

2008

The 'Hollywood' Treatment of Paedophilia: Comparing Some Cinematic and Australian Press Constructions of Paedophilia Between 2003 and 2006

Lelia Rosalind Green
Edith Cowan University

Sarah Goode
University of Winchester

This article was originally published as: Green, L. R., & Goode, S. (2008). The 'Hollywood' treatment of paedophilia: comparing some cinematic and Australian press constructions of paedophilia between 2003 and 2006. *Australian Journal of Communication*, 35(2), 71-85.

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.

<http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ecuworks/918>



The 'Hollywood' treatment of paedophilia

Comparing some cinematic and Australian
press constructions of paedophilia between
2003 and 2006

Lelia Green and Sarah Goode

ABSTRACT: *This paper hypothesises that the moral panics around paedophilia have meant that the 'Hollywood treatment' of this theme (in quotation marks, since the films mentioned include independent productions) is more nuanced and contextualised than is found in newspaper coverage. We investigate this possibility by drawing on reports of three high-profile paedophile-related news stories from Australia that ran in the press at the same time as the films to be considered were being screened between 2003 and 2006. The news stories analysed are the manslaughter conviction of child-killer Bill Clare, the controversy over the parole of Western Australian paedophile Otto Darcy-Searle, and the Australian Family Association campaign to ban Gregg Araki's film Mysterious Skin. This mainstream press coverage is contrasted with a range of paedophile-themed fictional films released in the same time period including The Woodsman, Mysterious Skin, Little Children, and Notes on a Scandal. In concluding that 'the entertainment media' is more nuanced in its coverage than 'the press', we ask whether the interests of vulnerable children would be better served by a more contextualised media approach to these issues.*

Lelia Green, School of
Communications and
Contemporary Arts, Edith
Cowan University, Perth,
Western Australia; Sarah
Dalal Goode, The University
of Winchester, United
Kingdom.

Introduction

The theme of paedophilia, and echoes of public discourses concerning it, has recently been embraced by Hollywood. Some Oscar-worthy stars including Nicole Kidman (*Birth*, dir. Glazer 2004); Cate Blanchett and Judi Dench (*Notes on a Scandal*, dir. Eyre 2006); Kate Winslett (*Little Children*, dir. Field 2006); Sean Penn (*Mystic*

The 'Hollywood' treatment of paedophilia

River dir. Eastwood 2003), and Kevin Bacon (*The Woodsman* dir. Kassell 2004) have joined lesser-known actors such as Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Brady Corbet (*Mysterious Skin* dir. Araki 2004) to explore themes of paedophilia and sex offenders in nuanced and contextualised ways. We propose here to contrast the 'Hollywood treatment' (in quotation marks, since the films mentioned include independent productions) of paedophiles and sex offenders with some ways in which the mainstream press handles these themes. To do this we will be drawing on coverage of three high-profile paedophile-related news stories from Australia that ran in the press at the same time as the films to be considered were being screened, 2003-6. The news stories to be considered are the manslaughter conviction of child-killer Bill Clare, the controversy over the parole of Australian paedophile Otto Darcy-Searle, and the Australian Family Association campaign to ban Araki's film *Mysterious Skin*.

In the interests of considering these stories alongside contemporary filmic treatments, we have excluded John Howard's *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bills 2007*. This purported to be in response to the *Little Children are Sacred* report (Wild & Anderson, 2007), although any such focus was complicated by issues of Indigenous and human rights, along with charges that Australia had returned to a paternalistic and non-consultative approach to Indigenous policy (Sturcke, 2007). Examples from 2008 of a continuing international moral panic around paedophilia include controversy centring on finds in the basement of a Jersey Children's Home, Haut de la Garenne (O'Neill, 2008), and the temporary Australian suspension of a Bill Henson photographic exhibition, featuring nude models as young as 13, which had been due to open at the Roslyn Oxley9 gallery in Sydney on 22 May (ABC, 2008; Ramachandran & Tovey, 2008).

It should be noted that the aim of this paper is not to critique the use of a chronological marker (age of consent) to justify the cultural construction of the psycho-bio-sexual boundary between social constructions of the 'child' and of those who are 'permitted-to-be-sexually-active' (see Waites, 2005). Nor are we going to explore why the particular focus of the media seems to be concentrated on the male paedophile who abuses boys rather than the more common 'dominant sexuality' exemplar of the male sex offender abusing girls (see Angelides, 2004; Cowburn & Dominelli, 2001). Above all, we do not doubt that children need to be protected from some very dangerous sexual predators, the majority of whom are known to them as family members, family friends, or as trusted people in their community. Our

aim in raising the matters covered here is to investigate differences between some press coverage of paedophile issues and the ways in which related themes have been covered in some films. We then explore possible reasons for any differences and examine some implications of such different approaches for effective social responses to child sexual abuse.

The past thirty years have seen an increasing media emphasis on constructions of the stranger-danger paedophile as the sexual predator of children (Angelides, 2004). Further, the recent Henson controversy seems to indicate that this momentum is building. Attempts to anatomise the moral panics surrounding paedophiles are hampered by concerns that analysts will be seen as apologists and possibly excised from acceptable society. Webster (cited in O'Neill, 2008) comments that paedophile moral panics 'often come across like "religious crusades", where those who ask critical questions about the facts can be denounced as "unbelievers" and "deniers"'. It is unsurprising that commentators hesitate to join the fray and that moral panics around paedophilia, without appropriate interrogation and analysis, are constant and continuing.

As a term, 'paedophile' appears to have eclipsed the more inclusive term 'child sexual abuser', which readily incorporates sexually abusive parents and, in particular, rapacious fathers. A study of articles in the *Sun*, Britain's highest selling daily paper, and its companion Sunday title the *News of the World*, conducted over three months in 2005, found only two articles referring to 'child sexual abuse', but 94 referring to 'paedophiles'. Not only were there constant references to paedophiles; but the language was highly emotive, including the terms 'pervert', 'nasty pervs', 'sex attacks', 'sickest', 'vile', 'nauseating', 'outrage', and 'horror' (Goode, 2008, p. 221).

These mainstream media perspectives are mirrored in other forms of contemporary materials in the public sphere, for example, charity appeals. A 2005 leaflet campaign by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children UK (NSPCC) included a display of three eye-catching tabloid-style headlines, presented as if torn from newspapers: 'Scarred for life by child abuse', 'Paedophile groomed boy, 14, for sex ring', and 'Britain's worst paedophile'. Underneath these headlines, the leaflet states 'The more of them there are, the more we need you'. Inside the leaflet, readers are told that 'Because paedophiles are organised, we must be better organised. Because they are cunning, we must be more intelligent. Because they are many,

we must have the support of many more' (cited in Goode, 2008, p. 209). In short, paedophiles are strangers in our midst; they are entirely different from us (Kelly, 1996; Cowburn & Dominelli, 2001). There is nothing in our own lives upon which we can draw in an attempt to understand the paedophile.

This contrasts starkly with the complex and nuanced treatment of some of the Hollywood films mentioned earlier. Of these, *The Woodsman* works hardest to humanise its paedophile lead character, Walter, and suggests not only that it is possible for paedophiles to reform, but also that it is humane and appropriate for other people to support them in doing so. This perspective is almost totally absent from Australian newspaper coverage of paedophiles. *Little Children* positions the main paedophile character as an inadequate adult dependent upon his ailing mother for emotional and social support. It examines the persecution of the paedophile in terms of the impact upon the mother, as well as asking questions about those who do the persecuting. Although it is comparatively commonplace (as with the Darcy-Searle case, to be considered shortly), for Australian media to hound paedophiles released into the care of their families as a condition of parole, the family's trauma in the face of vigilante attacks is never considered. The notion that 'no man is an island—not even a paedophile' is embraced only by the entertainment media, not the news media.

Arguably, the media makes its cut-and-dried approach to paedophile reporting easier by concentrating its coverage on minority manifestations of child sexual abuse, where strangers are the predators. This contrasts with the rather more common experience of sexual predation from within the child's social circle. '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"' (Kelly, 1996). It may be that the press prefers to concentrate on cases involving strangers because the coverage is uncomplicated by requirements for victim privacy. Cases where victims are abused by family members are almost impossible to report in a detailed way since scrutiny of the crime, and perpetrator photographs, have the potential to reveal the victim's identity. Such considerations are generally absent where the abuser is a stranger, since they are not related to their victim by usual social and family bonds. This distorted coverage, however, skews community understandings of paedophiles and distorts recognition of the kinds of social encounters that typically pose risks to children. It also makes it harder to form a complex understanding of paedophilia and

paedophiles, even though such an understanding would normally be seen as an important precursor to effective intervention.

This moral panic (Cohen, 2002) about the stranger-danger end of a child sexual abuse continuum has parallels with what we know about sexual assaults on women. There is considerable high-profile coverage of stranger-rape where the victim is randomly and unexpectedly assaulted while going about her normal business (although that business must usually be innocent—it normally excludes ‘sex work’, for example). Such comparatively rare sexual attacks by strangers attract extensive media coverage and release massive police energy. They constitute a tiny proportion of all sexual assaults.

Date-rape is an overwhelmingly more common form of sexual assault on women than is stranger-rape. Such non-consensual sex is almost impossible to prosecute in our contemporary legal systems, however, because the circumstances are construed as being complicated by social and emotional connections between the parties. The conundrum created is that the vast majority of sexual assault victims can provide addresses, phone numbers, and intimate details of their attackers but the tiny minority who can’t—who barely saw their assailants—are most likely to be supported in their search for justice and are more likely to benefit from a conviction if the perpetrator is apprehended.

Arguably, an equivalent dynamic occurs with child sexual abuse. The emphasis upon the paedophile stranger-danger lurking in the bushes diverts attention from the more common threat of the sexually predatory (or maybe, straightforwardly, drug- or alcohol-affected, opportunistically-motivated and inhibition-reduced) relative or family friend. The comparatively rare danger of the stranger-other is emphasised in contrast to the comparatively common danger posed by one of us: a member of the family circle.

In concentrating upon the media-fuelled paedophile panic, the suffering of three-quarters of children who are sexually abused at the hands of their parent(s), or their parents’ friends (NSPCC, 2006), tends to be overlooked—as are the consequences to the child of their taking power to make such abuse visible. The child-victim suffers in numerous ways when they are subject to a family-centred abuse. They suffer as the victim of assault; they suffer from having no place of safety; and they also suffer in terms of the responsibility they feel regarding the fracture of their family’s social, emotional, and economic circumstances if the assault is made public (Driver & Droisen, 1989; Cox et al., 2000).

The Australian moral panic concerning paedophiles has become manifest in a range of high profile cases, one of which—that of Robert Excell—has been construed as the exporting of paedophilia from Western Australia (WA) to the UK (BBC 2005). The three Australian cases upon which this paper draws are the July 2006 reporting of child-murderer Bill Clare; the August 2005 re-imprisonment of Otto Darcy-Searle on parole from WA and living with his sister in New South Wales; and the early 2005 Australian Family Association campaign to ban the screening of the controversial film *Mysterious Skin* (described by an opponent as a 'how to manual for pedophiles': [Refused-Classification, n.d.]). Clearly, this is an indicative (not an exhaustive) study of Australian constructions of paedophilia. Indeed, as the previously cited examples from 2007 and 2008 demonstrate, various constructions of paedophilia continue to gather momentum.

Bill Clare's heinous conduct in raping and killing a three-year old boy (the jury ultimately convicted him of the child's manslaughter), and multiply assaulting his six-year-old sister, is the stuff of every parent's nightmares. Nonetheless, the report of Clare's crimes focused far more on the sexual than the murderous nature of his behaviour. Jackman's (2006) article about Clare's trial was a front page lead in *The Weekend Australian* and contains eleven references to paedophiles, predators, and 'peds'; nine to rape; four to sex offenders; two to 'kill', and only one reference to 'murder'. The paper constructs this criminal activity predominantly as paedophilic. The cumulative weight of the descriptors is such that the sexual behaviour is presented as more shocking than the killing.

This coverage can be constructed as indicating that the paedophile activity is the deliberately evil behaviour while the death itself was found by the jury to have been unintentional. Accepting that death was unintentional, but that the sexual abuse was not, this might seem to be an acceptable position for a press report to take. It is a distortion of the media norm, however, where coverage would usually focus on the more serious of the crimes committed. It is equivalent to a wife-murderer being repeatedly taken to task for the assault and battery leading up to the killing (even where the death itself was not deliberate).

The details of the children's family life in the Bill Clare case are not explored, apart from an indication that the mother was not coping and that their grandmother felt that not enough had been done to protect them (even though they had come to the attention of the New

South Wales Department of Children's Services numerous times). In this respect, press coverage of criminal proceedings differs significantly from the more rounded and subtle fictionalised film representations within, for example, *Mysterious Skin* (2004). Indeed, in this film, it was the portrayal of the emptiness of the life of the central character, Neil, as an eight-year old child lacking a stable father-figure and the opportunity this provided for the boy to fall under the influence of his paedophile Little League coach, that led detractors to argue that the film constituted a how-to manual that could instruct potentially paedophile viewers in the mechanisms of successful 'grooming' behaviour.

Similarly, in *The Woodsman* (2004), the viewer is presented with a paedophile (played by Kevin Bacon) who is portrayed as so disturbingly and challengingly complex that we can regard him only with what the *New York Times* reviewer A. O. Scott has characterised as 'wary, ambivalent curiosity' (2004) rather than the outright hostility so often engendered by news reports. Online reviews of *The Woodsman* emphasise the pull to sympathy of Bacon's character, Walter, a sex offender released on parole after serving twelve years for the sexual abuse of young girls. One review site, the IMDb (Internet Movie Database), even had a post from someone who said 'Being myself a pedophile (I never intended to have sex with a child and I never will but I feel attraction pretty clearly) for the first time I found a movie that tries [sic] to look at the pedophile from this point of view, to get in his head and to understand his feelings like a human being' ('Taleyran', 2008). This would seem to imply that Hollywood has achieved more than feature writing or investigative reporting in examining this complex and threatening perversion. In theory, researching how people like Taleyran manage their 'attractions' might be a legitimate activity for news media and academic researchers. Such studies could also offer important strategies for reducing risks to children.

Although a greatly publicised act, child killing is comparatively rare. In the United Kingdom (UK), for example, with almost three times the population of Australia and approximately 12 million children, the total number of children murdered by strangers each year typically varies somewhere between five and ten (Hilpern, 2002). Statistically, this is a tiny number, small even in comparison to the total number of children murdered by family members each year, which is around fifty or so (Hilpern, 2002; NSPCC, 2006). The impact of this tiny number of murders and unlawful killings is intense, however, with the result that the even smaller sub-group of sexually motivated murders of

children sustains enough media interest to keep the issue repeatedly in the news. While it is not the case that all child murders are sexually motivated—and is the case that comparatively few child sexual assaults are precursors to a child's murder—the implication of the press coverage of the Bill Clare case is that the behaviour is intertwined. The impact of these associations is to help create a 'culture of fear' in which constant vigilance is required (Furedi, 2002).

This elision between stranger-attracted child sex offender and child murderer may explain why convicted paedophiles attract such extreme public outrage upon their release into the community after serving prison sentences. Morris Iemma, then Premier of New South Wales, was famously reported as saying 'We don't want to be a dumping ground for Western Australia's paedophiles' (Iggulden, 2005), when 63-year-old child sex offender Otto Darcy-Searle was released on parole into the care of his sister who was living in Banora Point, New South Wales. The local community reacted so angrily to the arrival of Darcy-Searle that he decided to put his sister's welfare first and voluntarily returned to prison in WA, since it was impossible for him to fulfil the conditions of his parole without an unacceptable price being paid by his sister and her family.

Although there is some scepticism about the convenience of a conversion to evangelical Christianity on the part of many prison inmates, Darcy-Searle had been a model prisoner as well as a 'born again' Christian. In 2000, he had pleaded guilty to his paedophile crimes (committed against four young people some 20 years earlier between 1978 and 1982). He had apparently been reformed for over two decades when he was released and allowed to travel interstate to fulfil his parole conditions while living with his family members. According to Bissett (2006), 'six murderers, five rapists, 10 drug dealers and 16 armed robbers' were among the 111 parolees moving to NSW in 2004-2005, compared with 157 parolees moving away from NSW after their release from NSW jails. Even so, it was Darcy-Searle's case that prompted community outrage, accusations from the NSW Premier, an enquiry into the procedure of interstate parole, and a robust response from Western Australia.

In 2004, a British Home Office minister, Lady Scotland, argued that 'The nature of sexual attraction to children is that it is often lifelong and compulsive' (Scotland, 2004). Indeed, this is the implication of WA's recent legislation allowing paedophiles to be indefinitely detained at the end of a custodial sentence if there is 'an unacceptable

risk that, if the person were not subject to a continuing detention order or a supervision order, the person would commit a serious sexual offence' (*Dangerous Sexual Offenders Act, 2006*). Further, this supposed intractability of paedophile activity may be part of the media/political justification for constructing 'peds' and 'pervs' as worse than murderers. Such a perception may be unwarranted, however. UK Home Office data indicates that, for prisoners released in 2002, 60% of those convicted of all crimes re-offended within two years. This is the average. Figures indicate that paedophiles are among those least likely to re-offend in this timeframe, however. 85% of people convicted of theft from vehicles re-offended, while 17% of people convicted of child sexual offences had re-offended (*Economist, 2006, p. 55*). The indication is that child sex offenders can be rehabilitated. Further, an American Department of Justice study 'found that while 39% of child molesters were arrested again within three years of release, just 3% were suspected of another sex crime against a child' (*Economist, 2006, p. 55*).

These figures gloss over differences between UK definitions of 'child sexual offences' (for example, someone who accesses child pornography) and the US definition for 'child molestation'. It also ignores the impact of Megan's Law (State of New Jersey, 2007) in the US, named after a young girl, Megan Kanka, who was murdered by a sex offender after he was released back into the community. This has resulted in the listing of half a million or so US sex offenders on public websites. This has the consequence that many people convicted of a child sex offence in the US are unable to 'make a life for themselves' upon release from jail, which could help explain the 39% criminal recidivism rate (which could include theft and burglary, for example), while less than 10% of these recidivist former child molesters—only three in 100—were suspected of further offences against children. Such matters escape typical newspaper commentary but are included in the context of some cinematic story-telling, as is the case with *Little Children* (Field, 2006) and *The Woodsman* (Kassell, 2004). In light of the importance of the Walter character's job to his growing sense of himself as a citizen in a community, it is an ironic coincidence that *The Woodsman* was released in the US just nine days after the state of California first put its sex offender register online.

As part of the continuing discussion concerning the furore about Darcy-Searle, and the attacks upon the WA parole system by NSW Premier Lemming, WA Justice Minister John D'Orazio commented that 'wherever you have a paedophile in the community, it causes

aggravation [...] we have to remember that you need to put these people in the best possible environment to stop them re-offending and to be reintegrated into the community' (*West Australian*, 2005). As indicated in *The Woodsman*, this comment suggests that for some paedophiles rehabilitation is a possibility, and it includes a realistic appreciation that integration within society is one way to reduce the chance of sex offenders re-offending.

Other commentators are less willing to accept the possibility of a benign resolution, either for perpetrator or victim. 'These children's lives and their family's have been damaged almost beyond repair in some cases', argued Hetty Johnston from *Bravehearts* (Geoghegan, 2003). Prior to her 2008 complaints about Bill Henson, Johnston had previously come to prominence with her opposition to the continuance in office of former Governor-General Peter Hollingworth as a result of his inappropriate handling of child sex abuse cases at the time he was Archbishop of Brisbane (Geoghegan, 2003). This construction of child sex abuse as a crime from which survivors may never be able to recover raises the possibility of their re-victimisation. It is equivalent to the nineteenth century notion of rape victims as having fared a 'fate worse than death'.

Indeed, this is the argument put forward by Sabine Dardenne (2005) in her autobiographical account of her abduction by Brussels murderer and paedophile Marc Dutroux. Dardenne's view is that her ability to live a normal life is compromised by social attitudes, suggesting that no-one can recover from such an extreme experience. Although her refusal to receive counselling for her experience has been seen as evidence of being 'in denial', she sees it as an important part of her recovery. 'Her mother obliged her to see a psychiatrist, but she attended only once and later wrote: "That's the day I understood that if I wasn't careful I really would go mad—not with what had happened but with all the whys and wherefores afterwards"' (Milton, 2005). The few victims who publicly claim to have recovered from abuse, or not to have been damaged by it, are denied the capacity to speak authoritatively of their experience. (This was the case, for example, with 15-year-old Benjamin Dunbar. Dunbar argued that he had pursued his 37-year-old teacher, Karen Ellis, and was undamaged by their six-week affair. Ellis served a six month prison sentence for paedophilia while child protection organisations and police argued that Dunbar was unable to appreciate the harm he had suffered [Karen Louise Ellis n.d.]).

Arguably—alongside news organisations, the courts, and the legislature—society explores its fears and taboos through its art. Although there have been a number of documentary films dealing with paedophilia, for example, the award-winning *Deliver us from Evil* (dir. Berg, 2006) and *Capturing the Friedmans* (dir. Jarecki, 2003), it is the dramatic representations of paedophiles and their victims that have raised the most questions about social responses to paedophilia. *Birth* (Glazer, 2004) posits a what-if scenario around ‘what if a widow believes her much-loved dead husband to be re-incarnated in the body of a child who knows more than is possible about the husband’s life and love?’ The controversy here was as much centred upon the film sequence of the child being visited by Nicole Kidman’s character as he bathed as it was about the implausibility and contradictions of the plot. *Little Children* (Field, 2006) contrasts the known background of a recently released sex offender, who resides with his frail elderly mother, with the secret past of an ex-cop waging a vigilante campaign to run the paedophile out of his community.

The Woodsman (Kassell, 2004) and *Mystic River* (Eastwood, 2003) both have plot points that hinge on a violent attack by a key character upon a paedophile. In *The Woodsman*, the attack is initiated by the now-released ex-child sex abuser; in *Mystic River* it is perpetrated by the victim (now an adult) of a paedophile attack. *Notes on a Scandal* (Eyre, 2006) deals with the less common circumstance of adult female sexual abuse of a male child and places this within the context of a teacher-student relationship in a high school (as in the Karen Ellis case). Here the emphasis is not on the impact of the relationship upon the underage victim (which is portrayed as much less traumatic than the fall-out when their affair becomes known), but instead concentrates upon the power that knowledge of the affair confers to a third party. The tagline to the film is, ‘One woman’s mistake is another’s opportunity’. (Note here, ‘mistake’, not an acceptable behaviour-descriptor for a news story about a paedophile.) These Hollywood storylines succeed in portraying both victims and perpetrators as human, although they do not gloss over the impact of the child sex abuse (in *Mystic River*, for example, the unspeakability of the crime directly leads to the death of Dave, the abused character). *The Woodsman*, *Little Children*, and *Notes on a Scandal* all show the abuser as redeemable.

Although all the dramas discussed address issues of paedophilia, sex offending, and child sexual abuse with various degrees of subtlety, and in the context of different levels of controversy, *Mysterious Skin* (dir. Araki, drama) became the Australian touchstone for a debate

about the censorship and banning of films that address paedophile material. Campaigners against *Mysterious Skin* admitted to not having seen the film and said they were acting instead on information circulated from other countries (mainly the US) by child protection campaigners. They decried the film before its release. The Australian Family Association appealed against the judgement of the Office of Film and Literature Classification to license the film for broadcast. They wanted the R18+ classification withdrawn, which would have resulted in the film's becoming unscreenable. Such action had, on at least one other occasion, been successful (for example, with *Baise-moi*, [Green, 2002]).

Mysterious Skin director and scriptwriter Gregg Araki (2004), adapting the autobiographical story by Scott Heim (1995), commented that 'the film has already opened in so many other countries with no incident, no problem with censorship or anything [...] I have always thought of Australia as a very sort of progressive, sophisticated, cosmopolitan place. So to run into this roadblock is surprising' (Softpedia, 2005). Ultimately, the majority finding of the Australian Office of Film and Literature Classification Review Board was that 'the film condemns child sexual abuse in unambiguous and clear terms [...] the film demonstrates, in a sensitive way, the awful consequences of child sexual abuse and the impact that it has on victims' lives' (Refused-Classification, n.d.). Far from wanting it banned, some critics instead suggested that the film should be 'compulsory viewing' for (school) years 10-12 (Hutchison, 2005).

It is through a considered response to issues raised by paedophile behaviour that society can learn more about the perpetrators and can do more to protect and support the victims. Reviewer A. O. Scott, writing in the *New York Times*, comments of *Mysterious Skin* that the child character's paedophile assailant 'is at once the predator who stole Neil's innocence, the father he never had, and the great love of his life' (Scott, 2005). While this is a highly controversial comment, Scott suggests that it makes sense within the dynamics of the film and it ties in with Heim's accounts of his life upon which *Mysterious Skin* (1995) is based. This is not the kind of information that we are ever likely to learn from a press discourse that elides paedophilia with child killing, and that promotes and supports vigilante groups whose voices dominate the moral high ground, denying those of some victims and repudiating the validity of any experience other than (almost) irrecoverable harm.

In the absence of more rounded reporting in the press, we can be glad that films, and some other narratives, continue to represent paedophilia as an issue that needs further consideration. Given that news media are not asking the complex and challenging questions, we should be grateful that Hollywood is. Arguably, alongside our response to the 'Hollywood' treatment, we should be asking what more academics and social theorists could be doing, and saying, to put these issues on the research agenda. It may be convenient to label paedophiles as a specific kind of sexual monster, best incarcerated far away from humanity, but such simplistic judgements mark an abdication of analytical, social, and cultural responsibility. They may also leave more children exposed to greater risk of harm: ignorance rarely trumps knowledge.

References

- ABC. (2008). Police quiz photographer over nude shots. *ABC News*, Friday May 23. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/05/23/2253293.htm>.
- Angelides, S. (2004). Feminism, child sexual abuse and the erasure of child sexuality. *GLQ*, 10(2), 141-177.
- Araki, G. (2004). *Mysterious skin*. Desperate Pictures. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://akas.imdb.com/title/tt0370986/>.
- BBC. (2005). *Paedophile faces highest security*. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4730087.stm>.
- Berg, A. (2006). *Deliver us from evil* (documentary). Lionsgate. Retrieved May 2008, from http://www.deliverusfromevilthemovie.com/index_flash.php.
- Bissett, K. (2006, February 6). State lets in hardcore criminals. *The Daily Telegraph*. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.dailytelegraph.news.com.au/story/0,20281,18051131-5001022,00.html>.
- Cohen, S. (1980). *Folk Devils and moral panics: The creation of the mods and rockers* (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Cowburn, M. & Dominelli, L. (2001). Masking hegemonic masculinity: Reconstructing the paedophile as the dangerous stranger, *British Journal of Social Work*, 31(3), 399-416.
- Cox, P., Kershaw, S., & Trotter, J. (Eds.). (2000). *Child sexual assault: Feminist perspectives*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Dangerous sexual offenders act. (2006). *Dangerous sexual offenders act*. WA Legislation, Parliament of Western Australia. Retrieved May 2008, from http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/wa/consol_act/dsoa2006275.txt/cgi-bin/download.cgi/download/au/legis/wa/consol_act/dsoa2006275.rtf.
- Dardenne, S. (2005). *I choose to live*. London: Virago.
- Driver, E. & Droisen, A. (Eds.). (1989). *Child sexual abuse: Feminist perspectives*. Basingstoke, MacMillan.
- Eastwood, C. (2003). *Mystic river*. Warner Bros. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://mysticrivermovie.warnerbros.com>.

- Eyre, R. (2006). *Notes on a scandal*. Fox searchlight. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.foxsearchlight.com/NOAS/>.
- Field, T. (2006). *Little children*. New Line Cinema. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0404203/>.
- Furedi, F. (2002). *Culture of Fear: Risk-taking and the morality of low expectation* (2nd ed.). UK: Continuum Compact.
- Geoghegan, A. (2003). Peter Hollingworth calls it quits. *7.30 Report*. ABC online. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2003/s864968.htm>.
- Goode, S. (2008). 'Paedophiles' in contemporary culture, in Nancy Billias, (Ed.). *Territories of evil*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Glazer, J. (2004). *Birth*. New Line Cinema. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0337876/>.
- Green, L. (2002). Sex: What's love got to do with it? *'Love' M/C: A Journal of Media and Culture*, 5(6). Retrieved May 2008, from <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0211/sex.php>.
- Heim, S. (1995). *Mysterious Skin*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Hilpern, K. (2002, October 23). Don't be scared to speak up. *Society Guardian*. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://society.guardian.co.uk/children/story/0,1074,816854,00.html>.
- Hutchison, T. (2005, August 3). An important movie that *should* be seen. *The Age*, Opinion. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.theage.com.au/news/opinion/an-important-movie-that-should-be-seen/2005/08/02/1122748632911.html>.
- Iggulden, T. (2005). State row intensifies over paedophile. *Lateline* 16 August. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2005/s1439194.htm>.
- Jackman, C. (2006, July 15-16). Master predator sustained by the state, *The Weekend Australian*. p. 1
- Jarecki, A. (2003). *Capturing the Friedmans*. Magnolia Pictures. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.capturingthefriedmans.com/main.html>.
- Kassell, N. (2004). *The Woodsman*. Newmarket Films. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.thewoodsmanfilm.com/>.
- Karen Louise Ellis (n.d.) *Bookrags*. Retrieved May 2008, from http://www.bookrags.com/wiki/Karen_Louise_Ellis.
- Kelly, L. (1996). 'Weasel words: Paedophiles and the cycle of abuse'. *Trouble and Strife*, 33, 44-49. Reprinted by the Women's Support Project. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.womenssupportproject.co.uk/files/pdf/WeaselWords.pdf>.
- Milton, R. (2005). Personal view: Psychological trauma and the ADF (Australian Defence Force). *ADF Health*, 6 (October), 85-87.
- NSPCC. (2006). Facts and figures about child abuse. *National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children*. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/html/home/newsandcampaigns/factsandfigures.htm>.
- O'Neill, B. (2008). Paedophile scares are always driven by the elite. *Spiked*, Monday 19 May. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php?site/article/5168/>.

- Ramachandran, A. & Tovey, J. (2008, May 26). Another Henson show banned, but not Strange Cargo. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts/another-henson-show-banned-but-not-strange-cargo/2008/05/26/1211653914186.html>.
- Refused-Classification. (n.d.) Mysterious Skin. *Refused Classification—Film censorship in Australia*. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.refused-classification.com/Films-mysteriousskin.htm>.
- Scotland, Rt. Hon. Baroness. (2004). Letter to the Chair. *Joint Committee on Human Rights, Fourth Report*, Appendix 7, UK Parliament, Publications. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt200405/jtselect/jtrights/26/2617.htm>.
- Scott, A. O. (2004, December 24). Released from prison but never really free. *New York Times*. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://movies.nytimes.com/2004/12/24/movies/24wood.html>.
- Scott, A. O. (2005, May 6). Seeking adult answers in two scarred boyhoods. *New York Times*. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/06/movies/06skin.html?ei=5070&en=b2ece4d4fbc9ce2e&ex=1156996800&adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1156856661-E71G0Vy1uqs/fWokSOmNOQ>.
- Softpedia. (2005, July). Mysterious Skin may be banned in Australian cinemas. *Softpedia*. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://news.softpedia.com/news/Mysterious-Skin-may-be-banned-in-Australian-cinemas-5076.shtml>.
- State of New Jersey. (2007). *Megan's Law: A guide for community organizations, schools & daycare centers*. N.J. Office of the Attorney General. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.state.nj.us/oag/dcj/megan/community-brochure.pdf>.
- Sturcke, J. (2007, June 21). The Aboriginal people are likely to disappear within a generation. *Guardian Unlimited*. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/australia/story/0,,2108294,00.html>.
- Taleyran. (2008). More movies dealing with this problem? Post on the *Internet Movie Database (IMDb)* Message Board. Retrieved May 2008, from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0361127/board/nest/97886745>.
- The end of innocence. (2006, January 21). *The Economist*, pp. 55-56.
- Waites, M. (2005). *The age of consent: Young people, sexuality and citizenship*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- West Australian*. (2005, December 30). Cited on MAKO (Movement against kindred offenders) Retrieved May 2008, from http://www.mako.org.au/temp_otto_searle.html.
- Wild, R. & Anderson, P. (2007). *Ampe akelyernemane meke mekarle. 'Little children are sacred': Report of the Northern Territory Board of inquiry into the protection of Aboriginal children from sexual abuse*. Northern Territory Government. Retrieved May 2008, from http://www.nt.gov.au/dcm/inquiriesaac/pdf/bipacsa_final_report.pdf.