay* boys so that they could express their sexuality with *gay* men. This was as much a political distinction as it was a description of the individuals and behaviors involved. Group members understood this quest for liberation as part of broader national and global struggles of the period, and they saw themselves as the radical voice of libratory activism. Thus, NAMBLA challenged institutional power and also mounted a critique of gay and feminist groups whose actions and agendas it perceived as insufficiently libratory.

Mitzel’s text details the group’s history from its 1977 beginnings as the Boston/Boise Committee through the adoption of the name North American Man/Boy Love Association in 1978 and concludes with coverage of the Revere trials in 1980. A journalist and self-styled truth teller, Mitzel fashioned *The Boston Sex Scandal* as the “real” account of what happened in Boston as the 1970s drew to a close. Praise from celebrated authors Edmund White and Gore Vidal appeared on both covers of the book celebrating the text as “A major document”<sup>168</sup> and “A brilliant and disturbing piece of

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<sup>167</sup> Mitzel, *The Boston Sex Scandal*, 137. Emphasis original.

<sup>168</sup> Taken from the front cover of the book, the quote is attributed to author and gay activist, Edmund White. In the book’s front matter White is quoted at length: “In his irreverent, hilarious and hard-hitting prose, Mitzel reveals the hypocrisy and cynicism that underlie the current crusade against intergenerational love. This book is a detailed look at the often banal, always ambiguous truth that the

investigative journalism.”<sup>169</sup> Indeed, Mitzel’s account was later adopted by some news sources as an accurate representation of the politics and events surrounding what the mainstream press dubbed “The Revere Sex Ring” and what he referred to alternately as a “moral panic” and “sex scandal.”<sup>170</sup> Despite this attention, critical readings of the text have not been published. *The Boston Sex Scandal*, like NAMBLA itself, is celebrated or maligned, wholly accepted or dismissed depending upon the political orientation of the reader.

As a piece of “investigative journalism,” *The Boston Sex Scandal* provides a documented narrative of the events that led to the creation of the Boston/Boise Committee, the formation of NAMBLA and the groups’ early activities. An appendix including speech transcripts, fliers, petitions, and the Committee’s “Suggestions for Media on Handling Alleged Sex ‘Crimes’ Involving Gay Men” coupled with the copies of photographs and newspaper reports featured throughout the text corroborate Mitzel’s account of events. *The Boston Sex Scandal* is more than a piece of journalism, however. A polemic that tells a “story of resistance,” the book also advances an

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sex scandal headlines have masked. I predict that children’s liberation will be the next great social movement in North America. This book will serve as a major document in what will turn out to be the most violent and radical debate on human rights we shall witness.”

<sup>169</sup> Taken from the back cover, the quote is attributed to scholar, author and NAMBLA co-founder, David Thorstad.

<sup>170</sup> Subsequent popular histories of NAMBLA have relied on Mitzel for an account of the group’s early years, especially David Thorstad’s *A Withchunt Foiled: The FBI vs. NAMBLA*. In the late 1990s and early twenty-first century NAMBLA was prosecuted in wrongful death suits and television programs began to dramatize, report, and satirize their agenda (especially: *Law and Order SVU, 20/20, The Oprah Winfrey Show*, and *The Daily Show*). As a result, the events of 1970s Boston once again received media attention. *The Boston Sex Scandal*, like the organization whose story it told, was vilified in these mainstream outlets, however, the gay press and a few social movement oriented sources treated the Mitzel text as a definitive statement on the origins of NAMBLA and also used it as a source for information about events in Boston and Revere. Mitzel’s account of events, interpretation of politics, and characterization of individuals involved was reproduced uncritically. See especially: JoAnn Wypijewski, “The Passion of Father Paul Shanley” in *Legal Affairs* Sept/Oct 2004; Benoit Denizey-Lewis “Boy Crazy: NAMBLA: The Story of a Lost Cause,” in *Boston Magazine*, May 2001; Tom O’Carroll, “Paedophilia: The Radical Case,” in *Contemporary Social Issues Series* No. 12, 1980; Steve Trinward, “The ‘Revere Ring’” *Free Market News Network, Corp.* Jan. 16, 2006.

argument about the inadequacies of the mainstream media, the judicial system, and the legislative process while positioning NAMBLA as the group best suited to bring about necessary radical change. In fact, Mitzel's critique of the mainstream press and its lack of objectivity is ultimately what allows him to balance these two approaches—one supposedly detached and neutral, the other passionately prejudiced. That is, the hyperbolic rhetoric and angry tone that infuse the text can be read as a reasonable facsimile of mainstream journalism as Mitzel read it.

To understand both the possibilities and limitations of arguments advanced by NAMBLA, one must look at more than the actions undertaken by group members; close reading of texts like Mitzel's *Boston Sex Scandal* and the journals and bulletins published by the group are also critical. Tracing Mitzel's use of the phrase "save the children" as well as his claims about the proper role of activism, the politics of rape, and the nature of liberation reveals the nuanced ways that NAMBLA sought to carve out a space for itself in the movements of the left. These concepts in particular highlight the group's critique of other perspectives typically associated with leftist politics as well as the ways that NAMBLA members tried to undermine institutional authority to define and regulate sexual behavior. Moreover, these texts, authored and edited by the co-founders of NAMBLA, are uniquely suited to present the radical politics, rhetoric and positions of the group as a whole.

Assuming a radical posture was central to NAMBLA's critique. Mitzel grounded his claim to radicalism equally in the taboo of intergenerational sex with children and in the persecution visited upon him and the group he represented. He used this radical position to make pronouncements about the appropriate direction of political

mobilization. That is, Mitzel's approach to activism, his critique of other social movement groups, and his rejection of institutional authority all rested on the performance of radicalism. In opposition to radical feminist groups like the Elizabeth Stone House which sought to redefine medical and legal notions of victimization by revealing the frequent and coercive nature of incest, NAMBLA's radicalism was grounded in a loving orientation that led it to challenge feminist assertions about rape culture as well as institutional homophobia that punished and pathologized the behaviors of "boy-lovers".<sup>171</sup> Mitzel saw himself and NAMBLA as exclusively qualified to lead the sexual revolution *because* they were on the fringes, speaking for an erotic orientation that was almost universally vilified. This vantage point allowed Mitzel to claim that protecting the civil and sexual rights of "boy-lovers" was good for everyone since rights withheld from the stigmatized revealed the limits of equal protection.

NAMBLA's politics extended beyond representing the interests of marginalized "boy-lovers" to include a defense of the boys who it argued were victimized by the very system that claimed to protect them. This approach to saving children from what Mitzel saw as the sometimes corrupt, always misguided efforts of legislators and reformers provided one of the cornerstones of *The Boston Sex Scandal*. Indeed, Mitzel used the second chapter of the book, "Protecting the Little Children," to expose the ways that conservative activists fabricated links between homosexuality, pornography and child abuse in order to deny children's sexual subjectivity. Once linked, this three-part issue

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<sup>171</sup> Detailed treatment of The Elizabeth Stone House can be found in chapter 2 of this dissertation.



would repeatedly be used to galvanize conservatives, organize legislators, and polarize the left.

Judianne Densen-Gerber, founder and topkick of the federally-funded drug rehabilitation center, Odyssey House, in New York City, announced *she* was launching a campaign against child pornography. [Anita] Bryant had explicitly stated that homosexuals did not deserve equal protection under law because all homosexual men were child molesters [sic]. Densen-Gerber's rage had a similar theme: homosexual men were, by and large, responsible for child abuse, child prostitution and kiddie-porno.<sup>172</sup>

Densen-Gerber and Bryant were used as stand-ins for the "Right."<sup>173</sup> Mitzel placed their rhetoric at the center of conservative mobilization and pointed to the size of their following and the extent of their media coverage to substantiate this move. He understood the homosexual-pornography-abuse straw man as central to a "right-wing" strategy to achieve broader domestic goals. "With momentum built up attacking gays and kiddie porn, the Right hoped to move on to kill off the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion rights, and recreational drug use, for starters."<sup>174</sup> Mitzel positioned the strategies used to attack NAMBLA as part of broader efforts to subdue the left while simultaneously suggesting that conservative interest in children's welfare was disingenuous. Thus, Mitzel was able to argue for recognition of NAMBLA as the vanguard of libratory activism and the group with genuine investment in the liberation of children.

Mitzel's description of the views of conservative figures like Bryant and Densen-Gerber questioned the self-evident nature of the link between pornography,

<sup>172</sup> Mitzel, *The Boston Sex Scandal*, 10.

<sup>173</sup> Other prominent figures are singled out in the text. On the first page, Mitzel argued, "[T]he war on homosexuals became overt and national in 1977 with coordinated campaigns by Anita Bryant, Ed Davis, Jerry Falwell, Judianne Densen-Gerber, the National District Attorneys Assoc., police, and press." (5).

<sup>174</sup> Mitzel, *The Boston Sex Scandal*, 13.

particularly “kiddie porn,” homosexuality and child abuse. He situated the proliferation of anti-pornography groups as a response to the findings published in the report of the President’s Commission on Pornography and Obscenity. The report recommended the decriminalization of the sale and ownership of sexual images and devices for adults.<sup>175</sup> A political battle over the morals of American culture ensued with anti-pornography activists expanding their ranks beyond “the rabid, right-wing, rifle-toting Christians, pale, thin-lipped book banners and their ilk” to forge alliances with centrist and even leftist groups.<sup>176</sup>

Using the trial against the 1976 film *Deep Throat* as a point of entry, Mitzel outlined the stakes of the pornography debate and the position of the players within it. “It [the trial against *Deep Throat*] demonstrated to liberals and those who generally supported First Amendment causes that they had to piss or get off the pot—that is, the issue of sexually graphic materials either involved serious matters of Constitutional protections or it didn’t.”<sup>177</sup> This chastisement of “liberals” was the first of many to come. Indeed, Mitzel used *The Boston Sex Scandal* not only to highlight the hypocrisies of the “Right,” but also to condemn the ways that latent homophobia and misplaced morality allowed the “Left” to be dissuaded from pursuing a radical politics of liberation.

[R]eactionary political forces were going to exploit the porno issue and use it, whenever possible, to revoke or set back many of the progressive social changes which had developed in the past decade and a half. In the Right’s strategy, porno, like that of recreational drugs, was a perfect issue since no one would

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<sup>175</sup> The report of the 1970 United States Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. For a treatment of this report, and the Meese Commission report of 1986 which directly contradicted it, see: Christine Miller and Bruce McKinney, ed. *Government Commission Communication* (Westport, 1993).

<sup>176</sup> Mitzel, *The Boston Sex Scandal*, 9.

<sup>177</sup> Mitzel, *The Boston Sex Scandal*, 10.

come to defend it, and it would give them a likely victory in their struggle to prosecute all ‘victimless crimes’—a designation they refuse to accept.<sup>178</sup>

Thus, the issue of pornography became one that could be easily exploited by conservative forces while liberals decided whether or not it was worthy of defense. According to Mitzel, this hesitation, grounded in homophobic prejudice or middle-class feminist disdain, allowed reactionary forces the space they needed to dismantle progressive political gains. The furor over pornography met with increasing concerns about the safety of children. Both the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974 and the Kildee Murphy Bill of 1977 enjoyed bi-partisan support, and both laws had provisions to protect children from sexual exploitation. It was into this context that NAMBLA was born.

### **NAMBLA’s Agenda**

In the introduction to his polemic, *The Boston Sex Scandal*, NAMBLA co-founder John Mitzel proclaimed, “This is a story of resistance.”<sup>179</sup> The tale that followed lived up to the book’s title and opening statement. Complete with sex, violence, persecution, suicide, and political corruption, *The Boston Sex Scandal* outlined NAMBLA’s origins from its beginnings as The Boston/Boise Committee (B/BC) and situated it in relation to broader liberation struggles, cultural change and institutional power. Mitzel’s heroic tale of resistance represented a dramatic revision of legal, political, and medical authority. In as much as NAMBLA members imagined themselves as the proper saviors of boys, they challenged the province of legislators,

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<sup>178</sup> Mitzel, *The Boston Sex Scandal*, 10.

<sup>179</sup> Mitzel, *The Boston Sex Scandal*, 5.

doctors, politicians and even parents to provide for the social and sexual needs of children.

NAMBLA's efforts to "save the children" were part of a larger national conversation about the dangers facing America's youth.<sup>180</sup> Revisions in several states' age of consent laws along with the introduction of new federal protective legislation designed to guard children from pornography, prostitution, abuse and neglect responded to growing grass-roots movements and a series of polls which suggested that Americans' believed that the threat of child abuse was increasing.<sup>181</sup> Legislators advanced varied and sometimes conflicting agendas in their efforts to allow for children's sexual subjectivity (as articulated by some medical and psychological professionals) while preserving an ideological investment in childhood innocence.<sup>182</sup> This legislative conflict was evidence of a broader cultural ambivalence about the proper treatment of children. Longstanding symbolic and rhetorical use of the figure of the child was disrupted by the real political activities of young people in America. Prolonged US involvement in Vietnam and the resulting draft combined with the social movements of the 1960s and 70s to catapult American youth into public politics in greater numbers than ever before. The discourses of liberation that circulated in the

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<sup>180</sup> It should also be noted that the call to "save the children" was central to international relief and human rights efforts, culminating in the first UNICEF convention on the rights of children in 1989. Elsewhere in the dissertation I argue that domestic attention to the welfare of American children provided justification for US intervention in other sovereign states. See especially

<sup>181</sup> For this and other poll information about American attitudes toward children, see: Joel Best, *Threatened Children* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

<sup>182</sup> As early as the 1960s, six states (New York, Hawaii, Illinois, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and South Dakota) began to recognize children's sexual behavior through the implementation of lower age of consent laws. By the 1970s, these laws were joined by new federal and state statutes designed to protect children from physical and sexual misuse—i.e. Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974 and the Kildee Murphy (Child Pornography) Bill of 1977. The development of these two sets of laws parallels increasingly public intellectual and political debates about children's sexuality.

period were taken up by young people and by others on their behalf. It is in this broader context that the emergence of NAMBLA and the actions of Massachusetts politicians must be understood.

NAMBLA's mission and activism undermined normative sexuality as well as the institutions designed to advance it. By endorsing intergenerational, homosexual relationships, the group challenged the family unit and gendered subject produced by laws regulating minors' sexual lives. Moreover, in its efforts to raise consciousness, NAMBLA members revealed that state laws were economically invested in producing particular families and specific genders. Thus, NAMBLA was able to position itself rhetorically as the morally motivated protector of children whose utilitarian agenda would accomplish the most good for the greatest number of people because it was dedicated to liberation rather than fiscal gains.

Opposed to "nuclear-family breeding, conventional parenthood and traditional child rearing, as well as state intervention to maintain status quo morality," NAMBLA members mounted objections to "Judeo-Christian prejudice shrouded in statutes" and anyone who served as apologists for them.<sup>183</sup> Group members claimed that the language and practices of ownership often used to define state and parental relationships with children were the truly coercive forces in children's lives. Indeed, in their "Call for Justice," the San Francisco Journal Collective wrote:

There are reasons for the reluctance of our political and social institutions to accept the liberation of children. Principal among these is the concept of children as chattel, that is, movable property. Legally, children are not owned by

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<sup>183</sup> Mitzel, 13, 22.

their parents, but nonetheless are completely subject to their parent's domination and consequently, have the status of slaves.<sup>184</sup>

A Dutch scholar whose writings were featured in *The NAMBLA Bulletin* challenged feminist, psychologist and legislative claims that adults in intimate, intergenerational relationships with children were dominating by citing a study that found no evidence that the pedophile dominated the child.<sup>185</sup> He further argued against the broader orientation of domination taken where children's lives were concerned. "There was, of course, nothing wrong with dominating children when it was used to teach them their lessons, to make them go to church, to discipline them and bring them up properly, but where sex was involved it was absolutely impermissible."<sup>186</sup> By highlighting this double standard and dismissing the idea that pedophiles are dominating at all, NAMBLA staked out a liberationist position in opposition to the repressions of state and family.

Some NAMBLA members, perhaps in an effort to ally with feminists, argued the biological and developmental differences between boy and girl children. Claiming that boys reached sexual maturation and sexual peak earlier in life, these members sought provide for the liberation of boys while allowing feminists to continue to protect girls. However, this stance did not gain much traction in NAMBLA or among feminists. Indeed, the group's orientation toward matters of children's liberation was characterized by a refusal to accept developmental models. Though NAMBLA was

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<sup>184</sup> Fri Beslut and the San Francisco Journal Collective, "A Call for Justice," in *NAMBLA JOURNAL* 6 (1983), 1.

<sup>185</sup> Neither the name of the psychologist who conducted the study nor any bibliographic information about the study were included in the article.

<sup>186</sup> Edward Brongersma, "An Historical Background" in *The NAMBLA Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No.2 (March, 1983).

most often engaged in battles over sexual expression and vilified for the erotic orientation that it endorsed, the agenda that it advanced was far more expansive. One piece proclaimed: “NAMBLA is against the draft, circumcision and clitoridectomy, ageism and other positions pertaining to youth.”<sup>187</sup> Another argued:

When viewed in a purely sexual context, the subject of child-adult sex can be quite limited. But it is very difficult to view it solely in that context. Hard upon the heels of the question of the legitimacy of children engaging in sex with adults or other children comes the more important issue of the right of children to have control of and consent in all areas of their lives, non-sexual as well as sexual.<sup>188</sup>

NAMBLA’s refusal to adopt gendered or age distinctions, their unwillingness to accept developmental models challenged the foundations upon which much minor law rested.

Where the law made distinctions on the basis of age, gender or sexuality, NAMBLA members were quick to highlight hypocrisies and double standards. Challenges both to statutes and their selective enforcement marked many NAMBLA publications. At the time of the Revere ring, Mitzel compiled a list of several other cases involving violations of age of consent laws in Boston and across the country.

[I]n the midst of the ‘Revere Sex Ring’ witchhunt, a man was indicted in neighboring Brookline...He was charged with running an *actual*/hetero ring which specialized in selling the sex of young females who were known as ‘The Sunshine Girls’...Not one patron of this ‘sex ring’ had his name released to the press. The Brookline whoremaster pleaded guilty and was given a two year sentence...About this same time, in New Mexico, an adult female was charged with corrupting a 15-year-old male by having sex with him. She was acquitted. The judge ruled that such sex was ‘educational.’<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> The Unicorn, “Letter from a Twelve Year Old,” in *The NAMBLA Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (July/August 1984), 10.

<sup>188</sup> Fri Beslut and the San Francisco Journal Collective, “A Call for Justice,” in *NAMBLA JOURNAL* 6 (1983), 1.

<sup>189</sup> Mitzel, *The Boston Sex Scandal*, 23-24.

Curiously, NAMBLA efforts to reveal gender bias within age of consent laws might not have met much legal resistance. In the 1981 case of Michael M. “the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of...sex-specific statutes. The Court there stated that sex-specific statutes can be justified on the basis that a primary goal of age of consent laws is the protection of young women from the consequences of teenage pregnancy.”<sup>190</sup> The Supreme Court position along with the language of several age of consent statutes which exempted women from prosecution explained why the majority of those charged with violating these laws were male. However, it did little to account for the prosecution of homosexual violators who faced no risk of unwanted pregnancy or the fact that same-sex violators of age of consent laws were often met with harsher penalties than those imposed for heterosexual sex.<sup>191</sup> For NAMBLA, the only remedy for this legally sanctioned discrimination was the abolition of laws regulating consensual sex and the liberation of children.

NAMBLA’s crusade against youth discrimination was founded on a belief in children’s liberation rather than a paradigm of children’s rights. Children’s rights, in this formulation, were externally imposed and inherently invested in maintaining the legal subject ‘child’. Statutory distinctions based on age were often perceived as oppressive to children. One article asserted that, “status offenses are by definition discriminatory.”<sup>192</sup> It went on to argue:

Children, for example, have the right in this country not to be treated as an adult in the juvenile justice system but forfeit as a consequence any and all of the legal rights adult citizens may possess. Children have a right not to work at

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<sup>190</sup> Sutherland, “From Jailbird to Jailbait,” 319.

<sup>191</sup> Sutherland, “From Jailbird to Jailbait,” 319.

<sup>192</sup> Fri Beslut and the San Francisco Journal Collective, “A Call for Justice,” in *NAMBLA JOURNAL* 6 (1983), #



arduous or dangerous jobs (though many do) but have been denied the right to earn a living and to live independently except at the convenience and behest of adults. Those rights granted to young people currently are those which when given still allow for easy maintenance of children as second class citizens.<sup>193</sup>

The equation of children with slaves and the use of language associated with other liberation and rights movements helped NAMBLA claim a position in a broader leftist struggle. The critique of ageism then extended beyond an exploration of the ways that the state oppressed children to include indictments against any group guilty of ageist discrimination. One teenager wrote:

[W]e will not take the seat in the back of the bus so many would prefer to see us in. We will not idly listen while decisions are made concerning us without our consultation. We will not allow ourselves to be overlooked, overpowered, or ridiculed. We will not continue to internalize the ageist propaganda fed to us by parents and teachers. We will not agree blindly to anything told us merely because the person telling us is three times our age. We WILL BE HEARD!!!!<sup>194</sup>

Though this teenager's manifesto was directed at the gay and lesbian community, other NAMBLA members of various ages charged groups on the left to take young people more seriously, pointing to precedents of youth activism and working to stretch the age boundaries of inclusion. Moreover, with its *Bulletin*, *Journal*, and *Newsletter*, NAMBLA provided a forum for young people to publish their thoughts about their own liberation. One youth wrote: "I want to dispel the myth that children do not have the ability to decide what they want to do with their lives...Age is an irrelevant factor in the ability to comprehend rationally."<sup>195</sup> In this "Letter from Twelve-Year-Old," the author

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<sup>193</sup> Fri Beslut and the San Francisco Journal Collective, "A Call for Justice," in *NAMBLA JOURNAL* 6 (1983), 2.

<sup>194</sup> Michael Alhonte, "The Politics of Ageism: A Statement to the Lesbian and Gay Community" in *The NAMBLA Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (April, 1983). 8.

<sup>195</sup> The Unicorn, "Letter from a Twelve Year Old," in *The NAMBLA Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (July/August 1984), 10.

took issue with the gay rights lobby and mainstream society while heralding NAMBLA as “very revolutionary” and “truly gay”.

There is little way to confirm the age of the pseudonymous author of the “Letter from Twelve-Year-Old,” or the ages of several of the other young contributors to NAMBLA publications. The ages of those individuals who used their real names and went on to pursue lives of activism can be substantiated. The fact that NAMBLA may have been publishing text that was misattributed to minors calls into question the altruistic motives for which the group supposedly stands. Nevertheless, the *possibility* or the *appearance* of youth participation for what they represent to the public and for what they indicate about the radicalism of NAMBLA. These possibilities and appearances are what led to years of FBI surveillance, arrests of leaders, and persecution of group members. They, as much as the reality that they imply, are what contributed to the public debate in which the group was intent on participating. Regardless of the veracity of names and ages, the questions posed by a movement calling for children’s sexual liberation remain the same.

More than ideological skirmishes or contests over who would determine the path of legislative reform, debates about sexuality represented a cultural ambivalence about the standing of the United States in the global order. “Suddenly the United States had one overriding concern: homosexuals. Their rights. Their ‘recruiting.’ Their alleged ‘exploitation’ of the little children.”<sup>196</sup> Mitzel combined the visibility of gay rights and gay liberation with the backlash represented by pornography panics to advance

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<sup>196</sup> Mitzel, *The Boston Sex Scandal*, 14.

arguments about a cultural preoccupation with and inability to handle sexual expression.

He described this phenomenon in the following terms:

The organized left-wing parties were ignored in most gay organizing and didn't know what to do. Several standard left cults are violently homophobic—it's a 'Bourgeois Degeneracy' dontcha know?—so, despite their usual hunger to move in and try to take over any mass popular movement, gay lib dumbfounded them. The right-wing, floundering under a world slipping out of their control, finally found an issue around which they hoped to mobilize irrational support, so essential for their ultimate goals, They would Save The Little Children. From *The Fags*.<sup>197</sup>

Again, Mitzel pointed to the limits of conventional political approaches to establish the need for a radical revision of politics and to situate NAMBLA as the group to fill that need.

In the introduction to his text, NAMBLA co-founder David Thorstad reflected: "NAMBLA has a membership of a few hundred. How could such a small group pose a threat to American society?"<sup>198</sup> The radical critique mounted by NAMBLA, which called into question the gendered, economic and familial systems supported by age of consent laws while giving voice to young people, threatened to undermine the foundations of American political life. NAMBLA denounced U.S. foreign policy. It highlighted the inadequacies and hypocrisies of a system of laws that rested on erroneous assumptions about gender and the universality of heterosexuality. It challenged the role of the family as a political and economic unit and sought to undermine the authority of parents therein. And it redefined the political spectrum by rejecting distinctions between "right" and "left" in favor of advancing a radically progressive politics. NAMBLA's battle for liberation, though inspired by erotic desire,

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<sup>197</sup> Mitzel, *The Boston Sex Scandal*, 14-15.

<sup>198</sup> David Thorstad, *A Witchhunt Foiled: The FBI vs. NAMBLA*, (New York, 1985), 6.

had a reach far beyond the sexual lives of intergenerational couples. Indeed, it was the notion of liberation that they advanced that posed the real threat to the American social order. This freedom, this idea of liberation which set NAMBLA apart from other social movement groups, is what was at stake in all of the publications and prosecutions that sought to celebrate or demonize the group.

### Responses to NAMBLA

The discomfort of the so-called “good gays” with B/BC and later NAMBLA initiatives was part of a longer history of gay activism. The homosexual had long been linked with the pederast in popular discourse.<sup>199</sup> At times, there was little rhetorical distinction between the two. Indeed, that history of association was part of what grounded the pornography-child abuse-homosexual triad that Mitzel accused conservative activists of advancing; it also provided the foundation for NAMBLA claims to membership in the gay liberation movement. The political tension surrounding NAMBLA was not only about the future direction of gay liberation, but also about what the public representation of the homosexual would be. Some activists saw NAMBLA as particularly detrimental to a movement that had spent decades trying to unravel the link uniting pedophiles with homosexuals. Many homosexuals refused to acknowledge “boy-lovers” as members of the gay community, viewing them instead as psychologically damaged. One gay man wrote to *The Boston Globe*, “It is one thing to

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<sup>199</sup> See especially Jenkins, *Moral Panics*. See also Philip Jenkins, *Beyond Tolerance: Child Pornography on the Internet* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Angelides, “Feminism, Child Sexual Abuse, and the Erasure of Child Sexuality.”

be gay, but totally another to be sick like these men and we hope sensible people will not link us to this travesty.”<sup>200</sup>

Some gay men who, as children, had had intimate relationships with men also did not embrace NAMBLA. Even when they did not understand their own experiences as damaging, they also did not perceive NAMBLA as a body that represented those experiences. Seeing them not as a group that represented the interests of children, but instead as one that represented the interests of men wishing to gain sexual access to children, these men were unmoved by NAMBLA’s claims that it stood for the needs of children.

Feminists, too, objected to NAMBLA’s attempts to position itself as liberator of children.<sup>201</sup> Seeing them instead as a group that twisted liberatory rhetoric and principles in order to exploit a vulnerable and disempowered population, many feminists understood NAMBLA as part of a broader culture of sexual exploitation. For both NAMBLA and the feminists who opposed them, the debate revolved around consent and coercion, rape and victimless crimes. That is, NAMBLA members advanced a framework where age alone did not determine one’s ability to consent to sexual activity at the same time that feminists’ efforts to reframe public discourses about incest identified children as a population in need of special protection. Within a new feminist framework of rape culture, NAMBLA represented another violent sexual excess that abused those left most vulnerable within patriarchal societies—children. In contrast, NAMBLA members viewed the “consensual” intergenerational relationships that they

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<sup>200</sup> Quoted in Mitzel, 32-33.

<sup>201</sup> See especially Amy Hoffman’s account of lesbian reactions to NAMBLA and her own changing attitudes about the organization, its founding, and its mission. Amy Hoffman, *An Army of Ex-Lovers: My Life at the Gay Community News* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).

endorsed, like the production and consumption of pornography, as crimes without victims. It was perhaps because both groups claimed membership in a leftist movement for change or perhaps because both had vested interests in remapping the judicial landscape by advocating the addition or abolition of laws endorsing their views that they existed in adamant opposition to one another. Whatever the reason, no easy peace could be made between NAMBLA and most feminist-identified groups.

NAMBLA members countered claims like these by arguing that the rest of the gay community would do well to rally around them because discrimination against “boy-lovers” would only make it easier to harass other homosexuals. By speaking on behalf of boys and boy lovers, NAMBLA claimed that it represented both the most vulnerable and most persecuted members of the gay community. Couching their rhetoric in the language of “love” and their politics in the language of “liberation,” members made efforts to forestall their expulsion from the left. Though the group was able to carve out a space for itself in libratory politics and in public debate, maintaining a presence in these spaces would become increasingly difficult as the 1970s gave way to the 1980s.

NAMBLA members advanced a two part agenda that called for an end to their surveillance by local authorities and the elimination of all age of consent laws. At the same time, they also fought to claim membership as part of a larger leftist, gay liberation movement. Mitzel placed clashes over sexuality at the heart of domestic politics, US imperial agendas, and the broader global order. Thus, NAMBLA could not only claim membership in a broader struggle with a long history, but could also assume a position of leadership within that struggle. Despite this broad view and NAMBLA’s

opposition to US imperialism, the group remained primarily focused on education and reform or repeal of legislation that denied young people full freedom and capacity to consent.

Controversial since its inception, NAMBLA nevertheless emerged as a visible in public debates about sexuality in the late 1970s. As the sexual revolution gave way to the rise of modern conservatism in the early 1980s, however, the redefinition of sexual politics could no longer recognize NAMBLA as valid, leftist or homosexual. With its leadership publicly discredited and its membership harassed, NAMBLA faded into comparative political obscurity, its very name used to foreclose discussions about sexuality.<sup>202</sup> Examining NAMBLA's rhetoric, the space it occupied, and the manner in which that space disappeared reveals the ways that invoking children realigned the actors in late 20<sup>th</sup> century American sexual politics. That is, the foreclosure of NAMBLA's participation in public debate represented a loss to political discourse and to the promises of liberalism. Thus, NAMBLA came to represent the limits of liberalism, becoming an object through which leftist groups abandoned their commitment to dissent as a constitutive part of democracy by participating in that foreclosure.

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<sup>202</sup> Satires of NAMBLA have become increasingly prevalent with John Stewart's *Daily Show* using the group as a substitute for any conservative group acronym. Here, the implication is that NAMBLA stands for everything reviled and contested by the group in question. In addition, the recent "war on pedophiles" declared by Oprah Winfrey on her show and the treatment of NAMBLA on television dramas like *Law and Order: SVU* operate to dismiss the views of the group and silence any who would advocate them.

## The Rise of the Child-Victim: Children's Vulnerability and the Changing Politics of Victims and Saviors

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As I have already shown, the figure of the modern child came to be broadly exploitable on the political landscape. Both its ability to symbolize the nation and its status as a sexualized being made the figure of the child a ubiquitous tool in political rhetoric in the US in the 1970s and '80s. By the late-1960s feminist health reformers in the Boston Women's Health Collective and the Elizabeth Stone House had seized upon the figure of the child in an effort to radicalize maternalist rhetoric while politicizing what it meant to be healthy. These activists pursued protection and empowerment for women and children in equal measure by focusing on the vulnerability and strength of both. A scant decade later the nascent North American Man/Boy Love Association argued that the modern child should share fully in the rights, privileges, and liberties of democratic citizenship. Presenting the child as an autonomous agent, NAMBLA challenged family and state ownership models that focused on safeguarding/restricting children rather than ensuring their freedom. Despite their different uses of the figure of the child, activists in each of these groups framed children as victims of violence and argued that their groups' mission contained the solution to the widespread cultural problem of child exploitation.

This chapter interrogates the implication of the use of this language of victimization to demonstrate the ways that progressive groups in the 1970s unknowingly contributed to the emergence of an iconic child-victim whose protection became central to the broader cultural conservatism of the 1980s. I use conservatism here to signal a foreclosure of dialogue and the introduction of a protectionist



imperative whenever the figure of the child-victim is invoked. As Lee Edelman has aptly argued, the figure of the child signifies the originary moment in the development of concept of the political and is implied in all calls for change. Hence, the figure of the child cannot be opposed when it is conjured in public debate. This chapter builds on Edelman's characterization of the child as an unquestionable entity by tracing the shift from a rhetorical reliance on the figure of the child to advance libratory agendas in the 1970s to a preoccupation with the child-victim and its need for protection in the 1980s. Conversely, those groups, like NAMBLA, that attempted to apply their libratory rhetoric to children rather than succumbing to protectionist fervor ultimately failed to garner public support for their political agendas.

Mirroring Edelman's formulation of the use of the figure of the child, the groups active in the 1970s deployed the rhetoric of child victimization to advance libratory agendas that were often about more than children. I will reveal that these groups were unknowingly laying the foundations for the emergence of an uncontestable child-victim, which in turn led to a protectionist discourse of the 1980s. As we shall see in this chapter, this discourse produced conditions for the victimization of other people. Thus the day-care abuse panics of the 1980s can be read as an insidious side-effect of the proliferation of child-victim protectionism.

As Rebecca Stringer notes, "'Victim' is an unruly word."<sup>203</sup> It communicates information about agency, power relations, and personal interactions while simultaneously inviting compassion or contempt. Indeed, the varied work performed by the word is dependent upon what Stringer describes as the "'type' of victim [that] is being addressed...on whether

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<sup>203</sup> Rebecca Stringer, "Blaming Me Blaming You: Victim Identity in Recent Feminism," *Outskirts: Feminism Along the Edge* 8 (2001), 3.

‘victim’ is supposed to denote a kind of agency or an utter lack of agency, and on what reading of power relations the denotation is servicing.<sup>204</sup> Thus, when group members advanced claims about children’s (and their own) victimization, they were constructing frameworks to communicate complex interactions on both personal and cultural levels. In fact, by identifying themselves and children as victims, group members sought to define victimization in a way that allowed themselves to locate a lack of agency with vulnerable children while retaining a kind of agency for themselves.

The word ‘victim’ houses numerous definitions from a variety of disciplinary settings: criminology, psychology, and feminist theory to name a few.<sup>205</sup> When constructing their frameworks, group members borrowed from each of these disciplines to define both the ‘victim’ that they were protecting and also the act or situation that led to victimization. Their claims about what produced victims were varied and ranged from criminal acts like incest, rape and battery to cultural biases such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and systemic problems like poverty. In raising the specter of the victim, these groups addressed the issues of immediate personal concern to their members while advancing broader cultural critiques. However, situating their critiques on a foundation of victimization left group members vulnerable not only to alternative disciplinary constructions of ‘the victim,’ but also to different political responses to victimization. That is, the long cultural and disciplinary reach that made focusing on ‘the victim’ an attractive political strategy overlooked the word’s unruliness.

The groups under examination here each carefully constructed both a child-victim and its adult counterpart. In doing so, they presented their groups’ vision of

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<sup>204</sup> Stringer, 3.

<sup>205</sup> Anne McLeer, “Saving the Victim: Recuperating the Language of the Victim and Reassessing Global Feminism,” *Hypatia* 13 (Winter 1998)

what led to victimization as well as the best responses to combating it. However, the construction of the victim employed by these groups to advance their libratory agendas was ultimately incompatible with a cohesive politics of liberation. I will argue that even in their claims to radicalism, members of these three groups engaged in a conservative protectionist politics when addressing child-victims. This political inconsistency was made more pronounced and ultimately more destructive to group missions because group members had paired their own victimization with that of children.

My analysis of these groups and their activism around issues of children's sexual victimization reveals a constitutive relationship between victimization and liberation. The political rhetoric that the groups produced and in which they participated highlights the ways that libratory discourse in the United States has acknowledged victimization as a necessary precondition for liberation.<sup>206</sup> For example, the experience of cultural oppression such as sexism or homophobia was framed by the Boston Women's Health Collective as victimizing all women (and children). In the case of the Elizabeth Stone House, poverty was coupled with the realities and omnipresent threats of coercive sexual contact and both were presented as part and parcel of the ways that patriarchy victimized women. Finally, NAMBLA used the pathologization of its members and their banishment from the political sphere as an example of repressive victimization. Thus, group members worked to show how these phenomena victimized them, using their activism to expand public perceptions of what

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<sup>206</sup> Here I am building on a long history of thinking about freedom that dates back to the Enlightenment when freedom emerged as an important political concept. Building on the work of scholars who have unpacked both positive- and negative-liberty, I construct a framework in which activists advance a positive-liberty (a call to be *free to* pursue a particular end) as a response to an *invented* negative-liberty (*freedom from* a particular form of victimization). That is, through their approaches to liberation, each of the groups coalesced around a rejection of the violence that was visited upon it.

constituted violence and who could be considered a victim of it. Moreover, by identifying themselves as victims, group members created a context in which liberation would be understood as a necessary goal. Thus, the liberatory politics espoused by each group involved not only battling persecution, but also redefining what constituted violence within popular and political culture.

At stake in this (re)definition of violence was the establishment of new categories of victims. By expanding the definition of violence, members of these groups created a space to position themselves as victims. Beyond merely claiming to be victims, however, members of these social movement groups situated their victimization along-side that of children. Indeed, the ability to link their victimization to that of the figure of the child was central to group efforts to communicate their political agenda to a broad audience. For example, the laws and diagnostic criteria that prevented men from having intimate relationships with under-aged boys were seen by NAMBLA members as victimizing both the men and the boys. Criminalizing consensual behaviors, pathologizing desire, and endorsing the sexual repression of youth were all framed as part of the same system of state-sponsored violence. Persuasive performance of the role of victim rested on social movement groups' ability to advance new definitions of violence and demonstrate the ways that this violence led to their victimization and the victimization of children.

This language of victimization had very important political implications. To analyze them, this chapter will begin by tracing group efforts to formulate new categories of victims and to situate their members along side of the figure of the child within these categories. I will then unpack the ways that group members, having

identified new ways of being victimized, positioned themselves as uniquely qualified to save child-victims. That is, I will expose the ways that members of these social movement groups simultaneously enacted the roles of victim and savior. Next I will demonstrate the ways that activists in the period made compelling performance as victims and saviors central to the success of their libratory models. Finally, I will conclude with an exploration of the ways that employing a libratory framework so steeped in models of victimization ultimately contributed to the emergence of a broader and more conservative protectionism within American politics.

### The Politics of Victims

The role of the victim assumed a measure of strategic importance to social movement groups, especially those involved with children's issues. In as much as public sympathies rested with victims of violence rather than its perpetrators, those groups that could perform their own victimization while also tapping the cultural weight of the figure of the child held powerful tools for swaying public opinion and winning political victories. Because of the child's assumed vulnerability, connecting adult group members' victimization to that of children invoked a stronger, more emotionally resonant image. The Stone House did more than frame poverty as a kind of violence—one that repressed potential, exposed its victims to crime and heightened surveillance, and limited their access to resources. By highlighting the ways that women in general and single mothers in particular were disproportionately affected by the violence of poverty, the Stone House painted the family—women and children—as victims. Connecting the welfare of its female residents to children created a space for women

who might otherwise be subjected to the negative stereotypes of mental illness to emerge in a more sympathetic light.

Social movement groups often used this pairing of adult and youth victimization to legitimize their claims about violence. However, those claims rested upon particular understandings of the figure of the child. That is, the child was deployed by some as a victim of sexist violence (incest, poverty) while being positioned by others as a victim of repression at the hands of the state (age of consent laws). Though the child that was imagined and the violence that was inflicted upon her/him differed, the discursive formula was the same. In each case, the definition of violence was expanded; the group was poised to counter that violence; and the child was central to both efforts.

The rhetoric employed by the three groups under examination relies on a relational dyad when discourses of violence are in use. That is, violence is understood to be meted out to a victim by a victimizer.<sup>207</sup> Within this framework, one must identify with the victim if one is to champion the just cause. However, the groups in question did more than align with the position of the victim. They reframed the very act of victimization so that their members could assume the role of victim rather than being limited to ally status. They positioned themselves alongside of the figure of the child as victims of the same system of violence.

In this framework, the victim holds rhetorical power, compelling action and amassing allies. The strategic usefulness of the victim position is derived, in part, from

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<sup>207</sup> Here, I'm building on theories of violence seen especially in conflict studies. I rely primarily on the work of scholars and theorists who apply a multi-level analysis, questioning the nature of change and utility of violence along with varied cultural and organizational responses to violence. See especially: Tim Jacoby, *Understanding Conflict and Violence: Theoretical and Interdisciplinary Approaches* (London: Routledge, 2008).

its capacity to define violence. In describing one's victimization, one necessarily exposes the (violent) act by which one was victimized. Thus, the victim becomes a site through which violence is given meaning. In addition to defining violence, the victim also identifies the victimizer. Here too the role of the victim holds strategic clout. For once an "abusive individual" and a "violent act" are identified, an agenda to stop abusive individuals from engaging in violent acts emerges. That is, violence (or the threat of it) is ultimately what compels action within this framework.

The figure of the child was at the heart of group efforts to perform the role of victim. When claiming victimization, group members did more than point to acts of violence. They positioned themselves alongside of the figure of the child and alleged to be victims of *the same* systems of violence that exploited children. Immediately understood as vulnerable and significant, the figure of the child already had an established place in American culture and politics. By pairing their victimization with that of the figure of the child, group members were able to use the cultural resonance afforded to children. This link elevated their own cause while simultaneously expanding the reach of the group.

The Boston Women's Health Collective's initial move to define rape as "sexual aggression by a man (or men) against a woman (or a child)" linked women and children as victims of male violence.<sup>208</sup> The second edition of the text went further to center the figure of the child and link its victimization with that of women. "Rape is a crime against women and children (far more children are victims of rape than most of us realize), a crime which might be viewed as the ultimate expression of negative attitudes

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<sup>208</sup> The Boston Women's Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1973), 92.

toward, and contempt for, women of all ages.”<sup>209</sup> In the three years that elapsed between the publication of the first and second editions of the text, Collective members were even more explicit about women’s vulnerability across generations: “Children as young as six months and women as old as ninety-three years have been raped.”<sup>210</sup> Additionally, the second edition did more to implicate American culture in the victimization of women and children. While the 1973 text focused on the inability of legal and medical systems to provide adequate services to victims, by 1976 bystanders who failed to intervene, individuals who blamed victims for their assaults, those who did not recognize a need for reform in courts and hospitals, and men who sought to keep women dependent upon them for protection were all framed as participants in rape culture.<sup>211</sup> Indeed, the Collective maintained that, “the problem of rape extends far beyond the rapist: there are many who would never commit a rape, but who continue to condone or accept others’ rape crimes.”<sup>212</sup> Implicating so many allowed the Collective to redefine the scope of rape and the acts (or failures to act) that constituted violence.

In his own move to reframe violence and victimization NAMBLA co-founder John Mitzel told the story of Gary, a sexually active, gay 15-year-old. After identifying Gary from a collection of polaroids seized at Peluso’s apartment, the police pressured Gary to cooperate with their investigation of the ‘Sex Ring.’ According to Mitzel, Gary “had occasionally taken money for sex with men in the apartment of Richard Peluso and elsewhere. And many times no cash was involved.” Mitzel continued:

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<sup>209</sup> The Boston Women’s Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book by and for Women, Revised and Expanded* (1976), 155.

<sup>210</sup> The Boston Women’s Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1976), 155.

<sup>211</sup> The Boston Women’s Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1976), 156. See also, chapter two of this dissertation.

<sup>212</sup> The Boston Women’s Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1976), 156.



After police located him, he and his mother were visited *no fewer than 6 times* by their parish priest who urged him to cooperate with police. Police showed nude pictures of Gary to neighborhood kids and encouraged them to badger him. He and his mother (recipients of state social aid) were threatened with a cut-off of funds if Gary refused to cooperate. The police finally coerced his mother to sign over legal custody of Gary to the State. Gary was promptly locked up in a youth detention house under police guard and told that if he refused to testify he himself would be indicted for ‘sex crimes.’ He relented and became the primary witness in 8 of the 24 cases.<sup>213</sup>

Both Mitzel’s account and the official record understood Gary as a victim. However, Mitzel painted “the state” in the form of coercive police presence and “dominant culture” in the form of a persistent parish priest as the villains. They harassed Gary and his mother, threatened their livelihood, exposed Gary to public humiliation and ridicule, and finally detained him under threat of indictment. Mitzel implicitly asked of Gary’s cooperation with the police what his feminist opponents may have asked of Gary’s sexual encounters in Peluso’s apartment: under what circumstance did Gary consent? In reframing Gary’s victimization, Mitzel was able to portray the police and the priest as the violent actors, and in so doing, he was able to open a space to redefine the role of the older men with whom Gary had sex. These men were also victims of the state, implicated in “wrong-doing” and prosecuted only because Gary was subjected to a targeted campaign of harassment.

In many cases advancing shared victimization with children involved a dramatic revision of what constituted violence, who could be imagined a victim of it, and what was understood to contribute to it. The different aims of these groups can leave little doubt that the left did not produce a singular definition of violence in this period.

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<sup>213</sup> Mitzel, *The Boston Sex Scandal*, 43-44 (emphasis in the original).

Instead, movement rhetoric expanded the definition of violence while specific groups fought for their definition to gain political primacy.

Ultimately, by expanding the definition of violence, members of social movement groups were able to locate themselves in the role of victim. Once this position was assumed, groups could use the rhetoric of victimization to condemn their opponents, protest their marginalization, and call for public support. Group members were not alone in the victim position, however. In linking their victimization with that of the figure of the child, these social movement groups attempted both to forestall opposition and to create a space for the advancement of their liberatory framework. In advancing frameworks for liberation, members of social movement groups reached beyond the victim to the role of savior at the same time.

### The Politics of Saviors

Merging the status of group members with that of children was not without its pitfalls. In this framework, children's resilience did not remove them from a position of eternal vulnerability. Despite its effectiveness, foregrounding violence and victimization and linking with children exposed group members to the vulnerability attached to the figure of the child. Just as the child held both growth and vulnerability, those groups that linked their status to that of the child accessed a culture of promise as well as a culture of fear. To address this duality, group members had to make themselves distinct from the figure of the child, even as they emphasized their shared victimization. This simultaneous connection and separation was accomplished by groups identifying as the savors of children. The savior role was figured as an altruistic

one since members were using their activism to save children rather than merely forwarding their own ends. Ultimately, social movement groups that articulated a shared victimization with children positioned their members as both victims and saviors.

To the extent that group members suffered the same ill effects of cultural, institutional, and physical violence as the figure of the child, they imagined and portrayed themselves as victims. However, when they organized collectively on the basis of that shared victimization in the hopes of affecting change, members of social movement groups became political subjects. Finally, when they advanced libratory social agendas as a means of rescuing children (and themselves) from cultural, institutional, and physical violence, they framed themselves as saviors. Identifying a shared victimization not only allowed them to attempt to gain public sympathy, it also granted them political authority to speak out against particular forms of violence. At the same time, group members' activism *on behalf of children* made their efforts appear altruistic rather than self-interested.

The role of savior, like that of victim, was one of strategic significance. Its power was derived largely from the cultural standing of the victim population being 'saved.' By positioning themselves as saviors of children, members of social movement groups chose a population that carried tremendous cultural weight. Because children were already seen as vulnerable, and because group activism often exposed new threats to children's safety, they were already understood as a population in need of protection. Moreover, as saviors of children, activists could lay claim to broader significance for their cause, linking it to the future health of the nation/society through the figure of the

child. To do this, group members linked their victimization with that of the figure of the child while maintaining the adult subjectivity that allowed them to act on behalf of children.

Mitzel's telling/recounting of Gary's story demonstrated the degree to which NAMBLA used this strategy.

In January, 1978, Gary did manage to escape his captors long enough to attend, at his own request, a meeting of the Boston/Boise Committee.<sup>214</sup> While there, he ran up and embraced one of the men he had named in the grand jury. Later, at the same meeting, he gave a signed statement to the B/BC chairman and counsel detailing the various forms of coercion used against him and he asked the B/BC to arrange neutral legal counsel to represent his interests, something the police had failed to inform him was his right. He wanted out of the whole mess. It was a graphic illustration of what enlightened sex counselors have long said: police and judicial interventions into instances of sex between adults and minors, when launched under the banner of protecting the children, always have the contrary effect. The 'children' are traumatized by the publicity, notoriety and police manipulation of their lives.<sup>215</sup>

As told by Mitzel, Gary's story fits the discursive formula outlined in this chapter.

Gary's victimization is (re)framed such that the police and the parish priests are figured as his abusers and the adult men with whom he engaged in sexual behavior are linked with him as victims of the same persecution. Moreover, B/BC members who listened to his story, arranged for his counsel, and helped him escape "the whole mess" emerged as the heroes of the tale. These activists were framed as the people intent on saving Gary from harm.

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<sup>214</sup> The Boston/Boise Committee (B/BC), formed in 1977 to respond to the Revere Sex Ring, became the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) in 1978. Though I attend to the ways in which the mission of the group expanded with the adoption of the new name in chapter 3, the similarities in membership, political orientation, and organizational strategy encourage me to use NAMBLA throughout this chapter as a short hand for both chronological moments.

<sup>215</sup> Mitzel, *The Boston Sex Scandal*, 43-44.

Aligning with victims was used to win public sympathy, but advancing a libratory framework was the centerpiece of group efforts to propose solutions, propel social change, and perform radicalism. Reframing victimization was a strategy that lent more credence to the various political agendas that were advanced; it was these libratory agendas, however, that were the real focus of group efforts. As group members sought to liberate children from the very models of violence that they brought to light, they became saviors not only because they identified previously unseen dangers to the figure of the child, but also because they advanced plans to minimize those dangers. Moreover, the victimization that adult group members shared with the figure of the child could now be framed as an advantage that gave them an empathic link, making them better equipped to understand and connect with imperiled children.

The empathic connection between group members and the figure of the child also enabled the establishment of a safer public image by seemingly depoliticizing calls for social change. By using empathic language, the groups were able to situate their politics within the realm of emotion. This move elided rational objections to their reform agendas as such objections were incongruent with emotional pleas for change. To the extent that formal political debate was understood to be a rational endeavor, when these groups privileged emotion over reason in their rhetoric, they were effectively reframing the method of political debate.

This is not to say that emotional appeals did not have a long history in politics. However, the move made by these groups went beyond using emotion in the service of logical argumentation. Instead, emotion became the grounds on which calls for change were based. This represented a significant shift in political discourse that held profound

gendered implications.<sup>216</sup> To the extent that Western political philosophy gendered rational thought masculine and emotional feeling feminine, it also privileged reason over emotion, making reason the seat of politics and morality. When group members elevated emotion over reason and centered it within political discourse, they reversed this trend and enacted an alternative approach to libratory politics, one that masked the radicalism both of their agendas and of how they were pursuing them.

The nature of the Stone House mission, to redefine the causes and consequences of women's emotional distress, made empathy and emotional modeling one of the cornerstones of their work. Indeed, when searching for a way to introduce the program to others involved in grass roots activism, they relied on the letter of a former resident. "This is the first real home I've ever had. Thanks for caring enough about yourselves to be able to make possible a community where respect for women is not a theory but is lived out daily in this home... Bless you all for loving yourselves first of all and for loving your sisters."<sup>217</sup> The act of love, of self and of other, was the very thing that made liberation/transformation possible. Moreover, the modeling relationship, which the letter writer described as "the parenting that I never got in my own family," was framed as something that reached back into the woman childhood to heal old wounds. The figure of the child was present even when the interaction was between adults, and

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<sup>216</sup> Much of Western political thought separates thinking/reason from feeling/emotion, equates reason with men and emotion with women, and privileges masculine rationality. This approach is best typified by: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006); John Rawles, *A Theory of Justice*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971); I am borrowing from and building on the feminist critiques of this approach, especially those offered by: Susan Moller Okin, "Reason and Feeling in Thinking about Justice," *Ethics* 99.2 (1989): 229-49. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>217</sup> Beckert, et. Al., *The Elizabeth Stone House Handbook* (1991), v-vi.

the attention to love and healing rendered the Stone House commitment to respecting women nurturing rather than political.

Thus social movement groups were able to use such an emotional approach to frame their libratory efforts as apolitical when interacting with the general public while highlighting the radical politics behind this move when engaging other activist groups/communities. That is, the very claims of radicalism that so informed group members' identity within a community of leftist activism were often muted when groups interacted with a broader public. Indeed, the performance of victim and savior, though it involved a radical expansion of cultural understandings of violence and radical revision of the language of politics/political debate, was designed to allow groups to take root in the public imagination as approachable and sympathetic rather than being perceived as radical extremists. To the extent that these efforts were successful, groups appeared to be calling for reasonable reforms in the interests of society as whole instead of advocating for radical, transformative change.

Simultaneously exhibiting the face of victim and savior, indeed, using the first to substantiate the second, group members used their victimization to advance an altruistic, libratory politics of emotion. Grounding their altruism in their efforts to save children, members of the Boston Women's Health Collective, the Elizabeth Stone House, and NAMBLA all located the figure of the child at the heart of their libratory political agendas. Despite the diversity of those agendas, members of each group made use of similar strategies to gain attention and support. When violence was used as the impetus for liberation, and victimization and altruism were used as the means of calling

for liberation, libratory politics became the province of the vulnerable (victims) and their protectors/advocates (saviors).

### The Politics of Liberation

In as much as victims and saviors were the actors in political drama, liberation was the driving force behind the plot of that drama. That is, the groups examined here performed these roles in an effort to bring their libratory frameworks to life for an audience whose good will was necessary if the framework was to be enacted on a broader stage. Compelling performances were rewarded with legislative initiatives, victories in court, or changes in public opinion polls. As members of each group circulated their message of victimization and salvation to more and more people, they found themselves in competition not only with the institutions that they sought to transform, but also with other social movement groups whose path to liberation was markedly different from their own.

Despite the difference in the liberation proposed, each group expanded the definition of violence, linked the victimization of the figure of the child to that of the group, and situated members as singularly able to understand victimized children and prevent future victimization. As self-identified participants in a radical leftist political struggle, members of these three social movement groups sought not only to forestall the violence that they identified/publicized, but also to liberate society from the attitudes and institutions that created the violence. When they did so, they relied on a model that advanced liberation as the solution to violence. To the extent that children and group members were subjected to systems of violence, they needed to be liberated



from those systems and the conditions that produced them. Even when group members played savior to the imperiled child, they portrayed their role as one in which they rescued children and freed them from the dangers of violence.

The Boston Women's Health Collective's mission was to empower women by educating them about their bodies and to transform patient care. The Collective sought to free women from both the paternalism of male experts and the sexism of socialization. Collective members highlighted the victimization of girls and women who were denied information about their bodies and their development, denied spaces in which they could understand and relationships in which they could express their sexual desires, and denied the opportunity to make informed decisions about their reproductive health like whether and how to have children. According to the Collective, such girls and women were victims of the violence of neglect, first at the hands of parents who were unwilling or unable to create an environment that fostered girls' natural sense of being at home in their bodies. They were further victimized by a culture that devalued women's sexual needs and finally by a medical establishment that dismissed women who had the temerity to question the validity of its diagnoses or its reliance on sexist cultural tropes. Having identified the various ways that girls and women were neglected, Collective members portrayed themselves as autodidacts capable of freeing women from a legacy of ignorance and insecurity. Collective members used the testimonials in *Our Bodies, Ourselves* as evidence of their own histories of victimization and of their triumph over it through the empowerment of the education.

Sometimes testimonials were used to foreground cultural and institutional mistreatment of women. In such cases, indifferent medical practitioners and the limited cultural space available to women were shown to be far more disabling than other physical maladies.

Because multiple birth defects (cleft lip and palate, spina bifida) made my body different, my whole being is perceived and related to as different. My body creates feelings of denial, anger, guilt and rejection both within myself and within others. The only people who touched my body were medical personnel, with all their clinical coldness and detachment, and then it was to induce pain. I never thought my body could be itself pleasurable or be a source of pleasure. In a disabled and disfigured body, I am ‘desexed’ by both society and myself. I was never aware of my sexuality until at twenty-two my emotional and social development put me into relationships where sexual attraction toward me occurred. A thirteen-year-old has greater knowledge, skill, and a sense of her sexuality than I did! I struggled to identify with and accept my ‘womanness.’ With no one there to help, I was forced to go it alone. Always I’ve asked, ‘Am I a person despite my physical handicaps?’ Now I ask also, ‘Am I a woman?’<sup>218</sup>

Included in the Sexuality chapter under the heading “Growing Up,” this testimonial was used not only to highlight an unfeeling medical establishment, but also to reveal the ways that women, regardless of their physical abilities, were made to feel isolated, ashamed of their bodies, and removed from their sexuality. The text following this testimonial asked the reader “could anyone be as ugly, dull, miserable as I?/What did we really learn about sex in a positive way in our teens?” In response, the Collective along with readers of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* worked to give children more openness, honesty, and information.

To the extent that the Collective framed children’s natural curiosity as healthy and children’s innocence as a seat of knowledge, its task was to safeguard that state and allow children to develop unfettered by the sexism that pervaded American culture. Put

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<sup>218</sup> The Boston Women’s Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1976), 41.

another way, the libratory agenda advanced by Collective members became increasingly protectionist in orientation when children were the population under examination. And while the disabled woman whose testimonial was added to the “Sexuality” chapter for the second edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* could easily be figured into a framework of liberation, children and childhood recollections occupied a murkier space. Recounting a tale in which she dealt openly and honestly with her daughter’s curiosity about her body, one Collective member wrote, “My father was extremely upset and told me afterward that I had handled it all wrong. I should have scolded her and told her not to talk that way. Not, he assured me, because *he* cared, but because there are some pretty small-minded people out there who will give her a rude awakening if she’s not trained now.”<sup>219</sup> The mother telling the story protects her daughter from those who would “train” her by candidly responding to questions and by refusing to shame the three-year-old for her teasing curiosity. Despite the grandfather’s desire to shield the child from future harm, his parenting philosophy represents the ethos from which *Our Bodies, Ourselves* sought to liberate its readers. Celebrating childhood innocence, whether the pre-sexual innocence rejected by the Collective or one of innate power, knowledge and sexuality that *Our Bodies, Ourselves* advanced, made protection necessary. The very social ills from which the Collective sought to liberate women had not yet corrupted innocent children; this is how the child was able to teach the mother about natural, healthy sexuality. Liberation of the sort the Collective was advocating was incompatible with the figure of the child it constructed.

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<sup>219</sup> The Boston Women’s Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1973), 26.

Since children were uncorrupted by sexism, there was nothing from which to free them, only a charge to protect them from the reach of violence of sexism.

Like the Collective, NAMBLA members understood theirs as an educative mission, one that would change public attitudes about intergenerational relationships and the transform laws and other cultural constraints on children's free sexual expression and choice of partner. To NAMBLA members a repressive state apparatus and a culture that celebrated the privatized, nuclear family were far more damaging to children than consensual, intergenerational relationships. Indeed, NAMBLA's political agenda was steeped in liberatory rhetoric precisely because the solution that they proposed—the unfettered sexual expression of children and youths—was criminalized by the state, pathologized by the medical establishment, and vilified by a culture bent on preserving and promoting children's sexual innocence. In response, NAMBLA identified the violence that undergirded each of these positions, pointing first to the violence of state repression, then to the violence of medical demonization, and finally to the violence of ownership models that gave parents near absolute control over their children. From this excessive repression, NAMBLA members sought to save children, liberating them so that they could exercise some measure of sexual subjectivity and enjoy the rights and privileges of democratic citizenship. Unlike the insecure girls and women championed by the Boston Women's Health Collective, the gay youth on whose behalf NAMBLA organized were painted as defiant. Because NAMBLA portrayed the dangers to this population as primarily punitive rather than pre-emptive, their "victims" were rebellious instead of vulnerable.

NAMBLA's efforts to capitalize on children's perceived vulnerability was less successful than the efforts of their feminist counterparts in part because the gay youth on whose behalf NAMBLA organized were already culturally marginalized and in part because NAMBLA's proposed solution—sexual emancipation of children—actually erased the very vulnerability on which its strategic maneuvering depended. That is, NAMBLA members' arguments for children's sexual subjectivity challenged cultural presumptions of children's vulnerability. By arguing that children were victims of the individuals and agencies charged with their protection (families, police, courts), NAMBLA attempted to recast victimization and reframe violence. However, the idea that left to their own devices and freed to make their own (sexual) choices children would flourish actually championed children's autonomy not their vulnerability. Thus, NAMBLA's attempts to make use of the same discursive strategies was compromised both by the marginalization of population they represented and by the ways that the group's mission was at odds with the discursive formula they employed.

NAMBLA claimed that gay youth needed only to be left alone to make autonomous decisions about their sex lives, in its own way echoing the rhetoric of natural development espoused by the Boston Women's Health Collective. While a *laissez-faire* approach to sexual decision making was congruent with the radical liberatory posture assumed by the group, Gary's story demonstrated how easily interchangeable liberation and protection were by exposing the vulnerability of youth not only to intrusions from the state, but also to the trauma wrought by such intrusive contact. Though Mitzel redefined the nature of Gary's victimization, positioning the priest and coercive police officers as the true villains and B/BC members as the heroic

saviors, the proper way to address the coercive arm of the state was to protect children from its traumatizing effect. That is, NAMBLA's efforts to liberate boys and the men who loved them were rhetorical and legislative in scope. To the extent that NAMBLA members 'saved' gay youth, they did so by affirming young people's sexual expressivity and also by trying to protect these youths from the prejudices and punishments that could be meted out to those who violated social (and legal) standards.

In contrast, staffers and clients at Elizabeth Stone House organized on behalf of a population that was, comparatively, more easily fit into existing categories of victimization. Nonetheless, the Stone House mission challenged the status quo by arguing that the feminization of poverty was as damaging as the prevalence of incest; they argued that trauma of diagnosis, institutionalization, and the suspension of parental rights, which amounted to a state sponsored rape, was at least as damaging to women and children as an actual forcible rape. With their alternative to institutionalization, their attention to autonomous empowerment, and their therapeutic community, Stone House staffers and residents provided a libratory model in which women overcame the violence of their past and were equipped to combat the violence of their culture. Unlike NAMBLA and the Collective, the Elizabeth Stone House provided temporary protection as part of their libratory efforts. With this group, even more than the other two, the space between a politics of liberation and one of protection was especially small.

Though the Boston Women's Health Collective, the Elizabeth Stone House, and the North American Man/Boy Love Association all engaged in radical leftist politics, the violence-based libratory frameworks they advanced created a space for the

emergence of a more conservative protectionist discourse/activism. That is, there were two responses to expanded cultural definitions of violence: a politics of liberation and one of protection. That each group slipped, however minimally, into a protectionist stance demonstrated the ways that violence could compel either/both liberation and/or protection. Their radical leftist identities left members of these social movement groups reluctant to embrace protectionist rhetoric. Despite this reluctance to advance protectionism, the libratory frameworks that they developed contained the seeds of for an alternative, protection-oriented politics. By the 1980s the child-victim was the subject of unprecedented media attention, and the protections discourse that surrounded it became the driving force behind a series of child abuse panics that ultimately painted children as equally vulnerable to those trying to help as they were to those trying to harm.

### 1980s Child Abuse Panics

*Reports of sexual abuse of children, even of infants, in day-care institutions have shocked the nation, provoking demands for harsh penalties and instant reforms...The crisis is evident.*<sup>220</sup>

The crisis elaborated upon in the *Times* article, which cites cases in the Bronx, Manhattan Beach, California, Chicago, Reno, and Alabama as sites of multiple day-care abuse allegations, was one that hit small towns and big cities across the country. Even those communities that were spared the costly trials were visited by an increase in day-care and preschool closures, and media outlets from newspapers and magazines to

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<sup>220</sup>Fred M. Hechinger, "Abuse at Centers: Underlying Flaws" *New York Times* August 28, 1984, pg. C6.

television documentaries and feature films covered the crisis as it spread throughout the decade and into the one that followed. Indeed, the first and last of the big 1980s day-care abuse cases both ended in the 1990s.

With a final cost to the government of fifteen million dollars, the McMartin Preschool trial was the most expensive and longest running criminal case in US history at its conclusion in 1990, seven years after the first accusation of child molestation was leveled against Ray Buckey. Four hundred children were questioned over the course of two trials in which the defendants were charged with more than three hundred counts of child abuse. The accusations included claims of sexual assault, animal sacrifice, and ritualistic satanic abuse. Both print and television news media covered the case, presenting the allegations of children and parents largely unchallenged. Ultimately, no convictions were obtained against Buckey and six other employees of the McMartin Preschool (including Buckey's mother, grandmother, and sister). The acquittals and mistrials further polarized the community of Manhattan Beach, California, and they offered little remedy to the defendants whose careers, finances, and reputations were irreversibly damaged by what most observers now admit was a modern day witch-hunt.

Despite its high profile, the McMartin case was one of several that gripped American communities in the 1980s. From 1982-1984 several residents of Bakersfield, California were arrested and convicted for participating in a series of child sexual abuse rings.<sup>221</sup> Away from the West Coast, allegations of the ritualistic satanic sexual abuse of children circulated in Jordan, Minnesota in 1983, and against day-care workers in Edenton, North Carolina in 1989. The existence of ritualistic satanic abuse has since

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<sup>221</sup>Many of the Bakersfield convicted have since been exonerated, released from prison after serving decades, and, in some cases, awarded settlements by the state.



been discredited, and the child abuse panics of the 1980s are now seen as cautionary tales about the dangers that public hysteria poses to the innocent. Nevertheless, what are now acknowledged as the moral or sexual “panics” of the 1980s represent both a response to the sexual politics of the 1960s and ‘70s as well as a foundation for the “war on pedophiles” of the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>222</sup>

The abuse panics took place on the heels of highly publicized child murders in Atlanta, Georgia and Oakland County, Michigan.<sup>223</sup> As these cases unfolded, parents and teachers renewed their efforts to inform children about “stranger danger.” Fears about child safety were reflected in the prevalence of public service announcement enquiring about the whereabouts of children. At the same time, however, information about the likelihood of abuse at the hands of a person known to the child (rather than a stranger) was beginning to reach wider audiences. The panics of the 1980s arose as a kind of culmination of the fears and dangers that already surrounded children.<sup>224</sup> In affected communities, every child was perceived as vulnerable and every adult was a potential perpetrator.

After seven years and two trials, the McMartin Preschool case finally ended in 1990 with no convictions against any of the seven accused. More than four hundred children were questioned by police, therapists, and prosecutors to generate the hundreds

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<sup>222</sup>In my discussion of moral panics, I am relying on the frameworks first outlined by Stuart Hall and Stanley Cohen. See especially, Stuart Hall, *Policing the Crisis*, (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978); and Stanley Cohen, *Folk-Devils and Moral Panics*, (London: Routledge, 2002). On October 4, 2005, Oprah Winfrey declared war on pedophilia and began offering rewards for information leading to the arrest of persons on her child predator watch list.

<sup>223</sup>Twenty-eight children and two adults were murdered in Atlanta between 1979 and 1981 in what investigators believed to be a related string of attacks, and at least four children were murdered in southwestern Michigan between 1976 and 1977 by an unidentified assailant referred to as “the Babysitter.”

<sup>224</sup>For an extended treatment of the ‘80s abuse-panics that also considers high profile celebrity disclosures of abuse, see Philip Jenkins, *Moral Panics*.

of charges that were filed against Virginia McMartin, owner of the preschool; her daughter, Peggy McMartin Buckey; and Peggy's children, Ray and Peggy Ann Buckey; along with preschool teachers, Mary Ann Jackson, Bette Raidor, and Babette Spitler. The McMartin case distinguished itself as the most widely publicized, most expensive, and longest running criminal trial with an interwoven cast of characters and escalating series of events worthy of a soap opera. Over the course of the investigation, the McMartin school was vandalized and set on fire, the original complainant died after being hospitalized following a psychotic break induced by paranoid schizophrenia, the investigative journalist who first broke the story had a live-in affair with the social worker who "uncovered" the abuse, and one of the prosecuting attorneys resigned rather than continue working a trial in which he believed in the innocence of the defendants.

The McMartin family was close-knit and headed by matriarch, Virginia McMartin. Touted by some in her neighborhood as "St. Virginia," she had devoted her adult life to working with and on behalf of children and had been repeatedly honored for that work.<sup>225</sup> After working for several years as a school bus driver, Virginia McMartin had saved enough money to open the McMartin Preschool in the Los Angeles suburb of Manhattan Beach, California. The school was a family affair from the beginning, with Virginia's daughter Peggy Buckey working as an administrator. By the time the case erupted, the school had been open for more than twenty-five years, and McMartin's daughter and grandchildren had all worked there. The remainder of the teachers and staff had attended church with McMartin family for several years, and the

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<sup>225</sup>Virginia McMartin received four public citations for community service, including the Rose and Scroll Award, the cities highest honor. See Virginia McMartin, "Virginia McMartin Preschool," unpublished autobiography, 1982 or early 1983; *Huntington Beach News*, August 14, 1987.

atmosphere at the school encouraged closeness between employees. At the time of her indictment in March 1984, seventy-six-year-old Virginia McMartin was taken into custody in a wheelchair wearing dark glasses to shield her eyes after cataract surgery. Peggy was fifty-seven, and teachers Mary Ann Jackson and Bette Raidor were both in their sixties.

The events that were eventually described as “scarr[ing] a whole generation of children” began with a single accusation.<sup>226</sup> In August 1983, prompted by her son’s painful bowel movements, Judy Johnson reported to the police that the two-and-a-half-year-old had been sodomized by McMartin school aide, Ray Buckey. Buckey, the grandson of school’s founder, Virginia McMartin, and the son of Peggy McMartin Buckey, an administrator at the preschool, denied all wrongdoing. Over the next two months Johnson continued to levy increasingly bizarre accusations against Buckey and other employees at the McMartin preschool alleging that, among other things, her son was “buried alive...[and] sodomized by a lion.”<sup>227</sup> Johnson would also accuse her husband of abusing their son, but police and prosecutors, who had already begun mounting a case against Buckey, were reluctant to pursue another investigation that could undermine the McMartin case.

After Buckey’s September arrest, he was released for lack of evidence. It was at this time that police chief Harry Kuhlmeier sent a letter to the parents of 200 current and former McMartin Preschool students. The letter informed parents of the ongoing investigation against Buckey and instructed them to question their children to see if they

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<sup>226</sup>“Details of Sexual Abuse Case at School Described” *New York Times* Apr 7, 1984, pg. 8.

<sup>227</sup>Quoted in Dr. Roland C. Summit, “The Dark Tunnels of McMartin,” in *Journal of Psychohistory* 21 (4) Spring 1994

had been abused or witnessed abuse while at the preschool. The letter asked parents to gather “any information from your child regarding having ever observed Ray Buckey to leave a classroom alone with a child during any nap period, or if they have ever observed Ray Buckey tie up a child.”<sup>228</sup> After the letter was distributed, the number of victims and charges quickly multiplied. Within five months, Virginia McMartin and her daughter were forced to close the school permanently.

Overwhelmed by the growing number of children involved in the case, the police department asked Kee MacFarlane, a social worker with Children’s Institute International (CII), to interview the children and make a determination regarding alleged abuse. Though she was not licensed in any state, MacFarlane had worked with abused children for more than a decade. She taped all of her interviews and used anatomically correct dolls to allow the children to identify body parts and actions and hand puppets to put the children at ease and allow them to gain distance from disclosures of abuse. As the case generated more publicity, MacFarlane became a kind of spokesperson for abused children, and she was portrayed and accepted as an expert, eventually testifying before Congress about “an organized operation of child predators designed to prevent detection.” Prompted by circumstantial evidence, MacFarlane claimed that within such networks preschools “serve as a ruse for larger unthinkable crimes against children.”<sup>229</sup>

The McMartin case was picked up by the national news media after Wayne Satz aired a series of exclusive investigative reports on the case for local Los Angeles

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<sup>228</sup>“Letter to McMartin Preschool Parents from Police Chief Kuhlmeier Jr.” September 8, 1983.

<sup>229</sup>Nadine Brozan, “Witness Says She Fears ‘Child Predator’ Network” *New York Times* September 18, 1984 pg.A21.

station, KABC. Satz's two year long coverage of the McMartin case won him two Golden Mikes awards, and is frequently credited with catapulting the case into the national spotlight. In fact, one reporter working the case has gone on record saying that "the D.A. might never have filed charges in the McMartin case had it not been for Channel 7's stories and the public attention they generated."<sup>230</sup> Both the District Attorney and Satz himself deny that his reports had this level of influence. However, after his initial reports aired, charges of abuse at McMartin and other area preschools and day-care centers increased dramatically, forcing several to close. Satz underwent further criticism for pursuing a romantic relationship with Kee MacFarlane, a primary prosecution witness, though Satz defended his behavior and insisted that there was no conflict of interest. By the time indictments were handed down against the seven defendants, KCBS reporter Ross Becker claimed that, "the story took on a life of its own."<sup>231</sup>

After the grand jury handed down indictments against McMartin, the Buckeys, Jackson, Raidor, and Spitler in March 1984, the seven were quickly arrested. At their bail hearings, prosecutor Lael Rubin argued against bail for the defendants, claiming that they had committed 397 crimes in addition to the 115 on which they had been indicted, and that the nature of the crimes combined with the threats made against the victims made remand necessary in this case. Bail was denied for Ray Buckey, and bail for Peggy Buckey was set at \$1 million. Unable to make bail, all defendants except for Virginia McMartin were imprisoned awaiting trial. Over the course of the pretrial

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<sup>230</sup>David Shaw, "Reporter's Early Exclusive Triggered a Media Frenzy" *Los Angeles Times* January 20, 1990.

<sup>231</sup>Quoted in David Shaw, "Reporter's Early Exclusive Triggered a Media Frenzy" *Los Angeles Times* January 20, 1990.

proceedings, which lasted nearly eighteen months, Peggy Ann was released on bond. And in 1986, the newly elected district attorney, Ira Reiner, dismissed charges against all defendants except Peggy and Ray Buckey, both of whom had remained incarcerated, citing “incredibly weak evidence.”<sup>232</sup> The prosecution proceeded to trial against Ray and Peggy Buckey on 65 counts of child abuse.

The trial against Ray and Peggy Buckey was unprecedented not only because of its duration and cost, but also because of the scope and sensitivity of the issues involved. Before it was over “63,000 pages of testimony, 917 exhibits and 124 witnesses” were generated.<sup>233</sup> Over the course of the 33-month trial, the defense strategy seemed to be to highlight the errors made by the police, the staff at CII and the district attorney’s office. In the end, many jurors were convinced that something had happened to the children, but they were unable to return a guilty verdict. Their reluctance to convict stemmed from the misconduct on the part of police who released Buckey’s name to parents before charges were filed, what they perceived as coercive therapeutic techniques, and inconsistent testimony from prosecution witnesses. On January 18, 1990, more than six years after Judy Johnson made the first complaint, the jury found the Buckeys not guilty on 52 counts, and deadlocked on 13 others. Echoing statements made in juror interviews, Ray Buckey’s attorney, Daniel Davis, told reporters after the conclusion of the trial, “I did not win this case by pluck or brilliance... The prosecution was never ready. They never conducted an organized, methodical investigation of the case before going to trial. This case was exceedingly easy to defend.”<sup>234</sup> A mere two

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<sup>232</sup>Susan Schindehette, “The McMartin Nightmare” *People* February 5, 1990. Vol. 33 No. 5

<sup>233</sup>Susan Schindehette, “The McMartin Nightmare” *People* February 5, 1990. Vol. 33 No. 5

<sup>234</sup>*Ibid.*

weeks later, the district attorney's office announced its intention to retry Ray Buckley on eight of the thirteen counts for which no verdict had been reached. The second trial, though quicker, also ended in a hung jury.

If, as Gail Rubin asserts, disputes over sexual behavior mask broader social anxieties, then the day-care abuse crisis ignited by the McMartin case can be read as evidence of Americans' ambivalence about the care of their children.<sup>235</sup> In the 1970s, feminists identified the home as a potentially dangerous place when they publicized the realities of incest in the face of class- and race-based fears of stranger danger.<sup>236</sup> At the same time, steady increases in women's work force participation saw greater numbers of American children in day-care facilities in the 1980s. As the child-abuse panics of the later decade spread, the media framed the issue as one of oversight, with some in the public demanding greater regulation and higher standards for day-care facilities and others pointing to women's absence from the home as the root cause of children's increased vulnerability.<sup>237</sup> With both the home and the school identified as sites of danger to children, Americans' fears about their children's well-being were on the rise.

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<sup>235</sup>Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." See also James Kincaid's analysis of the cultural narratives that surround child molestation cases in the United States. James Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

<sup>236</sup>The Boston Women's Health Collective's *Our Bodies, Ourselves* devoted considerable space to detailing the physical and emotional traumas associated with rape and incest and was among the first widely distributed texts that both highlighted the likelihood that victims would know their assailants and framed prominent stranger danger myths as being inspired by racism and class bias. See: The Boston Women's Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book By and For Women, Revised and Expanded* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 1976. See also: Vikki Bell, *Interrogating Incest: Feminism, Foucault, and the Law*, (New York: Routledge), 1993; and *Gender Violence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Laura O'Toole, Jessica Schiffman, and Margie Kiter Edwards, eds., (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 297-364.

<sup>237</sup>Fred M. Hechinger, "Abuse at Centers: Underlying Flaws," *New York Times* August 28, 1984, pg. C6; Robert Lindsey, "Increased Demand for Day-care Prompts a Debate on Regulation," *New York Times* September 2, 1984, pp. 1, 52.

The sphere in which children were perceived to be at risk was not the only shift from the 1970s to the 1980s. Debates about children and youth sexuality also underwent significant transformation. The earlier decade witnessed the rise of public debates about young people's ability to possess sexual desire and consent to sexual activity.<sup>238</sup> The 1980s elevation of the child-victim shifted public discourse from a focus on consent to one on vulnerability. Even the nature of the scandals that received media attention reveal this shift, highlighted by the 1970s media focus on adolescent prostitution and the 1980s attention to day-care abuse.<sup>239</sup>

What McMartin and other subsequent cases revealed, however, was that the discourse of children's vulnerability was complex, and that it often identified multiple actors as dangerous to children. That is, perpetrators of sexual violence were not the only threats to children when "overzealous prosecutor[s]...and a 'cottage industry' of child-abuse psychologists" were also capable of manipulating children into believing that abuse had occurred.<sup>240</sup> That children were in peril seemed not to be in doubt; it was the source of children's danger that was unclear. As children and their parents lamented the failures of the justice system with the same intensity displayed by the defendants and their attorneys, it was clear that this trial ushered in a new set of concerns for the child-victim and those accused of child abuse.

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<sup>238</sup>See especially, *The Age Taboo*, Daniel Tsang, ed., (Boston: Alyson Publications), 1981; Mitzel, *The Boston Sex Scandal*, (Boston: Glad Day Books), 1980.

<sup>239</sup>Two prominent child prostitution cases were heavily publicized in 1970s Boston, the Sunshine Girls case in which a group of under-aged girls was alleged to have been prostituted to prominent business men and the pedophile panic in which gay teens were reported to have been at the root of the arrest of gay men in the Boston public library.

<sup>240</sup>Robert Reinhold, "2 Acquitted of Child Molestation in Nation's Longest Criminal Trial," *New York Times* January 19, 1990 pg. A18.



After the first McMartin jury returned not guilty verdicts on more than fifty counts, some jurors conceded that they believed that children had been abused, but held that the prosecution had not convinced them that the abuse had taken place at the McMartin preschool or at the hands of Peggy or Ray Buckey: “I believe that the children believed what they were saying was true in the courtroom...At CII I could not tell from watching the tape that the children were telling what actually happened to them or if they were repeating what they were told by their parents or other people.”<sup>241</sup> For others on the jury, however, the credibility of the children was at issue: “I tried to believe the children, but I had a hard time picking fact from fiction.”<sup>242</sup> Indeed, the McMartin case would begin a debate in both judicial and psychological circles about the ability of children—especially very young children—to provide credible testimony. This question would be raised throughout subsequent abuse trials in the ‘80s, and would persist in the face of suspect therapeutic techniques and children recanting.<sup>243</sup>

Members of both the prosecution and the defense, along with police officials, social workers and legislators all agreed that the McMartin case provided useful lessons and hoped that its legacy would be to see those lessons borne out. After the verdict, social worker and key prosecution witness, Kee MacFarlane said, “I hope that people will see [the verdict] as the anomaly that it is, that parents won’t be afraid to bring their

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<sup>241</sup>Juror, Brenda Williams quoted in Robert Reinhold, “2 Acquitted of Child Molestation in the Nation’s Longest Criminal Trial,” *New York Times* January 19, 1990, pg. A18.

<sup>242</sup>Juror Daryl Hutchins quoted in Seth Mydans, “For Jurors, Facts Could Not Be Sifted From Fantasies,” *New York Times* January 19, 1990 pg. A18.

<sup>243</sup>Children in McMartin and subsequent cases would recant allegations, sometimes before trial proceedings concluded, sometimes years later. See: Roger Wortington, “Abuse testimony a story, boy says,” *Chicago Tribuen* January 25, 1985 pg. 1.

children forth, that prosecutors won't be afraid to prosecute."<sup>244</sup> Judicial analysis turned to the length of the trial and to the special needs of child witnesses.<sup>245</sup> In a statement made after the verdict, district attorney Reiner said, "The very idea that a case in trial for two and one half years can lead to a rational result is preposterous."<sup>246</sup> Because of the case's seven-year duration, however, these observations came too late to halt similar panics from cropping up. After the case first came to public attention in 1984, however, a rash of similar cases emerged throughout the country. The extent of the accusations and the frequency of day-care closures prompted a national debate about the need for regulation in nursery- and preschools, and for new guidelines for questioning children. Still, for those involved, the resolution of the case provided no comfort.

Similar charges were filed in Jordan, Minnesota in 1983. Within a year, 25 adults and one juvenile were arrested, dozens of children were removed from their parents' custody, the FBI and state police launched an investigation into alleged child pornography and infanticide, the state attorney general decried the handling of the case as "a tragedy," and the only trial based on the charges resulted in acquittal. Like other child abuse cases in the period, the charges in Jordan quickly multiplied, and stories of ritualistic satanic abuse surfaced. Unlike the McMartin case, however, one suspect pleaded guilty, and key witnesses admitted to fabricating charges by the end of 1984.

The arrest of more than two-dozen people for participating in a "sex ring" rocked the small town of Jordan, Minnesota. Thirty-five miles outside of Minneapolis,

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<sup>244</sup>Kee MacFarland quoted in Robert Reinhold, "2 Acquitted of Child Molestation in the Nation's Longest Criminal Trial," *New York Times* January 19, 1990, pg. A18.

<sup>245</sup>"Child Abuse—and Trial Abuse," *New York Times* January 20, 1990 pg. A24; Robert Reinhold, "Long Child Molestation Trial Viewed as System Run Amok," *New York Times* July 27, 1989, pg. A1; E.R. Shipp, "The Jeopardy of Children on the Stand," *New York Times*, September 23, 1984, pg. E8.

<sup>246</sup>Reiner quoted in Robert Reinhold, "2 Acquitted of Child Molestation in the Nation's Longest Criminal Trial," *New York Times* January 19, 1990, pg. A18.

Jordan was founded in the mid-nineteenth century. Despite its proximity to the Twin Cities, it was described as “rural, a safe haven from the crime and social upheaval of urban America.”<sup>247</sup> Heavily wooded, with homes nestled on bluffs or waterfronts, the town celebrated its “rural” feeling by setting aside forested land in a series of state and federal parks. The community of 2,700 was transformed by the allegations: “There’s more paranoia in the town of Jordan and in Scott County than I’ve seen anywhere. Everybody is afraid to bathe their children, hug their children, go to a fair in the country.”<sup>248</sup>

The case began in September 1983 when a resident reported that her nine-year-old daughter had been sexually assaulted by trash collector, James Rud, a man twice convicted of child molestation who was then under probation. In a 113-page statement made in August 1983, Rud implicated others in Jordan, including a deputy sheriff, a police officer, mechanics, and waitresses.<sup>249</sup> By the time the first case proceeded to trial, more than forty children, ranging in age from toddlers to teenagers, were identified as victims of twenty-five adults. The accused were said to have abused their own and each other’s children in an elaborate sex ring in which parents exchanged children with each other for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Once three boys came forward claiming to have witnessed the sacrifice of babies, the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) and the FBI were called in to investigate. In addition to the sexual

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<sup>247</sup>Peter Carlson, “Divided by Multiple Charges of Child Abuse, a Minnesota Town Seethes with Anger,” *People* October 22, 1984, Vol. 22, No. 17.

<sup>248</sup>Marck G. Kruzman quoted in E.R. Shipp, “Rumors of Murder Haunt Town Since Dropping of Sex Charges,” *New York Times* October 25, 1984, pg. A18.

<sup>249</sup>“Admitted Child Molester Sentenced to 40 Years” *San Diego Union-Tribune* January 19, 1985 pg. A2; and E.R. Shipp, “Two in Abuse Case Found Not Guilty,” *New York Times* September 20, 1984, pg. A21.

abuse and murder charges, authorities began looking for evidence of a child pornography syndicate based in the town.

Ultimately, no evidence of murder or pornography was found, and the case, from its initial investigation to its ultimate prosecution, was described by state attorney general, Hubert H. Humphrey III, as having “clearly [gone] awry.”<sup>250</sup> Though attorneys from Humphrey to Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia acknowledge that abuse occurred in Jordan, James Rud was the only one of the accused to be convicted as a result of a guilty plea.<sup>251</sup> Rud agreed to testify against other Jordan defendants, and in exchange, Scott County attorney, R. Kathleen Morris, agreed to drop 98 of the 100 charges pending against him. Ultimately, this plea undermined the credibility of the prosecution’s case and contributed to the not guilty verdict in the only case that went to trial. The acquittal combined with CBA and FBI findings, with witnesses recanting, and with Rud’s own admissions that he had made false statement to obtain leniency, left prosecutors with little choice but to drop the remaining charges.<sup>252</sup>

The only case to go to trial was that of Robert and Lois Brentz, a husband and wife who were charged with molesting their six-year-old son and four other Jordan children. The couple was acquitted after a four-week long trial and two days of jury deliberation. As in the McMartin case, children’s vulnerability to manipulation focused attention both on those accused of sexual abuse and on the leading tactics of the prosecution and its witnesses. In response to the verdict, county prosecutor R. Kathleen

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<sup>250</sup>Hubert H. Humphrey, III “Review of the Scott County Investigation” February 12, 1985.

<sup>251</sup>Humphrey, “Review of the Scott County Case”; J. Scalia dissenting opinion in *Maryland v. Craig* 497 US 836.

<sup>252</sup>E.R. Shipp, “Boys Recant Stories of Child Murders,” *New York Times* November 21, 1984 pg. A12; “Molester Admits False Testimony” *Washington Post* November 29, 1984 pg. A12.

Morris proclaimed, “This doesn’t mean they’re innocent. It means that I didn’t prove they were guilty. *This means that we live in a society that does not believe children.*”<sup>253</sup>

In a case that “rested almost exclusively on the credibility of the children,” an acquittal suggested that even if community hysteria contributed to child abuse panics, skepticism still prevailed in the jury room.<sup>254</sup>

As the 1980s drew to a close, the small town of Edenton, North Carolina made national news when the owners of its most prominent day-care, Little Rascals, were arrested for the sexual abuse of children in their care. Unlike the cases in Minnesota and California, the Little Rascals case was set apart because jury convictions were obtained against some of the accused, and because the media coverage ranged from uncritical to skeptical. The quiet calm of small town life was disrupted when the first allegations surfaced in January 1989. By the time the final Little Rascals charge was dismissed in 1997, more than four hundred counts of abuse were levied against seven people, including Bob and Betsy Kelly, the daughter and son-in-law of a local business owner and politician, and Scott Privott, son of a judge, successful business owner, and country club president. In fact, coverage of the scandal and subsequent trials revealed a community equally as shocked by the nature of the crimes as it was by the status of the people who were accused.

Bob and Betsy Kelly, owners of the Little Rascals Day-care Center, were at the heart of the case. The couple married in 1979 and opened Little Rascals in 1986. Two years later the couple moved the day-care into a converted bottle factory owned by

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<sup>253</sup>Quoted in E.R. Shipp “Two in Abuse Case Found Not Guilty,” *New York Times*, September 20, 1984, pg. A21, emphasis mine.

<sup>254</sup>Humphrey, “Review of the Scott County Case.”

Betsy's father. The new location allowed them to care for more children and to hire additional staff. Located just one block east of Edenton's main street, Little Rascals became the town's "most prestigious day-care."<sup>255</sup> This distinction carried weight in a town like Edenton, whose population in the mid-1980s was about six thousand. The small town atmosphere was based on more than the number of residents, however. The rural community on the edge of the Albemarle Sound boasts a number of historical markers as a testament to its eighteenth century founding and long-ago stint as unofficial state capital. Within its borders, many residents live in colonial homes and are part of families whose members have known one another for generations.

The closeness of Edenton residents became evident as the Little Rascals scandal unfolded. Three days after the new location opened, Bob slapped Joel Mabrey, the four-year-old son of Betsy's friend Jane. The circumstances surrounding the incident remain unclear; however, the Kellys refusal to apologize to Jane Mabrey, though they eventually claimed that the slap was an accident, are well documented.<sup>256</sup> According to interviews conducted as part of the first of three *Frontline* documentaries covering the allegations and subsequent trials, Jane was "devastated" by the incident. After her son told her that he had been slapped, she "knew that life would never be the same again... If I couldn't trust a day-care owned by my best friend for my child to be safe in, then I knew that I probably wouldn't be able to trust much of anything else."<sup>257</sup> Upset that no one seemed to take the slapping seriously, Jane confronted the Kellys: "And we

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<sup>255</sup> *Innocence Lost* Frontline original air date May 7, 1991.

<sup>256</sup> *Innocence Lost: the Verdict* Frontline, original air date July 20-21, 1993. (The entire incident is covered in both the first and second installment of the series, but in the second one the narrator refers to the slap as an accident.)

<sup>257</sup> Frontline, *Innocence Lost*.

had a very bad scene. I was crying and weeping and saying, ‘How could this happen?’ at the time still thinking it was an accident, but knowing I could never bring Joel back down there unless he understood that adults could make mistakes and they can rectify them. And that was never done.”<sup>258</sup> No apology from the Kellys was forthcoming. Jane’s dissatisfaction with the resolution of the event was still evident two months after the incident that prompted her to remove Joel from Little Rascals. She approached the Kellys again: “I was hoping that both Bob and Betsy would realize that losing Joel was a loss, mainly because he was my son and Betsy and I were friends.”<sup>259</sup> Bob and Betsy’s continued refusal to acknowledge the wrong that had been done to her son compelled Jane to act.

Betsy Kelly’s sister, Nancy Smith, believed that Jane instigated the panic that consumed Little Rascals less than four months after Jane removed her son from the day-care. According to Nancy, “She knew that, legally, physical abuse, which is what she thought she was justified in charging, wasn’t going to close the day-care. One incidence wasn’t going to do it.”<sup>260</sup> Indeed, Jane’s own words indicate that she uncovered what would become the first allegation of abuse after she began speaking with parents whose children attended Little Rascals: “my understanding is this one particular mother [Audrey Stever] I talked to was concerned—in our talking it raised some more red flags and she pursued it and found that it wasn’t a physical abuse that was taking place, but

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<sup>258</sup>Frontline *Innocence Lost*.

<sup>259</sup>Frontline *Innocence Lost*.

<sup>260</sup>Frontline *Innocence Lost*.

that it was sexual abuse. And that's what precipitated the investigation by the social services.”<sup>261</sup>

After her conversation with Jane, Stever approached police officer, Brenda Toppin. Stever and Toppin were friends, and Toppin, who had recently attended a seminar on child sexual abuse, told Stever how to question three-year-old Kyle. During this next round of questioning, Kyle told his mother that Mr. Bob played doctor with him and other boys at the day-care. According to Kyle, “playing doctor” meant “sticking things in your butt.” As a result of this conversation, a complaint was filed with social services, and eventually, a full scale investigation was launched.

The social service complaint alleging abuse was filed January 19, 1989. By February two more children disclosed abuse at Little Rascals, and each passing month saw the number of allegations grow. Though several parents initially rallied around Bob, the tide of public support shifted as the list of allegations grew. Bob Kelly was arrested in mid-April, and by the end of the month the day-care was forced to close. Unable to pay a bond that eventually reached 1.5 million dollars, Bob remained in prison awaiting trial. At his first pre-trial hearing in April, members of the prosecution approached Kelly’s lawyer, Chris Bean, to tell him that his son had been named by other children as a victim of abuse at the hands of Bob Kelly. Just after the grand jury handed down the first set of indictments against Kelly, Bean withdrew from the case. Bean’s refusal to represent Kelly was seen by Jane Mabrey and other Edenton residents as confirmation of Kelly’s guilt.

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<sup>261</sup>Frontline *Innocence Lost*.



Toppin and other police officials encouraged parents whose children had ever attended Little Rascals to have them evaluated by trained therapists. As the case grew, the state set aside monies to pay for these evaluations, and in some cases, to pay for treatment as well. Four therapists were recommended by the police, and the prosecution based the bulk of its case on their findings. Parents who refused to have their children evaluated were made to feel neglectful, while those who wanted independent evaluations from professionals removed from Edenton and Little Rascals had to pay for the services themselves. More than ninety percent of the allegations were based on statements made to Toppin or one of these four therapists, but the defense was not able to question them or review their notes.

By September, more than ninety children were involved in the case. In fact, the case had grown so much that Bill Hart was appointed as special prosecutor. The police and prosecution looked beyond Bob Kelly, and charges were filed against other Little Rascals employees. Betsy Kelly was the first to be arrested, charged with several counts of sexual abuse and even more counts of conspiracy. Scott Privott was arrested the same day as Betsy, his bail set at \$1 million. Privott maintained throughout his questioning and imprisonment that he had never even been inside Little Rascals. After Betsy's and Privott's September arrest, the others followed in rapid succession. By the end of the month Dawn Wilson, the cook at Little Rascals, and Shelly Stone, who worked with older children were also arrested. Bail was set at \$880 and \$375 thousand respectively. In January, the last two arrests were made when Robin Byrum and Darlene Harris were taken in to custody.

Though seven arrests were made in connection with alleged abuse at Little Rascals, only two defendants ever made it to trial: Bob Kelly and Dawn Wilson. Kelly's trial was first. It lasted eight months, was covered extensively in the print media, and was the topic of the second *Frontline* documentary on the Little Rascals scandal. The therapists never took the stand, and their reports were never made available to the defense team. Twelve children testified, all between the ages of three and five when the alleged abuse took place. The jury deliberated for two weeks before finding Kelly guilty on 99 of 100 charges. The next day, on April 23, 1992, he was sentenced to twelve consecutive life sentences.<sup>262</sup> The Little Rascals case had frequently been compared to McMartin because of its scope and cost, but the conviction became the biggest difference between the two cases. This resolution was hailed as a victory by the prosecution and by Edenton parents. According to juror interviewed just after the trial, "the children were convincing."<sup>263</sup>

In November of 1992 the prosecution mounted its case against Dawn Wilson. Wilson, the single mother of a young daughter, was offered a plea bargain just before her case proceeded to trial. In exchange pleading guilty on some of the charges, the prosecution offered her a drastically reduced sentence of 1-2 years, and they would count the seventeen months Wilson had already spent in prison as part of her time served. Rather than facing multiple life sentences, Wilson could conceivably serve no additional jail time. She refused the offer. Only four children testified against Dawn, but this time the prosecution introduced the therapy reports into evidence just before the

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<sup>262</sup>Ronald Smothers, "Child-Abuse Case Is Ordeal for a Town," *New York Times* Aug 19, 1991, pg.A13; "Day-care Owner is Convicted of Child Molesting," *New York Times*, Apr 23, 1992, pg. A16.

<sup>263</sup>"Day-Care Owner is Convicted of Child Molesting" *New York Times* Apr 23, 1992, pg A16.

jury began its deliberations. After just under three months, Wilson was convicted on all counts and sentenced to life in prison.

A few months after Dawn Wilson returned to prison, Scott Privott's bond was reduced from \$1 million to \$50 thousand. Unable to make bond before this reduction, Privott had been in jail awaiting trial for three years. He and the remaining four defendants waited to see who would be brought to trial next. More than three years had passed since the initial allegations were made, and each of the five had been offered several increasingly good deals by the prosecution. All had stated their unwillingness to confess to crimes that they did not commit. Moved by the convictions of Bob Kelly and Dawn Wilson, and haunted by her own years of imprisonment, Betsy Kelly pleaded no contest on January 28, 1994. She served ten months. Scott Privott, after being promised that he would have to serve no additional jail time, also pleaded no contest in June 1994.

Defense teams for Bob Kelly and Dawn Wilson filed several appeals, alleging, among other things, jury misconduct. In January 1995, they argued their cases in front of the state court of appeals. On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Appellate Court overturned the convictions of Bob Kelly and Dawn Wilson, and in September the state supreme court upheld the appellate court decision. Dawn Wilson had been released and placed under house arrest pending her appeal, while Bob Kelly had spent the time in prison. With these decisions, both were free on bond pending new trials. In 1996, more than seven years after the initial allegations were made, charges were dropped against Robin Byrum, Shelly Stone, and Darlene Harris after their lawyers argued that the prosecution

had violated their sixth amendment right to a speedy trial. The next year, all remaining Little Rascals charges were dropped against Bob Kelly and Dawn Wilson.

Unlike the doomed McMartin and Jordan cases, the initial prosecution wins against Little Rascals defendants were heralded as victories for the children. Just as in the first two cases, the verdict “hinge[d] on testimony by a dozen children.”<sup>264</sup> Jurors in this case, however, believed the children. After delivering the verdict, jury foreperson, Katherine Harris, reported: “As far as the children, for them to get up there and say something like that, it certainly made me believe them.”<sup>265</sup> Though the defense tried to paint a town that had been swept away by hysteria and allegations that were the product of fanatical therapists, and though the second Frontline documentary revealed a fractured jury, the unanimous verdict in both trials was vindication for the children and their parents as well as for the therapists involved in the case.

The credibility of the children was also at issue in the successful appeals that ultimately overturned the verdicts and ordered new trials in both cases. Defense lawyers argued that misconduct on the part of the prosecution, especially their exclusive reliance on child testimony and therapy reports in the absence of corroborating evidence or point of contact documentation, had compromised the proceedings and resulted in a miscarriage of justice. The appellate decision can be read as a vote of no confidence in the handling of very young children in these cases up to and including their testimony. The mixed messages of the Little Rascals trials were centered on children’s (lack of) credibility stemming from their particular vulnerabilities.

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<sup>264</sup> Ronald Smothers, “Big Molestation Trial Nears Its Close,” *New York Times* Mar 23, 1992, pg. A18.

<sup>265</sup> Quoted in “Sex Abuser Gets 12 Life Terms in Day-Care Case,” *New York Times* Apr 2, 1992, pg. A14.

In as much as the 1980s revealed fissures in children's credibility, the child also became dangerous not just to itself but also to others. The abuse panics exposed how easily manipulated children could be both by those seeking to harm and those seeking to protect them. As such, children's vulnerability became a danger to the innocent, to the justice system, and to communities that too easily got swept away in an hysteria of allegations and prosecutions.

The vulnerabilities highlighted in the day-care abuse panics were an extension of the ways that children were reframed in the preceding decade. Children became central to the description and definition of "the victim" in the 1970s, as demonstrated by the rhetorical strategies of the Boston Women's Health Collective, the Elizabeth Stone House, and even NAMBLA. Despite the differences in their political missions, each group seized the figure of the child and sought to reveal its vulnerabilities and victimization. By positioning themselves as both saviors of children and victims of the same violence that persecuted children, members of these social movement groups staked their legitimacy on occupying savior and victim positions simultaneously. This tension forced them to grapple with a radical politics of liberation on the one hand and a conservative politics of protection on the other. The day-care abuse panics can thus be understood as a broader implication of this rhetorical shift toward protectionism and as evidence of a national consensus regarding child-victims. Ultimately, the figure of the child framed the limits of the libratory discourses advanced by these social movement groups and their rhetorical reliance on that figure contributed to a broader shift towards a culture of (sexual) conservatism.

## Conclusion

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“The so-called molestation of the young is the start of politics.”<sup>266</sup> With this statement, Mitzel ended his polemic about activism surrounding the 1970s Boston pedophile panic and attempted to create a space for advancing children’s sexual subjectivity.<sup>267</sup> Unlike Mitzel, this dissertation has not attempted to re-imagine the sexual dynamics of intergenerational relationships (“so-called molestation”). Instead, I use this quote to demonstrate the ways that the “so-called molestation of the young”—that is, the sexuality attached to the figure of the child—came to drive politics and culture at both the community and the national levels as well as to highlight the peculiar landscape of sexual politics in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, Mitzel’s inflammatory conclusion linking sex, children, and politics is emblematic of a broader cultural ethos in the period that saw connections between these three categories. On the heels of calls for more expansive sexual politics from boy-lovers in Boston to best-sellers like *Our Bodies, Ourselves* that celebrated sexuality as a healthy part of life from infancy to old age, the sexual revolution of 1970s gave way to the sexual panics of the 1980s. Indeed, these panics may be read as a response to the *laissez-faire* approach advocated by NAMBLA and the sensual awakening promoted by the Boston Women’s Health Collective. Essential to these activists’ and social movement groups’ strategic maneuvering was their centering of the child within liberatory frameworks. Radical queer groups like NAMBLA, as well as feminist groups like The Boston Women’s

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<sup>266</sup>John Mitzel, *The Boston Sex Scandal*, (Boston: Glad Day Books, 1980), 137.

<sup>267</sup>*The Boston Sex Scandal* outlined the origins of the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) from its beginnings as The Boston/Boise Committee and situated it in relation to broader liberation struggles, cultural change and institutional power. Mitzel’s heroic tale of resistance represented a dramatic revision of legal, political, and medical authority. For more information, see chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Health Collective and the Elizabeth Stone House focused on issues of children's sexuality as part of broader contests over the nature of violence and the meaning of liberation.

My dissertation has taken the child as its focus to understand both liberation politics and social conservative movements in the postwar United States. I have argued that, even as leftist social movements viewed children as possessing "sexuality" and argued for the liberation of children's sexual expression, they simultaneously invoked the child as a vulnerable figure who must be protected from sexual abuse and violence in a dangerous postwar culture. Ultimately, the protectionist rhetoric about children's sexuality proved more powerful and influential than the liberatory rhetoric, in large part because it shared features with the burgeoning rhetoric of the religious right, who found political power in a broad call to "save the children." My analysis of these competing rhetorical frameworks revealed the ways in which the child came to structure late 20<sup>th</sup> century political discourse by marking the limits of liberation. Using children's sexuality as a point of entry into postwar political activism, my dissertation shed light on the evolution of political identities. Ultimately, my work highlights the shrinking of progressive political possibilities and the emergence of a consolidated conservative political discourse. Through their attention to children's sexuality, each of the social movement groups that I investigated advanced distinctive liberatory frameworks while grappling with expanding public perceptions of what constituted violence. Rather than focusing on a single movement, this project demonstrated that the child repeatedly emerged as a political tool in leftist activism and argued that this figure shaped the boundaries of liberation and the content of radicalism.

As preceding chapters have shown, the 1970s and '80s witnessed the narrowing of discourse about sexuality, particularly children's sexuality, and the corollary elevation of the child-victim. The groups examined in this dissertation participated in this process first by engaging in a diverse cultural and political politics of sexuality and then by adopting a more protectionist orientation when invoking the figure of the child. Increased media attention devoted to child-victims and to abuse panics reflected a kind of cultural consensus regarding children's (lack of) sexual subjectivity and their vulnerability to sexual victimization. As the sexual revolution came to a close, leftist social movements had to come to terms with the legacies of their own liberatory ideologies. The lines between sexual liberation and exploitation, between erotic agency and pathological deviance, between consent and coercion appeared increasingly permeable and in need of definition.

My project has intervened in the recent turn in queer studies toward reproductive futurism, offering historical grounding by examining a moment when the figure of the child shaped political discourse on the right and the left. Although the New Right is often associated with child- and family-centered politics, my dissertation reveals the ways that groups on the left also placed the child at the center of their political rhetoric. I have argued that relying on the child introduced conservative protectionism into leftist radicalism instead of cementing a broader investment in liberatory politics. Indeed, groups on the left displayed striking discursive and rhetorical similarities with their conservative counterparts when addressing issues of children's sexuality. These similarities fostered the rise of the New Right and ultimately rendered the figure of the child a tool of conservative politics.



Investigating the ways that the New Right exploited the spread of protectionist discourse as well as the ways that conservative groups in the period organized themselves around the protection of children and families would be an ideal site for future research. Future research might also return to Boston, which remains a focal point in debates about children and sex, thrust into the spotlight by persistent allegations of sexual abuse within the Boston archdiocese. The clergy abuse scandal offers a unique opportunity to continue the work begun in this dissertation because it bridges the gap between the 1970s and '80s (when a bulk of the abuse is alleged to have happened) and the present when the allegations are being prosecuted in the courts, the Church, and the media.

This project and its examination of political contests over children's sexuality are located at the heart of historical debates that seek to make meaning of age and erotic desire. As a local study with national implications, this dissertation grounds theory while revealing the ubiquity of political strategies that use sexualized children. Moreover, my attention to social movements and their interaction with cultural change shows the ways that approaches to children's sexuality in the period polarize the left, making manifest the differences between those who supported the erotically oppressed and those who sought to rescue the sexually victimized. At the same time, acknowledging children as they related to and were related to sex reveals the very limits of the libratory ideologies that were advanced by exposing the points at which they converged with conservative groups or become so radical as to be written out of the left. The juxtaposition of these groups and their approaches brings clarity to discursive and

political battles about the regulation of children's sexuality that began in the twentieth century and continues today.

The specter of the pedophile continues to loom large as the United States considers registration and civil commitment of sex offenders, the dangers posed by “on-line predators,” and the international sale of children into sexual servitude. At the same time, persistent debates about sexual education, the availability of contraceptive devices to youth, and parental notification for reproductive services reveal the ways that consensual sexual contact between young people is still controversial. In recent decades these debates and others within the culture wars have arguably defined American politics on both the right and the left.<sup>268</sup> With the implementation of new standards for child testimony and new approaches to child therapy, the legacies of the 1980s panics remain with us twenty years later. And though day-care panics remain, for now, a thing of the past, the media frenzy generated by the child in peril is still very much felt. If anything, cultural anxieties about the sexual dangers facing American children remain high as new technologies lead to new ways to exploit children.

Concerns about “sexting” and increased internet access have sparked debates about the sexual misadventures young people get into without aid or pressure from adult predators, while technologies like cell phones and GPS tracking systems are marketed to parents as tools to protect their children, allowing adults to maintain a watchful eye even when children are not in their presence. This surveillance is a legacy of the sexual politics and protectionist discourse of the 1970s and '80s. Both children and their extra-

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<sup>268</sup>See especially: John McMillian and Paul Buhle, eds., *The New Left Revisited* (Philadelphia, 2003); Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, (Chicago, 1997); Lisa Duggan and Nan Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture*, (New York, 1995).

familial caretakers are subjected to ever-increasing methods of tracking from fingerprinting and id badges for children to nanny cameras, background checks and psych profiles for caretakers. In addition to this surveillance, we are arriving at a cultural consensus to restrict children's mobility and limit them from being outdoors without supervision, whether for play or transportation. Together this increased surveillance and restricted mobility amount to the virtual imprisonment of youth in the name of protection and safeguarding.

The 1970s exposed the sexual child, and the 1980s left us with a child whose sexuality is at once imperiled and perilous. Despite the 1990s exoneration of '80s day-care defendants and the condemnation of therapeutic and investigative tactics, the child-victim remains a powerful paradigm. The pedophiles and predators on display on talk shows and television dramas continually (re)present the child-as-victim while stirring fears of omni-present danger and conspiracies of abuse. Intergenerational sexual relationships, the sexualizing of young people in popular culture, and the recognition of children's own sexual appetites highlight American uneasiness with sexual development, desire, and the fragile and constructed nature of purity and innocence. Even the attention given to the sexual exploits of youth reify ideas of childhood innocence and victimization. Young people engaged in sexual activity are often presented as victims of sex-saturated culture who have "grown up too fast." In this framework, sexual activity remains understood as the province of adults, and youth who engage in sex are still framed as victims.

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