

Extract: Lynley Hood, *A City Possessed: the Christchurch Civic Creche Case: Child Abuse, Gender Politics & the Law*, Longacre Press, Dunedin, 2001

Chapter 2

SEX, SEXISM & THE NEW DEMONOLOGY

When an influenza epidemic strikes, the warnings of experts confirm what we know already: there's a lot of it about. But to the average layperson, the current child sexual abuse epidemic is a mystery. Experts say it is widespread, but even with the benefit of that knowledge most of us recognise it only rarely in our midst. Our plight is one with which laypeople of the 16th and 17th centuries would sympathise.

Detailed analyses of the great witchhunts in Scotland and Germany reveal that they were not spontaneous movements of the people to which the authorities felt obliged to respond. Witch-hunting crises were preceded by official expressions of anxiety about the prevalence of witchcraft and the dangers it posed. Through the promotion of witch-fear, ambitious rulers consolidated their power by feeding the flames of panic; priests and clerics enhanced their authority by demonstrating a newfound expertise in the diagnosis of witchcraft. Laypeople were often sceptical of the experts' more extravagant claims and many tracts critical of the witchhunts were published. However, most people accepted that witchcraft was a great danger to society, and because they accepted the general truth of the theory they could not effectively challenge its more learned interpreters. Besides, those who did question the authorities were often denounced as witches themselves.¹

During the height of the witch-panic, as increasing numbers of ordinary women (and a few men) were sent to the stake, all but the most outspoken critics fell silent and many discontented common-folk seized the opportunity to make frivolous and vindictive accusations against people they disliked without fear of repercussions. The history of the late-20th century sexual abuse scare shows a similar pattern.

It began in the 1970s, when a clamour of competing social movements, each with its own agenda and each with its own moral entrepreneurs, vied for public and political attention. Then, in the early '80s, three major social streams - feminism, religious conservatism and the child protection movement - joined forces under the banner of combatting child sexual abuse. The resulting coalition surged through the '80s and beyond, gathering size and power along

the way, sweeping over, around or away most of the obstacles in its path. To understand how that coalition was formed, we need to revisit the '70s.

In this review, special attention will be paid to the moral entrepreneurs of the times and the beliefs they promoted. While it is true that social movements are nothing without their followers, for the most part followers simply follow. They believe - or go along with - whatever the rest of the group believes. Constructing a theoretical foundation for those beliefs is left primarily to the group's leaders. Leaders also define objectives, determine the means of achieving them and promote the group's beliefs to the wider community. Compared to followers, leaders tend to be more intense in their ambitions, more certain of their convictions and more willing to make sacrifices for the cause. Followers may not fully support the beliefs and actions of their leaders, and members of the wider community may be frankly sceptical. But, when confronted with the impassioned rhetoric of energetic, committed and persistent moral entrepreneurs, most people appreciate the price of peace in their personal lives and, with varying degrees of willingness, they are prepared to pay it.

This emphasis on the leader's role is not intended to let followers off the hook. It is a little simplistic but not untrue to suggest that throughout history charismatic zealots have taken out their personal problems on the world when given half a chance. When such leaders acquire power in a democracy, those who follow without question, and those who fail to voice their questions, must be as responsible for any resulting injustices as the single-minded and zealous leaders themselves.

I

The Strands of the Seventies

Throughout the Western world, the primary goal of '70s feminism was to free women from male oppression (and especially from the oppression of white, middle-class men). The agenda ranged from the evolutionary (equal pay, quality childcare, safe contraception, liberalised abortion and the abolition of sex-role stereotypes), to the revolutionary (female separatism, goddess worship, the abolition of the patriarchal family and the overthrow of patriarchal society). To evolutionary feminists the problem was sexism; to revolutionary feminists the problem was men.²

The first New Zealand women's liberation groups were formed in 1970. In the following years consciousness-raising groups, study groups and activist groups sprang up

nationwide. Media coverage, though often patronising and hostile, was extensive. The public was left in no doubt: women were on the move.³

As the decade progressed many feminist groups became established national organisations.⁴ Rape crisis centres, women's refuges and women's studies courses proliferated. In 1972, 200 women attended the National Women's Liberation Conference in Wellington. United Women's Conventions, held in other cities in 1973, 1975, 1977 and 1979, drew over 1000 participants each.

The New Zealand government was not immune to women's concerns. During the '70s the Equal Pay Act, the Matrimonial Property Act and the Human Rights Act (all of which outlawed discrimination against women) were passed. The Domestic Purposes Benefit (for the support of solo parents) was introduced, a state-run accident compensation scheme that covered non-earners was launched and the state-run national superannuation scheme was revised to give greater independence to married women.

Initially, women's liberation was for all women, and for men as well. *Broadsheet* magazine, which first appeared in 1972, was always primarily by, for and about women, but, during its first few years, articles by men appeared regularly. 'Don't put men down', wrote a correspondent. 'Ask them to join the fight.'⁵ Conservative women, and a scattering of men, rubbed shoulders with feminists at early United Women's Conventions. A representative of the Catholic Women's League told the first United Women's Convention: 'The true way to happiness is to make Christ our guide and our friend'. The men present were said to be 'largely unobtrusive and reasonably supportive'.

As the '70s progressed, women at the cutting edge of feminism became increasingly radicalised and United Women's Conventions became increasingly disunited. By the end of the decade the inclusiveness had vanished. Conservative women turned their backs on the movement, women who saw themselves as moderates distanced themselves from women they saw as extremists and feminists at the core of the movement dissipated much of their energy on in-group upheavals over sexual politics, race and social class.⁶

A cornerstone of the radicalisation of the women's movement was the feminist analysis of rape. In October 1975, *Broadsheet* readers were told: '...rape is part of a normal pattern of male behaviour. Males in this society are conditioned from birth to be sexual aggressors while females are conditioned to be passive and submissive - perfect victims ... Every male is a potential rapist.'⁷

The statement ‘every male is a potential rapist’ (which soon became the graffiti slogan ‘All men are rapists’) fits the definition of a stereotype in Gordon Allport’s *The Nature of Prejudice*: ‘Whether favourable or unfavourable, a stereotype is an exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify (rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category.’⁸

Category formation is an inevitable part of human existence. The business of life goes on with less effort if we stick with our own kind. The problem comes when loyalty to a category (the in-group - commonly united by nationality, race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation) leads to hostility to other categories (out-groups). The process is not inevitable; loyalty to New Zealand does not automatically mean hostility to China. It’s the negative stereotypes that cause the trouble.

Writing in the ‘50s, Allport observed that negative stereotypes, which may or may not originate in a kernel of truth, were used to justify hate-prejudice against Jews (who were believed to be clever, deceitful, overambitious and sly), Negroes (who were believed to be lecherous, lazy, filthy and aggressive) and women (who were believed to be hysterical, vain, irrational and intellectually deficient). A category not specifically considered by Allport was homosexuals (who were believed to be sick, degenerate, sex-mad, corrupters of youth). Allport noted that most stereotypes reflect the human tendency to attribute to others the weaknesses we most despise in ourselves.

Another major figure of Allport’s era was psychologist Theodor Adorno who identified a cluster of character traits in prejudiced people, which, taken together, constituted ‘the authoritarian personality’ (though recent studies suggest that authoritarianism is not so much a personality type as a reflection of the values and norms of the sub-groups to which prejudiced people belong). In addition to their high levels of prejudice (which they tend to turn on Jews, Catholics, homosexuals, Communists and splinter-groups within their own movements with equal vehemence), authoritarian people are rigidly moralistic, intolerant of ambiguity and deviance, and obsessively interested in other people’s sex lives. They feel threatened by powerful external forces and are much given to conspiracy theories.⁹

Allport suggested that what prejudiced people do in relation to groups they dislike may not be directly related to what they think or feel about them, but most negative attitudes eventually express themselves in some sort of action. Historically, outbreaks of persecution of homosexuals, or members of national, racial or ethnic out-groups, are

relatively common, but 400 years have passed since the last outbreak of gross persecution on the basis of gender.

While historians continue to debate the political, economic and social antecedents of the great witchhunts, most scholars agree that the publication of the *Malleus Malificarum* in 1486 was the spark that ignited the most sustained outbreak of misogyny in human history. Through the demonisation of women, the priests who authored that celebrated encyclopaedia of witchcraft created a scapegoat for the discontents of their age and a justification for the persecutions that followed. Their claim, 'All witchcraft is caused by carnal lust which is in women insatiable',¹⁰ is an example of stereotyping by gender that bears a remarkable resemblance to the contemporary feminist slogan, 'All men are rapists'. Also, like the witch-hunters' demonisation of women, the feminists' demonisation of men had far-reaching consequences.

One consequence was the beatification of women. If men were evil and bad, women were virtuous and good. Karl Jung would have explained it this way: there is good and bad in everyone, but, when radical feminists blamed men for all the evil in the world they split their essential selves. Then, having disowned the bad, all they had left for their own self-images was unadulterated good.

With the demonisation of men, the distinction made by women's liberationists between 'men we like' and 'male chauvinist pigs' was abolished. All men were predatory bastards. They ceased to appear on the pages of *Broadsheet*, they were no longer welcome at feminist events and their responsibility for the oppression of women was subject to further detailed analysis.

The outcome was a 'political critique of the institution and ideology of heterosexuality as a cornerstone of male supremacy' that portrayed sexual violence as 'a constant threat and reminder of the power of men over women', and 'an ultimate expression of female oppression in a patriarchal society'.¹¹

The ramifications of this analysis extended from the political to the personal. In the early '70s, feminist leaders protested that they were not bra-burning, man-hating lesbians, and declared that what some women did with other women in the privacy of their own bedrooms was their own business. Then, under the influence of radical feminist theory, what women did in their own bedrooms, and with whom, became issues of central importance. As the decade progressed, and committed feminists analysed their relationships in terms of male supremacy

and female oppression, many turned the slogan 'Feminism is the theory - lesbianism is the practice' into a personal reality.¹²

American Charlotte Bunch (who, five years earlier, had been Charlotte Bunch-Weeks, a married heterosexual) visited New Zealand for the second United Women's Convention in 1975, and discussed her lesbianism in an interview with *Broadsheet*:

...the best way for a woman to understand herself... is through a lesbian identity. Until society changes its attitudes, to say you are celibate identifies you with heterosexuality. I have good friends who are heterosexual ... but it is hard to understand since I find lesbianism so much more liberating for a woman.¹³

In *Broadsheet*, many New Zealand women shared their reasons for becoming lesbians. While the opportunity to acknowledge a sexual or romantic preference, escape an unhappy marriage, overcome loneliness, rebel against a rigid upbringing or indulge in sexual experimentation were often contributing factors, to some feminists the ascetic idealism espoused by Charlotte Bunch was the primary attraction. Like nuns in an age of faith, they depicted their lesbianism as a vocational choice that freed them to work for the greater good, unfettered by the distractions, temptations and obligations of a relationship with the opposite sex. From their vantage point on the moral high-ground, they pitied their heterosexual sisters. In the popular radical feminist book of the '70s *Lesbian Nation*, Jill Johnston wrote: 'All women are lesbians, except those who don't know it.'

(In view of the current climate of sexual politics, readers may wonder about the right of this heterosexual to write about lesbian history. While it is true that lesbian contributions to services for women and children in New Zealand have been much celebrated in lesbian-feminist circles, it is equally true that wider debate has been discouraged. At women's gatherings, when radical feminists introduce themselves with statements like, 'I'm a lesbian - does anyone have a problem with that?', they convey that, while for some lesbians it is *de rigueur* to make an issue of their gender identity, it is unacceptable for heterosexuals to do so. None-the-less, at the risk of being labelled as having 'a problem', I have come to the view that any study of child sexual abuse in New Zealand would be incomplete without an account of the influence of lesbian-feminist politics and personalities.)

Throughout the '70s, a major target of radical feminist criticism was the patriarchal family. In *Broadsheet*, the child rearing book most frequently cited was Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*. Like her sister theorists, Firestone regarded sexual oppression as a

cornerstone of political oppression, and the patriarchal family as the cornerstone of the patriarchal society. Her solution was radical in the extreme: she called for the abolition of the family. In practice, this feminist utopia proved elusive. Though most feminist mothers interviewed by *Broadsheet* had thrown off the theoretical oppression of the patriarchal family, all they had replaced it with was the practical oppression of solo motherhood.

On the outskirts of feminism, women who had accepted the traditional role of wife and mother without question reconsidered their options. But when they reflected on the changing attitudes of men towards child care, housework and family decision-making, and weighed the theory of patriarchal oppression against the practical advantages of raising children in a two-parent family, most mainstream women concluded that having a long-term relationship with the father of their children was the best option.

Meanwhile, at the core of feminism, the cauldron of debate congealed into dogma. No one dared ask why the Goddess had made heterosexual intercourse a necessary and pleasurable aspect of human reproduction, no one dared suggest there were decent men in the world for whom the label 'rapist' was as ridiculous as it was insulting and no one dared express a preference for the early-'70s 'strong, successful, self-reliant' feminist over the late-'70s 'weak and oppressed victim'. As Sandra Coney noted in a 1978 *Broadsheet* column, anyone who questioned the new feminist orthodoxy (or any of its more-oppressed-than-thou factions) laid herself open to invective, rejection and accusations of complicity in 'the anti-woman backlash'.¹⁴

By the end of the '70s, disillusioned heterosexuals were abandoning the women's liberation movement in droves, leaving lesbian radicals (and a few heterosexual radicals) in control of the feminist high ground. Women who would have been regarded as extremists in the early '70s (by their own unreconstructed selves as well as by the rest of society) became, in the '80s, the core theorists and spokespeople of the movement. Among their number were two energetic, intelligent women who took the feminist analysis of rape from the political to the personal, and on to the professional. Both began the '70s as heterosexual wives and mothers and ended it as lesbian-feminist psychologists. They were Hilary Haines and Miriam Jackson.

Haines and Jackson encountered women's liberation at Auckland University in the early '70s. They joined feminist consciousness-raising groups, became members of the *Broadsheet* collective, and reoriented their sexuality and ended their marriages during their

student years. Jackson also fought one of her first political campaigns. 'I drew graphs showing that we were turning people away from the [university] creche,' she recalled in 1987. 'They were quite distorted graphs, but successful politically in terms of getting an extension on the creche.'¹⁵ Using distorted statistics for political ends would bring Jackson further success in the years ahead [see Ch.2.II].

Miriam Jackson had five children of her own, but her career path did not include working with a range of normal children. Instead, she laid the groundwork for her later expertise in child sexual abuse by working with rapists and their victims as a Justice Department psychologist. She also studied overseas research, conducted surveys, analysed the results, gave lectures, contributed to conferences and wrote articles. Anger was her driving force. 'This anger gave me the energy to gather up society's dirty washing (male violence against women) and hang it out for the people to see and do something about,' she wrote in 1982.¹⁶

To feminist activists, rape statistics were an area where radical ideals and everyday reality clashed head-on. Despite a vigorous 'believe the victim' campaign and the establishment of rape crisis centres nationwide, rape continued to constitute less than 0.5 percent of recorded crime in New Zealand.¹⁷ Also, despite all the rhetoric about white, middle-class men being the chief perpetrators and beneficiaries of patriarchal privilege through rape and the threat of rape, those convicted of rape were usually poor men from racial minorities. Through all the analyses and agitation of the '70s, the men who held the reins of power had gone on holding the reins of power. A few minor reforms aside, nothing that feminists said or did had made any difference. In the light of this outcome, the theorists who argued that all men were rapists, and the rape crisis workers whose services lacked the anticipated demand, were faced with a dilemma: they could admit that their extravagant claims about the prevalence of rape and the identity of the rapists were wrong, or they could redefine the problem and repackage the statistics to produce the results they wanted. In the decade ahead, many enterprising feminists chose the latter option.

In most respects the antithesis of '70s feminism was '70s religious conservatism. Conservatives favoured a God-fearing society in which men ruled the world and women knew their place. They were opposed to abortion, homosexuality, pornography, sex education, extra-marital sex and working mothers. All that authoritarian conservatives

appeared to have in common with authoritarian feminists was an intense interest in what people did in the privacy of their own bedrooms and a tight-lipped disappointment with the creator for making heterosexual intercourse necessary for the continuation of the species. During the permissive '60s the protests of religious conservatives were trampled underfoot in the headlong communal rush to enjoy the fruits of the sexual revolution. But, during the '70s, conservatives returned to the public arena with a vengeance.¹⁸

Patricia Bartlett, ex-nun and indefatigable anti-pornography activist, founded the Society for the Promotion of Community Standards in 1970, and went on to picket, petition, survey, review, debate and lobby with unrelenting vigour but little success for the next 25 years. Another conservative movement of the '70s, the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child, persuaded parliament to tighten the laws on legalised abortion. But, despite this success, religious conservatism ended the decade still struggling to be taken seriously in the face of ongoing criticism from civil libertarians over issues of censorship, and ridicule from the general public for its busybody prurience.

The most spectacularly successful social force of the 1970s, the child protection movement, began early in the previous decade. In a 1962 paper, Denver paediatrician Henry Kempe coined the term 'the battered-child syndrome' to remind doctors that not all childhood injuries were accidental. Kempe claimed that this 'unrecognised trauma' was 'a frequent cause of permanent injury or death', and 'one of the most serious concerns facing society'.¹⁹

Henry Kempe was a man of vision, determination and charisma. Between the publication of his ground-breaking paper in 1962 and the first edition of *The Battered Child* in 1967, he persuaded all 50 American states to pass child-abuse reporting laws. The following year, two articles in scholarly journals cast doubt on his alarmist claims but failed to slow his momentum. Following the first article (which reported that only a minority of physically ill-treated children showed frank symptoms of the battered-child syndrome), Kempe expanded his frontiers and renamed his territory 'child abuse'. The second article (which concluded that sensational reports had greatly exaggerated the importance of the problem) appears to have been ignored.²⁰

In the second edition of *The Battered Child* (1974) Kempe noted that reports of suspected child abuse in New York city had escalated from 400 in 1966 to 10,000 in 1972. 'Adequate demographic data which provide up-to-date evidence of the true incidence of

significant child abuse in the United States is not available,' he added.

It should not have been insurmountably difficult for Henry Kempe to conduct his own prevalence survey. After all, it was the visible, and therefore presumably measurable, evidence of bleeding, bruising, broken bones and death that had enabled him to bring the problem to public attention in the first place. Perhaps he was discouraged by the official figures for childhood deaths due to violence in the United States, which, despite the escalating reporting rate, had stayed constant at 1000 per year in 1969, 1970 and 1971. In a population of 250 million, 1000 deaths per year is not a headline-grabbing figure. It is not a figure likely to inspire decision-makers to allocate more resources to child protection. In fact, the constancy of the figure could lead politicians to wonder whether the extra resources allocated thus far were serving any useful purpose.

But while the prevalence of non-accidental childhood injuries in the United States remained uninvestigated, New Zealand Department of Social Welfare researchers analysed information on all cases of suspected or alleged child abuse brought to the attention of the Child Welfare Division of the Department in 1967. Inevitably, some cases would have been concealed, some would have been handled by other agencies and some would not have been recognised. But, given New Zealand's relatively homogenous population of 2.75 million, the results were probably as reliable as any that could have been obtained anywhere in the world. The researchers concluded:

...child abuse is not a problem of major social importance in New Zealand. During the survey year fewer than 3 children in every 10,000 in the 0-16 age group came to the attention of the Child Welfare Division for incidents in which there was evidence of abuse. Even for the high risk (under 1 year old) group the incidence was only 4.5 per 10,000 children. Further, the bulk of incidents... involved only relatively minor injuries, and of the 255 abused children only 44 were hospitalised as a consequence of abuse. By way of comparison, in the same year 2,401 children in the 0-14 age group were admitted to hospital suffering from the effects of road accidents and a further 2,131 from accidental poisonings in the home.²¹

This finding may have been good news for New Zealand children. But scientific reality is one thing and social reality is something else again, and the social reality was that child abuse was an idea whose time had come.

In the 19th century, Victorian reformers blamed what they called ‘cruelty to children’ on the poverty and ignorance of the lower classes, and favoured removing needy children to orphanages and industrial schools. But, during the first half of the 20th century, as reformers realised that even the poorest families could do a better job of raising their own children than institutions, society became less inclined to police needy families, and more inclined to support them. And so the occupation of social worker was born.

In the 1960s, Henry Kempe put a new spin on the old problem by suggesting that child abuse was a medical and law-enforcement issue, and that children could be mistreated by individuals from any walk of life.²² Through this approach Kempe created a new research frontier where medical, psychiatric and statistical knowledge could be found and put to use. Almost overnight, he raised the status of people who worked with ill-treated children to undreamt-of heights and new recruits flocked to meet the challenge.

Using arguments couched in the trendy language of civil rights, Kempe campaigned for statutory changes allowing social workers to remove ‘at risk’ children from their families. His claim that the rights of children to be protected from abuse outweighed the rights of parents to raise their offspring as they saw fit²³ encouraged social workers to regard parents as selfish oppressors, and professionals as selfless carers. Though it was no more than linguistic legerdemain, Kempe’s claim set the pendulum of child protection swinging away from supporting needy families, and back towards policing them.

Also, by presenting child abuse as an illness and a crime, Kempe kept the social issues that normally divide liberals and conservatives off the political agenda. Vice-President Mondale promoted Kempe’s Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act with slogans like ‘This is a political problem, not a poverty problem’, and ‘Not even Richard Nixon is in favour of child abuse!’. In 1974 ‘the Mondale Act’ (which provided federal child-protection funds only to states with mandatory child-abuse reporting laws)²⁴ was passed almost unanimously. The same year the National Centre on Child Abuse and Neglect was established with an annual budget of \$19 million.

Having conquered the United States, Henry Kempe went on to conquer the world. In 1976, the First International Congress on Child Abuse and Neglect was held within the facilities of WHO in Geneva.

A mood of heady excitement pervaded the congress. ‘There has been an explosion of professional and public interest’, a delegate reported. ‘The battered child has moved from the

back pages of professional journals to the front pages of mass circulation newspapers. Daily, there are additional news articles, television and radio programmes and community meetings, not to mention professional conferences, on the subject.’²⁵

‘This could be the start of something big,’ observed another delegate.

The momentum continued with the establishment of the journal *Child Abuse and Neglect* in 1977. But, by the time the second International Congress was held in London in 1978, change was in the wind.

Along with the successes (more abuse reports, more funding, more media attention) had come problems. From 1976, U.S. statistics were collected annually by the American Humane Association. These showed that the astronomical rise in suspected child abuse cases was accompanied by an equally astronomical rise in false allegations²⁶. To make matters worse, the number of children who died at the hands of caregivers each year stayed virtually constant. These points did not go unnoticed by the media. Some articles damned child protection workers for tearing innocent families apart, others damned them for leaving guilty families intact.

By the late ‘70s the child protection movement was also drawing the wrath of feminists and religious conservatives. Feminists took exception to the claim that most physical child abuse was perpetrated by women (and, all too often, by poor women from racial minorities); while religious conservatives took exception to the movement’s wish to deny parents their divine right to hit their own children.

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