Adult accounts of organised child sexual abuse in Australia

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Adult accounts of organised child sexual abuse in Australia

Michael Salter

July 2010

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Public Health and Community Medicine
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Introduction

A significant proportion of sexual offences involve more than one perpetrator. Research suggests that between 10% and a third of rapes involve more than one man[1], and O'Sullivan (1991: 140) proposes that "group sexual assault is considered normal behaviour for some groups of young men in our society." In clinical settings, between 5% and 9% of sexually abused children (Rimsza & Niggemann 1982; De Jong, Hervada & Emmett 1983; Huston, Parra, Prihoda & Foulds 1995) and 10% to one third of adults with histories of sexual abuse (Briere & Runtz 1987; Alexander & Schaeffer 1994) report an incident of child sexual abuse involving more than one perpetrator. Co-victimisation, in which a child is victimised alongside other children, occurs frequently in child sexual abuse (Finkelhor 1984; Reinhart 1987; Faller 1989). So whilst most sexual offences involve one offender and one victim, incidents of multi-perpetrator and multi-victim abuse are not uncommon, and some abused children and adults with histories of sexual abuse have reported multi-perpetrator, multi-victim sexual abuse. Such experiences of abuse have been called "organised abuse" (La Fontaine 1993; Bibby 1996a; Gallagher, Hughes & Parker 1996) and are

[1] For a summary of the prevalence data on multiple perpetrator rape, see Franklin (2004) and Horvath and Kelly (2009).

associated with a range of trauma-related mental illnesses amongst victims as well as other poor life outcomes (Williams 1993; Leserman, Zhiming, Drossman, Toomey, Nachman & Glogau 1997; Gold, Hill, Swingle & Elfant 1999).

In the early 1980s, when research into sexual abuse began in earnest, researchers and law enforcement agencies suggested that most group sexual offences against children were extra-familial and involved the exploitation of "runaways" and vulnerable adolescents (e.g. Schoettle 1980; Burgess & Lindeqvist Clark 1984; Pierce 1984). During this period, child protection cases involving the organised abuse of very young children emerged, characterised by an unexpected severity of premeditated sadism within abusive families (Gallagher 1998). Some researchers have argued that the normative power structures of the family provide a context within which abusive adults can subject children to organised abuse with little risk of detection (Cleaver & Freeman 1996; Itzin 2001; Scott 2001). In the Australian context, Cooper, Anaf and Bowden (2006: 321) observed that organised sexual offences can be orchestrated through men's familial relations with women and children in the "private or relational sphere".

Group sexual offences are generally more sadistic than solo offences (O'Sullivan 1991) and in contexts without adequate legal oversight and regulation the violence of multiple perpetrator rape can escalate to incorporate torture, mutilation and murder (Hague 2007). Cases of organised abuse have included allegations of extreme violence, including torture and murder (Scott 2001; Sarson & MacDonald 2008). Kelly (2000) notes the similarities between the sexual atrocities documented in war zones overseas and those alleged to occur in cases of organised abuse in "first world"

domestic contexts. This lends support to the hypothesis of Cooper et al. (2006) that the power structures operating in domestic contexts, in which men's social control of women and children has traditionally been unregulated by the state, constitutes a "parallel state" operating within the nation state that provides a power base for abusive groups to orchestrate sexual violence with virtual impunity. As a result, the most extreme and prolonged forms of organised sexual offences against children are associated with family relations (Creighton 1993; Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996; Itzin 2001). On closer inspection, the distinction between the organised abuse of children and of women becomes somewhat arbitrary, as researchers report that, in organised contexts, the sexual assault of women and children frequently occurs together and girl children may be abused into adulthood (Gallagher 2001; Itzin 2001; Cooper, Anaf et al. 2006). Cooper et al. (2006) and Sarson and McDonald (2008) have questioned whether the discourse of "child abuse" or "domestic violence" can adequately capture the severity of the violence that is inflicted on children and adults in such circumstances.

Since the 1980s, allegations of organised abuse have featured centrally in debates over the meaning and significance of child sexual abuse as a public issue, with numerous media and academic commentators arguing that concern over organised abuse constitutes a moral panic (e.g. Jenkins & Maier-Katkin 1992; Victor 1998; Grometstein 2008). However, Kitzinger (2004: 55) suggests that "the real moral panic appears to centre around intervention". Campbell (1988) noted the paradox that, whilst journalists and politicians often demand that the authorities respond more decisively in response to a "crisis" of sexual abuse, the action that is taken is then construed as a "crisis". Cases of organised abuse are typically detected inadvertently (Gallagher 1998), snowballing from an initial report or suspicion of abuse into an

unanticipated explosion in referrals, complaints and media attention (Gaspar 1996).[2]

Children and adults victimised in organised contexts can display extremely disturbed behaviour, complicating forensic evidence gathering, and undermining the credibility of their testimony in court (Gaspar 1996). During the 1980s and 1990s, a diverse body of activists, journalists and academics highlighted the fragmented nature of adults' and children's disclosures of organised abuse as examples of the implausible nature of women's and children's reports of sexual violence more generally (for critiques of this argument see Hechler 1988; Scott 2001; Raschke 2008). This loose coalition argued that allegations of organised abuse were evidence that prurient forces within feminism and the child protection movement were utilising sexual abuse allegations to attack men and male sexuality. In the midst of a media "backlash" against feminism and allegations of sexual violence, such hyperbolic and inaccurate claims about organised abuse captured the cultural *zeitgeist*. Throughout the 1990s, adults disclosing organised abuse, and the professionals who supported them, became the subject of frequent *ad hominem* attacks in the popular and academic press. Whilst this controversy has largely faded away, its legacy is such that empirical data on multi-perpetrator and organised sexual offences against children remains largely obscured, and the development of evidence-based policy and practice in relation to organised abuse has been disrupted.

There has been a recent resurgence in research and clinical interest in organised abuse and ritualistic abuse (e.g. Cooper, Anaf et al. 2006; Noblitt & Perskin Noblitt 2008; Sachs & Galton 2008; Sarson & MacDonald 2008; Harkins & Dixon 2010). The question of *what to do* is re-emerging in the most pressing way. In a prevailing

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[2] For case studies of child protection investigations into organised abuse, see Galey (1995) and Doherty, Cassidy and Armstrong (1999).

climate of scepticism, the lack of data on organised abuse is a serious barrier to the investigation of organised abuse and the treatment of victimised children and women. As Campbell (1988: 71) observed:

> Detection is always contingent. It depends on a co-operation and a consensus about what matters, what is wrong, what hurts, what is visible and what is knowable. Detection is above all about what is *evident* and what is *evidence.* But all this is dependent on political consciousness. Seeing is believing, we're told, and yet evidence, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. If you don't believe it is possible for children to be sexually abused *en masse* by the men in their lives, then you don't see the signs, even when they are staring you in the face.

Campbell was writing twenty years ago in Britain, but it seems that, in contemporary Australia, organised abuse continues to challenge professional practice and terminology. In particular, the paucity of research in Australia constrains the capacity of services and policy-makers to respond in an appropriate and ethical way. Adults and children with histories of organised abuse are presenting with some frequency to health and welfare services throughout Australia (NSW Health 1997; Schmuttermaier & Veno 1999; Cooper & Bowden 2006) although little is known about the life histories and circumstances of this group. Their opportunities to attest publicly to their experiences are limited, since their testimony has been marginalised in public inquiries into organised abuse (Rogers 1999) and Australian law enforcement agencies have been reluctant to investigate eyewitness accounts of organised abuse (for example, see Carroll 1992).

The aims of the thesis

The primary aim of this thesis is to document and analyse accounts of organised abuse from adult survivors in order to develop a deeper understanding of the range of circumstances and contexts in which organised abuse arises and the forms of abuse to which children are subjected in organised contexts. My intention is to address the lack of data on organised abuse, thereby contributing to the development of evidence-based policy and practice in relation to the issue. Since little rigorous empirical or theoretical work has been done on the subject, the project is necessarily exploratory, utilising the life history method to illuminate a range of issues and questions emerging from within the lives of people who have been sexually victimised by groups and networks.

In undertaking this project, I have no wish to contribute to overblown narratives about "paedophile rings" in which children feature as passive and alluring "innocents" stalked by predatory "perverts".[3] Nor am I interested in the script prepared for the "moral panicker" or "conspiracy theorist" who, it has been argued, are the only people who would make a case for organised and ritualistic abuse as a serious problem (for instance, Nathan and Snedeker (1996) and de Young (1996)). What I aim to do in this thesis is simple enough: I seek to document the lived experience of organised forms of child sexual abuse, with the certainty that such forms of sexual abuse occur.

This certainty dates back to a period of my life in which I acted as the carer for a friend as she affected her exit from an organised group of sexual offenders. This was my introduction to organised abuse, and it does not lend itself to the ambivalence that

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[3] See Kelly (1996) and Kincaid (1998) for a critique of media constructions of sexual abuse and "organised paedophilia".

pervades much clinical and sociological writing about organised, ritualistic or otherwise complex sexual abuse. The perpetrators made themselves known to me through their threats, their home invasions, and the indelible marks they left on her after prolonged acts of violence and torture. These harms were compounded by the repeated failures of healthcare workers and law enforcement to act on her behalf. My time as a carer cannot be disentangled from this research, from its inception and formulation to its execution. Those experiences constitute a form of "situated knowledge" (Haraway 1988) that compels me to take accounts of organised abuse seriously, whilst acknowledging the partiality and specificity of my own experiences.

Concerns over the trustworthiness of memory and testimony have featured prominently in the literature on organised abuse, even amongst clinicians sympathetic to the plight of people disclosing histories of organised abuse (e.g. Ross 1995; Middleton 2004; International Society for the Study of Dissociation, Chu, Van der Hart, Dalenberg, Nijenhuis, Bowman, Boon, Goodwin, Jacobson, Ross, Sar, Fine, Frankel, Coons, Courtois, Gold & Howell 2005). My concern with survivors' accounts has less to do with theoretical questions regarding the interplay of memory, trauma and testimony and more to do with the value of those accounts in illuminating the lives of victims of organised abuse, and the operations of their abusers.

In this thesis, I have endeavoured to marry an empirical public health approach to sexual violence with criminological theories of gender and crime. The study of health and the study of crime are typically considered to be distinct disciplines and so the relationship between public health and criminology may not appear to be immediately obvious. Over the last twenty years, social scientists (building on the insights of feminist scholars and activists) have had much to say about gender in the commission

of violent crime (e.g. Connell 1987; Hearn 1990; Messerschmidt 2000), whilst the burden of illness associated with gendered violence has gained increasing attention in public health (e.g.Saltzman, Green, S. & Thacker 2000; Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg & Zwi 2002; Watts & Zimmerman 2002).

Through a public health lens, I have analysed descriptions of organised abuse, a topic about which we know comparatively little, in the context of the evidence base on sexual violence more generally; its epidemiology, prevalence and outcomes. Simultaneously, I have applied a gendered analysis to the complex linkages between the practice of violence and its emotional and physical health outcomes. In this thesis, I consider how particular patterns of violence, as gendered social practices, contribute to and craft relations of power between men, women and children, and how such relations become embedded within the dispositions of the perpetrators of, and the victims of, violence. In doing so, I have broadened the framework of my analysis from a strictly public health or criminological view to make a gendered study of a particularly harmful form of sexual violence.

Researching sexual violence is grim work and the study of organised abuse has proven no exception. The sociological model applied throughout this thesis has highlighted the relationship between organised abuse and the systemic social and cultural factors that promote sexual violence more generally. I have described the complex processes through which these social and cultural factors find expression within organised abuse, and how organised abuse emerges from within specific, although relatively commonplace, circumstances and contexts. The findings of this project suggest that the "prescribed spaces" (James, Jenks & Prout 1998) of childhood, such as home and school, are shaped by relations of gender and age that

privilege men's lives over those of women or children. This power differential not only ensures that most incidents of men's sexual violence against children go undetected, but it provides a power base through which complex subcultures of sexual violence can develop and sustain themselves. These subcultures are structured in ways that intensify the sexual aggression of the "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell 1987) that is frequently observed in homosocial circumstances and institutions.

Within the sexual subcultures of abusive groups, the powerlessness of children signifies them as potential objects of exchange between men who seek to affirm masculine domination, and accrue status and prestige, through shared performances of control, transgression and sexual violence. Whilst the violence of these performances can reach extraordinary heights, the control mechanisms through which children are subjugated to organised abuse rest upon the socially legitimised power of their abusers, who are usually parents, relatives or other authority figures. Since the strategies of power through which children are entrapped in organised abuse are normative and widespread, organised abuse is rarely detected in the circumstances in which it arises. Nonetheless, this study has brought to light multiple intervention points through which organised abuse can be disrupted and the harms of organised abuse ameliorated, and these opportunities for intervention will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

Terminology

At present, there is no commonly accepted definition or description of organised abuse. Complex cases of sexual abuse involving multiple abusers and multiple children attract a range of labels, ranging from "sex ring" (Burgess & Lindeqvist Clark 1984) to "ritual abuse" (Cozolino 1989) to "sexual exploitation" (Kelly & Regan 2000). Many researchers, including myself, believe that such cases share a number of similarities, and can be sensibly categorised without over-simplifying the complexities of individual cases. This thesis employs the term "**organised abuse**" as a relatively simple and inclusive descriptor for any occurrence of sexual abuse in which multiple victims have been exploited by multiple perpetrators acting in concert, in which one or more of the perpetrators is not related to the child and/or lives outside the child's home.

This definition of organised abuse is drawn from La Fontaine (1993) and is consonant with the use of the term by other researchers (Bibby 1996b; Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996). All types of abuse can be highly organised, but this definition of organised abuse focuses on groups of people who conspire to sexually abuse groups of children. The focus of this research into organised abuse is at the intersection of the four key dimensions of "organised abuse" identified by Gallagher (1994):

1. The number of children abused
2. The number of perpetrators
3. The number of incidences of abuse
4. The amount of premeditation (planning, organisation, grooming)

Where an incident of sexual abuse contains all four of these elements – that is, multiple victims, multiple abusers, and more than a single incident of abuse, as well as evidence of premeditation – then it is categorised as a case of "organised abuse". In using this approach, I treat specific forms of organised abuse, such as ritualistic abuse, the manufacture of child abuse images and child prostitution, as practices that occur within organised abuse.

The literature has consistently identified that ritualistic practices are a marker of a particularly severe category of organised abuse, characterised by the initiation of organised abuse in early childhood, usually in familial contexts, and involving prolonged, frequent and sadistic abuse (Creighton 1993; Weir & Wheatcroft 1995; Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996). This thesis will use the term "**organised and ritualistic abuse**" to refer to this form of organised abuse rather than the more common shorthand "ritual abuse". The reason for this is that ritualistic practices frequently occur alongside other forms of organised abuse, such as the manufacture of child abuse images, and the term "ritual abuse" tends to accord primacy to experiences of ritualistic abuse over and above other experiences of abuse. In this thesis, I aim to explore the relationship between the multiple forms of abuse that occur in organised contexts without presuming that one particular form of abuse is more significant than any other.

Another important distinction in this thesis is between "**familial organised abuse**" and "**extra-familial organised abuse**". Some participants in this project were subject to organised abuse by a father, mother or close relative who made them available for sexual abuse by adults within the family, as well as family friends and contacts. This

abuse will be called "**familial organised abuse**". Whilst the child is sexually abused by people outside the home as well as relatives, the genesis of the abuse lies in the socially legitimised power that the child's parents (and/or other relatives) are granted over the child. Experiences of organised abuse that do not involve family members or relatives (for example, in cases where the child is subject to organised abuse by a priest or teacher) will be called "**extra-familial organised abuse".** In the context of extra-familial organised abuse, there is often one particular person who is primarily responsible for inducting the child into organised abuse and maintaining them in a state of subservience. In this thesis, such a person will be referred to as the "**primary abuser**".

A complicating factor in the definition of organised abuse is that the delineation between adult and child sexual assault, which is largely taken for granted in the literature on sexual offences, is indistinct in cases of organised abuse. In organised contexts, a child may be sexually abused into adulthood, and children and women may be sexually assaulted in the same incident of organised abuse. Frequently, the needs and vulnerabilities of children victimised in organised contexts are bound up with the needs of their mothers, who may also be victimised (Cooper 2004). This thesis will use the adjective "**captive**" to describe children and women who are subject to ongoing violence by abusive groups e.g. "**captive child**" or "**captive woman**". The use of this term is drawn from the work and activism of Sarson and MacDonald (2004), who have documented how children and women are held captive by perpetrator groups in Canada and other "first world" nations.

In this research thesis, experiences of sexual abuse are not categorised as "organised abuse" where the child's victimisation is limited to non-contact abuse. Examples of non-contact abuse collected in this study included circumstances in which a child was taken to a nudist camp by their parents and forced to disrobe against their wishes, and an instance in which a child was forced to shower at a residential institution in the presence of staff members. Whilst these participants experienced such circumstances as disempowering and abusive, the non-contact abuse arose as a product of the invalidating and disempowering environment in which the child was being raised, rather than through a group of adults who conspired to abuse them sexually.

Some cases of sexual abuse involving multiple abusers do not meet all four criteria, and therefore will not be categorised as "organised abuse". The engagement of a child in "survival sex" (that is, sex work or sex for favours) does not satisfy the fourth criterion, and so is not defined as organised abuse. Many homeless and vulnerable children, predominantly teenagers, engage in "survival sex" in order to meet their basic needs for food, shelter and care (Tschirren, Hammet & Saunders 1996). Whilst this is undoubtedly an example of child sexual exploitation, "organised abuse" presumes a degree of collective coordination and planning on the part of multiple abusers that is often lacking in such cases. Nonetheless, survival sex sits on a continuum of coercion that includes organised abuse, and the two are not mutually exclusive.

Cases of multi-perpetrator abuse confined to a single house, or a single nuclear family, are also commonly excluded from the definition of organised abuse (La Fontaine 1993). Such instances of abuse fail to meet the fourth criterion of organised abuse, since the abuse has been facilitated, primarily, through familial ties and

domestic arrangements, rather than by "organisation" per se. The fourth criterion would be met where family members facilitated the child's abuse by people outside the home, for example, by wider kin, family "friends", or abusers who pay to assault the child.

The boundaries of "organised abuse" are often unclear in cases of institutional sexual abuse. In public inquiries in Australia, Europe and North America, numerous examples have been provided of children's institutions where sexual abuse by staff and visitors was frequent and widespread (Crossmaker 1991; Doran & Brannan 1996; Gallagher 2000). It has been common for institutional authorities to silence complaining children whilst protecting abusive staff, and some critics have described this pattern of institutional cover-ups as evidence of "organised paedophilia" (e.g. Hawkins & Briggs 1997). The line between complicity and conspiracy in such instances is often uncertain, particularly since evidence of organised abuse in institutional settings has been a feature of public inquiries into the sexual abuse of state wards in Australia and overseas (Brannan, Jones & Murch 1993; Gallagher 2000; Mullighan Report 2004). For the purpose of this thesis, instances of sexual abuse in institutional settings will be considered "organised abuse" where there is evidence of active coordination and conspiracy between people participating in sexual abuse. Official neglect, a lack of oversight and supervision, or unresponsiveness to complaints of sexual abuse will not be considered *prima facie* evidence of collusion and conspiracy, although I acknowledge that the boundaries between "organised" and what Kelly and Scott (1993) have called "disorganised" sexual abuse (that is, where a child is vulnerable to sexual abuse by multiple people due to a lack of organisation by child protection services) is unclear in many institutional cases

The exclusion of any case of sexual abuse from the remit of the thesis is not a statement about the seriousness of the harm inflicted on the child or the gravity of the crimes committed by the abusers. This project is not based on a "hierarchy of victimisation" with "organised abuse" at the top, but rather on a "connective model" (Kelly 1996) that explores the commonalities that emerge from the diverse experiences of organised abuse.

The structure of the thesis

The thesis begins with a chapter on the theoretical understandings of organised abuse, "A subject of smoke and mirrors: Conceptualising organised abuse". I have adopted the title of the chapter from Summit's (1994: 5) description of ritualistic and sadistic abuse as it reflects the difficulties facing therapists who seek to understand and conceptualise the phenomenon. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the efforts of researchers and therapists to grasp organised abuse theoretically. I suggest, instead, that critical masculinity theories and sociological theories of practice may offer new insights into the phenomenon.

In Chapter 2, "Organised abuse and the politics of disbelief", I explore the emergence of cases of organised abuse from within the fields of social work and child protection in the 1980s, and discuss how these cases became central to controversies over sexual abuse, memory and the law in the 1990s. I suggest that these controversies have displaced reasoned consideration of the evidence for organised abuse and stymied the development of an appropriate policy response to the issue in Australia and overseas. Through an analysis of "false memory" and "moral panic" literature on organised

abuse, I explore how cases of organised abuse have been misrepresented across a range of literature in an effort to call into question the credibility of women's and children's testimony of sexual abuse.

Chapter 3 provides a critical overview of empirical data on the prevalence and harms of organised abuse, and the circumstances in which organised abuse occurs. Through my reading of the empirical data and research evidence on organised abuse, I demonstrate the linkages between abusive groups and hegemonic relations of gender, age and power, and highlight how these power relations have shaped inquiries into organised abuse itself.

Chapter 4 describes the conduct of the project, including the selection of the methodology, the development and application of the recruitment and interviewing protocols, and the process of analysis and writing up. Whilst explaining the methodological basis of my research findings, I reflect on the experience of this unique research project and on the role of qualitative research in providing a voice to adults with histories of extreme trauma.

Chapters 5 to 10 analyse the interview data from a range of perspectives. The data gathered in this project was both voluminous and rich, and a single approach to analysis would be insufficient to capture the multitude of themes and issues emerging from data analysis. In Chapter 5, "Extraordinary abuses in everyday spaces", I emphasise how participants' experiences of organised abuse were situated within the everyday spaces and relationships of their childhoods. Whilst organised abuse can involve violence of extreme proportions, I consider how such violence can emerge

from within the common relations of gender, age and power that characterise the spaces of childhood.

In Chapter 6, "Gendering organised abuse", I argue that organised abuse is a gendered crime and a women's health issue by drawing on participants' accounts of organised abuse, as well as other studies on sexual violence, to show that the burden of trauma and violence in organised abuse falls primarily upon girls and women.

Chapter 7, "Living in two worlds: Familial organised abuse", explores in more detail the childhoods of those participants whose organised abuse was facilitated by their parents. Through their descriptions of their parents, their siblings and their family environment, I provide a glimpse of the "inner world" of families caught up in organised abuse and of the ways in which children adapt to and survive such extreme circumstances.

Chapters 8 to 10 draw together participants' descriptions of the abusive groups and the violent practices to which they were subjected in organised contexts. In Chapter 8, "Exchange, control and sadism in organised abuse", I highlight how the relations of power that characterise abusive groups give rise to practices of exchange, control and sadism as particular strategies of power. Chapter 9, "The legitimisation of organised abuse through ritual and torture", explores how some abusive groups legitimise their abusive practices by enshrouding them in religious and scientific justifications. In Chapter 10, "Atrocity and masculine transcendence", I confront the most unsettling and extreme accounts of sexual violence gathered in this study, and analyse them in terms of ideologies of gender, power and violence. The concluding chapter then

discusses the practical and theoretical implications of this study for the prevention, detection and treatment of violence against children and women.

1

A subject of smoke and mirrors
Conceptualising organised abuse

We continue to deal with a subject of smoke and mirrors. You see something, hear something, you form an image of what it must be and, before you can grasp it, it fades away and segues visually, conceptually, into something else.

- Professor Roland Summit's (1994: 5) description of the ritualistic and sadistic organised abuse of children to the New South Wales Child Protection Council

In Australia, rumours of "paedophile rings" have enlivened bar-room gossip for decades, fuelled sporadically by media reports, parliamentary debate, government reports, and, more recently, feverish online discussion. Where cases of organised abuse come to light, however, they bear little resemblance to the salacious rumours about celebrities and politicians in underground paedophilic brotherhoods. Eyewitness testimony of organised abuse, provided by children and adults, includes detailed accounts of premeditated and sadistic violence against children committed by parents,

priests, teachers and other people in the community with socially legitimised authority over children.[5] Where these cases come to the attention of the authorities, they are typically discovered inadvertently, and the forms of abuse suffered by children are more extensive and severe than is typically reported in solo offences (Gallagher 1998). It seems that the younger the initiation of organised abuse, the more severe the forms of violence experienced by the child, and the more likely that the abuse involves their parents and relatives (Creighton 1993; Gallagher, Hughes & Parker 1996). Allegations of organised abuse call into question the integrity and stability of normative cultural ideals of childhood, family life, and the home, and they have frequently been characterised as "beyond the pale" by journalists, academics and policy-makers. Mollon (2008: 108) suggests:

> We might consider the broad realm of mainstream cultural and media discourse as consisting of the dominant symbolic structure determining what we normally believe to be true, possible and within the nature of reality. Certain phenomena, such as ritual abuse of children within perverse religious groups, do not find a place within this mainstream discourse, other than in the negative ("it does not exist"). The possibility of their reality has no place in this dominant symbolic realm.

Whilst research suggests that families are an important site of child sexual exploitation (Kelly, Regan & Burton 2000; Itzin 2001), it appears that, for Australian policy-makers and law enforcement bodies, "real" cases of organised sexual abuse

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[5] See page 23 of the thesis for a list of autobiographical accounts of organised abuse. For collections of eyewitness acccounts of organised abuse, see Lorena and Levy (1998) and Mulliner and Hunt (1997). For a sociological analysis of such testimony, see Itzin (2001) and Scott (2001).

involve extra-familial men who target vulnerable children. During the 1990s and 2000s, a number of inquiries were conducted by state and federal authorities into allegations of organised child sexual offences (Independent Commission Against Corruption, 1994; NCA Joint Committee Report, 1995; Alford, 1997; Kimmins Report, 1999; Department of Family and Community Services, 2000).[6] These inquiries shared a common focus on allegations of organised sexual offences by extra-familial men, often with an implicit or explicit focus on the sexual abuse of boys. For example, the National Crime Authority's inquiries into allegations of organised abuse throughout the 1990s was guided by a definition of "paedophilia" that characterised serious sexual offenders as "usually, but not exclusively, extra-familial offenders" who "often prefer boys" (Miller 1997: 2). The Paedophile Inquiry of the Wood Royal Commission in New South Wales utilised a similar typology (Cossins 1999).

Cossins (1999) notes that the psychiatric profiles of sexual offenders employed by the Wood Royal Commission to justify their focus on the extra-familial abuse of boys are contested by a range of studies. The Wood Royal Commission is the only public Australian inquiry to have taken evidence from women with histories of familial organised and ritualistic abuse. However, Rogers (1999) documents how their testimony was marginalised by the Royal Commission, which concluded that allegations of the extra-familial organised abuse were more credible, and more urgent, than allegations of intra-familial organised abuse. The suppression of evidence of familial organised abuse in favour of the spectre of the homosexual and/or extra-

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[6] Some reports of investigations of allegations of organised abuse remain confidential, such as the Operation Gull Final Report (1992) and the Task Force Colo Final Report (1994) in New South Wales. Other confidential reports were leaked to the press, such as the National Crime Authority's (1997) strategic assessment on "organised paedophile activity", and the Victorian Ombudsman's investigation into allegations of organised abuse in Victoria (for a newspaper report summarising the Ombudsman's findings, see Hughes 2004).

familial "paedophile ring" is not only an Australian phenomenon. In the European context, Kelly (1996) has noted the "marked discomfort" of researchers and policy-makers at her attempts to "broaden the definition of sexual exploitation through reference to familial contexts in which child pornography is produced and children may be prostituted." She notes how "Documentation of 'organised abuse' networks tends to preface this with the word 'paedophile'", and she suggests:

> Immediately the word *paedophile* appears we have moved away from recognition of abusers as 'ordinary men' - fathers, brothers, uncles, colleagues - and are returned to the more comfortable view of them as 'other', a small minority who are fundamentally different from most men.

It seems that there are deep-seated obstacles embedded within a number of professional fields to the recognition and prioritisation of familial organised abuse. Cooper and colleagues (2006) reported that the illegal activities of abusive groups are only of interest to law enforcement where the group breaches laws that regulate the circulation of money and goods (e.g. through drug manufacture, trafficking and money laundering), whilst the violent offences committed by abusive groups upon women and children are not considered a legitimate focus of police energies.

The forms of organised abuse that are considered to be the legitimate focus of police attention, such as sex tourism, child trafficking, and online child pornography, all fall neatly on the "public" side of the "public–private" divide. These forms of organised abuse involve corporate and/or criminal organisations that transgress against "public" concerns such as national security, border control and/or the legal and financial

regulation of business activity. Moreover, discussion of these forms of organised abuse has typically located such abuse overseas in developed nations. Such an account:

> implicitly reproduces the imagined opposition between pre-modern and modern, barbarous and civilised, "oriental" and "occidental" societies ... After all, unenlightened and uncivilized folk might be expected to sexually abuse children (indeed, their maltreatment of women and children is part of what makes them primitive and barbarous), but for members of a "civilized" society to behave this way is intolerable (O'Connell Davidson 2005: 31).

Whilst the problem of organised sexual offences against children is implicitly construed as a far-away problem, "investigations of 'familial sexual abuse' seldom involve either searches for or questions about [organised] forms of abuse" (Kelly 1996).

Over the last thirty years, survivors of organised abuse and the mental health workers who support them have been working in coalition to bring to light the seriousness of organised forms of child sexual abuse, particularly those based within families. Emerging from this partnership has been a body of literature on organised abuse that includes autobiographies (Smith & Pazder 1980; Chase 1987; Spencer 1989; Buchanan 1994; Goobie 1994; Beckylane 1995; Jadelinn 1997; Richardson 1997; Lorena & Levy 1998; Daymore 2001; Roy 2005; Bowlby 2006; Davis 2008; Kezelman 2010; Owen 2010), clinic-based research studies (Hudson 1990; Kelley 1990; Snow & Sorenson 1990; Cook 1991; Driscoll & Wright 1991; Jonker-Bakker &

Jonker 1991; Ehrensaft 1992; Shaffer & Cozolino 1992; Bybee & Mobrey 1993; Leavitt 1994; Lawrence, Cozolino & Foy 1995; Noblitt 1995; Weir & Wheatcroft 1995; Jonker & Jonker-Bakker 1997; Leavitt & Labott 1998) and treatment guidelines and recommendations (Gould 1992; Mangen 1992; MacFarland & Lockerbie 1994; Sinason 1994; Mowbray & Bybee 1995; Ross 1995; Mollon 1996; Fraser 1997a; Gallagher 1998; Scott 1998; Sinason 2002; International Society for the Study of Dissociation, Chu, Van der Hart, Dalenberg, Nijenhuis, Bowman, Boon, Goodwin, Jacobson, Ross, Sar, Fine, Frankel, Coons, Courtois, Gold & Howell 2005; Noblitt & Perskin Noblitt 2008; Sachs & Galton 2008). Whilst this literature is heterogeneous, it highlights both the role of families in facilitating and camouflaging the organised sexual abuse of children and the serious harm of such abuse. However, this literature lacks a theoretical framework that might provide an alternative to the medicalised model of "paedophilia" that has marginalised the issue of organised abuse. Personal experience and the life course of the individual survivor has been the primary focus of the literature written by both survivors and therapists, who share, after all, an interest in the practicalities of survival and treatment. As a result, this literature employs a highly individualistic lens on the phenomenon of organised abuse, typically emphasising mental illness whilst overlooking the social and structural determinants of the conduct of victims or perpetrators.

My purpose in this chapter is threefold. Firstly, I provide an overview of the theoretical conceptualisations of organised abuse that have been developed primarily by mental health workers who take disclosures of organised abuse seriously. Secondly, I highlight how the psychological and individualistic focus of this literature has distorted conceptualisations of organised abuse and inhibited workers from

developing evidence-based understandings of organised abuse. Finally, I explore sociological conceptualisations of sexual violence in order to identify an alternative theoretical basis for research into organised abuse. In particular, I draw on the critical theories of practice that were developed by Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1979) and extended to the study of gender and violence by Connell (1987) and others (Liddle 1993; Messerschmidt 1993; Cossins 2000). Utilising their work, I propose a theoretical approach to organised abuse that is based on the construction of power relations through social practices, embodied experiences and gendered dispositions. Through such a model, I propose to study organised abuse in terms of the practices that constitute it, and the contexts that it takes place in, as an alternative to the individualised, medical behavioural models of sexual abuse. The theoretical positions and arguments of those researchers who do not consider disclosures of organised abuse to be credible will be considered in more detail in the following chapter.

Attempts to theorise organised abuse

As a field of inquiry and professional practice, organised abuse involves a multiplicity of agencies and workers with a multiplicity of views on how to address the needs of victims and how to interpret their disclosures. Much of the available literature is focused on ritualistic abuse, possibly because these clients present with clinically challenging traumatic and dissociative symptoms (Sinason 1994; Ross 1995; Fraser 1997a) and they disclose the most severe experiences of violence (Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996). This literature overlaps with the body of clinical literature and research on dissociative spectrum disorders, particularly dissociative identity disorder (DID)[7],

[7] Dissociative identity disorder (DID) (formerly known as multiple personality disorder) is a complex, chronic mental illness characerised by the presence of multiple, alternating self-states, personalities or identities (known as 'alters' in much of the psychological literature) as well as recurrent amnesia for

that has developed since the 1980s (Kluft, Braun & Sachs 1984; Fraser 1990; Mollon 1996). A significant proportion of people with histories of organised and ritualistic abuse have a diagnosis of DID (Noblitt & Perskin 2000) and, correspondingly, a significant minority of people (between 4.5 and 8.0%) in treatment for a dissociative disorder report a history of ritualistic abuse (Coons 1997; Putnam 1997). Much of the mental health literature that addresses the treatment of clients who disclose organised abuse has emphasised the importance of, in Middleton and Butler's (1995: 356) terms, the "the need for care in not going beyond the data"; that is, avoiding firm conclusions about organised and ritualistic abuse without strong evidence. For example, the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation, the global leader in the treatment of the mental health consequences of severe child abuse, has remained carefully agnostic on the subject of ritualistic abuse, preferring to focus on the development of general treatment guidelines (e.g. International Society for the Study of Dissociation, Chu et al. 2005).

Nonetheless, it is clear that organised and ritualistic abuse remains a serious and ongoing concern for mental health workers, a significant minority of whom report encountering a client reporting such a history during their career (Andrews, Morton, Bekerian, Brewin, Davis & Mollon 1995; Bottoms, Shaver & Goodman 1996; Schmuttermaier & Veno 1999). A range of workers have reported contact with children and adults reporting histories of organised abuse, including:

- child protection workers (Doran 1994; Goddard 1994)

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current and/or past events (Kluft 1996; Loewenstein 1996; International Society for the Study of Dissociation, Chu et al. 2005). DID develops as a response to chronic and overwhelming trauma exposure in childhood, including organised abuse (Ross 1995; Mollon 1996; Sinason 2002).

- domestic violence workers (Rowden-Johnson 2003; Cooper 2004; Cooper, Anaf & Bowden 2006)
- general practitioners (Jonker-Bakker & Jonker 1991; Jonker & Jonker-Bakker 1997)
- foster carers (Kelsall, 1994; Cairns, 2000; Scott, 2001)
- nurses (Sarson & MacDonald 2008)
- paediatricians (Spensley 1992; Hobbs & Wynne 1994; Buck 2008)
- psychiatrists (Ehrensaft 1992; Goodwin 1994; Rockwell 1994)
- psychoanalysts (Casement 1994; Perlman 1995; Stack 2002)
- psychotherapists (Gould 1987; Hudson 1991)
- school teachers (Hayden 1991)
- sexual assault workers (Scott 1998; Schmuttermaier & Veno 1999; Campbell 2002)
- and social workers (Dawson & Johnston 1989, 30 March; Wood 1990; Lunn 1991).

This work typically emphasises the shock experienced by workers who encounter a case of organised abuse, and the difficulties they face in meeting the complex needs of clients with histories of organised abuse. In publishing their experiences, many of these workers have sought to raise community awareness of the seriousness of organised abuse. The translation of the "inner world" of organised abuse into the object of public debate has not been a straightforward matter. One of the key challenges that has faced advocates for survivors of organised abuse is how to make sense out of lives in which multiple forms, contexts and perpetrators of abuse cluster and intersect in complex and sometimes bewildering ways. Such extreme forms of

violence have deleterious mental health consequences, and the coherence of eyewitness testimony of organised abuse appears to decline according to the seriousness of the violence disclosed by the victim. Politicising such narratives, Clapton (1993) suggests, has necessarily required considerable intervention and interlocution by workers, in the form of highlighting particular commonalities and advancing particular explanations.

I am a member of a two organisations committed to advancing the wellbeing of victims of sexual abuse and organised abuse in Australia and internationally, Adults Surviving Child Abuse and the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation. Whilst many of my fellow members are mental health workers and social workers, my background is in social research and public policy. Over the last five years, I have become concerned about models of organised abuse that emerge from the published literature and from within informal discussions that I have observed between survivors and health workers. Whilst most workers in the area are aware of the limits of naturalistic data on organised abuse gathered through clinical work (e.g. Fraser 1997c), a number of therapists have certainly "gone beyond the data" as they intuit, from the presentations and disclosures of clients with histories of organised abuse, the existence of a variety of criminal organisations. In these models, unfounded presumptions about the motivations of perpetrators abound. For example, Lacter (2008) proposes a distinction between "satanic groups" and "abusive witchcraft", Becker (2008) distinguishes between "satanic ritual abuse", "Gnostic" abuse, "child pornography" groups, "religious sects" and "fascist groups" and Noblitt and Perskin (2000) distinguish between "destructive religious cults", abusive "fraternal organisations", "destructive political cults", "organised crime groups",

"government and intelligence-related cults" and "experimental destructive cults". These typologies have a late-19th-century Frazerian *Golden Bough* quality to them, as therapists have catalogued the abusive practices disclosed by their clients, categorised them, and hypothesised the existence of various groups and cults based on these categories. The likelihood that these typologies are accurate is undermined by the proliferation of very dissimilar typologies and their lack of reproducibility. Therapists are clearly seeing very different patterns of reports arising in their treatment of clients with histories of organised abuse, which reflect of the diversity of abusive groups, the different lenses through which therapists approach their clients' disclosures, or both.

Whilst the labels may vary, these various typologies of organised abuse share a common behavioural model, in which the abusive practices of perpetrators, including sadistic and ritualistic abuse, are characterised as purposive actions undertaken with the intention of inducing particular psychological effects in victimised children, in particular, a mechanical reaction by which the child unconditionally obeys the abuser. Therapists and researchers have argued that this obedience is then exploited by the perpetrator in their pursuit of sexual pleasure and profit (e.g. Hudson 1990; McFadyen, Hanks & James 1993; Pooley & Wood 1994), or, as some Christian authors have claimed, in the efforts of the group to reproduce a deviant belief system (e.g. Boyd 1991; Core & Harrison 1991). The ritualistic and sadistic practices that have been observed in organised abuse are thus explained as calculated strategies that are undertaken by groups who possess foreknowledge of the likely psychological consequences of their conduct. Such a mode of explanation is inherently individualistic, privileging the psychological impacts of organised abuse (such as

dissociation) whilst ignoring the social contexts and significance of abuse and violence as social practices.

Moreover, such an individualistic model cannot explain the similarities in reports of organised abuse around the world. For example, if ritualistic abuse is being employed as a deliberate strategy by abusive groups because it is effective in inculcating dissociative states in children, as claimed by Noblitt and Perskin (2000), then who is teaching this strategy to abusive groups located in far-flung corners of the globe? Accordingly, some psychologists have speculated on the existence of an international network of sexually abusive groups. For example, psychologist Pamela Hudson argues:

> It would seem to me that since children quite literally all over the world are independently disclosing very specific details of quite bizarre abuse – details they could not possibly have fantasised – either we have a massive international conspiracy of toddlers or else there's some form of intelligent adult organisation involved (Hudson in Tate 1991: 1).

This approach infers a degree of cooperation between abusers that has left clinicians vulnerable to the charge of "conspiracy theory". Those advancing such a charge include Loftus (1995), Ofshe and Watters (1996) and Frankfurter (2006). Such a criticism fails to acknowledge that the driving force behind the argument of Hudson and others is emotional and contextual, rather than logical. Bourdieu (1979: 58) refers to such apparently conspiratorial arguments as "affective quasi-systematization", a unitary outlook on the social world whose "unifying principle" is emotional rather than rational.

For both survivors and clinicians, organised abuse is only grasped through its manifestations; that is, instances of abuse, stalking and terrorisation, and their emotional and physical consequences. The overarching structure and dynamics of organised abuse are bound to escape both the survivor, who is absorbed with the difficulties of living, and the clinician, whose primary focus is on supporting their distressed client. In his analysis of the discursive construction of ritualistic abuse, Summit (1994: 5) argues that, for some clinicians as well as survivors, organised abuse has become central to the experience of *systemic* abuse and invalidation:

> Once you believe it [ritualistic abuse], you tend to become a zealot in the eyes of others. Once you have been discredited by more 'reasonable' peers, you get marked further and further into an in-group of believers who have lost the support and the restraint of these more reasonable (or less experienced) colleagues.
>
> You begin to think that society is unable to cope with something like this, and you begin to imagine that this kind of group sadistic behaviour represents an unchecked and insidious, limitless kind of evil. You begin to believe that it must have existed for all time, that it must permeate society, that it infiltrates governments, local police, local authorities and respected public figures.

Thus, the concrete inequalities of public policies and the criminal justice system that fail to address the needs of victims of sexual violence can become conflated with the trauma of organised abuse itself. These experiences of abuse and invalidation, whilst diverse, have a coherent and methodical quality to them. Many survivors and advocates, like Hudson, have argued that only an "intelligent organisation" could be

responsible for such a situation. Such an explanation has dovetailed with the ideological biases of the religious agencies that have become involved on the treatment of ritualistic abuse, which has given religious or spiritual explanations of ritualistic abuse a resonance even amongst some secular workers. Accordingly, some authors have speculated that ritualistic abuse is evidence of a global conspiracy of sexual abusers (e.g. Core & Harrison 1991; Hammond 1992; Spensley 1992) whereas others imply that the reproduction of particular forms of conduct (such as ritualistic abuse) in different countries is suggestive of, if not *prima facie* evidence for, collusion and conspiracy (e.g. Raschke 1990; Boyd 1991; Katchen 1992).

Fraser (1997b: xiv) provides a note of caution, explaining that whilst it is relatively easy to "comment on the naïveté of those grappling with this issue" during the 1980s and early 1990s, "it is very difficult to actually face a new and urgent phenomenon and deal with it, but not fully understand it, while managing distressed and confused patients and their families". Since the mid-1990s, most of the literature on organised abuse has explicitly rejected claims of global conspiracies, and employed psychodynamic (rather than mechanistic) models of behaviour (e.g. Bibby 1996; Mollon 1996; Sinason 2002). Nonetheless, authors are frequently at a loss to explain the international commonalities of specific ritualistic and sadistic behaviours in organised abuse. The substantiation of ritualistic abuse in investigations into organised abuse, such the cases of Fred and Mary West in Britain and the Dutroux case in Belgium, provides general support for disclosures of organised abuse (Fraser 1997b; Kelly 1998), as do less high-profile convictions in Europe and throughout North America (Tate 1994; van der Hart, Boon & Heitmajer Jansen 1997; Noblitt & Perskin 2000). However, the questions raised by the similarities between these cases

still remain. Why is there an association, internationally, between the practices of ritualistic abuse and child sexual exploitation? Is there a common set of torture techniques being employed in organised abuse, and, if so, why? Is it possible for abusive groups to rape and murder children and women in developed countries without being identified by the authorities? More often than not, the position of clinicians who take disclosures of organised abuse seriously is one of bewildered credulity. In the following section, I explore how sexual violence has been conceptualised in the social sciences, and begin to build a firmer theoretical basis for the study of organised abuse than the model currently offered by the literature.

Theorising sexual violence

There is a parallel between the dilemmas faced by advocates for survivors of organised abuse and the difficulties faced by the women's movement in the 1970s and 1980s. In battered women's shelters and sexual assault services, feminist workers were the first to encounter and document the totality of men's violence against women and children. In the late 1970s, some radical feminists argued that men represented a united political bloc who had consciously adopted violence as a purposive strategy in the perpetuation of female subordination (for an overview of these claims, see Messerschmidt 1993: 39 - 50). Whilst the identification of the role of violence in the patterning of gender relations is an important insight, Connell (1987: 215) notes "[t]he notion of a collective project [of oppression] is not easy to get clear, except in the all-too-easy form of a conspiracy." Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985: 552) argued that the link established by radical feminists between men's practices of violence and the social structures of masculine domination presumed a high degree of intentionality and awareness on the part of individual men, who were characterised as "agents of patriarchy". "The overall relation between men and women", they suggested, "is not a

confrontation between homogenous, undifferentiated blocs" (Carrigan, Connell et al. 1985: 590). The authors advocated a "new sociology of masculinity" that moved beyond the determinism of structural or biological accounts of gender "roles" and the voluntarism of the radical feminist critiques of male violence. Their approach also acknowledged that individual men often do not practise violence and indeed may see violence as counter to men's interests or to their own personal interests as men.

Drawing on Giddens' (1979) and Bourdieu's (1977) theories of practice, Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985) proposed that male domination represents a historically contingent, but enduring, patterning of gender relations. Whilst this patterning is institutionalised through the collective practices of the state, the workplace, schools and the family, it is embodied by men in their everyday lives, and experienced as a constitutive force in their interpersonal and sexual relations. This model was subsequently expanded by Connell (1987; 2000; 2005), as well as Hearn (1987; 1998), Messerschmidt (1993; 1997) and others, into a body of work called "critical studies of men" (CSM) (Connell, Hearn & Kimmel 2005). Their work was part of a broader shift in sociological thought towards a symbolic interactionist view of gender as a situated accomplishment (West & Zimmerman 1987) and performance (Butler 1990) achieved through social interaction. "When persons 'do gender', they engage in on-going interactional processes in which they invoke, construct and enact dichotomous images of two genders" (Gilgun & McLeod 1999: 170 - 71). In CSM, particular patterns of men's behaviour such as sexual violence are made explicable according to the hegemonic patterning of social practice by the internalised ideals of the gender order. This is an approach that has been productively incorporated into the study of a diverse body of subjects, from education (e.g. Poynting & Donaldson 2005)

to media analysis (e.g. Hanke 1990) and the health sciences (e.g. Oliffe 2005). One of the key contributions of critical masculinity theory has been to the study of crime. Theorists aligned with CSM, such as Messerschmidt (1993; 1997; 2000), have called attention to the gendered nature of crime, and proposed that the disproportionate participation of men in a range of violent and criminal practices can be explained in terms of men's efforts to embody and reproduce hegemonic ideals of masculinity. Gendered theories of practice have also been applied to the study of sexual abuse (Frosh 1987; Liddle 1993; Cossins 2000).

A range of researchers have noted the similarities between reports of organised abuse, and reports of sexual violence historically (Hill & Goodwin 1989; Goodwin 1994), cross-culturally (Noblitt & Perskin 2000) and in contemporary settings such as armed conflicts (Golston 1993b; Golston 1993a; Kelly 2000). Understanding the polymorphous and sadistic nature of sexual abuse in organised contexts requires, according to Kelly (1998), a rejection of the distinctions and categories that dominate the literature on sexual offences. Kelly (1998) proposes a connective model of analysis to "limit the extent to which individual cases could be constructed as aberrant atrocities; instead locating them at the extreme end of a continuum, with a variety of links to the more mundane, everyday abuses which countless women and girls endure". Given the documented similarities between reports of organised abuse in diverse contexts, it would seem that the capacity to identify the underlying factors and social processes that prompt the development of sexually abusive groups in a range of circumstances should be one of the primary criteria for a credible theoretical model of organised abuse. The theory of practice developed within CSM provides a mode of explanation for sexual violence that moves away from the organised abuse literature's

speculation on some kind of "generative nucleus" (or primary cause) and instead opens a lens through which to explore the possibility that organised abuse may be an emergent practice within the social order. Connell's (in Messerschmidt 1993: xi) suggestion that "[A] great deal of crime makes sense only when it is seen as a resource for the making of gender, and in most cases, that means it is a strategy of masculinity" resonates strongly with recent research on organised abuse such as Scott's (2001) life history work with survivors of ritualistic abuse. Her study suggests that abusive groups are characterised by patterns of male domination and female subordination (see also Sarson & MacDonald 2008). In the following section, I explore the applicability of the theories of practice proffered by CSM to the study of organised abuse. There is a diverse body of empirical and theoretical studies that pertain to CSM and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a full overview of CSM with all its theoretical permutations. Instead, I will begin by summarising the existing work on sexual abuse within CSM, before identifying the relevance of such work to organised abuse.

Critical masculinity studies and sexual abuse

A key concept for the critical studies of men has been the notion of "hegemonic masculinity", defined by Connell (2005: 77) "as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women)." Hegemonic masculinity is a "culturally idealised form" of masculinity that is both a "personal and a collective project", emphasising aggression, dominance, heterosexual performance and homophobia as the natural, ordinary and normal state of a man (Donaldson 1993). It is an ideal that describes the lives of very few men and is often based on fictional ideals portrayed and embodied

by actors and sport stars. Nonetheless, it represents a pervasive patterning of gender relations that many men are complicit in. According to critical masculinity theorists such as Connell (2005) and Messerschmidt (1993), violent and coercive forms of masculine subjectivity and practice develop through the patterning of object-choice, desire and desirability within gender relations. Connell (1987: 83) argues that male bodies and sexualities are objects *and* agents of gender relations:

> My male body does not confer masculinity on me; it receives masculinity (or some fragment thereof) as its social definition. Nor is my sexuality the eruption of the natural; it too is part of a social process … The body, without ceasing to be the body, is taken in hand and transformed in social practice.

In his exploration of "the physical sense of genderedness", or how gender is produced through social practice and experienced through bodily sensation, Connell (1987: 84) highlights how the institutional regulation of social practices (such as participation in sport for boys) and social expectations *vis à vis* sexual practice creates a "physical sense of maleness" that "grows through a personal history of social practice, a life-history-in-society". Hegemonic masculinity becomes "naturalised", therefore, not only through the promulgation of particular attitudes and beliefs, but through a disciplining of the body within the gender order and through the consequent experience of that gendered body in sport, in sex, and everyday life. Connell (2005: 231) labels these practices "bodily reflexive practices", in which "the social relations of gender are experienced in the body". In particular, the fetishising of gendered practices and relations (and their symbols e.g. high heel shoes, leather jackets) leads

to an eroticisation of male dominance and female subordination that demarcates sexuality as a powerful force in the perpetuation of oppressive gender relations.

Messerschmidt (1993) adopts the theoretical framework proposed by Connell in order to address the disproportionate participation of boys and men in violent crime. He draws on ethnographic research with young men to highlight the role of crime in the performance of masculinities, showing how different groups of young men engage in different forms of crime depending on their relative status (particularly in terms of class and ethnicity) relative to other young men. He argues that criminal activity, as a form of "doing gender", is a situated performance shaped by the access of men and boys to social and financial resources (Messerschmidt 1993: 93). Working class youth, for instance, and marginalised black youth, are more likely to resort to major acts of violence and theft as a way of asserting hegemonic masculinity in contexts of structural powerlessness. In contrast, white and middle-class teenagers may engage in minor "pranks" in order to reaffirm their identification with hegemonic masculinity but they usually avoid committing the kinds of crime that would disrupt the educational pathways that ensure them access to a respectable, well-paying professional position (Messerschmidt 1993: Chapter 4). While Messerschmidt's work illuminates the practical logic of violence for men within the prevailing gender order, his structural analysis is inadequate to explain the prevalence of men's sexual violence against women and children. His deficit model would predict that sexual violence would be more prevalent amongst socioeconomically deprived or ethnic minority communities, which is a common misconception that feminists such as Russell (1986) and Herman (1981) have been at pains to deconstruct by demonstrating the sexual violence that occurs in middle- and upper-class families.

Edwards (2006) suggests that Messerschmidt's approach, whilst providing useful tools for the analysis of the variation in, and function of, men's crime and violence, fails to explain the violence of men who are successful and privileged rather than "subordinated". This is particularly evident in Messerschmidt's (1993: 114) analysis of the "Central Park Jogger Rape" case, which he argued illustrates the manner in which multi-perpetrator rape by black youth "helps maintain and reinforce an alliance among the boys by humiliating and devaluating women, thereby strengthening the fiction of masculine power". However, Messerschmidt's analysis suggests that boys and men are most likely resort to sexual violence in contexts of disempowerment and marginalisation. His focus on the offender's race and socioeconomic background fails to acknowledge the prevalence of multi-perpetrator rape across the socioeconomic spectrum, and he downplays the "performativity" of group contexts for sexual assault. In the "Central Park" case, it has since emerged that the crime was committed by a solo offender and the convictions of the five men in the case have been vacated.

The frequency of multi-perpetrator rapes by sporting teams (O'Sullivan 1991) and fraternities (Sanday 2007) suggests that experiences of poverty and racism are not necessary precursors to multi-perpetrator rape. Indeed, a range of men may use multi-perpetrator rape as, in Messerschmidt's (1993: 116) words, "a resource for accomplishing gender and constructing a particular type of masculinity, a collective, publicly aggressive form of masculinity." Drawing on her experience as a judge who has presided over numerous cases of multi-perpetrator rape, Judge Forer (in Sanday 2007: 23) describes as "facile" the view of gang rape "as a phenomenon of the underclass". The only difference that she observed between the white, middle-class men and the impoverished black youth charged with multi-perpetrator rape that she

encountered in the courtroom was that the former have far greater resources available to them to avoid prosecution.

Jefferson (1996: 340) acknowledges the theoretical advancements made by Messerschmidt, who, he suggests, has convincingly demonstrated how violent and criminal practices are ways of "accomplishing masculinity in a context of class and race disadvantage". However, Jefferson (1996: 341) suggests that the link between masculinities and crime requires a theory of subjectivity that explains the propensity to resort to violence in some, but not all, men.

> Messerschmidt's analysis is an important clarification of which groups of men are more or less likely to rape, pimp, rob, etc.; but it never asks a second crucial question, namely, why only particular men from a given class or race background (usually only a minority) come to identify with the crime option, while others identify with other resources to accomplish their masculinity. To answer this requires incorporating a theory of subjectivity" (Jefferson 1996: 340 - 41).

Jefferson's argument relates to crimes in which men's subordinate status, according to class or race, is a significant predictor of their participation in crime, but it applies even more forcefully to crimes, such as sexual violence, in which men's class or racial status is not a significant predictor of their participation. Messerschmidt, in fact, foreshadowed a more phenomenological approach to sexual violence in his account of marital rape:

> Both battering and force-only rapists consciously choose such violent action to facilitate a patriarchal gender strategy and to protect what they view as their "essential" privileges. The resulting masculine construction is not only an exhibition of their "essential nature", but also illustrates the seductive quality of violence for displaying that "essential nature". For these men, masculine authority is quite simply expressed through the violent control of women (Messerschmidt 1993: 152).

In this excerpt, Messerschmidt suggests that sexual assault is a gender strategy that can arise intra-psychically (that is, within consciousness) through the contradictions and ambiguities within a man's perception of his "essential nature". Messerschmidt suggests that this "essential nature" is a kind of internal representation constituted by the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, although he does not explore how this representation is internalised or maintained. Messerschmidt's (1999; 2000) subsequent research with young sexual offenders develops further this psychodynamic account of sexual abuse perpetration. In this research, Messerschmidt emphasises boys' experiences of powerlessness and inadequacy within the gender patterning of hegemonic masculinities, and he analyses sexual assault as a resource that some boys draw on to overcome their subjective sense of disempowerment. In one case study, Messerschmidt (2000: 293) identifies how the boys' experience of risk, pleasure and dominance in the commission of sexually abusive acts formed the basis of what he describes as a compensatory "supermasculine" identity. The participant Sam states: "Like, well, I'm a guy. I'm supposed to have sex. I'm supposed to be like every other guy. And so I'm like them, but I'm even better than them [the popular boys] because I can manipulate. They don't get the power and the excitement [that comes with sexual abuse]" (Messerschmidt 2000: 292).

These studies provide intriguing insights into the role of fantasy and imagination in the practice of sexual violence as a gender strategy, although Messerschmidt does not elucidate further on the link between masculinity, violence and subjectivity. Moreover, his analysis rests on a deficit model in which the abuser's youth is substituted for Messerschmidt's prior emphasis on class and race. As a result, sexual abuse continues to be framed as a compensatory practice undertaken, in this instance, by adolescent boys faced with "masculinity challenges" (Messerschmidt 2000). The specificity of sexual abuse as a social practice is somewhat lost in his analysis, which conflates sexual abuse and physical abuse as resources through which some adolescent boys seek to overcome their sense of powerlessness and inadequacy. This is, I would argue, symptomatic of the lack of attention paid to men's violence within CSM more generally.

Men's violence tends to serve as a symbolic touchstone in CSM, as evidence of the inequalities of the gender order rather than a discrete set of social practices with particular meanings and significance for offenders or victims. Early in the development of CSM, Hearn (1990) identified child sexual abuse as the "unmentionable" in debates on men, masculinities and heterosexuality, and called for an analysis of masculine domination in terms of age as well as gender. His call has gone largely unheard. The 2005 *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities,* edited by Kimmel, Hearn and Connell, contains contributions from authors described by the editors as the "best-known experts" in the critical studies of men (p 2). In the entire volume, there is a single paragraph on child abuse, under the umbrella category of "other forms of male violence" (Messerschmidt 2005: 361 - 362), and no mention

of child sexual abuse. Whilst CSM provides a number of theoretical resources through which sexual abuse can by analysed and understood, as well as a number of promising studies that have opened up lines of inquiry, it does not provide a general account of sexual abuse as a widespread form of male sexual practice.

The role of subjectivity in men's practice of sexual abuse

The theoretical apparatus of CSM has generally underplayed the role of inner experience, fantasy and imagination in the men's maintenance and reproduction of power relations (Jefferson 2002). However, it would seem that this inner dimension to men's experience is crucial to explaining men's sexual violence. Unlike other forms of crime, men's sexual violence against women and children is not predicted by their socioeconomic status or other social variables, as Messerschmidt's (1993) structuralist theory presumes. Because men constitute the overwhelming majority of sexual offenders, the link between sexual abuse and the social construction of masculinity requires an understanding of how the hegemonic patterning of men's social experience shapes their inner world in ways that gives rise to a propensity for sexual abuse. Kaufman (1987; 1999) has highlighted the role of psychodynamic processes such as repression, acting out and denial in men's perpetration of violence, and how this confluence of subjective experience and social practice emerges through the structuring influence of dominant gender relations. An act of gendered violence, Kaufman (1987: 1) suggests, is "many things at once":

> At the same instant it is the individual man acting out relations of sexual power; it is the violence of a society - a hierarchical, authoritarian, sexist, class-divided, militarist, racist, impersonal, crazy society – being focused through an individual man onto an individual woman. In the psyche of the

> individual man; it might be his denial of social powerlessness through an act of aggression. In total, these acts of violence are like a ritualised acting out of our social relations of power: the dominant and the weak, the powerful and the powerless, the active and the passive … the masculine and the feminine.

Kaufman's contention that men's violence is generated within the *subjective* and *intrapsychic* conflicts that arise in the context of men's internalisations of the *social structures* of masculine domination helps to explain the ubiquity of sexual violence as a male sexual practice. Kaufman (1999: 65) notes that the images of power associated with masculinity are fundamentally "childhood pictures of omnipotence". They are, by definition, impossible to obtain. Confronted with the unattainable nature of these ideals, some men may employ violence in an attempt to regain a sense of mastery, however momentary. Thus, violence emerges as an expression of the intrapsychic conflicts that arise through men's internalisation of power relations.

Those theorists who have extended the theoretical apparatus of CSM to the study of sexual abuse have typically emphasised the internal and subjective experiences of men in the gender order as a crucial contributing factor to their sexually abusive practices. Liddle (1993: 104) argues that an adequate account of sexual abuse must "make reference to connections between child sexual abuse, gender and the social structure of affect and desire, within which a more detailed description can be given of the gendered body." Drawing on Connell's (1987) theory of "structure of cathexis" (the predominant structure through which sexual desire is socially organised in any given society) Liddle (1993: 113) proposes that child sexual abuse can be understood as the product of "a particular but contingent masculinisation of bodies". Like Kaufman, Liddle points to the perpetual instability of men's attempts to perform,

obtain and incorporate the impossible standards of hegemonic masculinity. In the context of masculine domination, the social construction, organisation and bodily inscription of male sexuality is riven by unresolvable tensions and suppressed ambiguities, giving rise to "a sort of compulsiveness about obtaining one's masculine credentials" (Liddle 1993: 116). Liddle argues that the prevailing structure of cathexis in Western society generates numerous anxieties within men over dependency, adequacy, power, success and competency, all of which are linked to sexual conquest and release. If a compulsory, aggressive heterosexuality is the "first propensity" of male sexuality incited by this structure, then Liddle suggests that child sexual abuse is the "second propensity". In his view, it is the "disturbing rendezvous" of desire, dependency and powerlessness in child sexual abuse that marks it as the practice through which some men, in particular circumstances, attempt to resolve emotional conflicts over dependency through the satisfaction of desire.

Cossins (2000: 124) also notes the correspondence of sexual practices with children with the hegemonic ideals of masculinity, since "the accomplishment of masculinity and experiences of potency are more likely to occur with those who are perceived to have less social power than the individual man in question". To account for the prevalence of sexual practices with children amongst men regardless of socioeconomic and ethnic circumstances, she develops the "power/powerlessness theory", which suggests that "different masculinities contain normative sexual elements that some men reproduce and affirm through child sex offending in cultural environments where the lives of men are characterised by varying degrees of power and powerlessness, as a result of the masculine sexual practices of other men" (2000: 147). The power/powerlessness theory synthesises the theoretical approaches of critical masculinity theory to the structural antecedents to, and the psychodynamics of,

sexual abuse, and proposes that child sexual abuse is an embodied, social practice through which some men attempt to resolve the suppressed conflicts and ambiguities that are implicit for men within the gender order. This is an analysis that "envisages structure as a fluid metaphor" in constant change and flux (Cossins 2000: 147), and therefore child sexual abuse is both a reproductive and generative practice: it not only reproduces hegemonic gender relations, it produces *specific* forms of hegemonic masculine gender identities and relations depending on the circumstances in which the practices are taking place. This is the recursive relation of social practice and social structure identified by Giddens: "[E]very act which contributes to the reproduction of a structure is also an act of production, an novel enterprise, and as such may initiate change by altering that structure at the same time it reproduces it" (Giddens 1976: 138).

Through the analyses of Kaufman (1987), Liddle (1993) and Cossins (2000), we can understand how sexual abuse expresses, for some men, their internalised representations of the gender order, and the attendant fantasies and desires that the gender order prompts within them. The notion that subjectivity emerges from within gender relations, exciting specific propensities and predispositions in individuals without necessarily determining their conduct, brings us closer to the concept of the *habitus* and the work of Bourdieu upon which much of the theoretical apparatus of CSM is based. In Bourdieu's (1977: 93 - 94) view, sexual identity is the major element of social identity, and gender is the result of a "bodily hexis", described as a "political mythology realized, *em-bodied,* turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking and thereby of *feeling and thinking".* There are striking similarities between Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *hexis* and Connell's

(1995) subsequent conceptualisation of "hegemonic masculinity" and "body reflexive practice". The key distinction is that, in CSM, the iterative relationship between social practices and gendered dispositions (a process highlighted in Connell's work on "body reflexive practice") has frequently been overlooked in favour of a more structural analysis, and this is particularly clear in the case of sexual violence. Within the theoretical apparatus of CSM, we can understand how the propensity to engage in child sexual abuse comes about through the systemic eroticisation of power relations. Accounting for the prevalence of sexual violence across boundaries of class or race, however, requires a theory of masculine subjectivity that acknowledges how power relations are internalised and reproduced within the bounds of men's inner lives, including the functions of imagination, delusion and fantasy (Liddle 1993). Sexual abuse may therefore be a compensatory practice, as highlighted by Messerschmidt (1999; 2000) but the prevalence of sexual abuse suggests that it has a more general role in constructing (and not just buttressing or propping up) masculine subjectivities.

A theoretical approach to the organised abuse of children

In the analysis of sexual abuse offered by CSM and affiliated theorists, such as Liddle (1994) and Cossins (2000), the paradigmatic incident of sexual abuse is the most common one: the victimisation of a single child by a single man. In circumstances in which one man abuses one child, the reproduction and affirmation of hegemonic masculine ideals is an internal process for the abusive man, although this process is reflective and reproductive of the wider system of gender relations. In circumstances of organised abuse, however, the perpetration of sexual abuse is not an individual experience: it is a collective one that is affirmed and intensified by the presence of other like-minded men. Moreover, organised abuse is differentiated from solo offences by the ways in which men *exchange* children and, often, women between one

another (Kelly and Regan 1995). This practice of exchange is sometimes attended by sadistic and ritualistic practices that are rarely observed in solo offences. In this section, I propose to extend the theory of sexual abuse as a gendered practice to the study of organised abuse. In order to bridge the gap between organised abuse and the current theoretical focus on solo offences, I draw on the work of Sandy (2007) and other theorists on multi-perpetrator rape to explore how theories on group sexual violence against women might be applicable to group sexual violence against children.

Cossins (2000) has argued that the complex symbolic transactions that structure sexual abuse, as a form of sexual practice, reflect institutionalised and hegemonic gender ideals that the sexual abuser shares with other men. In solo offences, the affirmation of this relationship is an experience that arises from within the psyche of the individual abuser. The child serves, in effect, as an object of symbolic "exchange" through which a man affirms his position within an imaginary masculine polity. In multi-perpetrator contexts, however, the abusive group comes to embody this imaginary polity in which men attest to and affirm the masculine performance of one another through sexually abusive acts. In her study of multi-perpetrator rapes by university fraternities, Sanday (2007: 7 - 8) provides a detailed account of the homosociality of sexual violence:

> The woman involved is a tool, an object, the centrefold around which boys both test and demonstrate their power and heterosexual desire by performing for one another. They prove their manhood on a wounded girl who is unable to protest … The event operates to glue the male group as a unified entity, and

> helps boys to make the transition to their vision of a powerful manhood – in unity against women, one against the world.

Group sexual violence emerges in this analysis as a powerful site through which the subjectivities and the worldview of men can be collectively transformed in accordance with particular, institutionalised forms of hegemonic masculinity. In organised contexts, the generative and productive capacities of sexual violence are amplified by the presence of multi-perpetrators (and, potentially, multiple victims). The fantasies of "supermasculinity" generated by sexual abuse (Messerschmidt 2000) may be shared by multiple men, and thus affirmed and intensified.

Organised abuse not only involves incidents in which multiple men abuse children, but also incidents where men provide children to other men for abuse, and this cannot be "bolted on" to a pre-existing analysis of sexual abuse in a straightforward manner. If we accept Cossins' (2000) description of structure as a fluid metaphor, then the presence of exchange in abusive groups is a transformative principle that has far-reaching implications for the analysis of organised abuse. Mauss (2000) argued that systems of reciprocal obligation and exchange are "total social facts" because they give rise to, and organise, a diverse array of seemingly unrelated social structures and practices. Systems of exchange are phenomena that take on simultaneous "juridical, economic, religious and even aesthetic and morphological" dimensions, as they create and regulate new forms of relationships and identities (Mauss, 2000: 79). In the "archaic" societies studied by Mauss, it was through the giving and receiving of symbolic objects that cordial relations are established between men, and the threat of violence dispelled. These symbolic gestures must be reciprocated. Whilst the obligation to reciprocate can create, Mauss argues, communal relations between

groups of men, there is another dimension to the obligation to reciprocate. Exchange can also be part of brutal and destructive competitions between men in the establishment and maintenance of social hierarchies. Levi-Strauss (1969: 61) drew on Mauss's theory of exchange to propose that modern societies were built upon the exchange of women as "the most precious category of goods" (1969: 61) between men. He proclaimed that marriage is the modern form, and indeed, the "archetype" of this exchange (1969: 483), and it is this exchange that "provides the means of binding men together, and of superimposing upon the natural links of kinship the henceforth artificial links – artificial in the sense that they are removed from chance encounters or the promiscuity of family life of alliance governed by rule" (1969: 483). Pateman (1988: 112) notes that, whilst Levi-Strauss writes in the "grand tradition of theoretical speculation", his work can be read as the story of the origin of "a culturally and historically specific form of social order"; that is, modern forms of patriarchy and masculine domination.

In short, the exchange of children within organised abuse may not only generate collective masculine identities and fantasies (as theorised above) but complex relations between men as well. Kelly and Regan (1995) have suggested that organised abuse is not limited to the exchange of children for sexual pleasure. Rather, such processes of exchange may also generate profit, power and prestige between groups of men, who accrue status in the process of providing children for sexual abuse with other men. However, exchange also generates hierarchies constituted by systems of obligation and competition between participant men, as well as complex subcultures with their own rules and regulations. Such acts of exchange not only find historical precedent in the traditional form of marriage, as noted by Pateman (1988), but in the

ways in which sexual violence is used symbolically by some men to affirm their bonds with one another. In the case of university fraternities analysed by Sanday (2007), women were reduced to the status of "objects" and "exchanged" between fraternity brothers in an act that Sanday (2007: 8) described as "patriarchal bonding". In Sanday's account, multi-perpetrator rape was a sexual practice through which the boys regulated their own, and one anothers, construction of masculinities. Through this shared construction and harmonisation, they experienced themselves as entering into a secret brotherhood. In this way, the abusive group sought to establish their domination not only over women, but also over subordinate (and potentially threatening) alternative forms of masculinity as embodied by men from outside the fraternity who did not share the brothers' "secret knowledge".

In the fraternities studied by Sanday (2007), prospective male members were initiated into prescribed subject positions within the fraternity's hyper-masculinist gender order through a regime of ritualistic victimisation. The "initiations" described to Sanday included animal sacrifice, being forced to drink animal blood, being smeared in vomit, being bound and gagged, being locked in coffins and other methods of torture. Sanday (2007: 148) concluded that this pattern of coercive socialisation was "part of a process designed to bring about a transformation of consciousness so that group identity and attitudes become personalised". Once they were fraternity "brothers", members frequently physically victimised one another, and collectively sexually abuse women, in a constant reaffirmation of the "gender regime" of the fraternity. A "gender regime" is the localised configuration of gender relations in a particular circumstance or institution (Connell 1987). In one fraternity, the gender regime was codified within an idiosyncratic religious framework that attributed the "secrets of the brotherhood" to

a Greek goddess. The fraternity brothers claimed that, through initiation, they had ascended to a higher state of being. The violence of initiation, and the gender regime of the fraternity, thus took on an extraordinary metaphysical significance for the brothers. As one fraternity member stated:

> Our initiation experiences and new knowledge constituted the deepest insight and a sacred revelation. It gave us a secret weapon and an invisible armour. It made us special, and it united us against the world. Now we could be the masters of life, because we knew its tiny, black, hollow core (Fraternity member quoted in Sanday 2007: 162 - 163).

It seems that the masculinities generated through abusive practices such as multi-perpetrator rape, and institutionalised within the structures of the fraternity, was so deeply experienced that it became reified, misrepresented and legitimised (or, in Bourdieu's (1977) terms, "misrecognised") as a kind of metaphysical ideal, and this process gives rise to seemingly bizarre rituals and occult beliefs. Amongst groups of men in which collective sexual violence is an institutionalised practice, it may be that acts of sexual violence may take on the social dimensions of exchange – "juridical, economic, religious and even aesthetic and morphological" – described by Mauss (2000), resulting in ritualistic behaviours and metaphysical beliefs that, from the outsider's point of view, appear bizarre and almost cult-like. Many of the features of fraternity multi-perpetrator rape described by Sanday are well-noted within organised abuse, in particular the patterning of sexual violence by ritualistic and sadistic acts. Elsewhere, Sanday (1996) has noted that libertinism, a masculine sexual philosophy formalised during the Victorian era that heralded the proliferation of pornography and

prostitution in industrialised Western countries, promoted ritualistic sexual practices and sexual violence against women. She suggests that the libertine notion of a natural and universal masculine sexual prerogative is a now hegemonic feature of gender relations. In this regard, it may be that the sociality of organised abuse (and the attendant practices of ritualistic and sadistic abuse) is not a "niche" concern limited to the study and treatment of sexual offences, but rather it is a product of the development of a historically contingent set of dominant gender relations.

Bourdieu (1977) argues that particular social contexts *tend* to reproduce particular dispositions that *tend* to reproduce particular practices. From this perspective, the organised abuse of children is related to the broader social contexts from which it emerges. However, it is through the disposition (that is, the *habitus*, "a system of durable, transposable dispositions" based on acquired schemata, sensibilities and tastes (Bourdieu 1979: viii)) in Bourdieu's work that the practices of the individual agent are linked to broader social structures. In Sanday's account, group sexual violence is a practice that can transform the disposition of participants in ways that intensify widespread cultural associations between masculinity, sexuality and violence, and thus create a sense of camaraderie or brotherhood between participants. Organised contexts can therefore create environments in which the dispositions of abusive men are transformed in ways that legitimise sexual violence, and create the potential for more extreme violence. In the fraternities studied by Sanday (2007), a florid mytho-poetic logic obscured the relation between the collective "masculine" bond experienced by the brothers and the practices of physical and sexual victimisation (of women, and of one another) through which this bond was generated. Nonetheless, understanding the origins of such practices, Bourdieu argues, "is not a

question of decoding the internal logic of a symbolism but of restoring its practical necessity by relating it to the real conditions of its genesis" (Bourdieu 1977: 114). The study of organised abuse thus requires an analysis that contextualises the abusive practices of the group within the broader "gender order" and nonetheless pays attention to the role of subjective life (imagination, fantasy, delusion) in the production of these practices.

Conclusion

Over the last thirty years, a general picture of the operations of organised groups of sexual offenders has been emerging from a range of sources. However, the disturbing implications of these reports have been considered by few outside the fields of psychology, psychiatry and social work. Those authors focusing on organised abuse have rarely drawn on theories outside the "psy" professions to develop a framework to explain organised abuse. This has resulted in a highly individualised and pathologising set of explanations for organised abuse that struggles to explain the modes of practice and belief that are reported to occur in organised abuse around the globe. Theories on the critical studies of men, and critical theories of practice in general, offer new tools to make explicable what has otherwise been considered unthinkable: the sexual abuse of children, and women, by groups of adults acting in concert.

When viewed through the gender relations framework proposed by critical masculinity theorists, "organised abuse" becomes less inscrutable. Through this lens, organised abuse involves the practice of child sexual abuse by groups of men, and sometimes women, as part of a collective and highly gendered performance. This theoretical approach foregrounds how the patterning of social institutions and

structures by hegemonic ideals of gender shapes men's inner experiences, eroticising the power differential between men, women and children. In this view, sexual abuse is a practice through which men craft a "fiction of power" (Scarry 1985) upon the body of the abused child.

This theoretical lens has not been previously applied to multi-perpetrator sexual abuse. By drawing on prior research on multi-perpetrator rape, it is possible see the symbolic functions of sexual violence in multi-perpetrator contexts. Not only does the presence of multiple abusers tend to result in increasingly sadistic forms of sexual violence, but organised sexual violence can give rise to complex masculine subcultures in which victims are reduced to the status of objects and are exchanged between abusive men. This process can give rise to florid, mytho-poetic beliefs and ritualistic practices. The practices of organised sexual violence, and the regimes of gender and power that dominate the social life of children and women, are mutually reinforcing. This necessitates a theoretical lens on organised abuse that situates it within larger questions of gender, power, and violence. The theoretical issues identified in this chapter inform the analysis of the research findings and will be returned to and explored in more detail in the analysis chapters. The centrality of gender and power to the study of organised abuse, as identified in this chapter, will also form the basis of much of the proffered critique of the existing literature in the area.

2

Organised abuse and the politics of disbelief

Although it is a relatively infrequent form of sexual abuse (Gallagher, Hughes & Parker 1996), organised abuse has been amongst the most incendiary issues in debates on child sexual abuse over the last thirty years (Hechler 1988; Brown, Scheflin & Hammond 1998; Kitzinger 2004). Since the 1980s, a diverse body of activists, journalists and academics have argued that allegations of organised abuse have no basis in fact and are evidence of the excessive zealotry of feminism and the child protection movement. Whilst this argument was first articulated by journalists and lobby groups of people accused of sexual abuse, it proved to be compelling to those social scientists with concerns about the rising prominence of child sexual abuse in public debate. By the mid-1990s, a significant body of sceptical literature, written collaboratively by social scientists and journalists, purported to expose allegations of organised abuse as evidence of "hoaxes", "moral panics", "mass hysteria" and "false memories".

In this chapter, I contextualise the debate over organised abuse within the controversies over child abuse, memory and the law that emerged throughout the

1980s and 1990s. I highlight how cases of organised abuse became flashpoints for a range of activists, journalists and researchers who sought to reinvigorate traditional concerns about women and children's testimony of sexual assault. I call this strategy "the politics of disbelief" to foreground how commonsense notions of women's and children's credibility have been mobilised and intensified in the debate over organised abuse to contest the gains of feminism and the child protection movement. As narratives of sexual violence have gained increasingly legitimacy in the public eye, it seems that organised abuse was repositioned as a new frontier of disbelief.

This chapter is not only a discursive analysis of the politics of disbelief, but also an "archaeology of silence" (Foucault 1967: xi) that looks beyond the hegemony of denial to the evidence that women and children disclosing organised abuse have been subject to serious harm. Beyond words and discourse, "a real world and real lives do exist, howsoever we interpret, construct and recycle accounts of these by a variety of symbolic means" (Stanley 1993: 214). The catchcry of the politics of disbelief is that "there is no evidence" for organised abuse. However, I demonstrate the broad-based failure of such claims-makers to engage with the available evidence, and show how their work has focused instead on inciting pejorative speculations about the character of women and children who report organised abuse and the professionals who support them.

Sexual abuse in the 20th century

The term "child sexual abuse" is a relatively recent assemblage of words, but it is the latest in a succession of attempts to describe sexual interactions between children and adults. Over the last century, these attempts have been marked by prolonged periods of silence punctuated by flurries of discourse and activity (Herman 1992; Olafson,

Corwin & Summit 1993). It was not that child sexual abuse was unspeakable per se, but rather, that some forms of child abuse are incongruous with hegemonic idealisations of fatherhood, family life, and childhood (Miller 1983). In particular, evidence of incest has traditionally been ignored, or "put into discourse" (Foucault 1979: 11) in such a way as to minimise the prevalence and harms of sexual abuse within the family. Feminist histories of incest, such as those proffered by Rush (1980), Herman (1981) and Nelson (1982), were careful to distinguish the historical specificity of incest from child sexual assault as a whole, since it is clear that incest has proven troubling in a manner that extra-familial sexual abuse has not.

The prevalence and harms of incest were documented throughout the 19th century and early 20th century by such diverse bodies as French medical authorities (Masson 1984), American "child saving" charities (Gordon 1989) and British sexual health clinics (Smart 1999) but their findings made little impact upon the treatment of disturbed children or adults (Olafson, Corwin et al. 1993). After identifying incest as the "source of the Nile" of adult psychopathology in the 1890s, Freud would infamously retract his theory of childhood seduction a few years later, on the basis that "'it was hardly credible that perverted acts against children were so general" (Freud quoted in Herman 1981: 10). Miller (1988) argues Freud's retraction was not, in and of itself, a significant catalyst for the denial of incest, but rather, psychoanalysis offered a powerful new language of denial within a pre-existing culture of disbelief. For much of the 20th century, medical discourses of harm had little space for incest, commonly minimising the prevalence and harms of the crime, or else blaming the offence on "colluding" mothers or "seductive" children (Devlin 2005). This pattern of denial and minimisation was also a feature of professional

responses to domestic violence, marital rape and other forms of violence committed by men in the context of interpersonal relations with women and children (Gordon 1989).

Whilst men's sexual and physical violence within the family has historically been minimised or ignored, the dangers of assault by strangers has often been exaggerated, and to great political effect. In 1896, Kraft-Ebing created the medical category of "paedophilia" to account for some men's practices of child sexual abuse. Throughout the 20th century, the psychiatric construct of the "paedophile" has been systematically conflated with homosexuality, although this was not an aspect of Kraft-Ebing's original formulation (Freedman 1987; Fejes 2000). The displacement of the burden of sexual abuse from the home to the streets, and from families to the extra-familial "paedophile", reflected the systemic structural arrangements that granted men considerable power over children and wives. For example, in her review of British venereal disease clinics from the 1920s, Smart (1999) noted the dilemmas faced by clinicians treating a child with a sexually transmitted infection, since doctors could not examine a child for rape, or treat her for a sexually transmitted infection, without the express consent of her father. Raising a suspicion of abuse was unlikely to result in a positive outcome for the child, whose father could withhold medical treatment at any time, and even where a conviction for rape was obtained, could force the child to live with him on his release from prison (Smart 2000: 60). Abusive men have long enjoyed virtual impunity for physical and sexual offences against wives and children (Scutt 1997), whilst sexual violence has been misconstrued as an activity committed overwhelmingly by threatening strangers (Smart 2000).

From the 1960s, the efforts of the women's movement, in coalition with a range of professionals and researchers, began challenging the legal and social impunity enjoyed by men who beat or raped their wives and/or children. Women began writing autobiographical accounts of sexual abuse and incest (Armstrong 1978; Allen 1980; Brady 1980), Kempe (1978) published the first medical paper documenting the serious harms of incest, and the first prevalence studies on child sexual abuse were soon to follow (Finkelhor 1979; Fritz, Stoll & Wagner 1981; Russell 1983; Finkelhor 1984). Feminism brokered new forms of care and support for abused women and children, including rape crisis services and domestic violence shelters (Driver & Droison 1989; Farr 1991). A growing number of medical and psychological professionals began to consider the family home, and intimate relationships, as potential sites of serious and life-threatening harm (Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegmueller & Silver 1962; Kempe 1978).

By the early 1980s, significant gains had been made in relation to the public awareness of incest, sexual abuse, sexual assault and domestic violence(Herman 1981; Russell 1984; Finkelhor & Yllö 1985). These diverse changes in scientific, political and social thought deeply influenced child protection practice within social work and psychology (Finkelhor 1994), mental health care provision to adults (Breckenridge & Carmody 1992) and legislative frameworks relating to child abuse more broadly. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, mandatory child abuse reporting laws had been implemented in many countries across the Western world, which, combined with increased community awareness of child abuse, drove an unprecedented increase in child abuse notifications (Hutchison 1993; Ainsworth

2002). Child protection services were making incursions into private homes on an unprecedented scale (Breckenridge & Carmody 1992).

Kitzinger (2001) argues that there is an iterative relationship between the dominant discourses about abuse circulating through the media and community, and the manner in which survivors of abuse conceptualise and articulate their abusive experiences. For much of the 20th century, sexual abuse was conceptualised of as a vice engaged in by both victim and perpetrator rather than as a morally wrong and criminal act on behalf of the perpetrator (Smart 2000). As a result, sexually abused women and children were provided with few opportunities to frame their victimisation as a wrong committed against them (Kitzinger 2004: Chapter 3). The broad-based agenda for change that emerged in the 1980s around the issue of sexual abuse dramatically expanded the testimonial opportunities available to abused women and children. "Indeed, it was almost as if the dam of cultural suppression and denial of child sexual abuse had burst, as memoirs, novels, and films began chronicling stories of child sexual abuse" (Henderson 1997: 696). For the first time, disclosures of sexual abuse were being considered authentic representations of lived experience, not only in therapeutic contexts, but in the media (Beckett 1996) and the criminal justice system (Dallam 2001). As the testimonial opportunities of survivors of abuse began to expand, unexpected dimensions to men's violence began emerging. In particular, adults and children began disclosing experiences of organised, sadistic and sometimes ritualistic abuse by groups of people (Kagy 1986; Gould 1987; Hechler 1988). They exhibited a range of complex needs that taxed the limits of the nascent mental health response to sexual abuse. This was a group of people for whom the link between

adequate care, disclosure and wellbeing was both crucial and particularly tenuous (Scott 2001).

The libertine backlash

In the early 1980s, a political movement developed in the United States, comprised of people who objected to the rise in state-sponsored interventions in family life and adult-child relations. This movement was largely a piecemeal and ineffectual effort until the first prosecutions for organised abuse provided them with a key opportunity to centralise and politically mobilise (Armstrong 1994; Faller 2004). In 1983, several children living in a trailer park in Jordan, Minnesota, made corroborating allegations of sexual abuse against an unrelated man, and then against their parents. The man confessed and identified a number of the children's parents as perpetrators. Of the twenty-nine children reporting sexual abuse in the case, ten showed medical signs of sexual assault, with one nine-year old girl incontinent of urine and faeces (Tamarkin 1994b: 16). Twenty-four adults were charged with child abuse but only three went to trial. The mental health of the child witnesses deteriorated under the stress of testifying and the legal proceedings resulted in two acquittals and one conviction (Hechler 1988).

All other charges were dropped and the Federal Bureau of Investigations was called in once the complainant children began speaking about the manufacture of child pornography, as well as ritualistic experiences involving animal sacrifice, the eating and drinking of human waste, and the murder of a baby (Hechler 1988). No criminal charges resulted from the FBI investigation, and in his review of the case, the Attorney General noted that the initial investigation by the local police and county attorney was so poor that it had destroyed the opportunity to fully investigate the

children's allegations (Hechler 1988). A special commission later reviewed the conduct of the county attorney in dismissing charges against the remaining defendants, noting that it was likely that other charges would have been successfully prosecuted (Hechler 1988). The bizarre allegations of the children, the ambiguities of the investigation and the unsuccessful prosecutions were widely covered by the media. The fact that a number of accused parents confessed to sexually abusing their children, received immunity, and underwent treatment for sexual abuse, whilst parental rights for six other children in the case were terminated by the state, was not widely reported (Hechler 1988; Faller 2004).

In 1984, the community group Victims of Child Abuse Laws (or VOCAL) was formed following the collapse of the Jordan case. VOCAL was formed by two parents acquitted in the case and Dr Ralph Underwager, a Lutheran minister and psychologist who acted as an expert witness in their defence. In court, Underwager had claimed that the children's disclosures of organised abuse were the product of brainwashing by social workers, who, he testified, used Communist thought reform techniques to force the child witnesses to invent allegations against their parents (Summit 1994b: 14). Ostensibly, VOCAL was formed to advocate for the rights of parents with complaints against the child protection system, but VOCAL also provided a platform for the advancement of Underwager's radical libertine position on child sexual abuse.

Underwager believed that "[p]aedophiles need to become more positive and make the claim that paedophilia is an acceptable expression of God's will for love and unity among human beings" (Lightfoot 1993) and he suggested that "hysteria" about child sexual abuse was being fuelled by women's jealousy of the physical intimacy between men and boys (Geraci 1993). Within a year of its establishment, VOCAL claimed to

have three thousand members in one hundred chapters across forty states (Meinert 1985). Whether this figure was accurate or not, VOCAL provided an expansive platform for the promulgation of a position on child sexual abuse that harked back to views more prevalent in the early-to-mid twentieth century: that child sexual abuse is infrequent and not necessarily harmful, that children cannot tell the difference between fact and fantasy, and that social workers and others who investigate child abuse are obsessive and hysterical (e.g. Underwager & Wakefield 1990; Wakefield & Underwager 1994).

In the 1980s, the arguments of researchers and therapists that sexual abuse was widespread and harmful were being widely promulgated in the news media but it was by no means a consensus position (Beckett 1996). Underwager's libertine view of sexual abuse was shared by a range of journalists, lawyers and academics who argued that laws against child sexual abuse constituted an unreasonable and unnecessary imposition on the expression of male sexuality. Professor LeRoy Schultz, a featured speaker at VOCAL's first two national conferences, contested the notion that children cannot consent to sex with adults. His published work characterised sex between men and boys as "constructive, nurturing or neutral" (Schultz 1982) and claimed that the "greatest potential damage" to a sexually abused child came not from the abusive adult, but rather from others who "use" the child to prosecute the abuser (Schultz 1972: 50). Eberle and Eberle (1986; 1993) were also invited speakers at VOCAL conferences. In their written work, they deduced from investigations of organised and ritualistic abuse the existence of a feminist conspiracy that was suppressing the natural expression of affection between men and children, including non-violent sexual abuse which they called "benevolent pedophilia".

Authors who adopted a libertine stance on child sexual abuse frequently characterised themselves as a misunderstood minority combating the forces of puritinism and conservatism. For some of these authors, however, their high-minded rhetoric concealed serious conflicts of interest. The Eberles had previously manufactured and distributed child pornography during the 1970s prior to its criminalisation (Laurino 1988: 92). In 1990, the lawyer Lawrence Stanley received the 1989 Free Press Association Investigative Reporting Award for his *Playboy* article, "The Child Pornography Myth", in which he contested the claim that that child pornography was widespread or harmful (Stanley 1988). Stanley is currently in jail for child sex offences, and various investigations and court actions against him in a number of countries have revealed his membership of pro-paedophile organizations as well as his involvement in the production and distribution of child pornography (for a newspaper report, see McCain 2002).

Media coverage of sexual abuse in the early 1980s was focused, primarily, on the manner in which the harmful nature of child sexual abuse had been historically denied and silenced (Beckett 1996). Organised abuse featured powerfully in the efforts of VOCAL and affiliated researchers and journalists to give salience to a message about child abuse that was otherwise running counter to dominant media themes. Following the Jordan investigation, cases of organised abuse began emerging throughout North America in which children described groups of perpetrators engaging in strange ritual practices. Ritualistic abuse is associated with the extremes of child maltreatment but it is not a ubiquitous feature of cases of organised abuse (Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996). Nonetheless, allegations of ritualistic abuse have proven to be the most controversial aspect of cases of organised abuse. Public anxiety that an innocent adult could be subject to prosecution for sexual abuse on the basis of a child's whim or

confabulation was inflamed by the bizarre nature of children's allegations in organised abuse cases. Armstrong (1994: 101) argues that these cases offered VOCAL "a dramatic entrance onstage":

> [B]ecause of the outsize nature of the allegations that emerged, they offered a forum in which to make credible the suggestion that, hey, this stuff was *incredible.* They were the perfect place in which to propose the notion of child sexual abuse as *preposterous.*

VOCAL claimed that allegations of ritualistic abuse were evidence that children's testimony of sexual abuse is without credibility (Marron 1987) and that social workers and psychologists were caught up in a "moral panic" about child abuse (Wakefield & Underwager 1994). These views were promoted by Underwager in a prolific campaign in defence of people accused of sexual abuse and organised abuse. By the late 1980s, Underwager had testified for the defence in more than 200 sexual abuse cases in the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (Grant 1994), 28 of which involved allegations of organised and ritualistic abuse (Marron 1987). Underwager's popularity as a media commentator and defence expert for people accused of sexual abuse continued undiminished despite a report by Salter (1988), a clinical psychologist and researcher who specialises in the field of sexual abuse. In a review of the written work and public statements of Underwager, Salter found over 100 examples of misrepresentation and fabrication of research findings and sources in Underwager's work.

One of the longest-running and most expensive US American child molestation cases of the 1980s, the McMartin preschool case, proved to be the tipping point for the

credibility of ritualistic abuse allegations. The legal proceedings in the case were so protracted and the allegations so extreme that the failure to secure convictions in the case became, in the public eye, emblematic of allegations of ritualistic abuse as a whole. The McMartin case began in 1983 with a small number of complaints of sexual abuse at a local preschool in California. The investigation quickly snowballed, and over 360 former and current students, ranging from toddlers to teenagers, disclosed sexual and ritualistic abuse by the operators and teachers of the preschool over fifteen years (Gorney 1988). Some children spoke of a set of strange and baffling experiences in which they were taken underground from the preschool through a set of tunnels to a waiting car, and driven to other locations in the area. They spoke of being subjected to sexually exploitative acts by groups of people, including ritualistic practices. The investigation resulted in numerous charges against the owners and teachers of the preschool and seven years of legal proceedings, including a prolonged preliminary hearing, and two criminal trials, both of which resulted in hung juries. In court, defence attorneys highlighted allegations of ritualistic abuse contained in the child's statements, although these allegations did not constitute the basis for the charges against the accused (Summit 1994b: 12). There was a high rate of attrition amongst the child witnesses, who underwent extensive and hostile cross-examination for up to three weeks by multiple lawyers representing multiple defendants (Schindehette 1990).

Underwager was engaged as a defence expert for the McMartin defendants, and the defence strategy included a broad campaign of media advocacy. Prior to the trial, the defendants purchased advertising space in local newspapers, likening the trial to the Salem witch hunts and emphasising the ritualistic abuse detailed in the children's

witness statements (Timnik 1985). As legal proceedings became protracted and convoluted, the hyperbolic rhetoric of the defence ("witch trials" and "mass hysteria") became influential within media coverage of organised abuse specifically, and sexual abuse more generally. In 1990, when a mistrial was declared in the first McMartin trial, an opinion piece in the *Wall Street Journal* called for the child complainants, and their parents, to be charged with perjury and jailed (Cockburn 1990). When a mistrial was declared in the second trial, a media furore ensured, in which the McMartin case was recast as a symptom of a widespread "public hysteria" about child sexual abuse (Reinhold 1990) amidst a "witch-hunt atmosphere" (Felten 1991).

The metaphor of the "witch hunt" would become a mainstay of sceptical academic commentary on ritualistic abuse (e.g. Loftus 1995; Sebald 1995; Henningsen 1996; Victor 1998), casting men as victimised innocents and women and children as their lying persecutors. The McMartin case featured in this literature as a touchstone but the material aspects of the case, such as the medical evidence of sexual abuse amongst children at the preschool (Lindsay 1985; Rust 1985 - 1986), the archeological dig that corroborated the children's allegations of a room and tunnels under the school (Summit 1994a), a five-year cohort study of the children that documented long-term psychological harm (Kelley, Brant & Waterman 1993; Waterman, Kelly, Olivieri & McCord 1993), and the closure of nearby preschools in which children also disclosed organised and ritualistic abuse (Gorney 1988), were quickly forgotten.

For example, in Nathan's (1991) account, the McMartin case was sparked by the psychotic delusions of Judy Johnson, the mother of a child at the preschool, who later drank herself to death during the trial. Nathan claimed that Johnson's initial complaint

of sexual abuse was motivated by schizophrenia[8] but it was taken seriously by credulous investigators. In Nathan's view, investigators then disseminated Johnson's claims to other parents at the preschool, catalysing a pattern of contamination and panic that resulted in a range of baseless charges against the operators of the McMartin preschool. Nathan then expanded her argument to suggest that such patterns of contamination and hysteria were not limited to the McMartin case, but instead were the primacy source for all allegations of ritualistic abuse in North America. Whilst she conceded that children began disclosing ritualistic abuse years before widespread news coverage or public awareness of the phenomena, she suggests that the publication of a 1980 autobiography that including details of ritualistic abuse, *Michelle Remembers*, was the likely source of these allegations.

Precisely how numerous toddlers throughout North America came to memorise and reproduce the contents of this book goes unexamined in Nathan's account. However, her explanation was unconcerned with such practical or material concerns. Her argument at the time (and much of her work since) has been primarily concerned with what she calls sex "panics", which involve, she claims, the mass displacement of public anxiety about modern life onto men who are made into "scapegoats" through false sexual abuse allegations.[9] In her work, she does not so much engage with empirical data on sexual violence as contest its veracity (usually by impugning the

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[8] After the committal hearing, and prior to the first trial, Johnson suffered a psychotic breakdown and died from alcohol poisoning (Chambers 1986).

[9] e.g. "Periodically, the United States quakes with child sex abuse panic when society gets especially spooked about shifting ethnic relations, changing gender roles, advancing technology and the meanness of life limned by laissez-faire and consumerism. These days we live in war culture, market culture and the culture of self-possession and fame. Teens are recruited to Iraq via a military which touts itself as "an army of one". Images of their bodies are used in ads to sell things, even as they are denied education about sex. Amid this comes the dazzle and anarchy of the Internet – a medium that parents barely grasp but which youth wear like skin and e-paper with e-portraits – digital images of themselves clothed, partially clothed, and unclothed. They want to be American Idols. Who can blame them? Fifteen-year-olds desire our vote and will post sex pix of themselves to earn it. We stew about this. We panic. We want scapegoats" (Nathan 2007: 1).

motives of researchers who gather such data[10]) and then propose an alternative explanation that concords with her pre-existing "sex panic" hypothesis. A consistent theme in her work is the defence of men's sexuality against what she views as authoritarian, moralising forces.

In his account of the McMartin case, Summit (1994a), a psychotherapist and consultant on the case, calls attention to the factual material that Nathan neglected. He notes that Judy Johnson's son's initial presenting issue was persistent bleeding from the rectum, and, at the time of his complaint of sexual abuse at the preschool, several other children from the preschool were already in treatment having made similar disclosures. He points out that "The extensive criminal investigation and the evidence selected by prosecutors for the McMartin trials had nothing to do with information gained from Judy or her child". She was an "outsider" to the local community who was not in a position to "galvanize parental group hysteria". Nonetheless, the deterioration of her mental health over the course of the trial, and her eventual death, made her "fair game for the posthumous recreation as the cause of it all":

> For the successful theory of the defence and in the legacy of two mistrials she became the icon of hysterical misconception, the Chicken Little of a bird-brained gaggle of malicious parents. For those who knew her through those harried years she was the perfect embodiment of a sad truth: the individual who is suspicious enough to uncover a perfectly hidden evil will have to shoulder the blame for the chaos that is bound to follow.

[10] For example, Nathan (2006) has campaigned for the rights of journalists to access child pornography, on the basis that government-funded and vetted researchers cannot be trusted to tell the truth about child abuse images (see also Malek 2006; Wakeman 2007). Nathan (2006) claims that "lives are being ruined" by false claims about the prevalence of child pornography, and that journalists "must look at illegal material" otherwise "the government can use our fear and loathing of kiddie porn to make false political claims."

Despite its factual errors, Nathan's account of the McMartin case proved very influential in subsequent media coverage on allegations of ritualistic abuse. It seems that the McMartin case formed the basis of what Kitzinger (2000) has called a "media template", in which a media narrative around a high-profile event becomes the dominant frame on all subsequent coverage of similar events. For example, in 1990, the Australian Press Council upheld a complaint made regarding an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that described an investigation into sexual abuse at a Sydney day-care centre, which included allegations of ritualistic abuse, as a "witch hunt" (see Adjudication no 443 of the Australian Press Council). Like Nathan, the Australian journalists in question falsely claimed that a mother of one of the children disclosing abuse was schizophrenic, and the Press Council stated "this error was central to the idea of doubt and mismanagement of prosecution being developed in the article". The Press Council concluded "that the case put by the article for largely dismissing concern over children's reports of abuse was greatly overstated."

The controversy over the McMartin case would continue in the United States throughout much of the 1990s but it was something of a passing curiosity in Australia. Unlike the United States, there was no organised counter-movement in Australia against child protection services. The stricter rules of admissibility in Australian courts prevented professional defence experts from contesting eyewitness evidence in sexual abuse cases in the same manner as Underwager.[11] Australian police and the criminal justice system have been reluctant to proceed with prosecutions regarding allegations of organised abuse, citing the inherently unreliable nature of children's testimony (Carroll 1992; Hughes 2004). However, a number of substantiated cases of

[11] Underwager appeared in a committal hearing in Sydney in the day care centre sexual abuse case mentioned above. Although his evidence in the hearing was arguably influential in the decision not to proceed to trial, he has never taken the witness stand in criminal proceedings in Australia.

organised and ritualistic abuse (that is, the cases involved prosecutions on child sex charges that included testimony of organised abuse, or the organised abuse was substantiated by the authorities) were covered with relatively little fanfare by the Australian media during the early-to-mid 1990s (e.g. Hole 1989; Humphries 1991; Milburn 1992; Wilson 1992; Ogg 1996).

In response to the needs of clients with histories of extreme abuse, psychotherapists formed the Australian Association of Multiple Personality and Dissociation. A self-help network of adult survivors of organised and ritualistic abuse, called Ritual Abuse Survivors and Supporters, also formed during this period (RASS 1992). Since the early 1990s, sexual assault and domestic violence workers have been developing training and information packages on organised and ritualistic abuse (NSW Sexual Assault Committee 1994), while lobbying state governments for a response to the issue (Sydney Rape Crisis Centre 1995; Standing Committee on Social Issues 1996; ACT Community Law Reform Committee 1997; Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity 2002). In 1993, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of the Child, reporting on his mission to Australia, noted the emergence of reports of organised and ritualistic abuse, and recommended that the Australian government remain "on guard" (Muntarbhorn 1993: 14).

Tabloid sociology: Journalistic and academic portrayals of "satanic ritual abuse"

Throughout the 1980s, as an increasing number of adults began pursuing civil litigation claiming to have been sexually abused as children, a group of psychologists and sociologists began to supplement their academic incomes by acting as professional defence experts. In court, they claimed that the recollections of adults complaining of child sexual abuse were false or untrustworthy (Dallam 2001). In the

early 1990s, these professional defence experts collaborated with parents accused of sexual abuse to found the False Memory Syndrome Foundation (FMSF). The FMSF was initially based in North America but chapters were quickly established in the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. The FMSF's primary goal was to advocate on behalf of parents accused of child sexual abuse by their adult children, but the Foundation also became an important resource centre for people accused of sexual abuse by minors. With a number of prominent professional defence experts and other academics on their "professional advisory board", the Foundation claimed to have discovered a new psychiatric condition called "False Memory Syndrome" at "epidemic proportions" (Pope 1996: 957). This "syndrome" was based on the contention first proposed by Loftus (with journalist Katherine Ketcham) (1991) that many adults who recalled incidents of child sexual abuse after a period of prolonged amnesia were suffering from "false memories" produced by confabulation and malpractice by treating mental health professionals. The FMSF also drew on the writings of Ofshe, who, in collaboration with journalist Ethan Watters, characterised psychotherapy as a high-pressure environment in which clinicians maliciously subjected clients to coercive techniques that created "false memories" of child sexual abuse (Ofshe & Watters 1993a).

Some academics appear to have aligned themselves with the FMSF in the belief that allegations of sexual abuse constituted a political or ideological attack on men. In interview, a male member of the advisory board for the British False Memory Society expressed his concern about the "feminist agenda" to Kitzinger (1998: 192):

> I think we are very sensitive, males … not just me, all of us, I think we're all very sensitive now … about the feminist agenda. I can't believe that this

> assembly of figures [the BFMS advisory board] of figures of approximately twenty men and one woman isn't something to do with men if you like rushing in to protect their image … I think it's a defensive operation.

The academics and clinicians associated with the "false memory" movement coined novel psychological and sociological terms to re-articulate traditional concerns about women and children's testimony (Gaarder 2000). They then used these arguments in their testimony in the courtroom, as well as in the academic and popular press. Despite repeated disavowals by mental health and legal professionals, "false memory syndrome" enjoyed a remarkable influence in the courts, the media and amongst some academics throughout the 1990s. Today, it remains part of the popular, psychiatric and legal lexicon of scepticism regarding women and children's testimony of sexual abuse (Leavitt 2002; Raitt & Zeedyk 2003).

This period heralded a significant blurring of the boundaries between sensationalist journalism and sociological writing on child abuse more generally, and organised abuse specifically (Atmore 1997). The FMSF lacked the empirical evidence to prove that, as they claimed, many allegations of sexual abuse were the product of cognitive errors and widespread psychotherapeutic malpractice. Instead, they fed media controversies over allegations of ritualistic abuse in general in an attempt to suggest the existence of an "epidemic" of suggestibility and unprofessional conduct in the mental health and child protection sectors. Kluft (1997: 33) provides an excellent summary of this strategy:

> Groups purporting to speak for those who claim to have been falsely accused of child abuse have found it useful to exploit the skepticism surrounding alleged ritualized abuse as a starting point for their efforts to demolish the credibility of

those making more mundane accusations. Their strategy has seemed geared to finding a straw-man target and then initiating a domino effect that serves their agenda.

Loftus (1997) provides a typical example of how allegations of organised abuse were framed by "false memory" advocates in order to promote disbelief about women's allegations of sexual abuse. In an article in a non-academic magazine on the damage that false allegations of sexual abuse cause to accused men, Loftus referred to allegations of organised and ritualistic abuse as "satanic ritual abuse". She claimed that such cases invariably "involve allegations of highly bizarre and heinous criminal ritual abuse in the context of an alleged vast, covert network of highly organised, transgenerational satanic cults." Loftus then linked "satanic ritual abuse" to allegations of cannibalism and human sacrifice, and then states "[I]f therapists believe these type of claims, it seems likely that they would be even more likely to believe the less aggravated claims involving ordinary child sexual abuse." In this article, Loftus draws on allegations of organised and ritualistic abuse to create an effective straw man in "satanic ritual abuse". She leads the reader to assume that such disclosures invariably involve conspiracy theories and unbelievable allegations. She suggests mental health professionals are naturally credulous of such narratives, and directs the reader towards a set of pejorative conclusions regarding the credibility of psychotherapeutic practice, and the accuracy of sexual abuse testimony. Though she claims to be a scientist with an interest in social justice, Loftus's argument here is bereft of relevant and generalisable research findings. Instead, her argument rests on her construction and deployment of "satanic ritual abuse" in a manner that imputes a range of pejorative and empirically unfounded characteristics to psychotherapists and their clients. Moreover, the article was published in a populist magazine and took a

sensationalist style, which Loftus nonetheless sought to legitimise by highlighting her role as an academic and researcher.

The evidence base for organised and ritualistic abuse in the 1980s and 1990s was complex, including confessions, convictions, and the documentation of physical and psychological trauma amongst children and adults disclosing organised victimization. Evidence of organised and ritualistic abuse pertained to multiple successful prosecutions for child sex offences in North America, Europe and Australia (Tate 1994; Newton 1996). Two cohort studies of children disclosing organised and ritualistic abuse documented long-term and serious psychological harm consonant with their disclosures (Waterman, Kelly et al. 1993; Jonker & Jonker-Bakker 1997). Adults reporting histories of organised abuse presented in mental health care settings with similar psychological disorders to those observed in children reporting organised abuse (Coleman 1994; Lawrence, Cozolino & Foy 1995; Scott 1998). This evidence does not lend itself to the simplistic characterisations of the kind advanced by Loftus. However, during the 1990s, populist books and magazine articles provided an important forum in which empirically unfounded claims about ritualistic abuse could be made and disseminated, and then uncritically imported into academic literature, which gave these rhetorical claims even greater ideological power (Atmore 1997). Loftus and Ofshe's initial publications on "false memories" were co-written with journalists (Loftus & Ketcham 1991; Loftus & Ketcham 1994; Ofshe & Watters 1996). These publications were populist, tabloid-style books that did not conform to academic standards of evidence or argument, but were instead based on personal anecdotes, reflections and generalisations rather than empirical research.

Loftus and Ofshe drew on their experiences as professional defence experts to make strong and extremely sceptical claims about organised and ritualistic abuse, although the fact that they have both worked for private clients accused of these crimes raises questions regarding a conflict of interest. This was a very lucrative activity. For example, in 2005, Loftus' hourly rate as a defence expert was US$450, and she earned $11 000 in a single case (Messenger 2005). In 2006, during the preliminary hearings in *US vs Libby,* Loftus estimated that she had testified between 260 and 270 times in the previous 30 years, almost always as a defence witness.[12] The relationship between their academic theories on ritualistic abuse and their courtroom testimony was circular, since they justified their theories in scholarly publications by referencing cases they had worked on and presenting the arguments of the defence as their own (Olio & Cornell 1998; Leavitt 2002). Freyd and Quina (2000: 111) note that:

> psychologists serving as expert witnesses are often paid an hourly rate that far exceeds payment from other employment. Expert witnesses may find that they have a financial interest in the outcome of the research that they conduct insofar as their research findings influence their employability as expert witnesses. This creates a potential conflict of interest for the researcher who is also an expert witness.

Ofshe and Loftus have since been accused of making a range of unfounded claims and misrepresentations in populist books (see Butler 1995; Henderson 1997; Olio & Cornell 1998; Crook & Dean 1999a; Crook & Dean 1999b; Whitfield 2001). The ways in which they characterise people disclosing sexual abuse and the therapists who treat them has been described as scornful and bellicose (Henderson 1997; Gaarder

[12] The relevant exchange is recorded in "Transcript of Proceedings Before the Honorable Reggie B. Walton," *U.S. v. Libby,* No. CR 05-394 (D.C.C., 26 Oct. 2006), A.M. session, pp. 14 – 15.

2000). Nonetheless, journalists and academics alike cited Loftus and Ofshe's populist work to justify pejorative characterisations of cases of ritualistic abuse, *ad infinitum,* resulting in a pseudo-academic discourse of scorn and scepticism spanning popular and academic media.

Campbell (2003) proposed that the "false memory" account of sexual abuse had resonance because it drew on medical and legal traditions that have constructed women and children as incredible witnesses, and their testimony as lacking in value. Within the contemporary renaissance of these traditions, however, allegations of ritualistic abuse served as a focal point through which these attitudes could be reasserted with a particular intensity. Research suggests that, during the 1990s, journalists and editors were incredulous of the rising prominence of reports of sexual abuse, and organised abuse in particular (Skidmore 1998; Kitzinger 2004). This resulted in a disproportionate emphasis on "false allegations" of sexual abuse (Beckett 1996) and the development of a homogenising media-driven construction of cases of organised abuse as paradigmatic examples of false allegations and false memories (Kitzinger 2004). Sensationalist stereotypes of cases of organised abuse were then transposed onto emerging child protection controversies, and utilised to retrospectively re-envision past cases in terms of false allegations, suggestibility and coercion (Scott 2001).

> Press and television reports recorded the bewildered protests of ordinary people who claimed they had been falsely accused. Reports focused on the anguish of those whose children had been taken into care, challenged the validity of diagnostic techniques, vilified the professionals involved and presented a

> disturbing picture of children being cajoled and bullied into making false 'confessions' (Kitzinger 2004: 55).

Across the popular and academic media, cases of ritualistic abuse were described as the infectious symptoms of an impending social crisis. Ritualistic abuse allegations were referred to as "rashes" (Nathan 1990; Guilliatt 1995b; Goodlin 2002; Radford 2004), "weeds" or "welters" (Guilliatt 1996a), "mediasomatic ailments" (Nesvisky 1997), "psychosomatic illness" (Ross 1999), a "hysterical epidemic" (Showalter 1997) or simply the "madness in the air" (Appleyard 1998). Popular and academic literature suggested that allegations of ritualistic abuse were a particularly American form of hysteria that had since been "spread" around the world by American child abuse experts through their appearances at international conferences and training workshops (Waterhouse 1991; Witham 1994; Guilliatt 1996a; Frankfurter 2001). In this overblown narrative of infection and confabulation, women and children disclosing organised and ritualistic abuse were stigmatised as the carriers of a dangerous sociogenic illness, whilst professionals in the field of child abuse were characterised as the primary mode of transmission.

Abiding within "false memory" discourse was a profound antipathy to children and women who made allegations of sexual abuse against men, and this antipathy was blatantly visible in relation to organised abuse. For example, Underwager, claimed that, when asked questions about sexual abuse, children would inevitably invent an account of organised and ritualistic abuse because the "fantasy world of children is filled with mayhem, murder, cannibalism, blood and gore" (Struck 1986). In Underwager's account, all forensic interviews with children provoked their sadistic sexual fantasy life, creating "psychotic" and sexualised children who were "ruined for

life" (Duncan 1987; Smith 1992). In 1988, as an expert defence witness in a committal hearing in Sydney involving allegations of ritualistic abuse, Underwager argued that the child witnesses in the case had been turned into "monsters" by the investigation process (Hoyle & Glover 1989). Thus, the historical archetype of the knowing child, forever "ruined" by their association with sex, took on strange and demonic proportions. A similar argument was advanced by Ofshe, who suggested that, when women are encouraged to free-associate, they would naturally fantasise scenarios of brutal rape and ritual sadism (Ofshe & Watters 1993a; Ofshe & Watters 1996). Just as Underwager described child protection investigations as making "monsters" out of children, so Ofshe referred to psychotherapy as "making monsters" out of women. No longer was a woman or child an empty vessel who could easily imagine, or be convinced to believe, that they were abused. In public discourse, there were dark inferences that there was something malevolent within women and children driving cases of organised abuse specifically and allegations of sexual abuse more generally.

The construction and deployment of "satanic ritual abuse"

Scott (2001) argues that the deployment of the term "satanic ritual abuse" was a deliberate strategy undertaken by "false memory" activists and journalists sympathetic to the "false memory" movement in an attempt to portray cases of ritualistic abuse in a salacious light. In doing so, they were able to shift the debate of organised abuse from the terrain of child welfare, reframing the issue in terms of the susceptibility of women and children to coercive influence. The emphasis on *satanic* ritual abuse was a particularly important part of this strategy, characterising child protection workers and therapists as "anti-satanists" (Bromley 1991a; La Fontaine 1998; Best 2001) on a "witch hunt" (Guilliatt 1996b; Nathan & Snedeker 1996; Wright 2006). Thus, the

professions of psychotherapy and social work were depicted as harbouring ideological zealots who were conducting a personal vendetta against mythologised evils. This compelling but illusory narrative resonated strongly with a generation of social scientists raised on the cautionary tales of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and the excesses of McCarthyism. Through the straw man of "satanic ritual abuse", a range of academics and journalists constructed an elaborate fantasy in which they positioned themselves as progressive and enlightened rationalists arrayed against an imaginary coalition of feminists and Christian fundamentalists united in hysteria and sexual puritanism. This was a rhetorical strategy that substantively broadened the field of people evincing scepticism over women and children's testimony of organised abuse from the core of the "false memory" movement to include a range of progressive and relatively liberal commentators.

In the early-to-mid 1990s, a burgeoning social science literature emerged based on the proposition that allegations of "satanic ritual abuse" were the product of a range of claims makers who believed in vast conspiracies:

> The belief that diabolic satanic cults pose a real and present threat to this nation's children has been growing since the early 1980s when the first allegations of what has come to be termed satanic ritual abuse came to public attention (de Young 1994: 389).

> The current revival of popular belief in the existence of an international conspiratorial satanic blood cult has been promoted primarily by public declarations of alleged cult survivors, whose testimonies have been accredited by authoritative mental health professionals (Mulhern 1991: 145).

> Many claims makers assert that Satanists have infiltrated all the institutions of society in order to subvert society, create chaos, and thus promote their belief in Satan worship (Victor 1993: 4).

What is suprising about these extraordinary claims is that they are presented *prima facie.* The authors do not provide evidence, either anecdotal or qualitative, in the form of sources or quotes, or quantitative, in the form of survey results that the contexts in which claims of ritualistic abuse were arising (for instance, social work or mental health practice) were characterised by concern over "diabolic satanic cults" or "international conspiratorial satanic blood cults". Such concerns have traditionally been the province of the evangelical Christian far right and there is no evidence to suggest that these concerns are shared by, or have penetrated, the mental health or child protection sector to any significant degree, or that such concerns would inevitably result in workers forcing children or adults to concoct fantastic tales of sexual abuse.

It is in fact extremely difficult to find published material by mental health workers or social workers who evince such concerns (although see Core & Harrison 1991 for an example). The briefest purview of the literature written by authors who take disclosures of ritualistic abuse seriously indicate that the overwhelming majority of these authors are searching for an evidence-based and logical rationale for the phenomenon.

> The reports of my patients appear genuine and I am treating them very seriously. I do not, however, have any direct evidence that the stories are true. I am a

> therapist and my job is to treat whether or not the memories are in fact as recalled (Fraser 1990: 57).
>
> To understand this area we must maintain scientific skepticism and clinical empathy. We need to avoid the hysteria of overreaction and the denial mechanisms triggered when one is confronted with horrible material (Sakheim & Devine 1992: xii).
>
> I feel that the psychotherapist has to maintain an open mind about what is real and what is phantasy – holding reconstructive pictures in mind only as tentative hypothesis, ever ready to be revised as further material emerges. In this respect, my attitude to accounts of ritual abuse is no different to that towards any other childhood experience (Mollon 1994: 146).

In order to justify characterising therapists and social workers as "conspiracy theorists", sceptical authors typically quoted one another's unsourced claims, or else they simply presented their own claims as fact. For instance, Bromley's (1991b) account of the "unsubstantiated claims" of proponents of the "satanism scare" is, ironically, without substantiation. He posits the existence of an "Anti-Satanism Movement" (ASM) without identifying the constituent groups or members. He then claims that the ASM believes in a "tightly organised, powerful, infallible network that leaves no evidence of its large-scale abduction, breeding and human sacrifice activity", but he does not explain how he came to this conclusion (1991: 61). The reader is left with the impression that therapists and social workers who take allegations of ritualistic abuse seriously are primarily motivated by concerns over Satanism, rather than concerns over the health and wellbeing of their clients.

Other sceptics pointed to concerns about Satanism amongst fringe groups or in the mass media as evidence of a "moral panic" in the mental health or child protection sectors (which, they claimed, resulted in workers coercing clients into fabricating false allegations of abuse). For example, Jenkins and Maier-Katkin (1992) and de Young (1994) documented the fringe claims of Christian fundamentalists regarding Satanism, and then claimed, without substantiation, that such beliefs are held by everyone who believes that ritualistic abuse is a serious issue. Mulhern's (1991) argument that cases of ritualistic abuse were the product of "conspiracy theories" is based on her analysis of conferences and seminars in which ritualistic abuse was discussed. The reader is provided with few excerpts or quotes from speakers as evidence of their belief in such "conspiracy theories"; instead, Mulhern's analysis turns on her pejorative references to speakers and attendees. Where adults with histories of ritualistic abuse speak publicly, they are on the "satanic lecture circuit" (p 157). When a child protection conference includes a presentation on ritualistic abuse, it is an "SRA training conference" (p 159). Audience members become "SRA trainees" (p 161). When a world-renowned child protection expert, Professor Roland Summit, argued that allegations of ritualistic abuse should be taken seriously, Mulhern claims that Summit believes in "real brainwashing satanic cults" (p 163) although Summit makes no such claim. In this way, workers with clients with histories of organised abuse are "othered" as a homogenous group of irrational zealots.

A number of studies have been published that purport to demonstrate the falsity of allegations of ritualistic abuse. Typically, the ecological validity of these studies is based on the presumption that social workers, therapists and other investigating professionals are leading children and adults to fabricate false allegations of sexual

abuse. Researchers thus employ methodologies that attempt to reproduce the supposedly coercive environments that they presume are giving rise to allegations of ritualistic abuse. In effect, the relationships between their hypotheses, their methodologies and their conclusions are uncomfortably circular, since their methodologies appear designed to establish (rather than test) their hypotheses. Moreover, their methodologies are frequently idiosyncratic and lack reproducibility. Such limitations were rarely recognised by the researchers, who were at pains to characterise their findings as definitive and generalisable.

For example, in 1992, Ofshe published the results of an *ad hoc* "experiment" with a man on remand who had confessed to organised and ritualistic abuse. In this "experiment", Ofshe (1992) attempted to convince the man that he had committed acts of abuse that he had not confessed to. When the man acknowledged that he may have engaged in the conduct suggested by Ofshe, Ofshe concluded that the man's entire confession was false and the result of "false memories" implanted by the police. Although Ofshe's methods were questioned and his conclusions rejected by the trial judge in the case (Olio & Cornell 1998), Ofshe has subsequently popularised his findings in a range of publications (Ofshe & Watters 1993a; Ofshe & Watters 1996; Leo & Ofshe 1998). Noting that the man in question confessed and was convicted of child sex offences, Olio and Cornell (1998) have described Ofshe's account of the case as an "academic urban legend".

The politics of disbelief has not only shaped the conduct of empirical research, but it has resulted in a systematic distortion of the available evidence. Sceptical authors frequently have claimed that there is no evidence of a "satanic conspiracy", from

which they deduce there is no evidence of ritualistic abuse. However, it seems that the latter claim does not inevitably proceed from the former. Numerous people have been convicted on charges involving allegations of organised and ritualistic abuse around the world, for example, Paul Ingram (Olio & Cornell 1998), Frank Fuster (Hollingsworth 1986), Louis Lamonica, Robbin Lamonica and Austin Bernard (Mitchell 2009) in North America, Peter Ellis in New Zealand (Eichelbaum 2001), Scott Gozenton (Humphries 1991) and Robert Fletcher (Petraitis & O'Connor 1999) in Australia, Marc Dutroux in Belgium and Rosemary West in England (Kelly 1998). Newtown (1996) collected data on fifty-eight investigations in North America and Europe involving allegations of organised and ritualistic abuse, and he found that 144 defendants were sentenced, with 80 guilty or no-contest pleas. Rates of reversals or acquittals were average for these child sex offences. Whilst a small number of failed prosecutions or acquittals have been highlighted by sceptics as symptomatic of the weakness of the evidence in allegations of ritualistic abuse, it seems that the progress of allegations of organised and ritualistic abuse through the courts has not been that dissimilar from other allegations of sexual abuse.

A frequently cited source for the claim that there is no evidence of ritualistic abuse is a report written by an FBI "behavioural specialist", Kenneth Lanning, in 1992. In the report, Lanning (1992a) raises concerns regarding some of the claims being made by people marketing "anti-satanism" seminars to law enforcement officers in the wake of allegations of ritualistic abuse. Tamarkin (1994a: 22) agrees that these seminars "missed the boat" on ritualistic abuse:

> Instead of teaching investigators about sadistic sexual abuse, instead of teaching them about the various sexual paraphilias and sexual fetishes, the seminars dispensed handouts on occult holidays, occult signs and symbols, samples of Runic language [sic], readings by Anton LaVey, excerpts from Alistair Crowley, etc. The crime focus was lost amid hysteria over the phenomenon.

In his report, Lanning refuted the conspiracy theories promoted by the seminars of a national or international "satanic" cult involving child abuse and murder, although he acknowledged that some "multi-dimensional child sex rings" practise ritualistic and sadistic forms of sexual abuse (see also Lanning 1992b). He encouraged law enforcement officers to maintain an objective and evidence-based stance in relation to the investigation of ritualistic crimes. This is good advice. However, in his report Lanning appears to presume that the claims being made by people marketing "law enforcement seminars" are representative of all people who take ritualistic abuse seriously.

> Until hard evidence is obtained and corroborated, the public should not be frightened into believing that babies are being bred and eaten, that 50,000 missing children are being murdered in human sacrifices, or that satanists are taking over America's day care centers or institutions.

Lanning may have had reasonable grounds for concern in relation to the claims being made in "law enforcement seminars" but he had neither the experience, nor the evidence, to conflate these claims with concerns over ritualistic abuse in general.

Although his report refers to his work on "hundreds" of cases, he later amended this claim, stating that he had never interviewed an adult or a child alleging ritualistic abuse (Bennetts 1993). After making enquiries to the FBI, Noblitt and Perskin (2000) found no evidence that Lanning was personally involved in the study or investigation of any allegations of ritualistic abuse reported to the agency. They noted that, contrary to Lanning's claim, some FBI investigations into allegations of ritualistic abuse have, in fact, resulted in convictions (Noblitt and Perskin 2000: 179).

Not only is Lanning's report widely cited in sceptical literature, but it is frequently *mis*-cited in a manner designed to inflate the authority of the report. Lanning's original report was published by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, a private non-profit organisation that provides services for families and professionals to prevent child sexual abuse. The report was not commissioned by the FBI nor was it based on empirical research, case review or professional experience of ritualistic abuse investigations. Nonetheless, De Young (1996: 243) claims that Lanning personally investigated allegations of ritualistic abuse on behalf of the FBI. Bottoms, Shaver and Goodman (1996: 23) also attribute claims made in Lanning's report to "the FBI". Victor (1998: 546) refers to the paper as an "official government report" published by the "Behavioural Science Unit of the FBI". McNally (2007: 284) calls Lanning the "FBI's primary investigator" into allegations of ritualistic abuse. None of these attributions are correct. The importance of Lanning's report (and his status as an FBI agent) to sceptical literature on ritualistic abuse is further illustrated by the tendency of some authors to embellish the report with fictitious details designed to lend it an air of definitive authority. For example, Ofshe and Watters (1993b) claim that Lanning's report was based on a review of "three hundred cases"

of ritualistic abuse. Lief and Fetkewic (1997: 303) announce "When SRA is involved, we know ipso facto that the accusations are untrue" due to "a decade of study by the FBI". Wright (2006: 121) calls the report "a comprehensive, eight-year study by the FBI on occult crime".

In fact, it seems that the issue of ritualistic abuse has *not* been investigated or reviewed by strategic law enforcement agencies in the thorough manner that many sceptics have claimed. Tamarkin (1994b: 15) noted: "We tend to have stereotypical visions of the FBI always getting their man, of the police always investigating cases. That is not the case. The reality is that these cases [ritualistic abuse] are not only a low priority, but federally, they are a non-priority." This is supported by Gould (1995: 332), a therapist who has worked with adults and children with histories of ritualistic abuse, who states:

> I am personally aware of scores of adult survivors with memories of ritual crimes (contrary to the position of many sceptics, most of these memories were retrieved without hypnosis or chemical assistance; many were in fact retrieved outside of therapy) who have made concerted attempts to bring these crimes to the attention of law enforcement. The vast majority of these survivor accounts have been met with absolute indifference and inaction on the part of local law enforcement agencies, as well as the FBI, who might reasonably be expected to investigate the charges of interstate trafficking of children and pornography which are commonly made by ritual abuse survivors.

Put simply, the claim that cases of ritualistic abuse in the United States have been investigated *en masse* and the forensic bases of these investigations have been systematically analysed and found to lack substance is false. Not only have sceptics repeatedly made this false claim, but they appear to have invented fictitious details in order to bolster it.

It is clear that many academics and journalists approached the subject of ritualistic abuse with an extremely high index of suspicion over such allegations, and concern over the credibility of women and children's testimony of sexual abuse more generally. They subsequently reproduced and justified this suspicion in their written work, construing their own entrenched biases in terms of the available data through deductive reasoning or a kind of collective, self-referential speculation. The intensity of this circular relation was such that the relevant evidence has been misrepresented or ignored. This generated a milieu of disbelief that directly influenced the conduct of empirical research undertaken by academics who, ostensibly, appear unsympathetic to the "false memory" cause. For example, in the early 1990s the anthropologist La Fontaine was engaged by the British government to examine claims of ritualistic abuse. Her study drew on a data set of child protection cases involving allegations of organised abuse compiled by Gallagher and colleagues as part of the Organised Abuse Project (see Gallagher 1998b). In a report (1994), and subsequent book (1998), La Fontaine concluded that allegations children being sexually abused by groups of people engaged in devil worship have no basis in fact.

Whilst La Fontaine's study is frequently referred to as definitive proof of the falsity of disclosures of ritualistic abuse in England, what is rarely noted is that La Fontaine's

analysis departs in several aspects from that of Gallagher (1994; 1996; 1998b; 2000; 2001), who headed the research team that gathered the data set. La Fontaine's definition of "ritualistic abuse" was limited to ritualistic forms of abuse that, it could be determined, were undertaken with the intention of worshipping Satan. Although sixty-eight cases in her sample included allegations of organised and ritualistic abuse, she determined that the ritualistic abuse could not be attributed to devil worship, and on this basis she concluded there was no evidence of "satanic cults" abusing children. In her own work, as well as in other's interpretations of her work, the claim that "there is no satanic conspiracy to abuse children" blurred into the proposition "there is no evidence of ritualistic abuse".

Moreover, it is unclear why the question of "satanic conspiracy theories" was the primary object of her analysis. Like other sceptics, La Fontaine appears to have presumed that investigating professionals in cases of ritualistic abuse were motivated by their concerns about "satanic cults", and that these concerns necessarily compromised their professional competency. In his review of her book, Gallagher (1998a) rejects La Fontaine's imputation that all investigations into allegations of ritualistic abuse were carried out incompetently when this is not supported by the data available to her:

> It is indisputable that mistakes were made, but when she refers to children being "detained", to "threats to remove children into care", to individuals motivated by "ambition" and "self-esteem", and, at one point, to "Nazis", one suspects that she has lost some of her objectivity.

In this review, Gallagher questions why La Fontaine leads the reader to believe that, where allegations of ritualistic abuse were unsubstantiated in child protection investigations, the allegations were spurious. In the data set supplied to La Fontaine, he noted that investigators had substantiated organised abuse and/or sexual abuse in cases in which they had been unable to substantiate ritualistic abuse. Gallagher (2000) subsequently published case reviews of two child protection investigations that involved evidence of rituals and Satanism, demonstrating that, contrary to La Fontaine's claims, agency workers were pragmatic and grounded in their approach to such cases.

At the time, a number of therapists and clinicians expressed concern about La Fontaine's failure to engage children or adults with histories of organised abuse in her work (Kitzinger 1995). In an interview, La Fontaine suggested that any attempt to recruit adult survivors with histories of organised abuse would produce a "completely unrepresentative sample of self-selected volunteers" who are, most likely, "victims of therapy" rather than of the abuse that they recall (Kitzinger 1995). In contrast, she believed that child protection data would provide a nationally representative sample of organised abuse cases from which to make generalisable conclusions. In fact, it is well recognised that child protection data does not provide a representative sample of incidents of child abuse (Bromfield & Higgins 2003). Kitzinger (1995) suggests that La Fontaine's highly sceptical view of qualitative fieldwork is somewhat unusual for an anthropologist.

In the same year that La Fontaine published her findings, a book on ritualistic abuse in the United Kingdom was published detailing the experiences of forty social service

and health professionals with child and adult clients with histories of ritualistic abuse (Sinason 1994). The editor, Sinason, stated "I find it disturbing that one anthropologist's readings of transcripts are being listened to more seriously than 40 senior health service clinicians" (Kitzinger 1995) . Consonant with the "false memory" literature of the time, La Fontaine's argument rests on her theory that allegations of ritualistic abuse are the product of "contamination" (Scott 2001). The strength of her conviction in this hypothesis was such that her analysis departs in substantive ways from best practice in child protection. Where La Fontaine found allegations of ritualistic abuse clustering in particular cities, she argued that this was evidence that law enforcement and police in that area were predisposed to incorrectly interpreting disclosures of sexual abuse as ritualistic abuse. In contrast, social workers and law enforcement officers have argued that geographic clusterings of allegations of organised abuse and ritualistic abuse are evidence that such allegations are credible and should be taken seriously (Bibby 1996; Gaspar 1996).

In effect, whilst the stereotype of the "satanic ritual abuse" survivor first emerged from lobby groups of people accused of sexual abuse, it became a rallying cry for a diverse body of journalists and researchers with concerns about child abuse, memory and the law. The "false memory" account of ritualistic abuse would prove compelling for researchers who were looking to make sense out of new, and uncomfortable, evidence about the extremes of interpersonal violence against children. It is significant that the most vocal sceptics in the academic literature on organised abuse possessed no training or background in mental health, social work or forensic investigations, and they paid no heed to empirical data arising in such contexts. In their written work, they demonstrated little understanding of, or interest in, the social work and therapeutic practices that they claimed were producing false allegations of

organised abuse, nor were their criticisms designed to improve outcomes for abused women and children. To the contrary, they imputed a range of pejorative motives and characteristics to women and children disclosing organised abuse, and to the professionals who provided them with support. Their work ignored empirical evidence of physical and psychological harm to children and adults alleging organised abuse, including confession and convictions, and "explained away" geographic clusters of allegations of organised abuse in terms of contamination and professional malpractice. Whilst this argument was articulated in different ways throughout the literature, it had the consequence of demonising women and children with histories of organised and/or ritualistic abuse, and using their disclosures as a lens through which all accounts of sexual abuse could be called into disrepute.

The consequences of the politics of disbelief for victimised women and children

In the social science literature on "satanic ritual abuse", references to the severe and chronic mental and physical health problems of adults and children with histories of organised abuse are notable only for their absence. Whilst sceptics scornfully characterised allegations of organised abuse in terms of murder, cannibalism and ritual sacrifices, they ignored the mundane evidence of physical and sexual abuse that had led to the very child protection interventions and criminal prosecutions they claimed had no basis in fact. Like La Fontaine and Lanning, the majority of sceptics had little experience with adults or children with histories of organised or ritualistic abuse, and nor did they employ research methodologies that would familiarise them with the perspectives and needs of this population. To the contrary, through the "false memory" movement, many sceptical academics and journalists developed close personal and professional relationships with adults accused of organised and ritualistic

abuse. Throughout the 1990s, this sceptical coalition brought tremendous political and media pressure to bear on particular investigations into organised abuse on behalf of those accused. As these cases gained increasingly high-profile (and often global) media coverage, the claims of those accused were accepted at face value whilst social workers and therapists involved in the cases were restricted from challenging these claims by professional codes of confidentiality (Goddard 1994; Summit 1994b; Kitzinger 2004). In the ensuing controversy, the issue of children's and adults' welfare – the concern at the heart of the discourse on organised abuse that these authors are so critical of – was lost.

In the 1990s, as the sympathies of the media and many academics swung behind people accused of organised abuse, Nelson (2008) notes that children who had been placed in care after disclosing organised abuse were returned to their families against the children's express wishes. Quoting from the official inquiry into the Orkney organised abuse case in Scotland, Nelson notes the distress of one child who, despite her disclosures of organised abuse, who was forced to return to her family:

> She seemed shocked and bewildered. She said she did not want to go home and stood like a wooden doll refusing to get dressed. She left the foster carer's house in tears. On the journey home she engaged in bizarre behavior unlike anything she had shown before (Lord Clyde quoted in Nelson 2008: 337 - 38).

Upon being informed he was returning home, another child in the case asked whether the "bad things" would continue to happen, and began disclosing more details about sexual abuse at home (Nelson 2008: 338). In the Orkney case, the decision to send the children home was made unilaterally by a local Sheriff, a decision that was subsequently criticised by the Scottish Law Lords (Rafferty 1997). Nonetheless, the

Orkney case was widely framed in the media as an example of false allegations of organised abuse (Kitzinger 2004). The ensuing backlash against such allegations resulted in multiple failures to protect children who made similar disclosures. For example, in 2005, a report by Scotland's social work inspection agency found that, throughout the 1990s, social workers failed to remove three children from their parents despite clear evidence of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. The children had been in contact with over one hundred health professionals throughout the 1990s, and they frequently disclosed organised and ritualistic abuse by their parents. Despite clear evidence of abuse, it seems that these disclosures of ritualistic abuse were the primary reason why child protection authorities failed to intervene. Commenting on the case, the local social work director stated that "case workers were operating in the wake of the Orkney sex abuse allegations" and they were therefore "reluctant to make similar mistakes" (Seenan 2005).

Rafferty (1997) documents a litany of child protection failures in the United Kingdom following the backlash against cases of organised and ritualistic abuse. In one child protection case in Ayrshire, Scotland, eight children in care were returned home after five years of intense lobbying by the accused parents and sympathetic politicians. The Sheriff responsible for reversing the order returned the children to their parents although he was unwilling to conclude that the children had not been sexually abused. Rafferty (1997) notes: "His decision to send the children home reversed years of child-protection practice. Previously, where there was doubt, children's safety took precedence over parents' rights." As in the Orkney case, some of the Ayshire children were sent home although they maintained their testimony that they had been subject to sexual abuse by their parents. One ten-year-old child was in fact criticised by the Sheriff for "descending into vulgarity" for describing his experiences of sexual abuse

during the proceedings. Rafferty (1997) highlighted the extraordinary medical evidence of child torture in the case, in which a child who disclosed the forcible removal of his molars during an incident of ritualistic abuse was found to have injuries to his teeth consistent with his claims. Commenting on the strength of the evidence in the Ayrshire case, Nelson (1998: 148 - 149) suggested "if that case fell, it could be argued that any child sexual abuse case would fall."

The wholesale whitewashing of evidence of harm in cases of organised abuse not only compromised child protection efforts, but resulted in the denial of care and support to adults in severe distress. Ofshe and Watters (1996) and a range of "false memory" activists have lobbied against the provision of mental health treatment to people with histories of organised abuse and associated diagnoses, such as DID. In this literature, sceptics stated that adults who entered treatment and subsequently disclosed organised abuse and/or were diagnosed with DID usually had no symptoms prior to treatment, and therefore their disclosures and symptoms were iatrogenic. Pendergrast's (1995: 180) description below is typical of the "false memory" literature:

> The events usually unfold as follows. First, a young woman enters therapy for depression or some other complaint. Her therapist encourages her to see her family as dysfunctional, and herself as the victim of 'emotional incest'. Soon, she reads self-help recovery books and retrieves memories of physical incest by one family member. Then, as her memories flow more easily, she names other perpetrators. Finally, she recalls ritual abuse, is diagnosed with MPD, and often winds up heavily drugged and suicidal in a psychiatric ward.

Such a description bears no resemblance to the description of clinicians of their clients with DID as typified by the:

> dissociative and traumatized individual besieged by self-denigrating internal voices, who is affectively unstable, readily triggered, prone to suicidal ideation, who self-soothes by cutting, burning or using drugs/alcohol, who loses time, who is prone to derealization/depersonalization, and who struggles to have any clear boundaries or sense of personal identity (Middleton 2005: 41).

There is ample evidence that people with histories of organised abuse and/or a diagnosis of DID constitute a population of mental health patients with acute and complex needs (Ross 1995; Noblitt & Perskin 2000; Sachs & Galton 2008). Adults with undiagnosed or untreated DID have extremely high suicide rates several thousand times the American national average (Kluft 1995). However, Ross (1997) observes that, in his clinical experience, the suicide risk for this population reduces dramatically once they have established a working rapport with a mental health professional. Moreover, people with DID are at heightened risk of physical and sexual victimisation, and may require mental health care in order to bring ongoing abuse to an end. Middleton (2005: 44) reports that "Many [DID] patients presenting, even as adults, are still being repetitively abused by the same people who abused them as children, or by facsimiles of them." In his view, mental health care is therefore a mode of intervention through which the therapist can facilitate "cessation of abuse" through a period of hospitalisation, or otherwise helping the patient secure safe accommodation. The "false memory" campaign to restrict mental health care to this

population not only contributed to their risk of suicide and self-harm, but complicated their efforts to protect themselves from ongoing abuse and violence.

The misrepresentation of organised abuse in Australia

A range of researchers have noted the activist role of journalists in adopting and promulgating the arguments of the "false memory" movement in America and United Kingdom (Beckett 1996; Stanton 1997; Kitzinger 2002). In Australia, this role was quite stark: the term "false memory syndrome" first appeared in the Australian press in 1993, one year prior to the founding of the Australian chapter of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation. In a 1993 *Sydney Morning Herald* article entitled "Parents the latest victims of widespread sex abuse," philosopher Denis Dutton claimed that "false memory syndrome" "represents a threat to every loving, normal parent whose child might some day, encountering a rough patch, fall into the hands of a therapist who accepts the myths of memory repression and hypnotic enhancement" (p 11). He characterised a typical woman in therapy as gullible and easily led, and compared her memories of sexual abuse to accounts of alien abduction (Dutton 1993). By the mid-1990s, a range of Australian journalists were using "false memory syndrome" to describe "false allegations" of sexual abuse, under headlines such as:

- This man lost everything when his daughter accused him of sexual abuse (Wyndham 1994)
- Injustice in the realm of unreliable recesses of the mind (McGuinness 1994a)
- Abuse all around when a false memory lingers (Molitorisz 1995)
- Recovered memory creates "honest liar" (Hughes 1995)
- Abuse cases: Doubts grow on "recovered" memories (Guilliatt 1995a)

Cases of organised and ritualistic abuse featured frequently in these articles as examples of false allegations of sexual abuse. By the mid-1990s, stereotypes of women and children as suggestible and potentially malicious fantasists were firmly back on the agenda of the Australian media. These stereotypes, however, were now repackaged in the pseudo-scientific rhetoric of suggestibility and "false memories". Under the disparaging label "satanic abuse" or "satanic ritual abuse", a number of Australian commentators invoked cases of organised and ritualistic abuse to justify characterising women's and children's memory as fallible and their testimony as lacking credibility.

From 1994 to 1996, *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist Richard Guilliatt published a series of articles on allegations of ritualistic abuse, culminating in his book, *Speak of the Devil: Repressed memory and the ritual abuse witch-hunt* (Guilliatt 1996b). In this book, Guilliatt proposes that allegations of ritualistic abuse in Australia are evidence that "false memory syndrome" is a *bona fide* psychiatric diagnosis and a serious social problem. He basis this proposition, in part, on his conviction that the Mr Bubbles investigation (which involved allegations of ritualistic abuse at a Sydney day-care centre) was nothing more than a "welter of bizarre claims and community panic" originating at a child abuse conference in Sydney in 1986. Guilliatt suggests that, at this conference, Australian child protection workers were unduly influenced by American clinicians who had treated the children in the McMartin case. Although he provides no evidence that the individuals in question met one another, or indeed that ritualistic abuse was discussed at the conference, Guilliatt claims that the conference provided the impetus for child protection workers to coerce children into fabricating scurrilous ritualistic abuse allegations two years later. From the Mr Bubbles case, Guilliatt suggests, allegations of ritualistic abuse spread around Australia like

"weeds".[13]

However, the gaps in Guilliatt's argument require a number of leaps of faith from the reader. Guilliatt's claim that the charges in the Mr Bubbles case were baseless contradicts the medical evidence of sexual assault of some of the child witnesses in the case, and overlooked the fact that the owner of the day-care centre had prior convictions for the indecent assault of two children (Phelan 1999). Other allegations of ritualistic abuse dismissed by Guilliatt involved multiple witnesses and corroborating testimony. Whilst Guilliatt contests the expertise of a range of notable Australian child protection experts, he credits two informants, Chris Reeves and Jo Turnbull, with "acute insight", although they had previously circulated a threatening pamphlet to women's health services in New South Wales signed "666" in their own blood (Van Dyke 1995: 2; Guilliatt 1996b: 248). The success of Guilliatt's argument did not hinge on the consistency or quality of his evidence, but rather on his selective presentation of the facts and his forceful characterisation of allegations of "ritual abuse" as a kind of contagion. At the conclusion of his book, Guilliatt claims that ritualistic abuse allegations are the product of a widespread hysteria about child sexual abuse driven by feminism and a deep-seated "fear of male sexuality" (Guilliatt 1996b: 263). His conclusion that allegations of ritualistic abuse represent a covert attack on men suggests that an anti-feminist sentiment was at work in his coverage of ritualistic abuse, similar to the dynamic identified by researchers in the United Kingdom and the United States (Gaarder 2000; Kitzinger 2002; Campbell 2003).

[13] In New Zealand, Hill (1998) extended this argument, suggesting that workers who attended this conference in Australia then "imported" the "Satanism scare" to New Zealand, resulting in the emergence of allegations of organised and ritualistic abuse in New Zealand.

There are numerous other examples in the Australian media in which journalists utilised "satanic ritual abuse" as a lens through which to question the credibility of women and children reporting sexual abuse and the professionals who support them. In three articles published in the mid-1990s, journalist Paddy McGuinness expounded on a more conspiratorial variant of Guilliatt's argument, linking "satanic ritual abuse" with an international "movement" of health care and legal professionals with "political, ideological or financial motives" for coercing clients into making false allegations of sexual abuse (McGuinness 1994a). In a number of articles, McGuinness likened allegations of ritualistic abuse to "a rash of harassment, gender, race and other discrimination, childhood sexual abuse and similarly fashionable complaints" so numerous that, he suggests, "most of them cannot be considered credible". He describes these allegations as a form of terrorism enacted by women against men, and he encourages those accused to "fight back" and launch legal proceedings against the mental health professionals supporting complainants (McGuinness 1994b; 1995b; 1995a). Other journalists compared allegations of ritualistic abuse to stories of alien abduction (Wynhausen 1994) and suggested that cases of ritualistic abuse proved that "false memory syndrome" and "false allegations" were a "growing problem" in Australia (Waterstreet 1996). This hyperbolic treatment of ritualistic abuse was repeated in Australian academic circles, primarily by psychiatrists and physicians associated with the Australian "false memory" movement (e.g. Gelb 1993; Ogden 1993).

Children and adults who have been victimised in organised contexts are amongst the most traumatised and needy of clinical populations (Bloom 1994). However, in Australia, as overseas, they became the targets of a sustained campaign that undermined their rights to specialist and effective treatment and further narrowed their

access to the criminal justice system. In 1994, following pressure from the media, a NSW government-funded information package for child protection and sexual assault workers on organised and ritualistic abuse (NSW Sexual Assault Committee 1994) was withdrawn from circulation. Two government-funded evaluations of services for adult survivors of child sexual assault in New South Wales (NSW Health 1997) and the Australian Capital Territory (Courtney & Williams 1995) highlighted the unmet needs of adults with histories of organised and ritualistic abuse. However, recommendations specific to this client group were not implemented, and the funding for pilot programs for adults with histories of organised and ritualistic abuse was not renewed. Politicians and mental health professionals who had spoken out in support of child and adults with histories of organised and ritualistic abuse were publicly vilified e.g. Deidre Grusovin (Preston 1990b), Anne Schlebaum (Rogers 1999). The two key inquiries into "organised paedophilia" in Australia in the 1990s did not address the role of sexually abusive families in organised abuse, but instead focused on the homophobic stereotype of the extra-familial, homosexual pederast (NCA Joint Committee Report 1995; Wood Report 1997). Whilst the Wood Royal Commission (1997: 671) was presented with testimonial evidence of organised and ritualistic abuse by familial abusers, the Commission suggested that testimony of organised and ritualistic abuse could be the product of suggestion by therapists acting out a "religious fervor" and "paranoia" about sexual abuse (1997: 104). Rogers (1999) notes the frequency with which stereotypes of "mad or malicious mothers" and "overzealous therapists" featured in the Royal Commission's evaluation of the credibility of allegations of organised and ritualistic abuse, and she argues that the Commission's conclusions were significantly affected by the rhetoric of the "false memory" movement.

Edward Ogden: A case study of false memory research practices

As has been noted in the case of La Fontaine, the centrality of organised abuse within the politics of disbelief contributed to the development of a milieu that directly influenced the conduct and analysis of empirical research on the subject. In the Australian context, this can be seem most starkly in the work of Edward Ogden, a forensic physician and criminologist with the Victorian police force in Australia during in the 1980s and 1990s. During this period, Ogden began interviewing women with histories of ritualistic abuse as part of his Master of Criminology degree at the University of Melbourne. Ogden initially advocated on behalf of his research participants (McGuinness 1990; Preston 1990a), and was an important advocate for the child survivors of "The Family" cult in Victoria (Hamilton-Byrne 1995). Nonetheless, he became an early adopter of the "false memory" discourse, joining the board of the Australian False Memory Association in the mid-1990s. His work is the only existing qualitative study of organised and ritualistic abuse undertaken in Australia, and one of the few ever done in the world.

Whereas all other qualitative studies have emphasised the credibility of narratives of ritualistic abuse (Kent 1993b; Kent 1993a; Scott 2001; Sarson & MacDonald 2008), Ogden was quoted in the Australian media where he described allegations of ritualistic abuse as "outrageous and outlandish" (Guilliatt 1995c). In his unpublished Masters thesis, *Satanic cults: Ritual crime allegations and the False Memory Syndrome,* Ogden (1993) argues that, since there is no evidence of a complex "satanic conspiracy" to ritually abuse children, allegations of ritualistic abuse are likely to be the product of "false memory syndrome". Ogden's references to his participants were often cynical and at times scornful. He compared allegations of ritualistic abuse to the "psychotic delusions of the mentally ill" (p 8) and he equates clinicians who support

adults with histories of ritualistic abuse to members of a religious cult waiting for a spaceship to arrive (p 15).

The contempt with which Ogden wrote about women with histories of ritualistic abuse was reflected in his research practice. As part of the interview process, Ogden would offer to physically examine participants in order to confirm a disclosure of sexual assault. Although such a practice constitutes an egregious breach of ethical standards in research, Ogden (1993: 32) expressed amazement and disbelief when most participants declined his request to medically examine them:

> The victims interviewed showed an extraordinary reluctance to allow even the most cursory of medical examinations.

It appears that Ogden did conduct a vaginal exam on at least one research participant. He describes a participant who believed she had internal scarring as a result of sexualised torture. He states "[s]he was extensively investigated and no evidence of trauma could be found" (p 32). The refusal of most interviewees to consent to an unrequested medical examination was used as evidence by Ogden that allegations of ritualistic abuse are the product of "false memory syndrome". For example, one 25-year-old participant described a recollection in which, at the age of eight, she was tied up and sexually and physically assaulted alongside four other children (1993: 60). The participant then disclosed a sexual assault by her uncle only a few days prior to the interview. Ogden summarises this account in the following words: "This is a powerful story in the best satanic tradition. Unfortunately totally without corroboration as the individual refused examination." Odgen's research methods are not only unethical, but his conclusion that his participants were suffering from a delusion disorder because they would not provide him with medical evidence of sexual assault is

spurious. It is common for physical signs of sexual assault to be ambiguous or non-existent. His work raises serious questions about the competency of the University of Melbourne's ethics procedures at the time,[14] and indeed the degree of rigour with which his methodology was scrutinised by his supervisors or examiners. Ogden was a board member of the Australian False Memory Association, and it seems that his view of women with histories of ritualistic abuse was such that he did not extend to them even the most basic of rights or courtesies. Ogden's dual role as an advisor to the Victorian police force and the Australian False Memory Association raises questions about the impact that his flawed research findings might have had on police conduct, public policy and popular discourse on ritualistic abuse throughout the 1990s.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have documented how, during a period in which testimony of sexual violence was granted unprecedented legitimacy in the public eye, allegations of organised abuse were repositioned as the new frontier of disbelief by a loose coalition of researchers, journalists and activists. I demonstrated how this coalition misconstrued cases of organised abuse in order to mobilise public scepticism and disbelief against allegations of sexual abuse more broadly, and the resonance of this strategy amongst a diverse body of researchers and journalists. I suggest that the systematic misrepresentation of organised abuse was a compelling strategy because it drew on long-standing medical and legal traditions of disbelief regarding women and children's reports of sexual assault. Of all allegations of sexual abuse, cases of organised abuse were singled out for attack because of their complexity and ambiguity. Victims of organised abuse are amongst the most traumatised and

[14] I contacted the University of Melbourne's Human Research Ethics Committee in January 2009 requesting clarification. Whilst the Committee acknowledged receipt of my inquiry, they have yet to respond.

vulnerable of clinical populations, and thus poorly positioned to defend themselves. The centrality of organised abuse within the politics of disbelief contributed to the development of a culture within the media, and amongst some researchers and policy-makers, in which women and children reporting organised abuse were considered the legitimate focus of derision and contempt. Victims of organised abuse were systematically subjected to empirically unfounded attributions of suggestibility, vapidity and maliciousness. In their zeal to establish the falsity of allegations of organised abuse, researchers engaged in unfounded speculation and sometimes unethical research practices that transgressed against the rights of victims of organised abuse.

The "false memory" movement is atypical in terms of the degree of misrepresentation that some academic proponents were prepared to commit themselves to. Leavitt (2002: 32) argues that the discourse of false memories is characterised by so many exaggerations, distortions and false claims that researchers should become "intimately conversant with the literature" before "exercising scholarship in the area". It is nonetheless illuminating that these misrepresentations found numerous champions across the academic and popular media. Some forms of violence – such as incest, organised abuse and ritualistic abuse – disrupt cultural ideals of childhood and the family, and the gendered power relations that constitute these ideals. As these reports have emerged to public awareness, they have frequently been rendered in such a way as to stigmatise victims and vilify the professionals that support them. It seems that many academics held deep seated concern about the credibility of women and children as reliable witnesses to their own lives. After a period of relatively sympathetic media coverage on sexual violence, organised abuse was used as a frame

through which concerns about women and children's testimony could be made legitimate again.

3

Review of the literature

Whilst allegations of organised abuse have generated a wealth of controversy and commentary, empirical research and data on the subject are scarce. Attempts to gather information on the extent of organised abuse in developed countries have been stymied by the failure of governments to collect data, and by their unwillingness to publish the data available to them (Kelly & Regan 2000a; Renold & Creighton 2003). Investigating allegations of organised abuse is a difficult multi-professional and multi-agency task (Bibby 1996). Most countries make no specialist provisions for organised abuse investigations in either legislation or in law enforcement arrangements. In a recent survey of Council of Europe members, only two countries reported taking specific measures against the organised and/or ritualistic abuse of girls and women (Directorate General of Human Rights, 2007a; 2007b). Where intelligence on organised abuse exists, police forces may be reluctant to pass it on as it reflects poorly on their performance.[15]

[15] For example, in Australia the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the National Crime Authority undertook an inquiry into "organised criminal paedophile activity" in 1995, and concluded that there was no evidence of organised paedophile groups in Australia (NCA Joint Committee Report 1995a). Subsequently, during the proceedings of the Western Australian Police Royal Commission, it emerged that the paedophile desk of the Western Australian police force had been instructed not to

Although there are a number of large-scale epidemiological surveys of child sexual abuse, very few have incorporated questions that might differentiate experiences of organised abuse from other experiences of abuse, for example, by including questions about the manufacture of child abuse images or incidents of abuse that included multiple perpetrators. As a result, reliable quantitative measures of the prevalence of organised abuse are sparse. Frequently, social services do not distinguish between organised abuse, such as child prostitution or the manufacture of child abuse images, and other forms of sexual abuse, so data on organised abuse is often unavailable even at a local level (Gallagher, Hughes & Parker 1996). There is no standard, commonly accepted terminology to describe cases of sexual abuse involving multiple victims and multiple perpetrators and so workers may categorise cases of organised abuse in different ways (Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996). There are also numerous practical obstacles to identifying the numbers of children and young people abused by groups and networks (Di Nicola 2007). Abusers and victims often go to great lengths to keep sexual exploitation secret, so that sexually exploited children constitute a "hidden" population (Cusick 2002). Where estimates of the scale of the problem are available, they have sometimes been exaggerated, or minimised, by those concerned with the promotion of moral, political or religious agendas in this contentious area (Ennew 1986).

In the absence of reliable social service or law enforcement data, information on organised abuse comes from a variety of sources. As I shall show, a range of studies on adults' and children's reports of sexual abuse provide general support for the

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provide data to the Federal inquiry on the paedophile groups currently under surveillance (Shine & Egan 2002).

proposition that, while organised abuse constitutes a small minority of reports of sexual abuse overall, organised abuse is a source of serious harm to victims and as a result represents a significant burden upon health and welfare services. More specific information on organised abuse is available through survivor reports, case studies, media reports, clinical vignettes and small clinic-based research projects. A range of disciplines are represented in this body of literature, notably psychiatry, psychotherapy, social work, and law enforcement, as well as investigative journalism, sociology and criminology. Viewed collectively, this literature lacks a general sense of consensus or an over-arching theoretical paradigm that might qualify organised abuse as a "field of research". The study of organised abuse is complicated not only by the paucity of data, but by the dispersal of the available information across a diverse body of literature that has conceptualised organised abuse in different ways.

This chapter will proceed in two parts. The first section will summarise the findings of prevalence studies of organised abuse and examine their methodology and generalisability. I will then examine alternative indicators of the prevalence of organised abuse drawn from epidemiological studies of child sexual abuse and clinic-based studies. The second section will provide a chronological overview of the development of organised abuse research, from its early focus on prostitution and the manufacture of child pornography to the controversies over ritualistic abuse and institutional abuse. The research literature was gathered through searches of relevant databases, such as Pubmed and Sociological Abstracts, as well as through extensive reading of existing literature in order to identify relevant studies and findings. Organised abuse is a controversial subject and the amount of commentary and

speculation far outweighs the amount of empirical research that has been undertaken on the subject. This literature review will focus in particular on:

a. existing empirical, historical and theoretical literature pertinent to organised abuse, and
b. qualitative and quantitative studies of the forms of sexual abuse (for example, the manufacture of child abuse images or ritualistic abuse) that can be categorised as organised abuse.

The literature review will highlight key findings whilst exploring the social and political factors that have shaped research into organised abuse. The focus of the review is on research regarding organised groups of sexual abusers and their practices and activities. There is a significant body of related research regarding the psychological impact of organised abuse and the treatment of victims. Whilst this literature will be touched on where necessary, it is not the focus of the review, which is concerned primarily with research on organised abuse as a form of sexual abuse, rather than as a cause of mental illness.

Evidence for the prevalence of organised abuse

Establishing the prevalence of a history of any kind of sexual abuse is fraught with difficulties. The majority of sexually abused children do not disclose their abuse in childhood (London, Bruck, Ceci & Shuman 2005). It is rare that children are routinely screened for sexual abuse and, where such screenings have been undertaken, they have proven extremely controversial (e.g. Campbell 1988). Hence, most incidents of child sexual abuse go undetected and those cases detected by the authorities are unlikely to be representative of the prevalence or incidence of sexual abuse as a whole

(Bromfield & Higgins 2003). Those studies claiming to examine the prevalence of organised abuse have been based upon case reports to child protection services and law enforcement (Wild 1989; Creighton 1993; Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996) and their generalisability is limited due to the unrepresentative nature of statutory data on child abuse.

Wild (1989) collected data on child sexual abuse cases reported to police in Leeds, Britain from July 1984 to June 1986 and found that, over the two-year period, six "sex rings" involving multiple perpetrators and multiple children were reported to the police. Creighton's (1993) survey of the 71 child protection teams of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in Britain found that 41% of the agencies were aware of a case of organised abuse in their area in the period December 1989 to April 1991. Twenty percent of teams reported working with children who were suspected of having being victimised in organised abuse during this period. These teams were then interviewed in order to gain more information about the cases, and they reported 19 cases of suspected organised abuse involving 61 children from 43 families. These cases represented 0.3% of the total cases in the workload of NSPCC teams nationwide throughout the period under study.

These studies have found that reports of sexual abuse by multiple perpetrators involving multiple victims are a small minority of all known cases of sexual abuse, and most organised cases that have been reported to agencies are relatively small in scale, involving only a few perpetrators and/or victims (Creighton 1993). On the basis of their review of child protection cases, Gallagher et al. (1996) identified 78 cases of organised abuse reported to the police and social services in Britain from 1988 –

1991. These cases accounted for 1% of all child protection cases and 2% of sexual abuse cases reported to the police and 1% of child protection cases and 3% of sexual abuse cases reported to child protection agencies nationwide during the period under study. Gallagher et al. (1996: 227) observed that, whilst these figures were useful in placing organised abuse in context, "they tend to mask the impact which individual cases of organised abuse may have upon multi-agency work".

These studies suggest that organised abuse constitutes a small minority of reports of sexual abuse to the police and child protection agencies. However, it is pertinent to consider that, not only is child protection data an unreliable source of information on the prevalence of child abuse as a whole (Bromfield & Higgins 2003), but that cases of organised abuse may be under-represented in child protection data. Organised abuse is a secretive enterprise that is rarely the subject of specialist or targeted policing and investigation practices (Kelly 1998). When organised abuse is detected by the authorities, most cases are detected accidentally (Gallagher 1998). The factors that are correlated with traumatic amnesia and dissociation (which disrupt a child's capacity to disclose abuse or seek help), such as multiple perpetrators, repeated incidents of abuse, longer duration of abuse, early initiation of abuse, threats of death or harm during abuse, and a relation of dependence with a perpetrator (Briere & Conte 1993; Loewenstein 1996; Schultz, Passmore & Yoder 2003) are common features of organised abuse (Creighton 1993; Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996). Specific perpetrator strategies, such as drugging children (to reduce resistance and interfere with recall) or forcing children into sexual contact with other children (to engender a sense of guilty and complicity) also inhibit disclosure (Burgess & Lindeqvist Clark 1984; Gough 1996). For all these reasons, organised abuse may be a particularly

difficult form of sexual abuse to detect (Gallagher 1998). It may also be a difficult form of abuse for child protection agencies to respond to and record appropriately. A number of clinicians and protective parents have documented the systemic obstacles they have faced when attempting to report a child's disclosure of organised abuse to the police or child protection authorities (Kinscherff & Barnum 1992; Brooks 2001; Coleman 2008).

Whilst case review studies suggest that organised abuse is reported rarely to child protection authorities, surveys of workers suggest that adults and children are more likely to report organised abuse in health and welfare settings. Andrews and colleagues (1995) surveyed 4005 members of the British Psychological Society regarding their experiences of clients with recovered memories and received 1083 returned questionnaires (a low response rate of 27%). Of all survey respondents, 15% reported working with a client with a history of ritualistic abuse, and only 3% indicated that they believe that histories of ritualistic abuse are always false. In their study of "religion-related child abuse", Bottoms and colleagues (1996) conducted a stratified random sample survey of 5998 clinical members of the American Psychological Association. During 1990 and 1991, clinicians were asked to identify the number of cases of "ritualistic or religion- related" child abuse they had encountered between 1 January 1980 and 1 January 1990. There were 2,722 valid respondents (a 46% return rate), of whom 803 had encountered one or more ritual or religion-related cases. Of the 802 psychologists with cases, 43% saw at least one child client reporting ritualistic abuse and 38% saw at least one adult client reporting ritualistic abuse. The overwhelming majority of survey participants believed these accounts to be largely true. Whilst the generalisability of these two surveys is limited

by low return rates, they suggest that a significant minority of clinical practitioners have encountered a child or adult client reporting a history of ritualistic abuse, and that the majority find their disclosures to be convincing.

In Australia, Schmuttermaier and Veno (1999) surveyed three groups of mental health workers who specialise in trauma and abuse: rape crisis workers, registered psychologists and psychiatrists. Of the 392 workers surveyed, 93 returned their questionnaires. The response rate of 32% is comparable to the previous two studies. Participants were surveyed regarding the number of cases of "ritual abuse" they had encountered during the decade from 1980 and their attitudes and beliefs about these cases. Twenty six respondents identified a total of 153 cases of ritualistic abuse during the period under study. Eighty five percent of all participants indicated that they believed a disclosure of ritualistic abuse to be indicative of genuine trauma. A six-month case review of a domestic violence service in Adelaide found that 16% of new clients were seeking protection from groups of abusers, including some women who had been subject to organised abuse alongside their children (Cooper 2004).

Neither child protection data nor surveys of health and welfare workers provide reliable information from which the prevalence of organised abuse can be estimated. The research literature suggests that cases of organised abuse constitute a minority of cases of sexual abuse; however the complexity of these cases and the complex needs of victims pose a significant challenge for health and welfare services. Cooper and colleagues (Cooper 2004; Cooper, Anaf & Bowden 2006; Cooper & Bowden 2006) have documented the challenges faced by domestic violence workers with clients victimised by organised groups and networks. Extensive literature has documented the

stress and trauma experienced by mental health professionals and other health and welfare workers with clients with histories of organised abuse (e.g. Sinason & Svensson 1994; Youngson 1994; Doherty, Cassidy & Armstrong 1999).

Alternative sources of data on the prevalence of organised abuse

Due to the unreliability of statutory data, most prevalence studies of sexual abuse have been based on adult self-report. However, research has found that memory loss and inconsistent reporting are common amongst adults with histories of sexual abuse (Herman & Schatzow 1987; Briere & Conte 1993; Fergusson, Horwood & Woodward 2000). Hardt and Rutter (2004) suggest that prevalence findings based on self-report are likely to underestimate the extent of the problem. It is well acknowledged in the psychological literature that adults with histories of organised abuse are frequently amnestic for their abuse (Briere & Conte 1993; Williams 1993; Chu, Frey, Ganzel & Matthews 1999) and so retrospective self-report may not be a suitable methodology for this population. In addition to these methodological problems, studies of the epidemiology of child sexual abuse have generally not included specific questions that would assist in distinguishing experiences of organised abuse from experiences of child sexual abuse more generally. Nonetheless, by interrogating the available data for indicators of organised abuse it is possible to find more information on the extent of victimisation in organised abuse amongst sexually abused children and adults. In this section, I consider the research relating to the prevalence of sexual abuse more generally and then identify particular findings relevant to the study of organised abuse.

A range of prevalence studies of sexual abuse have been published since the 1970s. Their findings have varied widely according to a number of factors, including

recruitment methods, the gender of the sample, the methodology and the definition of sexual abuse (Goldman & Padayachi 2000). The findings of prevalence studies of sexual abuse in Australia vary significantly, with studies sampling university students (Goldman & Goldman 1988; Goldman & Padayachi 1997), women attending general practice clinics (Mazza, Dennerstein, Garamszegi & Dudley 2001), women in the community (Fleming 1997) and women and men in the community (Dunne, Purdie, Cook, Boyle & Najman 2002). In their meta-analysis of prevalence studies of sexual abuse, Perada and colleagues (2009) found a weighted mean Australian prevalence of 13% for men (with a range of 4.9% - 30.1%) and 37.8% for women (with a range of 22.9% and 55.5%). Their meta-analysis included studies that have employed a broad definition of sexual abuse (including non-contact abuse such as exhibitionism and sexual propositions) as well as studies that employed a narrow definition of sexual abuse (limited to contact sexual abuse only). It has been frequently observed that narrow definitions of sexual abuse tend to elicit lower prevalence findings (e.g. Wynkoop, Capps & Priest 1995; Gorey & Leslie 1997; Goldman & Padayachi 2000), although Perada and colleagues (2009) found that the mean prevalence of child sexual abuse in their study did not vary considerably according to the definition of child sexual abuse used. They argue that "the fact that one of the two definitions (broad) includes behaviour that is characteristic of the other (narrow) could account for this" (Perada, Guilera et al. 2009: 335).

More accurate measures of sexual abuse prevalence can be found in large-scale surveys of sexual behaviour that included questions about sexual abuse or coercion. The Australian Study of Health and Relationships was undertaken from 2001 to 2002 and involved telephone interviews with a representative sample of 10 173 men and

9 134 women aged 16 to 59 years. Respondents were asked whether they had ever been "forced or frightened" into unwanted sexual activity and, if so, at what age. 2.8% of men and 10.3% of women reported sexual coercion prior to 16 years of age (de Visser, Rissel, Richters & Grulich 2003). Whilst other prevalence studies have employed a range of questions on multiple forms of sexual abuse, measures of sexual coercion focus on frightening and coercive experiences of sexual abuse in childhood, which is of particular relevance to the study of organised abuse.

In the research literature, we can see evidence suggestive of organised abuse amongst adults and children reporting multi-perpetrator sexual abuse. In clinical populations, a significant proportion (16–57%) of adults reporting a history of sexual abuse report being victimised by multiple perpetrators (Long & Jackson 1991; Ray, Jackson & Townsley 1991; Gold, Hill, Swingle & Elfant 1999; Bulik, Prescott & Kendler 2001). A recent case review of 397 admissions to an inpatient child psychiatry service identified histories of sexual abuse by multiple assailants in 18% of the sample (Ford, Connor & Hawke 2009) . Rimsza and Niggeman's (1982) case review of 311 children and adolescents evaluated for sexual abuse found that approximately 5% of the sample reported multiple assailants. It is well established in the literature that a prior experience of sexual abuse increases a child's vulnerability to sexual abuse in the future (Kellogg & Hoffman 1997; Grauerholz 2000; Finkelhor, Ormrod & Turner 2007). These child and adult studies highlight the frequency of sexual victimisation by multiple perpetrators amongst sexual abuse victims but they do not distinguish between organised abuse and successive experiences of victimisation by perpetrators who do not know one another.

Some of the patterns evident in multi-perpetrator abuse are highly suggestive of organised abuse, particularly where children or adults are reporting an incident of child sexual abuse involving multiple perpetrators. A case review of the hospital records of 2130 sexually abused children presenting for medical evaluation found that 9% described at least one recent episode of abuse that involved multiple perpetrators (Huston, Parra, Prihoda & Foulds 1995). A cross-sectional survey of 538 adolescent and young adult waiting room patients from four clinic sites (including a clinic for sexually abused children) found, of the 258 participants reporting an unwanted sexual experience, 97 reported at least one incident involving multiple perpetrators (Kellogg & Hoffman 1997). In a case review of 566 children presenting to a sexual assault service, De Jong and colleagues (1983) found that multiple assailants were involved in the recent incident of assault for 8.7% of the children. A survey of 118 sexually abused women in psychotherapy found that 16% reported "concurrent multiple perpetrators" throughout their abuse; that is, at least one incident of multiple perpetrator rape in childhood (Gold, Hill et al. 1999). In Briere's (1988) clinical sample of 133 women with sexual abuse histories, 17% reported multiple simultaneous perpetrators and ritualistic and sadistic abuse. Although these studies are based on clinical samples, they suggest that between 10% and one third of children and adults reporting a history of sexual abuse have been subject to at least one incidence of multi-perpetrator abuse.

Another potential indicator of organised abuse is sexual abuse by women as well as men. Whilst the majority of male offenders act alone when sexually abusing children, the research literature indicates that a significant proportion of reports of sexually abusive women involve a woman co-offending with at least one male accomplice, and

frequently more than one. For example, in Faller's (1987; 1988; 1995) clinical studies of women in treatment for sexually abusive behaviour, over three-quarters of the women offended in the company of others. Finkelhor and William's (1988) study of sexual abuse in child care settings found that most cases involving female perpetrators also involved multiple co-offenders. In Vandiver's (2006) review of all female offenders identified in the national FBI sexual abuse incident database in 2001, 46% had at least one co-offender. Of these women, 48% had more than one co-offender, and 7% had ten or more co-offenders. Sexual abuse by both male and female perpetrators is a recurring feature of reports of organised abuse (Hunt & Baird 1990; Goddard 1994a; Goddard 1994b) and ritualistic abuse (Snow & Sorenson 1990; Driscoll & Wright 1991; Smith 1993).

It seems that multi-perpetrator sexual abuse involving both male and female perpetrators is a likely indicator of organised abuse, even where researchers have not specifically asked whether such abuse was coordinated or organised. In the American National Health and Social Life Survey, 2% of women and 5% of men reporting "sexual touching" under the age of 12 or 13 reported victimisation by both men and women (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael & Michaels 1994: 341). A survey of 399 teenagers with documented histories of sexual abuse at residential alcohol and drug treatment centres in North America found that approximately 20% of male and 30% of female respondents indicated sexual abuse by multiple perpetrators. Approximately six percent of the sample reported sexual abuse by both male and female perpetrators (Baker, Curtin & Papa-Lentini 2006). Reports of sexual abuse by multiple perpetrators, including the presence of female sexual offenders, is common amongst female sexual offenders. In a study of 70 female and 70 male teenage sexual

offenders, Matthews and colleagues (1997) found that 38% of the female sample reported sexual victimisation by multiple perpetrators compared to 3% of males, with 19% of the female sample reporting abuse by both men and women compared to 2% of males. Faller's (1987; 1988; 1995) research has emphasised that many sexually abusive women not only offend in organised contexts but they frequently have histories of being victimised through organised abuse.

Psychological literature on the prevalence of mental illnesses associated with organised abuse, such as DID, may also provide useful information on organised abuse. A substantial body of literature that links DID to chronic and pervasive childhood trauma, including organised abuse (see Noblitt & Perskin 2000; Sinason 2002; Sachs & Galton 2008). A significant proportion of people with histories of organised and ritualistic abuse meet the diagnostic criteria for DID (Noblitt & Perskin 2000) and between 5.4 and 8.0% of people in treatment for a dissociative disorder report a history of ritualistic abuse (Coons 1997; Putnam 1997). It is likely that prevalence studies of DID provide some indicator of the prevalence of extreme childhood trauma in the general population, including organised abuse.

In epidemiological studies of the general population, the prevalence of DID has been found to range from 1% to 3% (Loewenstein 1994). Dissociative disorders are common amongst psychiatric inpatients, although they are systemically misdiagnosed and underdiagnosed (Coons 1998; Steinberg & Siegel 2008). Screening studies of psychiatric inpatients and outpatients have found the prevalence of dissociative disorders in this population ranging between 4.3% and 21.0% (for a recent summary of prevalence data, see Sar, Akyuz & Dogan 2007). Alexander and Shaeffer (1994)

conducted a study of the abuse characteristics and family variables of 81 female adult incest survivors that provides relevant information on the frequency of organised abuse survivors in clinical populations. They identified a subset of eight women within the study whose abuse was characterised by multiple abusers. The researchers found that this subset of clients reported the most invasive degree of sexual abuse, the highest degree of coercion and the earliest age of onset reported by participants in the study. They described the family environments of these participants as "terrorising households" (Alexander & Schaeffer 1994: 466). This stratum of research participants had the worst mental health outcomes of the women in the study, with four of the eight women diagnosed with "multiple personality disorder" (now DID). The experiences and symptoms reported by these participants are evocative of organised abuse although the researchers did not make the connection. Whilst prevalence studies of DID in the general population provide a general indication of the frequency of extreme childhood trauma, the link between the prevalence of DID and the prevalence of organised abuse is not clear as yet. More research is necessary into the frequency of reports of organised abuse amongst people in treatment for DID.

Epidemiological and clinic-based studies provide further evidence that, while organised abuse is an uncommon form of child abuse, adults and children with histories of organised abuse present frequently in health and welfare settings. Large-scale, community-based surveys have found that less than 1% of adults report being victimised through the manufacture of child abuse images (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith 1989; Goldman & Padayachi 1997; Cawson, Wattam, Brooker & Kellly 2000). Less than 5% of people reporting contact sexual abuse in the American National Health and Social Life Survey reported sexual victimisation by both men and

women (Laumann, Gagnon et al. 1994: 341). The community prevalence of DID, a mental illness associated with organised abuse, is between 1% to 3% (Loewenstein 1994). However, the rates of these indicators increase dramatically in clinical populations of adults and children reporting sexual abuse and a significant number of mental health workers report seeing a client with a history of organised and/or ritualistic abuse (Andrews, Morton et al. 1995; Bottoms, Shaver et al. 1996; Schmuttermaier & Veno 1999). The severity of the mental and physical harms experienced by victims of organised abuse may result in their over-representation in health care settings, although this requires further research, since anecdotal evidence suggests that some victims of organised abuse experience great difficulties in accessing effective and affordable health care (see NSW Health 1997).

Research on child pornography and prostitution

As yet, there is no reliable statistical information on the community prevalence of organised abuse. The available data is suggestive rather than definitive. However, there is a wealth of descriptive research on organised abuse that has been developing over the last thirty years. Research into organised abuse began in the early 1980s and was focused predominantly on the manufacture of child abuse images and child prostitution. Depictions of nude children and sexual activity involving children have a long history. "As early as 1847 J.T. Withe produced an album containing explicitly erotic scenes with children and naked portraits of young girls" (Townsend 1996: 8). Erotic images of children and child pornography became a public concern in the 1970s, as the prevalence and harms of child sexual abuse became more widely recognised. During this period, concerns over child pornography were exacerbated as the decriminalisation of all forms of pornography in Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands resulted in the unprecedented growth in the manufacture and global

distribution of child pornography (Tate 1990; Svedin & Back 1996). In the 1970s, law enforcement in the United States, Europe and Australia noted the widespread availability of child pornography through pornography outlets, and the extremity of some of this material, which included depictions of bestiality and sadism (Whitehall 1980; Berenbaum, Burgess, Cucci, Davidson, McCaghy & Summit 1984: 10; Renold & Creighton 2003: 29). Concern over the availability of this material in the States culminated in a series of Congressional Hearings in 1977, which revealed that the police had uncovered major child pornography production centres in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and several other large cities (Baker 1977). By the late 1970s, the distribution and possession of child pornography was criminalised in the United States, Australia and most countries in Europe (Whitehall 1980).

The research literature on organised abuse during this period was dominated by a medicalised model of child abuse that largely ignored the insights of feminist writers on sexual abuse such as Butler (1978), Rush (1980) and Herman (1981) or the emerging social-medical model of child sexual abuse advanced by Finkelhor (1984). The literature on organised abuse generally presumed that the most serious and prevalent form of sexual abuse involved sexual offenders from outside the family, with a strong emphasis on the sexual abuse of boys. The motivations of offenders were typically conceptualised in terms of financial gain and/or a paraphiliac obsession (sometimes ambiguously conflated with homosexuality); in either case, questions of gender, age and power went unexamined. The experience of young children subject to organised abuse, particularly within the family, was poorly represented in the research literature of this period. Feminist research on child prostitution and the manufacture of child abuse images conducted during the 1980s was concerned with the linkages between child abuse and adult sexual exploitation, and the entry of girls into sex work

as minors (Silbert & Pines 1985; Weisberg 1985). Whilst elucidating the pathways through which sexually abused girls became involved in sex work, this work left unexamined the organised exploitation of minors away from the structures and sites traditionally associated with prostitution (e.g. the streets or brothels).

In the United States, the FBI made their "vice" files available to Burgess and colleagues to study cases of child pornography and "sex rings" (Burgess & Lindeqvist Clark 1984).[16] Whilst these files were constituted, largely, of cases of extra-familial exploitation,[17] the study contains important information on the processes through which young children are subject to organised abuse by extra-familial offenders. Burgess and colleagues (Burgess, Hartman, McCausland & Powers 1984; Burgess & Lindeqvist Clark 1984) demonstrated how offenders gain access to children through their legitimacy in the eyes of other adults; they are family friends, teachers, scout leaders, and so on. In the cases reviewed by Burgess et al. (1984), children were slowly socialised by the offender into the norms, values, codes and rules of the abusive group. Whilst this pedagogy was achieved through various means, including exposure to pornography, exhibitionism and non-penetrative sexual abuse, the researchers emphasised the role of a group subculture and peer dynamic between the abused children. Secrecy was maintained by a kind of self-policing between children as well as through explicit threats, blackmail and shaming on the part of the offenders. Children were forced into sexual contact with one another, which encouraged a sense of complicity and identification with the perpetrator, and children were also encouraged to recruit others for abuse. This research demonstrates that forms of

[16] The term "sex ring" refers to the sexual abuse of multiple children by a single abuser *or* multiple abusers, which is a broader definition than "organised abuse".

[17] It is likely that the skew in this data set towards extra-familial abuse reflects the neglect of incest by law enforcement and the criminal justice system during the period in which the files were gathered. Herman (1981: Chapter 10) discusses the lack of recognition given to incest within the American criminal justice system during this period.

organised abuse are not discrete: for instance, a perpetrator may be abusing multiple children on his own, as well as being active within an abusive group of perpetrators that is in turn a part of a broader network that facilitates child prostitution and the manufacture of child abuse images. These different contexts of abuse are not only specific modes of child sexual abuse, but also transitional spaces for the coercion of children into organised forms of sexual abuse such as prostitution and the production of child abuse images. Wild and colleague (Wild & Wynne 1986; Wild 1989) identified similar patterns of abuse at work in their study of "sex rings" identified by police in the British city of Leeds.

The early study by Burgess et al. (1984) remains the most substantial empirical study, to date, of the circumstances in which child abuse images are manufactured. Criminological research into the circumstances in which child abuse images are made is rare, although relevant research has been conducted in research into ritualistic abuse and organised abuse, which will be explored shortly. Research undertaken with child protection teams working directly with sexually abused children sheds some light on the frequency of victimisation in child pornography involving sexually abused children. In a sample of 316 cases of sexual abuse reported to a hospital in Northern Ireland, nine children were believed to have been abused through pornography manufacture (Research Team 1990). A preliminary study by Lewis (1997), quoted in Renold and Creighton (2003), found 22 child protection teams, of a sample of 106 teams, had worked on at least one case involving the manufacture of child pornography in the previous 12 months. Three studies of retrospective reports of child abuse included a specific question regarding the manufacture of child pornography. In a British sample of 2869 men and women, aged 18–25, less than 1% reported having pornographic photos or videos taken of them when they were under 16 years of age

(Cawson, Wattam et al. 2000). In a US study of 2626 men and women aged over 18, 0.1% of women and no men reported "nude photographs" being taken of them as a child (Finkelhor, Hotaling et al. 1989). In an Australian survey of 427 undergraduate students, Goldman and Padayaci (1997) found, of the 44.6% of women reporting child sexual abuse, 1.4% reported nude photographs being taken of them. No male participant reported such experiences. The predominant focus of research into child abuse images over the last twenty years has been on the association between viewing child pornography and the commission of child sexual offences (e.g.Howitt 1995; Proulx, Perreault & Ouirnet 1999; Endrass, Urbanoik, Hammermeister, Benz, Elbert, Laubacher & Rossegger 2009) and on the circulation of child pornography on the internet (e.g. Taylor & Quayle 2003; Burgess, Mahoney, Visk & Morgenbesser 2008; Steel 2009).

Research on the prevalence of child prostitution is limited predominantly to studies of "survival sex" amongst homeless adolescents accessing welfare services. Sereny (1984) conducted interviews with 161 under-age prostitutes in North America, Germany and Britain, all of whom had been filmed by clients. Her research revealed a variety of contexts for child prostitution and the manufacture of child pornography, including organised crime syndicates and informal networks of offenders. Young people also undertook sex work in order to maintain their independence from an abusive home. Whilst the presence of under-aged children in sex work can be a choice on their part – albeit a constrained choices in the context of poverty, homelessness and stigmatisation (see also O'Connell Davidson 2005) - their participation may also be the result of coercion and manipulation. More recently, Swann (1999) developed a conceptual model of entry into child prostitution, drawing on interviews with 100 young women in Britain involved in street-based sex work. She describes a process of

entrapment and control, in which the teenage girl is befriended and seduced by an older man, who progressively breaks her ties with her families and friends, and demands control over all aspects of her life. Over time, his behaviour becomes violent and coercive, and he insists on her total obedience and submission. Eventually, he requires that she engages in prostitution, under the rationale of paying off a debt, or as evidence of her love for him. Other researchers have also noted the manner in which abusers target emotionally vulnerable children, and actively build emotional bonds with them that they subsequently exploit to coerce the child into sex work (Campagna & Poffenberger 1988).

There have been a number of studies of "survival sex" in Australia. A quarter of 102 young homeless people surveyed in Adelaide between the ages of the 12 and 23 reported engaging in sex for favours (Tschirren, Hammet & Saunders 1996). An ECPAT study in 1997 found 300 people under the age of eighteen participating in sex work in metropolitan Melbourne, with a further 300 believed to be involved (Fitzgerald 1997). The Australian Institute of Criminology undertook a study of the "commercial sexual exploitation of children" in Australia in 1998 (Grant, David & Grabosky 2001) but they made no reference to other research findings on organised abuse and treated "commercial sexual exploitation" as a form of abuse distinct from familial abuse or incest. Following a set of interviews with police, social services and other key informants, the AIC concluded that there was no evidence of the commercial sexual abuse of young children, although some teenagers engaged in sex for favours and other forms of opportunistic prostitution. Other research into "commercial sexual activities" by children in Australia (Tschirren, Hammet et al. 1996; Fitzgerald 1997; International Save The Children Alliance 1999) has solely

targeted homeless and vulnerable teenagers and young adults in contact with welfare services (Marriot 2001).

These figures provide an indication of the frequency of prostitution amongst homeless youths. However, the exploitation of very young children, and the role of parents in sexual exploitation, has gone largely unaddressed in research on prostitution and the manufacture of child abuse images. Pierce (1984: 485) was an early commentator on the role of parents in child sexual exploitation:

> While the majority of filmmakers will rely on runaways as their subjects, others simply use their own children, or children from their neighborhood ... Other children become involved in the business after being sold by their parents or guardians to willing buyers.

The only qualitative study of very young prostituted children in North America or a compareable Western country was undertaken by Inciardi (1984), who interviewed nine North American children between the ages of eight and twelve who were currently being exploited in the context of child pornography and prostitution. He reported that most interviewees were being provided for sexual exploitation by their parents. Other research on "sex rings" in the 1980s highlighted the participation of family members, particularly incestuous fathers, in facilitating the sexual exploitation of children (Schoettle 1980; Wild & Wynne 1986; Wild 1989). A number of researchers have subsequently emphasised the role of families in the manufacture of child abuse images and child prostitution (Cleaver & Freeman 1996; Kelly & Regan 2000b; Itzin 2001). Itzin's (1997; 2001) qualitative research has emphasised how child abuse images emerge from circumstances in which children are subject to multiple forms of victimisation, including incest, multiple perpetrator rape and child

prostitution. The evidence gathered in these studies suggests that the manufacture of child abuse images and/or child prostitution are not discrete forms of child abuse, but rather abusive practices that co-occur alongside multiple other forms of victimisation and exploitation.

This research challenges both the psychiatric and the "commercial" construction or analysis of child prostitution and child pornography manufacture, which reduce the motivations of offenders to the pursuit of either pleasure or profit. In applying these reductive models to the study of child pornography and prostitution, researchers have reproduced the public–private demarcation by ignoring how the practices of organised abuse are embedded within "private" relations of gender, age and power. It seems that, for some researchers and policy-makers, organised abuse is only a legitimate concern when it can be conceptualised in terms of a "public" concern (i.e. a crimogenic mental illness ("paedophilia") or illegal profiteering ("organised crime")) or when organised abuse manifests within "public" spaces such as the streets. Kelly, Wingfield, Burton and Regan (1995) remarked on the reluctance of researchers and policy-makers to broaden the debate on child sexual exploitation to include the familial contexts of child prostitution and pornography manufacture. Kelly et al. (1995) argue that the emphasis of researchers on "commercial sexual exploitation" (that is, organised abuse for economic gain) fails to acknowledge how child sexual abuse may serve as a form of exchange that regulates relations between adults:

> [T]here are other mediums of exchange between adults [aside from money] which sexual abuse of children can be used to facilitate. The "profits" which can accrue to the procurer/facilitator, can include: access to other children themselves; access to child pornography … economic, political or social

> alliances and advantages. There can be a combination of money and other forms of 'profit'/advantage involved (Kelly, Wingfield et al. 1995: 11).

It is likely that the ability of researchers to track and count the number of children involved in prostitution or the manufacture of child abuse images is impeded by the privacy that the state affords to the arrangements within which many children are subject to organised abuse. These arrangements are often construed as "informal" (and therefore not "organised" in any significant sense) because they take place in domestic contexts or other environments in which adults enjoy socially legitimised control over children. A significant proportion of research on child prostitution and pornography is limited to publicly visible sites of exploitation, such as the internet or street-based prostitution, in which organised abuse has breached the bounds of the "private" sphere and is transgressing the regulations of the "public" sphere. This explains the discrepancy between the priority given to policing sexual abuse and child pornography on the internet and other technological platforms (e.g. peer-to-peer networks, Bulletin Board Systems, Usenet or text messaging) and the absence of comparable resources allocated specifically to the policing of organised abuse in homes, schools and local communities.[18] The consequence of this discrepancy is that the online technologies are often conceived of as the primary sites for the distribution of child pornography, when in fact they are simply the most publicly visible sites, and therefore the most amenable to intervention.

[18] In Australia, the exception to this has been the recent, high profile policing of sexual abuse and organised abuse in Indigenous communities and townships (Hanlon & Fawcett 2009). There are a range of possible explanation for this. It is possible that Australian authorities do not conceptualise Indigenous families and homes as "private" spaces that enjoy protection from state regulation and intervention. Australian authorities have a long history of over-policing and intervention in the familial arrangements of Indigenous peoples.

Research on ritualistic abuse

Most research into child sexual exploitation in the 1970s and early 1980s focused predominantly on the extra-familial abuse of adolescent runaways. However, in the mid-1980s, cases of organised abuse involving young children began to emerge across the Western world. The first such cases developed from child protection investigations into disclosures of sexual abuse in families and day-care centres (Hechler 1988). Reports of the organised abuse of very young children were distinguished from cases of sexually exploited teenagers, such as those examined by Burgess and colleagues (1984), by the frequency and severity of children's reports of sadistic and ritualistic abuse. In their sample of 270 substantiated cases of sexual abuse in day-care centres throughout America, Finkelhor and Williams (1988) found that 17% involved allegations of multiple perpetrators, and 13% involved allegations of ritualistic abuse. The authors observed that "[i]t is very clear that the multi-perpetrator cases have dynamics which set them apart" (Finkelhor & Williams 1988: 38), with the largest average number of victims, the most extended and serious forms of abuse (including the production of child abuse images and ritualistic practices) and an over-representation of female perpetrators in comparison to other day-care centre cases or in research on sexual abuse in general. They found that multi-perpetrator and ritualistic abuse was statistically associated with more severe traumatic symptoms amongst victims.

The majority of cases of the organised abuse of young children have involved facilitation by parents (Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996), although early research

focused predominantly on sexual abuse in a range of child care arrangements.[19] The largely unregulated nature of the growing child care sector in the 1970s and 1980s may have made it an attractive proposition for sexually abusive groups who sought to access children for sexual exploitation. In Finkelhor and Williams' (1988) study, family day-care arrangements, in which groups of children (six or more) were cared for in private homes, were associated with more prolonged cases of sexual abuse. However, cases of family day-care only constituted one third of their overall sample of sexual abuse cases. They reported that 25% of cases in the sample involved the perpetration of abuse by the owner or director of the child care business. "These are particularly frightening cases, in some respects, because of the authority of the director and the possibility that abuse was the reason for which the day-care operation was established" (Finkelhor & Williams 1988: 28).

Waterman and Kelly (1993) compared reports of abuse, and indicators of psychological harm, between samples of children disclosing ritualistic abuse at a day-care centre, children reporting sexual abuse at a day-care centre, and a control group of children who reported no sexual abuse. They found that children reporting ritualistic abuse reported more incidents, more types of abuse and more severe than non-ritualistically abused children. Children reporting ritualistic abuse demonstrated more severe symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder than children reporting other forms of sexual abuse. Case studies of organised abuse at day-care centres in North America by Hudson (1991), Mowbray and Bybee (1995), Ehrensaft (1992), Myers (1994), Abbott (1994) and Lamb (1994) have documented the occurrence of sadistic and ritualistic practices with the manufacture of child pornography. These authors

[19] This literature generally uses the term "day-care" to refer to all forms of child care arrangements, including child care centres and day-care in churches or private homes.

include psychotherapists, social workers and legal professionals who have been involved in the investigation and prosecution of cases of organised abuse in day-care centres.

Gallagher (2000b) described allegations of ritualistic abuse as "one of the most contentious issues in child protection" throughout the 1990s. Clapton (1993: 1) reports that, in the two and a half years from March 1989, 149 children were taken into public care or made wards of the state in British child protection cases in which there were allegations of organised and ritualistic abuse. A survey of British police forces, undertaken by the BBC, found that ritualistic abuse was substantiated in one out every forty "child sex rings" investigated by the police (Brindle 1990). Whilst ritualistic abuse is not a ubiquitous aspect of disclosures of organised abuse, it is associated with the extremes of child maltreatment, including murder, bestiality and the torture of children (Driscoll & Wright 1991; Hudson 1991; Smith 1993). Clinical psychologist Youngson (1994) argues that cases involving ritualistic abuse are qualitatively different from other forms of child abuse, however severe. Children and adults subject to ritualistic forms of abuse are profoundly traumatised, phobic of doctors and the police, and often convinced that the abusive group has supernatural powers (Mollon 1996). Cases involving ritualistic abuse are distinguished from other forms of organised abuse by the young age at which victimisation starts, the involvement of parents as primary abusers, the extremity and diversity of abusive practices, and the prolonged period of sexual exploitation (Creighton 1993; Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996). The ritualistic activity is typically structured by "deviant scriptualism", in which abusive groups draw on traditional religious values and principles (Kent 1993b; Kent 1993a).

In the United States, ritualistic abuse has been the primary lens through which research on organised abuse has been carried out. For example, Snow and Sorenson (1990) interviewed thirty-nine children from five different ritually abusive groups. Four of the groups included intra-familial offenders, and their reports of abuse were characterised by descriptions of the manufacture of child abuse images, forced ingestion of human waste, Satanic iconography and occult paraphernalia, animal mutilation or killing, and the use of drugs. These findings are commensurate with other studies that have surveyed the characteristics and experiences of adults who claim to be survivors of ritualistic abuse (Driscoll & Wright 1991; Young, Sachs, Braun & Watkins 1991; Smith 1993). These studies find further support in the growing body of autobiographies of survivors of ritualistic abuse published in North America and overseas, which provide detailed accounts of individual experiences of abuse and recovery (Smith & Pazder 1980; Chase 1987; Spencer 1989; Buchanan 1994; Goobie 1994; Beckylane 1995; Jadelinn 1997; Richardson 1997; Lorena & Levy 1998; Daymore 2001; Roy 2005; Davis 2008). In the Netherlands, Jonker and Jonker-Bakker (1991; 1993; 1997; 1998) followed a cohort of ninety ritually abused children over a period of seven years. They initially surveyed the children's families six to eight weeks after the case came to light and asked questions about the children's disclosures of abuse, their conduct at home and symptoms of psychological distress. The participant families were asked to repeat the survey at two and seven years later. The list of reported abuses included sexual abuse, threats, the manufacture of still and video pornography, bondage, various forms of physical assault and harm, animals being murdered and the forced ingestion of human waste and semen. The perpetrators

claimed to possess supernatural powers of control and surveillance over the abused children, which inhibited most children from spontaneous disclosure.

The literature on ritualistic abuse suggests that ritualistic sexual practices with young children are a characteristic of extremely violent and abusive groups, and that such practices typically occur alongside a diverse range of other abusive practices, including the manufacture of child abuse images. One of the shortcomings of this literature, however, is the general presumption (implicit or explicit) that abusive groups are motivated by a religious or spiritual conviction. In clinical and research literature, abusive groups are generally referred to as "cults", and "cult abuse", is a term used interchangeably with "ritual abuse" (e.g. Snowden 1988; Driscoll & Wright 1991; Kinscherff & Barnum 1992; Lloyd 1992; Johnson 1994; Noblitt & Perskin 2000). It is questionable whether "cult" is an accurate or useful descriptor for these abusive groups, who are usually constituted of multiple abusive families and family "friends" and contacts who are collectively engaged in multiple forms of sexual violence (Cook 1991; Driscoll & Wright 1991; Smith 1993). Speculation on the purpose of ritualistic sexual practices with children has tended to obscure the familial contexts of organised abuse, and the gendered dynamics of violence in cases of organised abuse (Clapton 1993) as well as the presence of domestic violence, physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect in families involved in ritualistic abuse (Scott 2001). The designation of these familial networks as "cults" has had the effect of alienating the study of ritualistic abuse from the insights of research into child abuse and domestic violence. Much of the literature on ritualistic abuse continues to utilise outdated theoretical concepts associated with research into cults from the 1960s and

1970s (such as "brainwashing" and "programming") without reference to more contemporary understandings of violence, trauma and dissociation.

The study of "ritual abuse" and "cult abuse" has been further complicated by the involvement of a number of evangelical and religious agencies in the provision of mental health care to adults and children with histories of organised abuse. These agencies, whose therapeutic agenda and treatment strategies are based upon spiritual and supernatural beliefs and/or conspiracy theories, have generated a prolific amount of "grey literature" (that is, unpublished material such as websites and booklets) on organised and ritualistic abuse that has found some purchase within the broader therapeutic community.[20] Whilst the majority of the published literature on ritualistic abuse rejects a conspiratorial view of the phenomenon, the clinical literature on ritualistic abuse tends to characterise ritualistic abuse as an ahistorical tradition "passed down" by "cults" who are united in their worship of Satan. Some of the clinical texts published on ritualistic abuse in the 1990s included pseudo-historical chapters on "satanic religions" (Katchen 1992), "ancient infanticide" (Kahr 1994) and "secret societies throughout history" (Ross 1995) that link ritualistic abuse to the history of religious abuses. These chapters only provide general and speculative links between cases of ritualistic abuse and historical reports of atrocities against children.

[20] For example, in the early 1990s, a far right wing Christian extremist called Fritz Springmeier began circulating a range of documents through evangelical churches and "deliverance ministries" in the United States that documented his theories about organised and ritualistic abuse. In these documents, later self-published, Springmeier (1996; 1997; 1998) alleged that a worldwide elite cabal of Satanists, called "the Illuminati", had infiltrated the American government and were orchestrating the organised and ritualistic abuse of children with the intention of furthering their political and social agenda. "The Illuminati" have featured in evangelical Protestant conspiracy theories for two centuries, having originally been blamed for the Enlightenment and the French Revolution (Ruotsila 2004). In the mid-1990s, Springmeier's extremist views proved to be influential amongst some clinicians who subsequently speculated on possible links between ritual abuse and "the Illuminati" (e.g. Ross 1995: 10 - 11). References to Springmeier's theories have declined over the last ten years, and Springmeier is currently serving a nine-year sentence for armed bank robbery and the bombing of a pornography store (for a newspaper report, see Larabee 2003). Nonetheless, the conspiratorial linkages proposed by Springmeier between organised abuse and the American government continue to influence the writing of some therapists on ritualistic abuse (for an example, see Lacter 2008).

Goodwin (1994b: 486) argues that the focus on "ritual" and "religion" is fundamentally misplaced:

> In many ways it is unfortunate that this element [ritualistic abuse] became so prominent in many of the early investigations that the phenomenon was named "ritual abuse" rather than severe or sadistic abuse. This has led to the misconception that this was some sort of new phenomenon, that religious rather than sexual, monetary or power motivations were central to it, that its roots could be found in the history of religion rather than the history of crime, and that to perceive or study the phenomenon constituted some sort of fundamentalist witchhunting.

Goodwin (1994b: 486) argues that at the heart of ritual abuse discourse is the fantasy that "perhaps only a single tiny satanic cult was engaged in this set of violent behaviors and that once this small cadre were stopped, we would all be safe forever." She suggests, instead, that ritualistic abuse is one expression of a historical continuum of sadistic sexual practices that she traces back to the Marquis de Sade and his libertine contemporaries in the 18th century. In a range of publications, Goodwin (1989; 1993; 1994b) highlights the historical continuity between de Sade's libertinism and ritualistic abuse, but she does not elucidate upon its implications for the study of organised abuse beyond advocating for a shift in focus towards the issues of sexual violence and power.

Wolff (2005) suggests that the "dynamics of libertinism" encouraged child sexual abuse, since children personified an idealised feminine innocence in eroticised

contradistinction to the aggressive masculine sexuality proposed by libertinism. In libertine "fraternities", groups of men enacted sado-maschoistic and ritualistic sexual practices that inverted and parodied traditional Christian theology (Trumbach 2003). Such ritualistic sexual practices were celebrated by de Sade, who, in *Justine* (1787), described the sexual abuse of a child during a Black Mass, and, in *The 120 Days of Sodom* (1789), described the prolonged sexual assault, torture and subsequent murder of a group of children by four libertines. Goodwin (1994a: 484 - 485) points out that these ordeals are not just similar to those described by children and adults with histories of ritualistic abuse, but rather that they are virtually identical in structure and detail:

> To mention a few: locking in cages, threatening with death, burying in coffins, holding under water, threatening with weapons, drugging and bleeding, tipping upside down and burning, wearing of robes and costumes, staging of mock marriages, defecating and urinating on victims, killing of animals, having victims witness torture, having them witness homicides, pouring or drinking of blood, and taking victims to churches and cemeteries.

The only contemporary element missing in de Sade's account of organised and ritualistic abuse, Goodwin (1994a: 484) notes, is the manufacture of child pornography; however, "its place is taken by use of peepholes and uses of stages at the orgies, where each libertine could be seen to perform with his entourage of victims." She suggests that contemporary reports of ritualistic abuse are neither unprecedented nor unexplainable, as sceptics suggest. Nor are they evidence of underground "cults" or a trans-historical "Satanic" tradition. Instead, it seems that

cases of ritualistic abuse may be evidence of the persistence of the libertine notion of the male sexual prerogative which is derived from the historical pattern of gendered relations of power, and the associated practices of group sexual violence and ritualistic abuse.

Over the last ten years, this view has been supported by researchers who have applied ethnographic research methods and sociological analysis to the study of organised abuse. Scott's (2001) qualitative research with adult survivors of ritualistic abuse synthesises research on ritualistic abuse and organised abuse more broadly with social theory on violence against women and children. Using a grounded theory approach, Scott (2001) explored how her participants' accounts of ritualistic abuse were enmeshed within histories of family violence, abuse and neglect, as well as networks of perpetrators engaged in sadistic practices with children, child prostitution and the manufacture of child abuse images. Her findings challenge many of the assumptions of the ritual abuse literature, as well as those of its detractors. She suggests that that the harmful and traumatic experiences of ritually abused children are driven by routine power-and-control relationships, such as those between a parent and a child, and that their ritualistic abuse experiences should be seen in relation to a wider picture of severe family dysfunction, psychopathology and isolation. Sarson and MacDonald (2008) have also developed a social model of the role of ritualistic torture in perpetuating the sexual exploitation of women and children. They propose that a new a term, "ritual abuse-torture", is necessary to adequately capture the severity of the violence experienced by women and children subject to sexual exploitation by familial groups and networks.

Research on organised abuse

In Britain, research into organised abuse has had a broader agenda than ritualistic abuse and has emphasised the multiplicity of abusive practices in organised contexts (Kelly 1993; La Fontaine 1993; Gallagher 1994). British researchers have used the term "organised abuse" to describe the circumstances in which children are subject to sexual abuse by groups or networks of abusers. This literature formed the basis of subsequent social and criminological research, with research into organised abuse and child sexual exploitation (Cleaver & Freeman 1996; Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996; Itzin 1997; Doherty, Cassidy et al. 1999) auspicing and enriching literature on "satanist abuse" (Sinason 1994), "ritual abuse" (Scott 2001), child pornography (Itzin 1997; 2001), child prostitution (Barnardo's 1998) and institutional abuse (Gallagher 2000a). The work of Kelly and colleagues has been instrumental in linking the phenomenon of organised abuse to the issue of human trafficking internationally (Kelly & Regan 2000a; Kelly & Regan 2000b; Kelly 2002). The feminist grounding of this research has maintained a focus on the lived experience of survivors, the specific contexts of abuse, and how these issues intersect with the practices of child protection, social work and psychotherapy. In British child protection policy, organised abuse has been recognised as a specific category of abuse that requires a specialist response (e.g. Cambridge Area Child Protection Committee 2006) although Scott (2001: 2) has observed the "watering down" of official definitions of organised abuse in an apparent response to media and lobby group pressure.

In the early 1990s, Gallagher and his colleagues at the University of Manchester established the Organised Abuse Project, in which they employed a multi-method approach to develop a data set of child protection cases involving allegations of

organised abuse (Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996). The researchers first sent a survey to all police, social and welfare agencies requesting data on cases of organised abuse for the period 1988 to 1991. Respondents identified 211 separate cases, and "ritual abuse" was the predominant form of abuse reported (29%), followed by "paedophile ring" (20%) and organised abuse at a "non-residential institution" (14%). The authors then undertook a more comprehensive review of child protection cases within eight local authority areas, encompassing 20 000 files across 32 sites. In identifying 78 cases of organised abuse, of which only 8 had been reported to them by the national survey, they concluded "if the per capita rate of known cases of organised abuse in the eight areas combined was the same as that in the whole of England and Wales, then there would have been 1111 cases of organised abuse in England and Wales between 1988 and 1991, or a mean incidence of 278 cases per annum" (Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996: 220).

The congruence in the quantitative findings of Gallagher et al.'s (1996) analysis with an earlier, preliminary survey by the British National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (Creighton 1993) suggests that organised abuse may take place within a number of "natural types" of perpetrator groups. In Gallagher and colleague's sample of 78 child sex rings, 33 were constituted only of male perpetrators, and these groups primarily abused children of one gender or another (boys in 17 rings, girls in 13, both in 3). A higher number of rings (41) were comprised of both male and female perpetrators, and these groups predominantly abused only girls (19 rings) or both boys and girls (15 rings). Meanwhile, Creighton's survey of child protection teams distinguished between "network" (multiple perpetrators, multiple victims) and "ritual" (multiple perpetrators, multiple victims, ritualistic behaviour) rings. She found that

"network" abuse was perpetrated primarily by men who were strangers to the child's family, and they predominantly victimised male under-age teenagers. In contrast, ritualistic abuse victims were younger, predominantly girls (83%), with immediate and extended family members constituting 57% of perpetrators and friends of the family another 31%. Within both these studies, we find distinct patterns of organised abuse. On the one hand, there are examples of extrafamilial organised abuse in which groups of men act on a shared sexual preference for one gender, who target vulnerable children and teenagers from unstable families or those in state care. On the other hand, we find family-based organised abuse with perpetrators of both genders, in which young children, predominantly girls, are subject to sadistic abuse, sometimes in ceremonial or ritualistic contexts.

Gallagher et al's (1996) multi-method study raises a number of important questions regarding the bias of mandatory reporters in the identification and categorisation of organised abuse cases. When the researchers compared the results of their survey of police and welfare agencies with the results of their case review, they found that:

a. In the case review, family members and relatives were involved in two-thirds of all organised abuse cases, but survey respondents only grouped 13% of identified cases under the "family" category.

b. In all cases of ritualistic abuse, a family member was involved, but such cases tended to be categorised by respondents as "ritual" cases rather than "family" cases.

c. "Paedophile rings", comprised of extrafamilial men who had sex with under-age boys, constituted 11% of cases in the case review, although they made up 20% of cases reported by survey respondents.

This study makes a number of important contributions to the field of organised abuse. Firstly, these findings suggest that controversial forms of organised abuse, such as ritualistic abuse or the extra-familial abuse of boys, tend to be over-emphasised, whilst the role of familial offenders in organised abuse is minimised. On the whole, the researchers found that each case involved multiple settings and forms of abuse: "In short, there was no typical organised abuse case, but rather a set of factors that tended to cluster" (Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996: 226). The researchers also noted that, in the case of medium- to large-scale cases of organised abuse, victims tended to have already been in contact with social services due to abuse and neglect in their families. The authors go on to observe:

> The sexual abuse these children suffered tended to be extreme. On occasions, they would be exposed to bizarre and sadistic practices, such as being forced to eat excrement, and bestiality (Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996: 227).

Cleaver and Freeman (1996) provide a case study of organised abuse of rare detail. Through their research with parents suspected of child abuse, they developed close relationships with research participants that enabled them to identify an "abuse network" across eight families. Through their analysis, they illustrated the "cross-configuration" of patterns of organised abuse within families, in that the abuse "extended vertically through the inter-generational family structure and laterally

through the involvement of wider kin and family friends" (Cleaver & Freeman 1996: 232). In some of these families, sexual abuse was routine. Children were engaged in sexual activities from a young age with various members of the family, with the abuse quickly progressing to include penetrative assaults. The authors noted that "men dominated that abusive activity but were not the only abusers". Women, usually mothers or grandmothers, were involved in abusive activities which "ranged from recruitment or tacit acceptance to restraining children or concealing its effects to being perpetrators themselves" (Cleaver & Freeman 1996: 237). Relationships between men and women within this family network were based on a system of exchange "in which the male perpetrator's offer of love and financial assistance was traded for sexual access to the woman's children" (Cleaver & Freeman 1996: 239). The families involved in the organised abuse all adopted and promoted an "abuse culture" that fostered secrecy and interdependence.

Handicapped children are a group of children who are disproportionately vulnerable to sexual abuse (Cross 1993; Sobsey & Mansell 1994; Herschkowitz, Lamb & Horowitz 2007). Research suggests that they are more likely to experience serious and/or organised abuse (Baladerian 1991). In a study of forensic statements by sexually abused children, Herschkowitz and colleagues (2007) found that children categorised as having "minor" or "severe" disabilities were more likely to report serious sexual offences (such as those involving penetration, repeated abuse, use of force, and threats) than their non-handicapped peers. Sinason (1994) first became aware of organised and ritualistic abuse while supervising the treatment of a severely mentally handicapped woman (she discusses this case in Sinason & Svensson 1994). Her book contains a number of chapters regarding the organised and ritualistic abuse

of the handicapped. Bicknell (1994: 151) argues that "children with learning disabilities are likely to be attractive to those who abuse children in ritualistic settings", noting that learning handicapped children have fewer resources to resist coercion and less capacity to disclose abuse. In the same book, Beail (1994) and Morris (1994) reported on their experiences with handicapped clients who disclosed histories of ritualistic abuse. One chapter was written by Charleson (1994), a handicapped man who described his experiences of organised and ritualistic abuse at boarding school during his teen years.

Organised abuse is a form of abuse in which sexual victimisation is not limited to discrete age, gender or relationship categories. Male and female children may be abused by the same perpetrators, perpetrators may abuse their own children as well as children from outside their family, and children and women may be abused alongside one another (Cleaver & Freeman 1996; Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996; Scott 2001). However, the literature on organised abuse has generally focused on the sexual abuse of children without considering the intersection between the organised abuse of children and the organised abuse of women. An exception to this is the recent article by Harkins and Dixon (2010) in which the authors review and compare the literature on group sexual offending against children and adults respectively. From this comparison, they develop a multi-factorial theory of multiple perpetrator offending that integrates psychological and sociological theory. They emphasise how individual "sexual interests" may be informed by prevailing ideologies of masculine domination that legitimise sexual assault as a strategy for male bonding. This is an intriguing theory that requires further exploration and research. However, the comprehensiveness of their literature review is undermined by their avoidance of the

literature on ritualistic abuse. Although they refer in passing to ritualistic abuse in their summary of Finkelhor and William's (1988) analysis of multi-perpetrator abuse in day-care centres, they fail to acknowledge ritualistic abuse as a particular category of multi-perpetrator sexual abuse, nor do they engage with the substantive work of Gallagher (1996), Scott (2001) and others (e.g. Creighton 1993; Waterman, Kelly et al. 1993; Jonker & Jonker-Bakker 1997) in relation to ritualistic abuse. Their reliance on the analysis of de Young (1997), who has dismissed allegations of organised abuse in day care centres as false in spite of the substantiation of numerous cases (Finkelhor & Williams 1988; Waterman, Kelly et al. 1993), suggests that the authors may have adopted an overly cautious approach to relation to organised abuse.

Organised abuse and gender

With few exceptions (Kelly 1998; Scott 2001), gender is a neglected factor in the literature on organised abuse. This is suprising, since women and girls are the overwhelming majority of victims who report histories of ritualistic abuse, which is generally considered a marker of the most prolonged and sadistic form of organised abuse (Driscoll & Wright 1991; Shaffer & Cozolino 1992; Creighton 1993; Scott 1993; Coleman 1994).[21] The limited prevalence data available suggests that girls are the primary targets of abusive groups (Wild & Wynne 1986; Wild 1989).[22] In their study of 211 reported cases of organised abuse in Britain and Wales, Gallagher and colleagues (1996) found that 45% of cases involved only the abuse of girls, and 24%

[21] A number of small surveys of adults and children reporting ritualistic abuse, or samples of cases of ritualistic abuse, do not report on the gender of victims (Hudson 1990; Snow & Sorenson 1990; Cook 1991) which highlights the lack of priority afforded to gender in many inquiries into ritual abuse.

[22] Gender parity has been found in some studies of extra-familial organised abuse (Hunt & Baird 1990; Jonker & Jonker-Bakker 1997), particularly ritualistic abuse in day-care centres (Bybee & Mobrey 1993; Gonzelez, Waterman & Kelly 1993). Nonetheless, day-care centre cases are not typical of reports of ritualistic abuse, which generally involve the abuse of children by parents and family members (Creighton 1993; Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996), or organised abuse more generally, which involves a preponderance of family members and relatives as perpetrators (Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996).

of cases involved the abuse of boys and girls. Less than a third of cases involved the groups that only targeted boys. Creighton (1993) reports that boys subject to organised abuse are generally in their teens and manipulated into sexual exploitation by a stranger or acquaintance. In contrast, girls subject to organised abuse were more likely to be abused by family members, the abuse began at a younger age and they were subject to more severe and prolonged abuse, including ritualistic abuse.

Simple prevalence measures hint at, but do not provide, the full picture of gender dynamics within organised abuse. For example, higher numbers of victims are often reported in cases of organised abuse in which boys are targeted. In such cases, however, victims are typically older and the frequency, severity and period of abuse of each male victim is limited in comparison to circumstances in which girls are targeted, or where boys and girls are targeted (Creighton 1993; Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996). A possible explanation is that, where boys are preferentially targeted, they are usually in their teens (and therefore have greater capacity for resistance than a young child) and their abusers are most often strangers or acquaintances with relatively limited control over them. Such abuse may result in relatively larger *numbers* of victims but a diminished *degree* of abuse severity, since teenage victims may find it easier to sever contact with the abusers, who must then find new victims in order to sustain the pattern of abuse. This description accords with many of the FBI case records analysed by Burgess and colleagues (Berenbaum, Burgess et al. 1984; Burgess, Hartman et al. 1984; Burgess & Lindeqvist Clark 1984) and described in public inquiries into organised "paedophilia" (NCA Joint Committee Report 1995a; Wood Report 1997).

Whilst fewer victims are reported in cases of organised abuse involving the abuse of girls, or girls and boys, the abuse is often more severe and prolonged (often involving ritualistic abuse) (Creighton 1993; Gallagher, Hughes et al. 1996) and may persist into adulthood. For example, Scott (1993) reported that, amongst the 191 who contacted a ritual abuse hotline in a twenty four hour period[23], twenty said that they were subject to ongoing abuse. Only three of these twenty callers were male, and female callers reporting a history of ritualistic abuse outnumbered men by a ratio of 2:1. The number of victims in cases of organised abuse is therefore only one measure of the severity of the abusive activity and may provide a misleading picture of the gendered dynamics of organised abuse. Other relevant indices include the age of abuse initiation, the diversity, extremity and frequency of the abusive acts, and the period of time that a victim was subject to organised abuse. The evidence suggests that, whilst abusive groups that preferentially target male victims may abuse higher numbers of children, those groups that victimise girls or boys and girls subject children to more intensive, frequent and prolonged victimisation, including the victimisation of some children into adulthood.

Whilst the gendered dynamics of organised abuse has gone largely unremarked, much has been made of the disproportionate participation of women as perpetrators in organised contexts. This phenomenon was first noted in day-care cases of organised abuse in the States (Finkelhor & Williams 1988; Waterman, Kelly et al. 1993) and it has also been reported in surveys of adult survivors (Driscoll & Wright 1991; Smith 1993) and in reports from clinicians working with adults and children with histories of organised abuse (Robinson, Koester & Kaufman 1994). Cases of organised abuse

[23] Scott (1993: 245) states that the helpline, available for twenty four hours after a BBC program on ritual abuse was screened in Britain in 1992, was unable to cope with demand, registering 4500 attempted calls in the first hour of operation.

constitute, in fact, a significant proportion of all detected cases of female sexual offending against children. In Faller's (1987: 266) study of forty women in treatment for sexually abusing children, almost three-quarters had offended in "poly-incestuous family situations" characterised by "multiple sexually abusive relationships and group sex with children of both sexes" . In an expanded study of seventy-two women in treatment for the perpetration of sexual abuse, Faller (1995) reported that almost 70% of the sample sexually abused alongside multiple offenders. In her description of the cases, she identified twenty-eight "poly-incestuous cases", and fifteen cases of women involved in extra-familial ritualistic abuse.

Faller (1987; 1995) documented the high level of mental illness, substance abuse and cognitive deficits amongst female sexual offenders, and suggested that many of the women in her studies had been coerced into sexually abusive behaviour by co-offending men. Her position that women's sexually abusive behaviour in organised contexts was frequently a product of "male dominance" (Faller 1987: 274; Faller 1995: 27) is an atypically political account of women's involvement in organised abuse. In much of the literature on ritualistic abuse, the participation of women is generally conceptualised in terms of their involuntary participation within an intergenerational "cult" alongside abusive men (deMause 1994; Sinason 1994; Noblitt & Perskin 2000). The literature suggests that both men and women who abuse in such contexts have also been abused in childhood, just as they offend in adulthood - the archetype of the "predisposed" or "intergenerational perpetrator" described by Peter (2006). The unspoken assumption is that women's participation in organised abuse is produced under the same circumstances as men's. At the very least, it seems that many therapists feel that the difference between men's and women's involvement in

organised abuse is unimportant when conceptualising organised abuse as a whole. Scott's (2001) research challenges these assumptions. She noted that, whilst abusive incidents may be orchestrated in a manner that "rendered women and men equal in the pursuit of power and pleasure" (Scott 2001: 130), the lives of women in abusive groups described by her participants were characterised by submission to the demands of husbands, fathers and other men. This submission was frequently achieved through violence and abuse. It seems that, whilst abusive groups frequently involve both men and women, their roles and experiences are not equivalent. The evidence suggests that organised abuse is a form of abuse in which women's reasons for abusing children may be very different from those of their male co-offenders.

Research on the organised abuse of children in care

The Australian Senate inquiry into institutional and out-of-home care estimated that more than half a million Australian children had been placed in an orphanage, children's home or industrial school over the last century (Senate Community Affairs Committee 2004). In 2008, there were 31,166 Australian children in care, although only 5% were in residential care and most were in fostering and kinship placements (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2007). This trend away from residential children's homes has occurred over the last thirty years as the poor life outcomes of children placed in residential care have become evident. Historically, very young children as well as older children have been placed in residential care, sometimes for many years, with little thought given to the impact of the institutional placement on the child's wellbeing or life outcomes. In reflecting on the plight of children in care, it is relevant to consider that, until relatively recently, the lack of effective birth control and legal, safe abortions resulted in high birth rates in poor families and hence a large

population of children in need of state care. The paradigm of institutional in Western countries has historically been marked by neglect and depersonalised and punitive responses by care givers (Goffman 1961; Foucault 1967).

Kelly and Scott (1993) describe the plight of many children in care as a form of "normalized organised abuse", since, throughout the 20th century, children in out-of-home and residential care have been subjected to regimes of child labour, deprivation and punishment with government and public support. Historically, children's institutions have been characterised by their isolation, in geographic and social terms, and the hierarchical and unequal power relationships between institutional administrators, staff and child wards (Doran & Brannan 1996). The physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children in care has been widespread (Coldrey 2000). Studies of the prevalence of the sexual abuse of children in public care suggest that rates of sexual victimisation remain disproportionately high, although the perpetrators are predominantly other children rather than staff (Gallagher 1999). Where staff have been found to be sexually abusing children in care, the majority have acted alone (Gallagher 2000a). However, an overlap between institutional abuse and organised abuse has been widely reported (Gallagher 1999).

Public inquiries into the plight of children in out-of-home care in Australia have documented complaints of sexual abuse perpetrated by officers, staff, clergy, other residents, or visitors to the institution (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997; Commission of Inquiry 2000; Senate Community Affairs References Committee 2001; Mullighan Report 2004; Senate Community Affairs Committee 2004). In Australia, as overseas (see Brannan, Jones & Murch 1993),

patterns of abuse have emerged in which administrators, staff and officers in particular institutions have fostered a culture of physical and sexual violence amongst staff and children, in which staff collaborated in sexually abusing wards and enjoined children in the abuse of other children. This was a particular feature of reports of abuse in Christian Brothers institutions, and the Senate report on child migration noted allegations that the Brothers operated, in effect, "sex rings" at some orphanages (Senate Community Affairs References Committee 2001: 77). The Wood Royal Commission also heard allegations that men obtained influential positions in the NSW child care system with the intention of sexually abusing children and enabling other men to do so (Hawkins & Briggs 1997), which reflects patterns of organised institutional abuse identified overseas (Stein 2006). Cases of organised abuse represent, statistically, a small proportion of cases of institutional abuse referred to the police for investigation (Gallagher 2000a). It is clear from the eyewitness testimony provided to public inquiries that the most serious cases of organised sexual abuse of children in institutional care have involved the targeting of very vulnerable children with few supports or resources to protect themselves.[24] This accords with research on institutional abuse, which finds that abusers utilise the knowledge gained through their legitimate employment as the children's caretakers to identify vulnerable children and entrap them into abuse (Colton & Vanstone 1996; Gallagher 1999).

Research into institutional abuse has focused largely on risk factors and prevention, resulting in a range of recommendations for social services to reduce the risk to children. Perpetrators are generally presumed to be "motivated" or "preferential" offenders who seek out employment in children's institutions with the intention of

[24] For example, The Wood Royal Commission in New South Wales heard testimony from a former social worker that he accessed the confidential files of children in care in order to identify vulnerable children for sexual abuse and the manufacture of child pornography (Hawkins & Briggs 1997: 45).

sexually abusing children (the "professional perpetrator" described by Sullivan and Beech (2002)) . This may accurately described some men who sexually abuse children in residential care. Nonetheless, the research does not support the uniform supposition that sexual abuse in institutional settings is the result of a pre-existing disposition towards sexual abuse amongst staff members, and this is particularly the case where organised and sadistic abuse is a feature of reports of institutional abuse. For example, the Christian Brothers have been implicated in the most serious cases of the institutional abuse of child wards globally, which suggests that the *culture* of the order is an important contributing factor towards the Brother's sadistic and abusive conduct with children.

> The Irish Christian Brothers have been world-renowned for their heavy reliance on corporal punishment – the discipline of ruler, rod, and cane liberally applied to the hands, legs, and backsides of slow learners. One notes a flagrant misrecognition, a failure or a refusal on the part of these stern disciplinarians to see the rather immediate and manifest relationship between corporal discipline and deviant sadomasochistic sexuality. Traditional Christian Brothers' school discipline managed to create a highly erotically charged environment, which may be seen as both antecedent and incitement to other forms of sexual abuse (Scheper-Hughes & Fishel Sargent 1998: 307).

Scheper-Hughes and Fishel Sargent (1998: 308) identify a "long-tolerated and altogether cozy relationship between normatively practiced corporal punishment and deviant practices of child rape in schools, orphanages and homes". In examining sexual abuse by men who work with children, Colton and Vanstone (1996) argued

that the predisposition to commit sexual abuse is not a mental illness, but rather is formed through men's psychodynamic integration and application of normative ideals of masculinity, which can in turn be intensified by organisational structures that provide the opportunity for men to eroticise their socially legitimised power over children. In her overview of research into sexuality and sexual-abuse issues in children's homes, Green (2005) has criticised the lack of attention afforded to gender in the study of institutional abuse, noting the deeply gendered characteristics of organisations in general, and the interplay of sex, gender and sexuality in residential care specifically.

Australian research on organised abuse

Successful prosecutions for organised and ritualistic abuse in Australia (e.g. Humphries 1991; Towers 1998; Petraitis & O'Connor 1999; Oberhardt & Keim 2004), and other cases detailed in the press (e.g. Wood & Chulov 1999; Hughes 2004a; Hughes 2004b; Hughes 2004c; Hughes 2006; O'Neill 2009) have not attracted much in the way of popular or academic attention. A small number of clinicians and researchers have highlighted the serious harms of organised and ritualistic abuse for Australian children (Spensley 1992; Oates 1996; McLeod & Goddard 2005). The New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory Health Departments have both commissioned studies of the needs of female survivors of sexual abuse that have emphasised the unmet needs of survivors of organised and ritualistic abuse (Courtney & Williams 1995; NSW Health 1997). A 2003 qualitative study of 31 female survivors of sexual abuse conducted by the South Australian Health Department included two survivors of organised abuse and emphasised the difficulties they have experienced with the criminal justice system and health system (Freer & Seymour 2003). As discussed in Chapter 2, where allegations of organised and ritualistic abuse

have been publicised in the media, it has been primarily in the context of debates over "recovered memories" and "false memory syndrome". A popular resource on organised and ritualistic abuse in Australia is a journalistic treatment by Richard Guilliatt (1996) which claims that survivors' accounts of ritualistic abuse are manufactured by untrained and overzealous psychotherapists.

A number of Australian government inquiries into "organised paedophilia" have been conducted over the last twenty years and they have yielded interesting information (NCA Joint Committee Report 1995b; Wood Report 1997; Kimmins Report 1999). Nonetheless, they have been conducted primarily within a juridico-legal framework that has reflected government priorities and policies, often devaluing the eyewitness evidence of abused women and children whilst privileging the perspective of the police, psychiatrists and other "authoritative" voices. Cossins (1999) has criticised the Wood Royal Commission's utilisation of a psychiatric typology of sexual offenders that prioritised the sexual abuse of boys over the abuse of girls. In England, Green (2005) also notes the tendency of public inquiries into allegations of sexual abuse to reflect traditional views that gay men are an intrinsic risk to the safety of teenage boys. She describes the manner in which public inquiries (and some academic literature) on sexual abuse overlook the evidence that most sexual abuse is committed by heterosexual men against girls as "extremely worrying" (Green 2005: 457). In Australia, the role of sexually abusive fathers in facilitating organised abuse has never been addressed by Australian law enforcement. McLeod and Goddard (2005: 29) have described the position of Australian authorities in relation to cases of organised and ritualistic abuse as one of "fundamental disbelief".

The Australian response to adults and children with histories of organised abuse has been driven by the community sector, particularly a non-government organisation for adults with histories of child abuse, Adults Surviving Child Abuse (Mulliner & Hunt 1997; ASCA 2006), and sexual assault and domestic violence services (Sydney Rape Crisis Centre 1995; Campbell 2002; Cooper, Anaf et al. 2006). Cooper and colleagues (2006) undertook a case review of clients presenting to domestic violence shelters, and found that 16% of them were seeking protection from partners with connections to organised groups, including ritualistic cults and bikie gangs. They documented workers' descriptions of the physical and sexual violence disclosed by these women, and argued that such violence can be accurately described as torture. Schmuttermaier and Veno (1999) conducted a survey of 93 sexual assault workers, psychologists and psychiatrists in Melbourne and found that 85% believed that disclosures of ritualistic abuse were an indication of genuine trauma. In the study, a sexual assault service undertook a case review of ritualistic abuse presentations from 1985 to 1995, identifying 153 cases over the period. Three autobiographies written by survivors of organised abuse have been published recently in Australia, including Roy's (2005) account of organised and ritualistic abuse in Queensland, Crease's (2005) account of organised abuse in Adelaide and Kezelman's (2010) memoir that documents her recollections of organised and ritualistic abuse. Brunet's (2007) unpublished doctoral thesis contains autobiographical material regarding her history of organised and ritualistic abuse, and Brown's (2006) unpublished doctoral thesis provides an in-depth account of the psychotherapeutic treatment of a woman subjected to organised and ritualistic abuse in Perth.

In Australia, action research by health and welfare services provides a picture of the diverse circumstances in which workers are encountering survivors of ritualistic abuse, and the burden of organised abuse overall on services. This research has focused primarily on ritualistic abuse, which predominantly involves reports of organised abuse of very young children by sadistic abusers. In 1992, a survey of 92 attendees at a conference on ritualistic abuse in Melbourne found that 65 had worked with a total of 424 clients with a history of ritualistic abuse (Australian Association of Multiple Personality & Dissociation, 1992). In 1994, a one-week review of contacts by new clients at eight women's health services in the ACT found 43 clients reporting a history of ritualistic abuse (Courtney & Williams 1995), whilst a survey of 79 workers at community health centres and women's services in NSW reported 123 cases of ritualistic abuse for the year (NSW Sexual Assault Committee 1994). In 1995, the Sydney Rape Crisis service reported receiving 584 calls from women who identified themselves as survivors of ritualistic abuse in the 12 months prior to June 1995 (Sydney Rape Crisis Centre 1995). Stepping Out, a supported accommodation service for adult survivors of child sexual assault in Sydney, has also reported a high rate of contact with women with a history of ritualistic abuse (van Dyke 1995). In 1999, a ten-year case review of a Centre Against Sexual Assault in Melbourne identified 153 cases of ritualistic abuse from between 1985 and 1996 (Schmuttermaier & Veno 1999). In 2000, Sisters Inside, a Brisbane-based community group for women in jail, published the findings of a survey of 100 of their members, which found that 16% reported a history of ritualistic abuse (Kilroy 2000).

Conclusion

The research literature suggests that a significant proportion of people reporting a history of sexual abuse indicate that they have been abused by multiple perpetrators. However, it is rare that multi-perpetrator forms of sexual abuse have been collectively reviewed and analysed by researchers. Those researchers that have studied multi-perpetrator abuse have generally presumed that sexual abuse victims are reporting abuse by perpetrators who are unknown to one another, however a number of clinic-based and victim report studies indicate that multiple perpetrators can collude and conspire to sexually abuse children. These studies also suggest that such instances of abuse involve particularly serious abuse and cause serious psychological and physical harm to victimised children. Nonetheless, there is no available data to reliably determine the community prevalence of organised abuse and organised abuse has been overlooked in research into sexual abuse more generally. For example, most epidemiological studies of child sexual abuse have failed to include research questions that might assist in determining the overall prevalence of organised abuse compared to other forms of sexual abuse, whilst service and law enforcement agencies generally do not collect data on organised abuse as a specific category of sexual abuse.

Research on organised abuse has generally been undertaken with a focus on particular abusive practices, such as ritualistic abuse or the manufacture of child abuse images, or else on particular sites of abuse, such as day-care centres and children's institutions. These studies provide important, if partial, vantage points on the practices of abusive groups, as well as the frequency with which adults and children with histories of organised abuse present to health and welfare services. However, researchers have focused disproportionately on sites where organised abuse emerges

into the "public" realm (e.g. through the online circulation of child abuse images or the participation of minors in sex work) whilst often struggling to account for or conceptualise organised abuse where it emerges in the "private" realm of the family and home. Moreover, by employing a highly specialised focus on a particular abusive practices, these studies have often failed to make the links between the different forms of organised abuse or the relationship between organised abuse and other forms of sexual abuse and violence.

Emerging from the research literature is evidence of a "hidden" population of abused children who are being subjected to organised, sadistic and ritualistic abuse by their parents and/or other adults who enjoy socially legitimised power over them. Sanday (1996) argues that sexual violence has been a characteristic of the development of the contemporary form of gender relations, which is underpinned by a masculine sexual ethos of that cuts across lines of class and race. She suggests that this is a "cult of virility" that not only encourages the use of coercion and force in men's interpersonal relations with women, but it enjoins men to participate collectively in sexual violence (Sanday 1996; Sanday 2007). Goodwin's (1994b) writing on the history of libertinism and child abuse has also highlights the relationship between the notion of a masculine sexual prerogative and group sexual violence; in this case, the organised and sadistic abuse of children. Nonetheless, the potential implications of this linkage between gender, power and violence have yet to be explored thoroughly by researchers in relation to organised abuse. It is apparent that more research is necessary into the multiple forms of abuse that cluster within reports of organised abuse, and the relation of organised abuse to broader questions of gender and power. This is the research gap that I seek to address in the rest of this thesis.

4

Methodology

Over the course of this project, twenty one adults with histories of sexual abuse by multiple perpetrators shared their life histories with me. Sixteen participants were women and five were men. They spoke of their childhoods, their pathways into adulthood, the circumstances of their present life, and their hopes for the future. Most were in their thirties and forties, although some were as young as their early twenties, and others were in their fifties and sixties. About half came from working-class backgrounds and half from middle- or upper-class families. Their cultural backgrounds were predominantly Anglo-Australian. Whilst highlighting the distinctive nature of organised abuse, this study has – through the use of a broad definition – identified a diverse set of experiences. My interest has been in foregrounding organised abuse as a configuration of sexual violence and documenting the lived experience of organised abuse through the eyewitness testimony of adult survivors.

Survivors of sexual abuse are rarely engaged in qualitative research, perhaps due to the concern of researchers that they may experience distress in interview (DePrince &

Freyd 2004; Becker-Blease & Freyd 2006). However, my experience in this project indicates that, when their particular needs and vulnerabilities are taken into account, adult survivors of sexual abuse have an important contribution to make to research into sexual abuse, and indeed many feel a moral duty to do so. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the development of the research methodology and how it worked in practice, before reflecting more generally on the role of qualitative methodologies with traumatised populations.

The selection of the project methodology

In developing this project, I found a strong starting point in Sara Scott's (2001) research with adult survivors of "ritual abuse" in Britain. Like me, Scott first encountered the subject of organised and ritualistic abuse as the carer for a young woman who was still being victimised by an abusive group. Her reflections on her time as a carer have a stark resonance for me:

> When I look back towards the early 1990s, it is almost impossible to grasp how much of my life was disrupted by coming to know about ritual abuse, or to really remember the fear, anxiety and confusion that enveloped my world … It is impossible to recapture the 'shock of the new' in listening to her accounts of hypnosis and torture, of killing hens and sheep and babies, of eating maggots and vomit and human flesh, and of child prostitution and pornography (Scott 2001: 9-10).

Scott's decision to undertake qualitative research with adult survivors of ritualistic abuse was motivated by her frustration with a sensationalist "discourse of disbelief" (Scott 2001: 6) that characterised women and children disclosing ritualistic abuse as unreliable witnesses to their own lives. She was particularly concerned with the

failure of the media and academic commentators to situate ritualistic abuse within the "whole lives" of victimised women and children (Scott 1998). Contemplating a research project on ritualistic abuse in a hostile media environment, she decided to adopt the life history method for strategic reasons:

> The decision to structure interviews as life histories was deliberate. I felt strongly that media and professional responses to ritual abuse had rarely dealt in "whole lives", sadistic rituals were presented without reference to the everyday, familial existence in which they were embedded, and that such decontextualisation encouraged disbelief ... Part of what I was doing was deliberately "normalising" the kinds of accounts I collected (Scott 1998).

In the life histories gathered by Scott (2001), ritualistic abuse was enmeshed within participants' narratives of a continuum of familial abuse and neglect. The extremes of ritualistic abuse emerged from within a broader context of abuse and powerlessness, which included a range of other forms of organised abuse, such as child prostitution and the manufacture of child abuse images. Scott argued that the life histories offered by her research participants provided an alternative narrative to the disbelief that dominated media and academic commentary on ritualistic abuse during the 1990s, and her analysis focused on "the organisation of power, status and gender" within narratives of ritualistic abuse as constructed by survivors and the media (Scott 1998).

I decided to build on Scott's findings by adopting a similar research methodology, whilst expanding the scope of the research to encompass all forms of organised abuse without privileging one form (e.g. ritualistic abuse) over another. In this way, I hoped to explore the manner in which forms of organised abuse clustered within the lived experiences of survivors, and to highlight how organised abuse was embedded within

more common experiences of violence and maltreatment. My approach departs from Scott's in a number of key ways. Wise (1999) argued that Scott's work, in exploring *and* contesting the ways that survivors' accounts of ritualistic abuse have been socially constructed (by survivors as well as by sceptical journalists and academics) "is a symptom of the very problem she discusses". Critical feminist theorists on child abuse, Wise suggested, are trapped in the paradox of asserting child abuse as a serious issue, *whilst also* challenging the social construction of child abuse: "In effect, the position many feminist researchers and activists have taken up has meant that they assert over and over that 'it happens' but also reject moving on from this to examine the complexities and problematics, as well as the facilities, involved" (Wise 1999). I agree with Wise that, when the sole concern of research on child abuse is the social construction of discourse and narratives, then the problem of child abuse, as it is enacted and experienced, is decentred and easily lost. Scott's work provided an important contribution to the debate over the social construction of women's testimonial legitimacy but the implications of her findings for the study of organised abuse, as a form of criminal activity, are underexplored.

From the outset of this project, I have been interested in organised abuse *as it is practised* by perpetrators and *experienced* by victims, and the relationship of these practices of victimisation to other forms of abuse and violence, such as domestic violence, incest and neglect. In this light, I applied the life history method as a way of eliciting "thick descriptions" (Geertz 1973) of organised abuse from within participants' recollections of everyday life as children and adults. I theorised that such narratives would contain not only important information on organised abuse, but also insights into the manner in which systemic relations of gender oppression reproduced themselves in organised abuse as well as in other forms of abuse and violence. In

contrast to the "individualising" modes of law and medicine that have dominated the conceptualisation of organised abuse, life history research is an approach that puts the subject into history and history into the subject. The recursiveness and contingency of *both* individual life *and* social structures are revealed in life history research through the lens of lived experience. Researchers such as Plummer (1995), Connell (2005) and Dowsett (1996) have used the life history method to explore the relational nature of gender and sexuality. Dowsett (1996: 50) argued that the utility of life history work is its capacity to "uncover more than is immediately obvious in the individual life" and investigate social processes. Historically, the life history method has been a useful methodology for researchers interested in bringing marginalised histories and stories to public awareness, thereby contesting dominant perspectives (Plummer 1983: 58).

In designing this project, I felt that the life history method was a "good fit" in practical as well as theoretical terms. The life history method has a number of qualities to recommend it in relation to research with survivors of organised abuse. The participant-directed nature of the life history interview was appealing because it empowers research participants to craft a self-narrative that reflects their own priorities and understandings. In such a validating context, I felt that potentially destabilising traumatic symptoms (such as "triggering" and flashbacks) were less likely to arise. The broad scope of the life history interview also provides many different opportunities and methods of addressing traumatic events without confronting the event in a direct and potentially unsafe way. For example, if a participant is unable to speak about a period or incident of abuse without experiencing distress, this event could instead be discussed in terms of its impact on the participant's schooling at the time, their health and wellbeing, and so on. In the ebb and flow of the interview, I felt that this could enable the participant to move past

potentially disturbing memories without disrupting or breaking their narrative. Thus, the potential risks to the participant could be minimised whilst the quality of data would be enhanced.

My decision to use the life history method had a political dimension. Survivors of organised abuse are enmeshed within a matrix of disempowerment according to gender, age, ethnicity, mental illness, alcohol and drug use, and a range of other factors that consign survivors of child abuse to a diminished social status. They often struggle to make their experiences understood, and urgent, to authorities who could intervene. Frequently, the only evidence they have to offer in support of their accounts are their own memories, and the value of such memories has been under sustained attack since the late 1980s. This attack has been based upon legalistic constructions of women's and children's credibility. However, Campbell (2003: 60) has proposed that models of "non-legal testimony" claimed by women can provide alternative ways of framing women's disclosures of sexual abuse. In particular, she suggests that the South American concept of *testimonio* provides a valuable reconceptualisation of women's testimony of sexual violence:

> *Testimonio* focuses attention on the collective political dimension of women's speech. At the same time, discussing this narrative form allows us to look at a number of specific ways in which testimony can be mediated by and dependent on others (Campbell 2003: 60).

Testimonio is a form of testimonial narrative made use of by subjects who are marginalised by authorised representation, such as children, women and the mentally ill. In offering *testimonio,* a person excluded from traditional means of seeking redress offers eyewitness evidence of serious harms committed against her and witnessed by

her. In my experience, many survivors of organised abuse feel a heavy sense of responsibility to others who are still being abused, as well as those cannot speak for themselves because of injury or death. However, adults with histories of organised abuse are largely excluded from the criminal justice system, due to the obfuscation of their memory by trauma and dissociation and/or a prolonged delay in reporting (Fraser 1997). Whilst these are all within the range of the normal psychological responses to severe abuse, such responses are systemically misconstrued in the criminal justice system as evidence that the victim is an unreliable witness (Cossins 2002). Through the life history method, I sought to provide survivors of organised abuse with an alternative testimonial opportunity that had legitimacy as an academic endeavour, without the invalidation and minimisation that has often attended their efforts to engage the police or other authorities. Through such a process, "private pain is transformed into political dignity" (Agger & Buus Jensen 1990: 115).

The development of the project methodology

The comfort, safety and confidentiality of research participants have been particularly pressing concerns throughout this project. The use of threats of violence against victimised children is ubiquitous in reports of organised abuse (Waterman, Kelly, Olivieri & McCord 1993; Jonker & Jonker-Bakker 1997; Doherty, Cassidy & Armstrong 1999). Such threats are an effective strategy in preventing disclosure in children (Finkelhor & Williams 1988; Lyon 1996) and the silencing effects of this strategy persist into adulthood through the associated fear and amnesia (Briere & Conte 1991; Alaggia 2004). Many adults with histories of organised abuse are terrified of disclosure years or decades after the abuse has ceased. This gives rise to what Herman (1992) calls the "dual imperative" of sexual abuse survivors to tell the truth about their lives whilst also maintaining their silence and thus avoiding

retaliation by their abusers. This dynamic is abundantly clear in the autobiographical writings of adults with histories of organised abuse. In the following excerpt, a survivor with the pseudonym "G&C" (1998: 7) reflects on the ongoing inhibition of her capacity to disclose her abuse:

> Today I can write only of my intention to write, and even this is more than I was taught to dare. I was three when my voice curled in on itself and settled into a deep, still sleep that remained unbroken for nearly twelve years. But I am twenty now and wide-eyes awake; my words are alive again and pressing to be named.

It is clear that fear is a serious obstacle to disclosure for adult survivors of organised abuse but this fear is not only the consequence of childhood abuse. Many women with histories of organised abuse report being stalked, terrorised and abused by the perpetrator group in adulthood (Scott 2001). It was conceivable that participation in the research project could result in serious harm for some survivors if their abusers were aware that they were disclosing their abuse. It was therefore crucial that participants felt safe and in control throughout the research process, and that extra measures were taken to ensure the security of their personal details.

Ethics approval

In October 2007, I submitted an application to the Human Ethics Research Committee at the University of New South Wales to recruit adult survivors of organised abuse for life history interviews. The Committee gave their approval to the project in November 2007 after requesting more information and a number of small changes to the Participant Information Statement and other preliminary documentation, most of which were technical rather than substantive. They requested changes to the

recruitment questionnaire, the initial draft of which had asked participants to identify with a tick the forms of organised abuse they had been subjected to (e.g. child prostitution, ritualistic abuse, the manufacture of child pornography and so on). The Committee requested that any questions about sexual abuse be removed from the questionnaire on the basis that these may cause distress to the participant. These questions were duly removed from the questionnaire, although this hampered my efforts to screen out people whose experiences of sexual abuse fell outside those under study. This issue will be discussed shortly (see page 190).

The Committee expressed a number of concerns about the potentially distressing nature of the research for participants, and they requested clarification of my particular skills or experience in "detecting distress" in research participants. In response to these concerns, I claimed no special expertise in "detecting distress", but instead I emphasised that the project was based on a commitment to the principle of autonomy i.e. that adults volunteering for a conversational interview could make their own judgements about what was good for them. I also drew the Committee's attention to Newman and colleagues' (1999b; 1999a; 2004) mixed-method research project on abuse histories and post-traumatic symptomology. In this project, 250 women participated in two interviews regarding their history of abuse of trauma, and during the researchers' evaluation of the project, 97% of participants agreed that they would have participated if they had known what the experience would have been like. Following the first interview, 86% of women agreed or strongly agreed that they had gained something positive from the experience of the interview, and no participants disagreed with this statement. Moreover, Becker-Blease and Freyd (2006: 221) reviewed a range of research findings on participant experiences of trauma research, and they concluded that "[i]t is rare that a research participant becomes distressed

after answering questions about abuse." They emphasise that researchers "must be careful that their efforts to protect survivors do not inadvertently send the message that survivors are incompetent", noting that such treatment is inherently victimising and may cause further harm (Becker-Blease & Freyd 2006: 223). The Committee were satisfied with the evidence that adult survivors of child abuse are capable of making an informed decision to participate in qualitative research and that it was important to respect their capacity to do so. The final Participant Information Statement and Consent Form is available at Appendix III.

Recruitment strategy

The recruitment strategy focused on recruiting potential participants through sites in which adult survivors of sexual abuse were likely to be accessing care and support, such as counselling services and community-based organisations. It was anticipated that survivors who had their own arrangements with care providers would be in a better position to participate in qualitative interviews then those who did not. In late 2007 and early 2008, I approached a number of organisations in the fields of sexual abuse, sexual assault, child protection and mental health, and requested permission to circulate a recruitment note through their newsletters and mailing lists. All organisations approached consented to participate in the research, with the exception of Dissociation Australia, the Australian chapter of the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation. The moderator of the Dissociation Australia mailing list declined to circulate a recruitment note on the basis that she did not support research projects that used online recruitment (although other modes of recruitment were also being used). No other agency raised any such concerns, and so the recruitment partners for the project were:

- Advocates for Survivors of Child Abuse (now Adults Surviving Child Abuse), a nation-wide organisation that provides support and referral options for adults with histories of child abuse
- The Care Leavers of Australia Network, a nation-wide peer-based organisation for adults who spent time as children in out-of-home care
- Bravehearts, a support and advocacy centre for sexually abused children in Brisbane
- The Australian Institute of Family Studies, the Commonwealth government-funded research centre on family wellbeing
- The Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, funded by the federal Office for Women to improve access to sexual assault research
- The Delphi Centre, which organises conferences and training for workers with abused clients. The Centre distributed over 600 advertisements throughout their 2008 conference tour to Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.

I drafted recruitment advertisements that provided an introduction to the research project and invited readers to contact me directly to inquire about the project and/or to pass the information on to others who may be interested (Appendix I). Adults with histories of organised abuse who contacted me were provided with a recruitment questionnaire (Appendix II) and asked to return it to me.

Screening and referrals

The primary objective of the questionnaire was to establish contact with potential interviewees and assess their suitability for participation in the project rather than to collect data *per se*. Reflecting on her research with adults with histories of ritualistic abuse, Scott (1998) states:

> The most crucial factors in selecting interviewees were that their choice to give an interview was well considered, that they seemed reasonably emotionally robust and that they were adequately supported by friends, partners and former or current therapists.

I developed a screening and referral protocol to determine the suitability of people who returned the questionnaire and the steps to be taken to screen unsuitable participants from the project. Questionnaire respondents were considered for the project if they indicated via the questionnaire that they were currently accessing mental health services or if they had supportive people in their life that knew about their history of organised abuse. If this was the case, the participant would be contacted to initiate formal consent procedures and to establish a time and date for interview. If participants did not have current access to care and support of any kind, or if they showed *prima facie* indicators of severe distress or untreated mental illness, then they would be declined from the project and referred to a local mental health agency or sexual assault service if need be. In 2007, I contacted all state-wide sexual assault services throughout Australia to notify them that I was undertaking the project, and to request permission to refer to them those people who were declined from the study due to a lack of support. All services indicated that they would accept such a referral.

The interview structure

Whilst developing the project, I familiarised myself with a variety of models utilised by researchers to document testimonies of abuse and torture from traumatised populations (Agger & Buus Jensen 1990; Campbell 2002; Denborough 2006). From

these models, I developed a carefully structured and regimented interview protocol, outlined below:

- *Preparing the person for interview:*
  - Provide a written statement describing the purpose of taking the testimony, why it will be significant, how it may contribute to the lives of others, and what kinds of questions will be asked.
  - Use formal consent forms to establish that the interviewee can choose not to answer any questions if they prefer not to, or that they can ask for a break, or stop the process entirely.
  - Establish confidentiality, ensure that participants are aware that all interviews will be transcribed solely by the researcher, and that interviewees will retain editorial control until they have read all transcripts and made any edits or alterations they deem necessary to protect their anonymity.
  - Ask where participants would like to be interviewed and whether they would like to bring a friend, family member and/or therapist

- *Setting a context of care at the beginning of the interview*
  - Consult the participant about how they would know if the interview becomes too stressful, how they could let the interviewer know if this is the case, and what would be most helpful if this occurred.

- *A three-part interviewing process (may take place over multiple sessions and/or days)*

1. *Setting a context:* Initial questions should focus on the participant's hopes/expectations in participating in the research, and how this relates more broadly to their system of values and meaning.

2. *Documenting the abuse and its effects:* The interview then begins documenting life history of abuse and trauma. The interviews will be based on a prompt sheet of chronological life events from birth to the present, although the semi-structured nature of the interview process is such that there will be non-chronological tangents and associations between events throughout the interview. The interview is designed to illicit a rich and textured narrative from the participant in which they reflect on their life and the meanings that they associate with specific events, and as such it is not designed to be a forensic, clinical or legalistic interview. In an interview environment with survivors of extreme trauma, it is important that a rapport is established between interviewer and participant, so they feel confident that their account is being treated seriously and that they are being considered to be reliable witnesses to their own lives. Without such a rapport, it is likely that the "thick description" (Geertz 1973) that is the ultimate purpose of qualitative research will not be forthcoming. The interview process within this research is grounded in the belief that a position of "objectivity" in qualitative research is neither achievable nor ideal and that the interviewer is situated in a specific relation to the subject matter and the participant. The interview, therefore, is a process in which knowledge is produced by an interaction between the interviewer and participant, rather than the

elucidation of pre-existing data from the participant by the "objective" interviewer.

3. *Eliciting stories of survival/resistance and closing the interview:* Key closing questions include asking the participant what suggestions they would offer to someone else in a similar situation, asking about coping mechanisms and so on. The interviewer may also offer some personal reflections on how hearing the respondent has influenced them, and how it will impact on their research.

Transcription

In order to ensure the safety of participants, and to overcome fears that might dissuade suitable participants or compromise the quality of the data, it was imperative that the research design ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of research participants as much as possible. In response to these issues, I resolved to adopt the approach utilised by Scott (2001), which involved a number of steps:

a. transcribing all interviews myself
b. anonymising all interviews during transcription
c. providing research participants with editorial control over the transcript, until the point where they had personally reviewed a copy and returned it with any changes.

The de-identification of data in this project included not only changing names and places, but also other details, such as the number of siblings, the occupation of parents and so forth. The interviews were transcribed according to the following legend:

- Comments or questions by the interviewer were italicised.
- Significant pauses in participants' responses were marked with an ellipse.
- For the most part, where a participant used "um" or "ah" to fill a silence whilst they consider their response, the utterance was removed from the transcript. I had initially included all such utterances in the transcripts, however I found that it made many participants feel self-conscious and uncertain about the clarity of their responses.
- Where a section of interview data is presented in a truncated manner in the analysis, the deleted material is indicated with square brackets around an ellipse i.e. [...].

Self-care

It is well documented that many professionals working with survivors of sexual assault and abuse often begin experiencing similar traumatic symptoms to their clients (Pealman & Saakvitne 1995; Schauben & Frazier 1995; Richardson 2001). Scott's (1998) reflections on her research with survivors of ritualistic abuse highlight the psychosomatic impacts of research on sexual violence upon the researcher herself:

> Each interview was a personal encounter that I relived in slow replay in the course of transcription. As a counsellor and carer I had worked with such traumatic material before, but the sheer quantity of stories in the research process created a high level of stress. I had dreams about dying, and dreams in which I learned that none of my interviewees had told me the truth. Staying in an unfamiliar house after one interview I walked in my sleep for the first time in my life, and during the weeks of transcription I endured stomach cramps and nausea on a regular basis.

I prepared an extensive briefing for the ethics committee on strategies to minimise the impact of vicarious trauma throughout the research project, drawn from "best practice" (Morrison 2007) and Campbell's (2002) research on the experience of researching rape. Accordingly, I organised regular counselling and debriefing sessions through the university counselling service.

The recruitment phase of the project

In early 2008, recruitment advertisements were circulated through the mailing lists and newsletters of the various recruitment partners. Potential participants usually contacted me through email, although a few therapists contacted me on behalf of their clients. As explained earlier, it was a prerequisite of participation in this project that participants had caring individuals in their life who knew about their history of abuse and could provide them with support throughout the interview process. All participants reported some contact with mental health services, although this was in the past for many of them. Some participants had spent considerable time in psychotherapy and in contact with psychiatrists in the past, whereas others had struggled to access effective and affordable mental health care. Some had supportive partners, a few of whom acted as full-time carers. Other participants were able to access support through friends, family and religious ministers. Since no potential participant indicated that they were without support or demonstrated evidence of serious mental illness or distress and were therefore ineligible for the project, it did not prove necessary to screen any participant from the project or make any referrals during the recruitment phase. This supports the proposition of Becker-Blease and Freyd (2006) that adult survivors of child sexual abuse can self-select accurately for qualitative research.

After I had received a completed questionnaire, I contacted each potential participant via the phone, email or mail, depending on the mode they had elected to be contacted by, in order to discuss the research process further. In the pre-interview phase, I established whether they would like to have a support person present for the interview, and discussed with them the potentially traumatic nature of the interview and the steps we could take to maximise their comfort and security. I outlined the aims of the research and the planned conduct of the interview, and invited participants to ask questions of me. The most common of these was "Why have you chosen this research project?" which provided me with an opportunity to provide a truncated history of my experiences as a carer. Participants frequently found this reassuring; my impression was that they were worried that, if I was a survivor, I would be traumatised by what they had to say, or that I was potentially a perpetrator. Conversely, if I was a dispassionate "outsider", they knew from experience that it would be unlikely I would be able to grasp the full range of their experiences.

Participants often had a range of concerns about the conduct of the interview and about their own security and anonymity as research participants. Below is the transcript of an email that I sent to a participant. This typifies the kind of information that I provided, via email or telephone, prior to the interview:

> Great to hear from you, and I understand the importance of security. I'll give you as much detail as I can, but please email me with any questions or concerns that you have.
>
> The research would involve you and I meeting in a place of your choosing, and we would have an unstructured, conversation-style interview in which we discuss your life history.

The conditions of this interview are up to you. You can decide where the interview takes place, and whether you'd like someone to be there with you during the interview. The interview would involve you and I speaking about your childhood and your reflections about your experiences of organised child abuse.

The project is particularly focused on the situations in which children may be sexually abused by groups of people (e.g. through abusive families, through preschools, through state care, through churches, etc) and how abusive groups operate.

Obviously, this is very sensitive territory, and so we have to put a lot of thought into your safety and wellbeing. In particular, we need to think about what you and I can do if you feel distressed during the interview (e.g. taking a break or giving someone a phone call) or if you feel distressed following the interview.

I would record the interview on a digital recording device, and I would bring it back to my office at the University of New South Wales and upload it on to my computer. I would then transcribe the interview by listening to the file on headphones, and typing what you and I said.

As I type, I anonymise all identifying information, which means that all information that might identify you would be changed so that the interview could not be traced back to you. Your name, and any other names and places, would be replaced with fictional names.

> Once I had transcribed the interview, the audio file would be deleted, or, if you'd like a copy, I could send it to you on a CD. I could also send you a copy of the transcript on a CD, so that you could read over it and make sure it is accurate. The CD would be sent via registered mail and "locked" via a password that only you and I know.
>
> You have full editorial control over the interview transcript up until you give me the go-ahead to start analysing it. Until that point, you can pull out whenever you like. Even if you go ahead with the interview, you can still call me up and tell me that you want everything deleted - the file, the interview, and all correspondence between you and me. After you give me permission to include your interview in my thesis, it's no longer possible to remove your material from the project, since I will have begun including it in my analysis.
>
> The transcript of the interview would be kept here on my computer at the University. It takes a swipecard, a security key, and a password to get into my office and access my computer, so the interview would be very safe. Our computer security system is also extremely sound.
>
> I'm not a survivor of child abuse, however, I spent a number of years helping a friend of mine leave a ritually abusive group that she'd been trapped in since she was a child. I understand how important security is, and it's very important that no harm comes to research participants as a result of this project.

Potential participants typically found this information satisfactory. In all, two participants opted to have a support person present for the interview, although it was clear that many appreciated having the option. This was a period during which

participants were assessing me closely for any signs that something wasn't right. Offering to conduct the interview with a support person in the room was a way of demonstrating that I had nothing to hide, and also that I trusted that they were not a threat to me. Prior to the interview, the process of carefully explaining the aims of the project, providing a Participant Information Statement, and obtaining the Consent Form were also important steps in providing participants with a sense of security and control. It assured them that they had a legitimate right to ask questions of me, test their degree of comfort with me, and make an informed decision about their participation in the research project. Many participants were concerned that the interview would be in a forensic, clinical or legalistic style. In the process of negotiating informed consent, I was often given the opportunity to assure them that they were not under an obligation to speak about matters that made them feel uncomfortable or upset. Some elements of the original protocol, such as discussing with the participant prior to interview how they might communicate with me that they were becoming distressed, proved to be unnecessary. The first participants interviewed were somewhat bewildered by this question, and pointed out that they knew how to communicate their needs without a pre-arranged signal.

I engaged in this program of study with the encouragement of a friend of mine who is also a survivor of organised abuse. As I have previously indicated, I was my friend's carer during a period in her twenties when she was subject to organised abuse by the men who abused her since childhood. My friend requested to be interviewed as part of this project, and I sought and received ethics approval for her inclusion in the project. I spent a weekend with her where, over two sessions, we discussed her life from early childhood to the present day. This was the first time we had discussed, in any great detail, the crisis period in which I came to act as her carer, or the chain of events that

led up to it. Like many others in this project, she had to push through her internal resistance to disclosure in order to participate in the interview but she was adamant in her commitment to participate. Prior to the interview, we discussed at length the ethical implications of her participation, since others had raised concerns that she might feel obliged to participate due to our friendship. She responded somewhat incredulously to this proposition and reminded me of the difficulties I had encountered in the past when I had tried to convince her to do anything she didn't want to do. Like a number of other participants, she indicated that her decision to participate was based on her sense of responsibility to children and women who remain trapped in abusive groups.

The interview

Prior to the interview, participants had often experienced years, if not decades, of grief and disability, as they struggled to construct a coherent life story from a maelstrom of amnesia, invasive flashbacks and overwhelming distress. My role as an interviewer was to provide a context in which participants felt safe engaging in the exposition of these histories with me. The literature on qualitative research heralds "the interview" as the site of the construction of knowledge between researcher and participant, yet the focus on "the interview" as the site of the emergence of knowledge in qualitative research runs the risk of trivialising the significance and durability of the life histories and self-identities that participants bring to the interview. Whilst participants readily recognised (and were intimately familiar with) the vagaries and ambiguities of memory, they came to the interview with a robust sense of their history and identity. Underlying their stories was a firm conviction that, although they might not always have got the details right, the stories they were recounting were sadly based in fact.

The semi-structured nature of the interview process in this project was designed to trace the life history of the participant and to explore the manner in which their recollections of organised abuse were embedded in their larger narratives of childhood, adolescence and development to the present day. Interviews were conducted within an open framework to allow for focused, conversational, two-way communication. I initially bought a prompt sheet to the interview but this proved unnecessary. Each interview had its own pace and style, since participants felt free to raise the issues and events that they felt were significant, and there was no need to impose a preconceived structure or chronology on the discussion. Interviews typically lasted three or four hours, although some interviews went for as long as eight hours (in multiple sessions). Face-to-face interviews were carried out through fieldwork in Tasmania, Victoria and New South Wales, and telephone interviews were carried out for participants in Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland. A telephone interview was also used for one participant who lived in New Zealand.

Whilst interviews did not necessarily proceed in a linear fashion, they generally began with a focus on the participant's early childhood and the family environment. I usually opened with a question such as "Can you tell me about your childhood and your family when you were a young child?" and the interview proceeded from there. In this initial phase of the interview, establishing a rapport with the participant was just as important as the data that was being generated. My questions focused on generic childhood experiences, such as:

> **Starting primary school:** "How did you feel starting school?", "What were your impressions of starting school?"

Familial environment: "What are the words you would use to describe your mother/father?", "Did you get along with your brothers/sisters?", "What was your parents' relationship like?". A particularly revealing question that I asked throughout the interviews was "As a child, if you had a minor accident and hurt yourself, would you run to your mother or your father? Why? What would be their response?"

These questions enabled the participants to relax and paint a general picture of their early life. Once the participant felt comfortable with me, they would generally begin to speak about the circumstances in which their organised abuse took place e.g. at home, at school, at church. I sometimes prompted participants with questions such as: "Was home/school a safe space for you? If not, why not?" Conducting an interview that was safe and comfortable for participants involved identifying their strengths early in the interview and building on those strengths, rather than pressing them for information regarding experiences that were unclear or frightening. With those participants who were more comfortable speaking about their abuse histories, I sought greater detail about the specifics of organised abuse. For those who were less comfortable speaking about their abuse, I focused on their home lives and their schooling, and explored why their abuse had gone unnoticed by those around them. As I was gauging their particular strengths, however, many participants were undertaking a similar process with me. I often observed participants searching my face and voice for signs of distress or disbelief, and testing my capacity to listen to, and accept, the extent of the abuse they had been subjected to.

The discussion of participants' early childhood experiences and their abuse was very intensive, in terms of both time and energy, and it usually took up most of the

interview. During this stage, it was crucial to maintain a responsive and compassionate orientation to the participant, and to offer empathy and validation where appropriate. For many participants, the interview was part of an ongoing struggle to understand their past, and master their sense of confusion and fear. It was clear to me that a "neutral" or "objective" researcher who failed to offer care and support during the potentially harmful reliving that attends trauma testimony would be causing direct harm to the research participant. It was occasionally necessary to adopt a more interventionist stance during the interview to respond appropriately to a concerning disclosure. For instance, one participant had disclosed sexual victimisation from childhood into adulthood by a priest, and this abuse had only ceased in the last few years. Over the course of his abuse of her, he had learnt to manipulate her DID in order to trigger lapses in her self-protective behaviours and thus coerce her into sexual activity. Towards the end of the interview, I became alarmed when she stated that she wanted to call and speak to this man again. I interrupted her to say:

> *But, of course, you can't risk being triggered by him if he's –*
>
> Well, I thought that. I said to a church investigator when he came last year, um, nice bloke, just, y'know, we talked through a few things, had a bit of dialogue. And he said that [the abuser] would have to – he'd be forced to talk to me, but in the presence of [others]– I think I'll have to do it [an internal church investigation], but I haven't gotten the courage up yet.
>
> *It's always a matter of time and making sure that any process that you go through, that you feel comfortable and equipped. And it's very much about finding the right time for you.*

The participant went on to speak of her fear that, if she contacted the abuser, he would be able to manipulate her as he had in the past. Reflecting on the complexity of the situation, she said "Not really my fault, is it? What do you think?" This provided me with the opportunity to affirm that she did not need to feel embarrassed or culpable about her ongoing sense of attachment to this man, and that this attachment was a natural and understandable response to the circumstances of her life.

> *I don't think it's your fault at all. Not at all. From a very early age, we all need love and affection, especially children and adolescents, when they're not getting love from their parents, they have to find it wherever they can. And sometimes that means that they're really vulnerable to being manipulated by men like [the abuser].*
>
> *And the bonds that form in those periods are strong and enduring precisely because it's the only place that you are getting that care, and yet it goes hand-in-hand with exploitation and abuse. And I think, y'know, from your point of view, your emotions are very understandable.*
>
> *They are so primal, y'know, we all have to feel loved, and the real question is about the willingness of an adult, and a man in a position of authority, to exploit that basic need in a vulnerable girl and woman for his own purposes.*

It was sometimes necessary to mourn with participants over a death that they continued to feel keenly, as well as to laugh with them at the black humour that many participants used to reframe and cope with their difficult experiences. Over time, once I felt that we had covered sufficient territory and that the participant was feeling safe and comfortable, I began moving the interview towards closure. The final questions in

the interview were designed to leave the participant feeling comfortable. They included questions such as "What advice would you give to another person with a similar history who was struggling to come to terms with what happened?", or "What was it about you that enabled you to survive this?" I usually closed the interview with questions about the participant's hopes for the future, which was a way of reframing the participant's present life in optimistic and forward-looking terms and thus constructing a space within which the interview could be brought to an end.

Once it was clear that the interview was over, I reaffirmed for the participant the value of their testimony, the clarity with which they had spoken and the courage it had taken to participate. This was a particularly moving part of the research process. For example, towards the end of our interview, Isabelle spoke of the difficulties she experienced trying to speak about her abuse, and how that made her feel "knotted up", "beyond repair" and powerless. By drawing her attention to her conduct throughout the interview, I could offer her an alternative view of herself without over-stepping the researcher-participant boundary.

> Isabelle: I find it really hard to put things in language and context half the time. It's just this messy imagery, sensory … it's like my body is there, and if my body could tell you exactly how and when, there would be a context. But everything is just so scattered in our mind. Sometimes it feels like there are twenty different events all connected in one. I just feel like … it's unravelling this messy … you know how cats play with balls of wool? And they get them all knotted up and messy? Sometimes you can't un-messy it, it's beyond repair. That's what it feels like in our head, sometimes.

Isabelle, today you've provided a really clear and articulate account of your life. You've spoken strongly and sensibly about these very difficult things. When I hear what you've got to say, I don't think about a tangled ball of wool at all. Not at all. I think you've been really articulate and really clear today about these incredibly difficult issues. And I really appreciate that you've trusted me to come and talk to me today in the way that you have. Because you've been so open and honest and there's a lot of effort for you behind that. So I just want to thank you for doing this. And I don't think you sound like a tangled ball of wool at all. Not one bit.

… Thanks … It would be nice if one day they didn't win, they didn't have power.

[...]When I started doing this work, someone said to me, "Look, it's a marathon, not a sprint." So we all do our little bits, yeah? We all do our little bits. And it's the little bits that are powerful. And I think, with all of the little cogs turning, we'll get there. [...] And everything you've talked about today has been really important, and there are a lot of people out there who are going to be better off for being able to read the things that you've had the guts to talk about today.

I often repeated such messages in subsequent communications with participants on the phone or via email. It was important to acknowledge how vulnerable survivors of organised abuse can feel in trusting information about their abuse to a stranger, and a man at that. Participants had shown admirable courage in their decision to participate

in the interview, and it was my responsibility as the interviewer to reflect openly with them on the value of their effort.

Interviews that were excluded from the project

In all, five interviews were undertaken that were not transcribed or analysed because these participants had not experienced "organised abuse" as it has been defined for the purposes of this project. "Organised abuse" is not a common term and some participants felt that their abuse was "organised"; as indeed it was, but not in the narrow sense that was being employed in the study. For example, one interviewee was subject to sexual abuse by her father over many decades from childhood into adulthood. Camouflaging this abuse from other family members involved a significant degree of planning and coordination by her father. Whilst this interview was very instructive in highlighting the lengths that incest offenders will go to facilitate the abuse of a child, the interviewee was nonetheless describing an experience that was outside the scope of this study. Other participants described non-contact experiences such as being taken to a nudist camp by their parents as children, or being forced to shower in front of staff at a children's residential institution. It was unclear that these were instances of sexual abuse at all, although it was clear that these interviewees experienced these events as invalidating and disempowering. Another participant was in a period of great distress following a death in her family, which had triggered memories of incest. Although she was aware that she was not a good fit for the project, she nonetheless saw the interview as an opportunity to speak at length about her grief and shock, which she was finding debilitating and overwhelming.

It was unfortunate that these participants were not screened from the project during the recruitment phase but it was not possible to identify, prior to the interview, that

these participants had not experienced organised abuse. The Ethics Committee had requested that all questions about sexual abuse be removed from the recruitment questionnaire, and so I had no information about the participant's history until we sat down for the interview. The removal of these questions may have reduced the (arguably small) risk that a respondent could experience an adverse response to the questionnaire. However, if these questions had been included, they would have provided information that would have enabled me to screen unsuitable respondents prior to interview, and thus reduced the likelihood that some people would be subjected unnecessarily to a deeply personal interview about sexual abuse.

In addition, this bloc of unsuitable interviews created an ethical dilemma for me. All participants had been promised a copy of their transcript following the interview, however, I had neither the time nor the energy to transcribe five interviews that could not be included in the project. This would have involved up to a month of full-time transcription during which time I would be re-exposed to a range of traumatic material that would be of no benefit to the research. I discussed this matter with my supervisors, and we collectively agreed to exclude these interviews from the project. On balance, it seems that the benefits gained by excluding the initial question about sexual abuse from the questionnaire were more than offset by the effort and potential for harm implicit in conducting unnecessary qualitative interviews with adult survivors of sexual abuse. It is fortunate that none of the five participants whose interviews were excluded from the project subsequently contacted me seeking a copy of their transcript.

Transcription

All interviews were personally transcribed by me, and identifying data was

anonymised as previously indicated. Each participant was provided with two copies of the interview transcript: one to make changes to and return, and another to keep for their own records. The transcripts were sent to participants with a letter in which I explained that they could make any changes that they wished to the transcript, including removing or adding material for any reason they saw fit. They were also free to withdraw from the project during this period. Once they returned the transcript to me, I explained that they were giving me permission to proceed with analysis, at which point I would begin to incorporate their interview into the project. My copy of the audio file of their interview was then destroyed, although participants were sent a copy if they wished. This ensured that no identifying data was being held at the university.

I felt that the process of participant review was an important part of the project. Many participants took this opportunity to add useful information to their interview, or to correct misheard information. One participant struck out a significant proportion of the interview, approximately one fifth, since it included information about her father that she felt uncomfortable having in the public domain. She was the only participant to make considerable alterations to her transcript at this point.

This was a period in which participants could reconsider and reaffirm their commitment to the project, and ensure that their participation was on their own terms. Some participants found other uses for their transcript. For example, a few participants gave the transcript to a mental health professional to provide background information to their lives. Nonetheless, some participants found reading their transcripts unexpectedly upsetting and sometimes shocking. After some initial

feedback, I incorporated a warning into the letter sent out with the transcripts notifying participants that others had experienced difficulties at this stage of the process. Nonetheless, some participants were unable to review their transcripts but I was able to obtain their permission to proceed to analysis regardless. This took months for a few participants, and in future, I would include a clause in the original agreement stating that I would progress transcripts to analysis if I had not heard back from participants within a given timeframe.

Analysis

In the development of grounded theory, "data collection and analysis occur in alternating sequences" (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 41). In this approach, data is analysed even as it is gathered, which in turn impacts upon subsequent data collection, leading to the refinement of the analysis, which feeds back into data collection and so on. In this project, analysis began with the reading and preliminary coding of two autobiographies written by Australian survivors of organised abuse, Roy (2005) and Kezelman (2010) in the months prior to the first interview. These two autobiographies were imported into the qualitative analysis program, NVivo, which enables users to assign a code to specific lines or segments of text. I began to develop a preliminary coding matrix. This process was based on the principles of grounded theory to create coded categories and to develop concepts that emerge from the data. This approach is defined by Strauss and Corbin (1967) as the breaking down, naming, comparing and categorising of data, a process in which hypotheses or theories are generated directly from the data, rather than through a priori assumptions or existing theoretical frameworks. Grounded theory involves "taking with great seriousness the words and actions of the people studied" (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 6). It dovetails closely with the ideological foundations of life history work. Strauss and Corbin (1998: 6) suggest that

grounded theory also contributes to the immersion of researchers in the data they gather, which enhances the integrity of their findings and conclusions. Importantly, grounded theory analysis is a way of generating theory as well as research findings by identifying and relating concepts within qualitative data. The development of empirically-grounded theory is crucial for a field like organised abuse, which has suffered from a dearth of studies that take a reflexive approach to empirical data and theoretical development.

This initial phase of coding was what Strauss and Corbin (1998: 57) have called "microanalysis", a "detailed line-by-line analysis necessary at the beginning of a study to generate initial categories (with their properties and dimensions) and to suggest relationships amongst categories". Working from Roy (2005) and Kezelman's (2010) autobiographies, I developed an extensive coding matrix (see Appendix IV) that was designed to identify a broad range of themes and issues without pre-emptively imposing a particular theoretical focus or stance. Instead, the initial matrix was designed to throw a "wide net" in order to facilitate the emergence of common categories and relationships from the data.

> Overall, this procedure is a very focused one. The focusing forces researchers to consider the range of plausibility, to avoid taking one stand or stance towards the data. Notice we say that it is the researcher who is being jolted out of his or her usual modes of thinking. It is not the data that are being forced. The data are not being forced; they are being allowed to speak (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 65).

The initial matrix was then applied to the interviews, and developed and refined further as commonalities emerged from the data, and as I sought to test new

conceptualisations and ideas I had gained through my reading of the literature. In grounded theory, data collection, analysis and theoretical development are iterative processes that often occur alongside and impact upon one another. This was certainly the case throughout this project. Glaser and Strauss (1967: 3) note that "theory in sociology is a strategy for handling data in research"; however, at the outset of this project, it was unclear where the basic theoretical foundation of the analysis lay. The lack of substantive theoretical frameworks within the literature on organised abuse demanded a flexible and multi-disciplinary approach to analysis and theoretical development, which in turn fed back into the conduct and focus of the interviews. My reading spanned sociology, anthropology, public health, criminology, psychology, social work and psychotherapy. Throughout coding and analysis, I adopted and tested a range of theoretical approaches in an effort to identify fruitful conceptual approaches to the data, which affected the kinds of questions I asked of participants in interview.

Many lines of inquiry were disposed of in this manner. For example, the dominance of Foucault in cultural studies is such that I had simply presumed that I would be drawing on works such as *Discipline and Punishment*, *The History of Sexuality* or *The Birth of the Clinic* throughout the thesis. However, Foucault has tended to provide an account of the colonisation/construction of the subject through dominant discourses, resulting in a theoretical bias towards discourse and away from lived experience amongst theorists who have adopted a Foucauldian approach to organised abuse such as Hacking (1995). In this study, participants spoke vividly of bodily experiences of pain and shame that defied description. They often indicated that they had adopted particular discourses (for example, the mental health terminology associated with trauma and dissociation) because they felt that these provided a "good fit" with their

own lived experience. Foucault provides few conceptual resources to address the iterative relationship between embodied experience and discourse or the struggle of survivors of violence to find a vocabulary adequate to the task of articulating their experiences. Hence, Foucault, and researchers and theorists influenced by him, are referred to sparingly throughout the analysis.

In contrast, Bourdieu's (1965; 1977; 2001) studies of the interplay of structure and subjectivity provided a way of conceptualising the complex behaviours of victims and perpetrators of organised abuse, as described by research participants. Glaser and Strauss (1967: 3) argue that theoretical categories in qualitative research should "fit" the data set, which is to say that the categories emerge from and are relevant to the data, and they should "work" to the extent that they provide an adequate explanation of the behaviour under study. Bourdieu's theories of practice provided a range of strategies through which the diverse body of experiences and practices described by participants could be conceptualised and categorised. His work also provided the theoretical frameworks through which these phenomena could be explained. Hence, Bourdieu's theories of practice have had a significant impact upon the analysis and reporting of this project, as has the work of theorists such as Connell (1987), Messerschmidt (1993) and Sanday (2007) who applied Bourdieu's work to the study of gender and violence. The writings of clinical psychotherapists such as Linehan (1993) and Herman (1992) on sexual abuse resonated with this body of theory in an unexpected way, since they theorised how sexual abuse interacts with systems of gender oppression to durably alter the psychological make-up of sexually abused girls and women. The theoretical and empirical basis to the project appeared, at times, to be something of a motley assemblage, but I became aware of an underlying theme that unified the various schools of thought I was drawing on. Over the course of my

analysis of the data, I became sensitised to the role of violent and abusive practices in the maintenance of gendered power relations. This was an insight that tied the data I had gathered to a diverse body of empirical and theoretical literature, and provided the ordering principle for the coding matrix and analysis.

The writing up of the analysis and preliminary findings were discussed with research participants in the interview context, and afterwards through prolonged email and telephone exchanges. During these exchanges, I aired my thoughts on what participants had told me, and how it related to what I had heard from others, and participants frequently debated and transformed my views. For instance, Lily and I engaged in a prolonged email discussion following her interview, exchanging opinions and challenging one another. Reviewing a paper of mine, she wrote:

> A question, though, you often talk about violence/rape perpetrated against women and children. What about men? I know within my cult there was certainly male rape. I can remember that being of young boys and adolescents. I also know there was adult male homosexuality within the cult. I don't know if that was by choice and was consensual, or like most things, was rape. Have you thought about the similarities/differences of rape of woman and rape of a known gay man and rape of a non dominant man? I guess those questions need to be asked about both male and female perpetrators.

These kinds of comments from participants provided important feedback for the development of my thinking and analysis around organised abuse. I was also able to pose questions to the Ritual Abuse Study List and other forums in which survivors and mental health professionals could provide comment and feedback. These included

general questions about their experiences of organised abuse (as survivors, as professionals assisting survivors, or both) and theoretical questions on topics such as organised abuse, mental health and gender. I was careful to ensure that no information was disclosed that could compromise participant anonymity or would otherwise breach ethical guidelines. This approach could be called "participatory action research" but I viewed it as a natural extension of my view of adult survivors of organised abuse as, in Scott's (2001) words, "people of serious intent".

Over time, the coding of the data moved from a focus on generating categories and determining their dimensions and relationships to one another towards the more systematic development and linking of themes and issues. This phase coincided with a general shift in analysis from description to conceptualisation, as I considered the findings of the research in light of existing theoretical and empirical literature on sexual violence. Whereas the initial focus of analysis had been on identifying common themes and issues across the data, as analysis developed I increasingly turned back to the narrative form of the life history interviews to contextualise these issues and to consider, in more depth, the role that they played in the histories of individual participants. I also began to consider, in a more systematic way, the role of "outliers" or those participants whose life stories ran counter to a particular theme or argument I was developing. In this way, I was able to review the emerging theoretical insights for internal consistency and logic.

By this point the process of "writing up" the analysis had become central to the creative process of finding a "fit" between the data, the existing literature and the emerging theoretical insights of the project. I began to write short sub-sections on particular themes, and I then began to group these sub-sections together to create an

overall narrative. It became clear to me early on that the richness and complexity of the data could not be captured through a single analytic approach, and so I began to develop three to four separate analysis chapters (the final two chapters were merged and separated a number of times). It was from the commonalities between these separate "embedded" analyses that the overarching theoretical framework of the thesis emerged. Once the coding categories specific to each chapter had reached "saturation" point (that is, no significant new information seemed to emerge from coding (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 136)) the remaining task was to ensure that they were logically presented, the relationship between them properly explained and articulated, and the theoretical implications of each chapter, and the thesis as a whole, compellingly presented.

Many qualitative researchers are separate to, and outside, the situations they observe and record. In contrast, I'm embedded within, and personally committed to, social and professional networks of survivors of organised abuse and the people who care for them. Early on in the research, a senior academic suggested that I lacked objectivity and would only find what I was looking for. In my experience, however, my familiarity with the field of organised abuse has had the effect of complicating, rather than simplifying, the research process, illuminating areas of ambiguity and contradiction that a naïve researcher may otherwise have missed. For survivors of organised abuse, the boundaries between the past and the present can become porous through chronic abuse, obfuscating the clarity of narrative testimony. This confusion is further compounded by the marginalisation of survivors within the mental health sector. In the absence of adequate care, survivors have developed a conspiratorial subculture that is consumed with theories of government involvement in the organised and ritualistic abuse of children. Whilst this subculture often has the effect of

intensifying feelings of persecution, and further marginalising survivors, it also provides a compensatory certainty in contrast to survivors' fragmented, terrifying and disorientating recollections of abuse. However, van der Hart and colleagues (1997) note that a small number of people whose histories of organised abuse appear to lack authenticity have emerged from this subculture. So whilst my experiences as a carer prompts me to consider organised abuse within the realm of possibility, they do not force me to occupy a position of certainty. Taking reports of organised abuse seriously, in my view, involves subjecting them to a degree of analysis commensurate to the seriousness of the crimes.

It is a mistake, however, to presume that self-reflexivity is the sole province of the researcher. Throughout this project, participants demonstrated a high degree of awareness of the manner in which they have constructed their autobiographies over time. In the lives of survivors of organised abuse, memory is often a force to be reckoned with, assaultive and elusive in equal measures. Survivors often endure extensive amnesia for their childhood *as well as* the intrusion of vivid recollections of dehumanisation and shame into their everyday life. Autobiographical coherence is a goal that many survivors have to work proactively towards, often over years of torturous reality-testing and corroboration. Some participants brought an extraordinary high index of suspicion to their own recollections, refusing to introduce new recollections into their life history before they had rigorously tested them for accuracy. Participants were, in a very real sense, the ethnographers of their own lives, with an unusual level of insight into the process by which they constructed their stories, their identities, and their social positions.

Evaluating the methodology

The project gathered over six hundred pages of interview data, as well as hundreds of pages of life history documents, including autobiographies, diaries, short essays and poems. The interview data was rich, diverse and textured, and provided ample material for analysis. I felt that the overriding concern of the project design to minimise the risk of harm to interviewees, and maximise the benefits of their participation, was realised. In order to evaluate participants' experiences in interview, all participants were sent a brief post-interview evaluation questionnaire with their transcripts (see Appendix V). The questionnaire included three items that were selected to measure participants' experience of the research in terms of the potential benefits, psychological distress, and risk-benefit ratio. The items were drawn from Newman et al.'s (1999a) study on the costs and benefits of participating in trauma-focused research, in which the constructs of benefit, expected upset, and regret were measured using the following 5-point Likert items:

1. I gained something positive from participating in the interview.
2. Participating in the interview upset me more than I expected.
3. Had I known in advance what the interview would be like for me, I still would have agreed.

Of the 21 participants, 16 returned their questionnaires, which was approximately a 75% return rate. One participant only completed one of the questions and so was dropped from the analysis, leaving a total questionnaires sample of 15 (70% of the total sample). Table 1 shows the distribution of participants' responses to the three reaction questions. All participants except one reported that they had experienced benefit from their participation, with two thirds of the sample strongly agreeing with

the benefit statement. The results of the unexpected upset measure were mixed. Over half the sample reported that they did not experience unexpected upset during interview, with 20% responding neutrally to the question and 20% reporting some experience of unexpected upset. Nonetheless, no participant reported regretting their participation, with two thirds of the sample strongly agreeing with the statement that they would have participated in the interview if they had known what the experience would have been like.

Table 1. Likert scale responses to questions regarding participation in the interview

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Benefit[a]	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	6.7	4	26.7	10	66.7
Unexpected upset[b]	5	33.3	4	26.7	3	20.0	3	20.0	0	0.0
No regrets[c]		0.0		0.0		0.0	5	33.3	10	66.7

[a] "I gained something positive from participating in the interview"
[b] "Participating in the interview upset me more than I expected"
[c] "Had I known in advance what the interview would be like for me, I still would have agreed"

Participants expressed few adverse reactions to the study and the majority indicated that they had derived benefit through their participation. This finding is particularly significant since often a month had elapsed before participants received the questionnaire with their transcripts, so their responses pertained not only to the interview experience but its aftermath. Although a minority of participants reported unexpected distress in interview, it seems that these experiences were tolerable since no participant expressed regret at their participation. It is also possible that participants' responses to the unexpected upset measure may have been influenced by the process of reviewing their transcript, since they received the questionnaire and transcript at once. Some participants remarked afterwards that reviewing their transcript was unexpectedly confronting, and indeed one participant wrote on her returned questionnaire "I had a stronger adverse reaction reading the transcript than I

did during the interview itself!" Participants may have benefited from more specific instructions to read their transcripts with a support person, and to prepare themselves for the possibility of being upset.

While the main purpose of this questionnaire was to evaluate the interview methodology, the findings support the proposition that adult survivors of organised abuse can be engaged safely and fruitfully in qualitative research. Participants were drawn from an extremely traumatised population and they had a spectrum of mental health diagnoses including DID, schizophrenia, psychotic depression, manic depression, bipolar disorder and "personality disorders". Nonetheless, participants appeared to be able to self-select for participation appropriately, and they were able to predict the possibility of distress in interview and manage this distress where it occurred. Indeed, some participants experienced a sense of relief at being able to discuss their lives openly without having to truncate or minimise the extent of their abuse:

> It's not often that I have an audience. On the topic of ritual abuse. So I'd like to thank you too. Apart from my therapist, who I tell bits and pieces to, there isn't an audience. The consent form was right, there is a short term benefit to this, I get to tell my story to someone who can listen. And you've been supportive and able to hold what I'm saying. I haven't detected one ounce of disbelief from you, or any need to minimise what I've said.
>
> Polly

> I do have to be careful with the ritual abuse stuff, because – as you know – not many people can handle it. That's why it's nice talking to you, because you

> are probably the only person who can cope with being told about this stuff. Because, you know, 98% of the population can't. And they'll react defensively and angrily and deny your reality.
>
> May

For Jane, the interview was an opportunity to tell the truth about her family, which her siblings had sought to bury in their efforts to construct new lives in which their violent and abusive childhoods could be forgotten. Jane had bore the brunt of this violence, both in terms of its' severity and its mental health consequences, and she was not in a position to forget as her siblings were. The interview therefore provided her with the opportunity to subvert the systemic scapegoating that construed her as the "strange" and "troubled" sister and instead recast herself as the messenger who bears the true history of her family.

> I'm really the messenger here, aren't I? My doctors worry that I was scapegoated [by my family], and I probably was as a young lass. But I've also been given the history. That's why it's important to meet people like you and talk about this.

The fact that 20% of participants reported unexpected distress in interview, yet did not regret their participation, highlights their perseverance and, perhaps, the importance of the opportunity to participate in this research project for them. In interview, it was clear that the personal cost to some participants, in terms of anxiety and fear, for their participation in this project was considerable. Isabelle's description of her emotional turmoil when her therapist handed her an advert for the research project focuses our attention to the anxieties that imbued every stage of the research process for some

participants. Nonetheless, her commitment to participate was born of a spirit of resistance against the violence inflicted upon herself and others:

> I got handed the research ad and I just went [gasp] "Fuck, that makes this concrete. The fact that you've even handed this to me makes my history concrete."
>
> Up until that point, it was kind like, "Oh yeah, I think I'm talking to someone about it [organised abuse], but maybe it's not real. It's still over there, it's still just my imagination, and one day, she's [the therapist] just going to come in with a straight jacket and it'll be cool and I'm just crazy and it'll be all over. And it'll make sense, because I'll just be mad."
>
> Until she handed me that bit of paper, and I'm sitting there, looking at it. And she said, "Oh, I'm just handing it to you, you don't even have to participate. You can screw it up, and throw it in the bin." And I'm looking at it, thinking, "Hmmm .... That makes things concrete ... you are handing it to me because I'm one of them [a survivor of organised abuse]. Oh fuck." And I'm kind of ... I just put it in my folder, and I didn't know whether I should screw it up.
>
> Another part of me thought, "Nah, if you ignore it, that means all this is going to be for nothing. And that means they are going to keep winning, and you don't want that either. And you can't do what he's [the researcher] doing, because it's not safe to do that [run a project on organised abuse]. But maybe it'll be OK to talk to him." So, then, that happens, and a couple of days go by

> with lots of anxiety, on a scale of 1 to 10 it was past that. And we still thought, "Nah, it's cool, we are going to do this."
>
> And then what was really freaky was when you picked up the phone, and our immediate response – and I don't remember doing this before – but now, looking back, we do this every day, but I didn't know that until this point – it was like, the first question that went through our mind was, "Are you one of them?"

In Isabelle's account, declining the opportunity to participate in the project would inherently devalue the total sum of her struggle for survival. Her tentative conclusion that "maybe it'll be OK to talk to him" persisted through a number of days of high anxiety; in fact, when she arrived at the interview she was still uncertain if I was "one of them". Her account illustrates the critical importance of qualitative research with survivors of organised abuse, and the ways in which it can disrupt the hegemony of disbelief that has dominated their lives to the point where some have internalised it.

Limitations of the study

The life history method had both benefits and drawbacks. The conversational tone of the interview set participants at ease and enabled them to speak about pertinent issues in their own words, and in their own time. For many participants, it was clear that some recollections of abuse could be directly addressed in the interview whereas other memories needed to be approached obliquely or avoided altogether. Some horrifying experiences were mentioned in passing, but participants were unable to speak about them at length. Wajnryb (2001: 187) observed a similar pattern in her analysis of Holocaust testimony:

> My impression is that the worst things imaginable a human being can face – having your baby ripped from your arms and dashed to death against a wall, witnessing horrific cruelty to a frail elderly parent – these were not told. Simply, they were untellable. They may be documented in historical archives but they were not the stuff of personal narrative.

The life history interview is simply not the appropriate forum for the disclosure of experiences of overwhelming pain or shame. Scarry (1985) notes that there are political implications to the fact that some experiences of pain are so great that they evade verbal representation. Physical and sexual experiences more generally are not easily reportable in words, and it could be argued that this is particularly the case where those experiences are bound up with issues of coercion, betrayal and loss. In the case of this research, it is likely that I have documented the "middle range" of organised abuse, but the depths of this abuse have not been plumbed.

It is important to acknowledge the absence of participants in this research project who are not in a position to participate in qualitative research but still very vulnerable to sexual abuse, such as the disabled. Given the high incidence of sexual abuse amongst disabled children and adults (Briggs 2006), it is highly likely that they are also targeted for organised abuse to a disproportionate degree (Baladerian 1991). The literature on organised abuse provides a number of examples of the victimisation of disabled children and adults. For example, Sinason and Svensson (1994) provide a case study of the treatment of a severely mentally handicapped woman who was subject to organised and ritualistic abuse. Furthermore, sexual abuse is an identified cause of developmental delays and disability (Crossmaker 1991), and therefore there may be a causal relationship between organised abuse and disability for some victims.

Research into experiences of organised abuse amongst the disabled is necessary, but it was outside the scope of this study. The experiences of another population who are disproportionately vulnerable to sexual abuse, Indigenous Australians, were also not represented in this study. No participant identified as Indigenous, and I did not pursue an Indigenous-specific recruitment strategy. This is important work requiring long-term relationship-building with Indigenous organisations and communities. That work required more time and resources than I had available to me in this project.

A common objection to the validity of qualitative research is "How do you know that the research participants are telling the truth?" Kvale (1994) lists this question amongst the "standard objections to qualitative research". However, in my experience, the proposition that research participants may be deliberately or unintentionally misleading is raised more frequently in relation to sexual abuse research than in relation to other areas of inquiry. I have been involved in a range of qualitative research projects in the past in sociology and public health and I have never previously been asked to account for the trustworthiness of research participants. In this project, however, it was not uncommon to field questions about "truth", "lies" and "false memories" from academic audiences. It is not possible to test the factual accuracy of the events recounted by qualitative research participants, and all forms of research – qualitative and quantitative – may be impacted upon by memory errors or false reporting. However, there is no evidence that people prone to confabulation or memory error are particularly likely to volunteer for participation in qualitative research, nor is there any evidence that such an individual would be particularly likely to volunteer for research into sexual abuse. It is likely that questions about the trustworthiness of qualitative research participants who report sexual abuse have their

origins in pejorative and misogynist stereotypes rather than genuine scientific interest (see Campbell 2003).

It is true that the accuracy of autobiographical memory amongst adults with post-traumatic and dissociative disorders continues to be debated (Loewenstein 2007). A number of psychological and psychiatric researchers insist that, where adults with dissociative and post-traumatic illnesses report severe abuse in childhood, such events are necessarily confabulations or "false memories" (Lilienfield & Lynn 2003; Piper & Merksey 2004; McNally 2005). Ross (2009) has highlighted the failure of proponents of this argument to engage with the research that suggests that the abuse histories of people with trauma-related disorders are largely accurate and can be corroborated. Kluft (1996: 337) is a psychiatric researcher with clinical expertise with adults with DID, and he has emphasised that "adult patients' given histories demonstrate the interplay of historical events, fantasy, confabulation, post-event information and the impact of many non-traumatic exogenous influences". However, it has not been established that these factors have any greater impact upon the autobiographical narratives of people with histories of abuse than on people without histories of abuse. Whilst survivors of child abuse may struggle with amnesia and other forms of memory disturbance, the notion that, as a clinical population, they are particularly prone to suggestion and confabulation has yet to find a scientific basis.

In considering the findings of this project, it is important to be mindful of the effect of time and trauma on recollections of abuse. Nonetheless, as the investigation progressed, I gained confidence in the accuracy of participants' accounts. Each interview had the detail, vividness and emotional intensity of well-preserved memory, and the interviews contained a number of underlying themes and common experiences

that tended to validate one another. The general picture that emerged from the life histories gathered in this project has been documented by other researchers studying organised abuse and other forms of violence against women and children. Nonetheless, this project has been exploratory in scope and focus. Rather than providing a definitive account of organised abuse it has highlighted a range of issues that require further research, as outlined in the conclusion.

5

Extraordinary abuses in everyday spaces

Disclosures of organised abuse can include descriptions of incidents of extreme violence, including torture and murder. Scott (2001) argues that reports of such acts have tended to dominate the literature on organised abuse at the expense of understanding how organised abuse relates to, and emerges from within, the social conditions within which perpetrators and victims live their lives. Theories of practice, and critical masculinity theory, suggest this linkage is important in understanding the significance of organised abuse in the lives of those who practise it and who are subject to it, as well as how extremely abusive relations with children arise within society in spite of the social and legal proscriptions against such abuse. In this chapter, I explore how the conditions of participants' lives as children contributed to their organised victimisation, drawing broadly on participants' descriptions of their childhood to argue that organised abuse is implicated in broader questions about gender, age, power and violence.

Childhood is lived in prescribed spaces, such as the home and school, governed by ostensibly benign regimes of control and coercion. James and colleagues (1998: 38)

argue that these regimes are "legitimized through ideologies of care, protection and privacy" that obscure the power differentials between adults and children. Despite the emergence of new forms of child surveillance (such as the development of new child-focused professional practices) (see Jenks, 1996) the prescribed spaces of childhood are socially constructed as sites in which adult control over children is largely unregulated. In this regard, the spaces of childhood conform to the ideology of the "public–private" divide, in which men's relations with other men have been subject to legal prescription whilst men's relations with women and children, historically, have not. In this study, I will argue that it was primarily through the socially legitimised power of men over children, through their dominance within the "private" spaces of childhood, that participants became entrapped within a range of sexually abusive relationships.

The abusive relationships described by participants were not limited to organised abuse. Rather, it was in the context of the everyday power inequities and injustices of childhood (what might be called the structured powerlessness of children) that organised abuse took form. For participants, the multiplicity of their experiences of sexual abuse and other forms of abuse and neglect in childhood resonated with their experiences of organised abuse in a way that gave sexual abuse an expected and everyday quality. Many of their psychological adaptations to repeated victimisation can be understood not only as symptoms of trauma but also as the internalisation of the relations of power that placed them in a subordinate position to adults and rendered them vulnerable to sexual abuse. I propose that, in order to understand organised abuse, we must first understand how organised abuse emerges from within, and is constituted by, the hidden relations of power that shape children's lives.

Child sexual abuse and the public–private divide

Although the experiences of organised abuse documented in this study emerged from a diverse range of circumstances, they were all characterised by extraordinary abuses in the context of ordinary, everyday relations and institutions. Organised abuse cannot be neatly extracted from the social conditions within which it emerges. As children, many participants described organised abuse as an inevitable and natural part of their lives.

> I was used to it, so I thought that's what life was. It was something to put up with, like eating over-cooked cabbage, you know? It's just what happens.
>
> Kate

> I can't remember a time when it wasn't happening. To me, it was a normal part of life, the same way that you have breakfast, lunch and dinner.
>
> Isabelle

> I can't say it happened once a week or once a fortnight – who knows? It was my life. It happened a lot.
>
> Polly

Premeditation and sadism are two of the defining features of organised abuse, and the evidence suggests that, the earlier the initiation of organised abuse in a child's life, the more egregious the violence committed against them in organised contexts (Creighton, 1993; Weir & Wheatcroft, 1995; Gallagher, Hughes et al., 1996). However, the violence of organised abuse, whilst sometimes of extreme proportions,

nonetheless had a "natural" and even mundane quality for participants, who described childhoods in which various forms of abuse and neglect were common.

For example, Renee recounted how she was victimised by her stepfather Mark, who orchestrated her exploitation in the manufacture of child pornography and child prostitution for a twelve month period when she was eight years old. These experiences of organised abuse included instances of sadism and multiple perpetrator rape. Despite their severity, these incidents were only one aspect of Renee's experience of sexual victimisation, which spanned home and school. In her recollection of life in the family home, she described Mark "getting into bed" with her at night when he was drunk, how she became his "little housewife" when her mother went away on holidays and her stepbrother groping and sexually harassing her. Moreover, her experiences of sexual victimisation were not limited to the family home:

> The school I went to, one of the PE teachers went to jail [for sexual abuse]. There were other male teachers. We talked about it! "Oh, Mr Smith's wife has gone away, he asked me if I wanted to come around to his place for a kiss." It's almost like it was everywhere.
>
> ... My deputy head principal at high school, I have never actually said the words, [cries] but he was into abusing girls. Y'know, we all wore uniforms up to here [indicates shortness of school skirt]. I've got memories of him, because I was always getting sent to him – saying "Step back a bit, step back a bit", so that he could see. And I remember him telling me to pull my dress higher, and

going around the side of his desk and he is having a wank.

In Renee's experience, sexual abuse was "everywhere". It was present at home and at school . She even recalls walking to high school one day "and there's this guy pulled over on the side of the road, car door open, guy in his fifties, bald, having a wank". In short, Renee experienced her entire social environment as being saturated with sexual abuse. Her organised victimisation was one part of the "continuum of sexual violence" (Kelly 1988) that prevailed throughout her childhood and adolescence. Whilst her organised abuse involved sexual exploitation and torture (as will be discussed in other chapters) it was not discontinuous with her experience of a social world dominated by the sexualised power of men over children. As she says, "I just thought it [sexual abuse] was, this was just life, you know." The pervasiveness of sexual abuse imparted to Renee the message that she was devalued and disreputable and that sexual abuse was a natural part of her social landscape. She described herself as one of the "dead shits" at school, misbehaving, drinking, unlikely to be believed if she reported abuse and therefore vulnerable to a few predatory teachers who targeted school children for abuse.

Renee's experience of sexual abuse as "just life" can be understood as a psychological adaptation to her persistent victimisation, a way of conceptualising and accommodating the frequency of sexual abuse in her life (see Summit, 1983). However, this adaptation had important political dimensions. At both home and school, it was through the privileges enjoyed by men that Renee was sexually victimised. These two institutions were the primary sites of her sexual victimisation, with each site compounding and reinforcing the harms of the abuse she was

experiencing in the other site. At home, her stepfather Mark had untrammelled access to Renee's body, having ensured her mother's compliance through a combination of brutal violence, alcohol and drugs.

> There was a lot of drinking. Every Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday were just - they would both go out with their own friends and get absolutely rotten. During the week there were always two or three drinks straight after work. Then the violence started. My stepfather started hitting mum and hitting us and that went on for a while.

Whilst Mark's authority was unquestioned at home, at school, the deputy principal and other male teachers used their positions of authority to sexually abuse Renee and her friends. The abusive deputy principal and her stepfather occupied comparable positions of authority over Renee in their respective spheres and they abused this authority in similar ways. In order to explain why Renee considered sexual abuse as "just life" and "everywhere", we need to understand not only her victimisation in organised abuse, but how this experience resonated with other abusive experiences in her life, and the ways that these experiences were organised by common structures of gender, age and power.

The childhoods of many participants seemed to be saturated with abuse and the threat of abuse. Even walking to and from school was dangerous; as previously described, Renee remembers a flasher pulling over as she walked to high school, but she wasn't the only participant to report sexual victimisation on the way to school or on the streets. Jo was sexually abused at a construction site when she took a shortcut to

primary school, and Colleen recalled a strange man stalking herself and her brother one day while they were playing in a nearby park.

> We played. We went to the parks. But there were problems. My brother, Connor and I, were followed by a man, who wasn't a good guy. Connor had to hide me in a bush, and then he climb up onto the roof of a house. He wasn't a nice man, I tell you what, it was scary stuff, what was happening. Once Connor was on the roof, he got the man's attention, and then he yelled at me to run home. I ran and Mum had to come up and get Connor. That was a scary thing, I remember that.
>
> Colleen

Throughout participants' narratives of childhood, the threat of sexual abuse sometimes seemed ever-present. Since it was particularly elevated at home and at school, it appears that the complex process through which sexual abuse emerges from within power relations of gender and age has an important spacial dimension. Within this symbolic-spacial arrangement of power, masculinity and power were related in symbolic as well as practical terms. In Western culture, the masculine subject position is, Connell (1987) has argued, the dominant subject position as defined in opposition to a subordinate subject position associated with femininity, powerlessness and vulnerability. Whilst respective positions in this arrangement are allocated through a social elaboration of biological sex, these subject positions are superordinate to the extent that *any* individual who occupies a subordinate position can be labelled as "feminine" regardless of biological sex. In this study, "age" overlapped with, but was not reducible to, "gender" as a dimension of children's powerlessness. In the homes

and schools described by participants, children and women occupied subordinate (and therefore "feminised") subject positions in relation to men, and this relation of subordination was reproduced through institutional as well as symbolic arrangements. The relations of gender, age and power that shaped participants' childhoods were characterised by the social construction of a gendered binary of "masculine" and "feminine". Within this arrangement, children's structured powerlessness on the basis of age appeared to mark them as "feminised" and therefore legitimate objects of sexual domination for abusive men.

Institutional sites of abuse: The home

Most participants grew up in homes with sexually and/or physically abusive fathers, stepfathers or grandfathers, regardless of whether these men were involved in organised abuse or not. Of all twenty-one participants, only Helena and Alex indicated that they grew up in homes without any physical or sexual violence. All other participants reported witnessing or experiencing physical or sexual abuse at home. Sixteen female participants reported being sexually abused by their fathers, as did a transgendered male participant who was born and raised as female. These interviewees often spoke of their role in the home as "little mothers" (Herman, 1981) or "little wives" for their fathers; cooking, cleaning and raising their siblings. Throughout their childhood, they learnt that sexual coercion was part and parcel of the gendered division of labour that fell to girls and women.

> It was after she [Mum] died that my father started, well, basically, I replaced her as far as he was concerned [...] He made the decision to turn her life support off. And he came back to us to tell her she was dead. And that was the

> first night that a part of me shared his bed. That's it. "You are taking her place".
>
> Rhea

> I even have some vague memories of Dad mumbling, "You've got to be good for something. If you aren't earning money, you've got to be good for something." So you are taught that people should be able to use you.
>
> Anne

Jane recounted how, at the age of eight, her mother was hospitalised with a major depressive illness, and Jane was instructed to "take over" from her. She says, "And I bloody well did." In addition to raising her younger sibling and doing the housework, Jane was subject to sexual abuse by her father throughout her childhood and adolescence.

> Daddy was a monster, when it came to his sexual orientation. He was a paedophile, a rock spider. And he was a *bad* one.
>
> Jane

A number of participants reported witnessing and/or being subject to their father's domestic violence in the home. In their accounts, the police refused to intervene when men battered their wives, and their battered mothers were provided with no alternatives. As MacKinnon (1989: 194) notes, "[T]he legal concept of privacy can and has shielded the place of battery, marital rape and women's exploited labour." In this excerpt, Jane suggests that her father's violence was well known to the local

police station. She believed that, during the 1960s and 70s, her father's legal rights over his wife and children were such that the police were largely powerless to intervene.[25]

> I'd pick up the phone and say, "Look, Dad's been beating up Mum, Dad's on the piss, uh, he's been trying to break into the bedroom again, could you come and help?" And, um, in those days, they couldn't, y'know that law that they couldn't intrude with domestic violence or incest – they couldn't come into the family home with those problems – that law has since changed, of course, but in those days they didn't quite know how to deal with that, that was considered domestic problem that the family had to deal with. The police couldn't intervene.

Colleen's father was a paranoid and violent man. Colleen suggested, in retrospect, that he may have suffered from schizophrenia. Like Jane, Colleen was raised during the 1960s and she recalled the unwillingness of the police to protect her family from her father.

> Mum and Dad had a big fight. Dad pushed Mum down the stairs. It was a terrace house, there were about six stairs. Dad could get a bit physical. Once, he broke a lot of windows in the house. And Mum went up to the police station, and the police came down. In those days, the police could not intervene in domestic violence. It was a private matter.

[25] In fact, Australian police were not legally constrained from interventing in cases of domestic violence, but rather they had adopted a policy of non-intervention (Hatty, 1989).

Colleen's mother made several attempts to leave her husband but lacking money, support or services, she was forced to return.

> I remember Dad pushing Mum down the stairs, then we left. Mum took us to a boarding house, and then left us there – she had to go back home to get crockery to feed us. She was an abused woman! There were no shelters then. So my Mum was very brave. She left Dad, and dad had guns. He had a rifle. He had bullets. She had to bury them in the backyard. I remember Dad with that rifle, and that would have scared my mother.

In participants' accounts, the coercive dimensions of masculine power in the "private" sphere were not limited to displays or performances of physical and sexual abuse. Even where abuse was absent in their house, participants indicated that, if they wanted, fathers could, and did, impose silence when faced with distress, ignore and invalidate unwanted opinions, withhold healthcare if they did not view an injury as deserving of attention, and control the flow of economic resources in such a way as to curtail the freedoms of their wives and children.

> I get the impression that Mum was totally powerless with Dad. She was totally reliant on him for money, I guess, she was repeating lots of messages she must have gotten from her family – she said things like, "There's no divorce in our family." She had been instructed not to leave him, there was no back-up for her if she did. And I don't think there was support for single mothers at that stage. But she definitely acted as though she had no choice. That she wasn't

> going to leave, she was going to stay with him for the money, and that he had to support his children.
>
> Anne

For many participants, relations of gender, age and power were so pervasive in family life that they were embedded within, and affirmed through, the mundanities of social interaction. Bourdieu (2001: 37) describes these implicit prescriptions as a form of "symbolic domination" that is "below the level of the decisions of consciousness and the controls of the will" and sets up "a cognitive relationship that is profoundly obscure to the self." In the childhoods of participants, men had the power to literally define their reality, both the material conditions of existence and children's subjective experiences of it. For example, Jo describes her father as a "woman and girl hater" who forcefully imposed his view of her thoughts and feeling upon her:

> He would tell you what you were thinking and what you were feeling, and you had to agree. "You did that because you are insolent". My mum used to despair because I used to want to try and stand up to him and say, "No, it's really like this".
>
> Sometimes there would be arguments, and sometimes it would be going on for ages, but eventually I would just have to back down and say "Yes, you're right, I was thinking this, I was feeling that, blah blah blah".

> Eventually, even when I got older, one time, I was trying so hard not to cry, but I couldn't help it, and then I would start crying, and it'd be "Oh, you see, now you are turning on the water works, trying to be manipulative".

The ubiquity of the inequities of gender and age in the "private" spaces of participants' homes can be seen in Alex's description of family life. Alex grew up in a home in which there was no physical or sexual abuse; as I will detail shortly, her first experience of abuse was organised and ritualistic abuse by a babysitter. Nonetheless, the spaces of her family home were gendered in subtle but pervasive ways that implicitly consigned herself, her sister and her mother to subordinate roles in relation to her father and brother. Alex noted that "when I think of my childhood, my mum is in the kitchen … always in the kitchen, and I think she did spend a lot of time there" whilst her father was engaged outside the home in medical research and consultation. This gendered division in labour was mirrored in the status granted to Alex's brother over Alex and her sister. Although barely older than Alex, Alex describes her brother as a "separate entity" to herself and her sister, who were referred to collectively by their parents as "the girls": "He's the mature, responsible one, he gets trusted to do everything. And we were always the immature ones." Even the different rooms of the family home were coded according to gendered prescriptions. Whilst the kitchen and the bedrooms of Alex and her sister were public space, Alex's father's study, and Alex's brother's room, were "off-limits". Alex says: "It was the 'adult space' and the more 'serious stuff' was going on in these rooms." As she grew up, Alex learnt that the interests, views and needs of her brother and father took precedence over her own. Alex particularly feared the disapproval of her father, whom she idolised: "I thought

he was the antithesis of my mother, and everything I wanted to be. Smart and in control, in a positive sort of way."

Institutional sites of abuse: School

In all, ten participants, male and female, disclosed opportunistic solo-offender sexual abuse by men at school. Teachers have traditionally been granted expansive powers of control and coercion over children (including, historically, the right to physically assault a child) with little oversight. Despite the emergence of new forms of control and surveillance over children (Jenks, 1996), school remains a common site for the sexual abuse of children (Shakeshaft, 2003). In this study, the power inequities between teachers and students were such that almost half of participants reported sexual abuse at school.

> Teachers grabbed you – I had a teacher come after me, and I fought it off, and then he turned on me and encouraged everyone to bully me. It was – I just called school "jail", it was awful. I wasn't safe at school as well as home.
>
> Sky

> The priests were supposed to take us for some sort of leisure activity, and I can remember they would try to sexually abuse – we were very young, only about five, kindergarten! You just want to kill them when you think about it.
>
> Jane

> Later on in high school, there was a chaplain who was sexual towards me. And there was another teacher who was sexually abusive.
>
> Kate

In Kate's account of high school, a senior teacher constructed a regime of verbally abusive discipline from which the only reprieve was the exchange of sexual favours.

> There was a very frightening man who was quite powerful in the school. And to not be absolutely shouted off the planet, I discovered you could hold his books. But then I discovered he would ask you to stay back, and he'd take you into a little room. That wasn't very good payment for staying on his good side.

In this study, Helena and Seb were subject to organised abuse through their schools and Colleen was subject to organised abuse in a children's residential institution. Helena was coerced into organised abuse when she was nine by an abusive teacher when her mother was hospitalised with a serious illness. This teacher, a nun, exploited her mother's illness to coerce Helena into organised abuse. Her teacher silenced Helena by telling her that, if her mother found out about the abuse, the shock might kill her. This was a threat that kept Helena silent well into her adult years.

> She [the Sister] knew that my mother had a heart attack, she knew that my mother was sick – and it took me a very long time, even as an adult, when I found out what had happened to me, to tell Mum – I only told my parents a year and a half ago. Because I was still so frightened that my mother would die. Because she [the Sister] told me that my mother would die if I ever told anybody.

Seb's experience of organised abuse at a Christian Brothers primary school followed a similar pattern. When Seb was eleven, his father was hospitalised following a serious heart attack. In the period immediately following his father's illness, a priest at his school subjected Seb to organised abuse.

> At the time, when this started, my father was in hospital. He spent six months, I think, in hospital. A very long stay, anyway. So, yeah, the family was very vulnerable, I was very vulnerable. And it was open season.

In Seb's account, the pre-existing power inequities between an adult and a child were amplified not only by the ideologies of pedagogy that legitimised the role of the teacher, but by the broader powers that his teachers enjoyed in the social life of the community as priests. Seb complained repeatedly to his parents that his treatment at school was unfair and violent. He recalls his father meeting with the headmaster of the school on his behalf, but this meeting did not effect any change in the teachers' abuse and violence. As a child, Seb struggled to understand his parents' deference to the priests that harmed him:

> I can remember, as a child, I just couldn't understand why my parents were subservient to these men, y'know. It was just ridiculous. Um. So. I had no respect for them, and I suppose it's a bit odd, looking back now, that I could see through the whole bullshit of it all as a child, all these adults behaving in rather insane ways. Certainly nonsensical.

The enmeshment of religion and education contributed to Seb's powerlessness and vulnerability to sexual abuse at school, since his abusive teachers wielded significant influence over his parents as priests. In Seb's account, the power that his teachers held over him found vivid and unforgettable embodiment in the injuries he sustained at the hands of the priests and other teachers at school.

> I seemed to attract, uh, violence. Cuts – when I say cuts, I mean strapping, from the Brothers and lay teachers. Ah. I think it was because I asked a lot of awkward questions, and I did play up. I didn't respond well to the authoritarian … attitudes, and quite the nonsense stuff they used to say.

In Seb's accounts, the "everyday" coercion that is inherent in teacher's relations with their pupils was the means through which a sexually abusive teacher was able to ensure his participation in organised abuse. Most participants went to school during the 1960s and 1970s, and it is tempting to suggest that there are now more controls in place to prevent educational sexual abuse. Nonetheless, it is evident from reports of harassment and abuse in schools that the "private" male prerogative remains intact in educational environments. For example, a survey of over 2000 American high school students found that 6.7% of all children in years 8 to 11 reported contact sexual abuse by a teacher (Shakeshaft, 2003). Surveys of high school graduates have revealed that many students have either witnessed or experienced teachers requesting social contact with students or initiating inappropriate relationships (Balenger & Sedlacek, 1992; Corbett, Gentry & Pearson, 1993; AAUW, 2001).

Cultures of rampant physical and sexual violence have been documented within children's institutions of all kinds, including exclusive private boarding schools (Poynting & Donaldson, 2005), special schools (Brannan, Jones et al., 1993), and day-care centres and preschools (Finkelhor & Williams, 1988). In children's institutions, in which children's lives are subject to extraordinary degrees of adult oversight and regulation, the prevalence of physical, sexual and emotional abuse of children in care has been disturbingly high (Hawkins & Briggs, 1997). In interview, Colleen lamented that, while the family she was removed from was not perfect, she was not sexually abused there. It was only once she was in care, and her parents were largely absent from her life, that her sexual abuse began.

> My parents were good people. And my father would never have sexually abused me. And when I was in that home, I was severely sexually abused.

Liddle (1993) has proposed that the dominant structures of cathexis (through which particular practices and symbols are eroticised and hegemonic forms of sexuality become embodied) entail the eroticisation of power relations in ways that excite some men to sexually abuse children. In this study, the spaces of childhood – that is, the home and school – provided the geographic locus of these power relations. In the "private" sphere of home and family, liberal philosophers have argued that man can "give flight to his imagination and develop his own conception of the good life", including the fulfilment of his needs for "emotional and sexual intimacy free from legal regulation" (Naffine, 1995: 26). This ideology has been heavily critiqued by feminist theorists who have argued that it has, in effect, constructed the family as a site of masculine hegemony and restricted women from full citizenship (Pateman,

1988; MacKinnon, 1989; Thornton, 1995a). In this study, many fathers' conceptualisation of the "good life" (that is, the exercise of the masculine prerogative to dictate the terms of family life) included the physical and/or sexual abuse of women and children. Even in schools and other children's institutions in which the distinction between "public" and "private" is blurred, the relations of power enshrined within the ideology of the "private" sphere continues to shape the interactions between children and adults (Foster, 1998; Green, 2005).

In participants' accounts, their diverse experiences of sexual abuse in different sites shared points of commonality: namely, their structured powerlessness as children, and the largely unchecked power of adults at home and school to coerce them into abuse. Whilst their experiences of abuse were diverse, they were organised by common structures of gender, age and power that characterised home and school. These structures placed children in subordinate position to adults which not only increased their vulnerability to sexual abuse but prevented them from protecting themselves. The abject powerlessness of children faced with organised abuse was a consistent theme in participants' accounts.

> Because there's just – there just was nobody. I tried going to the police as a kid, and got laughed out of there. I tried everything. I tried writing letters to the prime minister. Tried all sorts of things as a kid. And nothing happened. And there's just that feeling that there's not a real hope. And there wasn't anybody.
>
> Darren

> Now, I spent a lot of my time absolutely black and blue from these people. They'd butt out their cigarettes on me, they'd use me as an ashtray, they'd piss on me, they'd shit on me, they'd belt the fuck out of me, kick me around the room if I didn't do something properly. But nobody in my family noticed it. Nobody noticed my distress on that first occasion. Nor any other time. It was just put down to me being a clumsy kid.
>
> Neil

Powerless in the face of overwhelming abuse, many participants concluded, as children, that sexual abuse was a normal and natural part of social life. In the following section, I show how this conclusion is reflective of participants' internalisation of the relations of power that shape the lives of abused children, and I explore how this internalisation entrenched the powerlessness of participants and increased their vulnerability to ongoing victimisation.

The abused *habitus*

Participants spoke of sexual abuse as "normal" or "just life" because they experienced it as an ever-present aspect of their childhoods. They came to adjust to abuse, accommodate it and expect it. Bourdieu (1977) theorises that the individual disposition (or "*habitus*") is a collection of preferences, tendencies and habits that form through an individual's internalisation of the objective probabilities and conditions of the social environment. For participants in this study, the pervasiveness of the "relationship of domination" (Bourdieu, 2001) of men over children, as manifested through sexual abuse and other forms of abuse and neglect, was indeed an objective condition of their childhood. The individual ways that they responded to

abuse as a material fact of their lives, I argue, can be understood as the generation of a *habitus* that was sensitised and responsive to the threat of sexual abuse and sought to neutralise this threat through displays of compliance and obedience. For some participants, the generation of this disposition, premised on a worldview in which sexual abuse is widespread and normal, propelled them into a state of complicity with their own abuse, as their self-identity became premised upon ongoing dehumanisation and exploitation.

The complexity of the relationship between organised abuse, the general conditions of participants' lives as children, and the generation of a *habitus* that has adapted to abuse is well illustrated by Alex's life history. When Alex was five, she was subject to organised and ritualistic abuse by a babysitter who was a friend of her parents. She became a deeply disturbed child whose behaviour caused alarm at both home and school. Alex was in her late twenties at the time of interview, and so she began attending school during the 1980s, when presumably there was some community awareness of the issue of sexual abuse. Nonetheless, Alex's recollection was that her parents' and teachers' response to her troubled behaviour was largely punitive. They began subjecting her to intense scrutiny, and demanding that she provide them with a logical explanation for the confusion and distress that marked her behaviour at home and school.

> My memories are of a whole lot of incidents coming up and my parents demanding an explanation from me. And me trying really hard to explain, but not knowing how to give the satisfactory explanation that they wanted to hear. And them really disapproving, and really not understanding. And me feeling

> that somehow I'd done the wrong thing, and not sure what I'd done or how to do it differently. I don't know, everything was so messy for me, I couldn't get a grasp on how to interact with people, or how to talk to my parents. I don't know, I didn't get it. I didn't get it.

Alex's victimisation in organised abuse was extensive and severe. It involved men in her local community who were active in her school and church as well as the local youth sports club where she played. Their roles as educators, volunteers and respected professionals placed them at the heart of social life in the township where Alex was raised. Her abusers were therefore able to arrange for sexual abuse to take place at school as well as in other contexts, such as sports camps. As this abuse became progressively more severe, Alex's social development began to slow and her demeanour transformed from bright and outgoing to shy and depressed. In interview, she recalled the popularity and enthusiasm of her early years at school with some disbelief.

> When I think of the really young years, it's weird, because I remember – it's really weird – I can't even imagine myself like this. But I had clubs and things that I used to run, and I'd give people badges and stickers and I was kind of popular. This was when I was really quite young at school. And I'd always do these amazing clubs, and I had t-shirts that I'd drawn on and made, and cardboard badges and lollies and games and things that I ran. I cannot imagine me doing things like this now, ever – taking any leadership role now.

In Alex's narrative, the bright promise of her early years at school was in stark contrast to the bewildered child that subsequently emerged.

> I was feeling really different and unable to connect and that sort of thing at school. My school work was still – I still did well with that – but even in earlier years, from an adult's perspective, they identified that some of my behaviours were a bit strange. I think I still enjoyed it [school] until about year two and then it just went downhill.

Alex's teachers noticed this transformation and repeatedly contacted Alex's parents about "a whole lot of things whereby teachers said that they were concerned about my social interactions and behaviours and social development, I suppose." Whilst her parents and teachers observed this transformation, and were clearly concerned by it, they unintentionally colluded with her abusers by affirming that this transformation was the product of a flaw in Alex's nature. For Alex, the logical necessity of her ongoing abuse was not only impressed upon her by her abusers, but by the adults in her life who viewed her as erratic and strange. Like other participants, she described her experiences of organised abuse as a child as having a "natural" quality, and when I asked why, she said:

> Ah … hmmm. It's a bit chicken or egg. There are lots of aspects. One was that … I don't know, it fitted my picture of myself. Sort of. And the rest of my life as well – at school, and at home – it fitted that I was the one who … I don't know, that there was something about me. It's hard to say it in normal words.

> *When you say there was "something about me", were you special in a good way? Or special in a bad way?*
>
> Special in a bad way. [...] But also – that what they were doing was pretty normal, that this is what you do with someone like me. That's how – yeah, very much. Yeah, it was so natural. Because the sort of person I was, meant that this is how the world should respond to that.

It seems that Alex's view of herself and her social world, over time, became predicated on a cognitive schema in which her organised abuse was natural and justified: "This [organised abuse] is what you do with someone like me." The "me" that Alex refers to was not only the subordinated and dehumanised identity that was forced upon her through acts of organised abuse. The ways in which her parents and teachers responded to the physiological and psychological consequences of this abuse – her pain, her amnesia, her shyness and confusion – all reinforced to her that she was, indeed, deserving of harm. Her sense of self and identity thus came to depend in crucial ways upon ongoing abuse. By her early teens, her abusers had induced her to regularly leave the family home and meet them at pre-arranged times. When she was in her mid-teens, and the abusive group broke off contact with her, Alex described herself as "devastated" by this development. Subsequently, she began to seek out men who would hurt her as the abusive group had hurt her:

> There were times after they ceased contact where I was trying to find someone to fulfil their role. So things would happen – like, yeah, I would ring up

> random strangers and sort of form a relationship over the phone with older men that I didn't know, and end up going to their house. Creating those sorts of situations.

Experientially, the normalising and punitive judgements of her parents and teachers were concordant with the abusive and violent practises of the abusive group, and so Alex developed a sense of herself and her place in the world that was dependent on ongoing sexual violence. Without ongoing abuse, it appears that Alex's self-identity and her sense of her place in the world was at risk of collapse.

> *So it [organised abuse] wasn't just something that adults were doing that made no sense?*

> No, it made complete sense. In terms of who I was. That's why – I never thought it was this abnormal thing. It completely made sense. That's possibly why it was harder when it finished – when it was over, life didn't make sense.

> *So when the abuse came to an end, it was like –*

> That was like the worst time in my life. When it ended was … just everything just crashed down … The depression happened because, when the abuse ended, life stopped making sense. I think it [the abuse] made too much sense.

Alex went on to say: "I wouldn't have said I was depressed prior to that" (the end of the organised abuse) "in hindsight, looking back, I wouldn't say I had been depressed

before that. But when it finished, I was depressed." Alex described her late teens and early twenties as a time in which her mental health entered a serious decline, resulting in repeated hospitalisations for self-harm and suicide attempts. At some point in her early twenties, the abusive group made contact again with Alex, although she was uncertain specifically when or how this second phase of abuse began. She described this period as "fuzzy", observing "That whole time really just merges together." Nonetheless, she described her experiences of organised abuse during this period as "sort of very consensual" as she began to meet abusive groups at pre-arranged times as she had when she was a child. However, whilst participating in organised abuse, she also pursued a covert agenda of resistance, accessing mental health care and quietly disclosing her abuse to me and others. After a few years, she said that the abuse "stopped making sense" and she began to take proactive steps to protect herself from the abusive group.

Through the lens of Alex's life history, we can see how organised abuse can catalyse a pervasive pattern of invalidation whereby the victimised child's needs go unmet, her sense of identity is undermined, and her experiences of pain and shame are turned against her. In Alex's case, this invalidation was not only an implicit characteristic of her experience of organised abuse but it pervaded her experience of home and school. The very powerlessness that enabled her victimisation through organised abuse was intensified by the response of other adults to the symptoms of abuse that she manifested: her sudden change in temperament, her pathological shyness, her dissociative confusion. In effect, she became entrapped in social life, as the pervasive conditions of childhood simultaneously rendered her vulnerable to victimisation whilst preventing her from protecting herself.

Alex was unusual in this study in that her family home was free from physical or sexual abuse. Nonetheless, as previously discussed, it was a space in which her needs, alongside those of her sister and mother, were sublimated to those of her father and brother. At school, she was acutely aware of the presence of a few men who were involved in her organised abuse, whilst at home she also learnt to conduct herself in accordance with a gendered regime of power and control. She described a number of interventions by parents, teachers and psychologists when she was a child, however she emphasised that the primary aim of these interventions were to encourage her to accept responsibility for her troubled behaviour. In her experience, the adults around her put "their own frame on everything" and never considered the possibility that something traumatic or abusive was happening to her.

> I don't think that [sexual abuse] was in people's psyche at all. Certainly not in my polite private school! It just really wasn't talked about. And with me and my [privileged] background … there was no way that would happen. Honestly, even I didn't believe it! [laughs]

A great degree of powerlessness and vulnerability is an objective condition of childhood, although children's experiences of these conditions vary greatly depending on their life circumstances (Jenks, 1996). Many children only ever experience their subordinate position indirectly, through the seemingly arbitrary and erratic displays of adult authority that occur frequently in childhood. In Alex's case, her experiences of abuse and neglect made that powerlessness known to her in the visceral terms of pain and exploitation. Forced to adapt to circumstances beyond her control, Alex

internalised this powerlessness and orientated her decisions and behaviour accordingly. As a child, she learnt to view sexual victimisation as the "natural" and inevitable consequence of being a powerless girl in a world of sexualised masculine domination. Having been subjected to this practice over many years, she developed a subordinate identity that was dependent on ongoing experiences of dehumanisation. She thus became an active participant in her abuse, harming herself when others would not, and seeking out situations that would affirm her view of herself as shameful and deserving of harm.

In this study, organised abuse depended on the complicity of victims in a variety of ways: for example, victims meeting abusers at pre-arranged times, conducting themselves during abusive ordeals in the required manner, and remaining silent and loyal between abusive ordeals. In the following excerpt, Jo recalls her internal dialogue during an incident in her mid-teens in which she had been told to meet the abusive group after school.

> I remember thinking "I don't want to go, I don't want to go, I don't want to go, oh, but I have to go, but I have to go". Because my parents worked after school, and, so I would go off, walk off.

The conundrum of "I don't want to go, but I have to go" articulated by Jo was evident in many participants' accounts of organised abuse. Gaspar and Bibby (1996: 50) observe that it is often difficult for investigators of organised abuse to understand "why children keep going back to be abused, sometimes in the most degrading manner, and why, when away from the offender, they do not disclose." In this study,

children's obedience was not simply a product of the coercive strategies utilised by abusive groups, although, in participants' accounts, the threats, violence and emotional manipulations of the abusive group certainly exerted a powerful influence over them as children. Rather, the acceptance that "I have to go" was the product of a process whereby participants became enmeshed within a larger cycle of abuse, invalidation and powerlessness, as their attempts to disclose were ignored, their symptoms of abuse were misunderstood, and their escalating need for intervention and support went unmet. As a result, the dispositions and expectations engendered by organised abuse were endlessly confirmed through the course of "everyday" life.

Far from being an aberration, organised abuse can be said to be a product of the relations of power that were embedded within the everyday contexts of participants' childhoods. This gave rise to a multitude of experiences of abuse that, whilst diverse, nonetheless "made sense" to participants as they came to understand, and internalise, their subordinate status as abused children. Participants' descriptions of their childhoods indicate that the inequities of relations of gender and age were subtly and pervasively embedded within their social worlds as children, and that they internalised these relations through both implicit and explicit instruction. Abuse was one of the key expressions of these inequities, in which children learnt of their subordinate position within power relations in the irrefutable language of fear and pain. Foucault (1979b: 103) described sexuality as a particularly dense transfer point for power relations; however, this transfer point is amplified in the case of sexual abuse by the coercive nature of the abuse, and the developmental and social vulnerability of the child. As participants' needs escalated as a result of the harms inflicted upon them, the unwillingness and inability of the adults around them to respond to their needs

became increasingly harmful as well. Participants were frequently told, by abusers as well as other adults, that they were incorrect in their perceptions and feelings, and that the distress and shame generated by sexual abuse was, in fact, the result of their own moral or psychological deficits. Ultimately, they came to agree with this notion. Anne says, "You think you must deserve it. You must be so filthy and disgusting for these things to have happened to you."

This study is replete with examples of children's entrapment in organised abuse through the cycle of abuse, invalidation and powerlessness. For example, Darren described how his mother became enmeshed in a criminal syndicate in which she received heroin in exchange for providing herself and Darren for sexual exploitation. By the time Darren reached high school, he was aggressive and dissociative, displaying erratic changes in mood and academic performance. The extent of his abuse at home was such that it was not possible for him to regulate his conduct at school. In his words, "I had all these other horrible things happening to me, and that would spill over every now and again." Darren described suffering from dissociative lapses that interfered with his learning.

> This has happened to me a few times, I sort of get – there's a real slow sort of period, I must have been totally vagued out, and I'd sort of wake up and it was like I'd find myself in a totally new classroom. And it's like, "What the fuck am I doing here?" Y'know. And I'm being treated like I'm an imbecile, like I'm a slow learner, and I'd be like, "Well, I know all *that*! And *that*! Send me back to my class!" And that happened again in high school.

Darren also described outbursts in class that he couldn't control or understand.

> Some larrikin in class got his dick out and started pretending to masturbate under the table. And that triggered something in me, I got my dick out and started running up and down the middle of the class and that sort of stuff. And the teacher's absolutely horrified.

Darren's parents and teachers responded to his challenging conduct and learning problems by sending him to a reform school. Whilst he respected the headmaster, his need for intervention, care and support in relation to ongoing sexual abuse was not met. Instead, he was subject to further physical discipline. In the religious framework of the school, his behaviour resulted in him being labelled as "the devil".

> I'm only halfway through the first year, and I've weed myself in class, and all this sort of thing. And so they sent me off to this other school, it was, like – really small, really Christian, really hard disciplinarian. In some ways, it was the best thing that ever happened to me. The headmaster of that school was the only man that I know was an honest man as a kid. But the corporal punishment was really heavy, and that was all I needed at the time. And, y'know, I was the devil. I was the devil.

Darren's dissociative conduct and memory lapses made him vulnerable to sexually abusive men. During high school, he was sexually abused by a teacher. Whilst Darren suggests that it was common knowledge that this teacher was sexually abusive, his dissociative confusion and ingrained tendency towards obedience undermined his

capacity to protect himself.

> There was also the music teacher there, he was, you know, bent as all fuck. There was stuff going on there. But, see … it's like going through quicksand. I remember one time, because the girls … we were outside of the class, and the girls are saying "Don't go in there, don't go in there." But I'm just … god, I sort of, in half of my mind I know what's going to happen if I go in there, in the other half I'm opening the door and going into the classroom, y'know?

Through a cycle of abuse, powerlessness and invalidation, participants became sensitised to their subordinate status within relations of power and age, although they did not experience it as such; instead, they blamed themselves for the experiences of humiliation and marginalisation that they felt so vividly. To Darren's teachers, he was not an abused child in need, but rather a "devil" that invited corporal punishment, or in the case of the abusive teacher above, a vulnerable child who could be coerced into sexual abuse. For Darren, the sense of shame and humiliation that attended his complicity in his own abuse continues to this day. He spoke movingly of the powerlessness of children, including the vulnerability of his own children, however in relation to his experiences of abuse this knowledge was an intellectual "fact" rather than a conviction. Like most participants, the subordinate status constructed for Darren through organised abuse persisted into adulthood, expressed and embodied through intense feelings of self-blame and humiliation.

Conclusion

In participants' lives, their powerlessness as children was pervasive and self-legitimising. They did not experience organised abuse as radically discordant with their general experience of childhood, because they indicated that this abuse shared a logical relation with the invalidation and powerlessness that characterised their childhoods more broadly. Organised abuse was embedded within a matrix of physical and sexual abuse as well as an array of forms of neglect and belittlement, and through this matrix that participants learnt to view themselves as deserving of abuse and harm. In effect, they became entrapped in social life, as the pervasive conditions of childhood simultaneously rendered them vulnerable to victimisation whilst preventing them from protecting themselves. In response, they orientated themselves towards a future in which physical and sexual harm was an inevitable part of their lives, and this adjustment had serious implications for their health and wellbeing.

Many participants were sexually abused by opportunistic offenders after the commencement of their organised abuse once sexually abusive men identified their vulnerability and acted upon it. This is reflective of a cumulative pattern of risk and harm that features in the lives of many abused children (Finkelhor, Omroad & Turner, 2007). In this study, the primary message that organised abuse imparts to the abused child – that they are a dehumanised object without inherent worth – found resonance within across a range of environments, where participants were subject to a multitude of practices that constituted them as lacking basic worth and therefore unworthy of protection. Internalising these values, participants appeared to orientate themselves towards a future in which ongoing organised abuse is not only an objective probability, but a necessary punishment for being the person they had learnt they

were. The next chapter will explore the implications of the gendered distribution of power for the study of organised abuse. In particular, it will explore how cultural associations between masculinity and power impact upon the experiences of organised abuse for boys and girls and result in the disproportionate victimisation of girls and women by abusive groups.

6

Gendering organised abuse

A range of theorists have argued that, in a gender order in which selfhood is synonymous with masculinity and power, the powerlessness of children is an opportunity for some boys and men to "do gender" through acts of sexualised dominance (Liddle, 1993; Cossins, 2000; Messerschmidt, 2000). In the previous section, I connected this theory of sexual abuse to the private "prescribed spaces" (James, Jenks et al., 1998) of childhood, particularly the home and school. I argued that the structured powerlessness of children is produced through power relations of gender and age. That is, cultural associations between childhood, femininity and powerlessness place children in a subordinate position both symbolically and structurally. Through the inequities of adult–child relations, participants were coerced into sexual abuse and/or organised abuse at home and/or school, effectively held in plain sight by mechanisms of power that are invisible because they are widespread and socially legitimised. In this regard, organised abuse is similar to other forms of interpersonal violence against children and women and indeed organised abuse often occurs contemporaneously with emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect. As

such, organised abuse is frequently experienced by victims as a "natural" and "inevitable" condition of existence.

The literature on organised abuse tends towards a non-gendered analysis of the crime, with a strong emphasis on the role that trauma and the inculcation of dissociation plays in the operation of abusive groups (Noblitt & Perskin, 2000; Sinason, 2002; Sachs & Galton, 2008). In light of the evidence gathered in this study, it is difficult to be sanguine about the absence of a gendered analysis of organised abuse in much of the literature. Although the connections between gender, age and power became manifest in diverse ways throughout participants' accounts, all participants described how organised abuse emerged from within deeply gendered social contexts, such as home and school. They described how the violent practices of abusive groups produced a gendered hierarchy in which power accrued, disproportionately and often overwhelmingly, to men within the abusive group. The social structure of abusive groups reflected the larger gender order in which masculinity and power were mutually defining principles. Accordingly, the patterns of victimisation that emerge from this study were strongly gendered. Participants described how boys were frequently victimised alongside girls but in their accounts girls and women were subject to a disproportionate burden of abuse within organised contexts. In this study, the burden of organised abuse upon girls and women can be summarised in terms of four key issues:

- Risk: Girls were more likely to be targeted for organised abuse than boys.

- Period of abuse: Girls were subject to organised abuse for a longer period of time than boys. They were also more likely to be subject to organised abuse as adults.
- Intergenerational transmission: The children of female victims of organised abuse were at increased risk of organised victimisation.
- Increased lifetime vulnerability to interpersonal victimisation: Girls subject to organised abuse were at heightened risk of other experiences of interpersonal violence throughout their lives, which compounded the harms of organised abuse and prevented captive women from escaping organised abuse.

In highlighting the gendered dimensions of organised abuse, I am not denying the severity of the harms inflicted upon boys in organised abuse. Studies of children subject to extra-familial organised abuse in child care, and in other extra-familial contexts, have found that boys and girls were subjected to similar extremes of abuse and suffered serious harms as a result (Finkelhor & Williams, 1988; Waterman, Kelly et al., 1993; Jonker & Jonker-Bakker, 1997). It is clear that abusive groups are environments in which all children are at risk of abuse. However, it seems that girls are at greater risk than boys and this differential increases with age. In the following sections, I document this differential, and argue that it is the product of the overlap of power relations of age with power relations of gender.

Whilst seeking to craft a gendered account of organised abuse, I do not assume that power is neatly locked into a binary structure of abuse and victimisation, or power and powerlessness, with women and children viewed as a group unified in their powerlessness. Gender is a complex structure or a set of interlocking structures, as

argued by Connell (1987). Its role is more constitutive than causative in social relations, crafting constrained but shifting subject positions that induce particular dispositions and excite particular propensities. The study of organised abuse and the extremes of gendered violence do not reveal a fundamental "truth" about gender relations but rather its more extreme possibilities. In Western culture, notions of power and masculinity are linked within, and expressed through, a range of gendered social practices including physical and sexual violence (Kaufman, 1987; Messerschmidt, 1993; Connell, 2005). In social environments characterised by male violence, such as organised abuse, gendered categories of power and powerlessness were not directly linked to biological sex (or physiological immaturity, in the case of children) and the victims of organised abuse include men and boys as well as girls and women. Nonetheless, in this study, the gendering of power through violence found expression through the differential victimisation of girls and women in organised abuse.

Risk of abuse

In this study, it was common for participants, both male and female, to reveal that girls were victimised more frequently and more severely than boys in organised abuse and/or that girls were preferentially targeted for organised abuse whilst boys were spared. This was true even in familial settings where, although both sons and daughters were vulnerable to abuse, daughters bore the brunt of abuse, which suggests that the abuse of girls is of particular significance to many abusive groups. Darren noted that "It's usually the way that one person in the family cops it [victimisation in organised abuse], the big mother lode. And they are the sacrifice, if you will." For many participants, they were the only child in their family victimised through

organised abuse, or else they bore a disproportionate amount of abuse. In this study, the child who "copped it" was most often a daughter. A number of female participants born into circumstances of familial organised abuse noted that their brothers were not victimised, or else were subject to significantly fewer incidents of organised abuse than they were. This finding is supported by other studies that suggest that girls are more likely to be sexually abused than boys, and where boys are sexually abused they are frequently co-victimised alongside their sisters (Finkelhor, 1984; Reinhart, 1987; Faller, 1989).

For example, Jo was subject to organised and ritualistic abuse by her mother's family but she noted that her brother was not victimised, "so it doesn't seem to be the case that the whole family is just toddling off in their car, and, like, instead of going off to church, going off to the Satanist group." Jo reported that her mother, once Jo was an adult, had spoken to her about her own experiences of ritualistic abuse. Summarising her own and her mother's experience of ritualistic abuse, Jo suggested that the abusive group "concentrated more on the females":

> Because I know my mother was one of five, she had three older brothers, she says she can remember one of them being there [during ritualistic abuse] but she can't remember any of the others being there.

Rhea reported that her brother was subject to some experiences of sexual abuse and organised abuse by her father and his abusive family. When her brother was interviewed as part of a police investigation into Rhea's allegations of organised

abuse, her brother corroborated her history, and indicated that she was victimised to a far greater extent than him.

> I've got one brother. He's about 18 months younger than me. Involved in some of the abuse, but not as much as apparently I was. … He actually told the police when they interviewed him, "The same things happened to me but she had a worse time than I did." Something to that effect.

Lily and Rhea had somewhat similar histories, in that their fathers were both involved in a hierarchical ritualistic network of abusers. Lily's recollection of abuse also suggests that her brother, whilst victimised to some extent, was not victimised to the same extent that she was.

> In all the therapy that I've done, it's amazing how rarely he appears in any remembered scene. In ritual abuse therapy, yeah, there are some memories, but it's of both of us being involved in a ritual, or us being forced into performing something for ritual and for them to watch.

Sky was born biologically female, although he has since transitioned to male. He recalled, as a young child, how his infant brother was used to blackmail him into acquiescence in abusive ordeals, but otherwise left unharmed:

> When there were ceremonies in my house, in the lounge room, I was conscious – I remember my brother being there for some of it – but in all of my memories of him being there, he was unconscious. And I have a feeling –

> because they drugged us a lot – that they drugged him into unconsciousness, so he wouldn't be aware of it. I mean, they drugged him, and then they tortured me, saying "you've got to do what you are told or else he'll get it." And then he wouldn't be touched, and he'd be taken back upstairs. And then they'd do stuff to me.

Male participants in this study disclosed serious and diverse forms of abuse in organised contexts. There was often a commercial and extra-familial aspect to their accounts of abuse that was less pronounced in female participants' descriptions of abuse. Retrospective surveys of adults in the community (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith, 1990) and in therapy (Gold, Elhai, Lucenko, Swingle & Hughes, 1998) have found that sexually abused men are more likely to report extra-familial abuse than sexually abused women. Early studies of clinical samples of sexually abused children have made similar findings about the preponderance of extra-familial abuse amongst abused boys (Finkelhor, 1979; Finkelhor, 1984; Faller, 1989) whilst more recent studies have found comparable rates of familial and extra-familial abuse between male and female victims (Magalhaes, Taveira, Jardim, Santos, Matos & Santos, 2009; Maikovich-Fong & Jaffee, 2010). However, in this study, the primary site of organised abuse for male participants was most often an extra-familial group and location even where male participants reported being supplied for this abuse by their parents.

For example, Darren described how his mother prostituted him to a group of sadistic abusers in exchange for a regular supply of heroin. Only rarely did she participate actively in his sexual abuse and his father not at all. In his autobiography of organised

abuse in Queensland, Roy (2007) described his father selling him, and his brothers, to a ritualistically abusive group when they were young children, although his father did not participate in these incidents of abuse. Darren's and Roy's (2007) experiences of organised abuse took place in extra-familial settings although they were facilitated by their parents. For both men, these experiences had a commercial dimension involving the exchange of money or drugs. Neil's experience of organised abuse was also extra-familial. Unlike Darren and Roy (2007), his parents were unaware of this abuse, which was facilitated by a stranger in Neil's community. Neil's abuse included frequent experiences of child prostitution, in which his primary abuser would drive him to men's homes where he would be sexually abused. Afterwards, Neil was given an envelope and instructed to give it to the primary abuser, although Neil was unaware of the significance of this exchange as a child.

> I never knew, I never understood that I was actually collecting money for him when I was taken to different houses. Even though I'd seen money being taken out of the envelope, there was a few times where there were coins in the envelope, and I'd spill the coins when I handed it to him. And I didn't understand at that stage that it was his payment for what I'd done.

It is notable that all male participants' experiences of organised abuse took place in extra-familial settings, regardless of whether their parents had facilitated this abuse or were unaware of it, and often (although not always) had a commercial dimension such the exchange of money or drugs. While some female participants, such as Renee, also reported experiences of parentally facilitated commercial abuse, women's reports of organised abuse in this study were dominated by prolonged and sadistic experiences

of organised abuse, usually with parental involvement and without a clear profit motive. This reflects the findings of other studies of organised abuse, which suggest that, although money is occasionally involved in the organised abuse of girl children, it is not the primary motivating factor (Itzin, 1997; Scott, 2001; Sarson & MacDonald, 2008). It seems that the sexual abuse of girls may have particular meaning or significance for many abusive groups (in fact, may function as a kind of capital in and of itself) particularly where familial organised abuse is involved. Nonetheless, this was a pattern rather than a rule, and boys and girls were both at serious risk of harm in organised contexts.

Period of abuse

In this study, there was a marked difference in the length of time that male and female participants were subject to organised abuse. Seven female participants spoke of being subject to organised abuse into adulthood. In contrast, the only male participant who reported such a prolonged experience of abuse was Sky, who was born biologically female and has recently transitioned to male. One male participant, Darren, disclosed a period in his twenties where a group of men used his drug dependence to coerce him into abusive sex. This experience, whilst deeply traumatic for Darren, was nonetheless of a different kind to the ongoing organised abuse experienced by female participants and Sky. Whereas drugs were the primary means through which Darren was manipulated into sexual exploitation, female-born participants described being terrorised and battered into compliance by the abusive group, who invested a considerable amount of time and energy in maintaining the participant in a state of servitude.

This dramatic difference in the reports of organised abuse follows a pattern that has previously been noted in other research on sexual abuse. Where studies of sexual abuse investigate the period of abuse experienced by victims according to gender, they have found that the sexual abuse of boys tends to be terminated at an earlier age than the sexual abuse of girls (Briere, Evans, Runtz & Wall, 1988; Naar-King, Silvern, Ryan & Sebring, 2002). Dhaliwal et al. (1996: 623) proffer a number of explanations for this difference, including that boys are more likely to "resist" sexual abuse than girls and that boys are physiologically capable of "warding off" sexual abuse at a younger age than girls. Their evidence for such claims is limited to a study undertaken in 1956 and it is difficult to credit their views as anything more than the product of gender essentialism. They do put forward an alternative proposition, which is that "most perpetrators of female victims have been family members who have longer duration opportunities for contact with their victims than perpetrators of male victims who have been friends or strangers" (1996: 623–624).

This argument is more descriptive than it is explanatory. It is true in this study that the organised abuse of boys tended to occur in extra-familial circumstances (even where facilitated by a parent) whilst the organised abuse of girls tended to occur intra-familially. Nonetheless, this does not explain why daughters were differentially targeted for familial organised abuse whilst sons were spared or why abusive groups expended so much energy maintaining girls and women in a state of captivity. The shorter period of organised abuse reported by male participants was not a product of their abusers' lack of opportunity and access nor was it evident that male participants resisted their abuse to a greater degree than female participants. Male participants indicated that, due to the abusive groups' regime of control and manipulation, they

had developed compliant behaviours similar to those described by female participants such as leaving the house at pre-arranged times. It seems that, at a certain point in their development, the abusive group lost interest in them.

When male interviewees reached an age – usually early to mid-teens – when the biological markers of sex became clear, they were invariably rejected or allowed to leave by the organised group. In Neil's case, the majority of other victimised children in the abusive group were female, and Neil reported his abusers' insistence that he was a girl, not a boy, and their anger when he began developing pubic hair. When Neil was in his mid-teens, he was able to "disappear" after moving to his sister's house. Neil reported maintaining a state of vigilance to ensure that, as his abusers had threatened, photos of his abuse were not mailed to his father. His abusers never made good on this threat, and Neil never saw them again.

> They wanted younger and younger kids. But I was kept around [in my teens]. Because I was still useful for some of their friends [who were sexually interested in adolescent males]. I was still useful to be taken to different places, you know, compliant and that. Never dobbed on them, basically. [...] But when I was nearly sixteen, I guess, probably about fifteen and a half, my father got his long service leave. All my other sisters and that were married by then, and I was the only one still at home.
>
> So I got palmed off to [live with] one of my sisters. But it was still my duty to go back to our house and make sure the garden was weeded and check the mailbox and all of that. Now, I had checked the mailbox for quite a long time,

> because, you know, my parents went away for three months or something, and I knew what photos felt like. But I never found any. And then, one day, I never went back [to the house where abuse was arranged]. And, as I said, I kept checking the house, and no photos came. And then I just managed to disappear. That's how I got out.

While Neil was subject to extra-familial organised abuse, men subject to familial organised abuse have also reported the termination of organised abuse in their early-to-mid-teens. For example, Roy (2007) reported being subjected to organised abuse by his father from early childhood to his mid-teens. However, his experience of ritualistic and sadistic abuse was limited to early childhood, when his father periodically "sold" Roy and his brothers to an abusive group for incidents of ritualistic abuse. This abuse did not continue past puberty, although Roy reports that his father continued to sexually assault him and his brothers until Roy was in his mid-teens, as well as violently coercing Roy into prostitution at beats. Roy was able to bring this abuse to an end by leaving school and enlisting in the army.

Darren recounted a similar experience of familial organised abuse inasmuch as his mother also "sold" him to an abusive group, although she did not regularly participate in the abusive activities. She also prostituted Darren to other men. Darren's experience of organised and sadistic abuse continued until his late-teens, when the abusive group announced to him that they had no further need for him. Seb's experience of extra-familial organised abuse came to an end in his early teens when his parents transferred him to a new school, away from the group of priests who were abusing him. In interview, Seb described the substantial pressure that the abusive

group placed upon him to remain within the group, and their apparent wish that he make the transition from child victim to adult perpetrator. At the age of thirteen and in a new school, however, Seb was able to disrupt their plans for him by minimising their opportunities to contact him:

> I was constantly vigilant, looking out the front windows to see whose car was in the street. And when I'd see it, I'd be out – out the back, round through the garage, onto my bicycle, and off. And I managed to avoid him, although he did catch me at one stage, but – ah, so, that's how I got out of the cult.

This description demonstrates Seb's resolve to protect himself and bring his exploitation to an end. Nonetheless, the skills and resources available to him in his early teens were sufficient enough to achieve this goal. Since Seb's abuse was occurring extra-familially, his abusers had only a limited window of opportunity to exert control over him or gain access to him. By convincing his parents to enrol him in a new school, and by maintaining a state of vigilance, Seb was able to permanently terminate his organised abuse.

With the exception of Sky, who was born biologically female, no male participant reported a continuation of organised victimisation into adulthood. However, Alex, Isabelle, Kate, Rhea, Lily and Polly all spoke of experiences of organised abuse lasting into their twenties and beyond. These patterns of ongoing abuse were leveraged by a range of strategies, particularly stalking, threats and terrorisation at home and work. These participants described years and even decades of struggle before they were able to obtain some sense of personal safety and autonomy from the

abusive group. Some reported that they were still not safe. Similar patterns of stalking and terrorisation have been described amongst female survivors of organised abuse in Britain (Gallagher, 2001; Scott, 2001), Europe (Boon-Langelaan, 2010), Canada (Sarson & MacDonald, 2008) and the United States (Noblitt & Perskin, 2000. Whilst exiting organised abuse often involved a display of resistance from male participants, their escape appears relatively simple in comparison to female participants' descriptions of their desperate and prolonged attempts to bring organised abuse to an end, and the obsessive stalking and harassment of abusers who refused to release them.

For example, Rhea's experiences of organised abuse continued from early childhood until her mid-thirties. As an adult, she attempted to disrupt her abusers' capacity to coerce her into obedience by getting married and moving to a more isolated area. However, her husband was frequently absent from home, and she received sporadic threatening phone calls instructing her to attend abusive ordeals. She would obey these phone calls, and complied in bringing her infant son with her for abuse. In her mid thirties, when she began to seek mental health care, she stopped attending abusive ordeals. This triggered a three-year campaign of intensive terrorisation from the abusive group, which included the stalking of Rhea, her psychotherapist and a close friend. After a home invasion during which Rhea was raped, her son was placed in foster care and the police were called in to investigate. Her therapist reported a number of break-ins at her home and office, and her therapist eventually sent her own son to live elsewhere for his safety.

> Her files were broken into at the child protection office, where she was the head of that. Her staff there, private details were found and they were being harassed. I think one of them had an animal killed. It was all that sort of thing. As I said, files going missing. Very little done by the Department of Health, tried to brush it under the carpet, "no, it's not really happening". She [the therapist] had her house broken into, they found they'd come in through the roof, through tiles in the roof. She sent her son away because of what was happening.

Those participants reporting organised abuse in adulthood described how the abusive group used a range of terrorising strategies, including threats via telephone, emails, mail, and text message, as well as stalking and home invasions. These strategies were designed to intimidate the victim into silence and compliance, and to isolate them from people close to them. Alex reported an incident in her mid-twenties when the abusive group sent an envelope of pornographic magazines to her employer with her name attached to them in an attempt to disrupt her employment.

> All the stupid discrediting sort of stuff that the group did. Things that set me up. In the mail, when they sent – oh my god – they sent those porno magazines in the mail to my boss. With a note saying they were returning them to me. It was so full on.

Sky moved a number of times to maintain his safety, and he described an ongoing series of strange emails, letters and phone calls. He reported a recent phone call in which he was told he had thirteen days to live, and the anxiety and fear that escalated

with each passing day, until the final day arrived and a group of men showed up at the front door:

> And on the last day, at twenty past ten at night, a car pulled up. And there were three guys outside my house, with someone else still in the car – the engine was running – and they just kept knocking on the door. And it was like – are they just going to grab me?

The experiences of terrorisation and stalking described by those participants who were subject to organised abuse in adulthood are comparable to the "domestic violence by remote control" that has been documented by Cooper and colleagues (2006) amongst the female partners of gang members and women trapped within ritualistically abusive groups. In such circumstances, abusive men utilise their criminal networks to terrorise women into subservience. Since this campaign of terrorisation is undertaken by multiple men who may not personally know the victim, and whose only connection to one another is through undeclared criminal associations, it is almost impossible for the victim, or the police, to trace the harassment back to any one individual. In this study, similar strategies were effective in maintaining victimised women in a state of captivity.

For example, Polly, who was nearing fifty years of age at interview, reported that her last contact with the abusive group had only ceased in the year prior to the interview. Over the previous few years, she had been actively resisting instructions to meet the abusive group at pre-arranged times and dates. As a result, she described being subjected to a sustained pattern of terrorisation and victimisation by two men

associated with the abusive group. She identified one of these men as "the muscle", and another as "a programmer"; that is, a person who is trained in manipulating and reinforcing the dissociative reflexes that develop in people subject to organised abuse.[26]

> *So this pattern of harassment that you've spoken about, what are the forms that it's taken? What is the contact they've made with you since you tried to make your own life?*
>
> It's taken several forms. One of the forms is that two of them will come to my house. They never come alone. And I will be sexually and physically assaulted. Roughed up. One of the guys that comes regularly, his name is Shannon. He's kind of like the muscle. And one of the other guys, who is quite regular as well, his name is Patrick. And he's a programmer. So it will be a combination of physical intimidation and violence, as well as Patrick trying to talk to various parts of me, trying to convince me to continue a relationship with the group.

In the past, Polly has attempted to disrupt her abuse by making contact with the police; however, she reported being subject to punitive assaults after each attempt.

> I went down to a local city ... and I spoke out at the conference [on sexual abuse]. And I spoke to some of the police officers there. And when I got home, I got a visit from a couple of men. I locked the door, but they smashed

[26] The issue of "programming" will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

> their way in and beat me up. And there was another time where I went to the police, and I spoke to two officers about my childhood. And they took it really seriously. And that night, I open up the door, and there were three men who beat me to a pulp and raped me and all sorts of shit.

These patterns of punitive assaults were noted by a number of female participants, many of whom continued to live in fear of the abusive group. Similar patterns have been noted overseas. In Scotland, multiple attacks on organised abuse survivor Dana Fowley were reported following the jailing of her mother and two other men who subjected her to organised abuse. In 2007, Fowley and her two children were moved by the police to a secret location after a group of men armed with swords and hammers broke into the house (McEwan, 2007). A neighbour who intervened in a previous attack sustained knife injuries, and Fowley's partner was also threatened. Subsequently, Fowley's car was vandalised with the word "grass" scratched into the paintwork (McEwan, 2008).

Intergenerational transmission

As a result of the persistence of their abuse into adulthood, some female participants reported that their children were also subject to organised abuse. The intergenerational transmission of organised abuse is often noted in the literature (Brooks, 2001; Scott, 2001; Sarson & MacDonald, 2008). The abuse of girls into adulthood meant that this pattern of intergenerational abuse was particularly pronounced for female participants. Rhea, Isabelle and Anne all stated that their children were subject to organised abuse. For Rhea, this occurred whilst she too was being abused:

> He [my son] was initiated as a six-month-old baby into cult stuff and for the first four and half odd years of his life some pretty awful things were done to him.

When Isabelle's second child was born, she remembers receiving threatening phone calls in which she was told her children would be harmed if she did not do what she was told. She had fled interstate in the hope of disrupting her connection with her abusive family but there were still occasions on which she obeyed the demands of the group to provide her children for abuse.

> When David was born, I started getting these strange phone calls that I remember. People threatening me about what they would do with David if I didn't comply. About what, I didn't know.
>
> *So there weren't any explicit instructions in the phone calls?*
>
> … There were, at times, there were instructions about where to bring him. And there were times, that happened. But most of the time, it didn't. Like, there were a lot of times, when those phone calls happened, that I used to take him somewhere in hiding. And I would go and stay somewhere where nobody knew where I was.

When Anne's son Jimmy was three, he began telling her about his ritualistic abuse by Anne's parents. His disclosures sparked Anne's own memories of her childhood experiences of organised and ritualistic abuse orchestrated by her parents, and she

believes that it was her traumatic amnesia that prevented her from detecting her son's abuse earlier.

> The denial – for ages, I had the guilt. How can you be forty and not know this about your dad? I still idolised dad. And then, when these facts came out, then eventually I was just hearing things on the radio at the time. And I think the guilt must have lessened enough for me to hear it. They said, "The more trauma you've experienced, the less you are likely to remember it." But it took me years, even after hearing hints like that, and doing counselling courses. I felt so guilty that there was no way I could accept that I didn't, somehow, know that this was the family I came from.

In the following interview excerpt, Anne describes the series of incidents that led up to Jimmy's disclosures. She reported leaving Jimmy with her parents whilst she stayed overnight in hospital. When they picked her up from the hospital, she found Jimmy with a bump in the middle of his forehead. Her parents told her he had fallen off his bike, but Jimmy insisted that his grandfather had placed a nail on his head and tapped on it with a hammer. That night, he began disclosing sadistic sexual abuse by his grandparents, a process that took many months. Although Anne was initially unable to make sense of his disclosures, she slowly realised the potential significance of what Jimmy was describing.

> I had to ask my parents to look after Jimmy while I was in hospital. And he had a bump on his forehead when he came back. They picked me up from the hospital the next morning. And Jimmy … had a bump. And I remember just

thinking "Why can't you look after my children?" I had this ridiculous instinctive thing. "Why can't I trust you?" And Jimmy was already riding a bike, and I said, "What is this bump?" And they said, "Oh, he was bike riding and he fell down some stairs last night." And there were these three stairs where they were staying. And I just believed that.

And Jimmy stood there, and he said, "Grandpa put a nail on me. And hammered it." And I remember there was a lump, a bruise, and there was definitely a hole in his skin. And I just said to myself, "I cannot believe that my father could take a hammer to him!" ... I just sat down, had a cup of tea with them. And Jimmy was hungry and thirsty. And because I was there, my parents gave him biscuits and milkshakes, whatever he wanted. And he was starving.

And that night, he said to me, "They didn't give me anything to eat or drink. They peed and pooed on me. They scrubbed me in hot water to get the poo off. The shower was too hot. Grandpa put my head in the oven. Made me scared. I got nearly an asthma attack." All this stuff ...

[...] For months, he told me, "Grandma kissed me too much that night." He left it at that [...] "She kissed me too much that night. I wish I was able to fall asleep. Grandma came into the room, and I was trying to fall asleep, and Grandma kissed me all over my body. She kissed me on my penis a lot of times." And that was the start.

After this initial disclosure of sexual abuse, which occurred in the mid-1990s, Anne notified child protection authorities. However, Jimmy was unable to speak about his experiences of abuse to the satisfaction of the investigating social worker. In Anne's account, Jimmy was only provided with one opportunity for a forensic interview and he refused to speak to the interviewer. Although Jimmy was privately disclosing increasingly serious forms of abuse to his mother, including ritualistic abuse, Anne's report of child abuse was labelled "unsubstantiated" by the department.

> I think she [the social worker] just believed everything Mum and Dad told her. They came in, they probably said, "Oh, she used to be a lesbian and a vegetarian, she's a troublesome daughter. She's just the black sheep of the family." And I think this woman just believed them. Dad was a very senior official, and Mum was a qualified teacher. And I was nearly hysterical. No competition.

After her father attempted to break into her home, Anne fled interstate with her children in an attempt to keep them safe, since it had become clear that the authorities could not protect them. Brooks' (2001: 91) qualitative research with the mothers of victims of multi-perpetrator sexual abuse in Britain suggests that this is a common pattern in the lives of women who report organised and sadistic abuse to the authorities:

> Before the mothers approached social services for help no one had questioned their competence as mothers. The women see themselves as scapegoats, their children left unprotected because the authorities are reluctant to investigate

> allegations of sadistic multi-perpetrator abuse in middle-class families. Alleged perpetrators need only to protest their innocence, while credibility is denied to mothers.

Some women in Brooks' (2001) study, like Anne, were forced to move and live in hiding in order to protect their children. However, Brooks (2001) emphasises how such drastic measures were made necessary by the dramatic failure of multiple systems of authority – the police, the criminal justice system and child protection agencies – to listen to children's testimony of organised abuse or to take their mothers' concerns seriously. In this study, participants were acutely aware that they could not depend upon the powers of the police or the law to protect them. For example, when Alex spoke of having children with her partner, she assumed full responsibility for protecting them from the abusive group. On that basis, she questioned whether she can safely raise children whilst still living in Australia:

> I still have that fear that I'm not going to be able to live in Australia. And that's a really big thing. It's big for Simon [boyfriend], big for me, big for my relationship with you … bringing up kids. I have this fantasy that I can just go back and live near my parents, and we can just go and happily live there. But Simon is saying, rightly so, we aren't going back there – we can't if we are bringing up kids? How can we be sure that the kids are safe? That's a really really big impact of this group stuff, you know? That makes me quite angry. That I potentially can't … go back and live near my family, and have my kids there. You know? Like, my kid is not going to live near her grandparents.

As Alex planned for her future, she had no implicit trust or faith that her family would be protected from the abusive group by law enforcement. The experiences of the women in this study who reported organised abuse as adults highlights the systematic failure of social and legal authorities to respond to the vulnerability of adults with histories of organised abuse to ongoing victimisation.

Lifetime vulnerability to interpersonal victimisation

Not only did a number of female participants report organised abuse in adulthood, but they also reported a diverse array of abuses committed by husbands, partners and boyfriends. In interview, Polly described how her ex-husband's regime of violence and control complicated her efforts to nurse her profoundly disabled children:

> *When you say he [husband] was abusive, can you tell me more about that?*
>
> Physically and sexually. And the rest of the time, very neglectful. He had very little to do with his children. We were living in fairly substandard housing. We had to buy a house and have it moved out to a place in the country. And if the water-tank ran dry it could take him two or three weeks to get it filled it up. You know, to get a truck around. Spending money on his family just wasn't his priority.
>
> And Ashley [Polly's son], after his last surgery [...] he was just pouring faeces, non-stop. I was going through six dozen nappies with him, after his last surgery. And I was on a water tank supply that was empty. You know. It was that kind of neglect. Or he wouldn't pay the electricity bill because there was a

> car at auction that he wanted to buy. So I was trying to raise two profoundly disabled children without any power.

Other participants described patterns of financial abuse, coercive control and domestic violence from their partners.

> When we were married, Kevin wouldn't give me any money. So I applied for welfare – Kevin didn't want that, he wanted to use the kids to offset his tax. But I applied for it. It was only a small amount of money, but it was the way that Kevin acted that I couldn't' believe. It was a tiny amount of money that I took hold of. I said, "I'm having it." And the way he acted because I wanted that little bit of money, which the government wanted me to have anyway … it was incredible.
>
> Colleen

> He started on a small salary, but he kept getting promoted, and I didn't know that his salary was increasing. [...] I was only on this $150 budget a week for groceries, and I had to take out of that anything I was doing for the boys. And pay for petrol. And he just kept me in the dark. If he said we had no money, I believed him, year in, year out.
>
> Anne

> I got into the relationship with my ex-husband, who didn't smoke, drink, swear. He put on the front as Mr Perfect. Just like my family, this front again … To give you an example, by the end of the marriage – all the welfare

payments for the children were signed over to him, and if I didn't work, he wouldn't give me any money. So then I was having to approach different welfare agencies just for food vouchers.

But everything was totally controlled. Anything that was bought – like, I wasn't even allowed to pick out linen. Tea towels. All this crap again – "it's because you've got bad taste, you are useless" and all that same stuff. Without any of the violence, but what is spoken can be worse than getting a punch in the face – at least, with a punch in the face, it's over and done with. But I wasn't even allowed to take the kids for a haircut – he would have to – because he told me I'd give them idiot haircuts. They weren't – these were his words.

Deodorants, anything, I wasn't allowed to chose anything in the end. Everything, every aspect of my life was totally under his control. Which, I suppose, was reflected in the end, because I ended up sleeping on the floor at the end of the bed. It was basically – in a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual sense, even – that's where I was, under everything, beneath everything.

And because he was getting more and more and more violent with the children. There was no money, no food – that was when I finally did leave him. I couldn't do it initially, because he said that, if I left him, he'd kill the children. And I knew he would've. So he always wanted to move interstate, and I agreed, and I thought, "Well, good, when I leave him" – because I'd

> already been thinking of it – "I'll have two states between us." Which is how it ended up. I still had to get an AVO, because he had his mates threatening me after I had left him.
>
> Lauren

These kinds of experiences are described by Stark (2007) as the "entrapment of women in personal life", which adequately summarises the histories of many women in this project. Male participants frequently spoke of their difficulties in interpersonal relations but when they encountered violence and abuse, it was primarily in the context of public brawls and street fights. Darren spoke of periods of violence in his twenties in which he abused drugs and alcohol and provoked physical confrontations. He said, "I've been bashed within an inch of my life, and I've got scars all down here [indicates side of body]". Other male participants spoke of aggressive and risk-taking behaviours. There were intimations of domestic violence in the accounts of two male participants, Heath and Seb. Seb has been accused of violence by a former partner, which he strenuously denied. Heath recounted an incident that led to criminal charges and a custodial sentence, after he assaulted his then-wife's lover and shot at him.

> I've always gone camping with my mates, and the kids would come. But I've always had my suspicions that something was going on [between his now ex-wife and friend]. So I set it up one weekend. I came back the next night, in the middle of the night, snuck back in and there they were going hammer and tongs for it. And what made it worse, it was someone I knew. It was a so-called mate, you know.

> And that made things worse, because I threw him straight out the window. It's a double-storey house, but it didn't stop there, because I jumped out the window and did something pretty nasty ...
>
> *So what was the jail time for?*
>
> Because I discharged a weapon. I was using blanks, I knew no one would get hurt.

It is clear that organised abuse had a profound impact upon male participants and their interpersonal relationships. However, only among female participants was there a systematic relation between experiences of sexual victimisation in childhood and subsequent sexual and physical victimisation in adulthood, including but not limited to organised abuse. Female participants were vulnerable not only to unequal and exploitative relationships with their partners, but physical and sexual assault in the community as well. Kate was raised in a small religious community, and she describes it as an environment in which the physical and sexual abuse of children and women was excused and hidden from the authorities. After surviving organised and ritualistic abuse as a child, she has also been subjected to a number of violent multiple perpetrator rapes by members of her religious community as an adult.

> I was living in a caravan park while we were building a house for six months. My husband would be away on work all week. And there was a family who lived down the road, a few blocks away, who were of the religious group that

> we were attached to. There was a man and a wife, and the wife I made friends with.
>
> [...] Now, they used to take me shopping, but one time, he didn't take me shopping. He took us to a property in the country, where they had a cool store. And he took the wife, and daughter, and myself, and another young woman into the room. And there were other men there, a few of whom I knew. I knew the father, and I knew a couple of his friends. And there was a stranger there, as well. Apparently he was a butcher from a nearby town.
>
> [...] And that was very abusive – tying you up on the meat-hook stuff. And when you were bleeding, they would hose you down, because you were in the cool store where the butcher would cut his meat up anyway. So that was very ugly and sad. And my baby, my youngest, my little baby, was with me. And he was put on the floor while it all happened. Yeah. So it was very tragic that he was in a situation with that energy.

Subsequently, this man's children have approached Kate to speak about, in Kate's words, their father's "extreme and ongoing violence and sexual abuse". One of his daughters subsequently filed a complaint with the police, for which her father held Kate responsible. Kate was subsequently attacked and sexually abused in her workplace by this man and an accomplice. She lives in a constant state of fear.

> I'm very concerned about my safety. This man has told his son that he wants me dead. And I know that he has lots of friends. The other man that he brought

> along, he has a lot of contacts in the services. And he's an ugly character. So either of them, if they felt like it, they could find me. I've moved my work. I can't advertise, I can't have any cards on the desk. If someone walks in, they wouldn't know I work there. I keep a low profile. Because I don't know when they'll strike again.

Linehan (1993) has outlined how the inequities of gender relations can enmesh sexually abused girls in a spiral of psychological harm that profoundly compromises their mental health. She argues that this process has its structural antecedents within the gender order. This cycle does not disappear when the girl grows to adulthood, but persists in a myriad of ways, perceptible and imperceptible, structural and interpersonal, in which male and female behaviour are coded and patterned. Female participants attempted to subvert or resist the harms generated by masculine domination in a variety of ways, sometimes engaging in adaptive forms of gender-play in an effort to craft new identities and opportunities for themselves. For instance, Jo shortened her name from "Joanne" in her mid-teens, in a rejection of the weakness and vulnerability that she identified with her feminised self.

> I changed my name also when I was about sixteen at school. I became Jo. Joanne was sort of, the scary coward, the easily walked-on person off in the corner. I just called myself Jo and felt stronger and could get going in my life. And, um, sort of became a lot more masculine and I think I was trying to leave all the scared terror of being female behind.

Unable to access the care and support they needed, however, many women in this study spoke of their struggle to develop lasting, meaningful and safe relationships. Anne described herself as "turned inside out" by her experiences of abuse, highly sensitive to and yet unprotected from her social environment, like a person without skin. For women subject to organised abuse, it seems that many of the power relations that underpinned the abuse continue to resonate within their interpersonal and social relationships throughout their lives, resulting in a "blindness" towards or a high level of tolerance for abusive behaviour and/or an inability to trust themselves to make safe choices in sexual relationships.

> Can you see why I'm so scared of making contact with a man? Because if it becomes a sexual relationship, it's so hard to know – I've been abused since I was a kid, and my sexual connection just must be sick. I think I was in denial about it with Sam [ex-husband]. I was just being in the same pattern of trying to earn his love, and he was busy refusing to love me. That's the irony. I was chasing him emotionally and sexually in the relationship, and he was saying, "No, keep away from me, I don't like you." How can I make a real connection with a man if it involves sex? Because I feel like I am so ill, that there is an illness there.
>
> Anne

> I got into another really abusive relationship, spent three years being abused. [...] And then when I finally broke that relationship off, I spent five years at home. Where I left the house three times in five years. Didn't answer the phone. Didn't answer the door. I had groceries delivered online. I went up to

> the mailbox, up the driveway, I could do it every couple of weeks – that's all I could handle. And I felt nothing. For five years. I wanted nothing to do with people. I wanted nothing to do with the world. I couldn't believe that I could get into such good shape, and then at the snap of someone's fingers, I'd just let her treat me horrendously for so many years.
>
> Polly

> I've never been able to think about sex as sort of normal stuff. We were involved in so many abnormal, weird sexual aberrations that normal sexual activity is not, y'know, I mean, for instance, [my husband] and I haven't slept together for 20-odd years. Separate bedrooms, separate lives, separate everything. And that's, y'know, that's it. It just doesn't exist as far as normal stuff is concerned, and as far as I can tell, that happens to lots of people who've been involved in this sort of stuff. It's just – changes.
>
> Rhea

Conclusion

Although the victimisation of women and children within abusive groups entails a diverse range of experiences, a number of commonalities underpin victims' reports of organised abuse. This chapter explored the gendered antecedents and gendering effects of organised abuse on the grounds that it is only through an analysis of structures of power that organised abuse can be understood. In participants' lives, relations of gender, age and power were not only in evidence through specific acts such as sexual or physical violence; these relations were so pervasive that they were embedded within, and silently reaffirmed through, the mundanities of social interaction. Reports of extreme acts of violence have often dominated the literature on organised abuse, however, by paying close attention to the lives of adult survivors,

we can see how organised abuse shares a practical and logical relation with the general conditions of social life. In the accounts gathered in this study, it was clear that the burden of organised abuse fell primarily upon girls and women, and this had serious implications for their health and wellbeing and those of their children. This study suggests that, whilst boys were subject to severe harm in organised abuse, girls are more likely to be targeted for organised abuse. Where boys and girls are subject to organised abuse, the abuse of boys tends to finish at a younger age. This suggests that the victimisation of girls and women is of particular significance for many abusive groups, who appear averse to maintaining post-pubescent males in a state of servitude. In contrast, abusive groups appear to expend considerable time and energy terrorising teenage girls and women into compliance. For a number of female participants, their organised abuse persisted into adulthood and their children were also abused. The difficulties they experienced in extricating themselves from the abusive group were not solely a function of the group's persistent stalking and terrorisation, however. The prevalence of men's violence against women is such that some female participants, in adulthood, became entrapped in abusive relationships with intimate partners. This compounded the harms of organised abuse and prevented some participants, who were still trapped within organised abuse, from making their escape.

7

Living in two worlds
Familial organised abuse

In this study, parents were most often identified by participants as the people responsible for arranging and enabling their organised abuse. This chapter describes the home environments of these participants, and explores the place of organised abuse in family life. Chapter 5 emphasised the points of commonality between participants' accounts of home and school and discussed the ways that structures of power were reproduced across the environments in which participants' lived their childhoods. This chapter provides an account of the specificity of familial organised abuse, and analyses how the common and everyday inequities of age and gender that characterise family life camouflaged and enabled the sexual exploitation of participants subject to organised abuse by their parents.

Participants subject to familial organised abuse described their childhoods as bifurcated into "two worlds": a home life characterised by fear, control and abuse, juxtaposed to the "everyday" of schooling and life outside the home. This distinction mirrors the public–private divide that has been subject to sustained criticism by

MacKinnon (1989) and other feminist theorists (Thornton, 1995b; Landes, 1998). In participants' childhoods, this divide was made evident in the impunity enjoyed by their fathers and other abusive adults to subject them to organised abuse in the "private sphere" of the home, and the corresponding aversion of teachers, and other adults outside the family, to inquiring into the conditions of family life and thus transgress the public–private divide. For many participants, this divide was so stark that it was internalised and became manifest through psychic structures. Specifically, many participants developed psychological adaptations, such as dissociation and amnesia, in which the lived experience of schooling and life outside the home was "split off" from the fear and terror of organised abuse in domestic contexts.

In participants' accounts, organised abuse within the family emerged as a system of reciprocal obligation within extended kin groups and family contacts. Some participants' parents grew up within a familial culture of organised abuse, whilst other participants indicated that their parents' involvement was voluntary, at least initially. Regardless, many participants described scenes of abject fear and panic as their parents realised they could not extricate themselves from the abusive group without serious consequences. Whilst participants described a range of benefits accruing to adults who participated in organised abuse, including professional, social, financial and sexual benefits, it was clear that organised abuse was neither a free nor voluntary system of exchange. Organised abuse appeared to occur within strictly observed hierarchies of men regulated by blackmail and threats of injury and death. Parental involvement in organised abuse was a source of fear for both parent and child, as parents provided their children for abuse in an effort to ensure their own safety. Participants described families in a state of siege, in which fathers were locked into a

system of obligations that required them to facilitate the access of other men to the bodies of their children, grandchildren and wives (and, sometimes, to their own bodies). This chapter will explore the relations between family members trapped within organised abuse, and the manner in which children and adults adapted to a situation that was simultaneously intolerable and inescapable.

Family relations in organised abuse

Of the twenty one people interviewed, fifteen spoke of organised abuse that was facilitated by their parents and/or other relatives. In these participants' accounts of familial organised abuse, the involvement of their parents varied by degrees from awareness and passive acquiescence to active participation and facilitation. One or both parents could be implicated, and in different ways. For the majority of these participants, their fathers were their primary abuser who subjected them to incest as well as organised abuse. Fathers featured in their histories as the "perfect patriarchs" that have been noted throughout the literature on incest (Herman, 1981; Gordon, 1989; Williams, 1990). They were the arbiters of family life to the point where it was unusual for participants to report domestic violence by their fathers; the suggestion was that such violence was unnecessary. In many participants' accounts, their fathers' capacity to dictate the terms of family life was so entrenched that it went largely unspoken, and was expressed and reinforced through subtle displays of control and coercion.

> There was no physical stuff [domestic violence]. Occasionally, I can remember them having an argument or two. But – nah, there was no need for it. Because what he said went. Nobody ever questioned it. As soon as he

> walked into the room, everyone knew what their place was, and what they were allowed to say, and what they weren't allowed to say.
>
> Isabelle

> I didn't see any violence [between Mum and Dad] – I'm not saying it didn't happen, but it was never in front of us. No, it was psychological, looking back on it to see what the relationship was, and looking at domestic violence in those terms. It was total, y'know, it was financial dependency, it was psychological, emotional abuse. He didn't need to hit her.
>
> Rhea

> I think she [Mum] must have been very defined in her role as mother and wife, I think. But it wasn't the sort of house where there were any kind of arguments or disagreements. Everyone agreed with everybody. Um. And you didn't get angry, and you didn't cry, and you didn't complain, and you had perfect manners. And those things were kind of unspoken, rather than actually spoken.
>
> Felicity

Morris (2009) has drawn on the concept of the "gender regime", formulated by Connell (1987), to theorise the interplay of gender and power in households dominated by abusive men. Morris (2009: 418) argues that abusive men can draw on "the power (traditionally conferred on men) of defining people, events and relationships" in order to create a gender regime within their families or households that systemically invalidates womens' and childrens' inner experiences, construes their own views as superior and correct, and alienates children from their mothers:

> The combination of verbal messages, threats and violent and manipulative action and the way details are woven as evidence into the fabric of reality that the perpetrator creates means that his voice and his "truth" seep into women's and children's minds and beings in complex and interlocking, but frequently intangible, ways (Morris 2009: 417).

In this study, the dominant position of abusive fathers in these households was constantly reaffirmed through a gender regime embedded within the everyday routine of family life. Participants' families adhered rigidly to the traditional sexual division of labour. Most of their mothers were involved in full-time housework and childrearing, or else in low paid service or administration roles. In contrast, most fathers were engaged in higher status, better paid professional work. A number of authors have remarked on the alienation between mothers and daughters which seems to prevail in incestuous families (Herman, 1981; Laing, 1999; Morris, 2009). This was a noticeable feature in participants' accounts of familial organised abuse. Participants often described their mothers as weak and helpless and unable to nurture or protect them. This characterisation of their mothers was most frequently reflective of the fathers' treatment of them, which was both implicitly and explicitly disparaging.

> He was scathing [of my mother] in his cynicism, on the one hand, and he'd put her down. So much so that, when I was a teenager, I didn't think much of her, I thought she was a stupid woman with no brains – which is terrible, really. On the other hand, at other times, he would show a sort of – it was almost a borderline personality type switch there – he'd go into "Oh, if it wasn't for you

> I wouldn't have any friends come to visit" and "Oh, look at you, Madam, you do such wonderful things here in the house, making this beautiful meal." He'd be so effusive in his praise, but you knew it could drop any second. He could go into a temperamental rage in a moment, and then switch it off at a moment's notice if someone unexpectedly came by or the phone rang.
>
> Kate

Typically, participants' descriptions of their mothers were richer and lengthier than their descriptions of their fathers, since their mothers were largely responsible for child-rearing and featured more frequently in their lives as children. Nonetheless, it was clear that fathers and grandfathers loomed over participants' families as powerful figures in a totalistic regime of coercion and exploitation. Many participants described their fathers' alarming and unpredictable oscillations in mood between aggressive violence, cold aloofness and sexually inappropriate or abusive affection. These mood swings were all the more terrifying because of the seriousness of the crimes that participants had witnessed their fathers engaging in within organised contexts. When I asked Rhea to describe her father, she reported an involuntary somatic response to the question, and described other "parts" – that is, other personalities – suddenly taking an interest in our conversation. This internal alarm, whilst short-lived, was indicative of the extremes of love and fear that Rhea still felt for her father many years after his death.

How would you describe your father to me? His personality?

> Oh. [laughs] It's interesting, because when you said that, there's definitely a reaction. There's a feeling, like, I'm tingling all over, I'm tingling, my hands are tingling. My feet are tingling. My fingers are tingling, I'm tingling all through my body. And that's because there are other parts inside, who are basically listening to what we are saying, and they are basically connecting in … So it really does – my father, how do I describe my father, um ….
>
> Always there. When he's not there physically, he's always there. Always in my consciousness. A big man, physically, he was fairly large. Loud voice, but could be very soft voice when he wanted to be, but, he was prone to sudden mood changes. I remember once he lost his temper at work and smashed his fist down on a glass table of the desk, and he smashed the glass. That's pretty heavy glass. So he, um, ah … so scary sometimes. There are parts that were very frightened of him. But there was another part who could manipulate him because of the sex. She was the one who was in his bed. Parts that were scared of him, because they were baby parts that he abused. But, yeah, other parts that were quite, I guess you could say, they could handle him, manipulate him, um. Yeah. So, but he was always there, in … every way.

Like Rhea's, Lily's family was involved in organised and ritualistic abuse, and she also described a complex relationship with her father. She described him as her "main perpetrator", sadistically abusive in organised contexts, incestuously abusive in the home, but otherwise aloof and "off in his ivory tower". As a child, caught in the contradictory pattern of her father's abuse and neglect, Lily found small tokens or

indicators of affection from him powerfully significant. She described her relationship with her mother as a "competitive" one, as they competed for her father's attention.

> I think, in many ways, Dad did prefer my company to hers. And that was very distressing for her. I was a grotty bitchy little teenager who would really rub her nose in that, and say "Oh, he loves me more than you" and, y'know, the kind of stuff that's not particularly helpful. I can remember, as a teenager, there was screaming matches between Mum and I. Often at night, after Mum went to bed, I'd actually come out of my room, and Dad and I would sit and talk, and talk philosophy and different things. And I'd be allowed to have a cigarette and a drink and different things.

Lily's warmth towards her father, in spite of his abuse of her, is a testament to the durable nature of the relations that can be established through torture, abuse and manipulation. Moreover, Lily was impressed by her father's intellectual capacity and professional skills, which contrasted so sharply with her mother's domestic servitude and passivity. Lily was aware of this, marvelling that "my instinctive responses are always a lot warmer towards Dad than towards Mum."

> The stuff with Mum– it was, for a long time, it was just hatred of her – whereas, with Dad, there was a lot of love as well. There was good stuff. And that has always been far more confusing, and I still invariably go to that good stuff first. And so people who know me well, and know my story well, get very confused that I can still talk quite lovingly at times about my father.

Kate spoke more bluntly of her childhood affection for her father as a form of "Stockholm Syndrome", produced by her father's sporadic expressions of remorse and distress at the injuries that he inflicted on his daughter.

> So, for instance, when I came home from one of these events with these men, father would be see me standing there, with blood between my legs running down, and he'd come up to me, and carry me to the tap, and hose me down. And he'd be crying, "Oh, I'm so sorry." It was such a mess, because, emotionally, he was such a mix.

The abusive group was an unspoken, although powerful, factor in family life. Organised abuse was rarely openly acknowledged in the home and participants described parents who were at pains to conform to conventional family norms. Nonetheless, participants indicated that the sadistic violence of the abusive group was a silent but powerful threat that permeated the family home.

> But then there was this kind of reign of terror of my father, and my mother, and what they would do in a ritual context. It took over everyday life too. It was just keeping us in check with fear. I don't know if you would call that discipline, but it kept us in line.
>
> Sky

> Everything that I did, somehow, had a link back to sex and candles and dark places, religion and basically, if I didn't do what I was told, I was told it would result in something happening to me, something happening to the people that I

> care about. You know, there were times where I had something that I did care about, like pets, they never stayed around.
>
> Isabelle

Many participants were kept in a state of isolation by their fathers, who controlled and monitored all aspects of family life. In Isabelle's family it was considered a male prerogative to supervise and restrict the activities of women.

> I was kind of my father's property. He sort of saw me as his second wife. So everywhere he went, I did. If he was at home, I was at home. If he went shopping or something, and it wasn't a school day, I would be with him. There was no space to go on your own. It was kind of, "I'm not letting you out of my clutches, because if I let you out of my clutches you might start talking to people, and things might start making a different sense."
>
> Isabelle

Many participants were deterred from establishing any social contact outside the family. Their fathers and grandfathers consolidated their power by isolating their wives and children from the outside world. For some participants, the women in their family were just as active in policing their conduct as men. As a child, Lauren and her mother lived in her grandparents' home, and it seems that all adults in the home took responsibility for the micro-control of children.

> Growing up with my family, they wanted to control every aspect of my life. They want to know everything you do, every conversation you've had,

> because you are never allowed to speak about what's going on. So it's to keep this tight control, tabs on you.
>
> Lauren

The family environments described by those participants subject to familial organised abuse were implicitly structured around the principles of paternal control and authority. In these environments, girls and women were expected to subordinate their needs to the dictates of fathers, grandfathers and other male authority figures. Embedded in family life was a gendered pattern of domination whereby mothers were construed as weak and passive whilst fathers and other men appeared, in contrast, superior and in control. Even where participants' mothers were actively exercising what little power this arrangement granted them (as will be described in the section below) they were nonetheless subordinate within a male dominated hierarchy, both within the home as well as within the abusive group. The gender regime that structured daily life in their families was implicitly reinforced by what Sky called the "reign of terror" of organised abuse.

Maternal complicity in organised abuse

In autobiographies of familial organised abuse, survivors often refer to their mothers as being actively involved in their organised abuse (e.g. Lorena & Levy, 1998; Davis, 2008). Scott (2001: 106) has documented the claims of survivors of ritualistic abuse that women are "as bad" or "worse" in abusive contexts than men. In this study, it was rare for participants to describe an incident in which their mothers were enthusiastic participants in organised abuse. Sky was the only participant who spoke of his mother as a regular and proactive participant in organised abuse alongside his father. Sky

remembered his mother as "the boss" in family life. His parents formed a tightly-knit unit and he suggests that, together, they manipulated their children with great skill.

> There was no physical contact at all, apart from being hit. I think I have three memories of my mother hugging me as a child, and they were all – even as a 12-year-old – I was thinking "You are faking it." I'm balling my eyes out and thinking, "You don't even know how to hug."
>
> [...] It's almost clinical, the day-to-day relationships with my parents. At least, when you are in class with your mates, you say, "Are you having a decent day? What's going on for you?" But I knew more about the emotional life of my next door neighbours than I did about my family. In my family, sentences never start like "I feel ... blah blah blah." It was very odd.

In contrast, most participants indicated that their mothers were unaware of or marginally involved in their organised abuse. Their mothers often took a secondary role assisting men in organised contexts, whilst trying to regulate family life by balancing the demands of their violent husbands with the needs of themselves, their children and the long-term interests of the family. Trauma, violence and other factors, such as alcohol and drugs, often featured in narratives of maternal collusion in organised abuse. In Darren's experience, his mother would occasionally abuse him at the behest of paying clients, although he emphasised his mother's history of trauma and drug dependence as a mitigating factor in this abuse. Whilst Lauren expressed great antipathy for her mother, who had facilitated Lauren's sexual abuse by her

grandparents and others, she acknowledged that her mother was subject to ongoing victimisation as well:

> I have to admit, I have come to realise that all these mothers – I hate them – as young girls, they went through all this shit themselves. And they are victims themselves, I do recognise that. But it's still hard to cop, that the women are assisting the men all the time, and can be the main perpetrator.

Many participants grew up prior to the advent of no-fault divorce in Australia in 1975. Prior to this, fault-based divorce was legally difficult to obtain and very costly to achieve, and surrounded by significant social stigma. Single-parent families certainly existed at the time, however historical records suggest that their plight was extremely difficult (Gordon, 1989). In participants' families, none of the mothers had the skills or experience that would have made independent survival a realistic option.

In the absence of alternatives, women appeared to have employed a range of psychological mechanisms, such as denial, suppression and rationalisation, in order to maintain the integrity of the family unit whilst attempting to ameliorate the harms that were befalling themselves and/or their children. This placed them in the contradictory state of "knowing-but-not-knowing" about organised abuse, a paradox sustained only by frantic attempts to push from awareness any stimulus that might bring to light the contradictions inherent in their lives. When evidence of their children's abuse became unavoidable, some mothers responded with physical and emotional abuse.

> I still know that I came home one time and she [Mum] beat me up, probably because of she was just, all her anger about the cult getting to me, and that sort of tells me to dissociate further. So obviously you don't sort of have any, you are in that typical situation where you don't have support anywhere.
>
> Jo

> And if I dared to try to communicate to her that I was traumatised, and try to seek some soothing or some comfort from her, she would turn into this monster, this shrieking monster – that I wanted it … Like it's all my fault. "Don't you come crying to me!" You know. She was just crazy with me.
>
> Polly

> Not only are you taking all the abuse, but whenever aberrances occur because of the abuse that's going on throughout the family, then it's blamed on you. Y'know, you're the reason why everything is falling apart, or why we are all arguing. And it was just constant.
>
> Darren

Cara described her mother's consistent denial and minimisation of the extent of abuse in her family.

> [Mum would say] things like, "this is just the way it has to be." "It's not as bad as you think." Just minimising stuff.

Whilst the behaviour of these women can be conceptualised as complicit, it can also be understood as protective, in that it facilitated the long-term wellbeing of the family. In denying the seriousness of organised abuse, these women were able to maintain their attachment to an abusive husband, thus ensuring the social status and financial security of their family, and avoiding further violence against themselves and their children. The lack of options available to victimised children and women was a material condition of life that these women had to adapt to, due to the systemic neglect of the needs of abused women and children by the health and welfare services, and by the government more generally. This prompted a kind of learned helplessness that was reflected in their dispositions and parenting practices.

> Her [my mother's] biggest message to me was always "Don't get your hopes up." And she acted as if she was doing me a favour by squashing everything I ever wanted to do, because it was like, "No, just don't get your hopes up."
>
> Anne

The apparent captive state of some participants' mothers is well illustrated by the life histories of Polly and Lauren, whose mothers left violent partners whilst still raising young children. In the absence of financial or social support, neither mother was able to maintain her independence, and they were forced to move in with violent and sadistic parents. In interview, Polly recalled her mother's chaotic decompensation during the period prior to moving in with her grandparents:

> For a couple of years, she had a house – I guess she rented it – there wasn't welfare for single mothers then, and I have no idea how she survived

> financially. Women just didn't go out on their own and become solo mums then. My memory of her during that time was that she was completely mad. Just crazy mad. You know, like Sybil's mother? That kind of bizarre, sadistic, hideous abuse.

In this study, descriptions of maternal involvement in familial organised abuse ran the gamut from active involvement and facilitation to non-involvement and even unawareness. Underpinning their myriad responses to organised abuse, however, was the lack of opportunities afforded to them to protect themselves or their children from abuse. Participants grew up during a period of time in which cultural norms and legislative arrangements actively discriminated against women, and particularly married women, in the workforce. As a result, their mothers were dependent upon their abusive husbands for financial security. At the time, there were no services for battered women. When they fled in crisis, they were unable to maintain their independence from their abusive partners. In interview, Rhea described her mother's attempt to protect her unborn child from the ritualistic abuse that she, and her two children, had already been subjected to, and the punishment meted out by the abusive group.

> Mum did try, I've got to admit, Mum did try a few times to get us out of it. But she was very much under his control. And on one occasion, she did take off, she was – I was probably about eight or nine, and my brother – she was actually pregnant again, and she took off with us. And it was very hard at the time to, when it started coming back, and I had to talk about it – because a part of me rang my father and told him where we were. So it wasn't me, it wasn't

> Rhea, but it was certainly a part of me, a [different personality], and he and a few of his cronies showed up and brought us back. And due to what they did to her at the time, she miscarried, so, she lost that baby. She was punished very severely for that.

When considering participants' descriptions of maternal complicity in organised abuse, it is important to be mindful of the constrained choices available to their mothers. Only Sky described his mother as a willing and active participant in organised abuse, and his account of his mothers' involvement will be considered in more detail in Chapter 9. Most participants indicated that their mothers involvement in organised abuse was leveraged through threats and abuse, or else their mothers were not directly involved. Regardless of their level of involvement, it seems that these women had few choices available to them if they sought to protect themselves or their children from abuse. It is also pertinent to consider how years or decades of exposure to the household gender regime described in the previous section (and, indeed, the gender regime of the abusive groups within which these families were embedded) may serve to undermine the autonomy and agency of women and delegitimise individual resistance to sexual abuse or organised abuse.

When one parent doesn't know: The complexities of deceit and denial

The complexities of complicity, deceit and denial in families involved in organised abuse are well illustrated by the life histories of those participants who had a "non-involved" parent; that is, a parent who was unaware and uninvolved in their spouses' involvement in organised abuse. In interview, May and Felicity reported being subjected to organised and ritualistic abuse by their father whilst their mother was unaware of this behaviour. So too did Cathy Kezelman (2010), who provided an early

draft of her autobiography for this study. In contrast, Jo described being subjected to organised abuse by her mother's extended family without her father's knowledge. In these life histories, "not knowing" about organised abuse emerges as a situated accomplishment for non-involved parents. It seemed that the non-involved parent was unaware of the organised abuse, not because they had failed to "put the clues together", but because the circumstances of their life were such that inquiring further into the distress of their abused child would have placed them in an intolerable position. As such, the division between the "non-involved" parents described by these participants, and the "coercively involved" parents described by other participants, was somewhat indistinct.

These families shared a great deal in common with families in which both parents were involved in organised abuse. At home, their fathers were distant, unavailable, and unpredictable, and their mothers struggled to raise their children without partners who provided emotional support or assistance with childrearing and domestic labour. In May, Felicity and Cathy's accounts, it seems that they shouldered responsibility for their mother's emotional wellbeing from a very early age.

> I had felt responsible for her wellbeing and happiness for as long as I could remember. When my mother felt miserable I'd spring into action to find ways to lift her mood. My mother's happiness was one of my foremost concerns and had been since childhood.
>
> Cathy

> My mother is a very complicated person, in that she … she tries really hard, I

> think. She wants to be really loving, she wants to be the perfect mother. She wants her kids to be the best. In a lot of ways, but in other ways, she's very needy. It's almost as though we have to validate her need to feel perfect, in a lot of ways. But she's very sincere about all that.
>
> May

> I think I was pretty close to my mother, but I recognise now that there was a lot of protecting of her going on.
>
> Felicity

Jo's mother had been subject to organised and ritualistic abuse by her own parents. She escaped ongoing abuse by marrying Jo's father, who was not a member of the abusive group, although he was abusive in his own right. Nonetheless, the abusive group that Jo's maternal family was involved in coerced Jo's mother into permitting them regular access to Jo. From then on, Jo reported that her otherwise nurturing mother would become violent and abusive if confronted with evidence of Jo's abuse. Like Cathy, May and Felicity, Jo found that her mother's willingness to give care was contingent on Jo's capacity to do the same. Only by concealing their distress could these participants maintain the fragile worldview upon which their mothers' wellbeing was predicated, often "mothering their mothers" from the age of three or four.

Cathy and May characterised their mothers' state of "not-knowing" as an ongoing process constituted by a complex array of defensive techniques, ranging from denial, minimisation and dissociation to insults and angry outbursts. Cathy's father was Anglo-Australian but her mother was a Polish Jew orphaned in the Holocaust. In her

autobiography, Cathy reflected on "the dehumanising desensitisation, degrading humiliation, constant fear, emptiness and loneliness" of her mother's war years, but she also confronts the extraordinary abdication of responsibility implicit in her mother's refusal to acknowledge the abuse of her children.

> [My brother] and I were born from the rubble of her previous existence. We were special and our lives had to be happy... even if they weren't.

Cathy recalls incestuous assaults by her father from an early age, as well as weekly incidents of organised and ritualistic abuse orchestrated by her paternal grandparents under the guise of "Sunday church". Her mother was repeatedly confronted with evidence of this abuse, having interrupted an incestuous assault when Cathy was nine, and she attended Cathy's hospitalisation for injuries after an incident of ritualistic abuse. Nonetheless, the family folklore of a "happy childhood" was an inescapable prerogative through which Cathy's mother reconstituted family life on a minute-by-minute basis, rationalising or forgetting her husband's abuses, and framing Cathy's distress as an unnecessary burden. Cathy recalls the following exchange when her mother discovered her self-mutilating at the age of eleven:

> I open the door; my arm is bleeding.
>
> "Baba, how could you be so silly? You know how much I have to deal with and now this!"
>
> "I'm sorry mum." I feel really bad.

> My mother takes my penknife away and leaves me with my wounds.

Like Cathy, May also described her mother's efforts to maintain the ideal of a "happy family". This ideal was all the more valuable for its fragility. As her father subjected her to incest and organised abuse, May became a troubled child, with frequent migraines, nightmares and inexplicable phobias. She describes "switching off" as a child, dissociating in the family home and being unable to recall daily events or participate fully in family life. In her home environment, May's symptoms of trauma were rationalised away. May says her family "seemed to think that the way I was being and acting was very normal, and that was the way I was expected to act." May was frequently tearful at home, and her mother viewed May's depression as a personal affront:

> It was almost as though she felt that she had failed as a mother if I was upset. And I had to validate her then. "Perfect mother".

Maintaining a relationship with her mother, therefore, required May to fulfil her mother's emotional needs whilst denying her own. In her early teens, however, the scale of her distress became impossible to hide.

> I remember, in early high school, and they had sex education. I must have been around fourteen. And we had this sex education class. I can't remember what triggered me. I just started crying. I was crying and crying and crying. I cried all one night, and got through the next day. And then cried all the next

night. Until mum woke up one night and found me.

She would often find me - I was often crying, but I wouldn't know why I was crying? I didn't know why I was upset. And she would always be digging and needling me, "Why are you upset?" Questioning me and trying to get to the bottom of it.

And anyhow, this particular time – I really couldn't tell her, I didn't really know – but I think the only way I could describe what I was feeling was, like, "I don't think Dad is loving me right. I don't think he's loving me right. When he's hugging me, he's not hugging me as a daughter." And Mum was most offended. And she said, "Aren't you lucky that I'm not the jealous, vindictive type of mother who would believe this type of stuff."

This pattern of disclosure and invalidation was repeated a year later when, at the age of fifteen, May attempted to kill herself.

What was your family's response to that?

Oh, my mum was angry. "We gave you everything you need, why would you try to kill yourself?" She was the only person I told. I don't think she took me very seriously anyway.

Nonetheless, May demonstrated a great deal of insight and empathy regarding her mother's inability to acknowledge her daughter's distress.

> It was very hard for me. But, I think about how it must have been for her – being the type of person, with the emotional neediness she had, to be in the situation in which all hell was happening to her daughter, and she felt she couldn't do anything about it. Really, she had no option but to turn off. And dissociate from it.
>
> *So do you feel that she was aware of your distress?*
>
> Umm … yeah, I do, I think she felt that there was something not right. But I think she felt that it wasn't safe to pursue it any further.

The question of whether it was "safe" for May's mother to inquire further into her daughter's distress is an important one. Other participants described their fathers' violent responses when their mothers questioned or attempted to interrupt the sexual exploitation of her children. Lily recalls an incident in which she was knocked unconscious during an incident of organised abuse. Whilst she was convalescing, she overheard her mother challenging her father, and the domestic violence that resulted.

> I remember lying in bed, being really sick, and hearing them in the next room, and my mum saying "I don't know what you are doing, I don't know what you've done to her, but you have to stop." And then just hearing this thump, thump.

> And what the hell could she have done? She had two kids, and was incredibly conscious of her position in society. And divorce was just not done.

Although Jo's organised abuse was facilitated by her mother, without her father's knowledge, the patterns of male violence and maternal compliance that emerge from her history are very similar to those revealed by other participants. Jo's father was unaware of Jo's organised abuse because he was himself violent and abusive, and therefore unlikely to be attuned to her childhood expressions of distress. At home, Jo's mother played an important role in regulating family life, seeking to protect her children from the worst of her husband's excesses whilst displaying the compliance and loyalty that he demanded. Jo suggested that her mother maintained multiple, contradictory states of awareness in relation to Jo's organised abuse. Whilst she permitted men to come into the house and remove Jo for organised abuse, she also maintained the belief that Jo was being babysat by a family friend.

> I'm pretty sure also that my mum ... the times when I was out ... my mum had a close friend and she occasionally used to baby-sit and I would stay at this other woman's place and she, I think, mum probably believed it herself.

When Jo was in her thirties, her mother was diagnosed with DID and began recalling her own experiences of organised and ritualistic abuse by her father and his family. She also recalled enabling Jo's abuse. Jo's father has been an enduring barrier to a closer relationship with her mother, but Jo's mother's validation of Jo's experiences brought her some comfort.

Felicity's descriptions of her mother are in contrast to other descriptions of parents who were unaware of their organised abuse. At the time of interview, Felicity was still putting together an image of her childhood and life in the family home. Nonetheless, she describes her mother as a protective and involved parent, although she suggests that the family home was somewhat devoid of spontaneous displays of emotion or affection.

> I think she was a pretty amazing sort of woman, really. She was very family oriented … She had a great sense of humour, I remember her laughing a lot. I remember her being at home, I can remember her cleaning, doing things.
>
> But I don't ever remember anything much in the way of physical touch. I don't remember her hugging me. Possibly that's how it was at that time, I'm not really sure. But I don't remember physical touch within the family happening at all.

Felicity recalled her father subjecting her to organised and ritualistic abuse within an abusive group that met at the local church. Like Cathy and May, Felicity spoke of her need to "protect" her mother from this knowledge, and she tried to compensate by being the "perfect child". Unlike Cathy and May, however, Felicity's mother acted decisively when she was confronted with evidence of her child's sexual abuse by her husband's brother.

> [M]y mother discovered him [my uncle] abusing me one day, and then he was thrown out of the house, I assume, that night, and I never saw him again […] I

> was too scared to ask her about things for a long time – this was about my uncle – because there were things that I remembered but I didn't know how much she knew. And when I asked her about it , she said she believed that it started when I was a baby.

Felicity's account suggests that, in the gender-divided world of the 1950s, an otherwise protective mother could be deceived by an abusive spouse as he sexually exploited their child. Felicity's father was a distant man who was home only infrequently, and Felicity suggested that there was little communication between her mother and siblings, and her father.

> I'd have to say that I don't think I ever really knew him. He wasn't part of our lives. The only conversation I remember having with him – 1952, I think it was, the morning the king died – he was having breakfast, because he started early, and I could hear the national anthem playing. And I asked him what that was, and he said the king had died. And I think that's kind of … about the only conversation we had.
>
> [...] And he was always out a lot at night, and saw the family, I think, as Mum's responsibility. She brought us up, she took us to church, and, um, he didn't see that as part of his – which is probably what happened in those days, a lot. But I don't know much about him.

The colonisation of family relations by organised abuse

For those participants with a "non-involved" parent, the encroachment of organised abuse into the family home was somewhat limited. The abusive parent often had to

wait for their spouse to be absent from the home, or else find excuses to take their child from the home, in order to expose the child to organised abuse. These boundaries and constraints upon organised abuse were not in place for those participants whose entire household was aware of, and active in, organised abuse. The nuclear "units" of these families were often embedded within extensive networks of abusive kin within which incest and violence was widespread and normative. For example, Lauren lived with her three siblings and her mother in her grandparents' house and was expected to engage in regular sexual activity with her grandparents as well as with her uncles and other family members and friends. The participation of children in this activity was coerced by withholding food. Lauren reported that she and her siblings were often hungry and were given small amounts of money for sex acts. They used the money to buy food.

> We were all constantly abused. And also the involvement of other family members from a very early age. [...] In particular, one uncle would come to the house, and ... any one of us would have to perform oral sex or whatever with this uncle. Whoever he wanted. And that's where money would start changing hands. [...] Because there was major food deprivation and all that, you would accept that money and just use it so you could buy some food.

This excerpt demonstrates how, in circumstances of familial organised abuse, sexual abuse can become one of the organising principles of family relations. Lauren's mother lived with her parents, and in lieu of rent and board she provided her children for sexual abuse to her father. In turn, when Lauren's uncle came to visit his parents, he would regularly abuse Lauren and her siblings, providing payment to his parents as

well as small amounts to the children. In this way, lateral and intergenerational relations within Lauren's family were expressed through the medium of child sexual abuse. Adult male family members acted as abusers whilst adult female family members acted as facilitators, a division of labour that reflected, more generally, the relative status of women in Lauren's family.

Participants subject to familial organised abuse described their home lives as emotionally barren environments set within larger networks of abusive kin and other abusive adults to whom their parents had overriding obligations. As children, participants occupied the lowest rung of a hierarchy of abuse and victimisation that structured their immediate family environment, and children were objects of sexual exchange that regulated relationships between their nuclear family, their extended family, and other family friends and contacts. As such, their family environments were not discrete entities unto themselves, but rather localised sites of a larger regime of control and terrorisation. The lack of care or support available to a child in such an environment was highlighted by Anne, who stated:

> I'd only been taught that our physical survival mattered. I had to be grateful for the fact that I was physically alive, that was all that my parents had sent me off into the world with. The direction was, "You are alive. Be grateful for that."

In participants' histories, their abusive families and kin networks overlapped substantially with religious, fraternal and other male-dominated organisations. Abusive groups were often constituted by familial relations between adults and child

relatives, as well as the institutional and social relations between abusive men. The patterns of sexually abusive exchange outlined above were therefore not limited to intra-familial relations; they included relations with family "friends" and contacts across a range of institutions and social contexts. The abusive group often included members of mainstream institutions who, by acting cooperatively, were able to create systems of patronage and favour for others within the abusive group. Participants' organised abuse was linked directly to their family's socioeconomic status and their father's professional standing.

A number of participants suggested that, through organised abuse, their fathers were provided with professional connections and opportunities that would otherwise have been closed to them. For example, May's father rose from humble beginnings to become a senior business executive in a relatively short period of time. May noted that his rapid advancement coincided with his "association" with a group of wealthy men who subjected her to organised abuse.

> He [Dad] didn't have a lot of education. And he didn't have a lot of money. But somehow, he had all these rich people in his life. And there was this group of people that he used to associated with. And they are all quite wealthy. I always thought he started associating with them when he started getting wealthy himself, and moving up in the business world.

Anne also described her father's swift promotion from a relatively low-paid and unskilled position into a very senior position in the public service. Cara charted a similar path for her father, from impoverished beginnings, to participation in

organised abuse, to a managerial position. Isabelle noted a general relationship between her father's sexual exploitation of her and his ability to obtain social and economic advantage.

> He [Dad] always knew prominent people in the community – lawyers, solicitors, doctors, police officers – he could always manage to get out of something, or make excuses for something. He always had people coming to the house – males. Always. Every night there was always people chit-chatting and stuff, and I had to be his … I don't know, prize possession thing. Like, let's show off the daughter thing, let's put her on display. It was almost like you were a part of this meat market, being checked out for possible … whatever.

Both Lily and Rhea commented on the affluent and professional status of the men who participated, with their fathers, in organised and ritualistic abuse.

> I think, in a lot of ways, ritual abuse is an upper class crime. It's your solicitors and QCs and surgeons and academics and all those professions.
>
> Lily

> Dad was a partner in a large firm. The people who were members of the cult were all professional people. And some of the names, as I said, I mean, the names are all very well known. Oh, gosh, yes.
>
> Rhea

In such a context, family relations were primarily structured according to their parents' reciprocal obligations to kin and other abusers. In these contexts, children were assets or objects, and their primary value came from the appropriation of their physical and sexual labour. There was little emotional investment by parents in their relations with their children. Lily described her father as "incredibly aloof" and her mother as "cold". As a child, she felt her most sympathetic attachment figures were her pet and her teddy bear.

> We had a dog, and I have memories – like, a couple of very clear memories of sitting on the back step, talking to the dog, and sitting on the back step, and talking to the teddy bear. They were the two that were going to listen.

Isabelle described her father as a "mask" for a man whose primary obligations lay outside his family.

> I don't know if I've ever seen him as my father. I have a birth certificate, in that sense. But I'm not sure that I ever put it that context. I saw him connected to something outside the family, as opposed to … He played the role of being the, you know, figurehead, and I'm sure there were times where there were some nice things that he did just so that you knew he wasn't 100% horrible. But I'm not sure that I even related to him that way. It's kind of, "I have to do that at home, because that's the game we are playing".

In this study, ritualistic abuse occurred when organised abuse emerged within and/or extended into male-dominated organisations with pre-existing ritualistic traditions,

such as a Christian church or a chapter of the Freemasons. A number of participants indicated that their ritualistic abuse was coordinated through a local Christian church and/or by a priest or nun. Some participants mentioned that their fathers were Freemasons, and/or made references to abuse in Masonic temples and halls. In Cara's childhood, abusive ordeals often occurred during Masonic social events in which there were "whole halls full" of people however:

> it was kind of like a cover. They would hold things like dances, gatherings, on the top level. And higher order, higher degrees, Poppy was 33rd degree – I have his medals, so he was 33rd degree - and if you knew the passwords and the signs and the handshakes and all that, you'd get to go to the deeper levels. To participate. And, of course, the group gets smaller and smaller. That's the cover. On the top, it's looking like "Oh, yeah, it's a get-together." A dance, or a dinner. Or whatever. But on the other levels, full-on rituals are going on.

The subjection of children within these families to organised abuse became linked not only to their father's financial wellbeing but to their physical safety, even their lives. Parental involvement in organised abuse appeared to be a product of interlocking disincentives as well as incentives. Cara describes how her grandfather's fear of the abusive group effectively hollowed out and colonised all relations in her nuclear and extended family, as he sought to ensure the compliance of his wife, children and grandchildren to the demands of organised abuse and thus avoid any "trouble" for himself.

> Even though Poppy was still a 33rd degree [a senior Mason], it felt like he was still being controlled from above too. If he didn't do what he was meant to do, it was like he was going to be in trouble. It felt like he was acting from a place of fear. I know that Nanna definitely was. She was totally dominated by Poppy. And it just went down, of course, Dad was dominating Mum and Mum was very scared. So I think it was all about control.

Kate's father became involved in a sexually abusive group whilst overseas on missionary work. He pursued his interest in organised and ritualistic abuse when he returned to Australia although the abusive group became increasingly violent towards him as well as his children. Kate witnessed her father's physical and sexual victimisation in the organised group, and she spoke of her belief, as a child, that he would be killed if she didn't "go along with this."

> It was almost, though, as if he [Dad] was scared for his life. He was both a victim and a perpetrator. I had the sense that I had to go along with this, or else father would be killed. So I was kind of protecting him.

As the violence escalated, Kate's father found it difficult to extract himself and his family:

> We kept moving all the time. Father kept us moving, and I presume now that it was to get away from them. We could be gone at a moment's notice. But it was sort of a love-hate thing with father. He was a weak man, and I guess he loved the money, too, although he didn't need it by that time. He was making

> good money. But I guess he just loved that, you know, they would tie you up, and they'd hurt you, and then they'd assault you, and it'd be on film, and then he'd get paid.

Smart (2007: 45) describes family relationships as "sticky", suggesting "it is hard to shake free from them at an emotional level and their existence can continue to influence our practices and not just our thoughts." Within organised abuse, the "sticky" quality of family relationships took on overwhelming and life-threatening dimensions, as men viewed them as proprietary links that justified their exploitation of wives, children and grandchildren. In participants' accounts, these relationships were enduring and extraordinarily difficult for women, in particular, to extract themselves from. For example, Jo's mother had been subject to organised abuse by her own family as a child. Although she had escaped ongoing abuse by marrying Jo's father, and moving away from her family, the original abusive group threatened the safety of her infant son if she did not permit them regular access to Jo.

> The first thing that happened was when I was about three these men appeared during the day at our house, and I had a brother who was about eighteen months at the time. So they came and basically threatened my mother and I, and said that they would kill my brother if we didn't comply and I had to go with them. And my mother, I think, also having been pre-programmed ... um ... uh, didn't resist and I can remember her standing there kind of shaking, like almost in anger, kind of shaking like this and pointing to me [mock voice] "Get in the car", so I basically had to go with them.

Frankel and O'Hearn (1996) used the social dynamics of the Jewish ghettos in the Holocaust as a metaphor for the intra-psychic processes of people subjected to severe abuse, highlighting simultaneous patterns of strategic complicity, victimised coping, and underground resistance in victimised people as well as victimised communities. These patterns emerge in participants' accounts as characteristic of both the intra-psychic processes and familial relations that dominated their home environments, highlighting the constraints that organised abuse imposed upon parents as well as children. In a system of exchange regulated through threats of violence and death, the decision to participate – enthusiastically or otherwise – is neither simple nor free. These, participants described their parents' complicity occurring contemporaneously with their compulsive denial of the abuse, and sometimes their frantic efforts to escape.

Nonetheless, parental involvement in organised abuse cannot be reduced to a simple pattern of incentives and disincentives. The significance of sexual abuse in the lives of the families described by participants in this project was not a simple matter of economic gain. As children, participants occupied the lowest rung of a hierarchy of abuse and victimisation that structured their immediate family environment, and children were objects of sexual exchange that regulated relationships between their nuclear family, their extended family, and other family friends and contacts. Within these networks of relationships, fathers, grandfathers and other male authority figures used the bodies of children to establish their status *vis a vis* one another as well as to gain professional advantage and other forms of prestige. This system of exchange, predicated upon a hyper-masculine aggression and the performance of assaultive sexualities, arguably created the context in which men could generate a sense of self

and status through practices of sexual abuse. However, once they began to engage in organised abuse (and, for some participants' parents, it appeared they had little choice as they were born into familial organised abuse) they could not disengage without the threat of violence or death; an illustration of the darker side of exchange, as theorised by Mauss (2000). In participants' childhoods, this process was experienced through the depersonalisation and objectification of children that characterised their home lives. Their family environments were not discrete entities unto themselves, but rather localised sites of a larger regime of control and terrorisation.

Dissociation and the internalisation of the public–private divide

It is notable that participants lived in households that maintained (to greater or lesser degrees of success) a veneer of normalcy. Despite the extraordinary violence contained within them, their families did not attract the attention of the authorities, since family life was carefully structured around a collective denial and disavowal of organised abuse. Participants often spoke of their childhoods as bifurcated into "two worlds" or "two lives": there was the "everyday", in which they went to school and maintained the pretence of a happy family, and "night-time", which represented the unpredictable and dangerous reality of living with organised and (often) ritualistic abuse. Rhea encapsulated this perspective when she said:

> There were two lives. It wasn't like living in a cult where you were kept segregated from the outside world. It was nothing like that. I think that's so extreme, and we hear about those now. What we don't hear about are the kids that are just living absolutely normal, middle-class-type lives, where nobody's able to open the door and get behind to see what's happening. The cult always talked about people being outsiders, you never speak to outsiders. Ever. You

> don't tell outsiders about what happens in the home, you don't talk to outsiders. And what we learnt to do was not to talk to anybody about what was happening.

Lily and Darren spoke in similar terms:

> Y'know, there's the two worlds. There is the normal, everyday world, and there is the ritual abuse world.
>
> Lily

> [S]o much of my life is just sectioned off. And it had to be while I was a kid. I mean, I couldn't be going to school and remembering all that stuff. Y'know, there was two worlds.
>
> Darren

In participants' narratives of childhood, the public–private divide was stark. The home was, effectively, a zone of impunity in which their fathers and other abusive adults could assault them without fearing intervention or detection. Although participants were subject to frequent threats of harm should they disclose their abuse, the reluctance of teachers or other adults in the "public" world of school to inquire into the conditions of the "private" world of home was systemic. "Political captivity is generally recognised, whereas the domestic captivity of women and children is often unseen. A man's home is his castle; rarely is it understood that the same home may be a prison for women and children" (Herman, 1992: 74). Participants' parents maintained a strict distinction between the "private" world of organised abuse and a "public" façade that was employed in interactions with those outside the family.

They [parents] portrayed themselves as decent law-abiding, working-class citizens. Which, of course, then – it was just a big front. A pretence, anyway. And they would make sure that they would follow all day-to-day laws, and look good, and respectable. And it worked, because nobody dug underneath, and had a good look at them. Took the mask off their face. But they were hiding a great deal.

Lauren

A neighbour had come to our house, and Mum said to her, "I don't hit my children." And I distinctly remembered being hit by her a few days earlier. So, again, this is what I mean about the way we were fed certain stories about our family, which was different to what was really happening. But it wasn't until I was older, and I remembered that conversation, and I thought, "But that's not true." But we were all taught to bury the truth.

Anne

I think, I recall, a lot of my childhood life not making sense because what happened during the day was very different to what happened at the night, or on weekends. What was happening was the total opposite to what was being portrayed during the day, you know, the whole Brady Bunch thing. Mum, Dad, kids, everything looks hunky dory. It was the opposite to that.

Isabelle

For many participants, this "public–private" divide was such a prominent feature of their childhoods that it was internalised and became manifest through psychic structures. This interaction between the imaginary spaces of the "private-private" ideology, as they are mapped out across the geography of childhood, and then internalised as psychic structures, is reminiscent of Žižek's (1999: 3) reference to the interweaving of politics and geography.

> We are dealing with an imaginary cartography, which projects onto the real landscape its own shadowy ideological antagonisms, in the same way that the conversion-symptoms of the hysterical subject in Freud project onto the physical body the map of another, imaginary anatomy.

All participants described manifesting symptoms that Freud would have diagnosed as "hysterical": multiple personalities, trances, amnesia, nightmares, flashbacks and intense bodily pains without physiological explanation. In the lives of participants, however, their conversion symptoms were founded upon the "imaginary cartography" of the public–private divide projected onto the "real landscape" of home and school.

Many participants developed psychological adaptations, such as dissociation and amnesia, in which the lived experience of schooling and life outside the home was "split off" from the fear and terror of organised abuse in domestic contexts. Scott (2001) argues that, in circumstances of organised and ritualistic abuse, children develop multiple personalities because their roles in abusive family contexts are incompatible with their roles at school and outside the home. Such an argument finds support in this study, where participants subject to organised abuse described in detail

the contradictory roles that they were expected to adopt inside and outside the home, and the multitude of rules and regulations that demarcated this divide. The child was placed in an impossible situation by organised abuse: under pain of death she was to deny (even to herself) that any abuse was taking place, nonetheless she was expected to conduct herself at all times according to the code of secrecy and loyalty imposed by the abusive group.

As a result, participants often described themselves inhabiting an in-between space of awareness during "everyday life", as they avoided any stimulus that might remind them of their abuse whilst simultaneously maintaining semi-awareness of the rules against disclosure and disloyalty. As children, their response to this life-threatening paradox was to dissociate, which participants described as "flying away", "going inside" or going to the "deep dark". This "going inside" was described by participants as their only available response to a totalistic and life-threatening environment in which other options for resistance were unavailable. Says Anne:

> That's the only safe place, your own brain. Because, definitely, your body has been invaded, your body is not your own.

Dissociation enabled the child to enact the multiple, contradictory roles demanded of her whilst also maintaining the illusion of control and order in her life. Over time, the child came to identify herself according to these multiple roles; she develops DID, in which her social interactions and practices are mediated by multiple, alternating self-states (known as "alters" in the literature on dissociation) (Kluft, 1996; Ross, 1997; Sinason, 2002). Fittingly for a last-ditch psychological defence mechanism,

participants' descriptions of DID emphasised its functional quality, and the manner in which it enabled them to perform adequately within life-threatening and unpredictable circumstances. Rhea described how she generated new personalities and identities according to the respective dispositions demanded of her in sexual exploitation:

> Cult was separate to our day-to-day life. Me, Rhea, was there just for the day-to-day things that were happening. If cult stuff was happening, it would be other parts that were involved. I guess there were a few things that were happening around a few people that knew cult, knew we were involved, um, but they were very careful – a lot of them, they were very careful. As I said, we were just leading ordinary, normal lives. And only cult parts – cult parts would be activated if certain triggers were being used.

Rhea described her multiple personalities in almost mechanistic terms: when a different "part" was necessary for a particular function, that "part" would "switch" in and fulfil its role. The maintenance of two separate lives was achieved, for Rhea, through the amnesia that comes with dissociation. Nonetheless, she also indicated that maintaining the distinction between these "two worlds" required explicit instructions by her father at times, and her conscious obedience:

> There were marks after some rituals, I did have – I remember, we had marks on us, physical marks of the abuse, and our father told us that we were not to get undressed, we were not to get changed. I remember parts of us switching in and making excuses for why we were not able to play sport, things like that, that sort of thing I remember about school.

Jo also described the maintenance of these two lives as a source of great anxiety for her as a child, although she too had multiple personalities:

> I did sometimes lie in bed and wonder, and worry that I would have enough ... left to live in the day. So much was being taken up with coping with everything that was going on, I was worried that I would have actually enough resources to actually go about my everyday life and put on a facade of everything being fine.

Jo described the strict policing of her "everyday life" by the group, who stipulated a set of requirements to Jo that, she felt, she must obey or else risk being killed.

> It wasn't only a question of telling, you had to not draw attention to yourself … You're not [allowed to be] a trouble maker or having problems, but you're not [to allowed to be] drawing to attention to yourself the other way as well [i.e. excelling in any way]. You've got to be fairly average, particularly not be noticed, and not just in terms of what happened [i.e. organised abuse]. If you were in any way drawing attention to yourself that there might be something funny [there would be consequences].

Organised abuse, as it is acted out, experienced and then conceptualised, is saturated with the consequences of the public–private distinction. Not only does the commission of acts of organised abuse depend upon the power structures of the "private" sphere, but they in turn inscribe psychic structures that represent children's

efforts to adapt to, and live within, the intolerable conditions promoted by this distinction. Nonetheless, the divide between the "private" world of organised abuse and the "public" face of the family was sometimes disrupted. Whilst participants' fathers strove to reinforce a strong demarcation between organised abuse and "everyday" life, they sometimes engaged in sexually abusive activities at home that echoed participants' victimisation in organised abuse. Cara described her father sometimes engaging, in the family home, in sexual torture that included the vaginal cutting and blood-letting that was a feature of her organised abuse.

> He was in the army so he had different knives, and it would be very random – just grab me and a steak knife. And mum was always doing some bloody home remedy to try and fix it up.

Cara suggests that her father's torturous abuses, which occurred during "uncontrollable, drunken rages", were an expression of his deteriorating mental health; her impression was that "his psyche wasn't doing that well". Kate noted a similar pattern of explosive rage from her father who, when angered, would abuse her in the home in ways that mirrored her ritualistic abuse.

> *In terms of the belief system espoused by the group, did that ever enter the home life?*

> [Not] otherwise, aside from father's rages, which led to the same treatment – he did, he would tie you up under the house, he would follow up with some of the practices when the others weren't there.

The literature on trauma and dissociation is written almost wholly by psychologists and psychiatrists, and hence it maintains a primary emphasis on the psychopathological impacts of violence for the individual victim (e.g. Mollon, 1996; Briere & Scott, 2006; Sachs & Galton, 2008). However, this study emphasised the political nature of dissociation, and how the spatial distribution of relations of gender and power through the "public–private" divide can organise children's lives in ways that generate an intolerable contradiction between their "public" and "private" roles. In effect, dissociation can be said to be a personal adaptation to a systemic political phenomenon. The child responds to the contradictory roles demanded of her at home and elsewhere by generating a multiplicity of identities that corresponds to specific configurations of power in particular circumstances. The role of the "normal" child that goes out into the "public" world of school, however, is both the wish fulfilment fantasy of, and the facade of, the child who must adapt and survive the "private" conditions of home.

The contradictions in her life do not end with the "public–private" divide, however. Even in the "private" abusive context, the child is required to act out a multiplicity of roles: the "little mother" or "second wife" who attends to her father's domestic and sexual requirements, the sexual object who brings honour to her father in the eyes of other abusers by demonstrating her subservience and obedience, and the terrified child whose expressions of fear and pain elevate the sense of domination and superiority that abusers experience through organised abuse. These are just a few of the roles that participants identified adopting in familial organised abuse. Over time, dissociation may become the child's primary response to a world that she experiences as

unpredictable and violent, resulting in the proliferation of identities until, as Darren put it, "you are so splintered, and so divided, that you have no particular strength left in your compartments – no compartment is particularly big or strong."

"It's all a bad dream": Parental facilitation of abusive incidents

Participants subject to familial organised and ritualistic abuse generally reported an abusive ordeal at least once a week, most often on Friday and/or Saturday nights. Their reports of the transition from the family environment to abusive ordeals followed a common pattern. A number of participants reported their parents providing them with a drink before bed-time, and they would either quickly fall asleep as though sedated, or become aware of changes to their perceptions.

> I would get this horrible drink before I went to bed. It must have had something in it. And then we'd be in the car and I'd be taken out somewhere, I'd be semi-conscious type of thing.
>
> May

> We were given juices and milk drinks before going to bed, and waking up an hour or two later. And then we'd be taken off later.
>
> Cara

> My mum would say, "Kiddies, I've made you all a hot chocolate." For my brothers and sisters, she would use any old cup … but they would always bring out a particular cup and make sure they gave it to me. And they'd say to me, "This is your special cup." And sometimes they'd put cinnamon on the top. I don't know if the cinnamon was about disguising the taste, or if it was

> meant to be a trigger or something. But it was primary school, and that would happen, and then I'd get all the symptoms – I realise now – of being drugged.
>
> Sky

Anne reports a similar pattern, in which she was lying in bed as a child, and she would begin to see "black and yellow swirls" behind her closed eyes. This was the inevitable precursor to a "nightmare" of organised and ritualistic abuse. Her parents had assured her that these experiences were just "bad dreams", and she believed them as a child. It was very common for participants to report being told by their parents that a recollection of abuse was a "bad dream".

> If it had been a really bad night [of organised abuse], I would always be told the next day that it was nightmares. That it wasn't real.
>
> Lauren

> I'd be put in my bed, and sometimes I'd open my eyes and see these men in robes in my room, and I'd close my eyes and I'd try to wake myself up – because I'd been told they were a dream – I'd open my eyes, and they were gone, and I'd scream for my mum. And she'd come in and say, "It's all a dream, it's all a dream."
>
> Sky

> And my father would even say, if I questioned something, "No, that was just a dream. That was your imagination and it wasn't real." So you could never piece anything together.

Isabelle

Renee recalls being given "lollies" at abusive ordeals, only to wake up and be told it was all a "terrible dream".

> It was "a smartie" they called it, and they had a smiley face on it. Saying, you know, "have a lolly, pick your smarties". And always, we were always waking up, coming out of a sleep, hair stroked, "it's all right, it's just a terrible dream".

Participants maintained differing levels of awareness of the physical transition – that is, the travelling - from their family home to instances of organised abuse. Although they sometimes "woke up" from sedation in the car, there were incidents in which they woke up at an abusive ordeal. For Isabelle, home life seemed to cease when she went to bed, giving experiences of organised abuse a dream-like and unreal quality.

> There were a lot of times in life where you'd be doing your normal daily school activities and stuff and you'd go to bed asleep, and all of a sudden you'd wake up in the car. Going on these long drives into the bush and things would happen where you couldn't figure out, "Was I dreaming? Did I have a nightmare? Was it real? Am I crazy?"

In Sky's experience, some of his abuse occurred in the family home. The transition between "daytime" life and organised abuse was not marked by a car or train trip, but instead by his parents' strange costumes and masks. His mother taught him that these

robed figures were "ghosts", but Sky made a connection between his parents and the "ghosts" as a young child.

> When I was two and a half, I remember my mum coming into my room late at night and she was all dressed up. They wore these – I don't even know what they are called – but it's a blue, white and green costume thing. Like a gown, but almost Middle Eastern. I don't know how to describe it.
>
> Anyway, she comes into my room and she hadn't put the headpiece on, and she says, "Sweetie, it's time to wake up, it's time to wake up." And I remember sitting up, and she's kneeling by my bed, and she turned around and she'd put this thing over her head.
>
> And I was so young … I couldn't … like, I thought she wasn't my mum any more. I couldn't see her face, it was like she had turned into someone else. And after that night, I know that I didn't trust her. And I guess from then on, it was just – "all right, I've got to keep myself alive".

Although Sky's father began touching Sky inappropriately when he was in his teens, intra-familial sexual abuse occurred largely in the context of ritualistic abuse.

> For instance, when I was on holidays as a kid, suddenly there was only two ghosts. And, of course, that's because my mum and dad were in a different location, and the others were back home. And I don't know what they were

> thinking, but they'd brought their costumes along. And maybe it was like, "We're horny, let's put them on, and have a go at it."

Most participants who experienced familial organised abuse indicated that, during childhood, they were not always aware of their experiences of abuse; that is to say, in the periods of time between abusive incidents, they did not necessarily recall that abuse had occurred. They were not entirely unaware of the abuse and yet their capacity to recall it was intermittent. Freyd (1996) argues persuasively that such forms of forgetting are a logical response for children abused by a parent or caregiver, since forgetting the abuse enables the child to maintain their relationship with the person/s upon whom they are dependent for their basic needs. However, for these participants, abusive parents appeared to reinforce the amnestic process by assuring the child that the abuse was a bad dream. In Lily's case, she was instructed not to remember her abuse. In this excerpt, Lily describes her father's use of a strategy of "directed forgetting" in the immediate aftermath of an abusive ordeal.

> We are coming home, and my father saying, "You know that I love you. It didn't happen. You don't remember. You know that I love you. It didn't happen. You don't remember." And it's like … um, and it still just completely fogs my head.
>
> Lily

This strategy of directed forgetting may well be an effective one. Cognitive research has found that people are less likely to remember information that they have been told to forget (Sahakyan & Kelley, 2002). Sivers, Schooler and Freyd (2002) have

identified that the encoding of memory by children may be inhibited by a lack of discussion and validation for the event, and the threats or denial of perpetrators. In this study, it seemed that abusive parents placed great faith in the child's capacity to forget traumatic events. Anne's father was able to sexually and ritually abuse Anne's children because she had not, at that time, recalled his abuse of her. In interview, she recalls a telling slip-of-the-tongue.

> Before I knew what Dad was up to, at a conscious level, he said something that has stayed with me. He was talking about something innocuous, like, he said, "Do you remember when you were little we used to say this little rhyme?" It was something about Mickey Mouse. And we'd have to answer, making a squeaking noise like a mouse. It was in regards to that. And he said, "You don't remember that? We did it all the time?" And he made a little laugh, and he said, "For some reason, when they grow up, kids don't remember." And then he caught himself, and it was as if, "Oh, I've just said something I shouldn't have." And that's precisely how he got away with abusing my children.

The mind-bending and incomprehensible nature of the abusive ordeal was often taken advantage of by fathers and abusive adults, who encouraged victimised children to forget what had happened to them. Nonetheless, adults frequently utilised processes of amnesia and dissociation to compartmentalise their own involvement in organised abuse. Levi (1986: 24) notes "A person who has been wounded tends to block out the memory so as not to renew the pain; the person who has inflicted the wound pushes the memory deep down, to be rid of it, to alleviate the feeling of guilt." Lily, whose

father's soothing mantra after organised abuse was "you don't remember", would repeat similar words to himself just prior to his death.

> A friend of mine was a priest and he decided that he wanted to go and visit my dad. [...] And my friend just said who he was, and that he was a friend of mine. And Dad just sat there, saying, "I don't want to know. I don't want to remember. I just want to forget. I don't want to remember. I don't want to know." And my friend said it was the most heartbreaking thing. And so my friend left.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how familial organised abuse is embedded within the macro-political context that demarcates "the family" as a "private" and thus largely unregulated space. The impunity that the ideology of the "private" space grants to men in their interpersonal relations with women and children provides the conditions within which men involved in organised abuse can construct a gender regime that subordinates women and children to organised abuse. It is within this localised regime of coercion and control, which is policed not only by abusive fathers but also by their relatives, friends and associates, that the psychological adaptations of children and women to extreme trauma (such as dissociative spectrum disorders) develop. The violence unfolding around these families was of such magnitude that it prompted last-ditch psychological defence mechanisms, such as denial and dissociation, in parents as well as their children, in abusive men as well as their victims. Given the prohibitions against and consequences of breaking the silence, children and women were forced to accept and cope with organised abuse as a condition of their lives. Their psychological adaptations represented the

internalisation of the powerlessness of children and women legitimised by the ideology of the public–private divide. The violence that this ideology enabled and camouflaged inscribed it upon the psyche of abused children and women.

In this study, organised abuse was constituted by interlocking familial and institutional relations driven by a system of reciprocal obligation that prevented members of abusive groups from extricating themselves. Due to the constitution of organised abuse by familial and institutional relations, abusive groups were able to mobilise systems of favour, advantage and patronage to the benefit of their members, creating a strong inducement for some men to enter into organised abuse. Nonetheless, the system of reciprocal obligation within organised abuse was enforced through blackmail and threats of death that locked members of abusive groups into ongoing compliance. Participants described how their parents, usually their fathers, structured family life in order to meet these obligations, thus maximising access to the benefits of organised abuse, whilst minimising the risk of serious harm to themselves. This was achieved through the sacrifice of the wellbeing of their children, and frequently their wives, grandchildren, and other women and children over whom they had control.

In an environment fraught with threats and abuse, external displays of resistance became impossible. Instead, participants described creating spaces within themselves through which they could craft alternative identities and self-histories, which enabled them to maintain their attachment with abusive caregivers whilst dissociating overwhelming emotions and memories. For participants, simply maintaining a memory of their abuse, however dissociated, was an act of rebellion in an

environment with so many directives against remembering or disclosing. Through the gender regime controlled and maintained by their fathers (and/or other abusive relates), participants' familial environments were organised in such a way as to inhibit the formation of alliances with their mothers or other potentially protective individuals. They described homes in which they were on their own, unable to trust their parents or siblings, from the youngest age.

In the families described by participants, children functioned as symbolic capital through when men regulated their complex familial and institutional relations with other men. The reduction of children to the status of symbolic objects of exchange was achieved through two operations: firstly, men sexually and physically abused their children, and secondly, they provided their children for abuse by other men. In this way, the family home can be seen as the site through which the child is "trained" or prepared for sexual exploitation (Itzin, 2001). The very space that the state has traditionally demarcated for men as largely free from oversight and regulation – that is, the family home, and men's interpersonal relations with women and children therein – thus becomes the space through which serious and life-threatening crimes against children can be coordinated and camouflaged.

8

Exchange, control and sadism in organised abuse

As detailed in Chapter 2, the literature on organised abuse has often been "siloed" according to the particular practices of abusive groups: ritualistic abuse, for example, or the manufacture of child pornography. In this study, these practices were not discrete or distinct from one another in the organised contexts described by participations. Not only did they often occur at the same time, but they were underpinned and organised by common structures of gender, age and power. As I demonstrated in Chapter 6, the gendered nature of organised abuse had particular consequences for girls and women, who bore the brunt of the abuse and its consequences. In this chapter, I explore how organised abuse, as a sexual practice, is embedded within the structures and practices of what Connell (1987) called "hegemonic masculinity": the dominant masculine gender form that is established upon, and legitimises, the subordination of women and children and of alternative ways of "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987) as a man. I propose that organised abuse provides a context in which groups of men can collectively generate identities and relations premised upon masculine domination and control. This chapter documents the harm that this causes to the women and children who serve as the

objects of these collective practices of power, and how structures of gender, age and power emerge in organised abuse through the interconnecting practices of exchange and sexual sadism.

The relationship between organised abuse and masculinity at first may seem unclear, even counter-intuitive. The forms of violence reported in organised abuse, such as sexualised torture and murder, evoke the "body horror" (Taylor, 1998) that, in Western countries, is often constructed as a foreign and exotic phenomenon unknown in the "first" or "developed" world (Ignatieff, 1998; Boltanski, 1999; Sontag, 2003). Within the "discourse of disbelief" (Scott, 2001) that has developed around organised abuse and ritualistic abuse, there is an assumption that such excessive abuses are alien to the "civilised" Western world. However, the rape, torture and evisceration of women and children are not foreign to "first world" nations. Such atrocities are frequently reported in serial and domestic homicides and such crimes are mythologised and even valorised in popular culture and pornography (Brownmiller, 1975; Cameron & Frazer, 1987; Caputi, 1987). They are also frequently reported in war crimes committed by military forces and other armed groups of men. Kelly (2000: 57) has highlighted the similarities between reports of sadistic sexual violence in armed conflict and those alleged to occur in organised abuse:

> What is being enacted in most of these settings are reinforcements of the primacy of relationships between men, and the accompanying subordination of women which underpins male supremacy. Men affirm one another as men through the exclusion, humiliation and objectification of women. What we need to explore in more depth is whether any hierarchical grouping of men,

> organised as men, creates conditions in which coercive heterosexuality is promoted and enacted. These groupings would include sports teams, private clubs, gangs, secret societies as well as the military.

The relationship between extreme sexual violence, gender and power was in evidence throughout this study. Participants described environments of organised abuse in which sexual violence appeared to be an institutionalised expression of masculine status. The more severe the violence inflicted, the greater the prestige that accrued to the perpetrator. Their reports of torture in organised contexts – including electroshock, confinement in closed spaces, fake executions and forced sexual contact with animals – were disturbingly similar to reports of torture by other masculine groups, such as the perpetrators of torture in Abu Ghraib. The majority of participants disclosed ritualistic abuse, and their narratives of torture during ritualistic ordeals support the research that suggests that ritualistic abuse is a marker of the extremes of child maltreatment (see Creighton, 1993; Gallagher, Hughes et al., 1996).

Nonetheless, such extreme practices were not ubiquitous features of all participants' accounts. For example, Jane, Helena and Colleen described networks of abusers in religious and institutional settings who utilised their authority to subject children to sexually abusive practices. Whilst their experiences of abuse had, at times, sadistic and ritualistic features, they did not report the prolonged experiences of torture described by other participants. In contrast, Renee, Neil and Darren reported being subject to sadistic abuse by criminal networks that trafficked in child pornography and drugs, although they did not describe ritualistic abuse and cult-like practices. It seems

that there are multiple points of convergence and difference in the accounts gathered in this study, and these are related to particular strategies of abuse and power.

In this chapter, I will endeavour to describe each particular strategy of power through the narratives of those participants whose life histories provide the clearest illustration. For the purposes of analysis, participants will be grouped in the following ways:

Participants	**Commonalities**	**Major theme**
Jane, Helena, Colleen	Loosely organised networks of abusers who subjected children to sexual abuse	Sexual abuse as a medium of exchange between men
Renee, Darren, Neil	Highly organised abusive groups who subjected children to sadistic sexual abuse and torture	Sadism and the pursuit of control
Alex, Anne, Cara, Felicity, Heath, Isabelle, Jo, Kate, Lauren, Lily, May, Polly, Rhea, Seb, Sky	Highly organised abusive groups who subjected children to ritualistic sexual abuse as well as other forms of organised abuse	The legitimisation of organised abuse through ritual and torture

The first two categories of participants and the themes of exchange and sadism will be considered in this chapter. The preponderance of reports of ritualistic abuse in this study has provided a great deal of data on the subject which will be the focus of the following chapter. These three levels of analysis are designed to be read consecutively as evidence of particular "kinds" of abusive groups. Nonetheless, the strategies and practices of power identified at each level of analysis often occurred together and are interconnected, and therefore it is important to consider the commonalities between the abusive groups described by participants as well as their differences.

In general, life history research has been interested in the study of domination and oppression in routine and everyday settings (Plummer, 1983). Instances of organised abuse, however, are a form of collective activity that, in Giddens' (1979: 124) terms, constitute a "critical situation" in that organised abuse "departs from the routinised character of social reproduction characteristic of most settings of social life." His analysis of "critical situations" encompasses revolutionary movements, Nazi death camps, forced interrogation and religious conversation, and he notes the common responses of social actors throughout:

> The radical disruption of routine produces a sort of corrosive effect upon the customary behaviour of the actor, associated with the impact of anxiety or fear. This circumstance brings about heightened suggestibility, or vulnerability to the promptings of others; the correlate of such suggestibility is regressive behaviour. The outcome of these is a new process of identification – transitory

> in the case of the mob, more permanent in protracted critical situations – with an authority figure (Giddens, 1979: 126).

The concept of the "critical situation" calls attention to the saturation of organised abuse with violence, fear and pain. When reading through the extracts from life histories presented in this section, it is important to consider that abusive groups constitute coercive and high-pressure environments that do not necessarily accord with normative assumptions about social interaction and behaviour. As I have previously described, abusive groups are characterised by fear-driven responses from perpetrators as well as victims, resulting in environments characterised by dangerous and unpredictable violence. In this section, I highlight how organised abuse is interwoven with powerful processes of projection and transference that gain much of their potency from the fear and pain that is ever-present in circumstances of organised abuse.

Sexual abuse as a medium of exchange between men

Helena, Jane and Colleen's descriptions of abuse are consonant with the literature on "sex rings" (Burgess & Lindeqvist Clark, 1984; Wild & Wynne, 1986; Hunt & Baird, 1990) and extra-familial institutional abuse (Colton & Vanstone, 1996). All three participants were abused outside the family, and in religious settings: Jane was abused by a group of Catholic priests, Helena through a nun at her Catholic school, and Colleen at a Catholic-run children's institution. In each circumstance described by these participants, an institutionalised subculture of sexual abuse operated within, and through, formal and informal arrangements of gender and power within the Church. The sacralisation of masculine domination within the Church, the corresponding lack of accountability and oversight of priests and male staff, the subservience of nuns, and

the profound powerlessness of children in religious and educational settings were contributing factors to the abusive experiences reported by Jane, Helena and Colleen. In each of their narratives, the exchange of children was a medium through which power relations between adults were mediated, expressed and affirmed within an institutionalised culture of masculine domination.

As Kelly et al. (2000: 73) noted, in circumstances of organised abuse, "sexual access to children and young people is used as a power resource between men; to promote economic, political and social interests which they already share in common, or which may be a direct outcome of the provision of children/young people to abuse." In Jane's, Helena's and Colleen's accounts, sexual abuse as a medium of exchange offered an array of benefits to abusers, including financial advantage (in Helena's case, through the manufacture of child abuse images) and professional advancement (in Jane's case, the abusive group was a tightly-knit association of abusive priests that protected one another's interests), but more generally through the mutual affirmation of a masculine selfhood predicated on domination and control. As is evident in Helena's case, women may also co-offend in the organised abuse of children in their efforts to maintain their relationships with abusive men.

Helena's experience of organised abuse was restricted to the final term of her second year of primary school, in which her teacher, Sister Beryl, provided some of her pupils for organised abuse to a man she was in a sexual relationship with. Beryl provided this man, whom Helena believed was a priest, with access to the first floor of the small building where Helena was being schooled. During school hours, the Sister would force Helena and a few other students to go upstairs, where this man was

waiting with two boys. There, Helena would be drugged and forced into sexual contact with other children whilst the man took photos of the activity.

> You know, he'd want us to play with the boys and do sexual things, and he would take photos of us, um, doing things. He would give us an orange drink, I don't know what was in the orange drink but it made me feel funny. And he gave the other kids that as well, to make us relax.

In Helena's narrative of organised abuse, the production of images of child abuse was central. At the school, Beryl would assist in the manufacture of child pornography by taking photos of the man molesting the children. This man also drove Helena to outdoor locations where he took photos of her and the two boys in sexual situations. As an adult, whilst pursuing an internal Church investigation into her abuse, Helena discovered other former students who had been subject to organised abuse by Beryl.

During a formal church investigation into Helena's complaint, it emerged that Beryl had also been named in a criminal case relating to the sexual abuse of a child in another school. Of all the interviews gathered in this project, Helena's is perhaps the one most evocative of a profit motive, since it certainly seems that the production of child abuse images was occurring on a commercial scale. Helena surmised that the two boys that were being victimised with her were most likely from a local boys' home or orphanage, and had been transported to her school for the purposes of the manufacture of child abuse images. Nonetheless, this does not explain Beryl's repeated claim that Helena was possessed by Satan, or the abusive priest's incorporation of ritual into his abuse of Helena:

> Back at the school, he'd make me kneel down and pray for forgiveness, and then he'd molest me.

By and large, however, Helena's abuse did not escalate beyond the level of exchange. In the form of Beryl's provision of her students for abuse, or the manufacture and distribution of child abuse images. As Mauss (2000) noted, however, systems of exchange often serve a variety of purposes beyond the accrual of financial gain. Beryl was in a sexual relationship with this priest, and it may have been that that the abuse of children was the way Beryl maintained this relationship. Nonetheless, organised abuse also reaffirmed Beryl's subordinate position to her partner: formally, as a nun, but also as a woman. In Helena's narrative, Sister Beryl was obedient and compliant to the priest with whom she had a sexual relationship. She obliged him by assisting in the manufacture of child abuse images and providing her students for abuse.

Jane also described organised abuse within the Catholic Church in the form a network of priests and brothers who exchanged victimised children between them. They called themselves "the Brethren" and Jane jokingly described them as socialist: "So you did it with him, you can do it with him and him. Provided that you've got his OK on it." Jane's organised abuse was facilitated by the local parish priest, Sam, who continued to sexually abuse Jane from early childhood well into her adult years. She recalled Sam's sexual involvement with his superior, who was also a sexually abusive member of the Brethren:

> I know from very, very hazy memories as a child I witnessed, um, because, for some reason, people don't think children see things but they do, I witnessed [Sam] being – how would you put it – seduced by other priests. By his supervisor.

In Jane's narrative, Sam was subordinate and obedient to a priest with whom he was having a sexual relationship. Jane linked Sam's participation in organised abuse to the "pecking order" of the priests themselves. In this regard, Sam and Beryl were in similar positions: formally subordinate in the church hierarchy to a man with whom they were having a sexual relationship, as well as co-offending with. Sexual practices were therefore bound up within their own subordinate position in the church hierarchy whilst also serving as a strategy of power through which they participated in the subordination and victimisation of children. Of course, their consensual sexual relationships with adults cannot be simplistically equated with their participation in the sexual exploitation of children. Nonetheless, for both Sam and Beryl, it seems that sexual practices were linked to their respective and changing positions within hierarchies of power: subordinate to others in the formal church hierarchy whilst dominant over children.

Throughout her childhood and teenage years, Jane was victimised by a violent and sexually abusive father whilst also enduring the predations of "the Brethren". As a consequence, she developed DID and, by her twenties, had become amnestic for her abuse. During this period, Sam learnt ways of manipulating Jane into sexual abuse.

> He'd say things like, "I've got a chocolate-covered condom, you want to lick it off me?" He'd – so he'd always descend into the genitalia, let's have it off sort of thing. He'd try and bring me, bring me back into, um, the part of my personality that he controlled, which was his little wife, lover, whatever, mistress.

In her thirties, as Jane began recalling her experiences of abuse and receiving mental health care, Sam's methods of manipulation became less effective. When he could no longer coerce her into sexual activity, after three decades of sexual abuse, he cut off contact with her in as demeaning a manner as possible.

> He had a way of – I became aware, because I was getting treatment – I became aware of how he would try and get me to switch. And he became less and less effective and that made him more and more cranky, to the extent that the last phone call we had … he was really insulting. He called me a prostitute, a prostitute wearing a blonde wig. Because I – I went through a period where I had streaks, blonde streaks ... A prostitute wearing a blonde wig – I found that *grossly* insulting.

Jane's account of Sam's involvement with a subculture of abusive priests is evocative of Colton and Vanstone's (1996) study of sexual abuse by men who work with children. One of their research participants, "David", was a priest who spoke of a subculture within the Catholic Church that involves "a certain degree of inculturalisation between people who are abusers" (1996: 109). He was first exposed to this subculture whilst in theological college and subsequently encountered a

number of senior figures in the Church involved in child sexual abuse who gave David support to continue his sexually abusive behaviour (1996: 109 – 110). In Jane's description of "The Brethren", it seems that these subcultural linkages between abusive priests had developed into a network of priests who engaged in sexual activity with one another and collectively groomed and exchanged children for sexual abuse. Acculturated within this subculture from the early days of his priesthood, Sam trapped Jane within an abusive relationship that lasted for much of her life. The importance of the relation of domination to Sam was such that, when he found he could no longer manipulate Jane, he verbally abused her and severed any connection with her.

Colleen's account also illustrates the manner in which institutional cultures of hegemonic masculinity generate, and are reproduced through, organised abuse. At the age of seven, she was subject to organised abuse by grounds staff at the children's institution where she had been taken into care. In Colleen's account, one particular male worker, a gardener, orchestrated a regime of physical and sexual violence in which a number of other male staff members (some of whom were former child wards) and older child wards participated. Colleen's most intensive period of abuse occurred during her first year at the children's home, when she was seven. The gardener, as the primary abuser, terrified children into silence through a range of practices. Whilst other male staff did not participate in this process of terrorisation, it appears they were prepared to victimise children who had been terrorised in this fashion.

> On Saturdays, the man would take the older children that he had under control down to the dairy. He'd make me go around, and tell all the older children,

> certain children, that they had to go down to the dairy. And then he would take a chicken, break its neck, throw it and shoot it. And then he would say, "If you tell your parents, or anyone that comes tomorrow" because Sunday was the day where we had visitors, "you will be the chicken." And you didn't want to be the chicken. On Sundays, he would hide and watch us. You always knew he was watching.

For Colleen and the other children victimised by this group of men, physical and sexual abuse was bound up in a broader regime of control and domination. Colleen recalls seeing the heads of stray cats impaled on the fence near the workshop where she was abused, and being threatened with a gun. The primary abuser pursued a degree of control over Colleen that can only be described as obsessive. She was forced to repeat injunctions against disclosure to the point where, decades later, she found herself repeating them in her sleep.

> That man programmed me, he'd give me instructions and make me say things over and over and over again. When I started healing, I was doing automatic talking – I would wake up in the middle of the night, and my body was going through everything that had happened to me. My mouth – I should've recorded it – I was spouting these automatic instructions. I even talked like him. It was amazing. They were his rules, his instructions, about staying silent, and not telling, so nobody would know what was happening.

The practice of sexual abuse was not only a strategy of power through which the gardener sought to realise his capacity for control and domination. Rather, sexual

abuse was the foundational practice of a fantasy of omnipotent control in which Colleen's body was also the doorway to her mind. His campaign of terrorisation was so extensive that Colleen would follow his punishing injunctions, even in his absence:

> Once he told me, as punishment, that I couldn't drink any water. He told me all the places I couldn't drink water – the tap, the bubbler, the water tanks, the dam, the pool. But he didn't tell me I couldn't drink from the toilet. So I had to go to the toilet to drink water.

By demonstrating his control over Colleen and other children, emotionally as well as physically, this man established his status amongst other abusive male staff members, who were frightened of him. Organised abuse was therefore integral to the development and maintenance of relations of power between these men and the children. When this man was away, it wasn't only victimised children who breathed easier, but staff members as well.

> I can feel it, even now – when he wasn't around, we had some power as kids. The home was our space. When this man was on site, it was different. There were male staff that obeyed him, that did what he told them to do. But when he was away, they just went about their business.

It is well established that men with an interest in sexually abusing children may look for opportunities to work with vulnerable children (Colton & Vanstone, 1996; Hawkins & Briggs, 1997; Gallagher, 2000a). However, Colleen's account (and other cases of institutional abuse) suggests that institutional cultures of masculine

domination, aggression and control can excite or induce a propensity for sexual abuse within individuals (wards as well as staff). At the children's home, organised abuse was part of a larger culture of violence and abuse that drew in wards and staff. Colleen recalled being repeatedly sexually abused by a male labourer at the home contemporaneously with her experiences of organised abuse.

> Dwight [a gardener and labourer] had a room up near the boiler room, and he chose me to be the special child to knock on his door and come visit him. I remember we always had to wear dresses – little girls didn't wear shorts then – and he used to pull my pants down and just look at me. I don't remember him touching me. He didn't do anything else. He was inquisitive about my biology. I remember his bed. I don't remember him ever doing anything that hurt me greatly. But he just wanted to know where everything was. I remember lying on the bed and he just wanted to look and see what a girl looked like.

She was also subject to an attempted sexual assault by a teenaged boy at the institution, who was imitating the behaviours of abusive staff members.

> Lee pushed me into a dark space, near the staircase, and he started trying to rape me. He was pulling all my clothes, tearing my clothes, pulling all my buttons off. But I started crying, and he stopped. And he said, "I can't do it." And he said, "But I see that man doing stuff to you, and I want to do the same thing." There was a little hole in the dairy, in the room he was using, and the boys would watch what was happening.

In Colleen's account, former wards and abusive staff cooperated in the sexual and physical abuse of children in the home, within a culture of exploitation, violence and fear. This culture was camouflaged from view during government inspections, as the nuns that ran the orphanage threatened to beat the children if they disclosed any maltreatment or violence. Colleen's account accords with the testimony of other former wards in public inquiries in Australia, which suggests some children's institutions developed an open culture of sexual abuse in which men colluded with other men in the sexual abuse of child wards, often incorporating former wards into the abusive activity. For example, testimony at the Mullighan Inquiry (2005) from former state wards provides a startlingly corroborative and detailed account of a network of men who preyed upon child wards in Adelaide, engaging them in prostitution and abusing them in the manufacture of child pornography. Similar allegations emerged from the Paedophile Inquiry of the Wood Royal Commission in New South Wales (1997a).

The picture supplied by Colleen and the testimony of former state wards suggests that, in some children's residential institutions, sexual and physical violence can become part of the disciplinary regime and culture of the home. Researchers have suggested that the emergence of routine sexual and physical violence within children's institutions is the result of a convergence of factors. In particular, staff in children's institutions have traditionally been granted extraordinary powers of control and coercion over the children with relatively little oversight (Doran & Brannan, 1996b). Meanwhile, children may enter the home with a history of sexual victimisation, prompting complex patterns of abusive and/or vulnerable behaviours (Farmer & Pollock, 1998). Goffman (1961) describes "total institutions" as non-interactive,

closed places in which people's identities are reshaped by the processes of depersonalisation, stigmatisation, routinisation and abuses of privacy and other rights. Such a description provides a close fit with the case studies of organised abuse within children's institutions, in which sexually abusive staff may foster a culture of brutalisation and victimisation that entraps residents over time, encouraging the complicity and active participation of other staff and children. Public inquiries suggest that child wards who take to the streets in an effort to escape such brutal environments are at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation whilst soliciting "sex for favours" in an effort to further their independence.

Colleen's, Helena's and Jane's narratives provide a partial view of abusive networks operating within the Catholic Church. Religious commentators such as Porter (2003) have observed that sexual abuse appears to be more prevalent within the Catholic Church (that is, in comparison to the prevalence of sexual abuse in the community) and therefore the Catholic Church may have specific cultural and structural features that are conducive to sexual abuse. In Jane's, Helena's and Colleen's accounts, it seems that their experiences of organised abuse were a product of the formal and informal relations of gender, age and power within religious environments that have institutionalised (and, in the case of the Catholic Church, made sacred) the principles of masculine domination.

These three participants described serious and harmful experiences of organised abuse, although their accounts were at the lower end of the spectrum of severity gathered in this study. Their life histories highlight how processes of exchange and bonding provide the basic social architecture of organised abuse. In organised

contexts, the exchange of children through the act of sexual abuse is a form of patriarchal bonding between men in which hegemonic ideals of masculinity are mutually affirmed and embodied. Men provide children to other men as a strategy to create and regulate relations between one another, and in turn, they receive a range of benefits and advantages including, but not limited to, financial and professional gain and/or sexual pleasure. Underlying the interplay between abuse, exchange and gain is an implicit ideology of masculinity which assigns value to experiences of control, domination and sexual release. Levi-Strauss (1969: 61) argued that women represent "the most precious category of goods" within systems of exchange, both ancient and modern. Pateman (1988: 112) notes that, whilst Levi-Strauss writes in the "grand tradition of theoretical speculation", his work can be read as the story of the origin of "a culturally and historically specific form of social order"; that is, modern forms of patriarchy and masculine domination. Sedgwick (1995) also argues that patriarchal heterosexuality can be understood in terms of a "traffic in women" in which women are used to cement the bonds of men with men. In organised abuse, however, children co-exist with women as objects whose primary function is to contribute to the accumulation of prestige by the men who abuse them.

Mauss (2000) notes that the act of exchange not only establishes and regulates relations between men, but may also become part of destructive struggles for status and hierarchy. In abusive groups, men may be subject to victimising practices by other men, such as blackmail, threats or physical or sexual violence. This "shadow side" of the process of exchange emerges in the accounts of both Jane and Colleen, though in different ways. Colleen recalled the fear with which other men approached the primary, sadistic abuser, and the sense of relief that permeated the institution when

he was absent. Jane suggested that, whilst she was being sexually abused by Sam, Sam was being sexually coerced by his supervisor. Although these two experiences are not equivalent, they demonstrate how sexual abuse can arise through the interplay of power and powerlessness as men are subject to the dominating practices of other men, as argued by Cossins (2000). There were elements of Jane, Helena and Colleen's narratives that suggest that the complex fantasies of power generated by sexual abuse, as a form of "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987), become intensified through organised abuse. The priest forcing Helena to kneel during sexual abuse and the nun convincing her she was possessed by Satan; the repetitive sadism of Colleen's primary abuser and the rules he forced her to memorise; Sam's manipulation of Jane's dissociative reflexes – all of these extend the principles of power and control to the point that Bourdieu (2001) called "sheer possession", the affirmation of domination in its pure state.

If sexual abuse generates hierarchies of power between adults and children, and thus enables men to embody (in however transitory and illusory a manner) an idealised subject position of dominance and control (Liddle, 1993), then the pursuit of "sheer possession" is reflective of an attempt to reach a state of impossible ontological certitude and surety. Dworkin (1981: 13–14) describes this state in terms of a "male supremacist ideology" bound up in the notion that the:

> Male self ... is entitled to take what it wants to sustain or improve itself, to have anything, to requite any need at any cost ... The self is the conviction, beyond reason or scrutiny, that there is an equation between what one wants and the fact that one is.

The sadistic practices described by Colleen can be understood, ultimately, as *possessive* practices which sought to establish and maintain the relation of domination through which masculine supremacy could be exerted. In the circumstances described by Jane, Helena and Colleen, they were caught up in relatively loose associations of abusers who had a common interest in child sexual abuse, and much of their experiences involved one particular abuser. Their experiences are at the lower spectrum of severity of abuse documented in this study, and this may be related to the fact that their abusers were part of more loosely organised abusive networks rather than the highly coordinated and structured abusive groups described by other participants as documented below.

Sadism and the pursuit of control

Renee's, Darren's and Neil's life histories provide examples of abusive groups for whom the pursuit of "sheer possession", as a principle of gendered power, arguably became a communal goal. These participants, as children, were subject to an array of sadistic practices, including sexual abuse, by groups of men who mutually affirmed their privileged place in the social order through their terrorisation and control of women and children. The organised abuse described is consonant with the literature on "sadistic abuse" and "organised sadistic abuse", defined as "torture, confinement, extreme threat and domination, overlapping physical and sexual abuse, and multiple victim or multiple perpetrator patterns of abuse" (Goodwin, 1994b: 181). In sadistic abuse, multiple strategies of terrorisation are utilised in order to achieve "absolute levels of control" over victims (Goodwin, 1994b: 182). In Colleen's narrative, sadistic abuse was perpetrated by one man within an institutionalised culture of sexual abuse.

In the accounts of Renee, Darren and Neil, sadistic abuse was a core practice within the abusive groups that victimised them as children.

By conceptualising the relation of domination and control as the underlying principle of this abuse, the selection of children as sexual objects in organised abuse becomes explicable. If the relations and identities of the perpetrator group are predicated on the illusion of omnipotent control, then the powerlessness of children makes them particularly suitable objects of domination. Arguably, sadistic abuse is, in effect, a "disciplining practice" (Foucault, 1977) through which the emotions, responses and behaviours of children are shaped to correspond with gendered relations of domination. However, as Renee's, Darren's and Neil's interviews demonstrate, gender is a complex structure of power in which subject positions are not assigned neatly in terms of biological sex. In their descriptions, women also participated in gendered practices of power and domination by facilitating men's access to children whilst at the same time they were subject to these dominating and sadistic practices as well. Helena's account of organised abuse provided an example of a woman, Beryl, who enabled her sexual partner to access children for abuse in an institutional context in which she was formally subordinate to her partner (a priest) whilst dominant over children. In the accounts explored below, the flux of power on the basis of gender and age is particularly pronounced. In the abusive environments described by these participants, sexual practices served to affirm and express the relative status of adults over children in a general sense, and men over women and children more specifically.

Renee grew up in the 1960s and 70s. Her stepfather, Mark, was a violent and alcoholic man with family connections to the (then-illicit) prostitution trade and the

production of pornography. He was on close terms with the owners of a local photographic studio, which abutted an illegal brothel. Renee's home environment was violent, abusive and sexualised. Her mother and Mark drank heavily and smoked marijuana frequently. Mark, his friends and family made frequent sexual remarks about Renee and her sister and touched them inappropriately. Renee was often home alone after school, and one day, when she was eight, Renee was approached in the street by the owners of the photograph studio, Frank and Amy:

> So they basically befriended us and started saying things like, "How pretty you are!" and that they took photos of pretty children and, y'know, like, you are this chosen, special one.
>
> It sort of went from talking outside, from opening the studio doors up, and there were photos of children on the walls … And that's how it started, with, just, "take pretty pictures".
>
> And, look, I can't remember the exact step from being in the studio to, one day, lying on this mattress with another kid just in our underwear on, and simulating sex. But we had been shown, by Frank and Amy, and we were being filmed.
>
> … It was always – we were always told it was love. Our games after school were called S and L, which was "sex and love".

Frank and Amy offered Renee the validation she was not receiving at home. They commented on how pretty she was, and how they wanted to befriend her because, as Renee recalls, "not many children are like that [pretty], and you are". Over time, however, the "game" of "sex and love", with the attendant compliments and inducements of ice cream, came to incorporate increasingly disorientating and sadistic forms of abuse. Other abusers became involved in the abusive activities in the studio, their strange costumes maintaining the motif that the abuse was just a "game".

> And there was one guy, "Fat Cat", there was actually dress-ups, and he used to dress up like Fat Cat. There was dressing up, there was a skunk, um, it all sounds crazy ... And this skunk used to omit an odour, and things became smoky.

Nonetheless, Renee was threatened with death if she disclosed the abuse, and subject to torture if she disobeyed:

> Brainwashing stuff, y'know, that "If you do tell, we'll kill you, and there are people out there that will find you" and the threats, y'know, with knives held at throats and that kind of stuff.
>
> [...] As a child, in the studio, as part of the punishment, it's like this stretching, like, lying on the floor with your hands and legs outstretched, one person each side, and lift you, stretch you, until you feel like your arms are popping out of your sockets.

The stretching of the limbs is a common torture technique around the world (Peel & Iacopino, 2002: 165). In Renee's case, it was applied to the point of agony but perpetrators resisted inflicting detectable or permanent physical damage. Renee's abuse became increasingly sadistic, with new sites of abuse emerging. Renee was being driven from the studio to a private home, where groups of men had gathered for the purpose of sexual abuse:

> There were lots of older men there. And it was almost like a, like a pick-the-child thing. And the memory that I have of that is also of my stepbrother being there, and being … going to this room with him, and whether there was a camera in a wardrobe in this bedroom or whether that's just what I was used to, um, him, like, sodomising me.

A childhood friend of Renee's called Rebecca was also abused in this context. During an abusive incident, Renee recalls Rebecca's father sexually abusing her whilst playing the role of "doctor":

> I remember [Rebecca]'s father playing the role of doctor, with a stethoscope and stuff. And I can remember him – whether it was his fingers or whatever, but putting something inside of me and telling me to cough. "And cough again, and cough again." I don't know what all that was about. I don't really care, but, that was Rebecca's father.

In another incident, Renee told Rebecca that she had disclosed her abuse to a telephone operator over the phone. Shortly after, Renee was taken to someone whom

she believed was a psychologist who asked her questions about how much she had disclosed, before "turning" and threatening her with violence.

> It must have been pretend, a psychologist or something like that [cries] getting all this information out of me. Right, even though – it was like, "OK, she's spoken up, how much does she know?" And then came all the mental games, which were worse than anything. The person who played the counsellor role, being oh, so nice, and all "You poor thing, what happened to you" and then just turning. And [I was] being threatened with violence. All these mind games because I spoke up.

In reflecting on the role of uniforms in ten cases of ritualistic abuse, psychologist Hudson (1991: 15-16) states: "It is obvious that the costumed perpetrators tried to destroy the child's trust in law enforcement and in the medical community," resulting in "noncooperation during investigation or trial". The use of uniforms and costumes was an enduring feature of Renee's organised abuse. Following the ordeal with the "psychologist", Renee received a visit from a man and woman in police uniform at home:

> We were latch-key kids, and I came home from school one day, and the police knocked on my door. And there was a man and a lady. And I can't remember word for word but it was basically, "We've been told to come and see you because you've been telling stories." Now. I truly don't … believe they were real police. They may have been, I don't know, but they took me for a walk up the street and back home and that was *it*.

Renee's experience of abuse involved a well-organised and coordinated network that involved adult and child prostitution and the manufacture of child pornography. Integral to this abuse were repetitive, sadistic forms of terrorisation and the inculcation of fear and control. Whilst the abusers utilised children's games, costumes and uniforms, Renee's abuse did not have the cultic or ritualistic features described by other participants in this study. Renee addressed this point directly, stating:

> I don't think it was ritual in like "cult" kind of stuff. I think it could have been bordering on it, like, um, maybe Mark and his mates weren't in it big time, they were more experimenting with it. I don't know.

Renee remembers "money changing hands" between Mark and the owners of the photographic studio. Whilst it is possible, indeed likely, that Mark may have been receiving money in exchange for her abuse, it is also clear that her abuse had a strong familial and social component as well. Mark's friends and family members appear frequently in Renee's history of organised abuse. Mark's father was involved in the illegal sex industry, and Mark's son (who was several years older than Renee) was also involved in the abusive activities that were taking place during these private 'parties'. Max, his stepfather (that is, Mark's ex-wife's husband) was accused of sexual abuse by his two sons. Renee says:

> And I can remember my stepfather's daughter telling me, and look, I would have been twelve, thirteen, "they're not allowed to [see Max] any more

> because they went home and told stories to their mum that Max takes them out to the bush and all these scary things happen."

In the circumstances described by Renee, the provision of a child for organised abuse had both commercial, social and familial functions for Mark and other abusive men. Sexual abuse was a practice through which Renee's stepfather maintained relations with other men in his family, including his son, as well as with his friends and his connections in the sex industry. In this system, the child exists only as an object or, more precisely, as a symbol whose meaning is constituted outside of her (that is, the manner in which she is treated bears no relation to her own thoughts, needs or desires) and whose sole function is to contribute to the accumulation of prestige and/or money held by men. Arguably, the financial value of sexual abuse is predicated on the experiential value of sexual abuse as a practice that reaffirms, and perpetuates, hegemonic relations of gender. At times during Renee's organised abuse, the principle of domination that underpinned the sexual abuse found separate expression through these acts.

Darren's interview also emphasises the material, symbolic and experiential qualities of sexual abuse as a medium of exchange, as well as the importance of torture in organised abuse as an expression of domination and control. Darren's experience appears to sits on the mid-way point between sadistic and ritualistic abuse. His abusers employed a libertine ethos of transgression in which sadistic abuse and violence was a natural male prerogative. However, their abusive practices lacked the references to supernatural powers that characterises reports of ritualistic abuse. In interview, Darren described how his mother prostituted him from infancy in exchange

for drugs and money. As he got older, and into his early teens, this abuse became more organised and sadistic. Each week, he was taken to a shop, which had a back room in which groups of men wore robes and masks during sadistic ordeals of sexual abuse.

> [T]hey had the full Obi-Wan Kenobi cloaks on, and they'd all be fucking naked underneath and tossing off. And there'd be the good guys, and the bad guys, and like – photographs of my father's face as a mask. And one side would be my mother's face, and the other side would be my father's face.

Darren's description of organised abuse emphasises how sadistic abuse and torture can be employed to craft, for victims and abusers, a shared reality of domination and submission in which fantasies of omnipotence are acted out and legitimised. In Darren's experience of organised abuse, sexual abuse and torture went hand in hand. In interview, he highlighted the simplicity, and the ease, of sadistic abuse:

> If you want to take a person to death and back again, all you need is a bit of gaffer tape. Y'know. Wrap around their hands, put it over their mouth, two fingers [pinches nose] over the nose, that's as scary as it gets. And afterwards, there isn't a mark on their body. There is nothing to say that anything happened. That's how vulnerable human beings are.

Darren viewed child sexual abuse as one strategy amongst many used by abusive groups, throughout history, to gain control over others.

People think of child abuse as perverts, y'know, who want to do things to kids. It's not just that. Look, people have had slaves since Egypt, and way before that. Certain things happen when a person is put under that kind of trauma. You've heard of things like the Book of the Dead? They developed it into an art, y'know, using torture to train people. And through the ages, it's always been around, those skills. It just doesn't have to be as obvious as a chain around people's neck.

Slavery can be as simple as – if you take someone up to what I call a "crisis mind", if you take someone up to a crisis mind, it's like – When people have a car accident, they hardly ever remember the actual accident. They remember up to it, and then the actual moment, or whatever, is just blanked out – it might even be ten or fifteen minutes beforehand.

And that's the same sort of thing that they utilise when they break you. Because you don't actually remember the trauma. The mistake that most people make is that they don't inflict *enough* trauma, because then people can remember, and come back from it.

These guys, they will go so hard on you that you just never want to go back there. You will block it out of your mind. Y'know, if you have to remember, relive all that, it will just be too much for your sanity. So you stay where you are, trapped.

Darren's vivid descriptions of enslavement without chains, and torture committed without a physical trace, turns our attention to the body, and how its potentials and vulnerabilities are interwoven within organised abuse. Scarry (1985) argues that torture is a generative practice through which torturers craft a "convincing spectacle of power" that legitimises abusive regimes and beliefs. "The physical pain is so incontestably real that it seems to confer its quality of "'incontestable reality' on that power that has brought it into being" (Scarry, 1985: 28). In organised abuse, the torture and subordination of the child or woman is a spectacle of power that arguably comes to symbolise, and affirm, the abusive group's construction of a masculine supremacist fraternity. Through the subordination of the child, not only momentarily (in the act of sexual abuse or torture) but across time, the perpetrator group lends the illusion of corporeality to their abusive ideologies.

> Now, at least for the duration of this obscene and pathetic drama [the act of torture], it is not the pain but the regime that is incontestably real, not the pain but the regime that is total, not the pain but the regime that is able to eclipse all else, not the pain but the regime that is able to dissolve the world (Scarry, 1985: 56).

Critical masculinity theories have typically emphasised the importance of conformity to hegemonic ideals in men's performance of gender (Donaldson, 1993). In this study, Darren's interview emphasised the utility of transgression as a resource for doing gender in organised contexts. This is not the "oppositional masculinity" of disenchfranchised men and boys, as described by Messerschmidt (1993) and Connell (1987). Arguably, it is men extending the bounds of their social power, and in doing

so affirming the privileges and impunity afforded to them as men. Darren described a range of serious crimes, including the murder of children. When I asked him why a group of men might commit such crimes, he stated that, fundamentally, the abusive group was engaged in a process of transgressive thrill-seeking.

> It's taboos. What you are not allowed to do is the greatest thrill. Y'know, crossing the gender line is one thrill, and crossing the age line is another thrill, and crossing the pain line, and, y'know – what can you do that is more horrible and nasty and taboo than killing a child? Well, I'll give you an answer. You eat it. So they did that.

> They were always looking for the next thing. [...] You see, other people have a sexual lust, but these people, they thirst for pain. They want to degrade and it builds up. Whatever a person can't do this month – after successive steps – they'll do the next month, y'know. And once again, they are just leading them through the paths, the people who have already been there.

Darren's account suggests that the attraction of child sexual abuse in the context of organised abuse is its illegality and immorality. It is not simply in the commission of these acts that perpetrators find power, but also in orchestrating these acts in order to *get away with it*. There are echoes of this dynamic in Anne's description of her father, when she said:

> I think he really enjoyed the "spy" aspect of getting away with his behaviour [organised abuse]. It's his proof that he's more intelligent than anyone else. He thinks he is super-smart.

Neil described an extensive and well-organised network of groups of sadistic abusers, within which the bodies of children were exchanged in kind, and children were regularly made available for sexual abuse to paying clients outside the group. His narrative of organised abuse included the themes of exchange and sadism that have been emphasised in the accounts of participants above. Neil became entrapped within the group by a stranger who lived near his family but he indicated that the abusive groups were made up largely of families dominated by abusive fathers in which there was an intergenerational transmission of abuse. As an "outsider" to the group, Neil occupied a tier within the group between the children of abusers, who were groomed to continue the tradition of organised abuse, and the "disposable" children who, born without birth certificates, were vulnerable to grievous injury and murder. As a result of this in-between status, Neil was subject to an extreme, but controlled, regime of sadistic sexual violence over eight years until his mid-teens, when the abusive group lost interest in him.

> I've got a full understanding of pain. Because of what these people did. And we were often bashed senseless. They'd use whips, belts on us. Humiliate us, degrade us in any way possible. And we had to be respectful of them and obey every word they said.

Neil identified that the structure of the abusive groups, and the families involved, was explicitly patriarchal. As an "outsider", he was given strict instructions on the relative status of adults and children within the abusive group according to their gender and age. He reported that the children of abusers were frequently enjoined to harm him by their parents as a form of training.

> First we had to obey our "masters". Then we had to obey the highest ranking person in the room – all being male. Then the male children could do what they wanted with us. Then, from there, it went back to the mothers. They could do what they wanted with us. Then to the daughters. That was the hierarchy even within the family. I mean, I was taken into – allowed by the parents for two of the kids to take me into a bedroom at times, and you know, they'd use a broomstick on me and walk around belting me on my back or legs, and I wasn't allowed to retaliate.

In addition to "group functions" in which members of the abusive groups gathered to sexually abuse captive children, Neil also described frequent commercial arrangements between his primary abuser, a man he was forced to call "master", and other men who paid to sexually abuse him.

> A lot of money changed hands over the years, and I never knew what it was for. Often I had to take a day off of school and go to his [the "master's"] place, and I would be then taken to someone else's place for a few hours in the day.

Amidst these diverse exploitative arrangements, Neil identified a small "hierarchy" of abusers who were highly-placed professionals. In addition to the sadistic ordeals that characterised Neil's experiences of organised abuse, he reported that this "hierarchy" also engaged in what he called outdoor "night-time sessions" that involved ritualistic practices. The phenomenon of ritualistic abuse will be considered in more detail in the next chapter, however, it was notable that Neil identified ritualistic abuse as the practice of a central "core" of abusers within a larger network. This suggests that ritualistic abuse may represent an escalation, or a kind of intensification, of the practices and structures that characterise organised abuse more broadly. This possibility will be explored in the following chapter.

Conclusion

Sexual abuse is frequently explained in the psychological literature in terms of the perpetrator's pursuit of sexual pleasure. Indeed, the bodily experience of pleasure in sexual abuse may have a powerful role to play in the symbolic affirmation of the perpetrator's gender identity (Liddle, 1993). In the accounts of organised abuse documented in this chapter, however, men's practices of subordination were not limited to sexual abuse, but they include a range of sadistic activities that were designed to inflict harm and injury. These acts elude explanation in terms of either profit or pleasure. In the circumstances of organised abuse identified in this study, organised sexual violence emerges as a kind of "participatory theatre" (Franklin, 2004) within which men establish their solidarity with one another as men by inflicting harm on children and women. Organised abuse was a powerful method through which power relations could be eroticised, intensified and imposed in accordance with the ideals of what Connell (2005) called "hegemonic masculinity".

Whilst the sexual exchange of children between men was underpinned by ideals of sexualised domination and control, organised abuse cannot be explained simplistically as a forum that facilitates the sexual abuse of children. Instead, it seems that abusive groups were contexts in which men engaged in sexually sadistic performances in order to establish their masculine status to themselves and one another. Cossins (2000) has emphasised that, whilst power and masculinity are interdependent concepts, power is not a stable characteristic that can be claimed by any one individual on the basis of biological sex. Rather, power (and therefore masculinity) accrues through experiences of domination within hierarchical relations. Whilst men may draw on cultural notions of masculine entitlement to legitimise their position of power over subordinated groups (such as children and women), their dominant subject positions *vis a vis* other men must be constantly reaffirmed and maintained through practices of power. The abusive groups and networks described by participants in this study were characterised by their dependence upon sexual abuse as a practice of power.

In this chapter, I demonstrated how the process of *exchange* forms the basic social architecture of organised abuse, and the consequences of this process for both victims and abusers. In abusive groups, the use of children as sexual objects through which men regulated their relationships with one another gave rise to sadistic performances in which children were reduced to a despised symbol of vulnerability and passivity within a fantasy of masculine supremacy. Sexual abuse was thus one strategy within an array of practices through which perpetrators sought to establish a relationship of domination over children and women. In such an environment, sexual violence frequently escalated in severity. "The group gives the rapist protection through loyalty

and support, but also puts pressure on the man to imitate his peers and live up to or even exceed their expectations with his actions" (Hague, 2007: 57). These acts both express and legitimate the power inequalities between victims and abusers. As Scarry (1985: 59) has observed, "Power is cautious. It covers itself. It bases itself in another's pain and prevents all recognition that there is 'another' by looped circles that ensure its own solipsism". In the following chapter, I will explore this process of legitimisation in more detail.

9

The legitimisation of organised abuse through ritual and torture

In the previous chapter, I explored how the structures and practices of abusive groups generate and affirm an ideology of masculine supremacy through sadistic sexual practices. Through the life histories of Jane, Colleen and Helena, I analysed how the exchange of children as sexual objects between men is driven by relations of gender, age and power. For Renee, Darren and Neil, this process of exchange, which served to construct an aggressive, violent masculine subculture, became characterised by sadistic practices that served to affirm the relation of domination of adults over children, and men over women and children. As I showed in my analysis of Renee, Darren and Neil's life histories, these sadistic practices have a number of functions: expressive, performative and symbolic as well as practical to the extent that they enforced the silence and compliance of victimised children and women. The majority of participants in this study reported similar experiences to Renee, Darren and Neil, but their accounts of organised abuse also featured ritualistic practices and occult beliefs. Neil's account demonstrates the overlap between sadistic and ritualistic abuse. Whilst most of the abusers who harmed him were primarily engaged in organised and

sadistic abuse, there was a subset of abusers who orchestrated a set of ritualistic ordeals that Neil stated were quite distinct from the other abuses that he suffered.

> They used to get really, really – revved up [during ritualistic abuse]. I can't think of the right word, but they used to get to such a state where they were frantic ... It was totally different to ordinary group days.

Fifteen participants in this study reported ritualistic abuse; that is, they stated that a considerable proportion of incidents of organised abuse incorporated ritualistic practices, ceremonial trappings and religious iconography. In the "psy" professions, the ritualistic practices of abusive groups have been a cause for alarm and uncertainty for over one hundred years. Confronted with a client who described recollections of ritualistic abuse, including bloodletting and genital cutting, Freud stated in a letter to a friend: "I dream, therefore, of a primeval devil religion whose rites are carried on secretly, and I understand the harsh therapy of the witches' judges" (Masson, 1985: 227). Masson (1984: 105) states: "Freud is implying here that the Sabbats were real events (part of a ritualized religion in which sexual perversions were acted out). He seems to be saying: The torture and the murder of witches are understandable, for the judges were attempting to curtail a heinous cult."

As I've explored in Chapter 1, a number of therapists have drawn similar conclusions in contemporary settings. They have suggested that reports of ritualistic forms of sexual abuse are evidence of the existence of a tradition of cult-like organisations that sexually abuse children. Such a claim finds little support in this study, which suggests that the word "cult" is an inadequate descriptor for the abusive groups described by

participants. In the life histories gathered in this study, ritualistic abuse was not a religious practice, but instead it was part of a range of legitimising practices whereby abusive groups expressed, intensified and justified the sexualised subordination of women and children. A smaller subset of participants also reported a range of "mind control" experiences, in which they were tortured by abusive groups with the apparent intention of inculcating a dissociative and amnestic reflex in the child. Some participants believed that this process had, in fact, instilled in them an automatically obedient pattern of responses, and perhaps it did. However, their descriptions of the overwhelming internal injunctions they experienced against disclosure, and the urge to obey an abuser out of fear and terror, are comparable to those participants who were not subject to "mind control". It is therefore pertinent to consider whether "mind control", rather than being a "scientific" method of controlling a child during sexual exploitation, is instead a legitimising practice comparable to ritualistic abuse. It seems that abusive groups adopted scientific *as well as* religious ideologies to legitimise their abuses and to mystify the relations of gender and age that formed the basis of their power and control.

This chapter will not only consider the role of ritual and torture in abusive groups but also theorise the significance or attraction of ritualistic abuse for abusive men. Participants in this study described perpetrators of organised abuse across the socioeconomic spectrum. However, those participants with histories of ritualistic abuse emphasised that many of the men who abused them were neither poor nor working class but often middle- and upper-class professionals. It seems therefore that ritualistic abuse cannot be explained as a compensatory gender strategy engaged in by men who are disengaged or marginalised, as Messerschmidt's (1993) approach might

suggest. Rather, ritualistic abuse was often engaged in by men who were members of religious, fraternal or business networks and who therefore enjoyed relatively privileged access to status and power. Why wasn't this enough for the men that participants described participating in ritualistic abuse? How and why did they become enmeshed within ritualistic abuse when they could have employed alternative strategies and practices of power? In this chapter, I consider the relationship between ritualistic abuse and masculine privilege and theorise on the role of ritualistic abuse in the lives of abusive men.

Ritualistic abuse and deviant scripturalism

Those participants subject to ritualistic abuse reported that their abuse included references to a range of religious mythologies, particularly Christianity, Satanism and occultism. Kent (1993a; 1993b) described the misuse of ritualistic practices within organised abuse as "deviant scripturalism", noting that abusive groups draw from a range of ritualistic traditions in the course of harming children. Participants' accounts of organised abuse were replete with examples of "deviant scripturalism". For example, Felicity's organised and ritualistic abuse took place in a local Anglican church, where she was regularly taken for abuse by her father:

> I think what they did centred around Christian, I can't say ideals, can I, but Christian symbols and worship. You know, I'm sure it wasn't Satanistic stuff, so I think it was some kind of, abomination, perhaps, of Christianity.

Seb was subjected to ritualistic abuse by a group of Catholic priests, and he also recalls the incorporation of Christian churches and iconography into his abuse:

> There's this incident – again, it's in a group setting, with the hoods on – and, ah, and one priest is saying, "the good father has the position of honour". Well, the "position of honour" was up on the table behind me, buggering me.

Sky wondered whether the kinds of "satanic" ritual practices he was subjected to as a child arose out of the relation, in Judeo-Christian theology, between evil, sexuality and women and children:

> I wonder whether the inverted Christian stuff is just … if you have an extreme Christian background, and you want to have sex, and you are raised not to have a lot of empathy for women and children – maybe that's how you justify it to yourself, that's how you form your sexuality, that's how you justify it to the kids. And then you come to believe it? I don't know.

In this study, ritualistic abuse typically occurred where abusive groups formed within and/or extended into male-dominated religious or fraternal organisations. In participants' accounts of ritualistic abuse, cultural institutions of masculine hegemony, such as Christian churches or Masonic groups, often provided the setting and the structure for organised sexual violence. Through their participation in these mainstream male-dominated organisations, participants' fathers or other abusive men made connections with other like-minded men. In their practice of organised abuse they adopted and inverted the ritualistic traditions of the organisation. By incorporating sexual violence into this ritualistic tradition, they arguably intensified the bonds between men that constitute power relations at the level of the organisation, as well as in the social order more generally. In effect, the gender regime of the

abusive group was reflective of the gender regimes of the male-dominated institutions within which they operated covertly. These were in themselves intensifications of the wider "gender order". In the abusive group, the inequities of the overarching institutional gender regime were amplified through the misuse of ritualistic traditions. It is notable that, in this study, where abusive groups overlapped with organisations that did not have ritualistic or religious traditions, then ritualistic abuse was absent. For instance, Renee's organised abuse was facilitated through a network of brothels and pornography studios connected to the adult sex industry, and her organised abuse, whilst sadistic, did not have a ritualistic component. Similarly, Darren's organised abuse was facilitated through a drug trafficking network, and whilst this abuse was sadistic and repetitive, it also lacked the ritualistic features described by other participants.

Ritualistic abuse is clearly at odds with the ethical principles of Christianity and Freemasonry. However, in this study ritualistic abuse shared a *practical* and *experiential* logic with the gender regime of religious or fraternal groups. For instance, Kate was raised within a strict evangelical Christian sect. Several local men of the sect, including her father, participated in a group that sexually abused children in satanic rituals. In Kate's childhood, her father's "dual practice" of fundamentalist Christianity and abusive Satanism was fraught with contradictions.

> It [Satanism] would have been something consciously abhorrent to all of us. We consciously were all – certainly, Mother was – talking about the goodness of God, and trusting him, and everything we stood for was against that. We were against anything of the occult, or the bad. Mum broke apart an LP of a

> singer who was maybe from some Inca group, because we thought, "Oh, that's maybe demonistic". In the belief, things could be demonistic, and they had to be wiped out, which was rather ironic. There was … ambiguities everywhere.

At a superficial level, the evangelical sect and the abusive group appear irreconcilable in theological terms, although both groups maintained a belief in Satan as an active and influential force in daily life. At the level of practice, however, both groups shared a power structure in which male authority was supreme and unquestioned. Sexual abuse was endemic within the sect, and the sect's professed ignorance of sexual matters enabled the ongoing violence of male sect members against women and children. Kate notes:

> If you did get some men who were abusive in there [the sect] – like rocks under the water – they could have one hell of a time. A lot of people have sexually abused me, in my life. The pattern started early. And of all those people, probably forty per cent were of the original religious group, although the beliefs were against abusing children. Nevertheless, it happened within them, and some from the leadership.

It seems that ritualistic abuse is a particular configuration of abusive practice that reproduces and intensifies dominant patterns of gender relations. Bourdieu (2001) has linked normative ritual practices to the domination of women and therefore ritualistic abuse may be a grossly violent manifestation of an otherwise routine and everyday practice of power. The potential for such violence is of course unrealised by the majority of members of religious or fraternal orders. Nonetheless, the violence of

ritualistic abuse is arguably a gross exaggeration of otherwise widespread institutional and social attitudes to women and children.

On a practical level, the links between ritualistic abuse and institutions of male hegemony, such as the Christian churches and Freemasonry, amplified the capacity of abusive men to maintain their control over victimised children and women. Anne suggested that her father, through his participation in organised abuse, was well-connected across business and politics. She now lives in hiding, fearful of his influence.

> And he still has his network, even in his seventies. That's what I'm still scared of him. He still has access to all those people, and, on the surface, he just comes across as such a good guy.

Neil described the abusive group as being organised primarily by an "alliance" across a range of well-placed professionals.

> Just to put things into context, you had: The judge. The police. Doctor. Um, a husband and wife team that ran a children's home. They were the most significant people in the group.

Alex grew up in a small township, in which a number of abusive men held prominent roles in local organisations, schools and churches.

> It sort of encroached into all aspects of my life, in a very concrete sense. Because of how the group … you know, basketball was another significant area of my life. And sometimes these things [organised abuse] would occur at school, sometimes at basketball, sometimes in parks close to my home. And so it was just there, even physically, it was present in all aspects.
>
> ... I don't know if it was facilitated in living in the place that I lived – it was a small community anyway. One of the men involved was a key organiser of the local basketball club and things like that. But that's easy to do when everyone in the town either plays basketball or joins Scouts or whatever.
>
> ... One of them was a local priest, one of them was the president of the basketball club who was also the local GP. Yeah. Let's just say they were influential people, definitely. Everyone knew and respected some of these people.

The overlap between ritualistic abuse and male-dominated institutions provided a power base through which the capacity of individual men to sexually abuse children became amplified through their association with other like-minded men. Acting collectively, and utilising existing systems of patronage within the institution they controlled, these men could exponentially increase their control over a victimised child to the point where organised abuse was, in Alex's words, "present in all aspects" of the child's life. Moreover, participants generally felt that the involvement of their abusers across a number of different institutions meant that they had the capacity to camouflage their activity. As May said, "These people know how to cover their tracks

and have the resources to do so." Anne connected the power of her abusers to conceal their activities with a socio-cultural environment that that invalidates and stigmatises victims of sexual violence.

> They are ahead of the game. I think they were set up and organised a long time ago. I think they are aware of the system and they've been co-existing in it for much longer then the victims. We still live in a culture where it's much better to be an abuser then to be a victim. To be a victim is just shame – you are shaming yourself if you've been a victim of anything.

Mystifying domination through ritual

The theology and practices of ritualistic abuse often involve a "B-movie" version of Satanism, described by Scott (2001: 9) as a "tawdry occultism" that makes even the hardened researcher or counsellor cringe. Lauren spoke of the gap between the "insider" and "outsider" view of ritualistic abuse:

> With victims, what can appear to be really dorky or harmless – as a child, these things, they are connected to things that are absolutely terrifying. It might seem hammy, pretending to be vampires and witches and things, but, as a kid, you've seen them go through with it.

Few participants reported that the belief systems espoused by abusive groups was particularly complex or florid. Polly suggested that her ritualistic abuse was structured by a kind of libertinism that drew on "all sorts of things" as source material for abuse.

> The devil certainly got a fair number of mentions, but I wouldn't say they were Satanists. There was this thing about needing to do good so you can do evil. So there was a belief about balance, and balancing good with evil. I think Satan gets brought in because he's very handy for terrifying small children. If I was brought up in a Hindu country, they wouldn't use Satan, they'd use whatever their religious bad guy is. But to be honest, the whole religious side – aside from terrifying the fuck out of me – I don't think I took a lot on board.

Participants often described the beliefs of the abusive group in terms of simple, gendered dichotomies: evil/good, masculine/feminine, powerful/powerless, dark/light, Satanism/Christianity. These dichotomies involved the inversion of accepted ethical and religious principles, an act of transgression associated by the abusers with masculinity and superiority.

> In the torture sessions, there were always short simple things like "Satan is good", "God is evil", "Jesus is evil", "evil is good", "good is evil". That sort of thing.
>
> Seb

> [As a child], it's like, y'know, "my real life is my Satanist life and this is just some everyday façade" and Christianity is involved in that stuff where I'm some wimpy person who is being overpowered all the time.
>
> Jo

> So you are actually put in positions of having to make choices between good and bad, Satan, God, light, dark, you know. But also with my father, he would say things like, "I am God, I am the God you must worship. I am the God you must adore. I am evil."
>
> Lily

Scott (2001: 118) noted the conflation of femininity with Christianity, and masculinity with Satanism, in the context of ritualistic abuse. In abusive groups, it seems that prestige and status accrue to the perpetrators of violence, who appear to view violence as the embodied experience of a transhistorical masculine principle of transgression, superiority and sadism signified by Satan. Simultaneously, it seems that the ethical norms of the prevailing social order were signified by both femininity and Christianity. This is not the religious Satanism of some modern neopagans, or the Satanism associated with heavy metal and teenage nihilism, both of which have been conflated with ritualistic abuse by some academics and journalists (see Raschke, 1990; Boyd, 1996). Rather, the Satanism described by participants was evocative of the "Romantic" libertine Satanism of the post-Enlightenment era, in which the principle of the masculine sexual prerogative, "red in tooth and claw", was reified as a universal and metaphysical principle . In participants' descriptions, abusive groups were less like a religious cult than libertine fraternities in which groups of men inverted orthodox Christian practices and conducted sexual rituals. In other words, "women's bodies were offered as glue for male bonding" (Sanday, 1996: 86). In organised abuse, children as well as women serve as symbols of exchange through which men seek to accrue status and prestige in the eyes of other men.

From participants' accounts, the gender regimes of abusive groups were structured according to gendered dichotomies that associate strength and sadism with masculinity, and weakness and victimisation with femininity. The ritualistic assault of a child appeared to be a performative display of masculine domination rather than a religiously motivated practice.

> It seemed a very elitist type of gnosticism. Stuff like "We are God, the masters of the universe, so we are entitled to do whatever we wish. We need to overcome our petty moral human standards which the world has imposed on us."
>
> May

The manner in which abusive groups crafted their own representation, for example through ritualistic practices or metaphysical justifications, simultaneously mystified and legitimised the relations of domination that maintained children and women in a state of entrapment. Participants reported that some abusive men actively denied their dominant status or else justified their abusive practices as "occult" or "religious" in nature. Lauren was subject to organised and ritualistic abuse by her mother and maternal grandparents. She lived with her mother and siblings in her grandparents' home, where her mother's submissiveness to her parents contrasted with her domineering role in the abusive group. Lauren stated that the abusive group claimed to venerate women above men, in an attempt to invert the patriarchal order prescribed by the Bible.

> Girls were … because you are going against the Holy Bible again – the youngest girl was held in highest esteem, instead of the oldest son. Girls were feted over the boys, which set up another round of jealousies. Especially younger sisters. The older sisters – there's a lot of jealousy and sibling rivalry, and it's intensified, so many times over.

However, Lauren indicated that the supposed "matriarchy" of the abusive group was little more than an attempt by abusive men to control women's reproductive capacity, and the next generation of vulnerable children. Through grandiose promises of status, abusive men were able to manipulate victimised girls and women, turn them against one another, and control their reproductive capacities.

> Girls get it worse than the boys. They do, because the girls are the ones that they really want to control. Because they know that, if they've got control of the girl by the time she's a woman, then they've got the next generation. And that woman will just turn her back and not worry about her own children. So it's paramount that they really, really control her from a young age.

Whilst women were ostensibly "in control" in the abusive group, they were all spouses to male perpetrators, and they endured abusive and violent marriages.

> In the day-to-day life, the men are really nose-out-of-joint aggro. A lot of abusive marriages. They are always trying to dominate. And then, when you get to the coven meetings, the women are in control, and then the men will be punished because of the home life. And it feeds it, it's a continuous loop.

> Because they've been punished there, then the home life – things gets worse. So everyone is completely miserable.

This contradiction between "day-to-day life" and "coven meetings" described by Lauren mirrors Scott's (2001: 130) observation that, in the accounts of the ritual abuse survivors she interviewed, "[a] more everyday discourse of 'subordinate femininity' in which women's place was prone or at home and which demanded obedience to father or husband coexisted with their ritual elevation." In Lauren's account, young boys were socialised into similar kinds of unequal relations with girls and women. In this excerpt, she describes her mother rewarding her brother for performances of sexual abuse and violence.

> Even though it's the women that seem to be in charge – it's a major deceit. Other than for show, they aren't in control. If we had a night or a weekend with a particular event – if my oldest brother Owen had done really well – been a really good torturer, punisher, really awful – then I'd watch him get waited on hand and foot during the day. His meals brought to him, absolutely everything done for him. And it's like – they are rewarding this really atrocious behaviour that they've demanded of him.

Lauren described a number of women (including her mother and grandmother) who actively participated in the ritualistic abuse of children. Nonetheless, she noted that their primary role was in "assisting the men", and she viewed them as victims of a larger strategy of control. Her account highlights the plight of children and women in organised contexts, and the complexity of their subordination within organised abuse.

In particular, her history highlights how religion and ritual can be used to camouflage *whilst simultaneously* legitimising power relations of gender, age and violence. The ritual elevation of women in organised abuse occurred simultaneously with their sexual subordination within abusive ordeals as well as domestic contexts.

Embedding domination in the body

In this study, the religious *mythos* of abusive groups functioned to perpetuate organised abuse by enjoining women and girls' active participation in it. The melodrama of ritualistic abuse served to imbue their experiences of abuse with a powerful sense of significance. From an early age, the organised abuse of these participants was framed as magically or spiritually significant by perpetrators. For example, some participants were told that their maltreatment was expunging them of original sin, and purifying them in preparation for an important role or event in the future. This preparation ostensibly took place through ritualistic abuse, as the perpetrators sexually assaulted the child within a cycle of ceremonial ordeals. It is important to consider how powerful these promises must be to a terrified child. In the midst of an abusive regime that is overwhelming and terrifying, the metaphysical melodrama of the group's religious *mythos* offers the child a way of making sense of her suffering. Herman (1981: 98) suggests that narcissistic fantasies of extraordinary, destructive and magical powers are a common and enduring defence mechanism amongst children subject to sexual abuse. In organised abuse, this defence mechanism is pre-empted by the abuser's promises that, if the child is sufficiently obedient, she will obtain magical powers and an august role.

> They were getting me to be, some kind of "high priestess" and all this kind of stuff. They tortured me, and conditioned me, and then I end up being used.

> Yes, it's a position of power over men and boys, but I'm used to recruit the young boys through ... through sex. Then, of course, it's pretty horrible because I'm being tortured, but I end up, I really want to be involved.
>
> … They do it from torturing you first, they give you a position of power after they have conditioned you to be what they want you to be. Basically, so you've got really nowhere else to go.
>
> Jo

Rhea described how one of her personalities, Leah, interpreted sexual violence as an expression of her primary abuser's affection for her. In Rhea's account, Leah believed that, by submitting to the abuse, she was enacting an important spiritual function as well as expressing her love for her abuser.

> As far as I can gather, Leah, who was the main OSA [organised sadistic abuse] aligned part then, she felt that she was on a par with him, that she was the high priestess of the group. But he abused her to keep her in line, but she didn't see that as being abuse. It was – this was what she needed to do, or had to do, because it was for him.
>
> Rhea

Lily recalled similar promises being made to her. Like Jo and Rhea, she also wondered whether this was not just another method of control.

> And I was always told that I was in training to be a high priestess. But I also know of a few other ritual abuse survivors who say the same thing, so I'm never sure if that's a line that is used regularly, and it's just a lie.

In this study, ritualistic abuse was a practical strategy through which women and girls were actively enjoined to participate in their own abuse. Nonetheless, participants indicated that abusers appeared to believe in the *mythos* of power and subordination that they impressed upon victims. Bourdieu (1977: 79) emphasises that, whilst social agents may possess considerable "practical knowledge" of their situation, and are able to adjust their strategies to ensure a "fit" between objective probabilities and their subjective aspirations, the pragmatic nature of these adjustments may not be recognised by the person who employs them. Social agents are often "enchanted" by the mytho-poetic logic that they use to legitimise their conduct; they suffer from "genesis amnesia" in which they misrecognise the practical and strategic qualities of their behaviour even as they behave strategically (Bourdieu, 1977: 79). In this study, if ritualistic abuse was a strategy then the perpetrators appear to have been "caught up" in it as well. Alex suggested that victims and abusers operated under the shared conviction that the infliction of ritualistic abuse, far from being harmful, was necessary and even beneficial.

> *Do you think they believed in what they were telling you?*

> Yep. I think they most definitely did. There was a whole structure to it, and an ideology, I suppose.

Such a strange thing for them to live a life where they are constantly harming people.

Yeah, but that's not how they conceptualise it at all. I don't think they even thought there was any harm. I unquestionably think that they believe that [what they were doing wasn't harmful].

Seb emphasised the likelihood that the priests who subjected him to organised abuse, Doherty and Grenham, had a personal belief in Satanism.

Was it your impression that Doherty and Grenham were believers? Were Satanists? Was it your impression that this was something that they held a personal conviction in?

Yeah. If it wasn't, then they did a good job convincing me that they did. I certainly believed, and do believe, that they were committed to Satan. He was their – authority, or permission, or excuse for doing all this. There was certainly hatred of God and Jesus. Yeah, I would say it was the driver behind it.

Ritualistic practices do not appear to have been solely a cynical strategy of control, despite the utility of ritualistic abuse in subjugating a child to organised abuse. During abusive ordeals, participants were, at times, present simply as objects to be acted upon, not as participatory subjects. The literature on ritualistic abuse often emphasises the "indoctrination" of children through ritualistic practices (Coleman, 1994; Pooley

& Wood, 1994; Young & Young, 1997). However, in this study, some participants indicated that the primary focus of ritualistic activity appeared to be on the perpetrators themselves rather than on the children who were being abused. In their descriptions of ritualistic abuse, it seems that some participants occupied a relatively marginal role in abusive ordeals. They were treated as a vulnerable body to be abused, and little effort was made to explain the meaning or significance of their abuse.

> *Are you being told anything about why this is happening?*
>
> No. No. It seems they like you to be confused and off your guard. Because then you won't question them as much. I don't think they want you to understand what's going on. They want it all disjointed.
>
> [...] I didn't feel like I was expected to contribute anything like that. I knew I was expected to cooperate. To accept and give my consent to anything they wanted to do.
>
> May

> When I was little, I don't know how much was explained to me. When I think of myself when I was very little, my sense is that I just kept doing what I was told to make people proud of me.
>
> Polly

> I was confused out of my brain as a kid. There were so many different things, so many extremely different things [going on].
>
> Sky

In participants' descriptions, it was often the *perpetrators* who were the primary focus of the ritualistic acts. These acts had a transformative quality to them. Ritualistic ordeals were occasions where "new" abusers were introduced to the practices and ideologies of the abusive group whilst other abusers were pushed towards greater extremes of sadism and violence. Participants described how "new" abusers were sometimes uncertain or frightened whilst performing acts of abuse, since their competency in the abuse of a child would determine their status in the abusive group.

> I don't know why some of them were there, or where they got involved. I do remember a case where they all had to, um, rape me, and I remember, a couple of them, you could tell that they were thinking "What the hell am I doing having sex with this little girl?" You could tell that they were really frightened, and they really didn't really want to come. I look back, and I kind of think, I don't know really how they got involved.
>
> Jo

> Sometimes you could see, in some of the perpetrators, you could tell that they were really scared, you could tell that they, they were doing this because they had to do it.
>
> Rhea

> When I was taken to this place – and I was chained to the wall, and raped – when new people came, there was an induction process. And often the men would be quite unsure. They would be hesitant. Sometimes they would be put in groups together, like, three of them, and they would all have to "perform" together. There would be themes, someone would say, "Alright, everyone today is doing this particular act to this kid."
>
> And then they would get up the front, and heaps of other people would do it, and they wouldn't. They'd freeze a bit. And my dad would come over, and be like "OK, this is what you do, this and that and that." And everyone is watching, of course. Not necessarily directly at them, it wasn't necessarily a direct pressure, but I can understand that they would be feeling it. It was definitely, it's like – you start a new job, and here's the policies and procedures, and you've got to know it.
>
> Sky

These accounts emphasise the initiatory aspect of ritualistic abuse for perpetrators, and how ritualistic acts served to induct men into the abusive fraternity of the organised group, thereby establishing relations of power between men. Children and women constitute the predominant objects of subordination within these arrangements, but the symbolic associations between dominance and violence within the gender regimes of abusive groups are such that men who fail to acquit themselves adequately in the commission of violent and abusive acts may be "feminised" and subject to subordinating practices as well. Kate observed the physical victimisation of other men in the group by the "ringleader" (that is, the dominant man within the

group) and his cronies if they weren't displaying enthusiasm in the victimisation of young children. She stated: "They would kick and bash the men if they weren't performing sufficiently."

Caputi (1987: 30) notes that sexual violence is frequently mythologised as "some mysterious force of nature, the expression of deeply repressed 'human' urges, a fact of life, a supernatural evil, a monstrous aberration – anything but the logical and eminently functional product of the system of male domination". In this study, the relations of power that structured abusive groups were often mystified by ritualistic performances in which organised abuse was construed as part of the "natural" or "supernatural" order. This process of mystification, however, occurred simultaneously for victims and perpetrators. Ritualistic ordeals usually took place on annually recurring ritualistic "feast" or "festival" days associated with the solstices, equinoxes, the victim's birthday and particular Christian holidays. The regularity of abuse, and the sacralisation of "festival" days through group *mythos*, had the function of constituting organised abuse as a *habit*, something that participants adapted to and came to expect. Participants associated abusive ordeals with both biological and cosmic cycles, which leant the demands of the abusive group a powerful aura of inevitability. It is also clear that this *mythos* resonated deeply with perpetrators as well. It seems that the ritualistic abuse transformed the dispositions of perpetrators, ushering them into an abusive brotherhood and altering their self-concept in the process. May emphasised the transformative nature of ritualistic abuse when she suggested that the ritualisation of sexual abuse enables abusers to engage in the extremes of abuse that, otherwise, would be difficult for them to enact as individuals.

> I have often wondered why they did that [the rituals] as they didn't actually seem particularly religious at all. When I think about, I see that, psychologically, the ritualisation made people feel like they didn't have to stay in their little moral boundaries – they could go across them, become capable of doing anything. Become detached from their own personalities.

In this context, "Satanic" rituals were not necessarily a form of religious activity in themselves. Instead, they were practices through which men established and regulated their relations with other men in the group whilst maintaining the distinctiveness of their fraternal bond from "normal" life. The significance of their abusive practices and metaphysical justifications rested on their opposition to an "outside" world characterised as an emasculating and constraining environment. In this symbolic arrangement, authentic masculinity can be found through the collective abuse of children and women, who are construed as the embodiment of a castrating weakness. Ritualisation imbues this abuse with metaphysical and religious overtones, thereby recasting sexual abuse as a masculine right, even a duty, rather than as a contingent and specific practice of power. Arguably, through ritualistic abuse, perpetrators not only sought to establish their respective status within the abusive group, but to establish their inherent superiority in respect to "outsiders" who belonged to a feminising world order.

Connell (1987) notes that the construction of masculinity in terms of aggression and domination rests upon the simultaneous construction of femininity in terms of passivity and subordination. In ritualistic abuse, it seems that this gender polarity was

not only embedded within the gender regime of abusive groups, but also in the way that abusive groups constructed a collective self-image in opposition to those who did not practice ritualistic abuse. Ritualistic abuse can therefore be conceived as a masculine strategy of rebellion against a social order that some men experience as disempowering and invalidating. In this way, we can understand the potential attraction of ritualistically abusive groups for some men. As Kaufman (1999) points out, it is a paradox of the contemporary gender order that many men experience their relatively privileged position in terms of powerlessness and anxiety. Since status is inherently relational, all men, regardless of social position, are subject to the subordinating practices of other men whilst simultaneously exercising power over others (Cossins, 2000).

The use of torture to inscribe and trigger obedience

Of the fifteen participants who stated that they had been subject to ritualistic abuse, nine described pseudo-medicalised abuse in which "doctors" or other abusers used a variety of techniques, usually incorporating hypnosis and/or electro-shock, to induce dissociative or hypnotic states. For some participants, this activity appeared to be designed to inculcate or induce a dissociative reflex, possibly with the intention of disrupting the child's capacity to accurately recall or report her abuse. For example, May described her father taking her to a "doctor" who hypnotised her and taught her to "float away" in the year prior to the commencement of organised and ritualistic abuse. May said that this "treatment" only occurred a few times, and ceased once her ritualistic abuse began.

> I used to have these nightmares, when I was a very young child. Of being taken to a doctor, and he would hypnotise me, and tell me to leave my body.

> And I didn't know what to make of this for a very long time. Not so long ago, I realised that this was part of the abuse. And that's how it all started ... when I was a toddler.

Other participants reported more intensive, prolonged, structured kinds of experiences. Participants described these ordeals in terms such as "mind-bending" or as a "mind fuck" in which perpetrators systematically undermined and invalidated the child's sense of reality. Seb described an incident in which one abuser, Father Doherty, repeatedly gave electric shocks to Seb whilst telling him that the abuse was not occurring, and he was feeling no pain. If he disobeyed this injunction by screaming in pain, he was orally raped.

> Doherty was sitting in front of this box. It was a metal box. It would have been maybe a little less than two feet square, eight inches high. It was sloping top front face with dials and stuff. It was kind of … ah, pale yellowy creamy colour. Black knobs. And, he's running that, I'm strapped into a chair. Wrists and ankles, bit like the old classic pictures that you see of electrocution chairs. And, I've got a baton in each hands, and there's a goo, a gum, on them as well. And, ah, I'm being told, I can't feel this, that it's not happening. And when I do, y'know, yell, Grenham forces his penis into my mouth.

Of the nine participants who reported these pseudo-medical experiences, five reported that they believed they were subject to a program of torture designed to induce DID. They claimed that this program had been carried out by a particular person, or group of people, within the abusive group who were trained in the inducement of DID. For

example, Darren spoke of a man who was sent to "break" and "train" him, using a stove to torture him and "fracture" his personality into multiple compartments:

> This was early on, and a person was sent to break me, because I was continually fighting. And they sent him in to train me, and … he had potbelly stoves and he would hold my hand up to it and that. But he was also doing maths and all sorts of stuff on paper, and – I can remember him doing stuff about how this personality – they will fracture a personality, or create a personality, that then creates personalities? So then you keep on going until you are so splintered, and so divided, that you have no particular strength left in your compartments – no compartment is particularly big or strong.

These descriptions of torture and hypnosis are recurrent themes in disclosures of ritualistic abuse around the world (see Becker, Karriker, Overkamp & Rutz, 2008). In the literature on organised abuse, such ordeals are frequently referred to as "mind control". In 1989, the Los Angeles County Commission for Women's Ritual Abuse Taskforce published their report stating that "mind control" was the "cornerstone" of ritual abuse. The report identified "mind control" as an "elaborate system" that included "brainwashing, programming, indoctrination, hypnosis, and the use of various mind-altering drugs" (Ritual Abuse Task Force, 1989). In 1992, Gould and Cozolino (1992) contended that ritually abusive groups may use "mind control" to deliberately "program" Multiple Personality Disorder (now called DID) in victimised children. The connections between ritualistic abuse and mind control have been the subject of a number of recent publications in criminology (Pepinksy, 2002; Pepinksy, 2005), law (Wright, 2005), forensic psychotherapy (Sachs & Galton, 2008) and

psychology (Noblitt & Perskin Noblitt, 2008). In 2008, the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation established the "Ritual Abuse and Mind Control" interest group for therapists, counsellors and social workers concerned about these two issues, which has grown to become the largest formal special interest group hosted within the organisation. Very little has been written on the subject in Australia, although, in 1992, the eminent paediatrician, Dr John Spensely (1992: 1), warned a conference in Melbourne that that victims of "satanic cults" with Multiple Personality Disorder "have these states induced deliberately, yes deliberately, with forethought and knowledge".

Unsurprisingly, accounts of "mind control" have undermined the credibility of narratives of organised abuse as a whole. As Bell et al. (2004) point out, claims of "mind control" are common themes in the clinical presentations of people with schizophrenia. Nonetheless, the majority of adults with histories of ritualistic abuse do not meet the diagnostic criteria for schizophrenia (Ross, 1995), and indeed there are a number of differences between their reports of mind control and those of people with schizophrenia (Lacter & Lehman, 2008). Whilst some observers have dismissed such disclosures as evidence of delusion in cases of ritualistic abuse (Richardson, Best & Bromley, 1991), there are a number of criminal cases in which complainants have reported mind control and hypnosis in relation to their claims of sexual abuse and sexual assault. Noblitt and Perskin (2000) note a number of criminal cases in Northern America and elsewhere that have with significant parallels to reports of mind control. In these cases, "women were sexually abused in trance states that were induced powerfully and quickly caused the women to lapse in their normal, self-protective behaviours" (Noblitt & Perskin, 2000: 82). In Australia, hypnosis and brainwashing

have featured in a number of child sexual abuse prosecutions. For example, Robin Fletcher was convicted in 1998 on multiple child sex charges relating to the sexual abuse of two girls. Posing as a counsellor, Fletcher used hypnosis, drugs and threats of "black magic" to coerce two children into sexual abuse and child prostitution (Petraitis & O'Connor, 1999). In 1997, Brisbane school counsellor Kevin Lynch committed suicide after being charged with seven counts of indecent dealings with minors. Over ninety former pupils claimed to have been sexually abused by him over a twenty-year period. In many cases, Lynch used hypnosis to induce amnesia or repression of the abuse, and several victims reported feeling that they often left his office "in a fog" (Grant, 2005). Allegations of hypnosis and torture have also arisen in relation to claims of sexual abuse by a group of priests and teachers at a school in Bathurst, New South Wales (Kontominas, 2009).

In the literature, there is considerable overlap between the activities labelled "ritual abuse" and those labelled "mind control", to the point where the two terms are often used interchangeably. The term "mind control" tends to describe experiences or processes of abuse with pseudo-medical aspects (for instance, abusers dressing as doctors and wearing white coats), particularly where trance or dissociative states have been induced and reinforced in order to inhibit disclosure and coerce the child's obedience (a process also referred to as "programming"). However, "mind control" is a term used more broadly to emphasise the functional or purposive nature of many abusive practices in organised abuse. In contrast, "ritual abuse" tends to refer to experiences of abuse with religious or occultic overtones (for instance, where abusers wear ceremonial robes), although the term may describe any sadistic, repetitive practices that occur in organised contexts. The term is often used to emphasise the

similarity between sadistic abuse and more explicitly ritualistic conduct and thus can imply a potentially ideological or religious motivation behind sadistic abuse. In short, the terms "ritual abuse" and "mind control" often refer to the same practices, and the distinction between them hinges on assumptions about the motivations of perpetrators. In the literature on organised abuse, these presumptions can seem quite arbitrary, and lacking detailed or critical engagement with either eyewitness testimony or theory and research on child abuse and violence.[27] These ambiguities were present in this study, since a small number of participants had been, or were, in contact with groups and networks of ritual abuse survivors and specialist therapists.

Nonetheless, where participants used terms such as "programming", "brainwashing" or "mind control", they frequently did so in reference to abusive ordeals that had a number of pseudo-medical or scientific-experimental aspects that distinguished them from other experiences of organised abuse. For example, Cara was subject to organised and ritualistic abuse by her parents, who, along with her maternal grandparents, were involved in an abusive group that operated under the auspices of Freemasonry. In addition to ritualistic ordeals, in which she was subjected to sexual assault and torture alongside other children, Cara also reported a concurrent form of abuse that she described as "colour programming". From the ages of three to seven, Cara reported that she, her sister and a number of her cousins were subject to a bizarre regime of abuse in which the abusive group attempted to imprint them with an

[27] Although the literature on organised and ritualistic abuse indicates that adults and children with such histories present in a variety of contexts, there appears to be a preponderance of religious (particularly evangelical Protestant) counsellors in North America who are specifically concerned with ritualistic abuse and Dissociative Identity Disorder. This may explain the purchase which evangelical conspiracy theories, such as speculation about a network of global elites called the "Illuminati" (Ruotsila, 2004), have found amongst some counsellors working with ritually abused clients (e.g. Hammond, 1992). Conspiratorial explanations of ritualistic abuse typically attribute "mind control" experiences to a secretive agenda within the American government and/or a global Satanic conspiracy, corresponding with far-right Christian fears of an impending "New World Order". As Summit (1994b) notes, such conspiratorial views can be adopted by otherwise non-extremist therapists and counsellors working with ritually abused clients due to the impact of vicarious traumatisation.

internal configuration of the symbol of the Order of the Eastern Star. Just as the logo of the Order was coloured blue, yellow, white, green and red, the abusers sought to craft within Cara a corresponding personality configuration. In the following excerpt, she describes how this process began:

> In the beginning, I was being asked very simple questions, like "Are you red or blue?" And it's like, "Well, I'm neither, I'm not a colour." But that's not the right response, and an electric shock is used as a negative deterrent. The question would be asked again, "Are you red or blue?" So you make a choice, "OK, I'm red." And there's no shock. So they seem to be able to produce a line of thought in me that would create different parts of me. And I would give them the response that they wanted to prevent myself from being tortured further. And that's how the parts were created, those electric shocks.

These ordeals were distinct from Cara's victimisation in ritualistic abuse: they took place on different days, and were committed by different people, including one in a "white lab coat". Cara said that these "programming" ordeals took place frequently until, at the age of seven, Cara's grandfather died, which seemed to loosen the ties that bound Cara and her family to the abusive group.[28] Her father then took a job interstate and moved the family away, which brought Cara's victimisation within organised abuse to an end, although her father continued to sexually abuse her until

[28] In their qualitative research with survivors of ritualistic abuse, Sarson and MacDonald (2008: 424) interviewed a woman who indicated that her ritualistic abuse ended following her grandfather's death, since he was "considered to be the leader of the group". In this study, Lily also suggested that her victimisation came to a premature end with her father's death whilst she was in her mid-teens, whilst Isabelle's abuse was disrupted in her teens following her father's death, although her brother and other abusive men continued to stalk and terrorise her into adulthood.

she left home in her late teens. In adulthood, Cara has found that her sister also recalls this abuse, with some small differences:

> Because my sister remembers the same things – underground chambers – she just remembers them in a line, I remember them in a circle. She remembers hearing our cousins scream, but I don't remember hearing them scream, but being aware that they were there, in the other rooms.

Cara used the term "programming" to refer specifically to the pseudo-scientific abuse that she had endured, while other participants used the term more generally to describe how their abuse had structured their consciousness and awareness in ways that perpetuated their subservience to the abusive group.[29] For example, what Jo identified as "programming" and "mind control" was not limited to torture techniques, but could include the repetitive reinforcement of themes of domination, submission and control.

> This guy ... who was in charge, he knew what he was doing. When I think about it now, and from what I've picked up along the way, it's standard torture techniques, it's standard mind control techniques. He knew exactly what he was doing. He even said things like, at Christmas time, "Oh, you don't have presents, you know? They all belong to Satan." And so everything, any sense of ownership, was taken away, even everyday festivities and things like that.

[29] This broader use of the term "programming" has its antecedents in discussions regarding brainwashing and thought reform in cults (e.g. Ungerleider & Wellisch, 1979).

Jo also described a set of "mind control" experiences committed by men that she believed were doctors. Significantly, however, she suggested that these experiences of torture were part of the broader ideological continuum of her abuse:

> There were these doctors and they were interested in the whole "mind control" thing. But they were also interested from a spiritual thing point of view as well. It was like, it was almost like ... sounds pretty horrible, but it was almost like an inter-disciplinary torture-Satanist-doctor thing, and they were interested in how all these mechanisms of the brain, and mind control and the spiritual thing and how all these things were interconnected.

As a child, Jo earnestly believed in her role as the "high priestess" of the abusive group. Through this rationale, the abusive group legitimised Jo's rape and torture, and enjoined her participation in her own abuse. Similarly, the "mind control" ordeals described by Jo also resulted in durable changes to her apprehension of herself and her consciousness. She links the "mind control" abuse to her impression of machines installed in her brain, monitoring her all the time.

> I've had impressions, when I've had therapy in the past, to do with de-programming, and I've had impressions of things stuck in the back of my head, like, figuratively speaking. Maybe literally as well, but in your hypothalamus or whatever, it's like things stuck in my head, like tape recorders going and things going in my brain.

Sky described his organised abuse as structured by a set of connected "themes" that, he feels, were variations on the same abusive practices. As a child, his abuse predominantly involved "the ghosts" – that is, men and women would come to his house, and they and his parents would dress in robes, and subject him to ritualistic abuse. This abuse included references to the coming apocalypse and the end of the world. In his early teens, the emphasis of the abuse began to change: rather than wear robes, the abusers began to wear medical outfits, or suits, and claim to be "the government" engaging in "experimentation". However, Sky maintains that these were the same people as those who had previously worn "robes" and told him they were supernatural "ghosts".

> And then there were the "doctors". And, again, as a kid I didn't understand. I guess, when I hit about eight or nine, I remember trying to figure out what was going on. But I couldn't understand why I couldn't move, I was just paralysed with drugs, and didn't know where I was. But they'd all be dressed up in white, I'd be put on this table – I remember them in the same marching pattern, the same number of people as the supposed "ghosts". And then tortured with electricity.

Sky experienced great uncertainty about the truth claims of the abusive group. Sometimes they claimed to be acting out of religious or spiritual conviction in the coming apocalypse, other times they claimed to be working for the "government".

> I was brought up to fervently believe that the apocalypse was coming. And a lot of the theme was to do with the end of the world, blah blah blah. [...] Then,

> when I hit 13, "the government" theme appeared in my day-to-day awareness. And my understanding of it, I was just confused out of my head. I was like, "Why is the government interested in me? Like, seriously, I'm a kid, what do they want?"

Such accounts raise the possibility that ritualistic abuse and "mind control" are two sides of the same coin – practices of power that employ different ideologies (one religious, the other scientific) to reinforce the relations of domination in abusive groups and make the abuse appear both inescapable and inevitable. By connecting his abuse to the "government", Sky's abusers crafted the impression that they could locate and harm him if he attempted to escape or evade them. In interview, Sky was still very fearful of the abusive group. Whilst he was uncertain that they were connected to "the government", he was nonetheless terrified of the potential consequences of resisting or disobeying a direct order from the abusive group, since they claimed that the FBI or some other government agency would track him down if he did not do as he was told.

"Mind control" practices, like ritualistic abuse, may also be justified to the child by attributing great significance and importance to sexual victimisation. Sky was told that it was a privilege to have been selected by "the government" to be abused: "Like, it's an honour to do things for them, it's an honour to die for them, it's the greatest honour to be picked for them. It's my destiny." Like Sky, Polly also reported being told that, having been selected for a "mind control" program, she was one of the "elite". The psychiatrist who subjected her to this abuse, Christian, told her that his rape and torture of her had an important scientific purpose, namely:

> To be able to make a person do anything. To have complete control over a person. To reorder – I don't know how to explain it. It's like, you become an object. You stop being a person, a human being. It was his craft. He used to say that I was his instrument, and he was the instrument maker. "And together we are going to make beautiful music."

Polly's account of her "mind control" illuminates the complex emotional dynamics that survivors of organised abuse may have in believing, and adopting, particular explanations for their organised abuse. In Polly's description of her childhood, Christian was the closest thing she had to an attachment figure. By adopting the proposition that Christian's torture of her was "mind control" research, Polly was able to preserve a rare sense of attachment in a life that had often been devoid of opportunities to experience love and support:

> When I was sold into that [mind control] program, or given into that program, or whatever it was – there was never any love or care in my family – and any approach that I made to a member of my family was rejected. I was rejected. I was pushed away. And forced to bond with this man. And I did. And he was, you know, compared to everyone else in my life, he was the best of a bad lot.
>
> There was nothing sadistic about him. Mind control was a science. And there were all these distasteful things he had to do as part of his work. But he didn't enjoy them, he didn't get off on them. And so I have this really strong sense

> with him that these were necessary evils to try and achieve what he was trying to create.

Through the frame of "mind control", Polly was able to minimise Christian's rape and torture of her as "distasteful things he had to do as part of his work", and thus maintain her sense of affection for him. Nonetheless, her conceptualisation of Christian as a "scientist" with no personal investment in his "work" of rape and torture was frequently disrupted by her own narrative. Despite her repeated insistence that Christian "wasn't sadistic, he wasn't violent, he wasn't awful", she also described the pleasure he found in watching children fight and struggle during rape and torture:

> I remember him saying to me once, that nothing interests him about broken people. He wants people who still have something intact and will fight him. He wants the challenge. And so I've got lots of memories of him, when I was a kid, because I'm fairly feisty, and I've got some feisty alters, where there would be this active resistance in the middle of a session – and the smile would come on his face and his eyes would twinkle, and this little chuckle, and this genuine enjoyment of this feisty child … that would present a challenge to him.

Polly's conceptualisation of her sexual abuse and torture as a form of scientific "research" was contradicted by her admission that Christian appeared to be sexually attracted to children:

> But I think, with Christian, when I look at how he was with adults, he really had a thing for kids. And I'm aware of a lot of grief about losing him, about him losing interest in me as I got older. By the time I was seventeen ... I would still see him – whenever I went home – but the relationship wasn't the same any more.

The pseudo-scientific trappings of "mind control" may function much like the religious overtones of ritualistic abuse, legitimising the abuse and enjoining the victim to participate in her own exploitation. This practical but symbolic relation may explain why the two forms of abuse frequently co-occur, and why it is frequently unclear where ritualistic abuse ends and "mind control" begins. Polly's description of Christian's "mind control" program includes references to prolonged confinement, sensory deprivation, and torture with snakes, spiders and insects, and possession by "the beast", all of which are well-identified features of ritualistic abuse.

> There was a lot of electroshock. Of all sorts of different voltages. Confinement in small, dark places with creepy crawlies. Which is always revolting. I can remember one session that happened, when the two overseas visitors were there, and it was a session about silencing. The Canadian guy had a huge praying mantis that he kept putting in my mouth. And I was strapped down with my mouth strapped wide open. With all these references to "I can see the beast right inside you" and "My my, you have a big mouth" and all this stuff. And he killed a spider and I had to swallow it. Using a lot of those archetypal things that humans are instinctively terrified of. Spiders, snakes. A lot of that kind of thing. Sensory deprivation, isolation. There were drugs used. And

> some of the programming just went on and on and on. It was this real, progressive activity, wearing me down. This prolonged torture.

Many of the "mind control" ordeals described by participants had similar themes to other sadistic ordeals in which they were threatened not to disclose their abuse and/or express pain. Having been reinforced through torture, these injunctions were experienced by participants as automatic, overwhelming and persistent. The relationship between the "mind control" torture and their ongoing experience of embodied inhibitions against disclosure persistently reinforced participants' belief in the efficacy of "programming".

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore whether "mind control" ordeals in fact have the effects attributed to them by participants and by the literature on organised abuse more generally. It should be noted, however, that the powerful internalised injunctions against disclosure or help-seeking described by participants subject to "mind control" are very similar to those described by participants who were not subject to "mind control". In organised abuse, it is unclear that "mind control" ultimately results in a greater degree of control over the victimised child than achieved by perpetrators who did not employ "mind control". In this study, many of those participants who did not describe "mind control" also demonstrated the same prolonged tendencies towards obedience and silence. This observation disrupts the "scientific" justification of "mind control" as a functional method of control and instead highlights its similarities with ritualistic abuse and other practices that serve to legitimise organised abuse. Indeed, in the broader social context, just as religion is a domain within which masculine domination is simultaneously sacralised and

mystified (Bourdieu, 2001), so too has scientific authority traditionally justified men's dominance over women and children (Harding, 1986). It may be that, in abusive groups, religious and pseudo-medical/scientific ideologies serve to inform the abusive practices of the group and thus serve as an ideological framework within which abusive men craft and enhance experiences of domination and superiority.

Ritual, torture and symbolic violence

In much of the literature, ritualistic abuse and mind control have been identified as the primary means through which victimised children and women are subjugated by abusive groups (Sinason, 1994; van der Hart, Boon et al., 1997; Noblitt & Perskin, 2000). Sceptics such as Lanning (1992a), Coons (1997) and La Fontaine (1998) have responded by claiming that such crimes are so serious that it would be impossible to commit them without detection. The findings of this study challenge both of these premises, suggesting instead that the extraordinary violence of organised abuse often overshadows, to observers as well as victims, the role of what Bourdieu (2001) called "symbolic violence" in the imposition and maintenance of victims' subordination to abusive groups. The term "symbolic violence" refers to durable patterns of social practice and interaction across interconnected institutions (such as the family, the state and the school) that lend the arbitrary and contingent logic of social life the appearance of eternal and ahistorical fact (Bourdieu, 1965). As I've argued, sexually abusive groups and networks are not the product of strange, exotic conspiracies, but instead they arise out of the everyday power inequalities between men, women and children across the interconnected institutions of families, schools, churches and the state. Bourdieu (2001) has observed that states of domination are not shaped solely (or even mostly) through overt violence. Such relations are crafted in everyday life

through the myriad of unspoken prescriptions that reinforce the subordinate place of women and children.

In this study, the relations between men, women and children in organised abuse did not originate in sexual and physical violence; instead, organised abuse reproduced the symbolic divisions of gender and age that characterise the social order, and perpetrators utilised physical and sexual violence to legitimise and amplify these divisions. Through organised abuse, the "symbolic violence" through which relations of gender, age and power are constructed and maintained by social institutions was augmented by abusive and traumatic practices that embedded the relationship of domination within the victim's experience of her body as subordinated, shameful and dehumanised, and the perpetrators' experience of his body as dominant, superior and even super-human. Bourdieu (2001: 23) calls such a process the "somatisation of the social relations of domination", a process as pervasive as it is subtle. In organised abuse, it was achieved through two simultaneous operations: firstly, the abusive group drew from the symbolic inscriptions made upon gendered bodies in contexts of masculine domination. Harmful and abusive practices then condensed these symbolic associations to the point where the victim came to internalise a view of herself that was in harmony with the view of her abusers.

Crossley (2004: 39) notes that "the value of the ritual" is "its capacity to 'condense' meaning and circumvent verbal negotiation". In ritual, the exhaustive lists of rules that govern acceptable conduct do not need to be articulated or discussed, because "The ritual brings them to pass" (Crossley, 2004: 40). The indisputable finality that is implicit in ritual practice was an important feature of participants' experiences of

ritualistic abuse. In participants' accounts of ritualistic abuse, the abusive group integrated sexual assault and taboo substances into ceremonies of degradation that resulted in the victim internalising a profound sense of shame and dehumanisation. For example, Kate describes how vaginal, oral and anal rape were part of a continuum of sexually abusive practices in the abusive group that included bestiality, the mutilation of animals, and the forced ingestion of animal faeces, blood and flesh.

> So they would hurt their own children, then they would hurt the others' [children] as well. And they would use vaginal and oral and anal entry. They also forced – they would force – they did it to me – your face onto the genitals of the black dog. And then they tried to make you eat the faeces of the dog. And when they killed the chicken, they tried to get you – they would put it into the bowl, and they'd push your face towards it – and they tried to make you drink it. Which I refused. And when they killed the goat, the flesh was warm and they tried to make you eat it. It was horrible.

Such an account emphasises the psychodynamic dimensions of penetration in sexualised torture, in which the body is invaded not only by the penis of a man or dog, but through the forced ingestion of filth and waste. What is notable in participants' accounts of ritualistic abuse was the effort to which abusers went to in order to structure gang rape and torture in such as a way as to create, for the child as well as for others present, a sense that the child has been "marked" or fundamentally altered in a way that not only precludes her from the fraternal solidarity of the abusers, but from an authentic sense of union or belonging within the broader social order. Through ritualistic abuse, abusers seek to exile the child to the realm of what Kristeva

(1982) described as "the abject"; all that is "radically excluded" from the symbolic order and the world of social relations (taboo substances such as corpses, sewage and vomit). Kristeva argues that the construction of meaning and relations are premised upon the extrusion of knowledge of such phenomena from awareness:

> A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not **signify** death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses **show me** what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being (Kristeva, 1982: 3, emphasis in original).

In ritualistic abuse, all that is extruded from the symbolic order is made synonymous with the selfhood of the child, who becomes, to herself as well as to her abusers, the embodiment of all that must be quarantined from the social order. In ritualistic abuse, the child is forced to take into herself an array of taboo substances, and in doing so, she experiences herself as synonymous with those substances. Anne spoke powerfully and disturbingly of the "sewage cesspool inside myself"; May had felt she was "this corrupted, violated, horrible person"; Lily learnt that "if I loved somebody, they died" because "I'm poisonous, and if people touch you, if they love you, if you love them, the poison that is within you will kill them." Through violent degradation and ritualised exposure to taboo substances, the child is assigned to a non-place beyond the hope of comfort or love. She is treated as a vessel and source of contamination,

and she comes to share the view of her abusers that she must be extruded from the social compact between persons.

Indeed, it seemed that it was through collective participation in the extrusion of children that abusive groups constructed and affirmed the "sacred" bonds of their masculine fraternity. The accounts of participants show that abusive groups embody a gender order in which maleness is synonymous with personhood, and this relation could only be maintained through the constant ritualistic cleansing of the "feminising" influence of women and children (as symbols of vulnerability, decay and death) from their idealised body politic. In his account of the portrayal of sexual violence in Western cultural production, Kramer (1997: 259) observed:

> At a visceral level, misogyny expresses itself by identifying femininity with filth. Stray, formless matter, oozing liquids and the stains they leave behind, become both the signs that betray the true character of the feminine and the traces that women accordingly seek to cover or erase. The feminine is that which has to be cleaned up. If necessary, it has to be scoured.

As symbols of feminine contamination within a milieu that idolised the aggressive and violent exercise of power, the captive women and children described by participants were not simply objects of derision but targets of outright and vicious hatred. In abusive contexts, they became the legitimised focus of every rape myth, every sadistic misogynistic fantasy, every outrage and atrocity that a man could commit against a child or woman. Whilst the practices of abusive groups are undoubtedly extreme, the similarities between this gender regime and prevailing

structures of power are unmistakable. Since the time of de Sade, the image of women and children as unclean symbols of a corporeal "nature" over which men must establish their domination and, thus, affirm their self-identity as men has permeated gender relations (Cameron & Frazer, 1987).

In participants' accounts, this "cleansing" of the feminine took symbolic and literal forms. Kristeva (1982) suggested that the corpse is the paradigmatic example of the abject: it places us "at the border of my condition as a living being" (p 3), it is "death infecting life" (p 4). It is telling that, in this study, a number of participants recalled being forced into prolonged contact with dead bodies. This contact was disturbingly intimate; the child did not simply witness a corpse, but was forced into the subject position of a corpse. For example, Jo recalled an abusive ordeal in which she was placed in an open grave and told she no longer had a soul:

> They also did various rituals, I can remember one where, they had, this one scared the hell out of me, I think they dug up a grave, and put me in it and stuff and started putting dirt on me and said "Jesus is killing your soul" kind of anti-Christian type things ... just rituals that they did ...

Polly was subject to a similar ordeal by her grandfather, in which she was required to accurately mimic the properties of rigor mortis:

> My grandfather, there was some ceremony where he had to place me in the ground and bury me. And he trained me for it – and I remember, I was quite little, just three or four, and I remember trying to make him proud of me.

> Trying to do it right. To not struggle, to keep my body limp but not totally limp, to go through it all according to how I'd be trained. To make him look good.

Polly lived with her mother and sister on her grandparents' property, where they ran a nursing home. When a resident died, her grandmother would force Polly to share a bed with the deceased for a night:

> So if one of the residents died, which happened fairly often, because they were very old and frail – hopefully, they weren't assisted on their way – but one of the things my grandmother would do, is she would come and get me from my bed, and take me into the room where they kept the dead body. There was one particular bedroom in the room where they would place the body until the undertaker came. And she would make me sleep with the dead body, naked, skin on skin. And when the nursing home closed down, that room was given to me as my bedroom. Of all the bedrooms they could have given me, that was the one.

Through these ordeals, abusers disrupted the child's sense of belonging within the social/symbolic order and effected an enduring transformation in the child's sense of self. They crafted an alternative subject position for the child in which she was a non-subject, synonymous with a corpse, an exile from both the social order and the subcultural hierarchy of the abusers. Polly's non-status as a child who was also a living corpse, having undergone both burial and disinternment, was reflected in the treatment she received living under her grandparents' roof. She was treated not only

as defiled object but as a source of defilement. She was not allowed to sit on the furniture within the house. She was frequently denied a bed at night and forced to sleep on the floor, or else collared and chained up outside the house. In her words, she "wasn't even a little girl" to her family but something else entirely, something non-human and untouchable.

> Even when we were sitting in the lounge at dinner time, watching television, I was not allowed to sit on the furniture. I had to sit on a wooden box. So I had this role in the house, where I wasn't part of the family. And I've never felt like I had a family. The group has become my family. And if I was upset or hurt, as a child, I had no one to turn to for comfort or reassurance. Or anything.
>
> [...] My grandmother would come and get me from my bed at night time – I would have been about eight or so – and she gave me a choice, I could either be a dog for the night, or I could be her slave. And being her slave meant that I had to sexually service her, and then I had to sleep on the floor at the foot of her bed, no blankets or pillow. Or, if I chose to be a dog for the night, I would be chained up under the house all night. So that message, that I wasn't even a little girl, I wasn't a part of the family.

Anne described how the abusive group enacted a range of ordeals that were designed to craft a subject position for her at the symbolic borderline of life and death. She was brought into contact with murder and death and the possibility of her own death was made vividly real to her:

> I also have a memory of being held over an acid bath. The reason why I know it was acid is because they put things in it – bones – so that you knew that there was no way you could survive.

The abusive group frequently terrorised Anne with a black dog and sat her in the midst of a writhing pile of snakes. Anne recalls her father's anger during an incident in which she failed to display any fear of these snakes, possibly due to the effects of the sedatives she was given prior to organised abuse. Anne's son Jimmy, who began disclosing victimisation by Anne's father when he was three years old, also spoke of being terrorised with snakes.

> Jimmy brought it up, and he said it like I should already know – "Grandpa uses snakes, and he always tried to tell me I was poisoned." And Jimmy did say to me that he felt sick after some events like this, so maybe Dad does try to make the snakes bite you.

It seems that Anne's father employed non-venomous snakes as part of a performance in which the child's very nature was purportedly transformed into a venomous poison. In this sustained process of abjectification, Anne's parents employed their faeces and urine, and mimed murdering their grandchild in an oven:

> And that night, Jimmy said to me, "They didn't give me anything to eat or drink. They peed and pooed on me. They scrubbed me in hot water to get the

> poo off. The shower was too hot. Grandpa put my head in the oven. Made me scared. I got nearly an asthma attack."

The forced ingestion of human waste is one of the most frequently reported forms of torture in children's and adults' reports of ritualistic abuse (Snow & Sorenson, 1990; Jones, 1991; Waterman, Kelly et al., 1993), and an obsessive preoccupation with faeces and urine has been noted amongst children with a history of ritualistic abuse (Gallagher, 2001). In his account of organised abuse, Neil also recalled how the abusive group utilised urine and faeces as part of the routine degradation and dehumanisation during group meetings:

> They pulled out a bottle from the fridge, uncorked it, filled up a glass and bought it to me and said, "Drink it." It was a cup of urine. One of them had pissed in the bottle and I had to drink it and tell them how lovely it was. Then they said to me, "I bet you are hungry, boy. We've got some lovely food to give you." And they pulled out a lump of shit on a plate and I had to stand there and eat every mouthful of it … and, yeah, there was some really really sickening things.

Within traumatic ordeals in which they were forced into contact with death and blood and human waste, participants' views of themselves ultimately came to accord with the view of their abusers. They came to experience themselves in terms of abjection; poisonous or dangerous to others, hated by society, and trapped in the unclean prison of their selves. These participants came to experience organised abuse as an inevitable and natural extension of who they were; that is, they internalised their non-status as

objects or property who can only achieve value through abuse. The over-arching gender regime of the abusive group, in which all children and women are viewed as non-persons without status or rights, was not perceived directly by participants, who at the time of their abuse were concerned with the all-consuming question of their own survival. Rather, they learned their individual place within the abusive hierarchy in the visceral terms of pain and powerlessness. The degree of terror and pain experienced during abusive ordeals was of an order that participants' capacity to take note of their surroundings, or even the plight of other victimised children, was inhibited. At the moment of torture, their awareness shrunk to the immediacy of their agony and they could take note of little else. Polly felt that this was the natural response of a child to abuse, and she suggested that it was reinforced by the abusers as well:

> I think that, sometimes, when I first remember something [an incident of abuse], I only remember myself as the only child there. And I make sense of that in terms of, well, when you are a child, you are the centre of your own universe, and so what happens to me takes precedence in terms of memory.
>
> But the other factor is that, I have a feeling that, the abusers almost encourage that narcissism – the belief that the abuse makes you important in some way. That you are the chosen person. But when I take a step back, there are other children there. It just feels like it's only happening to me.
>
> I think that there is like psychological reasons for that – defensive reasons why it feels like it only happens to you. And I think, as survivors, it's important

> that we challenge that. And take a step back, and say "Hey, we aren't the only people in the universe, there were half a dozen kids there being tortured."

Within organised abuse, the only status offered to the child or woman came through their efforts to "be good"; that is, when they denied or overcame their non-status through obedience and participation in organised abuse. Having been symbolically condemned, children and women could exercise some degree of power in organised abuse by accepting the annihilation of their self-determination and adopting the forms of resistance that are an expression of powerlessness and appear as forms of capitulation and complicity. As mentioned above, a number of participants became active in facilitating their own abuse; they came to experience torture and abuse as a form of status-building or an expression of affection. The logic of this relationship is circular: the victim must continually establish her worth through participation in organised abuse in an effort to overcome her dehumanisation within organised abuse. Lauren noted the veneration of her mother as the "occult queen of Australia" within the abusive group; nonetheless, her mother was simultaneously being subject to terrorisation by her abusive parents, and in turn participated in the sexual abuse and ritual abuse of her own children. The opportunities for women and children to exercise power within the conditions of organised abuse appear to have been limited to facilitating their own abuse, participating in the abuse of others, or else attempting to exercise "occult" or "magical" powers.

All these actions ultimately reaffirm representations of women and children as maleficent and deserving of abuse and harm. The strategies through which a woman

or child may seek to negotiate a sense of efficacy or worth, therefore, reproduce the very conditions to which they are subjugated.

> If I … didn't act a certain way that was required - sexually, mainly, that was the biggest thing – it was like, I always grew up with this sense of: "Our body's a sacrifice, and we're just there for their pleasure. And somehow, we're evil, and the only way that we are going to get some form of repentance and get our soul back, because we don't have one, is if we comply and do what is expected of us." Whatever the fuck that is.
>
> Isabelle

> There was always this sense that I could change it [stop the organised abuse] if I was different. It wasn't like "I'm just that type of person and I can't change", it was like – "I'm choosing". Yeah, "I'm choosing this".

So you are choosing to be the bad person that you are? How could you no longer be this bad person?

> Yeah, that was the question I was asking too. I wasn't quite sure how, but there was a sense that I just wasn't doing the right thing, but I could. There was this intangible thing of "goodness" that I could strive for. And it was like everyone else – the majority of people – were "good" – it was like a good and evil comic book thing. Yeah, it was like a comic book. I was the evil that the rest of the world is trying to fight.

Alex

It was through their corporeality or physicality that participants learnt the terms of their "non-status" and were forced to internalise representations of themselves as degraded and shameful. Traumatic ordeals incorporating rape and torture were the primary means through which an "unclean" identity was revealed to participants during abuse. The insults of perpetrators and the legitimising *mythos* they employed only served to reinforce a message that had been more forcefully conveyed through the embodied experience of pain. However, participants' experiences of abuse were not limited to unpleasant sensations. All the potentialities of the body, including sexual pleasure, were harnessed by abusers in their efforts to demonstrate to children their powerlessness and the righteousness of their abuse. For example, Anne spoke of an incident in which her body's natural response to sexual stimulation was used against her by her father.

> One time, I must have responded, and enjoyed it. And I remember my father laughing and laughing and laughing. And that is why people who have been abused don't trust even their own bodies. Because it was as if I was betrayed by my body. That's the only way a little kid can think about it. I hated what he was doing, there was something in me that understood it was wrong. But when my body responded with pleasure, it was like, even my own body gave me away.

Jo also spoke of the role that sexual pleasure came to play in her involvement in organised abuse in her teens. Like Anne, Jo spoke of this pleasure as a powerful

indicator of the extent to which the innermost spaces of her self had been trespassed upon.

> Only just two years ago, I was feeling really suicidal, like "kill myself before it's too late" type of thing. I started realising that they [the abusive group] had gotten me to the point where I felt that like I wanted to be doing all of this, getting into the rituals and into Satan and I really wanted to have the sex. And that was pretty horrible because I had convinced myself for a long time that they hadn't really got to me *really,* but really they had.

Rhea provided her personal diaries for analysis as part of this project. They were written when Rhea was in her mid-thirties and was struggling to maintain her safety from Peter, her primary abuser. Her diaries contain multiple references to the experience of pleasure in the context of abuse. In her writing, however, pain and pleasure are inherently interlinked, generating a sense of "toxic shame and guilt". In effect, her experience of subordination in organised abuse had been forcibly eroticised by her abusers. This contributed to a compulsive desire for abuse that compromised her commitment to maintaining her personal safety and autonomy. In the following excerpt, she expresses her experience that pleasure is contingent upon pain, and her desire for a world in which the two are decoupled:

> Peter makes me feel good because he is the only one I will allow to make me feel good. Peter was just like Grandpa and Dad - they hurt me Rhea so terribly I had to deny the pain by giving the pain to others [other personalities], allowing it to be theirs, I didn't have to acknowledge it as mine. Peter took

> control of my life with the pain and the pleasure, one was conditional on the other. It doesn't have to be like that anymore, and I Rhea can have the love, the warm feelings, the caring and Rhea can feel good about myself without first enduring the pain and fear.

In Lily's account, the ways in which subordination and domination were eroticised within organised abuse formed a powerful inducement to actively participate in organised abuse. She described the experience of perpetration in organised contexts in the following terms:

> It is erotic, sadistic, omnipotent. It is a surge of energy that pulsates throughout my body that is strongly sexual and I feel indomitable and full of contempt for all who are weaker than me. Truly, I can understand why people would chose to go with that energy and its illusions.

It seems that the localised configuration of gender relations within abusive groups and families produced a specific "structure of cathexis" (Connell 1987) that served to eroticise the profoundly unequal power relations that prevailed in organised contexts, sexualising the experience of rape and torture for both perpetrators and victims. A number of participants reported their own active participation in their abuse: for example, leaving the house at pre-arranged times to meet abusers in particular places and seeking out other experiences of abuse when their organised abuse came to an end. For some participants in this study, the experience of pleasure and pain became linked through organised abuse and thus sexuality became yet another mode through which they could be dominated and controlled. Lily said "… I guess it's one of the

real consequences of the abuse is the whole issue of sexuality for me. And … sex not being a good thing ". This was something of a struggle for Lily, and for other participants who sought to recast their sexuality in their own terms. In contrast, Rhea bluntly abjured sex, stating:

> I've never been able to think about sex as sort of normal stuff. We were involved in so many abnormal, weird sexual aberrations that normal sexual activity is not ... I mean, for instance, my husband and I haven't slept together for 20-odd years. Separate bedrooms, separate lives, separate everything. And that's, y'know, that's it. It just doesn't exist as far as normal stuff is concerned, and as far as I can tell, that happens to lots of people who've been involved in this sort of stuff. It's just – changes.

For these participants, the linkage between sexuality and subordination felt inextricable, which emphasises the pervasive and enduring patterns of femininity within organised abuse in terms of a sexualised submission. Whilst this submission was frequently mythologised by the abusive group as evidence of women's and girls' privileged position in a natural/metaphysical order, it was submission nonetheless, and the legitimising *mythos* of the abusive group could only partially obscure the relations of power through which women and children (girls, in particular) were held captive. A number of participants reflected with great insight on the operations of power within abusive groups. Nonetheless, the dispositional changes wrought by organised abuse persisted in the forms of schemas of perception and cognition that were extremely difficult for participants to challenge and change.

Organised abuse becomes, in effect, a self-validating strategy of power. It takes its legitimacy from the durable transformations that it imprints on the disposition of victims and the effects it exerts through them. The abusive group becomes the structuring principle that brings significance and meaning into the lives of victims, foregrounding experiences of torture and abuse over the mundane world of schooling and home. For Isabelle, the manner in which she was treated by the abusive group resonated deeply with how she came to feel about herself. When she was being subject to ritualistic abuse, she felt that she was finally "home" in a world in which, otherwise, she could never experience a sense of belonging or communion.

> That would be the best way to describe it, like I'm their property, it's like I'm going … home. And it's kind of like – home, in the sense of the house that I grew up in, never felt like home. It was more a place – place where you play pretending. I always had a stronger connection – in the most unsafe, terrifying way possible – it felt more normal to be part of the dark places and chanting and sex and people's eyes and dead things … ah, that felt more normal then school, or television, or relationships … I don't know, somehow, that's how vested the roles where, it felt like that was where we belonged.

Many years after her victimisation in ritualistic abuse has come to an end, Jo still struggled with her entrenched belief that her ordeals defined the core of her nature, whilst the mundane, everyday routine of her life was an external "shell" that lacked authenticity.

> I've been gradually building more and more and more the external of my life, and that's been coming in, instead of just being an external shell it's, all the other things have been more and more my life, and this just become ... I still feel like, you still feel like it's this core, but I do kind of feel like the other stuff is slowly kind of filling it all in, but I'm still trying to get rid of this bit in the middle.

Whilst the abusive group promised (but never provided) victimised girls with a route to redemption through subservience and obedience, male "honour" in organised abuse was found through performances of abusive sexuality. Lauren mapped out a dramatically gendered system of ritualistic abuse in which, after a period of organised victimisation, male children were progressively "defeminised" and prepared for their roles as adult men and victimisers in the abusive group. This process aimed to "virilise" the boys by stripping from them the associations of femininity (and consequent sexual victimisation) that had attended their boyhood. They were expected to establish their masculinity through an abusive pedagogical process in which they engaged in sex with dead bodies and animals.

> And the main purpose of that is that there is never, like, a human face – these boys can virtually fuck anything, there's no head, there's no humanness, there's no woman, there's no love. And then they can go on to bestiality and all that. I mean, this is a corpse.

Sarson and MacDonald (2008: 429) comment that, in their interviews with survivors of ritualistic abuse, "[s]ocialized sexual victimization and aggression was frequently

spoken of as being central to the enforcement of gender-based roles". Whilst "perpetrators tell a little girl she needs to be taught 'How to be a woman', justifying her rape", a boy "is socialised to be an aggressor; forced into sexual acts with another child, he is taught 'how to be a man'". Within abusive groups, it seems that abusive men conceptualised their "true" nature in terms of an unmitigated right – indeed, a duty – to sexually abuse children and women. In the same context, women and children are expected to find expression of their "true" nature through subservience to, and complicity, with men. Nonetheless, the gender order that emerges from participants' accounts of organised abuse is not a totalistic or inflexible one. Participants described perpetrator groups that were diverse in structure, and it is clear that some women could, and did, achieve a sense of power and status in the context of sexual exploitation. In organised abuse, women could engage in strategies of power in order to ameliorate their subordinate status, whilst men could also become the subjects of subordination. For example, Rhea described how, whilst women's role in the abusive group was largely restricted to being "victims", they took an active role in "managing" children throughout abusive ordeals. They could then leverage the information they gathered in this role in an attempt to curry favour with abusive men:

> Then there's also the times when there are groups of kids who are waiting, um, for rituals to be performed. It's often women who are looking after, um, and it's women who will trick, it's women who will get close and make you start to trust them, and then report that you've actually trusted, or acted in some kind of faith, and so then there's the brutality or the murder that comes as a result of that.

Both Sky's parents were actively involved in his organised and ritualistic abuse, much of which took place in the family lounge room. He describes his parents' relationship as close and affectionate, and he describes his mother as "the boss" at home, as well as in organised contexts.

> I still get really confused about my mum's role in this. So much of what I've read [about organised abuse] is about the woman being enslaved and captive. I think my sister is in that position. But my mum – I thought, very recently, does she have any symptoms of a battered woman? In terms of being grateful to the perpetrators and so forth? But she didn't have any of that. She's the dominant one in day-to-day life.
>
> But I do remember one event where – I don't know, there were guys on her, and I was next to her, and there were guys on me. But I just wonder, if for her it was an S&M type thing. I don't know.

Sky's memory of this scene in which there were "guys on her" just as there were "guys on me" clearly troubles him. It contradicts his perception of his mother as "dominant" and in control of her life. His example highlights the complexity of organised abuse, and how difficult it can be to neatly assign categories such as "victim" and "perpetrator" to individuals whose lives have been "permeated with abuse and its legitimations" (Scott, 2001: 130). Nonetheless, the life histories gathered in this study illustrate the iterative relationship between the gender regimes of abusive households and abusive groups, and the gender order within which these groups and families are embedded. The patterns of violence within organised abuse

overwhelmingly have women and children as their objects, and they are forced by their subordinate social and legal status to accept and adapt to this violence to the point where "the most intolerable conditions of existence" are "perceived as acceptable and even natural" (Bourdieu, 2001: 1). The compulsion of the victim to obey the abusive group (for instance, refusing to disclose, or following an explicit instruction) may feel "magical" or otherwise automatic to the victim, but the demands of the group may do no more than trigger the dispositions that have been inscribed within them through "symbolic violence" and the pain of rape and torture. This inscription may be consecrated through ritualistic abuse and "mind control", however, I would argue that such techniques are effective because of the social structures that maintain women and children in a state of vulnerability and powerless.

Conclusion

This discussion of participants' accounts of ritualistic abuse has shown how ritualistic practices serve as a legitimising practice within organised abuse. Through symbolic practices such as ritualistic abuse and "mind control", the abusive groups generate a shared reality of domination and subordination that has experiential validity for victims as well as perpetrators, grounding the practices of organised abuse within a primordial "nature". This "nature" is the metaphysical pretence that abusers give to their shared interest in inflicting harm on children and women. Within traumatic rituals in which they were forced into contact with death and blood and human waste, participants' views of themselves ultimately came to accord with the view of their abusers. The embodied experience of ritualistic abuse involved such overwhelming trauma that it became the basis for the development of a subordinated and obedient disposition amongst victims that predisposed them to ongoing compliance with sexual exploitation. In turn, it seems that such abuses also transformed the worldview of

abusers, enabling them to view victimised children and women as dehumanised and shameful, and thus legitimate objects of hatred and sexual violence.

When faced with such extreme abuse, it is easy to lose sight of their relation to the "micro-practices" of power in operation throughout in the more mundane circumstances of victims' lives. In this chapter, I have argued that, whilst "mind control" and ritualistic abuse are processes that dehumanise and degrade victims, this degradation is all the more powerful because it intensifies and legitimises the normative structures of power. It is the reproduction and intensification of the gender order within organised abuse, through practices of rape and torture, that lend the relationship between abuser and abused its concrete and inescapable quality. This relationship between the gender order and organised abuse explains why, whilst investigators may experience organised abuse as "grappling with smoke" (Gallagher, 1998b), victims experience organised abuse as, in the words of one survivor, an "almost unbreakable circle" (Carli, 1998).

In organised abuse, the linkages between masculinity, power and violence are condensed through practices of sexual violence to construct a regime of masculine supremacy that hinges on its opposition to the femininity of children and women. Lauren pointed to the relationship between organised abuse and sexual violence more generally when she said:

> I mean, out in the "real world", you see these sporting celebrities pulled into court for sexual assault and – all their "heroes" are sexual deviants, it just

> reinforces what's already been brainwashed into them [boys and men in abusive groups] and forced onto them.

On an individual level, men's "access to power, relatively speaking, is constrained by hegemonic structures of power" which gives rise to feelings of powerlessness and alienation from hegemonic ideals of masculinity (Cossins, 2000: 109). As joining a street gang is often a solution to the lived experience of class and race powerlessness (Messerschmidt, 1997: 70), so joining an abusive group may be a solution to the fear, pain and insecurities inherent within men's attempts to incorporate the omnipotent (but impossible) fantasy ideals of hegemonic masculinity.

It is too simple to suggest that abusive groups are attractive to men because they offer opportunities for sexual violence: this presumes that male sexuality is inherently aggressive and violent, which leads us into the territory of biologism and essentialism. Rather, it is through the gender regime constructed by this violence that the abusive group claims supremacy over all other men, and this transcendental sense of domination and supremacy may be the primary attraction of organised abuse for some men. Many of the institutions of male bonding, such as clubs, sporting events, card games, locker rooms, work places, professional and religious hierarchies, provide a means for men to affirm themselves, find common ground with other men, establish networks of social and professional advantage, and collectively exercise their power as men (Kaufman, 1993; Burstyn, 1999). Organised abuse may be an extreme example of this relatively common process. However the question remains: If a range of legal and relatively harmless alternatives exist for men to pursue accumulate experiences of power and prestige, then why do some men engage in the strange and

extreme practices of organised abuse? This thesis has focused primarily on experiences of organised victimisation rather than perpetration (although the two are not always distinct); however, participants' accounts shed some light on the circumstances in which adults become involved in sexually abusive activities in organised contexts.

This chapter has examined how abusive groups emerged from within mainstream religious and fraternal traditions in which masculine domination was not just an institutional norm but a basic and fundamental value. In such circumstances, masculinity was constructed through the exclusion of the "feminine" as embodied by women and children and as symbolised by vulnerability and weakness. Such arrangements resonate with the gender order more generally (Connell, 1987) and its expression in other homosocial environments associated with sexual violence e.g. fraternities (Sanday, 2007), sporting teams (Curry, 1991) and the armed forces (Kelly, 2000). However, in participants' accounts of ritualistic abuse, the homosocial traditions and institutions in which abusive groups operated were characterised by ritualistic traditions that utilised metaphysical justifications and ideologies to mystify the very gender relations that constituted them. This seemed to create a milieu that was conducive to patterns of intense psychological projection and misrecognition, as men utilised ritualistic practices to perform and affirm their dominance whilst misrecognising these performances to be religious or metaphysical in nature. Harkins and Dixon (2010: 96) have emphasised "the role that situation alone can exert on group sexual behaviour" and it seems that particular contexts are conducive to the development of ritualistically abusive groups: male-dominated institutions and networks, in which mythic ideologies of patriarchal right are enacted through ritual

practice, legitimising the sense of masculine entitlement shared by abusive men and providing them with the opportunities, spaces and resources to meet and collectively organise. In the circumstances described by participants, it seems that abusive men, operating within institutional gender regimes of masculine domination, incorporated sexual violence into existing ritualistic practices in order to experience sexualised domination in visceral terms.

The notion that violent men suffer from a surplus of masculinity or that violence is the "overflow" of natural male impulses is a common one (Messerschmidt, 1993). I propose that some men resort to organised abuse, and the extremes of violence that organised abuse can entail, not on the basis of some repressed impulse but rather in accordance with a pervasive social logic that defines authentic masculinity in terms of eroticised sadism. In the following chapter, I explore the role of transgression and transcendence in the construction of dominant masculinities. I propose that, for some men, performances of extreme violence in organised abuse are an attempt to embody a transcendental image of masculinity as control over, and destruction of, the bodies of women and children. I draw on the work of a range of feminist researchers and historians to highlight the historical antecedents of this construction of masculinity, and how a range of disciplines and fields of practice have come to incorporate the notion that men are "naturally" predisposed to eroticised sadism. It seems that organised abuse may be the product of a gender order that, whilst ostensibly forbidding sexual violence, nonetheless defines it as one of the hallmarks of genuine and authentic masculinity.

10

Atrocity and masculine transcendence

> I am always amazed when people are so staggered by the atrocities committed during war. Have you noticed they are always perpetrated by the "other" side?
>
> Lily

The Oxford English Dictionary defines an atrocity as "an extremely wicked or cruel act, typically one involving physical violence or injury". Such a description accords with many of the abusive acts reported by participants in this study. However, the word "atrocious" is suggestive of monstrosity and obscenity, emphasising acts of gratuitous violence that appear to elude explanation. I have previously discussed how many of the abuses documented in this study had strategic or pragmatic aspects. For example, practices such as ritualistic abuse or mind control, despite their apparent bizarreness, serve to simultaneously legitimise and facilitate organised abuse. However, some participants described instances in which the conduct of perpetrators, and the forms and extremes of abuse they inflicted, appeared monstrous even by the standards of behaviour we might expect from a group of sexual abusers. For example, some participants described the forcible and violent termination of pregnancies and

ritualistic practices that incorporated the tissue of the aborted foetus. A number of participants described the sadistic and sexual murders of infants, children and adults, followed by acts such as necrophilia and cannibalism. Such behaviours are difficult to conceptualise as practical or strategic. Instead, they appear to be symbolic and expressive of a worldview so alien to our own that it overwhelms our capacity to make sense of it. Our instinctive response to such acts is to "banish them from consciousness" (Herman, 1992: 1), either by denying that they could occur, or else by quarantining them as the pathological aberrations of a select few.

The atrocities described by participants have parallels with the crimes described in the literature on "sexual murder" or "sexual homicide", the "intentional killing of a person during which there is sexual behaviour by the perpetrator" (Meloy, 2000: 1). Cameron and Frazer (1987) highlight the frequency of torture, mutilation, cannibalism and other sadistic and fetishistic practices in sexual murder and link such practices to the cultural construction of masculinity in terms of sadism and sexual domination. The psychological literature supports Cameron and Frazer's (1987) contention that serial and sexual murder is a profoundly gendered act committed almost solely by men and largely against women and children (e.g. Revitch & Schlesinger, 1981; Ressler, Burgess & Douglas, 1988; Warren, Hazelwood & Dietz, 1996). Forensic psychologists and psychiatrists have blamed the gendered dynamics of sexual murder on "castrating mothers" who disrupt their sons sexual development through displays of aggression or dominance (Brittain, 1970; Revitch, 1980; Schlesinger, 1999), whilst Meloy (2000) has suggested that male sexuality is inherently homicidal. On the basis of his claim that most men have experienced the urge to murder a person they

sexually desire, Meloy (2000: 2) proposed that the infrequency of sexual murder is "a testament to the strength of male inhibition" rather than the rarity of the impulse itself.

The notion that normative masculine sexuality harbours the urge to destroy the object of its desire is at play throughout this chapter; not as scientific "fact", however, but rather as an ideology and an aesthetic that is evident in academic as well as artistic and cultural works. In the post-Enlightenment era, representations of raped and murdered women in art and literature are so common it has become a cultural cliché (Bronfen, 1992). In the 20th century, such representations have culminated in numerous artistic, pornographic and cinematic portrayals of sexual murder (Cameron & Frazer, 1987; Tatar, 1995), representations that Caputi (1988; 1989) has argued are tantamount to valorisation and celebration. Cameron and Frazer (1987) point to similar tendencies in existential philosophy, in which sexual murder was constructed as the symbolic assertion of the authentic masculine self over an inert, feminine, corporeal "nature". They argue that the symbolic construction of a "transcendental" masculine subjectivity through sexual murder is not limited to intellectual or artistic representations but instead permeate the act of sexual murder itself. Their position is that sexual murder, in practice as in its symbolic representations, reflects the eroticisation of sadism that attends the construction of culturally prescribed masculine subject positions (Cameron and Frazer 1987). In a gender order in which femininity is associated with vulnerability, decay and death, Cameron and Frazery (1987) argue that some men construct a transcendental self-identity through the rape, murder and mutilation of others. This chapter identifies the extremes of sexualised violence reported by participants as "atrocities" and explores the relationship between atrocities in organised abuse and ideologies of sex and masculinity.

Reports of atrocities in organised abuse

Participants' accounts of the atrocities committed by abusive groups were similar to those reported by other survivors of organised abuse: the torture and murder of children, infants and adults and a variety of reproductive harms including non-consensual impregnation and termination, or induced births and the subsequent murder of the infant (Driscoll & Wright, 1991; Scott, 2001; Sarson & MacDonald, 2008). In this study, reports of atrocities in organised abuse fell under three general categories:

a. Sexual murder
b. Infanticide and cannibalisation
c. Reproductive harm

I will discuss these categories in order to highlight the specificity of reports of atrocities in organised abuse. Emerging from these reports is a pattern of extreme gendered violence whose primary target is the reproductive capacities and the bodies of women and children. When viewed collectively, reports of extreme violence describe groups of men who incorporate torture and murder into structured and highly gendered performances.

a. Sexual murder

In this study, participants subjected to ritualistic abuse described a myriad of sexualised tortures inflicted upon children, women and, less frequently, adult men. Examples of these acts featured prominently throughout Chapter 9. In their accounts of sexual murder, the dehumanisation and denial of personhood that accompanied

these violent acts culminated in murder, whereupon the victim's remains were subject to abuse and mutilation. Cameron and Frazer (1987) define "sexual murder" as those acts of murder in which "killing is *itself a sexual act*" (p 17), the "eroticisation of the act of killing in and for itself" (p 18). In the act of sexual murder, the moment of death does not demarcate the end of the rape and torture of the victim. The murderer engages with the body of the victim in a manner that erases the victim's subjectivity in life *or* death. Through acts of rape, torture, cannibalism and necrophilia, the victim (alive and dead) is reduced to a vulnerable physical body that is eviscerated in the murderer's efforts to establish incontestable evidence of his aggression, mastery and control (Cameron and Frazer 1987). The research literature suggests that such acts are overwhelmingly committed by men against women and children, although a minority of sexual murderers have victimised other men (Dietz, Hazelwood & Warren, 1990; Warren, Hazelwood et al., 1996; Meloy, 2000). In this study, Seb was the only participant to report witnessing the murder of an adult man in organised contexts:

> There was one young man who was definitely in his twenties, probably late twenties, who was beheaded by Doherty. And … I had my, ah, Doherty brings the axe down on his neck, and rushes around to the front, and there's this gushing blood. And he's drinking it, he's just wild with excitement. Then he comes over, grabs me by the hair and pushes my face into the severed neck. And I'm told to drink it.

Such a description was unusual in this study. Where participants reported the sexual murder of teenagers or adults, the victim was almost invariably female. It is notable that, in Seb's report of this man's death, he does not describe any sexualised

component. In contrast, where participants reported that, when teenage girls or women were murdered, the victim was subject to a range of sexualised tortures that can only be described as "gynocide", defined by Dworkin (1976: 16) as "the systematic crippling, raping, and/or killing of women by men ... the relentless violence perpetrated by the gender class men on the gender class women." Such gynocide was present, for instance, in Seb's description of the murder of a teenage girl, which was attended by genital mutilation and the cannibalisation of her body:

> She's up on a table or something, and sitting up, but somehow reclining. And Doherty puts a knife in her vagina. A dagger. And pulls it out quickly, and cuts her. And she thinks this is great, goes wild [Seb previously suggested that this girl was drugged during abuse]. Ah. The look on her face. Um. Bizarre. Anyway, and my head's stuffed into her vagina, and the blood's smeared all over my face. So that's another little snapshot.
>
> Ah, the next thing is, ah, her death. She – she's flailing around, she's naked, and Doherty, and I think it's Grenham, are trying to grab her and get her up onto this table. And she's resisting it. Presumably, she knows what is going to happen.
>
> And in the next instance, she's lying quite motionless, so I presume they've drugged her. But I'm watching this, quite helpless. And then, um, I'm brought around to the side of the table, the dagger is put into my hands, and Doherty's hands over my hands, and it's placed on her throat. And her throat is cut, very quickly, quite deeply …

> And the next thing, I'm on the other side of the table, there's Grenham and Doherty on the other side, her body in between. And they've cut her breasts off, and they're eating them. Y'know, this is great for them, they're happy as Larry.

Neil described an occasion of sexualised murder followed by necrophilia, in which the sexual assault of a young girl before and after death constituted a joint performance between two men who characterised the child solely in terms of "a fuck".

> On one of these occasions, there was a young girl, only about three years old, that had been raped. And she actually died there. And one of her abusers looked and said, "What a waste of a fuck. Fucking little shit just died on me." And another man came over, and said, "Can I have my turn now?" And the other guy is still going aggro that she'd died. And he's saying, "Fucking little bitch, she's dead." And the other guy just looked and said, "Well, she's still warm, she's still fuckable." And he dragged her away and, you know, did what he wanted to her. And over the years there were many children who were killed, maimed and very badly injured. You know. And I can say that because I was there, I witnessed it.

The political dimension of these murders becomes clearer when we consider their performative nature. These examples of murder, cannibalism and necrophilia were not undertaken solely for the perverse pleasures of the men involved, but rather they involved a group of men acting out an all-consuming sexual aggression in front of

other men. Caputi (1988; 1989) argues that acts of murderous, sexualised violence are the product of ideologies of masculine supremacy, even as lynching is an expression of white supremacy.

> The murders of women and children - including torture and murder by husbands, lovers, and fathers, as well as that committed by strangers - are not some inexplicable evil or the domain of "monsters" only. On the contrary, sexual murder is the ultimate expression of sexuality as a form of power. (Caputi, 1989: 439)

b. Infanticide and cannibalisation

The forced murder and cannibalisation of children by children is a widely reported feature of organised and ritualistic abuse (Young, Sachs et al., 1991; Scott, 2001; Rutz, Becker, Overkamp & Karriker, 2008), dating back to the earliest attempts to prosecute organised abuse in the United States. The allegations of organised and ritualistic abuse in Jordan, Minnesota made by a number of children in 1983 included reports of the murder and cannibalisation of an infant (Hechler, 1988). In this study, a number of participants recalled incidents in which they witnessed infanticide, and were forcibly engaged in the murderous act. The abusive group typically orchestrated the murder in order to inculcate a deep sense of culpability in the child.

> The … there was, um, an incident where I was told by, um, [an abuser], to choose between an infant … ah, and a young boy - who I guessed at about age six, maybe? – who would die, and if I don't choose, then both will die. I can still remember the look on this kid's face. He knew what was going on,

exactly. Terrified. I'd seen Doherty kill before, so I was under no illusions that he was bluffing or anything. I knew this was going to happen. So I chose the infant.

Ah, he then, very quickly, slit its throat. Ah. I remember being … *shocked*, it just happened *so* quickly. And he stuck his fingers in the baby's throat, in the gash, and then put his fingers in my mouth, forced them into my mouth. And he said, "You did that. You killed her."

Seb

In the beginning of my memories, there was an incident where I thought I had killed another child. [A personality of mine] had been taught to kill with a knife. And it was set up like – I killed another child, probably the same age, around seven. And then the next day, I saw something dead against a tree in the bush. Which necessarily, as I integrate all that as an adult, it's kind of like, "It may not necessarily have been a person, it could have been a dead sheep cut up, just the insides." But at the time, it felt like I had killed someone. And to this day I still couldn't tell you if I had or not.

Cara

I remember, once, I was made to hold a knife while an adult held a baby. And, to me, it was a feeling that they were trying to make me feel guilty, so that I would never speak. They tried to make the child – and I knew, at the time, I wasn't strong enough to do what they did with that knife – but they try and

> make you feel involved, make you feel like you are in it. But that was one of the most traumatic times.
>
> Anne

Participants' accounts of infanticide and cannibalism parallel recent reports from Africa in which militia groups abduct children and, as part of their "initiation" as sexual slaves and child soldiers, force them to participate in the ritualistic rape, murder and cannibalisation of adults and other children (for a newspaper report, see Judah, 2004). Through such a process, the child experiences a symbolic transformation of the "traditional system of meaning" resulting in "cultural and mental destruction" (Medeiros, 2007: 500). The resulting internal sense of anomie then binds the child to the abusive group, since they have lost their sense of communion or belonging to a wider social order. Infanticide may also be a practice utilised by abusers who seek to dispose of unwanted children conceived through sexual assault. For example, in 2007, the Dublin County Coroner ruled that an infant girl found stabbed to death in the 1970s was Noleen Murphy, the child of Cynthia Owen, a survivor of organised and ritualistic abuse (Owen, 2010). During the proceedings of the coronial inquest, Owen described giving birth to Noleen in the family home at the age of eleven, and Noleen's death at the hands of Owen's mother (Sheehan, 2007).

c. Reproductive harm

In organised abuse, it seems that there can be strategic aspects to even the most extreme forms of violence. However, participants' accounts did not indicate that infanticide was solely a cynical strategy of control or cover-up. To the contrary,

participants suggested that such acts were very significant to the abusive group. In Lauren's experience these acts were considered to have magical or supernatural significance by perpetrators:

> The sacrifice of babies. The eating of their flesh, and the drinking of their blood. That is – the purpose of that, they believe, they believe it is the eternal fountain of life. And by eating new life, they will live forever.

Claims to immortality and omnipotence frequently attend acts of sexual murder, which somewhat obscures questions of gender and power in relation to the commission of the crime (Caputi 1987). Indeed, in participants' accounts, and in the literature on ritualistic abuse, infanticide and murder tended to be referred to as a "sacrifice" or in similarly religious terms. For example, in a book on the clinical treatment of adults reporting ritualistic abuse, Ross (1995: 71) states that, in ritualistically abusive groups, "[r]itual activities involve ... human and animal sacrifice".

In this study, such acts were not explicable solely as religious practices but instead they formed part of a cycle of reproductive harm and foeticide/infanticide. Through this cycle, the specifically female work of gestation and child-bearing was not only integrated into organised abuse but it was annihilated through acts of reproductive harm. These acts seemed designed to establish male dominance over the female body in the most atavistic and primal way possible.

> They actually managed to get a pregnant woman from somewhere, they abducted a pregnant woman. And, I kind of think, um you know, you think that ... um ... you know, I know that she was terrified and you'd might think actually think if I was making this up, you'd think if I was making this up ... but I remember that he, he pulled her apart with, with his bare hands ... it was terrible and I actually had, I had to eat parts of the baby.
>
> Jo

In participants' accounts, women's and girl's bodies and their reproductive capacities were the primary targets of many of the atrocities enacted by abusive groups. The infants and children subject to sexualised murder were the children of captive teenage girls and adult women who had fallen pregnant through rape. Such pregnancies were rarely carried to full term. Participants stated that these pregnancies were typically aborted in the second trimester, or induced early in the third trimester, and these procedures were undertaken at home by members of the abusive group.

> I've read all this "How ridiculous, the idea that they could have 'baby breeders' where girls could get pregnant and walk around to term and have a baby and no one will notice." And I'm thinking, "You *stupid* idiots, what makes you think that they let us carry it to term?"
>
> Jo

Two male participants, Darren and Neil, identified that pregnant teenage girls were frequently targeted by the abusive group, and their children removed from them after birth.

> It's so easy for them, the actual killing of infants, they would just get one of these addicted women, removed her from society – and when that child is born, there is nothing, no records, nothing to ever say that child has been born. And so they can do what they like. We buried fucking dozens of carcasses of kids. They were just seeing how far they could go, y'know, they were seeing what kind of bizarre shit could they do and get away with.
>
> Darren

> For their "breeding purposes", as they called it – [they used] runaways. People who had stained the family name, back in those days. They put these people into places where, you know, to have the child and whatever. But these people used to know how to locate the girls who were pregnant, and they'd give them a place to stay. And even while they were pregnant, they'd be raped continually as well. But that was the way they work.
>
> Neil

These descriptions accorded with female participants' descriptions of having been sequestered in the latter stages of pregnancy and giving birth to children who were subsequently murdered. For example, Rhea recalls being pregnant as a teenager, and being taken in her final trimester to a remote house where she gave birth to a child who was later murdered.

> There were a number of early pregnancies which were hidden. The only one that I remember was up in the house, in the forest, where we were kept up there for must have been for about three months until we delivered.

Rhea recalled a number of secret pregnancies as a teenager and young woman. Some of these pregnancies were carried to term and she believed that some of these children may still be alive, although she was uncertain. As an adult trapped in the abusive group, Rhea gave birth to a child in the apartment of the group leader, Peter. In the following excerpt, she describes how one of her personalities, Leah, agreed to allow Peter to keep the child in his apartment, and the subsequent murder of the child. She also reflects on her uncertainties over the fate of other children born in secrecy.

> She [Leah] even had a child at that stage that he kept there for a while. The child died … I mean, I've got one son, who is very much alive, well and kicking, but, um, there were others, I, I don't know, some, some I know are alive, but others, others I don't know what may have happened to them. But this one certainly I saw her when she was about two months old, and he decapitated her, so I saw her die – Leah saw her die.

Rhea characterises Leah as a willing, if duped and coerced, participant in organised and ritualistic abuse. However, it seems that this was a period in her life in which Rhea was employing a dual strategy of overt obedience and covert resistance against Peter. After witnessing the murder of the child described above, Rhea terminated a subsequent pregnancy without Peter's knowledge, and found some safety by initiating a relationship with her now-husband, Colin. Peter responded to Rhea's emerging

autonomy with increasingly brutal and terroristic measures, including stalking, home invasions and sexual assaults. Throughout this prolonged and terrifying ordeal, any act of self-determination in which Rhea exercised her right to control her body and her reproductive capacity was viewed by Peter as an intolerable affront. In this excerpt, Rhea describes how she fell pregnant in her mid-thirties following a sexual assault by Peter, and his violent response when she terminated the child.

> We were raped, we were almost killed. He found out we'd terminated the baby, that he knew was his, and he wanted it, that was one he did want. It was gone, and, um, he abused us physically – he really got stuck into us for that.

It is telling that Peter responded violently when Rhea took it upon herself to decide the fate of a foetus who she knew she could not keep safe from harm. It may be that, in organised abuse, the act of impregnation of a girl or non-consenting woman is a performative act that establishes the virility of the abuser, and this act of pride can only be undone by an equivalent or greater demonstration of masculine control and domination; non-consensual abortion or induced birth and infanticide. Arguably, Rhea's termination was an act of self-determination and therefore a slight against Peter's masculine prestige, which he maintained by subjugating Rhea and utilising her reproductive capacities, in effect, as a form of literal and symbolic colonisation.

A number of female participants alluded to violent and non-consensual abortions and/or the murder of their children. The ongoing grief associated with these ordeals prevented them from speaking further about the conditions under which these abortions and infanticides took place. For example, Lily referred in passing to two

pregnancies conceived through rape when she was a teenager, their violent termination and the incorporation of the foetal tissue within ritualistic abuse:

> *How far advanced were your pregnancies permitted to go?*
>
> Enough … month wise I don't know, but enough so that when it was terminated there was enough for there to be a pretty graphic ritual. And very identifiably ...

Lily was not able to speak in detail about these events. Nonetheless, these were ordeals that stayed with her throughout her life, impacting upon her life choices and how she negotiated issues relating to her body, reproduction and sexuality. She situated the violent impregnations and terminations as the culmination of a series of ritualistic abuses that had become progressively more intrusive and soul-destroying throughout her childhood. In interview, she felt that these terminations had destroyed her capacity to willingly have children, emotionally if not physically.

> I remember as a very young child being dedicated to Satan, then at another point I had to pledge allegiance, and then later on was impregnated by, and married to, Satan. So those things, whilst at an essence, they are the same, each one is more complex, each one takes more from me, and then, with the, the impregnated and married to Satan, there was also an abortion, as a result of that. And that, still, is kind of one of the absolute worst memories of the whole, the whole thing. Not just the abortion, but the way it was done, and what happened. And I still think that still has a huge amount to do with why I

> don't have children. I was going to say "why I chose not to have children" but I'm fairly sure that was never a free choice.

In the life histories gathered in this study, non-consensual impregnation (and the subsequent abortions and infanticides) was a form of colonisation through which perpetrators sought to establish dominion, not only over participants' bodies, but over their minds as well. Lily described how desperately she wanted to keep the pregnancies, and her father's promises that she would be permitted to keep, at least, the second pregnancy: "Of course you will be able to keep this child. Yes, this will be your baby. Yes, it's special, nobody can take this away. You know you can trust me, you know that I love you." She called the violent termination of this pregnancy "the final death of hope":

> Because that was the point, I think, where I really just gave in. And that was really the point where I moved into being a perpetrator. Because of the despair. It was like there was no point any more. And the hope, that, as a perpetrator, you'll get treated better.

The manipulation of children's reproductive capacities was a strategy of power that could be extended to entrap captive boys as well as girls and women. After Seb had witnessed the murder of a child, and was forcibly engaged in the murderous act, he was told that the child was his. Like Lily, Seb describes this incident as a moment of "collapse".

> After the baby had been killed, there was another occasion after that, I'm told that the infant was mine. That I'd fathered it with [a teenaged girl who was also being abused by the group]. And it was quite impossible because I hadn't reached puberty. But I didn't quite understand that at the time. I must have understood puberty and all the rest of it, but, still, I believed them, or I was at least confused by it. And she is wailing and she just falls over me, and, y'know, saying "You killed my baby, you killed my baby." And then I started, I just collapsed onto the floor.

Participants employed a range of strategies to protect themselves and others from the emotional and physical harms of the reproductive harms they had witnessed. In Rhea's case, she utilised abortion not only to protect herself, but to protect the foetus. As she wrote in her diaries after she found out she was pregnant after a sexual assault: "It must be taken gently, nor not at all. It must not die in terror and pain but gently on its way, towards the light." Lauren utilised anorexia as a strategy to disrupt her menstrual cycle, prevent pregnancy and thus gain a sense of control over her body. As a child, Lauren witnessed the devastation wrought on her older sister through the murder of her children and she grew to adolescence seeking to forestall the horror of an induced birth and infanticide. She reported witnessing her sister haemorrhage to death in the family home after the early inducement and murder of her newborn by the abusive group. Lauren believes that her sister was incorrectly administered a blood clotting agent in the aftermath of the home birth in order to staunch her bleeding, but the high dosage resulted in a fatal blood clot.

My sister died in the house. But the day before, which was also my grandmother's birthday – huge celebration, they [the abusive group] always celebrate the winter solstice, which is the twenty-second.

And my sister was seven months pregnant, and everyone knew about it. This was the baby she was going to be allowed to keep, not give it up or anything else. Anyway … yeah, her last baby they took from her when she was thirteen or fourteen.

One of the things that seems to be quite prevalent in my family, they all have a lot of blood clotting problems. And one of the drugs that they used to use, after the girls or women in the group gave birth, they'd give them a blood-clotting agent. So they wouldn't haemorrhage, and bleed, and continue to bleed – afterwards, the girls could just fool themselves that they had a heavy period or something. And the worst thing you can give to anyone with a blood-clotting disorder is anything like that – it makes a blood clot.

I didn't see them administer her the drugs, but that's what I believe happened to her. She was given a blood clotting agent. And the next day, she had this pain all up through her leg and into her groin. And she was just getting sicker and sicker. Something was really wrong. And she said she had to go lie down.

I was getting really concerned, she was only twenty-two but she had this look on her face, a look of death. That was when I said to the mother, "You've got to call an ambulance, there's something wrong." She wouldn't, so I went and

> called an ambulance. And the next thing, I went back into the bedroom, and there's my sister, and she can't breathe.
>
> And I'm watching the mother thumping her chest, giving her CPR, but she's full on with it – like she's going to break every rib in her. So I went back to the phone again, to call for an ambulance again. And this all went on in the space of forty minutes, before she died.
>
> It was horrific. Mum is just on top of her, beating the crap out of her chest. And even though I didn't see them do it, I know they gave her those drugs deliberately … I even remember my mother saying then, and again more recently, "She should not have been given that drug, she needed Heparin [an anticoagulant]." This is why my sister's death was murder, she was given the drug they know would kill her. I rang for the ambulance three times, but it was too late.

After her sister's death, Lauren utilised anorexia in a strategy to prevent herself from falling pregnant. She says:

> The primary reason for anorexia was the total paranoid fear of not wanting to get pregnant. I had heard that anorexia throws out your periods. And nothing – because, they [the abusive group] kept count of everything, even your periods. You had to tell them when you had your last period, and when you'd be fertile. So anorexia was my way of fighting it – "I'll do whatever it takes, you are not making me pregnant". Because I'd seen my sister go through that, and it

> totally destroyed her. And I don't – I knew that it was something I couldn't cope with, with everything else on top.

In her study of ritualistic abuse, Scott (2001: 121) also noted that starvation was "practised by some survivors as providing some measure of control and experience of personal power. One woman claimed to have been able to keep her body weight so low in her mid-teens that she ceased menstruating and could not fall pregnant." In Lauren's case, the struggle over her right to reproductive control became central to her survival, both emotional and physical, and she employed starvation as the only method available to her.

As a result of these reproductive harms, some participants sought not to have children and others found their relationships with their children was permeated with anxiety and fear. Seb said "I really didn't want to have children" and felt "tricked" when his partners fell pregnant; by accident or design, he wasn't sure. It was after the birth of his daughter, with "all the afterbirth and blood and whatever", that his memories of ritualistic abuse came flooding back. Uncontrollable flashbacks and nightmares left him traumatised, overwhelmed and bedridden at a time when his wife was struggling to care for their newborn child. This was a source of conflict that marked the beginning of the end of their marriage.

> I've got a picture of me holding the baby, after the midwife has bathed her and whatever. And I've got this look – I was just off the planet. And then, after that, the memories started flooding back, first of Grenham and his abuse. And once I started talking about that, the ritual stuff started coming up.

Those participants who sought to have children were often extremely frightened and protective parents. For Isabelle, the murder of her first child when she was a teenager resulted in the enduring fear that her subsequent children could be harmed. As a result, she has lived much of her adult life in a semi-transient state, unable to stay in one place for too long for fear that her other children will be taken from her too.

> I think most of my life I pretty much spent irrationally freaking out about things like, "If I go outside the front door, people are going to know where I am. If people know I have kids, they [the abusers] are going to take them away." Because my first child died. Um, my first child didn't have a birth certificate, wasn't born in a hospital. Yeah, that was all … scary.
>
> And there was always this fear of, if I am connecting to anyone in any way that means that people will harm my boys in some way. So I felt like I was on the run. I'd constantly change houses, constantly change phone numbers, um, never stay in jobs for a long period of time if I was employed at all. Yeah … life was pretty … scatty.

Masculine transcendence in organised abuse

The traditional presumption within the "psy" disciplines has been that sadistic, bizarre, sexualised murders are the product of organic, psychosexual disorders (Cameron & Frazer, 1987). However, psychological screenings of sexual murderers find that the majority of perpetrators do not have a psychotic or delusional disorders or some other mental illness that might predispose them to such violence (Meloy, 1988; Meloy, Gacono & Kenney, 1994; Warren, Hazelwood et al., 1996). In their analysis of a sample of forty-two mass and serial killers, Levin and Fox (1985) found

that sexual murderers are not mentally ill but rather they are motivated primarily by the desire to control and dominate others. This desire for control and domination is closely associated with a hatred of women and a history of violence against women (Revitch & Schlesinger, 1981; Beauregard & Proulx, 2000; Meloy, 2000). Dietz and colleagues (1990) studied 30 men convicted for murders that were sexually sadistic and included acts of torture. They found that the men had carefully planned the murders with the intention of causing and witnessing the victim's fear, pain and the realisation of impending death. "This sense of being godlike and in control of [the] life and death of another human being … is reported by some of the men as one of the most exhilarating aspects of the sexual experiences and of their crimes" (Warren, Hazelwood et al., 1996: 974).

These research findings support Cameron and Frazer's (1987) argument instead that sexual murder is the pursuit of *masculine transcendence*: the practice of murder as an act of transcendental self-affirmation employed in the performance of a historically contingent form of masculine subjectivity based on transcendence, transgression, power and pleasure:

> In the writing of Sade and his later admirers, the quest for transcendence is explicitly eroticised. Sexual acts and desires that transgress social or religious norms are defined as inherently forms of transcendence, thus becoming the source of both power and pleasure, and paving the way for that male sexual sadism that becomes, at its most extreme, the lust to kill. (Cameron & Frazer, 1987: 169)

Cameron and Frazer (1987) propose that sexual murder is a practice excited amongst some men by the social construction of masculinity as transcendence over others. They argue that transcendence has “"come to be seen both as the project of the masculine and the sign of masculinity" (1987: 169) and they point to historical linkages between masculinity, transcendence and sadism in the work of the Marquis de Sade and others. The relationship between sex and violence, they argue, is neither ahistorical nor archetypical (as proposed by Caputi (1988)) but rather it is part of the ordering of gender relations in Western societies.

Kramer (1997) provides a similar although more psychoanalytically-orientated explanation for sexual violence in Western societies. In his analysis of representations of gender and violence in music, literature and philosophy since the 19th century, Kramer (1997: 1) argues that “the forms of selfhood mandated as normal in modern Western culture both promote and rationalize violence against women.” In his view, the dominant masculine subject position, whilst the primary locus of socially legitimised authority and power in Western culture, is inherently unobtainable for individual men. Thus all men occupy a subordinate position in relation to an idealised masculinity that “is the wielder and bearer of authority in all its forms, social, moral and cultural, both pleasure and truth are in his charge” (Kramer, 1997: 5). Men’s sexual violence against women, Kramer theorises, is the result of men’s “hair-trigger anxiety” about the fact that they occupy a subordinate “feminine” position in relation to an idealised but inaccessible masculinity.

> Masculine identity is always shadowed by disavowed reminders that it is borrowed, simulated, relative – more a costume than an essence. Meanwhile,

> and partly in consequence, biological women are made to bear the main burden of occupying the official, visible feminine subject position, and in so doing of maintaining the fiction that the position held by men is genuinely polarized, absolutely masculine in both content and structure (Kramer, 1997: 7).

Kramer's argument is that sexual violence is produced by the inherent paradox of the dominant masculine subject position in Western culture. Men must perform masculinity in strategic ways whilst denying they are performing, even to themselves. However, this denial only works sporadically. Since "the basis of the cultural authority associated with the impossible position of absolute masculinity is precisely the threat of violence" the anxieties produced in men through the paradoxes of the gender order frequently find expression through sexual violence (Kramer, 1997: 7). Acts of sexual violence are, in effect, "the somatisation of the relations of domination" (Bourdieu, 2001) that underpin the gender order.

In the accounts of male sexual violence provided by Cameron and Frazer (1987) and Kramer (1995), masculinity, subjectivity and fantasies of transcendence and omnipotence are intertwined. Within a culturally prescribed symbolic order, women and children are symbols of powerlessness and base corporeality that men must rise above if they are to realise their "true" and transcendental self. This ideology becomes physically manifest through sexual violence and murder, in which the victim's personhood is denied as they are literally and symbolically reduced to a violated and eviscerated body. During such acts, sexual murderers and other perpetrators of

atrocities report experiencing a sense of "godlike" power and manhood (Caputi, 1987; Warren, Hazelwood et al., 1996; Kelly, 2000).

In this study, participants also reported that perpetrators of atrocities and sexual violence expressing a sense of god-like or omnipotent selfhood. During abuse, Lily's father would tell her "I am God, I am the God you must worship. I am the God you must adore. I am evil." Other participants reported that their abusers called themselves "gods", "the masters of the universe", "warlocks" and "kings". Participants described perpetrators wearing robes, hoods, medieval ruffs and other paraphernalia designed to designate a special and superior status. According to participants, some perpetrators even claimed to have magical powers. Caputi (1986: 62) suggests that the relationship between sexual murder and delusions of grandeur is produced through a gender politics in which notions of masculinity, subjectivity and godhood are intimately linked. In organised abuse, it seems that some abusive groups have institutionalised and intensified this relationship through ritualistic abuse, effectively making a religion out of the grandiose experiences of superiority and dominance that are excited through men's participation in extreme acts of collective sexual violence.

The strategic maintenance of masculine transcendence

Kramer (1997) observes an inherent contradiction in the construction of experiences of masculine supremacy through violence. The idealised masculine subject position that men seek to internalise and embody through violence is valued precisely for its non-contingent nature. That is, its authenticity is connected to the notion that it is not something that a man performs or strives towards, but rather something that he naturally *is*. The very means through which a man attempts to construct a self-identity

in the image of this idealised masculine figure threatens to reveal, to him as well as others, that he does not inherently possess these masculine qualities.

> Gender-polarized masculinity is supposed to culminate in the attainment of a profoundly inner-directed autonomy, unavailable to women because their femininity is, precisely, its lack. Yet this autonomy, this manhood, is always damaged by the means of its attainment; it is always conferred from a superior external position, and always on certain binding conditions (Kramer, 1997: 249).

Likewise, in this study, perpetrators' collective identities as "masters" and "gods" was dependent on the acts of sexual violence they committed against children and women. Although they experienced (and legitimised) this relationship as a supernatural rather than a practical or social one, they nonetheless behaved strategically in their efforts to preserve and maintain it. The embodied feelings of control and domination that where excited within perpetrators of ritualistic ordeals, which were the generative force behind the perpetrators' masculine idealisations, were conceptualised (or, as Bourdieu (1977) might say, "misrecognised") by perpetrators as a kind of "life force" that was being taken from children during abusive acts. For example, May said of her ritualistic abuse:

> I don't remember it being totally Satanic, as in worshipping Satan. I think it was more about having power over life, and life force. Over my life force.

Isabelle articulated a similar philosophy embedded in her ritualistic abuse, and she suggested that it was used to craft another powerful impetus for obedience.

> It's like, there is this sense of, if I don't comply with sexual activity it's kind of like – it's all wrapped up in a sense of … I don't know, a bit like, power or something, a way of them getting new life. And if I don't comply, it means that it's not possible for them to have that. Therefore I'm evil, therefore I must be punished. So if other people die around me, or if animals die around me, I caused it, it's my fault.

Kate recalled a similar ideology structuring her experiences of ritualistic abuse:

> They used the word "Satan." They believed that they were "children of Satan". They believed this because they were – I'm trying to think of the words – because they were "unable to be good, because badness is in all". So they "might as well do it properly". It was this really crazy kind of thinking. They also believed that we children had more goodness, and they wanted to vanquish it. Basically. They didn't use those words, but that's what they were trying to do. It felt as though … it was as though they were trying to steal it? To make themselves stronger.

Participants reported that abusive groups obsessively policed children's conduct to ensure they acted in conformity with the perpetrators' collective fantasy of supernatural and omnipotent domination. It was therefore crucially important that children did not disrupt the illusion of power crafted by ritualistic abuse through

displays of reluctance or pain. Such displays would undermine the legitimising power of ritualistic abuse and destabilise the abusers' collective fantasy of sexual violence as a right or entitlement. Therefore, incorporated into organised abuse were structured ordeals in which children were conditioned to withstand sexual abuse and torture without complaint.

> They would tie you up on this equipment, and all your stuff would be off – except maybe a singlet, but sometimes that was taken off too, depending on the part of your body they wanted to access – and they would use, um, needles that they would insert into places on your body where it wouldn't be discovered. So it would be next to the nipple, up the vagina, under your nails. Things like that. And you were told, on pain of death, that you were not to make any noise. Not allowed to make any noise.

Kate

> And they had me stripped off, and they put stakes in the ground and tied me to the stakes. And, um, he put a thing inside me, which I learnt later on was called a speculum. And sort of opened my bum up and that. And he lifted me up around my middle, and pushed away the dirt there, and there was a bull ant's nest beneath me. And I had to lie there, with bull ants crawling all over me. And he said, "If you don't want to get a mouth full of these things, keep your fucking mouth shut." And they urinated on me while I was there and all kinds of things that made them happy. And took me back to their place, had

> me washed off, had the hose put in my bum and that. And you could see the ants and the blood coming out of me.
>
> Neil

The capacity of a child victim to endure great pain without complaint was emphasised by all participants. A number of participants stated that, without this skill, a child was at risk of death. In such instances, the death of non-compliant children was often orchestrated to establish what can be called, to use Foucault's (1977) phrase, the "sovereign power" of the abusers. Expressions of fear, pain or discomfort were an intolerable affront to the authority of the abusers, and many participants described how the torture and execution of a distressed or frightened child was arranged by abusers in order to establish, and affirm, the absolute nature of their power. For example, Jo recalled the murder or near-murder of a child who, she suggested, had not been sufficiently silent and compliant during torture.

> I think that she couldn't handle it very well, and they were worried about her telling. And they, actually, ah, in front of me, actually, um, put cuts all over her, so that she bled slowly to death. Or she was almost dead, I'm thinking back and I don't know if they killed her.
>
> *Right. This was meant to be ...*
>
> A deterrent to me to as well? Definitely. People might ask, "Is that really true?" But I'd only seen her a couple of times before, and I get the impression

> she wasn't coping very well. It wasn't only a question of telling, you had to not draw attention to yourself.

In Foucault's (1977) formulation of "sovereign power", any transgression against "the law" is a direct attack upon the power of the sovereign, since "the law" directly represents the will of the sovereign. Similarly, in organised abuse, the injunction against the expression of pain or fear was an attribute of the absolute authority that perpetrators adopted in their exaggerated roles as "kings", "gods", "masters" and so on. The torture and execution of non-compliant children was therefore a manifestation of the "sovereign power" that abusers bestowed upon themselves. The extremity of their response to even minor transgressions was, in effect, equivalent to the scale of their delusions of power. Kate remembers five other children who were abused alongside her, including an infant who was too young to know to be silent. In response, the leader of the abusive group killed the child.

> Unfortunately, one of the five was a baby, and the baby would unfortunately not understand not to make a noise. And the baby would cry, and scream and carry on. And I remember when the head man got the baby snuffed out, basically. And I actually always remember how the mother was distraught and nearly killed herself because the baby had died. And that was really tragic. But the other children, we learnt to be silent in pain.

Rhea was involved in an abusive group as an adult, and she recalls the death of another woman, Sally, who disobeyed a direct instruction from the group "leader". Sally was a fellow student at the university that Rhea attended, and Rhea believes her

death was intended to enforce the silence of the other captive adults.

> Because she disobeyed him, and he felt that she was going to start blowing the whistle, so to speak. Her death was a punishment and a – just for us to see, "This is what will happen if you try to get out, if you try to get away, this is it, this is what will happen to you." And so of course nobody, you know, decided to leave. Everyone sort of stayed involved, or went mad.

In participants' accounts, we can see the practical strategies that sustained the subcultures of masculine transcendence generated through organised abuse. Participants described the systems of discipline and surveillance that perpetrators put in place to ensure the stability of the relationship between sexual violence and their grandiose hyper-masculinities. At the same time, the strategic nature of these systems was denied and subsumed within the legitimising religious and subcultural *mythos*. The enforcement of the principle of obedience was simultaneously practical and symbolic: it was practical in that that it terrorised abused children into silence and obedience in organised abuse (whilst killing children or adults who could not or would not comply), and it was symbolic in that it reinforced the delusions of masculine omnipotence generated through organised abuse.

The credibility of accounts of atrocities in organised abuse

Sceptics have been at pains to exaggerate the numbers of deaths reported in cases of ritualistic abuse and to suggest that such deaths could not go undetected. For example, Bromley (1991b: 56) alleged that survivors of ritualistic abuse collectively report "tens of thousands" of child murders a year in North America. He offers no source for this claim, which is a characteristic of his writing on ritualistic abuse generally. In this

study, participants did not report the mass or random murder of children or adults by abusive groups. Instead, they described witnessing the carefully orchestrated and planned murder of vulnerable infants, children and adults. Rhea offers a reasonable explanation for the deaths she witnessed, deaths which she suggests were neither a common nor indiscriminate aspect of her experience of organised abuse.

> And people say, "Oh, how can people be killed, and not be found?" Now, I hate to say it, but there's a lot of missing people. And they stay missing. And it didn't happen all the time. It didn't happen on a regular basis. But it did happen.

When organised abuse is detected by the authorities, sexual murder may be reported by children or adults however it is rare that they are substantiated (Gallagher, 2001). In some cases, reports of organised and sadistic abuse have been substantiated whilst victims' claims that they witnessed murder have been unsubstantiated (Hechler, 1988; Gallagher, 2001). Nonetheless, in the British "House of Horrors" investigation of the crimes of Fred and Rosemary West, and in the Belgian organised abuse scandal that centred on Marc Dutroux, torture, murder and infanticide were linked to the organised and ritualistic abuse of children (Kelly 1998). The substantiation of these cases of organised abuse was marked by the accidental discovery of human remains rather than systematic police work. In this regard, organised sexual abuse is similar to serial and sexual murder, where cases of repeated rape, torture and murder have gone undetected by the authorities because the victims were vulnerable and easily overlooked (Cameron & Frazer, 1987; Caputi, 1987).

Cameron and Frazer (1987: 8) refer to the "dark figure" behind homicide statistics of murders that do not come to the attention of the authorities, either because they are classified as natural deaths or because no body is recovered. They note that some "missing" women and children are likely to have been murdered although they are not recorded as such in official statistics. In this study, participants' reports of sexual murder emphasised the victimisation of the homeless, sex workers, runaways and other minors and adults whose disappearances were unlikely to be noticed, especially children born to victims and perpetrators of organised abuse. The notion that the birth of a child could or would be concealed from the authorities in the fashion described by participants has been rejected out of hand by sceptics of organised abuse. However, there are examples in Australia and overseas in which groups of people have conspired to hide the birth of a child. For example, in 2005, American police found that multiple children had been born and raised in a cult that routinely sexually abused them. Press reports stated "many of the children in the group have no birth certificate, Social Security number or any type of documentation" (Brady, 2005). Recently, Australian police opened a murder investigation into the disappeared children of a woman who has reported a history of organised and ritualistic abuse (O'Neill, 2009). Speaking to a journalist, the woman in question stated "There are people out there. Groups. There is such evil. You have no idea of the evil." These examples suggest that, contrary to the claims of sceptics, children can and do "go missing" in contemporary society and that, where parents do not report the disappearance of their child or where they attempt to cover up that disappearance, then the child's plight is likely to go undetected by the authorities.

In this study, even where such murders are reported, witnesses may struggle to have their testimony taken seriously if they are not considered suitably legitimate in the somewhat arbitrary terms of the criminal justice system. Sky worked in a mental health service with the homeless, and he described a recent incident in which a young homeless client claimed to have witnessed murder. As a homeless youth, the police response to his report was largely dismissive.

> I had someone show up at work a couple of days back – it was a kid – and he said, "I've seen all these murders." And he is balling his eyes out. And I said, "Well, we've got to get the police in." And when the police showed up, they told him, "I'm not sure how legit you are. You are just a kid." And that was a straight-forward report, let alone all this stuff about people dressing up and dragging you off to a graveyard.

Rhea's testimony of organised abuse was investigated by the police after she and her therapist reported the stalking and terrorisation they were experiencing at the hands of the abusive group. Her complaint became part of a larger investigation into a number of missing people. As an adult, Rhea had been involved with a ritualistically abusive group and some members of this group are missing or deceased. In interview, she highlighted the challenges she experienced in providing a full and coherent account of the murders she had witnessed, since captive adults in the group knew very little about one another, whilst drugs, hypnosis and fear had blurred, at the time, the boundaries between real and unreal. The line between victim and perpetrator was also blurred in her account. In interview, she implied that she may have participated in some murders although she did not go into further detail.

> We never, we only knew first names, unless we talked to each other. And we very rarely did. We were given something [a drug] when we arrived. He [the primary abuser] rented a house which I took police to, that's where he lived, with a couple of other people. And that's where you'd start off from. And when we arrived we were given something. And from then it was very hard to know what was real, and what was not real, and what was happening. It was very difficult to know.
>
> There was one particular girl, Sally. Again, I never knew what her full name was, and so it was really hard for the police to track how she died and what happened. ... He [the primary abuser] used to have us sitting around in a circle, and we had to say – it was like a hypnotic thing, chants, and he'd say things, it was like a trigger. It's not a trigger for me any more, thank heavens, but it was! ... The words that he'd use were like, "What will you do for me?" and we had to repeat, "We'll kill for you, we'll kill for you." "What will you do for me?" "We'll kill for you, we'll kill for you." And that was like a trigger for things to start happening. And that was the rituals that were held at the house. And a number, a number of people were killed there.

The police were able to corroborate some of Rhea's claims: for example, her description of the apartment where she witnessed a number of murders and of properties in particular suburbs with customised basements.

> When I told the police all this, from what I can gather they actually found the houses. They found the basements, but there is nothing there. The place that was used, for instance, which I described to them and pointed out to them, it was just as I described it – but there is no evidence left. It's gone!

In the many years that had passed since the abuse had taken place, it was not possible for the police to obtain direct evidence of the crimes she had described. Nonetheless, Rhea was not dissatisfied with the contact she had with the police, which had substantiated her account at least to her own satisfaction, if not to the standards required for a criminal prosecution.

Conclusion

Connell (1987) notes that sexuality is one of the central structures through which relations of gendered domination are eroticised, acted out and reproduced. In organised abuse, the pursuit of "masculine transcendence" demands relations of domination so totalising that they can only be sustained by the expansion of the terrain of sexuality into the realm of the atrocious. In this study, the bodies of girls and women were the primary objects upon which abusive groups wrote what Scarry (1985) calls their "fiction of power", as the ideology of masculine transcendence was made corporeal through acts of mutilation, murder and desecration. As Caputi (1987) documents, abusive men who participate in acts of sexualised atrocity frequently experience delusions of godhood and omnipotence. Whilst participants reported that atrocities stimulated grandiose delusions of power amongst perpetrators, the impact of this violence upon victims was far from illusory. Through acts of reproductive harm, participants' reproductive capacities were turned against them. Non-consensual pregnancies conceived through rape served as a form of physiological and symbolic

colonisation. The subsequent terminations and infanticides were horrifying ordeals that left many participants mute with grief, shock and terror. These are the abuses that have sparked scornful scepticism in some academic commentators, and vicarious traumatisation amongst those workers and therapists who take them seriously (Summit, 1994b). In this chapter, I suggest that the atrocities reported by survivors of organised abuse are explicable according to the eroticisation of cruelty evident in contemporary constructions of sex and masculinity.

Eroticised representations of rape and murder have saturated high and low culture since at least the seventeenth century, including a detectable aesthetic subtheme that has sought to marry representations of corpses and death with sexuality and transgression (Cameron & Frazer, 1987; Tatar, 1995). In the tradition of de Sade and the libertines, the rapist and murderer has been valorised as a transgressive outlaw who shatters conventional morality and, in doing so, asserts and affirms a transcendental and undeniable self. Cameron and Frazer (1987) argue that this act of transgression has been constructed, implicitly and explicitly, as a masculine prerogative that is exercised over the feminised Other. They note how the eroticised libertine construction of this masculine prerogative, in which cruelty is "naturally" sexually pleasurable (to men), has been reproduced and entrenched across a range of disciplines and discourses: from Kraft-Ebing to Freud and psychoanalysis (which has always conflated sex and death) and surrealism, from Battaille to Foucault, and from Sartre and de Beauvoir to existentialism. Other researchers have traced the integration of Sade's conception of the "naturally aggressive" masculine sexual prerogative into the Western legal canon (Sanday, 1996) and into pornography and the practices of psychoanalysis and the "psy" disciplines (Trumbach, 2003). The ideology of

masculine transcendency has subtlely but pervasively shaped the construction of masculine sexuality within a diverse body of scientific and aesthetic disciplines. This process has transformed the expression of masculine sexual desire, coding cruelty and death as erotic.

Cameron and Frazer (1987) maintain that this relationship is not the province of a deviant or pathological minority, but rather it is part of a social construction of "authentic" masculine sexuality as intrinsically sadistic and prone to sexual violence. It is tempting to consign the atrocious extremes of sexual violence documented in this study to the fringes of social life. However, the atrocities reported to occur in organised abuse have been documented amongst a range of otherwise "normal men" who commit serial murders (Cameron & Frazer, 1987), who commit war crimes whilst in the armed forces (Caputi, 1987; Kelly, 2000; Hague, 2007), or who torture and murder their children and intimate partners in domestic violence or "honour killings" (Meetoo & Safia Mirza, 2007; Stark, 2007). Child abuse images categorised on the COPINE scale[1] as "category 10", meaning that they depict the sexual torture of children (e.g. the child is subject to sadistic abuse or forced into sexual contact with an animal) circulate on the internet (Taylor, Holland & Quayle, 2001). In his analysis of 9800 randomly selected pornography images gathered from usenet sites, Mehta (2001) found that 4.4% of images were "pedophilic" (meaning that the image either depicted sexual abuse, or sexualised nudity), 3.1% of all images depicted bestiality, and 0.2% depicted necrophilia. In their study of violent pornography on the internet, Bjornebekk and Evjen (2000) found servers and newsgroups in which images of

[1] The COPINE scale is a rating system, developed by staff at the Combating Paedophile Information Networks in Europe (COPINE) project, that categorises the severity of child abuse images. The COPINE scale rates child abuse images from 1 – 10, which 10 being the most extreme category. A simplified scale from 1 – 5, based on the COPINE scale, was developed by the UK Sentencing Panel and is widely used in the Australian criminal justice system (see Griffith & Simon, 2008: 16).

mutilated and dead infants and embryos were presented as a pornographic subgroup alongside other violent pornography.

In organised and ritualistic abuse, it may be that the historically contingent configuration of masculinity in terms of sexuality, supremacy and domination has found one of its most extreme and violent expressions. Through this lens, we can see the logical progression of organised abuse from the processes of exchange, to the legitimising practices of sadistic and ritualistic torture, to finally to the atrocities within which the bodies of children and women are destroyed in men's efforts to realise the impossible fantasies of control and domination excited by the patterning of masculine sexualities. These abuses exist on a continuum of sexual violence against children and women but the collective and social nature of organised abuse amplifies the eroticisation of cruelty that is otherwise a common feature of masculine sexualities. As men seek to establish their masculine prestige in relation to one another through the performance of sexual violence, victimised women and children are at risk of increasingly sadistic and harmful forms of violence which, for some abusive groups, may escalate into reproductive harm, infanticide and murder. In this study, it was through the violent destruction of the bodies of women and children, and through the colonisation and control of their reproductive capacities, that abusive groups attempted to consolidate their hyper-masculine identities and make a claim to a supernatural or otherwise metaphysical transcendence. From participants' accounts, it is clear that the impact of atrocity, as a gender strategy, upon the children and women that survive it is devastating. The adaptations that participants were forced to make in order to ameliorate the constant threat of death in abusive groups that practised atrocity stayed with them throughout their lives, in the form of ongoing fear,

terror and the guilt borne by all those that survive campaigns of atrocity and terror whilst those around them fell victim to it.

Conclusion and implications

This study has critically engaged with testimonies of organised abuse in an effort to open up such offences to the scrutiny of sociology and to shed some light on the collective nature of some men's sexually abusive practices. In my analysis of this testimony, I have suggested that organised abuse may be a manifestation of deep-seated social structures in which male violence against women and children serves powerful symbolic functions. In participants' accounts, organised abuse emerged as a strategy of power whereby abusive men (and sometimes women) sought to establish and maintain relations with one another through the sexual objectification and exchange of children and women. This process of exchange was marked by staged performances, sometimes of a ritualistic nature, as perpetrators acted out a mythology in which women and children were construed as despised symbols of powerlessness and contamination.

In popular and academic discourses, the evidence of severe mental and physical injuries amongst adults and children reporting organised abuse has been obscured by a pervasive denial that such forms of abuse could exist within modern Western societies. The prominence of sceptical accounts of organised abuse is a revealing case

study of the power of collective denial. "There are strict limits to human empathy", Ignatieff (1998: 287) warns in his account of media constructions of atrocities, and he highlights how bystanders attempt to avoid their obligation to intervene in human suffering by "othering" the victim on the grounds of ethnicity, tradition, history and so forth. In this case of organised abuse, the devices that have been used to "other" victims have been drawn from the very fields that claim to assist them: psychology, psychiatry and the law. The lived experience of survivors of organised abuse has often been eclipsed by the intervention of those clinicians and academics who have argued that their life histories have no truth value except as symptoms of pathology and disorder (e.g. Ganaway, 1989; Coons, 1994; Stack, 2002).

The notion that families and networks of men could use the bodies of children and women as a form of currency seems incongruous with our understanding of contemporary society. Upon closer inspection, I have suggested that the image of contemporary Western society as safe, predictable and "civilised" legitimises entrenched inequalities between men, women and children whilst rendering invisible the violence that arises from these inequalities. Physical and sexual violence against women and children remain deeply embedded in Western culture and a number of theorists have linked this violence to a literal and symbolic traffic in women and children between men (Rubin, 1975; Pateman, 1988; Bourdieu, 2001). The findings of this study suggest that organised abuse is part of this tradition of sexual traffic and exchange, sharing much in common with other forms of gendered violence, particularly multiple perpetrator rape (see O'Sullivan, 1991; Sanday, 2007; Horvath & Kelly, 2009), sexual murder (see Cameron & Frazer, 1987; Caputi, 1988) and other

group sexual offences against women and children (see Kelly, 2000; Cooper, Anaf & Bowden, 2006; Harkins & Dixon, 2010).

The relationship between age, gender and power has been an enduring theme throughout this thesis. These relations of power not only shaped the most mundane and basic conditions of participants' childhood experiences, they formed the basis for the abusive groups that subjected participants to organised abuse. In this study, organised abuse was a particularly intense configuration of gendered violence that leveraged women's and children's obedience through everyday power relations. Practices of sexual abuse and torture served to reinforce and intensify these relations, but nonetheless these relations were formed predominantly in the mundane contexts of home and school. The captivity of children and women in organised abuse was a constantly unfolding process that was given structure by the routine and ostensibly mundane inequities that subordinate women and children in everyday life. In abusive contexts, however, relations of power were expressed and maintained through practices of sexual abuse and, at times, torture and murder.

The literature on sexual offences is marked by distinct analytic binaries and dichotomies e.g. incest/extra-familial abuse, male victims/female victims, child victims/adult victims, male perpetrators/female perpetrators, child sexual abuse/rape. This study suggests that these dichotomies are somewhat arbitrary. In organised abuse, multiple configurations of victim, perpetrator and abuse intersect at once, highlighting the overlap between different configurations of sexual violence. In this study, sexual abuse appeared to be a practice whereby men sought to construct a sense of self in relation to others, a self formed through experiences of sexualised

domination and control and thus a self that accorded with socially valued forms of masculinities. In the context of abusive groups, this process was intensified by the legitimation offered by like-minded men and the development of a subculture based on a shared sense of masculine entitlement. These subcultures, whilst diverse and idiosyncratic, reflected the arrangement of power in the over-arching gender order. This study troubles the notion that "child sexual abuse" can be considered a category of abuse discrete from "adult sexual assault" or other forms of sexual violence. It calls for a re-evaluation of sexually abusive practices as *constructive* or *constitutive* practices through which men seek to accrue experiences of power and status through the sexualised subordination of others.

Sexual abuse as a gendered strategy of power

This study has highlighted the structured powerlessness of children within the gender order and their vulnerability to entrapment within profoundly abusive relationships with adults. I have explored how sexual abuse is embedded within the structural conditions of childhood, in which age functions as a specific dimension of children's powerlessness that overlaps with, but is not reducible to, gender. It may seem redundant to link the social construction of childhood to children's powerlessness. After all, an infant or a young child is physically, emotionally and psychologically dependent upon adults. Whilst children are necessarily immature in physiological and psychological terms, their dependency on adults is shaped by and mediated through social structures that situate children within power relations (Jenks, 1996). Children's powerlessness does therefore not take a "natural" or "inevitable" form but rather it is mediated by, and formed within, social structures. For most participants, the adults that subjected them to organised abuse were also adults who wielded a significant amount of power over them at home or school, the sites that Jenks and colleagues

(1998) call the "prescribed spaces" of childhood. Frequently, their primary abuser's power over them was based not only upon their age as adults but also upon their gender as men in male-dominated power structures and institutions. In short, the configurations of power that characterised the topography of participants' childhoods were such that participants were rendered vulnerable to sexual exploitation by adults. It may be that sexual abuse is the eroticisation of the very power differentials that render children vulnerable to sexual abuse in the first place (Liddle, 1993).

Sexual abuse is mostly practiced by solitary offenders but it is always *social* to the extent that it is a practice that expresses power structures of gender and age (Cossins, 2000). In participants' accounts of childhood, sexual abuse was a practice through which they learnt the respective status of children and adults and males and females. Gender and age were coincidental factors that operated at once and together. Common to the accounts that male and female participants provided of sexual abuse was their structured powerlessness on the basis of age, and this powerlessness had a "feminising" quality regardless of their biological sex. For many female participants, sexual and physical abuse and other forms of exploitation were bound up in the gendered division of labour: part and parcel of the workload of menial tasks that "naturally" fell to girls and women. Male participants' accounts implicitly affirmed this view. They experienced sexual abuse as a "feminising" practice that placed them in a subordinate (that is to say, "feminine") subject position. Whilst the vulnerability of male participants to organised abuse diminished as they aged and left the spaces of childhood, approximately half of the female participants reported organised abuse in adulthood. This suggests that the structured powerlessness described by participants during childhood persisted for many participants along the axis of gender.

The harms of sexual abuse were inextricably bound up with the failure of adults to detect and intervene in their abuse or to provide them with care and support. Some participants accounted for the failure of adults to detect their organised abuse by describing their own silence in the face of threats and/or the amnesiac "splitting" that interfered with their knowledge of their own victimisation. However, they also described exhibiting behaviour that, in retrospect, seems to be clearly indicative of a child in distress e.g. dissociative fugues and amnesia, adolescent incontinence, age-inappropriate sexual knowledge and conduct. Many participants grew up prior to the development of community awareness about the impacts of sexual abuse. It is therefore understandable that these behaviours might not have been considered symptomatic of sexual abuse. However, that does not explain why, when adults witnessed this disturbed behaviour, they generally held the child personally accountable for it rather than inquiring into its origins. Across the sample, there was little to distinguish the experiences of disbelief and invalidation experienced by participants when they tried to make their abuse known to authority figures, regardless of whether they were raised in the 1950s or the 1980s. This suggests that disbelief and invalidation are enduring features of adult–child relations and interactions.

It seems that many adults, whilst not sexually abusive themselves, nonetheless facilitate sexual abuse through their denial of sexual abuse and their pervasive invalidation of children's thoughts, feelings and needs. For many participants, this set in motion a cycle of abuse, invalidation and powerlessness that served to affirm, to the child, the legitimacy of her victimisation. James and colleagues (1998) have emphasised how arbitrary adult decision-making can seem to children and yet the injustices of the "gerontocracy" are not random, nor are they harmless. In this study,

many adults were complicit in institutional and familial cultures of child abuse and neglect, even though they were not actively abusive themselves. The manner in which the distress of abused children was disavowed was a powerful source of harm to participants. This cycle was particularly acute for female participants who grew up in familial and social environments in which the invalidation of the experiences and needs of girls and women was embedded within the routine of everyday life.[31]

Organised abuse and gendered structures of power

In the accounts of organised abuse gathered in this study, abusers turned the structured powerlessness of children against them, forcing them to internalise their powerlessness and adapt to it accordingly. These adaptations entrenched the powerlessness of children in their dispositions; that is, their powerlessness became inscribed in the precognitive functions that determined how they made sense of their world and themselves. Sky aptly described this as an "orientating response", emphasising how organised abuse becomes enmeshed in the most basic responses of victims to their environment.

> No matter what you say or do – they [the abusive group] are like the colour of your sunglasses. You feel them there. They are everywhere, everything, all the time. And it's really hard to move through that.

In participants' accounts, organised abuse drew on and intensified existing inequities between men, women and children through subordinating practices that harmonised the dispositions of victims and perpetrators. Žižek (2008: 31) observes that symbolic

[31] See Herman (1992) and Linehan (1993) for discussions on the relationship between the harms of sexual abuse and the harms of sexism.

violence at its purest "appears as its opposite, as the spontaneity of the milieu in which we dwell, of the air we breathe". In organised abuse, the impunity granted to abusive men by existing structures and ideologies of power created spaces and opportunities for abuse of bizarre or even atrocious proportions. I argued that this abuse, however extreme, emerged from within and shared much in common with everyday familial and institutional arrangements. It was precisely these arrangements that made organised abuse possible and, in participants' experiences, reaffirmed and legitimised their subordination to sexual exploitation.

In this study, the theme of "two worlds" (Chapter 7) highlighted how the ideology of the public–private divide made possible participants' victimisation in organised abuse. The prevalence of dissociative disorders amongst participants in this study, and amongst adults and children with histories of organised abuse as a whole (Ross, 1995; Mollon, 1996; Sinason, 2002), can be interpreted as evidence of the profound and enduring disjunction between the "public" and "private" realms, and the vulnerability of women and children to extreme interpersonal violence. In both symbolic and practical terms, organised abuse cannot be disentangled from the ideology of the public–private divide. Organised abuse is a life-threatening and prolonged form of violence facilitated through the impunity granted to men (and adults more generally) in the private or relational sphere and internalised as such, resulting in the development of multiple personalities as children attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable contradictions of their "public" and "private" lives.

Structures of power, after all, extend beyond their symbolic, linguistic and interpersonal manifestations. Male domination is a social, political and economic

reality, manifested through men's control of the institutions of power. It is the *realpolitik* of masculine domination that lends its symbolic representations such power and persuasiveness (Bourdieu, 2001). This was a reality that emerged strongly within participants' accounts. As children, participants were confronted with the institutional power available to their abusers through their roles as fathers, grandfathers, priests, teachers, doctors, Freemasons and other patriarchal figures of authority. This power was given terrifying form through the practice of ritualistic abuse, as abusers adopted the ritualistic traditions of masculine domination and integrated them into organised abuse. In participants' experiences, the power that their abusers held over them as adults and as men was only the precursor to the long shadow they cast as representatives of a network of abusers who had co-opted the symbolic and functional power of larger institutions.

Crafting and embedding relations of domination

Psychological explanations of sexually abusive behaviour have typically emphasised the perpetrator's pursuit of sexual pleasure: sexual abusers are "paedophiles" who seek sexual release with children (for critiques of this view, see Kelly, 1996; Kitzinger, 1999; Cowburn & Dominelli, 2001). In Australia, public inquiries into organised child sexual abuse have been based on this conceptualisation of sexual abuse as a paraphilia (e.g. NCA Joint Committee Report, 1995; Miller, 1997; Wood Report, 1997; for a critique, see Cossins, 1999). In contrast, this study has gathered numerous accounts of sexual abuse that would contradict such an explanation. Many participants described experiencing and witnessing sadistic sexual practices that appear to have been designed to inflict harm upon the child rather than generate sexual pleasure for the perpetrator. In addition, many participants described circumstances in which the sexual abuse of children and women (and sometimes men)

occurred simultaneously as well as the sexual abuse of girl children into adulthood. There is increasing attention being paid to what Heil and colleagues (2003) have called "crossover sexual offenses"; that is, men with a history of sexual offending that is not limited to specific age, gender or relationship categories (Heil, Ahlmeyer et al., 2003; Cann, Friendship & Gozna, 2007). The preponderance of sadistic practices and the prevalence of "crossover offences" in participants' accounts of organised abuse does not support the proposition that men who sexually abuse children in groups do so primarily because they share a sexual preference for children.

To rephrase what is now a feminist truism, organised abuse is about power and not sex; or rather, sexual practices are amongst the practices of power that organised perpetrators use against women and children. A survivor of the Belgium organised abuse case, Regina Louf, made this point clearly when she said:

> I find the expression "paedophile network" misleading. For me paedophiles are those men who go to playgrounds or swimming pools, priests ... I certainly don't want to exonerate them, but I would rather have paedophiles than the types we were involved with. There were men who never touched the children. Whether you were five, ten or fifteen didn't matter. What mattered to them was sex, power, experience. To do things they would never have tried with their own wives. Among them were some real sadists. (Louf quoted in Bulte & de Conick, 1998).

In short, psychological explanations of sexual abuse that rest on the presumption that perpetrators are motivated by a sexual desire for children ("paedophilia") are

manifestly unable to account for the conduct of abusive groups described in this study. Not only does the "paedophilia" literature fail to adequately account for sadistic abuse or the abuse of women and children by the same perpetrators, but it ignores the interactive nature of sexual abuse; that is, the impact of sexual abuse upon a child and the perpetrator's response to that impact.

In this study, children's responses to sexual abuse and sadistic abuse were specifically elicited, monitored and policed by abusers and abusive groups. In some circumstances, children were placed in terrifying circumstances (for example, being sat in the midst of a pile of snakes) and subjected to torture (for example, their heads held under water) with the apparent intention of eliciting a terrified response in the child. In other circumstances, children were subjected to torture during which they were forbidden to express fear or pain. Some participants described incidents of abuse in which an abuser stimulated a sexually pleasurable response in them. In participants' accounts, the various practices of sex and sadism to which they were subjected appear to have been demonstrations of power and control. It was in the response of victims to abuse (whether their response was one of pain, terrified silence or pleasure) that perpetrators sought evidence of their power.

The utility of sexual abuse as a practice of power may rest upon its capacity to produce victims whose subordinate conduct reinforces the abuser's sense of domination, control and, thus, his experiences of masculinity. Mollon (2001: 216), a psychologist specialising in treating sexually abused people, notes that, in the act of abusing a child,

> a significant part of the motivation of the abuser may be to evoke projectively in the child the unwanted negative images of the self – to make the abused one feel utterly helpless, humiliated, shamed, violated and abject – and to bring about a near annihilation of the true self of the abused.

It may be through this act of annihilation that the abuser generates a corresponding experience of gendered power. Whilst perpetrators may feel "supermasculine", (Messerschmidt 2000), the victim is simultaneously disempowered as the perpetrator manipulates her body to generate experiences of pain, fear and/or pleasure. It is notable that girls who are subject to men's physical and/or sexual violence for prolonged periods of time are at a significantly heightened risk of physical and sexual victimisation in adulthood, often at the hands of intimate partners (Coid, Petruckevitch, Feder, Chung, Richardson & Moorey, 2001; Bensley, Van Eenwyk & Wynkoop Simmons, 2003; Johnson, Ollus & Nevala, 2008). This suggests that sexual abuse, as a gendered strategy of power, results in the harmonising of the dispositions of the victim and the victimiser in ways that prompt victims to view masculine practices of power (such as physical and sexual violence) as an inevitable and natural part of gender relations.[32] This view is then pervasively reinforced by the relations of masculine domination embedded in the social and cultural environment. The fact that half of the women in this study reported organised abuse continuing into adulthood highlights not only the persistence of abusive groups, but the enduring nature of the psychological changes wrought by organised abuse.

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[32] This is not to hold the victim responsible for experiences of abuse and revictimisation. Grauerholz (2000) proposes an ecological explanation of revictimisation whereby the traumatic sexualisation of sexual abuse interacts with interpersonal and sociocultural factors to increase sexually abused women's vulnerability to interpersonal violence.

Ritual and atrocity as strategies of power

In participants' accounts of ritualistic abuse, abusive groups utilised ritualistic practices to generate a private discourse about the righteous domination of abusive men over women and children, a discourse often marked with references to the "natural" or "supernatural" order. The internal and private discourses of abusive groups, with their copious mentions of Satan, magical powers and eternal damnation, may appear jarringly naive and even garish to those unfamiliar with the abusive contexts in which they have arisen. However, for victims of organised abuse, they invoke a metaphysical order in which they are required to submit to further abuse and torture.

From the findings of this study, it would seem that the focus of much of the literature on ritualistic abuse is misplaced. If the religious *mythos* and ritualistic practices of abusive groups are the means through which the true nature of their control and domination is concealed, then it would seem that many therapists and researchers, in their focus on religion and ritual in organised abuse, are inadvertently conspiring with this strategy of power. I have argued in this study that many perpetrators of organised abuse appear "enchanted" by the scientific and religious ideologies that they use to legitimise their sexual victimisation of children and women. However, in much of the literature on ritualistic abuse, it seems that some therapists and researchers have become similarly "enchanted" by the religious *mythos* and practices of abusive groups, bedazzled by their strange robes, gestures and symbols.

If anything, this highlights the efficacy of ritualistic practices in obscuring relations of power and, in Bourdieu's (2001) terms, "eternalizing the arbitrary": "dehistoricizing"

and "eternalizing" contingent relations of power and thus placing them beyond the reach of intervention or change. I would suggest that ritualistic abuse and associated practices are not manifestations of an ahistorical "evil" or a secretive "satanic" tradition, but instead extreme expressions of a well-documented tradition of libertine misogyny (see Sanday, 1996; Trumbach, 2003; Wolff, 2005) that associates transgression and subjectivity with practices of masculinity, and passivity and objectification with practices of femininity. This is a tradition that permeates Western culture and the construction of masculine sexualities in terms of sadism and transgression (Cameron & Frazer, 1987; Tatar, 1995; Kramer, 1997).

Perhaps the most difficult task that this project demanded of me was the analysis of participants' reports of reproductive harms and other atrocities. I left this analysis to the last, since I suspected that it would require all the theoretical insights gleaned from previous analyses, but also I was reluctant to confront these reports in their totality. Sceptics have responded to these reports with contemptuous derision, characterising adults' and children's accounts of murder in organised abuse as fantasies of indiscriminate slaughter drawn from horror movies and popular culture. Once I began the analysis, however, the gendered nature of participants' descriptions of sexualised murders and reproductive harms were striking, as were their similarity to the documented crimes of serial and sexual murderers. Emerging from participants' descriptions of atrocities in organised contexts was a pattern of murderous, sexualised violence through which abusive groups enacted an ideology of masculine transcendence and supremacy. Participants' recollections did not have the unstructured quality of whimsies or fantasy, quite the opposite. They grieved deeply over the deaths they had witnessed and mourned the children that had been taken from

them. Their accounts of the cycle of reproductive harm in organised abuse appeared to be realistic and consistent across the study. The link between these atrocities and the inflated discourse of hyper-masculinity articulated by their abusers, with their claims to godhood and magical powers, was present in all these reports. This is a characteristic of reports of ritualistic abuse more generally (see Scott, 2001). It seems that, through such extreme acts of violence against women and children, some men seek to proffer final and incontrovertible proof of a transcendental masculine subjectivity.

Practices such as ritualistic abuse and sexual murder are devastating but rare. The reasons why groups of people might resort to such strategies in order to accrue experiences of power and prestige are complex. Each particular case of organised abuse is likely to involve specific personal, interpersonal and situational factors as well as more general sociocultural processes (Harkins & Dixon, 2010). What was discernable within accounts of organised abuse was a set of gendered dynamics that link organised abuse to men's violence more generally. In an excerpt from her personal journal, Kelly (2000: 45) muses on the unacknowledged commonalities that emerge in the media coverage of war, rape and murder:

> Chaos and the breakdown of the social order, or just business as usual? There is a common thread, which none of the reporting seems to notice – these are all stories of men engaged in the pursuit of entitlement, men who rage at being challenged or denied, men who have no respect for the lives of women and children.

Perhaps the prevalence and extremes of sexual violence by men speaks to the anxieties produced by the inherent ambiguities of the gender order, in which men are compelled to emulate idealised gender forms in whose shadows they perpetually labour (Kramer, 1997). The gender order may privilege men over women and children, and construe women and children as feminised objects in relation to the masculine subject. However, a number of theorists have noted that men's efforts to construct and perform their gender identity are attended by pervasive feelings of insecurity and inferiority (Messerschmidt, 1993; Kaufman, 1999; Connell, 2005). Men experience their structural privilege as an unstable flux of relations in which they are subject to other men's practices of power even as they seek to establish status and power through the subordination of others (Cossins, 2000). These are symbolic and structural arrangements in which men fantasise about complete control in a perpetually unstable web of relations with other men, and so practices of control and domination over subordinated groups (such as children and women) may serve as the medium through which this fantasy can be temporarily lived out.

Sexual violence has meaning and significance to men enmeshed within such an arrangement, whether experienced vicariously through music, art, theatre and cinema (Caputi, 1988; Kramer, 1997) or enacted through practices of rape, torture and murder (Cameron & Frazer, 1987). This study suggests that organised abuse involves groups and subcultures in which this logic has become a manifest and institutionalised characteristic of the relations between men. It was not the solely the resort of marginalised or impoverished men who were otherwise excluded from the exercise of power. Participants described organised groups that included professionals as well as

men on the margins of the workforce. Their stories of organised abuse were, at times, characterised by an *excess* of masculine power rather than a deficit of it, as some perpetrators of organised abuse were influential members of professional, religious and fraternal networks. For many participants, the relationship between organised abuse and the normative institutional and structural privileges accorded to men was made manifest through the horror of ritualistic abuse.

Some questions remain. Why did *these* particular men get involved in organised abuse and/or ritualistic abuse? Surely there is an element of sociopathy evident in men who become enmeshed in such arrangements? Perhaps there are psychological factors or individual motivations common to men who sexually abuse in organised contexts. However, they have yet to be definitively identified and I would question whether such factors are implicit within perpetrators themselves rather than individual manifestations of situational and/or sociocultural factors. As I emphasised at the conclusion of Chapter 9, it seems that organised abuse emerges in circumstances that share a number of characteristics: male-dominated institutions whose marginalisation of women is legitimised by ideologies (implicit or explicit) of masculine domination, particularly where that domination is embedded within ritualistic practices and metaphysical justifications. In participants' accounts, organised abuse did not develop through the collusion of like-minded men (that is, men with a predisposition for organised abuse), but rather it seemed that men's identities were formed within institutional and mainstream cultures of masculine domination and then (often through their contact with religious or fraternal organisations) they were initiated into the subculture of an abusive group. This took the form of a staged progression rather than a sudden transition. Individual perpetrators may have been harbouring a

predisposition for such abusive activities. Nonetheless, it seems that abusive groups are high-pressure environments that carefully select potential members and then employ a range of strategies to overcome individual inhibitions and legitimise sexual abuse and other forms of violence.

The practical implications of the research

The results of this thesis suggests that, although organised abuse constitutes a small minority of cases of sexual abuse overall, the crimes committed in organised contexts and the lifelong burden of illness and disability borne by survivors are so serious that they require a specialised response. The study has also documented the severe mental health consequences of organised abuse. Whilst the care and support needs of adults with histories of organised abuse have not been a specific focus of this thesis, it is clear from participants' accounts that they require specialist mental health care that is presently difficult to obtain and very expensive. I have explored this issue in more depth in a conference paper (see Appendix VI). The practical implications of this research fall under five general categories: Detection, training, care and support, further research and criminal justice issues.

1. Detection

The findings of this study suggest that organised abuse constitutes a covert pattern of sexual and physical violence against children and women that may be difficult for front line workers to detect and accurately identify. In this study, the obstacles preventing children from disclosing organised abuse were substantial, including terror, amnesia and the absence of a safe and supportive environment. Adults with prior or ongoing experiences of organised abuse may be inhibited from disclosing their experiences for similar reasons. However, the research literature has documented

that victims of organised abuse are presenting in a range of health and welfare settings, which presents opportunities for detection and early intervention.

> **Recommendation 1**: *Routine trauma screening and history taking in appropriate settings that incorporate potential measures or indicators of organised abuse*. Incorporating a trauma history screening tool into intake and assessment procedures in mental health or other settings (e.g. sexual health services, alcohol and drug services, domestic violence services, sexual assault services) with questions pertaining to indicators of organised abuse (e.g. repeated incidents of multi-perpetrator abuse, sexual abuse by men and women), may assist in the detection of victims of organised abuse and facilitate disclosure. It is pertinent to note that such questions have been incorporated into some large-scale quantitative surveys as well as clinical surveys without reports of widespread distress or upset. The early detection and intervention in cases of organised abuse through screening and assessment procedures are likely to have benefits that would offset the (arguably small) risk that such questions could cause distress.

Whilst public inquiries into organised child sexual abuse throughout the 1990s have resulted in significant improvements to child protection investigations, these changes related to sexual abuse more generally rather than organised abuse specifically. For example, the Paedophile Inquiry of the NSW Wood Royal Commission (1997) resulted in the formation of joint investigative and response task forces constituted of social workers as well as police officers, and greater interagency cooperation between child protection agencies and the police. However, there is still a lack of recognition of organised abuse amongst state-based and federal policing agencies. The kinds of

organised abuse documented in this study and others (Gallagher, Hughes & Parker, 1996; Itzin, 2001; Scott, 2001), which frequently involve familial abusers and mainstream institutions (e.g. churches, fraternal organisations), do not presently fall under the remit of federal policing bodies and intelligence agencies, although familial organised abuse often involves the most serious forms of sexual abuse (Gallagher, 1998).

> **Recommendation 2**: *The reassessment of policing priorities in relation to organised abuse in light of the research evidence that highlights the relationships between organised abuse, incest and extra-familial/institutional abuse.* At present, policing strategies in relation to organised abuse appear to be highly reactive and developed in response to community concerns (e.g. in relation to child sexual entrapment over the internet) or emerging political priorities (e.g. the Northern Territory intervention) rather than through scrutinising the evidence. All forms of organised abuse should be addressed by federal policing and intelligence bodies rather than solely those that are the subject of community, media or political attention.

Organised abuse, as a specific category of abuse, has not been the subject of proactive policing or systemic intelligence gathering in Australia. Gallagher (1998) argues that all child sexual abuse notifications should be centrally recorded in order to identify cases of organised abuse and to avoid the reactive and often ineffective investigatory response that attends the inadvertent detection of organised abuse cases. Cooper (2004) has observed how the Australian policing response to organised crime ignores the sexual and physical violence against women and children that often occurs in abusive groups and criminal networks.

Recommendation 3: *The development of systematic intelligence-gathering practices and arrangements in relation to organised abuse.* A case of organised abuse may only be uncovered by considering the similarities between different reports of sexual abuse (Gallagher, 1998). Child sexual abuse reports should be centrally recorded and scrutinised for patterns and similarities at a state and national level.

There is presently a dearth of empirical data on organised abuse due to the neglect of the issue by researchers. Presently, most surveys of sexual abuse and sexual practice do not include questions that might detect organised abuse. Given the frequency of multi-perpetrator sexual offences (Harkins & Dixon, 2010) this is a serious oversight.

Recommendation 4: *Incorporating organised abuse into the sexual health and sexual abuse research agenda.* Measures of sexual coercion and abuse have been integrated into large quantitative surveys without causing widespread distress and therefore future surveys should include measures that would enable researchers to differentiate organised abuse from other experiences of sexual abuse. Where research participants disclose sexual abuse or organised abuse, clear and supportive pathways to counselling and support should be made available.

2. Training

Presently, adult survivors of sexual abuse face very constrained choices in relation to care and support in Australia (Freer & Seymour, 2003; O'Brien, Henderson & Bateman, 2007), and this is a particularly acute issue for adults with histories of organised abuse. Many adults with histories of organised abuse are in need of regular,

long-term treatment. In my experience, they are frequently unable to locate a suitably skilled counsellor and they can't afford them when they do find them. Moreover, few clinicians choose to specialise in this difficult area and their services are in high demand. This lack of service coverage for adult survivors of organised abuse is just one example of the lack of priority given to adults with trauma-related mental health problems in the Australian public health system. Training on sexual abuse and dissociation is not a core feature of mental health curricula in Australia (Collins, 2005). As a result, much of the mental health workforce is not skilled in the identification and treatment of abuse-related and dissociative disorders.

Recommendation 5: *The development of a trauma-informed health system.* Child sexual abuse is a significant predictor of poor mental and physical health outcomes (Draper, Pirkis, Snowdon, Lautenschlager, Wilson & Almeida, 2008) and so training on sexual abuse should be a feature of the education of all health and welfare workers, and a particular focus of psychological and psychiatric training.

Recommendation 6: *Incorporating organised abuse into training on sexual abuse.* Organised abuse should constitute a component of all training on sexual abuse. Information on organised abuse should be integrated into education and training programs for workers in relation to child abuse and mental health in order to facilitate the accurate identification of victims of organised abuse. However, once a victim or case of organised abuse has been detected, appropriate referral pathways are necessary. At present, if an adult survivor of organised abuse was identified in a health or welfare context, it is

unclear where they could access appropriate care if they cannot afford private health care.

Recommendation 7: *Workforce planning.* There is a need for workforce planning and incentives that encourage mental health workers to develop their expertise in treating the complex needs of adult survivors of sexual abuse, including those people exposed to chronic and pervasive abuse such as survivors of organised abuse.

Cooper's (2004) research with women escaping from sexually abusive groups suggests that community service interventions are not only fraught but potentially dangerous for adult and child victims of organised abuse. Without sensitive inter-agency communication and case management, victims are at risk of retaliatory violence if they report their abuse to the authorities.

Recommendation 8: *Specialist police training.* Police require specialist training in order to identify potential indicators of organised abuse and the contexts and settings of organised abuse, and to enable them to work effectively with profoundly traumatised adults and children, provide them with protection when appropriate and thus maximise the quality of their evidence.

Recommendation 9: *Specialist training with support agencies.* Non-government or voluntary agencies providing support to adults or children during an investigation into allegations of organised abuse, or subsequent civil or criminal proceedings, should also be aware of, and responsive to, their particular needs.

The findings of this project suggest that organised abuse should be recognised specifically as a women's and child's health issue and integrated into policy-making in relation to preventing violence against women and children. Training on organised abuse should be incorporated into all areas of child abuse prevention, child protection and violence prevention.

Recommendation 10: *Integrating organised abuse into violence prevention programs.* Non-government agencies involved in abuse and violence prevention should be familiar with the unique characteristics of organised abuse (for example, the particular strategies utilised by abusive groups to coerce children and women into silence and obedience) and seek to address these challenges in their work.

Recommendation 11: *Skilling up teachers, counsellors and health educators in school settings to identify and respond to dissociation, trauma and abuse in young people and children.* The role of trauma and dissociation in developmental and educational delays was a factor in the life histories of a number of participants in this study. Since their teachers and school counsellors were unfamiliar with the relationship between abuse and learning and social difficulties, they were subject to inappropriate and stigmatising educational interventions e.g. repeating a year of school, being placed in a "special" class or being sent to a more punitive institution. Teachers and school counsellors should be sensitive to the possible role of abuse and trauma in delayed, disturbed or disruptive student behaviours and equipped to respond appropriately.

3. Care and support

This study suggests that the cycle of organised abuse and accommodation of the abuse is self-legitimising and produces victims who, in adulthood as well as childhood, are likely to repeatedly put themselves at risk of organised abuse and other forms of interpersonal violence despite a strong wish to bring the abuse to an end. In the lives of victims of organised abuse, safety and health are synonymous. It was clear that many participants continued to suffer from a high burden of illness and distress as a result of their organised abuse. For some, the extent of their unmet health and emotional needs compromised their efforts to keep themselves safe and contributed to their ongoing victimisation by abusive groups and/or abusive partners. In this study as well as others (Smith, 1993; Scott, 2001; Sarson & MacDonald, 2008), some participants described being forcibly involved in murder. Survivors of organised abuse may therefore have a rational fear that, should they disclose their victimisation, they risk prosecution for their involvement in criminal acts. This provides an effective leverage point for abusers who seek to blackmail victims of organised abuse into ongoing sexual exploitation.

To break the cycle of organised abuse, adult and child victims require specialist care within a physical environment that provides them with protection from revictimisation as well as the support to resist the urge to engage in at-risk behaviours. The unique dimensions of victimisation in organised abuse (such as the uncertainties around criminal responsibility outlined above) constitute vulnerabilities that are specific to survivors of organised abuse and therefore it is crucial that they can access specialist care and support. In Australia at present, specialist and long-term treatment for trauma-related and dissociative disorders are not available to those without private

health cover. Publicly funded services for adult survivors of trauma and torture are targeted primarily at veterans, migrants, refugees and people traumatised in adulthood (e.g. car accidents, natural disasters). Adults with histories of sexual abuse are specifically excluded from these services, and yet, despite their complex and acute needs, they are not provided with adequate alternatives.

Presently, the public health system provides for up to twelve psychotherapeutic sessions per year on referral by a general practitioner, which is manifestly inadequate for people with histories of organised abuse. To put it simply, the needs of adults with histories of severe sexual violence are not being addressed by the Australian health system (Cooper, 2004). Whilst some domestic violence services and supported accommodation programs are providing this support in an ad hoc fashion (van Dyke, 1995; Cooper, 2004), the lack of service coverage for victims of organised abuse reduces their opportunities to achieve a sense of stability and wellbeing and/or disrupt their abuse and protect themselves and, frequently, their children.

> **Recommendation 12**: *The development of a network of publicly funded services for adults with histories of abuse and trauma.* These services should include mental health services and drug and alcohol services. The provision of such services would address the diverse range of needs of adults with histories of sexual abuse, including organised abuse. It is possible that such services would also disrupt the mechanisms of power whereby women are held by abusive groups in captivity alongside their children and could potentially result in a substantive decline in the numbers of children and women subject to such abuse. The provision of mental health care and social work assistance to women with histories of organised abuse should include measures to ensure

their physical safety from revictimisation if necessary. The potential vulnerabilities of the children of women with histories of organised abuse should also be assessed and services should be responsive to the concerns that women with histories of organised abuse may have about the safety of their children.

Recommendation 13: *Changes to Medicare to ensure that adults with trauma-related disorders can access intensive and regular therapeutic care.* Without treatment, people with mental health problems associated with organised abuse, such as DID, are extremely vulnerable to suicide and self-harm (Kluft, 1995) as well as revictimisation (Middleton, 2005). The evidence suggests that people with dissociative and trauma-related disorders respond well to appropriate therapeutic interventions (Ross, 1999). Where adults are diagnosed with a trauma-related disorder, there should be provision in Medicare to enable them to receive the intensive and urgent treatment they require.

Recommendation 14: *The development of cooperative ties between policing agencies and specialist services for abuse and trauma.* Women and children escaping abusive groups face great risks to their safety and they require the protection and support of police agencies if they are to disclose information about organised abuse. For this reason, specialist health services for adults and children subject to sexual abuse should have recourse to specially trained police officers who are aware of and responsive to the needs of this population and the risks they face as informants or witnesses.

Participants in this study described experiencing considerable stigma and discrimination in mental health-care settings. Their histories of abuse were invalidated and their disclosures were mocked. They were at risk of stigmatising diagnoses such as "borderline personality disorder" or "factitious disorders" (a very low prevalence illness and therefore an unlikely explanation for a report of organised abuse) or even invented disorders such as "false memory syndrome". This was a particular issue in participants' encounters with psychiatrists (see Appendix V).

> **Recommendation 15**: *Specific measures are taken to reduce the stigmatisation of adults with histories of sexual abuse in mental health settings.* Mental health training and workforce planning should include measures that specific address discrimination against adults (and particularly women) in mental health care settings with histories of abuse and complex needs.

An appropriate response to the challenges of child sexual exploitation, Kelly, Regan and Burton (2000: 83) have emphasised, must provide "possibilities for children and young people to survive outside the nuclear family". In this study, many participants' homes and families served as both prisons and training grounds for organised abuse. However, Colleen's experience of organised abuse in a residential institution reflected the experiences of many state wards, as documented in a number of Australian public inquiries (Senate Community Affairs Committee, 2001; Mullighan Report, 2004; Senate Community Affairs Committee, 2004). Although the issue of children in care has been the subject of sustained discussion, policy development and service innovation, "out-of-home care systems around the world continue to be faced with difficulties in providing stable and nurturing placements for a sizeable proportion of

children and young people who cannot remain in their own homes" (Osborn, Delfabbro & Barber, 2008: 847). Whilst many children and young people are not safe from organised abuse (or other forms of abuse and neglect, for that matter) in their homes, it seems that the state cannot guarantee them a safe and nurturing environment outside their family.

Recommendation 16: *Increased investment in the development of a care system that provides positive life outcomes for children in out-of-home care.* The development of a well-funded care system that provides for the needs of abused children and young people is fundamental to addressing the entrapment of children in familial organised abuse and other forms of family-based abuse.

4. Further research

I have emphasised the political dimensions of participants' experiences in terms of the immediate impact of relations of age, gender and power, both within abusive groups and in the communities out of which the abusive groups emerged. These operations of power are also reflected in the hegemonic minimisation of the gendered violence experienced by women and children and the constitution of abused people as incredible witnesses in the criminal justice system and in some sections of the media and academia (Scutt, 1997; Campbell, 2003). It is clear that more research into organised abuse is necessary, not only in terms of its prevalence and incidence but also in terms of its symbolic construction in popular and academic discourse.

Recommendation 17: *The development of a coherent research agenda into organised abuse that contributes to and draws from existing knowledge about sexual violence.* At present, there is little empirical research into organised

abuse and other extreme forms of sexual abuse e.g. the circumstances in which children are sexually abused into adulthood, or the forms of sexual and physical violence that, although committed in domestic contexts, might nonetheless constitute "torture". Although some of these issues are addressed in the literature on "ritual abuse", this literature is highly idiosyncratic and lacks a firm basis in existing theory and research on sexual abuse. Our understanding of organised abuse would benefit from the development of a coherent research agenda that is embedded within existing knowledge and theory.

Recommendation 18: *Discursive and historical analyses of the symbolic construction of organised abuse.* More research is needed into the social and political arrangements that sustain the "discourse of disbelief" (Scott 2001) that renders women's and children's eyewitness testimony of sexual violence as lacking in probative value in the courts and more generally. Such a research agenda should pay close attention to financial and ideological conflicts of interest that emerge in the participation of some academic claims-makers in commercial activities (e.g. acting as consultants and expert witnesses to people accused of sexual abuse) that may influence their objectivity as researchers. There is also need for greater critical scrutiny of "moral panic" discourse and how it has developed into a rhetorical lens which is used frequently by journalists and academics to belittle and diminish women's and children's experiences of abuse and violence.

5. Criminal justice issues

Experiences of organised abuse highlight the ease with which women who allege sexual abuse in childhood can be construed as malicious or unstable by virtue of the fact that they exhibit symptoms of the very violence they allege. This is a pervasive problem within the criminal justice system and it goes to the heart of the justice system's construction of credibility, not to mention its claim to legitimacy. The identification and prosecution of organised sexual offences against women and children pose a number challenges to the criminal justice system. Most often, the failure of the system to accommodate the needs of victims has been construed as a failure on the part of the victim (O'Hara, 1996; Brooks, 2001; Coleman, 2008). At present, the inequities of relations of gender and age not only provide abusive men with the symbolic and material resources through which to conspire to sexually and physically abuse women and children, but they can draw on a legal, political and social environment which facilitates such offences and constructs a number of obstacles to their prevention, detection or prosecution.

Recommendation 19: *The recognition of adults with histories of organised abuse and other pervasive forms of trauma as vulnerable and intimidated witnesses.* Just as sexually victimised children have been recognised as vulnerable and intimidated witnesses in Australia, so too should adults with histories of chronic interpersonal violence.

Recommendation 20: *A systematic analysis of criminal justice arrangements that have facilitated the successful investigation and prosecution of organised abuse cases in Australia and overseas.* As yet, "best practice" in relation to the investigation and prosecution of organised abuse in Australia has not been

identified. There is a clear need for researchers and policy-makers to consider the arrangements that might facilitate the detection and prosecution of organised abuse as well as those arrangements which may be obstructing the access of victims of organised abuse to the criminal justice system and natural justice.

This study has highlighted the complex nature of organised abuse and the ways in which it is implicated in structures of power that are simultaneously crimogenic and pathenogenic: crimogenic because they promote, enable and camouflage sexual violence and pathenogenic because they entrap subordinate groups within environments and relations that compromise their mental and physical health, even their lives. Nonetheless, the commonplace contexts in which organised abuse arises, and the overlap between organised abuse and other forms of abuse and violence, also provides numerous points of intervention and therefore grounds for hope. Organised abuse is not the manifestation of a secretive conspiracy or timeless evil but rather it is the extreme expression of otherwise ordinary attitudes and practices of power. It may be precisely the *ordinariness* of organised abuse, and the ways in which it emerges from within everyday institutions and contexts, that makes it so difficult for policy-makers, academics and the community to recognise and respond to. The notion that child sexual abuse is practiced solely by a reviled, deviant minority is unsustainable in light of the prevalence of sexual abuse in the general community but it serves to preserve culturally valued ideals about childhood and family relations (which, in turn, camouflage the trenchant inequity of power relations between men, women and children). Over the last twenty years, the revelation of systemic physical and sexual abuse in children's institutions and in the churches has highlighted how sexual abuse

can become a commonplace feature of adult-child relations in particular contexts. New conceptualisations and understandings of child sexual abuse are still emerging in popular and academic media. With these new configurations of knowledge comes the possibility of a less reactive and a more balanced response to organised abuse and other forms of sexual violence.

Recent allegations of organised and even ritualistic abuse in Australia and overseas have received relatively limited media coverage in comparison to the controversies of the 1980s and 1990s (for newspaper reports of recent allegations, see Hughes, 2006; Mitchell, 2009; O'Neill, 2009). Whilst, on the face of it, the diminished public profile of organised abuse may be interpreted as a negative consequence of the "discourse of disbelief" (Scott 2001), it may also be the result of a number of positive developments. In particular, it may be that the culture of news production is less hostile to such allegations, that kneejerk scepticism is a less common response to allegations of sexual abuse than it once was, and that investigative practices by the police and child protection authorities in relation to complex cases of sexual abuse have advanced to the point where allegations of organised abuse can no longer be easily dismissed as the product of professional malpractice or incompetence. In Australia, Britain and North America, the organised abuse "scandals" of the 1980s and 1990s prompted the development of more integrated investigatory practices and arrangements in relation to allegations of sexual abuse, which, rather than eliminating allegations of organised or ritualistic abuse, have in some cases resulted in their substantiation. Sceptics continue to claim that the FBI has formally disavowed the existence of ritualistic abuse (e.g. Meloy, 2010), but, in 2007, a representative of the FBI testified about the evidence of ritualistic abuse in the successful prosecution of

man who, alongside several others, had been accused of organised child sexual abuse (Ellzey, 2007).

Contemporary social and legal arrangements continue to camouflage the extent of men's violence against women and children whilst drawing community support, resources and services away from victimised women and children through strategies of invalidation, disbelief and denial. Nonetheless, there is evidence that professional and community contexts may be increasingly supportive of the recognition of organised abuse. Importantly, organised abuse is now a subject with a substantial (although somewhat dispersed) evidence base from which to formulate and generate best practice models, whether in relation to child protection practice, mental health care or investigation and prosecution. The challenge is to integrate this evidence into public policy and service provision in spite of widespread resistance to the recognition of the extremes of physical and sexual violence against women and children that occur in "first world" countries, such as Australia, that pride themselves on being too modern and progressive to harbour such barbaric inclinations. This is difficult and long-term work but with the recognition of the seriousness of organised abuse comes the moral imperative to respond to it.

Appendix I

Recruitment note

If you have survived organised abuse I would like to hear your story

My name is Michael Salter and I am a PhD student at the University of New South Wales.
I am conducting research on "Adult accounts of organised child sexual abuse in Australia" and would like to interview 20 – 30 people (18 years and older) who have survived organised abuse in Australia. This includes people who have survived ritual abuse, child pornography, child prostitution, organised sadistic abuse and other forms of sexual abuse involving multiple perpetrators and multiple victims.

If you would like to talk about your experience of organised abuse, and how you survived, then please email me at: m.salter@unsw.edu.au or give me a call at (02) 9385 6455. I will send you more information about the research project, and a brief questionnaire about your life and your current access to support and care. This will help us both decide if the interview process is a good idea for you.

Interviews will be informal, and they can be held at a place and time of your choosing. Complete anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained at all stages of the research process.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

Appendix II

Recruitment questionnaire

Recruitment questionnaire
Adult accounts of organised child sexual abuse

Once you've completed this questionnaire, you can send it electronically to Michael Salter at m.salter@unsw.edu.au or you can mail it to Michael Salter, Faculty of Law, UNSW, Sydney 2052, Australia.

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact Michael via email or on 0420 377 742.

If you are uncomfortable providing details about yourself, or answering particular questions, then feel free to leave those sections blank.

Name:	**Age:**
Employment status (please circle): Full-time / Part-time / Casual / Unemployed / Disability / Other (please specify):	
Occupation (if applicable):	
Relationship status (please circle:) Single / live-in partner / Married / Other:	**Do you have children?**

1. Have you had any counselling, therapy or professional help regarding your abuse? If so, how long for? Are you currently receiving help?

2. Are there people in your life who know about your abuse and provide you with care and support, such as a friend, partner, spouse, psychologist, counsellor or religious minister?

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abuse?

4. What would you like to see come out of this research project on organised abuse?

5. If you would like to be interviewed, what is the best way for us to contact you?

Please circle your preference and provide details so that we can discuss your questionnaire and the interview process.

□ **Phone number:**
□ **Email address:**
□ **Postal address:**

If you have indicated that you would like to be part of the interview phase of the research, we will contact you as promptly as possible. Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Appendix III

Participant Information Statement and Consent Form

Approval No (HREC 07264)

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT AND CONSENT FORM

Adult Accounts of Organised Child Sexual Abuse in Australia

Participant selection and purpose of the study

You are invited to participate in a study of adult accounts of organised child sexual abuse in Australia. In this research project, we hope to document the different contexts within which children are sexually abused by organised groups, and the types of social structures and behaviours that can occur in organised groups of child sexual offenders.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you have indicated that you have experienced organised sexual abuse in childhood, and you have expressed your interest in being interviewed about your life history.

Description of study and risks

If you agree to participate, we will contact you to organise a time and place for the interview. We will also seek to establish with you whether you would like a support person present for the interview, how you will communicate with the interviewer if you are feeling distressed, the steps that you or the interviewer are to take if you feel distressed during the interview, and the steps you might take if you feel distressed after the interview. These steps could include taking a break from the interview, calling a therapist, counsellor or support person, or contacting Lifeline to talk about how you are feeling.

The interview is likely to take at least two to three hours, although interview length will vary depending on how you are feeling, and what you'd like to say. The interview may be conducted in one session, over a number of short sessions, or over a few days, depending on your preference and any time constraints on the interviewer. The interview will require you to speak of your experiences during childhood, and this may be challenging or upsetting. The interview questions will be general and thematic, but it might still be possible that information about serious crimes and criminal activity will be divulged in the interview. This researcher may be required to report this information to the authorities

The research project will provide no direct benefit to participants. However, participants may experience indirect short- or long-term benefits as a result of participation. In the short term, the interview process will provide a safe and confidential space for participants to talk about their lives and their experiences of organised abuse. In the longer term, the information gathered on organised abuse may be a valuable resource to the police, child protection services, healthcare providers, social workers, lawyers and psychotherapists. This may result in an indirect benefit to participants and other victims of abuse through the increased visibility of their experiences and the reorientation of services towards addressing their complex needs.

We cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this study. For your information, please also note that Michael Salter is a board member of Advocates for Survivors of Child Abuse.

Confidentiality and disclosure of information

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission, except as required by law.

Interviews will be taped and transcribed by the interviewer. The interviewer can then provide you with the original recording if you wish, or else the recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. The original recording will be returned to you in a digital format, with a password, either in person or through registered mail.

If you wish, you will be sent a copy of your transcript in order to ensure its accuracy, and to make any changes that you deem necessary to maintain your anonymity. Transcripts will be returned to you in a digital format, with a password, either in person or through registered mail. Transcripts will be kept for a minimum of 7 years, as required by law, after which time they may be disposed of.

If you give us your permission by signing this document, we plan to publish the results in Michael Salter's doctoral thesis, as well as through journal articles, conference presentations, and possibly in a book. In any publication, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified.

Adult Accounts of Organised Child Sexual Abuse in Australia

Complaints may be directed to the Ethics Secretariat, The University of New South Wales, SYDNEY 2052 AUSTRALIA (phone 9385 4234, fax 9385 6648, email ethics.sec@unsw.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be investigated promptly and you will be informed of the outcome.

Feedback to participants

After the thesis has been submitted, the research findings will be summarised in a report to be published and circulated to research participants, and other interested organisations and individuals.

If you would like to receive this report, please tick this box: ☐

Your consent

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with the University of New South Wales. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation without prejudice at any point until you approve your interview transcript.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask us. If you have any additional questions later, Michael Salter (0420 377 742) will be happy to answer them.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT AND CONSENT FORM (continued)

Adult Accounts of Organised Child Sexual Abuse in Australia

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that, having read the information provided above, you have decided to participate.

.....	.....
Signature of Research Participant	Signature of Witness
.....	.....
(Please PRINT name)	(Please PRINT name)
.....	.....
Date	Nature of Witness

REVOCATION OF CONSENT

Adult Accounts of Organised Child Sexual Abuse in Australia

I hereby wish to **WITHDRAW** my consent to participate in the research proposal described above and understand that such withdrawal **WILL NOT** jeopardise any treatment or my relationship with The University of New South Wales.

.....	.....
Signature	Date

.....
Please PRINT Name

The section for Revocation of Consent should be forwarded to Ass. Prof. Juliet Richters at the School of Public Health and Community Medicine, Level 2, Samuels Building, Faculty of Medicine, UNSW Sydney 2052.

Appendix IV

Qualitative coding matrix

Adulthood

Abuse or violence in adulthood

Children disclosing abuse to research participant
Experiences of domestic violence
Experiences of sexual assault
Experiences of organised abuse in adulthood

Economic life, education

Further study, university
Homelessness
Prostitution
Working life, career

Experiences of health care

Fringe care providers
General practitioners
Psychiatric medication
Psychotherapy
Self-help groups
Sexual assault services

Invalidation

Revictimisation
Encounters with disbelief, denial, minimisation
Labour exploitation
Parental denial of abuse

Psychological symptoms of trauma

Acts of violence
Anxiety
Avoidance
Depersonalisation
Depression
Dissociation
Eating disorders
Energy, fatigue
Flashbacks
Grief
Hyper-arousal
Lack of childhood memory, amnesia
Mania

Nightmares
Paranoia
Risk-taking
Self-harm
Somatisation
Substance abuse
Suicidality

Relationships and attachment

Attachment establishment
Attachment problems
Experiences of death
Family life
Friendships and social life
Parenting
Relationship with parents
Relationship with siblings
Religious life
Romantic and sexual relationships

Validation or resistance

Confronting disbelief
Confronting the perpetrator
Contact with the criminal justice system
Contact with the police
Corroboratnio
Investigation through the church
Reflections on collective denial
Reflections on survival
Self-care

Childhood

Education

Accounts of high school
Accounts of kindergarten
Accounts of primary school
Physical abuse at school
Sexual abuse at school

Experiences with health care

Experiences with welfare services

Invalidation

Attempts to disclose fail
Inner experiences denied, silenced
Revictimisation
Signs, symptoms of abuse ignored

Psychological symptoms of trauma

Anxiety
Dissociation
Eating disorders
Risk taking
Self-harm
Self-image
Sexual acting out
Shyness
Substance abuse
Suicidality

Relationships and attachment

Extra-familial abuse
Family life
Discipline
Domestic violence
Emotional abuse
Family 'secrets'
Food provision
Incest
Labour exploitation
Neglect
Parental mental health problems
Parents facilitating sexual abuse
Parents ignoring sexual abuse
Physical abuse
Poverty
Relationship with father
Relationship with mother
Relationship with siblings
Religious life
Substance abuse
Friends and social life

Organised abuse

Abusive groups

Misogyny
Structure
Theology, beliefs
Female perpetrators
Sexual activity between adult abusers

Abusive incidents

Being taken to an abusive incident

Brainwashing, programming
Child pornography
Child prostitution
Forced drugging
Forced ingestion of human waste
Frequency of abusive ordeals
Gang rape, sex parties
Murder
Places of abuse
Pregnancy and reproductive harm
Ritual sexual abuse
S&M
Torture

Descriptions of multiplicity

Initial experience of organised abuse

Intergeneral patterns of abuse

Maternal history of organised abuse
Paternal history of organised abuse
Sexually abusive grandparents

Perpetrators

Resistance and exiting

Torture, threats, triggers

Attempts to trigger
Costumes, games, scenarios
Electro-shock
Other torture methods
Promises of status, role
Threats

Appendix V

Interview evaluation questionnaire

Adult Accounts of Organised Child Sexual abuse
Interview evaluation questionnaire

This brief questionnaire is designed to evaluate your experience of the research interview. Please complete it by ticking an answer that for each question, and return it in the pre-paid envelope attached to this questionnaire.

1. I gained something positive from participating in the interview.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

2. Participating in the interview upset me more than I expected

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

3. Had I known in advance what the interview would be like for me, I still would have agreed.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

Appendix VI

Conference paper: Going crazy: The emergence of traumatic memory in adulthood and experiences of health care

Paper presented at the 6th Annual Student Research Conference at the School of Public Health and Community Medicine, University of New South Wales on the 13th November 2007.

Introduction

Traumatic amnesia is a common psychological adaptation amongst children subject to sexual victimisation (Briere & Conte, 1991; Loewenstein, 1996; Schultz, Passmore & Yoder, 2003). Not all sexually abused children develop traumatic amnesia, however, a significant proportion of victimised children will forget some or all of their experiences of sexual abuse. Traumatic amnesia is particularly common amongst children abused by a parent or authority figure (Freyd, 1996; Schultz, Passmore et al., 2003). Researchers have suggested that this forgetting is a form of compulsive avoidance, as the child attempts to ignore the abuse in order to preserve their attachment to a harmful caregiver (Herman, 1992; Freyd, 1996; Briere & Scott, 2006). These efforts to quarantine memories of abuse from awareness are fallible, however. In adulthood, forgotten experiences of child sexual assault may emerge to consciousness through intrusive re-experiencing in the form of flashbacks and nightmares (Briere & Scott, 2006).

In my research with adult survivors of organised child sexual abuse, the moment of recollection, or recognition, often figures in their life histories as a point of overwhelming fear and confusion, followed by acute traumatic stress and prolonged disability. This paper will outline the ways in which intrusive and uncontrollable remembering has featured in participants narratives of their lives, and their subsequent experiences of health care during the period of crises that followed. In particular, the paper will explore the health service implications of traumatic amnesia through the 'insider' perspective provided by life history research with survivors of profound early trauma.

This year, I have conducted 21 interviews with adults with a life history of sexual abuse by multiple abusers. These interviews are part of a criminological study that aims to document adult accounts of organised child sexual abuse. In interview, the participant is invited to provide accounts of their day-to-day life from childhood to the present day, and reflect on the issues that are most relevant to them. This paper draws on the life history material in which participants describe their experiences of traumatic memory and their accounts of relevant health-care seeking behaviour.

The experience of traumatic memory

In participant's narratives, the initial re-experiencing of traumatic material was an occasion of great distress, often presaged by a stressful live event, such as the birth of a child or a miscarriage. During the initial period of re-experiencing, participants were frequently overwhelmed by images and feelings associated with sexual assault. Joanne says:

> The very, very first memory that I had, I felt like the ground was falling from under me … I felt like I was falling into a black hole, and I had this, this overwhelming terror and everything … It wasn't just pictures in my mind, this was the actual terror.

Previously, some participants had no recollection of abuse in their childhood, whilst others were unaware of the full extent of their experiences of abuse. In both cases, participants described a flood of memory that catalysed a dramatic reassessment of their relationships with parents, siblings and loved ones.

Participants described a period of months or years in which memories of sexual assault returned with such frequency and severity that they were unable to maintain a basic level of functionality. The memories returned in the form of nightmares, flashbacks and transitory hallucinations that made day-to-day activities almost impossible. Jeanne says:

> I had gotten to the stage, literally, where I didn't know if it was hot or cold outside. I would have to look outside to see what I should wear, and what I should put my child in, because I couldn't feel anything. I was very dissociated, extremely dissociated.

Health-care seeking

Despite the severity of their symptoms, participants were often unable to access therapeutic support without first self-diagnosing and self-referring. Like Jeanne, this sometimes involved challenging inappropriate medical advice or treatment:

> I went to my GP and I basically said, "I want a psychiatrist." The doctor that I went to, he was a person unto himself, he thought he could handle everything. He said, "Take 25 grams of Zoloft and come back and see me in two days." … And I said, "I need to see someone, I need to see someone now. I am going to do myself in." I just wasn't functioning. So he eventually sent me to the clinic. And I got a doctor, and she saw me the first time. And basically, I was admitted that day.

After the initial referral, participant's experiences of therapeutic support were mixed. For a number of participants, it took years to find affordable and effective professional support. During this period, they presented frequently, and in crisis, to a range of health and social services who lacked the training and resources to meet their core needs.

Where therapeutic support was available, participants were vulnerable to experiencing traditional therapeutic boundaries – such as hourly sessions, with limits on contact outside of therapy – as invalidating and harmful. Reflecting on her fifteen year history of mental health care, Joanne says:

> You always feel like it's never enough, but you've still got to see someone. I remember a therapist saying to me, once, "It's like you are in a ward, but you need to be in intensive care". Y'know, and I kind of felt like I needed to be too … In terms of really having support, I feel like you've really got to do it all yourself, and I feel that way, because support, it's just not out there. You can find individuals who can be helpful to a certain extent, but they are not going to really understand.

Whilst searching for support, many participants reported inappropriate treatment by mental health professionals. Some were misdiagnosed and inappropriately medicated for psychosis, schizophrenia or bipolar depression. Others participants were subject to such dismissive treatment as to put their life at risk. Scott says:

> The psychiatrist turned around and basically told me I was crazy, and I was a victim of Fraudulent Memory Syndrome or something like that, False Memory Syndrome … It's just hard for me to even think about, it was one of the worst things that has ever happened to me. I'd wanted to, I'd been waiting to get enough money to see this guy, and I'd pinned a lot of hopes on being able to talk to this fellow. But then he just nailed me. I walked out of that place– I hadn't been that suicidal in years.

Positive experiences of health care

Participant's reports of positive experiences of health care had a number of factors in common. In particular, these participants described a continuity of care over time that was flexible according to their level of need, and responsive to the frequency and unpredictability of traumatic re-experiencing.

Jane's engagement with a social work team at her local hospital was amongst the most positive experiences of healthcare reported by participants. Notably, Jane was not referred to this service, but, like many others, stumbled across it in the course of seeking out information and support.

At a conference on sexual assault, Jane met a social worker, Leah, who recognised that Jane had a complex history of victimisation. She invited Jane to make contact with her service, which specialised in sexual assault and child sexual assault. Jane met Leah weekly over a four year period, for private counselling sessions as well as group therapy.

> You were physically dealing with flashbacks and physical phenomena in the body. Uh, you'd be lying on a mattress at night reading a book and you'd

> suddenly remember – ah – the, the face of the male perpetrator, and how old you were.
>
> ... But I could get on a bus, and I would go back to Leah's at the hospital. Lovely, peaceful environment where she'd go over and over all these memories that kept surfacing. One after the other!
>
> ... You could just go there, I went there once and just sat there sobbing. And they – it was winter time, and they just sat with me, I had just walked in off the street for God's sake!

The workers were accessible to Jane during regular, pre-arranged meetings, as well as in crisis periods, and they provided her with telephone support as well. They validated and normalised Jane's distress, and imparted a range of skills to Jane that built her capacity for self-care and self-management. As her anxiety over her traumatic memories decreased, so too did the frequency and severity of their intrusion. This not only greatly enhanced Jane's quality of life, but it provided the workers with a firm basis from which to engage Jane in longer-term therapeutic work.

Conclusion

Participants described the return of traumatic memories as profoundly disorientating and distressing. The intrusion of forgotten experiences of abuse often resulted in a period in which the participant was unable to care for themselves or those around them. During this period, participants sought assistance from health professionals, however, their experiences of health care were mixed and sometimes revictimising. Where professional support was unavailable, participants educated themselves about abuse and trauma, and sought to alleviate their own distress as much as possible.

It is clear that there is a role for health services in providing care to adult survivors of child sexual assault, however, there are a number of barriers to treatment, including:

- Lack of training/awareness amongst workers
- Lack of clear referral pathways and treatment plans
- Lack of affordable and effective services
- Discrimination against adults with a history of child sexual assault
- The emotional vulnerability of adult survivors of child sexual assault

These barriers to treatment can be overcome through:

- Training and education for workers

- Development of referral pathways and treatment plans for adult survivors of child sexual assault

- Comprehensive and flexible therapeutic models that address the frequency, severity and unpredictability of traumatic re-experiencing
- Short-term interventions focused on validation and acceptance strategies to decrease the impact of intrusive re-experiencing and enhance quality of life
- Longer-term capacity building in relation to life skills: in particular, self-care, mindfulness, emotional regulation, interpersonal effectiveness.

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