This is Exhibit " I " referred to in the
affidavit of Cheryl Regehr
_____ sworn before me this
30th day of March 2012
Paul Klann

Child Protection and the Media: Lessons from the Last Three Decades

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Summary

During the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, sensationalist coverage of a series of celebrated child abuse scandals in England and Wales resulted in the repeated vilification in the mass media of those child welfare agencies deemed culpable for the deaths of the children involved. This paper explores the contribution of the media to the creation of the climate of fear, blame and mistrust which seems to have become endemic within the field of child protection. It suggests that damaging distortions have been introduced into the child protection system as a result of the defensive responses of the relevant authorities at both national and local level to the media onslaught. A more strategic approach to understanding and managing media coverage of this difficult field is outlined.

Influences on the development of services in England and Wales

Those involved in devising and delivering child protection services in England and Wales over the last three decades will have observed a gradual but inexorable increase in the scope, complexity and sophistication of the child protection system and of the associated legislation and guidance. However, though more and more resources were invested in the system for most of this period, public confidence in it remained stubbornly and alarmingly low. Developments in services and in public attitudes may be seen to have been influenced primarily by three interrelated factors (Ayre, 1998a). First, messages from research about the nature and prevalence of abuse, and particularly sexual abuse, have been fairly widely disseminated not only amongst professionals but also amongst the general population. Awareness has been

enhanced by specific public information programmes promoted by government and voluntary agencies and by the generally responsible inclusion of relevant story lines in popular drama and literature. The rôle of the news media in providing balanced and informative coverage of this issue has been rather more equivocal, as we shall see.

A second important factor has been the primarily legal and adversarial context within which most child protection work in England and Wales is undertaken. Though a number of important and influential voluntary organizations are engaged in this sphere of activity, the dominant mode of service organization and delivery is very strongly statutory. Day-to-day practice is dominated by local authority social work agencies operating within a national framework providing for strong elements of guidance, scrutiny and control by central government. In keeping with the individualistic, libertarian tradition which has characterized politics in England and Wales, it has been felt important to constrain the exercise of power by the state in the field of child abuse by establishing a fairly rigid legal framework for intervention. Whilst this provides some defence against unwarranted state intrusion, the adversarial, rather than inquisitorial, character of the legal system in England and Wales has unfortunate consequences when applied to child protection. In particular, it tends to place families and the authorities working with them in opposing camps rather than encouraging them to participate in mutual endeavour (Cleaver and Freeman, 1995). As a result the child protection process tends to be characterized much more by conflict and much less by co-operation than would be the case in countries such as France with the benefits of legal systems founded on collectivism, citizenship and Roman law (Cooper *et al.*, 1995).

The third factor was the advent during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s of a series of celebrated child abuse scandals (Reder *et al.*, 1993) which placed severe strain on child-care services in England and Wales. Patterns of service in other European countries have been influenced by the public response to *causes célèbres* such as that of Alexander Aminoff in Sweden in 1979 (Christopherson, 1993) but the impact on child welfare in England and Wales was greatly amplified by the large number of cases brought to public attention and by the intensity of the response in the print and broadcast media. Each of these scandals was followed by an unholy trinity consisting of:

- the aggressive public pillorying in the mass media of those agencies deemed responsible;
- the publication of ever more detailed recommendations to welfare agencies resulting from public enquiries convened to look into the tragedies;
- the issuing by central government of increasingly intricately wrought practice guidance intended to prevent recurrence.

Increasing awareness of abuse, a conflict-oriented legal framework and public and professional responses to headline grabbing scandals were important both in setting the general climate for developments in child protection and in influencing directly the pattern and character of the services which were created. Whilst these factors had the potential to contribute positively to the development of a more careful and

accountable service, they also display considerable potential for introducing unhelpful biases and misplaced emphases. In particular, it may be helpful to explore their influence on the emotional context within which child protection work is undertaken and how they contributed to the creation of a climate of fear, a climate of mistrust and a climate of blame.

A climate of fear

The increased public awareness of abuse has been important in creating a more protective environment for our children and much of the coverage of this field in the media has been very helpful in this respect. Informative and supportive messages have been carried in adult fiction, in children's fiction and in the features or editorial output of the print and broadcast media. The influence of the news media has been much less helpful.

News journalists are 'not in the business of faithfully recording the most common events, they are in the business of finding, constructing and selling "news"' (Kitzinger, 1996, p. 320). The qualities of immediacy and drama required of news stories inevitably slant the selection of stories towards the more sensational. Analysis by McDevitt (1996, 1998) of media coverage of abuse in the United States and in Ireland demonstrates a clear preference for acute and exceptional manifestations such as lurid child sexual abuse and child murder to the extent that chronic forms of abuse like neglect or emotional abuse are almost invisible, though their consequences for the child can be no less devastating (Fitzgerald, 1995; Iwaniec, 1995). This might cause us less concern if we did not know that, where people have little direct personal knowledge, the image portrayed by the media becomes for them their image of the issue in question (Hutson *et al.*, 1994; Robinson, 1992). For example, as Kitzinger and Skidmore (1995) found, media coverage has increased public awareness of sexual abuse but, for most people, the concept tends to be associated strongly with 'stranger danger' and the likelihood of abuse or abduction by an unknown assailant. There is usually little awareness of the much more likely contingency that children will be abused by someone well-known to them. Gough (1996) points out that the news media 'tend to report rare hazards rather than commonplace events but in dramatising such extreme adversities as child murder, sex rings and social workers abducting children into care, encourage the development of moral panic, which over-sensitises people to the risks involved'.

It is important to recognize that the climate of fear is not confined to the general public, but extends also to the policy makers and professional groups most closely involved. Close scrutiny of developments in child protection in England and Wales over the last two and a half decades may suggest that the allocation of resources during this period has been driven primarily by the desire of politicians and senior managers to avoid featuring on the front page of the tabloid press following the latest celebrated child abuse scandal (Aldridge, 1994; Ayre, 1998b; Franklin and Parton, 1991*a*). The development of services offering a balanced and confident professional response is not promoted by the fear of seeing your picture on the cover

of a mass circulation daily above the headline 'Sack her, child abuse doc must go' (*Sun*, 7 July 1987).

A climate of mistrust

Whilst increased awareness of abuse undoubtedly has some impact on our general level of trust in our friends, neighbours, associates and fellow citizens in general, I wish to pay particular attention to trust between the general public, politicians and policy makers on one hand and the professionals working in child protection on the other. As we have seen, considerable tension is thrown into relationships by the adversarial character of the child protection system. The climate of mistrust can only be increased when the values underpinning the selection of news stories inevitably emphasize drama and conflict.

As newspaper quotations collected by Franklin and Parton (1991*b*), Kitzinger and Skidmore (1995) and Illsley (1989) demonstrate, the key news stories of the last three decades have tended to centre on criticism of the competence or motivations of child protection workers. On one hand social workers have been described as 'child stealers' (*Today*, 29 March 1991) who 'seize sleeping children in the middle of the night' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 10 July 1988). In this guise they are 'abusers of authority, hysterical and malignant' (*Daily Mail*, 7 July 1988), 'motivated by zealotry rather than facts' (*Daily Mail*, 6 July 1988) or 'like the SAS in cardigans and Hush Puppies' (*Sunday People*, 10 March 1991). On the other hand, they are 'naïve, bungling, easily fobbed off' (*Daily Express*, 29 March 1985), 'incompetent, indecisive and reluctant to intervene' (Kitzinger and Skidmore, 1995) and 'too trusting with too liberal a professional outlook' (*Guardian*, 19 December 1987). Such messages can do little to generate public confidence in child protection services which come across as sometimes too weak, sometimes too strong but never to be trusted. The notion that professional practice in this field is generally unreliable and unsafe seems to have had a powerful influence not only on the perceptions of the general public but also on policy makers and managers at all levels of national and local government and may clearly be seen reflected in the patterns of service which have developed.

A climate of blame

Over the past three decades, a climate of blame has come to be characteristic of child protection services in England and Wales. This may been seen, in part, as arising from the development of an influential discourse which centres on the responsibility of professionals for the abuse which they are attempting to prevent. The media have played an important part in creating and maintaining this discourse. As Hall *et al.* (1997) perceptively point out, child abuse stories were once represented in the news media primarily as crime stories and, accordingly, reporting followed the standard formula for this genre: discovery of crime, arrest and charge,

trial, conviction and sentence. This mode of presentation still seems to hold sway in much press reporting in continental Europe and North America. However, in recent years a further concluding element which concerns itself with the attribution of blame and 'how was this allowed to happen?' has begun to be added routinely to story lines in the British press.

When looking for explanations for the fault-oriented bias which characterizes child abuse reporting, it seems to have become conventional within the professions most associated with child abuse to place responsibility primarily on the news media and on the agendas and imperatives which drive them (Aldridge, 1994; Franklin and Parton, 1991*a*, Illsley, 1989). However, a little reflection on the rôle played by the child protection system itself in the generation of this situation may be appropriate.

The promise to protect

It is of course true that in the world of the media, 'good news is no news' and little or no attention tends to be paid to the routine daily successes of the system in detecting abuse and preventing death and serious injury (Pritchard, 1992). Unfortunately, it is in the nature of this work that it rarely generates spectacular successes to offset the impressions left by its occasional spectacular failures. Further, there can be little doubt that during the Thatcherite 1980s, when the New Right agenda called for the 'rolling back of the state' and the curbing of its influence on daily life, local authority social services departments came to represent for the Right-leaning media a metaphor for public services in general. They seemed to embody all the most reviled characteristics of state provision, being regarded as bureaucratic, inefficient and ineffective and, worse still, were seen as interfering with individual liberty and driven by political correctness and leftist dogma. The political climate was therefore clearly right for the re-creation of the social worker as folk-demon.

However, as Hall *et al.* (1997) remind us, it is not only the news media which have an interest in promoting a preferred image or model of child protection. Everyone has a story to tell, a discourse to sell and the child abuse professions have also been active in this regard. We must acknowledge that they too may have played their part, albeit unintentionally, in the process of transferring the blame for child abuse to their own agencies. By selecting the title 'child protection' for the service they offered, they were making a clear statement about the importance of its contribution to maintaining the social and moral fabric. However, we must recognize that 'when we choose for a service, a title which we cannot live up to, failure is inevitable' (Goddard, 1996, p. 304).

Unfortunately, the rather rash promise to keep children safe implicit in the name of the service was made still more rashly explicit during the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. During these decades, unremitting pressure on local government to reduce its expenditure seems to have induced senior managers to play on the climate of fear already described by deploying the argument that if the resources devoted to child protection services were reduced, children would die. Whilst many newspaper stories continued to reflect and create the 'incompetent service' discourse throughout this

period with headlines such as, 'Social workers failed to save battered baby' (*Daily Mail*, 21 June 1990), we can detect in other reports of the same incident the influence of the 'cash=safety' discourse reflected in story lines such as, 'Cash cuts linked to child's death' (*Daily Mirror*, 21 June 1990) and 'Cash curbs played part in abused girl's death' (*Independent*, 21 June 1990).

The inevitable but unwelcome corollary of child protection managers' emotive argument for continuing generous funding was an expectation on the part of the public, the politicians and the press that if sufficient resources were devoted to the service, children would no longer die as a result of abuse. Yet of course they did, because no amount of expenditure can ever render human behaviour totally predictable nor totally eliminate error, incompetence or folly, whether corporate or individual. To this extent, it ill becomes those of us engaged in child protection to criticize the media for pointing out when we fail, sometimes in dramatic fashion, to deliver what we are perceived to have promised.

The deprofessionalization of child protection

These factors combined to generate in the mind of all those engaged in child protection, from the highest to the lowest, the perception that this is essentially a very hazardous activity in which to be involved. Their impact on the development of child protection services in England and Wales over the past three decades can be seen most prominently in two general trends, towards deprofessionalization and towards specialization.

The deprofessionalization of the social work services in the field of child protection may be seen to some degree as falling within a more general movement taking place within public services in Britain and elsewhere in the English speaking world in the last quarter of the century (Deem, 1989, Dressel *et al.*, 1988). We have seen in most public agencies widespread shifts of culture and function associated with the advent of managerialism (Brewster, 1992), McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1993) and the audit culture (Grayson and Rogers, 1997). The trend toward management by externally defined objectives, standardization, routinization and the attitude that 'if you can't count it, it doesn't count' is exemplified by the advent of the National Curriculum and examination league tables for schools, and of comprehensive nationally defined standards and performance targets in health care, policing and the Probation Service.

We may surmise that the feeling, reflected in these developments, that the professions cannot be trusted to behave sensibly unless they are given very firm guidance about what to do might be particularly prevalent in the sphere of child protection, where there has been so much emphasis on what has gone wrong. It is an entirely natural management response to address problems which have arisen by writing new guidance and procedures. In doing so, we may hope to achieve two particularly desirable objectives. Not only are we helping our staff to act more appropriately next time, but also, and perhaps more importantly, we are shifting the level of responsibility one level down the line. National government writes guidance for

local authorities which then write guidance and procedures for their managers who in turn write detailed instructions for their staff. If anything then goes wrong, each can say 'I told you what to do and you failed to comply; the fault is yours'. In the blame oriented culture characteristic of child protection, this can be very comforting.

This tendency to deal with serious systems failures by procedural proliferation is not confined to the fields of child protection or social welfare. Many useful parallels may be drawn with the analysis by Reason (1995) of the rôle of organizational error in large-scale disasters which have occurred in a wide range of hazardous, well-defended industrial technologies during the past two decades. He notes that the root causes of these accidents can in fact be traced to 'latent failures and organizational errors arising in the upper echelons of the system in question' (Reason, 1995, p. 1708). Accident sequences begin with problems arising in management processes such as planning, specifying, communicating, regulating and developing, which are themselves subject to constraints created by the financial, economic and political context within which the organization operates.

Latent failures created by these organizational errors are 'transmitted along various organizational and departmental pathways to the workplace where they create the local conditions that promote the commission of errors and violations (e.g. high workload, deficient tools and equipment, time pressure, fatigue, low morale, conflicts between organizational and group norms and the like' (Reason, 1995, p. 1710). In this analysis, 'people at the sharp end are seen as the inheritors rather than the instigators of an accident sequence' (Reason, 1995, p. 1711). Yet, instead of dealing with the underpinning organizational weaknesses, 'sanctions, exhortations to be more careful, writing yet another procedure and "blaming and training" operators are still the error management techniques of choice in most industries' (Reason, 1995, p. 1720). This critique would seem to apply just as uncomfortably accurately to the 'child protection industry' as it does to the railway, chemical or nuclear power industries which Reason had primarily in mind.

The cumulative effects of this strategy are not wholly beneficial. First, when a problem occurs, new advice tends to be added to what we already have, it seldom replaces it. As Reason argues, ironically 'one of the effects of continually tightening up procedures in order to improve system safety is to increase the likelihood of violations being committed. The scope of permitted action can shrink to such an extent that procedures are either violated routinely, or on those occasions when operational necessity demands it' (Reason, 1995, p. 1715).

During the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, legislative change, statutory guidance, lengthy recommendations from public enquiries and research findings relevant to child protection (Department of Health, 1991; Reder *et al.*, 1993; Warner, 1996) proliferated at such a rate that it was difficult for ordinary competent practitioners and managers to feel confident that they were aware of all the important guidance relevant to their work. It is not just the depth of the pile of guidance notes which causes concern, it is also their texture, in that they have become ever more closely woven. If an instance of error seems to have fallen through the net provided by existing guidance, we start to write on the spaces between the lines in the vain hope that we will eventually catch everything.

The idea that we can control child protection and render it safe by writing increasingly detailed procedures describing right action is unfortunately fundamentally flawed. It rests heavily on the notion that if we could just get the system right, all would be well. However, we are here straying again into the territory covered by the 'myth of predictability'. Unpredictability is of the essence of human behaviour, both that of abusers and that of the professionals who work with them.

Two basic models of control system are identified in the literature in the field (Cantley, 1981; Kreitner, 1982). Feedforward control systems (Figure 1) involve following pre-set procedures through from initiation of activity to termination. By contrast, in feedback systems (Figure 2), actions are not predetermined. Rather, they are based on judgements made following assessment of the situation at the time. Control systems theory suggests that feedforward control systems assume that 'interventions are programmable in advance as a known function of environmental disturbances' (Cantley, 1981). Systems leaning heavily on feedforward controls and prescriptive procedures are therefore best suited to areas of work where the relevant characteristics of the situation are easily captured and quantified, where seemingly similar circumstances may always be dealt with effectively by a similar response and where it is possible to define an unequivocally 'right' answer for each contingency. Feedforward controls guide workers engaged in relatively simple tasks like production line assembly in factories but also those undertaking relatively complex tasks like television or motorcar repair. The workers involved are, however, primarily technicians rather than professionals. Professional activity more commonly involves judgements about the interaction of a multiplicity of diverse and relatively unpredictable elements and is more typically regulated by feedback control systems.

It is understandable that concern about the dangerousness of child protection activity may lead to the desire to improve our control over it. Any system for the regulation of the means of child protection which we adopt, like most control systems associated with the regulation of human activity, is likely to be a blend of the two types rather than ideotypical of either. However, it may be felt that we have come, in England and Wales, to place rather too much emphasis on the feedforward aspects of the system at the expense of the feedback. We are thus expending too much effort in developing ever more detailed procedures and ensuring compliance with them and too little in developing sound professional judgement which is flexible enough to produce reliable results across a wide range of rapidly and erratically shifting circumstances.

We may predict that over-reliance on feedforward controls and the consequent proceduralization and technicalization of child protection is likely to have two important adverse effects. First, workers may come increasingly to lack confidence in their own judgement and to be dependent on being told the right thing to do. Secondly, the system may become so wrapped up in process and procedure that it loses sight of objectives and outcomes. When those involved at all levels are asked to explain why certain actions were taken, they are likely to respond in terms of compliance with procedures and technical requirements. They are much less likely to speak, or perhaps even to think, about what they were trying to achieve for their clients. Participants in recent English research into decision making in child protec-
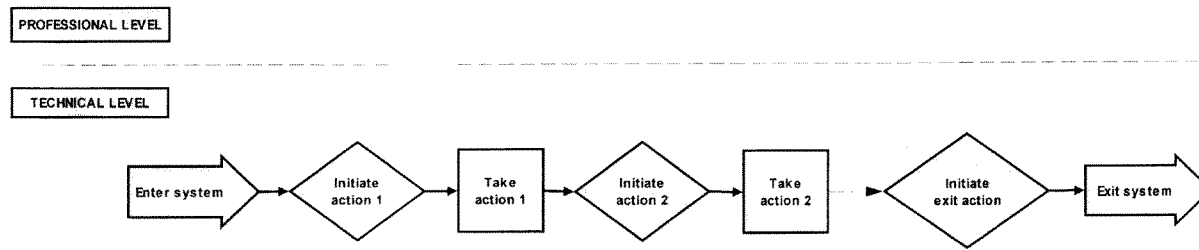
Figure 1 Feedforward control system

Enter system

Assess
and evaluate
Decide next
action

Exit system

PROFESSIONAL LEVEL

TECHNICAL LEVEL

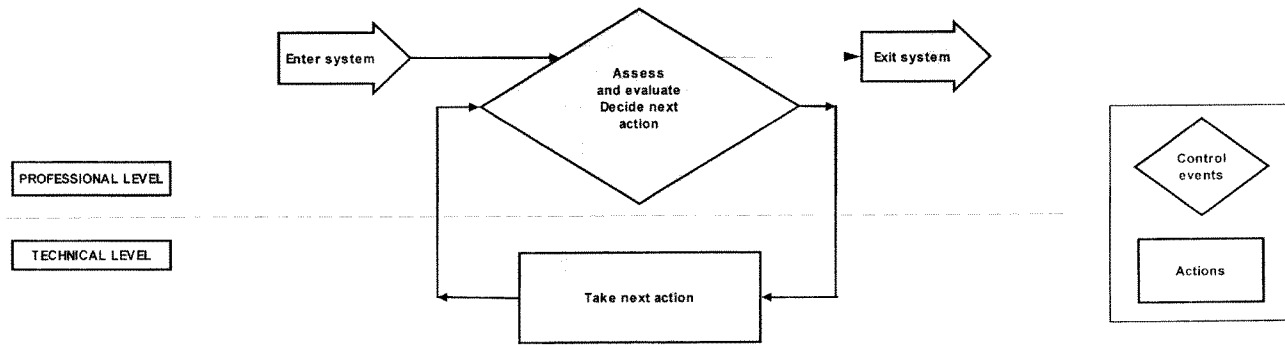Take next action

Control
events

Actions

Figure 2 Feedback control system

tion (Ayre, 1998a) suggested that they found these characteristics to be so widespread within their local child protection services that they might be regarded as typical.

Specialization in child protection

One of the most unfortunate consequences of the pressures outlined in this paper has been the opening up of a widening gulf between child protection and more general child welfare. The risks and complexities of child abuse work in this hazardous environment seemed to require that child protection services and the workers who offered them become highly specialized. In response to the generally hostile and challenging environment in which they found themselves, such services inevitably developed sets of priorities and survival strategies distinct from those found within other child welfare services where the workers felt less vulnerable. The fear of missing something vital encouraged practice so defensive that it seemed, at times, primarily calculated to protect the system rather than the child. Fear of public vilification led to a preoccupation with the acute and the dramatic. Services were configured to focus on physical and sexual abuse at the expense of neglect and emotional abuse and on the identification and elimination of danger at the expense of preventive or therapeutic responses (Audit Commission, 1994, Department of Health, 1995). This contrasts sharply with developments in continental Europe where child welfare workers in France and Italy were placing much more emphasis on the provision of on-going supportive services for families aimed at the prevention of abuse (Caffo, 1983; Girodet, 1989).

In the competition for scarce resources, the specialist child protection services in England and Wales always had a clear advantage, guaranteed by the awful consequences of failure in this field not only for the children involved but also for the agencies charged with protecting them. It is, then, unsurprising that a series of influential and important recent studies have suggested that too many families were being drawn into the scrutiny of the child protection system and further that services in the field of child and family welfare have come to concentrate so narrowly on child protection investigation that little time and money is left for anything else (Audit Commission, 1994; Department of Health, 1995). These findings are having a profound effect on the realignment of child-care services in England and Wales, but the perception of child protection as a particularly hazardous activity and its enduring appeal to the media as a source of front page headlines inevitably place constraints on the rate of change.

Learning lessons

When we reflect on the rôle of the news media in contributing to the pressures impinging on child protection in England and Wales over the last three decades and on the distortions in the system which have been created by the responses of man-

agers and policy makers to these pressures, it seems appropriate to draw out some of the lessons which we can learn from this experience. All too often the media are regarded as essentially and inevitably hostile to child protection services and the only strategic approach deployed is avoidance at all costs. In its simplest form, this strategy has consisted of non-co-operation with press enquiries about specific incidents, refusal to comment and failure to provide background information or to make credible spokespersons available for interview. This is essentially a hazardous approach, leaving the media with a story which they want to tell but large gaps in the narrative. In the absence of any contribution from official sources, they are forced to rely on the one side of the story they have, which is usually highly critical of the authorities, and to plug the holes with contributions from 'rent-a-quote' commentators with well-known, and often controversial, positions but no knowledge of the case in question.

At a slightly more sophisticated level, avoidance involves failure to maintain a routine, on-going media strategy. Such a strategy should involve agencies in promoting the successes and socially valued aspects of their services and in forming enduring relationships with journalists such as features writers who work in sectors of the media less driven by the hard-edged imperatives of news reporting (Aldridge, 1994). Social care services could learn much about media management from the approach adopted by most police forces in the United Kingdom.

Police forces have developed a competent understanding of what the media need and deploy this understanding to their benefit. Where possible they anticipate the breaking of a story which may prove controversial and prepare the ground by feeding in background information which tends to be either neutral or favourable to their position. When a story does break, they respond quickly and positively, rather than slowly and defensively. One of the most prominent features of their approach has been the willingness to make available for interview officers close to the action on the ground rather than Heads of Service with little detailed knowledge of the circumstances. Between serious incidents, they maintain a steady stream of stories tailored to the needs of different sectors of the media and cultivate selected journalists sympathetic to the messages which they want to sell.

Unfortunately, as we have seen, avoidance of adverse media attention appears to have become such a deep-seated imperative that it has been influential even at the level of policy formation. Services have been configured to concentrate on news-sensitive aspects of abuse and attempts have been made to eliminate error through tighter and more prescriptive control. However, this approach can never provide a complete answer. When we contemplate why one set of senior managers find themselves being nightly denigrated in the media over a child abuse tragedy whilst their neighbours are spared, we must acknowledge that the effectiveness of their respective services may not be the only relevant factor. The rôle of chance should not be underestimated. In one instance, unanticipated behaviour by a potentially abusive parent may lead to the unexpected positive resolution of a taxing case, in another it may lead to death or serious injury. On one occasion, professional error may lead to nothing more than an admonition during supervision, on another it may lead to tragedy. Sometimes a hint of a poor practice will be picked up by journalists and

pursued, sometimes it passes unremarked. The precursors of tragedy and scandal are the everyday realities of work in the field of child protection. Good management can, of course, reduce the odds considerably, but there will always be 100 potential tragedies for each one which is realized and a dozen potential scandals for each one the media happen to descend upon.

Better then to abandon avoidance as a strategy and to become more sophisticated in our understanding of the media and of how news is created. Fully to learn the lessons which are there to be learned, we must move beyond the conventional wisdom prescribing better media management. Certainly, more effective handling of the media would yield useful results. However, neither is poor handling of the media wholly responsible for the very poor public perception of child protection services, nor do the media 'just have it in for us'. To make real progress, we must begin to understand and address the fundamental discourses created by and creating media coverage. These are like the tides driving public opinion first one way, then another. Better media management, in the conventional sense, merely helps us to steer our ship more effectively across their surface.

If we want to be truly effective in developing our services and their public image, we must understand and work constructively with the deeper forces. First, we must understand how discourses are created and maintained and what makes one discourse more influential than another. We must then apply this understanding to the way we represent our services. We must recognize in particular the relationship between the generation of discourses affecting our work and discourses in the wider socio-economic milieu. Shifts in the prevailing paradigm applied at any time to our services are more likely to occur if they conform to powerful external political discourses (Burke, 1996). Thus, the 'incompetent service' discourse in child protection became prominent in the United Kingdom when public services were under attack in the political arena. We need to note that this discourse was never extended to child protection work undertaken by voluntary agencies such as the NSPCC, which seem to have retained their very positive public image throughout the general onslaught. An understanding of precisely which aspect of our services was fundamentally being attacked, in this case that they were exemplars of the reviled public services, might have allowed us to respond more effectively and proactively. Instead, we, for the most part, simply bought into and addressed the superficial manifestations of a negative discourse being created for us by those with little sympathy for the public sector.

We must also be more effective in the creation and promotion of our own preferred discourses. Clearly, we must avoid sending out messages which will ultimately prove damaging to us by, for example, seeming to promise to keep children safe from abuse in exchange for generous funding. More generally, we must recognize that, whilst the approved set of professional understandings enjoys an impressive degree of acceptance across the multi-agency community in the field of child protection in England and Wales, it has limited impact within the wider community. Whatever marketing strategies may be developed, it seems likely that the degree of penetration of the professional discourse will only be improved when it can be

aligned with wider, stronger and more influential political and social currents within the body politic.

The drive on the part of the present government of the United Kingdom towards the elimination of social exclusion by means of 'joined-up government' represents just such a current. Child protection services in England and Wales have much to do to rectify the poor public image under which they have toiled for the last three decades. Their success in doing so may depend crucially on their ability to align themselves with the thrust against social exclusion. They are already doing much to shake off their preoccupation with the more dramatic and sensational forms of abuse and to find a distinctive rôle within the general struggle to promote child welfare. If they are able to maintain progress in this direction despite the pressures towards narrowness and rigidity outlined in this paper, they may soon find themselves in a position to begin to re-establish their standing and reputation.

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