

# Sexualities News

Newsletter of the Sociology of Sexualities Section of the American Sociological Association

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### MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Thanks to Melissa's wonderful suggestions in the last newsletter and your submissions, we have some great reading inside! In addition to details on our roundtables in Atlanta, and the usual calls for papers, and members' books, I am pleased to include Nancy L. Fischer's essay, a reaction to Judith Levine's *Harmful to Minors* and also two new columns, "In the News" and "Achievements."

Please note that the submissions deadline for the next newsletter is November 30, 2003. Toward that goal, I have adapted a list of submission suggestions from the Crime, Law and Deviance Section list (thanks Kevin) that I hope will pique your interest and get those submissions rolling in. See you in Atlanta!

Teddy

# Visit the Sociology of Sexualities website at: http://www.asanet.org/sectionsex/index.html

### Newsletter submission ideas

- announcements (e.g., new programs, new books, personal accomplishments)
- <sup>3</sup> calls for papers
- <sup>3</sup> news items
- <sup>3</sup> articles or ideas for future articles/columns
- <sup>3</sup> advice for new teachers, and/or researchers
- <sup>3</sup> news from outside academe
- <sup>3</sup> websites for Sexualities-oriented organizations or resources
- <sup>3</sup> topics of interest to graduate students

# Section Membership: Achievements & Opportunities

### **Section Membership Exceeds 300!**

As of June 9, 2003, the Sexualities Section had an all-time high of 317 members. This means that we will gain an additional session for the annual ASA meetings in 2004 in wondrous San Francisco, doubling the number of dedicated Section sessions we'll have (from one to two).

See Section Membership, page 5

# Reaction to Judith Levine's Harmful to

**Minors** by Nancy L. Fischer, Department of Sociology, Macalester College

One month before it was available for sale, journalist Judith Levine's Harmful to Minors drew fire from conservatives. An association called Concerned Women for America (whose spokes*man* was Robert Knight) and Minnesota House Majority Leader Tim Pawlenty (now the governor of Minnesota) claimed the book was an endorsement for child molestation and Pawlenty tried to cut funding to the University of Minnesota Press. Without having read Harmful to *Minors*, critics portrayed it either as a godsend for child molesters looking for an academic argument to rationalize their criminal behavior or a "free love" manifesto for toddlers. Negative reviews full of fire and brimstone characterized Levine and her book as evil, charging that she was an apologist for pedophilia. Despite the commotion, Levine received critical acclaim, including a Los Angeles Times Book Award for Harmful to Minors. In my casual perusal of book reviews for Harmful to Minors most were either neutral or quite positive, arguing that Levine was a brave and sensible voice for the sexual education of youth.

When a book elicits such controversy it is hard to tell whether reviewers are responding to the book or to a larger debate. However, the heat of controversy surrounding Harmful to Minors seems to have presently cooled, so it is an opportune time to consider what the book actually says, whether it is a good read, and whether it is a useful text on the topic of child sexuality.

Levine's central argument is that America is caught up in fear regarding children and sex. We assume that sex is inherently damaging to youth rather than seeing the specific circumstances under which some teens have sex as damaging. Levine feels that conservatives with their rhetoric of moral purity and feminists with their rhetoric of victimization have been the main propagators of this fear (she does not say which feminists except in interviews after publication). She believes that America's efforts to protect children—ranging from abstinence-only sex education in schools to electronic babysitters which filter sexual content from the internet—are harmful to minors.

The book is divided into two distinctive parts. The first half focuses on five different areas where Levine feels that society harms both kids and adults in the name of protecting children. She takes on: the censorship of sexual knowledge and imagery (including pornography); therapeutic practices that define children as sexually dangerous; archaic statutory rape laws; sexual education programs that do not educate; and the curbing of abortion rights. Levine relates chilling anecdotes of people accused of sexual crimes for activities such as: parents photographing their babies au natural; kids forced into therapy and made to see themselves as sexually deranged for playing doctor; and boys labeled as criminals for falling in love with willing and younger girls. These fears arise because our culture has constructed children as completely asexual so that any expression of child sexuality seems pathological. From a sociologist's perspective, the first half of the book makes a standard moral panic argument that societal fears concerning children and sex are largely unfounded, disproportionate in relation to actual harm caused, and divert attention and resources away from "real" problems that affect children.

Sexual discourse in Western society is divided into a dichotomy of pleasure and danger. Likewise, Harmful to Minors first debunks the dangers associated with sex (and claims that it is dangerous to make sex seem so harmful) while the second half of the book emphasizes sexual pleasure. Levine not only wants to help kids avoid coercive sex, but "plain old bad sex." She focuses on how children grapple with their sexuality and what kind of sexual education would be more helpful to them not only in terms of getting accurate sexual information, but for discovering and refining their own desires. This is particularly important for girls. Quoting sociologist Deborah Tolman, Levine makes the case that when girls do not feel confident about their desires, their first sexual experiences are more likely to be negative or even coercive. And similarly, boys need help recognizing and expressing their emotions rather than just engaging in enthusiastic but crude sex talk. To that end, she advocates gender-specific sexual education not based on heterosexist assumptions. Her other recommendations on sex education include: an emphasis on "outercourse" sensual pleasures involving the whole body and not just intercourse; cultivation of literary appreciation continued on next page

## Harmful to Minors, continued

of sex and romance; providing reliable sex advice websites such as "Go Ask Alice" with 20-year olds providing "real world" sexual advice; a halt to "Good Touch/Bad Touch" sex education for young children which leads them to associate danger with sex at an early age; and community outreach sex education programs for gay, lesbian youth and runaways here in the Twin Cities.

Overall, Harmful to Minors is a fine book on sexual politics surrounding child sexuality. Levine's writing is very engaging and draws in the reader. However it is not without its faults. I wish that the tone of sexual and moral complexity that predominates in the second half of the book was more present in the first half. Largely due to the dramatic anecdotes that begin most chapters, the first half is more sensational (not unlike the media stories of sexual danger which Levine criticizes). At times it seemed that Levine oversimplified debates. For example, as someone who researches how the law handles sexual offenses against children, I felt that Levine was somewhat misguided on how statutory rape laws are (most often) used today. She notes that it is parents who bring most claims of statutory rape to police and she cites a TV talk show story about parents who charged statutory rape in order to end a romantic relationship between their 13-year-old daughter and her 21-year-old boyfriend. Thus statutory rape appears as a "victimless crime" that polices consensual sex. However, most prosecutors are reluctant to uphold charges in cases where sex can be construed as consensual and instead they use statutory rape laws to prosecute forcible rape against minors without the burden of having to prove lack of consent (Oberman 1994). And it is quite possible that parents make most reports because their children ask them to handle the police when tragedy hits. I know from interviews of Levine that her intention was not to suggest that statutory rape laws should be repealed and nor was it to portray all feminists as making hysterical claims, but the first half of the book did not always leave that impression. This is a minor quibble with *Harmful to* Minors that merely serves as a reminder for those of us who write about sexuality to avoid the temptation to simplify our arguments for the sake of challenging conventional wisdom or for defending against conservative attacks.

The second half of the book makes up for this shortcoming. Levine captures child and teen sexuality in all its complexity. The sexual socialization of children in this culture is a confusing experience. Most adults assume young children should be sexually innocent, i.e. ignorant of all matters sexual, and they actively try to shield them from sexual knowledge for fear of corrupting them. Meanwhile the media portrays hypersexualized adolescent girls who are sexy and sex-hungry and boys who revel in sexual vulgarity. Children get mixed messages about sex and have little room to explore and experiment sexually free from adult gaze and control. Levine captures the joy, confusion and pain surrounding early sexual experiences and I found her description of the difficulties girls have in recognizing their own sexual desires and pleasures particularly accurate and poignant. I kept thinking of an interview in photographer Lauren Greenfield's photo essay Girl Culture where a 14-year old girl describes how she and her 12- to-15-year old peers prefer oral sex to intercourse because they don't get much pleasure out of it, and therefore it lets them maintain emotional distance in their relationships. Kids manage befuddling messages that they should be sexual, fulfill their sexual desires, be independent and in control, and simultaneously maintain the romantic association of sex, intimacy and love. Levine argues that there is no way to avoid this emotional messiness; telling kids to "just say no" will not prevent heartache. Her message is that although adults may not like the idea of their teenagers (and sometimes pre-teens) experimenting with sex, many kids will explore their sexual desires, and so it is important to at least give kids more relevant information to help them navigate their sexual lives with responsibility and with some sense of how to find pleasure. This moral complexity makes Harmful to Minors a very worthwhile book, particularly for sparking classroom discussions on where lines should be drawn between child protection and minors' privacy rights.

### References

Greenfield, Lauren (2002). Girl Culture. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books. Oberman, Michelle (1994). "Turning Girls into Women: Re-Evaluating Modern Statutory Rape Law." Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology 85:1:15-79.

For current job listings check out the ASA Employment Bulletins online at http://www.asanet.org/pubs/eb/

### **MEMBERS' BOOKS**

Preves, Sharon E. (2003). *Intersex and Identity: The Contested Self*. Rutgers University Press.

Approximately one in every two thousand infants born in the United States each year is sexually ambiguous in such a way that doctors cannot immediately determine the child's sex. Some children's chromosomal sexuality contradicts their sexual characteristics. Others have the physical traits of both sexes, or of neither.

Drawing upon life history interviews with adults who were treated for intersexuality as children, Sharon E. Preves explores how such individuals experience and cope with being labeled sexual deviants in a society that demands sexual conformity. By demonstrating how intersexed people manage and create their own identities, often in conflict with their medical diagnosis, Preves argues that medical intervention into intersexuality often creates, rather than mitigates, the stigma these people suffer. For more info see: <a href="http://165.230.98.36/acatalog/">http://165.230.98.36/acatalog/</a> Intersex and Identity 1093.html

From the back cover: "In Intersex and Identity
Preves has produced the most up-to-date,
comprehensive account available of what it is like to
grow up and live with a body that isn't simply male
or female. This work is compassionate, intelligent,
and beautifully written, and promises to be well read
and highly valued."—Alice Dreger, Ph.D., author of
Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex

Nardi, Peter M. (2003). *Doing Survey Research: A Guide to Quantitative Research Methods* Allyn & Bacon. More info: <a href="http://www.ablongman.com/catalog/academic/product/1,4096,0205343481,00.html">http://www.ablongman.com/catalog/academic/product/1,4096,0205343481,00.html</a>

Stockdill, Brett C. (2003). Activism Against AIDS: At the Intersections of Sexuality, Race, Gender and Class. Lynne Rienner Publishers. ISBN: 1-58826-111-5. For more info see: www.rienner.com

Williams, Christine & Stein, Arlene Eds. (2002). *Sexuality and Gender*. Blackwell. 504pp.

The essays included here reflect differences in race, gender and class and demonstrate how different social groups experience different sets of social norms. Topics include gender and sex theory, identity, childhood and adolescent sexuality, the objectification of women, sexuality and religion, leisure and recreation, politics and social change and the possible future of sexual relationships.

From the back cover: "A superb collection! This book collects some of the most important works on gender and sexuality by contemporary social scientists. It is, instantly, the foundational anthology on the field."—Michael Kimmel, State University of New York at Stony Brook

A new Activities Manual for classroom and workshop use written by **Leonore Tiefer**, **Peggy** Brick, and Meg Kaplan was published early in 2003 as part of the "Campaign for a New View of Women's Sexual Problems." This 80-page manual contains 12 group exercises designed to illuminate the current social and political construction of women's sexual problems and how this construction serves the interests of doctors and the pharmaceutical industry. It is suitable for use in many different classes including sexualities, women's studies, social studies, medical sociology, introductory courses, etc. More information about the "Campaign" can be found at: http://www.fsdalert.org. The manual costs \$15 plus S&H and ordering information is on the website or contact LTiefer@mindspring.com.

### IN THE NEWS

# X Marks the Spot for Intersex Alex by

Julie Butler, The West Australian [AUSTRALIA] - A quiet trailblazer from Perth's Hills has become the first in Australia and probably the world to hold a passport acknowledging that not everyone is male or female.

# **Section Membership,** from page 1

Thanks much to all who helped reach this important goal, including those on the Membership Committee and also all the others who forwarded recruitment emails and urged colleagues to join up. A lastminute push by our newest Membership Committee member—James Dean—helped immensely (thanks James!). I shall stop hounding you to recruit for now, but feel free to urge people to join or rejoin the Sexualities Section if the opportunity arises! If you have any questions feel free to contact me at: kdv@indiana.edu.

Membership Committee: Natalie Bennett, Mary Bernstein, Erin Davis, James Dean, Kevin D. Vryan

### **ACHEIVEMENTS**

Salvador Vidal-Ortiz, Graduate Center-CUNY, received the Social Science Research Council's prestigious Sexuality Research Fellowship for his dissertation fieldwork for 2003-04. Salvador is researching the relationship between gender and sexuality as theoretical constructs in contemporary social/cultural/religious understandings of sexual minorities in the US—and specifically focusing on sexual minorities' participation in Santería, and Afro-Cuban religion. The fellowship award of \$28,000 will assist in the implementation of his archival, interview, and ethnographic research of gender and sexuality as they are negotiated within the religion, in New York's tri-state area. Salvador's dissertation proposal chair was Robert Alford, who recently passed away. He is currently working under the support of Patricia T. Clough, Director of Women Studies at the Graduate Center, as his dissertation advisor.

### **CALL FOR PAPERS**

# **Academics Needed to Contribute Articles to Help Raise Sexual Literacy**

American Sexuality magazine is seeking articles focused on sexuality, health, education, and rights in the United States for immediate and future publication. American Sexuality is the on-line magazine published by San Francisco State University's National Sexuality Resource Center (NSRC), directed by anthropologist Dr. Gilbert

Herdt, with major long-term funding from the Ford Foundation.

Newly established scholars and graduate students, as well as senior faculty are encouraged to submit brief proposals (200 words) for articles concerning sexual health, sexual education, sexual rights and/or sexual communities and cultures in the U.S. Publishing in American Sexuality is a unique opportunity to disseminate scholarly research in a widely read, internationally accessible medium aimed at informing academics, the general public and community based advocates on the critical gaps in sexuality research and policy.

The published article will be 1000-1500 words and written in a style that is accessible to non-academic audiences. Find American Sexuality magazine and further instructions for authors on line at: http://nsrc.sfsu.edu Please contact anthropologist Cymene Howe, Editor at cymene@sfsu.edu or 415-437-3942 with questions and proposals.

# The 6<sup>th</sup> Conference of the European **Sociological Association**

September 23-26, 2003, Murcia, Spain. The Sociology of Sexuality Network.

Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the volume of scholarly works on human sexuality has increased enormously. Encompassing assertions of sexual identities and rights, sexual politics and contraceptive cultures, sexual practices and lifestyles, sexual behaviours are investigated in a large number fields ranging from social history to anthropology and biology to law. The interest of many disciplines engaged in studying the sexual was partly fuelled by the global pandemic of HIV/AIDS and partly by the secularisation of western societies and changes in public attitudes to sexual politics, identities and reproductive matters. Sociologists have been playing pivotal roles in the investigation of human sexual behaviours and this year at the ESA Conference in Murcia, Spain, we hope to reflect the diversity of research interests and theories and determine the nature of Sociology of Sexuality studies.

To mark the establishment of the new "Sociology of Sexuality" Network, we invite submissions of

## 2003 ASA SEXUALITIES SECTION ROUNDTABLES

Organizers: Karl Bryant, University of California-Santa Barbara; Gloria González-López, University of Texas-Austin

TABLE 1: RETHINKING SEXUALITY, HEALTH, AND "RISK" Presider: Rita Melendez, Columbia University

Matt Mutchler & George Ayala, AIDS Project Los Angeles. "'Gay-Boy' Talk: Stopping the Waves of HIV Infection Among Young Gay Men."

Leslie Houts & Kristin Joos, University of Florida. "The Great Condom Adventure: Analyzing College Students' Narratives of Buying Condoms."

Adam Green, Indiana University-Bloomington. "'Party and Play': The institutional basis of clubdrug use among a sample of New York City gay men."

Christopher Carrington, San Francisco State University. "Circuit Boys: Sociological Reflections on the Gay Dance and Circuit Party Culture."

**TABLE 2: SEXUALITY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS** *Presider: Jyoti Puri, Simmons College* 

Kim Star, Northwestern University. "Two Eras of Gay Liberation: Framing, Gender Performance, and the Contemporary Implications."

Jennifer Fortado, University of Maryland-College Park. "The Contemporary Transgender Movement: When Identities Resist Collective Framing."

Elizabeth Erbaugh, University of New Mexico. "Community Organizing to End Violence Against Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer Women."

**TABLE 3. WOMEN, GENDER, AND SEXUALIZED LABOR** *Presider: Wendy Chapkis, University of Southern Maine* 

Louise Roth, Rachel Neal, Rebecca Sager, & Mary Nell Trautner, University of Arizona. "Beauty Labor as Identity Work: Some Preliminary Findings from the Field." Bernadette Barton, Morehead State University. "Female Solidarity in the Sex Industry."

Kari Lerum, University of Washington-Bothell. "Sexuality, Camaraderie, & Power in Service Work."

### TABLE 4. SEXUALITY AND

**RELATIONSHIPS** Presider: Jessica Fields, San Francisco State University

Jeffrey Sweat, University of California-Davis. "Participation in a School-based Anti-homophobic Youth Movement: Opportunities and Constraints."

Anna Muraco, University of California-Davis. Kith or Kin? The Role of Gay and Lesbian Friends in Straight Families

Sinikka Elliott, University of Texas-Austin. "Sexual and Emotional Relations in Long-term Intimate Partnerships."

TABLE 5. SEXUALITY, ETHNICITY, AND CULTURE Presider: Elena Gutierrez, University of Illinois-Chicago

Kumiko Nemoto, University of Texas-Austin. "Asian women under the shadow of white masculinity: Intimacy, desire, and construction of self in interracial relationship."

Carol Ann Chavez, University of Texas-Austin. "Homophobia, Hate Crimes, and Victimization in Racial and Ethnic Communities of Color."

Peter Chua, San José State University. "Doing Gramsci's Cultural Education: Antiracism and Gendered Sexuality in the NABWMT."

**TABLE 6. CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN SEXUALITY STUDIES** *Presider: Jodi O'Brien, Seattle University* 

Bradford Hepler & Tom Owuor, University of Maryland. "Sexual Behavior and Communication Among Adults: The Role of Email."

James Dean, SUNY Albany. "Queering Heterosexuality: Racial and Gendered Heterosexualities."

### continued on next page Table 6 Roundtables, continued

Daniel Cortese & Julie Dowling, University of Texas-Austin. "You Call This the Ghetto? Gay Urban Space in Dallas, Texas."

Robert Caputi, University of California-Santa Barbara. "Sexual Capital and Sexual Aesthetics."

### 2002-2003 Committee Chairs

**Graduate Student Paper Award Committee** Wendy Chapkis **Simon and Gagnon Award Committee** Jodi O'Brien **Membership Committee** Kevin David Vyran **Program Committee** Melissa Sheridan Embser-Herbert **Nominations Committee** Jodi O'Brien

### **Intersex**, from page 4

Alex MacFarlane, 48, is intersex and wanted a passport recognising it.

Women have a 46XX chromosome mix and men 46XY. Alex is 47XXY, a form of androgyny shared by about one in every 1500 to 2000 babies.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade initially baulked, saying its computers could deal only with an F or M in the sex field of passports. For Alex, choosing M or F would have been lying.

"I should not have to commit fraud because of a department's production inadequacies," Alex said.

Late last year, after months of correspondence from Alex, and an inquiry from The West Australian, the department had a rethink, deciding to change its passport processing system to allow an X in the sex field.

The X signifies unspecified sex or intersex and is the only other sex category allowed under International Civil Aviation Organisation guidelines for machinereadable passports.

A spokeswoman told The West Australian that, after reviewing the issue, the department had decided to accommodate people whose birth certificates recorded their sex as indeterminate.

Alex has since received the passport, with an X in the sex field. After making inquiries with intersex people overseas, Alex believes the move set a global precedent. "It means a great deal," Alex said. "I've been battling with 30-odd years of misrepresentation. It means I can now participate in more of the community."

Alex is also believed to be the first Australian issued with a birth certificate acknowledging a gender other than male of female. Alex's says "indeterminate -also known as intersex". It was issued in Alex's birth State of Victoria, which unlike WA, changed its policy to allow the category.

Despite all this ground-breaking, Alex shuns the limelight, quietly chipping away at bureaucratic discrimination. "Finding a niche to crawl into has been impossible, so I've made my own," Alex said.

"I do not want to change the world, but just the way some of it thinks. Intersex individuals should not have to break the law, by pretending to be male or female, in order to vote, marry, hold a licence, or own property."

Not all 47XXY people identify as androgynous. Some perceive themselves as male or female, and many, like Alex, were surgically altered at birth to appear male or female.

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# **Subscribe to the Sexualities discussion listsery**

In addition to the official announcement listsery to which all section members are automatically subscribed, we have an informal discussion listsery to which you may subscribe by sending an email message to Majordomo@listserv.asanet.org

In the body of the message, type "subscribe sexualities" (without the quotation marks). Leave the subject line blank, and make sure that anything else in the body is removed, such as any signature your email program may automatically insert.

### Call for Papers, from page 5

individual papers, which address—but are not limited to—the following topics:

### Sexual Health

Contributions are welcomed on HIV, AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, sexual violence, unwanted pregnancies, discrimination on sexual behaviour/identity, "high risk" behaviours, sexual health promotion, contraceptives, sexual networks, infertility and other issues relating to reproductive health.

### Sexual Culture

Sexual culture is taken here to mean the practices, beliefs, meanings and knowledge that structure sexuality in different social contexts. Papers can focus on specific aspects of a sexual culture or can review the different sub-cultures within a country, national sexual cultures or a shared sexual culture in western countries. Examples include examinations of symbolic sexual interactions, comparative studies of different sexual cultures, qualitative or quantitative studies of sexual attitudes and behaviours and analyses of the sexualisation of western cultures.

### Sexual Politics and Sexual Identities

Under this topic, papers are welcomed on queer rights and other sexual political issues and on the meanings and representation of homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, transsexual and transgender identities.

### Gender and Sexuality

For this session, we welcome contributions on the relationships between gender and sexuality, including the changes in women's participation in the workforce and the effects this may have on the female sexuality. Commentaries on the assertions of masculinity and femininity in sexual relationships and encounters are also welcomed.

### Sex Research and Methodology

This section will focus on the different methods in obtaining information on sexuality—examples include the "sex survey," observational studies, ethnography, computer simulation, media analysis—and their inherent problems and advantages in obtaining valid, reliable information on human sexual behaviours. Difficulties in securing access to participants may also be discussed.

If you are interested in presenting a paper, please submit an abstract of no more than 250 words, which states the title (in capital letters), the author name(s), institutional affiliations, city, country and e-mail address. Where there are two or more authors, please underline the presenting author. Abstracts may be submitted by email to: John.Vincke@rug.ac.be or Catherine.Heffernan@green.ox.ac.uk.

Deadline for submissions is March 31<sup>st</sup> 2003 (but willing to take late submissions).

The Sociologist Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Caucus & the Section on Sexualities of the American Sociological Association invite you to their co-sponsored reception on:

Saturday August 16th, 2003 6:00-9:00 p.m. The Atlanta Lesbian and Gay Center 170 Eleventh Street, NE Atlanta, Georgia 30309

The "Atlanta Lesbian and Gay Center" is located in midtown Atlanta about 1 and 1/2 miles from the downtown Atlanta ASA hotels at 170 Eleventh Street, between Juniper Street and Piedmont Avenue. There are many restaurants, bars, parks and other entertainment venues in the area immediately around the Atlanta Lesbian and Gay Center.