

**Queensland Crime Commission
Queensland Police Service**



Project AXIS

Child Sexual Abuse in Queensland: Selected Research Papers

JUNE 2000

The views expressed in this collection of papers are not necessarily the views of the Queensland Crime Commission or the Queensland Police Service.

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Foreword

Just as child sex offending is a multi-faceted phenomenon, our understanding of, and approaches to it must go beyond a strictly law enforcement response. During the course of Project Axis, it became obvious that a broad multi-disciplinary approach was needed to enhance our insight into the complex nature of child sex offending. Hence, this collection of selected papers from Queensland and interstate academics was compiled to provide a more comprehensive appreciation of the problem.

The collection of papers serves as a useful companion to *Project Axis Volume 1 Child Sexual Abuse in Queensland: The nature and extent* because it discusses aspects of child sexual abuse that are not only relevant to law enforcement, but also raise broader structural issues for the community as a whole to consider. These include deeply ingrained social issues such as family dynamics, the patriarchal nature of our society, myths and misconceptions about child sexual abuse, child sexuality, and power relationships between children and adults.

While law enforcement can and should be aware of these issues, they are quite rightly matters for wider social debate. Law enforcement agencies cannot hope to address the full extent of this phenomenon in isolation. Child sex offending is a community problem requiring a broadly-based social and community response. There are no easy solutions.

Contributions to this volume include historical perspectives and the contemporary social framework, covered by Associate Professor Simon Petrie; the concept of childhood and child sexuality by Dr Juliette Goldman and Ms Carol Ronken; the portrayal of child sexual abuse in the media, as discussed by Dr Chris Goddard and Ms Bernadette Saunders; and the consequences of child sexual abuse for its victims, outlined by Dr Michael Dunne and Ms Margot Legosz. Professor Patrick Parkinson also provides a detailed analysis of child sex offending in church communities and explores the significant features of offending in this setting.

The views expressed in this collection are not necessarily the views of the Crime Commission. However, if this volume serves to spark public debate and give momentum to efforts directed at necessary reform of fundamental social structures, then it will have achieved a great deal.

A truly inter-disciplinary approach to a project such as this is a vital part of improving law enforcement approaches to this, and other, pressing law enforcement issues. The QCC would therefore like to extend thanks to those individuals who contributed their time and effort to this publication, and we look forward to further collaborations with the academic community in the future.

T. F. Carmody SC
Crime Commissioner

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Historical and contemporary social setting

Associate Professor Simon Petrie

Introduction

It is important to state from the outset that paedophilia as a social phenomenon is both emotive and complex. It is emotive to the extent that at times, as some researchers have found to their personal cost (e.g. Brongersma, cited in Randall 1992; O'Carroll 1980), it is impossible if not dangerous to attempt to establish a discourse on the subject. Moreover, it is clear that although there has been a conspiracy of silence about paedophilia in the past, it is equally clear that as with other related phenomena such as child sexual abuse there has been no single silence (Smart 1998). The debates concerning adult-child sexual relationships have ebbed and flowed across history in the form of a range of discursive struggles. At any given time a particular discourse (e.g. medical, legal, criminological, political) may have held dominance over others. Generally the emotive, often highly politicised reactions to discourses on paedophilia have largely hindered the debate by obstructing or negating research, by cultivating myths or misconceptions, by creating public backlashes or by not allowing the debate to occur at all. As Kenny (1997 p. 24), states:

Informed debate and policy making on paedophilia are hindered by entrenched misconceptions about sex, sexuality and sexual offending. The women's movement, gay right's movement, media hyperbole, ill-informed public opinion, and the zealotry of self-interested health and helping professionals have all contributed to the current controversies surrounding acceptable codes of sexual conduct, particularly as they relate to children.

The discourses on paedophilia can be characterised by a lack of objective, informed, reasoned arguments. The 'silences' are punctuated by moral panics, described by Cohen (1972 p. 9) in the following terms:

A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops and politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved, or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates ... Sometimes the panic is passed over and forgotten, but at other times it has more serious and long term repercussions and it might produce changes in legal and social policy or even in the way in which societies conceive themselves.

The history of discourse relating to paedophilia could easily be summed up by reference to the paragraph above.

Paedophilia is also a complex phenomenon. Attempts to define the term can be compared with the difficulties associated with attempts to define the difference between what counts for erotica and what counts for pornography in the worlds of art or literature. There are many similarities. The difficulties are created, in part, by the confluence or intersection of social ideas, attitudes and values to do with sex, sexuality, gender, law and morality. The difficulties are also created by the complexity of power relationships in a modern, industrialised society. Paedophilia is a social construct. As such it is susceptible to the whims and vagaries of social interaction over time. The term — and the behaviour — will be defined and redefined with changing perceptions of harm or dangerousness; with differing notions of normality, deviance and/or criminality. For example, offences related to paedophilia are framed in terms of other offences such as rape, sexual assault,

indecent dealing or possessing child pornography (James 1996). Paedophilia as a topic is treated warily by the professional community. As recently as 1991, Schmidt states:

Paedophilia is one of the taboo topics in sex research. Sexologists carefully skirt and avoid the subject as much as possible; when they take it up they do so in conformist, moralizing and faint-hearted tones (Schmidt 1991, p. 1).

Children's sexuality provokes particular controversy (Jones 1991), despite documented evidence of the existence of sexual responses and feelings in children (Kinsey 1953) and the widespread occurrence of child and adolescent sexual experiences (Finkelhor 1979).

Arguably, however, paedophilia is not about sex, but about love (Li 1991). This point notwithstanding, central to any understanding of paedophilia is an understanding of sexuality.

According to Li, West and Woodhouse (1990 p. 316) the discourse of sexuality has created the context in which various categorisations are able to occur, such as "the homosexual, the paedophile, the lesbian ... and which mediate the expression of certain relations of power within modern society". The power of definition in any given society at any given time lies with those who own the mechanisms of social control within that society, including the legislature, the polity, the media and so on. Thus, recognition of the category of 'the paedophile' will be determined by the levels of public concern, commitment or political will that exist in that particular context at that time. A preponderance of political will, for example, may result in legislation. A lack of political will may mean that public concerns or the recommendations of official inquiries (such as the 1985 Sturgess Report) go largely disregarded.

Inevitably there is the potential for confusion. Change will occur only over time, usually slowly. Even then, change may occur only if layers of social hypocrisy and denial have been pared away. As Li, West and Woodhouse (1991 p. 316) state:

Liberation will take place through resistance to such categorisation of individuals into fixed sexual identities. Through affirmation of the diffuse nature of human sexuality, and the plurality of sexual expression, the monolithic edifice of 'sexuality' can be subverted.

The very act of defining the term paedophilia, as with other sexually-oriented categorisations such as sexual abuse, is located within "a history of ambivalence and conflict" (Smart 1998). There are dangers inherent in defining the term, or more important, in failing to recognise that 'paedophilia' is not an homogeneous category of explanation of the range of behaviours that adults are capable of manifesting towards children. With these provisos in mind, and for the purposes of this paper, paedophilia will be recognised and discussed as a form of sexual behaviour by an adult (however defined) towards or involving children (however defined). It is acknowledged that eminent writers in the field (e.g. Plummer 1991), on occasions choose not to use the term at all on the basis that it is misleading. It is also acknowledged that to be a paedophile *per se* is not a crime. As James (1996 p. 2) points out, there is "no common law or statutory definition in Australia of the word or the related word paedophilia".

This paper will focus upon the historical and social antecedents of paedophilia. It will include consideration of various theoretical perspectives on adult-child sexual relationships, sexuality,

sexual abuse and attitudes toward sexual activity. The paper will also include an examination of the myths and misconceptions associated with sexual abuse or adult–child sexual relations, as well as consideration of the issue of the ‘backlash movement’.

Central to this paper will be the hypothesis that the discourses on paedophilia in the Queensland context have been sporadic, unfocused and inconsistent. Discussion of the issue has resulted in little change, either to institutional perspectives or practice or to the fundamental structures of society. Where change does occur it tends to be institutional (e.g. to police practice and procedure) rather than structural (e.g. to social constructions of masculinity).

Theoretical models

There is little evidence to suggest that a single model, no matter how sophisticated, can subsume all theories and be found to be applicable to all cases of adult–child sexual contact.

As with criminality, a range of theories has been advanced to explain paedophilia; as with criminality, a single, all-embracing, all-encompassing theory remains a fanciful proposition, not least because neither crime nor paedophilia are unitary phenomena. Nevertheless, the range of theories of explanation that have been proposed span a broad spectrum of disciplines from psychoanalysis to sociology; from the medical to the legal; from the family system perspective to feminism. All are worthy of consideration, bearing in mind that at the heart of many of these approaches lies the proposition that heterosexuality is the norm and that, in particular, this is characterised by the attraction of an adult to an adult partner of the opposite sex, with genital orgasm the focus of sexual activity.

Sex can be viewed, according to Weeks (1989 p. 2) as:

a driving, instinctual force whose characteristics are built into the biology of the human animal, which shapes human institutions and whose will must force its way out, either in the form of direct sexual expression or, if blocked, in the form of perversions or neuroses.

In this way, paedophilia can be viewed as representing one form of perversion (paraphilia) or deviance from the norm. In the psychoanalytic literature, sexual perversions or deviations are generally traced to developmental difficulties in childhood. In particular, the Oedipus complex is central to psychoanalytical perspectives that view perversions as the effort to contain intense incestuous desires. Thus, it is possible to view all paraphilias as ‘a flight from incest’, or to view them as the product of emotional immaturity, the inability to love or narcissistic inversion. The emphasis is either upon the inability of the male to find sexual satisfaction in an adult relationship and thus to seek that satisfaction with children, or on the male who is narcissistically in love with his former youthful self. Either way, the emphasis is upon the development of the male child in a male-dominated world. Psychoanalytical theories have been subject to much criticism from feminists for failing to acknowledge sufficiently the patriarchal nature of Western society, for overemphasis of Freudian analysis and for its conservative formulations generally.

The medical discourse pathologises the paedophile. In this context, paedophilia is seen as a disease in which paraphilia are the symptoms. Paedophiles are people with psychological

disorders although, interestingly, it has been described as a disease of the morals rather than a disease of the mind (Li, West & Woodhouse 1990). This last point notwithstanding, paedophilia is viewed as a medical problem with either a physiological or a genetic base. By describing paedophilia as a disease, the medical discourse is framed around the search for 'cures' that will stop the disease from spreading, as well as return the individual to a 'normal' state. Treatment is the basis of any action and various cures are proposed for paedophilia ranging from surgical castration to drug therapy.

The physiological approach to an understanding of paedophilia is centred on neuroendocrinological explanations since it is believed that paedophilia, like homosexuality is caused by hormonal imbalances. The genetic approach asserts that paedophilia is best understood in terms of innately determined behaviour characteristics. Either way, the medical discourse on paedophilia is fundamentally flawed. It is too simplistic to talk of paedophilia as a disease. While it is not unreasonable to suggest that human behaviours are associated with physiological or genetic triggers, the degree of association is not altogether clear. Nor does an understanding of the triggers provide a complete and/or satisfactory explanation of the behaviours. As Li, West and Woodhouse (1990 p. 193) state:

correlation between a particular physiological state ... and paedophilic activities might not lead to any understanding of the human experience subsumed under the term 'paedophile'!

The major disadvantage of the medical discourse lies in the reification of paedophilia as a disease; that paedophilia is something that can be 'caught' and equally can be 'cured' through 'treatment'. As with psychoanalytical theories, the medical discourse denies the realities of the social world and is as flawed in its explanations of paedophilia as it is in its explanations of homosexuality or criminality.

The psychological discourse has focused as much on personality disorder as it has upon behavioural explanations in which sexual deviation is viewed as sexual response to deviant stimuli through repeated association of the two. Thus, paedophilia can be explained as "a generalised and life-long inability to form emotional attachment to adult peers" (Li, West & Woodhouse 1990 p. 195). This inability becomes the cause of the development of paraphilias which are in turn reinforced and maintained by sexual contact, often repeated sexual contact, with children. The choice is children because children are less threatening than adults and more submissive or compliant.

The dominance of behaviourist perspectives lies not so much in terms of explanations of paedophilia as in the development of programs of treatment. The over-psychologised view of social issues has been translated into 'treatment' programs ranging from aversion therapy to social skills training. There is little evidence yet available to point to the success of such programs, but at the same time, little has been offered by way of alternatives within, say, correctional settings. In the same way, the psychological perspective has developed the pseudo-scientific approach of profiling and/or personality traits classifications. Li, West and Woodhouse (1990 pp. 198–199) point to the work of Gephard et al. (1965) and of Groth (Groth 1978; Groth & Birnbaum 1979; Groth & Burgess 1977) in developing typologies from groups of known sex offenders. Other work has produced classifications of personality traits of sex offenders such as paedophiles, concluding that the three most common categories are the 'fixated offender', the 'regressed offender' and the

'sociopathic offender'. But the work in both areas is based only upon known sex offenders. Despite its intricacies, it suffers from closeness of focus, and ultimately, by their own admission, researchers are compelled to indicate that "paedophiles remain an enigma" (Langevin 1983).

With the upsurge of interest in child abuse, particularly child sexual abuse, in the late 1970s and 1980s, a child protection discourse developed with a notion of family systems at the heart of theoretical explanations. This emerged from the growing realisation that sexual abuse of children most often occurs in or around a family setting, although as with other categories of adult sexual relationships, the net widened in terms of definitions so that incest became a short-hand term for almost every example of intra-familial adult-child sexual contact. This is not altogether surprising. As O'Sullivan (1991) comments, earlier definitions of incest focused upon the belief that relationships could only be defined as incestuous if sexual intercourse occurred between blood relatives. Such definitions failed to take into consideration the changing nature of the family, particularly in terms of blended families, step-families and adoption. A more comprehensive definition is provided by Schechter and Roberge (1976) quoted by O'Sullivan (1991, p. 4) with incest defined as being:

the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual activities that they do not fully comprehend, are unable to give informed consent to, and that violate the social taboos of family roles.

This is less restrictive than other definitions because it avoids terms such as 'adult' and 'sexual intercourse' and acknowledges that incest may occur between siblings, but it fails to acknowledge any notion of force or coercion. Finkelhor (1984) argues that the terms 'family sex abuse' or 'intra-familial sexual abuse' are more appropriate than the term incest, while Breines and Gordon (1983) argue for the use of the term 'family violence'.

Regardless of the term being utilised, the focus is upon family (however defined) and that the dynamics of family relationships are in a constant state of flux. In the family system theory, incest is an example of dysfunctional patterns of relationships in which the dynamic equilibrium of the family has been maintained, albeit by altering the sexual relationships in the family unit, usually from adult male ('father') – adult female ('mother') to adult male ('father') – other female ('daughter').

The usefulness of this perspective lies in its revelations about and analysis of family dynamics. The 'chaotic family', for example, may be characterised by such traits as lack of impulse control, lack of judgement ability, guilty conscience, lack of ability for interpersonal intimacy, manipulation, self-indulgence and so on. The 'endogamous' family (Rosenfeld 1979; Will 1983; O'Sullivan 1991) may be characterised by impaired marital relationship, overt paternal domination, maternal abdication of responsibility or fear of family disintegration. The family relationships in this setting are conducted and concealed under a cloak of social respectability. These categorisations and classifications reveal the potential of the family unit to create the circumstances in which intra-familial sexual relationships can occur, to recreate the circumstances (intergenerational incest) or to foster a climate in which paedophilic incest specifically or paedophilic tendencies can emerge. The male experiences of childhood are central to the development of sexual proclivities. The 'chaotic', the 'endogamous', or the dysfunctional family settings provide socialising influences which may preclude or reduce the likelihood of the

development of 'normal' sexuality. More likely, as Finkelhor (1984) has described, the differences between men and women in socialisation patterns may go some way towards explaining the reasons why more men than women sexually abuse children. For example, men are less likely to learn to distinguish between sexual and non-sexual forms of affection and do so later and less fully than women. Men are socialised into the view that 'heterosexuality success' is more important to their gender identities than it is for women. That is, men are more likely than women to view sex as a means of confirming or reconfirming identity, even if the sexual partner is a child. Men are socialised more into accepting sex for its own sake rather than sex in the context of a relationship as part of that relationship. Men are socialised into the notions that appropriate sexual partners should be younger and smaller than themselves. This is very much the hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987) that views heterosexuality as the dominant and exclusive categorisation of male sexuality, emphasises male domination and women's subordination and reflects the sexual division of labour in both the private and the public spheres. In this context, the idealised male sex-role is built upon contempt for women, and non-heterosexuals and focuses on success in terms of wealth, power or status rather than in terms of meaningful and open relationships.

The importance of the family system perspective, as with the psychological discourse, lies at the therapeutic end of the cause-effect continuum. This perspective allows the focus of treatment to shift from the individual pathology of the offender to include 'the victim' as well as the 'dysfunctional family', in which the child sexual abuse occurs. A family focus provides the opportunity for child protection practitioners to develop the skills that identify, monitor and 'treat' cases of child sexual abuse. A family focus encourages inter-agency approaches to solutions and allows for each of the individuals involved directly or indirectly in the abuse — male adult, female adult, child victim and so on — to come to terms, in appropriate ways, with their role in the abusive situation.

The family system perspective is useful in terms of revealing the complexities of interpersonal relationships and roles within family settings that may contribute to the development of sexual abuse or even to the development of paedophilic tendencies. It is however the feminist perspective that has been most useful in recent times in deconstructing the role that gender, family and patriarchy have played in the development of child sexual abuse generally and paedophilia in particular.

It is important to return initially to a recurring theme. Just as there is no single silence, no single definition of paedophilia, no single explanation of paedophile behaviour, so there is a plurality of feminisms (Delmar 1989). It has been suggested above that hegemonic masculinity is a useful concept not least because it recognises that there is not a single masculinity. Within the range of feminist theorising, however, there is a degree of consensus that social life is, in every aspect, organised in terms of male domination. Thus, paedophilia is one of a range of intra- and extra-familial adult-child contacts brought about by patriarchal sexual oppression.

Drawing upon this perspective, the sexual abuse of children can be viewed as a consequence, in part, of the dominant male attitude that females and children are men's property (Brownmiller 1975). The family is the key site of patriarchal oppression. There is evidence to indicate that relationships, in particular issues of dependency, are experienced differently by men and women as a result of differential Oedipal development in early childhood. Gilligan (1982, p. 8) states:

for boys and men, separation and individuation are critically tied to gender identity since separation from the mother is essential for the development of masculinity. For girls and women, issues of femininity or feminine identity do not depend on separation from the mother or on the progress of individuation.

Since masculinity is defined through separation while femininity is defined through attachment, male gender identity is threatened by lack of separation.

Gilligan asserts that as a consequence of these differential experiences in early childhood, mature men and mature women have different moral frameworks within which they operate.

Men are more concerned with issues of domination and subordination; with issues of ownership and rights subject to public and rational assessment. Much of their behaviour is an extension of the attitudes, values and ideology inculcated, supported and reinforced by a patriarchal State. There is clear evidence (for example, in the findings of the *Commission of Inquiry into the Abuse of Children in Institutions*) that paternalistic policies on the part of the State in relation to child protection matters created situational contexts in which sexual abuse could and did occur.

Some feminist theorists reject the family system perspective because too much of the blame for sexual abuse has been apportioned to mothers and insufficient focus being given to men's culpability and full responsibility for child sexual abuse. The 'facts' would appear to be incontrovertible: virtually all perpetrators of child sexual abuse are male; the majority of victims are young girls; most mothers in families in which abuse occurs were themselves victims of abuse; and most victims and many mothers are too frightened to complain owing to their complete subordination to the control of adult male perpetrators. There is also considerable concern among feminists over the role of 'family' in the social construction of sexuality, marriage and motherhood and thus the oppression of women through a gendered form of social regulation. To reject 'family' altogether as an appropriate social structure is to deny some of the realities of social existence. It is too simplistic, as is the notion that all women are the victims of patriarchy or patriarchy's law. For some feminists (e.g. Smart 1992, p. 6) a more appropriate view of women is to see them as "social agents who negotiate law and related forms of social control rather than simply being its victims". This is not to deny the male domination of the State and organs of social control, but to acknowledge the power of the individual to intercede and to moderate or mitigate these influences.

The development of feminist perspectives has been important in a number of ways, not least by highlighting questions in relation to masculinity. Male sexuality, male sex drives and the development of male heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or transsexual identities are still not sufficiently understood. In this uncertain context the 'causes' of paedophilia remain problematic.

It is not my intention to understate or underestimate the importance of each of the theoretical perspectives outlined in this paper in explanation of paedophilia. Space does not permit a fuller exploration, but suffice to say that each has an important dimension to contribute to an overall understanding of the phenomenon, without being a total explanation in and of itself.

The key to understanding the possible causes of paedophilia lies as much in determining the meaning ascribed to the term as it does in understanding that no single explanation is available.

What does become evident is that a great deal more research is required. The research needs to be interdisciplinary in its approach. The medical, psychoanalytic and psychological discourses are too narrow in focus; the family system perspective and feminist discourse add considerably to any understanding of paedophilia but again leave gaps. There are two further areas of discourse which have had some impact upon the debate. The first is the legal discourse; the second is the discourse on sexuality. The two are linked and are discussed in the next section.

Sex, politics and society: the history of paedophilia

In order to understand social attitudes, values or ideas in relation to child sex offending, it is necessary to consider the specific phenomenon within a range of sexual phenomena as defined by both culture and time. For writers such as Weeks (1989) in consideration of homosexuality, O'Sullivan (1991) in consideration of incest, Collins (1991) in consideration of bestiality and Sandfort, Brongersma and Van Naerssen (1991) in consideration of man-boy relationships, it is critical that these phenomena be considered as part of a history of sexuality in which cultural forces continually shape and reshape them. It is the cultural forces that are of specific interest. Central to an understanding of cultural forces is historiographic analysis which allows for consideration of both the formulation and the understanding of phenomena such as paedophilia.

The 'history' of paedophilia is both illustrative and indicative. It is illustrative in the sense that it reveals much of social attitudes and values generally towards sex, sexuality and sexual relationships through time. Indeed, for Plummer (1991) central to any understanding of child sexual abuse and/or paedophilia is an understanding of childhood sexualities. It is indicative in the sense that historic landmarks are denoted by moral panics and political debate which momentarily subsume social, legal or medical discourses. The two will be dealt with in turn.

Before doing so, it is worth considering the framework provided by Weeks (1991) to examine the social construction of the 'sexed individual'. Weeks (1991, p. 12) is interested in the variety of forces that have shaped and constructed 'modern sexuality' ranging "from the familial and extra-familial forces that shape sexual and gender orientation at the level of the individual to the social and industrial transformations that have altered class relations".

While not exhaustive, Weeks suggests five sets of factors. First, kinship and family system, which includes changes over time to patterns of family interrelationships, kinship and the organisation of the family and the household. Weeks (1991, p. 12) states:

Changes in the organisation of inheritance, the importance assigned to primogeniture, shifts in the rules of exogamy and in the permitted degrees of marriages, in the construction of family forms in ideology and in welfare practices, the class differences in family and household patterns, the shaping of sex and gender divisions; all have to be taken in to account in the organisation of sexuality.

It is within the context of the family that the construction of 'sexed individuals' begins, is established and is reinforced. But just as 'child', 'parent' or 'childhood' are not all-embracing, homogeneous categories, so the term 'family' has come to have a plurality of meanings and understandings.

The second category of factors are economic and social changes. Clearly, changes to patterns of kinship and family can only be understood in terms of “long-term social transformations” (Weeks 1991, p. 13). Finch’s study of class and sexuality (1993), Reiger’s study of sexuality and morality in the family (1985), and Donzelot’s study of family and class (1979), are examples of writing that position ‘family’ within social change — primarily changes in the economy and consequently and subsequently, social change. For Weeks (1991, p. 13):

Changes in the organisation of the economy have affected the relative social situation of men and women, shifted their relations of dominance and subordination and altered the significance, materially and ideologically, of the family.

From social and economic change, Weeks suggests consideration of changing forms of social regulation, including the State, the Church and other organs of social control that seek to influence sexuality through the regulation of marriage, divorce, ages of consent, sexual unorthodoxy and other matters. In this category are included informal as well as formal means of control such as peer-group pressure.

The fourth category is what Weeks (1991, p. 14) describes as the “political moment” — the moral panics referred to earlier in this paper. Finally, Weeks (1991, p. 15) suggests that “the history of sexuality is as much a history of an avoidance of, or resistance to, the moral code, as of simple acceptance and internalisation”. In this category can be included consideration of the politicisation of sexual minorities. With this framework in mind the history of paedophilia can be explored, acknowledging that such history is as much about the social construction of the concept of ‘child’, of ‘sexuality’, of ‘sexual abuse’ and of ‘social deviance’ as it is about the single, unitary phenomenon called ‘paedophilia’.

Some writers (e.g. Krafft-Ebing 1965; Ford & Beach 1951; and Sandfort, Brongersma & Van Naerssen 1991) have pointed to the existence of historical and anthropological work that details examples of intimate involvement between men and boys. That is, at various times in history, the extent and tolerance of the notion of children as objects of sexual desire has varied. Both De Mause (1974) and Foucault (1980; 1984; 1985) have detailed the codes of sexuality in ancient Greek society, indicating not that such society was populated simply by bisexual or homosexual paedophiles, but that in the male-dominated society of the time, the purest form of love was the bond between an older free man and a pubescent free boy. The concerns about sexuality were in terms of those who played an active role in sex and those who were passive; about those who were moderate in their practices of sex and those who were immoderate or orgiastic, with moderation seen as being directly related to good health and virtue.

There are strong similarities between the sexual moral code of Greek civilisation and that of its Roman counterpart some centuries later. Sullivan (1992, p. 22) suggests that “the three standards that governed Roman sexual activity were free love, as opposed to exclusive marriage; sexual activity, as opposed to sexual passivity; and freedom, as opposed to slavery”. Sullivan continues (1992, p. 22):

The standards give some picture of the preference for boys and of the reduced interest in women, who were expected to be passive.

The last point is important for a number of reasons. First, that the descriptions are largely of a particular group of Greeks or Romans, that is the ruling class. The ruling classes of the time were specifically, exclusively male-dominated. There was little or no concern exhibited about the sexual practices of the working class not least because as Finch (1993) argues, the working class was not deemed sufficiently important for consideration.

Secondly, society had already decreed a passive role for women in matters of sexuality. It is not unreasonable to suggest that, if this was the case, men turned their sexual attentions towards children, particularly boys, because little or no concern would be voiced by women.

Thirdly, throughout history, there has been ambivalence about the role of sex in social interaction. There are strong arguments to suggest that sex was a means of power in ancient Greece and in Roman times; as a means of exploitative oppression of women, of slaves and of children. The record is not expansive. Sex then, as sex now, was not a topic that was addressed directly or subject to much public discussion.

Changes to notions of child sex and sexuality came with the introduction of Christianity, but not because Christianity frowned on the notion of sex with children. Indeed, as Kilpatrick(1992) has detailed, sex with children under the age of seven was deemed “inconsequential”. Christianity was concerned with the form of family, with the technical violation of the impediment of affinity (or incest) rather than with the consequences for children. More important, Christianity condemned homosexuality on religious and moral grounds. At the same time, the notions of women and children as property became entrenched in both Talmudic and English canon law. In Talmudic law “marriage was the purchase of a daughter from her father; prostitution was a selling and reselling of a female by her master for sexual service and rape was the theft of a girl’s virginity that could be compensated by payment to her father” (Kilpatrick 1992, p. 4).

Christian attitudes towards sex, sexuality and marriage took many centuries to evolve as social norms. During these times, the Church assumed the role of social, moral and sexual watch-dog. There is evidence, for example, of careful watchfulness being employed in relation to young boys entering monasteries. It must be noted, however, that the watchfulness was employed as much to protect the boys from self-abuse (masturbation) as it was to avoid sexual exploitation by adults, particularly homosexual exploitation. Rush (1980) notes that convents became “dumping grounds” for unwanted, unmarried female children and that, on occasions, Rome was forced to issue edicts calling for the punishment of ‘sexual solicitors’ taking advantage of their religious office.

Increasingly, the Church and the State became one where views about sex and sexuality were concerned. In the eighteenth century in Western Europe, the Church’s eternal vigilance with regard to homosexuality, together with the concept of property in the emerging capitalist economies of the various States of the time, promoted the concept of childhood as a distinct state of human development to be guarded, protected or cherished. There were other forces at work. As Sullivan (1992, p. 24) notes:

References to the sexual use of children by servants in the eighteenth century were followed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by a preoccupation with saving children from becoming

victims of their own abuse. The war on onanism was at the nexus of a series of important power relations. At the centre was the family, which was changing during the rise of industrial capitalism. The medical authorities, who sought to establish an important public health concern within their area of expertise, were supplanted by the educational authorities, who saw it as their duty to protect developing minds from pollution by self-abuse.

From this perspective, the concept of childhood and the concept of child protection arose as much from the desire on the part of the State to curb “the sexual feelings and sexual precocity in children” that led “to self-abuse and self-pollution” (Kilpatrick 1992, p. 9) as from the desire to protect children from the predations of others. This, despite the growing body of evidence to indicate that children generally were ill-treated and exploited, physically and sexually (De Mause 1974).

Thus, the legal discourse on child sexual issues emerged from two entirely different directions. Firstly, from the moral puritan stance of protecting children from self-abuse; and secondly, from the pursuit of homosexuality, as the social purity campaigns of the latter part of the nineteenth century in England gathered pace. Homosexuality, and interestingly, prostitution, were viewed as the products of undifferentiated male desire or lust. Legislative attempts to halt the activities of those who corrupted young girls also extended to homosexual behaviour. The efforts were aimed at controlling the uncontrolled lusts of certain men, while at the same time seeking to preserve the sanctity of the sexual bond between adults in marriage. Foucault (1980, p. 101) states:

There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and sub-species of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty and ‘psychic hermaphroditism’ made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of ‘perversity’.

It is not difficult to understand the reasons that led to paedophilia being included in the catch- all of areas of ‘perversity’. Nor is it difficult to understand the ways in which socio-political, legal attitudes created at such times endure well past the events of the time. Attempts were made to extend the criminal law to cover various forms of adult-child sexual contact. For example, the campaigns in England and Wales in the 1920s focused on prevention, punishment and process, but it was not difficult for the legal profession and the judiciary “to evade any real action to improve their practices or to facilitate legal changes” (Smart 1998).

There is a danger, however, in utilising snapshots in time to attempt to understand the complexities of change. The literature on sexuality tends to focus on three particular eras: the first is the Greco-Roman tradition; the second, loosely labelled ‘the Enlightenment’, is the period of history in Western Europe leading to the rise of capitalism and the rapid development of knowledge in the nineteenth century in areas such as medicine, science and education; the third era is that of the ‘permissive age’ of the 1960s and 1970s. Marwick (1998, p. 1) has described the sixties as follows:

for some it is the golden age, for others a time when the old secure framework of morality, authority, and discipline disintegrated.

After the Second World War the growing economic prosperity of Western, industrialised nations created the environment in which intense debates emerged at all levels of society. ‘Youth’ — a

hitherto little acknowledged sector of society — emerged as an ‘economic bloc’ of some significance. The label, once affixed, raised passions in older people and in youth themselves about their role in society. This ‘movement’ resurrected all the old debates about childhood and should be understood accordingly; that the concept of ‘adolescent’ or ‘youth’ (as with the concept of ‘childhood’) has been discontinuously constructed across a number of discursive struggles, without a linear history nor a clearly demarcated present. Legal, educational, medical, psychological and sociological discourses emerged, converged and separated. During this time the development of feminist thinking, the advent of post-modernist critiques and the emergence of the child protection discourse called into question not only matters of family and family life, but also the discourse of sexuality. Wide-ranging debates on homosexuality and prostitution produced hasty law reform which was often inept or inadequate. Nevertheless, the social debate was in full swing and the decriminalisation of homosexuality (e.g. in South Australia in 1975) was just around the corner. The point to be made in this context, however, is that there was no single uniform approach to such reforms; nor did they occur in all places simultaneously.

In the Queensland context, for example, the social, political and sexual conservatism of more than thirty years of National Party rule (religious fundamentalism, traditional ‘family’ values, paternalistic policies) resisted change or, even more so, actively fought to maintain the social barricades against the tide of ‘permissiveness’ sweeping the Western world. Perceived immorality on the part of ‘the young’, the advent of the AIDS pandemic, homosexuality, sexual freedom and increases in the availability of pornography, however defined, were all linked together and viewed as visible evidence of the moral decay of the social fabric. In this context, legislation was utilised as a blunt axe. Sex and sexuality were not discussed openly, although a growing demand for the end to ignorance led to an orchestrated campaign for the introduction of sex education into schools.

The dangers of even this development and the direction that it took are the matter of some debate (see for example Tait 1993), but suffice it to say that, for whatever reasons, some sectors of Queensland society at the time saw the need for a general reform of the social climate. The issue, of course, becomes one of determining which ‘reforms’ are appropriate. The relaxing of access to pornography, for example, may be seen by some as a mark of a more ‘sophisticated’ society, whereas to others it becomes a mark of moral decay. In such debates it is not difficult for the issue of paedophilia to become obscured. As will be discussed, the moral panics discernible in the Queensland context were instrumental in raising the public profile of the phenomenon. The tenor of the debate, however, did little to demystify paedophilia. Indeed, it is possible to argue that the various myths or misconceptions that have arisen about paedophilia owe their origins to the social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s.

Myths and misconceptions

Just as it is important to differentiate between the various forms of sexual and non-sexual activity that may constitute a working definition of paedophilia, so it is necessary to examine the myths and misconceptions that have arisen about the phenomenon with these differentiations in mind. This is not a straightforward task for myths and misconceptions not only vary across time and from place to place, but also on occasions serve to obfuscate the discourse of the time. Hewitt

(1986) has examined the myths and misconceptions associated with sexual abuse, some or all of which may be relevant in the context of the debate concerning paedophilia.

Hewitt identifies ten myths and while all ten are worthy of consideration in this section, examination of the first provides a salutary warning. The first myth presented is that children fantasise and/or lie about sexual assault. For Hewitt, there would appear to be no evidence to substantiate this claim. Hewitt quotes Giraretto (1981), the Director of the Child Sexual Abuse Treatment Program in California and someone with a long involvement in the treatment of children and their families involved in sexual abuse, as saying that “very few children, no more than two or three per thousand, have ever been found to exaggerate or to invent claims of sexual molestation”. There is little or no evidence to suggest that children are unable to distinguish between fact and fantasy. Indeed, children may understate rather than overstate their experiences (Rush 1980).

The ontogenesis of such mythology lies in the perceptions of adults. In the adult world, little credence is given to the statements of children. This says much of the power relationship between adults and children. It also says much of the ignorance of adults in matters of child development. It is possible that the denial and/or guilt of adults plays a part in patronising children, which leads to them being ignored or disbelieved. Equally, some adults also tend to romanticise childhood.

But Randall (1992) offers a completely different account of this myth. Randall (1992 p. 194) confesses that:

... my mind boggles at the sheer naivety of those who claim that children never tell lies about their sexual encounters, yet I have heard this statement repeated constantly in television documentaries and discussions on child abuse.

Randall suggests that those who argue that children could not possibly possess sufficient knowledge to invent credible accounts of abuse have lost sight of, or do not consider the possibility, that children today have far greater access to knowledge than they did. The children of today have access to the Internet, to television, to pornographic videos and magazines, all of which were probably not accessible to children thirty or forty years ago.

These contradictory approaches create the danger of misleading, or worse still, important messages being ignored or down-played. For example, experience has taught professionals in the field that children should be believed in these matters. More important, perhaps, it is essential that adults at least listen to what children have to say, both for the sake of investigation or evidence or for the sake of the child struggling with guilt and self-blame.

This is not to suggest that children are incapable of fantasising about such matters or never tell untruths; it does indicate that all too frequently adults have controlled the world of the child to the point of determining what it is that the child may think or say or interpreting the thoughts of children in a way that is convenient or comfortable.

There is another important aspect to this issue. Some writers (e.g. Scutt 1991) have indicated that the view that women and children are not to be believed in cases involving sexual offences is firmly entrenched in systems of justice. Scutt (1991, p. 137) concludes:

That a system fashioned by male courts so strongly adheres to the position that children and women are so untrustworthy where accusations of sexual abuse are in question, when it has no logical or factual basis, gives little option but to conclude that fear of the truth underlies it.

There are two related myths or misconceptions in this context. The first is that children are unable to distinguish between right and wrong. In some cases this may appear to be true, particularly if the child has been socialised into accepting as the 'norm' certain behaviours that society perceives differently. But equally, it is true to say that children can differentiate between right and wrong from an early age. The problems arise, particularly in this context, in situations in which the adult world is unsure about what constitutes right from wrong or controls the definitions.

Second, that children collude in their own downfalls, by being seductive or provocative. This 'invites' adults to 'assault' them. Hewitt (1986) suggests that this is classic 'blaming-the-victim' syndrome — and in some circumstances, it may well be. This approach by adults is symptomatic once again of the power relations between adults and children, more specifically the powerlessness of children. Adults retain the power of interpreting, explaining and labelling behaviour. There is a caveat. While children may experiment with behaviour, "adults retain the choice in determining how they will respond to such behaviour". This raises issues of a different kind. There is evidence to suggest that some children are capable of seductive, provocative behaviour (the Lolita syndrome).

Randall (1992, p. 180) has suggested that one of the taken-for-granted assumptions on which the current literature on child sexual abuse is based is that:

If a prepubertal child begins to behave in an overtly sexual manner towards other children or adults, this is an almost certain sign that he or she has been sexually assaulted at some time in the past.

This is related very closely to the notion that children cannot be believed in matters relating to sex and sexuality. The inference is that 'normal' children never behave in seductive, sexually provocative ways nor 'indulge' in sexual activity. This, again, is more a reflection of prevailing social norms than a matter of reality. Studies (e.g. Virkunnen 1981; Schultz 1973; Ingram 1979) have indicated that children can act provocatively or seductively towards adults. There is also evidence to indicate that children can and do initiate sexual activity with adults (Robinson 1990; Ingram 1979).

A further misconception is that sexual intercourse between people who are under the legal age of consent is abnormal. As Brongersma (1984) has suggested, it is 'society' that engendered the notion that it had no use for a child's sexuality and, by extension of argument, that children did not possess any sexuality. From this derives the myth that all children are "asexual, pure, innocent". This is indeed mythical. Children are capable of sexual thoughts from a relatively early age, not least determined by experience. Children are capable of mirroring adult behaviour. The dilemma lies in determining which comes first: sexuality, sexual thought and involvement in

sexual activity as part of a 'natural' course of personal development in children; or the willingness of children to submit to the demands of adults; or the exerting of power of adults over children.

These myths say much about adult sensitivities and moral hypocrisy. They serve to highlight the level of discomfort that adults experience in discussing matters of sexuality generally, as well as the specifics of child sexuality. They reflect a lack of willingness by the adult world to acknowledge that 'such things exist' or to provide explanations of such behaviours. There is another dimension to these myths that becomes worthy of consideration. It is what Pithouse (1987) describes as the 'occupational impotence' of professionals working in the field of child sexual abuse.

Hooper (1992, p. 69) states:

Where child sexual abuse is concerned the sources of occupational impotence are numerous: the tightrope social workers must walk between criticism for unwarranted intervention in the family on the one hand and failure to protect children on the other, difficulties of gaining direct access to children and to evidence of abuse, uncertainty about both the definition of abuse and often about the best solution, an inadequate knowledge base to predict accurately the risk to children that leaving them in the care of a particular adult involves, the relatively low status of social workers in the professional networks involved in child protection compared with the medical profession and police, the inadequacy of the criminal justice system, the lack of resources both for alternative accommodation for children and therapeutic work with individuals and families, and the reluctance of some individuals and families to participate in what services are offered.

Modern society is characterised by a professional penchant for labelling, at the heart of which lies the blaming of clients for the situations in which they (the clients) find themselves. Thus labels such as the 'dysfunctional family', the 'sick individual', the 'paedophile' become a method of stereotyping that serves to distance the professional from the client whilst at the same time providing an umbrella term that disguises lack of understanding of or ignorance about the complexities of the behaviours, processes or phenomena under consideration.

Myths and misconceptions are created and fed by stereotyping and shorthand explanations.

In similar vein, the myths that 'it is the stranger that is the danger', that 'the offenders are always dirty old men' and that 'offenders are sick, insane men' must be considered. Again, these ideas indicate much about adult perceptions of sexual abuse or assault and the conspiracies of silence that have evolved around such phenomena. Increasing research through the 1970s and 1980s, for example, clearly indicated that children are more likely to become sexually involved with people to whom they are acquainted than with complete strangers. This is not to say that children are entirely safe from strangers.

The sexual predator may strike indiscriminately, but this merely serves to highlight the distinctions between 'love for children', 'sexual activity with children' and sexual assault against children. Children are made vulnerable by adult-child relationships in which they lack power. They are made vulnerable by the controls that adults exert over children ("do as I say; do it now; and do it without question"). They are made vulnerable by lack of information or ignorance, for example, in dealing with behaviour from adults that makes them feel uncomfortable. The notions that sexual offenders are 'dirty old men' or are 'sick' or 'insane' also fall largely under the heading of ignorance and stereotyping. Groth & Birnbaum (1979) found that a majority of convicted sexual

offenders were under 35 years of age and that only a small percentage of offenders are psychopathic, sociopathic, schizophrenic or psychotic. This highlights the danger of classifying all sexual offenders as paedophiles (Righton 1981).

The myths concerning paedophilia say much about the dangers of social stereotyping. For example, the notion that children are at greater risk from homosexual adults than heterosexual adults indicates more about levels of homophobia in society than it does about the realities of the situation. There is no evidence to support the assumption that homosexual males engage in greater levels of sexual activity with children than heterosexual males. To the contrary, Groth (1978) found that of a sample of convicted child molesters, 51 per cent selected only female children; 51 per cent showed no persistent sexual preference for children; and of this latter group 83 per cent were exclusively heterosexual.

McConaghy (1998) suggests that there are many more heterosexual than homosexual paedophiles, and that in virtually all studies of the prevalence of paedophilia in community samples there are nearly twice as many female victims identified as male victims. The issues that are raised in this context are questions about the understanding and levels of awareness about heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality generally in the community including the much greater media and legal attention given to forms of so-called sexual deviance.

The notion calls into question levels of ignorance, misunderstanding and lack of understanding of matters of sexuality. The debate is characterised by moralistic, paternalistic attitudes, values and even laws that, far from protecting citizens from harm, create situations in which harm is caused.

The issue of harm is another that has given rise to myths and misconceptions about paedophilia and which may do more to reflect the state of confusion in the child abuse literature than advance understanding of the phenomenon. Hewitt (1986, p. 27) asserts that the myth is that “child sexual assault is not harmful, rather it is the intervention that causes problems for children who are sexually assaulted”. Hewitt’s concern is that the notion of harm caused by intervention becomes a justification for inaction on the part of official agencies. Certainly, there is evidence that the criminal justice system is less than perfect when dealing with cases of sexual abuse or assault, particularly against females (see for example Eastwood 1998), and that the actions of well-meaning professionals can cause severe trauma in children (see for example Butler-Sloss 1988), but Hewitt is more or less silent on the issue of physical, emotional harm to children as participants.

Randall takes a different tack. He asserts that the assumption is that “any kind of sexual activity, however mild, between a child and an adult is invariably harmful for the child” (1992, p. 181). Randall goes to considerable lengths, utilising classifications of type of offences (e.g. penetration, masturbation, no physical contact) and the degree of consensuality (e.g. physical violence/force, use of position of authority, child taking initiative) to categorise cases according to degree of harm and therefore of potential lasting damage to the child.

Children can be damaged physically or psychologically or both as a result of sexual encounters with adults. For example, in extreme cases, the child as victim forced into sexual activity may be murdered by the perpetrator. It is also clear that children may suffer injury or disease, including major diseases such as HIV-AIDS. But at the other end of the spectrum, the work of Powell and Chalkley (1981) in their review of the (then) literature indicates the following:

1. No long lasting negative effects were observed. Only Moses (1932) concluded that early paedophile experience has a lasting negative effect. However, few people now would see anything very odd in masturbation or preoccupation with sex.
2. Children that were disturbed after the event tended to be those who were disturbed before hand.
3. In the case of male children assaulted by a male paedophile, no increase in the incidence of homosexuality was noted.
4. The victims were not always passive in the experience. About one half of the children did not resist the incident or actively encouraged it.

Randall suggests that this is a very different picture to the notion that all incidents of sexual activity between adults and children are always harmful to the child. It is as well to bear in mind the caveat added by Powell and Chalkley that “they are not claiming that sexual assaults never have any harmful consequences”.

A number of important points emerge from this particular debate. First, that there is a lack of research providing conclusive evidence one way or the other about whether sexual interactions between adults and children are always harmful to the children. Secondly, there is evidence to suggest that sexual interactions between adults and children can be and are harmful to children, particularly where force has been used. This is particularly important, for it highlights the dangers inherent in the debate about the definition of the term paedophile. It is important to distinguish between the ‘child-lover’, the ‘timorous, inhibited male’ (West 1955) and the child rapist, child molester or assailant of children who seek to force themselves upon children against their will, and who are using or exploiting children to their own sexual ends. Thirdly, that the debate is likely to be dominated by professionals or campaigners working in the field of child sexual abuse who seek particular goals and who will “try to force their own interpretations onto their subjects, irrespective of any evidence to the contrary” (Randall 1992, p. 193).

Finally, in this section, it is important to give consideration to the myths and misconceptions related to the age differential between adults and children and the relationship of the child to the adult. While the notion of sexual intercourse between people who are under the legal age of consent is considered by some to be a manifestation of abnormality on the part of the child (or children) involved, there is considerable evidence to suggest otherwise. Randall (1992, p. 185) draws upon the anthropological evidence (for example, islanders in the South Pacific) to indicate that “arrangements were made by adults for children to learn sexual techniques long before they reached the age of puberty”. There is also evidence to indicate that some societies are aware of levels of sexual activity between adults and children without becoming unduly concerned (see for example Finch 1993). Ford and Beach (1951) detail sexual activities between adults and children in a large number of societies throughout history and Wilson (1981) suggests in his consideration of the Osborne case in Queensland, that “mothers were often keen to bring their sons to him”. Wilson (1981, p. 22) states:

It should be noted here that paedophiliac literature gives many other examples of mothers who actively encourage a man to have sexual relationships with their sons and treat them as though they were fathers showing their sons the ways of the world.

The legal approach to intergenerational sex is age-oriented. In relation to the English context, Schofield (1980, p. 119) states:

Less than a hundred years ago the age of consent was 13. And yet the age when an adolescent reaches puberty is much lower than it was when the decision was made, following a scandal about child prostitution in 1885, to raise the age of consent to 16.

In regard to the Queensland context, Barber (1977, pp. 96–97) indicates the following:

Under the provisions of the *Offences Against the Person Act 1865*, the age at which a girl could lawfully consent to a male person having carnal knowledge of her was set at 12 years.

Over the years, the lines have shifted in the sand. This is often the result of moral panic engendered by (politically) motivated parties. For example, in 1913 in Queensland, in the run-up to the Parliamentary debate on the introduction of a Bill to increase the age of consent from 14 to 17 years, “rumours began to circulate in Brisbane in mid-1913 telling of alleged kidnappings in the city of young women and girls for the white slave traffic”. The rumours were found subsequently to be groundless (Barber 1977, p. 108), but the moral panic no doubt influenced the debate and the outcome at the time.

There is little or no evidence available to suggest that sexual intercourse between people who are under the prescribed legal age of consent of the time, is harmful to the participants (in a physical or emotional sense) although the socio-legal consequences may be severe.

Backlash mythology

The ‘discovery’ of child abuse in the late 1960s – early 1970s was accompanied by varying levels of media coverage, engendering various degrees of moral panic in outraged, concerned communities. The impact of media coverage was not immediate, nor was it without collusion. Professionals working in the field of child abuse utilised the media to publicise cases in a deliberate campaign to raise awareness, to stimulate debate, to push for appropriate legislation or government policy and to obtain resources. Over time the coverage has spanned the spectrum of media reporting from the concerned to the strident; from the accurate to the inaccurate; from the supportive to the antagonistic; and all shades in between.

At various points in time, usually associated with some particularly bad case of abuse, gruesome murder or large-scale or brutal attacks on children, the media have highlighted and often sensationalised their coverage of the general phenomenon. It is important to note, however, that the media often lack discernment, consistency or understanding in their coverage. Little attention is paid, for example, to the significant differences between forms of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, neglect). All too frequently, one form of abuse is used as a catch-all to include other, albeit related, phenomena. Similarly, the media coverage can be characterised by its lack of depth or informed debate.

It is also possible to pin-point other land-marks in this particular progression. For example, in Queensland, the release of the book *The Man They Called a Monster* (Wilson 1981) brought to public

attention the 'career' of a man, a distinguished court and parliamentary reporter in the Queensland courts and the Parliament, who had had sexual relationships with more than two and a half thousand boys, many of them the sons of the wealthy and the elite of Brisbane. The socio-political climate of the time precluded further investigation, and what was not dismissed out of hand was quietly ignored. Society, at the time, demonised the author of the book rather than pursuing the implications of the findings.

In a similar way, the 1985 Sturgess report into *Sexual Offences against Children and Related Matters* provoked a storm of controversy on its release. The report generated considerable discussion about sex offending and sexual relationships between adults and children, although it also stimulated debate on matters such as homosexuality and pornography. But as with the revelations of the Osborne case, Queensland as a society was not ready, willing or able to cope with such matters. The Sturgess report quietly faded into memory after initially being dismissed as "too idiosyncratic and personal", and then the debate was side-tracked or subverted. The focus was on sexual predators, for example, rather than paedophiles; on male–male sexual relationships; on exploitation. Little or no attention was paid to male–female sexual relationships; to the ongoing sexual exploitation of females; or to the definitions of terms such as abuse, exploitation or even paedophilia.

For all their lack of sustained impact, both the Wilson book and the Sturgess report have to be viewed with the benefit of hindsight. Both emerged at a time when the child protection lobby in Queensland was growing in strength, but was largely confined to those professionals (medical, social work, police) working directly with cases of abuse. Nevertheless, there was a growing public ground-swell affirming that serious issues were not being addressed. The Wilson book, the Sturgess Report and the growing voice of the child protection lobby, among other issues, played their part in the inexorable march towards the Report of a Commission of Inquiry that produced the Fitzgerald report (1987–89) which laid bare official corruption and organised crime in Queensland. The recommendations of the report led directly to electoral reform, reform of the criminal justice system, a change of government and a sea-change in social and political attitudes in Queensland, not least towards matters of sex, sexuality and sexual relationships (for example, debates on prostitution, which could never have occurred prior to the inquiry).

More recently, the report of the Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service, 1997 ('the Wood report') has served to refocus the debate on paedophilia and related issues, albeit in a somewhat distorted way. To this extent, the issue of paedophilia is brought back into the public view. As a direct result of the NSW Royal Commission of Inquiry, 'paedophiles' have been identified and pursued with intent to prosecute. Considerable media coverage has been generated, focusing upon individual 'paedophiles' (such as Phillip Bell), as well as on discussions of the issues relating to paedophilia, adult–child sex and sexual abuse.

But 'net-widening', stereotyping and use of loose definitions all come back into play as the media seek sensation rather than information. So just as post-Wilson and post-Sturgess, the media coverage serves, in part, to distort the debate, to alter the focus, to side-track attention away from fundamental issues.

In particular, attention is focused upon institutional reform rather than structural change. Rogers (1998, p. 1) states:

Child sexual abuse, with its predominance of male offenders, should raise questions about the construction of masculinity in our society.

The necessary debate about structural change is not occurring. In the same way, questions should be asked about attitudes or values toward sexuality, about male violence and about patriarchy and paternalism. Questions about the role of the family, family interaction and family dynamics go unasked, as do questions about the role of institutions, such as education, in the development of sexuality and sexual relationships. Few questions are asked concerning the role of the media in developing appropriate discourse on these matters. It is this last area that is at the heart of what some writers (e.g. Sinclair 1995; Rogers 1998) have described as the 'backlash movement'.

Sinclair (1995, p. 155) has indicated that "the backlash and the child protection movement both have the power to orchestrate or manipulate media coverage and to sway public opinions about abuse", but that it is the 'backlash movement' that seeks to alter perceptions on the veracity of claims about child abuse; most advocates for the child protection movement work to find and support the truth (Sinclair 1995, p. 174). Sinclair cites examples in which people who have been accused of child abuse are able to alter public opinion through emotional public statements or appeals for help. Central to the backlash movement is the demonising of professionals who wrongly accuse adults of abuse and cause abuse to children through the child protection system. Rogers (1998, p. 1) is concerned about the extent to which "the themes and stereotypes that distinguish the backlash movement have achieved popular acceptance in the dominant legal discourse", to the extent that the discourse is set in a particular direction to the detriment of other points of view. The backlash movement uses a potent mix of half-truths and popular myths and misconceptions.

The ideology of the backlash movement is seductive. Building upon such shibboleths as the sanctity of the family and the rights of individuals, the proponents of the backlash movement extol the virtues of the family while advancing "the need to resist intrusive government actions, protect rights and care for families" (Sinclair 1995, p. 166). The messages appear to reflect legitimate social goals. At the same time, a useful scapegoat is identified in the form of the State. Sinclair argues that the backlash movement utilises existing social norms and that the strength of the movement lies in using ideas that "reflect rather than attempt to establish social norms" (Sinclair 1995, p. 167). Child protection advocates also use social norms, but because they are seeking to change norms, such as the legal or social responses to children, they have to first overcome existing social attitudes often based on misconceptions.

The backlash movement has at least one further advantage and that is the legitimacy of some of their complaints. It would not be difficult, for example, to use the events of Cleveland in the UK (1987) in order to highlight the ways in which well-meaning professionals can actually create trauma. This can be given a more sinister interpretation; that is, "the overzealous therapist ... fuelled by ... mercenary motives, manipulates or coerces children into telling falsehoods" (Rogers 1998, p. 2).

The backlash movement, while capitalising on mistakes, also works to demonise child protection professionals as people who interfere with the malleable rights of the individual or worse, inflict harm or unfairness on families. False allegations, false imprisonment, children wrongly taken into

State care or trauma inflicted on children in either the form of care or through the processes of the child protection/criminal justice systems are all products of the overzealous therapist. The dilemma for the child protection professional is, of course, that they are obliged (if not mandated) to investigate complaints, regardless of how bizarre, vexatious or malicious the complaints may appear. The professional must investigate the complaint until proven or proven false. If the complaint is proven to be false, then the professional is open to claims that the process of investigation was intimidatory, ill-conceived or malicious. Moreover, the falseness of the allegation will be asserted by the backlash movement as a further indication of the falseness of 'most' allegations, the inadequacies of the system or the desire on the part of authorities to divide families. Ultimately, the professionals are viewed not only as the instruments of an uncaring State but also as being out of control in their relentless pursuit of 'innocent families'.

There is a further twist to this particular issue. The overzealous therapist is viewed by the legal profession as challenging "the perceived objectivity, impartiality and neutrality of the legal system" by "their apparent disdain of evidentiary requirements and basic principles of criminal justice" (Rogers 1998, p. 3). In the adversarial legal system, this may be a useful stance to discredit the evidence of the child protection professional, but it does little to protect the rights of children and in the eyes of the child protection professionals lawyers are seen to be "preoccupied with technicalities at the expense of the child's welfare" (Rogers 1998, p. 3).

The discourse of child welfare clashes head on with legal discourse. In this scenario, the child loses every time and the credibility of both professions takes a battering, adding more grist to the mill of the backlash movement. Rogers' analysis of the role of the Paedophile Inquiry, as part of the Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service (1997), includes consideration of the view taken by the Commission of the overzealous therapist, particularly in allegations of satanic ritual abuse.

The Royal Commission (1997, p. 611) adopted the view that the overzealous therapist impeded the legal process in the pursuit of 'truth' and lacked credibility when it came to the giving of evidence because of the use of "dubious techniques designed to assist memory recall" and "the imparting of their own beliefs, preconceptions and prejudices to the child". The Royal Commission held "the overzealous therapist largely responsible for the most irrational, bizarre, problematic and confusing aspects of sexual abuse" (Rogers 1998, p. 8). Without entering into the debate, the obvious differences of opinion between the legal profession on the one hand and the child protection social work/social welfare professions on the other, are not edifying and play directly into the hands of the backlash movement.

There is a further key figure identifiable in the rhetoric of the backlash movement — that is the "mad" mother (Rogers 1998, p. 2, after Hatty 1991). In the words of Rogers (1998 p. 3):

This figure colludes with the overzealous therapist in contaminating evidence, in corrupting young minds, and in contributing to the persecution of the falsely accused.

By focusing on the 'hysterical mother', who may or may not have been a victim herself of previous abuse, and on the 'malicious' mother intent on bringing false claims against partners in custody or access disputes, 'mothers' can be made scapegoats in the mythologies perpetuated by the backlash movement. This occurs in the same way that rape victims have been viewed to have colluded in

their own violation or that mothers have been blamed of collusion or turning a blind eye in cases of incest. In all three scenarios the role of the (male) offender is down-played or at the very least, removed from the centre of the focus of attention. As Scutt (1991, p. 118) has indicated:

Social and cultural institutions adhere to a hierarchical structure placing men, and particularly fathers and husbands, at the top. Giving proper recognition to the enormity of the sexual abuse of children and wives threatens not only male concepts of justice, but the organisation of society itself. All legal institutions — police, courts, the legal profession — are so strongly imbued with the notion of ownership, combined with ‘male right’, that requiring the legal system to respond to children’s and women’s needs, rather than maintain male privilege, is no easy task.

It comes as no surprise to learn that the Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police was dominated by men from the legal profession, as indeed are so many Royal Commissions or Commissions of Inquiry in this country. There is clear evidence to suggest that the Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police not only accepted many of the myths and misconceptions surrounding paedophilia and incorporated them into the report but also focused on institutional reform rather than social change (Rogers 1998). Either way, the report provides implicit if not explicit support for the backlash movement.

Conclusion

Paedophilia is not a simple phenomenon either to explore or to explain. It is difficult to explore because, all too frequently, a range of behaviours that are not paedophilia are included in definitions of the phenomenon. It is difficult because the term itself evokes levels of public opprobrium that make objective discourse difficult, if not impossible. It is difficult because there is no single discourse at any given time. It is difficult because so little is known about paedophiles. As McConaghy (1998, p. 261) states:

Little information is available concerning the percentage of a representative normal population who have carried out paedophilic acts.

Such statements are contentious in themselves, not least in terms of the question “What is normal?” This provides some evidence of why paedophilia is a difficult phenomenon to explain. The lack of definition, the net-widening of definitions to include different but related phenomena, and the stereotyping that occurs all serve to obfuscate and obscure.

Definitions are also open to the vagaries of change both in terms of culture and time. It is a difficult phenomenon to explain because no single theory or model can explain adequately all the behaviours that can be included as adult–child sexual contact. There is little conclusive material to indicate the causes of paedophilia, although there is a strong suggestion that paedophiles have themselves been subject to adult–child sexual contact. To add to these difficulties, social discourse on the topic of paedophilia is often led by media portrayal that may be less than accurate or may be distorted for particular purposes. In Puplick’s words (1997, p. 64) the media in Australia in recent times “have shown a highly voyeuristic fascination with paedophilia”. Interest groups, such as child care professionals on the one hand or sexual libertarians on the other, debate issues along a continuum upon which there appears to be no middle ground. Throughout all of this

debate, social attitudes towards such matters as the legal age of consent, the rights of children (not least in terms of informed consent) and issues of gender and sexuality have changed, altering both the volume and the tenor of the debate to the point of obfuscation and disarray.

Paedophilia is about sexuality and adult-child relationships. As with incest, discussions of paedophilia intrude upon aspects of commonly held understandings of human behaviour that societies generally are unwilling to confront or explore. A hallmark of modern societies in reaction to such issues is denial. Paedophilia demands consideration at times of moral panic but because it raises uncomfortable issues for law-makers, social workers, the legal profession, medics, educators and so on it is generally allowed to slip off the socio-political agenda before the basic, underlying issues are addressed. There are a number of possible reasons why this occurs, beyond those associated with guilt, ignorance or unwillingness to confront the issues of decision makers. First, contemporary governments react to moral panics by establishing commissions of inquiry. Invariably a lawyer — usually male — is appointed to head the commission, with a battery of lawyers in support. This approach inevitably leads to legalistic solutions that invariably do not go nearly far enough to address systemic matters. The emphasis of recommendations is upon institutional not structural change. The perspectives utilised are narrow and constrained.

Second, the *modus operandi* on the part of modern governments is to audit rather than implement. This is particularly the case with conservative governments. Significant amounts of public money are spent on charting the territory, by experts in the field. The findings of these audits are translated into glossy reports which are circulated near and far for public comment. Quite apart from providing visible evidence of action on issues of concern, these reports provide a stamp of credibility and legitimacy, not least in terms of any policy that may be devised. This is not a quick process. It has the inherent disadvantage of providing only a snapshot in time. It does not provide a guarantee that policy will be implemented (given that there may be a change of government in the interim and a new round of auditing may begin), nor does it guarantee that appropriate programs will evolve or be suitably resourced.

What it does do, however, is reduce the issue — for example, paedophilia, incest, child sexual abuse — to a manageable problem, usually within the purview of a single government department, for example, the one in charge of family services. The disadvantage of this approach is that it is often beyond the capability of a single government department to address all aspects of the particular phenomenon. It is only relatively recently that governments have started to give consideration to ‘whole of government’ approaches to social issues.

There is a third possibility. To effect societal change, a government must possess vision and reformatory zeal. The price, however, may be electoral backlash and loss of office. It is therefore safer for governments to pursue a policy of *laissez-faire* and trust that the next moral panic is many years removed.

The recent history of paedophilia and of social reaction to paedophilia is sporadic, inconsistent and unsatisfactory. Paedophilia is most frequently discussed in the context of reform of the criminal justice system, either in terms of changes to particular laws or changes to law enforcement practices. This narrows the debate too far. Paedophilia can best be understood in terms of masculinity, of sexuality and of social attitudes towards sex. The paedophile is not so much a product of ‘failed socialisation’ as a social construct utilised to mask ignorance and lack of

understanding. The need is for open, objective debate, however, for this to occur, the critical need for more research must first be satisfied.

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The concept of childhood

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Background

As we near the twenty-first century society is becoming increasingly concerned with issues centred around childhood and abuse. Possibly at no time in history has the abuse of children been of such striking concern and the subject of such societal outrage and abhorrence. Underlying this are the notions of the innocence and vulnerability of the child and the special place we have reserved in our society for the age of childhood. Yet it is important to remind ourselves that there is little of our concept of the nature of childhood that is truly universal. With our knowledge of cultural and historical differences, it is difficult to ascertain an innate nature of childhood and a universal meaning of what it is to be a child.

In this paper, the defining characteristics of childhood will be explored in comparative social and legal frameworks. Through an abbreviated reconstruction of the history of childhood, we will explore definitions of the child and common characteristics, such as innocence and powerlessness, associated with the contemporary notion of childhood. In addition, it is important to also explore the stages of childhood, notions of child sexuality, the concept of consent, and finally processes through which children comprehend and react to significant events in their lives.

In a legal sense, childhood is characterised by notions of power, rights, maturation, experiences and knowledge based on chronological age. An individual is considered a child while they are under the age of eighteen. Up until this age an individual is said to be distinguished from adulthood by “political and ideological perspectives, economic conditions, social, and particularly family, relations and assumptions about what constitutes experience and knowledge” (ALRC 1997, p. 71). Childhood is seen as a period of dependence. Responsibility is taken up by the primary caregivers of the child, both legally and socially — though a more recent phenomenon is the shift of a proportion of this responsibility to secondary caregivers, such as schools and police.

Legal understandings of what being a child means and of what constitutes childhood are based heavily on social perceptions and constructions of childhood. The legal system imposes age limits on socially constructed characteristics of the child. Children are not considered responsible enough to drive until they are 16, and too immature to be considered to possess a political conscience until they are 18. They are considered too naive and innocent to decide to have sex, start smoking or drinking, or get married until the age of 16 or 18. These limits are based on characteristics of childhood that, as will be shown, are not innate or universal, but are nevertheless aligned with this stage of life and the place children hold in our social structure.

While we tend to assume a certain level of innocence with children, historically the nature of childhood has been viewed with much more intensity. Throughout the medieval period and up until the 12th century the concept of childhood did not exist, or if it did, as de Mause argues the attitudes we hold regarding the special importance and needs of childhood did not exist (Randall 1992). While there was a recognition of the *ages of life*, this was based more on social factors than chronological phases which differed to those we hold today.

The *discovery* of childhood can be traced back to the 13th century, the development of the modern concept of childhood as we know it becoming clearer from the end of the 1500s. During the period

between the 10th and 12th centuries, children were seen as nothing more than small adults, who were expected to perform adult duties as soon as they developed past the dependent phase of infancy (Randall 1992). Childhood passed quickly and, as it was just as quickly forgotten, was not a source of fond memories as it is often in twentieth century society. Children held a very different place in society to which they do now. Dependence was based more on physical dependence than anything else. Once a child was no longer an infant, they were considered able to work. The marriage of children in their early teens (13 or 14) was a common occurrence (Aries 1973).

Through the 14th to 17th centuries children were viewed with indifference. The fragility of life meant that parents emotionally detached themselves from their children (Aries 1973). The death of newborn children and infants were treated with what may appear to be callousness, but in the reality of the period, the indifference was merely a symptom of the times.

The Reformation and Counter-Reformation were times of great upheaval. With the social shifts and challenges to, and within, the church came changes in the way that children were viewed. There was a tendency to see children as being 'born evil', corrupted with original sin (closely aligned with sex) and in need of protection by adults. Without a strict and restrictive rearing, children were destined for a path of evil and debauchery (Jackson 1982). The diaries of Heroard, King Henri IV of France's physician, provide an illustration on how this picture of childhood blurred towards the end of the 16th century and into the 17th century. Heroard writes of the precocious sexual nature of Louis the XIV's childhood, describing scenes of sexual play between Louis and the adults around him (Aries 1973). This may have been a result of the view that children were asexual, and had no sexual desires or needs.

In the writings of 18th century philosophers, in particular John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau, children and the contemporary notions of purity and naiveté were more closely aligned. The ideal of childhood began to be transformed into our contemporary definition of the child. Whereas previously children were kept to the periphery of family life, Georgian Britain saw children being brought in to the centre of "family affections" (Jackson 1982). While no longer seen as corrupt and tainted by original sin, children were seen as vulnerable and in need of protection against the evil in the world.

The creation of the idea of modern childhood is aided when we consider these historical images of childhood. We see evidence of this confused history in our contemporary treatment of children, in both the social and legal sense. While on one hand we treat our children as innocent and pure versions of ourselves, we also recognise their vulnerability to corruption and fear their premature introduction into the evils of the adult world.

Despite the arbitrary nature of the child and the blurred line between childhood and adulthood, children are clearly different to adults. The different status childhood has held in the past is a reflection of the lack of a clear differentiation between adult and child work and leisure activities, not just changes between the nature of the adult and the child. The separation of adult and child lives in contemporary society has led to a shift in the way childhood is perceived, and in the definition of childhood characteristics. The position of the child within the family institution has resulted in a number of qualities being associated with childhood, relative to this institution.

The contemporary child is seen as being very much dependent on adults to provide for them and

mould their lives. The primary caregivers of a child provide him or her with all their needs: a home, health, food, education, religious guidance, discipline and so on. This dependency is part of the power adults hold over the child. The child, void of significant power over decisions in his/her life, has become increasingly vulnerable. The trust children are taught from birth to place in the adult world, puts them in a situation where they may be harmed, dependent on how an adult uses their power.

Children are taught, both overtly and covertly, to comply with an adult's direction. This dependency has become synonymous with the notion of their immaturity and helplessness. Yet children are capable of making decisions that affect them directly. This does not suggest that children should be treated as little adults, but rather that their competencies in relation to their maturity need to be recognised.

The process of children maturing into adulthood is a slow transition through stages, during which they take on adult responsibilities and characteristics. The identification of stages of life is not a new phenomenon. As Aries points out, determining phases of development through the life-span, has aided understanding of the biological processes of the human body (Aries 1979).

Throughout history these phases have changed and have been based on a variety of variables. In medieval times the ages of life corresponded to the planets. Texts from the time describe seven stages of life which included: childhood (birth to age 7); pueritia (7–14); adolescence (14–21/28); youth (up to 45/50); 'senectitude', old age and finally 'senies'. From the 14th to the 18th century, the notion of several stages of life dominated discourses. In one example these were the: age of toys, age of school, age of love or courting/knightly sports, age of war and chivalry, and sedentary age (Aries 1979). These were obviously based not only on biological stages but also on social roles.

The passage of the contemporary child into adulthood involves three clear stages: infancy, childhood and adolescence; although the awareness of a fourth phase, youth, has noticeably become more evident since World War I (youth can be seen as the encroachment of adolescence into the adult phase) (Aries 1979). These stages are frequently viewed in terms of a series of developmental steps. Mason and Steadman suggest that this is fundamental to the notion of a child *developing* into a fully-fledged adult (in Jones 1998). The transition from child to adult occurs during the adolescent stage.

Beginning at puberty, adolescence is a long period between childhood and mature adulthood which is marked by both physical and psychological changes. The fact that these changes occur at different rates for different individuals emphasises the difficulty of defining an age range for adolescence. Physical maturation occurs between the ages of 10 and 15 for girls and between 11 and 15 for boys (Byer & Shainberg 1991). Psychological maturity also occurs at a non-uniform rate, not only across individuals, but also culturally.

Perhaps the most important developing psychological characteristic during this period is a sexual awakening, triggered by physical maturation. The rituals of this development vary across cultures. For example, in some parts of Africa, a male relative is expected to introduce a young girl to coitus when she reaches puberty. In Indian hill tribes adolescents are encouraged to have sex with numerous peers during the two or three years preceding marriage, and in the Marquesas

Islands pubescent youngsters are introduced to sexual intercourse by an aunt or uncle (Bagley 1997). In modern Western societies the transition to adulthood is becoming more and more blurred.

Sexual rights have been seen as existing in conjunction with an acceptance into the adult world. The passage to adult sexuality has traditionally developed from sexual play and masturbation through to experimentation and onto coitus when the young person is physically and psychologically mature, as determined by social norms and practices. As children mature at earlier ages, the issue of children and sexuality emerges as an increasingly important one.

Jackson argues that “[t]he anxiety and controversy surrounding the issue of children and sex must be seen in the context of [the] prolongation of childhood and the special status it is given” (1982, p. 27). In order to understand the objection society holds to viewing children as sexual citizens, we need to understand what role children have in society. The concern and panic that surrounds the issues of childhood sexuality and child sex needs to be considered in the context of the social construction of childhood and the special status of the contemporary child.

The topic of children and their sexuality is one of the enduring taboos throughout history. In contemporary society the notion of child sexuality runs heavily against the dominant norms and morals. Goldman and Goldman (1982; 1988) discuss the diverse definitions of sex and sexuality, which range from biological differences, to sexual identity and activities. For the purposes of this paper, sexuality will be defined as the broad notion of “the quality of being sexual” (New World Dictionary cited in Goldman and Goldman 1982, p. 4) which encompasses all areas of sexual development, socialisation and behaviour.

The use of the terms of sexuality or ‘sexual’ in reference to children is often avoided and not considered appropriate, despite the recognition of the sexual behaviours and emotions of young people in the law (in particular the sexualisation of female crime and delinquency and the increased attention to juvenile sexual offenders). Because of this there is often a separation of commentaries on childhood and sexuality.

Typically this is an indication of the socially correct view of children as either asexual or sexually latent (Evans 1993) and the reluctance to acknowledge childhood sexuality. The problem with the study of childhood sexuality is that it is often mistaken as support for the sexual use of children, and discussion is often stunted by this misinterpretation. Rather, children need to be recognised as “sexual with all the physical systems (except the reproductive one) existing and ready to go, [and that they] inevitably think about, try to make sense of and find explanation for the sexual world they encounter” (Goldman & Goldman 1988, p. 3).

The two long-standing theories of childhood sexuality are defined along the rhetoric of child abuse (asexual) and child love (sexual) (Plummer 1991). In the first, children are seen as being asexual creatures who are naturally innocent and naive and vulnerable to the abuses of adults. Under this view, Plummer suggests that there are two models of childhood sexuality: the corruption model and the precocious model. Sexuality, in reference to children, is seen in terms of the innocent child vulnerable to corruption by adults or, in the second model, the notion of the prematurely sexualised child.

Alternatively there is the rhetoric of child love, where children are seen as sexual beings. Again, Plummer puts forward two models of childhood sexuality: the repression model and the liberation model. Under the repression model, childhood sexuality is seen in terms of original sin that need to be constrained and discouraged. The liberation model controversially suggests that natural childhood sexuality needs to be recognised and allowed to be expressed.

Plummer suggests that these typically narrow essentialist views of childhood sexuality, while important, are also problematic and that they typically polarise the issues rather than constructively clarify the complexities of childhood sexuality (1991).

A more useful way of looking at childhood sexuality has emerged over the past decade in the form of a constructionist approach. One of the major problems with theories on childhood sexuality is they often ignore the child's experience or the meaning children give to their experiences. This may be a result of the dominant views of childhood asexuality and sexual latency, and a reluctance to accept that children have experiences and can interpret them and understand them on a level that as adults, we cannot assume knowledge of. The models discussed above are prominent in the adult interpretation of children's sexuality and experiences, and evident in discourses on incest, child sexual abuse and paedophilia. A constructionist approach to childhood sexuality attempts to analyse the "multiple and often contradictory meanings that a child assembles and negotiates with others as it moves through a myriad of emerging encounters" (Plummer 1991, p. 235).

While children can experience sexual feelings, the meanings they apply differ from those of adults because their knowledges are different (Plummer 1991). Childhood experiences such as masturbation and sexual play cannot be termed sexual until they are interpreted as such. This can be achieved only through the learning of basic sexual facts. How we interpret our experience is dependent on our environment and past learning. Childhood sexuality is not a fixed, latent entity, but rather something constructed from experiences and social knowledges:

Sexuality certainly has its physiological and behavioural base: but amongst humans it has an essentially symbolic, socially constructed meaning. Nothing automatically translates itself for the child into sexual meaning — this, like everything else, has to be learned and is culture specific (Plummer 1991, p. 237).

This suggests that rather than liberating or repressing or controlling childhood sexuality, adults, as part of a larger society, actually create childhood sexuality.

As discussed previously, historically, children have held different positions in society and the line between adulthood and childhood was not defined in the same way as it may seem today. In many societies, cross-culturally and historically, views towards intergenerational sex demonstrate that what we regard to be 'natural' and 'appropriate' for children is in no way universal. Historical and cultural evidence exists of a long history of the use of children for sex. Ames and Houston (1990) provide a historical overview of the recorded sexual use of children. They trace the use of pubescent boys in Ancient Greece, the accepted practices of intergenerational sex in 18th century China, Japan, Turkey, Arabia, Egypt and other African countries, and the Islamic regions of India as well as practices in 19th century London (Ames & Houston 1990, pp. 334–336).

Despite the usefulness of reports such as these, one criticism of these works is that an adult interpretation has been placed on the child's experience of the encounters. Most research into the area of childhood and sexuality has taken the form of either separate adult commentaries, or retrospective studies into the experiences and interpretations of child abuse victims, which has little, if anything, to do with childhood sexuality. The studies of Goldman and Goldman on children and sexuality are among the few that seek to analyse the meaning children give to sexuality, and what they understand by it (1982, 1988). In their comparative study into children's sexual thinking, Goldman and Goldman found that responses from children in Australia, England, and North America demonstrated a "retardation in ... sexual thinking" compared with those in Sweden, where sex education is a compulsory part of the education system for children from 8 years of age (Goldman & Goldman 1982).

In Australia, sex education is usually left until adolescence (secondary school); awakening sexuality being aligned with physical maturity. Physical changes in children's bodies corresponding with sexual development are increasingly occurring in children of younger ages, this includes breast development, pubic hair growth, and the increase in size of sex organs. In conjunction, the age of onset of menstruation is also decreasing, with figures suggesting 50 per cent of girls will have begun menstruating before 12 years of age. For boys the average age of "first night emission or wet dream and voice breaking is about 13 years" (Goldman & Goldman 1988, pp. xxv-xxvi). Goldman and Goldman state figures which suggest that educating our children about sex should not, as is currently the case, be deferred until high school.

There is no doubt that children are maturing earlier, and with this comes a "growing ease of access and frequency of sexual activity among young people" (Kincaid 1998, p. 34). A survey published in the United States in 1994 found that 56 per cent of girls and 67 per cent of boys had had sex by the age of 17. It also reported that:

- 5 per cent of teenagers had had sex by the age of 12
- 27 per cent of teenagers had had sex by the age of 14
- 48 per cent of teenagers had had sex by the age of 16
- 61 per cent of teenagers had had sex by the age of 17, (Leigh, Morrison, Trocki, & Temple in Plotnik 1996, p. 375)

In Australia, La Trobe University's National Centre in HIV Social Research found that in 1997, 20 per cent of Year 10 students and 48 per cent of Year 11 students were sexually active (*The Australian* 1998).

In recognition of adolescent sexuality, liberal models of consent laws seek to balance the sexual needs of young people with notions of protection. In 1990 a Dutch parliament legalised sexual intercourse for children 12 years of age and over (see Schuijjer 1991 & Evans 1993). While the age of consent remains at 16, children from 12 can have sex if neither participant nor parents object. In Canada children aged 12 to 14 can legally consent to sex with a peer of the same age, and children from the age of 14 can have consensual sex with a person of any age (Bagley 1997). It is argued that these laws allow adolescents freedom and acknowledges the individual rights of young

people, while still protecting them against forms of abuse.

It is important to note that as childhood is shaped by society, so is childhood sexuality. The present manifestations of sexual behaviour in young adolescence can be considered neither natural or unnatural. Legal concessions, such as those from the Netherlands and Canada, challenge the contemporary objections to the notion of children having sex, with adults or other children, as being intrinsically wrong. This suggests that it is not possible to base objections on 'nature' arguments.

Can children consent to sexual relationships with adults?

Finkelhor identifies the three main arguments put forward against intergenerational sex as:

- Adult-child sex is intrinsically wrong
- Adult-child sex encourages premature sexualisation
- Adult-child sex is clearly harmful to children. (Finkelhor 1979a)

While these may be the more popularly held objections to intergenerational sex, with the findings of empirical work in the area, they may be considered inadequate (Finkelhor 1979a). It has been noted that with its complex history, the notion of adult-child sex as intrinsically wrong can be debated and the idea of premature sexualisation may be weakened if we consider children to be sexual creatures. The issue of harm is also difficult to pursue as an argument against intergenerational sex. As Finkelhor points out, “[g]iven that positive experiences between adults and children may be possible, can one still argue that sexual contact between adults and children is wrong because it is harmful” (Finkelhor 1984, p. 16)?

As Finkelhor rightly suggests a “more compelling” case can be built if we consider issues of informed consent. In order for an individual to be in a position to give informed consent, two conditions must be met. Firstly an individual must know what he/she is consenting to, and secondly must be free to give consent. The key argument in this section is that children are unable to give informed consent to sex with adults, and, in the case of young children (prepubescent), also incapable of consenting to sexual encounters with other children.

Leahy indicates that the assertions of the young people in his research into intergenerational sex suggest that they entered the “relationships” on an “informed, rational and independent” footing (Leahy 1994, p. 80). However, Leahy’s differentiation between consent and informed consent is not clear. There is a distinguishable difference between agreeing to participate and fully understanding what you are agreeing to.

For example, Leahy suggests that one young girl is free to make informed decisions on whether or not to consent to sex because she asserts that her family have always treated her as an adult and

that she is “[familiar] with ... adult pursuits” (Leahy 1994, p. 78),

Consequently she was free to make choices about her relationship with Martin without being unduly influenced by his status as an adult. By implication she is arguing that she is capable of informed consent (Leahy 1994, p.79).

Leahy infers that feeling free to say yes or no and believing that she is an adult, not a child, precipitates informed consent.

In order to be able to give informed consent to sex it is necessary to possess a knowledge and an understanding of the meaning of sexuality. Children do not have this. As the work of Goldman and Goldman indicates, while children may have the capacity to possess this knowledge, there is little evidence in our society that this is the case (1982 & 1988). It is important to note that where children *do* demonstrate a level of understanding of sexuality and the meaning of sexual relationships it is an “unequal knowledge [compared] with adults” (Hewitt 1986, p. 15).

While children may possess a certain level of knowledge about the nature of sex, they are less likely to have an adequate understanding of the social meaning of sexuality. Each society has its own rules and regulations concerning sexual contact (Jackson 1982). As Abel, Becker and Cunningham-Rathner emphasise, in order to fully understand what he/she is consenting to, a child must also be aware of the accepted sexual standards of the society in question and have an appreciation of the inevitable and potential consequences of their decision (1984). Without an understanding of their own community’s position on sex and adult–child sexual contact, as well as the rationale for and construction of that standard, children cannot adequately consider the advantages and disadvantages of consenting to sex and its consequences.

The second of Finkelhor’s requirements for informed consent is the freedom to consent. He suggests that children’s position in society is one of regulation by adults, and thus a child does not possess the necessary autonomy to freely consent (Finkelhor 1979a). The gap between the power base of adults and that of children means that children can never be on an equal footing with adults. Further, consent without the possibility of coercion requires equality between the parties.

The power differences between adults and children exist on two fundamental levels: physical and psychological. Firstly, adults are physically dominant over children. Their greater size and weight is an undeniable factor that children are aware of. The possibility that an adult may physically overpower a child is always present as is the possibility that this may influence a child’s decision to consent (Abel, Becker & Cunningham-Rathner 1984).

Psychologically, children are taught to comply with adults from an early age, and as Finkelhor (1979a) rightly asserts, it is difficult for children to refuse an adult for refusal often results in the child being disciplined. Therefore if an adult male, for example, asks a child to let him fondle their genitals, the child does not have the power base to freely say yes or no.

As mentioned previously, a number of studies have reported cases where children consented to sex and experienced “positive” intergenerational sexual encounters. As the debates on the nature of the child, the divergent theories of childhood sexuality, and complex discourses of consent have shown, these studies do not reflect the views of the wider community. In order to understand why

such cases have been reported, it is necessary to look at how children think about, perceive, process, remember and react to events in their lives.

The thought processes of children who have been sexually abused by adults are by no means consistent or clear. Numerous studies have been conducted into childhood and retrospective perceptions of sexual abuse. Childhood experiences have often been described in terms of fear and confusion. The secrecy and covert nature of the situation (being told not to tell anyone or that this is our little secret) alert the child to the illicitness of the activity. The notion that children blindly accept an adult's explanation or reasoning is not realistic. Children are aware of what is going on around them, but may not understand the implications of it.

The child's perception of the actions as abuse and/or as sexual may not be immediate, particularly with abuse that begins at a very early age. Berliner and Conte report the majority of children in their study did not, in the beginning, know that they were being sexually abused (1990). Often the abuse is presented as a "normal" expression of affection, or as an educational experience. Sexual abuse is not usually identified as abuse until school age, when as Finkelhor suggests (1979b), the child may learn what sex is, and discover that their friends had not had similar experiences; or the feelings of inappropriate behaviour may intensify as the child gains a greater sense of self.

The adult's own behaviour often intensifies the feelings of inappropriateness, fear and confusion. Finkelhor suggests that children were often aware of the strangeness in the way the adults would behave towards them immediately prior to, during and after the encounters (Finkelhor 1979b). In incestual or known-offender encounters the adult may exhibit preferential behaviour towards the abused child. The child may then assess the relationship as being on a different level from that between the adult and other children in the family, adding confusion to his/her feelings of uneasiness. Even if the sexual aspect of the encounter is not understood, fear is often produced through the domineering behaviour of the adult.

Occasionally children, or adults who were abused as a child, recall some pleasurable sensations. Finkelhor reports that participants in his study "... talked about the times the physical sensations felt good, or they remembered how their sexual experience with an adult or family member satisfied a longing for affection and closeness that was rarely met at any other time" (1979b, p. 65). The recollection of feelings of excitement or interest, however, does not lessen the impact of the abuse; those who recall pleasurable feelings during the encounter may find the experience more difficult to deal with, as there is an increased likelihood of guilt and confusion.

There are also an increasing number of reports, particularly from young boys, denying any sexual abuse. A number of papers published during the past few decades suggest that some children report their sexual contact with adults as a consensual and positive experience for them (see for examples: Brongersma 1986 & 1990; Constantine and Martinson 1981; Li, West and Woodhouse 1990; McConaghy 1993; O'Carroll 1980; Sandfort 1982, 1984 & 1987; Sandfort, Brongersma and van Naerssen 1991; Tsang 1981; Wilson 1982). A detrimental trend that has persisted in the area of sexual abuse research is to ignore or dismiss these perceptions. Rather than simply being dismissed, these experiences need to be validated and discussed in terms of the victim's construction of the event.

Most research has centred on the prevalence of unwanted sexual contact and effects of identified

abuse; little has been done to examine the differentiation of experiences. Research into these reports is limited because of the dominant abuse/harm discourse and a reluctance to distinguish between willing and unwilling intergenerational sexual encounters.

Early research into children or adolescents' sexual encounters with adults by Landis in the 1950s and Gagnon in the 1960s, suggested that "fewer than 5 per cent of adults involved as children in sexual experiences with adults felt that the experience had a severe negative impact" on them. In his work in the early 1980s Plummer found support for the argument that in the non-violent sexual encounters, children and adults were involved in affectionate, non-traumatic relationships (cited in McConaghy 1993). Okami's work into adult-child sexual contacts found that of the 79 encounters reported, only 21.5 per cent were rated as negative with 67.1 per cent rated as positive and 11.4 per cent given a neutral rating (Okami 1991). Other studies describe children as taking the initiative in the relationships and actively maintaining them.

It is difficult to accept that some children who have sex with adults do so willingly and do not suffer any long-term effects. Finkelhor has suggested that such positive reports of adult-child sexual encounters by the young person may be more a case of false attribution. For example, a young male's denial of abuse may be a product of "male ethics" the need to be seen as self-reliant positive reports may also be an attempt to demonstrate "youthful sexuality in adventuresome terms" (cited in McConaghy 1993, p. 257). Such defence processes may also be one way for the young person to cope with the conflict generated by encounters with adults.

But defences such as these are more than just "false attributions". They involve a complex process on the part of the young person to alter the dominant abuse/harm thesis. As a number of examples in Leahy's paper indicate, these young people outrightly reject the notion that they have been harmed or abused. The relationships are re-scripted away from the emphasis on age and sex:

... they've got problems and sometimes they go out with men like that they can learn all about it and things like that ... See he's getting his satisfaction and you're getting your satisfaction" (Leahy 1994, p. 77)

Paul and I were sitting in the bunkroom, playing guitar and drinking glasses of Port and just singing really nice songs and just really enjoying ourselves, you know. And it was just — outside was really sordid and they thought we were the ones that were really that sort of thing (Leahy 1994, p. 83)

I had this marvellous *boyfriend* and that managed to give me all manner of power and status. All the *dags* had boyfriends their own age" (Leahy 1994, p. 86).

These children are not just putting forward defences, but are coding the encounters into something that is more acceptable and more like a permissible relationship: a learning experience, a supportive association, an equal exchange, a boyfriend/ girlfriend relationship. By scripting his/her intergenerational encounters in such ways, the younger party is rejecting the notions of abuse, coercion, and power imbalances. It is a growing faction of the literature that suggests that the child can perceive some adult-child sexual experiences as positive, and this should not be ignored. The ambiguities of intergenerational sex that arise from such research open up the complexities of child sexuality and the reactions to, and effects of, adult-child sexual contact.

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The consequences of childhood sexual abuse

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Background

If we think broadly about childhood, we can imagine a complex web of positive and negative events and circumstances that might influence health and social well-being. Research with populations over many years has confirmed, for example, the benefits of good nutrition, affluence, education, family functioning and physical safety. When any of these is absent, we expect that the quality of life will be reduced.

However, human development is very difficult to predict at an individual level. Sometimes the most and least deprived people confound expectations; some thrive under adversity, while others wilt despite their relative advantage, and we are left to wonder what aspects of childhood are really important in the overall scheme of things.

This paper argues that childhood sexual abuse is a fundamentally important predictor of poor health and social well-being. In a scientific sense, child sexual abuse is fundamental because it goes close to satisfying many of the standard criteria for causation: it usually precedes other life problems, it is strongly associated with poor health in the population, there is a clear 'dose-effect' relationship (poorer outcomes follow the most severe and prolonged abuse) and there is consistency in findings across many studies that use different populations and research methods.

There are four parts to this review. First, research into the associations between child sexual abuse and physical health in children and adults is described. Second, psychological and social correlates and consequences are examined, and third, some data on economic effects are reviewed. Finally, the question of whether the effects of child sexual abuse alone can be separated from the effects that other life circumstances have on health and well-being is examined. The emphasis is on recent studies, although some key findings from early research are discussed.

Physical health consequences

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

The types of STI commonly found in victims of sexual abuse of all ages include gonorrhoea, *Trichomonas vaginalis*, genital warts, *Chlamydia trachomatis* infection, herpes simplex virus infection, HIV and syphilis (American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Adolescence 1994).

Few studies are available to predict the actual risk of acquiring an STI that directly follows abuse events in childhood, but *Chlamydia trachomatis* may be the STI most likely to be acquired (Schwarcz & Whittington 1990). In the USA, it has been estimated that the risk of acquiring gonorrhoea ranges from 6 to 12 per cent and that of acquiring syphilis ranges up to 3 per cent (Schwarcz & Whittington 1990). Those authors did not believe that the risk of acquiring other STIs could be quantified, but they noted that acquisition of viral STIs, including HIV, has been reported in both children and adults.

Sexual victimisation in childhood or adolescence may increase an individual's chance of contracting an STI, including HIV in adulthood, by affecting his/her future sexual behaviour. Various studies indicate that young women who have been sexually abused during childhood begin consensual intercourse significantly earlier than non-victimised women (Elders & Albert 1998). In a randomly selected sample of 407 men and women on the island of Barbados, Handwerker (1993) found that sexual abuse in childhood emerged as the single most important determinant of high-risk sexual activity during adolescence for both women and men. After controlling for a wide range of socio-economic and home environment factors, sexual abuse remained strongly linked to both the number of partners adolescents have and to their age at first consensual intercourse (see also Miller, Monsoon & Norton 1995). For men, physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse in childhood has also been demonstrated to be highly correlated with lack of condom use in adulthood (Heise, Moore & Toubia 1995).

Similar findings emerged from a long-term study of adolescents in New Zealand (Fergusson, Horwood & Lynskey 1997), where young women who reported child sexual abuse involving intercourse were more likely than others to have had multiple sexual partners, unprotected sex and an STI. According to the authors, this in part reflects a 'causal chain' where child sexual abuse was associated with earlier onset of sexual activity which, in turn, heightened risks of STI.

Pregnancy

Several studies strongly indicate that sexual abuse precedes pregnancy, and in many cases causes it. In the USA, it has been estimated that, among teenage mothers, the prevalence of pregnancy attributed to rape ranges from 11 per cent to 23 per cent (Elders & Albert, 1998). A study conducted at a maternity hospital in Lima, Peru, found that 90 per cent of young mothers aged 12 – 16 were victims of rape — the majority by their father, stepfather or other male relative (Rosas 1992).

In one of the most comprehensive studies to date, Fergusson, Horwood and Lynskey (1997) found that, among a cohort of 520 New Zealand-born young women, the risk of teenage pregnancy among those who had experienced rape before the age of 16 was more than four times higher than among young women who had not been sexually abused. In the USA, Zierler et al. (1991) found a three-fold increase in risk of pregnancy among abused girls (see also Romans, Martin & Mullen 1997). In addition to the direct effect of rape on pregnancy, the high risk of becoming pregnant arises because of many other factors associated with sexual trauma, including greater sexual promiscuity, risk taking, and the sense of loss of control experienced by many victims of child sexual abuse.

Unfortunately, the abuse does not end with the onset of pregnancy. In a study of 691 women attending an antenatal clinic in the US (Parker et al. 1993), more than one in five (21.7%) of the teenage mothers reported physical and verbal abuse during the pregnancy, which was somewhat more common than such abuse among adult women (15.9%).

Risk of suicide and serious self-harm

Survivors of childhood sexual abuse have often been identified as more self-destructive than those without an abusive history in childhood. The self-harm can be classified into several subtypes, including:

- *Suicidal behaviour such as suicidal ideation and suicide attempts* — women who have experienced sexual violence appear to be at significant risk for suicide (Standing Committee on Social Issues 1994; Statham et al. 1998). Among young college women in Maryland USA, 9.3 per cent of those who experienced sexual contact as a child also had a history of suicidal behaviour, compared with 5.1 per cent of the non-abused sample (Stepakoff 1998).
- *Deliberate self-harm such as self-mutilation* — this has been found among both male and female victims of abuse (Choquet et al. 1997; Coxell et al. 1999; Wiederman, Sansone & Sansone 1999) and among both clinical and non-clinical samples from the general population (Briere & Gil 1998).
- *Chronic self-destructiveness* — including eating disorders, failures in self-care, risk taking, accident proneness, and habitual self-defeating behaviours such as severe substance abuse (Boudewyn & Liem 1995; Mullen et al. 1993).

In a recent Australian study of nearly 6,000 adult twins, Statham et al. (1998) examined a wide range of predictors of suicidal thoughts and behaviours, including child sexual abuse, traumatic non-sexual experiences and a history of depression and alcohol dependence. A history of sexual abuse before the age of 18 was the single most important factor associated with serious suicide attempts (attempts requiring treatment) among women, and this exceeded other life stresses, such as marital breakdown, history of physical assault, recent loss of job, or loss of home or property. After statistically controlling for women's history of alcohol dependence, depression and other mental health problems, the risk of a serious suicide attempt was more than three times higher among adult women who had been sexually abused before the age of 18 (Statham et al. 1998). A similar pattern has been found in a large population-based sample in New Zealand (Mullen et al. 1993).

General physical health

Sexual abuse appears to increase risk for a range of physical health problems. In a comprehensive study of a population-based sample of women in Los Angeles, Golding (1994) showed convincingly that women who report being abused as a child or as an adult are found later in life to have higher than usual levels of physical problems, including ongoing pain (in several body sites), gastro-intestinal symptoms (vomiting, diarrhoea, food intolerance), excessive menstrual bleeding, and some neurological symptoms (e.g. fainting, paralysis and walking difficulties). In addition, there may be elevated rates of chronic physical disability and diabetes.

In Norway, Schei and Bakketeig (1989) found that traumatic events may have a cumulative effect on women, each experience increasing the likelihood of developing chronic pelvic pain or other somatised symptoms. In the USA, Leserman et al. (1997) found that a history of sexual abuse

'statistically explained' one quarter of all of the variation in physical health status among women attending a gastroenterology clinic (i.e. sexual abuse was one of the most important background factors). Although these studies suggest quite serious long-term physical consequences of sexual abuse, they did not distinguish between events occurring in childhood or as an adult.

A recent study from France has found some evidence for ongoing physical problems among children who have been raped (Choquet et al. 1997). Among a nationally representative sample of more than 8,000 public school students, those who reported rape experiences had higher rates of gastrointestinal problems (vomiting) and general malaise (dizziness, tiredness) than their peers who had not been raped. Among adult female survivors of child sexual abuse, chronic back pain and a range of problems in respiratory, gastrointestinal, neurological and gynaecological functions have been reported (Pecukonis 1996). Whether these problems reflect direct physical effects, or indicate a more general psychosomatic disorder, is not clear.

There are several plausible explanations of how child sexual abuse could lead directly or indirectly to physical health problems in both children and adults (Golding 1994). The most direct effects arise through STI and concurrent physical abuse. Indirectly, child sexual abuse clearly is a major life stress for many people, and as with other serious trauma, the resultant stress could reduce immune responses that could increase vulnerability to diseases (Koss, Woodruff & Koss 1990). A history of child sexual abuse often increases the risk of detrimental health-related behaviours such as smoking, heavy drinking and illicit drug abuse (Choquet et al. 1997; Epstein et al. 1998; Holmes 1997). Further, given that family break-up and poorer economic circumstances often follow incidents of child sexual abuse, individuals may find themselves with fewer of the economic and social resources that are necessary for promoting and maintaining physical health (Golding 1994).

Social and mental health consequences

Common sense and accumulated experience in legal and clinical services clearly indicate that many victims of child sexual abuse suffer both acute and chronic psychological and social problems. This is confirmed by a wealth of published research. What follows is a brief summary of the major findings from some recent studies. For more extensive reviews, especially of early research, see Browne and Finkelhor (1986) and Beitchman et al. (1992).

Anxiety-disorders

Fearfulness and anxiety-related symptoms have been frequently described as short-term and long-term effects in sexually abused children. The primary symptoms include sleep disturbances, insomnia and nightmares, phobic avoidance, generalised worry, oversensitivity and poor concentration (McLeer et al. 1998; Mullen et al. 1993; Ussher & Dewberry 1995). In a recent study in Philadelphia of 142 sexually abused children aged 6 – 16 years who had not been referred to clinical mental health services, McLeer et al. (1998) found these children to have significantly more worry/over-sensitivity, poor concentration and higher physiological anxiety than were present either in control children or in clinically-referred children with no history of sexual abuse.

Post-traumatic stress disorder

Severe cases of abuse are strongly predictive of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Goodwin (1985) described post-traumatic symptoms in child victims of incest (e.g. fear, startle reactions, re-enactment of the trauma, flashbacks and depressive symptoms). Goodwin also compared adult rape victims with sexually abused children and found that the children displayed more severe and longer lasting symptoms than did the adults, because the children experienced more frequent sexual assaults during a more prolonged period. Studies designed to explore more fully the PTSD symptoms of sexual abuse in children revealed the most frequently observed symptoms to be:

- acting as if the traumatic event was happening again,
- avoidance behaviour and phobias, and
- aggressive behaviour (McLeer et al. 1998).

PTSD (sometimes referred to as rape trauma syndrome for victims of sexual assault) can be divided into two phases: the acute phase and the long-term phase, best described as disorganisation and reorganisation respectively.

The immediate response may last for hours or days (acute phase) and is characterised by a distortion or paralysis of the individual's coping mechanisms. Outward responses vary from complete loss of emotional control to an apparently well controlled behaviour pattern. The signs may include generalised pain throughout the body; eating and sleep disturbances; physical symptoms such as vaginal discharge, itching, and rectal pain; and emotional complaints such as depression, anxiety and mood swings. In the days and weeks that follow, non-specific anxiety is often expressed in the form of a variety of complaints such as musculo-skeletal problems, headaches and insomnia.

The delayed phase (or organisational phase) is characterised by rationalisation regarding the assault and the need to continue with daily activities and work. It is characterised by flashbacks, nightmares, phobias, and a need for reorganisation of thought processes, as well as gynaecologic and menstrual complaints.

This delayed phase may occur months or years after the event and may involve major lifestyle adjustment. Often, victims present for health services without disclosing their experience and are unaware of its potential complications (McLeer et al. 1998). An adolescent may present to a health or social service, for example, with depression and multiple phobias, acting-out behaviours including running away, truancy or promiscuity.

It has been estimated that between 32 and 80 per cent of victims of sexual abuse suffer from PTSD (Kilpatrick, Edmonds & Seymour 1992; American Academy of Paediatrics Committee on Adolescence 1994). A complicating factor is that PTSD can also follow other forms of abuse, and it is often difficult to ascertain whether it arises specifically from the sexual abuse (Roth et al. 1997).

Dissociation disorders

Dissociation, or alteration in consciousness resulting in impairment of memory or identity, has been observed in children traumatised by sexual abuse (Bucky & Dallenberg 1992; Dancu et al. 1996). Signs of early dissociation in children are forgetfulness with periods of amnesia, excessive fantasising and daydreaming, trance-like states, sleepwalking, the presence of an imaginary companion, and blackouts. Dissociative problems appear to be greatest among people with the most severe abuse, including forced sexual intercourse as a child and repeated episodes of assault (Briggs & Joyce 1997; Draijer & Langeland 1999); children and adults presenting with multiple personality disorder, the most extreme form of dissociation, often are victims of severe physical or sexual abuse (Beitchman et al. 1992).

Depression, low self-esteem

Depression and low self-esteem are common among women and men with a history of child sexual abuse (Brayden et al. 1995; Dinwiddie et al. 2000; Miller et al. 1995; Roosa, Reinholtz & Angelini 1999), although the nature of the link between abuse and depression has not been precisely defined. A sense of betrayal, exploitation, stigmatisation, badness, shame, guilt and helplessness may become incorporated into the child's self-image, and might, in turn, relate to levels of depression (Finkelhor & Browne 1986). Depression might also relate to the level of support within the family, good support acting as a buffer against poor emotional outcomes (Runtz & Schallow 1997). The nature of the post-disclosure crisis (such as parental separation, placement of sibling in foster care etc.) may also affect the extent of depression experienced after the event.

A study of 547 young women in south-east Queensland by Donald (1998) found that those who reported ever having been forced into sexual contact also reported higher levels of depression, lower body image and self-esteem, higher rates of illicit drug use and poorer general physical health than young women who did not report abuse.

Sexual dysfunction

Disturbances in sexual behaviour are among the most striking and dramatic symptoms observed in sexually abused children. Sexual hyper-arousal (such as compulsive masturbation and promiscuity) and sexually aggressive behaviour, with a tendency to repeat and re-enact the sexual victimisation, have been frequently described in the literature. Many victims appear to be unable to differentiate between affectionate and sexual relationships (Green 1993).

Among adults, it has been reported that as many as 45 per cent of victims may encounter orgasmic failure; 38 per cent will have prolonged abstinence from sexual activity; 35 per cent will have altered sexual response; and 25 per cent will have altered emotional response (Dupre et al. 1988). Such problems are commonly found in studies of women attending counselling or mental health clinics (Beitchman et al. 1992). Although early studies of the general, non-clinical, population did not find excess sexual dysfunction among people with a history of child sexual abuse (e.g. Greenwald et al. 1990; Fromuth & Burkhart 1989), a recent national survey in the USA has found significant negative effects (Laumann, Paik & Rosen 1999). Specifically, problems in achieving and

maintaining sexual arousal were much more common in female child sexual abuse victims than in other women, while males suffered from an excess of erectile dysfunction, premature ejaculation and low sexual desire in comparison with those who had not been victims of adult-child contact.

Inter-personal relationships

Difficulty establishing and maintaining relationships may also be a common experience for sexual abuse victims. Many have difficulties with issues of control, anger, shame, trust, dependency and vulnerability (Drossman 1992). In a population-based sample of 720 Australian women, Fleming et al. (1999) found women with a history of child sexual abuse to have poorer self-esteem and problems with intimate relationships, and these were most severe for women who had had childhood experiences of forced sexual intercourse, compared with other forms of sexual abuse.

Some child sexual abuse victims also have difficulty later in life when they become parents. Banyard (1997) demonstrated that childhood sexual abuse may be a risk factor for more negative views of parenting and greater use of physical punishment strategies, even after accounting for differences in family-of-origin relationship quality. Zuravin and DiBlasio (1992) found that experiencing childhood sexual abuse was one factor that distinguished adolescent mothers who had been reported for neglect of their children from those who had not. In a later study, Zuravin et al. (1996) found that the severity of childhood sexual abuse was associated with an increased likelihood of having a child who experienced some form of maltreatment. Of course such effects may be the result of the relationship between abuse and higher rates of depression or other psychopathology, lower self-esteem, problematic family relationships (in which incest might have occurred) and fewer social supports (Banyard, 1997).

Recent Queensland data

A local study, currently being undertaken in Brisbane jointly by the Queensland University of Technology and Family Planning Queensland, has confirmed similar patterns of adversity among women who report a history of sexual abuse before the age of 16 years (Legosz et al. (in preparation)). The study is longitudinal in nature (data were collected at two time points), uses standardised instruments so that the findings can be compared to other research and other populations, applies specific definitions of abuse that cannot be open to wide interpretation, and is based on a random sample of 400 women attending a women's health clinic. Preliminary analyses suggest statistically significant associations between childhood sexual abuse and the following:

- sexual abuse (or re-victimisation) as an adult
- being in a violent relationship as an adult
- higher rates of depression and eating disorders
- poorer reported levels of general health
- higher levels of unhappiness

- higher rates of alcohol dependency and drug use
- increased risk for sexually transmitted infections and sexual dysfunction
- consensual sexual activity at a younger age
- significantly more sexual partners
- an increased likelihood of being on a pension.

How direct is the link between child sexual abuse and poor outcomes?

Considering all of this research together, there can be no doubt that the sexual abuse of children often has devastating consequences for individuals, families and society. Across numerous studies with different populations, survey methods and analytical techniques the results are remarkably consistent, especially regarding associations with poor mental health. In fact, so many surveys have been carried out that further research into simple correlations between child sexual abuse and well-being seems unlikely to increase understanding very much.

Nevertheless, some important questions remain. Perhaps the most vexing issue is whether it is possible to demonstrate that child sexual abuse alone is the primary cause of the problems discussed in this paper. Of course, sexual abuse in childhood does not occur in a vacuum. For the majority of victims it is part of a complex matrix of physical and emotional abuse, serious family dysfunction (including loss of a parent) and social and economic deprivation (Fleming, Mullen & Bammer 1997; Fleming et al. 1999; Mullen et al. 1993). Similarly, adult survivors often experience various forms of trauma and other problems, such as abuse within relationships, broken relationships, and physical and psychological disabilities (Boudewyn & Liem 1995).

A number of research projects have tried to disentangle the direct effects of child sexual abuse from the impact of other factors. In statistical terms, the question becomes: How much of all of the variation in health and well-being between people can be explained by child sexual abuse? Recent studies have illustrated the full complexity of the picture. When a wide range of other variables are considered (such as quality of parenting, concurrent physical abuse, parental psychological problems, family structure, and availability of social support), a distinct effect of child sexual abuse alone sometimes is not clearly evident. For example, Mulder et al. (1998) found that a history of physical abuse and concurrent psychiatric illness was directly related to dissociative symptoms (a common effect of trauma), but that sexual abuse was not. Rather, an effect of child sexual abuse emerged through its associations with recent psychiatric illness and childhood physical abuse.

Lange et al. (1999) found a moderate link between the severity of child sexual abuse and dissociative symptoms, but other factors were more important, including coping style (such as the degree of self-blame), and circumstantial factors, such as the emotional atmosphere in the family of origin and the reactions after disclosure. Indeed, there is a growing body of research indicating that the quality of parental care and protection, emotional support and parental mental health have both direct and indirect effects on the well-being of children exposed to child sexual abuse. Broadly speaking, family dysfunction may have a large effect on mental health that is independent of the specific trauma from child sexual abuse. In addition, though, poor family functioning exacerbates the child sexual abuse-related trauma and increases the longer-term complications.

The importance of family environment is strongly suggested by a recent, national Australian study of 5995 twins (Dinwiddie et al. 2000). By comparing the similarity between identical and fraternal twins in reported childhood sexual abuse, the degree to which risk aggregates in families was estimated.

Furthermore, by using non-abused co-twins as controls, the direct effects of childhood sexual abuse on individuals could be separated from shared environment factors which could have predisposed people to subsequent mental health problems

Dinwiddie et al. (2000) found that, among women, the risk of serious psychological problems (including depression and suicidal ideation) was high among those with a history of child sexual abuse, but it was also high among their non-abused co-twins (in the small number of cases where both twins were abused, mental health problems were not significantly worse than among pairs where only one was abused). Further, the best mental health was among twin pairs where neither twin was abused. This strongly indicates an effect of shared familial factors upon mental health. A separate analysis of data on suicidal thoughts and behaviours among this twin sample by Statham et al. (1998) found that child sexual abuse had an independent effect, but also that other traumatic experiences and life problems during childhood or as an adult explained large proportions of the overall risk for suicidal thoughts and actions.

These studies, and other recent work (Fleming et al. 1997; Mullen et al. 1993; Ruchkin, Eisemann & Hagglof 1998; Runtz & Schallow 1997) emphasise the importance of familial protective and vulnerability factors — failure to take these into account may lead to an overly simplistic view of the aetiology of health and social problems that follow childhood sexual abuse. According to Romans et al. (1999) child sexual abuse is best conceptualised as a non-specific risk factor for a wide range of adverse psychological and social adult outcomes. It is frequently found in families that have other risk factors for adverse outcomes (p. 327).

There is no fully comprehensive theoretical model of the characteristics of child sexual abuse events and background variables that increase or moderate the severity of trauma and adjustment problems resulting from child sexual abuse.

However, a summary of the most recent research would include the following factors:

Early life circumstances:

- the age and developmental level of the child;
- the child's pre-existing personality and resiliency;
- family structure, especially loss of a biological parent through death or separation;
- parental psychiatric problems, especially alcohol and illicit drug abuse;
- poor parenting, especially low emotional warmth and high parental rejection;
- relative economic deprivation.

The nature of the offence:

- the onset, duration and frequency of the abuse;
- the degree of coercion and physical trauma, especially forced intercourse before age 13;
- the closeness of the relationship between the child and the perpetrator;
- concurrent physical abuse.

The availability and quality of support:

- the willingness of the victim to disclose the abuse;
- the degree of supportiveness of the family's response to the disclosure;
- the availability of someone to confide in;
- the adaptive strategies that victims may use in the recovery process;
- the nature of the institutional response to the abuse (i.e. medical, investigatory and legal procedures);
- the availability and quality of therapeutic intervention.

Limitations of the data

While a substantial amount of research has been reported in the literature it is still important to consider that any research regarding such a sensitive issue has the potential for bias in one way or another. In a review of more than 100 articles of child sexual abuse in the previous decade, Green (1993) reported that, although a wide variety of psychological effects have been documented in

sexually abused children, the research is hampered by a number of methodological difficulties, including:

- problems with definition (the way sexual abuse is defined will effect prevalence rates and outcome studies);
- failure to measure the severity of the abuse (it is important to gather the nature, frequency and duration of the abuse);
- sampling problems (abused children from treatment programs are likely to be more impaired than abused children never referred for treatment, for example);
- failure to use standardised and valid measurements, and failure to use control groups (Green 1993);
- participation bias in sexuality research, and problems with self-disclosure of sensitive issues in research studies (Catania 1997; Dunne et al. 1997; Dunne 1998).

The reliability and validity of self-reports in legal cases and research studies are highly contentious. Although fictitious reports do occur, under-estimation of the true extent of the problem is likely to be a more serious bias than over-estimation. The issues involved in assessing the accuracy of self-reports are very complex and cannot be reviewed here, but are discussed in detail in by Fergusson and Mullen (1999), Lindsay and Briere (1997), Rogers (1995) and Williams (1994).

Conclusions

Childhood sexual abuse is a fundamentally important predictor of poor health and social functioning. Child sexual abuse clearly has a significant association with poor physical and mental health in childhood and in later life. The evidence is strongest that child sexual abuse increases risk for suicidal ideation and actions, precocious and risky adolescent sexual activity and drug abuse, mood disorders such a depression, and serious damage to personality, including dissociative mental states. There is also a pronounced 'dose-effect' relationship, where very severe intrusion (especially forced intercourse at an early age, and repeated episodes of sexual abuse) leads to poorer outcomes. Further, despite some disagreements over specific issues, there is remarkable consistency across studies drawn from quite different populations and samples that use very different research methods.

Does child sexual abuse definitely cause these problems? Despite much sophisticated research, it has not been possible to establish a clear causal link because child sexual abuse is, very often, associated with other factors that are also known to impair quality of life. For example, how do we distinguish between the effects of child sexual abuse and family dysfunction, if one helps to define the other? In the future, longitudinal research in which children with and without child sexual abuse living in different family and social contexts are followed up for many years may help to determine the relative importance of various threats to well-being. At present, the best evidence

strongly suggests that child sexual abuse is one of the most important, potentially preventable, threats to the development of our children.

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The problem of child sexual abuse in church communities

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The risk of child sexual abuse in churches

In recent years an increasing amount of attention has been given to the problem of child sexual abuse in church communities. Most attention has been paid in the media to the problem of sexual abuse by priests, ministers and members of religious orders, perhaps because these people represent the official 'face' of the churches. It may be also that sexual abuse is perceived as a particularly shocking crime if committed by clergy, given the betrayal of trust involved when clergy abuse their position of authority to fulfil a sexual interest in children. Case after case has emerged in the press of clergy and members of religious orders being charged with sex offences against children. Some of these cases go back years or even decades. Often, the offenders concerned have been charged with multiple offences involving more than one victim.

However, sexual abuse by clergy is only one part of the overall picture of sexual abuse in churches. Sexual abuse is also perpetrated by lay people in church communities and organisations. Churches are very vulnerable to the problem of child sexual abuse since they have an extensive involvement in work with children and young people. There are Sunday Schools, youth groups, church affiliated boys and girls' associations, holiday clubs, church camps and other such activities. It is likely that churches are the largest organised providers of activities for children outside of school hours. Churches thus offer many opportunities for people to work with children. Most of the children's and youth work in churches is done by volunteers, and with the range of activities that churches provide, volunteers are always needed. The work of teaching in Sunday School or running a youth group requires enthusiasm and commitment, but not formal qualifications. Therefore anyone who joins a local church is eligible to volunteer.

The great majority of people who volunteer to work with children are dedicated and give of their time sacrificially. It should not be surprising however, that churches are likely to attract people with a sexual interest in children, or contain within their ranks those who have paedophilic tendencies. The tendency to paedophilia crosses all sectors of the population and includes people with a great variety of beliefs. Paedophilia knows no boundaries.

It is not surprising then, that churches have a problem with child sexual abuse. It would be surprising if they did not. The issue is how well churches have addressed the problem and what measures they have taken to seek to prevent abuse.

The extent of sexual abuse in church communities

Little, objectively, is known about the extent of child sexual abuse in church communities. Most is known about the extent of the problem in the Catholic Church. A considerable number of priests and members of religious orders have been jailed for sexual molestation in the United States (Burkett & Bruni 1993; Jenkins 1996). The same pattern may be seen in other parts of the world, including Australia. An Australian support organisation for victims of religious abuse, Broken Rites, released statistics in mid-1999 which indicated that 61 Catholic priests and brothers have

been sentenced for sexual offences in Australia since 1993 (Broken Rites 1999). Further cases are currently before the courts.

Some indication of the extent of child sexual abuse by Catholic clergy comes from a survey conducted in the United States (Rossetti 1995). A questionnaire was sent to more than 7000 adults who were randomly selected from the mailing list of a religious publishing house which had mainly a Catholic readership. Twenty-five per cent responded. Most of the people who completed the questionnaire were either priests, nuns or actively involved in lay ministry within the Catholic Church. Sexual abuse of males under the age of 18 by a priest was reported by 3.3 per cent of men in the sample. The corresponding figure for females reporting abuse by priests was 1.7 per cent. The results need to be treated with caution since the response rate was quite low. It is possible that people who had been abused might have been more likely to respond to a mailed questionnaire on the subject than those who had not. However, it should also be noted that almost all of those who responded to this survey were active participants in church life, and many of them were following religious vocations. Many victims of molestation by priests abandon an active religious commitment.

One expert on sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, himself a former priest and a psychotherapist, has estimated that 2 per cent of the population of priests in North America are paedophiles abusing prepubescent children, and a further 4 per cent become sexually involved with adolescents (Sipe 1995). These estimates are supported by others working in the field.

However the problem of child sexual abuse by clergy and other religious workers is not confined to the Catholic Church. It is clear from all the evidence that sex offenders are found in all denominations and in people of many different theological persuasions (Parkinson 1997). Little systematic research has been done on the problem of child sexual abuse in churches other than the Catholic Church, and finding out the extent of the problem is difficult.

One survey in the United States provided an indication of the problem in a denomination within the reformed evangelical tradition of faith. Six hundred and forty-three adult members of the Christian Reformed Church in the United States responded to a survey about a range of sexual issues. Three per cent admitted to some form of sexual abuse of others (this included sexual abuse of adults).

There is no evidence that the sexual abuse of children is a greater problem in church communities than in the rest of the population. On the other hand, there is no good reason to believe that the extent of abuse is much less than in the community as a whole. There is a tendency in churches to see the problem of sexual abuse as being “out there” rather than being a crime which can touch any family or community. Complacency about the problem among those whose responsibility it is to supervise children, is one of the conditions which make it easier for abuse to occur.

Explanations for abuse in churches

Numerous writers have sought to explain the problem of sexual abuse in churches by reference to factors which are specific to churches in general or to one or more churches in particular. In this way, child sexual abuse is seen to be a symptom of problems in the life of the church and part of

the solution lies in institutional reforms. For example, attempts have been made by writers influenced by feminist thought, to explain the problem of sexual abuse as an outworking of patriarchal structures and beliefs in churches which denigrate the position of women and justify male dominance over others (Imbens & Jonker 1992). Such explanations generally have more power in explaining the sexual abuse of girls than of boys.

In seeking to explain the problem of child sexual abuse in church communities it is important not to ignore what is known about sex offending generally, as if the phenomenon of abuse in churches was entirely unique to those who practice a religious faith. General explanations for sexual abuse and paedophilic tendencies are as applicable to perpetrators in churches as in the rest of the community. Sexual offending against children is a multi-faceted problem and there is more than one reason why a person might feel a compulsion to abuse children or otherwise choose to do so. There are bio-genetic explanations, psychological explanations, and sociological explanations (Marshall, Laws & Barbaree 1990) and all of these may be as helpful for understanding sexual abuse in the churches as in the rest of the community.

Some sex offenders have a persistent and fixated sexual interest in children as their primary sexual orientation, which leads them to offend. Such men are to be found in churches as much as in other parts of the community or other walks of life. The psychological explanations for abusive behaviour also have equal validity in explaining abuse in churches. There is a clear link between a history of childhood physical or sexual abuse and adult sex offending by males, even though the great majority of victims of abuse do not go on to abuse others (Garland & Dougher 1990; Briggs 1995). There is evidence also that this is a contributing factor in church communities. Richard Sipe for example, found in his work with Catholic priests who abused children or young people, that most had themselves been abused as children (Sipe 1995). Other psychological explanations for abusive behaviour also are applicable to members of churches.

Factors in church life which contribute to abuse

There may be factors in church life which either contribute specifically to the propensity of people to abuse children, or which create a context in which it is easier for a perpetrator to get away with abuse. These factors, which are specific to churches, are not complete explanations for abuse in themselves, but they are factors which churches might be able to address in reducing their vulnerability to problems of sexual abuse of children.

In understanding the factors specific to church life which may contribute to sexually abusive behaviour, it is helpful to consider the conditions which allow sexual abuse to occur. These are both internal (the motivation of the offender) and external (the opportunity for abuse). David Finkelhor, a leading expert on child sex offending, has described four preconditions for sexual abuse to occur. Finkelhor (1984) suggests that, in order for an abusive act against a child to take place, the perpetrator needs to have the motivation, must overcome internal inhibitors to abusing a child, must have the opportunity, free from external inhibitors (such as the supervision of parents) and must overcome the resistance of the victim to an abusive act. There may be factors in church life which contribute both to the development of internal motivation, and which offer particular opportunities for abuse.

The propensity for abuse

There is at least some evidence that in the Catholic Church, there are factors which may contribute to a propensity to sexual abuse, for it is clear that sexual abuse by priests and male members of religious orders follows a different pattern from that of offenders in the general population. While this does not mean that priests or members of religious orders are more likely to abuse children or adolescents than people in other walks of life, the different patterns of age and gender targeting do require explanation in examining factors in church life which may contribute to abuse. It is an open question whether the explanation is to be found in either the requirement of priestly celibacy or other institutional features of the calling to religious life within the Catholic Church. A committee established by the Catholic Church has completed its own study of factors in church life which may contribute to abuse, and has concluded that celibacy itself, is not a factor (Towards Understanding 1999).

The different patterns of abusive behaviour within Catholicism may be observed in Rossetti's survey (1995). The percentage of men reporting abuse by priests was nearly twice as high as the proportion of women (3.3% compared with 1.7%). This contrasts with the patterns of abuse in the general population in which more than two-thirds of all victims are girls.

Pragmatic explanations for this phenomenon might be offered. The greater abuse of boys than girls in the Catholic Church may reflect the fact that priests have a greater opportunity to abuse boys than girls given the patterns of their ministry. In the past, at least, it has been more common for priests and members of religious orders to be alone with early adolescent boys or to have the opportunity to form unsupervised friendships with them, than with girls.

Nonetheless, some evidence points to the fact that the greater abuse of boys may be a matter of preference and sexual orientation rather than just opportunity. One study compared child molesters who were Roman Catholic clergy with non-clerical child molesters. The researchers found that the clergy were more likely to abuse boys, and the boys tended to be older than was the case with the non-clerical child molesters (Haywood et al. 1996). Richard Sipe reported that of the priests with a tendency to abuse prepubescent children, about three-quarters had a preference for abusing boys. The gender preference was more evenly distributed among the group of priests who targeted adolescents (Sipe 1995).

This evidence suggests that there may be factors in religious life within the Catholic Church or in the manner in which priests and religious are trained for the ministry which contribute to the propensity for a small minority of priests to have a sexual attraction towards prepubertal or young adolescent boys. While it would be easy to suggest that the problem is celibacy, since this is an obvious point of difference between Catholic clergy and those in Protestant churches, it is likely that the explanations are more complex and multi-faceted. Further exploration is required of the link between celibacy and psychosexual development, particularly where the decision to follow the path of priesthood is made in one's formative years. One explanation of the disproportionate sexual attraction of offending clergy to young teenage boys rather than girls is that this reflects an arrested stage of psychosexual development, or regression to an immature stage of that development when for many boys a period of same-sex attraction occurs (Sipe 1995).

There is another role which celibacy may also play in influencing the patterns of abuse by priests, and this is in the way that priests and members of religious orders who commit sex offences against children are able to justify their behaviour to themselves and reconcile it with their vows. A precondition to offending is that the offender overcomes the internal inhibitions to abuse such as the voice of conscience.

It is a characteristic of sex offenders that they have an extraordinary capacity for self deception. Perpetrators of child sexual abuse rationalise their abuse in a variety of ways (Pollock & Hashmall 1991). Some have convinced themselves that what they do is not morally wrong. Another common rationalisation is to see the child as the seducer. Other offenders may see sex as an entitlement for the male in the household, a right which is to be demanded if necessary. Some priest-offenders rationalise their conduct in terms of a legalistic interpretation of the requirements of celibacy. The vow of celibacy may be interpreted as prohibiting sexual relations with adult women and thus homosexual activity with adults or sexually developed adolescents is not interpreted as a breach of the priestly vow even if it is understood as sinful. Different levels of sexual contact falling short of intercourse may also be excused in this way (Ormerod & Ormerod 1995).

The issue of the possible link between celibacy and sex offending against minors is a highly emotive and controversial one. It raises issues not only of science but of faith and church tradition. Understanding the possible influences which celibacy may have on the propensity to offend or on the patterns of offending is important in determining how the problem of sexual abuse might be reduced. It does not lead inexorably to a theological debate about whether the requirement of celibacy should remain nor to a challenge to church teaching on this matter. If the Catholic Church is committed to the tradition of priestly celibacy, as it is, then the question arises how to address factors which might, in a few priests or members of religious orders, contribute to the propensity to sexual abuse of minors. There are options to address this problem other than to abolish the requirement of celibacy.

The opportunity for abuse

Other factors in church life may lead to greater opportunities for abuse than in other parts of the community or less likelihood that effective intervention will occur to stop the abuse once it is disclosed. Church communities provide an environment which is not only a source of strength and support for many people, but also a trusting environment which a small minority of people may exploit for the purposes of abusing children.

Relationships with children and young people

Most sex offenders who abuse children and young people do so after forming relationships with them through natural points of contact. These relationships then provide the context within which a child or young person may be persuaded or coerced into letting sexual contact occur.

Churches offer particular opportunities to those who have a propensity to abuse children. Whereas in schools, most activities are very structured and involve large numbers of children and young people in classrooms or sporting events, church work provides more opportunities for adults to be alone with children without others being present. In local churches, such

opportunities may arise from activities such as taking children or young people home after an activity or youth group, giving individual attention to a child who has an interest in the Bible, conducting individual sessions to prepare a young person for confirmation or baptism by immersion, and being alone with children and young people in residential summer camps. Volunteer child and youth workers also have other points of contact with children and young people outside of the structured activities. Churches are not only a place to which people go, and through which activities are organised. They are trusting and caring communities of people whose shared religious commitment leads to personal friendships and other kinds of social interaction. These social interactions may also offer opportunities to be alone with children or young people without other adults being suspicious or concerned.

Clergy also have this kind of access to children and young people, which those with a propensity for sexual abuse can gravely misuse. One victim of child sexual abuse who was abused by a priest over a long period of time, reflected on this opportunity that clergy have:

The power of the piece of white plastic. It is no more than three inches long, fitting neatly behind the shirt collar. It gave Sam access to so many homes, whenever he wanted, wherever he wanted. (Flanagan 1995, p. 42)

The moral and spiritual authority of clergy

Congregations expect that clergy serving in their community will share many aspects of their lives with them. Particularly in rural areas, the clergy are frequent visitors in the family home and they often, across generations, officiate at a number of baptisms, weddings and funerals within the one family. The clergy member's role incorporates professional, personal, social and spiritual elements. This provides clergy with not only professional and pastoral power, but also personal power (Rumbold 1993).

This power that clergy have can be used for great good or can be gravely misused. Since in religious communities, right and wrong have a moral dimension, and the priest or minister is influential in defining the boundaries of what is right and wrong, they have the power to define abusive behaviour as normal. This is one means by which the natural resistance of a victim may be overcome. One victim of sexual abuse by a priest in a Queensland children's home, told of how shocked he was when the priest first abused him by engaging him in an act of masturbation. The boy had been taught from an early age to be ashamed of anything to do with genitals and nudity. The priest replied that since he was a priest, it was not wrong. Later on, as sexual abuse became a frequent experience, the boy tried to use the confessional as a means of challenging the priest's behaviour. One occasion when he went to confession with this priest, he began by saying, 'Father, I have committed a sin of impurity'. The priest replied, 'what a priest does to a child is not a sin; but if you tell anyone, that would be a mortal sin and if you die you will go to hell.' (Parkinson 1997, pp. 141-2)

When spiritual authority is misused in this way it adds another dimension to the trauma of sexual abuse. The betrayal of trust involved is enormous, and for some victims of abuse it is difficult to trust people in authority again.

Christian teaching on forgiveness

There are also certain factors in churches which may affect the way in which cases of child sexual abuse are dealt with when abuse is disclosed. An important issue is Christian teaching on forgiveness, and how beliefs about forgiveness can influence attitudes towards perpetrators of abuse.

Forgiveness is something which Jesus emphasised strongly in his teachings. In his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus linked the forgiveness of others to God's forgiveness:

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins (Matthew 6:14–15).

It can be difficult to understand how to apply this teaching when a crime is disclosed. Too often in the past, victims have been told that they need to forgive the offender, and they have been discouraged from going to the police. This is illustrated by the case of one minister in a Protestant church who had sexually abused his daughter over a considerable period of time. He demanded that she forgive him. When his daughter first disclosed the abuse, he had contacted the church hierarchy and sought forgiveness from them. Having sought forgiveness from the church, he expected his daughter to forgive him as well. Then the case could be closed, and family life should be able to return to normal. Yet even after he demanded forgiveness from her, the abuse continued (Parkinson 1997, pp. 160–161).

Forgiveness is a continually recurring theme with Christian offenders. Too often, however, it is a means of avoiding responsibility whereas true repentance means taking responsibility. Forgiveness, in the eyes of the offender, may mean that the victim who has forgiven should not press charges, or that the church which has forgiven should not take disciplinary action. Forgiveness becomes a spiritual argument for avoiding the consequences of the crime, and for negating the need to deal with one's offending behaviour. Such an understanding of forgiveness is of course, a misrepresentation of Christian teaching. Forgiveness is not the opposite of accountability and punishment. It is the opposite of resentment and revenge. Bean (1981, p. 9) explained it in these terms:

The opposite of punishment is not forgiveness, for the opposite of forgiveness is resentment and ill-will. To forgive is to refuse to nurse resentment, or to try to refuse to nurse resentment: it means that one no longer says to the person 'you have done me an injury which I shall always remember and hold it against you.' ... Forgiveness is a moral sentiment where ill-will is no longer retained. It may occur before or after punishment, but does not affect it.

A misunderstanding of forgiveness in the past has led in some cases to perpetrators being allowed to continue their pattern of abuse as they were not brought to account for their crimes nor required to address the causes of the offending behaviour.

The churches' response to cases of abuse

It is now acknowledged by most denominations that the way in which child sex offending has been dealt with in the past in churches has left much to be desired. This is not true only of

churches, for in all areas of society, children were disbelieved when they disclosed sexual abuse or offenders were not adequately dealt with. Nonetheless, these failures in child protection took particular forms in church communities, and there were particular reasons for them.

While much has changed, and many churches are taking the problem of sexual abuse very seriously, it would be premature to say that these patterns of dealing with the problem can no longer be found.

Denial

One reason why church communities have in the past found it difficult to address the problem of sexual abuse is that there has been a reluctance to accept the possibility that abuse could happen in church communities. One girl as a young teenager tried to tell her Anglican minister that she was being abused by her father. He was a churchwarden of the church and had been the Superintendent of the Sunday School. The minister replied that 'things like that don't happen in families like yours.' (Parkinson 1997, p. 13) Another girl told her mother about her abuse by her father, who was a minister in a small evangelical denomination. The mother said 'how dare you say that about a minister?' and punished the girl severely for saying such a thing about a man of God (Parkinson 1997).

In the churches, as in other areas of society, the fate of so many children who disclosed sexual abuse is that they simply haven't been believed. In churches, there has been a theological dimension to this denial — a belief, or perhaps even an assumption, that such things could not happen in the church. That is to say, either Christians do not have the propensity to commit this kind of crime, or in some way God would not allow it.

In a radio interview, the Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane reflected on his own journey towards awareness of the problem. The Archbishop stated that 'it never crossed the mind of myself and I'd imagine of most people in the Church that this type of crime could ever possibly be committed in the Church' (ABC Radio 4QR, 19 October 1998).

The same is true of church leaders in all denominations who entered the ministry at a time when there was almost no awareness in the community that sexual abuse was a major issue. Even when awareness first emerged of the problem of child sexual abuse in the 1970s and 1980s, there was very little discussion of the issue as one affecting churches. Christians might have been victims of sexual abuse in the past — most pastors were aware of such women (and occasionally men) in their congregations — but there was little awareness that Christians might also be offenders. In the 1980s, writers in the United States began to focus attention on the problem of ministers exploiting their spiritual authority and abusing their position of trust by engaging adult women in sexual relations. Marie Fortune's book, *Is Nothing Sacred* (1989) was particularly influential.

However, awareness of the sexual abuse of children took longer to be acknowledged, and it was only in the 1990s that a number of books and studies were published which addressed the issue specifically (Sipe 1990; Anderson 1992; Goodwin 1992; Imbens & Jonker 1992; Heggen 1993; Cashman 1993; Burkett & Bruni 1993; Rossetti 1994; Jenkins 1996; Parkinson 1997).

Two cases of serial abuse by Catholic priests in the United States particularly raised awareness of

the problem of child sexual abuse in the churches. The first was the case of Gilbert Gauthé. In 1985 he was tried on multiple counts of child sexual abuse. The charges against him ranged from sexual assault of a child and forcible abuse to the possession and use of child pornography. He is alleged to have offended against more than 100 boys in four parishes alone. Gauthé was convicted in 1985 and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment (Jenkins 1996).

The second case was that of James Porter. As a priest in the 1960s and early 1970s, Porter had extensive contact with children and young people in his parish ministry. It was normal for him to be a visitor at the local Catholic school, to be alone with altar boys, and to have other opportunities to spend time with children. He used these opportunities to abuse them sexually. It was only in the early 1990s that the story of his predations was made public. About two hundred people made complaints (Burkett & Bruni 1993).

Lack of awareness of the problem of abuse, and a tendency to believe that it couldn't happen in the church, have certainly led to failures in child protection in the past. Even today, the problem of lack of awareness remains. This is particularly the case in certain evangelical and charismatic churches which have not had many well-publicised cases of child sexual abuse and in which there is a tendency to believe that being born again or experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit, will be effective to transform people's lives and remove from them the propensity to sin against children. Theologically, there is little justification for such a view even within the framework of evangelical or charismatic belief. Christians continue to experience struggles with sinful tendencies and there is no reason to believe that Christians are capable of committing any sin, except for this one.

Christian isolationism

Another factor which has led to failures of child protection in churches is the phenomenon of Christian isolationism. This refers to the tendency in the past for churches to deal with cases of child sexual abuse without involving the police or any other external authority. This is connected to a tendency in the past to see the sexual abuse of children or adolescents as a moral failure rather than as a serious breach of the criminal law.

Explanations for this reluctance to involve the civil authorities may be found at least partly in historical and theological influences. In the Catholic Church, the tradition was established centuries ago that the Church and the State exist as parallel legal systems and structures. Canon law emerged as a distinct body of law which paralleled the State's jurisdiction. Canon law was a vast system of law which governed the Church, and also covered moral and spiritual matters for the population such as laws concerning the validity of marriages. The Church had its own ecclesiastical courts, separate from the common law courts. The ecclesiastical courts were not subject to the other courts of the land, and in this sense, the Church was not subject to the laws of the State at all, even in relation to such matters as church property. Where the matter was within the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts, the Church dealt with the matter in accordance with its own laws and without reference to the civil law of the State.

Through canon law, the Church dealt with its own people. It exercised disciplinary functions over clergy. The legacy of that tradition may be one explanation why the Church has in the past neither

reported cases of child sexual abuse to the police not has it encouraged the victim or the victim's parents to do so.

This separateness from civil authority has been a major contributing factor in the past in the Church's failure to respond appropriately to cases of child sexual abuse. In Australia, the most well-known problems this century have occurred within the institutions run by the Christian Brothers of Western Australia. The Order's own historian, Barry Coldrey, has recorded how complaints of sexual abuse by boys in these institutions were taken seriously, but investigations were ineffectual. In one case in 1959, a leader in the Order in Melbourne wrote to a Brother in Western Australia, asking for his response to a boy's report that this Brother had interfered with him. The Brother replied in these terms:

In answer to your letter referring to my behaviour towards a boy, I am pleased to say that the accusation is completely untrue as far as I am concerned. I am deeply grateful for this opportunity to clear myself of any doubt in your eyes (Coldrey 1993 p.396).

There was no explanation offered for why the boy might have been making these allegations. No other attempt appears to have been made by the authorities in this situation to investigate the matter further. Coldrey records that this was not unusual. Typically, if the alleged perpetrator denied the allegation, then it was the boy's word against the Brother's, and usually no further action resulted other than to give a warning to the Brother concerned (Coldrey 1993). Such internal investigations were unlikely to be very effectual. If the matter had been seen clearly as one of alleged criminal misconduct, and the police had been called in to investigate, a different result might have been reached.

Christian isolationism takes a different form in Protestant circles. The Bible is sometimes used to justify Christian isolationism. This is based upon Paul's first letter to the Corinthians in which he urges believers to judge matters for themselves:

If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are competent to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? ... The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? (1 Corinthians 1: 2, 7)

The idea that Christians should tell it to the Church rather than going to the police about sexual abuse has often led to failures to protect children. In one case where the leader of a youth group abused children within the group, the minister of the Church sent him off to a counselling program. He participated on a voluntary basis for a while, but did not complete the program. He continued to be involved in the youth work. About two years later, he offended again (Parkinson 1997).

The geographical solution

Another common response cases where sexual abuse has emerged has been to relocate the offender. There have been numerous cases, in Australia and elsewhere, of priests and ministers being relocated following complaints of abuse. While it is certainly true that in most cases, church

leaders were unaware of the abuse, in some cases they were made aware of complaints again and again and dealt with the issue by moving the offender elsewhere. This was the situation, for example, in the Gauthe and Porter cases in the United States. Typically, further abuse of children has occurred in the next congregation. In some cases, problems have been dealt with by allowing the offender to go to another diocese perhaps in a remote part of Australia, or as a missionary to another country.

Relocations have not always occurred at the initiative of the authorities. Sometimes it has been the offender who has moved from one congregation to another and has been allowed to do so by church leaders who fail to take action when sexual abuse is alleged. In some cases in Australia, ministers or youth leaders have been allowed to resign quietly, citing personal reasons, ill-health, or some other cause, and without anything being done about their offending behaviour. In Protestant denominations, it is not uncommon for adherents to move between denominations or different local churches, with the consequence that a youth leader who is forced to resign from one local church may well emerge some time later in another church or denomination. Too often, the patterns of abuse recur.

Current Practices and Procedures

In recent years, much has changed. Most churches have developed policies and procedures to deal with the issue of sexual abuse. These procedures vary considerably in their focus and content. Policies and procedures may cover one or more of the following:

- Procedures for dealing with complaints of abuse against current clergy, employees or volunteers
- Procedures for addressing the needs of victims of abuse
- Procedures for the discipline of offenders
- Policies to prevent abuse.

These policies also vary considerably in their sensitivity to the needs of victims of abuse. That churches now have policies in place is a great step forward. The challenge for the next decade is to implement them in a way which is appropriate and responsible, and in which churches maintain a clear focus on the best interests of children as the paramount consideration.

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The role of the media

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Introduction

This paper examines the role of the media in relation to child sexual abuse. The part played by the media in the modern 'discovery' of child abuse is traced and some of the reasons proposed for continuing media interest in the subject are examined. The role of the media in community education and prevention are also reviewed. The perception of a media "backlash" concerning child sexual abuse, and some of the limitations of such an approach are identified and critically evaluated. The role of the media in protecting victims' privacy is assessed and the need for privacy (as well as the right to privacy) is examined. The active role of the media in "outing" perpetrators is also briefly summarised. The coverage of child sexual abuse in *The Courier Mail* (Brisbane) and *The Age* (Melbourne) is reviewed and trends, including the language used in the media coverage, are examined in some detail. This review incorporates work currently being undertaken by the Child Abuse & Family Violence Research Unit at Monash University (Victoria) (see Goddard & Saunders 2000). As this work is work in progress however, any conclusions reached should be regarded with some degree of caution.

Child sexual abuse has been the subject of media attention for a comparatively short time. The study of the media is also a relatively recent activity. As is discussed below, analysis of media representations of social problems is underdeveloped theoretically.

Just as child abuse has been described as an 'umbrella term' (Goddard 1996a) so the term 'child sexual abuse' must also be recognised as a form of shorthand. Such terms may facilitate communication but they may also reduce the seriousness of some of the offences described. 'Child sexual abuse' may be used to describe offences that range from exhibitionism to life-threatening rape. While the term has been used in this paper, its limitations are acknowledged. The Project Axis working definition of 'child sex offender' has been adopted in preference to the term 'paedophile'.

Finally, it is acknowledged that much of the analysis of media reporting of child abuse is extremely critical of the role of the media. It is contended, however, that media attention to child abuse has led to greater public awareness, major policy developments and institutional reform, all of which have increased the likelihood of the abuse of children being acknowledged as a serious problem. If the media were to lose interest in child abuse, children would be more vulnerable and less adequately protected.

The media 'discover' child abuse

Introduction

News reports play a large role in our lives. How events that occur on a particular day come to be chosen as news has long been a fascinating subject (Goddard 1996b; Grabosky and Wilson 1989). Stories of crime and deviant behaviours provide a significant part of the news: one study in Melbourne found that 20 per cent of news coverage concerned such behaviours (Edwards 1975). According to Grabosky and Wilson (1989) the issues of crime and criminal justice attract so much attention because such reporting is full of drama and involves life and property and the

frightening power to deprive a person of liberty. Crime news will always be 'prime news' (McGregor 1993), although some authors (for example, Grabosky & Wilson 1989) have suggested that media coverage of crime has declined.

While many journalists take the position that that they merely reflect society's views, they clearly do exercise some degree of power (Grabosky & Wilson 1989). It has been argued that journalists play a major role in constructing what is considered 'deviant' in our society and, therefore, what is 'normal' (Ericson et al. 1987). Ericson and his colleagues maintain that journalists do not merely reflect the work of others who define deviance and attempt to control it, but are themselves in some ways agents of social control; they are 'a kind of deviance defining elite' who articulate the 'proper bounds to behaviour' in our society (Ericson et al. 1987, p. 3). Such a role has inevitably led to critical scrutiny of the role of journalists in creating images of crime. Lotz, for example, suggests that '[m]ost newspapers in America's large cities appear to be bent on creating the disquieting impression that crime and disorder are rampant' (1991, p. 15).

The medical and media 'discovery' of child abuse

In 1962, Dr. C. Kempe and his colleagues published their article 'The Battered-Child Syndrome' in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Kempe et al. 1962). According to Nelson, this 'caused a storm' in the medical and mass media, with the AMA contributing a press release entitled '*Parental abuse looms in childhood deaths*' (Nelson 1984, p. 58).

Barbara Nelson argues that while the 'rediscovery' of child abuse as a social issue is usually attributed to the work of Dr. C. Kempe and his colleagues: '... in point of fact, the popular articles based on Kempe's research were equally important in creating the sense of an urgent national problem.' (1984, p. 13)

Nelson reports that Kempe's article was followed by stories about child abuse in mainstream magazines such as *Time*. At this stage child abuse was defined narrowly and speedy legislative responses were therefore possible. Defining the problem narrowly 'reduced conflict' and enhanced the 'noncontroversial nature of the issue' (Nelson 1984, p. 14). The media's role was important 'in transforming the once-minor charity concern called "cruelty to children" into an important social welfare issue' (Nelson 1984, p. 51).

The media continue to 'discover' child abuse. Nelson analyses media coverage of child abuse using the 'issue-attention cycle' described by Anthony Downs (1972). Downs proposed that this cycle of interest in a problem 'is rooted both in the nature of certain domestic problems and in the way major communications media interact with the public' (1972, p. 39).

Downs describes five stages of this cycle:

- a 'pre-problem stage' where the social condition exists but has yet to come to full attention
- a second stage of 'alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm'

- a third stage where the price of solving the problem is seen as high and may involve some major re-structuring of society itself
- a fourth stage where public interest slowly declines
- a final 'post-problem' stage where there is 'a twilight realm of lesser attention or spasmodic recurrences of interest' (Downs 1972, pp. 39–40).

Downs does not define this cycle of interest solely in terms of media coverage and qualifies his formulation by arguing that not all social problems will go through this cycle. Nelson suggests that there are four factors that contributed to child abuse breaking out of Down's limited cycle of attention. The first is increased media coverage of 'specific types' of abuse (1984). Nelson gives examples such as child abuse in military families. Secondly, and conversely, child abuse became linked with broader issues such as violence in the family more generally. Child abuse coverage has thus been enhanced both by 'topic differentiation and issue aggregation' according to Nelson (1984). Continuing media attention is also fed by a third factor, the media monitoring of papers in professional journals. Nelson proposes that this 'symbiotic relationship' between the mass media and professional outlets, while well established, has rarely been studied. A fourth factor, the increased use of 'soft news' or human interest stories about child abuse, in addition to the 'hard news' or crime stories, has also led to sustained media interest in child abuse (Nelson 1984).

The growth in the number of articles on child abuse in professional journals (which as Nelson notes, feed the broader media) was also accompanied by a growth in the number of journals. These factors have allowed increased coverage of child abuse in professional journals without excluding other topics (Nelson 1984).

Child sexual abuse is 'discovered'

Media interest in child sexual abuse, using the above analysis, can be seen as part of Nelson's 'topic differentiation and issue aggregation' (1984). Nelson's critical appraisal of the media coverage of child abuse was published as media interest in the sexual abuse of children started to gain momentum. Nelson argues that:

... child abuse reporting is not merely crime reporting ... There is a certain unfreshness about the act of abusing a child which adds a sense of personal and social deviance to the existing criminality. (1984, p. 66)

It can be claimed that child sexual abuse reporting is not merely child abuse reporting. It is suggested that there are significant differences not only between the offences of physically abusing and sexually abusing children but also in the context of the offences. There are two specific contextual factors in particular that ensure extensive media coverage. Firstly, child sexual abuse occurs on a significant scale outside the home as well as within the family. Child sexual abuse has been discovered in churches, schools, children's homes, day care nurseries and other institutions where, it was for a long time generally assumed, children would be safe. Secondly, there are individuals (overwhelmingly men) who seek to form relationships with children

specifically in order to sexually abuse them. Some of those individuals seek positions of authority in institutions in order to gain easier access to children.

These contextual factors have guaranteed extensive media coverage of child sexual abuse in recent years. Other factors have also contributed. The media appear to have become far more interested in stories about children generally. Some of these stories, however, are written about children as perpetrators of crime, rather than as victims (Franklin & Horwath 1996).

The role of the media: a facilitator for community education and preventive strategies

Introduction

As long ago as the mid to late 1800s physicians such as Toulmouche, Tardieu, Bernard and Lacassagne documented that children were frequently sexually assaulted, that their reports of sexual abuse were honest and that the offenders were often fathers and brothers (Olafsen et al. 1993). However, community awareness and acceptance of this knowledge have been slow to develop. 'Stranger danger' and beliefs that children's stories are untrustworthy appear to be easier for communities to accept. Such beliefs may present people with a means of turning a blind eye to the reality that child sexual abuse is often perpetrated by adults well known to children, in children's own homes, and in other trusted environments. Kitzinger and Skidmore (1995) quote one interviewee from Kidscape in the United Kingdom:

People don't want to be associated with child abuse as incest ... it's a message we try to get across to the press but they're very wary ... it's easier and safer to concentrate on strangers and bullying (Kidscape 1994, as quoted in Kitzinger and Skidmore 1995, p. 53).

Olafsen et al. (1993) observe that throughout history cycles of awareness have been followed by suppression and this typifies society's response to child sexual abuse. Recent debate in the media and the literature about recovered or false memories may be interpreted by some as demonstrating such an awareness-suppression cycle. Moore wrote in *The Age* in 1993 that:

People who work with survivors of child sexual abuse see False Memory Syndrome as a regressive step, reminiscent of the days when psychiatry dismissed stories of sexual abuse in childhood as fantasy.

It is also seen as a 'backlash' against increasing awareness of child sexual abuse, particularly cult-related abuse. There has only been grudging acceptance of the dimensions of child sexual abuse in some quarters and 'false memory syndrome' could provide a seemingly scientific basis to once again cast doubt on the stories of survivors. (Moore 1993, p.21).

An unwillingness to listen to and acknowledge victims' stories when they are disclosed may contribute to the perpetuation of child sexual abuse by those whom children trust. Mass media education and prevention campaigns present one means of breaking cycles of suppression and denial. As Kitzinger, in relation to the *Zero Tolerance Campaign* in Britain, notes:

... intervening against sexual violence, including child sexual abuse, depends at least in part, on addressing prevailing social attitudes: people's ability to believe that it happens, their refusal to tolerate such abuse and their willingness to act on their suspicions. (1994, p. 247).

Mass media education and prevention campaigns

Increasing the community's awareness of child sexual abuse is important. Mass media campaigns, such as those in NSW and Victoria, and other media coverage of the sexual assault of children have performed a significant role in placing this issue on the public and political agenda. Media coverage of child sexual assault has contributed to demystifying it and reducing the secrecy that has characteristically surrounded its occurrence (Wurtele & Miller-Perrin 1993).

An example of the potentially powerful influence of the media on people's attitudes is found in *The Age* in 1993. Milburn reported on the cancellation, after five days sitting, of a trial against a foster parent charged with the sexual penetration and sexual abuse of an 11-year-old boy in his care. The accused's defence lawyer raised concerns related to an *Age* article describing a television mini-series to be screened on Channel 10. The judge, in response to these concerns, ordered a mistrial. Milburn summarised the events as follows:

... the boy's lawyer said the article was unlikely to prejudice the jury ... [The article] focused on the Catholic Church and priests in a Canadian orphanage, whereas the charged foster parent was not a priest, had no particular religious affiliation and the sexual abuse was alleged to have occurred in his private home. (Milburn 1993b, p. 5)

The mistrial caused great distress to the child victim and others. Milburn (1993b) went on to quote a police source who noted the inconsistencies when comparing law related to sex crimes and law in relation to other crimes.

The power of the media, however, may be positively utilised in child abuse prevention campaigns that are either national or statewide, or even smaller in scale (Tomison 1997). Campaigns may be targeted at all families with a view to stopping abuse before it starts or is even considered (primary prevention). Campaigns may target families whose circumstances suggest that they may be at high risk of being abusive (secondary prevention). A campaign may also, or alternatively, target families in which abuse has already occurred with the intention of preventing its recurrence (tertiary prevention). The dual aims of education and prevention will usually be achieved, at least to some extent, by a successful mass media campaign. Other factors such as available funding, existing support services, and other educational activities, for example prevention programs in schools, will have an impact on the degree of success of a campaign (Calvert 1992; Donovan 1992; Scott 1993; NAPCAN 1994). The benefits of mass media campaigns are that they present the opportunity to communicate to large numbers of people and to target particular populations.

Mass media campaigns may provide the impetus for victims to disclose abuse. There are numerous cases of victims disclosing in this way. For example, Dixon (1993) writing about Annie, a victim of sexual assault perpetrated by her stepfather, noted how Annie remembered her reaction as a child to an advertisement about sexual abuse:

... her grandmother caught the fleeting look of despair and pain in her face. Her grandmother [who had previously had unconfirmed suspicions] asked [Annie] again about her stepfather. Annie says she burst into tears. (1993, p. 1)

In *The Age* in 1998 Kissane wrote about Cathy Freeman and other celebrities who, through the media, have revealed their sexual abuse as a child. At the end of the piece, she reported on a recent experience of Karen Hogan, who heads the Melbourne Royal Children's Hospital's Gatehouse Centre for abused children:

... for one little girl, this week, something has changed. Her mother recently rang Hogan ... for advice. The family suspected that the girl had suffered sexual abuse some time ago, but had been unable to confirm it. This week the girl told her mother, "Mum, you know what happened to Cathy Freeman? That happened to me." (Kissane 1998, p. 4)

Cathy Freeman, Derryn Hinch, Angry Anderson, Debra Byrne, Oprah Winfrey, Roseanne Barr, and Roger Moore are a few of the celebrities who have exposed their own experiences of child sexual abuse through the media. Joe Tucci, Executive Director of Australians Against Child Abuse, a Victorian agency that offers counselling to abused children, commented on the possible effect of celebrity disclosures through the media:

The most important result of someone like Cathy Freeman speaking out is that it helps lessen the shame for people who come after her ... It hooks into exactly what the kids are struggling with. They say, "Look at the courage it took them to come out and talk about it; I'm courageous, I did a similar thing to Cathy Freeman and Angry Anderson." It gives them hope about success, that they, too, will recover from the abuse. (Tucci, cited in Kissane 1998, p. 4)

The impact of a media campaign may be dramatic and far-reaching in both the immediate and short term. However, campaigns drawing attention to child abuse will be likely to be more effective if they are ongoing (Calvert 1992). Mass media campaigns have the potential to confront society with the horrific nature of much child abuse. Such campaigns can also educate the public about the many, often co-existing, forms of abuse suffered by children.

The NSW and Victorian mass media campaigns

Oates (1990, as cited in Tomison 1995) and Wurtele and Miller-Perrin (1993, as cited in Tomison 1995) have highlighted deficiencies in the community's perception of child sexual assault, and in its knowledge of how to seek help and of the resources available. Gaps in knowledge and misconceptions about child sexual abuse persist regardless of media campaigns such as those conducted in NSW and in Victoria. Irrespective of this, both campaigns were evaluated and considered for the most part to have been successful.

The NSW (1986–88) and Victorian (1992) mass media campaigns sought to draw the public's attention to the sexual assault of children. With prompting, some people may remember the slogans used for the campaigns: 'Child Sexual Assault, It's Often Closer To Home Than You Think'; 'Child Sexual Assault Offenders. No Excuses Never Ever'; 'Child Sexual Assault Is A Crime'; and 'Stand Up Victoria. Stand Up Against Child Sexual Abuse'.

The NSW and Victorian media campaigns comprised television commercials and community service announcements, press advertisements, information booklets, stickers, posters and telephone hotlines.

The messages of the NSW and the Victorian campaigns were targeted at adolescents, men and/or families. Children were not specifically targeted for either of these campaigns. Viewing times and television programs, such as sports programs viewed particularly by males, were carefully considered. Decisions were made about when and where child sexual abuse messages would be broadcast for greatest impact on targeted groups.

The New South Wales campaign

The NSW campaign was conducted over three years and involved three stages. The first stage ran for seven weeks and began in October 1986. The second stage ran for eight weeks and began in May 1987. The third stage, which replayed the radio and television advertisements of the first two campaigns, began in June 1988 and ended in the same year. The NSW campaign was considered to have been successful: “to the extent that it achieved improved knowledge about child sexual assault ... [the campaign] broke the taboo” (Calvert 1992, pp. 35, 37).

The messages the NSW campaign set out to communicate to the community included that children are at a greater risk of sexual abuse by relatives and family friends than by strangers, and that child sexual offenders ought to take responsibility for their actions (Calvert 1992).

It aimed to promote community awareness of:

- why perpetrators of child sexual assault commit this crime;
- how attitudes in society influence their behaviour;
- how these attitudes arise in the first place. (Calvert 1992)

Concerns documented following the evaluation of the media campaign included:

- an increase in the number of people who would take it upon themselves to talk to and try to discourage the offender without reporting the abuse to authorities, as a means of dealing with the abuse, perhaps further endangering the child;
- that by concentrating on one form of abuse important connections with other forms of abuse may not have been made;
- that the campaign could have been even more multilingual and culturally specific. (Calvert 1992)

Calvert also emphasised that:

... mass media campaigns will only have an impact on attitudes and behaviour if they are run over a long period of time ... supported by a range of other activities ... prevention strategies

obviously require a sustained effort and commitment to resources if they are to be successful ... additional and adequate funding must be provided. Unless these things are achieved, the prevention campaigns will be like pouring water on sand: gone as soon as it is poured. (Calvert 1992, pp. 39–40)

The Victorian campaign

In Victoria, the criteria used to evaluate the success of the campaign included:

- an increased acceptance of the seriousness of child sexual assault;
- a higher perception of the prevalence of child sexual assault;
- a higher awareness of the potential for sexual abuse to be perpetrated by adults known to the child;
- an increase in awareness of the types of organisations that could be approached for help;
- an increasingly strong belief that there is a need to take action to deal with child sexual assault;
- an increase in the belief that a child is best out of the home if child sexual assault is occurring. (Wallis Consulting Group 1992)

Apparently, removing the perpetrator rather than the child from the home was not considered either at this time or in this campaign.

Issues documented as needing to be tackled following the Victorian campaign included:

- There was little acknowledgment of the existence of female offenders.
- There was an increase in the number of mothers who believed that the child victim of sexual assault might be to blame, and an increase in the number of males who would blame the female in the home for the occurrence of child sexual assault.
- There was resistance to reporting child sexual assault to doctors, the police or to Community Services Victoria (as the Department of Human Services was then known).
- The misconception remained that children provoke men who sexually assault them. (Wallis Consulting Group 1992)

The Victorian Traffic Accident Corporation (TAC) advertisements and the Rape Crisis campaign

The Victorian Traffic Accident Corporation (TAC) advertisements are continually conveyed to the Victorian community as a means of cutting the road accident and fatalities toll. TAC advertisements present clear, hard-hitting messages about drink-driving, speeding, and driving without a seatbelt. Slogans such as 'If you drink then drive you're a bloody idiot' and 'Don't fool

yourself, speed kills' are effective and memorable. These ads are graphic in content with images of mutilated bodies and mangled vehicles, which combined with the sounds and expressions of grieving relatives bring home the reality of road trauma. Tomison (1995) advocates a similar approach for child sexual assault campaigns. McGurk proposes "confronting perpetrators [of family violence] with the grossness, grotesqueness and total unacceptability of their behaviour. For victims, the campaign would be directed at encouraging them to come out of the cupboard" (McGurk 1995, as cited in Tomison 1995, p. 11).

Such an approach has been adopted in New Zealand in relation to incest (Roberts 1998). The campaign was called 'It's okay to talk about incest'. Its aim was to break the silence, "to drive home the message that incest exists and everyone needs to talk about and challenge it" (Roberts 1998, p. 37). The campaign's media advertisements carried the personal messages of five incest survivors. One survivor of sexual abuse perpetrated by her father revealed in an advertisement:

Nobody forced him to come into my bedroom two or three times a week from when I was four. Nobody held a knife to his throat to make him lie on top of me. There was no-one blackmailing him to pinch what weren't even nipples yet. (Julia, in Roberts 1998, p. 36)

Graphic detail in the victims' true stories was followed by evidence of the emotional suffering of victims of incest:

... I haven't been able to get close to people, to trust anyone. I feel that time's running out for me to have a really close, fulfilling relationship with someone I can trust.' (Brian, a survivor of sexual, physical and emotional abuse perpetrated by his father, in Roberts 1998, p. 36)

The success of this media campaign was considerable in terms of public exposure to the problem of incest and government recognition of the effects of incest. Unfortunately, the campaign ran only for a week.

Donovan's recommendations for a national media campaign as part of a national response to child abuse

Donovan (1992) has completed a plan for a national, integrated, comprehensive campaign aimed at the prevention of child abuse. The recommendations include media campaigns, both through mass and localised media. Such campaigns can be divided into two categories: in-home media (e.g. TV and radio, and ex-home campaigns (e.g. posters, cinema). Media can then be directed at various audiences such as the general community, parents, children, perpetrators, victims and professionals.

He advocates use of a wide range of media approaches, including:

- advertising
- community service announcements
- feature articles and documentaries

- the deliberate inclusion of educational messages in entertainment vehicles such as TV ‘soap operas’.

Donovan notes that media campaigns can have a number of roles, but primarily:

- placing the issue on the community’s agenda
- framing the issue (presenting the issue in context)
- eliciting reports of abuse
- directing individuals to sources of assistance/further information
- changing social norms
- modelling appropriate and inappropriate behaviours
- increasing the awareness of the target audience with respect to their own behaviour, and hence increasing the likelihood that individuals will assess their own behaviour and their responsibility for that behaviour. (1992)

Donovan draws on Finkelhor to note that child sexual assault is a behaviour that is both premeditated and planned, rather than impulsive. Media campaigns are therefore presented with a “window of opportunity” (Donovan 1992). This window is the time between an actual or potential sexual abuser’s thoughts and calculations about committing an act of abuse and the actual abusive episode. It is suggested that media messages targeted at potential abusers during this lead-time may prevent initial or repeat abuse:

We need to target perpetrators when they are in the initial stage of planning a sexual assault, and we need to focus on the rationalisations they use to remove the usual inhibitors to child sexual abuse’. (Donovan 1992, p. 66)

Television dramas, documentaries, films, and live theatre productions

Mass media campaigns, such as in NSW and Victoria, have been specifically designed to combat child sexual assault. Child sexual assault is now also increasingly the subject of television dramas, documentaries, films, and live theatre productions. Some of them, characteristically controversial, have attracted comment in the literature and have been reviewed in the print media (Campbell 1989; Donovan 1992; Scott 1993; Hellen 1998; Musial 1999; Pristel 1999; Edwards 1999). Television programs are often followed by information about where victims and offenders/potential offenders can seek help, and telephone numbers to ring (helplines). Discussion about the impact of these types of media on the public’s perception of child sexual assault and on efforts to combat

the sexual abuse of children produces both positive and negative comment. The following section presents some examples and commentary.

Educational messages in entertainment vehicles

Donovan (1992) insists that incorporating educational messages in TV 'soap operas' and drama — requires very close liaison between writers, producers and experts in the field, such as child sexual abuse counsellors. He further argues that:

... documentaries and feature articles should not relate solely to child abuse but should deal also with family and child welfare issues. They should include positive modelling behaviours as well as highlighting unacceptable practices and the consequences of these unacceptable practices (Donovan 1992, p. 30).

Testimony of a Child, a BBC screenplay

It has been said that 'drama reaches the parts the documentary cannot' (Campbell 1989). Examining *Testimony of a Child*, a BBC screenplay that presented the 'other side of the Cleveland child sexual abuse saga — the story of an abused child going home to its abuser', Campbell argues that sexual assault:

... presents television with terrible problems. Television is about *seeing*. But it censors what we need to see if we are to understand because it bows to propriety and thus contains what is knowable ... (Campbell 1989, p. 45)

Despite this, Campbell notes the power of fictitious drama based on fact to:

... invite you to think: what would you do if faced with that child's face, his fantasies full of terror death, his starvation, his stubborn silences, his sore bum. And what would you do if those riddles were amplified by his little sister showing you a sexual relationship with a daddy dolly? (Campbell 1989, p. 45).

Similarly, Lesley Henderson a fellow at Glasgow University's mass media unit, commented that:

... a lot of people who have suffered child abuse quite simply lack the vocabulary, because of shame or fear, to come to terms with what has happened. Provided a drama does not place blame on the child, it can be very helpful (quoted by Hellen 1998).

Beyond Belief, a television documentary

A documentary screened in the United Kingdom in 1992 entitled *Beyond Belief* purported to present new evidence of satanic/ritual abuse in Britain. Following the program helplines were flooded with calls from people who claimed to have experienced sexual or ritual abuse. Counsellors noted that "... the programme appeared to have given callers permission to speak of their experiences and their gratitude that someone, somewhere took what they said seriously" (Scott 1993, p. 249).

Films for prevention and treatment of child sexual abuse

Byers promotes film as helpful in education about child abuse. In her review of 17 films for child sexual abuse prevention and treatment she argues that, "... filmmakers have provided a vehicle that in some ways surpasses any other in the ongoing endeavour to educate children and adults in the prevention of child abuse." (1986, p. 545)

Film presents the opportunity for issues to be brought to life, such as children's stories not being believed, perpetrators not being punished, and painful experiences of child sexual abuse being remembered. The impact of these issues on the people involved may be powerfully explored.

However, some commentators express concern that with increasing numbers of dramas and books concentrating on child sexual abuse there are "... dangers either that we become comfortable about the crime and start to regard it as acceptable, which it must never be, (or) that we become hysterical" (Esther Rantzen, founder of ChildLine in the United Kingdom, cited in Hellen 1998).

The film *Lolita*

There was considerable debate in the media about the latest adaptation of the film *Lolita* prior to its release in Australia in 1999. This film portrays a middle-aged man's sexual obsession with a 14-year-old girl. It has been argued that keeping the film from the public's view won't make paedophilia go away (Musial 1999). Indeed, it has even been suggested that 14-year-old children should see the film because this is a subject they will be faced with (Jeremy Lyons, quoted by Pristel 1999). Concern has been expressed that the film glamorises and normalises paedophilia (Pristel 1999). Federal MP Trish Draper, is reported to have said: I do not have a problem with a documentary on paedophilia, but this is a film to be viewed for entertainment. It is a huge difference (Draper, quoted by Pristel 1999).

Edwards (1999) argues that the child in the film *Lolita* is portrayed as the deserving victim, a seductress, in which case the sexual advances and culpability of a paedophile may be exonerated and disavowed. Like Pristel (1999), Edwards (1999) contends that:

The problem with *Lolita* is that it glamorizes and normalises sex with children by calling it 'art' and 'erotica', as if that makes it all right. In this film we find ... the very script of child pornography, and not just for paedophiles like Phillip Bell, who said recently: 'I am not a paedophile, I am a hebephile, I love children'... The screening of *Lolita* sets a new benchmark because it puts art's freedom above child protection. (Edwards 1999, p. 17)

The need for public education about incest and sexual abuse of children is borne out in a comment by Attwood (1999) who wrote in response to Edwards (1999): "In many ways it is she (*Lolita*, the child) who seduces him (Humbert, the perpetrator of child sexual assault)" (Attwood 1999, p. 15).

Attwood's comment confirms Edwards' perception that *Lolita*, is portrayed as a 'deserving' victim. Attwood (1999) goes on to quote Nabokov, the author of the novel *Lolita*, who refers to Humbert, the sexually abusive stepfather, as a pervert. It appears that Attwood still considers it

acceptable to believe that children can seduce adults, even perverts. Attwood seems to imply that perverts may sometimes be relinquished from any moral responsibility, even allowed to be pitied for surrendering to understandable sexual urges. The headline above Attwood's piece reads: In praise of Lolita, a funny love story. The urges of a sexually abusive stepfather may, the headline suggests, be described as love and perverted sexual urges, viewed in the context of sexual assault, may be described as funny.

The debate continues, but the film was released in Australia with an 'R' rating. Children are prohibited from viewing the film in theatres. However the film is now available on video.

Live theatre productions

In 1993 two plays about sexual offences against children opened in NSW within a month of each other. Armstrong (1993) reported on a controversial play entitled *Cold Hands*. The play:

... portrays a week in the life of a 12-year-old girl ... sexually assaulted by her father and ... pregnant. The play's focus allows the audience to gain an insight into the child's fear and trauma, the father's feeble rationalisation and defence, and the mother's fear of confronting the truth. (Armstrong 1993, p. 11)

Armstrong noted that the NSW Child Protection Council showed professional interest in the play and that plays have been used as part of child abuse awareness campaigns. David Ritchie, the play's director, remarked that: "... the play is powerful, dramatic, presenting practical and emotional reality. It is confronting, but it emphasises the fact that there is no excuse. Ever" (quoted by Armstrong 1993, p. 11).

The second play, *In Relation to Inadmissible Evidence*, was written by Helen Zigmund. Between the ages of four and a half and five and a half, Helen had been sexually abused by her parents' gardener. She hoped the play would:

... open the issue up for debate ... I want [the audience] to have listened, to have borne witness ... in theatre the monodrama is a wonderful medium for exploring the random, chaotic thoughts of a person trying to come to terms with something like this. (quoted by Evans 1993, p. 19)

Documentaries

Hoefnagels and Baartmann (1997) have documented a mass media prevention campaign in Western Europe. This campaign, which was directed at children, aimed to increase disclosures of abuse. It began with the screening of a television program entitled *Some secrets you have to talk about* and this became the campaign slogan. The initial program was followed by the screening of 20 other programs and documentaries on the subject of child sexual abuse. The campaign also included television commercials, newspaper and magazine articles, stickers, billboards, leaflets and booklets. It ran for nine months. Telephone calls to ChildLine services promoted as part of the campaign almost tripled as a result — mass media clearly had the desired effect of increasing disclosures (Hoefnagels & Baartmann 1997). However, as is the case in many social and political climates where child sexual abuse is prevalent and short-term media campaigns are run, Hoefnagels and Baartmann noted that the resources needed to meet

the needs of abused children continue to be deficient. Media campaigns that raise awareness of child sexual assault may be effective only if supported by at least a corresponding increase in human and material resources to meet children's needs.

Clearly, sustained awareness campaigns making use of the mass media are needed — campaigns that continually confront communities with the reality of child sexual assault. They must challenge people, institutions, and governments to listen to children, to respond to the needs of all children and families and especially to the needs of abused children. The campaigns must also censure perpetrators, many of whom are relatives and adults well known to the victimised child.

Investigative journalism

Many of the criticisms of the media coverage of crime in general (Surette 1992) are also made about the media portrayal of child abuse; it is often stereotyped, superficial and sensational (Wilczynski & Sinclair 1998). Wilczynski and Sinclair suggest, however, that even sensational coverage can have potentially beneficial effects, for example on public awareness.

The media clearly have contributed and continue to contribute a great deal to child protection. They have exposed inexcusable failings in child protection systems that in turn have led to major policy changes. A good example occurred in Victoria with the death of Daniel Valerio, which was followed by a major media campaign that led to the introduction of mandatory reporting (for analysis of this, see Goddard & Liddell 1993, 1995).

Media representations serve other important purposes. Hutson and Liddiard (1994), in their analysis of the social construction of a related problem — youth homelessness — argue that for most people the media presentations of a social problem are their main source of information. Surette (1992) also contends that the mass media provide our greatest source of knowledge: we use the information we gather to construct our view of the world. In-depth and investigative reporting of the highest standard has been a major feature of some of the media coverage of child abuse. Responses to child sexual abuse have repeatedly been informed by media portrayals of the size of the problem and its impact on victims.

In 1998, *The Guardian* in the United Kingdom published a major investigation by Nick Davies entitled “The most secret crime”. In a report spread over two pages for four consecutive days Davies, an acclaimed investigative journalist, exposed the seriousness and scale of the problem of child sexual abuse and the failings of those organisations with a responsibility to children.

Davies made some valuable points in the opening piece of his investigation, in which he sought to establish the scale of the problem:

The sexual abuse of children is a special crime, not simply because of the damage it does to victims, not even because of the anger and fear it provokes in communities, but more particularly because it is so easy — easy to commit, easy to get away with. (Davies 1998a, p. 4)

Davies suggests that the reason that it is easy to get away with is that:

Beyond the inherent difficulty of detecting and preventing this most secret crime, beyond the obstacle course of concealment erected by the collusion of clever paedophiles, the child victims of sexual abuse are betrayed by organisations who repeatedly prefer to avoid embarrassment by concealing awkward allegations and by a system of protection which simply does not work. (1998a, p. 5)

The following day, Davies (1998b) exposed scandals in child protection in the United Kingdom and case histories of the whistleblowers who attempted to expose corruption in the services supposedly protecting children. On the third day of the series, Davies (1998c) turned his attention to the Anglican Church, which had repeatedly failed to deal with serious abuse by priests. In the final part of his investigations, Davies (1998d) exposed the haphazard nature of child protection and the grim catalogue of failures.

Such detailed and exhaustive investigations are unfortunately rare. Nevertheless, they not only serve to provide detailed information about the extent and size of the problem. Davies' third piece, for example (1998c), was accompanied by the telephone number of a national child protection helpline providing counselling information and advice. The final piece (1998d) was accompanied by an editorial calling on the government to set in place child protection strategies. Such examples of educative and investigative journalism are rarely examined by those who undertake media analysis. Indeed, a number of writers have perceived what they term a "backlash" in media coverage.

The role of the media: what 'backlash'?

Introduction

In 1988, David Hechler's *The Battle and the 'backlash': the Child Sexual Abuse War* was published. While examining some high-profile child sexual abuse cases, Hechler (an investigative journalist) wrote that his book concentrates on the issues that arise in most cases. These included:

- obstacles to prosecution
- the rights of the accused
- the role of experts
- false accusations
- whether children lie about sexual abuse
- the role of the media.

Hechler's book provides little detailed analysis of the media coverage of child abuse. The principal focus is on what Hechler terms the 'backlash'. Hechler's argument, outlined in his first chapter, can be summarised as follows: The discovery of the full extent of child sexual abuse followed the recognition of physical abuse as a serious problem, after the work of Kempe and others. Interest

moved from the 'battered' to the 'molested' child (1988). Child sexual abuse had previously been regarded as rare, or the product of children's imagination and fantasy. The subject of child sexual abuse was rarely covered by the media. The media's 'discovery' of child sexual abuse, according to Hechler, led to an onslaught of cases and coverage (1988). Cases involving many professions were discovered. Expert opinions were regularly used throughout the media. The United States of America was described as 'besieged by a sexual abuse epidemic' (1988).

Hechler claims that a 'backlash' started in Jordan, Minnesota. A widely publicised case, where it was alleged that adults ran a child sex ring, collapsed and defendants were acquitted. In Hechler's words, "what the media giveth, the media taketh away" (1988, p. 6).

Just as the media 'discovered' child abuse, according to Hechler it also 'discovered' the 'backlash':

Articles appeared on other cases that had fallen apart ... there were articles suggesting how easily **anyone** could be accused of sexually abusing a child, and how difficult and expensive it was to defend oneself. (1988, p. 8, emphasis in original)

Hechler links cases where 'charges turned bizarre' to the creation of a 'backlash':

Allegedly abused children were talking about strange rituals, possibly satanic, involving the killing ... of animals. They told of eating excrement, drinking urine, and observing the murder ... of babies. (1988, p. 7)

It is interesting to note the language used by Hechler in his book. He writes that "one thing is clear: there *is* a war" (1988, p. 3, emphasis in original). A newspaper advertisement (likening a pre-school sexual abuse case to a witch hunt) is described as "an example of the salvos that have been fired" (Hechler 1988, p. 3).

Six years after Hechler's book, another book was published on the subject. *The 'Backlash': Child Protection Under Fire*, edited by Professor J. E. B. Myers (1994a), provided more detailed analysis of media coverage of child abuse. The theme of the book is provided by the second sentence of the first chapter: "In the late 1980s, after a period of almost exclusively favourable media attention, child protection became more publicly controversial" (Finkelhor 1994, p. 1).

According to Finkelhor all social movements 'engender 'backlash'', travelling through 'cycles of attention and controversy', and can be said to have a 'natural history' (1994).

The shift from generally positive media coverage of child abuse largely involved a shift in focus from child abuse itself to a more critical examination of society's response to child abuse, or what we now call child protection. This analysis is supported by Finkelhor's summary of what he terms the 'very successful' mobilisation of responses to child abuse. Child abuse, and child sexual abuse in particular 'have clearly arrived on the public agenda' and have been 'occupying center stage' for far longer than most social problems do (1994).

Finkelhor (1994) attributes this success to the alliance of child welfare professionals and the women's movement, particularly in the area of child sexual abuse. Success, according to Finkelhor, has also been achieved because of the 'symbolic strength' of the fight against child

abuse. Child sexual abuse in particular, he argues, has been even more 'symbolically powerful' (1994). This is because child sexual abuse unites three important preoccupations of the period: sexuality, changing gender and family relations, and the relationship between crime and justice (1994).

Myers (1994b) examines the literature on the so-called 'backlash'. Reviewing newspapers, magazines, books and broadcast media, he discerns a 'disturbing trend': reporting is increasingly critical of the child protection system (1994b). Myers also states that 'coverage of child sexual abuse is particularly vitriolic' (1994b). His definition of "backlash" (taken from Webster's Dictionary) is 'a strong adverse reaction to a political or social movement' (1994c). Myers also states that it is necessary to distinguish between two types of criticism of the child protection system: legitimate and illegitimate criticism.

There are, according to Myers, several themes that dominate the literature on the 'backlash'. He summarises the themes using the print and broadcast media, as well as books and journals. The major themes Myers summarises are as follows:

- In the first, it is alleged that the whole child protection system is 'out of control' and has major problems (1994b, pp. 89–90).
- In the second, child protection is seen as a witch hunt, with parallels drawn to the Salem witchcraft trials of the late 17th century.
- In the third theme, professionals involved in child protection are portrayed as unstable and contributing to hysteria about child abuse.

Other connected themes include the portrayal of professionals as the problem (1994b) or as "Nazis" (1994b, pp. 93–94). Myers also claims that those who are responsible for the "backlash literature" and who are critical of child protection use 'rhetorical devices' to support their arguments (1994b).

Research at the Child Abuse and Family Violence Research Unit at Monash University (Goddard & Saunders, in preparation) has led to rejection of the term 'backlash' in this paper in favour of 'contested aspects' of child sexual abuse. Some aspects of child protection practice have become contested, with considerable argument about the grounds for and level of intervention. The use of the term 'backlash', it is argued, is inappropriate. While Goddard and Saunders (in preparation) found that the number of articles in the print media critical of child protection services has increased, there continue to be many articles exposing the extent of child sexual abuse. Indeed, the suggestion of a significant 'backlash' is contradicted by other researchers. Jenkins (1996), for example, reviews the subject of 'clergy abuse' in the media:

Prior to the late 1980s, the use of these two words [clergy and abuse] almost invariably produced stories about clergy being active in the fight against drug abuse or child abuse, but this picture changed with a tremendous upsurge of stories about clergy themselves being active as abusers. (Jenkins 1996, p. 54)

Jenkins found that the number of stories about the clergy as perpetrators of abuse increased dramatically in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is hard to equate these and other findings with any significant 'backlash'.

It is also important to note that 'contested aspects' may be unavoidable in some circumstances. As Hechler acknowledges in his book, referring to an American case, uncertainty may always be with us: "What really happened in Jordan (Minnesota)? All the questions may never be answered. It will take a book or two to begin the process ..." (1988, p. 8).

Pyck (1994) makes similar points in an analysis of the Cleveland case in the United Kingdom and the Oude Pekela case in the Netherlands. In the words of Pyck, these were "the high-profile, multiple-victim cases" (1994, p. 70). The important distinction, according to our continuing media analysis, is summarised succinctly by Pyck, describing the media coverage about the Cleveland case: "Some reporting was thorough and objective, although other stories were exaggerated and distorted" (1994, p. 71).

Interestingly, Hechler uses a similar distinction when reviewing the Jordan case: "While some of the coverage was superficial and sensational, there were articles that examined the issues more carefully" (1988, p. 6).

It is interesting in this context to return to some of the earlier literature. Wilkinson (1980) reviewed the coverage of child abuse by the *Washington Post*. He inquired into whether the paper covered child abuse on a systematic basis and whether child abuse received the same coverage as politics, fashion or recipes. His answer was that the *Washington Post* did not cover the problem in the same systematic fashion, and he proposed a number of reasons for this. Firstly, the competition for space in the newspaper is fierce. Secondly, child abuse does not easily fit one particular area of reporting; it can be part of police, medical, political or sociological reporting, and therefore tends to 'fall through the cracks' (1980). Thirdly, many child abuse cases are reviewed in courts such as the family courts and there are restrictions on reporting and issues of confidentiality (see the section below on the publication of victims' names). Fourthly, other sources of news, such as hospital emergency rooms, present reporters with additional problems, particularly over verifying accusations of abuse.

Signorielli, in her review of the coverage of child abuse in magazines, paid particular attention to the issue of sensationalism. She reports (1980) that sensationalism is a major concern of professionals who argue that 'sensationalist coverage distorts and exploits a serious problem'. The other side of the coin, she proposes, is that sensationalism involves "reporters and editors trying to ... cover serious social issues, while continuing to turn a profit" (1980, p. 259). According to Signorielli's analysis, stories of child sexual abuse and pornography were treated in the most sensational fashion, with incest 'rated as the most sensational of all child abuse stories'.

Much of the media coverage in the United Kingdom and the United States of America that is described as part of a 'backlash' is concerned with child protection responses rather than with child abuse itself. Aldridge, for instance, writes of 'inordinately hostile press coverage' of social workers in United Kingdom child protection (1994). Franklin and Parton, again in the United Kingdom, suggest that social workers in child protection are described in the media as 'fools' or 'wimps' in some cases, or 'villains' and 'bullies' in others (1991).

Little attention has been paid to the impact of sensationalist coverage on child protection practice. Goddard (1994a; 1994b), in an interview with a social services manager, shows that in one case in the United Kingdom the more extreme features of the abuse were not emphasised, in an attempt to avoid sensationalist media coverage. This case study is also of interest because of the way child protection services are described as slow to use the media even in response to media campaigns orchestrated by victims' parents.

Part of a perceived 'backlash' may also be the result of poor media relations skills in protective services. Tate describes child protection as becoming 'defensive, terse and unforthcoming' in the face of sensationalist media coverage (1994). Poor media relations, according to Tate, lead to public perceptions that there must be a problem in the way the case is handled by child protection, rather than that the child's need for privacy requires restraint on the part of protective services:

By staying silent, social workers are handing the crucial battle for the hearts and minds of those who employ them to those who would rather they did not intervene in cases of alleged child abuse. The press is a vital conduit — perhaps *the* vital conduit for the creation of a political climate which either enables or obstructs good child protection work. (Tate 1994, p. 184, emphasis in original)

The continuing analysis by Goddard and Saunders (in preparation) of the media coverage of child abuse suggests that both 'contested' and 'uncontested' aspects of child sexual abuse may be treated in a sensational manner by the media. 'Contested aspects', however, such as recovered or false memories, and ritual and satanic abuse (e.g. Richardson et al. 1991), can become 'contested truths' when covered in the media. 'Contested truths' arise where there appears to be little middle ground: memories are recovered or false; ritual abuse does or does not exist. The media do not easily report uncertainty. As Gorelick (1995) suggests, 'any subtlety or middle ground in the public discourse is virtually obliterated'. The following case study provides important contextual analysis of this area.

'Contested aspects' of child sexual abuse: analysis of a Guardian story

One of the most hotly 'contested aspects' of child sexual abuse in recent years has been that of recovered or false memories. (Once again, this is an area where the choice of words reveals a great deal — see below.) The work of Deacon et al. (1999) of Loughborough University in the United Kingdom is particularly instructive when examining media representations of child sexual abuse, so their work will be examined in some detail.

Deacon and his colleagues examine what they term the 'natural history' of one print media article (in Britain's broadsheet newspaper *The Guardian*) about what they identify as the 'so-called false memories' or the 'false/recovered memory debate' or 'recovered memories' (1999). They seek to trace the article's development in "... the interaction between several individual and institutional sources and news professionals, through to details of its production, and then to its decoding by individuals ..." (1999, p. 10).

Their analysis of the newspaper article focuses on “ ... the issue of definitional power, exploring the different ways in which competing institutional sources, media professionals and audience members seek to define the meaning ...” (1999, p. 10).

Deacon et al. briefly summarise the controversial issue of whether memories of traumatic events can be ‘recovered’. They declare that the basic issue is:

... whether these memories are real recollections of actual events, or whether they are false — implanted in the minds of vulnerable individuals by therapists who employ dubious therapeutic practices (in particular related to hypnotic regression and suggestion) and who are professionally obsessed with the issue of child abuse and its prevalence. (1999, p 10).

They argue that in order to “ ... understand and evaluate ... the representation of the issue in this [*Guardian*] article ... it is necessary to pay attention to details of its inception and production.” (1999, p. 11)

The Guardian story analysed by Deacon et al. (1999) was prompted by the release in January 1995 of a report of the Working Party of the British Psychological Society (BPS) on recovered or false memories. It is particularly interesting to note that Deacon et al. report that the BPS investigation was — in part, at least — prompted by the media debate on the issue:

There were also concerns that the alarmist and unsubstantiated debate about the prevalence of ‘False Memory Syndrome’ was distracting media and public attention from the wider issue of child abuse. (1999, p. 11)

The conclusions drawn by the BPS report were ‘equivocal’ (1999) and thus might be difficult to ‘convey to the media’ (1999). The plans of the BPS were somewhat undermined by the British False Memory Society (BFMS)¹, which organised press releases prior to the BPS news conference and broke the news embargo.

Deacon et al. (1999) suggest that a number of features of this case need to be acknowledged. Two are of particular significance for this review. Firstly, there was open conflict between the two organisations over the BPS report and the issue of recovered or false memories. Secondly, both attempted to set the agenda of the media as both believed media response to be crucial in influencing the broader debates on the subject.

Deacon et al. (1999) interviewed the journalist who wrote the piece, who stated that his interest in the report was prompted, in part at least, by the fact that the issue was already on the media agenda. The status of the BPS was influential and the organisation of the launch, which allowed for forward planning, was also helpful. The negative aspect of the report was the “agnosticism of the Working Party’s message — that false memories might exist but they are unlikely to be widespread” (1999, p. 15).

This was counterbalanced by the actions of the BFMS, which created extra ‘news value’ by objecting to the report (1999). (Goddard (1997b) has written of the media coverage, and of similar

¹ The BFMS position is that recovered memories are false memories.

tactics used in Australia by Broken Rites, in connection with a press conference held by the Catholic Church in Melbourne.)

The study by Deacon et al. examines other influences on the way the report was 'encoded' and how one view was 'privileged' over another (1999). The BPS is seen as 'an arbiter on the issue — dispassionate, professional, expert', while the BFMS was regarded as an 'advocate ... whose intervention was grounded in vested, rather than independent, motives' (1999, p. 15). The BPS is thus given a 'discursive ascendancy' (1999). Skidmore (1995) has also emphasised the importance of 'credibility of sources' and of who gains the title of 'expert'.

Deacon et al. (1999) also conducted a series of 14 focus group interviews. From these they concluded that audience decoding of the message created by the journalist occurred at 'evaluative' rather than 'interpretative' levels (Deacon et al. 1999):

In this example audience responses and journalistic mediation are similarly constrained by their negligible access to alternative repertoires of discourse and experience about the false memory issue. (1999, p. 27)

The work of Deacon et al. (1999) has been summarised in some detail because it provides important evidence that there are severe limitations in media analysis that is purely textual, and because it recognises the importance of contextual issues and analysis. They argue that mass media research has not developed in an 'incremental' or 'linear' fashion but rather by "moments of sudden transition and transformation" (1999, p. 5). Understanding of child sexual abuse can be viewed as developing in a similar manner. Tracing the story from its production to its reception, Deacon et al. also suggest that deeper analysis of media activity is required and that far more rigorous theoretical approaches are required if we are to gain more insight into the influence of the media in social problems (1999).

Other criticisms

Some authors have suggested that the critical media coverage of child protection services, the so-called 'backlash', is deserved, Pinker, for example, in a review of Aldridge 1994, claims that negative media coverage of social workers in child protection is a result of the:

... sheer scale of the professional errors, the tragedies and the injustices uncovered. Of course, there have been times when newspapers have oversimplified some of the issues but such errors are as nothing compared to the sort of incompetence on which they are reporting. (Pinker 1994, p. 19)

It is argued that the use of the term 'backlash', deserved or not, to describe some media coverage of child sexual abuse is not only inappropriate but also serves to conceal other legitimate criticisms of how the media sometimes report the problem. Franklin and Parton, for example, assessed the content of the United Kingdom coverage of child abuse in general and found examples of seven main criticisms. They claim that reporting is often sensationalised and trivialised; tends to be biased; presents an oversimplified account; contains inaccuracies and misrepresentation; seeks scapegoats; is sometimes racist; and is often sexist (Franklin & Parton 1991).

Franklin and Parton make an important contribution in their analysis of what the media do *not* cover. They identify three main issues:

- The media rarely report on the inadequate resources provided to child protection services.
- The media frequently fail to deal with gender issues in child sexual abuse, rarely reporting, for example, that most perpetrators are male.
- The media rarely see the issues from the child's perspective, viewing most cases as a clash between the State and the parents, with children's rights rarely considered (1991).

It is suggested that further research into what is not reported in the Australian media would add to the contextual understanding of media coverage.

The role of the media: the publication of victims' names

Introduction

A common criticism of the media is that only the more grotesque cases of child abuse are reported. Such cases give the media the opportunity to 'titillate' the audience with 'unwholesome' stories (Nelson 1984). On the other hand, it is clear that many child abuse scandals and child protection system failures would not have seen the light of day if it were not for concerned individuals and the resources of the media. The responsible media coverage of child abuse and child protection is essential; children who require protection from the acts and omissions of adults can rarely speak for themselves.

Nevertheless, using the power of the media to promote what some might perceive to be a child's best interests does not necessitate revealing the child victim's identity. Nor is it necessary to identify a child in the pursuit of justice on his or her behalf. In fact, this was a deciding factor against the accused in two cases before the Supreme Court of Victoria (December 1995 and January 1996) — *Hinch v. Director of Public Prosecutions*, and *Television and Telecasters (Melbourne) Pty Ltd v. Director of Public Prosecutions*.

The issue of revealing a child victim's identity in the media was also brought to the fore by *The Australian's* coverage of 'the boy in the box'. Goddard and Saunders (in preparation) examined Scott's (1998a; 1998b) reporting of this child abuse case in both the Victorian and Queensland editions of the newspaper. For the Queensland edition a decision was made not to identify those involved (Scott 1998a) and the names were changed. In Victoria (Scott 1998b), the child's identity was revealed — but as the Queensland coverage of the story clearly demonstrated — this was not necessary. The two stories were otherwise identical, occupying exactly the same amount of space. The photographs used were also changed to protect the child's identity, but it could be argued the 'news value' remained the same whether the child was identified or not.

The Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958 (Vic.) and Hinch v DPP

In Victoria, it is an offence under subs. 4(1A) of the *Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958* (Vic.) if a person:

... publishes or causes to be published any matter that contains any particulars likely to lead to the identification of a person against whom a sexual offence is alleged to have been committed ... whether or not a proceeding in respect of the alleged offence is pending in a court.

It is a defence to a charge under the Act if the accused can prove that publication occurred with the permission of the Supreme Court, the County Court or the Magistrates Court, or with the permission of 'the person against whom the offence is alleged to have been committed' (Collins 1996, p. 60). The Act does not set out special conditions pertaining to sexual offences against a child:

Parliament made no provision for that permission to be given by parents, guardians, custodians or any one else in place of the victim (save a court). (Victorian Reports [1996], p. 691)

Where consent is required to legitimate an action such as publishing the identity of a victim:

... it will always be necessary to consider whether the nature and consequences of the consent have been understood. In the case of consent under para 4(1B)(b) of the Act, the victim must have some comprehension of the consequences of losing his or her anonymity as a victim of a sexual offence. (Collins 1996, p. 61)

Derryn Hinch and Television and Telecasters (Melbourne) Pty Ltd were charged under the Act when the identity of an eight-year-old boy (pseudonym William), who had been sexually assaulted by two men, was publicly revealed. The child's name was publicised in an interview between Hinch and William's parents on Channel 10 television.

The parents' motives for the media exposure were their dissatisfaction with the lenient sentences given to the perpetrators who sexually assaulted their son, and their desire for William to be viewed as "a victim, to be pitied but not condemned" (Victorian Reports [1996], p. 695). Hinch and Channel 10 argued that:

... the telecast was for the purpose of criticising the perceived inadequacy of the sentences imposed by the County Court, and for the purpose of promoting an appeal. (Collins 1996, p. 61)

William's parents spoke with him about the interview before it took place and the child gave consent for his identity to be revealed. He encouraged his father to "go for it" (Collins 1996, p. 60). The capacity of an eight-year-old child to give consent with full understanding of the implications of disclosing his or her identity was a point of contention in court. In a case before the High Court in 1992 it had been reasoned that:

A minor is, according to this principle, capable of giving informed consent when he or she 'achieves a sufficient understanding and intelligence to enable him or her to understand fully what is proposed' (*Secretary, Department of Health and Community Services v. JMB and SMB* (Marion's case) (1992) 175 CLR 218 at 237, cited in Collins 1996, p. 61).

In William's case it was decided that it was doubtful whether an eight-year-old child could ever have "the requisite degree of understanding of the ramifications of a loss of anonymity under s. 4 of the Act for the defence to be made out" (Collins 1996, p. 61). Further, it was decided that:

... it [cannot] be said to have been *necessary* to disclose the victim's name or indeed the names of the offenders; the point that the sentences were too light and that an appeal was warranted against their inadequacy was quite capable of being made without the disclosure either of identity or of details that might lead to identification. (Victorian Reports [1996], p. 690, emphasis in original)

Subsection 4(1A) of the *Judicial Proceedings Reports Act* explicitly aims to protect all victims of sexual assault, including children, from exposure of their identity through the media. The implications of such exposure must be fully understood by the victim for his or her consent to be given for the violation of this protection of privacy.

In Victoria, the privacy of children who are victims of crime may also be protected through other judicial means. Under the *Children and Young Person's Act 1989*, s. 19 and s. 26, a magistrate in the Children's Court (normally an open court) may impose restrictions both on publicity and on access to Children's Court hearings:

19. Proceedings to be heard in open court

- (1) Proceedings in the Court are, subject to sub-section (2), to be conducted in open court.
- (2) The Court may, on the application of a party or of any other person who has direct interest in the proceeding or without any such application –
 - (a) order that the whole or any part of a proceeding be heard in closed court; or
 - (b) order that only persons or classes of persons specified by it may be present during the whole or any part of a proceeding.
- (3) Any party to the proceeding and any other interested person has standing to support or oppose an application under sub-section (2).
- (4) If an order has been made under this section, the Court must cause a copy of it to be posted on a door of, or in another conspicuous place at, the place at which the Court is being held.
- (5) An order posted under this section must not contain any particulars likely to lead to the identification of the child who is a party to the proceeding.
- (6) A person must not contravene an order made and posted under this section.

Penalty applying in this sub-section:

- (a) In a case of a person of or above the age of 17 years, 25 penalty units or committal for a term of not more than six months to prison; or
- (b) In the case of a child of or above the age of 15 years, 25 penalty units or detention for a period of not more than six months in a youth training centre; or
- (c) In the case of a child under the age of 15 years, 12 penalty units or detention for a period of not more than three months in a youth residential centre.

26. Restriction on publication of proceedings

A person must not publish or cause to be published —

- (a) except with the permission of the Children's Court Senior Magistrate, a report of a proceeding in the court or of a proceeding in any other court arising out of a proceeding in the Court that contains any particulars likely to lead to the identification of —
 - (i) the particular venue of the Children Court in which the proceeding was heard; or
 - (ii) a child or other party to the proceeding; or
 - (iii) a witness in the proceeding; or
- (b) except with the permission of the Children's Court Senior Magistrate, a picture as being or including a picture of a child or other party to, or witness in, a proceeding referred to in paragraph (a) (*Children's and Young Person's Act 1989*)

Two other Acts provide a means for a court in Victoria to impose restrictions on the publication of details leading to the identification of a victim of crime. *The Magistrates Court Act 1989* s. 126 allows, in the public interest, concealment of the names of witnesses or persons whose safety is endangered, and *The Health Act 1958* s. 129 allows for the suppression of the name of a victim allegedly infected with HIV (Fox 1997). Further, while criminal proceedings are generally held in open courts with minimal, if any, restrictions on reporting by the press:

... the superior courts have an inherent right, which is exercised in exceptional circumstances, to conduct their business in camera [in a court closed to the public] or to conceal the identity of witnesses by use of pseudonyms or other means ... a trial judge may order that the whole or part of the proceedings be heard in a closed court, or may limit who may be present in the court-room, or may impose restrictions on the reporting of proceedings. (Fox 1997, p. 240)

Victoria is the only Australian state or territory that allows for criminal proceedings to be held in camera for any type of case (*Magistrates Court Act 1989* (Vic.), ss. 126, 3 (1)). Other Australian states and territories restrict *in camera* proceedings to cases where a sexual offence is alleged to have been committed (Bishop 1998). In Victoria, there has also been recent case law on the emerging idea of allowing witnesses to use pseudonyms where they are at risk. Though not specifically designed to protect children, they can provide useful analogies (Richard Fox 1999, personal communication).

Similar Acts to those described in Victoria apply in each Australian state and territory (see Bishop, 1998). In Queensland:

... a court is required to exclude all persons, other than those excepted, from the court when the complainant is giving evidence in respect of a sexual offence [*Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 1978* (Qld), s. 5; s. 3 ('complainant', 'examination of witness')]. The exceptions include a person who will provide emotional support to the complainant, and in the case of a complainant under the age of 17 years, the parent or guardian of the complainant, unless the court considers the presence of the person would not be in the interests of the complainant. (Bishop 1998, p. 358)

In relation to legal restrictions on publication in Queensland:

... restrictions are imposed in sexual cases on the publication of the complainant's identity and the premature publication of the accused's identity. Other than when the report is an 'exempted' report, a report in a sexual case must not reveal the name, address, school or place of employment of the complainant, or any other particular likely to lead to the identification of the complainant, unless for good and sufficient reason the court makes an order to the contrary. If it does make such an order, it may specify the particulars that may be revealed and the extent to which the publication of the report is permitted. A similar rule applies to the premature publication of the accused identity in relation to a 'prescribed' sexual offence (*Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 1978* (Qld), ss. 6, 3: ss. 7, 3) (Bishop 1998, pp. 359–360).

Children's rights to privacy

The area of rights to privacy of children who are subject to crime is a complex one, and a preliminary literature review suggests that little if anything has been written about the effects of media coverage of children as victims of crime.

The Australian Press Council has set out the broad principles to which it is committed (October, 1996). Its 'Statement of Principles' argues that 'the freedom of the press to publish is the freedom of the people to be informed' but is also 'important because of the obligation it entails towards the people [rather than] the rights it gives to the press'. The statement also stresses that 'Liberty does not mean licence'. It appears that, after these broad statements, it is the third general principle that is central to the issues discussed here:

Readers of publications are entitled to have news and comment presented to them honestly and fairly, and with respect for the privacy and sensibilities of individuals. However, the right to privacy should not prevent publication of matters of public record or obvious or significant public interest ... (Australian Press Council 'Statement of Principles', October 1996)

Similarly in the United Kingdom rights to privacy, according to a Press Council ruling, can be superseded by claims of legitimate public interest or where an individual gives consent (Crone 1989). Children as victims, such as in the case of the 'boy in the box' that concerns Queensland, cannot give consent for the same reasons that they are not deemed able to give consent to sexual assault: they are not fully informed. The United Kingdom ruling stressed that public interest must be 'legitimate', and not merely 'prurient' interest or 'morbid curiosity' (Crone 1989). Something that is 'of interest to the public' is not the same as 'in the public interest' (Crone 1989). Children are barely mentioned, if at all, in such discussions, although the United Kingdom Press Council did state that children should not be subject to 'damaging' or 'critical' articles just because their parents are in the public eye (Crone 1989).

Hurst and White (1994), in an examination of violence, crime and public safety, very briefly examine the psychological effects in the context of ethics and exposure to media violence. Setting the context, they state:

Children are smaller, weaker and less knowledgeable than adults. Until they grow in stature, strength and understanding equal to that of adults, it is unfair to take advantage of their relative powerlessness. And exercising unequal power destroys the trust children have in adults to care for them. (Hurst & White 1994, p. 102)

Hurst and White (1994) suggest that children can fall between 'the self-regulatory cracks' and they examine the Cangai siege. In this siege, Mike Willesee's interview with two children being held hostage (in which they were asked if they had seen anybody killed) was condemned. According to Hurst and White (1994), the *Herald and Weekly Times* later introduced guidelines which, amongst other aims, sought to prevent the exploitation of children while gathering news.

It is interesting to examine the 'Professional Practice Policy' of the *Herald and Weekly Times*. Children are the subject of Section 10.0:

10.1 You should not normally interview or photograph children under the age of 16 on subjects involving the personal welfare of the child in the absence of, and without the consent of, a parent or other adult responsible for the child.

10.2 Children should not be interviewed about their parents or siblings when the parents or siblings are the subject of any story except in the presence of, and with the consent of, a parent or other adult responsible for the child.

10.3 No inducement should be offered to a child to cooperate in an interview ...

There are clearly many issues that are not covered by these guidelines. When does a parent have the right to agree to the disclosure of intimate details about the welfare of his or her child? Intra-familial child abuse clearly demonstrates that parents do not always act in the best interests of their children. When one parent abuses a child, does he or she no longer have the right to consent to disclosure? Can it be assumed that the non-abusive parent retains that right when the other parent has abused the child? There are clearly significant concerns remaining about protecting children from abuse by the media.

According to the limited material available the Australian Press Council appears to be “concerned to protect children from unnecessary publicity” (Hurst & White 1994, p. 122). Hurst and White cite the case of *The Sun* in Sydney which was reprimanded by the Press Council for publication of a photograph of a 12-year-old boy whose father had shaved his head and dyed his hair as a punishment:

The fact that the boy’s parents had given authority for the picture made no difference. The [press] council said the newspaper had ‘added to the boy’s humiliation’. (Hurst & White 1994, p.122)

Accusations of invasions of privacy are major issues in the ethics of journalism, according to Belsey (1992). He suggests that this is because society ‘values personal privacy’ but also ‘thrives on publicity’. In their book *Media Ethics*, Christians et al. (1991) give case examples and draw out three moral principles: The first ‘promotes decency and basic fairness as nonnegotiable’; the second puts forward ‘redeeming social value’ as the guiding principle for choosing what private information can be disclosed; and the third states that “the dignity of persons ought not be maligned in the name of press privilege” (Christians et al. 1991, pp. 139–140).

Holsinger (1991) also states that “questions of privacy present more hard decisions than any others”, and few topics are debated more heatedly. It is interesting to note that far more attention appears to have been paid to the privacy of children as *perpetrators* of crime than as *victims*. The recognition that young offenders need privacy appears to be universally recognised on the grounds that “publicity for juvenile offenders would stigmatize them and make it more difficult for them to go straight” (Holsinger 1991, p. 380). There are clearly accepted arguments that young people who commit crimes “should not be haunted for the rest of their lives by the mistakes of their youth” (Holsinger 1991, p. 237). This is why identification of the perpetrators in the Bulger case in the United Kingdom caused such intense debate (Franklin & Horwath 1996).

In New Zealand, the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1989* states, in line with legislation elsewhere, that children should not be identified in child protection matters in civil

courts dealing with such cases. In the Youth Courts (dealing with offenders) offenders must not be identified and information that could lead to identification is also suppressed (Burrows 1990). Burrows suggests that judges cannot overrule this by giving permission to publish details. There seems to be a prevailing view that 'sensitive facts' about an individual's private life need to be treated with care (Burrows 1990). It appears that it should be possible for a child to take action on the grounds that disclosure of such information causes injury. Although a number of authors, both in New Zealand and elsewhere, indicate that there is no clear and coherent right to privacy in common law, the right to report is clearly circumscribed by a recognised right to privacy to some degree.

The tension is clear: breaches of privacy are nearly always "justified for a higher moral purpose or public good or for a nobler motivation than privacy protection" (Brill 1990, p. 44). Privacy, however, is almost exclusively examined from an adult perspective. The arguments used should be even more forceful when considering the needs of a child. De Cew, for example, describes privacy as a shield needed to protect individuals out of fear of being "scrutinized, judged, ridiculed, pressured, coerced, or otherwise taken advantage of by others" (1997, p. 74). These concerns, it is argued, apply even more to the child victim of abuse.

An excellent analysis of issues that are relevant to the debate in Queensland is presented by Patterson and Wilkins (1994). They argue that:

... while much of the debate focuses on the *right* to privacy, an equally compelling argument must be made for the *need* for privacy. Privacy is not to be viewed as a luxury or as an option, it is a necessary component of a democracy upon which many of its values such as freedom, individual dignity, and autonomy rest. (1994, p. 110, emphasis in original text)

Patterson and Wilkins argue that there are two particular causes of current problems. Firstly, community standards are changing, and what was once regarded as private is now openly and commonly reported. They cite the example of breast surgery which was once regarded as entirely private but is now commonly reported and the media coverage is "credited with saving lives" (1994, p. 110). The second cause they describe as arising from the fact that:

... privacy is both a legal concept in the domain of the courts and an ethical concept debated by philosophers. A confusion over which analysis is appropriate confounds our thinking. (Patterson and Wilkins 1994, p. 110)

According to Patterson and Wilkins the result is that "journalists have been caught between what the law allows and what their consciences will permit. This confusion has led to ethical bungling" (1994, p. 111).

A number of writers have observed that the perspectives and overall rights of victims have only recently been acknowledged, if considered at all (see e.g. Fattah 1986; Mawby & Crill 1987). Rape victims are the exception to this, and a number of effects of victimisation have been identified. Mawby and Crill (1987) suggest that emotional and psychological problems, behavioural and relationship difficulties, ill-health and financial costs are amongst these. Children are rarely mentioned in this limited literature on general victimology. It is noted that children in households that have been broken into are also affected by the crime (Mawby & Walklate 1995) but there are few other studies.

A recurrent claim is that the criminal justice system does not place value on the perspectives of victims, who may feel that they are subject to secondary victimisation (Fattah 1986). There appears to be little research on the effects of media coverage of the criminal justice system. Rape victims, in spite of their right to privacy, are reported to suffer embarrassment (Holmstrom & Burgess 1978; Allison & Wrightsman 1993). It is interesting to note that rape victims are seen as having anonymity for life (Mawby & Walklate 1995). One of the primary benefits of anonymity for rape victims has been that they are given the space to deal with victimisation in their own way (e.g. Roberts 1989).

The above summary identifies some of the issues arising from a brief review of the literature. There are, however, a number of other issues relevant to the child victim of assault:

- It is not clear why the child victim of physical assault should not be granted the same rights to privacy as the victim of sexual assault. In the latter cases the victim is given anonymity. This anomaly requires consideration. There are cases, for example, where it may be difficult to distinguish physical abuse from sexual abuse. For example, injuries to the genitalia may be physical injuries inflicted for a sexual purpose.
- While there are many books and articles that cover the effects of child abuse (e.g. Goddard 1996a) the victim of serious intra-familial abuse faces particular problems that are not faced by many other victims of crime. The most obvious is that the crime committed by parents or caregivers does not necessarily end the relationship between perpetrator and victim. This makes the media coverage of these issues particularly sensitive.
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) clearly states (Article 16) that no child 'shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy', and also pays attention to his or her reputation.
- Children, the evidence suggests, often blame themselves for their own victimisation. This is another reason for media sensitivity to their needs.
- The media clearly have major social responsibilities in the area of child abuse. While many of their efforts in exposing problems and educating the public are praiseworthy, there are risks to the child. Children who are physically abused are often told that it is their fault and that the abuse is punishment. As a result they internalise messages of guilt and self-blame. These may be exacerbated by media coverage, which may be discovered later and re-awaken these feelings.
- While the law is extremely important, changes in the law alone can only achieve limited change. Education and discussion are also important elements in any consideration of children's rights to privacy.

The role of the media: 'outing' the perpetrators

Introduction

Throughout the Western world, awareness of child sexual abuse has led to action by members of the public to draw attention to horrific crimes against children (Goddard 1997a). British newspapers in 1997 (and later) carried many articles on the dangers created for children when convicted child sex offenders are released from prison. The British media demonstrated that they were prepared to identify or 'out' the perpetrators. A selective review (Goddard 1997a) demonstrated that tabloid newspapers carried particularly graphic studies.

The Liverpool Echo on 17 June, for example, devoted almost its entire front page to an 'exclusive' by Jason Teasdale (1997) to the effect that a 'convicted paedophile' would soon be released. Broadsheet newspapers, for example *The Guardian*, also carried such stories. Interestingly *The Guardian*, exactly one week earlier, had carried the news that this particular man was to be released under the headlines "In a few days this man, a convicted child rapist, will be released. Police say he is 'incredibly dangerous'. Should you be told if he moves in next door?" and "Nightmare on any street" (Bowcott & Clouston 1997).

The story in *The Guardian* was accompanied by a photograph of the man, who had been detained after being found carrying a bag of books and toys. He admitted to the police that he was searching for a child (Bowcott & Clouston 1997).

The Guardian story summarised the issues in its opening:

Newspapers are 'outing' paedophiles and their homes are consequently being firebombed. Do child molesters deserve a second chance after they have served their sentences? Or has the public the right to know when such a menace moves in next door? (Bowcott and Clouston 1997, p. 2)

The role of newspapers in 'outing' convicted child molesters is examined in another piece in the same paper by Gary Younge (1997). Paul Horrocks, acting editor of the *Manchester Evening News*, a paper described as exposing several child molesters, is quoted as saying that a newspaper takes risks when it does so:

The paper must balance children's safety with the threat of mob rule; it pits the chance that a paedophile may reoffend against the fact that he has served his time and may be denied the right to resume a normal life. 'There is a risk that people will take the law into their own hands. But there is a greater risk that children will be hurt. If you can't take risks to protect children then when can you?' [Paul Horrocks] says. (Younge 1997, p. 3)

Risks there certainly are:

One of those 'outed' by the *Manchester Evening News* suffered physical and verbal abuse from his neighbours and moved away as a result. Horrocks describes as 'regrettable' a case of mistaken identity in which an innocent man was attacked by an angry mob. (Younge 1997, p. 3)

The anger and the potential for tragedy are described in the piece by Bowcott and Clouston:

In May 1994, a girl aged 14 called Samantha Penell died after the house in which she had been staying was burnt down. Those who set fire to the building were looking for a paedophile. (Bowcott and Clouston 1997, p. 3)

They recount other stories: a convicted child molester stabbed to death in Edinburgh, and a man in Manchester badly beaten by a gang who believed wrongly that he was a child rapist (Bowcott & Clouston 1997).

Recently, the release in New South Wales of convicted child killer John Lewthwaite prompted a considerable degree of media attention. After his release his new home was attacked by local residents, angry at his presence in their community.

Do the media create or reflect public dissatisfaction?

The tension between children's right to protection and the right of those who abuse children to be considered to have reformed after serving their sentences is at the heart of this matter. This is assessed by Caroline Lewis (1996) in a paper in the *Harvard Civil Rights — Civil Liberties Law Review*. She suggests (1996) that 'growing feelings of frustration and powerlessness' have been expressed by communities as media coverage has brought home the realisation that sex offenders are living in their neighbourhoods. High rates of recidivism and lack of success in rehabilitation have been quoted in support of legislation such as *Megan's Law* in the United States. Opponents of such laws, according to Lewis (1996), argue that they infringe the released offenders' civil liberties and limit their chances to rebuild their lives. These opponents also question the data on high recidivism rates and argue that most sex offences against children take place in the family or in child care.

A lack of confidence in the courts pervades many discussions. The case of Said Morgan in New South Wales is considered to reflect a lack of confidence in the courts' ability to deal appropriately with those charged with sexual assault. On 1 August 1997, a jury took little more than half an hour to find Morgan not guilty of murder or manslaughter. Morgan, a former detective, claimed that it was instinct that caused him to shoot an alleged child molester six times in the head with his police-issue revolver (Balogh 1997). The unnamed alleged offender was killed two days after Morgan learned that the man was charged with sexual assaults on three girls aged six, eleven and fourteen. Two of the victims were related to Morgan and the girls claimed that they had suffered four years of abuse including anal intercourse and digital penetration (medical evidence confirmed that abuse had occurred). The alleged perpetrator had threatened to kill the girls if they disclosed the abuse (Balogh 1997).

The *Sydney Morning Herald*, in an editorial describing the verdict as 'astonishing', suggested that the fact that 'juries simply do not like paedophiles' might have contributed to the decision. Speculating about other factors, the editorial suggested that:

Perhaps the explanation for the outright acquittal was the jury's unwillingness to leave the question of punishment to the court, as would have occurred had the jury found Mr. Morgan guilty of manslaughter. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 August 1997, editorial)

How much the media create rather than reflect such a lack of confidence remains a central question.

‘Outing’ alleged perpetrators

A brief analysis of the print media coverage of child sexual abuse in Queensland in 1998 demonstrates clearly the political, judicial and social tensions created by the discovery of child sexual abuse. Accusations of leaks (Ware 1998a) and cover-ups (Parnell 1998a) frequently appear on the same day, demonstrating that ‘contested truths’ are not limited to issues such as recovered or false memories. One of the issues that was subject to detailed debate was the naming of a member of the Queensland Parliament in relation to allegations of serious sexual offences and the subsequent police investigation. The ‘ALP backbencher’ and ‘long-serving Labor member’ (Koch 1998b) was identified by name in articles and in an editorial days later.

O’Gorman (1998) criticised *The Courier-Mail* for ‘having trashed the backbencher’s presumption of innocence’ by ‘abuse of its powerful media position’. O’Gorman argued that the real motive for publication was to score a ‘scoop’. The editor-in-chief defended *The Courier Mail’s* actions making a number of points (Mitchell 1998). These included the fact that the paper was not the first to name the MP and that he was named by the Premier after being identified in the paper and on Channel 9. Stronger arguments included the claim that identification was in the public interest given the status of the alleged perpetrator and of the minority state government. Such debates provide insights into how journalists see themselves and others:

A defence lawyer, in essence, seeks to hide from a judge and jury the truth about his client. The media, in seeking to find out the truth about stories in general, rightly seeks to shine a powerful spotlight on matters that lawyers and defendants would clearly prefer not to be revealed. (Mitchell 1998)

Earlier in the year, Brisbane’s Catholic Archbishop claimed that priests in particular are vulnerable to unsubstantiated allegations of child sexual abuse and that clergy had had ‘their lives wrecked’ (Thomas 1998). The editorial response again strongly declared the newspaper’s role:

The Church, and the community at large, should know that this newspaper is continuing its own rigorous investigations and will, if necessary in the public interest, name those it finds to have been involved in paedophilia. (*The Courier-Mail* 1998d)

As Jenkins has reported in his book on priests who sexually abuse children, for many years journalists ‘collaborated with the church’ to prevent even minor crimes committed by priests being reported in the papers (1996). This silence cost many children dearly. Accusations of child sexual abuse are now treated far more seriously, in part at least because of the public opprobrium that the media have reflected. Attempts to silence the media must be viewed with extreme caution. As Schellenberg (1996) proposes in his review of confidentiality and the media, the question is ‘confidentiality, to what end?’

Media coverage of child sexual abuse: a preliminary analysis

Introduction

A number of authors have criticised the standard analysis of media coverage of social problems. Just as concern is expressed about use of the term 'backlash', reservations are also expressed about the use of terms such as 'moral panic' (Cohen 1972)². Fundamentally, this is the idea that the media are part of the process by which panics are created (Howitt 1998). Kidd-Hewitt and Osborne (1995) have criticised the lack of theoretical development in the debate about the relationship between crime in general and the media. Kidd-Hewitt (1995) is more explicit, claiming that much of the study of crime in general and the media operates within an inflexible framework that comprises 'ritualistic reproductions of key concepts ... such as "moral panic" and "deviancy amplification".' Osborne (1995) also argues that development of theoretical approaches to media analysis has been slow.

Howitt has also criticised the standard 'moral panic' analysis, stating that it is "description rather than explanation" (1998, p. 26). Waddington (1986) has also argued that use of the term 'moral panic' is polemical rather than analytical. The term is not value-free, as Waddington proposes in relation to other crimes:

It seems virtually inconceivable that concern expressed about racial attacks, rape, or police misconduct would be described as a 'moral panic'. This is because the term has derogatory connotations: it implies that official and media concern is merely a 'moral panic' without substance or justification. (Waddington 1986, p. 258)

These and other criticisms of the use of 'moral panic' approaches to media coverage of child sexual abuse are justified. Clearly, however it would be extraordinary to imply that concerns about child sexual abuse are without substance; such analyses, according to Atmore (1996), serve to 'marginalise feminist and child advocates' as merely creating panics rather than contributing to debate and the development of theory.

Leaving aside these reservations about 'moral panic' approaches, there are other aspects of media coverage that are worthy of closer analysis. Kitzinger and Skidmore (1995) in their analysis of the British media found that most coverage of child sexual abuse was based on individual cases, reported by general reporters, and paid little attention to prevention. Kitzinger and Skidmore have proposed various ways of promoting the prevention of child sexual abuse in the mass media, including capitalising on news events, creating new initiatives that in turn create news, and working with specialist journalists who cover the area. Goddard and Liddell (1995) have also proposed that social workers and others working in child protection need to work more closely with the media, and have suggested ways of doing this.

Kitzinger and Skidmore (1995) also suggest that media coverage of prevention is inhibited by 'hard news' values. In this analysis, 'male values' dominate and the underlying causes of sexual abuse and feminist accounts of sexual abuse are rarely covered. Kitzinger (1996), however, in later work on recovered/false memory in particular, argues that gender divisions are not straightforward in representing the debate.

² Cohen (1972) studied groups of young people known as 'mods' and 'rockers' in the United Kingdom in the 1960s. Cohen suggested that the media defined the events, and described the two groups as deviants, who in turn lived up to their media image.)

A review of coverage of child sexual abuse in *The Age* ,1993 and 1998 — an historical perspective

The following preliminary analysis of articles printed in *The Age* newspaper in 1993 and 1998 is a part of Goddard and Saunders' research in progress at the Child Abuse and Family Violence Research Unit at Monash University. The findings are therefore tentative at this stage.

The review involved an analysis of all articles where the terms 'child sexual abuse', 'paedophilia', 'pedophilia' or 'incest' appeared in either the headline or the text of an article. Articles on the sexual abuse of children incorporate a very broad range of terms. It is therefore important to acknowledge that the articles analysed in this preliminary research may not include all articles about child sexual abuse printed in *The Age* during 1993 and 1998. Nevertheless, 120 articles and 97 articles respectively were analysed from those two years.

Articles were categorised under a number of headings, and the total number of articles matching each heading was calculated for the purpose of comparison (some articles were included in two categories). The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Articles about ‘child sexual abuse’, ‘paedophilia’, ‘pedophilia’ or ‘incest’ in *The Age* newspaper in 1993 and in 1998, categorised by content

Category	1993		1998	
	No.	%	No.	%
Victims’ stories	27	22.5	15	15.5
Stories identifying/emphasising alleged or convicted child sexual offender	20	16.7	41	42.3
Organisations implicated in child sexual abuse	21	17.5	20	20.6
Policy and law related to child sexual abuse	32	26.7	8	8.3
Prevention and treatment of child sexual abuse	13	10.8	6	6.2
Research findings and/or statistics about child sexual abuse	13	10.8	3	3.1
Independent or ‘expert’ commentaries	8	6.7	3	3.1
Other (e.g. commentary on sexual abuse in film/tv & pornography)	2	1.7	6	6.2
Total (given that some articles are included in two categories)	136		102	

Source: Goddard and Saunders (in preparation)

Discussion of the findings

While there was greater coverage in 1998 of victim and perpetrator stories (57.8%) than in 1993 (39.2%) the difference is due to the most striking finding — the predominance in 1998 of stories identifying or emphasising alleged convicted perpetrators of abuse- two and half times as many as in the earlier year.

Another interesting finding was the apparent shift away from articles on child sexual abuse that related to law and policy in the area. In 1993, 26.7 per cent of these articles focused on law and policy but in 1998 only 8.3 per cent of the articles had this as their focus. Further, there seems to have been much less coverage in 1998 than in 1993 of (a) research findings and statistical analysis (3% as against 10.8%); and (b) child sexual abuse prevention and treatment initiatives (6.2% as against 10.8%). As noted above, these aggregate figures are taken from the early stages of a larger project, and caution is appropriate in dealing with them.

The diminished coverage of research findings appears to contradict Nelson’s (1984) proposal that there is a well established ‘symbiotic relationship’ between the mass media and professional outlets. If the media were closely monitoring and reporting on papers in professional journals, the number of articles alerting the public to current child sexual abuse research findings would be increasing. Related research in progress at the Child Abuse and Family Violence Research Unit (Goddard & Saunders in preparation) suggests that articles on child sexual abuse predominate in major academic journals focused on child abuse in general. For example in 1998, of 122 articles in the international journal *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 62 (50.8%) were about child sexual abuse, and in 1993 of 79 articles 41 (51.89%) were on that subject. In each year a whole issue was devoted to

child sexual abuse — Vol. 17, No. 1 (1993) and Vol. 22, No. 6 (1998). It appears that the print media may be particularly selective in their coverage of research findings.

The apparent trend toward less reporting on changes in policy and law related to child sexual abuse, and less coverage of prevention and treatment initiatives, may indicate that in 1998 there were fewer changes in law and policy related to child sexual abuse and fewer prevention and treatment initiatives. While it is possible to interpret such preliminary findings in a number of ways, it may be that an increased preoccupation with perpetrators may not only reflect more cases coming to the attention of the courts but also community preoccupation with law and order, as noted previously.

Child sexual abuse issues making news in *The Age* in 1993 and in 1998

The main child sexual abuse issues making news in 1993 in *The Age* included:

- the Michael Jackson case
- the perceived inadequate sentencing of perpetrators in child sexual abuse cases
- the debate over whether children lie about child sexual abuse
- the changes or proposed changes in legislation related to both indefinite prison sentences for child sexual abuse, and loitering by child sex offenders
- sex tourism in Asia, and Australian paedophiles
- sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

Two cases were prominent in *The Age* in 1993: public attention was drawn to the conviction of a couple who physically and sexually abused their three children, and to the actions of one sexual abuse victim who drove over her step-father, the perpetrator of her sexual assault. Other sexual abuse issues gaining attention in *The Age* in that year included female genital mutilation, 'recovered memory', and the childhood sexual abuse histories of many perpetrators of sexual abuse (Goddard & Saunders in preparation).

In 1998, the main child sexual abuse issues capturing the interest of *Age* journalists were:

- Cathy Freeman's revelation of childhood sexual abuse
- the 'stolen children', both English and Aboriginal, and their treatment by the Catholic Church
- child prostitution, both in Australia and overseas

- pornography on the Internet.

In addition, there was a predominance of news items revealing the identities of alleged or convicted perpetrators.

Other less recurrent issues creating news included:

- child perpetrators of child abuse, including child sexual abuse
- ‘false memory’ and the credibility of children in relation to child sexual abuse
- other celebrity disclosures of childhood sexual abuse.

Three cases were particularly prominent in 1998:

- the LeTourneau affair — the case of a female teacher convicted of sexually assaulting her student and becoming pregnant with his child on two occasions
- the allegations that author Arthur C. Clarke was a child molester
- the ‘Dolly’ Dunn sexual abuse conviction. (Goddard & Saunders in preparation)

Organisations and professions implicated in some way with child sexual abuse, and thus exposed to critical public attention through the media, included:

In 1993

- the Catholic Church (priests) (Barnard 1993; Butts 1993; Wilding 1993; Byrne 1993; Steinfels 1993; Daley 1993; Robinson 1993b; World News 1993a; Hawker 1993; World News 1993b)
- sex tourism (businessmen) (*The Age*, 25 June 1993, editorial opinion)
- the Christian Brothers (teachers) (Graham 1993a, 1993b; Conroy 1993; Curtin 1993; Alcorn 1993)
- a kindergarten (company directors and child carers) (Milburn 1993a)
- sports organisations (male coaches) (Brady 1993)
- the Uniting and Anglican Churches (senior church figures) (Daley 1993)
- the 1993 Victorian Education Department (teachers) (Muller 1993).

In 1998

- the Catholic Church and schools (priests, brothers and teachers) (Miller 1998; Gurvich 1998b; Overington 1998b; Ewing 1998a, 1998b, 1998c; Darby 1998; Naidoo 1998b)
- the police (police officers) (Gurvich 1998a; Naidoo 1998a)
- Community Services Victoria and the Department of Human Services (social workers and state carers) (Mendes 1998; Butcher 1998; Gurvich 1998c; Davies 1998)
- a toy store (shoppers/strangers) (Martin 1998)
- a women's tennis association (tennis coaches) (Reid 1998)
- the 1998 Tasmanian Education Department (primary school principals) (*The Age* 1998)
- the Presbyterian Church (ministers) (Naidoo 1998c)
- the Foreign Service (diplomats) (Murdoch 1998)
- the scouting movement (youth workers) (Gurvich 1998d)
- the District Court bench (judges) (Kennedy and Gibbs 1998).

This limited analysis lends support to the pervasiveness of child sexual abuse in our community and to the increasing media exposure of the perpetrators of child sexual abuse. It appears that few major organisations or professions can escape some link with this significant social problem.

The power of language: media representations of who is doing what to whom

Introduction

Time constraints imposed limitations on the breadth and depth of this review of the media. A further constraint is imposed by the variations in the terminology used. Stories of child sexual abuse can be found in the print media only by searching for a wide variety of words and phrases. As Jenkins notes however, (1996) analysis of media approaches to the problem of child sexual abuse can be assisted by examining those key words and phrases that are used to characterise the issue, and appear regularly in the headlines and text of articles and news stories. It is interesting that there is little analysis of the language used by the media in reporting this issue.

Dangerous euphemisms: the textual abuse of children

There are a number of ways in which the perpetrator, the victim and the act of child sexual abuse can be described. Analysis of media coverage of child abuse, however, has paid little

attention to the language used to describe child sexual abuse. This further limitation is especially interesting because women have long recognised the power of language to exclude. Dale Spender, for example, argued powerfully that “language is not neutral. It is not merely a vehicle which carries ideas: It is itself a shaper of ideas” (1980, p. 139).

The following small story from *The Guardian* in the United Kingdom is worthy of examination:

The Guardian

Friday 20 June 1997

Man jailed for sex with girl, 10
by Emily Sheffield

A man was jailed for seven years yesterday after an affair with his step-daughter which began when she was 10 and led to her becoming pregnant and giving birth at the age of 11.

The man first attempted having sex with the girl during a trip to the seaside in 1995 when he gave her a half a pint of beer, Teeside crown court was told. A relationship developed until they were having sex every week.

The man, now 32, married the girl’s mother in 1991 and they had two children.

In January this year, the girl was found to be six months pregnant.

The man, who cannot be named for legal reasons, admitted sexual intercourse and attempted sexual intercourse with a minor.

Jailing the man for seven years, Judge Tony Briggs said, ‘You acted this way for a considerable period of time, and that brought disaster upon this girl. ‘You were in a position of trust and responsibility as far as the child was concerned, but you abused that trust in a significant and serious way.’

The man’s wife suspected the truth when she looked out of an upstairs window and saw them kissing. When confronted they both denied a relationship. Later a neighbour saw them kissing at a bus stop and the police intervened.

The social services were called and again the couple denied having sexual intercourse.

The man was arrested after the girl was found to be pregnant. She decided to keep the child and is bringing it up at home.

Both the girl’s mother and grandmother help to look after the baby while she continues her schooling.

A closer examination of this newspaper story shows how the serious and repeated sexual assault of this young girl has been represented in a way that reduces the impact of the events (Goddard & Saunders 2000). The sexual abuse of a child has been completely re-framed as a consensual relationship between adults:

- The sexual assault is called an ‘affair’

- Twice, the perpetrator and victim are described as having a ‘relationship’, and
- The perpetrator and victim are called a ‘couple’

As Butterworth (1997) pointed out, in a passionate letter to the offending newspaper, the story is written in the same type of language as that used by perpetrators of abuse to rationalise their violence against, and sexual abuse of, children. Such language is not confined to British newspapers, as the following headlines in Australia demonstrate:

- ‘Dangerous liaisons’ (Koch 1998a)
- ‘Man, 71 jailed for affair with girl’ (Williams 1998)
- ‘Teachers who don’t report affairs could face charges’ (Callinan & Koch 1998c)
- ‘Full term for the teacher who loved unwisely’ (Wolk 1998).

Media analysts and others, however, have concentrated on only some aspects of language, for example the extreme words used to describe child sex offenders. Research at Monash University (Goddard & Saunders 2000) suggests that the seriousness of sexual offences against children may be unduly played down through the use of language, just as in other articles perpetrators may be demonised. Soothill and Walby (1991), for example, suggest that coverage of the latter kind leads to the construction of a ‘sex monster’ that hinders a full understanding of sex crimes.

Judge Tony Briggs told the child molester who was the subject of the *Guardian* piece above that he was in a position of ‘trust and responsibility’. Those who write about children are in similar positions. Children must be granted respect. Sexual assaults on children should not be re-written as consensual relationships but described in language that portrays them as the crimes they clearly are.

Use of language in some Queensland print media

In Queensland, some print media coverage of the Kimmins inquiry, generally used the word ‘paedophilia’ to describe the activities under investigation. Reservations about the use of this word have already been expressed. Examples of this include an editorial (*The Courier-Mail* 1998g) and Solomon (1998). Those who sexually abuse children are likely to be described in a variety of other ways in the print media. Some are described by their occupation, which tends to indicate and emphasise the breach of trust involved in the offences. A review of some Queensland print media found the following examples:

- ‘Priest ordered to trial on 23 boy-sex charges’ (Murray 1998a)
- ‘Teen-sex teacher’s mum vows to fight on’ (Horan 1998)
- ‘Scout leader loses appeal on sex case’ (Oberhardt 1998a)

- ‘Umpire charged with school sex offences’ (*The Courier-Mail* 1998c)
- ‘Sex MP snap poll ruled out’ (Maher 1998)
- ‘Cleric abused young boy when teacher’ (Parnell 1998b)
- ‘Paedophile Brother jailed’ (*The Courier-Mail* 1998i)
- ‘Brother accused of abuse in two states’ (Maynard 1998)
- ‘Teacher sex inquiry opened’ (Callinan & Koch 1998a)
- ‘Sex case teacher still in job’ (Lamble 1998)
- ‘Two more teacher sex cases reported’ (Callinan & Koch 1998b)
- ‘Principal, priest charged’ (*The Courier-Mail* 1998a)
- ‘Teacher accused of sex with girls’ (Callinan 1998a)
- ‘Principal’s sex charge dismissed’ (Hele 1998a)
- ‘Teacher “had sex with teen”’ (Vale 1998)
- ‘Detective on stepson sex abuse charge’ (*The Courier-Mail* 1998h)
- ‘Ex-policeman admits sex abuse’ (Hart 1998a)
- ‘Radio star may face child sex charges’ (Whittaker, Doneman and Bradford 1998)
- ‘Ex-school driver admits molesting girls’ (Hart 1998b).

Some headlines are used to suggest that child sexual abuse may not be the only unusual behaviour involved (for example ‘Polygamist to face 22 child-sex charges’ (Wilkinson 1998)). Some occupations merely serve to accentuate a common element amongst the accused (e.g. ‘Four meat workers face 89 sex, torture charges’ (Dorries 1998)).

In cases involving sexual abuse within the family, the perpetrator’s relationship to the victim may be emphasised, highlighting the seriousness of the abuse of trust (e.g. ‘Sex abuse fathers have jail terms cut’ (Oberhardt & Retschlag 1998); and ‘Stepfather jailed for appalling acts’ (Hele 1998b)).

Other abusers are described by the actions themselves:

- ‘Abuser may be free in 2 years’ (McKenna 1998)
- ‘Rapist’s record “not disclosed to school”’ (Doneman & Retschlag 1998)

- 'Sex attacker in priest's care accused of raping girl, 14' (Doneman 1998a)
- 'Appeal open to girl's sex abuser' (Montgomery 1998a)
- 'Fourth jail term for molester' (Oberhardt 1998b)
- 'Molester aged 100' (*The Courier-Mail* 1998b)
- 'Elderly paedophile jailed' (Oberhardt 1998c)
- 'Sex pest' and 'sexual deviant' (*Gold Coast Bulletin*, 8–9 August 1998)
- 'Can sex offenders be reformed?' (Wilson 1998)
- 'Young must be protected from themselves as well as predators' (Jackman 1998)
- 'Predator closer to true life term' (Bradford and Doneman 1998).

The terms 'pederast' and 'paedophile' may be used interchangeably as Michael Ware's story on 29 June 1998 demonstrates. Ware's (1998b) piece about the murder of former Woolongong mayor Frank Arkell appeared under the headline 'Accused paedophile "murdered for his silence" on page 1 and 'Murder silences alleged pederast' on page 2.

Those who contribute opinion and editorial pieces are less restrained in their descriptions of those who sexually assault children. Recent examples include: 'maggot' (Kavanagh 1998a); 'sex fiend' (Callinan 1998b); 'pervert' (*The Courier Mail* 1998e); 'slimy, sub-human males' (Kavanagh 1998b); 'Sex beast deserves to die, says girl' (Viscovich 1998); and, 'sex monster' (Doneman 1998b).

The child sex abuse offences are described in a number of ways. Some descriptions are more explicit than others:

- 'Teacher accused of sex with girls' (Callinan 1998a)
- 'Sex attacker in priest's care accused of raping girl, 14' (Doneman 1998a)
- 'The perpetrator "sexually molested" three girls' (McKenna 1998)
- 'Teacher denies oral sex on student, 6' (Gearing 1998)
- 'Crusader targets exploitation of innocents' (Retschlag 1998)
- 'Child sex abuse strikes at heart of churches' (Thomas 1998)
- 'Child sex abuse charges dropped' (Murray 1998b)

- ‘Top umpire on child sex charges’ (Montgomery 1998b)
- ‘Couple jailed for “depraved” sex abuse’ (Oberhardt 1998d).

Some stories also use terms interchangeably. Parnell’s (1998a) piece on the Kimmins report, for example, uses ‘child sex’ in the headline while ‘paedophilia’ is used in the text. Where the offences occurred suggests the abuse of trust (e.g. ‘Umpire charged with school sex offences’ (*The Courier Mail* 1998c)). In other cases, the scale of the abuse is alluded to (e.g. ‘Organised child-sex targeted’ (Ware 1998c)).

The language used to describe the victims is far more limited. The descriptions used emphasise the abuse of trust (as in ‘daughter’), the age of the victim, or the abuse itself, as the following examples illustrate:

- ‘Teacher accused of sex with girls’ (Callinan 1998a)
- ‘Teacher “had sex with teen”’ (Vale 1998)
- ‘Crusader targets exploitation of innocents’ (Retschlag 1998)
- ‘Molested daughter wins claim’ (Oberhardt 1998e)
- ‘Man jailed for sex abuse of stepdaughter’ (Bradford 1998)
- ‘Stepdad used girl, 9, as “sex toy”’ (*The Courier-Mail* 1998f).

Use of language in the media (*The Age*, 1993 and 1998)

An analysis of the language used in *The Age* newspaper, in 1993 and 1998 to describe child sex abusers, sexually abusive acts, and the victims of child sexual abuse presents findings similar to those arising from the analysis of comparable articles in Queensland’s *The Courier Mail* in 1998. Examples include the following:

Child sex abusers were described as: ‘pathetic’ (Conway 1993); ‘the ugliest Australians’ (Robinson 1993a); ‘wolves [and] sexually dysfunctional’ (Daley 1993); ‘monsters’ (Sullivan 1993); ‘loitering pervert[s]’ (*The Age* 1993a); and ‘sexual predator[s]’ (*The Age* 1993b).

Sexually abusive acts were described as ‘sexual molestation’ (Barnard 1993); ‘child rape’ (Tippet 1993); ‘sexual misconduct [and] psychological compulsion’ (Steinfels 1993); ‘trashing of young hearts, minds and bodies’ (*The Age* 1993c); ‘corruption of my child’ (Sullivan 1993); ‘acts of indecency’ (Overington 1998a); ‘buggery’ (Gurvich 1998a); ‘[an] affair’ (Attwood 1998); ‘messing with boys’ (Overington 1998c); ‘carnal knowledge’ (Cant 1998); and being ‘interfered with’ (Naidoo 1998c).

Descriptions of a child or children who had been sexual assaulted included ‘child prostitutes’ (Robinson 1993); ‘lover [and] victim’ (Attwood 1998); and, ‘kids’ (AFP 1998).

Reflections

The media coverage that has been described, perhaps wrongly, as part of a 'backlash' has largely been concerned with problems in child protection responses to child abuse. There has been little written about the ideal role that the media can play in protecting children. An exception is Hammarberg's (1997) proposal that the media have essential roles in promoting and protecting children's rights. Hammarberg uses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to elaborate on the media's roles, and identifies four main functions of the media.

Firstly, violations of children's rights should be reported in the media, and progress towards protecting children should be measured in a systematic fashion by the media. It is interesting that Hammarberg sees media scrutiny as "probably ... more effective than the international procedure described by the Convention" (1997, p. 243). Secondly, the media should respect the integrity of children and avoid negative stereotypes:

... the media should be careful not to violate the integrity of individual children in their reporting on ... crime and sexual abuse. The convention specifically protects the individual child from violations of his or her privacy, honour and reputation. (1997, p. 244)

Thirdly, given the convention's requirement that children be heard and treated with respect, Hammarberg stresses that children be allowed to participate in the media and that their views be sought. Finally, children must still be protected from violent and pornographic material.

Hammarberg has provided a useful framework that can act as a starting point and by which the media's contribution to the protection of children can be evaluated. While some would argue that far greater attention should be paid to the media's use of language, Hammarberg has argued for a more active role for children in the media. Including children in debates about child abuse and child protection in the media would reflect and perpetuate children's potential contribution to a safer society.

Summary points

The media 'discovery' of child abuse

- The publication by Dr C. Kempe and his colleagues (Kempe et al. 1962) of their article 'The battered child syndrome' in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* attracted considerable media interest and has been said by many to mark the 'discovery' by the media of child abuse.
- There are two specific contextual factors that ensure extensive media coverage of child sexual abuse: firstly, there is now recognition that it occurs on a significant scale outside the home as well as within the family; and secondly, there are individuals (overwhelmingly men) who seek to ingratiate themselves with children specifically in order to sexually abuse them.

The role of the media: a facilitator for community education and preventive strategies

- The media have played and will continue to play a significant role in protecting children from abuse in all its forms.
- Mass media campaigns in particular have performed a significant role in placing the issue of child sexual abuse on the public and political agenda.
- The benefits of mass media campaigns are that they present an opportunity to communicate to large numbers of people and to target particular populations.
- Mass media child sexual abuse campaigns have been run in both NSW (1986–1988) and Victoria (1992) with some degree of success.

The role of the media: what ‘backlash’?

- Some have identified the emergence in the late 1980s of a media ‘backlash’ in the reporting of child sexual abuse issues. After a ‘period of almost exclusively favourable media attention’, the response of the media to child abuse became more critical.
- Some aspects of child protection practice have become contested, with considerable argument about the grounds for and level of intervention.
- The authors have found, however, that while the number of articles in the print media critical of child protection services has increased, there continue to be many articles that expose the extent of child sexual abuse

The role of the media: the publication of victims’ names

- The responsible media coverage of child abuse and child protection is essential. Children who require protection from acts and omissions of adults can rarely speak for themselves.
- A number of states in Australia have enacted legislation prohibiting publication of the identity of complainants (including children) in sexual cases (see the *Criminal Law Sexual Offences Act 1978* (Qld), ss. 6(3) and 7(3)).
- The area of rights to privacy of children who are subject to crime is a complex one.
- The media clearly have major social responsibilities in the area of child abuse. While many of their efforts in exposing problems and educating the public are praiseworthy, there are risks to the child.

The role of the media: ‘outing’ the perpetrators

- In recent years the media has assumed a role in identifying ('outing') perpetrators.
- The risks of exposing the identity and location of offenders have recently been highlighted in the case of John Lewthwaite who, upon release from custody, was subjected to verbal abuse and attacks on his home by angry residents.
- The issue involves the tension between children's right to protection and the right of those who abuse children to be considered as having been reformed after serving their sentences.

Media coverage of child sexual abuse

- Much of the literature that reviews the media and child abuse is critical rather than evaluative, and is based on approaches with little basis in theory.
- Goddard and Saunders (in preparation) have conducted a preliminary review of the coverage of child sexual abuse in *The Age*. They report an apparent trend towards less reporting on changes in policy and law related to child sexual abuse and less media coverage of prevention and treatment initiatives, along with greater coverage of victim and perpetrator stories. It is suggested that an increasing preoccupation with perpetrators may reflect not only the greater number of cases coming to the attention of the courts, but also community preoccupation with law and order.

The power of language: media representations of who is doing what to whom

- Research suggests that the seriousness of sexual offences against children may be minimised through the use of language just as, in other articles, perpetrators may be demonised.

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