

Letters to the editor

Various Authors

2012

All formats accepted including typescript & handwritten. Letters may be edited for length.
Send letters via email to fe@fifthestate.org or Fifth Estate, P.O. Box 201016, Ferndale MI 48220

Youth Sexualization

In your Spring 2012 issue, reviewer Paul Comeau questions Paul Goodman's "advocating the sexualization of adolescents and children." (see "The Anarchist Writings of Paul Goodman").

I would highly recommend Judith Levine's *Harmful To Minors*, in which she exposes the perils of protecting children from their own sexuality. Comeau says he thinks Goodman would agree that, "it is up to the freely associating members of our society to determine for themselves and their children what are appropriate levels of sexuality and sexual conduct."

One detects more than a hint of the authoritarian view that children are the property of their parents, and that they should be able to control and repress their children's developing sexuality at "appropriate levels."

I find more germane to anarchism Levine's well-argued view that children and adolescents have their own sexual feelings and desires which they should be free to explore and experiment with on their own, and that it is the duty of adults to offer them a good sex education and respect their privacy.

Kyle De Wolf

White Deer, Penn.

Paul J. Comeau Responds:

In a society where many adults cannot handle themselves and their sexual feelings and desires in healthy and constructive ways (consult statistics on sexual assault and sexual violence if you need proof of this), I find it hard to buy any view, however well-argued, that children should be free to explore and experiment with their sexuality.

Our society tries its best to deny the sexuality of half its adult population by denying them access to contraceptives and other care necessary to live healthy sex lives, and to shame otherwise responsible adults from expressing their sexuality with outmoded puritanical ideas of sin and guilt.

In such an oppressive setting, encouraging the sexuality of children can only be more harmful than beneficial.

It seems to me that there is a tacit assumption on the part of those who would advocate for child sexuality that households have a means, and a safe space to discuss sexuality with their children. This is a fallacious assumption, when due to economic conditions, parents and children spend very little time together. Combine this with the pressures many adults feel regarding their own sexuality and it can result in a highly toxic situation.

If we are going to strive to build a society where sexuality and sexual expression are acceptable, and not a source of shame, or repression, we need to address larger issues than questions of whether or not we should be encouraging sexuality of children.

Sex and sexuality are great things, but from my perspective, I think anarchists don't distinguish the forest from the trees by squabbling over smaller things like this, as opposed to focusing on smashing capitalism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity.

If we make that our focus, then it will naturally lead to empowering households and communities to have meaningful dialogue about issues addressed in everyday life, including sexuality and productive freedom.

Kelly Pflug-Back responds:

I think there is something to be gained here from the controversial position which author Patrick Califia takes in the book, *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex*.

Califia argues that many of the laws and social mores which are allegedly there to protect youth and children from being sexually exploited or “corrupted” actually do very little to accomplish this. Instead, they simply reinforce widespread societal notions that minors are not responsible or intelligent enough to know what is best for them.

Denying young people the agency to determine their own sexuality, as well as the agency to meaningfully participate in most of the public sphere, essentially objectifies them: they are not active subjects, but rather the property of their parents or guardians and the state.

This objectification is a large part of the reason that children and young people are vulnerable to being preyed upon sexually by adults.

As Califia and many others have argued, pedophilia is not a universal phenomenon but rather one that occurs most frequently in hierarchical societies where unequal power relations between people are eroticized.

Whether society approves or not, many young people of all orientations and gender identities are sexually active.

Placing restrictions on youth sexuality only pushes them into secrecy about their activities and limits their access to contraception, sexual health services, and information on sexual orientation and gender identity, all of which are essential for the kind of safe, healthy sex life that all people should have a right to if they so choose.

Certainly, our society is not an ideal place for youth to discover their sexuality, but this confusing miasma of exploitative imagery and prejudiced attitudes is unfortunately what they must navigate during one of life’s most transitional periods. What they need along this journey is support, respect, and free access to information, not more paternalism.

FE Note: Strangers In A Tangled Wilderness, a collective-run publisher of anarchist culture are releasing a short book of poetry by G-20 arrestee Kelly Rose Pflug-Back, *These Burning Streets*.

Kelly is facing 18 months in prison (see p. 7) and until she is free of the judicial system, the publisher is selling her book as a fundraiser, with every dollar received going directly to support her. Visit tangledwilderness.org to order.

Why We Give Free Subs to Prisoners

I am an inmate in the Pinckneyville Correctional Center in Perry County, Illinois. I read about your magazine in *Drawing Down the Moon* and that you offer free subscriptions to prisoners and soldiers.

I am a pagan inmate with limited funds. To be specific, I live off the ten dollars a month the state gives me to purchase hygiene items. Needless to say, your magazine would be greatly appreciated. The description in the book is something that I am very interested in.

Ryan Stueck

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I’m a prisoner in California in the Security Housing Unit for supposedly orchestrating the last summer and fall’s statewide prison hunger strike to protest conditions in units such as the one I’m in. [FE note: see prisons.org]. I received your publication from Books Through Bars (booksthroughbars.org) and enjoy the thought provoking articles.

I haven’t had many instances where I could read and learn things. I have a great hunger for things to read.

Here at Corcoran, we do not have a librarian or library privileges due to the state budget crisis even though federal and state prison regulations require reading material be made available to all inmates regardless of security level.

Reading is critical to the thought process, and I want to expand my mental horizons.

All of us share everything we come across to read, so would appreciate a subscription.

Alexander S. Parks

Corcoran, Calif.

FE Note: Many prisoners learn about our publication from Margot Adler’s 1979 book, *Drawing Down the*

Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today.

Adler, today an NPR commentator, hit a chord with the incarcerated as well as those on the outside as the book continues to sell briskly even after 33 years. It lists the Fifth Estate, for a reason unknown to us, as a resource for Wiccans. Perhaps it was because of our anti-technology and anti-civilization writings during that era.

Against His-Story

I recently re-read Fredy Perlman's *Against His-Story, Against Leviathan!* and was overcome with its poetry and power. I would really like to follow the background that brought Fredy to write that work but in the book he doesn't include any references and only refers to some of the sources by their surnames or pseudonyms.

Has anyone attempted to compile a list of further reading for those of us who have been set alight by this book?

Ransu

FE Note: That title and many more, including several by Fredy Perlman, are available through Black & Red; blackandred.org.

@s in Minsk

We have just launched a new project in Minsk, Belarus called Rebel Studies Library. We want to provide access to the anarchist and anti-authoritarian press to the citizens of our country.

If you could help, sending some books, etc., it could be great! Our web-site is rebels-library.org.

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