

# **Two Faces of Deviance**

**Crimes of the  
Powerless and  
the Powerful**

**edited by  
Paul R. Wilson  
and  
John Braithwaite**



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## Contents

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Index  
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Contributors	vii
INTRODUCTION: Pervs, Pimps, and Powerbrokers JOHN BRAITHWAITE and PAUL R. WILSON	1
<b>PART 1 CRIMES OF THE POWERLESS</b>	
1 Granny versus the Hooligans KEITH WINDSHUTTLE	15
2 Bodgies and Widgies: Folk Devils of the Fifties JOHN BRAITHWAITE and MICHELLE BARKER	26
3 What is Deviant Language? PAUL R. WILSON	46
4 The Prostitute: More Sinned Against than Sinning? MARGARET DEE	58
5 Cannabis, Witches, and Social Scapegoats PAUL R. WILSON	67
<b>PART 2 CRIMES OF THE POWERFUL</b>	
6 Multinationals or Mafia: Who Really Pushes Drugs? PAM GORRING	81
7 An Exploratory Study of Used Car Fraud JOHN BRAITHWAITE	101
8 Medibank Fraud PAT HODGE	123
9 Heads They Win, Tails We Lose: Environment and the Law THOR HUNDLOE	132

## 2

# **Bodgies and Widgies: Folk Devils of the Fifties**

**John Braithwaite  
and  
Michelle Barker**

## **INTRODUCTION**

They are the "Bodgies" and "Widgies", the unhappy "youth in revolt" in a neurotic world, a world that has lost too many of the external verities in an insane scramble in the service of Mammon. In no single instance has the author obtruded his opinions, preferring that the evidence presented should speak for itself.<sup>1</sup>

The above extract from the Foreword of Manning's "value-free" work, *The Bodgie: A Study in Psychological Abnormality*, illustrates the central role that social scientists have played in the manufacturing of Australian folk devils. Australian scholars have faithfully served the moral order by feigning expert analysis of the objective causes of deviant uprisings such as the bodgie and widgie scourge of the 'fifties. Rather than analyze the causes of an objective reality, this chapter seeks to understand how and why the bodgie and widgie scourge emerged as a manufactured reality.

In the cultural snap albums of the 'fifties, bodgies and widgies must stand alongside Elvis Presley, the birth of television in Australia, and Melbourne Olympic Games, seamless stockings, and the hula hoop. At the beginning of the decade the term *bodgie* referred simply to a style of dress. Five years later the social scientist was to refer to bodgies and widgies as "the active boils on the body of Australian Society; the tragically unhappy ones of this generation".<sup>2</sup> Now, another twenty years later, the subculture has disappeared from the public consciousness, remaining only in collective memory as folk devils of the past.

*Bodgie* or *Bodger* was a Darlinghurst slang word meaning

"spurious". During the Second World War it was applied to black marketeers, many of whom impersonated American seamen, and who sold Australian cloth as American cloth. Later the word was applied to anyone pretending to be American in costume or speech.

By 1948, a group of about two hundred bodgies had established their headquarters at a milkbar in Kings Cross. Other cliques were formed at Bondi, Eastwood, North Sydney, Mosman, Balmain, West Ryde, and South Sydney. Reports of bodgie groups in the suburban centres of Adelaide and Brisbane indicate that Sydney was not the only area of such activity.<sup>3</sup>

The stereotypical bodgie wore unusual slick-back haircuts following the styles made popular by various pop and film stars. While some males chose extremely short-legged trousers to display brightly coloured socks, all the trousers were much tighter in the legs than was the fashion. Many rode motor bikes. Widgies were not quite as extreme in their dress. The girls were more uniformly drab than the boys with their exotic colours. Their hair was worn drawn tightly back and tied in a tail, or was worn in a bushy, windswept style.

The bodgies and widgies belong to an indigenous variety of Australian folk devil which is now extinct. With the internationalization of capital, mass communications, and the popular music industry, there has now been an internationalization of folk devils. When Britain has its punk rockers, the United States and Australia have punk rock. While the United States has hippies and Woodstock, we have hippies and Nimbin. We missed out on skin heads, were not totally immune to mods and rockers, and, along with every English-speaking nation, were plagued by bikies and Hell's Angels.

In the 1950s cultural imperialism was not nearly so pervasive; the world was not yet a global village. Teddy boys in Britain and beatniks in America came and went causing barely a ripple upon Australia's cultural surface. Australasia managed a home-grown product which ironically grew out of an anti-American stereotype—Australasia rather than Australia because there is some suggestion that the bodgie phenomenon first started in New Zealand.<sup>4</sup>

The content of the deviant stereotype—be it American or indigenous—is unimportant. Predominantly arbitrary and ac-

cidental forces shape the content of folk devil stereotypes which suddenly emerge out of quiet phases during which there are no crystallized styles available. It is the function of the moral panic for the normative order which we must try to understand, rather than simply the arbitrary form that the folk devil takes. The following pages attempt to foster such an understanding through a developmental analysis of the bodgies and widgies moral panic. Even though the categories of analysis are different from those in Stanley Cohen's research on mods and rockers, the stimulus for this reconceptualization of the bodgie-widgie phenomenon comes from Cohen's work.<sup>5</sup>

### EXAGGERATION

It has been indicated previously that groups called bodgies had existed in a fairly benign form in Australia throughout the late 1940s. No one took much notice of them, and their subcultural identity was not very clearly crystallized. In the early 1950s, however, the press, the clergy, politicians, and others began to be dismayed at the way that postdepression and postwar affluence was giving the young a consumption role which generated a distinctive adolescent leisure culture. Young people were able to buy records, clothes, and motor bikes in a way denied their parents. Capitalism created new industries to exploit these markets—industries that thrived by creating special needs for special adolescent music and special adolescent garb. Adults panicked when they saw that adolescents were no longer junior versions of themselves, but were developing their own distinctive styles. The mood was ripe for a public display of outrage against young people's deviation from adult standards.

Amongst this amorphous mass of modern trends for the young, the press had to find a tangible and visible target for outrage. All that could be found was the benign bodgie. The press then set out to exaggerate the evil of the relatively harmless activities of the bodgies. The sensational headlines began to appear: "Bodgie Upsurge in City: Wild Sex, Liquor, 'Parties' Are Held!" (*Sunday Truth*, July 1954). The article detailed in point form the following horrendous activities.

*Truth* had been told that:

- Bodgies and Widgies have been ordered from the foyer of a city theatre.
- They have been told that they are not wanted at a city milk bar.
- That their activities at a meeting place near the G.P.O. is being watched. Bodgies and Widgies have gone underground in Brisbane, and now conduct wild, and lewd parties in private houses, or isolated bush spots. For an entree to these parties one must belong, or be known by the inner sanctum of Bodgiedom. Here are some of the startling facts regarding teenagers *Truth* uncovered this week:
- Five teenage girls recently found by police in Brisbane houses of ill-fame.
- Teenage girls rendezvousing with groups of young boys and then indulging in sex "parties".
- A young girl flaunting her partly-clad body in front of youths in a suburban playground.
- "Necking" parties in full public view in parklands.

Notice that in this long list of deviant acts not one specific violation of the Criminal Code is mentioned. A juvenile crime wave is manufactured without any reference to juvenile crime. We know, nevertheless, that there is more to it than meets the eye because "Bodgies and Widgies have gone underground", making it impossible for us to be able to confirm the worst of their activities. For four years between 1954 and 1958, citizens were regularly bombarded with headlines like "Gangs of Bodgies in Crime Wave", (*Sunday Truth*, 17 June 1956), "Youth Delinquency Remains Grave Problem in Sydney" (*Sydney Morning and Sun Herald*, 18 January 1955), "Bodgie Street Battle" (*Sunday Truth*, 16 June 1957), and "Bodgie Brawl" (*Sunday Truth*, 29 April 1956). These articles were crammed with emotive expressions such as "hoodlums", "louts", "young savages", "depraved", "melee", and "orgies of larrikanism and vandalism". The "Bodgie Brawl" article, for instance, read as follows:

Sydney Sat.: A mob of more than forty screaming, snarling, gouging Bodgies last night turned Lidcombe Park into a battlefield, rioting over Widgies and booze. Brawling Bodgies used jagged bottles, billets of wood, fists and boots to batter each other.

The fight started over possession of a number of Wiggins, associated with Lidcombe members of the Bodgie cult.

As in the last sentence of the above extract, wiggins were generally portrayed by the media as chattels of the bodgies. The wiggins injected a sexual element into the moral panic which helped to sell newspapers, as in the following extract from *Sunday Truth*, 6 November 1955.

#### Initiation into "Saints" Was Degrading Rite

Startling court revelations of initiation ceremonies practised on teenage girls by members of a Bodgie gang known as "The Saints", during which the girls are subjected to degrading rites, have shocked respectable Adelaide.

A 15 year old girl has confessed that she has been intimate with 3 boys, one after another, as part of her initiation as a Wiggle into "The Saints" gang.

Newspapers took pleasure in highlighting the wiggle invitation to shake hands—"Thumb me daddy; give me flesh." But irrespective of what form of deviance wiggins were found to be engaging in, that deviance, which might be asexual, had to be transformed into sexual degradation. "While other Bodgies brawled, Wiggins screamed and yelled and shouted obscenities. Some of the girls who were right in the thick of things had practically all their clothes torn from them" (*Sunday Truth*, 30 March 1958).

Exaggeration and distortion of the deviance of the bodgies and wiggins took many forms. The press indiscriminately used the generic plural: if a window was smashed in a bodgie fracas, then it was reported that "windows were smashed". Human interest stories about victims of bodgie terror were used to dramatize the evil of the folk devil. In an article in the *Sunday Truth* on 4 March 1957 there was a detailed report concerning an elderly woman who felt harassed by two or three youths who threw stones on her roof. The story was introduced, "Gang of Cowardly Bodgies Are Waging a Terror War against an Elderly Woman in Stafford". Eight months later (26 October 1957) the newspaper ran a story on the same woman under the headline "Bodgie War on Widow". This was presented as a new story, and few readers would have recognized her as the same victim of bodgie terror whom they had been told about eight months earlier.

## ACCOMMODATION

Once the exaggerated view of the bodgie-wiggle as criminal had been established, all kinds of additional information could be interpreted as evidence of the evil of the cult. The bodgie-wiggle stereotype provided a framework for the interpretation of events which would otherwise seem inexplicable. This ambiguity-reducing function has been ably explained by Halloran.<sup>6</sup> "... events will be selected for news reporting in terms of their fit or consonance with pre-existing images—the news of the event will confirm earlier ideas. The more unclear the news item and the more uncertain or doubtful the newsman is in how to report it the more likely it is to be reported in a general framework that has been already established."

A classic case in point is an interpretation of the considerable damage to exhibitions at the 1958 Brisbane Royal Show in an article headed "Bodgie Orgy Marred Show". There was no evidence that bodgies were responsible for the damage concerned. Yet the following story could be written in *Sunday Truth*, 17 August 1958:

Irresponsible larrikins are responsible for thousands of pounds worth of damage to valuable machinery equipment on display at this year's Royal Show. In an orgy of wanton destruction, the bodgie-type hoodlums slashed tyres and rubber hoses, scratched equipment and ripped away loose parts . . . because of the louts system of operation in "packs", complete with "look-outs", no bodgie arrests were made during the week.

Even where there were no facts to be accommodated to the bodgie stereotype, such facts could be fabricated or subtly assumed. A *Sunday Truth* story about a Gold Coast "scandal" attributed by the police to "nasty, low-type bodgies" concluded with the sentence, "There were no evident signs of drink about any of the dancers, but from their behaviour it would not be beyond the bounds to suggest some could have been under the influence of drugs" (24 December 1957).

## SYMBOLIZATION

Out of the process of exaggeration and accommodation are

crystallized a set of culturally identifiable symbols which characterize the folk devil. One *Sunday Truth* article on New Year's Day in 1954 described in detail the "garish type of uniform" worn by "members of the (bodgie) cult". No longer were bodgies and widgies to be part of the anonymous category of juvenile delinquents. The public now had a check list against which to measure all youth, and other young people knew exactly what they would have to wear to become part of the "bodgie scene". The media even told young people where to go to join up. "Favourite haunt of the bodgies and widgies is the end of the pier at Shorncliffe, where outlandishly dressed youths and girls congregate to jive" (*Sunday Truth*, 30 March 1958). "Gilbert Park, Ashgrove, and other spots in the suburbs have become meeting grounds . . ." (*Sunday Truth*, 4 July 1954).

If the young people who met on the Shorncliffe pier and in Gilbert Park did not know that they were bodgies and widgies, they did after reading *Sunday Truth*. The mass media therefore construct the content for deviant role-playing behaviour by transmitting expectations as to how the stereotypical bodgie should behave, where he should go, and what he should wear. It was not only the mass media which played a role in this clarification of stereotypes. During the bodgie moral panic, meetings of chiefs of police from Australia and New Zealand were held at which case histories of bodgie-widgie activities in their respective areas were swapped ("Bodgie Talks by Chiefs of Police", *Sunday Truth*, 16 March 1958). This ensured that a bodgie menace of uniform content was seen to appear in every population centre in Australia and New Zealand. As one senior police officer said, "The Bodgie-Widgie menace is widespread; everywhere the unsavory details are the same" (*Sunday Truth*, 18 July 1954).

### PREDICTION

During the early stages of the moral panic the universality of the bodgie phenomenon was further ensured by self-fulfilling prophecies that the disasters which had befallen other cities could easily happen locally. For instance, a story from "Bodgie battered New Zealand" on bodgie activities in Wellington was

headlined "It Could Have Happened Here in Brisbane" (*Sunday Truth*, 18 July 1954).

Throughout the moral panic there was a tacit assumption in most newspaper stories that we were not dealing with a transient phenomenon: what had happened would happen again. Cohen found this to be the case in his study of mods and rockers.<sup>7</sup> Youths were asked in television interviews about their plans for the next rumble, and interviews were printed with either a mod or a rocker threatening revenge "next time".

The Australian media obliged with similar self-fulfilling prophecies. Note this report from *Sunday Truth*, 30 March 1958.

#### Alert on Gang War! Knives Out in Bayside Clash

Police in the bayside suburb of Sandgate have been alerted to stand-by today for Round Two in a bodgie war! Today, rival gangs of bodgies and widgies from Redcliffe, Sandgate, Zillmere and Lutwyche are expected to continue the all-in vicious fight they began last Sunday night.

Unfortunately for the participants, the prediction made in this case was that the fight would be "vicious" and that "knives would be out". Hardly responsible journalism. Even when the prophecies were not in reality fulfilled, the upshot was often distorted such that the prediction appeared to have come true. This ensured the credibility of future predictions.

### GENERALIZATION

Cohen says that the mods and rockers "didn't become news because they were new; they were presented as new to justify their creation as news".<sup>8</sup> The folk devil becomes a detested symbol of everything that is new and different during a period of rapid social change. The public reaction to bodgies and widgies was that it was not only this, it was Elvis the pelvis, ban the bomb marches, teenage drinking, the decline of family life, and pornographic movies. Bodgies and widgies were a symbol of the perceived malaise of modern society. They were the Australian forerunners of the affluent American style of youth who had been debauched by comics, television, and the decline of religious authority.

The moral panic became an occasion, then, for celebrating the moral order. By denouncing bodgies as the embodiment of evil, people reaffirmed their own decency and normalcy. The moral panic therefore served a generalized function for the normative order, not one limited to juvenile delinquency. Moral panics help to preserve the status quo and bolster the dominant hegemony which buttresses that status quo.

As one example, the bodgies-widgies moral panic made no small contribution to maintaining the subjugation of women. The evil of widgies was sexual evil. They were chattels; sluts who served their masters, the bodgies. Anne Summers has argued convincingly that the subjugation of Australian women has been secured by the maintenance of two dominant stereotypes of women—damned whores and God's police.<sup>9</sup> God's police are respectable women (wives and mothers) who dutifully inculcate conservative traditions into future generations. Most women are held into the God's police role for fear of being pushed into the alternative damned whore stereotype. Any woman who steps beyond the traditional female role is in danger of being labelled as a whore. Hence the imagery of sexual deviance serves to keep women in their feminine, housewifely place. The labelling of "unfeminine" adolescent girls as sexually degenerate widgies is an important instance of Summers's maintenance of sexist hegemony through stigma. The moral panic over widgies demonstrated to all women of the 'fifties how important it was to be "a good girl".

The moral panic became an occasion for reasserting other tenets of sexist ideology. The *Report* of the Queensland Parliamentary Select Committee set up in 1957 to investigate the bodgie-widgie problem reported that better family life was a solution to delinquency.

... we believe that a young child should not be deprived of the loving care and affection of its mother during the day ... It may be possible in the interests of the nation, to grant additional Widows' Pension benefit to mothers of young children. However, the Committee would condemn any practice on the part of mothers of using Kindergartens as a "dumping ground" to get rid of their children during the day to allow them more freedom to pursue selfish desires.<sup>10</sup>

... the best disciplined homes are those where the father is still

the head of the family—"If the child learns to respect the single authority of his father in the important personality-forming period before the age of six the chances are he will know how to handle authority without disastrous rebellion in later life."<sup>11</sup>

All of the conventional wisdom of the dominant ideology comes to the surface in the moral panic. As well as the conventional wisdom about the role of women, the report of the Queensland Parliamentary Committee had a lot to say about traditional religious values. "Evidence placed before the Committee would indicate that young people who had been reared in God-fearing homes, coming fully within the influence of the Church rarely committed anti-social acts."<sup>12</sup>

Concern about "bodgiedom" was therefore generalized to concern about chastity, clean living, diligence, frugality, obedience, and all that is good and right. The generalized public outrage was mediated by various formal mechanisms. In Queensland, both the lord mayor of Brisbane and the mayor of Redcliffe called public meetings to come up with constructive solutions to the bodgie problem. Constructive solutions were not forthcoming, but that was hardly the point. It was the stirring of the collective conscience that was important, not the uncovering of solutions to a real problem. The Parliamentary Select Committee was quite honest in conceding this. "The interest displayed by people generally in the activities of the Committee, and the willing and generous help offered on all sides show the extent to which the public conscience can be moved by indications of social disorder, even to a limited degree, amongst our youth. It is good that such public conscience should be aroused, and if nothing more had been achieved, the enquiry would have been worthwhile."<sup>13</sup>

## DEGRADATION

As the public grew to despise bodgies, pressure mounted for the public degradation of the "misfits". Politicians waxed eloquent on the decadence and depravity of bodgies, while hastening to point out that they represented a lunatic fringe quite distinguishable from the wholesome mass of young people. Garfinkel has emphasized that the contrasting of the deviant with the

decent is one of the necessary conditions for successful degradation ceremonies.<sup>14</sup> The profane must be given meaning through juxtaposition with the sacred.

All manner of public displays are used to denounce the folk devil. Judges and magistrates shame and disgrace the deviants from the bench, priests from the pulpit, politicians from the Parliament. But it is the spontaneous attempts at degradation by ordinary citizens which are most bizarre. During the bodgie moral panic, groups of national servicemen systematically bashed young people who they identified as bodgies ("Brisbane 'War' against Bodgies", *Sydney Morning and Sun Herald*, 20 February 1956). There were spirited calls for vigilante groups and public flagellation of the folk devils.

The call for painful and humiliating forms of punishment has characterized all of Australia's moral panics. On 3 January 1886, a letter regarding the penalty for larrikinism in Toowoomba was published in the *Queensland Figaro*. "The sight of a larriken always raises my bile, and I thought as I watched the manoeuvres of some of these gentry on Saturday night, that I would like to have the power to string them all up and order the common hangman's brawny arm to lay on the cat-o-nine-tails for the larriken."

Times hardly change as witnessed by the following letter from a Maryborough reader to the *Sunday Truth* seventy years later (20 March 1955). "Admittedly, they must be half-witted to do some of these things of which they are guilty, but a few lashes with the "cat-o-nine-tails" followed by salt rubbed into the marks, would do them good. It would be gratifying to see even the meanest of the breed turn coward when he has to face retribution."

## INTERPRETATION

Once the menace has been manufactured, social scientists and medical experts are called in to find its causes. These social scientists take for granted the objective reality of the existence of the new menace. Usually the folk devil is analogous to a societal disease. Bodgiedom is a "social cancer" which "must be excised or Society faces death".<sup>15</sup> In interpreting the bodgie-

widgie moral panic social scientists in Australia employed a medical model which construed deviance as evidence of a sick personality. There was, after all, objective proof to support such a construction. "... it is statistically shown that delinquents and criminals are more neurotic than the average population."<sup>16</sup>

The bodgie was the victim of a malevolent unconscious. "A person may, and sometimes does, do wrong in order to satisfy an unconscious urge for punishment for some long-past sin. Stealing may relate back to a repressed sexual wish. Hatred and fear of authority may relate back to father fear, and inferiority will offer an explanation of the criminal's love of notoriety."<sup>17</sup>

This was all hogwash to those who favoured the lash as the solution of the problem. They felt that the psychologists' solution of "free analytical treatment for every unhappy, frustrated, or abnormal child to uncover the emotional disturbances and the emotionally charged complexes that cause rebellions against Society"<sup>18</sup> was an example of the very kind of coddling that had caused the problem.

The battle between adherents of the punitive model and the therapeutic model was bitterly fought. In the end, it was the therapeutic protagonists who won a decisive victory. The 'fifties was an era of unquestioned faith in science and experts. Toward the end of the moral panic various committees of enquiry were set up to find constructive solutions to the problem. In this calmer atmosphere the apparently objective scientific analyses of the clinical experts were more appealing than emotive cries for castration.

Manning has provided a representative list of what contemporary social scientists saw as being the major causes of the bodgie uprising—<sup>19</sup>

Examination of the "Bodgie" case histories showed the following common factors:

1. Unhappiness in early childhood.
2. Homes strained and tense.
3. Broken homes.
4. Lack of parental supervision.
5. Resistance and defiance to constant whippings.
6. Major frustrations in relation to the authoritarian attitudes of education.
7. Lack of moral and spiritual training.

8. Lack of sufficient teaching of the facts of life to give the child a chart to steer by in life's troubled seas.

Of course the efficacy of the solutions to the bodgie-widgie problem did not really matter. The problem was destined to disappear by 1959 irrespective of what "solutions" were found to be workable. It was the prodding and mobilization of the public conscience that mattered, not the finding of solutions. Nor did it matter whether the bodgie-widgie scourge was interpreted within a punitive or a therapeutic framework. The important thing was that our own uprightness be reaffirmed by the degrading of the deviant. He could be degraded punitively or psychopathologically. The psychiatrist's couch provided a subtle vehicle for degradation for those who found the lash and imprisonment inhumane. Social scientists served the normative order by supplying a humanitarian gloss to the mailed fist of social control.

## EXPLOITATION

Social workers and psychologists managed to exploit the bodgie-widgie moral panic to their professional advantage. The panic provided a boost to the already burgeoning social welfare and therapeutic industries. The Queensland Parliamentary Select Committee adopted a number of recommendations from the welfare professions—establishment of a Children's Court Clinic, establishment of Child Guidance Clinics in all large centres, expansion of the vocational guidance section of the Education Department, expansion of the kindergarten system, enlarging of maternal and child welfare work to give guidance to young parents on child training, expansion of the Marriage Guidance Council.

While it was the therapeutic state which had the most prodigious victory, other interests exploited the crisis to push their claims. The Australian Teachers' Federation announced through a newspaper headline that "Class Crowding Breeds Bodgies" (*Sydney Morning and Sun Herald*, 11 January 1956). The police of course called for more manpower. Youth organizations did very well out of the panic. A state subsidy for the capital expenditure of youth organizations was introduced in

Queensland, as well as financial assistance for leadership training. Crown land, where available, was to be granted free of all charges to approved youth clubs.

Clearly then, it is not only politicians and policemen who have a vested interest in sustaining the moral panic. For the policeman, the moral panic is an occasion when he can assert his indispensibility to the community. But more importantly, it is an occasion when he can successfully plea for a bigger share of the public purse. For the politician, it is an opportunity to display deep public concern; a safe topic on which to exercise his dramatic skills, because it directs public discontent away from his own performance and onto a conventionalized scapegoat. For the press it helps to sell newspapers. For clergymen, an occasion for rejuvenating conventional religious values in a shocked public conscience. For the welfare bureaucrat, a chance to expand his bureaucracy. For the sociologist, a chance to be taken seriously by the public.

Businessmen exploit the crisis as well. There was money to be made by advertising clothes, music, and motor bikes which appealed to stereotypical bodgies and widgies. But this is only the trivial sense in which capitalism benefited from the crisis. The crisis was a panic over law and order. Law and order campaigns are neither conspiracies nor accidents. Their cyclical occurrences arise partly because defenders of capitalism consciously link the ideology of law to the ideology of order in a capitalist system. Popular support for the law is used to bolster fading support for conservative order. Witness Richard Nixon's eulogy at the funeral of J. Edgar Hoover, "... the trend of permissiveness in this country, a trend which Edgar Hoover fought against all his life, a trend which has dangerously eroded our national heritage as a law-abiding people, is now being reversed. The American people today are tired of disorder, disruption and disrespect for the law. America wants to come back to the law as a way of life."<sup>20</sup>

Nixon's vice-president, Spiro Agnew, was another who used the ideology of law to bolster the ideology of order. "When I talk about troublemakers, I'm talking about muggers and criminals in the streets, assassins of political leaders, draft evaders and flag burners, campus militants, hecklers and demon-

strators against candidates for public office and looters and burners of cities."<sup>21</sup>

In this way, moral panics serve to secure the hegemony of the dominant ideology, and to secure the privilege of the ruling classes whose survival depends on such ideology.

## DECONSTRUCTION

By mid 1958 people were beginning to tire of the bodgie paranoia. Reporting of gang wars began to play down public indignation and took on the semblance of the reporting of sporting events. There were even home and away games. "Last Sunday night's brawl is a direct result of an earlier clash between bodgies at Redcliffe, in which the home side was thoroughly thrashed" (*Sunday Truth*, 30 March 1958).

The disappearance of the bodgies in Brisbane began in 1957 with the establishment by the police of a special "bodgie squad". This remarkable group of four men virtually cleaned up the bodgie menace in six months by breaking up bodgie gangs, chasing bodgies out of hotels, and shutting down juke-boxes. Note the following report from *Sunday Truth*, 16 June 1957.

### Brisbane Bodgies into Hiding

Rattled by more frequent police blitzes, Bodgies and Widgies gangs in Brisbane are going underground. A senior detective said that the clean-up drive was showing dividends, and official court records revealed a downward trend in juvenile crime.

The police apparently decided that it was time they showed the public that they could produce the goods. The 1957 bodgie blitz was just as much a manufactured reality as was the bodgie scourge in the first place—as if four policemen could achieve the feats which were attributed to them. But the blitz was seen to work. In their report, the Parliamentary Select Committee acclaimed the bodgie squad on their remarkable success, as did the local press.

2 Sent to Prison in Bodgie-Widgie "Blitz" (*Sunday Truth*, 28 July 1957).

Show Raided: Bodgies Ousted (*Sunday Truth*, 11 August 1957)

Bodgie Squad Wins! (*Sunday Truth* 8 September 1957)

Not all of the credit went to the police, however. "Police cite good work done by Rotary in Southport, where youthful delinquency of the purely bodgie-widgie type has completely disappeared since Rotary provided social amenities" (*Sunday Truth*, 21 July 1957).

In this way, many of the welfare, recreational, and law enforcement initiatives taken in response to the bodgie menace began to be interpreted by their proponents as successful in reducing bodgieism.

As a further signalling of the end of the moral panic, the Queensland Parliamentary Committee on Youth Problems appealed to the press for a reduction in coverage of bodgie activities. "For a period, the Press overstressed the activities of the 'bodgie', and partly as a result of this publicity there was considerable activity on the part of the bodgie element. It is significant that in times when little publicity has been given to the 'cult' there has been an apparent diminution in their activity."<sup>22</sup>

Throughout the moral panic there was another force which was unintentionally deconstructing the bodgie stereotype. This was the exploitation of the bodgie-widgie craze by the fashion industry up to a point where the bodgie became difficult to distinguish from "decent" people.

"Australian men are all becoming bodgies", said Angelo de Marco (former State and Australian Champion hair stylist). He stressed that businessmen, doctors and Macquarie Street specialists, were all wearing their hair longer at the sides and shorter on top.

"You might call some of the younger fellows bodgies, but most are just dressed in the modern American manner". (*Sydney Morning and Sun Herald*, 1 July 1956).

The Parliamentary Committee of Enquiry was at pains to point up the distinction between bodgies and normal youngsters following the fashion. "The Committee distinguishes clearly between the many decent young people who adopt a type of dress simply because they want to be in the fashion, and the criminal type (a small percentage) which has made similar dress its uniform."<sup>23</sup>

In practice, however, the fashion industry made this distinc-

tion increasingly impossible to sustain. The distinguishing symbolism of the bodgie had disintegrated. The bodgie was dead.

### THE COMMERCIALIZATION AND COOPTATION OF FOLK DEVILS

In arguing that the bodgie-widgie phenomenon was more manufactured than real we do not want to suggest that there were not in the 'fifties many young people who identified as bodgies and widgies and for whom that identification represented an expressive reaction of discontent with what society had to offer them. It was this partly real manifestation of discontent which was exaggerated, distorted and stylized to form the manufactured image.

Most folk devils are, in part, reactions against prevailing social conditions. The bodgie movement was the creation of a rewarding leisure culture among working class youth who had had unrewarding experiences in the nonleisure areas of school and work. The hippie movement was a reaction by middle class youth to the materialism and competitive acquisitiveness of their parents' generation. Pearson has shown how "Paki-bashing" in a Lancashire cotton town was partly a reaction to the threat which Asians had posed to the indigenous working class.<sup>24</sup> Punk rock was a reaction against the commercialism of mainstream rock, but ironically was taken over by commercial interests.

Punk rock is an interesting case. In early 1977 the punk rockers were shaping up as a new folk devil of significant proportions. The followers of Johnny Rotten and the Sex Pistols were angry, bitter young people and they wore distinctive and provocative symbols of their deviant status. By late 1977, however, punk rock had become highly commercialized. By the time this article is published punk rock will undoubtedly be dead. Punk rock is being killed as a framework for deviant identity at this moment because commercial interests have moved so quickly to exploit the craze. It is being commercialized even before it is crystallized as a full blown deviant form. No one is more acutely aware of Lenin's dictum that "the bourgeoisie love to be shocked" than the controllers of fashion capital, as evidenced in this report from the *Courier-Mail*, 26 October 1977.

### Paris Goes Punk

Punk rock this week crawled out of the slime to earn a seal of respectability at the 1978 Paris spring ready to wear (pret-a-porter) collections.

What self-respecting rebellious Brisbane youth could gain a sense of deviant identity through wearing fashions which are given a "seal of respectability" by the women's pages of the *Courier-Mail*? Capitalism takes over those aspects of any new social movement which are commercially exploitable—particularly styles of dress and music. It therefore disjoins the tangible physical sources of radical identity from the radical ideas or the discontents which generated the deviance. The angry social movement or the radical social movement loses its identity through the popularization of the visible symbols of that identity.

Sometimes a few of the radical ideas of an oppositional movement are also taken over commercially, but in a nihilistic fashion. The way that glossy women's magazines like *Cleo* and *Cosmopolitan* have taken over ideas from the Women's Liberation movement is a case in point. Such magazines exploit the sexual freedom advocated by the women's movement, but divorce such an advocacy from a coherent feminist critique of sexuality in Australian society. They make money out of a nihilistic pseudo-feminism in which the only positive political message is that it is necessary to buy all manner of consumer goods in order to be attractive to men. In this commercialization process the "deviant" lifestyle becomes a consumption style by being "bought up, sanitized, 'made safe' and resold to the wider youth market".<sup>25</sup> Commercialism thereby ensures that the contracultural group does not get out of hand. Ironically, in the case of punk rock, commercialism ensured that it did not even get off the ground—a still-born folk devil.

Commercialization therefore refers to the disjunction of the symbolic form of the folk devil stereotype from deviant ideas. Another common way in which folk devils are neutralized is through cooptation. With cooptation, the symbolic form of the folk devil stereotype is associated with conventional ideas. The Christian church are past masters at the cooptation of folk devils. We have seen "God squads", "the Jesus revolution", "rock mass", and "Jesus freaks". If commercialization had not so prematurely neutralized the punk rockers, we might well have

seen "Punks for Christ". Like commercialization, cooptation results in the disintegration of deviant symbolization, and the undermining of the ideological coherence of the contraculture.

## CONCLUSION

A number of developmental stages in the manufacture of the 1954-58 bodgie-widgie panic in Australia have been identified.

1. *Exaggeration*: The mass media distort and misrepresent the amount of deviant activity among groups which are loosely identified as bodgies and widgies.
2. *Accommodation*: Deviant acts perpetrated by nonbodgie youth are interpreted as the work of bodgies.
3. *Symbolization*: The mass media construct the content for deviant role playing behaviour by transmitting expectations as to how the stereotypical bodgie should behave, where he should go, and what he should wear.
4. *Prediction*: Deviance is assumed to be nontransient, and self-fulfilling prophecies are made.
5. *Generalization*: The bodgie-widgie becomes a symbol of the perceived wider social malaise and his/her denunciation becomes an occasion for celebrating the moral order.
6. *Degradation*: Public ceremonies to degrade the bodgie-widgie are instituted and advocated.
7. *Interpretation*: A public controversy rages over whether the bodgie-widgie is bad or mad.
8. *Exploitation*: Interest groups such as police and welfare bureaucracies exploit the bodgie-widgie menace to argue for a greater share of community resources.
9. *Deconstruction*: Curative measures are construed to have been effective, and the stereotype constructed in points 1-4 above is deconstructed.
10. *Commercialization*: Commercial exploitation results in the disjunction of the symbolic form of the folk devil stereotype from deviant ideas.

11. *Cooptation*: The symbolic form of the folk devil stereotype is associated with conventional ideas.

Some respectable forty-year-old ex-bodgies and widgies might read this article and agree that their evil was largely manufactured. For themselves personally, they may feel that it was a passing phase in their youth that really didn't matter very much. In spite of its transience, the bodgie-widgie panic does matter, because even today we live with the residue of the rejuvenation of ideology which was the consequence of the moral panic.

## NOTES

1. A.E. Manning, *The Bodgie: A Study in Psychological Abnormality* (Wellington: Angus and Robertson, 1959), p. 6.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
3. *Sydney Morning and Sun Herald*, 22 January 1956.
4. See, for example, *Sunday Truth*, 18 July 1954.
5. S. Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London: Paladin, 1973).
6. J.D. Halloran, *Demonstrations and Communication: A Case Study* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 112.
7. Cohen, *Folk Devils*, p. 39.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
9. A. Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police: The Colonization of Women in Australia* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975).
10. *Queensland Parliamentary Committee on Youth Problems, Report* (May 1959), p. 6.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
14. H. Garfinkel, "Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies", *American Journal of Sociology* 16 (1956): 422-23.
15. Manning, *The Bodgie*, p. 89.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
20. R. Quinney, *Critique of Legal Order: Crime Control in Capitalist Society* (Boston: Little Brown, 1974), p. 149.
21. F. Pearce, *Crimes of the Powerful: Marxism, Crime and Deviance* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), p. 77.
22. *Queensland Parliamentary Committee on Youth Problems, Report*, p. 19.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
24. G. Pearson, "'Paki-Bashing' in a North-East Lancashire Cotton Town: A Case Study and Its History", in *Working Class Youth Culture*, ed. G. Mungham and G. Pearson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976).
25. J. Clarke and T. Jefferson, "Working Class Youth Cultures", in *Working Class Youth Culture*, ed. Mungham and Pearson, p. 148.