

The “Participating Victim” in the Study of Erotic Experiences Between Children and Adults: An Historical Analysis

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Abstract During the 20th century, erotic experiences between minors and adults occupied a position of increasing interest, both public as well as scientific. In this area of research, one of the most notable evolutions in how these experiences are treated has been the progressive disappearance and/or the intense redefinition of what earlier researchers called “participating victims,” i.e., minors apparently interested in accepting and/or sustaining these relationships. The present work, through a comparative analysis of the literature, seeks to substantiate this transformation during the second third of the 20th century. It will also argue that this evolution can be fundamentally explained in terms of the intense emotional, moral, and ideological importance that is ascribed to these experiences in the rise of the current victimological paradigm. Finally, this study endeavors to contribute to the understanding of childhood and the scientific study of child sexuality as well as of these experiences with adults.

Keywords Childhood · Sexuality · Sexual abuse · Victims · Morality

Introduction

The study of erotic experiences between minors and adults reached its high-water mark in the last third of the 20th century, with the rise of the current child sexual abuse paradigm (Finkelhor, 1999; Jenkins, 1998, pp. 118–144). During those years, especially in the Western world, the conceptualizing of these relationships as despicable acts was dramatically intensified, leading to the dehumanizing—and even demonizing—of adults involved

(Krivacska, Freel, Gibb, & Kinnear, 2001; Nathan & Snedeker, 2001; Wakefield, 2006). The result has been that all of these experiences, without exception, are treated as serious criminal acts, with grave personal and legal implications (Malón, 2004).

Within this new framework, defining all of the minors involved as innocent victims without any responsibility for, or role in, what occurred has been essential (Angelides, 2004). Here, the minor is not regarded simply as the victim of a legally-defined offence (legal criterion), as being involved in an act which is morally condemned (moral criterion), or even implicated in an experience which was personally unpleasant and/or painful, or simply not wanted (personal criterion), but rather as being enmeshed in a necessarily destructive and always determinant experience (mythic/existential criterion) with the potential to compromise the minor’s short- and long-term mental health (medical criterion) (Malón, 2009).

This revised social construction of the “child victim” has manifested itself in a rigid redefinition of: (1) the child’s role in the initiation and repetition of the act; (2) his or her experience of it; and (3) its short and long term effects. First, it was hypothesized that the child never initiates or freely participates in these relationships; secondly, it was asserted that it was always a negative experience—sometimes dramatically so; and lastly, the principal that all of these experiences were necessarily traumatic became generalized (Green, 1992; Malón, 2009; Rind, Bauserman, & Tromovitch, 1998). While other authors have addressed these issues from their own perspectives (Angelides, 2004; Jenkins, 1998), this article is intended to be a more generalized and comprehensive examination of the evolution in the expert literature, principally in the second third of the 20th century, from the acknowledgement of the active, voluntary, and erotic participation of the child in some cases to a wide-ranging negation and redefinition of this participation.

In order to better understand this transformation in the “character” of “participant victims” and the way in which these

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are defined (or re-defined) and sometimes “narrated” (Plummer, 1995), the works of various authors will be examined in order to analyze the theories, interpretations, descriptions, etc., in the relevant literature throughout the 20th century. As Beckett (1996) pointed out about the issue of child sexual abuse, the political goal in this arena was to establish a frame of reference which, in our case, specifies what can no longer be said about “participant victims,” and what must instead be said about *all* minors involved. As a consequence, in the social, ideological, and political climate of the 1970s and 1980s any hint of “blaming the victim” became unacceptable (Angelides, 2004).

This article is a study of the historical evolution of the perspectives on, and the treatment of, these sorts of cases, delving into the history of scientific knowledge about child sexuality and erotic experiences between children and adults with the ultimate objective of a better understanding of our current way of approaching these experiences from a cultural and historical point of view. It does not address the questions of the “morality” or “immorality” of these experiences, attempt to pass judgment on such issues as power or the child’s capacity to consent, nor claim to establish more valid conclusions in these areas. These questions are outside the parameters of this paper and it would be a mistake to interpret the scientific recognition of the existence of “participant minors” as a direct argument to legitimize child/adult sexual experiences.

In this essay, discussion about the issue of the age criterion in the concept of “minor” has been avoided. The terms “minors” or “children” will be used in a very general sense, as the authors that we will analyze have used them. It will be shown that the “participant victim” concept is not a moral term, but a descriptive one that was used by some researchers as a way to define a kind of role that they “observed” in a great range of children’s ages, sometimes as young as 4, although most of the cases discussed under this category were boys and girls from 9 to 13 years. In the current paradigm of child sexual abuse, exemplified in the works of Finkelhor, nothing can be said about the age of “participant victims” because they have virtually disappeared.

The Scientific Study of Child/Adult Erotic Experiences in the Second Third of the 20th Century

Empirical descriptions of child/adult sexual interactions have their roots in the 19th century in the forensic observations of Ambroise Tardieu and others (Masson, 1985) as well as in Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*. After those, other than the psychoanalysts, such as Freud, Abraham, or Klein, the casual observations of certain sexologists (Ellis, 1913; Guyon, 1933; Hirschfeld, 1935; Moll, 1912), some data from more general studies (Davis, 1929; Hamilton, 1929; Landis, 1940), as well as the contributions of jurists, forensics studies, and criminologists (see Jenkins, 1998, pp. 26–34), significant casuistic studies of sexually expressed child/adult relationships prior to

the 1930s have not been found. What is apparently the first such study is an untranslated German work (Rasmussen, 1934) based on an examination, years afterwards, of the victims of 54 separate complaints dealt with by the courts between 1902 and 1914. In the Western world, the pioneering work of Bender and Blau (1937), which will be considered in detail in the present article, stands out. Bender also studied cases of childhood homosexuality that included some relationships with adults (Bender & Paster, 1941). She later did a follow-up of all of these cases in adult life (Bender & Grugett, 1952). This latter work cited Kinsey’s first study of males (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948) which, together with his work on females (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953), were the first to investigate these experiences using large samples. Years later, Gagnon (1965), one of Kinsey’s collaborators, utilized Kinsey’s data to probe deeper into this area. There is also a major research project into sexual offenses underwritten by the State of California (Bowman, 1953), which included a specific chapter about these child/adult sexual experiences. Another relevant work is that of Landis (1956).

Some authors have pointed out that, in the academic and professional world before approximately 1980, it was more common “to acknowledge child sexuality as a normal and natural reality... particularly in the context of sexual encounters with adults” (Angelides, 2004, p. 143). This article neither confirms nor rejects those positions, but will demonstrate that it was more common to devote greater attention to the willingness of some children in these experiences, something which continued to be present in later studies within the framework of the emerging child protection movement. However, in this new perspective, the question of sexual experiences between children and adults was increasingly treated as a particularly serious and deplorable type of mistreatment (Chaneles, 1967). Also worth mentioning is De Francis (1969), the director, beginning in 1954, of the Children’s Division of the *American Humane Association*, who prepared a report on sexual crimes against children and the institutional attention which they received.

Apart from an ample clinical literature on incest, and with the exception of some texts that were translated into English (Brunold, 1964), there is a dearth of relevant English-language studies until the 1970s, when we see an explosion of texts influenced by feminist theories and child protection groups, whose assertions were the origin of the current victimological paradigm (Malón, 2004). A professional, scientific, and social phenomenon then began to develop which converted child sexual abuse into one of the most notable social anxieties of the latter part of the 20th century (Malón, 2009; Nathan & Snedeker, 2001; Ofshe & Watters, 1994). In a review of publications about child mistreatment, it was asserted that “The greatest change since twenty or even ten years ago is that sexual abuse is clearly center stage” (Doyle, 1996, p. 571). Although there was certainly no lack of studies with an

alternative viewpoint to that of victimology (Constantine, 1981; Cook & Howells, 1981; Ingram, 1981; Lempp, 1978; Martinson, 1973; Okami, 1991; Sandfort, 1984), this viewpoint was a minority one.

Nevertheless, researchers of both perspectives have had to face the fact that, in some cases, minors initiated and/or consented to such relationships. In the mid-1970s, the “participating victim” was demoted to a subject of scant interest or even willful neglect, but up until that time researchers devoted a good portion of their efforts to trying to understand why some children exhibited this behavior and others did not. Mangus (1953a) pointed out that “the main research problem is etiologic, concerned with finding valid explanations as to why certain children accept sexual advances on the part of adults while others reject such adventures” (p. 146).

The existence of minors collaborating in these relationships was found in two types of works. Constituting the first group was the clinical literature on incest (Cavallin, 1966; Justice & Justice, 1979; Lukianowicz, 1972; Maisch, 1972; Molnar & Cameron, 1975; Rosenfeld, 1979a, b; Weinberg, 1955; Weiner, 1962, 1964, 1978). Although incest will not be explored in any great detail, there are indications that this as well aided in the progressive disappearance and radical redefinition of the participating victim. The turn towards the abuse perspective, with a marked child protection and feminist influence (Finkelhor, 1981; Herman, 2000), was well illustrated in the critique of authors like Renshaw (1982), who wrote that “Our contemporary struggle to understand and eliminate child abuse has mistakenly launched an overzealous crusade to regard all incest as criminal child abuse” (p. 73).

The second group of works, already cited, is that of studies which are not limited to incest. In them, as previously noted, the active role played by some children is central. In the 1960s, Gagnon pointed to this interest as one of the traits most characteristic of this area. In his study, based on data from Kinsey, he concluded that, on occasion, these children “could either have been more sensitive to the approaches of adults or might have in fact been more provocative in the offense than the bare bones of the description might allow” (Gagnon, 1965, p. 180).

In Weiss, Rogers, Darwin, and Dutton (1955) as well as in Landis (1956), the topic of this possible role as initiator and/or collaborator was analyzed to a similar extent. In the 1960s, even within the incipient framework of the child protection movement, authors acknowledged some children’s active and collaborative role (Chaneles, 1967). In De Francis (1969, pp. 58–65), several pages are devoted to analyzing the contributions of some victims, who “invited, consented, complied or participated” (De Francis, 1969, p. 61). The reference to the “illegitimate” nature of the consent appears here perhaps for the first time (see the case of Arthur in De Francis, 1969, p. 60).

Although some have been left out, the most cited and relevant works up through the 1970s have been mentioned. In the following, an analysis is presented of the way in which these

“participating victims,” as opposed to “casual” ones (Rogers & Weiss, 1953a; Weiss et al., 1955), were described, where the former encompassed “those experiences [which] might possibly include cases of cooperative participation on the part of the victim” (Landis, 1956, pp. 104–105). This will be done by comparing those earlier studies with the early works of Finkelhor, a prominent proponent of the current victimological paradigm, which situates us within the forty years that elapsed between these two disparate views of some children’s voluntary participation in these experiences.

Expert Accounts of “Participating Victims”

In 1937, Laurretta Bender, a prominent child psychiatrist known for the *Bender Vision-Motor Test*, and Abram Blau, of New York’s Bellevue Hospital, published an article entitled “The Reaction of Children to Sexual Relations with Adults.” In it they stated: “It is the purpose of this paper to present a psychiatric study of the reactions of children who have experienced actual sex relations with adults” (Bender & Blau, 1937, p. 500). They described the experiences of 11 girls and 5 boys between 5 and 12 years of age, most of whom were from disadvantaged social and family backgrounds. The description of the children was oddly optimistic, something which had already been observed by others (see Gagnon, 1965, p. 186). In it, the children, contrary to what is typical today, were not principally victims, but rather more or less autonomous beings, often strong, rebellious, erotically active, and even seductive, and “Their emotional reactions were remarkably devoid of guilt, fear or anxiety regarding the sexual experience. There was evidence that the child derived some emotional satisfaction from the experience” (Bender & Blau, 1937, p. 517).

They concluded that many children could be active participants in these relationships, which according to these authors was in agreement with the latest contributions from the field of child psychiatry, which in turn ascribed to children great psychiatric complexity and which recognized the existence of predisposing sexual impulses in their personality. Many did not merit, they continued, that mantle of innocence with which moralists and social reformers had been wishing to invest them. Their attractive personality, as Bender noted years later, might be an element of attraction for those adults, and it is very likely that some of these children acted more like seducers than the seduced (Bender & Grugett, 1952, p. 826).

It was apparent that these children obtained some satisfaction from relationships which typically were not interrupted until they were discovered by third persons. This was what their emotional tranquility seemed to indicate (Bender & Blau, 1937, p. 514). Some accounted for their experiences with serenity, in some cases recalling their consent and desire to continue them. This reaction on the child’s part contrasted, they add, with the exaggerated and anxious responses of parents and other adults vis-à-vis the child

and his/her future. A fear based not on the supposed consequences of the experience, but on the children's disquieting moral and erotic inclinations and "fundamental incorrigibility" (Bender & Blau, 1937, p. 511).

Years later, a large study of sexual delinquency in California was conducted (Bowman, 1953), part of which was published in an article entitled "A Study of Girl Sex Victims." Its primary objective was to account for the collaborative role played by some girls: "Do some children participate with the adult offender in initiating or maintaining a sexual relationship with him? If so, what factors in the child's personality favor such participation?" (Weiss et al., 1955, p. 11). In order to answer these questions, Weiss et al. examined 73 girls between the ages of 4 and 16 who had been made available to them through the district attorney's office. All had lower-class backgrounds and had participated in court proceedings as the victims of those sexual offenses. They catalogued 21 of them as casual victims, 44 as participants, and 8 as undetermined.

They found two general types of participating victims. One group, to whom they devoted scarcely any attention at all, consisted of girls from very problematic familial and social contexts in which their inappropriate sexual conduct was more of a sign of emotional disturbance and general behavior. A second group, which they analyze in detail, was described as the "typical participating victim," in terms similar to Bender's, as "very attractive and appealing. She may behave with the male psychiatrist as if he is an exalted authority. She may be submissive or sexually seductive with him, or she may attempt to win him masochistically by humiliating herself in order to gain pity" (Weiss et al., 1955, p. 4).

Taking these two studies as a foundation, and referring from time to time to the work of Kinsey, Landis, or De Francis, it will be discussed, as described by these authors, what the fundamental traits of participating victims seemed to be. Not all of the traits were ascribed to all of the minors; not even to all of those who had consented. They were, rather general characteristics which may be extrapolated from a detailed analysis of these texts, taking into account not so much their objective validity as what, to these authors, was possible. Six of these traits are discussed, which describe the child as (A) an Erotic Being, (B) Sexually Precocious, (C) "Guilty," (D) Against Society, (E) Encounter-Seeking, and (F) Absolved. Later in this paper, the radical mutation of each of these traits into the corresponding victimological point of reference will be delineated, using the same letters for equivalent section headings, and focusing on the works of Finkelhor as a principal example of this new perspective.

A: The Child as an Erotic Being

Bender and Blau's (1937) principal conclusion was the existence of child sexuality and a questioning of the presumed universality of the latency period. Many of the children exhibited marked erotic interests. And although that was interpreted as an

inducement by the adult or apparently "de-eroticized" as a search for affection, in some seven cases this erotic predisposition continued to be demonstrated. One example:

Case No. 14. Ewald. 11 years old. ... At about 4 years of age, he practiced mutual masturbation with a girl cousin of about the same age. From about 6 to 8 years, he lived with a younger male cousin, they bathed together and slept in one room; every night they played with each other's genitals. At 10 years he visited a beach and would undress in the same closet with a female cousin 2 years younger; on his invitation they repeatedly carried on sex play by mutual masturbation and approximation of their sex organs. A boy of 13 taught him pederasty a year ago and later he practiced pederasty and fellatio with another boy. He was envious about sex in adults: he watched men undressing at the beach to see their genitals and spied on his mother. Once he admired the genitals of a man who was defecating in a field, and later they practiced mutual masturbation. The most recent experience was with a 40-year-old married salesman who was in the habit of watching the boys at play.... This 11-year-old boy of average intelligence had a frankly hedonistic attitude toward sex. His sexual activities were both homosexual and heterosexual and date back to early childhood. It is not possible to say what early influences may have directed his interests. There is no doubt that the boy was the seducer of the adult in this case. (Bender & Blau, 1937, p. 509)

If in the above work the erotic dimension of these children was highlighted explicitly, and the demonstration of its existence formed part of the study, in the case of Weiss et al. (1955) it was instead an implicitly accepted premise: Children do possess some "sexual impulses" which, nevertheless, education must train them to channel. The inappropriate expression of that erotic interest will be seen as a problem, but will not remain unrecognized per se. Thus, for example, in the case of Elizabeth, 8 years old (Weiss et al., 1955, pp. 19–23), it is said that the child admits to her mother that she had enjoyed the sexual experience with the father of one of her friends. The girl's father, upon discovering the acts, turns to the authors asking for advice, not in order to "cure" the victim but to avoid the possibility that the latter "might continue to engage in such activities" (p. 19). Notwithstanding this acknowledgment of prepubertal eroticism, none of these authors had among their objectives its possible legitimizing, not even in terms of experimentation among peers. In the second third of the last century, Kinsey, whose work is recognized by those authors, was the first to defend the erotic dimension of boys and girls, and thus the legitimacy and even importance of expressing a condition intrinsic to human nature, and depended as much on individual sexuality as on experience.

Without going too deeply into Kinsey's observations of these acts, it should be noted that, to Kinsey, all children

possessed the capacity for sexual response, though not all to the same degree or manifested in the same circumstances. How and when they express this capacity was something of interest to the sexologist (Kinsey et al., 1953, p. 102). This will depend, in part, on the child's own background, which frequently includes experiences with adults or older children. Here, as in other facets of life, the more experienced, sometimes adults, initiate the neophytes (Kinsey et al., 1953, p. 107). But this, in and of itself, was regarded by Kinsey not as a problem, but simply as another aspect of the spectrum of human sexual interaction, with which the naturalist was merely charged with making a record.

B: The Sexually Precocious Child

This recognition of the child as having erotic capacities and interests does not necessarily imply tolerance of these, much less promotion. This same concept of sexual precociousness implicitly points to what some may see as a problem of a disturbed sexual development. At that point, although some children defend their conduct, in others a return to socially acceptable normality takes place: "But in other children it appeared to be a normal reparative process in bringing them to reject and repress their sexual desires, with a return to the usual childhood interests" (Bender & Blau, 1937, p. 511).

For these authors, the concept of sexual precociousness points to a pronounced sexual tension at a period during which the latter inclinations should have been sublimated in favor of more normative interests—academic, spiritual, or intellectual (Bender & Blau, 1937, p. 512). Some of the possible reasons which might lead to that erotic fixation was of an endogenous nature and the child's inability to exercise self-control, being due precisely to a limited tolerance for frustration or to a certain intellectual deficiency and lack of judgment. Moreover, with some of the children for whom these erotic desires may be exceptionally intense, there may have been personal circumstances which might have converted them into propitious victims, i.e., a lack of parental affection that could lead them to seek out relations with other adults. A final explanatory factor was the "abnormal stimulation of the sex urges by adults" (Bender & Blau, 1937, p. 515).

To the California sexual deviation study's researchers (Bowman, 1953; Rogers & Weiss, 1953a; Weiss et al., 1955), prepubertal sexuality, in what was considered normal development, was not supposed to express itself openly, much less in relations with adults. From that starting point, they looked for factors that might predispose some children to become involved and participate in such relationships. As far as the girls in the California study were concerned (Rogers & Weiss, 1953a, b; Weiss et al., 1955), that participation was explained by factors like neglect or rejection by the mother, ambivalent and contradictory parental attitudes towards sex education, or

a subtle "sexual stimulation" of the girl on the parents' part (Weiss et al., 1955, p. 27).

The final result was, on the one hand, an inability for the girl to control her impulses and sexual curiosity and, on the other, "a limited consciousness of guilt, which added up to an inclination to find attractive elements in the sexual experience, thus facilitating her participation" (Weiss et al., 1955, p. 24). In Pat's case, who continued in a relationship with a man from the age of 4 up until the time of the study, when she was 11, it was noted that: "She expressed the wish that she might be put in a convent because she felt addicted to sex and did not see how she could control herself" (*ibid.*).

If, for all of these authors, the child's inappropriate sexual conduct was, above all, "a deflection of the normally developing sexual impulses, and that such a deflection was responsive to social and clinical treatment" (Bender & Grugett, 1952, p. 837), to Kinsey this supposedly precocious expression of erotic interest and behavior was not a deviation but more of an expression of the inexhaustible diversity of human sexuality. Sexual precociousness has more to do with experiential variation where initiation on the part of others acquires a singular relevance: "Without help from more experienced persons, many pre-adolescents take a good many years to discover masturbatory techniques that are sexually effective" (Kinsey et al., 1948, p. 170).

This erotic condition, problematized or not, progressively disappeared, at least as an "explanatory" variable, with the establishment of the current child-victim point of reference. Chaneles (1967) and De Francis (1969), now under the child-protection paradigm, excluded this erotic interest from their inquiries, converting it at most into a search for affection, the attainment of material benefits, or, in the most extreme case, into merely the satisfaction of a child's curiosity. However, this emergent paradigm failed to address what some authors recognized from time to time in some cases was the erotic benefit that some children might derive from these experiences (e.g., De Francis, 1969, Case No. 139, p. 47). This awareness is something which also occasionally occurred from the 1970s on, though always interpreted as a pleasure induced in the child against his or her will.

C: The "Guilty" Child

These first studies occurred in a historical period in which the child was regarded as more responsible for his or her actions, including those of an erotic nature; he or she could be regarded as a sexual delinquent even if the acts were with adults (Bender & Blau, 1937, p. 511; Doshay, 1969, pp. 71–89; Mangus, 1953b, pp. 31–34). A certain responsibility on the victim's part arose with the differentiation between moral and legal criteria:

Sexual victimization is a form of prohibited sex contact involving two or more persons. It is of such a character as

to give these persons the respective legal statuses of victims and offenders under the laws designed to protect the “weaker” against the “stronger” members of society. From this definition it follows that there are two major types of victimization episodes: those of actual assault by an offender who forces his sexual contacts on a victim without the latter’s consent, against his will or against his resistance; and those episodes of mutual consent relations between coparticipants, in which the consent of the “weaker” party has no legal sanction. The first type includes victims in fact as well as in law. These may be called accidental victims. The second type consists of victims under the law but not in fact. They are participant victims. (Mangus, 1953a, p. 147)

Today, it seems surprising that these past researchers could have neglected the possibility that those children’s apparent participation could just as easily have been due to adults’ threats, bribes, and power as to children’s ignorance or innocence. In reality, this was recognized in some cases, but apparently that was not always enough to absolve the boy or girl of any responsibility. This view of the child is best exemplified by the fact that, according to Bender and Blau (1937), children also “rationalize” their conduct in order to justify it to others, a rationalization which occasionally might also induce the family to exculpate the child (De Francis, 1969, p. 62). In 1937, this self-justification, now only applicable to adults, was also applicable to the children involved:

It is true that the child often rationalized with excuses of fear of physical harm or the enticement of gifts, but these were obviously secondary reasons. Even in the cases in which physical force may have been applied by the adult, this did not wholly account for the frequent repetition of the practice. In most cases the relationship was not broken until it was discovered by their guardians, and in many the first reprimand did not prevent the development of other similar contacts. Furthermore, the emotional placidity of most of the children would seem to indicate that they derived some fundamental satisfaction from the relationship. (Bender & Blau, 1937, p. 514)

In addition to these and other explicit assertions, it is in general the language employed and the rhetoric and tone of these texts, aside from the underlying theory, which suggests to the reader the possibility that the child might be partially responsible. Thus, the way in which experts interpret issues like blame, the minor’s silence, or his or her description in general will be central elements in getting to the bottom of this possible “culpability.” One of the ways in which the latter is suggested is by pointing out that it was not only the adult but the girl or boy who had also engaged in sexual conduct: “. . .it is possible to formulate the factors favoring Shirley’s sexual behavior. . .” (Weiss et al., 1955, p. 15). Or, it turned out that many of these

boys and girls had already exhibited problematic behavior in general, whereby the sexual conduct was more a facet of their “difficult character” (Weiss et al., 1955, p. 23). In other cases, there are accounts in which the child grows more complex, possessing desires, impulses, and feelings, as well as the will and the ability to exercise them, often being capable of experiencing the most sublime emotions and feelings. Upon describing the more complex personages, the authors imply a responsibility which the modern view of the “child victim” omits:

Shirley may have felt frightened by the offender during her sexual activities with him and may have enjoyed this in the same way she enjoyed being frightened by her father or by “the grumpy janitor.” Her experience with the offender was thus a gratifying one. Shirley could express her anger and defiance toward her mother in obtaining this forbidden gratification, since she was doing something for which she knew her mother would take the blame. (Weiss et al., 1955, p. 15)

In all of these works, it is, therefore, suggested, explicitly or implicitly, that the child had something to do with what happened and could not be completely absolved of that role. To Kinsey et al. (1953), the repetition of some of these experiences might correspond to the fact that the girls “had become interested in the sexual activity and had more or less actively sought repetition of their experience” (p. 118). Gagnon (1965) addressed this possibility once again: “For most of the remainder of the cases, sexual and other gratifications on the part of the child were sufficient to maintain the mutual character of the encounter over long periods of time and for many more separate contacts” (p. 185).

D: The Child Against the Society

In contrast to what happened towards the end of the century, we see in Bender and Blau’s text at least the possibility that the child, even in this arena, was the one who was acting against society. According to these authors, practically all such minors had advance, and often condemnable, knowledge about sexuality. In this sense, it is relevant to observe how adults, perhaps including the authors themselves, were discomfited by the idea that children even had a sexuality, with all of its reproductive and hedonistic ends. Perhaps the societal view of sexuality as a source of pleasure was turning out to be, at the very least, very disturbing. Once their habits were discovered, the children were instructed as to its reproductive purpose; they were not, however, always convinced of it (Bender & Blau, 1937, p. 509).

Socially speaking, erotic experiences in childhood were bad, no matter how one looked at them; not only in terms of the adult taking advantage of the child, but also in terms of the child him or herself exhibiting immoral or even criminal conduct. Remorse

and an authentic sense of culpability could be redemptive, but many times the guilt, shame, and apparent regret were hypocritical gestures made under duress:

At first the children often showed no guilt but this tended to develop as they were separated from their sex object and means of gratification, and as they were exposed to the opinion of parents and court officials. It occurred especially with the more intelligent children and seemed in part a reflection of adult censure and not to carry any conviction to the child. In some instances this seemed to result in an intellectual and emotional bewilderment resulting from their effort to reconcile their personal experience with the attitude of authority. (Bender & Blau, 1937, p. 511)

In Weiss et al., a sense of guilt was pointed out as being omnipresent in practically all of the participating children, with it being explained in terms of parental ambiguity towards their daughter's sexual impulses, simultaneously stimulated and forbidden, it being a feeling associated more with family relations than with the experience per se. Consciousness of guilt with regard to these relationships even could be considered a desirable prerequisite since, if it were absent, it would be difficult for the child to resist the continuation of these relations (Rogers & Weiss, 1953a, p. 51).

In trying to account for the repetition of these experiences, considering that the adult's presumed threats or authority were not always enough, researchers asked why the children didn't just come out and tell people what had happened. Although the reasons contemplated by the authors were varied, and we often must read between the lines to extract them, they did not reject the idea that the children might conceal the event simply because that's what they wished to do, because it was been experienced positively, due to a fear that the parents would be angry and that they would accuse them of collaboration, or merely out of a desire to be loyal to their adult partner and not wanting anything bad to happen to him (De Francis, 1969; Landis, 1956).

Lastly, a characteristic common to these works is that their authors permit themselves to speak "ill" of the children or at least note their elders' impressions of them, including the authors', who describe the children as rebellious, disobedient, selfish, capricious, poor learners, manipulators, etc. (e.g., Weiss et al., 1955: Shirley, p. 14 and Elizabeth, p. 21). The possibility that a minor could be described in these terms, in a study into these acts, could lead the reader to have less "compassion" for the child, influence his/her victim status, and make it easier to hold him or her responsible for what happened, showing the child to be an individual with antisocial tendencies. These sorts of traits would show up less and less in future victimological literature; and, when they did appear, they were mentioned as the perverted effects of the sexual abuse itself, not as the child's innate qualities predating the sexual experience itself.

E: The Encounter-Seeking Child

Besides possible erotic enjoyment or the attainment of material benefits, a typical explanation for this participatory role has been the search for affection and attention, almost always stemming from a lack of attention within the family itself. This hypothesis would be the only one tolerated in the victimological paradigm, notwithstanding the fact that it would be utilized as an argument more along the lines that the child is always a victim who was looking for affection, but encountering only sex. This stood in stark contrast to the adult, who was always looking for sex, never affection (Herman, 2000, pp. 40–41).

To authors like Bender and Blau (1937), this explanation of the child's conduct, although acknowledged (p. 513), appears to serve not to further victimize the child but rather to acknowledge him or her as an active participant, though his or her motives were affective rather than sexual. Moreover the difference between these two types of interests remains much more vague: "...some children ... may possess unusually strong desires; in our material, most of the children showed an abnormal interest and drive for adult attention, and they were endowed with unusually attractive, charming personalities" (Bender & Blau, 1937, p. 515).

This search for intimate relations with adults need not be due solely to a lack of affection; it could be related to far more complex motives. Weiss et al. (1955) often described the participating victim as a girl ensnared in familial obligations—especially in relation to her mother—from whom sexual relations were a means of escape. Through sexual relationships with adult men, they expressed their defiance of their mothers and gained a feeling of independence. At the same time, they satisfied their longings for approval and attention (Weiss et al., 1955, p. 12; cf. Shirley, p. 15). Perhaps not limited to one isolated case, it was described as an element common to participating victim cases (Weiss et al., 1955, p. 8), and might even correspond to a marked interest in adults manifested from early childhood (Weiss et al., 1955, p. 16, Dorothy). In the case of girls whose sexual conduct was explained in terms of a general personality disorder, stemming from a chaotic family environment, the sexual experience might be a way of finding that stable relationship which was not being provided by either the family unit or social resources (Weiss et al., 1955, p. 25, Pat).

One conclusion applicable to these works is that in them the researchers understood that some of the children were seeking out these encounters. The important thing was not what the child's motives were, but that the child not be absolved of his/her role as a seeker and/or maintainer of that relationship. This means that the child, interested in an encounter with an adult, whether out of genuine erotic interest or for some other reason, saw this as potentially beneficial to him or her. Sometimes, the erotic experience was the way to obtain these benefits:

The few studies that have been made of this subject have been content to consider it an example of adult sexual perversion from which innocent children must be protected by proper legal measures. Although this attitude may be correct in some cases, certain features in our material would indicate that the children may not resist and often play an active or even initiating role. Within recent years, since the progress of child psychology, it has become evident that the child is not a negligible psychological creature in either an intellectual or emotional sense. It has been satisfactorily demonstrated that the child's behavior is determined by complex and unconscious drives, and that among these the sex urges are of primary significance. The child seeks in its relationship with the adult some form of satisfaction which in some instances at least is given to the child through sexual activities. (Bender & Blau, 1937, p. 513)

To Chaneles (1967), from a child protection standpoint, the need to study the etiology of these cases might be complicated by the voluntary participation of some victims. Chaneles said that, in many cases of relationships between men and prepubertal boys, the boys participated, in the absence of any coercion, in exchange for benefits either material or otherwise, which might explain their reticence to report these acts: "Many of his victims, eager to please and gain the attention of such a popular and public figure who was known and respected by the boy's parents, grew to adulthood, and during the entire 30-year period, no legal action was ever directed against the man" (Chaneles, 1967, p. 55).

The fact that the child got something out of these relationships, and that this benefit could be acknowledged by the researchers, turns out to be particularly representative of this perspective. Whether what they got out of it would have been attention, affection, money or gifts, security, entertainment, a feeling of superiority or of "being older," pleasure and excitement, curiosity, revenge, etc., is another matter. But to accept that some children derived benefits from these relationships and from their preservation, collaborating in them means attributing to children a degree of freedom that has been voided under the new paradigm.

F: The Absolved Child

The modern victimological discourse is characterized by a constant reproach of the experts of other epochs for the responsibility they attributed to the minors involved (Finkelhor, 1981; Herman, 2000, p. 39; Summit, 1988; see critical analysis in Angelides, 2004). In this sense the figure of the "participating victim" was, as we shall see, rejected by those who regarded this as only serving to assign blame to the victim and avoid the responsibilities of the adult. In talking about these boys and girls as little sexual delinquents, implying their

"voluntary" prostitution, pointing out a marked and incorrigible erotic interest, highlighting their attractive, seductive, or manipulative personalities, their rebelliousness and antisocial behavior, as well as the attainment of various benefits, the texts reviewed here might suggest that many of the children should be regarded as the ones principally to blame. But this reading, enslaved to a completely different moral and ideological framework, would be erroneous. In fact, the child might have been partially responsible, since it was not denied that he or she had a more or less active role in what occurred; but in the end, he or she would also be "absolved." Apparently, the recognition of some participant children does not imply that all are initiators or "little perverts," but neither are they "destroyed children" (Bender & Blau, 1937, p. 513).

For one thing, it must be emphasized that, as much in Bender and Blau's (1937) study as that of Weiss et al. (1955), the types of cases were not, nor did they claim to be, representative of the entire population of children who have these sorts of experiences. In both, what we have are studies of a qualitative nature. Bender and Blau's sample turned out to be particularly skewed. The lives of the majority of their subjects were, apparently, none too pleasant, for they often came from very problematic family and social environments, with many exhibiting a comportment that suggests an inner sorrow and grief, albeit perhaps feigned. Nevertheless, we can be certain that the accounts of the acts and of the children themselves were generally optimistic enough, with very few embellishments.

For their part, Weiss et al. (1955) devoted themselves to studying the kind of cases in which the girl's attitude and conduct was to collaborate with the adult in the interaction, excluding from their analysis cases of accidental victims, where other types of experiences were encountered. Neither do Bender and Blau (1937) deny some of the minors' status as innocent and/or victimized parties, though they certainly do so in a far more moderate way than is typical at the present time. Occasionally the child's victim role was bolstered not so much by the acts that occurred, which were quite superficially commented upon and were rarely considered abusive or violent, as by their effects which, although almost always slight, did manifest themselves in some of the minors.

In Weiss et al. (1955), in spite of frequently being described in terms of characteristics that suggest a certain responsibility for what occurred, and being regarded as having a "sexual behavior problem," the girl was always absolved. The way to absolve these girls was to blame the parents who, fundamentally through an ambiguous, contradictory, and confusing education, especially in matters of sexuality, led the girl to resort to relationships with other adults as a means of overcoming conflict and differentiating herself as an individual. In other cases, the girl's conduct, including her seductive and manipulative behavior with adults, was also a way of obtaining attention which she was not getting from her family (Weiss et al., 1955, p. 25; cf. Elizabeth, pp. 22–23). In this study, the

participating victims were not described as happy and sexually disinhibited girls. Quite the contrary: “Therefore, like other forms of deviant behavior, sexual participation in these cases is a manifestation of an emotional disturbance on the part of the child and of her family” (Rogers & Weiss, 1953b, p. 70).

In these older studies, apparently the recognition of the existence of some participating children and their collaborative role in some of these experiences did not lead to the authors’ tolerating the situations or excusing the adult involved; conversely, these children were not described as passive, vulnerable, and innocent victims who must be “rescued,” as they will be under the victimological and morally one-dimensional perspective of the last part of the 20th century: “The therapeutic discourse of child sexual abuse tends problematically to conflate, or to use as if interchangeable, the concepts of causation and responsibility. Saying that a child made decisions that contributed to the complex causal dynamics of an abusive situation is not the same as saying that the child was responsible for that abuse” (Angelides, 2004, Footnote 84).

The Decline and Redefinition of the “Participating Victim”

The evolution of the “participating victim” in the modern victimological paradigm (Malón, 2004) will now be further analyzed. Since the late 1970s, Finkelhor (1979, 1981, 1984, 1986) has been preeminent in formulating and propounding the hypotheses underlying the CSA model, and it is therefore appropriate that the focus be on his various publications, while concurrently considering authors such as Conte (1985), Herman (2000), Summit (1988), and others. This critical review will identify various aspects of the transition of the participating victim into the innocent and nonparticipating victim, beginning with Finkelhor’s (1979) article, *What’s Wrong with Sex Between Adults and Children? Ethics and the Problem of Sexual Abuse*, in which he reviewed and questioned the three arguments most often used to condemn these experiences: (1) the assertion that sex is intrinsically bad, which he felt was too categorical and increasingly called into question; (2) thinking that it involves the precocious sexualization of the child, which is false because children are sexual beings; and (3) regarding them as traumatic experiences, which would be more of an empirical than a moral argument, besides having been insufficiently demonstrated.

As an alternative, Finkelhor (1979) pointed to the absence of a true informed consent on the minor’s part, which had already been noted by De Francis (1969), and the existing power differential. The child could theoretically “desire” the adult and have physically pleasurable experiences, but would not be able to authentically accede to these relations. Moreover, the child is a being subordinate to and dependent upon the adult, like a prisoner before his.

These reflections were of a time of a certain moral confusion in matters of sexuality (Weeks, 1993), particularly with regard to the sexuality of children and adolescents. In this area, there were some authors appealing for greater sexual freedom for them (Farson, 1974) or at least for the de-dramatization of the lion’s share of these experiences and a differentiation between what is abuse and what is not (Constantine, 1981; Ramey, 1979). Priority was given to the continued advance of the process of sexual liberation, which they feared was being blocked by the increasing over-dramatization and exaggeration of these acts (Finkelhor, 1981, pp. 12–13). Standing in their way were those who, like Finkelhor (1981, pp. 152–153), conceptualized child sexual abuse as a serious social problem, the fight against which would not limit the liberty of persons of any age.

With these acts having been converted into a major social problem, and into evidence and even the epitome of the increasing victimization of childhood (Malón, 2004), what was previously known as the participating victim came to occupy a very tenuous position. Apparently, Finkelhor had no problem acknowledging that such cases existed; but the way they were handled would have to be modified substantially, given that they were already being overshadowed by an ever-rising tide of sexual abuse victims; alternatively, the nature and significance of their participation would have to be radically redefined. Finkelhor (1981) then published his book entitled “Sexually Victimized Children,” in which he provides us with some new pointers:

[T]here has been a long-standing concern with establishing how much the child participated in the sexual experience. We have tried to point out ... that this is not a fruitful, and is in fact a *destructive preoccupation* in the field. Our data show the children to be the recipients of sexual actions, not the initiators, and also the victims of force and coercion. Only in a tiny minority of cases did the respondents say they had initiated the sexual activity. Ninety-eight percent of the girls and 91 percent of the boys said it was the older partner who started the sexual behavior. (Finkelhor, 1981, pp. 63–64, emphasis added)

Finkelhor does not explain this renunciation, limiting himself instead to developing the arguments by which the participating victim was eventually removed from expert knowledge; by concentrating on those cases in which the adult resorts to force or threats; by pointing to the lack of cases where the child initiates the interaction and minimizing those which he or she is interested in maintaining; and lastly, by toning down the minor’s consent to the point that it ceases to be such, always converting it into a trick, a purchase, or a false acquiescence (Finkelhor, 1981, p. 64). This new rhetoric, which negated the previous one, absolved the child of any role in, or responsibility for, what happened.

The new characteristics of the ever more attenuated figure of the participating victim now will be examined within the

context of the same six traits used earlier. It is important to remember that the major portion of the proposals which are encountered in these texts are, necessarily, of a speculative nature, which aids this analysis; for here are the foundational texts of a new academic, professional, and social referent through which all of these experiences are to be interpreted from a victimological perspective, the founding hypothesis of which goes on to define victims as innocent and very few as even remotely “responsible.” In explaining the data and hypotheses, the intensification and radical victimization of all of the minors involved excludes any line of inquiry which threatens this possibility (Finkelhor, 1981, pp. 23–25).

A: From the Erotic Child to the Erotically Infantile Child

“Children are sexual; the asexuality of childhood is a myth. Most children are curious about sex. They explore sexuality with one another. In fact, when adults shield children from sex, it probably does more harm than good” (Finkelhor, 1979, p. 693). The struggle against sexual abuse does not involve a rejection of legitimate erotic experiences between peers. This concern “is not part of a Victorian resurgence. It is compatible with the most progressive attitude toward sexuality currently being voiced, a position that urges that consent be the sole standard by which the legitimacy of sexual acts be evaluated” (ibid., p. 697). This implies that child sexuality could remain legitimate among equals, but never with older persons (Finkelhor, 1980, p. 176).

But this erotic condition would be difficult to justify as an explanatory variable in those cases where the relationship was initiated by and/or maintained at the behest of the minor. In his first statistical study, Finkelhor (1981, p. 65) noted that around 8% of subjects recalled having experienced pleasure, which did not necessarily exclude other, perhaps contradictory, feelings. The subject might remember positive physical and emotional sensations derived from an experience in which emotional needs and the need for intimacy were met. But it was a question, nevertheless, of a pleasure that was too problematic to be worth it in any event:

On the whole, they were part of a confusing flood of feelings and sensations, usually dwarfed by an overwhelming sense of helplessness, guilt, anger, or fear. In fact, the pleasure often only intensified the guilt or the helplessness, since it added to the child’s confusion and left the child feeling out of control of even his or her emotions. (Finkelhor, 1981, pp. 65–66)

This pleasure, Finkelhor (ibid., p. 65) points out, was often misinterpreted by authors who have adopted a posture of misdirected criticism towards the minors. To Finkelhor, as would be typical from then on, it was basically an issue of involuntary pleasure, incited by the adult and never truly sought out and/or enjoyed by the child. This problematization

of the erotic child in these experiences is also observable in the way that Finkelhor treats homosexuality as a possible consequence of these relationships. In his study, a significant association was posited between having had one of these experiences and having more homosexual relationships in the future, which apparently is nothing more than pure conjecture. Citing authors who pointed out that the homosexual interest would appear very early in childhood, Finkelhor (1984) notes:

Related to these findings, it may be that men whose homosexual interest reached far back into childhood may have made themselves vulnerable or accessible to older men. They may have developed an infatuation for an older man which he capitalized on. They may have had an intense sexual curiosity directed toward men which made them vulnerable or open to sexual suggestions by older men. (p. 195)

Finkelhor here seems to make a rare acknowledgment of an erotic interest in children. And though he speaks of “infatuation,” he adds that it is the man who takes advantage of the child’s interest, whose sexual curiosity simply makes him more vulnerable. Preadolescent eroticism, highlighted in earlier works, has ceased to be a possible explanatory variable for some children’s interest in initiating and/or reprising these relationships, and at most will be converted into a “risk factor” which makes the erotically interested child more vulnerable to victimization.

B: From the Sexually Precocious Child to Traumatic Sexualization

The earlier erotically precocious, curious, provocative, hedonistic, or even moral-order-transgressing child basically disappeared in the new framework of abuse. The mere mention of these qualities were reviled by some as relics of an archaic era which, nevertheless, as Finkelhor (1984), along with feminist authors, admitted, had not disappeared (p. 108).

Apparently, the problem of sexual precociousness threatened what was the cornerstone of the emerging paradigm: the rigid rhetoric of the child victim and experts’ increasing refusal to attribute to the former any sort of responsibility for and/or active role. In the 1930s through the 1950s, the erotically precocious child was threatening a moral order in which sexual activity was supposed to be put in check until marriage, where homosexuality was a crime as well as a pathology, and in which behaviors such as masturbation, eroticized play, exploration of the body, etc., were supposed to be guarded against and eliminated (Doshay, 1969). But in the 1970s, these sorts of experiences were accepted, at least in theory, by a new moral order that recognized the dignity of our sexuality, including that of children and teenagers. But it is here that the erotically precocious child was transformed into the child victim of a traumatic sexualization.

This concept was developed by Finkelhor and Browne (1985) in an article about the trauma of sexual abuse, which was later incorporated into a book (Finkelhor, 1986). In reality, it was a matter of a concept and a model very close to that of sexual precociousness, and it is appropriate to discuss how it is possible that authors starting from such apparently different premises could come to similar conclusions. Certainly all of them, from Bender to Finkelhor, seem to acknowledge the existence of child sexuality. But whereas Finkelhor says that he defends its value, the others seem to regard it, in some of its manifestations which today are considered normal, as a problem to be “dealt with.” To those authors, virtually any expression of that sexuality would have to be appropriately contained. To Finkelhor (1979), by contrast, child sexuality was not a problem but, rather, something positive, except when it involved children and persons who were significantly older.

Paradoxically, despite having a different position on the issue, a detailed analysis brings us to the conclusion that under Finkelhor these experiences with adults would make child sexuality far more problematized. In fact, the sexual precociousness of some of the children studied by Bender and Blau appears not to be too serious of a problem in the majority of cases, since their behavior, following appropriate treatment, does return to normal. Certainly, in some cases, the minors’ sexual conduct does resist correction—i.e., the cases of Ewald or Rose—but what is most notable is that Bender and Blau, unlike Finkelhor, did not resort to the language of pathology and trauma, but rather to that of the child’s will and moral education.

In effect, traumatic sexualization would be a process by which the child’s sexuality, in terms of attitudes and feelings, is oriented along the lines of inappropriate and dysfunctional development, resulting in harmful short and long term effects (Finkelhor, 1986, pp. 188–189). Receiving gifts in exchange for sexual practices, which would generate a utilitarian attitude towards sexuality and one’s own body; transmitting to the child mistaken notions of what sexuality or sexual morality are, or causing the child to associate the sexual with unpleasant and threatening experiences, all of these could unleash sexual problems in the future. It would, therefore, be more intensely traumatically sexualizing if: (1) the child responds erotically versus when he does not do so; (2) the child is seduced into participating as opposed to force or threats being employed; and, (3) the child is older and more conscious of the sexual nature of the act.

For all of these authors, from Bender to Finkelhor, sexual experiences with adult persons could have the effect of “advancing” the child’s sex life or its inappropriate manifestation. Sexuality would be converted into a subject that was overly important to the child who, in addition to acquiring inappropriate sexual knowledge, might fall into repetitive masturbatory conduct or into provoking certain “sexual games” with his or her peers, i.e., “sexual intercourse or oral-genital contact” (Finkelhor, 1986,

p. 188), if not aggressive and abusive sexual behavior with other children. Moreover, these experiences could generate problems in terms of confusion regarding sexual identity and orientation (ibid., p. 189).

The differences and similarities between the two theories of precocious sexuality and traumatic sexualization are not all that different in terms of appearance, at least not in many of the implications described here, except perhaps in the tone and the language with which the latter consequences are described and evaluated by the various authors, these being more dramatic in Finkelhor than, for example, Bender and Blau. The pathologization inherent in the sexual abuse paradigm brings about the conversion of early erotic initiation, formerly an essentially moral and educational issue, into a medical and psychiatric problem with significant consequences. But another fundamental difference between these authors is in their theories regarding the origin of this precociousness or traumatic sexualization. To Bender and Blau (1937), and for Weiss et al. (1955), that sexual precociousness, manifested during a period of latency that is supposed to be characterized by shyness and continence, might be due to causes external to the child, i.e., a lack of affection or adult stimulation; but also to internal motivations such as markedly greater sexual interest among some children, a lack of self-control or tolerance for failure, or no consciousness of guilt. This would not preclude some of those internal factors from, in turn, being attributable to educational or environmental variables (Weiss et al., 1955), but the origin of that precociousness might stem from within the child him/herself, without necessarily holding others responsible for it. And the precociousness, a significant detail for our analysis, might have existed prior to the experience with the adult.

In Finkelhor’s speculations, by contrast, all of the internal elements will disappear in order to focus solely on external causes, especially the effects of adult sexual stimulation. Thus, the child will never be erotically precocious in a genuine way or for reasons distinct from the sexual experience with the adult, but these experiences come to be an explanatory key to the minor’s entire present and future life, erotic and otherwise (Malón, 2009). This may account for why Browne and Finkelhor’s (1986) speculations regarding “traumatic sexualization” occur within the framework of a theory of trauma. Starting with the assumption that these experiences are traumatic, which they admit was something that has not been proven, they go on to posit various “traumatogenic” elements, among which traumatic sexualization would be the one most associated with the abuse experience; while other mechanisms—such as defenselessness, treachery, and stigmatization—might also come into play. The key to them taking root is that “These dynamics, when present, alter the child’s cognitive and emotional orientation to the world, and create trauma by distorting a child’s self-concept, worldview, and affective capacities” (Finkelhor, 1986, p. 180).

A careful reading of this model does not prevent a critical reader from considering the possibility that the sexual experience with an adult would not have traumatic effects in those cases in which none of these four traumatic forces were present. However, at no time is this possibility acknowledged by Finkelhor (1986) who, nevertheless, does point out that sometimes the variables peripheral to the experience itself will play an important role, and perhaps can mitigate the traumatic effects (p. 196). Thus, the experience of treachery or defenselessness stemming from the abuse might have less effect for a child who lives in a family and social milieu that helps him or her to feel strong and secure; and the possible stigmatization might disappear if the social response is appropriate. Additionally, the possibility of variables which might make the sexual experience with the adult less traumatizing are not well developed, for although examples of the prior three factors are provided, curiously the latter—traumatic sexualization—is not developed.

As a conclusion to these first two points, it should be pointed out that a presumed erotic condition among prepubertal children, defended by Finkelhor, nevertheless is not considered to have even a minimal role in the beginning and/or continuing of these relationships. This implicit de-eroticization of childhood within the scope of expert knowledge is probably the predictable consequence of the ideological premise which sustains it.

C: From the “Guilty” to the “Innocent” Child

The possibility that minors or even adolescents might willingly involve themselves in criminal sexual behavior with adults was progressively abandoned with the development in the later 20th century of a general concept of childhood innocence, especially that which relates to eroticism (Angelides, 2004). Although it is true that in a portion of the expert literature of the 1980s and 1990s the child would once again be potentially considered a “sexual delinquent” under the label of “child perpetrator,” this always applied to sexual experiences with either peers or younger children (Lamb & Coakley, 1993; Okami, 1992).

In experiences with older persons, children axiomatically were described as weak and innocent parties who would never desire such a relationship; and if they did not avoid it or break it off, it was because they couldn’t or didn’t know how to do so. In the rare cases in which the idea was entertained that they did it because they “wanted it,” that desire would have to have been the result of brainwashing or inducement, in order to avoid ever having to take it seriously. The experts systematically abandoned asking themselves why the child might be interested in such a relationship, what he or she might get out of it, and what led him/her to initiate or maintain it. In a chapter devoted to the public’s concept of sexual abuse, and following the recourse to feminist theories of a patriarchal society supposedly promoting a perpetual state of the sexual exploitation of children and women, Finkelhor (1984) goes on to analyze some of the variables most important to defining what sexual abuse is and what it is

not, i.e., age, type of sexual behavior, relationship between those involved, the minor’s consent, the use of force, etc. (pp. 107–133). Regarding the issue of consent, such experiences were not considered equally abusive by all the persons polled, suggesting that the child might have a certain degree of responsibility for what happened. Many tended to reduce the gravity of the abuse when the child had not clearly repulsed the other’s approaches. This attitude of “blaming the victim,” says Finkelhor, somewhat surprised, would appear to be more widespread than one might have expected (*ibid.*, p. 120).

One possible explanation for this might be the reasonable logic by which the presence of coercion and force does render what occurred more serious; but it might also have a lot to do with prejudices that were simply too widespread. The feminist contention that many people believe that some victims of rape want to be raped might also apply here (Finkelhor, 1984, p. 119). But the principal problem would seem to be the public’s ignorance regarding children’s apparent quiescence to these experiences:

In a great deal of child sexual abuse, children do not resist, but it is not because these children seduce adults. Children passively comply or accept sexual advances from an adult because they are intimidated or cowed by the adult’s authority, especially when the adult is a family member. Young children, particularly, are gullible and easily manipulated, and adults give them rewards or misrepresent moral standards to get them to comply with sexual requests. ... *These are the kinds of realities about sexual abuse which workers in the field may need to convey more explicitly to the public,* so that children are not unfairly blamed for situations of sexual exploitation. (*ibid.*, p. 120, emphasis added)

For this, it is urgently necessary to convince society that the child never participates voluntarily, and that when such does appear to be the case, it is only under the trickery and deceit of the adult who is taking advantage of the child’s weakness. In place of the past question as to why some children participate and collaborate in these relationships, the question posed now is how some adults are able to overcome the child’s defenses, and how we can help the child to protect him/herself from these assaults.

Finkelhor’s question is made absolutely clear: What is it that enables the adult to overcome the child’s resistance? It is evident, he says, that when the use of physical violence or coercion is present, there is nothing to explain. But when these elements are absent, there must be other factors to account for why the child permitted the victimization to occur. One of the most notable is that the entire burden is shifted to the aggressor, who will choose his victims from among the most vulnerable (Finkelhor, 1984, p. 60), thereby precluding any speculation regarding minors who might encourage or suggest the encounter. The child will cease to have even the slightest responsibility for accounting for what occurred and become a mere

“receptacle” for adult desires (Finkelhor, 1981, p. 63), passively subject to circumstance. Thus, for example, it would never be a relationship of proximity, familiarity, or friendship that was the possible origin of an eroticized bond, but rather the possibility for the adult to commit his most opportune crimes: “Because the adult knows the child, the adult may frame the proposal in such away that the child will agree. That familiarity may allow the adult to formulate a threat which will thwart any resistance by the child” (Finkelhor, 1984, p. 61).

The interest in decades past in accounting for the repetition of many of these experiences disappeared or was implicitly explained by the sole argument of coercion. According to his first study (Finkelhor, 1981, p. 59), in 40% of cases the experience were repeated one or more times. And although he does provide possible explanations for these isolated cases, he does not reflect on their continuation. Neither did he do so in his subsequent book, of 1984, in which the question of the repetition of the experience practically disappeared. Later, this issue will acquire a certain degree of interest, but only as a possible variable to account for major versus minor traumatization (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Finkelhor, 1986, p. 166), something which might also occur in cases where a minor has sexual relations with multiple persons (Finkelhor, 1986, p. 167). Many other authors also abandoned asking themselves why some children have multiple experiences while others do not or why some children maintain relationships with various individuals while others do not.

The only time when it is possible to encounter in these works any degree of acceptance of the existence of minors who voluntarily initiate and/or maintain these relationships is when talking about male victims: “...sexual activities between boys and older persons are more often initiated by the boys themselves” and that “...boys are less negatively effected by what sexual contacts they may have with older persons” (Finkelhor, 1984, p. 151). In this new paradigm, however, no weight whatsoever is given to this differentiation that Rind et al. (1998) and other have pointed out, and the rhetoric is intent on: (1) minimizing the percentage of cases in which the child participates voluntarily (Finkelhor, 1981, pp. 69–70); (2) attaching little importance to the question of the “initiation” and diminishing the significance of the more typical situation in which the child shows an interest in maintaining and repeating the experience (Finkelhor, 1981, p. 152); (3) emphasizing the traumatic effect of these experiences: “Moreover, boys were more likely than girls to cite interest and pleasure as reactions they had to experiences at the time. However, when we looked at long-term effects of the experience as measured by impact on sexual self-esteem, the boys seem to have been affected as much, if not more, than the girls” (Finkelhor, 1984, p. 152), (4) not accounting for the larger percentage of positive experiences among males (ibid., p. 152); and, (5) pointing out that, despite this, they still are abusive experiences because there was no true consent (ibid., pp. 152–153). This new approach would make it

more difficult to study and learn about cases such as Ewald, the 11-year-old boy examined by Bender and Blau (1937, p. 509).

D: From the Child Against Society to Society Against the Child

In the West, the child has traditionally been regarded as a potential enemy of the state, an apprentice human being who must be tamed through discipline and punishment in order to convince him to submit to state morality and customs. This principal has mutated radically in our more recent history, where the child has come to be both the savior as well as the innocent victim of a society which is now described as the enemy of the child—i.e., books as Miller’s *For Your Own Good* (1983)—and of the unspoiled human nature which the latter embodies (Boas, 1966). Within this framework, and the more recent configuration of the child victim in the 20th century (Best, 1990), the theme of childhood sexuality became a monolithic topic among most authors. It was accepted that children “did have a sexuality,” but very quickly, with few exceptions (e.g., Brongersma, 1986; Constantine, 1981; Martinson, 1973; Yates, 1978), that sexuality became “innocent.” Any trace of “eroticism,” “arousal,” “seduction,” or “desire” among preadolescent children was discarded, even by Kinsey’s old colleagues (Gagnon & Simon, 1970, p. 15).

Among experts, this principle reinforced the premise established in the 1970s that as far as sexual experiences with adults are concerned, children should think and feel as the rest of society does. What to the latter was abuse should be the same to them as well. And inversely: it was a given that, for the child, these relationships were always abusive, and if society failed to grasp that concept, it was showing itself to be insensitive to the suffering of children.

In reality, one of the overarching trends which differentiates the initial studies from the present time is the ubiquitous condemnation of society’s supposed complicity in, tolerance of, or indifference towards the problem of child sexual abuse. When the former are not being denounced for a shameful historical blindness (Malón, 2004), they are being accused of maintaining an ideology which practically encourages the abuse, rape, and mistreatment of children and women (Angelides, 2005). This rhetoric came out of the two social movements most interested in promoting sexual abuse as a social problem: American child protection groups and the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s (Burgess, Groth, Holmstrom, & Sgroi, 1978; Herman, 2000; Rush, 1996). These authors and theories had a profound influence on Finkelhor’s own work (Malón, 2004; see acknowledgments in Finkelhor, 1981, 1984, 1986).

Elements which might have conveyed that even in this area the child might be against society faded into obscurity. Now, the child was not exhibiting sexually rebellious and unusual attitudes or behaviors; feelings of guilt ceased to be regarded as hypocritical gestures to make adults happy or even as genuine repentance for having behaved wrongly, and their tendency to

not tell about what happened was interpreted as a consequence of the submission to the adult's domination, never as the child's free and voluntary decision. And, of course, the wicked and anti-social child disappeared from these accounts in order to make room for descriptions which were always kind to and forgiving of minors. The "bad or rebellious" child would be so only following the sexual experience and as a consequence of it; never prior to it and as a possible factor facilitating it.

Certainly, Finkelhor (1981, pp. 105–106) contemplates different origins for the feeling of guilt. This could be due to the child feeling that he or she actually was a participant in what happened and at least partially responsible for it; or it might well be generated by adults' excessive and hysterical response to what occurred. What is new is that here the guilt, related to telling or not telling about what happened, instead of being a normal and perhaps even desirable human experience, was intimately associated with the question of trauma (Coffey, Leitenberg, Henning, & Turner, 1996).

In this way, the child's silence progressively ceased to be a possible sign of complicity in what occurred, being regarded instead as the evidence and/or source of his or her suffering, given the feelings of isolation and stigma which would always go with it (Finkelhor, 1984, p. 93). The issue of keeping a secret, formerly a possible sign of complicity, became an indication of pathology, and its revelation a necessary step for recovery, as feminism suggested (Burgess et al., 1978, Ch. 5). But the most salient thing about all of these reflections is not so much what they say as what they do not say and, above all, what cannot be said.

Thus, for example, in the case of males, who as we have seen were statistically more inclined to initiate these experiences and/or experience them positively, there also seems to be a lesser tendency on their part to tell their parents or other adults what had happened. However, at no time do the reasons speculated by Finkelhor (1984, p. 156)—for example, a masculine socialization which obliged boys to show themselves as being stronger, the stigma of homosexuality, or a fear of losing their greater freedom of movement—consider the possibility that the boy kept silent because he had wanted and/or enjoyed something which was probably not accepted by his elders or that he did not tell because he wanted the relationship to continue.

E: From the Seeking Child to the Sought-After Child

Given that cases in which the child appears to have initiated or facilitated these kinds of relationships are relegated to practical non-existence, the works analyzed here are of little use in understanding the phenomenon of the seeking child, as Finkelhor, especially, is not obliged to account for a reality which he considers to be of scant significance. Past benefits which the child might have derived from these relationships are abandoned as irrelevant here. Even upon discovering that 7% of the girls in his sample evaluated the experience as positive (Finkelhor, 1981,

p. 66), and he indicates that among boys—information which he does not provide us—the figure is even higher (p. 70), he does not go back to either comment on or inquire further about this data. The impression is that the child is always harmed by these relationships, never benefiting from them. The odd occasions when Finkelhor does comment that some of the children might have consented in exchange for money or gifts are used not to see the child in some way as an active participant, but to render the adult even more perverted. The girls who in Bender and Blau came voluntarily as a group to the adult's home now turn out to have been victims of networks of exploitative "sex rings" (Finkelhor, 1984, pp. 160–161). And the child touching or allowing him/herself to be touched in exchange for money or gifts will be supplanted by the one looking for affection.

In the initial studies, the experts considered that some minors were, in fact, looking for these relationships in order to address a range of needs, and this explained their collaborative role. With the rise of the present victimological referent, this variable was reinterpreted in other terms, essentially in order to explain these children's vulnerability. Thus, the fact that the child was, in these relationships, seeking affection and not sex has likewise been emphasized in current considerations of these experiences; but now it is used not only to absolve the child of all responsibility, but also to convert him or her into an even more devalued and victimized creature, thus reinforcing the guilt of the adults interested only in satisfying their own sexual desires. Therefore, the child's needs for affection, attention and other, now will become "risk factors."

A child who feels needy will be more vulnerable to the ploys of a potential abuser: the offers of attention, affection, or bribes. A child who feels unsupported will not have someone to turn to about the abuse or will be more afraid to tell. Children who are emotionally abused, who are disabled or disadvantaged, or who have poor relationships to their parents are all at-risk for these reasons. Several of the factors we found associated with abuse... fall into this category. They all erode a child's ability to resist. (Finkelhor, 1984, pp. 60–61)

Finkelhor was one of the first authors interested in an in-depth study of these so-called risk factors which render some children more likely victims. The usefulness of such studies, Finkelhor said, consists of their importance in understanding and preventing the problem. As early as 1981, he was pointing out the need for this analysis—which in later works played a more prominent role—as well as highlighting social isolation as a possible risk factor but also as an effect of the abuse itself:

A plausible hypothesis is that social isolation is related to abuse. If children have few friends, this may create a need for contact and friendship on which sexual abusers can

capitalize. However the friendlessness found in the three studies may, unfortunately, be the result of having been victimized rather than a risk factor. Children who are being abused by family members often isolate themselves from others. (Finkelhor, 1986, p. 72)

This quotation is revealing in how the question of risk factors is still a contentious issue. Its detailed analysis illustrates for us the questionable status of victims as beings of such “purity” that, apparently, any deviation from this assumption might convert them into guilty persons. And so, for example, if we assert that children who are lonely and in need of affection and attention from some adult might be prone to become involved in these experiences, we could be implicitly suggesting that the children are partially responsible. The fundamental elimination of any chance of “blaming the victim” also is converted here into one of the author’s most basic goals.

It is likely that this shift, by which these risk factors go from being the “causes” to the effects of the sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1986, p. 76), will aid in the process by which the sexual experience per se will come to play an ever more prominent role in explaining human biographies. In narrative terms, the sexual abuse was converted into an ever more decisive “event” (Bal, 1995) in people’s lives, thus relegating to a secondary level those elements which traditionally have explained sexual abuse or incest as a symptom of other family problems, or even as a way of preserving an unstable family system (Rosenfeld, 1979a). This is what Finkelhor (1986, pp. 75–77) does, for example, with relationship problems between the parents themselves or between them and their children which, as we have seen, was a potential variable to explain the conduct of participating victims in the studies by Weiss et al. (1955), and which has been the customary way to explain the dynamics of incestuous families (Renshaw, 1982).

We must not lose sight of the fact that we are referring not to conclusions with an empirical basis, but rather to hypotheses which the author is using to explain the available data or invite future inquiries. Thus, for example, when reflecting on the finding that a high percentage of families with stepfathers are incestuous, all of his speculations revolve around the elements which might account for why stepfathers are more likely to abuse their stepdaughters; but under no circumstances will he speculate that a stepfather might turn out to be more attractive to a stepdaughter, or that the latter, due to the different family and psychological dynamics, might more readily involve herself in or maintain a relationship with the former than with her biological father (Renshaw, 1982, pp. 61–63).

F: From the Absolved Child to the Child Who Is Above Suspicion?

In the final portion of the chapter devoted to risk factors, Finkelhor makes one last warning regarding the danger of blaming the victim:

Risk factors always require cautious handling, but this is particularly so when dealing with child sexual abuse, which has been fraught with myth and misunderstanding. In the past there have been those who have taken findings such as the fact that children without friends are at higher risk and used those findings to hold victims responsible for being abused. ...It’s important to emphasize that true causal responsibility for abuse lies with offenders. All the research suggests that it is offenders who initiate the sexual activity. (Finkelhor, 1986, p. 86)

It is possible that some will use the child’s loneliness and his or her interest in establishing connections with others as a reason to accuse and blame him/her for what occurred, although no authors have been encountered who have blamed the child and absolved the adult. The authors reviewed in the first portion of the present work certainly acknowledged the child’s participatory role and had no qualms about pointing out that some of them were genuinely interested in those relationships, in initiating them and, very frequently, in their repetition, but in the end all of them “absolved” the minors.

In historical terms, this recent preoccupation of the experts with absolving the child of all responsibility turns out to be quite striking. The words of one of the people responsible for child protection in Spain speak of this seeming obsession; he sees an unequivocal demand that “one clearly establish that there is one (or various) guilty person(s) and one innocent person (a victim), *and banish any trace of intentional complicity*” (Urrea, 2000, p. 151, emphasis added). Empirical investigation appears to demonstrate that complicity does, in fact, exist (Constantine, 1981; Ingram, 1981; Leahy, 1992; Li, West, & Woodhouse, 1993; Okami, 1991; Sandfort, 1987; West, 1998; Wilson, 1981), and perhaps the problem is not knowing what to do with it.

This disappearance of the participant child victim in the expert discourse suggests, moreover, an interesting line of inquiry: What happens to voluntarily participating children when others intervene in their relationships? If the public and professionals end up being more and more shocked that a child could enjoy and benefit from those relationships, what happens when such cases are encountered? It is likely that the “voluntary” aspect of these cases are minimized or ignored, and that the minors are not allowed to portray themselves in their own self-perceived terms. In the context of the de-erotized and traumatically sexualized child, in the face of the socially uncomprehending child who is never seeking and who is only being perversely sought out, it seems reasonable to imagine that the genuinely participating child would have to hide or mask any willingness, or suffer the extreme stigma of his or her participation.

Would it be an exaggeration to suggest that if in the works of Bender or Weiss the child was absolved, in Finkelhor the participating child might end up being above suspicion? It is clear that Finkelhor’s objective—and that of all of those who represent the

victimological framework—is to “save” children, not only physically and psychologically, but also morally. But sometimes good intentions lead to greater harm, and it does not seem beyond the realm of possibility that truly blaming participating minors is more of a reality now than ever, for now their transgression is not merely of a moral order but of a mythical or ideological one. Is it possible, then, that the experts’ stake in the disappearance or radical redefinition of the participating child has led to an excessively sanitized and one-dimensional scientific and cultural conception of these minors, which some flesh-and-bone children with erotically-infused experiences involving adults might not be capable of assuming?

As others authors (Angelides, 2004, p. 158; Bancroft, 1998; Kitzinger, 1988; Lamb, 1986) have suggested, the radical and ideologically imposed negation of the participation, interest and erotic complicity of some children could be damaging for these children who, as Finkelhor noted, are erotic beings. Angelides gives psychoanalytic reasons why this participation and erotic interest should be recognized, but perhaps it is better to simply recognize that children, as basically reasonable beings, would benefit far more from simple, realistic, rational, and calm acceptance and understanding.

Conclusion: The Rise of a Scientific Taboo

At the end of the 1970s, Finkelhor asserted: “What is unusual in the case of the sexual abuse of children is the degree of importance that the victim precipitation analysis has assumed” (Finkelhor, 1981, p. 24). Certainly, although it would be wrong to say that researchers’ interest was focused on “precipitation” on the victim’s part, it is undeniable that, as has been shown, the former were extremely interested in some minors’ participatory role in these relationships. With these words, Finkelhor was announcing what became a staple of the current hegemonic view of this problem, already posited in his earlier works, to wit, a notable interest precisely in denying and deflecting any trace of the voluntary participation of some minors in these experiences. Thus has been established the almost antagonistic shift in the expert treatment of these types of cases between one historical epoch and another.

There might be other ways of establishing this transformation, for example via an analysis of the actual cases used by authors to illustrate their assertions. Whereas accounts of voluntary and positive participation were plentiful in Bender or Weiss, in Finkelhor we only find accounts of very negative experiences. Only one counter-example has been encountered: “One reported that when he was twelve he had intercourse once with a twenty-three-year-old woman which he felt quite positive about” (Finkelhor, 1981, p. 80). But it is the exception that would prove the rule, resulting in it becoming more complicated for professionals and researchers to find out and study about these cases.

Perhaps that explains why someone reading the texts of Bender and her colleagues some 70 years later might be so disturbed by them. Often cited in the decades immediately following its publication as proof of some children’s participatory role or the absence of short- or long-term trauma, those studies progressively fell into oblivion when they were not being outright misinterpreted (Conte, 1985, p. 115; Conte & Schuerman, 1988, p. 158), or sharply criticized for the way in which they describe some children’s roles in these experiences (Herman, 2000, p. 39).

The almost total disappearance or radical transformation of the participating victim in the modern literature on the subject is explained by Finkelhor’s typical answer: accusing those authors of having erred in their observations, ascribing undue importance to the children’s apparent collaboration in what occurred, misrepresenting that participation, and, in short, falling once again into the grave error of “blaming the victim” (Finkelhor, 1981, pp. 23–25; 1986, p. 86). There may have been some truth in those accusations, although one point of view is that they are based on a distorted interpretation of those authors and their observations. In any event, this could be turned around to suggest that the current paradigm was able to oversimplify the problem in a different way: via the absolute denial of any participatory role on the children’s part and the consequent rejection of any hint of complicity in, interest in, or benefit from what happened. There are many possible reasons which might account for this shift, but let us focus only on those hypotheses which are of special relevance to the goals of the present study:

Victimism and Victimology

The paradigm of child sexual abuse, as we know it today, forms part of a historical process, of which Finkelhor’s texts are an integral part, in which resorting to the culture of victimism by the social sciences became prominent, perhaps even preeminent (Best, 1997; Bruckner, 1996; Hughes, 1994; Money, 1991a; Sykes, 1992). This allowed for the establishment of a new moral order (Furedi, 2002; Goodyear-Smith, 1993), as well as the rise of the “psychological industry” (Dineen, 1996). The pseudo-science of victimology, which gave scientific prestige to this culture of victimism, imposed previously unknown ethical boundaries on sexuality, especially the sexuality of children, was given preferential treatment in terms of social science funding, and mounted campaigns against both past and present researchers whose findings conflicted with this new dogma. The recent attacks on Kinsey for his data on orgasm in preadolescent boys are a good example (Bancroft, 1998, 2004).

Adversarial Logic

In this framework, a perspective is imposed which is based more on the tradition of Hammurabi than that of Hippocrates

(Money, 1991b, p. 3). This adversarial model of the innocent and the guilty, offenders and those offended against, victims and aggressors, is today claimed to be the only appropriate one with regard to sexual experiences between children and adults, but which was not either present or employed in the past (Gagnon, 1965; Goodyear-Smith, 1993; Renshaw, 1982; Rosenfeld, 1979a). An adversarial model implies a confrontation that can only end in the annihilation of one's opponent. In that context, talking about the child's possible interested and collaborative role might presume, to many, the absolution of an adult who must be condemned at all cost, sometimes forgetting the well-being of the minor (Stevenson, 1992, p. 172).

From the Qualitative to the Quantitative Study

Another possible factor is the current widespread use of the large-sample statistical model, as opposed to a qualitative one involving fewer cases. It is not that the large-number methodology explains the change in perspective; but perhaps it does facilitate it. Qualitative analysis (e.g., Bender & Blau, 1937; Ingram, 1981; Leahy, 1992; Li et al., 1993; Martinson, 1973; Sandfort, 1984; Weiss et al., 1955), also more typical in the literature on incest, does not allow for the making of generalizations; but it does reflect the great moral complexity and experiential diversity of human relationships. By contrast, the larger survey, which is more widely-favored at the present time, facilitates a better generalization of its results but also allows one to omit any study of the less common cases, as well as tending to over-simplify the many shades of human experience. Many works focused on consensual relationships have been questioned precisely for not being statistically representative (Bauserman, 1990), which is a misinterpretation of what their contribution to human knowledge actually consists.

The Public Use of a Private Act

Finkelhor's work was part of a new strategy in which researchers contributed to sexual abuse being regarded as a public problem to be prevented and combated, and not as the private conduct or experiences of some individuals which should be handled by taking into account the particulars of each case. The question of the participatory role of some children could be dealt with without the pressures of a hypersensitive social climate, but when it comes to ideological and political questions, in which the professional is faced not with an individual case but with a social struggle (Malón, 2004), any acknowledgment that some minors are not what everyone would believe could provoke not only a public outcry but an end to professional advancement.

The New Sexual Morality

Traditionally, everything that took place outside of the marital, reproductive, and heterosexual context was considered immoral

and criminal. There are many indications that until the 1960s or 1970s the age criterion was not so central, with other elements—virginity, incest, propriety and modesty, homosexuality, vices, prostitution, masturbation, promiscuity, etc.—having greater salience. For example, a homosexual relationship in and of itself, even between adults, was heavily frowned upon, with it being more or less immaterial whether a minor was involved. Landis' (1956) study and his concept of “sexual deviation” (p. 92) suggests as much, as do other works of that era on sexually delinquent minors (Doshay, 1969, pp. 71–89). However, at the present, the basic criteria are other than the participants' consent to the sexual relationship and the absence of harm, and it is in this context that in the face of the absence of harm or obvious force the denial of any active or collaborative role on the children's part acquires particular moral importance.

A Different Concept of Childhood

One final factor which has been with us implicitly throughout this historical review is the transformation of our idea of the child. The question of the existence of an erotic life during childhood and early adolescence is a particularly rich terrain for the configuration of the minor as an autonomous or a dependent being, strong or weak, rebellious or meek. Erotic ties to others, especially an adult, are signs of a withdrawal from and the dissolution of familial ties, and certainly one of the more powerful ones. In this area at least, the 20th century has evolved in the direction of a more fragile and innocent conception of childhood, more passive and vulnerable, raising, for example, the age of consent (Killias, 2000). But seeing things from a historical point of view, it is rather paradoxical that the same century in which science has recognized childhood sexuality is the one which is most intensely denying it, at least as far as their experiences with adults are concerned.

These and many other factors—such as the change from a moral terminology (“bad” boy) to a clinical one (“traumatized” boy)—add up to what has been suggested in the preceding pages is the element most characteristic of this whole process: the progressive idealization of this small sphere of knowledge under the influence of part of the feminist discourse and the rhetoric of power (Angelides, 2004) and child abuse. The aim, made explicit by Finkelhor himself, was principally to denounce what was considered a serious social problem rather than to become familiar with one particular facet of that which is human. Social science, self-invested with certainty and moral superiority, assumes the prerogative to exercise dominion over society's values (Best, 1997). It is here that Money's (1988) commentary on victimology—as a faux-science more interested in how things should be than how they really are—acquires its full meaning.

The present work points out that the current perspective of expert knowledge in this area is in general that of the *activist*, not the *naturalist*. The latter does have its virtues and defects, and

therefore its limits, when it devotes itself to issues with intensive social and human implications, in which claims of absolute objectivity are more than questionable. To reiterate, to recognize and study the possible participation of the child, even if it includes active collaboration or even initiation, in no way suggests that the child is responsible for what has happened. But questioning what might be the evasion of any moral implications does not mean having to renounce studying the experiences of children where there is clearly voluntary participation from the child and a relationship that he feels is positive, as was demanded by the U.S. congressional “denunciation” of Rind et al. (1998), a political incursion into science which created a firestorm of controversy (Lilienfeld, 2002; Mirkin, 2000; Oellerich, 2000; Rind, Bauserman, & Tromovitch, 2000; for opposing views, see Ondersma et al., 2001; Spiegel 2000). This does not necessarily mean, from this author’s point of view, that these relationships should be legitimized or legalized; there are many elements in this complex question that have not been addressed adequately beyond questionable dogmas of universal “trauma,” “innocence,” and “passivity” on the part of the minors involved. But the current “taboo” against the scientific study of these children and their experiences contributes nothing positive, but is instead a serious impediment to any appropriate understand in this area.

Near the end of the 20th century, Bullough and Bullough (1996) criticized the current state of knowledge regarding sexual experiences between children and adults. In their paper, they called for the development of new lines of inquiry, among which was included the importance of historically situating ourselves in this arena. While noting that a great deal of money had been invested in establishing a new social norm, they questioned if sufficient efforts had been made to understand just what it is that was being done, and/or that things perhaps had not always been this way. It appears that some scientists investigating sexual experiences between children and adults may have forgotten their obligation to situate themselves historically. This paper has endeavored to be a reminder of that obligation as well as an invitation to do so.

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