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## 'The Devil Goes Abroad': The Export of the Ritual Abuse Moral Panic

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### Abstract

This paper analyses the ideological recruitment of international child-savers into the controversial satanic ritual abuse moral panic. It examines the discourse of a cadre of American child-savers that has acted as the primary interest group in inciting the moral panic in the United States and spreading it abroad, and reveals how this discourse found three "points of resonance" through which panic discourse could be appropriated. The paper argues that when so appropriated, panic discourse has both ideological and material effects, that is, it influences participants to think and act in ways that reassert and protect the dominant values and interests that purportedly are being undermined by the moral panic's folk devils.

### Introduction

Fifty young children, all past or current enrollees in the Small World Preschool in Niles, Michigan accuse a teacher's aide of raping and sodomising them in the old Indian burial ground along the river. A physician warns the community that children are being abducted by strangers in animal costumes who cruise the narrow lanes of Oude Pekela, the Netherlands on bicycles. In a dawn raid social workers descend on four families living on one of the remote Orkney Islands off the northern coast of Scotland and remove their children. In Martensville, Canada children allege that five local police officers blinded them with acid and then confined them in cages suspended from the ceiling. And in Nottingham, England a woman urges police to search the labyrinth of sandstone tunnels under the city for evidence that children in her extended family were forced to participate in the sacrifices of newborn infants.

What links these fantastic and far-flung vignettes is a moral panic about the satanic ritual abuse of young children. Originating in the United States where hundreds of day care providers during the 1980's were accused of sexually abusing their young charges in satanic rituals that included such ghastly practices as cannibalism, blood-drinking and human sacrifice, the moral panic spread quickly to Canada and then abroad. Its rapid dispersion was unimpeded by sundry international investigations that found no evidence to corroborate the allegations and that warned that it is indeed a moral panic that is thrusting them into professional and public attention (Clyde 1992; Goodman et al., 1994; LaFontaine 1994; Miller 1994; Nottinghamshire County Council 1990; Werkgroep Ritueel Misbruik 1994).

A moral panic, according to Cohen (1972) who popularised the term, is a collective reaction resulting from unsettling social strain and incited and spread by interest groups, towards persons who are actively transformed into 'folk devils' and then treated as threats to dominant social interests and values. Through the use of highly emotive rhetoric, a moral panic tends to orchestrate cultural consent that something must be done, and quickly, to deal with this alleged threat. The increased moral authoritarianism and social control that typically follow end up reaffirming and preserving the very hegemonic interests and values that supposedly

are being undermined by the folk devils. In Cohen's view, then, a moral panic serves a stabilising function during a period of disquieting social strain.

Why and how a moral panic develops, the kinds of people it makes into folk devils, and the means by which it ultimately redefines the normative contours of a society at a given historical moment are questions of considerable interest to sociologists and criminologists. They have analysed an array of moral panics from witch-hunts and inquisitions (Ben-Yehuda 1980), temperance movements and drug wars (Gould 1994; Gusfield 1963), censorship and decency campaigns (Greek and Thompson 1992; Roe 1985; Shuker 1986), law and order crusades (King 1987; Hall et al. 1978), public health battles (Holland et al. 1990; Lester 1992), as well as the satanic ritual abuse scare, itself (deYoung 1998a; Richardson, et al. 1991). And while all agree that interest groups play a critical role in stirring up and perpetuating a moral panic, few have considered how these interest groups recruit participants, thereby spreading the moral panic.

One exception is Hay (1995) whose analysis of the youth crime moral panic that welled up after the abduction and murder of toddler Jamie Bulger by a pair of ten year olds in Liverpool, England is insightful on the question of recruitment. He asserts that participants are recruited into a moral panic when panic discourse finds or creates 'points of resonance' with their sensitivities, sensibilities and lived experiences. When so appropriated, panic discourse has both ideological and material effects, that is, it influences participants to think and act in ways that reassert and protect the dominant values and interests that purportedly are being subverted by the moral panic's folk devils. So while panic discourse is not inherently ideological, it becomes so when appropriated and then 'lived' by those recruited into the moral panic.

This present article seeks to contribute to moral panic theory through an elaboration of Hay's insights about ideological recruitment. To do so, it analyses the panic discourse of a cadre of American child-savers that came together in the early 1980's during the first, and arguably the most notorious, of the American satanic day care cases--the McMartin Preschool in southern California. It is this cadre that has acted as the primary interest group in inciting and spreading the satanic ritual abuse moral panic across America and Western Europe. The article then proposes that the unsettling discovery of sexual abuse in the early 1980's created three distinct 'points of resonance' for international child-savers through which this panic discourse could be appropriated. Finally, the article concludes that when so appropriated, panic discourse has both ideological and material effects, that is, it influences international child-savers to think and act in ways that reassert and protect the dominant values and interests that purportedly are being undermined by the moral panic's folk devils.

A clarification of terms is required. The somewhat old-fashioned term 'child-savers' is used purposely in this article to label both the cadre of Americans who give a discursive existence to satanic ritual abuse, and the international audience that it attempts to recruit into the moral panic. The term reflects the fact that both the rhetoricians and the audience are comprised of professionals, paraprofessionals and laypersons who provide a wide range of services to, and on behalf of, sexually abused children. In a manner consistent with that set out by Foucault (1977), the discourse of this cadre of American child-savers is identified as written or spoken statements that function to designate, label, typify, organise thinking and direct action.

## **Sexual Abuse and Points of Resonance**

Foundational to this article's analysis is the proposition that the discovery of child sexual abuse in the 1980's and its rapid eclipse of physical abuse, or child-battering, as the typification of child abuse problematised public sentiments as well as child-saving efforts. It did so in three ways.

First, sexual abuse introduced ambiguity into child-saving. Quite unlike physical abuse where 'the bones tell the story the child is too young or too frightened to tell' (Kempe et al. 1962: 20), sexual abuse cannot be medically or otherwise corroborated with confidence unless penetration of some kind has taken place (Kerns 1998). Only a minority of sexual abuse cases involves penetration, however; for the majority, then, the proof of sexual abuse rests not in medical evidence but in the uncertain, inconsistent and delayed disclosures of young children. This shift in the standard of proof from hard evidence to ephemeral words raised the cultural profile of young children and vested them with dubious power.

In the face of ambiguity, it was easy to attribute all kinds of motives, other than the simple desire to reveal the truth, to the unsettling disclosures of young children. Sebald (1995: 237), for example, insists that disclosures may be motivated by 'guilt, fear, rebellion, revenge, seeking status and praise, derring-do, the ecstasy of power, and sometimes pure malice.' With sentiments like this, it is little wonder that questions about the credibility and veracity of young children, and about the gullibility of child-savers who believed them and acted on their allegations, dominated both child-saving and public discourse in the early 1980's both in the United States and abroad (Beckett 1996; Franklin and Parton 1991; Van Montfoort 1993).

That heated discourse forged a new cultural image of young children that is built upon assumptions about innate evil and corruption. This Dionysian image, as Jenks (1996) labels it, is of young children not as hapless victims of adult impulses, as physically abused children were understood to be, but as malevolent victimisers of adults.

Second, sexual abuse politicised child-saving by infusing sexual politics into practice (Armstrong, 1994). Unlike physical abuse, most of its abusers are males, most of its victims female, and this startling gender asymmetry begged analysis of, and action in relation to, the oppressive power relations underlying it. That demand served as an entrée for feminist scholars and clinicians whose critique of these power relations both inside and outside of the family, and attempts to redress them, influenced the child-saving movement. According to Jenks (1996: 95):

The patriarchy thesis burgeoned. It was argued that there exists within modern Western society a dominant ideology of male supremacy and that the organization of families, accepted patterns of socialization, the occupational structure and the very formation of identity are regulated in relation to it. . . . Rather than seeking to conserve the family, such feminist arguments were far more radical in terms of recommending a dissolution of the existing order, as well as the protection of victims and the criminalization of abusers.

As Parton (1985) points out, despite the fact that child-saving historically has been a female-dominated activity, the movement always has been rooted in the preservation of the status quo and has been devoid of any real critique of the power and gender relations that sustain it. But contemporary child-savers could not avoid the critique, the disconcertingly radical social consequences of it, or the polarised public sentiments all of this created. Myers (1994), for example, finds that the vitriolic public discourse on sexual abuse in the United States fueled a 'backlash' against child-savers, depicting them as anti-male, anti-family and 'dangerously out of control.' And in Britain, feminists called for child-savers to challenge male dominance and the patriarchal family which breed sexual abuse (Dominelli 1987), and the conservative press responded by caricaturising them as intrusive busybodies with faddish notions about men and families (Franklin and Parton 1991).

With the discovery of sexual abuse, then, males and their institutions were being incriminated not just of a social ill, of which physical abuse was seen as symptomatic, but of 'the supreme evil of our age' (Webster 1998: 39), by children and women. This reversal of the epistemic gaze not only polarised public sentiments, but politicised child-saving.

Third, sexual abuse disenchanting child-saving. Unlike physical abuse that at least appeared amenable to a family support and preservation initiative, sexual abuse only revealed its weaknesses. The darling of both pro-family conservatives and pro-social services liberals, family preservation had become the goal of the child-saving movement after the 1980 passage of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act that made federal funds available for programs that kept children with their physically abusive parents while receiving intervention services, and that reunited children who had been taken into care with their rehabilitated parents (Costin et al. 1996).

Family preservation, however, did not stand up well against the ambiguity of sexual abuse, the feminist critique of the family, or the vast army of variously qualified and trained child-savers in place to deal with it. Highly publicised scandals of sexually abused children not believed while falsely accusing ones are, of children returned to their families only to be sexually abused again, of innocent fathers carted off to jail and guilty ones using their cultural capital to resist legal consequences-rocked the child-saving movement.

Pro-family and anti-child-saving pressure groups coalesced in response to the scandals and exerted increasing influence over public perception and public policy. As a result, child-saving was forced to become more procedural and bureaucratic, more formally rational in a Weberian (1904/1958) sense and therefore more constraining of individual initiative, intuitive judgment, and independent action. By the early 1980's the image of the child-saver as a

good-hearted rescuer was being replaced with an image of the child-saver as uninspired technocrat.

That latter critical point requires international illustrations. Parton (1986) discusses the proceduralisation of child-saving in Britain in the mid-1980's, interpreting it as a means of protecting agencies and individual child-savers who found themselves working in an atmosphere of debilitating fear in the face of sexual abuse scandals. In the United States during that same period, Wells et al. (1988) find that bureaucratisation displaced the goal of child-saving from securing the best interests of children to complying with the flurry of mandates set out by local, state and federal agencies that regulate it. Criticisms of child-savers for 'adhering too long to [bureaucratic] principles even when it has become clear they have failed' were voiced in Germany (Wustendorfer 1995: 243). In France, as another example, increasing concern was expressed about the proliferation of rules and procedures that replaced not only the judgment of child-savers but the voices of sexually abused children who found their way into the system (Armstrong and Hollows 1991), a concern that was echoed in the Netherlands (Van Montfoort 1993) and Finland (Tuomisto and Vuori-Karvia 1997).

In summary, the discovery of sexual abuse in the early 1980's in the United States problematised child-saving by creating new and disturbing cultural images of the child, the abuser and the rescuer. Pringle's analysis finds that it did much the same for child-savers in many Western and Northern European countries as well, since they share with the United States 'a significant degree of similarity in the ways they explain why [sexual] abuse happens and in the principles which underpin the various forms of intervention' (Pringle, 1998: 160).

That finding is important to this paper's analysis of ideological recruitment into the controversial satanic ritual abuse moral panic. It suggests that international child-savers share with their American counterparts three 'points of resonance'-the image of the child as victimiser, the abuser as male, and the rescuer as technocrat-at which panic discourse could be aimed, and through which it could be appropriated.

## **Discourse, Healing and Recruitment**

A necessarily brief explanation of why it was a cadre of American child-savers that coalesced into the primary interest group that incited and spread the satanic ritual abuse moral panic across the country, and then abroad, begins with the observation that by the 1980's, a complicated skein of ideological, economic and political forces in the United States had fomented a growing cultural anxiety about satanic menaces to children (Richardson et al. 1991; Victor 1993). From concerns about satanic influences in heavy metal music and fantasy role-playing games to rumor panics about satanic sex rings, the start of the decade was rife with satanic scares and ripened by them for a moral panic.

A trigger was needed, though, to set it off, some kind of spark that in the words of Adler (1996: 262) 'would link ethereal sentiment to focused activity.' That spark was lit in 1983 at the McMartin Preschool in southern California where the words of a 2.5 year old, vaguely suggestive of sexual abuse, were worked over time into an allegation of what quickly came to be known as satanic ritual abuse by an eclectic mix of child-savers who already had some experience as claims-makers in scares about satanic menaces to children (deYoung 1997).

Bent on proving satanic ritual abuse, the child-savers relentlessly grilled 400 present and former McMartin enrollees. Over 350 of them, despite their tender years, soon figured out that 'round unvarnish'd tales' were not what their inquisitors wanted to hear. So they told other tales- tales about ritualistic ingestion of human flesh, sacrifices of infants, confinement in cages and coffins, orgies with day care providers costumed as devils and witches in tunnels under the preschool and in airplanes, hotels, mansions and churches. And they named not only the seven McMartin day care providers as their satanic ritual abusers, but local business leaders, television and film stars, national politicians and international dignitaries (Nathan and Snedeker 1995).

In testimony before the United State Congress social worker Kee McFarlane spoke for the child-savers involved in the case when she claimed that it was an internationally organised cabal of satanists that had used the McMartin Preschool as 'a ruse for a larger, unthinkable network of crimes against children' (Brozan 1984: A21). Determined to reveal that cabal, she and the other McMartin child-savers took to the media and to the national and international

lecture and conference circuit to give a discursive existence to this 'perfectly hidden evil' (Summit 1994a: 339).

Little of their panic discourse has fidelity to fact or to established scientific truth. Nonetheless, it is able to 'hail' international child-savers, in the sense that Althusser (1971) uses the term, because it is aimed at those sensitised points of resonance. The hailing could be resisted, of course, and many child-savers did and continue to do so. But if it is not, then ideological recruitment into the moral panic is achieved. International child-savers then become part of an interest group that to this day is perpetuating a moral panic that despite all its *grand guignol* trappings, this paper argues, is ideologically con-servative and preservative in that its discourse attempts to restore the image of the child, the abuser and the rescuer that the discovery of sexual abuse had so disconcertingly chal-lenged.

## **Panic Discourse to Restore the Image of the Child as Victim**

If, indeed, 'myth and childhood belong together' (Rose 1985: 88), then the image of the satanic ritually abused child that is constructed by the panic discourse of the American child-savers is as contrary to that of the sexually abused child as myth allows. Innocent, pure, guileless and naturally good, this child shares no characteristics with the adult and is, in fact, an ontology in his or her own right, eminently believable and deserving of protection and care. This Appollonian representation of the child, as Jenks (1996) would refer to it, is a prismatic image in the panic discourse of the American child-savers. One facet of that image has to do with the role that innocence, itself, is said to play in satanic ritual abuse. Larson (1989), a conservative Christian commentator whose radio ministry is devoted to exposing satanic threats to children, insists that it is their very innocence that makes young children the 'perfect victims' of satanic day care providers in whose diabolism power is only released through their ritual abuse. Cozolino agrees. The ritual defilement of innocent children, he claims, empowers satanists 'because their abuse represents a victory over God' (Cozolino, 1989: 133).

Panic discourse like this reifies something wholly unproven: the existence of diabolic satanic cults. To bolster that claim, the American child-savers put together reams of unpublished and self-published materials on satanic cult symbols, rituals and roles, as well as satanic calendars that reveal the days that children supposedly are most at risk for ritual abuse (see for example, Gallant 1985; Justus Unlimited, 1991, Simandl 1988; Voices in Action 1988). These materials, curious admixtures of conjecture coming out of the American day care cases that followed on the heels of the McMartin case, folkloric and popular cultural representations of satanism, occultism and witchcraft, as well as religious fundamentalist notions of premillennarian evil, continue to this day to circulate freely through what Putnam (1991: 178) describes as the 'labyrinthine communication/rumor networks' that connect child-savers across the United States and abroad.

Another facet of this new image of the innocent child is reflected in the so-called 'indicator lists' that purport to describe what is being done to children by satanic ritual abusers, and to what effect (see for example Believe the Children 1988; Gould 1986; Hudson 1991; Voices in Action n.d.). With ritually abusive acts ranging from smearing the child with semen, to sewing the child into the carcass of a dead animal, to hanging the child upside-down in a parody of the crucifixion, and with symptomatic reactions ranging from anxiety attacks, learning disorders, fearing the color black, to passing gas, these lists have a powerful confirmatory effect. All of the items on them appear to have equal weight, so that any one of them, or any combination, can be used to confirm a diagnosis of satanic ritual abuse.

It is important to emphasise that not a single satanic ritual abuse case anywhere in the world alleges all or even most of these elements (deYoung 1998b), but their rhetorical advantage is considerable. In the face of ambiguity the lists offer epistemological certainty -they persuade international child-savers that they have uncovered an awful and evil truth, but a truth nonetheless.

The role of the indicator lists in the ideological recruitment of international child-savers is well documented. LaFontaine (1998), for example, finds that the list put together by Gould was disseminated in child-saving conferences throughout England and acted as 'a powerful instrument in spreading belief in satanic abuse by identifying new cases' (Gould, 1986: 106).

The list by Hudson (1991), as another example was passed around by child-savers to parents whose children were enrolled in the Civic Creche in Christchurch, New Zealand, and was instrumental in fomenting that satanic ritual abuse case (McLoughlin 1996).

But it is the image of the child that the indicators lists infer that is of particular interest to this present paper. Vulnerable, helpless, powerless and thoroughly traumatised, the imagined child in these lists is the site of the age old struggle of good against evil, innocence against unworldliness. It is a nostalgic, pre-sexual abuse, image of the child that pleads for adult vigilance and control, and provokes adult outrage and vituperation.

Indeed, all of these reactions are the material effects of the satanic ritual abuse moral panic. Child-savers placed allegedly victimised children under therapeutic control, where many remain to this very day and, especially in European countries where satanic ritual abuse cases were more likely to be situated in family settings, under state control through orders of care that removed them from their homes. All of this, and more, is testimony to Jenks's (1996) conclusion that throughout history the image of the child has been handled and manipulated in ways to achieve social ends wildly in excess of particular, embodied children.

## **Panic Discourse to Occlude the Image of the Abuser as Male**

The second rhetorical strategy of the American child-savers is to aim panic discourse at the point of resonance about the image of the abuser as male. Here, child-savers not only had the challenge of fashioning folk devils out of middle-aged, middle class, socially integrated female day care providers, but of persuading their international colleagues that evil can lurk successfully for so long behind such a homely façade.

The most provocative illustration of this type of panic discourse is the book *Nursery Crimes*, authored by two respected and influential scholars (Finkelhor and Williams 1988), and widely read and quoted by international child-savers. The book examines both 'conventional' and ritualised sexual abuse in day care. Despite a cautiously worded caveat that the substantiation of sexual abuse allegations of any kind is 'problematic,' the authors include any case that was validated by any investigator, such as a day care licensing worker, even if the police later closed the case for lack of evidence. In fact, less than one-third of the cases discussed in the book were ever prosecuted, and many that were ended in acquittals (Nathan and Snedeker 1995).

The book, one of the bibles of the international satanic ritual abuse moral panic, then goes on to explain the etiology of the evil deeds of the women day care providers who allegedly perpetrated the ghastly acts of satanic ritual abuse in the 40 satanic day care cases it examines. It is important to note that in forming this profile, the authors conducted no interviews with the accused women, relying instead almost exclusively on anecdotal information, and what later proved to be nothing more than rumor and innuendo provided by various sources involved in each case:

As a result of their own childhood abuse, sexual repression, or some other humiliation [satanic ritual abusers], we would hypothesize, develop a notion of their own sexuality as corrupted, evil or demonic in some way. This self-image can obviously lead to a sense of resentment, jealousy or hatred towards others whose sexuality seems pure or uncorrupted. One expression of this may be an intense desire to harm, corrupt, retaliate against. . .the sexuality of a small child because of its innocence. . . .A second important concept for understanding motivation in ritualistic abuse we would term the "identification with evil". . . .After many attempts to be good or do good that end in failure, they may become prey to reversal of the whole value system. Unable to achieve self-acceptance within the moralistic value system, they may discover a sense of power and spiritual fulfillment in a doctrine that celebrate participation in intentionally evil acts. (Finkelhor and Williams, 1988: 63-64)

The explanation can be appreciated on two levels, both critical for analysing the ideological recruitment of international child-savers into the satanic ritual abuse moral panic. On a metaphoric level, this is actually an oft-told tale of the sexually insatiable, pathologically evil woman. It begins with a scenario of sexual repression and abuse in childhood, goes on to indict the failure of gender role socialisation for inciting a smoldering hatred towards innocent children, and ends with the illusion of empowerment through evil beliefs and deeds. In a

paragraph or two the book not only reifies the notion of satanic ritual abuse but presents as its explanation a gendered fairy tale, all too familiar in Western cultures, in the guise of scientific theory.

On a more accessible surface level, the explanation elaborates a new criminal type: the female sex fiend in the guise of the friendly, matronly woman next door. In conjuring up the image of the abuser as female, panic discourse distracts international child-savers' attention from the on-going and unsettling critique of the ideology of patriarchy and the structure of male privilege that the discovery of sexual abuse introduced. The panic discourse created a straw woman, engendered by the sexual revolution and the rise of feminism, that can be flailed at, pathologised, vilified and demonised, but whose subduing does not first require sweeping ideological and social change.

Now it is true that not all of the folk devils in this moral panic are women. In the American cases about two-thirds of those accused are, and in the European cases about half are (deYoung 1998b). But the putative role of women is noteworthy. In every satanic ritual abuse case in the world in which a man is accused, a woman is implicated-for instigation, collusion, suppression or deceit.

It is also true that the American child-savers often side-step the 'gender question' entirely by offering another version of the banality of evil explanation, a version that is especially influential in the European satanic ritual abuse cases that more often are discovered in family and neighborhood settings than in day care facilities. In this version satanic ritual abusers are robed and hooded everypersons living everywhere: women and men, old and young, strangers and acquaintances, rich and poor, urban and rural, respectable and raffish. Satanic ritual abusers are 'normal looking and carry on normal lives,' insists Pazder (1989). 'They are members of every strata of society' (Pazder, 1989: 39). According to Sexton they also have infiltrated every profession and organisation in civilised society. 'We're not talking about the sleaze bag in the park,' he told a child-saving conference audience. 'We're talking about attorneys, ministers, high-ranking military people, Eagle Scouts' ('Satanic rites' 1998: A-3). This notion of the banality of evil is given an alliterative twist in the panic discourse of Braun (1988), one of the most prominent American child-savers, whose 'Rule of P's' reveals the public persona of secret satanic ritual abusers: physicians, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, principals and teachers, pallbearers, public workers, police, politicians and judges, priests and clergies of all religions, parents and providers of day care.

Panic discourse like this also is fundamental to an ideological effect of the moral panic: the creation of a hierarchy of abuse with the 'ultimate evil' of satanic ritual abuse at its peak. The hierarchy directs resources, time and energy towards its point, and away from the very real problem that lies beneath-the ordinary, prosaic, all too common sexual abuse of girls by men.

## **Panic Discourse to Re-Enchant the Image of the Rescuer**

Finally, the third rhetorical strategy is to aim panic discourse at the image of the rescuer as an uninspired technocrat. Here, the cadre of American child-savers take on the considerable challenge of re-enchanting child-savers who had become mired down in criticism, scandal, and public distrust.

The central theme of that discourse is belief-belief that satanic ritual abuse is real. In an impassioned defence of belief, Summit (1987) told an international audience of child-savers, 'Because we see it clinically, we see something we believe is real, and whether or not our colleagues or the press, or scientists at large or politicians or local law enforcement agencies agree that this is real, most of us have some sort of personal sense that it is.'

Pleas for belief also are accompanied by insistences that the absence of corroborating evidence is irrelevant. As Sexton (1989) told a conference of child-savers, 'I don't need the evidence. . . I don't need to see the evidence to believe.' He goes on to warn his audience, '(I)n the early eighties and late seventies no one believed that child sexual abuse was going on either. . . We are perpetuating the same process of not believing again because it is too impossible to believe.'

The rhetorical slights of hand are evident in panic discourse like this. By conjuring up an image of children crying to be heard by stubbornly incredulous adults, the American child-savers cleverly elide the fact that these children *are* being heard-by child-savers who are

more than a little ready to listen. By failing to acknowledge their own rhetoric that 'ritually abused children very seldom disclose any part of their abuse spontaneously' (Gould 1986: 1) they cleverly elide the fact that they are not really pleading with child-savers to believe what children are saying, but cajoling them to believe that what children are *not* saying is evidence of satanic ritual abuse.' To put it bluntly: child-savers must believe *before* they listen to children.

But belief has its own price, one that adds a tantalising frisson of danger to child-saving efforts. Braun (1988) told his audience of international child-savers that he had reason to believe his life was in danger because of the ugly truths he was revealing, and that he had taken to carrying a gun to protect himself. Hammond (1991), an internationally recognised expert on hypnosis, ended his conference speech with the revelation that he believed satanists were determined to kill him. 'My personal opinion has come to be, if they're going to kill me, they're going to kill me,' he told his audience. 'I think we have to stand up as some kind of moral conscience at some point.' And Summit (1994b), arguably the most influential ideologue of the satanic ritual abuse moral panic, reflects on the price he and his colleagues paid while working on the infamous McMartin case eleven years before:

And we went through the cycle of alarm and fear, being quite sure that our phones were tapped, being careful to avoid the chance that somebody was following us with a gun and a sniper attack-these terrible death fears. . . . You need someone to keep your fears in line, someone to keep your rage contained so that you don't become an army of one trying to fight not only an unknown number of enemies, but more than that, a whole society that will rally against you if you're too raucous, or you're too illogical, or you're claiming something that society doesn't want to believe.

Belief like that expressed in these samples of panic discourse narrates the spectacles and extravaganzas of the satanic ritual abuse moral panic that re-enchant child-saving as well: the conferences that sound like religious revivals with their appeals to belief; the rescues of children in dawn raids based on belief; the intensive therapeutic interventions that confirm belief; the long and expensive criminal trials where belief parades as evidence. In elevating belief over empiricism, panic discourse like this celebrates intuition and risk, embraces the unusual and the unexpected, and vests ordinary child-savers with charismatic authority.

In summary, panic discourse ideologically recruits international child-savers into the controversial satanic ritual abuse moral panic because it can be appropriated through these three points of resonance about the image of the child, the abuser and the rescuer. This panic discourse also reveals a meta-narrative-the moral in the moral panic. And the moral in the international satanic ritual abuse moral panic seems to be this: innocent children are surrounded by evil that lurks behind a banal façade and must be rescued by prescient and valorous adults.

This is an oft-told moral, and all the more ideologically resonant for it. And it is also a comforting moral in a way. It requires of those recruited to it no critical thinking, no action that will bring about real change. It is just a moral to be listened to-and believed.

## Conclusion

In his groundbreaking study, Cohen (1972) concludes that moral panics reveal something interesting about social structure, social process, and social change. The international satanic ritual abuse moral panic certainly is no exception, but an analysis of it also reveals that moral panic theory is in need of refinement. First, an updated theory must take into consideration the multi-mediated nature of the postmodern world that is the context of contemporary moral panics. The intricate web of relations between various interest groups, the nature of their sometimes contradictory discourse, and the international venues in which those claims are presented and contested must be part and parcel of moral panic theory.

Second, an updated theory also must take into account the various audiences of panic discourse. Either overlooked completely or treated as passive dupes in traditional theory, these audiences must be seen and appreciated for their imaginative and active roles in moral panics. Whether as actors, observers, readers or listeners, audiences actively decode and appropriate the discourse of the moral panic and act in relation to it. An updated theory, then, must critically examine the ideological nature of panic discourse, its resonance with the sensibilities and lived experiences of those audiences, its recruitment of them when



appropriated through these points of resonance, and its quite remarkable ability to retain them long after the 'facts' of the discourse have been disputed and debunked.

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