CHAPTER IX

ACCUSATIONS OF RITUAL ABUSE IN AUSTRALIA

In this chapter I will consider the accusations of ritual abuse that were made in Australia. I will argue that, following their introduction into Australia, ideas about the activities of abusive Satanists underwent subtle, but significant, changes. This transformation is very similar to that described by historians and anthropologists, whereby ideas about witches changed as they were spread by the inquisitors of early modern Europe and by members of African witch finding movements. Here I will show how "migrating" American ideas about ritual abuse were taken up and modified by Australians participating in a number of local debates and conflicts.

I will also argue that the people typically accused of perpetrating ritual abuse in Australia—whether by parents and child protection activists to whom young children had supposedly disclosed abuse or by adult survivors—were neither impoverished nor socially marginal. In this sense, accusations made in Australia more closely resemble American rather than British accusations. Those accused in Australia were, however, "outsiders" in other ways. I will show that those accused of perpetrating ritual abuse on young children were frequently people who were resented by the parents of the children they cared for and by the other residents of affluent Australian suburbs. They were also people whose "oddness" made their accusers suspicious of them and made it possible to believe that they had perpetrated serious wrongdoing. In
many cases, these people would not have been considered odd outside Australia.

I will argue that those making accusations in Australian "adult survivor" cases wished to dissociate themselves from those they accused and from their identities and values, which they had come to reject. The accused were "internal enemies" whose misdeeds caused misfortune both to their victims and in the wider society. By pursuing these "enemies", accusers and their supporters gained new identities and worthy new roles. In both "child" and "adult survivor" ritual abuse cases, accusations allowed activists to promote themselves as a vital part of the social and cultural order—rather than as zealots on its periphery. Accusations vindicated such activists' values and justified the kinds of radical investigative and punitive methods they were promoting.

"Child" Ritual Abuse Cases in Australia

Providers of Childcare

As in the American "child" cases, accusations were most commonly made in Australia against those—especially men—who provided care for young children or were perceived to be involved in this activity. Although both men and women were accused of perpetrating ritual abuse in a number of childcare centres, it was men who were the focus of the allegations. In the Seabeach case, for example, charges were laid in 1988 against the woman who operated the childcare centre and her female teaching staff. Yet the accusing parents, activists, police and media regarded the husband of the proprietor as the principal perpetrator (Hole and Glover SMH 12 Aug. 1989; French, evidence to WRC 6 Aug. 1996; counsel assisting, statement to WRC 6 Aug. 1996; Fluit, evidence to WRC 15 Aug. 1996; 60 Minutes TCN 9 5 Aug. 1990). Anthony Deren was assumed to be the abusive "Mr Bubbles" supposedly nominated by the children, even though he was employed full time outside the centre. In a striking
similarly, the couple who operated the Mornington Child-Care Centre in provincial Victoria were both accused in 1991 of abusing the young pupils enrolled there. It was Norman Shulvers, however, who parents and the press identified as the "Daddy Kenny" named by the children (Guilliatt 1996: 134ff.).

The man convicted of ritual abuse in 1994 (Regina versus K, NSW District Court) was actually the father of the supposed victims. He also had what his accusers believed to be inappropriate access to children. The accusations against him were made by his estranged wife, and involved incidents—including taking his children to rituals at which human sacrifices were made—which had supposedly occurred when the children were with him on unsupervised access visits. The children's mother had previously accused the teachers at a local childcare centre of abusing her daughter (Guilliatt 1996: 149, 151-2).

At the time of the outbreak of concern about the ritual abuse of young children in Australia, parents in this country were using childcare services in unprecedented—and increasing—numbers (Brennan 1998: 187). Yet there was considerable debate in this country about this practice and considerable hostility being expressed towards the providers of childcare—especially towards those such as the Derens and the Shulvers who were providing a private, commercial service.

Some of this hostility was directly imported from the recent American discourse about the impropriety and dangers of childcare. American experts on ritual abuse in preschools had caused a sensation when they addressed an audience of Australian paediatricians and child protection workers at the International Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect in 1986 (Hill 1998). A few years later, Australian experts—such as paediatrician Suzette Booth, who examined the Seabeach children at Camperdown Children's Hospital—were consulting American ritual abuse literature as they assessed local children (Booth and Horowitz 1992: 159-60). As I have discussed, parents who made accusations of ritual abuse—in the Seabeach case, for example—were also aware of this discourse. Parents became suspicious because their children engaged in some of the common childhood behaviours which American experts had proposed as indicators of ritual abuse, and the questions they put to their children also appear to
have been influenced by this kind of discourse (Hatty 1991: 263; Gould 1992: 210, 216; "Mr Bubbles . . . " OCRT 1999; Ralston, evidence to WRC 15 Aug. 1996; Sexton 2000: 36). Parents subsequently provided investigating police and officers of the Director of Public Prosecutions with literature about the recent spate of accusations against providers of childcare in the US (SB115, evidence to WRC 6 Aug. 1996).

A separate—but not unrelated—debate about childcare was raging in Australia at this time. During much the 1980s, social conservatives, “economic rationalists” and organisations representing the interests of commercial childcare providers had been campaigning against the existing childcare system. Under particular attack was the scheme—conceived in the mid-1970s under Whitlam, and implemented by Hawke—whereby substantial Federal government subsidies were provided for childcare, including centres providing daycare services (Brennan 1998: 95, 176-7).

Like their American counterparts, conservatives objected to the notion that the mothers of young children should be encouraged to work outside the home, or be aided in their decision to do so. Australian conservatives had also been concerned for some time by what they saw as the unhealthily feminist and collectivist ethos of the influential “community” childcare movement (Brennan 1998: 94, 104-5). Other critics objected not to childcare *per se*, but to what they saw as the inherent inefficiency of the current system, the unfair competition that private operators faced from government-subsidised community centres, and the government’s provision of “welfare” to affluent members of the community. They argued that subsidies should be strictly means-tested, and that families in genuine need could be best assisted through a system of fee-vouchers redeemable at private centres (Brennan 1998: 110, 190ff).

In response, supporters of community childcare—including feminists, trade unionists and social welfare activists—attacked the notion of “privatised” childcare by focusing on the perceived faults of the commercial childcare sector. They argued that in their quest to maximise profits, proprietors failed to provide proper facilities or to hire properly trained staff. Proprietors were also accused of failing to properly ascertain the suitability of their employees to work with young children—an issue that was to become central in the Seabeach case (Brennan 1998: 111).[1] Critics also cited the
relatively high fees which private centres charged--considering the more limited service they offered--and suggested that fees were likely to increase should the system be fully privatised (Brennan 1998: 191,195).

In 1989, therefore, the proprietors of private centres such as Seabeach could in various ways be regarded as "immersed in evil". During the local debates about childcare, they had been portrayed as charging exorbitant fees, and as the likely beneficiaries of any move by the government to remove or reduce childcare subsidies. They supposedly put profit before the safety and welfare of children. Yet they were also vilified by conservatives as the providers of daycare--rather than exclusively educational "preschool" services--and thereby contributing to the supposedly lamentable social and economic consequences of having mothers enter the paid workforce.

**Class and Status**

Like their American counterparts, those accused of ritually abusing children in Australia were "outsiders" in a variety of other ways. The Derens, for example, were relative newcomers to Sydney's Northern Peninsula and were regarded as strangers and upstarts by the prosperous, professional and close-knit group of parents who made the original allegations. Anthony Deren--a rotund, middle aged and eccentrically-coiffed man--contrasted sharply with the svelte men of this group. Unlike these men, whose wives fulfilled more traditional sex-roles, Deren was married to a successful businesswoman. Police investigating the parents' complaint discovered that Deren had once faced charges for indecent assault in Papua New Guinea in 1972. He had been found to have fondled two young girls in a swimming pool, but had been given a bond after agreeing to attend counselling (Derens vs. NSW Government, Supreme Court 6 Feb. 1998, 9 Feb. 1998; Sexton 2000: 47). This discovery convinced police and others that the more recent accusations against Deren were true, and it sharpened the focus of the investigation on him. It also accentuated--and justified--local perceptions of Deren's peculiarity.
The man at the centre of the "K" case had both a working class background and a history of violence. At the time the accusations were made against him, this man had also been leading a peripatetic and somewhat isolated existence. Both of his marriages had been marred by domestic violence, and he had been gaol for breaking bail conditions imposed on him in the past. His accusers had been his wife—a schoolteacher and devout Christian—and her mother (Guilliat 1996: 148ff.; "Louise" APCA vigil 15 Aug. 1997).

The couple who claimed in 1989 that their children had been ritually abused at a Sydney Sunday School were, however, themselves "outsiders" and in fact closely resembled the parents who were accused of perpetrating ritual abuse in Britain. The mother of the children was in a de facto relationship with a man who was not their biological father, and investigating police found that the couple were drug users and had been under the supervision of the Department of Family and Community Services. Their home was periodically in "a putrid state" and they were lax in preventing the children from observing the "explicit" pornography that was stored there (Report WRC Vol. IV 1997: 675, 678, 679).

Ironically, the marginal socio-economic status of this couple—especially in comparison to those they accused—was an important reason why they were accepted as the victims of "witch-like" crimes, rather than their perpetrators. When the couple became dissatisfied with the initial police investigation of their complaints, they approached the Labor parliamentarian Deidre Grusovin. Grusovin had been active on behalf of the Seabeach parents the year before—even though she realised they were probably not supporters of her political party—and she remained suspicious of the way that the police, DPP and courts had handled that case (Deidre Grusovin 11 Feb. 2002). It was clear when I spoke with Mrs Grusovin that she regards her campaigns against perpetrators of child abuse as one facet of a broader fight for social justice. She was therefore very likely to be sympathetic to the plight of a poor family whose children had apparently been the victims of more affluent perpetrators. At the same time that she was supporting these complainants, Grusovin was the Shadow Minister for Family and Community Services and thus able to marry her child protection and social justice agendas with more politically partisan activities.
Christianity

Those accused by the "Sunday School" couple were, however, also "outsiders" of a very different and specifically Australian kind. They were members of a congregation of "fundamentalist" Christians ("Corruption . . . " WNDP 1997). In the United States and Britain, fundamentalist Christians were prominent in raising and proliferating the idea that young children were being subjected to ritual abuse. They were also instrumental in precipitating accusations of ritual abuse against specific people (Jenkins 1998: 166-7, 172-3; La Fontaine 1998: 1998: 163ff.). In Australia, however, such Christians were very commonly accused--by parents, child protection workers and other activists--of perpetrating ritual abuse.[2]

The adherents of "fundamentalist" Christianity are a tiny minority of the Australian population. In her 1998 survey of accusations of ritual abuse in Australia, Elson identifies certain Protestant denominations--including "Christian Brethren, Baptist, Reform Church, Jehovah's Witnesses [and] Seventh Day Adventists"--as "fundamentalist" or of a "more fundamentalist type" (Elson 1998: 1.4). She neither defines this term nor justifies her grouping together of these denominations. I will, however, follow Elson in using the term "fundamentalist". In Australia, the denominations identified as such by Elson are relatively small and often insular groups which emphasise lay leadership, the primacy of scripture and the importance of evangelism (Barrett 1996: 37ff.). These Australian Christians also profess a political and moral conservatism (Hogan 1987: 267ff.). Religious faith and practice are fundamental to these people's sense of identity, and they believe that they practise Christianity in its most fundamental form. Elson found, furthermore, that 39% of those in her sample who made accusations of ritual abuse had at some time been members of these denominations. She notes that according to the 1996 census figures, only 3% of the Australian population belonged to such denominations. Although Elson's is a crude measurement, it does allow a comparison with American data which suggest that more than 30% of the population of the US belong to comparably "fundamentalist" denominations (ARIS Survey 2001).
The numbers of Australian Christians of any denomination committed enough to regularly attend church services are low--especially in comparison to Americans (American Demographics 1998; Barna 1996; Gillman 1988: 43-4; Princeton Religious Resource Center 1997; University of Michigan 1981,1997; World Values Survey 1995-7). Yet even these low figures, I believe, overstate levels of religious commitment in this country. They are inflated by the relatively high proportion of Roman Catholics and members of "ethnic" Christian churches who regularly attend church here (Kaldor 1987: 17, 194-5). Catholicism is now the largest religious denomination in Australia, and many of the relatively high numbers of Catholics who regularly attend church are essentially nominal adherents of their religion (ABS 2001; Kaldor 1987: 17). The Catholic Church in this country has historically reflected and advanced Irish cultural identity and political aspirations--rather than strong religious devotion (Clark 1962: 81; Inglis 1965: 46; Kaldor 1987: 18-9; Mol 1985: 217). In more recent times the Church has fulfilled a similar function for other ethnic groups (Kaldor 1987: 194; Mol 1985: 217). Catholicism also stresses church attendance at the expense of other modes of religious observance and practice, and the Church reinforces this decree by threatening eternal punishment--and has inculcated an essentially superstitious fear of this sanction in Australian adherents through its extensive network of schools (Clark 1962: 82-3; Kaldor 1987: 18-9; Mol 1985: 61-2).

Australian Church attendance figures are also boosted by the large numbers of active adherents of churches which cater to specific ethnic groups (Kaldor 1987: 17). Like Catholicism, these churches fulfil a cultural, communal and political function for migrants or locally-born members of certain "ethnic groups" (Kaldor 1987: 195).

Australian fundamentalist Protestants are, more significantly, "cultural outsiders"--and reside in a society historically suspicious of those who do not conform (Encel 1970: 50, 52). Adherents of evangelical Christianity--and especially the devotees of the more recently founded fundamentalist churches--engage in styles of worship which are unusual in their ostentation or their self-conscious simplicity. Such congregations may be perceived to be importing some of the few unwelcome American cultural values and mores into this country, while their clannishness and insularity may also arouse suspicion. As the Chamberlain case shows, Australians are likely to be deeply
suspicious about the activities of people with strong religious commitment and distinctive beliefs. There may even be suspicions that they are perpetrating crimes of the very worst kind (Bryson 1985: 98, 122, 271-2, 439-40).

These Christians, furthermore, self-consciously espouse ascetic values in a society which, although itself quite puritanical, proclaims adherence to an ethos of "sun-loving . . . hedonism" (Inglis 1962: 174; see also Encel 1970: 77-80; Mol 1985: 220). Their denunciations of the promiscuity, self-indulgence or other sinfulness of Australian society contrast markedly with Australians' own untroubled or even self-congratulatory perceptions (Hogan 1987: 286ff.). These clashes of values are all the more obvious and jarring when they occur—as they did in the Seabeach and "Sunday School" ritual abuse cases—in Sydney, Australia's "city of the plain" (Wotherspoon 1991: 20-1). Ascetics—especially those who emphasise the need for sexual restraint—have historically been mistrusted in Australia either for being unhealthily interested in matters occurring below the waist, or for being embarrassingly vocal about such matters (Harris 1962: 59-60). There are thus likely to be suspicions about the secret sexual activities of members of zealous and morally righteous fundamentalist congregations, and accusations of sexual depravity against them may be readily believed.

Suspicion, Outrage and the Denial of Obligations in "Child" Ritual Abuse Cases

The treatment of the proprietors and staff of the Seabeach childcare centre provides an illuminating example of the way in which "outsiders" accused of the witch-like crime of ritual child abuse are denied the obligations due to them. The neighbours and especially the customers of such "odd" people—a strange-looking man apparently involved in childcare, a couple who were both parvenus and religious enthusiasts—
suspected they may have been engaged in questionable activities of some kind. Their oddness also made it easier for people to believe the often incredible allegations made against them. Their status as "outsiders"--and the fact that they had been accused of horrendous, witch-like crimes--meant that the obligations due to them could be denied. Police and other officials felt that they could disregard both their duty and the obligations they owed the suspects--such as basing any charges against them on reasonable evidence and ensuring that they would receive a fair trial. Certain police, government officials, politicians, child protection experts and representatives of the media also felt that these perpetrators of "witch-like" crimes could be persecuted with impunity.

**Investigation and Trial**

The Derens and the staff of the Seabeach centre were never treated as mere "suspects" by police. The parents of the children enrolled at the centre accused its proprietors and staff of perpetrating child sexual abuse--and of perpetrating abuse which involved elements of "witchcraft", Satanism and the production of pornography. The police appear to have immediately decided that those accused were guilty--or perhaps, that they could be made to bear the guilt of others. They proceeded to question the Seabeach children in ways that made it likely that the children would corroborate their parents' complaints. Police also showed children photographs of Anthony Deren, and then interpreted the fact that the children recognised him as an "identification" of Deren as the perpetrator of abuse (Fluit, evidence to WRC 15 Aug. 1996).

Police subsequently altered or even reconstructed the records of interviews, withheld documents from the legal representatives of the accused, or possibly "lost" these documents (counsel assisting, statement to WRC 6 Aug. 1996, 13 Aug. 1996, 15 Aug. 1996; Fluit, evidence to WRC 15 Aug. 1996; Ralston, evidence to WRC 12 Aug. 1996, 13 Aug. 1996). Documents that had been in the possession of the DPP were also missing from the brief (Ralston, evidence to WRC 13 Aug. 1996).[3] It is probable
that the police gave false information to the media about the results of a search of the Derens’ home, and several newspapers subsequently reported that child pornography had been found there (Fluit, evidence to WRC 15 Aug. 1996; Ralston, evidence to WRC 13 Aug. 1996; Ryan, evidence in Derens vs NSW Government, Supreme Court 9 Feb. 1998; Sexton 2000: 38ff., 57-61).

Officers of the Department of Family and Community Services also went beyond their proper roles of supporting the Seabeach parents and providing accurate and useful information to the community about child abuse. They instead attempted to prejudice the defendants’ trial—thus denying them their legal rights—and they significantly injured the reputation of the suspects. FACS organised a meeting for the parents and other concerned citizens before the police investigation had been concluded. An informant who attended this meeting told me that its tone was very angry and that attendees were further inflamed by an address given by a women’s refuge worker and “expert” on ritual abuse (19 Feb. 1999).

Another informant told me that she believed that a local FACS worker had been involved in organising the demonstration which took place at the bail hearings for the defendants at the Manly Court House (3 Dec. 1998). The film taken of this event—showing demonstrators shouting and waving placards which called for violent retribution against the defendants—was played during television news reports on the hearing and subsequently accompanied reports on the Wood Royal Commission’s examination of the case in 1996, the Derens’ successful legal action against the NSW government in 1999 and the Crown’s appeal that same year (e.g. News TEN 10 5 Aug. 1996; News TEN 10 25 Feb. 1999, News ABCTV 25 Feb. 1999).

“Media Ethics”

The behaviour of much of the mass media was consistently unethical—and occasionally illegal—during the Seabeach investigation and committal hearing and after the collapse of the case. The childcare centre was illegally named by a Sydney radio
station, newspapers carried false reports about the discovery of child pornography at
the Derens’ home, and camera crews casually recorded demonstrators’ pursuit of and
threats of violence against a female defendant and her companion (Sexton 2000: 38-
42, Adabee J., ruling in Derens vs. NSW, Government Supreme Court 9 Feb.
1998).[4]

The media subsequently reported the collapse of the case and the activities of
parents, politicians and activists in ways that strongly suggested that a miscarriage of
justice had occurred. In one of the stories broadcast by the 60 Minutes television
program in 1990, for example, the reporter described Anthony Deren as “Mr Bubbles”,
the man "parents named [as having] sexually assaulted their children", and as
someone who paid a “hired gun”--that is, an expert witness--“to testify on his behalf”.
The program also aired interviews with the mothers of some of the Seabeach children
and reenactments of the children describing their abuse (TCN9 5 Aug. 1990).

Other stories which appeared in the early 1990s in both print and electronic media
described the events which supposedly occurred at the Seabeach centre as part of a
murderous, international Satanic conspiracy (e.g. Preston SMH 8 Dec. 1990; The
Devil Made Me Do It TEN 10 11 Sept. 1990 ). Others linked the case with other local
ritual abuse cases and other appalling unsolved crimes (Report WRC Vol.IV 1997:
676).[5]

During the first few days of the Wood Royal Commission’s examination of Seabeach
in 1996, the media reported the original outcome of the case and various theories about
its collapse and then detailed the evidence being put before the commission about the
laxity of police investigators (e.g. News TEN 10 5 Aug. 1996; Brown SMH 6 Aug.
1996, 7 Aug. 1996). The media were, however, reluctant to report subsequent
evidence about police overzealousness--and the possibility that the defendants had
been the victims of “just cause police corruption”. Coverage of the hearings by the
commercial electronic media very quickly diminished, and after a few days the scrum of
crews waiting to film witnesses arriving at the commission had disappeared altogether.
The media reported the Deren's 1999 legal action against the State government--and then the government's partially successful appeal against the massive damages awarded to the couple--in ways that suggested the Derens' guilt or that they faced the possibility of another "trial" (e.g. Walsh DT 4 Feb. 1998; Clifton DT 26 Feb. 1999; "Satan claim . . . " DT 5 Feb. 1998; News TEN 10 25 Feb. 1999). Journalists' misinterpretation of these cases is understandable, since they generally did not attend the hearings. During the Deren's defamation hearing, for example, as the Crown desperately argued that Anthony Deren could not have been defamed since he had perpetrated child abuse in New Guinea in the early 1970s, and as witnesses testified that the police had provided false information about the pornography found at the Derens' home, the court was briefly visited by a solitary, junior journalist. She told me that her editor had given her the tiresome errand of finding out "if anything was going on" at the court.

In a sense, however, these misdeeds of the media--especially the commercial media--do not constitute an abnegation of their ethical responsibilities or their obligations to those whose cases they report. The media were frequently reporting the very questionable explanations of the Seabeach case put forward by the police, other government officials and some child protection activists. Much of the media's unethical behaviour during the Seabeach case was encouraged--and even precipitated--by participants in the case, and by other activists fighting their own professional, ideological and political battles. In any case, the phrase "media ethics" is something of an oxymoron. The commercial news media--seeking to attract high circulation or ratings --commonly characterises certain acquittals and other events as instances of criminals or deviants being allowed to misbehave with impunity. Having created a sense of panic about these activities, the journal or program proceeds to take action which apparently "resolves" the problem (Littlemore 1996: 181-2; Richardson 1997: 68-9).
Reassessments

At the committal hearing in August 1989, magistrate David Hyde accepted the arguments of the defence's expert witnesses that the Seabeach children's testimony had been irreparably contaminated by repeated and suggestive questioning by parents, police and others. He was also scathing in his criticisms of the inadequacies of the prosecution case. The DPP solicitor who was acting as Crown Prosecutor withdrew all charges the following day (Ralston, evidence to WRC 12 Aug. 1996).[6] The NSW government, child protection experts and the media proceeded to publicly consider virtually every explanation for the collapse of the case--except that the defendants may have been innocent. The defendants had not been considered "innocent until proven guilty" prior to the hearing. Now they were treated as guilty despite having been found innocent.

At the request of the government Member for the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Pittwater, Jim Longley, the Office of the DPP considered an "appeal" against the magistrate's decision and subsequently investigated the need to reform laws relating to the evidence of young children (Ralston, evidence to WRC 13 Aug. 1996; Favretti, evidence to WRC 14 Aug. 1996; Hansard (NSW LA) 5 Sept. 1990: 6705). Some slight modifications were subsequently made to the Oaths Act (Hansard (NSW LA) 5 Sept. 1990: 6740ff.). An informant told me that Longley privately believed that the charges against the defendants had been rightly dismissed, but was unprepared to say so publicly for political reasons (19 Feb. 1999).

According to Attorney General John Dowd, the Seabeach case had collapsed on a legal technicality--a view which reflected both an inaccurate DPP review of the case and contemporary political considerations (Ralston, evidence to WRC 13 Aug. 1996). As the responsible minister, Dowd could not expeditiously blame the collapse of the case on the presumption, incompetence and malice of police and public servants. Nor could he criticise the attitudes and activities of the Seabeach parents, beyond characterising their actions as understandably overenthusiastic. He could, however, lay the blame on the faulty legal procedures which the government had inherited (Hansard (NSW LA) 5 Sept. 1990: 670ff.).
When assessing the case, Dowd strongly implied that he believed that the defendants had escaped justice. He is also alleged to have told the Seabeach parents and others that he believed "the defendant"—presumably Anthony Deren—was guilty (60 Minutes TCN 9 5 Aug. 1990). In 1991, his government announced that it would use the defence of "truth" when it came to face the Derens’ defamation action (Adabee J., ruling in Derens vs. NSW Government, Supreme Court 6 Feb. 1998).

Following the collapse of the case, Dowd’s political opponents—especially Deidre Grusovin—effectively attacked the government over Seabeach. Yet Grusovin’s speeches and other activism suggested that she, too, believed that the defendants had escaped justice and that the faults of the investigation indicated a conspiracy by corrupt police to aid the defendants (Grusovin 11 Feb. 2002; Hansard (NSW LA) 5 Sept. 1990: 6702, 6751ff.; Hicks Aust. 18/19 May 1996).

Child protection activists—including those occupying important positions in hospitals, universities and the bureaucracy—began their denunciations of the handling of the Seabeach case virtually on the steps of the Magistrate’s Court. They were almost unanimous in announcing their belief that the children had been abused. Although they acknowledged that the testimony of young children did constitute a serious legal problem, they argued that in the Seabeach case these problems related to the ways in which the children’s valid testimony had been unreasonably excluded by the magistrate. They were subsequently vocal in their condemnation of contemporary laws and court procedures relating to child abuse, expert defence witnesses and even the defendants themselves.

Kim Oates—a prominent paediatrician, author and past president of the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect—published two journal articles in the year following the collapse of the case. In these articles Oates defended the use of repetitive questioning in obtaining "disclosure" in cases of child sexual abuse, and argued that the need to protect children and pursue perpetrators of abuse necessitated reforms which would erode the rights of defendants in such cases (Oates AJL March 1990: 130ff; CUB Nov. 1990: 22ff.).
Oates commented much more specifically on the Seabeach case when he contributed to a sensational and biased report produced by the *60 Minutes* television program that same year. Described in the report as "known around the world as an expert in detecting child abuse", Oates stated that he was "absolutely convinced that the [Seabeach] children . . . [had been] sexually abused". This same program included footage of an angry Ralph Underwager—the American psychologist who had appeared as an expert witness for the defence—ordering reporter Mike Munro and the film crew from his home. Munro had used trickery to gain entry to Underwager's home and, when ordered to leave, protested that he "just love[d] children" (*60 Minutes*, TCN 9 5 Sept. 1990).

Underwager was subsequently subjected to serious criticism by Professor Freda Briggs of the Department of Child Development at the University of South Australia. In a 1993 book written for the parents of abused children, Briggs echoed the *60 Minutes* report by dismissing Underwager as a "professional witness" and criticising the magistrate's acceptance of his arguments (1993: 44). Briggs portrayed Underwager as a person lacking credibility by citing a 1990 American trial at which Underwager's expert testimony had not been accepted and a recently published critique which "claimed to have found hundreds of errors" in his published works (Briggs 1993: 44,45). Briggs did not, however, specifically address Underwager's criticisms of the way evidence was gathered in the Seabeach case, and, by criticising Hyde's refusal to assess the credibility of child witnesses by interviewing them himself, she implicitly supported the use of repetitive questioning to overcome children's attempts to accommodate abusive adults (Briggs 1993: 44).

Oates' absolute certainty that the Seabeach children had been abused contrasts somewhat with the views of the DPP solicitor Roger Ralston—who acted as the Crown Prosecutor during the committal hearings—and even of another paediatrician who had examined the children. Ralston told the Wood Royal Commission that the medical examinations of many of the children revealed no "clinical" evidence that they had been abused (13 Aug. 1996). In 1992, Suzette Booth—Oates' colleague at the Child Protection Unit of the Camperdown Children's Hospital—obliquely discussed the case as part of her examination of "the abuse of young children in day care" (Booth and
Horowitz 1992). She and her co-author noted that only five of the eighteen children examined showed possible “introital” or anal abnormalities. She states, however, that abuse was “strongly suspected” because of a combination of this physical evidence, the children’s disclosures—including disclosures of ritual abuse—and the parents’ reports of the children’s behaviour (Booth and Horowitz 1992: 156, 158).

Although she was marginally less certain than Oates that the Seabeach children had been abused, Booth shows definite signs of allowing the horrific nature of the accusations made against the defendants to impede her professional judgment. She brushes aside the absence of conclusive physical evidence of abuse and uncritically cites a number of problematic texts (Booth and Horowitz 1992: 159). She does not consider the possibility that the children’s behavioural symptoms may have been precipitated by the trauma of parental panic, repeated interrogations, physical examinations and therapy. Booth also fails to mention that neither the children’s “disclosures” nor the parents’ allegations had been able to withstand recent magisterial scrutiny.

Another--more outspoken--expert who commented on Seabeach was the psychiatrist Anne Schlebaum.[7] Schlebaum, who had become involved in the case after the children had made disclosures of abuse, expressed her views in an address to the 1990 conference of the Australian and New Zealand Association of Psychiatry, Psychology and Law. Citing Finkelhor, Schlebaum used the Seabeach case to argue that Australian childcare centres were being targeted by perpetrators as a source of children to be abused during occult rituals or as converts to Satanic religions (Guilliatt 1996: 90; Hill 1998). This idea was still being promoted by speakers at ritual abuse seminars as late as 1998 (e.g. Ritual Abuse Workshop, Queanbeyan District Hospital, NSW 21 Sept. 1998; see also Richardson and Meyer 1992). Schlebaum’s views—and the fact that she had treated the Seabeach children—were widely cited in the media’s increasing coverage of ritual abuse in the early 1990s (e.g. Kennedy She April 1995; Preston SMH 8 Dec. 1990).

For several years, Schlebaum campaigned to have the Seabeach case reopened. As the Wood Royal Commission was re-examining the case, Schlebaum was lobbying
NSW parliamentarians and the parents of the Seabeach children and energetically criticising Wood's procedures and likely findings. When summoned to appear before the commission, Schlebaum revealed considerable indifference to the facts of the Seabeach case—as well as a degree of paranoia. She explained that she had suspected that the commission had failed to uncover unambiguous evidence of ritual abuse at Seabeach because of deliberate obstruction of evidence by commission staff, possibly due to blackmail. Her suspicions, she was forced to admit, were not based on a reading of the relevant hearing transcript (Schlebaum, evidence to WRC 29 Oct. 1996; see also Lennane, Letter to WRC 14 Jan. 1997). As someone who regularly attended Wood's examination of Seabeach and other cases, I would further observe that Dr. Schlebaum—one of the commission's harshest and most active critics—was very rarely present in the public gallery.

Other Cases

The proprietors and staff of the Seabeach childcare centre were subjected to an unusually sustained period of persecution, and the extensive legal, professional and media scrutiny that the case generated did not occur in later cases. In other ways, however, Seabeach was quite typical of ritual abuse cases in Australia in the 1990s. There are strong similarities in the ways that the Seabeach defendants and other supposed perpetrators of "witch-like" crimes were denied the legal and other obligations due to them and in the ways they were persecuted by politicians, activists and the media. This occurred in cases where accusations of ritual abuse were made by adult survivors, as well as in "child" cases. In some instances, the suspects in these cases were more harshly treated than the Seabeach suspects.

There have been a number of ritual abuse cases where Australian police and other officials conducted investigations and prosecutions whose object seemed to be improperly gaining a conviction. Police investigating allegations made against the proprietors of the Mornington Child-Care Centre, for example, used a tactic which had proved most problematic in the McMartin case. They approached parents at the front
gate of the centre and began to question them about the possible abuse of their children. Investigators subsequently asked leading questions while interviewing the Mornington children, and referred to the Seabeach case as they attempted to interpret the peculiar replies they received (Guilliat 1996: 136-8). In the “Bunbury” case in Western Australia, police and the officers of the DPP based their prosecution of a retired school principal and Baptist elder wholly on the uncorroborated “repressed memories” of the man’s two adult daughters (Thomson 1995). The women’s allegations included rape by multiple perpetrators during occult ceremonies, torture, sexual assault with various work tools and being forced to have sex with animals. Police interviewed the man for eight hours and prepared a statement based on the women’s claims which they encouraged him to sign. They had also attempted to persuade the suspect to admit to the crimes by asking him if he believed his daughters were lying—even though the women’s psychologist had warned him that it would traumatisse his daughters to contradict their claims (Guilliat 1996: 16-7, 66).

The activities of officers of the NSW Department of Community Services—as FACS had been renamed—investigating a young Sydney woman’s “recovered” memories of ritual abuse by her parents and elderly grandmother in 1994 show comparable credulity and unethical conduct. DOCS promptly took the woman’s younger siblings into care, but housed the complainant—who continued to be under the care of a DOCS-appointed psychiatrist—with her younger sister. This girl then began to make comparable allegations, but later retracted these claims and complained that she had been subjected to constant, persuasive and coercive questioning (Guilliat 1997). In the subsequent court hearings—including a 1996 committal hearing at which all but one of the 67 charges against the trio were dropped—it was revealed that DOCS officers had made erroneous and misconceived assessments of the case, had ignored inconsistencies in and changes to the complainant’s account, and had failed to act on their own psychiatrist’s warnings about the young woman’s claims. DOCS officers had urged police to put the allegations of ritual abuse—for which there was no evidence—before the courts and, discounting the assessments of police investigators, had continued to treat the case as one involving a large, ritual abuse “network” (Guilliat 1997).
There are also numerous cases in which therapists and other child protection activists suspected that "witch-like" crimes had been perpetrated against children and so relinquished any reasonable objectivity or professional standards and ethics. The Wood Royal Commission examined the "Sydney Sunday School" ritual abuse case--including Anne Schlebaum's therapeutic techniques and activism--in some detail. Schlebaum had argued that children attending the Sunday School had been victims of ritual abuse, and she had actively campaigned to have the alleged perpetrators charged (Report WRC Vol. IV 1997: 680). Yet she had ignored the fact that the accounts given by the children and their parents in this case included elements that were impossible—that a member of a church congregation had grown wings and a tail during a Satanic ritual, for example—and that no evidence corroborating the accounts could be found. Schlebaum failed to consider the possibility that the indications of ritual abuse could well have had alternate explanations—especially considering the fact that the complaining parents were drug-users and preoccupied with pornography and the occult (Report WRC Vol. IV 1997: 676-7, 678-9). She used very dubious methods of questioning the children, and her report to police did not accurately reflect the details of the children's "disclosures" (Report WRC Vol. IV 1997: 680-2).

In the 1990s, politicians used their privileges and influence both to accuse certain "outsiders" of perpetuating "witch-like" crimes and to proclaim the guilt of some who had been accused by others. Within days of Schlebaum's humiliating appearance before the Royal Commission in 1996, her friend and ally Franca Arena used Parliament to criticise Wood's methods and priorities. She suggested that prominent men—including prominent Illawarra businessman and politician Frank Arkell—had been leniently treated as the commission inquired into the protection of pedophiles (Hansard NSW LC 31 Oct. 1996: 5623-4).[8] This claim—and Arena's subsequent campaign against "prominent pedophiles"—garnered considerable support among government backbenchers (Meredith Burgmann 3 June 2002).[9]

Stories about Arkell had been circulating for some years. Deidre Grusovin had used Parliament to name him as a pedophile in 1994 (Hansard NSW LA 13 May 1994: 6616-7). There were also long-standing rumours and press reports—particularly in the Illawarra Mercury—linking influential men, pedophilia and Satanism in the Illawarra.
region (Background Briefing ABC2RN 1 Sept. 1998; The Religion Report ABC2RN 22 July 1998). Arena’s accusation precipitated immense media and popular attention on Arkell and caused Wood to immediately lift the suppression order on his name. Arena also used her speech to suggest some sort of link between Arkell, pedophilia and ritual abuse. Besides naming Arkell and others in her speech, Arena revisited the Seabeach and Wahroonga cases and recommended that her colleagues in the Legislative Council read the controversial 1994 booklet Ritual Abuse: Information for Health and Welfare Professionals (Hansard (NSW LC) 31 Oct. 1996: 5623-4).

Arena’s information about Arkell had come from the most problematic of sources -- including informants who had placed stringent conditions on the use of their material, and allegations based solely on “rumour, innuendo and gossip” (Ryan Report to LC, 1997: 2, 4). She had also uncritically accepted the claims of prisoners (Report LCSCPPE Vol. 3 (Transcripts) 1998: 65, 178; Meredith Burgmann 3 June 2002).[10] One of Arena’s principal prison informants had himself been convicted of child sexual assault--as well as armed robbery--and had a history of intimidating witnesses (Report LCSCPPE Vol. 3 (Transcripts) 1998: 56, 64,66, 74, 76, 215). The lawyers, magistrates, psychologists and probation officers that this man had encountered since 1980 had described him variously as an unreliable witness, habitual liar, fantasist, manipulator and attention seeker (Report LCSCPPE Vol. 3 (Transcripts) 1998: 66-8, 313). Nevertheless, Arena’s parliamentary accusation gave his allegations against Arkell considerable publicity and status.

The police, acting on information supplied by the Wood Royal Commission, charged Arkell with various offences relating to sexual assault, sex with minors and the administration of stupefying drugs. During the committal hearing in February 1998, however, the testimony of Arena’s principal informant was demolished by defence counsel and the charges Arkell was to face reduced from 29 to 4, none of which related to sex with minors. Arkell’s defence counsel was confident he would be acquitted (Linton 2004: 46-8; Report LCSCPPE Vol. 3 (Transcripts) 1998: 215-6).

In June 1998--three months before he was to have faced trial--Arkell was murdered inside his Wollongong home and his body was mutilated. This precipitated a bout of
serious misbehaviour by the media. There was immediate speculation that Arkell’s was one of the mutilation-murders perpetrated that year by a “pederast or gay hate” serial killer (Guilliatt SMH 22 Aug. 1998; Kennedy SMH 29 June 1998; Linton 2004: 83-5; McClymont SMH 29 June 1998; “Killer . . . ” ST 5 July 1998). Much of the coverage of this scenario was, however, devoted to denouncing the evil of the murderer’s victims—especially Arkell—rather than expressing alarm that such a perpetrator was at large. Arkell’s murderer was actually a young man who—although motivated by troubles of his own—believed Arkell to be what Arena and the media had described: a perpetrator of child abuse who had escaped justice (Linton 2004: 118, 132).

Numerous reports of Arkell’s death ignored the results of the recent committal hearing, and the fact that many of the accusations against Arkell were ambiguous or came from unreliable sources. He was incorrectly described as facing 29 charges of child sexual abuse or simply as a known pedophile (see Clark SMH 4 July 1998; Linton 2004: 49, 278-9). Media commentators also described Arkell’s death as unfortunate for his “victims”—who would now be denied their “day in court”. Ray Chesterton—the Daily Telegraph’s resident expert on both Rugby League and pedophilia—suggested that mutilation-murder was an inadequate punishment for Arkell, but hoped that his final moments had been agonising. Chesterton also wrote of Arkell’s probable damnation (Clark SMH 4 July 1998; Background Briefing ABC2RN 1 Sept. 1998).

By the time of Arkell’s murder, however, the Australian mass media was either expressing scepticism about organised Satanism and ritual child abuse or ignoring the issue. Six years before, the Illawarra media had given extensive coverage to the claims of certain child protection activists, churchmen and their congregations about the activities of abusive Satanic cults in the region (see Guilliatt 1996: 142-7). In the panic that followed, a Masonic hall in Wollongong was firebombed and a local man prosecuted for ritual abuse. Yet in 1998, journalists never considered the possibility that Arkell’s murder could in some way be linked to Satanism, even though there were some glaringly “Satanic” aspects to the crime. Arkell had been beaten to death, and had one eye and other parts of his face punctured with tie-pins and lapel badges by the same person—it was believed—who had scrawled “Satanic” graffiti on the walls of the site of another mutilation-murder (Linton 2004: 11-2, 17).
Journalists were similarly reluctant to consider the views of Arkell’s most trenchant public accuser. Less than twelve months before Arkell’s death, Franca Arena’s claims of a conspiracy by senior politicians and judges to protect “prominent pedophiles” had generated a frenzy of sympathetic media attention. Even commentators sceptical about ritual abuse have argued that the panic in the Illawarra was actually a manifestation of the local community’s concern about the activities of wealthy and well-connected local “pedophiles” (e.g. Guilliat 1996: 144). As a result of the claims she made in 1998 about ritual abuse, however, Arena was being dismissed as a shrill “signora” who promoted “a witches’ cauldron of obscene fantasy” (Carlton SMH 21 March 1998). Even Arena’s speculation that Arkell “could have been murdered by a pedophile network to silence him” went largely unreported (Doherty et al. SMH 26 June 1998).

Arkell—like those accused in the Mornington, Sydney Sunday School and other ritual abuse cases—was widely regarded as someone who had been secretly “violate[f]ing] the most taken-for-granted cultural axioms about the natural limits of human behaviour” (see La Fontaine 1994: 20). Accusations against him had allowed certain politicians, the media and others to disregard their duty and the legal obligations they owed him, and to persecute him with impunity. By the time of Arkell’s death, however, for such accusations to be potent they could no longer include references to ritual abuse.

“Adult Survivor” Cases in Australia

One important difference between the kinds of obligations withheld from the accused in “child” ritual abuse cases and those in “adult survivor” cases, is that adult survivors are very often withdrawing filial or other familial obligations from those they accuse. Australian data suggests that—as in the US—those who are accused of ritual abuse by
adult survivors are the parents, and especially the fathers, of survivors. Australians who are accused of these “witch-like” crimes tend not to be impoverished or otherwise socially excluded. They do, however, have characteristics which lead survivors and their therapists to perceive them as "outsiders".

**Accused and Accusers**

There are a number of studies which provide useful information about the socio-economic status and other characteristics of Australians accused of ritual abuse by adult survivors. A “Summary of . . . Information” provided by the clients of the nurse-counsellor Gillian Johnson, for example, was published in 1992. This is an appendix to the paper Johnson presented that year to a conference on “Satanic Ritual Abuse” organised by the Australian Association of Multiple Personality and Dissociation.[11] The Advocates for the Survivors of Child Abuse organisation published the results of its survey of adult survivors in 1997, and the Australian False Memory Association published a survey of its own members the following year. The AFMA survey conducted by the Melbourne psychologist Merle Elson was the more extensive. There are many consistencies in the findings of these studies, even though Johnson and ASCA interpret the collected data in completely different ways to Elson and AFMA. Johnson and the members of ASCA would, in fact, regard AFMA as among their principal adversaries.

Neither the AFMA nor the ASCA surveys dealt exclusively with accusations of ritual abuse, and at first sight the percentage of respondents who claim to have survived ritual abuse or to have been accused of perpetrating it seems quite small. Only 14% of the survivors who responded to the ASCA survey claim to have suffered ritual abuse, while a little more than 20% of the respondents to the AFMA survey report being accused of perpetrating “Satanic ritual abuse” (ASCA 1997: #3; Elson 1998: 3.2.6). These figures, I believe, understate the numbers of respondents who claim to have either been subjected to ritual abuse or to been have accused of perpetrating it.
Almost a quarter of the ASCA respondents claim to have suffered "sadistic abuse"—or to have suffered both sadistic and ritual abuse (ASCA Survey 1997: #3). Terms such as "sadistic abuse" have been increasingly used by Australian survivors and their advocates to describe what is essentially "ritual abuse" (e.g. ASCA 2002; Halpern and Henry 1994). The editor of Beyond Survival—"a magazine on ritual abuse, trauma and dissociation"—certainly regarded the findings of the ASCA survey as relevant to her readers and published its preliminary findings in September 1996.

Similarly, a very high percentage of AFMA respondents had been accused of sexual abuse which had many similarities to ritual abuse—severe sexual abuse (45-88%), multiple perpetrators (59%), and abuse from a very young age (72-90%) (Elson 1998: 3.2.3/4/6). In more than half the cases, respondents also report that the accusations made against them had become "more serious and extensive" over time (Elson 1998: 3.2.8). A significant proportion (16%) did not know the precise nature of the abuse they were supposed to have perpetrated (Elson 1998: 3.2.6). It is therefore likely that many more than 20% of these respondents had been accused of perpetrating "ritual abuse". The findings of these surveys are thus very instructive about the issue, especially if they are considered alongside Johnson's "Summary of Client Information" and other relevant anecdotal data.

Both the surveys and Johnson’s summary found that the vast majority of those Australians accused of abuse—including ritual abuse—by adult survivors were close male relatives of the survivors. In the ASCA survey, 83% of respondents reported they had suffered "abuse from within the immediate family" and that males were "responsible for the abuse in 97% of cases" (ASCA Survey 1997: #1). Elson also found that those accused of abuse by adult survivors were overwhelmingly male and members of the survivors’ immediate families. Elson’s survey was, however, a little more specific here, and it indicates that those accused were primarily the fathers of adult survivors (Elson 1998: 1.1). Eight of the nine clients described in Johnson’s summary had "disclosed" being survivors of ritual abuse. All were women, and the four who provided information about perpetrators nominated their parents, grandparents and the members of the "sect" to which their parents belonged as their abusers. According to Johnson, when abuse is perpetrated by other sect members, it is
generally facilitated and witnessed by the victims' parents. Such appalling parental behaviour, she believes, is motivated by the perpetrators' need to properly program victims and by the vital importance of "bloodlines" in deciding roles and prestige within abusive sects (Johnson 1992c).

Elson's survey found that the vast majority of accusations were made by women. Her respondents reported that the accusations against them were made by males in only 2% of cases (1998: 1.3.1). This finding differs somewhat from the ASCA survey data. Although the respondents to the ASCA survey reported that males were responsible for 97% of the cases of abuse, a substantial proportion (11%) of respondents were themselves male (ASCA 1997# 1.1). I do not believe, however, that these male respondents were reporting ritual abuse or that they had "recovered" memories of abuse. The ASCA survey shows that 49% of all perpetrators were "from outside the family" (ASCA 1997: # 1.3). ASCA perceives this finding as indicating the prevalence of "multiple abusers". It is also possible, however, that this high figure was bolstered by male respondents reporting sexual encounters with family friends, teachers, acquaintances and the like. Numerous studies suggest the prevalence of such perpetrators in the sexual abuse--however defined--of boys and youths (e.g Moran 1991: 68ff; Rossetti 1991: 10; Weeks 1985: 228; see also Doll et al. 1992; Bagley 1995; Coddington 1997; "Information for Men . . . " BTS 1999; Lothstein 1991). It is also noticeable that young men who are troubled by such encounters are often present and active at gatherings organised by ASCA and similar organisations.

According to Elson, the socio-economic background of those accused by adult survivors is very similar to that of their overseas counterparts. Far from being economically or socially marginal, they are "typically well-educated, white and of high socio-economic status" (Elson 1998: 1.1). Certain professions--such as clergy, teachers and academics--were greatly over-represented among the accused. Accusations were not, however, commonly made against the most affluent, influential or esteemed members of Australian society. As I have discussed, where men of such status figure in allegations--especially allegations of ritual abuse--they are not usually identified, but simply mentioned as being among the members of the abusive groups to which the accused belonged (Report LCSCPPE Vol. 3 1998: 44ff; Ogden 1993: 30-
The information provided by Elson’s respondents and Johnson’s clients, as well as some anecdotal data, suggests that the survivors who make accusations are well educated and that they work in some of the same sorts of occupations as the accused. This is not surprising, given that they are generally the daughters of well educated and successful men. For various reasons, however, survivors are less financially secure than those they accuse, and they may feel themselves to be less successful.[12] Although 60% of accusers had been educated to tertiary level, 28% of them are unemployed. The 46% who are in the paid work force generally work in professions—such as school-teaching and social work—which require tertiary training but are not especially well remunerated or prestigious (Elson 1998: 1.3.1). Johnson’s clients—who are survivors of specifically ritual abuse—have occupations which are similar to those suggested by Elson’s respondents, or are training to undertake such occupations (Johnson 1992d). According to Elson’s survey, a further 18% of accusers perform “home duties”. Given that their average age was 34, however, many of these survivors are obviously absent from the paid work force while caring for their children (Elson 1998: 1.3.1; 3.2.2).

Elson’s survey suggests that survivors are facing other difficulties. Most Australian survivors were reported to be “without partners”, yet “more than half” of them had children. Survivors, in fact, have on average twice as many children as other Australian women (Elson 1998: 1.3.1). Many of these women had thus experienced the stress and emotional upheaval of divorce or separation, and as sole female parents—especially sole parents who have more than two children—they suffer considerable levels of economic hardship (Elson 1998: 1.3.1, 3.1.1; Harding et al. 2001: vii, 7, 8). Survivors’ impoverishment and other difficulties are aggravated by the fact that they have commonly had to endure changes to their working conditions, serious financial setbacks, illness or injuries (Elson 1998: 3.1.1).

The ASCA survey does not attempt to identify the socio-economic status of survivors, and the organisation’s literature stresses that abuse occurs in “rich or poor” families and that ASCA is “for all people” (“Child Sexual Assault Myths and Facts”)
1999; "Who We Are" n.d.). Judging by the ASCA seminars and other functions that I have attended, however, both adult survivors and the organisation’s more active members conform to Elson’s socio-economic profile of Australian "survivors". They are obviously well educated--given the arcane nature of the presentations given and the literature distributed at ASCA functions--but show few signs of real affluence or "upper-middle-class" mores. There is some variation in the apparent socio-economic profile of the participants at events held in different locations, although this is very slight. Those who attended ASCA’s specifically ritual abuse seminar in 2002 were not an obviously different socio-economic group from those that I have observed at other ASCA functions. They did seem, however, to more assertively participate in seminar discussions and to be more expert in the literature about repressed memory and the prescribed methods of dealing with an abusive past.

Johnson does not provide information about the socio-economic status of her clients. The members of another group of survivors of specifically "ritual abuse"--the WINGS group--do, however, seem to conform to the profile identified by Elson. Although it is difficult to precisely identify their backgrounds, they are residents of women’s shelters in the ACT and the NSW North Coast and appear to belong to the middle or lower-middle-classes of these regions. They also seem to have had sufficient education to participate in complex discussions about psychology and metaphysics and to competently--though idiosyncratically--apply these issues in each others' "healing".[13]

A slightly different assessment of the socio-economic status of ritual abuse survivors comes from Sydney-based forensic psychiatrist Yolanda Lucire. She believes that survivors of ritual abuse are members of social groups which have few material resources and little status. Dr Lucire encounters numerous adult survivors of sexual abuse in her private practice, and has worked with both survivors of ritual abuse and those accused by such survivors. She told me that in her experience it was "working class and lower-middle-class" women who most commonly make accusations after recovering memories of specifically ritual abuse (27 March 2002; 18 July 2002). Dr Lucire believes such accusations to be a manifestation of psychopathology--particularly various personality disorders--and that affluence and levels of education
affect the ways in which women manifest such disorders. Affluent women with personality disorders, she believes, are less likely to seek help from the kinds of low-cost or government-subsidised counsellors, support groups or medical practitioners who specialise in uncovering and treating ritual abuse.

I believe that Dr Lucire's "socio-economic analysis" needs to be regarded with some caution. It is based on her own clinical experience, and her practice is such that she encounters survivors in peculiarly disparate situations. Some adults who report that they were sexually abused as children are treated by Dr Lucire as private patients in her Eastern Suburbs practice. People who are determined to explore the possibility that their problems are the result of repressed memories of ritual abuse are most unlikely to continue as her private patients. Dr Lucire also encounters survivors in other situations—including "legal aid" cases—who quite obviously have a very different socio-economic status to her private patients. Some of these—a young woman, for example, whose lawyers were exploring the possibility that she was psychologically unfit to face charges of Creating Public Mischief—are in effect counting on Dr Lucire taking a sceptical attitude to their claims.

Dr Lucire's observations about the way that ritual abuse survivors commonly utilised inexpensive or subsidised services does, however, echo Elson's survey findings. Elson's survey suggests that despite being as well educated as their counterparts in the US, Australian survivors do not appear to be as professionally or financially successful a group as the American survivors. This may reflect factors such as the progress of American women into better paid positions or the strength of the American economy. It may also suggest that less affluent Australian survivors are able to apply themselves to their "healing"—including the pursuit of supposed perpetrators—and that they may be able to do so more devotedly. Anecdotal data suggest that affluent women in the US—who had health insurance—were over-represented among those coming to "recover" memories of their abusive past (see Pendergrast 1995: 206, 277, 350ff.; US District Court, Southern District, Texas 1993 H-97-237). American survivors also report that their insurance coverage and other welfare benefits were finite, so that they were frequently obliged to continue working to maintain their therapy, or to return to work after periods of intensive treatment (see Pendergrast 1995: 319ff, 325ff.,
330ff). Australian survivors, on the other hand, have access to this country's various welfare payments, as well as the extensive health care subsidies provided by Medicare.

The various Australian studies thus suggest some remarkable similarities between those Australians accused by adult survivors of perpetrating ritual abuse and their Americans and British counterparts. They were mostly the male relatives--principally the fathers--of their accusers. They were well-educated and affluent, but in Australian and American cases they were not usually members of the most affluent and prestigious socio-economic groups. Accusers in all three countries were well-educated women generally aged in their thirties and forties. They commonly faced financial difficulties or personal or health problems that they sought to address through therapy. Australian survivors appear to have been a slightly less affluent group than their American counterparts, although this may reflect differing work patterns for middle class women in Australia and the US or the assistance offered to troubled women by the Australian health care and social security systems.

**Therapy**

The comparatively modest financial and professional success of Australian survivors--especially given their high educational levels--and the other problems they have faced, are likely to have made these women a discontented and even resentful group. The process by which this discontentment and resentment precipitates accusations of ritual abuse is remarkably similar to that reported in the American data. Put simply, Australian survivors have typically sought out various kinds of therapy or counselling to address their problems, and they "recovered" memories of ritual abuse during this therapy.

All available survey and anecdotal data, I believe, show that the overwhelming majority of accusations of ritual abuse made by Australian adult survivors followed therapy in which memories of abuse were "recovered". According to Elson's
respondents and Johnson’s summary, survivors—like their American counterparts—had undertaken therapy in an attempt to deal with issues other than sexual abuse. They subsequently “recovered” memories—or as the AFMA would describe it, acquired false memories—of abuse (Elson 1996: 3.2.9). Although Johnson reports that three of her clients had disclosed their abuse “immediately”, these women had either already had counselling, were members of ritual abuse survivors’ groups before consulting Johnson or had come to her specifically seeking “deprogramming” (1992d).

Only 22% of the respondents to the ASCA survey reported that they had “recover[ed] memories [of abuse] after receiving outside help”. In most cases, respondents report that they had sought out therapy or support in order to help them deal with memories of abuse that they had already recovered (33%) or to deal with the effects of abuse that they had always known about (39%) (ASCA 1997: #6).

I find it difficult to believe that such a high proportion of ASCA respondents had not “recovered” memories of abuse. Although the theme of ASCA’s public campaigns is the need to prevent child sexual abuse, aid victims and deal more effectively with perpetrators, the focus of the organisation’s internal literature, seminars and other activities is the veracity of “repressed memories” (see Fig. 3). The organisation was founded by a woman who had recovered memories of sexual abuse. It was initially called We Remember, then the Australian Association for Repressed Memories (Guilliat 1996: 220, 225; Phillips 2003 BE ). ASCA’s newsletter continued to be called We Remember for some years. The survivors who speak at its seminars invariably report that they recovered memories of their abusive pasts.[14]

ASCA’s attitudes to recovered memories suggest, however, that the findings of its survey do not necessarily contradict Elson and Johnson—especially as they relate to memories of ritual abuse. The ASCA survey was very general, and in many of the questions—including the question about whether or not they had “recovered” their memories of abuse—respondents were asked to nominate an answer from a provided list. It is possible, therefore, that respondents were reporting that they had—like some of their American counterparts—always been aware of having been “abused” in various ways, but that they subsequently recovered memories of more prolonged,
It's easy to love one and hate the other, until you realise they're the same person.

There are two sides to every story. The most disturbing fact of all is that the abuse is often the person they trust the most; their mother or father.

The abuse, which can be either sexual, physical or psychological, usually begins at 3 or 4 and continues into puberty. They grow up with little or no self worth. Many become alcoholic, drug addicted and, worst of all, child abusers.

In fact, over 70% of adult abusers were abused themselves as children. We can be assured that the majority of abused children don't grow up to abuse.

Especially when you consider that 26,000 new cases of child abuse were reported last year in NSW alone.

Advocates for Survivors of Child Abuse in a world where no one wants to talk about child abuse, ASCA does.

ASCA (Advocates for Survivors of Child Abuse) helps survivors become survivors. If you've been abused and would like to heal, or wish to make a donation, call ASCA on 1 300 657 386. And help to break the cycle.

www.asca.org.au

Fig. 3. A 1999 magazine advertisement with a theme typical of ASCA’s public public campaigns.
invasive or bizarre abuse. Survivors certainly report experiences like this in ASCA literature and at the organisation’s seminars. In these accounts, the abuse which survivors had "always known" about may have been perpetrated by people other than those they later accuse, or it may consist of parental behaviours--corporal punishment, for example, or poor parenting practices--which they later came to regard as abusive. [15]

ASCA literature and the AFMA survey are, ironically, consistent on this issue. According to Elson’s respondents, 22% of those making accusations against them had indeed suffered some form of sexual abuse before the age of 16. A further 11% had been sexually assaulted at a later age. Elson suspects that these figures understate the actual number of accusers who had suffered such abuse. These assaults were, however, reported by accusers soon after they occurred, and they were not perpetrated by those who were accused following therapy (Elson 1998: 4.1.3).

In any case, what some respondents to the ASCA survey may have meant by "always know[ing] of the abuse" is ambiguous. Phenomena such as "nightmares", "inklings", "flashbacks" and "body feelings" are not clearly differentiated from "memories" in ASCA literature and discourse. [16] It is also possible--according to the Australian False Memory Association--that some "survivors" who have recovered memories may not readily admit it. An AFMA activist--and former office-holder in the association--told me that as police, prosecutors and the courts have taken an increasingly sceptical attitude to the evidentiary value of recovered memories, many adult survivors who had never mentioned an abusive past before undergoing therapy claim that they had always known that they had been abused (6 May 2002).

Like their American counterparts, Australian survivors had sought therapy in order to address problems which--although serious--were ubiquitous. Australian survivors had suffered the loss of infant children or other bereavement, they were troubled by marital or other relationship issues, and they had problems with work or education, illness, accidents, injury and relocation (Elson 1998: 3.1.1; Johnson 1992d). Elson’s survey also suggests that prior to commencing therapy, Australian survivors--again like their American counterparts--harboured deep-seated resentments against those they later
accused of abuse, or had even clashed with them. Australian survivors had typically been subjected to quite rigid control in childhood, and their parents' values and mores—including their perceptions about proper ways of rearing children and female adolescents—were soon to become outdated. When examining how accusers were disciplined during childhood, for example, Elson points out that although her respondents do not regard themselves as having been excessively authoritarian parents, they would probably be judged so by contemporary standards (1998: 2.1/2/3/4).

The therapy that survivors undertook, and the kinds of support groups they joined, meant that they did not simply come to regard their "repressive" or "dysfunctional" upbringing as the root of their problems. Many therapists—and many aspects of the "healing process" that they conduct or recommend—have a strongly Cultural Feminist ethos. Although survivors have most commonly been treated by psychiatrists and psychologists, there is evidence that survivors use these professionals in conjunction with a variety of other therapists and treatments (ASCA 1997: #8; Elson 1998: 3.2.10). Significant numbers of survivors consulted sexual assault counsellors or joined support groups for survivors of rape, sexual abuse or ritual abuse (Elson 1998: 3.2.10, 3.2.17; Johnson 1992d). Significant numbers also read survivor literature—much of which has a strongly Cultural Feminist philosophy (Elson 3.2.17).[17]

The therapists and counsellors consulted by accusers typically regard sexual abuse as endemic, believe that many victims of abuse have repressed memories of it and believe that these factors are the cause of innumerable psychological problems. Therapy therefore "converted" survivors' resentments into memories of abuse. Therapy also cultivated a perception among survivors that their parents—and especially their fathers—were the agents of an oppressive, and increasingly redundant, patriarchy. Their parents are thus "outsiders"—and the likely perpetrators of "witch-like" activities—to these women and their new network.
“Britons”

Although there are some obvious similarities between the experiences of Australian survivors and their American counterparts, the accusations of ritual abuse made by Australians also reflect some quite distinctive historical processes and social values. One very surprising finding of Elson’s survey, for example, was that a very high number of the Australian men accused by adult survivors had been born in the British Isles. While 19% of Australians in 1997 had “at least one parent born overseas”, 33% of the fathers accused of abuse in Elson’s survey were born overseas—and British-born men constituted 91% of this group (Elson 1998: 1.1).

Other factors investigated by the survey—such as the age and religious beliefs of respondents—suggest that these “Britons” are predominantly English, and that they had been part of the extensive waves of migration to Australia which followed World War II (Elson 1998: 1.1/4). This finding indicates a specific way in which these men were “outsiders”, as well as suggesting particular sources of conflict between them and their daughters.

British migrants are a minority group, but they are not—nor have they ever been—rare (Taft 1962: 200-1). Britons coming to Australia have not had to deal with language difficulties, nor have they encountered serious cultural differences. British—and especially English—migrants to Australia have, furthermore, never been regarded as “foreigners” (Taft 1962: 200-1). The children of these migrants are thus unlikely to have experienced the confusion about their identity which is commonly reported by children of other migrant groups, nor are the daughters of British migrants likely to be seriously resentful about being strictly raised according to the alien mores of “the old country” (see Harvey 1994: 43; Rawsthorne 1994: 87; Sarantakos 1996: 69-70).

Yet English migrants of this generation have the reputation of remaining very attached to England and all things English. They regard Australia as some sort of “colony” and thus inherently inferior to the “mother country”. They are also reputedly hypercritical of their new country (Horne 1970: 110, 174; Moffitt 1972: 95-6; Taft 1962: 203). These men’s sense of discontentment was likely to have heightened as increasingly large
numbers of non-Britons migrated to Australia, and as concomitant cultural changes occurred--such as attempts to cultivate a more independent and multicultural Australian national ethos.

Like other Australian men of their generation, the British-born men accused of ritual abuse by adult survivors are likely to have had some difficulties in their relationships with their daughters. These difficulties may have been aggravated by the way these men strongly and persistently stressed their detachment from and dissatisfaction with the society in which they lived. They are thus likely to have particularly offended or alienated their Australian-born--or Australian-raised--offspring.

"Fundamentalists"

Elson’s respondents also reported that they had raised their children in environments which, by Australian standards, were highly religious. As I have already discussed, more than a third of Elson’s respondents belonged to fundamentalist Christian denominations and may well have been perceived as “outsiders” by those around them.[18] These people’s unusual religiosity also has the potential to disturb and alienate their own children--especially since an overwhelming majority of those making accusations of abuse had come to reject their parents’ religious beliefs and enthusiasms (Elson 1998: 1.4).

One obvious explanation for this very high percentage of Australian survivors who have fundamentalist backgrounds is that by repudiating their parents’ faiths, these women have come to adopt more normatively Australian attitudes to religion and, perhaps, to regard their former co-religionists as odd. A second, and more important explanation is that survivors had been exposed to a belief system with a strong emphasis on the ubiquity and agency of Satan and his earthly agents, the declining morality of the world as the Apocalypse inexorably approaches and the especially dangerous nature of sexual sin. Australians raised in fundamentalist Christian households are among the relative few in this country to whom accounts of Satanic
cults, sacrificial ritual and the deliberate contamination of children's innocence would seem familiar.

Memories of fundamentalist religious services, Sunday Schools and church camps could, furthermore, be quite readily reconfigured as cultic activities during the "guided imagery" or other suggestive therapies commonly undertaken by accusers. It is a surprisingly common claim made in the accounts of Australian survivors, or in the literature about them, that the fundamentalist Christian organisations to which they belonged as children, or the activities they undertook then, were either Satanic or had been secretly subverted by Satanists.[19]

Another explanation for the very high percentage of Australian survivors who are women raised in fundamentalist families relates to the particular resentments that survivors may harbour towards their parents--and the intensity of this resentment. This explanation was suggested to me by the AFMA activist with whom I was able to discuss Elson's survey (6 May 2002). My informant regarded Elson's findings about the high percentage of fundamentalist Christians among the AFMA members accused of abuse to be consistent with his own observations. He went so far as to facetiously claim that AFMA was an evangelical Christian organization! He did not feel qualified, however, to comment on the religious profiles of the accused who are not members of AFMA or not politically active in other ways. He agreed with me that the fundamentalist Christian beliefs--about the presence of Satan and his earthly agents, for example--to which many accusers had been exposed had influenced their recovery of memories of ritual abuse. He felt, however, that the fundamentalist background of so many accusers was more significant in other, "psychological" ways.

I found his observations reminiscent of the arguments proposed by the American psychiatrist George Ganaway. Ganaway has argued that survivors in the US are commonly adults--and particularly women--who have not achieved the usual levels of separation or independence from their parents (see Scott 2001: 54; Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 92). They are likely, he argues, to harbour significant degrees of unstated resentment towards their parents, and guilt about these feelings. They also readily form close, pseudo-parental relationships with their therapists. These survivors
more readily accept their therapists' suggestions about childhood abuse, and are likely to use their "recovered" memories—and the accusations which ensue—as a way of achieving tolerable levels of adult separation and autonomy.

Drawing upon his knowledge of a number of cases in which AFMA had been active, as well as his more general observations of AFMA and the "false memory" issue, my informant argued that Australian women raised in fundamentalist Christian families have especially low levels of separation and independence from their parents. These families followed scriptural exhortations about the necessity of paternal authority, patriarchal sex-roles and the imposition of strict discipline on children. Such parents, and particularly the fathers in such families, are thus likely to have generated considerable resentment in their daughters—especially those who are tertiary-educated and who have come to reject their parents' religion.

Fundamentalist Christians are also concerned about children losing their faith and values through contact with the "outside world". Children raised in fundamentalist families have therefore been subjected to strong and rigid direction by their parents and have not been encouraged to develop their own autonomy. They are also likely to have had relatively limited experience with the sinful and misguided society around them. On reaching adulthood, people raised in such families will be disconcerted by their inevitable contact with the wider society, and they seek therapy to address the resulting problems. Therapy would also allow them to establish the kinds of dependent relationships with which they are familiar and comfortable. They are also more likely, according to my informant, to enthusiastically participate in suggestive therapies, and to accept therapists' explanations about the meanings and causes of the "symptoms" that such therapy inevitably provokes. These people would quite readily come to regard their parents as "immersed in evil", and their new-found status as "survivors" and participants in support groups would also provide them with membership of familiarly intimate and exclusive communities.

Australian women with fundamentalist Christian backgrounds may thus have particular identities and values which they need to repudiate, and their desire to dissociate themselves from those they accuse may be particularly strong. Even before they
commence therapy, these people would have memories of unusually strict and circumscribed childhood environments and of being raised with religious beliefs that they now find strange. Therapy precipitates the transformation of these memories and resentments into recovered memories of ritual abuse. They are then able to safely undertake the extraordinary measures necessary to detach themselves not only from stifling relationships with their parents, but also from ingrained religious beliefs and from their status as "outsiders". As survivors, they receive--and in turn provide to others--reassurance about their incredible new beliefs, as well as resolution of their internal conflicts about their identity and worth.

In both Britain and the United States, fundamentalist Christians played a vital role in spreading the idea that abusive Satanists were numerous and active. They also precipitated accusations of ritual abuse in many cases. Although accusations by adult survivors in the US were commonly made against committed Christians--many of whom belong to "fundamentalist" congregations--the high proportion of accusations made against fundamentalist Christians in Australia is quite extraordinary. Many of the Americans accused by their adult children of perpetrating ritual abuse are likely to have been Christians, but they reside in a somewhat religious society where there is general sympathy for those with fundamentalist Christian convictions. Their religious beliefs were largely incidental to the accusations. Australian fundamentalist Christians, on the other hand, were likely to have been accused because of their strong religious beliefs. They are a very small group residing within a society that is essentially indifferent to religion. Australian society is one, furthermore, that distrusts non-conformists, particularly those who self-consciously differentiate themselves from the mainstream. Australians have, in addition, historically had strong suspicions about the way in which Christian clergy or certain devout members of the laity were seemingly preoccupied with sexual purity. Australian fundamentalist Christians would thus be readily perceived by those around them as "outsiders" surreptitiously engaging in transgressive activities. Australian women who have discarded fundamentalist Christian beliefs could also come to perceive their parents in this way.

To summarise, the ideas first introduced into Australia in the late 1980s about the activities of abusive Satanists underwent subtle--but significant--changes. This
transformation is very similar to that described by historians and anthropologists, whereby ideas about witches changed as they were spread by the inquisitors of early modern Europe and by members of African witch finding movements. "Migrating" American ideas about ritual abuse were thus taken up and modified by Australians participating in local debates and conflicts. Accusations of ritual abuse became, for example, part of a particular and long-running debate in this country about the efficacy, cost and propriety of child care. Accusations were also used in a variety of local conflicts to cement some relationships and to sever others. The overwhelming majority of Australian adults who made accusations of ritual abuse did so after undergoing certain kinds of highly suggestive therapy and "recovering" memories of an abusive past. They were very frequently well educated and relatively affluent women who nevertheless harboured feelings of disappointment, discontentment and even resentment. These "survivors" mostly made accusations against their parents--particularly their fathers--a significant proportion of whom had been born in Britain and/or were members of fundamentalist Christian churches. Accusations in Australia--unlike those in Britain--were thus not generally part of a process whereby certain groups sought to achieve their goals and deflect hostility by attacking despised, impoverished minorities. Although those accused in Australia were generally affluent and of relatively high social status, they were non-conformists or people who could be made vulnerable to a charge of non-conformism by an accusation of ritual abuse. As such they were subject to considerable suspicion in this country.

In the next chapter I will discuss another important way that ideas about ritual abuse were transformed in Australia. Australians were always less likely than Americans to be profoundly troubled by thoughts of Satanism, and allegations of specifically ritual abuse proved unsustainable here when they were seriously tested by police, the courts, scholars and journalists. Australian ritual abuse theorists and activists therefore promoted ideas that resonated with longstanding popular antipathies to certain groups and suspicions about others. It was in this modified form, I will argue, that the idea of ritual abuse was able to generate panic and to precipitate some of the rigorous legal and political reforms long sought by certain feminists, child protection advocates and social conservatives.
Notes

[1] In defending the Derens' claims for damages before the Supreme Court in 1998, the NSW Government claimed that Dawn Deren had failed in her duty as a proprietor of a childcare centre by not declaring that her husband had once faced charges of indecent assault (Derens vs. NSW Government, Supreme Court 6 Feb. 1998).

[2] The Derens were also evangelical Christians (Hole SMH 12 Aug. 1989; "Mr Bubbles . . . " OCRT 1999). According to an informant, one of the accused Seabeach teachers was a "committed Christian" (3 Dec. 1998).

[3] The numerous mistakes made by police during the Seabeach investigation led to the development of several conspiracy theories about the case. One such theory was made public during a speech to Parliament by Deidre Grusovin in September 1990. She alleged that the police who had investigated the case were involved in a "racket" whereby arrested pedophiles could bribe police to drop the charges against them (Hansard (NSW LA) 6 Sept. 1990: 6751, 6756-7). According to another theory, the errors made by investigators were part of a conspiracy to have the Derens and two teachers at Seabeach convicted. Corrupt police were supposedly attempting to protect the real perpetrators by "fitting" the defendants with the crime (Bracey, evidence to WRC 14 Aug. 1996).

[4] My informant believes that the police sergeant in charge of the investigation deliberately allowed demonstrators to pursue and confront the defendant Louise Bugg and her heavily pregnant supporter and that he delayed police intervention while the incident was filmed by a news camera crew. Some of the demonstrators informed Bugg's companion that they believed she was unworthy to bear a child and should instead have it "ripped out" of her (3 Dec. 1998).

[5] Writing in 1991, the criminologist Suzanne Hatty argued--incredibly--that the media coverage of the case showed a "remarkable concordance" with the Derens' own views of the children's stories and what Hatty takes to be the generally misogynistic attitudes of child protection workers (Hatty 1991: 263). She cites a
single *Sydney Morning Herald* article published after the collapse of the case, and she details the journalists' factual errors and "ideological stance". Hatty notes that the journalists had incorrectly reported that a psychiatric assessment of the original complainant had been made before the allegations had been made to police. In fact, the assessment was made some time afterwards, and the psychiatrist was documenting the effects that the children's "disclosures" and the police investigation had had on this woman.

Ironically, Hatty's own handling of some facts is problematic. She notes that "in an interview screened after the dismissal of the charges" Anthony Deren publicly disclosed that he had been charged with sexually assaulting two girls "several years ago". These charges had in fact been laid seventeen years before. Hatty does not mention that the interview in question had been recorded some months before the case was put before the magistrate in the committal hearing and had been conducted by the zealously anti-pedophile broadcaster Deren Hinch. Hatty also omits any reference to the "ritual" elements of the allegation, except to note that Anthony Deren had "resorted to" explaining the children's allegations as the work of "a force of evil--the devil".

[6] The numerous other elements of the investigation which the defence could have put before the magistrate or a subsequent criminal court did not become public until the hearings of the Wood Royal Commission in 1996. These included the irregularities of the police investigation, the possibility that the very young witnesses would not be able to give legally admissible evidence, the ambiguous nature of the medical evidence, the use of hypnosis during the investigation, and the role of the media in preventing the defendants from receiving a fair trial.

[7] See Chapter IV.

[8] Wood had prevented Arkell's name being publicly reported and, according to Arena, had accepted feeble excuses for his failure to appear before the commission (*Hansard NSW* LC 31 Oct. 1996: 5623; *Report LESCPE* Vol.3 (Transcripts) 1998: 178). Wood had, however, publicly warned Arkell that he would
have to answer the allegations made against him, and he passed the information received by the commission to police (Linton 2004: 44-6; McClymont SMH 29 June 1998).

[9] Franca Arena’s activism also allowed accusations to be publicly made against the man whose conviction in the “K” case had been quashed by the Court of Appeal. Accusations by the man’s ex-wife—that he had perpetrated bizarre forms of abuse and had escaped punishment because of the intervention of the “three wise monkeys” who had upheld his appeal—were made at a 1997 rally organised by Arena and her allies (“Louise”, APCA Vigil 15 Aug. 1997). This same man had been refused bail when his appeal was pending due to the activism of Anne Schlebaumb, whose assessment of the man and the potential danger he posed to his children had been presented at his bail hearing (Guilliatt 1996: 154).

[10] Meredith Burgmann—who was Arena’s colleague in the ALP and the Legislative Council, as well as a campaigner for prison reform—told me that she regarded Arena’s uncritical acceptance of the stories of prisoners to be extremely naive (3 June 2002).


[12] This point needs some qualification. According to Elson’s survey, those accused were mostly men who had begun their working lives in the mid-1950s. They had been generally accused by their daughters—women who were on average aged 34 that year (Elson 1998: 1.1, 1.3.1). There are considerable differences between the Australian socio-economic system in which the accused spent most of their working lives and that which their accusers experience. Perceptions of “affluence” and what constitutes a “high level of education” in the 1950s and 1960s were quite different from more contemporary notions. The types of occupations which provided relatively high remuneration and status are also different from those which provided comparable rewards in later years. A man who undertook teacher training and then entered the rapidly expanding school system of the 1950s, for example, could well consider himself highly educated and report that he had worked in a
well-remunerated and high status occupation. His daughter, on the other hand, who gained a university degree before entering teaching in the mid-1980s, would have attained a less exceptionable level of education and worked in an occupation which was relatively more modest in its remuneration and status (see Anderson 1988: 218; Davies and Encel 1965: 21; Ford 1977: 55; Lawry 1965: 82; Phillips 1962: 106-7; Western and Western 1988: 85).

The concentration of survivors in certain professions reflects the more general position of women in the labour market. Australian women generally continue to be employed in "occupations traditionally dominated by women", and well educated Australian women dominate certain professions--such as teaching and nursing. They are, by contrast, numerically under-represented in fields--such as management and administration--which are presently very well remunerated and highly prestigious (ABS 1998).

Survivors could--with some justification--be deeply resentful about both their current socio-economic status, and the fact that economic and industrial relations reforms enacted in the 1980s and 1990s added significantly to their burdens. It is possible that they also resent their parents or members of their parents' generation, who are perceived as having benefited from living in a more prosperous era.


[14] Some extremely controversial--and incredible--views of memory repression are accepted with great equanimity by ASCA members. At a seminar in Gosford in 2000, for example, there was some good-natured banter--which seminar participants seemed to enjoy--between a guest speaker and the MC about the number of "alternate personalities" that their abuse had precipitated. The speaker had related that she had numerous "alters", and that one of them had--without her knowledge--completed university courses and gained professional qualifications. The MC stated that she could relate to such experiences since she had even more
numerous alters and, furthermore, that it was an alter who had actually married her husband sixteen years before. She did not consider herself to have been truly married until she and her "husband" renewed their vows at a ceremony on their tenth wedding anniversary ("Break the Silence" seminar, Central Coast Leagues Club, 18 March 2000).


[17] Many Australian activists who have acted as advocates for survivors of ritual abuse, and who have campaigned to have ritual abuse more widely recognised, have also worked in rape crisis centres and women's refuges. From the early 1990s, numerous ritual abuse workshops were organised by support groups for victims of sexual assault and/or were held in women's refuges. These included Women's Health and Sexual Assault Education Unit seminars at Royal North Shore Hospital, a Sydney Incest Survivors ritual abuse workshop, and other, smaller events (see RS (18) July 1996; RS (21) Feb. 1997; Hodgins "Introduction/Welcome" SIS Conference, 1992; van Dyke (circular letter to) "Women's Refuge Workers in W.A" 2 July 1993). The majority of the activists in an influential "ritual/satanic abuse group" in the western suburbs of Sydney in the early 1990s were representatives of sexual assault centres and women's refuges from all over the city, as well as child protection advocates, hospital social workers, and "femocrats" ("M. van Luyen's Ritual/Satanic Abuse Group" (original document) 24 Feb. 1992). Beyond Survival magazine inevitably prints the grateful and congratulatory letters that the editor has received from such activists, their centres and refuges.

Much of the ritual abuse literature imported into Australia has been very strongly influenced by Cultural Feminist ideas about the ubiquity of patriarchal violence, the
inherent truthfulness of claims of sexual assault, and the need to validate such claims in the face of societal denial. Locally produced literature also reflects these ideas (e.g. Cinto n.d. [c.1994]; O’Donovan 1993). Beyond Survival magazine actually includes among its inspirational quotations poems and aphorisms by Cultural Feminist writers such as Adrienne Rich (e.g. RS (19) Sept. 1996).

[18] While a significant proportion of Elson’s respondents (39%) belong to “fundamentalist” denominations, a further 20% were Anglicans. Many of the respondents who describe themselves as “active” or “very active” Anglicans could well be strict, conservative evangelicals—especially in NSW. The Anglican Counselling Centre (ACC) in Sydney has in fact been criticised for using therapeutic techniques likely to precipitate the recovery of false memories of ritual abuse (e.g. “You must remember this . . . ” Four Corners ABCTV 29 Aug. 1994; 7-30 Report ABCTV 27 July 1999). Critics of the ACC were, however, more concerned that false memories of sexual abuse—rather than ritual abuse—could be “recovered” by clients of the centre. The use of these techniques—and the pursuit of abusive Satanists—was, however, in no way authorised by the Sydney Anglican Diocese. In 1998, the Diocese appointed an investigating committee which was highly critical of the counselling techniques used at the ACC. Significantly, the committee also expressed concern that the counsellors helping clients to recover memories of abuse were unqualified and lacking in Christian commitment. The committee recommended that the ACC be fully integrated with the Sydney Anglican Home Mission Society (see Enquiry into the Anglican Counselling Service, 1998).

According to Elson’s survey, significant numbers of the Catholics (18%) and members of the Uniting Church (15%) have been accused of perpetrating ritual abuse (Elson 1998: 1.4). These respondents may also be strict and conservative Christians.

2000; *Ritual Abuse Workshop* 21 Sept. 1998; “Survivor’s Assessment” AAMPAD, 1992; Van Dyke *BS* (21) Feb. 1997; RASSA 2000 “What is Ritual Abuse” and “Ritual Abuse Cults/Organizations”. The claims made in some of these sources refer to Catholicism rather than fundamentalist Protestantism, and a few are reproductions of American material in Australian newsletters and magazines.
CHAPTER X

WITCHES AND PEDOPHILES

In his analysis of witch-killing among the Hewa of Papua New Guinea, Steadman notes that certain women were accused of witchcraft even though they were never observed perpetrating their evil deeds, and nor had their supposed victims complained of being under attack. No witch had ever been “caught in the act”, and the Hewa were well aware that people make false accusations against others (Steadman 1986: 111-2). Steadman also found that after they had killed a suspected witch, Hewa men were always uncertain about the veracity of the accusation and troubled by the lack of any definite means for identifying witches (1986: 111).

Steadman cites this uncertainty of the Hewa witch killers in support of his argument that the “essence of witchcraft does not lie in the alleged practices of witches, but in the use of assertion alone to justify injuring or destroying innocent individuals” (1986: 121). According to Steadman, Hewa witch hunters attack an innocent person as a way of intimidating a rival or potentially rival group, and they justify their actions by accusing their victim of witchcraft (1986: 115-6). La Fontaine finds Steadman’s argument persuasive, but does not believe that the British social workers and activists who accused members of impoverished families of perpetrating ritual abuse did so to threaten their “political enemies”. She clearly does not believe that activists were making accusations that they regarded as false—or even questionable. She instead proposes that they were making a more symbolic attack on wealthy and powerful Satanists who were never brought to justice and on other “members of the elite” who had protected them (La Fontaine 1998: 74).
I have been more critical than La Fontaine of Steadman’s argument, and I have proposed different explanations for the targeting of "outsiders" by Australian activists and survivors.[1] It is obvious, however, that Australian ritual abuse activists have engaged in the sort of symbolic attacks on “members of the elite” described by La Fontaine. Like their British counterparts, Australian activists promoted the idea that wealthy, powerful and well-connected people were involved in ritual child abuse, even though specific accusations were rarely made against such people (e.g. RASSA 2000 “Ritual Abuse Cults/Organizations”; see also Ogden 1993: 30-1; Report LCSCPPE Vol. 3 (Transcripts)1998: 44ff.). Many explanations for the lack of unambiguous evidence for ritual abuse were, in fact, tenable only if there were influential people who either perpetrated abuse or protected perpetrators (e.g. Johnson 1992c; O’Donovan 1993: 9-11; Powell n.d. [c.1999]). Australian activists also commonly proposed that society was in denial about such abuse--and that abusive, misogynistic or self-interested members of the elite played an important role in perpetuating this denial (Halpern 1992; Spensley 1992a; 1992b; Whistleblowers Network 1997).

I nevertheless found Steadman’s description of Hewa witch killers expressing doubt about their actions eerily familiar. Some Australians whose activities had been instrumental in publicising the issue of ritual abuse, and in the naming and persecution of alleged perpetrators of ritual and other forms of organised child abuse, were subsequently rather ambivalent about their activities. The NSW politician Deidre Grusovin, for example, had been publicly campaigning against the perpetrators of child abuse--and on behalf of victims--since 1989. Grusovin had acted on behalf of parents in a number of preschool ritual abuse cases, and she had used Parliament to describe Seabeach as a case where “sexual, physical, ritualistic and emotional atrocities” had occurred (Hansard NSW LA 6 Sept. 1990: 6751, 6756-7). She had appeared on The Devil Made me Do It --a highly credulous 1990 television program about ritual abuse--and had worked closely with the journalist responsible for New Idea magazine’s lurid account of animal sacrifices and Satanic sex rituals at the Seabeach kindergarten (Deirdre Grusovin 11 Feb. 2002; Hicks Aust 18/19 May 1996; Sexton 2000: 48-9).
When I interviewed her in 2002, however, I was surprised by Mrs Grusovin’s ambivalent attitude to the issue of ritual abuse. She told me that she believed some local activists had too readily embraced American explanations for claims of ritual abuse, and she speculated that some perpetrators may have cynically used ritual to confuse victims. Mrs Grusovin also stated that she had found participating in *The Devil Made Me Do It* disturbing, and I sensed that she had found many of the claims made in the program bizarre and implausible.

Franca Arena--another NSW Labor politician and campaigner against child abuse--was also somewhat circumspect when asked directly about her attitude to ritual abuse in 1997. Among the "tragic stories" of abuse provided to Arena--and which she believed constituted evidence that certain politicians, judges and others were pedophiles--were a number that involved ritual abuse (Arena 2002: 258ff.; *Hansard* NSW LC 31 Oct. 1996: 5623; 17 Sept. 1997: 63-4, 67, 68; Meredith Burgmann 3 June 2002). Following the release of the Wood Royal Commission report--and especially after she made a speech to the Legislative Council accusing Wood and a number of politicians of conspiring to protect pedophiles--Arena came under considerable pressure to produce evidence for her claims (*Hansard* NSW LC 17 Sept. 1997: 63-4). She therefore provided a selection of documents to the Legislative Council, and then to the Council's Standing Committee on Parliamentary Privilege and Ethics (*Hansard* NSW LC 21 Oct. 1997: 991-2; *Report LCSCPPE* 1998: 6-7 Vol. 3 (Transcripts) 1998: 49).

The committee questioned Mrs Arena in considerable detail about one of her informant's accusations against a prominent judge. "Miss A" alleged that the judge had perpetrated ritual abuse, and had committed numerous murders and other appalling crimes (*Report LCSCPPE* Vol. 3 (Transcripts) 1998: 44, 46-7, 101, 130-1). At various times during her testimony, Arena asserted that Miss A's claims could well be true. Arena differentiated this account from "the really outlandish things" some people had told her, which she did not consider worthy of serious consideration (*Report LCSCPPE* Vol. 3 (Transcripts) 1998: 47,49). She had found Miss A to be a "most decent, nice girl", and she noted that Miss A had been brought to see her by "Dr C"--Jean Lennane--"an eminent, qualified, professional medical psychiatrist." (Arena 2002:
60-1; Report LCSCPPE Vol. 3 (Transcripts) 1998: 45, 49, 257). It was possible, she believed, that the judge could be leading a murderous "double life" (Report LCSCPPE Vol. 3 (Transcripts) 1998: 44 46). When pressed by members of the committee, however, Arena had to concede that Miss A's claims were "incredible", "hocus-pocus", "crazy" and "absolutely unbelievable incredible stupid thing[s]" (Report LCSCPPE Vol. 3 (Transcripts) 1998: 44, 45 47, 51).

The ambivalence expressed by Grusovin, Arena and other activists does not indicate that they had been unsure about the culpability of those they had accused or campaigned against in other ways. It does not suggest that activists were trying to achieve other, unstated objectives. Indeed, their campaigns had been conducted simultaneously against members of the elite whom they believed perpetrated ritual abuse, those who knowingly protected them and those who did so inadvertently. By the mid-1990s, however, activists had to increasingly confront the fact that there was a troubling lack of evidence for ritual abuse. Credible alternative explanations for the statements of victims and the claims of adult survivors had also become increasingly compelling.

Activists could, however, continue to believe that perpetrators of profound evil were active and to sympathise with and support those claiming to be victims of these perpetrators. Some came to believe that survivors were reporting ritual abuse they had suffered at the hands of small groups with unorthodox religious beliefs or sexual proclivities (e.g. Henry and Halpern 1993a; 1993b). Others--among them Deidre Grusovin--regard claims of ritual abuse as extreme and distorted reports of much less rigidly organised forms of child sexual abuse occurring in this country. They believe that perpetrators have far less arcane--though still thoroughly objectionable--motivations. Activists continue to regard perpetrators as protected by institutional corruption, but also by the fact that the sexual mistreatment of women and children is often disregarded--especially by the more powerful and influential sections of Australian society. Of course, a core of ritual abuse survivors and activists remains convinced that large and well organised Satanic cults are active in this country.
Despite these revisions, activists were also able to continue their campaigns. In this chapter I will argue that at the same time that the panic about ritual abuse was in decline in Australia—and when ritual abuse allegations and theories were being greeted with incredulity and derision—ritual abuse activists played an important role in generating panic about the activities of "pedophiles", especially those who were homosexual, influential members of society and who supposedly formed highly organised networks. Activists were, in fact, far more successful in generating public fear—and in having certain onerous child protection measures adopted—when they targeted these despised sexual deviants than when they promoted their imported ideas about ritual abuse. Activists were able to animate Australians' historic—but still intensely felt—fears about the activities of sexual deviants and about the national consequences of these activities.

"The Pedophile Inquiry"

In his summary of the so-called "pedophile hearings" of the Wood Royal Commission in 1996, *Sydney Morning Herald* correspondent Malcolm Brown stated that Wood had shown that the activities of pedophiles were "far more widespread and insidious than might have been realised" (Brown *SMH* 9 Sept. 1996). This claim would seem absurd to anyone who had attended schools of a certain type or who visited areas of East Sydney in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet Brown's assessment does indicate the central role played by the Royal Commission in precipitating the panic about pedophiles that occurred in Australia from the mid-1990s. The pedophile hearings—and some other remarkable incidents which occurred as the first such hearings were being held—were profoundly disturbing events of the kind that typically trigger moral panics (see Jenkins 1998: 221-3).

Wood had been commissioned to investigate the activities of pedophiles not because of public pressure but because of a deal between opposition politicians in New South
Wales. The Labor Party had cooperated with Independent MLA John Hatton to set up a Royal Commission into police corruption. ALP leadership included the investigation of pedophilia in the commission’s terms of reference in an attempt to prolong the embarrassment of the government over the Seabeach case. Deirdre Grusovin believes that Hatton—a long-term campaigner against police corruption—may not have agreed to these terms of reference had he foreseen their consequences (11 Feb. 2002; see also Hansard NSW LA 11 May 1994: 2286ff., 2302).

There was very little discussion of pedophilia in the parliamentary debates about the establishment of the commission or in contemporary media coverage (Hansard NSW LA 11 May 1994: 2286ff., 2302, 2612-3). Throughout 1994—when the commission was established—and 1995, the media had in fact published and broadcast numerous items about the problems of false allegations of child sexual abuse. Many of these stories dealt with local and overseas cases where ritual abuse had been alleged.[2]

For more than a year—until March 1996, when the pedophile hearings began—Wood heard evidence of serious and widespread misbehaviour by NSW police. This included alcohol and drug abuse, taking bribes from criminals and suspects, fabricating evidence and giving false testimony, absence from duty and misusing overtime. Wood also heard about police involvement in serious theft, drug dealing and the distribution of illegal pornography (see Report WRC Vol. I 1997). According to Gary Sturgess—a member of the Police Board and former senior public servant—the commission revealed not only that criminal activity by police was endemic but also that police were reluctant to accept or even to realise the corrupt nature of existing police culture (Background Briefing ABC2RN 23 March 1996).

These revelations were all the more dramatic because the commission conducted effective covert surveillance of suspects and regularly released film of illegal police activity to the media. Television news stories about corrupt and criminal behaviour by police were therefore accompanied by graphic footage of police receiving and dividing bribe money, taking drugs, and committing other crimes.
The Royal Commission considered the activities of pedophiles as part of this wider investigation of corruption in the Police Service. Wood was instructed to investigate whether corrupt police had protected perpetrators of crime—child abuse—from arrest, or had impeded investigations of their activities (see Hansard NSW LA 11 May 1994: 2286). The commission’s hearings were thus disproportionately concerned with men whose abuse of boys had been the subject of past complaints or rumours and/or were considered likely to have been the beneficiaries of corrupt police protection.

Immediately prior to the commission’s pedophile hearings, a series of sensational media articles appeared which sharpened the public’s attention on such homosexual offenders—and on the activities of “influential men”. Journalists implied that they had access to accurate information about the year-long investigation conducted by officers of the Royal Commission into pedophilia, and they predicted that politicians, judges, police, clergy, businessmen and celebrities would soon be exposed as members of extensive and well organised pedophile groups. It was further suggested that these groups had been operating with virtual impunity (see Arena 2002: 241; Report, LCSCPPE Vol. 3 1998: 17-8).

Wood’s subsequent actions heightened media (and thus public) panic about pedophilia, and reinforced the impression that pedophiles were older, rather odious, homosexual men. Wood began the hearings by issuing a much publicised warning that some of the forthcoming evidence would be “shocking, distressing and offensive” (e.g. Brown SMH 19 March 1996; News ABCTV 18 March 1996; News TEN 10 18 March 1996; Ogg DT 19 March 1996). Four days later, he provided the media with some explicit child pornography—which could not possibly have been broadcast or published—which had been seized from the home of a suspect. At the same time, Wood gave the media permission to broadcast and to publish stills from a videotape which Robert “Dolly” Dunn had made of a holiday trip. This tape—which received enormous media exposure—recorded conversations that two middle aged “pedophiles” had with boys and youths, voyeuristic shots of boys, and the men’s assessment of the attractiveness of the boys.
Wood’s warnings and media releases—as well as the information that his officers had supposedly leaked to the media—precipitated a media frenzy, the airing of problematic or unsubstantiated accusations of pedophilia and anti-pedophile rallies and demonstrations. Political campaigns were conducted, and new—often draconian—laws and regulations were enacted. Anti-pedophile vigilante activity was organised, and there was spontaneous violence against suspected pedophiles. The Australian public, it seemed, had come to accept the claims about pedophilia and homosexuality that certain feminists, child protection activists and social conservatives had been making over the past twenty years (Jenkins 1998: 216ff.). At the same time, public concerns about police corruption in NSW seemed to dissolve.

The commissioner and his assistants—perhaps inadvertently—further sharpened the focus of the media and public onto homosexual offenders by the way they used the term “pedophilia”. This was a term originally used by mental health professionals to describe adults’ erotic interest in pre-pubescent children (Briere and Runtz 1989: 66; DSM-III-R 1987: 284). Psychiatrists and psychologists thus differentiated pedophilia from hebephilia (also called ephebephilia)—an erotic interest in pubescent or even more developed minors (Freund 1981: 161; Jenkins 1996: 79). More recently, the literature has increasingly described the perpetration of child abuse as a defining element of pedophilia, rather than as a corollary of the disorder (DSM-IV 1994: 527-8). “Pedophilia” has also increasingly become a moral concept—especially in popular usage (Kincaid 1998: 88).

The particular and panic-stricken vision of pedophilia precipitated by the hearings of the Wood Royal Commission was simplistic, and—ironically—not cognizant of some of the most troubling aspects of the condition. Many pedophiles, for example, never actually perpetrate child abuse. Nor do many acknowledge—or are even especially aware of—their erotic interest in children (Freund 1981: 161-2). Few are exclusively fixated on children (Howells 1981: 77). Most sexual abuse of children by pedophiles does not involve genital contact, and some common pedophile activities—such as voyeurism—do not actually involve perpetrators’ abusive contact with children (Freund 1981: 161; Mohr 1981: 44). On the other hand, studies suggest that many normal men exhibit pedophilic and hebephilic tendencies—especially in relation to female children.
and adolescents (Briere and Runtz 1989: 71; Freund 1981: 161-2). Although there is considerable debate about the exact ratio, researchers agree that female children are far more likely than males to come into contact with pedophiles (Gillham 1991: 8ff.; Howells 1981: 77, 83). Serious and intrusive types of child sexual abuse can, in addition, result from factors other than pedophilia (DSM-III-R 1987: 285; see also Lanning 1992: 129).

These ideas are relatively uncontroversial in the scholarly psychological and sociological literature dealing with child abuse. More contentious issues include the extent to which data in studies of sexual contact between adults and children is skewed by their being based on the experiences reported by convicted offenders, perpetrators undergoing mental health treatment and traumatised victims (Avery-Clark et al. 1981: 9; Briere and Runtz 1989: 65). The value of hypotheses based on experiments which more readily measure male responses to sexual stimuli is also disputed, and scholars debate the role of researchers' own social conditioning, moral outlook or political advocacy in the generation and interpretation of data (Craissati 1998: 26-7; Freund 1981: 161-2; La Fontaine 1990: 45-6; Mohr 1981: 44). Most controversial of all is the issue of the role in pedophilic activity of cooperative or even seductive children (Bagley 1995: 34; Plummer 1981: 243; Virkkunen 1981: 121ff.).

Commissioner Wood and his assistants at times demonstrated that they were conscious of these complexities (see Report WRC Vol. IV 1997: 578ff.). Wood noted that there were various--often conflicting--definitions of "paedophilia", and he was extremely careful to define how the commission would use the term. This was the very legalistic definition of pedophiles as "those adults who act on their sexual preference or urge for children, in a manner which is contrary to the laws of the State of New South Wales". By "child" Wood meant "a person who is below the relevant age of consent" (Report WRC, Vol. IV 1997: 578). Wood thus effectively disregarded the concept of pedophilia as a medical condition--and one whose primary characteristic was pathological sexual "urges and fantasies". He also disregarded the definition of the pedophile as someone fixated on pre-pubescent children (DSM-III-R 1987: 284).
By defining pedophilia in this way, Wood also problematically labelled men who had sex with youths—and young men—aged between 16 and 18 as pedophiles. Members of Sydney’s homosexual community were therefore outraged when counsel assisting the commissioner described “middle-aged [men] . . . who . . . have sex with . . . boy[s] under the age of 18” as pedophiles (Farely and Machon LOL July 1996). Wood’s many explanations and qualifications of the term were obscured by the volume and detail of evidence heard by the commission and by the tone and circumspect language used by the commissioner and his staff. Journalists reporting the daily events at the commission—which often involved lengthy and complex statements by staff and witnesses—and rushing to meet deadlines could therefore easily misunderstand or misconstrue the issue. This was not, however, the only problem with the media coverage of, and commentary on, Wood’s pedophile “hearings”.

Themes of the Australian “Pedophile Panic”

From the beginning, “pedophilia” was treated as a moral, rather than a medical concept by the Australian media. Journalists wrote of “the secret, evil world of the pedophile”, “men who trawl for human flesh”, and “violators of innocence” (Chesterton DT 19 March 1996; Loane SMH 30 March 1996a, 30 March 1996b). They described children as the “prey” of pedophiles and gloated over Royal Commission witnesses who were about to “burn” (Chesterton DT 11 April 1996; Loane SMH 30 March 96a). Journalists chose to interview experts with particular, highly moralistic opinions on the issue, or misconstrued other experts’ more circumspect views (e.g. Lateline ABCTV 9 April 1996; Loane SMH 30 March 1996b).[3] In one television interview, Neil McConaghy—a senior mental health academic from the University of New South Wales—attempted to explain that defining pedophilia and assessing its effects on victims was a complex and problematic process. He also tried to caution against overestimating the extent of
pedophilia, especially of highly organised pedophilic activity. To do this, McConaghy had to constantly battle the journalist's emphasis on the intrinsic and inevitable damage caused by pedophilia and on the extent of organised pedophile networks (interviewed by O'Brien 7-30 Report ABCTV 18 March 1996).

Journalists adopted an excessively broad definition of "pedophilia". They used the term to describe virtually all sexual activity by adults with those under the legal age of consent--and even sex between young and older men.[4] They dismissed or even ridiculed attempts by commission witnesses or those being investigated to use more specific terminology (e.g. Brown SMH 3 Aug. 1996; Dunn SMH 8 Feb. 1997; Loane SMH 30 March 1996a). At the same time, however, journalists described Wood's narrowly focused investigation as an investigation into pedophilia per se. They thus portrayed the kinds of activities being examined by the commission as representing the whole of the phenomenon. Sydney's Daily Telegraph actually referred to proceedings as "the paedophile inquiry".

Although the vast majority of the men being investigated by Wood were sexually interested in adolescent or even older males, it was at times suggested that they abused very young children. The Daily Telegraph even used an illustration of a broken doll as the motif for its coverage of the hearings. Journalists described virtually all minors as "children" and misconstrued some evidence presented to the commission in their stories. When describing the sexual activities of the fugitive Sydney businessman Philip Bell, for example, journalists emphasised a statement by one witness that "some" of the youths abused by Bell "had met" him "early in life . . . as young as 11" (Bearup and Brown SMH 6 April 1996b). In the same report, however, it was conceded that Bell was interested in boys aged between "13 or 14" and "16 or 17"--whose sexuality is a more ambiguous and perhaps less emotive issue.

Journalists also failed to differentiate between those "pedophiles" who acted on their impulses and those who did not. In their various media appearances, Neil McConaghy and Alex Blaszczynski--another mental health academic--pointed out that "not all [pedophiles] act on their impulses", that pedophiles' penetrative sexual contact with and coercion of children was rare, and that present data about pedophilia was not
wholly reliable (Blaszczynski interviewed by Doogue *Life Matters* ABC2RN 19 March 1996; Loane *SMH* 30 March 1996b; McConaghy interviewed by O'Brien *7-30 Report* ABCTV 18 March 1996). Herald journalist Sally Loane used figures provided by these experts and other clinical data to imply that the rarest and most extreme form of child abuse was the norm, and was thus being perpetrated on a massive scale (*SMH* 30 March 1996b).

**Homosexuality and Organised Pedophile Networks**

The most striking characteristic of the media coverage of Wood's pedophile hearings was the suggestion that child abuse and homosexuality were connected. Wood had issued lengthy explanations for the commission's particular interest in homosexual and extra-familial child abuse, and he had specifically warned the media about misinterpreting or reacting hysterically to the evidence being heard. Some sections of the media failed to report this, or they did so under sensational headlines and alongside the most hysterical of articles and opinion pieces. Instances of heterosexual child abuse investigated by the commission were not reported in the media (McClymont *SMH* 1 June 1996).

Journalists and media commentators did not simply concentrate on male pedophiles who were sexually interested in boys. They suggested that male homosexuals almost inevitably exhibited such an interest. Considerable media attention was devoted to the alleged pedophilia of prominent homosexual citizens, such as John Marsden, and homophobic social conservatives--most notably the *Daily Telegraph's* Ray Chesterton--were assigned to comment on the hearings. Even a more reasonable commentator such as the *Herald's* Malcolm Brown reported finding one commission witness's differentiation of "pedophiles, pederasts, hebephiles and homosexuals" to
be pedantic (SMH 3 Aug. 1996 my emphasis; see also Farrelly and Machon LQTL July 1996). The views of certain apologists for homosexual pedophilia were also given prominent media coverage. They argued that a considerable number of homosexual men—perhaps half—were attracted to minors, but that gay organisations were dominated either by men who were not attracted to minors or who were unwilling to admit the true facts for reasons of political expediency (e.g. Loane SMH 30 March 1996c).

Journalists especially emphasised cases where homosexual perpetrators were alleged to be members of organised networks. They also suggested these groups were large, well organised and pervasive, and that their activities were insidious. At the height of the hysteria, in April 1996, for example, a Sydney Morning Herald article dealing principally with the activities of just two perpetrators was published under the ominous headline “The Brotherhood” (Bearup and Brown SMH 6 April 1996). A Sydney tabloid article of the same period suggested that police conspired to discontinue the surveillance of suspected perpetrators, and that they corruptly failed to investigate inaccuracies in one suspect's Notice of Alibi. Likely, though less sensational, explanations for these investigative shortcomings—such as cost-cutting, presumption or oversight—were dismissed as incredible (Ogg DT 11 April 1996). While the commission did examine the activities of “circle[s] of paedophile offenders”, the evidence generally showed perpetrators of organised child abuse formed small, localised networks rather than larger, more complex ones (Report WRC Vol. IV 1997: 639-40, 824ff).

The entertainment media reinforced the impression thus created by the news media. A number of Australian television dramas and serials dealing with pedophilia were screened at this time. The most influential was a film version of Gabrielle Lord’s novel Whipping Boy, which was screened in November 1996. This depicted a pedophile and child pornography network composed of homosexual men in positions of power and influence. A disturbing early scene portrayed the sadistic sexual abuse of a youth, which resulted in his death. Although the film version had been in production for some years, Lord’s novel had been written “in the wake of” the Seabeach case and Deidre Grusovin’s earlier anti-pedophile activity. Lord herself says that she researched the
book by "immers[ing] herself in the moral underworld of protection rackets [and] organised pedophilia" (Wheatley SMH 9 May 1998).[5]

Accusations

Suspicions about influential homosexuals and organised pedophile networks were strengthened when, beginning in 1996, a series of sensational accusations were made public against prominent homosexual men—or men who were presumed to be homosexuals. John Marsden, Frank Arkell and Judges David Yeldham and Phillip Bell were denounced either in the press, under parliamentary privilege or in other ways. Allegations were made against High Court Judge Michael Kirby in 1998, and repeated in the Senate in 2002. George Pell—Catholic Archbishop of Sydney—was also accused in 2002. Accusations were made against other prominent men, but their identities were not made public (Meredith Burgmann 3 June 2002; see also Hansard NSW LC 21 Oct. 1997: 991; Report LCSCPPE Vol. 3 (Transcripts) 1998; Ryan Report to LC 1997).

Some of these men were accused of being members of organised pedophile networks, or their involvement in organised pedophile activity was suggested in other ways. In October 1996, for example, Franca Arena acted on information she had received about retired Supreme Court Judge David Yeldham (Arena 2002: 243ff.; Report WRC Vol. IV 1997: 803ff.). In a speech in the NSW Legislative Council she suggested that Yeldham was being given preferential treatment by the Wood Royal Commission. She also emphasised that Yeldham was a former director of the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, and speculated that he had detailed knowledge about organised and corruptly protected pedophiles (Hansard NSW LC 31 Oct. 1996: 5623). There was comparable innuendo about John Marsden’s past position on the Police Board (e.g. Report LCSCPPE Vol. 3(Transcripts) 1998: 159ff.; Witness ATN7 7 May 1996).
Arena's accusation attracted massive media attention. Yeldham's' subsequent suicide, and revelations that he had been a clandestine homosexual—who had regularly sought out anonymous sex in public places—were widely seen as a vindication of Arena. A number of commentators agreed with her questionable assertion that Yeldham's quest for anonymous sex was an indication of pedophilia (Arena interviewed by Dempster Stateline ABCTV 29 Aug. 1997; Scucchi, letter to the editor, SMH 11 Nov. 1996; see also Guilliatt SMH 5 July 1997). Ironically, Yeldham's brother had written the screenplay for Whipping Boy—one of whose characters was a pedophile judge—which was broadcast a week after his suicide.

Political Campaigns

Concerns about a conspiracy by influential homosexual men also motivated considerable anti-pedophile political activity. There were, for example, attempts both within the governing ALP and by opposition politicians to extend the terms of reference of the Wood Royal Commission. A significant number of government backbenchers were concerned that pedophiles in positions of power and influence were either escaping scrutiny by the commission, or were even somehow being protected by Wood. The ALP caucus therefore initially supported a motion by Franca Arena which would have empowered Wood to investigate “all aspects” of pedophilia and to conduct pseudo-criminal investigations of individual cases. Virtually identical motions were subsequently moved by opposition politicians in both houses of the NSW Parliament (Arena 2002: 244ff.; Hansard NSW LC 31 Oct. 1996: 5619, 5621).

Those who campaigned against Wood’s recommendation that the age of consent laws in NSW be made “gender neutral” were generally less concerned about high-ranking homosexual pedophiles than with the unacceptable aspects of homosexuality per se. There were some commentators, however, who subtly linked the age of consent issue with the supposed activities of organised pedophile networks. In his report, Wood had recommended that "consideration be given, with appropriate community consultation" to reforming child protection laws so that "existing distinctions between heterosexual
and male homosexual activity involving children” are removed (Report WRC Vol. V 1997: 1087). This principally involved setting the age of consent at 16 for both heterosexual and homosexual activity, applying the same penalties for illegal heterosexual and homosexual activity, and allowing homosexual males to argue as part of their defence that they had believed a partner aged between 14 and 16 was over the legal age of consent (Report WRC Vol. V 1997: 1068ff.). Wood cited arguments both for and against this reform, but concluded that it was necessary “for the law to recognise current social mores and practices”, rather than to proscribe “consensual conduct [on] purely moral and religious grounds, particularly where [it is] the subject of genuinely divergent opinions”. He did not consider that the change “would bring about any behavioural shift, or that it would, in real terms, expose any more children to the risk of paedophile activity than are presently exposed to that risk” (Report WRC Vol. V 1997: 1079).

Wood’s recommendation provoked an immediate outcry from politicians on both sides, clergy, media commentators and child protection advocates. Opponents of the recommendation argued that lowering the age of consent for homosexual activity to 16 effectively lowered it to 14 or 15 (e.g. Chesterton ACA TCN9 26 Aug. 1997; Lateline ABCTV 26 Aug. 1997; Hansard NSW LC 17 Sept. 1997: 68). They seemed to assume that police or the courts would automatically accept an offender’s claim that he believed his male sexual partner to be over the age of consent. They also ignored Wood’s recommendation that the legal defence of “mistaken but reasonable belief” would not apply where the offender was in a “position of trust” with the 14 to 16-year-old (Report WRC Vol. V 1997: 1081). The male homosexual offenders whose activities had caused commentators such alarm during the commission hearings were very often “person[s] providing instruction or services to, or having the care or supervision of or authority over the child[ren]”. Sexual activity by such persons was to remain illegal until their partner was 18 (Report WRC Vol. V 1997: 1081,1082).

Rev. Fred Nile of the Australian Festival of Light was one of the few opponents of Wood’s recommendation to explicitly state that pedophilia was essentially perpetrated by homosexual males (Hansard NSW LC 17 Sept. 1997: 75). Many more of Wood’s critics simply failed to distinguish between pedophilia and male homosexuality--let
alone between pedophilia and hebephilia. They especially ignored the fact that under the proposed reforms, any sexual activity between males would be illegal unless it was consensual (Report WRC Vol. V 1997: 1065, 1073). Opponents of the recommendation presented predation as the only scenario for homosexual encounters between older and younger males, rejecting Wood’s argument that adolescent males could well be aware of their homosexuality or in the process of exploring it (Report WRC Vol. IV 1997: 616). NSW Opposition Leader Peter Collins, for example, described the proposed change as expanding “the pool of victims for pedophiles”, while Ray Chesterton invoked the image of homosexuals stalking boys young enough to be “wearing . . . school uniform[s] and eating . . . lollipop[s]” (ACA TCN9 26 Aug. 1997; 7-30 Report ABCTV 27 Aug. 1997).

Some of the most vociferous opponents of Wood’s recommendation that the age of consent laws be reformed had also expressed concern about the activities of organised pedophile networks. They had been especially critical of Wood’s failure to name high-ranking pedophiles in his report. Some simply expressed disappointment that the identity of those accused before the commission had not been exposed. Others—such as Nile—suggested that through his procedures and misguided recommendations, Wood had inadvertently aided offenders. Nile referred to the existence of a single “paedophile network operating in New South Wales”, and compared its activities to those perpetrated by the Dutroux gang in Belgium and to alleged activities of pedophiles in other Australian states (Hansard NSW LC 17 Sept. 1997:70-1). Nile was referring to rumours that there were very highly organised pedophile networks in Queensland and South Australia and that senior politicians, judges, members of the legal profession and businessmen were involved. It was claimed that a pedophile sex-tourist industry had been established in Queensland and that pedophiles were involved in the production of “snuff” movies. Boys were supposedly imported from Asia, and teachers used to recruit local victims. Pedophiles were also supposed to have murdered children and to possess sophisticated ways of disposing of victims’ bodies (Hansard NSW LC 17 Sept. 1997:71; Roberts SMH 23 Aug. 1997; 7-30 Report ABCTV 19 Aug. 1997).
Some of Wood's critics, however, suggested that the commissioner had conspired with others to protect high-ranking pedophiles or even that he was himself involved in more serious wrongdoing. The conservative journalist and commentator Piers Ackerman decried Wood's recommendation concerning the age of consent, as well as what Ackerman perceived to be the commissioner's excessively sympathetic treatment of homosexuals. He believed that children were being sacrificed "on the altar of political correctness" (DT 27 Aug 1997). Franca Arena repeatedly claimed that certain pedophiles--"people in high places", those from "the top end of town", the "untouchables" and "so-called upstanding citizens"--had been getting "away with it for too long" (Hansard NSW LC 17 Sept. 1997: 63, 64, 65-7; Lateline ABCTV 16 Aug. 1997; News TCN9 26 Aug. 1997; Stateline ABCTV 29 Aug. 1997). Initially she suggested that these offenders had been sheltered by the inadequacy of the commission's revised terms of reference, by the commissioner's failure to use all possible means to expose their abusive activities and by the deference which Wood showed to the politicians and members of the judiciary who had been accused (e.g. Vass SMH 27 Aug. 1997; Stateline ABCTV 29 Aug. 1997). Soon after the release of the report, however, Arena accused Wood, the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, and "important figures in the ALP" of meeting secretly to "ensure that people in high places would not be named . . ." (Hansard NSW LC 17 Sept. 1997: 63-4).

Demonstrations

The belief that there was a connection between pedophilia, male homosexuals and organised networks of high-ranking offenders reverberated at the demonstrations organised during the hearings of the Wood Royal Commission and after the release of its report. Speakers at the vigils organised by the Australian Child Protection Alliance (ACPA) came from a variety of organisations--including Advocates for the Survivors of Child Abuse, Whistleblowers Australia, the Festival of Light and even the prisoners' rights group Justice Action. Some focused on past policies of removing Aboriginal children, while others applied a left-wing critique to law-enforcement, judicial and
custodial institutions. A number of speakers preempted Wood’s criticisms of the Department of Community Services and condemned the incompetence and brutality of some DOCS officers (see Recommendations 8-43, Report WRC Vol. V 1997: 1319-21).

There were also strong concerns expressed at these demonstrations about the activities of organised pedophile networks and high-ranking offenders. Franca Arena was significantly involved in these events, which were an important part of her ongoing campaign to expose high-ranking pedophiles. Arena gave speeches at rallies organised by the Spokespeople of [sic] Survivors and Fatalities of Child Rape and Sexual Exploitation (SOSAFOCRASE) in November 1996 and by the Festival of Light in October 1997. One of the stated aims of the Festival of Light’s “White Ribbon” rally was, in fact, to draw attention to “pedophile networks which allegedly include members of parliament and the judiciary” and to “support . . . Franca Arena . . . in her efforts to expose [them]”. Arena and other speakers at this rally condemned pedophiles among society’s elites and the protection offered to them by legal, judicial and governmental institutions (Williams FWN Nov.1997). Arena did not simply speak at the ACPA vigils held in August 1997. She acted as one of the MCs, liaised with the media and even joined in to help the faltering performance of the ACPA Childrens’ Choir!

**Vigilante Action**

In February 1997, New Zealand journalist Deborah Coddington published the *Australian Paedophile and Sex Offender Index*. It received massive media attention and sold out its initial print-run of 5000 copies in two days (Phelan SMH 22 Feb. 1997). The perpetrators of child abuse named in the index were not predominantly homosexual in orientation, nor were they from the “top end of town”. Because they had been convicted of a criminal offence, they tended to be those who perpetrated outside the familial setting—and especially those who gained access to minors via their occupation or involvement in recreational organisations (Coddington 1997:16-17). A
significant number were repeat offenders and thus probably sexually fixated on children, rather than the so-called "non-preferential" perpetrators who are responsible for most child sexual abuse (Howells 1981:77).

Yet the discourse which accompanied the publication of the index--and especially the arguments justifying it--had the effect of reinforcing the impression of pedophile activity proposed by activists such as Arena. Coddington stated that pedophiles are people “often described as pillars of the community” (1997: 16). When criticised by the NSW Council for Civil Liberties, the DPP, Justice Wood and even the professor of psychology who was cited in the foreword of the index, Coddington argued that perpetrators unreasonably benefited from the protections accorded to the accused in the various state legal systems, and--if convicted--were leniently treated (Henderson Who 3 March 1997; Montgomery interviewed by Doogue, Life Matters ABC2RN 18 Feb. 1997; Phelan SMH 22 Feb. 1997). Pedophiles, she argued, were “protected by a cone of silence” (Coddington 1997:26).

Coddington proposed that the purpose of the index was to allow parents and employers in certain industries to check neighbours, acquaintances and employees, and to take appropriate measures to ensure the safety of children (Coddington 1997: 23, 26). Many of her critics feared that releasing the names, addresses and photographs of past offenders would encourage unofficial punitive action against pedophiles and persecution of their families (Phelan SMH 15 Feb. 1997). Coddington herself never explicitly renounced such vigilantism, and her complaints about the inadequacy of governmental and judicial action against perpetrators suggests that she regarded her work as an attempt to unofficially empower the community.

The anti-pedophile vigilantes who were active at this time publicised the identity of men who had been convicted of sexual crimes against minors, or attempted to force them to leave particular neighbourhoods. Vigilantes were thus concerned about both heterosexual and homosexual perpetrators--and principally those with relatively modest incomes and status. In one celebrated case, Sydney policeman Said Morgan killed a man he believed had abused two members of his family and the daughter of a family friend. Morgan’s case was, however, widely believed to indicate community
disquiet about the protection being offered to pedophiles by the government and judiciary. A small crowd had demonstrated in support of Morgan outside the Supreme Court, and his acquittal delighted numerous commentators, callers to talk-back radio and writers to newspaper editors. Morgan himself claimed to have received a large amount of supportive mail, much of it expressing satisfaction that his actions had resulted in justice being truly done (Morgan interviewed by Martin, ACA TCN9 5 Aug. 1997).

Some of Morgan’s supporters angrily rejected criticisms of the verdict made by members of the judiciary and legal profession and argued that official inaction had previously forced “law-abiding citizens . . . to turn the other cheek . . . and let the perpetrators roam the streets seeking new victims” (Hill, letter to editor SMH 8 Aug. 1997). Even the grounds for Morgan’s acquittal suggested that the jury had accepted the propriety of his action. Jurors had had the option of finding that Morgan’s responsibility for the killing was diminished by psychological factors. Instead, the jury-- whose members exhibited strong rapport with Morgan during and after the trial-- accepted that he had killed the offender as a way of protecting the victims, an expanded version of the “self-defence” argument (Curtin SMH 2 Aug. 1997a; 2 Aug. 1997b; Murphy interviewed by Dempster, Statewide ABCTV 8 Aug. 1997). This defence obviously relied on the jury’s belief that official action to restrain and ultimately punish the offender was inadequate. The prosecution had actually warned the jury that accepting this defence condoned vigilante action and had the potential to encourage further instances of it (Curtin SMH 2 Aug. 1997b).

Morgan spoke at one of the vigils organised the ACPA (15 Aug. 1997). He did not comment on the supposed protection provided to offenders by the government or courts. He did, however, seem to be encouraging violent anti-pedophile vigilantism by repeatedly and forcefully calling for the “elimination” of pedophilia.
Ritual Abuse and the Pedophile Panic

The supposed activities of Satanists or other perpetrators of ritual abuse were hardly mentioned during the pedophile panic. There was some criticism of Wood's failure to expose ritual abuse at the SOSAFOCRASE rally in November 1996. The rally was well attended, but it was held just days after David Yeldham's suicide and received minimal media attention. This rally was, furthermore, promoted--even in a periodical for ritual abuse survivors--as a protest against "organised sadistic exploitation" and "horrors" such as those perpetrated by the Dutroux gang, rather than against "ritual abuse" (see Kent and Cumming SH 10 Nov. 1996; van Dyke BS (21) Feb. 1997; "What's On" BS (20) Nov. 1996).

Wood heard evidence about ritual abuse, and specifically addressed the issue--which he referred to as "satanic ritual abuse" or "SRA"--in his report (see Report WRC Vol. IV 1997: 670ff.). Wood's discussion was couched in his usual neutral tone, and he passed the information provided to the commission on to the police. His findings were, however, unequivocal. Wood approvingly quoted sceptical theorists--especially Lanning--in his analysis and proposed numerous alternative explanations for local victims' belief that they had been ritually abused. He discussed the social and historical circumstances in which ritual abuse allegations arose--and noted how such allegations can be precipitated by poor therapeutic or investigative techniques. Wood went on to describe the practitioners of such techniques as part of "a virtual growth industry . . . some of [whom] appear to be driven by an almost religious fervour . . . or by a paranoia about SRA which leads them to a hypervigilant detection of past abuse in almost every person they treat" (Report WRC Vol. IV 1997: 673-4).

There was surprisingly little comment on ritual abuse in the media coverage of or other responses to the release of Wood's report. In their extensive coverage of the report, each of the Sydney daily newspapers made single, brief references to ritual abuse (Guilliatt SMH 27 Aug. 1997; DT 27 Aug. 1997). The Australian gave the release of the report detailed coverage, but did not mention ritual abuse. Although The Bulletin
declared the commission to have been an outstanding success, it did not actually cover the release of the report (Martin Bulletin 26 Aug. 1997).

Commentary on ritual abuse outside the mass media was largely absent. Beyond Survival magazine was by this time out of circulation, and its publisher was instead concentrating on gaining refugee status for herself "for being a survivor of ritual abuse who had to flee her home-country to be safe from her perpetrators" (We Remember March 1999; van Dyke Letter, 26 Nov. 1998). The devil-hating Festival of Light expressed strong support for Franca Arena’s ongoing fight against rings of high ranking pedophiles and their protectors. At this stage--and in public--the movement was strangely silent about Satanic perpetrators. The Festival of Light’s leader instead stressed the connections which he perceived between pedophilia and other issues of great concern to the movement over the years--pornography, prostitution and homosexuality (see Hansard NSW LC 17 Sept. 1997: 70ff.; Williams FWN Nov. 1997). Representatives of ACPA were similarly preoccupied with "high ranking pedophiles" and the protection supposedly afforded them by the commission (Bernoth SMH 27 Aug. 1997; Nason Aust 27 Aug. 1997).

Ironically, however, ritual abuse literature, discourse and activism had played a most important covert role in precipitating and shaping the pedophile panic. Certain cases--most especially the Seabeach case--where ritual abuse had been alleged, had motivated Deidre Grusovin and other activists to work for the establishment of the Wood Royal Commission. The sorts of concerns that ritual abuse activists had been expressing for some years--that politicians, judges and other high-ranking citizens had been engaging in child abuse, and that there had been a massive conspiracy afoot to keep these activities secret or to prevent the prosecution of perpetrators--were taken up more widely during the panic triggered by the Royal Commission. Many Australian ritual abuse activists, in fact, now argued that groups of "pedophiles"--rather than members of covens or Satanic cults--were responsible for the abuse reported by victims and survivors. Some activists proposed that both "pedophiles" and "Satanists" had abused survivors. Others, however, who believed that Satanists were perpetrating child abuse, stressed the "pedophilia"--rather than the religious beliefs--of these perpetrators.[6]
The similarities between concerns about ritual abuse and those later expressed during the Australian pedophile panic were to a significant extent the result of ongoing activism by ritual abuse survivors and their advocates. Franca Arena, for example, hardly mentioned Satanism or ritual abuse in her public statements about pedophilia. Arena had spoken at the SOSAFOCRASE rally in 1996 and, during the lengthy parliamentary speech in which she denounced David Yeldham, she mentioned cases where ritual abuse in Australian preschools had been alleged and advised her colleagues to consult a 1993 booklet on the issue (Hansard NSW LC 31 Oct. 1996: 5624). The bulk of this speech, however, was devoted to “high ranking pedophiles”. Other speeches and media interviews—especially those she gave around the time of the release of the Royal Commission report—were exclusively concerned with “pedophilia”.

The psychiatrist Jean Lennane was similarly outspoken in her criticism of Wood’s failure to name high-ranking offenders in his report (Bernoth SMH 27 Aug. 1997). During the hearings of the Nader inquiry—which had been set up to assess Arena’s claims of a conspiracy to protect influential pedophiles—Lennane told journalists that officers of the Wood Royal Commission seemed to be in the process of selectively destroying documentary evidence presented to it. She also expressed her concern that any of Arena’s informants who gave evidence before Nader would be subjected to “institutionalised and legalised bullying” (Cooke SMH 17 Oct. 1997). It was only later revealed that some of those whose allegations had led Arena to conduct her extraordinary anti-pedophile campaign believed themselves to have been subjected to ritual abuse and that one such survivor had been brought to see Arena by Lennane (Meredith Burgmann 3 June 2002; see also Arena 2002: 260-1; Report LCSCPPE Vol. 3 (Transcripts) 1998: 44-9, 101 129-31).

Arena’s acquaintance with the psychiatrist and ritual abuse activist Anne Schlebaum was also little known at this time. Arena had, in fact, known Schlebaum for many years. In 1996 and 1997, Schlebaum lobbied Arena and a number of other NSW politicians to have the Wood Royal Commission more vigorously pursue high-ranking pedophiles—especially after the commission began to scrutinise Schlebaum’s own activities and methodology. Arena’s speech denouncing Yeldham was made only days
after Schlebaum had been humiliated when giving evidence to the Royal Commission (Guilliat SMH 5 July 1997; Lennane, Letter to WRC 14 Jan. 1997; Report WRC Vol. IV 1997: 676-7, 678-82). Arena also denounced Frank Arkell in this speech, and the cases she cited—Seabeach and the Wahroonga preschool case—were ones in which Schlebaum had been involved (Hansard NSW LC 31 Oct. 1996: 5623).

The mother of two children under Schlebaum’s professional care appeared on the same podium as Arena at one of the ACPA vigils in September 1997. Although it had been alleged in this case that this woman's children had been subjected to ritual abuse, "Louise" described her ex-husband only as a "pedophile"—albeit one who had perpetrated serious and somewhat bizarre forms of abuse (APCA Vigil 15 Aug. 1997; Guilliat 1996: 154).

Fred Nile and the members of the Festival of Light probably did not differentiate their campaigns against pedophilia and ritual abuse. Nile and his supporters had been warning Australians about the activities of Satan and his various followers since the 1970s. He had also consistently denounced the “diabolical” activities of homosexuals, and claimed that they were almost inevitably attracted to boys.[7] Nile made numerous speeches in the Legislative Council supporting Deidre Grusovin and Franca Arena in their campaigns against pedophiles—and supporting Grusovin against the perpetrators of ritual abuse (see Hansard NSW LC 12 Sept. 1990: 6932; 31 Oct. 1996: 5619ff.; 17 Sept. 1997: 70ff.; 18 Sept. 1997: 1212). While serving as a member of the Legislative Council’s Privileges Committee, Nile was confronted with the problematic nature of the evidence for ritual abuse. He expressed concern about patients recalling false memories of ritual abuse after undergoing poor therapy, but he still concluded that some survivors had been subjected to “genuine Satanic activity”. Nile also believed that some perpetrators “are using [Satanism] as a cover in case they’re ever in danger of being exposed” (Report LCSCPPE Vol. 3. (Transcripts) 1998: 132; The Religion Report ABC2RN 22 July 1998).

The following year, the Festival of Light was again stressing the links between Satanism, homosexuality and pedophilia. Among the “satanic activities” condemned at the organisation’s 1999 Christian Conference were ritual child abuse, pedophilia and
the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras (see FWN March 1999).

Sex, Conformity and Social Control

Australians were more generally and profoundly panic-stricken by the possibility that pedophiles were--in Deborah Coddington's words--"out there hunting [their] children" than they ever were about the activities of Satanists (Coddington 1997:16). Australians were especially disturbed about the supposed activities of networks of influential homosexual men and therefore willing to accept some significant legal and administrative reforms. The events which triggered and shaped this panic--warnings issued by Wood at the beginning of the Royal Commission's pedophiles hearings, his release of pornographic and other material to the media, the speculative media reports about what investigators had uncovered and the subsequent focus on organised, homosexual child abuse--did not simply convince many Australians to heed the warnings of child protection activists, feminists and social conservatives. These episodes also rekindled certain ideas about sex, conformity and social control which have historically been of the utmost importance to Australians.

Cultural Elites, Permissiveness and Civil Liberties

The pedophile panic in Australia coincided with a period of antipathy to so-called "cultural elites". These were denounced by conservative politicians and candidates prior to the election of the Howard Federal Government in 1996 and during much of its first term of office. Similar discourse emanated from the populist One Nation party, reformers within the ALP, and conservative commentators (Akerman 1998:71; Goldsmith 1998:186-7; Kingston 1999:xvii; Marr 2000 [1999]; Webb and Enstice 1998:
272ff.). “Elites” were described as holding unacceptably liberal views on such issues as Aboriginal rights and welfare, government-funded social programs, immigration and multiculturalism, the environment and sexuality. They included public servants who were “left-liberal by instinct and personal disposition”, judges whose decisions were “out of touch” with the values of “real” or ‘ordinary’ Australians”, and certain other “experts and city types” (Marr 2000 [1999]: 41ff., 184, 197, 209). Coalition politicians and their supporters argued that significant economic and social reforms were needed to dismantle the institutional power accrued by elites, especially over the preceding decade (Hadjimichael 1998:122).

The rhetoric of Australian anti-pedophile campaigners was infused with comparable antipathy to elites. They claimed that pedophilia was rife at “the top end of town”, and that perpetrators were being protected by a corrupt and permissive legal and political system—and by the “elites” who administered it. Campaigners commonly contrasted what they saw as permissive elite attitudes to pedophilia—and/or a stubborn, unreasonable loyalty to the system that protected offenders—with the concerns and goals of what Arena called “the community out there” (Hansard NSW LC 31 Oct. 1996: 5623; Lateline ABCTV 16 Aug. 1997; Stateline ABCTV 29 Aug. 1997). These sorts of complaints also reflect longstanding leftist and feminist concerns about the dominance of politics, the judiciary and the legal profession by men of a particular age and socio-economic background. Contemporary anti-elite rhetoric is thus part of a process whereby potentially disruptive social tensions are addressed in ways that deflect attention from their “structural social source”, and which do not too radically alter the social order (Crawford 1994: 1358).

Antipathy to elites is very evident in the criticisms levelled at Wood for failing to name high-ranking pedophiles in his report. The bulk of the report of the Wood Royal Commission deals with systemic failures by the courts, the police force, other government departments and the churches. Using the testimony given before the commission and other data collected by his officers, Wood constructed detailed expositions of the relevant structures of these organisations and detailed recent histories of how each had attempted to address the issue of child protection, select appropriate staff and deal with suspected and proven perpetrators. The majority of
Wood’s recommendations, similarly, concerned ways in which the past failures and inadequacies of these organisations could be remedied.

Wood was sharply criticised by those--such as Arena, Chesterton and Lennane--who had wanted those accused of pedophilia before the commission to be identified in the report and publicly shamed (see Bernoth SMH 27 Aug. 1997; Chesterton DT 27 Aug. 1997; Hansard NSW LC 17 Sept. 1997:62ff.). These critics ignored the fact that Wood had passed evidence of criminal activity on to police (Report WRC Vol. IV 1997: 788). They denounced the commission’s terms of reference, which had obliged Wood to examine the activities of pedophiles allegedly protected by corrupt police, to conduct a structural examination of pedophilia and to make recommendations for its control (Report WRC Vol. IV 1997: 570). Arena, in fact, regarded the government’s failure to provide Wood with more extensive terms of reference as part of a high-level conspiracy (Hansard NSW LC 17 Sept. 1997: 63-4). Wood’s critics saw his use of code names and other measures which concealed the identity of those who had not been charged--and even his distinction between rumoured, alleged and actual pedophilia--as legalistic pedantry, or an attempt to protect members of his own profession or class. They also called for radical reforms of the legal system in NSW, which they believed had hitherto protected pedophiles.

There was also a good deal of comparable “anti-elite” rhetoric used by those who supported Wood’s recommendations concerning the formation of a “children’s commission” and the creation of a “National [Pedophile] Index”. Some supporters of these recommendations had--ironically--vehemently criticised Wood’s other decisions and recommendations. Wood had recommended that the proposed children’s commission be given an “employment information” function. Employers--and then officers of the new commission itself--would conduct checks on adults seeking to work in areas involving close contact with children, or wishing to perform voluntary work with children (Report WRC Vol. V 1997: 1301,1306, 1314). The Pedophile Index proposed by Wood would be “a system for the compulsory registration with the Police . . . of all convicted child sexual offenders” and for recording intelligence concerning paedophile offenders . . . through the agency of the [Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence]”. Wood also recommended that police be given the power to provide unsolicited

Publicly opposing these recommendations were privacy advocates, civil libertarians and trade unions whose members were likely to be subjected to heightened scrutiny. There were also a few commentators who pointed out the expense, impracticality and ineffectiveness of many of the recommended measures. Both Wood and Roger West--the senior bureaucrat whose work in 1996 foreshadowed many of these recommendations--were adamant that strong privacy and security measures should be part of any children's commission or other agency subsequently formed (Report WRC Vol. V 1997:1248-9). The chairman of the NSW Privacy Commission was, however, concerned that the government would swiftly implement rigorous new child protection measures--including the creation of a powerful and intrusive new government body--but balk at the introduction of complementary privacy legislation. Civil libertarians were alarmed at the potential for any such agency to gather extraordinary amounts of information about adults not convicted of any offence, its immunity from legal action, and the amorphous nature of the rulings that it could make (Horin SMH 27 Aug. 1997; see also Privacy NSW Annual Report 1999-2000). They also expressed concern about the possible consequences if police informed residents of the presence of "pedophiles" (News TCN9 27 Aug. 1997).

The NSW Teachers' Federation welcomed certain of the proposed reforms which would end once-common practices by the Department of Education or individual principals--such as simply transferring suspect teachers. The union was, however, concerned about the lack of protection for teachers if Wood's recommendations were implemented. Teachers had long been aware that their close daily contact with children and the nature of their work made them vulnerable to malicious or other problematic allegations of "inappropriate" behaviour (Hansard NSW LC 23 Sept. 1997; NSW Teachers Federation Conference Resolution, July 2003; Raethel SMH 27 Aug. 1997). Events prior to the release of Wood's report had alerted the Federation to the possibility that governmental reforms and a heightened public awareness of the problem of child abuse could result in innocent teachers being suspended, vilified, made virtually unemployable or even subjected to vigilante action (see Report WRC Vol. IV 1997: 968ff).
Supporters of Wood’s recommendations were generally dismissive of such objections. Child protection advocates and feminists—as well as conservative homophobes—expressed strong support for measures to increase government scrutiny of pedophiles and suspected pedophiles. This was probably the only issue on which many of them agreed. Their attitude is best summarised—in terms of both argument and emotion—by the Federal Minister for Community Services Judi Moylan. “The first and most important thing here,” she said “is that the protection of our children must be paramount . . . [T]here must be greater vigilance by government and the community at large . . . ” (Moylan Lateline ABC TV 26 Aug. 1997).

These commentators argued that the lesson of the Wood Royal Commission was that pedophilia was widespread and pervasive and that traditional legal and law enforcement methods—and the protections these offered to suspects and defendants—were no longer appropriate (e.g. Editorial DT 27 Aug. 1997; Horin SMH 30 Aug. 1997). They largely ignored Wood’s recommendations about the protection of privacy and civil liberties, and suggested that those concerned about such matters were members of a pedantic, permissive or even self-interested “elite”. The Daily Telegraph’s editorial writer, for example, characterised civil libertarians as a “noisy . . . unrepresentative minority”. This writer contrasted their arguments with “the proper course” of action, which was based on “the certain knowledge” of “the community” (DT 27 Aug. 1997).

Franca Arena used Parliament to make sarcastic attacks on civil libertarians, even suggesting that they were somehow deliberately protecting perpetrators. “We know a lot of pedophiles,” she told the Legislative Council “but of course we have to respect their privacy, we have to respect their civil liberties” (Hansard NSW LC 17 Sept. 1997: 68). At the Festival of Light’s White Ribbon rally she announced that “civil liberties can go to hell” (Balough Aust 7 Oct. 1997).

Of course, many anti-pedophile commentators were most concerned about—and determined to counteract—the permissive elite notion that homosexuality was a natural and unproblematic condition, and that it was reasonable for homosexuals to enjoy legal rights and more general social acceptance. Many of these commentators had campaigned in the past against legal reforms which had decriminalised homosexuality. They were disturbed by what they saw as the consequences of these and other
changes, or they had religious or personal objections to homosexuality.[8] The Wood Royal Commission hearings and report allowed them to effectively propose that pedophilia was an essentially homosexual vice—or even that pedophilia was virtually synonymous with homosexuality—that "pedophiles/homosexuals" were strange in their behaviour, appearance and demeanour, and that they had formed themselves into well-organised groups to promote their pernicious interests.

These commentators had inherited—and successfully appealed to—traditional Western views of homosexuals as perpetrating an abominable sin, having aberrant gender and sexuality, showing signs of serious illness and inevitably undermining the heterosexual and familial basis of society (Altman 1996: 82; Marr 2000 [1999]: 156-7; Shilton 1978). They also expressed the sorts of hostility to homosexuality that had precipitated panics about the activities of male, homosexual pedophiles and pornographers in the United States and Britain. There the proliferation of pedophilia and child pornography had been portrayed as the inevitable result of freeing homosexuals—among others—from proper state scrutiny and restriction, and granting them an unreasonable degree of toleration or even approval (Crawford 1994: 1354; Jenkins 1998: 146ff., 164-5; 224-5; La Fontaine 1996: 56-7; Stanley 1991: 22-3).

Such antipathy fused with longstanding Australian attitudes to homosexuals and other deviants and with beliefs about the role of the state in regulating social and moral issues. As late as 1984, engaging in consensual homosexual acts in NSW legally constituted an "abominable crime" punishable by "penal servitude for 14 years" (see Shilton 1978: 5). Plain clothes police used to solicit sex with suspected homosexuals and arrest them if they acquiesced (Marr 2000 [1999]: 155). To be called a homosexual was a "deadly and unforgivable" insult in Australia, one "loaded with . . . disgust, distaste and hatred" (Harris 1962: 56). Homosexuals—or any group whose members define themselves by sexual proclivity or who take too much or too obvious an interest in sex—also flout traditionally strong Australian puritanism and conformism, which manifests itself as a "half-affected half-ingrained [sexual] casualness" (Harris 1962: 60; see also Dixon 1976: 27ff.; Marr 2000 [1999]: 155-6).
Australians who in the 1990s called for the state to restrict and more vigorously monitor the activities of sexual deviants also invoked the tradition here of having strong--frequently authoritarian--governmental involvement in social and economic regulation, and in the organisation and supervision of people's lives (Encel 1970: 77-9). Such governmental activism--and its popular acceptance--has, furthermore, historically been applied to the enforcement of puritanical morals and mores, especially upon those whose sexuality was not considered normative (Dutton 1970: 97; Encel 1970: 77-8; Harris 1962: 55; Wilson 1985: 151). Australians have traditionally regarded the liberalisation of moral laws or attitudes as having somehow been initiated by those who deviated from normative values or as undesirable since they accommodated such deviants (Wilson 1985:151).

**Homosexual Vice and “Race Suicide”**

Strong governmental control and surveillance of deviants were considered necessary because, since the nineteenth century, Australians have regarded certain sexual attitudes and practices--among them homosexuality--as dangerously corrupting (see Hicks 1978: 59-61, 65-7, 115; Wotherspoon 1991: 21-2, 112ff.). Fears of moral decay have, furthermore, been particularly acute in Australia because of their close connection to anxieties about race. White Australians have historically regarded their success in occupying the continent and the propriety of this enterprise in racial terms. They justified their dispossession of the Aborigines and other indigenous peoples of the Pacific by citing the military, economic and moral superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race, and the evolutionary rectitude of undertaking such imperialist endeavours (Evans 1975: 8; Horsman 1981: 62-3; McQueen 1975: 21). Australians were, however, aware that their white outpost of empire lay in close proximity to lands populated by peoples whose massive numbers more than outweighed their racial inferiority. The recent panic about boatloads of “terrorists”, “illegals” or “queue jumpers” arriving from the north and the fear of “being swamped by Asians” suggest that these anxieties are ongoing (see Hage 1998: 209ff.; Webb and Ensticke 1998: 271ff.)
Australians believed that a large and vigorous white population in Australia was essential if the establishment of "a new Britannia" which dominated the "countless isles" of the Pacific was to be assured (McQueen 1975: 69; Serle 1973: 27, 89; Young 1984: 24-5). Moral laxity was thus considered a form of white Australian "race suicide" (Hicks 1978: 59-61, 65-7; McQueen 1975: 83, 88-9; Serle 1973: 104, 217).

In the last decades of nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth, certain groups were considered especially likely to contribute to the decline—in terms of both numbers and vigour—of the white race in Australia. Clergy and devout lay Christians have been among the most outspoken commentators on "race suicide". They tended—and still tend—to avoid expressing their concerns in overtly religious terms, and they commonly stressed the particular danger that the practitioners of "vicious habits" posed to children (Hicks 1978: 59ff.). These critics have generally been unable to convince Australians to end the "slaughter" or corruption "of the innocents" caused by their own "flippancy", "selfishness" and "love of ease" (Hicks 1978: 59-61, 65). Sectarianism, religious indifference and moral squeamishness, in fact, led to popular suspicion about the sexuality of clergy and others who strongly professed their religious beliefs—especially if these beliefs were unusual—and the various dangers they posed to children (Harris 1962: 59-60; Hogan 1987: 287; Serle 1973: 21). These critics have, however, been successful in demonising those Australians who openly profess atypical sexual or other beliefs—or who too obviously put them into practice.

Historically, Australians have particularly feared and detested the "vicious habits" of homosexual men. Homosexuals have been widely seen as potentially retarding both the growth and the virility of the Anglo-Saxon race in Australia, and panics about homosexuals' activities and attempts to suppress them by legislation have occurred periodically (Wotherspoon 1991: 89ff., 112ff.). In the period following World War II, homosexuality was popularly conceptualised as something wilfully adopted and with the intrinsic capacity to precipitate more general moral decay (Wotherspoon 1991: 89ff., 112ff.). Boys, youths and other "weak" males were regarded as particularly susceptible to seduction or sexual coercion (Dutton 1970: 97; Shilton 1978: 2,8,9; Wilson 1985: 33). These sorts of ideas were widely recirculated in the 1970s and 1980s as moral conservatives and Christian groups campaigned against proposed
amendments to the laws prohibiting homosexuality (see Benjamin n.d. [c.1981]; Coleman 1978; Shilton 1978). Homosexuals, it was argued, not only find boys and youths sexually attractive, but will seduce them for reasons of self-justification or even to increase the size of the homosexual community—and thus the pool of available sexual partners. They are, in effect, driven to “convert” males who would not otherwise become homosexual.[9]

The anti-pedophile commentators in the 1990s restated these sorts of objections to homosexuality. Critics of Wood’s recommendation that the age of consent for homosexual acts be reduced to 16, for example, commonly described men’s sexual interest in youths—and even older men’s interest in younger men—as predatory. Critics argued that changing the age of consent laws “sends out the wrong message”, that youths’ experimentation with “sodomy” was “undesirable” and that they “don’t have the maturity to make a decision which could put them outside the social mainstream for the rest of their lives”. [10] Few commentators proposed raising the age of consent for females to 18, or contemplated the possibility that the existing law allowed predatory sexual victimisation of females aged between 16 and 18. Those that did were generally male homosexuals—or others sympathetic to the homosexual cause—and were not seriously suggesting that the age of consent for females be raised (e.g. Letters to the Editor SMH 30 Aug. 1997). On the rare occasions when this suggestion was seriously made, it did not prove popular. One proponent of raising the age of consent for females to 18 was Ian Armstrong, whose demise as the leader of the National Party in NSW was—unknown to him—imminent (Humphries and Cooke SMH 27 Aug. 1997).

The horrified reactions to the broadcast of “Dolly” Dunn’s holiday video in early 1996 reflected similar attitudes. Dunn’s video did not depict sex or nudity, and the conversations recorded between the men and some youths were largely inane. Neither the activities depicted nor the recording of such a video were illegal at that time (Report WRC Vol. V 1997: 1084). This tape, furthermore, shocked a society whose male population exhibits substantial (heterosexual) pedophilic and hebephilic inclinations (see Briere and Runtz 1989: 71; Freund 1981:161-2). Highly sexualized depictions of girls—including very young girls—are ubiquitous here and not generally
considered problematic (see Kincaid 1998:102-6). Some feminists in fact argue that
these suggestive images of and performances by girls--and the conceptions which
underlie them--play an accepted role in the heterosexual socialisation of women (Driver
1989: 22-6).

Much of the supposedly “anti-pedophile” discourse in Australia thus reiterated earlier
claims about predatory homosexuality and its consequences for the young. A major
residual fear fuelling this panic was that homosexuals--effete and functionally infertile
themselves--could readily corrupt other males. Numerous Australian men would be lost
to an alienating and enervating vice and their children would never be conceived. The
fear that male homosexuals might be seducing or sexually coercing boys, youths or
even young men certainly provoked a more intense and widespread sense of horror in
1997 than the thought of sex between men and girls.

To summarise, the pedophile panic in Australia arose at a time when allegations about
ritual abuse had largely disappeared from public discourse, evidently because they
had become unsustainable. Ideas about the dangers posed to children by abusive
Satanists and other religious deviants--and even by evil supernatural entities--had
horrified many Americans. Yet, as I argued in Chapter VII, such ideas always made
less sense in the religiously indifferent society of Australia. A variety of structural,
historical and cultural factors--as well as the prompt availability here of sceptical
overseas discourse--inevitably impeded the generation of a panic about the ritual
murder and abuse of Australian children. Examinations by Australian police, the courts
and other official bodies of claims of ritual abuse had, in particular, precipitated
widespread scepticism in this country. I have argued that this was a process
analogous to that described in the literature about witchcraft in Africa and early modern
Europe whereby “witch beliefs” and accusations of witchcraft were modified as they
spread through different regions.

Seemingly undaunted, however, Australian ritual abuse theorists and activists were
subsequently instrumental in generating panic here about the activities of despised
sexual deviants. Deidre Grusovin, for example, played a direct and important role in
having an investigation of pedophilia included in the terms of reference of the Wood
Royal Commission. Grusovin had been motivated by the horror she felt at the “sexual, physical, ritualistic and emotional atrocities” that she believed had occurred at the Seabeach kindergarten and at a certain Sydney Sunday School. The “paedophile hearings” of the Royal Commission precipitated a more general panic about the activities of influential and well organized homosexual pedophiles. Certain leaders of the campaign to expose and punish pedophiles--such as Franca Arena and the psychiatrist Jean Lennane--were also motivated by the stories that they had been told by survivors of ritual abuse and their supporters. Other activists--such as the members of Spokespeople of Survivors and Fatalities of Child Rape and Sexual Exploitation--who were vitally concerned with the issue of ritual abuse, began at the time of the Wood Royal Commission to campaign against what they publicly described as large and well-organised pedophile networks. As I discussed in Chapter III, the Australian Association of Trauma and Dissociation also ceased using the term “ritual abuse” and, around this time, turned its public attention towards what was described as “organised sadistic abuse”.

Activists were, in fact, far more successful in precipitating panic--and in achieving reforms of the child protection laws and regulations--when they targeted “pedophiles” than when they promoted ideas about ritual abuse. These activists were able to incite historic Australian fears about the activities of sexual deviants and about the consequences of these activities. The “pedophile panic” of the 1990s was, in fact, the latest in a series of panics that have occurred in Australia about the activities of sexual deviants, particularly homosexual men. This panic was, however, surprisingly virulent, given the era in which it occurred. The claims made during the panic about the activities of pedophiles--and of homosexual men in general--were, furthermore, similar in many ways to those that had recently been made about the supposed perpetrators of ritual abuse.
Pedophiles as “Witches”? 

I have so far referred only to a “panic” about pedophilia in Australia in the mid-to-late 1990s, and I have implicitly differentiated this phenomenon from the earlier concerns about the activities of “witch-like” perpetrators of ritual abuse. Like La Fontaine, I believe that concerns about the danger posed by abusive Satanists--and the actions taken to thwart and punish them--are best compared to a “witch craze” because of the characteristic significance of the “occult” in the panic about ritual abuse and because perpetrators of ritual abuse were regarded as figures who epitomised and personified an inhuman evil (La Fontaine 1998: 14, 22).

Australian activists and commentators of the 1990s did not suggest that pedophiles were in any way involved with or interested in the occult. Even those activists still concerned about specifically ritual abuse commonly conceived this activity as a form of pedophilia or described it as such in their public pronouncements. The question of whether “pedophiles” exhibit witch-like characteristics is, however, very complex, and it demonstrates the problems of using terms like “witch” and “witch craze” in relation to a modern secular society--and one in which these terms evoke specific historical connotations.

As I argued in Chapter VI, the supposed perpetrators of ritual abuse definitely resemble the “witches” described in anthropological and historical studies. They were considered profoundly evil--inverting proper human behaviour, violating society’s fundamental rules and even transcending the human condition. Their appalling activities--and even the fact that they were active--was regarded as a sign that something was seriously amiss in society. Perpetrators were identified among the very poor and among deviant groups, or they were regarded as secretly belonging to “outsider” groups.

Pedophiles--as they were represented by Australian activists, journalists and other commentators in the 1990s--were also most definitely “outsiders”. They were
predominantly men who indulged in the most prohibited form of homosexual activity. They were members of a despised “elite”, who held deviant moral and political views or who belonged to professions with arcane and outmoded practices. They formed themselves into secret organizations to facilitate their activities, to protect each other and even to try to change society so that their depravity would be considered acceptable.

Pedophiles were also regarded as the practitioners of the most horrendous misbehaviour. Their critics had to resort to biblical language and imagery to adequately describe the pedophiles’ vice and to properly express their condemnation of it. The crusading editor of the Illawarra Mercury, Peter Cullen, defended the paper’s tendency to assume that the men accused of child abuse were actually guilty by claiming that perpetrators were improperly protected by the legal system. He expressed this quite common criticism, however, by describing pedophilia as “evil” and “sinful” and by stating that the legal system should be “damned” (Background Briefing ABC2RN 1 Sept. 1998). Ray Chesterton wrote that “Hell’s torments” awaited Frank Arkell, while a number of the people in the public gallery as Philip Bell was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment called for him to “burn in Hell” (Clark SMH 4 July 1998; Phelan SMH 13 Feb 1999).

Yet pedophiles were essentially accused only of horrendous sexual wrongdoing. Unlike alleged perpetrators of ritual abuse, pedophiles were not believed to engage in other types of “witch-like” misbehaviour. They were not religious deviants, nor did they ingest forbidden substances. Journalists and other commentators often described pedophiles using hunting imagery, and some commentators suggested that pedophilia was an inherently violent activity (e.g. Briggs interviewed by McKew Lateline ABCTV 9 April 1996; Chesterton DT 19 March 1996; Coddington 1997:16; Gripper SMH 20 March 1996; Loane SMH 30 March 1996a). There were also depictions in both the news and entertainment media of pedophiles threatening their victims with deadly force and causing their deaths in various ways. These were rare, however, and it was not generally suggested that pedophiles inevitably or deliberately killed their victims.
There is some doubt, furthermore, about whether the sexual misbehaviour of pedophiles really is an inversion of Australian society’s most important sexual beliefs and mores. Anthropologists have described many societies where witches are supposed to engage in sexual activities that are unthinkable for other people. Navaho witches are thus believed to engage in necrophilia—an activity so aberrant that Navahos who think about it worry that they are “losing [their] mind[s]” (Kluckhohn 1982 [1970]: 251). Some of these activities were so horrendous that only beings with magical powers could possibly perform them. Witches in late medieval and early modern Europe were thought to smear themselves with a magical potion made from the fat of murdered babies, then fly to meetings with the terrible “Prince of Darkness”. There they would kiss the anus of the Devil—who appeared in the form of “a stinking goat”—and engage in painful sexual intercourse with him (Trevor-Roper 1969 [1956]: 93-5).

While ritual abuse has some resemblance to this kind of sexual misbehaviour by witches, the pedophilia that provoked such anxiety in Australia in the 1990s does not. Pedophile activity is, however, quite similar to other sorts of sexual activities attributed to witches. In certain societies, witches do not engage in sexual activities that are in themselves appalling. Rather, it is the probable consequences of such misbehaviour that are appalling. Writing about the Pondo people of South Africa in the 1940s, for example, Wilson described the strong prohibitions which prevented young Pondo men and women from marrying—or even flirting with—members of different “colour-castes”. Relations between young people were otherwise quite free, and members of the prohibited castes lived in tantalisingly close proximity to each other. Pondo witches, however, were believed to habitually engage in sex with familiars who transformed themselves so that they closely resembled members of forbidden castes (Wilson 1982 [1970]: 278-9, 283). Even in Europe, witches were thought to behave with an abandon which was, unfortunately, forbidden to true Christians—and especially to zealous, often celibate scholars and inquisitors. It is not therefore surprising that churchmen emphasised the unpleasant aspects of witches’ paying homage to the Devil, feasting and surrendering to an insatiable “carnal lust” (Nelson 1975: 338-9, 346; see also Paine 1972: 19-20; Trevor-Roper 1969 [1956]: 95).
Although pedophilia is publicly denounced by virtually all Australians, it undoubtedly occurs here: sexual relations between adults and minors are not uncommon, and many more Australian men are attracted to minors than would admit it—or perhaps even fully realise that they felt such attraction. Heterosexual men's attraction to older minors is, furthermore, surreptitiously condoned (Briere and Runz 1989: 71; Driver 1989:22-6; Freund 1981:161-2 Kincaid 1998:102-6; Lucire 2000).

Homosexuality is no longer universally condemned in Australia. There are still, however, significant levels of community disapproval of homosexuality and antipathy towards homosexuals. There is also ongoing public vilification of homosexuals--and, of course, the depiction of homosexuality as virtually synonymous with pedophilia (see Hillier et al. 1998: 2-3; Kelley 2001; Mason 1993). Wotherspoon and others persuasively argue that the contemporary relative acceptance of homosexuality is actually the result of economic factors, while sympathetic media depictions of male homosexuals frequently underplay or ignore the sexuality of these men (Hurley 2003: 1, 41-2, 66-7; Wotherspoon 1991: 212). The decriminalisation of homosexuality in this country was extensively delayed, and other legal rights are still denied to homosexuals (Marr 200 [1999]: 156ff., 312-3).

There are, however, numerous studies which suggest that—in the midst of this antipathy to homosexuality—significant numbers of Australian men engage in homosexual activities, have done so in the past or are sexually attracted to other males.[11] The Australian feminist Miriam Dixon has suggested, furthermore, that sublimated homosexuality permeates the kinds of bonds that are still cultivated between men in this society and in the legendary "apartheid" between the sexes here (Dixon 1976: 22ff., 81; see also Harris 1962: 60).

Australians thus regard pedophiles and homosexuals in ways that are somewhat similar to the Pondo view of witches. Pedophiles and homosexuals can indulge in sexual activities that are forbidden, but which many Australians would find delectable. They can, first of all, admit—to themselves as well as others—their profound interest in sex. Male homosexuals grant themselves permission to indulge in sex with other men and reputedly engage in constant casual encounters. Pedophiles have sex with
minors—and in doing so fulfil other, even more common sexual fantasies. Their sexual partners are attractive but—it is assumed—almost inevitably guileless. According to their critics, pedophiles constantly encounter these sexually alluring people through their work, social or recreational activities. Pedophiles' wealth, status or experience allows them to easily seduce such people. By discarding children and adolescents after a few years and selecting new ones of more desirable age, pedophiles can also ensure that their sexual partners always retain their appeal. Nor do pedophiles have to use magic to achieve this marvellous feat.

Notes

[1] See Chapter VIII.

[2] A surprisingly wide range of Australian journals and other media published or broadcasted sceptical analyses of sexual abuse allegations in this period. Richard Guiliatt, for example, began a serial critique of recovered memory therapy and ritual abuse claims in the Sydney Morning Herald in early 1995. The popular print and electronic media conducted critical analyses of local cases at the conclusion of trials and appeal hearings, detailing how miscarriages of justice had occurred. The Australian media also reproduced and rebroadcast sceptical overseas discourse about ritual and other forms of sexual abuse, and comparable stories appeared in imported media articles and broadcasts. In the mid-1990s, popular American programs whose coverage of child abuse issues had played an important role in the proliferation of false diagnoses and dubious accusations of abuse began to cover such issues as “Parents who say they were falsely accused of abusing their children” and “Children admit they lied while their parents rot in jail for sex abuse” (e.g. Donahue TEN10 10 13 March 1996, 19 Aug. 1996).
[3] Freda Briggs--an Early Childhood Studies academic and vociferous critic of the outcome of the Seabeach case--was one expert whose views were widely reported in the "quality" media at this time. As well as using the term "child" with little discrimination, Briggs emphasised instances of sexual contact between adults and minors which involved violence and even suggested that such sexual interaction was implicitly violent (Briggs interviewed by McKew *LateLine* ABCTV 9 April 1996; Gripper *SMH* 20 March 1996). She argued that research tended to understate the number of males subjected to childhood abuse because boys frequently did not perceive early sexual experiences to be abusive (*LateLine* ABCTV 9 April 1996). Briggs thus simultaneously emphasised minors' sexual innocence and passivity, and contributed to the focus on homosexuals in Australian discourse about pedophilia. Briggs based many of her arguments on research which she had conducted with convicted perpetrators--which, as others have argued, can create a misleading impression of the nature of sexual contacts between adults and minors (e.g. Avery-Clark et al 1981:9). Ironically, Briggs drew on this research to conclude that pedophiles had themselves once been the victims of child abuse (*LateLine* ABCTV 9 April 1996).

[4] Journalists described the sexual orientations and activities of some witnesses and suspects as pedophilic--or dealt with them while reporting the "pedophile inquiry"--despite the fact that these men had been involved with youths as old as seventeen, or even older (e.g. Bearup and Brown *SMH* 6 April 1996b; Cooke *SMH* 4 April 1998; Cornford *SMH* 5 Oct. 1996; Ellingsen *SMH* 13 April 1996). As Wood pointed out in his report, it was perfectly legal for men to have sex with seventeen-year-old girls. It was, furthermore, legal for women to have sex with seventeen-year-olds of either sex, and women charged with having sex with a child aged between 14 and 16 could cite their "reasonable belief" that the child was over 16 as a defence. Penalties were also more severe for male homosexual abuse of children than for heterosexual abuse (*Report WRC* Vol. V 1997:1068-71).

[5] *Whipping Boy* is in some ways similar to Frank Moorhouse's 1980 novel *The Everlasting Secret Family*. A film version of this novel had been made in 1988. Pedophilia was also explored in 1996 episodes of Australian serials such as *Blue*.
Healers and the ABC’s GP, Justice Wood personally congratulated the producers of GP when the episode was screened in April (SMH 24 April 1996).


[7] Festival of Light literature had for some time described homosexuals as among the permissive minorities who have “straight-out Satanic motives”, occupy “Satan’s evil centre of influence”, are agents of “the powers of sin and evil”, commit “crimes against God and humanity”, and engage in “hellish” activities (e.g. Come Crown, Jesus . . ., 1990; Decade of Decision 1989; Pleasure House . . ., 1977). Commenting in Parliament on the release of the report of the Royal Commission, Nile compared the “paedophile network operating in New South Wales” to the supposedly Satanic Dutroux gang. He also mentioned the Seabeach case. Nile went on to contradict himself somewhat by describing pedophilia as essentially an activity perpetrated by homosexual males. He cited various studies and surveys which he believed constituted “evidence [of] the link between the homosexual movement and paedophiles”--and even that “a percentage of homosexuals prefer to have sex with or sodomise young boys, especially attractive young blond boys . . .” (Hansard NSW LC 17 Sept. 1997: 70ff.).

[8] The Festival of Light had consistently campaigned against granting homosexuals legal rights (see Pleasure House . . ., 1977; Light May 1985; Shilton 1978). Rev. Nile played a prominent role in defeating the 1981 bill to decriminalise homosexuality in NSW, and he was a vocal critic of the reforms which were finally enacted in 1984 (Marr 2000 [1999]:164ff.). Nile and other leaders of the movement continually stressed the inherent dangers posed to children by measures granting legal rights to homosexuals.

Senator Bill Heffernan—who used parliamentary privilege to allege that Justice Michael Kirby of the High Court was a pedophile—had been campaigning against homosexual perpetrators of child abuse for “a period of years” (Hansard Senate 12 March 2002: 574ff.). He also provided active support to ASCA and other child protection advocates—who fondly described him as “the cavalry” (Petersen SMH 16
March 2000).

Heffernan was notoriously preoccupied with the secret homosexuality of certain politicians, bureaucrats and clergy, and he kept extensive files on these and other miscreants. He had long believed there was a conspiracy to protect networks of high-ranking pedophiles. Kirby was not the first prominent man accused by Heffernan under parliamentary privilege, and the senator was notorious for the claims he made in private (see McCallum 2003 [2002]: 55; Seccombe SMH 14 March 2002).

Franca Arena’s relationship with Sydney’s homosexual community had also been rather antagonistic. Arena’s hostility was widely attributed to her “sorrow” over the homosexuality of her two sons (Arena 2002: 198ff).

[9] Conceptualisations of homosexuality as “evangelical” or “corrupting” characterise not only contemporary media and popular discourse, but also much clinical and scholarly research into the consequences of child abuse for its victims. Whetsell-Mitchell, for example, cites a number of studies which proposed child abuse as the cause of adult homosexuality and speculated about the exact process of this conversion of “young males” who, it was implied, would not otherwise engage in homosexual activities (1995:58-9).

The findings of such research are of questionable validity. As Bagley points out, much research into child sexual abuse treats all sexual contact between adults and minors as abusive, regardless of the degree of “victim” agency (1995:34). This assumption is especially problematic in cases such as those where sexual contact between adults and adolescents is consensual or even initiated by the minor (Weeks 1985:228). Some researchers have found that boys and youths who perceive themselves to be homosexual, or who are experiencing nascent homosexual desires, may accept the overtures of adult men—or even seek them out—rather than engaging in inappropriate though more socially acceptable modes of sexual experimentation (Bagley 1995:34; Isaacs and McKendrick 1992:15-7). Doll and her colleagues point out, furthermore, that some men who engaged in
consensual sexual experimentation with adult men in their youth perceive themselves in retrospect to be the victims of abuse (Doll et al. 1992: 861-2).

There is, on the other hand, evidence which suggests that considerable hebephilia exists among members of Australia's male homosexual community. Homosexual men have actually been criticised for their pedophilia and hebephilia--or for their tolerance of it--in the Australian gay media (e.g. Farelly and Machon LOL July 1996). The prominence of young male sex workers at various times in East Sydney, and the acceptance which is accorded to pedophilic and hebephilic themes in gay literature and biography, also supports this contention. Sandfort has examined tensions within the Dutch homosexual community which are quite similar to those that exist here (1987: 89ff.). He found that some Dutch homosexuals strongly differentiate themselves from homosexual pedophiles and hebephiles and seek a wider societal acceptance of same-sex relationships. They have been criticised for pandering to popular prejudices. Others, who argue that pedophilia and hebephilia are, like homosexuality, simply unconventional sexual orientations and practices have themselves been portrayed as self-serving sexual predators by certain lesbian critics (Sandfort 1987: 101,103-4).

[10] The comments quoted were made by ALP parliamentarian Bob Harrison and by John Fogarty, a Family Court judge who had served on a number of governmental commissions on children's issues (Humphries and Cooke SMH 27 Aug. 1997; Lateline ABCTV 26 Aug. 1997).

[11] There are debates about whether homosexuality should be defined by "behaviour" or "degree of [same-sex] attraction" (e.g. Baily et al. 2000; Kelley 2001). If a strict, exclusively "behavioural" definition is used, less than 3% of Australian men are homosexuals (Kelley 2001). Even fewer identify themselves as such (Smith et al. 2003). Yet considerably higher numbers of Australian men have engaged in homosexual activity, or engage in both heterosexual and homosexual activity. Ross (1988), for example, found that 11% of a sample of Australian men had engaged in homosexual activity and that 6% had done so in the previous 12 months. Hass found 14% of young men had had "at least some homosexual
experience" (see Hillier et al. 1998: 7). Researchers have also found that
Australian men who engage in homosexual behaviour may not identify as
homosexuals. Australian HIV-AIDS educators, for example, had to adopt special
strategies when dealing with men who regularly engage in homosexual activity but
did not regard themselves as homosexuals (Hillier et al. 1998: 23-4; Hurley 2003:
56, 61). Hillier and her colleagues similarly found that 9% of their sample of young
Australian people who are "same sex attracted"—most of whom were sexually
active—actually identified themselves as "heterosexual" (Hillier et al. 1998: 23-4).

If "same-sex attraction" is used to define homosexuality, the number of Australian
men who are "homosexual" is even higher. Smith and his colleagues found that
"same sex attraction or experience" was reported by 8.6% of the men in their
sample (Smith et al. 2003). The number of Australian men who are attracted to other
males—but who dismiss, repress or deny this attraction—may well be higher than
indicated by this randomised telephone survey.